MYTHOLOGIES OF POETIC CREATION
IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY
RUSSIAN VERSE

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

In my dissertation, I address how four twentieth-century Russian poets grapple(d) with the mysteries of poetic inspiration and I propose what I consider to be their personal mythologies of the creative process. As none of these poets offers a comprehensive description of his/her personal mythology of poetic creation, my task has been to sift through the poets' poems and prose in order to uncover pertinent textual references to themes of inspiration.

The four poet-subjects are Osip Mandelstam, Anna Akhmatova, Joseph Brodsky, and Olga Sedakova. Together they represent many of the factors contributing to the remarkable genius of twentieth-century Russian poetry. By looking at these four particular mythologies of poetic creation, we are able to view notions developed by both genders, within two faiths, in both capitals, and throughout the entirety of the century.

It is significant that each of these poets has turned to prose to work out his/her ideas concerning the creative process. In reconstructing these mythologies of poetic creation, I have looked to the poets' entire oeuvres and the “single semantic system" working within each of them. My work aims to bring together poets' prose and poetry and to offer readings of texts that are guided by the poets own concerns and beliefs.
For Sophie and Maeve,

with much love
I am thankful to have had much help and encouragement throughout the writing of this dissertation. My adviser, Angela Brintlinger, deserves my fullest gratitude; her comments have always been extensive and perceptive, her support constant. I simply could not have had a better adviser. I am also indebted to the other members of my committee, Irene Masing-Delic and Dick Davis. These two very inspiring professors were integral to the shaping of the final piece. The initial impulse for this dissertation came from a paper I wrote in a class taught by George Kalbouss. It is in part thanks to his enthusiasm for that paper that I had the confidence to expand it into a dissertation.

Many other people have contributed to my work in one way or another. I am grateful both to my good friend Aneliese Everett and to the ever-helpful Beth Myre, for their technical support. I would also like to extend my thanks to Karina Ross, Daniel Collins, and Anelya Rugaleva, for answering questions I had concerning the Russian language; and to Valentina Polukhina, Galina Slavskaiia and Mary Delle LeBeau for graciously sharing their knowledge with someone they have never even met.

My friends and family were a key part of this process. Their support, patience, and enthusiasm have helped me so much more than any of them realizes. This is especially true of my husband, Eamon. Finally, I dedicate my work to my daughters, Sophie and Maeve. The countless hours I poured into this dissertation was precious time away from them.
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NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

In order that this study be comprehensible to the general English readership, I have provided translations of all quoted material. If the translations are not referenced, they are my own. References to translations by other authors can be found in the footnotes and/or parenthetical documentation.

Generally, transliterated words in this dissertation follow the Library of Congress system. Exceptions to this system are names with established English spellings. One prominent example of this is the spelling “Mandelstam” rather than the Library of Congress version, “Mandel’shtam.”
INTRODUCTION

THE SECRETS OF THEIR CRAFT

Every serious work of art tells the genesis of its own creation.
*Roman Jakobson*

Artistic creation, after all, is not subject to absolute laws, valid from age to age; since it is related to the more general aim of mastery of the world, it has an infinite number of facets, the vincula that connect man with his vital activity; and even if the path towards knowledge is unending, no step that takes man nearer to a full understanding of the meaning of his existence can be too small to count.
*Andrey Tarkovsky*

This dissertation is an attempt at understanding how the creative process is viewed by four Russian poets of the twentieth century: Osip Mandelstam, Anna Akhmatova, Joseph Brodsky, and Olga Sedakova. It is in considering the following such questions that poets generally mythologize various elements of their vocation: Do my poems come from outside of myself and, if so, how? Do I consider my experience to be of a divine nature and, if so, in what forms does it appear? Which of my senses is most active during my inspired state? How do my fears and anxieties affect my creativity and what forms do they take? At times the poets in this study address these and other such questions in essays and/or interviews, and in so doing provide valuable information about the creative process. Most often, however, it is their poetry that reveals the images and notions they have formed
about their creativity. My method, then, has been to extract clues from these poets' verse, essays and interviews, and then to (re-)construct their mythologies of poetic creation.1

**Mythologies of Poetic Creation**

Just what, precisely, does “the creative process” mean? One definition, put forth by René Wellek and Austin Warren, refers to the process's “entire sequence” but provides only the first and last elements. According to this definition, the creative process should “cover the entire sequence from the subconscious origins of a literary work to those last revisions” (85). In order to define this process fully, we need to identify those missing elements that occur between the poet's subconscious impulses and conscious revisions.

A significantly more comprehensive definition has been offered by the creativity researcher Frank Barren. The majority of the elements he identifies as comprising the creative process will be addressed in the mythologies presented here; a few of them, however, will not be covered. What the mythologies in the present study do not tend to include are the poet's final, conscious revisions. Barren refers to such elements as: “the author's conscious intentions," "the choice of form," "important revisions," and "unexpected or unplanned alterations in the intentions of form" (quoted in Fehrman 21). On the other hand, those elements which are -- to varying degrees -- addressed in the mythologies of poetic creation are what Barren terms “preconscious and unconscious intentions” and “sudden inspiration," as well as what he identifies as emotional states,

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1 A similar method has been taken by Nadezhda Mandelstam in her work *Mozart and Salieri*. She based her approach to the study of poetic creativity on the views of her husband, the poet Osip Mandelstam, who himself “wanted to reconstruct the movement of poetic thought” (105).
productive times of the day, difficulty and ease of writing, cycles of productivity, and the author's self-criticism (quoted in Fehrman 21).

It is because of the very nature of myth that these particular components become aspects of the poets' mythologies. Every poet has ideas about why he or she is inspired to write and from where his or her poems come -- these ideas evolve into personal mythologies. Since myths "deal with the knowledge of the unknowable" (Segal 266), the subconscious aspects of the creative process are the "unknowable" aspects and so claim precedence in the mythologies. However, there are certain elements of a poet's creative process which, while not entirely shrouded in secrecy, remain curious; factors such as when and where the poet tends to write, as well as why there are stretches of time when his or her creative ability eludes him. These and other such factors find their way into mythologies of poetic creation.

The mythologies presented in this dissertation strive to explain the "divine," mysterious, and curious aspects of these poets' creative processes. As Rudolf Bultmann has argued, "Mythology is the use of imagery to express the otherworldly in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life, the other side in terms of this side."2 The poet searches for earthly metaphors through which to describe his or her inspired state and, at times, the search itself becomes a poetic motif. In Midsummer Night's Dream, Shakespeare provides this very image of a poet torn between his earthly reality and the otherworldly origins of his inspiration: "The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling, / Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven." Many poets are aware of having to

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grapple with this kind of duality:

Just, then, as the most dangerous criminals are lucid maniacs, so the most perfect poets are madmen using unfailing reason. But poets are not really mad. Consequently, they are aware in themselves of a torturing division, a rending of their own human substance, which they are condemned to bring to unity -- enigmatic, unstable, never satisfying unity -- not in themselves, but in their work. Hence their connatural torment. They are obliged to be at the same time at two different levels of soul, out of their senses and rational, passively moved by inspiration and actively conscious, intent on an unknown more powerful than they are which a sagacious operative knowledge must serve and manifest in fear and trembling. No wonder that they live in inner solitude and insecurity (Maritain 249-50).

The nature of poetry, then, calls upon the poet to harmonize the conflict of reason with the sensual, emotional and mysterious.

Integral to these mythologies of poetic creation is the notion that everything an author writes is, in theory, of a continuous piece. Lidia Ginzburg, for example, refers to this notion as a "single semantic system." The idea that prose, in particular, can provide commentary to poetry is widely held by poets and literary critics alike. Nadezhda Mandelstam believes “that almost all the prose of poets is knowledge of their inner being and therefore can serve as commentary on poetry” (Mozart and Salieri 57). Her remarkable essay on poetic creativity as well as her personal associations with a number of Russia’s greatest poets posit her as an authority on the subject. But the real expert witness is Brodsky, who, in his aptly-titled essay “A Poet and Prose," also suggests we turn to prose to enlighten our understanding of the creative process. “Perhaps no better laboratory can be found,” he has written, “for analyzing the psychology of poetic creation, inasmuch as all stages of the process are shown at extremely close range, verging on the starkness of caricature” (Less than One 179). A poet’s metapoetic prose is an expansion of his or her
poetry and thus also its magnifying glass.

In suggesting that the “semantic key” to a poem is “generally found beyond the boundaries of the poetic text,” Ginzburg also finds memoirs about poets to be an important and valid source of information (376). By juxtaposing these ideas of Ginzburg’s with a theory of Gerard Genette’s, contemporaries' memoirs become “key epitexts” to poets' verse. Genette uses the term “epitext” to describe those outside texts which might inform the primary ones. The term is subdivided into “public epitexts” (from the author or publisher: an interview, for example) and “private epitexts” (authorial correspondence, oral confidences, diaries, and pre-texts) (Genette xviii.). For my purposes, I am amending Genette's theory to include poets' essays as public epitexts, since they inform the poet's entire poetic oeuvre. Thus, epitexts of all kinds have contributed immensely to the construction of the mythologies of poetic creation in the present study.

The theoretical approach to this dissertation, then, is, generally speaking, post-structuralist and, more specifically, psychoanalytic. I should like to assert, however, that the aim of this dissertation is not to pronounce a psychological discovery, but to demonstrate to what degree an understanding of the creative process can enlighten our reading of poetry in general. I have also found co-conspirators in the so-called “critics of consciousness,” who were interested in “genetic criticism,” i.e., “an attempt to re-experience in reading the very genesis or birth of a work from the author's experience to its structure in words” (Lawall viii). These critics interpreted poetry, as I do in this study,
as a "verbal transcription of a coherent human experience" (Lawall viii). My work adheres
to the tenets of these various theories insofar as I view the texts not as entities separate
from their creators but as expressions of the authors' psyches. “The created object that
poetry becomes,” Paul de Man has asserted, “has . . . nothing in common with the poetic act
itself” (64). This dissertation respectfully challenges this assertion and others like it.

A Preview, of Sorts

The debate, begun with the birth of literature, of how and why poets come to write
verse continues to this day. The notion of the Muses was conceived in antiquity and later
incorporated into Christianity as divine grace. With developments in science and
psychology in the 17th and 18th centuries, the state of inspiration came to be viewed no
longer as divine intervention from above but as a psychological state of the poet (Brogan
135). Influenced by the changing views of their time, Romantic poets understood
inspiration to be a form of madness, or furor poeticus.4

Generally speaking, there have been two opposing doctrines concerning the poetic
impulse; one suggests that the poet is possessed by some mysterious state of inspiration;
the other purports that poetic creation involves nothing more than hard work and, perhaps,
skill. This distinction also concerns itself with the chronology of the writing process,
which Gary Saul Morson has explained in his article "Return to Genesis: Russian Formalist
Theories of Creativity": “One, the ‘romantic or ‘inspirational,’ locates creativity at the
beginning of the process; the other, the ‘classical’ or ‘formulaic,’ school finds it at the end"

4 Although the Romantics popularized this idea, they were by no means the first to
introduce it. The association between artistic inspiration and madness dates back to Plato.
The Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley is often alluded to as an example of the former school, having been known to wait in the woods for his Muse to come and possess him (Harding 61). One of the most staunch proponents of the other stance was Edgar Allen Poe who, in his well-known essay “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846), likened his creative “modus operandi” to “the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem” (Feagin 209). Another often quoted remark on the subject is one by William Morris, who said, “That talk of inspiration is sheer nonsense; there is no such thing. It is a mere matter of craftsmanship” (Bowra 2). Poets who have granted at least some degree of mystery to their creative process tend to agree that elements of their poetry (be they actual words, sounds, or meter) seem to come of their own accord. T. S. Eliot has described the poet as possessing a kind of “auditory imagination.” This dissertation intends to demonstrate that Eliot’s description is quite universal, regardless of which side of the debate the poet leans toward.

Russian poets have been no less interested in the topic of poetic creation. Aleksandr Pushkin returned to the motif with frequency, such as in two of his most famous poems “Пророк” [The Prophet (1826)] and “Поэт” [The Poet (1827)]. Like Eliot, Pushkin is said to have insisted “that the poet listen only to internal voices” (Sandler i). Both of these poems emphasize the poet's hearing, referred to in one as a "чуткий слух" [keen ear]. In the first, the poet has a terrifying but liberating vision of a seraph who imparts the almighty power of the Word onto the poet. In the second of these two poems, Pushkin again depicts the poet as resurrected by the power of poetic inspiration.

Perhaps the single most comprehensive discussion of the creative process found in
twentieth-century Russian literature is Marina Tsvetaeva's 1932 essay "Искусство при свете совести" [Art in the Light of Conscience]. From this essay five major phenomena experienced by Tsvetaeva during poetic creation can be outlined. A look at this remarkable piece will serve as a preview, so to speak, to the mythologies included in the following chapters of this dissertation. Tsvetaeva's mythology not only shares much in common with them but also serves to enrich them through its unique notions.

In this self-contained mythology of poetic creation, Tsvetaeva describes herself as being “chosen” and then as being “held” by some force outside of herself. It is as though she is “seized” and then falls under some sort of a spell: "Искусство есть то, через что стихия держит -- и одерживает” [(402) Art is that through which the elemental force holds – and overpowers (252)]. These forces of the elements, in Russian, стихии, are the possessor. Tsvetaeva claims to have confused this word with the word стихи [poetry] in her childhood and so her adult perception of the connection is understandable. I would describe this first step in her poetic creative process as a наитие, a word Tsvetaeva herself uses in the essay. It has been translated as “visitation” (232) with regard to Tsvetaeva but can also simply mean “inspiration.”

The second phenomenon is the “soundless tune.” Tsvetaeva writes that there is some “заданный слуховой урок” (399) [prescribed aural lesson (249)], which the poet must obey and that:

Слух этот не иносказательный, хотя и не физический. Настолько не физический, что вообще

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5 It is also this essay that inspired one of the rare critical articles that discusses the creative process: “Tsvetaeva’s ‘Art in the Light of Conscience’” by Angela Livingstone. The Russian quotations from this essay are taken from: Marina Tsvetaeva. Proza. New York: Izdatel'stvo imeni Chekhova, 1953. The English translations are by Angela Livingstone and Valentina Coe.
никаких слов не слышишь, а если слышишь, то не понимаешь, как спросоном. Физический слух либо спит, либо не доносит, замещенный слухом иным (399).

[This hearing is not allegorical, though not physical, either. So far is it from physical that you don't hear any words at all, or if you do you don't understand them, like someone half asleep. The physical hearing either sleeps or fails to carry, replaced by other hearing (249)].

The soundless tune is heard only by the poet's "keen ear," to use Pushkin's phrase.

The visitation and soundless tune comprise what might be understood to be Tsvetaeva's poetic inspiration. Interestingly, however, Tsvetaeva rarely uses the word вдохновение [inspiration] in the essay and nor, in fact, does she use it much in her poetry. Also fairly uncommon in Tsvetaeva is the image of the Muse; for Tsvetaeva it is rather the forces of nature which act as her Muse and inspiration. Tsvetaeva likens the creative process to the birthing experience and in doing so points out a third phenomenon. For this poet, "inspiration" is not breathed into her by the Muse -- rather, it is pushed out of her with sweat, blood and pain.

In her trance-like possession by the visitation, Tsvetaeva experiences various types of bliss which are illustrated in her poems. This bliss is the fourth phenomenon that occurs during the process of poetic creation. She describes this state as a surrendering to the elemental force that has taken possession of her. This bliss, to continue the metaphorical image of childbirth, most likely would occur both with the initial excitement at the onset of labor (that is, the visitation) and then again after the birth.

This last phenomenon in the process is the least ethereal, the one over which Tsvetaeva herself has the most control. After she has been seized by some elemental force, has obeyed the soundless tune which has come to her, has pushed the poem out of herself, and has emerged from a blissful state, she then puts the poem onto paper by "thinking the
work back” (233) [продумать вещь (377)]. Tsvetaeva explains this part of the process thus:
“Задумать вещь можно только назад, от последнего пройденного шага к первому, пройти в зрячу тот путь, который прошёл вслепую” (377) [One can only plan a work backwards, from the last step taken to the first, retracing with one's eyes open that path which one had walked blindly (233)] . It is here that Tsvetaeva takes what has been an experience and puts it into words. It is, in fact, the act of imposing order onto what had been chaos, for chaos is, literally, “formless matter.”

Thus we see in Tsvetaeva's mythology how the very nature of myth prefers certain aspects of the creative process over others. In other words, unconscious components of the process, as well as the suddenness of inspiration, find some degree of clarity through these mythologies.

**The Featured Poets**

The four poets included in this study together represent many of the factors contributing to the remarkable genius of twentieth-century Russian poetry. By looking at these four particular mythologies of poetic creation, we are able to view notions developed by both genders, within two faiths, in both capitals, and throughout the entirety of the century. Anna Akhmatova and Olga Sedakova offer two very disparate female experiences of poetic creation, the former laced with heartache and passion, the latter woven with a puritanical faith. Both of these women emphasize nature's role in inspiration, but while for Akhmatova it pervades human drama, for Sedakova it is itself the subject of a painted still-life. The poets representing the male perspective on poetic creation, Osip
Mandelstam and Joseph Brodsky, are similar to one another in their use of scientific
metaphors but very different in their views on female influence. Each of them
acknowledges a female Muse-figure, but Mandelstam's resides within his hermaphroditic
self, whereas Brodsky's is a distant seraph.

This division of the group by gender marks a like division of faiths between the
four poets as well. Both Mandelstam and Brodsky, while not faithful followers of Judaism,
were nonetheless conscious of their Jewish identities. While this *distinction* of faiths is not
particularly apparent in the mythologies of poetic creation, the duality is nonetheless a fact
of the collective Russian psyche and was thus considered when the poets in this
dissertation were chosen. And although Judaism is not central to any of the mythologies
here, faith is central to all of them. To varying degrees, these creation myths look to the
Biblical creation myth for parallels. Brodsky's notions of creativity are drawn particularly
from the Old Testament, and Sedakova's are indebted to a number of Eastern Orthodox
beliefs and practices.

While Sedakova's poetry finds its roots in the Orthodoxy of old Muscovy, St.
Petersburg and its Classical traditions resonate throughout the mythologies presented by
Mandelstam, Akhmatova, and Brodsky. Sedakova feels the distinction between these two
cities' influences strongly: “I'm from Moscow and for that reason Brodsky's Petersburg
origin is very evident to me...perhaps Petersburg demanded the stoicism of him...the
martyr-city of the Empire” (“A Rare Independence” 246). Including the traditions of both
of Russia's capitals enriches my discussion.

Finally, the poets together cover the length of the century. For this reason,
Akhmatova serves as the nucleus to this dissertation, bringing together Russia’s great Silver Age with its rebirth of great poetry in the latter half of the twentieth century. Hence, I begin my study with the highly gifted Mandelstam, then move on to Akhmatova whose poetic work spans over sixty years and who, so to speak, hands the torch to the brilliant young Brodsky. I conclude this dissertation with Sedakova, a highly talented contemporary poet, through whose meditative poetry we may quietly step into the modern complexities of the twenty-first century.

The mythologies of poetic creation formed in the twentieth-century Russian mind are surprisingly traditional and timeless. With the exception of Brodsky, whose interest in modern physics comes through in his poetic myths, these poets tend to avoid metaphors unique to our modern age. Instead, each of them, to varying degrees, acknowledges and appropriates Classical notions of inspiration and the Muse -- Akhmatova does so the most faithfully of the four, then Brodsky, next Mandelstam, and, finally Sedakova. 

мы не только творцы, мы все и хранители тайны!" [We are not just creators, we also are also keepers of secrets!], as Valery Briusov declared.6 One might ask whether these mythologies of poetic creation are the poets’ own secrets, as some of the poets have intimated they are. While on occasion Akhmatova and Sedakova have portended secrecy, at other times they openly divulge their methods and beliefs.7 Brodsky, on the other hand, claims to have no secrets concerning the process and yet, when personal facts of his biography are concerned, he purposefully covers his tracks. Virtually all poets write to be read and, presumably, the

6 Valerii Briusov “Начинающему” [To the beginner (1906)]. Quoted in Wachtel, p. 194.
7 Paradoxically, Akhmatova called the poem which discloses the most about her creative process, “Тайны ремесла” [Secrets of the Craft]. Sedakova, who has discussed her notions of creativity in interviews and essays, once answered a question concerning her poetry by
poets would like their readers to be affected by what they read. Thus, the “secrets of the craft” uncovered through these mythologies are not so much personal secrets as mysteries to be solved together with the reader along “the universal path to knowledge.”

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Throughout much of his life, Osip Mandelstam was preoccupied with what he called "asphyxia," a biographical fact that has been often remarked upon yet seldom discussed at any great length.\(^1\) Two of the other poets included in this dissertation, however, have connected this fact with Mandelstam's poetry. Akhmatova, for one, has explained this fear of Mandelstam's thus: “Больше всего на свете он боялся собственной немоты, называя её

\(^1\) One scholar who has placed great importance on Mandelstam's asthma as well as on the poet's motif of breathing in general is Kiril Taranovsky. He has also pointed out that the theme is so complex it should require a separate study" (10). Some others who mention Mandelstam's asthma/fear of asphyxia are: Gregory Freidin ("For Mandelstam, who, incidentally, suffered from asthma, breathing often stood for poetry..." 37) and Jane Gary Harris ("Mandelstam's heart condition worsened, and his nervous disorder grew so severe that he was overwhelmed by anxiety and unable to breathe each time Nadezhda had to leave him to go to Moscow to find work or obtain money") (10).
[More than anything else in the world he was afraid of his own muteness, identifying it as a difficulty in breathing. When it came over him he rushed about in horror]. Brodsky has also given some thought to Mandelstam's condition. "Если Мандельштам чем и болел," he has said, "так только астмой. Мандельштам был поэтом, для которого поэзия была в прямом смысле слова воздухом. . . Я думаю, что его астма явилась воплощением атмосферы, которая царила тогда в обществе" [(quoted in Polukhina, Bol'shaja kniga 533) If Mandelstam had any illness, then it was only asthma. Mandelstam was a poet for whom poetry was actually words of air . . . I think that his asthma was an embodiment of the atmosphere prevailing then in society2]. A study of Mandelstam's mythology of poetic creation will reveal that the concept of asphyxia does indeed play a central role in his poetry.

In this chapter I analyze the following complex mythology of Mandelstam's creative process. To put it briefly, Mandelstam perceived of his Muse not as an outsider or a visitor, but as a part of himself, an "inner voice," and he partook in a kind of dialogue with this inner voice which became, for him, the process of remembering. For Mandelstam, memory was auditory and spurred poetic creation; his Muse is perhaps best understood as Mnemosyne herself, who had become a part of the poet's own mind. Moreover, "writer's block" for Mandelstam manifested itself as a kind of asphyxia, for when the voice of his internal Muse, or his auditory memory, ceased, he was rendered speechless, i.e., poem-less. As Akhmatova has explained, muteness for Mandelstam was associated with a lack of air.

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2 Throughout this chapter, any translations that are without citation are my own.
Consequently, he would turn to “artificial” forms of inspiration—regulated breathing and pacing—in order to stimulate poetic creation. Evidence of each of these mythopoetic elements, as I demonstrate throughout this chapter, can be found both in Mandelstam’s poetry and prose.

* * *

Mandelstam, born in 1891, was a poet who began writing under the influence of the Symbolists, but soon allied himself with a group of young poets who called themselves Acmeists. His first book of poetry, Камень [Stone], appearing in 1913, brought him instant praise and attention. He wrote four more collections of poetry during his lifetime, only two of which he lived to see published. It was not long after the publication of his second book of poetry, Tristia, in 1922 that Mandelstam’s difficulties with the Soviet state began. It is not, however, until 1934 that real trouble set in: Mandelstam was arrested and exiled for having written a poem insulting Stalin. Four years later he was arrested a second time and died in one of Stalin’s prison camps.

Before moving on to an in-depth discussion of the mythopoesis suggested above, let us take a brief look at some seminal Mandelstam scholarship. Much of the work done in the United States on Mandelstam has been informed by the subtextual method; Kiril Taranovsky and Omry Ronen are but a few of the eminent scholars who have produced such readings of Mandelstam’s work. Jane Gary Harris has contributed award-winning translations of Mandelstam’s prose as well as an exceptional monograph on the poet. Gregory Freidin and Clare Cavanagh have also written valuable studies—while the former speaks of how Mandelstam authored his own myths, the latter situates the poet within the modernist tradition. Last, but certainly not least, American scholarship is deeply indebted to Clarence Brown for his pioneering work on Mandelstam.

3 There are numerous other studies which deserve mention but which I have had to leave out in the interest of space.
Although the work of these eminent scholars does, at times, touch upon the themes and motifs I discuss in this chapter, to the best of my knowledge there has yet to be a comprehensive study devoted to Mandelstam's mythology of poetic creation. Many of the works cited above offer individual aspects of the mythology or even, at times, brief summations of it as a whole; no matter how close some of them have come, however, comprehensive explanations of *how* such mythologies were formed are generally lacking. My study, then, aims to fill in this aspectual lacuna in Mandelstam scholarship. As my work often expands upon previously proposed mythopoetic elements, it would be prudent to note those moments when the above-mentioned scholars have contributed most to the unraveling of Mandelstam's mythology of creative consciousness proposed here.

Brown has aided in our understanding of Mandelstam's creative process in, particularly, three aspects: 1) discussing the motif of silence; 2) remarking upon the poet's auditory tendencies; 3) and, finally, noting Mandelstam's perception of himself as a recipient of his poetry. The most relevant remark Brown makes is perhaps the following:

[Mandelstam] held with extraordinary tenacity to the view that he was the discoverer (or the recipient) of his poems, or of the occasions when poems were possible. The notion of a poet as a law unto himself, as a being free to create and dispose of his material without regard for what that material and the world around it wanted, was utterly abhorrent [to him] (148).

Mandelstam did indeed feel that he “discovered” auditory memories that existed within himself and that he often had to wait for his Muse to initiate the creative process.

Taranovsky's essays have been particularly critical to my work. His work is, in fact, so filled with pertinent remarks that at this point it will suffice to say that his ideas on breathing, silence and the Muse will be noted throughout this chapter.

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4 Throughout this chapter I will be discussing these scholars' more specific parallels with or divergences from my work. At this point I am focusing on their more general interest in Mandelstam's creative process.
Another particularly exceptional venture into the realms of Mandelstam's creative consciousness can be found in Ronen's canonical monograph. Although his discussion of the theme of creation is limited to the mythology presented in only one poem, “Грифельная ода” (“The Slate Ode,” 1923), Ronen, nonetheless, comes closest to systematizing a comprehensive mythology of Mandelstam's poetic creation.\(^5\) He writes that the plot of “The Slate Ode” “develops around the central event of enlightenment” (13). By “enlightenment” I understand Ronen to mean specifically poetic illumination, i.e., a form of inspiration, as evidenced by the rest of Ronen's assessment. The event, Ronen goes on to explain, moves from “the transition from a state of obliviousness, through recollection, to a state of superconscious creative ecstasy, and culminates in the discovery of a secret book of life and a magic curative act” (13). Much of what Ronen proposes here corresponds to the mythology of poetic creation that I summarily described above. “The Slate Ode” does indeed typify many of the concepts involved in Mandelstam's mythology of poetic creation. The state of oblivion is that chaotic realm from which emerges Mandelstam's auditory imagination, and the state of recollection occurs once the poet has successfully entered into dialogue with the voice of the Muse/Mnemosyne. Just as Brown wrote that Mandelstam saw himself as “receiving” his poetry, so too does Ronen portray the lyrical persona as “discovering” his poems (which constitute the “secret book of life”). Finally, the “magic curative act” is quite simply the pleasure or perhaps peace that Mandelstam experiences when fulfilling his poetic calling.

What Freidin contributes most to the current subject are his comments on the role of memory\(^6\) in Mandelstam's creative consciousness as well as his focus on breathing as a metaphor for poetry (the second chapter of his book is, in fact, titled “Mysteries of

\(^5\) For this discussion, see Ronen, pp.44-50.

\(^6\) For Freidin's view on the role of memory in Mandelstam's mythopoesis, see, in particular, chapter 6, pp. 154-186.
Breathing"). Freidin also connects Mandelstam's poetic creation with a form of eroticism, albeit the Symbolist vision of non-physical love: “Recalling Annenskii’s remark and Mandelstam’s choice of metaphor for poetry, ‘the breathing of the mystery of marriage,’ this analogy may be safely extended into the realm of eros, not the physical variety, but the displaced, mystical, Platonic and Manichean eros that Russian Symbolists had preached, beginning with Vladimir Solov’ev” (53). As I proposed above, the other voice with which Mandelstam converses is necessarily a female figure (partly Muse, partly Mnemosyne) and through this “dialogue” a poem is born. Although I agree with Freidin that for Mandelstam the eroticism involved in poetic creation somewhat echoes the Symbolist version, I hold that it moved beyond the Platonic one. For one thing, Mandelstam often looked at the world from a scientific point of view, particularly a biological one, and so his mythopoetic “eroticism” might be less ethereally based than the Symbolists’. Secondly, as I have already mentioned and will expand upon below, Mandelstam's inspired poems were “born” from a union. That is, the poems were the children produced from an “erotic” moment of inspired dialogue and, thus, his “eroticism” must have necessarily moved beyond the Platonic. Freidin has also offered partial summations of Mandelstam's creative process in the following statements: “When the ‘secret sign’ the poet has been awaiting finally arrives, he will experience an epiphany and fuse with the ultimate” (42); “only after the poet’s prayer for the “word”, which is “senseless” and strongly erotic in connotation, does the hypnotic recollection begin”(182); and “the word, transformed into a node of memory by the poet, can operate according to the principle of sympathetic magic and tame the devouring time” (194). In reading these various statements, we encounter many of the same motifs and notions that I have already linked to Mandelstam’s mythology of poetic creation. We should note, in particular, that each of these summations portrays the creative process as beginning with “the word” or “secret sign” (i.e., the auditory imagination), as moving through some act of recollection (hence the role of Mnemosyne) and, finally, as
involving an altered perception of reality, such as an epiphany or hypnosis.

Like Taranovsky, Harris has concentrated a good deal on Mandelstam's creative process, or, more specifically, creative "impulse." In particular, her reading of the lyric “Я слово позабыл” ("I have forgotten the word") is exceptionally revealing. She keenly suggests that a creative impulse can be a negative one, such as fear, and she also connects the themes of memory, “memorylessness,” sounds and the absence of sounds with Mandelstam's creative impulse. Also helpful to my work has been the autobiographical slant with which Harris often presents Mandelstam's work to her readers. It is not, however, the lyrical persona's mythology of poetic creation that she deals with—it is Mandelstam the poet's. The distinction lies in the fact that Mandelstam the writer, not his lyrical persona, is the persona behind the essays which greatly contribute to the mythology I am proposing; therefore, the autobiographical elements take on greater importance in my work than they otherwise would.

Finally, like Harris, Cavanagh also identifies a "negative" impulse behind Mandelstam's poetry -- chaos. In doing so, she discusses the paradoxical nature of the motif of silence in Mandelstam's work, which is a prominent motif in his mythology of the creative process. Furthermore, Cavanagh speaks of Mandelstam's notion of the poet-hermaphrodite, which I identify as a key element of his mythological version of poetic creation.

Since Mandelstam has not left us any one comprehensive explanation of what he perceived his creative process to be, my task has been: 1) to extract the various comments and remarks scattered throughout his essays and poems, and in doing so 2) to formulate his myths into a coherent mythology. I have also taken into account memoirs and personal correspondence of Mandelstam's contemporaries, such as his wife, Nadezhda Mandelstam,

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7 This reading can be found in Harris, pp. 44-47.
and his friend Anna Akhmatova. I then read through Mandelstam's poetry, gathering textual evidence in support of the mythology proposed by his essays, his friends and previous Mandelstam scholarship. This method might be likened to one that Mandelstam himself used in an essay. He described his method in the following way: “я говорю, конечно, по догадке, на основании робких намеков рецензента, подобно Кювье конструируя ихтиозавра по косточке” [(3: 55) I am surmising, of course, on the basis of timid hints made by the reviewer, like Cuvier constructing his ichthyosaurus bone by bone (299)].

“Surmising” is indeed part and parcel of any critical interpretation and so has contributed to the skeletal mythology that I (re-) construct here.

1.1 The Inner Dialogue, or The Aural Image

In virtually every one of his essays Mandelstam touches upon the language of his inner dialogue or, at the very least, the question of language itself. For him, language, in all its various manifestations, is both the source and the subject of writing.

In one of his earliest published essays, “François Villon” (1913), Mandelstam wrote that, “Лирический поэт по природе своей, двуполое существо, способное к бесчисленным расщеплениям во имя внутреннего диалога” [(2: 305) The lyric poet is a hermaphrodite by nature, capable of limitless fissions in the name of his inner dialogue (56)]. Here Mandelstam couched within metaphorical terms his ideas on the poet's inner dialogue: through metaphor he attempted to rationalize the illogical notion of the voice of inspiration by likening himself to a hermaphroditic organism. In doing so, Mandelstam could justify


9 An interesting subtext to this notion of Mandelstam's might be the myth of Tiresius, a figure who was not only a blind prophet but who was, at different periods of his life, both a
the “other” (i.e., female) voice with which his male self conversed. Interestingly, Mandelstam notes specific examples of “lyrical hermaphroditism,” or “duets,” which he hears in Villon’s work, all of which I see as describing various facets of the classical relationship between a poet and his Muse: “огорченный и утешитель, мать и дитя, судья и подсудимый, собственник и нищий” [(2: 305) the aggrieved and the comforter, the mother and child, the judge and the judged, the proprietor and the beggar (56)]. In his relationship with his Muse, the poet can be viewed as the more powerless in each of these dichotomies: the Muse is at times his comforter, his mother-figure, his judge and even his “owner” when it comes to imparting upon him knowledge of the poetic word.

Mandelstam continues his metaphor of the hermaphrodite with the idea of fission—the biological process of reproduction in which a unicellular organism creates offspring by splitting apart. In this way, Mandelstam is able to explain how he is capable of producing “offspring” (i.e., “poems”) by himself.10

We find this notion of the hermaphrodite in a couple of Mandelstam’s lyrics, as well. A decade after “Francois Villon,” for example, Mandelstam writes his celebrated poem “Грифельная ода” [The Slate Ode (1923)] in which the lyrical persona views himself as having a double soul (“с двойной душой”); such an image can surely be likened to the hermaphrodite mentioned in “François Villon.” Similarly, in the poem “Вернись в смесительное лоне” [Return to the incestuous womb (1920)] the Biblical Leah symbolizes a man and a woman. I would like to acknowledge Irene Masing-Delic for this reference. For a study centered around the topic of Mandelstam’s lyrical hermaphroditism, see Svetlana Boym’s article “Dialogue as ‘Lyrical Hermaphroditism’: Mandelstam’s Challenge to Bakhtin.” For additional reading on not only Tiresius but issues of gender in mythologies of inspiration, see Helen Sword’s engaging introduction to her book Engendering Inspiration.

10 Ronen speaks of voices that are as yet unborn and connects them with “bifurcating futures” in his discussion of the poem “Не у меня, не у тебя—у них...” [Not mine, not yours -- but theirs]. For this analysis, see p. 186 of his monograph.
kind of inner-Muse. In the poem, Leah is told that by loving a Jew (like herself), she will vanish into him. By joining the Jew, i.e., a facet of Mandelstam's lyrical persona, Leah becomes the other half of his soul, and, hence, the lyrical persona's inner Muse.

