POET VS. POETESS: FEMININE IMAGES IN THE
POETRY OF ANNA AKHMATOVA

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Abstract of Thesis

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Somehow, Anna Akhmatova was able to portray herself not only as an individual poet writing deeply personal lyrics, but also as a self-appointed symbol of Russia. The reason why the reader so readily accepts Akhmatova in this way is because she adopted a poetic persona which corresponds, not only to archetypal associations of women, but also to images of women specific to Russian culture.

Rather than portray her poetic persona as an active, creative poet-figure, Akhmatova's early persona is often portrayed as conspicuously silent or powerless when confronted with the articulate hero. This portrayal is one manifestation of the fact that the two most influential movements in terms of Akhmatova's poetic career - Symbolism and Acmeism/Adamism - adopted imagery which was manifestly inappropriate for Akhmatova as a woman poet. The persona's silence is, at least in part, a reaction to the general tendency to view women as handmaidens or means of transcendence for the male poet as opposed to poet figures in their own right.

In this context, this thesis will consider two approaches which Akhmatova adopted, if only to a limited extent, to portray her persona as an active poet figure. First, in a limited number of poems, Akhmatova simply adopts a male speaker. Secondly, in some poems, she develops what might be described as an 'eternal masculine' figure. Perhaps surprisingly, however, Akhmatova rejected the straightforward image of the poet as 'mother' to the poem (or even as a maternal figure in terms of individual children), though such images were readily available to her.

This thesis will also consider the unusual, detached perspective which Akhmatova's persona assumes in many poems. It will explore the sense of Akhmatova's persona as intuitive and sensitive to the forces of nature and, at times, to the will of God. Finally, it will link these approaches to the tradition of 'women's language' in Russian culture.

This thesis will look at one of the most interesting manifestations of the unusual perspective with which Akhmatova invests her persona - that of the persona as object of art as opposed to artist. It will also consider Akhmatova's complex use of 'doubles' and muses in this context.

The authoritative, matriarchal persona of Rekviem did not emerge in a vacuum. She is the culmination of Akhmatova's selective choice of feminine images and approaches throughout her early career.
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Anna Akhmatova wrote with an extraordinary sense of authority. Even her earliest poetry conveys a sense of purpose and importance that many mature poets, perhaps, never even attempt. Somehow, Akhmatova was able to portray herself not only as an individual poet writing deeply personal lyrics, but also, in time, as a self-appointed symbol of Russia. Her role came to extend far beyond that of poet. She embodied the concept of an icon - literally a conduit between Heaven and Earth - by portraying herself not only as a vessel for the Word of God, but also as able to appeal to God on behalf of the people of Soviet Russia.

One of the reasons why the reader so readily accepts Akhmatova in this role is because she adopted a poetic persona which corresponds, not only to archetypal images of women, but also to images of women specific to Russian culture. Akhmatova's poetic persona is sensitive to the forces of nature and receptive to the Word of God. Rather than compose poetry, she is 'given' songs. At the same time, Akhmatova subtly constructs a  

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persona who possesses characteristics associated with such figures as Mary, Cassandra and Antigone. Thus, Akhmatova's persona derives her authority from a number of different sources. She not only serves as a vehicle for divine inspiration, but also assumes a number of parallel roles such as prophet and mourner of the dead.

Akhmatova negotiated influential literary movements such as Symbolism and, in some aspects, Acmeism/Adamism which were essentially hostile, both in theory and, often, in reality, to women poets. As Chapter 1 will later explore, members of these movements developed imagery and espoused manifestos which often excluded the possibility of an active, articulate, coherent female figure. Yet Akhmatova accomplished just this by appropriating images from these movements and re-interpreting them in such a way as to bolster her authority as a poet.

Akhmatova was not radical, but rather, deeply conservative, regarding herself as part of a traditional male lineage which extended back to Pushkin and Dante. She worked within existing poetic structures, rather than create new ones, and borrowed from traditional images of women to rework them for her own creative ends. As Catriona Kelly notes, 'Akhmatova was a poet who, unlike Tsvetaeva, perpetuated rather than exploded tradition, the tradition of "feminine poetry" included'. In this way, Akhmatova confidently formulated an extraordinary role for herself as a woman poet.

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Poet vs. Poetess

Akhmatova was sensitive to the stereotype often attached to women poets of her time - frivolous chatterboxes or, as Akhmatova's great friend, Osip Mandel'shtam coined them, the 'seamstresses of poetry'.

Мандельштам в конце концов может принять Ахматову за поэта равного достоинства. Тем не менее, его комментарий выше отражает мнение, которое было преобладающим среди русской литературной аристократии. Как объясняет катриона Келли, для русского уха, слова 'женского творчества' и 'женской прозы или поэзии' имеют 'обидный и не особенно презрительный оттенок'. Слова 'леди проза' или 'леди поэзия' по мнению Келли особенно гнушаемы тем, что они полагают, что это '...всегда идёт на счёт позитивных качеств наблюдательности и декоративности, но с более чем компенсирующими недостатками: сентиментальности, банальности, и отсутствия интеллектуальной мощи'.

Mandel'shtam may have ultimately embraced Akhmatova as a poet of equal merit. Nonetheless, his comments above reflect a view that was prevalent among the Russian literary élite. As Catriona Kelly explains, to the Russian ear, the very terms 'women's creativity' and 'women's prose or poetry' have a 'belittling if not derogatory flavour'. The terms 'lady's prose' or 'lady's poetry' are, according to Kelly, particularly abhorrent in that they suggest a work which is '...assumed to show the positive merits of observation and decoration, but to have the more than compensatory demerits of sentimentality, banality, and lack of intellectual power'.


4 Catriona Kelly, A History of Russian Women's Writing, p. 2.

5 Julia Heaton confirms that this view remains today: In accordance with the general climate of hostility towards feminism that exists in Russia today the term "women's writing" carries none of the positive (if still problematic) associations that it may do in the West. "Women's writing" is a taboo
Akhmatova was sensitive to being typecast as a mere 'lady poet'. Alert to this stereotype from an early age, in 1907 she wrote to her sister's husband, Sergei Vladimirovich von Shtein, asking him to send her some of his new poems: 'Пришлите, я буду ужасно (женское слово) рада видеть Ваши стихи'. When she was eleven years old, her father, 'for some reason', called her a 'decadent poetess'. She also looked back on Vecher, her first collection, with uncharacteristic modesty: '...эти бедные стихи пустейшей девочки почему-то перечитываются тридцать раз.....' Further, one of her poems written in Tsarskoe Selo begins,

Жрицам божественной бессмыслицы  
Назвала нас дивная судьба,  
Но я точно знаю - нам зачислятся  
Бденья у позорного столба, (1910) (1,352)

In another poem - 'On liubil...' - Akhmatova's persona specifically lists 'women's hysterics' as one of the things the hero does not love (I, 43). This concurs with a comment noted in Akhmatova's diary that Leonid Chatskii (pseudonym of Leonid Strakhovskii) had once claimed that Gumilev considered her poetry to be the 'hobby of a poet's wife' in spite of term, it is regarded as a derogatory category and as such is rejected by most Russian women writers themselves. (Julia Heaton, 'Russian Women's Writing - Problems of a Feminist Approach with Particular Reference to the Writing of Marina Palei', Slavonic and East European Review, 75, 1997, pp. 63-85, p. 63)

7 Anna Akhmatova, 'Avtobiograficheskaia proza', Sochineniia, II, p. 245.
8 Anna Akhmatova, 'Avtobiograficheskaia proza', Sochineniia, II, p. 245.
Gumilev's published reviews to the contrary.

Still another poem, 'V poslednii raz my vstrelis' togda', describes the persona's last meeting with the hero on the embankment of the Neva. The hero speaks dismissively of women poets generally:

Он говорил о лете и о том,
Что быть поэтом женщине - нелепость.

These lines are particularly interesting in that they supposedly derive from a comment by Aleksandr Blok. However, the hero's proclamation about women is contradicted in the final stanza; the persona ultimately triumphs creatively in that she is 'given' one of her 'mad songs':

И в этот час была мне отдана
Последняя из всех безумных песен. (1914) (I, 54)

This poem is a useful example of Akhmatova's approach to her role as a poet generally. On the face of it, writing in the wake of Symbolism was an 'absurdity' - women were designated mere objects of inspiration, condemned to the stereotype of 'divine babble' as opposed to being perceived as creative artists in their own right. Akhmatova might have chosen to take a more radical approach like Tsvetaeva and explode the myth in a straightforward way. Yet as noted earlier, if anything, Akhmatova perpetuated the status quo. In 'V poslednii raz my vstrelis' togda' she is 'given' her 'mad song', conveying the sense that she has been chosen

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by a power greater than her earthly companion. At the same time, she remains strangely passive, not so much creating as receiving.

In her review of Nadezhda L'vova's poems, Akhmatova writes: 'Но странно: такие сильные в жизни, такие чуткие ко всем любовным очарованиям женщины, когда начинают писать, знают только одну любовь, мучительную, болезненно прозорливую и безнадежную.'

This criticism is somewhat ironic in that it could easily have been levelled at Akhmatova's early works. In fact, the comment may directly reflect a criticism which Gumilev once levelled at Akhmatova herself: 'Ахматовой, чтобы полюбить мир, нужно видеть его милым и простым.' However, Akhmatova's comment reflects her general tendency (despite her reference to Vecher above) to consider herself to be the exception to the general rule that women were inevitably inferior poets. Akhmatova seems to have concurred with the hero's proclamation in 'В последний раз мы встретились тогда': to be a woman poet was an absurdity, though she was an exception. Such sentiment not only appears in Akhmatova's prose, but also in such humorous poems as 'Epigrama':

Могла ли Биче словно Дант творить,
Или Лаура жар любви восславить?
Я научила женщин говорить...
Но, боже, как их замолчать заставить!

The poem 'Я не любви твоей просшу' also typifies the confidence which Akhmatova possessed in terms of competition from female 'rivals'. In this poem, her persona reacts to the hero by

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11 Anna Akhmatova, 'O stikhakh N. L'vovoi', Sochinenia, II, p. 211.

daring him to show her poems to his new lover:

Я не любви твоей прошу.
Она теперь в надежном месте...
Поверь, что я твоей невесте
Ревнивых писем не пишу.
Но мудрые прими советы:
Дай ей читать мои стихи,
Дай ей хранить мои портреты -
Ведь так любезны женихи!
А этим дурочкам нужней
Сознайте полное победы,
Чем дружбы светлые беседы
И память первых нежных дней... (1914) (I, 50-51)

Akhmatova's persona is sufficiently confident to allow her rival in love to read her poems, presumably because the 'little fool' will not understand them. While she may have lost her lover to her rival, she ultimately triumphs in terms of talent and a facade of indifference to the situation.

Akhmatova also wished to distinguish herself from more prominent women in the cultural life of her time. According to Lidia Chukovskaia, Akhmatova predicted that historians would lump her together with such diverse figures as Larisa Reisner, Zinaida Gippius, Lily Brik, and Anna Radlova: "...будем называться: "женщины времени..." В нас непременно найдут общий стиль." She made some exceptions to this tendency to regard herself as unique. In her autobiographical prose, for example, Akhmatova claims to have been related to Anna Bunina - 'the first woman poetess'. She also maintained a

14 Akhmatova claimed Anna Bunina was her grandfather's aunt ('Avtobiograficheskaia proza', p.240).
lifelong respect for Marina Tsvetaeva. But, generally, Akhmatova was anxious to avoid any association with women writers of her own or any other era. As she notes in 'Khvaly eti mne ne po chinu':

Многихressing, in Akhmatova's particular case, was not considered by her supporters to be a creative handicap.

However, some critics have gone further and have not only perceived Akhmatova's femininity as a source of strength, but have also considered her to be a pioneer for women writers. This is certainly, for example, how Akhmatova has been marketed in the West. For example, the dust jacket to Roberta Reeder's biography of Akhmatova includes a quote from

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15 Amanda Haight notes that Leonid Grossman compared Akhmatova to Sappho and, in 1965, the Public Orator revived this comparison when Akhmatova was awarded her honorary doctorate at Oxford University (Amanda Haight, Anna Akhmatova: A Poetic Pilgrimage, Oxford, 1990, p. 80).

16 Nikolai Gumilev, 'Stat'i i zametki o russkoj poezii', p. 337.
John Bayley: 'Anna Akhmatova has given a voice to women and their feelings.'\textsuperscript{17} Similarly, another of Akhmatova's biographers, Amanda Haight, believed that Akhmatova was '...concerned with the necessity of giving voice to the woman's point of view in a culture where women's voices, although beginning to be heard, were few and far between and where women were still suffering from the illusion that to be equal with men, they must be like them'.\textsuperscript{18}

It is not only Westerners who have appointed Akhmatova as representative of women in general. Roman Timenchik, for example, has noted that *Večer* appeared at a time when Russia was looking for a great woman poet who could, at last, express the feelings of 'sincere but inarticulate women'.\textsuperscript{19} Akhmatova recalled in an article on Aleksandr Blok that writer and childhood friend, Ariadna Tyrkova-Vergezhskaia, once commented: 'Вот Анечка для себя добилась равноправия.'\textsuperscript{20} The flamboyant Aleksandra Kollontai maintained a similar view:

Ахматова не просто <<поэтесса>>, каких много, переживающая то, что уже не раз говорили великие писатели уходящей культуры и говорили сильнее и ярче слабых подражательниц-поэтесс. Ахматова - сама творец. И, как поэт-творец, она привносит в искусство, а, значит и в знание человеческой


\textsuperscript{18} Amanda Haight, *A Poetic Pilgrimage*, p. 2.


\textsuperscript{20} Anna Akhmatova, 'Vospominaniia ob Aleksandre Bloke', *Sochineniia*, II, pp. 185-88, p. 185.
Akhmatova's detractors, however, were just as prone to criticise her for her feminine poetry. In the Soviet period, such criticism was often made in tandem with comments about her poetry's lack of communist content. For example, in *Literatura i revoliutsiia*, Trotsky wrote:

> С недоумением читаешь большинство наших стихотворных сборников, особенно женских, - вот уж поистине где без бога ни до порога. Лирический круг Ахматовой, Цветаевой, Радловой и иных действительных и приближительных поэтесс, очень мал. Он охватывает самое поэтессу, неизвестного, в котелке или со шпорами, и непременно бога - без особых примет. Это очень удобное и портативное третье лицо, вполне комнатного воспитания, друг дома, выполняющий время от времени обязанности врача по женским недомоганиям. Как этот немолодой уже персонаж, обремененный личными, нередко весьма хлопотливыми поручениями Ахматовой, Цветаевой и других, умудряется еще в свободные часы заведывать судьбами вселенной - это просто-таки уму непостижимо.

The varied ways in which such readers interpret Akhmatova's feminine poetry reflect, as much as anything, each reader's own personal or political agenda. It is not surprising that Amanda Haight - Akhmatova's Western biographer writing in the 1970s - finds Akhmatova's femininity a more positive factor than Trotsky. What unites all of these critiques, however, is a tendency to generalise and to place Akhmatova's status as a woman poet at the heart of their criticism or praise.

Thus, as a woman writer who nearly always adopted a female poetic persona,

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Akhmatova was inevitably forced to confront a fundamental question which her male contemporaries and precursors could overlook: how to portray a female persona and, by extension, herself as a poet, as a serious, active and creative figure in the face of a culture which failed to take women poets seriously?

The answer to this question is at the heart of the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter: her 'strength' lies elsewhere. Akhmatova's authority as a poet lies not as a 'craftsman' or active forger of words, but rather, from a series of images which link her to archetypal associations with women in Russian culture. Her persona is imbued with a sensitivity and ability to communicate with forces of nature, growing in sophistication to serve, ultimately, as a kind of intermediary between Heaven and Earth. In this way, Akhmatova developed ultimate authority as a female poet.

Approach

This thesis will not attempt to reconcile Akhmatova's works with a particular strain of feminist criticism. Nor will it attempt to discover fledgling strains of feminist thought which Akhmatova may have deliberately or unwittingly incorporated into her works. Rather, it will adopt a similar approach to that taken by Wendy Rosslyn in her book *The prince, the fool and the nunnery: the religious theme in the early poetry of Anna*

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23 On the problem of reconciling Russian women writers with Western variants of feminism, see, for example, Julia Heaton, 'Russian Women's Writing'.

24 This is the approach adopted in such works as Barbara Heldt's *Terrible Perfection: Women and Russian Literature*, Indiana, 1987.
Akhmatova. In this book, Rosslyn adopts the approach which Akhmatova, herself, advised: to study groups of recurring images in order to discover the poet's 'personality' and 'spirit'.

Rosslyn considers various images and attitudes towards love and religion in individual poems in order to draw general conclusions about Akhmatova's own beliefs. Similarly, this thesis will look at individual feminine images and attitudes and evaluate the overall impression they convey in terms of Akhmatova's poetic authority.

The impact of feminine images and attitudes on Akhmatova's poetic authority is an important consideration in that, as noted earlier, Akhmatova wrote during an era in which the very term 'woman writer' or 'poetess' carried a variety of negative associations. The first Chapter will, therefore, look at the way in which two of the most influential movements in terms of Akhmatova's poetic career - Symbolism and, in some aspects, Acmeism - developed imagery which was manifestly inappropriate for the woman poet.

The second chapter will consider possible reasons why Akhmatova, a prolific poet, chose to adopt an early poetic persona who is almost the antithesis of a poet-figure in that she is often silent, incoherent or inarticulate. It will consider the progression of Akhmatova's early silent persona through to such works as Rekviem.

The third chapter will look at three strategies which Akhmatova developed to

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25 Wendy Rosslyn, The prince, the fool and the nunnery: the religious theme in the early poetry of Anna Akhmatova, Amersham, 1984.

26 Wendy Rosslyn, The prince, the fool and the nunnery, p. 3 (quoting Lidiia Chukovskaia, Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatovoi, I, p. 149).

27 As this thesis is intended to provide a broad overview of feminine themes and images, a number of its aspects will invariably overlap with issues analysed in existing critical works. Such works will be referred to in the course of the thesis as and when relevant.
overcome her fundamental incompatibility with the major literary movements of her time. First, it will consider the limited number of poems in which Akhmatova adopts a male speaker. Secondly, it will look at the image of what might be described as a kind of 'eternal masculine'. Finally, it will look at one of the most complex feminine images available to Akhmatova - the persona as mother - both in terms of the cliché of the poet as mother to the poem and in terms of the persona as mother to an individual child. The fourth chapter will consider one of the most interesting manifestations of Akhmatova's battle with the legacy of Symbolism - the unusual perspective which she assumes in many poems. It will examine a number of poems in which she assumes a detached perspective, sometimes as if viewing her persona through a mirror. In detaching herself from her poetic persona, she is able to assume the kind of stance a male poet would normally assume, not only considering her female persona from a more objective point of view, but also assessing the persona's influence upon those around her. At the same time, Akhmatova emphasises the image of the persona as intuitive and sensitive to the forces of nature or the will of God.

The fifth chapter will look at another interesting perspective which Akhmatova assumed - portraying her persona, not as an artist, but as an art object. It will consider a number of poems in which the persona's physical body is literally transformed into a statue or monument or is the subject of another artist's portrait.

Finally, the sixth chapter will consider a topic already well explored by critics: Akhmatova's poetic 'doubles' (including her distinctive muse). In this particular context, however, it will consider their application in terms of her unusual perspective mentioned above. Akhmatova's doubles allow her, as a poet, to assume simultaneously both an
objective and subjective stance in terms of her persona. Akhmatova's choice of famous heroines in such works as 'Bibleiskie stikhi' allows her to appropriate the stature they command simply by virtue of their familiarity. At the same time, however, Akhmatova subtly blends a personal subtext which the reader is able to identify.
Chapter 1 - Symbolism and Acmeism/Adamism - the Problem of Perspective

Symbolism

The variety of attitudes towards women writers at the time of Akhmatova's early works has already been touched upon in the Introduction. It is now, however, worth paying particular consideration to the Symbolists' approach to the subject. Many Symbolists were particularly unresponsive, both in theory and in reality, to the notion of a female poet. Of course there were female Symbolists and certain Symbolists, such as Innokentii Annenskii, had a high regard for women's intellectual and artistic abilities. However, this does not diminish the fact that the fundamental dynamics of Symbolist poetry - particularly in terms of Vladimir Solov'ev's views on love - dictated that a woman is unable pursue the transcendent through the principle of the eternal feminine because she actually embodies this principle herself.

The Symbolists espoused two central views on love, both of which rendered the woman poet an oxymoron. Whereas the first derived from Solov'ev and was represented

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1 Catriona Kelly explains that '[Annenskii's] respect for women's intellectual and artistic activity was almost unique amongst Russian male poets of the Silver Age'. She speculates that Annenskii, '...as a male poet who avoided the stereotyped macho posturings of the Acmeist and Futurist manifestos, may have helped to feminise Russian poetic discourse as the novelist Samuel Richardson had helped to feminise discourse in the novel a century and a half earlier' (Catriona Kelly, 'The Impossibility of Imitation: Anna Akhmatova and Innokentii Annenskii', in The Speech of Unknown Eyes: Akhmatova's Readers on Her Poetry, ed. Wendy Rosslyn, 2 vols, Nottingham, 1990, II, pp. 231-46, p. 233).
by the figure of Sophia, the second derived from Nietzsche and manifested itself as a quasi-cult of Dionysus. In terms of the former, Pamela Davidson notes that although Solov'ev's concept of the 'eternal feminine' was, in theory, applicable to either sex, in practice, the ideology designated women as the mediator of male aspirations. She cites a number of reasons for this:

The language of the treatise, written by a man, implied a male perspective on love. Sophia, although not a woman, was closely related to the principle of the eternal feminine; she was often symbolically depicted as a female saint in the Russian iconographic tradition, and her cult was also associated with that of the Virgin Mary. Furthermore, most of Solovev's disciples who claimed to put his theory into practice were men, and to varying degrees tended to link their beloved woman with Sophia.

Similarly, the cult derived from Nietzsche emphasised the image of the male God Dionysus worshipped through ecstatic sacrificial rites carried out by female "Maenads". Davidson notes that both views on love designate women as 'passive objects to be loved as a means to a higher end, or as creatures capable of reaching or inducing Dionysiac transports of ecstasy - or sometimes as both. In either case, their role in their experience of love was defined by men and in terms of male inspiration as a means to an end.

Thus, for the Symbolists, women were 'high priestesses', manifestations of Blok's 'Beautiful Lady', or, to use Akhmatova and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam's own phrase, the

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'bearers of myrrh'. With the main exception of women as prophets (which will be discussed in Chapter 6), male Symbolists tended to portray women as passive objects of inspiration as opposed to active, creative figures.

