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INTRODUCTION

MANDELSTAM: THE POET AS BUILDER

. . . his multilingual tombstone, like Navellicky Kamen . . .
—Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*

We stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter, and that everything in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, "I refute it thus."

—Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*

MANDELSTAM (pronounced Mandelshtám) did not believe that biographical information about artists was of much importance. "My memory is inimical to all that is personal," he declares in *The Sound of Time* (*Shum vremeni*, 1925). "I was never able to understand the Tolstoys and Aksakovs . . . enamoured of family archives with their epic domestic memoirs." He defined himself as a *raznochinets*, a classless or "upstart" intellectual with no clearly defined social or official rank, who was committed to the liberal and human values of the nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia. "A *raznochinets* needs no memory," he explains, "it is enough for him to tell of the books he has read, and his biography is done."¹ He considered himself bound to the *raznochintsi* and their values by an oath "solemn enough to bring tears."² During most of his life, Mandelstam owned nothing but a few books and some clothing (after the Revolution, when he was completely destitute, he applied to Gorky through the Union of Poets for a sweater and a pair of trousers; Gorky refused the trousers).³ Only rarely did he have a room of

¹ SS, 2: 137. P, p. 122.

² "1 January 1924," SS, poem 140.

³ Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned*, trans. Max Hayward (New York: Atheneum, 1974), p. 63.

his own to live and work in or a desk at which to write—he usually composed his poems in his mind while walking the streets and wrote or dictated them only at the end of the poetic process. “How many sandals did Alighieri wear out in the course of his poetic work, wandering about on the goat paths of Italy?” he asked, imagining the admired Dante sharing his own working habits. “The *Inferno* and especially the *Purgatorio* glorify the human gait, the measure and rhythm of walking.”⁴ Peripatetic, homeless, and owning almost nothing long before he was sent to one of Stalin’s concentration camps, Mandelstam thought of himself as an “internal emigré,” an exile in his own country, and identified himself with the exiled Dante, with Joseph sold into Egypt (Osip is a form of Joseph), and with Ovid and Pushkin, both exiled to the shores of the Black Sea by angry emperors.

OSIP EMILEVICH MANDELSTAM was born in January 1891 in Warsaw, then under Russian rule, and died in a transit camp near Vladivostok, probably at the end of 1938. The two cities, at extreme ends of the old Russian Empire, are unlikely locales in Mandelstam’s life, for he is identified with St. Petersburg, the cultural and political capital of imperial Russia, where he spent his early years. Many of his poems are about that strange misty city, with its vast squares, its Roman buildings and Dutch canals. St. Petersburg’s traditional mission was to make Russians aware of Western European culture, and as a poet Mandelstam dedicates himself to the same mission by attempting a synthesis of Western and Russian culture, the latter contained in the Russian language itself.

The Mandelstams were Jews and, like all Jews in imperial Russia, lived in an uneasy relationship to authority and to their Slavic fellow subjects. The poet’s father was a prosperous leather merchant and a man of standing, allowed to live in St. Petersburg and its suburb of Pavlovsk, places where Jews were not ordinarily permitted to live.

⁴Dante, p. 68. See also Monas, p. 6; SS, 2:406.

Emil Mandelstam came originally from Riga and spoke German as his first language. Like many nineteenth-century Jews, he had abandoned traditional Jewish ways of living and thinking to become "progressive." His son describes him as enthusiastically exploring, a century late, the startling new ideas of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.⁵

In *The Sound of Time* ("time rushes backwards with a roar and a swash, like a dammed up stream"),⁶ Mandelstam uses the family bookcase as a metaphor for his own intellectual background: on the bottom shelf the "Judaic chaos" of his father's Hebrew books, which the poet could not and would not read; above these the "orderly arrangement" of German books—Schiller, Goethe, Kerner, Shakespeare in German, "my father fighting his way as an autodidact into the German world out of the Talmudic wilds"; and still higher his mother's Russian books—Pushkin, Lermontov, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, the "civic poet" Nadson.⁷ Mme. Mandelstam's Russian was "clear and sonorous without the least foreign admixture. . . . Mother loved to speak and took joy in the roots and sounds of her Great Russian speech, impoverished by intellectual clichés." Mandelstam attributes his own preoccupation with words—their value, forms, sounds, their *weight*—to his awareness of the differences in his parents' ways of speaking: "The speech of the father and the speech of the mother—does not our language feed throughout all its long life on the confluence of these two, do they not compose its character?"⁸

The young Mandelstam evaded his parents' half-hearted attempts to have him learn Hebrew and something of his Jewish heritage. He seems to have rejected "the Judaic chaos" for emotional reasons, perhaps even on grounds of decorum. In *The Sound of Time*, he describes his attraction to the pageantry of imperial Petersburg and to the austere order of the city's neoclassic fa-

⁵ P, pp. 90-91.

⁶ "Pushkin and Scriabin," SS, 2: 356.

⁷ P, pp. 81-84.

⁸ P, pp. 89-90.

cedes, "the granite paradise of my sedate strolls."⁹ The desire for classical form and spaciousness was to become a central theme in his poetry, along with a hunger for Western culture and a compulsion to become a master of the Russian language, defiantly aware that as a Jew the language was not his birthright. Like Stephen Dedalus, he was at once attracted and excluded by the language of his rulers: "How different are the words *home*, *Christ*, *ale*, *master* on his lips and on mine!" Stephen thinks, talking with an English Jesuit. "I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words."

Nadezhda Mandelstam, the poet's wife, has described Mandelstam's feeling of not "belonging," for him an aspect of being a *raznochinets*. She points out his identification with Parnok, the continually excluded hero of his novel *The Egyptian Stamp* (*Egipetskaia marka*, 1928), and his description of Dante as a *raznochinets* who needs Virgil to be his sponsor and teacher.¹⁰ It has even been suggested that the lines in poem 17

I grew as a rustling reed
Where the pond is foul and muddy
And with languid and tender greed
Breathe a life forbidden to me

and the image of "cozy mud" in poem 18 express Mandelstam's awareness that he belongs in the "muddy pond" of "Judaic chaos" and not in the light-filled upper air of Russian culture.¹¹

⁹ P, p. 80.

¹⁰ Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope*, trans. Max Hayward (New York: Athenaeum, 1976), pp. 175-176.

