Olga Sedakova and the Art of Meeting: Elegy, Epitaph, and the Death of the Poet

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the elegiac verse of Olga Sedakova (b. 1949) vis-à-vis the Russian elegiac tradition. One of the foremost poets of post-Soviet Russia, Sedakova is often studied as a religious poet, a philosophical poet, or a contemporary "woman poet." Yet, despite the preponderance of poems designated as elegies in her oeuvre, one label Sedakova continues to elude is "elegiac poet."

Employing John Frow's idea of genre as a "constellation" of thematic, rhetorical, and formal features (rather than a specific mode or theme), I argue that the elegy constitutes the most dynamic generic territory in Sedakova's poetic corpus, wherein the poet delineates her poetic identity, grapples with anxieties over her poetic standing, and reaches beyond the boundaries of lyric subjectivity (i.e., the limitations of a singular or gendered lyric "I") in her pursuit of the unknown.

Due to the elegy's breadth, this study focuses on two subgenres of the Russian elegy that lay at the heart of the Russian poetic tradition: the churchyard elegy and the elegy on the death of poet. Chapter One considers the history of the Russian churchyard elegy and Sedakova's treatment of its paradigms of mourning and consolation in her poem "Country Churchyard" and her cycle *Stelai and Inscriptions*. Chapters Two and Three consider Sedakova's engagement with the "Death of the Poet" tradition through intertextual dialogue and use (or subversion) of tropes such as funerary motifs and the mytho-poetic image of the poet-as-martyr in her elegies to Leonid Gubanov and Joseph Brodsky.

The ultimate goal of this study is not to confine Sedakova to yet another label, but rather to put the constitutive power of genre as an interpretive framework to use. By

examining select poems as elegies, this study lays bare Sedakova's "poetics of meeting." Forging a path across the topography of the elegy, whose landmarks include distinct prosodic and thematic conventions, Sedakova's poetic personae—the wanderer, the stranger, the fellow poet—do not embark upon poetic partings, but poetic *meetings* with the dead, the unknown other, and the divine.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

I have followed the Library of Congress system of transliteration for all citations and inline quotations of Russian text. For Russian proper names in the body of the dissertation, however, I have used their anglicized forms (e.g. “Trediakovsky” instead of “Trediakovskii”; “Olga” instead of “Ol'ga”) for the sake of readability.

INTRODUCTION

Olga Alexandrovna Sedakova (b. 1949), one of the foremost Russian poets of the post-Soviet period, has been called a religious poet, Russia's "first woman philosopher and last humanist," a "bookish poetess," and recently, the new, third face of what can now be called a "triumvirate" of Russian women poets—Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva, and Sedakova.[1] Many of these designations come with unwanted baggage or limitations, however. Though religious themes, Biblical motifs, and prayerful refrains figure prominently in her verse, Sedakova resists the label of "religious poet." Such a term, she says, implies an adherence to canon law or religious doctrine in the composition of one's verse. "[M]ine is certainly not that exemplary art which people have in mind when they call it religious. First and foremost it is the word that is in the right. […] For me poetry is unthinkable without 'openness' of meaning," Sedakova cautions.[2] The label of "woman poet" (or worse, "poetess")[3] also comes with its own set of limitations in that it potentially excludes the poet from the mytho-poetic paradigm of the (typically male) genius inspired by the (female) muse. As feminist critics have observed, the category of poetic "genius" is inherently problematic, "insofar as it derives from a Romantic mythology of the (implicitly) male poet and therefore prevents the inclusion of women in the literary canon."[4] Indeed, the "triumvirate" of honored female poets in which Yury

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[1] Listed correspondingly to the order presented above, such characterizations are either attributed or discussed in: Sedakova, "A Rare Independence," 240-41; Yastremski, "Freedom in 'Post-Everything' Culture: The Religious Philosophy of Olga Sedakova" (Introduction to Sedakova, *Freedom to Believe*), 9; Bondarenko, "Ostrov ozarenii Ol'gi Sedakovoi," 200; Kazarin, "Melodiia iz milosti i sily… O poezii Ol'gi Sedakovoi," 344.

[2] Sedakova, "A Rare Independence," 239-40.

[3] For a discussion of the connotations of "cultural inferiority" which plague the Russian "poetess," see Boym, *Death in Quotations Marks*, 192-5.

[4] Dinega, *A Russian Psyche*, 4. Catriona Kelly discusses this problem in the context of Russian Romanticism in *A History of Russian Women's Writing 1820-1992*, 13.

Kazarin situates Sedakova only reinforces the male dominance of the Russian poetic tradition—a canon, which feminist critics such as Barbara Heldt have described as having only "a few openings, for which no more than two or three women poets need apply."[5] Moreover, while Sedakova is indeed a both a woman and a poet, her poetry can hardly be described as women's poetry, or verse that concerns itself with femininity or the female condition. Rather, as Catriona Kelly observes, instead of rejecting, polemicizing, or seeking to transgress the "feminine" category, Sedakova usually circumvents it. In instances when the poet does broach the issue of femininity, she speaks of it as if from the outside, at a distance:

> Женская доля—это прялка,
> как на старых надгробьях.
>
> A woman's lot is the spindle / as on the gravestones of old.[6]

Moreover, we rarely encounter a distinctly female poetic speaker in Sedakova's verse. Instead, the lyric persona of Sedakova's poetry is often genderless—an ambiguity achieved by the use of the present and future tenses rather than the past tense, which is grammatically gendered.[7] In addition, while many scholars trace the theme of a fragmented or mirrored self and a reversal of the male subject/female object dominance

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[5] Heldt, *Terrible Perfection*, 1.

[6] Quoted and translated by Kelly, 426.

[7] Of the forty-one poems and cycles that comprise the early collection, *The Wild Rose* (*Dikii shipovnik*, 1976-78), for example, there are only four instances of an explicitly female lyric speaker, which is signaled by either a past tense verb or a feminine adjectival form. In two poems—"Strange Journey" ("Strannoe puteshestvie") and "Woman and Mirror" ("Zhenshchina i zerkalo")—the poet employs feminine grammatical forms more than once. In the cycles, "Azarovka," and "Eight Octaves" ("Vosem' vos'mistishii"), however, the gender of the female poetic speaker manifests itself grammatically only fleetingly. In "Eight Octaves," for example, the speaker does not reveal her gender until the final line of last octave, evident in the gender of the short-form adjective, which concludes the cycle: "…in Diocletian's quiet circus / I will not die, but remain alive" ("…v tikhom tsirke Diokletiana / ne umru, no no ostanus' zhiva"). In the 1982 collection, *Stelai and Inscriptions*, the lyric speaker's gender does not manifest itself grammatically at all, while half of the poems that comprise the collection, *Elegies* (*Elegii*, 1987-2004), (i.e. three of the six elegies) contain grammatical signals of a distinctly female poetic speaker.

of the male lyric in Russian women's poetry,[8] Sedakova's lyric persona appears to be not fragmented, but distant or even absent.[9] Her poetry concerns itself less with reversing gender binaries than with dissolving the subject/object binary altogether.

Nonetheless, such labels enjoy an implicit currency in Sedakova scholarship to the extent that they provide the most common frameworks in which Sedakova's verse is studied (religious themes, philosophy, contemporary women's poetry). One label that remains absent in studies of Sedakova, however, is "elegist." This omission is curious given the fundamental position the genre of the elegy occupies in her poetic corpus, which contains a rich diversity of explicit reworkings of distinct elegiac sub-traditions, including, but not limited to, the churchyard elegy (as in "Country Churchyard," and the cycle, *Stelai and Inscriptions*), the meditative elegy (such as "Elegy on a Linden Tree," "Earth," "Beginning"), the autumn elegy ("Elegy of Autumn Water"), and the funeral or "On the Death of" elegy (as in her elegies on Gubanov and Brodsky). In addition to such explicit engagements with the Russian elegy, we also find a predominance of traditionally elegiac themes (departures, death, the afterlife) which imbue non-elegiac

[8] For a discussion of the female lyric persona vis-à-vis the male subject/female object dominance of the male lyric in Russian women's poetry in general and in the poetry of Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva in particular, see Heldt, 104-6; 116-43. The issue of the female lyric persona in Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva's work, respectively, has inspired a rich body of scholarship. In the context of Akhmatova's work, see, for example, Harrington's *The Poetry of Anna Akhmatova: Living in Different Mirrors* and Amert's *In a Shattered Mirror: The Later Poetry of Anna Akhmatova*. In the context of Tsvetaeva's work, see, for example, Gove's "The Feminine Stereotype and Beyond: Role Conflict and Resolution in the Poetics of Marina Tsvetaeva," 231-55; Dinega's *A Russian Psyche: The Poetic Mind of Marina Tsvetaeva*; and Shevelenko's *Literaturnyi put' Tsvetaevoi: ideologiia, poetika, identichnost' avtora v kontekste epokhi*, 63-72. The topic of Russian women poets and their treatment of the female condition in general also boasts a rich body of work, of which a few notable studies include Chester and Forrester's *Engendering Slavic Literatures*, Clyman and Greene's *Women Writers in Russian Literature*, and Kelly's *A History of Russian Women's Writing, 1820-1992*.

[9] There are of course exceptions to this rule of distance or absence, some of which we will encounter along the course of this study. For a study of Sedakova's poetic exploration of the self through mirror imagery as well as its implications regarding the poet's own anxieties over her poetic status, see Sandler, "Scared into Selfhood," 473-90.

poems, such as her "Legends" which treat the death of Alexis the Roman Saint ("Legenda sed'maia") or the funeral of a nun ("Legenda deviataia").

It is significant that, when asked by Valentina Polukhina, "In which of your poems do you see yourself as reaching the heights of your powers, as a poet and as a Christian?" Sedakova ultimately settles on two elegies: "That is difficult," Sedakova says. "Perhaps there is not a whole poem—but there are outbursts […]. In *Tristan* [*and Isolde*], 'Starye pesni' (*Old Songs*), in 'Kitaiskoe puteshestvie' (*A Chinese Journey*). […] Perhaps if you had a to take a whole poem, the second in 'Babochka ili dve ikh' ["A Butterfly, or Two of Them"] or 'Elegiia smokovnitsy' ["Elegy for a Fig Tree"]."[10] Thus, elegies not only make up a large portion of her work, but constitute instances at which the poet considers herself to be at the height of her powers.

Given the preponderance of the genre in Sedakova's oeuvre, it is not surprising that a 2003 English language collection of her poetry is entitled *Poems and Elegies*. However, Sedakova's elegiac work has received little scholarly attention in terms of its generic engagement. Indeed, the genre's titular presence in the aforementioned collection goes without mention in Emily Grosholz's foreword or Slava Yastremski's introduction to the book. Such oversight characterizes much of the scholarship written on Sedakova over the past several decades, which has both rigorously and admirably endeavored to tease out Sedakova's treatment of such themes as death or parting in studies which center upon Sedakova's religiosity or erudition (manifest in the multi-layered, allusive texture of her poems). Yet, the *generic structure* into which these specific themes are woven escapes acknowledgement and has yet to be sufficiently examined.

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[10] Sedakova, "Conform not to this Age," 75.

Two notable exceptions to this oversight are Evgeniia Kniazeva's 2002 article, "The Genre of the Elegy in the Poetry of O. Sedakova" ("Zhanr elegii v poezii O. Sedakovoi"), and Alexandra Smith's "Russian Women Poets on the Death of the Poet, the Modernist Canon and the Postmodern Condition" (2012).[11] Though Kniazeva does not examine specific varieties or conventions of the Russian elegy in Sedakova's work (aside from the general components of reflective meditation or lament), she delineates the pivotal role genre plays in Sedakova's work and makes important preliminary strokes in what has thus far been an incomplete a picture of Sedakova's elegiac poetics. Smith, on the other hand, focuses on Sedakova's (as well as Znamenskaya's and Shvarts's) negotiation of the long shadows cast by Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva. Though she does not seek to outline Sedakova's elegiac poetics *per se*, Smith nonetheless implicitly demonstrates the central role the elegy plays in Sedakova's negotiation of her forebears as well as the definition of her own poetic persona.

To be sure, the importance of generic form in Sedakova's poetic corpus has not gone ignored. Andrew Wachtel's 1996 essay, "The Youngest Archaists: Kutik, Sedakova, Kibirov, Parshchikov," examines Sedakova's renewal of the eighteenth-century ode, while Stephanie Sandler's 2017 essay, "Constrained Freedom: On Dreams and Rhythms in the Poetry of Olga Sedakova" ("Stesnennaia svoboda: O snakh i ritmakh v poezii Ol'gi Sedakovoi"), examines Sedakova's engagement of the genres of the fairytale ("skazka") and the legend ("legenda").[12] Sandler in particular provides an insightful discussion of the paradoxically liberating power of the limitations and conventions of generic

[11] Kniazeva, 228-34; Smith, "Russian Women Poets on the Death of the Poet, the Modernist Canon, and the Postmodern Condition," 300-19.
[12] See Wachtel, "The Youngest Archaists: Kutik, Sedakova, Kibirov, Parshchikov," 270-86; Sendler (Sandler), "Stesnennaia svoboda: O snakh i ritmakh v poezii Ol'gi Sedakovoi," 19-48.

frameworks in Sedakova's verse: like rhythm, which can free the listener from the semantic dimensions of language and grant him or her a momentary sense of freedom of thought, generic conventions—which give rise to a poem's course of action, personae, or rhythm—paradoxically expand the poet's "freedom of imagination" ("svoboda voobrazheniia") by providing a firmer basis upon which the poet may enter a poetic or dreamlike state.[13]

The aforementioned essays are the only works to my knowledge that explicitly address what has thus far been an under-examined dimension of Sedakova's poetic corpus—the very structures of its component parts. To be sure, Sedakova's verse certainly offers a diverse array of entry points for scholarly inquiry, which easily overshadows the question of generic positioning. Such wide-ranging points of entry have prompted an equally wide range of responses and interpretations. Sedakova's signature use of enigmatic imagery in a deceptively simple syntax has been dismissed as an incomprehensible "affected tongue-tiedness" ("pritvornoe kosnoiazychie")[14] and praised as a poetic phenomenon amounting to "a historical shift" ("istoricheskii sdvig").[15] The poet's treatment of Biblical themes, her negotiation of her own lyric persona, the philosophical dimensions of her verse, and her deep love of the world literary tradition have already inspired a rich body of scholarship on her work during her lifetime in many languages.[16]

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[13] Sendler, "Stesnennaia svoboda," 32-33. In drawing this comparison between the paradoxical implications of rhythmic and generic constraints Sandler draws upon discussions of rhythm in Aviram's *Telling Rhythm* (232-34; 21) and Culler's *Theory of the Lyric* (140).
[14] Slavianskii, 378. See also Bondarenko, "Ostrov ozarenii," 193-207; Slavetskii, 233-37.
[15] Shevchenko, 110.
[16] Insightful discussions of Sedakova's religiosity and her use of Biblical themes include Paloff, "The God Function...," 713-36; Khotimsky, "Singing David, Dancing David…," 737-52; Couvée, 81-100; Von Zitzewitz, 183-98; and Kan, 145-81. On the subject of poetic depictions of the self in Sedakova's verse, see Sandler, "Thinking Self in the Poetry of Ol'ga Sedakova," 302-25. On the philosophical dimensions of

This dissertation seeks to begin to fill an important gap in the existing scholarship by examining Sedakova's elegies with specific regard to the Russian elegiac tradition. I say "begin," because I believe the subject of the elegy in Sedakova's work is a rich one that spans well beyond this present study's narrow confines. Though Sedakova's elegiac verse certainly subverts traditional conventions of elegiac mourning (and may therefore be interpreted as a "rejection of the elegy"),[17] I argue that the elegy in fact constitutes the most dynamic generic territory in which the poet negotiates the boundaries of lyric subjectivity (i.e., the limitations of a singular or gendered lyric "I"), grapples with anxieties of her own poetic standing, and delineates her poetic identity.

By examining the specific ways in which Sedakova employs, rejects, or inverts elegiac conventions, this study lays bare the primacy of the elegy in Sedakova's verse. Due to the genre's wide-ranging breadth, however, I set my purview on two strains (or subgenres) of the Russian elegy which lay at the heart of the Russian poetic tradition: the churchyard elegy, which "crystallized" the theme of the poet's untimely death in Russian literature,[18] and elegies on the death of poet, which built upon this theme to form one of the most culturally potent elegiac modes in Russian poetry.[19] Chapter One considers the history of the Russian churchyard elegy and Sedakova's engagement with its paradigms of elegiac mourning (both self-referential and transitive) and consolation, while Chapters Two and Three consider Sedakova's engagement with the "Death of the Poet" tradition through intertextual dialogue and use (or subversion) of traditional tropes, such as

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Sedakova's poetry, see Medvedeva, "Poeticheskaia metafizika…" (Diss.), and Shtal', 252-92. On Sedakova's use of subtexts, see Pakhareva, *Opyt Akmeizma*, 163-96; Smith, "Russian Women Poets on the Death of the Poet…," 300-19; and Aizenshtein, 205-242. For a thorough account of Sedakova's poetics in general, see Medvedeva's monograph, *Tainye stikhi*.

[17] Sandler, "Thinking Self," 310.

[18] Toporov, "'Sel'skoe kladbishche' Zhukovskogo: K istokam russkoi poezii," 248.

[19] On the interconnectedness between poems of on the death of the poet and the Russian myth of a national poet see Sandler, *Commemorating Pushkin*, 26.

funerary motifs and the mytho-poetic image of the poet-as-martyr. The ultimate aim of this study is not to confine Sedakova to yet another label ("elegist"), but rather to put the constitutive power of genre as an interpretive tool to use. By examining select poems as elegies *per se*, this study seeks to lay bare overlooked aspects of Sedakova's poetics and better see these particular poems "in all [their] previously inexplicable and 'literary' fullness."[20]

SEDAKOVA AND THE ELEGY

When Olga Sedakova's examination committee asked her the standard question about the relevance of her doctoral dissertation, she answered that, in the present circumstances, its relevance goes without saying.[21] The year was 1983, and her dissertation examined the funerary rituals of pre-Christian eastern and southern Slavs. Leonid Brezhnev had died the previous November, prompting a televised state funeral and public demonstrations of mourning, which, as Sedakova recalls in her commentary to "Elegy That Becomes a Requiem" ("Elegiia perekhodiashchaia v rekviem," c. 1984), ushered in an "epoch of state funerals." This epoch lasted until 1985: Brezhnev's "half-dead" replacement, Andropov, died two years later only to be replaced by the "decrepit" Chernenko who died the following year. The Russian population tuned in for one "magnificent ritual" after the next, and as Sedakova notes, the events carried a whiff of the pagan funerary rites she had studied, despite the state's official "scientific atheism." "One does not need to fully imagine traditional paganism in order to see something pagan

[20] Rosmarin, *The Power of Genre*, 25.
[21] Yastremski, "Freedom in 'Post-Everything Culture,'" 9 n. 2 Sedakova defended her doctoral thesis, *Poetika obriada. Pogrebal'naia obriadnost' vostochnykh i iuzhnykh slavian* at the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. It was later published as a book by Indrik Press in 2004.

in Soviet rituals (and totalitarian rituals generally). It is a different faith, a different ritual," Sedakova recalls.[22]

In a commentary to the poem, Sedakova recalls that the funeral ceremonies took on particular gravity in light of the personality cult Soviet leaders enjoyed and the ambiguity of the laws surrounding the transfer of power when they died. The death of a Soviet leader often signaled the end of an era—a veritable cosmic collapse—which only portended a new regime more severe that the previous one.[23] Thus, when Sedakova writes "Elegy that Becomes a Requiem," she takes her cue not from the Catholic hymn on the crucifixion, "Stabat Mater Dolorosa" ("the sorrowful mother was standing"), as Akhmatova does in *Requiem*, but rather the hymn "Dies Irae" ("Day of Wrath"), in which the last trumpet summons the souls before the throne on Judgment Day. The elegy to Brezhnev soon transforms into a "requiem" for the unmourned "other sacrifices"—not the so-called enemies of the state who were executed or imprisoned (as those mourned in Akhmatova's *Requiem*), but rather those who receded into obscurity or alcoholism in order to survive, those who did not live to the current day, and "most of all—those who lived too long."[24] The requiem concludes with an apocalyptic scene in which the poet wishes that she could dip a pine tree into Mount Vesuvius in order to write a single word across the firmament, sobbing, for all the martyrs, now stars in the sky, to see: "Help!"

During these late years of the stagnation—the "epoch of state funerals"—Sedakova endured the losses of a number of personal friends, loved ones, and mentors, including her spiritual mentor and beloved grandmother, Daria Semenovna Sedakova, her

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[22] Sedakova, "Prilozhenie. Elegiia perekhodiashchaia v rekviem. Tekst i kommentarii k tekstu," 133. This commentary, published in the collection *Tri puteshestviia*, is also available online: http://www.pravmir.ru/rekviem-brezhnevu-rekviem-epoxe/.
[23] Sedakova, "Prilozhenie," 133.
[24] Sedakova writes of these "other victims" in her essay, "Drugie zhertvy," 13-17.

music teacher and dear friend Vladimir Khvostin, and fellow poets Leonid Gubanov and Sergei Morozov. The poet mourns these losses in elegies for Khvostin (1982) and Gubanov (1983),[25] as well as a long free-verse cycle, *Old Songs* (*Starye pesni*, 1980-81), which she dedicates to her grandmother's memory and describes as a "portrait of my grandmother in words."[26]

Given both the historical and personal events of Sedakova's life during this formative period, it is no surprise that the themes of death, mourning, passage to the afterlife, and remembrance come to occupy a central place in Sedakova's verse. Nonetheless, scholars have resisted examining these themes within the framework of the elegy, likely due to the poet's own resistance to lament or "sad contents"—the primary criteria by which the elegy is customarily defined.[27] Stephanie Sandler has argued that, though Sedakova's poems may "contain" eruptions of the elegy, Sedakova's work "exists in a tense relationship to the elegy"[28] and even poses a "rejection of the elegy."[29] Where elegy "defines the present in terms of the past," observes Sandler, "[Sedakova's] poems nearly always envision the present and imagine a future. Where elegy mourns what is lost, Sedakova celebrates what is, even in the face of loss. Where elegy often equates thinking with having memories, these poems reveal an interplay between fresh stimulus and reverberating associations."[30] The point is well taken, but in light of the fact that Sedakova designates many of her poems as elegies (including her cycle, *Elegies* [*Elegii*,

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[25] In addition to "On the Death of Leonid Gubanov," see "On the Death of Vladimir Ivanovich Khvostin" ("Na smert' Vladimira Ivanovicha Khvostina," c. 1979-83), and "Elegy of Autumn Water" ("Elegiia osennei vody," c. 1985), which is dedicated to Gubanov and Morozov.
[26] Sedakova, *The Wild Rose*, 228.
[27] Belinskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (hereafter *PSS*), 5: 50.
[28] Sandler, "Thinking Self in the Poetry of Ol'ga Sedakova," 303.
[29] Ibid., 310.
[30] Ibid., 303.

c. 1987-2004]) and employs specific elegiac tropes (such as funerary motifs and choral refrains), the issue remains far from settled.

To be sure, Sedakova's seemingly paradoxical interpretation of the elegy—celebrating what *is*—becomes particularly pronounced in her poetic treatments of death, which bear sharp contrasts to those of her contemporaries. While Joseph Brodsky depicts death as the creator of time ("vremia sozdano smert'iu"),[31] imbuing human life with unbearable levity on the one hand and redeeming freedom on the other, Elena Shvarts depicts death as a malefic force which will "eat your shape" ("smert' tvoi kontur ob'est").[32] Death both entraps (as in *Elegies on the Corners of the World*, wherein life's endless circle of renewal and traumatic death imprisons the heroine) and is, paradoxically, the poet's only way out.[33] For Sedakova, on the other hand, death resembles the element of water: it flows, purifies, washes away, and gives life. Death is an "overflow of wonder" ("perepolnen'e chuda") and a "stirring force" ("volnuiushchaia sila").[34] Time does not carry everything away ("unosit vse dela") or "drown in the abyss of oblivion" ("topit v propasti zavben'ia"), as Derzhavin's "river of times." Rather, as Evgeniia Kniazeva notes, the "river of time" in Sedakova's verse sooner *bears* gifts than carries them away. The speaker of "Candlemas" ("Sretenie," c. 1976-78), for example, revels in the movement of time:

> Да, время движется, как реки Вавилона,
> но есть в безумии его
> лицо, полюбленное легионом

[31] Brodskii, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* (hereafter *SiP*), 1:289.
[32] Shvarts, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* (hereafter *SiP*), 96.
[33] Shvarts's cycle, *Elegies on the Corners of the World* (*Elegii na storony sveta*), depicts the poet's endeavor to break out of life's circle of death. See Shvarts, *SiP,* 92-8. Two decades later Shvarts composes a fifth installment, "Big Elegy to the Fifth Corner of the World" ("Bol'shaia elegiia na piatuiu storonu sveta") wherein the poet succeeds in breaking out the circular motion and enters its center, which extends upward, like a cross. Shvarts, *SiP*, 205-7. See Fridli, "'Elegii na storony sveta' Eleny Shvarts," 305-13.
[34] Sedakova, *Chetyre toma* (hereafter *ChT*), 1: 79; 85.

чудес, хранящих вещество...[35]

Yes, time moves like the rivers of Babylon, / but there is a face in its madness, / beloved by a legion / of miracles preserving matter…

If for Shvarts earthly existence represents an inescapable cycle of death and rebirth which the poet seeks to transgress, for Sedakova life is but a tiny point, like a "glass gift fallen from your hands" ("stekliannyi podarok, upavshii iz ruk") while death is "long, like everything around" ("A smert' dlinna, kak vse vokrug, / a smert' dlinna, dlinna").[36] Death surrounds the island of human existence like an ocean:

Жизнь ведь – небольшая вещица:
вся, бывает, соберется
на мизинце, на конце ресницы.
А смерть кругом нее, как море.[37]

Life after all is a small thing: / the whole of it, it happens, will meet / on your little finger, on the end of your eyelash. And death surrounds it, like the sea.

Death is similarly all-encompassing in "Country Churchyard" ("Sel'skoe kladbishche," c. 1979-83), wherein death appears as the "connector of times" ("sviaz' vremen") who "slowly flows and for a long time sees children before the graves of children" ("medlenno teche[t] i dolgo vidi[t] detei pered mogilami detei)."[38] In an early poem, "Death often appears to me in a dream and offers…" ("Mne chasto snitsia smert' i predlagaet…," c. 1976-78), the speaker imagines death is surrounded not by a cursed place where the child, crone, and widower are brought, but memory. Memory is like air, while death is like water:

Мне часто снится смерть и предлагает
какую-то услугу. И когда,
не разобравшись, говорю я: нет! –

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[35] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 82.
[36] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 148.
[37] Sedakova, *ChT,* 1: 197.
[38] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 251.

она кивает.
Лестница двойная
ведет ее туда, откуда свет. –
И странно мне и пусто...
Я думаю, что около нее
не прóклятое место, где заводит
ребенка, и старуху, и вдовца,
а память, память.
Воздух из путей кратчайших,
падающих, как вода, –
но вверх.
И вот, не обращаясь к ней,
я улыбаюсь,
и рука уходит
в простую воду легкого лица.[39]

Death often appears to me in a dream and offers / some kind of service. And when, / not understanding, I say, "no!" – / she nods. / A double stairway / leads her to where the light is from. – / I feel both strange and empty… / I think that near her / is not a cursed place, where / a child, an old woman, and a widower are brought / but memory, memory. / Air from the shortest paths / falling like water / but upwards. / And now, without appeal to her, / I smile, / and my hand extends / into the simple water of her light face.

If in Sedakova's poetry "the motif of the path, of knowledge, of the return to one's paternal home, and to childhood symbolize the attainment of poetic language," as Maria Khotimsky observes,[40] the primary means one has of this attainment is memory. As the incantation above illustrates ("but memory, memory…"), the cyclic motion of remembering facilitates the poet's entry into poetic language, which, like death, signifies a loss of the self's boundaries ("and my hand extends into the simple water of her light face"). "Candlemas" ("Sretenie")[41] depicts a similar extension:

И время движется, как реки Вавилона.
Неразделенную длину,
огромные года, их сон уединенный –
я всё, как руку, протяну.

Я руку протяну, чтобы меня не стало.

[39] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 99.
[40] Khotimskaia, "*Semanticheskaia vertikal':* Tserkovnoslavianskoe slovo i poetika perevoda v tvorchestve Ol'gi Sedakovoi" 389.
[41] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 81-3.

> And time moves, like the rivers of Babylon. / The undivided length, / the large years, their secluded sleep— / I extend everything like my hand. // I will stretch out my hand in order to cease to be.

Rather than an immediacy or frankness of feeling, for Sedakova it is this poetic extension into nonbeing—the transgression of the boundaries of the self—which constitutes the poet's primary endeavor. The "sincerity of the lyric poet lies in his most sincere wish to cease being himself," Sedakova states.[42] In order to transgress the boundaries of the self, the poet embarks upon a path that is neither linear nor outward, but a "double stairway"—the path leads upward, yet also back, whence one begins.[43] This idea reverberates throughout Sedakova's Dante-inspired triptych *Selva selvaggia* (c. 1976-78), written in memory of Mikhail Khinskii:

> Мне часто снится этот шаг и путь,
> как вещь, какую в детстве кто-нибудь
> нам показал и вышел.[44]

> I often dream of this step and this path, / like a thing that someone in childhood / showed to us and then left.

As the prodigal son finds his way to God and returns to his father's home after squandering his inheritance and facing the prospect of a lonely death, so, too, the deceased "returns" to the afterlife. The triptych consists of a funerary scene, entitled "Parting" ("Provody"), the deceased man's path or "return" into the afterlife, which is entitled "The Return of the Prodigal Son" ("Vozvroashchenie bludnogo syna"), and, finally, the deceased's postmortem cycle of eternal disappearance in the "Ballad of

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[42] Sedakova, *In Praise of Poetry*, 181.
[43] The image of the double stairway recalls the ladder to heaven, which appears to Jacob in a dream (Genesis 28: 10-19).
[44] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 66.

Continuing" ("Ballada prodolzheniia").[45] Employing the canzona, which Dante uses in *La Vita Nuova*, Sedakova reworks the parable of The Prodigal Son to depict the deceased man's journey as a "circular movement of escape-wandering-return," which, as Josephine von Zitzewitz observes, is expressed through the "mantra-like repetition" of the words "Walk!" and "he walks."[46]

The image of the road or path as a symbol of life's progression (which inevitably leads to death) is an enduring poetic metaphor that is hardly unique.[47] Yet, as von Zitzewitz observes, many of Sedakova's poems do not merely depict journeys but constitute journeys in themselves.[48] This journey, von Zitzewitz suggests, is a movement "from the sensory experience of image and sound towards meaning and understanding" that is by definition spiritual.[49] Deceptive in its simplicity, such a journey resembles Heidegger's interpretation of language (the "house of being"), wherein an interrogation of meaning requires a return along the etymological path to the originating forms which gave rise to the words in the first place.[50] It also, more fundamentally of course, enacts

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[45] Von Zitzewitz compares the journey of *Selva Selvaggia* to the circular journey of Dante's *Inferno*, in which the poet descends into the rings of Hell, travels through Purgatory, and is finally led to Paradise, "where he is rewarded with a fleeting vision of the Trinity." Von Zitzewitz 189. On the Dantean subtext of the triptych see also Aizenshtein, "'Vdol' ostrovov vysokikh i veselyikh'. O poezii Ol'gi Sedakovoi," 207-13.

[46] Von Zitzewitz 190.

[47] A few well-known examples include Pushkin's "Wanderer" ("Strannik"), Lermontov's "Alone I set off onto the road…" ("Vykhozhu odin ia na dorogu…"). Poems by Sedakova which feature paths, roads, or journeys include "Strange Journey" ("Strannoe puteshestvie"), "The Flight of the Prodigal Son" ("Pobeg bludnogo syna"), "Candlemas" ("Sretenie"), and "Journey of the Magi" ("Puteshestvie volkhvov"), and the collection *Chinese Journey* (*Kitaiskoe puteshestvie*).

[48] Von Zitzewitz, 184. On the significance of the theme of the path in Sedakova's work, see also Aizenshtein, "'Vdol' ostrovov vysokikh i veselyikh,'" 207-13.

[49] Von Zitzewitz 184.

[50] See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 55-8, 193-5; "Letter on Humanism," 190-242. The influence of Heidegger's thought on Sedakova's conceptions of poetic language certainly represents an area worthy of deeper inquiry. Though Sedakova notes that she does not particularly value Heidegger as a poet—her translations of his verse were published in 1993 (Sedakova, "Martin Khaidegger: Gadachtes," 109-12), though she does not consider them to be of any literary merit—she notes, "Heidegger's thought was a big revelation to me, especially in my youth." Personal conversation, 5 March 2014.

the "poetry of meeting" epitomized by Dante, who writes in the *Convivio* that "the greatest desire of each thing—and the first given it by nature—is to return to its origin."[51]

> В каждом слове есть дорога,
> путь унылый и страстный.[52]
>
> In every word is a road, / a path mournful and passionate.

As the prodigal son returns to his father's home, so the poet returns to the silent center of the poetic word.

Memory, in Sedakova's view, not only serves as the poet's primary means by which she moves along this path into poetic language, but also represents the creative ability which distinguishes a poet from other artists. Memory allows the poet "not to miss the array of likenesses, repetitions, and contrasts that enter his own experience; […] not to see things bare, unclad in their centuries' old interpretations," and "not to hear words stripped of their roots and notional, aural, and stylistic contexts," Sedakova notes.[53] Like the backward gaze of remembrance, the path of the poetic word always leads back to its original silent center, its roots, its paternal home.

Significantly, when asked what, in her view, constitutes the thematic basis of the elegy, Sedakova answers that it is most certainly "memory" or a "meeting" rather than an "art of parting" (in Mandelstam's words) or a meditation upon absence.[54] Confessing that she fell in love with the genre from an early age ("Why did I like it? …It seemed somehow especially poetic…" she notes), Sedakova points to Pushkin's elegies, which bore particular influence on her in her early years. While dealing with something that is

[51] Quoted and translated by Susan Stewart in *The Poet's Freedom*, 162. On Dante and the poetry of meeting, see Stewart's chapter entitled "Meeting," 161-85.
[52] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 201.
[53] Sedakova, *In Praise of Poetry*, 134.
[54] Personal conversation with the poet, 5 March 2014.

past or absent, Sedakova asserts, they also resurrect ("voskreshaiut") that which has passed: that which is absent "again comes to life and is full of some kind of new, different meaning."[55] However, she notes, the Pushkinian elegy is quite different from the modern elegy. As Sedakova suggests elsewhere, the conventional modern elegist mourns a self which no longer exists:

> I do not think of the element of time as an exclusively regrettable thing, a succession of momentary deaths, as the stoics did. Time is, equally, a constant rebirth. Yesterday's me no longer exists, so many mournful elegies have been written on that theme. But today's me did not exist yesterday, and, apparently, none of the poets managed to find that something to celebrate.[56]

By rejecting lament in favor of celebration, Sedakova ostensibly circumvents the traditional territory of the elegy—a "song of sad contents," as Belinsky once described the genre[57]—and indeed enters into some other kind of generic territory, which perhaps stands in a neighborly "tension" with the elegy.

However, as the close readings presented here demonstrate, although Sedakova's elegies may subvert traditional modes of elegiac mourning, which progress from lament to consolation,[58] as well as modern, "anti-elegiac" modes of mourning, which resist consolation,[59] they nonetheless enter into the "particular *constellations* of thematic, rhetorical, and formal features" which make up specific subgenres of the Russian elegy.[60] Forging a path across the topography of the elegy, whose landmarks include distinct prosodic and thematic conventions, Sedakova's poetic personae—the wanderer, the

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[55] Personal conversation, 5 March 2014.
[56] Sedakova, "Conform not to this Age," 39-40.
[57] Belinksii, *PSS*, 5: 50.
[58] In his study on the English elegy, Peter Sacks delineates the specific ways in which compensatory mourning forms the psychological basis for the elegy, wherein the poet overcomes grief by establishing a substitute for the lost person or object, thus recapitulating the oedipal resolution in order to achieve consolation. See Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies on the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*.
[59] On the modern tendency to resist consolation see Ramazani and Spargo.
[60] Frow, 71.

stranger, the fellow poet—do not embark upon poetic partings, but poetic *meetings*—with the dead, the unknown other, and the divine. The poet embarks upon these meetings by extending her hand ("ia ruku protianu…"), looking ahead rather than back, and forging onward. Tellingly, an unknown voice in the final line of *Stelai and Inscriptions* cautions the poet-pilgrim: "So go faster, or I will overtake you" ("Tak skoree idi: ia obgoniaiu tebia"). Rather than look back to the past, the elegies of Sedakova pursue the open-endedness of possibility, follow paths of transformation via memory, allusion, and poetic language, and look forward in order to meet the past in the future.

Before we proceed any further in our task of uncovering Sedakova's elegiac poetics of meeting, however, it is first worth addressing the question of how we can indeed situate Sedakova's so-called elegies within the Russian elegiac tradition. How can poems of loss which spring forth from meditations on presence and future be inscribed into a poetic tradition that we typically associate with absence and mourning? In order to satisfactorily address this question, we shall first consider the Russian elegy's history and the ways in which scholars have approached it.

IN CONTEXT: THE RUSSIAN ELEGY

Dating back to the seventh century BC, the elegy is one of the oldest poetic genres in the world.[61] Though the word "elegy" (*elegeia* in Greek) derives from the Greek word *elegos*, which signified a "mournful song," the earliest extant elegies are not funereal in nature.[62] Rather, *elegeia* simply designated a poem composed in elegiac distich (a couplet consisting of line in hexameter followed by a line in pentameter), which addressed a

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[61] Callinus, who lived in the first half of the seventh century BC, is generally considered to be the originator of the elegy.
[62] Kennedy, *Elegy*, 11.

diverse range of themes, including politics, military campaigns, and love.[63] Though Latin elegists of classical antiquity such as Tibullus and Ovid increasingly focused on amatory complaint, the genre permitted a variety of themes up to the Renaissance and lacked a formal definition.[64]

The elegy first entered the Russian poetic tradition in the Petrine era by the hands of German "elegiac poet-dilettantes" (i.e. Germans writing in Russian) who were writing elegiac verses based on Western epistolary love poems and romances.[65] It was not until 1735 that the first formal definition of the elegy appeared in Vasily Trediakovsky's *New and Brief Method for the Composing of Russian Verse*. Deriving his definition of the genre from its "most glorious authors," such as Pindar, Anakreon, Ovid, Horace, Tibullus, and Propertius, Trediakovsky describes the elegy as a "plaintive and sorrowful verse" ("stikh plachevnyi i pechal'nyi"), which is written "truthfully" ("podlinno").[66] However, as David Houston rightly observes, in order to support such a narrow definition of the elegy, Trediakovsky must single out certain passages (such as a mournful passage from Ovid's *Amores*, which touches upon the sudden death of Ovid's friend and fellow poet Tibullus) while passing over others. Trediakovsky, Houston remarks, "might also have drawn attention to another characterization of Elegy and the *Amores* as a whole. Any reader who remembers that in *Amores* 3.1.7-10 Elegy is said to have feet of unequal length will likely recall why this might be relevant to one's thinking on the entire

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[63] Kennedy, 3.
[64] In the English tradition, for example, it was only during the sixteenth century, in the works of Spenser, Sidney, and Donne that the elegy's definition as "a poem of mortal loss and consolation" gained currency. Sacks, 3.
[65] These figures included Willem Mons, a chamberlain at Peter's court, Johann Ernst Glück, a pastor and headmaster, and Johann Werner Paus (a teacher who later took Glück's place as headmaster when Glück passed away). See Grigor'ian, 8-9.
[66] Trediakovskii, *Novyi i kratkii sposob k slozheniiu rossiiskikh stikhov s opredeleniiami do sego nadlezhashchikh zvanii*, 395.

collection."[67] In other words, Trediakovsky suppresses one aspect of the elegy (i.e. its original criterion of elegiac distich) while privileging another aspect in order to corroborate his conception of the elegy as a truthful, plaintive, and sorrowful verse. That Trediakovsky's definition gained canonical status only highlights the discrepancies that can and often do exist between theory and practice when it comes to genre, and the elegy in particular.[68]

Against this backdrop, the first flowering of the Russian elegy occurred several decades later in the 1760s in large part thanks to Alexander Sumarokov, who is credited with fully domesticating the elegy, ode, and a range of imported forms. This short-lived initial flowering was later followed by what some perceive as a period of disuse or "crisis" in the elegy, which did not abate until the early nineteenth century when the second and most influential flowering of the Russian elegy occurred.[69] As L. Frizman notes, the elegy proved to be an especially suitable means for expressing the Romantic dissatisfaction with life and consequently became the most widespread and significant genre of intimate lyric poetry in Russia at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[70] From 1800–1820, poets of the "elegiac school"—namely, Zhukovsky, Muravyov, and Batiushkov, with the later addition of the younger Baratynsky and Pushkin—cultivated the hallmarks of the Russian interpretation of the elegy.[71] As opposed to a funerary poem

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[67] Houston, "Remembrance of Former Things: Three Figures of Russian Elegiac Literature," 7.

[68] On the pitfalls of genre theory with regard to the elegy and its two prevailing approaches (descriptive or historical and interpretive), see Houston, 1-37. For a concise historical overview of the many definitions, interpretations, and manipulations of the elegy, see Karen Weisman's Introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, 3-10.

[69] While Gukovskii discerns a sudden drop or "crisis" in the elegy (101), Grigor'ian (24-25) and Vatsuro (8-9) trace a persistence of the elegy, despite a drop in poems carrying the title of "elegy."

[70] Frizman, *Kratkaia literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, 866.

[71] On the formation of the "elegiac school" see Mitin, *Formirovanie elegicheskoi shkoly v russkoi poezii kontsa XVIII-nachala XIX v. M. N. Murav'ev, V. A. Zhukovskii, i K. N. Batiushkov* (Diss), in addition to Grigor'ian and Vatsuro.

of mourning (as in the English elegies of Coleridge or Wordsworth), or a "light" poem on lost love (as in the French elegies of Parny or Lamartine), the Russian elegy emerged as a "song of sorrowful contents" ("pesnia grustnogo soderzhaniia").[72] As Lidiya Ginzburg observes, rather than specific themes (such as death or a lover's departure), the genre's primary identifying markers in the early nineteenth century consisted of common "word signals" associated with personal feeling (such as "tears," "dreams," "youth," and "joy").[73] When such sentimental lexical "signals" associated with the elegy soon grew restrictive and fell out of use in subsequent decades—indeed many poets later parodied such lexicon and stylized posturing (as Pushkin in his portrayal of Lensky in *Eugene Onegin*)[74]—the elegy's thematic fluidity only increased. As Ginzburg observes, Pushkin's later verse reflects this trend of variation and fragmentation. His 1826 "Under the blue sky of her native land…" ("Pod nebom golubym strany svoei rodnoi…,"), for example, speaks not of love, but an absence of love and laments not death, but rather the poet's indifference to death; his 1830 "Autumn" ("Osen'") employs a concreteness of imagery and vernacularism that is inconsonant with the delicate language of the elegy of the prior two decades.[75]

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[72] Belinskii, *PSS*, 5: 50.
[73] Ginzburg, 27. In identifying these lexical signals Lidiia Ginzburg draws upon V. A. Gofman's method of categorizing modes of poetry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Gizburg notes that, though the elegiac style of the 1810-20s, of course, was not the classicism of the seventeenth or even the eighteenth centuries—it was much more complex, emotional, and associative—it nonetheless followed the same lexical principle. Though these "signals" ranged widely from the departure of a lover (as in Baratysnky's "Parting," 1818-19) to self-reflective meditations inspired by nature (as in Zhukovsky's "Sea," 1822), from the death of a comrade (as in Batiushkov's "Shadow of a Friend," 1814) to the paradox of intimacy achieved in solitary dreaming (as in Pushkin's "Awakening," 1822).
[74] See Hoisington, 266-278. The fall in popularity of such lexicon is often attributed to Kiukhel'beker and his polemical 1824 essay, "O napravlenii nashei poezii, osobenno liricheskoi, v poslednee desiatiletie" (453-58), which criticized the pervasiveness of the elegy and the hackneyed quality of contemporary verse as a result.
[75] Ginzburg, 202.

Though varied when taken as a whole, these elegiac stances of the early nineteenth century—from the sentimental lyric hero who mourns a lover's departure to the meditative poet who laments his own indifference—to a large degree still serve as the markers by which the elegy is measured in Russian literary studies today. This is not to say that the elegy did not continue to evolve beyond this period, nor is it to say that Zhukovsky, Batiushkov, Baratynsky, and Pushkin were the only writers of elegies in the nineteenth century.[76] However, it is specifically the elegists of the early nineteenth century who have endured as the standard-bearers of the genre.[77] M. L. Gasparov's 2001 definition of the elegy as a "a lyrical genre, a poem of medium length, with a meditative or emotional content (usually sorrowful), most often written in the first person, without a distinct composition" reflects this orientation.[78] Igor Shaitanov similarly describes the elegy: "The genre, as it has existed for the past three hundred years […] always [treats] an emotional state—with a tear, with a complaint. That is, it is an emotional evaluation."[79] The key element of such an evaluation, continues Shaitanov, is not the subject matter itself, but the elegist's *perception* of the subject matter—an orientation that lexically manifests itself in the use of adjectives rather than nouns—a statement which recalls the "word signals" by which Ginzburg traces poems of the earlier "elegiac school."

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[76] Lermontov, Fet, Nekrasov, and Tiutchev, for example, are among the many other poets one could discuss as developers of the Russian elegy. Compare, for example, Fet's "Strange Feeling" ("Strannoe chuvstvo," 1847), which is composed in elegiac distich, or his meditative "In the midnight silence of my insomnia…" ("V polunochnoi tishi bessonitsy moei…," 1888), which presents an intimate expression of feeling. For a comprehensive summary of the Russian elegy which covers the mid-late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, see Frizman, "Dva veka russkoi elegii," 5-48.

[77] Indeed, in a reading of Nekrasov's "Elegies (to A. N. Erakov)" written in "the unelegiac epoch," Frizman observes that Nekrasov employs the language of Zhukovsky and Baratynsky as well as the same lexicon and turns of speech as the elegies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. See Frizman, "Dva veka russkoi elegii," 40.

[78] Gasparov, "Elegiia," 1228.

[79] Shaitanov, *Delo vkusa*, 492.

This tendency of scholars to define the elegy according to early nineteenth-century criteria almost gives the impression that the genre has remained static in subsequent periods. Indeed, with regard to the latter half of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century, Gasparov states that "the word 'elegy' is used solely as a title of cycles (like in Fet) and individual poems of a few poets (Akhmatova, Samoilov)" and that it "gradually loses its generic distinctiveness, and the term falls out of use, remaining merely a sign of tradition (such as in Rilke's *Duino Elegies* of 1923 or Brecht's *Buckow Elegies* of 1949)."[80] Zubkov goes so far as to assert "the elegy currently does not exist as a literary fact."[81]

Though the elegy has certainly not fallen out of use (Akhmatova, Tvardovsky, and Brodsky are but a few examples of modern poets commonly perceived as elegists), the strong influence of the early nineteenth-century Russian elegy on the modern Russian elegiac tradition further obscures the matter. As the rhythmic structures of Pushkin and Baratynsky imbue the elegiac verses of Akhmatova's 1917 collection *White Flock* (*Belaia staia*), or Mandelstam triangulates the elegiac traditions of Pushkin and classical poets such as Ovid or Homer in his poems, "Tristia" and "Insomnia, Homer, taut sails…" ("Bessonitsa, Gomer, tugie parusa…"), scholars, with good reason, have come to approach the modern Russian elegy in relation to the genre's earlier conventions.[82] Thus, studies which focus on the twentieth-century elegy usually focus not on the elegy *per se*, but rather on the elegiac poetics of a single poet and the specific ways in which the poet

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[80] Gasparov, "Elegiia," 1228.
[81] Zubkov, "Elegiia," 349. Or, in other words, the elegy is no longer an automatized literary function that bears currency as a social convention. See Tynianov, 29-49.
[82] For such studies on Akhmatova see Zhirmunskii, V. M. "Iz stat'i o 'Beloi stae'"; and Verheul, *The Theme of Time in the Poetry of Anna Akhmatova*. For studies on Mandelstam, see Terras, "Classical Motives in the Poetry of Osip Mandelstam" (251-267), and the chapter, "Three poems of *Tristia*" in Brown's *Mandelstam* (219-252).

continues or diverges from the early nineteenth-century elegiac tradition. As Vladimir Kozlov notes, until quite recently genre studies likewise have elided the elegy *per se*. Instead studies tend to focus on twentieth-century poets' propensity for cyclicization or a deterioration of genre altogether, observing that the twentieth century marks a "post-genre epoch" or a "noncanonical period."[83]

With regard to the elegy itself in the postmodernist period (from the early 1970s to the present),[84] scholars (and sometimes poets themselves) of the last several decades have tended to take up one of two stances: they either write the elegy off as a genre that has fallen out of use or lost its canonical shape (as Gasparov and Zubkov, above), or they conclude that the elegy has so saturated modern poetry that its borders are indiscernible—that all poetry is (or at least potentially is) elegiac. In a foreword to a collection of Evgeny Rein's poetry, for example, Brodsky observes that the elegy, a "retrospective genre," is "probably the most widespread" genre in poetry. "In a distinct sense, poetry itself is elegy today; almost every line, whether one or another author intends (it is worse if he does not intend it) is allusive and retrospective."[85] Shaitanov likewise suggests that "an elegiac spirit" spreads throughout literature of the seventies and eighties,[86] while V. E. Khalizev concludes that "in principle, what constitutes the elegy as such and its unique character throughout the epochs is impossible to say. The definition of the elegy 'in general' as a 'genre of lyric poetry' proves to be the only valid one."[87]

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[83] Kozlov, 12.
[84] For a concise overview of the overarching aesthetic, cultural, and historical paradigms of this period, see Thomas Epstein's "Introduction" (vii-xii) in *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture*, eds. Mikhail Epstein, et al.
[85] Brodskii, "Predislovie," 6; 7.
[86] Shaitanov, *Delo vkusa*, 607.
[87] Khalizev, 320.

Such observations, however, likely stem from a limited understanding of the elegy in the first place. In his monograph, *The Russian Elegy of the Non-Canonical Period* (*Russkaia elegiia nekanonicheskogo perioda*), Vladimir Kozlov seeks to correct such underestimations and overgeneralizations. By tracing a wide range of varieties of the elegy (including the "sorrowful elegy," the "autumn elegy," the "churchyard elegy," the "symbolist elegy," and other varieties) in the works of poets ranging from Zhukovsky to Kibirov, Kozlov illuminates the endurance of the elegy as a distinct, dynamic genre that consists of specific varieties with corresponding conventions.

Nonetheless, scholarly perceptions of a modern ubiquity of the elegy certainly speak to the historical and cultural realities of the late and post-Soviet periods. If the period of stagnation entailed a trail of state funerals on the one hand and an erasure or "banalization"[88] of death in official discourse on the other, the collapse of the Soviet Union commenced a different set of losses. As Serguei Oushakine observes, the dismantling of Communist institutions and ideology left newly independent Russia with little unifying cultural framework. Consequently, he argues, the "trope of loss" has become the primary symbolic device capable of "translating people's Soviet experience into the post-Soviet context."[89] Alexander Etkind likewise characterizes both the Soviet and post-Soviet milieu as a "land of the unburied" where memorials to gulag victims remain inadequate, historic atrocities have yet to elicit repentance, and "warped" mourning practices have superseded productive practices.[90]

Describing the Soviet literary landscape, Leiderman and Lipovetsky suggest that poets born in the fifties entered the literary scene just as the Thaw-era dream of a

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[88] Sedakova quoted by Yastremski, "Freedom in Post-Everything Culture," 19.
[89] Oushakine, 1-2.
[90] See Etkind, *Warped Mourning: Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied*.

resurgence of the high modernism of the pre-revolutionary Silver Age proved to be implausible: "Culture was in non-recoverable ruins, and the only option for the existence of the 'heir' to the cultural tradition turned out to be spiritual wandering among the ruins with no hope for the revival of the previous harmonious order of existence."[91] However, Leiderman and Lipovetsky note that although some poets, such as Ivan Zhdanov, view the cultural situation as a "tragedy,"[92] many other poets have seen opportunity:

> Some saw an opportunity to enter into dialogue as equals with all the cultural languages, which had been leveled by the state of decay and death (this is the way of conceptualism); some discovered a strange "non-classical" beauty of chaos in the strange illogical combinations and wreaths which arose among the cultural ruins (such were the versions of E. Shvarts and A. Parshchikov); others tried to build their own singular, unique homes out of the fragments (such were the paths taken by Eremenko and Kalpidi).[93]

Amid such cultural ruins, a pervasive elegiac impulse in late and post-Soviet poetry comes as no surprise. Yet, contrary to what these new aesthetic approaches described above might appear to suggest, there is little acknowledgment of the fact that this renewed impulse likely necessitates a fresh examination of what in fact constitutes the postmodernist elegy or by what criteria we perceive certain poets as elegists.[94] While Kozlov's study illustrates the endurance and diversity of the genre and its centrality to the Russian canon, it provides only cursory attention to how the genre's current pervasiveness in the postmodern period has challenged modern poets, such as Sedakova,

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[91] Leiderman and Lipovetskii, "Poeziia neobarokko (I. Zhdanov, E. Shvarts, A. Eremenko, A. Parshchikov)," 452.
[92] Zhdanov, *Mesto zemli*, 3.
[93] Leiderman and Lipovetskii, 452.
[94] My use of the term "postmodernist" here and throughout may strike some as inapplicable to or incompatible with Sedakova and her work. However, as the following chapters implicitly demonstrate, the core tasks of her elegiac poems, such as the exploration of immortality and eternity as opposed to mortality and finality, stem from a reaction *against* postmodernist aesthetics, which Sedakova views to be preoccupied with finality and trauma. Thus, though her work stands in opposition to the postmodernist aesthetic impulse, it is also *borne out of it* in that it is a reaction against it. More fundamentally, however, I use the term here as a historical marker, referring to the period and aesthetic milieu in which Sedakova is writing, spanning roughly from the early 1970s to the present.

Elena Shvarts, Ivan Zhdanov, Sergey Gandlevsky, and others to engage the elegy in new, often paradoxical ways.[95] Though such questions no doubt lie beyond the scope of Kozlov's study, they are questions which, in light of Kozlov's valuable insights into the genre *per se*, are made all the more worth examining.

Though modern elegists have traditionally been designated as such in terms of their correlation with the elegiac tradition,[96] there rightly has been a growing tendency to study certain poets as elegists due to their preference for the elegy as a generic space in which to define their own poetic style and thereby innovate its conventions. David Wells, for example, observes that if Akhmatova adopts many of the motifs and lexical elements from the elegy of the early nineteenth century, then the way in which Akhmatova *develops* them is in opposition to this tradition.[97] V. I. Dogalakova triangulates Elena Shvarts's elegiac poetics in a similar fashion. In light of the spatial and temporal estrangement conveyed in Shvarts's "Elegy on an X-Ray of my Skull," Dogalakova notes a likeness to Baratynsky's elegiac practice of conflating seemingly opposite phenomena (such as feeling and thought or life and death). Through such conflation, however, Shvarts resists the convention of consolation, leaving her reader instead with a poetic persona who has become completely estranged from herself. [98] Genrikh Kirshbaum, too, provides new approaches to poets including Zabolotsky, who develops the "elegiac halo of the anapestic trimeter," and Gandlevsky, whose epistles unfold in the space of the

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[95] Kozlov does, however, list Sedakova among a range of poets (including Aleksei Purin, Vladimir Strochkov, Svetlana Kekova) whose poetry can be linked to the "metaphysical elegy" of the "Brodskian type," which grew out of symbolist language (273).

[96] Brodsky, for example, identifies Evgenii Rein as a "tragic elegist" due to not only the generic affiliation of the majority of Rein's poems, but the tonality, penchant for the past tense, the distribution of parts of speech, the retrospective nature of his poems. See Brodskii, "Predislovie," 8.

[97] Wells, "Akhmatova and Pushkin: The Genres of Elegy and Ballad," 634.

