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The Modernist Russian Lyric Thinks Through Classical Myth

by

Caroline L. Brickman

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Lyubov Golburt, Chair

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Professor Chana Kronfeld

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines three modernist Russian poets' engagement with ancient mythology to illuminate the conceptual effects of lyric poetry. In a series of close readings, I argue that these poets (Viacheslav Ivanov, Osip Mandelstam, Joseph Brodsky) deploy a variety of mythic material and modes (Dionysian revelry, epic quests, modern centaurs) in their writings in order to perform intellectual work (historiography, philosophical inquiry, deconstruction) and ultimately reveal the lyric genre's constitutive devices (metaphor and sound patterning, apostrophe, metonymy) to be ancient technologies of thought.

In the process, I demonstrate that these modernist Russian lyrics reckon with – and invite us to perform – a reflexive conceptual feat. Engaging with the conditions of their own emergence, reaching for their connections with the Hellenic past, the lyrical works of Ivanov, Mandelstam, and Brodsky explore the links between classical myth and modern poetic expression, exposing the power of the poetic word to unite the fragmentary, and to make mystical the mundane. By investigating how these works each enter a mythic mode, deploy a lyrical device by which the mythic mode is thought through, and then engender a resulting conceptual effect, this dissertation proposes connections stretching from classical antiquity to the twentieth century, from structuralist studies of myth to ecocriticism to new media studies.

While the affinity between ancient myth and poetic expression is a well-known feature of Russian lyric modernism, this dissertation examines how these lyrical works limn their own constitutive devices as technologies of human thought and apperception. Ivanov's, Mandelstam's, and Brodsky's investments in antiquity adumbrates how lyric can reflexively pursue itself as both an object and medium of thought. In this way, the poems this dissertation examines conjure myth as a resource, and invite the reader to participate in the prevailing cognitive mode they represent.

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INTRODUCTION

“Before Socrates, the Greeks received from the poets alone their central interpretation of reality.”

John Finley, *Pindar and Aeschylus*¹

In her 1905 poem “Ты” [You], Zinaida Gippius draws on the classical Greek myth of the androgynous moon. The poem is comprised of a list of images meant to represent the speaker’s lunar love: the moon is likened to the thrill of an evening in springtime; the new shoot of a poplar tree; and a tender, limpid mystery. The central device of the lyric lies in shifting the grammatical and semantic gender of these images after each line break. Thus in the first and third lines of every stanza, the poem’s beloved seems masculine (e.g. “my heavenly sword”); in the corresponding lines, she seems feminine (e.g. “dewy daisy”).

The stakes of the poem rise in its penultimate stanza, as the speaker ceases comparing the addressee to nouns such as “sword” and “daisy” (which have fixed grammatical gender), and, following the m/f/m/f pattern already established, switches to adjectival epithets. The adjectives have no nouns to modify, yet they still shift gender in every new line:

Ты — на распутьи костер ярко-жадный —
И над долиною дымка невестная.
Ты — мой веселый и беспощадный, —
Ты — моя близкая и неизвестная.²

Halfway through this stanza, the device of the lyric is bared. The poem’s original *motivirovka* – the immutable fact of gendered nouns – is done away with, and the mutable gender of the poem’s addressee takes the reins of the lyric. What had begun as a poetic problem of language is deployed to model the philosophical problems of sexual identity and sexual difference.³

Gippius’s poem engages with the Greek myth of the moon’s androgyny in order to unlock the philosophical problem about the stability of identity, desire, and signification that had

¹ Finley, John. *Pindar and Aeschylus*. Harvard UP, 1955, 17.

² You’re the bright-greedy bonfire at the crossroads — / And the bridal mist over the valley. / **You’re my merry and merciless [masc.], — / You’re my near and unknown [fem.]**. Translation mine, emphasis mine.

³ Olga Matich has argued for a complex understanding of Gippius’s sexuality that takes into consideration the poet’s conscious attempts to repress her own private homosexual desire, combined with a willful and irreverent gender-bending social persona. See Olga Matich, *Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia’s Fin de Siècle*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005, especially chapter five, and Olga Matich, *Paradox in the religious poetry of Zinaida Gippius*, Munich: W. Fink, 1972. Jenifer Presto, by contrast, argues that Gippius’s androgyny was an attempt to hide or unmark her own sex (Jenifer Presto, *Beyond the Flesh: Alexander Blok, Zinaida Gippius and the Symbolist sublimation of sex*, Madison, WI: U. of Wisconsin Press, 2008).

inherited in the poetic possibilities of gendered grammar, namely: how can two be one?⁴ This question comes to a climax in the poem's final line, as the same adjective is repeated to address the beloved, with a gender shift:

Встань же, мой месяц серебряно-красный,
Выйди, двурогая, — Милый мой — Милая...⁵

The poem's final lines offer a condensed version of the paradox developed throughout: how can "МИЛЫЙ МОЙ" and "МИЛАЯ" be the same entity, since they differ in gender; yet they must share a referent, for the same word names them. Thus two central philosophical preoccupations of the Symbolist project – the non-arbitrary signifying capacity of poetic language and the marriage of the sexes into one entity – are found inscribed in the same device. Like the "symbol" itself in the modernist imagination, the fragmentariness and anxious difference of signifiers and sexes in this world carry with them the promise of integration and togetherness in the transcendent realm evoked by the poem.

This ode to the androgynous moon is a direct reference to Plato's *Symposium*: when the comedic poet Aristophanes takes his turn to speak in praise of Eros, he prefaces his encomium with a lengthy mythic tale about the cosmic origins of human desire. A long time ago, he tells the other dinner guests, there were not two sexes but three: the children of the sun, the children of the earth, and the children of the moon. Humans were not shaped the way we are now, but each was rather made of two discrete beings merged together to make up one composite form. The children of the sun were entirely male, the children of the earth entirely female, and the children of the moon were androgynous, made of a man-woman hybrid. One day, so the myth goes, Zeus used his thunderbolt to split mankind in half while in a fit of rage. Eros was born of this split; it names the terrible desire each person naturally feels to reunite – physically as well as spiritually – with her other half.

In Ancient Greek the word *symbolon* meant a token of one's debt or word. The physical form this token took was half of a knucklebone which would always symbolize the other half and thus the ideal whole, and accordingly some future time when the debt was paid or the promise kept. Each of us was torn asunder from our beloved other half, Aristophanes continues, and now "each one of us is but the *symbolon* of a human being – sliced in half like a flatfish, two instead of one – and each pursues a never-ending search for the *symbolon* of himself."⁶ An ambitious mythopoetic cosmogony of erotic desire masquerading as a humorous interlude in a philosophical dialogue, Aristophanes's *Symposium* speech is also a compelling early work of Symbolist literary theory. The argument here is that desire and signification are puzzles whose solutions lie in conceptions of originary unity, and the poet is willing to furnish his audience with a vision of that unity. The androgynous children of the moon are key to the vision, for their

⁴ The modernist trope of the androgynous moon mediating the problems of sexual identity and signification is not specific to Gippius. In "Priklucheniia," a 1919 drama in verse about Casanova, Marina Tsvetaeva would pen the lines: "Все в мире – только имена! / кто скажет месяц, кто луна ... / Анри сегодня, завтра Генриэтта."

⁵ Rise up, my moon silver-red, / Come out, two-horned, — Darling mine [masc.] — Darling [fem.]...

⁶ W. R. M. Lamb, ed., *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 191d. Translation modified.

progeny are the only humans able to procreate, the only humans able to actually achieve one borne of two.

With its debts to ancient mythic material, its willingness to exploit the capabilities of poetic language to accomplish fundamentally theoretical work, its romantic-erotic affect, and its earnest and rigorous hope for the inherent togetherness of apparently disparate phenomena, Gippius's poem serves as a prime example of the questions that centrally occupy this study of modernist Russian lyric. What happens when the lyric genre, with its composite formal attributes, capacities, and histories, takes on the project of investigating its own origins? What happens when the lyric contemplates the conditions of its own emergence? What formal and conceptual innovations are made possible precisely by the lyric's engagement with its foundational poetics?

The Ancient and the Modern

Modernist Russian poetry harbored a particular interest in the cultural and conceptual links between classical myth and the possibilities of poetic expression. Some scholars locate Russian modernism's fascination with classical antiquity in a more general modernizing trend, looking for models to reorganize and transform late nineteenth-century society.⁷ Others imagine it as a kind of nation-building project channeled through literature and cultural identity.⁸ Sensing an ideological charge to the choice version of antiquity evoked by a given modernist work or movement, Michael Kunichika coins the phrase 'elective antiquity,' signaling that the reasons for and the quality of modernist literary or aesthetic engagement with antiquity might be more easily discerned if we take into account the plethora of antiquities to choose from.⁹

The Russian modernists were especially interested in classical myth for its potential to yield poetic fruit. The period's two major poetic movements preceding the revolution took their

⁷ Among the scholars who think about Russian modernism's interest in antiquity socio-culturally, Irina Shevelenko is the most recent and most comprehensive; her monograph *Modernizm kak arkhazim* treats the nineteenth-century rise of folklore studies as material for social transformation, and understands modernist literary aesthetics as the vehicle for this societal change (Irina Shevelenko. *Modernizm kak arkhazim: natsionalizm i poiski modernistkoi estetiki v Rossii*, Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2017).

⁸ An especially thorough example is Judith Kalb, who reads modernist engagement with ancient Rome in terms of literary nation-building, as a bid on a certain kind of cultural heritage. As Kalb shows, due to Rome's flexible polysemy (republic, empire, Christian, pagan, decadent), *which* specific cultural heritage is mutable depending on the writer, their ideological contexts and projects, and their time in history (Judith Kalb. *Russia's Rome: Imperial Visions, Messianic Dreams, 1890-1930*. UWP: 2008).

⁹ A partial list offered by Kunichika includes: Viacheslav Ivanov's Dionysian/Thracian visions, Osip Mandelstam's Hellenism, Mikhail Kuzmin's Alexandria, and the varied Scythian fantasies of Aleksandr Blok and Velimir Khlebnikov. Kunichika's monograph treats the modernist interest in Slavic archaeological excavations, reading material objects as a confirmation of the flourishing of mythic paradigms at the turn of the century (Michael Kunichika, *Our Native Antiquity: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the culture of Russian Modernism*. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2015).

names from ancient Greek sources, as did many of the era's literary journals and poetry collections.¹⁰ Even the vaguer, cross-school appellation "Silver Age," though it did not come into use until the 1960s, implicitly compared the poets of Russian modernism to their ancient classical counterparts.¹¹ In addition to this understanding of classical antiquity as a mirror or a menu of intertexts after which the poets of modernity might style themselves and their verse, ancient myth also offered modernism a range of material and – crucially – a reflexive way of thinking through that material. Observing the fundamentally philosophical potential of myth at work in modernist lyric, Omry Ronen isolates "one prominent device which is traceable in twentieth-century myth-oriented poetry irrespective of trends and schools," a device which "consists of conducting a basic, traditionally 'sacred' theme through one or several 'lay' literary, historical or scientific subtexts."¹² This view on myth, where a poet's task is to "conduct" a mythic theme or trope through layers of poetic language, dominates much scholarship on Russian poetry's orientation to ancient myth.¹³ More relevant for this study, however, is the inverse conception, which conjures myth itself as a flexible, inviting framework for self-discovery, and the poem as a mechanism for traversing it. As Tomas Venclova describes two modernist poets' approaches to this task, "one may perceive myth from without and from within, may interpret it and live in its element."¹⁴ At once an elemental realm of thought and the interpretive portal for ingress, myth is conceived of in this capacity as an epistemological framework for poetry to explore.

Tapping consciously into this framework, Osip Mandelstam would write in 1922: "A doctrine of the reality of the word as such... animates the spirit of our language and links it with

¹⁰ The moniker "Acmeism" was given to the school by the symbolist Viacheslav Ivanov himself, not without some irony: *akme* means "cutting edge" in Greek. Such a name "alluded to the Acmeists' allegiance to the 'upper crust' of meaning, in contradistinction to the Symbolists' metaphysical depths" (Boris Gasparov, "Poetry of the Silver Age," *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*, eds. Evgeny Dobrenko and Marina Balina, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 1-20, 9). The name "Symbolism" has its etiology in the Greek *symbolon*, as outlined above: a physical signifier of unity in a separate temporal realm. The major Acmeist journal, *Apollon* – established originally by Vladimir Mayakovsky – came to replace the Symbolist publication *Vesy* (Libra) in fin-de-siècle culture.

¹¹ Gasparov maintains that the name "Silver Age" most likely *was* "indigenous to the epoch itself, although it never surfaced in documents of the time, perhaps because it was just too obvious to be mentioned," and that the phrase "lay dormant in the collective memory" until it surfaced nearly half a century later, first in Sergei Makovsky's 1962 memoirs and then in Anna Akhmatova's 1965 "Poema bez geroia" (Gasparov, 1).

¹² Per Ronen, the symbolists' basic theme was Dionysus; the acmeists', the poetic word as such: *Logos*. Omry Ronen, "A Functional Technique of Myth Transformation in Twentieth Century Russian Lyrical Poetry." in *Myth in Literature 5*, 110-23.

¹³ A wonderful, nuanced, and useful example of this scholarly methodology is Yuri Levin's "Zametki o 'krymsko-ellinskikh' stikakh O. Mandel'shtama," an essay that traces and links a series of mythic themes through a vast corpus of Mandelstam's verse ("Zametki o 'krymsko-ellinskikh' stikakh O. Mandel'shtama," in ed. O.A. Lekmanov, *Mandel'shtam i antichnost': Sbornik statei. Zapiski Mandel'shtamovskogo obshchestva, Tom. 7*. Moscow, 1995, 77-103).

¹⁴ Tomas Venclova, "On Russian Mythological Tragedy: Vjačeslav Ivanov and Marina Cvetaeva," in *Myth in Literature 5*, ed. A. Kodjak et al. (Columbus, 1986), 89-109.

Hellenic philological culture, not etymologically and not literarily, but through a principle of inner freedom that is equally inherent in them both.”¹⁵ For Mandelstam, as for his contemporaries and successors in the tradition, poetry itself was the medium in which this “doctrine” of the word was written and conceived; poetry was the mechanism by which Hellenic culture could be accessed anew, and the links to Russian modernity illuminated. Paradoxically, in their reach for the past, the poems committed to this undertaking feature innovations – not in form or in content but in the very nature of the lyric, in their imaginings of what lyric practice can and should achieve in the world, in the mind, and in the realm of the spirit. These erudite experiments in thought and verse press the lyric’s expressive capacities to their limits in their ardent hopes to uncover the “principles of inner freedom” that inhere within and describe poetry’s originary connection to ancient myth. As Gippius peeled back a grammatical category to let a love poem about the myth of the moon present a theoretical argument about signification and sex, so the modernist Russian lyric foregrounds its own constitutive devices and attributes – the very mechanisms that structure it, whether grammatical or ideational – as technologies of human thought.

In order to conceive of modernist poetry as a technology capable of accomplishing thought, we might take as a simple example semiotician Vladimir Toporov’s essay on the “Rome text,” the lesser-known sibling of his famous “Petersburg text.”¹⁶ Toporov’s “Rome text,” a mythic image of Rome accessed and created by literary works, has as its central tenet the phonetic play between the Russian words for “Rome” and the “world” (Рим and мир), which are acoustic and visual mirrors of each other, and which allow for the playful, extra-semantic argument that Rome constitutes, reflects, and refracts the world.¹⁷ It is the capacity of lyric to make precisely this kind of argument about classical antiquity, based (in Toporov’s case) in sound, but equally possibly in image evoked, or in the quality of a poem’s metonymies, that this project discusses.

Turning to the corpus of Russian lyric modernism for examples, we might think of Vladislav Khodasevich’s 1928 “Дактили” [Dactyls], an elegiac poem about the speaker’s father’s fingers (“Был мой отец шестипалым. Такими рождаются счастливыцы”) which, composed not in epic dactylic meter but in lyrical distich, attempts to reconcile blood genealogy with cultural genealogy, etymological meaning with vernacular meaning, memory with history, and the unnatural with divine poetic inspiration. Or we might take Marina Tsvetaeva’s 1922 “Федра” [Phaedra], a highly erotic poem exploiting affective onomatopoeia to make a mythopoetic argument: the structural question of whether sound and meaning are arbitrarily

¹⁵ Monas, Sidney. “Osip Mandelstam: About the Nature of the Word,” in *Arion*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1975, 506-526, quote from 511. Mandelstam’s Russian is as follows: “представление о реальности слова как такового, животворит дух нашего языка и связывает его с эллинской филологической культурой не этимологически и не литературно, а через принцип внутренней свободы, одинаково присущей им обоим” (Mandel’shtam, O.E., *Sobranie sochinenii v 4 t.*, Moscow, 1993. T. 1, 226).

¹⁶ V.N. Toporov, “Vergilianskaia tema Rima,” in: *Issledovania po etimologii i semantike, t. 1.* Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul’tury, 2004, 711-726.

¹⁷ Although examples of the Rome text can be found in Karamzin and Pushkin through Gogol and Tiutchev, Toporov holds that the city of the Rome text only gains a soul in the early twentieth century – with the advent of Russian modernism.

linked is thematically presented in terms of illegitimate love and tragedy.¹⁸ Relying heavily on sound patterning devices (rhythm, alternating meters, alliteration, and rhyme), this lyric stages its own creation and explicitly questions the conditions of poetic possibility (“Олимпийцы?! Их взгляд спящ! / Небожителей — мы — лепим!”).¹⁹

My focus on the “device” as the linchpin of the lyric allows me to theorize the complex relation of technology to temporality featured in much modernist lyric in a fresh way. Within Slavic studies, any giving of primacy to the device as the core constituent of literature comes in the shadow of early Russian Formalism, whose programmatic upholding of the device was most famously articulated in Viktor Shklovsky’s essay “Iskusstvo kak priem” (1917). The most obvious connections between Formalist theory and modernist Russian poetic practice concern Futurism; Roman Jakobson’s seminal early study of Velimir Khlebnikov was one of the most articulate products of a longer close acquaintance between Futurists such as Khlebnikov and Mayakovsky, on the one hand, and Shklovsky, Jakobson, and Yuri Tynianov, on the other.²⁰ My focus on antiquity develops the Formalist interest in the modernist device in another direction, by which the device serves not only to defamiliarize modern sensibilities made dull by routine and cliché but, through its very technique, to reflect *on literary history*, deriving its power by working through the fertile connections between antiquity and modernity. Thus the refreshed aesthetic perception which Jakobson, following Shklovsky, links to *literaturnost’* comes not just from defamiliarizing the old, but by circling lyric form back through its mythic origins, thereby revealing how such form becomes possible.²¹

The poems this dissertation treats understand themselves as technologies, as tools, as mechanisms participating in the development of apprehension and cognition. They are technology in the Hellenic sense: the Aristotelian *technē*, an orientation to knowledge that exists external to the craftsman rather than within him, a disposition concerned with bringing objects and thoughts into existence which otherwise would not be produced.²² The way this technique works is temporal; in keeping with the orientation to the past indicated by a corpus of poetry

¹⁸ I am grateful to an essay by Charles Altieri for opening my eyes to the possibilities of contemporary affect theory with regard to interpretations of lyric poetry (Charles Altieri, “Reading for Affect in the Lyric: from modern to contemporary,” in Joan Retallack and Juliana Spahr, eds., *Poetry and Pedagogy: the challenge of the contemporary*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, 39-62).

¹⁹ “The Olympians?! Their gaze is asleep! / We – fashion – the citizens of heaven!”

²⁰ The Jakobson study is *Noveishaia russkaia poeziia: nabrosok pervyi* (Prague, 1921).

²¹ This is a direction which Shklovsky himself hinted at, only to lament it as impossible, in his 1914 talk *Resurrecting the Word (Voskreshenie slova)*, a text which is more uninhibited about his debts to Potebnja and Veselovsky than his later essays: “Many believe that they do experience old art. But mistakes are so frequent here! ... It is often impossible to directly inhabit ancient art... a genius could not simply repeat the forms of another age. The museum delights of ignoramus can only be explained by their thoughtlessness and the low demands they make on their own ability to inhabit ancient times.” (Viktor Shklovsky, “Resurrecting the Word,” in *Viktor Shklovsky: A Reader*, ed. and trans. Alexandra Berlina, New York, Bloomsbury, 2017: 63-72, 67). My argument is that the poems studied in this dissertation do in fact make their readers “inhabit ancient art,” namely myth; not as a “simple repetition,” but as a conceptual enactment bordering on the ritualistic, and which opens up the unique possibilities of the modern.

²² *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a1–20.

explicitly about ancient mythology, the poems here conjure myth as a resource for their own origin stories, whether in a cognitive sense or a mystical, pseudo-historical mode. Thus Viacheslav Ivanov, the first of the poets studied here, is able to implore, with the urgency of a zealot and the gravitas of a scholar: “Is myth still possible? Where is the creative religious soil on which it might blossom?”²³ Mandelstam, my second poet, writes, in a passage that could nearly be a gloss on Aristotle, “Hellenism means consciously surrounding man with domestic utensils instead of indifferent objects.”²⁴ The poet’s relationship to the mythic past must be a technological, constructive orientation that brings him, paradoxically, home. Finally, Joseph Brodsky, conscious of his own lateness to the modernist tradition, renders this temporal paradox as an acute tension: the centaurs in his 1988 lyric cycle, emissaries from a distant temporal plane, are a “crossbreed of the past and the future,” only visible by means of a stereoscope and other modernist technologies of perception.²⁵

My use of the term “modernist” to describe works of verse written between 1900 and 1988 – rather than “symbolist,” “acmeist,” “Soviet,” “émigré,” or other terms of periodization and literary school, as might seem more precise – is intended to highlight this paradoxical, at times kaleidoscopic, relationship to temporality held in common by the poets treated here. Of course, “modernism” is already a slippery (if now indispensable) label with respect to twentieth century Russian literature, because it was not commonly used by those writers we now call modernists themselves. I should note, also, that this study makes no absolute claim to define the essence or boundaries of “Russian modernism” as a movement. Rather, I maintain the label’s continued usefulness, because the attitude towards temporality which enabled – and was significantly enacted by – the poems I study was one which emerged with the early twentieth century, the cyclical, technological, extra-historical sensibility which we readily identify as modernist. The chief philosophical exponent of this view, whose writings were enthusiastically read and eagerly put to use by Russian modernist poets, was Henri Bergson, whose understanding of “temporality” and “historicity” profoundly broke with the earlier nineteenth-century fixation on linear, progressivist chronology to embrace long duration, and repetition, as the foundational components of human temporal experience, particularly close to the intuitions of the creative mind.²⁶

In other words, the Russian modernist reach back into the past that I examine throughout is not merely antiquarian: these poems search for and cultivate myth as the iterative foundation of lyric, drawing modernity and antiquity together, with modern lyric perception extending through the poetic word back to myth to explore the conditions of its own possibility.²⁷ On the

²³ “Возможен ли еще миф? Где творческая религиозная почва, на которой он мог бы расцвести?” (V. I. Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii* 4 vols. (Brussels, 1971-84), 3:554).

²⁴ “Эллинизм — это сознательное окружение человека утварью вместо безразличных предметов” (Mandel’shtam 1:226).

²⁵ Iosif Brodskii, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy v 2 tomakh*, ed. Lev Losev, Saint Petersburg: Vita nova, 2011.

²⁶ As has been detailed by Hilary Fink in *Bergson and Russian Modernism: 1900-1930*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1999.

²⁷ Among the works of scholarship that treat modernism’s conception of myth as poetry’s origin are Emily Wang, “Acmeist Mythopoetics: Nikolai Gumilev, Viacheslav Ivanov, and ‘Eidology’,” *Slavic and East European Journal* 56.3 (2012): 415-430, and Stuart Goldberg, *Mandelstam, Blok, and the Boundaries of Mythopoetic Symbolism*, University of Ohio Press, 2012.

one hand, the conceptions of temporality displayed in these poems are vast, Bergsonian, transhistorical; they posit cyclical, palimpsested, infinite timescapes. On the other hand, they are united in the conviction that one key capacity of the lyric genre is its ability to model and represent the experience of time, scaled to the human faculties of perception and cognition. As Ivanov would claim in 1908, the lyric's ability to leap, "lightninglike," from one mental image to another more quickly than rational thought can permit is what distinguishes it from all other genres.²⁸ Eighty years later, working in the same tradition and preoccupied by the same problem, Brodsky would compose a cycle of poems in an attempt to freeze one such lyrical "lightning flash" at work upon the mind, and examine it during its transition from one mental image to the next. Brodsky's position in the sequence I trace, and his relationship to "modernism" as typically construed, is perhaps less self-evident than those of Ivanov and Mandelstam; yet I construe his work as fundamentally modern, rather than post-modern, in its conception of the lyric as verbal technology that – charted through antiquity – models non-linear time. Moreover, the same logic that recognizes Ivanov and Mandelstam as classicists, in that they are not only influenced by an earlier era but productively drawn to re-map it in the act of lyric articulation, here illuminates Brodsky as their rightful heir (engaged in the same project) and as a modernist (himself motivated by profound affinities with, and a journey back to, the early twentieth century's poetic endeavors).²⁹

At once conjuring an epic, ecstatic mythic past and attentive to the minutiae and immediacies of perception and cognition, the poets here reveal the consequences of turning the lyric into a technology of quirky, rigorous self-study. The outcome of this technique does more than provide another chapter in the modern compendium of classical reception studies.³⁰ It offers us the occasion to revise our own investments in the contrivances of the lyric and the dustiness of myth, and to experience some of the lightning ourselves.

²⁸ "Лирическому стилю свойственны внезапные переходы от одного мысленного представления к другому, молниенные изломы воображения" (Ivanov, 3:120).

²⁹ Indeed, Brodsky's playful classicism has been theorized as the premier factor in considering him a late modernist, an heir to the symbolist-acmeist tradition. This argument is made explicitly by Nirman Moranjak Bamburać ("Iosif Brodskii i akmeizm," *Russian Literature XL (1996)*, 57-76).

³⁰ Examples of reception studies in the Russian modernist context, a school which intends to chart classical intertexts and influences in and upon modern literature, include G.S. Knabe, *Russkaia antichnost': Soderzhanie, rol' i sud'ba antichnogo nasledia v kul'ture Rossii*, Moscow: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi gumanitarnyi institut, 2000; Anna Frajlich, *The Legacy of Ancient Rome in the Russian Silver Age* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007); Zara Martirisova Torlone, *Russia and the Classics: poetry's foreign muse* (London: Duckworth, 2009); Zara Martirisova Torlone, *Vergil in Russia: national identity and classical reception* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014); Anna Viktorovna Uspenskaia, *Antichnost' v russkoi poezii vtoroi poloviny XIX veka*, Dis. Fak. filol. nauk: SPb, 2005, Boris Gasparov, "Russkaia Gretsii, russkii Rim," *Christianity and the Eastern Slavs*. Berkley; Los Angeles; London, 1994. Vol. II Russian Culture in Modern Times. P. 245-287; as well as less recent single-author reception studies, such as: Victor Terras, "Classical Motives in the Poetry of Osip Mandelstam," *Slavic and East European Journal* 10.3 (1966): 251-67, and Catriona Kelly, *Innokenty Feodorovich Annensky and the Classical Ideal: poetry, translations, drama and literary essays* (Ph.D. thesis, 1986).

Tracing the meanings of this experience requires a style of scholarship that draws on theories of the lyric and mythology, but also attends to theories of the cultivated world, of new and old media, of psychology and perception. In their essences, myth – as cosmology – and lyric – as ideation – are modes by which literature reaches out into the worlds of materiality and cognition; to appreciate the continued force of this movement for modernist poetry requires a method of reading which incorporates the insights provided by contemporary theories of ecology, psychology, and new technology.

Such a style of criticism must draw, finally, on the poems it treats to disclose their own philosophies and histories. It must be a place where the marvelous and divine thing at hand – the lyric made up of parts at work in harmony, all marshalled for the task of *thinking* through the myth – can still take place, can be experienced as an acrobatic that the rational mind would not have otherwise performed.

“Thinking Through”: The Intellectual Work of the Lyric

My overarching project is to demonstrate that these modernist Russian lyrics, reaching for the Hellenic past and unfolding through myth, perform a rigorous and reflexive conceptual feat. In so doing, I intervene in broader contemporary debates about the nature and capacities of lyric practice across historical periods. One, sometimes called the New Lyric Studies, holds that those features we might consider essential to the lyric are a modern critical invention, a series of effects with their roots in Romantic poetic practice, cemented in the 20th century by academic reading practices.³¹ The opposing school, attentive to form, genre memory, and those elements of lyrical texts that may be said to transcend epochal specificity, claim the lyric as an enduring, transhistorical genre, traceable by means of an inductive approach.³² While these discussions

³¹ The “New Lyric Studies” was inaugurated as a definitive school of lyric criticism in 2008; see the 2008 *PMLA* special cluster by this name. For this critical history of the birth of lyric as a modern genre and the role of the lyrical speaker in that history, see Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (eds.), *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*. Johns Hopkins UP: 2014, 4-5. Jackson and Prins argue that the rise of the “speaker” as a lyrical category (which coincided with the rise of the “lyric” as a catch-all poetic-expressive genre) was a twentieth-century critical invention. Over the course of their essay selections, Jackson and Prins set out to debunk two myths at once: first, the naïve supposition that the tripartite division of poetry into lyric, epic, and dramatic genres was available or relevant to the ancients (and with it that the Greeks and Romans imagined lyric primarily as a speech act originating from a lyrical subject); second, the more common critical misconception that the lyric as a unified genre centered on a speaking subject was explicitly present in the Romantic poetic imagination. Rather, Jackson and Prins argue, it was the early twentieth-century New Critics and Formalists, with their twin fascinations with voice and genre, who colluded to produce these modes of reading lyric. Thus the “New Lyric” scholars, critics, and theorists insist on the historical contingencies of texts we call lyrical, aiming to lay bare their contemporary reading and writing practices, surrounding institutions of power, acting bodies and biographies – and ultimately deconstruct the “lyric” as a meaningful genre label.