¹¹ See Omry Ronen's article on Mandelstam in *Encyclopedia Judaica: Yearbook 1972*, briefly summarized in Taranovsky, pp. 51-54. Taranovsky's third chapter is subtitled "The Jewish Theme in Mandel'stam's Poetry."

When he was nine years old, Mandelstam entered the recently founded Tenishev School, the best and one of the most expensive secondary schools in St. Petersburg. The school was formed on the English model (though as a day school) and provided an education that was liberal in both the educational and the political sense. The curriculum included a thorough grounding in Latin and a very full survey of Russian literature (a whole year was devoted to Pushkin) from its origins to Turgenev and the lyric poet Fet, although Dostoevsky and Tolstoy seem to have been excluded. The school was legally required to limit Jewish students to 5 percent of the student body, but Vladimir Nabokov, a Tenishev student a few years after Mandelstam's time, recalled that 10 to 12 percent of the students were Jews and that the school authorities falsified their reports.¹²

Mandelstam finished at Tenishev School in the spring of 1907, when he was sixteen. He was already writing poetry, and in September we hear of him back at the school to give a reading of his poems. By Christmas of 1907, he was in Paris. He spent most of his time in Western Europe until 1910, living in Paris and paying brief visits to Switzerland and Italy. Though doubts have been expressed about the reality and duration of Mandelstam's Italian visits, the excursions have been confirmed not only by Nadezhda Mandelstam but also by the way in which the experience of Italy and especially of Rome reverberates in Mandelstam's poetry.¹³ He also lived in Germany in 1909, where he spent the winter at the university of Heidelberg, attending lectures on Old French literature and on the philosophy of Kant.

¹² Andrew Field, *Nabokov: His Life in Part* (New York: Viking, 1977), pp. 109-127.

¹³ N. Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned*, p. 26. See also Gleb Struve, "Italian Images and Motifs in the Poetry of Osip Mandelstam" ("Ital'ianskie obrazy i motivy v poezii Osipa Mandel'stama"), in *Studi in onore di Ettore Lo Gatto e Giovanni Maver* (Roma: Sansoni Editore, 1962), pp. 601-614. The title has been cited in English as a courtesy to the reader: no English translation exists.

By 1911 Mandelstam was back in St. Petersburg, where he studied philology at the university, but he apparently never took his degree; he was also baptized as a Lutheran, probably to ease his admission to the university, which had a strict Jewish quota.¹⁴ More importantly, he began to publish poems, first in the elegant journal *Apollo* (*Apol-lon*), one of the most respected magazines of the period, whose name emphasized its dedication to classical principles of decorum. He soon became a frequent contributor to *Apollo* and other journals and began to attend the weekly literary salon at Vyacheslav Ivanov's Petersburg apartment, "The Tower."

A few years later, in the spring of 1913—the year of *Pygmalion*, *Le Sacre du printemps*, *A Boy's Will*, the Armory Show, *Alcools*, *Sons and Lovers*, *Petersburg*, *Der Tod in Venedig*, and *Du côté de chez Swann*—Mandelstam published his first book, *Stone* (*Kamen'*), a thirty-six page pamphlet with a pale green cover, containing twenty-three poems. Mandelstam later brought out three enlarged editions of *Stone*: a ninety-two page edition in 1916, a ninety-eight page edition in 1923, and an edition included in his *Collected Poems* (*Stikhotvoreniia*) in 1928. These four redactions of *Stone*, with their shifting contents and arrangement, comprise the book that the reader is now holding. It is the book of a young poet, containing poems written between his seventeenth and his twenty-fifth year, in all the excitement of rapid artistic growth and mastery.

In a sense, I have now told all that the reader needs to know about Mandelstam's biography for a reading of *Stone*. His subsequent publications, adventures, and ordeals are not relevant to this book, and to know about them can lead the reader to search among these poems for foreshadowings of events that are to occur many years later. The two poems about Ovid in exile (60 and 80) seem to prefigure Mandelstam's own eventual fate, con-

¹⁴ B, p. 46. Brown's *Mandelstam* is a valuable and lively book that clarifies the poet's life and work. Those who know Brown's work will recognize the large debt I owe to his researches.

demned, like the Roman poet, for offending his emperor by "*carmen et error*"—a poem and a mistake,¹⁵ and the hope expressed at the end of "Notre Dame" (39), that "From cruel weight, I too will someday make beauty rise," gains an added poignancy. These poems should rather be read as triumphs of form over emptiness ("games that time plays with space," in Beckett's phrase), triumphs of the word over silence, the work of a young poet entering into his "demesne" with astonishing assurance.

MANDELSTAM AFTER *Stone*

If we consider *Stone* as a single book, Mandelstam published only two other collections of poetry: *Tristia* (1922; second edition 1923), whose title, though not of Mandelstam's choosing, further emphasizes his identification with Ovid; and the previously mentioned *Poems* of 1928, which contained three sections: *Stone*, *Tristia*, and poems of 1921 to 1925. There are also four little books of children's verse, published in 1925 and 1926; the autobiographical *The Sound of Time*; his short novel, *The Egyptian Stamp*; and a collection of essays about poetry entitled *On Poetry* (*O poezii*, 1928).

The period between the first and fourth publication of *Stone* was a time of upheaval and change in Russia: World War I, the revolutions of 1917, the long agony of civil war (1918-1920), the death of Lenin (1924), and the gradual tightening of Soviet control in all areas of life, including literature, occurred between 1913 and 1928. Like thousands of other Russians, Mandelstam spent much of this period as a refugee. He had been exempted from military service and so did not fight in the war but rather spent parts of 1915, 1916, and 1918 in the Crimea, the part of Russia he loved for its sun, warmth, and wine and be-

¹⁵ Ovid *Tristia* 2. 207. Numbers appearing in parentheses following quoted material or titles refer to the poems in the text and will be indicated this way throughout the introduction.

cause he saw it as an outpost of the ancient classical world, the home of Medea and the Golden Fleece. We find him in St. Petersburg when the Soviets seized power in 1917, and later in Kiev, where he met and married—unofficially—Nadezhda Yakovlevna Khazina in 1919 and survived the expulsion of the Soviets and the capture of the city by a vindictive White army. Later Mandelstam left Nadezhda Yakovlevna in Kiev and returned to the Crimea, still untouched by revolutionary disorder: he epitomizes the time and place in his memoir of the period (attached to *The Sound of Time*) by describing the harbor-master's office in Feodosia, where crisp white uniforms, nautical charts, and gleaming clocks and sextants still represented an order that had vanished forever. For a time he was in Georgia, and then made his way back to St. Petersburg—where Gorky denied him the pair of trousers. He and Nadezhda Yakovlevna were reunited in 1921 and legally married in 1922, in the course of further wanderings across Russia. They settled in Moscow for a year, and then received one of the apartments set aside for writers in the former imperial palaces at Tsarskoe Selo, the "imperial village" near St. Petersburg. Mandelstam was beginning to suffer from heart trouble and Nadezhda Yakovlevna from tuberculosis, conditions probably aggravated by the privations of their vagabond years.