Of course this dynamic was not exclusive to the Symbolists; the fundamental association of women with inspiration and men with creativity can be traced back far further. As Nadezhda Mandel'shtam comments: 'Лауры и Беатриче, прекрасные дамы менистrellей, недоступные и далекие, блоковские незнакомки, проходящие мимо поэта, не мода и не выдумка своего времени, а нечто более глубокое, укорененное в самой природе поэзии.' The Symbolists were, however, particularly enamoured with the perceived link between femininity and 'other-worldliness'.

In an article which Akhmatova herself considered to be particularly astute, one of Akhmatova's greatest admirers, V.N. Nedobrovo, considered Symbolism as indicative of a male-dominated literary culture in which romantic love was rarely portrayed from a woman's point of view:

Вследствие этого искусством до чрезвычайности разработана поэтика мужского стремления и женских очарований, и, напротив, поэтика женских волнений и мужских обаяний почти не налажена. Мужчины-поэты, создавая мужские образы, сосредоточивались на общечеловеческом в них, оставляя любовное в тени, потому что и влеклись к нему мало, да и не могли располагать необходимой полярной чуткостью к нему. Однако типы мужественности едва намечены и очень далеки от кристаллизованности,

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7 Lidiia Chukovskaia writes that Akhmatova told her, '...Недоброво понял мой путь, мое будущее угадал и предсказал его потому, что хорошо знал меня.' (*Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatovoi*, I, p. 113).
Thus women poets, he argues, critically lack a means of entry into the 'lofty spheres' which correspond with the Symbolists' 'eternal feminine'. Akhmatova herself (if ironically) appears to acknowledge this in such poems as 'Pust' dazhe vyleta mne net':

Пуст даже вылета мне нет
Из стаи лебединой...
Увы! Лирический поэт
Обязан быть мужчиною,
Иначе все пойдет вверх дном
До часа расставанья -
И сад - не сад, и дом - не дом,
Свиданье - не свиданье. (1944-52) (1, 338)

This also appears to be the sentiment behind the following lines:

Ты выдумал меня. Такой на свете нет,
Такой на свете быть не может. (1956) (1, 224)

In this context, it is interesting to compare the poems which Akhmatova and


9 This sentiment is echoed by Joseph Campbell in an even wider sense. Campbell contends that the archetypal female role as depicted in myth and literature is to act as 'guide' for the male hero:

The hero is the one who comes to know. As he progresses in the slow initiation which is life, the form of the goddess undergoes for him a series of transfigurations: she can never be greater than himself, though she can always promise more than he is yet capable of comprehending...Woman is the guide to the sublime acme of sensuous adventure. (Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Princeton, 1973, p. 116)
Aleksandr Blok wrote to each other. In her poem dedicated to Blok (written in January 1914), Akhmatova seems to confirm the prediction that she is unsuited to the lofty heights to which the Symbolist poet aspires by emphasising the realistic and concrete setting, free of Symbolist accoutrements:

И я пришла к поэту в гости.
Ровно полдень. Воскресенье.
Тихо в комнате просторной,
А за окнами мороз.

И малиновое солнце
Над лохматым сизым дымом...
Как хозяин молчаливый
Ясно смотрит на меня!

У него глаза такие,
Что запомнить каждый должен;
Мне же лучше, осторожной,
В них и вовсе не глядеть.

Но запомнится беседа,
Дымный полдень, воскресенье
В доме сером и высоком
У морских ворот Невы. (January 1914) (і, 75-76)

In this poem, it is precisely Akhmatova's failings as a Symbolist which render her a successful Acmeist; the details in the first stanza - the particular time and place - ground this poem in reality. This may be contrasted with the poem which Blok dedicated to her in which he transforms her into a Carmen figure:

<<Красота страшна>> - Вам скажут, -
Вы накинете лениво
Шаль испанскую на плечи,
Красный розан - в волосах.
<<Красота проста>> - Вам скажут, -  
Pестрой шалью неумело  
Вы укроете ребенка,  
Красный розан - на полу.  

Но, рассеянно внимая  
Всем словам, кругом звучащим,  
Вы задумаетесь грустно  
И твердите про себя:  

<<Не страшна и не проста я;  
Я не так страшна, чтоб просто  
Убивать; не так проста я,  
Чтоб не знать, как жизнь страшна>>.  

Apparently, Blok's depiction was not spontaneous; he realised Akhmatova would come to visit him and composed the verse the night before. Further, in her memoirs, Akhmatova describes the way in which Blok romanticised her visit:  

...У меня никогда не было испанской шали, в которой я там изображена, но в это время Блок бредил Карамен и испанализировал меня. Я и красной розы, разумеется, никогда в волосах не носила. Не случайно это стихотворение написано испанской строфой романсеро. И в последнюю нашу встречу за кулисами Большого Драматического театра весной 1921 года Блок подошел и спросил меня: <<Угде испанская шаль?>> Это последние слова, которые я слышала от него.  

Interestingly, Akhmatova appears to have picked up on this Spanish theme in her subtle  

12 Anna Akhmatova, 'Vospominaniia ob Aleksandre Bloke', p. 186.
conversion of Blok into the figure of Don Juan in *Poema bez geroia*. Further, as Wendy Rosslyn argues, Akhmatova re-tells the tale of Don Juan with a female protagonist, feminising Don Juan, while rejecting the image of Donna Anna as his potential saviour.

**Acmeism/Adamism**

The Acmeist manifestos are neither clear nor consistent. This is at least partly due to the fact that they merely attempted to consolidate and clarify aspects of a style already apparent rather than initiate a new way of thinking. As Roman Timenchik stresses, Acmeism was not 'discovered' or 'thought up', but evolved from the joint efforts of the young poets involved.

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15 It has been suggested, for example, that it was Akhmatova who originally precipitated the theory of Acmeism in that *Vecher* was published before her Acmeist colleagues published their manifestos on the subject (Sam Driver, 'Directions in Akhmatova's Poetry Since the Early Period', *Russian Literature*, 1975, Spring Supplement, pp. 84-91, p. 84.)

Piast suggested that the term 'acme' may echo the name 'Akhmatova' (see Amanda Haight, *A Poetic Pilgrimage*, p. 18, quoting V. Piast, *Vstrechi*, Moscow, 1929, p. 155). The term 'acmeism' is derived from the word 'acme' which is defined by Gumilev as '...высшая степень чего-либо, цвет, цветущая пора....' (Nikolai Gumilev, 'Nasledie simvolizma i akmeizm', *Sobranie sochinenii*, IV, pp. 171-76, p. 171).

At least in theory, Acmeism is more complementary to the female poet than Symbolism in that the Acmeists' emphasis on the concrete and tangible suggests at least a superficial predisposition to portraying women more realistically than in the idealised Symbolist manner. According to Gorodetskii's famous synopsis,

У акмеистов роза опять стала хороша сама по себе, своими лепестками, запахом и цветом, а не своими мыслимыми подобиями с мистической любовью или чем-нибудь ещё.17

As Catriona Kelly notes, '...[Acmeism] offered a way out of Symbolism's assumption that women's writing was necessarily passive and automatic, with its emphasis on the Word and the poet as craftsman'.18

Given Gumilev's reputation as a somewhat macho poet, it is, perhaps, surprising that the imagery he adopts in his critical works emphasises the sense of the work as a female. For example, in 'Zhizn' stikha', he distinguishes between 'Art for life' and 'Art for art's sake'. In terms of the former, '...искусство низводят до степени проститутки или солдата. Его существование имеет ценность лишь постольку, поскольку оно служит чуждым ему целям. Неудивительно, если у кратких муз глаза становятся мутными, и они приобретают дурные манеры.' In terms of the latter, '...искусство изнеживается, становится мучительно-лучным...'19 Further, it is not only art which Gumilev describes in feminine terms, but also the actual poet whom he describes as a kind of mother-in-waiting

19 Nikolai Gumilev, 'Zhizn' stikha', Sobranie sochinenii, IV, pp. 157-70, p. 158.
The fact that Mandel'shtam accepted Akhmatova as a poet and intellectual equal is especially striking when one takes into account Nadezhda Mandel'shtam's description of his perception of women in general:

И по духовной структуре, и по физиологическим свойствам он принадлежал к тем, кто не терпит опекунов и к женщине относится, как к подопечному и не совсем полноценному существу: испуганный глаз, недотрога, врушка и еще лучше - дурочка... Женщину нужно обязательно увезти из дома - идеал: умывание. Она должна быть гораздо моложе и весящее зависеть от мужа. В очень ранней молодости он еще не вполне сознавал свои вкусы и подился культу <<красавиц>>, который отчаянно поддерживала Ахматова.20

This, as well as the passage quoted in the Introduction in which Mandel'shtam condemned the 'seamstresses of poetry', suggest that, even if his published views of women were relatively positive, a creeping misogyny underpinned many of Mandel'shtam's views on women poets. Akhmatova would have had to overcome significant obstacles in gaining his respect as a poet. Despite Acmeism's general affinity for women poets, Akhmatova was not provided with a literary prescription for dealing with the paradigm of the Symbolists' Beautiful Lady.

The relatively minor strand of Acmeism known as 'Adamism' developed imagery which, on nearly every level, was completely inappropriate for Akhmatova as a woman poet. According to Gumilev, Adamism refers to, '...мужественно твердый и ясный взгляд на жизнь'.21 In particular, as noted above, Gumilev valued Adam's role as 'name-giver',

20 Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, Vtorai kniga, p. 122.
21 Nikolai Gumilev, 'Nasledie simvolizma i akmeizma', p. 171.
stressing that the poet must strive to look at things already known with a fresh and enthusiastic gaze, like Adam on the first day of creation.

Amanda Haight alludes to this theme, describing Akhmatova's style in Adamic terms and her role as 'name-giver':

[Akhmatova] was the formulator, the poet who by means of her tool, the word, could bring order out of chaos and in so doing fulfil the highest human function: 'And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field' (Genesis 2:20).22

In some poems, such as 'Mnogoe eshche, naverno, khochet', the persona could, in a broad sense, be described as 'seeing the world as if new', although its late date suggests that any link with Adamism is coincidental:

Многое еще, наверно, хочет
Быть воспетым голосом моим:
То, что, бессловесное, грохочет,
Иль во тьме подземный камень точит,
Иль пробивается сквозь дым.
У меня не выяснены счеты
С пламенем, и ветром, и водой... 
Оттого-то мне мои дремоты
Вдруг такие распахнут ворота
И ведут за утренней звездой. (1936-60) (I, 194)

The poem 'Notre Dame' is, in a sense, Osip Mandel'shtam's manifesto on the subject of Acmeism and Adamism:

Где римский судья судил чужой народ -
Стоит базилика, и радостный и первый,
Как некогда Adam, распластывая нервы,
Играет мышцами крестовый легкий свод.

The speaker describes how the 'light Gothic ribbed vault' of the basilica, stretching its 'nerves', 'plays with its muscles...like Adam in former times'. As Peter Steiner notes, the 'vault' in this poem conveys the sense of 'peak' or 'summit' or 'acme' (Greek for the highest point), while the image of Adam is as close as Mandel'shtam comes to explicitly adopting an Adamist stance. Steiner notes that the adjectives 'радостный' and 'первый' add to the sense of optimism and primacy, while the description of playing with its muscles evokes Gumilev's insistence on the poet's essential virility. The cathedral's masculinity is further emphasised by the 'strength of the saddle-girth arches' and the description of the plumb-line as 'tsar'. Thus, in the context of Adamism, the cathedral, itself, is representative of Adam

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24 The first draft of this poem also included a reference to tendons: 'И жилы вытянув и напрягая нервы...'. (Peter Steiner, 'Poem as Manifesto: Mandel'shtam's "Notre Dame"', Russian Literature, V, 1977, pp. 239-56, p. 246).

25 Peter Steiner, 'Poem as Manifesto: Mandel'shtam's "Notre Dame"', pp. 245-46.

26 Peter Steiner, 'Poem as Manifesto: Mandel'shtam's "Notre Dame"', p. 246.
in that it embodies the masculine qualities which Mandel'shtam valued so highly. Yet the 'ribbed' vault and, of course, the name Notre Dame of the 'basilica' (also a feminine noun) reinforces the sense that the creation itself is feminine, as well as Mandel'shtam's contrast of the 'strength of Egypt' with 'Christian meekness' and the fragile 'reed' with the strong 'oak'.

Chapter 6 will consider Akhmatova's identification with Eve in this respect. For now, however, the point to note is not that Akhmatova was incapable of adapting to such, rather superficial imagery or such strong views on the role of women generally; rather, it is the fact of having to adapt (or collude) in the first place that sets Akhmatova apart from her Acmeist contemporaries. Aleksandr Blok apparently refers to this in his early criticism of Akhmatova: '...не знаю, считала ли она сама себя <<акменсткой>>; во всяком случае, <<расцвета физических и духовных сил>> в ее усталой, болезненной, женской и самоуглубленной манере положительно нельзя было найти'. Though critical, Blok's comment at least acknowledges a fundamental incompatibility for Akhmatova with the movement she helped create. In order to overcome the 'problem of perspective' inherited from Symbolism, Akhmatova had to adopt a number of strategies, rather than merely rely upon Acmeist manifestos for solutions. Some of these strategies will be discussed in the chapters which follow.

27 Aleksandr Blok, "Bez bozhestva, bez vdokhnoven'ia" (tsekh akmeistov'), Sobranie sochinenii, VI, pp. 174-84, p. 180.
Chapter 2 - The Silent Persona

As noted in the Introduction, Akhmatova's detractors considered her to be typical of frivolous and banal women poets. At the same time, many of Akhmatova's supporters considered her to be the exception to the rule that women were inherently inferior poets. Further, as discussed in Chapter 1, Akhmatova wrote in the midst of major literary movements such as Symbolism which excluded (or failed to take seriously) women poets generally.

At the same time, although a prolific poet, Akhmatova developed a poetic persona which is often manifestly silent. Rather than emphasise her persona's ability to articulate or shape events through words (e.g. the Acmeist poet as 'craftsman'), Akhmatova emphasises that language is either inappropriate or powerless in the face of difficulty. One explanation for the persona's silence is that such a portrayal is consistent with the ideal of women in fashion at the time she began to write. The persona does not speak because it is enough that she simply exists, enabling the hero to take action or dedicate beautiful love lyrics to her. In this sense, Akhmatova perpetuates classical and Symbolist associations of women as objects as opposed to creators.¹

Akhmatova's silent persona is, of course, not unique, as the futility of words is a well-established literary theme. However, the significance of this theme for Akhmatova is

¹ Such silence is also ironic in that it was commonly assumed in the West at the time of Rekviem that Akhmatova was no longer writing, a misconception oblivious to the atmosphere of repression in which she lived and the extreme lengths to which she went to ensure that the text of Rekviem survived.
not the fact that she adopted it, as many before and after her have, but that it complemented her status as a woman poet. Her authority as a poet does not arise from her active talent with words, but rather, as a passive, mysterious witness or embodiment of tragedy surrounding her or as receptor of the Word of God.

It is important to draw a distinction between those poems in which the persona is simply unable to speak and these in which her silence is, in fact, a means of self-expression. There is a chronological element to this distinction. For example, Akhmatova's early persona is often speechless when confronted with the hero. In 'Khochesht' znat', kak vse eto bylo?', for example, the persona's struggle to find the right words is fundamental to the dramatic tension between the two figures:

Хочешь знать, как все это было? -
Три в столовой пробило,
И прощаясь, держась за перила,
Она словно с трудом говорила:
<<Это все...Ах, нет, я забыла,
Я люблю вас, я вас любила
Еще тогда!>>
<<Да>>. (1910) (1, 28)²

² This compares with another famous poem - 'Szhala ruki pod temnoi vual'iu...' in which the persona's language is powerless to compel the hero to return to her. This poem also features a mysterious voice which questions the persona:

Сжала руки под темной вуалью...
<<Отчего ты сегодня бледна?>>
- Оттого что я терпкой печалью
Напоила его дольшина.

Как забуду? Он вышел, шатаясь,
Искрывился мучительно рот...
Я сбежала, перил не касаясь,
Я бежала за ним до ворот.
Akhmatova's persona has been described in terms of two types - the nun and the harlot (images which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3). For now, in terms of the 'harlot' persona, love for the hero does not generate lines of poetry or even coherent declarations of love. Rather, it emphasises the balance of power in the relationship and, often, the hero's superficial dominance over the persona. Similarly, language is ineffective in terms of Akhmatova's 'nun' persona. For example, in the following poem, Akhmatova's persona leads a life of spiritual contemplation which is manifestly silent:

Молюсь оконному лучу -
Он бледен, тонок, прям.
Сегодня я с утра молчу,
А сердце - пополам. (1909) (1,20)

In some early poems, even if the persona does manage to speak, she specifies that she speaks 'in vain':

Как велит простая учтивость,
Подошел ко мне, улыбнулся,
Полуласково, полулениво
Попелем руки коснулся -
И загадочных, древних ликов
На меня поглядили очи...
Десять лет замираний и криков,
Все мои бессонные ночи
Я вложила в тихое слово
И сказала его - напрасно.
Отошел ты, и стало снова
На душе и пусто и ясно. (1913) (1,50)

Задыхаясь, я крикнула: <<Шутка
Все, что было. Уйдешь, я умру>>.
Улыбнулся спокойно и жутко
И сказал мне: <<Не стой на ветру>>. (1911) (1,25)
Also, the persona's silence is often linked to her deteriorating physical health. In 'Ia napisala slova', for example, it is the act of self-expression itself that is to blame for the persona's weakened physical state. Writing or speaking requires tremendous physical effort:

Я написала слова,  
Что долго сказать не смела.  
Тупо болит голова,  
Странно немеет тело. (1910) (I, 33)

Finally, rather than emphasise the immortality of her work, in 'Umiraia, tomlius' o bessmerti', Akhmatova uses the image of her persona's voice being 'buried':

Смертный час, наклонясь, напоит  
Прозрачною сукемой.  
А люди придут, зероют  
Мое тело и голос мой. (1912) (I, 67)

As noted already, the early persona's silence is ironic considering the fact that Akhmatova not only became well known very quickly, but also was quite prolific. Furthermore, Akhmatova's persona ultimately develops into the voice of all Russia. For example, the inarticulate early persona who confronts her lover is far removed from that of the persona who ultimately emerges in Akhmatova's civic poetry - the matriarch of Leningrad and author of the famous war poem - 'Muzhestvo' - who rallies the people to preserve 'Russian speech' at all costs.³

³ Akhmatova's stature as the 'voice of Russia' prompted the literary critic (and husband of Ol'ga Berggolts) Georgii Makogonenko to ask Akhmatova to appear on a radio show in order to bolster the morale of the people of Leningrad during the early months of World War II. Though her work had been banned for years, her name still represented, to many
Also, a poem written in September 1922 anticipates the role which Akhmatova would
ultimately assume as the voice or embodiment of suffering women during the time of Terror
in the Soviet Union:

Я - голос ваш, жар вашего дыханья,
Я - отраженье вашего лица.
Напрасных крыл напрасны трепетанье, -
Ведь все равно я с вами до конца. (1922) (l, 170)

Despite these civic works, the theme of the persona's silence continues through much
of Akhmatova's later poetry. Of course, in her later poetry, the persona's silence has a
specific political element; during the height of Stalinism, Akhmatova was forced to be silent
to protect her son and those close to her. But in many poems, her silence is of a more
expressive nature. For example, Mary's silence in Rekviem is a profound statement about
circumstances too tragic for words

Магдалина билась и рыдала,
Ученик любимый каменел,
А туда, где молча Мать стояла,
Так никто взглянуть и не посмел.4

Russians, the essence of Russian literature and culture. Interestingly, Akhmatova spoke
from the point of view of an ordinary citizen and mother rather than as a celebrity poet
(see Roberta Reeder, Anna Akhmatova: Poet & Prophet, pp. 257-58).

4 Anna Akhmatova, Sochinenia, ed. G.P. Struve and B.A. Filippov, 3 vols, I, Munich,
1967, II, Munich, 1968, III, Paris, 1983, I, p. 368 (further references to Rekviem will be to
The silent Mary in *Rekviem* is a particularly profound image in that Akhmatova's persona's ability to 'describe' is highlighted in the beginning of the cycle in 'Vmesto predisloviia':

В страшные годы ежовщины я провела семнадцать месяцев в тюремных очередях в Ленинграде. Как-то раз кто-то <<опознал >>меня. Тогда стоящая за мной женщина с голубыми губами, которая, конечно, никогда не слыхала моего имени, очнулась от свойственного нам всем оцепенения и спросила меня на ухо (там все говорили шепотом):

- А это вы можете описать?
И я сказала:
- Могу.

Тогда что-то вроде улыбки скользнуло по тому, что некогда было ее лицом. (т, 361)

In other later poems, the persona's silence is not so much a dignified gesture as a reaction to an indifferent (or even tyrannical) hero. This persona who exerts power over the hero through 'silence' is of an entirely different character to the one described in such poems as *Rekviem*. Love for the hero does not inspire her to write lines of poetry or even speak, as in the following poem, 'Proshchal'naia', written in 1959:

Не смеялась и не плакала,
Целый день молчала,
А всего с тобой хотела
С самого начала:
Беззаботной первой ссоры,
Полной светлых бредней,
И безмолвной, чёрствой, скорой
Транезы последней. (1959) (т, 238)

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this edition and will be given in the text, citing volume and page number only).
The theme of silence which runs throughout Akhmatova's poetry is one manifestation of the role of a female persona in a literary culture which deemed female figures objects as opposed to creators. In adopting this theme, Akhmatova maintained the status quo in that her persona continued to exhibit traditional associations of silent, mysterious heroines who inspire others to action.
As discussed in the preceding chapters, from the outset of her poetic life Akhmatova was inevitably confronted with a dilemma: how to portray a female persona as a creative figure in a literary culture which demanded she remain a passive object of inspiration? She could not pursue transcendence through romantic love because, in theory, she represented the figure who serves as the vehicle for transcendence. In the terminology of Joseph Campbell, while the male hero experienced the 'call to adventure', Akhmatova's female persona could only serve as 'guide', representing the 'totality of what can be known'.

Rather than radically alter the Symbolist paradigm of femininity and inspiration, Akhmatova adapted to it. This chapter will consider three such adaptations, mainly from her earlier works. First, in a small number of poems, Akhmatova adopts a male persona, although the fact that she did not use this approach more often suggests that she did not consider this to be a viable long-term option. Further, the few poems in which she does use a male speaker are not as radical as might be supposed in that each poem still features a female character easily identifiable as Akhmatova's typical female persona, cold and indifferent to her male pursuer.