³² In defense of the transhistorical approach, one acolyte of this school, Stephanie Burt, writes, somewhat mockingly: “Lyric poetry was not just the same in 1850 or 1400 as in 1950, but

have centered on genre and its historical contingencies, other current discussions have come closer to the Slavic and East European context, mediated by form on the one hand, and formalism's legacy on the other.³³ Writing as part of an emerging wave of scholarship that reconsiders poetry's historical relation to form, Boris Maslov and Ilya Klinger have recently argued for reinvigorating the nineteenth-century literary theorist Aleksandr Veselovsky's coinage "historical poetics" to name an understanding of lyric practice that does the work of intellectual inquiry.³⁴

Instead of considering the lyric solely as a literary genre with inductive delineations or set of practices made possible and constrained by historical forces, my understanding of the lyric as a complex technology of thought allows for a focus on what work poetry may be said to accomplish and under what circumstances that work may take place. I am moved, and persuaded, by New Lyric Studies' argument for the recent historical construction of the "lyric" as the spoken, univocal monologue of a personalized subject, and the anachronistic gaps between this definition and the actual poetic self-understanding of the genre prior to the twentieth century. However, where this school has focused itself (for good reasons) primarily on the role of twentieth-century *critics*, rather than poets, in asserting an abstract and unhistorical model of what lyric is – and, moreover, directed its scrutiny at French and Anglo-American scholars in so doing – my project takes up a quite different trajectory, of how Russian poets in the twentieth century sought to establish what lyric is and what it can do. As I hope to demonstrate, these Russian poets' lyric engagement with classical myth produced a more fertile and capacious model of lyric in practice than the critics targeted by New Lyric Studies did in theory.

My approach to lyric has certain affinities with the inductive, trans-historical school, particularly as represented by Jonathan Culler's *Theory of the Lyric* (2015): like Culler, my investment in the genre label "lyric" is that it designates poems which bring certain critically identifiable devices together, in a configuration that is unique to each poem, to reach expressively out from subjectivity into the world. This point, the singular operation of the individual poem, also illuminates my methodological relationship to seminal Russophone

neither was an apple, or an earlobe; nevertheless, we hypothesize that apples and earlobes were present in 1400 and 1850 and that some people enjoyed them in some way – though 'earlobe,' the word, dates only to 1859. Did John Donne have earlobes? Did John Donne write lyric poems?" (Stephanie Burt, "What Is This Thing Called Lyric?" *Modern Philology* vol. 113, issue 3 (February 2016), 422-440).

³³ Caroline Levine's 2015 study *Forms* links form – and a literary study of it – to the everyday structures that order our social and political lives (Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015). In a 2017 review of Levine's monograph, Slavacist Marijeta Bozovic takes Levine to task for omitting a serious discussion of Russian Formalism's role in our current scholarly thinking about form and its relation to political life (Marijeta Bozovic, "Whose Forms? Missing Russians in Caroline Levine's *Forms*," *PMLA* 132.5 (October 2017): 1181-1186).

³⁴ "Poetics as inquiry into verbal art succeeds when it reaches phenomena that lie beyond authorial poetics. A historical poetics grasps these phenomena as having a history (participating in the history of forms), responsive to history (produced by a particular historical conjuncture), and formative of history (defining present and future historical experience and practice)" (Ilya Klinger and Boris Maslov, eds., *Persistent Forms: explorations in historical poetics* (New York: Fordham UP, 2016, 15).

philologists such as Mikhail Gasparov and Omry Ronen: as I allude to above, and will elaborate (with reference to Mandelstam) in Chapter Two, I am drawn to seeing the individual modernist lyric poem as a specific *technē* for traversing myth, rather than these scholars' inclination to follow mythic tropes to chart a vast course through the accumulated text of Russian poetry. Yet their method of intense close reading as a route to broader conceptual discovery is an inspiration, and a path which I too pursue.

While the intellectual labor I uncover in the poems I treat is by no means subordinate to philosophy – indeed, as my epigraph observes, it precedes philosophy – a comparison may be made with the German idealist tradition, a body of thought with which these poets, particularly Ivanov, were intimately familiar.³⁵ Where the philosophical project begun by Immanuel Kant strove to uncover reason's conditions of possibility and limits through the critical exercise of reason itself, Johann Gottfried Herder was one of the first modern thinkers to attempt to locate “myth” in the very workings of human thought. In his “Fragment of an Essay on Mythology,” written during the 1780s, Herder criticized the champions of reason of a generation earlier, who dismissed myth as “blind superstition” and inaugurated a modern understanding of myth as a fundamentally conceptual framework – a framework that modeled and represented thought. Furthering this reflexive intellectual tradition, G.W.F. Hegel would claim that the temporal process of rationally unfolding an idea, in its series of notional forms, was necessary to illuminate not only that idea's genesis but its very content.³⁶

The poems I study perform an analogous task: the process of exploring lyric's genesis, nature, and capabilities, not through syllogism or description or analysis but *through the language of lyric*, with myth. These poems are not – to reference generic names often attached to certain Russian romantic poets – “philosophical lyric” or “metaphysical lyric.” Their investment in antiquity is rather to show that before philosophy, lyric, via its relationship to its mythic origins, already commands the means of reflexively interrogating itself as both object and medium of human thought. This is to make a particular claim for the intellectual power of lyric: not in its capacity to illustrate or evoke an abstract idea, but as a practice which shows us how a mythic embodiment of meaning might be possible in modernity, through the very formal means by which lyric poses the question of its own possibility through myth.³⁷

³⁵ On the intellectual debts of Ivanov and his coterie to the German Idealists – and its effects on the worldviews refracted in his verse – see especially Michael Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition: Goethe, Novalis, and the Poetics of Viacheslav Ivanov* (Madison, 1994).

³⁶ Hegel's dialectical argument that ancient epic gave rise to the lyric, before the two generic modes found their synthesis in drama, serves as a crude but powerful model for the argument that myth conceptually underlies lyric practice. Rather than the idea that lyric poetry emerged from myth or mythic thinking in any *developmental* sense, however, this dissertation takes a more Kantian line of thought. The poets examined here perform a transcendental metapoetics: they treat myth as a conceptual framework that underlies lyrical expression such that when metaphor and lyrical expression engage with myth they may be said to be engaging with the very conditions of their own possibility.

³⁷ In a gloss on the formalists Roman Jakobson and Yuri Tynianov's 1928 essay “Problemy izucheniia literatury i iazyka,” Maslov and Kliger write, “it is not the immediate past alone that matters inasmuch as it helps to foreground what is innovative in a given work; it is rather any given past that could be reawakened by the work, entering into a relationship of productive tension with it” (Maslov and Kliger, 7-8).

The connection between German idealism and poetic language was first foundationally drawn in Russia by the nineteenth-century philologist Aleksandr Potebnja. In addition to the German idealist strain in his intellectual framework, Potebnja came from a generation of Russian thinkers directly influenced by the rise of folklorics. He subscribed to the Hegelian progression of classical history, while also understanding literature as an essentially verbal art. Instantiating a tradition of thought that the modernist poets would pick up almost verbatim sixty years later, Potebnja argues for the primacy of the *word* as the most basic unit of intellectual history and cultural continuity, rather than the primacy of the image or idea (as per the German idealists).³⁸ Ultimately, for Potebnja, poetic figure is the basis of both language and thought. The word is the primary organ of thought because it is a symbol.

From Viacheslav Ivanov's famous claim that symbolist poetry, based in imagery and rhythm, is the source of intuitive cognition, to Viktor Shklovsky's more famous treatise against Potebnja's "thinking in images," Potebnja's work underpins the entirety of twentieth-century Russian poetic philosophy and theory.³⁹ Among the poets I discuss, he was particularly important for Ivanov, the most scholarly of the three. It is well established that Ivanov's lyrical mythopoesis was taken up and refigured by Mandelstam, who was part of the coterie of younger modernists influenced by the formative poetry soirées at Ivanov's salon. This dissertation further traces how the Potebnjan linguistic understanding that infuses Ivanov's (and Mandelstam's) renderings of mythological lyric is refracted in Brodsky's centaurs.

In Potebnja's account (from his seminal 1862 work *Mysl' i iazyk*), ancient thought followed a conceptual and tropeic trajectory from myth to metaphor. In keeping with the cyclical temporalities traced by the poems I study, my own understanding of the genealogical relationship between myth and the poetic devices of the lyric does not follow a unidirectional progression. The precise configuration of myth and lyric differs with each poet: Ivanov seeks the new and immediate blooming of myth and divinity from the modern poetic trope; Mandelstam configures the lyric as searching for its mythic origins, for a home that is constructed in the very act of searching; Brodsky experiments with how continuity between myth and lyric can arise from the basic maneuver of holding them in close, even startling, proximity. For all of them, though, the relationship between myth and lyric is mutual, co-constitutive, interpenetrative. Not only is myth the origin of lyric, its enriching source; the new versions of ancient myth offered by modern poetry nourish those myths, providing (per Claude Lévi-Strauss) new versions and interpretations of the mythic canon. The iterability of myth is made manifest in its articulation by

³⁸ For two serious, relevant, and quite differing treatments of this part of Potebnja's 1862 *Mysl' i iazyk*, see the chapter on Potebnja in Eleazar Meletinskii's 1976 *Poetika mifa*, as well as the first chapter of Thomas Seifrid's *The Word Made Self: Russian Writings about Language 1860-1930* (Cornell UP, 2005).

³⁹ Seifrid begins his study of the role of "the word" in modern Russian culture with the sentence: "The modern phase of Russian writing about language arguably begins in the 1860s, with Aleksandr Afanas'evich Potebnia" (7). Much of the most influential Russian Formalist theory positioned itself in the legacy of or in polemic against Potebnja's writings; his radical breaking with German Idealism's focus on the Idea and embrace of the word – what Seifrid calls a "metaphysics of verbal structure" (61) – ultimately did not go far enough for the Formalists, and Shklovsky renounced him in a 1919 essay titled, simply, "Potebnja," in which he claimed that the perception of verbal structure, rather than symbolic imagery, is what constitutes the primary difference between poetry and prose.

lyric; the poetic technology, and intellectual muscle, of lyric is exhibited in how lyric cultivates, seeks out, and thinks through myth.

The Vine, the Quest, and the Centaur: an Overview

To dissect the poems which this dissertation is about into their component parts – to reverse, that is, the synthetic operation of the poems themselves – shows them to consist of a *mythic mode* which each enters; a *lyrical device* by which means the mythic mode is embodied and thought through; and a *conceptual effect*, the result of such lyric mental enactment. Like a symbol, the poems bring these elements into complex, synthetic union, articulated through the particular form of each text. The progression of the dissertation is chronological, from Ivanov's poetic-erotic-conceptual posing of the problems and possibilities of Olympian gods on modernist soil, through Mandelstam's searching refinement of the originary and domestic relationship between the ancient and the modern, ending with Brodsky's seizing upon the legacy of his modernist forebears in one arresting, metonymic trope.

Chapter One, "Plant, Metaphor, God: Thinking Mythically with Viacheslav Ivanov," takes up a poet-scholar whose seminal role in the history of Russian modernism has never been in question, yet whose actual poems have often failed to garner appreciation. Ivanov's underwhelmed reception by contemporaries such as Anna Akhmatova and Mikhail Bakhtin, I argue, misconstrues the role of his classicist erudition (to Nikolai Gumilev, Ivanov was more a philologist than a poet) in his lyric creation. The chapter begins with an engagement of Ivanov's essays, not as expository outlines of his poetic aims, but as texts which develop and exhibit the very devices which sustain his poems. With reference to work in cognitive poetics, dwelling on Ivanov's essays – namely "The Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles" (1905), "Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism" (1908) and "The Testaments of Symbolism" (1910) – reveals him as an investigator of how sound patterns and images convey thought with an immediacy that precedes rational contemplation.

The mythic mode of Ivanov's poetic inquiry is divinity itself, the manifestation of the gods; his central devices are metaphor and image, which the lyric allows to succeed one another with instantaneous speed. Specifically, I trace the appearances of Dionysus and Demeter, the gods of earth, through Ivanov's work. Framing my discussion of Ivanov's essays with one of his early poems – "Beauty" (1902) – and a later one – "With the ray of his arrows Eros pierced me" (1907) – I chart an argumentative progression through the changing manifestations of Dionysus and Demeter in these texts, from their early presence in godly form to the later appearances of metaphoric and horticultural avatars, as vine and grain; this trajectory corresponds to the progression identified by 19th century myth scholars (notably including Potebnja) from myth to metaphor. Through this movement, Ivanov conveys both synchronous and diachronous ideas: both simultaneity of apprehension (of images) and the cyclical movement of the development of poetic thought in human history. In so doing, he both lays the foundation for Mandelstam and Brodsky's explorations and anticipates the later insights of structuralist scholars of myth and poetics. Ivanov's devices create poems which allow, indeed require, the reader to experience the thought processes they model.

From a bookish Symbolist poet, Chapter Two, “The Quest and the Question: Osip Mandelstam’s Hellenic Poems,” turns to an Acmeist whose elegant intricacy has long led critics and connoisseurs alike to treat his densely crafted poems as puzzles, labyrinths which must be ventured into for the hermeneutic key which will finally unlock them. The chapter argues for a shift in emphasis, such that Mandelstam’s lyrics be seen not as riddles to be solved, but quests; the end point of reading him, I suggest, comes not from finding the key but from traversing the labyrinth itself. The quest, rooted in classical epic, is the mythic mode which fascinates Mandelstam, by which he poses the question of how modern culture might find its way back to a Hellenic home. Yet, as the act of reading through the poem leads us to recognize, this home is made present, created, found, only through the search for it, the effort to correctly pose (rather than resolutely answer) the question of modern poetry’s mythic origin.

The main devices by which Mandelstam incarnates his quest are, again, metaphor, now foregrounded specifically as a means of *expression*, a vessel, the crafting of vehicles which, like the above-mentioned “domestic utensils,” can carefully hold their tenors; and apostrophe, the direct mode of address which, as Jonathan Culler has argued, most evidently foregrounds lyric’s status as lyric. In these poems – “Insomnia. Homer. Taut sails” (1915), “The golden stream of mead” (1917), “Because I couldn’t hold on to your hands” (1920), “And Schubert on the water” (1934), as well as the 1922 essay “On the Nature of the Word” – apostrophe takes the specific form of a question. These tropes perform the conceptual work of inquiry which constitutes Mandelstam’s quest; they model the poet’s selective searching through the cultural past as a paradigmatic linguistic inquiry, pointing to a vast network of connections among equally potentially present terms. In this regard, Mandelstam’s poems prefigure – and are illuminated by – the modern database as it is understood by theorists of new media. Adapting the syntagm/paradigm distinction of semiotics to digital technology, scholars like Lev Manovich emphasize the specifically *mental* nature of the paradigm: where syntagms manifest their elements as physically present (words in a sentence, or on a screen), paradigms indicate an archive, most of whose elements are immediately absent but incipiently available to a user, writer, or reader. In this way, Mandelstam’s poetic word gestures at a database of possible cultural knowledge, through which his poems navigate, slipping the bounds of linear time to span from past to present in a Bergsonian *durée*. His myth-poems resolve, not with absolute conclusions, but with the turn of an infinite cycle, the traversal of which embodies the useful Hellenic utensils that hold culture together through time.

The final chapter, “Stuck Together: Joseph Brodsky’s Centaurs,” refines the scope of its inquiry to a specific trope: the titular creature of Brodsky’s 1988 *Centaurs* cycle, which I engage as a meta-figure for metonymy. Brodsky’s centaurs are ancient mythical creatures thrust into – held against – late Soviet modernity: rather than Ivanov’s ritualistic reflowering of antiquity in the present, or Mandelstam’s searching journey through history’s archive, the temporal logic of the cycle’s mythopoetics is to join the ancient and the modern by holding them maximally close together, but not quite making them identical. This play with proximity leads to a prolonged deconstruction of metonymy itself, a complex, ongoing illustration of how this trope creates the appearance of continuity through the strenuous maintenance of contiguity. Brodsky’s famous preoccupation with borders and margins appears here as a fascination with the edges of physical things; edges which, when brought together, produce a conceptually unified *one* from a spatially proximate *two*. The centaur provides the mythic boundaries of this inquiry, as a beast formed from the metonymic bringing together of man and horse.

The cycle exhaustively deploys the same device from different angles in each of its four poems: their centaurs are not the classical human/equine creatures, but a series of hybrids, from furniture-women to a fusion of the past with the future. Although their metonymies seem reliant on simultaneity – with both parts of the centaur held together in the same instant – the poems’ progression from a beginning to an end allows Brodsky to chart the distinct moments by which metonymy is apprehended, a series of freeze-frames which allow the stages of metonymic perception to emerge. These stages – proximity, followed by contiguity, followed by continuity – may appear as visual, or logical, but are in fact lexical; the path traveled by the cycle’s metonymies – from space, to time, to language itself – lays bare the semantic dimension of the device. This progression, which encodes a conceptual (if not chronological) temporality in an apparently spatial figure, corresponds to different developmental moments of children’s interpretations of centaurs, as recorded (contemporaneously to Brodsky’s writing) by the psychologist Harvey Nash. The cycle’s deconstructive movement through the stages of metonymy plays itself out by splitting wholes into parts and recombining parts into wholes, an oscillation which manifests in the erotics of the poems. What results, both in the cycle’s thematics and its form, is an origin story: the conceptual birth of metonymy as a figure.

Developing modernist articulations of mythic modes through lyrical devices to express the fundamentally conceptual possibilities of the genre, the poems I study lay bare the historical, intellectual, and aesthetic force of lyric itself. The turn to antiquity proves itself as a journey through the Hellenic source of mythic creation whose contours express the exceptional capacity of modern lyric to take a conceptual leap: the power of poetry is not that it can serve as a container for philosophical argument but that the very devices which constitute it provoke a confrontation with the embodiment of thought. The modernist lyric thereby reveals itself as a *technē* in both the most ancient and the most modern sense.

CHAPTER ONE

Plant, Metaphor, God: Thinking Mythically with Viacheslav Ivanov

In a lecture on the poet given many times in the 1920s in Vitebsk and in Leningrad, Mikhail Bakhtin remarked that the “flesh” of the word is not properly felt in Viacheslav Ivanov’s poetry. Ivanov’s tendency toward “logical thought,” claimed Bakhtin, suffocates the poetic word’s individuality, and indeed the very scent of its body. For these reasons, he concludes, one cannot really consider Ivanov an “intimate” poet.⁴⁰ Bakhtin’s lukewarm appraisal of Ivanov’s poetics has become a commonplace in the poet’s reception by his contemporaries and critics alike. From a fellow poet’s bemused remark that “for all his depth of understanding, he wrote bad poems” to a critic’s comment that Ivanov was “risen from Trediakovsky’s grave, writing poetry with a mop,” the difficult, unappealing, and downright unpoetic nature of his verse is now, paradoxically, a central feature of the cultural myth of one of Russian modernism’s founding poets.⁴¹ However, Ivanov’s verse bears a significant advantage: it has drawn those readers who are, in a certain sense, disciples of his, in that they believe in his precept that poetry can accomplish intellectual work – that it can think.

The goal of this chapter is to illuminate the poetic-cognitive effects of Ivanov’s expository engagement with a specific set of mythical material, specifically Demeter and Dionysus. To do so, I focus on those poems and essays where his deployment of these mythic personages as metaphors in the service of explaining the task of poetry is most profound. The essays are “The Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles” (1905), “Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism” (1908), and “The Testaments of Symbolism” (1910). I frame my discussion of his essays with examples of these mythic images in verse: one early (“Beauty,” 1902) and one later (“With the rays of his arrows Eros pierced me,” 1907). As we move through the corpus chronologically, we note a progression in terms of the images employed. What starts with Dionysus (and – per Ivanov’s pantheon – his alter-ego Christ) and Demeter as embodied character-presences in the texts slowly morphs into their presence in avatar form: vine and grain.

Sensing the cognitive and conceptual potential of Ivanov’s poetics – though in a review that angered the poet greatly – Nikolai Gumilev ventured that Ivanov’s relation to language and verse was closer to that of a philologist than a poet: he did not see them as ends in themselves, but rather as a means to convey the idea concealed within.⁴² It was these ideas – this intense *thinking* – that shaped the language of Ivanov’s verse and gave it distinction.⁴³ All the resources available to Ivanov the poet were marshalled in the service of the poetically based expression of thought.

⁴⁰ M. M. Bakhtin, “Viacheslav Ivanov,” in *Viacheslav Ivanov: Pro et contra. Lichnost’ i tvorchestvo Viacheslava Ivanova v otsenke russkikh i zarubezhnykh myslitelei i issledovatelei. Antologiya*, 2 vols. (St.Petersburg, 2016), 2:12.

⁴¹ The first speaker is Akhmatova, from Lidiia Chukovskaya’s “Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatovoi,” and the second is Pyotr Yakubovich, both quoted in *Pro et contra* 2:8, 12.

⁴² N. S. Gumilev, “Viacheslav Ivanov. Cor ardens. Chast’ pervaiia,” in *Pro et contra* 1:275-76.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 276.

“Lightninglike fissures of the imagination”

Myth was one such resource. Indeed, not only in his verse but also, overwhelmingly, in his essays, Ivanov turns to ancient Greek myth in order to accomplish that cognitive and conceptual work, and frequently by means of traditionally *poetic* device. In this case, form supports and continues the work of content: Ivanov’s essays, which are urgent, erudite blends of Symbolist manifesto, lyric theory, mythopoesis, cultural criticism, and ancient history, are often dedicated to illuminating the work of poetry on the mind and the task of the poet. To this end, his engagement with mythic metaphor, his use of patterned sound and image, and his temporal play with repetition and rhythmic rupture collaborate to make his case more clearly, more quickly, and on a level of thought separate from the logical faculties we usually animate to apprehend written argument.⁴⁴

Thinkers from different schools of thought have tackled the effects of poetry on the mind variously. Reuven Tsur, an influential scholar in the field of cognitive poetics, calls what I have just referred to as a “separate level of thought” the “precategorical” (that is, pre-linguistic) realm of cognition, observing that, because of speech’s “focus” on speech categories, “language is particularly ill-suited to convey unique emotional experiences, unique sensations, mystic insights, and the like,” and concludes that a speaker’s recourse to metaphoric image and rhythm might significantly enhance their attempts to communicate such experience.⁴⁵ Ultimately, for Tsur, “the sound patterns of poetry in general, and rhyme in particular, typically exploit this precategorical acoustic information.”⁴⁶

From quite a different angle, Boris Maslov and Richard Martin, two scholars from an emergent wave of scholarship reconsidering historical context’s relation to poetic form, have also recently written about poetic metaphor as a kind of pre-logical conceptual technology, one which surfaced along with the invention of the lyric poem and which signified a mythic (pre-

⁴⁴ For this way of conceiving of the intellectual work poetry might do, I am indebted to a specific phrase from Simon Jarvis, who, in an analysis of Viktor Zhirmunsky’s description of Pushkin, remarked that (per Zhirmunsky) Pushkin’s rhymes “both sound and think.” See Jarvis, “Why Rhyme Pleases,” *Thinking Verse*. 1 (2011): 22.

⁴⁵ Reuven Tsur, *Playing by Ear and by Tip of the Tongue: Precategorical Information in Poetry* (Amsterdam, 2012), 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 120. In *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* (New York, 2002), Peter Stockton makes a similar argument, situating the work of thinking poetically firmly in the mind and – crucially – the *body* of the reader, thus understanding poetry not as a locus of thought but rather as thought’s ingrained linguistic form. In the words of one leading scholar in the field, “Most simply, we think in the forms that we do and we say things in the ways that we do because we are all roughly human-sized containers of air and liquid with our main receptors at the top of our bodies” (p. 4). More lyrically, Nikki Skillman has recently written about poetry as a faculty of thought in twentieth-century American poetry, finding in the material workings of the brain itself a fecund source of metaphorical material for her poets, as lyric encounter “evolves into a mediation on the emergence of consciousness from the interaction of inanimate parts – on the origins of mind in matter.” See Skillman, *The Lyric in the Age of the Brain* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 2.

philosophical) mode of perception, conception, and expression. As Maslov puts it, in order to understand the role performed by metaphor in ancient poetry and thought,

we must remember that, before the rise of philosophy, the task of *conceiving* of the world was pursued, first and foremost, within the medium of poetry. Abstract concepts were not rigorously defined, interrelated by logic, or organized into a philosophical system; instead, they were construed as actors and cast (“hypostasized”) into what we would call personifications. The setting in which these concepts interacted was provided by “myth” – yet that was myth before the rise of philosophically inflected theology. In other words, it was not a mythological doctrine but a malleable medium of thought, which was subject to innovation and change that were *conceptual* in their nature and effects.⁴⁷

Although the cognitive school’s focus is on logical or conceptual priority (wherein “precategorical” signifies a realm of the brain, not a stage of human development) and the historical poetics focus is on historical priority (“before the rise of philosophy”), both otherwise quite disparate fields of poetry-study agree that metaphor and other conceptual strategies commonly deployed by poetry are best understood in terms of priority, firstness, or before-ness. The effects of poetry on the mind, in other words, take place *before differentiation*, whether that differentiation takes place at the level of the speech category or (as the classicist Martin puts it) occurs when science comes along to dissect the metaphor with a scalpel.⁴⁸

In *The World as Will and Representation*, a work that exerted great influence on Ivanov, Schopenhauer also observes that the thoughts effected by poetry are achieved “prior to” those arrived at by the faculties of judgment and reason:

Rhythm and rhyme are quite peculiar aids to poetry. I can give no other explanation of their incredibly powerful effect than that our faculties of perception have received from time, to which they are essentially bound, some quality on account of which we inwardly follow, and, as it were, consent to each regularly recurring sound. In this way rhythm and rhyme are partly a means of holding our attention, because we willingly follow the poem read, and *partly they produce in us a blind consent to what is read prior to any judgment, and this gives the poem a certain emphatic power of convincing independent of all reasons.*⁴⁹

In a fragment on the workings of lyric poetry written in 1908, Ivanov commented that the lyric is distinguished from the other classical genres in that the “chord of the moment” is proper to it and

⁴⁷ Boris Maslov, *Pindar and the Emergence of Literature* (Cambridge, England, 2015), 119.

⁴⁸ Richard Martin, “Against Ornament: O. M. Freidenberg’s Concept of Metaphor in Ancient and Modern Contexts,” in *Persistent Forms: Explorations in Historical Poetics*, ed. Ilya Kliger et al. (New York, 2015), 274-313.

⁴⁹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York, 1966), bk. 1:243-44 (emphasis added). Ivanov was explicitly interested in Schopenhauer’s theory of “bezvol’noe sozertsanie” as he glossed the above in his 1914 essay on Novalis. See V. I. Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii* 4 vols. (Brussels, 1971-84), 4:264.

to no other genre. The lyric is constituted by transitions from one mental image to another: they are “lightninglike fissures of the imagination.”⁵⁰

It was Ivanov’s conviction that this quick, sensory mode of thinking, which occurs “prior to any judgment,” as Schopenhauer puts it, was a process with its roots in ancient myth: a mode of representation wherein the means of thinking and speaking are united. Following an idea that originated with Herder and had significant influence on the Russian and German intellectual and scholarly traditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Ivanov believed that divinity had once inhered, mystically, within words – that when poets and priests had uttered words like “mixing bowl” and “cave” they signified not only mixing bowl and cave but also, simultaneously, divine concepts like “soul” and “birth,” concepts which lived inside the image of those cooking implements and geographical features and were not separable from them. And he believed that through the effects of Symbolist poetry that divinity could be expressed again.⁵¹ Indeed, just as one may apprehend the divinity in a religious icon immediately upon apprehending its image, so too do the principles of poetry – patterned sound and image – work with “priority” upon the listener, claiming and modeling a certain immediacy of the experience of perception, thought, and time.

There is something of the divine in this mental experience, and while modeling poetic thought on the level of the individual image, sound, and word, Ivanov also lets a vast mythic drama – nearly a storyline, nearly a whole new myth unto itself – play out in the poetic moments of these essays. Throughout Ivanov’s essay-corpus, the vehicle for this concept of poetry as a tool of thought is the “two great gods of earth,” in Edith Hamilton’s immortal words: a repeated metaphoric cluster of pastures, fields, soil, the things that grow on them in nature and in cultivation, and the agents and instruments of that cultivation.⁵² Thus the reader apprehends Ivanov’s claim – his hope for the inherent togetherness of things – on the syntactic level of the prose argument, on the sensory level of the experience of poetry, and on the ritual level of the myth of two specific Greek gods: Demeter and Dionysus. At these moments the language itself is charged with the full complexity of thought, just as language is specially charged during ritual or ceremony. They are moments of mythic speech, and for Ivanov, to speak mythically is, in a sense, to *think* – to accomplish the thought of the myth.

As in Claude Lévi-Strauss’s seminal definition, myth’s conceptual power comes from its ability to transcend time, to absorb and explain more than one historical moment at once.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii* 3:119-20.

⁵¹ I am paraphrasing from Ivanov, “Zavety simvolizma,” *Sobranie sochinenii* 2:593. Herder’s ideas on myth are elaborated in the enormously influential “Fragment of an Essay on Mythology,” written during the 1780s, in which he became the first thinker of the modern era to discuss myth as a fundamentally conceptual framework – a framework that modeled and represented thought. Herder’s essay can be found in Marcia Bunge, ed. and trans., *Against Pure Reason: Writings on Religion, Language, and History* (Eugene, 1993), 80.

⁵² “The Two Great Gods of Earth” is the title given to the subchapter on Dionysus and Demeter in Edith Hamilton’s now-classic compendium for schoolchildren, *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes* (Boston, 1942).

⁵³ “On the one hand, a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place in time: before the world was created, or during its first stages – anyway, long ago. But what gives the myth an operative value is that the specific pattern described is everlasting; it explains the present and the

“Ivanov’s thinking was ultimately metahistorical,” observes one scholar. “In this framework time is a very relative value. The cultural process or phenomenon is not conceived in terms of creation or destruction, but memory and oblivion.”⁵⁴ Ivanov’s profound relationship to the mythical is best understood in the same terms as his conception of poetry: simultaneity, the internal togetherness of different temporalities.

Ivanov’s understanding of myth had its roots in the works of such German thinkers as Herder, Goethe, and Novalis, and scholars have tended to distinguish him in terms of degree, rather than kind.⁵⁵ Indeed, Michael Wachtel maintains that Ivanov “went further” than the Jena Romantics, understanding myth as more than a “not strictly rational way of cognizing reality”: “essentially true, not a merely psychological phenomenon... Not the creation of an individual, but the conviction of a community.”⁵⁶ In an article arguing that the Symbolists were primarily engaged in *neomythological* (or mythopoetic) work, rather than a stylization of mythic works or an orientation to them of the kind we find in Romanticism, Zara Mints cites Ivanov’s adage “from symbol to myth,” heralding him as an architect of a more essentially *creative* attitude toward myth.⁵⁷ Robert Bird, following a “ritual/narrative” dichotomy of the sort proposed by Roland Greene and upheld by contemporary lyric theorists, argues that “myth” comprises the narrative elements of Ivanov’s poetic output and thought.⁵⁸ Taking a more critical tone, Tomas Venclova has remarked that Ivanov’s capacity to engage with myth was “masked” by his scholarship; his philological concerns eclipsing the kernels of anarchic revelation that one finds in other modernist poets.⁵⁹

What these scholarly perspectives have in common is their conception of myth as creative material for Ivanov, either used radically and fully, as in Wachtel, Mints, and Bird’s views, or not realizing its potential, as in Venclova’s. In Ivanov’s intellectual oeuvre, one can see this sort of relation to myth at work perhaps most profoundly and influentially in his writings on Dionysus and Friedrich Nietzsche. In a famous 1904 essay, “Nietzsche and Dionysus,” Ivanov casts the mythologies of the German philosopher and the Greek god in each other’s terms, writing Nietzsche’s biography into a trajectory of Dionysian ecstasy and sacrifice, cult and divinity. He opens with the established Greek myth of the Thessalonian military leader

past as well as the future” (Lévi-Strauss, Claude. “The Structural Study of Myth,” *Journal of American Folklore* 68 [October-December 1955]: 430).