Mandelstam suffered from a kind of writers' block between 1925 and 1930 and was unable to write poetry. He had already discovered that many journals were unwilling to publish his work, presumably because of his traditional humanist values and his failure to celebrate the new Soviet regime with conspicuously patriotic verse. He supported himself by writing children's books, by translating novels by Upton Sinclair, Jules Romains, Charles de Coster, and other Western writers, by revising a translation of the novels of Sir Walter Scott, and by occasional journalism. In 1923 he interviewed the young Ho Chi Minh, and characteristically commented on Ho's uneasy relationship with the language of his rulers: "He speaks French,

the language of the oppressors, but the French words sound dim and faint, like the muffled bell of his native language."¹⁶

Mandelstam had one powerful protector, Nikolay Bukharin, a member of the Politburo and head of the Comintern. Bukharin arranged for the publication of *Poems* in 1928 and probably for the publication of *The Egyptian Stamp* and *On Poetry* in the same year; he also arranged an eight-month visit to Armenia for the Mandelstams in 1930,¹⁷ where Mandelstam found that he was once again able to write poetry. But Bukharin's influence was on the wane: he was deprived of all his positions and expelled from the Party by Stalin in 1929, briefly readmitted to favor in 1934, and finally arrested and executed in 1938.

"Constant searching for some shelter, unsatisfied hunger for thought," Mandelstam wrote on his fortieth birthday (1931), summing up the conditions of his life. The search for shelter was met by the contemptuous assignment of three small rooms in the Moscow Writers' Union, the hunger for thought by his reading of Dante and by increasing creative activity. In 1933, Mandelstam's article "Journey to Armenia" ("Puteshestvie v Armeniiu") appeared, his last publication in his lifetime, and was harshly criticized for failing to celebrate Soviet achievements; in the same year he finally obtained a small Moscow apartment.

Mandelstam was arrested in May 1934, apparently because he composed a poem about Stalin and recited it to several friends, one of whom reported the incident to the authorities (the informer was himself soon arrested and died in a concentration camp before Mandelstam did). The poem describes Stalin's complete domination of Russia by emphasizing the weight and reality of the dictator's words—more real than those of other men because they are instantly translated into action. It also jibes at Stalin's

¹⁶ B, pp. 108-109. Brown translates the entire interview. The Russian text is in SS, 2: 246-249.

¹⁷ N. Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope*, p. 113.

Georgian background by calling him a mountaineer and an Ossetian:

We live, but we do not feel the land beneath us,
Ten steps away and our words cannot be heard,
And when there are just enough people for half a
dialogue—
Then they remember the Kremlin mountaineer.

His fat fingers are slimy, like slugs,
And his words are absolute, like grocers' weights.

His cockroach whiskers are laughing,
And his boot-tops shine.

He has a rabble of skinny-necked leaders around him,
He plays games with the aid of those who are only half
human,

Who twitter, who mew, who whimper.
He alone bangs and thrusts.

Decree after decree, he hammers them out like
horseshoes—
One in the groin for him, in the forehead for him, for
him one over the eyes, one in the eyes for him.

When he has an execution, it's a special treat
And the Ossetian chest swells.

(SS, poem 286; November 1933)

Mandelstam's papers, including all his unpublished poems, were confiscated during his arrest, and he was sentenced to hard labor on the White Sea Canal, a sentence that few survived. Bukharin intervened, and the sentence was commuted to exile in Cherdyn, a small town on the eastern side of the Urals; later Mandelstam was allowed to serve out his exile in Voronezh, a larger and more attractive city. Nadezhda Mandelstam describes their departure for Cherdyn as a departure from

"Europe," the metaphor stressing her sense of physical and psychic dislocation: "I say 'Europe' advisedly," she writes, "because in the 'new' state I had entered there was nothing of the European complex of thought, feelings and ideas by which I had lived hitherto."¹⁸ Mandelstam had a breakdown and tried to commit suicide in Cherdyn; he recovered in Voronezh and, despite his precarious legal position and his inability to earn any money by writing, he enjoyed another splendid period of creativity.

When his sentence expired in 1937, Mandelstam had to leave Voronezh, and found himself not only homeless but destitute as well. He was rearrested in May 1938, sentenced to five years hard labor, and sent to a transit camp near Vladivostok; an official death certificate (unusual for prisoners), issued in 1940, says that he died there of "heart failure" on 27 December 1938. He was formally "rehabilitated" in 1956, but his poems were not allowed to appear in the Soviet Union until 1974, and then only in an edition intended primarily for sale abroad.

The survival of about two hundred poems that Mandelstam wrote after 1930, the poet's own survival after his 1934 arrest, and virtually all of our information about his later life are due to the extraordinary woman who joined her fortunes with his in 1919. Nadezhda Mandelstam managed to avoid arrest during the Stalin era, and later she wrote a remarkable account of her life that is itself a classic of modern Russian literature, although it remains unpublished in her own country. Entitled *Vospominaniia* (1970) and *Vtoraia kniga* (1972), this work has been published in English as *Hope Against Hope* (1970) and *Hope Abandoned* (1974). Her books celebrate and exemplify the traditions of human decency and the preservation of European culture for which the best of the *raznochintsi* stood. She also preserved Mandelstam's poems, concealing manuscripts and copies and even memorizing them in case all copies should be destroyed.

¹⁸ N. Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope*, pp. 113; 41-42.