Secondly, Akhmatova occasionally develops her male hero into what might be described as a kind of 'eternal masculine' figure, uplifting her persona's romantic longings to a quasi-religious experience. Again, however, Akhmatova only used this strategy in a few instances and, in most cases, she emphasises that love of the hero only results in silence and

1 Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, p. 16.
Thirdly, although it was an image readily available to her, Akhmatova avoided experimenting with the image of poet as 'mother' to the poem. At the same time, Akhmatova portrays her persona as a bad mother to an individual child, perhaps due to her own personal, complicated experience of motherhood.

**Male Persona**

As noted earlier, Symbolism developed imagery which was manifestly incompatible with the image of the female poet - particularly in terms of the concept of the eternal feminine. One obvious way in which Akhmatova might have combatted this would be to adopt a male persona. This was, for example, a strategy adopted by Zinaida Gippius. Yet despite the fact that Akhmatova was not necessarily obliged to adopt a feminine persona and use feminine images, a feminine persona is a dominant feature of her verse. Akhmatova primarily wrote as a woman in the first person and identified with female figures from history and literature (though, interestingly, not with women poets on the whole): her poetry, by her own making, was overwhelmingly feminine. As Vasilii Gippius stressed,

Голос, запевший в стихах А. Ахматовой, выдает свою женскую душу.

Здесь все женское: зоркость глаза, любовная память о милых вещах, грация - тонкая и чуть капризная.2

2 Vasilii Gippius, 'Anna Akhmatova <<Vecher>>', in Desiatye gody, p. 80, p. 80.
In her Introduction to 'Boil'shaia ispoved', Akhmatova writes:

Позвольте скрыть мне все: мой пол и возраст,
Цвет кожи, веру, даже день рождения
И вообще все то, что можно скрыть.
А скрыть нельзя - отсутствие таланта
И кое-что еще, остальное ж
Скрывайте на здоровье. (undated) (I, 377)

This proclamation is interesting in that Akhmatova consistently blurs the distinction between her poetic persona and her own self. Akhmatova played on her literary celebrity and, in many poems, she deliberately evokes details from her personal appearance and life which the reader is likely to recognise.

Only in a scattering of poems does Akhmatova attempt to 'conceal her sex' by adopting a male persona and, in any case, these poems still feature a female character who is easily identified as Akhmatova's typical female persona. Still, in adopting a male speaker, Akhmatova circumnavigated the 'problem of perspective' mentioned earlier. Adopting a male persona was an obvious way of enabling Akhmatova to retain the paradigm of male poet and female object of inspiration.

One poem in which Akhmatova adopts a male persona is directly linked to a proponent of Symbolism - Innokentii Annenskii. As its title suggests, in 'Podrazhanie IF. Annenskomu', Akhmatova intended to 'imitate' the male poet. In it, her male speaker stresses his beloved's indifference to him:

И с тобой, моей первой причудой,
Я простился. Восток голубел.
Просто молвила: <<Я не забуду>>.
Я не сразу поверил тебе.

36
Annenskii adopted a relatively flexible approach to Symbolist ideas - especially in terms of the eternal feminine. With this in mind, Akhmatova may have felt more at liberty to depict a flawed romance in the poem imitating his style. This is supported, for example, by Catriona Kelly's assertion that Akhmatova intended the poem to be read, not so much as a direct imitation of Annenskii, but as a kind of manifesto as to how Annenskii should be read.³

In a later poem dedicated to Georgii Ivanov - 'Bisernym pocherkom pishete, Lise,'

- Akhmatova portrays the romantic relationship in far more idealised terms:

³ There are two strains of thought regarding 'Podrazhanie I.F. Annenskomu'. On the one hand, Catriona Kelly maintains that the poem, '...distinguishes itself most precisely from Annenskii's poetic practice'. She argues that the poem represents Akhmatova's statement towards Symbolism generally (Catriona Kelly, 'The Impossibility of Imitation: Anna Akhmatova and Innokentii Annenskii', p. 243). On the other hand, Sonia Ketchian considers that the poem, '...selects as building blocks, that is as material, compatible themes, motifs and imagery from Annenskii's poems to craft a new pseudo-Annenskian edifice hardly distinguishable from his own' (Sonia Ketchian, The Poetry of Anna Akhmatova: A Conquest of Time and Space, Munich, 1986, p. 122).
Although Ivanov was not, himself, a Symbolist, the poem dedicated to him follows the Symbolist paradigm of female object of inspiration - complete with doves and garlands. The female character assumes the qualities of the sun and the male speaker contemplates bowing before her, though he adds (perhaps ironically) that if he does, she will never forgive him.

The poem dedicated to Ivanov offers a straightforward means of adopting the paradigm of male artist/female object; it simply adopts the structure and plugs in a male speaker. Yet the other poems in which Akhmatova adopts a male speaker more closely resemble the poem dedicated to Annenskii in that they stress the beloved's indifference to the male speaker. In the following poem, for example, the male speaker is not inspired or overwhelmed by his beloved. Rather, his meeting with her confirms the end of the relationship:

На столике чай, печения слобные,
В серебряной вазочке драже.
Подобрала ноги, села удобнее,
Равнодушно спросила: <<Уже?>>
Протянула руку. Мои губы дрогнулись
До холодных гладких колец.

38
Similarly, the speaker in the poem 'Shelestit o proshlom staryi dub' has been silent for years and his fingers chill and tremble at the memory of her hands:

Шелестит о прошлом старый дуб,
Лунный луч лениво проникся.
Я твоих благословенных губ
Никогда мечтою не коснулся.

Бледный лоб чадрой лиловой сжат,
Ты со мною. Тихая, больная.
Пальцы холодеют и дрожат,
Тонкость рук твоих припомнина.

Я молчал так много тяжких лет.
Пытка встреч еще неотвратима.
Как давно я знаю твой ответ:
Я люблю и не была любима. (February 1911) (t, 344)

Akhmatova did not explore the option of adopting an androgynous persona. This approach was, for example, readily adopted by Marina Tsvetaeva, allowing her to overcome the more confining stereotypes a female persona might otherwise evoke. The fact that Akhmatova did not attempt this approach is in keeping with her overall tendency to adhere to tradition as opposed to radically revising the image of a Russian heroine; while Akhmatova's early heroine is in keeping with the reading public's expectations, her later heroine is imbued with archetypal 'female' authority. By contrast, as Anya Kroth notes, for Tsvetaeva to have chosen a male or female persona, 'would have meant acceptance of the

\[^{4}\text{On this subject see, for example, Antonia Filonov Gove, 'The Feminine Stereotype and Beyond: Role Conflict and Resolution in the Poetics of Marina Tsvetaeva', \textit{Slavic Review}, 36, 1977, pp. 231-55.}\]
division and duality of sex and would have been inconsistent with the poet's world view'.

Thus, to a limited extent, Akhmatova experimented with adopting a male speaker in her early period. Although she eventually abandoned this approach entirely, the fact that she applied it at all suggests an awareness that adopting a female persona presented certain limitations in the prevalent literary culture.

The Eternal Masculine

Another strategy which Akhmatova might have employed to counter the limitations of adopting a female persona would have been simply to reverse the scheme and depict a kind of 'eternal masculine'. V.N. Nedobrovo, for example, attempted to reconcile Akhmatova's unhappy heroine with the concept of the 'eternal feminine' in this way:

Аподклоновано томление во напечатлено в недрах личности сливается с женственным томлением по вечному женственному - и в лучах великой любви является человек в поэзии Ахматовой. Мукой живой души платит она его возвеличение.  

It is questionable as to whether or not Akhmatova ever explicitly adopted this strategy. With the exception of U samogo moria (discussed in detail below), at most this approach might be indirectly traced in a limited number of poems from her early period in the sense of a male hero who inspires the persona to write.

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stakana', for example, the hero's voice 'sings' in her poetry and vice versa:

Не будем пить из одного стакана
Ни воду мы, ни сладкое вино,
Не поползуемся мы утром рано,
А ввечеру не поглядим в окно.
Ты дышишь солнцем, я дышу луной,
Но живы мы любовию одною.

Со мной всегда мой верный, нежный друг,
С тобой твоя веселая подруга.
Но мне понятен серых глаз испуг,
И ты виновник моего недуга.
Коротких мы не уважаем встреч.
Так наш покой нам суждено беречь.

Лишь голос твой пост в моих стихах,
В твоих стихах моё дыханье вест.
О, есть костер, которого не смеет
Коснуться ни забвение ни страх,
И если б знал ты, как сейчас мне любь
Твои сухие, розовые губы! (1913) (1, 56)

Also, in 'Tvoi belyi dom i tikhii sad ostavliu', the hero is no longer the persona's beloved, though their relationship will fuel her poetry in future:

Твой белый дом и тихий сад оставлю.
Да будет жизнь пустыня и светла.
Тебя, тебя в моих стихах прославлю,
Как женщина прославить не могла.
И ты подругу помнишь дорогую
В тобою созданном для глаз ее раю,
А я товаром редкостным торгую -
Твою любовь и нежность продаю. (1913) (1, 77)

Much later, in the second poem of the cycle 'Cinque', both male and female figures assume an aura of other-worldliness; the 'night dialogue' between the persona and hero is 'transformed' into the 'light brilliance of crossed rainbows':

41
The title of Wendy Rosslyn’s book, *The prince, the fool and the nunnery* is taken from one of Akhmatova’s poems in which a Hamlet-hero informs the Ophelia-persona of her options:

У кладбища направо пылил пустырь,
А за ним голубела река.
Ты сказал мне: <“Ну что ж, иди в монастырь
Или замуж за дурака...”>
Принцы только такое всегда говорят,
Но я эту запомнила речь,
Пусть струится она сто веков подряд
Горностаевой мантией с плеч. (1909) (l. 21)

According to Rosslyn, these options are emblematic of the options available to Akhmatova’s early poetic persona in general:

The heroine can persist in her search for an ideal relationship of human love, though in the awareness that the ideal has already been refused her: that is to say, she can marry, but her husband must be a fool, and not a prince. Or she can abandon her search and, withdrawing from human intimacy because it is inevitably flawed, seek a relationship with God instead: that is to say, she can get thee to a nunnery.7

Akhmatova’s persona is famous for this tendency to blur the search for a human relationship with a relationship with God (this will be considered below). In a sense, this blurring could be described as the foundation of a kind of eternal masculine in that love for a hero is uplifted

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7 Wendy Rosslyn, *The prince, the fool and the nunnery*, p. 31.
into religious devotion.

The 'double image of the heroine' is particularly prominent in terms of Akhmatova's collections as a whole, as her persona often changes character from poem to poem. However, the tendency to mix 'prayer' with 'sin' is evident in many individual poems as well, such as *Usamogo moria* (1914). This poem comes closest in Akhmatova to the depiction of an 'eternal masculine' in that the idealised hero is explicitly linked with Christ.

The poem begins with the heroine sitting, siren-like, on a rock a mile from land. The siren image is reinforced by a gypsy woman who tells her that she will someday 'lure' the tsarevich, not with her beauty, nor with love, but with her 'one song'. As well as a classical image, the siren is an important feminine image in Russian folklore. A variation on the *rusalka*, she lures men to their deaths with her song. The image of the persona as a siren foreshadows the events that will take place later in the poem; she will lure the tsarevich to her shores, killing him in the process.

The young persona's limited knowledge of the outside world comes from her friendship with the local fishermen:

Я с рыбаками дружбу водила.  
Под опрокинутой лодкой часто  
Во время ливня с ними сидела,  
Про море слушала, запомниала,  
Каждому слову тайно веря.  
И очень ко мне рыбаки привыкли.  
Если меня на пристани нету,  
Старший за мной слал девочку,  
И та кричала: <<Наши вернулись!  
Нынче мы камбалу жарить будетем>>. (I, 263)

This scene is far less sexual in tone than an earlier poem on the same subject - 'Rybak':

43
Yet, a menacing kind of sexuality lingers in *Usamogo moria* in the form of the 'clever tramp' from whom the persona buries her 'yellow dress' so he will not steal it while she swims.

The persona possesses a sensitivity to nature: a green fish swims up to her and a gull flies to her. She also has the ability to 'divine water' and is considered to bring good luck by those in her community. In isolation, these abilities may seem arbitrary. However, when considered against a background of the kinds of issues discussed earlier, a common theme emerges: this persona, in many respects, is a traditional Symbolist heroine, an earthly link with realms beyond the comprehension of ordinary men.

However, as might be expected, Akhmatova's persona is far more complicated than
the one-dimensional figure of a Symbolist heroine. For one thing, she is ambitious in that she dreams of becoming tsaritsa. She even rejects the love of a grey-eyed boy because he cannot help her achieve this aim:

... «Что же -
Он ответил, - тогда мне делать,
Если так я в тебя влюбился>>,.
И мне стало обидно: «Глупый!-
Я спросила. - Что ты - царевич?>>
Это был сероглазый мальчик,
На погоде меня моложе.
<<Я хочу на тебе жениться, -
Он сказал, - скоро стану взрослым
И поеду с тобой на север...>>
Заплакал высокий мальчик,
Оттого что я не хотела
Ни роз, ни ехать на север.

Плохо я его утешала:
<<Подумай, я буду царицей,
На что мне такого мужа?>>
<<Ну, тогда я стану монахом, -
Он сказал, - у вас в Херсонес>>.
<<Нет, не надо лучше: монахи
Только делают, что умирают.
Как придешь - одного хоронят,
А другие, знаешь, не плачут>>. (I, 263-64)

The persona is not content simply to inspire others to action, she wishes to alter events, to have an impact upon the course of history. This is, in part, compounded by her knowledge that her country is at war:

Я собирала французские пули,
Как собирают грибы и чернику,
И приносила домой в подоле
Осколки ржавые бомб тяжелых. (I, 262)

As she tells her sister:
The persona's prayer in autumn anticipates the kind of ruler she intends to become:

<<Боже, мы мудро царствовать будем,
Строить над морем большие церкви
И маяки высокие строить.
Будем беречь мы воду и землю,
Мы никого обижать не станем.>> (I, 265)

At the same time, the persona's prayers are also inclined to revolve around much more personal concerns:

А вечером перед кроватью
Молилась темной иконке,
Чтоб град не побил черешен,
Чтоб крупная рыба ловилась
И чтобы хитрый бродяга
Не заметил желтого платья. (I, 262-63)

In typical Akhmatova fashion, the persona's more civic ambitions are inextricably linked to her own private world.

The poem ends at Easter with the persona at the edge of the sea, anticipating the tsarevich's arrival. She sings her song, only to see an old man in the distance carrying the dying tsarevich. She recites a prayer she has known since childhood, but the tsarevich dies calling out to her.

One of the most interesting features of this poem is its unusual choice of settings. Given the cast of characters, the more obvious story would be that of the tsarevich. An Odysseus figure, the poem would recount the trials and tribulations he endures in order to
return to the youthful heroine. Instead, Akhmatova chose the sheltered, almost exclusively female world of the persona and her sister, Lena. In this respect, Akhmatova's side of the story is that which is traditionally overlooked or misrepresented (an approach which will be considered in Chapter 6 on Akhmatova's doubles).

As we shall see in Chapter 6, Lena is associated with the Mother of God. The shroud she embroiders features a scene from the Crucifixion and foreshadows the death of the tsarevich. Lena weeps for the tsarevich and, like Mary in Rekviem, falls silent upon news of his death. Lena is the Christian counterpart to Akhmatova's pagan persona. Further, as Wendy Rosslyn observes, the dates of the tsarevich's movements suggest a parallel with Christ:

Like Jesus going to Jerusalem, Palm Sunday finds the tsarevich already on his journey. And before Easter Day both are dead. The death of each is followed by a miracle, and the shroud of Christ which Lena is making stands as an omen of the death of the tsarevich. Both Jesus and the tsarevich are bridegrooms.8

Thus, the association of the tsarevich with Christ effectively uplifts the persona's romantic yearnings to a religious awakening. The tsarevich represents a kind of 'divine masculine' for whom the persona may devote her 'singular song'. The profane nature of this song is suggested by the persona's question to Lena about its source:

<<Леночка, - я сестре сказала, -
Я ухожу сейчас на берег.
Если царевич за мной придет,
Ты объясни ему дорогу.
Пусть он меня в степи нагонит:
Хочется на море мне сегодня>>.
<<Где же ты песенку услыхала, -
Ту, что царевича приманил? -

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8 Wendy Rosslyn, The prince, the fool and the nunnery, p. 114.
The two sisters also represent the extremes of Akhmatova's varied youth. On the one hand, Akhmatova characterises her time spent as a young girl in Khersones as follows:

This contrasted with her life in Tsarskoe Selo:

The two sisters embody the famous characterisation of the persona as 'half-harlot, half-nun'.

At the same time, however, they represent a split in Akhmatova's approach, not only to the role of her poetic persona, but also to her own role as a female poet. On the one hand, she could assume a more active, ambitious role, using her song to lure the tsarevich. On the other hand, she could emulate Mary and assume a more passive and humble role of weeping for the fallen. At least when writing *U samogo moria*, Akhmatova seems to have advocated


10 Anna Akhmatova, 'Dikaia devochka', p. 244.
the latter in the poem's ambiguous ending:

В сумерки я домой вернулась.
В комнате темной было тихо,
И над лампадкой стоял высокий,
Узкий малиновый огонечек.
<<Не приходил за тобой царевич, -
Лена сказала, шаги услышав,-
Я привела его до вечерни
И посылала детей на пристань>>.
<<Он никогда не придет за мною,
Он никогда не вернется, Лена.
Умер сегодня мой царевич>>.
Долго и часто сестра крестилась;
Вся повернувшись к стене, молчала.
Я догадалась, что Лена плачет.

Слышала я - над царевичем пели:
<<Христос воскресе из мертвых>>, -
И несказанным светом сияла
Круглая церковь. (I, 268)

A remarkably similar poem - 'Ty pover', ne zmeinoe ostroe zhalo' - also deals with
the persona's powerlessness to cast spells that will make the tsarevich dream of her at night:

Ты поверь, не змеиное остroe жало,
А тоска мою выпила кровь.
В белом поле я тихою девушкой стала,
Pтичьим голосом кличу любовь.

И давно мне закрыта дорога иная,
Мой царевич в высоком кремле.
Оману ли его, оману ли? - Не знаю!
Только ложью живу на земле.

Не забыть, как пришел он со мною проститься.
Я не плакала: это судьба.
Ворожу, чтоб царевичу ночью присниться,
Но бессильна моя ворожба.

Оттого ль его сон безмятежен и мирен,
Что я здесь у закрытых ворот,
In this poem, the image of the Siren is made explicit. Again, the theme of the persona's silence appears - in the 'white field' the persona becomes a 'quiet' girl. Self-expression becomes possible when linked with nature in that she cries out for love with the 'voice of a little bird'.

As noted above, the two sisters represent what Boris Eikhenbaum first described as the 'double image of the heroine' as 'half "harlot" burning with passion, half-"nun" able to pray to God for his forgiveness'. One interesting issue in connection with this characterisation is whether either role complements the persona as a poet figure. There are many examples of the persona assuming both roles - as a so-called 'harlot', using her song to attract the hero, and as a 'nun', devoting her gifts to a quiet spiritual existence. In some poems, Akhmatova's persona is preoccupied with passion or the 'torment' of romantic love. In 'Pokorno mne voobrazhen'e', for example, the persona remembers the hero 'bitterly':

11 Boris Eikhenbaum, Anna Akhmatova: Opyt analiza, Paris, 1980, p. 7. One of Akhmatova's biographers, Roberta Reeder, however, questions this characterisation:

Surely Eikhenbaum should have understood the difference between the normal passion of a woman who felt life deeply, and the decadent eroticism more typical of the Symbolists, such as Gippius. As the artist Yury Annenkov says of this characterisation of Akhmatova's poems, "Erotic motives - I have never felt them in the poetry of Akhmatova. Love - yes. About love she has written a lot. But Pushkin also wrote a lot about love." (Roberta Reeder, Anna Akhmatova: Poet & Prophet, p. 169)

For example, in the poem 'Gost' the male figure asks the persona:

<<Расскажи, как тебя целуют,
Расскажи, как целуется ты.>> (1 January 1914) (I, 74-75)
Покорно мне воображенье
В изображенье серых глаз.
В моем тверском уединенье
Я горько вспоминаю вас.

Прекрасных рук счастливый пленник
На левом берегу Невы,
Мой знаменитый современник,
Случилось, как хотели вы,

Вы, приказавший мне: довольно,
Поди, убей свою любовь!
И вот я таю, я безвольна,
Но все сильней скучет кровь.

И если я умру, то кто ж
Мои стихи напишет вам,
Кто стать звенищим поможет
Еще не сказанным словам? (1913) (t. 54)

This is one of the few poems in which the persona explicitly mentions writing poems to the hero. Her will to live is driven by the fear that there will be no one to take her place. Also, in 'Ty pis'mo moe, milyi, ne komkai', the persona asks the hero to read her letter to the end:

Ты письмо мое, милый, не комкай.
До конца его, друг, прочти.
Надосло мне быть незнакомкой,
Быть чужой на твоем пути.

Не гляди так, не хмурься гневно.
Я любимая, я твоя.
Не пастушка, не королева
И уже не монашенка я -

В этом сером, будничном платье,
На стоптанных каблуках...
Но, как прежде, жгуче обятье,
Тот же страх в огромных глазах.
Though designation of the persona of these last two poems as a 'harlot' may be extreme, they certainly differ in tone from what might be characterised as Akhmatova's 'nun' poems in which her persona aspires to a peaceful, spiritual life, if only through her death. In a very early poem (1909), 'Molius' okonnomo luchu', for example, her washstand is transformed into a 'golden celebration' by a sunbeam:

Молюсь оконному лучу -
Он бледен, тонок, прям.
Сегодня я с утра молчу,
А сердце - пополам.
На рукомойнике моем
Позеленела медь.
Но так играет луч на нем,
Что весело глядеть.
Такой невинный и простой
В вечерней тишине,
Но в этой храмине пустой
Он словно праздник золотой
И утешенье мне. (1909) (I, 20)

Again, Akhmatova emphasises that the persona has been 'silent' since morning. It is a force from nature - in this case, a sunbeam (perhaps suggestive of the Light of God) - that transforms her environment, not the persona's own words. Also, in 'Ia nauchilas' prosto, mudro zhit", the persona deals with her 'useless anxiety' by living 'simply and wisely':

Я научилась просто, мудро жить,
Смотреть на небо и молиться богу,
И долго перед вечером бродить,
Чтоб утомить ненужную тревогу.
Когда шуршат в овраге лопухи
И никнет грозь яглыи желто-красной,
Славаю я веселые стихи
О жизни тленной, тленной и прекрасной.

Я возвращаюсь. Лежит мне ладонь
Пушестый кот, мурлыкает умилень,
И яркий загорается огонь
На башенке озерной лесоньки.

