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"Sophisticated Players": Adults Writing as Children in the Stalin Era and Beyond

A dissertation presented by

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to

The Department of Comparative Literature, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

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"Sophisticated Players": Adults Writing as Children in the Stalin Era and Beyond

Abstract

This dissertation contributes to the growing field of children's studies in and outside of Slavic studies by broadening the scope of the existing scholarly conversation beyond writing explicitly or ostensibly *for* children. Instead, I consider the role of childhood as both a theme and rhetorical stance in the writing of Kornei Chukovskii and Lidia Chukovsksaia, Osip and Nadezhda Mandelstam, and Boris Pasternak. Their use of the child was made possible by the pivotal role played by childhood in the forging of the new Soviet state and New Soviet Person. Building on historical scholarship as well as insights from queer theory, I show how these authors employ childhood to express something that is neither childlike nor childish, nor even child-oriented, as they negotiate their changing relationship to the Soviet state. I argue that what began as a modernist interest in childhood inherited from Romanticism took on new expressive possibilities in the Stalin era, which sought to model its adult citizenry after an image of passive and docile Soviet children as the population was made to adopt a childlike role vis-à-vis Stalin the Father. Chukovskii, Pasternak, and Osip Mandelstam explore these dynamics in their writings in order to articulate a critique of the state. Lidia Chukovskaia spoke of her own childhood and of her father *as* a child in her writings about him as she sought to wrest his legacy from the hands of the co-opting forces of the

Soviet bureaucracy as well as to write herself back in to the social order. The afterward considers how Nadezhda Mandelstam amplified the specifically childlike quality of her husband's oppositional stance as she wrote herself in as a part of the continuum of his poetry and life. Taken together, these authors operate as "sophisticated players," demonstrating the potency of the signifier of the child to break down and resist, as well, as obscure, the personal, political, and aesthetic aims of those who deploy it.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, from whom I have inherited a love of poetry and who has read every draft of every part of this dissertation numerous times. Aside from a keen editor she has been an invaluable and infinitely generous interlocuter, and I hope to continue our conversation for many years to come.

For Flora Zaitseva

Introduction

In Hans Christian Andersen's 1837 fable "The Emperor's New Clothes," only the child says what everyone is thinking: "But he doesn't have anything on!" the child exclaims as the emperor passes. "Did you ever hear such innocent prattle?" the child's father asks rhetorically, while a nearby adult whispers what he has just overheard: "He hasn't anything on. A child says he hasn't anything on."[1]

In Andersen's allegory, the overhearing adults do not suddenly see, in a literal sense, what they had not seen before; rather, they marvel that someone—a child—has said what they knew not to say. With his capacity to voice unmediated truth, the child sets off a chain of events that touches even the sovereign: "The Emperor shivered, for he suspected they were right. But he thought, 'This procession has got to go on.' So he walked more proudly than ever, as his noblemen held high the train that wasn't there at all."[2] Although the emperor decides that the procession must move forward, it will likely be his last in this particular set of robes.

According to Michael Taussig, there are two possible readings of the scene at the culmination of Andersen's story: either the child "has not yet mastered the art of knowing what not to know," or he is a "sophisticated player, taking advantage of adult positioning of the child as innocent and ethically immature so

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[1] H. C. (Hans Christian) Andersen, *The Complete Stories* (London: British Library, 2005), 71.

[2] Ibid.

as to untwist....the public secret."[3] In Andersen's tale, it is irrelevant what the child's true motives are, or if there is even enough reflection involved to warrant the use of the word "motive." What matters is the role that the child plays in the adult's imagination and the real, political consequences of the adult's imagination of the inner workings of the child's mind.

I would add that, like the child, the father in Andersen's story may also be a "sophisticated player": although perhaps he believes his own characterization that his son's words are "innocent prattle," he may simply be trying to diffuse the child's explosive remark by casting him as "innocent and ethically immature."[4] It is possible that the father recognizes the usefulness of maintaining a category of innocence, which alone is capable of speaking truth to power with impunity. If this is the case, then the father too "tak[es] advantage of adult positioning of the child as innocent and ethically immature" so as to "untwist....the public secret."[5]

This dissertation takes the chain reaction at the climax of Andersen's story—one that starts with the child and ends with the king—and transposes it onto the Soviet period. I do so in order to interrogate what happens when the adult subject speaks to power by telling a story about childhood, about children—

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[3] Michael Taussig, "The Adult's Imagination of the Child's Imagination," in *Aesthetic Subjects*, ed. David Bruce McWhirter and Pamela R. Matthews (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 458-9.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

as the father of Andersen's story does. As we will see, sometimes adults even speak to power in a child's voice.

The Soviet period and Stalinism in particular offer rich grounds for this discussion: not only due to the patriarchal nature of the state's relation to its citizenry (e.g., the widespread moniker for Stalin as "the father of nations," *otets narodov*) but in the special role played by children in the political sphere. As Lisa Kirschenbaum has written, "Children had long been represented as both the chief beneficiaries of the Revolution and as its purest exponents," and the state identified children's interests with its own.[6] As a result, according to Catriona Kelly, the Soviet state "placed children's affairs at the heart of its political legitimacy, emphasizing that children were treated with greater care than they were anywhere else in the world."[7]

Propagandistic images of Stalin surrounded by admiring, cheerful children accompanied by slogans like "Thank you, Stalin, for our happy childhood!" (*Spasibo liubimumu Stalinu za nashe shchastlivoe detstvo*!) served to model the state's expectation that its adult citizens be similarly passive and docile.[8] Like children proclaiming their gratitude to Stalin, adults were expected to express their subordination through what Serhy Yekelchyk calls the "civic emotions" of

[6] Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932*, Studies in the History of Education (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2001), 151-2.

[7] Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890-1991* (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2007), 1.

[8] Ibid. 93-4.

"love and gratitude: love for Stalin and the Motherland, and gratitude to Stalin and the Soviet state for their 'gift' of life and well-being."[9] Moreover, Soviet citizens—especially under Stalin—were "demobilized as a political force."[10] This political demobilization of the Soviet populace was, I argue, also infantilizing: the perceived passivity of children has historically been one of the primary factors to disqualify them from enjoying the full benefits of citizenship, and in the Soviet era the passivity imposed on the adult population put them in a position similar to the one historically occupied by children.[11] Like a child held in check by the tenuous promise of future rewards (or, more likely, punishments), adult citizens were fully subject to the whims of the parent state.

The disempowerment of the populace in the Stalin era especially had as its correlate the relative unknowability of the citizenry in the eyes of the state. As Yekelchyk writes, "the machinery of the Stalinist state could only make assumptions about what its citizens really thought."[12] Echoing this formulation,

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[9] Serhy Yekelchyk, *Stalin's Citizens: Everyday Politics in the Wake of Total War* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4.

[10] Hiroaki Kuromiya, "How Do We Know What The People Thought Under Stalin?," in *Sovetskaia Vlast'—Narodnaia Vlast'?: Ocherki istorii narodnogo vospriiatiia sovetskoi vlasti v SSSR*, ed. Timo Vihavainen (Saint Petersburg: Evropeiskii Dom, 2003), 43.

[11] Tom Cockburn, *Rethinking Children's Citizenship*, Studies in Childhood and Youth (Houndmills, Basingstoke ; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 111. As Cockburn notes, in contrast to the participatory Greek model of citizenship, ancient Rome conceived of it as a passive ideal in which citizens "rarely directly shaped policies." Ibid., 227. It is perhaps not a coincidence, then, that Moscow was patterned as the "Fourth Rome."

[12] Yekelchyk, *Stalin's Citizens*, 4. In their scholarship, historians of the Soviet era such as Yekelchyk, Hiroaki Kuromiya, Vladimir Shlapentokh and others work to surmount this very difficulty of gauging the true sentiments of subjects of totalitarianism, a difficulty they have inherited from the state that begot it. Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Jacqueline Rose has gone so far as to call the relationship between the adult and the child an "impossible"[13] one: impossible in the sense that adults can only guess at the contents of children's minds and desires. Just as the father in Andersen's story may be obscuring the real motivation behind his son's incendiary observation with his own remark, by telling a story about its citizenry—that it had created "a new Soviet person, [with] an omnipresent 'inner Soviet self'"—the Soviet state inadvertently provided cover for an inner self that differed markedly from the idealized Soviet self.[14]

By placing children at its heart and relegating its citizens to the status of children in the metaphorical sense, the Soviet state inadvertently furnished a language through which its adult citizenry could speak back to the state. Indeed, the myth of Soviet children's unqualified happiness belied the condition of the most vulnerable children, such as those orphaned in the recurring waves of state repressions and arrests. The state could not acknowledge these children's socially conditioned vulnerability if it was to maintain a narrative of Soviet children's supreme wellbeing.[15] To question the state's treatment of children and childhood was, then, to aim at the very heart of the state's legitimacy—something the five

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[13] Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, Or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, Language, Discourse, Society (London: Macmillan, 1984), 1.

[14] Yekelchyk, *Stalin's Citizens*, 4.

[15] Ibid., 6-7.

authors discussed in this dissertation wittingly or unwittingly did. [16] Kornei Chukovskii, Lidia Chukovskaia, Osip and Nadezhda Mandelstam, and Boris Pasternak all took advantage of the relative unknowability of children—a correlate of their vulnerability vis-à-vis the adult world—in order to speak of and to power. Speaking about children, they also spoke *as* children.

To be sure, these writers were not alone in using childhood and children as a way to negotiate their complex and changing relationships to the Soviet state. From the 1920s onwards, Aesopian language in children's literature flourished,[17] and the members of the avant-garde OBERIU (*Ob"edinenie real'nogo iskusstva*, Association for Real Art) group explored infantilism as a way to express their growing sense of disempowerment.[18] While existing scholarship—most notably Sara Pankenier Weld's excellent book *Voiceless Vanguard*: *The Infantilist Aesthetic of the Russian Avant-Garde*—addresses both of these phenomena amply, to date little has been done to place them within the wider context of children's central role in Soviet ideology or even politics in the broadest sense. The writers discussed in the chapters to come serve to illustrate the political potency of the trope of

[16] As Catriona Kelly writes, especially after 1936, "the notion that children owed their perfectly happy childhood to the Soviet leadership was to become one of the central tenets of propaganda, aimed both at the Soviet population and at potential supporters abroad." Kelly, *Children's World,* 1.

[17] Lev Losev, *On the Beneficence of Censorship : Aesopian Language in Modern Russian Literature*, Arbeiten Und Texte Zur Slavistik, 31 (Munich: OSagner in Kommission, 1984), 193-4. See also Larissa Klein Tumanov, "Writing for a Dual Audience in the Former Soviet Union: The Aesopian Children's Literature of Kornei Chukovskii, Mikhail Zoshchenko, and Daniil Kharms," in *Transcending Boundaries : Writing for a Dual Audience of Children and Adults* (Garland, 1999).

[18] Sara Pankenier Weld, *Voiceless Vanguard: The Infantilist Aesthetic of the Russian Avant-Garde*, Northwestern University Press Studies in Russian Literature and Theory (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 5.

childhood well outside the confines of the avant-garde. Their focus was also notably not *infantilist*—as Weld has shown, the Russian avant-garde's interest in the *pre-verbal* child centered largely on his ability to illuminate "the materiality of language and signification itself."[19] By contrast, on the cusp of participating in the body politic, Andersen's child does not lack for words—whence both the power and ambiguity of his remark.

Like both the child and father of Andersen's story, the authors discussed in the chapters to come all operated as "sophisticated players" vis-à-vis the state. Indeed both words—"sophistication" and "player"—draw our attention to the slippage between the adult and the child that was so crucial to how these authors employed the idiom of childhood and of children. As Mark Backman notes, child's play and sophisticated adult behavior are linked through pretend and imitation, which "are the most essential kinds of child's play." Adults, according to Backman, "employ…[these skills] with greater subtlety and precision born of self-conscious intent."[20] Indeed as Johan Huizinga shows in his seminal book *Homo ludens*, "play" is an integral aspect of the human experience regardless of age.[21] D.W. Winnicott also ties child play to adult play in his idea of "cultural experience," which, like playing, is "located in the *potential space* between the individual and the

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[19] Weld, *Voiceless Vanguard*, 4.

[20] Mark Backman, *Sophistication: Rhetoric & the Rise of Self-Consciousness* (Woodbridge, Conn.: Ox Bow Press, 1991), 9.

[21] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, International Library of Sociology and Social Reconstruction (Routledge & Kegan Paul) (London ; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), 5-6.

environment (originally the object)." Like children's games, "Cultural experience begins with creative living first manifested in play."[22]

The word "sophisticated" also puts the child and the adult into relation with one another. As Faye Hammill has noted, the term has oscillated between positive and negative connotations with time, at points signaling the primacy of the qualities associated with adulthood over those of childhood ("worldly wisdom or experience, subtlety, discrimination, refinement"[23]) and, at times, the very opposite: "falsification" and "specious fallacy," "disingenuous alteration or perversion" and "adulteration."[24] For our purposes, I propose to read this last word ("adulteration") in its strongest sense, for it reveals the extent to which the reception of an individual's social performance hinges on the receiver's attitude toward childhood and adulthood alike: specifically, how much of childhood adults can or should rightly partake in.

The equation is somewhat different for women, who have historically been categorized as children of sorts. Both Nadezhda Mandelstam and Lidia Chukovskaia seize on this possibility in their writings and deploy it to subversive ends in their challenge to the state. Writing as the new Soviet society was still taking shape as well as throughout its most oppressive period, all three male authors discussed in the pages to come inherited their modernist interest in

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[22] D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1980), 100.

[23] Faye Hammill, *Sophistication: A Literary and Cultural History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 1-2.

[24] Ibid.

childhood from Romanticism. That interest—which arose before the Revolution—came, after 1917, to be revalued in light of the new ideological pressures placed on the figure of the child by the Soviet state. With these pressures came new expressive possibilities, possibilities inescapably inscribed in politics.

A sophisticated player par excellence, famed critic and writer for children Kornei Chukovskii often succeeded in passing himself off as exactly the opposite—others described him as resembling the children he so loved, as for example the unnamed poet who called him a "childlike father."[25] This delicate play in turn allowed him to maintain a level of artistic independence with relative impunity. The most striking example of this is the surprising history of one of Chukovskii's best-known poems for children, *The Big Bad Cockroach* (*Tarakanishche*, first published in 1923). Telling the story of a whiskered cockroach's tyrannical reign over a group of hapless animals, the poem is commonly, and erroneously, believed to have been aimed at a real-life whiskered tyrant, Joseph Stalin. However, the date of composition several years before Stalin's rise to prominence, in 1921, reveals the chronological impossibility that Chukovskii could have had Stalin specifically in mind. As far as misconceptions go, however, this widespread belief is a particularly revealing one: the values Chukovskii held dear for children were fundamentally at odds with the Soviet ones he was expected to help instill in the next generation. In

[25] As Chukovskaia writes, "One young poetess, who had never seen him with children, wrote of him in 1912 that he was probably a very 'tender' and 'childlike' father. She was right." Lidia Korneevna Chukovskaia, *To the Memory of Childhood* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 42.

the first chapter, titled “The Emperor’s New Soviet Clothes: From Kornei Chukovskii to Osip Mandelstam’s Stalin Poems,” I argue not only that *The Big Bad Cockroach* reveals how incongruous Chukovskii’s vision of ideal childhood was with the state-sponsored childhood, but also that in his private writings he performs a sophisticated dance between knowing and not knowing reminiscent of Andersen’s child himself.

Although *The Big Bad Cockroach* was not explicitly aimed at Stalin, it does reveal a great deal about Chukovskii’s attitude toward tyranny, and it enabled outright anti-Soviet thinking in others. The poet Osip Mandelstam made use of Chukovskii’s notorious image of the tyrant-cockroach in his notorious Stalin Epigram (*My zhyvem pod soboiu ne chuia strany*, 1933). Mandelstam eventually paid for his Epigram with his life—he was arrested after one of the audience members to whom he recited the short, jocular poem denounced him to the police. Mandelstam died on his way to the gulag several years later. While the Epigram builds on and amplifies some of the themes in Chukovskii’s poem and incorporates poetic elements reminiscent of children’s poetry, in the way the Epigram uses childhood it also evokes what at first appears to be its exact opposite: the 1937 Ode to Stalin, “Were I to take a charcoal for the sake of supreme praise” (“*Kogda b ia ugol’ vzial za vysshei pokhvaly*”). Although admirers of Mandelstam have tended to view the Ode as an exercise in insincerity (at best) or alienation (at worst), it is in reality neither: rather, sincere horror and admiration commingle in

this panegyric poem. As I show, this complex commingling finds expression in the way he poses as child to Stalin the father.

The discussion of the role of childhood in Chukovskii and Mandelstam's negotiation with the Soviet state invites comparison to fellow writer Boris Pasternak. Like Chukovskii, Pasternak was glossed during his lifetime as possessing the qualities of a child: poet Anna Akhmatova famously dubbed him "blessed with a kind of eternal childhood" (*odaren kakim-to vechnym detstvom*), an epithet that both reflected and reified the relatively privileged freedom he enjoyed as a result.[26] As I show in the second chapter, titled "'Blessed with the gift of eternal childhood?': Boris Pasternak and the Self-Fashioning of the Poet-Child," Akhmatova's description was in fact the culmination of Pasternak's masterful performance of the role of child. Yet as Lazar Fleishman has shown, Akhmatova's epithet was neither unambiguous nor wholly positive: Like his Peredelkino neighbor Chukovskii, Pasternak rose to the highest echelons a writer could reach in the Soviet era, which necessarily entailed compromise.[27] Aided in part by his reputation as an "eternal child," Pasternak enjoyed a level of creative independence: Stalin himself allegedly said of him, "leave that sky-dweller in peace" (*ostav'te v pokoe etogo nebozhitelia*).[28] Although childhood began in

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[26] Anna Andreevna Akhmatova, "Nad chem ia rabotaiu," *Literaturnii Leningrad*, September 29, 1936. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this dissertation—of poetry and otherwise—are my own.

[27] Lazar Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak v dvadtsatye gody* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1981), 118-9.

[28] Christopher J. Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*, vol. 2 (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 143. Stalin's comment harkens to the category of holy fool, or *iurodivyi*, with which Pasternak (and for that matter, Chukovskii too) were often associated. As

Pasternak's poetics as a legacy of the Romantic tradition, from the late 1920s onward it proved significant in his articulation of opposition to Soviet rule. Childhood is central, for instance, to the critique Pasternak levels against the state in his novel *Doctor Zhivago* (1957). It thus served a dual purpose in Pasternak's trajectory: the story he told about childhood took on new valences and potential for a critique of the Soviet project, while the story he told *about himself* as a metaphorical child—a story reinforced in public rhetoric about him like Akhmatova's—provided cover for this same critique.

While Chukovskii and Pasternak largely succeeded in associating themselves with the positive qualities of childhood and submerging their critique of the Soviet state, in Mandelstam's poetry the figure of the child and idiom of childhood come to occupy an openly antagonistic role vis-à-vis the social order and with time openly critique the values of the totalitarian state. In the third chapter, titled "From Children's Books to Ration Books: The Rise of the Soviet Child in Osip Mandelstam's Poetics," I return to Mandelstam—Pasternak's poetic "antipode," in the words of Nadezhda Mandelstam—in order to show that the figure of the child, who appears as both the double to and foil of the lyric persona, serves as a powerful vehicle to express Mandelstam's changing sense of society and of his own place within it.

Lauren Bennett has shown, in the Soviet era artists drew on the figure of the holy fool in order to preserve a measure of independence and express dissent. The holy fool and the childlike adult are related categories, and I believe that in the case of Chukovskii and Pasternak the latter captures the nature of their respective self-fashioning more accurately. Lauren Bennett, "The Synthesis of Holy Fool and Artist in Post-Revolutionary Russian Literature" (University of Virginia, 2000).

To contextualize Mandelstam's use of childhood in reacting to the state, I have found it helpful to consider Lee Edelman's notion of "reproductive futurism." Reproductive futurism, Edelman has famously argued, is the process by which the idealized figure of the Child comes to stand for life itself. In this regime, the Child embodies "the telos of the social order and [has] come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust."[29] Yet there is an internal contradiction in the reproductive-futurist equation, for as Edelman argues, in being made to stand for life the Child comes instead to embody death: The picture of "imaginary wholeness,"[30] the Child "wants, and therefore…wants for, nothing."[31] Lacking any form of desire, this Child is in a sense dead—a stasis that paradoxically positions him alongside queer adults, who have come to represent death within the social order insofar as they are seen as not "fighting for life."[32]

Mandelstam's poetics are shot through with children's dual capacity to stand for life and death alike, as well as children's peculiar brand of freedom. "If you scratch a child," Kathryn Bond Stockton has written, "you will find a queer."[33] She means this both in the sexual sense and in the sense that children are, quite

[29] Lee Edelman, *No Future : Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Series Q (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

[30] Ibid., 10.

[31] Ibid., 21.

[32] Ibid., 25.

[33] Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*, Series Q (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009), 1.

simply, strange.[34] Children exceed the boundaries of whatever container adults may strive to put them in.[35] Quintessentially vulnerable yet emboldened with a sense of daring, Mandelstam's child helps to set poetic creation into motion and imbues his earliest lyric voice, as well as the account of his beloved proto-Acmeist François Villon, with his qualities. At the same time, this child serves as a reminder of the vulnerability that inheres in both the poet and poetry, which stand, as a result of their provenance, outside the (adult) social world.

When Chukovskii's dissident daughter Lidia Korneevna Chukovskaia took pen to paper in the 1960s and 70s to write about her father, childhood served a double purpose: it challenged the ongoing Soviet cult of childhood and the state's desire to co-opt her father's legacy into that cult.[36] The complex relationship between father and daughter is at the heart of the fourth chapter, titled "Adult Daughter, Child Father: Lidia Chukovskaia and Kornei Chukovskii's Speak to the State." In this chapter, I return to Kornei Chukovskii in order to examine his writings about his own children, which served, in many ways, as a microcosm of his hopes for and frustrations with Soviet children writ large. I then turn to

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[34] The Oxford English Dictionary gives the first definition of "queer" as "Strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric" and "suspicious." "queer, adj.1". OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.ezpprod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/Entry/156236?rskey=vGTnEm&result=2&isAdvanced=false (accessed October 20, 2017).

[35] Indeed children's potential to transgress drew such thinkers as Georges Bataille, and Michel Foucault after him, to consider them in this light. Georges Bataille, "Inner Experience," in *The Bataille Reader*, Blackwell Readers (Oxford, UK ; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 71–75. Michel Foucault, *Préface à la transgression: hommage à Georges Bataille* ([Paris]: Lignes, 2012).

[36] As Catriona Kelly notes, it was not until the late 1980s that the falsity of the Soviet state's claims regarding the happiness of its children came to be widely acknowledged. Kelly, *Children's World*, 283.

Chukovskaia's elegiac poetry and prose about her famous father and argue that after her father's death, Chukovskaia used the rhetoric of childhood in order to undermine state attempts to co-opt his legacy as unambiguously Soviet. Surprisingly, however, Chukovskaia's efforts did not work unilaterally to cast her father as the would-be dissident he is often painted as today. Rather, in her poetry as well in her book *To the Memory of Childhood* (*Pamiati detstva*, 1983), Chukovskaia uses childhood as a device to critique both the state and her father: on the one hand, she shows how the values her father instilled in her were fundamentally out of step with Soviet ones, while on other, she speaks of and to her father as if he were a child in order to express her frustration with his inability to fully inhabit his dissident convictions as she successfully did.

In considering these different strains of Chukovskaia's writing, I have found it helpful to look not just at her poetry but her prose, as well, as elegiac in David Kennedy's broad sense: he invites us to see poetry as a sub-genre of elegy rather than the other way around.[37] Indeed both Chukovskaia's poetry and prose align with Jahan Ramazani's contention that "the modern elegist tends not to achieve but to resist consolation, not to heal but to reopen the wounds of loss."[38] Mourning is central to the works I discuss, and through her recalcitrant mourning, Chukovskaia shows the potency of childhood to realign relationships of power—a potency heightened, in her case, by her identification as a daughter and woman.

[37] David Kennedy, *Elegy*, New Critical Idiom (London ; New York: Routledge, 2007), 8.

[38] Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), xi.

Chukovskaia's writings also challenge the binaries posited by Giorgio Agamben and Judith Butler between the grievable death of *bios* and the ungrievable death of *zoē* (Agamben) and livable lives versus unlivable ones (Butler):[39] her poetry and prose about Chukovskii reveal the extent to which even a successful author favored by the state could have not just a livable life but a life unlived, and her process of mourning reflects the fraught consequences of this not fully realized existence.

In many ways, Osip Mandelstam's case is exactly the inverse of Chukovskii's: he is seen, too neatly, as having possessed only one life, where in reality his relationship to Stalin and to the Soviet state was riddled with ambiguity. His relationship with Nadezhda Mandelstam was equally complex. This relationship is at the heart of the afterword, titled "'Living together as children': The Memoirs of Nadezhda Mandelstam." Time and again in her memoirs, Nadezhda Mandelstam underscored that the dynamics of her marriage were in some ways an extension of her husband's poetics and vice versa: she repeatedly portrays herself as the child of her older, seemingly wiser husband, and at other times they are children together. In authoring the definitive companion to his poetry and account of their marriage, Nadezhda Mandelstam concretized the oppositional role of their relationship vis-à-vis the ideal heterosexual relations espoused by the state.

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[39] Giorgio Agamben, *Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Meridian (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1998), 8. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life : The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London ; New York: Verso, 2006), xiv-xv.

At numerous turns, she does so by speaking of the Mandelstams as children to each other and of their decision not to have children of their own. She thus gives readers a new way to understand not only the oppositional stance toward the state occupied by Mandelstam during his lifetime, but the continuity between that stance and his poetics, as well as her own place in the former. By talking about children and childhood and writing *as* children, both Lidia Chukovskaia and Nadezhda Mandelstam challenge the very legacies they simultaneously seek to enshrine. Paradoxically, by occupying the subject position of "child," both women transcend the historically limiting association between the categories of "woman" and "child."

To varying degrees, then, all of the authors discussed in this dissertation bare the device of the state's power by pointing to the nakedness of the emperor—a metaphor, in this case, for the lie at the heart of Soviet reproductive futurism, which would have its citizens enslaved to the perpetually deferred future in the name of the Child. Collectively, their writings, spanning the years of 1906 to 1983, illustrate the aesthetic potential of the fundamentally transgressive quality of childhood, a quality that makes it difficult to subsume into structures of control.

Chapter 1

The Emperor's New Soviet Clothes: From Kornei Chukovskii's *Big Bad Cockroach* to Osip Mandelstam's Stalin Poems

Introduction

In 1922, Kornei Chukovskii, Russia's foremost children's poet, wrote a poem called *Tarakanishche*, roughly translated as *Big Bad Cockroach*. Published the following year and spanning 169 lines, *Big Bad Cockroach* tells the story of a group of animals that finds itself tyrannized by a small but frightful arthropod.[1] Forced to suspend their merriment and give up the pleasurable pastime of munching on gingerbread, the animals instead gather up their young and tearfully prepare to surrender them to their new leader.

By the 1920s, Aesopian language in children's literature had emerged as a mainstay in the repressive political climate,[2] and in time, intellectuals on the left invariably took up Chukovskii's poem as an allegory for Joseph Stalin's tyrannical reign.[3] Even after Stalin's death in 1953, however, Chukovskii continued to deny the presence of anti-Stalinist undercurrents in his poem—though it would likely

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[1] The poet Nikolai Oleinikov composed a cockroach-themed poem of his own a decade later, in 1934. In his poem, however, the primary intertext is Dostoevsky's *Demons,* an epigraph from which inaugurates his poem. In Dostoevsky's work as in Oleinikov's, the cockroach is a victim rather than the perpetrator. As such, these examples belong to a different textual lineage than Chukovskii's, and—as we will see—Mandelstam's, poem.

[2] Lev Losev. *On the Beneficence of Censorship : Aesopian Language in Modern Russian Literature*. Arbeiten Und Texte Zur Slavistik, 31. München: OSagner in Kommission, 1984, 193-4.

[3] Elena Chukovskaia, "Ten' budushchego," *Nezavisemaia gazeta*, www.chukfamily.ru/Elena/Articles/ten.htm.

have been advantageous to claim otherwise.[4] And although several of Chukovskii's poems faced harsh censorship throughout the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, *Big Bad Cockroach* never did, instead living on in the public imagination as an unambiguous statement against Stalin although it was written before his rise to power.

In 1933, the poet Osip Mandelstam recited what is commonly referred to as the "Stalin Epigram" (*My zhivem pod soboiu ne chuia strany*) to a roomful of people.[5] The jocular poem poked fun at Stalin and characterized him, among other things, as "cockroach-whiskered": throughout his political career, Stalin had worn a thick handlebar mustache. Although Chukovskii never acknowledged Mandelstam's borrowing, he was sympathetic to its cost: in 1958, Chukovskii would write in his diary that Mandelstam's fate was an "all too familiar Russian picture: talent smothered and killed."[6] Indeed, Mandelstam's poem marked the beginning of the end for him: In the words of fellow poet Boris Pasternak, the

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[4] In a diary entry from March 9, 1956, Chukovskii writes, "When I told Kazakevich that in spite of everything I had once loved Stalin very much even if I'd written less about him than others had, he said, 'What about "The Giant Cockroach"? That's all about Stalin!' Much as I protested—I had written 'The Giant Cockroach' in 1921, and it developed naturally out of 'The Crocodile'—he would have none of it." («Когда я сказал Казакевичу, что я, несмотря ни на что, очень любил Сталина, но писал о нем меньше, чем другие, Казакевич сказал: — А 'Тараканище'?! Оно целиком посвящено Сталину. Напрасно я говорил, что писал 'Тараканище' в 1921 году, что оно отпочковалось у меня от «Крокодила»,— он блестяще иллюстрировал свою мысль цитатами из 'Т-ща'.») Kornei Chukovskii. *Diary, 1901-1969*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, 405; *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh*. Moscow: Terra-Knizhnii klub, 2001, vol. 13, 214.

[5] In fact Mandelstam had recited the Epigram on numerous occasions. Osip Mandel'shtam. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Moscow: Progress-Pleiada, 2009, vol. 1, 617.

[6] «Очень знакомая российская картина: задушенный, убитый талант.» Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*, 430; *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh*, vol. 13, 258.

Epigram was "suicide,"[7] while Mandelstam's widow Nadezhda Mandelstam described it as his way of "choosing the manner of his death."[8] Mandelstam was denounced by one of his audience members and, following a brief stay in prison, sentenced to exile. He died five years later on his way to a labor camp, near Vladivostok.

In "choosing the manner of his death," why did Mandelstam have recourse to an image from a children's poem, and to Chukovskii's in particular? As I will show, Mandelstam's critique of Stalin is rendered more potent through its resonance with Chukovskii's poem, from which Mandelstam derives a substantial part of his arsenal against the state.[9] Moreover, Mandelstam's critique is amplified by the way he occupies the subject position of a child within the Epigram, setting the stage for his (on my argument, equally subversive) 1937 *Ode* to Stalin, "Were I to take a charcoal for the sake of supreme praise," *Kogda b ia ugol' vzial dlia vysshei pokhvaly*).

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[7] «То, что Вы мне прочли, не имеет никакого отношения к литературе, поэзии. Это не литературный факт, но акт самоубийства.» Anonymous. "Zametki o peresechenii biografii Osipa Mandel'shtama i Borisa Pasternaka," *Pamiat': istoricheskii sbornik* 4 (1979), 316.

[8] Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope: A Memoir*, Modern Library paperback ed. (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 159; *Vospominaniia*. New York: Izd-vo imeni Chekhova, 1970, 165.

[9] While in their thought-provoking work Lev Losev and I.V. Kondakov note the indebtedness of Mandelstam's poem to Chukovskii's in passing, they offer little in the way of analysis of this poetic adaptation. Losev simply notes that "There is no question that this word-picture [of the cockroach] is used in its most powerful and condensed form in Mandelstam," while Kondakov writes that "Mandelstam's 'Cockroach-like laugh his whiskers' is a clearly taken from Chukovskii" («мандельштамовское "тараканьи смеются усища" - явно почерпнуто у Чуковского»). Lev Losev. *On the Beneficence of Censorship*, 202. I.V. Kondakov. "'Lepye nelepitsy' Kornei Chukovskogo: tekst, contekst, intertekst." *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost'*, February 28, 2003. http://www.chukfamily.ru/Kornei/Biblio/Kondakov.htm, 9.

Neither Chukovskii nor Mandelstam had an unambiguously antagonistic relationship to the Leader—Mandelstam expressed admiration for Stalin on numerous occasions in his poetry beginning in 1935,[10] and Chukovskii both helped to bolster the Soviet project by reinforcing the image of the happiness of Soviet children and professed to admire Stalin when it was no longer fashionable (or necessary) to do so.[11] By considering both *The Big Bad Cockroach* and Chukovskii's writings about Stalin in his diary entries alongside Mandelstam's Epigram and Ode through the lens of the role that childhood plays in both, we can see beyond the simplistic model that posits a neat binary between dissidence and collaboration, truth and falsehood under totalitarian rule.

Poetic Resistance in Chukovskii's **Big Bad Cockroach**

Childhood played a uniquely important role in the Bolshevik project to create the New Soviet Person. According to Lisa Kirschenbaum, "Children had long been represented as both the chief beneficiaries of the Revolution and as its purest

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[10] Pointing to the similarities between the so-called Stalin Ode and "If our enemies take me" (*Esli b menia nashi vragi vziali,* February 1937), Bengt Jangfedt goes so far as to conclude that "Mandelstam… wrote not one 'ode' to Stalin but two." Bengt Jangfedt. "Osip Mandel'shtam's 'Ode to Stalin.'" *Scando-Slavica*, no. 22 (1976), 41. Other poems that touch on Stalin as a theme include «Ты должен мной повелевать» (April-May 1935?), «Стансы» («Необходимо сердцу биться», July 1937), «От сырой простыни говорящая» (June 1935), «Обороняет сон мою донскую сонь» (February 1937), and «Средь народного шума и спеха» (January 1937). Mikhail Gasparov argues against Nadezhda Mandelstam's assertion that the Ode gave birth to a cycle of poems fundamentally different from it and contends instead that the Ode has much in common with them formally and thematically. M. L. Gasparov. *O. Mandel'shtam: grazhdanskaia lirika 1937 goda*. Prepr. izd. 17. Moscow: RGGU, 1996, 89.

[11] Chukovskii. *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh*, vol. 13, 214.

exponents,"[12] and Catriona Kelly writes that "Children were the ultimate model citizens of the Soviet state, more perfectly grateful than any adult could be."[13] As such, the Soviet state "placed children's affairs at the heart of its political legitimacy, emphasizing that children were treated with greater care than they were anywhere else in the world."[14] Children "basked at the warm heart of the Soviet state, enjoying its *zabota i vnimanie*, 'care and attention'," but their privileged status came at a cost: "the state's capacity for care and the state's capacity for surveillance were united. Enjoying the first meant also submitting to the latter."[15] As such, the situation of children distilled that of Soviet adults, who also partook of a share of "care and attention" at the expense of their personal liberty.

With his commitment to lightheartedness and joy, Chukovskii was central to the efforts to mold an idyllic Soviet childhood, and his poem "Let There Always Be Sunshine" (*Pust' vsegda budet solntse*), based on words uttered spontaneously by a child and commemorated in Chukovskii's book *From Two to Five* (*Ot dvukh do piati*, 1928, first published under the title *Little Children, Malen'kie deti*) perpetuated the "stereotype of children—particularly young children—as

[12] Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932*, Studies in the History of Education (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2001), Ibid., 151-2.

[13] Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890-1991* (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2007), 110.

[14] Ibid., 1.

[15] Ibid., 110.

perpetually joyful, innocent, and docile."[16] Chukovskii rarely wrote with the Party line in mind, and as a result, stories like *The Fly's Wedding* (*Mukha-Tsokotukha*, 1924), *The Crocodile* (*Krokodil*, originally published under the title *Prikliucheniia Krokodila Krokodilovicha* in 1919), and *Barmalei* (1925) drifted in and out of favor throughout the Soviet era.[17] *The Big Bad Cockroach* was never censored perhaps in part because Stalin himself made use of it in a speech at the 16th Party Congress in 1930, where he cast his opposition in the role of the villainous insect.[18] By coopting Chukovskii's story, Stalin may have wanted to neutralize any potential threat it posed, but his borrowing paradoxically had the opposite effect: although the poem lived on in the public imagination as a statement against Stalin, it was outwardly tolerated in part because of his appropriation,[19] and 73,000 copies were published

[16] Ibid., 153.

[17] A. V. Blium, *Tsenzura v Sovetskom Soiuze, 1917-1991 : dokumenty*. Seriia Kul'tura i vlast' ot Stalina do Gorbacheva. Dokumenty. Moscow: ROSSPĖN, 2004, 128.Others, like *Washtobits* (*Мойдодыр*, 1923), fortuitously aligned with official doctrine and were regularly and amply reprinted as a result. "*Washtobits*, Chukovsky's humorous poem about a boy who is forced to wash when all the objects in the flat rebel against his slovenliness, was enough in tune with the hygienic side of 'education in a spirit of collectivism' to be reprinted in 1930." Kelly, *Children's World*, 98.

[18] The 16th Party Congress was a decisive moment in Stalin's solidification of power and victory over the "Right Opposition" (embodied by Stalin's then chief opponent Nikolai Bukharin, conspicuously absent from the proceedings). Having the previous year, in 1929, announced a definitive change in Party policy (namely, collectivization and the liquidation of the Kulaks), at the 16th Party Congress Stalin glossed over the significant failures of these policies (the beginnings of a devastating famine that would soon be felt in Ukraine and surrounding areas) and quashed once and for all inner-Party dissent. Applying the moniker of 'cockroach' to the opposition within the Bolshevik party, Stalin said, "Somewhere a cockroach began to rustle…and already they jump back in fear and begin to howl about catastrophe, about the downfall of Soviet power" («Зашуршал где-либо таракан, не успев еще вылезти как следует из норы, - а они уже шарахаются назад, приходят в ужас и начинают вопить о катастрофе, о гибели Советской власти»). Mark Lipovetsky, "Ideologiia literatury. Allegorii vlasti. Skazkovlast': 'Tarakanishche'' Stalina",'" *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 2000, 122–36.

[19] In her memoir *Journey into the Whirlwind* (*Крутой маршрут*, 1967), well-known dissident Evgenia Ginzburg devotes a whole chapter to "Tarakanische," writing of an experience reading

between 1921 and 1929 alone.[20] As we have seen, even at the safe distance of three years after Stalin's death, Chukovskii continued to deny having had any subversive intentions while writing it.

Formally, *Big Bad Cockroach* is divided into two parts: in the first, the animals start off merrily, riding along on their bikes and automobiles, only to find themselves confronted by a cockroach and quickly cowed into obedience. They submit, but not before putting up a struggle: "Don't yell and don't roar, we ourselves are whiskered," the crabs boldly, but bootlessly, exclaim.[21] The hippopotamus offers a gift of a spruce cone and two frogs to any animal that dares to go up against the intruder, to which the animals fearlessly exclaim "We're not afraid of your giant: with our teeth, with our fangs, with our hooves, we'll show him!" (*Ne boimsia my ego, Velikana tvoego: My zubami, my klykami, my kopytami ego!*) They set off as a "cheerful crowd" (*veseloiu gur'boi*) only to see "the whiskered one" (*usacha*) and lose all confidence. When the hippopotamus scolds them, they attempt to justify themselves: "We'd get the enemy with our horns, it's just that our hide is dear to us, you see" (*My vraga by na roga by, tol'ko shkura doroga*). The

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aloud from a tome of Chukovskii that "All of the sudden we were all struck with the second meaning of the poem" («И вдруг всех нас поразил второй смысл стиха»). Evgeniia Ginzburg, *Krutoi marshrut* (Milano: Mondadori, 1967), 307.

[20] Olich, Jacqueline Marie. "Competing Ideologies and Children's Books: The Making of a Soviet Children's Literature, 1918-1935." University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000, 151.

[21] Chukovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh*, vol. 1, 24-9.

animals' justification to the hippo evokes the word for someone who only thinks to save their own hide, *shkurnik*, realized here with real, not metaphorical, hide.[22]

In the second part of the poem, the animals, thoroughly defeated, prepare to surrender their children to their new leader. It is here that the narrative voice offers not-so-subtle resistance to the whiskered tyrant:

That's how the Cockroach became victorious,	Вот и стал Таракан победителем,
Sovereign of the woods and the hills.	и лесов и полей повелителем.
The animals obeyed him	Покорился звери усатому
(May the devil take him, accursed one!)	(Чтоб ему провалиться, проклятому!)

he says, calling the cockroach an "insatiable monster" (*nesytoe chuchelo*). At this point, a kangaroo comes along and sees the cockroach for what he really is: a lowercase "cockroach" and not so "big and bad," after all.

Is that the giant?	Разве это великан?
(Hahaha!)	(Ха-ха-ха!)
It's just a cockroach!	Это просто таракан!
(Hahaha!)	(Ха-ха-ха!)

Then, out of nowhere, a sparrow swoops down and swallows the cockroach whole. So happy are the animals at this turn of events that they sing and dance—one female elephant so exuberantly that the moon dislodges from the sky and falls into a swamp. The poem ends with the suggestion of more adventures to come: "That was a whole other story/ How they dove after the moon into the swamp/ And attached it to the sky with nails!" (*Vot byla potom zabota—za lunoi nyriat' v boloto, i gvozdiami k nebesam prikolachivat'!*).

[22] Ibid., 22-37.

In the way that Chukovskii's story relates children (his addressees) to power (the tyrant), it calls to mind Hans Christian Andersen's "The Emperor's New Clothes." An avid reader of English children's literature since his time on assignment in London for an Odessa newspaper in 1905, Chukovskii was undoubtedly familiar with Andersen's story.[23] In "The Emperor's New Clothes," only the child says what everyone else is thinking: "But he doesn't have anything on!", the child shouts as the emperor passes.[24] The child's father, perhaps nervous, asks "Did you ever hear such innocent prattle?" but the damage is done: a murmur of "he hasn't got anything on!" spreads throughout the crowd, and even the king shivers as he passes.[25] Andersen's story ends here, but Chukovskii amplifies its themes in two important ways: the "emperor" in *Big Bad Cockroach* is a usurper guilty of more than petty vanity, and unlike Andersen's narrator, Chukovskii's condemns him directly.

Michael Taussig's analysis of Andersen's story resonates deeply with *Big Bad Cockroach*. According to Taussig, on one reading of Andersen's story, the child "has not yet mastered the art of knowing what not to know."[26] On another reading, "This child is a sophisticated player, taking advantage of adult positioning of the

[23] Elena Sokol, *Russian Poetry for Children* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 3-4.

[24] H. C. (Hans Christian) Andersen, *The Complete Stories* (London: British Library, 2005), 71.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Michael Taussig. "The Adult's Imagination of the Child's Imagination." *Aesthetic Subjects*. Ed. David Bruce McWhirter and Pamela R. Matthews. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, 458.

child as innocent and ethically immature so as to untwist….the public secret."[27] In their own way, both the kangaroo and sparrow of Chukovskii's tale (who "un-name" the cockroach and eat him, respectively) demonstrate a similar lack of acculturation: neither seems to know "what not to know": namely, that the cockroach is not in fact Big and Bad at all but is, rather, fine fodder for a meal. Alternately, the kangaroo and the sparrow are not so much *untutored* as they are "sophisticated players" who casually undo the entire basis of the sovereign's power. Finally and perhaps most obviously, both the kangaroo and sparrow serve as an example for readers of the story: like them, Chukovskii seems to be saying, children should not be afraid to question baseless authority. Thus, although given the date of its composition Chukovskii could not have had Stalin in mind while composing his poem, his sentiment towards *samodury,* or petty tyrants, is clear.

Indeed, Chukovskii's poem undermines and resists its titular character most obviously by telling a story that ends in his demise and twice condemning him explicitly. However, more subtly and more powerfully, the poem begins the work of undermining the tyrant from the very start by initiating the poetic mechanism by which the logic of *Tarakanische*'s power will eventually be undone. At the beginning of Chukovskii's poem, the cockroach is introduced simply as what he is: a *tarakan*, the standard Russian word for cockroach. Prior to his *entrée en scène*, the rhyming couplets suggest an acoustic motivation for most elements of the poem: "Bears rode/ On bikes" (*Ekhali med've**di**/ Na velosipe**de***), the first line reads.

[27] Ibid., 458-9.

The rhyme generates bicycles (*velosipede*) for the bears (*med'vedi*). By contrast, the cockroach's appellation "Big Bad" (rendered in Russian by -*ishche*, an augmentative suffix implying a huge and impressive quality) is entirely unmotivated, poetically speaking:

Suddenly from under the gate
Comes a fearful giant
Chestnut colored and whiskered
Cock-a-roach!
Cockroach, cockroach, Big Bad Cockroach!

Вдруг из подворотни
Страшный великан,
Рыжий и усатый
Та-ра-кан!
Таракан, Таракан, Тараканище!

While the Russian for "giant" (*velikan*, line 2) and "cockroach" (*tarakan*, line 4) rhyme, the appellation "Big Bad" comes—as does the cockroach himself—out of nowhere: the word *Tarakanische* rhymes with nothing. Like his power, it is arbitrary, and so can easily be undone.

This inevitably happens in the second part of the poem, when a kangaroo comes along and sees the cockroach for what he really is ("Is that the giant? Hahaha!…). Aided by the very line that bestows the intruder with his power (*Tarakan, tarakan, Tarakanische!*), the kangaroo attaches a diminutive suffix to our villain, instead: "Cockroach, cockroach, Little Tiny Cockroach," he says: *Tarakan, tarakan, taraka**shechka***. The new suffix brings him down to size: "little, tiny, thin-legged squirt" (*Zhydkonogaia koziavochka-buka**shechka***). The animals react in horror at the kangaroo's words: "Get out of here!/We don't need any trouble!"

(*Ukhodi-ka ty otsiuda, kak by ne bylo nam khuda*!), but the stage for the denouement has already been set: the sparrow swallows him up soon after. It is worth pausing here to note that the physical and definitive defeat (being swallowed) is preceded by a linguistic one (being named—or unnamed, as it were).

Figure 1.1. From left to right, Osip Mandelstam, Kornei Chukovskii, Benedikt Livshitz and Iurii Annenkov (1914). From Kornei Chukovskii and Iraklii Luarsabovich Andronikov. *Chukokkala: rukopisnyi al'manakh Korneia Chukovskogo*. Moskva: Russkii put', 2006, 59.

Although Chukovskii was aware, and disapproved, of Stalin's own borrowing of his story,[28] as far as we know he was silent on the matter of another instance of literary borrowing—Mandelstam's. But while in Chukovskii's tale the threat to the sovereign's power is channeled through the voices of the animals, in Mandelstam's Epigram the poet himself occupies the role of child—a relative outsider to the existing power dynamics who either does not know what he is not supposed to know, or, perhaps, knows it full well but says it anyway. [29]

[28] "All at once I remembered that Stalin himself had quoted 'The Giant Cockroach'—during the Fourteenth Party Congress, I believe. He opened his plagiarism with the line 'Somewhere a cockroach rustled' and proceeded to retell the whole story without referring to the author." («И тут я вспомнил, что цитировал "Т-ще" он, И.В. Сталин, - кажется, на XVI съезде. "Зашуршал где-то таракан" - так начинался его плагиат. Потом он пересказал всю мою сказку и не сослался на автора.») March 9, 1956. Chukovskii. *Diary, 1901-1969*, 405; *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh* vol. 13, 214.

[29] Anna Andreevna Akhmatova, "Nad chem ia rabotaiu," *Literaturnii Leningrad*, September 29, 1936. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this dissertation—of poetry and otherwise—are my own.

Chukovskii's legacy to Mandelstam's "Stalin Epigram"

A famous photo taken in 1914 during a mobilization parade on Nevsky Prospekt in Saint Petersburg shows Mandelstam and Chukovskii sitting, arms linked, alongside poet Benedikt Livshitz and painter Iurii Annenkov (Figure 1.1).[30] Although they never became close friends, Mandelstam and Chukovskii read and appreciated each other's work—Mandelstam praised Chukovskii's 1922 critical volume on the poet Nikolai Nekrasov, and Chukovskii read and admired Mandelstam's poetry. [31]

As Mandelstam's fate took a turn for the worse in the mid 1920s, Chukovskii did not remain unmoved.[32] He did what little he could to ease the massive emotional and financial strain the Mandelstams were under in Voronezh, where

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[30] Annenkov writes about the provenance of the photo in his diaries: «В один из этих дней, зная, что по Невскому проспекту будут идти мобилизованные, Корней Чуковский и я решили пойти на эту улицу. Там, совершенно случайно, с нами встретился и присоединился к нам Осип Мандельштам, о котором Ахматова написала замечательную статью в нью-йоркском журнале 'Воздушные Пути.' Когда стали проходить мобилизованные, еще не в военной форме, с тюками на плечах, то вдруг из их рядов вышел, тоже с тюком, и подбежал к нам поэт Бенедикт Лившиц. Мы обнимали его, жали ему руки, когда к нам подошел незнакомый фотограф и попросил разрешение снять нас. Мы взяли друг друга под руки и были так вчетвером сфотографированы...» Iurii Annenkov, *Dnevnik moikh vstrech: tsikl tragedii*, vol. 1 (New York: Mezhdunarodnoe literaturnoe sodruzhestvo, 1966), 134-5.

[31] On November 6, 1928 he wrote, "I recited Mandelshtam's magnificent 'Rose Muffled in Fur' at V.I. Popov's, and *after that* Mandzhosikha asked me to read Vyatkin's awful, barrel-organ, Nadson-like doggerel!" («Я прочитал на Минутке у Всеволода Ив. Попова чудное стихотворение О. Мандельштама 'Розу кутают в меха,' и вот Манджосиха просит *после этого* прочитать ей стишки Г. Вяткина — ужасные, шарманочные, вроде надсоновских!») Chukovskii. *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh* vol 12. Moscow: Terra-Knizhnyi klub, 2006, 384. Six years later, while lying ill in a hospital in Moscow, Chukovskii recounted a visit paid to him by Mandelstam in which the latter read him his latest poetry and Petrarch translations. His diary from February 10, 1934 reads: "He reads poorly, in a singsong whisper, but it is expremely powerful: no other poet has been vouchsafed his feeling for the physical sweetness of the word." («Читает он плохо, певучим *шопотом*, но сила огромная, чувство физической сладости слова дано ему, как никому из поэтов»). Ibid. 534; *Diary, 1901-1969*, 298.

[32] "We were both outraged by Osip Mandelstam's situation." («Возмущались мы оба положением Осипа Мандельштама.») August 31, 1925. Chukovskii. *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh* vol. 12, 245.

they had chosen to serve out Osip's term of exile (his punishment for reciting the "Stalin Epigram").[33]

We live not feeling the land beneath us,
From ten paces away you can't hear us.
Where you're nabbed for some half-talk they overhear
They'll mention the Kremlin mountaineer.
His plump fingers, like earthworms, are fatty,[34]
His words, heavy dumb-bells, come true easy-peasy.[35]
Cockroach-like laugh his whiskers
And his boot-shafts, why, don't they just glisten?

He's surrounded by a rabble of chicken-necked chiefs,
He rules over them as if they were fiefs.
Who whistles, who miauls, and who whimpers,
He alone jabs and thunders.[36]
Like a horseshoe, he gifts decree on decree,
In the groin, on the head, on the brow, in the eye, all with glee.
To his mouth execution taste like a berry,
And the Ossetian's chest is oh so wide, very.[37]

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[33] For more on the exchange of letters between Chukovskii and the Mandelstams, see A. A. Morozov, "Iz arkhiva K. I. Chukovskogo: Pis'ma N. Ia. I O.E. Mandel'shtam, Stikhi 1935-1937, Zapisi v dnevnike K. I. Chukovskogo," 1991, http://www.chukfamily.ru/Kornei/Biblio/mandelshtam.htm.

[34] The word "fatty" (*zhirny*) can also mean "greasy." In this second interpretation, this line may be based in part on a real incident—the poet Dem'ian Bednyi, who was in the habit of lending books to Stalin, is said to have complained that the latter returned them to him with grease marks on the pages. Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope: A Memoir* (London: Collins & Harvill Press, 1971), 26.

[35] In Russian, "heavy kettle bells" (*pudovye giri*) are in fact kettle bells that weigh one *pud*, or 16 kilograms, making them heavy enough to kill anyone struck by them as by Stalin's words.

[36] Here Mandelstam appears to invent a word (*babachit*). According to E.A. Toddes, this is a neologism derived from the words *taldychit*' (to repeat over and over) and *doldonit'* (to hammer home or hit over the head). Leonid Vidgof hears a play on the word for a wealthy Eastern landowndner, *bai* or *babai*. This word is echoed in the 1933 poem "An apartment quiet as paper" (*Kvartira tikha, kak bumaga*), in which the lyric voice is forced to sing "a menacing rock-a-bye baby…to the lord of the Kolkhoz" (*I groznoe baiushki-baiu/ Kolkhoznomu baiu poiu*). I hear equally an echo of the word *babakhnut'*, which means to go off with a bang. E.A. Toddes. "Antistalinskoe stikhotvorenie Mandel'shtama (k 60-letiiu teksta)." *Tynianovskii sbornik* 5, no. 2 (1994), 208. L. M. Vidgof. *"No liubliu moiu kurvu-Moskvu": Osip Mandel'shtam: poet i gorod: kniga-ekskursiia*. Moscow: Astrel', 2012, 493.

[37] In my translation, I have privileged preserving the element of sound play and rhyme scheme.

Мы живём, под собою не чуя страны,
Наши речи за десять шагов не слышны,
А где хватит на полразговорца
Там припомнят кремлёвского горца.
Его толстые пальцы, как черви, жирны,
А слова, как пудовые гири, верны,
Тараканьи смеются усища
И сияют его голенища.

А вокруг него сброд тонкошеих вождей,
Он играет услугами полулюдей.
Кто свистит, кто мяучит, кто хнычет,
Он один лишь бабачит и тычет,
Как подкову, дарит за указом указ:
Кому в пах, кому в лоб, кому в бровь, кому в глаз.
Что ни казнь у него - то малина,
И широкая грудь осетина.[38]

Mandelstam was undoubtedly familiar with *Big Bad Cockroach* and probably with Stalin's appropriation of it at the 16th Party Congress speech, as well.[39] Chukovskii's poem set the stage for Mandelstam's in three interrelated ways: First and most obviously, it provided him with the figure of the tyrant-cockroach. Second, Chukovskii's poem initiates the laughter and deflation needed to undo the tyrant *within* the poem, laughter that in Mandelstam's poem will find itself projected outward, toward the 'real' cockroach himself. Third, in Mandelstam's poem as in Chukovskii's, it is through this children's world that the battle with the tyrant is waged.

We could say that Mandelstam's poem begins in the second half of Chukovskii's: everyone has been cowed and defeated. People speak in a whisper,

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[38] Mandel'shtam. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Moscow: Progress-Pleiada, 2009, vol. 1, 184.

[39] The speech was reprinted in the most widely circulated Soviet newspaper, *Pravda*, on July 3, 1930.

calling to mind the hippos' exclamation to the kangaroo in Chukovskii's poem, "Get out of here! We don't need any trouble!"[40] Moreover, Mandelstam's poem functions something like the kangaroo's boisterous "Hahaha!": his laughter, though not spelled out onomatopoetically, deflates the tyrant. And although the narrative in Chukovskii's poem serves to drive home the point that tyrants are only as powerful as we allow them to be, in Mandelstam's poem, the absence of a moral can be read in two complementary ways: on the one hand, no neat lesson can be extracted from the devastated, carnivalesque world that Mandelstam describes. On the other, the moral of Chukovskii's poem in some way serves as the premise for Mandelstam's own: as absurd as Stalin's power comes to seem, it is no less real.

Childhood within this poem functions on two different levels: on that of both the narrative and that of the character being described. Formally, the rhyming couplets, frequent noun-adjective combinations ("fatty fingers," "Kremlin mountaineer," "chicken-necked chiefs," "wide chest"), and frequent anapestic tetrameter are all characteristic of children's, or playful, verse.[41] The same is true of anaphora (e.g. the repetition "like" in the first stanza or of "in the," *komu*—which doesn't vary in Russian as it does in the translation—in the sixth line of the second stanza) and sound play (e.g. the neologism *babachit',* rendered above as

[40] According to Joshua Kotin, "The epigram tested the validity of this claim: would Mandel'shtam's speech be audible ten steps away?" Joshua Kotin. "Osip and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam and Soviet Utopianism." *Modernism/modernity* 24, no. 1 (2017), 165.

[41] Patricia Ann Meyer Spacks. *Reading Eighteenth-Century Poetry*. Reading Poetry. Chichester, U.K. ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 265.

"thunders").[42] At the same time, there is something childish about Stalin himself: like a child who doesn't know his own strength, "he gifts decree on decree" (*darit za ukazom ukaz*), delighting in the harm he causes others. [43] Note, too, the choice of the word "play" (*igraet*): Stalin "plays" with people, as a child does with toys.

Developmental psychologist D.W. Winnicott's description of the process he terms "reality acceptance" also points to Stalin's childishness. According to Winnicott, throughout development the infant is gradually disabused of his illusion of "omnipotent control."[44] On this view, Stalin, surrounded by his yes-men (the "chicken-necked chiefs," *sbrod tonkosheikh vozhdei*), is an overgrown child unaware of his own non-omnipotence.[45] The staccato rhythm of the next line ("In the groin, on the head, on the brow, in the eye," *Komu v pakh, komu v lob, komu v brov', komu v glaz*) amplifies our sense of this child-tyrant's glee and recapitulates

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[42] Ibid.

[43] This view is supported by Mandelstam's statement during his interrogation that "My lampoon…is not a document of personal perceptions and attitudes but expresses the perceptions and attitudes of a part of the old intelligentsia which considers itself the custodian and transmitter to the present time of the values of previous cultures." Unlike the "old intelligentsia," this intruding mountaineer is an outsider who respects no pieties or traditions. Vitalii Shentalinskii. *The KGB's Literary Archive*. London: Harvill Press, 1995, 181.

[44] "The mother, at the beginning, by an almost 100 per cent adaptation affords the infant the opportunity for the *illusion* that her breast is part of the infant. It is, as it were, under the baby's magical control…Omnipotence is nearly a fact of experience. The mother's task is gradually to disillusion the infant." D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1980), 11.

[45] According to Joshua Kotin, "The epigram…did not tackle Stalinism as an idea, but as a cult of personality—as a cult of the wrong personality." Kotin. "Osip and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam and Soviet Utopianism," 168.

the repetition commonly found in children's poetry—with a morbid twist. [46] To him, corporal punishment tastes as good as a berry (*chto ni kazn' u nego, to malina*).[47]

In his poem, Mandelstam draws on the element of magic from Chukovskii (recall the dislodged moon), here reflected in its menacing variety. In the sixth line, we learn that (in a literal translation) "His words, like 16-kilogram kettle-bell weights, are true" (*A slova, kak pudovye giri, verny*): it is the characteristic of magical powers that willing something can make it so. In this sense the sixth line prefigures the eighth: "He rules over them as if they were fiefs"—more exactly, "He does what he wants with these half-people" (*On igrait uslugami poluliudei*). This line again hints at an element of the fantastic: one pictures Stalin as a puppet master over his enchanted, half-human subjects.[48] In Mandelstam's poetic world as in real life, the punishments the tyrant metes out are immediately translated from word to action.

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[46] In Russian, one need only think of classic children's rhymes such as «Сорока-ворона кашу варила» or «Ехали мы, ехали в город за орехами.»

[47] In Russian the word for raspberry, *malina*, also means "thieves' den." Kotin. "Osip and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam and Soviet Utopianism," 166.

[48] The image of political leaders as puppeteers (and puppets) is an old one, and Mandelstam would likely have been familiar with the work of German artist John Heartfield, of whose this was a favorite trope. As Katerina Clark notes in *Moscow, The Fourth Rome,* by the 1930s Heartfield was well known by Moscow intellectuals. Katerina Clark. *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011, 31.

This element of danger is not unfamiliar to the world of fairy and folk tales—in fact, as Bruno Bettelheim notes, it is a constituent part.[49] In Chukovskii's poem, the moon crashing into the earth signals an upheaval in the order of things. Although no cosmic body is dislodged from its rightful place in Mandelstam's, Stalin has nonetheless managed to turn the values of this world upside down: "Like a horseshoe, he gifts decree after decree" (*Kak podkivu, darit za ukazom ukaz*). Stalin's power has revaluated horseshoes, traditionally a sign of good luck, forcing his subjects to accept their punishments (death, exile) as one might auspicious talismans.