THE SILVER AGE

The beginning of Mandelstam's literary career coincided with an intense period of cultural excitement and achievement in Russia, paralleling the period's political agitation. Russian cultural historians describe the years between 1895 and 1915 as "the Silver Age"—silver only because the epithet "Golden" has already been reserved, by general consent, for the age of Pushkin. The literary scene was dominated by the Symbolists: Alexandr Blok, Konstantin Balmont, Andrey Bely, Valery Bryusov, Vyacheslav Ivanov. Mandelstam's earliest poems are Symbolist in style and feeling, and for a time he considered Bryusov and Ivanov as his mentors: it was at one of Ivanov's "Tower" gatherings that he met two younger poets with whom his literary career was to be closely connected, Anna Akhmatova and her husband, Nikolay Gumilyov; the trio would soon become known as the Acmeist school.

Poets of the period tended to think of themselves as members of groups or schools. Along with the reigning Symbolists, there were the Futurists, led by Mayakovsky and Khlebnikov, while Esenin was the best known among the "peasant" poets. Groups divided and subdivided as frequently as the new political parties in the Duma—there were also the Ego-Futurists, the Imaginists, and the Argonauts.

The other arts were in an equally lively state. Chagall and Vrubel were emerging as painters, Scriabin, Rachmaninov, and the young Stravinsky were revolutionizing music, Stanislavski and Meyerhold were developing new methods in theatrical production, and Diaghilev was reforming classical Russian ballet, while Lev Bakst and Alexandr Benois were everywhere, painting, illustrating books, designing costumes and scenery for ballet and theater. There was a remarkable intensity about it all, as if the participants foresaw that this creativity was soon to be stifled by the Soviets or scattered into foreign exile.

The great achievements of Russian novelists in the age

of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Turgenev had not been matched by the Russian poets who were their contemporaries. Most of them wrote "civic" poetry in a style that Mandelstam described as an "almost wooden simplicity."¹⁹ Their chief concern was to make the reader a better and more enlightened citizen in a gently liberal way. A subjective poet or a poet preoccupied with technique rather than with civic virtue seemed to them a kind of renegade: Afanasy Fet chose to avoid such criticism by publishing nothing for twenty years (1863-1883). The intolerance of the civic poets and critics, and their insistence that the chief purpose of literature is to assist in the forming of the good citizen, reemerged in the 1920s as Socialist Realism, since imposed upon all Soviet writers.

In the 1890s, the Symbolists challenged the prevalent civic theories and succeeded in freeing Russian poetry from what Gumilyov called its "narrow prison of ideology and prejudice."²⁰ The Symbolists wrote subjective poetry and insisted that poets must be concerned about technique—good intentions were no longer sufficient. A number of first-rate poets appeared to put these principles into action: Bryusov, Balmont, Zinaida Gippius, Sologub, and a little later the second Symbolist generation of Blok, Bely, and Ivanov. At the same time, the Symbolists taught the public how to read both the new poetry and the poetry of the past. The Symbolists also influenced painting, music, and other arts, and they brought Russia into touch with a literary movement that was European rather than national, represented elsewhere by Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Valéry, Maeterlinck, D'Annunzio, Stefan George, Rilke, and Yeats.

By about 1906, the Symbolists had become the literary establishment in Russia and were ready for schism. The younger Symbolists, Bely, Ivanov, and to some extent Blok, came to think of poetry as essentially religious, mystical, and metaphysical. The poet was seer rather

¹⁹ P, p. 83.

²⁰ Quoted in Simon Karlinsky, *Marina Cvetaeva: Her Life and Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), p. 2.

than craftsman, and he was to seek and record visions of eternal metaphysical truth rather than to concern himself with artistic form. There was also a partial shift of interest away from Western European culture to the Russian or even the Byzantine cultural past: the mystic Symbolists called one of their new journals *The Golden Fleece* (*Zolotoe runo*) to remind people that the Fleece was found in Russia, not by journeying abroad. Valery Bryusov spoke for the older Symbolist values, arguing that poetry was an end in itself and that the poet's chief task was to perfect his technique: "Poets may be evaluated by the worth and the flaws in their poetry, and by nothing else," least of all by "how they communicate with 'The Woman Clothed with the Sun' " or by how they try to write their own book of Revelation.²¹ Bryusov cited with approval Gautier's definition of the poet as first of all a worker—a builder, a craftsman²²—an idea that became the basis of Mandelstam's position and is often echoed in his poetry.

Both the Symbolist split and Bryusov's theory of the poet as craftsman brought two new groups into being, each concerned with poetic technique and each emphasizing certain aspects of Bryusov's teachings: the Futurists and the Acmeists. Each is defined primarily by its attitude toward the basic unit of poetic activity: the word. Futurists and Acmeists agreed that the mystic Symbolists misused words because they were often not interested in a word's objective meaning but only in what it could be made to mean; they were not interested in the real object that a word signified but only in finding a way to make that object a symbol for something else, for some abstract concept—what Mandelstam called "the frightful *contre-danse* of 'correspondences,' one bobbing to another." To

²¹ Valery Bryusov, "A Defence against Certain Praising" ("V zashchitu ot odnoi pokhvaly"), in *Vesy* [The scales], May 1905, p. 38. The "woman clothed with the sun" appears in *Rev.* 12:1. See also Martin P. Rice, *Valery Briusov and the Rise of Russian Symbolism* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1975), p. 85.

²² Bryusov, "The Holy Sacrifice" ("Sviashchennaia zhertva"), in *Vesy*, January 1905, p. 25. See also Rice, *Valery Briusov*, pp. 78-85.

the Symbolist, he declared, "a rose, the sun, a dove, a girl . . . not one . . . is interesting in its own right, but the rose is an image for the sun, the sun is an image for the rose, the dove is an image for the girl, the girl is an image for the dove. They disembowel the original object like a bird about to be stuffed, and stuff it with foreign matter. Instead of a forest of symbols, a taxidermy studio." And he quoted with approval the Acmeist slogan: "Down with Symbolism, long live the living rose!"²³

Although the Futurists were also opposed to using words as symbols, they were not really interested in a word's lexical meaning. Their concern was with the *form* and sound of a word itself, and Velimir Khlebnikov soon developed his "trans-sense" or metalogic (*zaumny*), treating words as incantations and often exploding them into their roots and derivatives, as in his famous poem "Incantation by Laughter" ("Zaklyatie smekhom," 1910), made up of words derived from the Russian word for laughter (*smekh*):

O rassmeytes smekhachi!
O zasmeytes smekhachi!
Chto smeyutsya smekhami, chto smeyanstvuyut
smeyalno
O zasmeytes usmeyalno.