Лишь изредка прорезывает тишь
Крик аиста, слетевшего на крышу.
И если в дверь мою ты постучишь,
Мне кажется, я даже не услышу. (1912) (I, 61-62)

Akhmatova may be suggesting, however, that such a lifestyle is not conducive to generating interesting poetry as she composes 'happy poems about mortal life...'.

In still other poems, the two dynamics merge; Akhmatova blends the sacred and profane to dramatic effect, as illustrated in 'Ispoved':

Умолк простивший мне грехи.
Лиловый сумрак гасит свечи,
И темная спирахиль
Накрыла голову и плечи.

Не тот ли голос: <<Дева! встань...>>
Удары сердца чаще, чаще.
Прикосновение сквозь ткань
Руки, рассеянно крестящей. (1911) (I, 68)

Although some early poems bear traces of what can be described as a kind of eternal masculine, on its own this approach was insufficient to overcome the barriers which Symbolism and Acmeism presented in terms of portraying a female figure as a creative poet and Akhmatova largely abandoned this approach later in life. Perhaps one explanation for this is that, whatever role the male hero assumes, Akhmatova's female persona continues to evoke associations with inspiration as opposed to creativity. As she says in one poem:
Сказал, что у меня соперниц нет. 
Я для него не женщина земная. (I, 138)

Mother to the Poem

The Acmeists were particularly prone to adopting the cliché of 'giving birth to poetry'. In 'Zhizn' stikha', for example, Gumilev describes the creation of individual poems as follows:

Происхождение отдельных стихотворений таинственно схоже с происхождением живых организмов. Дума поэта получает толчок из внешнего мира, иногда в незабываемо-яркий миг, иногда смутно, как зачатье во сне, и долго приходится вынашивать зародыш будущего творения, прислушиваясь к робким движениям еще неокрепшей новой жизни. Все действует на ход ее развития - и косой луч луны, и внезапно услышанная мелодия, и прочитанная книга, и запах цветка. Все определяет ее будущую судьбу. Древние уважали молчающего поэта, как уважают женщину, готовящуюся стать матерью.

Гумилев does not dwell on the moment of conception - the 'shock from the external world' - but rather, on the poet nurturing the foetal poem, responsible for its early development.

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13 Catriona Kelly identifies the minor prose writer, N.N. Verevkin, as making, '...the first attempt to invoke scientific or pseudo-scientific material in order to link women's psychology with their physiology' (Catriona Kelly, A History of Russian Women's Writing, p. 42).

Interestingly, he notes that it is the 'silent' poet whom the ancients respected.

Gumilev's feminine image of the act of poetic creation has to do with the poem's mysterious early development which the poet cannot control or comprehend. For the poet to tamper with this critical maternal phase is to commit the Symbolist error of attempting to know the unknowable.

Osip Mandel'shtam also uses reproduction as a metaphor for memory and the composition of poetry. In one passage, he describes memory as a process similar to biological growth:

Все мы, сами о том не подозревая, являемся носителями громадного эмбриологического опыта: ведь процесс припоминания, увенчанный победой усилия памяти, удивительно схож с феноменом роста. И здесь и там - росток, зачаток, - черточка лица или полухарактера, полузвук, окончание имени, что-то грубое или нежное, сладкая горошина на языке, - развивается не из себя, но лишь отвечает на приглашение, лишь вытягивается навстречу, оправдывая ожидание.\(^{15}\)

This image of the poet as mother-in-waiting is, at least, a positive image of a woman as a poet. However, Akhmatova does not exploit this image, though in one poem she mysteriously remarks:

Я стихам не матерью -
Мачехой была. (I, 237).

In 'Poslednee stikhotvorenie' (the sixth poem contained in the cycle 'Tainy remesla'), Akhmatova falls short of explicitly portraying her persona as a mother-in-waiting, though

she does emphasise the unique physical qualities of each of the poems that manifests itself
to her, or the circumstances of the poems' genesis:

Одно, словно кем-то встревоженный гром,
С дыханием жизни врывается в дом,
Смеется, у горла трепещет,
И кружится, и рукоплещет.

Другое, в полной тишине,
Не знаю откуда крадется ко мне,
Из зеркала смотрит пустого
И что-то бормочет сурово.

И есть и такие: среди белого дня,
Как будто почти что не видя меня,
Струятся по белой бумаге,
Как чистый источник в овраге.

А вот еще: тайное бродит вокруг -
Не звук и не цвет, не цвет и не звук,-
Гранится, меняется, вьется,
А в руки живым не даешь.

Но это!..по капельке выпило кровь,
Как в юности злая девчонка - любовь,
И, мне не сказавши ни слова,
Безмолвством сделалось снова.

И я не знал я жесточе беды.
Ушло, и его протянулись следы
К какому-то крайнему краю,
А я без него...умираю. (1936-60) (I.192-93)

In the second stanza, for example, the persona specifies that the poem is 'born in midnight silence', while others are born during the day. In the fourth stanza, the poem slips through her hands alive and, in the final stanza, the personified poem, after drinking her blood 'drop by drop', falls silent and abandons her, leaving footprints to the 'very edge of the edge'.

Whereas the persona is not depicted as 'mother' to the poem, she is sometimes
portrayed as mother to a child or even a matriarchal figure for all of Russia. Marina Tsvetaeva alludes to this in her portrayal of Akhmatova and her son Lev in the following poem:

Имя ребенка - Лев,
Матери - Анна.
В имени его - гнев,
В материнском - тишь.
Волосом он рыж
- Голова тюльпана! -
Что ж, осанна
Маленькому царю.16

The theme of Mary as one of Akhmatova's most important 'doubles' will be considered in Chapter 6. For now, it is interesting to note that Akhmatova's persona is more successful as a universal mother than as mother to her own child. Just as she chastises her persona for her failings in romantic relationships, Akhmatova's persona blames herself for her failings to embody the high maternal ideals to which she aspires, as in the following poem:

<<Где, высокая, твой цыганенок,
Тот, что шлацал под черным платком,
Где твой маленький первый ребенок,
Что ты знаешь, что помнишь о нем?>>

<<Доля матери - светлая пытка,
Я достойна ее не была.
В белый рай растворилась калитка,
Магдалина сыночка взяла.

Каждый день мой - веселый, хороший,
Заблудилась я в длинной весне,
Только руки тоскуют по ное,
Только плач его слышу во сне.

In 'Mne ne nado schast'ia malogo', the persona prays to the Mother of God to be a good mother:

Мне не надо счастья малого,
Мужа к милой провожу
И довольного, усталого,
Спать ребенка уложу.

Снова мне в прохладной горнице
Богородицу молить...
Трудно, трудно жить затворницей,
Да трудней веселой быть.

Только б сон приснился пламенный,
Как войду в нагорный храм,
Пятиглавый, белый, каменный,
По запомненным тропам. (1914) (1, 121)

Wendy Rosslyn notes of this poem:

...the heroine is willing to sacrifice family happiness, doubtless all the more so because it is of little value to her. family life depresses her, imprisoning her spirit. Her willingness to give it up does not represent a step on her religious path, for she does not move along that path, she only dreams of doing so. Religion is for her a way of escaping from life's difficulties, rather than a means of dealing with them.¹⁷

The poem is, perhaps, more ambiguous than this quote suggests. In any case, however, the persona is not portrayed as a bad mother as her child is 'content'.

The persona's guilt over her abilities as mother are almost certainly rooted in the complex relationship Akhmatova had with her own son, Lev Gumilev. It is commonly held

¹⁷ Wendy Rosslyn, *The prince, the fool and the nunnery*, p. 144.
that Akhmatova 'gave up' her son to be raised in Bezhetsk by his paternal grandmother when she and Gumilev broke up. Though the background to this decision is unclear, the usual explanation is that Akhmatova found life as a mother incompatible with life as a poet. In her memoir, one of Akhmatova's childhood friends, Valerieia Sreznevskiaia, describes Akhmatova as an 'imperious mother'. According to Sreznevskiaia:

Рождение сына очень связало Анну Ахматову. Она первое время сама кормила сына и прочно обосновалась в Царском.

Не думаю, что тогда водились чудаки-отцы, катающие колясочку с сыном, - для этого были опытные няни. И Коля был как все отцы, навещал своего сына всякий раз, когда это было возможно, и конечно, был не хуже, если не лучше многих образцов отцов. Разве все эти нити не могут называться любовью? Роли отцов и матерей так различны, особенно в первые годы ребенка. Понемногу и Аня освобождалась от роли матери в том понимании, которое сопряжено с уходом и заботами о ребенке: там были бабушка и няня. И она вошла в обычную жизнь литературной богемы. ¹⁸

Pavel Luknitskii, however, rejects the notion that Akhmatova was relieved to give up her son. In his diary of his encounters with Akhmatova, he writes that she was coerced by Gumilev's mother and aunt into giving up her son:

Когда Лева родился, бабушка и тетка забрали его к себе на том основании, что <<ты, Анечка, молодая, красивая, куда тебе ребенок?>> АА силилась протестовать, но это было бесполезным, потому что Николай Степанович был на стороне бабушки и Сверчковой. Потом взяли к себе в Бежецк - отобрали ребенка. А.А. сделала все, чтобы этого не случилось... ¹⁹

Amanda Haight also gives a brief synopsis of this event in Akhmatova's life:

Her marriage to Gumilyov was no cure for loneliness. Akhmatova seemed, until much later in life, incapable of the simple acts of love which make it possible to live with another person. She and Gumilyov, who was in many ways like her, did not

¹⁸ Valerieia Sreznevskiaia, 'Dafnis i Khloia', in Ob Anne Akhmatovoi, pp. 15-25, p. 23.
¹⁹ P.N. Luknitskii, 'Iz dnevnikov', in Ob Anne Akhmatovoi, pp. 128-69, p. 136.
know why they were living in the same house, or what to do with their child. Recognizing this inadequacy, Akhmatova left her child to be brought up by her husband's mother, who had little affection for her daughter-in-law; thus in effect she 'lost' her son.²⁰

Akhmatova's relationship with her son later in life was, evidently, complicated. At sixteen, Lev Gumilev eventually came to live with Akhmatova when she was living with Nikolai Punin at Fontannyi Dom. He attended school through the help of Punin's brother and went on to study History at Leningrad University. He was arrested twice - once on 1 December 1934 on the day of Kirov's assassination (he was released almost immediately) and again on 10 March 1937, the same year in which Osip Mandel'shtam was arrested for the last time. Lev Gumilev was imprisoned in Leningrad for seventeen months. His death sentence was eventually commuted to exile, and he spent seven years in the same prison camp where Punin died. He was arrested again on 6 November 1949, an event which Akhmatova blamed on her famous meeting with Isaiah Berlin in 1945 and the fact of his parents' fame generally.²¹

Her cycle of poems 'Slava miru' in which she praises Stalin were offerings to save her son's life, representing, according to Amanda Haight,

...a sacrifice she had not been allowed to make before, when as a young woman she had tried to give up being a poet for the sake of a more 'normal' existence as a woman. In doing this now she proved that she had come the whole way, not only as a poet but as a woman. It is a measure of a person's greatness if having sacrificed all to be true to one thing, he can give that up if it should be necessary. Akhmatova could write praise of Stalin and it became not a sad thing - proof of a proud poet brought finally to heel - but a joke on the very times themselves when a handful of bad poems by someone who had written the poems of 'Requiem' could actually result in saving someone's life. But that it was a sacrifice there is no doubt and for

²⁰ Amanda Haight, A Poetic Pilgrimage, pp. 28-29.

²¹ Amanda Haight, A Poetic Pilgrimage, p. 159.
The loss of a child is a recurring theme in Akhmatova's poetry. In her earlier poetry, however, the circumstances behind the loss of the persona's child vary. For example, in some poems, the persona does not abandon her child, but loses him through neglect or through the interference of others. In the poem cited above, 'Gde, vysokaia, tvoi tsyganenok', the persona admits that she is not worthy of the 'bright torture' of motherhood. The heavens intervene, the gates of white paradise open, and Magdalene takes away her son. Amanda Haight notes that the fact that the persona 'is willing to include her child in the sacrificial offering underlines once more her failure as a mother'. But the poem emphasises that the child is 'taken' rather than sacrificed. Rather than question the justice of her loss, the persona seems resigned to the explanation that she is not 'worthy' of a mother's fate.

This poem contrasts the persona and Magdalene as guardians for the child. The casting of Mary Magdalene as intercessor may suggest the persona's failure as a mother is related to her own love life. Images of lightness and darkness emphasise the contrast between the two women; whereas Magdalene resides in 'white paradise', the persona wanders through 'dark rooms'. Although the persona describes motherhood as 'bright torture', she carries her crying child under a 'black' shawl. The setting of the poem during a 'long springtime' evokes, on the one hand, an atmosphere of light and fertility; on the other


hand, Spring often signifies Akhmatova's fear of tuberculosis.  

In 'Budu tikho na pogoste', the persona describes the scene when her child visits her grave:

Буду тихо на могосте
Под доской дубовой спать,
Будешь, милый, к маме в гости
В воскресенье прибегать -
Через речку и по горке,
Так что взрослым не догнать,
Издалека, мальчик зоркий,
Будешь крест мой узнавать.
Знаю, милый, можешь мало
Обо мне припоминать:
Не бранила, не ласкала,
Не водила причащать. (1915) (t, 107)

Though her 'sharp-sighted' son will recognize his mother's cross, he will not remember much about the mother herself. The persona confesses to her son of all the duties she did not do in her lifetime, maintaining the theme of the persona as a bad mother. In this poem, however, she specifies that her child will run up to her grave so that 'the adults will not catch up', perhaps suggesting that others have previously interfered and prevented him from visiting or being alone with his mother.

In contrast, in 'Zabolet' by kak sleduet, v zhguchem bredu', the child is led to the persona by someone only identified as 'ty'. Here, as in the previous poem, the persona describes a future event:

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Заболеть бы как следует, в жгучем бреду
Повстречаться со всеми опять,
В полном ветре и солнца приморском саду
По широким аллеям гулять.

Даже мертвые нынче согласны прийти,
И изгнанники в доме моем.
Ты ребенка за ручку ко мне приведи,
Так давно я скукаю о нем.

Буду с милыми есть голубой виноград,
Буду пить ледяное вино
И глядеть, как струится седой водопад
На кремнистое влажное дно. (1922) (t. 145)

Again, the child seems to be in the care of others. Though the persona has 'longed' for him, only now, in a delirious vision, is she reunited with her child. It is unclear whether the child is alive or, like the others, dead or exiled.

In these poems, the persona's role as a mother is passive. In 'Gde, vysokaia, tvoi tsyganenok', Mary Magdalene intervenes and 'takes' her child away. In the other poems, the child is in the care of others. The persona admits to being a failure as a mother, though she describes this failure as if she, herself, is not directly responsible. In 'Gde, vysokaia, tvoi tsyganenok', she vaguely remarks that she is not worthy of the 'bright torture' of a mother's fate. In 'Budu tikho na pogoste', she seems confident that the child is too young to resent her for all the things she did not do for him. In all three poems, the persona accepts that others are her child's proper guardians.

In 'Molitva', the persona is willing to sacrifice her son (and lover and poetic gift) for the sake of Russia:
Like Abraham who was willing to sacrifice his son as a gesture of faith, Akhmatova's persona declares her willingness to sacrifice on behalf of Russia.

In 'Zemnoi otradoi serdtsa ne tomi', the persona apparently speaks to a man:

Земной отрадой сердца не томи,
Не пристрашайся ни к жене, ни к дому,
У своего ребенка хлеб возьми,
Чтобы отдать его нежному.

И будь слугой смиреннейшим того,
Кто был твоим кромешным супостатом,
И назови лесного зверя братом,
И не проси у бога ничего. (1921) (I, 138)

Part of the Christian ethic she espouses is to deny not only herself, but her own child as an act of charity.

Although Akhmatova never explicitly adopted the image of 'giving birth to poetry', this image could nonetheless be regarded as the basis for more subtle and sophisticated themes. For example, the image complements her association with the Mother of God. For now, however, it is interesting to note that although Akhmatova was reluctant to portray her persona as a competent mother, she boldly linked her persona with Mary - most notably in Rekviem. This 'double' suited her as a poet in that the ultimate extension of the image of 'mother to the poem' is the poet as vessel for the Word of God.

As a side note, in a few poems, Akhmatova evokes associations with the pagan
precursor of the Mother of God - the cult of Mother Earth (mat' syra zemlia ). In this
tradition, as Joanna Hubbs explains,

...all things are borne by the earth and derive from her fertility. The soil is the great
baba...the giant Matrioshka who enfolds the historical Mother Russia. The soil is
sacred: the peasants implore "Moist Mother Earth" for aid in their lives.25

Traces of such pagan associations can be found in several of Akhmatova's poems, though
primarily in her later works. In one of her later poems, for example, she evokes a kind of
primitive fertility rite, pressing her body onto the earth and drawing from it a 'mysterious
strength':

Вот она, плодоносящая осень!
Pоздновато ее привели.
А пятнадцать блажнейших весен
Я поднясь не смела с земли.
Я так близко ее разглядела,
К ней припала, ее обняла,
А она в обреченное тело
Сильно тайную тайно лила. (1962) (1, 227)

Thus, Akhmatova only adopted a male speaker in a limited number of poems. She
rarely depicted what might be described as a kind of 'eternal masculine'. She also rejected
the positive image of the persona as 'mother' to the poem as well as emphasised her persona's
failings as mother to an individual child. The following chapter will, however, discuss some
of the more subtle associations with women and creativity which Akhmatova did exploit.

25 Joanna Hubbs, *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture*, Bloomington,
Indiana, 1988, p. xiv.
Akhmatova adopted the approaches discussed in Chapter 3 to a limited extent only and, primarily, during her early period. Two more widely used approaches will be considered in this chapter - the image of the persona as detached and as sensitive to the forces of nature. These more common devices reflect what might be termed the tradition of 'women's language' which will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

The Detached Persona

In addition to the approaches discussed in Chapter 3, Akhmatova developed her authority as a woman poet by portraying her persona in a detached fashion. This approach creates the impression that she writes from an objective point of view as well as allowing her to retain the sense that her persona is, essentially, passive; it is not she who speaks, writes or generally acts as a poet - it is someone else who instigates these actions. The persona is merely a vehicle for an action ultimately implemented by someone else - whether a controlling lover or a mysterious voice in the trees. This image, as will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, is the precursor to such themes as the persona's actual transformation into a statue and her complex use of doubles.

For example, in the second poem of 'Severnye elegii', the persona describes her early childhood as follows:
И никакого розового детства...
Веснушечек, и мишеч, и игрушек,
И добрых теть, и страшных дядь, и даже
Приятелей сред камешков речных.
Себе самой я с самого начала
То чьим-то сном казалась или бредом,
Иль отраженьем в зеркале чужом,
Без имени, без плоти, без причины.
Уже я знала список преступлений,
Которые должна я совершить.
И вот я, лунатически ступая,
Вступила в жизнь и испугала жизнь:
Она передо мною стоялась лугом,
Где некогда гуляла Прозерпина.
Передо мной, безродной, неумелой,
Открылись неожиданные двери,
И выходили люди и кричали:
<<Она пришла, она пришла сама!>>
А я на них глядела с изумленьем
И думала: <<Они с ума сошли!>>
И чем сильней оны меня хвалили,
Чем мной сильнее люди восхищались,
Тем мне страшнее было в мире жить,
И тем сильней хотелось пробудиться,
И знала я, что заплачу стороной
В тюрьме, в могиле, в сумасшедшем доме,
Везде, где просыпаться надлежит
Таким, как я, - но длилась пытка счастьем. (4 July 1955) (1, 254)

It is not as if the persona believes the praise from others is undeserved - it merely bewilders her as she enters life like a 'sleepwalker' with no control over the 'list of crimes' she is to commit. People respond to her as if she is a holy figure. Rather than feel inspired by such adoration, however, she is frightened and knows she will ultimately pay for it in prison, the grave or the madhouse. Thus, the persona disassociates herself from her accomplishments. She is a passive 'sleepwalker', condemned by the praise of others.

In other poems, a mysterious 'voice' serves the function of narrator, describing the
flawed persona from an outside perspective. Akhmatova uses this technique in some of her most famous poems, such as 'Pesnia poslednei vstrechi' in which the 'whisper of autumn in the maple trees' pleads with the persona, 'Die with me':

This poem is also interesting in terms of the concept of an 'eternal masculine' discussed earlier. Akhmatova contrasts two types of hero: one earthly one who, presumably, is within the 'dark house' burning candles in the bedroom with an 'indifferent yellow light', and another, mysterious one - the 'whisper of the autumn in the maples' whom the persona calls 'darling'. The persona appears to leave the former, indifferent lover, in order to die with a kind heavenly one. Though she responds to the whisper in the maples, neither bridegroom, however, seems to inspire the persona to speak; she is so flustered, she is unable to put on her gloves. The persona's death is the inevitable conclusion.

Another famous early poem - 'Seroglazyi korol" - ends with the 'whisper' of the
Whether or not the husband appreciates that he has been cuckolded is unclear. Still, the poem presents two versions of bridegroom - the husband and a king who is no longer of the earth. In terms of language, the husband dominates in that he is the one who announces that the king is dead; in terms of power, the persona with her grey-eyed child triumphs. But the line which confirms her relationship with the king is the 'whisper of the poplars'.

Another example of this mysterious voice is found in 'Lotova zhena' in which the voice of 'alarm' convinces Lot's wife to look back. This poem will be considered in more detail in Chapter 6 on Akhmatova's 'doubles'. For now, Lot's wife is split between her 'righteous' husband and the mysterious voice of 'alarm.' She chooses the latter with famous consequences. This poem is unusual in that the female character is distinct from Akhmatova, though, as the later chapter will discuss, Akhmatova empathises with her to the point of
assimilation.

In 'Tri raza pytat' prikhodila', the voice assumes a harsh, judgemental tone:

Три раза пытать приходила.
Я с криком тоски просыпалась
И видела тонкие руки
И темный насмешливый рот.
<<Ты с кем на заре целовалась,
Клялась, что погибнешь в разлуке,
И жгучую радость таила,
Рыдая у черных ворот?
Кого ты на смерть проводила,
Тот скоро, о, скоро умрет>>.
Был голос как крик ястремый,
Но странно на чей-то похожий.
Все тело мое изгибалось,
Почувствовав смертную дрожь,
И плотная сеть паутины
Упала, окутала ложе...
О, ты не напрасно смелясь,
Моя непрощенная ложь! (1911) (I, 38-39)

The tone suggests that the voice may emanate from the persona's own conscience.