[98] Dogalakova, http://adogalakov.narod.ru/trudy/V_I_Dogalakova/staty/shvarc.html (Accessed October 21, 2016).

elegy.[99] Such approaches indeed mark a departure from that of Kurganov, for example, who ascribes Brodsky's "elegism" to the poet's penchant for self-mourning—a "genuine elegiac dominant" in the poetry of Baratynsky, he points out—as well as Brodsky's "discord with the century."[100] To the contrary, Wells, Dogalakova, and Kirshbaum interpret the above modern poets' employment of and innovations in the elegy as poetic manifestations of their times, not as manifestations of discord with their times.

In Anglo-American literary studies, the elegy is similarly perceived as a pervasive poetic phenomenon in the twentieth century. As David Kennedy suggests, "Large areas of contemporary poetry seem, in Coleridge's terms, to '[present] every thing as lost and gone, or absent and future' to the extent that poetry often seems like a sub-genre of elegy as opposed to the other way around."[101] A rich body of scholarship in recent decades has therefore sought to demarcate new criteria by which the modern elegy may be defined.[102] If Anglo-American elegists of previous periods drew upon the social conventions of the funeral rite—a ceremonial structure, a processional movement, offerings, choral repetitions or refrains, ancient funeral games or contests—in order to sing a song of "mortal loss and consolation," as Peter Sacks notes,[103] the twentieth-century Anglo-American elegist, as Jahan Ramazani suggests, resists conventional modes of consolation. The modern elegy "offers not a guide to 'successful' mourning but a spur to

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[99] Kirshbaum, "Okhotniki na snegu," 282; 279. See also Kirshbaum, "Zekrolog allegorii. O tanatopoetike severa v lirike Nikolaia Zabolotskogo," 279-303.
[100] Kurganov, "Brodskii i iskusstvo elegii," 167.
[101] Kennedy, 7-8.
[102] See, for example, Sacks's *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*; Schenck's *Mourning and Panegyric: The Poetics of Pastoral Ceremony*; Shaw's *Elegy & Paradox: Testing the Conventions*; Zeiger's *Beyond Consolation: Death, Sexuality, and the Changing Shapes of Elegy*; Ramazani's *Poetry of Mourning: the Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*; Spargo's *Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature*; and Vickery's *The Modern Elegiac Temper*.
[103] Sacks, 3 and 1-37 generally.

rethinking the vexed experience of grief in the modern world."[104] In contrast to Peter Sacks, who identifies compensatory mourning as the psychic basis of the elegy (whereby the lyric hero achieves consolation by reattaching his desire to a substitute for the lost subject, as in Freud's paradigms of normative mourning and the oedipal resolution of the child), Jahan Ramazani draws upon the same psychoanalytical framework (though diluting the rigidity of the binary) in order to suggest that a converse protocol of melancholic mourning dominates in the twentieth century. The modern elegist, in Ramazani's view, "tends not to achieve but to resist consolation, not to override but to sustain anger, not to heal but to reopen the wounds of loss."[105]

Rather than take a historical or descriptive approach to the elegy by cataloging the genre's conventions and/or tracing its evolution, Sacks and Ramazani take an interpretive approach. In other words, they examine the genre in author-centric studies that trace select poets' interpretations, continuations, and revisions of the elegy's conventions. The aim is to offer a corrective to the pitfalls of descriptive approaches, which seem to concern themselves more with assimilating works into predetermined generic criteria than with interpreting the poems themselves. Indeed, in her study on Russian women writers and poets, Heldt laments, "While scholarship since the Formalists has illuminated questions of period, genre, and verbal texture, only rarely is the authorial vision of reality in the text or the author's rhetorical stance made to interact with these other factors. Yet, only by studying these questions can we hope for a more balanced picture of literary art."[106] However, an analytical focus on authorial vision across the works of disparate

[104] Ramazani, ix.
[105] Ramazani, xi. See also Freud, 124-40. Ramazani's thesis therefore challenges that of Schenck, who argues that non-consolatory elegies are in fact "anti-elegies." See Schenck, *Mourning and Panegyric*.
[106] Heldt, 4.

authors risks the same perils of pigeonholing and exclusion as a focus on overarching trends of historical development. As Heldt situates Russian women poets within a paradigm of fragmented self, so Sacks and Ramazani situate the elegy within a strict psychological framework of successful or failed consolation. Indeed, the extent to which modern elegists explore the elegy as a mechanism of consolation of questionable efficacy has become the customary framework which scholars either employ or challenge in Anglo-American elegy studies.[107]

In Russian literary studies, on the other hand, the elegy has yet to receive a rigorous reexamination. In her essay on Sedakova and the elegy, Evgeniya Kniazeva rightly expresses a need for a reevaluation of the criteria by which we delineate the elegy. She suggests that if genre in the Classical and Romantic periods manifests itself in a correlation between the poetics of a given poem and the conventions of a genre, in the twentieth century genre takes on greater fluidity. Thus,

> What turns out to be significant for the creative process is not the evolution of a genre itself, but the mobility [podvizhnost'] of its conception by the author-reader. Thus, a more important question turns out to be not, "Does the given text correspond to the genre of elegy or not?" but rather, "What allows the author to conceive of his or her text as elegiac; what is the associative nature of this appeal to the given genre?"[108]

Though, as this study demonstrates, specific elegiac conventions certainly retain currency as an important determinant of elegy's topography—indeed, Kozlov's important study of the Russian elegy attests to the endurance of specific conventions and divisions—

[107] W. David Shaw, for example, cautions that "grief therapy is a dangerous basis for a theory of art," arguing that the elegies of "weak mourners," such as Henry King's "The Exequy" or Robert Frost's "Home Burial" should not be counted as "defective" (180). See Shaw's chapter, "Does Good Therapy Make Good Art? The Paradox of Strong and Weak Mourners" in *Elegy and Paradox: Testing the Conventions*, 180-209. Additional studies which employ the theme of consolation as their framework include R. Clifton Spargo's *Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature* and Melissa F. Zeiger's *Beyond Consolation: Death, Sexuality, and the Changing Shapes of Elegy*.

[108] Kniazeva, 228-229.

Kniazeva's reformulation of the question clears new space for examining purportedly unelegiac poets, such as Sedakova, as elegists. Such requestioning also suggests a need to reevaluate the conventions that have shaped the Russian elegy since the turn of the nineteenth century and to translate them into them into the postmodern context.

In addition to arguing that the twentieth century does not in fact constitute a "post-generic" or "non-canonical" period in literature, Kozlov makes an important distinction in the way genre is conceived.[109] A poet, contends Kozlov, cannot have a relationship *to* or an attitude *towards* a certain genre. In light of Grigorian's assertion that Pushkin "in his work was not indifferent to various genres" and that the poet simultaneously "did not adhere to any firm boundaries or rules" and "freely used different poetic forms,"[110] Kozlov argues that genre is in fact a space that a poet *inhabits*:

> [I]t is not as important what a poet's attitude is towards a genre system; what is important is how he *uses* it. The genre system, speaking figuratively, is not a suitcase that the poet can take or not take on his creative path; it is a literary space in which every poet works. The poet does not exist beyond the space of the genre system. However, it is precisely the poet who defines the "face," the architectonics, and the hierarchy of this genre system.[111]

Though operating upon the basis of Kozlov's distinction, this study nonetheless makes a case similar to Grigorian's in that it seeks to add a new dimension to the way we conceive of and approach a particular poet. As Grigorian makes the case for the enduring place ("prochnoe mesto") the elegy occupies in Pushkin's work, this study, too, makes its case for conceiving of Sedakova as an elegist and bringing the elegy to bear as an "enduring place" from which her poetic world largely springs.

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[109] Kozlov thus challenges statements by critics such as V. A. Grekhnev, who suggests that during Pushkin's time, genres such as the ode, elegy, and epistle "complete their cycles of development, and lyric poetry enters the space of free thinking." Grekhnev, 6.
[110] Grigor'ian, 91.
[111] Kozlov, 13.

Chapter Summary and a Note on Terms

Though this study is interpretive rather than descriptive in nature, my close readings of Sedakova's elegies are grounded in the generic history of the Russian elegy (and the subgenres it contains) and the continuation of the genre in the twentieth century. This dissertation interprets genre not as a "thematic element"[112] (such as loss or death, for example) but rather, as mentioned above, a particular "constellation" of thematic, rhetorical, and formal features.[113] Another clarification that should be made, in light of Alastair Fowler's important distinction regarding genre and mode, is that this study examines the elegiac *genre* as the basis of a selection of Sedakova's poems, and not the elegiac *mode*.[114] A mode, as Fowler clarifies, refers to when a work's "tone" is indicative of a certain genre, but is in fact not composed in the formal structure of that genre. In other words, mode functions in an "adjectival" sense.[115] While Sedakova often enters into the constellation of the elegy by employing certain conventions (themes, funerary tropes, specific metrical structures or rhyme pairs, and specific mytho-poetic topoi), she very rarely composes poems in the elegiac mode, which Frow describes as a tone "of reflective melancholy or sadness."[116]

As pertains to the specific genre at hand, this study interprets the elegy not as a "song of sad contents" (which, in light of Fowler's distinction may in fact constitute a conflation of the elegiac genre and mode rather than a definition of the genre itself), but most generally, a poem which reflects upon a loss of some kind while employing a

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[112] Genette, *The Architext,* 64-5.
[113] Frow, *Genre*, 71.
[114] Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 106.
[115] For example, if we call *Emma* a comic novel, "we mean that *Emma* is by kind a novel, by mode comic," Fowler notes (106).
[116] Frow, 143.

certain number of themes, tropes, turns-of-phrase, metrical forms, or conventions associated with the elegy. I believe the advantages of such a Formalist definition of the elegy (i.e., that it is essentially "a sum of its devices" and that "the act of belonging to a genre involves both adoption of and resistance to its conventions")[117] lie precisely in its disadvantages lamented by Heldt above. By approaching the elegy as a set of devices (that the poet employs, resists, or reinvigorates), rather than a mode, perception, or specific activity (i.e., successful or failed consolation), we may more easily tease out Sedakova's own conception of the genre, to what ends she enters into the elegy as a generic territory, and what her engagement with the genre reveals about her poetic world.

While individually, not one single trope, theme, or convention is sufficient—indeed, many are not even necessary—for a poem to be considered an elegy, the close readings presented here base themselves on the assumption that when a poet starts employing a certain number of these aspects, a certain generic landscape or territory emerges. I believe such an elastic (albeit Formalist) approach is more profitable in avoiding the pitfalls of exclusion. If the elegy can viewed as emerging from a constellation of topoi rather than a specific task, we can not only account for such disparate elegies such as those which subvert consolation or those which speak to "non-elegiac" themes but are composed in elegiac distich, but, more significantly, we can allow for a poet's elegies to emerge on their own terms.

Nonetheless, placing this definition of the elegy aside, the close readings presented here are also predicated upon the fact that readers by and large *do* usually view

[117] Duff, "Introduction" to *Modern Genre Theory*, 8. See Tynianov's "The Literary Fact" in the same collection (29-49). For the Russian original, see Tynianov, "Literaturnyi fakt" in *Poetika, istoriia literatury, kino*, 255-270.

the elegy as a "structure for mourning and consolation."[118] For this reason, I believe the genre provides an all the more effective landscape for Sedakova to bring her emphasis on the eternal rather than the transient into sharper focus. By employing identifiable markers of the churchyard elegy and the "Death of the Poet" tradition, Sedakova's "celebration of what is," as Sandler describes it, becomes all the more defined in contradistinction to the set of expectations we may bring to the text.

Within this general scope, Chapter One examines the subgenre of the churchyard elegy in relation to the subgenre's prototext, Vasily Zhukovsky's "Country Churchyard" ("Sel'skoe kladbishche"), and the conventions therein which Russian poets have continued, revised, or rejected. These conventions include the figure of a usually itinerant figure of a poet-wanderer, a graveyard setting, an encounter with a stranger's grave or epitaph (literal of figurative), a confrontation with alterity, religious questioning or affirmation, and, ultimately, self-lament. In light of this generic structure, Chapter One explores the specific ways this elegiac subgenre forms the structural and thematic basis of Sedakova's poem, "Country Churchyard" ("Sel'skoe kladbishche," c. 1979-83) and her cycle, *Stelai and Inscriptions* (*Stely i nadpisi*, 1982). Upon this basis, however, the poet advances central tenets of her poetics, which appear contrary to the subgenre's framework. Instead of a modulation of lament for an unknown other and lament for the self, we encounter a subversion of conventional modes of mourning (both traditional and modern) altogether, and a transgression of the boundaries of traditional lyric introspection.

While the churchyard elegy centers upon the poet's chance encounter with a monument or epitaph of an unknown other, the "On the Death of" elegy results from the

[118] Kennedy, 13.

elegist's premeditated endeavor to construct a figurative monument to a specific individual, or in this case, a deceased poet. Chapters Two and Three investigate Sedakova's treatment of a particular strain of the "On the Death of" elegiac subgenre, the elegy on the death of a poet, with regard to the cultural mythology of the poet-as-martyr and the tropes and lexical markers of the inter-authorial "Death of the Poet" cycle, as outlined by Georgy Levinton. Readings of "On the Death of Leonid Gubanov" ("Na smert' Leonida Gubanova," 1983) and "In Memory of a Poet" ("Pamiati poeta," first published in 1998) reveal that, as in Sedakova's churchyard elegies, the poet incorporates familiar features of the subgenre (in this case of the Death of the Poet elegy: homage, voice imitation, intertextual dialogue, polemic, poetic evaluation, and implicit self-considerations) only to subvert the elegy's common downward movement of grief. Nonetheless, within the elegies' upward thrust, we still discern subtle (or not so subtle) articulations of the author's own aspirations and anxieties vis-à-vis the poetic tradition, which are characteristic of the genre.

Rather than poems of parting, the elegies examined in this study constitute poems of meeting. Whether with an unknown other, the divine, or a deceased poet, these poetic meetings, however, are always counter-balanced by (and often at odds with) a second meeting: the poet's meeting with herself as a poet and the prospect of her own inevitable demise. Reading these elegies in the context of the Russian elegiac tradition not only brings the contours of Sedakova's own brand of elegiac poetics to bear, but uncovers her implied place in the Russian tradition vis-à-vis her precursors and contemporaries and helps to trace the development of her own lyric persona.

1. "A Monument to Meeting": Encounters with Epitaphs and Country Churchyards

Though traditionally viewed as an archetypical elegy, Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard* (1751) in fact dispensed with elegiac conventions and expanded the traditional parameters of elegiac mourning that characterized the eighteenth-century English elegy. Rather than mourn a specific individual, the elegist laments the life of a nameless other (i.e., a figure he never knew and thus never lost), the overarching societal structures and the unknown other's position within them, and, ultimately, the elegist's own inevitable death. As James Garrison, Catherine Ciepiela, and others have shown, when Vasily Zhukovsky translated Gray's *Elegy* in 1802, he not only wrote "an insuperable model for the elegy" for Russian letters in its own right,[1] but altered the poem's narrative structure, expanded the elegy's religious dimensions, and helped distill central topoi of the Russian cultural mythology of the poet (such as the poet's untimely death), which would become definitive of the Russian poetic tradition.[2] Despite Zhukovsky's alterations, however, the underlying ambiguity of the poem's frame of lament (culminating in the elegy's concluding self-referential epitaph) remained, and the tension between lamenting an unknown other and lamenting one's own imagined death endures as one of the central paradoxes of the genre.

This chapter examines this tension in the context of Sedakova's "Country Churchyard" ("Sel'skoe kladbishche," c. 1979-83) and her cycle *Stelai and Inscriptions* (*Stely i nadpisi*, 1982), which, in the tradition of the Russian churchyard elegy, depict a traveler's encounters with funerary art objects and their accompanying epitaphs. These

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[1] Ciepiela, "Reading Russian Pastoral: Zhukovsky's Translation of Gray's Elegy," 31.

[2] Garrison, *A Dangerous Liberty*, 128-38; Toporov, "'Sel'skoe kladbishche' Zhukovskogo: K istokam russkoi poezii," 207-286; Ciepiela, 31-46; Kozlov, *Russkaia elegiia nekanonicheskogo perioda,* 33-68.

encounters prompt the poet who, in the tradition of Zhukovsky, is an itinerant figure ("strannik") traveling along a path, to meditate upon death in a more abstract sense (as the grave, urn, statue, etc., is of a stranger) as well as her own inevitable entry into the afterlife. However, rather than mourn her own death and find consolation in God's grace in accordance with the models of Gray and Zhukovsky, the churchyard elegist of Sedakova's model seeks to break beyond the purview of the poet's personal fate.

In many ways Sedakova's poetic reworkings of the churchyard elegy present a converse paradox to Gray's original poem: rather than dispense with elegiac conventions in order to *broaden* the act of lament, the poet engages recognizable elegiac conventions in order to *subvert* the genre's paradigm of subjective lament. Seeking neither to penetrate the alterity of a deceased other nor to better discern her own fate in introspection, the churchyard elegist of Sedakova's verse seeks, as Emily Grosholz suggests, to "restore, to go to the heart of things"[3] and yet also to transgress the limitations of the poet's lyrical "I."

IN CONTEXT: THE CHURCHYARD ELEGY

When Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard* first appeared in 1751, its popularity was both immediate and enduring. Gray's poem is not only widely regarded as one of the best-known poems in the English language, but also as a significant fixture in the poetic traditions of many other languages.[4] As Herbert W. Starr notes, by 1946, roughly two centuries after its initial publication, Gray's *Elegy* had not only been imitated and parodied in English over two hundred times, but translated into over eighteen languages as well. In some of these languages, such as French and Italian,

[3] Groskhol'ts, "Detstvo i pul'siruiushchee ravnovesie…," 123
[4] Starr, "Introduction," 9; Garrison, 9.

there were as many as twenty-five to forty different renderings.[5] Beyond the Anglo-American tradition, however, nowhere has Gray's *Elegy* more significantly shaped a culture's poetic canon than in Russia. As Vadim Vatsuro notes, in the fifteen years following the first full Russian translation in 1785, the poem was translated four more times.[6] Among these translations, however, it was Vasily Zhukovsky's 1802 translation (his second of three) that received "almost immediate canonical status" as a contribution to Russian literature.[7]

Zhukovsky's "Country Churchyard" ("Sel'skoe kladbishche") enjoyed a success just as enduring as Gray's original. Though the publication of the poem brought Zhukovsky "some little renown," it has subsequently been declared more than once to be "the birthday of Russian poetry."[8] Zhukovsky's poem not only provided Russia its "entry into European culture,"[9] but its "homeland" as Solov'ev famously put it in his poem, "The Homeland of Russian Poetry" ("Rodina russkoi poezii"), dedicated to Zhukovsky and his poem.[10] As Vladimir Kozlov notes, Russia received Gray's *Elegy* like "a little chest containing the fundamental genres of European lyric poetry," and Russian poets "have continued to extract something from it ever since."[11] More significantly, as Vladimir Toporov has shown, Zhukovsky's "Country Churchyard" helped to crystallize

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[5] Starr, 9. See also Garrison's *A Dangerous Liberty*, which traces the specific ways in which different literary cultures have interpreted and assimilated the *Elegy* into their respective poetics canons.
[6] Vatsuro, 48. Translators included Prince F. Sibirskii, P. B. Kozlovskii (in prose), and P. I. Golenishchev-Kutuzov. Vasily Zhukovsky translated the poem a total of three times: first in 1801 (this translation was rejected by Karamzin for publication in *Vestnik Evropy*), again in 1802 (the now canonical version), and again in 1839 (a more literal translation written when Zhukovsky was in Windsor and visited the cemetery which inspired Gray's elegy).
[7] Garrison, 117.
[8] Moser, 124; Mirsky, 73. On the legacy of Zhukovsky's "Sel'skoe kladbishche" in the Russian poetic canon, see Gukovskii, *Russkaia poeziia XVIII veka*, 101; Toporov, 207-86; Frizman, *Russkaia Elegiia*, 16-19; Vatsuro, 48-73; Kozlov, *Russkaia elegiia*, 33-68.
[9] Greenleaf, 90 and 56-70 *passim*.
[10] Solov'ev, 118.
[11] Kozlov, 35.

the topos of the poet's untimely death, which came to define Russian cultural mythologies of the poet. This topos of the poet's ill fate not only takes on more concrete shape in Zhukovsky's alterations to the poem's concluding self-referential epitaph, but in the historical circumstances surrounding the poem as well.[12] The poet's cultural status of witness of truth-sayer for the people (*narod*), which is dramatized in the poet's position as the only "friend of the deceased" ("pochivshikh drug") in the elegy, amplifies the significance of the poet's untimely death. In addition, as Vladimir Kozlov suggests, Zhukovsky's translation also crystallizes the inter-relationship between the poet and the *narod*: while the poet is the "best mouthpiece" for the fates of the nameless villagers who rest in the churchyard, he is also dependent upon the villagers. His memory and poetic legacy are only realized in the perception of the "hoary-haired villager" ("selianin s pochtennoi sedinoiu") who will invite passersby to read his epitaph.[13]

In addition to bringing central topoi of Russian cultural mythologies of the poet into higher definition, Zhukovsky's elegy more specifically provided an model for the elegy. The elegy's sensitivity of feeling and stylistic texture, marked by strict harmony, a suggestive open-endedness, and melodic repetition, in addition to its graveyard landscape (then a novel place for poetic reflection in Russian letters), and its potential for self-mourning, became definitive for the Russian romantic "elegiac school" of the early decades of the nineteenth century.[14] Though Zhukovsky's elegy did not *introduce* these hallmarks, it consolidated them into one wholly integrated model that has retained

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[12] In the year following the poem's publication, Andrei Turgenev, the poet and friend to whom Zhukovsky dedicated the poem, passed away suddenly. Lending further poignancy to the trope is the fact that Turgenev himself seemed to have foreseen his untimely death in verses he wrote the year of his death. See Toporov, "'Sel'skoe kladbishche' Zhukovskogo," 248.
[13] Kozlov, 52.
[14] See Vatsuro, 64-73; Kozlov, 34-37. On the novelty of the graveyard setting in particular see Frizman *Russkaia elegiia*, 16; Kozlov, 45-49.

currency into the postmodernist period as a ratification of sorts of the Russian elegy. In focusing on the elegiac themes of death and nature—hardly innovated by Gray or Zhukovsky—Kirill Kobrin, for example, nonetheless identifies Zhukovsky's translation as the poem "contain[ing] almost everything that was needed for the subsequent elegies of Russian poetry: Death and Nature. The Russian classical elegy is, in large part, made of these two ingredients."[15] Moreover, when poets engage or allude to Zhukovsky's elegy in their verse, they potentially "target the Russian elegiac tradition in its entirety," as Marat Grinberg notes in his reading of Boris Slutsky's "Village Cemetery" ("Sel'skoe kladbishche").[16]

Though Gray's *Elegy*, much like its Russian rendering, is traditionally viewed as an archetypical elegy, literary critics have wrestled with the significant ways in which the poem in fact resists such a definition. Gray himself seems to have been the first to admit this as he originally titled the poem *Stanzas Wrote in Country Churchyard*. Gray only settled upon the title of *Elegy* as a result of the urging of his good friend William Mason, who recognized its form (quatrains composed in iambic pentameter with alternating rhymes) as that used by elegists such as Hammond and Shenstone who were reinvigorating the classical conception of the elegy as merely a formal structure for philosophical or erotic rumination.[17]

Starr notes the poem's closeness particularly to landscape poetry, of which "graveyard poetry" is a subgroup. As opposed to landscape poetry generally, which

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[15] Kobrin, "Tomnyi vgliad nazad," 69.
[16] Grinberg, *"I Am to Be Read Not from Left to Right…,"* 244.
[17] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, 133. See also Starr, "Introduction," 9. Kozlov traces at least four different genres in the poem, including the pastoral (manifested in the poem's rustic setting and country personae), the descriptive, the "night elegy" ("nochnaia elegiia") (as the crepuscular lighting allows the poet's own thoughts to take foreground), as well as the epitaph, which is dramatized both by the poet's encounters with the epitaphs of the unknown graves and monuments as well as the epitaph that concludes the poem. See Kozlov, *Russkaia elegiia*, 38-43.

featured philosophical meditations in nature, graveyard poetry featured more melancholy and subjective reflections such as those in Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, which appeared shortly before Gray composed his *Elegy* and likely influenced him.[18] Jean Hagstrum likewise connects the poem to the descriptive and pictorial, suggesting that the poem's alternating scenes of pictorial description and philosophical reflection in fact constitute an example of the neoclassical picturesque, which evokes the art of painting: "For what is this poem if not a succession of visually rendered scenes, each leading to a relevant verbalized reflection? That is, do not the passages of moral and philosophical reflection remind one, in all aspects except their length, of words engraved under a sculptured or painted scene?"[19] The nature and meaning of these "engraved words," which verbalize the scenes and give voice to the deceased, according to George T. Wright, constitute the central subject of the poem. Gray's *Elegy*, Wright suggests, demonstrates that "no matter how modest, […] an epitaph works against the stillness to which all human action and achievement are in time reduced."[20]

The *Elegy*'s most significant source of generic ambiguity, however, lies both in its method and focus of lament. As Eric Smith notes, Gray's elegy does not contain any of the classical elegiac conventions which, in at least partial combination, often

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[18] Starr "Introduction" 5. In its narrowest sense, "graveyard poetry" refers to four eighteenth-century British poems: Thomas Parnell's "Night-Piece on Death" (1721), Robert Blair's *The Grave* (1743), Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742-45), and Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. However, the term is usually used more broadly to refer to, as Eric Parisot says, "a rather loose conglomeration of British poetry from the early to mid-eighteenth century that meditated upon the transience of life, the imminence of death, and (on most occasions) the consolation accorded by a Christian afterlife" (1). Expanding upon Draper's observation that the four original "graveyard poems" generalized the subject-matter of the elegy and freed it "from the confines of merely occasional verse" (Draper 4), John Frow identifies the four original "graveyard poems" as marking the romantic shift from the elegy proper to the elegiac *mode*. Thus, the poems are not elegiac in an fundamental sense, but rather in an "adjectival sense." "Mode here is a matter of tone—of reflective melancholy or sadness—whereas the elegy as a genre remains more specifically concerned with the act of mourning a particular person," writes Frow (143).

[19] Hagstrum, 301.

[20] Wright, 388.

characterized the pastoral funeral elegy of the period: the poem features no invocation; no procession of mourners (save for those mentioned by the swain when he recalls the passing of the youth in stanza twenty-nine); no tribute of flowers; and no consolation in the conventional sense (though he notes that the concluding epitaph does present a resolution).[21] Moreover, the poem does not mourn the loss of a particular man. Rather, the elegist laments the "disparity between the human condition as it is observed to be and as it might more ideally be conceived."[22] By referring to the deceased villagers as "some village-Hampden… some mute inglorious Milton…some Cromwell, guiltless of his country's blood," Gray highlights the economic disparity between the wealthy and the poor. The villagers' lack of social mobility has resulted in both opportunities missed and crimes escaped. [23] Indeed, in light of the poet's acknowledgment of the villagers' lack of education ("But knowledge to their eyes her ample page / Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll") and the swain's illiteracy ("Approach and read [for thou canst read] the lay…"), Empson, Guillory, and others suggest that matters of class and economic injustice form the crux of the poem.[24]

Yet for many critics it is precisely this underlying social commentary that provides the elegiac heart of the poem. In portraying the plight of the poor, the poet, as Morse Peckham suggests, indeed *does* mourn the loss of an individual—the unknown

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[21] Smith, 40. For a discussion of pastoral elegiac conventions see Sacks 2-35.
[22] Smith, 40.
[23] Garrison, 28.
[24] In light of the poet's rather complacent and calm response to the social disparities he acknowledges, Empson holds the poem up as an example the pastoral, a genre which represents "a beautiful relationship between rich and poor," and is therefore a "bogus" concept. Empson, 22, quoted in Ciepiela, 32. Guillory examines these questions in terms of literacy, highlighted in the figure of illiterate swain ("Approach and read [for thou canst read] the lay…"), arguing that the poet-speaker grapples with his middle-class position—he is neither of the aristocracy nor of the illiterate poor (Guillory 85-133). Though Frizman notes that Zhukovsky generally works around such sociological themes in his translation (Frizman *Russkaia elegiia* 17), Catherine Ciepiela explores them in her essay, "Reading Russian Pastoral: Zhukovsky's Translation of Gray's Elegy," arguing that Zhukovsky transforms the play of relationships between the poet and the poor man in ways that speak to context of late eighteenth-century Russia (31-46).

youth or "local Stonecutter-Poet."[25] As Hagstrum and others note, the poem pays tribute to a "'mute inglorious Milton,' who in his own way had served but at the same time transcended the community that had imperfectly understood and appreciated him."[26]

Others do not find such an interpretation satisfactory, however. Indeed, the prevailing view is that the poet ultimately mourns an imagined version of himself.[27] The line in the epitaph which reads, "Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth," John H. Sutherland observes, would seem to refer to "someone a little better educated than an artisan inspired by 'th' unletter'd muse.'"[28] As Guillory notes, the fact that the mourned subject of the "Epitaph" is "unknown" to fortune and fame and yet has not been frowned upon by "Fair Science" seems to indicate an individual who is neither aristocratic nor poor, but rather a person of the new middle class, or, in other words, the poet-speaker himself, who is both similar and dissimilar to the unknown peasant youth. Caught between "emulation (or ambition) and its systematic self-repression," the solitary poet, in Guillory's interpretation, grapples with his ambivalence about social ambition, and in so doing, memorializes not the obscure villager, but an image of himself.[29] Sacks echoes these sentiments when he likewise concludes that Gray's poem indeed mourns a particular death and is therefore an elegy: "This individual death, albeit imaginary, is that of the poet himself."[30]

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[25] Peckham, 411.
[26] Hagstrum, 295. See also Starr "'A Youth to Fortune…'" 97-107; Ellis, 971-1008; Peckham, 409-11. Sergei Averintsev's estimation of the poem's immediate popularity in Russia echoes such an interpretation. Gray's poem, he observes, does not treat unnamed *heroes* or *citizens* (such as those celebrated in the French Revolution), but unnamed *people* as being worthy of lament. "Secret human dignity is presented as a value in itself […] having priority ontologically and axiologically over everything that is public." See Averintsev, "Britanskoe zerkalo," 264.
[27] See Brady, 177-89; Dyson, 83-87.
[28] Sutherland, 12.
[29] Guillory, 114, quoted in Ciepiela, 35.
[30] Sacks, 133.

The potential ambiguity of the mourned subject in Gray's *Elegy* lays bare a significant ethical contention of the elegy which can emerge regardless of whether the poet mourns a specific individual or an anonymous figure: the alterity of the other. Whether divided by social class, or by death, the parallel, yet mutually foreign nature of the elegist's world (that of the living) and the deceased (that of the dead) both underscores their separateness, and, as R. Clifton Spargo argues, necessitates in the elegist a "claim of intimacy." In Zhukovsky's rendering, which unites the elegist and the obscure villager in significant ways, the figure of failed intimacy comes into play all the more strongly. As Ober and Ober observe, though Zhukovsky's lines "faithfully reproduce Gray's objectivity, they do not reproduce the detachment" of the original.[31] Zhukovsky both instills the poem with more detail (Gray's "Gem of purest Ray serene" becomes a "rare pearl, hidden by the waves" ["redkii perl, volnami sokrovennyi"], for example) and aligns the poet-speaker and reader with the deceased through the rhetorical devices such as the increased use of the first-person plural.[32] When the speaker of Gray's elegy wonders, rather distantly in stanza eleven, whether flattery can "soothe the dull cold ear of Death," the speaker of Zhukovsky's elegy brings himself and his reader into the villagers' fates by asserting that the voice of honor "will not rekindle *our* extinguished ashes" ("Ugasshii pepel *nash* ne vospaliat," emphasis mine). Additionally, while for Gray "The paths of glory lead but to the grave," for Zhukovsky "The path of greatness leads *us* but to the grave" ("I put' velichiia ko grobu *nas* vedet," emphasis

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[31] Ober and Ober, 168-69.

[32] Ober and Ober 167-172. As Garrison notes, Zhukovsky not only inserts the first-person plural, but omits the first-person singular. Whereas the concluding lines of the original opening stanza read, "The plowman homeward plods his weary way, / And leaves the world to darkness and to me," Zhukovsky's read, "Ustalyi selianin medlitel'noi stopoiu / Idet, zadumavshis', v shalash spokoinyi svoi" ("The tired villager goes by with slow step / pensively into a calm canopy of branches.") See Garrison, 129.

mine). Such alterations, as Ober and Ober suggest, not only more directly involve his reader personally in the fates of the unknown villagers, but in the fact of death as well.

It has been observed that, in universalizing the fate of the deceased, Zhukovsky mutes the socio-economic commentary of the poem and augments the spiritual dimensions of Gray's *Elegy* instead.[33] Indeed, while the "frail memorial" bears a "holy text" which "teach[es] the rustic moralist to die" in Gray's poem, the monument of Zhukovsky's bears a more specific "Biblical moral" ("bibleiskaia moral'") according to which "we must learn to die" ("my dolzhny uchit'sia umirat'"—again, Zhukovsky inserts the first-person plural). Zhukovsky further amplifies the religious potential of the original by comparing the solitary poet to a wanderer ("strannik") deprived of his homeland, thereby evoking the Christian concept of the soul as a pilgrim in search of God. Though translators have added or adapted lines to foster a religious interpretation of the poem, Garrison notes that "the most sustained religious appreciation of the *Elegy* is Zhukovsky's Russian translation of 1802."[34]

Nonetheless, the poem's concluding epitaph, which Zhukovsky skillfully domesticates in his translation,[35] lends his poem the same ethical problems of intimacy

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[33] For example, Zhukovsky omits the detail of the swain's illiteracy. Whereas the swain in Gray's poem says, "Approach and read (for thou canst read) the lay," the swain in Zhukovsky's poem says, "Pribliz'sia, prochitai nadgrobie prostoe..." ("Come closer, read the simple grave inscription..."). For an insightful analysis of Zhukovsky's amplification of the spiritual dimensions of Gray's *Elegy*, see Garrison, 128-38.
[34] Garrison, 129.
[35] In a departure from the epitaph of the classical European tradition, the epitaph in Gray's elegy enshrines not the poet's deeds, but his virtues: "Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth, / And Melancholy mark'd him for her own. // Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere…." Zhukovsky, too, elevates the poet's sensibilities over his actions: "No muzy ot nego litsa ne otvratili, / I melankholii, pechat' byla na nem. // On krotok serdtsem byl, chuvstvitelen dushoiu…" ("But the muses did not turn their faces from him / and the imprint of melancholy was on him. // He was meet-hearted, he had a sensitive soul.") In doing so, however, Zhukovsky also departs from the original by incorporating key conventions of the Russian epitaph, such as the conventional address to a passerby (absent in Gray's original): "Prokhozhii, pomolis' nad etoi mogilou…" ("To he who passes by, pray over this grave…"). In fact, Zhukovsky embeds this epitaphic paradigm earlier on as well: in describing the humble inscription which adorns the modest monument, the poet says that it "calls a passerby" to sigh over the villagers' ashes ("prokhozhego zovet

and reciprocity, which Spargo discerns as one of the greater paradoxes of elegiac address.[36] On the one hand, the epitaph serves as a window into the former life of the deceased, thereby prompting the poet to "take in" the life of an unknown other; it facilitates "a meeting with the deceased."[37] On the other hand, this "taking in" prompts a converse action of projection. In filling in the gaps of what the epitaph does *not* say, the elegist draws upon his own experience, which now takes on new significance in the liminal space of the silent graveyard. The elegist therefore comes not to a deeper consideration of the unnamed other, but to a consideration of his own demise as hypothetically lamented by the local village stonecutter poet. He, the "friend of the deceased," suddenly realizes that his "fateful hour, too, will strike" ("A ty, pochivshikh drug, pevets uedinennyi, / I tvoi udarit chas, poslednii, rokovoi…").[38]

The elegist's efforts to describe the lives of the obscure villagers produce a portrait that is more idealized than realistic: "How often their sickles reaped the golden cornfields / And their plow conquered the persistent fields!" ("Kak chasto ikh serpy zlatuiu nivu zhali / I plug ikh pobezhdal upornye polia!"), the poet thinks to himself. As the elegist stands over the grave of the unknown youth and muses that perhaps there rest the ashes of "a tender heart that knew how to love" ("serdtsa nezhnogo, umevshego liubit'") and a head "that was born to be crowned or soar with thoughts" ("rozhdennoi byt' v ventse il' mysliami parit'"), he does "does not take in the real fate of the unknown

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vzdokhnut' nad prakhom ikh"). The original simply states: "With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd, implores the passing tribute of a sigh." As Garrison notes, translators have traditionally taken greater liberty with the concluding epitaph of Gray's poem, often even composing it in a metric form different than the poem's preceding stanzas. While Giuseppe Gennari, for example, composes his 1772 translation of the poem in terza rima, he renders the epitaph in ottava rima. Marie-Joseph Blaise de Chénier, meanwhile, translates the epitaph in quatrains—a distinct change from the couplet paragraphs which make up the preceding stanzas in his 1805 French translation. See Garrison, 26.

[36] Spargo, 129.

[37] Kozlov, 45.

[38] Zhukovsky, *SS*, 1:56.

person in as much as he *reads* the unknown fate of the unknown villager as an *ideal*," Kozlov observes.[39]

The elegy, as Spargo suggests, "must work hard to maintain a claim of intimacy, for the (sometimes fictive) remembrance of intimacy provides assurance that the other was and remains knowable."[40] In Zhukovsky's elegy, however, the poet is faced with a nameless other, of whom the only vestige is a modest monument with a "humble inscription and simple carving" ("s nepyshnoi nadpis'iu i rez"boiu prostoiu"). The elegist's idealization of the deceased does not create intimacy but rather allows the poet to compensate for the absence of the customary "reciprocity" between the speaker and the mourned subject: "By belatedly protecting one who is already beyond protection, a mourner recuperates reciprocity as an act of self-protection, expecting that the apotheosized one 'shalt be good / To all that wander in that perilous flood'" [i.e. to those who take up the work of the mourning on his behalf], writes Spargo.[41] In other words, the mourned subject will in turn protect the elegist. This reciprocity, of course, is impossible since the subject is dead. Rather, the implication is that, in compensation for his protection of the significance of the dead among the living, the elegist will inherit the legacy of elegiac protection from the living—from his readers and, more significantly, his fellow poets—when he, too, meets his end.[42]

This compensatory model of elegiac self-protection culminates at the end of the poem in the twelve-line epitaph, which of course seems to commemorate the poet himself rather than the obscure villager. The elegist (perhaps with a furtive glance towards his

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[39] Kozlov, 49.
[40] Spargo, 129.
[41] Spargo, 160. (Spargo quotes Milton's "Lycidas" here.)
[42] Spargo, 162.

reader) considers the possibility that passersby will no doubt recall to others how he, "sorrowful, gloomy, with bowed head" ("priskorbyi, sumrachnyi, s glavoiu naklonennoi") would "often go into the grove to weep, / Like a wanderer deprived of his homeland, his friends, everything…" ("On chasto ukhodil v dubravu slezy lit', / Kak strannik, rodiny, druzei, vsego lishennyi…"). Passersby will entreat others to read the inscription on the grave where the poet now lays so that they may "bless the memory of the kind man with a tear" ("Chtob pamiat' dobrogo slezoi blagoslovit'"):

> *Здесь пепел юноши безвременно сокрыли,*
> *Что слава, счастие, не знал он в мире сем.*
> *Но музы от него лица не отвратили,*
> *И меланхолии, печать была на нем.*
>
> *Он кроток сердцем был, чувствителен душою —*
> *Чувствительным творец награду положил.*
> *Дарил несчастных он — чем только мог — слезою;*
> *В награду от творца он друга получил.*
>
> *Прохожий, помолись над этою могилой;*
> *Он в ней нашел приют от всех земных тревог;*
> *Здесь все оставил он, что в нем греховно было,*
> *С надеждою, что жив его спаситель-бог.*
>
> Here are prematurely hidden the ashes of a youth, / who in this world did not know glory and happiness. / But the muses did not turn their faces from him, / And the imprint of melancholy was on him. // He was meek of heart, he sensitive of soul— / For the sensitive ones the creator has laid an award. / He gave the unfortunate all he could—a tear; / And as a reward from the creator he received a friend. // Passerby, pray over this grave; / He has found in it a refuge from all his earthly troubles; / He has left all that was sinful in him here, / With the hope that his savior-God is alive.

Zhukovsky not only domesticates epitaph by employing one of the traditional forms of address to a passerby found in Russian epitaphs, but integrates the epitaphic model of reciprocity and elegiac protection into a distinctly spiritual framework.

This framework can be discerned in subsequent reworkings of the graveyard theme, such as Pushkin's "Whether I wander the noisy streets..." ("Brozhu li ia vdol' ulits

shumnykh," 1829) and "When I wander, pensive, outside the city..." ("Kogda za gorodom, zadumchiv, ia brozhu…," 1836), which feature a meditative poet-wanderer in graveyard settings. While "When I wander, pensive..." features a juxtaposition between the tombstones of the more elegant, yet miry urban graveyards of Petersburg and the humble but more pristine graveyards of the countryside, thereby evoking the contrastive structure of Gray's *Elegy*, the poem also features a palpable spiritual dimension, as a villager passes by the poet-wanderer "with a prayer and a sigh" ("s molitvoi i so vzdokhom"). "Whether I wander...," on the other hand, employs the elegy's epitaphic structure in a subtle and innovative way. As "Country Churchyard" concludes with the death of the poet's imagined persona memorialized in an epitaph, Pushkin's poem concludes with the death of its speaker as well, though it is not conveyed by an epitaph. Rather, it is embedded in the poem's rhetorical structure. As Michael Wachtel notes, "The overwhelming emphasis on the self (first-person singular) gradually shifts from nominative to dative case, then disappears entirely in the final stanza with the imagined death of the speaker (and the attendant decomposition of the ego)."[43] Moreover, the final lines implicitly resemble an epitaph with its generalized grammar of universal sentiment:

> И пусть у гробового входа
> Младая будет жизнь играть,
> И равнодушная природа
> Красою вечною сиять.
>
> And at the sepulchral entrance / May young life play / And indifferent nature / Shine with everlasting beauty.

Pushkin incorporates the central paradigms Zhukovsky renders from Gray, though with Zhukovsky's added motif of the soul's Christian pilgrimage. "Where will fate doom me to death?" ("I gde mne smert' poshlet sud'bina?") the poet of "Whether I wander…"

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[43] Wachtel, 159.

wonders: “In battle, on a journey, at sea?” (“V boiu lik v stranstvii, v volnakh?”) Like Gray and Zhukovsky, Pushkin highlights both the inevitability of death and the hope for consolation, as well as the question of where along his journey he will meet his end.

How do these models of spiritual-seeking and consolation function in the twentieth-century Russian elegy? In his seminal study of modern Anglo-American poetry, *Poetry of Mourning*, Jahan Ramazani argues that the modern elegist in fact resists the traditional elegiac conventions, by which the deceased is released or replaced and the speaker finds consolation or, at the very least, resolution. In resisting elegiac protection (i.e., the defense of the other who has already been harmed), consolation, and resolution, an elegy becomes an *anti-elegy*, which, as Ramazani argues, constitutes the essence of the modern elegy.[44] The modern elegist does not take up the work of mourning, whereby he transfers his attachment from the mourned object to a substitute, but rather indulges in the practice of melancholic mourning. In other words, the elegist narcissistically identifies with the lost object, turns his mournful eye inward towards himself, and sustains his grief rather than resolving it.[45] While Ramazani suggests that the mechanism of melancholic mourning in the modern elegy reflects a degradation or alienation in cultural practices presiding over grief in the twentieth century, Spargo traces the psychological paradigm of melancholia in elegiac literature spanning long before the contemporary period (including, for example, episodes in *Antigone* and *Hamlet*). More significantly, Spargo discerns in this practice not a neurosis or psychological weakness but a striving for ethical integrity. The melancholic impulse, he suggests, signifies an

[44] Ramazani, 1-23.
[45] See Freud, 126-128, for his commentary on the qualities that distinguish melancholia from the work of mourning. On Ramazani’s application of Freud’s paradigm, see Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, esp. xi, 4-8, 28-31.

ethical concern for the other, which stems from the mourner's "dedication to the time and realm of the other" and a desire to interrogate "the symbolic social structures that contain and reduce the meaning of the other who is being lamented."[46] Regardless of its ethical implications, however, both scholars suggest that the elegist's desire to achieve intimacy with the other results in a modern elegy that foresees no end to mourning—it is melancholic (in psychological terms) and *anti-elegiac* (in generic terms).[47]

Of course, working within the confines of a theoretical binary risks diminishing the nuances of both a genre's development as well as the corpuses of individual poets—even more so if the binary is taken from a different cultural and linguistic context (the Anglo-American tradition) and grafted onto another (the Russian tradition). Indeed, Boris Ryzhii's 1998 elegy, "The words of the trans-Asian poet will acquire a pan-European gloss…" ("Priobretut vseevropeiskii losk…"), certainly constitutes an exception to this modern anti-elegiac trend Ramazani traces. In the poem, the poet wishes to be buried in a "nameless Sverdlovsk cemetery" ("na bezymiannom kladbishche sverdlovskom") located in his native Vtorchermet neighborhood of Ekaterinburg, so that he may rest alongside his old neighborhood friends whose profiles are now etched in marble ("potomu chto tam moi kenty, / ikh profili na mramore i rozy").[48] Though Kozlov offers Ryzhii's elegy as a telling example of how the churchyard elegy works in the post-Soviet context,[49] it is worth noting that the ethical problem posed by the alterity of the mourned object is conveniently elided. Though Ryzhii's elegy laments the post-Soviet equivalent of the nameless villagers—locals who graduated from trade school with Cs and "faltered with

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[46] Spargo, 11.
[47] Ramazani, xi; Spargo, 13.
[48] Ryzhii composed this elegy several years before committing suicide on May 7, 2001.
[49] See Kozlov, 67.

copper in their skulls / like the first soldiers of perestroika" ("zapnulis' s med'iu v cherepakh / kak pervye soldaty perestroiki")—these men also happen to be the poet's childhood friends. Nonetheless, the poet plays up the traditional trope of anonymity by calling the Sverlovsk cemetery "nameless."

The elegy also contains the traditional unknown passerby, or here, a "woman who wasn't with me" ("zhenshchina, chto ne byla so mnoi"), who in turn models for the reader how the elegist should be compensated for his preservation of the memory of the dead:

> Она откроет голубой альбом,
> где лица наши будущим согреты,
> где живы мы, в альбоме голубом,
> земная шваль: бандиты и поэты.[50]
>
> She will open the blue album, / in which our faces are inspired by the future, / where we are living, in the blue album, / the earth's riffraff: bandits and poets.

As with the speaker of Zhukovsky's elegy, the speaker of Ryzhii's elegy serves as the only link to the forgotten "bandits and poets" who rest in the nameless Sverdlovsk cemetery, left behind by the new post-Soviet era of capitalism. The poet enjoys elegiac reciprocity between himself and the deceased and employs many of the traditional tropes established in Zhukovsky's translation. At the same time, however, Ryzhii dispenses with certain conventions, thereby revealing glimmers of an anti-elegiac tenor: unlike Zhukovsky's elegy, which provides consolation in the fact that the deceased poet has left his sins behind, and the hope that the grace of God will prevail ("Zdes' vse ostavil on, chto v nem grekhovno bylo, / S nadezhdoiu, chto zhiv ego spasitel'-bog"), Ryzhii's elegy lacks a hope of salvation. Thus, though the elegy contains a resolution—the poet may be remembered, if misunderstood—it does not provide consolation.

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[50] Ryzhii, 198-199.

While Ryzhii sidesteps the problem of alterity and resists both the consolatory and anti-consolatory elegiac models of mourning, other modern Russian elegists tend to either embark upon this generic space of meeting the deceased other in new ways or to reject the task of meeting altogether. In Joseph Brodsky's earlier "A Jewish Cemetery near Leningrad…" ("Evreiskoe kladbishche okolo Leningrada…," 1958), the speaker encounters a Jewish graveyard, where the poet feels a certain conflicted kinship with those who buried there—lawyers, merchants, musicians, revolutionaries.[51]

> Для себя пели.
> Для себя копили.
> Для других умирали.
> Но сначала платили налоги,
> уважали пристава,
> и в этом мире, безвыходно материальном,
> толковали Талмуд,
> оставаясь идеалистами.
>
> Может, видели больше.
> А, возможно, верили слепо.
> Но учили детей, чтобы были терпимы
> и стали упорны.
> И не сеяли хлеба.
> Никогда не сеяли хлеба.
> Просто сами ложились
> в холодную землю, как зерна.
> И навек засыпали.
> А потом – их землей засыпали,
> зажигали свечи,
> и в день Поминовения
> голодные старики высокими голосами,
> задыхаясь от голода, кричали об успокоении.
> И они обретали его.
> В виде распада материи.[52]

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[51] This moment certainly contains a foil to Pushkin's "When outside the city, pensive, I wander…" Whereas the speaker of Pushkin's poem looks at the mausoleums of the deceased merchants and bureaucrats in the swampy Petersburg cemetery, he takes solace in his "ancestral cemetery" ("kladbishche rodovoe") in the country.

[52] Brodskii, *Izbrannye stikhotvoreniia*, 6.

> For themselves they sang. / For themselves they hoarded. / For others they died. / But first they paid taxes, / respected the police officer, / and in this world, hopelessly material, / they interpreted the Talmud, / remaining idealists. // Maybe they saw more. / Or maybe they believed blindly. / But they taught the children to be tolerant / and became obstinate. / and they did not sow grain. / They never sowed grain. / They simply laid themselves / into the cold earth, like seeds. / And fell forever asleep. / And then — people covered them with earth, / burned candles, / and on the day of commemoration / hungry geriatrics with high-pitched voices, / gasping from hunger, shouted about consolation. / and they gained it. / in the form of the disintegration of matter.

Though the speaker conjectures about their lives and faith, it is with a stoic flatness, which conveys an emotional distance: "Maybe they saw more, / But maybe, they believed blindly," the poet remarks ("Mozhet, videli bol'she, / A, vozmozhno, verili slepo"). He does not attempt to construct a sense of intimacy or elegiac reciprocity with these unknown others. The repetition of "maybe" underscores his regard for their private lives, unknown to him. Furthermore, whereas the obscure villagers of Zhukovsky's poem "went along their path light-heartedly" in life ("bespechno shli tropinkoiu svoei"), the speaker of Brodsky's poem depicts a scenario in which the decay of death mirrors that of life. The deceased townsmen did not sow grain or conquer persistent fields but became themselves persistent and simply "laid themselves into the cold earth like seeds."

While a heightened metaphysical dimension is hinted at with the comparison of the people's entombed remains to buried seeds, such potential is rejected near the end with consolation found only in the form of disintegrated matter, and the suddenly distant view of the cemetery from the outside, "behind the crooked fence of rotten plywood, four kilometers from the tram ring." This scene replaces the conventional pastoral landscape with a scene of urban decay, whose metaphysical potential is polluted by Soviet life.

Boris Slutsky's "Village Cemetery" ("Sel'skoe kladbishche") also foregoes the construction of reciprocity with the lamented object. Instead, the elegy depicts the centuries-long cultural debates spanning from the schism of the Russian Church (signaled

by Slutsky's use of the word *raskol*) in the seventeenth century to the modern tension between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism in the Soviet atheistic state. As the indifferent wind strikes the tin of the cross and the tin of the star, the creaking monuments continue the debate between religion and secularism: the cross creaks, "God exists!" ("Bog est'!"), while the star answers "There is no God and never was" ("boga ne bylo i net").

> Как спорили звезда и крест!
> Не согласились до сих пор!
> Конечно, нет в России мест,
> где был доспорен этот спор.
>
> А ветер ударяет в жесть
> креста, и слышится: Бог есть!
> И жесть звезды скрипит в ответ,
> что бога не было и нет.
>
> Пока была душа жива,
> ревели эти голоса.
> Теперь вокруг одна трава.
> Теперь вокруг одни леса.[53]
>
> How the cross and star argued! / They haven't agreed to this day! / Of course, there is no place in Russia, / where this argument was argued to its end. // And the wind strikes the tin / of the cross, and it is heard "God exists!" / and the tin of the star creaks/scratches in response, / that God is not and never was. // As long as there was a living soul / these voices roared. / Now there is only grass. / Now there are only forests.

As Marat Grinberg suggests, while the melancholic speaker in Zhukovsky's elegy laments the death of the unknown young man and maintains the hope in God's grace toward the dead, Slutsky depicts a scene of historical breadth, wherein the souls of the dead are extinguished: "The tins tremble not under an inspiration from God or the deceased, but in response to the silent and indifferent forces of nature. The cemetery is a

[53] Slutskii, *SS*, 2: 324.

place of complete demise which can tell the living something about the past but nothing about the present or the future."[54]

Though the speaker inserts asides, through which we sense his presence ("Of course, there is no place in Russia, / where this argument was argued to its end," the poet notes), the underlying tasks of self-mourning and compensatory modeling are absent. Rather than evoke the elegiac tradition intertextually, Grinberg argues, Slutsky writes "A Village Cemetery" as an elegiac parody in order to open up a polemical field within his verse. Slutsky later composes "A five-cornered star argued with a six-cornered star…" in response to his previous churchyard elegy, wherein he "expose[s] the Jewish underpinnings of his poetics without shattering his positioning within Russian literature."[55]

As the "homeland" of Russian poetry, the churchyard elegy often serves as a poetic space in which a poet may open up new polemical or semantic fields within his or her corpus or distill central hallmarks of his or her poetics. The cemetery, as K.S. Sokolov suggests, functions not as a place of rest, but "a locus" that gives a "performative value" to the poet's speech uttered over the graves, and is thus perceived as an "artistic or civic credo."[56] Indeed, Aleksei Purin's satirical churchyard elegy, "Yelagin Island" ("Elagin ostrov," 1985), has been called the "most vivid" dramatization of his "witty diagnosis of the contemporary state of culture."[57] The elegy depicts Yelagin Island, a recreational park near St. Petersburg, where the poetic speaker walks among monuments not of marble or bronze, but cut-rate plastered and asbestos-filled

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[54] Grinberg, 244.
[55] Grinberg, 243.
[56] Sokolov, "'Evreiskoe kladbishche okolo Leningrada…' I. Brodskogo: tema i metod," 313.
[57] Shaitanov, "Metafiziki i liriki," 21.

sculptures.[58] The poet watches flimsy boats carrying burly school boys and young women from a local teachers' college float by: the boats are constructed of rusty nails and flimsy boards with oars that barely disturb the oily surface of the water. It is a summer day, yet the summer crawls by like a "sticky, slimy snail" ("likoiu i slizistoi ulitkoiu"). Watching the young boat passengers drink their "ordinary" wine, the poet concludes:

> И уж забронировано место их.
> Молодые каменеют лица их -
> так же, как у тех пловчих асбестовых,
> у метателей тех диска гипсовых...
>
> Да и ты, среди куртин гуляющий
> и чужим пыланием взволнованный,
> радуешься вдруг всепоглощающей
> тишине забвенья загипсованной.[59]
>
> And their place is already reserved. / Their young faces turn to stone / like those of the asbestos female swimmers, / and the plastered disc throwers… // And you, walking among the curtain walls / excited by someone else's burning, / rejoice suddenly in the all-encompassing / silence of plastered oblivion.

Walking among the plastered figures, the poet takes sudden joy in his surroundings, and a new, ironic sentimentalism is portrayed: the poet does not meditate upon real graves, but cheaply made sculptures; his meditation is driven not by the fate of a nameless deceased other, but the ordinariness of some passersby, who, in the original churchyard model would be participating in the poet's commemoration, but in Purin's elegy only more firmly consign the poet to oblivion, as they drink their wine and proceed by, ignorant of his presence. The questions of the poet's ability to discern the other's dignity are eclipsed

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[58] This scene inverts the traditional properties of the "monument" motif of Horace's "Exegi monumentum" and Pushkin's "Ia pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi…" ("I erected myself a monument made not by hand…"). Brodsky, too, inverts this motif in his "Ia pamiatnik vozdvig sebe inoi!" ("I erected a different kind of monument for myself!"), wherein the poet constructs of statue of himself made of plaster. The bust turns his backside toward "the shameful century" and his buttocks are turned to "a sea of half-truths." For an incisive reading of the Brodsky's reworking of the "monument" tradition (a tradition contiguous with the graveyard tradition), see Pyatkevich, 161-182.

[59] Purin, 71.

by his ability to discern the degenerative state of late Soviet culture and its loss of dignity and authenticity. It presents a wry yet melancholic work of self-mourning, but the poet is too self-critical in his penchant for irony to sustain his grief. Instead, he sarcastically rejoices.