In evoking the symbol of the horseshoe, Mandelstam recalls his 1923 poem "The Horseshoe Finder" (*Nashedshii podkovu*), written not long before a five-year-long poetic silence. "The Horseshoe Finder" expresses the speaker's feeling of disempowerment and being out of tune with the time.[50] The horseshoe that the eponymous finder uncovers is likely left over from a dying racehorse, itself the

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[49] "Contrary to what takes place in many modern children's stories, in fairy tales evil is as omnipresent as virtue." Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment : The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1976), 8.

[50] According to the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, "The speaker seeks to follow Pindar in praising the unnamed captain of a modern ship of state but falters both through his own ambivalence and because his lyric gifts apparently no longer answer the needs of a new revolutionary regime." R. von Hallberg, C. Cavanagh, and Y. Lorman, "Politics and Poetry," in The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. Roland Greene et al., 4th ed., Princeton Reference (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1081. For an extended analysis of "The Horseshoe Finder," see also L. G. Panova. *"Mir", "prostranstvo", "vremia" v poezii Osipa Mandel'shtama*. Studia philologica (Moscow, Russia). Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2003, 607-715.

symbol of a dying age.[51] Diana Myers and others have read the horseshoe as a fundamentally melancholic symbol: once the finder hangs it up on his threshold, "it loses its primary designation, turning into a knickknack, a decoration, at best into a good-luck symbol."[52] However, like the unearthed ancient coin at the conclusion of the poem, the horseshoe is nonetheless a bearer of the past, and there is something tenderly quiescent in the image of the horseshoe fastened "So that it may rest/ And will no longer have to hew sparks from flint" (*On veshaet ee na paroge/ Chtoby ona otdokhnula,/ i bol'she uzh ei ne pridetsia vysekat' iskry iz kremnia*).[53] So too the racehorse, though reluctant to die, is nevertheless on the cusp of being freed from a life of struggle and toil. In the Epigram, the horseshoe is given no rest. Recalling Mandelstam's admission that his lampoon "expresses the perceptions and attitudes of a part of the old intelligentsia which considers itself the custodian and transmitter to the present time of the values of previous cultures,"[54] this symbol of the past is taken off the jamb on which it hangs and is

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[51] Steven Broyde. *Osip Mandel'štam and His Age: A Commentary on the Themes of War and Revolution in the Poetry 1913-1923*. Harvard Slavic Monographs ; 1. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975, 176.

[52] Diana Myers. "The Hum of Metaphor and the Cast of Voice. Observations on Mandel'shtam's 'The Horseshoe Finder.'" *The Slavonic and Eastern European Review* 69, no. 1 (1991), 34. This quiescent image foreshadows the final stanza of the poem, where the lyric voice imagines his voice (poem) being unearthed like an old coin, a recapitulation of an image in his 1922 essay "Humanism and the Present" (*Gumanizm i sovremennost'*) in which Mandelstam writes that "the excellent florins of humanism…will see their day, and as sound current coin they will start circulating from hand to hand, when the time comes." Osip Mandelstam. "Humanism & Modern Life." In *Osip Mandelstam, Selected Essays*. The Dan Danciger Publication Series. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977, 156.

[53] Mandel'shtam. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*, vol. 1, 131.

[54] Shentalinskii. *The KGB's Literary Archive*, 181.

appropriated for a perverse symbolic function. Instead of striking the flint stone of the smithy once more, it strikes the recipients of Stalin's decrees, his punishments.

Stalin is, moreover, as capricious as the child in "The Horseshoe Finder," who answers "'I will give you an apple' or 'I will not give you an apple'" (*'Ia dam tebe iabloko'—ili: 'Ia ne dam tebe iabloko'*) depending on his whim and mood.[55] In the earlier poem, the child does not speak by himself, pronouncing instead his yeses and no's in the "exact mold of the voice pronouncing these words" (*I litso ego—tochnyi slepok s golosa, kotoryi proiznosit eti slova*). He speaks, in other words, not in his own voice but in the voice of the adults who created him, the voice of the age itself. In the Epigram, that age appears to be entirely in Stalin's grasp, but the speaker is no longer content to lie dormant in the ground waiting for it to pass. Instead, he employs the unmasking power of children—their ability to see things for what they really are—to reveal the Father of Nations for what *he* really is: not a father at all but an overgrown child, wreaking destruction on cultural heritage and the people around him alike. The Epigram, in other words, pits the poet-child against another child, casting the latter as an overgrown perversion.

[55] As Diana Myers notes, a child holding an apple—a symbol of the world—is a frequent motif in Renaissance painting. Myers. "The Hum of Metaphor and the Cast of Voice," 31.

As Mandelstam takes up the magical element of children's stories and the superstitions of folk tradition to show, in his Epigram, the perversion of both, he also shows the frightening underbelly of the animal allegory deployed in Chukovskii's tale. Whereas Chukovskii's poem employs the familiar device of transposing the human world onto the animal one, in Mandelstam's poem the image of Stalin wavers uncomfortably between the two poles. The grotesque image of Stalin's fat, earthworm-like fingers (line 5) is more sinister than it may at first appear: earth worms, famously, feed on detritus like human flesh. We next come to the heart of this poem's intertext with Chukovskii: "Cockroach-like laugh his whiskers/ And his boot-shafts, why, don't they just glisten?" (*Tarakan'i smeiutsia usischa/ I siiaiut ego golenischa*).[56] In Sergei Chekhonin's original drawings for the first edition *Big Bad Cockroach* (Figure 1.2),[57] the titular anti-hero is decidedly insect-like. As we have seen, that is indeed part of the point: the cockroach is smaller and less physically powerful than any of the animals he terrorizes.

Figure 1.2. An image from Sergei Chekhonin's illustrations for the first edition of *Tarakanische* (1923). Courtesy of Houghton Library at Harvard University.

To return to the idea that Mandelstam plays the role of Chukovskii's "kangaroo"—a stand-in for the reader-child—and diminishes Stalin through

[56] Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*, 184.

[57] Kornei Chukovskii. *Tarakanishche*. [Petrograd]: Izdatel'stvo "Raduga," 1923.

laughter, it is worth pausing to consider Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of "grotesque realism": according to Bakhtin, the "grotesque realism" of the medieval world travestied in François Rabelais's writing "degrades, brings down to earth, turns its subject into flesh." Likewise "laughter," a key component thereof, "degrades and materializes." [58] Mandelstam knew and read French literature extensively, and his affinity for the late Middle Ages is well known.[59] It is the very effect of degradation and materialization of which Bakhtin speaks that Mandelstam's Epigram has as its aim: time and time again Mandelstam draws our attention to the leader's grotesque physicality (e.g. fatty fingers). The poem even ends with a static image thereof: "And the Ossetian's chest is oh so wide, very" (*i shirokaia grud' osetina*).[60]

In the way Mandelstam's Epigram approaches the leader physically through verbal description, it calls to mind the cult of Stalin aimed at children, who from the 1930s onward were depicted as having access to the leader's physical person in ways that adults could not.[61] Propaganda posters and photographs depicted them

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[58] M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 1st Midland book ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 20. According to M. Keith Booker and Dubravka Juraga, we can read Bakhtin's book as a "submerged critique of Stalinism." Tumanov. "Writing for a Dual Audience in the Former Soviet Union: The Aesopian Children's Literature of Kornei Chukovskii, Mikhail Zoshchenko, and Daniil Kharms." In *Transcending Boundaries : Writing for a Dual Audience of Children and Adults*. Garland, 1999, 131.

[59] E.g. his essays and poems featuring Rabelais's almost contemporary, François Villon.

[60] According to Joshua Kotin, with his image of Stalin Mandelstam aims at the utopian Soviet project: the travestied, anatomized body in the epigram is equally a metaphor for the Soviet Union, "a picture of immense and ongoing self-harm, a body destroying itself." Kotin. "Osip and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam and Soviet Utopianism," 166.

[61] Kelly, *Children's World*, 106-7.

surrounding him in happy, smiling broods and sometimes even sitting on his lap.[62] In the Stalin Epigram, the unofficial injunction against such physical proximity on the part of adults is breached by a grotesque incarnation of Stalin's body in verse. In the sense that Mandelstam comes "too close," as it were, to the body of the ruler and thereby reduces him to flesh, the Epigram finds an unlikely double in the poem that has traditionally been read as its antipode: the so-called "Ode to Stalin" written four years later, in 1937. In that poem as well, the subversion at its core is made possible in large part by the way the poet assumes the role of a child.

Father and Child in Mandelstam's Ode to Stalin

Composed between January and March of 1937 in Voronezh, Mandelstam's Ode ("Were I to take a charcoal…") took some forty years to come to light after being saved by his widow, Nadezhda Mandelstam, for fear of it otherwise surviving only in the various incomplete and apocryphal versions that circulated in the late 1930s.[63] Scholars and admirers of Mandelstam have been troubled by the Ode since the initial rumors of its existence.[64] Indeed its sycophantic qualities strike the

[62] Ibid., 105.

[63] Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope*, 205.

[64] Several critics have insisted on reading the Ode as an expended exercise in Aesopian language, e.g. L.F. Katsis, Pavel Nerler, and Irina Mess-Beier. Joshua Kotin has written that the Ode "represents Mandelstam's sincere desire to live, but not his true feelings about Stalin." L.F. Katsis. "Poet i palach: opyt prochteniia stalinskikh stikhov." *Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, no. 1 (91): 46–54. A.D. Mikhailov and P. M. Nerler, eds. *Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh*. Khudozhestvennaiia literatura, 1990, 586-8. Irina Mess-Beier. "Ezopov iazyk v poezii Mandel'shtama 30-kh godov." *Russian Literature* 29 (1991): 243–394. Joshua Kotin. "Osip and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam and Soviet Utopianism," 177.

reader immediately as being out of tune with Mandelstam's reputation as a martyr-poet who spoke truth to power and paid for his courage with his life. He describes Stalin as a "warrior" to be "cherished" and speaks of the leader's "courage" (stanza 3, lines 1, 9, and 12).[65] Reacting to such lines, fellow poet Anna Akhmatova spoke of the Ode as a "sickness,"[66] while Mandelstam's first translator into English, Clarence Brown, described it as an attempt "to dragoon his muse into writing a poem of which he felt a kind of preliminary revulsion and shame."[67] Brown's view was colored by Nadezhda Mandelstam's, who called her husband's process of writing the Ode an "attempt to do violence to himself."[68] According to J.M. Coetzee, it was quite simply "madness."[69]

But while madness is, by its very definition, a state of exception, I'd like to ask what can be gained from seeing Mandelstam's Ode as the norm. In saying this I do not mean to invoke Nadezhda Mandelstam's admission, in her chapter on the

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[65] Katsis argues that the warrior is in fact Mandelstam, who through intertextuality with his almost contemporaneously authored poem "Poem to an Unknown Soldier" (*Stikhi o neizvestnom soldate,* March 1937) is in fact commanding himself to obey an order and write the Ode. Katsis, "Poet i palach," 52.

[66] Cited in Anonymous, "Mandelstam's 'Ode' to Stalin," *Slavic Review* 34, no. 4 (1975): 683.

[67] Clarence Brown, "Into the Heart of Darkness: Mandelstam's Ode to Stalin," *Slavic Review: American Quarterly of Soviet and East European Studies* 26, no. 4 (1967), 586.

[68] Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope*, 202. As Mikhail Gasparov justly notes, Nadezhda Mandelstam's memoirs are works of "publicity" and, as such, glossed over the uncomfortable complexity of such poems as the Ode. Gasparov. *O. Mandel'shtam: grazhdanskaia lirika 1937 goda*, 17.

[69] For all its poetic beauty, this conception of Mandelstam's Ode as an exercise in "madness" somehow misses the point: "The task in reading Mandelstam's ode should not, then," he writes, "be a task of searching it for an ineffable sincerity or insincerity, but of searching for the nature of its madness and, more importantly, for signs of reflection within the ode upon the ode's own madness." J.M. Coetzee. "Osip Mandelstam and the Stalin Ode." *Representations* 35 (1991), 74.

Ode, that “leading a double life was an absolute fact of our age, and nobody was exempt,”[70] but rather to ask what happens if we see the Ode as representative of *one* life. What would it mean to see the inconsistencies within the Ode, as well as between the Ode and Mandelstam’s other poems, as one somehow coherent whole? It will be my argument that we can better understand the contradictory nature of Mandelstam’s legacy as well as the Ode without reducing it to madness or an extended exercise in Aesopian language through a consideration of the filial theme that runs throughout it: by reinstating Stalin in the role of Father and casting himself in the role of child to him, Mandelstam finds a language through which to both ask for forgiveness and ensure the lastingness of his legacy in case that forgiveness is not forthcoming.

I find the argument that the Ode is disingenuous less compelling than the view that sincere horror and admiration for the leader coexist on equal footing within the same poem. This interpretation resonates with Alexei Yurchak’s call to challenge the “problematic binary between ‘truth’ and ‘falsity,’ ‘reality’ and ‘mask’” that so often inheres in discussion of the Soviet period.[71] Deploying Yurchak’s

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[70] Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope*, 205.

[71] Responding to models such as Peter Sloterdijk’s and Slavoj Žižek’s, he writes, “All these models share a crucial problem: although they provide an alternative to the binary division between the recognition and misrecognition of ideology, they do so by producing another problematic binary between ‘truth’ and ‘falsity,’ ‘reality’ and ‘mask,’ ‘revealing’ and ‘dissimulating.’” Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More : The Last Soviet Generation*, In-Formation Series (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 17. In his *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Sloterdijk sets forth his theory of what he calls “enlightened false consciousness” and enumerates various possible “unmaskings” to which it has been deployed. Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Theory and History of Literature ; v. 40 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek extends Sloterdijk’s formulation “they know very well what they

insight in the service of Mandelstam's Ode, we might say that there is no true Mandelstam who stands behind the poetic persona he projects in his paean.[72] Rather, the Ode is a palimpsest of ambiguity that, taken in its entirety, speaks to the need to view Mandelstam's legacy, as well as—by extension—Chukovskii's, outside the binary model of dissidence and cooptation. In the case of the Ode, the inadequacy of this binary is particularly clear: as J.M. Coetzee notes, "we have two forces leaving their traces in the poem: a force of alienation and a force of identification."[73] We are meant, I think, to take each of these seriously and on its own terms—and not, as Gregory Freidin suggests, as a sort of Stockholm syndrome of a "victim [identifying]….with his tormentor."[74]

An unquestioned faith in the binary between truth and falsity, reality and mask lies behind the traditional view that the Epigram and the Ode are diametrically opposed. An anonymous 1975 article evinces this very attitude, viewing the Ode as an exercise in false consciousness:

> Indeed one notes with particular interest Mandelstam's avoidance of the repulsive personal attributes of Stalin that stand out so vividly in the notorious epigram that he wrote less than three years before…Instead we have the outlines of the smiling portrait that stared 'from a million frames'…[75]

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are doing, but still, they are doing it" and places the emphasis on the illusion of *knowing* rather than doing. Slavoj Žižek. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso, 2008, 30.

[72] To quote Yurchak's paraphrase of Aldo Tassi, "there is no role that stands 'behind' all our other roles and defines what we 'really' are." Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever,* 22.

[73] Coetzee, "Osip Mandelstam and the Stalin Ode," 76.

[74] Gregory Freidin, "Mandel'shtam's Ode to Stalin: History and Myth," *Russian Review* 41, no. 4 (1982), 403.

[75] Anonymous. "Mandelstam's 'Ode' to Stalin," 684.

Far from being an antipode of the Epigram, however, Mandelstam's Ode to Stalin is in fact continuous with it—both include the qualities of propaganda and both feature prominently the metaphor of the poet as child. Specifically, the Ode's image of Stalin's eyebrow as "projecting itself…out of a million frames" (*Rabotaet iz milionna ramok*, line 44) evokes the "million frames" of posters depicting the leader.[76] According to Mandelstam, the Epigram was also composed according to the principles of propaganda: in his police interrogation, Mandelstam said that his Epigram "possesses the qualities of a propaganda poster of great effective force."[77]

Moreover, insofar as we can view the Ode as an admixture of sincere praise and subversion, we can think of it as fulfilling, or at least continuing, the work of the Epigram. As Bakhtin writes of the tradition of medieval carnival to which Rabelais belongs (and that, I argue, finds itself channeled in the Epigram), "carnival is far distant from the negative and formal parody of modern times. Folk humor denies, but it revives and renews at the same time. Bare negation is completely alien to folk culture."[78] On this metric, Mandelstam's Stalin Epigram comes to look less like a force that undermines the system and leader it critiques and more like an integral feature of that system: tellingly, far from being affronted

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[76] Freidin. "Mandel'shtam's Ode to Stalin: History and Myth," 409, 411, 415.

[77] Shentalinskii. *The KGB's Literary Archive*, 180. Cited in Kotin. "Osip and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam and Soviet Utopianism," 168.

[78] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. 1st Midland book ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, 11.

or upset by it, Stalin purportedly *liked* the Epigram.[79] And although if Stalin had liked the *Ode* Mandelstam penned for him a bit better it may have fulfilled its function of saving the poet, the continuity between the Epigram and the Ode is rendered evident in light of the idiom of childhood present in both.

If the Epigram unmasks the leader, the Ode extends this project but gives its addressee, Stalin, a way out. This is not to say that the Ode is entirely insincere: rather, it simultaneously does and undoes the very aims it ostensibly sets out to fulfill. By casting himself in the role of a child in his poem, Mandelstam hopes to save himself by offering the leader an opportunity to reaffirm his benevolence toward his seemingly most disenfranchised citizens (e.g. children, and Mandelstam himself). In a sense, Mandelstam constructs the Ode as a morbid sort of *win-win*: either the plea for forgiveness works, the myth of the state's legitimacy is reaffirmed, and the poet's life spared, or (much more likely) the plea falls on deaf ears and the poet goes down, taking—in his view—the last remnants of the myth with him.[80]

To understand the mechanism of this simultaneous doing and undoing, this attempt to have it both ways, I find it helpful to consider what Joseph Brodsky

[79] According to Pavel Nerler, the Epigram was proof that Stalin's consolidation of power had been successful and reflected to him the image of himself he wished to see. P. M. Nerler. "Muzei Mandel'shtama." https://hum.hse.ru/news/213423125.html. Accessed January 5, 2018.

[80] Joshua Kotin argues that "Mandel'shtam triumphed over Stalin because the epigram caused Mandel'shtam's death and by doing so, vindicated his account of Stalin's cruelty." Kotin, "Osip and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam and Soviet Utopianism," 164.

terms the "territorial imperative" that operates within the Ode. Brodsky likens the impertinence of the poetic persona in the Ode to a gypsy in the bazaar:

> it's like in Russia at a bazaar, when a gypsy would come up to you, grab you by the button, look into your eyes, and say: 'Want me to tell your fortune?' What was she doing, diving into your face? She was violating a territorial imperative! ... Mandelstam carried off more or less the same trick.[81]

While the analogy between Mandelstam's poetic voice in the Ode and a gypsy is certainly evocative, in this case comparing him to a child is more apt: being approached by a gypsy is seldom welcome, but in his Ode Mandelstam draws on the ostensible intimacy between Stalin and children to breach the distance usually erected between the leader and the adult citizenry.[82] And while the Epigram allows Mandelstam to come "too close" to his object in a physical sense—by evoking his fatty fingers, his shining boot shafts, and his wide chest—the Stalin of the Ode is, rather, the distant leader depicted on propaganda posters: the image being "projected...out of a million frames" (stanza 4, line 8). However, rather than physically, in his Ode Mandelstam comes too close to the leader in another way: quite simply, to the truth, and this time he is no longer laughing. Nor is he attempting to "carry off" any trick: on the contrary, the Ode is meant to lay bare

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[81] Solomon Volkov, *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky: A Poet's Journey through the Twentieth Century* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 31. Volkov's books have been plagued with some scandal regarding their faithfulness, or lack thereof, to their subject. Given the tape-recorded nature of his conversations with Brodsky's and Brodsky's own interest in and involvement with the project, I have little reason to believe that these words are not a faithful transcription.

[82] "[T]he Stalin cult presented the leader as the patron guide of children, rather than a model for heir emulation. There was a genre of Stalin biographies for children, but far more prominent were images in which he was shown embracing them and patting them on the head, or protecting them from harm." Kelly, *Children's World* 106.

the lie of filiation between Father and citizen at the heart of Stalin's cult of personality. In the Ode, Mandelstam is a child who is *trying* to get caught.

As Max Hayward reminds us, Stalin had "a kind of superstitious appreciation of the supreme worth [of great poets]."[83] It is likely on account of this "superstitious appreciation" that, following Mandelstam's first arrest in 1934, Stalin famously called the poet Boris Pasternak to ask if his acquaintance was a "master."[84] According to Coetzee, Stalin was worried that Mandelstam's fame and representation of Stalin might outlast Stalin himself.[85] "[W]hat is striking about the ode," Coetzee writes,

> is Mandelstam's preternatural sensitivity to the Oedipal threat that a *great* poem about Stalin holds, and the lengths to which he is prepared to go…to mask that threat. This sensitivity in turn not only attests to Stalin's sensitivity on the question of usurpation….but also, perhaps, to the power of usurpatory urges in Mandelstam himself.[86]

Whether Mandelstam attempts to mask the threat he poses to the leader and falls short, or whether he is not truly attempting to mask it at all, the fact remains that Mandelstam's Ode at every turn "comes too close" for the paean it is.

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[83] Cited in Coetzee, "Osip Mandelstam and the Stalin Ode," 77.

[84] Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope,* 147; *Vospominaniia*. 154.

[85] Coetzee, "Osip Mandelstam and the Stalin Ode," 77.

[86] Ibid., 78.

It does so in part through the idiom of doubling, which enters the poem in the second stanza: “I shall find for the twin/ (I won’t say who he is) that expression, drawing close to/ Which, to him—you suddenly recognize the father” (*naidu dlia bliznetsa,/ Kakogo ne skakhu, to vyrazhen’e, blizias’/K kotoromu, k nemu,—vdrug uznaesh’ ottsa,* lines 5-7). As Mikhail Gasparov and others have noted, the word “twin” would most likely have evoked Lenin in Soviet readers’ minds—Stalin and Lenin were frequently depicted together on propaganda posters and Stalin was seen as Lenin’s true and rightful heir (Figure 1.3). On second glance, however, it appears that the “twin” is in fact the artist, Mandelstam himself.[87] This motif is strengthened through the sonic similarity between the Russian word for “axis” (*os’*); the word for “wasp” (*osa*); Stalin’s first name, I*os*if; and the poet’s name, *Os*ip (in Russian, Osip is a diminutive of Iosif). At the beginning of the Ode, Mandelstam says he “would speak about him who has shifted the earth’s axis [*os’*]” (stanza 1, line 7), recalling the same motif in the contemporaneous poem “Armed with the eye of an arrowing wasp….” (*Vooruzhennyi zren’em uzkikh os…*, February 1937). In that poem,

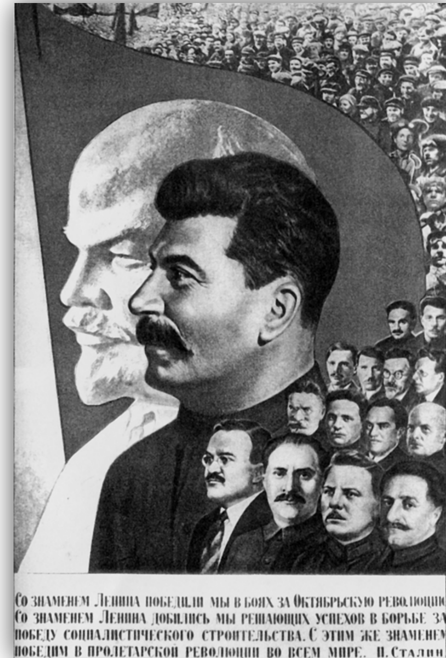

Figure 1.3. “With Stalin at the Helm” (*So Stalinim vo glave*). Source. Vidgof, *“No liubliu moiu kurvu-Moskvu,” 492.*

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[87] Gasparov, *O. Mandel’shtam: grazhdanskaia lirika 1937 goda*, 101. A popular saying went that “Stalin is Lenin today” (*Stalin—eto Lenin segodnia*). L.F. Katsis. “Poet i palach,” 50.

(unnamed) Stalin is a "strong and cunning" wasp that the speaker "loves to envy" (*liubliu/Zavidovat' moguchim, khitrym osam*).[88] In the Ode, talk of "shifting" the earth's axis is yet another reference to Stalin's strength—this time political—and, likely, to such projects as the White Sea/Baltic Canal, which Mandelstam had seen and the brutality of which in all probability led to the composition of his Epigram.[89] This first instance of the word "axis" is thus extremely ambiguous: it's not necessarily a good thing to "shift" the axis of the earth, and indeed many a Soviet project to reshape nature ended in environmental devastation, needless deaths, and failure.

The "axis" reappears in the fifth stanza, which also continues the metaphor of the poet as artist from the first line of the poem ("Were I to take a charcoal for the sake of supreme praise…"[90]). Here, Mandelstam writes, "With a rapacious hand—to catch the axis of his likeness—I shall make the coal crumble, searching for his features" (*Rukoiu zhadnoiu odno lish' skhodstvo klicha/ Rukoiu khischnoiu—*

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[88] Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 1. Moscow: Progress-Pleiada, 2009, 225. For more on the wasp theme in Mandelstam's poetics, see Kiril Taranovsky. *Essays on Mandel'stam*. Harvard Slavic Studies (Cambridge, Mass.) ; v. 6. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976, 112-14. Mandel'shtam. *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii*. Novaia biblioteka poėta. Saint Petersburg: Gumanitarnoe agentstvo "Akademicheskii proekt," 1995, 624. Vladimir Mikushevich. "Os': Zvukosimvol O. Mandel'shtama." *Sokhrani moiu rech'*, no. 1 (1991): 69–74. Gregory Freidin. *A Coat of Many Colors: Osip Mandelstam and His Mythologies of Self-Presentation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987. Katsis argues that there is a third Iosif in this poem—the one who guarded Mandelstam as he made his way to Cherdyn, his first place of exile, with his wife. Katsis, "Poet i palach," 52.

[89] Kotin, "Osip and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam and Soviet Utopianism," 163. In the third and final stanza of "Armed with the eye of an arrowing wasp….," Mandelstam expresses his desire to "hear beyond sleep and death the earth's axis, the earth's axis" ("*son i smert' minuia…uslyshat' os' zemnuiu, os' zemnuiu…*").

[90] Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh* vol.1, 308.

lovit' lish' sxodstva os', lines 2-3).[91] This second instance refers not to the axis of the earth but the axis of symmetry of Stalin's face.[92] Stalin may have shifted "the world's axis" (stanza 1, line 7), but Mandelstam is tinkering with an axis of his own: the "axis of likeness," of Stalin himself.[93] Through the sonic resemblance of his name and Stalin's he also makes a case for *their* likeness, suggesting that in the end, it is the poet who is the greater of the two tinkerers.[94] He is, moreover, so close to the leader that he can (at least metaphorically) touch his face.[95]

To come so close to the leader is nothing if not dangerous. This sense is amplified in the second stanza, where Mandelstam writes that "in the friendship of his wise eyes, I shall find for the twin…that expression, drawing close to which, to him—you suddenly recognize the father and gasp, sensing the proximity of peace [/the world]" (*I v druzhbe mudrykh glaz naidu dlia bliznetsa…to vyrazhen'e, blizias'/ K kotoromu, k nemu —vdrug uznaesh ottsa/ I zadykhaeshsia, pochuiav mira*

[91] Ibid.

[92] Freidin, "Mandel'shtam's Ode to Stalin," 416.

[93] By 1936 the word "axis" was a political term as well, evoking the alliance between fascist Berlin and Rome. Gasparov, *O. Mandel'shtam: grazhdanskaia lirika 1937 goda,* 92.

[94] According to Mikhail Gasparov, the dynamic between Mandelstam and Stalin in the Ode is not unlike that between the emperor Augustus and the Roman poet Ovid, who was exiled from Rome at the express command of Augustus because of a poem. Mandelstam treats this theme in his 1915 poem "With cheerful neighing graze the herds" (*S veselym rzhaniem pasutsia tabuny…*) Ibid. 95.

[95] The ambiguity of Stalin's shifting of the world's axis, the disingenuousness of this line, is enhanced by the one immediately after: "Honoring the customs of one hundred and forty peoples" (*Sta soroka narodov chtia obychai*, line 8). As Freidin notes, in such poems as "Old Crimea" (*Staryi Krym,* 1933) and "The apartment is quiet, like paper…" (*Kvartira tikha, kak bumaga,* 1933) Mandelstam spoke "with a supreme clarity…about the devastation of the countryside in the terror of forced collectivization." In light of this, his use of the word "honor" can only ring hollow. Freidin, "Mandel'shtam's Ode to Stalin," Ibid. 408.

blizost', stanza 2, lines 6-8).[96] The verb "to gasp," *zadykhat'sia,* seems at first glance to connote surprise at having "recognize[d] the father," but it means first and foremost "to suffocate." The price of coming too close to the father is death, and as Mandelstam and many others driven to the margins of society knew well, death was often the only viable path to "peace."

The ambiguity of this stanza is present, too, in the description of Stalin's "far-sighted hearing" (*zorkii slukh*) that "is intolerant to muffling" (*ne terpiashchii surdinki,* line 46). This description, literally "his far-sighted hearing does not tolerate sordinos" (a mute for musical instruments), echoes the first line of the Stalin Epigram, where Mandelstam writes that people speak in a whisper ("From ten paces away you can't hear us," *Nashy rechi za desiat' shagov ne slyshny*) but are nevertheless "nabbed for some half-talk they overhear" (*khvatit na polrazgovortsa*). The Ode thus evokes the expansive police state, praise only to those doing the policing. It also recalls the 1931 poem "With the world of sovereignty I was but childishly bound" (*S mirom derzhavnym ia byl lish' rebiacheski sviazan*), where the lyric voice apologizes to his addressee—Lady Godiva, a stand-in for the actress Vera Sudeikina—for his inability to remember the halcyon days of their pre-Revolutionary acquaintance: "I repeat to myself as though under sordino: —Lady Godiva, farewell…I don't remember, Godiva" (*Ia povtoriaiu sebe pod surdinku: —*

[96] Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh* vol. 1, 309. The Russian word *mir* can mean both peace and world.

Ledi Godiva, proschai, …ia ne pomniu, Godiva).[97] As Stalin's intolerance of even a whisper or "half-talk" attests, if you must say it "under sordino" you shouldn't say it at all.

Adding to the mortal undertones of this stanza, Mandelstam writes, "His gloomy little wrinkles are playfully stretching to reach out to all those who are ready to live and die" (*Na vsekh gotovykh zhit' i umeret'/ Begut, igraia, khmurye morshchinki*, stanza 4, lines 11-12). The evocation of bones in the next lines of the second stanza ("And I want to thank the hills that have shaped this bone and this hand," *I ia khochu blagodarit' kholmy, chto etu kost' i etu kist' razvili*) strengthens the impression that the risk associated with approaching the father too closely is great: in the most literal sense, bones are "shaped" by hills (the earth) over time, when all the other human remains have long since deteriorated. Having shown in no uncertain terms the consequences of "recognize[ing] the father," of coming too close to him, Mandelstam finishes the stanza by doing just this: Evoking Joseph Stalin's real name, Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, he writes, "I want to call him—not Stalin,—Dzhugashvili!" (*Khochu nazvat' ego—ne Stalin, Dzhugashvili!* stanza 2, line 12). This renaming is in fact an un-naming: by evoking the leader's birth name, Mandelstam in a sense strips him of the persona Stalin had so painstakingly built up.

[97] Mandelstam had been infatuated with Sudeikina for a time and had been a frequent guest at her home on the Black Sea. Brown, *Mandelstam*. Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press, 1973, 74.

And although forgiveness is doubtless the unstated request that underlies the motivation for the Ode's composition, for all Stalin's playful wrinkles (stanza 4, line 11), happy eyes (stanza 5, line 12), and smiles (stanza 2, line 3; stanza 6, line 5) the Ode still renders the possibility of attaining it doubtful.[98] For one thing, the line "He is smiling with the smile of a harvester" (*zhnetsa*) (*On ulybaetsia ulybkoiu zhnetsa*, stanza 6, line 5) is, like much of what precedes it, not unambiguous: harvesters smile as they cut down the living things they have sown, and a famous poem by Konstantin Batiushkov, a poet Mandelstam admired, starts with the lyric voice awaiting death in his sick bed "Like a lily of the valley bends its head and wilts under the mortal sickle of a reaper" (*zhnetsa*) (*Kak landysh pod serpom ubiistvennym zhnetsa/ Skloniaet golovu I vianet*, from *Vyzdorovlenie*, 1807).[99] Thus while according to Freidin Mandelstam may be asking for "Christian… forgiveness,"[100] as far as the second stanza of the Ode is concerned, a more 'Judeo'

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[98] Freidin, "Mandel'shtam's Ode to Stalin," Ibid. 408, 417, 419. Kotin, "Osip and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam and Soviet Utopianism," 177.

[99] Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov, Stikhotvoreniia, Klassiki i sovremenniki (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1987), 11-12.

[100] Gregory Freidin sees the tension of the dual register consisting of Greek antiquity (evoked in the very first stanza in references to Aeschylus and Prometheus) and Christianity (stanza 5, line 10, "I have not yet been sated with gall or tears," *Ne nasyschen ia i zhelch'iu i slezami*) and the final stanza, when Mandelstam imagines his resurrection) within the Ode as being reconciled by the latter. Freidin notes that for Mandelstam the Greeks enjoyed a "blissful and carefree 'communion of the Father with his children'" if only when "their gods were taking a rest from supplying material to the writers of tragedies […] Christianity…had rendered this undesirable aspect of Greek life obsolete." For Mandelstam, Freidin argues, "By accepting the bitter cup, Christ focused upon himself and redeemed the fatal flaw of mankind, thereby relieving once and for all the tension between the divine and the human that had hitherto made universal participation in tragedy an inevitable fact." Evoking what he calls Mandelstam's "kenotic *imitatio Christi*" Freidin argues that "by having the Christian view supersede its Greek counterpart, Mandel'shtam was pleading for a different interpretation of his predicament, integrating it into the framework of the universal Christian redemption, forgiveness." Freidin, "Mandel'shtam's Ode to Stalin," Ibid. 408, 417, 419.

and less ‘Christian’ analogy may be appropriate: Hebraic tradition holds that because Moses would have perished had he looked at God directly, God appeared to him as a burning bush to command him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and into Canaan.[101] Moreover, in the Jewish tradition, God’s name is not just unpronounced but *unpronounceable*: the pronunciation of the letters that make up his name has been lost, and even the word that has been used to stand in for it (*adonai*) cannot be taken in vain. Thus most commonly, the Hebrew God is referred to simply as “Hashem,” literally, *the name* [that cannot be said]. In light of the mortal danger of approaching the Father that the second stanza of the Ode sets up, one can imagine the risk or, to use Mandelstam’s own word, daring, *derzost’*, of calling the Father by name. Add to this the commonplace association of the Hebrew God as a vengeful God and Mandelstam’s outlook, even in this emotional peak (the last line of the second stanza contains the only exclamation point of the entire poem: “I want to call him, not Stalin,—Dzhugashvili!”), looks grim.[102]

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[101] As Catriona Kelly writes, “Stalin’s image was divided—on the one hand—as in his ‘warrior’ or ‘border guard’ manifestation—he was all-seeing, and vengeful as the Old Testament God....But there was also emphasis on another persona of Stalin, one indulgent of ‘little children’ in the manner of the New Testament Christ.” Kelly, *Children’s World,* 123-4.

[102] My hesitation to see the Father in the Ode as a Christian, and thus ostensibly forgiving, God gains traction in the fifth stanza, which drives the contrast between Stalin’s smiling eyes and mouth and his treatment of the “Homer-people” (line 32) home: “I am learning from him, but learning not for my own sake/ I am learning from him to be merciless to myself” (*Ia u nego uchus’, ne dlia sebia uchias’. Ia u nego uchus’—k sebe ne znat’ poschady,* lines 53-4). One need not stretch too much to see how, no matter the value of the lesson being learned, mercilessness hardly comes across as a positive value, and the pupil (child?) in this stanza is not learning ‘for himself’: the lesson seems as arbitrary as it is imposed from without.

Mandelstam's Ode to Stalin and the poetics of daring

The second half of the 1930s saw the rise of a new, hierarchical utopian kinship model with Stalin in the role of "ultimate father."[103] Similar to children, Stakhanovite, or shock, workers were portrayed as enjoying a special, albeit earned, relationship with the leader.[104] With their extraordinary achievements, such workers were seen as standing outside of the hierarchical system of production, and only the Father stood above them.[105] Significantly, the secret of the Stakhanovite's success "lay in his *daring* to discount established empirical norms" rather than his "sheer human strength."[106] The role of daring in helping the Stakhanovite to supposedly exceed scientifically determined limits of technology helps us to better understand the role of daring in Mandelstam's Ode.

As it did with stakhanovites, the daring of the Ode helps to place Mandelstam in special relation to Stalin the father, a relationship that is also uniquely filial in nature. In the first stanza, Mandelstam speaks of his "art bordering on daring" (*V isskustve s derzost'iu granicha*, line 6)—perhaps the daring of approaching the father's features so closely. In the same stanza, Mandelstam once again evokes an act of "coming too close"—this time, by likening himself to

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[103] Clark, "Utopian Anthropology as a Context for Stalinist Literature / Katerina Clark." In *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation*, edited by Robert C. Tucker. New Brunswick, N.J., U.S.A.: Transaction Publishers, 1999, 182.

[104] "Children were left in no doubt that their special relationship with Stalin was a result of the ruler's munificence, and not something to which they were automatically entitled." Kelly, *Children's World*, 107.

[105] Clark, "Utopian Anthropology as a Context for Stalinist Literature," 187.

[106] Ibid., 168.

Prometheus, who transgressed against Zeus by stealing fire for mortals: "Oh, it must be Prometheus blowing on his coal—Look, Aeschylus, how I weep as I am drawing" (*Znat', Prometei razdul svoi ugolek,—Gliadi, Eskhil, kak ia, risuia, plachu!*, stanza 1, lines 11-12). One of the common epithets for a Stakhanovite worker was "Prometheus unbound,"[107] a reference to the sequel of Aeschylus's play *Prometheus Bound* or to Percy Shelley's 1820 rewriting of the same title.

In the Ode, Mandelstam identifies himself with the fire-stealing Prometheus in order to depict the Father up close. Like Prometheus, the lyric voice is "blowing on his coal" (*razdul svoi ugolek*), in other words coaxing fire from the ember—not, as Prometheus, in order to give it to others and thereby anger the Father, but to draw his portrait and ostensibly please him, instead.[108] In this reading, the theft in question may be the act of daring that undergirds the Ode as a whole, or the specific act of daring that is suggesting—as Mandelstam seems to in the second stanza—that he (rather than Lenin) may in fact be the father's double: "the twin—I won't say who he is" (*bliznetsia/ Kakogo ne skazhu*, stanza 2,

[107] "Literatura i stakhanovskoe dvizhenie," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, October 29, 1935, No. 60, page 1. Cited in Clark, "Utopian Anthropology as a Context for Stalinist Literature," 187. At the First Writers' Congress in 1934, Maksim Gorky had called on Soviet writers to model their subjects on the heroes of world literature, naming Prometheus as one potent source. Ibid., 195. For more on the *au courant* usage of the Prometheus theme at the time of the Ode's composition, see Freidin, "Mandel'shtam's Ode to Stalin: History and Myth," fn 49, page 412.

[108] The cause for his weeping is unclear—if he, like Aeschylus's Prometheus, is "bound," it may be his eternal suffering, or the preemptive weeping of one who has not yet committed the theft but who intends to and knows the punishment he will receive—being bound to a rock and having his liver eaten by the emblem of Zeus, an eagle, and regenerated *ad infinitum*. As L.F. Katsis notes, Mandelstam may also be identifying with the smith-god Hephestus, who in Aeschylus's play is tasked with binding Prometheus in punishment and weeps as he does so. It is fear of not fulfilling the "father" Zeus's command that moves him. Katsis, "Poet i palach," 47.

lines 5-6). In likening the poet to a titan—Stalin—the Ode invites an interpretation of the leader as Zeus who, like Stalin, was imprisoned in the mountains ("He was born in the mountains and knew the bitterness of jail," *On rodilsia v gorakh i gorech' znal tiur'my,* stanza 2 line 11).[109]

The mountains of Stalin's youth become mere hillocks in the final stanza of the *Ode*:

The hills of people's heads are running into the distance,
In them I am growing smaller; soon I won't be noticed,
But in tender books and in children's games,
I shall be resurrected to say that the sun is shining.

Уходят вдаль людских голов бугры:
Я уменьшаюсь там, меня уж не заметят,
Но в книгах ласковых и в играх детворы
Воскресну я сказать, что солнце светит.

This final stanza of the Ode has often been evoked, in isolation, in order to signal Mandelstam's defiance of the regime.[110] While this is certainly an appealing interpretation, Joshua Kotin points out that the shining sun is a symbol of Soviet power.[111] Moreover, the "hills of people's heads" are as much the stuff of horror (or Brothers Grimm tales) as they are of images from propaganda posters, and the line that "soon I won't be noticed" seems more like an admission of impending death

[109] Prometheus was raised with limited freedom as his mother sought to keep him safe from his murderous father, Cronus. Katsis also identifies the figure of Stalin with Zeus. Katsis. "Poet i palach, 53."

[110] Most recently, in the preface to a new edition of Mandelstam's poetry for children. Osip Mandel'shtam, *Sonnye tramvai* (Saint Petersburg: Vita Nova, 2012), 5.

[111] Kotin, "Osip and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam and Soviet Utopianism," 176.

or the naïve hope of a child hiding in plain sight than any real possibility of escape.[112]

But although on one level these lines continue the perspectival play at work throughout the poem (e.g. Stalin leaning over the podium as on a mountain in stanza 4, the plane squinting in the distance in stanza 6, and so on), we might also read this as a game of "hide and seek" with the Father reminiscent of Mandelstam's unfinished 1915 essay "Scriabin and Christianity" (*Scriabin i khristianstvo*). In this essay, Mandelstam writes that

> Art cannot be sacrifice, since that has already been made; it cannot be redemption, since the world, including the artist, has already been redeemed. What is left? Joyous fellowship with God, the game, so to speak, of the Father with his children, the blind-man's-bluff, the hide-and-seek of the spirit!"[113]

Although as Gregory Freidin notes, by the 1930s Mandelstam's conception of art was bound to have become less ecstatic than the one adumbrated in the above

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[112] The theme of mortality and leveling (in the Ode, in the form of a sea of heads) echoes the 1922 poem "A chill tickles the pate" (*Kholodok shchekochet temia*). In this poem, Mandelstam writes that "I see these moving lips do not come free, and the peaks stir, condemned to felling." («Видно, даром не проходит/ Шевеленье этих губ,/ И вершина колобродит,/ Обреченная на сруб.») Katsis sees an answer to Pasternak's 1936 poem "All inclinations and deposits" (*Vse naklonen'ia i zalogi*), in which he speaks of disappearing without a trace and returning powerless (*Sgin' bez vesti, vernis' bez sil*). Pasternak wrote this poem for Mandelstam and, tellingly, evokes "daring" to characterize art and caution his addressee not to heed Dante and Torquatus. Anna Sergeeva-Kliatis argues that the second half of the poem is a direct response to Mandelstam. Anna Sergeeva-Kliatis, *Pasternak*. Zhizn′ zamechatel′nykh liudei (Molodaia gvardiia). Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2015, 235-6. Katsis, "Poet i palach," 51. For more on the intertextuality between the Ode and Pasternak, Lermontov, Khlebnikov, and others, see Ibid., 46–54.

[113] Brown, *Mandelstam*, 233-4. «Искусство не может быть жертвой, ибо она уже совершилась, не может быть искуплением, ибо мир вместе с художником уже искуплен, — что же остается? Радостное богообщение, как бы игра отца с детьми, жмурки и прятки духа!» Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh* vol. 2, 37.

passage,[114] even this early characterization reveals an undercurrent of death: the artist's (here, Scriabin's) "highest creative act" (*vysschii akt ego tvorchestva*) was his death—the natural conclusion of the "game…of the Father with his children" (*igra ottsa s det'mi*). An extension of the "kenotic *imitatio Christi*" that Freidin detects in the *Ode*,[115] the final stanza of the Ode appears to contain an echo of the New Testament, which repeatedly bids readers to become like "little children" in order to enter the kingdom of God.[116]

As we have seen, in the Epigram, the children's world brought into the poem through the intertexuality with Chukovskii's poem adds to the incisiveness of Mandelstam's critique by reducing a social order predicated on the promise of its care for children to the stuff of their nightmares instead. If for Mandelstam the artist's death was in fact his highest creative act, than the Ode represents the apotheosis of that act: by posing as a child—little Osip to Big Iosif—Mandelstam ensures that his death will reveal that the world created by Stalin is no place for children at all. At work in the Ode, then, is neither "madness" and "alienation" (as per Coetzee) nor Aesopian language (as per Mess-Beier).[117] Rather, Mandelstam relates to Stalin with all the complexity and ambiguity of a child to his father, knowing full well that the legacy of one stands in direct competition with the

[114] Freidin, "Mandel'shtam's Ode to Stalin: History and Myth," 421.

[115] Ibid. 417.

[116] E.g. Mark 10:15, Matthew 18:30 and 19:14, Luke 18:17.

[117] Coetzee, "Osip Mandelstam and the Stalin Ode." Mess-Beier, "Ezopov iazyk v poezii Mandel'shtama 30-kh godov."

legacy of the other. The Ode dramatizes that competition but also makes them co-creators, fulfilling the Acmeist response to the challenge of its predecessors, the Symbolists, to "transubstantiate 'real life' by means of art 'not just in theory, but in fact.'"[118]

Chukovskii's "Ode" to Stalin

Just as it would be more comfortable to ignore the existence of Mandelstam's Ode entirely or dismiss its obsequious lines as an exercise in alienation or insincerity, so too it would be comfortable to believe that, at the height of the Great Terror of the late 1930s, the author of *The Big Bad Cockroach* acknowledged—if only in private—the resonance between the events around him and his poem. Although Chukovskii's diaries do on occasion evince doubt about the increasingly harsh injustices occurring around him, no statement as unambiguous as Mandelstam's Epigram ever came, nor did he exclusively express doubt about the Soviet project in his private reminiscences. Like Mandelstam, in one remarkable instance of Chukovskii's diary he also comes "too close" to the leader by at once praising him and breaching the distance meant to separate Stalin and his adult subjects. In so doing he recalls the kangaroo and swallow of his own poem, themselves stand-ins for Andersen's "sophisticated player," the sagacious child.

[118] Omri Ronen, "Akmeizm." *Zvezda*, no. 7 (2008): 217–26.

In his diary, Chukovskii recounts with enthusiasm his (presumably first) in-person encounter with Joseph Stalin at the congress of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League in April 1936:

> Sat in the sixth or seventh row at the Komsomol meeting yesterday, and whom did I see, when I happened to turn my head, but Pasternak.[119] I went over to him and brought him up to the front (there was a seat free next to me). All at once Kaganovich, Voroshilov, Andreev, Zhdanov, and Stalin appeared. The hall was in an uproar! But HE simply stood there, looking slightly weary, thoughtful, and grandiose. You could feel how accustomed to power and how powerful he was, yet at the same time there was something soft and feminine about him. I looked around and saw nothing but loving, tender, inspired, and smiling faces. Seeing him—just seeing him—was a delight for all of us. Demchenko kept turning to him and making conversation, and oh, how envious we were of her, how jealous. We followed his every move with veneration. I never thought myself capable of such feelings. While we were applauding him, he took out his watch (a silver watch) and held it up to the audience with a charming smile, and we all whispered, 'His watch, his watch! He's showing us his watch!' Later, going our separate ways at the cloakroom, we brought the watch up again. Pasternak kept whispering enthusiastic things to me about him, and we both said at one point, 'That Demchenko. She's blocking our view!' I walked home with Pasternak. The two of us were exhilarated, intoxicated...[120]

[119] A famous photo (figure 1.4 below) shows Chukovskii and Pasternak sitting side by side, evidently deeply engrossed by the presentation taking place before them. Attributions for this photo taken by Boris Ignatovich vary widely, from placing it at the *seventh* Komsomol Congress in 1932 to the 10th Komsomol Congress in April of 1936 to 1935. *Margot Blank and Deutsch-Russisches Museum Berlin-Karlshorst, Kunst im Auftrag: Boris Ignatowitsch ; Fotografien 1927-1946 ; [im Deutsch-Russischen Museum Berlin-Karlshorst, 17. November 2006 - 11. Februar 2007] = Iskusstvo na zakaz : Boric Ignatovich ; fotografii 1927-1946* (*Berlin: Links, 2006*). Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969.* Boris Ignatovich, *Boris Ignatovich, fotografii 1927-1963: katalog vystavki v chest' 100-letiia so dnia rozhdeniia* (Moscow: Art-Rodnik, 2002), image 65.

[120] «Вчера на съезде сидел в 6-м или 7 ряду. Оглянулся: Борис Пастернак. Я пошел к нему, взял его в передние ряды (рядом со мной было свободное место). Вдруг появляются Каганович, Ворошилов, Андреев, Жданов и Сталин. Что сделалось с залом! А *ОН* стоял, немного утомленный, задумчивый и величавый. Чувствовалась огромная привычка к власти, сила и в то же время что-то женственное, мягкое. Я оглянулся: у всех были влюбленные, нежные, одухотворенные и смеющиеся лица. Видеть его — просто видеть — для всех нас было счастьем. К нему все время обращалась с какими-то разговорами Демченко. И мы все

By this point in the diaries, Chukovskii has already expressed dismay over the treatment of Mandelstam and others,[121] commented bitterly on the social order,[122] reported blatant injustices,[123] and expressed skepticism over some of the Party's (and its leader's) most ambitious projects,[124] as well as frustration and dismay over the need to regurgitate the very dogma that courses through this 1936 entry.[125]

ревновали, завидовали,— счастливая! Каждый его жест воспринимали с благоговением. Никогда я даже не считал себя способным на такие чувства. Когда ему аплодировали, он вынул часы (серебряные) и показал аудитории с прелестной улыбкой — все мы так и зашептали. «Часы, часы, он показал часы» — и потом расходясь, уже возле вешалок вновь вспоминали об этих часах. Пастернак шептал мне все время о нем восторженные слова, а я ему, и оба мы в один голос сказали: «Ах, эта Демченко, заслоняет его!» (на минуту). Домой мы шли вместе с Пастернаком и оба упивались нашей радостью...» Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*, 325; *Sobranie sochinenii* vol. 13, pages 19-20.

[121] E.g. in an entry from December 20, 1934 in which he writes, "There are rumors going round Academia that Kamenev was arrested four days ago. No one says anything definite, but what they don't say leads me to believe it is true. Can he really be such a villain? Can he really have a connection with Kirov's murder? If so, he is a supernatural hypocrite, because when we went up to Kirov's grave he was overcome with grief, indignant at the despicable act" («В 'Academia' носятся слухи, что уже 4 дня как арестован Каменев. Никто ничего определенного не говорит, но по умолчаниям можно заключить, что это так. Неужели он такой негодяй? Неужели он имел какое-нб. отношение к убийству Кирова? В таком случае он лицемер сверхъестественный, т. к. к гробу Кирова он шел вместе со мною в глубоком горе, негодуя против гнусного убийцы»). Recounting the rumors, Chukovskii says only that the arrest "must be true," not the charges against Kamenev. Moreover, the emotions recounted and the hyperbolic wording "supernatural hypocrite" suggest that this interpretation is an unlikely one. Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*, page 306, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 12, 549-50.

[122] In an entry from November 25, 1931, from which the page has been partially torn out, he writes, "the rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer («богатые становятся все богаче, а бедные все беднее»). Kornei Chukovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii* vol. 12, 434.

[123] E.g., the summary firing of Glebov-Putilovskii, editor of the "Red Newspaper." January 25, 1932. Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*, 263. *Sobranie sochinenii* vol. 12., 453-4.

[124] E.g. the Moskanal entry on March 19, 1932: "An illiterate, crazy, morally despicable engineer by the name of Avdeev has proposed a grandiose plan to the authorities: to bring the Volga to Moscow from Syzran, thereby 'changing the face of the land in Bolshevik fashion.' The communists like the idea and have set up a project they call the Moskanal. .... Do we need the Volga in Moscow?" («Безграмотный, сумасшедший, нравственно грязный инженер Авдеев — предложил начальству эффектный план: провести в Москву от Сызрани — Волгу и таким обр. «по-большевицки изменить лицо земли». Коммунистам это понравилось, и они создали строительство «Москанал». <...> Нужна ли нам Волга в Москве?») Ibid. 266, 466.

Yet the enthusiastic emotional pitch here is unmistakable, from the exclamation point to the capitalized “HE” (*ON*) to the descriptions of his transcendent and unexpected “feelings” (*chustva*) as well as of Stalin’s expression and smile that echo Mandelstam’s own characterizations of them in the Ode: Stalin’s expression is “weary, thoughtful, and grandiose” (*nemnogo utomlennyi, zadumchivyi i velichavyi*, echoing the “wise eyes” of the Ode; stanza 2, line 5). Here as in Mandelstam’s Ode we see Stalin towering over a podium (stanza 4, line 1) and repeated emphasis on his smile (stanza 2, line 3; stanza 6, line 5). Chukovskii’s account also oscillates between his individual reaction (“I never thought myself capable…”) and his belonging to the admiring horde: “we followed his every move…” (*Kazhdyi ego zhest vosprinimali s blagogoveniem*) and “we all whispered…” (*vse my tak zasheptali*) and so on, evoking the “Homer-people” who offer up their “triple-praise” to the leader in Mandelstam’s Ode (*Narod-Gomer khvalu utroet*, stanza 3, line 8).

Figure 1.4. Boris Pasternak and Kornei Chukovskii, possibly at the 10th Komsomol Congress, April 1936. See footnote 119.

And yet, just as in Mandelstam’s Ode not every element is compatible with its stated intention, not everything in Chukovskii’s account is as laudatory as it

[125] Speaking of an antagonistic encounter with a former member of RAPP, the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers, Chukovskii writes, “he wanted me to repeat the well-known dogmas” («он хочет, чтобы я говорил всем известные догматы…»). June 17, 1932. Ibid. 271, 480.

may at first appear. At a key moment in this entry, after having portrayed Stalin in traditionally masculine terms (he is both "powerful" and "accustomed to power"), Chukovskii subverts this popular image by saying that there is also "something soft and feminine about him" (*chto-to zhenstvennoe, miagkoe*). Like Mandelstam in the Epigram and, later, Ode, Chukovskii comes *too close* to the leader, violating the parameters of acceptable rhetoric surrounding him and thus simultaneously expressing what seems to be sincere awe while, in a sense, bringing the Father down to size—in this case, by making him a mother. In so doing, Chukovskii also creates a kind of doubling of his own: he had previously lamented his own status as an "All-Union mommy" (*vsesoiuznaia mamasha*).[126] The description of himself and Pasternak as becoming "intoxicated" (*oba upivalis'*) is likewise not entirely positive: as if under a spell from his "charming smile" (*prelestnaia ulybka*), the audience is captivated not so much by the sound reasoning of Stalin's rhetoric as by the extra-rational (if not *irrational*) features that keep his cult of personality afloat. Chukovskii's diary entry reveals the extent to which he realized that Stalin's power was not meant for comprehension. He is so easily absorbed into the crowd, the "we," that he is himself surprised: "I never thought myself capable of such

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[126] See the diary entry from July 19, 1930, in which Chukovskii writes of "going through the letters about children that come to me from all over the country" and writes that he has "turned into a kind of ['All-Union mommy']: no sooner does something happen to a child than I get a letter about it."

«Разбирал письма о детях, которые идут ко мне со всего Союза. В год я получаю этих писем не меньше 500. Я стал какая-то 'Всесоюзная мамаша',— что бы ни случилось с чьим-нибудь ребенком, сейчас же пишут мне об этом письмо.» Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*, 245; *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 12, 406.

feelings." He disappears, in a manner, into the "hillocks of heads" (*liudskikh golov bugry*) of which Mandelstam spoke.

The passivity that this passage evokes, however, is in reality subsumed by the *telling* of that passivity, a telling that implies distance from the cult of personality, and therefore agency. Indeed, the very first sentence that describes Stalin's effect is conspicuously *not* recounted in the first-person plural: "The hall was in an uproar!" (*Chto sdelalos' s zalom!*) After describing "HIM," Chukovskii once again separates himself from the very horde into which, at first glance, he is subsumed: "*I looked around* and saw nothing but loving, tender, inspired, and smiling faces" (*Ia oglianulsia: u vsekh byli vliublennye, nezhnye, odukhotvorennye i smeiushchiesia litsa,* English italics mine). The act of looking implies a distance between those "loving, tender" faces and Chukovskii's own. And while Chukovskii subsequently reintegrates into the group ("Seeing him...was a delight for all of us" etc.), the cloying account of the audience whispering "'His watch, his watch! He's showing us his watch!'" (*Chasy, chasy, on pokazal chasy*!) suggests a level of ironic distance. Although the stakes of Chukovskii's "Ode," as I have termed it, were not remotely as immediate as Mandelstam's (to ask for forgiveness and thereby, hopefully, save his own life), like him, Chukovskii attempts to have it both ways: in this case, he partakes of the incomprehension of the masses even as he comments upon it; he is part of the crowd but seems to see—like Andersen's child—what they are not meant to.

Conclusion

In “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” to the extent that the child remains unpunished for his transgression, the social order also remains unchanged:

> The Emperor shivered, for he suspected they were right. But he thought, “This procession has got to go on.” So he walked more proudly than ever, as his noblemen held high the train that wasn't there at all.[127]

When, at the congress of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, Chukovskii looks around the room and sees himself, along with the crowd, marveling at the emperor’s new clothing (“His watch, his watch! He’s showing us his watch!”), the power of his description comes precisely from our inability to say which role he occupies more—Andersen’s frenzied adults (“Oh, how fine are his new clothes!”) or his clear-sighted child. Although he was weary of the Soviet state, his success depended on the very undecidability that the April 1936 diary entry reveals.

Figure 1.5
A postage stamp commemorating Chukovskii from 1993. Slovari i entsiklopedii na Akademike.

The ambiguities that run throughout Chukovskii’s writings have made it possible to retroactively fashion him into a kind of would-be dissident, and perhaps no single work of his has played so great a role in this transformation as *The Big Bad Cockroach* and the resonance it has anachronistically enjoyed with Mandelstam’s Stalin Epigram. Sixty years after the

[127] Andersen, *The Complete Stories*. London: British Library, 2005, 71.

composition of the Epigram, Mandelstam's image of cockroach-Stalin has become part of the standard iconography for *Big Bad Cockroach*: a 1993 postage stamp commemorating Chukovskii depicts the roach wearing shiny boots and brandishing a whip as per Mandelstam's—rather than Chukovskii's—description (Figure 1.5).[128]

Mandelstam, meanwhile, took up Chukovskii's call in *Big Bad Cockroach* to name—and thereby un-name—the tyrant, using first laughter, then ambiguity to do so. In this way he too operates like Taussig's "sophisticated player," who works to "untwist....the public secret"[129] by saying what is not meant to be said. In the process, untwisted—or, more precisely, unwoven—too, are the threads that once tethered the poet to the fabric of the social order, their dissolution the cost of revealing that the finer-than-gossamer strands of the emperor's garment were never really there at all.

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[128] "Kornei Chukovskii," Slovari i entsiklopedii na Akademike, accessed March 20, 2018, https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ruwiki/981241.

[129] Taussig, "The Adult's Imagination of the Child's Imagination," 458-9.

Chapter 2

"Blessed with the Gift of Eternal Childhood"? Boris Pasternak and the Self-Fashioning of the Poet-Child

The antipodes

In her memoir *Hope Against Hope* (*Vospominaniia*, 1970), Nadezhda Mandelstam wrote of Osip Mandelstam's relationship to Boris Pasternak, "In certain respects [Mandelstam] and Pasternak were antipodes."[1] Poetically speaking, Mandelstam and Pasternak do seem quite opposed: In their early periods they belonged to antagonistic literary factions,[2] Pasternak eschewed the lyric 'I' and gravitated toward nature in his poetics while for Mandelstam the lyric 'I' was a default mode and he wrote of nature sparingly.[3] Moreover, over time Pasternak's poetry moved away from complexity, as Mandelstam's moved toward it. The poets' biographies, too, are opposed: Mandelstam died at a transit camp on his way to the

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[1] «В некоторых отношениях О.М. и Пастернак были антиподами.» Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope: A Memoir*. London: Collins & Harvill Press, 1971, 149; *Vospominaniia*. New York: Izd-vo imeni Chekhova, 1970, 157. The Oxford English Dictionary defines antipodes as "Those who dwell directly opposite to each other on the globe, so that the soles of their feet are as it were planted against each other." Anna Akhmatova, a close friend of both, supported the paradigm by which Mandelstam and Pasternak were antipodes, asking new acquaintances if they preferred tea or coffee, dogs or cats, Pasternak or Mandelstam. Dmitrii Bykov, *Boris Pasternak*. Zhizn' zamechatel'nykh liudei. Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2005, 447.