What in his essay “François Villon” Mandelstam describes as an inner dialogue, he later recasts as an inner image. His move away from the word “dialogue” does not, however, mean a move away from the concept of an internalized aural exchange; rather, it clarifies that the so-called dialogue is, in fact, devoid of actual words. The perceived phenomenon is sooner an exchange of aural images between the two halves of the poet's hermaphroditic self. As Mandelstam explains,

[The poem lives through an inner image, that ringing mold of form which anticipates the written poem. There is not yet a single word, but the poem can already be heard. This is the sound of the inner image, this is the poet's ear touching it. Only the instant of recognition is sweet to us!” (116)]

Nadezhda Mandelstam supports this explanation of an aural-yet-wordless image that was present in her husband's creative mind. In her memoir, she describes the genesis of Mandelstam's poems as resulting from “a musical phrase ringing insistently in the ears; at first inchoate, it later takes on a precise form, though still without words” (70). In his analysis of Mandelstam's poem “Что поют часы-кузнецик” [What the Grasshopper Clocks Sing (1917)], Taranovsky has suggested that it is “as if the poet hears the biological process going on within his body' and that this “‘listening to his own organism' is characteristic of

11 Kiril Taranovsky has also suggested that Leah represents a Muse-figure in this poem. See Taranovsky, p. 61
12 See his “Слово и культура” [The Word and Culture (1921)].
Mandelstam” (74). It seems, then, that Mandelstam’s poems resonate with the aural images that created them. In this way, the original aural image from the poet’s subconscious ultimately becomes the image of the poem itself.

This concept of an inner aural image can also be found in Mandelstam’s poetic cycle “Восьмистишия” [Octets (1933-4)]: “Быть может, прежде губ уже родился шепот” [Maybe the whisper was born before the lips]. Here Mandelstam suggests the possibility that a whisper exists before it is even spoken; in other words, that a type of utterance has audible properties (i.e., is an aural image) before it has been made audible through being uttered.

1.2 The Birth of Memory

Besides inspiring him with resonant subject matter and form, Mandelstam’s auditory imagination often seemed to stimulate (even give birth to) memory. In his essay “Путешествие в Армению” [Journey to Armenia (1933)], Mandelstam metaphorically describes memories as immature, “embryonic” sounds. Moreover, he explained that these acoustic embryos do not develop of their own accord; rather, they “respond to invitation”:

Все мы, сами о том не подозревая, являемся носителями громадного эмбриологического опыта: ведь процесс узнаванья, увенчанный победой усилия памяти, удивительно схож с феноменом роста. И здесь и там—росток, зачаток и—черточка лица или полухаркера, полузвук, окончание имени, что-то губное или небное, сладкая горошина на языке,—развивается не из себя, но лишь отвечает на приглашение, лишь вытягивается, оправдывая ожидание (2: 155).

[We are all carriers of an enormous embryological experiment: indeed, the very process of remembering, crowned with the victory of memory’s effort, is astonishingly similar to the phenomenon of growth. In both instances, here is a sprout, an embryo, either some facial feature or character trait, a half-sound, a name-ending, something labial or palatal, some sweet pea on the tongue, which does not develop out of itself, but only responds to an invitation, only stretches forth, justifying our expectation (359).

According to Mandelstam, then, everyone--female or male--is capable of carrying an embryonic form within him- or herself. Mandelstam’s mythology of the
poet-hermaphrodite can help to explain how a male might support an embryo—we need simply recall his remarks on biological fissions taking place within the poet. It becomes clear only in “Journey to Armenia,” however, that the other, female, half of the male poet inspires memory which, in turn, grows into a poem. The notion that a poem begins as a memory is new to Mandelstam's mythology of poetic creation. Here we see that memory is auditory and begins as an embryonic half-sound that responds to the inner dialogue of the hermaphroditic poet during creative conception. (The eroticism at play here, as I discussed above, is necessarily more than Platonic as it ends in a metaphorically biological reproduction.)

Accordingly, the embryonic memory grows, moving up and into the mouth, becoming labial, becoming a recited poem. Mandelstam's figurative birthing of poems through his lips has indeed been noted elsewhere, as, for example, by Harris: “The image of the poet’s “lips” presented in “I have forgotten the word" has evolved into one of Mandelstam's most powerful emblems of poetic creation. It is still associated with the idea of pain and sacrifice as integral to the creative act” (103).

The importance of memory in Mandelstam's mythopoesis has been noted by other scholars, as well. Among them is Nadezhda Mandelstam, who remarked upon the vital role of memory in her husband's perception of poetic creation: “The process of creating verse...involves the recollection of something that has never before been said, and the

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13 Cavanagh has connected Mandelstam's inspiration with a "sensual lust." See her reading of “Из омута злого” [From an evil, miry pond (46)]. Mandelstam favored the use of birth imagery in a number of his metaphors. In “Разговор о Данте” [Conversation about Dante], for example, we find the following: “эмбриональные преобразы” [(2: 373) embryological prototypes] , “нерожденного . . . времени”[(2: 392) of an unborn time], and “Послушаем, как родилась...дирижерская палочка" [( 2: 395) We will hear how the conductor's baton was born]. Also in this essay he calls Virgil Dante's midwife and Beatrice his nurse (2: 385).

14 Ronen has validated his subtextual approach to Mandelstam by reminding his readers that memory was the fundamental concern of Acmeism (xii). (He then reiterates this on p. 168.) The memory that I am speaking about is, however, not that of the poet's literary predecessors.
search for lost words is an attempt to remember what is still to be brought into being" (Hope against Hope 187). The contemporary American poet Mary Kinzie has described the initial “prompting” of a poem in a way that very much reminds me of this aspect of Mandelstam's mythology. She has written that the poetic impulse can be likened to “overhearing music that is not yet made” (1). Both N. Mandelstam and Kinzie, then, compare the genesis of a poem to the act of remembering or overhearing that which does not yet exist: it is as though past and future conflate at the moment of poetic inspiration. Harris, too, has identified the power of memory as a central theme in Mandelstam's oeuvre (34). In her introduction to Mandelstam: Critical Prose and Letters, entitled “The Impulse and the Text," she quotes the above passage from "Journey to Armenia," and discusses the role of memory in Mandelstam's creative consciousness:

In this way, Mandelstam's conversations, his memory of those conversations, as well as his perception of the act of memory as in itself a creative act, form the basis of his own creative autobiography. Mandelstam assures us that the act of memory is in itself a creative act, in that it is intimately connected with the ‘phenomenon of growth’, with the life-giving force (37).

In other words, it is as if the act itself of remembering evolves into a poem, recalling Wordsworth's well-known description of poetry as coming from “emotion recollected in tranquility.” We might find further clarification in Mandelstam's similar view of a conductor and his music, or "sound": “Когда дирижер вытягивает палочкой тему из оркестра, он не является физической причиной звука. Звучанье уже дано в партитуре симфонии, в спонтанном сговоре исполнителей, в многолюдстве зала и в устройстве музыкальных орудий” [(2: 164-165)

When the conductor draws a theme out of the orchestra with his baton, he is hardly the physical cause of that sound. The sound is already present in the symphonic score, in the spontaneous collusion of the performers, in the throngs filling the auditorium, and in the structure of the musical instruments (367-8)]. Here again we are told that what will be in a
sense already is or has been.

In the well-known memoir on his youth, Шум времени [The Noise of Time] (1923), Mandelstam writes that it is not living people whom he remembers but "слепки голосов" [(2: 103) the plaster casts struck from their voices (113)]. Indeed, this particular prose piece of Mandelstam's is bursting with sounds. In the sixty-page memoir there are approximately one hundred different noises. About a third of them are related to voices -- everywhere in his memory people are talking, yelling, bellowing, and whispering; some twenty sounds are music-related; there are also man-made sounds (e.g., whistles, bells, and clattering) and sounds connected with nature (e.g., crunching snow, cicadas and rustling roots). In creating this exceptional piece of prose work, Mandelstam's inner dialogue -- his auditory imagination -- invited each of these memories to its maturation.

What Mandelstam has demonstrated in his essays regarding the role of sounds in inspiration is likewise true in his poetry. To begin with, it is highly significant that in the later versions of Mandelstam's inaugural book Stone, the inaugural poem begins with the word “sound”.

Звук осторожный и глухой
Плода, сорвавшегося с древа,
Среди немолчного напева
Глубокой тишины лесной...

[The tentative and muted sound

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15 In her discussion of the poem "Вооруженный зреньем узких ос" (1937) [Armed with the sight of narrow wasps], Harris notes the vital significance of what I have been calling Mandelstam's auditory imagination: “the poet-speaker acknowledges the failure of his creative powers--'I do not sing'-- as a result of his inability to “hear the earth's axis”. . . Mandelstam had to 'hear' the imperative of 'the earth.’ Vision alone, no matter how penetrating, was inadequate.” (135).
Of fruit fallen from a tree,
Amid the unquiet melody
Of the deep forest silence...]

In this brief lyric we encounter, first, a sound that does not seem to want to be a sound (tentative and muted are, after all, unusual attributes for a sound) and, second, an unquiet melody of silence (also antithetical in nature). In this poem we see the young Mandelstam playing with the relationship of sound to silence and vice versa. I contend that when sounds (or lack thereof, as will be discussed below) occur in Mandelstam’s poetry, the poet is alluding to his creative process. The above poem demonstrates this well. The word “плод” in Russian, translated above as “fruit”, can also mean “embryo.” Mandelstam often used birth imagery in his poems and especially in his essays, as discussed above. In this poem, the fruit, or embryo, is the poem itself falling away from its source of creation. The poem is created in a melody of silence because the “melody,” i.e. the aural image, is what has caused the poem to mature.

Just as the poem discussed above begins with the image of a sound, so do many of Mandelstam’s other poems. In illustration of this, let us look at some examples of first lines from the various collections of his poetry. In his first book, Stone, we find: “Когда, пронзительнее свиста, / Я слышу английский язык...” [When I hear the English tongue/ Like a whistle, but even shriller...], “Пусть имена цветущих городов/ Ласкают слух значительностью бренной” [Let the names of flowering cities / Caress the ear with their brief time of fame],

16 Mandelstam’s interest in Beethoven parallels the antithetical nature of this poem; Beethoven was a deaf composer -- a notion, as Ronen has pointed out, that is “fundamentally oxymoronic” (21).

17 Interestingly, the notion of language as a tree whose fruit is plucked by the poet is central to Brodsky’s mythology of poetic creation.
and “С веселым ржанием пасутся табуны” [Grazing herds of horses joyfully neigh].18 In Tristia, Mandelstam's second book of poetry, we meet with the following: “В разноголосице девического хора...” [In the discordance of a maiden choir...] and “Что поют часы-кузнечик” [What the grasshopper-clocks sing...]. “Зашумела, задрожала, Как смоковницы листва” [It made noise, it trembled / Like the leaves of a fig-tree] is an example from his Moscow Notebooks, and, finally, from his Voronezh Poems: “Слышу, слышу ранний лед...” [I hear, I hear the early ice]. The frequency with which Mandelstam begins poems with images of sounds can, I believe, only be explained through an understanding of Mandelstam's auditory imagination, which serves as an impetus for the creation of the poems. In addition, there is an extraordinary number of poems that feature sounds, although they do not actually begin with images of sounds. These sounds, too, can be explained through Mandelstam's aural creative process.

1.3 The Paradox of Silence

In Mandelstam's mythology of poetic creation, then, poems having been inspired by his auditory imagination have either grown out of an invited memory or have developed as reproductions of those sounds reverberating in his inspired mind. If the poet’s auditory imagination were to be silenced, it would lead to his own muteness, for he would then neither have sounds to reproduce nor a way of enticing his own memories. It follows that his poems which seem to concentrate on the motif of silence rather than that of sounds (and there are many of these as well) are actually focusing not on the presence of silence but on the absence of sounds.

The motif of silence has been discussed frequently in Mandelstam scholarship but has remained somewhat of a mystery--precisely because it was a paradox for Mandelstam

18 These translations by Robert Tracy.
himself. Seemingly contrary to what I have stated above (that the motif of silence is actually the motif of the absence of sounds), Clarence Brown has suggested that:

Mandelstam was an aural poet. He heard his lines and took them down, having wrested them from silence, from what he could not, at first, hear....The poems came from silence where they were perfect; such is his platonic notion. Should they not aspire to that condition? To that first and ultimate stasis, concealed and perfect, from which he brought them forth? (175)

and also

The silence of ["Silentium"s] title is not, of course, merely the absence of sound... Mandelstam's silence is a hypostasized something, almost substance. It is the primal state, the condition preceding even creation itself, the Background against which all communication takes place, both music and the word, and is therefore the link between them, as between the calm sea and the lunatic brilliance of day. The longings of the speaker of the poem – a poet, again–are universal in scale: to go beyond statement, to achieve a mute art, a "meaningless art"... (166-7).

Brown is, of course, correct in his assessment of “Silentium”s silence: in this particular poem silence is indeed a concretized, idealized state of nothingness.19 The best explanation of this paradox of silence, to my mind, has been put forth by Leonard Olschner in his comparative essay on Paul Celan and Mandelstam. Olschner, also writing on "Silentium," says that the “[r]emnants of original silence...threaten poetic speech less than they fertilize it; in this sense they–like the minute dose of poison which heals–help define the path of a poetic thought or text to concretion" (383). Olschner's use of simile ("the minute dose of poison which heals") is a nice one and, I think, helps to clarify the paradox of “Silentium.” Ryszard Przybyski has also contributed a useful discussion on Mandelstamian silence. He says that “sound is born from silence's singing. Silence is music. This seeming paradox haunted Mandelstam throughout his life. In a poem written in 1910, a soundless chorus of birds flies through the silence at midnight. Singing man is a form of God. The interruption of silence means the appearance of form" (81). In

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19 For a discussion of Mandelstam's “Silentium" in relation to Tiutchev's poem by the same name, see, for example, Cavanagh 41-43.
Przybylski's explanation, silence remains a kind of original, idealized state but concomitantly stands for a force to be reckoned with if poetry (form) is to be created. Olschner and Przybylski, like Brown, see the state of silence as a necessary element in poetic creation. The paradox of silence throughout Mandelstam's verse, however, changes and evolves in his mythology of poetic creation. The three scholars mentioned above view silence's role primarily as it was in Mandelstam's early poetry; each of their expositions on the motif is put forth in connection with poems from the year 1910: "Silentium" and "И тишину переплывает" [And [the choir] sails across the silence]. Later, though, Mandelstam comes to realize that there is another type of silence, a more prevalent, and indeed quite ordinary, silence. He begins to identify this other silence with the periodic muteness of his Muse, his hermaphroditic other half, his auditory imagination. And that results in his own poetic muteness: a silence which the mature Mandelstam knows will never become the primal, idealized silence of "Silentium." The only way to come to terms with this paradox, then, is by separating Mandelstam's earlier, idealized notion of primordial silence from his later, practical notion of non-silence.

There is surprisingly little in Mandelstam's essays about silence -- a fact that also contributes to the obscurity of the motif--especially considering its frequent appearance in his poems. There are, however, a few comments in his essays which should be taken into account. I would like to preface these comments of his, however, with a comparison Mandelstam puts forth as early as 1913, a metaphor that to some extent forecasts Mandelstam's paradoxical view of silence. In his essay "УТРО АКМЕИЗМА" [Morning of Acmeism], Mandelstam equates the stone from Tiutchev's 1833 poem (and hence his own Stone) with the word. He envisions the word as building material for poetry in the same

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20 Some others who have touched upon this apparent contradiction in Mandelstam's mythopoesis are Przybylski (81) and Cavanagh (36).

21 For a discussion of the influence of Tiutchev's "stone" on Mandelstam see: Cavanagh 33, 35-36.
way that stone can be used as a building material for walls or houses. The paradox here is that stone is representative of both the word and, more literally, silence, since a stone is of obviously mute matter. The other remarks from Mandelstam's essays that can be tied to silence are generally made in connection with poets needing to be able to hear, since if a poet has grown deaf he is living in constant silence and cannot therefore create poetry. This is an element of Mandelstam's mythology which recurs in a number of essays. In one of the rare times when Mandelstam uses the actual word “silence” in an essay (“Kiev”), he connects it with death by referring to the silence of a funeral parlor. Mandelstam connects these two themes in his poetry as well (as will be discussed below).

The rest of the pertinent references to silence can be found in “Путешествие в Армению” [Journey to Armenia]. In this piece we find images of deafness (and muteness), i.e. forms of silence: Mandelstam speaks of people “suffer[ing] from a slight loss of voice” [(346) чуточку спадают с голоса (2: 140)]; of “strain[ing] your ears” [(348) как не упрягай ухо (2: 141)]; of trees that are “deaf with age” [(352) оглохшие от старости (v.2, 147)]; and of someone's "ears hav[ing] grown foolish from the silence" [(377) уши его поглупели от тишины (2: 175)]. What is particularly interesting in this essay is the point at which Mandelstam writes: “Семя Аршака зачахло в мошонке и голос его жидок, как блеяние овцы. . .” [(2: 175) The seed of Arshak withered away in his scrotum and his voice grew as feeble as the bleating of a lamb (377)]. With this image, Mandelstam ties the voice to procreation, which hearkens back to the notion of the poet-hermaphrodite giving birth to poems through an inner dialogue. And when the dialogue ceases, when the other half (Muse-Mnemosyne) refuses to speak, the embryonic poems cannot come to be.

In sum, although the textual evidence from the essays laid out here may seem meager, it is important to remember two things: that silence abounds in Mandelstam's
verse and that, contrary to common interpretation, there is little that portrays silence as a positive force.

Let us now look at the predominant motif of silence in Mandelstam's verse. The following lines best illuminate Mandelstam's poetic view of the motif as changeable:

После полуночи сердце ворует
Прямо из рук запрещенную тишь,
Тихо живет, хорошо озорует –
Любишь – не любишь– ни с чем не сравнишь.

[After midnight the heart steals
forbidden silence from the hands.
It lives quietly, but is mischievous,
loves me, loves me not -- it's not like anything else.]23

These lines were written in 1931 by the mature Mandelstam, for whom silence has retained its enigmatic ways: he casts silence as the persona's capricious lover. Other examples of oxymoronic lines abound in Mandelstam's poetry. Just as in the lyric “Звук осторожный и глухой” [The tentative and muted sound], Mandelstam repeatedly binds the opposing images of sound and silence in other poems: “И тихий звук / Неунывающих / речей” (1909) [And the quiet sound / Of undejected / Speech”]; “Я слушаю моих пенатов / Всегда восторженную тишь” (1909) [I hear the always-enthusiastic silence/ of my penates”] ; “И тишину переплывает/ Полночных птиц незвучный хор” (1910) [And the soundless choir of midnight birds / sails across the silence”].

23 This translation is by Richard and Elizabeth McKane.
There are also numerous examples in which silence is undoubtedly cast in the role of antagonist. As a point of departure, we might consider the following stanza from as early as 1911:

Сегодня дурной день,
Кузнецов хор спит
И сумрачных скал сень
Мрачней гробовых плит.

[Today is a bad day,
The cicada chorus sleeps
And the cliff’s dark shadow looms
As dismal as tombs.] 24

The poem's opening line tells its reader that it is a bad day for the lyrical persona; the next three lines proceed to explain why precisely the day is a bad one. Essentially, two reasons are given. First, the grasshoppers are silent. We might assume, then, that if the choir of grasshoppers was singing, the day might not be so bad. Second, this silence is accompanied by shadows that are as somber as gravestones. It is precisely the line about the silent, sleeping choir of grasshoppers that strikes the reader the most since it is the more subjective and unusual explanation of a bad day; dark shadows could seem ominous to many people, but a silenced choir of grasshoppers bodes ill only for a poet with an auditory imagination. 25

Another poem from the same year similarly suggests that poetry cannot be born

24 The translation is by Robert Tracy.

25 Using this very poem as an example, Ronen has suggested that in Mandelstam's earlier poetry, day (as opposed to night) is “inimical to poetry” (138). Thus, Ronen offers a like reading in that he finds the day “дурной” because the lyrical persona, a poet, is unable to create poetry.
Скучный луч холодной мерою
Сеет свет в сыром лесу.
Я печаль, как птицу серую,
В сердце медленно несу.

Что мне делать с птицей раненой?
Твердь умолкла, умерла.
С колокольни отуманенной
Кто-то снял колокола,

И стоит осиротелая
И немая вышина,
Как пустая башня белая,
Где туман и тишина.

Утро, нежностью бездонное,
Полуяя и полусон –
Забытье неутоленное –
Дум туманный перезвон...

[Cold meager rays that sow
Thin light dripping in the forest.
I slowly carry sorrow
Like a gray bird in my breast.
What shall I do with this broken bird?
The dead sky has nothing to say.
Fog has left the bell tower obscured
Where they've taken the bells away.

And the orphaned heights are empty
And fallen still
Like the white abandoned tower
Where fog and silence dwell.

In the morning the long caress
Of half awake and half not--
An endless drowsiness--
The vague chiming of thought. . .]

If we bear in mind that birds are a traditional metaphor for poets and/or poems, then one reading of this poem is of a poet lamenting his inability to create poetry. His broken bird stands for the poem that refuses to be born. He does not know how to find inspiration because the sky is silent and the bells have been taken away and so cannot ring. The poem ends with the image of the poet lying in bed, attempting to capture the moment of poetic oblivion in which his thoughts take on their own aural quality, ringing as the missing bells might. The ellipsis leaves the reader guessing as to whether the poet will be able to mend his broken poem or not. We do, however, have a completed poem before us, which, in a more literal sense, suggests that he was successful.

In Mandelstam's second book of poetry, Tristia, silence continues its role as antagonist, as something to be defeated or overcome. Consider, for example, the following:
“Когда на площадях и в тишине келейной/ Мы сходим медленно с ума” [When, on the squares and in the hermetic silence, / We slowly lose our minds] (1917). There are a couple of significant elements to these lines. First, we understand that it is through silence that the poet loses his mind (recall Mandelstam’s essays that warn of deaf poets). Second, and more specifically, the epithet “hermetic” implies that the silence seals off entry or influence from the outside. In keeping with the mythological system of poetic creation under discussion, the hermetic silence cuts Mandelstam off from his Muse, i.e., the female side of his hermaphroditic self.26

Two poems from Tristia recall Mandelstam’s silenced grasshopper chorus in Stone. “Я слово позабыл” [I have forgotten the word] (1920) is one of them. In it, the poet is wrestling with writer’s block and we again meet with a bird, this time a blind swallow representing the unrealized poem. The second stanza then begins “Не слышно птиц” [The birds cannot be heard]. The missing sound of birds is directly tied to the impossibility of poetic creation. A similar lack of sound is found in another of Tristia’s poems, “Мне жалко, что теперь зима / И комаров не слышно в доме” (1920) [It grieves me that it is winter now/ And mosquitos cannot be heard in the house]. Such a complaint is even more unusual than that about the sleeping grasshoppers, but becomes understandable if we remember that these are the sounds that feed the poet’s creative consciousness—without them he is virtually deaf to inspiration.

In one of Mandelstam’s uncollected poems from 1933 there is another example of the place of silence in this mythology. The poem, “Квартира тиха, как бумага” [The apartment is as quiet as paper], was written as a response to Boris Pasternak who once remarked to Mandelstam, “Now you have an apartment—you can write” (Freidin 241). The exchange between the two poets ingeniously demonstrates the vast difference between

26 Also important here is the fact that the adjective “hermetic” is often associated with lack of air—remember Mandelstam’s fear of asphyxia. I will return to this below.
their creative processes. For Pasternak, silence and a room of his own created the ideal conditions for poetic inspiration. But not a study, not even a desk, could inspire Mandelstam to write the way it could Pasternak. Mandelstam’s new apartment was simply too quiet to inspire his auditory imagination.

1.4 Breathing Poetry and the Suffocating Poet

Mandelstam’s “poems of silence,” then, must have a different source of inspiration than the poet’s auditory imagination. The source emerges from the poet’s greatest fear, suffocation, and manifests itself in his solution to the fear: air and breath. Mandelstam’s fear is one of muteness but is also connected with a fear of death. “Asphyxiation” at best leads to unconsciousness, rendering the poet speechless, but at worst can result in the permanent silence of death. To ward off asphyxiation, breath and air become the poet’s substitute muse. Let us return for a moment to the 1917 poem “When, on the squares and in the hermetic silence.” In this lyric, Mandelstam describes the hermetic silence which caused the lyrical persona to lose his mind. The word “hermetic” can be associated with a lack of air, thus the silence in the poem can be interpreted as asphyxiating. Consequently,

27 Besides Akhmatova, as in the epigraph to this chapter, a number of scholars have noted the driving force behind Mandelstam’s fear. Ginzburg, for example, believed that “Mandelstam’s poetry always had its source at the point where fear of life and love of life meet” (quoted in Mandelstam, Osip Mandelstam 121). And Harris, in her perceptive interpretation of “Я слово позабыл” (see pp. 44-47), notes that fear could function as an impulse for Mandelstam’s poetic creation. She writes that “the source of poetry may just as likely be ‘winter and night’ as spring and sunlight” (45) and that “for Mandelstam the negative creative impulse can serve as a challenge to time and as a source of cultural continuity” (47).

Other scholars have also noted the role of breath in Mandelstam’s mythopoesis. As I mentioned above, Freidin aptly titled his second chapter “Mysteries of Breathing.” In it, Freidin suggests that “for Mandelstam, who, incidentally suffered from asthma, breathing often stood for poetry” (37).

28 Ronald Hingley has also connected air with Mandelstam’s creative activity: “He believed that poets could somehow seize on phantom word combinations that floated on the air around them...” (178).
air or breath would be the solution to the lyrical persona's hermetic silence. Brown has pointed out that not only do the words “воздух” [air] and “звук” [sound] appear extremely frequently in Mandelstam's verse, but they often appear together. Although Brown does not explore the connection between the two words, I believe their relationship becomes clear through systematizing Mandelstam's mythology of poetic creation—that is, these seemingly unconnected words actually act interchangeably as implements of poetic creation. These poems without sounds are born from a more conscious attempt toward poetic creation—an explicit appeal to the inner Muse rather than a reproduction of the poet's "dialogue" with her, or of the memories conjured up by their communication.

The etymology of the Russian word for inspiration, вдохновение, might further explain why Mandelstam would have turned to breath and air for artificial forms of inspiration. Like its English counterpart, the word's root “дых” means “spir-” and, as in the Latin, “spiritus” means “spirit” and “breath.” The prefix of the Russian word, “в-,” implies a drawing in of the breath or taking in of a spirit, i.e., the Muse. Hesiod claimed that he became a poet precisely at that moment when the Muses breathed a voice into him (Trimpi ix). Mandelstam, an extremely erudite poet, surely contemplated the components of this word himself.

By mapping out the presence of breath in Mandelstam's prose, it becomes evident that the role of this motif alters over the years. In the earlier essays, Mandelstam speaks of breath with some frequency, and he uses it as a metaphor for poetry. In the later works, the motif's frequency increases and becomes bound up with more somber images, such as choking and suffocating. Although Mandelstam claimed in one letter, dated 1937, that his

29 Taranovsky has noted a similar connection which Zeeman has also pointed out in his monograph. Zeeman writes “Readers familiar with Mandelstam's poetry will no doubt identify it [the poetic line "еле дух переводя" ("gasping for breath")] as the prominent Mandelstamian theme of difficulty in breathing/lack of air (14). This is a theme which, according to Taranovsky, nearly always operates within the semantic fields "lack of happiness, lack of freedom and lack (or impossibility) of poetic creation" (49).
asthma had developed “in recent years,” it remains nonetheless highly probable that difficulty in breathing was on his mind even earlier. For one thing, as I and others have already noted, the motif of breath is highly evident in Mandelstam’s prose and poetry throughout his career as a writer. Secondly, his wife Nadezhda suffered from asthmatic conditions that were surely a source of worry for Mandelstam, who was acutely sensitive to his wife's health. In a letter to Kiril Taranovsky, Iurii Levin wrote that in 1922 (the year “Сеновал” [The Hayloft] was written), “у Мандельштама ещё не было и следов астмы, но у Надежды Яковлевны было что-то в этом роде (или что-то аллергическое, типа сенной лихорадки); не отсюда ли—через 'симпатию'--... подчеркивание душности и дыхания?” [(138) Mandelstam still didn't have a trace of asthma but Nadezhda Iakovlevna had something of the sort (or some type of allergy, like hay fever); couldn't it be from this -- through a “sympathy” -- . . . the emphasis of suffocation and breathing?]. Levin's idea that Mandelstam was empathetic toward his wife's condition does indeed explain not only the poem “The Hayloft,” but also much of the poet's early fixation with the motifs of breath and suffocation.

At first, breathing for Mandelstam is deeply connected with the “autonomous inner life” of poetry. The earliest use of the breath motif in Mandelstam's prose can be found in his essay “О собеседнике” [On the Addressee] (1913) in which Mandelstam warns that when composing verse a poet should not have too specific an addressee in mind. He argues that placing such limitations upon the text results in depriving it of air, for Mandelstam perceives poetry as a living, breathing phenomenon which should not be confined. (Even this first mention of breath anticipates Mandelstam's eventual preoccupation with asphyxia.) That same year, in a review of Jack London's Collected Works, Mandelstam notes that “London's work must be measured not by the depth of thought expressed by the author, but by the involuntary spiritual exhalations creating the atmosphere of the literary work” (98). In another review from the same year (“Павел Кокорин. Музыка рифм” [Pavel Kokorin. The Music of Rhymes]), Mandelstam describes some poetry's rhythm as being
Here again, we see poetry emulating human life through breath. A year or two later, in writing “Заметки о Шенье” [Remarks on Chenier], Mandelstam again refers to what he now terms poetry's “autonomous inner life” (76). He speaks of the breathing of the Alexandrine line and of the warm breath of “by no means fleshless allegories” (79).

The role of breath in Mandelstam's mythopoesis broadens over the next few years; it is no longer just poetry that breathes, but all of language and even music. In 1921, in “Слово и культура” [The Word and Culture], Mandelstam depicts the transformation of the word into music as occurring precisely through the power of breath: “Слово стало не семиствольной, а тысячествольной цевницей, оживляемой сразу дыханием всех веков” [2: 227] The word has become, not a seven-, but a thousand-reed pipe, animated by the breath of all the ages (116). Here we see Mandelstam recalling the seven-reed pipe, a traditionally classical symbol of poetic inspiration, which further supports the notion of breath as an agent of inspiration. The following year, in his well-known essay “О природе слова” [On the Nature of the Word], we find a comparison of language to breathing flesh: “...русский язык историчен уже сам по себе, так как во всей своей совокупности он есть волнующееся море событий, непрерывное воплощение и действие разумной и дышашей плоти” [2: 246]. The Russian language is historical by its very nature, since in its totality it is a turbulent sea of events, a continuous incarnation and activation of rational and breathing flesh (121). Mandelstam goes on to explain that it is the word as such that empowers language as a whole with its

30 The full quotations of these are as follows: “Распределение времени по желобам глагола, существительного и эпитета составляет автономную внутреннюю жизнь александрийского стиха, регулирует его дыхание, его напряженность и насыщенность” [(emphasis added) (2: 295) The distribution of time along the grooves of verb, noun and epithet comprises the autonomous inner life of the Alexandrine line, regulates its breathing, its tension and its degree of saturation (76)] and “Очень широкие аллегории, отнюдь не бесплотные...” [(2: 298) Very broad, and by no means fleshless allegories... (79)].

Mentions of breath in Mandelstam's prose can also be found in the following essays: Chaadaev (84); “Henri-Auguste Barbier” (186); “For the Anniversary of F.K. Sologub” (207); and in “The Bloody Mystery-Play of January 9th” (237).
breath: “Russian nominalism, that is, the idea of the reality of the word as such, breathes life into the spirit of our language...” [(2: 246) Russian nominalism, that is, the idea of the reality of the word as such, breathes life into the spirit of our language... (121)]. Also in this essay he repeats the idea that the language, as a breathing phenomenon, should not be limited, forced or contained--or it will lead to suffocation: Andrei Bely, “[э]ахлебываясь в изощренном многословии... нещадно и бесцерemonно гоняет слово, сообразуясь исключительно с темпераментом своего спекулятивного мышления” [(2: 246) choking in his refined prolixity... unsparingly and unceremoniously hounds the word, forcing it to conform to the temperament of his own speculative thought (121)]. Here, for the second time since “On the Addressee” nine years previously, Mandelstam has hinted at the significant change the role of breath is to undergo in his mythology of poetic creation. In the same year as “On the Nature of the Word” we meet again with Mandelstam's favored image of breathing poetry. In his essay “Литературная Москва” [Literary Moscow], however, a new connection is born--one between breathing and memory:

Познания дышит и ртом и носом, и воспоминанием и изобретением. Нужно быть факиром, чтобы отказываться от одного из видов дыхания. Жажда поэтического дыхания через воспоминания--сказала в том повышенном интересе, с которым Москва встретила приезд Ходасевича, слава Богу, уже лет двадцать пять пишущего стихи, но внезапно оказавшегося в положении молодого, только начинающего поэта (2: 328).

Poetry breathes through both the mouth and the nose, both memory and inventiveness. Only a fakir could reject one of these modes of breathing. The passion for poetic breathing through memory was revealed in the great interest with which Moscow greeted the arrival of Khodasevich who, thank God, had already been writing poetry for twenty-five years but suddenly found himself in the position of a young poet just beginning (146-147).

With "Literary Moscow," Mandelstam personifies poetry to its highest degree thus far by granting it a true respiratory apparatus. He connects other aspects of writing with breath in two other essays of the same year (1922), “Литературная Москва: Рождение фабулы” [Literary Moscow: The Birth of Plot] and “Кое-что о грузинском искусстве” [A Word or Two about
Georgian Art]. In the former essay, Mandelstam joins breath with plot ("фабула дышит"),
while in the latter he marries it to form and composition ("плоскостные формы и линейная
композиция (ритм линий) дышат").

In “Заметки о поэзии” [Notes on Poetry (1923)], Mandelstam’s mythology of
breathing deepens, extending down into the throat; it is also with this essay that the breath
begins to show its curative powers. In discussing Pasternak’s poetry, Mandelstam remarks
upon how it “chokes”--which both recalls his earlier comment on Bely and looks forward to
an increasing frequency of somber images connected with breath (264). Reading further in
the essay, we meet with mention of the anatomical structure of the throat and the
suggestion that “[с]тихи Пастернака почитать—горло прочистить, дыхание укрепить, обновить
легкие: такие стихи должны быть целебны от туберкулеза. У нас сейчас нет более здоровой поэзии.
Это — кумыс после американского молока” [(2: 264) To read Pasternak’s verse is to clear your
throat, to fortify your breathing, to fill your lungs; surely such poetry could provide a cure
for tuberculosis. No poetry is more healthful at the present moment. It is koumiss after
evaporated milk (168)]. With this remark, Mandelstam divulges that poetry can indeed
manifest itself as a restorative breath, a health cure of sorts. This essay then goes on to
suggest that poetry can be understood not only as breath but as having a personified life of
its own -- indeed, one including arms and a head:

31 More complete quotations are as follows: “Прислушайся к фольклору и улышишь, как
шевелится в нем тематическая жизнь, как дышит фабула…” [(2: 336) Listen closely to folklore
and you will hear thematic life stirring in it, the plot breathing. . .(153)]; “Войдите в
национальный музей грузинской живописи в Тифлисе. Перед вами представит длинна вереница
строгих портретов, преимущественно женских, по своей технике к глубокому статическому покою
напоминающих немецкую живопись. В то же время плоскостные формы и линейная композиция
(ритм линий) дышат приемами персидской миниатюры” [(3: 38) Enter the National
Museum of Georgian Art in Tiflis and you will see before you a long line of portraits,
predominantly women, which both by virtue of their technique and their profound static
calm remind you of German painting. At the same time, however, flattened form and linear
composition (the rhythm of the lines) breathes with the devices of the Persian miniature
(161)].
Книга Пастернака “Сестра моя жизнь” представляется мне сборником прекрасных упражнений дыхания: каждый раз голос ставится по-новому, каждый раз иначе регулируется мощный дыхательный аппарат. Так, размахивая руками, бормоча, плетется поэзия, пошатываясь, головокруж, блаженно очумела и все-таки единственная трезвая, единственная проснувшаяся из всего, что есть в мире (2: 264-5).