As the above examples illustrate, a poet's negotiation of the churchyard elegy's paradigms of mourning as well as its liminal setting often brings the idiosyncrasies of his poetic world into sharp focus. Not only does the poet's meditation become a "performative" act, but the poet's encounter with the graves and epitaphs of unknown others challenges the poet to test the capacity of poetic language to penetrate the boundaries of alterity, verbalize death, and safeguard the poet himself against death. Moreover, as Sokolov suggests, while the poet negotiates the metaphysical limits posed by the graves before him, both he and the reader "enter into the work of self-identification"[60] as the poet, unconsciously or consciously, considers the inevitability of his own death.

The above examples also illustrate the diverse and vast constellation of tropes and conventions that constitutes the Russian churchyard elegy. This constellation is comprised of disparate generic contours (ranging from the pastoral to the epitaph), motifs (the anonymous grave, the solitary traveler or wanderer), conventions (such as repeated mournful refrains and a structural arc that moves from description to self-description), and themes, including the alterity of the other, the negotiation of the poet's inner persona (the romantic lyrical "I"), and the gravity of death. The close readings contained in this chapter illustrate how Sedakova takes up the work of elegizing, which Monika Greenleaf

[60] Sokolov, 313.

describes as "the recoding of personal experience into the language of elegy,"[61] by reworking the parameters of the Russian churchyard elegy. In recoding her personal experiences into the language of the genre, however, Sedakova subverts the traditional practice of lament in a meditative triangulation of memory, language, and death. This triangulation leads not to a meeting with an obscure villager or the poet's own imagined death, but the silent, meditative capacity of the poetic word. Thus, while Gray's *Elegy* expands the parameters of mourning to encompass more abstract subjects such as socio-economic disparities, the death of an unknown other, and the lyric subject himself, Sedakova subverts the element of mourning altogether in order to expand the metaphysical capacity of elegizing in "Country Churchyard" and *Stelai and Inscriptions*, which, as will be shown below, continue and respond to the tradition of the churchyard elegy.

SEDAKOVA'S "COUNTRY CHURCHYARD"

A common observation of the elegy is that its texture is often repetitive, rhythmic, cyclic, and even monotonous. As Peter Sacks observes, many elegies recapitulate prior losses, they reenact an "entry" into a preexisting language and code, and they often seem to "begin again" or to commence with a "yet once more." Sacks notes, for example, that Thyrsis's song in Theocritus's "First Idyll," which is commonly regarded as the originator of the genre, contains the refrain, "Begin, Muses, begin again the pastoral song."[62] Sedakova's elegies, however, have a tendency not to "begin again," but rather to continue on as if they had never ended in the first place. Her elegies to the deceased Leonid Gubanov ("Or is death a piece of news, and we ourselves won't say…") and (still

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[61] Greenleaf 89.
[62] Sacks 23.

living) Ivan Zhdanov ("The tree, Vanya, that very tree, the sycamore…") begin seemingly mid-conversation with the addressee. Though Sedakova's churchyard elegy does not begin mid-conversation, it begins with a reminiscence of a repeated action—childhood visits to an old churchyard:

> Сельское кладбище
>
> Мы приезжали на велосипедах к погосту восемнадцатого века,
> мы не клялись, но взрослые не знали, и это было лучше каждый раз,
> где двигались церковные деревья вдоль неба, как ненынешние реки,
> их тени расходились и сходились и обрывали разговор при нас.
>
> Чугунный ангел свиток или факел придерживал: трех девочек старинных
> он сон оберегал и нам велел
> не забывать, что времени немного и что при дифтеритах и ангинах
> шаг слишком явен, голос слишком смел.
>
> Как сердце любит странную надежду. Как ветер жизни, страшный для героя,
> качает в колыбельной колыбели. Как сердце любит память ни о чем,
> нигде, никак... Неуловимым взглядом обмениваешься себе с сестрою,
> как этот ствол, едва мы отвернемся, как белый луч с белёным кирпичом.
>
> Ты, связь времен, и если ты бываешь (а разве нет?), ты сон выздоровленья,
> ты медленно течешь и долго видишь детей перед могилами детей.
> – Пойдем, пора. – Постой, еще немного. Я встану, если нужно, на колени,
> я не боюсь, когда ты разгибаешь свой свиток круглый до скончанья дней.
>
> Осветит ли мне путь чугунный факел? Заговорит неговорящий голос?
> Я вижу, как нас видят, отстраняя, чтоб лучше разглядеть последний раз...
> Никто не знает берега другого. Никто не вынет драгоценный образ
> из этой неизвестной колыбели. Никто, никто не разуверит нас…
>
> Country Churchyard // We would come by bicycle to the eighteenth-century churchyard, / we would not swear, but the adults did not know, and it was better every time, / where the church trees moved along the sky, like rivers of another time, / their shadows dispersing and gathering and halting their conversation upon in our presence. // A cast-iron angel there held a scroll or a lantern: he guarded the sleep of three girls of old / and ordered us / not to forget that there is little time and that in the presence of the diphtherias and tonsillitises / [our] step is too overt, our voice too bold. // How the heart loves strange hope. How the wind of life, frightening for the hero, / rocks cradles in a lullaby. How the heart loves memory of nothing, / nowhere, no how… You exchange a furtive gaze between yourself and your sister, / like this tree trunk, we will hardly turn back, like a white beam of light with whitewashed brick. // You, connector of ages, and if you occur (and don't you?), you are a mending sleep, / you slowly flow and for a long time see children before the graves of children. / "Let's go, it's time." "Wait, let's stay a while

> longer." I'll get, if necessary, on my knees, / I'm not afraid when you straighten your round scroll out until the end of days. // Will this cast-iron lantern light my way? Will the unspeaking voice begin to speak? / I see, as we are seen, pushing aside, in order to better discern for the last time… / No one knows another shore. No one will extract the precious image / from this unknown cradle. No one, no one will dissuade us.

The imperfective verbal forms and repetitive syntax (the first two lines begin with "we": "My priezzhali…; My ne klialis'…"), followed by the phrase "every time" ("i eto bylo luchshe kazhdyi raz") underscore the cyclic, repetitious nature of the memory. Indeed, as Sacks suggests, the repetitive, inherited language of the elegy which is frequently comprised of subtextual allusions to previous poems, as well as repeating refrains, imagery, and rhymes in the elegy itself, creates a continuity which serves to oppose "the extreme discontinuity of death."[63] Indeed, in addition to the poem's premise of recalling a repeated action, repeated phonemes, phrases, and motifs imbue the texture of Sedakova's poem. The second masculine rhyme pair of the opening stanza ("raz" and "nas") also concludes the final stanza, this time punctuated with ellipses, thereby hinting at the potential for further repetition. On the lexical level, semantic roots correlating to walking ("khod"), rocking and/or lullabies ("koleb"), the color white ("bel"), standing ("stoj"), and, finally, seeing ("vid") repeat in phrasal pairs: "teni raskhodilis' i skhodilis'…"; "…kachaet v kolybel'noi kolybeli…"; "belyi luch s belenym kirpichom"; "– Postoi, eshche nemnogo. Ia vstanu…"; "Ia vizhu, kak nas vidiat…." The elegy is also marked by apophatic refrains (a hallmark of Sedakova's poetry in general), both at the poem's midpoint ("How the heart loves memory of nothing, / no where, no how…") and once more at the poem's conclusion: "No one knows another shore. No one will extract the precious image / from this unknown cradle. No one, no one will dissuade us." Such repeating negations echo Zhukovsky's elegy, which unlike Gray's, conveys the finality of

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[63] Sacks, 23.

the villagers' sleep in negative constructions:

> Ни крики петуха, ни звучный гул рогов,
> Ни ранней ласточки на кровле щебетанье—
> Ничто не вызовет почивших их гробов.
>
> Not the cock's cries, nor the sonorous roar of horns, / not the twittering of an early swallow on the roof / Nothing will summon the deceased from their tombs.

However, while Zhukovsky incorporates other repeating introductory adverbs and stylistic features, such as in the description of the silence of the landscape with the recurrence of "povsiudu" ("everywhere")—"Everywhere silence; everywhere a dead sleep" ("Povsiudu tishina; povsiudu mertvyi son…")—and the anaphora of "lish'" ("only") ("Lish' izredka … / Lish' slyshitsia … // Lish' dikaia sova …"),[64] Sedakova emphasizes not ubiquity or scarcity but nothingness: "pamiat' ni o chem, / nigde, nikak…." This second series of negations in combination with the repetitive phrase, "I see, as we are seen," culminate in the poet's "elegiac" recognition: that no one can "know" another "shore," and no one will dissuade them from this fact.

In sustaining the poet's grief and keeping it in motion, Sacks argues, poetic repetition both allows the poet's grief to be "conjured forth and exorcised" while also providing comfort in a sense of ceremony.[65] Lidiia Ginzberg, on the other hand, emphasizes the capacity of elegiac repetition to facilitate recognition. "Elegiac poetics," she writes, "is the *poetics of recognition*, and tradition, manifested namely in *repetition*, is one its strongest poetic mechanisms."[66] Such recognition, as Greenleaf argues, lies in the elegist's sharpened awareness of the absence of the original object, which in turn

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[64] Garrison also notes Zhukovsky's use of repeated stylistic features. He notes that Zhukovsky's anaphora of "lish'" augments Gray's once repeated "Save" in lines 7 and 9 of the *Elegy*. See Garrison, 131.
[65] Sacks 23.
[66] Ginzburg 29. Ginzburg, of course, alludes to Mandelstam's poem "Tristia" wherein the poet asserts, "And sweet is but the moment of recognition" ("I sladok nam lish' uznavan'ia mig").

engenders a “language of mourning.”[67] In terms of the churchyard elegy, however, Kozlov argues that the elegiac recognition achieved is the poet’s (albeit idealized) understanding of the anonymous other and a sense of shared values.[68]

Sedakova’s churchyard elegy, however, contains neither the traditional elegiac paradigm of recognition of absence, nor the churchyard paradigm of recognition of commonality. Recognition is not achieved in the lyric subject’s understanding of the deceased, unnamed other and a sense of shared values (as Kozlov argues), but in her rejection of this task. The poet does not seek reciprocity by seeking to close the metaphysical gulf that stretches between her and the unknown young girls (“starinnye devitsy”) whose sleep is guarded by a cast-iron angel. To the contrary, the elegist, through her repeated childhood visits to the graveyard, comes to a recognition and appreciation of the impenetrability of the other, as well as her own end—death, like the elegy itself, presents not discontinuity but continuity. Like water, death is the “connector of ages” (“sviaz' vremen”).[69]

As Benjamin Paloff observes, the “Other” of Sedakova’s churchyard elegy is not an obscure villager but an entity undefined. The “connector of times” whom the poet addresses in the poem’s final lines, Paloff suggests, is not necessarily God or even the fellow traveler with whom the poet comes to the churchyard: “As is often the case in Sedakova’s verse, the second person remains undefined, though in this lyrical ambiguity there is a particular ontological foundation. For Sedakova the openness of ‘you’ mirrors the openness of ‘I,’” he observes. Thus, when the poet asserts that “No one knows

[67] Greenleaf, 49.
[68] Kozlov, *Russkaia elegiia*, 49.
[69] It is worth noting that this term recalls Hamlet’s words in A. Kroneberg’s 1844 translation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*: “Raspalas' sviaz' vremen! / Zachem zh ia sviazat' ee rozhden!” (The original reads: “The time is out of joint; —O cursed Spite, / That ever I was born to see it right!”)

another shore," we can also discern the inverse: that "no one knows the shore of one's own 'I.'"[70] Thus, if in Gray's *Elegy* (and Zhukovsky's translation) the limits of poet-speaker become blurred in the presence of the face of the stonecutter-poet-Other, in Sedakova's churchyard elegy this dynamic is dramatized in the face of a more abstract Other, the "connector of ages."[71]

The poet's omission of the genre's central romantic lyric markers is only highlighted, however, by her employment of the churchyard elegy's generic signals, including the Zhukovskian title, rural graveyard setting, and central premise of a poet's encounter with the grave(s) of strangers. Against this generic background the speaker who occupies the foreground becomes all the more striking: she is not a romantic figure with "languid eyes" ("tomnymi ochami") who sits beneath a dormant willow ("sidel pod dremliushcheiu ivoi") or "stands sorrowfully" ("Stoiu pechalen"), but a young girl who arrives by bicycle.[72] (One recalls Belikov's horror at seeing Varen'ka on a bicycle in Chekhov's "Man in a Case": "A woman or girl on a bike—it's horrible!") While Zhukovsky's graveyard poet encounters the "forefathers of the village" who lie in "solitary graves" locked in a "wakeless sleep," the speaker of Sedakova's poem encounters "three girls of old"; the conventional anonymous grave is converted into an

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[70] Paloff, "Esli eto ne sad…," 500. Maria Khotimsky discusses the overcoming of the "romantic 'I'" as a characteristic of Sedakova's verse in juxtaposition to Shvarts's. See Khotimsky, "Singing David, Dancing David," 747.

[71] See Paloff, "Esli eto ne sad…," 500 n. 15. Paloff's use of the term "the face of the Other" is a clear allusion to Levinas's discussions of alterity, the "face of the other," and the "face of death." See Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, 144-153.

[72] In Zhukovsky's elegy, the villager ("selianin") "walks with a slow step, pensively" ("medlitel'noi stopoiu / idet, zadumavshis'…"). The speakers of Pushkin's elegies who give pause over the unnamed deceased in graveyards usually wander (brodit): ("Brozhu li is vdol' ulits shumnykh, / Vkhozhu l' vo mnogoliudnyi khram, / Sizhu l' mezh iunoshei bezumnykh, Ia predaius' moim mechtam"); ("Kogda za gorodom, zadumchiv, ia brozhu / I na publichnoe kladbishche zakhozhu…"); or stand solemnly "Stoiu pechalen na kladbishche. / Gliazhu krugom…"). The speaker of Khodasevich's "Elegy," too, moves by foot: the old and pensive fisherman does not turn at the sound of his steps ("Zadumchivyi i vetkhii rybolov, / Edva oborotias' na zvuk moikh shagov…").

"unknown cradle"; death is a "healing sleep." The poet's comparison of death to a healing sleep in the penultimate stanza brings us into the realm of consolation, though with an admittedly curious effect, given that we seem to have skipped the traditional motions of lament. Though framed in a distinct constellation of lexical markers and motifs that traditionally characterize the churchyard elegy, the elegiac task of remembering supplants the work of mourning in Sedakova's "Country Churchyard."

As the poet eschews both the churchyard elegy's traditionally mournful tone and subjective intimacy, we are reminded of another poem that takes up the elegiac task of remembrance while dispensing with elegiac conventions. As Savelii Senderovich carefully demonstrates, Pushkin's "Remembrance" ("Vospominanie," 1828) constitutes a "refined elegy" not in its adherence to the convention of elegiac dialogue, but in its *rejection* of such allusiveness.[73] In dispensing with the elegy's characteristic texture of intertextual allusion in favor of refined soliloquy, the lyric speaker of Pushkin's poem embeds his own "long scroll" of memories into the memory of the genre.[74]

> Воспоминание безмолвно предо мной
> Свой длинный развивает свиток;
> И с отвращением читая жизнь мою,
> Я трепещу и проклинаю,
> И горько жалуюсь, и горько слезы лью,
> Но строк печальных не смываю.
>
> Memory silently before me / unfurls his long scroll; / And with repugnance reading my life, / I tremble and curse; / I bitterly complain and bitterly weep, / But I do not wipe away the sad lines.

Senderovich juxtaposes these last lines of the first, published half of "Remembrance" with the corresponding lines of the second, unrevised, and unpublished half of the poem, which features two angels from the poet's past. These "sweet shadows" ("milye teni")

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[73] Senderovich, *Aleteiia*, 138.
[74] Senderovich, *Aleteiia*, 62-63. See also Greenleaf 90.

both guard and avenge the poet and speak to him "in a dead language / About the secrets of happiness and the grave" ("I oba govoriat mne mertvym iazykom / O tainakh schastiia i groba"). By juxtaposing these lines, Senderovich illustrates how Pushkin superimposes the sequence of events cast by his memory onto the familiar iconographic image of the guardian angel with the scroll, who, in the Russian Orthodox tradition, accompanies one from baptism until death, recording his actions.[75] When the person dies, the guardian angel unfurls his scroll and leads the deceased through a post-mortem examination of his life spent on earth. In Pushkin's poem, the scroll likewise contains all of his past deeds and represents memory.[76]

The "healing sleep" of death in Sedakova's poem echoes the alleviating sleep that serves as the "reward for the day's labors" ("son, dnevnykh trudov nagrada") in Pushkin's "Remembrance." Both poets encroach upon the dream-state of sleep, yet while the speaker of Pushkin's poem is barred from the otherworldly state by his memories, the speaker of Sedakova's poem is brought into closer proximity to the state. "I am not afraid when you unfurl your round scroll to the end of days," the speaker says. Though the scroll in Pushkin's poem causes pain to the poet, he does not (or cannot) wipe away its words—"memory [in Pushkin's poetry] restores traces of the past truly and steadfastly, but *poetic* memory restores them forever," says Senderovich.[77] Thus, the recoding of memory becomes a central function of poetry. As Senderovich argues elsewhere, memory comprises the central motif in Pushkin's elegiac verse, wherein the central conflict is the "dramatic collision of memory with the current moment" and the central

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[75] Senderovich, *Aleteiia*, 39.
[76] Ibid., 76-78.
[77] Ibid., 12.

aim is "introspection through the process of reminiscence."[78]

For Sedakova, however, memory is connected not so much an aim of introspection but with entering a poetic or non-human consciousness. The central conflict does not involve a collision between the past and present, but the collision of the earthly and the otherworldly. Memory, says, Sedakova, allows the poet to hear words in relation to their origins and their notional and stylistic contexts.[79] When the halo of these linguistic and cultural contexts is revealed, each syllable of the poetic word functions as a threshold:

> Но слог его, высокий, как порог,
> выводит с освещенного крыльца
> в каком-то заполярье без конца,
> где всё стрекочет с острия копья
> кузнечиком в траве небытия.
>
> But his [the poet's] syllable, high, like a threshold, / leads away from the illumined porch / in some kind of polar region without an end, / where everything chirrs from the tip of a spear / like a grasshopper in the grasses of non-existence.[80]

In speaking of the inhuman quality of poetry, Sedakova compares it to an "anthropological experience," which she describes as "the experience of the *improbable person*, *homo impossibilis*" who encounters within him or herself not so much "another, unknown self," or an "instantaneous personality" (such as "the instantaneous personality who created these poems" in Mallarmé), or the "musical subject" described by A.F. Losev, but rather "the pure desire to disappear ('I am ready for death')—at the threshold,

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[78] Senderovich, *Figura sokrytiia*, 244. This elegiac aim, Senderovich argues, constitutes the "core" of Pushkin's work in general, as well.
[79] Sedakova, *In Praise of Poetry*, 134.
[80] Sedakova plays on the double meaning of the word "slog" here, which means both "syllable" and "style." It is both the poet's "high style," yet, more concretely, his use of poetic language or the *word*, which leads one into an inhuman state.

in the beginning, in the *promise* of something completely different that he recognizes as extremely one's own."[81]

The entry through this threshold is dramatized in the churchyard elegy as the poet enters the rural graveyard, a realm of silence "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife." While the elegy's trope of silence traditionally signifies death as Kozlov and others observe, the motif carries more complex connotations in Sedakova's poetics.[82] As Sedakova says, "For me the word is surrounded by a huge zone of whiteness, of silence—the silence within words. The silence within words is, as you know, the fundamental principle of hesychasm; for me it is where poetry begins."[83] Hesychasm (which derives from the Greek word *hesychia*, meaning "quietness," "silence," or "inner stillness") denotes "silence of the heart" and "signifies the quest for union with God through 'apophatic' or 'non-iconic' prayer, that is to say, prayer that is free from images and discursive thinking."[84] Ona Renner-Fahey devotes particular attention to the ways in which the methods and symbolic schema of hesychasm provide constant motifs in Sedakova's verse, including silence, darkness (which was believed to aid hesychasts in attaining inner calm), wind (which was perceived as the "carrier of prayers" in hesychasm), and weaving—both as a practical task, such as belt-weaving, but as a meditative, linguistic activity as well. "Word-weaving" and "rhythmic repetition" in combination with breathing techniques and meditative posture facilitated direct links with God in hesychast prayer.[85]

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[81] Sedakova, "Poetry and Anthropology" in *Freedom to Believe*, 166. Henricke Stahl discusses this concept of Sedakova's poetry in Shtal', "'Poka tebia *eto* ne kosnulos''. Immanentnost' transtsendentnosti: Poetologicheskii razmyshleniia o misticheskikh aspektakh poezii Ol'gi Sedakovoi," 252-92.
[82] On silence as death in Gray's *Elegy* or the genre of the churchyard elegy in general, see Kozlov, 55-61.
[83] Sedakova, "A Rare Independence," 241.
[84] McGuckin, *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, 299-301.
[85] Renner-Fahey 152-155. See also Grierson 23 and Billington 55, from whom Renner-Fahey draws.

The apophatic refrains at the poem's center ("How the heart loves memory of nothing, / nowhere, no how…") and conclusion ("No one knows another shore. No one will extract the precious image … one, no one will dissuade us…") reveal the way in which the cyclic motion of remembrance—transfiguring the past into the present, considering its meaning for future, and then back again—leads not to a level of heightened introspection but a spiritual or ontological transgression which leads both inward (towards the center or origin of things) and outward (towards the otherwordly). This cyclic and enigmatic power of remembrance imbues the narrational structure of the poem, as the poet modulates between an exclusive "we" (she and her companion) and an inclusive "we" (she and the reader), which places the reader in different positions—at times outside of the depicted memory (as in stanzas one and two, when the speaker recalls her visits to the churchyard with an unnamed companion in the past tense), and sometimes within the depicted memory, alongside the speaker (a shift that is signaled by use of the demonstrative pronoun "this" in the third stanza: "kak *etot* stvol, edva my otvernemsia…" [emphasis mine]). In the fourth stanza, the poet addresses an additional addressee, the "connector of times," whom she addresses as "ty." Though addresses made in the second-person singular are characteristically ambiguous in Sedakova's verse, as Paloff has noted,[86] we can surmise that in the context of the churchyard elegy, wherein "death rages upon all" ("Na vsekh iaritsia smert'"), the "connector of times" who "slowly flows" and "sees for a long time children before the graves of children" is most certainly Death. A similar moment occurs in *Stelai and Inscriptions* when the poet suddenly acknowledges an additional addressee in the familiar second person ("ty"), who, similarly to the "connector of times" in "Country Churchyard," has an "attentive gaze":

[86] Paloff "Esli eto ne sad…," 500.

> Взгляд внимательный, смерть, ты не отнимешь –
> законную горсть
> у того, кто уходит, о нас печалясь.
>
> An attentive gaze, death, you won't take away / the legitimate handful / from the one who is leaving, still grieving over us.

By the fifth and final stanza, the speaker switches to future tense ("Will a cast-iron lantern light my way? Will an unspeaking voice begin to speak?") and asserts, "I see, as we are seen, pushing aside, to better see for the last time…." Unlike the use of "we" in the opening stanzas, which denotes the speaker and her companion, the use of "we" ("nas") in this instance is more ambiguous, possibly intended to include the reader. Moreover, the speaker is suddenly able to see herself as if from outside; the perspective shifts from first person to omniscient. In light of our proximity to the grave indicated by the poet's assertion, "No one will extract a precious image from *this* unknown cradle" ("Nikto ne vynet dragotsennyi obraz / iz *etoi* neizvestnoi kolybeli" [emphasis mine]), the first person plural of the final line, "No one, no one will dissuade us…" ("Nikto, nikto ne razuverit nas…") is ambiguously open, further emphasized by the ellipses.

Sedakova describes the enigmatic power of memory in her essay, "In Praise of Poetry," which she describes both a childhood tale and an *ars poetica*.[87] In describing the first inklings of her poetic inclination and some of her favorite early topics (places, birds, and berries), Sedakova recalls two significant events from her adolescence, which occurred in churchyards. The first occurs during a visit to Pasternak's grave, where there

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[87] As Sedakova explains in "Conform not…," she wrote the text at the request of V. Saitanov and originally intended it to be a "something along the lines of Tolstoi's *Detstvo* (Childhood)" that would convey the happiness of her childhood. She had also had a longstanding desire to write an *ars poetica*—and for that she "could not find the form either." So Saitanov's "seeming strange request" suddenly became an opportunity to blend both her stories of childhood and her musings on the nature of poetry. "In the course of 'Pokhvala poezii' the second voice gets more and more voluble and squeezes out the first, my childhood, about which there is finally less than I would like. But, perhaps, everything I write in my poetry is really about my childhood." See "Conform not," 66.

was a "wild rose bearing dark hips that looked black in the dark and rain." She writes, "I ate my fill of them and felt quite strange. Then I forgot all about it. And then in the winter the beginnings of 'The Wild Rose' came to me out of the blue."[88] A similar episode occurs once more when she visits an abandoned churchyard in her native Zaokskii region. After eating her fill of wild strawberries "also dark and sickeningly sweet, too much like blood" in the churchyard, a couple months later she rereads some verses she had just written, and she suddenly tastes her native Zaokskii region again:

> Течение деревьев придорожных
> краснеет. Сок, прозрачнейший в полыни,
> зеленоватый в ласковой гадюке,
> забагрянел в артерии моей.
> И близко торфяная кровь земли […][89]
>
> The flow of roadside trees / grows red. The juice, clearest in the wormwood, / greenish in the tender adder, / turned scarlet in my artery. / And the peat blood of the earth is near…

Berries not only come to signify Sedakova's first poetic inclinations, but also evoke, for the familiar reader, her poetic predecessors Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova, who can be detected both in the names of the poems Sedakova cites as well as their imagery of flowers and berries, which take on an auspicious quality in the essay:

> Душа воспитала шиповник,
> как братьев его – чернозем.
> Когда вас никто не упомнит,
> шиповник помянет добром.
> («Шиповник»)
>
> My soul nourished a rosehip, / like its brothers – the black earth. / When no one will remember you, / the rosehip will remember you with kindness.
> (Sedakova, "Rosehip")

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[88] Sedakova, *In Praise of Poetry*, 145.
[89] Red berries appear elsewhere in *Wild Dog Rose*. The poem, "Cat, Butterfly, Candle" ("Kot, babochka, svecha"), for example, mentions an adder in raspberries: "faster than we pull back our hand, / seeing an adder in the raspberries, / the spirit pulls back from us himself." ("…my otdernem ruku, / v maline uvidav gadiuku, / on ot sebia otdernet nas.") A poem on Sedakova's native village, "Azarovka. A Suite of Landscapes" ("Azarovka. Siuita peizazhei"), depicts an old woman with a heavy heart, like a drop on a berry.

The soul nourishes the rosehip, and the rosehip, akin to poetry, in turn also provides nourishment—in the form of memory. After the poet ingests the berries, she later writes a few lines of verse, not remembering. In this sequence the berry "becomes a word," as in Akhmatova's cycle *The Wild Rose Blooms* (*Shipovnik tsvetet*) ("The rosehip was so fragrant, / That it even became a word…" ["Shipovnik tak blagoukhal, / Chto dazhe prevratilsia v slovo…"]). Tsvetaeva's epitaphic poem, "You're walking onto me, passerby…" ("Idesh' na menia prokhozhii…," 1913), is also evoked. In the epitaph, the poet implores the passerby to eat one of the wild strawberries near her grave rather than just stand solemnly. Churchyard strawberries, she says, are the largest and sweetest ("Kladbishchesnkoi zemlianiki / krupnee i slashche net"). Eating one of these berries growing near her grave will generate a more lasting impression than simply standing over it with one's head bowed: "Easily think of me / Easily forget me," says the deceased poet ("Legko obo mne podumai, / Legko obo mne zabud'").[90]

Writing in 1982 of these circumstances surrounding her early poems and her favorite subjects perhaps inspired Sedakova to return to one of the places, the untended Zaokskii graveyard, where she ate those wild strawberries which later inspired the mysterious verses. As Sedakova says, "[E]ach poem is to some extent a portrait of a place."[91] Though there are no berries in her "Country Churchyard," the poem appears to be a reminiscence of her childhood graveyard visits as the poet reverts to a childlike

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[90] Berries, in particularly the raspberry, often signify the poet herself in Tsvetaeva's poetry. In Akhmatova's "There are Four of us" ("Nas chetvero," 1961) Tsvetaeva's presence is signified by a "fresh elderberry branch" in a "thicket of hardy raspberries" (Akhmatova, *SS*, 4: 325). In her autobiographical essay "Klystovki," Tsvetaeva's father fondly calls her "Marina-Malina" ("Marina-Raspberry") (*SS* 5: 97). The essay concludes with the poet saying that she wishes to be buried at a khlysty cemetery is Tarusa under a elderberry bush, in one of the graves with a silver dove, where "the reddest and biggest wild strawberries grow."

[91] Sedakova, *In Praise of Poetry*, 141.

perspective, whereby the landscape takes on a mysterious life of its own. Trees cast shadows that flow like "rivers of another time" ("nenyshnie reki") and halt their conversation upon the poet's entrance.[92] The cast-iron angel atop the monument takes a rather stern tone as it warns the girls to be more heedful of those who rest in the churchyard. The young female poet, in contrast to those of Gray or Zhukovsky, does not attribute gravity to death.

Describing the perspective of childhood, Sedakova notes, "Any little thing that catches our eye seems like a treasure. I still love these treasures. […] It is strange, how many people are left without memories of this paradise. I am certain that this is the experience of every young child."[93] The Freudian concept of initial childhood trauma, which, as Peter Sacks argues, provides an apt psychological illustration of the work of elegizing, seems to have no place in Sedakova's poetic world. Recalling Freud's description of his eighteen-month-old grandson who appeared to "master" the absence of his mother by throwing and then retrieving a wooden reel to the syllables *fort* ("gone") and *da* ("there" or "here"), Sacks identifies the child's *fort-da* game as a "primitive form of mourning." In the game, "the child not only comes to terms with the otherness and absence of his first love-object; he also learns to *represent absence*, and to make the

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[92] In Sedakova's poetry, nature "speaks for itself"—at times intelligibly, as in the cycle *Chinese Journey* (*Kitaiskoe puteshestvie*, 1986) ("The pond says: / if I had hands and a voice…" ["Prud govorit: / byli by u menia ruki i golos…"]), though often times unintelligibly, as in "Azarovka. A Suite of Landscapes": "And there, far off, where the water babbles / a non-Russian speech…" ("A tam, daleko, gde bormochet voda / nerusskuiu rech'…"). This is a trait she develops further in her Chinese pastoral cycle, *Chinese Journey*, especially. "Communion with nature is reflected in the very structure of a Chinese painting or poem, with the line or the word becoming part of the landscape. There is often a certain aggression in European art, a certain invasion and capture of space. Eastern art is to the contrary based on dissolving in space; it allows nature to speak for itself. This is how artists, as far as I know, are brought up in the East—they let nature speak and do not intrude on it, and this was always very attractive to me," Sedakova says in "A Dialogue on Poetry" (interview by Slava I. Yastremski) in *Poems and Elegies*, 17. For an insightful discussion on the treatment of nature in Sedakova's poetry, see also Yastremski's introductory essay, "A Revealed Miracle: Introduction to Olga Sedakova's Life and Works," esp. 27-28

[93] Sedakova, "'Ne khochu i ne boius' provala'" (Interview with Anna Gal'perina), http://www.pravmir.ru/olga-sedakova-ne-xochu-uspexa-i-ne-boyus-provala/ (accessed March 12, 2015).

absent present, by means of a substitutive figure accompanied by an elementary language."[94] As a work of mourning, the elegy can provide a space for the poet to recast his loss in order to either sustain his grief or find a substitution. Sacks traces this practice in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, wherein, through a series of repeated negations, the poet's departure from his childhood home of Somersby repeats the effect of the loss of Arthur Hallum, the mourned subject: "And, leaving these, to pass away, / I think once more he seems to die."[95]

The "child's posture" for Sedakova, however, does not correspond to an initial trauma or loss, but to blissful discovery. Childhood is "when one best remembers Eden." It is "a different world which socialization has not yet entered and placed everything on their respective shelves."[96] It "is occupied with the 'nature of things,' trying to match names to things."[97] Thus, cast in the child's view of the young lyric hero, the churchyard elegy's central issue of the other's alterity poses not an obstacle to reciprocity and consolation, but a value in itself. In her essay, "In Praise of Poetry," Sedakova describes the strange pleasure she experienced in the secret nature of the lives of others:

> Apart from familiar words—of relatives and my nanny—there were also mysterious people: children. They were entirely other to me. In very early childhood they all seemed to be more important, interesting, and beautiful than I was, because they could disappear: they had a secret. Their homes, food, and clothes were a part of this secret. I did not have a secret life this, and I was always entirely at my own disposal. Neither my nanny nor grandmother would call me in from the window and lead me away from myself. In the 'other,' there was a different and better world, as any other world was. It did not occur to me to try to possess this secret, for I loved it devotedly as a secret. Each stranger had the

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[94] Sacks 11. Sedakova rejects what she calls postmodernism's preoccupation with initial trauma or loss. "It is as if the artist and his spectator have never seen anything in this world but trauma, which in the opinion of the modern psychologists occurs at the dawn of the experience: man's early traumas determine all his future life," Sedakova writes in a 2010 essay, "The Issue of Man in Modern Secular Culture." Web.
[95] Sacks 196.
[96] Sedakova "Vacancy of a Poet" 76; Sedakova, "'Ne khochu i ne boius' provala'…" web.
[97] Sedakova, *In Praise of Poetry*, 119.

> ability to turn into a 'charming demon' [Pushkin], into a treasure—'and the key was entrusted only to me' [Blok].[98]

While the young churchyard elegist's precursors are able to discern the hidden lives of their surroundings—such as the hidden dignity of an unknown deceased peasant (Zhukovsky) or the winded debate between the tin cross and the tin star about the existence of God (Slutsky)—the surroundings in Sedakova's "Country Churchyard" remain closed. As the poet of Zhukovsky's elegy laments that the cock's crow, the cowbells' clanging, and the swallow's chirping will not summon the deceased from their graves ("*Nichto* ne vyzovet pochivshikh iz grobov," emphasis mine), the speaker in Sedakova's elegy turns her attention to her own human limits ("Nikto…"): "No one will extract the precious image / from this unknown cradle. No one, no one will dissuade us." The child-poet is not concerned with the lives of the deceased—no thought is given to what "gem of purest ray serene" (Gray) or "rare pearl, hidden by waves" ("redkii perl, volnami sokrovennyi") (Zhukovsky) remains undisclosed to the poet who encroaches upon the silent realm of the churchyard.

To the contrary, the child-poet concerns herself with the face of a different other, the "connector of ages," and the boundaries she seeks to deconstruct are of a different order, as the motifs of the cradle and lullaby illustrate. As the poet's dreamlike state in Pushkin's "Remembrance" leads him to deeper introspection, a dreamlike state in Sedakova's verse leads both downward and upward, both outward and inward. As Renner-Fahey observes, poems that feature lullabies in Sedakova's oeuvre almost always take place in borderlands or remote realms, which convey a metaphysical liminality:[99]

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[98] Sedakova, *In Praise of Poetry*, 122.

[99] Renner-Fahey 180. M. E. Zvegintsova makes a similar observation about the topos of the garden in Sedakova's verse. The garden, she observes, often serves as a border space in which a dialogue that is both

"Mountain Lullaby" ("Gornaia kolybel'naia," c. 1976-78) depicts empty cradles in a hazel-tree grove on a mountain top; "Lullaby" ("Kolybel'naia," c. 1980-81) depicts a cradle in a spruce grove atop a narrow summit; another poem entitled "Lullaby" (from the later collection, *Beginning of a Book* [*Nachalo knigi*]), does not feature a concrete chronotope, though the speaker compares the heart to a mountain dove in a cleft, thereby evoking topoi both atmospheric and earthly:

> Как горный голубь в расщелине,
> как городская ласточка под стрехой –
> за день нахлопочутся, налетаются
> и спят себе почивают,
> крепко,
> как будто еще не родились –
>
> так и ты, мое сердце,
> в гнезде-обиде
> сыто, согрето, утешено,
> спи себе, почивай,
> никого не слушай […]
>
> Like a mountain dove in a cleft, / like an city swallow beneath the eaves – / they take the day unawares, fly their fill / and sleep a deep sleep, / deeply, / as if they have not been born yet – // so you, my heart / in a nest of insult / are sated, warm, consoled, / sleep to your heart's content, rest, / listen to no one […]

In this example as well as in "Country Churchyard," Sedakova plays on the metaphoric link between sleep and death contained in Slavic lullabies and pre-Christian burial rites. As a lullaby serves to lull the child to the "other world" ("inoi mir"—the same euphemism used for the afterlife in ancient funerary rites), so the funeral rite serves to guide the deceased to the afterlife.[100] Further reinforcing this metaphoric binary was the

verbal and visual is realized between the realms of the living and the dead. See Zvegintsova, "Kostsept 'sad' v lirike O. Sedakovoi," 76.

[100] Sedakova, *Poetika obriada*, 19. Sedakova discusses the intersections of Slavic lullabies and ancient funeral rites both in terms of their sequencing of events and characters. In terms of characters, for example, various guests are summoned to assist with the send-off (of the child into slumber or the deceased into the afterlife), and these guests appear both in Slavic lullabies and the pagan Slavic funeral rites: such guests

customary practice of keeping vigil over the dead. As Sedakova notes in *Poetics of the Funerary Rite*, pre-Christian funerary practice dictated that mourners keep vigil two to three nights over the deceased. Children, too, were forbidden from sleeping during the transfer of the body. Such vigil required standing: as opposed to the deceased, who lay in a horizontal position, the mourners maintained a vertical position. This binary imbues the Russian epitaph as well. The living (i.e. the addressee of the epitaph, the passerby or "prikhozhii") walk (khodiat) or wander (stranstvuiut, bredut), while the dead are those who lie (lezhat) in the earth ("Zdes' lezhit…").[101] Indeed many Russian epitaphs (like the ancient Greco-Roman epitaphs which preceded them) feature an entreaty from the deceased to "take a seat" ("prisest' na kamne").[102] In light of the examples of the Russian churchyard elegy discussed above, it is easy to recognize how the epitaph imbues the genre with many of its motifs.

Yet, in Sedakova's "Country Churchyard," as in Sedakova's other lullaby poems, the vertical and horizontal axes of waking and sleeping, life and death, begin to blur as the poet, similar to a child being lulled to sleep by a lullaby, enters a dreamlike state. In the instance of "Country Churchyard" it is the cast-iron angel's warning, distinguished by alternating ten- and five-beat lines, which initiates the transition. The cast-iron angel's entreaty to the young travelers to heed their mortality, as it is paraphrased by the poet, not only presents the only instance of iambic pentameter in the poem (leading us to suspect that the poet is perhaps paraphrasing an epitaph of some kind), but presents a notable

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include cats, wolves (the 'silver little wolf' in Russian lullabies, or the 'two wolfettes' in south Slavic lullabies), birds, and ducks, and others. See pp. 57-8.

[101] Veselova notes that epitaphic poetry often features such a paradigm: the animate living are presented according to a vertical axis; the dead and non-moving according to a horizontal axis. Veselova, "Teoriia: problemy i razmyshleniia. Epitafiia – formul'nyi zhanr," 138-139.

[102] As Veselova notes, this convention originates in Latin epitaphs in which the traveler (*viator*) is invited to take a rest (140).

alternation of line lengths, which visually mimics the rocking of a cradle. The speaker then wonders at how "the heart loves strange hope" and the "wind of life, frightening for the hero, / rocks the cradles in a lullaby." Frightening for the hero, the wind recalls the "fair wind" of God described in "Legend the Second" ("Legenda vtoraia," c. 1976-78), which pushes one forward on the beaten path ("Sredi putei, vruchennykh serdtsu, / est' put', probityi v ony dni"): "Who knew that God is a fair wind?" remarks the poet ("Kto znal, chto Bog – poputnyi veter?"). If life's path inevitably leads to the grave, the fair wind of God (or in the hesychast tradition, the "carrier of prayers") leads one toward this end. However, as Sedakova's "Country Churchyard" demonstrates, the grave is not a "narrow cell" in which one is "for ever laid," but an "unknown cradle." Thus, death becomes elided with birth, and the afterlife with life.

This elision is reflected in the morphological texture of the poem. As the poet's companion bids her to leave, the poet wishes to stay a bit longer:

> – Пойдем, пора. – Постой, еще немного. Я встану, если нужно, на колени,
> я не боюсь, когда ты разгибаешь свой свиток круглый до скончанья дней.
>
> "Let's go, it's time." "Wait, let's stay a while longer." I'll get, if necessary, on my knees, / I'm not afraid when you straighten your round scroll out until the end of days.

The repeated morphological root of "stoj" ("stand") in the verbal forms in the first line of this couplet ("poidem," "postoi," and "vstanu") lexically embeds the vertical axis of the traditional epitaphic vertical-horizontal binary. However, when the speaker follows up the last verb with "na koleni" ("on my knees"), she undercuts the binary and brings herself in closer proximity to the horizontal axis.

This encroachment not only brings to bear one of the principle actions of the traditional churchyard elegy—the penetration of ontological barriers—but also demonstrates the ability of the poet, or more specifically, a "child's poet," for whom

"things are not placed on their respective shelves," to enter poetic consciousness. This ability of the "child's poet" recalls Sedakova's predecessor Pasternak, for whom the poet is merely "the best-known variety of the human species, of 'the poor *Homo sapiens*,'" as well as their shared poetic influence, Rainer Maria Rilke:

> Even in their sleep [the poets] remain alert:
> out of dreaming and being, out of sobs and laughter
> there appears meaning, and this overcomes them,
> and they fall on their knees in front of death and life;
> thus the world is given a new measure
> in this right angle of their knees![103]

In alluding to this new measure of lowering to her knees, the speaker, "a child before the graves of children," encroaches upon "birth-giving-depth" of the divine.[104]

Also blurring the traditional binary structure of the epitaph is Sedakova's employment of the word "pogost" ("churchyard," "graveyard") which replaces the titular "kladbishche" in the opening line of the poem. Whereas "kladbishche" stems from the Ukrainian "kladovishche" ("klad'ba"—"laying down") and originally signified a "place for stowage; interment" ("mesto dlia skladyvaniia; pogrebeniia"),[105] "pogost" encapsulates a wider spectrum of meanings, centering, namely, upon the word "guest" ("gost'"). As Sedakova explains in *Poetics of the Funerary Rite*, the "guest" in the case of funerary practices refers to the deceased, who, now a guest in the world of the living, is conveyed to the graveyard where his body will reside or stay ("gostit'" or "gas'tiuvat'"). The poet's use of "pogost" thus subtly converts the usually static space of the graveyard into a more dynamic setting of temporary residence. Moreover, the term "guest," notes

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[103] Rilke, "Geschrieben für Karl Graf Lanckoronski: 'Nicht Geist, nicht Inbrunst wollen wir entbehren.'" Quoted in Sedakova "The Vacancy of a Poet" 72. Translation by Vitaly Chernetsky.
[104] Sedakova discusses this concept in Pasternak's work, which has clearly influenced her own poetics, in "The Vacancy of a Poet" (71-77).
[105] Zelenin 150.

Sedakova, “also carries the meaning of ‘putnik’ [traveler], ‘postoialets’ [lodger], ‘vremennyi obitatel'’ [temporary resident or dweller].” The poet’s word choice also subtly amplifies the spiritual dimension of the churchyard elegy, wherein the poet figures as a Christian wanderer.[106] As the Christian soul wanders in life, the released soul then completes this homeward journey. This idea is reflected etymologically in Old Russian terms for the modern “pogost,” such as *gost'bishche* and *gostebishche* from the Zaokskii region, and the Old Russian гостинецъ (“bol'shaia doroga”—“big road”).[107] Such roots associated with travel and roads point to the afterlife as one’s final “home” (or “domovishche” as the grave was sometimes called).[108] We find this idea reflected in some extant Russian epitaphs, such as one Veselova presents in her study on the epitaph as a formulaic genre:

> Прохожий, ты идешь, а не лежишь, как я.
> Постой и отдохни на гробе у меня.
> Сорви былиночку и вспомни о судьбе,
> Я дома. Ты в гостях. Подумай о себе.
> Как ты, был жив и я,
> Умрешь и ты, как я...[109]
>
> Passerby, you walk and do not lie, like I. / Pause and have a rest at my grave. / Pick a little blade of grass and think about your fate. / I am home. You are my guest. Think about yourself. / Like you, I was once alive, / Like me, you will someday die.

Thus, as Slutsky’s “A five-pointed star and six-pointed star argued…” transforms the customary solemn graveyard into a “beit-hakhayim” (a euphemism for graveyard in

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[106] Sedakova *Poetika obriada* 136. Amongst the etymological layers that constitute “gost'” Sedakova also lists “enemy” (“vrag”) and “foreign” (“chuzhoi”), in that the deceased is alien or inimical to the living, since s/he is now an embodiment of death; at the same time this “alien” quality of the deceased is also divine in that the deceased is also a messenger (“poslanets”) entering the underworld of the forefathers. Sedakova also delineates the semantics of “torgovets” or “trader” in gost’, as the funeral rituals also included the act of purchasing a grave plot for the deceased or paying a tax.
[107] Sedakova *Poetika obriada* 136.
[108] Sedakova, *Poetika obriada*, 72-73.
[109] Veselova, 142. The grave on which this epitaph is inscribed is located at the writer Saltykov-Shchedrin’s estate.

Jewish culture meaning "house of the living"), Sedakova's "Country Churchyard" converts the setting into the dynamic, transitional chronotope of the road, where the wanderer-poet encounters the "unknown cradles" of the dead who are reborn into the afterlife.[110]

"Will a cast-iron lantern light my way?" wonders the poet, who, in the final stanza now appears as a solitary figure. Unlike the elegist of Gray's *Elegy* ("*He gain'd from Heav'n ('twas all he wish'd) a friend*") and Zukovsky's "Country Churchyard" ("V nagradu ot tvortsa on druga poluchil") who is granted a friend (an imagined projection of the poet-reader himself) in death, the poet's fellow traveler who arrived with her at the churchyard is absent. In a shift which enshrines the solitude (the Heideggarian "ownmost") of death rather than the poet-speaker's own remembrance, the concluding stanza of Sedakova's churchyard elegy turns the conventional epitaphic conclusion on its head. The poet's consolation is not her poetic legacy but a metaphysical omniscience acquired in the afterlife: "I see as we are seen" ("Ia vizhu, kak nas vidiat").

Thus, all the while employing the churchyard elegy's conventional progression from the descriptive to the self-descriptive, the self-descriptive concluding moment is employed in order to invert the usually metapoetic treatment of the poet's memory in favor of an open-ended affirmation of faith. As if in response to the elegy's mood of dissuasion, exemplified in Baratysnky's well-known elegy—

> Уж я не верю увереньям,
> Уж я не верую в любовь,
> И не могу предаться вновь
> Раз изменившим сновиденьям![111]

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[110] The term "beit-hakhayim" ("house of the living"), Grinberg argues, serves to convey a vibrant rather than solemn realm resembling a Jewish market or rabbinic academy "bustling with argument, Jewish sarcasm, and jokes." See Grinberg, 246.

[111] "Dissuasion" ("Razuverenie," 1821). Boratynskii, *PSS*, 1:31.

> I no longer believe assurances / I no longer believe in love, / And I cannot surrender myself again / to dreams that have betrayed me!

—the poet of Sedakova's churchyard elegy concludes, "No one, no one will dissuade us…." Sedakova's reworking of the churchyard elegy therefore depicts not an elegiac recognition of loss but of the capacity of poetic language to penetrate the impermeability of both life and death. While the poet bears witness to these phenomena, not fully understanding, the poet recognizes that death is the "connector of ages"; the cycle of loss repeats. Nothing is recuperated ("no one will extract a precious image"), yet nothing is lost.

STELAI AND INSCRIPTIONS

Sedakova expands upon the ideas developed in "Country Churchyard" in her antique cycle *Stelai and Inscriptions* by integrating much of the poem's imagery (such as water and whiteness) and many of its motifs (such as the play with vision and perspective and states of waking and sleeping) into an intricate poetic framework that is both ekphrastic and epitaphic as the poet meditates upon the scenes depicted in ancient Greek stelai and their accompanying inscriptions. Though at least two studies have focused on the cycle as an exercise of ekphrasis composed in an epitaphic framework, it is worth giving further consideration to the cycle's epitaphic premise, which is manifested in its metrical scheme of fractured elegiac distich (or "broken hexameter").[112] The fractured metrical structure not only facilitates subtle shifts in narrative perspective, but blurs the boundaries between the pictorial and the textual, the stele's relief or painting and its

[112] The analysis presented in this section builds upon Medvedeva's chapter, "'Stely i nadpisi': 'teatr veshchei i izobrazhenii' i poetika slova" in "*Tainye stikhi"* (228-247), Stepantsov, "Posleslovie" in Sedakova, *Stely i nadpisi* (21-40), and Stepantsov, "Stikhotvorenie 'Zhenskaia figura' iz knigi O. Sedakovoi 'Stely i nadpisi,'" http://textonly.ru/case/?article=38744&issue=39 (accessed January 7, 2017).

inscription. More significantly, beneath such intricate modulations, we detect an elaborate and innovative recasting of the churchyard elegy, as the poet meditates upon the gravestones of unknown others before composing a metapoetic, self-referential "inscription" or epitaph.

Like "Country Churchyard," *Stelai and Inscriptions* seems to have been inspired by a significant event of Sedakova's literary development. While "Country Churchyard" recalls the poet's childhood visits to local churchyards, Sedakova's stelai cycle undoubtedly arises from the impression her encounters with ancient Greek sculpture and stelai left on her as a young student. When asked by Igor Shevelev about the most significant moments that have shaped her life, Sedakova answered, "Sometimes there is a look or a discovery which leads to a change in life. For me, this was becoming acquainted with the Greek plastic arts in the Pushkin Museum during my school years. When I saw those sculptures and stelai, I felt that the horizon of my life had changed."[113] As "Country Churchyard" recodes a childhood memory into an elegiac framework in order to subvert the convention of self-mourning in favor of metaphysical inquiry, *Stelai and Inscriptions*, too, draws upon the churchyard premise, though in a more intricate fashion, in order to foreground the central, yet paradoxical theme of her poetics: poetry, and more particularly the *elegy*, as an art of meeting.

The stele—a rectangular or square stone slab adorned with pediments, acroteria, leaflets (palmettes), or even small animal figurines—is the most widely found type of Archaic Greek grave marker, originating mostly from Athens and Attica (from around

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[113] Sedakova, "Punktir, pomniashchii drug o druge" (Interview by Igor' Shevelev), http://www.mgarsky-monastery.org/kolokol.php?id=2682 (accessed May 9, 2016). Sedakova also speaks of the significance of her encounter with the Greek plastic arts in the essay "Zvuk." See *ChT* 3:202.

600 BC and onward).[114] Commissioned by the deceased person's family, stelai bore scenes that were either painted or carved (or a combination of the two) and depicted not only the deceased, but members of the deceased person's family or household.[115] A corpus of painted stelai (dated 294/3–88 BC) excavated in the Thessalian city of Demetrius, for example, which Christina Salowey describes in her article, "Women on Hellenistic Grave Stelai: Reading Images and Texts," exhibits scenes similar to those depicted in Sedakova's cycle:

> In general the scenes depicted on this corpus of stelai are derived from Attic funerary iconography: the clasping of the right hands of individuals in farewell (*dexiosis*), the deceased at a funerary banquet (*Totenmahl*), soldiers depicted with weapons, single individuals accompanied by a household servant. Several stelai, however, move away from the Attic tradition and are striking for their depiction of interior domestic space or for vivid vignettes of the deceased in life or in death. More than half of the stelai discovered commemorate women.[116]

As Sergei Stepantsov carefully demonstrates, several, if not all, of the poems in *Stelai and Inscriptions* correspond with specific extant grave stelai Sedakova may have encountered in museums, as mentioned above, or in the research of Nina Braginskaya, her close friend and scholar of classical antiquity to whom Sedakova dedicates her cycle. While Stepantsov is unable to identify an extant stele which corresponds to that depicted in the opening poem, "Boy, Old Man, and Dog" ("Mal'chik, starik i sobaka"), he connects the second poem, "Two Figures" ("Dve figury"), with the Stele of Philoxenos and Philomene (held at the Getty Museum). Other poems of the cycle, Stepantsov observes, seem to depict general *types* of ancient stelai rather than specific pieces. "Figure of a Woman" ("Zhenskaia figura"), for example, possibly describes the Stele of

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[114] Salowey, 249; *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 1399-1400. For a compendium of Attic stelai, see Christoph Clairmont's six-volume work, *Classical Attic Tombstones*.
[115] Salowey, 249.
[116] Salowey, 251.

Polyxena (held at the National Archeological Museum of Athens or NAMA), though the relief does not contain anything that might resemble the poplar tree mentioned in the poem.[117] "Lady and a Servant" ("Gospozha i sluzhanka") presents a similar quandary as it evokes a host of known stelai: Natalya Medvedeva observes its similarity in composition to the Stele of Hegeso (NAMA) or the Stele of Mnesarete (Munich) (though in the latter the woman does not visibly hold a mirror), while Stepantsov expands the list of possible models to include the Stele of Mika and Dion (NAMA), the Stele of Kalliarista (Rhodes), and others.[118] Therefore, it is possible the poem describes a loose combination of several stelai which depict a servant and a woman holding a mirror—it was customary, after all, to depict deceased women as holding a mirror.

Though a preexisting art object is not a prerequisite for an ekphrastic poem—many ekphrastic poems, such as Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," are thought to depict fictive art objects[119]—the correlations described above invite an ekphrastic reading of *Stelai and Inscriptions* all the more. As Stepantsov asserts, "It is clear that ekphrasis is the type of literary work that is, in essence, closest to *Stelai and Inscriptions*." Spanning back to works of classical antiquity, such as Homer's *Iliad* (wherein the poet vividly describes the shield of Achilles), and the aesthetic thought of Plato and Aristotle who both compare poetry to painting,[120] ekphrasis can be generally defined, in the words of

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[117] Stepantsov "Stikhotvorenie…" web.
[118] Medvedeva, 229, Stepantsov, "Stikhotvorenie…" web.
[119] Krieger, 17. Krieger makes the case that if one were to find an urn that seemed to be the one that occasioned Keats's poem, "it would seem, for all its beauty, a poor thing so long as we expected it to account for all that the poem makes us aware of with respect to the urn. The ability of Keats's language [and ekphrastic poetry in general] to exploit the paradox of the urn's multidimensional 'still'-ness at once leads us beyond the circular enclosure of the urn [or art object] itself."
[120] We recall that for Plato, the likeness between poetry and "illusionistic painting" and "mimesis" (the imitative creation of images) carried a pejorative connotation in that it stood in opposition to the acquisition of knowledge and truth. Aristotle, however, rejected Plato's pejorative meaning of "mimesis" (Hagstum 4-

James A. W. Heffernan, as "the verbal representation of graphic representation."[121] Building upon Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1767), scholars have expanded and narrowed the meaning of ekphrasis. Murray Krieger argues that a poem reaches its ekphrastic potential when the verbal "emulate[s] the spatial character of the painting or sculpture by trying to force words […] to take on a substantive configuration—in effect to become an emblem" or to become "frozen" in space.[122] Jean Hagstrum, on the other hand, takes the term in a more limited sense based on the etymology of the Greek word, *ekphrazein* (*ek* – "out"; *phrasis* – "to speak"), applying the term only to works which make the visual representation "speak out" or "tell in full" by giving "voice and language to the otherwise mute art object."[123] Poetic representations which do not give voice to the art object, he says, are not ekphrastic, but rather "iconic" or pictorial.[124]

James Heffernan, too, distinguishes ekphrasis from pictorialism and iconicity, which, as he points out, aim to depict natural objects and artifacts, and are therefore not types of ekphrasis. Ekphrasis, he argues, must be held to the core principle that it "explicitly represents representation itself."[125] In other words, while a poem may employ pictorial or iconic techniques—for example, the layout of a poem may mimic the shape or movement of its subject, as we see in Sedakova's "Wild Dog Rose" which features

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5). For a more detailed discussion on the roots of ekphrasis from Plato to Horace, see Hagstrum, *Sister Arts* 3-36; Krieger, 1-66; Bilman, 15-33.

[121] Heffernan, "Ekphrasis and Representation," 299. W. J. T. Mitchell also employs this definition of ekphrasis in his chapter, "Ekphrasis and the Other" in *Picture Theory*, 151-181.

