“Four Ways of Writing the City”: St. Petersburg-Leningrad as a Metaphor in the Poetry of Joseph Brodsky
I began this work on Joseph Brodsky as a postgraduate student at the Department of Slavonic and Baltic Languages and Literatures of the University of Helsinki under the supervision of Professor Pekka Pesonen. I am very grateful to Professor Pesonen for his tireless help and encouragement. His lectures on the myth of St. Petersburg in Russian literature served as the impetus for subsequent scholarship. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Department for all the support they gave me and, in particular, Professor Arto Mustajoki for providing me with facilities needed for my research work. As for the financial support I have received, I am much indebted to the Helsinki University Research Fund and the Finnish Konkordia Foundation.

I have benefited greatly from the generous attention paid to my manuscript by various readers at different stages of the work. I would especially like to thank Professor Mikhail Lotman for his penetrating reading and inspiring suggestions. I am also deeply grateful to Professor Alexander Dolinin, who provided generous commentary that significantly improved this study. Their encouraging comments helped to clear the darkest clouds.

My thanks also go to Henry Fullenwider for his meticulous copyediting. All remaining errors are my own. In the final stages of the text editing, I received much encouragement from my colleague Jussi Heinonen, whose patience I tested on a daily basis.

The support of friends was invaluable throughout the writing of my work. My greatest thanks, however, are reserved for my parents. Without them this work would never have been completed.

M. K.
Helsinki
February 2003
CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................................................7
  1.1 Theoretical Terminology ............................................................................................13

2 ST. PETERSBURG AS “THE COMMON PLACE” OF THE PETERSBURG TEXT ..........................................................17
  2.1 The Petersburg Text as a Myth ....................................................................................17
  2.2 The Petersburg Text as a Code ...................................................................................22
  2.3 Brodsky and The Petersburg Text ................................................................................26
  2.4 St. Petersburg as a Setting ..........................................................................................29
    2.4.1 St. Petersburg as a Locus of Parting .................................................................30
    2.4.1.1 “Прачечный мост” ..........................................................................................31
    2.4.1.2 “Мы вышли с почты прямо на канал...” .......................................................40
    2.4.2 St. Petersburg as a Locus of Death .....................................................................45
    2.4.2.1 “Еврейское кладбище около Ленинграда...” .............................................45
    2.4.2.2 “Бессмертия у смерти не прошу...”,
      “Стансы”, “Стансы городу” ...............................................................................50
  2.4.3 St. Petersburg as a Locus of Fictional Heroes
     (Fictional vs. Actual Chronotope) .............................................................................57
  2.4.4 St. Petersburg as a Locus of Struggle between Nature and Culture .....................72
    2.4.4.1 “Отрывок” ......................................................................................................74
    2.4.4.2 “Поэти элегия” ............................................................................................79
    2.4.4.3 “С февраля по апрель” ...............................................................................84

3 ST. PETERSBURG AS “PARADISE AND/OR HELL” ..........................................................92
  3.1 “Декабрь во Флоренции” - A Postcard from Florence? ........................................93
    3.1.1 “Florence - St. Petersburg” Parallel ....................................................................98
    3.1.2 The Constellation “Dante - Mandel’shtam - Brodsky” .....................................114
      3.1.2.1 Speech vs. Scripture .....................................................................................125
  3.2 St. Petersburg as Paradise Lost ....................................................................................133
  3.3 “Пятая годовщина” - The Lost Paradise or the Lost Hell? .......................................140
    3.3.1 “Пятая годовщина” as a Generalised Image of Soviet Life ..............................158
    3.3.2 Language as Homeland ....................................................................................167
  3.4 Other Insights into “Hell” and “Paradise” -
    “Похороны Бобо” ..................................................................................................179
    3.4.1 “Мы жили в городе цвета окаменевшей водки...” ........................................189
# Table of Contents

4 ST. PETERSBURG AS “UTOPIA” .................................................................195  
4.1 “Развивая Платона” ......................................................................195  
4.2 The “Audenesque” Realm of “Развивая Платона” ..............202  
  4.2.1 “Memorial for the City” ..............................................................207  
  4.2.2 “Under Sirius” ........................................................................219  
  4.2.3 “Horae Canonicae” .................................................................225  
4.3 Location and Existence of “The Ideal City” .........................233  
4.4 Time and Its Direction .................................................................240  

5 ST. PETERSBURG AS “VOID” ................................................................251  
5.1 “Полдень в комнате” ..................................................................251  
  5.1.1 Space as a “Place” ....................................................................252  
  5.1.2 Space as a “Void” .....................................................................262  
    5.1.2.1 The “Void” as Absolute Time and Absolute Space 268  

6 CONCLUSION ......................................................................................277  

LITERATURE .........................................................................................284  
  Works by Joseph Brodsky .............................................................284  
  Other Works ..................................................................................285  

APPENDIX ............................................................................................315  
ABSTRACT ...........................................................................................340
The present study is devoted to the theme of St. Petersburg-Leningrad in Joseph Brodsky’s works. The chosen approach to the evolving vision of the city in Brodsky’s poetry is a close examination of four metaphors: St. Petersburg as “the common place” of the Petersburg Text, St. Petersburg as paradise and/or hell, St. Petersburg as utopia and St. Petersburg as void. All four metaphors are connected to the native city of the poet - either explicitly or in an implicit manner, mainly in the form of intertextual allusions - in his texts. Furthermore, spatial and temporal characteristics can be assigned to each of the selected metaphors - hypostases of the poet’s native city.

City texts as such occupy a central position in Brodsky’s literary realm. The theme of the city emerges frequently both in his prose works as well as in his lyrics. In this study the emphasis will be put on his poetry on St. Petersburg.1

The poetics of space and time serves as a starting point for the examination of the city-image. Methodologically, this study engages in close readings of Brodsky’s lyric works with an emphasis on semantic interpretation rather than on linguistic examination. One essential aspect of Brodsky’s poetics is its pervasively literary nature, for it is imbued with allusions to other, for the most part, literary texts. In addition to investigating the spatio-temporal features of Brodsky’s St. Petersburg the study will focus on exposing and analysing the intertextual relations of the scrutinised texts with other texts from Russian as well as Western belles lettres.

The chosen approach, underlining the spatio-temporal aspects of the city-image, is based on the fact that space and time are the central categories on which Brodsky builds his worldview, which is manifested in most of his works. He defines his position in the world first and foremost in terms of spatio-temporal dimensions, which becomes apparent in one of his interviews:

Главное - спросить себя, выяснить /.../, что тебе интересно на этом свете, понимаешь ли ты то пространство, в котором находишься; чувствуешь ли ты идиотичность этой геометрии,

---

1 I will refer to the city as St. Petersburg, which Brodsky prefers to employ in his autobiographical essays on the city. The name Leningrad (or St. Petersburg-Leningrad) will be used when the examined text is rendered with clear associations with the Soviet reality, or when the poet uses that name himself.
The list of the metaphors selected to illustrate Brodsky’s image of St. Petersburg is not meant to be exhaustive. It would have been equally appropriate to examine the city as a metaphor of empire, for instance. At any rate, notwithstanding the fact that the poet attaches to his city of birth attributes which testify to its imperial origin, the theme of empire is not treated separately here, but in connection with each analysed text, when necessary. Besides, several studies have been devoted to the theme of empire in Brodsky’s poetics. I refer the reader to the enlightening account of Ungurianu, among others, of the images of Antiquity in Brodsky’s works⁵, as well as to Polukhina’s monograph “Joseph Brodsky. A Poet for Our Time” in which she sheds light on the imperial aspects of St. Petersburg in Brodsky’s poetry.⁴ Moreover, an exhaustive examination of the theme would require the inclusion of Brodsky’s works on the thematics of Rome, which would exceed the scope of the present study. Brodsky’s ”Roman Text” has already been elucidated by such scholars as Innis, Nivat, Ranchin, Rigsbee and Sproede, among others⁵. Apart from Rome, Brodsky draws an analogy between St. Petersburg and another ancient city with imperial connotations, viz. Constantinople/ Istanbul, in his essay ”Flight from Byzantium”. This essay, with its allusions to the city on the Neva, has been analysed in detail by Tomas Venclova, among others.⁶

Brodsky’s poems on Venice, as well as his essay “Watermark”, could have been taken into account in Chapter 3, which deals with the paradisiac connotations of the city-image. It is well known that Brodsky perceived Venice as a place which comes closest to an earthly paradise.⁷ The obvious parallel in depictions of the Italian city with its Russian counter-

---

⁶ Venclova 1990 passim or Венцлова 1997 passim. See also Вайль 1999: 316-343.
part has not escaped the attention of Brodsky scholars, and is, and is not dealt with here in detail.\textsuperscript{8}

Despite the central role that the theme of St. Petersburg plays in Brodsky’s lyrics, the subject has so far not been treated comprehensively. The theme has been touched in brief by many but, to my knowledge, there are only a couple of accounts devoted to the image of the native city of the poet as it appears in his verse. A paper on Brodsky’s St. Petersburg presented by Mikhail Lotman during a symposium on St. Petersburg at the University of Jyväskylä has unfortunately been published only in a Finnish translation\textsuperscript{9}. Nirman Moranjak-Bamburać has written on the affinities of Brodsky’s poetics with the so-called ”Petersburg Text” as it appears in the poetry of the Acmeists.\textsuperscript{10} Both of these accounts are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.3 below.