However, Akhmatova could easily have conveyed the persona's feelings of guilt without this external device; the main impression which the detached voice contributes to the poem that a simple first-person narration could not is a sense of detachment from the persona.

In 'Golos pamiati' (dedicated to Ol'ga Sudeikina), as the title suggests, the mysterious 'voice' is that of 'memory':

Что ты видишь, тусло на стену смотря,
В час, когда па небе поздня заря?
Чайку ли на синей скатерти воды
Или флорентийские сады?
Или парк огромный Царского Села,
Где тебе тревога путь пересекла?
Иль того ты видишь у своих колен,
Кто для белой смерти твой покинул плен?

Нет, я вижу стени только - и на ней
Ответы небесных гасящих огней. (1913) (I, 61)

The notion that the substance of the poem is derived from elsewhere is also related
to the theme of the persona's communication with the dead (a theme particularly important
in such major works as Poema bez geroia). In this context, the 'voice' is actually someone
from Akhmatova's past, such as Gumilev. But more often, the voice of the poem is neutral;
it simply manifests itself to the persona and demands that she translate it into words.

In other poems, Akhmatova manages to suggest a sense of detachment without an
external voice or hero to comment on her appearance or behaviour. Sam Driver remarks on
this displacement of the persona:

...it is the stance or point of view of the persona - somehow apart from herself,
observering herself - which is most unusual. The peculiar stance permits an emotional
distance, a degree of restraint and a certain objectivity in the expression of intense
lyrical emotion.  

In 'Na shee melkikh chetok riad,' for example, the persona considers her own image in a
mirror (one of its earlier titles was 'V zerkale'):

1 The reference to the one who 'broke her spells' for 'white death' is an allusion to
Vsevolod Kniazev, who killed himself out of unrequited love for Ol'ga Sudeikina.
Akhmatova, herself, may have been in love with him at one point. (Amanda Haight, A
Poetic Pilgrimage, p. 27)

2 Sam Driver, 'Anna Akhmatova: Early Love Poems', Russian Literature TriQuarterly,

3 Anna Akhmatova, Sochineniia, I, p. 405.
In this poem, the persona tells the story of the meeting which did not happen by considering the minute details of her appearance: the 'pale face' against 'lavender silk' and the 'pale mouth slightly open'. At the same time, her reference to the 'straight fringe' adds to the sense that this is Akhmatova, herself, speaking directly to the reader as opposed to speaking through the medium of a distinct persona.

Another evocative example of this tendency is found in 'Tikho l'etsia tikhii Don' in Rekviem in which the 'yellow moon' which lights the scene provides an almost cinematic quality:

Тихо льется тихий Дон,
Желтый месяц входит в дом.

Входит в шапке набекрень.
Видит желтый месяц тень.

Эта женщина больна,
Эта женщина одна.
This tendency is also found in the third poem in *Rekviem*:

Нет, это не я, это кто-то другой страдает.
Я бы так не могла, а то, что случилось,
Пусть черные сукна покроют,
И пусть унесут фонари...
   Ночь. (1, 364)

In the ninth poem, the persona 'overhears' herself:

И поняла я, что ему
Должна я уступить победу,
Прислушиваясь к своему
Уже как бы чужому бреду. (367)

The common tendency in all of the above poems is a reluctance to describe events through straightforward first-person narration. Like those poems in which Akhmatova adopts a male speaker, these perspectives allow her to consider her persona from outside, creating an atmosphere of objective detachment. This approach allowed Akhmatova to retain the sense of her persona as objective. In this way, she neither controls her actions, nor takes responsibility for them. She also emphasizes the sense that the persona is a detached, objective observer.

*The Sensitive Persona*

Rather than display characteristics akin to the Symbolists' eternal feminine or the Acmeists' poet as 'craftsman', Akhmatova emphasises the sense of her persona as intuitive
and responsive to the forces of nature. Rather than being inspired by nature, she is sensitive
to it or, as with the birds in 'Bessmertnik sukh i rozov' (1916) (I, 97-98), 'converses' with
it. Rather than act as 'craftsman' of the poem, she is the medium through which the chaotic
poem finds form.

The image of the sensitive, receptive persona is particularly pronounced in
'Tvorchestvo' in which the poem manifests itself to the persona progressively from 'sound'
to 'lines':

Бывает так: какая-то истома;
В ушах не умолкает бой часов;
Вдали раскат стихающего грома.
Неузнанных и пленных голосов
Мне чудятся и жалобы и стон,
Сужается какой-то тайный круг,
Но в этой бездне шепотов и звонов
Встает один, все победивший звук.
Так в круг него непоправимо тихо,
Что слышно, как в лесу растет трава,
Как по земле идет с котомкой лихо...
Но вот уже послышались слова
И легких рифм сигнальные звоночки,-
Тогда я начинаю понимать,
И просто продиктованные строчки
Ложатся в белоснежную тетрадь. (1936-60) (I, 190)

The persona is extraordinarily perceptive, but, in the process of actual writing, she is merely
a scribe as opposed to an active forger of words.

Similarly, in other poems such as 'Iva', Akhmatova draws on the traditional notion
of feminine receptivity:

А я росла в узорной тишине,
В прохладной детской молодого века.
И не был мил мне голос человека,
А голос ветра был понятен мне.
This poem (written in 1940) not only evokes Akhmatova's childhood in Tsarskoe Selo, but also her bond with Pushkin. For example, the epigraph to the poem - 'И дряхлый пук дерев' - is taken from Pushkin. Also, such imagery resembles that of a poem written in 1911 and included in Akhmatova's first collection - *Večer*:

The type of tree is different - a willow in the former and a pine in the latter. However, the image of a particular tree as a direct link to Pushkin remains. Again, Akhmatova emphasises receptivity rather than craftsmanship: the persona is receptive to the 'conversations' of the other willows in the former poem and is able to discern the 'barely audible footsteps' in the latter. When the willow dies and becomes a mere stump in 'Iva' the persona becomes silent.

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as if a brother has died, while the 'other willows' speak to each other.

As one of the specific places in which the persona is able to discern such mysterious sounds is Tsarskoe Selo, it is interesting to consider 'Gorodu Pushkina' in this context:

O, горе мне! Они тебя сожгли...
O, встреча, что разлуки тяжелее!...
Здесь был фонтан, высокие аллеи,
Громада парка древнего вдали,
Заря была себя самой алею,
В апреле запах прели и земли,
И первый поцелуй... (1957) (t, 236)

The persona mourns the loss of place as if mourning for a loved one. There is no sense of 'conversing' with her surroundings as these have been destroyed. However, the title and epigraph 'I tsarskosel'skije khranitel'nie seni...' again emphasise the link with Pushkin.

In the second poem of the cycle, it is poetry and the persona, herself, who preserve the 'living outlines of her gardens' at Tsarskoe Selo:

Этой ивы листы в девятнадцатом веке увили,
Чтобы в строчке стиха серебриться свежее стократ.
Одичалые розы цурпурным шиповником стали,
А лицеийские гимны все так же здравно звучат.
Полстолетья прошло... Щедро взяшка ней судьбою,
Я в беспамятстве дней забывала течение годов,-
И туда не вернусь! Но возьму и за лету с собою
Очертанья живые моих царскосельских садов. (1957) (t, 237)

Though not the main theme of the poem, the persona will take with her something fully formed rather than create something new. Also, the first lines emphasise that the willow leaves wither in order that they may be one hundred times more 'freshly silvered' in poetry.

Nature retains control of its own transformation into poetry.

The personification of nature has a Christian element to it. For example, in the
second poem of 'Verenitsa chetverostishii', Akhmatova writes:

В каждом древе распятый господь,
В каждом колосе тело Христово,
И молитвы пречистое слово
Исцеляет болящего плоть. (1946) (I, 211)

The personification of nature also has links with Pushkin who developed the tradition of the poet as 'listener' in Russian literature. However, the fact that the sensitive, listening poet is an image derived from other traditions does not undermine its particular and additional significance for Akhmatova as a woman poet; Akhmatova borrowed heavily from such traditions precisely because they complemented her status as a woman poet.

Akhmatova appropriated the image of woman as passive vehicle for inspiration and transposed it onto the image of the woman poet as receptor. She retained the Symbolist sense of the female persona as passive and, often, inarticulate. However, she also borrowed from traditions such as the poet as 'listener' to render her persona as a kind of human conduit for the divine or forces of nature. As she writes in 'V lesu':

Лежу в траве я, густой и влажной,
Бессвязно звонки мои слова. (1911) (I, 307)

The overall impression she creates is that the persona is in direct contact with a primal source of nature. Rather than mediate between a romantic figure on earth (as, for example, in Blok's Stikhi o prekrasnoi dame), she is the direct recipient of divine inspiration.
Akhmatova's detached, sensitive persona enhances the sense that her authority is derived from 'elsewhere'. She writes, not only with the confidence of someone who has endured the trials she describes, but also as someone responsive to realms beyond the comprehension of ordinary people. Such 'female sensitivity' not only distinguishes her from her male contemporaries and precursors, but bolsters her authority as a poet.

Further, Akhmatova's treatment of the theme of passivity can be extreme; sometimes she depicts the personified poem as consuming her, forcing her to transmit its message. For example, this tendency is particularly prominent in Akhmatova's prose writings on Poema bez geroia:

...Я сразу услышала и увидела ее всю - какая она сейчас (кроме войны, разумеется), но понадобилось двадцать лет, чтобы из первого наброска выросла вся поэма.

На месяцы, годы она закрывалась герметически, я забывала её, я не любила её, я внутренне боролась с ней.  

Akhmatova also described her struggle with the Poema in verse:

Все небо в рыжих голубях,
Решетки в окнах - дух гарема...
Как почка, набухает тема.
Мне не уехать без тебя -
Беглянка, беженка, поэма.
....
А я дописываю <<Печёт>>,
Опять в предпосленной тоске.

Anna Akhmatova, 'Proza o poeme', Sochinenia, II, pp. 221-31, p. 222.
До середины мне видна
Моя поэма. В ней прохладно,
Как в доме, где душистый мрак
И окна заперты от зноя,
И где пока что нет герою,
Но кровью кровью залит мак. (1943) (I, 205-06)

Again, Akhmatova was not the only poet - male or female - to describe the origins of a new poem as deriving from an external source. For example, Nadezhda Mandel'shtam describes the 'musical phrase' which struck both her husband and Akhmatova:

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

Anna Andrejevna рассказывала, что, когда пришла <<Поэма>>, она готова была сделать что угодно, лишь бы от нее избавиться, даже бросилась стирать, но ничего не помогло.

В какой-то момент через музыкальную фразу вдруг поступали слова, и тогда начинали шевелиться губы. Вероятно, в работе композитора и поэта есть что-то общее, и появление слов - критический момент, разделяющий эти два вида сочинительства.

Иногда погода приходила к О.М. во сне, но, проснувшись он не помнил приснившихся ему стихов.6

The image of the poet as human conduit for a fully-formed poem was especially significant for Akhmatova in that it complemented her status as a woman poet. It evoked the Symbolist images of women and their perceived sensitivity to realms beyond the comprehension of

6 Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, Vospominaniia, p. 64.
ordinary men. In effect, it is an image borrowed from a tradition of what might be described as 'women's language'.

The concept of a separate and mysterious 'women's language' was supported by Akhmatova's teacher and mentor - Innokentii Annenskii. As already briefly noted in Chapters 1 and 3, Annenskii was relatively receptive to the notion of a female poet. According to Catriona Kelly, he developed a flexible approach to Symbolism:

On the one hand, Annenskii argued that "the eternal feminine" was nothing more than a symbol, a construct. But on the other hand, he asserted that the origins of recent Russian women's poetry lay in the fact that women had been "written out" of men's poetry by such constructs, and he urged women writers to use "women's language", which he saw in conventional Symbolist terms as mysterious, magical, other-worldly, alienating, yet of great power.  

A prominent example of the sense of a separate and mysterious 'women's language' is contained in Doktor Zhivago. In this novel, Boris Pasternak explicitly links his hero - Iurii Zhivago - with Christ, while Lara, his heroine, is linked to Mary Magdalene. As Jane Gary Harris describes, 'Lara, as Pasternak's ultimate feminine image, his "representative" of Life "born to understand its insane enchantment," expresses the "voice" or "presence" of everyday life in its most intricate details, for in her "the articulate principle of existence becomes sensitive and capable of speech". Significantly in this context, Harris notes that Lara does not express verbally the philosophical ideals first articulated by Nikolai Nikolaevich (and subsequently by Iurii Zhivago), 'as the "representative of life" she absorbs them and acts

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7 Catriona Kelly, A History of Russian Women's Writing, p. 173.
them out. At first, these two points seem to contradict each other - on the one hand Lara becomes capable of speech, on the other, she does not express ideals verbally. This is because Pasternak preserves both aspects - the ability to speak, a woman's voice, and yet without losing the woman's passivity, which may remain silent.

The role of Akhmatova's sensitive persona in the poetic process is not so much to compose poetry, but rather, to embody or transmit poetry. On the one hand, this image runs contrary to Akhmatova's ambitions as a poet. On the other hand, it affords her a level of authority unavailable to her male contemporaries in that the substance of her poetry is derived from a higher source, normally beyond human comprehension. In this way, Akhmatova is able to portray her poetic persona, not so much as a poet, but as a kind of intermediary between Heaven and Earth.

CHAPTER 5 - Suffering Turned to Stone

One of the ways in which Akhmatova was able to adapt to the Symbolists' perspective of women as passive objects of inspiration was to portray her persona as an actual work of art. This approach is related to the themes of the 'sensitive' and 'detached' persona discussed in Chapter 4. Akhmatova tends to portray her persona as a vehicle for art as opposed to an actual artist. Her body is the instrument through which each poem finds coherent expression. Her role as a poet is essentially passive; she has little or no control over the process of artistic creation.

This chapter will consider two artistic media in which Akhmatova identified with the work of art as opposed to the artist - statues and portraits. It is important to note at the outset, however, that it is not only Akhmatova's statue and portrait poems that demonstrate a tendency to relate to the work of art as opposed to the artist. In most of Akhmatova's poems which concern a work of art - whether painting, music or ballet - her persona is not the artist, composer, or choreographer, but at the centre of the work itself.
The variety of art forms which Akhmatova depicts reflects her relatively generous regard for forms other than poetry. Rather than adopt the stance that the role of the poet supersedes that of all other artists, Akhmatova embraced various forms of art. For example, in the following poem, she compares various means by which different types of 'artists' express themselves:

Нам свежесть слов и чувства простоту
Терять не то ли, что живописцу - зренье
Или актеру - голос и движенье,
А женщине прекрасной - красоту? (1915) (1, 84)

Statue Poems

The most common manifestation of this theme is the portrayal of the persona as a statue. This motif is related to the general dilemma discussed earlier of portraying a female poetic persona as a creative figure, as opposed to the object of inspiration which Symbolism demanded. As a woman, Akhmatova was effectively excluded from the dominant image of the poet as active sculptor/artist. She responded to this dilemma by adopting a separate, but complementary image - that of the poet whose body is art or is 'created' by others.1

Akhmatova's statue imagery is normally considered in terms of a general Acmeist

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1 According to Susan Gubar, a similar strategy was commonly used in the writings of privileged Western women: 'Certainly women's limited options...have shaped the art they create. Unable to train themselves as painters, unable to obtain the space or income to become sculptors, gifted women in these areas have had to work in private, using the only materials at hand - their bodies, their selves.' (Susan Gubar, "The Blank Page" and Female Creativity', in Writing and Sexual Difference, ed. Elizabeth Abel, Brighton, Sussex, 1982, pp. 73-109, p. 79).
predisposition for words suggesting concreteness, weight and mass. Sam Driver, for example, links the theme of the persona turning to stone with the Acmeists' 'love of architectonic mass'. This tendency is particularly pronounced in the works of Osip Mandel'shtam who often used the image of the poet as 'sculptor'. His aim, of course, differed from that of the Symbolists; Mandel'shtam and his Acmeist contemporaries were more interested in the 'craftsmanship' of the sculptor than his ability to animate lifeless stone. For example, in 'Razgovor o Dante', Mandel'shtam writes:

However, in his poem actually depicting Akhmatova, Mandel'shtam does not use a stone image to glorify her abilities as poet-craftsman but, rather, describes her partial transformation into stone:

Thus, one of Akhmatova's contemporaries who exerted enormous influence over her associated Akhmatova not with the 'creator', but with the 'creation'.

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This motif of the petrified persona is, perhaps, best illustrated by the famous poem 'Lotova zhen' (a poem which will also be discussed in Chapter 6 on Akhmatova's doubles). Akhmatova's inscription to the poem is taken from the Bible and emphasises the critical moment: 'жена же Лотова оглянулась позади его и стала соляным столпом.' In the rest of the poem, Akhmatova elaborates upon the Biblical story:

И праведник шел за посланником бога,  
Огромный и светлый, по черной горе.  
Но громко жена говорила тревога:  
Не поздно, ты можешь еще посмотреть  
На красные башни родного Содома,  
На площадь, где нела, на двор, где пряла,  
На окна пустые высокого дома,  
Где милому мужу детей родила.

Взглянула - и, скованы смертною болью,  
Глаза ее больше смотреть не могли;  
И сделалось тело прозрачною солью,  
И быстрые ноги к земле приросли.

Кто женщину тую оплакивать будет?  
Не меньше ли мянится она из утрат?  
Лишь сердце мое никогда не забудет  
Отдавшую жизнь за единственной взгляд. (1922-24) (I, 147-48)

In becoming a pillar of salt, Lot's wife is recast into a kind of statue or memorial. Her physical body is transformed into something permanent; she literally becomes rooted to the earth. Thus, her personal memories, as well as the actual action of looking back, are preserved for eternity. Her body serves as a kind of artistic medium. 

5 Akhmatova's link with Lot's wife is reinforced in another poem written in 1946, 'Vtoraia godovshchina', which marks the second anniversary of Akhmatova's return to Leningrad (quoted in full in Chapter 6).
Another example of Akhmatova's use of her statue imagery is *Rekviem*. The disciple who stands at the foot of the Cross in 'Raspiatie', for example, reacts by 'turning into stone' ('Ученик любимый каменел') (I, 368). Similarly, she describes her son's 'terrible eyes' as 'suffering turned to stone' ('каменелое страданье'), and in 'Prigovor', she writes,

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У меня сегодня много дела:
Надо память до конца убить,
Надо, чтоб душа окаменела,
Надо снова научиться жить. (I, 365)
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In the last poem of this cycle, the reader is especially encouraged to identify the speaker/persona as Akhmatova, herself. She describes her transformation into a 'monument' that will ensure the preservation of her memory, even beyond death:

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А если когда-нибудь в этой стране
Возьмутся задумать памятник мне,
Согласься на это дау торжество,
Но только с условьем - не ставить его

Ни около моря, где я родилась:
Последняя с морем разорвана связь,

Ни в царском саду у заветного пня,
Где тень безутешная ищет меня,

А здесь, где стояла я триста часов
И где для меня не открыли засов.

Затем, что и в смерти блаженной боюсь
Забыть громыхание черных марысь.

Забыть, как постылая хлюпала дверь
И выла старуха как раненный зверь.

И пусть с неподвижных и бронзовых век
Как слезы струятся подтаявший снег,
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This image fulfils the prophecy which Akhmatova recalls in her memoirs:

These images differ from that in 'Lotova zhena' in that Akhmatova relies upon others to erect such a monument. This distinction is significant: it reflects Akhmatova's progression from a poet of essentially private themes to that of civic poet. Whereas Lot's wife, as a pillar of salt, preserves her personal experience of singing, spinning and bearing children, Akhmatova's monument will embody the experience of all the suffering people of Russia. As Michael Basker notes, '...instead of looking upon and praying for the suffering and sundered narod, the poet now merges completely with them as the instrument of their expression....'

In other poems, this motif of the persona's body as a statue is only indirectly apparent. In the poem 'Uedinenie', for example, Catriona Kelly suggests that the adjective 'slender' (строійная) may render the 'tower' a metaphor for Akhmatova's own body.6

7 Michael Basker, 'Dislocation and Relocation in Akhmatova's "Rekviem"', in The Speech of Unknown Eyes, I, pp. 5-26, p. 21.
Так много камней брошено в меня,
Что ни один из них уже не страшен,
И строить башни стала западня,
Высокою среди высоких башен.
Строителей ее благодарю,
Пусты их забота и печаль минут.
Отсюда раньше вижу я зарю,
Здесь солнце луч последний торжествует.
И часто в окна комнаты моей,
И голубь ест из рук моих пшеницу...
А не дописанную мной страницу -
Божественно спокойна и легка,
Допишет Музы смуглая рука. (1914) (1, 78)

This poem also features the image of the passive persona discussed earlier in that it is the muse's 'swarthy' hand which will finish the persona's unfinished page.

Although the persona's actual transformation into a statue appears more often in Akhmatova's later poems, in one early poem, the persona sees her 'marble double' lying under an old maple tree:

...А там мой мраморный двойник,
Поверженный под старым кленом,
Озерным водам отдал лику,
Внимает шорохам зеленым.

И моют светлые дожди
Его запекающую рану...
Холодный, белый, подожди,
Я тоже мраморною стану. (1911) (1, 24)

The statue's wounds (as well as the third poem in this short cycle - 'Smuglyi otrok brodil po alleiam') indicate that this 'double' is Pushkin, though the statue's position also evokes the image of Narcissus. Again, transformation into a statue represents a permanent link with her past, as well as her cultural inheritance.

In addition to the Acmeist tradition referred to earlier, another obvious source for
Akhmatova's statue motif is Pushkin. For example, the persona's transformation into a monument in *Rekviem* (cited earlier) most obviously evokes Pushkin's famous Bronze Horseman. However, as Roberta Reeder notes, '[Pushkin's poems] are more objective descriptions of statues, focusing on the way in which visual art has translated emotion into stone or bronze. In Akhmatova's work the statue has become her "marble double" and is employed to parallel the speaker's own state of mind.' Hence, the persona's 'marble double' '...is cold and white, that is, aloof and emotionally distant, just as she sees herself.' Thus, Akhmatova's persona empathises with statues to such an extent, the statues become actual extensions of the persona herself.  

In 'Tsarskosel'skaia statuia', Akhmatova turns to a subject also used by Pushkin - the statue by Sokolov in Tsarskoe Selo of a milkmaid with a pitcher, as depicted in the fable by La Fontaine:

Уже кленовые листы  
На пруд слетают лебединый,  
И окровавлены кусты  
Неспешно зреющей рябины,  

И ослепительно стройна,  
Поджав незябующие ноги,  
На камне северном она  
Сидит и смотрит на дороги. (1916) (1, 95-96)

Again, the adjective 'slender' appears, perhaps suggesting a link between the statue and

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10 This contrasts with Annenskii's 'Bronzovyi poet' in which the statue is clearly identified as Pushkin while the poetic persona remains distinct.
Akhmatova herself. However, this statue is not only slender, but 'dazzlingly slender' ('ослепительно стройна'). The next two stanzas further suggest that the persona's relationship to the statue is not so much one of identification, as of rivalry:

Я чувствовала смутный страх
Пред этой девушкой воспетой.
Играли на ее плечах
Лучи скудного света.