[2] Early in his career Pasternak was associated with the Futurist movement, while Mandelstam was and remained a proponent of Acmeism.

[3] As Lazar Fleishman writes, "one may recall here Roman Jakobson's observation that in Pasternak's lyrics the first person is pushed into the background." Lazar Fleishman, "In Search of the Word: An Analysis of Pasternak's Poem 'Tak nachinaiut…'." *Zexzyty naukowe wyższej szkoły pedagogicznej w Bydgoszczy, Studia Filologiczne*, Filologia Rosyjska, 31, no. 12 (1989), 67. Nadezhda Mandelstam likened Mandelstam to a centripetal force and Pasternak to a centrifugal one. Bykov, Dmitrii. *Boris Pasternak*, 449. Their poetic differences seem to mirror a longstanding opposition in the Russian imagination between the two cities from which they hailed: Saint Petersburg (Mandelstam) and Moscow (Pasternak).

gulag in 1938, while Pasternak outlived Stalin himself and weathered the scandal of his novel *Doctor Zhivago* (1957) from the comfort of his dacha in Peredelkino, a suburb of Moscow where he had been granted a home by the government in 1936 shortly after publishing poems in praise of Stalin in the January issue of the journal *Znamia*.[4]

It would be overstatement to attribute Mandelstam and Pasternak's difference in fate wholly to their artistic dissimilarities and downplay the considerable element of luck and calculated compromise that helped Pasternak evade arrest. Yet the two men's differing relation to the Soviet state was nonetheless reflected in their poetry: Pasternak had a reputation for being largely apolitical, while Mandelstam's name became synonymous with dissidence: one of his best-known lyrics, the so-called Stalin Epigram (*My zhivem, pod soboiu ne chuia strany*, 1933), is a direct and unambiguous attack on Joseph Stalin. It will be the argument of these two chapters that the politics of Pasternak and Mandelstam's poetics have more in common than has so far been appreciated and that this commonality is reflected in the role that childhood plays in both.

Childhood found entrée into both Pasternak and Mandelstam's poetics

[4] Pasternak had offered two poems as tribute to the Leader in the journal *Izvestiia*: "The obstreperous temperament of the artist is pleasing to me" (*Mne po dushe stroptivyi norov…*) and "I understood: all is alive" (*Ia ponial: vse zhivo*), one of numerous attempts to engage with and appease the state. Boris Pasternak, "Ia ponial: vse zhivo' and 'Mne po dushe stroptivyi norov." *Znamia* 4 (January 1936): 3–5. The favor of a second home in Peredelkino was a telltale sign of being in the good political graces of the regime and followed the publication of Pasternak's poems to Stalin by only a few months. For more on Pasternak's negotiations with the state and his relationship to Joseph Stalin, see Leslie Checkin, "Dialogue with Stalin: Aesthetic Response to Stalin in the Works of Russian Writers of the Thirties (Tvardovskii, Pasternak, Bulgakov)" (Cornell University, 1995).

early on as an inheritance of European literary tradition: recall, for instance, Charles Baudelaire's dictum that "genius is but childhood rediscovered at will."[5] However, what started as an aesthetic interest in the poetic potential of childhood as a source of inspiration changed over time as children and childhood were deployed to undergird Soviet legitimacy, and youth organizations such as the Pioneers gave rise to the new Soviet Child, characterized by civic activism and discipline.[6]

As dissimilar to the Soviet Child as they are to each other, for both Pasternak and Mandelstam the evolution of the role played by childhood in their poetics maps onto the evolution of their feelings toward the new society taking shape around them. As this feeling grew, childhood became a convenient vehicle to express their discomfort and endeavor to maintain their artistic freedom. In their own ways, Pasternak and Mandelstam thus brandished childhood as a weapon against the state—Pasternak by linking it to his conception of Art and, in so doing, using childhood to both critique the new order and preserve his right to a degree of independence from it.[7] For Mandelstam, meanwhile, the admixture of passivity and agency he envisioned as fundamental qualities of the Acmeist poet

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[5] "le génie n'est que l'enfance *retrouvée* à volonté," from Charles Baudelaire, "Le Peintre de la vie moderne," in *L'art romantique* (Paris: Louis Conard, 1925), 60. Hence the extra polemical layer hidden behind both Pasternak's public comment, in 1936, that "I do not recall in our legislation any decree forbidding genius." Christopher J. Barnes, *Boris Pasternak,* vol. 2, 120.

[6] Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2001, 151-2; Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890-1991*. New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2007, 110, 547-8.

[7] As opposed to the lower-case-a art of Socialist realism, or, before that, what he saw as the Futurists' misguided attempts to dispose of both personal and literary genealogy in their works.

was linked early on in his poetics to the qualities of childhood. These qualities, in turn, were integral to his conception of poetry's oppositional role and ability to outlast the social forces that would seek to curtail it. The oppositional stance that childhood allows the poet to occupy gained traction in the 1920s and 30s as Mandelstam's intuitive sense of those hostile social forces solidified into certainty.

Although Nadezhda Mandelstam acknowledges that Pasternak and Mandelstam "had common features that united them,"[8] unsurprisingly, the bulk of the "Antipodes" chapter of her memoirs is spent arguing for their difference.[9] She goes to great lengths to show that Pasternak sought material comfort and "points of contact with [the literary establishment]" while Mandelstam shied away from them.[10] In reality, however, Pasternak was largely relieved to be pushed to the margins of officialdom in the late 1930s and 1940s,[11] and his cooptation by the literary establishment was for him time and again a source of dismay. In 1932

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[8] Nadezhda Mandelstam herself notes of the two that "since antipodes are by definition located at opposite poles of the same sphere, it is possible to draw a line between them" («но антиподы помещаются в противостоящих точках одного пространства. Их можно соединить линией.») Mandel'shtam, *Hope against Hope,* 149; *Vospominaniia,* 157.

[9] As Dmitrii Bykov put it in a recent lecture, Nadezhda Mandelstam divided the world into two binary categories: those who died in a common grave, metaphorically speaking, and those who didn't. Moreover, for those who didn't die such a death, judgment depended on what they had done to compromise themselves in order to avoid this fate. Dmitrii Bykov, "Osip Mandelshtam i Nadezhda Khazina: Istoriia velikikh par." Priamaia rech', January 15, 2017. http://www.pryamaya.ru/bykov_mandelshtam.

[10] Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope,* 151; *Vospominaniia,* 157. For more on what Aleksander Zholkovskii calls Pasternak's "adoption complex," see A. Zholkovskii, "Mekhanizmy vtorogo rozhdeniia: O stikhotvorenii Pasternaka 'Mne khochetsia domoi, v ogromnost' …'." *Literaturnoe Obozrenie:* 2 (1990): 35–41.

[11] Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 2., 216.

Pasternak remarked to Mandelstam that he "envied his freedom," Pasternak's way of expressing his desire for unofficial, amateur status that would, as he saw it, free him up from the pressures of serving as a court poet.[12] Pasternak's idealization of Mandelstam's unofficial status was, of course, just that—an idealization. As Nadezhda Mandelstam herself admits, no one in that era, not even Mandelstam, was exempt from a "double life."[13]

As I showed in the first chapter, the contradictions in Mandelstam's as well as Kornei Chukovskii's legacies are a testament not of two lives but of the complexities of one. This is equally true of Pasternak, whose 1936 poems to Stalin in turn served as a template for Mandelstam's own and who sat transfixed by the spectacle of Stalin's power at the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League in April 1936.[14] Even from the margins of society to which he was pushed by the end of his life, Mandelstam authored a number of seemingly sincere poems in praise of the very Soviet power that would in short order kill him.[15] In his ode to Stalin, Mandelstam fashioned himself into a child, perhaps hoping that some of the leniency Pasternak enjoyed would rub off on him. Indeed Pasternak's long-standing reputation for child-like, holy-fool behavior allegedly led Stalin himself to

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[12] Clarence Brown, *Mandelstam*. Cambridge [Eng.]: Cambridge University Press, 1973, 129. Barnes, *Boris Pasternak,* vol. 2, 72-3.

[13] Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope,* 205; *Vospominaniia,* 220.

[14] Natal'ia Ivanova, "Prosvet v bespredel'noi' pokinutosti..." *Znamia*, no. 2 (February 2016): 190–97. For more on Pasternak's reaction to Stalin, see Kornei Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, 325; *Sobranie sochinenii* , vol. 13, pages 19-20.

[15] E.g. "If our enemies took me" (*Esli b menia nashi vragi vziali*, 1937).

bid that this "denizen of the heavens" (*nebozhitel'*) be left in peace.[16] Although it took Pasternak longer to acknowledge the depth of his discord with the state, once he did, unlike Mandelstam, he never wavered. However, in a manner that one would expect of antipodes, if Mandelstam sought, temporarily, to mend fences with the Soviet state, Pasternak assumed a definitively antagonistic stance toward it—quiet at first, then louder and firmer as time went by.

As Mandelstam's status declined beyond repair in the 1930s, Pasternak's rose. Indeed Mandelstam and his wife were forced to ask friends and acquaintances for money—acquaintances such as Pasternak.[17] Despite their different fates, Pasternak and Mandelstam are irrevocably entwined: having met in 1922, they quickly became, if not exactly close friends, at least warm admirers of each other's poetry,[18] and Pasternak's involvement in trying to save Mandelstam following the betrayal of his Stalin Epigram is by now the stuff of legend.[19] These

[16] Barnes, *Boris Pasternak,* vol. 2, 143.

[17] Ibid., 131. To the Mandelstams and to many others in their situation, Pasternak gave all he could, harboring a feeling of guilt regarding his own good fortune, which he sensed was due to unwholesome forces seeking to compromise his moral integrity.

[18] Mandelstam praised Pasternak's early collection of poems, "My sister—Life" (1922) (published the year they first met) in the highest terms in his essay "Remarks on Poetry" («Заметки о поэзии», 1923), while Pasternak, in turn, admired Mandelstam—in a letter to Mandelstam from November 1924, Pasternak wrote, "In my whole life I couldn't write a book like 'Stone'!" («Да мне ведь и в жизнь не написать книжки, подобной 'Камню'!») Boris Pasternak, *Biografiia v pis'makh*. Moscow: Art-Fleks, 2000, 119.

[19] As recounted in the previous chapter, Osip Mandelstam was arrested in May of 1934 after reciting his "Stalin epigram" to several people. The now-famous anecdote of Pasternak's reaction to the Epigram displays the characteristic caution that helped him maintain the material benefits provided to writers favored by the state. It is also a key part of the mythology of the difference between the two poets, according to which Pasternak was cautious and disengaged while Mandelstam unhesitatingly risked it all: Pasternak disapproved of Mandelstam's poem, reportedly saying "What you have read bears no relation to literature, to poetry. It isn't a literary fact, but a

differences notwithstanding, when asked in an interview in 1977 whether she could think of any poet with whom to compare Mandelstam, Nadezhda Mandelstam answered decisively "Of course, Pasternak," adding after a pause "And no one else."[20]

Indeed a never-ending quest for artistic and personal freedom marks both of their poetics. This quest finds articulation in and around the semantic field of childhood, idealized by adults as a time of innocuous liberty. As individual and artistic freedom in the Soviet Union dwindled, the theme of childhood took on new restraints as well as new possibilities for Pasternak and Mandelstam, whose own childhoods had taken place in the pre-Revolutionary era and who found

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suicidal act that I neither approve of nor want any part in. You didn't read me anything, I didn't hear anthing, and I ask you not to read it to anyone else." («То, что вы мне прочли, не имеет никакого отношения к литературе, поэзии. Это не литературный факт, но акт самоубийства, который я не одобряю и в котором не хочу принимать участия. Вы мне ничего не читали, я ничего не слышал, и прошу вас не читать их никому другому»). Anonymous, "Zametki o peresechenii biografii Osipa Mandel'shtama i Borisa Pasternaka." *Pamiat': istoricheskii sbornik* 4 (1979), 316. Pasternak "felt that rhymed invective was just as much a betrayal of art as the newspaper poetry of [Vladimir] Mayakovsky," referring to the darling poet of the young Soviet state. Lazar Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak: the poet and his politics*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990, 177. As Nadezhda Mandelstam writes, following Mandelstam's arrest Nikolai Bukharin authored a letter to Stalin in which he cited Pasternak's negative reaction to the arrest as a "way of indicating to Stalin what the effect of [Mandelstam's] arrest had been on public opinion." Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope,* 145; *Vospominaniia,* 152. Fleishman writes that as a result of this initiative the poem came to be regarded "not as a terrorist act but merely as counterrevolutionary propaganda," leading to a lighter sentence. Although Bukharin and Pasternak's actions appear to have had a decisive role in saving Mandelstam (for the time being), Fleishman notes that Stalin had his own reasons for showing relative clemency to this 'dangerous' poet: to use the so-called "Mandelstam affair" to "demonstrate the influence of the liberal political wing in connection with literature. To do this, Stalin used Pasternak." In a way, then, Pasternak's rise and Mandelstam's fall are directly correlated, for the most serious of Mandelstam's problems started on the eve of Pasternak's ascension, with the help of Bukharin to the role of 'premier' Soviet poet. Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak: the poet and his politics*, 179, 180, 184.

[20] «Конечно, Пастернак (пауза), а больше никого». Interview with Elizabeth de Mauny (wife of the first BBC correspondent to Moscow) from October of 1977. M.V. Figurnova and O.S. Figurnova, eds. *Osip i Nadezhda Mandel'shtamy v rasskazakh sovremennikov*. Moscow: Natalis, 2002, 478.

themselves in a position of having to account for their loyalties in the period before it. In the post-revolutionary era, the limits of what *kinds* of childhoods could be depicted and how they were to be depicted became more circumscribed.[21] However, by virtue of being both central to Soviet ideological life and universally experienced (and thus "fair game," artistically speaking), childhood represented a sort of Achilles heel in the regime for those wishing to push back against the dominant political narrative. In this chapter and the next one, I will show how, by adopting it to their own ends, Pasternak and Mandelstam turned the Soviet state's claims to legitimacy against it.

Introduction

"O childhood! Ladle of spiritual depths!"
-"To the slanderers," 1917

«О детство! Ковш душевной глуби!»
-«Клеветникам,» 1917

Thus begins Pasternak's "To the Slanderers," a poem that likely takes as its intertext Alexander Pushkin's "To the Slanderers of Russia" (*Klevetnikam Rossii*).[22] In Pasternak's poem, it is childhood, rather than the homeland, that the poet wishes to defend against slanderous outsiders, calling childhood "My source of inspiration, my regent" (*Moi vdokhnovitel', moi regent*). With this metaphor, it is as

[21] E.g., juvenile delinquents who arose among homeless children especially, leading to debates over exactly which children were entitled to the happy Soviet childhood mythologized by the state. Kelly, *Children's World,* 230.

[22] Pushkin's poem was a nationalistic response to the French delegation that had arrived in Russia to try to mediate on behalf of Poland, Russia's adversary, in the Polish-Russian War of 1830-31.

though the poet wishes to signal childhood's status as the only authority to which he will answer. The choice of the word "regent" from the perspective of 1917 is striking in its ambiguity: is Pasternak placing the emphasis on the monarchic basis of his metaphor or on its disruption? In other words, is childhood his *regent* or is *childhood* his regent?

In the privileged place it accords childhood as well as in its ambiguity, "To the Slanderers" represents an early declaration of Pasternak's belief in its centrality to the development of the artist's subconscious and ability to regain what Christopher Barnes calls "a lost and privileged immediacy" first made available to us during that critical time but later hidden beneath an "overlay of routine worldly concerns."[23] "O Sun, do you hear that? 'Give me money,'" (*O solntse, slyshish'? 'Vyruch' deneg'*), Pasternak goes on to write later in the poem, as if to mock mundane concerns.

In "To the slanderers," it is childhood that helps the poet stay above the fray of such concerns by distancing him from the social, adult world. Thus the poem illustrates the strong Romantic roots of Pasternak's notion of childhood: for him, it is a time of purity, freedom, and innocence.[24] As Linda Pollock notes, however, this quintessentially Romantic model of childhood innocence popularized by Jean-

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[23] Christopher J. Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 1. Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989, 398.

[24] As numerous critics have noted, in his commitment to effacing the lyric "I" of the poet, Pasternak differed greatly from the Romantics. Alexander Zholkovsky, "Iz zapisok po poezii grammatiki: On Pasternak's Figurative Voices." *Russian Linguistics: International Journal for the Study of the Russian Language* 9, no. 2–3 (1985): 375–86.

Jacques Rousseau in his watershed book *Emile* of 1762 was not without its contradictions: Rousseau believed in the necessity of letting children express their "natural inclinations," but he also believed in the need for strict guidance from adults in order for a child's natural goodness not to be corrupted.[25] Adopting only the first half of this equation, Pasternak did not concern himself with questions of pedagogy. Rather, for him, the poet should remain, as much as possible, a child. From his earliest poetry, Pasternak pits childhood against adulthood and declares his affinity with the former. In the early days of the Revolution and the subsequent decades, childhood as a trope and metaphor would serve to bring his critique of the new social order into focus. At the same time, he actively cultivated his childlike reputation in order to shield himself from the more severe consequences of his commitment to individualism.

The poet as child in Pasternak's pre-Revolutionary poetry

In one of Pasternak's earliest poems, "Feasts" (*Pirshestva*, 1913), he draws on a classic story for children, Charles Perrault's 1697 "Cinderella," in order to capture the fundamentally solitary nature of poetic creation as well as its necessary estrangement from the prosaic adult world. [26] Pasternak writes:

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[25] Linda Pollock, "Foreward." In *Picturing Children: Constructions of Childhood between Rousseau and Freud*, edited by Marilyn Brown, xv – xix. Aldershot, Hants, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002, xix.

[26] In a 1965 essay, Andrei Siniavskii wrote of Pasternak's early reception that his "first books gave the impression of a writer almost completely estranged from contemporary life, and he acquired the reputation of a poet far removed from the large social questions, shut away in a world of his own private experiences" («Вместе с тем его первые книги производили впечатление почти

I drink the bitterness of tuberose, the bitterness of autumn skies,
And in them the burning stream of your betrayals,
I drink the bitterness of evenings, nights, and rowdy gatherings,
Of a weeping strophe the damp bitterness I drink—

Sons of the intoxicated earth, we don't abide sobriety,
And enmity to the hopes of childhood days is declared.
The doleful wind of nights—of those cup-bearing toasts
That will, like us, never come to pass.

Not even rumor knows those extraordinary repasts
Whose hock cup night will empty out with greed,
And, like little Cendrillon, the vagabond anapests
Will clean these crumbs of nighttime cates by morning.[27]

And Cinderella's steps, her decisive action,
Do not disrupt the realm of prim and proper sleep,
So long as she not turn the crystal bowls of cates
Into a heap of tuberose.

Пью горечь тубероз, небес осенних горечь,
И в них твоих измен горящую струю,
Пью горечь вечеров, ночей и людных сборищ,
Рыдающей строфы сырую горечь пью—

Земли хмельной сыны, мы трезвости не терпим,
Надежде детских дней объявлена вражда.
Унылый ветр ночей—тех здравиц виночерпьем,
Которым, как и нам —не сбыться никогда.

Не ведает молва тех необычных трапез,
Чей с жадностию ночь опустошит крюшон,
И крохи яств ночных скитальческий анапест
На утро подберет, как крошка Сандрильон.

полной отрешенности от современной жизни. За Пастернаком упрочилась репутация поэта далекого от больших общественных вопросов, замкнутого в мире сугубо интимных переживаний»). Andrei Sinyavskii, "Boris Pasternak." In *Pasternak*, edited by Donald Davie and Angela Livingstone, 154–219. Modern Judgements. London: Macmillan, 1969, 154; *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, edited by Lev Ozerov, 9–62. Biblioteka poeta. Bol'shaia seriia. 2. izd. Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel' Leningrds-koe otd-nie, 1965, 9.

[27] Aeschylus called poetry "crumbs from Homer's table." M. L. Gasparov and Konstantin Polivanov, *"Bliznets v tuchakh" Borisa Pasternaka: opyt kommentariia*. Chteniia po istorii i teorii kul'tury ; vyp. 47. M: RGGU, 2005, 96.

И Золушки шаги, её самоуправство
Не нарушают графства чопорного сна,
Покуда в хрусталях неубранные яства
Во груды туберoз не превратит она.[28]

In this poem from Pasternak's first collection, *Twin in Stormclouds* (*Bliznets v tuchakh,* 1914) about the transformative power of poetry, the sublime feasts of the poets are juxtaposed with the solitary labor of the poet through the metaphor of a story for children. Although the brotherhood of the "sons of the intoxicated earth" (*zemli khmel'noi syny*) constitutes a community for the lyric voice, the poet is as fundamentally solitary as his "vagabond anapests" (*skital'cheskii anapest*). These anapests work like Cendrillon to clean the crumbs of "nighttime cates," or delicacies, left over from the feast (*iastv nochnykh*)—in other words, they transform lofty poetic raptures into verse. [29] As the third stanza makes clear, however, poetic creation is the result of the sober labors of the poet. In contrast to the heightened tone of the "extraordinary repasts" (*neobychnykh trapez*), "little Cendrillon" (*kroshka Sandril'on*) sweeps up crumbs. Pasternak emphasizes the affinity between the humble crumbs and their equally humble sweeper by repeating the word: they are *krokhi,* as she is a *kroshka*.

Poetry brings order to disorderly feeling by morning as Cinderella tidies her house ("like little Cendrillon, the vagabond anapests/ Will clean these crumbs…by

[28] Boris Pasternak, *Bliznets v tuchakh*. Moscow: Lirika, 1914.

[29] For more on the theme of feasts in this and other poems by Pasternak, see Tomas Ventslova, "O nekotorykh podtekstov 'Pirov' Pasternaka." Accessed April 17, 2017. http://silver-age.info/o-nekotoryx-podtekstax-pirov-pasternaka/.

morning," *I krokhi iastv nochnykh skital'sheskii anapest/ na utro podberet*), but unlike Cinderella, a poet cannot wait for someone else to come along and work magic on his behalf: he must initiate the process of turning bitter tuberose into verse himself. As Cinderella's fairy godmother turns pumpkins into carriages and mice into handsome steeds, it is precisely on the basis of the small and domestic that the poet's transformative powers work.[30] It is for this reason that the poets announce their "enmity to the hopes of childhood days" (*Nadezhde detskikh dnei ob'iavlena vrazhda*). Both the poet and the heroine of the children's story, however, must face the same obstacle: the hostile forces of the adult world, represented in Perrault's tale by the "prim and proper" sleepers evoked in the last stanza of Pasternak's poem: her evil stepmother and sisters. If they had their way, Cinderella would never go to the ball at all. Thus "Feasts" draws on a beloved tale from childhood to express the poet's need for retreat into the hearth in order for poetic creation to take flight.

The poet's estrangement from the adult world and affinity for childhood is also a central theme of "My Sister—Life"[31] (*Sestra moia—zhizn'*). The title poem of a collection published in 1922 and subtitled for the period between the February and October revolutions ("The Summer of 1917," *Leto 1917 goda*), "My sister—Life"

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[30] Mikhail Gasparov and Konstantin Polivanov note the contrast between the "Romantic sublime" the first two stanzas represent and the more prosaic, everyday quality of the last two. «Образность в первой части романтически возвышенная, во второй заостренно прозаизированная.» Gasparov and Polivanov, *"Bliznets v tuchakh" Borisa Pasternaka*, 96.

[31] The book that bears its name was written in 1917, published in various editions over the following few years and in full in 1922.

advanced the theme from “To the slanderers” of the poet’s sympathy with the natural world and out-of-step-ness with the social one. [32] Central to both themes is the poet’s identification with childhood, which both endows the lyric persona with a unique receptivity to nature and alienates him from adults, with all of their artifice and insincerity. The first two stanzas read:

My sister – Life is overflowing today,
spring rain shattering itself like glass,
but people with watch charms still complain,
and sting, politely, as snakes do in oats.

The elders have their reasons of course,
Surely, surely your reason is silly,
that eyes and lawns glow lilac in storms,
and fragrant smell of mignonette blows from the horizon.

Сестра моя – жизнь и сегодня в разливе
Расшиблась весенним дождем обо всех,
Но люди в брелоках высоко брюзгливы
И вежливо жалят, как змеи в овсе.

У старших на это свои есть резоны.
Бесспорно, бесспорно смешон твой резон,
Что в грозу лиловы глаза и газоны
И пахнет сырой резедой горизонт.[33]

The poem begins with a characterization of the poet’s unique orientation to life and ends with a train journey to see his beloved. On this journey, the poet seems

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[32] Katherine Tiernan O’Connor sees “My Sister—Life” as the first poem in its identically titled collection that lays claim to Pasternak’s distinctiveness as a poet: “After paying tribute to the various poets…who have inspired his poetry, Pasternak now puts himself in the limelight and celebrates his own unique form of poetic expression and the forces that set it in motion.” Katherine Tiernan O’Connor, *Boris Pasternak’s My Sister - Life: The Illusion of Narrative*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1988, 27.

[33] Boris Leonidovich Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami : v odinnadtsati tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Slovo, 2005), 116-7.

to be in communion with the whole of the natural world. As in "To the Slanderers," here the sun once again makes an appearance, sympathizing with the lyric voice when his stop doesn't come as soon as he would like it to (*I solntse, sadias', soboleznuiet mne*).[34]

In the first two stanzas of the poem excerpted here, "people with watch charms" (adults, particularly adult men) are set up in opposition to the poetic persona for not liking the rain. For Pasternak, in this poem and elsewhere, rain is metonymous with life, the source of poetic inspiration itself.[35] They sting like snakes, concealing their true motives behind the trappings of civility. The first line of the second stanza appears to soften this damning image somewhat: "The elders have their reasons," he says, and concedes—with a likely dose of irony—that his own reason for feeling how he does about the weather is "silly" (*smeshnoi*).

But while the lyric persona's feelings toward the present weather are occasioned by the sweetness of the smell and the sensory delights he experiences are funneled directly into art, the reasons of "the elders" serve not Art but artfulness: the clever two-faced "stinging" of those who have mastered social mores. The world of these stodgy elders who "sting like snakes" (*zhaliat, kak zmei v*

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[34] As Grigorii Kruzhkov notes, the feeling of being one with the world is a distinctive quality of childlikeness in Pasternak. Grigorii Kruzhkov, "Detstvo i igra u Pasternaka." In *Nostalgiia obeliskov*. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2001, 558.

[35] Consider such poems as "February. Take ink and weep!" (*Fevral'—dostat' chernil i plakat'*! 1912) or the "weeping strophes" (*rydaiushchie strophy*) of "Feasts."

ovse) is one of artifice rather than intuition, and thus as inimical to poetry as they are to the poet-child.[36]

The Revolution as child

Aside from its subtitle ("Summer of 1917"), *My Sister—Life* never alludes to the Revolution explicitly. This did not stop numerous critics from seeing it as incontrovertible proof of Pasternak's sympathetic attention to the events of 1917.[37] He dismissed their interpretations as silly, embracing instead his own uniquely idiosyncratic definition of what constitutes revolutionary character in a letter to

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[36] As Katherine Tiernan O'Connor writes, "Although the poet's own response to the rainstorm may be more 'childish,' there is no question that it is definitely preferable to the uninspired 'adult' response of his stodgy 'elders'." O'Connor, *Boris Pasternak's My Sister – Life,* 28.

[37] For example, fellow poet Marina Tsvetaeva, who lauded the collection as incontrovertible proof of Pasternak's attentiveness to politics. Tsvetaeva writes, "Pasternak did not hide from the Revolution in any of the available intellectual cellars…An encounter did take place. He saw it for the first time—somewhere far off, a mirage—a haystack rearing wildly in the wind, and heard it in the headlong moan of roads. It gave itself to him (reached him), like everything in his life, through nature" («Пастернак не прятался от Революции в те или иные интеллигентские подвалы…Встреча была. –Увидел он ее впервые—там где-то—в маревах—взметнувшейся копкой, услышал—в стонущем бегстве дорог. Далась она ему (дошла) как всё в его жизнь—через природу»). Marina Tsvetaeva, "A Downpour of Light." In *Pasternak*. Modern Judgements. London: Macmillan, 1969. 56; "Svetovoi Liven'." In *Proza*, 353–71. New York: Chekhov Publishing House, 1953, 365. To Pasternak's dismay, the "attentiveness" of which Tsvetaeva speaks was mistaken by some contemporary critics as all-out embrace. Pasternak openly mocked this kind of misreading in a letter written to poet Iurii Iurkun in 1922, inviting his correspondent to "Find anything revolutionary in [*My Sister—Life*] in the popular sense! It is simply laughable what fortune *Sister* has had. An apolitical book, to say the least…this book ought to have attracted the most routine and ordinary attacks, and yet…it is recognized as being 'most revolutionary.'" («Найдите в них хоть что-нибудь 'революционное' в ходовом смысле. Просто смешно, до чего 'Сестре' посчастливилось. Мало сказать, аполитическая, …эта должна была вызвать самые ходячие и самые натуральные нападки, а между тем—и эту терминологию можно простить—она признается 'революционнейшею'»). Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami* vol. 7, 385-6. Cited in Christopher J. Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 1, 288.

Symbolist poet Valerii Briusov from 1922:[38]

> *Sister* is revolutionary in the best sense of the word [...] The stage of revolution closest to my heart and to poetry is the revolution's *morning*, and its initial outburst, when it returns man to his own *nature* and looks at the government through the eyes of *natural* rights (the American and French declarations of rights).[39]

As this letter demonstrates, Pasternak was more sympathetic to the potentiality of Revolution to empower people and strip back the layers of centuries'-old tradition and convention in order to reassert their claim to the natural rights with which they were born. The third poem of the collection, "Longing" (*Toska,* 1917), links the dawn of revolution with childhood, thus demonstrating how childhood as a theme enabled Pasternak to articulate his feelings vis-à-vis the changes happening around him. As "Longing," *The Childhood of Liuvers* (*Detstvo Liuvers*, 1918),[40] and the 1926 cycle *The Year 1905* (*905 god*) demonstrate, childhood, which initially helped Pasternak emphasize his outsider status vis-à-vis the adult world in the abstract, would come to mediate his negotiation with the Revolution and ensuing Soviet power. This negotiation culminated in his 1957 novel, *Doctor Zhivago*. In the

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[38] In this letter Pasternak echoes the commitment to individualism that he would evoke in his own defense to Lev Trotsky. In 1922 Pasternak was summoned by Trotsky to explain himself on the event of his impending departure to Berlin to visit his family. Facing questions regarding what Trotsky observed as the dearth of "social themes" in Pasternak's work, the poet "declared that 'genuine individualism' was an integral part of every new 'social organism'—an answer that evidently pleased his interrogator." Lazar Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak: the poet and his politics*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990, 118.

[39] «'Сестра'—революционна в лучшем смысле этого слова. Что стадия революции, наиболее близкая сердцу и поэзии, что—*утро* революции и ее взрыв, когда она возвращает человека к *природе* человека и смотрит на государство глазами *естественного* права (американская и французская декларация прав)» Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami* vol. 7, 398. Partially cited in Christopher J. Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 1, 288.

[40] *The Childhood of Liuvers* was written contemporaneously with *My Sister—Life* but published before it.

last two of these works especially, by likening the growth and maturation of the Revolution to the undesirable process of growing up, Pasternak expresses his view that poetry was incommensurate with both.

Pasternak's natural vision of revolution lower-case-r is nowhere more evident—and more ambiguous—than in the third poem of *My Sister—Life*, "Longing" (*Toska*). In the poem, this natural vision is linked from the get-go to the poet's childhood, which serves to introduce a potent strain of ambivalence regarding unfolding events:

As an epigraph for this book
The deserts grew hoarse,
The lions roared and to dawns of tigers
Stretched Kipling.

The terrible well of naked longing
dried up and gaped,
Swayed, chattering and rubbing
their chilled fur against each other.

Now, continuing to sway
In verses outside of rank,
They roam in the mist through the dew of the glades,
And come to the Ganges in its dreams.

Like a cold viper, dawn
Crawls into pits
And in the jungles there is the dampness
Of funeral rites and incense.[41]

Для этой книги на эпиграф
Пустыни сипли,

[41] Translation, with modification, from O'Connor, *Boris Pasternak's My Sister– Life*: *The Illusion of Narrative,* 26-7.

Ревели львы и к зорям тигров
Тянулся Киплинг.

Зиял, иссякнув, страшный кладезь
Тоски отверстой,
Качались, ляская и гладясь
Иззябшей шерстью.

Теперь качаться продолжая
В стихах вне ранга,
Бредут в туман росой лужаек
И снятся Гангу.

Рассвет холодною ехидной
Вползает в ямы,
И в джунглях сырость панихиды
И фимиама.[42]

This poem takes as its main intertext Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*, which ostensibly featured prominently in the poet's childhood and now evokes the sense of longing to which the title of he poem refers. So strongly felt is the presence of Kipling's book in Pasternak's own that the lions and tigers have been transported away from their native Ganges in order to serve as the metrical feet of the book. As such they rub against each other and out of their original "rank" but, presumably, now in a new one—the structure of the poem.

Although the summer of 1917 marks the period when Pasternak held great hope for what the Revolution had in store, the world brought into the book of poetry by way of childhood is notably sinister: the teeming life of the jungle is portrayed nearly at its most predatory, for if the vipers and felines are crawling into pits at dawn and shivering in hordes, respectively, they have likely just

[42] Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami: v odinnadtsati tomakh*, vol. 1, 116.

finished hunting for the night.[43] Equally strikingly, in the fourth stanza dampness and incense from *panikhidy*, Eastern Orthodox (and some Eastern Catholic) funeral rites, pervade the jungle: the church rituals for the dead creep, like dawn into its pit, into the stanza, ending the poem on a note of something all too familiar during the summer of 1917—funeral rites for the dead.[44] The missing verb in the last clause, the implied "there is" (*est',* optional in Russian) in "And in the jungles there is the dampness/ Of funeral rites and incense" (*I v dzhungliakh syrost' panikhidy i fimiama*), strengthens the metaphor by hiding its logic: the absence of a verb allows funeral rites and incense to exist alongside the jungle on the same semantic plane.

In light of this final stanza, a distinctly menacing shadow is cast back not only on the entirety of the poem but also on the book as a whole, which has as an "epigraph" this same violence. The dawn (*rassvet*) in the final stanza mirrors the dawn of tigers (*k zoriam tigrov*) of the first, suggesting that the poem, and the collection, begin when the funeral does. Although Pasternak did not yet know, at the time of writing, what bloodshed October would bring, by the summer of 1917 he had seen enough to have a sense of the cost of such upheaval. The precious

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[43] Pasternak had been idealistic and hopeful about the events of February 1917, the same attitude he had had as a boy during the 1905 revolution 12 years earlier. Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 1, 226.

[44] As a case in point, in her own reading of the poem Katherine Tiernan O'Connor argues that "The Mass for the Dead being celebrated is presumably due to the 'death' or loss to the poet of one of the most exotic sources of his childhood fantasies, Kipling's jungle kingdom. Once again there is the implication that the loss is shared both by the poet and by the lost world of Kipling fantasy." O'Connor, *Boris Pasternak's My Sister—Life: The Illusion of Narrative*, 27. While the loss of "Kipling's jungle kingdom" may indeed be a layer of the poem, it is a surface layer—the real deaths being alluded to, I argue, are not in the realm of fiction.

world of childhood, embodied here in Kipling's book, thus offers an ideal means for Pasternak to express both the naturalness of revolution as a concept and its potential for violence. In *My Sister—Life,* childhood helped the poet's reservations regarding the Revolution pass undetected for the first, but not the last, time.

If "Longing" captures the underlying violence of the jungle that pits one group of animals against another, *The Childhood of Liuvers* (1918) sought to counteract the mentality of the horde by honing in on one particular consciousness and one particular childhood set far away from the world depicted in Kipling's stories.[45] Offering the bare minimum in terms of plot, *The Childhood of Liuvers* closely follows a few months in the life of one Zhenia Liuvers, from just before she begins menstruating to the aftermath of the death of a stranger, which touches her deeply. The novella continues the theme of incompatibility between the child's and adult's world from Pasternak's early poetry and advances the suggestion that childhood does not square comfortably with the values of the Revolution. Pasternak does so in part by endowing Zhenia with the qualities of a poet, and of himself specifically—both her heightened sensitivity to her surroundings and her femininity resonate with Pasternak's own similar qualities. [46]

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[45] According to Christopher Barnes, *The Childhood of Liuvers* "was composed at a time when arrest, execution, destruction of families, and the swallowing up of the individual by mass movements and statistics were part of everyday life, and it was written in opposition to all of this." Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 1, 272.

[46] "I have a mass of feminine features in me," Pasternak wrote in a letter to Marina Tsvetaeva. Cited in Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 1, 271.

The incompatibility between the child-poet's world and the world of adults is announced in the very first scene of the novella when, troubled by her parents' party, Zhenia Liuvers asks her father to help her understand what she sees outside of her window. Although he explains that it is a factory called Motovilikha, he also scolds her for being unable to sleep, saying "You ought to be ashamed. A big girl like you."[47] When she asks follow-up questions the next morning about what Motovilikha is and what happens there, the adult answers neither satisfy her nor get at the heart of her interest: "Motovilikha was a factory, a government factory where castings were made and from castings…."[48]—we learn no more, for the narration trails off with Zhenia's interest. This unsatisfying interaction uncovers a fissure that will grow more pronounced as the novella goes on: the very next morning, as though with a sense of distrust, Zhenia does not share all of her questions with her father: "she did not ask these questions and for some reason concealed them on purpose."[49]

The misunderstanding between children and adults and the fraught relationship to which this gives rise is likewise at the heart of one of the novella's few traditionally dramatic scenes. Horrified by the phenomenon of menstruation that no one had explained to her, Zhenia uses powder to cover the stain left on her

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[47] «Стыдно. Такая большая девочка.» Boris Pasternak, *Safe Conduct: An Autobiography : And Other Writings*. New Directions Paperbook. New York: New Directions, 1958, 161; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami: v odinnadtsati tomakh*, vol. 3, 35. Throughout my discussion of *The Childhood of Liuvers* I borrow from Robert Payne's translation with frequent modification.

[48] «Мотовилиха — завод, казенный завод, и что делают там чугун, а из чугуна...». Ibid.

[49] «но этих вопросов она не задала и их почему-то умышленно скрыла.» Ibid.

bed sheets and is subsequently scolded by her French governess, who assumes she had used it for her face. Even her mother, who is eventually sympathetic, hears "evil notes behind the tears; where there were none."[50] Although she eventually softens and feels sympathy for her daughter, that sympathy and her desire to show affection is stifled with the curt phrase "But—pedagogy."[51] As this phrase shows, Madame Liuvers suddenly recalls the pedagogical best practices of her day and decides to quash her natural instinct for tenderness. This struggle between nature and nurture evokes the same tension that is inherent in the Romantic cult of childhood—Pasternak emphasizes the former, privileging the sanctity of intuition and feeling over reason.

This same nefarious pedagogy is, soon after, the cause of a definitive break in the girl's life:

> They declared to her that she had to go to school. Of that she was only glad. But they declared it to her....all this was declared to her. Life ceased to be a poetical caprice; it fermented around her like a harsh and evil fable—in so far as it became prose and was transformed into fact. Stubbornly, painfully and without luster, as though in a state of eternal sobering, elements of trivial existence entered into her awakening soul.[52]

Zhenia's life before and after being enrolled in school is juxtaposed as starkly as poetry and prose—and, even more menacing, an "evil fable" (*chernaia skazka*).

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[50] «Но матери слышались злобные ноты в этом плаче, которых не было в нем» Ibid. 168; 40.

[51] Ibid.

[52] «Ей объявили, что она поступит в гимназию. Это было только приятно. Но это объявили ей. ....Но, как и оно, все это объявлялось ей. Перестав быть поэтическим пустячком, жизнь забродила крутой черной сказкой постольку, поскольку стала прозой и превратилась в факт. Тупо, ломотно и тускло, как бы в состоянии вечного протрезвления, попадали элементы будничного существования в завязывавшуюся душу.» Ibid. 182; 50.

This scene anticipates Pasternak's 1948 letter to fellow poet Kaisyn Kuliev, in which he writes of the "elementary school text" that is "the childish model of the universe, placed in your heart from your youngest years."[53] The discipline of schooling gets in the way of real learning and diminishes Zhenia's sense of wonder.

And although Pasternak hyperbolically understates the need for formal education to make a point about the potency of the child's mind, Zhenia is not so much opposed to the idea of school as she is to the power relationship that undergirds it—"They declared it to her," the narrator repeats, and so it happens to her. Thus, through unsympathetic adult intervention, school comes to seem as unexpected and external to her as menstruation. Once again the adult world in Pasternak's early writing emerges as hostile, unsympathetic, and more wedded to rules and regulations than to sentiment and curiosity.

If Zhenia's untutored perceptions offer a roadmap of sorts for Pasternak's poetic vision, the novella also suggests that this vision is inimical to the values of the Revolution as they came to be defined. The very setting of the tale is unambiguously pre-Revolutionary, and the milieu of the Liuvers home the very sort that the Revolution sought to (and did) destroy: Zhenia's childhood world is one of foreign governesses and wealth (recall that her father is the director of a mine). Sheltered though she is from social realities, her open and curious

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[53] Boris Pasternak. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 9. Moscow: Slovo, 2003, 549. As Grigorii Kruzhkov writes in his essay on childhood in Pasternak's poetics, the one 'game' Pasternak eschews is playing at school. Kruzhkov, "Detstvo i igra u Pasternaka," 561.

orientation toward the world nonetheless leads her to contemplate one of the most pressing issues of the Revolution's agenda—social class. However, the conclusions she draws are not necessarily in harmony with its values.

Guided only by untutored perceptions, Zhenia first encounters the issue of social class when she begins to think about the similarities between the caretaker's wife Aksinya and her mother, who, although Zhenia does not understand this, are both pregnant:

> Suddenly a strange thought entered her head…It occurred to her that for some time there had existed an incomprehensible resemblance between her mother and the caretaker's wife. There was something altogether elusive in this resemblance. She paused. It lay—she thought—in something people bear in mind when they are talking: we are all mortal…or we are all tarred with the same brush…or fate pays no respect to birth.[54]

Zhenia recognizes that at the broadest level—the level of "fate"—all mortals are equal, but she nonetheless struggles with what the comparison between the lodge-keeper's wife and her mother might reveal about social stratification: "But then why not go on to discover resemblance between herself and Aksinya?" she asks. Zhenya ultimately concludes that it is Aksinya "who gave the right note to the rapprochement" between the two: "The countrywoman gained nothing, but the lady lost something" she decides, expressing with this conclusion a desire to do

[54] «Вдруг ей пришло в голову что-то странное…Ей пришло в голову, что с недавнего времени между мамой и дворничихой завелось какое-то неуследимое сходство. В чем-то совсем неуловимом. Она остановилась. В чем-то таком — она задумалась — в таком что ли, что имеют в виду, когда говорят: все мы люди… или одним, мол, миром мазаны… или судьба кости не разбирает». Pasternak. *Safe Conduct: An Autobiography : And Other Writings*, 190; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 3, 55-6.

both women justice but nevertheless maintain the elevated status of the latter.[55]

It is then that Zhenia remembers, with a hint of concern, that "rusticity had already penetrated her mother's nature" and imagines Madame Liuvers speaking in a peasant manner: "the day will come and she will just step in and blurt out an order with a heavy peasant intonation, all while wearing a new silk dressing-gown without a girdle."[56] The young girl's concern over language and social class and the desire for everything to have its place despite the ultimate equality of all people ("we are all mortal") haunts Zhenia for another twenty pages, when she suddenly asks her mother a puzzling question:

> Interrupting her mother, as though in a dream, Zhenia asked Madame Liuvers to say, "The Beheading of John the Forerunner." Her mother repeated the words, perplexed. She did not say, "John of the Forenners." That is what Aksinya said. The next moment Zhenia was seized with amazement at what she had done…Who had put it into her head?"[57]

Although Zhenia is astonished by her own request, she is relieved to find the class distinction between her mother and the caretaker's wife reinforced—her mother correctly pronounced the word "forerunner," (*predtecha*) while Aksinya had not:

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[55] Ibid. 191. «между тем именно Аксинья задавала тон этому навязывавшемуся сравнению. Она брала перевес в этом сближенье. От него не выигрывала баба, а проигрывала барыня.» Ibid.

[56] «Ей показалось, что в маму вселилось какое-то начало простонародности, и она представила себе мать, произносящей шука вместо щука, работам вместо работаем; а вдруг — померещилось ей — придет день и в своем новом шелковом капоте без кушака, кораблем, она возьмет да и брякнет «к дверьми прислонь!» Ibid.

[57] «Матери вперебой, словно со сна, дочь попросила госпожу Люверс произнести: 'Усекновение Главы Иоанна Предтечи'. Мать повторила, недоумевая. Она не сказала: «Предтеича». Так говорила Аксинья. В следующую же минуту Женю взяло диво на самое себя. Что это было такое? Кто подтолкнул? Откуда взялось?» Ibid. 210, 70. I have altered Payne's translation somewhat.

she mistook it for John's patronymic and pronounces it in the colloquial, contracted form (*predteich*). Thus the child's worldview, openness of perception, and attention to language serve to reinforce the social stratification that, from the post-Revolutionary perspective, was as outmoded as the rest of the world to which she belongs.[58] Embedded in that pronouncement is a realization that beneath the comforting stratification lies an ultimate equality ("fate pays no respect to birth"),[59] but that equality is determined only in a kind of anticipatory hindsight: one day their fates will have been one and the same all along. As such, Zhenia's understanding of the proper order of things is perfectly compatible with a vision of social *inequality* during life—the countrywoman has her place just as the lady has hers.

The coexistence of Zhenia Liuvers's innate sense of the ultimate equality of people as well as her belief in the naturalness of social stratification would be

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[58] This paradoxical admixture of the modern and archaic was noted by Nikolai Ashukin, who wrote in a 1922 review that although *The Childhood of Liuvers* was markedly non- (rather than just "pre-") Revolutionary, the voice of the prose was unquestionably modern: "There is none of our contemporary moment, no Revolution in it. But the entire texture of the prose of the novella, its airy, bright impressionism, its weightless psychological aspect, all this could only have appeared in the contemporary moment." («Нашей современности, революции, в ней нет. Но вся ткань прозы, из которой создана повесть, ее воздушный, светлый импрессионизм, ее отличная от старой литературы невесомая психологичность, все это могло возникнуть только в современности»). Lazar Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak v dvadtsatye gody*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1981, 16.

[59] Pasternak, *Safe Conduct: An Autobiography : And Other Writings*, 190; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami: v odinnadtsati tomakh*, vol. 3, 56. Just as the evident Modernism of the text rescues it (if partially) from charges of apoliticality, Pasternak benefitted by inscribing his text into the tradition of a certain type of Russian *bildungsroman*, the writerly "pseudo-autobiography" genre popularized by Sergei Aksaakov, Leo Tolstoy, Maxim Gorky, and others and discussed in Andrew Wachtel's *The Battle for Childhood*. Moreover, as Susan Layton notes, "The drawing of an analogy between artistic vision and the spontaneous perception of a child placed Pasternak within a vital current of post-Symbolist Russian literature." Susan Layton, "Poetic Vision in Pasternak's 'The Childhood of Luvers.'" *The Slavic and East European Journal* 22, no. 2 (1978), 163.

captured perfectly some four decades later when Iurii Zhivago, drawn to the Revolution initially for its salutary potential,[60] nurses a White soldier back to health in secret as he himself is being held captive by the partisans. According to the narrator, "All his sympathy was on the side of the heroically dying children. In his heart he wished them [the Whites] success. They were offspring of families probably close to him in spirit, to his upbringing, his moral cast, his notions."[61] Expressed by the narrator through free indirect discourse, these words implicitly affirm Iurii Zhivago's belief in the existence of a moral hierarchy even as he works evenhandedly to serve, at great personal risk, those on both sides of the fight.

The compatibility between fundamental equality and social stratification in Zhenia's belief system prefigures Pasternak's own praise of revolution for its potential to "[return] man to his own *nature* and looks at the government through the eyes of *natural* rights (the American and French declarations of rights)."[62]

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[60] He likens it to "magnificent surgery," to taking and "at one stroke artistically cut[ting] out the old, stinking sores!" («Какая великолепная хирургия! Взять и разом артистически вырезать старые вонючие язвы!»). Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*. New York: Vintage Classics, 2010, 228; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami: v odinnadtsati tomakh*, vol. 4, Moscow: Slovo, 2003, 193. Here Iurii Zhivago echoes Pasternak's own words to his sister in a letter from 1930: "Measures of broad-ranging, epochal significance are in progress [in the countryside]. But…one would have to experience these surgical transformations on oneself. Pasternak. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami* , vol. 8. Moscow: Slovo-2005, 390. Cited in Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 2, 15. This observation may also be a hidden polemic with the Futurists, as it echoes Filippo Marinetti's language in the Futurist Manifesto that "We will glorify war—the world's only hygiene" ("vogliamo glorificare la guerra - sola igiene del mondo"). Here, it is not "militarism and patriotism" that Iurii Zhivago admires, but a careful, considered cleansing.

[61] «Все его сочувствие было на стороне героически гибнувших детей. Он от души желал им удачи. Это были отпрыски семейств, вероятно, близких ему по духу, его воспитания, его нравственного склада, его понятий.» Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*. New York: Vintage Classics, 2010, 395; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 4, Moscow: Slovo, 2003, 332.

[62] «она возвращает человека к *природе* человека и смотрит на государство глазами *естественного* права (американские и французская декларация прав.» Boris Pasternak, *Polnoe*

Specifically, Pasternak's evocation of the French and American declarations of rights resonates with Zhenia's conclusions regarding her mother and Aksinya: The first article of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen proclaimed that men are born free and equal in rights but preserved the system of social distinctions. Rather than allowing man to "[look] at the government through the eyes of natural rights," however, the Bolsheviks prided themselves on forging the New Soviet Person and new historical collective (*novaia isstoricheskaia obshchnost'*).

The fate of the sequel to *The Childhood of Liuvers* also tells us something about the incompatibility between Zhenia and the new social order waiting for her just around the bend. In 1931 and 1932, Pasternak took a series of trips to the Urals as part of the government's effort to solicit artistic support for economic initiatives marking the fifteenth anniversary of the October Revolution.[63] As an official guest of the Urals District Party Committee, he had access to luxuries unheard of by the locals, and this inequality as well as the obvious hunger of the rural population distressed Pasternak to the point that he began bringing food he had collected from the private Party dining room to the starving peasants and finally just stopped eating there altogether.[64] The trip so shook Pasternak's faith in socialism that he burned the 1932 sequel to the novel he had been working on at the time, of

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sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami: v odinnadtsati tomakh, vol. 7, 398. Partially cited in Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 1, 288.

[63] Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 2, 69.

[64] Ibid.

which *The Childhood of Liuvers* was to make up the first part. [65]

The fact that Pasternak abandoned the second half of the novella as a result of his disillusionment with the socialist project suggests that he could not square the childhood he had envisioned in the first half with the reality of what the future held. That young Zhenia Liuvers likely served as a study for *Doctor Zhivago*'s Lara and Iurii Zhivago was bestowed with her upper-class upbringing (Iurii's father was a factory owner) supports this interpretation: in *Doctor Zhivago*, both Iurii and Lara perish, and the fact that Lara *is* depicted both during and after the Revolution only serves to emphasize that history is not kind to her. To preserve her purity and poetic vision, Zhenia Liuvers could not be allowed to exist in the new Soviet society. She could not, as it were, be allowed to grow up.

If in Pasternak's early poetry and *The Childhood of Liuvers* an antagonism is established between the world of poetry/childhood and the world of prosaic adulthood, in the years and decades following the Revolution that opposition would take on the force of an even more explicit social critique. In a key poem of Pasternak's 1926 cycle of poems *The Year 1905* (*905 god*), Pasternak employs childhood on two levels—as the explicit topic of his poem and as a metaphor—in order to offer a submerged critique of what the 1905 Revolution "grew up" to be as well as the personal cost of political upheaval.

Written for the 10-year anniversary of the Revolution of 1917, *The Year 1905*

[65] Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak: the poet and his politics*, 171.

had as its explicit aim the alleviation of Pasternak's financial straits and rehabilitation of his reputation.[66] Despite it having served its purpose, Pasternak himself thought little of the cycle, calling it "not a poem, but a mere chronicle" and a "trifle" (*poshliatina*).[67] By the mid 1920s, critics were waiting for Pasternak—until then only a "fellow traveler" of the Revolution—to offer evidence that he was in fact one of them.[68] It was likely as a result of this expectation that the critical subtext of the cycle was overlooked, subtext that Pasternak himself acknowledged in a letter that same year to his friend Konstantin Fedin.[69]

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[66] Anna Sergeeva-Kliatis, "Svoi sredi chuzhykh, chuzhoi sredi svoikh." *Voprosy literatury* 5 (2012). Accessed April 17, 2017. http://magazines.russ.ru/voplit/2012/5/k32.html. He was so desperate for money, in fact, that he broke the stanzas up with unnatural line breaks to increase his page count. Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 1, 349.

[67] The cycle was greeted resoundingly warmly by the Soviet press. The critic Viktor Pertsov entitled his review of the cycle "The New Pasternak," admitting in a 1957 memoir that his characterization had been entirely premature. For more on the Soviet Press's reaction to Pasternak's epos, see Sergeeva-Kliatis, "Poema B. Pasternaka '905-i god' v sovetskoi zhurnalistike i kritike russkogo zarubezh'ia." *Elektronnii nauchnii zhurnal "Mediaskop."* Accessed April 17, 2017. http://www.mediascope.ru/node/1483. In a letter to Pasternak dated Oct. 18, 1927, Maxim Gorky called *The Year 1905* an "excellent" book by a "societal poet" (социальный поэт). Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami,* vol. 1, 519. Pasternak wrote in a letter to an acquaintance in 1927 that the poem "served as [his] rehabilitation" («Она послужила к моей реабилитации, т.е., возвратила в разряд людей, о которых можно тут говорить»). Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami ,* vol. 7. Moscow: Slovo-2005, 16. Cited in Sergeeva-Kliatis, "Svoi sredi chuzhykh, chuzhoi sredi svoikh." *Voprosy literatury* 5 (2012). http://magazines.russ.ru/voplit/2012/5/k32.html, endnote 60. Ibid., endnote 4. Letter to Konstantin Fedin dating December 6, 1928, cited in Sergeeva-Kliatis, "Poema B. Pasternaka '905-i god'," endnote 7.

[68] Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 1, 367. Apparently coined by Leon Trotsky in 1923, the term "fellow traveler" («попутчик») referred to writers who accepted the Revolution but did not take part actively in it and did not have a proletarian background. When the Union of Soviet Writers formed in 1932 and disbanded all literary groups, the term lost its meaning. Victor Terras, *Handbook of Russian Literature*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, 135.

[69] On December 6, 1928, he wrote, "When I was writing *The Year 1905*, I approached this relative trifle consciously for the sake of an ideal compromise with the time…I wanted to give in irrevocably enmeshed form not only that which is at odds in our society, a struggle that is elevated nearly to the status of primary accomplishment of the age. I wanted to say that which is ill-reputed and ridiculed (and inherently dear to me), along with that which is foreign to me in order that my

On the most basic level, to focus on 1905 in a cycle ostensibly meant to commemorate the October Revolution was to say publicly what he otherwise could not—that the necessity and naturalness of revolution as an ideal (embodied by the events of February 1917) had been squandered by the violence and groupthink of what followed. Indeed, for Pasternak, the revolutions of 1905 and February 1917 were to the October Revolution of 1917 what childhood is to adulthood: as we have seen, for Pasternak nothing ever improves with age.[70] By focusing on the Revolution in its youth, Pasternak "avoided the dilemma of trying to portray the 1917 revolution in a personally honest and at the same time acceptably Leninist light."[71]

The theme of the third poem of the cycle, "Childhood" ("*Detstvo,*" 1925), provided the greatest opportunity for Pasternak not only to express his feelings toward the October Revolution of 1917, but to veil those feelings in a seemingly neutral autobiographic account. This was in part due to the familiarity of the theme at play—couched among historically focused poems and itself embedded in

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contemporaries would, honoring their own dogmatism, nevertheless be obliged to unwittingly accept my ideals as well." Cited in Sergeeva-Kliatis, "Svoi sredi chuzhykh, chuzhoi sredi svoikh," endnote 7. «Когда я писал 905-й год, то на эту относительную пошлятину я шел сознательно из добровольной идеальной сделки с временем <…> Мне хотелось дать в неразрывно-сосватанном виде то, что не только поссорено у нас, но ссора чего возведена чуть ли не в главную заслугу эпохи. Мне хотелось связать то, что ославлено и осмеяно (и прирожденно дорого мне), с тем, что мне чуждо, для того, чтобы, поклоняясь своим догматам, современник был вынужден, того не замечая, принять и мои идеалы.»

[70] Of Pasternak's hopeful attitude toward the Revolution—the result, according to Lazar Fleishman, of the bloodlessness of the February events—Fleishman writes, "It was not the individual parties or political slogans that attracted him, but the general spirit of freedom and unanimity, which he saw as uniting not only inimical groups and classes of society but even the trees and the land—nature itself." Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak: the poet and his politics*, 89.

[71] Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 1, 358.

an account of key events of 1905 such as Bloody Sunday, "Childhood" evoked a genre already familiar by the late 1920s: the "coming into Marxism" narrative. As an account of his childhood, however, the poem was in fact closer to what Pasternak would assert by means of the polemical title of his 1929 biography, *Safe Conduct* (*Okhrannaia gramota*): that every poet had the right to his own past self.[72]

In this poem, childhood comes early on to serve as a means of superimposing the pre- and post-Revolutionary eras, a temporal layering that embeds a critique of the present. Indeed the second line situates the poem almost immediately between two temporal frames, one pre- and one post-Revolutionary: "I'm fourteen years old./ Vkhutemas/ is still a sculpting school" (2-3), he writes.[73] The fact that Pasternak's age in 1905 (fourteen) is no longer "childhood" strictly speaking suggests that the childhood he has in mind may indeed be the Revolution's. It is, of course, equally his own: as we have seen, for Pasternak

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[72] Originally published in 1929, *Safe Conduct* was in fact a polemic document with the Futurist group LEF (*Levyi front iskusstv,* led by Vladimir Mayakovsky) as well as with the Revolution itself—as Oleg Lekmanov notes, the phrase "safe conduct" (*okhrannaia gramota*, more literally a "certificate of protection") was a common one in the Soviet era to denote a document granting exemption for private property against large-scale nationalization. O. Lekmanov, "'Okhrannaia gramota' B. Pasternaka: o vozmozhnom smyslovom obertone zaglaviia." *Russkaia rech'*, April 2015, 18–21. The "property" in this case was the poet's right to his own past self, to the continuities between the past and present self that opposed LEF's vision of a "future without genealogy." Christopher J. Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 1, 397. Stressing this inviolability of origins, in this same book Pasternak would assert that "the only real theme of a work of art is the story of its own birth." Lazar Fleishman, "In Search of the Word: An Analysis of Pasternak's Poem 'Tak nachinaiut...'." *Zexzyty naukowe wyższej szkoły pedagogicznej w Bydgoszczy, Studia Filologiczne*, Filologia Rosyjska, 31, no. 12 (1989), 86. *Safe Conduct* was panned by critics in the early 1930s and not reprinted in the Soviet Union until the 1980s. Christopher J. Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 2. Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989, 61, 79.

[73] «Мне четырнадцать лет./ Вхутемас/ Еще—школа ваянья» (1-3). Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami,* vol. 1, 267. This time period is also described in chapter four of his second autobiography, *People and Propositions* (1956).

"childhood" as such is not tied with age so much as with freshness of perception and emotive naiveté that could be sustained into adulthood through the sensitivity of the poet.