Losev and Ross, among others, have been attracted by Brodsky’s essays on the city of his childhood, Losev by ”A Guide to a Renamed City”, Ross, for his part, by the autobiographical essay “In a Room and a Half”\textsuperscript{11}. The theme of St. Petersburg occurs in Polukhina’s monograph on Brodsky, as was already mentioned\textsuperscript{12}. The city figures also in Mikhail Lotman’s elucidation, the focus of which is on the marine theme in Brodsky’s verse, the Baltic Sea in particular\textsuperscript{13}. Andrey Ranchin views the theme of the city through the lens of Pushkin’s Petersburg poem par excellence ”Медный всадник” in his treatment of Brodsky’s poem ”Я родился и вырос в балтийских болотах подле серых цинковых волн”\textsuperscript{14}.

Given the particular place that the thematics of space and time occupy in Brodsky’s poetic universe, it has been examined in its various aspects by

\textsuperscript{9} Lotman M.1994 passim. See Chapter 2.3 below.
\textsuperscript{10} Moranjak-Bamburać 1996 passim. For other accounts of Brodsky’s St. Petersburg, see Chapter 2.3.
\textsuperscript{12} Polukhina 1989: 1-17, 84, 213-225.
\textsuperscript{14} Ранчин 2001: 256-284 or Ранчин 2000 passim.
numerous scholars. The most comprehensive (and fascinating) treatments of the subject are, without doubt, Vanshenkina’s article “Остриё. Пространство и время в лирике Иосифа Бродского”, where the author focusses on the various manifestations and meanings of “остриё” - “point/cone” in Brodsky’s lyric works, as well as the Lotmans’ observations on Brodsky’s poetics in Brodsky’s collection “Уранія” - “Между вещью и пустотой”.\(^\text{15}\) MacFadyen discusses the dialectics of space and time as a sign of Brodsky’s dualistic thinking, whereas Nivat has emphasised the predominance of space in Brodsky’s poetic world.\(^\text{16}\) Lev Loseff illustrates differences between Brodsky’s depictions of “home” and ”abroad”, while Kline and Smith concentrate on his representations of foreign countries.\(^\text{17}\) Stepanjan, on her part, focusses on the urban landscape in Brodsky’s lyrics.\(^\text{18}\)

Despite the fact that Brodsky’s poetic landscape, especially in the two first decades of his literary production, i.e. the 1960’s and 1970’s, is dominated by the outline of his native city, the theme of St. Petersburg in Brodsky’s poetry has not yet been systematically studied. In what follows, I shall concentrate on those of his lyric works where the poet’s attention is clearly on his native city. The analysis will comprise 18 poems. Beginning with the early “romantic” verse dating from 1958 and the early 1960’s, the study will trace the emergence of Brodsky’s varying vision of the city as it appears in his “classical” phase through the 1970’s up to his last poem dedicated to the city, ”Мы жили в городе цвета окаменевшей водки”, completed in 1994\(^\text{19}\). Whereas most of these texts date from the 1960’s and the first half of the 1970’s, there are practically taken no poems written in the 1980’s that deal thematically with St. Petersburg\(^\text{20}\). What is of importance is the shift in the point of view of the

\(^{15}\) Ваншенкина 1996 \textit{passim}, Лотман Ю.1993: 294-307. (The article is written by Yury and Mikhail Lotman).


\(^{17}\) Loseff 1991 \textit{passim}, Smith 1991 \textit{passim}, Kline 1990 \textit{passim}.

\(^{18}\) Степанян 1990 \textit{passim}.

\(^{19}\) For a discussion of different phases in Brodsky’s lyric oeuvre, see Viktor Kullè’s account “Иосиф Бродский: Новая Одиссея” in Бродский I: 283-297. For a periodisation of Brodsky’s verse works on the basis of apparent changes in stanzaic forms, see Шерр 2002a: 283-285, 296-297.

\(^{20}\) There is only one exception, namely “Эклога 4-я (зимняя)”, written in 1980. The 1980’s is a period in Brodsky’s works when the image of St. Petersburg is mostly
poet vis-à-vis this city that occurred as a result of his enforced emigration from Leningrad in June 1972. In poems written in the 1960’s the lyrical subject is part of the city, within its boundaries, while in lyrics completed after the emigration the city is observed from outside. My intention is not to proceed chronologically from the 1950’s to the 1990’s. Instead the poetic texts are viewed and, in some cases, grouped together in accordance with their shared thematic content. There are some poems where St. Petersburg figures in the centre of Brodsky’s poetic vision, namely "Остановка в пустыне" and "От окраины к центру" as well as “Эклога 4-я (зимняя), which are omitted from the present study as they have already been quite thoroughly investigated by other scholars.21

Each chapter centres around a close reading of the key poems, thus tracing the evolution of the city imagery from poem to poem. Despite the fact that the examination of the texts does not proceed in a strictly chronological order, it reveals the apparent changes and stages in the poet’s view of the city.

The relationship between Brodsky’s image of St. Petersburg and the highly elaborated myth of St. Petersburg as it emerges in the so-called Petersburg Text of Russian literature is examined in Chapter 2. A brief discussion of the myth of St. Petersburg and its modes of manifestation is followed by an analysis of some poetic texts. These are divided into four groups, each one of which reflects a particular thematic aspect which Brodsky’s poems and the Petersburg Text have in common. In spite of the fact that the Petersburg Text provides an appropriate starting point for the analysis of these poems, my intention is not to limit the discussion to how Brodsky might be seen to continue or depart from the conventions of this particular “city-text”. The thematic affinities which occur on the lexical and semantical level prove to be notional in many cases. The main aim of the investigation is to disclose the intrinsic essence of themes shared by the Petersburg Text and Brodsky’s early lyrics, so as to then reveal and explicate his own authorial St. Petersburg myth, which may turn out to contravene the preceding tradition.

The theme of separation serves as the basis for an examination of the semantic content in the poems "Прачечный мост“ and "Мы вышли с почты прямо на канал...” in Chapter 2.4.1. In Chapter 2.4.2 the theme of death, which is closely related to the tradition of the Petersburg Text, serves as a starting point for a discussion of Brodsky’s early verses conveyed through Italian city-scapes, see, e.g. “Римские элегии” (1981), “Венецианские строфы (2)" (1982) and “В Италии” (1985).

21 For discussions of these three poems, see Chapter 2.3 below.
“Стансы”, “Стансы городу”, “Бессмертия у смерти не прошу” and “Еврейское кладбище около Ленинграда”. Chapter 2.4.3 is devoted to the study of the intrusion of fictional heroes and fictional chronotopes from the texts ascribed to the Petersburg Text into the poetic space of Brodsky’s poems. The focus of the investigation is on the long poems "Шествие" and "Петербургский роман". Chapter 2.4.4 elucidates the possible actualisations in Brodsky’s texts of the polarity “nature vs. culture” which underlies the St. Petersburg myth in Russian literature. The poems examined in this context are "Отрывок”, "Почты элегия” and "С февраля по апрель”, all of them dating from the end of the 1960’s.  

The meanings which Brodsky invests in the notions of paradise and hell as they appear in connection with the image of the city of St. Petersburg-Leningrad will be discussed at length in Chapter 3. I shall first consider the image of St. Petersburg as it is reflected in the only poem Brodsky devoted to the Italian city of Florence, viz. "Декабрь во Флоренции”. Brodsky’s most obvious double, one with whom he shares the banished poet’s fate outside his longed-for city, is Dante. The Dantean context in "Декабрь во Флоренции” (Chapter 3.1) as well as in "Пятая годовишина” (Chapter 3.3) is examined on the basis of Brodsky’s literary references to the "Divine Comedy”. But equally important are the images of other poets - Mandel’shtam and Akhmatova in particular - and of their works, whose verses are an essential part of the city-image constructed by Brodsky in these two texts. The paradisiac origin and potential of St. Petersburg as it is manifested in Brodsky’s autobiographical essays "Less than One”, "In a Room and a Half” and "A Guide to a Renamed City” are discussed briefly in Chapter 3.2. Chapter 3.4 is devoted to yet another two poems in which the theme of paradise-hell - closely connected by Brodsky to the topography of St. Petersburg - appears at the lexicothematical level, namely in "Похороны Бобо” and "Мы жили в городе цвета окаменевшей водки”. The former deals with the traditional Petersburg themes of death and afterlife, while the latter focusses on the theme of memory.

The two-part fourth chapter will be concerned with one lyric work only, viz. "Развивая Платона”. In the first part (Chapter 4.1) I shall consider the poem as an independent entity of its own, focussing on its allusions to non-materialised as well as materialised variants of “the ideal state” in

22 The original published texts of all examined poems, except for the long poems, are given in the appendix.
the history of mankind, from Plato’s *polis* to the utopian ideals promoted by the French Revolution and the October Revolution. In the other part - comprised of Chapters 4.2 and 4.4 - “Развивая Платона” is examined in the context of W.H. Auden’s city poetry, with which it has obvious connections. The study centres on such poems as "Memorial for the City", "Under Sirius" and "Hораe Canonicae", which are alluded to in Brodsky’s variant of a utopia. Chapter 4.3 is devoted to the theme of space as it is manifested in “Развивая Платона”. Chapter 4.4 offers a conclusion to the ruminations on the philosophical aspects of time, space and history as conceived of by Brodsky in his poem “Развивая Платона” about a utopian city, juxtaposing his views with those of Auden.