⁵⁴ Vasily Rudich, “Vyacheslav Ivanov and Classical Antiquity,” in *Vyacheslav Ivanov: Poet, Critic and Philosopher*, ed. Robert Louis Jackson and Lowry Nelson, Jr. (New Haven, 1986).

⁵⁵ It is not a coincidence that Ivanov’s favorite poets are primarily those known for their ideas and worldviews – those famous, in other words, for philosophizing through poetry. On Ivanov’s intellectual debts to the German Romantic tradition and its mystical, interactive, comprehensive worldview, as played out specifically in his poetry, see Michael Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition: Goethe, Novalis, and the Poetics of Viacheslav Ivanov* (Madison, 1994).

⁵⁶ Viacheslav Ivanov, *Selected Essays*, ed. Michael Wachtel (Evanston, 2001), xii.

⁵⁷ Zara Mints, “O nekotorykh ‘neomifologicheskikh’ tekstakh v tvorchestve russkikh simvolistov,” *Blok i russkii simvolizm: Izbrannye trudy v 3 kn, bk. 3, Poetika russkogo simvolizma* (St. Petersburg, 2004), 59-96).

⁵⁸ Robert Bird, “Lyric Ritual and Narrative Myth in Russian Modernism: The Case of Viacheslav Ivanov,” *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture* 36 (Spring/Summer 2003): 81-106.

⁵⁹ Tomas Venclova, “On Russian Mythological Tragedy: Vjačeslav Ivanov and Marina Cvetaeva,” in *Myth in Literature* 5, ed. A. Kodjak et al. (Columbus, 1986), 89-109.

Eurypylus, who received the cult image of Dionysus as a Trojan war trophy and who, like Nietzsche (so Ivanov), consequently became steeped in holy madness. Inaugurating a myth about the German thinker that would stay in the Russian poetic and cultural consciousness for over a century, Ivanov concludes: “Nietzsche gave Dionysus back to the world: therein lay his calling and his prophetic madness.”⁶⁰

What we could call the “myth as creative material” angle on Ivanov’s relation to myth, then, is a crucial one for understanding his work. But in addition to creative fodder and cult idol, Dionysus was also, for Ivanov, a *mode of thinking*: not merely malleable material for ideation and text production, but a structure of thought and experience which Ivanov himself did not write so much as access. In the essay “The Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God,” written contemporaneously with “Nietzsche and Dionysus,” Ivanov elaborates what would be his most influential theory of the Dionysian: a conception of pagan cult worship inflected with Christian mysticism. Ivanov argues that ecstasy – transcendence of the individual – is the most ancient and deepest phenomenon of religious experience; that suffering and sacrifice are required for it. This essay, which provides a kind of theoretical backdrop to the cult narrative developed in “Nietzsche and Dionysus,” presents the story of Dionysus, crucially, as the *means* of mystical transcendence rather than the substance of it. “The element of Dionysus is only a state,” professed Ivanov in “Hellenic Religion,” describing the possibility of encountering the god as the possibility of collective self-discovery and transformation, rather than as material for narrative. The myths of Dionysus’s appearances, he continues, are only an attempt to give those appearances and encounters an etiological explanation.⁶¹ In this understanding, the stories about the god are secondary to the god as a mode.

This more capacious consideration of Dionysus as a mode of thought and experience will prove fruitful when engaging with his cameos in Ivanov’s essays. Omry Ronen has remarked that for Ivanov and the early Symbolists, “Dionysus was the principle autometadescriptive sign... the symbol of the symbol.”⁶² In this vein, Nina Segal-Rudnik has recently argued that since Ivanov was first and foremost invested in poetic language – and brought that to his work on questions of theology and philosophy – we are justified in understanding his engagement with the Dionysian as a “device.”⁶³ Much like metaphor itself, the presence of the god in Ivanov’s essays is best conceived of at once as a portal to divine poetic expression – the image resolving in the more abstract concept, or the vehicle pointing to the distant tenor – and the name of that very expression, the divinity achieved by poetic utterance.

In his study *Greek Mythology and Poetics*, classicist Gregory Nagy adopts specific terminology from Roman Jakobson and the Prague Linguistic Circle to illuminate the relation of poetic language to myth in ancient Greek culture. Nagy comments that, for the ancient Greeks,

the language of ritual and myth is marked, whereas “everyday” language is unmarked. The Greek language gives us an example of these semantics: *múō* means “I have my eyes closed” or “I have my mouth closed” in everyday situations, but

⁶⁰ Ivanov, “Nietzsche i Dionis,” *Sobranie sochinenii* 1:717).

⁶¹ Ivanov, “Ellinskaia religiia stradaiushchego boga: Opyt religiozno-istoricheskoi kharakteristiki,” *Sobranie sochinenii* 3:39).

⁶² Omry Ronen, “A Functional Technique of Myth Transformation in Twentieth Century Russian Lyrical Poetry.” in: *Myth in Literature* 5, 110-23.

⁶³ Nina Segal-Rudnik, “Dionisiistvo kak priem,” in *Pro et contra* 2:145.

“I see in a special way” or “I say in a special way” in ritual. Hence *mústēs* is “one who is initiated” and *mustērion* is “that into which one is initiated, mystery (Latin *mysterium*).” Hence also *múthos*, “myth”: this word, it has been argued, is a derivative of *múō* and had at an earlier stage meant “special” as opposed to “everyday” speech.⁶⁴

This passage could almost have been written by Ivanov. Its “content,” or logical aim, is to demonstrate that mythic poetry uses the same words as everyday speech but in a “special” way. At the end Nagy reveals that the very words he has used to make his argument are complicit in the phenomenon he describes. The reader is left quite persuaded, but not entirely sure of how the persuasion took place, since the final sentence in the passage worked more quickly on the intellectual consciousness than the others had. It works, I would argue, poetically. The poetic principle at play here is based in a specific kind of repetition which suddenly shortens the reader’s experience of linear time – the time it usually takes to apprehend a written argument. Like rhyme, which achieves its effect by dovetailing a remembered sound and a new piece of semantic information, the last sentence in this paragraph dovetails a remembered word and a new semantic position for it to occupy. The word *myth*, which had previously been presented as mere setting or scaffolding – as “unmarked,” indeed, in Jakobson’s schema – is re-presented anew, now as the object of inquiry, the most marked position. That the word also *means* the intellectual maneuver we have just experienced (everyday speech becoming special speech) is left for us to marvel at, and to believe.

As we shall see, when poetry is presented as a faculty of thought in Ivanov’s essay corpus, this same basic pattern is employed. The genre seems prosaic and logical, linear even; the subject matter is “how poetic language and thought work, have worked, or ought to work”; a poetic principle is activated in the prose; the point is made through some combination of linear argument and extra-semantic cognitive experience; the name of that combination and its performance is revealed to be “myth.” If there is something tricky or that seems like sleight of hand in the pattern I have just outlined, I submit that that is because poetic principles at work in prose catch us intellectually unawares.

Even the chronological progression we note within the essays contains a mythic argument. The earlier essays present the gods as gods: thus, for instance, Dionysus and Demeter make literal appearances in “The Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles.” The later essays present them in their earthly avatars: “The Testaments of Symbolism” employs intricate analogies featuring vines, ears of grain, and the soil of their marriage. This progression is variously interpretable. It may, from the perspective of cognitive poetics, function as a drawn-out example of the development and refinement of the pre-categorical realm of thought, as an abstract image is required to take on the burden of increasingly complex signification. Alternatively, from the vantage point of the nineteenth-century school of myth studies and philology to which Ivanov was indebted, it may be said to trace the conceptual trajectory that the ancients themselves underwent: from myth to pure metaphor.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Gregory Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca, 1990), viii.

⁶⁵ I am paraphrasing from Aleksandr Potebnja’s *Mysl’ i iazyk* (1862). The phrase “pure metaphor” (chistaia metafora) I take from Eleazar Meletinsky’s gloss on Potebnja in his canonical *Poetika mifa* (Moscow, 1976), 123.

“The Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles”

The 1905 essay “The Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles” is devoted to a careful consideration of individual dynamic poetic principles: Ivanov unfolds the colors, physical setting, sex, Greek gods, poetic images, poetic moods, and themes inherently symbolically associated with each of three “principles” (начала). Ivanov’s use of the word начало is telling: it well exemplifies his commitment to the originary. This interest in origins is not only temporary – in that he believes in circularity and return – but also structural: he discusses the poetic origins underlying the mechanisms of thought and expression.⁶⁶ The essay codifies these origins and correlates them into unified principles available to poetic thought.

In his explication of the poetics of “descent” (нисхождение), the colors pink and emerald, the goddesses Aphrodite and Demeter, the feminine sex, the earth, the themes of grace, beauty, assent, and return, and the images of rings, wreaths, and rainbows are all unfolded from a single poetic principle: the divine movement *downward*. This principle, in turn, is the antithesis of the sublime motion *upward*: “Ascent is rupture and separation; descent is the return and good tidings of victory. The one is ‘glory in the highest’; the other is ‘peace on earth.’ Ascent is a ‘No’ to the Earth; descent is ‘a meek ray of the mysterious Yes.’”⁶⁷ As is common in his prose works, the final few words come from Ivanov’s own poetic oeuvre, and later in the essay he offers more of the poem to illustrate the image of Aphrodite’s smile:

Я ношу кольцо,
И мое лицо -
Кроткий луч таинственного Да.⁶⁸

The lines come from a poem called “Beauty,” which features an enamored traveler in dialogue with a mysterious beauty – perhaps better understood as Beauty incarnate: a “daughter of the earth or the heavens” (дочь ли ты земли / иль небес). The lines quoted in the essay belong to the female speaker, and end the poem. The circularity of the ring (and the “o” sound of *kol’to*, *moë*, *litso*), the mysterious Yes not uttered but inherent within the speaker’s countenance, are the themes and motifs that constitute the “feminine” principle discussed in Ivanov’s essay. The unsaid Yes of the speaker’s face, an example of mythically meaningful speech both expressed and apprehended by non-logical means, signifies consent as such, not only between the poem’s speakers.

Here is the poem in its entirety.

КРАСОТА

Владимиру Сергеевичу Соловьёву

⁶⁶ Both words are calques of the Greek *archa*, as in Aristotle’s “first principles.”

⁶⁷ Ivanov, *Selected Essays*, 8. For the original see Ivanov, “Simvoliki esteticheskikh nachal,” *Sobranie sochinenii* 1:826. Subsequent citations to various Ivanov essays will show the Wachtel and Bird translation, followed by a reference to the Russian-language version.

⁶⁸ Ivanov, “Simvoliki,” 827. “I wear a ring / And my face / Is a meek ray of the mysterious Yes.”

Περὶ τ' ἄμφι τε κάλλος ἄητο.
Нутн. Номер.

Вижу вас, божественные дали,
Умбрских гор синеющий кристалл!
Ах! там сон мой боги оправдали:
Въяве там он путнику предстал...
«Дочь ли ты земли
Иль небес, - внемли:
Твой я! Вечно мне твой лик блистал».

- «Гайна мне самой и тайна миру,
Я, в моей обители земной,
Се, гряду по светлому эфиру:
Путник, зреть отныне будешь мной!
Кто мой лик узрел,
Тот навек прозрел -
Дольний мир навек пред ним иной.

«Радостно по цветоносной Гее
Я иду, не ведая - куда.
Я служу с улыбкой Адрастее,
Благосклонно - девственно - чужда.
Я ношу кольцо,
И мое лицо -
Кроткий луч таинственного Да».⁶⁹

The line immediately before the lines cited in Ivanov's essay frames them tellingly: "I am, virginally, *other*," declares the earthly incarnation of beauty; "I wear a ring, / And my face / Is a meek ray of the mysterious Yes." She must be other so that she may be rejoined; she must be virginal so that her Yes will always signify anew. For just as the principle of sublime ascent represents a "No" to the earth, this poem is about the principle of earthly consent. It is about the promise of marriage (я ношу кольцо) and about consummation. It is about being together again – the traveler traverses the earth; the beauty is of it – and the eternity of that return to unity, the circularity of time. Remarkably, the poem describes a kind of movement, a dynamic, a change, a consummation – not only a togetherness but a *coming-togetherness* – yet the dynamic is eternal

⁶⁹ Ibid., 827. "BEAUTY // To Vladimir Sergeevich Solovyov. // *Beauty spread around her. / Homeric hymn. // I see you, divine expanses, / Of Umbrian mountains the crystal shining blue! / Ah! there the gods justified my dream: / There in reality it appeared to a traveler... / "Whether you are daughter of earth / Or heavens, – hark: / I am yours! Your face has been shining to me eternally." / "I am mystery to myself and mystery to the world, / I, in my earthly dwelling, / Lo, I approach along the light ether: / Traveler, hence you will see by me! / Who has seen my face / Has seen the light eternally - / The world below is eternally different before him. / Joyfully along flower-bearing Gaia / I go, not knowing where. / I serve Adrastea with a smile, / Am propitiously - virginally - other. / I wear a ring, / And my face / Is a meek ray of the mysterious Yes."*

(some version of *vechno* or *navek* is repeated three times throughout the poem). The poem's dialogic structure participates in this experience: a literary device known for its capacity to represent and model tension, here the dialogue resolves in allegory, something more akin to the lovers' holy duet in the Song of Songs than the philosophical debates hosted by Socrates. The speakers in the poem participate allegorically in Ivanov's myth of the symbolist word itself: the union of things meaning and things meant.

The poem is cited, per Ivanov, for its imagistic evocation of Aphrodite's smile of consent.⁷⁰ It bears an epigraph from the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, and indeed seems primarily to feature a female earth divinity. The association – even identification – of Aphrodite and Demeter is particularly remarkable in this section of the essay “The Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles.” Or – perhaps precisely not remarkable, since in Ivanov's description they seem intuitively to belong together and to mean each other, in an abundance of earthliness and natural feminine sensuality. But the “intuitive” structure of Ivanov's associating these two specific goddesses is a deeply mythical one, and deserves some consideration.

The association of sex and eros with fertility and agriculture was a basic principle of ideological organization in Indo-European ritual and social practice. Indo-European ritual and culture, the ancestral genitor of ancient Greek myth and poetic production, is commonly understood to have been organized into three “functions”: one category of ritual was dedicated to the sovereign and the sacral, another to warfare, and a third to fertility, sex, agriculture, and animal husbandry.⁷¹ It has been suggested that these lines of organization find their way into Greek myth in the story known as the Judgment of Paris, that beauty contest between Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite at which Paris of Troy served as judge, and the consequences of which launched the events of the *Iliad*. As the myth goes, each goddess offered Paris a bribe, hoping to be named the most beautiful. Hera offered to make Paris sovereign ruler of all Europe and Asia; Athena offered him great military wisdom and skill in warfare; and Aphrodite offered him the love of the most beautiful woman in the world, then Helen of Sparta.

Nagy argues that the goddesses' offerings to Paris map on to the discrete categories of Indo-European ritual: Hera's offer represents the sovereign and sacral; Athena's, warfare; and Aphrodite's, fertility, sex, and agriculture. In the fabula of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the Judgment of Paris is the point of departure for the Trojan War and its aftermath and thus represents, as Nagy puts it, Greek “epic's reckoning with its own genesis.”⁷² I would continue this line of argument and suggest that Paris's opting for Helen can be read, in historical-mythic terms, as Greek myth's capacity to self-theorize in eroticized agricultural metaphor. The

⁷⁰ In this vein, Wachtel has discussed Aphrodite's smile – in this essay, in this poem, and throughout Ivanov's corpus – as a signifier of “visionary experience” (*Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition*, 51). Taking the “vision” trope further, Nikolai Kotrelev has identified seeing as *the* gateway to divine knowledge in this poem. Reading the traveler as an avatar for the biological poet, he claims: “he *sees the world through her*.” See Kotrelev, “‘Videt’ i ‘vedat’” u Viacheslava Ivanova,” in *Pro et contra* 2:262.

⁷¹ The term “function” belongs to Georges Dumézil, whose seminal work in comparative mythology *Mythe et épopée. I. L'idéologie des trois fonctions dans les épopées des peuples indo-européens* (Paris, 1968) was the first to propose this tripartite ideological breakdown. Following him and considering in particular the consequences of his work for Greek myth's capacity to self-theorize is Nagy's *Greek Mythology and Poetics*.

⁷² Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics*, 16.

intertwining agrarian metaphors Ivanov employs repeatedly to depict – and indeed to *model* – mythic thought and expression may be understood, then, as the descendants of the Judgment of Paris. They conjure the gods of the epic era; they intend to re-effect a total synthesis of crop, deity, and the poetic trope that binds them.

At the end of “The Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles,” Ivanov discusses the third aesthetic principle: the frenzied Dionysian plunge to the underworld.⁷³ At first presented as a synthesis reaching beyond the scope of the first two principles, it becomes clear that this principle has a special, erotically charged, relationship with the Aphroditic/Demetrian cluster, offering our first scene in Ivanov’s myth of the gods of harvest and the vine: “Dionysus is the god of moisture (влажный бог), fertilizing and enlivening (животворящий) the earth with ambrosial intoxication...”⁷⁴ This drunken, mystical rite seems to resemble cultivation itself – the god does, after all, irrigate the soil. But Ivanov doesn’t quite cast the god in the image of the cultivating man, wielding agricultural technology over the submissive earth. Rather, his decision to ascribe the attributes of cultivation to the vine-god, and to portray them in such erotic terms, can be read as a vote of confidence in the symbiotic crops’ relative autonomy from human hands. Left to their own devices, the gods – which are the earth and its plants – will ready themselves to make myth grow.

One could locate something of the proto-ecocritical in this particular structure of thought. In a foray into the relationship between plants and human philosophy, ecocritical theorist Michael Marder has recently observed that, because they *may* reproduce asexually, “sexuality is a luxurious appendage of plant life.”⁷⁵ In a section on viticulture and eroticism in particular, he asks:

What does the humanly enforced asexual reproduction hold in store for plants and, above all, for Hegel’s favorite grapes? Predictably enough, a future in which we [humans] continue to impose abstinence on plants is grim; it is a future of greatly diminished diversity and a nearly identical genetic makeup in three-quarters of the world’s grape varieties.⁷⁶

As if predicting Marder’s call for humans to let grapevines express their “sexuality” freely, Ivanov portrays the sprouting of mythic expression as a sexual communion between divine plants cultivating each other. Like the traveler and the beauty in “Beauty,” they simultaneously belong to each other and are strange to each other, and constantly renew that relational cycle.

The interpretive maneuver I am proposing here – an ecocritical reading of Ivanov’s plant metaphors – requires a different conception of the relation of wine to grape than the one I imagine Marder has in mind. He takes Hegel to task for not letting the vine attain “being-for-self”; he condemns the wine industry for exploiting the vine; forced asexual reproduction is his case in point. But to conceive of the vine mythically is to understand wine – perhaps intoxication as such – as a principle that inheres in the grape. It isn’t a commodity for the taking; it is proper to the grape. It is divine and the name of it is Dionysus. Thus when Ivanov writes of Dionysus’s

⁷³ Ivanov, “Simvoliki,” 829.

⁷⁴ Ivanov, *Selected Essays*, 8; Ivanov, “Simvoliki,” 826.

⁷⁵ Michael Marder, *The Philosopher’s Plant: An Intellectual Herbarium* (New York, 2014), 166.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

“fertilizing and enlivening the earth with ambrosial intoxication,” he is describing a plant-on-plant dynamic, as it were. Dionysus becomes the subject and the object of viticulture at once.

“Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism”

In “Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism,” a 1908 essay devoted to disentangling the “idealistic” from the “realistic” strands of symbolist thought and art, Ivanov turns again to agrarian metaphors while giving a mythologized intellectual history. “Two Elements” is in part a manifesto, in this case advocating poetic composition in a literary mode he calls “realistic symbolism”; in part a work of comparative historiography, in this case tracing the trajectory of symbolist thought from antiquity through modernity; and in very large part a work of ambitious mythopoesis, seizing upon subtle patterns across cultures and histories to forge a great new meta-myth about the task of the symbolist poetic word. As with “The Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles,” one can read this essay, too, as a work of mystical lyric theory, employing poetic thinking to make – and model – the argument for myth.

The essay’s basic device is a compare-and-contrast between the trends of “idealism” and “realism” in symbolist literary art. As in “Symbolics,” Ivanov correlates each trend to a sex and one of art’s roles; idealism, he claims, is masculine and transformative; realism, feminine and signifying. Over the course of the essay, Ivanov makes it clear that he much prefers realism and even despairs somewhat over the reign of the idealist tendency, decrying it for promoting rampant “individualism” and forsaking the natural (природное).

The third of the essay’s nine sections is dedicated primarily to the ancient and medieval literary arts. Here Ivanov again invokes divine imagery to demonstrate the power and process of poetic thought, this time through metaphors of the harvest:

...индивидуализма в нашем смысле греко-римская древность не знала; она лишь предвкушала благодать тех злаков и яды тех плевел, которые могли прозябнуть только на исторической почве, вспаханной христианством. Ибо христианство открыло тайну лика и утвердило окончательно личность.⁷⁷

Here the soil is the historical consciousness of a whole epoch, the cultivating agent is Christianity, and the forms of knowledge it produces are both positively and negatively valued. The good grain ears may be said to correspond to the happy revelation of the mystery of the *lik*, which indeed is symbolist poetry’s task; whereas the poisonous weeds are likely responsible for decisively championing *lichnost*’ and cultivating individualism.

The finer pattern of argument rests on a virtuosic combination of expressive modes: it relies simultaneously on linear argument, unfolding sentence by sentence, and on poetic device, which achieves its effects more quickly. Here, first a curious kind of knowledge is introduced (индивидуализма в нашем смысле греко-римская древность не знала); then a sense-

⁷⁷ Ivanov, “Dve stikhii v sovremennom simvolizme,” *Sobranie sochinenii* 2:542. “Greco-Roman antiquity did not know individualism in our sense. It only had a foretaste of the goodness of the grains and the poisons of the chaff that could only sprout on a historical soil that had been plowed by Christianity. For Christianity revealed the mystery of the face-image and affirmed the personality once and for all” (Ivanov, *Selected Essays*, 18, translation modified).

perception verb is employed to describe knowing, with a claim on double temporality (она лишь предвкусала); finally the mythic metaphors of grain and chaff are marshalled to evoke the phenomenon of mythical thinking “taking root” in a given cultural climate. What is more, these metaphors are accompanied by an even more “poetic” device: dactylic meter (благодать тех злаков и яды тех плевел). The sentence is nearly a Gesamtkunstwerk in itself, uniting not art forms but modes of apprehension: it plays on the aural, visual, and gustatory modes of apprehending and producing knowledge.

The metaphors’ mythic promises resolve with an erotic twist: Demeter shows up, newly, embodied in the ears of grain and weeds sprouting on cultivated soil. And the god of the vine, so bodily present in the agrarian scene offered in “Symbolics,” appears here in a different form. Dionysus is evoked by the specter of Christ in the scene, the *lik* and the *lichnost*, the masculine force of knowledge that “ploughs” the fertile earth, recalling their cultivation-relation in the earlier essay. From the union of mythic parents is born a mythic knowledge.

Later in the same essay, in a kind of echo, the agrarian metaphors come back intensely. Ivanov lapses into a familiar vatic mode, dropping the premise of mytho-historiography and exhorting absolutely.

Только из символа, понятого как реальность, может вырасти, как колос из зерна, миф. Ибо миф — объективная правда о сущем. Миф есть чистейшая форма ознаменовательной поэзии. Не даром, по Платону, в гармонии анти-индивидуалистического мира, ему желанного, задача поэта, «если он хочет быть поэтом, творить мифы». Возможен ли еще миф? Где творческая религиозная почва, на которой он мог бы расцвести?⁷⁸

This return to the dynamic images of grain and earth confirms their role as bearers of mythic knowledge on the soil of cultural consciousness. We witness an effective poetic device in action: the move from simile (как колос из зерна) to straight metaphor (Где творческая религиозная почва, на которой он мог бы расцвести?), which presents the second round of figurative language as reality. As though the yearned-for creative religious soil existed in *our* plane. But we know where it is: it must be on the other side of the simile, with the grain and the seed. Only by thinking according to poetic principles, in other words, is it possible to “find” the frame of mind that would let myth take root.

“The Testaments of Symbolism”

Much like “Two Elements” and “Symbolics,” Ivanov’s 1910 essay “The Testaments of Symbolism” puts forth part mythic historiography, part modern poetic program. Its stated goal is an explication of the task of the Symbolist poet: to make the mysteries of poetic language known

⁷⁸ Ivanov, “Dve stikhii,” 554. “Myth can only grow from out of the symbol, understood as reality, like an ear of grain from a seed. For myth is the objective truth about the existing. Myth is the purest form of poetry that signifies. Thus, Plato claims that in the harmony of the anti-individualist world he desires, the task of the poet, “if he wants to be a poet, is to create myths.” Is myth still possible? Where is the creative religious soil on which it might blossom?” (Ivanov, *Selected Essays*, 29, translation modified).

to all, just as the ancient poets of ritual did. The essay has a dual claim on time: its author invokes the trans-historical, ever-present mystical power of the poetic word, while also calling on his contemporaries with a sense of urgency, exhorting them to take up the mantle of the ancients and write *now*.

The essay is not only a narrative manifesto, however: like “Two Elements,” it also offers a lengthy, philologically inclined, mystical linguistic theory, with its roots in German idealism and Greek myth. Immediately after presenting a sweeping mythologized history of the modern loss of access to poetic mystery, Ivanov calls upon the contemporary poets of Symbolism to recover it. He describes two kinds of speech available to them, championing the second as their special prerogative:

Символизм кажется упреждением той гипотетически мыслимой, собственно религиозной эпохи языка, когда он будет обнимать две отдельных речи: речь об эмпирических вещах и отношениях и речь о предметах и отношениях иного порядка, открывающегося во внутреннем опыте, — иератическую речь пророчествования. Первая речь, ныне единственно нам привычная, будет речь логическая, — та, основную внутреннюю форму которой является суждение аналитическое; вторая, ныне случайно примененная к первой, обвивающая священную золотую омелой дружные с нею дубы поэзии и глушащая паразитическим произрастанием рассады науки, поднимающаяся тучными колосьями родного злака на пажитях вдохновенного созерцания и чуждыми плевелами на поле, вспаханном плугами точного мышления, — будет речь мифологическая, основную форму которой послужит «миф», понятый как синтетическое суждение, где подлежащее — понятие-символ [*sic*], а сказуемое — глагол: ибо миф есть динамический вид (*modus*) символа, — символ, созерцаемый как движение и двигатель, как действие и действенная сила.⁷⁹

The passage is only two sentences long (three in English translation), but it is convoluted enough that it merits some unpacking. In the second sentence, where Ivanov describes the kind of poetic/mythical language that ought, under Symbolism, to reign, he mobilizes four discrete

⁷⁹ Ivanov, “Zavety simbolizma,” 594-95. “Symbolism forebodes that hypothetically conceivable, fully religious epoch of language, when it will embrace two separate forms of speech: speech about empirical things and relations, and speech about objects and relations of an order revealed only in inward experience, that is, the hieratic speech of prophesying. The former speech (the only one we are presently accustomed to) will be logical speech, a speech having analytic judgment as its fundamental inner form. The latter kind of speech is currently entangled with the former in an incidental fashion, just as holy golden mistletoe encircles the congenial oaks of poetry but strangles the gardens of science with parasitic growths; on pastures of inspired contemplation such speech rises as lush ears of native grain, but it is like foreign chaff on fields turned by the plows of exact thought; this latter is mythological speech. The main form of mythological speech will be “myth,” understood as a synthetic judgment with a conceptsymbol (*sic*) as its subject, and a verb for its predicate: for myth is the dynamic aspect (*modus*) of the symbol, viewed as movement and mover, as action and active force” (Ivanov, *Selected Essays*, 41, translation modified).

metaphoric scenarios: the holy golden vines winding around the oaks of poetry who are friendly to it; the parasitic upgrowth suffocating the hotbeds of science; the lush ears of native grain rising on pastures of inspired contemplation; and the foreign weeds on the field worked by ploughs of exact thought. The vines and the ears of grain represent mythological speech, and the friendly oaks of poetry and pastures of inspired contemplation represent a poetically-inclined intellectual-cultural landscape where such speech might flourish. Conversely, the parasitic upgrowth and foreign weeds represent the same mythological speech, doomed to strangle or perish on the hotbeds of science and the fields ploughed by exact thought, which represent a logically-inclined intellectual-cultural landscape. Unlike the plants in “Two Elements,” which grew on the same patch of land and represented a simultaneity of good and bad, these plants are offered as competing, separate visions of how speech might work.

This particular metaphoric cluster of images that Ivanov uses to discuss the intellectual work with which poetry is tasked and to which it is suited is not only “about” poetry: it is *itself* a performance of the double-knowledge of which poetry is capable – and, indeed, to which it is bound. The vehicles of poetic thought in the passage above – the ears of grain and the vine – represent, in one sense, simply “the kind of poetic speech that Ivanov likes.” This is the sense in which the reader of the essay is meant to logically understand Ivanov’s argument, aided through the (suffocating!) stacked relative clauses and the lengthy verbal participles by the clarity of the images they hold. In another, greater sense, those vehicles are also Demeter and Dionysus, gods of the harvest and of wine. The extended metaphor series is the story of their work and – as in the other instances throughout his corpus of essays – their relation to each other. Their myth unfolds and refolds, as it were, as Ivanov uses their attributes and earthly forms as metaphors for poetic knowledge.

The conceptual performance here is not totally different from the usual signifying acrobatics of a good lyric poem, though the stakes, perhaps, are higher; the tenors more numerous. One must grasp, at once, the objects on the page (grain, vine) and their apparent referent (positively valued poetic speech in a friendly intellectual environment), and sense their mythic persons (Demeter, Dionysus) dancing behind the scenes. The major difference is that the metaphor is not in a poem; it is in a rather programmatic essay about what poetry must do, and it is using the tools of poetic knowledge to establish its argument.