By 1926 when Pasternak was composing *The Year 1905*, the Moscow School of Art in which the former Pasternak family apartment was located had been rebranded Vkhutemas (*Vysshaia khudozhestvенно-tekhnicheskaia masterskaia*), and Pasternak was living there with his first wife and young child alongside six other families.[74] To go back to the earlier era, then, is to recall a time not only when Pasternak lived in greater comfort, but also a time when the Pasternak family and the promise of the Revolution were still intact, before the poet's family left the Soviet Union once and for all. The next lines zero in on the sense of loss already at work within the poem: "In the wing where Rabfak is, above, my father's studio" (4-6).[75] The appearance of the Rabfak (an abbreviation for "Workers' Faculty" in Russian, *rabochii fakul'tet*) thus appears less a neutral observation than one tinged with regret and nostalgia. The lost world is, of course, the Old World, evoked subtly by the lines "These are the debris of winter./Since December the lamps sit enthroned" (*Eto—debri zimy./ S dekabria votsariaiutsia lampy*). The world illuminated by imperial lamps (they sit "enthroned"—the Russian word contains the root *tsar*) is thus doubly lost: once in the personal/biographic sense

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[74] Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 2, 15.

[75] «В том крыле, где рабфак,/ Наверху,/ Мастерская отца» (4-6). Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami,* vol. 1, 267.

and once in the political sense, for the optimism the young Pasternak felt toward this revolution was not destined to last.

The poem's focus on Pasternak's own childhood serves to segue to a description of the *revolution's* childhood (or, more aptly, its infancy) but suggests that the two 'children' would grow up very differently:

Petersburg night.
The air swells with black icicles
From prickly steps.
No one gets in their way.
Some in coats, some in sheepskins.
The moon chills like a fifty-kopeck coin.
We're in the Narvskii Department.
The crowd parts:
Gapon.

In the hall, a hum.
It's stuffy.
Some five thousand, reckon the trees.
Blowing in from the street into the
entry halls,
Snow on the stairs.
This is a maternity ward,
And in the unpainted vaulted womb
Against the walls of the rooms
Beats, a plain clump,
The age.

Петербургская ночь.
Воздух пучится черною льдиной
От иглистых шагов.
Никому не чинится препон.
Кто в пальто, кто в тулупе.
Луна холодеет полтиной.
Это в Нарвском отделе.
Толпа раздается:
Гапон.

В зале гул.
Духота.

Тысяч пять сосчитали деревья.
Сеясь с улицы в сени,
По лестнице снег.
Здесь родильный приют,
И в некрашеном сводчатом чреве
Бьется об стены комнат
Комком неприкрашенным
Век.[76]

The stanzas cited above refer to the evening of January 19 (January 6 Old Style) 1905, when after a series of discussions at a tavern in the Narvskii region of Saint Petersburg the contents of the petition that was to be presented to the Tsar at the upcoming Sunday protest were decided on. Chief among the leaders present was Father Georgii Gapon, and that fateful day would go down in history as "Bloody Sunday": the climax of the 1905 Revolution and a direct catalyst for the more lasting, full-blown Revolution that would follow over a decade later.[77] The tavern where the peaceful gathering that led to Bloody Sunday was born is thus described in the poem as a "maternity ward" (*rodil'nyi priiut*) and the era as a fetus bumping up against the walls of the womb that contain it, as though restless to get out.

In the next four stanzas, Pasternak reintroduces the topic of his own childhood and emphasizes the inextricability of his biography from that of the Revolution:

[76] Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 1, 269.

[77] The January 1904 war between Japan and Russia increased social discontent and led to many strikes across a wide sector of Russian society. The tensions culminated a year later when, on Sunday, January 9, a peaceful procession of workers and their families in Saint Petersburg came under fire by guards from the Winter Palace. As Christopher Barnes notes, the Pasternak family was disgusted with the violence of the events. Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 1, 56.

The sidewalks flooded with people.
It's growing dark.
The day can't get up.
Fire
Answers
Fire from the barricades.
I'm fourteen years old.
In a month, I'll be fifteen.
These days are like a diary.
You read them,
Opening at random.

Тротуары в бегущих.
Смеркается.
Дню не подняться.
Перекату пальбы
Отвечают
Пальбой с баррикад.
Мне четырнадцать лет.
Через месяц мне будет пятнадцать.
Эти дни: как дневник.
В них читаешь,
Открыв наугад.[78]

These stanzas describe the events of Bloody Sunday itself, which took place just three days after the evening meeting at the Narvskii tavern. The climax of the Revolution of 1905 as well as of the poem, this historical account is interrupted suddenly by the non sequitur "I'm fourteen years old." By ushering back in the poet's youth, these lines remind the reader that though Pasternak's biography had temporarily receded into the background in favor of historical events, it still serves as the anchor for the present narration. The inextricability of the poet's youth from the events being recounted is reinforced in the next lines: "These days are like a

[78] Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 1, 270-1.

diary," he writes. "You read them,/ Opening at random" (*Eti dni: kak dnevnik./ V nikh chitaesh',/ Otkryv naugad*, 124-6).

On the face of it, this statement implies that just as the poet might open to any page of his childhood diary and find something of his former self, one could look to any day of the Revolution of 1905 and learn what it would "grow up" to be—the October Revolution twelve years later. The omnipresence of the Revolution in his "diary"—that is to say, his biography—could be understood, in turn, in two different ways: on the one hand, it could signal a youthful sympathy, while on the other, a value-neutral coincidence: the Revolution came of age as he did. As these lines leave open the possibility for either of the above interpretations, they pave the way for the most important ambiguity of all: namely, there is nothing "random" about Pasternak's choice to open his diary to this specific page. Focusing on one Revolution makes it possible to say what he could not say about the later one.

Nor is there anything random about the ambiguity of the personal and autobiographic note on which the poem concludes:

We are having a snowball fight
These snowballs we make from
Failing grades
That fell from the sky and snowflakes,
And murmurs intrinsic to the time.
This avalanche of kingdoms,
This drunk fall of snow—
The courtyard of the gymnasium
On the corner of Povarskaia
In January.
Snowstorms each day.
Those in the Party

Look as proud as a peacock.
They're older.
But we:
We tease the Greek teacher with impunity.
We put our desks against the wall,
Play Parliament at lessons
And linger in our dreams
On illegal areas of *Gruzin*y.

Мы играем в снежки
Мы их мнем из валящихся с неба
Единиц,
И снежинок,
И толков, присущих поре.
Этот оползень царств,
Это пьяное паданье снега—
Гимназический двор
На углу Поварской
В январе.
Что ни дни, то метель.
Те, что в партии,
Смотрят орлами.
Это в старших.
А мы:
Безнаказанно греку дерзим.
Ставим парты к стене,
На уроках играем в парламент
И витаем в мечтах
В нелегальном районе Грузин.[79]

The political goings on of the adult world are everywhere in this description, from Pasternak's children's games to his classwork. He and his fellow schoolboys make snowballs out of failing grades, snowflakes (Pasternak plays on the word *edinitsa*, "unit," which is also a failing grade in the Russian school system), and rumors

[79] Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami : v odinnadtsati tomakh,* vol. 1, 271.

about current events ("murmurs intrinsic to the time," *tolkov prisushchikh pore*).[80] The snowfall, moreover, is likened to the impending fall of the empire: Pasternak writes of an "avalanche of kingdoms" (*opolzen' tsarstv*), mirroring the "enthronement of lamps" (*votsarenie lamp*) earlier in the poem. Though on the most literal level this line is about the snowfall at hand, Pasternak is also playing on the well-known opposition between the "heavenly kingdom" (*tsarstvo nebesnoe*) and the earthly one (*tsarstvo zemnoe*), evoking the burgeoning upheaval and overturning of the world order to come. While the younger boys, Pasternak's peers, are not yet old enough to join the Party, they are clearly anxious to, and they play at politics in their own ineffectual way: they pretend to be members of Parliament with their school desks. The children's imaginations give wing to dreams of the *Gruziny* area of Moscow, signaling a temporal jump: the Revolution of 1905 culminated in December of that year in Moscow, and revolutionaries erected barricades in the *Presnenskii* district where *Gruziny* is located. As such, it is as if the boys' dreams will the Revolution into being.

Indeed the all-pervading nature of revolutionary politics in these schoolboys' lives echoes the "maternity ward" of the era from earlier in the poem by showing the bits and pieces of personal biography that amount, with time, to

[80] This imagery echoes Pasternak's description of the Russian people during the October Revolution in his epos "Sublime Malady" («Высокая болезнь») written four years earlier, in 1923: "In those days a passion for stories befell us all…and all night, filled with snow, the ears of quiet darkness rustled, and we tossed fairy tales back and forth." («В те дни на всех припала страсть/К рассказам…/То шевелились тихой тьмы/ Засыпанные снегом уши,/ И сказками метались мы/ На мятных пряниках подушек.») The present poem, *The Year 1905*, thus casts back critically on the earlier poem—the adults act like children, trading in rumors, ears stuffed so full of snow they likely couldn't make out the truth if they tried.

political awakening. If the description of Bloody Sunday serves as the poem's dramatic apex, the final passage serves as its emotional one:

The snow falls for a third day.
It continues to fall into evening.
Overnight
It clears up.
In the morning
A thundering peal from the Kremlin:
The school's trustee…
Killed…
Sergei Aleksandrych…
I began to love the storm
In those first days of February.

Снег идет третий день.
Он идет еще под вечер.
За ночь
Проясняется.
Утром—
Громовый раскат из Кремля:
Попечитель училища…
Насмерть…
Сергей Александрыч…
Я грозу полюбил
В эти первые дни февраля.[81]

That emotional apex takes place not just in the final lines themselves, but in their ellipses: "The school's patron…/To death…/Sergei Aleksandrych…," as well as in the seeming disjuncture between those lines and the final two: "I began to love the storm/ In those first days of February." Read for their combined effect and for their silences, these lines suggest the lyric voice's misgivings regarding the events being described.

[81] Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 1, 271.

Despite the seemingly positive declaration that he "began to love the storm/ In those first days of February," the lyric persona embeds a reference to a historical event that touched his family personally: the assassination of Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich. On the morning of February 4, 1905, the Grand Duke, who was also governor of Moscow, was killed by a bomb planted at the Nikolskii Gate by Socialist Revolutionaries.[82] The informal, colloquial form of his name in the poem (the shortened ending of his patronymic, -ych instead of –ovich) channels the voice of the poet in his youth, when the Grand Duke was a familiar fixture in and around the Moscow School of Painting for which he served as a trustee and patron and where Leonid Pasternak taught and lived with his family.[83] The Pasternaks, then, and young Boris Pasternak among them, could hardly have greeted the Grand Duke's death with anything but sadness, and the Socialist Revolutionaries responsible for the Grand Duke's death would hasten the arrival of the bigger Revolution that would eventually drive them from their native land while their two sons stayed behind. The critique implicit in these lines, which commemorate a victory for the burgeoning Revolution but a small personal tragedy for the poet and his family—is heightened by the ellipses within them, the only ones of the entire 1905 cycle of poems. Something, the ellipses suggest, has been left unsaid.

That something lies in the gap between these lines and the last two of the poem, which appear to be non-sequiturs. First and foremost, the "storm" that

[82] Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 1, 56.

[83] Ibid.

young Pasternak came to love most clearly refers to the revolution, though it is notably unclear which one(s) he has in mind. Furthermore, it is unlike Pasternak to announce this love after recounting a violent event that touched his life personally. The word for "storm," *groza,* is in itself no more positive than the event just described—it can also mean "disaster" or "terror" and contrasts with the more positive *liven'* ("shower" or "downpour") that symbolizes a creative outpouring in *My sister—Life*. To announce, then, that he "began to love the storm" in the first days of February (*Ia grozu poliubil/ V eti pervye dni fevralia*) suggests not the beginning of an unambiguously enthusiastic relationship with the Revolution as it does the dramatic irony that exists between the adult poet and what he, as a boy, did not yet know.

Pasternak's uncensored thoughts about the Revolution of 1917 would find expression in a poem named for it (*Russkaia revoliutsiia,* 1918), unpublished in the Soviet Union until 1989. In this poem, the February 1917 Revolution is contrasted with the violence of October, when sailors mutinied at Kronstadt, throwing their commanding officers into the furnaces of the ship:

How good it was to breathe you in March
And to hear, with pine needles and snow, in the yard,
In the sunlight, in the morning, beyond faces, names, and parties,
Your ice-breaking breath!

[....]

Now you're a mutiny. Now you're a furnace blaze.
And fumes in the boiler room, where at the tops of boilers
On the brink of explosion, hell splashes, a Baltic tub
With human blood, brains and the drunken vomit of the flotillas.

Как было хорошо дышать тобою в марте
И слышать на дворе, со снегом и хвоёй
На солнце, поутру, вне лиц, имен и партий
Ломающее лед дыхание твое!

[....]

Теперь ты—бунт. Теперь ты—топки полыханье.
И чад в котельной, где на головы котлов
Пред взрывом плещет ад Балтийскою лоханью
Людскую кровь, мозги и пьяный флотский блев.[84]

It is with this same sort of reflection about the Revolution's development that Pasternak endows his metonymous hero Iurii Zhivago near the end of the novel: Thinking back to the beginning of his adult acquaintance with Lara in the town of Meliuzeevo during the First World War, when the Revolution of 1917 was still over a year away, Iurii

> lamented that far-off summer…when the revolution was a god come down from heaven to earth, the god of that time, that summer, and each one went mad in his own way, and the life of each existed by itself and not as an explanatory illustration confirming the rightness of superior politics.[85]

The emphasis on individualism versus "superior politics" echoes the pleasure of the February Revolution "beyond faces, names, and parties" (*vne lits, imen, i partii*). In Iurii's view as in his author's, the distance between the Revolution as potentiality and as reality is as big as the distance between childhood and

[84] Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 2, 224-5.

[85] «оплакивал то далекое лето в Мелюсееве, когда революция была тогдашним с неба на землю сошедшим богом, богом того лета, и каждый сумасшествовал по-своему, и жизнь каждого существовала сама по себе, а не пояснительно-иллюстративно, в подтверждение правоты высшей политики.» Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 4, 539, 452.

adulthood.

The poet-child and the new order

As we have seen, Pasternak's early affinity to childhood—and the poetry to which it helps give rise—over prosaic adulthood would eventually help him to articulate his reservations regarding the Revolution of 1917. First and foremost, however, it cast the poet as being at odds with the adult, social world, linked initially (if tenuously) to his brethren poets but eventually standing entirely apart. As this sort of individualism became more and more suspect in the Soviet era, Pasternak increasingly sought refuge in childhood, using it to excuse away his non-participatory behavior while at the same time molding it to downplay the antagonism between the poet-child and the world of adults.[86]

Pasternak's best-known statement of his poetic credo, "Thus they begin. At two years old…" (*Tak nachinaiut. Goda v dva…*, 1921),[87] builds on the identification between the poet and the child from Pasternak's earliest prose but blurs the

[86] Olga Sedakova argues that the Russian Revolution challenged the traditional Russian paradigm of the Elected Poet standing far above the crowd (*chern'/ tolpa*) by making it, in fact, dangerous to do so. It thus became necessary to restructure the poet's relationship to his readers and society as a whole: "The old idea of a calling or a vocation transformed the entire external social hierarchy, with its 'vacancies' and rationing coupons, into a flat plane, in comparison with the vertical axis that had opened out for the chosen poet." Olga Sedakova, "The Vacancy of a Poet: Toward a Poetology of Pasternak." In *Rereading Russian Poetry*, edited by Stephanie Sandler. Russian Literature and Thought. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999, 71. As Dmitrii Bykov writes, Pasternak long harbored a feeling of guilt before the people. Dmitrii Bykov, *Boris Pasternak*. Zhizn' zamechatel'nykh liudei. Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2005, 456. In the 1940s, this desire to live simply and close to these same 'people' was finally realized in Pasternak's quiet Peredelkino life. Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 2, 177.

[87] Published a year after *My Sister—Life* in the collection *Themes and Variations* (*Темы и вариации*, 1923).

boundary between the child destined to become a poet and all children. Downplaying the antagonism of the poet-child and the adult world, in this poem Pasternak argues for the continuity between a *universal* childhood in which every person takes part and the poet's unique brand of childlikeness, which merely maintains it. This reformulation in fact preserves the previous antagonism but renders the poet's stance less threatening—because less out of sync—by emphasizing the way it partakes in shared human experience. However, on closer inspection we see that even the childhood being heralded as universal in this poem actually deviates from the norm:

Thus they begin. At two years old
They tear from nurses into the darkness of melody
Babble, whistle, — and words
Emerge in the third year.

Thus they begin to understand.
And in the noise of a working turbine
It seems that mother is not mother
That you are not yourself, and home a foreign country.

What is frightful beauty to do,
Sitting on a bench amongst the lilacs,
Why indeed shouldn't it steal children?
Thus suspicions arise.

Thus fears ripen. How will he let
A star surpass his achievements
When he is Faust, when he's a fantast?
So begin the gypsies.

Thus are revealed, soaring
Over fences, and where there should be houses
Instead lie seas as sudden as a breath.
So iambs will commence.

Thus summer nights, having fallen

into oats face down, with a wish: come true,
Threaten dawn itself with your pupil.
Thus begin squabbles with the sun.

Thus they begin to live through poetry.

Так начинают. Года в два
От мамки рвутся в тьму мелодий,
Щебечут, свищут,—а слова
Являются о третьем годе.

Так начинают понимать.
И в шуме пущенной турбины
Мерещится, что мать - не мать,
Что ты - не ты, что дом - чужбина.

Что делать страшной красоте
Присевшей на скамью сирени,
Когда и впрямь не красть детей?
Так возникают подозренья.

Так зреют страхи. Как он даст
Звезде превысить досяганье,
Когда он - Фауст, когда - фантаст?
Так начинаются цыгане.

Так открываются, паря
Поверх плетней, где быть домам бы,
Внезапные, как вздох, моря.
Так будут начинаться ямбы.

Так ночи летние, ничком
Упав в овсы с мольбой: исполнься,
Грозят заре твоим зрачком.
Так затевают ссоры с солнцем.

Так начинают жить стихом.[88]

For fellow poet Marina Tsvetaeva, "Thus they begin. At two years old" served as a perfect illustration of Pasternak's privileged kinship with childhood: "He doesn't

[88] Boris Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 1, 118.

yet know our words; his speech seems to come from a desert-island, from childhood, from the Garden of Eden," she wrote: "it doesn't quite make sense, and it knocks you over. At three this is common and is called 'a child.' At twenty-three it is uncommon and called 'a poet.'"[89] Although in the poem the blurring of the distinction between any child and the poet begins almost immediately (who is the referent of "they," and who begins to "tear from nurses into the darkness of melody"?), there is more than meets the eye at work in this seemingly universalizing statement. Indeed Pasternak's portrayal of childhood and of entry into language actually *deviates* from the norm, a deviation that has critical implications for the new social order to which the poet is ostensibly trying to belong.

At two, Pasternak writes, the child tears himself away from his wet nurse and into the darkness of melody (line 2). The second stanza repeats the theme of sound but reveals that a cheap trick has been played on the child. The noise of a turbine (*I v shume pushchennoi turbiny,* line 6) is hardly the promised dark melody. In fact, it is the very opposite: turbines generate electricity to create *light*. The turbine also brings into the poem a great symbol of socialism, evoking the famous "Lenin Bulb" (*Lampochka Il'icha*) and Lenin's ambition to "electrify the land" (*elektrifikatsiia vsei strany*) both literally and metaphorically. A large part of

[89] «Наших слов он еще не знает: что-то островитянски-ребячески-перворайски невразумительное—и опракидывающее. В три года это привычно и называется: ребенок, в двадцать три это непривычно и называется: поэт.» Marina Tsvetaeva, "Svetovoi Liven'." In *Proza*, 353–71. New York: Chekhov Publishing House, 1953, 356; "A Downpour of Light," in *Pasternak*, ed. Donald Davie and Angela Livingstone, Modern Judgements (London: Macmillan, 1970), 44.

the literal electrification scheme had to do with electrifying the home: every Russian could now enjoy the gifts of modernity. Thus the home where the child is coming into consciousness is, in this poem as in real life, fundamentally altered. In other words, for Pasternak, the universal and timeless human experience of coming into the verbal order is marked indelibly by the *new* order, and not for the better.

As a consequence of this impingement of society on what should, in the Romantic view shared by Pasternak, be a thoroughly un-political experience, we can understand why what has traditionally been read as a description of a universal childhood experience is actually significantly more time-specific, particular, and not, perhaps, nearly as uncorrupted as one would like. That Pasternak chose this very poem to read in (André Malraux's) French translation at the 1935 Congress of Writers in Defense of Culture in Paris further supports this reading: A reluctant participant ordered to attend despite illness, Pasternak made brief remarks to the Congress in which he exhorted attendees to avoid organizing at all costs and called organization the "death of art."[90]

Another somewhat sinister element of this vision of childhood is present in the oscillation between the *Heimliche* and *Unheimliche* in this poem. For Jacques Lacan, it is the mother who helps bring about the infant's understanding of himself as a Subject and also, significantly, represents the first important Other through

[90] Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 2, 106.

whom the infant comes to recognize the existence of other 'Others' in the world.[91] The fact that for Pasternak the din of the turbine turns the mother into *not* a mother, a not-mother ("It seems that mother is not mother;" *Mereshchitsia, chto mat'—ne mat'*), suggests a disruption of a critical developmental process. The development of the infant's perception of himself, too, is interrupted: "That you are not yourself" (*Ty—ne ty*). A fundamental disruption of the family order appears to be at work here: at no point should the infant see his house as a foreign land, *chuzhbina*. In fact, the same year that "Thus they begin. At two years old" was written, Pasternak's mother, father, and sister left for Germany.[92] The Revolution thus disrupted the Pasternak family home, as in this poem it disrupts the infant's. The sounds of the whirring turbine alter the fragile process that takes place as the infant comes gently into the self, and the world, through his mother. They also contrast starkly the "enthronement of lamps" (*votsarenie lamp*) of Pasternak's youth as chronicled in the poem "Childhood."

The fact that the home becomes a foreign land for the child connects with what Lazar Fleishman calls a significant "thematic layer" of the poem: kidnapping, wandering, and homelessness.[93] This theme recalls the earlier poem "I grew. Like

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[91] As Malcolm Bowie writes, "The identification of oneself with another being is the very process by which a continuing sense of selfhood becomes possible, and it is from successive assimilations of other people's attributes that what is familiarly called the ego or the personality is constructed." Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991, 30-1.

[92] Leonid Pasternak had found it difficult to maintain his previous level of professional success in the Soviet Union. Although his parents urged Pasternak and his brother to join them on many occasions, Pasternak stayed, considering that an artist's fate was tied to that of his homeland. Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 1, 278, 310.

[93] Fleishman, "In Search of the Word: An Analysis of Pasternak's Poem 'Tak nachinaiut…'," 69.

Ganymede" (*Ia ros. Menia, kak Ganimeda*, 1913/28), where the young poet describes being swept away by emotion like Ganymede, the beautiful adolescent from Greek mythology granted immortality and stolen from Earth to serve as cupbearer to the gods by Zeus himself. Here, it is Zeus rather than "frightful beauty" sitting on a park bench that steals children—and not just, it seems, the ones destined to be poets. Thus, Pasternak writes, "begin the gypsies" (*Tak nachinaiutsia tsygane*). If we imagine that the bench from which the children are stolen is found in a park, this somewhat cryptic line becomes more comprehensible: parks are public spaces where children can, in a moment of parental inattention, certainly be stolen—and gypsies have a reputation for doing just this. At the same time, the ambiguity of the line "So begin the gypsies" leaves open the possibility that the poet-child is *himself* on the path to gypsy-hood—that is to say, to a life of liminality, but also of freedom.[94] The adjective "frightful" (*strashnaia*), moreover, evokes the dual nature of the image of gypsies in popular lore—at once alluring and suspect. By aligning the gypsies with the beauty that steals children as much as with the children themselves, Pasternak levels a subtle criticism against the society that excludes them: just as gypsies are excluded from the social order, so too is beauty, and with it the poet. In this sense we could read special significance into Pasternak's evocation of oats in the final quatrain of the poem: here, they are intended to be

[94] This theme echoes Aleksandr Pushkin's 1824 poem "The Gypsies" (*Tsygany*). Fleishman notes that gypsies also had a very real resonance with Pushkin's life, reflecting "the episode of the author's own life when he temporarily joined a vagrancy gypsy camp, severing all his ties with civilization." This intertext allows us to "discover some other hints of the same 'prototype' in our text—Pushkin's 'orphanhood' and the loneliness of his childhood." Fleishman, "In Search of the Word: An Analysis of Pasternak's Poem 'Tak nachinaiut…'," 75, 78-9.

the soft, gentle landing place of the dreamy, ambitious child who falls face first—that is to say, trustingly—into them.[95] As we can recall from "My sister—life," however, the oats may not in fact be the safest place, after all: the child is likely to encounter snakelike adults slithering around among them. Thus while ostensibly portraying the naturalness of the poet-child's place in the new order and his harmony with it, Pasternak is at the same time expressing characteristic reservation over the cost of securing such a place.

Just as society plays a trick on the child by substituting the noise of whirring turbines for the promised melody, in this canonical poem Pasternak performs a sleight of hand of his own: he makes us believe that the hubris of the poet is really just an extension of the hubris of the infant more generally. "How will he let/ A star surpass his achievements/ When he is Faust, when he's a fantast," Pasternak writes (*Kak on dast/ Zvezde prevysit' dosiagan'e/ Kogda on—Faust, kogda—fantast*, lines 13-5). The theme of competition with the star prefigures the other cosmic battle of the poem, "squabbles with the sun" (*ssory s solntsem*, line 25).[96] As Lazar Fleishman notes, for the Futurists "The heliomachian theme served at the time as a 'militant' metaphor of the relations between art and life."[97] Indeed, though it didn't

[95] For Pasternak falling or lying down are associated with artistic emotion. Angela Livingstone, "'Fausta chto-li, Gamleta-li': The Meaning of Faust in Pasternak's Poetry." In *The European Foundations of Russian Modernism*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991, 183.

[96] In *Doctor Zhivago*, Iurii echoes this sentiment: "Everyone is born a Faust," he says, "to embrace everything, experience everything, express everything" («Каждый родится Фаустом, чтобы всё обнять, всё испытать, всё выразить»). Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, 338; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 4, 283.

[97] According to Fleishman, Pasternak is locating himself within the poetic polemic of his time: "In this poem on poetry, written in the midst of a literary upheaval, he appeals to the very heart of

end well for the squabbler, this line also recalls Icarus—fittingly, the poetic persona is flying. By evoking this Futurist theme, Pasternak portrays the poet as possessing the same sort of ultimately harmless arrogance as a child—a move that downplays the critical elements found within the poem.

If the Futurist arrogance evoked by the image of squabbles with the sun serves to downplay the poet's exceptionalism by casting it as a feature of the profession, the theme of childhood renders it an anodyne and natural part of the developmental process. Specifically, through the theme of childhood Pasternak blurs the distinction between poet and child by attributing the perceived arrogance of the former to the child's normal worldview. Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and others after them see wishful thinking and denial of reality as a fundamental phase in the development of the child. In his 1944 essay "On Narcissism," Freud argues for the link between "primitive peoples" and the child. In the former, he says, we can recognize a kind of

> megalomania: an over-estimation of the power of their wishes and mental acts, the 'omnipotence of thoughts,' a belief in the thaumaturgic force of words, and a technique for dealing with the external world—'magic'—which appears to be a logical application of these grandiose premises. In the children of today, whose development is much more obscure to us, we expect to find an exactly analogous attitude toward the external world.[98]

This description resonates not only with Pasternak's portrayal of the child in this

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Pushkin's contribution to Russian verse—his canonization of the iamb." Pushkin is introduced into the poem by the mention of gypsies, who recall his 1824 discussed in footnote 94 above. Fleishman, "In Search of the Word: An Analysis of Pasternak's Poem 'Tak nachinaiut…',"' 82-3, 78-9.

[98] Sigmund Freud et al., *Freud's "On Narcissism: An Introduction,"* Contemporary Freud (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 5.

poem, but also with his portrayal of the poet. And as Freud notes, the narcissism of the child is not only tolerated by adults, but appreciated: "The charm of a child lies to a great extent in his narcissism, his self-contentment and inaccessibility."[99] Just as people tend to tolerate and find charming the child's arrogance and over-estimation of himself, Pasternak seems to suggest, we should find the poet's infantile strain of arrogance harmless and even charming. "Thus they begin. At two years old…" simultaneously reaffirms the poet's unique bonds with the universal human experience of childhood and deemphasizes his exceptionality. At the same time, it also helped Pasternak to articulate his critique of a world grown increasingly inimical to the fragile sensitivities of the young poet.

His frustration with that world would find more explicit articulation in the 1928 reworking of his earliest poems, such as "Having arisen from a rumbling rhombus" (*Vstav iz grokhochushchego romba,* 1913) and "Feasts" (he changed the title from *Pirshesvta* to *Piry*), which took place after his departure from the literary group LEF.[100] In these poems Pasternak sharpens not only the opposition between the world of childhood and poetry on the one hand and the world of adulthood and prose on the other, but the opposition between him and his fellow poets, as well. According to Christopher Barnes, Pasternak's revisions "often accented a new sense of post-revolutionary vulnerability" and gave an increased "sense of exposure

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[99] Ibid. 19.

[100] Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak v dvadtsatye gody*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1981, 83.

to a new and cruel age."[101]

Revealing of Pasternak's sense of isolation were his marked changes to "Having arisen from a rumbling rhombus." In the 1913 poem, the lyric voice bade his addressee:

> Don't look for me under clear skies
> In a crowd of friendly muses,
> I'll wrap myself with abandon
> In untamed northern intuition.
>
> Под ясным небом не ищите
> Меня в толпе приветных муз,
> Я севером глухих наитий
> Самозабвенно обоймусь.[102]

By contrast, in the 1928 revision, "friendly muses" are substituted for "dry colleagues" and the intuitive north is named explicitly as the setting for the poet's childhood.[103]

> Don't look for me under clear skies
> In a crowd of dry colleagues.
> I'm soaked to the bone with intuition
> And since childhood the north has been my abode.

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[101] Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 1, 410-11.

[102] Pasternak, *Bliznets v tuchakh* (Moscow: Lirika, 1914).

[103] To understand these changes, it is necessary to consider both the 1928 and 1913 versions of "Feasts" in light of Pasternak's changing relationship with his former LEF colleagues and Nikolai Aseev especially. The 1913 version had been a response to Aseev's contemporaneous poem "Tercets to a Friend" from his 1914 book *The Night Flute* (*Nochnaia fleita*), which he had dedicated to Pasternak. Pasternak had been friendly with Aseev since the early 1910s and 1920s, but Aseev's actions against a fellow writer Viacheslav Polonskii served as the impetus for Pasternak's departure from the literary group. Aseev's article had been written in a climate of increasing censorship and official interference in literature. It therfore read as what Christopher Barnes terms a "mean act of denunciation." Indeed although in 1927 Polonskii's removal from his position was only rumored, in 1928 he was finally stripped of his title as chief editor at the journal *Novy mir*. Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 1, 387.

Под ясным небом не ищите
Меня в толпе сухих коллег.
Я смок до нитки от наитий,
И север с детства мой ночлег.[104]

It is as if Pasternak wished to emphasize that his intuition is tied to childhood and sets him apart from other unimaginative members of his trade.[105]

This sense of isolation and separation is heightened in the revision of "Feasts," where the lyric voice's comparatively "dry colleagues" once again come to the fore:

I drink the bitterness of tuberose, the bitterness of autumn skies
And in them the burning stream of your betrayals.
I drink the bitterness of evenings, nights and rowdy gatherings,
Of a weeping strophe the damp bitterness I drink.

The spawn of artists' studios, we don't abide sobriety,
To dependable scraps our enmity is well known,
The restless wind of nights—of those cup-bearing toasts
That will, perhaps, never be again.

Inheritance and death—attendees of our repasts.
At quiet dawn – the treetops burn—
In the sugar bowl, anapests rummage like mice,
And Cinderella, hurrying, changes her dress.

The floors are swept, there's not a crumb on the tablecloth,
Like a child's kiss the poem gently breathes,
And Cinderella dashes—on good days in a carriage—
On lean days, on her own two feet.

Пью горечь тубероз, небес осенних горечь
И в них твоих измен горящую струю.
Пью горечь вечеров, ночей и людных сборищ,
Рыдающей строфы сырую горечь пью.

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[104] Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami: v odinnadtsati tomakh*, vol. 1, 71.

[105] In the first version the hero of the poem is the poet himself, whereas in the second it is the north, which rules over him. Gasparov and Polivanov, *"Bliznets v tuchakh" Borisa Pasternaka*, 67.

Исчадья мастерских, мы трезвости не терпим.
Надежному куску объявлена вражда.
Тревожный ветр ночей—тех здравиц виночерпьем,
Которым, может быть, не сбыться никогда.

Наследственность и смерть—застольцы наших трапез.
И тихой зарей,—верхи дерев горят—
В сухарнице, как мышь, копается анапест,
И Золушка, спеша, меняет свой наряд.

Полы подметены, на скатерти—ни крошки,
Как детский поцелуй, спокойно дышит стих,
И Золушка бежит - во дни удач на дрожках,
А сдан последний грош,— и на своих двоих.[106]

The prosaic "dependable scraps" (*kuski nadezhnye*) take the place of the "hope of childhood days" of the original, and far from being safe from the prying ears of "rumor," at these feasts "inheritance and death" get a place at the table (*Nasledstvennost' i smert'—zastol'tsy nashikh trapez,* line 9). The poet's confidence in his transformative powers is also shaken: at the end of the poem even Cinderella cannot simply count on the magic of the story to do this work on its own—she must go to the ball by any means necessary, even if on her own two feet (*I Zolushka bezhit—vo dni udach na drozhkakh,/ A sdan poslednii grosh,—i na svoikh dvoikh*, lines 15-6). Set against the enmity of death and prosaic concerns for "scraps," the image of poetry crystallizes around childhood so as to emphasize its vulnerability: the poem breathes "like a child's kiss" (*Kak detskii potselui, spokoino dyshit stikh,* line 14). As we have seen, then, the changes wrought by the Revolution served to entrench Pasternak more deeply in his identification with

[106] Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 1, 70.

childhood. They also led him to exploit its symbolic and generic possibilities to express his growing discontent.

Childhood and revolution in *Doctor Zhivago*

In 1932 Pasternak remarked to Osip Mandelstam that he "envied his freedom," an expression of his view that unofficial, amateur status would free him up from the pressures of conforming to expectations of his "dry colleagues" and official organs such as the Union of Soviet Writers. [107] He imbued the metonymous hero of his 1956 novel *Doctor Zhivago* with this very freedom, but the same qualities that endow Iurii Zhivago with a unique poetic sensitivity also doom him from the perspective of the Revolutionary social upheavals taking place around him.[108] Indeed a central element of the novel's critique of the Revolution is the Revolution's treatment of children as well as its incompatibility with—and indeed

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[107] Brown, *Mandelstam*. Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press, 1973, 129. Barnes, *Boris Pasternak,* vol. 2, 72-3. Pasternak began working on *Doctor Zhivago* in the summer of 1948, at the height of the political campaign against him that saw him ousted from the board of the Writers' Union and repeatedly denounced in print for his apoliticism. He finished it in winter of 1955. Lazar Fleishman. *Boris Pasternak: the poet and his politics*, 253, 258. In his 1957 autobiography, Pasternak called *Doctor Zhivago* his "chief and most important work." Boris Pasternak, *The Voice of Prose* (Edinburgh : Port Credit, Ontario, Can.: Polygon ; Distributed by PDMeany Publishers, 1986), 85. According to Fleishman, in it the poet "intended to tell, in the purest and most complete form, the story of his generation." Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak: the poet and his politics*, 254.

[108] According to Fleishman, Iurii is the character in the novel who comes closest to Pasternak himself. Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak: the poet and his politics*, 266. Aside from the notably complex relationship to politics and the penchant for writing poetry shared by the two, Pasternak takes a jab at the Futurists through Iurii and makes the cause of his title character's death the same health problem he himself had had in fall of 1952. Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, 190; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 4, 162. Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak: the poet and his politics*, 268. At the same time, as Igor Sukhikh notes, Pasternak conceived of his hero as a composite between himself, Aleksandr Blok, Sergei Esenin, and Vladimir Maiakovskii, and in endowing him with the profession of doctor he had in mind Anton Chekhov. Igor' Sukhikh, "Zhivago zhizn': Stikhi i stikhii." *Zvezda*, no. 4 (2001), 223.

intolerance of—the positive childlike qualities that follow some of the novel's characters into adulthood.

Throughout his adult life, Iurii Zhivago is identified time and time again not only with childhood, but with femininity and a kind of passivity reminiscent of Zhenia Liuvers.[109] It is these very qualities that characterize his poetic sensibility but lead to his demise within the novel, just as they served as a point of condemnation for critics at the time: as Lazar Fleishman writes, Iurii represented a "radical departure from the Soviet literary canon… passive, unheroic hero, anemic in the 'battle for ideals' and immersed in a private world."[110]

The novel establishes Iurii's nascent poethood in its very first scene, which echoes themes explored in "My sister—Life." As a ten-year-old child at his mother's funeral, Iurii Zhivago covers his face with his hands and bursts into sobs as a "cold downpour" (*kholodn*yi *liven'*) beats down on him.[111] The word "downpour" (*liven'*) shares a root with the word *razliv* of "My sister—Life" and appears in another poem of the collection, "The Earth's Illnesses" (*Bolezni zemli*).

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[109] Marina Tsvetaeva called Zhenia "Pasternak if he were a girl." Cited in Catherine Ciepiela, *The Same Solitude: Boris Pasternak and Marina Tsvetaeva*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006, 51.

[110] Lazar Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak: the poet and his politics*, 278-9. The scandal that *Zhivago* occasioned (first by being published abroad; then, to the embarrassment of the authorities, by leading to Pasternak's nomination for the Nobel Prize) is well known. Already facing the reality that his novel would be unpublishable, even in censored form, in the Soviet Union, in 1956 Pasternak handed a manuscript to a visiting representative of the Italian publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli believing it would serve merely as a copy for review. Although the scandal of international publication would have been mitigated somewhat had Feltrinelli waited for the novel's release—even in censored form—in the USSR, he refused to do so, correctly guessing that the novel was unpublishable. Like Pasternak's 1918 poem "Russian Revolution," *Doctor Zhivago* wasn't published in the Soviet Union until after Pasternak's death, in the late 1980s. Ibid. 278-9; 307.

[111] Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, 3; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami,* vol. 4, 6-7.

For Pasternak's tears symbolize the outflowing, and overflowing, of poetry.[112] The reciprocal sensitivity between the child and the outside world is contrasted in the chapter with the "state of torpor and insensibility" (*sostoianiia otupeniia i beschustvennostii*) that overcomes the adults at the end of the funeral.[113]

Moreover, in the novel the bond between Iurii and Lara helps bring his poetry into being, a bond that is tied closely to their figurative and literal childhoods. The description of that bond echoes Pasternak's conception of the poet's ideal relation to the natural world from his earliest poems: "They loved each other because everything around them wanted it so," the narrator says, because of "their relation to the whole picture." As a result of this relation, "They breathed only by that oneness."[114] Lara described the two of them as having been "sent as children [from heaven] to live in the same time."[115] As in "My sister—Life" and other early poems there is a professed antagonism between the worlds of childhood and adulthood, the narrator of *Doctor Zhivago* describes Iurii and Lara as "united by the abyss that separated them from the rest of the world."[116] For this

[112] In "February. Take ink and weep!," the rains of February inspire the flow of ink, unencumbered by adult reason and hesitation. This same connection between poetic creativity, intuitiveness of perception, and rain is echoed when Iurii longs "for the coming of evening and the desire to weep out his anguish in expressions that would make everyone weep" («Но еще больше томило его ожидание вечера и желание выплакать эту тоску в таком выражении, чтобы заплакал всякий»). Ibid. 521; 437.

[113] Ibid. 3; 6.

[114] Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, 593; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 4, 497-8.

[115] «А нас точно научили целоваться на небе и потом детьми послали жить в одно время, чтобы друг на друге проверить эту способность.» Ibid. 515; 432.

[116] «их объединяла пропасть, отделявшая их от остального мира.» Ibid. 469; 392.

reason he tells Lara, "It's not for nothing that you stand at the end of my life, my secret, my forbidden angel, under a sky of wars and rebellions, just as you once rose up under the peaceful sky of childhood at its beginning."[117]

So too the moments before Iurii's death echo "My sister—life," but in a minor key, suggesting that the childlike cannot sustain itself in an incomprehensible adult world. This time, sitting on a tram instead of a train and on a journey away from his beloved rather than toward her, Iurii too thinks of the timetable (*kogda poezdov raspisan'e…chitaesh' v kupe,* lines 9-10).[118] However, he can no longer recall the basic math he learned in his childhood:

> Yuri Andreevich recalled school problems on the calculation of the time and order of arrival of trains starting at different moments and moving at different speeds, and he wanted to recall the general method of solving them, but failed to do so and, without finishing, skipped from these memories to other, much more complicated reflections.[119]

This characterization of Iurii's restless thought process recalls Iurii Tynianov's description of the child's perspective in Pasternak's poetry as penetrating down to the syntactical level, which according to him results in the densely metonymic and metaphoric character of Pasternak's work:

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[117] «Ты недаром стоишь у конца моей жизни, потаенный, запретный мой ангел, под небом войн и восстаний, ты когда-то под мирным небом детства так же поднялась у её начала» Ibid. 505; 424.

[118] «Что в мае, когда поездов расписанье/Камышинской веткой читаешь в купе.» Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 1, 116.

[119] «Юрию Андреевичу вспомнились школьные задачи на исчисление скора и поряда пущенных в разные часы и идущих с разною скоростью поездов, и он хотел припомнить общий способ их решения, но у него ничего не вышло, и, не доведя их до конца, он перескочил с этих воспоминаний на другие, еще более сложные размышления.» Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, 581; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 4, 487.

> Childhood, not the childhood described in our anthologies, but childhood as a turning of vision, confounds things and verse, so that things are brought onto a level with us and verses can be felt with our very hands. Childhood justifies, and makes obligatory, images which hold together the most incongruous and most disparate things.[120]

Skipping thoughts proceed by metonymic logic, and this end is in some ways a return to Iurii's beginning.[121] Recalling Pasternak's description to poet Kaisyn Kuliev of the "elementary school text on comprehending the world from within its best and most astonishing aspect," we can interpret this ending as a return to early childhood, before a math problem so much as even entered his life.[122] As Zhenia struggles with the letter ѣ and her aversion to "pedagogy," Iurii cannot understand the seemingly pointless questions put to him by the adult world.[123] Lara's death can

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[120] Iurii Tynyanov, "Pasternak's 'Mission,'" in *Pasternak*, ed. Donald Davie and Angela Livingstone, Modern Judgements (London: Macmillan, 1969), 129. «Детство, не хрестоматийное «детство», а детство как поворот зрения, смешивает вещь и стих, и вещь становится в ряд с нами, а стих можно ощупать руками. Детство оправдывает, делает обязательными образы, вяжущие самые несоизмеримые, разные вещи.» Iurii Tynianov, "Promezhutok." In *Arkhaisty i novatory*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1985, 565.

[121] According to Roman Jacobson, metonymy constitutes one of the hallmarks of Pasternak's lyric voice, which dissolves the "I." Roman Jacobson, "Marginal Notes on the Prose of the Poet Pasternak," in *Pasternak*, ed. Donald Davie and Angela Livingstone (Nashville/London: Aurora Publishers, 1970), 141. Originally published as "Randbemergunken zur Proza des Dichters Pasternak." *Slavische Rundschau: Berichtende und kritische Zeitschrift für das geistige Leben der slavischen Völker*, 1929.

[122] Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 9. Moscow: Slovo, 2003, 549. Cited in Andrei Siniavskii, "Boris Pasternak," in *Pasternak*, ed. Donald Davie and Angela Livingstone, Modern Judgements (London: Macmillan, 1969), 205.

[123] The idea that children understand, or at least think they understand, things that adults do not recurs throughout the novel—As a boy of 11, early in the novel the character of Misha Gordon "gradually became filled with scorn for adults, who had cooked a pudding they were unable to eat. He was convinced that when he grew up, he would untangle it all." («И, делая исключение для отца и матери, Миша постепенно преисполнился презрением к взрослым, заварившим кашу, которой они не в силах расхлебать. Он был уверен, что, когда он вырастет, он всё это распутает»). Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, 15; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 4, 16.

also be read as a commentary on what becomes of children in the cruel post-Revolutionary world: after being separated from Iurii by Komarovsky, she eventually dies "in one of the countless general or women's concentration camps in the north."[124] Although in the geographical sense this is the same north that, we learn in "Having arisen from a rumbling rhombus," had been Pasternak's "abode" from childhood (*I sever s detstva noi nochleg*), Lara's fate highlights its starkly malevolent transformation. In *Doctor Zhivago* these distant wilds are hollowed out of their connection to intuition and childhood, as if to emphasize their devastation.

Iurii continues to be identified with childhood even after he grows up, and it is this quality that draws Lara to him. In a heated conversation about the revolution on the train ride to Varykino, Iurii questions a quixotic man named Samdevyatov about the inevitability of the Revolution, to which his interlocutor incredulously responds, "What, are you a little boy, or are you pretending? Did you drop from the moon or something?"[125] In response, Iurii explains his aversion to violence, saying that he is no longer "in a very revolutionary mood."[126] This passivity and commitment to seeing events on his own terms puts Iurii markedly out of step with those around him: Later in the novel, Komarovsky says to him bluntly, "But no one so clearly violates [the Communist] way of living as you do,

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[124] «в одном из неисчислимых общих или женских концлагерей севера.» Ibid. 595; 499.

[125] «Что вы, маленький или притворяетесь? С луны вы свалились, что ли?» Ibid. 311; 261.

[126] Ibid.

Yury Andreevich."[127] It is also Komarovsky who informs Iurii and Lara that they are unsuited for life in the new order, calling them "children… who don't reflect on anything."[128]

Swaggering Samdevyatov courts Lara unsuccessfully, but she is drawn instead to Iurii, whose not conventionally masculine nature appeals to her. In one scene, Iurii asks Lara if she has been romantically involved with Samdevyatov, who uses his local political influence to help her. She categorically denies it, saying that "In matters of the heart, such strutting, mustachioed male self-satisfaction is disgusting. I understand intimacy and life quite differently."[129] The "strutting, mustachioed male self-satisfaction" she speaks of describes not just Samdevyatov but Lara's first husband, Pasha Antipov, who later reappears under the name Strelnikov, or "The Executioner" (from the Russian verb "to shoot," *streliat'*).

Iurii's foil in the novel, Pasha represents not the child destined to become a poet, but an ordinary child who is swept up in revolutionary fervor and undone by it. Viewed together, Iurii and Pasha's fates serve to signal that the Revolution is unkind to both children: the one destined to become a poet, and the more ordinary child. Like the corrupting influence of the encroaching social world in

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[127] «Но никто так явно не нарушает этой манеры жить и думать, как вы, Юрий Андреевич.» Ibid. 498; 418.

[128] «Да, так, с вашего позволения, поздравляю вас, дети мои. К сожалению, однако, вы не только по моему выражению, но и на самом деле дети, ничего не ведающие, ни о чем не задумывающиеся.» Ibid.

[129] «В делах сердечных петушащееся усатое мужское самодовольство отвратительно. Я совсем по-другому понимаю близость и жизнь.» Ibid. 472; 395.

"Thus they begin. At two years old," the Revolution and what Lara calls its "dominion of the ready-made phrase" corrupt the Antipov household with a "social delusion [that] was all-enveloping, contagious."[130] Having become the infamous general Strelnikov, Pasha falls out of favor and commits suicide after spending the night with Iurii in the home that Lara had recently abandoned. He kills himself at night, as Iurii is dreaming of childhood, the gunshot blending with Iurii's dream as though to underscore the connection between Pasha's death and the unbreachable divide between the present and the long-lost world of their youth.[131] And although on a literal level it is of course Pasha who kills himself, on a figurative level he dies at the hands of Strelnikov, the man that the Revolution had transformed him into.

Both the deaths of childlike Iurii and Lara and the fates of their own children—their daughter Tanya and the book of poetry they bring into being together—occasion a critique of the Revolution in the novel. In the epilogue, the characters Misha Gordon and Nika Dudorov, whom the reader has met as children but who are now second lieutenant and major, respectively, in the Soviet army, are fighting the Germans in the summer of 1943. Dudorov notes that their linen girl resembles their deceased friend Iurii. [132] When they hear her life story, their suspicions are confirmed: orphaned after the death of her mother Lara, Tanya

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[130] «Это общественное заблуждение было всеохватывающим, прилипчивым. Все подпадало под его влияние.» Ibid. 479; 401. With these words the narrator echoes Pasternak's trope of revolutionary fervor as an illness in his long-form poem *Sublime Malady* (*Vysokaia bolezn'*) of 1923.

[131] Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, 550; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 4, 461.

[132] «У этой Тани манера улыбаться во все лицо, как была у Юрия, ты заметил?» Ibid. 602; 505.

spent a difficult childhood as one of the thousands of homeless children of the war.

Tanya's fate in turn ushers in the novel's ultimate pronouncement (via the character of Gordon) about their era. After telling Dudorov that Iurii's half-brother Evgraf, now a renowned general, will look after Tanya, Gordon adds,

> It has already been so several times in history. What was conceived as ideal and lofty became coarse and material. So Greece turned into Rome, so the Russian enlightenment turned into the Russian revolution. Take Blok's "We, the children of Russia's terrible years," and you'll see the difference in the epochs. When Blok said that, it was to be understood in a metaphorical sense, figuratively. The children were not children, but sons, offspring, the intelligentsia, and the terrors were not terrible, but providential, apocalyptic, and those are two different things. But now all that was metaphorical has become literal, and the children are children, and the terrors are terrifying—there lies the difference. [133]

Gordon's pronouncement that "all that was metaphorical has become literal" and that in the third decade after the Revolution "the children are children, and the terrors are terrifying" is especially damning against the backdrop of World War II

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[133] «Так было уже несколько раз в истории. Задуманное идеально, возвышенно,—грубело, овеществлялось. Так Греция стала Римом, так русское просвещение стало русской революцией. Возьми ты это блоковское 'Мы, дети страшных лет России', и сразу увидишь различие эпох. Когда Блок говорил это, это надо было понимать в переносном смысле, фигурально. И дети были не дети, а сыны, детища, интеллигенция, и страхи были не страшны, а провиденциальны, апокалиптичны, а это разные вещи. А теперь все переносное стало буквальным, и дети—дети, а страхи страшны, вот в чем разница.» Ibid. 612; 513. The mention of Alexander Blok, a poet influential in Pasternak's life and one who makes several appearances in *Doctor Zhivago*, refers specifically to his 1914 poem that begins "Those born in obscure times/ Do not remember their path./ We, the children of Russia's terrible years/ Are unable to forget anything." Ibid. 675. According to Olga Sedakova, Gordon is not entirely correct when he says that Blok understood his words in a metaphorical sense. Rather, Sedakova argues, Blok keenly felt himself to be a literal child of the age of revolutionary upheavals, but having died in 1921 he never had to live through what the next generation, represented here by Dudorov and Gordon, did. Ol'ga Sedakova, *Chetyre toma: stikhi, perevody, poetica, moralia*. Vol. 3. Moscow: Universitet Dmitriia Pozharskogo : Russkii fond sodeistviia obrazovaniiu, 2010, 451.

when the scene takes place. With these words, Gordon minimizes the perils of this enemy: the terrors of his homeland, he seems to say, are the real cause of his fears. Furthermore, this characterization at the end of the novel directly mirrors the description of the upheavals that followed on the heels of the Revolution: "People in the cities were as helpless as children in the face of the approaching unknown, which overturned all established habits in its way and left devastation behind it, though it was itself a child of the city and the creation of city dwellers," the narrator writes.[134] As Igor Sukhikh puts it, in *Doctor Zhivago* the "Habitual conflict between fathers and children at the turn of a new century becomes a confrontation between children and the time."[135]

Iurii and Lara's biological child Tanya thus serves as the impetus for the novel's most concise and most damning critique of the Revolution. So too it is the book of poetry that Iurii Zhivago writes down on Lara's behest and that she, after his death, arranges for publication that critiques that same Revolution from an aesthetic point of view: their deeply religious undertones and unapologetically non-political themes flew in the face of the expectations that a professional poet like Pasternak was forced to confront. Unlike Pasternak's, Iurii Zhivago's "amateur" poetry never had to make compromises with the realm of officialdom. Its very

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[134] «хотя сама была детищем города и созданием горожан.» Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, 214-5; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 4, 182.

[135] «Привычный конфликт отцов и детей на рубеже столетий превращается в столкновение детей и времени». Sukhikh, "Zhivago zhizn': Stikhi i stikhii." 223.

placement at the end and outside of the story time of the novel echoes its incompatibility with that prosaic realm.

Conclusion

Iurii Zhivago enjoys the freedom Pasternak envied, but he pays the price for it—the price of remaining, on some metric, a child. By endowing Iurii Zhivago with so many of his own characteristics but sending him down a fate so unlike his own, Pasternak revealed how actually *unlike* a child he himself really was: even as Pasternak held more and more fast to childhood as a source of poetic inspiration and refuge from the adult world of professional writers, he was invariably "growing up": ceding to the dictates of necessity, concessions he saw as "adult."[136] However, Pasternak continued to benefit from his association with holy-fool-like behavior even as he did so: in Russian tradition as in others, holy fools enjoyed "license to allude to awful truths…while enjoying protection from reprisal,"[137] and Stalin

[136] As Bykov writes, «Мандельштам же, как и Хлебников,—художник 'отвлеченной свободы', отказызающийся признать над собою диктант жизни, и это-то выключенность из контекста для Пастернака неприемлема; для него это—безответственность и детство, а покорность нуждам времени и творческой самодисциплине для него сродни вдохновенной затверженности балета.» Bykov, *Boris Pasternak*, 468.

[137] Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 2, 76. Barnes himself likens Pasternak's behavior to that of a *iurodivyi* at numerous turns in his literary biography: e.g. in relation to his conversation with Stalin (Ibid. 92), his sometimes odd public behavior (Ibid. 94), and others' extraordinary treatment of him (Ibid. 109). By the 1930s, however, the establishment's patience with what was deemed his "holy foolishness" (*iurodstvo*) had all but run out: In a letter to Kornei Chukovskii dated March 12, 1942, Pasternak recalls the writer Vladimir Stavskii's complaint several years earlier rebuking Pasternak for his refusal to sign a letter calling for the execution of Iona Yakir, Mikhail Tukhachevskii, and other military leaders for participation in the so-called "Case of Trotskyist Anti-Soviet Military Organization": "When will this tolstoyan holy foolishness end?" («Когда кончится толстовское юродство?»), Pasternak recalls Stavskii saying. Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 9, 266-7. At the Fourth Plenary Session of the Board of the Writers' Union in 1937, the writer Jack Altauzen attacked Pasternak as a "poet posing as a holy

himself had famously said of Pasternak, “leave that denizen of the heavens in peace” (*Ostav’te v pokoe etogo nebozhitelia*). [138]

It was Anna Akhmatova, however, who gifted Pasternak with his most enduring moniker. In a 1936 article published in the journal Literary Leningard (*Literaturnyi Leningrad*) called “What I am working on” (*Nad chem ia rabotaiu*), Akhmatova writes of her recent literary activity on the work of Aleksandr Pushkin and goes on to say that among contemporary poets, she values Pasternak. She then includes a stanza from a poem she had recently written and dedicated to him:

He’s blessed with the gift of a kind of eternal childhood,
With the generosity and keen vision of the stars.
And the whole world was his inheritance,
Which he shared with all of us.

Он награжден каким-то вечным детством,
Той щедростью и зоркостью светил.
И вся земля была его наследством…
А он её со всеми разделил.[139]

Anna Akhmatova’s characterization of Pasternak is “blessed with the gift of a kind of eternal childhood” was not an *ex nihilo* pronouncement. As we have seen, it was in many ways the culmination of the image that Pasternak had cultivated for himself over two-plus decades that helped sum up, indeed reinforce, his somewhat

fool.” Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 2, 140. For a discussion of this trope in *Doctor Zhivago*, see Lauren Bennett, “The Synthesis of Holy Fool and Artist in Post-Revolutionary Russian Literature.” University of Virginia, 2000.

[138] Lazar Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak v tridtsatye gody*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1984, 414.

[139] Anna Andreevna Akhmatova, “Nad chem ia rabotaiu.” *Literaturnii Leningrad*, September 29, 1936. “To Boris Pasternak” was published its entirety in the journal *Zvezda* No.3-4, four years later, in 1940.

exceptional status. Yet Akhmatova's statement was no more unambiguously positive than it was unprompted.

Akhmatova's poem was a response to Pasternak's own poem to *her* seven years earlier, in 1929 (*Anne Akhmatovoi*).[140] The belated timing of the appearance of her poem—initially just the last stanza of it—in September of 1936 to follow closely on the heels of Pasternak's panegyric poems to Stalin (*Ia ponial: vse zhivo* and *Mne po dushe stroptivyi norov*, 1936) suggests that Akhmatova was responding as much to Pasternak's most recent actions as she was to the earlier poem. Her response to Pasternak was also conditioned by the recent events in her own life: the one-year anniversary of the arrests of her only son, Lev Gumilev, and her common law husband, Nikolai Punin. Pasternak, along with other prominent writers such as Boris Pilniak and Mikhail Bulgakov, had been instrumental in successfully appealing their arrests, and Pasternak's generous behavior toward Akhmatova is echoed in her poem to him.[141]

In light of Pasternak's recent experience with Akhmatova's plight, his Stalin poems appear in part to have been a token of sincere gratitude—both Gumilev and Punin were released a month after their arrests.[142] Yet the optimism expressed in Pasternak's Stalin poems could only have seemed like naiveté to Akhmatova, who

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[140] Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak v dvadtsatye gody*, 118-9.

[141] For more on Pasternak's involvement in Akhmatova's trials, see Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak v tridtsatye gody*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1984, 275-7. As Lazar Fleishman notes, in 1936 Pasternak had come increasingly under fire by his colleagues in the Union of Soviet Writers. Ibid, 394-405.

[142] Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 2, 114.

was by the 1930s in dire financial straits. And naiveté it was, for both Gumilev and Punin were rearrested—Gumilev to spend years in the camps, and Punin to die there. In stark contrast to Akhmatova's shaky fortunes, Pasternak had by September of 1936 moved into his Peredelkino dacha. This boon was the direct result not only of his self-cultivated image as a "denizen of the heavens" (*nebozhitel',* in Stalin's words) but also of calculated compromises he, like so many, made to get by—compromises such as the Stalin poems. At the same time, he was arguably more vulnerable than ever before: as he had been in the 1920s, by the mid-1930s he had once again become a frequent target of attack in the Soviet press.[143]

On the backdrop of these events, Akhmatova's moniker seemed to strengthen the aura of protection that had surrounded Pasternak while at the same time expressing the ambiguity of Pasternak's relationship with the Leader and his dealings with the state. Pasternak's *material* blessings came, after all, not from the sky, but from Stalin. Pasternak himself likely received Akhmatova's poem in the ambiguous spirit in which it was written: In 1935 he had written to an acquaintance that Mandelstam "is an immeasurably greater artist than I. But, like Khlebnikov of the sort of abstract, unachievable perfection to which I never aspired. I was never a child—even in childhood, it seems to me. But they…anyhow,

[143] Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak v tridtsatye gody*, 370-2.

I'm probably being unfair."[144] As Pasternak's elliptic words ("But they…anyhow, I'm probably being unfair") reveal, for him being identified as a child was not an unambiguous compliment.

On another level, from the perspective of 1936, calling a poet who had written praise poems to Stalin a "child" could not but resonate with widespread slogans like "Thank you, dear Stalin, for our happy childhood," which according to Catriona Kelly reconfigured the traditional understanding of happiness as "a state of fortuitous delight descending on a person unexpectedly, by an act of God as it were," by making happiness instead something that needed to be earned, a reward for what the subordination of the self.[145] The relation between Pasternak's childlikeness and his share of this bounty is bound up in Akhmatova's very choice of word *nagrazhden*, which I translate as "blessed" for sonic reasons but which means something closer to "bestowed," shares a root with *grazhdanin*, the standard post-Revolutionary word for citizen. In Akhmatova's poem, however, Pasternak's gift is *immaterial*—it is "generosity and keen vision" (*shchedrost' i zorkost'*). The immateriality of this boon emphasizes the elusiveness of its source: if Pasternak's eternal childhood is indeed a bounty from beyond, it is all the harder to deprive him of it.

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[144] «Он художник неизмеримо больший, чем я. Но, как и Хлебников, того недостижимо отвлеченного совершенства, к которому я никогда не стремился. Я никогда не был ребенком, —и в детстве, кажется мне. А они…Впрочем, верно, я несправедлив.»Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami*, vol. 9, 15. Cited in Sergeeva-Kliatis, *Pasternak*, 234.