[122] Krieger, 9. Heffernan argues that such an expansion of the term stretches it beyond its original purpose of containing a particular kind of literature. In Krieger's interpretation, Heffernan argues, the term "merely becomes a new name for formalism." See Heffernan, 298.

[123] Hagstrum, 18 n. 34.

[124] See Hagstrum, 17-29.

[125] Heffernan, 300.

lengthening lines to mimic the blooming of the dog rose—a poem is only ekphrastic when it represents an object that is in the first place *representational*.

In the context of *Stelai and Inscriptions*, wherein the stone figures speak both to each other and to the poet-observer, Hagstrum's emphasis of ekphrasis as the "speaking out" of a graphic representation takes on particular significance. Medvedeva suggests that the cycle is an example of *dialogic* ekphrasis—a literary genre Nina Braginskaya describes in her essay, "The Genesis of *Imagines* by Philostratus the Elder" ("Genezis 'Kartin' Filostrata Starshego"). More than merely an ekphrastic text, which usually contains a monologic description of a visual representation told in the first person from the perspective of the lyric hero or author, Braginskaya suggests that a text containing dialogic ekphrasis features a discussion, usually between a viewer (or a group of viewers) and an exegete, about an artwork (a painting, sculpture, relief, tapestry, etc.) which depicts something.[126] The dialogue between the viewer(s) and the exegete produces a dialogic rather than monologic description of the visual representation not only for the viewer in the text, but the reader—or "off-stage" viewer, we could say—of the literary text.

Such theatrical terminology is appropriate, since Braginskaya traces the literary genre back to "proto-theater" of folkloric ceremonies. In these ceremonial performances, the "actor" was not a person but an image or object. Puppets, statues, and paintings would "act" in the performance alongside the human actor, and the human actor, in turn, would imitate the objects, puppets, and poses of the statues.[127] As in the plays of Thespis, such performances would be narrated by a host, who, as Braginskaya notes, essentially serves

[126] Braginskaia, "Genezis…" 226. The dialogue can be also be performed by an elder and a youth (as in Philostratus's *Imagines*), a teacher and a student, a sage or a holy figure and a lay person (231).
[127] Braginskaia, "Genezis," 240. Quoted in Medvedeva, 232.

the role of exegete.[128] Such "theater of representation" ("teatr izobrazhenii") relates to a time in cultural development "when theatrical and visual art did not have strictly defined boundaries; the theater of representation can be called also a performance of works of visual art," writes Braginskaya.[129] Performances of dialogic ekphrasis not only blurred the division between the animate and the inanimate, but constituted a *dramatic* version of ekphrasis.

As Medvedeva observes, Sedakova creates instances of dialogic ekphrasis in *Stelai and Inscriptions* through changes in the narration. The poet narrates the dialogues between the depicted figures, between herself and the figures, between herself and the reader, and, in the final poem, "Inscription" ("Nadpis'"), between herself and her addressee, the scholar or "exegete" of ancient Greek stelai, Braginskaya. The fourth poem of the cycle, for example, "Lady and Servant" ("Gospozha i sluzhanka"), begins with the poet addressing the reader:

> Женщина в зеркало смотрит: что она видит – не видно;
> вряд ли там что-нибудь есть. Впрочем, зачем же тогда
> любоваться одним и гадать, как поправить другое
> той или этой уловкой? зачем себя изучать?
> Видно, что-то там есть.[130]
>
> A woman is looking into a mirror: what she sees is not visible; / it's unlikely something's there. But then why / admire one thing and conjecture about how to correct another with one trick or another? Why study oneself? / It's apparent something is there.

In the next stanza, however, the dialogic mode shifts (indicated by a simple line break) to display a verbal exchange between the two depicted figures:

> Да, мы друг друга ни разу не поняли. Это понятно.
> Это было нетрудно.
> Труднее другое: мы знали

[128] Braginskaia, "Genezis," 245.
[129] Braginskaia, *Poetika drevnegrecheskoi literatury*, 240. Quoted in Medvedeva, 232.
[130] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 299.

> всё о каждом. Всё, до конца, до последней
> нежной его бесконечности.
> Не желая, не думая – знали.
> Не слушая, знали
> и обсуждали в уме его просьбу, с которой он к нам
> не успел обратиться и даже подумать. Еще бы.
> Просьба одна у нас всех;
> ничего-то и нет кроме этой
> просьбы.

> Yes, we not once understood each other. That is understood. / That was not hard. / Something else was harder: we knew / everything about everyone. Everything, to its end, to its last / tender eternity. / Not wishing, not thinking – we knew. / Not listening, we knew / and discussed in our minds a request, which one has not yet / managed to make or even think. Of course. / We all have the same request; / there is nothing except / this one request.

Not only does the dialogic mode shift from the poetic speaker and the reader to the two depicted figures, but, as Medvedeva notes, the first-person plural ("we") of the depicted figures gradually expands to include both the poet and the reader. The figures reflect on the fact that in life, they did not understand each other, but it was easier that way; in death they must suffer the burden of being all-knowing. By the end, they change to present tense: "We all have the same request." This "we," Medvedeva observes, encompasses both the dead and the living.[131]

Stepantsov, too, highlights the intricate narrative structure, characterized by sudden interruptions or shifts and expanding personas, as a poetic rendering of dialogic ekphrasis. As Stepantsov notes, most of the poems (with the exceptions of "Figure of a Woman" and "Inscription") are united by their ekphrastic use of "we." In contrast to Philostratus's *Imagines*, which features primarily a dialogue between "I" and "you," *Stelai and Inscriptions* modulates between an "exclusive 'we'" and an "inclusive 'we'" as well as a subtype of inclusive "we"—the exegetic "we" such as that used by a museum

[131] Medvedeva 243.

guide when describing art ("In this picture we can see…"). "It is this kind of 'we,' the ekphrastic 'we,' which unites the observers and comprises the foundation of the dialogic ekphrasis in *Stelai and Inscriptions*," observes Stepantsov.[132]

Braginskaya's working definition of dialogic ekphrasis, which she outlines in her study of Philostratus's *Imagines*, indeed seems to provide an uncanny blueprint for Sedakova's cycle. To be sure, Sedakova likely was aware of Braginskaya's work on the subject in light of their close friendship and the fact that Braginskaya's article was published around the time Sedakova composed her cycle. Texts exhibiting dialogic ekphrasis, Braginskaya suggests, discuss a visual representation that is sacred and/or used for a religious ceremony which is mysterious and sometimes allegorical. The discussion is carried out by a viewer (in this case the poet) who asks questions about the depicted image and an exegete (in this case the cycle's dedicatee, Braginskaya), who explains or interprets. The encounter with the visual representation occurs in a foreign land ("na chuzhbine") (cf. the poet's observation of the stele of "Two Figures": "a handful of native earth in a foreign land – one needs nothing more" ["gorst' rodimoi zemli na chuzhbine – bol'she ne nuzhno"]) or on a road during travel (as in the final poem, "Inscription": "Nina, was it in a dream, or in my mind, along some ancient road / we walked once…" ["Nina, vo sne li, v ume li, kakoi-to starinnoi dorogoi / shli my odnazhdy…"]). Furthermore, the ekphrastic description, wrought by the viewer and exegete's dialogue, always conveys an indistinguishable likeness between imitation and reality—the depicted image is viewed as a living or almost living thing. As a result of this latter characteristic, Braginskaya notes, discussions regarding the artist's skill (a customary convention of ekphrasis) are limited. "All of the attention of the viewer and

[132] Stepantsov, "Posleslovie," 35.

the exegete is concentrated not on the art object itself as a work of art, but on the depicted subject […]; the picture or statue therefore teaches, compels; it opens a vital, philosophical, or religious mystery; it illustrates a myth."[133]

As an implicit (or explicit) extol of the mastery of the artist, monologic poetic ekphrasis always demonstrates the capacity of the poetic word. The Grecian urn or "sylvan historian" of Keats's ode, for example, "canst thus express / A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme." However, as Stepantsov rightly suggests, a particular characteristic of the ekphrasis of *Stelai and Inscriptions* is its "capacity to give depicted figures not only the power of speech [slovo], but also silence [molchanie] and the rejection of speech [otkaz ot slova]."[134] The ekphrastic interplay between the poet and her addressee, the poet and the depicted figures, and the depicted figures themselves, therefore highlights the twofold significance of the poetic word in Sedakova's verse—its capacity for depth and its capacity for hesychastic silence.

Examining the cycle through the prism of dialogic ekphrasis also lays bare the epitaphic foundation of the cycle, which provides a significant link to the churchyard elegy. As Stepantsov notes, in addition to her work on Philostratus's *Imagines*, Braginskaya also published two works on the relationship between inscription and imagery on monuments in classical antiquity later in 1982.[135] Though these articles were published later in the year, one cannot discount the possibility that Braginskaya and Sedakova discussed the topics addressed in these two publications earlier, thereby bringing the ancient Greek epitaph into Sedakova's immediate purview as well. Like

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[133] Braginskaia, "Genezis," 232. See pp. 231-232 for Braginskaya's full list of characteristics of dialogic ekphrasis.
[134] Stepantsov, "Posleslovie," 38.
[135] See Braginskaia, "Epitafiia kak pis'mennyi folklor'," 119-39; "Elegicheskii distikh i struktura pogrebal'nogo placha," 14-17.

"Country Churchyard," *Stelai and Inscriptions* indeed moves from description to self-description, though with a more explicit link to the epitaph, evidenced by the poem's title ("Inscription") as well as the speaker's entreaty to take pause ("Ostanovis': ia gliazhu glazami ogromnei zemli" ["Stop: I peer with eyes of the vast earth"]).

At this point it is worth noting that, although Sedakova's "Country Churchyard" is of course not a poetic exercise of ekphrasis in that the poem depicts a memory, rather than a visual representation, we discern dialogic modulations and shifts in perspective between that are strikingly similar to those in *Stelai and Inscriptions*. As discussed above, the poet's modulation between an exclusive "we" and an inclusive "we" implies different spatial orientations of the reader. At times we are outside of the depicted memory and sometimes inside. Moreover, the speaker is suddenly able to see herself as if from outside. The perspective shifts from first person to omniscient, thereby mirroring the basic narrational progression of *Stelai and Inscriptions*, which dramatizes the transgression of the barrier between life and the afterlife.

Significantly, the succession of narrative shifts in "Country Churchyard" begins when the "cast-iron angel" speaks out to or commands ("velel") the poet. The poet's emphasis on what the monument says (rather than what its inscription reads) marks a departure from the inherited churchyard blueprint from Zhukovsky via Gray. While Hagstrum identifies *pictorial* moments of Gray's "Elegy," whereby it exhibits static, painting-like qualities (many of which carry over into Zhukovsky's translation),[136]

[136] Though one should avoid conflating Gray's and Zhukovsky's respective churchyard elegies, the instances of pictorialism Hagstrum observes in Gray's poem can be traced in Zhukovsky's as well: the use of demonstrative pronouns ("*yonder* ivy-mantled tower" ["pod drevnim svodom / *toi* bashni"] "*those* rugged elms, *that* yew-tree's shade" [Zhukovsky dispenses with these pronouns but includes the use of "here" a few lines down instead: "*Zdes'* praottsy sela, v grobakh uedinennykh…"]) makes "the suggestion of pictured landscape […] inescapable" (292). Hagstrum also makes the intriguing case that Gray's concluding epitaph may have been inspired by, if not indeed based upon, Nicolas Poussin's "The

Sedakova's churchyard elegy depicts the monument's speech rather than its appearance. Save for the adjective of "cast-iron" ("chugunnyi"), the poet provides no physical attributes to the monument. We know the angel once held a scroll or a lantern, but the reason for this ambiguity is also unclear. Is the object once held by the angel unknown because the eighteenth-century monument has atrophied, or is the speaker simply unable to recall in this recollection of her childhood memory? Thus, the description does not "evoke" the monument or provide the *enargeia*, or verisimilitude, characteristic of ekphrasis. Instead, as noted above, the alternating shorter line lengths of this stanza set it apart from the rest of the poem and ape the monument's inscription rather than its physiognomy:

> Чугунный ангел свиток или факел придерживал: трех девочек старинных
> он сон оберегал и нам велел
> не забывать, что времени немного и что при дифтеритах и ангинах
> шаг слишком явен, голос слишком смел.[137]
>
> A cast-iron angel held a scroll or a torch: / he guarded the sleep of three girls of old and ordered us / not to forget that there is little time and that in the presence of the diptherias and tonsillitises / our step is too overt, our voice too bold.

Though the monument's command could constitute a stern message imagined by the young speaker, the change in the above quatrain's second and fourth lines to a more pristine iambic pentameter, stripped of the extrametric syllables which populate the rest of the poem's sprawling iambic lines, more likely indicate that the poet is paraphrasing the monument's inscribed epitaph, which, in accordance with common epitaphic

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Shepherds of Arcady" (held at the Louvre). See Hagstrum, 292-301. Though Sedakova's "Country Churchyard," too, contains such demonstrative pronouns ("Kak *etot* stvol," "Iz *etoi* izvestnoi kolybeli"), I believe they serve to advance a change in perspective rather than convey a "pictured landscape." Nonetheless, the ekphrastic, or at the very least, pictorial potential of the churchyard elegy is certainly a topic deserving of further study given the genre's occasional tendency to center upon a specific monument rather than a general churchyard landscape dotted by many.

[137] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 250.

formulae, implores the passersby to appreciate their limited time on earth and to be respectful of the deceased—in this case, the three nameless maidens.

In the poems of *Stelai and Inscriptions*, the epitaph not only similarly facilitates shifts in narrative perspective similar to those in "Country Churchyard," but imbues the very texture of the poems throughout. As a subtitle to earlier publications of the cycle indicates, the poems are composed in "broken hexameter" ("razrushennyi geksametr").[138] Interspersed with occasional extrametric syllables, the meter of the poems is largely dactylic, thereby evoking the dactylic hexameters and elegiac distiches (couplets in which a dactylic hexameter is followed by a pentameter) in which the overwhelming majority of inscribed epitaphs on Attic stelai are composed.[139] Extrametric syllables, fractured lines, and uneven spacing convey the "broken" condition of the hexameters. The fractured prosody of the cycle not only imitates the worn surface of an ancient stele but causes the eye of the viewer to move in a less linear fashion, thereby simulating the kinaesthesia of viewing a picture.[140]

The prosodic structure of the cycle also reflects the symbiotic relationship between text and picture at work in grave stelai. As Salowey emphasizes, a stele's inscription (commonly referred to as a funerary or sepulchral epigram or, if it is metrical, an epitaph) is just as important as the illustration when deciphering the story of a stele.[141]

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[138] Even though the subtitle is not included in the more recent publications of the cycle in Sedakova's two-volume collection (2001), the four-volume collection (2010), or the book, *Stely i nadpisi* (2014), Sedakova includes it in her reading of the cycle that is available on her official website. Andrew Wachtel, too, includes the subtitle in his English translation of the cycle in *Third Wave* (ed. Kent Johnson and Stephen M. Ashby) (132), which is reprinted in Sedakova, *Poems and Elegies* 46.
[139] For a concise yet detailed analysis of the versification of Greek inscriptions, see Tsagalis 285-307.
[140] "Whereas a poem's images may be visualized mentally by the reader's imagination," writes Emily Bilman, when one views a painting or other visual representation, "we can move our eyes vertically, horizontally, or enter depths through the painting's perspective." See Bilman, *Modern Ekphrasis*, 27.
[141] Salowey, 250. I take this distinction between epigram and epitaph from Tsagalis, *Inscribing Sorrow: Fourth-Century Attic Funerary Epigrams*, 1. For a discussion of the Russian epitaph, see Veselova,

Inscriptions provide the deceased person's name, age, ethnicity, and city or region of birth, and, in the case of longer, metrical inscriptions, "a longer encomium for the deceased…that can reveal details of [the person's] life." Such encomia may enumerate decrees and honors related to military exploits or political deeds, or, in the case of women, her position in life (priestess, cloistered wife, unmarried daughter, unfortunate immigrant). While the archaic grave epigram is terse, impersonal, and characterized by "epic overtones," the classical metrical inscription, which became more common in the fifth century BC, is more elaborate: "its style is not so terse, [and] special care is given to the placement of the words in the verse," writes Tsagalis. Moreover, he says, "[E]pitaphs are imbued with a didactic-idealistic tone."[142]

Since the iconography of the grave stelai rarely portrays the deceased person alone (though there are exceptions to this practice, as demonstrated by "Figure of a Woman"), the roles and relations of those depicted often remain ambiguous to modern scholars, despite the specificity of a stele's epigram or epitaph. As Salowey cautions, "the wording of the epitaphs can be reinforced or contradicted by the iconography of the decoration."[143] The lyric speaker of *Stelai and Inscriptions* grapples with this ambiguity at various junctures in the cycle, often in the opening lines of a poem. In the first poem, "Boy, Old Man, and Dog," for example, the poet questions the correlation between the stele's inscription and visual imagery before ultimately reconciling the two:

> Мальчик, старик и собака. Может быть, это надгробье
> женщины или старухи.

"Teoriia: problemy i razmyshleniia. Epitafiia – formul'nyi zhanr," 133-145. For a general discussion of the epitaph as a poetic genre in European culture, see Ivaniuk, "Epitafiia stikhotvornaia: slovarnoe opisanie zhanra," 285-292. For studies which outline the conventions and tropes of archaic and classic Greek epigrams and epitaphs, see Tsagalis, *Inscribing Sorrow: Fourth-Century Attic Funerary Epigrams*, and Baumbach, et al, *Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram*.

[142] Tsagalis, 3.

[143] Salowey, 250

Откуда нам знать,
кем человек отразится, глядя в глубокую воду,
гладкую, как алебастр?
Может, и так:
мальчик, собака, старик.[144]

Boy, old man, and dog. Maybe this is the headstone / of a woman or a crone. / How are we to know, / how a person's reflection will be, looking into the deep water, / smooth as alabaster? / Maybe, thus: / boy, dog, old man.

Not only is the observer unable to discern who among the depicted is the deceased, but if the deceased is even depicted. It is possible that only the mourners are depicted, since grave stelai commonly featured funeral banquets and family groups. Alternatively, perhaps the stele does indeed depict the deceased. Yet how are we "to know how a person's reflection will be" in death's alabaster? As Medvedeva observes, death, as it is portrayed in the cycle, "takes away oppositions and invalidates gender roles…. Death levels all in terms of gender, as well as age."[145] Thus, in the fifth poem of the cycle, "Pitcher, the Headstone of a Friend" ("Kuvshin, nadgrobie druga"), the deceased male friend ("drug") is offered both a lance (associated with men) and a spinning wheel (associated with women) by the mourners. The third poem, "Two Figures," similarly reflects this ambiguity. After considering a range of possibilities for the relationship between the two depicted figures, the poet muses that it is perhaps "all of that and more":

Брат и сестра? муж и жена? дочь и отец? все это и больше?
Кто из них умер, кто жив
и эту плиту заказал,
памятник встречи?
Кто и кого на прощанье
хочет запомнить?

Brother and sister? Husband and wife? Daughter and father? All of that and more? / Who of them died, who is alive / and ordered this slab, / this monument of meeting? / Who upon parting / wants to remember whom?

[144] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 295.
[145] Medvedeva, 241.

Of the seven poems, the first (“Boy, Old Man, and Dog”), third (“Two Figures”), and fourth (“Lady and Servant”) feature similar structures: they begin with a series of questions, which underpin both the archeological tactility and the metaphysical impenetrability of the stelai as ancient funerary art objects. In “Lady and Servant,” for example, the stele’s two-dimensionality precludes the poet from deciphering what the woman beholds in the mirror into which she peers:

> Женщина в зеркало смотрит: что она видит – не видно;
> вряд ли там что-нибудь есть. Впрочем, зачем же тогда
> любоваться одним и гадать, как поправить другое
> той или этой уловкой? зачем себя изучать?
> Видно, что-то там есть. Что-то требует ласковой мази,
> бус и подвесок. Молча служанка стоит
> в ожидании просьбы, которой она не исполнит.[146]
>
> A woman is looking into a mirror: what she sees is not visible; / it’s unlikely something’s there. But then why / admire one thing and conjecture about how to correct another with one trick or another? Why study oneself? / It’s apparent something is there. Something requires a soothing balm, / beads, a pendant. Silently the servant stands / in expectation of a request that she will never fulfill.

This stanza captures the simultaneous dynamism and stasis achieved in ekphrasis. As the poet’s questions imbue the woman with a certain animacy—the figure seems to almost come to life as she fusses in front of the mirror—the reader is then reminded of the stillness of the scene: the servant will never fulfill this request. The tension between movement and stasis pervades the descriptions of the grave figures, who both speak out and yet remain motionless in the white stone of the stelai. The dog silently watches the conversation between the old man and boy with “eyes of this white water, of this tableau” (“glaza etoi beloi vody, etoi kartiny”). The child of “A Child Playing” (“Igraiushchii

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[146] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 299.

rebenok") plays "in inaudible music, a room of white" ("v neslyshimoi muzyke, v komnate beloi").

As Stepantsov observes, the majority of the cycle is written in a neutral register that is neither conversational nor particularly poetic. The neutral coloring of the poems' language in combination with the primacy of the color white—as Medvedeva observes, white is the only color mentioned in the cycle—create a backdrop of white, evocative of the "smooth alabaster" of the grave slabs.[147] This backdrop, Stepantsov observes, is further felt in the phonological presence of white ("belyi") in alliterative lines such as "gliadia v glubokuiu vodu, gliadkuiu, kak alebastr."[148] The texture of the poems not only evokes the pallor of the gravestones but serves as a foil against which certain phrases, more distinct in diction or tone, may protrude in higher relief. One such instance is the old man's parting words to the young boy in their conversation:

> – Я провинился, отец, но уже никогда не исправлюсь.
> – Что же, – старик говорит, – я прощаю, но ты не
> услышишь.
> Здесь хорошо.
> – Здесь хорошо?..
> – Здесь хорошо?.. –
> в коридорах
> эхо является.
>
> – Вот, ты звал, я пришел.
> Здравствуй, отец, у нас перестроили спальни.
> Мама скучает. – Сын мой, поздний, единственный, слушай,
> я говорю на прощанье: всегда соблюдай благородство,
> это лучшее дело живущих...
> – Мама велела сказать...
> – Будешь ты счастлив.
> – Когда?
> – Всегда.
> – Это горько.
> – Что поделаешь,

[147] Stepantsov, "Posleslovie," 22; Medvedeva, 237.
[148] Stepantsov, "Posleslovie," 22.

так нам положено.
Молча собака глядит
на беседу: глаза этой белой воды,
этой картины –
«мальчик, собака, старик».[149]

"I've done wrong, Father, but now I will never make it right." / "Well," says the father, "I forgive, but you will not / hear it. / It's nice here." / "It's nice here?.." / "It's nice here?.." – / There is an echo / in the corridors. // "Well, you called, and I came. / Hello, Father, we've remodeled the bedrooms. / Mama misses you." "My son, my late-born, my only one, listen, / I say in parting: always heed noble virtue, / it is the best the living can do…" / "Mama told me to tell you…" / "Be happy." / "When?" / "Always." / "It's hard." / "What can you do, / it is our custom." / The dog silently watches / the conversation: the eyes of this white water, / of this tableau – / "boy, dog, old man."

As Stepantsov rightly notes, the archaic phrasing, "sobliudai blagorodstvo," which Andrew Wachtel renders as "to nobility always adhere" in his translation of the poem,[150] evokes the gnomic literature of Theognis or Isocrates and therefore represents a brief departure from the poem's inconspicuous texture. Indeed, the maxim recalls the dactylic hexametric *Golden Verses* of Pythagoras, a collection of moral exhortations which enjoyed great popularity in late antiquity and which urge the listener to heed the world's natural order, revere the gods, and honor one's elders.[151] Supporting this connection is the fact that the line which contains the exhortation, "ia govoriu na proshchan'e: vsegda sobliudai blagorodstvo," represents the only instance of unbroken dactylic hexameter in the poem.

However, we do not need to go beyond the genre of Greek funerary inscription, which, as mentioned above, is often didactic in tone, to justify the presence of such a gnomic statement. Usually denoting "nobility" or "generosity" and "goodness" in contemporary Russian usage, the word "blagorodstvo" in the context of the grave stele likely denotes the ancient Greek concept of aristocratic virtue (*arete*). *Arete*, along with

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[149] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 295-6.
[150] See Johnson and Ashby, eds., *Third Wave*, 132; Sedakova, *Poems and Elegies*, 46.
[151] Rowe, *The Golden Verses of Pythagoras*, 3-4.

sophrosyne ("soundness of mind" and "prudence"), are, according to Tsagalis, "the most often attested abstract concepts in fourth-century Attic grave epigrams."[152] Thus, as in "Country Churchyard," it is likely that the poet is incorporating language from the inscribed epitaph into her ekphrastic treatment of the figures.

According to Tsagalis, wisdom statements (or *gnomai*) in funerary epigrams served as "*modes of communication* between the anonymous versifiers and the person(s) who commissioned their composition and erection of the funerary monument on the one hand, and the passers-by who would stop and read them."[153] Maxims not only serve in the private mourning of the deceased individual by instilling in him or her the authority of consolatory wisdom, but in the public display of the monument as well. The "broadly shared truth advertised in the maxim," both piques the passerby's curiosity and engages the passerby more deeply by entreating him or her to either follow or abstain from a course of action. Aphoristic grammar devices, such as anaphora, the tenseless present, the gnomic aorist, or absolute language, all serve to mechanize the universal applicability of these statements and thereby prompt the passerby to read the inscription aloud.[154] Thus, the old man not only tells the young boy to adhere to tenets of aristocratic virtue, but universalizes the exhortation by adding that "it is the best the living can do" ("eto luchshee delo zhivushchikh"). Such epitaphic universalization of the exhortation sparks a "degree of involvement during which [the passersby] would recognize in the inscribed text an experience familiar with their own lives," Tsagali notes.[155]

[152] Tsagalis, 135.
[153] Tsagalis, 17. Emphasis in the original.
[154] See Tsagalis, 19-37.
[155] Tsagalis, 29.

Gnomic statements, Tsagalis suggests, are a constituent part of the "staging" of epitaphs by future readers.[156] When an epitaph features a gnomic statement presented as being uttered by the deceased in the first person (as opposed to when the deceased is designated in the second or third person, which is also common), the temporal-spatial center of the epigraph is therefore the *ego* of the dead man. In turn, the staging of the epitaph becomes all the more dynamic and paradoxical in that the reader is invited to play a twofold role:

> [T]he reader's voice would, at the moment of reading the inscription, "transfer" itself to the other end of the communicative spectrum, i.e. to the dead man who is presented as speaking. […] Under this parameter, the reader would be faced with an interpretive conundrum: is it possible for him to be at the same time a 'staged-made speaking *I*' and a silent "listening *you*"?[157]

This very dynamic plays out in "Boy, Old Man, and Dog" and underscores the central, though hitherto underemphasized role the epitaphic component plays in facilitating the ekphrastic "dialogue between life and death" described by Medvedeva. While the poems indeed "translate" and "give sound" to the "silent conversations" depicted on the stelai, as Medvedeva carefully demonstrates,[158] the poems also give sound to the inscriptions, or rather, release the sound of the inscriptions which the poet hears.

As Sedakova notes in her essay, "Sound" ("Zvuk," 1999), she does not consider the written word ("pis'mo") to be contrary to sound ("zvuk"). Recalling the words of Bunin—"in the world's cemetery / only the written letters are heard" ("na mirovom pogoste / Zvuchat lish' pis'mena")—Sedakova wonders,

> How are they *heard* if we are speaking of inscriptions? But the written word in fact does make sound! When I encountered words I that I could make out on ancient sarcophagi—such as the Greek greeting *Khaire!* (Χαίρε) or the Latin

[156] Tsagalis, 19; 5.
[157] Tsagalis, 24.
[158] Medvedeva, 239.

> *Salve!*—they without a doubt *were heard* in my mind. Looking at an inscription, wrought by a human hand, we feel a certain (potential, hidden) *sound* of those letters, the *sound* of the utterance.[159]

Sedakova considers Anton Webern's definition of sound, which he bases on Goethe's definition of color. While Goethe defines color as "the laws of nature perceived by sight," Webern defines sound as "the laws of nature perceived by hearing." In the poetic world of Sedakova, however, this applies not only to the laws of nature, but, as she says, "the *action* [*deistvie*] of nature, its *energeia*." Sedakova's choice of the word *energeia* here is significant in that it leads us back to a discussion of ekphrasis. Aristotle used the term to describe the effect of an orator who is able to "set things before the eyes of the auditor by using words that signify actuality," Hagstrum writes.[160] Homonymous with *enargeia*, which signifies the achievement of a pictorial quality (i.e., verisimilitude) and which served as the measuring stick of effective poetry for Hellenistic and Roman critics, *energeia* is not measured in relation to the visual arts or the tactile world. *Energeia* is achieved in poetry when "it has achieved its own independent being quite apart from its analogies with nature of another art, and when it operates as an autonomous form with an effectual working power of its own," explains Hagstrum.[161] By using the term *energeia*, Sedakova implicitly gives favor to poetry in light of previous attempts to equate painting and poetry as tools of imitation by different means (language vs. colors and shapes) used by Plato, Aristotle, and Lessing.[162] Rather, she stresses that "in the case of sound this is even more *apparent* [*iavno*] than in the case of color. It is harder to escape sound than

[159] This is a quotation from Bunin's poem, "Slovo." Sedakova, *ChT*, 3: 202. Quoted in Medvedeva, 239.
[160] Hagstrum, 12.
[161] Hagstrum, 12.
[162] See Plato's *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, Aristotle's *The Poetics*, and Lessing's *Laocoön*, all of which form the theoretical foundation of studies on ekphrasis. Emily Bilman presents a particularly concise summary of this theoretical foundation in the chapter, "The Genesis of Ekphrasis," in her *Modern Ekphrasis* (15-33).

color; it works instantly. Undoubtedly this is the case with acoustic sound; it is similar to color. But is it *by ear* that the sound of language (i.e., the sound of poetry) is perceived? Is it by ear that we hear that inscriptions on sarcophagi *ring out*?"[163] (Sedakova notes that the words "sound" ("zvuk") and "chime" ("zvon") in Old Slavonic were synonymous.) Sedakova clarifies that she does not have in mind an "acoustic hallucination" but rather a different sound—an "inner sound" ("vnutrennyi zvuk"). "This sound," she says, "is the *future sense* [*budushchii smysl*] of the thing which we recognize as sound."[164] She continues, "In the Russian language the word *sound* [*zvuk*] and the word *chime* [*zvon*] are connected with the verb *to call* [*zvat'*]. A *sound* is that which *calls*, it is a harbinger of a thing, its main theme. The author does not know what the thing is yet, but he has already heard its *sound* [*zvuk*], its *call* [*zov*]."[165] The "call" or "ringing out" of the inscriptions appears in the dialogue of the old man and young boy depicted on the first stele. "Well, you *called*, and I came" ("Vot, ty *zval*, ia prishel," emphasis mine), the little boy says to the old man.

The epitaph inserts itself once again into the ekphrasis of the stele's pictorial component in "Two Figures." As the poet wonders who has died ("who is departing?") and what the two figures are saying,

> Кто же уходит?
> кто, соскучившись в долгой разлуке, к милой руке
> наконец прикасается? –
> тень к тени, былое к былому,
> белое к белому. Что они там говорят?
> Говорят:
> – Это так.
> – Я клянусь, это так.
> – Так оно было и будет,

[163] Sedakova, *ChT*, 3: 203.
[164] Sedakova, *ChT*, 3: 204.
[165] Sedakova, *ChT*, 3: 204.

> даже если не будет. Так.
> Прохожий, люби свою жизнь,
> благодари за нее. Тени мало что надо:
> памятник встречи.[166]

> Who is departing? / who, having pined in long separation, finally touches tenderly / the dear hand? – / shadow touching shadow, past touching past, / white touching white. What are they saying there? / They're saying: / "It's like this." / "I swear, it is like this." / "Like this it was and will be, / even if it won't be. Like this." / Passerby, love your life, / give thanks for it. A spirit doesn't need much: / a monument to meeting.

In this instance the epitaphic address to the passerby is immediately recognizable, though the speaker of the "epitaph" is ambiguous. Is the exhortation meant to be the deceased's parting words paraphrased by the poet, or the poet's own gnomic statement to the reader? Despite, or perhaps because of its ambiguity of perspective, the concluding lines hang all the more in grammatical timelessness, thereby achieving verbally what the above-depicted handclasp (*dexiosis*) achieves pictorially.

The handclasp, a common gesture depicted on grave stelai of antiquity, represented "a simple farewell, a reunion in the afterlife, or a continuing connection between the deceased and the living."[167] As a symbol of simultaneous farewell and greeting between the living and the dead, one could suggest that the handclasp functions as a non-linguistic, pictorial recapitulation of the work of mourning carried in the funerary ritual. As Sacks describes, the ancient Greek funerary rite was comprised of two phases—the cathode, or way (*hodos*) down (*cata*), and the anode, or way up—and thus, a simultaneous parting and reunion. "On the one hand these phases mimed the death and return of the vegetation god, while on the other they came to represent an initiate's descent to and ascent from a crisis of mysterious revelation," notes Sacks.[168] These two

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[166] Sedakova *ChT*, 1: 298.
[167] *J. Paul Getty Museum Handbook*, 22. Quoted in Ricks, 431-32.
[168] Sacks, 20.

phases also correspond to the "rhythm of loss and retrieval" of the child's *fort-da* game described earlier in light of the elegy's repetitious language. By repeating the fact of the loss ("Who is leaving? Who … finally touches tenderly…?" ["Kto zhe ukhodit? Kto … nakonets prikasaetsia?"]), the mourner is then able to "master" the disappearance, as the child masters the disappearance of his mother. Sacks also notes that the repetitious texture of elegiac language, which "recalls the actual weaving of the burial clothes and shroud," also serves to create a protective barrier between the living and the dead.[169] The ekphrasis of the stele ("shadow touching shadow, past touching past, white touching white…"), and the speech of the parting figures ("It's like this…I swear, it is like this…Like this it was and will be…") dramatize the consolatory power of such repetitions which simultaneously recast the loss of the deceased (*fort*) and resurrect the deceased in the afterlife (*da*). In the context of the epitaph, addressed to a passerby, this consolatory power culminates in the staging or repetition of the deceased's words by a future reader, which recapitulates the simultaneous death and resurrection.

The cycle's fifth poem, "Jug: Tombstone of a Friend" ("Kuvshin, nadgrobie druga") represents the most explicit recapitulation of the funerary rite in the cycle, featuring repeating incantations, votive offerings to the deceased, the weaving of laurels or garlands, and payment to Charon, the mythic ferryman of the dead. The poem depicts not a stele but a lecythus (or lekythos), a small, clay oil-flask or jug usually painted with scenes of domestic life or funerary mourning. Until 430 BC, Attic funerary art was restricted to lecythi, which depicted scenes of mourning at the tomb itself or the departure

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[169] Sacks, 18-19. Sacks notes that the act of weaving commonly figures into the elegy. In addition to Apollo's laurel wreath and Pan's cut and bound reeds, Sacks notes the boy on the carved bowl of Theocritus's "First Idyll" who plaits a cage of asphodel, as well as the elegist of Virgil's "Eclogue X" who weaves a basket while singing, as examples of weaving.

of the deceased to underworld, as attested on extant lecythi, which show Achilles dragging the body of Hector, or Charon aboard his boat, as he conveys the dead across the river Acheron or lake Acherusia in his boat to Hades.[170] The poet also draws upon ancient Greek beliefs about the afterlife depicted in funerary epitaphs which describe the deceased's journey to Hades, as well as other concepts, such as the asterization of the deceased (i.e. the person's transformation into a star) or his or her absorption into the atmosphere.[171] Thus, when the poet mentions the apocryphal story of the identification by Conon of Samos of the constellation Coma Berenices ("Berenice's hair"), which he claimed was an asterization of the lock of hair Queen Berenice gave as a votive offering to the victory of Ptolemy III, the poet notes that the story was perpetuated "not without reason." The "matter from which our constellations are made" will be discovered by the saddened mind and both catch fire and become woven together like a garland in garlands:

> Хочешь – кувшин, хочешь – копье, хочешь – прялку.
> Если лгали про локон, как он на небе нашелся, –
> лгали недаром.
> Ум печальный отыщет в мельчайшей вещице
> вещество, из которого сложены наши созвездья,
> звуки беззвучных имен, –
> она загорится, совьется,
> как гирлянда в гирляндах, ласкающих смертное сердце:
>
> каждый вечер Персей Андромеду спасает – и каждый
> знает, какая звезда спасает его, подхватив
> того, кто больше не с нами. Что хочешь ему – то отдай.
> Хочешь – кувшин, хочешь – копье, хочешь – прялку.
> Что подвернется, он больше не просит. И это сумеет
> стать как всё: нужно только за всё не цепляться,
> положить эти медные деньги. Он сам разберется,

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[170] Hornblower and Spawforth, 307. Medvedeva also notes that the depicted "ferryman" is likely Charon. See *Tainye stikhi*, 231, 240.

[171] Hornblower and Spawforth, 417. One example that is cited in Hornblower and Spawforth is an epitaph honoring the Athenians who died in the battle at Potidaea (432 BC). It reads: "Aether has received their souls and earth their bodies; / They died at the gates of Potidaea; / Some of their enemies have the grave as their portion, others fleeing / Put the wall as their truest hope of life."

> руку поднимет, какой мы здесь не видали,
> руку созвездья. Возьми, перевозчик, ты видишь,
> как мы живем на земле:
> Прялка. Плуг. Копье. Кувшин.[172]
>
> Would you like a pitcher—a spear—a spindle? / If they lied about the lock of hair, how it was found in the sky, / they lied not without reason. / The saddened mind will discover in the minutest thing / the matter from which our constellations are made, / the sounds of soundless names, – / it will catch fire, intertwine, / like a garland in garlands, caressing the mortal heart: // every night Perseus saves Andromeda – and everyone / knows which star saves him, catching / the one who is no longer with us. Whatever you want to give him – give it. / A jug, a spear, a spindle, whatever you like. / Whatever turns up, he won't ask for more. And it will be able / to become like everything: one only needs to not cling to everything, / give these copper coins. He will figure it out himself, / he will lift up a hand like we haven't seen here before, / the hand of a constellation. Take it, ferryman, you see / how we live on earth: / Spindle. Plow. Spear. Jug.

In Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Perseus saves Andromeda, who is tied to a stone and left as a sacrifice to a sea monster to atone for her mother's pride. Perseus slays the monster with his sword, and, in compensation, accepts Andromeda as his bride. Later, when Perseus dies, Minerva preserves him and Andromeda in the sky as constellations. Thus, every evening, when the sky darkens and the stars appear, the asterized Perseus saves Andromeda anew.[173] The poet's ekphrasis of the lecythus demonstrates how the poet's viewing of the jug—and the reader's reading of the poem-epitaph—mirror the

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[172] Sedakova *ChT*, 1: 300.
[173] The theme of asterization and this allusion to the Greco-Roman myth of Perseus and Andromeda anticipates Sedakova's depiction in "Elegy that Becomes a Requiem" of the many monks and priests who were executed and buried in mass graves under the Soviet regime as stars in the zodiac who watch over the living from afar:

К святым своим, убитым, как собаки,	To our saints, murdered like dogs,
зарытым так, чтоб больше не найти,	buried so as never be found,
безропотно, как звезды в зодиаке,	without a murmur, like stars in the zodiac,
пойдем и мы по общему пути,	we too will go along the same path,
как этот. Без суда и без могилы	like this one. Without judgment and without a grave
от кесаревича до батрака	from the Tsarevich to the hireling
убитые, как это нужно было,	killed, as was necessary,
давно они глядят издалека.	for a long time now they watch over from afar.

In both instances the event of loss is recast in a cyclic pattern as the deceased reappear every night as stars illuminating the sky, though in the latter instance this is noted with grave irony, since these givers of light were executed in the name of the "swift triumph over darkness" ("dlia bystrogo preodelen'ia t'my").

recapitulation of the nightly show: every time a passerby views the jug, the scene is interpreted and brought to life again.

Unlike a stele, which features both text and image, the lecythus is more strictly pictorial. Thus, rather than depict, expand upon, or paraphrase a grave epitaph as the poems above, "Jug: Tombstone of a Friend" serves *as* an epitaph, which, in elegiac fashion, recapitulates the loss of the depicted subject.[174] We recall that the reading of the epitaph constitutes the "staging" of a "speech-act" which acquires a performative force. The deceased speaks to the passerby every time the latter stops to read the epitaph and the "'repeated' *present* of the *performance*" is felt," observes Tsagalis.[175] The staging of the speech-act thus recapitulates the subject's exit from the physical world. In this case, however, we hear not the voice of the deceased addressing the living, but that of the mourners who first address the deceased, entreating the deceased to pick an object for his grave, and who then address Charon, entreating the ferryman to take his payment and the offering. Nonetheless, as Medvedeva notes, the address is not individualized but generalized—the deceased must pick an object for his grave, which shows "how *we* live on earth."[176] Thus, in this case the reading of the poem-inscription recapitulates the departure of the dead and the funerary ceremony performed by the living, dramatized in the repeated refrain "jug…spear…spindle…."

While nearly all of the poems of *Stelai and Inscriptions* contain either repetitions of the graves' headstone inscriptions or consolatory gnomic statements, the cycle's

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[174] Karen Mills-Courts notes the similarity between the poetic act of representation and the "epitaphic gesture" in her monograph *Poetry as Epitaph: Representation and Poetic Language*. "Like an inscription on a cenotaph, it [the act of representation] proclaims death and an empty core, but that emptiness is of a peculiar sort: the emptiness of a nothing that seems, somehow, to signify something" (13).
[175] Tsagalis, 30.
[176] Medvedeva, 243-44.

second poem, “Figure of a Woman” (“Zhenskaia figura”), stands apart from the cycle. As Stepantsov observes, “Figure of a Woman” is the only poem which does not conclude with a reiteration of its title or an opened sense of the depicted woman’s grief.[177] It is also the only poem in which the depicted figure addresses the observer directly:

> Отвернувшись,
> в широком большом покрывале
> стоит она. Кажется, тополь
> рядом с ней.
> Это кажется. Тополя нет.
> Да она бы сама охотно в него превратилась
> по примеру преданья –
> лишь бы не слушать:
> – Что ты там видишь?
> – Что я вижу, безумные люди?
> Я вижу открытое море. Легко догадаться.
> Море – и всё. Или этого мало,
> чтобы мне вечно скорбеть, а вам –
> досаждать любопытством?[178]

> Having turned away, / in a wide, big shawl / she stands. It appears a poplar / is next to her. It appears that way. There is no poplar. / But she would willingly turn into one / like in the legend – / if only not to hear: / “What do you see?” / “What do I see, you mad people? / I see an open sea. It’s easy to guess. / The sea – and that’s it. Or is that too little, / for me to eternally grieve, and for you – / to vex me with curiosity?”

As Elena Aizenshtein observes, while the afterlife in the first poem is depicted as a place where, as the old man says, “things are nice” for the dead (“Zdes' khorosho”), in “Figure of a Woman,” the afterlife resembles a prison.[179] As the poet-speaker observes, the woman depicted on the second stele resembles one of the Heliades who turned into poplars from grief at the bank of a river. She seems trapped, possibly claustrophobic, in an intimate, close-up frame which precludes the viewer from seeing where she stands or what she is looking at. Though there is no poplar in the frame, the poet surmises that the

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[177] Stepantsov, web.
[178] Sedakova *ChT*, 1: 297.
[179] Aizenshtein, 236.

figure would "willingly turn into one" if only not to hear the endless line of curious admirers, who ask, "What do you see?" "What do I see, you mad people?" the figure snaps back, "I see an open sea. It's easy to guess."

The figure's admonishment ruptures the otherwise meditative mood of the cycle and reveals a more ambivalent, elegiac framework beneath the cycle's ekphrastic surface. While the poet succeeds in figuratively eavesdropping on the other conversations of the stelai, wherein the figures converse with each other in gnomic statements that only subtly imply the inclusion of the reader-viewer, the figure of the second stele addresses the viewer directly. In a brief but revealing moment, the figure's admonishment lays bare the conflicts of the modern elegy (or anti-elegy) which are elided in Sedakova's "Country Churchyard" and which seem otherwise absent throughout the rest of the cycle: the poet's awareness of her belatedness, a remembrance of failed intimacy, and an ambivalence in her pursuit of reciprocity with the deceased other. As Spargo observes, in the modern "anti-elegy," the elegy's convention of the renewal of grief (the "begin again" motif) is subverted. Rather than "begin again," the elegist is belated; he begins only *after* the other survivors have already mourned. This element of noncooperation, notes Spargo, marks the elegist "as someone who is, if only accidentally, out of step with the rhythm of his society and its forgetful flow toward the future."[180] The figure of belatedness in "Figure of a Woman," however, achieves an opposite effect, highlighting the elegist's unoriginality rather than her uniqueness: she is but one of many observers who vex the "lost other." If in previous churchyard poems the elegist paused over the graves of unknown others in order to meditate upon their epitaphs and sculpted images and

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[180] Spargo, 129. Brodsky's elegiac verse, which, as Kurganov observes, reflects the poet's "discord with the century," particularly exhibits traits of the anti-elegy as described by Spargo. Kurganov, "Brodskii i iskusstvo elegii," 167.

recognize his own reflection upon them, the poet of Sedakova's graveyard verse seeks to break this mold. While the speaker of "Country Churchyard" delights in the alterity of the other and leaves it intact, the speaker of *Stelai and Inscriptions* endeavors to discern the voices of the unknown others in symbiotic renderings of the pictorial and textual components of grave stelai. However, the speaker is not permitted to indulge in the church elegy's task of overcoming failed intimacy and recuperating a sense of reciprocity with the unknown other without at least some admonishment. As if to serve as a wry caveat to the commencement of the cycle, the voice of the female figure of the second poem chastens the elegist-viewer for disturbing her. Though in the paradigm of dialogic ekphrasis the poet is a viewer who, in dialogue with the exegete-addressee, gains access to and verbalizes the visual representations of the stelai, in the paradigm of the churchyard elegy the speaker is not a viewer but one of a long lineage of elegists who have meditated upon these gravestones prior to her. The poet acknowledges that she is merely one of many "mad people" who peer at the stele and repeat the same questions. If in life the female figure was, like the obscure villager of Gray's elegy, "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife" (or as rendered in Zhukovsky's second translation: "smut i volnenii bezumnoi tolpy"), now as a carved figure on a stele in a museum, she must endure the endless questioning by the "mad people" ("bezumnye liudi") passing by. "Is it too little," asks the figure, "to vex me with curiosity?"

The poet soon reconciles such conflicts as the cycle progresses, of course, and by the time we reach the penultimate poem of the cycle, "A Child, Playing" ("Igraiushchii rebenok"), the poet reconciles yet another opposition—that of classical and Christian conceptions of the afterlife.

И в предчувствии мы проживаем
то, чего жить не придется. Великую славу.
Брачную ночь. Премудрую, бодрую старость.
Внуков – детей того сына, которого нет.
Нет, не пустая мечта человеческим сердцем играет.
Знает ребенок, зачем он так странно утешен.
Чем он играет.

Мы не видим лица. Мы глядим на него, как из двери
мать поглядела – и тут же спокойно уходит:
он играет. Белый луч на полу.
– Он еще поиграет,
я успею доделать, что нужно.
Время не ждет, он играет.

Перед самым несчастьем предчувствие нас покидает:
это уже не снаружи, это мы сами. Прекрасно
в этой неслышимой музыке, в комнате белой.
Так он в сердце играет,
ребенок, играющий в шашки.[181]

And we live in anticipation / of what will not come to pass. Great glory. / A wedding night. Wise and vibrant old age. / Grandchildren – the children of that son who doesn't exist. / No, it's not an empty dream that plays with the human heart. / The child knows why he is so strangely comforted. / With what he plays. // We don't see his face. We peer at him like his mother / who checks on him from the door – and then quietly leaves: / he is playing. A white beam is on the floor. / "He will play a little longer, / I will manage to finish what is left to be done. / Time is not waiting; he is playing." // Right before a most grave misfortune, premonition abandons us: / it is no longer something on the outside, it is we ourselves. It is splendid / in this inaudible music, in this room of white. / In this way he plays in the heart, / the child, playing checkers.

As Medvedeva notes, the image of "wise and vibrant old age"—one of the life stages we expect to reach in life but that the depicted child has not—recalls both the biblical descriptions of the wise antediluvian patriarchs as well as the "mighty, evangelical old age" of Akhmatova's poem dedicated to Pasternak about the arrival of autumn ("I snova osen' valit Tamerlanom…").[182] As the poet of Akhmatova's poem likens the autumn wind to a "bitter sigh" from the garden of Gethsemane, the poem concludes with the foreboding anticipation of Christ's crucifixion, which, when inserted into the subtexture

[181] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 301.
[182] Medvedeva, 241.

of Sedakova's poem, mirrors the premature death of the depicted child. The child, however, is "strangely comforted" ("stranno uteshen"). This image of the calmed child recalls David's song of humility before God: "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul *is* even as a weaned child." (Psalm 131:2, KJV). In her poetic interpretation of the Psalter in "David Sings for Saul" ("David poet Saulu," c. 1979-83), Sedakova similarly juxtaposes old age and infancy:

> Ты видел, как это бывает, когда
> ребенок, еще бессловесный,
> поднимается ночью и смотрит туда,
> куда не глядит, не уйдя без следа,
> шатаясь и плача. Как звезда его вызывает? Какая дуда
> каких заклинателей?[183]
>
> You have seen how it is when / a child, still unable to speak, / gets up in the night and looks / where one doesn't look, without fear of leaving without a trace, / rocking and crying. What star calls out to him? What flute / of what charmers?

As Maria Khotimsky notes, Sedakova's "David Sings for Saul" refers to "the human longing for death as a quest for unknown space, and tests the possibility of achieving such space in a creative act."[184] As in "Country Churchyard" it is the childlikeness of the poet that enables her to enter into this state, for childlikeness—of being "open and helpless"[185]—also opens one up to the kingdom of God: "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein" (Mark 10:15). This theme of the soul's infancy appears in *Old Songs* as well:

> Ах, много я на людей смотрела
> и знаю странные вещи:
> знаю, что душа – младенец,
> младенец до последнего часа […][186]

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[183] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 222.
[184] Khotimsky, "Singing David…" 748.
[185] Sedakova, *ChT*, 4: 682.
[186] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 208.

> Ah, many times I've looked at people / and I know strange things: / I know that the soul – is an infant, / an infant to the last hour […]

As in Sedakova's interpretation of David's song, consolation is resolved with the inevitability of death, and "inner peace" is found "in the face of irresolvable metaphysical concerns."[187] In the room of "inaudible music" where the child plays, the poet observes, "it is splendid." A white beam of light which illuminates the room's floor signifies both death's inevitability (as white is the color of death) and well as a guiding light, evocative of the angel's shining lantern in "Country Churchyard" ("Will the light of a cast-iron lantern light my path?"). As in *Selva selvaggia* the beam of light provides guidance for the soul's departure and homecoming: as the deceased's soul departs in "Farewell" ("Provody"), it "flies to a light beam" ("sletaetsia k luchu"); similarly in the triptych's second poem, the "Return of the Prodigal Son" the errant youth is assured that "Wherever you were – you were, as a beam within a beam…" ("Gde b ni byl ty – ty byl, kak luch v luche…"). A specifically white beam of light, however, occurs in Sedakova's poetic corpus only twice—here and in "Country Churchyard"—and thus provides a significant link between the two poems. In "Country Churchyard" the image of the "white beam" on the "whitewashed brick" of the eighteenth-century gravestones ("belyi luch s belenym kirpichom"), which precipitates the "connector of ages" whom the poet addresses in the following stanza, mirrors the image of the white beam of light shining on the white stone of the child's stele in "A Child Playing," thereby signifying a parallel metaphysical encounter.[188] As in "Country Churchyard," the encounter provokes not introspection, but

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[187] Khotimsky, "Singing David…" 748.

[188] The image of the white beam also echoes Innokenty Annensky, who translated many texts of classical antiquity and whose suggestive poem "If you're no longer weeping, wipe away your tears…" ("Esli bol'she ne plachesh', to slezy sotri…") features a gently rippling white ray of light, which plays on the subject's face and gives the effect of a smile: "On your face a softly flickering / white light gave the appearance of a smile…" ("Na litse tvoem, laskovo-zybkii, / Belyi luch pritvorilsia ulybkoi… ").

outward meditation which goes beyond the self (the ego or the lyrical "I") and yet also returns inward to the self's inner core: "Like this he plays in his heart," the poet concludes.

In an essay on Russian Orthodox perception, Sedakova notes the importance of purifying the heart and its role as the "paradoxical center" of a human being. The first rule of prayer, she says, to "place [one's] intellect into [one's] heart." This placement means "to stop all reasoning—for it keeps one out of touch with the center of one's own existence—and to…comprehend everything from the point of the *heart*." By "heart," Sedakova explains, she does not refer to anatomical heart or one's sentimental heart, but rather "the very center of the human person." "'Heart' in Russian is of the same root as the words 'middle' and 'core' ['seredina', 'serdtsevina']," Sedakova notes.[189] The heart is paradoxical in that it brings us to our limit—to a participation in *The Other*:

> It is the paradoxical center, [the] center of personality which is, at the same time, its border, and the broken one. In its heart (or even 'in the heart of heart', as the Orthodox mystics say) the human being comes to its limit and to its 'being-with' or 'being-between', i.e. to its participation in *The Other*. Thus, heart must not be seen as the center within some closed psychic structure—but, on the contrary, as the central point of disclosing of such a structure and its meeting with the revelation of *The Other*.[190]

As in "Country Churchyard," the poet's revelation of and participation in *The Other* in *Stelai and Inscriptions* is conveyed by a sudden shift in narrative perspective, from the first person to the omniscient, though in this case, within the explicit framework of self-referential epitaph. As Medvedeva observes, the concluding "Inscription" ("Nadpis'") is the only poem that does not depict a stele; i.e. it is, as its title indicates, the inscription to the whole cycle, thereby fulfilling "an auto-referential function." Moreover,

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[189] Sedakova, *ChT*, 4: 682-3.
[190] Sedakova, *ChT*, 4: 683.

it is the only instance at which we see the author "as a private person," which is underscored by her address to Nina, the interlocutor and exegete of the cycle.[191] While simulating what one might call a "meta-ekphrastic" scene which features a description of the pair's *encounter* with the art object rather than a description of the art object itself, the poet also provides a reworking of the conventional conclusion of the churchyard elegy, which, of course, consists of a self-referential epitaph. However, in contrast to the elegist's response to the death of the other depicted in Zhukovsky's elegy, which concludes with a consideration of the poet's own ego in light of a renewed faith in God, the poet of Sedakova's cycle transgresses the limits of the poet's own lyric persona or ego, thereby amplifying the latent spiritual dimension of the churchyard chronotope:

> Надпись
>
> Нина, во сне ли, в уме ли, какой-то старинной дорогой
> шли мы однажды, как мне показалось, вдоль многих
> белых, сглаженных плит.
> – Не Аппиева, так другая, –
> ты мне сказала, – это неважно. У их городов
> мало ли было дорог,
> которые к гробу от гроба
> переходили.
> – Здравствуй! – слышали мы, –
> здравствуй! (мы знаем, это любимое слово прощанья).
> Здравствуй! как ясно ты смотришь на милую землю.
> Остановись: я гляжу глазами огромней земли.
> Только отсутствие смотрит. Только невидимый видит.
> Так скорее иди: я обгоняю тебя.[192]
>
> Nina, was it in a dream, or in my mind, that we once walked along / some ancient road, along, as it seemed to me, many white, smooth grave slabs. / "Not the Appian, but a different one," / you told me, "it doesn't matter. Their towns / had few roads, / which we crossed / from grave to grave." / "Hello!" we heard, / "Hello!" (we know that is a beloved parting word). / Hello! How clearly you look at the dear earth. / Stop: I peer with eyes of the vast earth. / Only absence watches. Only the invisible see. / So go faster, or I will overtake you.

[191] Medvedeva, 245-46
[192] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 302.