И как я ей простить
Восторг твоей хвалы влюбленной...
Смотри, ей весело грустить,
Такой нарядно обнаженной. (1916) (l. 95-96)

This statue is able to arouse feelings of envy in the persona with her 'dazzling slenderness', fame and, most importantly, the ability to attract the attention of the persona's lover. Thus, although the statue remains a separate figure from the persona, their relationship is akin to that between the persona and her muse or 'sister' in other poems (this subject will be considered in more detail in Chapter 6).

Roberta Reeder notes that Akhmatova's depiction of this statue again differs from Pushkin. Pushkin's milkmaid has a dilemma: in being immortal, she must sit, 'eternally contemplating the broken pitcher'. Akhmatova's statue, by contrast, raises feelings of jealousy in the persona: 'Playing on a phrase from the Pushkin poem, "Дева печально сидит", Akhmatova observes, "ей весело грустить", as if she were enjoying this state. Perhaps the statue represents all other women who might attract the speaker's lover, and thus creates the uneasy feeling in the poet."

The image of the poet transformed into a statue also reinterprets the myth of Pygmalion. According to Ovid's version of this myth, Pygmalion, the King of Cyprus, fell in love with his own work of art, an ivory statue of a woman. He asked Aphrodite to grant him a woman resembling the statue and returned home to find that his statue had actually come to life. This myth has become a literary archetype; Pygmalion is the emblematic artist who 'creates' life from stone. Akhmatova, therefore, furnishes a variation on this theme; the artist who, herself, is transformed into a work of art. As Susan Gubar concludes in the context of a short story by Isak Dineson, 'In terms of the Pygmalion myth...the woman who cannot become an artist can nevertheless turn herself into an artistic object.' Akhmatova may have been drawn to the Pygmalion motif in response to its Symbolist associations. As Irene Masing-Delic notes, the Symbolists regarded Pygmalion as the prototypical artist:

This mythic sculptor as it were anticipated their cherished theurgical aspirations. To them he was the true artist who transcended the confines of mere art, an artist who, knowing the secrets of wondrous transformations, learned how to animate stone in the literal sense of the word "animate." He thus achieved the creation of real life, as opposed to its mere likeness.

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12 Susan Gubar describes the moment when Ovid's Pygmalion discovers his statue has come to life: 'When he feels the ivory under his fingers soften, "as wax grows soft in the sunshine, made pliable by handling," Pygmalion is astonished with joy: "It's a body!" Not only has he created life, he has created female life as he would like it to be - pliable, responsive, purely physical. Most important, he has evaded the humiliation shared by many men of acknowledging that it is he who is really created out of and from the female body' (Susan Gubar, "The Blank Page" and Female Creativity', p. 73).

13 Susan Gubar, "The Blank Page" and Female Creativity', p. 79.

14 Other writers, she adds, were attracted to variations on this motif. George Bernard Shaw interpreted the image as the portrayal of an artist, '...who aspires, like God, to create life'. Goethe, by contrast, rejected the image entirely in favour of King Midas who was granted the power by Dionysus to transform whatever he touched into gold - '...that is, make human beings into statues rather than statues into human beings' (Irene Masing-
She traces the origin of the motif to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and notes that the image had attracted attention in Russian literature as far back as Pushkin.\(^{15}\)

*Portrait Poems*

Another medium to which Akhmatova was drawn in this context is portrait painting.\(^{16}\) This is probably due, in part, to the fact that a number of leading artists of her time painted portraits of her. Most of these portraits emphasise Akhmatova's regal qualities. For example, Amedeo Modigliani drew Akhmatova's head in the style of 'queens and dancers of the Nile'.\(^{17}\) Both Ol'ga Della-Vos-Kardovskaia and Natan Al'tman's oil portraits feature her famous profile and straight fringe; the effect is one of serenity and composure.

In 'Nadpis' na neokonchennom portrete', Akhmatova literally portrays her persona


from the unusual perspective of an unfinished portrait - not the person sitting for the portrait, but from within the work of art itself:

O, не вздыхайте обо мне,
Печаль преступна и напрасна,
Я здесь, не сером полотне,
Возникла странно и неясно.

Вздевших рук излом больной,
В глазах улыбка изступленья,
Я не могла бы стать иной
Пред горьким часом наслажденья.

Он так хотел, он так велел
Словами мертвыми и злыми.
Мой рот тревожно звалел,
И щеки стали снежными.

И нет греха в его вине,
Ушел, глядит в глаза другие,
Но ничего не снится мне
В моей предсмертной летаргии. (included in Vecher) (l. 44)

As an unfinished portrait, the persona is trapped and manipulated by the artist's limited vision. The artist may or may not be the unfaithful lover; in any case it is he who 'ordered' her awkward and 'frenzied smile' and 'snow white cheeks'.\(^\text{18}\) The persona is manifestly the art object as opposed to the artist.

In the second part of 'Epicheskie motivy', Akhmatova depicts sitting for her famous portrait by Al'tman. Again, she emphasises the relationship between painting and poetry:

\(^{18}\) Similarly, in 'Otryvok' (I, 55), a mysterious voice observes the effect the persona's lover has had on her, including, evidently, causing her to outline her eyes as if with 'black, thick Indian ink'.

93
Как в зеркало, глядела я тревожно  
На серый холст, и с каждой неделей  
Все горше и страннее было сходство  
Мое с моим изображеньем новым.  
Теперь не знаю, где художник милый,  
С которым я из голубой мансарды  
Через окно на крышу выходила  
И по карнизу пла над смертной бездной,  
Чтоб видеть снег, Неву и облака, -  
Но чувствуя, что Музы наши дружны  
Беспечной и пленительною дружбой,  
Как девушки, не знавшие любви. (1914-16) (I, 154)

Similarly, the artist's 'blessed' work appears before the (presumably female) persona of 'Khudozhniku':

Мне все твоя мерещится работа,  
Твои благословенные труды:  
Лип, навсегда осенних позолота  
И синь сегодня созданной воды.

Подумай, и тончайшая дремота  
Уже ведет меня в твои сады,  
Где, каждого путаясь поворота,  
В беспамятстве ищу твои следы.

Войду ли я под свод преображеный,  
Твоей рукой в небо превращенный,  
Чтоб остыдился мой постылый жар?...

Там стану я блаженною навеки  
И, раскаленные смежная веки,  
Там снова обрету я слезный дар. (1924) (I, 174)

Wendy Rosslyn considers the artist of this poem to be God: '...His works are the golden hue of the lime trees, forever autumnal, and the blueness of the water just created.'19 Whereas

19 Wendy Rosslyn, 'Painters and Painting in the Poetry of Anna Akhmatova', p. 179.
this may be suggested by the image of the persona entering into the artist's 'garden', the poem
stresses that the artist's 'works' are 'blessed', suggesting that although the artist may be
inspired by God, he is a separate, human agent; it is his human hand which 'transforms' the
vault into sky.

The persona, by contrast, 'searches' for 'traces' of the artist. The persona is passive;
she searches in a state of 'unconsciousness' and is 'led' by 'drowsiness'. The 'gift' she hopes
to recover is not creative in the same way as the artist's but, rather, is the gift of 'tears', an
image evoking associations with the figure of the Mother of God in Rekviem. At the same
time, the persona's search for the artist evokes another 'double' who figures in Akhmatova's
work - Antigone.\(^\text{20}\)

Earlier, it was noted that even when Akhmatova does not literally portray her
persona as a statue, she often empathises with statues to such an extent, the statue can be
regarded as a poetic 'double'. This is also true of Akhmatova's 'portrait poems'. For
example, although the persona in 'Staryi portret' is distinct from the figure in the portrait, she
identifies with the figure to the point of assimilation:

Сжала тебя золотистым овалом  
Узкая, старая рама;  
Нетр за тобой с голубым ошалом,  
Стройная белая дама.

Тонки по-девичьи нежные плечи,  
Смотришь надменно-упрямо;  
Тускло мерцают высокие свечи,  
Словно в преддверии храма.

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\(^{20}\) This theme is related to the death of Nikolai Gumilev and Akhmatova's subsequent
search for his grave (on this, see Chapter 6 on one of Akhmatova's doubles, Antigone).
The fact that the poem is dedicated to a female artist - the Kiev painter and pioneer of Russian Futurism, Aleksandra Ekster - adds an interesting twist. For example, rather than discuss the relationship between the artist and poetic persona, Akhmatova focuses exclusively on the subject of the portrait; the 'artist' is almost an irrelevance. Further, as Wendy Rosslyn observes, '...though the poem is addressed to the painter Ekster, the portrait is neither by her, nor of her, nor in her style, and the portrait remains unidentified'.

A similar portrait motif also appears in Akhmatova's identification with Feodosiia Morozova as depicted in the famous painting by Surikov. Morozova was a seventeenth-century noblewoman and follower of the Old Believers who rejected changes in devotional practice in the seventeenth century. While Avvakum was burned at the stake, Morozova was sent to a convent and tortured on the rack. She eventually died in prison. One lesser-known aspect of the Morozova legend with which Akhmatova almost certainly would have identified is the fact that the followers of Patriarch Nikon also tortured Morozova's son as a means of punishing her. Surikov's painting depicts Morozova in the guise of the archetypal Mother Russia - the suffering woman who remains strong in the face of adversity.

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As Vera Sandomirskii Dunham explains, Surikov's painting is based upon this image; he depicts Morozova being dragged away on a sled as 'the fiercely stubborn folk heroine who "went to the end", who would have let her son be torn by bloodhounds rather than deny her faith and who indeed died in prison of starvation'.

Akhmatova's identification with Morozova is mediated through Surikov's depiction:

Я знаю, с места не сдвинуться  
От тяжести Виных век.  
О, если бы вдруг откинуться  
В какой-то семнадцатый век.

С душистой веткой березовой  
Под Троицу в церкви стоять,  
С боярынею Морозовой  
Сладкий медок попивать,

И после на дровнях в сумерки  
В навозном снегу тонуть...  
Какой сумасшедший Суриков  
Мой последний напишет путь? (1939) (l, 320)

The persona not only fantasises about what it would be like to be 'thrown back' into the seventeenth century of Boiarynia Morozova, but considers her own life in her own century to be worthy of depiction by some 'mad Surikov'. This highlights a trend which Wendy


23 According to Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, the last two lines of this poem refer to a comment made by Punin to Akhmatova while the two were visiting the Tret'iakov Gallery where Surikov's painting hangs: 'A теперь пойдем посмотреть, как вас повезут на казнь.' (Vospominaniia, p. 4).

24 Nadezhda Mandel'shtam writes: 'Поверив в <<кротость>> зрелой Ахматовой, я попалась на мышку. Ведь в лучших стихах, внешне сдержанных, всегда слышится голос эдакой боярьни, то плакальщицы, постницы и молельщицы, то
Rosslyn describes as follows:

The relationship between literature and painting in Akhmatova's poems, weighted as it is in favor of literature, could well be described as an interactive one on the part of the poet. The poet remodels paintings. That is to say, on the one hand, that which is enclosed within the frame is conceived of as life rather than as art, and on the other hand, that there is no rigid barrier between the picture and the viewer.  

Whereas the persona of *Rekviem* envisages her immortality through the rendering of her body into a bronze monument, the persona of the Morozova poem envisages a time when her actions will be immortalised in someone else's work of art, though, of course, it is important to note the earlier point that Akhmatova already had evidence that she would be immortalised through portraits.

Another poem - 'Kogda chelovek umiraet' - considers the relationship between viewer and portrait subject:

*Kогда человек умирает,*

*Изменяются его портреты.*

*По-другому глаза глядят, и губы*

*Улыбаются другой улыбкой.*

*Я заметила это, вернувшись*

*С похорон одного поэта.*

*И с тех пор проверяла часто,*

*И моя догадка подтвердились.* (1940) (л. 186)

In one sense, the portrait changes when the subject dies because the viewer's perception of the subject changes. On the other hand, Akhmatova was also prone to more theatrical, supernatural twists. For example, in *Poema bez geroiia*, the portraits actually come to life:

проклинающей недругов и превозносящей друзей и единомышленников, что любому Никону следовало бы держаться подальше!' (*Vtorata kniga*, p. 444).

In a wide sense, the image of portraits actually coming to life reflects Akhmatova's tendency to portray life and death in terms of parallel worlds. It also conveys the theatrical sense of place as the set for a drama.

It would go too far to suggest that Akhmatova deliberately portrayed her persona as a work of art solely as a direct attempt to negotiate a Symbolist tradition which insisted that the 'artist' be male. Akhmatova had a variety of reasons for portraying her persona in this way. However, this strategy certainly achieved such an effect; Akhmatova maintained the paradigm of male artist by tending to write from the point of view of the work of art.

В старости и в юности мы все эгоцентрики, а в игре в двойничество действовал механизм эгоцентризма. Правда, в оправдание Ахматовой я могу сказать, что кроме эгоцентризма в этом проявлялось еще свойство присущее ей в самой высокой степени: она увлекалась каждым человеком, и от этого у нее возникала потребность покрепче его связать с собой, слиться с ним. (Надежда Мандельштам)

Akhmatova's identification with famous heroines bolstered her overall authority as a poet by creating the impression that she, as a woman who endured similar experiences, was able to empathise with such heroines to a greater extent than the authors who initially told the tale. In this way, her doubles serve as manifestations of her own character. As Kees Verheul explains:

There are in the poet's work several poems that would at a superficial reading seem to be mere poetical third-person portraits of well-known historical or literary figures. When we compare these poems, however, with other, first-person verse from a similar period, it appears that we have in most cases to do with 'lyrical' portraits, that is to say portraits in which some essential traits of the persons described are intimately related to elements from the author's life that have been differently, and more directly transformed into motifs connected with the figure of the lyrical 'I' in other poems.

1 Надежда Мандельштам, Vtoraia kniga, p. 357.
Similarly, in her article on Akhmatova's use of ancient heroines, T.V. Tsiv'ian makes it clear that Akhmatova's motivation in choosing her particular heroines was not simply assimilation for its own sake but, rather, to explore their motivation in specific, highly charged, moral situations; Akhmatova found her own experiences 'mirrored' in the stories of these women who personified the great themes of history and literature.  

At the same time, however, Akhmatova's doubles enabled her to distance herself from their experiences in that she retold a tale already familiar to her reader or picked up where the story left off. Akhmatova tended to choose figures whom she could approach through an existing literary medium, through their representation in a work of literature, although a historical or mythological reality lies behind. Akhmatova chose heroines from standard literary texts and works familiar to all educated Russians. When she portrays Cleopatra, for example, her epigraph indicates that she is specifically referring to the Cleopatra of Pushkin's poem. Her Dido is Virgil's Dido; her Phaedra, Seneca's Phaedra; her Cassandra, the Cassandra from Schiller. Even her Morozova is not the Morozova of legend but specifically the Morozova of Surikov's painting. Thus, the embodiment of her choice of famous historical doubles enables her to assume a role akin to an objective storyteller without diminishing her more subjective subtext. This approach is similar to the detached persona considered earlier in Chapter 4; Akhmatova retains a distance from her poetic persona, emphasising the sense that she is a player in a much larger story.  

By directly or indirectly referring to the texts of her precursors and contemporaries,

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Akhmatova emphasised a sense of tradition and continuity. She also elevated her own status as a poet by aligning herself with a canon of great poets who commanded national and universal respect, as the natural 'inheritor' of such literary giants as Pushkin and Schiller, Akhmatova emphasised the sense that she was 'chosen' to play a role of similar stature.

Much has been written about Akhmatova's use of intertextuality as a means of widening the scope of her poetic themes. Sonia Ketchian, for example, links the intertextuality in Akhmatova's work with the philosophical concept of metempsychosis: the belief that, upon death, the soul enters into another body. Ketchian explains that, in a broad sense, '...metempsychosis represents the same for the persona of Akhmatova's verse as literary tradition does for poetry and for the poet per se, enabling an individual, like the lyrical ego, to experience several stages of life, retaining all the while the memory associated with each life span'.

Linking this concept with such themes as memory and non-meetings, Ketchian demonstrates that this concept adds another layer of authority to Akhmatova's work:

...if the oeuvre of each poet can be construed as one lifetime or one stage in the process of literary reincarnation, then resonances with any other writer's works represent, as it were, an incorporation of other lives and the memories of others into the framework of Akhmatova's work. Consequently, the limits of her work are expanded, enabling the poet to observe an economy of her own words and images through the invocation of already-existing and recognizable images, concepts and

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4 On this subject in terms of Pushkin see, for example, David Wells, *Akhmatova and Pushkin*.

This analysis is related to the more general strategy discussed earlier. By appropriating the work of others or, to use Sonia Ketchian's terminology, by incorporating the lives of others into her works, Akhmatova again managed to emphasise the sense that her persona is, essentially, passive. Her role is not so much that of active poet, but that of interpreter, or manifestation, of other writers' themes and techniques. Thus, metempsychosis is another concept which compliments Akhmatova as a woman poet in that it allowed her to explore a number of themes that would otherwise be unavailable to her poetic persona.

As Sonia Ketchian comments:

...the persona in Akhmatova, in assuming a reincarnated identity and the capabilities enabling her to undergo metempsychosis, grows clearly independent of Akhmatova the person and enters other times, lives and forms of life and nature. Akhmatova the poet, the creator of this migrating persona, cannot accompany her in her transformations or transmigrations. Instead, she employs the unusual speaker to experience what is inaccessible to herself and with the help of the Muse, a witness to all bygone times and events as well as to those to come, she crafts the poem to reflect the experience and results of the persona's metempsychosis.

Related to this is the fact that Akhmatova's doubles allowed her to draw upon the stories of women who distinguished themselves through such 'alternative' means as prophecy, matriarchy, intercession, lamentation and martyrdom. Rather than tackle head on the obstacle of portraying her female persona as a poet figure in a male-centered poetic culture, Akhmatova experimented with complementary means of self-expression.

Interestingly, Akhmatova's affinity for historical heroines provided her with models

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who, though important creative figures in their own right, were not poets; whereas Akhmatova identified with archetypal heroines, she did not write about other female writers (though in a few poems she pays homage to Marina Tsvetaeva). This, at least in part, reflects a tendency discussed earlier, in that Akhmatova considered herself to be the exception to the general rule that women were inferior writers. She considered her primary literary precursors to be such male writers as Pushkin, Dante and Blok. Akhmatova positively prided herself on her originality, even claiming in 'Mogla li Biche slovno Dant tvorit' that she 'taught women how to speak':

Могла ли Биче словно Дант творить,
Или Лаура жар любви восславить?
Я научила женщин говорить...
Но боже, как их замолчать заставить! (1936-60) (t, 193)

This chapter will now consider some of the more important doubles who appear in Akhmatova's poetry. It will not consider the full range of doubles, excluding, for example, such figures as Princess Eudoxia (who makes a cameo appearance in Vecher) and Laura and Beatrice (mentioned briefly in the poem quoted above). Rather, it will concentrate on those figures who represent major themes in Akhmatova's work generally.

Mary

Akhmatova related to certain aspects of Mary more than others. For example, in terms of Mary's status as a mother, Akhmatova is ambivalent. As noted earlier, Akhmatova's persona has contradictory feelings towards motherhood. On the one hand, in a sense, Akhmatova grew to become a matriarchal figure for all the suffering people of Soviet Russia;
her identification with Mary certainly bolstered this sense, if only indirectly. On the other hand, Akhmatova's persona is a self-confessed bad mother.

In addition to that of matriarch, Mary evokes another role which does relate to Akhmatova's persona - that of intercessor. As with matriarchy, however, Akhmatova's persona displays contradictory feelings towards her new role. In 'Tiazhela ty, liubovnaia pamiat!', for example, she writes:

T a x e j i a  T L i, J ii o ô o B H a a  n a M a x t !
Mne
B jiMMy
t b o c m
next
h
ropext,
A
flo y x H M
- 3 X 0  x o jitK O  njiaM M ,
Hxo6
o c x t i B m y i o  « y n i y
rpext.
H
x o ô b i
c fle jia jia c B  a
h c m o h,
H M O K >  ôeccjiaBHyio cJiaBy
OCHaHHBIM 3aÔBGHHGM  C M O H .
(1914) (1, 79-80)

In the first poem of 'liul' 1914', the persona actually mentions the Mother of God:

Пахнет гарью. Четыре недели
Торф сухой по болотам горит.
Даже птицы сегодня не пели,
И осина уже не дрожит.

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8 Lidiia Chukovskaia wrote of how Akhmatova looked like a statue of the Madonna when she held one of two little children from next door, 'Я уже не раз замечала - с ребенком на руках она сразу становится похожей на статую мадонны, - не лицом, а всей осанкой, каким-то скромным и скорбным величием.' (Lidiia Chukovskaia, Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatovoi, I, pp. 150-51).
The second poem in the cycle focuses on the women whose husbands died in battle:

In a sense, these two poems present contrasting vehicles for intercession. The first poem emphasises the need for intervention by the Mother of God in the tradition of *Pokrov*; the second poem describes the process of collective prayer. The persona remains distinct from these actions; her personal response as well as her thoughts on her own role remain

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9 Mary's role as intercessor relates to the tenth century legend of *Pokrov* in which she is said to have appeared in a church in Constantinople and extended her veil over the people.
ambiguous. This contrasts with the later memorial poem in which the persona positively recoils from the devastation she witnesses, covering her face and begging God to strike her dead before the first battle.

The image of Mary in the tradition of *Pokrov* is implicit in the poem 'Maiskii sneg':

Прозрачная ложится пелена  
На свежий дерн и незаметно тает.  
Жестокая, студеная весна  
Налившиеся почки убивает.  
И ранней смерти так ужасен вид,  
Что не могу на божий мир глядеть я.  
Во мне печаль, которой царь Давид  
По-парски одарили тысячелетья. (1916) (1,98-99)

The image of *Pokrov* is suggested by the 'transparent shroud'. The link with Mary is also suggested by the epigraph included which is derived from Psalm 6:7: ‘Утомлен я воздыханиями моими: каждую ночь омываю ложе мое слезами моими омочаю постель мою.’

Akhmatova explicitly develops the link between her persona and the image of Mary as intercessor in two major works - *U samogo moria* and *Rekviem*. *Rekviem*, in particular, represents Akhmatova's mature sense of her role as a female poet: to act as intercessor on behalf of the people of Russia, not only offering her poetry as a form of prayer, but also as a form of protection in the tradition of *Pokrov*.