[145] Kelly, *Children's World*, 94.

In Pasternak's poetics, the Romantic figure of the poet-child became a citizen, *grazhdanin*, but one endowed (*nagrazhden*) with eternal childhood: in reality, a citizen in name only and a dweller of the intuitive wilderness of the north. To call Pasternak blessed with the gift of eternal child, then, was to simultaneously highlight the equivocal nature of his relation to the state and conceal the agency involved in cultivating an appearance of passivity. The true source of the gift was none other than the poet himself.

Chapter 3

From Children's Books to Ration Books
The Rise of the Soviet Child in Osip Mandelstam's Poetics

Introduction

When Vladimir Lenin died on January 21, 1924, Boris Pasternak, Osip, and Nadezhda Mandelstam stood for hours together in line at the House of the Unions (*Dom soiuzov*) near Moscow's Red Square for a glimpse of his body lying in state.[1] Mandelstam describes this experience in his brief essay "Waves Breaking at the Casket" (*Priboi u groba*) published a few days later:

> Revolution, you accustomed yourself to lines. You suffered and writhed in lines in '19 and in '20: here is your greatest line yet, here is your last line toward the night sun, toward the night casket…Dead Lenin in Moscow! How can one not feel Moscow in moments like these? Who doesn't want to see that dear face, the face of Russia itself?[2]

The gathered crowds that make up the endless lines of which Mandelstam writes are always just that—crowds, hordes of undistinguishable faces that, taken together, make up the cooling wave of collective ceremonial presence.

Standing with them but somehow apart are children: "What time is it? Two, three, four? How long must we wait? No one knows. We've lost track of time. We

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[1] Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, *Vtoraia kniga*. Paris: YMCA-Press, 1972, 232.

[2] «Революция, ты сжилась с очередями. Ты мучилась и корчилась в очередях и в 19-ом, и в 20 ом: вот самая великая твоя очередь, вот последняя твоя очередь к ночному солнцу, к ночному гробу…Мертвый Ленин в Москве! Как не почувствовать Москвы в эти минуты! Кому не хочется увидеть дорогое лицо, лицо самой России?» Osip Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 3. Moscow: Progress-Pleiada, 2011, 70. Published on the first page of the Moscow journal *Na vakhte*, January 26, 1924.

stand in a marvelous nocturnal forest of people. And with us there are thousands of children," Mandelstam writes.[3] These children, who likely don't truly understand the gravitas of the occasion, are playing: "Every so often children's laughter sounds. Children are always children—they even play leapfrog."[4] These same children move unexpectedly to the fore by the end of the essay, where they seem to supersede the adults in importance: "Lenin loved life, he loved children. And even dead he was the most alive, awash in life, cooling his throbbing brow on the tide of life," the essay concludes.[5] The children, synonymous in Mandelstam's essay with life itself, help to cool the formerly inflamed brow of Lenin—an echo of a stock motif of the leader, whose large forehead was associated with his genius.[6]

The children in "Waves Breaking at the Casket" echo a development in Mandelstam's poetry less than a year earlier, in 1923: the appearance of a new kind of child in his poetics beginning with "He who found a horseshoe" (*Nashedshii podkovu*). This child is markedly different from the one who infuses the early lyric

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[3] «Который час? Два, три, четыре? Сколько простоим? Никто не знает. Счёт времени потерян. Стоим в чудном человеческом лесу. И с нами тысячи детей.» Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 3, 70.

[4] «Нет, нет, да и прорвется детский смех. Дети—всегда дети: даже в чехарду играют.» Ibid. 71.

[5] «Ленин любил жизнь, любил детей. И мертвый — он самый живой, омытый жизнью, жизнью остудивший свой воспаленный лоб.» Ibid.

[6] «Там, в электрическом пожаре, окружённый елками, омываемый вечно-свежими волнами толпы, лежит он, перегоревший, чей лоб был воспален еще три дня назад...» Ibid. In a poem written the same year, Maiakovskii, too, made use of the trope of Lenin's considerable forehead: "They'll rig up an aura round any head:/ the very idea—/I abhor it,/ that such a halo/ poetry-bred/should hide/Lenin's real, huge,/human forehead" («Рассияют головою венчик, я тревожусь, не закрыли чтоб настоящий, / мудрый, /человечий ленинский/ огромный лоб»). Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin*. Ripon: Smokestack Books, 2017, 26-7.

personas of such poems as "A body is given me" (*Dano mne telo,* 1908) and "Notre Dame" (1912) with his voice. Less child than adult, this new child ventriloquizes the values of his age and is positioned squarely against the poet, from whom he withholds his favor at whim.

Written as the poet's faith in the positive potential of the new regime waned, the essay as a whole poses an implicit question: what's next? What will become of games, of the unpredictable, difficult-to-regulate excess energy of life now that he who so loved them has died? It is as if the author senses a change of tide ahead. Indeed to Mandelstam, Lenin's death was a nail in the coffin of the Revolution's positive potential: As he remarked to Nadezhda Mandelstam about the crowds of people coming to pay their respects, "They've come to complain to Lenin about the Bolsheviks—vain hope, useless."[7]

In what follows, it will be my argument that the figure of the child plays a significant role in the way that early poems by Mandelstam conceive of the challenge and power of the poet. The potency of this image of childhood, tinged in the Romantic tradition to which it was heir, was hollowed out in the two decades following the Revolution as the decline of the Romantic child marked the ascent of the Soviet one. Mandelstam's poetics actively reflect this change. Beginning with "He who found a horseshoe" and arising again in numerous poems of the 1920s and

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[7] «Они пришли жаловаться Ленину на большевиков,—сказал Мандельштам и прибавил,—напрасная надежно: бесполезно.» Nadezhda Mandel'shtam,*Vtoraia kniga*, 232. By the summer of 1917, Mandelstam's biographer Clarence Brown tells us, "Mandelstam had conceived an intense dislike for the Bolsheviks." Clarence Brown, *Mandelstam*. Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press, 1973, 70.

1930s, the Soviet child reflects the inimical forces of the era and even imbues the lyric voice's surroundings with its malevolent qualities. By reflecting this child and casting him as a foil to himself in his poetics, Mandelstam expresses his disenchantment with his era as well as its perceived antagonism toward him.

Indeed "Waves Breaking at the Casket" proves remarkably prescient in light of the vast changes that Soviet society underwent following the death of Lenin: it forecasts, for instance, the increasingly important role that children would come to play in the Soviet state's quest to solidify its own legitimacy. Unlike the cult of Stalin for children that would develop in subsequent years, images of Lenin with children were a relative rarity in Soviet propaganda of the early 1920s, yet this very proximity prophetically constitutes the heart of Mandelstam's essay.[8] The weeks and months following Lenin's death would see the amplification of his cult for children based on the activity of mourning him,[9] and the more expansive cult of childhood surrounding his successor, Stalin, would give rise to one of the most famous slogans of that era: "Thank you, dear Stalin, for our happy childhood!" (*Spasibo liubimumu Stalinu za nashe shchastlivoe detstvo*!) The innocent children's games of "Waves Breaking at the Casket" would take on a very different character

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[8] Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890-1991*. New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2007, 73.

[9] As Kelly writes, "After Lenin's death in January 1924, the cult started to take off in a big way…the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Komsomol produced an exemplary plan for a 'Lenin corner' to be set up in schools and Pioneer clubs: such a 'corner' was supposed to contain…extracts from Lenin's speeches, details of his final illness, memoirs of acquaintances, and information about what Lenin had done for children…Children were plunged, like the rest of Russia, into mourning for the leader: they were encouraged to brood on Lenin's demise and his legacy, to design mausoleums and monuments to commemorate him, and to compose songs in his honor." Kelly, *Children's World,* 73-4.

during the reign of Stalin: in 1932, the story of Pavlik Morozov, a boy of 13 who denounced his own father to the authorities, swept through the Soviet Union. His story, and the regime's celebration of it, exemplified in extreme form the child activism fostered by the state: children were encouraged to denounce even their parents if they failed to live up to the state's expectations.

In the early years of Soviet power, however, these patterns were not yet fully elaborated or consistent and children were, as Mandelstam says in his essay, still children: According to Catriona Kelly, "Children were at once citizens and subjects, assertive yet docile."[10] This paradoxical blend of assertiveness and docility was evident in the central organization devoted to preparing children to be productive Soviet citizens: the Vladimir Lenin All-Union Pioneer Organization, founded in 1924 under the directive of the All-Union Young Communist League (or *Komsomol*, itself founded just two years earlier). The Pioneer organization aimed to draw children into the project of constructing the new Soviet society, creating a breed of "quintessential[ly] empowered children" emboldened to advocate on their own behalf and even on occasion speak in commandeering tones to adults in the service of this utopian aim.[11] The range of possible independent initiative grew more limited toward the end of the 1920s and beginning of 1930s as Pioneer membership was expanded beyond a strict merit basis to include almost all

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., 547-8.

children and the organization's structures of regimentation and discipline also became increasingly fixed.[12]

Empowering children to take part in societal problems as actively engaged citizens risked empowering them *too* much: in reaction to an innocently provocative political poem composed by a child, the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Komsomol wrote in 1926 of an "extremely dangerous and excessive swing in the direction of creativity by children."[13] This pronouncement offers an answer to Mandelstam's implicit question in "Waves Breaking at the Casket": in the years immediately following Lenin's death, the excess energy and liveliness of children would become less welcome, finding fewer and fewer channels within the official limits of acceptable expression for the new Soviet Child.

The change in leadership necessitated by Lenin's death would bring about the codification of the state's expectations not only for children, but for adults as well: The unspoken ties between the figure of the (idealized) Soviet child and adults served to curtail the freedoms of the latter in a striking instance of what Lee Edelman has termed "reproductive futurism." According to Edelman, reproductive futurism identifies the Child with life itself and, as a result, "invariably shapes the

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[12] Ibid. 549.

[13] The occasion for this particular remark was the publication of a child's humorous political rhyme in a Pioneer newspaper. The poem read "If you want to feed a pig/ Go and buy some fodder./ The Pioneers are meant to help/ Their *komsomol'tsy* brothers." Ibid. 548.

logic within which the political itself must be thought."[14] Taking the form of what he calls a "logical Mobius strip," these politics feature such commonplace tropes as "fighting for the children," tropes that do not in fact permit another side—fighting for the children, after all, is fighting for Life. In this way, reproductive futurism acts to substitute actual freedoms for "notional" ones, making us less free now for the sake of tomorrow, for the sake of the children.[15]

The naked, and nakedly political, equation of children and life in Mandelstam's essay reveals his preternatural sensitivity to reproductive futurism. Could Lenin *not* love children? A decade later, the ubiquitous slogan "Thank you, dear Stalin, for our happy childhood!" would ventriloquize them, but it was of course aimed at adults: perpetuating the myth of Soviet children's supreme wellbeing, it also served to model the state's expectation that its adult citizens be as passive and docile as children.[16]

Interpolated into but not coextensive with the network of symbols that constitutes the idealized Child, real, flesh-and-blood children become the unintended beneficiaries of reproductive futurist politics. As Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley note, the regulatory industry that springs up around the idealized

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[14] Lee Edelman, *No Future : Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Series Q. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004, 2.

[15] Ibid., 11.

[16] "From the mid-1930s onwards, attitudes to children became much more consistent. All commitment to children's autonomy was abandoned: the model child was now without question one who was obedient, and grateful to adults for their guidance....Thus children became models for adult behavior in their utter devotion to the Soviet dictator." Kelly, *Children's World,* 93-4.

figure of the Child paradoxically opens up a space of greater freedom for real, actual children: "Childhood itself is afforded a modicum of queerness when people worry more about how the child turns out than about how the child exists as child."[17] There is something decidedly queer about the children's games in "Waves Breaking at the Casket"—not that the children are playing (as Mandelstam writes, "children are always children"), but that the author emphasizes the proximity of their games—the product of their vital force—with death.

Mandelstam blurs the distinction between these (real) children and the idealized Child primarily by way of their games: standing for the children's "liveliness," the energy of these games is as boundless as that of a wave breaking on the shore of Lenin's burning brow. And if Lenin loved children, how could he not love their games, too? Playing in the space between agency and passivity, the children of Mandelstam's essay are both subsumed into reproductive futurist politics and unconcerned by them. Mandelstam's poetics contain a reaction to the contradiction at the heart of Soviet reproductive futurist politics: in seeking at all costs to mold its citizenry around the idealized Child, the state increasingly betrayed the fact that its love of the idealized Child outpaced its love of living children—both literal children and adult citizens, the figurative children of the state.

[17] Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, xiv.

François Villon: childlike proto-Acmeist

As a literary movement, Acmeism, which Mandelstam helped to found in the second decade of the 20th century along with poets Nikolai Gumilev, Sergei Gorodetskii, and Anna Akhmatova, was a reaction first and foremost to the Symbolists who came before it. As Omry Ronen has written, by superimposing metonymy and metaphor, Acmeism adopted a hybrid rhetorical approach that combined elements of both Realism and Romanticism, to the latter of which Symbolism was an heir. [18] One of the defining qualities of Mandelstam's poetics is his extremely context-dependent use of repetition, which crystalizes the novel stylistic and semantic function of literary devices in his poetry.[19] As Ronen—citing Boris Eikhenbaum—notes, this lexical repetition is also characteristic of children's speech, which frees the child from a practical relation to the word.[20] This freedom finds itself reflected in one of the other distinguishing features of Acmeist poetics and Mandelstam's poetics specifically: the liberal blend of historical layers so prominent therein.[21] Thus children's relationship to words has consequences for Acmeist aesthetics and for Mandelstam's aesthetics specifically.

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[18] «По классификации, предложенной Р. О. Якобсоном, реализм основан на метонимии, в которой понятия заменяют друг друга по сходству (часть за целое или наоборот), а символизм, как и другие стили романтического типа, — на метафоре, в которой сдвиг происходит по сходству (подобное замещается подобным). Акмеизм культивировал гибридный риторический прием: смежность накладывается на сходство, "купец похож на свой товар", как писал Мандельштам.» Omri Ronen, "Akmeizm." *Zvezda*, no. 7 (2008), 219.

[19] Omri Ronen, *Poetika Osipa Mandel'shtama*. Filologicheskaia biblioteka ; kn. 1. Saint Petersburg: Giperion, 2002, 19.

[20] Ibid., 93.

[21] Ronen, "Akmeizm," 221.

As a trope too, Mandelstam preserved childhood in its more or less intact Romantic form: the pre-Acmeistic poem "Only to read children's books" is set away from society, in a garden, and expresses the lyric persona's desire to return to childhood and "dispel all that is big" (*Vse bol'shoe daleko razveiat'*). Something of the child also remained in Acmeism's very *rejection* of the Romantic impulse toward hyperbole invariably followed by disenchantment: by contrast, Ronan has noted, Acmeism begins with a feeling of one's own smallness.[22] As I will show, this feeling of smallness finds expression in Mandelstam's poetry through the figure and intonation of a child. Indeed in the Acmeist conception, it is precisely on the basis of that very feeling of smallness that grandeur is built. Yet there is an unmistakably Romantic strain of longing for hyperbolic grandeur in Mandelstam's characterization of the medieval poet François Villon, in an essay about whom (*Fransua Villon*, 1910) he begins to explore the ideas that would find clearer articulation in his Acmeist manifesto, "The Morning of Acmeism" (*Utro akmeizma,* 1912). Fashioned as a model for Mandelstam that he would return to almost three decades later, near the end of his life, to express his hopes for his own poetic legacy, the childlike Villon of the 1910 essay willingly occupies a place at the margins of society. It is this marginal position, in turn, that allows him to speak over the heads of his contemporaries to posterity.

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[22] «Акмеизм не штурмовал и не теснил, а преодолевал "снятием". Для течений романтического типа типична первоначальная гиперболизация образа поэта и поэзии, приводившая в конечном счете к разочарованию и так называемой "романтической иронии". У акмеистов, наоборот, в начале преобладает сознание собственной малости.» Omri Ronen, "Akmeizm," 222.

In the essay, the proto-Acmeist Villon is doubly associated with childhood, first owing to his medievality and secondly, to his law-breaking university days: "Medieval people," Mandelstam writes, "loved to consider themselves children of the city, of the church, of the university. But the 'children of the university' were exceptionally inclined to mischief."[23] On this metric, Villon was indeed a child of the university, for it was during his time at the Sorbonne in Paris that his troubles with the law began. Borrowing Villon's own words, Mandelstam calls him a "wily boy," *lukavyi mal'chishka* ("bad child," or *mauvaiz enffant* in Old French).

If Villon's mischief got him into trouble, his passivity was in part what got him out. According to Mandelstam, he had the passivity necessary to survive an era in which "Poetry and life…were two independent, hostile dimensions."[24] After describing the many twists and turns that kept the outlaw Villon always one step ahead of those who sought to punish him, Mandelstam writes, "The passivity of his fate is remarkable."[25] Villon's marginal existence and his defiance of established pieties occasioned his most enduring work, *Le Testament*, which irreverently parodies the feudal jurisdiction to which Villon was subject. In it, Villon bequeaths

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[23] Osip Mandelstam, "François Villon," trans. Sidney Monas, *New Literary History* 6, no. 3, History and Criticism: II (Spring 1975), 634-5. «Средневековые люди любили считать себя детьми города, церкви, университета… Но «дети университета» исключительно вошли во вкус шалостей.» Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 2, 15.

[24] Mandel'shtam, "François Villon," 633. «Поэзия и жизнь в XV веке — два самостоятельных, враждебных измерения.» Ibid. 14.

[25] «Пассивность его судьбы замечательна» Mandelstam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 2, 16. Implicated during his lifetime in both murder and robbery, Villon was banished from Paris and his punishment later commuted by Charles VII. Mandelstam, "François Villon," 635.

absolutely nothing material, instead mocking figures of authority that mistreated him (e.g. Thibaud d'Aussigny) and asserting his own idiosyncratic idea of justice (*Je suis pecheur, je le sçay bien/ Pourtant ne vault pas Dieu ma mort*).[26]

Villon's passivity is manifested in his attitude toward the medieval world in which he lives. Mandelstam describes Villon as having

> considered himself part of the world-building, as necessary and as constrained as any stone in the gothic structure, bearing with dignity the pressure of his neighbors and entering the inevitable stake into the general play of forces.[27]

In "bearing with dignity the pressure of his neighbors" and "entering the inevitable stake into the general play of forces," the description of Villon prefigures the language in Mandelstam's Acmeist manifesto. In "The Morning of Acmeism," he writes that "Acmeism is for those who, seized with the spirit of building, do not cravenly refuse to bear its heavy weight, but joyously accept it, in order to awaken and use the forces of architecture sleeping in it."[28] In light of the later characterization of Acmeism, we can see how Mandelstam fashions Villon into a sort of proto-Acmeist, a medieval person who intuitively grasped the kinship of

[26] François Villon, *Poésies complètes*. Lettres gothiques. Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1991, 99.

[27] Mandelstam, "François Villon," 638. «Средневековый человек считал себя в мировом здании столь же необходимым и связанным, как любой камень в готической постройке, с достоинством выносящий давление соседей и входящий неизбежной ставкой в общую игру сил.» Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 2, 21.

[28] «Акмеизм — для тех, кто, обуянный духом строительства, не отказывается малодушно от своей тяжести, а радостно принимает ее, чтобы разбудить и использовать архитектурно спящие в ней силы.» Osip Mandelstam, "Acmeist Manifesto." Translated by Clarence Brown, *The Russian Review* 24, no. 1 (January 1965), 48; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 2, 23.

flesh, word, and stone so fundamental to the Acmeist mission.[29] For Mandelstam, Villon's childlike mischievousness plays a key role in this understanding.

This kinship is likewise at the heart of Mandelstam's 1912 poem "Notre Dame," which Peter Steiner has referred to as a manifesto in verse:[30]

Where a Roman judge judged a foreign people
Stands a basilica—and, joyful and the first,
Like Adam once did, extending out its nerves,
The four-point airy vault plays with its muscles.

But the furtive plan betrays itself on the outside:
The strength of the reinforcing arcs took care here
So that the weighty mass would not crush the walls,
And the battering ram of the daring arch sits dormant.

Elemental labyrinth, impenetrable forest,
Thinking abyss of the Gothic soul,
Egyptian might and Christian humility,
By the reed an oak, and everywhere the plumb-line king.

But the more carefully, o stronghold Notre Dame,
I studied your monstrous ribs,
The more often thought I: from this unkind heaviness
I, too, will one day create beauty.

Где римский судия судил чужой народ,
Стоит базилика, и — радостный и первый,
Как некогда Адам, распластывая нервы,
Играет мышцами крестовый легкий свод.

Но выдает себя снаружи тайный план:
Здесь позаботилась подпружных арок сила

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[29] Villon's "stoniness" is echoed in the title of Mandelstam's first collection of poems, *Stone* (*Kamen'*, 1913).

[30] Peter Steiner, "Poem as Manifesto: Mandel'stam's 'Notre Dame.'" *Russian Literature* 5, no. 3 (1977), 240. For more on the relationship between "Notre Dame" and Acmeism, see M. L. Gasparov, "Poet i obshchestvo: dve gotiki i dva Egipta v poezii O. Mandel'shtama." Edited by O. Lekmanov, P. M. Nerler, M. Sokolova, and I.L. Freidin, *Sokhrani moiu rech'*, 2000.

Чтоб масса грузная стены не сокрушила,
И свода дерзкого бездействует таран.

Стихийный лабиринт, непостижимый лес,
Души готической рассудочная пропасть,
Египетская мощь и христианства робость,
С тростинкой рядом — дуб, и всюду царь — отвес.

Но чем внимательней, твердыня Notre Dame,
Я изучал твои чудовищные ребра,
Тем чаще думал я: из тяжести недоброй
И я когда-нибудь прекрасное создам.[31]

Numerous critics have detected something childlike in this poem's lyric persona.[32] I would add that the cathedral itself resembles his childlike exemplar of proto-Acmeism, Villon.[33] Held upright through static tension, it combines passivity and agency: Although the "daring vault" (*derzskii svod*) is "dormant" (*bezdeistvuet*, literally "non-acting"), it is in no way passive—transformed through metaphor into a "battering ram," the arches act to counter the "weighty mass" (*massa gruznaia*) of

[31] Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 1, 62.

[32] Clare Cavanagh, "Rereading the Poet's Ending: Mandelstam, Chaplin, and Stalin." *PMLA, Publications of the Modern Language Association* 109, no. 1 (1994), 79-80. Clarence Brown detects a note of "arrogance" in this poem. Brown, *Mandelstam*, 171. There is indeed something childlike about the sentiment expressed in the final quatrain: a desire to imitate, a sense of deferral to a future time (even as, in uttering these words, the poetic persona has already created beauty of his own), a desire to have one's turn. In fact the poet-child appears to be competing with God himself, gazing at the cathedral's "ribs" (both in the anatomical and an architectural sense) and wanting to create something as grand of his own. An unpublished poem sent by Mandelstam to his mentor, the older symbolist Viacheslav Ivanov, strengthens the impression that what is at stake in the last stanza of "Notre Dame" is no less than a competition with God himself: the poem included the line "I am the creator of my own worlds" («Я—создатель миров моих»). Ibid., 39.

[33] Nikolai Gumilev would declare the affinity between Villon and Acmeism explicitly in his 1913 essay "Acmeism and the Legacy of Symbolism" («Наследие символизма и акмеизм»): «В кругах, близких к акмеизму, чаще всего произносятся имена Шекспира, Рабле, Виллона и Теофиля Готье.» Nikolai Gumilev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, vol. 7 (Moscow: Voskresen'e, 2006), 149-50. According to Clarence Brown, "Mandelstam had made Villon a patron saint of Acmeism before Gumilev conferred the title upon him officially...in his manifesto." Brown, *Mandelstam*, 185.

the vault, opposing it as though at war (i.e. the metaphor of the battering ram). The ribbed vault is, moreover, "daring," suggesting a kinship between it and the lyric persona: according to Clare Cavanagh, the poem's ending is reminiscent of "the challenge of a defiant child addressing his towering parent: 'I too will create beauty someday.'"[34] The vague temporality of the poem also invites us to image Mandelstam's hero, François Villon, looking up at the basilica of his native city and thinking exactly the same thing. The "play of forces" (*igra sil*) of "François Villon" echoes the "playing muscles" (*igraet myshtsami*) of "Notre Dame" and the leapfrog game of children in "Waves Breaking at the Casket": in all three, "play" is subsumed by the gravitas of the context but also constitutes an integral part of it.

When Mandelstam wrote "François Villon" in 1910, "poetry and life" had not yet become "two independent, hostile dimensions" in a true sense.[35] However, by the time he returned to Villon in his 1937 poem "So that, friend of wind and raindrops" (*Chtob, priiatel' i vetra i kapel'*), they would be. In this poem, one of Mandelstam's last, Villon would once again become the focus of Mandelstam's meditation on the marginal and childlike poet's ability to outwit and outlast his oppressor. [36]

So that, friend of wind and raindrops,
Sandstone would preserve them inside,

[34] Cavanagh, "Rereading the Poet's Ending," 79-80.

[35] «Поэзия и жизнь в XV веке — два самостоятельных, враждебных измерения.» Mandelstam, "François Villon," 633; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 2, 14.

[36] As Mikhail Gasparov notes, Mandelstam's image of Villon is less historical than mythological. Gasparov, "Poet i obshchestvo: dve gotiki i dva Egipta v poezii O. Mandel'shtama," 29.

Pharaohs scratched out a herd of herons,
And bottles in bottles.

The governmental shame of the Egyptians
Adorned itself in the choicest dog pelts,
Endowed the dead with all sorts of trifles,
And sticks out like a knickknack pyramid.

How much better my beloved blood brother,
You soothingly sinful songster, —
We can still hear the gnashing of your teeth,
Plaintiff of carefree justice.

Unwinding a bundle of feeble possessions
Into two testaments
And, chirring, grants in farewell
A world as deep as a skull.

He lived alongside the Gothic, playing pranks,
And spat on its spidery laws,
A shameless schoolboy, an avenging angel,
The incomparable Villon François.

He's the brigand of heaven's clergy,
And to sit by his side's no disgrace –
And before the world's final ending
Skylarks will be ringing...[37]

Чтоб, приятель и ветра и капель,
Сохранил их песчаник внутри,
Нацарапали множество цапель
И бутылок в бутылках цари.

Украшался отборной собачиной
Египтян государственный стыд,
Мертвецов наделял всякой всячиной
И торчит пустячком пирамид.

То ли дело любимец мой кровный,

[37] Translation of last two stanzas taken from Cavanagh, "Rereading the Poet's Ending: Mandelstam, Chaplin, and Stalin," 71. I have modified the word "to" for "of" in the line "He's the brigand of heaven's clergy."

Утешительно-грешный певец,
Еще слышен твой скрежет зубовный,
Беззаботного права истец.

Размотавший на два завещанья
Слабовольных имуществ клубок
И в прощанье отдав, в верещанье,
Мир, который как череп глубок, —

Рядом с готикой жил озоруючи
И плевал на паучьи права
Наглый школьник и ангел ворующий,
Несравненный Виллон Франсуа.

Он разбойник небесного клира,
Рядом с ним не зазорно сидеть –
И пред самой кончиною мира
Будут жаворонки звенеть...[38]

In this poem Mandelstam continues the theme from his 1910 essay of Villon as childlike and mischievous, but the defiant tone of the poem as a whole transforms Villon's former passivity into agency: he is no longer a defendant as in actual historical fact but, rather the "plaintiff" (*istets*), presumably attune to the "shame" of the state and bringing suit against it in his Testament.[39] In contrast to the grandeur of the Egyptians that ultimately amounts to "trifles" and "knickknacks" (*vsiakaia vsiachina; pustiachok*, lines 7-8), however, the "shameless schoolboy" (*naglyi shkol'nik*) imparts "A world as deep as a skull" as a parting gesture,

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[38] Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 1, 237-8.

[39] According to Fedor Uspenskii, the phrase "governmental shame" is likely a play on "governmental system" (*gosudarstvennyi stroi*). Nadezhda Mandelstam reports that another variation of the poem had used the more standard phrase. Fedor Uspenskii, *Raboty o iazyke i poetike Osipa Mandel'shtama : "sopodchinennost' poryva i teksta."* Moscow: IaSK, 2014, 84.

trafficking in depth rather than height.[40] Though seemingly far less durable than the "friend of wind and raindrops," the pyramid, Villon's "bundle of feeble possessions" (*slabovol'nykh imushchestv klubok*, line 14)—his testament in verse—lasts just as long or longer (*Eshche slyshen tvoi skrezhet zubovnyi,/ Bezzabotnogo prava istets,* lines 11-12).

As Sergei Stratanovskii and Irina Surat note, it may be overreaching to identify Villon with Mandelstam wholesale—instead, he serves as a model for how to outlast one's oppressor. [41] As Clare Cavanagh writes, "the late Villon takes on the enemy state by combating its inhuman, monumental way of death with his ferocious, cheeky form of immortality."[42] That enemy state is equally Mandelstam's own: Mandelstam's description of Egypt could easily be applied to the USSR, and the pyramids described evoke the shape of Lenin's mausoleum.[43] In Mandelstam's vision, Villon gets, against all odds, the better of forces much stronger than him, the arsenal of this boyish poet consisting solely of words, spit (*pleval na pauch'i prava*), and pranks (he is described as having lived *ozoruiuchi*, literally "naughtily," bringing to mind the phrase "naughty child," *ozoruiushchii rebenok*). From the very first, with the help of Villon Mandelstam articulates the stakes of the mission

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[40] A reference to Golgotha (which means "place of the skull" in Aramaic), where Adam's skull is said to be buried. Uspenskii, *Raboty o iazyke i poetike Osipa Mandel'shtama,* 95.

[41] Sergei Stratanovskii, "Mal'chishka-okean: o stikhotvorenii Mandel'shtama 'Reims-Laon.'" *Zvezda*, no. 12 (2007), 185 and Irina Surat, "Prevrashcheniia imeni." *Novij mir,* no. 9 (2004), 160.

[42] Cavanagh, "Rereading the Poet's Ending," 74.

[43] Uspenskii, *Raboty o iazyke i poetike Osipa Mandel'shtama,* 86-8.

of Acmeism not so much as the perennial poetic problem of *lasting* (e.g. creating a monument, in Horace's words, more durable than bronze) as of *outlasting*. It is his childlike qualities that grant him access to this "ferocious, cheeky form of immortality."[44]

The child's body in Mandelstam's pre-Revolutionary writings

Scholars agree that the human body was central to the Acmeist response to Symbolism. As Omri Ronen has noted,

> For the Acmeists, transubstantiation should occur not *through* art, but *in* art as a part of life, and when in his poem 'Notre Dame' Mandelstam promised: 'from this unkind heaviness/I, too, will one day create beauty,' he was using the idea from that very same article of Soloviev's that architecture is the expression of the victory of ideal forms 'over the fundamental anti-ideal quality of matter—heaviness,' but for Acmeists these forms were the forms of the human body, of Adam.[45]

Less commonly explored is the specifically *childlike* quality of the poet's sense of his own body as he strives to overcome the heaviness of matter. In a nexus of early poems about poetic creation, Mandelstam expresses his feelings about what it means to be a poet with recourse to the human body: Specifically, to the *child's* body, which captures the blend of confidence and anxiety with regard to his poetic

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[44] Cavanagh, "Rereading the Poet's Ending," 74.

[45] «Пресуществление для акмеистов должно было быть исполнено не "искусством", а "в искусстве" как части жизни, и Мандельштам, когда в стихотворении "Notre Dame" обещал: "Из тяжести недоброй / И я когда-нибудь прекрасное создам", воспользовался мыслью из той же статьи Соловьева, что архитектура выражает победу идеальных форм "над основным анти-идеальным свойством вещества — тяжестью", но формы эти для акмеиста — формы человеческого тела, Адама.» Ronen, "Akmeizm," 223.

mission. We see this both in his 1909 poem “A body is given me” (*Dano mne telo*) as well as in the 1916 poem “On a peasant sledge lined with straw” (*Na rozval’niakh, ulozhennykh solomoi*).

A body is given me—what shall I do with it
So singular and so my own?

For the quiet happiness of breathing and living
To whom, pray tell, shall I give thanks?

I’m a gardener and a flower I am, too,
In the dungeon of the world I am not alone.

On the glass of eternity my breath,
My warmth has already settled.

A pattern is imprinted on it,
Unrecognizable in recent times.

Let the murk of a moment wash away—
Let the dear pattern not be erased.[46]

Дано мне тело—что мне делать с ним
Таким единым и таким моим?

За радость тихую дышать и жить
Кого, скажите, мне благодарить?

Я и садовник, я же и цветок,
В темнице мира я не одинок.

На стекла вечности уже легло
Мое дыхание, мое тепло.

Запечатлеется на нем узор,
Неузнаваемый с недавних пор.

Пускай мгновения стекает муть —
Узора милого не зачеркнуть.[47]

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[46] Translation adapted from Gregory Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colors: Osip Mandelstam and His Mythologies of Self-Presentation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, 35.

Gregory Freidin has identified something childlike in "A body is given me," noting the "touching" and "childish innocence" of the poem and its sometimes "wobbly syntax."[48] From the rhyming iambic couplets to the simplicity of the phrasing, this poem gives an undeniably naïve first impression. The central drama of "A body is given me" is also one of the central dramas of childhood: it is as if the lyric persona is discovering his own body and asking, subsequently, where it comes from and whether it is truly his own.[49] The young lyric voice is certain that it is: "I am a gardener and a flower I am, too" (*Ia i sadovnik, ia zhe i tsvetok*).

The horticultural metaphor recalls not only the favorite Romantic trope of childrearing as cultivation, but also the famous last line of Voltaire's *Candide* of 1759.[50] The subtitle of Voltaire's novel ("Optimism") points to its dialectic with Leibniz's idea that we live in the "best of possible worlds" (*le meilleur des mondes possible*), urging instead a world-weary pragmatism that is anything but childlike. The intertextuality with Voltaire thus reveals the very *adult* question at the heart of the deceptively naïve pronouncement "I am a gardener and a flower I am, too."

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[47] Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 1, 46.

[48] Rendered in this translation as "I'm a gardener and a flower I am, too." Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colors*, 35-6.

[49] As Sergei Stratanovskii has noted, this early poem is also directly tied to Mandelstam's two childhood illnesses, asthma and angina. Stratanovskii, "Tvorchestvo i bolezn': O rannem Mandel'shtame." *Zvezda*, no. 2 (2004), 210.

[50] Gardening was popularized by Rousseau as a favorite metaphor for childhood and childrearing. Linda Pollock, "Foreward." In *Picturing Children: Constructions of Childhood between Rousseau and Freud*, edited by Marilyn Brown, xv – xix. Aldershot, Hants, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002, xvi.

In *Candide*, after his plethora of misadventures and trials, the once-naïve titular character resolves that one must not accept one's lot and must instead strive to improve it. The novella famously concludes that "We must cultivate our garden" (*Il faut cultiver notre jardin*). Mandelstam's appropriation places the emphasis elsewhere: He is *both* the gardener and the flower—in other words, he combines the passivity of the cultivated with the agency of the cultivator, recalling the admixture that characterizes the children of "Waves Breaking at the Casket" and the childlike François Villon. It is this poet-child chimera that aims for immortality: he wills that the "dear pattern" (*uzor milyi*) of his words shall not be erased (*ne zacherknut'*).[51]

Yet anxiety is at the core of "A body is given me": in order to declare "I am a gardener and a flower I am, too," the poet must ask whom he is to thank "For the quiet happiness of breathing and living" (*Za radost' tikhuiu dyshat' i zhit'/ Kogo, skazhite, mne blagodarit'?*). Although on one level this question is a rhetorical one—the answer is likely *no one*—it gives voice to a rightful apprehension. Viewed in light of the oppressive decades to come, this question no longer seems so rhetorical. By asking the question, the young lyric voice suggests a tenuous undercurrent in his self-assurance: since poetic creation is tied with his breath ("On the glass of eternity my breath, my warmth has already settled"), the stakes of asking who is to thank for the "quiet happiness of breathing" are clear.

[51] According to Sergei Stratanovskii, the oxymoronic "glass of eternity" (*steklo vechnosti*) complicates this assurance. Stratanovskii, "Tvorchestvo i bolezn': O rannem Mandel'shtame," 211.

But it is the child's very uncertainty (and even lack of awareness) of his own power that paradoxically fuels his success: Gregory Freidin detects in this poem an intertext with Hans Christian Andersen's 1844 story *The Snow Queen,* in which a little boy named Kay first sees the Snow Queen, his eventual captor, in a setting similar to the one described in this poem: through a peephole that has been thawed on a frozen pane of glass. The resonance of this story with Mandelstam's poem is indeed striking, for among other things, once captive (for Mandelstam, in "the dungeon of the world") Kay must spell out the word "eternity" in ice in order to be set free ("Let the dear pattern not be erased," *uzora milogo ne zacherknut'*).[52]

This happens with the help of his little friend, Gerda. Throughout the story, neither Kay nor Gerda are aware of the power they have. Andersen voices this through the kindly old Finn woman, whose reindeer wants to help Gerda:

> No power that I could give could be as great as that which she already has. Don't you see how men and beasts are compelled to serve her, and how far she has come in the wide world since she started out on her naked feet? We mustn't tell her about this power.[53]

Eventually, Gerda saves Kay with her kiss: they fall down in blissful embrace and their bodies spell out the magic word, thus breaking the Snow Queen's hold over Kay. In Andersen's story, the innocence of the children—their ignorance concerning their own powers—is integral to their strength and their ability to live, by means of a word spelled in ice, forever. Gerda is innocent of the possibility that

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[52] Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colors*, 36.

[53] H. C. (Hans Christian) Andersen, *The Complete Stories*. London: British Library, 2005, 234.

good may not prevail over evil and she may not succeed in her quest, and it is this innocence that enables her to set her friend free.[54] Mandelstam's medium is even more ephemeral than ice: he stakes his bets for eternity on breath resting on a pane of glass. By channeling the naïve voice of a child reminiscent of Andersen's story, the poem suggests that he will succeed.

In the 1916 poem "On a peasant sledge lined with straw," Mandelstam once again has recourse to the image of the captive child in order to express some of the key anxieties concerning his mission as a poet. This time, however, the tone and conclusion are much less optimistic.

On a peasant sledge lined with straw
Barely covered with fateful sackcloth,
From the Sparrow Hills to the familiar little church
We were riding across enormous Moscow.

And in Uglich, children are playing *babki*,
And it smells of bread left in the oven.
They are carting me through the streets without a hat,
And in a chapel three candles flicker.

It wasn't three candles burning, but three meetings—
One of them blessed by God himself,
A fourth there shall not be, and Rome is far away,—
And never did he love Rome.

The sledge was diving into black potholes,
And people were returning from their revelries.
Thin muzhiks and angry women

[54] Hans-Heino Ewers argues that Andersen's fairy tale represents intellectual rather than sexual awakening, and both Kay and Gerda remain children. This rejection of sexual knowledge is characteristic of the Biedermeier tendency in literature, a development of Romanticism with which Andersen was often (sometimes condescendingly) associated. Hans-Heino Ewers, "Male Adolescence in German Fairy-Tale Novellas of the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and 'Biedermeier.'" *Marvels & Tales* 17, no. 1 (2003), 79.

Shifted from foot to foot by the gates.

The wet yonder turned black with flocks of birds,
And the tied hands have swollen.
They are carting the tsarevich, the body is growing terribly numb,
And the rust-colored straw has been set on fire.[55]

На розвальнях, уложенных соломой,
Едва прикрытые рогожей роковой,
От Воробьевых гор до церковки знакомой
Мы ехали огромною Москвой.

А в Угличе играют дети в бабки
И пахнет хлеб, оставленный в печи.
По улицам меня везут без шапки,
И теплятся в часовне три свечи.

Не три свечи горели, а три встречи —
Одну из них сам Бог благословил,
Четвертой не бывать, а Рим далече —
И никогда он Рима не любил.

Ныряли сани в черные ухабы,
И возвращался с гульбища народ.
Худые мужики и злые бабы
Переминались у ворот.

Сырая даль от птичьих стай чернела,
И связанные руки затекли;
Царевича везут, немеет страшно тело —
И рыжую солому подожгли.[56]

Written as part of a poetic gift exchange with fellow poet Marina Tsvetaeva, "On a peasant sledge lined with straw" can be read, on one level, as a love poem, the impending death sentence serving as an admission that their love affair is not

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[55] Translation from Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colors*, 107. I have modified the word "dice" for *babki* in the second stanza and of the last line of the fourth stanza, to which Freidin adds what is not in the original and has the men and women "nibbling on sunflower seed by the gates."

[56] Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 1, 91-2.

bound to last.[57] The present tense of the first stanza invites us to imagine the lyric voice and his beloved riding through Moscow, taking in the sights from the Sparrow Hills to the Kremlin from the comfort of their horse-drawn sledge.[58]

However, with their deep dive into history, the subsequent stanzas ask a deeper question than when exactly the amorous sleigh ride (i.e., the love affair between two young poets) will end. As Gregory Freidin has argued, the poem poses a question about the nature of poetic charisma: through a layering of historical references, it expresses "the complex polyvalent motif of uncertainty about the nature of one's mission…for the poet Mandelstam, the degree to which the 'charisma' of his vocation was genuine."[59] The implicit questions of the poem, then, can be articulated something like this: What distinguishes a real poet from an imposter? And can the poet himself really know which one he is?[60]

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[57] M. L. Gasparov, "Osip Mandel'shtam: tri ego poetiki." In *O russkoi poezii: Analizy, interpretatsii, kharakteristiki*, 193–259. Saint Petersburg: Azbuka, 2001, 217. For more on the Marina Tsvetaeva/Mandelstam exchange see "Prolepsis in Tristia: 1915-1917" in Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colors*, 99-123.

[58] O. Lekmanov, "Mandel'shtam. 'Na rozval'niakh, ulozhennykh solomoi…,'" Arzamas, accessed January 25, 2018, http://arzamas.academy/courses/31/2.

[59] Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colors*, 111.

[60] Ibid. Mandelstam's identification with the captive prince anticipates his friend Nikolai Khardzhiev's description of him at a reading of his poetry in November of 1932. Khardzhiev wrote of Mandelstam that "He is a poet of genius, of valor, a heroic man. A gray-bearded patriarch, Mandelstam presided as shaman for two and a half hours." In the audience was Boris Pasternak, who purportedly took fright at Mandelstam's unabashed display of freedom. Ibid., 7. When questioned harshly by fellow poets in the audience attempting to 'unmask' Mandelstam politically, Khardzhiev writes, "He answered them with the haughtiness of a captive emperor—or captive poet." Letter to Boris Eikhenbaum, cited in Brown, *Mandelstam*, 129. Khardzhiev's remark is, of course, first and foremost a comment on the poet's charisma—though himself likened to a captive, it was in fact Mandelstam who held *his audience* captive.

These interrelated questions are first introduced in the second stanza of the poem, where we learn that "in Uglich, children are playing *babki*" (*A v Ugliche igraiut deti v babki*). This line is a reference to Tsarevich Dmitrii, the youngest son of Ivan the Terrible. Imprisoned at Uglich in 1584, after his father's death, by the regent Boris Godunov, Tsarevich Dmitrii was probably killed there by Godunov's operatives a short time later.[61] However, the regent's deputies reported that the child was not killed: rather, they claimed, he had died after falling on a knife during a game closely resembling the game of *babki*.[62] Although Freidin notes other possible historical references at work in the poem, along with Lidia Ginzburg I will focus on the main two: the young Tsarevich Dmitrii and an older man who later claimed to be him, so-called False Dmitrii (*Lzhedmitrii*), who reigned for 11 months before being killed by a mob in 1606. [63] As Ginzburg notes, False Dmitrii's body was later burned, and like the straw in the final line of the poem, his hair is said to have been red.[64]

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[61] Lidiia Ginzburg, "Poetika Osipa Mandel'shtama." *Izvestiia Akademii nauk SSSR: Seriia literatury i iazyka* 31, no. 4 (1972), 322.

[62] Ibid.

[63] The tsarevich may also be Tsarevich Aleksei, the son of Peter the Great who was condemned to death for conspiring against his father but died under torture in 1718 before the sentence could be carried out. The image of being led bound on a sledge recalls the imprisonment of the late 17th-century Old Believer Feodosia Morozova, immortalized in the Russian imagination in Vasilii Surikov's painting. Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colors*, 109. No fewer than *three* Dmitriis came forward claiming to be Tsarevich Dmitrii. They are symbolized by three candles in the poem, which also coincides with the number of meetings between Mandelstam and Tsvetaeva. Gasparov, "Osip Mandel'shtam: tri ego poetiki," 217.

[64] Ginzburg, "Poetika Osipa Mandel'shtama," 322.

With this historical background in mind, the anxieties of the lyric persona are two-fold. Either he doesn't know whether he is the real prince or the imposter, or he *is* the imposter but he doesn't know it himself: according to the historian Vasilii Kliuchevskii, False Dmitrii was "completely certain of his royal origin."[65] In the poem it is the young prince—or, more exactly, a game that foreshadows his death—that introduces the anxiety over authenticity into the poem, and the ambiguity of its nature is amplified through the ambiguous pronoun use: in the second stanza we learn that "They are carting me" (*menia vezut*), but in the last that "they are carting the tsarevich" (*tsarevicha vezut*). Whether the lyric voice and the tsarevich are one and the same, both are notably passive: "the tied hands have swollen" (*sviazannye ruki zatekli*) and the body is "growing terribly numb" (*nemeet strashno telo*). Whose body is it that is "growing terribly numb"? None of the alternatives bode well for the lyric persona, for in this poem all paths lead to death: both the child Dmitrii and his later imposter met premature ends. In the poem, however, the young prince lives on through the game, which exists in the present progressive tense ("the children are playing *babki*") as though in perpetual reminder of him.

[65] Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colors*, 99-100.

In “He who found a horseshoe” (*Nashedshii podkovu*, 1923), he would again return to the children’s game *babki* in order to signify death—this time, in the form of the end of an age.[66]

A rustle runs across the trees like a green *lapta* bat,
Children play *babki* with the vertebra of dead animals.
The fragile logbook of our era is coming to an end.
Thank you for all that was:
I too was mistaken, got confused, lost count.

Шорох пробегает по деревьям зеленой лаптой.
Дети играют в бабки позвонками умерших животных.
Хрупкое летоисчисление нашей эры подходит к концу.
Спасибо за то, что было:
Я сам ошибся, я сбился, запутался в счете.[67]

The comingling of these children’s carefree game with death (they are playing with the bones of dead animals, and the era is coming to an end) recalls the children playing leapfrog on the backdrop of death in “Waves Breaking at the Casket,” written just one year later. In “On a peasant sledge lined with straw,” however, the figure of the child that serves as a possible alter ego for the poet is a threat to those in charge. Like Gerda in Andersen’s tale, he does not know his power, and although he does not triumph over evil, he gains his share of eternity in a negative sense: Unlike False Dmitrii’s grotesque and ultimately meaningless death, the child’s reverberates through history—after Tsarevich Dmitrii’s death in 1591, the people of Uglich rose up in protest, unrest evoked in the poem through the image

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[66] “He who found a horseshoe” was one of the final poems Mandelstam wrote before his five-year poetic silence.

[67] Mandel’shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 1, 130.

of bread left in the oven.[68] Building on the theme of the childlike poet's ability to defy the "heaviness" trained against him by the hostile world from Mandelstam's earliest poems, in "On a peasant sledge lined with straw" he uses the captive and vulnerable child's body to express a certain measured confidence that this child can withstand, if at the cost of his life, the inimical play of forces aimed against him—the games of adults vying for power.

Childhood and the social world

As Andrew Wachtel has demonstrated, the image of childhood posited in Leo Tolstoy's 1852 pseudo-autobiography *Childhood* (*Detstvo*) enjoyed a surprisingly long afterlife in Soviet autobiographies supposedly written in opposition to his idealized, apolitical, and unapologetically bourgeois vision of childhood.[69] Although Tolstoy's anti-Romantic realism is well known, strong strains of Romanticism persist in *Childhood* through the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*.[70] These strains are equally evident in *The Noise of Time* (*Shum vremeni,* 1923), which reiterates a desire first expressed in the 1908 poem "Only to read children's books" (*Tol'ko detskie knigi chitat'*) to "dispel all that is

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[68] As Freidin notes, with the image of children playing babki Mandelstam evokes the famous aphorism by Heraclitus that "Eternity is a child playing dice," translated in Russian with the word "bones" (*kosti*). By substituting bones for *babki*, Mandelstam grants the young prince (himself?) his share of eternity. Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colors*, 112.

[69] Andrew Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood: Creation of a Russian Myth*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990, 1.

[70] For more on the influence of Rousseau's thought on Tolstoy's early writings, see Ibid. 37-8, Donna Tussing Orwin. *Tolstoy's Art and Thought, 1847-1880*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993, 33-4, 38, and Margaret M. Bullitt, "Rousseau and Tolstoy: Childhood and Confession." *Comparative Literature Studies* 16, no. 1 (1979): 12–20.

big" and hide in the garden of childhood away from the noise of the adult world. For Mandelstam, both texts present an opportunity to deploy childhood as a screen to critique the adult world: in *The Noise of Time,* Mandelstam responds to the new order's desire to make its citizens' sympathies and origins legible by highlighting the artifice inherent in such efforts and by stating plainly that he had always been the wrong kind of child, destined to grow into the wrong kind of adult.

Beginning with "Only to read children's books" (1906), childhood as an explicit theme for Mandelstam is never just an innocent glance backwards: instead, remembrance of childhood aims to reveal rather than conceal what he is turning away *from*.

Only to read children's books, Only to cherish children's thoughts, To dispel all that is big, To rise from deep sadness.	Только детские книги читать, Только детские думы лелеять, Все большое далеко развеять, Из глубокой печали восстать.
I'm tired to death of life, I'll accept nothing from her, But I love my poor land For I've seen no other.	Я от жизни смертельно устал, Ничего от нее не приемлю, Но люблю мою бедную землю, Оттого, что иной не видал.
I swung in a far-away garden On a simple wooden swing And tall, dark spruces I recall in this cloudy delirium.	Я качался в далеком саду На простой деревянной качели, И высокие темные ели Вспоминаю в туманном бреду.[71]

[71] Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 1, 44.

Although this poem echoes the familiar Romantic theme of childhood as a time of harmony and wholeness, the emphasis here is not so much on childhood as on the adult voice that evokes it: rather than framing it solely as a good in and of itself, the poem underscores the potency of childhood as a means for the lyric persona to resist the damaging forces of the adult world. The harmony of the world of childhood is tied to its simplicity, which is emphasized by the anaphora of the word "only" in the opening lines of the poem. This adverb is inherently relational: it establishes a hierarchy between what it does and does not refer to and privileges the former. In the next two lines of the first stanza, childhood is posited even more directly as a force of opposition: it is a means "to dispel all that is big" and to overcome sadness that stems, necessarily, from current reality. To turn to childhood is thus framed from the first as the poet's reaction to the social world, somewhere he turns for a dose of harmony when the present threatens to overwhelm him.

Moreover, the form of the poem suggests that a kind of traumatic response is at work. What it is a response *to* is not specified in this early poem, and it is hard to imagine what its 17-year-old poet would have had to be tired of. Yet the repetition of the word "only" and the string of infinitive verbs suggest not only that a mantra is being chanted. The embracing rhyme scheme as a whole also seems to hold the poem, and perhaps the poet along with it, in, and the poem performs the act of "dispelling" it evokes: the desire to pare down existence is echoed in the strict anapestic trimeter and exact rhymes. On a formal level, the poem is as

“simple” as the childhood swing it evokes.[72] One might even argue that the garden of the third and final stanza is generated as a response to the present: the words “garden” and “delirium” (*sadu, bredu*) are rhymed antithetically, as if to highlight the opposition between them.

The fact that Mandelstam chooses to stage the remembrance of childhood in a garden is surprising given his urban upbringing and points to the contrivance at the poem’s core: the lyric persona fashions childhood into what he needs it to be—not just a garden but a garden of Eden, as far away from the present reality as it can possibly be. We might also think of this garden as the very same one evoked in “A body is given to me” a year later (“I’m a gardener and a flower I am, too”): a world where the lyric voice is his own master, independent of the unkind forces of the social adult world. Indeed the adjective “far-away” (*dalekii*) is somewhat ambiguous: Is the garden “far away” because the time when he swung in it is, or because it seems distant in light of the poet’s present condition? In other words, is the distance quantitative or qualitative? The garden of childhood blurs the distinction between time and space.

Whatever it is that drives the lyric voice to turn to childhood in the first place, that very same childhood seems to infect the intonation of the poem itself and generate the rejecting impulse at its heart. Like a cranky child refusing

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[72] This admirable simplicity echoes the virtues of the women Mandelstam describes in a poem “You wished paints for yourself” («Ты красок себе пожелала,» 1931): “And, as simple as children’s drawings/ Not worrying my blood/ Here women walk past” («И, крови моей не волнуя,/ Как детский рисунок просты/ Здесь жены проходят»). This poem was written after his spirit-reviving (and poetry-inspiring) trip to Armenia. Mandel’shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 1, 146-7.

everything that comes his way, negation is at its literal center, in the embraced rhyme of the middle stanza (the poem follows the rhyme pattern aBBa).[73] Even the words the lyric persona uses to reject the adult world strike the reader as childish: "I'm tired to death of life" (*Ia ot zhizni smertel'no ustal*), he announces with markedly juvenile wordplay.

The turn to childhood in the final lines of the poem, where the lyric voice recalls the dark spruces of the garden of childhood, establishes a response mechanism to the unbearable present that will serve the poet going forward: the imperfective verb "I recall" points not only to the present act of remembrance, but to his intention to reprise it in the future. Indeed, the gesture of looking up at the "tall, dark spruces" (he can only tell that they are tall if he looks up, and they are "dark" at the top, where they blur together) anticipates a similar, more desperate one in "For the thundering valor of centuries to come" (*Za gremuchuiu doblest' griadushchikh vekov,* 1935). In that poem, written almost three decades later, the lyric persona asks to be led away to where "the pines reach the stars" (*Uvedi menia v noch', gde techet Enisei/ I sosna do zvezdy dostaet*). Fashioned in "Only to read children's books" first and foremost as a reaction to the unbearable present, childhood is set in an idyllic garden, where it serves to highlight the lack of harmony of the adult world.

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[73] As Joseph Brodsky notes, negation is at the heart of Mandelstam's poetics: «перечислять стихотворения О.М., начинающиеся с этой ноты, с антитезы, с 'не' и с 'нет' нет нужды.» Joseph Brodsky, "'S mirom derzhavnym ia byl lish' rebiacheskii sviazan...'." In *Stoletie Mandel'shtama: materialy simpoziuma*, edited by Robin Aizlewood. Tenafly, N.J: Ermitazh, 1994, 11.

Such Romantic notions of childhood would fall out of fashion in the Soviet era, when coming-of-age memoirs increasingly fed into the idea that the Soviet Child had always been there, just waiting for his era to begin, by offering a sort of "coming-into-Marxism" tale. As with his Stalin Ode a decade later, with his autobiography *The Noise of Time* Mandelstam had a chance to put himself on good footing with the regime by emphasizing his ideological compatibility with and non-antagonism, if not full-on embrace, of the reigning ideology of his time. As Nadezhda Mandelstam writes, the editor who had commissioned *The Noise of Time*, Isaiah Lezhnev, had been expecting "the story of a Jewish boy from the shtetl who discovers Marxism," but the failure of *The Noise of Time* to conform to the expectations of the genre led Lezhnev to deem it unpublishable.[74]

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[74] «Именно он заказал ему 'Шум времени', а потом отклонил: ему мерещилась совсем иные воспоминания и совсем другое детство, о котором впоследствии он написал сам. Это была история еврейского местечкового подростка, открывшего для себя марксизм.» Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope : A Memoir*. Modern Library paperback ed. New York: Modern Library, 1999, 241; *Vospominaniia*. New York: Izd-vo imeni Chekhova, 1970, 259. Lezhnev was not the only editor to pass up the chance to print *The Noise of Time.* Among the others were Nikolai Tikhonov, Nikolai Bukharin, and Vladimir Narbut. Brown, *Mandelstam*, 101-2. Lezhnev would himself go on to write the sort of book he had hoped to get from Mandelstam, for which he earned one of the biggest rewards of all: "He was lucky with his book," Nadezhda Mandelstam writes: "At first nobody wanted to publish it—though it was probably no worse than others of its kind—but then it was read and approved by Stalin. Stalin even tried to phone Lezhnev to tell him, but Lezhnev was not at home at the moment Stalin called" («Лежневу повезло: его книгу, которую никто не хотел печатать—хотя она была не хуже других—прочел и одобрил Сталин. Он даже позвонил Лежневу дома, но не застал его дома»). Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope,* 242; *Vospominaniia*, 260. By contrast, *The Noise of Time* was critiqued harshly by members of the Soviet press—the critic Vladimir Sosinskii wrote in a letter to a colleague that "[Mandelstam's] book, which Marina Ivanovna considers obsequious, has been deemed counterrevolutionary in the USSR" («Его книга, которую М.И. считает раболепством, объявлена в СССР контрреволюционной»). Natal'ia Ivanova, "Prosvet v bespredel'noi' pokinutosti…" *Znamia*, no. 2 (February 2016), 194. According to Iurii Freidin, the surprising fact that *The Noise of Time* did not cause more of a scandal can be explained by the fact that, in the mid 1920s, the state had not yet decided to resolve literary problems with death setences and Mandelstam could, for the time, be tolerated. Iurii L'vovich Freidin, Interview conducted by Lusia Zaitseva in Moscow, May 12, 2017. Interestingly, in a 1925 article Isaiah Lezhnev himself compared *The Noise of Time* and Mandelstam's recent poetry to

The writing of *The Noise of Time* in 1923 coincides with the beginning of Mandelstam's fall from grace and his growing pessimism regarding what the future held.[75] This realization informs the despairing tone of his essay "Humanism and the Present" (*Gumanizm i sovremennost'*, 1922), in which Mandelstam pulls no punches vis-à-vis the era:

> There are epochs which contend that they care nothing for man, that he is to be used like brick or cement, that he is to be built with, not for. Social architecture takes its measure from the scale of man. Sometimes it becomes hostile to man and nourishes its own majesty by belittling and deprecating him, [76]

My Sister—Life, a comparison not intended as a compliment: "We are in no way admirers of Mandelstam the poet, especially not his most recent work. His poems become more and more polished and more boring with time. They've completely lost their own smell and smell now like *My Sister—Life*. They're constructed like a rebus, but one whose rewards are considerably less than promised" («Мы отнюдь не являемся поклонниками Мандельштама-поэта, особенно Мандельштама последнего времени. Стихи его становятся с каждым разом все более отделанными, но и все более скучными. Они потеряли собственный запах и пахнут сейчас так, как пахнет 'Сестра моя жизнь.' Они составлены как ребус, но разгаданные дают гораздо меньше, чем обещают. И тем более удивляет нас такая книга, как 'Шум времени'»). A.D. Mikhailov, and P. M. Nerler, eds. *Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh*. Vol.2. Khudozhestvennaiia literatura, 1990, 380.

[75] By the early 1920s Mandelstam's name was beginning to disappear from the mastheads of prominent publications, and a 1922 run-in with the Cheka on his younger brother's behalf gave Mandelstam a glimpse of what the future likely held. Brown, *Mandelstam*, 100, 102.

[76] «Бывают эпохи, которые говорят, что им нет дела до человека, что его нужно использовать, как кирпич, как цемент, что из него нужно строить, а не для него. Социальная архитектура измеряется масштабом человека. Иногда она становится враждебной человеку и питает свое величие его унижением и ничтожеством.» Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 2, 125; "Humanism & Modern Life." In *Osip Mandelstam, Selected Essays*. The Dan Danciger Publication Series. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977, 154. Although Mandelstam writes in no uncertain terms about the cost of this decline stating that an age that abandons its humanist values is bound to crush the individual. But he adds that—like a coin temporarily devalued by circulating from hand to hand until the day its value is rediscovered—ultimately, humanism will triumph: "Switching to gold currency is a matter for the future, and in the realm of culture it will mean the exchange of current ideas—paper issue—for the gold coinage of the European humanistic heritage; and it is not under the spade of the archeologist that the excellent florins of humanism will ring; but they will see their day, and as sound current coin they will start circulating from hand to hand, when the time comes" («Переход на золотую валюту — дело будущего, и в области культуры предстоит замена временных идей — бумажных выпусков — золотым чеканом европейского гуманистического наследства, и не под заступом археолога звякнут прекрасные флорины гуманизма, а увидят свой день и, как

the opening line reads. This essay was a response not just to Mandelstam's own experience, but to an earlier essay: Alexander Blok's "The Decline of Humanism" (*Krushenie gumanizma,* 1919). In that essay, Blok announces the end of individualism and the rise of the masses that, according to him, live in tune with the "musical" (as opposed to "historic") time of the Revolution.[77] A continuation of Mandelstam's polemic with Blok, *The Noise of Time* was in fact a polemic with the Revolution as a whole.[78] That polemic is articulated primarily through childhood, which challenges the desire to naturalize the New Soviet Person as having in some way existed before the era that wrought him. Moreover, *The Noise of Time* reprises

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ходячая звонкая монета, пойдут по рукам, когда настанет срок»). Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 2, 156.