Like the Italian word "Ciao," the Greek and Latin words for greeting ("Χαίρε!" and "Salve!" respectively) are also used in parting. Thus, "Hello!" is both a greeting and a "beloved parting word," or one could say, a verbal emblem of the sacred handclasp, which signifies the itinerant soul's simultaneous departure and arrival into the afterlife. The "ancient road" along which the poet and her companion walk therefore also takes on a paradoxical significance. Like the human heart, the road leads the poet both towards and away, as "absence watches" and the "invisible sees." Resembling a Christian pilgrim, the itinerant poet continues her way, though the unknown voice of the epitaph cautions, "Go faster, or I will overtake you."

Sedakova herself would not travel to Italy and visit the Appian Way until nearly a decade later, but the cycle's concluding scene foreshadows an encounter the poet would later have on a Venetian square with an old Roman man who confides in her that "we are all tourists." As Sedakova recounts the encounter in her foreword to her book, *Three Travels*, the man said:

> "We are all tourists here." "And you?" I asked, understanding his Roman dialect with difficulty. "Yes, I was born in Rome, and my father was born in Rome, and my grandfather, and great-grandfather. But all the same I'm a tourist. We are all tourists here. Then the Lord will call us: "Time to come home! Home!" (*A casa! A casa!*) He gestured like an Italian mother calling out to her children in the yard from the window. "Then we will go home. But for now, we are traveling."[193]

[193] Sedakova, *Tri puteshestviia*, 8.

2. Elegizing on a Tightrope: A Precarious Lament for Leonid Gubanov and the Lost Generation

While the churchyard elegy centers upon the poet's encounter with the monument or epitaph of an unknown stranger, the "On the Death of" elegy constitutes a figurative construction of a monument in honor of a specific individual. The construction of such monuments for fellow poets, as Lawrence Lipking observes, comprises "the heart of literary history" as the poet both constructs a "memorial to the past" and attempts to "improve upon it or put it to use."[1] In the Russian context, the elegizing of poets represents a particularly rich tradition—a specific subgenre or "inter-authorial cycle" comprised of very specific conventions, which include not only the plot-driving techniques associated with the funerary rite, such as mournful refrains, questioning, a procession, and a figurative burial or laying to rest of the subject (as in the Western tradition), but specific images, turns of phrase, and rhyme pairs as well.[2]

Though ostensibly a well-intentioned commemoration, the elegy on the death of a poet, as Joseph Brodsky suggests, almost always reveals a "self-portrait" in which we learn more about the elegist's own attitudes towards death than the demise of the mourned subject. Practitioners of Harold Bloom's theory of the poetic tradition, which centers on poets' "anxiety of influence," however, discern a more contentious or malicious impulse in the poetic lamentation of a fellow poet.[3] As Bloom suggests, the living poet must assert his dominance by solipsizing or even expunging his subject from

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[1] Lipking, *The Life of the Poet*, 140.

[2] Levinton, "Smert' poeta," 190-215. Though Levinton's article centers upon the elegiac verse of Joseph Brodsky (and was written shortly after his death), it remains the *locus classicus* of study of the "Death of the Poet" tradition in Russian poetry.

[3] See, for example, Lipking's chapter on the *tombeau* in *Life of the Poet* (138-79) and Rigsbee's *Styles of Ruin: Joseph Brodsky and the Postmodernist Elegy*.

the poem.[4] Though such Bloomian competition may not arise when a poet mourns an inferior poet,[5] a different situation may arise when a great poet elegizes another. As Lipking notes, in poems between great poets "an implicit comparison between the dead and living masters can never be wholly disowned," and "the author's compassion for the spirit who has gone may well vie with his sense of spiritual competition."[6]

For reasons that will be discussed in more detail below, Bloom's theory of influence has been met with resistance in the Russian tradition.[7] And while the readings contained in the present and subsequent chapter do not take up the work of direct theoretical application,[8] a study of a Russian poet's elegies on the deaths of other poets would be remiss if it did not at least acknowledge the very clear cracks of anxiety that line the Russian "Death of the Poet" monument.

Such a necessity becomes all the more apparent when reading Sedakova's "On the Death of Leonid Gubanov" ("Na smert' Leonida Gubanova," 1983) and "In Memory of a Poet" ("Pamiati poeta," first published in 1998), written on the death of Brodsky, which

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[4] Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, 9.
[5] Lipking, 140. Milton's *Lycidas*, written on the death of Edward King, for example, does not concern itself with an effort to undercut King's legacy. Rather, as Bloom demonstrates, the poem in many ways speaks past its subject, addressing the elegiac tradition from Theocritus to Spenser instead. See Bloom, *Map of Misreading*, xiii-xxiii.
[6] Lipking, 140.
[7] Studies which challenge the applicability of Bloom's theory of influence to the Russian tradition include Bethea, *Realizing Metaphors* (see in particular the chapter, "Bloom: The Critic as Romantic Poet," 67-88); Bethea, *Joseph Brodsky and the Creation of Exile*; Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition*; and Weiner, "Influence as Tribute in Joseph Brodsky's Occasional Poems: A Study of his Links to Modern English-Language Poets," 36-58. Studies which employ revisions of Bloom's theory include Cavanagh, *Osip Mandelstam and the Modernist Creation of Tradition*; Givens, "The Anxiety of a Dedication: Joseph Brodsky's 'Kvintet/Sextet' and Mark Strand," 203-26; Pratt "Garol'd Blum i 'Strakh vliiania,'" 5-16; Reynolds, "Feathers and Suns: Joseph Brodsky's 'Dedal v Sitsilii' and the 'Fear of Replication," 553-582; Reynolds, "Returning the Ticket: Joseph Brodsky's 'August' and the End of the Petersburg Text?," 307-332; Reynolds, "'Light Breathing: Osip Mandel'shtam's 'First' Poems, Pushkin, and the Poetics of Influence," 103-27; and Goldberg, *Mandelstam, Blok, and the Boundaries of Mythopoetic Symbolism*.
[8] For examples of direct applications of Bloom's theory in the Russian poetic tradition, see Burnett, "The Complicity of the Real: Affinities in the Poetics of Brodsky and Mandelstam," 12-33, and Pratt, "'Antithesis and Completion': Zaboloskij Responds to Tjutčev," 211-27. Both Burnett and Pratt employ Bloom's ratio of *tessera* as a model of influence in perceptive readings of Brodsky in relation to Mandelstam and Zabolotsky in relation to Tiutchev.

provide intriguing contrasts to the self-transgressing elegies examined in Chapter One. As the close readings presented in the following chapters illustrate, Sedakova's elegies on the deaths of other poets represent some of the most personal poems of her poetic corpus, as they, like one of the stelai of *Stelai and Inscriptions*, depict both the departed subjects and the lyric hero herself. As in elegies examined above, the elegist incorporates familiar features of the elegy (in this case, homage, voice imitation, intertextual dialogue, polemic, poetic evaluation, and implicit self-considerations) only to further her signature elegiac trope of "celebrating what *is*." Underpinning the poet's buoyant laments, however, are discernable assertions of the author's own aspirations and anxieties before the poetic tradition and her responsibilities as a surviving poet.

IN CONTEXT: THE ELEGY ON THE DEATH OF THE POET

Unlike other varieties of the Russian elegy, such as the "sorrowful elegy" ("unylaia elegiia"), the "philosophical elegy," or the "churchyard elegy," which poets have modified in accordance with or in resistance to aesthetic trends, Vladimir Kozlov observes that the "On the Death of" elegy more likely comprises the "stable home front" of the elegy, remaining relatively immune to aesthetic trends of different periods.[9] As a lamentation cannot take place without a funeral, notes Kozlov, so an elegy which commemorates a death cannot take place without a real death.[10] Though surely an "On the Death of" elegy may also mourn a figurative or impending death,[11] the point is well taken. Whether symbolic, imminent, or painfully real, the "On the Death of" poem

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[9] Kozlov, *Russkaia elegiia nekanonicheskogo perioda*, 79.
[10] Kozlov, "Publichnoe proshchan'e ili lichnaia utrata?" 41.
[11] See, for example, Andrew Reynolds's analysis of Joseph Brodsky's "August," which he reads as an elegy on the poet's own inevitable demise with connections to both the Russian "monument" and "death of the poet" traditions. Reynolds, "Returning the Ticket," 307-332.

always grapples with a death of some kind. Like the English funeral elegy, the Russian "On the Death of" elegy is rooted in the funeral ritual: it enacts (palpably or subtly) a ceremonial transfer of the deceased from one "spatial category" (the world of the living) to another (the afterlife).[12] The elegy that commemorates a death, as Peter Sacks observes, almost always works "to place the dead, and death itself, at some cleared distance from the living."[13] This cleared distance may be completed by a gravestone or monument, the atmosphere, the earth, or, in the case of the poet, a figurative combination of these spatial categories—the realm of poetic quotation.

As Kozlov observes, however, the elegy's work of parting also figures as a "last occasion for meeting." This last meeting, he notes, not only reveals the lamented subject, but the lyrical "I" of the elegist as well.[14] Kozlov's rather diplomatic assessment of this last meeting presents a striking contrast to Brodsky's (albeit not always consistent) characterization of the genre as a "self-portrait" which in fact reveals more about the author's attitudes towards his own death than that of his subject. As Brodsky remarks, "[I]t is difficult, sometimes simply awkward to combat the feeling that the writer is situated in regard to his subject as a spectator is to the stage, and that his own reaction (tears, not applause) is of greater consequence to him than the horror of what is taking place; that at best he simply occupies a seat in the front row of the orchestra."[15] Indeed, in Oleg Chukhontsev's "Of some kind of incurable guilt…" ("Kakoiu-to vinoi neizbavimoi…") which Kozlov includes as an example of the elegy's dual meeting, the lyric hero's periphrastic lamentation appears to evade rather than face the deceased. Upon

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[12] Sedakova, *Poetika obriada*, 32. Quoted in Kozlov, "Publichnoe proshchan'e ili lichnaia utrata?" 40.
[13] Sacks, 19.
[14] Kozlov, *Russkaia elegiia*, 77-78.
[15] Brodsky, *Less than One*, 195-6

returning home from the burial, the poet is plagued by an "incoherent question that knocks nearby" ("bessviaznomu, tolkavshemusia vozle / voprosu"). As he attempts to decipher this question, which "circumvents the subject, unnamed due to lack of evidence" ("obkhodivshemu predmet, / ne nazyvaemyi ot nedostatka svidetel'stva"), one cannot help but notice that the subject of the question bears an uncanny resemblance to the mourned subject of the elegy—it is both unnamed and circumvented.

> Какою-то виной неизбавимой
> я виноват перед тобою, брат,
> за что, не вем. За схожую с давильней
> жизнь общую, где каждый виноват?
> За глину немоты?.. Чуть удивленный,
> с открытым ртом, не отрок, не старик,
> а перелосток в старце воплощенный
> лежал ты, отошед, ничей должник,
> из ада повседневного, из хмари
> залитых глаз в свое небытие.[16]

> Of some kind of incurable fault / I am guilty before you, brother, / for what, I know not. For our shared life, / analogous to a winepress, where everyone is guilty? / For the clay of muteness?.. Somewhat surprised, / with open mouth, not an adolescent, not an old man, but one who took too long, in an old man's body, / you lay, gone, no one's debtor, / from everyday hell, from the gloom / of brimming eyes into your nonbeing.

The poet describes his unnamed subject (a male acquaintance? A friend?) both apophatically (he is not young, not old, no one's debtor) and paradoxically (he is an over-aged child in an elder's body), but never directly. As the elegist contemplates the gnawing question, his Bible falls open to the Book of Kings and a cardboard bookmark of Marshal Zhukov slips out. Against the textual backdrop of the Book of Kings, the figure of Zhukov, as Kozlov notes, recalls Saul, whom God chose to serve as the monarch of Israel but who failed due to his preoccupation with earthly measures of success rather than God's precepts. Saul, of course, is foiled against David, the poet-singer whom God

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[16] Chukhontsev, 20. Quoted in Kozlov, 77.

blesses with divine power. The deceased subject's earthly afflictions—his alcoholism, obstinacy, pride, and poverty—appear before the elegist like skeletal fractures on an X-ray held up to the light. The poet's realization of the deceased's likeness to Saul (or, more precisely, his realization that, instead of mourning the subject, he has configured him with Saul) grips the poet with guilt.

Undoubtedly amplifying the poet's guilt in this scenario is the poet's own default role of David, the poet-singer who outlives Saul after the king falls on his own sword. The poet therefore concludes his elegy with the words, "Forgive me" ("Prosti"). As Kozlov notes, "the results of this meeting are so deprived of any rhetorical pathos that the lyric subject asks forgiveness for not only what he has said but what he has thought."[17] Thus, the conventional figure of elegiac guilt is doubled in Chukhontsev's elegy: it is not simply survivor's guilt—the realization that "I'm alive, whereas he—the better one—is dead," as Brodsky discerns in Tsvetaeva's elegy to Rilke,[18] for example—but rather: "I am alive, and yet also *better*." Adding insult to injury is the speaker's candid, confessional tone. Rather than seek to revise his insensitive figuration, he instead seeks forgiveness—something that the deceased is in no position to give.

As Brodsky suggests, the "On the Death of" elegy's proneness to solipsistic confession, self-mourning, and even "self-admiration" only intensifies if the elegy is written on the death of a fellow writer with whom the elegist, for reasons real or imagined, identifies.[19] The impetus for Brodsky's well-known observations, of course, is Tsvetaeva's "New Year's Poem" ("Novogodnee," 1927), written on the death of Rainer Maria Rilke. In the poem, the lyric hero does not simply admire her subject from the

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[17] Kozlov, 78.
[18] Brodsky, *Less*, 205.
[19] Ibid., 196.

"orchestra" but joins him "on the stage," so to speak, thereby rejecting the elegiac convention of distancing the dead.[20] The poem features the ultimate metaphysical transgression as the poet embarks upon an out-of-body union with Rilke's departed soul—not only in order to be closer to him, but also to peer at herself and the world he left behind through the eyes of his soul, which now roves in the atmosphere.[21] This metaphysical feat is accompanied by the poet's vacillations between soaring moments of poetic prowess—

> […] (ночь, которой чаю:
> Вместо мозгового полушарья —
> Звездное!)
>
> (the night which I plead for: / Instead of a cerebral hemisphere— / A stellar one!)

—and penitent "self-flagellation"—as the speaker intermittently restrains her poetic register or notes with regret that Russian, rather than German words (the mode of their correspondence) have burst forth. And further: "Am I getting distracted? But no such thing / Could happen—to be distracted by you" ("Otvlekaius'? No takoi i veshchi / Ne naidetsia — ot tebia otvlech'sia").[22]

As Lawrence Lipking suggests, this tension between commemoration and self-assertion (or self-insertion) constitutes the central drama of the poem on the death of another poet, or *tombeau* (the departed poet's linguistic "tomb" constructed by the living poet).[23] As the deceased and the living poet "collaborate" in the construction of the

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[20] Ibid., 198.

[21] The poem, as has been noted, is dated on the fortieth day after Rilke's death—the day on which, according to the Russian Orthodox Church, the soul of the deceased departs from the earthly world. See Hasty, *Orphic Journeys*, 170; Dinega, 147.

[22] Translated and quoted by Brodsky in *Less*, 229-33. For the Russian original, quoted above, see Tsvetaeva, *SS*, 3:132-36.

[23] Lipking, 138-79. The term *tombeau* in Lipking's usage not only extends his implicit metaphor of a poet's artistic life as a musical composition (initiation, harmonium, and tombeau), but also derives from Stéphane Mallarmé's elegies on Poe, Baudelaire, and Verlaine, which he called "tombs."

departed's tomb, Lipking notes, their interests do not always align: the deceased poet demands tribute, but the living poet "must look to his own art."[24] Thus, the elegy on the death of a poet often features a figurative battle as the elegist seeks to honor his subject's strengths while also (subtly or blatantly) drawing attention to his subject's weaknesses in order to position himself as the departed's rightful heir. In this poetic confrontation, the elegist characteristically incorporates reminiscences of the memorialized poet (in the form of lyrical style, metric forms, images, or specific lines) and "may even try, eerily, to impersonate his voice."[25] Indeed, though Tsvetaeva composes her "New Year's Poem" to Rilke in her native tongue and charts the topography of her own poetic world—a poetic "self-portrait," as Brodsky suggests—she does so by integrating and appropriating the central philosophical concerns of Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* and *Duino Elegies*, as well as the stellar motifs of his poem to Tsvetaeva, "Elegie an Marina Zwetajewa-Efron."[26] As Olga Peters Hasty observes, however, Tsvetaeva reverses the gender roles: she is the Orpheus to her subject, Rilke-Eurydice: rather than descend into the underworld to retrieve her beloved, she ascends to the atmosphere "to learn what he knows."[27] This reversal, of course, not only configures Rilke as the female victim, but configures the speaker as archetypical poet-singer *par excellence*, Orpheus.

The elegiac strategy of impersonation is, as Sacks suggests, both a means by which the elegist may "merge with the mask of the revived dead" as well as "a brilliant compound of self-glorification and self-effacement, of inheritance and submission."[28]

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[24] Lipking, 139.
[25] Lipking, 140.
[26] See Hasty, *Tsvetaeva's Orphic Journeys*, 163-222, and Dinega, 129-76, for insightful analyses of these subtextual connections.
[27] Hasty, *Tsvetaeva's Orphic Journeys*, 164.
[28] Sacks, 132.

Indeed, within Tsetaeva's loving assimilations, bursts of penitence, and soulful union with her subject, the astonishing heights of her poem (which so struck Brodsky) nonetheless speak to the other element of this compound—inheritance—and Tsvetaeva demonstrates that she is indeed up to the task of presenting an answer to the question she poses Rilke in her first letter to him: "What more can a poet do after you?" ("Was nach Ihnen ein Dichter noch thun kann?") She continues, "One overcomes a master (like Goethe, for example), but to overcome you means (would mean) to overcome poetry. A poet is he who overcomes (should overcome) life."[29] Tsvetaeva's "New Year's Poem" not only mourns the painful loss of her beloved interlocutor but represents her effort to overcome him, and indeed, transgress the boundaries of life and death.

Though Lipking in his interpretation of the *tombeau* seems to generally corroborate Harold Bloom's contention that "all major elegies for poets" in fact "do not express grief but center upon their composers' own creative anxieties," he stops short of the full implications Bloom delineates.[30] In Bloom's model, as poets seek to repress the "enchantment of incest" of the poetic tradition which resembles Freud's model of the "family romance," poets therefore "offer…as consolation their own ambitions…or if they are beyond ambition…then they offer oblivion."[31] While Lipking indeed traces lines of anxiety in a number of nuanced readings of *tombeaux*, he ultimately shifts his focus to the resulting product rather than the product's contentious construction. While, on the one hand, the liberties the elegist takes in constructing his subject's tomb may distort, polemicize, or even attempt to solipsize his subject, Lipking acknowledges, on the other

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[29] Translated and quoted by Hasty in *Tsvetaeva's Orphic Journeys*, 165. For the German original see Azadovskii, *Nebesnaia arka*, 47.
[30] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence,* 151.
[31] Ibid., 95, 151.

hand, glimmers of the dead poet's image and voice always surface.[32] This perseverance of the subject, observes Lipking, regardless of the poet's intentions, ultimately enacts a tribute. Even in an elegy traditionally viewed as polemical, such as Auden's "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," wherein the poet rejects his subject's desired burial (which Yeats stipulates in "Under Ben Bulben") and scatters him "among a hundred cities" instead (thereby ostensibly committing his subject to oblivion, as in the Bloomian model), numerous scholars in fact discern a reconciliation in the elegy.[33] The poet's apparent undermining of his subject's poetic legacy is both reinforced and belied by the poet's assertion that "poetry makes nothing happen." As Lipking notes, if poetry *did* make something happen, Yeats, who, as Auden charged, "rejected social justice and reason, and prayed for war," would have much to answer for. Thus, while the assertion certainly undermines the impact of his subject's labors, it also serves the critical function of enabling Auden to separate the "'silly' opinions of the man" from the "artistic excellence of the poet" in order to commemorate him.[34] Moreover, the elegist's rebuttals of his precursor's self-elegy, which ostensibly serve to "offer oblivion" to the subject, as Bloom would suggest, paradoxically also revive the dead poet's voice, thereby ensuring his life-after-death. Ultimately, Lipking observes, "[B]oth poets profit from the exchange."[35]

Such a compromise, however, does not go far enough for poets and critics and poets alike in the Russian tradition who contend that the Bloomian "anxiety of influence" does not apply to Russian poetry.[36] When considering the applicability of Bloom's

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[32] Lipking, 139; 162.
[33] In addition to Lipking, 151-60, see Ramazani, 176-91.
[34] Lipking, 155. See Auden's prose obituary for Yeats, "The Public v. the Late Mr. William Butler Yeats" 389-93. As Lipking notes, in 1939, especially, Auden's charge is not one that can be easily dismissed.
[35] Lipking, 162-3.
[36] See, for example, the chapter, "Bloom: The Critic as Romantic Poet," in Bethea's *Realizing Metaphors* (67-88); Bethea, *Joseph Brodsky and the Creation of Exile*; Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism and Literary*

paradigm to Brodsky's work, for example David M. Bethea remarks that "[w]e would be closer to the mark if we spoke of a catharsis or redemption of influence."[37] Surely it is undeniable that "every creative process is a reaction to predecessors," as Brodsky notes,[38] and, as a result, elegies on poets indeed often figure as authorial self-portraits. But the notion that the poet's creative process is wrought with anxiety and a desire to expunge or solipsize one's precursors—that as the "carriers of literary history," poets hold the past within them as an "infection" rather than a life-giving "seed"[39]—undermines the cultural mythology of the Russian poet, which centers on a collective bond between poets and their precursors. As Brodsky asserts:

> A true poet does not avoid influences or continuity but frequently nurtures them, and emphasizes them in every possible way. There is nothing more pleasant physically (even physiologically) than repeating someone else's lines—whether to oneself or out loud. Fear of influence, fear of dependence, is the fear—the affliction—of a savage, but not of culture, which is all continuity, all echo. (I wish someone would inform Mr. Harold Bloom.)[40]

For Sedakova, the influence of a great precursor is not merely pleasurable but a means of transcending oneself in order to become "freer and more skillful." In an essay on Dante's influence on Russian poetry, Sedakova laments, "The literary world of modernity knows only a miserable 'anxiety of influence.' The artist of the new age prefers to 'be (or remain) himself' at any cost." For Sedakova, however, the influence of a precursor such as Dante leads to a birth of a "different self" or "transumanare" (as it is referred to Dante's *Comedy*, meaning to go beyond one's human perception). This birth, Sedakova

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Tradition; and Weiner, "Influence as Tribute in Joseph Brodsky's Occasional Poems: A Study of his Links to Modern English-Language Poets," 36-58.

[37] Bethea, *Joseph Brodsky and the Creation of Exile*, 138.

[38] Brodsky, *Less*, 210.

[39] Lipking, 160.

[40] Brodsky, "A Footnote to a Commentary," 184.

contends, is "a story of a multistage initiation, or a multistage repentance, which is completed in utter seriousness and at the cost of one's blood."[41]

Though, as will be discussed below, both Brodsky and Sedakova (particularly Brodsky) contradict themselves elsewhere, it is worth pausing on the enduring mythologies of the Russian poet which undoubtedly motivate their statements. Though the notion of the collective can be traced to the salons and literary societies of the Pushkin epoch, the poets of the Silver Age, who viewed themselves as a reincarnation of this tradition,[42] and who have arguably wielded the strongest influence on poets of the postmodern period such as Brodsky and Sedakova, placed particular renewed emphasis on these principles of collectivism and redemption in both their creative processes and self-fashioning as poets. As Boris Gasparov notes, Russian Modernist poets did not so much "follow in the footsteps" of prototypical poets such as Orpheus, Dante, and Dionysus, as much as they *manifested* the "eternal Orphic or Dionysian principle" within themselves. In other words, poets of the Silver Age conceived of themselves and their work not in linear, historic time, but in an atemporal realm of *myth*, wherein they conceived of themselves as peers, rather than successors, to their predecessors, such as

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[41] Sedakova, "Dantovskoe vdokhnovenie v russkoi poezii," http://magazines.russ.ru/prosodia/2015/3/dantovskoe-vdohnovenie-v-russkoj-poezii.html#_ftn16 (accessed March 14, 2017).

[42] As Boris Gasparov notes, poets of the early twentieth century repeated the models of literary societies such as Arzamas and The Green Lamp in their symposia held at Viacheslav Ivanov's apartment ("The Tower"), literary evenings held at the "Wandering Dog" café, as well as in the editorial board of *Apollo*. In an episode at one of the meetings at The Tower, recorded in Andrei Belyi's memoirs, for example, Belyi recalls how Ivanov addresses him as if they are reenacted the iconic situation of Gogol's reading of his works to Pushkin: "Well, you little Gogol', you, go ahead with your Moscow chronicle!" ("Nu, ty, Gogolek, — nachinai-ka moskovskuiu khroniku!"), Ivanov says. Quoted in Gasparov, "The 'Golden Age' and its Role in the Cultural Mythology of Russian Modernism," 9.

the prototypical poets such as Orpheus or Dante, and Pushkin and his contemporaries in particular.[43]

Alexander Pushkin's "facticity" (i.e., his "unavoidability" for subsequent writers) in Russian culture, as Andrew Reynolds notes, would seem to liken the poet's stature to that of Shakespeare in Anglophone culture and thereby fit a Bloomian model of influence and repression.[44] Yet, rather than constitute a progenitor-voice to be repressed, Pushkin was perceived by Silver Age poets as the original embodiment of *zhiznetvorchestvo* or "life-creation" (i.e. the ultimate union of life and art), evocative of the image of Christ as the incarnation of God and His Word (Logos). During the 1921 celebrations of the eighty-fourth anniversary of Pushkin's death (and also the eightieth anniversary of Mikhail Lermontov's death), poets such as Alexander Blok and Vladislav Khodasevich extolled Pushkin as "the highest symbol of Russian spirituality."[45]

Moreover, the event of Pushkin's death, which gave rise to the potent mytho-poetic motif of the "death of the poet," not only signified the demise of Russia's greatest poet (the "sun of our poetry" ["solntse nashei Poezii"]), but the demise of culture.[46] Only with reverence to the "happy name" ("veseloe imia") of Pushkin, Blok warned, would the current generation be able safeguard themselves against the second, greater loss of

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[43] Gasparov, "The 'Golden Age' and its Role in the Cultural Mythology of Russian Modernism," 4. As Mandelstam asserts in his essay, "The Word and Culture" ("Slovo i kul'tura," 1921), for example, "One often hears: that might be good, but it belongs to yesterday. But I say: yesterday hasn't been born yet. It has not yet really come to pass. I want Ovid, Pushkin, Catullus afresh, and I will not be satisfied with the historical Ovid, Pushkin, Catullus." Mandelstam, *Osip Mandelstam: Selected Essays*, 50. Translated by Sidney Monas.

[44] Reynolds, "Light Breathing," 107.

[45] Gasparov, "Eshche raz…" 172.

[46] As Irina Surat notes, Pushkin even during his life was perceived "as the sun, as the center of the poetic universe." In his obituary on the poet V. F. Odoevsky only solidified this conception when he declared, "The sun or our Poetry has set!" ("Solntse nashei Poezii zakatilos'!") See Surat *Mandel'stam i Pushkin*, 25. As Alexander Blok asserts in his speech, "On the Purpose of the Poet" ("O naznachenii poeta," 1921): "As Pushkin's life approached its sunset, his path became increasingly filled with obstacles. Pushkin grew weak—and with him the culture of his time grew weak—the only cultural epoch of the last century." Blok, *SS*, 6: 167.

culture which the Bolshevik revolution and the years of war communism seemed to portend.[47] Khodasevich warned against a second "eclipse of the Pushkinian sun." "[O]ur desire to make the day of Pushkin's death a day of national celebration," he asserted, "is prompted by […] [a] premonition: we are working out what name we are to halloo to one another, how we will call each other in the encroaching darkness."[48]

While in Bloom's model of poetic influence poets "work to subvert the immortality of their precursors" when confronted with the imminence of death ("as though any one poet's afterlife could be metaphorically prolonged at the expense of another's," Bloom remarks),[49] poets of post-revolutionary Russia sought to resurrect their precursors. The untimely deaths of Alexander Blok and Nikolai Gumilev (who was executed under false conspiracy charges) in August 1921, roughly six months after the Pushkin celebrations, only confirmed the sense of eschatological doom that Blok and Khodasevich had expressed. Subverting the immortality of one's precursors or fellow poets therefore bore an all-too uncomfortable resemblance to the Soviet system's treatment of poets in reality, and this resemblance only continued throughout the Soviet period.

As Russian poets of the postwar and late Soviet periods continued to meet premature ends, and revelations of the of Stalin's terror were made public in the Thaw of the sixties, the untimely deaths of past poets, such as Pushkin, Esenin, Mayakovsky, and Mandelstam, took on renewed significance in the later Soviet era. Leonid Gubanov's

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[47] Blok, *SS*, 6: 168.
[48] Vladislav Khodasevich, *SS*, 2: 313; 316. The first "eclipse of the Pushkinian sun" occurred in the 1860s when radical literary critics such as Dmitrii Pisarev slandered Pushkin as a spoiled aristocrat akin to his own Evgenii Onegin, whose primary ability is to "be bored always and everywhere" indicates not a high mind but an "idleness of thought." See Pisarev's polemical 1865 essay, "Pushkin i Belinskii."
[49] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence,* 151.

"We live in grief and merriment…" ("Zhivem v pechali i vesel'e…"), for example, describes the Russian poetic landscape as an apocalyptic, war-torn scene, strewn with the dead bodies of Russia's ill-fated poets:

> Живем в печали и веселье,
> живем у Бога на виду.
> В петле качается Есенин
> и Мандельштам лежит на льду.
>
> А мы рассказываем сказки,
> и, замаскировав слезу,
> опять сосновые салазки
> куда-то Пушкина везут.[50]
>
> We live in grief and merriment, / we live in view of God. / On the noose sways Esenin / and Mandelstam lies on the ice. // And meanwhile we tell fairy tales, / and, concealing a tear, / again the pine toboggan / takes Pushkin away.

Similarly, Evtushenko's "Lermontov" (1964) portrays the flashing reflections of "two dead Pushkins" in the eyes of Lermontov as the depicted hero watches the sleigh carrying Pushkin's body drive by. "Poets in Russia were born with d'Anthès's bullet in their chests," asserts the speaker ("…Poety v Rossii rozhdalis' / s dantesovskoi pulei v grudi").[51]

Viewing culture as the "accumulated wisdom of the past," as T. S. Eliot described it, Sedakova has remarked, "I think that in Russia we saw culture very differently than people in Europe and America. For us culture was freedom . . . [W]e perceived culture as our salvation. For us culture in its broadest historical aspect was that very freedom and height of the spirit denied to us by the Soviet system."[52] Pushkin, Lermontov, and other figures of Russia's cultural heritage came to represent traditions which required not a

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[50] Gubanov, *Seryi kon'*, 24.
[51] Evtushenko, *SS*, 3.1, 439.
[52] Sedakova, *Freedom to Believe*, 16. See also T. S. Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1949), 21.

"completion and antithesis" as in Bloom's revisionary ratio of *tessera*, whereby the poet retains the terms of a "parent poem" only to use them in an antithetical sense—as if the precursor did not "go far enough", Bloom notes[53]—but rather a resurrection and synthesis. The original Greco-Roman meaning of *tessera*, which Bloom appropriates for the name of this ratio of antithetical completion, however, nonetheless provides a fruitful metaphor for the way in which influence ostensibly functions in the Russian tradition. Evocative of Khodasevich's description of Pushkin as a "happy name" that poets can pronounce in order to recognize each other in the encroaching darkness, the *tessera* functioned "as a token of recognition" or "password." As Bloom notes, "The *tessera* was employed in the early mystery religions where fitting together again the two halves of a broken piece of pottery was used as a means of recognition by the initiates.'"[54] In elegizing their fellow poets, Russian poets of the twentieth century have embedded such figurative tokens (from Pushkin, Lermontov, Ovid, Annensky, and others) into the subtextual layers of their elegies not only as a means of providing a sign of recognition in cultural darkness, but of initiation, as well. Such an initiation can be readily discerned, for example, in Akhmatova's "And today is the nameday of Our Lady of Smolensk…" ("A Smolenskaia nynche imeninnitsa…," 1921) written on the death of Blok. The poet refers to the deceased poet as "our sun, having extinguished in torment" while also integrating imagery from Blok's own work, referring to him a "pure swan" (thereby echoing Blok's "On Kulikova Field" ["Na pole Kulikovom"], "Song of Fate" ["Pesnia sud'by"], and others):[55]

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[53] Bloom, *Anxiety*, 14. For applications of Bloom's concept of *tessera* in the Russian tradition, see Burnett, 12-33, and Pratt, "'Antithesis and Completion': Zaboloskij Responds to Tjutćev," 211-27.
[54] Bloom, *Anxiety*, 67.
[55] See Levinton's discussion of these links in "Smert' poeta," 194.

> Принесли мы Смоленской заступнице,
> Принесли Пресвятой Богородице
> На руках во гробе серебряном
> Наше солнце, в муке погасшее, —
> Александра, лебедя чистого.[56]

> We have brought to the Intercessor of Smolensk, / We have brought to the Holy Mother of God, / In our hands, in a silver coffin / Our sun, extinguished in torment— / Alexander, pure swan.[57]

Like an interlocking of the *tessera* in the religious initiation rituals of antiquity, the poet's metaleptic characterization of her mourned subject enacts an imagistic interlocking of Blok with their shared precursor Pushkin, thereby signaling an initiation of her mourned subject into Russia's lineage of great poets.[58]

In another elegy of 1921 Akhmatova depicts the fallen poets as "dear souls" among the stars—a celestial pantheon of great poets:

> Все души милых на высоких звездах.
> Как хорошо, что некого терять
> И можно плакать. Царскосельский воздух
> Был создан, чтобы песни повторять.[59]

> All the souls of my dear ones are in the lofty stars. / How nice it is to have no one to lose / and be free to cry. The Tsarskoe Selo air / Was created to repeat songs.

As in Tsvetaeva's elegy to Rilke, the elegist's reference to the dead poets' extraterrestrial coordinates not only serves to underline their journey from the world of the living into the afterlife but the enduring and redemptive power of their poetry. Brodsky plays with this motif in his elegies to Robert Frost ("Na smert' Roberta Frosta," 1963), in which the poet asks the departed to permit him to tell the stars to cast their light more brightly in the

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[56] Akhmatova, *SS*, 1: 363.
[57] Translated by Judith Hemschemeyer. Akhmatova, *The Complete Poems of Anna Akhmatova*, 286-7.
[58] Mandelstam enacts a similar initiation in his "Concert at the Station" ("Kontsert na vokzale, 1921"), which likens the deaths of Blok and Gumilev to the deaths of Pushkin and Lermontov. See Gasparov, "The Iron Age of the 1930s," 78-82; Ronen, *An Approach to Mandel'štam*, xviii-xx; Taranovsky, *Essays on Mandel'shtam*, 1-20.
[59] Akhmatova, *SS*, 1: 372.

bushes, where the deceased poet wanders in darkness to take his place among the great,[60] as well as his elegy to Gennadii Shmakov ("Pamiati Gennadiia Shmakova," 1989), which commemorates Brodsky's departed friend Shmakov. As a fellow poet, "who knew the bravado of the pen" ("znavshii chernil'nuiu spes'"), the poet notes, his subject will no doubt forgive him for converting his earthly impulses ("liadvii") into a "mixture of astronomy and abracadabra" ("smes' astronomii s abrakadabroi").[61]

Such stellar topographies are but one of many motifs Georgii Levinton traces in what he identifies as an inter-authorial "cycle" ("tsikl nadyndividual'nyi") of the "Death of the Poet."[62] Made up of intra-poetic links, subtexts, poetic quotations, and specific themes or topoi, the cycle "exists not in the *oeuvre* of one poet, but in Russian poetry as a unified whole," Levinton notes.[63] As such, the cycle could be viewed as a particularly persuasive testament to the redemptive power of influence in Russian poetry. Rather than a Bloomian struggle for poetic independence, the Russian elegiac tradition dedicated to the deaths of poets represents a cross-generational honorary funerary rite of sorts: once a great poet dies, his legacy is invariably woven into the palimpsestic "Death of the Poet" monument by his contemporaries, or retroactively by his successors. As the Russian churchyard elegy grew out of the specific prototext of Zhukovsky's "Country Churchyard," the Death of the Poet Cycle, too, originates from and remembers a specific

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[60] Kozlov, "Smert' poeta," 47. See in particular Fedotov, "Poet i bessmertie (elegii 'na smert' poeta' v lirike Brodskogo)," 189-203.
[61] Brodskii, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, 2:138. Levinton delineates intertextual links in Brodsky's elegy to Shmakov not only to Tsvetaeva and her elegy to Rilke, but Akhmatova, Kuzmin, and Pasternak as well. See Levinton 190-191.
[62] See Levinton, "Smert' poeta: Iosif Brodskii," 190-215.
[63] Levinton, "Smert' poeta: Iosif Brodskii," 193. Levinton notes that he uses the term "cycle" in a way similar to Kiril Taranovsky when he traced thematic, stylistic, and subtextual links between a number poems composed by different poets in trochaic pentameter, which engage, continue, or revise Lermontov's poem, "Alone I set out on the road…" ("Vykhohu odin ia na dorogu…") and which therefore comprise what he calls the "Lermontovian cycle" ("lermontovskii tsikl"). See Taranovskii, "O vzaimootnoshenii stikhotvornogo ritma i tematiki," 372-403.

text. As Levinton illustrates, the cycle inherited its framework most notably from Lermontov's elegy on the death of Pushkin, "The Death of the Poet" ("Smert' poeta," 1837),[64] which depicts the perished poet as a Christ-like martyr who is slandered and persecuted by society but achieves posthumous triumph through the redemptive power of his verse. This paradigm, as Kozlov notes, shaped the myth of the Russian poet as "a genius who is always doomed in the earthly world," which imbues the elegy on the death of the poet, though the extent of its resonance "is largely determined by the scale of the deceased."[65]

Beyond the genre's Christological underpinnings, Levinton identifies a diverse catalogue of motifs which originate not only in Lermontov's source-text but other texts which built upon the tradition: a trail of steam rising from a cup (Akhmatova), a slanted downpour (Mayakovsky), a life-giving ear of grain (Akhmatova on Pasternak), a bed of slander (Pasternak on Mayakovsky), a calendar page (Brodsky)—these are but a small number of threads Levinton traces in the cycle which "establishes the consciousness of

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[64] Though Lermontov's poem is arguably the progenitor of the tradition, Levinton also notes that the Death of the Poet cycle can be further linked to Derzhavin's "Na smert' kn. Meshcherskogo" ("On the Death of Prince Meshchersky") and Zhukovsky's verses on the death of V. A. Ozerov, wherein the poet describes the poet's crown being woven with "thorns of envy" by his friends who have betrayed him. See Levinton, 193. One of the most prominent depictions of the poet as a Christ figure by poets of the Silver Age is of course Pasternak's "Hamlet" ("Gamlet," 1946).

[65] Kozlov, "Publichnoe proshan'e ili lichnaia utrata?," 43. The image of the poet as Christ figures as an especially prominent motif in the Silver Age. Tsvetaeva, in her *Verses to Blok* (*Stikhi v Bloku*), refers to the poet as "my splendid divine righteous one" ("bozhii pravednik moi prekrashnyi"), asserting that she, unlike others, will not drive a nail into his hand. (Tsvetaeva, *SS*, 1: 290). Mayakovsky also invokes the familiar Christological imagery in portrayals of his poetic persona, such as that in "The Backbone Flute" ("Fleita-pozvonochnik," 1915): "Create, / magic is equal to crucifixion. / You see – / with the nails of words / I am nailed to the page." (Tvoris', / raspiat'iu ravnaia magiia. / Vidite – / govozdiami slov / pribit k bumage ia.") (Maiakovskii, *PSS* 1: 208.) Mandelstam depicts the poet as a Christ-like figure in poems such as "Do not tempt foreign tongues…" ("Ne iskushai chuzhikh narechii…," 1933), which concludes with the foreboding that the poet will receive a "vinegar-soaked sponge" to his "traitorous lips" as punishment for his pride, and "Like Rembrandt the martyr of the chiaroscuro…" ("Kak svetoteni muchenik Rembrandt…," 1937), which centers on Christ's procession to Golgotha. (Mandel'shtam, *SS v chetyrekh tomakh* 3: 73; 119.) On the motif of *imitatio Christi* in Mandelstam's verse, see, for example, Freidin's, *A Coat of Many Colors: Osip Mandelstam and His Mythologies of Self-Representation*, "Sidia na saniakh: Osip Mandel'shtam i kharizmaticheskaia traditsiia russkogo modernizma," 9-31, and Surat, *Mandel'shtam i Pushkin*, 16-46.

poetic generations."[66] In addition to a highly allusive texture, other stylistic and structural cues of the cycle include certain rhyme pairs (such as "singer/end" ["pevets/konets"] or "voice/ear" ["golos/kolos"]), and a two-part structure (in light of the concluding stanza that Lermontov added later, which differs both structurally and in terms of tone, voice, and addressee).[67] Most fundamentally, poems that comprise the "Death of the Poet," Levinton notes, usually allude, firstly, to works by mourned subject, and secondly, to other poems of the cycle.[68]

Perhaps no other subgenre, cycle, or mode of Russian poetry better exemplifies Michael Wachtel's revision of Bloom's model than the Russian elegy on the death of the poet: rather than an "anxiety of influence," Wachtel asserts, Russian poetry more likely evinces an "anxious desire to be influenced."[69] Notably, Wachtel does not fully eliminate anxiety from the model. Rather, he shifts it to an adjectival position preceding a desire to *be* influenced. As we consider the full implications of such a formula, it is worth considering first what is meant by "influence." As Bloom reminds us, the word "influence" only acquired the sense of "having power over another" in the era of Aquinas, and for centuries after that, the word still retained its root meaning of "inflow,"

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[66] Levinton, 196.

[67] Death of the Poet poem which consist of two-part structures include Tsvetaeva's *Verses to Blok* (*Stikhi k Bloku*), to which she added after Blok's death, Pasternak's elegy to Mayakovsky, Akhmatova's elegy to Pasternak, and, as Levinton suggests, Brodsky's "On the Death of T. S. Eliot." Though Brodsky's elegy consists of three parts, Levinton observes that the first two parts are composed in meter (iambic pentameter), while the third is composed in a different meter (trochaic tetrameter). Since the third section of the elegy sharply differs in tone, the poem's three-part structure nonetheless follows the precedent set by Lermontov's poem. See Levinton, "Smert' poeta," 193.

[68] Notably, in his analysis of Tiutchev's "January 29, 1837" Alexander Dolinin demonstrates that a poem may not necessarily display all or any of these traits outlined by Levinton in order to engage or be attributed to the "Death of the Poet" tradition: a poem without such direct citation or linguistic mimicry, such as in Tiutchev's poem, for example, can still engage or even be ascribed to the tradition. See Dolinin, "Tsikl 'smert' poeta' i '29 ianvaria 1837' Tiutcheva," web.

[69] Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition*, 4. Though Wachtel makes this observation of the Russian Symbolists specifically, subsequent critics, such as Andrew Wachtel, have used his formulation to refer to all periods of Russian poetry as I have done here. See Andrew Wachtel's "From the Ends to the Beginning: A Bilingual Web Anthology of Russian Verse," Web.

signifying "an emanation or force coming in upon mankind from the stars." To be influenced therefore meant "to receive an ethereal fluid flowing in upon one from the stars, a fluid that affected one's character and destiny, and that altered all sublunary things. A power—divine and moral—later simply a secret power—exercised itself, in defiance of all that had seemed voluntary in one."[70] The Russian etymology of "vliianie" ("vliv''") mirrors this progression, as "vliiat'" (to influence) originates in "vlivat'" or "lit'" (to pour in, to flow) and encompasses the sense of receiving a moral advantage ("nravstvennyi pereves").[71] As the living anoints the dead poet with the astral "inflow" of their shared precursors and inducts the dead poet into the constellation of dead poets—or transforms the addressee into "poetic quotation," as Levinton describes[72]—the elegist must grapple with his or her own "anxious desire" to be influenced, or, in other words, to receive the inflow of divine or moral power from their shared precursors and initiate him or herself into this realm as well.

Such a model of influence is evinced not only in Tsvetaeva's elegy to Rilke discussed above, but Akhmatova's 1921 elegy in which she laments her "dear ones" who are now placed among the "lofty stars." In addition to lamenting her fellow poets, the poetic speaker also laments an image of herself and, more significantly, articulates her own place among their ranks:

> У берега серебряная ива
> Касается сентябрьских ярких вод.
> Из прошлого восставши, молчаливо
> Ко мне навстречу тень моя идет.
>
> Здесь столько лир повешено на ветки,
> Но и моей как будто место есть.

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[70] Bloom, *Anxiety*, 27.
[71] Dal', 523-4.
[72] Levinton "Smert' poeta" 191.

А этот дождик, солнечный и редкий,
Мне утешенье и благая весть.

> At the bank a silver willow / Touches the bright September waters. / Rising from the past, silently / Towards me my shadow comes. // So many lyres have been hung here on the branches, / But it seems there is a place for mine. / And this rain, sunny and rare, / Brings me consolation and good tidings.

Notably, rather than her subjects' immortality (which is certainly affirmed), the speaker finds consolation in the assurance that there is a space amongst the branches for her own lyre. Akhmatova's elegy to Blok discussed above enacts a similar, though more veiled self-initiation. As Levinton notes, the poet's assimilation of Blok and Pushkin's deaths (in the images of the sun and the swan joined by the name Alexander) also subtly assimilates an image of Akhmatova herself through the voice of Mandelstam, who employed the image of the "sun of Alexander" ("solntse Aleksandra") in his address to her in his "To Cassandra" ("Kassandre," 1917).[73]

As Levinton carefully delineates the edifice of the inter-authorial Death of the Poet monument, patterns of self-assertion and self-initiation and, though they are not brought to bear, even cracks of tension and anxiety can be readily discerned. Such cracks are perhaps most plainly visible in the tradition's very prototext itself, Lermontov's elegy on the death of Pushkin, which he wrote upon hearing the news that Pushkin was severely wounded after his duel with d'Anthès. In Pushkin's final hours, as he bade his friends farewell from his deathbed and large crowds of people thronged the streets of St. Petersburg in public outcry, Lermontov, still an unknown poet, penned his "angry elegiac ode." Written when Pushkin still had not taken his last breath, Lermontov's poem declares, "The poet is dead!" ("Pogib poet!") and condemns the aristocracy for their

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[73] Levinton, 194.

slander and manipulations of him, which ultimately led Pushkin into a duel with d'Anthès, who was rumored to be having an affair with Pushkin's wife.

Though the elegy ostensibly honors and avenges the poet, the poem does not attempt to transfer the deceased from the world of the living to the dead, nor does it provide any assurances of the deceased poet's immortality. Rather, as David Powelstock observes, the elegy depicts Pushkin as "a man utterly defeated and humiliated by society, a victim of its conventions ('honor's slave') and […] treachery."[74] The poet, in a supposed tribute to his subject, interweaves his homage to the poet with quotations, rhyme pairings, and metrical aspects from his works and likens the slain poet to the lovelorn romantic figure of Lensky from his *Eugen Onegin*:[75]

> И он убит – и взят могилой,
> Как тот певец, неведомый, но милый,
> Добыча ревности глухой,
> Воспетый им с такою чудной силой,
> Сраженный, как и он, безжалостной рукой.[76]

> And he is killed—taken by the grave, / Like that bard, unknown but dear, / The plunder of blind jealousy, / Of whom he sang with such marvelous powers, / Cut down, like he, by a merciless hand.[77]

In light of Pushkin's satirical portrayal of Lensky (the Byronic figure's overwrought, hackneyed verses might even lead one to call him a caricature), however, we can hardly conclude that Pushkin would have been wholly satisfied with such an alignment.[78] Moreover, as Powelstock notes, in contrast to Lensky, who receives a lengthy eulogy and

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[74] Powelstock, 184. Powelstock observes that the subject's lack of agency is even reflected in the grammatical texture of the poem as he almost always the direct object of transitive verbs and in the few instances in which he does figure as the grammatical subject, most of the verbs signify submission or death.
[75] On Lermontov's use of the subtext of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, see Miller, "Lermontov Reads *Eugene Onegin*," 59-66. On Lermontov's use of other Pushkinian subtexts, as well as those of their shared precursors, see Dolinin, "Tsikl 'smert' poeta' i '29 ianvaria 1837,'" web.
[76] Lermontov, *SS*, 2: 61.
[77] Translated by Powelstock in *Becoming Mikhail Lermontov*, 183.
[78] For a highly nuanced reading of Pushkin's satirical, yet double-layered portrayal of Lensky, see Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion*, 237-49.

proper burial after he is killed in his duel with Onegin, Pushkin is deprived of a funerary procession or burial. Instead the elegist offers an implicit reproach to his subject: why did the poet who "had understood men" in his early years "believe the false words and caresses" in his later years? ("Zachem poveril on slovam i laskam lozhnym, / On, s iunykh let postignuvshii liudei?") As Powelstock notes, the elegist seems to imply that Pushkin squandered his talents, which Lermontov, as an obscure struggling poet who would not have taken Pushkin's fame for granted, would have guarded more carefully.[79]

As the poet strips his subject of his Protean wit and denies him a customary funerary rite, the image of the expired poet that emerges appears to be more patronized than honored, more victimized than mourned. The poet's incrimination of the court society for the events leading up to Pushkin's death solidifies not only the mythopoetic image of Pushkin as the poet-martyr *par excellence*, but establishes a very clear binary between society ("the greedy crowd at the throne" ["Vy, zhadnoiu tolpoi stoiashchie u trona"]) and the poet, who heeds not the law of the court but the law of God ("bozhii sud"). This demarcation underscores Lermontov's own position against the state as Pushkin's avenger and, by extension, his rightful heir. As the sounds of the dead poet's "wondrous songs" have now fallen silent, never to sound again ("Zamolkli zvuki chudnykh pesen, / Ne razdavat'sia im opiat'"), Lermontov's poem therefore offers itself as a song to fill this silence. Indeed, as the poem underwent rapid duplications and passed from hand to hand in the wake of Pushkin's death, it achieved exactly that: Lermontov's

[79] Powelstock, 184-5.

name, before then only known amongst the literary circles, immediately became nationally known.[80]

Lermontov's assimilation of images and lines from Pushkin's poetry into his monument to the poet-martyr proves to be the ultimate "misprision" in the Bloomian sense—both a "willful misreading" and an "unjust *imprisonment*" (as Shakespeare punned)—for the figuration permanently shaped Pushkin's poetic mythology.[81] The opening lines of the poem, "The poet is slain!" ("Pogib poet!"), continue to carry particular power, reverberating throughout elegies on the death of the poet as if to repeatedly declare Pushkin's terminus. Though subsequent poets, particularly at the Pushkin celebrations of 1921 discussed above, criticized Lermontov's emphasis on the poet's demise rather than his enduring spirit,[82] the poet's declaration of Pushkin's death ("Pogib poet!") has continued to be applied to other poets, both sincerely and ironically.[83]

Though Lermontov certainly did not rejoice at Pushkin's death, a Bloomian assertion of dominance in the poem is undeniable. "Even though the poem is, on its surface, devoted to defending Pushkin's reputation," Powelstock observes, "on a deeper level it also prepares a mythological role for Lermontov as the avenger of poetry and the

[80] See Lermontov, *SS*, 2: 280. Prior to "The Death of the Poet," none of Lermontov's works had been published, save for *Hadji the Blood Outcast* [*Khadzhii Abrek*], which was published without his permission. See Powelstock, 400.

[81] See Bloom, xiii.

[82] At the Pushkin celebrations in St. Petersburg in 1921, Mikhail Kuzmin insisted, "Pushkin lives!" Quoted in Powelstock, 185. See Hughes, "Pushkin in Petrograd, February 1921," 204-13.

[83] In Akhmatova's 1960 elegy on the death of Pasternak, for example, the poet somberly begins with the assertion, "An inimitable voice fell silent yesterday" ("Umolk vchera nepovtorimyi golos…"), thereby echoing Lermontov's opening lines both semantically and metrically while borrowing imagery from Lermontov's penultimate stanza, which reads "The miraculous songs have fallen silent" ("Zamolkli zvuku chudnykh pesen"). Akhmatova, *SS*, 4: 328. Polina Barskova, on the other hand, satirizes the phrase in honor of Brodsky in her 1996 elegy on his death: "A poet has perished. More precisely – he kicked the bucket. / How his last breath smelled / – we don't know, and it's a bit shameful to guess." ("Pogib poet. Tochnee – on podokh. / Kakim na vkus ego poslednii vdokh / Byl – my ne znaem, i gadat' postydno.")

poet, casting Lermontov himself as the kind of active hero Pushkin was not."[84] Aside from his more distant role model of Lord Byron—a poet from whom Lermontov also sought to distinguish himself[85]—the older contemporary and compatriot Pushkin indeed appears to have represented a more immediate source of anxiety, which hampered Lermontov's ability carve out a poetic niche for himself in Russian society.[86]

Scholars who have productively applied Bloomian models of influence to Russian poets such as Mandelstam or Tsvetaeva, who have both been shown to have encountered a "blocking figure" in their older contemporary Blok, for example, certainly attest to the fact that such anxieties before an older contemporaries are not unique to Lermontov.[87] Even Brodsky, who insists upon the pleasure of poetic influence, has elsewhere asserted that "a writer, exiled or not, never wants to appear influenced by his contemporaries."[88] Moreover, as Clare Cavanagh observes, the Bloomian model is not as foreign to the Russian context as one might think. Pointing to a 1933 essay on Mandelstam by Boris Eikhenbaum, who observes that Mandelstam's best verses result from the poet's "battle with the craft" of other poets, and that one must "conquer" the "great poet" if one is to learn from him, Cavanagh discerns a Bloomian formulation which predates Bloom. Cavanagh observes,

> If we substitute "strong poet" for Eikhenbaum's "great poet" and combine his remarks with Mandelstam's vision of literature as an endlessly squabbling family, we come up with a version of poetic tradition that looks very like Harold Bloom's

[84] Powelstock, 186.
[85] On Lermontov and Byron see, Koretsky, "'I'm NO Byron': Lermontov, Love, and the Anxiety of Byronic Influence," 70-81.
[86] See Powelstock, 178-90.
[87] On Mandelstam's anxiety before Blok, see Goldberg, "Bedside with the Symbolist Hero: Blok in Mandel'shtam's 'Pust' v dushnoi komnate,'" 26-42. On Tsvetaeva and Blok, see Dinega, *A Russian Psyche*, 41-42.
[88] Brodsky, "The Condition We Call Exile," 18. For discussions of the inconsistencies in Brodsky's essays and interviews with regard to Bloom's theory of influence, see Reynolds "Feathers and Sons," 571-573; Givens, 203-4.

> more recent notion of a poetry that derives its force from the ceaseless battling of poetic parents and their rebellious offspring.[89]

In addition to the anxieties a poet may feel under the weight of the past (with poetic forebears "breathing down his neck," as Brodsky once put it),[90] poets of Soviet Russia faced additional social and civic burdens.[91] As Sedakova observes in her polemical obituary to Gubanov, "On the Lost Literary Generation: In Memory of Lenia Gubanov" ("O pogibshem literaturnom pokolenii: Pamiati Leni Gubanova," 1984), poets of the "second culture" felt the weight of a social and artistic responsibility to either capitulate to the Soviet system or to defy it, in order to take on the civic and social responsibility their precursors bore. Yet neither possible path seems to lead to meaningful literary achievement. One could either publish whitewashed verse, or one could languish in the margins with no readership. Sedakova criticizes both those who capitulated to or embraced the system, as well those who were persecuted by the system and who therefore enjoyed a sense of moral superiority over those whom they viewed as morally compromised. She also criticizes her own self-righteousness as someone who neither capitulated to the system nor openly defied it.[92]

This civic predicament only further complicated the Russian poet's literary predicament before the overwhelming literary tradition. Perhaps even more unconscious than the anxiety of influence itself, as Andrew Reynolds observes, was the possibility that an emulation (or surpassing) of Pushkin in one's life and poetry would inevitably also

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[89] Cavanagh, *Osip Mandelstam and the Modernist Creation of Tradition*, 11-12. See Eikhenbaum, "O Mandel'shtame,"167-68.
[90] Brodsky, *On Grief and Reason*, 319.
[91] Clare Cavanagh discusses this additional burden in the Polish context, See "Lyrical Ethics: The Poetry of Adam Zagajewski," 1-15.
[92] Sedakova, "O pogibshem literaturnom pokolenii," 138.

lead to a repetition of his untimely end.[93] Thus, in contrast to the professional ambivalence a Johnson or Shelley might feel before Shakespeare, a Mandelstam or a Brodsky would undoubtedly feel an additional, human source of ambivalence before Pushkin in light of a (faint or not-so-faint) premonition that in order to achieve "Pushkinian strength" one may have to "die a 'Pushkinian death.'"[94]

While Brodsky, who had already achieved poetic fame by the time of his exile in 1972, may have faced the full implications of Pushkinian imitation with trepidation, poets such as Leonid Gubanov, who were deprived of a readership, all too eagerly embraced such a fate, finding it easier, as Sedakova laments, to imitate their predecessors' tragic ends than improve upon the tradition bequeathed to them. For her polemical obituary on Gubanov Sedakova therefore takes her title from Roman Jakobson's polemical obituary of Mayakovsky, "On the Generation that Squandered its poets" ("O pokolenii, rastrativshem svoikh poetov"), which traces the theme of suicide in Mayakovsky's work and argues that it had always functioned as the poet's "poetic dominant."[95] Against the suicidal backdrop of Jakobson's essay, Sedakova presents an updated scenario in which a generation has lost its *future* poets: rather than reaching their potential, the poets of the sixties and seventies languished in self-reverence as ill-fated, underground "geniuses," writing only for themselves and to one another, with no meaningful readership. Describing the cultural milieu in which she and her contemporaries embarked upon their poetic careers, Sedakova recalls,

[93] Reynolds, "Light Breathing," 114.
[94] Reynolds, "Light Breathing," 115.
[95] Sedakova, "O pogibshem literaturnom pokolenii," 135-46. See Iakobson, "O pokolenii, rastrativshem svoikh poetov," 8-34, or, in English translation, Jakobson, "On a Generation that Squandered its Poets" in *My Futurist Years*, 209-245.