*Rekviem* realises an ambition which Akhmatova attempted to articulate in the much earlier *U samogo moria*: to serve the Russian people as an active poet. Yet Akhmatova mediates this through the figure of Mary. As discussed earlier, she appropriates the stature Mary commands and assumes her roles as mother and intercessor. As Amanda Haight notes...
of the figure of Mary in Rekviem, 'Akhmatova is not observing Mary from outside. She is looking at the world through her eyes'. In this way, Akhmatova embraces the various traditions discussed earlier: she assumes the role of a poet without jeopardising the more traditional feminine associations with inspiration and 'other-worldliness'.

_U samogo moria_ was discussed in Chapter 3 in the context of Akhmatova constructing a kind of 'eternal masculine'. This chapter will focus on the persona's sister, Lena. Lena is a poetic double for the persona: the girls are almost the same age and have such similar appearances, their mother could only tell them apart by their birthmarks. Unlike the athletic persona who loves to swim, Lena has been paralysed since birth:

Ка̀к восковая кукла лежала;
Ни на кого не сердилась. (I, 266)

If the persona represents the 'wild girl' aspect of Akhmatova's childhood in Khersones, Lena represents the well brought-up girl of Tsarskoe Selo. Whereas the persona uses her song to lure the tsarevich, Lena quietly embroiders a shroud featuring a scene from the Crucifixion:

Слышала я, как она шептала:
<<Плац Богородицы будет синим... 
Боже, апостолу Иоанну  
Жемчужин для слез достать мне негде...>> (I, 266)

Lena's shroud anticipates the death of the tsarevich. When the persona goes to the seaside, she notices:

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10 Amanda Haight, _A Poetic Pilgrimage_, p. 100.
Further, Lena's feverish whisper about the Mother of God's blue cloak foreshadows the scene of the tsarevich's death. Interestingly, Lena's silence at the end of the poem anticipates Mary's in Rekviem (this scene is quoted in full in Chapter 3). Turning her face to the wall, Lena 'falls silent'. She also crosses herself repeatedly and (the persona guesses) weeps for the fallen tsarevich - an action traditionally associated with Mary. Thus, Akhmatova places Lena in a Christian context in contrast to her more pagan sister.

The speaker of Rekviem is a composite figure. On the one hand, she speaks with the personal conviction of a mother who has endured a tremendous personal sacrifice. On the other hand, she is imbued with archetypal authority, representative of the Russian people's last link with God.

From the outset of Rekviem, Akhmatova's persona expresses an absolute conviction of her moral duty to 'describe'. Her authority to do so stems from the fact that she is in her proper place - among her people - during this particular tragic period of Russian history:

Есмь и не под чуждым небосводом,
И не под защитой чужих крыл, -
Я была тогда с моим народом,
Там, где мой народ, к несчастью, был. (361)

If her authority is based upon her personal experience of living through such terrible times, her impulse actually to describe events is instigated by the woman who identifies her in the Leningrad prison line. The woman with 'blue lips' is a kind of variation of Akhmatova's muse.

In Rekviem, Akhmatova not only carries out the task of describing the circumstances
that unite the women who stand in line, she extends this task to actually protecting the victims:

Хотелось бы всех поименно назвать,
Да отняли список, и негде узнать.

Для них соткала я широкий покров
Из бедных, у них же подслушанных слов. (369)

As in *U samogo moria*, weaving a cover over the victims evokes the image of Mary. Although Akhmatova could not necessarily claim to protect them in this world, she could offer them a memorial shroud and bring them together - dead or alive. Also, in the first Epilogue, the persona prays for all who suffered a similar fate:

Узнала я, как опадают лица,
Как из-под век выглядывает страх,
Как клинописи жесткие страницы
Страдание выводит на щеках,
Как локоны из пепельных и черных
Серебряными делаются вдруг,
Улыбка вянет на губах покорных,
И в сухоньком смешке дрожит испуг.
И я молюсь не о себе одной,
А обо всех, кто там стоял со мною,
И в лютый холод, и в июльский зной,
Под красную ослепшую стеною. (368-69)

Susan Amert notes that *Rekviem* 'commemorates the "velikie skorbi"/"great sorrows" of the Russian land, but it is the poet who plays the role of intercessor for Russia by fashioning a metaphorical burial shroud for it, a shroud that will preserve and sanctify, ensuring Russia's future resurrection'. 11 This image of the persona as intercessor or protector may be contrasted with an earlier poem in the cycle, 'Raspiatie', in which the

persona likens her vigil outside the prison where her son is incarcerated to that of those who witnessed Christ's Crucifixion. As noted earlier, each figure represents a potential manifestation of grief, each of which is represented throughout Akhmatova's poetry:

Магдалина была и рыдала,
Ученик любимий крепел,
А туда, где молча мать стояла,
Так никто взглянуть не посмел. (I, 368)

The disciple who 'turns to stone' can be linked to Akhmatova's statue poems in the sense that she is transformed into a memorial as opposed to creating a memorial. Mary Magdalene who 'beats and sobs' can also be compared with Akhmatova's persona who declares:

Женский голос, хриплый и задорный,
Не поет - кричит, кричит. (I, 313)

This image is also repeated within Rekviem itself. For example, in one poem, the persona declares:

Семнадцать месяцев кричу,
Зову тебя домой. (I, 364)

In another famous section from 'Uvodili tebia na rassvete', she declares:

Буду я, как стрелечки женки,
Под кремлевскими башнями выть. (I, 363)

However, it is the image of Mary that remains most prominent in the reader's mind. As Michael Basker notes:

...to the extent that the three disunited figures may be seen as projections of the self, Mary evidently symbolises no harmonious, healing reintegration; while the final locative statement establishes that her place is a kind of no-man's land, inaccessible to normal human emotion (a tuda...). From the context of the entire poem it must be concluded that Mary has come to terms with suffering and terror not through mystic transcendence or divine intervention, but by complete divorce of self from all that is most dear in the normal world, a fiercely cruel purging of all ordinary
emotion...  

Further, Amanda Haight considers Mary's suffering to be a reflection of Christ's:

Mary the mother is set in opposition to Mary Magdalene who has lost Christ and will only find Him again when he appears to her after his resurrection. The Mother's suffering is a reflection of that of Christ who endures the Crucifixion to fulfill what he has been sent to do and whose suffering is not lessened but, if anything, heightened by understanding this necessity. He has no comforting illusions to place between Himself and the feeling of having been forsaken by God. And Mary, his mother, must watch Him, knowing that one cannot help anyone else, however great one's love, and that His suffering is necessary if God's purpose is to be fulfilled.  

As noted in an Chapter 2, in one sense, Mary's silence represents the general atmosphere of political repression which Akhmatova emphasises at the outset by explaining that everyone spoke in whispers. At the same time, however, Mary's silence reflects a motif which runs throughout Akhmatova's poetry of the persona who is unable to speak, though this in no way diminishes her authority. Her purpose in this poem is not to speak, write or even commemorate - she is simply a mother bearing witness to her child's suffering.

Cassandra

Cassandra was granted the power of prophecy by Apollo who was in love with her. When she later rejected him, Apollo changed her powers so that no one would ever believe her prophecies. Cassandra was then condemned to anticipate disasters and yet be powerless


13 Amanda Haight, A Poetic Pilgrimage, p. 100.
to convince others to avert them. Akhmatova was drawn to the image of Cassandra early in her poetic career. In a letter to her brother-in-law written at seventeen, she says:

...помните весть Кассандры Шиллера? Я одной гранью души примыкаю к темному образу этой великой в своем страдании пророчицы! Но до величия мне далеко.

Given Cassandra's status as archetypal woman prophet and Akhmatova's stated orientation towards her, one can suppose an implicit or explicit allusion or parallel to Cassandra in Akhmatova's assertion of a prophetic role. For example, Akhmatova alludes to a link between her persona and Cassandra in 'Teper' nikto ne stanet slushat' pesen', written in 1917:

Теперь никто не станет слушать песен.
Предсказанные наступили дни.
Моя последняя, мир больше не чудесен,
Не разрывай мне сердца, не звени.

Еще недавно ласточкой свободной
Свершила ты свой утренний полет,
А ныне станешь нищенкой голодной,
Не доступишься у чужих ворот. (1917) (131)

Similarly, in 'la gibel' naklikala milym', written in 1921, she writes:

14 In many respects, Akhmatova's early attraction to the image of Cassandra came true for her later in life. On 14 August 1946, the Central Committee of the Communist Party passed a resolution censuring the journals Zvezda and Leningrad for publishing the works of Akhmatova and Mikhail Zoshchenko. A week later, Andrei Zhdanov issued a report in which he stated that publishing Akhmatova 'was equivalent to publishing Merezhkovsky, Kuz'min, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Gippius, Sologub, and others from the same "literary swamp"' (quoted in Amanda Haight, A Poetic Pilgrimage, pp. 143-44). However, such isolation went beyond the realisation of the Cassandra predicament in that Akhmatova was neither listened to, nor able to be heard.

15 Anna Akhmatova, Anna Akhmatova: stikhi/perepiska/vospominaniia/ikonografiia, p. 96.

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я гибель накликала милым,
и гибли один за другим.
o, горе мне! эти могилы
предсказаны словом моим.
как вороны кружатся, чуя
горячую, свежую кровь,
так дикие песни, ликуя,
моя насыщала любовь.
с тобою мне сладко и знойно,
ты близок, как сердце в груди.
дай руку мне, слушай спокойно.
тебя заклинаю: уйди.
и пусть не узнаю я, где ты,
o муза, его не зови,
da будет живым, невоспетым
мой не узнавший любви. (1921) (1, 163)

the image of cassandra can also be detected in more indirect references. for example in

нет, царевич, я не та,
кем меня ты видеть хочешь,
и давно мои уста
не целуют, а пророчат. (1915) (1, 114)

the persona of this poem describes her abilities in detail. yet the hero appears to reject her 'lips' which 'no longer kiss' but 'prophesy' in that she tells him to go home and forget that they ever met.

the persona as a cassandra figure is suggested in rekviem generally in that one of the cycle's major themes is the futility of language in the face of tragedy. anna crone also links the theme of the persona's madness to cassandra, comparing lines from 'uzhe bezumie krylom' in rekviem to cassandra's description of herself in aeschylus: 'half-mad

16 anna l. crone, 'antimetabole in rekviem: the structural disposition of themes and motifs', in the speech of unknown eyes, i, pp. 27-44, p. 37.
and I endured it all':

Уже безумие крылом
Души закрыло половину, (4 May 1940) (I, 367)

Crone also identifies the image of Cassandra in a poem written at the end of the 1940s, 'Vse
ushli i nikto ne vernulsia':

Наградили меня немотой,
На весь мир окаянно кляня
Обкорнили меня клеветою
Опили отравой меня.
И до самого края доведши,
Почему-то оставили там -
Буду я городской сумасшедшей
По притихшим бродить площадям.\(^\text{17}\)

Crone notes that in this poem, 'Akhmatova presents herself as a Cassandra, cursed, ridiculed,
taken to the final lengths of suffering but \textit{not killed}.\(^\text{18}\)

A classical prophet such as Cassandra was an image readily accessible to the female poet. According to Catriona Kelly, the male Symbolists were, in particular, receptive to the image of the woman writer as prophet (especially in the tradition of Russian folklore) as a way of actualising their belief that women, by their nature, were granted 'privileged access to the mythic domain': 'The argument that women's capacity for prophecy was directly dependent on their nature ruled out the possibility that women might appropriate male


\(^{18}\) Anna L. Crone, 'Antimetabole in \textit{Rekviem}: the Structural Disposition of Themes and Motifs', p. 37.
masks, since that would have knocked down the equation between nature and expression.\textsuperscript{19}

In addition to Cassandra, Akhmatova's persona bears some qualities of the Old Testament prophet, particularly as famously depicted by Pushkin. In Pushkin's poem, the seraphim commands the poet:

\begin{verbatim}
<<Восстань, пророк, и вижь, и внемли,
Исполнись воле моей,
И, обходя моря и земли,
Глаголом жги сердца людей>>.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{verbatim}

There are traces of Pushkin's prophet in Akhmatova's mature poetry, though as Jeanne Van der Eng-Liedmeier argues, it is impossible to consider the Biblical prophet a straightforward 'double'. She cites, in particular, the poem 'Pamiat' 19 iulia 1914', noting that, like Pushkin, Akhmatova emphasises the poet's special calling and inner transformation.\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{verbatim}
Мы на сто лет состарились, и это
Тогда случилось в час один:
Короткое уже кончалось лето,
Дымилось тело вспаханных равнин.

Вдруг запестрела тихая дорога,
Плач полетел, серебряно звения...
Закрыв лицо, я умолила бога.
До первой битвы умертвить меня.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{19} Catriona Kelly, \textit{A History of Russian Women's Writing}, p. 164.


Van der Eng-Liedmeier also acknowledges two major distinctions between Pushkin and Akhmatova's respective versions of the poet/prophet. Firstly, she notes that Akhmatova is concerned with the purification of memory as opposed to transformation of the senses and heart. Memory, she notes, is an all-encompassing theme throughout Akhmatova's poetry and takes in 'all the impressions and experiences given to her by the senses and the heart'. Secondly, unlike Pushkin, Akhmatova initially uses the pronoun 'we', shifting to the first person singular in the second and third stanzas. This, Van der Eng-Liedmeier suggests, denotes a particular group for whom the persona speaks.

Akhmatova was certainly open to conveying the sense of the poet as 'chosen'. For example, this image is suggested in the famous opening in *Rekviem* - 'Vmesto predisloviia' (I, 361) - in which the persona is approached by a 'woman with blue lips' from the cold. This woman does not select Akhmatova at random but, rather, she 'recognises' her (which Akhmatova, herself, emphasises by putting the word in quotation marks) (I, 361). The woman believes that Akhmatova, above others, possesses the ability to describe events.

This image of Akhmatova as uniquely suited to serve this function has a precursor in an earlier poem, 'Besshumno khodili po domu'. In this poem, Akhmatova's persona is led to a sick man whom she does not recognise. The man is temporarily revived in her presence and praises God that she has finally arrived. He tells her:

The persona gives the same short answer as she gives the woman in *Rekviem*: 'Mory'.

The fact that Akhmatova was drawn to the image of Cassandra rendered her a different kind of poet from those who exclusively identified with Pushkin's famous prophet from 'Prorok'. For one thing, Cassandra evokes the theme of 'muteness' and powerlessness, despite her poetic capabilities. It also provides Akhmatova with a perspective that enables her to uplift her message to historical proportions; the persona's 'muteness' in the face of her own personal failings in her romantic life expands to represent a nation cowed into silence by a repressive regime. Ultimately, Akhmatova's authority and celebrity were enhanced by the merging of poet and persona: Akhmatova, herself, eventually became regarded as a Cassandra figure in her own right. As Nadezhda Mandel'shtam describes:


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'Bibleiske stikhi' - Rachel, Lot's Wife and Michal

The famous cycle 'Bibleiske stikhi' is useful for considering Akhmatova's use of doubles in general. In the three poems which comprise the cycle, Akhmatova relates the stories of women who play mere supporting roles in the Bible: Rachel, Lot's wife, and Michal. Akhmatova is the self-appointed champion of these women; although she relates their tales from the point of view of an external narrator, she sympathises with their plights. The impression is that, as a woman, she is finally able to relate a more accurate version of events than has been traditionally understood, as she suggests in a personal aside in 'Lotova zhena':

Кто женщину эту оплакивать будет?
Не меньшей ли мятись она из утрат?
Лишь сердце мое никогда не забудет
Отдавшую жизнь за единственный взгляд. (1922-24) (I, 148)

The poems in this cycle are the most explicitly 'feminist' in approach, though Akhmatova would almost certainly not have described them as such. She anticipates a trend in such Western works as Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys which retells the story of Jane Eyre from the point of view of Rochester's insane wife locked away in the attic, Bertha. Akhmatova goes beyond picking up on a theme or narrative structure; she re-tells the story from what has been traditionally the unsympathetic point of view.

In this cycle, the Bible serves as the primary text from which Akhmatova improvises a more detailed portrayal. Akhmatova makes some concessions to the actual Biblical texts; her epigraphs are direct quotes from the Bible and each poem begins with the conjunction 'and', simulating Biblical style. However, the similarities end there. Rather than meekly
accept their fate, all three heroines struggle with the situations in which they find themselves. Rachel is consumed with jealousy for her sister; Lot's wife looks back in defiance of her husband's wishes and in full knowledge of the potential consequences; Michal's soul is full of 'sorrow' and 'resentment' as she is presented to David.

Akhmatova's Biblical heroines are, in many respects, typical of Akhmatova's poetic persona generally. This is because Akhmatova highlights qualities in her heroines which also apply to her own poetic persona, including an unwillingness to submit to the will of others and a predisposition for such human weaknesses as jealousy, nostalgia and passion. In all but name, her Biblical heroines are the heroines of Chetki and Belaia staia. Further, as Amanda Haight explains, these issues were central to Akhmatova's personal life:

The poet's choice of these [Biblical] women as heroines was not purely arbitrary. Akhmatova was not describing Rachel, Lot's wife, and Michal from outside, but looking through their eyes. In them she had found at least the suggestion of a way of looking at life which might begin to explain the riddle of her own existence. If she could use a heroine who drew together the disconnected facets of her own character, it could only be because she had herself undergone, or was undergoing such a change.24

Rachel

Akhmatova's epigraph indicates the precise part of the Biblical story on which she intends to focus: 'И служил Иаков за Рахиль семь лет; и они показались ему за несколько дней, потому что он любил ее.' The poem's first stanza only elaborates slightly on the Biblical version:

Akhmatova emphasises that Jacob bows to Rachel like a 'homeless wanderer'. She leaves out the purpose of Jacob's visit - to obey Isaac's command to take a wife from one of Laban's daughters.

Akhmatova then relates the portion of the story in which Jacob agrees to serve Laban for seven years in return for Rachel, Laban's youngest daughter.

The reference to seven years seeming like 'seven dazzling days' is borrowed from the Bible (Bytie, 29: 20). The rest of the poem describes Laban's deceit when he sends his older daughter, Leah, to the marriage bed and not Rachel:

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И встретил Иаков в долине Рахиль,  
Он ей поклонился, как странник бездомный.  
Стада подымали горячую пыль,  
Источник был камнем завален огромным.  
Он камень своей рукой отвалил  
И чистой водою овец напоил. (1921) (I, 146)

Ахматова подчеркивает, что Иаков поклоняется Рахиль как бездомному страннику. Она пропускает цель посещения Иакова - подчиниться команде Исаака забрать невесту из дочерей Лабана.

Ахматова затем описывает тот факт, что Иаков согласился служить Лабану семь лет в обмен на Рахиль, которую является его младшей дочерью.

Ссылаясь на Библию (Bytie, 29: 20), Ахматова продолжает описывать интригу Лабана, когда он отправляет старшую дочь, Лейлу, замуж за Иакова, а не Рахиль.

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И снится Иакову сладостный час
Прозрачный источник долинный,
Веселые взоры Рахильных глаз
И голос ее голубиний:
Иаков, не ты ли меня целовал
И черной голубкой своей называл? (1921) (I, 146-47)

Ахматова оставляет без внимания тот факт, что Лабан оправдывался, отправляя Лейлу, тем, что традиция не передавать старшую дочь до приёма младшей. В Библии Лабан позже говорит Иакову о заматывании Лейло традиции, и в обмен на это, он может тогда получить Рахел. Ахматова также не упоминает о каких-либо упоминаниях о более высоких планах: инструкциях Иакова сформировать племя от дочерей своего племянника — Лабана. В конечном итоге, в Библии Лейлу награждают потомством, в то время как Рахел осталась бездетной. В Библии, любовная история второстепенна, для Ахматовой, она становится центром. Она превращает историю Рахели и Иакова в конфликт, с которым могла бы столкнуться ее ранний персонаж и героиня.

Отказавшись от роли, которую ей отвели в планах Божьих.

Lot's Wife

The only significant mention the Bible makes of Lot's wife serves as Akhmatova's epigraph to the poem: 'Жена же Лотова оглянулась позади него и стала соляным столпом.' From this textual point, Akhmatova constructs a history for Lot's wife:

И праведник шел за посланником бога,
Огромный и светлый, по черной горе.
Но громко жена говорила тревога:
Не поздно, ты можешь еще посмотреть
На красные башни родного Содома,
На площадь, где пела, на двор, где пряла,
На окна пустые высокого дома,
Где милому мужу детей родила.

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Взглянула - и, скованы смертною болью,
Глаза ее больше не могли;
И сделалось тело прозрачною солью,
И быстрые ноги земле приросли.

Кто женщину эту оплакивать будет?
Не меньше ли мнится она из утрат?
Лишь сердце мое никогда не забудет
Отдавшую жизнь за единственный взгляд. (1922-24) (I, 147-48)

As already discussed in Chapter 5, the transformation of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt may be interpreted as her transformation into a kind of memorial to the act of remembrance. Parallel to this is the way in which Akhmatova blends the concrete objects with personal experience; she not only sees the buildings of Sodom - the red towers, the square, the courtyard and the 'empty windows of the tall home' - but also recalls the activities that went on there: singing, spinning and giving birth to children. This effect is described by Kees Verheul as follows:

...the heroine's departure from her native city is envisaged as a breach with her personal past, from which she is irrevocably cut off by historical catastrophe. The PUBLIC BUILDINGS of the city which she is to leave are filled with PERSONAL MEMORIES; the description of the architecture of Sodom, to which the heroine casts her lethal glance, culminates in that of the HOUSE in which she has lived with her husband and children and from which she is now to be cut off forever.  

Lot's wife has fond associations with motherhood in particular which, as discussed in Chapter 3, is untypical of Akhmatova's persona generally. As Amanda Haight emphasises,

'Lot's wife does not look back at a place which has been a trap from which she has to free

herself or to some place where she has been a "bad mother". Rather, she cherishes her memories to such an extent, she is willing to give her life to preserve them.

Akhmatova uses similar imagery in 'Vtoraia godovshchina', written on the second anniversary of her return to Leningrad:

Нет, я не выплакала их.  
Они внутри скипелись сами.  
И все проходит пред глазами  
Давно без них, всегда без них.

Без них меня томит и душит  
Обиды и разлуки боль.  
Проника в кровь - трезвят и сушит  
Их всесжигающая соль.

Но мнится мне: в сорок четвертом,  
И не в июне ль первый день,  
Как на шелку возникла стертом  
Твоя страдальческая тень.