[77] «Есть как бы два времени, два пространства; одно - историческое, календарное, другое - исчислимое, музыкальное. Только первое время и первое пространство неизменно присутствуют в цивилизованном сознании; во втором мы живем лишь тогда, когда чувствуем свою близость к природе, когда отдаемся музыкальной волне, исходящей из мирового оркестра.» Aleksandr Blok, "Isskustvo i revoliutsiia (Po povodu tvoreniia Rikharda Vagnera)." In *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, edited by V.N. Orlov, A.A. Surkov, and K.I. Chukovskii, 6: Proza 1918-1921:21–25. Moscow-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1962, 101.

[78] In the final lines of the book, Mandelstam evokes the conservative monarchist philosopher Konstantin Leont'ev, writing that Leont'ev "feels centuries as he feels the weather, and he shouts at them" («Он чувствует столетия, как погоду, и покрикивает на них»). While Leont'ev was "struck dumb" and his vision defeated by its countercurrent, Mandelstam continues where he left off: he hails "the [entire nineteenth] century…as one would hail settled weather, and…see[s] in it the unity lent it by the measureless cold which welded decades together into one day, one night, one profound winter" («я хочу окликнуть столетие, как устойчивую погоду, и вижу в нем единство непомерной стужи, спаявшей десятилетия в один денек, в одну ночку, в глубокую зиму.») Mandelstam, *The Noise of Time: Selected Prose*. European Classics (Evanston, Ill.). Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2002, 117; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 2, 258. In doing so he proclaims his loyalty to the very sort of "historic time" that Blok condemns as outmoded and blasé. For more on the genesis of Mandelstam's understanding of time, see Gregory Freidin, "The Whisper of History and the Noise of Time in the Writings of Osip Mandel'shtam," *The Russian Review* 37, no. 4 (1978): 421–437.

the Romantic notion set out in “Only to read children’s books” that childhood has nothing to gain from contact with the social, adult world.[79]

The lukewarm reception of *The Noise of Time* hinged on the author’s evident failure to provide a convincing narrative of the continuity between his younger and present self, a narrative that mapped the evolution of his own revolutionary sentiment onto the intensifying revolutionary spirit of the age. Marina Tsvetaeva noted the falsity of Mandelstam’s proposed genealogy in an unpublished 1926 essay (“My Reply to Osip Mandelstam,” *Moi otvet Osipu Mandel’shtamu*):

> The revolutionary character of Mandelstam is not from the year 1917 onward but from the year 1917 backward. Not from 1881-1917 (as he would now have it), but from 1917 - 1881, from right to left, a lie…October knows what will be, it doesn’t know what was. In vain did Mandelstam labor in his imaginary revolutionary swaddling clothes.[80]

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[79] This belief is echoed in the 1928/29 essay “Children’s Literature” («Детская литература», unpublished until 1967), in which Mandelstam bitingly recounts of one “old grannie’s” (*starushka*) terrified cowing before the mandate against personification in children’s literature. This was likely a response to Nadezhda Krupskaya’s polemic against Mandelstam’s friend Kornei Chukovskii—in 1928, she had published an article critiquing Chukovskii’s approach to representing animals in his beloved book *Krokodil*. In this brief piece, children defy adult attempts to control them: “Children’s literature is a difficult thing. On the one hand, one cannot allow the personification of animals and objects. On the other, children need to play, and as soon as they do, whoops! There they go personifying one thing or another, the rogues.” («Детская литература вещь трудная. С одной стороны, нельзя допускать очеловеченья зверей и предметов, с другой — надо же ребенку поиграть, а он — бестия — только начнет играть, сразу ляпнет и что-нибудь очеловечит.») Mandel’shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 3, 315. Sara Pankenier Weld sees this satirical article as evidence that “Mandelstam was engaging himself in the contemporaneous debates on children’s literature.” Sara Pankenier Weld, “Dual Audience and Double Vision: Aesopian Depths and Hidden Subtexts,” in *An Ecology of the Russian Avant-Garde Picturebook*, Children’s Literature, Culture, and Cognition (CLCC), Volume 9 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2018), 81.

[80] «Революционность Мандельштама не с 1917 г. - вперед, а с 1917 г. назад. Не 1891-1917 (как он этого ныне хочет), а с 1917 г.-1891 г. - справа налево, ложь…Октябрь знает: вперед, он не знает назад. Октябрь знает: будет, он не знает: было, зря старался Мандельштам с его вымышленными революционными пеленками.» Marina Tsvetaeva, “Moi otvet Osipu Mandel’shtamu.” In *Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh*, edited by A. A. Saakiants and L. A.

In setting out to 'unmask' Mandelstam, Tsvetaeva overlooked the fact that he had never really tried to mask himself in the first place—although Nadezhda Iakovlevna writes in her memoir that *The Noise of Time* constituted an attempt on Mandelstam's part to pay "lip service" to the Revolution,[81] he does so half-heartedly, using the expectations of the genre as a point of departure to critique the very activity in which he was expected to engage.[82]

Nowhere is Mandelstam's critique of politics more apparent than in the chapter that deals with his entrée into Marxist ideology—"The Erfurt Program."

Mnukhin, 5: Avtobiograficheskaiia proza. Stat'i. Esse. Perevody.:305–16. Moscow: Ellis Lak, 1994, 313. Tsvetaeva's husband Sergei Efron, considering the piece too harsh, convinced her not to publish it. A.D. Mikhailov, and P. M. Nerler, eds. *Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh* vol. 2, 385.

[81] As Nadezhda Mandelstam admits in her memoir, "M. was very cautious about the Revolution's demand for a change of values, though he did pay some lip service to it. This took the form, in the first instance, of making clear what his relations with the 'world of sovereignty' had been." («А к переоценке ценностей О.М. подошел очень осторожно, хотя все же отдал ей дань. Прежде всего он захотел определить свои отношения с 'миром державным'»). Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope,* 173; *Vospominaniia*, 181.The "old world" is Clarence Brown's translation for «мир державный,» which I translate in the poem to which Nadezhda Mandelstam refers as "world of sovereignty" to echo the title of the poem "With the world of sovereignty I was but childishly bound" (*S mirom derzhavnym ia byl lish' rebiacheski sviazan,* 1935).

[82] There are several possible explanations for Tsvetaeva's harsh response. As Tatyana Gevorkian notes, Tsvetaeva's indictment was likely more personal than political, for her long friendship with Mandelstam gave her the impression of having some sort of say in what kind of child he had been, and she did not recognize that child in *The Noise of Time.* Tatyana Gevorkian, "Neskol'ko kholodnykh velikolepii o Moskve: Marina Tsvetaeva i Osip Mandelstam." *Kontinent*, no. 109 (2001), 393. Childhood was, for Tsvetaeva, also a kind of hallowed and untouchable bygone era (hence her ecstasy over Pasternak's *My Sister—Life*) and what she perceived as Mandelstam's revisionist history must have seemed to her like a desecration. Tsvetaeva had previously spoken fondly of Mandelstam in a 1916 poem, calling him a "divine boy" («В тебе божественного мальчика/ Десятилетнего я чту»). Ibid. In addition, Tsvetaeva's negative assessment may have been partially motivated by Mandelstam's own critique of her in 1922, in the article "Literaturnaia Moskva" for the journal *Rossiia* as being "tasteless and historically [false]." Brown, *Mandelstam*, 105. By the 1920s Mandelstam had come to think little of Tsvetaeva as a poet and even declared himself openly to Anna Akhmatova as being "anti-Tsvetaevan." Ibid. 68. According to Iurii Freidin, the cause of Tsvetaeva's reaction was likely more political in nature, having to do with what she saw as the unfair treatment of the Red Army and of the Captain Tsygal'skii, who had been personally kind to him. Iurii L'vovich Freidin, Interview with Lusia Zaitseva in Moscow, May 12, 2017.

This chapter begins with young Mandelstam casually throwing the holy grail of Marxism, *Das Kapital*, away in favor of his beloved dime-a-dozen political pamphlets.[83] By reading *The Noise of Time* as Mandelstam's straightforward attempt to don "imaginary swaddling clothes," Tsvetaeva takes the premise of this chapter at face value: if the book as a whole constitutes an attempt by the author to justify his belonging to the new order, this chapter in particular must be at the center of that effort, for it is here that the author narrates his first exposure to Marxist dogma. It is on this basis that Tsvetaeva attacks Mandelstam, writing, "Where is the Erfurt Program, where is the falling apple of the capitalist world, or the mention of even one heroic deed from the Tenishev years? Where are the boys? Nowhere. Because they never existed."[84]

Yet the key to "The Erfurt Program" lies not in the question of whether the Erfurt Program was indeed a part of the Tenishev curriculum but, rather, in Mandelstam's reason for staging it there: evoking it points to the distance between the author and the doctrine of the state. Specifically, the members of the Erfurt Program sought to pursue its socialist program not through revolution but through legal reform. One of its key members, the Czech-Austrian philosopher

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[83] Mandelstam, *The Noise of Time: Selected Prose*, 99, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 2, 238.

[84] «Где же Эрфуртская программа, где же падающее яблоко капиталистического мира, хотя бы отзвук один героического тенишевского школьничества? Мальчишки где? Нигде. Потому что их не было.» Marina Tsvetaeva, "Moi otvet Osipu Mandel'shtamu," 313. The image of the falling apple of capitalism echoes the phrase "apple of sovereignty" (*derzhavnoe iabloko*), or the orb of precious metal that symbolizes sovereign power. Irina Surat, "Iabloko prostoe," *Literatura*, no. 16 (2009).

Karl Kautsky, was in fact something of a thorn in the side of Vladimir Lenin, who at the time that *The Noise of Time* was written was perfectly alive, if not exactly well—Kautsky was known as a vocal critic of the Bolshevik Revolution, authoring books and articles critiquing the Russian efforts and Lenin specifically well into the 1930s.[85]

Given its status, from a Soviet vantage point, as a dissenting view, the Erfurt Program represents something of the lost positive potential of the Bolshevik Revolution, which had provided in embryonic form the harmony that Mandelstam sought in the social structure—as Nadezhda Iakovlevna writes, Mandelstam sought "the harmony and grandeur" of a society "with a clearly defined structure" but did not find it in the Soviet regime: "he was not frightened by the idea of authority, even when it was translated into dictatorial power. But the grand scale of the socialist State structure frightened rather than dazzled him."[86] Thus contrary to Tsvetaeva's assertion, *The Noise of Time* creates the impression that the author's commitment to the Revolution was, like Pasternak's, indeed left to right—from 1881 to 1917, and not much further.[87]

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[85] Lenin critiqued Kautsky directly in his pamphlet "The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky," while Kautsky authored *Marxism and Bolshevism: Democracy and Dictatorship* in 1934, well after the publication of *The Noise of Time*. In it, Kautsky likened Lenin to a new tsar, a comparison that would have pleased the author's youthful persona in *The Noise of Time*. Before the Bolshevik Revolution, the writings of Kautsky as well as those of other members of the Erfurt Program proved divisive and caused a splintering in the international socialist movement. John H. Kautsky, *Karl Kautsky: Marxism, Revolution & Democracy*. New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction Publishers, 1994, 1.

[86] Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope,* 258; *Vospominaniia*, 274. Ibid., 256; 275.

[87] As Clarence Brown tells us, "By the summer of 1917 Mandelstam had conceived an intense dislike for the Bolsheviks." Brown, *Mandelstam*, 70.

Yet even if Kautsky's brand of socialism, unlike Bolshevism, had possessed the very "harmony" that Mandelstam sought, its intrusion onto Mandelstam's idyllic lycée came too early:

> Early, O Erfurt Program, you Marxist Propylaea, too early did you train our spirits to a sense of harmoniousness, but to me and to many others you gave a sense of life in those prehistoric years when thought hungered after unity and harmony, when the backbone of the century was becoming erect, when the heart needed more than anything the red blood of the aorta! Is Kautsky Tiutchev?[88]

Marxism, as touted by Kautsky, gave him and his peers "a sense of life" and trained their "spirits to a sense of harmony," but it arguably wasn't one that they needed in the first place. In the chapter "The Tenishev School," about the school where Mandelstam studied from approximately 1899 to 1907,[89] he writes

> Still, there were some good boys in the Tenishev School…Little ascetics, monks in their children's monastery, where the notebooks, equipment, glass retorts, and German books contained more spirituality and inner harmony than can be found in the grown-up world.[90]

Kautsky may have offered a sense of harmony to his acolytes, but that harmony was intended for the adult world—the children already possessed it. Thus, the

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[88] «Эрфуртская программа, марксистские Пропилеи, рано, слишком рано, приучили вы дух к стройности, но мне и многим другим дали ощущение жизни в предысторические годы, когда жизнь жаждет единства и стройности, когда выпрямляется позвоночник века, когда сердцу нужнее всего красная кровь аорты! Разве Каутский - Тютчев?» Mandelstam, *The Noise of Time: Selected Prose*, 100; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 1, 239-40.

[89] Brown, *Mandelstam*, 22-3.

[90] «А все-таки в Тенишевском были хорошие мальчики…Маленькие аскеты, монахи в детском своем монастыре, где в тетрадках, приборах, стеклянных колбочках и немецких книжках больше духовности и внутреннего строя, чем в жизни взрослых.» Mandelstam, *The Noise of Time: Selected Prose*, 94; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 2, 232-3.

Erfurt Program, metonymic for "Life, with all its unexpected interests and its passionate intellectual diversions...burst in upon the most hothouse-like, the most completely sterilized Russian school, as it once burst into Pushkin's lycée"—not, this time, in the form of a foreign invader (in Pushkin's case, Napoleon), but a foreign ideology (and possibly a misinterpreted one, at that). [91]

Mandelstam could poke fun at Kautsky in a way that he couldn't mock Bolshevism or Marxism, but the screen is a flimsy one intended to highlight the inadequacy of all politics in the face not only of the harmonious nature of childhood, but of poetry specifically: "But just imagine," he continues after he asks rhetorically whether Kautsky is Tiutchev,

> for a person at a certain age and at a certain moment Kautsky (I say Kautsky, of course, just as an example and might with even greater justice have said Marx, Plekhanov) *is* Tiutchev, that is, the source of a cosmic joy, the bearer of a strong and harmonious attitude toward life, the thinking reed, and a cover thrown over the abyss.[92]

This statement is highly ambiguous, and either way one reads it points to the inadequacy of politics in the face of poetry. If, for instance, we take Kautsky to represent what the Bolshevik Revolution might have been but wasn't, Tiutchev nonetheless offers what Kautsky purported to, earlier and probably better: that is, "a cosmic joy...and harmonious attitude toward life." If instead we view Kautsky from a 1923 Soviet vantage point, once again the poet wins: the critic of the

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[91] Ibid., 100; 239.

[92] «А представьте, что для известного возраста и мгновения Каутский (я называю его, конечно, к примеру, не он, так Маркс, Плеханов, с гораздо большим правом) тот же Тютчев, то есть источник космической радости, податель сильного и стройного мироощущения, мыслящий тростник и покров, накинутый над бездной.» Ibid. 100; 240.

Revolution is a poor substitute for the Romantic poet. Either way, Mandelstam writes, politics entered into the author's life as it did into the life of the school—prematurely. At the same time, there is something exculpatory about Mandelstam's comparison between Kautsky and Tiutchev: what was "a person at a certain age" to do if his era offered him not Tiutchev but Kautsky? In 1923, Mandelstam's days at the Tenishev School must have seemed closer in spirit to Pushkin's lycée than to the contemporary moment, and only the reminiscence of childhood allows Mandelstam to express his longing for the "strong and harmonious attitude toward life" and "harmony and grandeur" missing from that present. This longing is at the heart of the chapter titled "Childish Imperialism," which recalls "Only to read children's books": in both, the author turns toward childhood in order to highlight the inadequacy of the author's present.[93]

The title "Childish Imperialism" is itself a kind of exculpatory gesture: by calling it specifically "childish" (*rebiacheskii* rather than *detskii*), Mandelstam dismisses it from the very first as a feature of the bygone era to which that childhood belongs—as distant from his present as he is from his former self. Mandelstam presents a similar excuse early in the chapter: "I spent my early childhood in Petersburg under the sign of the most authentic militarism, but it was not really my fault," he insists.[94] Yet the ensuing chapter suggest that, far from

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[93] Ibid. 100-1, 240. Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope,* 258; *Vospominaniia*, 274.

[94] «Случилось так, что раннее мое петербургское детство прошло под знаком самого настоящего милитаризма и, право, в этом не моя вина.» Mandelstam, *The Noise of Time: Selected Prose*, 72, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 2, 208-9.

being a figment of his distant "childhood imperialism," the author's affinity for "authentic militarism" remains in full force.

Framed as recollection, Mandelstam's account of that militarism reveals his evident pleasure to be reliving it: on numerous occasions, he lapses almost imperceptibly from the past tense into the present by means of free indirect discourse. Of the days leading up to the May Parade when he would get to see the tsar and his family in the royal progress, Mandelstam writes, "I...ran up and down the stairs feeling as if I were on the stage, a participant in the next day's splendid spectacle, and envied the very boards themselves, which would probably see the attack."[95] His desperation to be privy to the spectacle quickly reaches a fever pitch of free indirect discourse that blurs the distinction between the author and his childhood self: "If one could only hide in the Summer Garden unnoticed!" he opines. "To see the outpouring of the cavalry!"[96] It is as if the narrator of "Childish Imperialism" marvels at the spectacle of imperial military power from the solitary

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[95] «Каждый день я навещал постройку, любовался плавностью работы, бегал по лесенкам, чувствуя себя на подмостках, участником завтрашнего великолепного зрелища, и завидовал даже доскам, которые наверное увидят атаку.» Ibid. 73; 210. This predilection would follow the poet into adulthood and into his relationship to the new order: in his "Stanzas" (*Ia ne khochu sred' iunoshei teplichnykh...*) of 1935, he would write of his love for the smooth simplicity of Red Army overcoats and their pleats: "I love the pleats of the Red Army greatcoat/ That reaches to the toes, sleeves smooth and simple." («Люблю шинель красноармейской складки — /Длину до пят, рукав простой и гладкий»). My reading of these lines differs from Jennifer Baines, who sees these lines as a key part of Mandelstam's "malicious eulogy." Jennifer Baines, *Mandelstam: The Later Poetry*. Cambridge [Eng.] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976, 127.

[96] «Если бы спрятаться в Летнем саду незаметно!...Увидеть кавалерскую лаву!» Mandelstam, *The Noise of Time: Selected Prose*, 73; *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 2, 210. Here I am modifying Brown's translation of "*lava*" as "attack." It is closer to an "outpouring."

comfort of his hiding place, undisturbed and unnoticed by the era that followed.[97] Thus Tsvetaeva is not completely wrong when she writes "Power! There it is, the code for everything, the secret key to Mandelstam. *The Noise of Time* is Mandelstam's gift to those in charge, like many poems of 'Stone,' tribute."[98] However, the power to which he pays tribute is not that of the new order, but the old. The childhood of *The Noise of Time* is markedly *not* a proto-Soviet one, and the child within it takes no pains to hide that he grew into the wrong kind of adult.

Mandelstam would revisit the subject of his own childhood in the early 1930s, this time in verse. "With the world of sovereignty I was but childishly bound" (*S mirom derzhavnym ia byl lish' rebiacheskii sviazan*) and "I returned to my city, familiar to the point of tears" (*Ia vernulsia v moi gorod, znakomyi do slez*) of 1931 and 1930, respectively, highlight the irrevocable rupture between the adult poet and his childhood and the impossibility of retreating from the adult, social world and into childhood as the poet once did. This rupture is at the heart of the 1931 poem "With the world of sovereignty I was but childishly bound," in which, like the narrator of *The Noise of Time*, the lyric voice is asked to account for his

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[97] This desire would find itself echoed in the final stanza of Mandelstam's 1937 ode to Stalin (*Kogda b ia ugol' vzial dlia vysshei pokhvaly*): «Уходит вдаль людских голов бугры:/ Я уменьшаюсь там. Меня уж не заметят./ Но в книгах ласковых и в играх детворы/ Воскресну я сказать, как солнце светит.» Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 1, 310-11.

[98] «- Власть! - Вот оно, слово ко всему, тайный ключ к Мандельштаму. "Шум времени" - подарок Мандельштама властям, как многие стихи "Камня" – дань.» Tsvetaeva, "Moi otvet Osipu Mandel'shtamu," 314. In a private letter to Mandelstam dated August 16, 1925 Pasternak wrote that "*The Noise of Time* gave me a rare feeling of pleasure I have not felt in a long time" («'Шум времени' доставил мне редкое, давно не испытанное наслаждение»). Boris Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami : v odinnadtsati tomakh*. Vol. 7. Moscow: Slovo-2005, 573-4.

pre-Revolutionary childhood and comes up short. In fact he fails at this task so spectacularly as to make his failure seem intentional, and in so doing, he critiques the very notion of such an exercise as well as the order that forces him to partake of it in the first place.

With the sovereign world I was but childishly bound
I feared oysters and eyed guards with distrust—
And I'm not beholden to it with even a shred of my soul,
No matter how much I tortured myself to be like others.

With silly importance and furrow-browed in a beaver mitre
I didn't stand under the bank's Egyptian portico,
And over the citreous Neva to the crunch of a hundred rubles
Never ever did for me dance a gypsy.

Sensing impending executions, from the roar of stormy events
I ran away to the Nereids on the Black Sea,
And for the sake of those tender European beauties of yore
How much strife and humiliation I suffered!

So why oh why does this city still weigh
On my thoughts and feelings by its former rights?
It's even more shameless after its frosts and its fires,
Conceited, damned, vacant, youthful.

Maybe because I once saw in a children's picture
Lady Godiva, red mane all aflow,
I repeat to myself in a whisper:
—Lady Godiva, farewell…I don't remember, Godiva…

С миром державным я был лишь ребячески связан,
Устриц боялся и на гвардейцев смотрел исподлобья—
И ни крупицей души я ему не обязан,
Как я ни мучил себя по чужому подобью.

С важностью глупой, насупившись, в митре бобровой
Я не стоял под египетским портиком банка,
И над лимонной Невою под хруст сторублевый
Мне никогда, никогда не плясала цыганка.

Чуя грядущие казни, от рева событий мятежных
Я убежал к нереидам на Черное море,
И от красавиц тогдашних — от тех европеянок нежных —
Сколько я принял смущенья, надсады и горя!

Так отчего ж до сих пор этот город довлеет
Мыслям и чувствам моим по старинному праву?
Он от пожаров еще и морозов наглее,
Самолюбивый, проклятый, пустой, моложавый.

Не потому ль, что я видел на детской картинке
Лэди Годиву с распущенной рыжею гривой,
Я повторяю еще про себя под сурдинку:
— Лэди Годива, прощай... Я не помню, Годива...[99]

According to Joseph Brodsky, the poem takes the form of the lyric persona's response to a questionnaire asking those who fill it out to relate their ties to the old world.[100] Like his predecessor in *The Noise of Time*, the poet choose a strategy for doing so that can minimize the importance of the loyalties forged in childhood in the first place: "I was *but* childishly bound," he writes in the very first line. As Joseph Brodsky explains,

> "Childishly" is said by an "adult,'" as though the "adult" were filling out a questionnaire...It is as if the "adult," by means of this epithet insists, so to speak, that he be considered specifically *an adult* who has already grown in to the new social reality, thereby exculpating

[99] Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 1. Moscow: Progress-Pleiada, 2009, 153-4.

[100] "A questionnaire, naturally, is filled out in order to confirm one's right to exist in the new world or, more exactly, new society" («Анкета—естественно, заполняется на предмет подтверждения права на существование в новом мире, точнее—в новом обществе»). The year 1931, Brodsky writes, "was a time when the new social order was solidifying into a real governmental system...a time of adaptation to new circumstances for those who didn't share an enthusiasm for that order" («Это время затвердевания нового общественного порядка в подлинно государственную систему...время адаптации для тех, кто энтузиазма этого не разделяет, к новым обстоятельствам»). Brodsky, "'S mirom derzhavnym ia byl lish' rebiacheskii sviazan...'." In *Stoletie Mandel'shtama: materialy simpoziuma*, edited by Robin Aizlewood. Tenafly, N.J: Ermitazh, 1994, 9-10.

> himself not only of his ties to the social class into which he was born…but for the very "sovereign world" that turns out to have been a category of his childhood, a naïve form of self-identification.[101]

But these bonds prove as strong as "childish imperialism" proved enduring: As we have seen, to be childishly bound is to be very tightly bound indeed.

And as in *The Noise of Time*, the poet of "With the world…" turns the request of his primary addressee, the new order, against it: if the state is asking him to remember and recount his youth, he uses the occasion to deliver a healthy dose of criticism.[102] The turn to childhood seeps into the very fiber of the poem: negation is at its heart, related to the refusal to accept anything from his present life and the desire "Only to read children's books." As Brodsky writes,

> An example of this [childish] worldview is the negating intonation (an echo, if you will, of a child's outwardly capricious—but in its intensity exceeding any expression of acceptance—"I don't want").[103]

The act of negation that runs throughout the poem borders on frantic ("never ever"—in Russian, rendered as three consecutive negatives, *nikogda, nikogda ne*) and undermines the lyric voice's supposed aim: In over-insisting on all of all the

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[101] «'Ребячески' сказано 'взрослым,' ибо 'взрослый заполняет анкету…'Взрослый' посредством этого эпитета как бы настаивает, чтоб его считали именно взрослым, вросшим уже в новую социальную реальность, снимающий с себя ответственность не только за классовую чуждость, связанную с фактом рождения…но и за самый 'державный мир', оказывающийся категорией детства, наивной формой самосознания.» Ibid., 10-11.

[102] As Brodsky writes, "The poem is written for the sake of the third and final stanza, for the sake of remembrance" («Написано оно ради этой третьей и ради последней строфы: ради воспоминания»). Ibid., 13.

[103] «Примером этого мироощущения является интонация отрицания (эхо, если угодно, детского, внешне капризного, но по своей интенсивности превосходящего любое выражение приятия 'не хочу!'). Brodsky adds, "and there is no need to enumerate the poems by O.M. that start from this note, with antithesis, with "not" or "no." («и перечислять стихотворения О.М., начинающиеся с этой ноты, с антитезы, с 'не' и с 'нет', нет нужды.») Ibid., 11.

things he *didn't* do, he draws attention to himself. Indeed the specificity with which he recalls all that he did not do is in itself suspect—even if he didn't consume oysters or hire a gypsy to dance for him, perhaps he wanted to grow up to be the sort of adult who did.

The intrusion of the new world and the destruction of the old one got in the way of those plans, and it is at this new order that the lyric voice's criticism is aimed. This critique is introduced in the third stanza, where the child seems to sense something unpleasant is waiting for him on the other side of adolescence and recounts his escape from the city of his childhood: "Sensing impending executions…I ran away to the Nereids" (*Chuia griadushchie kazni…ia ubezhal k nereidam*). As Joseph Brodsky notes, this is the first hint that the second addressee of the poem (alongside the new order) is the actress Vera Sudeikina, with whom Mandelstam had once been infatuated and in whose Koktebel home on the Black Sea he had been a frequent guest.[104] The act of "running away," like the choice of the words "impending executions," is of course itself a criticism of the new order that anticipates the opening line of "For the thundering valor of centuries to come" (*Za gremuchuiu doblest' griadushchikh vekov,* 1935). As in *The Noise of Time,* this childhood highlights rather than conceals its creator's failure to fit in. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Mandelstam would use the same gerund, "sensing" (*chuia*), in the first line of the Stalin Epigram written two years later (1933): "We live, not sensing the land beneath us" (*My zhivem, pod soboiu ne chuia strany*). The

[104] Ibid. 16.

intuitive child of "With the world…" knows to flee before the future closes in on him. And while it may be a stretch to call this child the future author of the Stalin Epigram, he seems to sense that he will grow up to be the wrong kind of adult.

Something of the Epigram is present in the final stanza of the poem as well, where the lyric voice addresses not the new order but a "beauty of yore"—Lady Godiva. As Joseph Brodsky explains, reference to Godiva's portrait is another clue that the addressee in the last stanza is in fact Sudeikina, who inspired his 1917 poem "A stream of golden honey flowed from the bottle" (*Zolotistogo meda struia iz butylki tekla*). The formal similarities of the two poems notwithstanding, Brodsky sees an unmistakable echo of Sudeikina's famed portrait taken three years before Mandelstam authored his first poem to her, in 1914.[105] The adolescent embarrassment that the poetic persona describes having experienced allows for the possibility that his apology at the end of the poem is somehow related—Lady Godiva was, after all, famously naked upon her horse. I would argue, however, that the apologetic tone of the last stanza stems not from *having* forgotten (if he remembers even his dislike for oysters, it seems unlikely that he has), but from *needing* to forget.

This imperative is owed to the inimical nature, from a Soviet perspective, of the halcyon days to which Sudeikina, in his memory, belongs. As Brodsky writes, "Only the [present] poem can allow itself to remember the [former] poem" ("A

[105] Dactylic pentameter and anapestic pentameter with a strong caesura—both linked, according to Brodsky, to a tragic sense in Mandelstam's poetics. Ibid., 15. Ibid., 16.

stream of golden honey…”).[106] The implication is akin to that of Pasternak’s “Thus they begin. At two years old” (written ten years earlier), where beauty, like gypsies, has no place in the new social order. Indeed Mandelstam’s poem has a gypsy of its own, and he fervently denies any association with her: “Never ever did for me dance a gypsy” (*Mne nikogda, nikogda ne pliasala tsyganka*). The fact that the poet’s apology must be whispered further drives home its subversive nature by echoing the whispered conversations of the Stalin Epigram (“From ten steps away you can’t hear us,” *Nashi rechi za desiat’ shagov ne slyshny*). The Russian idiom rendered in my translation as “whisper,” *skazat’ pod surdinku*, also contains a sonic echo of Sudeikina’s name as though to emphasize how secret it is: *surdinka*, the diminuitive for the word *sordino* (a mute for stringed instruments), sounds a lot like Sudeikina.

But the lyric voice of “With the world…” need not go all he way to the Black Sea to cast a look back critically on the new social order—to stay in his native city is enough, for by doing so he emphasizes that unlike the natural passage of time that separates any adult from childhood, the rupture at the heart of this poem is in large part man-made. At the most basic level, the “city” evoked in the fourth stanza is pre-Soviet Saint Petersburg, which “weigh[s] on [his] thoughts and feelings by its former rights” so much that even his very language bears the trace of the Old World: Mandelstam uses the outmoded dative rather than the instrumental case

[106] «Только стихотворение может себе позволить вспомнить стихотворение.» Ibid., 17.

with the verb "to weigh on" (*dovlet'*) and omits the usual preposition "on" (*nad*).[107] The next two lines suggest that what is weighing on him is not so much Saint Petersburg as he knew it in his childhood, but the discontinuities between it and Leningrad, as it was renamed after the Revolution. The word "even" in the third line of this stanza suggests a comparison: the city is *more* shameless than it once was.

The poet's use of the adjective "vacant" (*pustoi*) to describe his native city points not to Saint Petersburg of yore but to present-day Leningrad and, even more specifically, to a comparison between the two. This tension is at the heart of the poem "I returned to my city, familiar to the point of tears," written one year earlier, in 1930. In this earlier poem, the lyric voice returns to his native city only to find no trace of the people he once knew there:

I returned to my city, familiar to the point of tears
To the blood vessels, to the swollen glands of childhood.

You came back here, so hurry up and gulp down
The cod-liver oil of Leningrad's riverside lanterns.

Hurry up and recognize the December day
Where evil tar is mixed in with the egg yolk.

Petersburg! I don't want to die yet:
You still have my telephone numbers.

Petersburg! I still have the addresses
By which I will find the voices of dead.

[107] The line should more correctly read «почему этот город довлеет *над* мыслям*и* и чувствам*и* моим*и*.» Dmitrii Nikolaevich Ushakov, *Tolkovyi slovar' russkogo jazyka: in 4 volumes*. Slavica Publishers. Reprint series, no. 1, part 1. Cambridge, Mass.: Slavica Publishers, 1974, 733.

I live on the back stairs, and the buzz of a bell
Pulled out with its meat strikes my temple,

And all night long I await the dear guests
Jiggling the fetters of the chain locks on the doors.

Я вернулся в мой город, знакомый до слез,
До прожилок, до детских припухлых желез.

Ты вернулся сюда—так глотай же скорей
Рыбий жир ленинградских речных фонарей,

Узнавай же скорее декабрьский денек,
Где к зловещему дегтю подмешан желток.

Петербург! я еще не хочу умирать:
У тебя телефонов моих номера.

Петербург! У меня еще есть адреса,
По которым найду мертвецов голоса.

Я на лестнице черной живу, и в висок
Ударяет мне вырванный с мясом звонок,

И всю ночь напролет жду гостей дорогих,
Шевеля кандалами цепочек дверных.[108]

Here the city is a palimpsest of history and bears the traces of all it has seen. Flickering between the past and the present, this Leningrad-Petersburg can best be described as pointing to what in visual art is known as negative space: it shows him what (and who) is no longer there. The poem gives the distinct impression that the "sick son of the age" of the poem "1 January 1924" (1 *ianvaria* 1924, stanza 3 line 1) is sick again, his childhood illnesses having returned in full force in the form of swollen glands. The prophylactic cod-liver oil of his youth (line 4) is unlikely to

[108] Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 1, 152-3.

cure him, for it (and he) comes too late. The healing power of remembrance that the poet sets out in "Only to read children's books" seems to have wholly collapsed—severed forever from the present by a traumatic rupture, childhood can offer him no solace.

In light of "I returned to my city…," the meaning of the fourth stanza of "With the world…" becomes clear: in the later poem, the city is "conceited, damned…youthful" (*samoliubivyi*, *prokliatyi…molozhavyi,* stanza 4, line 4), and "more shameless" (*naglee,* stanza 4, line 3) because of the effect it has on the lyric voice. Improving as it grows older while the poet is borne away by the ravages of time and caring only for itself, the city will not answer the cry at the heart of the 1930 poem: "Petersburg! I don't want to die yet" (*Peterburg! Ia eshche ne khochu umirat',* line 7). Instead, the city thumbs its nose at the lyric voice, reminding him of all it once was and all of those who waited at night for a fateful knock on their door only never to return, but doing nothing about it.[109] By gesturing to the incendiary poem "I returned to my city…," "With the world…" undermines the implicit purpose for which it was written.[110] It is as if the lyric persona uses the

[109] The description "youthful" (*molozhavyi*) also recalls a line of the Stalin Ode, where Mandelstam refers to Stalin's "youthful millennium entire" (*Vse molozhavoe ego tysiachelet'e*, stanza 2, line 1). The word *molozhavyi* is used to describe someone who looks or acts younger that his or her actual age. To speak of Stalin's "youthful millennium" as the millennium is in fact coming to a close is thus not to praise it: the *tabula rasa* of the Revolution aimed to reset the clock on Russian history, but, Mandelstam seems to be saying, the new society's "youthful" behavior does not become it.

[110] Somewhat remarkably, the incendiary poem "I returned to my city…" was published in Mandelstam's lifetime, in the journal *Literaturnaia gazeta.* Osip Mandelstam, "Ia vernulsia v moi gorod, znakomyi do slez." *Literaturnaia gazeta*, no. 53 (November 23, 1932). The decision to publish the poem was very likely a provocative gesture on the part of the editors. Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 1, 596. Nadezhda Iakovlevna recounts that a well-meaning emissary from the journal *Izvestiia* had warned Mandelstam to stop reciting this poem or

occasion of answering the new state's "questionnaire" to thumb his nose at it as the now-empty city of his youth, Petersburg-Leningrad, does at him.[111] Both "I returned to my city…" and "With the world I was but childishly bound" thus highlight the traumatic rupture between the present and the poet's childhood by giving a place to the absent and otherwise unspeakable. In "I returned to my city…," the city of his youth also takes on something of the qualities of a bratty child trained against the poet in all its malevolence.

The Soviet Child against the poet

The personification of Leningrad/Saint Petersburg is one manifestation of a theme that appeared almost a decade earlier in Mandelstam's poetics, beginning

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risk a nighttime visit of his own. («Писались стихи в Ленинграде, куда мы поехали после Москвы — на месяц, в дом отдыха ЦЕКУБУ. Это тогда Тихонов объяснил О. М., чтобы мы поскорее убирались из Ленинграда — «как на фронте»… Какой-то дружелюбный человек, представитель 'Известий', предупреждал О. М.: поменьше читайте эти стихи, а то они в самом деле придут за вами.») Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Kniga tret'ia*. Paris: YMCA-Press, 1987, 148. In light of this warning, the last couplet of the poem seems like a challenge: with dripping sarcasm Mandelstam announces his intention to wait for his "dear guests."

[111] In this way "With the world…" recalls yet another poem of 1931, "Preserve my speech forever for its aftertaste of misfortune and smoke" («Сохрани мою речь за привкус несчастья и дыма»), in which the lyric persona outlines what he is willing to do so that "these frozen scaffolds would love me" («Лишь бы только любили меня эти мерзлые плахи»). As Alexander Zholkovskii notes, for a poem purportedly intended to strike a deal with the new order in order to assure his immortality, it is profoundly ambivalent: "The thing is, the more concessions he is willing to make, and the more eloquently he describes the horrible conditions he accepts, the more unacceptable his offer becomes for his possible partners. They're unlikely to be comfortable with the designation as hangmen…in other words…villains." («Дело в том, что, чем на большие уступки он готов пойти, и чем красноречивее выписывает принимаемые им ужасные условия, тем неприемлемее становится его предложение для предполагаемых партнеров. Их вряд ли может устроить аттестация в качестве палачей…то есть…*злодеев*.») A.K. Zholkovskii, "'Sokhrani moiu rech'' i 'Ia primu tebia kak upriazh'': Mandel'shtam i Pasternak v 1931 godu." *Zvezda* 4 (2012), 233. Although Zholkovskii doesn't say so, there's something intentionally naïve—we might say childlike—about this approach, as though the lyric persona refuses to see how the glaring shortcoming of his offer might be unpalatable. In "With the world…," he makes a similar gesture, as though to say, "You're the one who asked the question in the first place" and shrug off the provocative quality of his answers.

with “He who found a horseshoe” of 1923: namely, the ventriloquism of children by the era to which they belong. As these poems show, for Mandelstam the Romantic image of the child became hollowed out and unavailable as the Soviet era wore on, replaced by the antagonistic new age with its equally antagonistic New Soviet Person. Indeed, in the poems of the 1920s and 30s discussed below, the figure of the child almost always resembles the new Soviet Child—he is the best, brightest, and happiest, justifying implicitly the sacrifices made in his name. At the same time, there is something sinister about these Soviet children: they parrot the ideals of their time unreflexively and are indifferent to the suffering of others. The ironic distance between the author/speaker and the children in these poems serves to articulate Mandelstam’s critique of the society that wraught them as well as his feeling of being out of step and out of place.

Children are a notable, and notably unsympathetic, presence in the 1923 poem “For me the language of a cobblestone is clearer than a dove’s” (*Iazyk bulyzhnika mne golubia poniatnei*). Inspired by Mandelstam’s contemporaneous translations from French poet Henri Auguste Barbier, according to Olga Shcherbinina the poem uses revolutionary Paris as a screen for Soviet Russia.[112]

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[112] “[I]n this poem Paris, with its ancient features, is associated with the ancient features of Moscow in the poem ‘1 January 1924’ (e.g. the textual coincidences: snow, apples, etc.). All of this serves as grounds to see allusions to the Russian fate in the features of French cathedrals.” («Париж в этом стихотворении с его приметами старины не случайно соотносится с приметами старинной Москвы в стихотворении '1 января 1924 года' (см. текстовые совпадения: снег, яблоки и пр.). Всё дает основания увидеть в приметах французских соборов намеки на русскую судьбу.») Ol’ga Shcherbinina, “Roza, vzdokh, i mal’chishka-okean,” *Zvezda*, no. 3 (March 2016), 224.

For me the language of a cobblestone is clearer than a dove's,
The stones are doves here, the homes like dovecots,
And the horseshoes' tale flows like a bright stream
Along the sonorous pavements of the great-grandmother of cities.
Here hordes of children, mendicants of spectacles,
And flocks of spooked sparrows
Pecked hastily at plumbeous crumbs,
Peas scattered by a Phrygian *babushka*.
And a woven basket lives on in memory
And through the air swims forgotten currant
And crowded houses stand, a row of milk teeth,
Upon senile gums, like twins.

They nicknamed months here like they were kittens,
And gave milk and blood to gentle lion cubs,
And when they grow up, could it really be
That their heads held up on shoulders for a whole two years!
The large-headed[113] raised their hands
And played with an oath on sand as though with an apple...
It's hard for me to speak: I didn't see anything,
But nonetheless I'll say: I remember one,
He was raising his paw like a flaming rose,
And, like a child, showing everyone his splinter,
They didn't listen to him: the coachmen laughed
Children chomped on apples as a barrel organ played.
They glued up posters, and set steel traps,
And sang songs, and roasted chestnuts.
And along a bright street, as though along a straight clearing,
Horses flew from dense forest!

Язык булыжника мне голубя понятней,
Здесь камни — голуби, дома — как голубятни,
И светлым ручейком течет рассказ подков
По звучным мостовым прабабки городов.
Здесь толпы детские — событий попрошайки,
Парижских воробьев испуганные стайки,
Клевали наскоро крупу свинцовых крох —

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[113] According to Mikhail Gasparov, this moniker refers to two of the leaders of the French Revolution, Mirabeau and Danton. Osip Mandel′shtam, *Stikhotvoreniia, proza*, ed. M. L. Gasparov (Moscow: Folio, 2001), 643. Anna Lisa Crone calls this a "surrealist" image echoed in *The Egyptian Stamp*. Anna Lisa Crone, "Echoes of Nietzsche and Mallarmé in Mandel'štam's Metapoetic 'Petersburg,'" *Russian Literature*, The Russian Avant-Garde XXXVIII on the Occasion of the Centenary of Mandel"štam's Birthday (II), 30, no. 4 (November 15, 1991), 422.

Фригийской бабушкой рассыпанный горох.
И в памяти живет плетеная корзинка,
И в воздухе плывет забытая коринка,
И тесные дома — зубов молочных ряд
На деснах старческих, как близнецы, стоят.

Здесь клички месяцам давали, как котятам,
И молоко и кровь давали нежным львятам;
А подрастут они — то разве года два
Держалась на плечах большая голова!
Большеголовые там руки подымали
И клятвой на песке, как яблоком, играли...
Мне трудно говорить — не видел ничего,
Но все-таки скажу: я помню одного, —
Он лапу поднимал, как огненную розу,
И, как ребенок, всем показывал занозу,
Его не слушали: смеялись кучера,
И грызла яблоки, с шарманкой, детвора.
Афиши клеили, и ставили капканы,
И пели песенки, и жарили каштаны,
И светлой улицей, как просекой прямой,
Летели лошади из зелени густой![114]

Shcherbinina contends that the lion cub in this poem is a double for Mandelstam himself.[115] In Barbier's 1830 poem *Le lion*, it represents the spirit of the July Revolution, initially untamed and bounding through the streets and ultimately tied up and muzzled.[116] In Mandelstam's poem, the image of the tamed lion evokes

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[114] Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*, vol. 1, 136.

[115] "Here the lion obviously signifies an unacknowledged eminent individual whose fate coincides with Mandelstam's own, thus the lion in the apocalyptic 1937 poem "Reims and Laon" is seen as an autobiographical comparison. The lion battles with the fox, with wily and mighty power." («Здесь лев с очевидностью подразумевает выдающуюся непризнанную личность, чья судьба сходна с судьбой самого Мандельштама, так что лев в апокалиптическом стихотворении 1937 года видится автобиографическим сопоставлением. Лев борется с лисой — хитрой и сильной властью.») Shcherbinina, "Roza, vzdokh, i mal'chishka-okean," 224.

[116] As Gleb Struve notes, in Mandelstam's essay on Barbier he calls the July Revolution "ill-fated" (неудачная) and a "cynical abuse of the name of the people" (циничн[ое]...злоупотребл[ение] имени народа). Gleb Struve, "Osip Mandelstam and Auguste Barbier: Notes on Mandelstam's Versions of Iambes," *California Slavic Studies* 8 (1975), 139.

equally the myth of Androcles and the Lion, in which a lion is spared from the pain of his splinter by a runaway slave, an act of kindness that sparks a lasting friendship that eventually saves the latter's life. In Mandelstam's poem, no such kindness is shown: the coachmen laugh outright, and the children, egged on perhaps by the adults, "chomp on apples" indifferently.[117] Their snack echoes the Tennis Court Oath of the 1789 Revolution, rendered in Mandelstam's poem as an apple-oath. Their casual chomping suggests their indifference not just to the cub's plight, but to the Revolutionary cause. Although "like a child" (*kak rebenok*), the poet-cub comes to seem more vulnerable than the actual children: he is caged and bleeding. If Paris is indeed a screen for Moscow in this poem, these children become not just allegories for the good name of "the people" being used against them, but Russian children—and people—as well. Unlike the myth of Androcles, no former "slave" (here, the "freed" former members of the Third Estate) will help the lyric voice, who must instead bear witness to his own suffering ("But nonetheless I'll say: I remember one," line 20). As in "With the world…," he does so through the subversive gesture of remembrance, which refuses to condemn to oblivion that which he feels should be remembered.

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[117] According to Mikhail Gasparov, the "hordes of children" of the first stanza are likely those of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. Osip Mandel'shtam, *Stikhotvoreniia, proza*, ed. M. L. Gasparov (Moscow: Folio, 2001), 642.

Uncompassionate children would recur in Mandelstam's children's book *2 Trams (2 tramvaia*, 1925). As Evgeniia Zavadskaia notes, the likely subtext of this poem is the death of Mandelstam's friend and fellow Acmeist Nikolai Gumilev, who was executed by the Cheka in 1921.[118] On this reading, the protagonist, a tram creatively named Tram, is Gumilev, who goes around the city and asks if anyone has seen his silly younger cousin Klik (Mandelstam was five years younger). Readers, meanwhile, know that Klik is safe—just sleepy and dazed. Like the author of "Waves Breaking at the Casket" or the lyric voice in "He who found a horseshoe," Klik is disoriented, having lost track not of time but of his own identity, his number. Instead of assistance, as in "For me the language of a cobblestone is clearer than a dove's," the coachmen and children do nothing, this time laughing in unison:

Every rail joint's knock and jingle
Hurt Klik's base.
In the evening he could hardly keep his headlights open:
He forgot his number—not five, not three...
The coachmen and the children laugh:
Look at that sleepy tram!

От стука и звона у каждого стыка
На рельсах болела площадка у Клика.
Под вечер слипались его фонари:
Забыл он свой номер — не пятый, не третий...
Смеются над Кликом извозчик и дети:
Вот сонный трамвай, посмотри![119]

[118] Evgeniia Vladimirovna Zavadskaia, "Tramvainoe teplo," *Detskaia literatura*, no. 11 (November 1988), 55.

[119] Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*, vol. 1, 421-3.

The casual laughter of these children seems especially sinister if we consider this poem to be an Aesopian expression of longing for a friend who is never coming back.[120] In such a reading, the children echo and indeed amplify the cruelty of the state, laughing gleefully at the poet's pain and loss. The poem also echoes the language of "For me the language of a cobblestone is clearer than a dove's": when Tram asks a truck whether he has seen his lost friend, he replies with unhelpful benevolence, "We don't know anything,/ We haven't seen him" (*My ne znaem nichego/ Ne vidali my ego*). Although it is possible to read this simply as a forthright admission of ignorance, when viewed through the lens of Aesopian language the truck's words suggest the fearful atomization of the people, who believe that the less they know, the less likely it is that they will be the next to disappear into the night.

In light of these children's indifference to the trams of *2 Trams*, we can better understand the sardonic undertones of "The boy in the tram" (*Mal'chik v tramvae,* 1924-6?). In this children's poem, a child wows the conductor, professors, and doctors aboard a tram with his brilliant command of simple arithmetic:

And all by himself	А мальчик сам,
And to everyone	А мальчик всем
The boy said that ten minus seven	Сказал, что десять минус семь
Is always three.	Всегда выходит три.
And everyone said: say that again!	И все сказали: повтори![121]

[120] For an extended reading of the Aesopian dimension of this poem, see Weld, "Dual Audience and Double Vision: Aesopian Depths and Hidden Subtexts."

[121] Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 1, 432.

It is possible to read “The boy in the tram” on two levels: On one, this poem functions to reproduce the myth of Soviet children’s preeminence—we judge children according to a sliding scale, and it may well be impressive for a child to have a firm grasp of arithmetic. On the other, it is unlikely that the adults feigning awe would need to hear the child’s very simple calculation again, suggesting that Mandelstam may in fact be poking fun as much at the child as at the adults who have enshrined him. On this satirical reading, the boy in the tram is the new Soviet Child and the awed adults aren’t pretending at all. In this case, the poem is a kind of reduction *ad absurdum* of the Soviet belief in the exemplariness of its children.

Mandelstam’s 1924 translation of Robert Louis Stevenson’s 1913 poem for children titled “Foreign Children” (*Zamorskie deti*) reflects an even more foundational Soviet myth: that of the supreme wellbeing and care enjoyed by all of its children. The original Stevenson poem reads:

Little Indian, Sioux or Crow,
Little frosty Eskimo,
Little Turn of Japanee,
O! don’t you wish that you were me?

You have seen the scarlet trees
And the lions overseas;
You have eaten ostrich eggs,
And turned the turtles off their legs.

Such a life is very fine,
But it’s not so nice as mine:
You must often, as you trod,
Have wearied, *not* to be abroad.

You have curious things to eat,
I am fed on proper meat;
You must swell beyond the foam,
But I am safe and live at home.

Little Indian, Sioux or Crow,
Little frosty Eskimo,
Little Turn of Japanee,
O! don't you wish that you were me?[122]

Mandelstam's sensitivity to the basic premise of Soviet reproductive futurism comes to the fore in this translation, one of only two from Stevenson. He takes many liberties with the particulars (Mandelstam's refrain, for instance, features "negro children" and "Malaysian boys"), but he reproduces the child-speaker's naïve, nationalistic myopia—we might say his "childish imperialism"—faithfully. The third stanza of the translation reads:

You have coconuts and bananas there
And monkeys sit on branches.
That's all well and good, but it won't do:
I don't want to live abroad forever!

Там у вас кокосы и бананы
И сидят на ветках обезьяны.
Хорошо—но все же не годится:
Не хочу всегда жить за границей![123]

This touching egoism is echoed in the third stanza, where Stevenson's "You must swell beyond the foam,/ But I am safe and live at home" becomes "I sleep in a bed on my very own pillow" (*Spliu v krovati na svoei podushke*). This line presumes that

[122] Robert Louis Stevenson, *A Child's Garden of Verses* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), 35.

[123] P. M. Nerler, *O.E. Mandelstam: Sobranie sochinenij v chetyrekh tomakh* (Moscow: Art-Biznes-Tsentr, 1993), vol. 2, 212. From Osip Mandel'shtam, "Zamorskie deti," *Vorobei*, 1924, 27.

the phrase “my very own” has a stable referant and that foreign children might not sleep in *their* own beds and on *their own* pillows, too.

In its chipper patriotism and insistence on happiness, Stevenson’s poem resonates remarkably well with the context in which Mandelstam translated it. As Catriona Kelly writes, between the years of 1917 and 1935

> The standard mode of representation was one in which the life of the fortunate, well-loved Soviet child was contrasted with the grim exploitation to which children ‘abroad’ (that is, in the capitalist West, and the West’s colonial dependencies) were subject.[124]

However, neither Stevenson’s original nor Mandelstam’s translation simply ventriloquize their child protagonists in an uncritical light. Stevenson expressed his critique of colonialism in his letters from the 1890s,[125] and according to Ann Colley “the belligerent image of the English child [in Stevenson’s poems] displays a critical distance from the naiveté of the child persona.”[126] Mandelstam’s decision to translate Stevenson resonates with his earliest poetics, for example with “Only to read children’s books.” Like the poet, Stevenson, notable for his neo-Romantic tendencies in an era dominated by English modernism, is said to have been

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[124] Kelly, *Children’s World,* 61. Mandelstam’s translation of Stevenson would resound eerily in such popular Soviet songs as “O how good it is to live in a Soviet land” (*Ekh khorosho v strane sovetskoi zhit’*, 1935), the “Song of Soviet Schoolchildren” (“Today, with a cheerful song…,” *Segodnia my s pesnei veseloi,* 1937) by V. Gusev, and Vasilii Lebedev-Kumach’s “O how wide is my dear country” (*Shiroka strana moia rodna,* 1939).

[125] Ann C. Colley, “Robert Louis Stevenson’s South Seas Crossings.” *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 48, no. 4 (2008), 871-2. His letters to family and friends were published shortly after his death, in 1899, and likely available at the library in Moscow by the 1920s. J. Herbert Slater, *Robert Louis Stevenson, a Bibliography of His Complete Works*. GBell, 1914, 21.

[126] Colley, Ann C. *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Colonial Imagination*. Aldershot, Hants, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub, 2004, 190.

“[s]ensitive to the child that lives within the adult” and to have “referred to himself as a grown man who feels ‘weary and timid in this big, jostling world.’”[127]

The warm and well-tended child of Stevenson’s poem would make another appearance in the 1932 poem “O how we love to play the hypocrite” (*O, kak my liubim litsemerit’*), where he serves to express Mandelstam’s feeling of disempowerment and marginality in the new order:

O how we love to play the hypocrite
And so easily forget
That in childhood we are closer to death
Than in our old age.

A sleepy child still sips resentment
From a saucer
But I have no one to sulk at
And am alone on every road.

But I don’t want to fall asleep
Like a fish in the deep swoon of the seas,
And I find dear the freedom to choose
My own sufferings and cares.

О, как мы любим лицемерить
И забываем без труда
То, что мы в детстве ближе к смерти,
Чем в наши зрелые года.

Еще обиду тянет с блюдца
Невыспавшееся дитя,
А мне уж не на кого дуться,
И я один на всех путях.

[127] Colley, Ann C. “‘Writing towards Home’: The Landscape of A Child’s Garden of Verses.” *Victorian Poetry* 35, no. 3 (1997), 305.

Но не хочу уснуть, как рыба,
В глубоком обмороке вод,
И дорог мне свободный выбор
Моих страданий и забот.[128]

As we see in this poem, by 1932 the image of the child has crystalized in Mandelstam's poetics as a way to signal his own marginality and vulnerability. Mandelstam contrasts himself with a child, who unlike him has the luxury of taking for granted that which has been lovingly given. By highlighting the child's proximity to death, however, Mandelstam returns to a theme of his 1916 "On a peasant sledge lined with straw," using the inherent vulnerability of children to underscore his own (now even greater) precariousness. By reaffirming his desire to choose his own sufferings and concerns, Mandelstam actively rejects the state's emphasis on care.[129] As the poem illustrates and as Catriona Kelly has argued, this care came at the cost of freedom: "the state's capacity for care and the state's capacity for surveillance were united. Enjoying the first also meant submitting to the latter."[130] For Mandelstam, it is better to be a disenfranchised adult than a figurative ward of the state.

[128] Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 1, 172-3.

[129] Recall the claims of the new order that children in the Soviet Union "were treated with greater care than they were anywhere else in the world." Kelly, *Children's World*, 1.

[130] Ibid., 110.

Conclusion

The Polish poet and Nobel laureate Czeslaw Milosz once heard fellow poet Naum Korzhavin speak at a conference about Pasternak's 1932 book *Second Birth* (*Vtoroe rozhdenie*), which both men had read as children and which Mandelstam had once professed to hating.[131] While Milosz remembered nothing of his own early reading experience in Pasternak's book but "art, nature, and so on," Korzhavin recounted a very different reading experience: "I was a young boy and I said, 'If everything is so beautiful in our country…,' and Pasternak converted me to being a Stalinist."[132]

This is undoubtedly not the effect that Mandelstam had in mind when he wrote, in his final letter to Pasternak, that he wanted his addressee's poetry to "surge toward the world, toward the people, the children."[133] Mandelstam's wish expresses an awareness of the stakes of speaking to and for children as well as a desire for Pasternak to overcome the forces that shaped children into citizens and citizens into children in order to speak to them without mediation.

This is the very wish that Mandelstam expresses for himself in his 1935 poem "Yes, I lie in the ground with moving lips" (*Da, ia lezhu v zemle, gubami*

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[131] Mandelstam called it "Soviet baroque." Aleksandr Kushner, "Eto ne literaturnyi fakt, a samoubiistvo." *Novyi mir*, no. 7 (2005), 138.

[132] Czesław Miłosz, *Czesław Miłosz: Conversations*. 1st ed. Literary Conversations Series. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006, 114.

[133] «Я хочу, чтобы ваша поэзия, которой мы все избалованы и незаслуженно задарены, — рвалась дальше, к миру, к народу, к детям…». Pasternak received this letter from "beyond the grave" only in 1945, although it had been written eight years earlier. Christopher J. Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*. Vol. 2. Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989, 216.

shevelia), in which he envisions schoolchildren someday learning the words formed by his moving lips: "And what I say will be repeated by each schoolchild" (*I to, chto ia skazhu, zauchit kazhdyi shkol'nik*). The schoolchildren in this poem stand in stark opposition with the "twittering hangmen" (*shchebeta*[*vshie*] *palachi*] who perch on school benches in Mandelstam's poem "An apartment, quiet as paper" (*Kvartira tikha, kak bumaga*) of the same year. Written as an angry response to Pasternak's innocent comment that now that the Mandelstams had been given an apartment, Osip could finally write,[134] the poem lays bare the poet's fear of being co-opted, and corrupted, with material favors from the powers that be:

[….] And the damned walls are thin,
And there's nowhere left to run,
And like a fool playing a comb,
I'm obliged to play for someone.

Snottier still than a Komsomol cell,
More arrogant than a college song,
I've got to teach hangmen to twitter
As they perch on a school bench. [….]

I read ration books
I catch hempen words
And a menacing rock-a-bye-baby
I sing to the lord of the Kolkhoz.

[….] А стены проклятые тонки,
И некуда больше бежать,
И я как дурак на гребенке
Обязан кому-то играть.

[134] Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colors*, 239.

Наглей комсомольской ячейки
И вузовской песни бойчей
Присевших на школьной скамейке
Учить щебетать палачей. [....]

Пайковые книги читаю,
Пеньковые речи ловлю
И грозное баюшки-баю
Колхозному баю пою,[135] [....]

In this excerpt, it is unclear whether children have become hangmen or hangmen, children. Whatever the case may be, the lyric voice feels obliged to pander to them and sing lullabies *as if* they were children, suggesting the former poet-child is now the only adult in the room. Nonetheless, the poet must learn the curriculum of his age along with these schoolchildren. This new curriculum includes not the "children's books" of 1908, but "ration books": the dull and unimaginative byproduct of the humdrum realities and scarcity that characterized Soviet life, a daily dose of what is deemed to be sufficient knowledge.

In light of this 1932 poem, we might say that the words "what I say will be repeated by each schoolchild" express a secondary desire to make children children again. The "final weapon" (*poslednee oruzh'e*) Mandelstam has in mind as he lies buried in the ground at the end of "Stanzas" (*Ia ne khochu sred' iunoshei teplichnykh*, 1935) is aimed at the heart of the state's present and future legitimacy, expressed in part through its ability to shape its children—and its citizens as a

[135] Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 1, 182-3.

whole—after the image of the immutable and contented Child.[136] By contrast, Mandelstam's poetics highlight the embodied and lively perishability exemplified by real children, the difference between being "used like brick or cement" by the age and seizing joyously "the spirit of building…in order to awaken and use the forces of architecture sleeping in it."[137] Children in Mandelstam's poetics thus function as a mirror of the societal forces that privilege the idea of Life at the expense of living. By enshrining both these children and, later, the Soviet child in his poetics, Mandelstam reflects back on the reproductive futurism of the Stalin era and points to the inadequacy of its vision.

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[136] Jennifer Baines describes "Stanzas" as a "malicious eulogy." Baines, *Mandelstam: The Later Poetry*, 127.