[To me Pasternak's book, My Sister Life, is a collection of marvelous breathing exercises: each time the voice is arranged anew, each time the powerful breathing apparatus is adjusted differently. So, waving its arms and muttering under its breath, poetry moves off, staggering, its head swimming, blissfully crazy, and yet the only sober one, the only one completely awake in the whole world (169)].

Good poetry, for Mandelstam, evolves out of a harmonious relationship between the poet and his inner "other"; the poet must cultivate the dialogue within himself so that the ensuing poetry will have a life of its own. Not just anyone, of course, can be a good poet, which people fail to realize, as Mandelstam discusses in his essay “Армия поэтов” [An Army of Poets] (1923). The inner voice, or auditory image, that Mandelstam has cultivated within himself, remains for many nothing more than an infant's cry for survival. In “An Army of Poets," Mandelstam returns to the notion of the poet-hermaphrodite and connects him to the breathing poetry which is born out of him:

Ребенок кричит оттого, что он дышит и живет, затем крик обрывается—начинается лепет, но внутренний крик не стихает, и взрослый человек внутренне кричит немым криком, тем же древним криком новорожденных. Общественное прилипление заглушает этот крик—он сплошное зияние. Стихотворство юношей и взрослых людей нередко этот самый крик—атавистический, продолжающийся крик малолетка.

Слова безразличные—это вечное я живу, я хочу, мне больно. Они привез из Иркутска, из рабочих, большое самолюбие, не бойтесь праведны, когда ему говорят 'плохо', он приве не стих, а сплошной крик. Ему кажется, что это похоже не то Маяковского, не то на каких-то имажинистов. Ни на что не похоже. Короткие строки, два-три слова, дробит, грызет, заклеивается, душит, неистовствует, затихает, опять куда-то громоздится, ревет, слова безразличны, слова непослышны, все выходят не так, как он хочет, но слышен в них древний рев: я живу, я хочу, мне больно, и, может быть, еще одно уже от взрослого и сознательного человека.—помогите! Таких как этот—десятки тысяч. Они—самое главное—им нужна помощь, чтобы они перестали кричать, когда для них будет поконечно со стихами — этим атавистическим ревом, — начнется лепет, начнется речь, начнется жизнь (2: 214-215).

An infant cries because it breathes and lives. Later it stops crying and starts to babble, but the inner cry does not subside, and a grown man cries with the same
ancient cry of a newborn baby muffled within. Social decorum drowns out this cry -- it is a pure abyss. The poetry of young people and adults is too often this very cry, the atavistic, ceaseless cry of an infant.

Words are of no consequence: the cry is eternal: I live, I want, I am sick. He arrived from Irkutsk, a worker with enormous self-love, not afraid to tell the truth when they tell him that "it's bad"; he has brought not poetry but an unadulterated cry. He thinks it resembles something of a cross between Mayakovskiy and the Imagists. It resembles nothing. Short lines, two or three words, it splinters, gnaws, chokes, suffocates, rages, subsides, then again clambers up somewhere, roars, words are of no consequence, words are disobedient, everything comes out not the way he wants, but as an ancient roar: I live, I want, I am sick, and perhaps, still more from a grown and conscious man: help! There are tens of thousands such as these. Most important, they must be given help so that they will stop shouting. When they are done with poetry, with this atavistic howling, they will begin to babble, they will begin to speak, they will begin to live (196).

By reading the above passage with Mandelstam's mythology of poetic creation in mind, it becomes clear that this army of untalented poets is only capable of producing poetry that chokes and suffocates; this "army" cannot distinguish the living, breathing word within it.

After 1923 or so, the majority of images connected with breath in Mandelstam's essays are those of gasps and choking. Moreover, the images are no longer so faithfully bound up with language and poetry; they seem to permeate other areas of Mandelstam's consciousness, perhaps as his fixation on asthma in general increases. We now encounter such diverse images as the wheeze of Imperial Russia, a breathing city, society choking with laughter, and literature being stuffed down throats.32

It is by 1930 that breath secures itself as a sort of artificial stimulus in Mandelstam's creative process. By this time, of course, Mandelstam has been grappling with the Soviet state for some years; he has had to endure difficulties in publishing and, therefore, poverty. In his famous “Четвертая проза” [Fourth Prose(1929-31)], Mandelstam broaches the subject of sanctioned writing and in doing so again suggests a correlation between good writing and air, albeit a “stolen” air: “Все произведения мировой литературы я

32 These examples can be found, respectively, in Mandelstam, Osip Mandelstam 237, 256, 300, and 335.
делю на разрешенные и написанные без разрешения. Первые—это мразь, вторые—ворованный воздух” [(2: 182) I divide all of world literature into authorized and unauthorized works. The former are all trash; the latter—stolen air (316)].  

This passage is a return to Mandelstam’s earlier ideas about poetry and breath; unauthorized works are good for the very reason that they have been born out of the poet’s own solution to a silenced (from above) imagination.

In yet another very well-known essay, “Разговор о Данте” [Conversation about Dante] (1933), Mandelstam expands upon how not only his breath but his step, too, are tools in his creative process. He writes: “В поэзии, где все есть мера и все исходит от меры и вращается вокруг нее и ради нее, измерители суть орудия особого свойства, несущие особую активную функцию” [(2: 369) In poetry, where everything is measure and everything derives from measure, revolves around it and for its sake, instruments of measure are tools of a special kind, performing an especially active function (403)]. In and of itself, this quote remains fairly cryptic. To which instruments of measure can he be referring? Mandelstam does not, in fact, continue this passage with any sort of clarification. If, however, we remember an enlightening statement from three pages earlier in the essay, the instruments of measure are clarified: “Стопа стихов—вдох и выдох—шаг” [(2: 367) The metrical foot is the inhalation and the exhalation of the step (400)]. Thus Mandelstam recognized verse metrics in the regularity of his own breath. In addition, Mandelstam, who was known to pace as he created, saw a similar connection between metrics and the step of his pacing. If Mandelstam was having trouble composing “inspired” poetry, he might very well have begun to pace intentionally, thereby stimulating metrics with his step and breath.

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33 For a slightly different reading of this passage, see Cavanagh, pp. 16 and 27.

34 Also in “Conversation About Dante,” Mandelstam writes that the step is linked with breathing (400). Nadezhda Mandelstam, too, has mentioned the close connection between poetry and walking (Hope against Hope 184). Przybylski has remarked upon the fact that “Mandelstam, like Dante, praised steps. For a step is both measure and rhythm” (93).
Mandelstam's poem “Шарманка” [The Barrel Organ] suggests just such a method:

Какой обыкновенный день!
Как невозможно вдохновение—
В мозгу игла, брожу, как тень.

Я бы приветствовал кремень
Точильщика, как избавленье—
Бродяга—я люблю движение.

[What an ordinary day!
How impossible inspiration is—
There is a needle in my brain, I wander, like a shadow.

I would welcome the grinder's
Flint as deliverance. . .
A vagrant, I love motion.]

The lyrical hero of this poem, presumably a poet, looks to movement when inspiration eludes him, finding poetry through the impulse of his step.

Mandelstam's mythopoetic perception of breath and air is also evident throughout the rest of his poetic oeuvre. In his celebrated poem "Дано мне тело" [I have been given a body (1909)], Mandelstam speaks both of the joy of breathing and living and of the eternal pattern (although no longer visible) that his breath makes upon the windowpane. In the poem, the “pattern” left by his breath is in fact his creation, the eternal poetry he has breathed. This early poem of Mandelstam's perfectly reflects that the young poet equated
In concluding this study of Mandelstam's mythology of his creative process, we will now look at five of Mandelstam's poems that contain the specific image of "drinking in" air. Two lines, written a decade apart, refer to clean mountain air: "Я христианства пью холодный горный воздух" [I drink in the cold mountain air of Christianity (1919)] and "Весь воздух выпила огромная гора..." [The enormous mountain drank up all the air (1930)]. The first line was written before Mandelstam became preoccupied with suffocating and simply equates Christianity, like poetry, with breath and air. The second line, however, reveals the poet's fear of the thin mountain air--the air has been used up by the mountain, leaving none for the lyrical persona. The preoccupation with asphyxia is definitely felt in this later poem.

The three other lines about drinking air are as follows: "Отравлен хлеб и воздух выпит" [The bread is poisoned and the air drunk up (1913)]; "Мы в каждом вздохе смертный воздух пьём"[We drink in mortal air in every breath we take (1916)]; "Словою темную воду я пью помутнившийся воздух..." [Like dark water I drink in the turbid air (1920)]. In each of these lines the air has become contaminated. Although this air is potentially lethal, it has nonetheless become the only possibility for inspiring the poet to write. As long as Mandelstam can feel and "drink" any air he knows he can use his voice, even if his auditory imagination, and hence memory, fail him.

Mandelstam once wrote that "Готовая вещь есть не что иное, как каллиграфический продукт, неизбежно остающийся в результате исполнительского порыва" [(2: 413) The finished

35 The metaphor of drinking air is by no means unique to Mandelstam; it can be found, for example, in Pushkin's Пир во время чумы [A Feast during the Plague] when he writes: "И девы-розы пьём дыхание,-- / Быть может...полное Чумы" [And we drink in the breath of the rose-maiden/Possibly full of the plague]. It is very likely that not only Mandelstam's fear of asphyxia but Pushkin's plagued air inspired these poems. Interestingly, and also possibly connected to Pushkin's plague, is that the last year of Mandelstam's life produces a line not about drinking air, but about eating it. This air, too, is neither curative, nor inspiring--it is dead, (like in the poem from 1916): "И, задыхаясь, мертвый воздух ем" [And, gasping, I eat the dead air].
poem is no more than a calligraphic product, the inevitable result of the impulse to perform (442)]. His good friend and fellow poet, Akhmatova, shared a similar view. While she did not work out in prose her thoughts on creativity to the extent Mandelstam did, her notions of poetic creativity--the subject of the next chapter--serve equally well in illuminating certain aspects of her poetry.
CHAPTER 2

ANNA AKHMATOVA: “ПЕЧАЛЬНАЯ МУЗА МОЯ” [MY MELANCHOLY MUSE]

Память в песнях о себе оставлю.
Анна Ахматова, “Ты прости мне, что я плохо правлю”

[I leave traces of myself in my songs.
Anna Akhmatova, “Forgive me that I manage badly” (1927)]

More than any of the other poets in this dissertation and, indeed, perhaps more than any Russian poet at all, it is Anna Akhmatova who creates a cult of the Muse. By modifying the classical Muse, Akhmatova designs a Muse who embodies her particular and evolving conception of poetic inspiration. Numerous poems contain a Muse figure; some of them explicitly name the Muse as such, while others mask her presence.

While the previous chapter relied heavily upon Mandelstam's essays, this study of Akhmatova's mythology of poetic creation will center around the most unequivocal of her notions of inspiration—her Muse-poems, i.e. those in which the Muse is explicitly named. There are twenty-one of these, which will be discussed chronologically and divided into three periods. The division is based, structurally, on notable gaps in the Muse's appearances (5 years and 13 years, respectively) and, contextually, on the significant changes in the Muse that follow her absences. The three periods are: 1912 to 1916, 1921 to 1927 and, finally, 1940 to 1964. I have chosen the chronological approach in order to follow the Muse's development. Since it is unlikely that poets consciously form a
complete notion of their creative processes at the time they become poets (or, for that matter, at any other time in their careers), I present each subsequent Muse-poem as an addition to a developing, evolving image.

After discussing the Muse-poems and indicating which of their themes tie into Akhmatova's mythology of the creative process, I will briefly turn to a number of poems whose subjects are considerably more ambiguous. Examples of these are poems about unnamed figures (female and male) as well as poems directed to an unknown, yet specific, addressee. By noting commonalities between these uncertain figures and the established Muse-persona[s], I will suggest metapoetic readings of these otherwise obscure poems. This approach will show that many of these mysterious figures are, in essence, masked Muses.

The third section of this chapter will continue to discuss the metapoetic by focusing on the highly significant Secrets of the Craft. In the history of Russian verse, this cycle of poetry is probably one of the most comprehensive meditations on the creative process.

The conclusion will show that Akhmatova's mythology of poetic creation stems from the major topos of the lyrical persona-poet: the window at which she sits and awaits both inspiration and romantic meetings alike. What she hears, sees and envisions as she gazes through her window becomes both the stuff of her poetry and its inspiration.

* * *

Poetry came to Akhmatova at an early age. Born in Odessa in 1889 as Anna Gorenko, she and her family moved to Tsarskoe Selo outside of St. Petersburg where by the age of about eleven she was writing lyrical poems. By the time she was fourteen the
poet Nikolai Gumilev was vying for her attentions. They married in 1910 and two years later Akhmatova celebrated two births— that of their son Lev and of her first book of poetry, Вечер [Evening (1912)]. By this time she had taken her great-grandmother's name, Akhmatova, for a pseudonym. The first book, as well as her subsequent collections Чётки [Rosary (1914)] and Белая стая [White Flock (1917)], brought her great success. The many years of Akhmatova's personal hardship and persecution begin not long after the publication of her third book and the Bolshevik Revolution which took place that year. The facts of her various tribulations are well-known: her marriage with Gumilev ends and three years later he is executed; she is prohibited from publishing any poetry for almost 20 years (1923-1940); she lives through another difficult marriage and divorce from V. Shileiko; her son, her third husband (Nikolai Punin), and her dear friend Mandelstam are arrested and sent to labor camps; and she lives out the majority of her life in extreme poverty. The fruit of these years, however, is her remarkable and empowered mature poetry. Akhmatova's life is indeed one of the most famous biographies of twentieth-century Russia. And her work has become one of the most widely read and studied oeuvres of all of Russian literature.

There exists, however, surprisingly little published research on Akhmatova's creative process and Muse. The most complete discussions relevant to my topic can be found in Marion Graf-Schneider's article "Muza' dans l'oeuvre d'Anna Akhmatova" (1981), Wendy Rosslyn's book The Prince, the Fool and the Nunnery (1984), and Nadezhda Mandelstam's Mozart and Salieri (1973).

Although Graf-Schneider is well-versed in this subject, her article is quite simply
too short to be comprehensive. She discusses the majority of Akhmatova’s Muse-poems, but not all. And although her study appears to be chronologically based, there is some skipping about in places. Nevertheless, Graf-Schneider has valid observations and rightly concludes that throughout the years Akhmatova’s Muse gains importance in dimension while losing a certain plasticity.

Rosslyn's book has two sections that have proved to be of particular relevance to my work: one called “The Muse” and the other “The Creative Process.”¹ The first of these sections includes an interesting look at how Akhmatova's Muse is “a confusing combination of the prince and the fool,” in other words, a figure who is both loved and feared (108). In the second of these two sections, Rosslyn discusses the interplay between the secular and religious elements of Akhmatova's creative process--at times, the poet's inspirations sprout from personal pain, at others, they emanate directly from God. Also of interest is Rosslyn's composite portrait of the various elements of Akhmatova's Muse (135, 137). Because Rosslyn's theories are extremely perceptive and engaging yet relatively brief (creativity, after all, is not the main thrust of her book), her readers are left wanting more. Rosslyn's conclusions can be enhanced and extended by considering Akhmatova's entire oeuvre.²

Yet another excellent source on Mandelstam's creativity is Nadezhda Mandelstam's *Mozart and Salieri*. In it, the author focuses on the poet Osip Mandelstam's belief in the co-existence of divine inspiration and craft in the writing of poetry. N.

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¹ See pages 104-115 and 126-139.

² The two sections on creativity concentrate primarily on *Rosary* and *White Flock*, respectively.
Mandelstam speaks of her husband's and Akhmatova's shared preoccupation with the enigma of creativity, drawing comparisons between their creative processes, likening, for instance, their experiences of the onset of inspiration (the former's notion of an "inner theme" and the latter's "prelyrical anxiety") (38).³

My research has also been enhanced by the work of other scholars. In her monograph on Akhmatova, for example, Susan Amert sets out to unravel the secrecy and mystification inherent in the poet's later metapoetry. Among a plethora of provocative readings, Amert's book includes a solid exposition of the cycle Тайны ремесла (Secrets of the Craft)--a poetic cycle highly relevant to Akhmatova's mythology of poetic creation (7-11).

I have also found Viktor Zhirmunsky's work to be very insightful. He has noted and discussed various of the Muse's traits in Akhmatova's poetry, such as her distinctions from the symbolists' conception of the Muse, her classical characteristics (inherited in part via Pushkin), and her often realist portraiture (78-79). Zhirmunsky also demonstrates an interest in Akhmatova's psychology of poetic creation as when he describes the significant role played by her auditory imagination: "При всей своей прекрасной памяти Ахматова, когда писала свои воспоминания—почти через пятьдесят лет после событий,—могла вспомнить только музыкально-поэтические мотивы, послужившие толчком для её творчества ..." [(129) Regardless of her wonderful memory, when she wrote her memoirs almost 50 years later, Akhmatova could remember only the musically-poetic motifs which served as the stimulus for her creative work. . .]

³ A comparison of these can also be made with the prelyrical panic and “frequency” which Brodsky experiences. These notions of Brodsky's are discussed in the next chapter of this dissertation.
Roman Timenchik is yet another scholar who has contributed to the study of Akhmatova's creative process, particularly in his article “Автометаописание у Ахматовой” [Autometapoiesis in Akhmatova's Work]. Timenchik’s theory (reminiscent of Mandelstam's mythology of poetic creation), that at times the rhythm of Akhmatova’s poetry reflects the act of breathing, is of particular relevance to my research (214). Additionally, Timenchik suggests, as I do, approaching the whole of Akhmatova's work as one single text.

Although there are more scholars who have contributed to my work, I will conclude this survey of influences and corroboration with a nod to Tatiana Tsivian's article “Ахматова и музыка” [Akhmatova and Music]. Tsivian discusses Akhmatova's themes of sight and hearing, laying them bare as sources of poetic creation. She places more significance upon sight in Akhmatova's early poetry and depicts the later poetry as a world of sounds and hearing. While I see more sight than Tsivian does in Akhmatova's later period, her work in this area remains seminal.

The considerably limited comprehensive research on Akhmatova's creative process notwithstanding, it is in large part due to the above-mentioned scholars, as well as others yet to be noted throughout the course of this chapter, that I have been able to design a study that is based on solid foundations.

2.1 The Muse Poems

Any poet who employs a Muse is also engaging with the classical notions of her existence. Akhmatova demonstrates an undeniable familiarity with these classical notions through her Muse's resemblance to her classical predecessors. In order to understand
which of her Muse's attributes are borrowed or inherited and which are departures from the
tradition, a brief history of the Muses is in order. The most traditional and familiar
Muse-mythology is very likely akin to that which Thomas Bullfinch has compiled.

Bullfinch introduces the Muses thus:

The Muses were the daughters of Jupiter and Mnemosyne (Memory). They
presided over song, and prompted the memory. They were nine in number, to each
of whom was assigned the precedence over some particular department of literature,
art or science. Calliope was the muse of epic poetry, Clio of history, Euterpe of
lyric poetry, Melpomene of tragedy, Terpsichore of choral dance and song, Erato of
love poetry, Polyhymnia of sacred poetry, Urania of astronomy, Thalia of comedy

Traditionally, the Muses have a number of particular attributes closely associated
with them. One of these is laurel leaves. Another is the lyre, a stringed musical instrument
believed to have been invented by Hermes, who made it out of a tortoise shell and nine
linen cords (the number nine relating to the group of Muses). Hermes presented Apollo
with the instrument and through him it became associated with the muses. (Some sources
say that a shepherd's pipe was also given to Apollo along with the lyre; this pipe, or musical
reed, figures prominently in Akhmatova's Muse mythology.) The lyre is also associated
with the poet Orpheus, who was a son of Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, and, some
sources say, of Apollo. Orpheus was taught by the Muses to play the lyre and his musical
touch was charmed and unequaled. Upon Orpheus's death, Zeus put the deceased's lyre up

4 Hesiod is said to have named the nine Muses, although it was not he who delegated to
them their arts.
5 This tree and its leaves came to be associated with the Muses through Apollo. (The laurel
tree had once been a nymph whom Apollo had pursued.)
6 Bulfinch explains that shells are often symbols for poetry and music because of this origin
(9, n. 3).
among the stars, converting it into a constellation.

Stars are, in fact, closely connected with the mythology of inspiration, undoubtedly due both to the gods' home near the heavens as well as to their representation in the constellations. Although Bullfinch does not suggest this connection, it has been discussed by others, such as Ernst Robert Curtius. Curtius reports that the Muses took on a later interpretation as “divinities of the celestial sphere” whose “song produced the harmony of the spheres” (234). He also writes that

[b]y their favor thought mounts toward the ether, is initiated into the secrets of nature, and comprehends the evolutions of the choir of the stars. It is delivered from the cares of this world, transported to the world of ideas and of beauty, and purified from material passions, And after death the divine virgins summon to themselves in the starry spheres the soul which has sanctified itself in their service, and cause it to share in the blessed life of the Immortals (235).

This celestial connotation, although perhaps not as familiar to the average reader as the earlier, classical connotations, nonetheless influenced much of modern poetry. And so it follows that a poet might look to the stars for inspiration as, indeed, Akhmatova's lyrical persona does on a number of occasions.

There is one final aspect of the Muse that is helpful in interpreting Akhmatova's work, and it has to do with her own interest in folklore and mythology. That is, in classical mythology the Muse is “strongly associated" with Aphrodite and, hence, mermaids (Friedrich, The Meaning of Aphrodite 127). One reason this is important is that the sea, i.e. the source of both the goddess of love, who was born of the foam of the sea, and mermaids, is very much an inspirational topos in Akhmatova's mythopoesis. This association between the Muses and Aphrodite is not talked of often, yet these so-called "structural
variants," or “allomorphs" are commonplace in mythology in general (Friedrich, *The Meaning of Aphrodite* 47). The Muses, for example, started out as nympha, only later becoming goddesses. As nympha, they were highly associated with nature, dancing and singing and thus can be interpreted as having been structural variants of mermaids. Aphrodite's counterpart, the Babylonian goddess Astarte, who is associated with nature, the moon, and stars, is another example of an allomorph. Moreover, both Aphrodite and Astarte have any number of sister-figures, such as Helen of Troy, the sea goddess Thetis, the island nymph Calypso, and the sorceress Circe (Friedrich, *The Meaning of Aphrodite* 47).

Some of Akhmatova's poems depict figures who are, in essence, allomorphs of her Muse, or what I term "masked Muses." In a number of these poems, the Muse is masked as a mermaid or Aphrodite figure. The sensual relationship between the poet and his female Muse becomes confused when the poet is a woman (particularly a heterosexual woman). Fusing the Muse with Aphrodite works toward solving this same-gender issue, for if the goddess of love is one of the Muse's masks, then it follows that she would wax and wane in relation to the comings and goings of the lyrical persona's lovers.

Although his explanation is driven solely by the psychology of the male poet, Lawrence Lipking offers an informing view into the persistence behind Muse mythology. In fact, with all her secrets and abandoned love Lipking's Muse calls to mind Akhmatova's lyrical persona-poet.

Almost as long as poetry has existed, male poets have shared a fantasy: the dream of

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7 Astarte, in fact, is mentioned in *The Golden Bough*, a book Akhmatova read with great interest.
speaking with a woman's voice. Sometimes that fantasy has been embodied in the Muse, the beautiful virgin daughter of Memory who descends in the night, breathes into the passive, instrumental male, and allows him to take dictation. . . . Evidently women know secrets that men are compelled to learn if they wish to be poets. A man by himself can speak with the voice of a hero; he knows about anger and travel and arms and the law. But a woman's voice can strike certain notes better: abandoned love, the fear of being lost. Her register is higher and more piercing than anything a man can reach. Hence male poets express those notes through women. By stealth or force, they borrow a different voice and find that they can speak a different language (127).

Another theory as to the Muse's function is that of the feminist critics, who have interpreted the Muse as a female figure who can be objectified, appropriated and controlled by male poets (DeShazer 2-3). Certainly women poets view their Muses in a great number of ways. Building on Lipking's thoughts, we might see how a Muse-figure serves to hit new registers in the voice of a woman poet. And if the Muse can be a source of empowerment for male poets, as the feminist critics suggest, she can for women poets as well, since she is appropriated by them together with the male-dominated poetic tradition.

Lipking has more to offer us on the same-gender issue of the woman poet and her Muse.8

The female daughter of memory who breathes into the male poet, wrapping him in a cloud of sexual confusion and longing until he takes up his pen and tries to impale her, exerts no spell over women. At one extreme she may even prevent women from writing. A poet who identifies with the Muse or Nature, the objects of desire, may find it impossible to regard herself as subject. She ought to inspire poems, not write them. Some critics have used this dilemma to account for the literary inhibitions of women or to recommend a new model of inspiration in which the Muse transmits her power to women as mother or sister or lover. . . . [A]nother kind of inspiration may be available to the woman poet: not the Muse but the absent lover. The poem fills the empty space the beloved leaves behind; it represents the failure of nature and humankind. . . . Thus women poets create from a sense of loss; the myth, not of hope pursued, but of hope abandoned. To write such poetry

8 It is in the context of the Italian Renaissance poet Gaspara Stampa's poetry that Lipking is discussing the Muse.
requires a bitter knowledge (180).

This theory of Lipking’s is very helpful in understanding the function of Akhmatova’s Muse. Akhmatova is not inhibited by the notion of a Muse, as some women poets have been. Rather, she employs the Muse vigorously—more so, even, than one might think because Akhmatova’s Muse is often masked. As Lipking suggests, the Muse “fills the empty space the beloved leaves behind” (180). It is during her lover’s absence that the Muse appears: as his substitute, as a reflection of the poet, as an emotional care giver, or as a source of escape. Whatever mask she wears or role she plays, her poet can always identify with her because of their shared gender. Even when Akhmatova is empowered by her appropriation of her Muse, it is not an other that she takes possession of but a form of herself.9

2.1.1 “Муза-сестра”[The Sister-Muse]: 1912-1916

It is in 1912 with the poem “Муза” [To the Muse] that Akhmatova’s lyrical persona first meets her Muse and that the image of the Muse-sister is first introduced. At this initial meeting the Muse looks into the face of the poet (“Муза-сестра заглянула в лицо/ взгляде её ясен и ярок” [The Muse, my sister, looked into my face, / Her glance was bright and clear]).10

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9 In a discussion of Akhmatova’s poem “Лотова жена” [Lot’s Wife], Stephanie Sandler suggests that the poet identifies with the female subject of her poem who has been “excluded” and “trivialized” (117). Akhmatova’s Muse is, similarly, a female figure with whom she can identify.

The gaze, one of Akhmatova's most prominent poetic motifs, is here connected with the Muse and inspiration very early on in her poetry. In the Muse's clear and bright gaze there is no trace of the muddled and tortuous earthly love that is evident in the lyrical persona's eyes. For the lyrical persona of Akhmatova's early lyrics, love and poetry are inextricably linked--paradoxically, they are intrinsically related yet are in competition with one another. Both love and poetry share a time--night, when the lover and the Muse visit. And their topoi is the window through which the lyrical persona looks out in expectation of a visitor (her lover or her Muse) and the garden or grove (places of inspiration and of secret rendezvous). Poetry and love each offer the lyrical persona freedom from the other by replacing one another; when love, or loss of it, becomes all-consuming, she turns to poetry and her Muse. And when she struggles with her craft, she turns to her lover, or thoughts of him.

Robert Graves, in his renowned study *The White Goddess*, suggests that a poet comes to know his Muse through "a woman in whom the Goddess is to some degree resident" and that the embodiment of the Muse is the poet's true love (481). In other words, the female lover, representing the Muse, is able to inspire the poet on her own. Such a mythology might seem to presuppose that the poet is a man, yet Graves's ideas are valid regardless of the genders involved. In Akhmatova's early poetry, the lyrical persona's lovers and Muse are quite dependent upon one another.

"Уединение" [Solitude], the second of the Muse-poems, follows two years later, in 1914. With it are added a couple of new elements to Akhmatova's early mythology of poetic creation. For one, the Muse is now physically writing down poetry for the poet, or,
more specifically, finishing a poem: “божественно спокойно и легка / допишет Музы смуглая рука” [The Muse's tawny hand, divinely calm / And delicate, will finish it]. This is a departure from the classical tradition of the Muse, who acts as a go-between for the poet and the divine word but who does not herself partake in the act of writing down poetry. In a sense, Akhmatova's lyrical poet-persona empowers her Muse more than is typical in that she allows her this high degree of active participation. What future does the poet have if the Muses begin writing the poetry?

Another new element is the striking epithet used to describe the Muse's hand: “смуглая” [tawny, dusky]. This attribute has two relevant connotations. First, it is a word commonly used to describe the color of Alexander Pushkin's skin, due to his African ancestry. A further importance of this epithet is that it marries the Muse to nature or, more specifically, to both the night sky and to the darkness of the soil. Additional support for this claim can be found if we skip ahead in time to 1915, to yet another of the early Muse-poems “Муза ушла по дороге” [The Muse fled down the road]. In this later poem the epithet “смуглая” [tawny, dusky] is repeated, but this time to describe not the Muse's arm but her dewy legs: “смуглые ноги, обрызганы крупной росой” [And her dusky feet / Were sprinkled with drops of dew]. As I have said above, the topoi of the Muse are the garden, the grove or the field. All of these are places of nature and Akhmatova's mythology of poetic creation produces a Muse that is born of these places. Not only her dark complexion ties her to the soil and the earth, but her dew-covered body likewise implies a close association with the earth. This connection to nature will continue (excepting a more classical phase in the early '20s) throughout the evolution of Akhmatova's creative process. In fact, in a much later poem,
Akhmatova will describe her Muse as lying in the ground, rotting like grain. In yet another poem, Akhmatova repeats the image of a dew-covered being in a lyric called “Эта встреча никем не воспета” [No one sang about that meeting (1915)]. The Muse-figure is not named in this poem but the dewy addressee has the power to inspire the lyrical persona’s soul with knowledge: “Ты, росой окропляющий травы, / Вестью душу мою оживи,--” [You, sprinkling the grass with dew, / Revive my soul with news--]. Interestingly, the addressee is masculine according to grammatical gender (окропляющий), and so this may serve as an example of the Muse masked as a lover.

There is another possible interpretation of this dew-covered female that I would like to suggest. It is based on the connection between the Muse and Aphrodite that I mentioned above. Friedrich has pointed out that dew is a substance “between air and water” -- like foam (The Meaning of Aphrodite 146). This association can serve to support the connection between the Muse and Aphrodite. Graves connects mermaids, and it would follow Aphrodite, with the Muse. He claims that the mermaid has stood for the bittersweetness of love (386). This suggestion reinforces the idea that Akhmatova's Muse enters after the lover has exited.

Returning to the chronology, to 1914, we discover more about the Muse's demeanor in the third of the Muse-poems, “Был блаженной моей колыбелью” [My blissful cradle was]. The Muse is described as a sorrowful figure in this lyric: “печальная Муза моя, / как слепую,

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11 “А Муза и глюха и слепла, / В земле истлевала зерном” [But the Muse, both deaf and blind, / Rotted in the ground like grain,]. “Забудут?” [They will forget?] (1957).

12 Hesiod, too, associated poetry with dew in his Theogeny where he writes about “sweet dew upon [the] tongue” (qtd. in Trimpi x).
vodila menya" [And my melancholy Muse / led me as one leads the blind]. At this point in the evolution of the Muse-figure, it is unclear to the reader whether the Muse is a sad figure inherently or whether her mood is the result of current circumstance – she could be feeling compassion for her metaphorically blind poet. Note again that this Muse is more active and more powerful than her Classical predecessors; she is taking control and caring for her impaired poet.

Akhmatova worked on the next four Muse-poems during one year, 1915. This, coupled with the fact that the first two Muse-poems were written the previous year, finds Akhmatova at a period in her life when she is contemplating her Muse more strongly than at any other time. In other words, approximately one-third of all of Akhmatova's recorded considerations of her Muse were written during this two-year period. For someone who wrote poetry for over 60 years, this is a remarkable proportion. There are two constants regarding the Muse in all four of these poems: in each, she is associated with nature and is in some way melancholy or serene.

The image of the sorrowful Muse from the year before, 1914, is continued with the next poem, Эпические мотивы [Epic Motifs]. Instead of being led by her Muse, however, as she was in the previous poem, the lyrical persona has now abandoned her Muse and inspirational grove, consequently, is living happily: “Покинув рощи родины священной, / И дом, где Муза Плача изнывала, / Я, тихая, весёлая, жила” [Having forsaken my homeland's sacred groves / And the house where the Muse of Weeping languished, / Tranquil, contented, I live]. The poet has abandoned poetry for love and is searching for her lover, who is a painter. Cutting herself off from her poetic inspiration has not only freed herself from the
angst of writing poems, but has also freed her Muse from having to be immersed in the poet's troublesome love-life. The painter has abandoned his Muse, too, thereby freeing her, as well. This is all suggested in the lines: “Но чувствую, что Музы наши дружны / беспечной и пленительною дружбой, / как девушки, не знавшие любви” [But I feel that our Muses are in harmony / With a lighthearted, charming friendship, / Like girls who have not yet known love]. Poetry for the young Akhmatova was so much an outlet for the angst of her love-life that it in itself could become oppressive; in fact, it began to weaken her Muse. Only a person who has never known love can be truly happy and so the lyrical persona imagines freeing her weeping Muse from their union and, in doing so, granting her happiness.

In the fifth Muse-poem, called “Ведь где-то есть простая жизнь и свет” [Somewhere there is a simple life and a world], also from 1915, Akhmatova writes the following lines: “бессолнечные, мрачные сады / И голос Музы еле слышный” [The sunless, gloomy gardens, / And, barely audible, the Muse's voice]. Once again, the Muse is found in nature, and not in a bright and colorful space but one gloomy either because of weather or, more likely still, because it is night. These lines also tell us for the first time that the Muse has a voice, something we would have expected of a classically-inspired Muse. Of particular interest however, is the fact that her voice is barely audible. Does this difficulty in hearing the Muse suggest a struggle for inspiration, or, conversely, that the poet is the only one capable of hearing the Muse's voice? The rest of the poem suggests that both of these possible readings are correct. There is a more joyful life than the solemn and difficult one in which the lyrical persona lives, but she would not trade her life for this other one. Thus, she sets herself apart from others; she is a chosen one, capable of hearing the Muse. Yet, she admits that hers is a
difficult life, which implies struggles with her craft.

Through the next 1915 Muse-poem, “За чем притворяешься ты...” [Why do you pretend to be], we are given another rare glance at the Muse’s appearance: “И Муза в дырявом платке” [And the Muse, in a ragged scarf]13. The Muse wears a tattered scarf which, like the dark complexion and the dewy body, can connect her to nature. This Muse of Akhmatova’s lyrical persona lives among the elements in nature; wind and rain could have taken their toll on her clothing. An alabaster-skinned Muse in flawless dress would have no place in this first stage of the Muse's development.

This same poem also adds to the development of the Muse's actions. To review, these began with gazing, changed to silent writing, to leading the lyrical persona down a path, to finding a voice, to, with this poem, singing: “Протяжно поет и уныло” [Sings despondently and at length]. Note, however, that although the Muse is now singing, her demeanor remains solemn. In fact, if we read further in the poem we discover that this Muse's power over the lyrical persona is akin to the melancholy of young, angst-ridden heartbreak: “В жестокой и юной тоске / Её чудотворная сила” [In hard and youthful anguish / Is her miraculous strength]. This is another example of the Muse masked as a lover.