In the final chapter, titled ”St. Petersburg as Void”, I explore the evolution of the image of the poet’s native city as it emerges in the poem "Полдень в комнате”. My rather subjective interpretation of the poetic text puts the emphasis on the interplay of the city-theme with the other, abstract references to space, time and void which interrupt the poet’s meditations on his native city. The chapter is divided into two sub-chapters in which the space portrayed in "Полдень в комнате” is examined from two different angles, first as “a corporeal place”, and then as “an incorporeal void”, deprived of its material referent.

### 1.1 Theoretical Terminology

The focus of the close readings will be on representations of space as they appear in Brodsky’s works. Each of the spatial representations is part of the literary space which makes itself manifest in the corpus of the scrutinised texts. The notion of literary space implies, on the one hand, space as a cognitive category - as certain categorisations of space based on *a priori* conceptions, knowledge and personal or common impressions and experience. On the other hand, it suggests space as a textual representation - a description of a particular space in a literary text. From the point of view of the author, the depiction may include elements of information that he has not given an explicit form to, but which are possibly revealed by examining other texts of the given author or his biography. The author may also use elements of the actual world, i.e. facts and *re-alia* - actual places and features of St. Petersburg, in this particular case - as components of his fictional world. He may also borrow elements from
other literary texts, i.e. from already existing fictional worlds, to create his individual literary realm.

The form of literary space which consists of such elements of information that are not explicitly manifested in the text I will call the extra-textual space. It is the space which extends beyond the boundaries of the intra-textual space of the given text, formulated in an explicit manner. All elements belonging to extra-textual space give additional meaning to the space/place represented in the text. Extra-textual elements function as hidden signposts that help the reader to follow the route that the author’s thoughts have taken. They can, as well, intentionally or unintentionally, lead one astray.

One of the ways to discover the implicit fictional worlds looming behind the explicit text is to follow the various forms of allusions in the primary text to its possible subtexts. In elucidating intertextual relations in Brodsky’s lyrics I shall use the term subtext, introduced by Taranovsky, in its original sense, i.e. denoting an already existing, literary - in most cases - poetic text which is reflected in a later, new text in the form of an apparent reminiscence or a ciphered allusion. As construed, the subtext is a purely linguistic phenomenon that unites the texts together metonymically.23

Below, I shall employ Bakhtin’s notion of chronotope as a synonym for the term setting. Both of them signify the space-time explicitly rendered in the given text. By chronotope, Bakhtin refers to the unity of spatial and temporal relations and their mutual interdependence, which is defined in the text by artistic means. The entwined spatial and temporal characteristics constitute an artistic chronotope (литературно-художественный хронотоп) which forms a meaningful and concrete whole reflecting the chronotope of the actual world. Bakhtin conceives of space and time as forms of reality rather than as abstract concepts. In a literary text, time and space concretise the given text by providing it with a spatio-temporal frame. By referring to the concrete nature of the chronotope Bakhtin does not want to argue that the space-time presented in a text should correspond to a particular real situation, but he obviously refers to the structural analogy which exists between an artistic chronotope and the actual reality.24 It is this very analogy which helps the reader to

23 For Taranovsky’s definition of subtext, see Тарановский 2000: 15, 31-32, 38.
24 For the notion of chronotope and its relation to the actual world, see Бахтин 1975: 391-392.
reconstruct in his mind a meaningful whole out of the spatio-temporal setting depicted in the text.

Inasmuch as one main focus of the examination is the elucidation of Brodsky’s image of St. Petersburg in its connection both to the extra-linguistic reality as well as to the fictional realities created in other literary texts, it would not be impossible to view the present study within the paradigm of possible worlds. In fact, in my research on the relationship between fictional and actual chronotopes, as well as between various fictional worlds that emerge in Brodsky’s verse, I shall frequently resort to the terminology adopted from the theory of possible worlds as applied in Doležel’s book “Heterocosmica. Fiction and Possible Worlds”. The employed terms will be defined in the text. My intention is not to “rewrite” the object of the study by the use of theoretical conceptions. The basis of my analyses as well as the subsequent interpretations always lies in the text itself.

This approach concerns the chosen metaphors through the prism of which Brodsky’s city is seen and examined. Notwithstanding the fact that they happen to be closely related to the mythologised image of St. Petersburg in Russian literature, the justification of the use of the metaphors in this study arises not from their linkage to the St. Petersburg myth but from the particular way they are manifested in Brodsky’s lyric texts. In the end, it may turn out that the Brodskian Utopia, Paradise/Hell and Void may have very little in common with the characteristics ascribed to the city of St. Petersburg in the first days of its history. Moreover, in Brodsky’s poetry the metaphors now linked to his image of Peter’s city seem to arise from the exiled poet’s position in regard to his native city - his view from the outside. The authorial look backward from beyond the boundaries of St. Petersburg-Leningrad goes against the established conventions of the Petersburg Text, which was written from within the city-space. Consequently, it seems appropriate to examine the poems written in exile as independent texts, irrespective of the existing tradition. The juxtaposition of Brodsky’s image of the city with the Petersburg Text functions as a starting point only for my examination of the texts completed in Leningrad in Chapter 2.

All in all, the theoretical framework’s function is not to circumscribe the approach to the subject to the limits of the existing conventions, but

\[25\text{ Peter the Great visioned his city as a paradise, a utopian dream which he was able to realise, whereas the eschatological myths related to the new capital predicted its disappearance from the earth, leaving behind an emptiness - a void.}\]
to present some tools that help to unveil Brodsky’s personal myth of the city, the essential peculiarities of his unique position vis-à-vis the established tradition.
2 ST. PETERSBURG AS “THE COMMON PLACE” OF THE PETERSBURG TEXT

2.1 The Petersburg Text as a Myth

The notion of the “Petersburg Text” was introduced by V. N. Toporov and further developed by other members of the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics. What is meant by the PT is a collection of works in Russian literature which are incorporated under the concept of the PT through their semantic unity - a certain idea of St. Petersburg which they all share. The PT is thus a construct, a synthetic and synchronic “super-text”, written by various authors at different times in history. The notion is based on a semiotic concept of a “text”, conceived of as basic unit of culture. So construed, the concept of “text” is applicable to any cultural phenomenon capable of carrying an integral meaning. Thus, it does not refer only to written texts, i.e. to messages in natural language, but to a multiplicity of “texts” in various cultural languages. As such, it can be applied to a ceremony, behaviour, a work of art, among others, since all these possess an integral meaning and function in a cultural system, a meaning which can be defined. Accordingly, apart from the literary texts ascribed to the PT in terms of their semantic unity, the corpus of the PT consists also of “texts” that belong to the realia of the city, to its topography with its objects of architecture and art, and even to its meteorological peculiarities. For Toporov, the city has its own language; it speaks through the PT with its topoi - streets, canals, parks, squares and buildings - having thus both the role of a subject as that of an object within the PT.

The common idea in the heterogeneous PT is the myth of St. Petersburg originating from the oral folklore tradition which accompanied the construction of the city right from the beginning of its history in the first years of the 18th century. According to the myth, the essence of the city is

---

26 Henceforth the “Petersburg Text” is referred to as PT in this study.
27 The term appeared first in Toporov’s article “О структуре романа Достоевского в связи с архангельскими схемами мифологического мышления (“Преступление и наказание”)”, published for the first time in 1973. For a discussion of semantic unity, the basic character of the texts incorporated in the PT, see Топоров 1997: 591-592.
28 For a definition of the specifically semiotic sense of the concept of “text”, see, e.g. Ivanov et al. 1998: 38.
29 Топоров 1995: 278.
based on a certain dualism inherent in its nature which, in its turn, determines the image of the city along with the life and fate of its inhabitants. The manifestations of the dualism in the text are manifold. They can be expressed in terms of oppositions which form the underlying structure of the description of the nature of St. Petersburg in the PT. The main opposition derives from the extraordinary origin of the city. It is generally perceived as a city without history, since - in contrast to the genesis of most great cities - it did not grow organically, but was built according to the vision, plan and willpower of Peter the Great. Consequently, the emergence of St. Petersburg on earth as a man-made utopia, as well as its eccentric geographical position on the shore of the North-Western Russian periphery, contributed to the eschatological myths which have accompanied Peter’s creation through the centuries. The city has been seen either as a triumph of reason over natural elements or as a crime against nature. In the eschatological schemes the natural powers of chaos eventually take over and the city becomes a desolate wasteland. The ambivalence of the mythological St. Petersburg is often exposed as an interplay between two conceptions of the city; on the one hand St. Petersburg is juxtaposed to the eternal Rome, on the other hand to Constantinople, a city doomed to be swept away by flood as nature’s revenge.