As we have seen, this constellation of images allows Ivanov some freedom with regard to the agency and purposiveness of poetic knowledge-cultivation: sometimes the field of knowledge represents a single human mind, sometimes it is the collective consciousness of a generation, an epoch, or indeed human culture writ large.⁸⁰ It also allows him to speak of the intellectual work that poetry does simultaneously in terms of *longue-durée* intellectual history and individual human consciousness. One of the features of poetic thought, evidently, is its ability to jump between, correlate, and unite a great variety of scales and patterns of temporal experience. Like myth in Lévi-Strauss’s conception – at once a series of real historical events and also a narrative with eternal explanatory power – Ivanov’s poetic thought is tasked with signifying doubly, a “synthetic judgment,” wherein things are meant rationally and mythically at

⁸⁰ The tension between Ivanov’s faith in crowds of people (cast in his work as a Dionysian throng) and the prophet-savior, between his belief in a collective, continuous culture and revolutionary sacrifice, have been discussed in Robert Bird, “Concepts of the Person in the Symbolist Philosophy of Viacheslav Ivanov,” *Studies in East European Thought* 61 (August 2009): 89-96); and Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition*, esp. 217-24.

once.⁸¹ It is the creative principles of poetry – metaphor, patterned sound, repeated image and motif; also poetry’s simultaneous claims on ritual and the immediate present – which make possible such a conceptual simultaneity, such a synthesis of judgment.⁸²

The piece in which Ivanov most explicitly outlines his anti-individualist, pro-collective aesthetic program in *political* terms is the essay “Crisis of Individualism,” penned five years earlier.⁸³ The essay takes as its primary focus a certain type of individual – typified, for Ivanov, in such heroes as Don Quixote, Hamlet, or Ivan Karamazov – who struggles with and ultimately cannot accept the world. Ivanov maintains that in the passion and ‘individualism’ of these heroes there remains, however, something of the tragic and the collective. The name of the synthesis of the two, he proclaims, is anarchy. Ivanov is tentatively disposed to positively value the anarchic inclination, but cautions that it must gain a kind of spiritual consciousness if it is to be a valid path to *sobornost*’.

Истинная анархия есть безумие, разрешающее основную дилемму жизни; «сытость или свобода» — решительным избранием «свободы». Ее верные будут бежать довольства и питаться растертыми в руках колосьями не ими вспаханных полей, помогая работающим на одной ниве и насыщая свой голод на другой.

Анархия, если она не хочет извратиться, должна самоопределяться как факт в плане духа.⁸⁴

The now-familiar image of the harvested grains and the ploughed fields in this passage can be read in two quite differing ways. On the one hand, it seems that they are invoked, here, to offer a vision of symbiosis and mutual support. The unities discussed above – of cultivator and cultivated, of symbolic image and concept, of god and grain and thought – are now extended to

⁸¹ The terms “analytic judgment” and “synthetic judgment,” together with the syntactic language of “subject” and “predicate” are, clearly, Kantian. Per Kant, synthetic judgments do not contain their predicates within their subject concepts: thus, in Ivanov’s schema, myth is dynamic, formed of a “conceptsymbol” plus a verb. Analytic judgments, by comparison, are static, with diminished opportunity to affect the world around them.

⁸² For recent and convincing work on poetry’s dual temporalities (à la myth), see especially Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 294, where he discusses lyric’s special, even hyperbolic, claim on the repeatable present, which he calls the “iterable *now*.”

⁸³ Some scholars hold that this essay represents a change in Ivanov’s intellectual trajectory: that it marks his turn away from a specifically Nietzschean individualism and towards an embrace of *sobornost*. (See, for instance, *A Revolution of the Spirit: Crisis of Value in Russia 1890-1924*, eds. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal and Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak. Fordham UP, 1990, 161.) I would disagree: as shown in the earlier “Nitsche i Dionis,” Ivanov’s Nietzsche is not quite an individualist, and his relation to him, I would contend, is continuously complex throughout his engagement in prose and verse.

⁸⁴ Ivanov 1: 839. “True anarchy is insanity that resolves the basic dilemma of life – “satiety or freedom?” – with the decisive choice “freedom.” Its believers will flee contentment and feed upon hand-ground ears of grain of fields not ploughed by them, helping those working on one field and quenching their hunger on another. Anarchy, if it does not want to be perverted, must define itself as a fact on the plane of the spirit.”

the divisions of labor and care in a society. In this reading, anarchy is indeed the happy synthesis of the concerns of the individual and the collective.

There is a suggestion, however, that anarchy's failure to register itself on a spiritual plane is reflected in the scene in the fields. The followers of anarchy are not fed by the grain they themselves cultivate, and therefore, it seems, they miss out on the spiritual component of their fare. They do not cultivate the 'creative religious soil,' in other words, where myth might blossom; their opting for freedom over satiety includes with it a kind of wastefulness of their capacity for the mystical.

Poetic Practice: "With the rays of his arrows Eros pierced me"

A year after "Testaments of Symbolism," Ivanov published the first half of his poetry collection *Cor ardens*, the book that earned him the epithet "philologist" in Gumilev's review. One of the poems in the collection where Ivanov's "synthetic" poetics of togetherness is particularly apparent is the sonnet "With the rays of his arrows Eros pierced me." The poem also offers a slightly different vision of agricultural metaphor in the realm of Dionysian passion. As "Beauty" depicted a Demetrian landscape inflected with her Aphroditic counterpart, so "With the rays of his arrows" depicts a Dionysian world shot through with Erotic fertility.

Лучами стрел Эрот меня пронзил,
Влача на казнь, как связня Севастьяна;
И, расточа горячий сноп колчана,
С другим снопом примчатся угрозил.

Так вещей сон мой жребий отразил
В зеркальности нелживого обмана...
И стал я весь - одна живая рана;
И каждый луч мне в сердце водрузил

Росток огня и корнем врос тягучим;
И я расцвел - золотоцвет мечей -
Одним из солнц; и багрецом текучим

К ногам стекла волна моих ключей...
Ты погребла в пурпурном море тело,
И роза дня в струистой урне тлела.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Ivanov, "Luchami strel Erot menia pronzil," in his *Cor ardens* (Moscow, 1911). "With the rays of his arrows Eros pierced me, / Dragging me to execution like the captive Sebastian; / And, scattering the burning sheaf of his quiver, / Threatened to come bearing down with another sheaf. // Thus a prophetic dream reflected my lot / In the mirroriness of an unfalse deceit... / And I became all over – one living wound; // And each ray erected in my heart / A sprout of flame and grew into prolix root / And I blossomed - chrysanthemum of swords — / As one of the suns. And in a crimson flow // To my feet the wave of my springs flowed hard... / You entombed my body in the purple sea / And the rose of day in wavelike urn decayed."

The poem combines elements from epic and lyrical models of representation. Perhaps it makes an argument for the epistemological transition from one to the next; perhaps it argues for their synthesis.⁸⁶ The past tense – rare for a short lyric poem – brings us into an epic realm, forsaking the lyric present, but the first-person pronoun and the sonnet form reestablish lyricity. The scope and scale of the poem alternates between personal hyperbole (И стал я весь - одна живая рана; И я расцвел - золотоцвет мечей) and trans-historical epic modes (Так вещий сон мой жребий отразил / В зеркальности нелживого обмана; the leaps from Eros to St. Sebastian, the parable-like quality of the rising and setting sun).

The most striking strategy the poem employs to combine epic and lyric, however, is that it performs its own reading. Any time a visual symbol is offered in the poem (Eros's arrows, blood, fire), the reader is prevented from thinking of what it might "mean," since Ivanov immediately supplies an array of accompanying "meanings" (divine penetration, wine and intoxication, the circularity of the sun's rising and falling). Reading the poem, one does not *venture* that these images and concepts are linked by the bond of signification; one *experiences* that they all mutually inhere at once.⁸⁷

Finally, this sonnet offers the most radical intimacy of Demetrian and Dionysian imagery we have seen, braiding the two together so tightly that they are figured not as two gods consummating their romance or two plants intertwining as they grow, but instead as *one* androgynous body, penetrating and penetrated at once, fertilizing and sprouting at once.⁸⁸ The

⁸⁶ Working with a similar German philosophical framework as Ivanov himself, the contemporary classicist Maslov has, following Herder and others, argued that the historical transition from the epic to the lyric modes of thought and expression is marked by the "separation" of image from concept in poetic metaphor: in epic, ideas come wholesale with their visual images and one experiences knowledge of them together; in lyric, images are presented as signifying, and we must locate and identify the signified concept ourselves (*Pindar and the Emergence of Literature*, esp. chap. 2; and Maslov, "From [Theogonic] Mythos to [Poetic] Logos: Reading Pindar's Genealogical Metaphors after Freidenberg," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 12 [January 2012]: 49-77).

⁸⁷ This phenomenon seems to have frustrated readers, scholars, and critics who would like to do the intellectual work of interpretation – of seeing X and discovering it means Y. In a reading of this poem, for instance, Boris Gasparov has observed that "there is something almost didactic in the persistence with which Ivanov's poetic subject points toward the symbolic reverberations of every phenomenon that comes his way." His comment on the poem's "didactic" quality suggests to me an interpretive frustration with the poem's inability or unwillingness to participate in a pattern of concealing and revealing latent meaning; frustration with its commitment to mythic immanence. Ivanov's poetics is one of simultaneity; concepts are less *meant* by each other than *given* together at once. See Gasparov, "Poetry of the Silver Age," in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*, ed. Evgeny Dobrenko and Marina Balina (Cambridge, England, 2011), 6.

⁸⁸ Earlier, in "Two Elements," Ivanov discusses Sergei Gorodetskii's poem "Iar'," which prominently features grain and vine imagery suffused with mythic eroticism. "Реальное мистическое событие - в данном случае брак Деметры и Диониса, - событие, свершившееся в высшем плане бытия, сохранилось в памяти хлебных колосьев..." ("Dve

Dionysian arrows become a Demetrian sheaf of wheat (расточа горячий сноп колчана); Dionysian flame bears a Demetrian root and blossom (И каждый луч мне в сердце водрузил // Росток огня корнем врос тягучим; / И я расцвел - золотоцвет мечей). In keeping with Ivanov's notions that a symbolist poem ought to bring two principles together (the inner and outer worlds, the active and passive modes of comprehension), so this poem brings the masculine and feminine principles together into one body.⁸⁹

In a recent comprehensive essay about metaphor called "Against Ornament," Richard Martin discusses the history of people conceiving of metaphor as an adornment or dressing – something fancy and unnecessary gracing an otherwise straightforward communication.⁹⁰ This conception, which, as Martin explains, goes at least back to Cicero's generation of rhetoricians, found great popularity in the Enlightenment, and remained the popular intellectual conception of metaphor up through the emergence of cognitive linguistics as a discipline.⁹¹ As suggested by his title, it is Martin's aim in the essay to conceive of metaphor in different terms: not as dress, not something "external" at all, but as an integral element of certain patterns and structures of thought.

Drawing on an intellectual history that Ivanov would have recognized and claimed, based in pre-Platonic Greek poetic practice and German idealist philosophies of language, Martin lands triumphantly upon a formulation coined by Soviet philologist Olga Freidenberg, describing the way the trope worked for the ancient Greeks.⁹² In Freidenberg's vision, metaphor is not clothing; it is an integral semantic whole, where image (perhaps "vehicle" or signifier, or, in Ivanov's words, "symbol") and concept (perhaps "tenor" or signified) are naturally fused, and only come apart when scholarly science dissects them.⁹³ The possibility of this integral unity, as

stikhii," 556). "With the rays of his arrows" continues in this vein and furthers it, rendering the two divine lover-crops as one entangled body.

⁸⁹ The image of the androgynous body, and the combination of sun and earth imagery here strongly recalls Aristophanes' mythopoetic speech in Plato's *Symposium*, in the same tradition that Gippius took up in "Ты."

⁹⁰ Martin, "Against Ornament."

⁹¹ Probably the most well-known of his discipline, cognitive linguist George Lakoff famously declared that human life is essentially structured by unconscious use of metaphor in cognition in the now-classic *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, 1980).

⁹² Martin extensively discusses Pindar, whose early lyric poetry serves as a laboratory for mythic notions of metaphor usage. His philosophers include Johann Gottfried Herder, one of the first modern thinkers to formulate a mythic epistemological framework; Ernst Cassirer, who understood metaphor as the simplest mythic form; Hermann Usener, who argued that all myth is generated from image; and Aleksandr Potebnja, who inherited German idealist philosophies of language and forged one based more centrally in the [poetic] word than in the image. With regard to Freidenberg, who was deeply indebted to these traditions, as well as their structuralist and symbolist philosophical outgrowths, we might consider Iurii Murashov's radical and convincing argument that the Russian structuralist theory of myth, though it claims to be universal, in fact has its roots primarily in *Ivanov's own work* with dionysianism. See Murashov, "Dionisiistvo simvolizma i structuralisticheskaia teoriia mifa: Viacheslav Ivanov i Iurii Lotman / Zara Mints," *Pro et contra* 2:122-31.

⁹³ Ol'ga Fridenberg, *Mif i literatura drevnosti* (1954; reprint ed. Moscow, 1988), 230.

Freidenberg has it, is the conceptual legacy myth leaves to lyric poetry. The poetic trope is in fact an ancient technology of thought.

Freidenberg's insistence on the ancient unity between image and concept recalls Ivanov's hope for the same. The mythological speech described in "The Testaments of Symbolism" with recourse to the pastures, vines, and grain, resolves in synthesis, after all, "with a conceptsymbol (понятиесимвол) as its subject."⁹⁴ In this light it is necessary to understand that Ivanov does not "choose" in the ordinary sense to allegorize his arguments for poetic knowledge with crops or gods. It is rather that the possibility of poetic thought inheres in the soil and the vine, inheres in divine communion, just as gods may be said to have inherited fully once in grain and wine. This is Ivanov's final conceptual sleight of hand: in reading him closely one feels one's mind participating in the thought processes he models. To follow the argument is to become, briefly, a believer in the myth.

Or perhaps, as history teaches us, not so briefly. Broadly speaking, Ivanov's project constitutes a lyrical inquiry into the premises of lyric itself – that is, into the structures of thought that made and make it possible, and which it in turn makes possible now. Understood in these terms, this project had enormous influence on both Russian modernism's self-perception – as a movement conceivably based in ancient classical thought – as well as for the future of the Russian lyric throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first – as a genre capable of doing a certain kind of thinking or philosophizing. Like Dionysus (at once the agent and object, remember, of viticulture), lyric poetry itself is herein understood at once as a matter to be investigated *and* the most appropriate means to do the investigating.

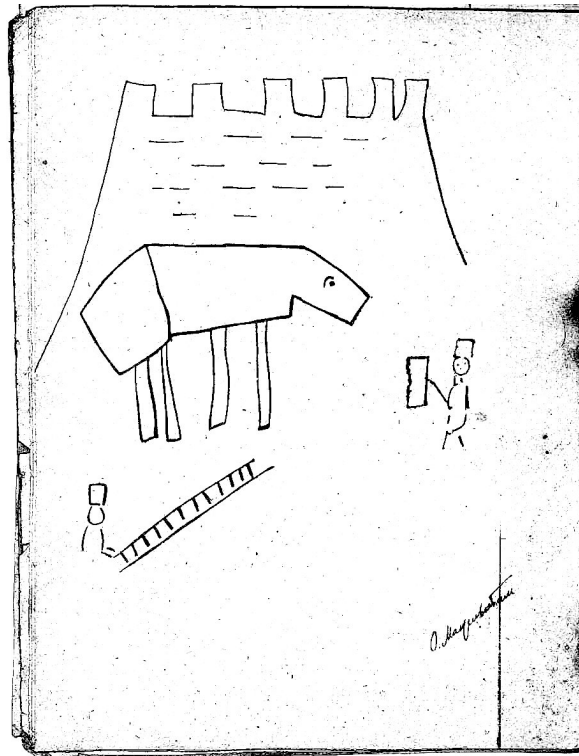
⁹⁴ Ivanov, "Zavety simvolizma."

CHAPTER TWO

The Quest and the Question: Osip Mandelstam's Hellenic Poems

In 1921, Osip Mandelstam contributed a poem and an accompanying illustration to the first issue of the Tsekh Poetov publication "Novyi Giperborei." The poem, now better known as "Za to, chto ia ruki tvoe ne sumel uderzhat" [Because I couldn't hold on to your hands], was titled "Troianskii kon'" [Trojan horse] in the Novyi Giperborei version, and its facing page, indeed, showed Mandelstam's rough sketch of a large horse at the foot of an ancient city wall, flanked by two human figures in military hats.

The animal looks unnatural in the picture, trapezoidal, large-bottomed and spindly-legged, and might convincingly seem not like an animal at all but a wooden structure except for its face. The horse's lone facial feature, a dark dot of an eye partially circumscribed by an eyebrow, is trained curiously on one of the soldiers, effectively animating its face with a mild inquisitiveness.



The picture looks like an animal although we know it is meant to represent a wooden container full of Achaeans. In this way, it playfully dramatizes through visual means the horse's status as an epistemological cipher – sacrificial gift or cunning military ploy? – in the plot of the Trojan War myth. This cipher-like quality, wherein it is known that the figure represents *something specific* but it is not presently clear *what*, has shadowed the horse from ancient to contemporary classical scholarship, as critics from the 2nd century to the 21st have debated whether Homer's

phrase for the Trojan Horse, “doureatos hippos” [wooden horse], did not name a horse-like figure but instead a kind of ship.⁹⁵

Does Mandelstam’s drawing depict an animate creature or a man-made structure? Was the “dourateos hippos” in the Odyssey a big hollow statue of a horse or a wooden ship? Did the horse at the edge of the city represent Trojan victory or did it portend their defeat? What these questions have in common is that in each case the horse is standing between the seeker and the answer sought – an answer whose ontological status is not in question but whose content is.

This attitude, held by scholars, mythical heroes, and modernist poet alike, is overwhelmingly championed in the critical literature on Mandelstam’s poetry – particularly his Hellenic-themed lyrics. “Nomen est omen,” famously declared Gregory Freidin on the first page of his monograph on the poet’s work and thought, cementing even Mandelstam’s given name as a riddle guarded by the Sphinx of cultural mythology.⁹⁶ “Just What Word Did Mandel’shtam Forget?” queries the title of Mikhail Gronas’s article on the poet’s “‘Ia slovo pozabyi, chto ia khotel skazat’” [I have forgotten the word that I wanted to say], before offering a “solution” to the problem.⁹⁷ An especially in-depth example is Mikhail Gasparov’s extensive reading devoted to deciphering the poem directly facing the horse sketch in “Novyi Giperborei,” in an article subtitled “a poem with a thrown-away key.”⁹⁸

It is common, in other words, for critical readers to treat Mandelstam like a cipher: to conceive of his work like a corpus of interrelated information, which gains meaning when the correct query (“nomen,” “key,” “just what word...?”) is articulated and applied to it. In the pages that follow, I will argue that readers who do this are unwittingly copying the reading practices that Mandelstam himself models in these very Hellenic poems. Instead of a corpus of modernist poetry and a reader armed with a query, Mandelstam will show us a corpus of Hellenic myth, and a lyric poem deploying direct address and vivid metaphor – two devices particularly suited to the lyric genre – to pose a question.

Several of Mandelstam’s Hellenic-themed lyrics depict a hero on a quest through classical myth in search of something specific. What that *something* is varies depending on the poem: I focus primarily on “Bessonitsa. Gomer. Tugie parusa” [Insomnia. Homer. Taut sails] (1915), “Zolotistogo meda struia” [The golden stream of mead] (1917), “Za to, chto ia ruki tvoie ne sumel uderzhat’” [Because I couldn’t hold on to your hands] (1920) and, briefly, “I Shubert na vode” [And Schubert on the water] (1934), as well as Mandelstam’s essay “O prirode slova” [On the nature of the word] (1922). These works are united not only in their Hellenic theme but more specifically in their quest themes: they explicitly treat the Achaeans’ quest for victory at Troy, Odysseus’s quest for home, and the Argonauts’ quest for the Golden Fleece. They also explicitly feature quests for ancient knowledge, and provide models for accessing it: through interpreting dreams, or reading ancient epic, or reminiscing about antiquity. In each case,

⁹⁵ Francesco Tiboni, “The Dourateos Hippos from allegory to Archaeology: a Phoenician Ship to break the Wall,” in *Archaeologia Maritima Mediterranea*, 13, 2016, 91-104.

⁹⁶ Gregory Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colors: Osip Mandelstam and His Mythologies of Self-presentation*. University of California Press, 1987, 1.

⁹⁷ Mikhail Gronas, “Just What Word Did Mandel’shtam Forget? A Mnemopoetic Solution to the Problem of Saussure’s Anagrams,” in *Poetics Today* 30:2, Summer 2009, 155-205.

⁹⁸ M.L. Gasparov, “‘Za to, chto ia ruki tvoie...’ – stikhotvorenie s otbroshennym kliuchom,” in ed. O.A. Lekmanov, *Mandel’shtam i antichnost’: Sbornik statei. Zapiski Mandel’shtamovskogo obshchestva, Tom. 7*. Moscow, 1995, 104-115.

knowledge is thus figured as a kind of war trophy or a hearth awaiting its hero's return. Finally, each poem formalizes these thematic quests in the same way: part of the body of each lyric is composed of questions. In each case, I argue, the question is the structural linchpin or keystone around which the rest of the poem is organized. In each case, the questions are posed in the next-to-last stanza, thus introducing the poem's finale, and preparing to announce its status as complete. In each case, too, the question is where the poem foregrounds its own lyrical status most explicitly. Put more simply, the poems announce their "mythic" concerns via recourse to "questing" content; they announce their "lyrical" methodologies via recourse to "questioning" form.

This chapter has two aims: first, I show that Mandelstam's Hellenic poems stage and model a quest for mythic knowledge, knowledge which may be variously understood as the origins of lyric poetry, an entry into ancient culture, and a kind of home. As outlined above, the shape this quest takes is specific: one with a structural certainty that the answer exists, the prize at the end of the poem, and that the task at hand is to arrive at it. As such, the poems lyrically dramatize the experience of using mythology as an archive or even a database for the kinds of questions the speaker wants answered. When the correct questions are articulated, the poem begins to be completed, and the fully-fledged poem emerges as a kind of answer.

The notion that the lyric genre has its roots in ancient myth and ritual is one that these poems explore doubly: in a historical sense and in a conceptual sense. Building on Enlightenment and Romantic German philosophy of language, a recent wave of classical scholarship has argued for a myth-based understanding of the historical emergence of the lyric, showing that the form we now call "lyric" emerged during the period in literary and intellectual history when poets began to use metaphors *rather than myth* as a mode of expression, communication, and a specific kind of cognition. If we consider, for instance, the fifth century BC, the moment in Greek antiquity when lyric practice was evolving, we find, in the words of classicist Boris Maslov,

...the process whereby a genealogical metaphor is converted into a theogonic myth, a fictitious narrative whose purpose is, in this case, not cosmological or aitiological – it does not seek to explain the origins of things – but instead, one might say, simply *logical*; it seeks to place a concept in relation to other concepts, define it, by substituting images for logical operators.⁹⁹

In this framework, myth is understood as a fundamentally conceptual framework – a framework that can model and represent thought. And lyric, with its distinctive attribute metaphor, is understood as an innovative technology of expression – as a way of saying something new rather than merely providing information.

Mandelstam wrote in "On the Nature of the Word" about the dangers of hewing too closely to historical narratives of development and progress, observing that "there may be two histories of literature, written in two different keys: one that speaks only of acquisitions, another

⁹⁹ Maslov, Boris. "From (Theogonic) Mythos to (Poetic) Logos: Reading Pindar's Genealogical Metaphors after Freidenberg," in: *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions*, vol. 12, 2012, 49-77, quote from 58-59.

only of losses, and both would be speaking of one and the same thing.”¹⁰⁰ Indeed, it is not my goal to pull a narrative of development from this history of myth and poetry; that way lies teleological narrowness and nostalgia.¹⁰¹ Let us take from it, instead, the second, related sense in which lyric may be said to have its roots in myth: conceptually. This requires understanding the lyric as a kind of shared “technology of ideation,” as Roland Greene has put it;¹⁰² a special and capacious set of techniques and methods for producing and expressing thoughts. Considering lyric’s conceptual, rather than merely historical, debts to myth allows for a more self-reflexive and metapoetic vision – and one whose relations emerge as theoretical as well as material.¹⁰³ In this framework, lyric’s engagement with myth even on a *thematic* level (e.g. “Когда бы не Елена, / Что Троя вам одна, ахейские мужи?” or “Одиссей возвратился, пространством и временем полный”) may be understood as a fundamentally metapoetic gesture.¹⁰⁴ Myth, in turn, is understood as a conceptual framework that underlies the possibility of lyrical expression, such that when lyrical expression engages with myth it may be said to be engaging with the very conditions of its own possibility.

The second aim of this chapter is to discuss the kinds of thinking and knowing that these lyrical questions presuppose. As earlier stated, the questions foreground the poems’ own status as “lyric” by deploying vivid metaphor and direct address. We have seen that – in the terms of

¹⁰⁰ “...возможны две истории литературы, написанные в двух ключах: одна — говорящая только о приобретениях, другая — только об утратах, и обе будут говорить об одном и том же” (Mandel’shtam, O.E., *Sobranie sochinenii v 4 t.*, Moscow, 1993. T. 1, 219).

¹⁰¹ Herder, to whom the modern conception of myth as an epistemological framework is indebted, certainly believed that after the rise of metaphor, human thought became increasingly less embodied and more abstracted, right up to the invention of prose and the subsequent emergence, in the 5th century BC, of philosophy (Herder, J. G. *Against Pure Reason: Writings on Religion, Language, and History*. ed. and trans. Bunge, Marcia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993.). Two of the most famous examples of the “teleological” consequences of this intellectual historiography in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are Wilhelm Nestle’s von-mythos-zum-logos tradition and Hegel’s epic-lyric-drama dialectic. The former famously posits that the rational human spirit vanquished the primitive mythic stage of development; the latter, more appealingly, that ‘objective’ epic and the subsequent ‘subjective’ lyric find their synthesis in Greek tragedy. More appealing still is Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which reveals “myth” and “reason” to be mutually constitutive, and the myth-to-reason narrative conducive to fascism.

¹⁰² Roland Greene, “The Lyric,” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Volume 3: The Renaissance*, Cambridge UP, 1999, 216-228, quote from 222.

¹⁰³ Again, the “conceptual” relation is not so easily distinguished from the “historical.” Regarding the fifth century BC emergence of lyrical practice, Maslov continues: “Rather than serving the task of ornamentation, metaphor in Pindar has, fundamentally, a cognitive role: the image is used to convey conceptually relevant information. To approach Pindar’s metaphors merely as artifacts of his imaginative genius is to miss the fact that Pindar’s poetics antedates the emergence of a *non-poetic* language of abstract thought. Before Aristotle, there could be no poetic figure that was conceptually or ideologically non-compromised” (Maslov, “Mythos to Logos,” 70).

¹⁰⁴ Lines, respectively, from “Bessonitsa. Gomer. Tugie parusa” and “Zolotistogo meda struia,” chosen here for their explicit mythic content.

literary history, and the conceptual possibilities indexed by that history – the device “metaphor” is a specific technology of thought native to the emergence of lyric practice. Address, too, may be understood as accomplishing a kind of work proper to the lyric genre – especially when the addressee is dead, canonically fictional, or inanimate, and therefore cannot respond, as is the case in Mandelstam’s Hellenic poems. Address in such poems is often termed “apostrophe,” and this device, according to Jonathan Culler, is not only proper to lyric but fundamentally characterizes it, for it allows the lyric to “displace a time of narrative, of past events reported, and place us in the continuing present of apostrophic address.”¹⁰⁵ This capacity for temporal “displacement” while still retaining – and even, in Culler’s account, heightening – the stakes of the situation depicted is especially meaningful given the ancient-mythic setting of Mandelstam’s Hellenic lyrics. It allows Mandelstam to exhibit a sensitivity to temporal difference and temporal perception without the burden of historical fidelity – or even fidelity to received accounts of Homeric myth. His querying address establishes a temporal rapport between the myth he surveys and the lyric he uses to survey it that “history” does not adequately name. We shall see below that he eschews the notion of temporal succession in favor of other temporalities. For Mandelstam non-linear temporal connection is made manifest in question and address. Indeed, the word “apostrophe,” with its ancient connotations of indirectness (“turning away”) and its modern connotations of directness (turning towards), comes closer to naming the certain-uncertain temporal reach of Mandelstam’s questions.

In his seminal lecture “Linguistics and Poetics,” Roman Jakobson associates the imperative command, rather than the question, with the conative function (which privileges the second person), and he associates the “lyric” as such with the emotive function (privileging the first person).¹⁰⁶ Indeed, for Jakobson, the *question* in verbal structure is frequently associated with the mic-check functions (phatic and metalingual): “do you hear me?” “What does that mean?” In each of the poems I discuss the questions interrupt what had been a narration or description of mythic events or landscape in order to instantiate direct address, and I hope to show that – *pace* Jakobson – the question in fact works to foreground that structure of address particular to lyric. It does this by highlighting both the “you” and the speaking “I” at once. The addressee is emphasized because suddenly addressed. The speaker is more emphasized than in normal direct address because in the case of a question the querent would, after all, like an answer to the question at hand; he sets himself up as a hopeful future addressee.¹⁰⁷ The question thus builds what Barbara Johnson has described as “a bridge” between “the pure presencing of

¹⁰⁵ Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, Harvard UP, 2015, 226.

¹⁰⁶ “Orientation toward the addressee, the conative function, finds its purest grammatical expression in the vocative and imperative... The imperative sentences cardinally differ from declarative sentences” (Jakobson, Roman. “Linguistics and Poetics,” in eds. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins, *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*. Johns Hopkins UP, 2014 [orig. 1960], 234-248, quote from 238); “the lyric, oriented toward the first person, is intimately linked with the emotive function” (239).

¹⁰⁷ In Mandelstam’s own words, in the 1913 essay “O sobesednike,” the very act of speaking conjures an obligatory listener – thus speaker and addressee are mutually constitutive: “(я говорю — значит, меня слушают, и слушают не даром, не из любезности, а потому, что обязаны)” (Mandel’shtam 1:184).

the second person” and “the pure presencing of the first person,” bringing together the conative and the emotive functions and illuminating their interrelation.¹⁰⁸

The poems are, clearly, about their own mythic origins. They are also grappling with how to lyrically articulate their own mythic origins. In each case, the poem begins in the hopes of finding some answers; it establishes myth as the archive which may yield an answer; it slowly figures out how to ask what it wants; it poses a question or a set of questions; it ends, satisfied and complete.¹⁰⁹ Thus the trajectory I have just described materializes as the *answer* to those questions, the full articulation of the lyric from beginning to end. The end of the poem thus explains the relation of the (lyrical) question to the (mythic) quest: in each of the poems discussed here, the moment of the poem’s articulating its own search in the terms of a question is the moment the quest begins to end.