> For the first time there appeared a poet known throughout the Soviet Union, whose name [Brodsky] was mentioned in the press only in connection to a trial against him. To publish seemed more shameful than honorable—and in this very predicament the mill of gray literary terror continued to spin. There were no substantial or more concrete reasons behind it. If someone, for example, was not suitable because of his or her "religiousness," another was too blasphemous; if someone was "incomprehensible," someone else was too simple… So lived those whose literary debut was to be made in the mid sixties and early seventies. We were deprived of any meeting with an open reader, denied even criticism and denunciations and the right to be mentioned publicly. We can be proud only of the fact that no contemptible poet of the past was granted this honor of ours, though the best poets of the twentieth century were granted it either fully or partially. But such company should not be flattering.[96]

In a society where the poet who stands up to "societal opinions" is met not with slander but with silence, pursuing either end of the equation—Pushkinian strength or a Pushkinian end—seemed only to lead to the same oblivion. As Kirill Kovaldzhi laments in a 1994 two-part series on the status of Russian poetry in *Voprosy literatury* (*Questions of Literature*), "Alas, in the splendid formulation 'A poet in Russia is more than a poet,' the verb should now be put in the past tense. There is no longer any demand for odes or invectives. Your verses no longer get you an apartment in the Kremlin (as they did for Demyan Bedny) or cost you your life (as they did for Mandelstam)."[97]

Sedakova's elegies address two very different poets and two very different ends of the equation, but who were both in their own rights "death-obsessed" and concerned with their poetic genealogies.[98] While Gubanov unabashedly appropriated both the lyric and biographical personas of Esenin and Pushkin in his art and life, Brodsky, in his own way, ambivalently embraced his title of "the second Osya" after Mandelstam (a nickname given to him by the precursor's wife, Nadezhda Mandelstam, and continued by his

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[96] Sedakova, "O pogibshem literaturnom pokolenii," 140.
[97] Koval'dzhi, "XX vek: Iskusstvo. Kul'tura. Zhizn'. Proiasnennyi nebosklon," 8.
[98] David M. Bethea describes Joseph Brodsky as the post most obsessed with death since Innokentii Annenskii. See Bethea, *Joseph Brodsky and the Creation of Exile*, 93.

friends). In contrast to her subjects, however, Sedakova resists such familial self-identification and takes great pains to emphasize that there is in fact an "abyss" ("propast'") between the poet-author and the poet-artist, the "biographical 'I'" of the author and the "I" revealed to us in his work. Citing Pushkin's poem, "The Poet", Sedakova suggests that "Pushkin expressed this thought many times: the poet, when he is not called to his task, when he is an ordinary, insignificant creature, is maybe 'the most insignificant of all.' […] The contrast is striking."[99]

However, while such deflection attests to the theme of going beyond the limitations of the lyrical "I" in her work, as discussed in the previous chapter, it also speaks to the fact that Sedakova does not take the issues of poetic influence and tradition lightly.

> There is unquestionable risk and drama in [tradition] because having passed something to another hand, the bequeather understands that those hands are now free to deal with the bequeathed object in their own way. And the receiver would have to deal with the object in his or her own way precisely to preserve tradition. Thus, the tradition includes a change, included by necessity, it cannot be imagined without it. After all, the thing is in different hands, in a different time. In different hands, but in trusted ones, we must point out, not in the hands of the first person we meet, not in anyone's. *One must be worthy of tradition*.[100]

Indeed, when asked by Valentina Polukhina about her influences, Sedakova acknowledges the awe, if not anxiety, Mandelstam struck in her as a young poet. "It was not a matter of writing post-Auschwitz, as they say now, but of writing post-Mandelstam, writing in the wake of that new intensity and beauty, all that he achieved in his late

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[99] Sedakova, "Veshchestvo chelovechnosti. Beseda c Patrikom de Lob'e o 'Poslanie liudiam iskusstva' Papy Ioanna Pavla II," <http://www.olgasedakova.com/interview/128> (accessed 17 October 2015).
[100] Emphasis mine. Sedakova, *Freedom to Believe*, 171-172.

poems. Now the sharpness of that relationship with Mandelstam has softened, though many of his things still seem to me to be landmarks."[101]

Though tracing the specific ways in which Bloomian paradigms play out in Sedakova's poetry lies beyond the scope of this study, these cursory remarks serve to illustrate that such tensions indeed lie at the heart of the Russian tradition on the death of the poet. In the elegies of Sedakova, whose poetry is commonly (though to a large extent mistakenly) lauded for its "meekness," we might very well expect not only a pronounced absence of any claim to dominance, but perhaps an even further eschewal of self-portrait—an attempt to move beyond the frame of self-portrayal or self-stylization. Contrary to our expectations, however, the poet pervades every layer of the poems presented in these following chapters. Like one of the stelai in her *Stelai and Inscriptions*, Sedakova's poetic tombs depict both the mourner and the departed. Moreover, as the elegist engages her subject in a dexiotic clasp—both a parting and a meeting—the lyric hero assimilates both herself and her subjects into their own respective corners of the poetic constellation of influence.

"On the Death of Leonid Gubanov"

One of the more notorious figures of the Moscow literary underground in the sixties and early seventies, Leonid Gubanov is now remembered primarily as the founder of "The Youngest Society of Geniuses" (SMOG), the first unofficial literary group to counter the official Soviet literature of the postwar period.[102] Though not one full-length

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[101] Sedakova, "Conform not to This Age," 49.

[102] The acronym is most often said to stand for "Samoe molodoe obshestvo geniiev," though it is also said to stand for "Smelost' Molodost' Obraz Glubina" ("Boldness Youth Image Depth"). Another (rarer) interpretation that Titova includes is: "Sila Myslei, Orgiia Giperbol" ("Force of Thoughts, Orgy of Hyperbole"). (Titova, "Budushchee kak liricheskii siuzhet v poezii Leonida Gubanova," 276.) Formed in

poem of his ever appeared in print during his lifetime,[103] Gubanov gained notoriety amongst the literary underground in the sixties—a vibrant, though thorny period of his life marked by artistic performances with the *smogisty* (before they disbanded in 1966 due to political pressure), political demonstrations, arrests, and stints in psychiatric wards.[104] Though he continued to write verse into his later years, however, Gubanov spent his last decade living in obscurity, deprived of a readership and receding further into alcoholism. A solitary figure with few friends, Gubanov died alone in his apartment in 1983 of a heart attack at the age of thirty-seven. It was not until a year later that four of his poems appeared in the annual almanac *Day of Poetry* (*Den' poezii*).[105]

Sedakova met Gubanov in the early 1960s at the literary studio at the Moscow Palace of the Pioneers, and, like Sedakova, Gubanov impressed his mentors and peers with his poetic talent. As Vladimir Aleinikov recalls, "Gubanov began early and brilliantly. His great talent was obvious to everyone. His poems were marvelous to the ear. And he eagerly recited them often and everywhere. Within a year he captivated Moscow's literary scene. One could say it was a Russian version of what had happened

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1965, the short-lived SMOG group included Vladimir Aleinikov, V. Batshev, Sergei Gandlevsky, Yurii Kublanovsky, Vadim Delone, and others.

[103] A few stanzas of one poem, "Polina" appeared in the official magazine, *Iunost'* (*Youth*) in 1964, due to the efforts of Evtushenko, and a small number of his poems were published in underground *SMOG* pamphlets. Gubanov, "Khudozhnik (otryvok iz poemy 'Poliny')," 68. Like Sedakova, when Gubanov was a young pupil at the Palace of the Pioneers in 1962, he, too, was published in the official journal, *Pionerskaia pravda*. His later 1964 publication in *Iunost'*, however is his only publication reflective of his more mature work.

[104] References to Kashchenko Hospital (Moscow Psychiatric Hospital No. 1) appear throughout Gubanov's poetry. See, for example, "Thank you" ("Blagodariu"): "I am thankful that I was imprisoned, / I am thankful that I loafed about in the nut house, / I am thankful that I lived among the shadows" ("Blagodariu za to, chto ia sidel v tiur'me, / blagodariu za to, chto shialsia v zheltom dome, / blagodariu za to, chto zhil sredi tenei…") (*Seryi kon'*, 195); or "Palette of Grief" ("Palitra skorbi"): "I spend my youth in asylums, / where they couldn't strangle me, cleave me in half…" ("Ia provel svoiu iunost' po sumasshedshim domam, / gde menia ne smogli udavit', rasrubit' popolam…") (*Seryi kon'*, 197).

[105] The first large publication of his poems appeared in *Znamia* in 1993, and the first book of his collected works, *I was Exiled to the Muse in the Galleys* (*Ia soslan k Muze na galery*) appeared in 2003.

with Rimbaud, except [Gubanov] never gave up writing poetry."[106] At sixteen he was already a celebrity of the literary underground, and, as Bondarenko writes, "The [literary] underground was the talk of [Russia's] cultural bohemia, and everyone—even those who never saw him or read any of his poems in samizdat—heard about Gubanov."[107]

Though the poet earned praise from respected figures of the literary scene, such as Evgenii and Elena Pasternak and Andrei Siniavskii, Gubanov notoriously did not take criticism well: as one (likely embellished) story goes, when Gubanov happened upon Evtushenko and a visiting Englishman one day in Peredelkino (a favorite place of Gubanov's), Evtushenko asked Gubanov to recite some of his poems. Gubanov readily obliged, and when he had finished, Evtushenko started to make some critical remarks. However, Gubanov cut him off, shouting, "You are shit, but I am a brilliant poet!" ("Ty – der'mo, a ia – gennial'nyi poet!").[108] Gubanov's habit of declaring himself a genius repelled many of his peers and older contemporaries. Lev Anninskii recalls an evening when the "geniuses" were invited to read their poetry at the Writers' Union, where he served as the invited critic for the event. Despite his role, however, he found himself unable to recall whether he was impressed by their work:

> I could not remember any of their poems. Preventing me from doing so was the carnival-like presentation and the continuous, almost knee-jerk repulsion one feels when someone calls himself a genius. I remember a white-haired Boris Slutsky, who with a magisterial intonation rapped out, "Comrade *smogisty*, I consider your business here to be: ve-ry *good*." And then one of the geniuses just as firmly rapped back, "But if I were to ask one of you for three rubles, you wouldn't give it to me!"[109]

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[106] Quoted in Krokhin, *Profili na serebre: Povest' o Leonide Gubanove*, 65-66.
[107] Bondarenko, *Poslednie poety imperii,* 603.
[108] This was a story Gubanov loved to tell, and it is recounted by both Krokhin and Shmel'kova in their biographical writings about the poet. See Krokhin (*Profili na serebre*, 22) and Shmel'kova (*Vo chreve machekhi*, 132).
[109] Anninskii, "Leonid Gubanov: 'V tainstvennom bredu,'" 188.

Gubanov's obsession with being a "genius" repelled Sedakova as well, and as she acknowledges in her obituary on the poet, she did not take his work very seriously.[110] Though she associated with Gubanov and the *smogisty* at the height of the movement in mid-sixties, as well as during her time as a student ay Moscow State University where she matriculated in 1967, she never joined the group, and their relationship was marked by a certain distaste or even enmity. Though Vladimir Bondarenko attributes this distance to Gubanov's impatience for Sedakova's "meek and mild" disposition and her preoccupation with "Christian themes"—"[F]or the rebels and drunken chaps like Konstantin Kuz'minskii, Venedikt Erofeev, and Leonid Gubanov, it was difficult to bear her presence for too long," he notes[111]—the distaste seems to have been mutual. Nonetheless, the two poets certainly maintained a relationship, as reflected in one of several personal anecdotes Sedakova shares in her commemorative essay on him. During a visit Gubanov paid her to read some of his new verses, for example, Sedakova recalls the following exchange, in which Gubanov asks,

> "Well? Am I a genius?"
> "Dante is a genius, not you."
> Lenia gnashed his teeth and hurled a teacup onto the floor.
> 'Well, am I a genius?'
> 'Dante is a genius, but not you.' (Lenia was not the only one drinking port that winter evening.)
> Again the crockery, again the question, again Dante. Finally, having smashed everything in sight and putting his fist into a mirror in the hallway—there were shards and blood, but nothing too serious—and sobering up a little, Lenia sought a compromise.
> 'Fine, the hell with Dante. But I'm better than Pushkin, right?'
> 'Better,' quietly and meanly I agreed, fearing for the windowpanes, which he was eyeing askance. (It was frightfully cold outside.)[112]

[110] Sedakova, "O pogibshem literaturnom pokolenii," 135.
[111] Bondarenko, "Ostrov ozarenii," 200.
[112] Sedakova, "O pogibshem literaturnom pokolenii," 135-136.

Natalya Shmelkova, who became acquainted with Gubanov in 1975, corroborates such characterizations of the poet in her memoirs. “He was unpredictable,” she writes. “He was a man of extremes. Nothing was ever in moderation. Sometimes sensitive and vulnerable like a child, at other times rude and uncontrollable, then too trusting, and then irrationally suspicious. He invigorated people with his unbridled energy, though he also exhausted them with it.”[113] Comparing Gubanov with Joseph Brodsky, Vladimir Bondarenko speculates that, had the fates of the respective Muscovite and Petersburg poets been reversed—if it had been Gubanov who had been exiled to Arkhangelsk and then exiled to the west instead of Brodsky—Gubanov nonetheless would not have achieved the same literary success: “[H]e would have managed to quarrel with all the western Slavists and journalists; in the end, he would have punched someone in the mug, and, being in emigration, would have ended up in some American jail.”[114]

Like Gubanov himself, Gubanov’s verse is described as a sometimes brilliant, sometimes overwrought and cacophonous, synthesis of contradictory impulses and influences. E. V. Titova, for example, distinguishes in Gubanov’s verse a dynamic temporality that teeters between the future and the past—but never the present. Echoing the poet Tatyana Rebrovaya’s assertion, that “he ought to have been born either earlier or later,” Titova adds, however, that “such a creative talent cannot be attributed to any of the cultural epochs which preceded him or came after him.”[115]

In light of such wide-ranging aesthetic impulses, reminiscences by Gubanov’s peers differ greatly in their appraisals of Gubanov’s “literary genealogy.” “For some he is the poetic grandson of Esenin; for others (in light of the harshness of his style and the

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113 Shmel'kova, *Vo chreve machekhi, ili Zhizn' – diktatura krasnogo*, 121.
114 Bondarenko, *Poslednie poety imperii*, 602
115 Titova, “Budushchee kak liricheskii siuzhet v poezii Leonida Gubanova,” 281.

energy that bursts forth from his verses) he is closer to Mayakovsky," Shmel'kova notes.[116] Readers also trace frequent allusions to Lermontov, Mandelstam, Gumilev, Tsvetaeva, Pasternak, Khlebnikov, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Pushkin. Andrei Zhurbin argues that Gubanov's verse represents a synthesis of both Mayakovsky's and Esenin's lyrical styles.[117]

Sedakova's polemical commemorative essay on the poet certainly conveys a synthesis of the two precursors in its title, a reformulation of Jakobson's essay written primarily on Mayakovsky's death and to a secondary degree on Esenin's death. Sedakova also emphasizes the influence of Pushkin in the poet's self-styling, however—particularly in terms of his envisioned death. Gubanov held to the rule, Sedakova notes, that the lives of proper geniuses are always cut off prematurely: "Venevitinov at 23, Lermontov at 26, Esenin at 30… Only mediocre talents live past 37."[118] When Gubanov survived his thirtieth birthday (thereby outliving his idol, Esenin), he wrote "an entire justificatory cycle":

> Если не был бы я поэтом
> То повесился б, как Есенин.[119]

> If I weren't a poet, / Then I'd hang myself like Esenin.

"I will die at thirty-seven," Gubanov liked to say to new acquaintances for dramatic effect.[120] Indeed, thirty-seven might have seemed all the more desirable: it was the age at which both Pushkin and Rimbaud had died, and of which Mayakovsky and Khlebnikov had been just shy at their deaths—not to mention the number of Gubanov's own

[116] Ibid., 277.
[117] See Chapter One of Zhurbin's *Intertekstual'nost' tvorchestva Leonida Gubanova*.
[118] Sedakova, "O pogibshem literaturnom pokolenii," 137.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.; See also Radzishevskii, "Aforizmy razresannogo gorla," 210.

apartment on Krasnykh zor' Street in Moscow. Thus, the poet asserted, the dimensions of his verse's canvas and frame were "37 by 37" ("Kholst 37 na 37, / takogo zh razmera ramka"), and he was "the thirty-seventh map" ("Ia — tridsat' sed'maia karta").[121] "Right now I'm occupied with one thing. And that is: my thoughts and plans about 37. I want to make a long poem about 37," Gubanov wrote in 1965 to Maria Markovna Shur, telling her that he will need "fresh facts and anecdotes" from the lives of Pushkin, Khlebnikov, Mayakovsky, Rimbaud, Lorca, Raphael, Mozart, and others who died at thirty-seven.[122]

Among the constellation of thirty-seven-year-old poetic precursors, however, Gubanov found his ultimate tragic figure of emulation in Pushkin: when returning from prolific writing periods, he would confide, "Listen, I had a Boldino autumn again. Eighty verses in three weeks. A record, right? And all of them brilliant, all of them."[123] "He swore that he would under no circumstances outlive Pushkin," recalls Sedakova. "And he had his way."[124] In 1983 at the age of thirty-seven Gubanov died of a heart attack, alone in his Moscow apartment. His death fulfilled his prediction and secured him his coveted place amongst his admired forebears. Although Gubanov died of natural causes, many of his contemporaries perceived his death symbolically as an act of suicide or a result of the psychological abuse committed against him by the state. As Konstantin Kedrov writes, his death "can hardly be called a natural death. There was no noose, no gun, but there were debilitating psychiatric wards—the ideological gas chambers of the epoch of

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[121] Gubanov, "Khudozhnik (otryvok iz poemy 'Poliny')," 68. A later redaction (1977) reads: "We die not from cancer / and not from idleness at all" ("My umiraem ne ot raka / i ne ot prazdnosti sovsem"). Gubanov, *Seryi kon'*, 370; 237. September, the month of his death, figures prominently as well: In "Autumn. Oil." ("Osen'. Maslo"), for example, the poet declares, "I've died, my September, / Take me in into you book cover…" ("Umer ia, sentiabr' moi, / Ty voz'mi menia v oblozhku…"). Gubanov, *Seryi kon'*, 107.
[122] Quoted in Krokhin, *Profili na serebre*, 71-72.
[123] Sedakova, "O pogibshem literaturnom pokolenii," 136.
[124] Ibid., 137.

developed socialism where they threw poets who were inconvenient for the bright future."[125]

In light of Gubanov's role as the leader of SMOG, Alexandra Smith suggests that Sedakova's elegy, "On the Death of Leonid Gubanov," can be read "as an elegy that laments the whole generation of post-war poets who were subjected to political pressures and censorship."[126] The same could be said of Sedakova's 1984 commemorative essay of the poet, as well, which portrays Gubanov as a representative of their generation and thereby expands into a polemic on the entire generation's arrested development. However, the particular way in which Sedakova finds Gubanov to be a representative of their generation is perhaps not in the way the poet would have hoped. Rather than the generation's poet *par excellence*, Sedakova presents Gubanov as a representative casualty of the late Soviet period and as evidence that perhaps one *cannot* achieve poetic greatness in the current Soviet cultural conditions, after all.

If one were to take Sedakova's commemorative essay—an elegy in prose, one could say—as a "litmus test" of her elegiac poetics, once could first observe that, despite the differences between the two genres, Sedakova's essay follows many of the familiar conventions of the elegy on the death of a poet identified by Brodsky and Lipking: the author establishes both her kinship with the deceased (by recalling anecdotal exchanges such as that above); yet she also underscores her autonomy from him (she asserts that she calls him "Lenia" not out of friendship, but because it was his literary name, a political

[125] Kedrov, "Nepokorennyi genii," 7.
[126] Smith, "In the Shadow of Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova: Olga Sedakova and the Postmodern Writing of Melancholy," 3.

statement, as it were, defying the uniformity of Soviet culture);[127] moreover, in traditional modern elegiac fashion, the mourned subject's death ultimately serves as a departure point rather than an endpoint: in this case, the lament over Gubanov's death gives way to a consideration of the emptied status of death itself, a "cliché" in Soviet culture, and then, more broadly, to the condition of the literary generation of the sixties and seventies). The poet therefore concludes her essay, "And I apologize to Lenia, about whom there is so little said here."[128]

Though critics such as Krokhin and Bondarenko regard Gubanov as an inimitable yet underappreciated poet of the Soviet period,[129] for many others, his work remains stunted, due in no small part to his limiting preoccupation with being a "genius" and meeting his rightful tragic end. Gubanov's many epithets, ranging from the "Moscow" or "Russian Rimbaud" ("moskovskii Rembo"; "rossiiskii Rembo"),[130] to the "underground grandson of Esenin" ("podpol'nyi vnuk Esenina"),[131] or the "vulgar Esenin" ("kabatskii Esenin")[132] is telling of this contradiction: for some, these epithets convey a genealogical link to the tradition; for others, they convey a coarse character, an imitative poetic style, and a predictable, tragic end. As Evgenii Pasternak, who earlier praised Gubanov's talent, remarked: "He did not manage to find out what the life of the artist is; he immersed himself in a bohemian life of drugs; he wrote not poetry but one continuous shapeless

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[127] Sedakova likewise addresses Gubanov as "Lenia" in "On the Death of Leonid Gubanov" as well as in "Elegy of Autumn Water" ("Elegiia osennei vody") which is dedicated to Gubanov and Sergei Morozov, a poet who committed suicide.
[128] Sedakova, "O pogibshem literaturnom pokolenii," 146.
[129] See Krokhin's *Profili na serebre* and Bondarenko's chapter on Gubanov, "Leonid Gubanov v rubishche velikikh slov," in *Poslednie poety imperii* (596-614).
[130] See, for example, Borisov, "Lenia, Lenechka Gubanov, rossiiskii Rembo…," 5; Sedakova, "O pogibshem," 135.
[131] Titova, "Budushchee kak liricheskii siuzhet," 277.
[132] Sedakova, "O pogibshem literaturnom pokolenii," 140.

poem for many years in many forms."[133]

Sedakova appropriately begins her poem to Gubanov with an epigraph from his "poetic grandfather," Esenin. By excerpting the opening line of Esenin's most famous poem, "Goodbye, my friend, goodbye…" ("Do svidaniia, drug moi, do svidaniia…," 1925), which the poet famously wrote in his own blood before hanging himself in the Angleterre Hotel in Leningrad, Sedakova both underlines the tragic suicidal quality of Gubanov's death, and yet also, by employing such a famous (obvious?) line, she underlines the clichéd quality of his death.

На смерть Леонида Губанова

До свиданья, друг мой, до свиданья.
С. Есенин

Или новость – смерть, и мы не скажем сами:
все другое *больше* не с руки?
Разве не конец, летящий с бубенцами,
составляет звук строки?

Самый неразумный вслушивался в это –
с колокольчиком вдали.
Потому что, Леня, дар поэта
так отраден для земли.

Кто среди сокровищ тяжких, страстных
ларчик восхищенья выбрал наугад?
Кто еще похвалит мир прекрасный,
где нас топят, как котят?

Как эквилибрист-лунатик, засыпая,
преступает через естество,
знаешь, через что я преступаю?
Чрез ненужность ничего.

До свиданья, Леня. Тройкой из романса
пусть хоть целый мир летит в распыл,
ничего не страшно. Нужно постараться.
Быть не может, чтобы Бог забыл.[134]

[133] Quoted in Sedakova, "V Geraklitovu reku raz ne voidesh'," 193.

> On the Death of Leonid Gubanov
>
> *Goodbye, my friend, goodbye.* (S. Esenin)
>
> Or is death a piece of news, and we ourselves wouldn't say: / Everything else is *more* inconvenient? / Surely it's the end, flying with harness bells, / that makes up the sound of a line? // Even the most foolish of men strained to hear it— / with its hand bell in the distance. / Because, Lenia, the poet's gift / is so gratifying for the earth. // Who amongst the heavy, ardent treasures / chose at random a little chest of delight? / Who else will sing the praises of this lovely world, / where they drown us like kittens? // As a tightrope-sleep-walker, drifting off, / transgressing nature, / do you know what I transgress? / The needlessness of nothing. // Goodbye, Lenia. Like a troika from a romance, / let the whole world go to hell; / nothing is frightening. One must try. / It cannot be that God has forgotten.

Sedakova's continuation of Esenin's trochaic beat (though with varied line lengths) evinces the verses of Esenin's final years during which he composed a large number of poems in trochaic pentameter, which implicitly engage, as Kiril Taranovsky has shown, Lermontov's famous antemortem poem, "Alone I set out on the road…" ("Vykhozhu odin ia na dorogu…," 1841). Lermontov's poem, Taranovsky observes, "gave rise not only to a number of 'variations on the subject,' in which the *dynamic motif of the road* is opposed to the *static motif of life*, but also a number of poetic meditations on life and death, when a lonely man confronts 'dispassionate nature' (sometimes replaced by a dispassionate urban landscape)."[135] Though Sedakova's elegy does not explicitly feature the conventional chronotope of the Lermontovian road ("doroga") or path ("put'"), it is implied by images such as end the poetic line which "flies with harness bells" and the horse-drawn carriage ("troika") in the final stanza. The thematic associations or "semantic halo" of death which the meter carries (as the road or path of life inevitably

[134] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 260.
[135] Quoted by Mikhail L. Gasparov in "The Semantic Halo of Russian Trochaic Pentameter: Thirty Years of the Problem," 192 (Translated by Marina Tarlinskaia). For the Russian original, see Taranovskii, "O vzaimootnoshenii stikhotvornogo ritma i tematiki," 381.

leads to death) is further underlined by Lermontov's tragic death in a duel a few months later. Thus, though not composed in pentametric lines, the poem's epigraph in combination with its trochaic beat certainly evoke both the thematic and biographical residues of the form.

The form also pays implicit tribute to Gubanov's own verses, in which the poet revived characteristic motifs of both Lermontov's and Esenin's work (such as winter storms, horses, carriages, or a lover's lips) or explicitly addressed them. Gubanov dedicates his poem "First Swath" ("Pervaia proseka") to Esenin, and his poem "Thank You" ("Blagodariu") provides a sardonic reformulation of both Lermontov's "Gratitude" ("Blagodarnost'," 1840) and Esenin's "Life is an illusion with bewitching anguish…" ("Zhizn' — obman s charuiushchei toskoiu…" 1925). Whereas Lermontov's and Esenin's poems give thanks for life in the face of persecution (cf. Esenin's "No i vse zh, tesnimyi i gonimyi, / … // Etu zhizn' za vse blagodariu"), Gubanov's poem gives thanks for his stints in jail and psychiatric wards ("Blagodariu za to, chto ia sidel v tiur'me…").[136]

Most significant for Gubanov, of course, was the image of Esenin's suicide:

> И когда меня гладили прожектора
> и аплодисменты я слушал,
> как слушал пощечины,
> я понял – почему он повесился в номерах...
>
> And when the floodlights were caressing me / and I listened to the applause, like I listened to slaps to the face, / I understood why he hanged himself in the hotel suite…

In his "A Detailed Letter" ("Pis'mo s podrobniastiami") the poet boasts of abetting the poetic precursor:

> Поэтов, слава Богу, хватало,
> раз, приехав с севера,
> подарил я тот ремень от чемодана

[136] Gubanov, *Seryi kon'*, 62; 195-6.

> Есенину.
> От тогда вроде писал –
> «...ты меня не любишь,
> не жалеешь...»
> и ворочался от боли белый сад, веришь?[137]

> There were enough poets, thank God, / once when I returned from the north, / I gave that suitcase strap / to Esenin. / He then wrote something like, / "You do not love me, / do not pity me…" / and the white garden tossed and turned from pain, do you believe it?

While Sedakova's epigraph ostensibly serves to square her subject with his admired poetic grandfather, it also constitutes the elegist's first polemical stroke in what proves to be a highly ambivalent farewell portrait. Given the Pushkinian age at which Gubanov died (as opposed to Esenin and Lermontov who died at thirty and twenty-six, respectively), as well as his unabashed self-identification with Pushkin, one cannot help but wonder whether Gubanov might have preferred to be elegized differently. Adding insult to injury is the poem's title, "Na smert' Leonida Gubanova," which for the familiar reader signals a monument-building "On the Death of the Poet" poem, but which is then followed by an epigraph evoking the antemortem tradition of Esenin instead (and by extension, Lermontov as well), thereby hinting at another distinction the elegist may wish to make: between what could have been (a poetic "genius" like Pushkin) and what was—a poetic talent not fully realized, akin to Esenin who, like Gubanov, sought to imitate the life-trajectory of Pushkin, and yet, contrary to Gubanov, did not live past thirty.[138] Even more, Gubanov did not achieve Esenin's cult status and mass following.

Indeed, the poem's framework and tone contrast sharply with Sedakova's elegy to her music teacher and mentor, Vladimir Khvostin, "On the Death of Vladimir Ivanovich

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[137] Gubanov, *Seryi kon'*, 79.
[138] Nikolai Sardovskii, for example, recalls that Esenin considered Pushkin to be "the most remarkable man in the history of Russia" ("samyi vydaiushchiisia chelovek v istorii Rossii"). Anna Nazarova recounts a time when Esenin dressed up as Pushkin on his birthday, saying playfully, yet earnestly, "I would like to at least in some way resemble him" ("No mne tak khotelos' khot' chem-nibud' byt' na nego pokhozhim"). Shubnikova-Guseva, ed., *Sergei Esenin glazami sovremennikov*, 108; 234.

Khvostin" ("Na smert' Vladimira Ivanovicha Khvostina"), which neighbors her elegy to Gubanov on the previous page in the collection *Gates. Windows. Arches* (*Vorota. Okna. Arki.*)[139] Though Khvostin was not a poet, Sedakova's elegy to him displays many of the hallmarks of the "Death of the Poet" tradition. She employs a two-part structure with the first poem composed in modulating pentametric and tetrametric trochees and the second poem composed in iambic pentameter. The change in meter signals a shift from an affectionate, more familiar tone to one that is more solemn and reverent. The poet's use of the Death of the Poet elegy's characteristic two-part structure pays homage not only to Khvostin but to the tradition of elegizing fellow poets. In addition, the elegy's opening line, though not comprised of the customary iambs identified by Levinton, nonetheless carries the cycle's most recognizable trait—a declaration of artistic terminus, in the spirit of Lermontov's elegy to Pushkin or Akhmatova's elegy to Pasternak ("Umolk vchera nepovtorimyi golos"):

> Кончен труд, мой бедный, кончен труд
> счастья и надежды: безупречный
> труд любви. И что же, нас сотрут,
> как рисунок мелом? Дар сердечный,
> обаянье будущего, Млечный
> точный путь, которым нас ведут...
> Или не доводят? Друг мой *вечный*,
> или вечность – только тут?

> Finished is your labor, my poor one, finished is your labor / of happiness and hope: the perfect / labor of love. And well, we will be wiped away, / like a chalk drawing? A gift of the heart, / the charm of the future, the Milky / precise way along which we are led… / Or are we are led *to* it? My friend *eternal*, / or is eternity – only here?

The declaration also echoes, of course, Pushkin's poem on the completion of his years-long endeavor of writing *Eugene Onegin*: "The long-awaited moment has come: my work of many years is done" ("Mig vozhdelennyi nastal: okonchen moi trud mnogoletnii"),

[139] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 257-9.

thereby likening the mourned subject's life to the magnum opus of Russia's greatest poet. Though Khvostin was a pianist and not a poet, the elegist affectionately assimilates her subject into what she no doubt perceives as the highest honor she can offer, the Death of the Poet monument, by embossing his image in poetic reminiscences of her most beloved domestic influences, Pushkin and Mandelstam. The "milky precise way" and "chalk drawing" comprise an explicit allusion to Mandelstam's "Slate Ode" ("Grifel'naia oda"), which takes the poem Derzhavin etched on a slate shortly before his death. Derzhavin's poem, as we recall, centers on the question of the endurance of the poet's legacy, symbolized by the sounds of the lyre ("zvuki liry i truby") in the flow of the river of time, which takes everything away into the "abyss of oblivion" ("v propasti zabveniia").[140] Offering up both her own ambitions (as Bloom would say) and assurances of immortality to her subject, the elegist affirms that life is not a desert (as the Lermontovian "flint path" ["kremnistyi put'"] in Mandelstam's ode might suggest), but an "illumined home where friends meet and talk about what should be said," evocative of the Heideggerian notion of language as a "house of being":

> В пустыне жизни... Что я говорю,
> в какой пустыне? В освещенном доме,
> где сходятся друзья и говорят
> о том, что следует сказать.
>
> In life's desert… What am I saying, / in what desert? In an illumined home, / where friends meet and talk / about what should be said.

Yet, the poet continues, if life is indeed a desert, the subject's music will live on; he amounts to more than she can express:

> В саду у роз,

[140] On the Derzhavinian subtext of Mandelstam's ode, see M. Gasparov, "Priroda i kul'tura v 'Grifel'noi ode' Mandel'shtama," web; Ronen, *An Approach to Mandel'štam*.

в гостях у всех – и все-таки в пустыне,
в пустыне нашей жизни, в худобе
ее несчастной, никому не видной, –
Вы были больше, чем я расскажу.

Ни разум мой и ни глухой язык,
я знаю, никогда не прикоснутся
к тому, чего хотят. Не в этом дело.
Мы все, мой друг, достойны состраданья
хотя бы за попытку. Кто нас создал,
тот скажет, почему мы таковы,
и сделает, какими пожелает.

А если бы не так... Найти места
неслышной музыки: ее созвездья, цепи,
горящие переплетенья счастья,
в которой эта музыка сошлась,
как в разрешенье – вся большая пьеса,
доигранная. Долгая педаль.

In the garden of roses, / on visits to everyone – and, nonetheless, in the desert, / in the desert of our life, in its leanness / unfortunate, visible to no one, / You were more than I can say. // Neither my mind nor my deaf language, / I know, will ever begin to touch / what they want. But that is not the issue. / We are all, my friend, worthy of compassion / at least for trying. The one who created us, / will say why we are this way, / and will make us how he wishes. // And if that were not so… To find places / of unheard music: its constellations, chains, / burning interlacings of happiness, / in which this music came together, / as in a resolution – the whole big play, / is finished. A long pedal.

As the poet initiates her subject and his artistic labor into the "constellations" and "interlacings of happiness" of her highest precursors, Sedakova's elegy to Khvostin constitutes a heartfelt eulogy of highest praise. This poet's conferment of poetic status to her mentor only brings her ambivalence on the following pages in her treatment of Gubanov, a fellow poet, into greater relief.

Sedakova's elegy to Gubanov on the other hand begins not with a solemn declaration of terminus but a series of rejoinders:

Или новость – смерть, и мы не скажем сами:
все другое *больше* не с руки?
Разве не конец, летящий с бубенцами,
составляет звук строки?

> Or is death a piece of news, and we ourselves wouldn't say: / Everything else is *more* inconvenient? / Surely it's the end, flying with harness bells, / that makes up the sound of a line?

Speaking past her immediate subject, the poet seems instead to prefer to respond first to Esenin's "Goodbye my Friend…" which concludes with the well-known lines:

> В этой жизни умирать не ново,
> Но и жить, конечно, не новей.

> In this life, to die is nothing new, / But to live, of course, is nothing newer.

However, is the elegist's rejoinder motivated by cynicism or restorative hope? Due to the dual meaning of *novost'*, which may denote a piece of news or something that is novel or new, the line is ambiguous. Is the poet posing a rhetorical question or asking for assent? One could translate the opening lines as Roy Fisher has: "Or death is news and we ourselves wouldn't say / everything else no longer suits us?" Yet one could also render the line as Gerald Smith has—as an earnest rebuttal to Esenin's poem: "Or death *is* something new, and we ourselves wouldn't say / that everything is *more* inconvenient?"[141] While Fisher's translation depicts the word "death" as something that has become a cliché (i.e. just a common fixture of the daily news), G. Smith's translation implies a sincere desire on the part of the poet to reinstate the word (and the event) with its original significance, which Esenin cynically undermines. Using Fisher's translation, Alexandra Smith suggests that the poet presents the word "death" as a cliché, a word that has been emptied of its gravity due to the event's ubiquity in Soviet daily life and speech.[142] Indeed, on the one hand, in the aftermath of the Soviet purges, Second World

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[141] These translations are available on Olga Sedakova's official website: <http://www.olgasedakova.com/eng/56/359> (accessed June 10, 2017).
[142] Smith, "In the Shadow of Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova: Olga Sedakova and the Postmodern Writing of Melancholy," unpublished paper.

War and the continuing systematic oppression the Soviet Union endured throughout the twentieth century, death, one could say, was everywhere. Of course, this was also the time when the gerontocracy was dying out, beginning with Brezhnev's death in 1982. Yet, on the other hand, for the state, death represented an inconvenient truth—a pesky statistic that undermined the narrative of Soviet progress. Thus, death was also an event that remained at the margins, present only in the retouching of a photograph or a quietly covered gravesite; it was not acknowledged in public discourse.[143] By pointing to such casualties of the Soviet regime, both real and linguistic, the poem implicitly mourns not only Gubanov, but poetic language itself, as well as other poets of the silenced generation who were pushed underground or "drowned" in this "lovely world" like kittens ("gde nas topiat, kak kotiat").[144]

Gerald Smith's rendering of the lines perhaps does not conflict with Fisher's translation but rather captures another dimension implied by *novost'*: though emptied of its gravity, the poet may also assert (thereby reproaching her subject) that death *is* "something new" and that it should not be taken lightly; it is that which "comprises the sound" of the poetic line of the poet's life; it is the final act, as Mandelstam suggests, the "concluding link" on the "chain of his artistic achievements."[145] Death is, as Tsvetaeva writes in her cycle to Mayakovsky after his suicide, beyond the realm of daily news:

> Литературная — не в ней
> Суть, а вот — кровь пролейте!
> Выходит каждые семь дней.

[143] On the paradoxical treatment of death in both official discourse and everyday life, see Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth-Century Russia*.
[144] Drowning is a common theme in poetry and memoirs about the Soviet government's cultural suppression. As Iunna Morits concludes her 1982 poem, "Poetry is Alive with Freedom and Love…" ("Poeziia zhiva svobodoi i liubov'iu…"): "Poets are the minority who allow the people / to breathe, breathe, breathe— / if only through a stalk under water!" ("Poety—men'shinstvo, daiushchee narodu / dyshat', dyshat', dyshat'— / khot' v stebel' pod vodoi!")
[145] Mandel'shtam, *PSSP* 3.2, 135.

Ушедший — раз в столетье […]

> The Literary—the heart of the matter / is not in it—shed the blood! / The newspaper comes out every seven days. / The departed—once a century […][146]

The irony, of course, is that while the deaths of poets such as Esenin and, in particular, Mayakovsky, *were* featured in the news, as the image of blood on the front page of the literary paper in Tsvetaeva's poem suggests, the deaths of poets such as Gubanov in the eighties were met with silence.

Like Mandelstam, Tsvetaeva, too, perceives the poet's death as his final act. The poet's body of work remains incomplete until he dies: poems are not autonomous entities that can be severed from the poet, but rather organically linked entities that inform and alter one another's meaning and comprise a continuously evolving chain, which can be only ended by the poet's death.[147] "He who has not read every line of a poet's work has no right to judge the poet," writes Tsvetaeva. "In 1915 I explain myself in 1925. Chronology is the key to understanding."[148] As Olga Peters Hasty explains: "This termination thus becomes a completion. Inasmuch as this completion is effected by the poet's death, his poems come to be read as leading toward it and foreshadowing it, even as the death itself affects retroactively the reading of those poems. The poet's death is thereby incorporated into the context of his art and demands interpretation."[149]

The elegist's implicit restating of Tsvetaeva's thesis has a dual effect. On the one hand, it thematically realizes that which occurs on the metapoetic level of a line: while each subsequent word or phrase in a line retroactively informs the meaning of the words

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[146] Translated by Svetlana Boym. Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks*, 224.
[147] Tsvetaeva discusses this idea in essays such as "Poet o kritike" (*SS* 7.5, 274-278) and "Iskusstvo pri svete sovesti" (*SS* 7.5, 346-374). See also Olga Peters Hasty's analysis of this conception of lyric poetry in Tsvetaeva's work in "Poèma vs. Cycle in Cvetaeva's Definition of Lyric Verse" (390-98) and "Reading Suicide: Tsvetaeva on Esenin and Maiakovskii" (836).
[148] Tsvetaeva, "Poet o kritike," *SS*, 7.5, 276.
[149] Hasty, "Reading Suicide: Tsvetaeva on Esenin and Maiakovskii," 836.

that precede it, and all that precedes the end of the line can then be reread as *leading toward it*, the end of a line is that which comprises the sound (or the meaning) of a line. The poet's rhetorical question, "Surely it's the end, flying with harness bells, that makes up the sound of a line?" serves to remind her subject of this "literary fact." The line also provides a rhyming rejoinder to Esenin and Mayakovsky: as Esenin remarks, "I do not know: whether my end is near or far" ("Ia ne znaiu: moi konets blizok li, dalek li"), Maykovsky wonders whether it might be better to punctuate his own life line with a bullet:

> Все чаще думаю—
> не поставить ли лучше
> точку пули в своем конце.[150]
>
> All the more often I think — / it might be better to put / the period of a bullet at my end.

While the speaker of Sedakova's elegy reminds her subject of the significance of the poet's death as his final creative act, the emphasis on the line's "sound" also implies the importance of committing oneself to and reaching the end of one's poetic endeavor first.

As Sedakova writes reproachfully in her essay on the "lost generation," the theme is not only employed by poets in order differentiate themselves from the everyday "Soviet philistine" striving to live in abundance, but to inspire love or pity for themselves from those very same philistines. However, there was also "something serious" in the theme: "Not at all times was it fashionable. Now when I see before my eyes the perennial continuations of those beginnings and those countless ends, I am troubled by a presumption: perhaps we were instructed to die early? Perhaps it was a historical task?"[151] Thus, though the popular theme of death has become, on the one hand, a clichéd

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[150] Maiakovskii, *PSS*, 1: 199.
[151] Sedakova, "O pogibshem literaturnom pokolenii," 136.

trope for rendering oneself as anti-philistine, on the other hand, this emptying of death—particularly the poet's death—makes the subject all the more pressing. Yet, without perseverance, however, the poet's death does not lead to martyrdom but, as for many poets of the lost generation, constitutes merely a piece of news. To strive for anything beyond this end appeared more inconvenient or unsuitable ("*bol'she* ne s ruki") than the "irrational" undertaking of the impossible.

While the significance with which Mandelstam and Tsvetaeva infuse the poet's death certainly informs the basis of the speaker's dialogue with her subject, it also serves as the grounds on which the speaker polemicizes the poetic stances of Esenin, Tsvetaeva, and Gubanov, in addition to Mayakovsky, whose response to Esenin's last poem (and suicide) no doubt also motivates the opening lines of Sedakova's poem:

> В этой жизни
> помереть
> не трудно.
> Сделать жизнь
> значительно трудней.[152]
>
> In this life / to die / isn't difficult. / To make a life / is significantly harder.

At this point we may recall that it is not only thanks to Esenin, but Mayakovsky, as well, that the trochaic meter carries with it not simply premonitions of death, but a specifically suicidal complex. In his *poema*, "About That" ("Pro eto"), for example, the dominating dol'nik structure with alternating anacrusis is suddenly interrupted by a romance interlude in trochaic pentameter, which depicts the suicide of the author's double on the "last path" of his life. Connecting this scene to the Lermontov cycle, Taranovsky notes, "One cannot help but agree that an epigraph from Lermontov—"I no longer expect anything from

[152] Maiakovskii, *PSS* 7: 105.

life…" (Uzh ne zhdu ot zhizni nichego ia…")—would have aptly underscored this theme."[153]

Mayakovsky employs a trochaic beat again in his polemic poem to Esenin in 1926, in which he castigates the poet for his weakness. Irritated by the outpouring of speeches and commemorative pieces in the local papers Esenin's suicide prompted, Mayakovsky showed little sympathy for Esenin's death. In his essay "How to Make Verse" ("Kak delat' stikhi"), he criticizes the tender way in which fellow poets eulogize Esenin and address him by the diminutive form of his name: "The use of the familial form 'Serezha' immediately breaks the social mandate," asserts Mayakovsky.[154] Four years later, after Mayakovsky himself commits suicide at the age of thirty-seven, Tsvetaeva composes a poem in which Mayakovsky and Esenin engage in a playful postmortem dialogue and address each other affectionately by the diminutive forms of their names (Serezha and Volodya), thereby, as Olga Peters Hasty observes, implicitly rejecting Mayakovsky's adherence to the "social mandate" ("sotsial'nyi zakaz").[155] Sedakova continues Tsvetaeva's refutation of Mayakovsky's "social mandate," of course, by addressing Gubanov affectionately as "Lenia," which serves as implicit tribute to Gubanov and the *smogisty*, for whom the use of one another's Christian names was a subtle linguistic form of dissent.[156]

As noted above, the Lermontovian theme of the road of life does not figure explicitly in Sedakova's poem (though it is implied). Instead, the poet walks along a

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[153] Taranovskii, "O vzaimootnoshenii…," 394.
[154] Maiakovskii, *PSS*, 12: 96.
[155] Hasty, "Reading Suicide," 843.
[156] The poet of Sedakova's "Elegy of Autumn Water" ("Elegiia osennei vody"), written in memory of Sergei Morozov and Leonid Gubanov, likewise addresses the poets as Seryozha and Lyona, respectively: "Serezha, Lenia, / do you remember how the earth gasps on the slope, having seen below / the flame of pre-winter's water?" ("Serezha, Lenia, / pomnite, kak zemlia akhnet na sklone, / uvidav vnizu / fakel predzimnei vody?" Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 378.

tightrope. Comparing herself to a “sleepwalking tightrope walker,” the speaker breaks or “oversteps” (“prestupaet”) the needlessness of nothing. The implied tightrope, however, nonetheless facilitates a movement forward, while the rhythm and rhyme scheme of the first stanza, in its correspondence with the popular romance “On the Long Road” (“Dorogoi dlinnoiu”),[157] thereby also evokes the presence of a road:

Или новость – смерть,
и мы не скажем **са́ми**:
все другое *больше* не с **руки́**?
Разве не конец, летящий с бубен**ца́ми**,
составляет звук **строки́**?

Or is death a piece of news, and we
ourselves wouldn’t say:
Everything else is *more* inconvenient?
Surely it’s the end, flying with harness bells,
that makes up the sound of a line?

Ехали на тройке с бубен**ца́ми**,
А вдали мелькали ог**оньки́**.
Эх, когда бы мне теперь за **Ва́ми,**
Душу бы развеять от **тоски́**.

We drove a troika with harness bells,
And in the distance twinkled little lights.
Ah, whenever I can come for you,
My soul will be dispelled of longing.

As bells, troikas, and road travel are all stock images of the romance genre, the elegy’s acoustic correlation to “On the Long Road” in combination with the image of the “flying harness bells” not only presages the troika, which appears at the poem’s end, but sets stage for a possible culmination of the road’s end. The evocation of the romance song also recalls the romance interlude of Mayakovsky, thereby playing off of its semantic association of suicide and the road.

The romantic turns of the poem both hint at the common origins of the elegy and the romance[158] and imitate Gubanov’s own poetic voice, which as Kublanovskii describes, contains “intonational overflows of the romance.”[159] As the troika immediately

[157] I am grateful to Alexander Dolinin for pointing out this similarity to me.
[158] See Ginzburg, *O lirike*, 25 and Kozlov, *Russkaia elegiia*, 32
[159] Kublanovskii, “Na svetu i temnotakh liricheskoi somobytnosti,” 9. The folk song-like quality of the poem also serves as yet another reminder of the connecting threads between Gubanov, Esenin, and Lermontov, whose poems have been adapted into popular romances. Gubanov’s poem “Gray Horse” (“Seryi kon'”), for example, was adapted for the guitar by the poet’s good friend Vladimir Berezhkov, as Shmel'kova notes in her reminiscences (*Vo chreve machekhi*, 127). A notable example of a musical

recalls the Gogolian "mad troikas" ("beshenye troiki") of both Blok and Esenin, its contiguity with the curious line, "everything else is *more* inconvenient?" ("vse drugoe *bol'she* ne s ruki?"), in addition to the soporific state of the speaker (who compares herself to a sleepwalker falling asleep) recalls Esenin's "Young years with bell-harnessed glory" ("Gody molodye s zububennoi slavoi…"), in particular. Written in 1924 the poem depicts a poet who, dreaming, finds himself aboard a troika in a dangerous snowstorm, wondering if he will survive: "And I do not know: is my end near or far" ("Ia ne znaiu: moi konets blizok li, dalek li"). Disoriented and unable to see, the poet suddenly hears the cries of the horseman and instructs him to drive faster. The driver protests, saying that the storm is too dangerous, and the poet calls him a coward:

> Ты, ямщик, я вижу, трус.
> Это не с руки нам!
>
> You, driver, I see, are a coward. That does not suit us!

The poet takes over the reins and charges onward only to be thrown from the troika. At this moment, however, the poet awakes to find that he is not in a troika but a hospital bed (indeed, Esenin was hospitalized at the time of writing the poem):

> Встал и вижу: что за черт—вместо бойкой тройки...
> Забинтованный лежу на больничной койке.
>
> I arose and I see: what the hell—instead of a quick troika… / I'm bandaged up, lying in a hospital bed.

The lexical similarities between Esenin and Sedakova's poems highlight one of many biographical links between Gubanov and Esenin (their stints in hospitals), and also hint at the poets' preoccupation with their own deaths.

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rendition of Esenin's poetry is Aleksandr Vertinsky's "Last Letter" ("Poslednee pis'mo") based on Esenin's "Goodbye my Friend…"), while an adaptation of Lermontov's "Alone I go out…" (most likely be P. P. Bulakhov) also remains a popular romance. See Taranovskii, "O vzaimootnoshenii…," 381.

Such subtextual underpinnings from Esenin certainly evoke the trochaic meter's "halo" or association with the image of the road, and, in light of superstitions Sedakova describes in her study on ancient Slavic funeral rites, one wonders whether the speaker's somnolence might signal misfortune: according to superstition, to dream of gatherings or assemblies on a road is commonly thought to portend death and, in particular, "if one is sick and speaks in delirium of horses, a road, or reins, he will die."[160] Sedakova also notes the abundance of common idioms pertaining to funeral rites in a number Slavic languages that feature a path or road and contain the root *put-*. She cites examples from ancient Bulgarian rites (wherein to "travel along the path" ["e na p"tia] means "to die" ["umirat'"]) and Belorussian rites (wherein "to knock one from the path" ["zbitstsa z dorogi"; "sbit' s putia"] means to "draw out one's agony" ["zatianut' agoniiu"]).[161] Thus, the "semantic halo" of the road that accompanies the Esenian (and by extension, Lermontovian) subtext not only recalls previous prophetic ruminations upon death, but the central chronotope of ancient Slavic funeral rites, as well.

Despite its prosodic and subtextual underpinnings, however, it is the troika, portended by the sound of its harness bells, rather than the road, which drives the poem: "Goodbye, Lenia. Like a troika from a romance, / let all the world go to hell; / nothing is frightening." An image connected with Russia's fate in the works of Gogol to Blok, the troika (in addition to its accoutrements, such as horses, roads, and harness bells) is a recurring motif of Gubanov's work, often tied to the theme of the poet's disregard for destiny:

Не монахи мы. Убогое
нам прискучило жилье.

[160] Sedakova, *Poetika obriada*, 51.
[161] Ibid.

> Мы на бойкой тройке Гоголя
> пьем шампанское свое.[162]
>
> We're no monks. We got bored / of the wretched house. / We drink our champagne / on Gogol's jaunty troika.

It is indeed a horse-drawn carriage ("kareta") which serves as the meeting place between the poet and his fate-mate, Pushkin, in Gubanov's "Conversation with Pushkin" ("Razgovor c Pushkinym"):

> Обо всем забыв на свете,
> потому что я шальной,
> в ослепительной карете
> проношуся по Страстной.
> Эй, привет, поэт кудравый!
> Как дела? Давно ли пил?
> Или просто нашей славы
> не хотел и не любил?
>
> Having forgotten about everything in the world, / because I am wild, / in a blinding carriage / rushing along Strastnoi. / Hey, curly-haired poet! / How's it going? Have you been drinking long? / Or is it just our glory / you didn't want and didn't like?

However, the troika which concludes Sedakova's elegy does not serve as a meeting space for Gubanov and his admired forefather. Rather, it is a stock image: a generic "troika from a romance." By the conclusion of the poem, the poet's question, "And we ourselves will say that everything else is *more* inconvenient?" appears more pointed than we may have first thought. Though it is certainly easier *not* to charge onward in the storm, as in Esenin's poem, or, in the context of Sedakova's elegy, *not* to break away from a "bohemian life of drugs" (as Bondarenko describes Gubanov's lifestyle)[163] and develop one's poetic gift at the risk of persecution, one cannot achieve a Pushkinian end without first achieving Pushkinian greatness. Furthermore, against the backdrop of Esenin's suicide, which was widely believed to be committed out of the

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[162] Gubanov, *Seryi kon'*, 22.
[163] Bondarenko, *Poslednie poety imperii*, 597.

poet's fear of losing his poetic abilities (indeed, the frequent images of death in the verse of Esenin's latter years correlate with the poet's growing fear that his artistic talent had already reached its peak), the speaker of Sedakova's elegy no doubt also reproaches her subject for his capitulation to the all too "convenient" fetishization of death, rather than innovation or self-discipline, as a means of achieving canonical stature. "One must try. It cannot be that God has forgotten," concludes the poet. Read in this light, the elegy therefore concludes in much the same manner as Sedakova's polemical essay on the poet.

Further admonishing her subject, the elegist says that "even the most foolish of men" strained to the hear the flying end of the poetic line:

> Самый неразумный вслушивался в это—
> с колокольчиком в дали.
> Потому что, Леня, дар поэта
> так отраден для земли.

> Even the most foolish of men strained to hear it / with its jingle bell in the distance. / Because, Lenia, the poet's gift / is so gratifying for the earth.