Based on these considerations, the main opposition forming the immediate constituent of the PT can be defined as the classical antithesis of nature vs. culture which manifests itself in the conflict of water and stone, both elements serving as main markers of the symbolic city-space. As Lotman remarks, the Petersburg stone is an artefact, not a natural phenomenon, which is in eternal conflict with the destructive force of water. The stone in this myth has been laid by man on water, on flat marshland with no guarantee of support. The Petersburg stone is transitory, while the element of water is eternal, since it existed before the stone and has

30 In many aspects of the myth, St. Petersburg is treated as an antipode of Moscow, which is perceived as a naturally grown, organic, even sacred, genuine Russian city, where one can live a comfortable life without the existential fears and anomalies caused by the ambivalent nature of St. Petersburg. On the opposition of St. Petersburg - Moscow, see, e.g. Топоров 1984: 7-13 or 1995: 267-274. For discussions of manifestations of the polarity Moscow - St. Petersburg in Russian literature, see, e.g. Замятин 1963 (written in 1933): 115-137, Монас 1983: 26-39, Страда 1995: 503-515, Шубинский 2000: 145-156. The timespan of the accounts testifies to the fact that the theme does not yet seem to be exhausted.

the potential to destroy it. Likewise, as St. Petersburg is without historical roots which would tie it to the common soil of Russianness, it lacks a firm foundation. This fact gave rise to the perception of the city as a quasi-space - a phantasmagoric space where everything is possible, where supernatural things intermingle with reality.

Another underlying conflict in the St. Petersburg myth is its conception as an ideal city, as an **embodiment of rationalism**, which on the material level is reflected in the static geometrical organisation of its streets, *versus* its perception as an **artistic text**, as a living mechanism undergoing constant transformation. In this dualistic view the chaotic aspects of the myth act as a counterbalance to the artificiality of the systematic order. As the myth developed over the decades, the image of the city gradually drew apart from its utopian ideal. In the course of its cultural history, the ahistorical city turned out to be a complicated cultural and social system, capable of creating its own history, as well as of prompting new myths about itself.

The PT is usually seen as a closed system within the history of Russian literature. The dualistic character of Peter the Great’s city, which had existed in the legends and myths of the oral folklore already from the first years of the establishment of the city in 1703, was first introduced in Russian literature by Pushkin’s poema “The Bronze Horseman”. The poema diverts the attention from the laudatory odes of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century to the grandiose imperial city and its founder composed by Tredyakovsky, Lomonosov, Derzhavin and Sumorokov, among others, to a critical portrayal of the devastating impact of the city on Evgeny - the archetype of the main hero of the PT - the “little man”. In fact, the role of harsh fate playing with the lives of the “little men” is given to the city itself. With its abstractness and secular militancy it fails to take individual human contingency sufficiently into account. Pushkin was the first to articulate the **conflict between the oppressive order of the imperial city and the disorderliness** of the lives of its inhabitants. As the central figure of Pushkin’s poema, Falconet’s monument of Peter the Great, the Bronze Horseman, assumes its ambivalent, but evidently lasting role as the main emblem of the city and its space\textsuperscript{32}.

\textsuperscript{32} The recurrent appearance of the motif of the Bronze Horseman in literature can be taken as a token of the fact that it is still regarded as the emblem of St. Petersburg with deep symbolic meaning. It occurs in several works of Brodsky, as well, e.g. in the essay “A Guide to a Renamed City”, in “Шествие” (see Chapter 2.4.3), “С февраля по апрель” (see Chapter 2.4.4.3), and in “Развивая Платона” (see Chapter 4.4).
To use Holquist’s expression, the “pathos” and “tragedy” of the Petersburg space was first dramatised in “Медный всадник”, whereas Gogol discovered its mystical dimensions in his “Петербургские повести”. Pushkin and Gogol are regarded as the founders of the tradition, while Dostoyevsky was the first author who consciously developed the theme of the PT in his novels. Dostoyevsky’s emphasis was on the theme of moral salvation, of spiritual rebirth in circumstances where life has become the realm of death, where evil triumphs over goodness. The theme of the road to purification through the experience of the evil - the essence of the St. Petersburg myth - found its variations in the corpus of the texts ascribed to the PT. It was the Symbolists who conceived of the works of their predecessors, the above-mentioned classical texts on the “theme of St. Petersburg”, as a semantical whole, as a coherent text which subsequently appeared as one of the central themes in their own works. The connection with the tradition was established by a conscious play with the texts of the existing PT, actualised by various forms of allusion to it. Consequently, the PT obtained the status of a “third reality” along with the immaterial, abstract world of the St. Petersburg “idea” and its materialised personifications in the historical, everyday St. Petersburg reality. The most prominent contributions to the PT from the circle of Russian Symbolists are, without doubt, Blok’s St. Petersburg poetry and Belyi’s novel “Петербург”.

The Postsymbolist phase in Russian literature is often regarded as a period when the myth of St. Petersburg came to an end. Mandel’shtam

---

34 For a discussion of the main authors and concrete texts included in the PT, see Топоров 1995: 274-281 and Минц et al. 1984: 81-82. “Преступление и наказание”, “Идот” and “Подросток” form the very core of the PT. The authorial PT of Dostoyevsky has been investigated by Тороров (Топоров 1997: 590-660 - “Преступление и наказание”) and Tsiv’jan (Цивьян 1997a: 661-706 and Цивьян 1997b: 173-192 - “Подросток”), among others.
37 For a discussion of the PT in Russian Symbolism/Postsymbolism, see Тименчик 1984:117-124. I restrict my references here only to the accounts that explicitly use the term PT in their examinations. There are several authors who have written about the image of St. Petersburg in Mandel’shtam’s or Akhmatova’s poetry in a way which corresponds to the themes and claims of the PT and the St. Petersburg myth, without mentioning the theoretical construct of the PT. See, for instance, Leiter’s elucidation of Akhmatova’s St. Petersburg, where the apocalyptic theme as well as the dichotomy
and Akhmatova wrote about the death of the classical St. Petersburg - the city which they treat as a symbol of classical beauty and European civilisation. Acmeists can be considered as carriers and preservers of the myth, thus making it part of the cultural memory. Piln’jak, Zamjatin and Vaginov brought the myth to its final end and closed the history of the PT in the 1920’s. The focus of the cultural life was shifted to Moscow. The reinforcement of the cult of Moscow started in the beginning of the 1930’s, which testifies to the fact that the St. Petersburg myth was not a purely literary phenomenon, but reflected the atmosphere and events of the ambient reality as well.

Notwithstanding the fact that it is often asserted that literature written after the second decade of the 20th century cannot be seen as belonging to the PT - that the mythical St. Petersburg no longer exists - the tradition of the St. Petersburg myth resurfaces in the works of such writers as Nabokov and Bitov, especially in the latter’s prose work “Пушкинский дом”, in which the PT is reflected in the pervasive metaliterary nature of the text.

between the triumph of the eternal form/order over fluctuating chaos emerge, not to mention the theme of the fate of the “little man” in the city (Leiter 1983 passim). The same applies to Crone’s article on Mandel’shtam’s St. Petersburg as it appears in his collection of poems “Tristia”. Her account is structured around various oppositions embedded in Mandel’shtam’s city-image (Crone 1987 passim). See also Leiter’s account of Mandel’shtam’s early poems on the theme of St. Petersburg, especially pp. 477-482 (Leiter 1978).

For a discussion of the PT in the prose of the 1920’s (Grin, Zamjatin, Kozyrev), see Григорьева 1996: 97-106. On its presence in Pil’njak’s works, see Горинова 1996: 114-129.

For the evolution of the St. Petersburg myth in Russian literature, see, e.g. Топоров 1995: 274-277 and Тульчинский 1993: 146-147. Contrary to Топоров, in whose opinion the PT came to an end with Mandel’shtam, Akhmatova, Zoshchenko and Vaginov, Tul’chinsky adds a new, and last, phase to its evolution which covers the period after the 1920’s up to the end of the 20th century. During this period the originally unified idea of St. Petersburg has become totally separated from the reality of the city. It has become an abstract phenomenon of cultural history, an echo or memory of the past tradition, a mere literary fact. In Jangfeldt’s view, what Топоров (Топоров 1995: 335) wants to say with his somewhat cryptic argument in the endnotes of his most extensive version of his accounts of the PT - concerning the nature of the PT as a closed system (Топоров asserts that the problem lies not so much on a formal level as in the missing idea) and its coming to an end in the 1920’s - is that after that period it has not been possible to find form to the central PT idea of moral salvation (Jangfeldt 1995а: 231).

For a discussion of the PT in Nabokov’s works, see, for instance, Tammi 1999: 65-90.