Еще на всем печать лежала  
Великих бед, недавних гроз, -  
И я свой город увидела  
Сквозь радугу последних слез. (1946) (I, 215-16)

The 'rainbow' of her 'last tears' and the reference to 'fiery salt' spreading through her blood echo the image of Lot's wife looking back on Sodom.

Michal

In this poem, Akhmatova drastically elaborates upon the Biblical tale. Only her epigraph is taken directly from the Bible (Tsarstv 18: 21):

26 Amanda Haight, A Poetic Pilgrimage, p. 86.

124
No Davida полюбила...дочь
Саула Мелхола.
Саул думал: отдам ее за него,
и она будет ему сестрой.

The rest is Akhmatova's own elaboration:

И троек играет безумцу царю,
И ночь беспощадную рушит,
И громко победную кличет зарю,
И призраки ужаса душит.
И царь благосклонно ему говорит:
<<Огонь в тебе, юношь, дивный горит,
И я за такое лекарство
Отдам тебе дочку и царство>>.
И царская дочка глядит на певца,
Её песен не нужно, не нужно венца,
В душе ее скорбь и обида,
Но хочет Мелхола - Давида.
Бледнее, чем мертвая, рот ее сжат;
В зеленых глазах исступление;
Сняют одежды, и стройно звят
Запястья при каждом движенье.
Как тайна, как сон, как праматерь Лилит...
Не волей своей она говорит:
<<Наверно, с отравой мне дали питье,
И мой помрачается дух.
Бесстыдство мое! Унижение мое!
Бродьга! Разбойник! Пастух!
Зачем же никто из придворных вельмож,
Увы, на него не похож?
А солнца лучи...а звезды в ночи...
А эта холодная дрожь...(1922-61) (I, 148-49)

One possible interpretation of this poem is that it focuses on Michal's resistance to play the part handed to her by God. Michal, in the Bible, becomes key in that she warns David to run for his life from her father who used her like a 'trap'. Yet Akhmatova's heroine is full of 'sorrow' and 'shame' at her passion for David - a mere shepherd. Akhmatova's mysterious reference to Lilith - the 'original mother', will be considered below.
For now, however, it is interesting to note that David's main attraction in this poem are his musical talents. Similarly, in 'Muzyka', Akhmatova describes music in terms of something 'miracle-working' which 'burns' in it:

В ней что-то чудотворное горит,
И на глазах ее края гранятся.
Она одна со мною говорит,
Когда другим подойти боятся.

Когда последний друг отвер глаза,
Она была со мной в моей могиле
И пела словно нервая гроза
Иль будто все цветы заговорили. (1958) (l, 234-35)

Antigone

Antigone was the daughter of Oedipus who resigned the throne of Thebes, giving way to Creon. Antigone accompanied her blind father when he was eventually expelled from Thebes. She is more famous, however, for disobeying Creon's proclamation that her brother, Polyneices, should be left for the beasts and birds to tear and devour for fighting against the city of Thebes. Creon proclaimed that anyone who buried Polyneices would be put to death. Despite her sister's pleas to obey the state, Antigone insisted on burying the brother she loved, answering to a higher law than that of the state. Antigone was put to death for her actions.

While Akhmatova was drawn to the role of intercessor, she was also drawn to figures such as Antigone for her associations with mourning the dead. This image, as Nadezhda Mandel'shtam notes, was one her husband would have commended:
У Мандельштама было своеобразное деление мира на <<мужей>> и <<жен>>. Всю ответственность за течение земных дел несут <<мужи>>, а <<жены>> плакальщицы, гадалки, собирательницы легкого пешла... Только мне гадать он не позволял, и я обижалась, что выключена из числа <<жен>>. Однажды, отгоняя от меня гадалку он сказал: <<Тебе зачем гадать? Ты уже все знаешь>>. Господи, что я знала тогда, если я и сейчас ничего не знаю...  

She also describes how her husband valued the image of men in battle and the 'handshake at moments of danger', though, '...в минуту опасности не наплюш ли одного <<мужа>>, который бы пожал ему руку. Зато с нами была плакальщица Ахматова, последняя из тех, кого он называл <<мы>>. Ее прощальный поцелуй стоил больше того, на что были способны кучные <<мужи>> нашей эпохи.  

Nadezhda Mandel'shtam also notes that the image of Antigone was representative of a generation of Russian women:

В могущественных державах двадцатого века, прославляемых некоторыми поэтами и многими трибунами как единственная надежда человечества, властители и цари находились на такой головокружительной высоте и в такой ослепительной изоляции, что никакие человеческие голоса не достигали их слуха. Миллионы неосуществившихся Антигон прятались по углам, заполняя анкеты, ходили на службу и не смели не то что похоронить, но даже оплакать своих мертвецов. Плачущая женщина немедленно потеряла бы службу и сдохла с голоду.  

In the third poem of a cycle dedicated to Boris Pasternak, Akhmatova explicitly refers to Antigone when she lead her blind father out of Thebes:

Словно дочка слепого Эдипа,  
Муза к смерти провидца вела,

__________________________

27 Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, Vtoraia kniga, p. 57.
28 Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, Vtoraia kniga, p. 57.
As with the image of Cassandra, some of Akhmatova's references to Antigone are more generic. For example, Akhmatova's poetry often fulfils the function of a lament - a ritual which, in Orthodoxy, is traditionally performed by women and which is associated with Antigone. Akhmatova briefly mentions such a figure in \textit{U samogo moria} - the soldier's wife who 'sang of her grief'. Mourning for the dead provided another role which ideally suited Akhmatova as a woman poet.

This image of Antigone is related to the death of Nikolai Gumilev and Akhmatova's subsequent search for his grave. However, the theme also predates Gumilev's death as the following extract written in 1914 demonstrates:

\begin{quote}
Вестей от него не получишь больше,
Не услышишь ты про него.
В объятой пожарами, скорбной Польше
Не найдешь могилы его. (1914) (1, 101)
\end{quote}

Akhmatova dedicated the poem 'Я не знаю, ты жив или умер,' to Boris Anrep:

\begin{quote}
Я не знаю, ты жив или умер,
На земле тебя можно искать
Или только в вечерней думе
По усопшем светло горевать. (1915) (1, 113-14)
\end{quote}

This poem also, perhaps, relates to the theme of the eternal masculine discussed in an earlier chapter. 'Everything' is for the hero: her 'daily prayers', the 'fever of insomnia' and her poetry - her 'white flock', referring to the book in which the poem is included.
As noted in Chapter 1, there is an obvious tension in attempting to include Akhmatova in a movement such as Acmeism/Adamism with overwhelmingly masculine imagery. Akhmatova faced the choice of either adopting the masculine theory, despite her evident incompatibility, or assuming a separate image complementary to the dominant masculine one. Akhmatova was conscious of this tension, as suggested by the following quote:

В зиму Sturm und Drang акмеизма мы несколько раз выступали как группа. Гум(илев) и Гор(одецкий) читали доклады, помпю, как старик Род(етский) (?) с гигантской бородой потрясал кулаками и кричал: «&lt;Эти Адамы и эта тощая Ева&gt; t[(o) b[сть)] я] [sic].30

Further, in 'Dolgim vzgliadom tvoim istomlennai', Akhmatova explicitly links her persona with Eve:

Долгим взглядом твоим истомленная,
И сама научилась томить,
Из ребра твоего сотворенная,
Как могу я тебя не любить?

Быть твою сестрою отрадною
Мне завещано древней судьбой,
А я стала лукавой и жадною
И сладчайшей твоюю рабой.

Но когда замираю, смиренная,
На груди твоей спека белей,
Как ликует твое умурренное
Сердце - солнце отчизны моей! (1921) (1, 163)

30 Anna Akhmatova, 'Avtobiograficheskaia proza', p. 7.
Akhmatova's contemporaries approached the impact of a female Adamist with mixed results. For example, in a poem dedicated to Akhmatova - 'Son Adama' - Gumilev succumbs to the temptation of casting her in the role of Eve:

Вот Ева - блудница, лепчет бессвязно,
Вот Ева - святая, с печально очей,
То лунная дева, то дева земная,
Но вечно и всюду чужая, чужая.31

Gorodetskii, the poet most closely associated with Adamism, was also prone to associating Akhmatova with Eve as opposed to Adam. Unlike Gumilev, Gorodetskii positively addressed the issue of Akhmatova's apparent incompatibility with such a masculine theory:

...Адам, как истинный художник, понял, что здесь он должен уступить место Еве. Женская рука, женское чутье, женский взор здесь более уместны...Пирика Анны Ахматовой остроумно и нежно подошла к этой задаче, достаточно трудной. О 'Вечер' много писали. Многим сразу стали дороги изящная печаль, нежность и безхитростность этой книги. Но мало кто заметил, что пессимизм 'Вечера' - акмеистичен, что 'называя' уродцев певрастием и всякой иной тоски, Анна Ахматова в несчастных этих звереныхках любит не то, что искалечено в них, не то, что осталось

от Адама, ликующего в раю своем. Эти 'остатки' она ласкает в поэзии своей рукой почти мастера.32

Although this association of Akhmatova with Eve may seem essentially superficial, it suggests that Akhmatova was confronted with imagery which cast her in a fundamentally different role from that of her male contemporaries. The two images of the poet - Adam and Eve - are mutually exclusive: one names, the other is named. Akhmatova seems to allude to this in her comments on the poem cited above, 'Tsaritsa', in which Gumilev compares her

32 Sergei Gorodetskii, 'Nekotorye techenia v sovremennoi russkoii poezii', p. 49.
This comment suggests that it was the contradictory nature of Gumilev’s characterisation that concerned her, as opposed to actually being cast as Eve in the first place. This image of being 'split in two' reappears in 'Prolog' (also known as 'Son vo sne'), but in this context, however, it refers to the 'split' between the woman as beloved and poet:

Даже эта полночь не добилась,
Кто возлюбленная, кто поэт,
Не погибла я, но раздвоилась,
А двоим нам в мире места нет. (1964) (1, 374)

Later in this work, Akhmatova writes:

Этот рай, где мы не согрешили,
Тошен нам.
Этот запах смертоносных лилий
И еще не стыдный срам.
Сниться улыбающейся Еве,

Что ее сквозь грозные века
С будущим убийцею во чреве
Поведет любимая рука. (1946) (1, 376)

The image of Eve carries with it aspects of archetypal associations with Original Sin that do not apply to Adam. By exploiting these associations, Akhmatova was able to uplift the theme of personal guilt to archetypal proportions. Thus, even when Eve is not specifically mentioned, her presence is felt nonetheless, as, for example, in 'Iz bol'shoi ispovedi':

Я званье то приобрела
За сотни преступлений,
Живым изменницей была
И верной - только тени. (1963) (I, 380)

Lilith

A less well-known character in the Adam and Eve myth is Lilith - Adam's first wife.

In 'Tsaritsa', Gumilev not only compared Akhmatova to Eve, but also to Lilith:

Твой лоб в кудрях отлива бронзы,
Как сталь, глаза твои остры,
Тебе задумчивые бронзы
В Тибете ставили костры.

Когда Тимур в унылой злобе
Народы бросил к их мете,
Тебя несли в пустынях Гоби
На боевом его щите.

И ты вступила в крепость Агры,
Светла, как древняя Лилит,
Твои веселые онагры
Звенели золотом копыт.34

Also, as noted earlier, Akhmatova compares Michal's role in her 'Bibleiskie stikhi' to that of 'the first mother - Lilith'. This comparison is mysterious. First of all, Akhmatova seems to suggest that the point of comparison between Michal and Lilith has to do with motherhood in that she stresses that Lilith is 'the first mother'. However, Michal was not a maternal figure: she was ultimately denied children as punishment for condemning David for his dance before the Arc of the Covenant. Secondly, Lilith is not a typical maternal image. According to Hebraic tradition, when Adam tried to force Lilith to lie with him, Lilith

34 Nikolai Gumilev, Sobranie sochinenii, I, pp. 102-03.
sneered and fled to the Red Sea. When God sent his angels to fetch her, she cursed them and ignored God's command. She willingly slept with demons, however, and gave birth to one hundred children each day. Meanwhile, God created Eve as Adam's more co-operative companion. Lilith was known as 'Great Mother' to agricultural tribes, though her legacy was as more of an archetypal 'anti-mother'. According to Christian legend, male babies could not be left alone in the house or else, it was said, Lilith would seize them. Some believers even drew protective chalk around baby boys with the names of the angels whom God sent to fetch Lilith.\textsuperscript{35} Lilith, therefore, may be considered a variant of the 'bad mother' and 'harlot' motifs discussed earlier.

Perhaps Akhmatova's reference to Lilith in 'Melkhola' (quoted in full above), therefore, has to do with a refusal to submit; just as Lilith refused to submit to Adam, Akhmatova's Michal attempts to overcome her passion for David. Of course, in the Bible, Michal did ultimately submit to David. The ambiguous ending to Akhmatova's poem may allude to this:

А солнца лучи... а звезды в ночи...
А эта холодная дрожь...\textsuperscript{4(l, 149)}

Muse Poems

Akhmatova's muse poems highlight a number of themes which have been explored in earlier chapters. For example, Akhmatova's muse conveys the sense of a parallel world to which Akhmatova's persona is granted privileged, if limited, access. Also, in some poems, her muse provides yet another means of Akhmatova's persona adopting an objective stance; she may remain passive while her muse takes action. In others, however, Akhmatova emphasises the symbiotic relationship between her persona and muse, as one deteriorates, so does the other. Finally, in some poems, as David Wells notes, Akhmatova's novel twist to the image of the poem as 'dictated' to the poet is to depict her muse as companion or friend as opposed to the traditional male connotation of muse as lover.36 This is evident in such poems as 'Muze' in which she describes her muse as her 'muse-sister':

Муза-сестра заглянула в лицо,  
Взгляд ее ясен и ярок.  
И отняла золотое кольцо,  
Первый весенний подарок.

Муза! ты видишь, как счастливы все -  
Девушки, женщины, вдовы...  
Лучше погибну на колесе,  
Только не эти оковы.

Знаю: гадая, и мне обрывать  
Нежный цветок маргаритку.  
Должен на этой земле испытать  
Каждый любовную пытку.

The poem stresses the persona's symbiotic relationship with her muse; the muse's gaze is 'bright and clear' and she has taken the persona's 'golden ring'.

In 'la prishla tebia smenit', sestra', Akhmatova refers to a muse-like figure as her 'sister', emphasising the close link between the two:

<<Я пришла тебя сменить, сестра,
У лесного, у высокого костра.

Поседели твои волосы. Глаза
Замутила, затуманила слеза.

Ты уже не понимаешь пенья птиц,
Ты ни звезд не замечаешь, ни зарниц.

И давно ударя бубна не слышны,
А я знаю, ты боишься тишины.

Я пришла тебя сменить, сестра,
У лесного, у высокого костра>>.

<<Ты пришла меня похоронить.
Где же заступ твой, где лопата?
Только флейта в руках твоих.
Я не буду тебя винить,
Разве жаль, что давно, когда-то,
Навсегда мой голос затих.

135
This poem illustrates a number of themes and motifs discussed in earlier chapters. For example, the people entitled to sit by the 'high fire' are female. Although the poem seems to have more to do with a younger poet (or muse) figure replacing the elder, it is women who are (or have been able) to 'understand the song of birds', 'notice the stars or summer lightning' and cause the tamborine to beat. This process also highlights the image of the sensitive persona discussed earlier; it is her ability to discern such things which renders her a poet figure, not her ability to craft words. The silent persona is not applicable in this poem as one of the symptoms which convince the elder figure to give up her place is that her voice has quietened down forever and the younger person says that she knows 'the elder is frightened of silence'. The theme of the detached persona is retained, however, in that the two sisters serve as observers of the other. Further, an association with Symbolism is conveyed by the scent of 'lilac' and the mysterious sense of place, suggestive of another world. The impression is that this could be one manifestation of one Eternal Feminine
replacing the other.

Another poem which evokes a sense that the muse is akin to a kind of Symbolist parallel world is 'Muza ushla po doroge':

Муза ушла по дороге,
Осеньей, узкой, крутоей,
И были смуглые ноги
Обрызганы крупной росой.

Я долго её просила
Зимы со мной подождать,
Но сказала: <<Ведь здесь могила,
Как ты можешь ещё дышать?>>

Я голубку ей дать хотела,
Ту, что всех в голубятне белей,
Но птица сама полетела
За стройной гостью моей.

Я, глядя ей вслед, молчала,
Я любила ее одну,
А в небе заря стояла,
Как ворота в её страну. (1915) (l.81)

The gate to the muse's country is like a link to another world which contrasts with the persona's world which is like a 'grave'. The reference to the muse's feet as 'swarthy' is interesting in that that is the description in 'Smuglyi otrok brodil po alleiam' which signals that the youth in question is Pushkin. Her muse is also described as 'swarthy' in 'Uedinenie':

А не дописанную мной страницу -
Божественно спокойна и легка,
Допишет Музы смуглая рука. (1914) (l.78)

37 The muse's parallel world is also described in 'Pust' golosa organa snova grianut':

А я иду владеть чудесным садом,
Где шелест трав и восклицанье муз. (1921) (l.160)
In "Vse otniato: i sila, i liubov", both the persona and her muse deteriorate simultaneously. This probably has to do with the fact that the poem was written while Akhmatova was in the Crimea recovering from tuberculosis. Nonetheless, it is not the silent muse who attempts to revive the persona's flagging strength, but the persona's own 'conscience':

Все отнято: и сила, и любовь.  
В немилый город брошенное тело  
Не радо солнцу. Чувствую, что кровь  
Во мне уже совсем похолодела.

Веселой Музы нрав не узнаю:  
Она глядит и слова не проронит,  
А голову в веночке темном клонит,  
Изнеможенная, на грудь мою.

И только совесть с каждым днём страшней  
Беснуется: великой хочет дани.  
Закрыв лицо, я отвечала ей...  
Но больше нет ни слез, ни оправданий. (1916) (1, 84)

The sense that her muse is, in fact, just as sad or vulnerable as she, is also emphasised in 'Byl blazhennoi moei kolybel’iu':

Солнцем молений моих  
Был ты, строгий, спокойный, туманный.  
Там впервые предстал мне жених,  
Указал свой путь осиянный,  
И печальная Муза моя,  
Как слепую, водила меня. (1914) (1, 85)

Akhmatova's muse poems embrace a number of themes discussed earlier. For example, in 'O, znala l' ia, kogda v odezhde beloi', Akhmatova again uses the image of turning to stone (in this case, her lyre), evoking many of the issues discussed in Chapter 3:
In 'Muza', Akhmatova takes the image of the passive persona to the extreme:

Когда я ночью жду ее прихода,
Жизнь, кажется, висит на волоске.
Что почести, что юность, что свобода
Пред милой гостью с дудочкой в рукe.

И вот вошла. Откинув покрывало,
Внимательно взглянула на меня.
Ей говорю: «<Ты ли Данту диктовала
Страницы Ада?>» Отвечает «<Я>». (1924) (p. 173-74)

The reference to Dante also suggests a continuity between him and Akhmatova. Again, she sees herself as part of a male lineage of poets. In any case, her role in the poetic process is utterly passive; her muse literally 'dictates'. Finally, the poem 'Muza' from the cycle 'Tainy remesla' evokes the image of 'women's language' discussed earlier. In this poem, the persona corrects the assumptions made by others about the nature of the 'divine babble':

Как и жить мне с этой обузой,
А еще называют Музой,
Говорят: «<Ты с ней на лугу...>»
Говорят: «<Божественный лепет...>»
Жестче, чем лихорадка, отрешляет,
И опять весь год ни гу-гу. (1936-60) (p. 191)
Conclusion

The fact that Akhmatova began her poetic career in the wake of Symbolism had a profound impact on her own poetic persona. Symbolism cast her, as a woman, as an object of inspiration or mediator between the (male) artist and the chaos of the universe. In adopting a female persona, Akhmatova confronted a paradigm which automatically designated her as object as opposed to creator.

Although the images which the Acmeists furnished in terms of a creative female figure were less restrictive, they did not provide Akhmatova with a prescription for dealing with the 'problem of perspective' she inherited from the Symbolists. The Acmeists were prone to emphasising the poet's masculinity and virility - a trend which manifestly excluded Akhmatova. They also glossed over the obvious tension of including Akhmatova as an Adamist by either ignoring the issue altogether or designating her as an Eve figure with little thought as to the implications of this parallel image. Whereas Gumilev awkwardly adopted the cliché of the male poet as 'mother' to the poem, Akhmatova did not readily adopt this image, at least partly, perhaps, as a consequence of her complicated associations with motherhood in general.

Akhmatova did use a number of devices to enhance her authority as a woman poet. In a limited number of poems, for example, she experimented with adopting a male speaker. In others, she reversed the Symbolist paradigm to create a kind of 'eternal masculine'. As a more substantial device, however, Akhmatova simply retained the associations of the feminine with the transcendent. Her persona is sensitive to the forces of nature and, in some
poems, to the Word of God. At the same time, she enhances the sense that the persona is detached from her own actions; she is not the creator or the actor but, rather, the receptor and the instrument through which divine forces find coherent form. One implication of this approach is that, in many poems, her persona is silent or unable to speak coherently. At the same time, however, she is imbued with the authority of one with direct access to the Word of God. Thus, rather than become overwhelmed by negative associations of women and creativity (such as the 'divine babble' of female poets), she appropriated them and reworked them for her own creative ends.

A related theme to this approach is that of the persona as a work of art as opposed to the creator of a work of art. This theme perfectly complemented the Symbolist legacy of the artist as a Pygmalion figure. It also lent itself to identification with such figures as Lot's wife, whose transformation into a pillar of salt Akhmatova uplifts into the action of a poet - a desire to preserve memory at all cost.

Akhmatova's doubles are figures taken from history as mediated through works of literature familiar to Russians. Akhmatova retold their stories from their own individual points of view. At the same time, she elaborated upon their stories to bring out elements relevant to her own personal circumstances; her identification with the great matriarchs, wives and mothers of history went beyond mere identification - it extended to actual assimilation. Again, this technique allowed her to continue to portray her persona as essentially passive; she simply embraced events and actions which had already taken place and made them seem like her own.
The authoritative, matriarchal persona of *Rekviem* did not emerge in a vacuum. She is the culmination of Akhmatova's selective choice of feminine themes and imagery throughout her early career. She is also the manifestation of the powerful cult of personality which Akhmatova actively encouraged. Akhmatova realised that her strength as a poet was a particular feminine kind of strength. Just as the poet who identifies with Mary is clearly a different kind of poet from one who identifies with Christ, the poet who identifies with Eve evokes a different range of associations from one who identifies with Adam. Akhmatova realised that it was precisely this perception of her as different that effectively underpinned her extraordinary sense of poetic authority.
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