In Sedakova's interpretation of Pushkin's last poem, "Exegi Monumentum," which concludes, "And do not argue with a fool" ("I ne osporivai gluptsa"), Sedakova suggests that, rather than serving as an ironic parody of Derzhavin, this final line of one of Pushkin's last poems is in fact written in seriousness. "This final line would not be so unexpected if we remember what place *stupidity* occupies in Pushkin's world," Sedakova says.[164] Elucidating the array of meanings that "stupidity" or "foolishness" ("glupost'") encompasses in Pushkin's work (including evil, the inability to perceive, insentience, irrationality, and noble simplicity) and the historical time periods to which various meanings correspond (the Middle Ages, the Enlightenment, and the romantic period), Sedakova argues that it is not always negative. Citing Dante, who "calls fainthearted and

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[164] Sedakova, *Freedom to Believe*, 75.

base (*vile*) those who have accepted hopelessness, who did not fight for the impossible," Sedakova observes that "stupidity" at times (though certainly not always) represents a positive quality in Pushkin's work: as Dante equates the foolishness of fighting for the impossible with integrity, Pushkin depicts noble simplicity triumphing over calculation and insidiousness in prose works such as "The Shot" ("Vystrel") and *The Captain's Daughter* (*Kapitanskaia dochka*).[165] Significantly, Sedakova also characterizes the experience of poetry—both its creation and reception—as a non-rational experience: poetry, she says, is an "experience of happy non-possession, of uncomprehending understanding" ("opyt schastlivogo neobladaniia, *nerazumeiushchego* ponimaniia").[166]

A poet who is most foolish would no doubt forge onward in the storm against all odds and "strain to hear" the gift of poetry, no matter the muffling "white noise" of the age.[167] The possible implications here, of course, are not flattering for Gubanov. The mourned subject either comes across as more foolish than the most foolish of men or, in light of the virtues of foolishness, he comes across as insufficiently foolish. The speaker then reminds her subject, rather patronizingly, "Because, Lenia, the poet's gift is so gratifying to the earth." As Sedakova laments in her commemorative essay on Gubanov, giftedness ("odarennost'"), was deemed to be the highest threat to the Soviet state: "Our generation was the first to encounter a situation in which not ideas, not political views, not something else, but *giftedness* itself turned out to be politically undesirable."[168] In both of her elegies to Gubanov and to Brodsky, Sedakova therefore reinstates the poet's

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[165] Sedakova, *Freedom to Believe*, 79.

[166] Emphasis mine. See "'V tselomudrennoi bezdne stikha'. O smysle poeticheskom i smysle doktrinal'nom" in *ChT,* 3: 138

[167] "And those to the sound of the signal suppressor / honor the madness of the brave […] // […] Caravans, / train cars, echelons… White noise…." ("A te pod shum glushilki / bezumstvo khrabykh slaviat […] // […] Karavany, / vagony, eshelony… Belyi shum….") Sedakova, "Elegiia, perekhodiashchaia v rekviem," *ChT*, 1: 309.

[168] Sedakova, "O pogibshem literaturnom pokolenii," 137.

gift as "joy" or "gratification" ("otrada")—in her elegy to Brodsky, the poet's spirit rests ultimately alongside "Sappho's joy" ("otrada Safo") on the island of Lesbos after completing an Orphic journey reminiscent of Tsvetaeva and Rilke.

Upon the utterance of this reminder to "Lenia," the subject of the present elegy, however, the question arises over whether the speaker considers her subject to be amongst the "most foolish" who pressed on and listened with his "little bell in the distance," and who chooses a "little chest of delight" at random, "singing the praises of this lovely world where they drown us like kittens," or if she considers him to be amongst those who succumbed to the perils of the period, choosing to embrace his end rather than face that which lay before it on his path. Indeed, contrary to the poet's gift, which is gratifying for the earth, predictions of one's own death are an "insulting amusement" for the earth, as the speaker of Sedakova's *Old Songs* (*Starye pesni*) states:

> Не гадай о собственной смерти
> и не радуйся, что все пропало,
> не задумывай, как тебя оплачут,
> как замучит их поздняя жалость.
>
> Это все плохое утешенье,
> для земли обидняя забава.[169]
>
> Do not make predictions about your own death / and do not be glad that all is lost, / do not think about how people will mourn you, / about how belated remorse will torment them. // That is poor consolation, / an insulting amusement for the earth.

In light of the poem's subtexts and Sedakova's known ambivalence toward her subject, one could conclude that the speaker chastises her subject in the elegy's second stanza. On the other hand, the foolish poet listening with a "little bell in the distance" could very well depict Gubanov, who, though falling into obscurity, continued to write until his death—

[169] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 186.

Пишу я для себя, потом для Бога.
У каждого своя теперь дорога.[170]

I write for myself, then for God. / Everyone has his own path now.

—and whose verse is pervaded by the clangor of bells. As Aleinikov writes in his reminiscences of the poet, SMOG represented both a "password" and a "call to battle"; it was "the booming clangor of the veche bell ['vechevogo kolokola']," which evokes Lermontov's depiction of the citizen-poet as the voice of revolution:[171]

Твой стих, как божий дух, носился над толпой
И, отзыв мыслей благородных,
Звучал, как колокол на башне вечевой
Во дни торжеств и бед народных.[172]

Your verse, like the Holy Spirit, carried over the crowd / And, a reply of noble thoughts / Resounded like Veche tower bell / In the days of celebrations and people's troubles.

Throughout Gubanov's verse, the image of the bell ("kolokol") is indeed essential to the poet's self-stylization as the voice of his generation, as he poses as both the embodiment and the ringer of SMOG's veche bell(s):

Я—колокол озябшего пророчества
и, господа, отвечу на прощание,
что от меня беременна псаломщица,
которая Антихристом стращает.[173]

I am the bell of frozen prophesy / and, gentlemen, upon my parting I will answer / that the lady-psalm-reader who scares us with the anti-Christ / has been impregnated by me.

In "Who will I furtively tell?" ("Kogo ukradkoi rasskazhu?") the poet declares,

Нет ни двора и ни кола,
но все равно счастливой тенью
звоню во все колокола
растерянному поколенью.[174]

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[170] Gubanov, *Seryi kon'*, 288.
[171] Aleinikov, "Imia vremeni," 228.
[172] Lermontov, *PSS*, 2: 88.
[173] Gubanov, *Seryi kon'*, 247.
[174] Ibid., 148.

> I've got no house or home, / but as a happy shadow all the same / I ring on all the bells, shout out from all the housetops / to the confused generation.

In "The Birch Bark of Disavowal" ("Beresta otrecheniia"), the poet compares the cross he wears on his neck to a bell on a sheep's neck, betraying its escape:

> Я шел, как статуя, и лишь серебрянный крестик,
> как колокольчик не шее заблудшей овцы,
> выдавал мое громкое бегство.

> I walked like a statue, and only my little cross, / like a bell on the neck of a lost sheep, / betrayed my noisy escape.

The bell ("kolokol" or "kolokol'chik") is at once a battle cry, a password, and the sound of brotherhood (as in Mandelstam's 1932 poem, "Batiushkov"[175]). It is also, however, a harbinger of misfortune, as in John Donne ("Therefore send not to know / For whom the bell tolls, / It tolls for thee")[176] or Pushkin ("Your bell has tolled," he writes in an 1826 to his friend the Decembrist Ivan Pushchin, upon learning of his being sentenced to hard labor).[177] Behind an imagistic fusion of Mayakovsky and Pasternak, Gubanov conveys this ominous quality in "Autumn. A Water Color" ("Osen'. Akvarel'").

> А за пощечиной плетня
> Гудят колокола беды...[178]

> And behind the wicker fence's slap to the face / Drone the bells of misfortune…

As an accoutrement of the fatal troika or horse-drawn carriage, the harness bell similarly serves as a harbinger of misfortune, and an embedded permutation of lines from Akhmatova's 1936 poem, "Boris Pasternak," hints at this. As the poet of Sedakova's

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[175] "Our torment and our treasure, / Tongue-tied, he brought with him— / The noise of poetry and the bell of brotherhood / And a harmonious outpour of tears." ("Nashe muchen'e i nashe bogatstvo, / Kosnoiazychnyi, s soboi on prines— / Shum stikhotvorstva i kolokol bratstva / I garmonicheskii proliven' slez.") Mandel'shtam, *SS* 4.3, 66.
[176] Sedakova takes this line for the title of her translation of a collection of Donne's poetry and prose. See Donn, *Po kom zvenit kolokol…* (Moskva: Aenigma, 2012).
[177] "Tvoi kolokol'chik oglasil." Pushkin, "I. I. Pushchinu," *SS*, 2:156.
[178] Gubanov, *Seryi kon'*, 108.

elegy states that it is “the end, flying with harness bells,” which comprises the sound of a poetic line, the mourned poet who hears this sound with a bell in the distance (“vdali”) recalls the speaker of Akhmatova’s poem on Pasternak:

> И снова жжет московская истома,
> Звенит вдали смертельный бубенец...
> Кто заблудился в двух шагах от дома,
> Где снег по пояс и всему конец?[179]
>
> And the languor of Moscow burns anew, / A fatal jingle bell rings in the distance… / Who lost his way two steps from home, / Where the snow is up to our waists and everything is at its end?

Though Pasternak was another poet Gubanov greatly admired,[180] the allusion does not assimilate her subject with Pasternak. Rather, the echo foreshadows the speakers own approximation with Akhmatova and a veiled reproach of her subject. In the subsequent stanza, Akhmatova’s voice once again enters the text, though this time more explicitly when the poet compares herself to a sleepwalker on a tightrope, falling asleep:

> Как эквилибрист-лунатик, засыпая,
> преступает через естество,
> знаешь, через что я преступаю?
> Чрез ненужность ничего.
>
> As a tightrope-sleep-walker, drifting off, / transgressing nature, / do you know what I transgress? / The needlessness of nothing.

On the one hand, this dream-like state evokes Gubanov’s poetry, which, as Kublanovskii observes, “resemble[s] improvisations […]” borne from a “sleepwalking state.”[181] On the other hand, the line echoes more directly a different source, Akhmatova’s 1955 elegy,

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[179] Akhmatova, *SS*, 1: 426.

[180] It was at Pasternak’s grave in Peredelkino, a favorite place of Gubanov’s, where he and Aleinikov had the idea for SMOG. For Aleinikov’s account of the founding of SMOG, see his “Tri oseni,” <http://www.zinziver.ru/publication.php?id=4315> (accessed 22 December 2014); and “Imia vremeni,” 223-256. Gubanov’s veneration of Pasternak as a teacher and role model is frequently mentioned in reminiscences of him. As Shmel'kova recalls, upon expressing delight in listening to Gubanov read some poems he had revised, he replied, “I myself know that they are good. One needs to work at verse, of course, as Pasternak taught.” Shmel'kova, *Vo chreve machekhi*…, 120-121.

[181] See Kublanovskii, “Na svetu i temnotakh,” 9.

"On the 1910s…" ("O desiatykh godakh…"), in which the poet laments her lack of a "rosy childhood":

> И вот я, лунатически ступая,
> Вступила в жизнь и испугала жизнь:
> Она передо мною стлалась лугом,
> Где некогда гуляла Прозерпина.[182]

> And here I, like a sleepwalker, / Entered into life and frightened life: / It spread before me like a meadow, / Where Proserpine once walked.

The voice of Akhmatova (who indeed suffered from somnambulism as a child and whose lines can be taken literally)[183] thus mediates the only instance of the first-person lyrical "I" in the poem. This approximation is significant since Akhmatova, as is known, did not particularly like the poet with whom the elegist assimilates Gubanov. As Pavel Luknitskii notes in his reminiscences of Akhmatova, the poet "was not fond of Esenin, not as a poet, and, of course, not as a person." Nonetheless, Esenin's death filled Akhmatova with anxiety: "He lived terribly and died terribly… How fragile these peasants are, when civilization affects them adversely. It seems that every year a poet dies… It is frightful when a poet dies," Luknitskii recalls Akhmatova saying.[184] Sedakova's reaction to Gubanov's death finds an uncanny reflection in Akhmatova's reaction to Esenin's death, as described by Luknitskii:

> From this conversation [with Akhmatova] it was clear that the weight of life, which was felt by everyone and weighed sharply upon civilized people, at times gave rise to thoughts of suicide. But the more intellectual the person, the stronger his spirit, the more resistant he was… I apply these words firstly to Akhmatova herself. But people like Esenin—he is weaker in spirit. Such people do not survive.[185]

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[182] Akhmatova, *SS*, 2: 172.
[183] Chukovskaia, *Pamiati Anny Akhmatovoi*, 213.
[184] Luknitskii, *Atsumiana: Vstrechi s Annoi Akhmatovoi*, 1: 84.
[185] Ibid.

In contrast to the evoked precursor's voice, however, the speaker of Sedakova's elegy does not enter into and frighten life; rather she transgresses the "needlessness of nothing."

The poet's figurative, soporific transgression on a tightrope, however, evinces yet another precursor's voice:

> На, кажется, надрезанном канате
> Я – маленький плясун.
> Я – тень от чьей-то тени. Я – лунатик
> Двух темных лун.[186]
>
> On, it seems, a slightly cut rope / I am a little dancer. / I am the shadow of someone's shadow. I am a sleepwalker / Of two dark moons.
>
> Там, на тугом канате,
> Между картонных скал,
> Ты ль это как лунатик
> Приступом небо брал?
> […]
> Помню сухой и жуткий
> Смех – из последних жил!
> Только тогда – как будто –
> Юбочку ты носил...[187]
>
> There, on the taut tightrope, / Between the cardboard cliffs, / Was it you who like a sleepwalker / Took the sky by storm? / [...] / I remember dry and terrible / laughter — on the brink of exhaustion! / Only then — it was as if — / you wore a skirt.[188]

As Alyssa Dinega Gillespie observes, the recurrent motif of the tightrope in Tsvetaeva's poetry is always explicitly employed in connection with "the female poetic predicament"—i.e. taking up an "impossibly acrobatic posture" in negotiating a space for herself over the abyss between "feminine subversion" and the "ungendered attainment of the sublime."[189] The poet of Sedakova's elegy likewise appears to negotiate a middle ground, though rather than a predicament of gender, she faces a predicament of oblivion and capitulation, of poetic peril or indifferent silence. Like Nietzsche's tightrope walker,

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[186] Tsvetaeva, *SS*, 1: 214.
[187] Tsvetaeva, *SS*, 1: 542.
[188] Translated by Alyssa Dinega in *A Russian Psyche*, 3.
[189] Dinega, *A Russian Psyche*, 5.

the poet "makes danger her vocation." Yet unlike the tightrope walker of *Thus Spoke Zarathrusta* the poet maintains her balance, enters a dream-like state, and moves forward, sustained by her faith in God.[190]

Entering into a semi-conscious or dreamlike state serves as a means of transcending such binaries in both Tsvetaeva and Sedakova's poetics. As Valentina Polukhina observes, a dream state in Sedakova's work represents a place where "the earthly and the heavenly often intersect" and functions as a "chief means of communication with the other world."[191] We recall that in Sedakova's poem "Inscription" ("Nadpis'"), walking in a dream-state functions as a way of accessing higher knowledge and inaugurating the poetic process of "uncomprehending understanding" mentioned above: "Nina, vo sne li, v ume li, kakoi-to starinnoi dorogoi…" Such emphasis on dreaming serves as thematic link between Sedakova and Tsvetaeva, who likewise describes the creative process as the condition of dreaming:

> The condition of artistic creation is the condition of dreaming, when suddenly you, submitting to an unknown need, set your house on fire or push your friend off a mountain. Is it you who did this? Obviously, it was you (you are sleeping, you are *dreaming*, after all!). You are acting in full freedom, without conscience; your act is an act of nature.[192]

By speaking through the masks of her female precursors, the lyric speaker veils her implicit reproach of the mourned subject for being unable (or *unwilling*) to negotiate his own position on the figurative tightrope, which stretched between official recognition and

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[190] After telling the fallen tightrope walker that he need not fear the afterlife, since there is no God, Zarathustra says, "You have made danger in your vocation; there is nothing contemptible in that. Now you perish of your vocation: for that I will bury you with my own hands." Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 132.

[191] Sedakova, "Conform not to this Age," 41-42.

[192] Tsvetaeva, *SS*, 5: 366.

persecution, spanning over the abyss of intoxicating oblivion where so many of Sedakova's generation met their ends.

While the precursors' voices mediate and thereby soften the poet's reproach on her behalf, they also appear to provide consolation to the poet herself, who grapples with her own creative anxieties, as she, like a sleepwalker, walks along the tightrope. The questions, reproaches, and assurances the poet directs towards her subject—"Who else will sing the praises of this lovely world where they drown us like kittens?"—perhaps more immediately represent reproaches and assurances to the poet herself, who remains the only one in the present scenario who is indeed able to meet these challenges.

As the poet negotiates her predicament, the voices of Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova provide another source of consolation, in that they draw an implicit division between the poet and her subject: while Gubanov is heir to Esenin who did not realize his full potential, the poetic speaker, by default, has implicitly made herself heir to Tsvetaeva (who transformed "the spiritual experience of an epoch" into the material of art)[193] and Akhmatova—Russia's enduring "guardian of culture."[194] From this custodial position, the speaker concludes her elegy with not a *hope* for remembrance, as Lermontov's "Alone I set out on the road…"—

> Я б желал навеки так уснуть,
> […]
>
> Чтоб всю ночь, весь день мой слух лелея,
> Про любовь мне сладкий голос пел,
> Надо мной чтоб вечно зеленея
> Темный дуб склонялся и шумел.[195]

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[193] Brodsky, *Less,* 191.
[194] Yastremski, "A Revealed Miracle: An Introduction to Olga Sedakova's Life and Work" in Sedakova, *Poems and Elegies*, 24.
[195] Lermontov, *SS*, 2:208-209

> I would like to sleep eternally, / […] // So that all night, all day, nourishing my hearing, / A sweet voice sings to me about love, / And over me an eternally green / Dark oak bent and rustled.

—but an affirmation (to both herself and her subject) of remembrance and God's guardianship. As Gubanov concludes his "I take the horse's bow-legged summer" ("Ia beru krivonogoe leto konia"), with the thrice-posed question, "But what about God?" ("Nu a bog?"),[196] the speaker promises, "It cannot be that God has forgotten":

> До свиданья, Леня. Тройкой из романса
> пусть хоть целый мир летит в распыл,
> ничего не страшно. Нужно постараться.
> Быть не может, чтобы Бог забыл.

> Goodbye, Lyonya. Like a troika from a romance, / let all the world fly into dust; / nothing is frightening. One must try. / It cannot be that God has forgotten.

Thus, as Mayakovsky refutes and transforms the end of Esenin's poem, asserting that "to make a life is significantly harder," thereby challenging his subject to use his poetic gift to face life's challenges rather than succumb to suicide, Sedakova, too, concludes her poem with various rejoinders to Gubanov, including a response to his preoccupation with his own premature demise: "One must try" ("Nuzhno postarat'sia"). In light of this exhortation, Sedakova's elegy departs from the traditional endpoint at which the "road of life" ends. It does not lead merely to the poet's demise and a hope for remembrance, as in Lermontov's formative poem, or the question of God's existence, as in Gubanov's, but an affirmation of faith and a reinstatement of the power of the poetic word.

[196] Gubanov, *Seryi Kon'*, 113.

3. "(Not a Brother? Not a Confrere?)": On the Death of Joseph Brodsky

Contrary to Sedakova's more personal relationship with Gubanov, her relationship to Brodsky can be characterized as a brief professional acquaintanceship, solely "intra-poetic" in nature. If one wanted to draw a line between her and Joseph Brodsky, Sedakova contends, "It really would have to be a crooked line. Or you could start from someone who is our complete opposite (from Evtushenko, let's say)."[1] Sedakova and Brodsky indeed represent disparate poetic styles: while Brodsky's verse displays a Baroque syntax, varied linguistic registers, and a stoicism prone to sudden moments of pathos or Kierkegaardian "leaps" of faith, Sedakova's verse features a deceptively plain syntax and imagery that is enigmatic in both its simplicity and multi-layeredness. More significantly, their poetic worlds spring from seemingly opposing spiritual stances: whereas Sedakova is a practicing Orthodox Christian who counts spiritual thinkers such as Nikolai Berdyaev and Pavel Florensky among her philosophical influences, Brodsky refers to himself a "Christian by correspondence" ("khristianin-zaochnik")[2] or a figurative Calvinist.[3] While Sedakova's poetry enters into the otherness of prayerful meditation and transgresses the metaphysical bounds of human existence into omniscient divinity, Brodsky's poetry both springs from and pushes still deeper into the "voice of language" itself.[4] As Andrei Ranchin puts it, Brodsky's verse "does not await a meeting with a personal God but rather survives God's abandonment and is

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[1] Sedakova, "A Rare Independence," 242.
[2] Sumerkin, "Continuation of Poetry by Other Means," 215.
[3] Losev is quick to point out that when Brodsky speaks of Calvinism to interviewers, he means it as a figure of speech or a trope. "The only thing Calvinist about his metaphysics was the belief in original sin (or, in Brodsky's case, original guilt) that cannot be prayed or worked away." See Losev, *Joseph Brodsky: A Literary Life*, 157.
[4] Sumerkin, "Continuation of Poetry by Other Means," 215

inclined toward disbelief."[5] In comparing the function of religious themes in Brodsky and Sedakova, Benjamin Paloff observes that while religious themes in Sedakova's verse facilitate the poet's "mystical contact with the Other" in which the reader is invited to participate, in Brodsky's verse they serve to facilitate a dialogue in the realm of language between the poet and the literary tradition, poetic language, and the poet himself.[6]

As will be discussed below, Brodsky and Sedakova's respective poetic metaphysical systems contain points of overlap (such as their employment of Biblical motifs) and sharp contrast (such as the ends to which such motifs lead). Encompassing such spiritual similarities and contrasts, however, are the constellations of influence that dot the atmospheric strata of these respective poetic systems. Citing Dante, Rilke, the English Metaphysicals, T. S. Eliot, and Mandelstam as their influences, both Sedakova and Brodsky continue the Acmeist "longing for world culture" in their verse.[7] Not surprisingly, in a moment of praise for Brodsky, Sedakova acknowledges that "[h]e has revived the link with Russian poetry proper, with its last 'positive' tendency—Acmeism—and reprised the theme of Acmeism, 'the nostalgia for World Culture.'"[8] Though Sedakova generally eschews commonalities between them, this praise reveals a fundamental trait that they share: a belief in the redemptive power of poetic influence and

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[5] Ranchin, *Na piru mnemoziny*, 135. The subject of Brodsky's religiosity is a complex one and has been the subject of many studies. Significant works on the topic include Loseff, "Iosif Brodskii's Poetics of Faith," 188-201; Ranchin, "'Chelovek est' ispytatel' boli': religiozno-filosofskie motivy poezii Brodskogo i ekzistentsialism" in *Na piru mnemoziny*, 146-74; Minakov, "Tret'e Evangelie ot Fomy?: Pretenzii k Gospodu. Brodskii i khristianstvo," 73-87; MacFadyen, *Joseph Brodsky and the Baroque*.
[6] Paloff, "The God Function in Joseph Brodsky and Olga Sedakova," 716-736. See also Medvedeva, "Poeticheskaiia metafizika I. Brodskogo i O. Sedakovoi v kontekste kul'turnoi traditsii," Diss.
[7] On the influence of Acmeist poetics, and Gumilev's poetics in particular, in both Brodsky and Sedakova's work, see Pakhareva's *Opyt akmeizma (akmeisticheskaia sostavliaiushchaia sovremennoi russkoi poezii)*. On the influence of the Acmeist poets' influence on Brodsky specifically, see Lotman and Lotman, "Mezhdu veshch'iu i pustotoi (Iz nabliudenii nad poetiki Iosifa Brodskogo 'Uraniia')," 731-47, and Moranjak-Bamburac, "Iosif Brodskii i akmeizm," 57-76. On the Acmeist traits in Sedakova's poetics, see Kelly, "Olga Sedakova," 423-32, and Alexandra Smith's essay, "Russian Women Poets and the Death of the Poet, the Modernist Canon and the Postmodern Condition," 300-319.
[8] Sedakova, "A Rare Independence," 247.

the renewal of the poetic word. This common ground, as Alexandra Smith observes, directly shapes their manner of writing elegies, which appears "conspicuously similar" in their use of subtext: "They are both what might be called neo-Acmeist poet-craftsmen who use intertextuality as an important device in the mnemonic writing that is oriented towards a living poetry of the object-word."[9]

If the ways in which Brodsky and Sedakova embed subtexts into their elegiac works are similar, one might be quick to caution that their modes of mourning, however, are not. While Sedakova has been characterized as managing "to eliminate the first person singular in poetry,"[10] Brodsky conceives of poetry as a self-reflective linguistic *imitatio* of the poet's own death. As Brodsky notes in his penetrating essay on Mandelstam, "After the last line of a poem nothing follows except literary criticism. So when we read a poet, we participate in his or his works' death." In the case of Mandelstam, whose poetry *did* in fact lead to his literal death, Brodsky asserts, that when we read Mandelstam, "[W]e participate in both."[11] Though Brodsky's observation refers to Mandelstam, Brodsky's own marginalized status and eventual exile invite the application of such a model to his own his own poems (and his elegies in particular), and many scholars have laid bare the poet's penchants for self-mourning and "participation in his own death."[12]

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[9] Smith, "Russian Women Poets and the Death of the Poet, the Modernist Canon and the Postmodern Condition," 308.

[10] Sedakova, "Conform not to this Age," 52. On the subject of selfhood in Sedakova's poetry see Sandler, "Scared into Selfhood," 473-90, and "Thinking Self in the Poetry of Ol'ga Sedakova," 302-23.

[11] Brodsky, "The Child of Civilization" in *Less Than One*, 123.

[12] As David Bethea observes, in elegizing Robert Lowell against an Ovidian seashore setting populated by the shadows of his Russian precursors (Pushkin and Mandelstam) and his Anglo-American precursors (Eliot and Stevens), Brodsky also mourns his own marginalized status as an outsider to both his new home, the United States, and his homeland, Russia. See Bethea, "Joseph Brodsky and the American Seashore Poem," 115-122. Andrew Reynolds traces such self-mourning in "Daedalus in Sicily," as well, wherein Brodsky mourns both his subject, Auden, and himself by depicting himself as the poetic son (Icarus) to

Comments by Sedakova herself, however, belie such an opposition between Brodsky the self-portraitist on the one hand and Sedakova the self-effacer on the other. When asked how she manages to eliminate the first person from her poetry, Sedakova responds,

> It's an illusion! I think that I use the first person singular as much as anyone. I have never seen that as my mission, to eliminate the first person singular. In the final analysis, it is only a narrative strategy: you can talk about yourself in the third person. Nobody is really fooled as to the identity of the 'sick man' in Pasternak's 'V bol'nitse' (In hospital) […], nor as to the identity of the 'lodger in the raincoat, with a bottle of grappa in his pocket' (in Brodsky's 'Laguna' [Lagoon]) and the same goes for the hawk in his 'Osennii krik iastreba' (The hawk's cry in autumn).[13]

Significantly, these two poems of Brodsky's ("The Lagoon" and "The Hawk's Cry in Autumn"), which Sedakova readily offers as examples of poetic self-portrayals, comprise prominent subtexts in her elegy to the poet. Thus, while the employment of these subtexts on the one hand nods to the two poets' shared fondness of Italian motifs and the city of Venice in particular (the location of their first and only meeting), on the other hand they also lay the groundwork for Sedakova to present, in honor of Brodsky's own elegiac style, a self-portrait of her own in return. Though the poet-speaker mimics the deceased poet's voice and embeds fragments from his works and those of his influences into her text, the poet's own visage—perhaps in a nod to her subject's own poetic custom—illuminates every level of the poem, from the ancient Slavic funerary rite to the poem's grand conception ("zamysel") of both rewriting and initiating her subject into the "Death of the Poet" tradition. At once a polemic and a tribute, an imitation and a self-portrait, a

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Auden, his poetic father (Daedalus). See Reynolds, "Feathers and Sons," 553-582. On the elegy and self-mourning in Brodsky's verse, see also Kurganov, "Brodskii i iskusstvo elegii," 166-85.

[13] Sedakova, "Conform not to this Age," 52.

reunion and a contest, Sedakova's elegy ultimately serves to initiate the deceased poet into the constellation of their most treasured influences.

As an older contemporary, Brodsky is in some ways a peer to Sedakova, and in other ways a predecessor. Theirs is not a clear-cut intra-poetic relationship, a "battle between strong equals, father and son as mighty opposites, Laius and Oedipus at the crossroads" as one paradigm of Bloom's theory of influence would have it.[14] The speaker in Sedakova's elegy, too, wonders aloud as to how best to relate to her subject:

> Не друг, не попутчик
> (не брат? не собрат?)
> <...>
>
> Not a friend, nor a fellow traveler / (not a brother? not a confrere?) […]

If anything, Brodsky would better fit the role of intra-poetic elder brother than father, progenitor, or, more generally, predecessor: the two poets are only nine years apart in age. Nonetheless, the geographical distance between them caused by Brodsky's deportation from the Soviet Union 1972, in addition to his death in 1996, place Brodsky in a position more akin to distant predecessor than contemporary. Indeed, their birth years (1940 and 1949) place them on opposite sides of the significant generational divide of World War II. While Brodsky came of age poetically as part of a generation of "post-war" poets, Sedakova came of age amongst a group that would later come to be called the "late Soviet" and then "post-Soviet" poets. Moreover, Sedakova was only a teenager writing poetry at the writing studio at the Young Pioneer Palace when, in October 1963, Brodsky's name first appeared a Leningrad newspaper as a "literary drone" (a coded phrase which indicated the crime of "social parasitism" for which Brodsky would be

[14] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, 11.

arrested the following year).[15] As Brodsky's arrest and sentence to five years of domestic exile incited public outcry from public figures at home and abroad (including Evtushenko, Dmitrii Shostakovich, Jean-Paul Sartre, and his own beloved mentor, Akhmatova), Sedakova was only beginning to compose juvenilia, a handful of which were published in various official youth newspapers but which she would soon repudiate.

It was not until Sedakova's first year at Moscow State University in 1967 that she read Brodsky's poetry, which was, as she tells Polukhina, "going the rounds, from hand to hand."[16] When asked by Polukhina about her first impressions of Brodsky's verse at this time, Sedakova replied, "I have to say that at the time he didn't really impress me. I was reading Mandelstam at the time. And to love, really love, those two poetics simultaneously is impossible. So I read Brodsky, really read, a bit later than that."[17] From her indifference, she admits that she later progressed to an acute dislike of his poetry. She disliked the content "because of the general tone of skepticism" and the form because she prefers "the crystalline composition" of late Mandelstam.[18] Sedakova continued to write poems (now collected in *From Early Verses* [*Iz rannikh stikhov*]) while she studied at university, but she did not make her poetic debut until February 10, 1972 at a conference with members of the Moscow-Tartu semiotic school in Estonia. By this time, of course, the deportation of Joseph Brodsky, the international *cause célèbre*, was already imminent. In June 1972 he was put on a plane to Vienna, and the two poets never became acquainted.

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[15] For an account of Brodsky's persecution, trial, and exile, see Losev, *Joseph Brodsky: A Literary Life*, 67-94.
[16] Sedakova, "Rare Independence," 241.
[17] Sedakova, "Rare Independence," 241.
[18] Ibid.

It was not until 1989 when Sedakova traveled abroad for the first time that the two met. By this time she had developed a respect, if not a fondness, for Brodsky's work. While in Glasgow, a month before her meeting with Brodsky, Sedakova confides to Polukhina in an interview that his poetic rhythm and his essays eventually won her over: "A poet who introduces a new rhythm to poetry is a great poet," she said. She describes his essays in particular as intelligent and generous, the latter of these two qualities being "the greatest gift anyone who is called to be a poet can possess."[19] Several weeks after these remarks, Sedakova traveled to Venice for a conference at Ca' Foscari University, where she met Brodsky, and he introduced her to the audience at her poetry reading at the Palazzo Querini Stampalia. At the close of her reading when audience members shared their impressions and asked questions, Brodsky disagreed with an audience member who praised the Christian "meekness and humility" of Sedakova's verse. "The content of a poet is in his form," remarked Brodsky, "and the content of this verse therefore is not meekness, but will [volia] and aggressiveness."[20]

Sedakova's estimations of Brodsky, on the other hand, both contradict and corroborate prevailing narratives. Though she rejects the notion that Brodsky is a "religious poet,"[21] she identifies Brodsky—more specifically, his poem "A Christmas Romance" ("Rozhdestvenskii romans")—as the "epigraph" to the new spiritual reawakening in poetry of the 1960s.[22] In her essay "The Death of Brodsky" ("Konchina Brodskogo," 1996) Sedakova recalls the "extreme novelty" ("bezumnaia novizna") that Brodsky's verse introduced to her generation: this novelty not only included human

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Vladimir Bondarenko describes this scene in his article, "Ostrov ozarenii Ol'gi Sedakovoi" (201-202).
[21] Yury Kublanovsky refers to Brodsky as a religious poet in an interview with Valentina Polukhina. Kublanovsky, "A Yankee in Russian Poetry," 243.
[22] Sedakova, *Proza*, 258.

mortality (a forbidden subject in Soviet ideology) but the existence of God. Sedakova notes that Brodsky's elegy for John Donne, for example, which depicts the deceased poet's departed soul, contains the implicit declaration that "there is a God! And there is a soul! And you yourself have one!"[23] Where one might discern an "increasing pessimism about man's future" in Brodsky's later work,[24] Sedakova discerns maturity and stoicism, which she defines as "not just 'courage to be' in a world which one cannot change […], but also a solicitude for, a gratitude *vis-à-vis* this perishable world of ours."[25] Nonetheless, as Sedakova admits, Brodsky's verse always seems to run up against an emotional and metaphysical limit. In contrast to Eliot who declared, "In my beginning is my end" (which Sedakova includes as an epigraph to her essay), she laments that in Brodsky's case, such metaphysical categories remain firmly separate. "The beginning and the end are distinguished from one another like two end points on a pendulum-like trajectory," Sedakova observes.[26] Further on, she notes,

> Brodsky usually does not break off from this pendulum trajectory: after an upward movement one can always expect a return downward, after a movement to the right (open sentimentality), a movement to the left (irony, a grin). His tenacity in remaining in this swinging motion, in not leaving a single open movement without a counterweight, evidently, was for him a matter of honor, both literary and human. A test of stoicism and humility, as he understood it: an acceptance of what is, in all its unsightliness and hopelessness. I know of only one exception: "The Hawk's Cry in Autumn." Here the movement breaks up upward, in one direction: in contrast to the soul's flight in "Elegy for John Donne," which returns to the sleeping body once it reaches its ultimate height, [the hawk's] ascent along its rising trajectory culminates in death.[27]

Though certainly conflicted, Sedakova's assessment of Brodsky is not without deepest respect. Brodsky may not be a Dante or a Donne with regard to the breadth of his faith—

[23] Sedakova, *ChT*, 3: 481.
[24] Reynolds, "Feathers and Suns," 558.
[25] Sedakova, "A Rare Independence," 246.
[26] Sedakova, *ChT*, 3: 484.
[27] Sedakova, *ChT*, 3: 486-7.

"For all the complexities and subtleties of the argument I can't conceive of a Christianity that could exist without Christ," she notes"[28]—but he is a Dante in terms of his mythopoetic stature, which consists of a "[s]toic wisdom, courageous humility before the state of things" which is "expressed not by one or another aphoristic utterance, but by the entire form of Brodsky's poetry," Sedakova concludes. "And this, perhaps, makes Brodsky the 'Poet for our time,' a Virgil and a Dante, the classical speaker of our nonclassical time."[29]

Brodsky, of course, is not only a modern-day Dante in terms of his poetic stature, but, as Sedakova suggests (perhaps with a touch of irony), in terms of his biography as well:

> No other poet has received such a multitude of highest honors and honorary titles in his lifetime; no one has come even close, it seems. Amongst these accolades is one which he was awarded this past year: Florence named Brodsky its honorary citizen—as if using the Russian exile to repay its own debt to the Florentine citizen it once cast out—Dante, who [like Brodsky], even until his death did not wish to return to his native city. By the same token, Brodsky is our Dante.[30]

As a modern-day embodiment of the exilic traditions of Ovid and Pushkin, Brodsky certainly casts a formidable shadow not only over post-Soviet Russian verse, but the very genre in which Sedakova's poetic persona now mourns him.[31] Indeed, while the speaker in "On the Death of Leonid Gubanov" refers to her addressee by the diminutive form of his name (Lenia), and engages him in a polemical yet buoyant tête-à-tête that seems to have been already in progress well before the reader enters the poem (over half of the

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[28] Sedakova, "A Rare Independence," 242.

[29] Sedakova, *ChT* 3: 489. See also Polukhina's monograph on Brodsky. While Brodsky names Virgil a "poet for his time" ("poet dlia svoego vremini"), Polukhina titles her monograph on Brodsky, *Joseph Brodsky: A Poet for Our Time.*

[30] Sedakova, *ChT*, 3: 477-78.

[31] Polukhina discusses the biographical parallels between Brodsky and Pushkin, including their falling out with their respective regimes, their being under surveillance and censored by the Tsarist Okhranka or the Soviet KGB, and their exiles. See Polukhina, "Pushkin and Brodsky: the Art of Self-deprecation," 153-174.

poem's total nine sentences are questions), the speaker in "In Memory of a Poet" strikes a more respectful tone. This different tone is felt immediately in the very title of the poem, "In Memory of a Poet." In Sedakova's elegy to Gubanov, the poet employs the customary titular formula, "On the Death of" in addition to her subject's full name, which only brings the intimate nature of the lines that follow into higher relief. In her elegy to Brodsky, however, though the poet's name is mentioned in the epigraph, the poet refrains from naming her subject both in the title and throughout the poem.[32] By foregoing the possible title "In Memory of Joseph Brodsky," the poet squares her subject with other elegized poets whose names go without saying, such as Pushkin (as elegized by Lermontov), Mayakovsky (as elegized by Pasternak), and Pasternak (as elegized by Akhmatova). The title nods in accordance with Levinton's assertion that some poetic deaths serve as "milestones, banners of their poetic periods," and that for the generation that came of age in the post-Stalinist period, Brodsky's death certainly represented such a milestone.[33]

While withholding the lamented subject's name does not present a deviation from tradition, the poet manages to insert minor deviations elsewhere in the title as well as in an appended footnote, thereby framing her poem with a conflicting set of generic markers for the reader. In titling her poem "In Memory of a Poet" ("Pamiati poeta"), rather than "Death of a Poet" ("Smert' Poeta") or "On the Death of…" ("Na smert' …"), the poet subtly shifts the orientation of her elegy onto that which remains or is gained from the

[32] If it were not for the epigraph, the poet's withholding of his name would resemble Mandelstam's treatment of Pushkin, who, as Nadezhda Mandelstam recounts in her memoirs, maintained that one should never mention Pushkin's name in vain. For him, N. Mandelstam explains, Pushkin was part of a certain realm (which also encompassed certain things and people like his mother) to which any direct reference was almost sacrilege. As Surat observes, Pushkin only graces Mandelstam's verse as an "unmentioned figure" ("figura umolchaniia"). See Mandel'shtam, *Vospominaniia*, 38, 78; Surat, 159; Reynolds, "The Burden of Memories."

[33] Levinton, "Smert' poeta," 196.

loss of the poet (his memory), rather than the loss itself. Though this shift indicates a revision to the customary "Death of the Poet" tradition, the author's footnote (which appears in the 1998 publication of the poem) seems to signal an effort to pay homage to her subject by elegizing him in his own fashion:

> As the reader can hear immediately, the model for this piece was Akhmatova's 'The Way of All the Earth.' The reader can also hear Tsvetaevian turns of speech. I wanted these two Russian Muses to participate in verses dedicated to Brodsky's memory. Brodsky himself took Auden's 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats' as a model for his poem on the death of T. S. Eliot.[34]

Brodsky, as we recall, was drawn to Auden's elegy, because it "had none" of the common tendency of the elegist to mourn himself and his own inevitable demise while honoring another poet. "What's more," he notes in his essay on Auden, "I soon realized that even its structure was designed to pay tribute to the dead poet, imitating in reverse order the great Irishman's own modes of stylistic development."[35] Of course, if it is true the poem lacks an indulgence of self-portraiture on Auden's part, there is certainly no dearth of polemical parlay and successorial anxiety, as has been discussed in numerous studies.[36] Regardless, in emulating Auden's elegy to Yeats in his elegy to Eliot, Brodsky follows the stylistic trajectory of Eliot's oeuvre and, as Bethea observes, "goes out of his native tradition in order, as it were, to reinvent it."[37]

In light of the author's footnote, the reader might expect a similar imitation of the deceased poet's style, mediated, of course, by the specified "Russian Muses" in

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[34] Sedakova, "Pamiati poeta," 5. The footnote accompanies the poem in this and other subsequent publications of the poem elsewhere, though it is not included in the more recent four-volume collection of her works.
[35] Brodsky, *Less*, 361.
[36] See Chapter Three, "Burying and Praising: Auden's Anti-Elegiac Elegies" in Wetzsteon, *Influential Ghosts: A Study of Auden's Sources*, 57-71 and O'Neill, "Yeats" in *W. H. Auden in Context*, ed. Tony Sharpe, 276-285. For a general discussion of Auden as "one of the massive modern sufferers from the malady of Poetic Influence," see Bloom's Introduction to *W. H. Auden*, 1-5.
[37] Bethea, *Joseph Brodsky and the Creation of Exile*, 120-121.

Sedakova's elegy to Brodsky. The reader might also expect, in light of Brodsky and Auden's poems, which both commence with a statement of the time of year the poets died ("He died in January, at the year's beginning," and "He died in the midst of winter," respectively), a similar acknowledgment at the beginning in Sedakova's elegy in light of the all too glaring coincidence of Yeats's, Eliot's, and Brodsky's (not to mention Pushkin's) shared month of death.

However, perhaps one does not need to state the obvious in a case such as Brodsky's. Rather than lay a foundation for some kind of converse cultural engagement *à la* Brodsky and weave her subject into the implied cross-cultural exilic lineage of Eliot, Auden (and by extension Ovid and Pushkin), Sedakova's annotational reminder serves, ostensibly, as justification for her similar use of Akhmatova's "The Way of All the Earth" and "Tsvetaevian turns of speech." More significantly, however, the footnote establishes parallels that are both poetic and circumstantial: on the one hand, the author states that she, too, will adopt the "mourning tongue" of another poet (namely, Akhmatova in her poem "The Way of All the Earth") in order to speak of the death of another (Brodsky), thereby incorporating a hallmark trope of Brodsky's elegiac poetics and therefore a crucial form of homage. On the other hand, this trope subtly distances the poet-speaker from her subject's death and creates an intimacy between her and the poets whose "mourning tongues" she employs.

While Brodsky's use of Auden in elegizing Eliot creates an exilic triangle between himself (Brodsky was serving his domestic exile in Norenskaia at the time), Eliot (the American who had become a naturalized citizen of England), and Auden (the Briton who had become an American citizen), Sedakova's invocation of Akhmatova and

Tsvetaeva, at the expense of her subject, creates a different triangulation of *female* Russian poets who did *not* emigrate. Though Tsvetaeva emigrated to Prague, she returned to Moscow in 1939, while Akhmatova, like Sedakova, never emigrated.[38] Thus, while Brodsky mourns a foreign poetic father (Eliot) via another foreign poetic father (Auden) who, in the elegy which serves as Brodsky's model, mourns his own poetic father (Yeats),[39] Sedakova reaches into her own domestic tradition in order to mourn a compatriot elder poetic brother by invoking the voices of their shared poetic mothers. However, what motivates Sedakova to invoke these voices over, say, Mandelstam, their shared poetic father? After all, it would seem Mandelstam could be the more logical choice. Akhmatova and Nadezhda Mandelstam alike referred to Brodsky as "Osya junior" in light of Brodsky's resemblance to the great namesake in both appearance and demeanor.[40] The two poets' shared Jewish roots and penchant for "domesticating" foreign traditions into their Russian verse also provide nearly hereditary links. As Bethea says of Brodsky,

> [R]eaders have to go back to the 1930s and the high modernism of Mandelstam to find another poet so bent on domesticating the foreign and the 'other' in order to create a niche for himself, always of course still on the margins, within the mainstream of Russian-Soviet letters. […] That Mandelstam was a Jew whose family had come to Russia from Central Europe and whose own generation suffered from what the poet called, in *The Noise of Time* (1925), 'congenital tongue-tie' are facts that have not been lost on Brodsky, whose debt to this precursor-as-outsider is, as we have seen, very great indeed.[41]

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[38] "No, not under foreign firmament, / nor under the protection of foreign wings, – / I was with my people, / There, where my people, unfortunately, were" (*Requiem*). ("Net, i ne pod chuzhdym nebosvodom, / I ne pod zashchitoi chuzhdykh kryl, – / Ia byla togda s moim narodom, / Tam, gde moi narod, k neschast'iu, byl" ("Rekviem"). Akhmatova, *SS*, 3: 21.

[39] Bethea, *Brodsky and the Creation of Exile*, 120-21.

[40] Loseff, *Joseph Brodsky: A Literary Biography*, 59. For the original Russian text, see Losev, *Iosif Brodskii. Opyt literaturnoi biografii*, 70.

[41] Bethea, *Brodsky and the Creation of Exile*, 122. See also Knox, "Iosif Brodskij's Affinity with Osip Mandel'štam: Cultural Links with the Past."

Of course, Mandelstam's "crystalline verse" plays just as pivotal of a role for Sedakova's poetics as Brodsky's. And though Mandelstam's voice can indeed be discerned in her elegy, it is the voices of Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva, Russia's female "guardians of culture" and the two poets' primary female models, which imbue the poem most strongly. As Sedakova employs the dol'nik-laden amphibraic dimeter of Akhmatova's "The Way of All the Earth" ("Putem vseia zemli"), which sets a rhythm uncannily echoing Tsvetaeva's second elegy to Rilke, *Poem of the Air* (*Poema vozdukha*),[42] these two female voices fold into the elegist's own voice, thereby creating a three-part female harmonization which places the male subject in the decidedly in the minority.

Perhaps one can only surmise as to the complex, over-determined motivation behind this revised triangulation—is it because the poet does not wish to infringe upon the arguably more intimate and familial relationship between the two "Osyas"? And if this is the case, is the avoidance motivated by anxiety or respect? On the other hand, if the poet feels more at home appropriating the voices of her and her subject's shared poetic mothers (as Sedakova's elegy to Gubanov suggests), perhaps the poet perceives the Russian muses' voices as a more tenable means of achieving reciprocity with her subject. As in the case of the omission of their shared domestic father, however, this preference, too, is possibly double-edged, as it may implicitly imply that perhaps the elegist, as a domestic female poet, is better equipped to impersonate these predecessors than her subject is. Indeed, as Aaron Beaver notes, "Brodsky seems more dazzled by

[42] See Alexandra Smith's perceptive discussion on the rhythmic similarities between Sedakova's and Tsvetaeva's respective elegies in "Russian Women Poets and the Death of the Poet," 309-13.

Tsvetaeva and less willing or able to echo her than [Mandelstam] and Akhmatova, whose [A]cmeist practice he extends into a bona fide post-[A]cmeism."[43]

The fact that Tsvetaeva's poem escapes mention in the explanatory footnote further complicates matters and prompts speculation over the author's intentions behind the footnote in the first place. Is it meant to elucidate or deceive? In light of the ethical issues of poetic mourning that Brodsky himself discusses, however, perhaps it is a *post facto* attempt of a different order: to undercut her own artistry and thereby immunize the poem against any untoward airs of presumption—in other words, a justification rather than an explanation. After all, a mourned subject "wouldn't like to be used as the point of departure for no matter how spectacular a destination," as Brodsky asserts. Moreover, it was indeed *Akhmatova's* ability to "particulariz[e] the fallen instead of generalizing about them" which Brodsky found so admirable in her elegiac verse.[44]

Notably, Tsvetaeva's *Poem of the Air*, which escapes mention in Sedakova's footnote, implicitly defies the mourned subject Brodsky in two significant ways. The poem provides an elegiac model, which indeed uses the mourned subject as a point of departure (which disregards Brodsky's implied wish to not be used as such). Moreover, as Tsvetaeva's "purest meditation on the theme of death as liberation,"[45] the poem moves not like a pendulum but a soaring projectile which ascends to the seventh layer of the atmosphere, thereby constructing a metapoetic tomb of air for her subject. As Dinega observes, "If Tsvetaeva derives her crowning poetic myth in the course of 'New Year's Letter,' then she celebrates it in the exhilarating flight of 'Poem of the Air.'"[46] Unlike

[43] Beaver, "Lyricism and Philosophy in Brodsky's Elegiac Verse," 592, n. 6.
[44] Brodsky, *Less Than One*, 50.
[45] Dinega, *A Russian Psyche*, 167.
[46] Ibid., 166.

Brodsky's "The Hawk's Cry in Autumn," which, in a defiance of the poet's own usual pendulum swing, continues a vertical trajectory and culminates in the poet's destruction, Tsvetaeva's exultant elegy curves "the forward arrow of time…into an unbroken circle."[47] In other words, the end is transformed into a beginning. While the resplendent transformation contained in this unnamed subtext does not constitute Sedakova's *departure point* (as it might for a true disciple of Tsvetaeva, who always begins where another's poem would end, as Brodsky remarks[48])—nor does the speaker of Sedakova's elegy seek to merge herself with her subject, as Tsvetaeva—it nonetheless sets the parameters of the poet's task which she sets before herself: to take her subject's end as her beginning and to push his characteristic pendulum-like trajectory beyond its endpoints, past the destruction of death and into the realm in which the two opposite poles meet. Sedakova's elegy leads her subject not to the grave—that "limit of the earth" as Brodsky terms it at the end of the second section of his elegy to Eliot ("No kazhdaia mogila — krai zemli")—but rather "*beyond* the edge of the end" (emphasis mine):

> как лоно лагуны,
> звук, запах и вид
> загробные струны
> сестер Пиерид
> вбирают, вникая
> в молчанье певца
> у края
> изгнанья,
> за краем конца –
>
> like the bosom of a lagoon, / the sepulchral strings / of the sisters Pieride / absorb the sound, smell and sight, / going carefully / into the singer's silence / at the edge / of exile, / beyond the edge of the end —

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[47] Dinega, 175.
[48] Brodsky, *Less*, 201.

The dashes which conclude the first two stanzas of the poem (and thereby defy stanzaic bounds) not only evoke the over-wrought lines of Tsvetaeva, nearly out of breath as the poet ascends farther and farther into the ether, but a lack of finality, as the poet seeks to strip her subject of his comfortable confines.

As in Sedakova's elegy on Gubanov, wherein a confluence of Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva's voices convey the first and only instance of the lyrical "I," here the voices of Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva, represented by the Pierides' sepulchral strings, also aid the poet's voice, which makes itself explicit by the end of Part 2 (in the first person plural pronoun "we") as she attempts to define (or obfuscate) the relationship between her and the subject.

Opening with the deceased poet laid on a bier before cremation, the poem depicts a funerary rite that resembles a pre-Christian Slavic burial rite that culminates in the burning of the poet's body and the release his soul into the atmosphere:

Памяти поэта

Главное – величие замысла,
как говорит Иосиф.
Из письма А. Ахматовой

1

Уставившись в небо,
в пустые черты
в прямую, как скрепа,
лазурь слепоты,
как взгляд берет внутрь,
в свой взвившийся дым
скарб, выморок, утварь,
всё, что перед ним, –

как лоно лагуны,
звук, запах и вид

загробные струны
сестер Пиерид
вбирают, вникая
в молчанье певца
у края
изгнанья,
за краем конца –

2

так мертвый уносит,
захлопнув свой том,
ту позднюю осень
с названьем «при нем»,
ту башню, ту арку,
тот дивный проем,
ту площадь Сан Марко,
где шли мы втроем.

3

Не друг, не попутчик
(не брат? не собрат?),
в бряцанье созвучий
родной звукоряд
державший,
как тот,
кто решил наперед,
что жизнь
не заманит
и смерть
не собьет, –

как руль – корабельщик,
как конный – бразды,
как путники –
угол
земли и звезды:

всё мимо, всё меньше:
молельня, базар...
Звук – странная вещь: Мель-
хиор. Балтазар.
Заставы. Нагорья.
Секретный союз.
Звук – странное горе:

служение Муз.

Чего же искал он,
дух, бросивший всех:
рог, верящий в Карла?
Дым, ищущий: вверх!

4

О да, мы рождались
на равнинах других,
где древняя жалость,
не видя живых,

с хребтом перебитым –
к таким, как сама
(не Дева Обида:
косолапая тьма) –

к забытым,
забитым,
к незашто убитым,
к сведенным с ума...

Смерть – нерусское слово.
Как там Пауль писал?
Смерть – немецкое слово,
но русское слово – тюрьма.

5

Гребец на галере,
кощей на цепи,
этапник в безмерной,
безмерной степи
тоску свою вложат
в то, жгущее всех:
вверх!
здесь невозможно
без этого: вверх!
Иначе,
сглотнув наше вечное «Нет!»,
котел твой и нож твой,
позор – людоед.

6

Как дверца,
открытая птице лесной,
как сердце,
враждебное тяге земной, –
от всех гравитаций
отвязанный плот.
Кто сможет остаться,
как он поплывет?

7

То дым не пожарищ,
не горных атак,
не сёл, выдыхающих
душу во мрак,
не тленья,
не гари, не огненных мук,
дым – вечер моленья,
он, как Шива, сторук.

8

Вначале шатаясь
на ватных ногах,
клубясь, утыкаясь,
петляя в кустах –
и над всею потравой,
над долинами слёз
– О Господи, слава
Тебе – занялось! –
он встает на колени,
словно сердце царей,
дым благословенный
земных алтарей.

9

...Вечернее море,
отрада Сафо,
звезда за звездою,
строфа за строфой...
Там больше не вспомнят,
кто умер, кто жив.
Усталый наемник,
волов отрешив...

Что чище того,
что сгорело дотла?
что бездне нет дна и
звездам нет числа...

10

Как дети играют:
«Чур, первую мне!» –
у края
созданья, в заочной стране –

забвения мак,
поминания мед
кто первый уйдет,
пусть с собой и берет –

туда, где, как сестры,
встречает прибой,
где небо, где остров,
где: Спи, дорогой![49]

In Memory of a Poet

The main thing is the grandeur of the conception, as Joseph says. / – From a letter of Anna Akhmatova's

1
Having stared into the sky, / into empty features, / into the straight-as-a-clamp / azure of blindness, / the way his gaze takes in, / into its rising smoke, / belongings, heirless property, utensils, / all that is before it, — // like the bosom of a lagoon, / the sepulchral strings / of the sisters Pierides / absorb the sound, smell and sight, / going carefully / into the singer's silence / at the edge / of exile, / beyond the edge of the end —

2
Thus the dead man, / having slammed shut his tome, / carries away that late autumn / with the title "in his presence," / that tower, the arch, / that marvelous aperture, / that Piazza San Marco, / where the three of us walked.

3
Not a friend, nor a fellow traveler / (nor a brother? nor a confrere?), / holding / in the clanging of consonances / his own musical scale, / like one / who decided in advance, / that life / will not tempt him / and death / will not lead him astray, — // as a sea captain holds the helm, / a horsemen—the reigns / as wayfarers— / the angle / of the earth and the stars: // ever past, ever smaller: / a chapel, a bazaar… / Sound is a strange thing: Mel- / chior. Balthazar. / Border outposts. Plateaus. / A clandestine union. / Sound is a strange

[49] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 391-396.

sorrow: / a service of the Muses. // What did he seek, / the spirit who quit everyone: / a horn with faith in Charlemagne? / Smoke seeking: upward!

4
O yes, we were born / on other planes, / where ancient pity, / blind to the living, // with a broken spine // goes to those who are like she, / (not the Swan Maiden: / but pigeon-toed darkness) – // to the forgotten, / to the beaten, / to those killed for no reason, / to those driven mad... // Death is not a Russian word. / What was it that Paul wrote? / Death is a German word, / but a Russian word – is prison.

5
The oarsman in the galley, / Koshchei the Deathless in chains, / a convict in transit in the boundless, / boundless steppe / will place all their anguish / into what burns everyone: / upward! / it's impossible here / without it: upward! / Otherwise, / swallowing our eternal "No!", / [there remain only] your cauldron and your knife, / shame – is a cannibal.

6
Like a cage door, / opened for a woodland bird, / Like a heart, / inimical to the earth's pull— / a raft is unfettered / from all gravitations. / Who will be able to remain, / when it floats away?

7
This smoke rises not from conflagrations, / nor of mountain attacks, / nor of hamlets, exhaling / a soul into darkness, / nor of decomposition, / nor from ashes, or fiery torments, / this smoke – is an evening of prayer, / it is, like Shiva, hundred-armed.

8
Swaying at first / on cotton legs, / curling, billowing, / ambling in bushes – / over all the ravaged crops, / over the valleys of tears / – Oh, Lord, thanks be / to You – the fire has started at last! – / it kneels, / like the heart of kings, / the blessed smoke / of earthly altars.