The Folded Fan

Mandelstam begins his 1922 essay “On the Nature of the Word” [О природе слова] by addressing a social problem faced post revolution, cast in philosophical terms: the felt disunity of time. The essay, a manifesto for the post-revolutionary wave of the Acmeist movement, takes as its central project the unfolding of a transhistorical metaphysics of the poetic word – a task particularly urgent given the shaken contemporary moment. This perception of “shakiness” [заколебалось]¹¹⁰ can be explained, he continues, with recourse to Henri Bergson’s philosophy of duration and temporal perception. Mandelstam, who “knew by heart both his own verse and the work of Bergson,” in the words of a fellow poet, summarizes the philosopher’s concept of time efficiently and furnishes it with an Acmeist gloss, describing it with the image of a folded fan:¹¹¹

Бергсон рассматривает явления не в порядке их подчинения закону временной последовательности, а как бы в порядке их **пространственной протяженности**. Его интересуется исключительно внутренняя связь явлений. Эту связь он освобождает от времени и рассматривает отдельно. Таким образом, связанные между собой явления образуют как бы веер, створки которого можно развернуть во времени, но в то же время он поддается умпостигаемому свертыванию.

¹⁰⁸ “...the bridge between the ‘O’ of the pure vocative, Jakobson’s conative function, or the pure presencing of the second person, and the ‘oh’ of pure subjectivity, Jakobson’s emotive function, or the pure presencing of the first person” (Barbara Johnson. “Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion.” in *The Lyric Theory Reader* [orig. 1986], 529-540, quote from 531).

¹⁰⁹ Complete in the sense of the Greek word *teleios* ‘perfect, complete, ready; completely initiated in ritual.’

¹¹⁰ “...заколебалось понятие единицы времени” (Mandel’shtam 1:217).

¹¹¹ The remark is Georgii Ivanov’s: “...и свои стихи, и Бергсона он помнил наизусть” (Ivanov, G.B., *Peterburgskie zimy*. M: Prospekt, 1994, 84).

Уподобление объединенных во времени явлений такому вееру подчеркивает только их внутреннюю связь...¹¹²

This description of Bergson's theory of duration depends less on the succession of phenomena than their internal affinity. The system described here is proto-structuralist: a system of interrelated phenomena which may be looked at as temporally bound from one angle and liberated from time, interbound by some other relation, from another. In this way Mandelstam departs slightly from Bergson, for whom that bond between things is constituted by human memory, which gives the lie to linear-temporal perception.¹¹³ But it is something like cultural memory, though the term appears nowhere in "O prirode slova," that constitutes Mandelstam's "inner bond," for the name of this system, finally, is "Hellenism":

Эллинизм — это система в бергсоновском смысле слова, которую человек разворачивает вокруг себя, как веер явлений, освобожденных от временной зависимости, соподчиненных внутренней связи через человеческое я.¹¹⁴

The image of the folds of a fan suggest that discrete phenomena in time may have some internal affinity which is not subject to where they fall in standard historical relation to each other. Further, the image of man unfolding this fan around himself likens it to a primitive shelter of sorts – the construction of the domicile of human subjectivity, unbound by teleological conceptions of history and time. Such is Mandelstam's understanding of this "Bergsonian system," Hellenism's situation in early twentieth-century Russian verse: a home built of transhistorical phenomena, united by inner likeness rather than consecutivity.

In this reading, Mandelstam's bringing Hellenism into Russian modernist context has much in common with the Symbolist project to do the same, similarly by means of the inherent sameness of things despite outwards difference. However, many read this essay as an explicit polemic with symbolist philosophy.¹¹⁵ Perhaps one may reconcile these readings by recalling

¹¹² Mandel'shtam 1: 217-18, emphasis OEM's. Sidney Monas offers the following translation: "Bergson examines phenomena not through the logic of their subordination to the law of temporal sequence, but, as it were, through the logic of their **distribution through space**. It is exclusively the inner bond of phenomena that interests him. This bond he liberates from time, and examines separately. In this way, interconnected phenomena form a kind of fan, the folds of which may develop in time, while at the same time the fan may be collapsed in a way that allows the mind to grasp it.

Comparing phenomena united in time to such a fan merely emphasizes their inner bond" (Sidney Monas, "Osip Mandelstam: About the Nature of the Word," in *Arion*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1975, 506-526, quote from 506-7).

¹¹³ "...our consciousness, which begins by being only memory, prolongs a plurality of moments into each other, contracting them into a single intuition" (Herni Bergson, *Matter and Memory*. Trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer. New York: Zone, 1988 [orig. 1896], 219).

¹¹⁴ Mandel'shtam, 1:227. "Hellenism is a system, in the Bergsonian sense of the word, which man unfolds around himself, like a fan of phenomena liberated from temporal dependence, commonly subordinated to an inner bond through the human 'I'" (Monas, 518).

¹¹⁵ Hilary Fink, for instance, writes: "By returning to 'the word' its Hellenistic nature (that is, respecting the word as a historical bearer of stable meaning), Mandel'shtam believed that the

Ivanov's comment in "The Testaments of Symbolism" that in ancient times, 'soul' was signified by 'mixing bowl'¹¹⁶; and Mandelstam's comment, later in this very essay, that all of Hellenism inheres in a cooking pot. Both Ivanov and Mandelstam understand the task of modernist poetry to reactivate the soul within the bowl, reactivate Hellenism within the pot; their disagreement lies in how. For Ivanov, for instance, the poet must strip the mixing bowl of its everyday, common associations and transcend them to reach the ancient meaning 'soul'; for Mandelstam the poet must at all costs retain the domestic valence – the utensilhood – of the pot.

Viewing the Bergsonian fan of Hellenism as a specific kind of domestic utensil or technology of knowledge oriented homewards will help us begin to theorize how modern lyric may relate to myth in a "systemic" way. In a seminal monograph on how the forms of technology known as "new media" model and reflect human language usage and knowledge, theorist Lev Manovich takes recourse to a similar framework developed and made famous by twentieth-century semioticians, post-Bergson: the paradigm / syntagm framework.¹¹⁷ As Manovich summarizes, in the case of narrative or descriptive language, "elements in the syntagmatic dimension are related *in praesentia*, while elements in the paradigmatic dimension are related *in absentia*."¹¹⁸ The syntagm, he elaborates, exists materially, whether as spoken word, or cinematic image on a screen, or ink on a page, "while the paradigmatic sets to which these words belong **only exist in the writer's and reader's minds**."¹¹⁹ This new-media image

Symbolist divide separating man and word would be bridged, and man once more could depend on words as helpful tools by which to feel more a part of the world around him, once more to become master in his own house" (Hilary Fink, *Bergson and Russian Modernism, 1900-1930*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1999, 70).

¹¹⁶ "...и понимали одни, что «смесительная чаша» означает душу..."

¹¹⁷ For extensive analyses of the influence of Bergson's temporal philosophies on late-cinema and new media studies, see Mary Ann Doane's 1993 essay "Technology's Body," which discusses the uniquely human elements of Bergson's concept of memory and time, and, by contrast, Suzanne Guerlac's 2006 *Thinking in Time*, which relates Bergson's conception of duration to artificial intelligence and virtual reality (Mary Ann Doane, "Technology's Body: Cinematic Vision in Modernity," in *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, Summer 1993, vol. 5, no. 2, 1-23; Suzanne Guerlac, *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson*, Cornell UP, 2006). Manovich himself does not explicitly engage with Bergson but he does bring in Gilles Deleuze's postmodern glosses of Bergson in order to situate his concepts of space and time in the cinematic imagination.

¹¹⁸ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, MIT, 2001, 230.

¹¹⁹ Manovich, 230, emphasis mine. He continues:

Particular words, sentences, shots, and scenes that make up a narrative have a material existence; other elements that form the imaginary world of an author or a particular literary or cinematic style, and that could have appeared instead, exist only virtually. Put differently, the database of choices from which narrative is constructed (the paradigm) is implicit; while the actual narrative (the syntagm) is explicit.

New media reverse this relationship. Database (the paradigm) is given material existence, while narrative (the syntagm) is dematerialised. Paradigm is privileged, syntagm is downplayed. Paradigm is real; syntagm, virtual. To see this, consider the new media design process. The design of any new media object begins with assembling a database of possible elements to be used. [...] The narrative is constructed by linking

of the database may help us to conceptualize the role played by Hellenic mythic material in Mandelstam's lyrics: we can see it, now, as a kind of archive of received cultural knowledge which is not quite knowledge yet, but rather knowledge's possibility, a network of the conditions of lyrical possibility, which poetry's task is to engage with so as to emerge from.¹²⁰ We can see, too, that Bergson's "fan," in Mandelstam's telling, describes Hellenism as a paradigm of "inner connection" freed from the stifling compulsion to conform to a causal narrative (what we might call a "syntagm"). In this light, Mandelstam's claim that the Russian poetic word's capacity to theorize its own reality is what links it with Hellenism furnishes us with a vision of how lyric relates to myth. It is a vision in which Russian lyric emerges from this Hellenic network of myth not in broad, pseudo-historical strokes, but instead self-consciously, conceptually, and constantly.

Georgii Ivanov's comment that Mandelstam knew both his own poetry and Bergson's philosophy by heart [наизусть] now begins to take on more significance. The remark portrays each corpus (Mandelstam's verse and Bergson's works) as a kind of database which one might commit to memory, whereas it might be more accurate to say that each represents not a database but a *theory* of the database. Not a paradigm to be unlocked with a hermeneutic key, that is, but the lyrical conjuring of such a paradigm, accompanied by guides to intellectually navigate it.

Conceiving of (Greek) myth as a conditional, semi-immanent network of (Russian) lyrical possibility is corroborated in much of Mandelstam's verse. One particularly famous example is the eight-line lyric "I Shubert na vode..." [And Schubert on the water...] from later in the poet's oeuvre, written in late 1933 and finished in January 1934. This lyric, which has been commonly interpreted as an example of the mythical chicken-or-egg interrelation of human knowledge and poetic expression, reads as follows in its entirety:

И Шуберт на воде, и Моцарт в птичьей 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 кружились листья,

elements of this database in a particular order, that is by designing a trajectory leading from one element to another. On the material level, a narrative is just a set of links; the elements themselves remain stored in the database. Thus the narrative is virtual while the database exists materially (Manovich, 231).

¹²⁰ In an essay devoted to uncovering the associative links between Mandelstam's "Crimean-Hellenic" lyrics, Yuri Levin relies on a similar understanding of mythic material's role in the poet's work, to which he adds the psychoanalytic notion of the subconscious: "Но носителем архетипов является не только миф, но и глубинные, подсознательные слои человеческой психики, и отсюда возникает четвертый компонент этого синкретического пространства -- психологическое пространство, арена блужданий «забытого слова»" (Yu. I. Levin, "Zametki o 'krymsko-ellinskikh' stikakh O. Mandel'shtama," in ed. O.A. Lekmanov, *Mandel'shtam i antichnost': Sbornik statei. Zapiski Mandel'shtamovskogo obshchestva, Tom. 7*. Moscow, 1995, 77-103, quote from pg. 78).

И те, кому мы посвящаем опыт,
До опыта приобрели черты.¹²¹

While not commonly read as one of Mandelstam's "Hellenic poems," in fact the poem participates in the poet's Hellenist project in a number of ways. To begin, the poem is structured mythopoetically, along the lines of an origin story we might find in, for instance, Hesiod's *Theogony*. Examples of great poetic thinkers are listed with their attributes and epithets, like the gods and heroes of ancient myth. Then their ongoing relation to the crowd whence they came is described, much like Night of Chaos, or Aphrodite and the sea-foam of her origins. At last this parable is abstracted to the level of maxim or truism about the workings of the world, just like the given natural or social phenomenon the ancient myth purports to explain or illuminate.

The stuff poetic knowledge is made of here, however, is not Aphroditic sea-foam; it is the pulse of the crowd and the poets' reciprocal trust in that crowd. Nadezhda Mandelstam said of this poem that it was meant to represent the "coming-togetherness of consciousness": the words uttered by the poet "already existed in the consciousness of the crowd, whom he trusts."¹²² The poem, in other words, instantiates a model of knowledge production wherein knowledge, rather than emerging from an individual genius innovator rupturing the limits of the known, is instead made collectively, is already in existence in some form, and assumes the status of "knowledge" proper at the moment of its being sought out.

This conception of lyrical production is attested to in Nadezhda Mandelstam's memoirs about the poet, in a section dedicated to a description of Osip Mandelstam's experience of composing individual poems.

Стихи начинаются так — об этом есть у многих поэтов, и в «Поэме без героя» [Ахматовой], и у О. М.: в ушах звучит назойливая, сначала неоформленная, а потом точная, но еще бессловесная музыкальная фраза. Мне не раз приходилось видеть, как О. М. пытался избавиться от погудки, стряхнуть ее, уйти... Он мотал головой, словно ее можно было выплеснуть, как каплю воды, попавшую в ухо во время купания. Но ничто ее не заглушало — ни шум, ни радио, ни разговоры в той же комнате. [...]

У меня создалось впечатление, что стихи существуют до того, как они сочинены. (О. М. никогда не говорил, что стихи «написаны». Он сначала «сочинял», потом записывал.) Весь процесс сочинения состоит в напряженном улавливании и проявлении уже существующего и неизвестно откуда транслирующегося гармонического и смыслового единства, постепенно воплощающегося в слова. [...]

¹²¹ O.E. Mandel'shtam. *Sobranie sochinenii v 2 t.* M: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990, 202. And Schubert on the water, and Mozart in the avian clamor, / And Goethe, whistling on the twisting path, / And Hamlet, having thought by fearful steps, / They took the crowd's pulse and they trusted the crowd. / Maybe, before the lips, the whisper was already born, / And in woodlessness whirled leaves, / And those to whom we dedicate our experience / Gained features before experience themselves.

¹²² "...[стихотворение —] о соборности сознания. Губы поэта — орудие его труда. Но то, что он скажет, уже существовало раньше в сознании толпы, которой он верит."

В работе над стихами я замечала не один, а два «выпрямительных вдоха» — один, когда появляются в строке или в строфе первые слова, второй, когда последнее точное слово изгоняет случайно внедрившихся пришельцев. Тогда процесс вслушивания в самого себя, тот самый, который подготавливает почву к расстройству внутреннего слуха, к болезни, останавливается. Стихотворение как бы отпадает от своего автора, перестает жужжать и пучить его. Одержимый получает освобождение. Бедная корова Ио удрала от пчелы.¹²³

In addition to the idea of a crowd (or a “pogudka,” which we might understand as a database of not-yet-meaningful noise) whence words and lines and poems are formed, Nadezhda Mandelstam also describes the poet’s process of composition in terms of a passive search for the exact right word. Furthermore, she describes the event of finding it as a kind of “falling away” (“стихотворение как бы **отпадает** от своего автора”), an experience that, as we will see, comes to characterize the endings of the Hellenic lyrics at hand, as they too find their correct articulations.

Finally, this elaborate account of Mandelstam’s “search term” method of lyrical composition is structured – like “I Shubert na vode” – mythopoetically. It seeks simultaneously to give a narrative of [Mandelstam’s] lyrics’ origins (“стихи начинаются так”) and to build the cultural myth of the poet it describes. In order to do these things the author herself turns to the archive of Greek mythology available to her (“бедная корова Ио удрала от пчелы”) and imbues it with metapoetic significance.

The metaphor of Io and the gadfly is metapoetic because it is about poetry. On this level, Io represents the poet, and the gadfly represents the terrible hum of an unfinished poem. But it is also more than that. In my reading, myth (the stuff of holy cows and maddening insects) constitutes the matter Nadezhda Mandelstam describes here (the уже существующее и

¹²³ N. Ia. Mandel’shtam, *Vospominaniia*. New York: Chekhov Publishing Corporation, 1970, 83-84. In Max Hayward’s translation: “As many poets have said – Akhmatova (in ‘Poem Without a Hero’) and M. among them – a poem begins with a musical phrase ringing insistently in the ears, at first inchoate, it later takes on a precise form, though still without words. I sometimes saw M. trying to get rid of this kind of ‘hum,’ to brush it off and escape from it. He would toss his head as though it could be shaken out like a drop of water that gets into your ear while bathing. But it was always louder than any noise, radio or conversation in the same room. [...]”

I have a feeling that verse exists before it is composed (M. never talked of ‘writing’ verse, only of ‘composing’ it and then copying it out). The whole process of composition is one of straining to catch and record something compounded of harmony and sense as it is relayed from an unknown source and gradually forms itself into words. [...]

I noticed that in his work on a poem there were two points at which he would sigh with relief – when the first words in a line or stanza came to him, and when the last of the foreign bodies had been driven out by the last word. Only then is there an end to the process of listening in to oneself – the same process that can prepare the way for a disturbance of the inner hearing and loss of sanity. The poem now seems to fall away from the author and no longer torments him with its resonance. He is released from the thing that obsesses him. Io, the poor cow, escapes from the gadfly” (Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope: A Memoir*. trans. Max Hayward, with introductions by Joseph Brodsky and Clarence Brown. NY: Modern Library, 1999, 71-72).

неизвестно откуда транслирующееся гармоническое и смысловое единство, постепенно воплощающееся в слова). So in a move we will see Osip Mandelstam perform multiply below, the figure is also an example of what we might call transcendental metapoetics. As “I Shubert na vode” was explicitly intellectually engaged with the question of the origins of poetry, so too is N. Ia. Mandelstam’s mythic metaphor – it is explicitly intellectually engaged with the conceptual and material origins of poetry. It contemplates the conditions of its own possibility, it struggles to utter them and so to bring them into articulate existence.

“Insomnia. Homer. Taut sails.” and “The golden stream of mead”

One of Mandelstam’s earlier Hellenic lyrics, “Bessonnitsa. Gomer. Tugie parusa” was written in the summer of 1915, in Crimea. The poem takes as its starting point the experience of reading Homeric epic in bed, unable to sleep.

Бессонница. Гомер. Тугие паруса.
Я список кораблей прочел до середины:
Сей длинный выводок, сей поезд журавлиный,
Что над Элладой когда-то поднялся.

Как журавлиный клин в чужие рубежи —
На головах царей божественная пена —
Куда плывете вы? Когда бы не Елена,
Что Троя вам одна, ахейские мужи?

И море, и Гомер — все движется любовью.
Кого же слушать мне? И вот Гомер молчит,
И море черное, витийствуя, шумит
И с тяжким грохотом подходит к изголовью.¹²⁴

The words that begin the poem already read somewhat like search terms, nouns stabbing into the ether to narrow the scope of the poem’s quest in metered realtime. It has been observed that the poem’s opening allies it more closely with Fet’s “Shepot. Robkoe dykhan’e” and Blok’s “Noch’. Ulitsa. Fonar’. Apteka” than the Pushkinian/Batiushkovian “Bessonnitsa” tradition. But where those poems’ respective opening lines set a scene and an affect (imagine a camera panning), Mandelstam’s opening line zooms in, starting with the speaker’s sleepless night, then focusing on and closing in on the book in his hands, then on a very concrete image featured in that book.

¹²⁴ All verse translations mine unless otherwise specified. “Insomnia. Homer. Taut sails. / I’ve read through half the list of ships: / This long-trailing hatch, this train of crane, / That once rose over Hellas. // Like a wedge of crane to foreign borders – / On the heads of kings, divine sea-foam – / Where are you going? Were it not for Helen, / What would Troy alone be for you, Achaeans? // The sea and Homer: all is moved by love. / To whom should I harken? And here Homer goes silent, / And the black sea, orating, clamors / And with a heavy rumble approaches the head of the bed.”

This zooming-in effect, epistemological at first, is repeated on a visual level as the metaphors begin and the neutral “list” of ships becomes a litter of just-hatched animals, and then a train made of crane.¹²⁵ One might read for many reasons but one does not read for *no* reason, one reads with a purpose, which is indexed by the mention of only getting “halfway” through the list. At this point the list’s generic capacity for flattening out experience and masking difference is figured in terms that are not only more dynamic but more purposeful, more *heading-somewhere*: a group of baby animals on the move (*Make Way for Ducklings* avant la lettre), animals that grow to form a train with a destination.¹²⁶ Their spatial purposiveness is highlighted by the temporal unspecificity of their backdrop (когда-то). Further, within the выводок we catch an echo of the word вывод: the conclusion to an argument, perhaps the answer to an inquiry. Finally, we get an image of a wedge, which visually points the poem in the direction of its quest.

At this point, the poem’s declarative and descriptive statements ebb and the questions begin. Until now the poem has done two things: it has established a sense of purpose, figured by narrowing the scope of the poem’s possibility as well as by images or shapes of *things narrowing and things with a purpose*. And it has established Homeric myth as the realm for that sense of purpose. In Manovich’s terms, it has assembled a paradigm and an artistic way of orienting oneself toward that paradigm. The questions that follow build on this foundation, pivoting to direct address as a lyrical way to mark suddenly higher stakes. *Where are you going?* The word “kuda” has the same effect as the image of the wedge – it’s a word that points in a direction – but it’s uttered more urgently and immerses the poem more fully in the myth it had, till now, been describing from a distance. “Where are you going” describes the velocity and direction of the poem’s own energy into the myth as much as that of the soldiers’ towards Troy.

The next question does not only raise the stakes of the poem, it also *is* a question about the poem’s stakes – and the stakes of the military quest the poem is about. This isn’t a quest for love alone, observes the poem. What is the real meaning of the prize? A clear figure, in my reading, for the poem’s own preoccupations with arriving at its destination, the question *chto Troia vam odna* is not only a figure; it is in some sense the poem’s real question. “The word in the Hellenic conception is active flesh that resolves itself in an event,” wrote Mandelstam in “O

¹²⁵ This experience of “narrowing” or “zooming in” is made possible precisely by Mandelstam’s reliance on sets of three. Two sets of images alone would not be sufficient to accomplish the effect. This happens in the opening line, as the poem’s setting is increasingly specified (insomnia --> Homer --> taut sails); and on the level of layered metaphor in line three (ships --> line of baby animals --> train of crane). Peter Zeeman has cited this moment in particular (figuring the ships as a *vyvodok* and then as a train) as an example of Mandelstam’s work with “three-term metaphors,” as opposed to the more standard use of the device with only two terms (vehicle and tenor). Curiously, it seems that ships and baby animals are frequently correlated in Mandelstam’s use of this uncommon trope (Zeeman, Peter. *The Later Poetry of Osip Mandelstam: Text and Context*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988. 67-68).

¹²⁶ As many have pointed out, the likely source of the particular images deployed here is the start of the third book (not the second, where the catalogue of ships is given) of the *Iliad*, when the Trojans (not the Achaeans) fall into battle like noisy wildfowl, like noisy cranes flying into the sky. I am grateful to Mick Song for pointing out that in Homer, the effect is also, strikingly, one of a camera “zooming” – but *out*, giving an increasingly broad perspective, rather than an increasingly narrow one.

prirode slova,” and here the poem has located the source of that active flesh, has located its own origins: the sacred city of Troy.

It seems useful at this point to consider the question in geographical terms. Where *are* the Achaeans going? The direction is north-eastward. The vector of the poem’s imagery – from Greece¹²⁷ to Troy – is up towards Asia Minor, towards latter-day Koktebel’, Crimea, where Mandelstam wrote this poem in the summer of 1915. Propelled by the right questions and auspicious winds, the Greek soldiers carry the poem homeward. This is another sense in which the myth may be said to lead to Mandelstam’s Russian poem: not only meta-conceptually, but also cartographically. The answer, we begin to see, is “hither,” not “thither”; it is immanent; it is already present, and waiting to be revealed, waiting to be made meaningful.¹²⁸

Home within its sights, the poem, now, begins to end. The imagery melts into dreamy surrealism as the voice of the Bard gives way to the voice of the sea. In order to discuss the poem’s end, however, let us look at another Hellenic poem, comparison with which will be instructive: the 1917 “Zolotistogo meda struia.”

Золотистого меда струя из бутылки текла
Так тягуче и долго, что молвить хозяйка успела:
— Здесь, в печальной Тавриде, куда нас судьба занесла,
Мы совсем не скучаем, — и через плечо поглядела.

Всюду Бахуса службы, как будто на свете одни
Сторожа и собаки, — идешь, никого не заметишь.
Как тяжелые бочки, спокойные катятся дни.
Далеко в шалаше голоса — не поймешь, не ответишь.

После чаю мы вышли в огромный коричневый сад,
Как ресницы, на окнах опущены темные шторы.
Мимо белых колонн мы пошли посмотреть виноград,
Где воздушным стеклом обливаются сонные горы.

Я сказал: виноград, как старинная битва, живет,
Где курчавые всадники бьются в кудрявом порядке;
В каменистой Тавриде наука Эллады — и вот
Золотых десятин благородные, ржавые грядки.

Ну, а в комнате белой, как прятка, стоит тишина,
Пахнет укусом, краской и свежим вином из подвала.

¹²⁷ The Achaeans launched from Aulis, some 60 kilometers north of present-day Athens.

¹²⁸ Anna Glazova has written about this poem’s capacity for “bringing about presence,” reading deeply into Paul Celan’s translation of it. Celan’s translation, penned in the spirit of demonstrating Mandelstam’s commitment to “a language that communicates the poet’s experience of time and bears the index of the poet’s presence,” offers as its final word “hierher” (hither) (Anna Glazova, “Poetry of Bringing about Presence: Paul Celan Translates Osip Mandelstam,” in *MLN*, vol. 123, no. 5 (Dec. 2008), 1108-1126, quote from 1112).

Помнишь, в греческом доме: любимая всеми жена, —
Не Елена — другая, — как долго она вышивала?

Золотое руно, где же ты, золотое руно?
Всю дорогу шумели морские тяжелые волны,
И, покинув корабль, натрудивший в морях полотно,
Одиссей возвратился, пространством и временем полный.¹²⁹

Like “Bessonnitsa,” this poem sets up a mythic paradigm and a sense of direction and velocity. The poem takes place in Crimea, which is referred to as “Tavrida” throughout, thus highlighting the place’s geographical connection to ancient Greece and allowing the speaker to wander around thinking about antiquity. Spatial wandering maps onto epistemological wandering: while “Zolotistogo meda struia” is structured similarly to “Bessonnitsa,” its conceptual sense of direction is far less purposeful. The happy coincidence of ancient location and present location is treated as the poem’s *motivirovka*, rather than the statement of divine immanence we had in “Bessonnitsa.”

At the start of the poem, the liquid in line one pours slowly and this is accepted; the days roll by heavy as wine barrels; *time is not yet differentiated*; voices are vaguely heard but not yet marked as significant. The forms and lines in this poem are not arrow-shaped and indexical but round, circumlocutory, and oblique: even the ancient military, with their curly-haired epithets, wage their battles not like a wedge or a train or a V of cranes but “в кудрявом порядке,” in curling file. The most explicit move into the Homeric myth is not visually figured, as in “Bessonnitsa,” as motion across space. Instead, the speaker’s other senses are stimulated (“стоит тишина, / Пахнет уксусом, краской и свежим вином”), and the myth opens for him in response (“Помнишь, в греческом доме...?”).

That moment of the myth’s opening is the poem’s first question uttered. As in “Bessonnitsa,” “Zolotistogo meda struia” also introduces its questions just before the last stanza, and as in “Bessonnitsa,” they too mark the poem as an epic search whose tools (direct address; intricate, nearly synaesthetic metaphor) are archetypically lyrical, thus providing a modernist experimental model of the trajectory from myth to lyric. *Do you remember the ancient Greek domestic heroine? Do you remember how she endured time? Where is the golden fleece now?* As

¹²⁹ The stream of golden honey/mead poured from the bottle / So thick and long that the hostess had time to say: / “Here, in sad Taurida, where fate has delivered us, / We never get bored —” and she glanced over her shoulder. // Bacchus’s rites everywhere, as if there were only in the world / Guards and the dogs – walk along, you won’t see a soul. / Like heavy barrels, the peaceful days roll by. / Voices in far-off huts – you won’t notice, won’t reply. // After tea we went out to the enormous brown garden. / Like eyelashes over windows the drapes were drawn. / Past the white columns we went to look at the grapevines, / Where the sleepy hills spill over with ethereal glass. // I said: like an ancient battle, the grapevine lives / Where curly-headed horsemen fight in curling file; / The science of Hellas, in stony Taurida – and here / The golden tithes’ noble, rusty garden beds. // And in the white room silence stands like a spinning wheel. / Smells like vinegar, paint, fresh wine from the cellar. / Remember, in the Greek house, the wife everyone loved – / Not Helen – the other one – how long she spent embroidering? // Golden fleece, where are you, golden fleece? / The heavy waves of the sea resounded all the way, / And having left his ship, his canvas worn by the seas, / Odysseus returned, full of space and time.

in “Bessonnitsa,” the questions function as metapoetic figures (the poem is about asking questions and searching for something) while also standing as real questions, central philosophical preoccupations that hope for answers. As in “Bessonnitsa,” the poem explicitly casts Helen aside (“когда бы не Елена, / что Троя вам одна?” “не Елена – другая –”), and moves in for the real trophy: the home, the duration of time, the gold at the end of the quest.

It is clear to the careful reader that nameless Penelope’s “long” weaving repeats the nameless khoziaika’s “long” pouring in line one. Let us make clear, too, that these longnesses are meta-folds in the Bergsonian fan: they are internally likened, and they are *about duration*. In each case a domestic task is begun and ended, and in that time a speech act bridging the lyrical and the mythic is initiated and completed. The khoziaika “has time” [молвить хозяйка успела] to tie her chronotope to antiquity (“Здесь, в печальной Тавриде”); Penelope’s weaving spans Homeric myth and culminates in the speaker’s ultra-lyric, apostrophic cry (“Золотое руно, где же ты, золотое руно?”).

Each of these poems ends with a resolution of space and of time: in “Bessonnitsa,” the speaker falls into sleep as the epic comes to greet him, traversing the Black sea to do so; in “Zolotistogo meda struia,” Odysseus returns “full of space and time.” In each case, these resolutions are felt not as answers in their own right to the questions that immediately preceded them but rather as expressions of relief that the questions could be given voice at all. In each case, the poem was staged in the hopes of being able to ask a question about its own origin – that is, mythology; in each case, the first stanzas of the poem establish and survey the database of myth available to it, offering an entypoint (a geographical palimpsest, the activity of reading Homer in bed) and a way to do so (walking around, moving with purpose). Finally, the poem figures out how to articulate the questions that motivate it: which way is Troy? Where is the Golden Fleece? Is it possible to remember Penelope? What is her relation to home, to time? What is the meaning of Troy in its own right? – and the rightness of these questions gives way to the resolution that follows. The resolution is figured as a fall back into the speaker’s chronotope of lyric modernity – falling asleep, coming home – with part of the myth joined to it. In each case the poem has hit upon its *raison d’etre* and, ouroboros-like, is created from the myth it was combing.¹³⁰ In Nadezhda Mandelstam’s words, “The poem now seems to fall away from the author and no longer torments him with its resonance. He is released from the thing that obsesses him. Io, the poor cow, escapes from the gadfly.”