For the PT in Bitov’s prose, see Pesonen 1993: 325-341 or Pesonen 1997: 157-168. See also Амусин 1998: 413-429.
As Clark concludes, the myth of St. Petersburg is above all a myth of transformation and modernisation centred on one particular urban environment. In each successive phase of its evolution - in its attempts to liberate itself from the chronotope of the surrounding reality - it cannot help resonating with the prevailing historical moment. It often happened that time was successfully overcome in one way or another but, as a consequence of and compensation for time, space acquired outstanding significance. In Clark’s opinion the St. Petersburg myth in its very essence is a myth about how transformation in space stood in for transformation in time.\footnote{Clark 1995: 8-12.}

2.2 The Petersburg Text as a Code

As was noted above, the separate texts that are gathered under the umbrella of the notion of the PT are linked to each other by a common idea\footnote{The common idea on which the Tartu-Moscow semiotics base their studies was to a large extent disclosed by Antsiferov in the 1920’s. He emphasised the beginning of St. Petersburg as a city which did not grow organically but whose founding was meant to meet the requirements of the state, of an already established culture. Apart from its artificial historical origin, Antsiferov seeks for the \textit{genius loci} of the city in its extraordinary “architectural landscapes” which evoke a real “чувство пространства” (feeling of space). He follows the evolution of the city-space in Russian history with the reflections of the city-image in literary texts. Antsiferov’s conclusion about the evolution of the literary image of the city is based on the integrity of that image in its various historical phases - an idea which subsequently came to form the quintessence of the PT: “/…/ Отражение Петербурга в душах наших художников слова не случайно, здесь нет творческого произвола ярко выраженных индивидуальностей. За всеми этими впечатлениями чувствуется определенная последовательность, можно сказать, закономерность. Создается незыблемое впечатление, что душа города имеет свою судьбу, и наши писатели, каждый в свое время, отмечали определенный момент в истории развития души города.” (Анциферов 1991: 44).}. This means, as Tsiv’jan aptly states\footnote{Цивьян 1994: 125. [Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in the text are mine - MK.]} that “each PT is a text about St. Petersburg but not every text about St. Petersburg is PT”, precisely because PT presupposes a certain idea. The unifying idea or semantic content of the PT, based on the myth of St. Petersburg, manifests itself in the unity of the means of representation in the separate works forming the PT. What strikes one in the texts ascribed to the PT is, above all, their homogeneity on the lexical level; certain words, names, places, certain
weather or time of the year, as well as particular attributes, adverbs and expressions are repeatedly employed in the works by different authors. Consequently, the repeated, restricted lexicon can be conceived as a system of signs which forms the core of the PT. These signs serve as a code through which the PT can be recognised in an individual text. This being the case, the PT can be perceived simultaneously as a myth and a code. These two aspects are inseparable in the sense that the coding aspect of the text is actually a device that both produces and reveals the mythological content of the text. Vice versa - there would be no codes - manifestations of the myth - without the basic mythology that forms the idea, the substance matter of the “PT”.

According to the general theory of communication, a code is a link between content (myth) and expression (signs), it consists of rules with the help of which signs can be given a meaning. The sender as well as the recipient of the message have to share - at least to a certain extent - a common code in order for communication to take place. Accordingly, the question of the PT as a code can be examined from two points of view. On the one hand, it is the author (the sender/addresser of the message) who encodes the PT into his text by employing - in a more or less conscious manner - the constituents of the PT. The main mechanism of encoding is through allusions.

Citations from the corpus of the texts ascribed to the PT are not conceived of as imitation or plagiarism within the context of the PT precisely because the PT is perceived as one coherent whole, a unified text.

On the other hand, it is the reader who interprets or decodes the message of the author by using his/her knowledge of the already existing common features of the PT. The Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics has invented the concept of “text-code”\textsuperscript{45} which can be applied to the PT, as well, especially to its function as a code. A “text-code” is an abstract construct (for instance an invariant model of a myth/fairy-tale or, in this particular case, the PT), an organised structure of signs which may remain implicit in the memory of the author or in the reader’s mind, but which nonetheless provides him/her with a mental hold, a capacity to understand the semantics as well as the structural principles of the text he/she is writing or reading. Construed as an implicit “text-code”, the PT - like any other “city-text” - is conceived of as a model of an ideal text, a complete, unified text - not as a mere sum of explicitly stated rules - which enables one to reconstruct a coherent whole from the one particular text in question.

\textsuperscript{45} For a definition of the notion of “text-code”, see, e.g. the Conceptual Dictionary of the Tartu-Moscow Semiotic School. Tartu Semiotics Library 2. Tartu 1999: 188.
Shared communal knowledge is thus a prerequisite for the recognition of the PT. The implied meaning behind the determinant explicit texture can be revealed only with the help of a common encyclopaedia. In the case of the PT, the shared knowledge may consist of actual facts about the city as well as of fictitious facts from the literary worlds created in the existing texts of the PT. Doležel\textsuperscript{46} calls the former source of knowledge “the actual world encyclopaedia”, while the latter is named “the fictional world encyclopaedia”. They can overlap, but only in part. “The actual world encyclopaedia” alone does not provide a sufficient basis for interpretation. If we follow Doležel’s typology of texts into “world-imaging texts” and “world-constructing texts”,\textsuperscript{47} one could, perhaps, maintain that although the appearance of the city of St. Petersburg in \textit{materia} served as an impulse and prerequisite for the emergence of the PT in Russian literature, the existence of the PT is nevertheless not so much dependent on real world referents as on the determining structures of the mythical, fictional worlds created within the PT. The characteristics of the texts ascribed to the PT conform to the essential elements of “a world-constructing text”; they construct worlds rather than imitate reality.

Consequently, every text in the PT is a possibility to move not only \textit{a realibus ad realiora} - from reality to an even more “real” reality - a shift that entails the transformation of material facts to spiritual values, as Toporov\textsuperscript{48} writes, but it also implies a shift from the reality created by one particular author (= author’s/authorial PT) to the common reality of the PT, which consists of various versions of the same invariant story/myth. As an invariant supertext it has its “extensive aspect”, by which I refer to the relation of the text to the city, to its \textit{realia}. The “intensive aspect”, in turn, establishes a connection between each individual text and the corpus of the texts included in the PT.\textsuperscript{49} Both aspects extend the immanent analysis of a poetic text beyond its borders to the extra-textual space of the given text.

\textsuperscript{46} According to Doležel, “the actual-world encyclopaedia” is just one among numerous encyclopaedias of possible worlds. Knowledge about a possible world constructed in a fictional text constitutes “a fictional world encyclopaedia”. “Fictional world encyclopaedias” are many and diverse, but all of them, to a greater or lesser degree, differ from “the actual-world encyclopaedia” (Doležel 1998: 177).

\textsuperscript{47} “A world-imaging text” is a representation of a reality; it presupposes the existence of an actual world before a text can occur. “A world-constructing text”, in contrast, is prior to worlds; it creates a world and determines its structure irrespective of the existence of any real world. (Doležel 1998:24).

\textsuperscript{48} Топоров 1995: 259.

\textsuperscript{49} For the “extensive” and “intensive aspects” of a “text-code”, see, e.g. Топор 1998: 141, Топоров 1995: 280.
Thus, the PT is simultaneously a representation - with some distinctive characteristics - of the myth of St. Petersburg in Russian literature, and its interpretation. In the PT a single text is joined to a certain cultural tradition through predetermined common hallmarks. The discovery of these distinctive signs, i.e. decoding of a text, becomes possible through certain markers that activate the PT in a particular text. The term marker is used here as denoting the diverse indices through which the presence of another text within the primary text is signalled. Since the PT is understood as a semantic whole, the markers may not be referring to a single text within its corpus, but to several texts, in which case we may talk about polygenetic markers or polygenetic citations. An allusion marker functions as an activator of the dynamism between the primary text and its subtexts.

The markers can be divided into a) linguistic markers, which point to the literary origins of the text (“the intensive aspect” of a “text-code”), or b) topographical markers, which emphasise the origins of the text in reality (“the extensive aspect” of a “text-code”). Both of these markers are strategies of activating the PT. In the first case it may be, for instance, an allusion to Pushkin’s “Медный всадник”, whereas in the latter case, the name of a locus, or a description of a typical meteorological feature of the Petersburg climate activates the PT in the reader’s mind. A literary marker has several forms of manifestations; it can be a single word, a motif, a theme, a fictional person or a characteristic of a typically Petersburg hero that invokes an aspect of the unified idea of the PT. As for topographical markers, as Pesonen maintains, notwithstanding the fact that the topography of the city has been conceived of as a precondition for a work’s inclusion in the PT, the factual topographic reference may be illusory or misleading.

---

50 The definition of the term marker (in the sense of an allusion marker) is taken from Tammi’s account of the Dostoyevskian subtext in Nabokov’s “Приглашение на казнь” (Tammi 1999: 17, 120).

51 Mints sees the polygenesis together with the heterogeneity of the images and plots as a characteristic of neo-mythological texts of the Symbolists. She stresses the close relation of the notion of polygenesis to other typical features of a neo-mythological text, namely those of “metaliterariness”, “metaculturality” and “polyculturality”- the effect of cultural synthesis (Минц 1978: 94). In her account of the PT and Russian Symbolism, Mints writes about the two functions of the “alien word”, i.e. an allusion to the PT - its function as a theme and as a code - reminding of the general preconditions for the creation of a coherent PT: the quotation has to be recognised by the reader a) as a quotation, b) as a quotation from the PT (Минц et al. 1984: 80-81).

52 Pesonen 1997: 135

However, the topographical markers, recognisable as typically Petersburgian, such motifs as “a bridge” or “a streetlight”, for instance, become “names”, indications of the couleur locale, which are perceived as signs referring to the PT in its entirety. On the other hand, they do no longer refer to a certain real place in the city but are taken as a generalised “image” of the St. Petersburg city-scape, “a common place”, attached with a touch of anonymity.\(^{54}\)

This review of the PT as a literary concept was by no means meant to be exhaustive. As I will now proceed to the analysis of concrete texts by Brodsky, I will focus my attention on the aspects of the PT that occur in the poems under examination, including those aspects and details omitted in the theoretical introduction of the PT. As a conclusion to the discussion of the PT as an abstract concept, one could add that in the process of the evolution of the PT, there was a shift in its category of meaning. What was first a subjective meaning of content - a semantic category put down by an individual author - came to denote a general structural category. In what follows, I will try to shed light on both of these aspects, i.e. on Brodsky’s individual/authorial “myth” of St. Petersburg, as well as on the PT as an implicit structural factor, contributing to the formation of the city-image in Brodsky’s early verse works.