Chronologically speaking, “Муза ушла по дороге” [The Muse fled down the road] is the next of the early Muse poems. In this lyric, the Muse-figure's direct speech is quoted for the first time: she comments on the non-freedom of the poet's world, i.e. the world of earthly love with which she, the Muse, is in competition: “Ведь здесь могила, / Как ты можешь еще дышать?” [“It's a tomb here, / How can you still manage to breathe?”]. The world of earthly

13 Hemschemeyer's translation reads “a ragged dress”; since the Russian word “платок” means “scarf,” I have altered the translation.
love, as we were told in the first of the Muse-poems “Музe” [To the Muse], clouds a person's gaze; now we learn that it is also suffocating.\footnote{The motif of breath is indeed connected with Akhmatova's mythology of poetic creation and although “Муза ушла по дороге” [The Muse fled down the road] is the first Muse-poem to speak of it, the motif has been connected to poetry in an even earlier lyric by Akhmatova, “Не будем пить” [We will not drink] (1913). This poem contrasts day and night, the latter being the creative period for the lyrical persona, a time when she is able to breathe the by moon: “Ты дышишь солнцем, а я дышу луной / . . . В твоих стихах мое дыхание веет” [You breathe by the sun, I breathe by the moon, / . . .In your verses my breath beats]. The motif of suffocation also plays a role in Mandelstam's and Brodsky's mythologies of poetic creation. See the specified sections in the chapters on these poets.}

Another very important aspect of Akhmatova's mythology of poetic creation appears in “Муза ушла по дороге” [The Muse fled down the road]: the symbol of the bird. The metaphor of the bird has often stood both for the poet and his work and is, in fact, used by Mandelstam and Brodsky, as well. In this Muse-poem, the lyrical persona wants to present her Muse with a dove (an attribute of Aphrodite and thus symbolizing love), but the dove flies to the Muse before it can be offered as a present, and in doing so denies the poet her gift.\footnote{Interestingly, Akhmatova uses the specific species of the dove when she describes her intended gift (“Я голубку ей дать хотела” [I wanted to give her a dove]), but that once the dove has dashed her hopes, it becomes an unspecified bird (“но птица сама полетела/за стройной гостей моей”[But the bird itself flew / After my slender guest]).}

By having the dove of its own volition leave with the Muse, Akhmatova is emphasizing both her Muse's independence from the poet and her harmony with nature.

“Всё отнято” [Everything has been cut off (1916)] is the last of the early Muse-poems. The second of its three stanzas presents a sorrowful Muse but suggests that this mood is not typical of her:

Весёлой Музы нрав не узнаю:
Она глядит и слова не пророчит
А голову в веночке тёмном клонит
Изнеможенная, на грудь мою.

[ I cannot recognize my once-happy Muse:
She stares and won't utter a word,
And her head, in a dark wreath, rests,
Exhausted, on my breast]

This lyric yet again begs the comparison between the Muse and lover. The Muse steps in to replace the lover once he is gone and in this way she is present while the lyrical persona is experiencing heartbreak. Note the opening line of this poem: “Всё отнято: и сила, и любовь” [Everything has been cut off: both strength and love]. The lover is gone but the Muse has replaced him—she leans her head upon her poet's breast in an intimate gesture. Poetry steps in when love is absent. This very poem results from a break-up.

This last of the early Muse-poems heralds some variation in Akhmatova's mythology. The dark wreath that crowns the Muse's head further signifies her convergence with nature since it is presumably made of leaves and perhaps flowers. The fact that it is dark echoes her dark complexion as well as the blackness of her nocturnal visits. It also looks ahead to the dark, autumnal world of Akhmatova's mature poetry.

2.1.2 “Милая гостья” [The Kind Guest]: 1921-1927

Generally speaking, the composite Muse of 1921-1927 has become more classically-inspired than the one of 1912-1916 and the poet has become less emotionally
attached to her. There are five Muse-poems written during this second period, three of which are from 1921. This means that after five years of not having written, at least frankly, about her Muse, Akhmatova suddenly and conspicuously returns to her. Her renewed interest in the subject becomes even more obvious once the more specific dates of the Muse-poems are noted: the first two were written in August, that is, within one month of each other, and the third only two months later, in October. There were some highly significant events from that August that may have acted as impulses toward the Muse's return. Gumilev's arrest and execution, as well as Aleksandr Blok's death, all happened in this one month. The fates of these poets and close friends of Akhmatova surely led her to contemplate more fully what it meant to be a poet.

The first of these 1921 Muse-poems was written after the break-up with Arthur Lourie, which was undoubtedly the initial impulse for the poem. Like her earlier Muse-poems, it presents love and poetry as capable of replacing one another. The loss of love in this poem ("Кое-как удалось разлучиться" [Somehow we've managed to part]) is not debilitating because the lyrical persona can not only turn to poetry, her other love, but can literally become poetically inspired by the actual loss of love. The second of the four stanzas shows the poet not alone with her sorrow but in the company of both her Muse and a personified female fame-figure:

Я-то вольная. Всё мне забава,--
Ночью Муза слетит утешать,
А наутро притащится слава
Погремушкой над ухом трещать.
[I'm willing. It's all fun for me--
At night the Muse flies down to comfort me,
And in the morning, fame drags herself here
To sound her rattle in my ear.]

The Muse is now able to comfort her poet because she has been emotionally distanced -- her role has changed from sister to dear guest. She would not have been able to offer solace if she herself were sharing the lyrical persona's angst in sisterly fashion. In the earlier poem "Всё отнято" [Everything has been cut off], the Muse was dejected and exhausted, mirroring the poet's reaction to heartbreak; she was not at all in a position to comfort her poet. By the second period, the lyrical persona has distanced herself from the emotional tie she previously had with her Muse--nowhere in this poem is the Muse's mood noted because the relationship between them is not based on emotion any longer. The comfort that the Muse now provides is that of being occupied with poetic composition, of not having to dwell idly on lost love. Akhmatova's matured Muse, then, has become more traditionally classical in the sense that she is less human, i.e., less emotional. Hesiod, in fact, depicted the Muses as having, in Trimpi's words, an "immunity from care, . . . a necessary condition of artistic freedom from obligations which might otherwise restrict the activities of the Muses" (xvii).

The Muse's ability to fly in this poem further removes her from the earlier sister-role. This power makes her more divine and, simultaneously, might again suggest an affinity with nature or, more precisely, birds. In connection with the earlier Muse-poem "Муза ушла по дороге" [The Muse fled down the road], I noted that birds have long been
metaphors for poetry. Of Akhmatova's early poems, there are two that most significantly marry birds and poetry. In one, the lyrical persona says that a man has killed her white bird so as to silence it, and in another she metaphorically casts herself as a caged bird that no longer sings. The bird clearly stands for the Muse/poetry in the former poem and for the poet in the latter. Moreover, the title of her second book, Белая стая [White Flock], metaphorically refers to the poems contained within it. In "Somehow we've managed to part," then, emphasis is placed upon the Muse's otherness and caring.

The next of the three 1921 Muse-poems is distinct in that there is not one Muse but a number of them: "А я иду чудесным садом, / Где шелест трав и восклицанья муз" [But a miraculous garden I go to claim, / Where grass rustles and the Muses exclaim]. In classical mythology there are, of course, nine Muses—a fact to which, until this poem, Akhmatova has not alluded. The multiple muses might suggest a waning egoism on the part of the maturing poet as she begins to acknowledge the shared privilege of poetic inspiration with other poets.

It is because of heartache that the lyrical persona goes to the garden to search out poetic inspiration and the muses that breathe it. Another form of inspiration she finds in this garden is the sound of rustling grasses. In classical mythology, such rustling leaves and grasses typically signify the Muse's presence. Although this is the first time that nature's rustling appears in one of Akhmatova's Muse-poems, these sounds are a recurring motif throughout Akhmatova's poetry: as early as 1911 an "old oak rustles about the past"; in 1916 it is wild birches that are heard; in Requiem she writes that "Summer's ardent rustling / Is

16 Hemschemeyer has not preserved the plural noun in her translation so I have altered the line.
like a festival outside my window." Pines are perhaps her most constant source of botanical inspiration, appearing throughout her oeuvre from 1916 through the early sixties. Toward the end of her life, Akhmatova reveals one of the secrets behind nature's rustling: “For me, Komarovo's pines / Speak a language all their own." With the motif of rustling leaves, Akhmatova has once again drawn from classical Muse-mythology; but she has varied this mythology ever so slightly by empowering nature as a source of inspiration independent from the Muse.

The final Muse-poem of 1921 is “Я гибель накликала милым” [I brought disaster to my dear ones]. In this poem, the lyrical persona laments her many deceased loved ones. As mentioned above, it is probable that the events of August inspired this topic. The lyrical persona feels that her poetry is in some way responsible for their deaths -- that those whom she loved and wrote about were those who died.

It was fairly common for classical poetry to begin with an appeal to the Muse, a request for poetic inspiration. “Я гибель накликала милым” [I brought disaster to my dear ones] contains such a classical appeal to the Muse, but the twists, so to speak, that Akhmatova puts on this tradition are that the appeal comes at the end of the poem instead of the beginning and that it is not so much an appeal for inspiration as an appeal not to inspire: “О, Муза, его не зови, / Да будет живым, невоспетым / Моей не узнавший любви” [O Muse, don't call him, / Let him live unsung, / Unaware of my love]. Perhaps the object of her love will be saved if she is not inspired to write about her love for him.

Three years after these three Muse-poems, Akhmatova writes her famous “Муза“
[The Muse].\textsuperscript{17} The poem reads:

\begin{quote}
Когда ночью жду её прихода,
Жизнь, кажется, висит на волоске.
Что почесть, что юность, что свобода
Пред милой гостей с дудочкой в руке.
И вот вошла. Откинув покрывало,
внимательно взглянула на меня.
Ей говорю: “Ты ли Данту диктовала
Страницы Ада?” Отвечает: “Я.”
\end{quote}

[When at night I await her coming,
It seems that life hangs by a strand.
What are honors, what is youth, what is freedom,
Compared to that dear guest with rustic pipe in hand.

And she entered. Drawing aside her shawl
She gazed attentively at me.
I said to her: “Was it you who dictated to Dante
The pages of \textit{The Inferno}?” She replied: “It was I.”]

As usual, it is night when the poet feels her Muse’s presence. This poem is evenly divided, structurally, between anticipation of the Muse’s arrival and her actual presence. She is now termed a милая гость [dear guest] and carries with her another classical emblem, the pipe,

\textsuperscript{17} The poem will become part of a considerably later cycle “Тайны ремесла” [Secrets of the Craft].
suggesting that poetic inspiration can be found through music. Akhmatova was, in fact, very interested in the creative processes of composers \(^{18}\) and her Muse certainly inspires through or with music. In one of the 1915 Muse-poems, as discussed above, the Muse used her voice to create music \(^{19}\)--this poem implies that she also creates music with an instrument.

Music and rustling leaves, then, both act as creative impulses -- but these are not the only sounds capable of producing poetic creativity. Just like Mandelstam, Tsvetaeva, and so many others, Akhmatova's sense of hearing is vital to the production of her poems. For these poets, sounds, in general, serve to stimulate poetic creation. Paul Friedrich has theorized about sounds and music in Akhmatova's poetry and, consequently, in her mythology of poetic creation:

... her poems, even more than is usual for poetry, are saliently about the sounds of which they are constituted; this phonic self-reflexivity derived in good measure from the primacy accorded to musical sound in symbolism, which decisively formed her earlier work, but it also reflects her own sensitivity to sound in any sense. Like Blok, she felt there was not a sharp line between the sounds of music and the linguistic sounds of poetry, of conversation, of different languages, and even of nonlinguistic sounds such as street sounds and the knelling of bells (*Music in Russian Poetry* 174).\(^{20}\)

The “phonic self-reflexivity” found in Akhmatova's poems is indeed a kind of textual evidence of the auditory process of her inspiration; let us not forget, however, that what

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\(^{18}\) For an informed discussion of the role of music in Akhmatova, see Friedrich, *Music in Russian Poetry* (171-182).

\(^{19}\) “Зачем притворяешься ты...” [Why do you pretend to be... ] (1915).

\(^{20}\) For a discussion of “phonic self-reflexivity” in Mandelstam's poetry (which is more prevalent even than in Akhmatova's poetry), see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.
might be termed “visual self-reflexivity” is of equal, if not greater, importance to this poet's mythology of poetic creation. The interaction in this poem between the Muse and poet begins with a look (“внимательно взглянула на меня” [She gazed attentively at me]), until the poet initiates verbal interaction.\textsuperscript{21} Anatoly Nayman has commented upon the relevance of this particular line, believing it to contribute to the plasticity of the Muse: “The words [...] take the description of the Muse's arrival out of the sphere of the imagination, just as Dante's contemporaries did not imagine that he had been there, but were sure that he had been” (94). The Muse's concise answer to the poet's query is very revealing: from it, the reader understands that the lyrical persona shares Dante's greatness: they share the same Muse but, concomitantly, share the hellish burden of the poet gift. Another of Dante's great admirers, Mandelstam, viewed poetry's bitter sweetness as "наше мученье и наше богатство" [our torment and our wealth].\textsuperscript{22}

Akhmatova's readers are once again privy to the Muse's visitation when she enters the poet's room three years later, in 1927, wearing white clothing ("в одежде белой").\textsuperscript{23} Gone now is the tattered clothing of the young Muse of nature. This meeting takes place indoors, as did the previous Muse-poem. It may be that the increasing overlap with the classical tradition has helped to create a less organic, more sterile and angelic Muse. (Indeed, the

\textsuperscript{21} “Музе” [To the Muse, 1912] and “Муза” [The Muse, 1924], for example, also begin with looks and gazes.

\textsuperscript{22} “Батюшков” [Batiushkov (1932)].

\textsuperscript{23} Hemschemeyer, gives an earlier date (1925) for “О, знала ли я, когда в одежде белой ...” [Oh, if only I'd known, when, dressed in white...]. I have chosen to use the dates supplied by the Russian edition of her poetry published by Ellis Lak, a more recent and more authoritative publication than the translated one.
winged Muse from “Ко́е-как удалось разлучиться” [Somehow we've managed to part] could also be the Muse masked as an angel since she is winged and provides a gesture of comfort.) The epithet “смуглая”[tawny, dusky] has not been repeated since 1915 and there is no nature imagery in this poem; this fact, coupled with the increasing classicism of the Muse, suggests a movement away from Akhmatova's young sisterly Muse of nature. Although I earlier suggested that through her wings the Muse had been masked as a bird and that this tied her to nature, it is important to point out that the only possible nature imagery in this second group of Muse-poems has been this potential bird connection. Realizing the absence of nature in this stage of the Muse, we might look for other possible winged inspirations, such as angels. Such an association might fit better with the classical notion of the Muse and, hence, the composite portrait of this Muse.

The arrival of the Muse is overdue; Akhmatova had not produced much poetry in the couple of years before this. The Muse's entrance also suggests a hint of intimacy (recalling the lover) by the simple fact that she is entering the lyrical persona's narrow, cramped room, very likely at night (“Входила Муза в тесный мой приют” [The Muse entered my narrow room]). The reader is witness to the Muse's act of inspiration as the lyrical persona takes up her lyre, a metaphor for composing poetry. The poet is herself active in this instance of poetic creation -- it is her human, living (“живые”) hands that grab the long-dormant instrument, thus imparting life into it once again: “к лире, навсегда окаменелой, Мои живые руки припадут” [That my living hands would cling / To a lyre turned to stone].

This lyric shows poetic creation at its most cooperative -- that is, as a joint pursuit. The Muse's role, traditionally, has been that of mediator: “By telling us of things beyond
our powers of perception, through their mediation, the Muses increase human knowledge by enabling us to communicate, through their mediation, with the remoteness of the divine” (Trimpi 116). In Akhmatova's early poems, the Muse was more than a divine ambassador: she dominated the poems by writing them down, as in “Уединение” [Solitude], and by allowing her emotions to become subjects of the poems themselves. As a “Kind Guest,” however, the Muse has relinquished her lead role for a supporting one -- her appearance in this second set of poems is limited to her arrivals, i.e. she becomes the Classical harbinger of poetic inspiration. In the next and last set of poems, the Muse will change again, as, living through many torments together, she and her poet grow old side by side.

2.1.3 “Моею музой оказалась мука” [Torment proved to be my Muse]: 1940-64

For almost a decade Akhmatova's Muse disappears from her poems. This second absence coincides with difficult historical and personal events in Akhmatova's life, such as enforced collectivization and Stalin's purges; poverty, friends' deaths and her son's arrest. Although Akhmatova was barred from publishing poetry during these years, she did continue to write. In her biography of the poet, Roberta Reeder notes that by 1935 Akhmatova felt an “emptiness,” a “sense that her Muse had forsaken her.” Reeder also quotes a friend of Akhmatova's, Nina Olshevskaia, who had been told by the poet: “I probably have already written everything [I ever will]. Poems no longer come into my head” (204-205). Poems did, in fact, return to her, though they were of a different sort and their arrival was through a changed Muse:

In 1936 I began to write again, but my handwriting changed, my voice sounded different, and my life passed under the reigns of a Pegasus which somehow reminds one of the apocalyptic White Horse or Black Horse of poems that were yet to be
born—a return to my first style is impossible. Whether it is better or worse one cannot judge (qtd. in Reeder 211).

In the beginning of 1936, Akhmatova traveled to Voronezh to stay with Mandelstam and his wife, Nadezhda. This visit, and the state in which she found her friend “Osia,” inspired Akhmatova to write “Воронеж” [Voronezh]. With this poem, a Muse appears again in Akhmatova’s work—as for the first time in nine years—but it is not the same Muse whose development I have been tracing so far; this Muse is Mandelstam’s. Like Akhmatova’s poem in which her Muse flies down to comfort the lyrical persona, this Muse provides comfort to the poet by occupying his mind with inspiration—thereby replacing his fear: “А в комнате опального поэта/ дежурят страх и Муза в свой черёд” [But in the room of the poet in disgrace, / Fear and the Muse keep watch by turns]. It is not for another four years, in 1940 (a year that Rosslyn has called “the most important year in the evolution of [Akhmatova’s] art”), that Akhmatova’s own lyrical hero will again meet with her Muse (The Speech of Unknown Eyes 45).

Henry Gifford has discussed two periods in Akhmatova’s poetic career that were particularly prolific—namely, 1921 and 1940. These years also happen to mark the Muse-figure’s returns. Gifford writes:

On 23 January [1940] a haggard and worn Akhmatova told Chukovskaia that she was getting no sleep and writing “the whole night through.” This burst of compulsive activity lasted for the whole of January. In March there was a second visitation; then in May, on a lesser scale, and in August and September. What had happened is similar to her outpouring of poetry in 1921... In the latter part of [1940] probably the “blackest days of Akhmatova’s life” were to ensue (47).

This synchronism of Muse-poems and poetic prolificacy supports my contention that traces of Akhmatova’s mythology of poetic creation pervade her work. In the above quote,
Gifford also points to the “black days” that are yet to come—these days will be reflected in Akhmatova's poetry and, it follows, in her mythology of poetic creation: the final group of Muse-poems lays bare the bleakest images of Akhmatova's Muse.

It is with the 1940 poem Путем всев земли [The Way of All the Earth] that Akhmatova's lyrical persona finally rejoins her Muse -- if only briefly.24 (The image of the Muse will not visit her again for some twenty years and when she does her role will have changed immensely.) Not surprisingly, the lyrical persona greets this long-awaited reunion in earnest; not so, however, her Muse, who scoffs at her poet's solemn oath of fidelity. Note that the Muse's emotion has again become the subject of the poem, as it tended to be in Akhmatova's early poems. This, however, is a very different emotion from that of the early, melancholy sister-figure. The emotions of the Muse and her poet are no longer in harmony with one another; the separation seems to have ruptured their former alliance:25

Над мёртвой медузой
Смущенно стою;
Здесь встретилась с музой,
Ей кляту даю,
Но громко смеётся,
Не верит – 'Тебе ль?...'  
По капелькам льётся
Душистый апрель.

24 For more on this poem, see Haight, 116-117.

25 Amert, “Predystoria”, 13: “The persona... encounters a mocking, incredulous Muse, the antithesis of the nurturing Muse figure in ‘V to vremia’ [1913]” Amert, too, has observed this rupture: “The failed return to the Black Sea idyll in Putem vseia zemli is emblematic of a rupture with the past, and it bespeaks the inadequacy of ‘V to vremia’ [At that Time] as a personal myth of origins for Akhmatova in 1940” (13).
[Over a dead medusa,
Baffled, I stand;
It was here I met the Muse,
Swearing my fidelity.
But she laughs loudly,
Not believing: “Really, to you?”
Drop by drop,
Sweet-smelling April spills.]

The oath and the skepticism surrounding it sound more like an exchange between lovers than between a poet and her Muse. I have said that Akhmatova's dew-covered Muse recalls Aphrodite, who was conventionally held to be born from sea foam. In placing her Muse by the sea, Akhmatova may again be connecting her to Aphrodite. Also in support of this Muse-Aphrodite conflation are the lines immediately following the Muse's quoted speech, which read: “По капелькам льётся / Душистый апрель” [Drop by drop, Sweet-smelling April spills.]. Here, the Muse's appearance is accompanied by fragrant air, another fact which binds her to Aphrodite, who has been described as “diagnostically floral" and as being clothed in fragrant garments.⁶ Akhmatova has, in fact, an early poem appealing to Aphrodite, just as one might to the Muse. In it, the poet offers to compose a dance for the goddess if she will visit her. If Akhmatova’s Muse, then, is at times conflated with the goddess of love, the Muse's conflation with the lover is also one between Aphrodite and

⁶ Stasinus of Cyprus, Cyprian Lays. (Quoted in Friedrich, The Meaning of Aphrodite
the lover. This in part explains the potentially problematic gender issue.

Through the dead medusa ("Над мёртвой медузой / смущенно стою" [Over a dead medusa / Baffled, I stand]), the Muse has another connection to the sea. Susan Amert has pointed out that this medusa: harks back to the descriptions of nature in "V to vremia" [At that time. . .] and U samogo moria [At the Edge of the Sea]. The latter contains the lines:

И заплывали в бухту медузы--
Словно звёзды, упавшие за ночь,
Глубоко под водой голубели.

[And medusas floated into the bay --
Like stars that had fallen at night,
Deep under the water they glowed blue.]

Amert goes on to say:

The medusas presage the appearance of the poet's Muse: just seven lines later, the persona says that she began dreaming of a 'devushka...s dudochkoi beloi' [a maiden . . .with white pipes]. "V to vremia" [At that time. . .] confirms this link between the medusa and the Muse, by likening the words of the Muse to falling stars: "A slova-/Kak zvezdy padali sentiabr'skoi noch'iu." [. . .but her words / Fell like stars in the September night] (n. 2: 24-25).

Stars certainly are a major motif throughout Akhmatova's poetic oeuvre. They induce poetic creativity in Akhmatova's lyrical persona in that they are representative of the time of poetic inspiration (night) and of the place from which poetic inspiration descends (the heavens). But besides thematically linking stars with the Muse, the medusas in this poem
are also significant in that they have died. It is possible that they were dead before the Muse's appearance, but it seems more likely that their death is in some way a result of her disturbing visit. This “mature” Muse of Akhmatova's will become increasingly connected with death and somber imagery in general.

The Muse will now disappear yet again and, barring one exception, is not mentioned for another dozen years. After her behavior in “Путем всёя земли” [The Way of All the Earth], perhaps it is the poet who has abandoned her Muse and not vice-versa. It is significant that in 1940, the same year as “Путем всёя земли” [The Way of All the Earth], Akhmatova begins work on her remarkable Поэма без героя [Poem Without a Hero]. With the advent of this poem, the Muse's role in Akhmatova's mythology of poetic creation lessens considerably. That is, although the Muse will be mentioned in six more poems, it is Poetry itself that takes over visiting -- the Muse's mediation becomes virtually unnecessary.

Note the often-quoted introduction to Поэма без героя [Poem Without a Hero]:

Она пришла ко мне в ночь на 27 Декабря 1940 г., прислав, как вестника, ещё осенью один небольшой отрывок (про актёрку). Я не звала её. Я даже не ждала её в тот холодный и тёмный день моей последней ленинградской зимы (3: 91).

[The first time this poem came to me was on the night of December 27, 1940, in the Fountain House, having sent, that autumn, one small fragment as a messenger . . . I did not summon it. I was not even expecting it on that dark, cold day of my last winter in Leningrad.]

The subject (“она”[she]) of this introduction is the poem itself, not the Muse. There is, actually, reference made to the muses in but it is intentionally downplayed. That is, instead of the figure of the Muse that Akhmatova's readers have come to know, it is all nine of the muses who are referred to in Поэма без героя [Poem Without a Hero] -- in number although
not name:

А сейчас бы домой скорее,
Камероновой Галерее
В ледяной таинственный сад,
Где безмолвствуют водопады,
Где все девять мне будут рады,
Как бывал ты когда-то рад.

[And now to go home quickly,
Through the Cameron Gallery
To the icy, mysterious garden
Where the waterfalls are silent,
Where all the nine will be glad to see me,
As you were once glad]

In Путем всея земли [The Way of All the Earth] the Muse scoffed at the suggestion of a monogamous relationship. Now, in defining her inspiration in terms of “the nine" rather than “my Muse," the poet tries her hand at a rejection of her Muse.27 (Granted, Akhmatova's Muse must be included in the nine and so the lyrical persona does not deny her Muse entirely.)28 This description reads as a slight return to Akhmatova's

27 Of course, the reading that I suggest of these lines is not evident outside of the chronological context of the other Muse poems.

28 Thus far there has been only one other instance in which the poet does not single out her Muse: the 1921 poem discussed above “Пусть голоса органа грянут” [Let the voice of the organ
depersonalized and classical conception of the Muse of the 1920s; here, inspiration is defined simply by the presence of the muses in their otherworldly garden.

Akhmatova wrote that the impulse for this poem was something Pushkin had written, namely: “Only the first lover leaves the impression on a woman, like the first casualty in a war” (qtd. in Reeder 384). Here again we see that, for Akhmatova, inspiration recalls lost love--poetic creativity replaces love’s presence. Lidia Chukovskaia, in fact, commented upon her friend’s attitude toward this poem when she said, “Evidently in her tragic, tormented life, the Poem is the only ray of hope, the only illusion of happiness” (qtd. in Reeder 376).

The tragedy and torment experienced by Akhmatova in these years is strongly felt in her poetry. There is significant focus, for example, on “disfiguration through violence” in Akhmatova's work of the fifties, as Susan Amert has noted (149). This general increase in morbidity has no uncertain effect upon Akhmatova's Muse. In 1952, while she is still working on “Поэма без героя” [Poem without a Hero] and a dozen years after “Путем всевозможной земли” [The Way of all the Earth], Akhmatova writes that her Muse is dead. She apparently did not expect this news to come as a surprise to her readers. On the contrary, the next of the Muse-poems, “Черепки” [Shards], reveals not the actual news of the death but only the wish that it had been kept secret:

Кому и когда говорила,
Зачем от людей не таю,
Что каторга сына сгноила,

again burst forth]. Interestingly, these two depictions of inspiration are similar beyond the plurality of muses in that each description contains little more than the muses’ presence in some type of esoteric garden.
Что Музу засекли мою.

[When and to whom did I talk?
Why didn't I hide from people
that my son was rotting in the camps,
that they flogged my Muse to death.]

Although none of the previous Muse-poems revealed the shocking news of her Muse's death, those readers who are familiar with Akhmatova's biography would have understood at approximately what point, for what reasons, and by whose hand this brutal "murder" occurred. This understanding on the part of her readers is greatly due to the fact that Akhmatova shaped her biography, partook in that act of жизнетворчество [life-creation] prevalent among any number of poets and artists of the symbolist period. 29 In discussing this very concept of Akhmatova's self-creation, Alexander Zholkovsky has suggested that during this period of her life the poet envisioned herself as "locked in a direct and mortal combat with Stalin the supreme villain" (63). The “they” who flogged and killed her Muse in “Черепки” [Shards] is of course a transparent reference to Stalin and his cronies, the secret police. Yet what makes the poem that much more powerful an allegation is the indirectness of the announcement, the non-announcement, as it were. Akhmatova's readers cannot help but nod their heads in agreement, thinking: yes, I should have known, or did know, that her Muse had perished by their hands. Her question about not having

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29 For further reading on this idea of self-creating, see Irina Paperno and Joan Grossman, eds. Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism. Stanford: Stanford UP,
kept her torment a secret is obviously rhetorical (indeed, there is not even a question mark): her sadness is very much the stuff of her self-guided biography.

In 1946, Akhmatova had been at the height of her "systematic official victimization" by the Soviet State (Zholkovsky 56). In 1950, she submitted to her oppressors and wrote a cycle of patriotic poetry that was published in Ogonek. The flogging had been going on for years--I suggest that her Muse breathed her last breath when desperation replaced true poetic inspiration, producing "In Praise of Peace."

Throughout the next few years, Akhmatova continues to find her inspiration in sources other than her Muse. In fact, the only Muse metioned at all is an “epistolary” Muse, brought up once in a conversation with Lidia Ginzburg and once in a letter to her son in 1953. Both times Akhmatova refers to her modern Muse's space as the post office (Reeder 308, 316).

Although absent for five more years, Akhmatova's former sister-figure and source of comfort is remembered in 1957 with the poem “Забудут” [They will forget]. In general, the poem's images are still somber and morbid, yet its ending is graced with hope.

А Муза и глохла и слепла,
В земле истлевала зерном,
Чтоб снова, как Феникс из пепла,
В эфире восстать голубом.

[But the Muse, both deaf and blind,
Rotted in the ground, like grain,]
Only, like the Phoenix from the ashes,
To rise into the blue ether again.]

By metaphorically describing the Muse's corpse as rotting grain, Akhmatova is revisiting her early Muse of nature, a Muse who has returned to the soil that had so marked her complexion. Her Muse had been lifeless for many years but her death had had a purpose: She died in order that [чтоб] she rise again.

The Phoenix in this poem refers to an ancient legendary bird that has found its way into many poems over the ages, including those by Ovid, Shakespeare, and Milton. The Russian Жар-птица [Firebird], a stock character in folk-tales, is very likely an extension of the Phoenix. Akhmatova compares her Muse's ressurection to the Phoenix who emerged, born again, from the ashes. Yet the Russian legends of the Firebird offer a more penetrating interpretation of the Muse's resurrection. The Firebird, according to legend, had been a young and beautiful woman, Marushka, whose skill at embroidery surpassed all others'. She was turned into the Firebird by an embittered Kashchei the Deathless after she refused to dedicate her art solely to him. She then willfully gave up her life by shedding her extraordinary feathers. This legend provides a subtext to the Muse's death and possible resurrection in that: 1) Marushka, similar to the Muse, was a kind of female mediator between Art and those who appreciate art; and that 2) Akhmatova's Muse was killed by a system that supressed and confined the arts, just as Marushka was ultimately killed by a sorcerer with a similar agenda.

30 It is well-known that Akhmatova had a great knowledge of folklore and she incorporated it into her work frequently.
Another possible subtext for this stanza of “Забудут” [They will forget] is the biography of Akhmatova's son. After spending years in Soviet prison camps, Lev Gumilev was freed on May 14, 1956 and on June 2 of that year he was exonerated officially. A couple of months before his release, in a letter to his good friend Emma Gershtein, Gumilev had written that he felt his possible release to be “like the Resurrection” (Reeder 310). It is very likely that Gershtein shared the contents of this letter with Akhmatova. It is highly possible that this comment of her son's played into Akhmatova's poem “Забудут” [They will forget]. A further possible connection between this poem and Lev Gumilev is that he, in the previous Muse-poem, had been described as “rotting” in prison, just as the Muse in this poem is described as “rotting” in the grave. Two different verbs are used to express this rotting (стонуть and истлевать, respectively) yet the images remain the same. Thus it seems that Akhmatova's Muse during this period of her life followed a similar path as her son, concomitantly disappearing from her life into a world of decay only to find freedom and rebirth simultaneously as well. Although Akhmatova is often cast by literary historins an uncaring mother, her son was surely a source of inspiration for her at certain periods of her life.

It might be expected that the Muse's rebirth would be cause for celebration; her return, however, was anything but this: Akhmatova writes only four more Muse-poems after “Забудут”[They will forget], two placing the Muse in an undisputably negative light, one possibly not concerning her own Muse at all, and one speaking sparingly and indifferently of multiple muses. Chronologically, the next poem (the fifth in this period) is from a cycle entitled “Памяти Бориса Пастернака” [To the Memory of the Poet] and was
written in June of 1960 after receiving news of her Pasternak's death. Although the Muse in this poem is Pasternak's, she evokes similar images and connotations to the Muse I have been tracing. For example, Akhmatova returned to blindness and death in this cycle, as in:

"Словно дочь слепного Эпидура, / Муза к см ерти провидца вела" [Like the little daughter of blind Oedipus, / The Muse led the prophet toward death]. Pasternak inspired this poem in a way that recalls how Akhmatova's Muse and son inspired other poems: “Он превратится в жизнь дающий колос” [He became a life-giving ear of grain]. He, like they, is rotting in the ground only to be reborn.

The autumn after Akhmatova writes about Pasternak and his Muse she returns to reflect upon her own Muse. This she does through two separate poems, each of which presents the Muse as burdensome and insufferable. This dark attitude toward poetry recalls Mandelstam's in one of his later poems, “Батюшков” [Batiushkov], which I quoted earlier in connection with Dante. In it, he paradoxically refers to poetry as "наше мученье и наше богатство" [Our torment and our wealth]. The word that Akhmatova uses, “мука” [torment, torture] is a synonym for and shared root of the word that Mandelstam used, “мученье” [torment, torture]. It is possible that Mandelstam's poem may have influenced Akhmatova's.

The first of the two poems, “Муза” [The Muse], is a sextet from the cycle Тайны ремесла [Secrets of the Craft]. The other poem, untitled and uncollected, is a quatrain. There is a shared sentiment between these poems, as if they are part of one narrative:

Как и жить мне с этой обузой,
А ещё называют Музой,
Говорят: <<Ты с ней на лугу>>,
Говорят: «Божественный лепет...>>
Жестче, чем лихорадка, отрепет,
И онять весь год ни гу-гу.

[How can I live with this burden?
And yet they call it the Muse.
They say: "You and she are in a meadow. . ."
The say: “The divine babble. . ."
More savagely than fever she attacks you,
Then for a whole year, not a syllable.]

And:

Моею Музой оказалась мука.
Она со мною кое-как прошла
Там, где нельзя, там, где живёт разлука,
Где хищница, отведавшая зла.

[Torment proved to be my muse,
She and I somehow passed through
The place where nothing is permitted,
The place where separation dwells,
And the harpy who has tasted evil.]

Akhmatova's Muse is now a far cry from the romanticized and idealized companion of her youth; it is not that her Muse has changed again—rather, her true colors have been revealed,
exposing her as something of a capricious imposter. Akhmatova's lyrical persona is the only one privy to this truth—others still see this “Muse” in her guise of divine being (“А ещё называют Музой” [And yet they call it the Muse]). For the poet, inspiration, with its fits and starts, has become virtually intolerable; and, looking back, it becomes clear to her that everything she and her Muse had shared was forbidden, contrary and forlorn. The mature lyrical persona now understands that throughout her life as a poet, true “inspiration” came not from a divine being. Her inspiration was her personal tragedies and misfortunes. The prospect of continuing to write is a grim one because the source of her poetry has been her torment.

The last of the Muse-poems continues in this same vein. “Запретная роза” [Forbidden Rose], written four years after the previous two Muse-poems and a year and a half before her death, contains an epigraph that echoes the lyrical persona’s cynicism toward her Muse and her own poetry: “Ваша горькая божественная речь . . .” [Your bitter divine babble]. This quote from a poem by Anatoly Nayman ties together the bitter feelings that are connected with the “divine babble” of poetry. The end of the poem suggests, however, that the bitter emotions may sooner be bittersweet, that for the poet the paradox of heartbreak is, simultaneously, torment and creative release. The pain of separation invokes the onset of inspiration. A separation with the lover is a union with the Muse: “тот союз, что зовут разлукой, / . . . / И какою-то сотою мукой, / Что всех чище и всех черней” [That union that is called separation / And is torment to the hundredth power, / That is the cleanest and most vile].