Valentina Apresyan and Mikhail Gronas have recently identified and named this “ouroboros-like” trope, wherein the agent and the object of a given action are fused, and they observe that it is often found in lyrical modernism. The name they give it is “metactant,” to make clear the meta- or self-reflexive role of the trope’s actor. As we saw in the last chapter, this is also the trope by which Ivanov figures Dionysus as vine, at once fertilizer and fertilized.

¹³⁰ Other famous examples include Yeats’ “How can we know the dancer from the dance?”, Nabokov’s “As night unites the viewer and the view,” and Mandelstam’s own “Я и садовник, я же и цветок” (from “Dano mne telo,” 1909) (Gronas and Apresyan, “A cognitive interpretation of a new trope at the intersection of metaphor and metonymy,” paper given at AATSEEL 2018).

“Because I couldn’t hold on to your hands”

If “Bessonnitsa” and “Zolotistogo meda struia” are both structured as distinct ingresses into Greek myth, the later “Za to, chto ia ruki tvoie ne sumel uderzhat” (1920) begins already from within the myth – indeed, from within an architectural structure – and describes a hope for exit. It does not spend time constructing an inroad into the myth; the myth is given from the start.

За то, что я руки твои не сумел удержать,
За то, что я предал соленые нежные губы,
Я должен рассвета в дремучем акрополе ждать.
Как я ненавижу пахучие древние срубы!

Ахейские мужи во тьме снаряжают коня,
Зубчатыми пилами в стены вгрызаются крепко,
Никак не уляжется крови сухая возня,
И нет для тебя ни названья, ни звука, ни слепка.

Как мог я подумать, что ты возвратишься, как смел!
Зачем преждевременно я от тебя оторвался!
Еще не рассеялся мрак и петух не пропел,
Еще в древесину горячий топор не врезался.

Прозрачной слезой на стенах проступила смола,
И чувствует город свои деревянные ребра,
Но хлынула к лестницам кровь и на приступ пошла,
И трижды приснился мужьям соблазнительный образ.

Где милая Троя? Где царский, где девичий дом?
Он будет разрушен, высокий Приамов скворечник.
И падают стрелы сухим деревянным дождем,
И стрелы другие растут на земле, как орешник.

Последней звезды безболезненно гаснет укол,
И серую ласточкой утро в окно постучится,
И медленный день, как в соломе проснувшийся вол,
На стогнах шершавых от долгого сна шевелится.¹³¹

¹³¹ Osip Mandel’shtam. *Stikhotvoreniia*. Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1973, 121. Because I couldn't hold onto your hands, / Because I betrayed your salty tender lips, / I must wait for dawn in the crude acropolis. / How I hate these strong-smelling wooden cabins! // The Achaeans harness their horse in the dark, / With their toothed saws they bite hard into the walls, / The dry commotion of blood will not subside, / And for you there is nor name, nor sound, nor cast. // How could I think that you'd come back, how did I dare! / Why did I tear myself from you prematurely! / The night still hadn't scattered and the cock hadn't crowed, / And into the wood the hot ax still hadn't plunged. // Like a translucent teardrop the sap appeared on the walls, / And the city is feeling its own wooden ribs, / But blood rushed to the ladders and began the onslaught,

One of the primary interpretive problems the poem has historically presented is summed up, I believe, in its more-intricate-than-usual deployment of lyrical tropes to interrogate a more-mythic-than-usual situation. What I mean by “more mythic than usual” is that Mandelstam draws on multiple different mythic narratives, oversaturating the landscape of the lyric with mythic imagery and overdetermining the mythic signifiers on offer.

Unlike many of Mandelstam’s other Hellenic poems – certainly unlike the previous two – the physical location of this poem is not completely clear.¹³² Let us note the evocations of the “Achaean soldiers,” who “harness their horse,” “Priam’s” “Troy” which “will be destroyed,” and Mandelstam’s implicit reference to Helen of Troy’s three attempts to call to the Achaeans in the voices of their wives in order to lure them out of the horse; let us recall the sketch of the Trojan Horse published opposite this lyric in 1921. We must be satisfied that this lyric evokes the events of the Trojan Horse myth, but we cannot ascertain whether we are in Achaean territory or at the foot of Troy, nor indeed with whose army the speaker’s military allegiances lie.

In terms of content, we begin squarely within the myth (“я должен рассвета в дремучем акрополе ждать”); in terms of form, we begin squarely within the lyric genre: the first four stanzas alternate between ultra-lyrical hyperbolic exclamations (“Как я ненавижу пахучие древние срубы!” “Зачем преждевременно я от тебя оторвался!”) and evocations of events in the lyrical present and prophetic future (“никак не уляжется крови сухая возня, / И нет для тебя ни названья, ни звука, ни слепка,” “и чувствует город свои деревянные ребра”). The statements remain non-narrative and nearly non-descriptive; rather than representing reality, they evoke it line by line.

/ And thrice the men dreamed the seductive image. // Where is dear Troy? Where the royal, where the virginal home? / It will be destroyed, Priam’s lofty birdhouse. / And the arrows fall like dry wooden rain, / And other arrows will grow on the ground like a nut tree. // The last prickle of starlight painlessly goes out, / And like a gray sparrow, dawn will knock at the window, / And the slow day, like an ox woken up in the straw, / On city squares rugged with long sleep is stirring.

¹³² Mikhail Gasparov’s essay about this poem, mentioned above, takes this point of locational unclarity as its starting point (given the dense imagery, why isn’t it clear to us where the speaker *is*, and why isn’t it clear whether his military allegiances are with the Achaeans or the Trojans?) and reads so heavily into it that he manages to uncover an alternative manuscript history. One might appeal to Michel Riffaterre’s concept of “ungrammaticality” to illuminate Gasparov’s method of reading, which I discuss at some length here because it strikes me as extremely symptomatic of the “cipher-like” way scholars tend to read Mandelstam’s Hellenic corpus. One of the characteristics of Riffaterrean “ungrammaticality” is that if a text harbors a hidden meaning, it will become unreadable in a straightforward (“mimetic”) way, and then offer up formal indices to the reader, who will come up with the key to interpretation. These indices have two kinds of formal properties: one, a “deictic” feature, perceived as a warp in the text’s straightforwardness, “encoded in such a way that, first, it *reveals* that it is *hiding* something”; two, a “hermeneutic” feature: the sort of distortion of mimesis that “indicates how we can *find* that something” (Michel Riffaterre. *Text Production*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, 12, emphasis in the original). In Gasparov’s reading, the “hidden” thing is not symbolic meaning but a different *material* history of the text.

This lyrical-evocative, non-mimetic quality reigns in part because of the heightened emotion of these utterances, and the second person address throughout. However, it is also because of the virtuosic metaphor usage employed. “И чувствует город свои деревянные ребра...” The line is a tour de force in terms of figure. The primary visual meaning of “ребро” is anatomical (“rib,” denoting the bone of an animal or a person); the secondary, geometrical or technical (“edge”); the tertiary, geological (“ridge”). While the geometrical or geological definitions of the word may make the most rational sense in terms of a city’s attributes, the verb “чувствует” pulls us into the realm of the sensorial and the bodily, thus indicating a part of the body so specific as to be either erotically intimate, or medically precise, or else grotesque. The ancient city under attack has a body like a lover, or a patient, or a burnt sacrifice. The body is made of wood, a material that unites natural life and human culture.¹³³ The image is arresting – and squarely “lyrical.”¹³⁴ That is, it accomplishes a significant amount of work, exploiting polysemy and drawing on the dialectical relationship between the body’s feelings and the mind’s ideation.¹³⁵

Because the poem does not explain or describe its path into the myth, but instead begins *in medias res*, we might consider “Za to, chto ia ruki tvoï” as though it were a dramatic monologue. This lyric genre has a stronger and more complicated claim to fictionality, as well as to the rules about the way that fiction works, than a standard lyric poem has; upon encountering

¹³³ Mandelstam’s decision to forsake the stone of ancient culture here and build the city presented in the poem out of wood instead is a significant one. Gasparov takes it up (“Это не согласуется с традиционным (и в данном случае правильным) представлением об античности как о времени каменных крепостей”) and concludes that something must be wrong with the poem on the level of textual inaccuracy or publication misprint, rather than fantastic imaginativeness (perhaps even “myth-making”) on the part of the poet or poem (Gasparov, 108). On the poetic importance of stone in particular for the Acmeists, Omry Ronen’s famous 1971 essay “Leksicheskii povtor, podtekst i smysl” comments on the sonic relationship between “akme” and “kamen’,” and serves as a seminal example of the “cipher-based” interpretive impulse in Mandelstam scholarship (“Leksicheskii povtor, podtekst i smysl v poetike Osipa Mandel’shtama,” in Omri Ronen, *Poetika Osipa Mandel’shtama*. SPb: Giperion, 2002, 13-42). With regard to the importance of wood in “Za to, chto” in particular, Kirill Taranovsky argues that it is linked to the theme of dryness, opposing the other “key” [kliuchevoe] (!) word in the poem, “blood” (Kirill Taranovskii, *O poezii i poetike, Iazyki russkoi kul’tury*, Moskva, 2000, 45).

¹³⁴ Remarkably “ребра” will rhyme, two lines later, with “образ,” the name of this device.

¹³⁵ Further, such a complex figure is entirely impossible to imagine in Homeric myth. There is, it seems, only one instance of pathetic fallacy proper in all of Homeric epic, namely in Book 13 of the *Iliad*, when the sea rejoices as Poseidon passes above it in his chariot – though weapons are occasionally made animate in battle scenes (S. Burris, “Pathetic Fallacy,” in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, eds. Roland Greene, Stephen Cushman, Clare Cavanaugh, Jahan Ramazani, and Paul Rouzer, Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012, 1009-1010). In general, however, metaphors in Homer are so fixed, and are so commonly understood to serve *purpose* – whether that purpose be informative or metrical-formulaic, depending on the school of classics criticism – that Milman Parry, writing in 1933, was able to *count* the instances of metaphoric-figurative language in the *Iliad*, and classify them according to usage (Milman Parry, “The Traditional Metaphor in Homer,” *Classical Philology*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Jan. 1933, 30-43).

the work, the reader is expected to distinguish this claim from the more ritualistic genre conventions that the poem participates in.¹³⁶ Thinking of the poem as oriented along a fiction-ritual axis may help us negotiate and name the specific way the poem has of straddling an overdetermined mythic fiction and a lyrical situation at once: the Horse plot setting, then, is “fiction.” It has already been canonically established and ought to serve as an indicator of the world in which the poem takes place and of which it is a mimetic representation. The city’s body and feelings are “ritual.” They signify lyricity and help establish modes (both intellectually and emotionally) of relating to the event of the poem itself: the stakes of the situation are raised (cities have feelings!); the emotional tenor is heightened (the ribs produce an atmosphere of eros, and of sacrifice).

However, the primary drama of the poem does not seem to be the drama of its wartime setting. Rather, that setting provides the backdrop for the poem’s personal, emotional-philosophical drama, whose moments are marked by questions, exclamations, and heightened address (“why did I leave you!” “Will you return!” “Where is home?”). Further, the lyric is a speech act *not* within an accepted and standardized fictional world with accepted and standardized rules about the laws that govern it, but within a mythic setting, the ancient received accounts of which already differ so vastly that it is not at all clear what counts as “canon.”¹³⁷ (As Claude Lévi-Strauss says, Freud’s account of the Oedipus complex is now part of our received

¹³⁶ A less formal, more reader-centered method of conceiving of the genre distinction has been formulated by Ralph Rader, who proposes that a poem may be considered a dramatic monologue if “the reader must imagine the speaker as an outward presence, as we in our bodies register others in their bodies, from the outside in,” whereas in the case of traditional lyric utterance “we are imaginatively conflated with the speaker, understanding him from the inside out, seeing with his eyes and speaking with his voice” (Ralph Rader, “Notes on Some Structural Varieties and Variations in Dramatic ‘I’ Poems and Their Theoretical Implications,” in *Victorian Poetry*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Summer 1984, 103-120, quote from pg. 104). I find this “inside/outside” method of distinction an appealing one with regards to Mandelstam’s Hellenic lyrics in particular because of the ease with which readers have tended unconsciously to emulate the thought process modeled by the poems, reading them in search of something. But as Jonathan Culler has put it more recently: “In the dramatic monologue, in sum, the tension between the ritualistic and fictional elements of the poem yields, by convention, a dissociation of levels: readers unconsciously separate the act of communication by the fictional speaker in his or her situation from the verse produced by the poet. **The ritualistic frames the fictional, but as a separable embedded level.** In other lyrics, however, there is no reason to posit a fictional speaker performing some real-world speech act separate from the poetic discourse that the verse provides, and fictional elements are assimilated in other ways” (Culler, 275, emphasis mine). Culler here draws heavily on Robert Langbaum’s 1957 *The Poetry of Experience*. Langbaum uses a similar framework in distinguishing monologues from other kinds of lyric utterance, though he calls it “situational.”

¹³⁷ Our received Trojan horse myth actually comes primarily from Virgil, though of course we associate it with Homer because of the horse’s key role in the unfolding of the Trojan War. Indeed it is mentioned in the *Odyssey*, but the details – in our consciousness and in this poem – are Augustan, post-oral.

Oedipus myth.¹³⁸) Nor are we in an established “situation” (i.e., “Pered zerkalom,” “Plovet,” even “Osen”), which might come with its own conventions, set up its own expectations, and install its own rules: the poem is too emotionally erratic to “situate” it in a specific time or, for that matter, location. In the words of myth scholar Guy Lanoue, “Myth continually switches codes, while literature switches scenes and points of view within a unified armature of psychologically or socially motivated action.”¹³⁹ Myth does not merely exist in another historical moment or another imagined plane of existence. It is both of these but, crucially, it “is a *system*, in the Bergsonian sense of the word, which man unfolds around himself, like a fan of phenomena liberated from temporal dependence, commonly subordinated to an inner bond through the human ‘I’”:¹⁴⁰ that is, it is “unfolded” here for its capacity to wield explanatory power over a conundrum, a problem that an individual or the collective cultural consciousness is struggling to think through.

“Za to, chto ia ruki tvoi” is not, in other words, conjuring a conventional situation *in order to* pose certain lyrical questions. Its posing those questions (is a return possible? ...to my royal, inviolate home?) and its “unfolding” the myth of Troy are the same project. When “myth” replaces the “fictional” pole of the “fiction-ritual” structure of a lyric poem, the poem’s epistemological stakes are radically re-oriented, since myth already encompasses both ritual and, understood loosely, a kind of fiction. Rather, the poem is in fact *about that epistemological re-orientation*; we might say that it invites the kind of “cipher-based” reading so often performed by its critics precisely because it lyrically dramatizes the experience of using mythology as an archive or database for the kinds of questions the speaker in “Za to, chto” wants answered. It is a dramatic monologue, in other words, but the speaker is not (as some scholars have posited) Menelaus, lamenting the realtime loss of his wife Helen and hoping the sacking of Troy will

¹³⁸ “...our [structuralist – *CLB*] method eliminates a problem which has been so far one of the main obstacles to the progress of mythological studies, namely, the quest for the *true* version, or the *earlier* one. On the contrary, we define the myth as consisting of all its versions [...] A striking example is offered by the fact that our interpretation may take into account, and is certainly applicable to, the Freudian use of the Oedipus myth. Although the Freudian problem has ceased to be that of autochthony verses bisexual reproduction, it is still the problem of understanding how *one* can be born from *two*: how is it that we do not have only one procreator, but a mother plus a father? Therefore, not only Sophocles, but Freud himself, should be included among the recorded versions of the Oedipus myth on a par with earlier or seemingly more ‘authentic’ versions” (Lévi-Strauss, 435, emphasis in the original).

¹³⁹ This from Lanoue’s foreword to Eleazar Meletinsky’s 1976 *Poetika mifa*. Lanoue elucidates the difference between myth’s negotiation of social reality and literature’s: “Myth, like literature, is linked to the ‘symbolic,’ ‘modeling’ and ‘classificatory’ language that people use to impose an interpretive structure on the social, cosmological, material, and political aspects of everyday life... Myth continually switches codes, while literature switches scenes and points of view within a unified armature of psychologically or socially motivated action” (Eleazar Meletinsky, *The Poetics of Myth*, trans. Guy Lanoue and Alexandre Sadetsky, Routledge, 2000, ix-x).

¹⁴⁰ See Lévi-Strauss’s nearly identical description of myth: “On the one hand, a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place in time: before the world was created, or during its first stages – anyway, long ago. But what gives the myth an operative value is that the specific pattern described is everlasting; it explains the present and the past as well as the future” (Lévi-Strauss, 430).

yield her;¹⁴¹ “Za to, chto”’s speaker is better conceived of as a time-traveler, searching for a kind of knowledge and hoping the myth will yield it.

The myth will, does, yield it. Like clockwork, the questions are posed in the second-to-last stanza; once they are voiced, the poem is given resolution. *Where is Troy?* Cue the final stanza; it arrives like an answer. Morning drops like a curtain over the stage of the poem. Bergson’s fan folds resolutely shut. “Bessonnitsa” and “Zolotistogo meda struia” figured this resolution with nightfall, homecoming, dream; “Za to, chto” offers an equally drowsy dawn, the heavy body of an ox waking up in bed as if from the dream of the poem’s myth, sleepy and surprised on the newly enlightened town square of the present. This final image is yet another ouroboros-like figure for lyric’s emergence from myth. “И медленный день, как в соломе проснувшийся вол”: the daybreak is like an ox, waking up to daybreak, ad infinitum.

Like “Bessonnitsa” and “Zolotistogo meda struia,” the lyric utterance that becomes “Za to, chto” commences in the hopes of conducting an inquiry. It immediately establishes myth as the realm which will yield a resolution and, slowly, the poem figures out how to ask exactly what it wants to know. At the penultimate stanza, a set of questions is posed, and the lyric ends, complete. The climax of the poem’s end thus formally delivers a resolution, an answer to the inquiry at hand, the total articulation of the lyric from start to finish, the conscious integration of lyrical question and mythic quest.

In “On the Nature of the Word,” the same essay featuring Bergson’s folded fan, Mandelstam declared that Hellenism inheres in “any personal possession that joins part of the external world to man.” “Hellenism means consciously surrounding man with utensils instead of indifferent objects”; it is “the metamorphosis of these objects into the utensil,” the conscious rendering of material and matter in useful, instrumental forms.¹⁴² In addition to its domestic valence, that is, Hellenism in Mandelstam’s conception is deeply technological: it is external to, rather than inherent in, the self; and it relates to humanity purposively.

Let us understand this series of questing poems as performing this same work. They were created from raw material (a received Homeric myth, a *pogudka* in the ears) to accomplish an intellectual inquiry – the study of that very raw material, and the conditions under which poetry may emerge from it. Like Mandelstam’s utensils, they bring part of the external, ancient, eternal world home to the here and now of the lyric. And in so doing, their purpose is self-evident, complete, integrative: their capacity to pose a question guarantees their right to a response.

¹⁴¹ “...это Менелай, он упустил свою Елену, десять лет воевал, чтобы ее возвратить, но теперь, накануне решающей победы, вдруг понял, что если даже он сможет возвратить Елену то не сможет возвратить ее любви, а тогда зачем она ему, и зачем была нужна вся сокрушительная война?” (Gasparov, 109).

¹⁴² Эллинизм — это печной горшок, ухват, крынка с молоком, это — домашняя утварь, посуда, всеокружение тела; эллинизм — это тепло очага, ощущаемое как священное, всякая собственность, приобщающая часть внешнего мира к человеку... Эллинизм — это сознательное окружение человека утварью вместо безразличных предметов, превращение этих предметов в утварь, очеловечивание окружающего мира (Mandel’shtam, 1:226).

CHAPTER THREE

Stuck Together: Joseph Brodsky's Centaurs

Writing about the role of things and space in the philosophy of Brodsky's late poetry, Yuri and Mikhail Lotman observe that the most significant feature of a thing, for the poet, are the *borders* of that thing – the edges of it, the part literally in between the middle of the thing and empty space, which have more in common with each other than either has with the border.¹⁴³ For Brodsky, argue the Lotmans, the border of a thing is the clearest site of form's marriage to material and therefore it is where the essence of a thing gathers. It is also, therefore, the site of the intersection of space and time: for the form of a thing is taken out of eternity and brought into time when given earthly matter to shape.¹⁴⁴

As the Lotmans show, in Brodsky's philosophico-poetics, the edge of a thing signifies a kind of struggle between the thing itself and the pure space around it, which would like to swallow it.¹⁴⁵ However, in addition to conceiving of the edge as keeping its thing intact and safe from the space around it (a dynamic which results in the thing being meaningful in itself), we might take the Lotmans' concept one step further, and locate in the edge of a thing its best capacity for *relational* significance. At once *part of the thing* and *outward-facing*, the edge of a thing is especially well situated for making meaning in relation to other things, particularly when that meaning is based in spatial or sense-perceptible relation (as opposed to conceptual or structural relation).

It is this capacity for spatial-relational significance that Brodsky explores in his 1988 lyrical cycle *Centaurs* [Кентавры]. The cycle's titular image already makes an argument for a certain relation between things, as well as a hierarchy for conceiving of their relation: two things whose edges have come into such intense *spatial* contact as to merge *conceptually* into one being.

In terms of image, the fusion (слияние) of two disparate beings into one is the central motif of the cycle. Following the horse-human hybrids evoked by the title, the first poem features a woman-sofa hybrid on a romantic date with a man-automobile hybrid. The second poem features water and fish fused to produce an ichthyosaur. The third, more abstract, features a crossbreed (помесь) of the past with the future, "us" fused with lovers, belief crossbred with the stratosphere. The cycle's final poem, most invested in the spatial metaphysics of language

¹⁴³ "Из примата формы над материей следует, в частности, что **основным признаком вещи становятся ее границы**; реальность вещи – это дыра, которую она после себя оставляет в пространстве" (Lotman, Iurii, and Lotman, Mikhail. "Mezhdū veshch'iu i pustotoi (Iz nabliudenii nad poetikoi sbornika Iosifa Brodskogo 'Uraniiā')." In: Lotman, Iu. M., *O poetakh i poezii: analiz poeticheskogo teksta*. SPb, 1996, emphasis mine).

¹⁴⁴ Lotman, 267.

¹⁴⁵ "...в конфликте пространства и вещи, вещь становится (или жаждет стать) активной стороной: пространство стремится вещь поглотить, вещь – его вытеснить. Вещь, по Бродскому, – аристотелевская энтелехия: актуализированная форма плюс материя" (Lotman, 268).

itself, features fusion on the level of the word: wartime tanks are fused with livestock to produce mutant “moo-tanks” (муу-танки), before Brodsky’s speaker declares that everyone turns into everyone else with help from the word “вдруг,” imparting a temporal urgency to the strange image of friends metamorphosing into each other, or more literally getting inside each other.

Fusion is so central to the cycle’s interrogation of space, time, and language, in fact, that the “centaurs” of the title are better read as synecdoches for the merged figure they represent. It is almost as though the cycle were called “Figures for fusion.” From this perspective the cycle is not about centaurs (it is not about horse-human hybrids); it is about *things participating in the same basic figure that centaurs feature*; namely, the spatial fusion of two things into one integral conceptual whole. So the centaurs of the title are a meta-figure: they are made to *represent* a specific figure of speech, further examples of which follow in the poems themselves.

This meta-figurative quality of Brodsky’s centaurs – their readiness to *stand for figure* or for poetic diction – is echoed in much writing, both scholarly and popular, about the poet. In an obituary published in the *Independent* the year of Brodsky’s death, a fellow anglophone poet opined: “But there’s something centaur-like about the poetry (the centaur is a recurrent image of his): shinningly intelligent up top, yet oddly clumping in diction and rhythm. He loves English not wisely but too well, gorging on archaisms. Even when highly controlled, the language is somehow all over the place.”¹⁴⁶ Less acerbic, the poet Lev Losev turned to the Centaurs cycle to find a metaphor for Brodsky’s metaphors.

Перенос качества с одного на другое – метафора, мышление по аналогии, слишком рискованно в рациональном мышлении, но является основой художественного творчества. В позднем творчестве Бродский иногда гротескно обнажает эту основу искусства – мышление по аналогии: некоторые лежанки называются «софа» и некоторых женщин зовут «Софа», у лежанки есть ножки и у женщины они есть, «стало быть», софа и Софа – одно и то же, «кентавр».¹⁴⁷

Brodsky’s centaur, then, is over-intelligible as a figure, its presence visibly indexing a lesson in how poetic language works, how a poem is made or experienced.¹⁴⁸ It offers a visual for a mental

¹⁴⁶ Morrison, Blake. “The Muse and Mortals.” *The Independent*, 24 November 1996. <<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/books-the-muse-and-mortals-1354077.html>> Accessed December 8, 2019.

¹⁴⁷ Losev, Lev. *Iosif Brodskii*. Molodaia gvardiia, Moscow, 2006. “Transferring the quality of one thing to another thing – that is, creating a metaphor, thinking by analogy – is something formal logic will not risk. But it is the very foundation of art. In his late works Brodsky almost grotesquely bares this basic artistic device, this thinking by analogy and association: some couches are called sofas; some women are named Sofa; the couches have legs; the women have legs – therefore sofa and Sofa merge into a kind of centaur” (Loseff, Lev, trans. Miller, Jane Ann, *Joseph Brodsky: A Literary Life*, Yale UP, 2011, 20).

¹⁴⁸ It also happens less explicitly, or less consciously: many scholars slip casually into using the word “centaur” the way Brodsky does, i.e. as a figure-for-the-figure-of fusion. For instance, Denis Akhapiin, writing about certain verb tense usage in Brodsky’s late work, writes: “В приведенном примере ‘future in the past’ и ‘present continuous’ выступают как некие

maneuver – specifically, I shall argue, the mental maneuver required to make meaningful the phenomenon of two things coming into very close contact, so close they may become one thing.

The spatial and linguistic stakes of this drama of figure (proximity becoming contiguity becoming continuity) are obvious; the temporal stakes perhaps less so. But as the Lotmans remind us, the edge of a thing is where the infinity of its form meets the temporariness of its matter.¹⁴⁹ We conceive of this “merging” as happening in time – not the time of history and biography but conceptual time, that is, the “time” of something coming conceptually prior to something else; the time of our perceiving and then processing information to land on a result. (The time of “proximity **becoming** contiguity **becoming** continuity.”) The time of the action implied by the noun “fusion,” even if the object in question was always already fused.

Although Brodsky’s version of it is idiosyncratic, the standard literary-theoretical term for this figure (two things in meaningful physical contiguity) is metonymy. In a recent monograph devoted to metonymy, Sebastian Matzner has argued that the “contiguity principle” constitutive of the device is best understood as lexical, rather than logical, contiguity.¹⁵⁰ The device functions through lateral shifts which we imagine are spatial or imagistic but in fact, Matzner argues, are semantic. Metonymy *appears* to happen in the spatial movement from (for instance) sleeve to wrist to body proper (and so a shirt sleeve can be a metonym for a person) but *in fact* happens in the mental movement from one paradigmatic element to another.

This insistence on the semantic nature of the device foregrounds the conceptual nature of its temporality – foregrounds, to speak plainly, the fact that metonymy does not reside in the contiguity of two things but instead in their capacity to make meaning via that contiguity. The centaur (or “fusion”) is an uncommon example of metonymy; it is one that lays bare the workings of the device by emphasizing in awkward visual terms exactly how it works. It thus becomes a visual story about metonymy instead of a metonym. We arrest the lateral shift (the time of thought) in action; the visual result is an impossible mythical beast.

The “impossible” or fantastic status of the centaur borne as the result of arresting metonymy mid-action is notable. It announces the presence not just of a figure but a meta-figure; the centaur’s mythicity is a major source of its clearly being *about* something. This is in part because, unreal, it must mean something; while on the other hand, the centaur’s fantasticity playfully contrasts with metonymy’s well-documented reliance on the real. As Pajari Räsänen has observed,

...despite the certain arbitrariness and contingency that often characterizes the connection by contiguity (or coincidence), the metonymic associations are still relations of ‘dependency’ and ‘inclusion,’ since their relation is established within,

«кентавры», сочетающие в себе элементы двух времен” (Akhapkin, Denis. “Iosif Brodskii: Glagoly,” in *Poetika Iosifa Brodskogo*, Tverskoi gosudarstvennyi institut: 2003, 28-38).

¹⁴⁹ “Материя, из которой состоят вещи, – конечна и временна; форма вещи – бесконечна и абсолютна” (Lotman, 267).

¹⁵⁰ “At the heart of this book lies the aim of providing a more precise understanding of the contiguity principle as the key characteristic of metonymy, which, I propose, should be understood as **lexical – not logical – contiguity**... metonymy is best understood as a **lateral shift within the terminology of one semantic field**” (Matzner, Sebastian. *Rethinking Metonymy: Literary Theory and Poetic Practice from Pindar to Jakobson*. Oxford UP, 2016, 8. emphasis mine).

or in regard of, some specific temporal, spatial, material or conceptual continuum between, for instance, matter and form, form and content, part and whole, cause and effect, and so on.¹⁵¹

Metonymy has often been pitted against other figures, such as metaphor, in these terms: while metaphor may violate the laws of reality, metonymy arises from the chance encounter of two entities in space and time.¹⁵² Brodsky's centaurs may be said to emerge from a too-intense engagement with the metonymic continuum described by Räsänen – specifically, an engagement with both the amount and the *kinds* of time it takes to traverse it.

In order to tease out the way that conceptual temporality is encoded in the spatial poetics of the figure of the centaur, I would like to consider a study published by psychologist Harvey Nash in 1984. The article offers a “psychological perspective” on the origin of the Greek myth of the centaur. Hoping to ascertain where the centaur myth comes from, Nash describes a series of experiments performed on children aged 3-5 years, and then again on adults. In the experiments, the subjects were shown images of human-animal hybrids taken from both eastern and western mythological sources and asked to name them. “Whereas the children were allowed an unhurried look at the figures, the adult subjects viewed the stimuli tachistoscopically; i.e., they were permitted only the briefest glimpse (1/125 second) of each stimulus.”¹⁵³ Nash's report continues:

Not knowing the actual names of the hybrids, the preschool children improvised. The younger preschoolers typically gave one-word single-species responses, e.g., calling the centaur a “horse.” The older preschoolers, by contrast, typically gave more complex responses which implicitly or explicitly acknowledged both the human and the animal features of a hybrid. While occasionally calling hybrids by familiar therianthropic hybrid names (e.g., “angel,” “mermaid”), the older preschoolers more frequently referred to the hybrids by specially-formulated combination names (e.g., calling the centaur a “man-horse”). ...Some others split the centaur into its human and equine components, regenerating each component into a distinct and apparently complete single-species creature, e.g., “he's next to a horse.” Occasional preschoolers attempted to establish a relationship other than mere proximity between the human and the horse into which they had transformed the centaur, e.g., “man on a horse,” “lady on a horse.”