O laugh it up you laughletes!
O laugh it out you laughletes!
That laugh with laughs, that laughelize
laughingly
O laugh it out so laughily
O of laughing at laughilies—
the laugh of laughish laughers . . .

Khlebnikov described himself as looking for "a touchstone for the transformation of all Slavic words one into another, for the free fusion of all Slavic words. Such is the

²³ "Concerning the Nature of the Word" ("O prirode slova"), SS, 2: 296-299.

self-valuing word without relation to life or use."²⁴ Ma-yakovsky declared that his method was "common sense," but he too was interested in the word in a new way. He used startling, sometimes bizarre rhymes, and made the word his basic unit, often isolating each word or brief phrase in a line of its own until a poem resembles a flight of steps. The Futurists further proclaimed that all the literature and culture of the past ought to be jettisoned "from the steamship of modernity" as useless rubbish and replaced by something completely new.

The Acmeists, the group with which Mandelstam is identified, had different ideas. The Symbolist Bely offered them their name in derision, but they seized it proudly, explaining that in Greek *akmé* meant "the highest degree of something . . . a time of flowering."²⁵ They had originally come together as "The Poets' Workshop" (*Tsekh poetov*), a name that affirmed their sense of themselves as primarily craftsmen. Gumilyov founded the Workshop in November 1911, with himself and Sergey Gorodetsky as "Masters of the Guild" and Anna Akhmatova as "Secretary"; Mandelstam soon became, in Akhmatova's phrase, "first violin."²⁶

In January 1913, Gumilyov and Gorodetsky published Acmeist manifestoes in *Apollo*; Mandelstam also wrote a manifesto, "The Morning of Acmeism" ("Utro akmeizma"), which was not published until 1919. Gumilyov's manifesto, "The Legacy of Symbolism and Acmeism" ("Nasledie simvolizma i akmeizm"), acknowledged the Acmeists' Symbolist ancestry ("Symbolism has been a worthy father"), and claimed that the

²⁴ Both the poem and the prose passage are quoted from Roman Jakobson, *Noveyshaya russkaya poeziya* [Modern russian poetry] (Prague: Politika, 1921), as excerpted and translated in Edward J. Brown, *Major Soviet Writers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 74-75, 81.

²⁵ "The Legacy of Symbolism and Acmeism" ("Nasledie simvolizma i akmeizm"), Gumilyov, 4: 171. The essay originally appeared in *Apollo*, no. 1 (January 1913), pp. 42-45. For Bely's and Ivanov's role in naming Acmeism, see B, pp. 139, 305-306.

²⁶ "Mandelstam," AAS, 2: 169.

Acmeists were the true heirs of Symbolism, preserving the best of the older movement, its tradition of craftsmanship, while abjuring the heresies of writing too subjectively and of making poetry into a handmaiden of mysticism. "It is harder to be an Acmeist than to be a Symbolist," he declared, "as it is harder to build a cathedral than to build a tower"—a dig at Ivanov and the "Tower" mystics. Gumilyov demanded that subject and object be equally important in a poem; that a word's meaning remain fixed, so that it would not vanish into a protean chain of metaphors; and that the poet respect the integrity of each word or phenomenon in itself, which would ensure a respect for each word's value in the scheme of the poem and each phenomenon's value in the general scheme of things. He also called for less rigid metrical forms, and proclaimed Shakespeare, Rabelais, Villon, and Gautier (whose *Émaux et camées* he had translated) as the four cornerstones of Acmeism.²⁷

As these names suggest, the Acmeists shared that commitment to Western European culture traditionally associated with St. Petersburg (Bely, Blok, and Ivanov were proclaiming their preference for the traditionally Russian, the Byzantine, the Scythian) and emphasized in the title of the journal *Apollo*, with its classical and orderly implications (Ivanov, in contrast, was attracted by Dionysus). When the Acmeists started their own journal late in 1912, they called it *The Hyperborean* (*Giperborei*): even though they lived in the distant north, the Hyperboreans, according to Herodotus and Pindar, were worshippers of Apollo and considered themselves part of the Hellenic world.²⁸ Years later, when Mandelstam was pressed to define Acmeism by a hostile audience, he defined it as "a yearning for world culture."²⁹

It is customary to describe Acmeism as if it were a well-organized movement with a clearly defined body of doc-

²⁷ "The Legacy of Symbolism and Acmeism," Gumilyov, 4: 171-178, esp. pp. 172-173.

²⁸ Herodotus *Histories* 4. Pindar *Pythian Odes* 10. 29-49.

²⁹ "Mandelstam," AAS, 2: 185.

trine. Some of the Acmeist poets, including Mandelstam, did try to define a set of literary theories that the group held in common, but in fact Acmeism was less a school or movement than it was a quest for greater clarity and precision in poetry. To read the poems of the three best Acmeists is to see this quest for precision at work, but the reader also notices diversities rather than similarities. Gumilyov wanted poetry to be “manly”; consequently he celebrated bravery and stoicism. His poem “My Readers” (“Moi chitateli”) describes his ideal audience:

. . . A man who shot an imperial ambassador
Amid a throng of people
Came to shake my hand
To thank me for my poems.

There are many of these, strong, wicked,
cheerful,
Who have killed elephants and men,
Who have died of thirst in the desert,
Frozen on the rim of the eternal ice,
Who are loyal to our strong,
Our cheerful, our wicked planet,
Who carry my books in their saddle bag,
Read them in a palm grove,
Leave them behind on a sinking ship,

.....
. . . when bullets whistle around,
When waves split the ship's side,
I teach them to be unafraid . . .³⁰

1921

³⁰ Gumilyov, 2: 61. The poem first appeared in Gumilyov's collection *Ognenny stolp* [A pillar of fire, 1921], containing poems written between 1918 and 1921. Gumilyov won the George Cross, Russia's highest award for bravery, during World War I. When he gave the destitute Mandelstam an extra pair of trousers, Mandelstam claimed that he felt “unusually strong and manly” while wearing them. See N. Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned*, p. 64.

Akhmatova's poems of that period were sparse epiphanies, representing such events as a woman recalling a few concrete details about the ending of a love affair:

She wrung her hands beneath her dark veil . . .
"Why are you pale today?"
—Because I have made him drunk
With bitter sorrow.