The title of this poem, “Запретная роза” [Forbidden Rose], can be read as a metaphor
for Akhmatova's new Muse. Remember that in the previous Muse-poem the poet relates that she and her Muse have been to places together where nothing was permitted (i.e. everything was forbidden) and to that place where separation dwells (compare to the “union” in this poem). The rose inspires through its fragrance, as we are given to understand through the verb вдыхать [to inhale], alluding to the inhalation of the Muse's breath. The rose is also compared to a “первая невеста” [first bride], recalling the Classical conception of the virgin Muse.

Although the actual word “муз” [the genitive case of the plural word ‘muses’] does appear in the poem, it is the rose that reflects her image most. This is a particularly appropriate poem with which to conclude this section of the chapter because in the following section I will look at precisely these kinds of masked Muses. Akhmatova suggests unnamed Muse-like figures throughout her oeuvre but “Запретная роза” [Forbidden Rose] is the only instance in which she does so while simultaneously naming the Muse.

2.2 Masked Muses

Due to the abundance of poems with masked Muse-figures, my selections have been made with the following criteria in mind: that the examples span the breadth of Akhmatova's poetic output and that a thematic variety of masked Muses be presented (such as siblings, the lover, insomnia, nature, and music).

31 “Мне принёс её тот крылатый повелитель богов и муз” [She was brought to me / by that winged ruler of gods and muses].

32 From time to time other scholars have written about Muse-like figures in various of Akhmatova's poems. Kees Verheul, for one, has seen the Muse in the figure of the girl in “At that time I sojourned the earth...” 51; Rosslyn has noted Muse qualities in “I have come to
In her early poetry, in particular, there are a number of times that the lyrical persona refers to other characters as sisters or brothers. As we know from the early Muse-poems, the role of sister is played by the Muse. It follows, then, that sister-figures in other early poems may be masked Muses. In a poem from 1912, for example, there is a conversation between two women, one of whom calls the other “sister” and has come to “take her place.” She has come to the woods (a Muse-space) to replace the other who has grown old, whose eyes are no longer clear (recall “Музе” [To the Muse] from the same year: “взгляд её ясен и ярок” [her glance was bright and clear]), and who is no longer in tune with nature. This first figure has the Muse attributes of a flute and sweet scent. The other, who is to be replaced, departs as a blind woman. This impairment looks ahead to Akhmatova's relationship with her Muse two years hence when the sorrowful Muse leads her blind poet down the road. It also presages Akhmatova's mature Muse who will be described both as blind Oedipus's daughter and as a blind corpse rotting in the ground. This poem may also foretell the Muse's fate to be continually reborn like the Phoenix.

The notion of convergence or, rather, substitution of the Muse and the lover is upheld by the sibling-like relationship between the lyrical persona and her lovers. In one poem from 1916 a male “stranger” believes the lyrical persona to be someone he has cared for like a sister. He then presents her with a ring that will protect her from love. The ring appears to be an object that is passed between the Muse and the lovers via the lyrical

 replace you, sister,” “At the Edge of the Sea” and “Like the angel who troubled the water” (“The Function of Architectural Imagery. . .” on pages 112-13; 113; and 158, respectively).

33 “По неделе ни слова ни с кем не скажу” [All week I don't say a word to anyone].
Interestingly, toward the end of her life Akhmatova returns yet again to the motif of the ring: a man takes her ring away later to have his spirit return to her in womanly form: “He was a woman”. In two other early poems the lyrical persona describes her feelings in terms of a love between siblings: in one, she has for him the love of forty sisters and in another, she relates to him as she would to a brother, i.e. without jealousy. A couple other of the early poems mention unnamed young girls, who might be interpreted as sisterly Muse-figures and who provide impetuses for the poems. Much as an older sibling might view her younger sister, these figures are always vulnerable, generally barefoot and crying or weary. These girls may also be read as representing the lyrical persona herself as a child; the girls, however, are always represented as others and definitely function as creative impulses for the poems in which they appear.

Two other examples of masked Muses from the early period are each integral to Akhmatova's mythology of the creative process. One of these is Insomnia, the nocturnal state for poetic creation; the other is Nature, deeply inspirational in her many forms. The Insomnia-Muse has a certain plasticity: she is pretty, has a “fixed countenance” and speaks. Moreover, she is described as a “my nightnurse,” suggesting Dante's nurse-Muse. The Nature-Muse is very prevalent throughout not only Akhmatova’s early poetry but her

34 See also, for example “Словно ангел, возмутивший воду” [Like the angel moving upon the water (1916)].
35 “Despite all the vows” (1961).
36 “Читая Гамлета” [Reading Hamlet] (1909); “Меня покинул в новолуние” [At the new moon he abandoned me] (1911). 
37 “Песенка” [A Song] (1911); “Рыбак” [The Fisherman] (1911). The later “early” poem, “Долгим взглядом твоим истомленная” [Exhausted by your long, fixed gaze] (1921), can also be included in this grouping.
38 “Слаб голос мой, но воля не слабеет” [Weak is my voice, but my will isn't weakening (1912)].
entire œuvre.

Two more examples of the Muse masked as nature are: an Earth-Muse in “Я пришла сюда, безделица” [I came here, an idler (1911)] and an Autumn-Muse in “Вновь подарен мне дремотой” [Drowsiness takes me back again (1916)]. In the first of these, the lyrical persona, beneath a shining moon and quivering aspen, addresses the earth itself, preparing to "join" her (just as the Muse will some forty-plus years hence). In this poem the lyrical persona is a careful observer of the earth -- it is through a silent gaze that she connects with her inspiration. In the second of these two examples, Autumn enters on the heels of the departed lover, as the Muse so often does, in order to replace him by inspiring poetic creation. She is personified in that she wears a dress, which we know from the fact of her clothing having a hem. Another of Autumn's nods to the Muse is their shared duskiness: we meet again with the epithet “смуглая.” In a slightly later poem, “Заплаканная осень, как вдова” [The tear-stained autumn, like a widow (1921)], autumn is personified to an even greater extent, lamenting lost love and being compared to a widow.

In a poem Akhmatova wrote not long before her death, she writes of her complex feelings concerning music -- feelings that echo those she has had toward her Muse. In “Музыка” [Music (1965)], music is the eponymous addressee of the poem. Without a prior awareness of Akhmatova's personal Muse mythology, the subject of this poem might not

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39 The adjective is, in fact, used thirteen times throughout all of Akhmatova's poetry (Patera 203). A comprehensive study of its uses and symbolic meanings in Akhmatova's work is a subject for future research.

40 In a much later poem, Akhmatova personifies another season, spring, which is also described metaphorically as a widow. (“In the Fortieth Year: ‘To the Memory of a Friend’) (1945). Anatoly Nayman has written that Akhmatova did not like spring or autumn because of their “fickleness” and “transience” (145). This again echoes her sentiments toward her Muse.
seem to be a masked Muse at all (other than the fact of the common etymological root of муза and музыка). Here the poet portrays music as being "always on the boundary," somewhere “between good and evil, earthly pits and paradise.” The Muse, too, hovers between these qualities (sister, nurse, comforter vs. torment, burden) and spaces (inhabitor of the garden and grave vs. celestial, divine being). Thresholds and boundaries in Akhmatova's poetry represent a neutral space across which the lover or Muse may or may not traverse in order to reach the poet.\textsuperscript{41} Music, then, shares a certain capriciousness with these other two figures. Also in this poem, music is personified: it admires itself and, as if it had a throat, chokes on itself. Moreover, it is a mythic mother-figure who gives birth to herself, recalling the Phoenix metaphor for the Muse eight years previous to this poem.

\textbf{2.3 Secrets of the Craft: Metapoetry}

The closest Akhmatova comes to revealing the mysteries of poetic inspiration is in her poetic cycle Тайны ремесла [Secrets of the Craft]. As Amert has remarked, "The Formalist notion of \textit{obnazhenie priema} (the baring of the device) aptly describes the poet's technique here: the device of concealment is oxymoronically being laid bare" (7). Although Akhmatova does unveil much of her mythology of poetic creation in this cycle, there nonetheless remains much that is purposefully covered. Moreover, the tone at times approaches a playfulness, casting a degree of suspicion on the truthfulness of the divulgence.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{41} For a discussion of the lover and thresholds in Akhmatova's work, see Rosslyn "The Function of Architectural Imagery" (20-21).

\textsuperscript{42} Amert, too, notices this playfulness, particularly in the “Grand Confession" which she terms a "spirited parody of the genre of the confession" (8).
What begins her mythology of inspiration is something very similar to the auditory imagination described by T. S. Eliot. It all begins, she writes, with “a kind of languor” after which she hears sorrowful whispers and ringing. These make way, eventually, for “one triumphant sound” (of what, exactly, is left a mystery) that is surrounded by an absolute silence. Paradoxically, the silence allows for unusual things to be heard: growing grass (à la Tolstoy) and the steady walk of “misfortune with a knapsack,” i.e., another masked Muse.

Then the sounds become comprehensible, first as rhymes and then as “simply dictated lines.” In the fourth poem of the cycle she reduces this -- her initial definition -- to the simple explanation that she either overhears music which she jokingly appropriates or that she “eavesdrops” on the silent pines. But amid all this banter she again reveals some truth: that she finds much of her inspiration in “the silence of the night.” *Is* this the truth? It is immediately exposed as an exaggerated claim when it is followed by a contradictory explanation: not all of her poems are born from the night--each comes to her differently: some at night, some during the day, some thunderously bursting forth, some creeping up, some appearing easily, some with pain. Other as yet unborn poems come to be through “flame and wind and water.” That is, she finds inspiration through these elements. Her intended audience also has some part, however small, in shaping the poems -- she is aware of their eyes as she writes.

Akhmatova also deromanticizes the source of poetry: it grows from rubbish. What she means by this is that a poet can find inspiration in anything, particularly things grasped by the senses, such as hearing, smell, or sight: “An angry cry, fresh smell of tar, / Mysterious mold on the wall.”
Akhmatova perhaps realizes that her reader might wonder about her Muse, but she does not entirely satisfy this curiosity by including the Muse-poem “Муза” [The Muse] in the cycle. “They call it the Muse,” she writes. *She* does not. And she proceeds to virtually debunk the myth she had been active in propagating.

She ends the cycle with a myth involving rays of the moon at midnight on New Year's Eve. With this proper time and setting, it is said that inspiration can be anticipated. It is sensed as a barely audible sound (recall her Muse from 1915 whose voice was barely audible) or as weeping (“Муза Плача” [The Muse of Weeping]). This conclusion to *Secrets of the Craft* actually summarizes Akhmatova's own past presentations of inspiration.

As we know, there are many instances in which Akhmatova refers to her own writing in her poems. The Muse-poems, masked Muses and the cycle *Secrets of the Craft* are only a few on which I have focused here. Akhmatova's *tour de force*, Поэма без героя [Poem without a Hero], for example, is brimming with metapoetic wealth. It is a work, however, whose complexity requires and deserves a thorough and separate study. I will say, however, that Akhmatova was to repeat again and again that *The Poem* had a life of its own. It was written during the period of strife with her Muse and credit for this work is not given to the Muse. This poem came from the many life experiences of the mature poet and, Akhmatova suggests, it required no divine mediation but came of its own accord and there was no stopping it.

2.4 *The Omnipresent Window*

One of the key images in Akhmatova's mythology of poetic creation lies
somewhere between the inspiration and the craft of penning the poem: her omnipresent window. The window is both the factual and fictional place at which the poem is recorded because it is where both Akhmatova the poet and the lyrical poet-persona write.

Akhmatova once said she wrote every poem on either a windowsill or an edge of something (Nayman 157). Optimally, the view from the window would look out onto a garden. At the end of her life, while she lived in Komarovo, she did indeed have a desk at the windows with a view to a little pine-wood (Nayman 145). Her gaze would transport her out into the garden where she would commune with Nature, her Muse. “Akhmatova, it seems,” Rosslyn has written, “sets up the image of the garden as a contrast to the image of the house, opposing to the scene of the lovers' domestic life together an open area which offers freedom, the freedom of artistic creation” (“The Function of Architectural Imagery” 186). At night, when insomnia reigned, the window provided her a view of the moon and stars, which shone back at her with a gaze of their own. In the Poem she writes that “through the slender windows there's not a star to be seen,” portending death, i.e. life without poetry. The importance of the gaze in this mythology of poetic creation is great and I suggest its prominence is due in large part to the window. The window is the eye of the house and this symbolism is in fact preserved in the Russian word for window,

“окно,” coming from the archaic word for eye, “око.” Akhmatova has told her readers this

43 The word “окно” [window] is used by Akhmatova 66 times in her poetry and the word “сад” [garden] is used 65 times (Patera 135; 186). The frequency of each of these words is high and, strangely, virtually equal.

44 Long ago, Konstantin Mochul'skii wrote about this very connection: Кто теперь в слове 'окно'. . . Почувствует глубоко поэтический первоначальный образ 'око'. . . --глаз дома? . . . Поэт стремится к непроизводному и первоначальному. [Who now senses in the word “window” the deeply poetic original image 'eye'--the eye of the house? . . . The poet strives toward the
in “Северные элегии” [Northern Elegies (1942)]:

А в ту минуту за плечом моим
Мой бывший дом ещё следил за мною
Прищуренным, неблагосклонным оком,
Тем навсегда мне памятным окном.

[And right now, over my shoulder,
My old house still spies on me
With its disapproving eye,
That omnipresent window.]

Akhmatova once asked her friend Lidia Chukovskaia, “Почему повторение образа сада и Музы в моих стихах—манерность?” [Why is the repetition of the garden and Muse imagery in my poetry mannerism?] She continued, “Напротив, чтоб добраться до сути, надо изучать гнезда постоянно повторяющихся образов в стихах поэта—в них таится личность автора и дух его поэзии.” [On the contrary, in order to get to the heart of it, one should study the clusters of constantly recurring imagery in a poet's work – it is there that the author's personality and the spirit of his poetry is hidden (Chukovskaia 137).] I have taken Akhmatova's advice in studying her poetry and the repeated images have indeed assembled themselves into a revealing mythology of poetic creation.

In her final years, Akhmatova was seen by many as having the power to rekindle opaque and original (48)].
the greatness of Russian poetry which had been smothered during the Soviet period. It is generally understood that Akhmatova recognized the “new dawn of Russian poetry” in the subject of the next chapter, the young Joseph Brodsky, and that she handed the torch over to him.\footnote{This notion of Brodsky representing the “new dawn of Russian poetry” was created by Akhmatova, who was said to have repeated this again and again. See Loseff, \textit{Poetika Brodskogo} 219. The image of the passing of the torch was first suggested by D.S. in his famous essay “Pushkin and Brodsky” (Loseff, \textit{Poetika Brodskogo} 207).}
CHAPTER 3

JOSEPH BRODSKY: “АПОФЕОЗ ЗВУКА” [AN APOTHEOSIS OF SOUND]

Whispers of Immortality.
*T.S. Eliot*

If the origins of mythology are fear and isolation,
I am isolated all right.
*Joseph Brodsky “In a Room and a Half”*

With this chapter, the present study changes its focus to a more recent period of Russian literature. The elements of this mythology of poetic creation--Joseph Brodsky's--move in Brownian motion between two “modes of cognition”: what he calls the Occidental and the Oriental.¹ The former offers elements born from reason and science, the latter from emotion, spirituality and tradition. On the one hand, Brodsky's reason prompts him to refute antiquated classical notions of inspiration and to offer new interpretations informed by sober analysis and modern physics. On the other hand, the Oriental mode of his cognition appropriates certain aspects of his predecessors' mythologies, such as the notion of the Muse; Mandelstam's “noise of time" and fear of asphyxiation; and Akhmatova's dictated lines and omnipresent window. These appropriations are rooted in his deep familiarity with and love of literature and its history.

¹ While Brodsky's concept of the Oriental is by no means based on Edward Said's (published in 1978), it does happen to support Said's basic thesis that Westerners view the East as an *other.*
The Occidental and Oriental modes are at constant play with one another in Brodsky's mythology of poetic creation. One moment Brodsky says that writing poetry is an entirely rational process and the next he explains how it induces a suffocating panic as it becomes an irrational event. He rationally rejects the notion of a Muse and then elevates her to the most angelic heights. One time he analytically explains his auditory imagination in terms of modern physics (as a frequency or reception), another time he fervently deifies this language resounding in his mind. “In the final analysis,” as Brodsky so liked to say, this poet's mythology is a “theology of language”--a rational inquiry into both the rational and irrational elements of poetic creation.

This chapter is structured around Brodsky's two modes of cognition. My discussion of the Occidental elements of Brodsky's mythology will show his rejection of Classical notions of inspiration in favor of metaphysical explanations. A look at the Oriental elements will reveal Brodsky's strong penchant for myth-making.

* * *

He was born Iosif Aleksandrovich Brodskii in the year 1940 in Leningrad. After quitting school at the age of fifteen, he tried his hand at a wide array of occupations. Poetry began to interest him before he turned twenty and in just a few years it became a genuine passion. He was introduced to Akhmatova at the age of 22 and, together with his three brothers-in-arms, Yevgeny Rein, Anatoly Nayman and Dmitry Bobyshev, was taken under her wing. When in 1963 Akhmatova read Brodskii’s “Большая элегия Джону Донну” [Elegy to John Donne], she immediately perceived the extent of his poetic gift, telling him that even he was not truly aware of what he had written. Akhmatova's support of Brodskii
extended beyond his craft; she also offered him support during the various persecutions thrust upon him by the Soviet government. Brodskii was sent to prison and into exile a number of times (between the years of 1959 and 1965) and -- to his mind an even worse fate -- to a psychiatric hospital on two separate occasions (1963-64). Akhmatova, who intervened on his behalf, did not live to see the extent of Brodskii's further persecutions, nor the great poet he was to become. In 1966, it was Brodskii who arranged Akhmatova's funeral and burial (Polukhina, Bol'shaia kniga 171-176). Six years later, with very little warning, the Soviet government forced him into exile. Brodskii ended up in America, and was to live the next two dozen years of his life primarily in New York City and Ann Arbor, Michigan. He became Joseph Brodsky, an American professor, an American Poet Laureate (1991) and eventually an American Nobel Prize winner (1995). But it was writing poetry, which he did in his native language, that describes him best and, until his fatal heart attack in 1996, Brodsky was regarded by many as the greatest living Russian poet.

Like those of Marina Tsvetaeva, his favorite poet, Brodsky's aesthetics defy categorization. Contemporary Russian poets have on occasion been asked to define Brodsky's poetic style and have variously characterized him as "the last Romantic poet," a "son of Russian Symbolism," "a contemporary lyricist," "the first Russian post-modernist," and "a religious poet." Each of these definitions certainly carries some weight. The sum

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2 For the history and transcripts of Brodsky's notorious trial, see Efim Etkind's Protsess Iosifa Brodskogo.
3 Brodsky has said that he chose the variation "Joseph" over "Iosif" not to assimilate but simply make it easier for the American Embassy (Polukhina, Bol'shaia kniga 322).
4 These quotations are taken from Polukhina, Brodsky through the Eyes, pages 106, 127, 154, 180 and 205, respectively.
of all of these definitions, however, carries more weight because Brodsky's poetry is a full embodiment of the rich legacy of Russian verse that had for so long been stifled by the Soviet regime. Of all the brief definitions, I find Olga Sedakova's the most all-encompassing. "He has revived the link," she says, "with Russian poetry proper, with its last 'positive' tendency--Acmeism--and reprised the theme of Acmeism, 'the nostalgia for World Culture'" (Polukhina, *Brodsky through the Eyes* 247). While Brodsky did not consider his poetry to be Acmeist *per se*, he has certainly acknowledged the movement's profound influence upon himself and has indeed inherited Mandelstam's (another of his favorite Russian poets) notion of World Culture.5 One way to define Brodsky's poetry succinctly is to focus, as Sedakova has, on the notions of recovery, revival and succession.

Much scholarship has been devoted to Brodsky. Generally speaking, this research has focused on his literary influences (the English metaphysical poets, the Acmeists, Tsvetaeva, et al.), his mastery of prosodic devices (e.g. compound rhymes), and certain of his poetic themes (e.g. Time, Empire, exile/nostalgia, and death). Two people who have contributed many volumes to Brodsky scholarship are Lev Loseff and Valentina Polukhina, who have been active both as co-editors and as individual editors of collections dedicated to Brodsky. Polukhina has also authored a monograph on Brodsky and has published, together with Iulle Piarli, a dictionary of tropes used by Brodsky in his book Часть речи (*A Part of Speech*). Our knowledge about Brodsky's poetry, aesthetics and life has been further enriched by his over 150 published interviews,6 sixty of which have been gathered

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5 The question of Acmeist's influence upon Brodsky's aesthetics has been the topic of several studies. See, for example: Moranjak-Bamburac 57-76.

6 Polukhina offers a total count of 153 interviews (*Bol'shaia kniga*).
in one volume by Polukhina. Another highly edifying resource in Brodsky scholarship is
the collection by Solomon Volkov of his and Brodsky's conversations, which spanned a
fifteen-year period.

Although the genre of the interview has been an undeniable boon to literary
scholarship in this modern age, the genre of the monograph remains a fundamental
tradition. In 1984, Mikhail Kreps published the first book-length study devoted to
Brodsky's poetry, O poezii Iosifa Brodskogo [On Joseph Brodsky's Poetry]. Since Kreps's
pioneering volume, a number of monographs on the same subject have appeared. After
Polukhina's Joseph Brodsky: A Poet for our Time in 1989, there was David Bethea's,
Joseph Brodsky and the Creation of Exile in 1994. The year 2000 proved to be an
important year in Brodsky scholarship, with monographs by Iakov Gordin, Evgenii
Kelebaii, and David MacFayden.

While none of these scholars has chosen to focus exclusively on Brodsky's creative
process, many of them have contributed valuable insights on the topic.7 Both Kreps and
Polukhina have spoken of the significance of Brodsky's neologism “тихотворение”: “an
abbreviation of stikhhotvorenie (‘a poem’), is formed from the root tikho (‘still’, ‘quiet’)
combined with stikh, meaning ‘verse’, and tvorenie (‘creation’, ‘work’)" (Polukhina, Joseph
Brodsky 246). Each of these scholars has also detected a hint of insanity within this

7 The research on Brodsky most similar to my own is the chapter “The mask of metaphor"
in Polukhina's monograph on Brodsky. She describes her work thus: “This chapter is an
attempt to reconstruct Brodsky's poetic world. . . Such an approach allows us to ask
whether poetic language is able to create its own reality by means of metaphoric
transferences, and what types of interrelation exist between the poetic world and the real
world" (104). Polukhina's work is at once broader in content (going beyond the creative
process) and narrower in regard to the issue of poetic building blocks (focusing on tropes) than my own.
“extremely lonely process” (Polukhina, Joseph Brodsky 246). Kreps describes Brodsky’s *tikhotvorenie* as involving a shift of perception, which concurs with my thesis of Brodsky’s two modes of cognition. Likewise corroborating my own work is Polukhina’s assertion that the creative process consists of paradox. “The creative process,” Polukhina writes, “is the collocation of the ineffable and what is expressed. In the very conventionality of poetry, in its limited means of expression, there is something that is unlimited and absolute. In this sense, poetry is not only alienation, but also the means of overcoming it” (Joseph Brodsky, 247). Of all the poets included in my study, this contradiction is felt most strongly in Brodsky’s mythopoesis.

### 3.1 Reconciling Polar Attitudes

As we are now well aware, Brodsky's diverse notions about poetic inspiration do not appear to add up. Just note, for example, how David Bethea begins one of his articles on him: “Joseph Brodsky is a bundle of contradictions” (Loseff, Joseph Brodsky 240). Throughout the course of his many interviews and essays, Brodsky razes all the myths about inspiration only to rebuild and raze them yet again. In an interview from 1982, for example, Brodsky dismisses all of the classical notions of inspiration: “Ах, вся это ерунда насчёт вдохновения, спонтанности, эмоции. Когда сочиняешь стихи, занял тем, что пишешь. Это труд, и труд тяжёлый. Написание стихов – дело серьёзное. Это абсолютно рациональный процесс” [Oh, that is all nonsense about inspiration, spontaneity, emotion. When you compose poetry you are engaged in what you are writing. It is work, hard work. The writing of poetry is serious business. It is an absolutely rational process](Polukhina, Bol’shaia kniga
Contrary to this statement, however, are Brodsky's many references to his Muse and the language she dictates.

The paradox in Brodsky's mythology is partly due to the great amount of thought he has given to the enigma of his poetic inspiration. Because of the popularity in our age of the interview genre, Brodsky has been called upon to discuss the topic of his creativity much more frequently than the other poets in this study. Unless one were to approach this genre as Vladimir Nabokov did, requesting the questions in writing and crafting your answers on your own time, remarks recorded during interviews are, naturally, fairly "off the cuff." Though Brodsky does have some ready answers concerning poetic creation (i.e., his repeated assertion that language dictates poetry), I intend to show that they are often variously nuanced.

Brodsky's rational, scientific mind was forever questioning the poetic traditions which he had already embraced--after all, the shades of his favorite poets had instilled in him their own mythologies of poetic creation. (For, according to Brodsky, all that a person reads goes straight into his blood.) (Polukhina, Bol'shaia kniga 579). In other words, while Brodsky rationally polemicized with these mythologies, he also lovingly acknowledged certain of their aspects.

What I consider to be Brodsky's key notion about poetic creation is that a poet "unwittingly" uses two "main modes of cognition": the Occidental and the Oriental. The
first of these is the rational, analytical mode—the second, intuitive. These modes can similarly be understood as, respectively, creativity's "analytical functions and spiritual aspect" (Less than One, 208). In using geographical terminology to explain his way of thinking, Brodsky is drawing on the facts of his own biography. Historically, Russia has been viewed as a country belonging neither to the East nor to the West. Brodsky has given considerable thought to his homeland's geographical and historical placement, believing it to be slightly more Asiatic than European (and thus calling it Asiopa rather than Eurasia). Brodsky then extends to himself this notion of straddling boundaries: his poetic Russian mind works in the same two modes and his move to America evenly distributes the weight of the opposing principles by adding more Occidental to the mix.

There is a general tendency to think of Brodsky as a man of reason, a poet led by thought and not by intuition or emotion. In fact, the number of Brodsky's contemporaries who have described his poetry as "cold" is quite remarkable. (The poets Viktor Krivulin, Yury Kublanovsky, Mikhail Meilakh, Elena Shvartz and Tomas Venclova have all used this same epithet in their discussions of Brodsky's poetry.) While this "cold" reason is certainly part of Brodsky's poetic innovation in the Russian tradition, it is nevertheless an

10 There is a comparison to be noted here with Tsvetaeva—one which Efim Etkind has already made: "В той или иной степени конфликт между синтаксисом и метром у Цветаевой, как у Бродского, — это всегда конфликт между разумом и открытым эмоцией, или между КОСМОСОМ сознания и хаосом подсознания, гармонией и стихией" [To one degree or another the conflict between syntax and meter in Tsvetaeva, as in Brodsky, is always a conflict between reason and open emotion, or between the cosmos of consciousness and the chaos of subconsciousness, harmony and the elements (La matièœre, 119)].
11 My suggestion that Brodsky associates his mind with continents is not made without further textual corroboration. In his poem "Колыбельная Трескового мыса" [Lullaby for Cape Cod], he refers to the brain's Africa, Europe and Asia as well as to its two lobes.
12 These remarks can all be found in Polukhina, Brodsky through the Eyes. See pages 186, 208, 162, 219, and 280, respectively.
attitude offset by his infrequently discussed poignant lyricism. The opposing tones of his poetry are textual evidence of the Occidental and Oriental “modes of cognition" at play during his creative process. In speaking of Robert Frost, Brodsky once said that “language's most efficient fuel, poetry's indelible ink" is the conflict of grief and reason (On Grief 260). Brodsky was also speaking of the conflict of the Occidental and the Oriental that fueled his own creativity. Traces of these two mentalities can be uncovered in Brodsky's verse, such as in the 1973 poem “Лагуна”[Lagoon]: “твёрдый разум / внезапно становится мокрым глазом” [suddenly the dry / light of reason dissolves in the moisture of the eye] 13.

3.2 The Occidental Mode

3.2.1 The Voice of Language

The auditory imagination has played a role in all of the mythologies I have presented so far and continues to do so in Brodsky's. In comparing the creative processes of Brodsky and the Acmeists, Sedakova perceives an auditory imagination in the latter but not in the former: “For the Acmeists, poetry is sound. . . . But with Brodsky it's the brain, and ink. Literary work and not pythic raptures" (Polukhina, Brodsky through the Eyes 248). In his essay “Footnote to a Poem" (1981), however, Brodsky emphasizes the importance of the auditory in his creative process. In poetry, he says,

everything--form, content, and the very spirit of the work – is picked out by ear. ... rational enterprise – choice, selection – is entrusted to hearing or . . . is focused into

hearing. . . But not only analytical functions are relegated by the poet to hearing: the same thing happens with the purely spiritual aspect of creativity. . . . Picked out “by ear” is the very spirit of the work . . . (Less than One 208).

As Sedakova suggests, Brodsky does indeed view certain aspects of poetic composition as craft; however, the very genesis of his poems is dictated to him by what he calls the voice of language: “Я называю это гулом, который звучит в голове. . . Гул— это голос языка. Принято называть его голосом Музы, но это просто язык” [I call it a hum that sounds in the head. . . The hum is the voice of language. It is generally called the voice of the Muse, but it is just language] (Polukhina, Bol’shaia kniga 215). The two words Brodsky uses most frequently to define this sound are “гул” [hum, din], as he does in this instance, and “шум” [noise].14 While these are his two most constant metaphors, Brodsky expands his explanation from time to time. For instance, in an interview from 1980 he talks openly about the very private and “strange” phenomenon of his auditory imagination:

...есть определённая доминирующая нота или мелодия, которая упорно звучит в голове. Это очень странно. Я говорю мелодия, точно так же я могу сказать шум. Так или иначе, что бы это ни было, это не буквально мелодия, а музыкальный гул. Ведь у этого гула есть определённое психологическое наложение. Это зона весьма неустойчивого приёма—нет, не зона, это, так сказать, определённая частота, на который работаешь и которую время от времени меняешь (Polukhina, Bol’shaia kniga 55-56).

[. . . there is a certain dominant note or melody that stubbornly sounds in the head. It's very strange. I say “melody” but I can just as easily say “noise.” Either way, whatever it is, it is not literally a melody but a musical hum. After all this hum has a specific, psychological application. It is a zone of highly fluctuating reception—no, not a zone, it's, so to say, a certain frequency on which you work and which you change from time to time.]

Note again what a difficult time Brodsky is having in deciding how best to explain this phenomenon. What we can be sure of, however, is that it is some kind of sound that

14 Brodsky was certainly aware that by describing the sound as a “шум” [noise] he was acknowledging an aspect of Mandelstam’s notion of inspiration. I am referring, of course,
has a constancy (or stubbornness), a musicality, and a rippling quality. This last aspect is a fascinating addition to our understanding of the processes of inspiration in that it is a uniquely twentieth-century perspective. Knowledge of modern physics allows Brodsky to interpret his auditory imagination in terms of “frequency” and “reception,” thus bringing into his mythology images of waveforms and electric currents. It is as if this poet were plugged into the language of the late twentieth century.

Many of Brodsky's contemporaries describe his relationship to language by using these types of metaphors unique to our modern age. Similar to my metaphorical interpretation, Nayman has said that: “Brodsky found Russian grammar's concealed power-sockets and he plunges himself into the electrical system and receives that initial impulse which sets him on his way.” Rein has described another of Brodsky's unusually keen poetic senses thus: “His sight is of a very special kind, more powerful than any other I know, picking up on minute details like some very technologically advanced camera that's used for taking pictures from satellite.” And, as a last example, Gorbanevskaiia has described Brodsky's poetry as “highly skilled flying maneuvers.” In choosing to use metaphors of modern technology, each of these poets took his/her cue from Brodsky himself. The following section of this chapter will discuss further how Brodsky attempted to rationalize the workings of his inspiration by analyzing it in often scientific terms.

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15 The three quotations here are from Polukhina, Brodsky through the Eyes, pages 11, 65, and 78, respectively. Gorbanevskaiia's metaphor can be understood two ways: True to one of his “modern” boyhood passions, Brodsky is portrayed as a pilot or, true to traditional poetic metaphor, he becomes a bird.
3.2.2 An Acceleration of Consciousness

The sound of Brodsky's inspiration contains a psychological aspect, or “оттенок” [nuance]. The psychology of this stage of his inspiration can be further explained as a zone where the rational and irrational are conjoined. While Brodsky only refers to this conjunction once or twice, he does repeat many times over that the state of inspiration is a colossally accelerated state of consciousness. This acceleration is, I will suggest, a form of estrangement and, hence, must be what produces the sense of irrationality which accompanies inspiration. It follows that if the poet's mind is working on what he considers to be an irrational level, then the “irrational” (i.e., unknowable, mythological) traditions of poetic inspiration would fit perfectly within such a frame of mind. This mode of thinking would very likely present occasions when Brodsky accepts the Muse and her accompanying rustling leaves into his consciousness.

The “frequency” of Brodsky's poetic imagination begins by dictating the meter of the poem. According to Brodsky, form precedes content: “the poet 'picks' his way toward the spirit of the work by means of the meter” (Less than One 209). He, like Mandelstam before him, writes the poem in order to capture the hum in his head.

The hums and frequencies of Brodsky's auditory imagination are absorbed through the thematics and prosody of his poetry (just as they are in the other mythologies included in this dissertation). Brodsky's verse continually buzzes with a variety of insects and onomatopoeic words, which can be used metaphorically to describe the “voices” of his inspiration. The prevalence in his poetry of these types of “stubborn” humming noises begs notice. One encounters, for instance, the droning of insects (“гуденье насекомых”), the
buzzing of a bullet ("жужжащая пуля") and of a fly ("жужжанье мухи"), the scratching of a pen ("перо скрипит в тишине"), and general din ("в общем гаме"). Each of these various humming noises is a metaphor through which the poet can capture a sense of his auditory imagination. At times, the metaphors Brodsky chooses are ones borrowed from classical notions of inspiration, such as the rustling sound that traditionally heralds the Muse's arrival: "в мозгу раздается не неземное <<до>>, / но её шуршание" ("Часть речи") [your mind resounds not with the seraphic (tone of) "do," / only its rustling ("A Part of Speech"). This acknowledgment of classical imagery is a result of Brodsky's other mode of cognition--the Oriental.

Thus, Brodsky's rational, Occidental mode of cognition constantly questions traditional mythological interpretations of poetic experience. Mythology is born out of emotion and so is inimical to reason. Brodsky looks to the logic of science and technology in order to define the enigmatic state of mind experienced during moments of poetic creativity. Terming inspiration as "the voice of language" and an "accelerated state of consciousness" is Brodsky's way of rejecting the seemingly more illogical explanations offered by classical mythology.