The “man on a horse” response suggests that man and horse are acting on one another, that special muscular tensions have been induced in the two contiguous

¹⁵¹ Räsänen, Pajari. *Counter-figures. An Essay on Anti-Metaphoric Resistance*. Dissertation. University of Helsinki Printing House, 2007, 84.

¹⁵² Albert Henry observes on this point: “Dans une certaine mesure, la métaphore fait toujours violence au réel. Par le fait même, elle est plus exposée que la métonymie à la fantaisie gratuite et même à l'élucubration.

La métonymie procède de l'observation objective : elle découvre et traduit un lien qui est dans nos représentations des choses. Elle trouve un garde-fou et une justification dans l'évidence du monde extérieur ou dans des rapports conceptuels acceptés” (Albert Henry, *Métonymie et métaphore* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971), p. 64).

¹⁵³ Nash, Harvey, “The Centaur's Origin: A Psychological Perspective,” *The Classical World*, vol. 77, no. 5, 273-291, quote on 279.

creatures as a consequence of their interrelation. ...The relationship between human and mount was even more intimate in such responses as “man riding a horse.” For here, human and mount were involved in a dynamic and perhaps complex partnership: the horse being active and presumably tolerant of its human companion or burden, and the rider being sufficiently active to maintain his or her balance atop the horse, and perhaps also to exercise some control over the horse.¹⁵⁴

There are two striking assumptions made by the psychologists who ran these experiments; both are instructive. Firstly, the aim of the study was, explicitly, to discover the psychological *origin* of a certain mythical figure; in order to do this, the psychologists studied a) children and b) adults with temporally limited perception. The decision to interview children in order to learn something about early human culture is influenced by the notion, no longer fashionable, that microgenesis parallels ontogenesis, wherein a child’s perceptive and nominative capabilities stand in for those of primitive human culture as such. The notion is based in the collapsing, whether accidental or deliberate, of historical time and conceptual time: that is, it understands the development of a person’s cognitive abilities to unfold in time, just as civilizations may be said to develop in time. The decision to interview adults after tachistoscopic stimuli, that is, after induced brevity of perception, suggests that something cognitive that happens almost instantaneously in adults can be observed as a process in children – and that this instantaneous cognitive process can be captured and analyzed via analogy with its more drawn-out childhood counterpart. Indeed, this decision indexes an understanding that the workings of the centaur trope are essentially temporal: we may speak of the conceptual movement of two bodies towards each other and their subsequent merging into one body as “having happened” in time – thus, we may also speak of it “happening.” The study implicitly argues that we may capture this process by registering it in foreshortened adult perception, replay it slowly by experimenting with children’s minds, and thus effectively witness a conceptual moment in early history: the birth of the centaur.

Another assumption made here is that the thought process involved in *seeing a centaur and understanding a man on a horse*, as the children do, is analogous to the thought process involved in *seeing a man on a horse and understanding a centaur*, as Nash goes on to claim the ancient Greeks did – a claim fortified by the experiments described. The assumption here is that disparate contiguous parts can mentally come together to form continuous wholes as easily as continuous wholes can be mentally broken down into disparate contiguous parts.

Beyond these assumptions, the study also contains a remarkable analysis of the figure represented by the centaur, and the way it engages with and models human perception, knowledge, and interpretation. This analysis lies in Nash’s evaluation of the children’s responses (paragraph two of the block quote). Again:

The “man on a horse” response suggests that **man and horse are acting on one another**, that **special muscular tensions** have been induced in the **two contiguous creatures** as a **consequence of their interrelation**. ...The relationship between human and mount was even more **intimate** in such responses as “man riding a horse.” For here, **human and mount were involved in a dynamic and perhaps complex partnership**: the **horse being active** and presumably tolerant of its

¹⁵⁴ Nash, 278-279.

human companion or burden, and the **rider being sufficiently active to maintain his or her balance atop the horse, and perhaps also to exercise some control over the horse.**

Whether or not it is reasonable to assume that preschool children aged three to five years have any notion of horseback riding as an activity that involves both horse and rider doing such specific things with each other both bodily and psychologically, Nash has very effectively and tellingly unpacked horseback riding's ontology. He describes it as an "intimate," mutually "dynamic" physical relationship between "two contiguous creatures" involved in a kind of power play. The language he uses is extremely erotically charged. The idea we arrive at is that a centaur, the mythic composite of human and horse, is just one conceptual step away from a human and a horse not only touching, but involved with each other at the level of muscles flexing and productively controlling each other's bodies. A human and horse so intimately involved with each other, that is, that their relation is hard to describe without recourse to the language of sexual intercourse.

Nash intends to offer a "psychological" origin story for the centaur, but has tapped into something profound: the mythological origin stories attested to in early accounts are all stories of rapes – either horse-human rapes or else rapes of humans by gods in equine form.¹⁵⁵ The twentieth-century cultural anthropological explanations of the centaur's origin also tend to be sexualizing, suggesting that for the ancients, the centaur represented animal desires in human

¹⁵⁵ Classicist Ryan Platte offers a survey of erotic centaur mythopoetics in his recent study of the equine poetics of antiquity: "As in the case of the IE horse the association between centaurs and sexuality is very common, but in the case of the centaurs that sex is almost always violent. The most famous example stems from the myth of Nessos attempting to rape Deianeira, depicted by the Nessos Painter, in Sophocles' *Trachiniai*, and elsewhere. Nessos not only attempted to rape Deianeira but then convinced her that a mixture of his blood and semen would serve as a love charm to secure the affections of Heracles, which it did not. A connection between centaurs, sexual assault, and semen is also demonstrated by Nonnos, who incorporates this motif into his depiction of horned centaurs sprung from the semen of Zeus...."

Even the story of the centaurs' creation links the figures essentially with extreme and inappropriate sexual impulse. Pindar's *Pythian* II tells of how Ixion was brought by Zeus to Olympus, where it was discovered that Ixion intended to have sex with Hera. Zeus was in disbelief, so tested Ixion by fashioning an eidolon, or copy, of Hera, like that fashioned of Helen, and Ixion did indeed have sex with it. From this union was born a man named Kentauros, who had sex with the mares around Mount Pelion, and from them the race of the centaurs was born. For his act Ixion was punished by being tied eternally to a spinning chariot wheel. Since chariot wheels spin due to the force of horses this form of punishment is ironic. The eternally spinning wheel reflects unchecked equine force because Ixion's own sexual impulses were uncontrollable, and the eventual and logical product of that sexual impulse was the race of the centaurs. The centaurs' very essence is linked to a sexual impulse associated with horses, but the centaurs' expression of it is uniquely violent and transgressive" (Platte, Ryan. 2017. *Equine Poetics*. Hellenic Studies Series 74. Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebook:CHS_PlatteR.Equine_Poetics.2017. Accessed June 13, 2020. Quote from "Appendix: Centaurs").

form, or sexual savagery combined with rationalism.¹⁵⁶ The sexual element is strongly present in myriad angles on the centaur, whether abstract and allegorical (“this looks like it represents lust combined with intellect”) or literal and material (“this looks like the offspring of a horse and a human”; “this is a human and a horse so intensely physically involved with each other that their two bodies have been mistaken for one fused body”).

Mythologically speaking, the idea that erotic desire is the bridge between contiguity and continuity is not limited to the centaur myth. Theorizing the origin of eros, Aristophanes’ famous speech in Plato’s *Symposium* hypothesizes that in our earlier forms, humans were two bodies fused together into one double whole. On an angry whim, Zeus sliced those wholes in half and eros was born of the split; now humans are condemned to roam the earth in search of our “other half,” hoping to fuse again into our originary forms.¹⁵⁷ Much like Nash’s description of horseback riding, this myth describes sex as an explicit attempt to forge one whole of two disparate parts – and, as in the case of the centaur, the visual result is an unreal and grotesque mythical beast.

More abstractly, Claude Lévi-Strauss describes the Oedipus myth as an ancient attempt to work through a similar problem, of parts and people bodily and conceptually fusing and separating to make discrete wholes. In defense of the modern, Freudian version of the Oedipus myth, he writes: “Although the Freudian problem has ceased to be that of autochthony versus bisexual reproduction, it is still the problem of how *one* can be born from *two*; how is it that we do not have only one procreator, but a mother plus a father?”¹⁵⁸ This “problem” may be understood in Aristotelian terms as a confusion of the efficient cause (parents make children) with the formal cause (“one” is formally distinct from “two”). Brodsky’s centaurs nearly parody this confusion; in “Kentavry I” the forces holding his hybrids’ disparate parts together are explained on the one hand by the demands of the figure (formal cause), on the other by desire (efficient cause).¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Comparative mythologist Georges Dumézil writes in a 1921 study called *Le Problème des Centaures* of the nature-culture duality represented by centaurs and other hybrids across mythologies; drawing on him, classicist G. S. Kirk writes, “First of all the Centaurs themselves, in that they were half horse, symbolized both the wild aspect of nature (for horses are shaggy, swift, sometimes difficult to control, and obviously potent in a sexual sense) and its more benign side (for they are also friendly to men, impressive and dignified in appearance, contemplative in their glance, and a mark of social standing). That is in their horse-aspect, but they are half men as well, and so the coexistence of nature and culture becomes all the more striking” (Kirk, G.S., *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures*, University of California Press, 1973, 160). More immediately, recall Blake Morrison’s words in his obituary of Brodsky, which also rely on this conceptual duality. As Morrison has it, Brodsky’s poetry is explicitly centaur-like, “shiningly intelligent up top, yet oddly clumping in diction and rhythm.”

¹⁵⁷ Plato, *Symposium*, 191d.

¹⁵⁸ Lévi-Strauss, Claude, “The Structural Study of Myth,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 68, Oct-Dec 1955, 435.

¹⁵⁹ For a more detailed reading of the “forces” holding Brodsky’s centaurs together, and a consideration of the relation between erotic desire and poetic figure in those forces, see Brickman, Caroline Lemak, “A Study in Upholstery,” in “The Stuff of Figure, Now,” *Post45: Contemporaries* October 2019. < <http://post45.org/2019/10/a-study-in-upholstery/>> Accessed July 5th 2020.

Finally, the erotics of Brodsky's use of domestic object imagery – particularly in connection with myth – has been commented on by multiple scholars. Writing in 2001, Irina Kovaleva coined the term “mythology of furniture” [мифология мебели] to index Brodsky's semi-frequent recourse to furniture imagery when engaging with mythological tropes – a trope with its roots in Odysseus and Penelope's marital bed.¹⁶⁰ Closer to home, David MacFadyen locates Brodsky's shared living space with his parents as the site of the centaur poems, noting that their tiny apartment “was dominated by outsized furniture; two ten-foot-high chests and an equally ornate bed.”¹⁶¹

I have discussed the Nash analysis at such length because it presents clearly the three constitutive elements of Brodsky's complex centaur figure, and so it will function as a key to interpretation as we turn to the poems. Those three elements are 1) the conceptually temporal basis of a visually spatial figure, 2) the fusing of parts into wholes and the splitting of wholes into parts, and 3) the erotic dynamic between contiguity (metonymy) and continuity (fusion). From the perspective of the structure of the lyrics, these elements describe the work of the figure in the poems. From the perspective of the myth, these elements describe the conceptual birth of the figure of metonymy, an origin story that plays out formally and thematically in the cycle.

«Эта склонность мышцы к мебели»: *Kentavry I*

The first poem imagines a romantic rendez-vous between two hybrid creatures who are composed partly of humans and partly of domestic objects.¹⁶² Already on the level of plot it thus posits a relationship between the fusion of disparate parts into continuous wholes (the hybrid creatures) and the role of erotic desire in drawing two beings into contact (their date).

Кентавры I

Наполовину красавица, наполовину софа', в просторечьи – Со'фа,
по вечерам оглашая улицу, чьи окна отчасти лица,
стуком шести каблуков (в конце концов, катастрофа –
то, в результате чего трудно не измениться),
она спешит на свидание. Любовь состоит из тюля,
волоса, крови, пружин, валика, счастья, родов.
На две трети мужчина, на одну легковая – Муля –
встречает ее рычанием холостых оборотов

¹⁶⁰ Kovaleva, Irina. “Odissei i Nikto: Ob odnom antichnom motive v poezii I. Brodskogo,” *Staroe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 2001, 2(278).

¹⁶¹ MacFadyen, David. *Joseph Brodsky and the Baroque*. 146.

¹⁶² Working from a Digital Humanities perspective, Ingrid Nordgaard demonstrates that mythological “hybrids” (i.e. centaurs, angels, sphinxes, minotaurs) make up a large portion of Brodsky's animalia (Nordgaard, Ingrid. “Brodsky's Beasts from Eternal Butterflies to Contemporary Centaurs: The Digital Brodsky Animal Timeline,” published on the Digital Humanities Lab / Russian and East European Studies Platform <<http://dhrees.yale.edu/dhrees-project/avante-gardes-and-emigres/brodsky-lab-projects/brodskys-beasts/>>, accessed June 27, 2019).

и увлекает в театр. В каждом бедре с пеленок
сидит эта склонность мышцы к мебели, к выкрутасам
красного дерева, к шкапу, у чьих филенок,
в свою очередь, склонность к трем четвертям, к анфасам
с отпечатками пальцев. Увлекает в театр, где, спрятавшись в пятый угол,
наезжая впотымах друг на дружку, меся колесом фанеру,
они наслаждаются в паузах драмой из жизни кукол,
чем мы и были, собственно, в нашу эру.¹⁶³

Syntactically, the poem consists of five sentences. The sentences follow a pattern. First comes a sentence establishing character (Sofa), setting (her domestic space),¹⁶⁴ and moving the plot along (she's rushing to a date). Second comes a philosophical statement explaining the laws of the world in concrete detail (love consists of parts). This is repeated: the poem's third sentence establishes character (Mulya), setting (outside Sofa's place), and moves the plot along (Sofa and Mulya go to the theater). Fourth comes another philosophical sentence explaining the laws of the world in concrete detail (body parts yearn for furniture parts and furniture parts yearn for body parts). Last comes yet another sentence establishing setting (the theater), moving the plot along (Sofa and Mulya hook up and watch a puppet show); it finishes by establishing character (the speaker, in first-person-plural form). Narrative-description-narrative-description-narrative.

There are three characters that emerge during the sentences of the poem invested in establishing character: Sofa, Mulya, and the speaker. All are part-part fusions of some sort: Sofa is part beautiful [woman], part couch; Mulya is part man, part automobile; the speaker is plural

¹⁶³ All translations my own unless otherwise indicated. "Half beautiful woman, half sofa, in the vernacular – Sofa, / in the evenings filling the streets whose windows are partly faces / with the clop of six heels (after all, a catastrophe / is something as the result of which it's hard not to change) / she's hurrying to a date. / Love consists of tulle, / hair, blood, springs, a bolster, happiness, childbirth. / Two-thirds man, one [third] sedan – Mulya – / meets her with the roar of an idling engine / and draws her to the theater. In every thigh since diapers / sits this inclination of muscle for furniture, for the quirks / of mahogany, for cabinetry whose panels, / in turn, harbor an inclination for now three-quarters, now *en face* profiles / with fingerprints. Draws her to the theater where, hidden in the fifth corner, / running each other over in the dark, kneading plywood with wheel, / they intermittently enjoy a drama from the life of puppets, / which is what we were, in fact, in our era."

¹⁶⁴ The poem does not state this outright but it seems that the first scene takes place inside Sofa's room. Mulya greets Sofa with a roar of his engine and takes her to the theater, which strongly suggests that he picks her up at her place. (When we first meet him, he is stationary; his engine is idle; he has been waiting for her for a while.) The feeling of the poem opening *within Sofa's domestic space* is enhanced by the fact that she is part domestic object herself – couches are found inside rooms, not outside them – and the "love consists" line, some of whose components (tulle, hair) contribute to the image of a young woman getting ready for a date. In this sense the centaurs' bodies are also metonyms for certain kinds of space: she, private, domestic; he, public, outside; their togetherness, something like the communal space of solitude represented by the dark theater.

(perhaps implying the reader's complicity).¹⁶⁵ In those "narrative" sentences, the settings are also established in the language of "parts": the windows in Sofa's neighborhood are "partly" [отчасти] faces; the centaurs make out in the theater's "fifth corner" (suggesting an awkwardly-shaped space consisting of numbered parts, much as Sofa is "наполовину" couch and Mulya is "two-thirds" a human man).¹⁶⁶ Finally, at the poem's end, the language of the characters' actions also participates in this part-part terminology: Sofa and Mulya's attentions are partially engaged with each other, partially engaged by the entertainment playing out before them ("наезжая впотьмах друг на дружку, меся колесом фанеру, / они наслаждаются в паузах драмой"). Poetic diction is made to conform to and confirm the uncanny images of fusion presented in these sentences: Sofa's name represents the animation and personhood of an inanimate object; the roar of Mulya's idling engine [рычание холостых оборотов] inscribes his bachelor status into the car's machinery.¹⁶⁷

The two sentences describing the laws of the poem's world also deal with parts, for the laws of the poem's world are based in the relation of parts to each other. The poem is a love story and the first descriptive sentence tells us how love works. It works by consisting in extremely disparate parts brought together to make it up. The parts of love are so varied and specific as to verge on the humorous or even grotesque.¹⁶⁸ The poem needs the specificity, though, because metonymy can only take root in the real and the local. These specifics also lend themselves to visualization, anchoring the reader as she progresses through the poem. But then the highly visual nature of words like *волоса*, *кровь*, *пружины*, and *валик* makes the impossibility of visually reconciling them at all – much less into something called love – all the more jarring. A reader might have pictured, haltingly but successfully, the hybrid creature Sofa, guided by the poem through the perceptible clomp of her six heels; this work of envisioning becomes far more daunting once we are told how Sofa is made. This sentence thus forces the reader to experience firsthand the process of the poem, which works to lay bare the mechanics of bringing together in space separate things and merging them to forge one concept – and exposes those mechanics, blood and springs and messy childbirth and all.

The second philosophical-descriptive sentence (fourth in the poem) picks up where the first one left off, moving from childbirth to diapers. These two sentences are uttered in a more impersonal tone than the focused "narrative" ones, and do not *seem* to tell a story (as the 1st, 3rd, and 5th sentences empirically do); they describe *how things are* instead of *what's happening specifically*. But, in fact, these sentences tell a different kind of story: an origin story, from childbirth to diapers, of the poem's laws of figure.

¹⁶⁵ Indeed, David MacFadyen argues that, given the context of person-thing metamorphosis, the sudden intrusion of the speaker in plural form effectively morphs the reader from agent to "patient," thus breaking the fourth wall and catching us in the same dynamic that Sofa and Mulya participate in (MacFadyen, 146).

¹⁶⁶ In the English version of this poem, translated by Brodsky and published the same year, the mahogany armoires of lines 11-12 feature "two-thirds, full-face, profiles" (Brodsky, Joseph. *So Forth*. FSG, 1996, 27).

¹⁶⁷ In her useful reading of this poem, Alexandra Berlina comments on Brodsky's missed opportunity to rhyme or pun on *мужчина / машина* (Berlina, Alexandra. *Brodsky Translating Brodsky: Poetry in Self-Translation*. Bloomsbury, 2014, 129).

¹⁶⁸ Indeed, Lev Losev reads this cycle as essentially humorous: "Юмор доминирует в таких стихотворениях, как «Кентавры»" (Losev, 198).

...В каждом бедре с пеленок
 сидит эта склонность мышцы к мебели, к выкрутасам
 красного дерева, к шкапу, у чьих филенок,
 в свою очередь, склонность к трем четвертям, к анфасам
 с отпечатками пальцев.¹⁶⁹

Like the “love consists” line, this sentence is so based in visual detail as to be nearly impossible to visualize. But the stakes of the poem skyrocket in this sentence. We move from a young woman late for a date, a happy [“счастье”] description of love’s contents, and an eligible young man to meet her, to an earnest description of the poem’s metaphysical circumstances. These circumstances are laid at the reader’s feet. There is a shift in the tone of the poem’s difficulty, hitherto light and coy, now urgent and expository. Certain words are emphasized; articles and quantifiers are brought in to introduce body parts and feelings, nouns which had previously floated indiscriminately in lists (“В **каждом** бедре с пеленок / сидит **эта** склонность мышцы к мебели”).

The stakes of the poem are very high, now, because the poem is now conscious that it is no longer about Sofa and Mulya alone. With the intensity of exposition that emerges in the poem’s above-quoted fourth sentence comes the internal realization that the lyric is metapoetic – an understanding that it will make explicit in its fifth and final sentence, as Sofa and Mulya watch a puppet show representing “us.” For now, though, the poem is committed to making clear the laws that govern it. Every thigh since infancy harbors this craving of muscles for furniture. In every body part since the dawn of consciousness the desire to join with some other strange part has reigned, and the desire is reciprocated. The word “every” (в **каждом** бедре) de-specifies the thighs and shows the universality of the law; the word “this” (“**эта** склонность мышцы к мебели”) shows that the *law of attraction* is what is specific, not the muscles and the furniture. The specificity of the parts in the sentence is for erotic effect and to show the importance of reality and locality for the poetic figure at hand. That is, they could be any parts, but they could not *seem* to be “any parts”; their specificity as a quality they have is more important than what they specifically are. They must be articulated not because the muscles and mahogany paneling and fingerprints matter to the device but because the device needs to marry muscles and mahogany paneling and fingerprints to reveal itself.

The fourth sentence therefore prepares us to read the only instance of perfect (not meta, not awkward) metonymy in the poem, which comes in sentence five and which – unlike the other instances, which are strange and forced and which call attention to themselves as figures – might almost pass unnoticed, were it not for the education of the first four sentences. The fifth sentence is as follows, metonymy bolded:

Увлекает в театр, где, спрятавшись в пятый угол,
 наезжая впотымах друг на дружку, **меся колесом фанеру**,
 они наслаждаются в паузах драмой из жизни кукол,

¹⁶⁹ In every thigh since diapers / sits this inclination of muscle for furniture, for the quirks / of mahogany, for cabinetry whose panels, / in turn, harbor an inclination for now three-quarters, now *en face* profiles / with fingerprints.

чем мы и были, собственно, в нашу эру.¹⁷⁰

On the one hand, this is standard metonymy: we've been taught to understand the wheel and the plywood as body parts; especially given the context of Sofa and Mulya's date, it is basically impossible not to read this clause as light sexual activity, some furniture-centaur equivalent of what young humans do with each other on a date at the movies. In this reading, the wheel is a part that represents a whole agent (Mulya); the plywood is a part that represents a whole agent (Sofa); we understand the acting of one part on another part to represent the acting of one agent on another, which is why I have previously referred to this moment in the poem as their "hooking up," "making out," etc., even though no such exact thing has transpired. The human parts of the centaurs have successfully merged with their inanimate parts; the objects stand seamlessly for their humanity.

Like the centaurs of Greek antiquity, which combined symbolically (lust plus intellect) as well as physically (equine-human sexual relations), so too do Sofa and Mulya combine both symbolically and physically with their object components. In these lines, the objects stand so seamlessly for Sofa and Mulya's humanity in part because they've been successfully spatially merged and in part because of the ease with which those objects – couches, cars – symbolize the very human petty bourgeois aspirations of late Soviet culture. Fusing their bodies with commodities illuminates another element of the centaurs' "personhood": their desires for each other and their desire as consumers are literally fused as well. Inasmuch as the narrative of this lyric has a temporal orientation, it is oriented towards the short-term future, where the centaurs have a clear-cut role to play in the "puppet-show" drama of production and reproduction.

On the other hand, this clause also shows the literal fusing – the mixing – of one part with another. Since the parts at hand are a car wheel and a piece of plywood, this is not physically possible, and is therefore either strange all over again (on the level of concept: how can two things come so close as to form one thing?) or else simply violent (if we do not let them merge conceptually, and keep trying to make them merge spatially). That we have read it as standard metonymy, as two weird centaurs fooling around in a movie theater, only goes to show that the figure is not awkward and it is not strange unless it is arrested mid-action or its history explicated; in the space of fourteen lines, even a wheel trying to fuse with a piece of plywood can come to be read as "natural."

«Слишком реальны, слишком стереоскопичны»: *Kentavry II*

The cycle's second poem extends and builds on the work of the first, continuing to consider the laws of metonymic fusion. "*Kentavry II*" is primarily invested in two figure-based problems. The first is the problem of the merging of diffuse elements of space (rather than bodies); space is not comprised of bodies or things with edges, so it is more difficult for it to represent fusion. The second problem is the corollary to the figure of fusion (two things coming close, then touching, then merging): the dissolution of wholes into constituent parts. In order to address each problem, the poem considers objects and space in terms of perspective and temporality, thus extending its

¹⁷⁰ Draws her to the theater where, hidden in the fifth corner, / running each other over in the dark, **kneading plywood with wheel**, / they intermittently enjoy a drama from the life of puppets, / which is what we were, in fact, in our era.

lyrical inquiry into contiguity and continuity further, into the realms of human perception and of time.

Кентавры II

Они выбегают из будущего и, прокричав “напрасно!”,
тотчас в него возвращаются; вы слышите их чечетку.
На ветку садятся птицы, большие, чем пространство,
в них – ни пера, ни пуха, а только к черту, к черту.
Горизонтальное море, крашенное закатом.
Зимний вечер, устав от его заочной
синевы, поигрывает, как атом
накануне распада и проч., цепочкой
от часов. Тело сгоревшей спички,
голая статуя, безлюдная танцплощадка
слишком реальны, слишком стереоскопичны,
потому что им больше не во что превращаться.
Только плоские вещи, как то: вода и рыба,
слившись, в силах со временем дать вам ихтиозавра.
Для возникшего в результате взрыва
профиля не существует завтра.¹⁷¹

In terms of space, “Kentavry I” had focused primarily on the bodies of human-object hybrids, which presented a particularly high concentration of meaning. It stands to reason: the lyrical cycle is about things merging; bodies are a site of especial psychological significance and density of matter, and their capacity for penetration by other bodies is an especially meaningful version of the Lotmans’ theory that the edge of a thing is its most significant feature. Staying with the relational laws established by the first poem, “Kentavry II” zooms out now in a kind of panorama. This poem is still comprised of parts relating to each other at some point in the process of fusion, yet the parts are now not bodies but diffuse elements of space. Our setting is no longer a cluttered domestic-urban space but a horizontal seascape, “painted with sunset.” The diffuse horizon is still trying to represent the fusion of spaces across a line, but this is difficult: things may fuse but space is not a thing; it has no clear edge.

This is the problem of “Kentavry II.” Can empty space participate in the same part-part relation that bodies and things did in “Kentavry I”? The poem tries to solve this problem in a variety of ways. It begins by turning the usual thing-in-space dynamic inside out to produce a space-in-thing image. “На ветку садятся птицы, большие, чем пространство, / в них – ни

¹⁷¹ They come running out of the future, and, having cried “in vain!” / immediately return to it; you hear their tapdance. / On a branch land birds larger than space, / within them – neither feather nor fluff, but only ‘to the devil, to the devil.’ / Horizontal sea painted with sunset. / Winter evening, tired of its absentee / blueness, plays like an atom / on the eve of its splitting, etc., with the chain / of a watch. The body of a burnt match, / the naked statue, the empty dancefloor / are too real, too stereoscopic, / for there’s nothing more for them to turn into. / Only flat things, for instance: water and fish, / fused, are able in due time to give you an ichthyosaur. / For this profile, emerged as the rest of an explosion, / there is no tomorrow.

пера, ни пуха, а только к черту, к черту.” The birds in these lines come flying through space (“салятся” implies an arrival), and are shown to be literally larger than space itself. Their bodies contain no things but hollow puns, impersonal hopes for good fortune rendered backwards and ironicized. “К черту” is here made to echo inside the birds (it is a rejoinder and it is repeated), which is one strategy verbal art has for modeling space. Rather than cramming two things together, here space is crammed into a thing. And the thing is expanded and contorted into a sort of Klein bottle, existing in an uneasy liminal relationship with the space within and without it. It’s a successful trick: the two (space and birds) are merged, each simultaneously inside the other, and yet the edges of the things have not been violated; they remain intact. The space is still space, the birds are still coherent birds, and the parts of birds that are usually on the outside edge (feathers and down) are still safely there – not inside, we are explicitly assured.

In addition to strangely animating an idiom and exploring its spaciousness, the figure of fusion in this line also accomplishes an example of Matzner’s “semantic shift.” The line evokes the parts of a living being most available for commodification – quills and down – and through a linguistic shift, brings them into contact with a mythological figure (the devil) and then turns them inside out, fusing them with space. Turning things-in-space inside out is a dimensional method of representing the figure of fusion, exploiting loopholes in the dimensions that make up our perception of space rather than the increasingly crude-seeming technique from “Kentavry I,” of just shoving furniture and pretty women together and hoping they stay stuck. The second method the poem showcases of fusing space is a strategy that exceeds spatial dimensions: it moves into time.

Time is represented here as having spatial dimensions. The poem opens with an image of “the future” as something that can be exited from [выбегают из будущего] and entered into again [в него возвращаются]. It takes up space like a container, some place with an interior and borders that can be crossed. The idea of the future, rather than the past, as the starting locus of the poem and the homeland of ancient mythic beasts introduces a motif which will be picked up explicitly later in the cycle: the fusion of two discrete temporalities into one. The centaurs, simultaneously of the past and of the future, gallop into the lyrical present, instantiate the poem, and exit. The image is not so different from the big birds: there, bodies flew through space to enter the space of the poem, then sat harboring space within them; here, bodies run through time to enter the time of the poem, then cry out while harboring vestiges of other times within them. The word they utter – напрасно! – is a verbal testament to the failures of standard teleological temporality; the rhyming sound they leave behind – чечетка – makes our empty present echo like a chamber, further spatializing time.

In terms of temporality, “Kentavry I” had offered a narrative; one event had followed another and a mini plotline developed over the course of the poem – the plot of the centaurs’ date. However, there was also a “catastrophe” hovering in a slightly different plane of time over the poem. The catastrophe was presented only parenthetically, buried in difficult syntax, and it was not explained as the poem developed. “(В конце концов, катастрофа – / то, в результате чего трудно не измениться).” This cryptic pseudo-definition gave a partially veiled, somewhat mythic, somewhat apocalyptic origin story to the first poem in particular, and to the cycle as a whole. It is hard not to read it as the poem’s original cause, or at least the cause of its titular centaurs: the catastrophe perhaps resulted in the present governing laws, and certainly resulted in *change*.