How will I forget it? He went out shaking,
His mouth twisted with pain . . .
I ran down, not touching the railing,
And ran after him to the gate.

Panting, I cried, "It was just a joke,
That's all. If you go, I die."
With a calm and terrible smile
He said, "Don't stand in the wind."³¹

1911, Kiev

Mandelstam wrote a poetry that is both more impersonal and more allusive. It is concrete but extremely associative: his ideal reader has been trained in "a school of the most rapid associations" to "grasp things on the wing," to be "sensitive to allusions."³²

All three Acmeists agreed on the importance of precise language and clarity, and rejected mystical experience, considering the real world the only appropriate subject matter for poetry: "That which cannot be known," Gumilyov remarked crisply, "cannot be understood."³³ They were sparing with adjectives, and, while they often wrote subjectively, the "I" of a poem was always placed in the presence of a clearly defined objective reality. The following passages are from three poems with similar set-

³¹ AAS, 1: 64-65.

³² Dante, p. 68. See also Monas, p. 7; SS, 2: 406.

³³ "The Legacy of Symbolism and Acmeism," Gumilyov, 4: 174.

tings, by the Symbolist Alexandr Blok, by Akhmatova, and by Mandelstam:

I shall never forget it (did it really happen or not
This evening): the fires of sunset
Burned and drove back the pale sky,
And the streetlights showed against the yellow sunset.

I sat at a window in the overcrowded room.
Somewhere violins sang about love . . .

Blok, "In the Restaurant" ("V restorane")
(19 April 1910)

Music jangled away in the garden
With inexpressible sadness.
On a plate, oysters bedded in ice
With a sharp fresh tang of sea.

He said to me, "I am a true friend!"
And touched my dress . . .

Akhmatova, "In the Evening"
("Vecherom") (March 1913)

But I love to be out on the dunes at the casino,
The wide views that the murky window shows,
And thin on the crumpled tablecloth the light;

Green water all around on every side;
When wine shows red in the crystal, like a
rose—

I love to follow a seagull soaring in flight.

Mandelstam, "The Casino" ("Kazino," 33)
(1912)

Blok undercuts his own poem by suggesting the unreliability of the narrator at the very beginning—he is unsure about the reality of his experience and may well be telling us about a hallucination. Akhmatova is quite sure about the reality of her episode: there is no doubt about the oys-

ters on the dish or about the man and the woman's awareness of his physical presence, and the music is not a cliché of romantic violins but real music, and not very well-played at that. The speaker is present as an accurate recorder of her surroundings and her feelings about them. Mandelstam is equally accurate but perhaps a little more impersonal. He is alone with the objects in the casino—tablecloths, wine glass, the green water and seagull outside—and the poem is about these objects rather than about the poet's reaction to them or about the objects as part of the scenery for an emotional encounter.³⁴ Mandelstam's poem offers a parallel reality in words.

Clarence Brown and other critics have pointed out strong resemblances between Gumilyov's and Mandelstam's theories about the word in poetry and the theories that Ezra Pound was proclaiming as "Imagism" at about the same time, theories that Pound later described as "the revolution of the word."³⁵ Pound called for clarity and precision not only as technically desirable but as a moral imperative for the poet. "Honesty of the word does not permit dishonesty of the matter," he wrote many years later. "An artist's technique is the test of his personal validity. Honesty of the word is the writer's first aim."³⁶ For Mandelstam, the central tenet of Acmeism was respect "for the word as such."³⁷ He shared Gumilyov's respect

³⁴ For Blok's poem, see his *Sobranie sochinenii* [Collected works] (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennii literatury, 1960), 3: 25; for Akhmatova's, see AAS, 1: 99. The translations are my own. The comparison of the poems by Blok and Akhmatova draws on V. M. Zhirmunsky, "Two Tendencies of Contemporary Lyric Poetry" (1920; "Dva napravleniia sovremennoi poezii"), trans. John Glad, in *The Silver Age of Russian Culture*, ed. Carl Proffer and Ellendea Proffer (Ann Arbor: Ardis, n.d.), pp. 60-65. The Russian text is available in Zhirmunsky's *Voprosi teorii literatury* [Problems of literary theory] (1928; facsimile ed., 'S-Gravenhage: Mouton and Co., 1962), pp. 182-189. Zhirmunsky does not discuss Mandelstam in this article.

³⁵ Ezra Pound, *Polite Essays* (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1937), p. 49.

³⁶ Pound, *Polite Essays*, p. 193.

³⁷ "The Morning of Acmeism" ("Utro akmeizma"), SS, 2: 363.

for the word as a phenomenon existing in its own right, but he went further, considering the word in some degree independent even of that which it signifies. In Poem 75, he celebrates the *Imyabozhtsi* or *Imyaslavtsi*, the members of the "God's Name" movement who taught that the name of God is itself divine. For Mandelstam, words are things. They exist in and of themselves and speak for themselves. The poet's task is to find the right ones—the precisely right ones—and arrange them; Eliot makes the same point in "Little Gidding":

And every phrase
And sentence that is right (where every word is
at home,
Taking its place to support the others,
The word neither diffident not ostentatious,
An easy commerce of the old with the new,
The common word exact without vulgarity,
The formal word precise but not pedantic,
The complete consort dancing together) . . .

For Mandelstam the word does not exclusively or primarily represent an object or concept. "Words are perhaps the hardest of all material of art," Eliot wrote, "for they must be used to express both visual beauty and beauty of sound, as well as communicating a grammatical statement."³⁸ Mandelstam seems to have looked on each word as "fossil poetry"—Emerson's striking phrase in "The Poet"—and expected it to evoke rather than represent that which it signifies, so that in a poem a word and its significance exist separately but together, like body and soul. In a poem from *Tristia* which begins "We shall gather once more in Petersburg" (SS, poem 118), Mandelstam dreams of pronouncing "the blessed word *without*

³⁸ T. S. Eliot, *Ezra Pound: His Metric and Poetry* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1917), p. 14. Nadezhda Mandelstam interestingly compares Mandelstam and Eliot in terms of their commitment to the word in *Mozart and Salieri*, trans. Robert A. McLean (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1973), pp. 43-45.

meaning" (italics mine), and in "The Word and Culture" ("Slovo i kultura"), he asks, "Why identify the word with a material thing, with grass, with the phenomenon it signifies?"