[137] Mandelstam, "Humanism & Modern Life." In *Osip Mandelstam, Selected Essays*, 154. «Акмеизм — для тех, кто, обуянный духом строительства, не отказывается малодушно от своей тяжести, а радостно принимает ее, чтобы разбудить и использовать архитектурно спящие в ней силы.» Mandelstam, "Acmeist Manifesto," 48. Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 2, 23.

Chapter 4

Adult Daughter, Child Father
Lidia Chukovskaia and Kornei Chukovskii's Speak to the State

Introduction

By the time the famed children's writer and critic Kornei Chukovskii died in October of 1969 at the age of 87, he had long been a celebrated and beloved author of books that had shaped generations of Russian children for half a century. He had lived in relative comfort in the writers' colony of Peredelkino outside of Moscow and, unlike so many writers from the Soviet era whose work is still admired today, his books had been printed by the millions during his lifetime.[1]

That a children's writer could have risen to such prominence in the USSR should come as no great surprise: throughout the Soviet era, and in the early years especially, pedagogical debates raged as educators and writers grappled with the state's dictate to forge the New Soviet Person.[2] As Lisa Kirschenbaum has written, "Children had long been represented as both the chief beneficiaries of the Revolution and as its purest exponents,"[3] and according to Catriona Kelly, the Soviet state "placed children's affairs at the heart of its political legitimacy,

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[1] According to Nina Christesen, 849 editions of his works, totaling 123 million copies, were published in his lifetime. Nina Christesen, "Introduction," in *Lydia Korneevna Chukovskaya: A Tribute* (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 1987), ii.

[2] "[D]ebates on childhood and kindergarten suggested ways of putting revolutionary visions into practice." Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932*, Studies in the History of Education (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2001), 3.

[3] Ibid., 151-2.

emphasizing that children were treated with greater care than they were anywhere else in the world."[4] Chukovskii, who had emerged as a new and exciting voice in children's literature at the dawn of the Revolution (his breakout book *The Crocodile* was published in the fall of 1917), had been at the vanguard of these debates,[5] and despite numerous run-ins with the censors throughout the early years of the Soviet Union,[6] he nevertheless fared reasonably well—his dacha at Peredelkino one telltale sign of state favor. By the time of his death, he had been awarded numerous prestigious distinctions for his service to Soviet letters in the field of children's literature and criticism alike.[7]

Yet none of the major Soviet newspapers mentioned Chukovskii's funeral, and his death was noted only in the briefest of terms in *Pravda*, the most widely

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[4] Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890-1991* (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2007), 1.

[5] Chukovskii's writings about children were widely read and played a role in the day-to-day life of parents. Ibid. 356. Like his colleague Samuil Marshak, he was "constantly invited to pontificate about the special place of children's literature and of the child in Soviet culture, and [was] canvassed for [his] views on education and morality." Ibid., 100. Moreover, despite his disagreements with his colleagues over how and what one should write for children, "two of the most prominent figures associated with [Soviet pedagogy,]…A.R. Luria and Lev Vygotsky, respectfully and uncritically cited examples taken from *Little Children* [later titled *From Two to Five*]…in an essay on child development from the early 1930s." Ibid. 91.

[6] E.g. the so-called "chukovshchina" period in 1929, when Chukovskii and likeminded writers for children were critiqued for their lack of "contemporariness," or ideological engagement. In 1943, Joseph Stalin personally ordered that a portion of Chukovskii's 1925 tale *Barmalei* (*Odaleem Barmaleia*) be excluded from a collection of works for children, beginning a period of professional troubles for the author. In 1946, a campaign against Chukovskii's *Bibigon* (1945) began, once again for reasons of apoliticality. Irina Luk'ianova, *Kornei Chukovskii*, vol. 1037, Zhizn' zamechatel'nykh liudei (Molodaia gvardiia) (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2006), 522, 748, 778-9.

[7] The Order of Lenin (1957), the Order of the Red Banner of Labor (*Orden' trudovogo krasnogo znameni*; 1939, 1962, 1965, 1967), the Lenin Prize (1962), and others. According to the newspaper *Pravda,* the Order of Lenin awarded for "achievement in the development of Soviet literature" («За заслуги в развитии советской литературы»). Unkown author, *"Ukaz Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR O Nagrazhdenii Pisetalia K.I. Chukovskogo Ordenom Lenina," Pravda, March 30, 1957.*

read Soviet daily.[8] According to his friend Iulian Oksman, this move was intentional: the state had omitted mention of Chukovskii's funeral in order to avoid the public outcry that would likely arise if people gathered at his grave in large numbers. "At the grave of a great writer an electric field of protest invariably emerges…In such hours, official lies are especially unbearable for them," Oksman writes.[9] Official skittishness over the funeral rites of a major cultural figure was nothing new by 1969—the state's attempts to reduce the numbers of attendees at Chukovskii's funeral resembled its earlier maneuverings following the deaths of two other great writers, Boris Pasternak and Anna Akhmatova, in 1960 and 1966 respectively. "An old song!" Oksman writes. "They hastened just so to bury Pasternak…The same provocative trick was repeated at Anna Akhmatova's grave."[10] As further evidence of the state's desire to control the symbolic significance of Chukovskii's death, members of the KGB were in attendance in order to regulate who spoke and on what themes.[11]

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[8] The October 29, 1969 issue of *Pravda* relegates it to a small box in the bottom left corner of the last page of the issue, with no mention of the upcoming funeral. *Izvestia*, another major Soviet paper, omits mention of Chukovskii's death altogether. Unknown author, "Announcement of Death of Kornei Chukovskii," *Pravda*, October 29, 1969.

[9] «У гроба большого писателя неизменно возникает электрическое поле общественного протеста…В такие часы для них особенно невыносима официальная ложь.» Iulian Oksman, "Na pokhoronakh Korneia Chukovskogo," October 31, 1969, http://www.chukfamily.ru/kornei/bibliografiya/articles-bibliografiya/na-poxoronax-korneya-chukovskogo.

[10] «Старая песня! Точно так же спешили закопать Пастернака….Тот же провокационный трюк повторился у гроба Анны Андреевны Ахматовой.» Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

By likening Chukovskii's funeral to Pasternak's and Akhmatova's, Oksman implies that these three writers had a comparable relationship to the state. Yet Chukovskii's travails never reached the heights of either of his friends and contemporaries: unlike Pasternak, he had never published prose critical of the Soviet project, and he had never teetered on the edge of arrest or lost either a spouse or a child to the camps as Akhmatova had with Nikolai Gumilyev, Nikolai Punin, and her son Lev Gumilev. Chukovskii's own son, Nikolai Chukovskii, was, by contrast, a celebrated Soviet writer in his own right and had in fact voted to exclude Pasternak from the ranks of the Union of Soviet Writers following the publication of *Doctor Zhivago* abroad in 1957.[12] Although Chukovskii's daughter Lidia Chukovskaia had been arrested twice,[13] had lost her husband to the Great Terror of the late 1930s, and had emerged as a vocal critic of the regime by the 1960s,[14] Chukovskii's stature and connections helped to spare her from some of the more severe consequences of her dissidence.[15] What's more, the poem most often

[12] This action pained Chukovskii greatly. Lidia Chukovskaia, by contrast, chose not to attend the Union meeting, knowing that her absence came at the risk of exclusion. Luk'ianova, *Kornei Chukovskii*, 870.

[13] Once in 1925 as the result of her involvement in a mix-up involving a student group at her university, and the second time in 1926 in connection with leaflets deemed anti-Soviet. As a result of the second arrest she was sentenced to one year of exile in Saratov. E. N. Nikitin, *Kakie oni raznye... : Kornei, Nikolai i Lidiia Chukovskie*, Imena (Nizhnii Novgorod: DEKOM, 2014), 218-25.

[14] In 1966 she and writer Vladimir Kornilov co-authored a letter to the editorial board of the Soviet newspaper *Izvestiia* in defense of Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel', who were put on trial for publishing writings satirizing the Soviet regime abroad. Lidiia Korneevna Chukovskaia, *Otkrytoe slovo* (New York: Khronika, 1976), 15-7.

[15] As evidenced by her relatively comfortable living situation in Saratov, where she spent was sentenced to spend three years in exile but spent less than one. E. N. Nikitin, *Kakie oni raznye...*, 225, 231.

cited as evidence of Chukovskii's dissident convictions, *The Big Bad Cockroach* (*Tarakanishche*, 1923), was not aimed at Stalin as it is commonly believed: it was written and published before Lenin's death, and thus before Stalin came into his reputation as a dictator. Instead, *Big Bad Cockroach*, which tells the story of a group of animals terrorized by a cockroach until a kangaroo and sparrow join forces and set them free, was cited by Stalin himself at the 16th Party Congress as an allegory for his political opponents.[16] Moreover, likely as a result of this appropriation by Stalin, *The Big Bad Cockroach* saw numerous print runs in Chukovskii's lifetime and was never censored even when so many of his other books were.[17]

Although *The Big Bad Cockroach* was not the decisive political statement it has been made out to be,[18] it does reveal a great deal about Chukovskii's beliefs,

[16] Mark Lipovetsky, "Ideologiia literatury. Allegorii vlasti. Skazkovlast': 'Tarakanishche" Stalina",'" *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 2000, 126.

[17] E.g. *The Crocodile* (1917), *The Miracle Tree* (1924), *Barmalei* (1925), *From Two to Five* (1928), and others.

[18] This misunderstanding persists at both the level of popular imagination and scholarship. For example, in her memoir *Steep Route* (*Krutoi marshrut*, 1967), well-known dissident Evgenia Ginzburg devotes a whole chapter to "Tarakanische," writing of an experience reading aloud from a tome of Chukovskii that "All of the sudden we were all struck with the second meaning of the poem" («И вдруг всех нас поразил второй смысл стиха»). When her acquaintance asks with disbelief whether Chukovskii could have dared to write such an outright critique of Stalin («Неужели Чуковский осмелился?»), Ginzburg concedes that he did not necessarily intend the double meaning: "Probably not. But it can't mean anything else!" («Наверно, нет. Но объективно только так и выходит!»). In an essay titled "Writing for a Dual Audience in the Former Soviet Union," Larissa Klein Tumanov holds that Chukovskii doubtless meant the subtext to imply Stalin (134-5), although Stalin only rose to prominence after Lenin's death, three years following the publication of "Big Bad Cockroach," in 1924. Evgeniia Ginzburg, *Krutoi marshrut* (Milano: Mondadori, 1967), 307. Larissa Klein Tumanov, "Writing for a Dual Audience in the Former Soviet Union: The Aesopian Children's Literature of Kornei Chukovskii, Mikhail Zoshchenko, and Daniil Kharms" (Garland, 1999), 134-5. Elena Chukovskaia, "Ten' budushchego," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, July 9, 1991.

and throughout his life he showed great sympathy to writers out of favor with the regime. Even when his own material circumstances were less than stable, he helped Nadezhda and Osip Mandelstam during their years of exile in Voronezh,[19] and he petitioned on behalf of the poet Joseph Brodsky and sheltered the dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn when the latter ran into troubles with the state over the seizure of his manuscript for *The First Circle*.[20] It is on this part of Chukovskii's legacy that Oksman chooses to focus when he writes, with palpable sadness, that Chukovskii's was "A civic funeral" (*Grazhdanskaia panikhida.*)[21] As this plaintive, short sentence implies, Chukovskii's funeral did not reflect his true convictions, and the state's attempts to mold his legacy went against the grain of who Chukovskii had really been. The image of Chukovskii as an unwilling Soviet writer persists to this day, and in his diaries Chukovskii expresses guilt over his relative good standing on numerous occasions.[22]

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[19] For more on the exchange of letters between Chukovskii and the Mandelstams, see A. A. Morozov, "Iz arkhiva K. I. Chukovskogo: Pis'ma N. Ia. I O.E. Mandel'shtam, Stikhi 1935-1937, Zapisi v dnevnike K. I. Chukovskogo," 1991, http://www.chukfamily.ru/Kornei/Biblio/mandelshtam.htm.

[20] Luk'ianova, *Kornei Chukovskii*, 925, 934.

[21] By contrast, in her diaries Lidia Chukovskaia writes that Akhmatova's was *not* a civic funeral: "There was no civic funeral in Moscow or in the Union. And they change everything constantly—when? Where? Deliberately?" «И в Москве, в Союзе, не было гражданской панихиды. И все время все меняют—когда? Где? Не нарочно ли?» Lidia Korneevna Chukovskaia, *"Dnevnik—bol'shoe podspor'e …": (1938-1994)*. Moscow: Vremia, 2015, 179.

[22] As, for example, when he wrote, "I am more comfortable when they revile me than when they praise me." («тот период, когда меня хаяли, чем-то больше по душе, чем этот, когда меня хвалят.») Kornei Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, 302; *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh*. Vol. 12. Moscow: Terra-Knizhnyi klub, 2001, 541.

In Irina Luk'ianova's recent biography of him, she paints Chukovskii's death as the end of an era. It was only afterwards, she notes as if to imply a subtle causal link, that Aleksandr Solzhenistyn was finally excluded from the Writers' Union and the children's writer Sergei Mikhalkov ascended to the role of chief Soviet children's writer—a man who spoke of there being "no room" for liberalism in the domain of children's writing.[23] It is as if Chukovskii's death opened the floodgates for these unfortunate events, and Oksman's own account begins, "The last person before whom they [i.e. the Soviet authorities] felt any shame has died."[24] As Luk'ianova plainly states of the era that follows his death, "Chukovskii did not belong in such times."[25] She concludes the biography on a kind of composite image borrowed from Chukovskaia's childhood reminiscences of her father and his writings for children (*The Big Bad Cockroach* especially), envisioning a time when "everything is possible, and you don't want for anything, and the neighborhood children travel along the sun-dappled paths covered in pine needles on their bikes, riding and laughing and munching on gingerbread."[26] The implication here is not only that Chukovskii represents the very best in all of us—the whimsy and fancy

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[23] Luk'ianova, *Kornei Chukovskii*, 978.

[24] «Умер последний человек, которого еще сколько-нибудь стеснялись.» Oksman, "Na pokhoronakh Korneia Chukovskogo."

[25] «В этом времени Чуковскому делать было нечего.» Luk'ianova, *Kornei Chukovskii*, 978-9.

[26] «И все можно, и ничего не нужно, и по пыльной, усыпанной сосновыми иглами дороге в пятнах солнечных зайцев колесят соседские дети на великах, едут и смеются, и пряники жуют.» Ibid.

seen as the *propre* of children—but that he no more belonged in the time period in question than does this halcyon image.

In reality, Chukovskii had lived through much worse than the Brezhnev era. And, far from being incompatible with the times, through his writings for and about children he had played an active role in bolstering the legitimacy of the very state about which he harbored reservations—as Catriona Kelly writes, the poem "Let There Always Be Sunshine" (*Pust' vsegda budet solntse*), based on words uttered spontaneously by a child and commemorated in Chukovskii's beloved book *From Two to Five* (*Ot dvukh do piati*, 1928, first published under the title *Little Children, Malen'kie deti*) perpetuated the "stereotype of children—particularly young children—as perpetually joyful, innocent, and docile."[27] Kelly writes that in the Soviet era "Espousing the myth of 'happy childhood' came to seem a respectable position for a Soviet intellectual who was coolly disposed to Soviet power, as well as for an enthusiastic supporter of the regime."[28] Chukovskii's commitment to this happy image, however, was an ambivalent one at best.

When reality fell short of the sun-soaked ideal evoked in the last pages of Luk'ianova's biography, Chukovskii did not flinch from cold pragmatism: in 1943 he authored a letter to Joseph Stalin calling for juvenile labor colonies "with a strict military regimen" (*trudkolonii s surovym voennym rezhimom*) for wayward

[27] Kelly, *Children's World* 153.

[28] Ibid. 154.

children and even named several such children by name.[29] As this letter and numerous other instances indicate,[30] throughout his life Chukovskii engaged in a negotiation with the state far more complex than either Oksman or Luk'ianova's accounts suggest.[31]

In what follows, I propose to examine that complex legacy through the lens of the topic Chukovskii loved best: childhood. As his writings about children (his own and others') show, Chukovskii engaged in a constant process of renegotiating his relationship to the Soviet state, at times appearing to throw his hat in completely with the Bolshevik project. At others, almost in spite of himself, he was forced to admit that childhood as he envisioned it differed markedly from both the reality and the Soviet ideal. This discrepancy in turn cast doubt on the legitimacy of the state's vision as well as the compatibility of that vision with his own. The lens of childhood thus serves as a powerful tool for revealing the contradictions of Chukovskii's legacy, just as it served to reveal the inadequacies of the Soviet project to Chukovskii himself.

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[29] K.I. Chukovskii May 17, 1943. 558.11.885. Л 85-7, Rossiiskii gossudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politichesoi isstorii.

[30] For example his account of his encounter with Stalin at the congress of the All-Union Lenin Young Communist League in April of 1936 discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, or his admission to fellow writer Emmanuil Kazakevich that he "had once loved Stalin in spite of everything, but wrote about him less than others" («несмотря ни на что любил Сталина, но писал о нем меньше, чем другие.») Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*, 325; *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh* vol. 13, 19-20; Ibid. 405, 214.

[31] The tone of Oksman's account is understandable—the stakes of losing a friend and a powerful (if often quiet) proponent of liberalism in 1969 are readily apparent. As Luk'ianova notes, he himself had recently lost his job. Luk'ianova, *Kornei Chukovskii*, 926.

It is for this reason that Lidia Chukovskaia chooses time and again to speak of her father through childhood: by speaking of her own childhood and of his own "eternal" one, she brings to light (sometimes in spite of herself) the contradictions in his considerable legacy. In both *To the Memory of Childhood* (*Pamiati detstva,* begun in 1970/1) and in her elegiac poetry authored after his death,[32] Chukovskaia suggests that all too often, her father appeased or failed to challenge the powers that be. As Chukovskaia shows, her father made a calculate choice to retreat into a children's world rather than harness the innate ability of childhood to stand up to power as his famed *Big Bad Cockroach* exhorts readers to do.

Published abroad in 1983 during the period when Chukovskaia's writing did not appear in print in the Soviet Union, *To the Memory of Childhood* also plays an important role in how Chukovskaia writes herself back into social existence. In her combined eulogy/memoir, she weaponizes her childhood in order to reassert her filiation and contest the state's attempts to shape her father's legacy. To insist on the close ties between a beloved and widely celebrated figure like Chukovskii and herself was also to contest the boundary between official and unofficial lives, and official and unofficial deaths. Chukovskii may have enjoyed renown and state-approval in the last decades of his life, but as the competing interests at his funeral attested, his legacy could not be viewed through a binary lens.

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[32] Lidia Korneevna Chukovskaia, *Po etu storonu smerti: iz dnevnika 1936-1976*. (Paris: YMCA Press, 1978).

Kornei Chukovskii and Soviet children

Contrary to Oksman's portrayal in his recollections of the funeral, in reality Chukovskii's attitude fell well within the limits of what Katerina Clark, in tandem with Kwame Anthony Appiah, has called "cosmopolitan patriotism," or the phenomenon by which Stalin-era individuals "pushed for a more cosmopolitan culture" while still remaining "committed to the Soviet state."[33] Like Clark's cosmopolitan patriots, Chukovskii too "had [his] own [agenda]…that often overlapped with official stipulations but did not necessarily coincide."[34] Indeed although Chukovskii's concern for and devotion to children's wellbeing in some ways aligned with the state's, they were not coextensive with it:[35] he was awarded numerous prestigious distinctions for his literary efforts, yet throughout the Soviet era his children's books repeatedly came under fire for lack of ideological engagement or for being out of step with their time.[36]

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[33] Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome : Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011), 30.

[34] Ibid., 28.

[35] My reading differs from Jacqueline Olich's, who argues that, far from advancing the aims of the state, Chukovskii made use of the state's publishing apparatus for children to promote "his own liberal, pro-Western, literature-centric ideology." Jacqueline Marie Olich, "Competing Ideologies and Children's Books: The Making of a Soviet Children's Literature, 1918-1935," 2000. 126. In portraying Chukovskii as an "anti-Bolshevik intellectual" (143) who "likely hoped that Russia would evolve into a liberal democracy" (113), Olich is writing against such scholars as Lidia Kon and, later, Elena Sokol, who saw Chukovskii as "apolitical" or not "ideologically engaged." Ibid. 18, 115. In this sense, Olich's critique is just—even if it doesn't conceal intentional political subtext, Chukovskii's work is certainly ideological, and in important ways, it ran counter to the ideology of the state.

[36] E.g. the so-called "chukovshchina" period (1929) and the controversy surrounding *Bibigon* (1945). Tellingly, his colleague Samuil Marshak was honored by the Union of Soviet Writer's in 1947 when Chukovskii's story was not being printed. Chukovskaia, *"Dnevnik—bol'shoe podspor'e …,"* 79.

For all the truth that some of these accusations held, as Clark reminds us, "Such disparities and gestures are indicators of a *degree* of independence on the part of intellectuals, but not necessarily of dissidence."[37] As the repeated, if somewhat latent, recognition of the state indicates, through his writings for and about children Chukovskii contributed to the development of the same state about which he sometimes harbored doubts. In his diaries, we occasionally glimpse his attempts to live according to the spirit of the age: as Johann Hellbeck has compellingly argued, far from being a site in which to reveal one's "real" or "hidden" self, diaries in the Soviet era suggest that having a "dual soul" was not in fact appealing and that, instead, people frequently used the pages of their diaries as a site of negotiation between themselves and the state as they grappled with how to transform themselves into the New Soviet Person.[38] Although Chukovskii was far from the "semi-literate" citizens Hellbeck focuses on in his study,[39] we can nevertheless see the pressures to align his two selves—just as, at other moments, we see his dismay when those efforts come to naught.

Chukovskii's hopes for children can be summed up in what I will call "transcendental childhood." I use this term to signal the extent to which Chukovskii's hopes for all children did not spring, strictly speaking, from Russian

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[37] Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome*, 29.

[38] Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind : Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006), 11, 13.

[39] Ibid., 14.

soil and were not limited to his native land in either scope or ambition:[40] as is well known, his desire to write engagingly for children stems from his time in England as a correspondent for a Ukrainian newspaper in the early 1900s.[41] Chukovskii's vision of childhood was, moreover, deeply rooted in Romantic notions. As Ann Wierda Rowland has written, "the 'Romantic child' earns its sobriquet because it is essentially an idealized, nostalgic, sentimental figure of childhood, one characterized by innocence, imagination, nature and primitivism."[42] This image contrasts greatly from that of the ideal Soviet child, who was expected to actively participate in the political life of the nation and reflect, through his devotion to Stalin and overall wellbeing, its modernizing achievements.[43] In contrast to this results-oriented approach, a great deal of idealization and an emphasis on not only innocence but imagination especially characterizes Chukovskii's vision of childhood, with the caveat that Chukovskii's ideal child is a quixotic amalgam of untutored innocence and sophistication: Chukovskii believed that the innate faculties of children could be channeled into uniquely keen literary sensitivity. In

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[40] As Jacqueline Olich writes, Chukovskii's writings for children "ultimately transcended the Soviet system and undermined efforts to create a 'Soviet' children's literature. Olich, "Competing Ideologies and Children's Books," 103.

[41] Elena Sokol, *Russian Poetry for Children* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 4.

[42] Ann Wierda Rowland, *Romanticism and Childhood: The Infantilization of British Literary Culture* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 9.

[43] "Children's needs were of high importance, but not of supreme importance: at the center of the Soviet system lay productive labor, and children's contribution to productive labor could be at best restricted…Children might be unproductive at present; they were, however, essential to building the future. From the first, therefore, the leaders of the new regime targeted them not just as the recipients of nurture, but as an audience for political ideas." Kelly, *Children's World*, 62.

its purity, a transcendental childhood—like Romantic childhood—was also one unsubsumed by the ruling ideology of the time, existing beyond the strictures that political currents (and countercurrents) would seek to impose upon it. "Transcendental childhood" describes Chukovskii's hopes for all children, not just Soviet ones, and it is from this discrepancy that tensions sometimes arose.

One gets the sense that for Chukovskii, the Soviet project was worthwhile only insofar as it could help achieve his vision.[44] Referring to the widespread Timurite movement, which launched in the wake of Arkady Gaidar's popular youth novel *Timur and His Squad* (*Timur i ego komanda*, 1940) and centered on children's volunteerism, Chukovskii writes in a letter to Stalin dated May 1943:

> One would have to be blind in order not to see that the vast majority of [Soviet children] are honorable and courageous. The Timurite movement alone, the likes of which exists nowhere else on earth, stands as a great triumph of our pedagogical system.[45]

Chukovskii's distaste for official platitudes is well known,[46] and he buried copies of Stalin's book on Leninism left behind at his Peredelkino home by soldiers around

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[44] Luk'ianova overstates this in her biography, where she writes that Chukovskii mistakenly identified the USSR with the "imaginary land of happiness" he envisioned («Недаром…расширились границы его Айболитии, 'сказочной страны человечьего счастья', с которой он так долко и ошибочно отождествлял СССР.») Luk'ianova, *Kornei Chukovskii*, 737.

[45] «Нужно быть слепым, чтобы не видеть, что в огромном своем большинстве они благородны и мужественны. Уже одно движение тимуровцев, подобного которому не существует нигде на земле, является великим триумфом всей нашей воспитательной системы.» Chukovskii, May 17, 1943, 558.11.885. Л 85-7, Rossiiskii gossudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politichesoi isstorii.

[46] As for example when Chukovskii laments at length the state of people who repeat ideological formulas handed down from above and are unable to think for themselves. Of a literateur who critiqued an article that Chukovskii had written, he writes in a 1932 diary entry that "he wanted me to repeat the well-known dogmas" («он хочет, чтобы я говорил всем известные догматы…»). Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969* 271; *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh* vol. 12, 480.

the same time that he composed this letter.[47] Yet one senses that he praises the children of whom he writes readily and with pleasure. The purpose of his letter lies elsewhere than praise, however. Chukovskii writes to Stalin to express his concern regarding the rise in truancy and petty crime among school-age children that had resulted from wartime conditions:

> But precisely because I am whole-heartedly amazed by the historically unprecedented cohesion (*splochennost'iu*) and moral strength of our children, I consider it my duty as a Soviet writer to inform you that the moral decay of a certain group of children that grew out of wartime conditions worries me greatly."[48]

Where Soviet pedagogy proves successful, he willingly echoes the language of the state: In the Soviet era, word "cohesion" (*splochennost'*) was used to describe the potency of the Bolshevik Party,[49] and although Chukovskii is likely just speaking to Stalin in the language he expects the leader to want to hear, his praise could have

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[47] In a December 2, 1967 entry he describes how he found some sixty copies of Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism* at his Peredelkino estate and, after asking the office of the writer's colony to take them, "knowing I was committing a political crime, I tossed them into a small ditch in the woods and covered these dull and mediocre books with dirt, and there those awful holy scriptures of our Mao have been peacefully rotting these twenty-four years." («я ночью, сознавая, что совершаю политическое преступление, засыпал этими бездарными книгами небольшой ров в лесочке и засыпал их глиной. Там они мирно гниют 24 года,—эти священные творения нашего Мао»). Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969* 525; *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh* vol. 13, 451.

[48] «Но именно потому, что я всей душой восхищаюсь невиданной в истории сплоченностью и нравственной силой наших детей, я считаю своим долгом советского писателя сказать Вам, что в условиях военного времени образовалась обширная группа детей, моральное **разложение** которых внушает мне большую тревогу.» Chukovskii, May 17, 1943, 558.11.885. Л 85-7, Rossiiskii gossudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politichesoi isstorii.

[49] According to D.N. Ushakov, the word *splochennost'* (solidarity, cohesion) means the "status, condition of people who have banded together. The cohesion of the troops. The Bolsheviks astonished the world with their cohesion. The cohesion and unity of will and action of the Party is its strength." «[С]остояние, положение сплотившихся людей. Сплочённость бойцов. Большевики изумили мир своей сплоченностью. Партия сильна своей сплоченностью, единством воли, единством действий…» D. N. Ushakov, *Tolkovyj slovar' russkogo jazyka: in 4 volumes*, Slavica Publishers. Reprint series, no. 1, part 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Slavica Publishers, 1974), 442.

been tempered if it had been less sincere. Chukovskii goes on to recount the petty thefts and misconduct of a group of students at school no. 613 in Moscow, singling several schoolchildren, and one in particular, out by name. He writes of being especially concerned about "manifestations of childhood brutality" (*osobenno smushaiut menia proiavleniia detskoi zhestokosti*) and calls on Stalin to help "return them to salutary productive labor" (*vernut' ikh k poleznoi sozidatel'noi rabote*) before it's too late. To do so, Chukovskii suggests increasing the numbers of juvenile "labor colonies with a strict military regimen in the style of Anton Makarenko" (*trudkolonii s surovym voennym rezhimom tipa Antona Makarenko*), a celebrated Soviet pedagogue who envisioned a system of self-governing child collectives and integration of productive labor into the educational system. Chukovskii had seen the results of Makarenko's pedagogical innovations with his own eyes and likely knew of his troubles with officialdom over a decade prior,[50] when Makarenko's approach to reeducation had been critiqued as being "anti-Soviet" in its harsh and military-inspired approach to discipline. His pedagogical style, critics had said, hardly fit with the prevailing wisdom, which emphasized that a system of self-discipline that treated children as the "flowers of life" was the only acceptable attitude to take toward budding Soviet citizens.[51] But it had been

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[50] Chukovskii had seen Makarenko's remarkable success at reeducating wayward children when he had visited him in 1936 and recounts the experience in his reminscences of Makarenko published after Makarenko's death. Kornei Chukovskii, "Makarenko." In *Sovremeniki: Portrety I etiudy*, 488–96. Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1967.

[51] W. L. Goodman, *Anton Simeonovitch Makarenko, Russian Teacher.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949, 58.

Makarenko's very success that led to his troubles with officialdom.[52] According to one scholar, Makarenko's colony demonstrated the sort of pure ideal of Communism that highlighted the failings of the greater Soviet state.[53] For Chukovskii to evoke Makarenko's effective leadership to Stalin was, then, an ambivalent gesture that contained an Aesopian dimension.[54] Although the history of Makarenko's troubles with Soviet bureaucracy was subsumed by the posthumous fashioning of his legacy, Chukovskii partially resurrects it by evoking the colonies that had led to the trouble in the first place.[55]

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[52] "All this work, both at Trepke and at Kuraijh, had been carried out to the accompaniment of a running fire of criticism and opposition on the part of various members of the Ukraine Ministry of Education and officialdom generally. It is probable that his very success around their jealousy." Ibid., 57.

[53] Benedikt Sarnov, "V kommune ostanovka," 2002. https://tvkultura.ru/brand/show/brand_id/28192/. As Katerina Clark notes, the mid- to late-1930s were dominated by a hierarchical kinship model for Soviet society, with Stalin as the father at its helm. This deeply rooted hierarchy was in stark contrast to the equally deeply egalitarian structure of Makarenko's colonies, where children regularly traded roles and units were composed of children of different ages with pairings meant to simulate a sibling relationship. Katerina Clark, "Utopian Anthropology as a Context for Stalinist Literature." In *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation*, edited by Robert C. Tucker. New Brunswick, N.J., U.S.A.: Transaction Publishers, 1999, 182.

[54] In a diary entry after Stalin's death Chukovskii would write, "The 'simple people' are shocked by the revelations showing Stalin to be an incompetent commander-in-chief, a raving mad administrator who violated all he articles of his own constitution." The implication, of course, is that Chukovskii was not shocked. («Все «простые люди» потрясены разоблачениями Сталина, как бездарного полководца, свирепого администратора, нарушившего все пункты своей же Конституции.»). Kornei Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, 405; *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh*. Vol. 1. Moscow: Terra-Knizhnii klub, 2001, vol. 13, 214.

[55] Stalin had allegedly said "Let him write his fairytales" («Пусть пишет свои сказки!»). Anton Makarenko, *Anton Semenovich Makarenko Pedagogicheskie Poemy: "Flagi Na Bashniakh", "Marsh 30 Goda", "FD-1."* Edited by Svetlana Nevskaya. ITRK, 2013, 4. According to Benedic Sarnov, the global acclaim of Makarenko's "Pedagogical Poem" had saved him from being repressed. Benedikt Sarnov, "V kommune ostanovka," 2002. https://tvkultura.ru/brand/show/brand_id/28192/. Instead, in February 1939, fewer than three months before his early and unexpected death of natural causes at the age of fifty-one, Makarenko was awarded the Red Banner of Labor and became a candidate for membership of the Communist Party under the sponsorship of the Union of Soviet Writers. Goodman, W. L. *Anton Simeonovitch Makarenko, Russian Teacher,* 68.

Irina Luk'ianova suggests that Chukovskii's call for a return to Makarenko's approach to reeducation has been misconstrued as evidence of his heartlessness and loathing for actual, flesh-and-blood children.[56] Yet there is no denying that Chukovskii's request for a "strict military regimen" in juvenile labor colonies of the sort that had once shocked Soviet bureaucrats hardly aligns with his popular image as a playful, gentle grandfather. In this letter Chukovskii also evinces a strong will to idealize Soviet children, insisting that "brutality" is a perversion of childhood rather than one of the possible manifestations of human nature untamed. And his unnerving decision to list specific children by name is perhaps not the product of a "journalistic" impulse as Luk'ianova describes—Stalin would hardly have reason to doubt the veracity of Chukovskii's account.[57] When children undermine his ideal and reveal the failures of the state's pedagogical efforts on their behalf, Chukovskii exhibits something like brutality of his own: indeed as Luk'ianova herself concedes, citing wayward children to Stalin *by name* reads eerily like telling him where to find them. [58]

One gets the sense that his distress over these wayward children is in part fueled by the despair when his efforts on their behalf—his *raison d'être*—appear to come to naught. In March of that year, Chukovskii had had an unpleasant run-in

[56] Luk'ianova, *Kornei Chukovskii*, 750.

[57] Ibid., 754.

[58] Ibid.

with a young bandit,[59] and shortly after sending his letter to Stalin he once again confronted the extent of Soviet children's moral dereliction. Visiting his dacha at Peredelkino, outside of Moscow, upon his return from evacuation in Tashkent, Chukovskii found his library pillaged and decades of collection efforts laid to waste. "On my way out I noticed a campfire in the woods, and I was drawn to the children sitting around it," he recounts:

> 'Stop, where are you going? I cried, but they ran away. What I saw when I got there were my English books in flames…And I thought, how grotesque! What do I see before my very eyes but the children I've loved so dearly burning the books I'd have used to serve them.[60]

It is striking that the children's destruction of the books occurs not in winter (when it might serve to provide necessary warmth), but in summer and in a forest in the midst of plentiful firewood. In light of this fact, their actions were unlikely to have a utilitarian motivation[61] or to result from the "wartime conditions" (*usloviiakh voennogo vremeni*) Chukovskii cites as the reason for the troubles he

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[59] Chukovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh* vol. 13, 66.

[60] «Уже уезжая, я увидел в лесу костер. Меня потянуло к детям, которые сидели у костра. — Постойте, куда же вы? Но они разбежались. Я подошел и увидел: горят английские книги … И я подумал, какой это гротеск, что *дети*, те, которым я отдал столько любви, жгут у меня на глазах те книги, которыми я хотел бы служить им.» (July 24, 1943). Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*, 350; *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh* vol. 13, 69.

[61] It is also possible to read into their choice to burn specifically *English* books—the children, likely not knowing the difference between English and German, may have associated Chukovskii's books with the enemy and thought themselves to be performing a patriotic service. As we learn elsewhere in the diary entry, his manuscripts, letters, and other books were also a target. Ibid.

describes in his letter to Stalin.[62] What's more, their sudden flight betrays full awareness of the nature of their crime and, more importantly, of its victim.

As Luk'ianova justly notes,[63] it was not so much the loss of personal property, however valuable, that injured Chukovskii so deeply—it was the realization that he, a writer for children, lived in a world where children burned books. Chukovskii's feeling of betrayal by the children he "loved so dearly" and would have wanted to "serve" is especially poignant when viewed in light of a 1936 entry in which he speaks of his desire to write a children's book in order to "convey [his] love for Soviet children and—through them—for the era."[64] In the 1936 entry, we see Chukovskii's efforts to unite his "dual soul" (in Jochen Hellbeck's words)[65] into one: he is not so much recapitulating the push (which he despised) to instill children's literature with ideology[66] as he is striving to see Soviet childhood as

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[62] Chukovskii, May 17, 1943, 558.11.885. Л 85-7, Rossiiskii gossudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politichesoi isstorii.

[63] Luk'ianova, *Kornei Chukovskii*, 758.

[64] "Мне пришла в голову великолепная тема детской книги, в ней должна вылиться моя жаркая любовь к советскому ребенку — и сквозь этого ребенка — к эпохе." (January 17, 1936). Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*, 321; *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh* vol. 13, 9.

[65] Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind,* 11.

[66] He came to (verbal) blows with Lenin's widow, Nadezhda Krupskaia, about the politicization of children's literature in the 1920s, and his friendship with Samuil Marshak was strained by what Chukovskii saw as Marshak's capitulation to pressures to imbue children's literature with ideology. See Nadezhda Krupskaia, "O 'Krokodile' Chukovskogo." *Pravda*. February 1, 1928. Krupskaia critiques Chukovskii's *Krokodil* for its lack of ideological engagement and concludes that it is "bourgeois filth" that should not be given to children. In 1929, while Chukovskaia was working under Marshak, he published a letter—along with the poet Nikolai Oleinikov and others, decrying a "class enemy" (meaning Chukovskii and his camp) in the field of children's literature. Nikitin, *Kakie oni raznye…*, 239-40. In the late 1920s their relationship grew strained when Marshak would not support Chukovskii's *Barmalei* against the censor. As Chukovskii wrote in his diary on June 2, 1943 that "Once more Marshak showed himself the great hypocrite and schemer he is. I didn't ask him to praise my tale, only to protect it from the sordid Detgiz intrigues, and all he did was to tell

being commensurate with the Soviet project rather than as something that undermines it. If the two truly align, showing his love for one would indeed allow him to show his love for the other. As the 1943 letter to Stalin and the diary entry of that same year suggest, Chukovskii feels betrayed as much by the "era" as by the "Soviet child" that it had, despite his decades-long efforts, engendered. Reality, it seems, necessitated a more complex equation. Moreover, in both his letter to Stalin and in this diary entry, Chukovskii expresses his sense of betrayal in a way he otherwise couldn't—through children, who reflect for him the failings of the adult world. At the same time, one senses that children's ability to signify—here, the failings of the state—matter more than the real, flesh-and-blood children themselves.

Murochka

Where Soviet children failed to live up to Chukovskii's standards of enlightenment and *delicatesse*, his own children succeeded. The only one of the Chukovskii children born after the Revolution (in 1920), Maria Chukovskaia (affectionately called Mura or Murochka) serves time and again as an example of everything the majority of Soviet children aren't: a child with a love and respect for

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me 'openly, as a friend' and 'because you mean so much to me' that my tale was no good and I'd be better off not publishing it." («Маршак вновь открылся предо мною, как великий лицемер и лукавец. Дело идет не о том, чтобы расхвалить мою сказку, а о том, чтобы защитить ее от подлых интриг Детгиза. Но он стал 'откровенно и дружески,' 'из любви ко мне' утверждать, что сказка вышла у меня неудачная.») Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*, 349; *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh* vol. 13, 68.

literature as well as deep personal dignity. In her father's diaries, Murochka, who died at the young age of 11 after a battle with tuberculosis, helps to highlight again and again the benighted character of many of her coevals, who suffer from what Chukovskii considered the biggest ailment of all: "spiritual illiteracy" (*dukhovnaia bezgramotnost'*).[67]

Unlike the majority of the school children Chukovskii encounters,[68] Murochka delights in learning: he reports on her pride and enthusiasm when she learns how to spell and her earnest answer when he asks her at one of their lessons if she remembered learning the letter "sh" (ш) during the previous one: "Of course!" she replies. "I thought about it all night."[69] In numerous anecdotes in the diaries Chukovskii records Murochka's (and his own) dismay at the ignorance of the children around her: in one particularly amusing incident, a bemused Murochka recounts the questions posed to her by her friend at the sanatorium: "Did your papa write 'The Little Humpbacked Horse?'" When Murochka replied that Petr Ershov had written it, the little girl asked, "But did he write Pushkin?"[70]

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[67] An ailment that Chukovskii saw as afflicting the majority of Soviet school children and, as a result, adults. See Kornei Chukovskii, "O dukhovnoi bezgrammatnosti," *Literaturnaiia Rossiia*, July 2, 1965.

[68] Ibid.

[69] «Как же! я о ней всю ночь думала.» Chukovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh* vol. 12, 231.

[70] "Мура со смехом рассказывает, что Марина спросила ее:

— Твой папа написал «Конька Горбунка»?

— Нет, не мой папа, Ершов!

— А Пушкина твой папа написал?

October 10, 1930. Chukovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh*, vol.12, 418. English translation adapted from Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*, 249-50.

By contrast, Murochka invents her own imaginary country and language, recites poetry in that language, and remembers by heart even minute passages of stories read to her.[71] "How undeveloped these local children are!" (*Do chego nerazvity zdeshnie deti*!), Chukovskii laments as he contemplates the comparison between his own daughter and the other children in her sanatorium. [72]

Murochka also engages deeply with some of the most important questions provoked by literature, albeit in her own childlike way: When encountering a new character in the Brothers' Grimm tale of the Golden Goose, she interrupts her father to ask him if the character is "kind" (*A on dobryi*?) before deciding whether or not to sympathize with him: "In that case I feel sorry for him" (*Nu tak mne ego zhalko*).[73] Even near the end of her life, when there is no longer any hope of recovery, she "tries to be cheerful" and recites classical poetry for her father.[74] After Murochka's death, Chukovskii speaks to fellow writer Marietta Shaginyan "about

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[71] Chukovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii* vol. 12, 236-7, 241. In a 1931 entry dated simply "June," Chukovskii writes, "I've been reading Hugo's *Toilers of the Sea,* and when I read a page over again five days later I happened to leave out a sentence of no importance. 'What happened to 'He looked askance at him?' she asked." Kornei Chukovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii* vol. 12, 426; *Diary, 1901-1969* 253.

[72] Ibid., 418; 250.

[73] Kornei Chukovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii* vol. 12, Ibid., 147-8.

[74] In the months leading up to Murochka's death, Chukovskii writes of her in his diary, "Mura does her best to be cheerful, but there is no hope left for a cure. The pulmonary tuberculosis is spread….Her face has shrunk to nothing, her color is terrible—an earth-like gray. And for all that her memory is keen, her understanding of poetry astute" («Старается быть веселой — но надежды на выздоровление уже нет никакой. Туберкулез легких растет. <…> Личико стало крошечное, его цвет ужасен — серая земля. И при этом великолепная память, тонкое понимание поэзии.») Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*,253; *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh* vol. 12, 426.

Murochka, about what a gentle, proud, pure, unique soul she was."[75] Chukovskii never fully recovered from this loss. One gets the sense that with Murochka's death, he lost not just a beloved daughter but the equally "pure" childhood full of learning and adventure that he worked so hard to give her.

One also gets the distinct sense that, had Murochka lived to adulthood, she might not have become the sort of Soviet citizen that the state sought to foster. In Alexei Yurchak's words, the Soviet citizen

> was called upon to submit completely to party leadership, to cultivate a collectivist ethic, and repress individualism, while at the same time becoming an enlightened and independent-minded individual who pursues knowledge and is inquisitive and creative.[76]

Soviet ideology is markedly absent from Murochka's upbringing: as Chukovskii's countless anecdotes about her convey, she was nothing if not an inquisitive and creative lover of knowledge. Furthermore, Chukovskii reports how she sings along with songs for the anniversary of the October Revolution with the other children in her sanatorium but, despite being old enough to do so (she was ten in 1930), doesn't understand what she is singing: she asks him what the word "initiative"—associated in the Russian context with an important article by Vladimir Lenin about the role of working people in the aftermath of the Revolution—means.[77]

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[75] «о Мурочке, какая это была нежная, гордая, светлая, единственная в мире душа.» December 3, 1931. Ibid., 260; 442.

[76] Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More : The Last Soviet Generation*, In-Formation Series (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 11.

[77] «Приготовлениями к Октябрьским торжествам Мура увлечена очень:
По их почину целый мир
Охвачен пламенем пожара,—

Chukovskii does not say, in his diary, how he answered Murochka's question, though one suspects he did not go through great pains to explain its ideological connotation.

One wonders if Chukovskii knew that, four years earlier, Murochka herself had been cited as evidence for the ideological incompatibility of his work with official ideology: During the proceedings from a session of the northwestern division of printing of the Central Committee Community Party of the Soviet Union, one attendee suggests that Chukovskii's 1923 "Murka's Book" be censored and cites it as one of the publishing house Raduga's "ideologically divergent" (*ideologicheki nevyderzhannye*) publications.[78] According to the anonymous author,

> For example, it is necessary to consider, in this regard, several books by K. Chukovskii that are successful and admissible by virtue of their light, rhythmic verse but absolutely ideologically inadequate. Take for instance *Murka's Book* and *Miracle Tree* (an abridged edition of that same book) as books obviously intended for children like Murochka, whose parents, like her, are accustomed to receiving all the bounties of life without any effort on their own part, into whose mouths "ruddy-rolled sandwiches fly all by themselves"...[79]

твердит со всей санаторией, но спрашивает меня: 'Что такое почин?' Ее остригли.» Chukovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh*, vol.12, 418; *Diary, 1901-1969*, 249-50. The word "initiative" (почин) was associated with Vladimir Lenin, who authored a 1919 article "The Great Initiative" («Великий почин») about the so-called *subbotniks*, who volunteered to do unpaid labor on the weekends following the October Revolution.

[78] A. V. Blium, *Tsenzura v Sovetskom Soiuze, 1917-1991 : dokumenty*, Seriia Kul'tura i vlast' ot Stalina do Gorbacheva. Dokumenty (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004), 108.

[79] «К последним нужно отнести, например, некоторые книги К. Чуковского, которые удачны и приемлемы по ритмическому легкому стиху, но совершенно неудовлетворительны идеологически. Укажем хотя бы на 'Муркину книгу' и 'Чудо-дерево' (сокращенное издание той же книги) как на книги, рассчитанные, очевидно, на детей вроде Мурочки, родители

While the censor objects to Murochka, the book that bears her name, *and* her parents not on the basis of their open-mindedness and intellectualism but, rather, for the seemingly obvious reason of bourgeois leanings, he is right to suspect that the ethos of Murochka's upbringing is not in step with the ruling ideology of the time.

Lidia

Though the question of what kind of *adult* Murochka would have become can only lead to speculation, Chukovskii's surviving daughter Lidia Chukovskaia (1907-1996) may offer us something in the way of an answer. Her novella about Stalin's Great Terror, *Sofia Petrovna* (1965), provides a rare and incisive account of that time written contemporaneously with it and published only in 1965. In the 1960s and 70s she defended such dissidents as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Andrei Sakharov loudly and fearlessly when they fell prey to official smear campaigns. She also spoke out against favored Soviet figures such as the writer Mikhail Sholokhov and came under fire for doing so.[80] In his diaries Chukovskii is silent regarding most of his daughter's political activity, but on Chukovskaia's own account it caused him much distress: "Since childhood I was always the cause of your

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которой и она сама привыкли получать все блага жизни без всякого труда, которым и 'бутерброды с краснощекой булочкой' сами в рот летят...» Ibid.

[80] Her book *Open Word* (*Otkrytoe slovo*), published in New York in 1976 chronicles her open letters and other pronouncements spanning the years 1965-1974. Chukovskaia recounts the aftermath of that open letter in her diaries. Chukovskaia, *"Dnevnik—bol'shoe podspor'e ...,"* 183-9.

troubles, willingly or unwillingly. I always gave you grief, but you liked when people enlivened and cheered you…Will they arrest me for my letter to Sholokhov, [you wondered]?" she writes in a diary entry the day of his death.[81] The entry concludes, "But you were a bit proud of me nonetheless."[82]

We detect something of that pride in one striking instance of Chukovskii's diary from the height of the Great Terror. In a 1937 entry, he speaks in veiled terms of his daughter's troubles: her husband Matvei Bronshtein had been arrested and, as they later found out, summarily executed in Kiev. The need to speak only obliquely of the unfolding events is clear enough: as his account of Lev Vygotskii's request that Marietta Shaginian erase all mention of Viktor Shklovsky's attempts to elude arrest from her diary shows, Chukovskii knew full well the risk of being candid even in prose ostensibly destined only for oneself.[83] Needing to record the event regardless of the risk of doing so, Chukovskii chooses to express his feelings about his daughter through the idiom of childhood.

In the August 1937 entry in question, Chukovskii makes note of the event itself only briefly, as "Lidia's tragedy" (*Lidina tragedia*.) To speak of Bronshtein's tragedy as uniquely his daughter's implies a measure of distance (in this

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[81] «Я всегда, с детства, причиняла тебе неприятности, вольно или невольно. От меня всегда на тебя шла тревога, а ты любил, чтобы от людей шло веселое, бодрое…Не посадят ли за письмо Шолохову?» Ibid., 239.

[82] «Но все-таки ты немного гордился мной…» Ibid.

[83] Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*, 263-4; *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh*, vol. 12, 454-6.

formulation, it is not also *his* tragedy), and Chukovskii goes on to distance himself from her still further in the subsequent lines of his diary:

> Although I disagree with her on every point, although I feel she is doing the wrong thing when it comes to the interests of Soviet children and children's literature (in other words, I think she should write rather than edit), I admire her dignity, energy, and candor.[84]

In this entry one senses that Chukovskii is not so much writing for himself as for other eyes that may come across his diaries. The meaning of Chukovskii's decisive statement "I disagree with her on every point," for instance, is unclear—does he disagree with her politically, or in the arena of her efforts for children? The rest of the sentence would imply the second interpretation, but the use of the conjunction "although" (*khotia*) leaves it open to interpretation. The distance and restraint evinced by this passage does not, moreover, accord with Chukovskaia's own description of her father's conduct as the secret police searched her apartment for evidence to use against Bronshtein, who had at that point not yet been arrested: "I remember his face so well. It was the face of suffering."[85] Although Chukovskii seems to feel the need to restrain himself from expressing his emotions fully in this entry, by speaking of his daughter's efforts on behalf of Soviet children's literature he is nonetheless able to express his solidarity with her.

[84] «Хотя я с ней не согласен ни в одном пункте, хотя я считаю, что она даже в интересах сов. детей, в интересах детской книги должна бы делать не то, что она делает (т. е. должна бы писать, а не редактировать), все же я любуюсь ее благородством, ее энергией, ее прямотой.» August 29, 1937. Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*, 334; *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh* vol. 13, 41.

[85] «Я так хорошо помню его лицо. Это было лицо страдания.» Nikitin, *Kakie oni raznye…*, 269.

Specifically, he chooses to articulate his disapproval of Chukovskaia on the basis of her efforts for children's writers as well as her suppression of her own potential as a writer for children, a domain in which no one could critique his authority but one that decreases the stakes of his critique considerably by sidestepping the incommensurability of "dignity…and candor" with the strictures of the time. The stakes of this statement, in other words, are seemingly political, but in reality, they are much more limited in scope: on the face of it, he is speaking only of the domain of children's literature. At the same time, the final words of this excerpt, "I admire her dignity, energy, and candor," allows Chukovskii to have it both ways—he is neither betraying his daughter nor showing her unconditional support on paper in the face of her personal tragedy. The language he uses to speak about Chukovskaia, moreover, echoes the language he used when writing about Murochka: Lidia has "dignity" (*blagorodnost'*), while Murochka was "proud" (*gordaia*). Chukovskii also praises the very qualities that would lead his daughter to become the outright dissident she became in subsequent decades: "energy" and "candor." It is notable, moreover, that Chukovskii praises her candor in an entry where he himself expresses so little of it. His equivocation recalls his equally subtle description of his encounter with Stalin at the congress of the All-Union Lenin Young Communist League in April of 1936, discussed in the first chapter.[86] In that (earlier) diary entry, it is difficult to discern if Chukovskii is admiring the Leader

[86] Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*, 325; *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh* vol. 13, 19-20.

along with the rest of the captivated audience or commenting on the mystification that underpins their admiration.

As we have seen, for Chukovskii childhood (and children) served to reveal the failings of the state's efforts to instill in the new generation of Soviet citizens the values he saw as being indispensable. At the same time, they provided him with a means to express his feelings of powerlessness and disenchantment when his efforts came to naught. In the diary entry written in the aftermath of Bronshtein's arrest, the professional arena of children's literature shared by father and daughter serves as a means to couch his despair in acceptable terms and praise in his surviving daughter the very qualities that made her so ill-suited to an era of totalitarianism and groupthink.

Father as child

Given who her father had been, setting Chukovskaia's tribute to him in her own childhood was a natural choice. Far from an ideologically neutral account of her halcyon childhood with the father of Soviet childhood, however, Chukovskaia's *To the Memory of Childhood* allowed her to reassert her filiation with a beloved figure in Soviet letters and offer an account of her father that leaves little room to doubt what his political leanings really were. In so doing, Chukovskaia partially wrests his legacy from the state that sought to co-opt it: a man who took an active hand in raising an outspoken dissident daughter could hardly fit with the benign

image of an "All-Union storyteller" and "grandfather" to all.[87] At the same time, by positioning her *father* as the child time and again in both her memoir and elegiac poetry, Chukovskaia acknowledges the complexity of that legacy and grapples with it: her characterization of Chukovskii oscillates between the childlike and the childish. By deploying the idiom of childhood as she goes up against both the state and her father's formidable legacy in her elegiac writings, Chukovskaia asserts both her belonging to the body politic and her independence, vis-à-vis her father, as a writer and thinker.

Chukovskaia was arguably the biggest threat to the state's efforts to paint Chukovskii as having been uncomplicatedly one of their own: it was she who conveyed to the Union of Soviet Writers her father's list of whom *not* to invite to his funeral,[88] an early sign of her intimate knowledge of her father's personal convictions as well as the privileged role she occupied vis-à-vis his legacy. Indeed, the book that would become *To the Memory of Childhood*, originally titled *To the Memory of My Father* (*Pamiati moego ottsa*), challenged the notion of Chukovskii's unfaltering belief in the Soviet project by hinting at—and sometimes even overtly stating—his true beliefs. Filtered through the vantage point of an increasingly

[87] Luk'ianova, *Kornei Chukovskii*, 850. These were just two of the names that circulated in the Soviet Press in commemoration of Chukovskii's 75th birthday. «[В]сесоюзный сказочник», «дедушка Корней.»

[88] Ibid., 975.

defiant citizen,[89] Chukovskaia's childhood account also contained the (from the state's view) dangerous implication that her dissidence was in some part the product of her upbringing.

As Chukovskaia quickly learned in the aftermath of her father's death, the very association of her name and his posed a threat to the state. Her father's final, posthumous article was only allowed in print after all mention of Chukovskaia, who had prepared it for publication, had been excised,[90] and during the trial intended to exclude her from the Union of Soviet Writers, one member matter-of-factly proclaimed, "We must separate Kornei Chukovskii and Nikolai Chukovskii from Lidia Chukovskaia. Her shadow must not fall on them."[91] Chukovskaia was excluded from the Literary Heritage Commission for her father's literary estate,[92] and neither of the books devoted to Chukovskii published in the decade after his death includes any mention of her.[93] Still in the 1980s, photos of Chukovskii that

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[89] E.g. the above-mentioned letter criticizing Mikhail Sholokhov, or openly defending Aleksandr Solzhenistyn in 1968 against widespread attempts to discredit him in the eyes of readers. Chukovskaia, *Otkrytoe slovo*, 25-30, 49-62.

[90] Ibid. 144.

[91] Spoken by V. Morozova. «Необходимо отделить Корнея Чуковского и Николая Чуковского от Лидии Чуковской. Чтобы ее тень не падала на них.» Lidia Korneevna Chukovskaia, *Protsess iskliucheniia: ocherk literaturnykh nravov*. [Paris]: YMCA-Press, 1979, 30. Lidia Chukovskaia's brother Nikolai Chukovskii a popular Soviet writer who despite early beginnings in literature among the likes of Lev Gumilev, Nikolai Zabolotskii and others acquiesced in time to the political pressures of the regime and even served on the leadership of the Union of Soviet Writers in the years leading up to his death in 1965.

[92] Lidiia Chukovskaia, *To the Memory of Childhood* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 143.

[93] K. I. Lozovskaia, Zinovii Samoilovich Papernyi, and E. Ts. Chukovskaia, *Vospominaniia o Kornee Chukovskom: Sbornik* (Moscow: Sovpisatel', 1977) and Iurii Nikolaevich Tynianov and Valentin

included Chukovskaia as a young girl would omit her name in the caption,[94] and only the first four chapters of *To the Memory of Childhood* were publishable in the Soviet Union prior to 1989.[95] As Chukovskaia writes in *The Process of Exclusion,* "It's been decided—I am not to reminisce about him."[96]

At least since Antigone gave her life in order to bury her dead brother, grieving the dead has been understood as a potentially deeply political act. Chukovskaia's writings about her father evince a deep awareness of the political stakes of her mourning. Indeed few contexts resonate as much with Antigone's archetypal example as the Soviet one, where, as Aleksandr Etkind has written, "Under a regime that refused to acknowledge its own violence, mourning its victims was a political act, an important and sometimes even dominating mechanism of resistance to this regime."[97] As is well known, the family members of those whose lives had not been deemed grievable were à priori seen as a threat the state. The practice of arresting wives alongside husbands and placing children

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Berestov, *Zhizn' i tvorchestvo Korneia Chukovskogo: Sbornik* (Moscow: Detlit, 1978). Cited in Bella Hirshorn, *Lydia Korneevna Chukovskaya: A Tribute* (University of Melbourne, 1987), 5.

[94] Efim Etkind, "Otets i doch'." December 9, 1983. http://www.chukfamily.ru/lidia/biblio/articles-biblio/otec-i-doch-2.

[95] *To the Memory of Childhood* was first published in full abroad, in so-called *tamizdat*, by Chalidze Publications (1983). One eager editor of *Family and School* magazine in the Soviet Union had wanted to print the entire text serially. Chukovskaia agreed to publish seven chapters over the course of three issues in 1972, but a senior editor unceremoniously put an end to the idea after the second of the two issues had been printed. Ibid., 147.

[96] Ibid., 149. «Мне о нем вспоминать—не положено.» Chukovskaia, *Protsess iskliucheniia*, 225.

[97] Etkind, *Warped Mourning,* 4.

of so-called "enemies of the people" (*vragi naroda*) in labor camps was a testament to the state's reluctance to leave potentially intractable mourners behind.[98]

Although Chukovskii was not one of the regime's victims in the traditional sense and thus Etkind's claim would not, on the face of it, apply to him, in her writings Chukovskaia makes clear that he had been its victim in another way. Reflecting, in *The Process of Exclusion*, on the original title of *To the Memory of Childhood*, Chukovskaia writes, "'To the memory of my father'…He was not tormented in a labor camp, nor shot. In the last ten years of his life he enjoyed prosperity and fame. However, his life had its own tragedy and its own conflict."[99] As this formulation suggests, "prosperity and fame" in no way guarded against "tragedy and…conflict": Chukovskaia makes clear that her father's good standing and material wellbeing had not come without personal cost. Part of this cost was measured in professional compromise: Chukovskaia writes in *The Process of Exclusion* that in the Soviet era "Kornei Chukovskii continued to work in his other specialties, but until the end of his life he keenly and painfully felt his failure to

[98] "The kaleidoscope juvenile population in the camps included a contingent who had ended up there not because of some crime they had supposedly committed, but because they were the offspring of an adult, or adults, in the camps….Additionally, article 7 of the 1926 Criminal Code, relating to 'socially dangerous elements', was sometimes invokes in order to round up members of a suspect's family." Kelly, *Children's World*, 237.

[99] «'Памяти моего отца'…Он не был замучен в лагере, не был расстрелян. Последнее десятилетие его жизни прошло в достатке и славе. Однако была у него в жизни своя трагедия и своя борьба.» Chukovskaia, *Protsess iskliucheniia* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnaia assotsiatsiia deiatelei kul′tury "Novoe vremia" : Zhurnal "Gorizont," 1990), 224. Translated in Lidia Korneevna Chukovskaia, *To the Memory of Childhood*, 148.

recognize his principal vocation"—literary criticism.[100] As it had for so many, children's literature provided Chukovskii a relatively safe haven in which to express himself creatively, but the cost of this relative security was a partial relinquishing of his literary calling.