### 2.3 Brodsky and The Petersburg Text

The corpus of texts discussed in this chapter and viewed from the angle of the tradition established in the Petersburg Text consists of Brodsky’s poems which are linked with identifiable geographical locations in the city of St. Petersburg- Leningrad. The timespan between the poems under investigation covers a period from 1961 up to 1970, with few exceptions.\(^{55}\) All of these texts are the works of a poet who perceives the city-space from within its boundaries, the vantage point prevailing in the PT. The city of Leningrad appears as a setting in a more or less explicit manner in the following poems: “Еврейское кладбище около Ленинграда”, “Почти элегия”, “Прячный мост”, “Стансы городу”, “Отрывок”, “Стансы”, “Мы вышли с почеты прямо на канал. .”, “Бес-

\(^{54}\) Ibid. 86.

\(^{55}\) As was noted by M. Lotman, the theme of Leningrad plays a significant role in Brodsky’s early poetry. In the works of his mature period, written in emigration, the theme of the city appears in images which are somehow related to Leningrad, often through other themes that serve as indirect indicators of the theme of the native city. (Лотман М.1988: 184-185).
смерти у смерти не прошу…”, “С февраля по апрель”, “Шествие” и “Петербургский роман” 56. These works are written in two traditional genres - the short lyric and the longer poem, called the lyric poem.

Although the theme of St. Petersburg is generally conceived of as one of the central themes in Brodsky’s poetry, the study of his image of St. Petersburg, especially through the prism of the PT, is limited. Most accounts which focus on Brodsky’s Petersburg concentrate on his two essays, namely on “A Guide to a Renamed City” and on “Less than One” 57. As for the relation of Brodsky’s works to the St. Petersburg myth and the tradition of the PT, some scholars mention it only in passing. Crone 58, for instance, regards Brodsky’s works as variations of the models set by Belyi and other modernists belonging to the Petersburg tradition, as far as the identification of the poet’s self with the city is concerned. In an article entitled “Ленинградский Гамлет” Rais highlights the role of the St. Petersburg myth in Brodsky’s poetry, especially in the long poem “Шествие”. He discerns in Brodsky’s poetic image of the city - not a reflection of the contemporary Leningrad - but that of the eternal city, familiar from the texts of his literary predecessors:

И это именно вечный град Петров, с его единственной в мире иллюзорной атмосферой северной Пальмиры и Венеции, город-призрак, с его экзистенциальной тоской по непрочности земных твердых, с его высокой, но обреченной культурой, а не банальный, плоский, искусственный Ленинград. 59

56 The list of poems does not embrace all poems dating from this period where St. Petersburg- Leningrad figures. Such poems as “Остановка в пустыне” and “Эклога 4-я” could be added to the list. Since they have been examined by various scholars, they are omitted from the present study. For a discussion of “Остановка в пустыне”, I refer the reader to Polukhina’s comprehensive analysis of the content as well as the metrical aspects of the poem (Polukhina 1989: 44-58) and to Loseff 1990: 38-41. In his fascinating account of “Остановка в пустыне” Wachtel uses the poetic form as an interpretative tool for disclosing the poetic meaning. He examines the poem in the context of the preceding tradition of philosophical and meditative lyrics written in blank verse (Wachtel 1998: 103-111). Brodsky’s own comments on the poem in question are worth reading, as well (see Brumm 1974: 236-237). See also MacFadyen 1998: 51-52. For accounts of “Эклога 4-я (зимняя)”, see, e.g. Scherr 1995 passim, Шерр 2002 passim, Polukhina 1989: 251-257, Jangfeldt 1995: 198-200, 204-205, Ранчин 2001: 234, 350-351, among others.


58 Crone 1993: 93.

59 Райс 1965: 169. [Here and henceforth bolding is mine - MK, if not otherwise indicated.]
A. Losev⁶⁰, in turn, argues that Brodsky’s identification of Russian literature with St. Petersburg manifested in his essay “Leningrad”⁶¹ does not hold good when taken under objective study. He maintains that Brodsky’s remarks concerning the image of St. Petersburg in Russian literature rely more on quotations from the sentimental rhetoric of Antsiferov’s book “Душа Петербурга” than on literary texts themselves. Monas⁶², when referring to Brodsky’s words about the vast scale of St. Petersburg classicism in “A Guide to a Renamed City”⁶³, argues that it is the very vastness surrounding St. Petersburg classicism that gave the impetus to its transformation to a merely imaginary reality. Monas compares the efforts of the young Brodsky to those of Cavafy in his relation to the city of Alexandria. Both try in their poetry to discrown and, at the same time, remythologise the “Unreal City”. However, Monas does not give any examples of how the de- and remythologising of the city is reflected on the level of concrete texts.

Mikhail Lotman’s⁶⁴ and Nirman Moranjak-Bamburač’s⁶⁵ accounts are more comprehensive in their elucidations on Brodsky’s authorial PT, and they will be discussed in a more detailed manner in the following chapters. It suffices to say in this regard that both scholars come to the conclusion that Brodsky’s image of St. Petersburg has plenty of affinities with the tradition of the PT. Lotman⁶⁶ wants to keep in mind, however, that Brodsky is above all a rationalist, a neoclassicist with no connection to the neo-mythological tendencies of the first decades of the 20th century.

---

⁶⁰ Лосев А. 1980: 56.
⁶¹ Published first under this title in Vogue, republished later as “A Guide to a Renamed City” in “Less Than One”.
⁶³ Brodsky 1986: 76-80, 84.
⁶⁴ Lotman M. 1994: 118-121. To my knowledge, Mikhail Lotman’s paper, “Josip Brodski ja Pietarin myytti”, presented in a symposium on the theme of St. Petersburg at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, is published only in Finnish.
⁶⁵ Moranjak-Bamburač 1996: 71-73. This authority dwells on the affinities of Brodsky’s poetics with that of Acmeism. He finds connecting links between the two in their poetical lexicon related to certain reoccurring poetic themes, as well as in the use of certain literary devices which he sees as an introduction of prose elements into poetry (“потребляния в ‘петербургский текст’”) are also signs of affinity between Brodsky and the Acmeists (ibid. 62).
⁶⁶ Lotman M. 1994: 118.
In what follows, the analysis of poems will proceed mainly through an investigation of the portrayal of the St. Petersburg space/place, i.e. the settings/chronotopes in the above-mentioned short lyric works. A detailed investigation of the longer poems exceeds the scope of the present study. Instead, I focus on the short lyrics, most of which have not been studied in detail, whereas the long poems have attracted the attention of several scholars. I examine only those parts of the long poems that clearly reveal new aspects that complement the image of the city conveyed in the short poems.

It should be emphasised once again that my intention is not so much to search for the affinities on the lexical, thematical or topographical level of Brodsky’s image of his native city with the conventions of the PT, as to illuminate the peculiarities of Brodsky’s own PT, to disclose its mythological essence. In the final analysis, the main issue in this chapter (as in the present study in its entirety) is to reveal the inner deeper unity of the image of the city in Brodsky’s oeuvre - a task which cannot be accomplished without taking the role of the PT, as one potential dimension of that image, into account.

2.4 St. Petersburg as a Setting

I will start my examination by taking a look at the ways in which the St. Petersburg setting in Brodsky’s works functions as a spatial locus of the lyric plot, paying special attention to the topographical and meteorological markers that are recognisable from the PT. The choice of topographical realia as a starting point of the study is based on the assumption that they - as explicit constituents of the city - will help to reveal the more general principles of his creation of a “city-text”. But, as was already noted, the recognition of the Petersburg realia as such remains meaningless unless the connection between the level of reality and the symbolic, imaginable or conceivable level of citation, which is manifested in the text in the form of distinguishable linguistic markers of the PT, is established. Quoting Mints\textsuperscript{67}, the essential function as well as the semantics of the depicted or named realia - in other words “поэтика реалий” [“the poetics of realia” - MK] - can be determined only through their juxtaposition with the level of “поэтика цитат” [“the poetics of citations” - MK].

\textsuperscript{67} Минц et al. 1984: 84-85.
Most of Brodsky’s city-poems, especially those written in the 1960’s, are linked with identifiable geographical locations, although the name of the depicted place is often omitted. The verisimilitude and plausibility of his “geographical” poems ties them closely to reality. The surrounding reality of Leningrad serves as a springboard for his poetical excursions in the city. As a rule, Brodsky begins these poems with an exposition of the urban setting and proceeds with the introduction of the theme/argument, followed by a denouement, given often in the form of a concluding statement. Nevertheless, the main theme of these poems may be presented first, before setting the scene. Whatever the order of representation, the thematics seem never to be separate from the represented St. Petersburg setting. This being the case, I will investigate in the following some of the presented loci with their topographical and meteorological particularities in order to disclose the unifying links between the thematics of the given text and the unfolding loci.

2.4.1 St. Petersburg as a Locus of Parting

Parting and separation constitute the central themes of Brodsky’s poetry to such a degree that he has been called the “main Russian poet of separation”\(^{68}\). The necessary counterpart and precondition for parting is the theme of love and affection which is - almost as a rule - presented in terms of its inevitable result, i.e., separation. It is as if separation and loneliness were for Brodsky existential categories that are closely related to the basic components of his world-construct, space and time. St. Petersburg-Leningrad serves as a setting for two different representations of parting in “Прачечный мост” (1968)\(^{69}\) and “Мы вышли с почты прямо на канал...” (1962)\(^{70}\). Apart from signalling the possible affinities with the PT in them, I will focus on the functions of the chronotope in the lyric narrative. At the same time I will explore the role of the chronotope in the exposition of the central thematic and philosophical aspects of the poems as well.