9
...The evening sea, / Sappho's delight, / star after star, / verse after verse... / There it's no longer remembered, / who has died, who lives. / A tired hireling, / releasing the oxen... / What is purer than that / which has burnt to the ground? / The bottomless abyss / the numberless stars...

10
As children playing – / "Mine! Me first!" – / at the edge / of creation, in a land reached only by correspondence – // the poppy of forgetting, / the mead of remembrance / let whoever departs first / take with him thence– // where, like sisters, / the surf meets us, / where there is sky, where there's an island, / where: Sleep, my dear!

Instead of attributing Brodsky's axiom directly to him in the poem's epigraph, the poet conveys his words through the voice of Akhmatova, thereby signaling the female predecessor's voice not only as a mediator for her own voice, but for Brodsky's as well. On the one hand, such vocal layering conveys respect and "endows Brodsky with double

authority" as Alexandra Smith suggests. "[I]t is not he who cites Akhmatova, but Akhmatova citing Brodsky. This is a double-edged device that plays on the expectations of readers used to imagining poetic evolution as a linear process of handing on tradition in hierarchical order."[50] Also notable, however, (and not incompatible with Smith's interpretation), is the fact that the epigraph's vocal layering, for all of its deference, also keeps the deceased poet at a firm distance from the speaker. Aside from the author's footnote, which lies beyond the confines of the poem (or is absent, depending on the publication), the poem contains no instances at which the poet utters her subject's name.

Moreover, the epigraph could be taken to reveal just as much about Akhmatova as it does about Brodsky, as it was a phrase she repeated many times to friends and acquaintances in conversation, correspondences, and her personal journal after hearing it from Brodsky in conversation.[51] As for Brodsky, the phrase served as a kind of mantra as he immersed himself in a period of prolific literary production during his eighteen-month exile in Norenskaia (1964-65), despite the threat of further punishment and his own censorious, perfectionist thoughts. He repeated this phrase in his correspondences and in conversations with friends, such as Iakov Gordin and Igor Efimov, who visited the poet in Norenskaia. "The only thing that can save one here is grandeur of conception," Brodsky told Efimov, emphasizing the importance of throwing oneself "headlong, maybe into the void, maybe into disaster" when writing.[52]

Many of the Brodskian subtexts that interlace Sedakova's elegy stem from the period of the poet's domestic exile in Norenskaia as well as his ultimate exile to the West, thereby underpinning the biographical parallels between Brodsky and his exiled

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[50] Smith, "Russian Women Poets and the Death of the Poet," 307.
[51] Loseff, *Joseph Brodsky*, 59.
[52] Efimov, "One Step out of Line," 43.

forebears, Pushkin, Ovid, and the self-exiled Anglophone poets Auden and Eliot. Other poems that comprise the subtextual fabric of the poem also stem from his Nativity verses or cycle (the later poems of which often feature a Venetian setting due to Brodsky's habit of spending Christmas and the New Year there) and poems that speak explicitly to questions of religious faith.

Though Brodsky's biography does not conclude with a return to his origin, Sedakova, in tune with Akhmatova's model text, sets her elegy in a motion which moves both forward (as his soul ascends to its resting place, the island of Lesbos) and backwards (both in terms of the spirit's intermittent lower elevations as well as the theme of rebirth). Notably, in calling her poem a "great dirge for itself" ("bol'shaia panikhida po samoi sebe"),[53] Akhmatova does not portray her hero (the "kitezhanka") from the traditional funerary perspective of retrospection, farewell, and departure. Rather, the poem moves in a cyclical motion of departure and return (thereby conveying a general backwards temporal movement):

> У давних пожарищ
> Обугленный склад.
> «Вот пропуск, товарищ,
> Пустите назад...»
> И воин спокойно
> Отводит штык.
> Как пышно и знойно
> Тот остров возник![54]

> Near ancient sites of conflagration / Stands a charred warehouse. / "Here's my pass, comrade, / Let me go back…" / And the soldier calmly / Averts his bayonet. / How splendid and torrid, / That island arose!

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[53] Akhmatova, *Zapisnye knizhki*, 310-11.

[54] Akhmatova, *SS*, 3: 31. A side-by-side comparison of this stanza with Part 7 of Sedakova's poem illustrates the prosodic parallels between the two poems, which include even a morphologically similar rhyme scheme (consisting primarily of alternating feminine and masculine with occasional dactylic exceptions in Sedakova's poem).

Moving back in time, the hero traverses wars and historical events of her lifetime all the way to the mythical city of Kitezh.[55] Via this backwards movement through time and death, the speaker, akin to Fevroniia, the *kitezhanka*, who survived the destruction of the city, enters new life through the divine salvation of the poetic word.[56]

Akhmatova's metempsychic "restructuring of time" certainly befits a tribute to Brodsky. Indeed, Rigsbee observes that the "most significant advance" of the other text which Sedakova takes as a model, Brodsky's elegy to Eliot, lies in "its understanding of temporality":

> With the death of Eliot (to say nothing of that of his mentor, Akhmatova, who died in 1965), Brodsky had come to understand that to think in terms of temporal matters is already to think in terms of elegiac ones. If time is the dimension that definitively separates us from the dead, then the 'restructuring' of time, through poetry, would seem to be a step in the right direction, namely, the direction of literalizing structural tasks for what had before transpired largely under the aegis of metaphor. This restructuring of time is what he discovered in Auden's elegy for Yeats, particularly in the strict prosodic ordering of the famous third part.[57]

Though Sedakova's poem operates generally in a forward motion (in that the soul of the cremated poet travels to his resting place, Lesbos), the nativity imagery threaded throughout the poem also imbues it with a sense of backwards movement, emphasizing birth and renewal, thereby inverting the customary elegiac orientation on loss and retrospection.

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[55] On the theme of Kitezh in Russian literature, see Woodson, "The Legend of Kitezh in Russian Literature," Diss. In contrast to epic and Biblical sunken city legends which allegorize a punishment for moral failure, the mythical city of Kitezh, located at the bottom of Lake Svetloyar, represents a place of divine salvation. See Woodson, 9-16.

[56] Goncharova observes that though the poem's first epigraph is attributed to the old Russian text, *Grand Prince Vladimir Monomakh's Instruction to his Children* (*Pouchenie Vladimira Monomakha detiam*), it is actually a paraphrase of both the *Instruction* and Joshua 23:14 ("And behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth…"). This permutation, she argues, embodies the non-linear temporality of the poem. See Goncharova, "'Putem vseia zemli' kak novaia intonatsiia," 29. For a general discussion of metempsychic temporality in Akhmatova's poetry, see Harrington, 174-178.

[57] Rigsbee, 36**.**

Against this backdrop, the poetic reflection of Brodsky's burial place, the island of San Michele, is refracted in three ways: at the textual level, the Venetian island serves both as Brodsky's biographical endpoint and as Sedakova's beginning point: the bier marks only the beginning of the spirit's journey. At the mythopoetic level, the island transforms into the celestial island of Lesbos, the island of "Sappho's delight"—in other words, the realm of poetic predecessors, which can be reached only by correspondence. At the poem's subtextual foundation, however, it resembles Kitezh, the legendary underwater island—a symbol of "secret freedom" for poets at the beginning of the twentieth century.[58] While the poet-speaker of Akhmatova's poem travels backwards to her "last dwelling" ("poslednee zhilishche)" where she will find peace ("Menia upokoi"), the mourned poet of Sedakova's poem is transported by a "tired hireling" and oxen to the poetic refuge of Lesbos, where he will rest in peace ("Spi, dorogoi!").

In a series of negations commencing with the Akhmatovian "sites of conflagration," Sedakova incorporates the voices of three precursors—Akhmatova, Pushkin, and Tsvetaeva—in order to give proper due to her subject and fashion her own mode of lament against them. While the smoke ("dym") in Akhmatova's poem emanates from historic battles and sites of conflagration ("u davnikh pozharishch"), the smoke in Sedakova's poem is specified as *not* emanating from these sites ("To dym ne pozharishch"). The smoke also does *not* arise from decomposition ("tlen'e") (which is likewise avoided by the poet of Pushkin's "Exegi Monumentum"), nor does the smoke emanate from fiery torments ("ognennye muki"), such as those towards which Tsvetaeva

[58] See Goncharova, "*Putem vseia zemli* kak novaia intonatsiia," 30. See also Chapter Four, "A Lost Home: Kitezh After the Revolution" in Woodson, 153-221.

tumbles in an open embrace of despair.[59] To the contrary, the smoke is the departing spirit of the deceased rising from the evening of prayer ("vecher molen'ia").

This layering of intertextual negations not only exemplifies the way in which the poet threads Akhmatova's model-text throughout her poem, but also serves as a trope by which the speaker articulates her rejection of the traditional Christology imbuing the poetic myths of Pushkin, Blok, or Mandelstam. In Sedakova's elegy, the mourned poet does not suffer for others' sins and perish in a Pushkinian model of kenotic sacrifice. Rather than perishing for the sake of others' redemption, the mourned poet himself is redeemed. The elegist's assertion that the smoke rises from an evening of prayer rather than fiery torments serves as an explicit reminder to the reader of this inversion, which is achieved by the central action of the poem: a funeral—or, more precisely, the cremation of the poet's body in a ritual that mimics a pre-Christian ancient Slavic funeral rite. The elegy indeed completes the steps of an ancient funeral rite, which, as Sedakova illustrates in her monograph on the subject, consist of the dressing or preparation of the body (the conclusion of which we glimpse in Part 1 of the elegy), mourning (Part 1), the procession and transfer of the body (Parts 2 and 3), the burial, submergence into water, or cremation of the body (in this case, the latter: Parts 3-9) and the allowance of play (Part 10).[60]

In addition to employing conventions of the funerary rite, Sedakova's elegy commences with a stylistic impersonation of the mourned subject. The baroque syntax of

[59] See Tsvetaeva's poem, "I hear something, but I don't hear words…" ("Vot: slyshitsia, a slov ne slyshu…"): "I hear something, but I don't hear words, / Here, it's coming – but suddenly, it grows dark / But I know it's from the field – or from on high – / That sound – is it from the heart… // Onward, to the fiery torments! / – In waves of sheep fleece / I raise my arms to the sky / As – before – a girl alone." ("Vot: slyshitsia, a slov ne slyshu, / No znaiu, s polia – ili svyshe -- / Tot zvuk – iz serdtsa li tot zvuk… // – Vpered na ognennye muki! – / V volnakh ovech'ego runa / Ia k nebu vozdevaiu ruki – / Kak – drevle – devushka odna…") Tsvetaeva, *SS*, 1, 449-450. It is also worth recalling that Akhmatova's elegy to Blok depicts the poet as "our sun, extinguished in torment" ("nashe solntse, pogasshee v muke").
[60] Sedakova, *Poetika obriada*, 98.

the opening stanzas, which contain no predicate or full stop until the third stanza, indicates a tribute to Sedakova's subject with an explicit imitation of Brodsky's poetic voice. In accordance with convention, however, the poet's impersonation not only foregrounds her subject while disguising her own voice, but camouflages a critique of her subject as well. Mikhail Perepelkin notes that the poet's first invitation to her subject to engage in a debate in fact begins in the very first line, "Having stared into the sky" ("Ustavivshis' v nebo…").[61] The upward gaze recalls instances at which Brodsky's own lyric persona fixes his gaze upward in moments of spiritual meditation. These upward gazes often conclude with anticlimactic results—

> Бог смотрит вниз. А люди смотрят вверх.
> Однако, интерес у всех различен.
> Бог органичен. Да. А человек?
> А человек, должно быить, ограничен.
>
> («Два часа в резервуаре», 1965)[62]
>
> God looks down. And people look up. / However, they have different interests. / God is organic. Yes. But man? / Man, probably, is limited.
>
> ("Two Hours in a Reservoir," 1965)

—but occasional instances of humanistic affirmation:

> И молча глядя в потолок,
> поскольку явно пуст чулок,
> поймешь, что скупость — лишь залог
> того, что слишком стар.
> Что поздно верить чудесам.
> И, взгляд подняв к небесам,
> ты вдруг почувствуешь, что сам
> — чистосердечный дар.
>
> («1 января 1965 года», 1965)[63]

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[61] Perepelkin, "Tvorchestvo Ol'gi Sedakovoi v kontekste russkoi poeticheskoi kul'tury (smert' i bessmertie v paradigme traditsii)," 95-96.
[62] Brodskii, *SiP*, 1: 209.
[63] Brodskii, *SiP*, 1: 174.

> And silently looking at the ceiling / insofar as your stocking's clearly empty, / you'll realize that miserliness is but a security deposit / for that which is too old. / That it's too late to believe in miracles. / And, raising your gaze towards the heavens, / you'll suddenly feel how you yourself / are the sincere gift.
>
> ("1 January 1965," 1965)

Beginning the elegy with the deceased having just looked upward immediately opens up the topic of religion, a point of contrast between the two poets. While the sky's lack of features seems to corroborate the poet's own assertion that "Probably, after death is emptiness" ("Naverno, posle smerti – pustota"),[64] the physical movement of the deceased subject (which is anticipated grammatically by the past participial form of "ustavit'") immediately belies such a notion. The beginning of Part 2 of the poem finally reveals this anticipated action: the poet slams shut his book and carries it away. This action performed by the poet, as Perepelkin observes, calls the extent to which he is actually dead into question.[65]

Though the upward direction of the poet's gaze certainly accords with that of Brodsky's metaphysical poetic considerations, it does not necessarily accord with the perceptual orientation of his elegies, which are often characterized by a downward gaze. John Donne's soul, for example, looks downward from the upper rungs of the atmosphere, whence the world resembles a miniature scene:

> …откуда этот мир – лишь сотня башен
> да ленты рек, и где, при взгляде вниз,
> сей страшный суд совсем не страшен.
>
> …from where this world is but a hundred towers / and river ribbons, and where, looking down, / the Last Judgment is not at all frightening.

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[64] Brodskii, *SiP*, 1: 324.
[65] Perepelkin, "Tvorchestvo Ol'gi Sedakovoi…," 98.

In Brodsky's elegy to Auden, the figure of the hawk-poet, too, views the earth from above. As the bird soars higher into the air, "unfurled" and "alone" ("rasplastannyi, odinok"), he no longer sees the "chicken's tasty promenade along the dilapidated farmyard." Rather, he only makes out a darkened horizon and "smoke rising from chimneys." If in Hardy's elegy on the sinking of the Titanic a "dispassionate stare" would seem "anathema to elegy," and "to look on loss from a great height and see it as part of a fated pattern is to reduce mournful feelings to ironic twinges," as Ramazani argues,[66] Brodsky lessens these twinges by bringing his mourned subjects up to his vantage point—or rather, by transgressing the distance that death has placed between him and his subjects and joining them at their vantage point. After all, it was Hardy's "hawk's vision, his way of looking at life from a very great height" that Auden most admired in him.[67]

In Brodsky's elegiac poems such adjustments or realignments in perspective occur on ethical and spiritual planes as well. Though the speaker of "Verses on the Death of T. S. Eliot" wryly acknowledges Eliot's Catholicism ("A Catholic, he lived until Christmas" ["Katolik, on dozhil do rozhdestva"]), the poet asserts that "it is no longer God, but only Time" that calls him ("Uzhe ne Bog, a tol'ko Vremia, Vremia / zovet ego").[68] David Rigsbee observes a similar minimization of the spiritual dimension in Brodsky's elegy to Donne, which depicts the mourned subject's Christianity as "a mythological expression for language, specifically poetic language, and so, in a way

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[66] Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, 33.
[67] Quoted in Ramazani, 33. See also Reynolds, "Feathers and Sons," 560-565. In Reynolds's reading of the elegy, Brodsky places the link between the hawk and Auden at the heart of "The Hawk's Cry in Autumn."
[68] Brodskii, *SiP*, 1: 191.

unanticipated by Eliot, Donne appears as a modern (or indeed postmodern) language-worshipper *avant le lettre*."[69]

Thus, it is both in spite of and in accordance with Brodsky's own elegiac poetics that Sedakova, too, embarks upon a realignment of Brodsky's perspective within the metaphysical space of her own poetic world, which he now inhabits. At the end of the first stanza the deceased poet's characteristic upward gaze shifts inward; rather than staring into nothingness, the poet "takes in" ("beret vnutr'") all that is before him:

> как взгляд берет внутрь,
> в свой взвившийся дым
> скарб, выморок, утварь,
> все, что перед ним, –
>
> the way his gaze takes in, / into its rising smoke, / belongings, things escheated, utensils, / all that is before it.

This new orientation in perspective is more characteristic of Sedakova's own poetics and the role vision plays in it: like the poetic word (often depicted as a vessel or container: "sosud," "lar'," "larchik"), vision, too, contains unseen depths, which the poet unlocks, such as in the "Second Prelude" ("Vstuplenie vtoroe") of *Tristan and Isolde*:

> Где кто-то идет – там кто-то глядит
> и думает о нем.
> И этот взгляд, как дупло, открыт,
> и в том дупле свеча горит
> и стоит подводный дом.[70]
>
> Where someone walks – that someone looks / and thinks about him. / And that gaze, like a hollow in a tree, is open, / and in that hollow burns a candle / and there is an underwater house.

In a poetics centered upon depth and containment, where blindness constitutes "inner vision" ("vnutrennee zren'e") and can, like Pushkin's oak trees, "widely resound"

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[69] Rigsbee, *Styles of Ruin: Joseph Brodsky and the Postmodernist Elegy,* 21; 23.
[70] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 148.

("shiroko shumit"),[71] inward, abstract properties (such as the "inside of vision") act as outward, concrete properties—

> И все пройдет, и все летит, как снег:
> изнанка зренья, оболочка век...[72]

> And all will pass, all flies, like snow: / the inside of vision, the membrane of eyelids […]

—and the boundaries between sensory modes become diminished, as illustrated in the elegy's first stanza when the sepulchral strings of the Pierides absorb sound, smell, and sight.

In addition to folding the subject's field of vision inward, Sedakova eliminates the customary boundary that the elegy on the death of a poet maintains between the deceased poet and the living, as well as his own verses, which he leaves behind. In Brodsky's elegy to Eliot, for example, the poet asserts,

> смерть выбирает не красоты слога,
> а неизменно самого певца.[73]

> death chooses not the beauty of his words, / but invariably the poet himself.

In Sedakova's elegy, however, the deceased poet's verses are not to be "modified in the guts of the living," as in Auden, or to be disseminated into and remembered by nature as in Brodsky ("budet pomnit' les i dol"). Rather, the poet's verses fulfill the dual role of both accompanying and absorbing the deceased poet. In contrast to the deceased Donne of Brodsky's elegy who leaves all of his belongings (both the pedestrian and poetic) behind, the deceased poet in Sedakova's elegy takes his all of his belongings ("skarb")

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[71] See Sedakova's "Prefatory Song" ("Predpesnia") to *The Wild Rose* (*Dikii shipovnik*): "But like the two-note pipe to the serpent, / whistling an inner vision, / forces a repetition of it, / when the blind man places in his lap / his entire light lyre […]" ("No kak zmeiu dvuzvuchnaia duda, / vysvistyvaia vnutrennee zren'e, / zastavit povtorit' ego – togda, / kogda slepets polozhit na koleni / vsiu liru legkuiu <…>") Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 75.

[72] Sedakova, *ChT*, 1: 282.

[73] Brodskii, *SIP*, I, 191.

with him. He takes objects that are both literal and figurative: the belongings are, in Brodskian fashion, of contrasting linguistic registers: the everyday "belongings" ("skarb"), the more arcane "vymorok," or "escheated property," (i.e. property or goods that are left behind after one's death without an heir), and his "utensils"—the "inner Hellenism" of the Russian language celebrated by Mandelstam.[74]

That the deceased poet takes these items along with the Pushkinian "late autumn" (which people criticize as a rule ["Dni pozdnei oseni braniat obyknovenno…"]), and Piazza San Marco in Venice, the meeting place of the two poets, sparks the first inkling that, in addition to polemicizing certain tenets of her subject's poetics, the elegist also seeks to assimilate his poetic world into her own and illuminate the connective tissue that connects them. Such binding ties both open up points of contention while also hinting that perhaps the poet's belongings and property—in short, his poetic legacy—is not without an heir(ess) after all.

Though the deceased's belongings indicate the two poets' shared faith in the poetic word, the subject's physical action of taking these items with him certainly undermines the supposed "emptiness" that awaits one after death. Further undermining (or perhaps highlighting) Brodsky's skepticism regarding the afterlife is the dual nature of the opening scene of the poem. On the one hand, the poet's body, supine on a bier, constitutes a standard funeral scene to the reader. On the other hand, it also resembles an inverted nativity scene: the surrounding space consists of the "bosom" of the Venetian lagoon (evoking the bosom of the Mother of God), the attendant Pierides who, akin to angels, pluck their strings. The Venetian setting, beloved by both poets, also contributes to the yuletide atmosphere, as many of Brodsky's Christmas poems were written there.

[74] Mandel'shtam, *SS* 1: 226.

Hints of the Nativity grow still stronger with the appearance of the Magi in Part 3. Though they appear as growing smaller in the distance as the spirit of the poet moves forward—

> все мимо, все меньше:
> молельня, базар...
> Звук – странная вешь: Мель-
> хиор. Балтазар.

ever past, ever smaller: / a chapel, a bazaar… / Sound is a strange thing: Mel- / chior. Balthazar.

—these "strange sounds" of the magi participate in the transfer of the poet to the afterlife, similar to how they participated in the welcoming of Christ into life. The splitting of Melchior's name between lines allows the speaker to visually foreshadow the spirit's ultimate destination; "Melchior" becomes "mel'," or the shallow sandbank of a shoreline.

Having "slammed shut his tome" ("zakhlopnuv svoi tom"), the deceased poet resembles Brodsky's portrayal of the symbol of Venice, the Lion of Saint Mark, who has also "slammed shut his book" and "will not shout 'Fight!'" ("knigu zakhlopnuv, ne kriknet 'ratyi!'") in his first Italian poem, "Laguna," which he wrote in 1973 on his first trip to Venice from Michigan.[75] "I really like that beast," Brodsky once told Volkov, "Firstly, it is from the Gospel of Mark, which interests me more than the other Gospels. Secondly, it is nice: a cunning beast with little wings. It's not that I identify with it myself, but nonetheless […]."[76] A conflation of the elegized subject and the Lion of St. Mark would not be too far off the mark, however, since, as the legend goes, when St. Mark reached Venice, an angel appeared to him and said, "May Peace be with you, Mark, my Evangelist. Here your body will rest" ("Pax tibi Marce, evangelista meus. Hic

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[75] Brodskii, Iosif. *SiP*, 1: 344. The poem was originally entitled "Venice" ("Venetsiia") when it was published in *Vestnik russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniia* 112/113 (1974): 174-176.
[76] Volkov, *Dialogi*, 203.

requiescet corpus tuum”). St. Mark’s remains were later stolen from his tomb in Alexandria and brought to Venice, where the saint rests to this day and serves as the city’s patron saint.

By framing her subject’s departure in a scene that is part nativity, part funeral, Sedakova’s elegy evinces Brodsky’s own inversion of a departure into an entrance in his “Nunc Dimittis” (“Sreten'e”),[77] while turning a central pillar of the Russian Death of the Poet tradition—the poet as sacrificial martyr—on its head. Rather than a sacrificial death, the poet’s death represents a new entrance or phase of existence, akin to the poet’s exile to the West. The poet’s initial departure, as David M. Bethea carefully demonstrates, is foreshadowed in Brodsky’s “Nunc Dimittis,” wherein the poet employs the nativity theme to write himself into the poetic parentage of Akhmatova, his patron and poetic mother, as well as his poetic father—the elder Iosif or Osip, who, though is noticeably absent (and rightly so, since Mandelstam died before Brodsky was born) is nonetheless present in the very texture of the poem.[78] Written months before his exile to the West, the poem now reads as a prescient depiction of Brodsky’s impending departure and “birth” into the Western Judeo-Christian world. And yet, now, recast after his death, a nativity paradigm realizes his “birth” into immortality.

The Magi also serve as a response to the question the poet poses in Brodsky’s elegy to Eliot. “Where are you, Magi, readers of men’s souls? Come here! And hold the halo.” (“Chitaiushchie v litsakh, magi, gde vy? Siuda! I podderzhite oreol”). Rather than polemicizing or reformulating the question, Sedakova takes it as serious and implicitly

[77] For an analysis of the poem as Brodsky’s “birth” into the Judeo-Christian world at the threshold of his exile to the West, see Bethea, *Creation of Exile*, 166-73.
[78] Such textual cues include the cavernous womb, forest-like (cf. “zamershii les” and “nepostizhimyi les”) and architectural traits (cf. “rasplast'sia” and “rasplatyvaia nervy”), of “Notre Dame” (*Our Mother*!), where the Acmeist first and second Adam was born. See Bethea, *Joseph Brodsky and the Creation of Exile*, 172.

answers it with the appearance of the magi, thereby providing consolation. As Sacks argues, the elegiac query (such as Milton's "Where were ye Nymphs . . . ?"), as a convention, masks a fundamental elegiac question: Where were you (the supposed guardians, nymphs, gods, parent deities, or as in "Lycidas," the "Muse herself")? Or, in other words, "Why do you (the supposed guardians) not exist?"[79] While Brodsky employs this elegiac trope in a more conventional manner—i.e. in order to intimate that nothing or no one can save us from death—Sedakova's version of elegiac questioning takes on a different tone, to different ends.[80] The questions she poses later ("What is purer than what has burnt to the ground?") as well as her implicit answering of Brodsky's question provide both a sense of consolation and a challenge to her subject: while Brodsky's "1 January 1965" depicts a night emptied of any potential holiness, as each familiar element of the nativity is negated—the wise men will not visit; there will be no guiding star over your head; no singing of any angels will be heard, only the howling wind—Sedakova takes great care to incorporate these negated fixtures into her elegy.[81] Following the implicit comparison between the mourned subject and a Christ-like figure whom "death will not deter" in Part 3, stars appear in a comparison of the subject to a wanderer along with the appearance of two of the three magi.

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[79] Sacks, *English Elegy*, 22.

[80] Sacks also argues that when the elegiac question is addressed to someone else, the mourner succeeds in shifting her focus to the outside world and away from herself. If tinged with anger, the questioning carries the anger away from the subject and the mourner "may stave off that self-directed anger" (i.e. melancholia) (Sacks, 22). While Kennedy points out that such an elision of elegiac questioning and healthy mourning (in the Freudian sense) is problematic (Kennedy, *Elegy*, 22), one could argue that the idea holds in both Brodsky's model poem and Sedakova's elegy on Brodsky.

[81] Though the coming of the magi is negated in his Christmas poem, "1 January 1965," the men do appear in his other Christmas poems. See, for example, "Christmas" ("Rozhdestvo," 1963): "Volkhvy prishli. Mladenets krepko spal. / Zvezda svetila iarko s nebosvoda" and "Christmas Star" ("Rozhdestvenskaia zvezda," 1987): "Emu vse kazalos' ogromnym; grud' materi, zheltyi par / Iz volov'ikh nozdrei, volkhvy -- Bal'tazar, Kaspar, / Mel'khior; ikh podarki, vtashchennye siuda."

The interweaving of the Nativity elements invites the participation of yet another poetic voice—that of Pasternak, whose poetic world Sedakova characterizes as "the world of victorious resurrection."[82] Oxen, whose breath warm the newborn savior in Pasternak's "Christmas Star," but are negated in Brodsky's "Laguna," appear in Sedakova's poem, and, as Perepelkin observes, the poet interlaces the two poets in her portrayal of the deceased poet's postmortem journey. As the mourners' prayers, the city bazaar, the outposts, and the plateaus grow more and more distant ("vse mimo, vse men'she…"), the poet implicitly likens the deceased's journey to that which Brodsky depicts in his early poem, "Pilgrims" ("Piligrimy"):

> Мимо ристалищ, капищ,
> мимо храмов и баров,
> мимо шикарных кладбищ,
> мимо больших базаров,
> мира и горя мимо,
> мимо Мекки и Рима.[83]

> Past the tiltyards, the pagan shrines, / past the temples and bars, / past the grand cemeteries, / past the big bazaars, / past peace and grief, / past Mecca and Rome.

As Perepelkin observes, the "border outposts" (zastavy) and "plateaus" ("nagor'ia") echo the "fences" and "gravestones" ("ogrady, nadgrob'ia") of Pasternak's "Christmas Star" ("Rozhdestvenskaia zvezda"). In these acoustic correlations, Perepelkin discerns an implicit assimilation of the poet's departure to Christ's departure to Golgotha. In light of the lines, "Sound is a strange thing… Sound is a strange sorrow," he notes that sorrow "accompanied Christ as he made his way to Golgotha. The objects [i.e. the chapel, bazaar, border outposts, and plateaus] past which the gaze of the bearer of lyric consciousness moves, are very simple and plain; they are objects which could have been

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[82] Sedakova, "The Vacancy of a Poet," 309.
[83] Brodskii, *SiP*, 2: 231.

part of the urban landscape in Jerusalem."[84] On the other hand, there is ample evidence to support a contrary view—that Sedakova is at pains to undercut this traditional narrative. The reference to her addressee as a fellow traveler (or wanderer), the stars, and the appearance of the magi surely evoke the scene of Christ's birth, and the embedded allusions to Pasternak's "Christmas Star" only bring this theme into higher relief, thereby reviving the "fairy-tale festiveness" of Pasternak's portrayal of Christmas Eve.[85]

Furthermore, these echoes more directly align with Sedakova's characterizations of Brodsky's poetics, and, in particular, the "things which Brodsky's skepticism did not touch":

> It's easy to name things, upon which Brodsky's skepticism did not touch. These are, firstly, the "service of the Muses" itself ("and the proximity of the Divine is unquestionable," [as he writes in "To One Poetess"]) and poets, the wardens of language, whom he speaks about with deepest respect; it is language, toward which he felt some kind of religious feeling; it is grief ("Only with grief do I feel solidarity," [as he writes in "I entered instead of a wild beast into a cage…"]) and human weakness in general; it is freedom which is "all the sweeter than the end, the beginning" […]. Behind his estranged tone and unconquered and insurmountable grief is audible, that very "howl" ("voi"), which he "did not afford" ["ne pozvolial"] himself.[86]

Though the border outposts and plateaus provide morphological links to Pasternak, the "strange grief" and the "service of the Muses" more likely comprise a continuation of the belongings listed in the in Parts 1 and 2 (the utensils, the tower, arch, etc.), except on a higher, poetic plane (as the poet's spirit ascends higher and higher).

The "secret union" ("sekretnyi soiuz"), too, represents a hallmark of Brodsky's poetics in Sedakova's view. It not only refers to the disparate traditions (Polish, English, Russian) and varying models (pre-Pushkinian and early modernist) which Brodsky unites

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[84] Perepelkin, "Tvorchestvo Ol'gi Sedakovoi…," 115.
[85] Gasparov discusses this quality of Pasternak's poem in *Boris Pasternak: Po tu storonu poetiki*, 40.
[86] Sedakova, *ChT*, 3: 499.

in his verse, but the union, which in Sedakova's view "reigns supreme in Russian verse"—the poetic "combination of words,"[87] or, in Mandelstam's words, the "mystery of the marriage / in the simply combination of words."[88] In her essay, "Joseph Brodsky: Will to Form" ("Iosif Brodskii: volia k forme") Sedakova identifies a progression throughout Brodsky's work from a "combination of words" to a "combination of the word and mind" ("sochetanie 'uma' so 'slovom'"). Perceiving the tradition of the Russian word as primarily evocative ("vnushaiushchee") and suggestive ("suggestivnoe") as a result of its roots in Old Church Slavonic—wherein "liturgical and prayer texts often remain incomprehensible to even those who know them by heart," thus requiring one to develop the skill of accepting the "word combinations" without attempting to "translate" them into everyday Russian—Sedakova observes that Brodsky moves away from such "divine gibberish" ("sviashchennaia nevniatitsa") of poetic speech in his later work. The change in his poetic speech from his early verse to his later verse "can be described as a consistent movement from phrases that carry a musical impulse to a union of the mind and word, to a joining of aphorisms and definitions."[89]

In light of the Nativity motifs, the elegy's Christological paradigm takes on a metapoetic significance rather than a mythopoetic significance. When the poet compares the deceased poet to him "who decided in advance that life will not tempt him, and death will not lead him astray," she appears to be comparing her subject to Christ. As Mikhail

[87] Sedakova, *ChT*, 3: 495. "V russkom stikhe gospodstvuet slovosochetanie."
[88] "I dyshit tainstvennost' braka / V prostom sochetanii slov." Mandel'shtam, *SS*, 1: 56. Compare also Pushkin's "To N. Ia. Pliuskova" ("K N. Ia. Pliuskovoi") wherein love and a "secret Freedom," inspire a "simple hymn": "Liubov' i tainaia Svoboda / Vnushali serdtsu gimn prostoi…"
[89] Sedakova, *ChT*, 3: 497.

Perepelkin notes, "he who decided in advance" is surely Christ, for only *He* knew his own end in advance:[90]

> Не друг, не попутчик
> (не брат? не собрат?),
> в бряцанье созвучий
> родной звукоряд
> державший,
> как тот,
> кто решил наперед,
> что жизнь
> не заманит
> и смерть
> не собьет, –
>
> Not a friend, nor a fellow traveler / (Not a brother? Not a brother-in-arms?) / in the clanging of consonances / of his own musical scale / holding, / like he / who decided in advance, / that life will not tempt him, / and death / will not lead him astray, —

However, in light of the "clanging consonances" and the "native scale" which the deceased poet holds, the subject resembles not the *Biblical* Christ but rather the composite *mytho-poetic* figure of the *poet-as-Christ*, embodied most explicitly at this particular juncture by Mandelstam. The poet's journey certainly parallels that depicted in "I climbed the ladder leaning against the hay…" ("Ia po lesenke pristavnoi…," 1922), wherein the poet breaths "the dust of milky stars" as he ascends though the "swarm of extended sounds" ("udlennykh zvuchanii roi") into the "wondrous Aeolian stratum" ("Eoliiskii chudesnyi stroi") before returning to his native scale ("rodnoi zvukoriad").[91] The subsequent stanzas in Part 3, which assimilate the mourned subject into a dense compression of Tsvetaevian stylistic markers ("kak rul' — korabel'shik, / kak konnyi — brazdy") and acoustic and imagistic fragments of their shared precursors ranging from Pushkin to Akhmatova, Mandelstam, and Pasternak both convey both a "homecoming" to

[90] Perepelkin, 109.
[91] Mandel'shtam, *SS*, 2: 40.

his forebears, but an explicit initiation of the poet into the "Death of the Poet" monument. As Levinton suggests, the proximity of quotations from certain poets, such as Akhmatova or Mayakovsky, comprise a key marker of the tradition in that they "may act as a metonymy for the cycle (*pars pro toto*)." Such intertextual overlapping also signifies what is perhaps the central task of the metapoetic funeral rite: the transformation of the poet into *poetic quotation*.[92]

Other moments of the elegy also implicitly acknowledge the Russian Death of the Poet tradition. In Part 3 the singer's silence ("molchanie pevtsa") coupled with the rhyme of "singer" ("pevtsa") and "end" ("kontsa"), for example, immediately recall Lermontov's elegy on Pushkin, in which "the sounds of wondrous songs have fallen silent" ("Zamolkli zvuki chudnykh pesen") and "the young singer has found an untimely end" ("mladoi pevets / nashel bezvremennyi konets!") as well as subsequent elegies, such as Akhmatova's elegy on Pasternak. The speaker follows this potent imagery with a reminder of the poet's banishment and foreign location at the time of his death ("at the edge / of exile, / beyond the edge of the end"), thereby inviting the reader to expect other topoi that characterize the "Death of the Poet"; however, these familiar topoi only bring the poet's subsequent breaks with the tradition into higher relief: there is no "crown of thorns" ("venets ternovyi") or "solemn wreath" ("torzhestvennyi venok") as in Lermontov, nor an Apollonian wreath ("venok") to be laid at the deceased's feet as in Brodsky's elegy to Eliot. Though Sedakova initiates Brodsky into the ranks of his highest precursors, it seems she does not wish to coronate him in the familiar elegiac paradigm of wreathed martyrdom, and subsequent omissions and inversions of familiar topoi attest to this exception.

[92] Levinton, "Smert' poeta," 191.

As the poet transforms him from a corporeal being into a mass of billowing smoke in Part 5 of the elegy, the cloud of smoke ambles amongst the bushes in a manner reminiscent of Brodsky's own depiction of the spirit of his mourned friend Shmakov, who wanders the grounds of Peterhof like a slanted rain (cf. Mayakovsky's "po rodnoi strane proidu storonoi, / kak prokhodit kosoi dozhd'") and a rising trail of steam from a cup of coffee (cf. Akhmatova's "Nad chernym kofeem pakhuchii tonkii par"):[93]

> ты бредешь, как тот дождь, стороной,
> вьешься вверх струйкой пара над кофе,
> треплешь парк, набегаешь волной
> на песок где-нибудь в Петергофе.[94]
>
> you plod on, like that rain, in a roundabout way, / you twist upward like a little trail of stream above some coffee, / you blow about the park, surge like a wave / on the sands somewhere in Peterhof.

Sedakova's depiction, however, includes neither steam nor rain—nor a sandy Pushkinian landscape. Rather, the smoke of the departing spirit billows on "cotton legs" over ravaged crops:

> Вначале шатаясь
> на ватных ногах,
> клубясь, утыкаясь,
> петляя в кустах –
> над всею потравой,
> над долинами слез
> – О Господи, слава
> Тебе – занялось! –
>
> Swaying at first / on cotton legs, / curling, billowing, / ambling in bushes – / over all the ravaged crops, / over the valleys of tears / – Oh, Lord, thanks be / to You – the fire has started at last! –

The damaged crops ("potrava") offer a Soviet version of the pastoral ears of grain or grassy pastures which typically dot the landscape of the funeral elegy. If Pasternak's

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[93] Levinton discusses these subtexts in Brodsky's elegy to Shmakov in "Smert' poeta," 190-1.
[94] Brodsky, "Pamiati Gennadiia Shmakova," *SiP*, 2: 137.

spirit becomes a life-giving ear of grain ("On prevratilsia v zhizn' daiushchii kolos") before dispersing into a floral landscape in Akhmatova's elegy, or Eliot is remembered by "every grass" ("Budet pomnit' kazhdyi zlak") in Brodsky's elegy, Brodsky's spirit has no verdant landscape in which to disperse, but only ineffectual crops.[95] His only choice is to ascend upward: "Upward! It is impossible here without it: upward!"

The released spirit at first hesitates before his ascent: as the poet likens her subject to a raft, unfettered from all gravitations, she wonders, "How will he sail off" ("kak on poplyvet")? The smoke at first meanders in bushes ("v kustakh"), but ultimately the poet is swept up by a divine power. "Oh, Lord, thanks be to You – the fire has started at last!" the poet exclaims. The spirit—the "blessed smoke of earthly alters"—kneels "like the heart of kings," before dissipating into a celestial evening sea. Thus, in a breach of her subject's pendulum swing, the poet successfully escorts her subject beyond his usual endpoint and initiates him into a realm where sky and water merge, where death merges into birth. However, unlike the hero of Tsvetaeva's *Poem of the Air*, who dies in order to merge with her subject and gives thanks—

> Слава тебе, допустившему бреши:
> Больше не вешу.
> Слава тебе, обвалившему крышу:
> Больше не слышу.
> Солнцепричастная, больше не щурюсь
> Дух: не дышу уж![96]

> Glory to you, who allowed a breach: / I weigh no longer. / Glory to you, who wrecked the roof: / I hear no longer. / Part of the sun now, I squint no longer. / A spirit: I no longer breathe![97]

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[95] The landscape in fact evokes an episode in Nadezhda Mandelstam's *Vtoraia kniga*, wherein she compares her pre-revolutionary childhood years to a bountiful field, which is then overrun by an enormous damaging herd. "U menia oshushchenia, budto po kolosiashchemusia poliu bezhit ogromnoe stado—proiskhodit gigantskaia potrava." Mandel'shtam, Nadezhda. *Vtoraia kniga*, 18.
[96] Tsvetaeva, *SS*, 3:140.
[97] Translated by Alyssa Dinega in *A Russian Psyche*, 173.

—the speaker of Sedakova's elegy maintains her distance from her subject. If earlier on the elegist cautiously aligns herself with her subject (albeit in hindsight) when she remarks, "Oh yes, we were born on other plains" ("O da, my rozhdalis' na ravninakh drugikh"), in the end she gives thanks for her subject's successful departure from afar. As the departed poet dissolves into an oceanic constellation, the speaker gives no indication of her current coordinates: the deceased is "there" ("tam bol'she ne vpomnit…"), yet there is no mention of "here."

"What is purer than / that which has burnt to the ground?" Though only ashes may know "what it means to burn to the ground,"[98] an allusion to Lomonosov's meditation on the greatness of God and nature illustrates that, to the contrary, a "loftier conception" awaits the deceased, when, in the next lines she paraphrases the opening stanza of Lomonosov's "Evening Meditation on the Northern Lights," wherein the day "hides its face" and the night's black shadows cover the mountains to reveal "stars beyond number, an abyss without end" ("zvezdam chisla net, bezdne dna"):

> Что чище того,
> Что сгорело дотла?
> что бездне нет дна и
> звездам нет числа...
>
> What is purer than that / which has burnt to the ground? / An abyss without end and / stars without number…

Thus the poet's postmortem journey ultimately leads to "an evening sea" and "Sappho's delight," followed by the atmospheric strata of stars ("zvezda za zvezdoiu") and verses ("strofa za strofoi"). The stars (which, unlike the following verses, are in the old-style instrumental declension) echo the conversing stars of Lermontov's "Alone I set out on the road…" ("zvezda s zvezdoiu govorit") and thereby remind the reader of the rich

[98] Cf. Brodsky's poem, "Tol'ko pepel znaet, chto znachit sgoret' dotla." Brodskii, *SiP*, 2: 122.

tradition surrounding poetic exits, while affirming the poet's place amongst his predecessors. The speaker therefore affirms that her subject will not become merely a guiding light signaling future generations forward as Brodsky's last poem predicts ("Having made a career out of a crossroads, the knight / himself is now a traffic light").[99] Rather, the speaker the poet is more apt to become a guiding light akin to that in Pasternak's "Christmas Star."

By the time the reader reaches these final stanzas of the poem, the religious polemic with which the elegy commences has long faded into reconciliation, and the opening stanzas present a different reading: though the azure's "blindness" in the fourth line could be ascribed to a religious polemic as it could refer to the "blindness" attributed to nonbelievers in the Bible, which Brodsky himself references in "Two Hours in a Reservoir" ("Disbelief is blindness, but more often – swinishness." ["Never'e – slepota, a chashche – svinstsvo"]), it could also be taken, in light of pre-Christian funerary motifs, to indicate the opposition between the visible world ("vidimyi mir," i.e. life), the invisible world ("nevidimyi mir," i.e. death). As Sedakova describes in her study on ancient Slavic burial rites, this opposition was emphasized in certain burial rituals and physically enacted in games that involved blindfolding and were played near the deceased. As a line from the burial rites in the Vladimir region goes: "Until Judgment there are not torments, but all the dead are blind" ("Do Suda net muki, no vse [umershie] slepy").[100] The dead are blind; instead, it is the devils who see the living ("devils who see the living (Vii) are like shamans among them").[101] Indeed, in the lexicon connected with the burial ritual this conception of "blindness" is preserved: blind poppy (сліпий мак, Ukrainian)—poppy

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[99] "Sdelav sebe kar'eru iz pereput'ia, vitiaz' / sam teper' svetofor…" Brodskii, *SiP*, 2: 226.
[100] From a rite of the Vladimirskii region. Quoted by Sedakova in *Poetika obriada*, 66.
[101] Quoted in Sedakova, *Poetika obriada*, 60.

which is sprinkled on the grave of the босуркуна."[102] Thus, the imagery of child's play and the blind poppy—or the "poppy of forgetting" ("zabveniia mak"), as the speaker says—in the concluding section of the poem bring the funerary sequence to its final phase.

Another subtext present in the opening stanzas further belies the polemical stance that previous scholars have discerned. The azure, blindness, and empty features depicted in the opening stanza provide many imagistic links to the opening poem of Tsvetaeva's cycle, *The Youth* (*Otrok*, 1921):

> Пустоты отроческих глаз! Провалы
> В лазурь! Как ни черны – лазурь!
> Игралища для битвы небывалой,
> Дарохранительницы бурь.
>
> Зеркальные! Ни зыби в них, ни лона,
> Вселенная в них правит ход.
> Лазурь! Лазурь! Пустынная до звону!
> Книгохранилища пустот![103]
>
> The voids of youthful eyes! Swoons / Into the azure! No matter how black – azure! / Playthings for a made up battle, / Tabernacles of storms. // Smooth! No ripples in them, no bosom, / The universe steers its course in them. / Azure! Azure! So empty it echoes! / A library of voids!

While one could interpret these lexical allusions as a subtle advancement of a religious polemic in light of the Biblical subtext of the cycle's opening poem (the last two lines of which allude to the parable of Saul and David),[104] the key to these allusions may in fact lie in the individual who inspired Tsvetaeva's *Youth* cycle: Emilii Mindlin, the young poet who took refuge in Tsvetaeva's home in August 1921 (the fateful month which

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[102] Sedakova, *Poetika obriada*, 66.
[103] Tsvetaeva, *SS*, 2, 50-51.
[104] "Thus at night, disturbing David's sleep, / King Saul choked." ("Tak po nocham, trevozha son Davidov, / Zakhlebyvalsia Tsar' Saul.") For such an interpretation see Perepelkin, 96.

brought the deaths of Blok and Gumilev).[105] In light of the mentorship Brodsky enjoyed under Akhmatova, it is possible that, by a proxy (i.e. Mindlin), Sedakova conveys a parallel kinship between her subject and her other muse, Tsvetaeva, who, like Akhmatova, was a poetic role model for Brodsky. However, the genealogical line must be drawn by proxy, since Brodsky and Tsvetaeva never met (as she died roughly a year after he was born). The young Mindlin inspired another poem by Tsvetaeva, "Straight into the Ether…" ("Priamo v efir…," 1921), which contains the same imagery of blindness and blue sky, but no biblical allusions, and also features an upward movement such as Brodsky's in Sedakova's elegy:

> Прямо в эфир
> Рвется тропа.
> – Остановись! –
> Юность слепа.
> Ввысь им и ввысь!
> В синюю рожь!
> – Остановись! –
> В небо ступнешь.[106]

> Straight into the ether / Bursts a trail. / – Stop! – / Youth is blind. / They want to go upward and upward! / Into blue rye! / – Stop! – / You'll go right into the sky.

Thus, like the entire elegy, the polemic of the opening stanzas is wrought with conflicting narrative impulses. Though the poet spars with her subject on the subject of religious faith, struggles to define their poetic relationship, and may (wittingly or unwittingly) wish to show that she bears a poetic connection to their shared poetic mothers that is just as strong (if not stronger) than his, she also reaffirms his position as their poetic son and rightful heir.

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[105] In addition to Mindlin, other "orphans" whom Tsvetaeva took under her wing and addressed in her poetry over the years include Nikolai Gronskii and Anatolii Shteiger. See Chapter Four, "Ruing Young Orphans: The End of the Line" in Dinega's *Russian Psyche*, 177-225.

[106] Tsvetaeva, *SS*, 2, 50.

In this vein, one cannot overlook the very title of Tsvetaeva's cycle, *The Youth*. Though the word is not mentioned in Sedakova's text, the allusions to the poems of the cycle bring the word into the elegy's orbit, and we are reminded of Akhmatova's use of the term to describe Pushkin in her poem, "In Tsarkoe Selo" ("V Tsarskom Sele"), wherein she calls the great poet a "swarthy adolescent" ("smuglyi otrok"). Brodsky then embeds this phrase, in a subtle reformulation, in his last poem, "August" ("Avgust," 1996):

> Загорелый подросток, выбежавший в переднюю,
> у вас отбирает будущее, стоя в одних трусах.[107]
>
> A tanned youth, running out to the entryway, / takes the future from you, standing in just his underwear.

Though these lines could betray the ailing Brodsky's potential anxiety before younger, "adolescent" generations of poets, Reynolds argues that the "swarthy youth" may also imply Pushkin, who "emasculated all past and future Russian writers [via his] reading of 'Vospominaniia v Tsarskom Sele' before Gavriil Derzhavin."[108] Whether a source of anxiety or not, the image of Pushkin in Brodsky's poem serves as an affirmation of the forebear's exalted place both in the Russian tradition and from Brodsky's own perspective. In light of this reading, Sedakova not only implicitly reunites Brodsky with his poetic maternal figures, but also elevates him into the ranks of Pushkin, the father of Russian poetry. This elevation is further buttressed by the Pushkinian phrases the poet embeds in her text, such as "the service of the Muses" or the "late autumn," as discussed above.

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[107] Brodskii, *SiP*, 2: 226.
[108] Reynolds, "Returning the Ticket: Joseph Brodsky's 'August' and the End of the Petersburg Text?", 329.

As in Brodsky's "Hawk's Cry," Sedakova's elegy concludes with a scene of children playing:

> Как дети играют:
> «Чур, первую мне!» –
> у края
> созданья, в заочном стране –
>
> As children playing – / 'Mine! Me first!' – / at the edge / of creation, in a land reached only by correspondence –

As the American children at the conclusion of Brodsky's poem scream "Winter, winter!" and they run about in their "motley jackets" to catch the snow—the icy dispersal of the hawk whose fragments now fall to the earth and "melt in the palm of your hand" ("taiut v ladoni")—the children at the close of Sedakova's poem also play in an inaccessible land, "reached only by correspondence" ("zaochnaia"). Unlike Brodsky's poem, however, Sedakova neither commits her subject to an upward "devolution"[109] or a Christological sacrifice; instead her subject is reborn as an Orphic figure, thereby achieving a metaphysical transgression in order to reach his resting place amongst his forebears.

As the death of a poet is "kept from his poems" by "mourning tongues" in the *tombeau* tradition, so too is the deceased (in name, at least) kept from the rituals of the ancient Slavic funerals, wherein superstition prohibits the utterance of the deceased's name, in addition to one's relation to him.[110] Sedakova notes that the common practice of hiring weeping women ("traditsiia naemnykh plakal'shchits")—a tradition no doubt fulfilled by Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva here—further fostered the forbiddance of such

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[109] Using Darwinian terms, MacFadyen delineates a reverse evolution of the hawk as it transforms from a bird to a cry, to nothingness in the ionosphere, to a smattering of letters and then snow that falls below onto a scene of child's play. This devolution marks the metapoetic finale of the poem, as aurality becomes reified in its typed letters, which like letters to the page, fall in the form of snow to the ground. See MacFadyen, *Joseph Brodsky and the Baroque*, 110.

[110] Sedakova, *Poetika obriada*, 35. Sedakova notes that the practice of hiring weeping women also contributed to the practice of not uttering the deceased's name, as the hired mourners often did not know the name of the person they were mourning.

utterance, as the hired mourners often did not know whom they were mourning. Children during this period incorporated the practice into make-believe funeral games, which later bore influence on traditional Christmas-time games, such as *Umrun* ("Dead Man"), which centers on the question of the "dead" person's identity.

While the scene of child's play at the opening of the poem's final section therefore enacts the ancient funeral rite's final segment—the "allowance for play" ("razreshenie smekhovoe")—it also brings to bear Sedakova's interpretation of the role of Christology in the "Death of the Poet" tradition. By depicting child's play rather than a climactic poetic sacrifice, she puts forth an implicit affirmation of Mandelstam's characterization of "Christian art" and the proper "imitation of Christ." For Mandelstam, such imitation should be not a sacrifice or a redemption, but a "joyful communion" that is like a "game played by the Father with his children":

> Art cannot be a sacrifice, for a sacrifice has already been made; it cannot be redemption, for the world together with the artist has already been redeemed. What then is left? A joyful communion with God [bogoobshchenie], like a game played the Father with his children, a hide-and-seek of the spirit! [….] Our whole two-thousand-year-old culture, thanks to the miraculous mercy of Christianity, is the *world's release into freedom* for the sake of play, for spiritual joy, for the free "imitation of Christ."[111]

In light of Mandelstam's words, one could certainly call Sedakova's elegy such an imitation. By releasing her subject into such playful freedom, the boundaries between the living and the dead, the pre-Christian and Christian worlds, the poet and his verse, and, indeed, the speaker herself and her subject, diminish. The diminishment of these boundaries allows the speaker to lay her subject to rest while also affirming, in spite of Brodsky, that which the writer of Pasternak's "Christmas Star," Yurii Zhivago believes: that earthly life in itself constitutes resurrection and that immortality reside[s] largely in

[111] Mandel'shtam, "Skriabin i khristianstvo," *SS*, 1, 202.

human *memory*.[112] As the poet's death encompasses a simultaneous departure and arrival, Sedakova's elegy encompasses both a polemic and a reconciliation. By subverting the traditional Pushkinian paradigm of redemptive sacrifice, the elegist thereby denies her subject his expected link on the chain of tragic deaths from Pushkin to Mandelstam. However, with the aid of their compatriot "muses," the elegist nonetheless squares her subject with his poetic fathers by enshrouding him in the densely intertextual fabric of her poem as she lays him to rest: "Sleep, my dear!"

[112] On this theme in Pasternak, see Barnes, 245.

CONCLUSION

It is widely acknowledged that poems of loss have shaped the Russian cultural myth of the poet.[1] In times when the cultural status of the poet has depreciated, the need for more rigorous study of the poems that both shape and contend with such cultural mythology becomes all the more acute. Moreover, if the "trope of loss" truly has become the primary symbolic device capable of translating people's Soviet experience into the post-Soviet context, as Serguei Oushakine suggests,[2] how are we to satisfactorily negotiate the terrain of contemporary Russian poetry? Is all twentieth-century poetry really one boundless mass that is elegiac or at least potentially so? In light of these questions, the modern elegy certainly represents a frontier of Russian literary studies worthy of deeper study.

By investigating the specific ways in which Sedakova engages the Russian churchyard elegy and the Death of the Poet elegy, this study has attempted to distill Sedakova's dominant elegiac method: namely, the employment or explicit rejection of traditional elegiac conventions in order to challenge the act of poetic self-stylization that undergirds customary poetic practices of consolatory, non-consolatory, and self-reflexive mourning. For Sedakova, the elegy is not a poem of mourning or consolation, but a poetic mechanism for seeing something in a new light, meeting the past in the future, and moving beyond the limitations of personal poetic mythology.

More fundamentally, this study has attempted to demonstrate that the elegy constitutes one of the most significant generic territories in Sedakova's corpus. The genre of the elegy paradoxically lays the grounds for the poet's transgression of lyric

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[1] Sandler, *Commemorating Pushkin*, 26.
[2] Oushakine, 1-2.

subjectivity and yet also brings the contours of her poetic identity into sharper focus. Like a Dantean traveler traversing the river Acheron, the Sedakovian poet embarks upon a journey to the redemptive center of the poetic word and to God. Peering into the waters of Death, the poet discerns not her own demise, but the poets of the past, a meeting in the future, and a path to the divine. The elegy constitutes a realm of meeting rather than a realm of parting.

While this dissertation has endeavored to provide a more satisfactory interpretative framework for approaching the elegiac verse of Sedakova,[3] it is my hope that this study will also encourage fresh and more rigorous study of Sedakova's contemporaries with regard to the elegy. Modern Russian poets beyond the scope of the present study who would nevertheless be fruitful subjects of such an analysis include Aleksei Parshchikov, Elena Shvarts, Viktor Krivulin, and Sergey Gandlevsky, to name just a few.[4] Further study of the ways in which contemporary and twentieth-century Russian poets negotiate elegiac conventions will certainly bring much needed clarity to the topography of the Russian modern elegy. Only with such study—to which the present work is a hopefully compelling addition—can we begin to assess the contours and conventions of the Russian elegy, which endures as a dynamic poetic form today.

[3] Sedakova's metapoetic meditations (such as those found in her early verse) and elegies on nature (such as "Elegy on a Linden Tree" ["Elegiia lipe," ca. 1984-85] and "Elegy for a Fig Tree" ["Elegiia smokovnitsy," ca. 1987-2004]) are but a few areas of her elegiac verse deserving of closer study within such a framework.
[4] Parshchikov's "Country Churchyard" ("Sel′skoe kladbishche") or Krivulin's "Rite of Parting" ("Obriad proshchaniia") are but two of a large collection of poems which would benefit from more rigorous study through the framework of the elegiac genre. See Parshchikov, *Dirizhabli*, 193-212; Krivulin, *Voskresnye oblaka*, 110-12.

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