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16 "Письма римскому другу" [Letters to a Roman Friend (1972)]; "Часть речи" [A Part of Speech"]; "Эклога 5-я (летняя)" [Eclogue V: Summer (1981)]; "Примечания папоротника" [The Notes of a Fern (my translation) (1989)]; "Портрет трагедии" [Portrait of Tragedy (1991)]. Jane Knox has also written of how a stubborn humming has made its way into one of Brodsky's poems, "Глаголы" [Verbs (1960)]; "Гудящий, монотонный ритм городской жизни выражён здесь многими средствами, например, назойливым повторением ...звукосочетаний gol и gla." [The humming, monotonous rhythm of city life is expressed here in many ways, for example through the importunate repetition ...of the sound combinations gol and gla (my translation) (Loseff, Poetika 161)].
3.3 The Oriental Mode

3.3.1 The Suffocating Poet, Revisited

Through Brodsky's mythology of poetic creation, we revisit Mandelstam's mythology, in which a fear of asphyxiation affected the poet's creative ability.17 Brodsky was not only aware of this aspect of Mandelstam's biography but, in fact, gave some thought to it, saying: "Если Мандельштам чем и болел, так только астмой. Мандельштам был поэтом, для которого поэзия была в прямом смысле слова воздухом..." (Polukhina Bol'shaia kniga 535) [If Mandelstam had any illness, it was only asthma. Mandelstam was a poet for whom poetry was literally made up of air. . .] Mandelstam's phobia, growing from his wife's and later his own asthmatic problems, logically integrated itself into his mythology of inspiration in part because of the well-established classical connections between breath and poetry. According to the beliefs of the Ancient Greeks, verse is inspired by a Muse who breathes the poem into the poet. This notion has been retained by the word "inspiration" in many languages. The Russian word, вдохновение, is comprised of a root meaning "spirit" or "breath" and a prefix meaning "in." Thus, the poet has the poem breathed into him. If he is experiencing difficulty breathing, he will not be able to take in the Muse's inspiration -- a preoccupation also inherent in Brodsky's mythology of poetic creation.18

In a number of interviews, Brodsky describes a feeling of panic that accompanied

17 It was when Brodsky was about 20 years old that he began to be influenced by Mandelstam's poetry (Polukhina, Bol'shaia kniga 90); (Volkov, Dialogi 225).
18 Apparently, not much attention has been paid to this motif in Brodsky's poetry. Evgenii Kelebai, in his book Poet v dome rebenka, has devoted a short section to the theme of Air; however, he connects its importance more to space than to breath. Nonetheless, he does mention Brodsky's heart condition and the problems it may have caused in breathing. See
his creative process, saying even that it is his "most frequent state of mind" while writing
(Less than One 17). Panic surfaces when Brodsky senses the irrational (Oriental) element
entering into his consciousness. This panic, I would suggest, makes its way into the
thematics of Brodsky's verse through the motif of suffocation.

A state of panic is commonly associated with difficult breathing and a racing
heartbeat. Over the years, Brodsky spoke of poetry's dependence on the regular rhythms of
the body, examples of which can be found in essays from 1977, 1984 and 1994. In the first
of these essays, he compares metric irregularities to those of the breath and heartbeat and
he returns to this connection between meter and breath in the second essay, written some
seven years later (Less than One 141, 327). Finally, a decade after this (1994), he
continues in this vein: "A poem's length . . . is its breath. The first stanza inhales, the
second exhales, the third stanza inhales. . ." (On Grief 332). As I have already suggested,
this association of poetry with breath ties Brodsky to traditions of classical poetry and to
Mandelstam. And by granting poetry its own breath Brodsky is creating something more
than eternal – he is creating something immortal. Although the concept of eternity
suggests timelessness and endlessness, it does not evoke the image of victory over death
like the concept of immortality does. For this reason, by bestowing breath (i.e. life) to an
already eternal poetry, Brodsky battles against the burden of his own mortality.

Brodsky, being an incessant smoker and having serious heart problems, was in poor
health for most of his adult life. He experienced the pain and fear of a heart-attack three

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19 "Когда рациональное вас покидает, на какое-то время вы оказываетесь во власти паники. Но
именно здесь вас ожидает откровения." [When the rational abandons you, you find yourself
for a while in the grip of panic. But it is precisely here that revelations await you]
times--first, in 1976, four years after his emigration, the second in 1984, and the final and fatal one in 1996. His concern about his heart may have emphasized the connection between heartbeat and poetry and the emphysema caused by smoking could have contributed to the motif of suffocation in his poetry.20

The poetic motif of panic extends to that of terror. In the verse of Mandelstam and two other of his favorite poets, Robert Frost and Constantine Cavafy, Brodsky identified an aspect which he defined as “terrifying” -- an existential and lonely tone with which he himself was all too familiar.21 This “terror,” a “product of the imagination” (Less than One 62), is a form of what might be called “existential panic,” i.e. panic at the thought of one's isolation and eventual death. Mortality is a preoccupation shared by many poets and can be traced back through the tradition of “monument poems,” from Horace's classical work and into the Russian canon with the works by Gavrila Derzhavin and Aleksandr Pushkin. In creating poetry, the poet is often conscious of the fact that his work will outlive him.

We can look closely at one poem, Brodsky's “ПОСВЯЩАЕТСЯ ЯЛТЕ” [Homage to Yalta (1969)], in order to examine these motifs of panic and breathlessness and to see how they are embodied in structural line breaks. The characters in this poem inherit the state of panic and sense of suffocation that occurred during the process of their creation. Their gasps are ripples of Brodsky's own.

(Polukhina, Bol'shaia kniga 95).

20 This association of poetry with the heart is also a prominent feature of Olga Sedakova's mythology of poetic creation.

21 He has written that the main theme of what is known as Mandelstam's Voronezh period was “bare existential horror and a terrifying spiritual acceleration” (Less than One 129). About the American poet, Brodsky agrees with Lionel Trilling that terror was Frost's “forte” (On Grief 225). Brodsky has also described the love poetry written by Cavafy as “terrifying” (Less than One 62). Each of these descriptions portrays an extraordinarily rich
The narrator of the poem, a police inspector, is investigating a murder. The first reference to suffocation is in part II when a witness says to the narrator: “Да, совершенно верно: душный вечер.” [You're right: the evening is stifling.] Two stanzas later, she says:

Вы правы, нынче очень, очень душно.
И тяжело. И совершенно нечем дышать. И всё мешает. Духота.
Я задыхаюсь. Да. А вы? А вы?
Вы тоже, да? А вы? А вы? Я больше --
я больше ничего не знаю. Да?
Я совершенно ничего не знаю.
Ну что вам нужно от меня? Ну что вы. . .
Ну что ты хочешь? А? Ну что? Ну что? Ну что?

[Yes, you're right,

the atmosphere tonight is really stifling.

Oppressive, too. There's absolutely nothing
to breathe. Oh – everything just makes it hard.

The stuffiness. I'm suffocating. Yes.

And you? And you? You, too? You, too, then? Nothing --
there's nothing else at all I know. Oh, yes?

There's absolutely nothing I can tell you.

Say, what is it you want from me? What is it. . .

imagination fueled by loneliness.
All right, now. Tell me, huh? What is it? What?

This witness, apparently addressing a remark the narrator had made outside the text, agrees that the air is suffocating. It is just after she acknowledges this difficulty breathing that she begins to feel panic about being a possible murder suspect -- quite suddenly her speech is comprised of defensive questioning, trailing thoughts, and abrupt sentences.

Gasps for air are also suggested by the rhythmic features of this poem. The first “gasp,” found in the narrator's introductory monologue, occurs at the very moment at which the investigator must turn to the dreaded task at hand, i.e. the testimonies. His pausing for air is expressed through a line break. Brodsky uses a device similar to a caesura, the difference being that Brodsky makes the poetic feature visible structurally. Such poetic devices as the caesura and enjambment impart an emotional quality to a poem.22 By associating structural pauses with emotional gasps for air, Brodsky is, in effect, giving his readers clues as to which witness is experiencing feelings of guilt.

The first of the four witnesses (part I), an acquaintance of the deceased, is the least emotionally involved. This detachment is emphasized through the witness's bantering tone. While all of the other witnesses pause here and there (through physical breaks within a line), this witness does so but once, following his only display of emotion – “А жаль! Я так хотел его увидеть.” [What a shame it was! I really would have liked to see him.] With his wonderful sense of irony, Brodsky emphasizes this character's inanity when he directs him to comment unknowingly upon his own superficiality. The garrulous character himself

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22 Barry Sherr supports this type of interpretation, saying: “Pushkin resorted to frequent enjambment when describing the mad Evgeny in The Bronze Horseman” (263). And Brodsky himself, in reading Frost, explains the choking effect that a caesura can create (On Grief 228).
says: „мы / молчанье собеседника обычно / воспринимаем как работу мысли” [we ordinarily interpret silence / to mean a person's mind is busy working]. This witness is superficial, pausing only long enough to calculate a prudent moment of grief in the presence of his interrogator.

The poem contains three more testimonies. The second witness is the ex-girlfriend of the deceased. There is a line-break in fifth stanza of her monologue just before she states where they found the body. This line-break depicts a gasp for air as she prepares to retell the most emotional part of her account. The next witness is a widower and the ex-girlfriend's current boyfriend. His emotional gasp for air does not occur while he is remembering the corpse (for he has no personal connection to the deceased) but at the point when he retells how he had seen his girlfriend together with the deceased back when the two were dating. His gasp is a pause pregnant with jealousy. The rhythmic features of the next and final testimony reveal the most emotionally-charged of all the monologues. In confessing to the crime, the teenage son of the widower-boyfriend is hesitant, nervous and excited. His speech contains four instances of these physical line-breaks.

In the poem's final section, the narrator echoes the female witness who had remarked at one point in her testimony that the whole investigation was a “nightmare.” Pondering his own life, the narrator describes his profession as nightmarish. Then, at the precise moment when his thoughts turn to his own eventual death, he begins to have trouble breathing: “Выходит, что всю жизнь мы ждём убийства, / что следствие -- лишь форма ожидания” [It turns out we're waiting to / be murdered, and thereby investigating / just proves to be a form of expectation.] The narrator panics at the realization that the life he
has chosen for himself is in fact dedicated to an inquiry into his own death.

There are a dozen or so more of Brodsky's poems which share this motif of breath and suffocation. In 1971, for instance, Brodsky writes of his “борьба с удушьем” [struggle against suffocation]. Then, following Brodsky's exile (1972) and, to an even greater extent, after his two heart attacks (1976, 1984), Brodsky returns to this theme with more frequency. In 1975, as if in anticipation of his first heart attack, Brodsky writes two poems containing this motif. In the long poem “Колыбельная Трескового мыса” [Lullaby of Cape Cod], the lyrical persona is attempting to come to terms with the state of his exile. Saddened by his loss and finding little comfort in his new home, he repeats again and again that he feels stifled and tells of his weak heart. Then, in the celebrated poem “Осенный крик ястреба” [A Hawk's Cry in Autumn], we share in the terrifying experience of a hawk who has soared up into the thin air of high altitude.23 Unable to return below, it wonders how it got to this suffocating place. The final, apotheosized scream issuing from the hawk glorifies both the bird and the language in which it participates.

The next year (1976) Brodsky again writes two poems that touch upon this theme, “Квинтет” [Sextet]24 and “Новый Жюль Верн” [The New Jules Verne]. The second of these, inspired by Verne's 20,000 Leagues under the Sea, tells the intriguing story of Captain Nemo and Jacques's lives inside the belly of an octopus where it is “сыро и душно” [damp and stifling].25 This poem, like the two I have just mentioned, is a reflection upon the state

23 An excellent reading of this poem can be found in Tridsat’ tret’ia bukva, Leonid Batkin’s book on Brodsky (321-328).
24 The Russian title actually reads “Quintet.” However, Brodsky added an extra section to his English translation, creating a “Sextet.”
25 Brodsky's own English translation of this poem does not use these words. Instead, he describes it with “This jelly / is hard to inhale.” This image is discussed below.
of exile and the panic its isolation induces. Brodsky may have been envisioning the digestive system's mucous-membrane-lined tube (i.e., the alimentary canal) when he has his English-speaking version Jacques write that the “jelly / is hard to inhale.” Moreover, although Brodsky chose the less obvious but wonderfully rich rhyme of “jelly” with “ukulele,” a rhyme with “belly” is what is instinctually anticipated by most readers. A sense of panic comes not only from the suffocation, but also by the extreme isolation of Nemo's extended situation. “Сердце сжимается,” Jacques writes, “как подумаешь, как он тут одинок” [. . . If I think of his loneliness, my heart starts to pound . . .].

In 1977 Brodsky begins his “Эклога 4-ая (зимняя)”[Eclogue IV: Winter] but does not finish it until 1980, after a respite from poetry due to his first open heart surgery (1979). His return to poetry this year brings two more poems concerned with breathing, “Я входил вместо дикого зверя в клетку” [May 24, 1980] and “То не Муза воды набирает в рот” [Folk Tune]. Other of Brodsky’s poems which touch upon this theme are “В окрестностях Александрии” [Near Alexandria (1982)], “Дорогая, я вышел сегодня из дому поздно вечером” [Brise Marine (1989)], “Song of Welcome” (1992), and “С натуры” [In Front of Casa Marcello (1995)].

3.3.2 A Theology of Language: Classical Aspects, Biblical Aspects

Brodsky's attitude toward language is one of deepest reverence and devotion. He has, in fact, suggested that language is the genuine object of his faith and is, perhaps, his true God.26 Brodsky must have formed these notions while still quite young since, at the

26 Brodsky has made the following comments in two separate interviews (from 1979 and 1988): “Если Бог для меня и существует, то это именно язык” [If God does exist for me, then it is
first of his famous trials in 1964, when he was only 24 years old, he said that his poetry came from God:

Судья: А кто это признал, что вы поэт? Кто причислил вас к поэтам?
Бродский: Никто. (Без вызова.) А кто причислил меня к роду человеческому?
Судья: А вы учились этому?
Бродский: Чему?
Судья: Чтобы быть поэтом? Не пытались кончить вуз, где готовят... где учат...
Бродский: Я не думал, что это даётся образованием.
Судья: А чем же?
Бродский: Я думаю, это... (растверянно)... от Бога... (Etkind 61)

In attempting to understand his divine notions of language, Brodsky cultivated what he has called a “theology of language” (Polukhina, Bol’shaia kniga 235). Since theology is generally understood to be a rational inquiry into some type of divine power, Brodsky would, in theory, be able to reconcile his two modes of thought through his theology. In other words, he could employ his Occidental mode of thinking in order to clarify and accept aspects of his Oriental mode. Brodsky has said that he grapples with the abstract by attempting to give it tangible forms27 and, by defining it in rational terms, he

27 “Я пытаюсь сделать эти абстрактные размышления осязаемые посредством образности, конкретных символов” [I try to make these abstract thoughts tangible by means of imagery, of concrete symbols (Polukhina, Bol’shaia kniga 60)].
thereby domesticates it.\textsuperscript{28} Herein lies his strong preference for aesthetics over ethics ("эстетика – это осязаемое, она в некотором смысле реальнее, ближе, чем предмет вашей веры") (aesthetics are something tangible, it is in some sense more real, closer than the subject of your faith]) (Polukhina, Bol'shaia kniga 456). Lending form to the intangible is so typical of Brodsky that he has gone so far as to define language as a "diluted aspect of matter" (On Grief 311), although it "negat[es] its own mass and laws of gravity" (Less than One 186).

Geometry, his favorite branch of mathematics, provides him numerous models of form, allowing him, for example, to reign in the otherwise-chaotic movement of his poetic thought to a manageable, if wholly absorbing, 360 degree range (Less than One 99).

Ultimately, in giving form to poetry, Brodsky is able to give form to Time, since "poetry . . . collapses time and smells of geography" (On Grief 441). "[A]rt", Brodsky believes, "imitates that realm of which life supplies no notion: realizing its own brevity, art tries to domesticate the longest possible version of time" (Less than One 104). Writing about the deceased, for example, enables him to "domesticate the reprehensible infinity" (Less than One 49) because each monosyllabic word in poetry is a captured second of time, each representing one second (On Grief 368).

What is most intriguing about Brodsky's theology of language is that in his attempt to rationalize the divinity of poetry, he paradoxically abstracts it further through the tangible forms he creates to explain it. The two "tangible" forms I will look at are rooted in classical and Biblical symbolism, respectively: the Muse and the Tree of Knowledge.

\textsuperscript{28} Polukhina has spoken of this attitude of Brodsky's toward poetry: "Brodsky sees human creativity as a means of easing the burden of existence, bringing shape to an emptiness . . . resistance to chaos . . ." (Poet 189).
3.3.2.1 *The Seraphic Muse*

Characterizing Brodsky's Muse is somewhat tricky, particularly as he himself has named her “most defining characteristic” -- “undefinable” (*On Grief* 94). She is variously described by him in terms of both insouciance and emotion. As we know, Brodsky has on occasion passionately denied her existence entirely: “Ах, вся это ерунда насчёт вдохновения, спонтанности, эмоции” [Oh, that is all nonsense about inspiration, spontaneity, emotion. . . (Polukhina, *Bol'shaia kniga* 198)]. His attitude toward the Muse has also been tongue-in-cheek, such as when he joked about her having boarded the wrong airplane at the time of Brodsky's exile: “Я прибыл сюда без своей Музы. Наверное, она не села на тот самолёт” [I arrived here without my Muse. Probably, she got on the wrong plane (Polukhina, *Bol'shaia kniga* 21)]. And at still other times Brodsky will paint a surprisingly traditional portrait, apparently in order to mask any biographical references: “Let's leave her with a flute and a wreath of wildflowers.” Brodsky has also suggested that “[t]his way at least she might escape a biographer” (*On Grief* 95). Others have spoken of the diversity and elusiveness of her forms. Jane Knox, for one, has written that Brodsky's Muse, “иногда изображаемая им в неясных женственных чертах, становится ещё неуловимее” [sometimes depicted by him in vague female characteristics, becomes even more imperceptible ( Loseff, *Poetika* 167)].

Notwithstanding Brodsky's repeated attempts at excommunicating the Muse from his mythology of poetic creation, her image(s) persists because she is a way for him to make his divine language tangible. His tangible Muse stands in opposition to the Muse of the ancients, whom he describes as “hardly corporeal” and not “palpable” (*On Grief* 83).
Like Akhmatova’s, Brodsky’s Muse is often masked – frequently as an angel or seraph.

Since the (abstract) material Brodsky has to work with is of a divine nature (language), it is only fitting that he would sculpt it into these most heavenly forms.

This scenario calls to mind the myth of Pygmalion—a vital subtext, in fact, to Brodsky's mythology of poetic creation. In his article “Brodsky, Frost, and the Pygmalion Myth,” Bethea provides some very useful insights into Brodsky’s notions of poetic inspiration. Interpreting the English-language poem “Galatea Encore” with an eye to Brodsky's essay “On Grief and Reason,” Bethea extrapolates that “[t]he female statue has become so chiseled, so figured out, so placed upon a distant pedestal that it no longer recalls the human being it was modeled upon. . . Pygmalion has not been given a statue come to life at his touch, as in Ovid's original, but a human being he . . . has turned to stone (alabaster)” (300). Thus, on the one hand, Brodsky foils his readers' expectations because his statue does not engender human life but dehumanizes it. While the poem openly divulges that the statue becomes a goddess (“goddess, née alabaster”), Bethea uncovers its original, masked inspiration (following Brodsky’s model: alabaster, née beloved).

Building upon Bethea's theory, I would argue, first, that this now-dehumanized beloved acts, in turn, as an armature for the form into which the poet will mold his divine language. Thus, the poet's beloved becomes not only impenetrable, as Bethea suggests, but also immortal -- sharing her final form, as she does, with a goddess. This metamorphosis, then, would be schematized as: beloved → alabaster → Muse → language.29 According to

29 In his essay “Altra Ego”, Brodsky asserts that the Muse is the “older woman” and thus precedes the beloved (On Grief 84). It is important to note that the schema I am proposing does not repudiate this hierarchy because it does not state that the Muse had once been the lover -- rather, it depicts the lover as transforming into a likeness of the Muse.
Brodsky, what distinguishes the beloved from the Muse is her mortality and her comparative youth (On Grief 95). His Muse, an “older woman,” “precedes” the lover. These stages of metamorphosis explain the poem's notion of “coming full circle” (life-death-life) and the beloved's now-ethereal face and garments.

That’s what coming full circle means—
when your countenance starts to resemble weather,
when Pygmalion's vanished. And you are free
to cloud your folds, to bare the navel.

Future at last! That is, bleached debris
of a glacier amid the five-lettered ‘never’.

I would further argue for the presence in this poem of a parallel and reversed metamorphosis: language → Muse → alabaster → beloved.30 The direction of this metamorphosis follows Ovid’s original myth, in which Pygmalion’s statue, modeled after his Muse, becomes the lover. As in Ovid, there is a sensual element in Brodsky's mythology. A poem, he has said, is the “sublimation of the author's erotic urges and should be treated as such” (On Grief 84). In his essay “Altra Ego” (1990), a quasi epilogue to “Galatea Encore,” Brodsky returns to the model of a female metamorphosis resulting from a union with the poet, described here as Muse née language. According to Brodsky,

[t]he general scheme goes like this: the femininity of the Muse presupposes the masculinity of the poet. The masculinity of the poet presupposes the femininity of the lover. Ergo, the lover is the Muse, or could be called that. Another ergo: a poem is the sublimation of the author's erotic urges and should be treated as such.

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30 This presence of two reversed metamorphoses is supported by the image of mercury, an element which is used in making mirrors. For more on the image of mercury in the poem, see Leon Burnett's solid and comprehensive article “Galatea Encore” (Loseff and Polukhina, Brodsky’s Poetics and Aesthetics 150-176).
Simple (On Grief 86).

Through this parallel transformation, we witness Brodsky's need to make language tangible by lending it the familiar form of his lover.

"Galatea Encore," then, presents two opposite metamorphoses. In one, the beloved acquires protection and eternity ("Future at last!"). In the other, language acquires a feminine form, becoming an Eve nestled between the first and last letters of "never."

Moreover, through the alternating inexact rhyme of "navel" and "never" the reader can discern the poet greeting his new Eve with a similarly masked *ave* (in the word "navel").

Just as Brodsky gives his ethereal Muse a human form, so does he translate her heavenly dictation for human ears and eyes. For Brodsky, poetry resides entirely in the air and not underfoot, in the grass, as he said it did for Pasternak (Polukhina, Bol’shaia kniga 270]). This divine poetry is accessed by the poet only when his Oriental mode of cognition is active. Once he engages in "conversation" with the Muse, however, the space of poetry is elevated to a realm somewhere between the poet's intuition and a state of divine revelation. The metaphors of Muse and angel offer Brodsky figures through whom he can converse with language; they become the "ideal" conversant capable of mediating a revelation.

Lev Loseff has spoken of this ideal seraphic conversant, noting instances of her in

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31 *Ave* is Latin for the greeting "Hail".

32 Brodsky has said that language is a "перевод – на земной с серафического" [translation – to the earthly from the seraphic (Polukhina, Bol’shaia kniga 243)].

33 Brodsky has mentioned his angelic conversant in interviews. He has said, for example, "...идеальным собеседником поэта становится не человек, а ангел, невидимый посредник" [...it is not a person who becomes the poet's ideal conversant, but an angel, an invisible mediator (Polukhina, Bol’shaia kniga 285) and “Я пишу для некоего ангела русского языка” [I write for
two of Brodsky's poems.

И в “Разговоре с небожителем”, и в десятой главе “Горбунова и Горчакова” (“Разговор на крыльях”) лирические герои ищут адресата в высших сферах, за пределами угруюмого ландшафта, в котором они пребывают. Отвечая своему приземленному товарищу и доносчику Горчакову, Горбунов жалуется на отсутствие более серафического собеседника. . . (Loseff, Poetika165).

In both “Conversation with a Celestial Being” 34 and the tenth chapter of “Gorbunov and Gorchakov” (“A Conversation on the Porch”), the lyrical heroes search for an addressee in the highest realms, beyond the bounds of the gloomy landscape in which they reside. Gorbunov, in answering his earthly comrade, the informer, Gorchakov, complains about the lack of a more seraphic conversant.

The Muse and her heavenly abode extend Brodsky's sphere of isolation and offer him a secret companionship and a glimpse into eternity. I would suggest that there are at least three sources for this particularly seraphic form of hers: the Old Testament, Pushkin's “Пророк” [The Prophet], and Italian architecture. In the Book of Isaiah, the prophet has a vision of a six-winged seraph. Pushkin's poem, in retelling this parable, portrays a meeting between a poet and a seraph who empowers him with the Word. Through the angel's touch not only are the poet's eyes truly opened, but so are his ears, which ring with the sounds of the earth, water and heavens, including the angels' flight. It is certain that Brodsky knew both of these texts and very likely that they influenced the form his Muse took. As for Italian architecture, Brodsky's love for Venice is well documented and the angels that grace its many ornamental façades and interiors have likely inspired Brodsky's poetry.35

“Пенье без музыки”[Singing without Music (1970)] has rightly been called “one of

some kind of angel of the Russian language (Polukhina, Bol'shaia kniga 215)].

34 I have used Polukhina's translation of this title, as this poem is not included in Brodsky's Collected Poems in English (Joseph Brodsky 263).

the outstanding longer love poems in twentieth-century Russian literature. In this extraordinarily touching poem, the lyrical persona looks skyward to ease his lovesick heart. His lover, having left the country indefinitely, is now separated from him by a vast expanse of space. In order to reach one another, he suggests that their glances join at a star high above. There, in the clouds, they can be together and converse in their own heavenly grotto: “Вот место нашей встречи. Грот / заоблочный. Беседка в тучах. / Приют гостеприимный. . . ” [This is our meeting place. A spot / in clouds. A seraphic grotto. / A pergola in spheres. . . ] The lyrical persona is thus able to reunite with his lover through the medium of the Muse's heavenly and safe abode. Furthermore, he has found a way to create for himself his ideal celestial conversant. This suggested reading is not evident through the above translation, since the word "беседка"—meaning both "summer house" or "pergola"—is derived from the word "беседа" [conversation]. The original Russian points directly to the search in Brodsky's mythology of poetic creation for an ideal conversant.

Clouds are representative of the Muse and inspiration in other of Brodsky's poems. In a poem actually titled "Clouds" (1989), for example, we are privy to the many shapes and images that clouds bring to the lyrical persona's mind. Clouds are a source of inspiration not only because, like the stone statues, they can give birth to new life ("вы -- изваяния / существований / без рубежа" [you are the limpid / sculptures of limit- / less genesis]) and because they can form into his seraphic Muse ("Пенный каскад / ангелов" [Frothy cascades / of seraphs]) but also because of their inherent transience, which beckons his intuition and defies his reason. In the following two stanzas we clearly see how his Oriental

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36 See Gerry Smith's article in Loseff and Polukhina, *Joseph Brodsky* 12.
mode of thinking is gaining precedence:

Это от вас
я научился
верить не в числа –
в чистый отказ

от правоты
веса и меры
в пользу химеры
и лепоты!

[It's you who let
me with your nimbus
trust not in numbers
but in the complete

spurning of weights
and measures in favor
--once and forever--
of phantoms and grace.]

By gazing up at the clouds, Brodsky’s lyrical persona is, in effect, searching for poetic inspiration. One can catch a glimpse of his angelic Muse in the clouds of at least three other poems, “Ex voto” (1983), “Муха” [The Fly (1985)], and “History of the Twentieth Century: A Roadside Show” (1986).
Most often, poets write indoors. If clouds can induce inspiration, then Brodsky would need a room with a view. Windows are, in fact, a prominent motif in his poetry and this, I would suggest, Brodsky inherited from Akhmatova. The windows in Brodsky's poetry are so much a part of his creative process that their curtains become cloud-like and clouds are described as curtains. In "На смерть друга" [To a friend: In Memorium (1973)], for instance, we have the following metaphor – added by Brodsky in his own translation —: “someone's pipe blows in vain its small tune far above heavy, cumulous curtains.”

Then, almost a decade later, in “Венецианские строфы (2)" [Venetian Stanzas II (1982)], the diaphanous white curtain floats about, recalling clouds: "Чуткую бязь в окне колблют вдох и выдох" [The window's sentient gauze gets fluttered by both exhaling and inhaling.]

Like Akhmatova, Brodsky developed a relationship with his windows and their views. They are so important to him that without them he feels stifled. When he was in the insane asylum what he found most awful was the small size of the room and the lack of windows. In his highly regarded “Часть речи" [A Part of Speech (1975-76)], Brodsky alludes to his preference for certain houses because of their windows: “... Некоторые дома / лучше других: больше вещей в витринах; / и хотя бы уж тем, что если сойдешь с ума, / то, во всяком случае, не внутри них.” [. . . Some houses, let's say, / are better than others. To take one item, / some have richer windows. What's more, if you go insane, / it won't happen, at least, inside them.] And in another poem he grieves at having to part with them. Reflecting upon the New York apartment he was moving out of after so many years, his thoughts turned to the windows: “But what should I do / with my windows' view? / I feel like I've been married to it, or something” (“Blues" 1992). Because of the windows' association with

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37 The original Russian reads: "тщётно некто трубит наверху в свою дудку протяжно."
clouds and, hence, the Muse, the male poet here viewed his relationship with the windows as a kind of marriage.

In concluding my discussion of Brodsky’s seraphic Muse, I will look at one final poem. In “Литовский ноктюрн: Томасу Венцлова” [Lithuanian Nocturne (1973)], Brodsky evokes the Muse – but it is not only his own poetic inspiration he seeks. Now in exile and parted from his good friend, he pleads with the Muse to remain faithful to Tomas Venclova:

За пределами веры,
из своей стратосферы,
Муза, с ними призри
на певца тех равнин, в рукотворную тьму
погруженных по кровлю,
на певца усмиренных пейзажей.

[...Muse! From the heights where you dwell, beyond any creed's stratosphere, from your rarified ether,
look, I pray you, together
with those two,
after these pacified sunken plains' sullen bard.]

In exchange for granting his request, he dedicates this very poem to her.

. . . Муза, прими
эту арию следствия, петую в ухо причине,
то есть двойнику,
Muse, accept this effect's
little aria sung to the gentle
cause's sensitive ear,
and regard it and its do-re-me-ing tercets
in your rarified rental
from the viewpoint of air, of pure air! . . .]

Brodsky engages Muse mythology more vigorously in this poem than in perhaps any of his others. For a goddess whose existence Brodsky so often denies, she is here most graciously evoked and honored.

3.3.2.2 A Tree of Knowledge

The ideal view that a poet's window can offer is, for most, one of nature and, hence, trees. As we know, rustling leaves foretell of the Muse's arrival and so are often looked to for inspiration. Trees are a prominent motif in Brodsky's poetry and one of the reasons for this can be found in The Bible.

The Old Testament, in particular, was an extremely profound influence on Brodsky (Polukhina, Bol'shaia kniga 481). After his exile, he grew to identify himself with Adam,

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38 A number of other poems containing references to the Muse and/or angels are: “December in Florence,” “San Pietro,” “Twenty Sonnets,” “Fifth Anniversary,” “Folkturn,” “Roman Elegies,” “Eclogue IV: Winter,” “Kellomaki,” “Angel,” “Centaur III,” “August
whom he viewed as a Jew who had been cast from his home (Brodsky, *On Grief*, 27).

Brodsky has not discussed this identification in any great detail, but it seems clear that the comparison extends to the forbidden knowledge that each acquired. Adam gained knowledge from a tree in the Garden of Eden, while it came to Brodsky through Language. I would like to suggest that the source of this knowledge became a poetic motif for Brodsky.

In a number of interviews, Brodsky has used the image of a fruit tree to describe the source of his poems. The fruit from the tree stands for the words of his poetry: “Язык развивается, достигает определённого уровня, а писатель просто оказывается поблизости, чтобы подхватить или сорвать эти плоды” [Language develops, reaches a certain level, while the writer simply finds himself near at hand to pick or tear off these fruits] (Polukhina, *Bol’shaia kniga* 54). He repeated this idea in another interview:

“… язык уже существовал до нас … Язык … живёт и развивается. Это в некотором смысле как природа. И он достигает определённой зрелости. А поэт ...вблизи, чтобы подобрать плоды, которые падают, и организовать их.” [Language existed before us. . . Language lives and develops. It is in a sense like nature. And it reaches a certain ripeness. And the poet . . . is at hand to pluck the fruits that fall and organize them] (Polukhina, *Bol’shaia kniga* 142).

Brodsky has even extended the metaphor of his creative process to the Biblical notion of temptation. When asked in an interview what his main device is as a writer, he replied:

“именно готовность поддаться искушению сделать следующий шаг” [. . . precisely the willingness to yield to the temptation of taking the next step] (Polukhina, *Bol’shaia kniga* 57).

These metaphors pervade Brodsky’s poetry. For example, Adam's apple, race and Rain.
exile are all referred to in “Горбунов и Горчаков” [Gorbunov and Gorchakov (1968)].

Holding an apple, one of the patients declares: “Еврей снял это яблоко со древа / познания”

[This apple was picked from the tree of knowledge by a Jew.] This leads to a discussion of Adam and Eve and, eventually, to an attempt at defining the notion of “parting,” i.e., the condition of exile.

A last example is from the poem, “Мексиканский дивертисмент” [Mexican Divertimento (1975)], in which Brodsky's language takes the form of pears. The leaves of the pear tree are rustling, conversing with people's souls. “Селяне околачивают груши. / ... / Слух различает в ропоте листы / жаргон, которым пользуются души, / общаясь в переполненном Аду” [The local lads shake down a rain of pears. / . . . / The ear picks out among the rustling shudders / of leaves the lingo tossed around as pairs / of souls converse in hell of things profound].

Brodsky has often spoken of how poets are like birds. This is because, he says, they sit on any of the tree's branches and interpret the rustling of the leaves as applause (Polukhina, Bol’shaia kniga 348). His assertion that the bird/bard can sit anywhere on any tree is of particular importance because it is not his state of exile that isolates him but the fact that he is a poet unfailingly aware of his metaphysical existence. The topos of his poetry is Chronos: “the infinite is poetry's standard turf” (Brodsky, On Grief 322). It breathes down his neck, as if daring him to reach back and pluck off what language it has to offer.

Brodsky's Oriental mode of cognition sought to create a mythology of poetic creation while his Occidental mode wavered between contributing rational elements to it and rejecting it altogether. It was during his interviews that Brodsky seemed most
uncomfortable with the mysterious elements of his poetic creation. This is certainly due to the fact that he was not in a creative frame of mind when he was giving his interviews, as he was when he was writing poetry or even prose. Thus, Brodsky's interviews offer a very different picture than the other two genres do when it comes to his notions of poetic creation. Had Mandelstam and Akhmatova been called upon to give as many interviews as Brodsky had, their mythologies of poetic creation might have turned out differently. In the next chapter we will look at a second contemporary poet's notions of poetic creation. Like Brodsky, Olga Sedakova has offered a number of interviews; unlike Brodsky, she does not tend to question the myth-making inherent in her poetry.
CHAPTER 4

OLGA SEDAKOVA:
"ТАИНСТВЕННАЯ ГЛУБИНА" [THE SECRET DEPTH]

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot “Little Gidding”

The present study will conclude with Olga Sedakova's mythology of poetic creation. If, as Brodsky said, everything we read goes into our blood, then Sedakova's veins flow not only with the words and myths of Mandelstam, Akhmatova, and Brodsky but with world culture in general. She is an extremely erudite poet whose continual backward glances to literary history make her a highly worthy subject with whom to conclude this study.

In the first half of this chapter, I propose that Olga Sedakova's personal mythology of poetic creation centers around her interest in two Orthodox practices: icon painting and Hesychasm. Both of these provide her with models for entering into an inspired state which, in Sedakova's mythology, is a deeply inward contemplation, ultimately leading her to an act of "service", i.e. to the creation of her poetry. Sedakova's verse, being highly metapoetic, retains traces of these two practices in its themes and motifs.

The second half of this chapter will focus on the specific paths Sedakova names as capable of opening the doors of her perception: dreams, music, and visual objects. These
paths, while offering the poet “broader expanses of meaning,” themselves become prominent motifs in Sedakova's verse (Sedakova, Polukhina, Reid 241).