In her writings about her father, Chukovskaia seeks not only to reassert her filial bond and emphasize the ideological unity between them, but to invite readers to reexamine her father's life and legacy in a new light. She also begins the process of challenging the neat binary that had emerged after the death of Stalin between those who had suffered under his rule and those who, presumably by dint of moral compromise, had not.[101] As the poet Anna Akhmatova said in the wake of Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 so-called "secret speech" denouncing Stalin, "Now two Russias will look each other in the eye: the one that sent people away and the one that was sent away."[102] Chukovskii had never been "sent away," yet neither had he done any "sending." Rather, the bulk of his adult life had been characterized by a careful dance between the two poles of dissidence and cooptation. The traces of

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[100] «Корней Чуковский продолжал работать по другим своим специальностям, но до конца жизни остро и болезненно ощущал неосуществленность своего основного призвания…». Translated in Chukovskaia, *To the Memory of Childhood* 148; *Protsess iskliuchenia* 224.

[101] Significantly, Chukovskaia's memoirs were published after Nadezhda Mandelstam's, which circulated widely in *samizdat* in the 1960s and constitute perhaps the best-known example of writing that helped to launch a kind of cult of suffering around her martyred husband, Osip Mandelstam. Beth Holmgren, *Women's Works in Stalin's Time: On Lidiia Chukovskaia and Nadezhda Mandelstam* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 114. Given the tone and timing of Chukovskaia's memoirs, it is reasonable to believe that they were in some ways a reaction to this same cult.

[102] «Сейчас две России посмотрят друг другу в глаза — та, что сажала, и та, что сидела». Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 50. Cited in Lidia Chukovskaia, *Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatovoi,* vol. 2, 1952-62 (Paris, 1980), 137.

those contradictory tendencies in turn leave a mark on Chukovskaia's writings about him.

This tried-and-true Thaw-era binary between the persecuted and the persecutors recalls Giorgio Agamben's distinction between *zoē* and *bios*, or "bare life" and "political existence."[103] In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben writes that "The fundamental categorical pair of Western politics is not that of friend/enemy but that of bare life/political existence, *zoē*/*bios*, exclusion/inclusion."[104] He concludes that *zoē*, or bare life, is "the life of *homo sacer* (sacred man), who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed.*"[105] In the Soviet and in the Stalin era especially, it is clear enough what constituted "bare life," yet the boundary between bare and political lives was an incredibly fine and fraught one: as Aleksandr Etkind has noted, "It was a rule rather than an exception that the perpetrators of one wave of terror became victims of the next."[106]

As the conduct of the Soviet bureaucracy in the days following Chukovskii's death shows, in the Soviet Union, the state determined the category not only of one's life, but of one's death as well. As Judith Butler writes, the state dictates that

[103] Agamben, *Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Meridian (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1998), 8.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Aleksandr Etkind, *Warped Mourning*, 8.

> Some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved…operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death?[107]

Although Butler speaks of contemporary American society, in few contexts does this question resound more than in the Soviet case, which turned this equation inward on its own citizens: some were deemed "normatively human" and thus endowed with both "livable lives" and "grievable deaths," while others were not.

By 1970 when Chukovskaia began her reminiscences of childhood, she had long teetered on the cusp between *zoē* and *bios*. As we have already seen, as a young woman she had been arrested for suspected counter-revolutionary activity, and when her husband was arrested and executed at the height of the Great Terror, Chukovskaia barely escaped the same fate.[108] In the late 1920s, the section of the State Publishing House for which she worked (the children's section, headed by Samuil Marshak) came under fire for its alleged bourgeois leanings and many any of its members, Chukovskaia included, narrowly escaped arrest.[109] Her official exclusion from the Union of Soviet Writers on January 9, 1974[110] marked not only the effective end of her official literary career but her exclusion from the body

[107] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life : The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London ; New York: Verso, 2006), xiv-xv.

[108] Nina Christesen, "Introduction," iii.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Chukovskaia, *Protsess iskliuchenia,* 263.

politic writ large, as well. As Chukovskaia writes at the close of *Process of Exclusion*, "I don't exist and I never existed. But—will I exist again?"[111]

To the Memory of Childhood is shot through with an awareness of the fraught boundary between *zoē* and *bios*. As Chukovskaia shows, such a binary is necessarily insufficient: one cannot neatly separate livable, grievable lives from unlivable and ungrievable (as in Butler's account), nor is inclusion in the body politic is a binary affair (as in Agamben's). As Chukovskaia demonstrates with reference to her father, it is possible to grieve the wrong life when the person in question had, in a sense, "two lives" or, more exactly, one life unlived due to political constraints. The death Chukovskaia grieves is not her father's public death, the death of one included in the central governing order. Instead, she mourns the life lived under the cover of metaphorical night and relegated to the margins of the historical record.

To mourn that unrealized life and, in so doing, reassert her filial bond to her famous father was a dangerous task. The provocation this gesture contained is evident from the original title, *To the Memory of My Father*, which ran in the pages of the journal *Family and School* (*Sem'ia i shkola*) when excerpts of Chukovskaia's memoirs were published there in 1972.[112] With either *To the Memory of Childhood* or *To the Memory of my Father* as its title, Chukovskaia's text gives the impression,

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[111] «Меня нет и никогда не было. Но – буду ли я?», Ibid., 267.

[112] As mentioned earlier, the plan was abruptly aborted before the full seven chapters slated for publication had been printed, and only two of the three planned installations appeared in print. Lidia Korneevna Chukovskaia, "Na morskom beregu." *Sem'ia i shkola*, 9 (1972): 44–48. "Na morskom beregu (*okonchanie*)" *Sem'ia i shkola*, 10 (1972): 46–47.

from the very first, that mourning her bygone childhood and mourning her father are intertwined and inextricable processes. Moreover, from the very cover of the memoir, Chukovskaia signals the political intentions underlying her mourning text: *To the Memory of My Father*, as a title, stresses the regrettable (from the state's point of view) filial bonds between Chukovskii and his dissident daughter, but the new title does one better, quietly asserting that the childhood created for Chukovskaia by her father is contiguous with the childhood he wished to give Soviet children writ large.[113] Given the outcome of Chukovskaia's own upbringing, as well as the accusation of bourgeois leanings to which Chukovskii's parenting sometimes fell prey,[114] there can be no mistaking the subversive implications of this assertion. To align the making of her *own* childhood with the making of a broader, state-sponsored one was to wrest the meaning of her father's legacy from the hands of the state that sought to co-opt it.

The continuity between Chukovskaia's childhood and the childhood Chukovskii wished to give *all* Russian children is emphasized in the body of the text as well, where Chukovskaia connects her childhood with the Soviet childhood

[113] "I am not writing Kornei Ivanovich's biography. I am writing about my childhood, and he was its creator," she writes («Я пишу не биографию Корнея Ивановича. Я пишу свое детство, а оно было создано им»). Chukovskaia, *To the Memory of Childhood* 121; *Pamiati detstva : vospominaniia o Kornee Chukovskom* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1989),172. Echoing Beth Holmgren, Mallika Ramdas notes, "Chukovskaia excises her mother almost completely out of her childhood memoir." Mallika Ramdas, "Through Other 'I's: Self and Other in Russian Women's Autobiographical Texts." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1996, 93. Beth Holmgren, *Women's Works in Stalin's Time,* 31. This observation supports the idea that there is more at work in her text than a simple chronicle of a happy childhood.

[114] Recall the reasons cited for censoring *Murka's Book* and *Miracle Tree*. A.V. Bliium, *Tsenzura v Sovetskom Soiuze, 1917-1991*, 108.

Chukovskii would later play an important role in shaping. Describing the time before her father became a public figure, before the publication of his phenomenally popular book *The Crocodile* (originally titled *Adventures of Crocodile Crocodilovich*, *Prikliuchenia Krokodila Krokodilovicha*, 1919), in a portion of *To the Memory of Childhood* that *was* published in *Family and School*, Chukovskaia writes,

> At that time Kornei Chukovskii's first children's book was still three years off, his second, almost ten, he had not yet written a single line for children, but he himself, both physically and temperamentally, seemed expressly designed 'for younger children' and produced in a special one-of-a-kind edition. We were lucky. We had been given this one-of-a-kind edition for our own.[115]

The metaphor of her father-as-book, evoked in such phrases as "produced" (more precisely published, *vypushchen*) and "one-of-a-kind edition" (*odin ekzempliar*), draws a clear line of continuity between the private father that Lidia and her siblings enjoyed and the public figure that he would in short order become. The "book," like the man, may have been initially intended for them alone, but the boundary between public and private blurred as Chukovskii's personal philosophies about childhood and childrearing became a national matter of course.

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[115] «До первой детской книги Корнея Чуковского оставалось в ту пору года три, до второй—около десяти, им не была написана еще ни единая строка для детей, но сам он, во всем своем физическом и душевном обличье, был словно нарочно изготовлен природой по чьему-то специальному заказу 'для детей младшего возраста' и выпущен в свет тиражом в один экземпляр. Нам повезло. Мы этот единственный экземпляр получили в собственность.» Chukovskaia, *To the Memory of Childhood*, 2.; *Pamiati detstva,* 6.

As the genre of childhood memoir allows Chukovskaia to paint her own as having been part of a continuum with the childhood Chukovskii wished to endow all Soviet children with, it also allows her to cite incisive examples of the lessons she learned from her father. And though it is possible to read these instances in their strongest sense as telltale signs of Chukovskii's deeply felt liberalism, they are by their very nature equivocal: they refer to long-gone historical events and themselves belong to the pre-Soviet era. In one instance, after citing from the poet Nikolai Nekrasov to illustrate how her father used poetry to illuminate and complement his children's history lessons, Chukovskaia writes,

> The same tragic theme, fundamental to his understanding of art, appeared everywhere in his narratives: the unremitting attack on genius and talent by the powerful, massed forces of mediocrity. This was always a painful issue for him. The desecration of talent. The persecution of talent. The ongoing struggle of defenseless talent against well-armed talentlessness.[116]

Although "massed forces of mediocrity" is likely evocative for even readers of the English text, the original phrase, *splochenn*[*aia*]…*bezdarnnost'*, (massed… mediocrity) is even more so: as we have already seen, the adjective "massed" was used explicitly, and in the positive sense, to describe the potency of the Bolshevik Party. The undercutting implied in the coupling of this adjective with "mediocrity," then, goes without saying. Chukovskaia implies that the entire Soviet era was for her father one long "struggle of defenseless talent against well-armed

[116] «Всюду в его повествовании пробивалась эта трагическая тема, естественная при его отношении к искусству: расправа с гением и талантом, учиняемая сплоченной и могучей бездарностью. Тут—болевая точка, ощущавшаяся им постоянно. Надругательство над талантом. Преследование таланта. Борьба безоружного таланта с вооруженной бездарностью.» Ibid., 53; 77.

talentlessness." On another level, however, there is nothing incendiary about Chukovskaia's reference to a poet about whom her father authored a widely respected monograph, *Nekrasov the Master* (*Masterstvo Nekrasova*)—in fact, he had received the prestigious Lenin Prize for it in 1962.[117] Given the context, however, it is more likely that Chukovskaia is alluding here to a still-earlier work of her father's on Nekrasov, *The Poet and the Hangman* (*Poet i palach*, 1922)—his study, fittingly enough, of Aesopian language in Nekrasov's writings.[118]

In another instance, she takes a similarly subtle tack, leaving the reader to extrapolate what Chukovskii's judgment of his own era would have been based on the lessons he imparted to his children about classical Russian literature. Recalling her early poetic education and recounting her first awareness of events such as the Revolution of 1905 (which took place two years before her birth) or the poet Alexander Pushkin's death in a duel in 1837, Chukovskaia writes,

> Maybe because our teacher unconsciously conveyed to us his secret belief that a poet's murderer is also a murderer of the people; or maybe because both evil events—the murder of Pushkin and the shooting of the demonstrators—took place in January in the snow on similar sounding dates...they became permanently and indissolubly linked in my memory.[119]

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[117] Kornei Chukovskii, *Masterstvo Nekrasova*. Moscow: Gosizd-vo Khydozhlit-ry, 1952.

[118] Kornei Chukovskii, *Poet i palach: Nekrasov i Murav'ev*. Nekrasovskaia biblioteka. Peterburg: Epokha, 1922.

[119] «Потому ли, что скрытой мыслью нашего учителя, невольно передававшейся нам, было: убийца поэтов не может не быть убийцей народа; потому ли, что оба злодейства—убийство Пушкина и расстрел демонстрантов—совершались в январе и оба на снегу, и в похожие числа...они раз и навсегда нерасторжимо сочетались в моей памяти.» Chukovskaia, *To the Memory of Childhood*, 55; *Pamiati detstva,* 80.

In the era of the post-Thaw, this would have undoubtedly called to mind such recently rehabilitated victims of the state as Osip Mandelstam, but the fact that the childhood recollections enumerated here belong to a time prior to the Soviet era softens the allusion to the murder of the poet. Yet the specific historical context of these events is also immaterial for the purposes of Chukovskaia's portrayal of her father—presumably, his belief that "a poet's murderer is also a murderer of the people" did not change with the decades that saw D'Anthès's individual, personally motivated killing of a poet (Pushkin) amplified by the impersonal apparatus of the state. Other allusions to Chukovskii's discomfiture with the status quo also strike the reader, from his critique of the People's Commissariat of Education (or Narkompros, *Narodnyi komissariat prosveshchenia*)[120] to Chukovskaia's mention of the dissident writers who populated her early years.[121]

Taken together, these instances clearly point to Chukovskaia's intention to counteract the state's efforts to coopt her father's legacy. Yet although she had read his diaries, which contain effusive tributes to Soviet leadership and ideology as well as censure of it and cites them in two instances,[122] and although welcoming

[120] "But it seems Narkompros does not want to instill in children a love of literature. Let them slave away at the curriculum—with no emotion whatsoever!" («Но похоже, что Наркомпрос вообще не желает внушать детям любовь к литературе. Пусть зубрят по программе—без всяких эмоций!» Ibid. 96; 136.

[121] Ibid. 137; 214.

[122] To take just a few examples, his awe of Stalin and proclamation of love for the era (April 22, 1936; January 17, 1936) on the one hand and his censure of the Moscow-Volga Canal project (March 19, 1932) and thinly veiled incredulity over the brutal aftermath of Kirov's murder (December 20, 1934) on the other. Ibid., 105, 129; 183-4.

dissidents into one's home didn't make her father a dissident, in *To the Memory of Childhood* Chukovskaia glosses over much of the complexity of her father's diaries, choosing instead to portray her father as a tragic figure who tried to live in full adherence to his values despite the restrictions and dangers of the times. That she would do so in prose destined for a broad readership is hardly surprising: it takes such a monolithic view to counter the equally monolithic version proffered by the state. Although Chukovskaia's reading of her father may be sound, something like wishful thinking may equally be at work: the examples above only serve to underscore Chukovskii's skillful pragmatism as he navigated the fraught terrain between officialdom and his inner principles. As Chukovskaia implies, however, those principles were very much in line with her own.

And yet, by politicizing not only her father's life, but his memory, Chukovskaia is not so much *finishing* what he started as doing what he himself never did.[123] In this sense my reading of Chukovskaia's work differs from Beth Holmgren's, who argues in her excellent book *Women's Works in Stalin's Time* that, "Abiding by [her father's] values and tastes, [Chukovskaia] never allowed herself to posit her own difference as a reader and critic."[124] By contrast, I argue

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[123] In his article about Chukovskii and Chukovskaia, Efim Etkind generously, but in my view overly forgivingly, attributes the difference in their behavior vis-à-vis the state to a generational divide, saying that Chukovskii simply "cherished all kinds of optimistic illusions" (*pital samye raduzhnye illiuzii*). Etkind, "Otets i doch'."

[124] Holmgren, *Women's Work*, 42-3. Holmgren does not discuss Chukovskaia's poetry in her 1993 book.

that Chukovskaia's poetry reveals the complexity of that obedience.[125] Throughout *To the Memory of Childhood*, much of the critique implicit in Chukovskaia's recuperative project finds expression through the setting of the story during Chukovskaia's childhood and the comparison she draws between her actual youth and Chukovskii's so-called eternal one—an image that oscillates between positive and negative, or between the childlike and childish.

It is this tension between childlikeness and childishness that characterizes one of the earliest and most damning accounts of her entire memoir:

> Kornei Ivanovich loved to describe himself as a frivolous person. In fact, throughout his life carelessness was as characteristic of him as stubbornness and strength of will. And a kind of childish (*detskaia*) belief in happy endings to bad situations. One young [poet], who had never seen him with children, wrote him in 1912 that he was probably a very "tender" and "childlike" (*rebiachlivyi*) father. She was right. One day we nearly died thanks to his careless childishness (*rebiachlivosti*).[126]

The poet's words to Chukovskii are of course meant as a compliment, and Eliza Klose's translation correctly renders the Russian words *rebiachlivyi* as "childlike" in the passage above.[127] Playing on the ambivalence of the word, Chukovskaia draws

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[125] E.g. the poem "Nineteen Sixty-Nine" ("*God tysiacha deviat'sot shest'desiat' deviatyi*"), discussed below, or the poem "House" ("*Dom*"), which falls outside the purview of this chapter.

[126] «Корней Иванович любил говорить о себе, что он—человек легкомысленный. В самом деле, вместе с упорством и волей беспечность была присуща ему во все времена жизни. И какая-то детская вера в счастливое окончание беды. Одна молодая поэтесса, никогда не видавшая его вместе с детьми, писала ему в 1912 году, что, наверное, он очень 'нежный' и 'ребячливый отец.' Это была правда. Из-за беспечной ребячливости однажды мы чуть не погибли.» Chukovskaia, *To the Memory of Childhood* 42; *Pamiati detstva* 76.

[127] As they do in English, the Russian words for "childlike" and "childish" (*rebiachlivyi*, *detskii*) contain a good deal of overlap. Ushakov defines ребячливый as «Склонный ребячиться, вести себя по-детски легкомысленно, шаловливо, похожий по своим свойствам на детей. Ребячливый нрав. Ребячливое настроение.» Детский is defined first as «Прил. к дитя и к дети.

on it in order to introduce a tale that paints her father in a critical light into the narrative: "One day we nearly died thanks to his careless childishness (*rebiachlivosti*)," she says, using the noun form of the same word (*rebiachlivyi*, *rebiachlivosti*) but giving us to understand, from the context of a near-death experience, that she does not mean it in a positive sense.

All things considered, the anecdote that follows is not really so damning at all—at most, it elicits a few bated breaths, disapproving nods, and perhaps a chuckle. The incident, after all, concludes as happily as the endings that, according to his daughter, Chukovskii so loved. On another level, however, Chukovskaia's account of this scene early in her memoir sets into motion a key tension that will run throughout her writing about her father: the difficulty of discerning the "true" self that lies behind his masterful performance of childhood and the ensuing difficulty of assigning blame for his reticence to advocate for his views in louder, more plain-spoken terms.

Setting the scene, Chukovskaia writes,

> He decided to set out on the water one murky, windy, doubtful day in early fall with five little children in the boat, small, smaller, and smallest, his own and others, not bothering to wait for the third rower, Kolya's friend, Pavka. He had finished some article or a part of an article which had given him a lot of trouble. He had to celebrate! (But he didn't look at the horizon.)[128]

Детские игрушки, книжки, шалости, болезни. Детская литература. Детский дом (см. дом). Детский сад (см. сад)» and secondly as «2. перен. Незрелый, не свойственный взрослому, вполне зрелому человеку (разг.). Это - детское рассуждение. Детская болезнь левизны (заглавие статьи Ленина о левом уклоне). Детское место (анат.) - то же, что плацента.» Dmitrii Nikolaevich Ushakov, *Tolkovyi slovar' russkogo jazyka*, 1306, 699.

[128] «Он отправился на морскую прогулку в предосенний, мутный, сомнительный, ветреный день, посадив в лодку пятерых ребятишек, мал-мала меньше, своих и чужих, и не потрудившись дождаться нашего третьего гребца—Колиного сверстника, Павки. Он окончил

The enumeration of the "five little children," "small, smaller, and smallest," both "his own and others'," as well as the characterization of his decision-making process ("not bothering to wait," so, minimal at best) and the decidedly *childish* free indirect discourse of "He had to celebrate!"—all serve to amplify a sense of mild condemnation in the text: while on his daughter's, as well as many others', account Chukovskii preferred to live his life not just among children but in a children's world, here his childishness goes too far, crossing over from endearing to reckless and, in the final instance, unbecoming of a grown-up, father, and future Soviet citizen. Already, then, the stakes of Chukovskaia's account come to seem higher than had perhaps previously been thought: with his childishness Chukovskii endangers the young people in his charge rather than protecting them. However, because he rows them to safety, singing loudly to distract them all the while, the account is not ultimately as damning as it might have been.

Read more closely, though, Chukovskaia's account of the incident points to an even more serious ethical ambiguity than the question of how far into a children's world an adult should ultimately be allowed to go—his "carelessness" (*bespechnost'*) in this case, after all, is not on the order of leaving a stove on or door unlocked, but an impulsive desire to create adventure irrespective of practical

какую-то статью или главу из статьи, которая долго не давалась ему. Необходимо отпраздновать! (А в горизонт не вглядывался)». Chukovskaia, *To the Memory of Childhood* 42; *Pamiati detstva* 76.

concerns.[129] Extrapolated from the Kuokkala period, where Chukovskaia's childhood and thus the bulk of her autobiographic text takes place, this passage invites readers to contemplate what, in the Soviet period that followed, the consequences of Chukovskii's "kind of childish belief in happy endings to bad situations" and general "childishness" really were.[130] In this way, the anecdote of the ill-fated rowing trip suggests that, in Chukovskaia's childhood as well as after, Chukovskii sometimes used his childishness to sidestep his responsibility to the social world and to those around him. The emphasis Chukovskii placed on light-heartedness and cheer, moreover, had immediate political repercussions: in Chukovskaia's case, living in accordance with her inner convictions led to multiple run-ins with the authorities. As her diary entry written after his death makes clear, Chukovskaia's political activity was the very opposite of the light-hearted cheer her father loved and served as a source of tension between them: "I always gave you grief, but you liked when people enlivened and cheered you..."[131]

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[129] In this sense my reading differs from Mallika Ramdas's, who argues that Chukovskii's "stature and authority" in Chukovskaia's text "are so immense that her rare attempts at candid—though forever tempered—criticism fail to diminish his mythic proportions." Mallika Ramdas, "Through Other 'I's," 96. In my view, she is not trying to "diminish" him but is questioning and negotiating his complicated legacy.

[130] She also recalls, for instance, that "He didn't like being gloomy and sad and resisted others' attempts to make him feel that way. Sometimes he simply refused to let people talk about injuries, bad luck, and calamities in his presence, protecting with this injunction his work, and with his work, his good spirits..." («Он не любил пребывать в состоянии уныния, мрака, и сопротивлялся, когда ему тянули туда. Иногда попросту запрещал окружающим касаться в его присутствии какой-нибудь раны, неудачи, беды, этим требованием защищая свою работу, а работой обороняя веселье...») Chukovskaia, *To the Memory of Childhood* 109; *Pamiati detstva* 194.

[131] Chukovskaia, *"Dnevnik—bol'shoe podspor'e ..."* 239.

At the same time, the rowing anecdote implies that there was nothing sly about her "childlike father": he could not help but be swept along the tide of childhood, no matter the consequences.[132] The result is a somewhat equivocating statement: by perpetuating the image that Chukovskii himself cultivated as a happy, playful man operating above the noise of daily political squabbles, in this scene Chukovskaia leaves it to the reader to decide what his convictions truly were. From the perspective of liberal readers who, like Oksman, were eager to read Chukovskii as having been one unequivocally one of their own, Chukovskaia's portrayal serves to excuse her father's lack of outright political engagement. From the perspective of the state, this excuse functions in an equal but opposite sense: Chukovskii's disengagement from politics was to be expected from a man perceived to be more interested in children than in adults.

Although Chukovskaia, at the time of writing *To the Memory of Childhood*, is no longer a small child precariously seated in a rocking row boat on a stormy sea, she is once more left open to external danger as she works to contest the Soviet state's account of her father's work and life. It is perhaps not a coincidence, then, that upon looking at her father's hands in the coffin, Chukovskaia writes, "I saw them on the oars in Kuokkala."[133] By leaving the work of uniting his two lives

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[132] In his diary, Chukovskii records how Anna Akhmatova had told him in 1924 that he was a "sly one: "but I believe what you write. You can't lie." («Вы лукавый, но когда вы пишете, я верю, вы не можете соврать, убеждена.») Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*, 142; *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh* vol. 12, 142.

[133] «Глядя на его руки во гробе, я видела эти руки на веслах в Куоккале.» Chukovskaia, *To the Memory of Childhood* 121; *Pamiati detstva* 218.

into one undone, in his death as that day on the boat Chukovskii leaves his daughter open to the metaphorical elements—and this time, he is not there to 'save' her.

Her increased vulnerability following her father's death is once more evoked in her poem "Nineteen Sixty-Nine" (*God tysiacha deviat'sot shest'desiat' deviatyi*), written shortly thereafter and published abroad in her 1978 collection *On This Side of Death* (*Po etu storonu smerti*) and in Russia in 1992.[134] Although in her memoir Chukovskaia provides her father with something like an alibi for his lack of political engagement that confirms his reputation as a grown-up child in the positive sense, her poetry amplifies the critical strain that runs throughout this account. A particularly incisive critique of her father that finds expression through the idiom of childhood is at the heart of "Nineteen Sixty-Nine," where Chukovskaia once again addresses her father as though *he* were the child. As with the rowing incident, however, her aim is, once again, not to praise him:

<table>
<tr><td>1
А здесь, наверно, хорошо лежать,
Как до рожденья или в колыбели,
Когда еще до жизни птицы пели,
И после жизни—спи!—поют опять.</td><td>1
It's good to lie here, likely
As before birth or in the cradle
When birds still sang before life,
And after—sleep!—they sing again.</td></tr>
<tr><td>2
В домике скворца живут бельчата
На березе, за твоим окном.
Ты на них поглядывал когда-то,
Поднимая руку над письмом.</td><td>2
In the starling's home there live some squirrels
Upon the birch, outside your window.
You used to glance at them once upon a time,
Raising your hand over a letter.</td></tr>
</table>

[134] Chukovskaia, *Po etu storonu smerti: iz dnevnika 1936-1976* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1978); *Stikhotvoreniia* (Moscow: Gorizont, 1992).

И береза излучает свет	And the birch illuminates the light
Глаз твоих, которых больше нет.	Of your eyes, which are no longer.
3	3
Одна в глубоком обмороке	Alone in the deep swoon
Немых ветвей	Of silent boughs
Одна в глубоком сумраке…	Alone in the deep dusk…
Ответь! Повей!	Respond! Gust softly!
....	....
Снег черный. Не из ада ли?	The snow is black. From hell, perhaps?
Гроб на земле. В гробу	The coffin's on the earth. In the coffin
Ты. И снежинки падали,	You. And snowflakes fell,
Не таяли на лбу.	Not melting on the brow.
Зачем же ты притворствовал	Why did you pretend
Как будто неживой,	As if you weren't alive,
И нечисти потворствовал,	And pandered to the evil spirits,
Кружившей над тобой?[135]	Spinning up above you?

In the idyllic scene evoked in the first and second sections of the poem, the natural world bears the trace of the deceased, singing for him and reminding Chukovskaia of her father's writing habits. However, the third section departs significantly from the measured—even whimsical—tone of the first two. Chukovskaia writes that she is "alone" (the Russian *odna* is feminine and thus leaves no ambiguity as to its referent), and unlike the white snow that served as the backdrop for Pushkin's duel,[136] this snow is black as if from "hell." As the third section of the poem implies, her solitude is not just the natural byproduct of her father's death, but the result of his actions in life, as well: there is something accusatory about the enjambment of the word "You" ("*Ty*") in the second stanza of

[135] Chukovskaia, *Stikhotvoreniia* 85-6.

[136] Chukovskaia, *To the Memory of Childhood* 55, *Pamiati detstva* 80.

that section, and as the final stanza of the poem suggests, her father was not simply the good guy contending with "evil spirits" around him (presumably, the apparatchiks whom he had to appease in the name of professional survival). Rather, he actively "pandered" to them and "pretended" to be dead (*potvorstvoval*/ *Kak budto nezhivoi*), undercutting the earlier image built up in *To the Memory of Childhood* of his childlike behavior as having been sincere and unaffected. Here, Chukovskaia points to his agency, his deliberate performance of being figuratively "dead"—in other words, an obedient cog in the Soviet machine.

By linking his real, physical death to another death that happened before in her poem, Chukovskaia also suggests that the original death was the death of his unlived life. Thus, her poem recalls Judith Butler's distinction between livable lives and grievable deaths on the one hand and unlivable, ungrievable ones on the other. But whereas in *To the Memory of Childhood* this second, metaphorical death is depicted as Chukovskii's "tragedy" and thus something that happened to him the way that her tragedy happened to her,[137] in the poem it appears more like a deliberate choice: Chukovskii chose a policy of appeasement when he could have done otherwise. The poem as a whole concludes on a note of ambivalence, her despair at the loss of her father blending into her despair at his inability to live one unified life. In light of this conclusion, I cannot help but reread the soothing command to "Sleep!" (*Spi*!) of the first stanza as being equally ambivalent: it is

[137] «Однако была у него в жизни своя трагедия и своя борьба.» Lidia Chukovskaia, *Protsess iskliucheniia*, 224; *To the Memory of Childhood* 148. Recall Chukovskii's evocation of his daughter's "tragedy" following the arrest of her husband Matvei Bronshtein in 1937. Chukovskii, *Diary, 1901-1969*, 334; *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh* vol. 13, 41.

unclear whether Chukovskaia is telling her father to keep sleeping because he is dead or because he was in a sense just as "asleep" in life as he is now.

Conclusion

In a diary entry from 1925, when Chukovskaia was only 18, her father wrote, "Lida and I have become close friends. During our intimate evening talks I see more and more clearly the terrible fate she has in store. She has an amazingly noble character and does not bend and can only break."[138] As the quiet foreboding in this entry suggests, Chukovskii sensed what lay ahead not only for his daughter, but for the fate of freedom in the nation as a whole as well. One also gets the sense that he understood full well the expediency of "bending." It is this very quality of his that Chukovskaia, in her own diary entry written some four decades later (in 1963), comments upon when she wonders, "What is this remarkable person lacking in order to be truly great?...'A keen sense of truth.' 'moral foundation.' A heightened sense of honor, which always leads to civic-mindedness" (*grazhdansvennosti*).[139] Although as Iulian Oksman had noted with remorse that Chukovskii had had a "civic funeral" (*Grazhdanskaia panikhida*),[140] Chukovskaia

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[138] Ibid., 170; *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh* vol. 12, 237. "С Лидой у меня установилась тесная дружба. По вечерам мы ведем задушевные беседы—и мне больше видна ее мучительная судьба впереди. У нее изумительно благородный характер, который не гнется, а только ломается.»

[139] «Чего не хватает этому замечательному человеку, чтобы быть великим? ...Чего не хватает? 'Зуда правды'. 'Нравственного гнезда'. Обостренного чувства чести, которое всегда приводит к гражданственности.» Chukovskaia, *"Dnevnik—bol'shoe podspor'e ...,"* 147.

[140] Oksman, "Na pokhoronakh Korneia Chukovskogo."

revalues the meaning of "civic" to suggest that the cooptation that Oksman and others noted with regret at her father's funeral was at least in part her father's own doing. By speaking of her father's lack of "moral foundation" (literally his "moral nest," *nravstvennoe gnezdo*), Chukovskaia sounds more like the parent than the daughter and implies that her own moral foundation was at least in part of her own making—it is the parent's responsibility to make a "nest."

And while Chukovskii understood his daughter and the incommensurability of her character with the Soviet era well, he got one thing wrong: although her diaries evince a keen sense of loneliness and sometimes despair, she never did "break."[141] Instead, by sheer force of will and despite such obstacles as exclusion from the Writers' Union,[142] Chukovskaia spoke past the heavy Iron Curtain and to the world of the injustice she saw transpiring everywhere around her. There is no denying that her status as Chukovskii's daughter helped her to obtain a platform for doing so,[143] as well as a means, when the need arose, to write herself back into the social order. In the process, Chukovskaia was forced to contend with the contradictory legacy her father left behind as well as the incongruities between that legacy and her own emerging one.

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[141] E.g. a 1959 entry where she writes of work as the only means to dull her feeling of pain and loneliness. Chukovskaia, *"Dnevnik—bol'shoe podspor'e…*, 129.

[142] Among other things, this deprived her of the literary secretary she so needed as she gradually lost her sight. Aleksandr Ospovat, Interview conducted by Lusia Zaitseva in Moscow, May 2017.

[143] E.g. an article titled "Children of the Revolution" about the Syniavskii/Daniil affair printed in the January 14, 1968 issue of *The Observer*, which records her disapproval of the Soviet state only after identifying her as "daughter of a much more famous writer." Edward Crankshaw, "Children of the Revolution." *The Observer*, January 18, 1968.

By engaging with that legacy through the domain to which the state had largely relegated her father and through which Chukovskii himself had spoken of and to that same state—the domain of childhood—Chukovskaia finds a language through which not only to honor him but to posit her difference from him, as well. In their own way, by speaking "as children," Chukovskii and Chukovskaia showed how very *adult* they actually were.

Afterword

"Living together like children"
The Memoirs of Nadezhda Mandelstam

In the first volume of her memoirs, Nadezhda Mandelstam describes how she stood in line outside of the Lubianka prison alongside countless others after Osip Mandelstam was arrested. Noting with horror the children who stood with her, alone, to ask for news of their arrested parents, Mandelstam writes, "It was astonishing that life continued at all, and that people still brought children into the world and had families. How could they do this, knowing what went on in front of the window of the building on Sophia Street?"[1]

In this passage and elsewhere, Mandelstam evinces a keen awareness not only of the special vulnerability of children in the Stalin era, but of the degradation of the family unit that it wrought. In one remarkable instance, Mandelstam recounts with dismay the proud pronouncement of Pasternak's wife Zinaida Neigauz that her children loved Stalin more than they loved her. "Others did not go so far," Mandelstam writes, "but nobody confided their doubts to their children: why condemn them to death? And then suppose the child talked in school and

[1] «А самое удивительное, что жизнь продолжалась и люди обзаводились семьями и рожали детей. Как они могли на это решиться, зная о том, что происходило перед окошком на Софийке?» Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope: A Memoir* (London: Collins & Harvill Press, 1971), 374-5; *Vospominaniia* (New York: Izd-vo imeni Chekhova, 1970), 390. Max Hayward translates "Sophia Street" (*Sophiika*, really *Sophiiskaia ulitsa*—later named *Pushechnaia*) as "Sophia Embankment." However, it doesn't appear that this street is or has ever been an embankment.

brought disaster on the whole family?[2] In the second volume of her memoirs she mentions one such child specifically: 13-year-old pioneer Pavlik Morozov, the boy who denounced his father in the early 1930s and was subsequently killed in revenge for his actions (likely on his own family's directive).[3] The story of his deeds was drilled into Soviet children, and Mandelstam describes this inculcation sardonically: "Children in the lower classes at school had to learn the edifying story of Pavlik by heart so they too would always be ready to denounce their own fathers."[4]

As Beth Holmgren has noted, Mandelstam's memoirs express an intuitive awareness of the unique power of politics to shape personal experience.[5] In numerous instances, Mandelstam reflects on the influence of politics on her (and presumably also her husband's) decision not to have children. This decision emerges as much as a matter of necessity as a matter of choice: "I realized in time

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[2] «Другие так далеко не заходили, но своими сомнениями с детьми не делился никто: а вдруг ребенок проболтается в школе и погубит всю семью?» Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope* 45; *Vospominaniia*, 48.

[3] Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned*, 1st Atheneum paperback ed. (New York: Atheneum, 1981), 296; *Vtoraia kniga* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1972), 333.

[4] «Дети в младших классах выучивали на зубок поучительную историю про Павлика и всегда были готовы донести даже собственного отца.» Ibid.

[5] As Beth Holmgren writes of Mandelstam's *Third Book* (*Kniga tret'ia*), "While her sketches stylistically reflect her irreverence for certain autobiographical conventions, they mainly register the constant interference of political context. Nadezhda Mandelstam's venture back into childhood is precarious, dramatized by attendant memories of its destruction." Beth Holmgren, *Women's Works in Stalin's Time : On Lidiia Chukovskaia and Nadezhda Mandelstam* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 99.

that one must not have children," she writes.[6] Recounting the story of a former co-worker known simply as the "violinist's widow," Mandelstam emphasizes the fact that not being a mother—particularly the mother of a son (as her former coworker, and for that matter, her good friend Anna Akhmatova, was) had freed Mandelstam from her share of the fear that such women experienced: "If I myself no longer constantly quake in my shoes, it is because I have no son to worry about," she writes.[7] But she did have something else to worry about: the poems she was entrusted to project. Mandelstam suggests that for her and her husband, poetry occupied the role of a surrogate child: later in the same sentence she acknowledges that another reason why she need no longer "tremble" is that the poem-children are published and thus 'safe.'[8] It is these poems that bound the family unit together as children normally do: in the memoirs, she readily admits her anxiety that Osip would likely have left her had she not played such an integral role in the poetry he wrote in her presence.[9]

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[6] «[Я] вовремя сообразила, что детей иметь нельзя.» Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned* 173; *Vtoraia kniga* 197.

[7] «Я, например, не дрожу только потому, что у меня нет сына, стихи напечатаны.» Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, *Hope Abandoned*, 170; *Vtoraia kniga* 194. Later in the same chapter, she repeats, "I also know what it means to be a widow, but at least I have been spared the terror one feels on behalf of a son" («Я тоже вдова, но второй волны страха—за сына—я избежала»). Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned* 173; *Vtoraia kniga* 197. As Beth Holmgren notes, Mandelstam considered women to be generally less vulnerable and heartier than men. Holmgren, *Women's Works in Stalin's Time* 146.

[8] "[A]fter the publication of M.'s poetry I was able to say to myself, 'Enough—no more trembling!'" («стихи напечатаны и я себе сказала: 'Хватит—надрожалась'...»). Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned* 173; *Vtoraia kniga* 197.

[9] "I still suspect...that if none of his poetry had yet been written, he might well have decided to let me leave him for T." «Я только подозреваю одно: если б в тот момент, когда он застал меня с чемоданом, стихи еще не были написаны, он возможно, дал бы мне уйти.» Ibid. 212; 240.

The Mandelstams' childlessness also gave them the freedom to play children to each other. In her final letter to her husband, Mandelstam wrote, "Osiusha, what a joy it was living together like children—all our squabbles and arguments, the games we played, and our love....Like blind puppies we nuzzled one another, and we were happy."[10] With these words, included at the end of the second volume of memoirs, Mandelstam expresses her longing not just for their marriage in general, but for the era when she ascended to a more equal role vis-à-vis her husband.

Initially triggered by the breaking point brought on by Osip's infidelity,[11] this change and its equalizing effect had as much to do with forces external to the marriage: the more precarious Osip Mandelstam's, and thus their shared, situation became, the more equal they were. Indeed, his failing physical and mental health following his first arrest in 1934 initiated Mandelstam's role as caretaker.[12] As Beth Holmgren notes, "as their relationship matured and Mandelstam had to yield more responsibility to his 'foolish' younger wife, the two of them achieved a kind of

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[10] «Осюша — наша детская с тобой жизнь — какое это было счастье. Наши ссоры, наши перебранки, наши игры и наша любовь....Мы как слепые щенята тыкались друг в друга, и нам было хорошо.» Ibid. 620; 694. I have modified Max Hayward's translation somewhat.

[11] This period is described at length in the chapter titled "A Case of Touch and Go" (*Pogranichnaia situatsiia*) of *Hope Abandoned*.

[12] As Mandelstam recounts, her husband's suicidal tendencies first arose on the way to Cherdyn in 1934, and he tried to kill himself at a hospital there by jumping out of a window. Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope* 58-60; *Vospominaniia* 61-3. While incarcerated at the Lubianka prison, he tried to slit his wrists. Ibid. 77; 81. In 1937, when the Mandelstams were settled at Voronezh, Nadezhda Mandelstam's mother would come to keep an eye on Osip as Nadezhda went to Moscow in search of prospects for the couple as Osip's official term of exile was coming to a close. Ibid. 213; 228.

balance of non-status, an equal level of childlike helplessness and 'light-heartedness.'"[13]

From 1934 onward especially, their childlike helplessness and light-heartedness helped them to resist and undermine the dominant ideals of the social order to the margins of which they had been pushed. United in their playful poverty and contributing little to the new Soviet society in terms of either acknowledged labor or offspring, the Mandelstams forged a marriage that was a far cry from "'normal' family relations…based on close emotional ties between man and woman aimed at the conception, gestation, and upbringing of further generations."[14] The childless, playfully nonconformist, and non-(re)productive nature of their marriage flew in the face of prevailing ideals about what the Soviet family should be. We might even say that there was something queer about it: not only in the definitional sense of "strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric" and "suspicious,"[15] but in the contemporary, theoretical sense as well.[16]

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[13] Holmgren, *Women's Works in Stalin's Time* 110.

[14] Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890-1991* (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2007), 579-80.

[15] "queer, adj.1". OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/Entry/156236?rskey=SSz31k&result=2 (accessed March 16, 2018).

[16] David Halperin argues that queer "acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm." Consequently, Halperin speaks of the need to return to the definitional sense of the word queer as "whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant." David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62. This conception invites us to view the Mandelstams, a quintessentially dissident couple, through Halperin's lens, and indeed recent scholarship in the field of queer theory has argued that even heterosexual relations can be queer. Lynne Segal, *Straight Sex: Rethinking the Politics of Pleasure* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Cited in Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory (New York: New York University Press, 2003)* 132.

Charles Isenberg and Beth Holmgren have noted the role that Osip Mandelstam played in saving his wife from the familiar marriage script she so feared, which Holmgren terms the "bourgeois family romance."[17] Yet if Osip Mandelstam saved her from such a script, she equally saved him: she was a far cry from the "ladies" (the salon-keepers of Moscow and Leningrad) whom he despised, describing herself instead as "a mere slip of a girl…belonging to a lower order of womanhood."[18] And if Mandelstam marvels time and again at his light-heartedness (*legkomyslie*), she possesses it in almost equal measure: "For all my light-heartedness, even I was astonished by his improvidence."[19] However, she gave him free reign to express his: "I feel free with you," she records Osip as having said to her.[20] That freedom is inherently playful: she emphasizes her husband's love of

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[17] Beth Holmgren, *Women's Works in Stalin's Time,* 107. Ironically, Isenberg notes, the Stalinist terror had the effect of inoculating their marriage against such a predictable outcome. "The situation is paradoxical: the writer arraigns Stalinism for its destruction of the possibility of an ordinary life, yet her text risks implying that the special pressure exerted by the state upon the Mandelstams has the effect of saving their marriage from the usual fate of such marriages." Charles Isenberg, "The Rhetoric of Nadezhda Mandelstam's Hope Against Hope," in *Autobiographical Statements in Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*, ed. Jane Gary Harris, Studies of the Harriman Institute (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1990), 198.

[18] Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned* 117, 245; *Vtoraia kniga* 136, 277.

[19] In the second volume she writes that "For all my light-heartedness, even I was astonished by his improvidence," («Даже я, легкомысленная из легкомысленных, удивлялась его беспечности.») Ibid. 13; 18.

[20] "'Why do you need me?' I used to ask [Mandelstam]," she writes. "'I feel free with you,' was one reply, and another: 'Because you believe in me.'" («'Зачем я тебе нужна?'—спрашивала я Мандельштама. Один ответ: 'Я с тобой свободен', другой: 'Ты в меня веришь.'») Ibid. 228; 257. This idea is also echoed in the first volume of the memoirs: "I didn't realize that, hearing the mysterious call of freedom and fate at the very outset, he had made of me exactly what he needed." Mandelstam writes («я не отдавала себе отчета, что он сам сделал из меня то, что ему было нужно, потому что сразу почувствовал таинственную свободу-судьбу.») Ibid. 245; 278.

games and his boyishness in countless instances and joined him it in. Indeed the Mandelstams turned even their itinerancy into a sort of game.[21]

It is Osip Mandelstam's playful, boyish qualities that often get overlooked in scholarly accounts of his work for their seeming dissonance with the piety he elicits. Yet as she works not only to preserve but also to form the canon of her husband's poetry,[22] Mandelstam makes clear that levity and gravity coexisted in him in equal measure. Mandelstam's emphasis on these qualities is in part the product of the importance her husband placed on unifying one's life and work and contributes to what Holmgren describes as a portrayal of an "uncompromised, but altogether human artist."[23] A feature of her husband's "boyish[ness]" (*mal'chishes*[*tvo*]), his obsession with continuity and his resultant antipathy toward the "drab infinity" (*durnaia beskonechnost'*) of clocks led him to fashion his wife into a kind of child, a bearer of his worldview and, eventually, his legacy.[24]

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[21] "We used to think of arriving in a new town as a kind of game." («У нас была игра—входить в новый город.») Ibid. 76; 89. "Although M. did not seek happiness, he described everything he valued in terms of pleasure and play." «Хотя Мандельштам не искал счастья, все ценное в своей жизни он называл весельем, игрой.» Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope* 269; *Vospominaniia* 285-6.

[22] Isenberg, "The Rhetoric of Nadezhda Mandelstam's Hope Against Hope" 193.

[23] Beth Holmgren, *Women's Works in Stalin's Time*, 120. "Nadezhda Mandelstam finds fault with the artists who cannot maintain the intense bond between life and work that she learned from Mandelstam." Ibid. 153.

[24] "Another thing that constantly provoked argument was the question of continuity, which he sought everywhere—in history, culture, and art. Here…he found the analogy with a clock's hands useful: a clock is wound up and movement begins from nothing, but an 'event' is inconceivable without continuity. M. was distinguished by a rather comic and childish literal-mindedness: once he had found this analogy between a clock hand and 'drab infinity,' he took a dislike to clocks and watches, always refusing to have one." («Вторым постоянным толчком для споров был вопрос о преемственности, которую он искал повсюду—в истории, в культуре, в искусстве. Здесь…помогала аналогия с часами: часы заводятся и движение начинается из ничего, а событие немыслимо без преемственности. О.М. отличался какой-то смешной мальчишеской

And yet, for all her readiness to play a child to him both when he was alive and after, by reliving her "childhood" with him in the memoirs, Mandelstam figuratively grows up. She does so by partially dismantling, in the second volume of the memoirs, the monument that she had worked so hard to enshrine in the first: she highlights his cruelty to and tyranny over her when she could just as well consign them to oblivion.[25] She also makes clear that neither she nor her husband were typical "children." Although she herself calls Osip childish, boyish, and light-hearted, at other times she insists that "These were not the attributes of a child," and in general she resists the image painted by some of her contemporaries of Osip as a kind of holy fool.[26]

прямолинейной конкретностью: раз найдено уподобление и часовая стрелка напомнила ему 'дурную бесконечность', антипатия распространилась и на такую полезную вещь, как часы; он не любил и никогда не имел часов.») Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope* 250; *Vospominaniia* 266.

[25] One especially poignant example of his cruelty toward her is the period in the mid-1920s when he would leave her bedridden (Mandelstam was suffering from tuberculosis) and tell her "to be sure to take my temperature and not get up on any account." («Мандельштам, уходя с Ольгой, напоминал мне, чтобы я не забыла смерить температуру и не в коем случае не ставала.») Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned* 210; *Vtoraia kniga* 237. In *Hope Against Hope*, she opts not to name the people who were present for the recitation of the Stalin Epigram lest "someone be tempted to speculate as to the identity of the traitor." Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope* 84; *Vospominaniia* 88.

[26] "These were not the attributes of a child—a child is ignorant of life and full of desires, depending entirely on those around him and demanding their attention. Only a really mature person can have inner freedom…M.'s more sober-minded contemporaries spoke of his frivolity—and I had more than enough conventional wisdom myself o feel the same way…Everybody who has written about him makes him out to be almost a simpleton—always laughing, incapable of earning money…in other words, not a serious man at all." («Это не детские черты—ребенок не знает жизни и полон желаний. Он целиком зависит от окружающих и требует от них внимание. Внутренней свободой может обладать только воистину зрелый человек…Разумные люди говорили о легкомыслии Мандельштама, и я тоже…Все, кто писал о нем, изображали его почти дурачком—вечно смеется, денег зарабатывать не умеет….словом—солидности никакой…») Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned* 128; *Vtoraia kniga* 148.

To counter this image, she stresses the role that her husband's seemingly juvenile qualities played in his resilience as well as their status as the necessary outgrowth of his complete certainty in his poetic gift. She complicates, too, her own status as a kind of hybrid child-wife: in one striking instance, by dismissing a famed (if fictional) child-wife, Ibsen's Nora Helmer. "It is a good thing that the problems raised by Ibsen already seemed trivial and ridiculous by then," she writes, "otherwise I should have taken offense at this lack of respect for my identity and left M. like some provincial Nora."[27] In contrast to Nora's actions, Mandelstam sees her service to her husband as inherently non-egotistical: "It is interesting how a woman puffs herself up and puts on airs if she suddenly feels people ought to respect her. I have never suffered such pride."[28] Although freer to leave than the tragic protagonist of Ibsen's play, Mandelstam made the powerful choice to stay. She also continued to play child to her husband long after his death, both by bearing his legacy and by reliving her "childhood" with him through the memoirs with evident pleasure.[29]

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[27] «Хорошо, что ибсеновские проблемы казались тогда уже никчемными и смешными, не то я внезапно обиделась бы на неуважение к моей личности и ушла от Мандельштама, как какая-нибудь провинциальная Нора...Интересно, как распухает от важности женщина, когда вдруг почувствует себя достойной уважения.» Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned* 218; *Vtoraia kniga* 246. I have changed Max Hayward's translation of *lichnost*' from "personality" to "individuality."

[28] Ibid.

[29] Mandelstam's pleasure in reliving her figurative childhood contrasts with her feelings toward those who choose to relive their literal one. The memoirs, I would argue, are a tribute to a childhood transposed into her adult life. "In general I fail to understand people's excessive interest in their own childhood; I believe it must have something to do with the desire to treat reality as an unbroken whole and to relive past experience. This is a feature of the age...which hinders the attainment of maturity and the growth of the personality...The desire to take refuge in one's childhood is invariably a symptom of some...feeling of inadequacy." («Я вообще не понимаю

Her effort to fulfill the role of bearer of his legacy in part by establishing the continuity Mandelstam sought between his life and work is evident, for instance, in the trope of them as "puppies" in her last letter, which she may have borrowed from his translation of the 13th-century French *chanson de geste*, *Les quatre fils d'Aymon* (*Synov'ia Aimona,* 1922/27). In the story, the four sons of Aymon, with the most daring brother Renaud at their helm, enter into conflict with King Charlemagne but prevail after a long series of misadventures that includes Renaud's death and resurrection. Mandelstam describes the moment when the brothers finally make their way home after their wanderings and their mother recognizes them in the following way: "Like a lovesome laika looks at her blind brood of pups/ So gazes the princess upon the four princes" (*Kak laskovaia laika na slepykh shcheniat/ Gliadit kniaginia na chetyrekh kniazhat*).[30] The evocation of a thoroughly un-French canine, the laika, suggests a superposition of the poet's present onto his retelling of the French *chanson*, a frequent trope in Osip Mandelstam's writing.[31] This image captures the way that, for the poet, childlikeness and strength can coexist.

чрезмерного внимания к собственному детству. Мне кажется, что расцвет интереса к детству имеет что-то общее с потребностью восстанавливать непрерывность и вторично переживать уже пережитое. В нашей стране, этому способствовало….затаенность испуганных и неполноценных людей. Но спасение в собственное детство всегда признак неполноценности.») Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned*, 181-2; *Vtoraia kniga* 207.

[30] Osip Mandel'shtam, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress-Pleiada, 2009), 133.

[31] E.g. "On a peasant sledge lined with straw" (*Na rozval'niakh, ulozhennykh solomoi*, 1916), "For me the language of a cobblestone is clearer than a dove's" (*Iazyk bulyzhnika mne golubia poniatnei,* 1923), and "So that, friend of wind and raindrops" (*Chtob, priiatel' i vetra i kapel',* 1937), discussed in chapter 3.

Thus my reading differs slightly from Holmgren's when she argues that Mandelstam "boldly reorient[ed] the male-centered visions of Bulgakov, Pasternak, and her husband" in order to define

> her own spiritual-cultural opposition to Stalinism along gender lines; implying the involvement of [Osip] Mandelstam, Akhmatova, and herself, she claims that only these 'weak' men and women…can resist the destruction and corruption of a force-loving, stereotypically masculine Stalinism.[32]

As I argue in chapters 2 and 3, neither Pasternak's nor Osip Mandelstam's views were classically "male-centered." By emphasizing the strength to be found in weakness—as she does when she insists on the role that her husband's boyish carelessness played in his resilience or in the image of them as children/puppies playing happily on the backdrop of an increasingly hostile world—Mandelstam is not so much "boldly reorient[ing]" Osip's vision as amplifying it and casting herself as part of the continuum between his life and his work in the process.

Osip Mandelstam would return to and identify explicitly with the image of puppies to express his defiant difference in the 1931 poem "I'm still far from a patriarch" (*Eshche daleko mne do patriarkha*), a poem that signals his reluctance to play the strong, masculine role expected of him by his compatriots. According to Mandelstam this theme emerged in her husband's poetics around the time that he was translating "The Sons of Aymon."[33] As Gleb Struve notes, Osip Mandelstam

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[32] Holmgren, *Women's Works in Stalin's Time*, 147.

[33] Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope* 178; *Vospominaniia* 184, cited in Gleb Struve, "Osip Mandelstam and Auguste Barbier: Notes on Mandelstam's Versions of Iambes," *California Slavic Studies* 8 (1975), 133-4.

added the word "family man" to his contemporaneous translation of Henri Auguste Barbier's "La curée," which later reemerged as his seething indictment of the "honest traitor…a family man" (*chestnyi predatel'…zheny i detei soderzhatel'*) in the 1933 poem "An apartment, quiet as paper…" (*Kvartira tikha, kak bumaga*).[34] In "I'm still far from a patriarch," the poet writes, "Like a puppy I rush to the telephone/ At every hysterical ring" (*Ia kak shchenok kidaius' k telefonu/ Na kazhdyi istericheskii zvonok*). Before this, he admits that his peers are disappointed in and gossip about him: "They still call me names behind my back/ In the language of tram squabbles" (*Eshche menia rugaiut za glaza/ Na iazyke tramvainykh perebranok*). The echo of the title of the poem in this line ("I'm *still* far from a patriarch"; "they *still* call me names," italics mine) suggests a direct parallel between his fraught relationship with his contemporaries and the distance he has yet to traverse before becoming a "patriarch." This poem suggests he wants no such thing.[35]

As she does by evoking children and nuzzling puppies in her final letter, Mandelstam amplifies classical themes from Osip's poetry in order to express the

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[34] Ibid.

[35] The 1932 poem "Lamark" expresses his admiration of and identification with the scientist to whom the poem is dedicated, an "old man, as shy as a boy" (*starik, zastenchivyi, kak mal'chik*). In that poem Osip Mandelstam expresses his desire to occupy the "last rung" of Lamark's evolutionary ladder. Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*, vol. 1, 165. According to Wolf Iro, Lamark's childlikeness is central to the poet's view of the scientist "as not only defending the honor of nature but human imagination in general." Wolf Iro, "Children's World View as a Subtext of O. Mandel'štam's 'Putešestvie v Armeniju,'" *Russian Literature* 49, no. 1 (2001), 56.

fraught nature of her mourning. Recounting a recurring nightmare that she had following Osip Mandelstam's final arrest, she writes,

> Before I learned of M.'s death I kept having a dream: I was out with him buying something for our supper and he was standing behind me; we were about to go home, but when I turned around he was no longer there and I caught a glimpse of him somewhere ahead of me. I ran after him, but never managed to catch up and ask what they were doing with him 'there.'[36]

The gender play as well as the evocation of the threshold between the dead and the living echoes his 1934 poem "Mistress of guilty glances" (*Masteritsa vinovatykh vzorov*). In that poem, the lyric voice is both a would-be lover and a sister to his addressee: "Our way is sisterly" (*Nash obychai sestrinskii*), he writes, blurring the boundary between the male and the female in a poem that ends on a desperate plea to "Go, leave, stay a while" (*ukhodi, uidi, eshche pobud'*).[37] The poem ends on the image of a stony threshold that, given the lyric persona's desire to "forestall death" (*nado smert' predupredit'*), can only be read as the threshold between the dead and the living—a threshold that, in her dream, Mandelstam crosses as unsuccessfully as Orpheus once did, borrowing from his own reworking of gender tropes in order to play Orpheus to his Eurydice.[38] Mandelstam's use of that archetypal myth in order to express her relationship with the dead may be

[36] «Пока не пришло известие о смерти Мандельштама, я всё видела один сон: я что-то покупаю на ужин, а он стоит сзади, мы сейчас пойдем домой…Когда я оборачиваюсь—его уже нет, он ушел и маячит где-то впереди…Я бегу, но не успеваю догнать его и спросить, что с ним 'там' делают.» Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope* 370; *Vospominaniia* 386.

[37] Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*, vol. 1, 194.

[38] For more on the Orphic theme in Mandelstam's poetics, see Victor Terras, "The Black Sun: Orphic Imagery in the Poetry of Osip Mandelstam," *Slavic and East European Journal* 45, no. 1 (2001): 45–60.

significant for another reason as well: like the Mandelstams, Orpheus and Eurydice were also childless.

Her defiant mourning of her husband places her into the additional role of sister: in one remarkable instance of the second volume, she compares herself with Antigone in her quest to bury her dead brother and admits to envying the heroine's ability to give up her life for the dead.[39] By likening herself to the Antigone of the Sophocles play that bears her name, Mandelstam in fact reprises an image from her husband's writings and boldly identifies herself with the poetic word: the figure of Antigone appears in Mandelstam's famous poem "I forgot the word I wanted to say" (*Ia slovo pozabyl, chto ia khotel skazat'*, 1920), where the word the poet seeks at times appears to him suddenly falling before him like "mad Antigone" (*To vdrug prokinetsia bezumnoi Antigonoi*).[40]

This image of Antigone also echoes the melding of the erotic and infantile in Nadezhda's final letter, a melding that underscores a uniquely oppositional political strain in their marriage. As Judith Butler notes, Antigone "hardly represents the normative principles of kinship, steeped as she is in incestuous

[39] "I envy Antigone—not so much when she acts as a guide for her blind father as when she gives her life in return for the right to bury her brother." («Я всегда завидовала Антигоне—не той, что была поводырем слепого отца, а более поздней, которая отдала жизнь за право похоронить брата.») Mandel'shtam, *Hope Abandoned* 143; *Vtoraia kniga* 164-5.

[40] Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*, vol. 1, 110. Additionally, in his 1917 essay "Scriabin and Christianity," in which Mandelstam speaks of the "spirit of Greek tragedy" being awoken in music: "The spirit of Greek tragedy awoke in music. Music came full circle and returned to its origin: once again Phèdre calls for the wet-nurse, one again Antigone asks for burial and ablution for the dear body of her brother." («Дух греческой трагедии проснулся в музыке. Музыка совершила круг и вернулась туда, откуда она вышла: снова Федра кличет кормилицу, снова Антигона требует погребения и возлияний для милого братнего тела.» Mandel'shtam, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Progress-Pleiada, 2010), 39-40.

legacies that confound her position within kinship."[41] This confounded kinship (recall her father Oedipus's revelation that his wife Jocasta is actually his mother) resonates not only with Nadezhda Mandelstam's admixture of registers when speaking of her marriage, but with the oppositional role she occupied vis-à-vis society more generally: her defiant grieving of what Butler, in another essay, calls an un-grievable death put her at odds with the Soviet state.[42] As the quote about Antigone shows, for Nadezhda Mandelstam the ideal mourner gives her life for the dead, recalling what Clifton Spargo, paraphrasing Ismene's words to Antigone, has called the "impossible standard" of solidarity with the dead[43]—that is, giving up one's life, as well.

By continuing to play "child" to Osip Mandelstam after his death even as she ascends to her own authoritative status as a writer and thereby figuratively "grows up," Mandelstam not only keeps her husband present in her life, but bears out and shapes his subversive legacy as she does so. She also amplifies that legacy

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[41] Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim : Kinship between Life & Death*, Wellek Library Lectures at the University of California, Irvine (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 2.

[42] Butler writes that in the process of nation-building, "Some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved…operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death?" Judith Butler, *Precarious Life : The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London ; New York: Verso, 2006), xiv-xv.

[43] Drawing on the archetype provided by Sophocles' Antigone, Clifton Spargo writes, "in Sophocles' play, it is Ismene who tells Antigone, 'you are in love with the impossible' [*amēkhanōn*, literally what is beyond help, what is impracticable]"…Solidarity with the dead is an impossible standard." R. Clifton Spargo, *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 5.

by pointing to the necessity of occupying an oppositional stance outside of the dominant political vision. Some children, she seems to say, should never grow up.

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