Is the material thing really the master of the word? The word is Psyche, soul. The living word does not signify a phenomenon, but freely chooses, as it were, one or another objective significance, or concreteness, or cherished body, for its dwelling place. And then the word freely envelops the material thing, as a soul hovers around a body that it has discarded but not forgotten.³⁹

In "Concerning the Nature of the Word" ("O prirode slova"), he calls for "the living poetry of the word-phenomenon" or "word-material object."⁴⁰ "I do believe," Byron had written a century before, "Though I have found them not, that there may be/Words which are things . . ." (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, 3. 114. 1,059-1,061).

Mandelstam maintains the autonomy and preeminence of "the word as such" in his poetry, and avoids subordinating it to ideas or even to its lexical meaning by placing conventional signposts at intervals throughout a poem without letting them point out a real road through the poem. He uses words like *so*, *therefore*, and *yet*, *let us then*, *but*, *what then* to give the poem an apparent logical structure behind which the real action—the dance of the "word object"—can go on.⁴¹ Mandelstam is an intellectual poet, but he is not an ideological poet in the way that, say, Eliot and Auden are—he considered it a misuse of poetry to make it serve as argument. In a sense, these are poems about *not* making words convey ideas.

³⁹ SS, 2: 268. See also B, p. 235.

⁴⁰ SS, 2: 301.

⁴¹ I am summarizing Boris Bukhshtab, "The Poetry of Mandelstam," trans. Clarence Brown, *Russian Literature Triquarterly* 1 (1971): 262-282. This is the first appearance of this 1929 essay in print, in any language.

Mandelstam created his own poetic theory and practice out of the cluster of ideas that made up Acmeism, and it is these that govern *Stone*, although in fact many of the earlier poems in the volume are Symbolist poems, as Gumilyov pointed out when he reviewed it (he considered Poem 31, "No, not the moon . . .," to be the first of the Acmeist poems).⁴² *Stone* actually records Mandelstam's development from Symbolism to Acmeism and so records "the growth of a poet's mind," although it hardly seems a prelude since he was a mature poet from the beginning. He himself spoke of the 1913 *Stone*, in the copy he inscribed for Akhmatova, as "flashes of consciousness in the oblivion of days."⁴³

STONE SONGS

The title *Stone* proclaims Mandelstam's poetic principles. Gumilyov had approvingly quoted Gautier: "Creation is the more perfect/The more passionless the material is! Be it verse, marble, metal . . ." ⁴⁴ Among minor Symbolists, titles like *Beryl* or *Chrysophrase* were popular, and even Gumilyov had published *Pearls* (*Zhemchuga*, 1910); Mandelstam's working title for *Stone* before publication was "Seashell" ("Rakovina"),⁴⁵ and in the poem of that name (26), the shell is specified as one "without pearls." Mandelstam offered only a stone, an ordinary stone that might be picked up anywhere, a stone that a mason could use to build with. The title is also a

⁴² Gumilyov reviewed both the 1913 and the 1916 editions of *Stone* in *Apollon*: see Gumilyov, 4: 327-328, 363-366. The reviews appeared in *Apollon*, no. 1-2 (January-February 1914) and no. 1 (January 1916).

⁴³ "Mandelstam," AAS, 2: 167.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Zhirmunsky, "Two Tendencies," in Proffer and Proffer, eds., *Silver Age of Russian Culture*, p. 60.

⁴⁵ B, p. 161. There is an odd and presumably accidental echo of Wordsworth's vision of the Bedouin carrying a stone and a shell (*Prelude* 5. 71-165). The stone represents reality, the shell vision, and the poet "wondered not, although I plainly saw/The one to be a stone, the other a shell/Nor doubted once but that they both were books" (ll. 111-113).

builder. A building is made out of stone; a poem is made out of words, not out of ideas or its subject matter. A word "thirsts" to participate in a poem, for the poem is a new mode of existence, a challenge to the void of silence and nothingness, just as the stone thirsts to participate in the soaring vault that supports roof or tower, to create a structure where only emptiness had been:

Stone, become a web,
A lace fragility:
Let your thin needle stab
The empty breast of sky. (29)

"To build means to contend with the void, to hypnotize space," Mandelstam explains. "the beautiful shaft of the Gothic bell tower is angry, for the entire meaning of it is to stab the sky, to reproach it because it is empty."⁴⁷

The stone-word is active, not passive. It is not acted upon by the mason who places it in the arch but rather enters into a strenuous and continual activity, the sustaining of the structure. "The arch never sleeps"⁴⁸—and neither does Mandelstam's line and stanza, in which each word accepts its charge of dynamically sustaining the poem. In a poem of 1933 (SS, poem 276), he describes the creative moment when a poem is achieved:

How splendid and how oppressive,
When the moment is drawing nearer—
And then suddenly the tension of the arch
Can be heard in my mutterings.

Mandelstam's habit of thinking of poetry in architectural terms often leads him to write poems about build-

⁴⁷ All prose quotations in the two preceding paragraphs are from "The Morning of Acmeism," SS, 2: 364-65. The "cross-vaulting" is from *Stone* 39, line 3.

⁴⁸ This phrase is a kind of refrain in J. Meade Falkner's architectural novel, *The Nebuly Coat* (1903), a novel Mandelstam would probably have liked. See also William Golding's *The Spire* (1964).

ings: "The Admiralty" (48), "Notre Dame" (39), "Hagia Sophia" (38). These poems are at once statements and examples of his poetic creed—especially "The Admiralty," which is about a St. Petersburg building that is literally a word, or at least an initial letter: the central arch forms the Russian letter "П," Peter's initial. The Admiralty was built to emphasize Russia's eagerness to communicate with the West, and above the arch the architect has "quoted" two Western buildings, a classical temple (to Mandelstam an "Acropolis") and above that a Gothic spire. Finally, the poem and the building refute the Symbolist idea of poetry as inspiration, a sudden God-given vision, and teach "that beauty is no demi-god's caprice/ But is caught by a simple carpenter's greedy eye." "Irish poets, learn your trade," Yeats was to command in his valedictory poem, "Sing whatever is well made."