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Although she is among the best Russian poets writing today, Olga Sedakova may still require some introduction. She was born in 1949 and has lived primarily in Moscow, spending a good portion of her time at Moscow State University, first as a student and currently as a professor. Her poetry, essays, and literary honors convey her impressive wealth of knowledge. Besides knowing a great deal about literature, her erudition has been informed both by Medieval studies (the subject of her dissertation), and by the intellectual milieu of the Tartu circle in the 1970s. A third factor that has significantly contributed to her life as a poet is the Orthodox faith. Although Sedakova does not consider herself a “religious poet”--she finds the term limiting in the conformity that it demands upon the content of her poems--she is certainly a poet who is deeply influenced by her faith.1 For Sedakova, the experience of poetic inspiration and creation is one of deep contemplation, prayer, and transcendence. As the scholar Valentina Polukhina has said, “[Sedakova's] main interest is the knowledge of the spirit buried deep within us” (Sedakova, “A Rare Independence” 34). Sedakova's poetry is extremely metapoetic, continually speaking of its own birth; thus, it is her poetic process (consisting of contemplation, prayer, and transcendence) that becomes the major motif of her poetry.2

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1 “For me, poetry is unthinkable without ‘openness’ of meaning, whilst religion in art, according to the common view, involves a prescriptive, engaged approach” (“A Rare Independence” 239-40).

2 Stephanie Sandler has also noted the prominence of the metapoetic element in Sedakova’s poetry: “Sedakova writes about the processes of thought, about the emotions that surge when one turns an idea over in the mind, rather than the discoveries that thinking can yield”
Sedakova’s publications have encountered their share of obstacles. She was able, through her connections with the Tartu circle, to publish a couple of essays in the mid 1980s. Her poetry, on the other hand, was for many years virtually unknown, until in 1986 when a book of her poetry, Ворота. Окна. Арки. [Gates. Windows. Arches.] was published in France. The Afterword to this book contributed to its success: it was written by Vladimir Shaitanov, under the pseudonym D.S. This, then, may be considered the seminal published commentary on her poetry. Two years following the book’s publication, Viacheslav Ivanov published a short, laudatory piece in Druzhba narodov. Also in 1988 Mikhail Epstein published an article on contemporary Russian poetry which contained a significant focus on Sedakova and which labeled her the ultimate “metarealist.” He defines metarealism as an extreme type of realism, which might encompass all and any realities, such as those of even a fly or an electron. ³ Additionally, he contrasts the elements of her poetry with the distortions and perversions of Conceptualist poetry, particularly that of the poet Lev Rubinshtein. Her second book of poetry, Китайское путешествие. Стелы и надписи. Старые песни. [A Chinese Journey. Stellae and Inscriptions. Old Songs], was published in Russia in 1990.

Sedakova was introduced to the English-language readership only in the early nineties, with a few translations appearing in anthologies (The Poetry of Perestroika and The Third Wave) and with an interview by Valentina Polukhina in a collection dedicated to Brodsky. The year 1994 will surely be seen as the turning point in Sedakova’s public career. Two books of her poetry were published, one in Russia (Стихи [Poems]) and one in

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³ For a highly informative, albeit slightly dated, article on movements in contemporary

(Sandler “Thinking Self” 302).
England with parallel English translations (Шёлк времени: The Silk of Time). The first of these contains poetry written between the years 1970 and 1993, a republished and longer version of her ars poetica, “Похвала поэзии” [In Praise of Poetry], and an essay on her poetry by Sergei Averintsev. The second book was put together by Valentina Polukhina, who has contributed significantly to broadening Sedakova's readership. Also in 1994, the well-known scholars Andrew Wachtel and Catriona Kelley, independently of one another, published translations of a number of her poems. In 1995, Novyi mir published two separate essays criticizing her poetry for, essentially, being utterly incomprehensible. These unfavorable reviews, however, seemed to have had little effect on her reputation.

Sedakova has remained a research interest for Wachtel. In his 1999 article “The Youngest Archaists,” he analyzes Sedakova's poem “Горная ода” [Mountain Ode] in terms of eighteenth-century poetic traditions and also notes its metaphysical aspect. At the same time, another eminent scholar of Russian poetry, Stephanie Sandler, contributed to Sedakova scholarship, and Richard McKane was working on a book of her translations, which would come out the following year. Sandler wrote about the self in Sedakova's verse, concluding that it is a dispersed psyche always hidden within something or someone else. Her analysis is based largely upon Sedakova's own ideas about the motif of внутриположность [the placing of one thing inside another]⁴ in Akhmatova's “Поэма без героя”[Poem without a Hero]. Sandler's second piece on Sedakova, published in 2001, continues to explore the self in Sedakova's poetry but narrows in on the notion of fear in her poem “Взгляд кота” [Cat's Gaze]. I have found Sandler's approach to Sedakova most

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⁴ I am using Sandler’s translation of this neologism (“Thinking Self” 310).
perceptive and helpful to my own work. Sedakova has continued to write and publish actively, particularly in the last four years or so. Besides having had numerous essays published in journals, she has witnessed the publication of two new books in the last two years. One, *Наше положение: Образ настоящего* (*Our Position: An Image of the Present*), is a collection of essays in collaboration with other writers. The second, published in 2001, is a two-volume collected works that includes both poetry and prose.

4.1 *The verbal icon*

In one of her interviews, Sedakova mentions the old tradition in icon painting, whereby the artist would pray and fast in order to reach a state of divine inspiration. In another, she says that she herself has made attempts at consciously inducing poetic inspiration by fasting. This, coupled with the fact that Sedakova prays regularly, hints to a parallel between her creative process and that of the icon painter's. Yet another of Sedakova's passing remarks supports this claim: “There remains some unexpressed beauty which none of the poets has as yet expressed. Let us say there is some sort of literary analogue to icon painting” (“Conform not to this Age” 60). Almost a decade before Sedakova suggested this literary analogue, she had already been visualizing her poems as

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5 This unique collection of essays is described thus: “Российская ситуация в начале III тысячелетия, взятая в её интимной, жуткой и обещающей сути минуя поверхность властного скандала и журналистики. Судьба страны, настроение современного человека, поэтическое пророчество, вера и церковь, правда спасения определяют направленность внимания” [The Russian situation in the beginning of the third millennium, taken in its intimate, cruel and promised essence, escaping the superficiality of the imperious scandal and journalism. The direction of attention is defined by the fate of the country, the mood of modern man, the poetic prophesy, the church and faith, and the truth of salvation]. While the majority of the essays are by Sedakova, nearly as many are by V. Bibikhin. The other contributing authors are A. I. Shmaina-Velikanova, A. V. Akhutin, A.K. Vustin, and S.S. Khoruzhii.
being, in part, portraits of the places where they were composed. Different forms of visual art have received her highest praise: “The only testimony to the times when the spirit has flowered in Russia that we have are her icons and her architecture” (“A Rare Independence” 247). Mandelstam, one of her favorite poets, understood and was inspired by the spirit in architecture; perhaps Sedakova is complementing his focus with her love of icon painting.

There is, as Sandler has so perceptively noted, very little action in Sedakova’s poetry (“Thinking Self” 305-6). Her objects and images generally remain motionless. This aspect of her poetry further contributes to the static, pictorial sense of her verse. Sedakova feels that poets are drawn to what she calls visual art’s “prepared semantic sum.” In other words, the various components contained in a piece of art lose their separateness and chronology at the time the work is viewed. The semantic sum of a poem, on the other hand, is only realized upon its conclusion; it is dependent upon the time it takes to be read. This is not at all, however, a criticism of poetry. On the contrary, Sedakova exploits this aspect of verbal art. Sandler has understood this as the essence of Sedakova’s poetry and I could not agree more:

Sedakova uses textual difficulty to slow down the reader’s work of sense-making. Her poems take apart and play with the constituent elements of thought and of poetry . . . The slow steps in coming to comprehend an idea--her richest subject--can be viewed as a miniature version of what happens to a reader in the presence of

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6 “[Каждое стихотворение в какой-мере портрет места]” [Every poem is to some degree a portrait of a place] (“Zametki” 147).
7 “Поэты любят в живописи готовый смысловой итог” [Poets love the prepared semantic sum in painting] (“Zametki” 152).
one of Sedakova's poems ("Thinking Self" 303).

This nudging of the reader to reflect upon the poetry brings me back to thoughts of the icon. Averintsev, a well-respected philosopher and friend of Sedakova's, has succinctly explained the general role of the icon in this way: it is “intended to encourage prayer and meditation” (Grierson 13). The role, so to speak, of Sedakova's poetry is just this: to provide a verbal icon.

In his book *Painting, Psychoanalysis, and Spirituality*, Stephen J. Newton looks at what he calls the “inner core” of the creative process of painters. He draws heavily on the work of Anton Ehrenzweig, who proposed a theory of a highly structured unconscious psyche, in contrast to the commonly accepted notion of a chaotic psyche. Ehrenzweig termed the central phase of the psyche's creative structure “manic-oceanic.” He conceived of this phase as being the deepest level of the psyche, the place at which the artist experiences *ekstasis*, a kind of psychic “death” and “resurrection.” Newton asserts that the “definitive manifestation [of *ekstasis*] is in the religious icon” (Newton 84). The explanation Newton offers for this is, in part, the following:

If we recall that the word *acheiropoiesis* means 'made without the agency of hands' and that the icon, in its spontaneous manifestation, became associated with miracle cures, it can be seen that the icon painting incorporates the creative process as the core of spiritual healing. In other words, the unconscious creative process that can appear to be the unseen work of divine intervention, in its potential for psychic structural transfiguration and for creating a healed, whole self, also offers the ultimate ecstatic revelation of spiritual redemption and salvation (Newton 193).

Here, Newton is discussing a concept that is of great interest to Sedakova herself--*acheiropoiesis*. In her essay "Поеzия и антропология" [Poetry and Anthropology], she identifies the inherent paradox of *acheiropoiesis*, which she calls “нечеловечество”
["non-humanity"], as belonging to the study of anthropology. She writes that this inhuman quality of poetry variously takes on different forms of expression:

Например, постоянная тема медиумического характера творчества: это не создаётся человеком, а диктуется Музой (языком); является во сне; само (произведение) себя создаёт и под[обное].
Или такой поворот: эти строки (звуки, изваяния) создал совсем не тот человек, который вот сейчас занят пустяками. . .
Все эти случаи восторга перед нечеловеческим в искусстве открывают нам в конце концов нашу актуальную антропологию (Sedakova, ed., et al 115).

[For example, the constant theme of the mediumistic nature of creation: it is not created by man but is dictated by the Muse (language); it appears during sleep; it (the work) creates itself and so on.
Or such a turn: these lines (sounds, sculptures) were created by a completely different person than the one who is at this moment involved with trivialities. . .
All of these instances of ecstasy in the face of the non-human in art ultimately reveal to us our current anthropology.]

Traces of each of these forms of divine expression can be found in the themes of Sedakova's poetry, as will be discussed below. Moreover, Sedakova has shown a keen interest in the concept of acheiropoiesis by the fact that she reserves her highest praise for those poems which seem to have been crafted by something other than human endeavor ("Conform not" 40).

4.2 Service

Getting to the state of true inspiration is no easy task. Sedakova says that this is done only through purging oneself of all motives and intentions; the poet needs to attain a kind of pure intentness or state of "service"(Sedakova, ed., et al, 115). I believe "pure intentness" is a better explanation than "expurgating intentions" because the latter of these definitions creates a paradox. This "service" can be understood, I am suggesting, as a kind
of prayer or dedication, both of which are intentional. My suggestion is, in part, informed by another of Sedakova's passing remarks in which she describes secular art as being "of unserviceable things" ("Conform not" 68). If her own poetic art form is "serviceable," then it must belong in some sense to the non-secular. Polukhina has made a statement that further supports a categorization of Sedakova's poetry as non-secular. She has said that Sedakova's "greatest ambition" is "to return poetry to the Russian Orthodox church and to give the Church to poetry" ("Conform not" 33).  

This service, then, is the first condition in Sedakova's mythology of the creative process: ideally, she must shake off all *unpure*, so to speak, personal motives for writing a poem. The poem must serve not herself, but some *other*. Through her faith and, more specifically, prayer, she is able to deflect the focus away from her self and dedicate it to serving an *other*. Sedakova has in fact said that she is drawn to poetry that has an anonymous feel to it. Her desire to rid herself of personal motives might then also be seen as a desire for a sense of anonymity.  This notion recalls yet again the traditions of icon painting since, as is well known, the painters did not sign their works. Thus, just as icons are considered expressions of prayer, so Sedakova's ideal poem becomes just such an expression (Limouris 195).

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8 I, personally, have not read anything this extreme by Sedakova but Polukhina has certainly had unpublished discussions with her.
9 "...[M]не приятнее и интереснее анонимная или близкая к анонимной поэзия -- средневековая, фольклорная... Мне перестали быть интересны поэты с личной манерой, со "своим", что называется, миром" ("Dlia togo chtoby perevesti" n.p.). [...] [M]ore pleasant and interesting to me is anonymous or virtually anonymous poetry--medieval, folkloric...poets with their own style--with their "own," so-called, world--no longer interest me]

Sedakova had also mentioned anonymity in folk poetry in a previous essay called "Немного о поэзии" [A Bit about Poetry].

I would like to thank Kristin Peterson for suggesting that I look for mention of anonymity in
According to Sedakova, it was Pushkin more than anyone else who was able to attain this state of pure "service." For him, just as for Mandelstam, who followed his lead, the most valuable aspect of art was its inspiration, not its final form. In Sedakova's view, this is what should be learned first and foremost from Pushkin, this is the inner theme ("внутренняя тема") of his poetry. Sedakova interprets Pushkin's relationship with his Muse as one full of trust and reverence, allowing him to "serve" the hypnotic state of inspiration ("служит поэтическому внушению" [he serves poetic suggestion]).

In the same vein, for Sedakova, the essence of Mandelstam's poetry is its own creation precisely because he was able to remove himself from his poetry and attain a "momentary personality" within his experience of poetic inspiration. His "personality vanished in the heat of creative rapture: ‘To fly in light's pursuit, Where I am not at all' "("A Rare Independence" 248).

Quite a few of Sedakova's poems display this motif of service. The following stanza from her poem "Слово" [The Word] is but one example.

И кто любит, того полюбят.
Кто служит, тому послужат,
не теперь, так когда-нибудь после.
Но лучше тому, кто благодарен,
кто пойдёт, послужив, без Рахили
весёлый, по холмам зелёным.

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Sedakova's work as a further parallel to icon painting.
10 The rest of this discussion of Pushkin and Mandelstam is based on Sedakova's ars poetica, "Zametki" (150-151).
11 Translations of Sedakova's essays and poetry are my own, unless otherwise noted.
12 Biblical motifs, particularly from the New Testament, are prevalent in Sedakova's poetry.
[And he who loves will be loved.
Who serves will be served,
if not now then at some later time.
But it is better for him who is grateful,
who, having served, will go
about the green hills,
cheerful without Rachel]¹³

In this poem, the mirrored structure of the first two lines strikes a balance between the actions of love and service; they are each acts of devotion that promise requital through redemption. In this particular poem, the other whom is served (and loved) is the Word.

Once, in speaking directly about Pasternak and indirectly about herself, Sedakova wrote: "Poetry is not a professional occupation, it is life itself. . ."("Vacancy of a Poet" 73). In Sedakova's mythology of poetic creation, living the life of a devout Christian is a necessary condition in the pursuit of poetic ekstasis. If the poet strives toward faith, love, and humility in her daily life, she may then attempt to rid herself of deliberate motives when she is working on her craft. Prayer and contemplation can be seen as vehicles that lead her mind toward this ultimate ekstasis.

Textual evidence of the process of contemplation can be found in Sedakova's poem “Старушки” [Old Women], in which the lyrical persona says that she observes and ponders

¹³ All poetic excerpts are taken from Sedakova's Sobranie sochinenii v 2 t. Moskva (Moscow): En Ef K’iu, 2001.
the faces of the elderly.\textsuperscript{14}

It is important to note that this poem begins by suggesting an image of a painter. Secular painters have good reason to study faces but icon painters have an additional reason: their belief that humans were created in God's image. Sedakova's lyrical persona recognizes the immortal power of God that resides within these women. The renowned Orthodox priest and professor Gennadios Limouris has explained that Heaven is anticipated in the human face: “starting from certain faces, certain old faces, fashioned by a long life, faces which have not been plunged into resentment or bitterness or the fear of death, faces of those who

\textsuperscript{14} The translation is by Catriona Kelly.
do not flinch as they approach death, faces that know precisely where they are, and have found again the mind of a child" (119). In Sedakova's poem, God's power is visible even on the faces of embittered believers. Sedakova's lyrical persona continues her contemplation of humans in another poem:

Ах, много я на людей смотрела
и знаю странные вещи:
знаю, что душа -- младенец,
младенец до последнего часа.

[Oh, I have often watched people
and I know strange things:
I know that the soul is an infant,
an infant until the final hour.]

By describing the soul as an infant, Sedakova is in effect telling her readers that the human soul retains a piece of Eden and anticipates Heaven. Sedakova views childhood as an entirely different semantic system from that of adulthood. It is an age "when one best remembers Eden" ("Vacancy of a Poet" 76). These notions of hers gain additional significance when we are told by Sedakova that "perhaps everything I write in my poetry is really about my childhood" ("Vacancy of a Poet" 67).

The next poetic excerpt, from "Давид поёт Саулу" [David Sings to Saul], also speaks of this different semantic system:

Ты видел, как это бывает, когда
ребёнок, ещё бессловесный,
Children are instinctual and natural; their innocence and wordlessness comprise the pure intention which adults should strive for. Contemplating and remembering childhood is a way to that desired state (or place) of pure intent, or service. The topos of this desired state is the subject of the next section.

4.3 The silence of the heart

Traditionally, of course, the heart has been synonymous with love. For Sedakova, however, it is above all synonymous with the center of the body, spirit, and mind. It is the place where one can learn about the self, God, humility, and love in the broadest sense.15

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15 Sedakova scrupulously avoids references to romantic love in her poetry.
It is the source of poetry.

The meaning and role of the heart in Sedakova's mythology is rooted in the beliefs of Hesychasm, whose name originates from the word “hesychia,” meaning “the silence of the heart.” Hesychasm, which originated in Byzantium, came to Russia in the fifteenth century. It is known as an ascetic tradition, a spiritual practice, and is sometimes called a religious anthropology, since it deals with the meaning of human existence. Much of the information we have today about Hesychasm is due to St. Gregory Palamas who, in the fourteenth century, recorded and interpreted the philosophy and practices of the Hesychasts.

This group’s spiritual practices work toward the ultimate aim of theosis, deification, salvation: Through the constant repetition of prayer and the techniques of breath control and meditative posture, the hesychasts attempted to penetrate the mysteries of the heart and attain direct knowledge of God through a vision of the same uncreated light which had been revealed to the disciples during the Transfiguration (Grierson 23).

Sedakova refers to the Hesychasts, albeit briefly, in one of her interviews. Once again, however, her passing remark is very revealing. She says: “for me the word is surrounded by a huge zone of whiteness, of silence – the silence within words. The silence within words is, as you know, the fundamental principle of hesychasm; for me it is where poetry begins” (“A Rare Independence” 241). In other words, Sedakova is saying that the fundamental principle of Hesychasm is akin to the creation of her poetry.

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16 Sedakova's erudition concerning this period of history (it was the subject of her doctoral dissertation) is another reason to expect a familiarity with Hesychasm.
17 It is with some frequency that Sedakova writes about anthropology. In her Vatican speech, she discusses Vladimir Solov'ev’s “anthropology.” His interest in Hesychasm is another possible source for Sedakova's knowledge about this spiritual practice.
The prominent motif of the heart in Sedakova's poetry is by no means the only connection between her mythology of poetic creation and Hesychasm. Her involvement in deep contemplation, which I have discussed above, as well as her interests in the themes of silence, transfiguration, darkness, wind, and fabric are a few other commonalities. The theme of transfiguration in Sedakova's poetry, for example, has been recognized by other scholars, including Sandler, who has pointed to metamorphosis, or transformativeness, as “the central activity of [Sedakova's] poetry” (“Thinking Self” 306). Darkness, a theme which will be discussed below, was believed to aid the Hesychasts in their attainment of an inner calm (Grierson 51). The theme of wind in Sedakova's verse can be understood in Hesychast terms as the carrier of prayers (Billington 55). In her poetry, Sedakova has associated wind with God, such as in the poem “Эпітідії Втора” [The Second Legend] in which she writes: “Кто знал, что Бог -- попутный ветер?” [Who knew that God is a favorable wind?]. Additionally, Sedakova may very well be aware of the role the Hesychast monks played in decorative belt-weaving and word-weaving: “the subordination of verbal inventiveness and pictorial naturalism to the balanced and rhythmic repetition of a few simple patterns and phrases designed to facilitate direct links with God” (Billington 55.) Images of weaving do occur in Sedakova's verse and I will be returning to this motif further on in the chapter. The “rhythmic repetition” of the weaving process echoes a beating heart. Moreover, Sedakova tends to rely on stock words and images, returning to them again and again, thereby generating a similar type of “rhythmic repetition” such as used in this weaving process.

Sedakova's essay “Немного о поэзии” [A Bit about Poetry] best explains the
centrality of the heart in her poetic process. One of poetry's lessons is that space can be transformed: that which is far away can actually be near us, or even inside of us, and vice versa. The space of poetry is transformative because its topos is the heart.

An example of this transformative space is that often in Sedakova's poetry heartbeats are heard outside the body, such as in the sky, in the earth and, simply, everywhere. The poem “Легенда десятая” [The Tenth Legend] recalls the Biblical Jacob who had visions in his sleep and foresaw a severe drought. In it, the heart is described as the sky: “Слышащее сердце...небо, круглое на вид,/ не свод, а куб -- и он гремит,/ и сердце есть внутри него” [The listening heart is the sky, to our eyes round,/ not a vault but a cube -- and it thunders / and the heart is inside of it]. “Рыцари едут на турнир” [Knights Going to a Tournament] is another poem in which we meet with the motif of a body-less heart. This time it is the earth's heart that is beating: “И что же, бывают времена, / бывает время таким, / что слышно, как бьётся сердце земли / . . . / Сердцебиенье лесной земли” [What's there to do, there are times like these, / there is a time like this / when it is audible how the earth's heart beats]. One last example can be found in “Легенда одиннадцатая” [The Eleventh Legend]. There is a group of
people, sitting around a dinner table. At first they do not speak and then one of them reveals news that makes them anxious. It is at this point we are told: “Сердце билось, кажется, везде” [A heart, it seemed, beat everywhere]. The shared feeling of nervousness between the dinner guests took on a life of its own outside of the individuals and became part of the outside world. For Sedakova, the heart is the place inside of each of us where we can connect with God, with ourselves, with the rest of the world--it is the center of the universe. It is a space which encourages transformations.

Beating, in Sedakova's mythology, is not limited to the heart. What is often called “personification” occurs frequently in her poetry because, as Epstein has explained in his definition of metarealism, Sedakova is interested in all realities, i.e. she looks at things from an endless variety of perspectives. One example of this involves a kind of personification of the heart. The opening poem in the book Китайское путешествие [A Chinese Journey] contains the following line: “Родина! вскринуло сердце при виде ивы” [Homeland! Cried the heart upon seeing the willow]. Such an expression may not, in fact, seem all that unusual since we are used to speaking about the heart metaphorically. The difference here, however, is that what might first seem to be a metaphor in Sedakova's poetry is, in actuality, another version of reality. In this and many of her other poems we are being asked to view life from another perspective.

### 4.4 The birth-giving depth

The frequent motifs of the heart, contemplation, and memory in Sedakova's poetry all share a common space--depths. Sedakova feels that the notion of depths is
gravely misunderstood—it is too often seen as a “страшный подвал” [terrifying basement] (*Nashe polozenie* 136). Depth, then, is a space that she embraces, while its opposite, плоскость [flatness], she rejects. The modern world, in her view, is becoming too flat. Modern culture, i.e. advertising, contemporary music, postmodern literature, is becoming too unified, is losing its depth. All that which is flat has no heart, it is бессердечное [heart-less] (“Nemnogo o poezii”). This belief that true poetry cannot be created in a heartless space is shared by icon painters concerning their own art.

Totally characteristic of the content of an Orthodox icon is its depth. It is evident that a spiritual, liturgical and theological art should have sought to express depth and profundity in the representations of its themes. It is for this reason precisely that it neither impresses nor captures those who habitually limit themselves to surface things (Grierson 99).

A speech that Sedakova gave at the Vatican upon receiving the Vladimir Solov'ev prize in 1998 further illuminates the notion of depth in her poetic world view. She spoke about images of depth to show a kinship between art and Christianity. She began her discussion around the image of the roots of Christianity in the Evangelical parables, which do not reach up toward the Heavens but grow down into the earth. These roots, she explains, provide us with a visible, tangible image of that which is otherwise dark, secret, unknown. They allow one to “понимать не понимая” [understand while not understanding] (*Sobranie Sochinenie* v. 2, 942). The source of poetry is the heart, which, like the roots Sedakova speaks of, is dark, secret, and unknown. But the writing of poetry brings the mysteries of its inspiration to the surface, giving them shape. Sedakova believes that the images of poetry contain a “счастливую тревогу глубины” (*Sobranie Sochinenie* v. 2, 942). The poems, then, provide us with a visible imagery of the wellspring of her poetry.
Just as Sedakova at times locates a beating heart outside the body, she puts a similar twist on our expectations of depth. Stars, through their reflections in the water, are pulled down into the bottom of a well, bringing the heavens down beneath the earth’s surface. The water absorbs these many reflections so that they become one star which, in turn, is transfigured into the face of God: “. . . словно в глубине колодца,/ все звёзды вобралась в одну . . . отражая до конца/ лицо влюбленного отца” [as if in the depth of a well, / all of the stars were absorbed into one . . . endlessly reflecting / the face of the father in love]. This poem teaches its readers that God is everywhere and that depths are actually Heavenly places. We return to these very same images in a later poem, “Третья тетрадь” [The Third Notebook]. Here the poet is remembering her deceased grandmother, to whom the cycle is dedicated, and imagines her as having become part of everything. It is suggested that the grandmother, like God in the previous poem, could be within a deep well or a distant star. The extreme distance between these possible locations is closed through her death and salvation. “Как из глубокого колодца/ или со звезды далёкой/ смотрит бабушка из каждой вещи” [As if from a deep well / or from a distant star / grandmother is watching from every thing].

Depth in this world view is not so much a measurement or dimension as it is a spatial quality. It not only appears below and above but can also be found without and within. In one poem, depth acts as a kind of receptacle as it swallows its own visions (“Пускай свои видения глотает глубина” [Let the depth swallow its visions]); in another, it becomes that which is contained: “. . . то, что здесь передо мной / стоит, перенасыщаясь

18 “Побег блудного сына” [The Prodigal Son's Flight].
Deep inside herself can be found what Sedakova has called the “birth-giving depth” of the Divine (“Vacancy” 75). It is at once inside her and is the world around her. When she has reached this “birth-giving depth,” poetry acts as a midwife, birthing “meanings new for the writer” (“Conform not” 40). In her most frank discussion of poetic inspiration, Sedakova names three things which are able to help her reach a state of ekstasis, or what she calls “increased intensity” (“Conform not” 43). Dreams, music and visual images are that which can help her push open the doors of this new kind of perception. These three aids appear as prominent themes in Sedakova’s metapoetic verse and will be analyzed in the following sections.

4.4.1 Inspiring dreams

The motif of the dream-state in Sedakova’s poetry is so pervasive that it cannot go unnoticed by those who have read even a fairly select number of her poems. Polukhina has asked Sedakova about the prominence of this motif, suggesting that it “is the chief means of communication with the other world” (“Conform not” 40-41). Quoting from the Book of Job, Polukhina notes that “in dreams God ‘openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction.’” She goes on to suggest, “Your dreamer is a sort of guide to the heavenly spirit on its visitations to earth” (“Conform not” 42). Sedakova responds to this, saying:

Dreams, the state of dreaming, have, from childhood on, meant more to me, perhaps, than reality. Often they simply outstripped it (prophetic dreams). But it is not that anticipation that is important; they were obviously more intelligent than me.

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19 “Сын муэз” [The Muses’ Son]; “Стансы третьи: вино и плавание” [The Third Stanzas: Wine and Swimming].
I just did not possess sufficient intellectual power to conceive of the things I would see in dreams. So I become a sort of hypnomania, living from one miraculous, instructive dream to the next, I longed for them, I long for them now, because it has been a long time since I have seen anything of that kind ("Conform not" 42).

Although Sedakova does not directly comment on the connection between dreams and the "other world," as suggested by Polukhina, the way in which she describes her dreams as being "miraculous" and "instructive" does in fact suggest such a connection. Sedakova learns of the miraculous through her dreams, just as she might learn of the miraculous through communication with the Heavenly Father.

While in Job it is through men's ears that the miraculous is learned, in Sedakova's mythology it is also through the eyes. This can again be compared to the process of icon painting: for Sedakova, the act of dreaming recalls the process of icon painting (and the state of ekstasis) because it is through imagery ("the things I see in dreams") that she, like the icon painter, experiences this miraculous instruction.

In her poetry Sedakova more directly touches upon the subject of how her dreams "connect" her with her own spirituality and state of ekstasis. My discussion of the dream motif will focus on five poems from five separate books. I have purposefully selected texts from a variety of books in order to demonstrate the constancy of the motif and its associations throughout the entirety of Sedakova's poetic oeuvre.

The initial poem of the two-part “Болезнь” [Illness] begins with a sick person waking up: “Больной просыпался” [The sick man awoke]. After this introduction, the cycle turns its focus away from sleep and toward the pain of the illness, only to return to the sleep motif with the second poem. These two poems not only differ in their motifs of wakefulness and sleep but also in the points of view from which they are told. The reader
is drawn deeper into the psychology of the ailing hero when, with the second poem, the point of view shifts from third- to first-person. Presumably, the man in this poem is the same ailing male person from the first.\textsuperscript{20} He believes that he will somehow find salvation in his dreams by getting to know his true self and finding guidance there. The first two stanzas of the poem are:

\begin{center}
Нет, это не свет был, нет, это не свет,
не то, что я помню и думаю помнить.
Я верю, что там, где меня уже нет,
я сам себя встречу, как чудный совет,
который уже не хочу не исполнить.
\end{center}

\begin{center}
Я чувствую сна допотопную связь
со всеми, кто был и не выполнил дела.
Я сам исчезаю, и сам я из вас.
Я слушаю долгий и связный рассказ
в огромном раю глубочайшего тела.
\end{center}

[No, this was not light, is not light,
not that which I remember and think I remember.
I believe that there where I no longer am
I will meet myself like the miraculous harmony
that already I don't want not to fulfill.

\textsuperscript{20} It is immediately apparent that the subject of the first poem is male (both because of the male adjectival ending of the word “больной” and because of the past-tense verbal ending). The only grammatical clues about gender in the second poem, however, are the adjectival masculine ending of the word “сам” repeated three times throughout the poem.
I myself am disappearing and myself from you.
I feel the sleep of the antediluvian ties
with everyone who had been and did not fulfill the cause
I hear a long and connected story
in the enormous paradise of the deepest body.]

We know that the place ("там"[there]) he is speaking about is sleep both because it is where he has just been in the previous poem ("где меня уже нет") and because we know that Sedakova sees dreams as being "miraculous" and "instructive" (in this poem he finds "чудный совет" [miraculous harmony] there). This ailing hero believes that in the sleep- or dream-state, everyone is connected by a kind of common, prelapsarian innocence. It is here that he can find guidance and attain a kind of pure service by rejecting his individuality, by disappearing, and by listening (as in the Book of Job). At the end of this second stanza, the man is no longer simply dreaming but has found himself in Paradise, has found his instruction in the form of a "связный рассказ." Just as his Paradisiacal dreams occur in the depths of his mind/body, so this Paradise occurs in the depths of the universe or its creator, i.e. "the deepest body." Such opposing latitudes of depths and the heavenly are typical of Sedakova.

There is a lesson that this illness contains which has been taught through the delirium of sleep:

Я думаю, учит болезнь, как никто,
ложиться на санки, летящие мимо,
There occurs in this poem an epiphanous realization about the importance of humility. Generally, in a state of good health, a person thinks less often of his or her mortality and, hence, about the immortal power of God. In sickness, on the other hand, a person becomes that much closer to death, and in doing so is brought nearer to an understanding of the mortality of the physical body. This realization comes to the ailing lyrical hero through his delirious sleep. The “intellectual power” needed to come to this realization has come to him through his dreams.

In the next poetic excerpt, dreams do not only anticipate human mortality but exist beyond this mortality. “Рыцари едут на турнир”[Knights Going to a Tournament], the first in a twelve-poem cycle entitled “Тристан и Изольда” [Tristan and Isolde], posits the prevalence of a personified nature over human action. Here, people do not look at nature but hide from its boldly staring eyes, they do not dream of nature, it dreams of them:

Ты помнишь эту розу,
глядящую на нас?
мы прячем от неё глаза,
она не сводит глаз.
А тот, кто умер молодым,
и сам любил, и был любим,
он шёл -- и всё, что перед ним,
прикосновением одним
он сделал золотом живым
счастливей, чем Мидас.

И он теперь повсюду,
и он -- тот самый сон,
который смотрят холм и склон
небес сияющих . . .

[Do you remember this rose,
looking at us?
we hide from its eyes,
it doesn't take away its eyes.

But he who dies young,
and loved and was loved,
he walked and all that was before him
he made live gold with one touch
happier, than Midas.

And now he is everywhere
and he is that very dream
watched by the hills and slopes
of the radiant skies. . .

This poem shows us that we have more in common with the natural world than we might think, we are connected to it through our mutual dreams of each other. The poem also reveals a lesson to be learned through the dream of the deceased boy, who is something of a Christ-figure: he, an innocent (having died young, having loved and been loved), has attained a kind of immortality, being preserved in the dreams of the natural world. His life was a model to live by.

The notion of depths is returned to here, as well, through the rhyming of the words он (occurring two times), сын, and склон. The slope (склон) is another return to the vertical axis so prominent in Sedakova's mythology of poetic creation. The boy's death (which is also the hill's dream) belongs concomitantly to the heavenly upward slope and to the downward slope of the secret depths.

The one poem which Sedakova actually titles "Сон" [The Dream] is one of the less elusive of her poems. She has taken one of the most well-known Biblical stories, that of

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21 It is the penultimate poem in a cycle of twelve called “Первая тетрадь”[The First Notebook], dedicated to her grandmother.
the Prodigal son, and has written its sequel, as it were.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{quote}
Снится блудному сыну,
снится на смертном ложе,
как он уезжает из дома.

На нём весёлое платье,
на руке прадедовский перстень.
Лошадь ему брат выводит.

Хорошо бывает рано утром:
за спиной гудят ложки и струны,
впереди ещё лучше играют.

А собаки, слуги и служанки
у ворот собрались и смотрят,
желают счастливой дорогой.

[A prodigal son dreams,
on his deathbed he dreams
that he is leaving home.]
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{22} The theme of the prodigal son occurs elsewhere in Sedakova's poetry. Besides its own Biblical and moral lessons, it is also loaded with the more personal subtext of the life of her close friend, Venedikt Erofeev. She sees him as the "exemplary prodigal son": "образцово блудного сына -- автора и героя поэмы <<Москва-Петушки>> [. . . the exemplary prodigal son -- the author and hero of the poem Moscow to the End of the Line] ("Zametki" 153).
He is wearing merry clothing
and wears his great-grandfather's ring.
His brother is bringing him a horse.

It is pleasant in the early morning:
behind him strings and spoons resound,
ahead of him they are played better.

And the dogs, servants, and maids
were gathering by the gates, looking on,
and wishing him a good journey.]