This catastrophe, with its post-nuclear nod at Lucretius, follows us into “Kentavry II.” We are given a little more insight into its circumstances:

Зимний вечер, устав от его заочной
 синевы, поигрывает, как атом
 накануне распада и проч., цепочкой
 от часов.¹⁷²

This is the poem's first foray into splitting [распад] where it had previously been exclusively concerned with fusion. The splitting is construed almost entirely temporally. The sentence offers a time-based agent (winter evening, a time of day in a time of year) playing with a time-based object (the chain of a watch); the play is described by a frequentative verb (поигрывает rather than the less temporally complex играет); the mode of this play is likened to an atom just before it splits. So the atom is presented as containing the event of its fissure inside itself, an event which is essentially temporal (it has not happened yet) but will play out in space (a body splitting into parts).¹⁷³ It is not a coincidence that the first instance of fissure occurs in tandem with this precarious temporal situation. The word накануне itself represents a fissure in time, for it helps us divide time into discrete conceptual units, units with edges and surfaces ("на-"). In the case of the atom's split "накануне" clearly divides time into a "before" and an "after," but it also helps us reconceptualize nearby phrases such as "зимний вечер," which had seemed to signify the slow ends of time-units (end of the day, of the year) but now show some capacity for *being edges of things*, some eligibility for "канун" status, some chance of *being contiguous with* and even *signifying* the next day or the next year. Some version, that is, of metonymy (a figure wherein things are contiguous with each other and are therefore able to signify each other), localized in time rather than space.

Another, less explosive tack the poem takes to address the problem of how to represent space in terms of fusion is to pin the problem back onto the viewer, asserting that the issue is one not of space but of perception.

...Тело сгоревшей спички,
 голая статуя, безлюдная танцплощадка
 слишком реальны, слишком стереоскопичны,
 потому что им больше не во что превращаться.¹⁷⁴

This gesture at metapoetics is a bold one: the "real" breaks through the poem's hopes for representation, foiled by a stereoscopic gaze. This moment is partially foreshadowed by the very end of *Kentavry I*, which had also abruptly implicated the reader (in the speaker's "us"), also in a dynamic of viewership (Sofa and Mulya are watching a puppet show about us). Here the vector of spectatorship is flipped, but we, now viewing, are still an object of the poem's concern; it is

¹⁷² Winter evening, tired of its absentee / blueness, plays like an atom / on the eve of its splitting, etc., with the chain / of a watch.

¹⁷³ The atom playing on the eve of its **splitting** with the **chain** of a watch also features a nuclear pun: "накануне **распада... цепочкой**" aurally contains "распад цепи," "decay chain." So the radioactivity is encoded literally and then echoed aurally, hinging on a linguistic turn of phrase.

¹⁷⁴ The body of a burnt match, / the naked statue, the empty dancefloor / are too real, too stereoscopic, / for there's nothing more for them to turn into.

somehow the case that our capacity for stereoscopic vision is to blame for the empty dancefloor lacking bodies to host, to blame for the hyperreality of things.

In a short essay on the Russian poetic tradition, composed two years before the “Kentavry” cycle, Brodsky remarked abstrusely that “analysis is always a profile, synthesis is always *en face*, and a good poem is always stereoscopic.”¹⁷⁵ The metapoetic metaphor of the stereoscope, an early modernist technology that gives an impression of depth to flat images by exploiting the physiological fact of our having two lines of sight, is invoked here to demonstrate that all [“good”!] poetic figure is in some sense combinatory and somewhat tricky. The stereoscope has a mimetic, deconstructive character: breaking down the mechanics of binocular eye convergence and packaging those mechanics so that flat things are given depth, a stereoscope shows us the way our vision already works by capturing and reproducing it in illusory miniature.

As we discovered in “Kentavry I,” the poems are invested in laying bare the construction or emergence of metonymy via fusion. This laying-bare involves freezing, mid-motion, a development which *seems* to take place out in the world, in space, but in *fact* takes place in the mind, in time. The poem’s claim that its things and spaces are “too stereoscopic” to fuse and morph is a reassertion that the figural laws of its reality are primarily held and reinforced conceptually, rather than materially, though those conceptual laws are expressed materially and have material effects. A burnt match, a statue, and an empty dancefloor are “too stereoscopic,” then, in the sense that they are already comprised of fusion – the fusion of one line of sight with another, mentally added to make up “reality,” as the mind does with its stereoscopic input. Already comprised of fusion, which is to say, already existing in reality and not strange-seeming.

In the temporal sense, these objects represent *post-eventhood*. A burnt match is used up, a statue is a body already morphed to stone, an empty dancefloor has been left for the night (perhaps by the tapdancing centaurs of the opening lines). Only flat things, pre-fusion, ready to combine in the logic of the stereoscope, will freeze the mechanics of the figure for us (“Только плоские вещи, как то: вода и рыба, слившись, в силах со временем дать вам ихтиозавра”)¹⁷⁶ – or else things pregnant with time, an atom on the verge of its fissure. “Too real, too stereoscopic”: with these things we arrive, temporally, post-fusion or post-split; the poem did not manage to arrest the figure mid-development, did not manage to manifest an awkward image.

«В плену перспективы»: Kentavry III

What I am hoping to show is that over the course of the poems we see a spatial figure deconstructed and explained in time. The figure is metonymy. The way it is explained is that –

¹⁷⁵ Brodsky, Joseph, “Preface,” in: Proffer, Carl, *Modern Russian Poets on Poetry*, Ardis, 1976, 7-8.

¹⁷⁶ The “ichthyosaur” as an example of fusion may well have its roots in a sideways etymology: the word itself is a combination of the Greek words for “fish” and “lizard.” Andrei Ranchin observes that the *ikhtiozavra / zavtra* rhyme creates another kind of temporal centaur, merging the future with the distant past (Ranchin, Andrei. *Na piru Mnemoziny: Interteksty Iosifa Brodskogo*. Moscow, Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2001, 39). It thus sonically predicts the visual image of the opening lines of the cycle’s third poem.

like stills from a film – different moments in its emergence are presented and considered. In addition to a lesson about the development of metonymy specifically, then, the cycle also functions as a lesson in the workings of poetic figure more generally. One may extrapolate and understand Brodsky’s Centaurs cycle to be arguing for a specific understanding of figure as such, namely one where poetic figures do not merely *exist* (e.g. in a poem) or even *work* (e.g. upon material) as we might be inclined to think but rather *develop conceptually*. The Centaurs cycle models and charts that development. In this framework, the poems treat the myth of the centaur as a kind of fossil: a frozen moment in the conceptual development of the figure.

As we have seen, one consequence of presenting a space-based figure as developing in time is that the poems must commit to considering the interrelatedness of space and time. The cycle’s third lyric extends the cycle’s interrogation of temporal fusion and offers a provenance for certain images presented in the second poem. In this way, the “origin story” of the figure of metonymy is also given narrative depth, as the “too real, too stereoscopic,” already-fused objects in “Kentavry II” are outfitted with a history and a chronology, a past and a future.

Another consequence of presenting a figure as developing conceptually is that the poems must address what is made possible and what is precluded by that figure’s situation in the specific context of the conceptual. The particular capacities and limits of human cognition, perception and perspective, visual apprehension and interpretation are taken up explicitly in “Kentavry III.”

Кентавры III

Помесь прошлого с будущим, данная в камне, крупным
планом. Развитым торсом и конским крупом.
Либо – простым грамматическим “был” и “буду”
в настоящем продолженном. Дать эту вещь как груду
скушных подробностей, в голой избе на курьих
ножках. Плюс нас, со стороны, на стульях.
Или – слившихся с теми, кого любили
в горизонтальной постели. Или в автомобиле,
суть в плену перспективы, в рабстве у линий. Либо
просто в мозгу. Дать это вслух, крикливо,
мыслью о смерти – частой, саднящей, вещной.
Дать это жизнью сейчас и вечной
жизнью, в которой, как яйца в сетке,
мы все одинаковы и страшны насадке,
повторяющей средствами нашей эры
шестикрылую помесь веры и стратосферы.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ A crossbreed of the past and the future, rendered in stone, in close- / -up. In developed torso and horse’s rump. / Or – in the simple grammatical “was” and “will,” / in the present continuous. Render this thing as a heap / of boring details, in a naked hut on chicken / legs. Plus us, from the side, in chairs. / Or – fused with those we loved / in a horizontal bed. Or in a car, / essentially in captivity to perspective, enslaved to lines. Or else / simply in the brain. Render it aloud, clamorous, / as the thought of death – frequent, abrasive, thinglike. / Render it as life now and eternal / life, where, like eggs in a mesh shopping bag, / we are all identical and frightening to

The staccato, fragmentary verbal structure of this poem allows for a kind of photomontage of imagery, a meta-commentary compilation from the rest of the cycle: centaurs, overt temporal fusion, the erotics of cars and furniture, the boundaries and restraints of human perception and perspective, “us,” “our era,” the flattening regime of the horizontal.

This poem begins with a metaphysically weighted image of fusion (“a crossbreed of the past and the future, rendered in stone”) and presses on in search of more lines to cross. Like the cycle’s first two poems, “Kentavry III” sets and describes a kind of scene, and spends its sixteen lines testing the limits of its own universe – not only the edges of the things it describes or contains, but also the edges of the thing (“эта вещь”) that it itself is. The first indication that we are watching a sort of scene comes in the enjambment across lines 1 and 2: the stone figure is shot “in close-up”; the concepts of visual technology, depth of field, and perspective are introduced as integral to the construction of this image.¹⁷⁸

Moving on from the primary image – a zoetropic gallery of fusions temporal, physical, material, linguistic, folkloric, and domestic – we learn that this scene has a side, and the side gives us the angle from which the scene is viewed: “Плюс нас, **со стороны**, на стульях.” The poem’s first stab at delineating its own boundaries also metapoetically introduces “us,” perched on and precariously close to merging with a set of chairs. The integrity of the fourth wall is thus threatened at the same moment of its being established and promptly collapses: the “sideview” becomes the *center* of the poem’s attentions as Brodsky riffs on the cycle’s erotic theme explicitly, taking the language of fusion previously employed to evoke a hybrid creature (вода и рыба, / слившись) and putting it to sexualized use (“Или – слившихся с теми, кого любили / в горизонтальной постели”). “Our” sideways perch becomes a confluence of bodies – first in bed, and then only in memory.

At this point the poem is somewhat dizzying, not because the images are particularly complex or difficult to construct in the mind (as had been the case in Centaurs I and II) but because the emotional tones associated with the images the poem is presenting are so varied, and the motion from image to image so rapid and abrupt, that it becomes difficult to locate one’s own correct orientation to it. The marriage of humor with semi-plausible erotics, tedium (“a heap of boring details”), stabs of earnest nostalgia at a series of memories of love, and the bitter aftertaste at knowledge of their ephemerality is disorienting.¹⁷⁹

Unlike the first two poems in the cycle, the poem is no longer conjuring images in accordance with a logic of addition. The structure and development of “Kentavry I” had been

the brooding hen, / who repeats, by the means of our era, / a six-winged crossbreed of belief and the stratosphere.

¹⁷⁸ Where “крупный [план]” here refers to a way of seeing, it’s repurposed as a descriptor for mutant livestock in “Kentavry IV” (“крупный единорогий скот”). In order for “close[-up]” to also mean “large,” which it does in the cycle’s next poem, we are forced to consider that proximity (“close”) of subject to object determines relative size (“large”); the word’s double usage in the cycle thus contains a lesson about perspective. The hinge between the first and second instance of the word comes later in “Kentavry III,” where круп is repurposed to refer to the rear end of a horse.

¹⁷⁹ Alexandra Berlina reads this cycle as primarily about Brodsky’s experience of the Soviet Jewish-American diaspora, and the centaur as an attempt to “fuse” two disparate cultures into one continuous lived experience (Berlina, 132-134).

relatively straightforward: two strange characters in a mini-narrative. “Kentavry II” had developed rather like a haunted memory palace, each new image another zany extension of the dystopian landscape, all tied together via loopholes in the space-time continuum. By contrast, “Kentavry III”’s heavy reliance on the conjunctions *либо* and *или* indicates a phenomenological shift in the structure of its inquiry into the fusion figure. Until now the fusion in question had inhered in the things (bodies, spaces, temporalities) themselves; crudely put, the privileged connectors were ones that signified “and” (“вода **и** рыба, / слившись,” “Помесь прошлого с будущим,” “Развитым торсом **и** конским крупом”). The transition at this moment in the cycle to an “or”-dominated model of holding poetic images together effectively relocates the responsibility for the work of the fusion to another agent. The images can’t hold together themselves; they don’t exist in the same plane of reality (a crossbreed cast in stone **or else** cast in the present tense; plus us in chairs, **or** in bed, **or** in a car). Where the figure’s work had previously existed in the objects of fusion, we now find the mechanics at work in the mind of the beholder.

As in the case of a standard mythological centaur, wherein a man and a horse both really do exist and the unreal feature is their combination, so too are these images posited as individually real, and yet combine mentally across a grammatical line of unreality. “*Либо,*” “*или,*” “*or*” – words that always and exclusively signify a set of alternate and separate realities – here are transgressed as the “hybrid” in question is cast again and again, in new combinations and new forms, changing as the subject’s situation changes over time and with it our perspective.

“*Либо / просто в мозгу.*” The reader’s experience of disorientation at this rapidly moving slideshow of images is a kind of dizziness that highlights the mind at work on the figure. For now the poem centers on the mind – not semi-successful object-animal hybrids, and not lovers fused in bed. Now the mind is strapped in to the center of the device and, “captive to perspective,” it lets the images it apprehends merge thanks to the persistence of vision, a fluke miracle of human physiology. The centaur myth, protean in its capacity to combine disparate phenomena across the edges of reality and let them mutually signify, is here likened to a stereoscope or a zoetrope: a primitive device that arrests, deconstructs, and recreates a certain cognitive faculty at play.

The poem’s penultimate image offers a single visual example of the dizzying “*либо*” effect: “...как яйца в сетке, / мы все одинаковы и страшны насадке.” The eggs in a mesh grocery bag are frightening precisely because their relation to each other is governed by the same logic that transgresses the line between alternative or different realities.¹⁸⁰ “This egg... or this one... or this one...?” They’re all the same. Caught in a cycle where firstness and difference are erased – one might say, a chicken-and-egg cycle – the image reveals the effect of mythic thinking within the lyric cycle. Time is brought out of history and into perpetual motion, into cyclicity.

«С помощью слова “вдруг”»: Kentavry IV

What the first three poems had accomplished regarding body, space, time, perception, and language, the cycle’s fourth and final poem develops focusing primarily on the level of the word

¹⁸⁰ They also constitute another instance of the Centaurs cycle’s presentation of life in embryonic form rendered as a commodity for consumption.

itself. The lyric cycle's preoccupation with halting poetic figure mid-formation and recreating it in order to observe its signifying potential from all sides now lands upon the most basic unit of verbal representation.

Кентавры IV

Местность цвета сапог, цвета сырой портянки.
Совершенно не важно, который век или который год.
На закате ревут, возвращаясь с полей, муу-танки:
крупный единорогий скот.
Все переходят друг в друга с помощью слова “вдруг”
– реже во время войны, чем во время мира.
Меч, стосковавшись по телу при перековке в плуг,
выскальзывает из рук, как мыло.
Без поводка от владельцев не отличить собак,
в книге вторая буква выглядит слепком с первой;
возле кинотеатра толпятся подростки, как
белоголовки с замерзшей спермой.
Лишь многорукость деревьев для ветерана мзда
за одноногость, за черный квадрат окопа
с ржавой водой, в который могла б звезда
упасть, спасаясь от телескопа.¹⁸¹

The poem features a number of standard metonyms, the densest set of which comes in lines 11-12. Continuing and complicating the cycle's interest in visual technology, the theater from “Kentavry I” is brought back and modernized, presented again as a site of erotic youthful sociality:

...возле кинотеатра толпятся подростки, как
белоголовки с замерзшей спермой.¹⁸²

The break between these two lines is the first in the poem to employ any kind of enjambment, and such an especially jarring instance (“..., как / ...”) in a poem whose line breaks have otherwise corresponded with punctuation and syntax draws formal attention to the couplet. The second line in the pair, containing the simile's vehicle, exhibits three metonyms, including

¹⁸¹ Locality the color of boots, the color of a damp footwrap. / Doesn't matter at all which century or which year. / Bellowing at sunset, returning from the fields, moo-tanks: / large unicorn livestock. / Everyone turns into each other with the help of the word “suddenly” / – less often in wartime than in peacetime. / A sword, yearning for body, reforged to ploughshare, / slips through hands like soap. / Without a leash you can't distinguish dogs from their owners, / the second letter in the book looks like a mould of the first; / near the movie theater adolescents crowd like / whitecapped bottles with frozen sperm. / Only the multihandedness of trees rewards a veteran / for his oneleggedness, for the black square of the trench / with rusty water, into which a star might / fall, escaping the telescope.

¹⁸² ... near the movie theater adolescents crowd like / whitecapped bottles with frozen sperm.

one nestled inside another: teenagers crowd around like white-capped [vodka bottles] with frozen sperm.¹⁸³ The adolescents are thus triply metonymically signified: first, by their bottles of vodka (which are themselves only metonymically evoked by the color of their caps), second by their sperm, the teenagers' own capacity for fusing in sex and splitting in procreation literally frozen, as if in the hopes of slowing down time and drawing it out later. Third, while the primary meaning of "белоголовка" is a certain kind of vodka, given its proximity to the image of semen, it is also virtually impossible not to read the word as the head of a penis ("головка"), whitened with sperm – a second-degree metonym.¹⁸⁴

Meanwhile, the overt war lexicon and imagery throughout the poem situate us in an implicitly post-nuclear setting, one where the problem of measuring time as we know it has been numbly resolved (не важно).¹⁸⁵ Now that the bodies in the cycle are given a belated *motivirovka* for fusing, splitting, and mutating, now that we find ourselves outside of historical time altogether, the poem turns its attentions on the flexibilities and possibilities of units of words. In a return to the contrived-seeming paronomasia that had previously graced such constructions as Sofa (half beauty, half sofa), "Kentavry IV" features a number of neologisms coined to represent fusion on the level of morphology. The most prominent and obviously inventive of these comes at the end of line 3. "Муу-танки," a clear combination of "moo" (what cows say) and "tanks" (the wartime technology), also has the unmistakable echo of "мутанты" (mutants), in a curious twist of meta-onomatopoeia: it sounds like what it is.

¹⁸³ Brodsky's own translation of this line corroborates the reading of the obscure word "белоголовки" as slang for the kind of vodka sold in bottles with white caps (as opposed to the cheaper красноголовки): "...like tightly corked bottles with frozen sperm" (*So Forth*, 30).

¹⁸⁴ It is noteworthy that much of the existing scholarship on this line takes a methodologically encyclopedic approach, rather than an explicatory one. Valentina Polukhina's *Slovar' tsveta poezii Iosifa Brodskogo* lists it in the white and white varietals section without comment ("белоголовки"); Yuri Lifshits's *Poety ob intimnom* simply lists it in the chapter on Brodsky along with other erotic language, again without interpretive comment; Olga Tverdokhlebova lists it in a section dedicated to viscous body fluids modified by participles ("с замерзшей спермой") in Brodsky's verse (Polukhina, Valentina, *Slovar' tsveta poezii Iosifa Brodskogo*, Moscow, NLO, 2017, xiii; Lifshits, Iurii, *Poety ob intimnom. Sbornik statei*. Ridero, 2017; Tverdokhlebova, O.G., "Esteticheskaia funktsiia somaticheskoi leksiki v poezii I. Brodskogo," *Iazyk i kul'tura*, 2017, 52). I mention these here because the frequency of this line's inclusion in scholarly literature and the infrequency of its explication suggests to me that it *seems to mean something* without revealing what, exactly, it means. The line's particular appeal to catalogue-minded scholars illuminates its status as collectible, its metonymic availability to play a part in a corpus with claims on exhaustive wholeness, whether that corpus is "Brodsky's color palette," "Brodsky's engagement with sexual language," or "Brodsky's use of participles to modify vocabulary pertaining to the body." It means, at root, its own figurative possibility, the fact that a bottlecap can mean a drink, can mean a penis, a teenager frozen in time.

¹⁸⁵ There is some scholarly disagreement on this point. Natalia Rulyova is sure the war in question is WWII; Berlina says "any war could be implied" (Rulyova, Natalia, "Joseph Brodsky: Exile, Language and Metamorphosis," in Stroinska, M and Cecchetto, eds, *Exile, Language and Identity*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003, 111-24; Berlina 145). MacFadyen seems to think the war is a specific one but does not say which one he thinks it is ("...a shell-shocked veteran after **the war**," 146).

The beast-object hybrids are re-explained in the next line as “крупный единорогий скот,” a slightly more sophisticated play on words than moo-tanks. Returning to the logic of “ни пера ни пуха” turned inside out and the chicken-and-egg problem reimagined as groceries, here a tired phrase (“крупный рогатый скот,” “cattle, livestock”) referring to animals in commodity form is mutated and morphed into a mythological creature.

These instances of verbal fusion function as hyperexamples, nearly parodies, of Sebastian Matzner’s argument that the metonymic device functions through lexical, rather than imagistic, shifts. The third instance of overt paronomasia in the poem is simpler in construction than the moo-tanks and unicorn livestock, but more profound in effect: “Все переходят друг в друга с помощью слова ‘вдруг’.”¹⁸⁶ The play on words consists in the fact that “вдруг” is morphologically part of “переходят друг **в** друга.” The explication of that morphological fact in a line of verse effectively illuminates a previously hidden and mutually constitutive (“helpful”) part-whole relationship between “suddenness” and “into-eachotherness.” The relationship would have gone unnoticed were it not for the repetition of the sound “вдруг,” the explicit slowing down and drawing out of something too fast to discern, the almost awkward experience of a poetic gimmick explaining itself. In these ways the line functions much as the centaur does throughout the cycle, halting, slowing, and exhaustively replaying a conceptual maneuver that usually happens too quickly to notice. That the relationship revealed by this exemplary line – between “вдруг” and “друг в друга,” “suddenness” and “into-eachotherness” – is also the crux of the centaur question – can we capture an emerging metonym suddenly enough to watch parts merging into each other? – is a testament to the figure’s consistent metapoetic tendency, its willingness to stand for figure.

Can we capture an emerging metonym suddenly enough? In this sense we locate in Brodsky’s cycle the same impulses exhibited by Harvey Nash, the psychologist who conducted the centaur experiments some four years before “Centaur” was published. Like Nash, the poetic cycle understands the centaur myth as the Paradebeispiel of the origin of a certain conceptual maneuver (a figure, a device, a technology of thought) and understands the modernist task at hand, then, as arresting that maneuver and playing it back slowly, playing it back to the scale of human perception and interpretation. One does not see a centaur and understand metonymy (see continuity and understand contiguity) unless one slowly sees the figure’s laws played out in space and time, learns of muscles literally longing to combine with furniture, unless one looks into a stereoscope, unless one asks a child.

Clearly, this is the gift of the myth to the modern lyric: a model for conceiving of the world and our being in it in relation to other things, but also a model that transcends the limits of our perspective and temporality. The centaur means, freezes, and replays a human-scale conceptual maneuver; yet to truly behold the centaur plucks us out of the perceivable, out of time as we know it, and into cyclicity and rupture. The tension between those two models, then, is the gift of the modern lyric back to the myth.

In this sense, the orientation of this lyric cycle to its own mythic material is not so far from Theodor W. Adorno’s analysis of modern lyric and its development: “the collective power

¹⁸⁶ The line literally means “Everyone turns into each other with the help of the word ‘suddenly’,” but the word “suddenly” (vdrug) echoes part of “turns into each other” (perekhodiat drug **v** druga).

of contemporary lyric poetry may be largely due to the linguistic and psychic residues of a condition that is not yet fully individuated,” he writes, “a state of affairs that is prebourgeois in the broadest sense.”¹⁸⁷ The difference is that Brodsky’s poems understand themselves – understand *poetic thinking* as such – as the best tool on hand to study that development. We have seen how the lyric, here, offers itself as a kind of science or technology: a psychologist performing a tachistoscopic experiment on a subject, a stereoscope’s lenses converging on an object, a literary theorist wielding a linguistic paradigm. And the centaur comes into focus, a metactant, at once the object of modern lyrical inquiry and borne of its devices.

¹⁸⁷ Adorno, Theodor, eds. Tiedeman, Rolf, trans. Nicholzen, Shierry Weber.. *Notes to Literature, Volume One*. New York, Columbia UP, 1991, 46.

CODA

In his 2003 poem “Corvus corvus,” poet and classicist Sergei Zavalov conjures the image of a great mythological bird, weighted with metaphysical significance, in order to contemplate the problems of time and death. Like many other poems in the experimental lyrical collection *Melika*, this one offers a fragment of ancient verse and then comes spilling out of it, expanding and meditating on one ancient poetic moment.

Zavalov introduces “Corvus corvus” with an epigraph from Pindar, below which he offers a translation from Viacheslav Ivanov.

CORVUS CORVUS

εὔδει δ' ἀνὰ σκάπ -	II epitr c anacr
τῷ Διὸς αἰετός, ὠκεῖ -	hem hypercat
αν πτέρυγ' ἀμφοτέρωθεν χαλάξαις	hem II epitr

Pind. Pyth. I. 6

и огнемогучный орел	никнет сонный,
никнет на Зевсовом скиптре,	
быстрых роняя чету	крыльев долу.

Вяч. Иванов

О как короток		II paeon c anacr
даже солнечный этот	декабрьский день	pher ia
бесснежный		ba
и облака над заливом	перьями-крыльями	hem hypercat 2 d

вот и взлетел		cho
ночи ворон взлетел	Нет	pher
это ворон смерти взлетел		glyc inv
	и крыльями бьет и бьет	teles

Ты забудешься		II paeon c anacr
в мае листва	зелень травы	2 cho
	а дальше	ba
если удача	то плотный прибой черноморский	5 d cat

но пульсирует сердце	pher
и траурный ворон летит	hem c anacr ad
пусть незаметно	
пусть точкой у горизонта	pher c anacr
неразличимой почти	hem
Ты можешь лгать себе	2 d
и обольщаться	4 d cat
то легким вином	
то плотью цветущей	reiz
но нету укрытия	teles
от ужас несущего свиста	hem hypercat c anacr
рассекающих	II paeon c anacr bis
иссекающих	
воздух ли время ли	
крыл	} hem
Снова канун Рождеству	hem
Петергоф	anap cho
году конец	
декорации те же	pher
но этой	ba II paeon
нависающей	c anacr
с угасшим последним небесным пятном	4 d cat c anacr
ночью	sp
ты явственно слышишь	reiz
как приближаясь летит	2 hem
и не пиндáров орел	
а ворон	ba pher
угасанья и смерти	
corvus corvus	II epitr

CORVUS CORVUS

εὔδει δ' ἀνὰ σκάπ -
 τῷ Διὸς αἰετός, ὠκεῖ -
 ἀν πτέρυγ' ἀμφοτέρωθεν χαλάξαις

Pindar, Pythian Ode 1, line 6

[And the eagle sleeps on the scepter of Zeus,
 relaxing his swift wings on either side – CLB]

The device at hand is an almost gimmicky intertextuality: the quotes and references to Pindar are echoed on the level of textual apparatus, in the right-hand sidebar of metrical abbreviations. The raven, himself an anti-intertext (“не пиндáров орел”), serves as the poem’s portal into the past, as well as the opportunity to dwell on the terrible here and now.

The poem is about time. Being subject to time, but also subjecting it. Cutting it up, delineating it, measuring it, predicting it. That is what the meter sidebar does, it keeps time, like an hourglass pouring sand out next to the text of the poem. That is what the speaker does at the beginning – “what a short December day” – and at the end – “Christmas eve soon. End of the year.” That is what the body does – the heart pulsates – and the sun does – the looming night, the “fading final sky bruise” – and that is what the raven does with his wings, slicing the air, now, now slicing time itself.

That a short poem or cluster of lyrical devices might model the experience of time, scaled to our own faculties of perception and cognition, more effectively and miraculously than other forms of thought and expression has been one of the central arguments of this dissertation. Zavalov’s “Corvus corvus” seems a kind of extended meditation on this entire effect of lyric’s conceptual reach back through myth: it halts, frames, and examines one still taken from a sequence of continued motion, which signifies something about time.

If Mandelstam’s *khoziaika*, heavily pouring her honey mead out at length, could model the amount of time it takes for the mind to traverse the Crimean-Hellenic palimpsest, and if Brodsky’s Centaur experiments were meant to freeze the modernist lyric at work upon the mind and draw it out, exhaustively, then Zavalov continues in these modes and furthers them. The complex collapse of temporality that Ivanov and Mandelstam accomplish, with the integrated Dionysian “понятиесимвол,” with the folds of Bergson’s fan, is ponderously protracted by Zavalov. Are the wings beating space – or time? Is it a raven of the night – or a raven of death? The experience of perception itself, finally, is elaborated and elongated – the raven flies “even if unnoticed. / Even if as a dot on the horizon” – before coming into contact with the limits of perceptibility itself – “indiscernible almost.”

Zavalov does not stylistically emulate a projected ancient myth but instead takes a real philological starting point – the Pindar fragment – and unfolds it. The raven is not Pindar’s eagle but an elaboration of it. The motion in the Pindar excerpt – a single downward stroke of the great bird’s wings – becomes, in Zavalov, the very explicit metaphor for the mental process of cutting up time itself into perception-sized frames. In other words, a metaphor for the work of lyricized experience, as it is felt and seen.

The mode is deconstructive, almost pedagogically expository, but the effect is not dismemberment so much as unraveling. “Corvus corvus” is not *nauka*’s scalpel, in Olga Freidenberg’s vision, not science and rational scholarship coming along to dissect an integral poetic unity; rather, it is Mandelstam’s *utvar*’, consciously humanizing the objects around man and joining part of the external world to him. Indeed “Corvus corvus” *continues* the same project as Ivanov’s hoped-for poetic unity: but where that unity was transcendent and everywhere, transporting human consciousness into the realm of the divine; this one, crucially, is local and specific, scaled to our own faculties and consciousness, arguing that the lyric is human-sized, well forged to bring the vast and impossible ideas of time and death flying home to us, well designed to let us ideate them.

The modernist tradition Zavalov continues, then, is the poetic impulse to take one small piece of antiquity and unfold it to let it show the way to here and now. The unfolded thing might

be text-based (a would-be scholarly sidebar of metrical notations) or imagistic (the downward motion of the bird's wings). It is based in visual perception and in time. It makes an argument, most broadly, for the lyric as a technology that can model apprehension and temporal experience – and most urgently, an argument about the specific scale and the pacing of that apprehension and experience.

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