\(^{68}\) Зализняк et al. 1999: 62. For a discussion of the theme of love and separation in Brodsky’s poetry, see, e.g. Zeeman 1988.

\(^{69}\) Бродский II: 242.

\(^{70}\) Бродский I: 195.
2.4.1.1 “Прачечный мост”

In the title of this poem the poet explicitly locates the depicted scene at a certain geographical point in the actual St. Petersburg landscape. By naming the locus where the event takes place, Brodsky confirms its connection to reality. The place of the event is a topographical fact, and its actual material existence is emphasised by repeating the name of the bridge three times; first in the title and then twice in the text. By choosing a geographical name as the title of his poem, Brodsky defines the substance matter of the text in spatial terms. Rather than reflecting the content of the poem, the title only sets the spatial context for the subsequent representation, the scope of which, in fact, is confined to the scene with the bridge and the canal. Apart from the bridge, river and the three protagonists - the lyrical subject included - there are no other constituents in the poetic scene that could with certainty be ascribed to elements of the actual world.

The sparse description of the actual world setting in this particular poem is enriched by the deep metaphorical meaning with which each of the mentioned elements is invested. The metaphorical and symbolic meanings are not necessarily indicated, or even implied by the poet, but they are evoked by the implicit relation of the presented elements, constituents of the chronotope, to the tradition of the PT. A bridge, for instance, as a topographical marker, which belongs to the elements of the material-cultural sphere of the PT in Toporov’s typology, is a poetic commonplace with a condensed meaning. It is one of the loci that Bakhtin calls “crisis points” in his essay on Dostoyevskian poetics of St. Petersburg space. “A crisis point” serves as a sort of threshold marking a decisive change in the fate of the hero, a locus where final decisions are made.

In Brodsky’s poem, Prachechny Bridge forms the setting of two scenes that are separated from each other by an undefined timespan. The bridge is the place where the lyric subject took leave of a loved one, evidently not in the very remote past. Only the first four lines of the first stanza are devoted to the scene of the actual farewell:

На Прачечном мосту, где мы с тобой уподоблялись стрелкам циферблата, обнявшимся в двенадцать перед тем,

---

71 Топоров 1995: 283, 315.
72 For a discussion of crisis points in the literary space of “Преступление и наказание”, see Бахтин 1979: 198-199.
It is worth noting that Brodsky avoids any direct description of the parting by referring to it metaphorically in a very characteristic way. He compares the two lovers in each others’ arms to the hands of a clock at twelve o’clock. A clock is a concretised, conventional symbol of time and, simultaneously, a real object situated in the immediate environment. It measures time with the movements of its hands. What is of importance for Brodsky is the visual, physical aspect of the movement of the hands on the dial, not the actual time of the event. Instead of seeing the clock face as an instrument for measuring time, he perceives it as an instrument measuring the finite physical distance between the lovers. (The closeness of the lovers unified in a last embrace is likened to the merging of the hands at twelve o’clock.) Since separation is always forever according to Brodsky’s poetical philosophy, it is most obvious that after the last embrace the hands of the clock will keep chasing each other, never to meet again. It is the very same distance of the hands that signifies the physical distance between the bodies of the lovers now apart. The verb “расстаться” refers to the process of parting, to the drifting apart of the two bodies in space. The result of the process - the distance, “расстояние” - is only implied by the constant movement of the hands of the clock symbolising the inevitable flow of time.

This kind of merging together of time and space is characteristic of the chronotope of this poem in general. While the clock has the capacity to indicate the location of a physical body in space, the bridge can be conceived of as a focal point where past time and present moment converge. At the very moment of parting, Prachechny Bridge becomes a place “outside time”. Time instantaneously stops when the lovers embrace, only to regain its tempo after that short period of timelessness. Consequently, the bridge as a place of observation offers a point of view in both directions, to the past as well as to the future of the lyrical subject.

Notwithstanding the fact that Brodsky employs the verb “расставаться-расстаться” in depicting the act of parting, the condition which unavoidably emerges as an immediate consequence of leave-taking could be best conveyed in Russian by the word “разлука”, which

---

73 Marina Tsvetayeva points to the spatial distance which occurs as a consequence of parting by graphic means in her poem “Рас - стояние: версты, мили... / Нас рас - ставили, рас - садили, / Чтобы тихо себя вели / По двум разным концам земли./...". (Цветаева: Собрание сочинений в семи томах, т. II, 1997: 258-259).
does not appear in Brodsky’s poem. According to Zaliznyak, the word “разлука” has no exact equivalent in Western European languages. It denotes a break in contact between people who are close to each other. The state of “разлука” begins simultaneously with the physical separation in space. “Разлука” differs from “расставание” (“separation”) in the sense that it carries in itself a special kind of conflict between an inner state and an outer state. To be in разлуке means to be physically apart, but emotionally together, whereas “расставание” does not have this conflicting connotation. Furthermore, the word “разлука” connotes - in a characteristically Russian way - something inevitable that cannot be subordinated to man’s will, even in cases when parting occurs as an act of deliberate choice. Zaliznyak maintains that if the parting is final, as in the case of “Прачечный мост”, it should be called “разрыв”, a rupture, since “разлука” presumes a meeting in the future, whereas, she continues, it is possible to talk about “вечная разлука”, especially in poetic language, which suggests that notwithstanding the facts, one is still emotionally tuned to a meeting.

While the first four lines of the poem portray the scene of separation that belongs to the past experience of the lyrical subject, i.e. to the situation “before” his present solitude, the next four lines of the first stanza - separated visually from the first four by a dash - are devoted to the situation “after” the farewell - “после разлуки”. The state of being alone as an effect of being separated is illustrated in a description of the very same topographical spot of the urban landscape where the instance of parting took place some time past:

/.../ сегодня здесь, на Прачечном мосту, рыбац, страдая комплексом Нарцисса, таращится, забыв о поплавке, на зыбкое свое изображенье.

74 Зализняк et al. 1999: 57. For special meanings and connotations of the words “разлука” and “расставанье”, see ibid. passim.
75 In another poem about separation, “Строфы”, written in the same year of 1968 as “Прачечный мост”, Brodsky makes use of all possible variants of separation - “разлука”, “разрыв” and “расставанье”. Furthermore, separation in “Строфы” is literally for good, including after death: “На прощанье - ни звука. / Граммофон за стеной. / В этом мире разлука - / лишь прообраз иной. / Ибо врость, а не подле / мало веки смежать / вплоть до смерти. И после / нам не вместе лежать. //.../ Чем тесней единенье, / тем кромешной разрыв. //.../ Невозможность свиданья / превращает страну / в вариант мированья, / хоть она в ширину, / завидующая к славе, / не уступит любой / залегейской державе; / превзойдет голытьбой. //.../ расставанье заметней, / чем слияние душ.” (Бродский II: 244-246).
The repetition of the name of the place, “here, on the Prachechny Bridge” seems to suggest, that although it refers geographically to the same place as in the opening lines of the poem, its function is different. The meaning of the deictic elements “today”/“сегодня” and “here”/“здесь” which Brodsky employs in his poem is equal to that of the adverbs “now”/“сейчас” and “here”/“здесь”, which Paducheva in her account “Семантика нарратива” calls “наречиями 1-го лица” [“first person adverbs” - MK]76. Together with the verb in the present tense (compared to the narrative in the past tense in the preceding depiction of the very moment of separation) they indicate the change in the perspective and position of the lyrical subject. “Today” and “here”, like the personal pronouns “I” and “you”, inherent in the pronoun “we”, which appeared in the first line of the poem, refer, as a rule, to those who are actually speaking and, accordingly, they present their point of view. Accordingly, “here” denotes the place where the speaker is located at the moment of the speech act. These kinds of words and constructions, the semantics of which depend on communication and which include a reference to the speaker, are called egocentric elements of the language.77

In this particular case the demonstrative adverbs “here” and “today” act as markers of a change in the point of view, they highlight the difference between the states “before” and “after” parting. Wierzbicka’s account78 of “semantic primitives” identifies such concepts as “world”, “part” and “becoming” as elementary notions in analysing semantic interrelations between temporal expressions such as “before - after”. She points out that whenever we mention some event, we predicate something of a certain “world”. By place as a spatial position we mean “a part of the world”. Consequently, “to be somewhere” means “to be thinkable of being a part of that world”.79 The relation between these “worlds” can be expressed by the word “becoming”, which constitutes a basic component of the notions of “time” and “movement”. If we now try to apply Wierzbicka’s notions and logic to Brodsky’s poem, we could comprehend the first four lines of “Прачечный мост” as a depiction of a “world” which Brodsky’s implicit “you” was a part of and which was “becoming” a “world” which the “you” - implied to by the personal pronoun “we” - is no longer a part, her place being taken by the fisherman. The “world before” reflected a state of mutual love and physical closeness, whereas the “world after” - which excludes the “you” - is a world of

---

77 Ibid. 200.
78 Wierzbicka 1972: 112-114.
79 Ibid. 93-98.
solitary ponderings of the lyrical subject over time, space and distance brought about as a result of separation. Time is actually referred to only by the adverb “сегодня”/ “today”, which underlines the timespan between the two depicted events or scenes that occur at an undefined interval on the same spot.