Just as in the poem “Болезнь”[Illness], here the dream's lesson is learned in the face of illness. Each of these poems may have been influenced by Tolstoy's Ivan Ilych. Sedakova has discussed this character's frame of mind in similar terms to the mythology of dreams I have been presenting here. She writes that she is intrigued by what Ivan Ilych

really sees at the end. . . What could he possibly see, or what do other Tolstoyan heroes see in their dreams, or partial ravings? “Life after life”? “Another world”? It seems to me that he simply sees the real, the real that is perfectly home in our world. [...] It's that real, what is in fact that I, speaking in first person, would call the truth of poetry (“Statement" 131).

Now on his deathbed, a prodigal son dreams of the peacefulness his impending death will bring. He dreams that his departure from life will be a reverse image of his celebrated return home. This final departure will be his second chance to leave, loving and being
loved, just as the boy in the previous poem “Рыцари едут на турнир” [Knights Going to a Tournament]. The clothes and ring mentioned in the poem are those given to him by his father upon his return in the Biblical parable. The son had returned with nothing but will leave with these objects, which signify not only prosperity but, more importantly, the love of his family. The ring reveals that he will leave not only as a son, but as a great-grandson, for he wears the old family ring. In other words, he returned without family but will leave with deep familial connections. Lastly, the Biblical brother, who had been angered by their father's gift of an animal to the prodigal son, now himself graciously hands his dying older brother an animal. In the Bible, the prodigal son's arrival was a rebirth of his mortal existence (he “was dead and has come to life again; he was lost, and is found” Luke 15: 24), while this second departure is a rebirth of his salvation. It is his dream that clarifies all of this for him. What Sedakova has said of Ivan Ilych holds true for her prodigal son--that which he dreams of is “what is in fact.”

A dream in another poetic cycle, “Сказка, в которой почти ничего не происходит”[A Fairytale in which almost Nothing Happens], has as its subtext Jacob's vision of God (Genesis 28). On another level, the dream clarifies for the poet the purpose (or lesson) of her poetry. The cycle is comprised of fourteen poems and is evenly divided between wakefulness (the first seven poems) and dreaming (the last seven). In the fifth poem, we encounter the following confessional lament:

Страшно дело песнопенья
для того, чей разум зорок,
зренье трезво, слово твёрдо
и над сердцем страх Господень.
Нужно петь, как слабоумный,
быстро, пёстро, бесприютно,
нужно бить, как погремушка,
отгоняющая змея. . .

[Poesy is a terrifying thing
for him whose reason is perceptive,
sight is sober, word is firm
and who is God-fearing in his heart.
One needs to sing, like the feeble-minded,
quickly, floridly, without shelter,
one needs to drum, like a rattle
driving off a snake. . .]

In this poem of the cycle, the difficulties of the poet's craft are considered. Two poems later, these difficulties are further clarified when we are guided through the dark depths of a dream (simultaneously Jacob's and the poet's) which, paradoxically, illuminates itself:

С фонарями сновидений
мы бредем по тьме кромешной, 23
шатким светом задевая
ближний куст и дальний дом --
не Лаванов ли? Но что же:

23 “Тьма кромешная” [outer darkness] is a term from the New Testament.
[With the lanterns of dreams 
we wander through the outer darkness, 
touching with a vacillating light 
a nearby bush and a far-off home –
is it not Labban's? But never mind: 
all has disappeared, has changed –
the sheep, the sun, and the girls –
the sleep-inducing poppy, 
shaking its seeds, 
strewing its miraculous sleep.]

The dream-lanterns in this poem are what aid Jacob in his vision and allow the poet to find inspiration.

One particularly interesting aspect to this poem is that Sedakova is playing with the traditions of the Muse. Here the role of the Muse is played by the poppy. Although masculine in its grammatical gender (мак), the poppy is fully presented as a feminine form. First, the line immediately preceding her introduction ends with the word "девица" ("girl" or "virgin"), which sets up in the reader's mind an image with which to personify the ensuing
poppy. Next, the poppy is accompanied (and preceded grammatically) by a rustling sound, a Classical harbinger of the appearance of the Muse. Thirdly, and most obviously, flowers are a universal symbol of femininity. Next, the three words immediately following the word “мак” (перетряхивая зерна, рассыпая) resound with the feminine phoneme [a], as if to eradicate the poppy’s grammatical gender. And, finally, the poppy is personified in her suggested act of strewing her seeds. If the masculine reproductive or sexual implications of this act of strewing seed seem to my readers to dominate over the female Muse-portrait I have drawn, then I might remind them of the obvious lacunae of sexual references in Sedakova’s writing in general. Such a reading might fit in with a mythology like Mandelstam’s with his internal Muse-hermaphrodite, but it does not work within this poet’s mythopoesis. It is possible, on the other hand, to take the discussion of the poppy in an opposite direction, by noting the association between the words мак and маковка (a cupola of a church). This association, which conflates the Muse-figure with the Orthodox church, seems entirely credible within Sedakova’s mythology of poetic creation. Either with or without this second association, however, the dreamer in this poem is left with the promise of a miraculous sleep (“чудный сон”).

The poem immediately following this one in the cycle is the dream that the Muse-poppy has induced. The action of the dream (of which there is little, as promised by the cycle’s title), takes place in an alpine hut. Sedakova again connects the notion of the slope to dreams when in this poem the lyrical persona must pass by a steep slope in order to reach the main setting of the dream, where she will eventually find the light that is the ultimate goal of the dream.
The cycle ends by echoing its earlier lament about the elusiveness of poetic inspiration, only to be followed by a quiet acceptance of this lot (as well as a return to the above-discussed motif of service).

Страшно дело песнопенья,
но оно мне тихо служит
или я ему служу:
.........................
Что не нами началось,
что закончится не нами. . .

[Poesy is a terrifying thing
but it quietly serves me
or I serve it:
.........................
What was begun not by us
will end not by us.]

There is also in this poem a return to the lesson of humility, a reminder that the world existed before us and will continue without us. While the world may "serve" our purposes, we need to remember to "serve" it, as well.

We meet again with the connection of the dream to the afterlife in the last of the dream-poems I will be discussing. In the first stanza of the cycle “Стансы вторые: На смерть котёнка” [Second Stanzas: On the Death of a Kitten], we are told that dreams, in their wisdom and peacefulness, can teach a person about his own soul. “Разве сон/ переживает
душу, как озон/ свою грозу -- и говорит о ней/ умней и тише, тише и умней” [Really the dream / will outlive the soul, as the ozone will / its storm – and to speak of it / is wiser and gentler, gentler and wiser]. Dreams contain so much wisdom because they are older than the soul and outlive the soul.

Six poems later in this cycle “Стансы вторые” [Second Stanzas], the poet returns to these notions:

Живое живо в глубочайшем сне,
в забвении, в рассеянье, на дне
какого-то челна: не дух, не плоть,
но вся кудель чудес Твоих, Господь.

[The living is alive in the deepest sleep,
in unconsciousness, in dispersion, on the bottom
of some boat: not spirit, not flesh,
but the whole fiber of Your miracles, Lord.]

Here dreams are described as being states of oblivion. Thus, entering the oblivious dream-state is one way to achieve pure intent or expurgate motives and intentions; such goals cannot of course be retained if there is no memory of their having been planned. Sedakova's lyrical persona has already told us that it is extremely difficult for her to write poetry when she feels her reasoning to be too perceptive, her vision too sober and her word too firm (“Ста́ра шю де́ло песнопенья/ для того, чей разум зорок, зрение трезво, слово твёрдо”). In the depths of dreams the poet can break free from the mind and body and can connect with the world's chaotic origins and with God Himself. This state carries the potential to inspire
her to weave poems out of that same miraculous fiber with which God creates. Moreover, this weaving, according to the beliefs of the Hesychasts, strengthens her connection to God.

I will conclude my discussion of the dream motif with a line from another of Sedakova's poems: “Пора исполнить вдохновенья урок” [It's Time to Perform Inspiration's Lesson]. In the interview excerpt I quoted at the start of this section, Sedakova states that there are lessons to be learned in dreams. Through close readings of her poems, it becomes clear that in Sedakova's mythology of poetic creation, dreams bring her to a state of ekstasis. Building on Ehrenzweig's definition of this term, then, the conscious state “dies" in order for the unconscious dream-state to be “resurrected." This “death" is felt throughout much of Sedakova's poetry; for “Смерть присутствует в самой интонации стихотворного языка. . ." [Death is present in the very intonation of poetic language] (“Заметки" 161). In a state of miraculous resurrection, the poet is at last able to connect with some other (be it the true self, God, a Muse-figure, etc.) to learn the lessons of inspiration.

4.4.2 Inspiring music

Sedakova has said that, besides dreams, another way of opening the doors into a state of increased intensity is through music. Although she does not expand on this statement at the time she makes it, Sedakova returns to the connection between music and poetry thirteen years later during a collective analysis of one of her poems (also with Polukhina). This discussion of music concerns itself primarily with the reception of poetry rather than its inception; however, much of what she says does serve to illuminate music's role as an impulse toward poetic creation. For this reason, I will quote at length excerpts from this
provocative discussion:

I think that the reader, as well as the critic of poetry, would be very well advised to bear in mind the key importance of music when interpreting meaning. This might neutralize the negative reaction underlying the 'I can't understand it!' response which I have heard from my earliest years as a poet . . . In claiming that music is the key to the reception of poetry, I certainly do not have in mind a knowledge of harmony, polyphony or other specialized disciplines; they have no relevance here. I simply mean a readiness to grasp the whole, not correlating it via its parts to external 'meanings', that is not taking it to pieces as though it were a collage or an allegory . . . [I]n music, the functional significance of a note depends on its position in the overall tonal structure. Thus, arguably, the most ambitious leap which poetic language demands of the reader is that which takes him beyond the boundaries of literal meaning. And for many this leap – into the broader expanses of meaning – is an absurd adventure. However I have heard monks maintain that it is the apprehension of precisely such a poetical verbal semantics which is conducive to prayer, being a kind of way into it (Sedakova, Polukhina, Reid 240-41).

Like her dreams, then, music offers Sedakova a glimpse into “broader expanses of meaning,” suggesting new perspectives and expressions. It is a “way into” prayer for it opens doors into a state of increased intensity. The lessons to be learned from music, like the lessons of dreams, are the lessons of an altered state of consciousness, a kind of остранение [estrangement]; what one might learn from seeing things from another perspective. I would suggest that it is Sedakova's hope that the reception of her poetry will mimic its inception, that her readers will hear it as she first heard it in her auditory imagination (or visualize it as she first did).

Although “music” is what Sedakova names this particular path toward inspiration, I believe she suggests something more encompassing than the general meaning of the word (instrumental or vocal sounds combined in a composition). The word “music” is derived from the Greek word for Muse, Mousa; this is a semantic connection that surely every
educated poet bears in mind. For Sedakova, as for so many other poets, inspiring music can be created with instruments or the human voice, but it may also come from nature or any sound-creating device at all. The defining characteristic is that it be an *inspiring* sound.

At least one of Sedakova's poems has had a kind of symphonic birth, announcing itself to her in its whole form: it "came to [her], quite unexpectedly and in its entirety" "between the rumblings and silences of the refrigerator" (Sedakova, Polukhina, Reid 239). This particular poem, “Дикий шиповник”[The Wild Rose], is an example of unintentioned, inspired verse, emerging from the rhythmic sounds and rests reverberating in the poet's mind.24

Ты развернёшься в расширенном сердце страдания,
дикый шиповник,
о,
ранящий сад мирозданья.

Дикий шиповник и белый, белее любого.
Тот, кто тебя назовёт, переспорит Иова.

Я же молчу, исчезая в уме от любимого взгляда,
глаз не спуская
и рук не снимая с ограды.

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24 In an inspired circumstance such as this, Sedakova does not perceive herself simply to be a passive vehicle for the inspired word. “. . .[T]he idea that the writer is a medium, passively submitting to the dictates of language seems to me to be an exaggeration. As a rule, I dislike fatalism, linguistic fatalism included" (“A Rare Independence” 244).
Дикий шиповник
идёт как садовник суровый,
не знающий страха,
с розой пунцовой,
со спрятанной раной участья под дикой рубахе.

[You open in the hollowed heart of pain,
wild rose,
and prickle all creation's garden.

Wild rose white, and whiter than all other.
To guess your name takes patience more than Job's.

I'm hushed. That loving gaze melts all within.
I cannot turn aside
or prize the railings from my grasp.

Wild rose –
like a gardener grave and calm
with scarlet bloom he comes.
His wild robe shields the sympathetic wound.\[25\]

Reading this poem, we are immersed in the circumstances of its debut in a number of ways. Polukhina has pointed out that the intonation of this poem recalls that of the Russian genre of lament. She has also noticed that many of the rhymes in the poem harbor a stressed “a” and that “[t]his monointonational element, supplemented by other deep vowels, gradually expands, attaining at times an almost unbearable monotone” (244). What I will add to Polukhina’s analysis is that this monotone echoes the acoustics of the above-mentioned refrigerator. The prominence of hushers and sibilants in the poem reveal “phonic self-reflexivity,” to use Paul Friedrich’s term. Yet another nod to the poem’s inspiration are the audible and visual rests within some lines, marked by indentations and/or comparatively short lines. These rests, or white spaces within the poem, recall the periodic silences between the rumblings of the refrigerator.\[26\] This transference of the auditory to the visual is entirely in keeping with Sedakova’s mythology of poetic creation; for her, the visual and auditory are interchangeable. Her music teacher, finding her not naturally musically-inclined, would explain musical concepts to her visually, on a “canvas.”\[27\]

Sedakova has long been aware of the inspirational power of the auditory on her craft. She came to this realization while in her early twenties and recently, in 2000, she

\[25\] The translation is by Robert Reid.

\[26\] For a detailed and informative analysis on the symbolism and poetic language in this poem, see the “collective analysis” by Sedakova, Polukhina, and Reid.

\[27\] See “Zametki” p. 152.
spoke of it more specifically, saying that by listening very carefully she is able to find rhythms out of which the beginnings of her poems are sometimes born (“Conform not” 46). One of her early (and untitled) poems speaks of just such an entirely conscious instance of listening. Struggling with her faith, the lyrical persona listens for Divine inspiration but fears it might lead to her ultimate salvation, i.e. death.

Мой слух наготове. Ты знаешь. И даже
когда я не вижу, но музыка вяжет

висячую лестницу в воздухе сада,
и каждая ветка угодничать рада --

мой слух наготове. И руки окрепли
отталкивать эти свистящие петли.

[My hearing is ready. You know. And even
while I do not see, music crochets
a suspended ladder in the garden air
and every branch is happy to serve –

my hearing is ready. And my hands strengthened
to push aside these whistling stitches.]
This poem, as with so many of Sedakova's poems, contains a number of partially veiled Biblical references. The lyrical persona relies on her sense of hearing when her sense of sight fails her, although we know that, ultimately, either sense has the potential to guide her toward God. To quote again from The Book of Job: “in dreams God 'openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction.” Because the setting of this poem is a “garden,” the whistling sounds which are heard could be from either birds, wind or both. The wind motif, as I stated earlier, connects Sedakova's poetic world view to Hesychasm. Recall that the followers of this spiritual practice believed that the wind carried the Lord's energy. Furthermore, the scriptural verse of Genesis 28, a favorite of the Hesychasts, is certainly a subtext here. Jacob, lying down outside to sleep, dreams of a stairway leading to God. Sedakova's poem suggests that the whistling wind may aid in recreating a situation similar to Jacob's.

The poem's last word, петли, has a number of connotations. First, it brings in yet again the influence of the Hesychast traditions in Sedakova's mythology of poetic creation because of its meaning “stitch” in connection with the staircase, which is crocheted (вязать) not woven (ткать); nonetheless, the similarity of the imagery is apparent. Secondly, петля is also the word for “noose.” This meaning most effectively explains why the lyrical persona is rejecting these stitches. Thirdly, the word can also mean the eye of the crochet hook. Each of these images (stitch, noose, hook eye), contains a hole through which the wind might pass, creating the whistling sound referred to in the last line.

The sounds in this early poem prelude the wind instruments that will resound in

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28 Sedakova has commented upon the prominence of bird imagery in her early poetry. See “Zametki” 148.
Sedakova's subsequent poems. The pipe has traditionally heralded poetic inspiration and Sedakova has incorporated this Classical emblem into her own mythology of poetic creation. It may be heard, for example, in her poem “Пастух играет” [The Shepherd Plays]. Sedakova has extended the inspirational connotations of the pipe to its wind-instrument cousins, in such poems as “Золотая труба. В ритме Заболоцкого” [The Golden Trumpet. In the Rhythm of Zabolotskii] and “Флейте отвечает флейта” [Flute Responds to Flute]. The sound of whistling, which is also the sound of the Divine wind, is the most consistent sound her inspiration makes: “. . . ты свищешь в свой свисток, вдохновенье.” [. . .you blow your whistle, / inspiration].

I will now turn my focus from the favored musical instruments to the musical genre of choice. The lullaby is more than just a motif running throughout Sedakova's poems, it is actually used to define three of her poems: “Горная колыбельная” [Mountain Lullaby], “Колыбельная” [Lullaby], and “Другая колыбельная” [Another Lullaby]. Considering her proclivity for dreaming, it is immediately clear why this particular type of song has such stature within Sedakova's verse, leading as it does to the eventual dream-state. Indeed, as tradition would have it, in all three of these lullabies the poet sings “Go to sleep” (Усни in the first, спи in the last two). Another commonality between all three is that the scenes are placed on boundaries: 1.) a hazel-tree grove on a mountain top, 2.) on a mountain on some type of isolated terrain feature, 3.) on the edge of a barley field. These boundaries are the physical manifestations of the liminal states of the dying or endangered children in all three poems. In short, the lullabies are sung in order to ease the children's transition into the

29 From the seventeenth poem in Китайское путешествие [A Chinese Journey]. The translation is by Andrew Wachtel.
afterlife. As Sedakova will clarify in another poem written a few years after these: a
woman hands out candles to people, "Как ребёнку малому, который уходит в страшное место, /
где слава Божья" [as if to a small child who is leaving for a frightful place, / where there is
God's glory].

There are many more instances in Sedakova's poetry of not only lullabies but songs
in general. Some of them are, for example, "Предпесня" [Pre-song], "Отпевание монахини"
[The Nun's Burial Service], "Пения" [Singing], "Крестьянская песня" [A Peasant's Song],
"Походная песня" [A Marching Song], "Давид поёт Саулу" [David Sings to Saul], "Из песни
Данте" [From A Song by Dante], and the book title Старые песни [Old Songs]. She has
referred to her poems as musical "ballads" (after Chopin), and has labeled one poem a coda
and another as resembling a requiem ("Кода", "Элегия, переходящая в реквием"). Sedakova has
also named the crescendo as a musical influence on her poetry.

I began this section on inspiring music with one of Sedakova's early poems. I will
now conclude with one from what might be called her middle period. The fourteenth poem
in the cycle "Китайское путешествие" [A Chinese Journey] is one I mentioned above,
beginning with the line "Флейте отвечает флейта" [Flute responds to flute]. This inspiring
music, it turns out, is not from a man-made flute, but from nature's version of the
instrument. Sedakova has extended the traditional emblem of the inspiring pipe yet again.

Флейте отвечает флейта,

---

30 "Земля" [The Earth].

31 The root of the Russian word for "Burial service" is "петь," meaning "to sing."

32 Although Brodsky did not, to the best of my knowledge, use the term crescendo in
speaking of his inspiration or poetry, he did describe something very similar to it--a hum that
would, like the crescendo, increase in intensity.
Flute responds to flute –
not ivory or wooden,
but the one that the mountains hold
in their caves and crevasses.
Strings respond to strings,
and words respond to words.]

In reading this poem, we re-experience Sedakova's inspired moment through her use of “phonic self-reflexivity”: the inspiring sound of air rushing through the mountain's crevices is retained in the repeated sounds of щ and х in the words “пещерах” [in caves] and “щелях” [in crevasses], as well as in other prominent hushers and sibilants in the rest of the poem.

In this poem, the auditory and visual both serve to inspire the poet. The focus of the second half of the poem shifts to the visual, when the lyrical persona addresses an evening star as “друг мой вдохновенный” [my inspired friend]. This latter source of inspiration looks ahead to the topic of my next section, the visual.
4.4.3 Inspiring Visual Imagery

Visual imagery is the last of the three poetic impulses Sedakova names. She has said that “the language of images comes more naturally to [her]” (Sedakova, Polukhina, Reid 255). In her critical work on other poets, Sedakova has made some self-referential insights concerning the visual. She has noted, for example, the prominence of sight in Viktor Krivulin's poetry, terming it one of the elements of his Muse ("Zametki" 259). And she has remarked upon the concreteness of visual imagery in Akhmatova's poetry ("Shkatulka" 106). 33

I concluded the previous section on music by discussing the auditory in the poem that begins “Флейте отвечает flute” [Flute responds to flute]; the visual imagery in the same poem will serve to begin the verse analysis in this section. The poem is set out of doors in the evening. As we know, the lyrical persona is attuned to the sounds of the wind howling through the hollows of a mountain. In the second half of the poem, however, she focuses her gaze on a rising evening star. Thus it is both her hearing and her sight that bring her closer to knowing her own heart.

И вечерней звезде, быстро восходящей
отвечает просьба моего сердца:

33 The motif of the visual in Sedakova's poetry has been commented upon by other scholars. Stephanie Sandler has shown the most interest in this aspect of Sedakova's poetry. In her analysis of the poem “Взгляд кота”[Cat's Gaze] she suggests that the image of the cat is a form of poetic vision. She has elsewhere concluded that Sedakova's “poetic vision always doubles back on itself” and she terms this a “grammar of reflexivity” (“Scared into Selfhood" 487). Sandler has also observed that the action of the poem "Женская фигура" [A Woman's Figure] is based upon “a visual perception and its attendant emotion” (“Thinking Self" 306).
Ты выведешь тысячи звезд
вечерняя звезда,
и тысячами просьб
зажжется моё сердце,
мириадами просьб об одном и то же:
просыпайся,
погляди на меня, друг мой вдохновенный,
посмотри, как ночь сверкает...

[And the supplication of my heart
responds to the quickly rising evening star:

you breed thousands of stars,
evening star,
and thousands of supplications burn my heart,
myriad supplications about one and the same thing:
wake up,
glance at me, my inspired friend,
see how the night sparkles. . .]

In Sedakova's mythology of poetic creation, there are lessons to be learned from visual imagery, just as there are from dreams and music. In this poem, Sedakova, in metarealist fashion, points her readers in the direction of the star's reality. What we can
learn from this poem is not found by simply looking at stars but by seeing how a star might look at us. Gazing up at the star is a way to open the doors to increased perception, but, ultimately, the perspective changes as the lyrical persona tells the star to look back at her:

“погляди на меня”[glance at me], “посмотри”[see].

It's a seeing of oneself or rather a non-seeing of oneself through the eyes of another: ‘Я поглядели кругом, чтобы увидеть, как видимо это’ [I looked around to see how visible this is] (‘Странные путешествие’) [A Strange Journey]; that is, not how it looked to me, but to someone else who could see everything as it really was. We might compare this with Eliot's lines at the opening of the first of the Quartets:

And the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses
Had the look of flowers that are looked at.34
This is certainly in the Dantean tradition of ‘visible vision’ (Sedakova, Polukhina, Reid 254).

I find these thoughts offer us a way to understand this poem, as well. In “Дикий шиповник” [The Wild Rose], the lyrical persona disappears into the mind, away from a loving glance (“… исчезая в уме от любимого взгляда”). She is seen by the wild rose (which is also Christ) and because she is seen in this new way, she gains access to another consciousness.35

Sedakova's poetry is very much a lesson in humility, What do we actually see when we look at someone or something? And is it (or he or she) looking back at us? One feels this sense of humility when reading Sedakova's poetry because her perspectives constantly contradict our own egocentrism. We are reminded that the rest of the world is

34 This rose of Eliot's has surfaced elsewhere in Sedakova's thoughts. Recall the following lines from “рыцари едут на турнир”[Knights Going to a Tournament], which was discussed in the section on dreams in this chapter: “Ты помнишь эту розу, / глядящую на нас? / мы прячем от неё глаза, / она не сводит глаз” [Do you remember this rose, / looking at us? / we hide from its eyes, / it doesn't take away its eyes]. In answer to Eliot's rose, Sedakova is playing with perspective.

35 “Изчезая в уме’ [Disappearing in the mind] doesn’t signify a literal disappearance but rather a consciousness, a cognisance of the fact that one is disappearing in the eyes of him who is passing by, who is leaving” (Sedakova, Polukhina, Reid 254). (The translation is my
also in the process of living; we are reminded to be modest, respectful, and unpretentious.

There is another very important aspect to this act of observing which is rooted in Byzantine teachings. An essay by Sedakova's close friend, Sergei Averintsev, is an excellent source for understanding Sedakova's notions of the image. It is called, apropos of Sedakova's mythology of poetic creation, “Visions of the Invisible: The Dual Nature of the Icon.” Averintsev begins this piece by explaining the origin of the word “icon” (it is Greek for “image”). Then, quoting from an anonymous fifth-century text, he explains the importance in Orthodoxy of the theological term “icon”: “Visible things are revealed images (eikones) of invisible things” (11). This notion is entirely in keeping with Sedakova's poetic world view.36 (Recall, for example, her explanation about the image of the roots of Christianity.) In much the same way that a person can re-experience the creation of a poem by reading it, a person re-experiences God's creation of the material world by looking at it, observing it. This is because all matter (вещество, материя) was created from ideas or “visions.” Sedakova employs these notions in another poem about the prodigal son.37 In this poem, he is again awaiting death but finds help in faith, realizing that, “мы, как слепцы последние, идём --/ как зренье, сделанное веществом” [we go, like the last blind people --/ like vision made into matter]. In other words, our vision is not true vision, since we are but a product of God's vision, His creation. This motif can be found in another of Sedakova's poems: "и само вещество поклянется,/ что оно зрением было и в зрение вернётся"

36 Averintsev's essay discusses not only the image and the traditions of the icon, but also the influence that hesychasm had on these traditions. For example, he writes that the light in icon paintings is representing the Divine energies the Hesychasts so firmly believed in.
37 “Selva selvaggia.”
[and matter itself swears / that it was vision and will return to being vision].

Here we are reminded not only that everything in the world around us came from God's vision but we are again shown life from a perspective not our own, i.e. matter is here personified. Thus, everything began as a vision; once anything is looked at, it becomes a kind of vision again. It is only returns to its original, true state of vision, however, once it dies (or erodes, evaporates, decomposes, etc.), thus returning to God.

Together, the poetic impulses of dreams, music, and visual imagery cover a broad spectrum. Sedakova's mythology of poetic creation potentially allows for the poet to find poetic impulses both in sleep and in various states of wakefulness. If the lyrical persona's doors of perception are opened through a dream, then it is of course the state of sleep that has enabled this impulse. If they are opened by visual images, it is due, in part, to her wakefulness. On the other hand, the music of a lullaby, which might very well find the lyrical persona in a state of half-sleep, also serves to open these doors. For Sedakova, poetry is not an occupation--the poet is at all times a poet.

Sedakova's poems are “traces” of their inspiration (“Conform not” 43). Reading them, we are able to re-experience, in part, the process of their creation. She writes of the steps she takes to create a state of mind conducive to writing poetry. These steps include emulating icon painters in acts of praying and fasting; expurgating herself of motives and intentions in order to achieve a kind of “pure intentness” or service; and attempting to open the doors of her perception through dreams, music and visual imagery. Once she is able to achieve a state of increased intensity, Hesychast beliefs and practices inform the birth of

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38 “Странные путешествие” [A Strange Journey].
her poems. She locates the source of her poetry as deep within herself, in the silence of her heart. She listens for the silent inner theme which births new meanings for her. Sedakova's poems are the verbal icons of her explorations of the self, humankind, the world and God.
CONCLUSION

This dissertation set out to consider how Mandelstam, Akhmatova, Brodsky, and Sedakova have viewed their poetic creativity. Do poems come from outside of myself and, if so, how? Do I consider my experience to be of a divine nature and, if so, in what forms does it appear? Which of my senses is most active during my inspired state? How do my fears and anxieties affect my creativity and what forms do they take? These and other questions formed the basis of my investigation into each poet. In concluding, I would like to consider how the mythologies presented here relate to each other.

The first three of these questions can be addressed together. While all four of these poets identify their inspiration as divine and, thus, as an other, they do so to extremely varying degrees, depending on where they envision the source of poetry to be versus the source of their inspiration. The source of poetry, or language, can be understood as the place where it--or its raw materials--is stored before it is created. The source of inspiration, then, is that which spurs the poet toward the source of poetry. Akhmatova and Brodsky differ from Mandelstam and Sedakova in that they locate the source of their language to be, like their forms of inspiration, an other. Akhmatova's mythology is in many ways the most straightforward, for she repeats again and again that her poetry was dictated to her. Poetry spoke through her auditory imagination, often in times of pain. That Akhmatova
considered her poetry to be of a divine nature is certain, although she did not like to speak of it in such terms. We know that she believed in God and that she envisioned her inspiration through the divine form of the Muse. Her creative topos, then, was the window and its view of the garden and sky, i.e. the natural world of her poetry.

Like Akhmatova, Brodsky created a mythology in which the source of his language existed outside of himself and, even more importantly to Brodsky--before him. His Occidental mode of thinking (his reason) argued against any outside influence and for poetic creation as craft. But his Oriental mode of thinking (his intuition) nonetheless allowed him to create a mythology of poetic creation based on his notion of an "apotheosis of sound"--poetic creation occurring within an auditory imagination. For Brodsky, language was both his inspiration and the source of his poetry. Its topos was Eternity.

The other two poets in this dissertation, Mandelstam and Sedakova, looked inward to find the sources of their poetry. Mandelstam took what had once been a divine figure (Mnemosyne) and appropriated her into himself, thereby rescinding her divinity. She then became the inner voice of his auditory imagination. His poetry, then, is the least divinely inspired of these four poets for the source of his inspiration became the world's culture and sounds. The topos of his poetry was inside of his hermaphroditic self--in his "womb," his ears, his mouth, and his mind.

Sedakova likewise locates the source of her poetry inside of herself; its topos is her own heart within its secret depths. The divine inspiration which helps her find the poetry in her heart comes from her devotion to God. While Sedakova's mythology of poetic creation does suggest the presence of an auditory imagination, her creativity relies on the
visual more than the other poets do. This becomes apparent not only through her affinity with the processes of icon painters but also through her interest in space and dimension.

The question concerning how fears played into these mythologies proved particularly interesting. Sedakova's mythology was in many ways the most optimistic, lacking any apparent fears. This is likely due to the fact that she was not forced to experience the severe persecution the others did. Although every writer has certainly experienced some degree of anxiety regarding his or her creative flow, this concern only becomes a prominent feature of the mythology of poetic creation if it is exasperated in some way. Recall that Brodsky described Mandelstam's asthma as an "embodiment of the atmosphere prevailing then in society" (Polukhina, Bol'shaia kniga 535). Although decades younger, Brodsky breathed the same oppressive atmosphere as Mandelstam and so shared the older poet's fear of suffocation. The women poets in this study also breathed the same twentieth-century Russian air--how is it that they did not find it stifling in the same way? As I have already remarked, Sedakova was fortunate to avoid much of what these other three experienced. Or, perhaps her faith in God gives her a strength the others lacked. Whatever the reason, the other three poets let their fears lend a hand in shaping their mythologies of poetic creation. The forms Akhmatova's fear took were, some might argue, of a particularly feminine slant. "Precisely because the abandoned woman has nothing left to lose," Lawrence Lipking has theorized, "she is free to describe her feelings with an honesty and candor that other verse seldom approaches" (9-10). For a period, Akhmatova did let a fear of abandonment inform her creativity; eventually, however, she outgrew her Muse and with it the Goddess's potential leavetaking.
One aspect of these (and other) mythologies which contains elements of both fear and empowerment is the noticeable presence of birthing imagery. This dissertation introduced the concept of the mythology of poetic creation by looking at Tsvetaeva's essay “Art in the Light of Conscience.” In this work of hers, Tsvetaeva envisions giving birth to her poetry. We have seen this same motif in other of the mythologies presented here. Mandelstam's, for example, very much revolves around his hermaphroditic self being able to birth a poem. Brodsky spoke of poems resulting from the poet's erotic urges and even Akhmatova's poems were often results of passionate heartache. In the last chapter, Sedakova described the topos of her poetry as a fertile place where things are born (“the birth-giving depth) but her mythology lacks the erotic notions and metaphors of conception that figure so prominently into Tsvetaeva's and Mandelstam's mythologies.

**Prospects for Future Research**

A study devoted exclusively to birth imagery within mythologies of poetic creation, then, is a territory of my research as yet uncharted. Not only is there more to be uncovered within the mythologies of the present study, there are also many other Russian poets whose work contains this as a prominent motif. A comparison of the imagery in the works of male and female poets and the Muse's role in poetry's conception and/or birth promises to reveal some interesting notions.

While a consideration of birth imagery is a way to narrow my focus, my other prospects for further research involve broadening the focus. Were I to expand the present study to include a larger number of poets, it would be more feasible to identify actual
trends shared between the mythologies. Some nice additions to those poets already included would be Aleksandr Blok, Boris Pasternak, and the contemporary poet Elena Shvarts. I would also like to take a more in-depth look at Marina Tsvetaeva. One promising source is Blok’s “On the Mission of the Poet,” a speech he gave on Pushkin at the House of Writers in 1921. In it, he addresses both his own and Pushkin's notions of inspiration. Like the four poets discussed in this dissertation, Blok understands the poet's role as bringing harmony into the world through his auditory imagination. One example of his reliance on the auditory can be found in his poem “Художник”[The Artist (1913)] which makes reference to a “лёгкий, доселе неслышанный звон” [light, until now unheard ringing].

Boris Pasternak's poetic cycle “Занятие философией” [The Occupation of Philosophy] is dedicated to the topic of creativity. It consists of three poems, “Определение поэзии” [A Definition of Poetry], “Определение души” [A Definition of the Soul], and “Определение творчества”[A Definition of Creative Art]. Taking the following extract as an example, we see that Pasternak defines poetry primarily in terms of various senses--sound, touch and taste:

Это – круто налившийся свист,
Это – щелканье сдавленных льдинок,
Это – ночь, леденящая лист,
Это – двух соловьёв поединок.

Это --слаский заглохший горох,
Это – слёзы вселенной в лопатках,
Это – с пультов и флейт – Фигаро
Низвергается градом на грядку.
[It is a sharply made hiss,
It is the cracking of constricted ice,
It is night, freezing a leaf,
It is the duel of two nightingales.

It is a pea, sweet and untended,
It is tears within the shoulder blades of the world,
It is Figaro rushing down from the music stand and flutes,
like hail on a garden bed.]

These eight lines alone conjure up a wealth of rich imagery connected to poetic creation and show a return to numerous of the themes discussed here in connection with Mandelstam, Akhmatova, Brodsky and Sedakova.

Finally, I would add Elena Shvarts to this expanded group of subjects, whose notions of poetic creation portray language as a “handmaiden” and poetic creation as “a sacramental, sacred act in which certain powers coalesce” (Polukhina, Brodsky through the Eyes 224). These same ideas can be perceived in her poetry, such as in her poem “Imitation of Boileau” (1971), which reads in part: “The poet is an eye--you'll learn this in due course – / Connected briefly to a roaring godly force”). This force of poetry has also been explained by her as a verbal wave (Polukhina, Brodsky through the Eyes 224).

We have seen how a number of Russia's best twentieth-century poets interpret and mythologize the source and, indeed, force of their poetry as well as the process of creating
it. In reconstructing these mythologies of poetic creation, I have looked to the poets' entire oeuvres and the "single semantic system" working within each of them. My work aims to bring together poets' prose and poetry and to offer readings of texts that are guided by the poets' own concerns and beliefs.
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