Mandelstam's "Notre Dame" celebrates a monument of Western culture and its Roman origin. The poet does not look at the cathedral romantically, and he does not mention the Virgin at all. His poem is almost aggressively masculine, and he sees the church as "original, exulting,/ Each nerve stretched taut along the light cross-vaulting,/ Each muscle flexing, like Adam when he first woke"—Michelangelo's Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, testing his newly discovered powers. The lines evoke Mandelstam's sense that Gothic architecture is "the triumph of dynamics" and that a Gothic cathedral is more in motion and more fluid than a wave in the sea.⁴⁹ And they recall that the Acmeists also thought of calling themselves Adamists, the name Sergey Gorodetsky preferred in his manifesto⁵⁰: a poet should look at the world with Adam's fresh eye, and Adam created words by giving names to things.

The cathedral is at once Adam awakening to new creation and an epitome of Western culture and of human his-

⁴⁹ "François Villon," SS, 2: 350.

⁵⁰ Sergey Gorodetsky, "Some Tendencies in Contemporary Russian Poetry" ("Nekotorye techeniya v sovremennoi russkoi poezii"), *Apolon*, no. 1 (January 1913), pp. 46-50.

tory. When the poet looks at the cathedral, his perception expands through time to include the Gothic age when the church was built, its architectural stresses and strains planned and controlled; then back to an even earlier event, the founding of Paris as a Roman outpost, an extension of Roman law and logic into empty or uncivilized space, which was the necessary preamble to the development of Gothic architectural skills; and then back even further to the creation of Adam, when the Word of God created man to fill the empty spaces of the world, to raise himself erect and make ready to raise cathedrals and towers. If Adam is indeed the Adam of the Sistine Chapel, Rome reenters the poem with him, or rather continues in the poem—Renaissance Rome now, in the most literal sense. Mandelstam would expect his reader to recall the etymology of *tsar*, derived from Caesar, invoking the unity that Rome created for European culture—like the Dante he imagined, he wanted a reader to make “rapid associations . . . grasp things on the wing . . . be sensitive to allusions,”⁵¹ and even catch an echo of Revelation 11: 1: “And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God.” A whole tradition is continuously and insistently present in both cathedral and poem.

“Hagia Sophia” presents another cathedral that embodies its own tradition. Mandelstam admires Justinian for incorporating the ancient Greek past in his building by using pillars from the temple of Diana at Ephesus. He emphasizes the reality of the building, and specifies its elements: 107 pillars, 40 windows, 4 pendentives. The mystical Symbolists had made much of what they called “the Eternal Sophia,” a feminine embodiment of Divine Wisdom. Vladimir Solovyov had spent much of his life seeking her—Her?—and had actually glimpsed her on three occasions: in a Moscow church when he was nine, in the British Museum Reading Room, and in the desert near

⁵¹ Dante, p. 68. See also *Monas*, p. 7; *SS*, 2: 406.

Cairo⁵²; a little later she became Blok's Eternal Feminine, a mysterious and beautiful woman who shows herself only occasionally to the poet, and then only for a moment. On the other hand, Mandelstam's solid church is always there, and visible to all; it is not evoked by an individual sensibility but instead develops out of and directs the religious and cultural aspirations of its society.

Mandelstam's preoccupation with architecture also leads him to write poems about cityscapes, especially poems about St. Petersburg, the city whose name operates as a kind of subtext for the title *Stone*. Petersburg is a city of stone, built of that gray Finnish granite that brought on Solovyov's "prophetic terror." Its name incorporates Christ's only recorded pun, on the word stone: "Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam"—"You are Stone, and upon this stone I will build my church." Petersburg—Stone City. When Tsar Peter named his new capital after his own patron saint, he deliberately emphasized the city's "Western" aspects by using non-Russian words—Sankt Peterburg: *Sankt* is Dutch and German, from the Latin *sanctus* (the Russian word would be *svatoi*); Peter rather than Pyotr; and German *burg* instead of Russian *grad*.

Mandelstam's St. Petersburg is not the vague and hallucinatory city of Dostoevsky, of Blok, of Bely's *Petersburg*. It is a real and specific city, caught in a moment of time in "Petersburg Stanzas" (42) much as a photograph or a statue freezes action. The city is literally frozen, the Neva icebound and its ships unmoving. Tsar Peter himself appears but as a statue, the famous "Bronze Horseman" fixed forever upon a granite wave that will never break, forever pointing to the West. The law student of stanza one is caught with his arm in a similar gesture. The city's reality—and its myth—has already been fixed

⁵² See his poem "Three Meetings" ("Tri svidan'ya," 1898), in *Stikhovoreniia i shutochnie p'esi* [Poems and comic pieces], Biblioteka poeta (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1974), p. 125.

in architecture and literature: the statue and "Queer proud Evgeni" evoke Pushkin's poem *The Bronze Horseman* (*Medny vsadnik*), and Pushkin's *Onegin* is also present.

St. Petersburg is named for a saint associated with the papacy and Rome, and the two cities are architecturally similar—when the architect of the Kazan Cathedral "quotes" Bernini's colonnade at St. Peter's, Mandelstam refers to him as "a Russian with his heart in Rome" (61). The poet's heart is often in Rome, at once papal and imperial. His attitude toward Rome was influenced by the philosopher Pyotr Chaadaev (1794-1856), who admired Catholicism and Western culture. Mandelstam's interest in Catholicism was cultural rather than theological: he inherited Chaadaev's respect for the papacy as the great unifying principle of Western Europe rather than as a divinely sanctioned religious authority. Rome defines "man's place in the universal scheme" (66) by continuing the Judaeo-Graeco-Roman cultural tradition that was centered on man and man's needs.

Western Europe, together with St. Petersburg and some of the little outposts of the classical world along the Black Sea, exemplified order and form, qualities lacking in the vast sprawl of the Russian landscape that Chaadaev had called raw and undefined.⁵³ While in his Voronezh exile in 1937, Mandelstam described himself as sick of the open plains (SS, poem 351) and held prisoner by their "lucid dreariness" (SS, poem 352), unable to leave "these hills of Voronezh, still young/For those lucid hills of Tuscany where all men feel at home." The landscape of the West was comfortable, familiar—"I love bourgeois, European comfort and am devoted to it not only physically but also emotionally," he wrote Vyacheslav Ivanov from Switzerland in 1909.⁵⁴ The landscape was on a human scale, long habituated to and shaped by a human presence and possessing what Mandelstam called Hellenism:

⁵³ "Pyotr Chaadaev," SS, 2: 327.

⁵⁴ B, p. 37.