The other protagonist of the story has changed, as was indicated. An unnamed fisherman, enamoured with the reflection of his own image on the water of the river, has come to replace the departed “you”80. The rest of the poem, - embracing the entire second stanza of the poem - is a meditation not so much on the changing image of the fisherman on the surface of the water, as on his right to occupy the place where the lovers were on the bridge:

Река его то молодит, то старит.
То проступают юные черты,
то набегают на чело морщины.
Он занял наше место. Что ж, он прав!
С недавних пор все то, что одиноко,
символизирует другое время;
а это - ордер на пространство.
Пусть
он смотрится спокойно в наши воды
и даже узнает себя. Ему
река теперь принадлежит по праву,
как дом, в который зеркало внесли,
но жить не стали.

Water in its different forms is the main metaphor of time in Brodsky’s oeuvre. For him water is the image of time81. In this respect “Прачечный мост” is no exception. Water is represented in the form of a river. In

80 Judging by the given initials, F.W., the addressee and, probably, the “you” of the poem is Faith Wigzell, a distinguished Slavist in her own right, whom Brodsky met in Leningrad. He subsequently applied several times, without success, for a visa to go to visit her in Britain. Taking into account the fact that it was almost impossible for a non-party member, not to speak of a person who had been convicted as a “social parasite” and “cosmopolitan”, to travel abroad, at least to the non-communist countries in the Soviet times, saying farewell to someone from the West could indeed signify parting for good, as Brodsky suggests in his poem.

81 For Brodsky’s observations on water and its relation to time and God, see, e.g. “Watermark”: “/.../ I always thought that if the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the water, the water was bound to reflect it. Hence my sentiment for water, for its folds, wrinkles, and ripples, and - as I am a Northerner - for its greyness. I simply think that water is the image of time /.../.’”(Brodsky 1992: 42-44).
fact, Prachechny Bridge is a bridge across the Fontanka Canal that joins the Kutuzov and Dvortssovoye Promenades on the mouth of Fontanka on the bank of the Bolshaya Neva. The location of the bridge at the confluence of two rivers is not without significance in this context, as it relates the poem to the theme of doubling. The semantics of the word “prachechny” is closely associated with the element of water. The bridge has its name from “Prachechny dvor”, which was a place on the Fontanka where the laundry of the court was washed. Considering the semantics of the name, Brodsky’s choice of this particular place as the setting of his poem seems to point to another thematic issue raised in the poem, viz. the transitory nature of life. The flow of time is expressed metaphorically in the image of the river of time in a most conventional way. It is as if the linear movement of the river is now more effective in illustrating the emotions of the solitary hero than the cyclical movement of a clock. The flow of the river cannot be reversed, it washes away all traces of the past “world”, it preserves nothing and reflects only the present “world” which is in a constant state of “becoming”.

The theme of doubling forms an essential part of the St. Petersburg myth, reflection being one variant of it. The whole city is constantly reflected in its rivers and canals, which alone is enough to attach to the city a degree of dreamlike illusoriness and unreality. Brodsky owes the narcissistic tendency of the city and its predilection for appearances at the expense of content to the fact that it is surrounded on all sides by water.

The complex of Narcissus serves as a mythologeme, an organising metaphoric image or a central motif which gathers other motives of a literary text together. Gasparov calls this aspect of the metaphorisation of a poetic text its periphrastic level. In contrast to the level of reality which

---

82 I owe this remark to Professor Alexander Dolinin.
83 Built in 1766-69, at the same time as the granite pavements of Fontanka, Prachechny Bridge, made also of granite, was one of the first bridges in St. Petersburg. It was reconstructed in 1926-28.
84 See, e.g. “A Guide to a Renamed City”: “/.../ The twelve-mile long Neva branching right in the centre of the town, with its twenty-five large and small coiling canals, provides this city with such quantity of mirrors that narcissism becomes inevitable. Reflected every second by thousands of square feet of running silver amalgam, it’s as if the city were constantly being filmed by its river /.../ No wonder that sometimes this city gives the impression of an utter egoist preoccupied solely with its own appearance.” (Brodsky 1986: 77). See also “Позднеч в комнате”: “/.../ Или - как город, чьи красота, / была отраженьем своим сыта, / как Нарцисс у ручья. /.../.” (Бродский III: 178), see also Chapter 5.1.1 below.
served as a starting point of the present analysis, the aim and direction of the periphrastic level is not towards reality, but away from it. Its function is to guarantee the semantic integrity of the text. The further the text departs from the level of reality, the more enigmatic its semantics become.

Several motives are incorporated in the myth of Narcissus. First of all, it embraces such motives as reflection and mirror\textsuperscript{86}, as well as other water imagery. Secondly, the myth is associated with identity, with special focus on the aspect of dual personality inherent in the myth - the “other” in the “self” - in other words the motif of the double. The motives related to visuality - seeing and being visible - are also contained in the Narcissus myth. Together with such aspects as mobility vs. immobility, transitoriness and flight, i.e. aspects concerning dynamism and movement, inseparable in the final analysis from the theme of time, they form the semantic core of the Narcissus myth.

Two contrasting motives are united in the complex of Narcissus - reflection and flight. As Genette\textsuperscript{87} points out, the main issue in it is the fleeing image. The necessary precondition for the mirror image on the surface of water to remain whole is its absolute motionlessness. A slight movement either of the reflecting surface or the reflected subject would mean its distortion and fragmentation. The reflected image on water is simultaneously a confirmed identity, reinforced through recognition, as well as a stolen identity. Its veracity is questionable due to the unstable nature of the image. Apart from being a perfect symbol of estrangement, the mirror image has also been construed as symbolising unrequited, non-materialised love. Both of the symbolic meanings can be applied to Brodsky’s poem “Прачечный мост”.

Brodsky’s lyrical subject does not contemplate his own reflection on the surface of Fontanka, but his gaze focusses on the mirror image of the fisherman, who has taken his place on the bridge. The lyrical subject seems to be watching the scene from the sidelines, which would imply that the impression of estrangement is doubled. His dwellings on the reflection are, indeed, rendered in a calm, general tone. Moreover, the rippling mirror image seems to take on the properties of a magic mirror, ca-

\textsuperscript{86} One of the motives related to mirror and reflection in the PT is that of dream. All three motives contribute to the phantasmagoric nature of the city. Moranjak-Bamburać has discovered in Brodsky’s poem “Горбунов и Горчаков” a typical dream of a Petersburger: “/.../ “Скажи мне, Горчаков, / а что вам, ленинградцам, часто снится?”/ “Да как когда... Концерты, лес смычков. / Проспекты, переулки. Просто лица. / (Сны состоят как будто из ключков). / Нева. Мосты. А иногда - страница. / и я ее читаю без очков!” (On other Petersburg themes in Brodsky’s poetry and prose, see Moranjak-Bamburać 1996: 72-73).

\textsuperscript{87} Genette 1966: 21-22.
pable of reflecting not only the present moment but also the recognisable past and future hypostases of the reflected figure:

Река его то молодит, то старит.
То проступают юные черты,
то набегают на чело морщины.

Пусть
он смотрится спокойно в наши воды
и даже узнает себя.

The equivalence between the original and the reflection is broken by the flowing element of water. The ability to reflect the past and the future is a property assigned to magic mirrors. The fact that the reflection does not coincide with the original can also be conceived as an indicator of the idea inherent in the motif of a magic mirror, namely that it reflects not the discernible appearance, but the innermost being of the reflected.88

If we understand the essence of the Narcissus myth to lie in the change of perspective that it entails, Brodsky’s poem offers an interesting variation of the myth. Whereas Narcissus sees himself as “the other”, the lyrical subject on Prachechny Bridge sees not the reflection of himself but that of another person in his place. Accordingly, a shift takes place in the meaning of the egocentric words, a shift characteristic to motives related to the theme of reflection.89 In a reflection in an ordinary mirror, the components of the reflection are symmetrical to those of the reflected world. The only thing that will change is the point of observation. The reflected world is looked at from the side, which entails that “I” and “here”, become “I seen from the sidelines” and “here seen from the sidelines”. When we are dealing with reflection in a magic mirror, the deictic particulars undergo a more radical change; “I” appears as “non-I”, i.e. “my double”, while “here” becomes “there”, and “now” may cease to exist and be replaced by “then”, referring either to the past or to the future. Furthermore, the magical process may entail a transformation of the actual world, where the “I” is located, either to an illusory or to one which corresponds to reality, depending on the case.

In “Прачечный мост” the truthfulness of the actual position of the lyrical subject, no matter how painful, is reinforced by his looking at the

89 For a discussion of the motive of the magic mirror and the shifts it may entail in the meaning of deictic expressions, see Золян 1988: 41-42.
changing image on Fontanka Canal. “I” which was part of the “we” has been replaced by “he”:

Он занял наше место. Что ж он прав!
С недавних пор все то, что одиноко,
символизирует другое время;
а это ордер на пространство.

/.../ Ему
река теперь принадлежит по праву /.../.

It seems as if the legitimacy of the intrusion of the “other” to “our place”, is confirmed by time itself. “He” is entitled to this particular spot in St. Petersburg just because things change in time, because the union between the two people referred to as “we” is now broken⁹⁰. This truth is unveiled by the changing image on the water. A new era has began - that of infinite solitude - a state which, paradoxically enough, both male protagonists of the poem seem to share. As Hansen-Löve⁹¹ recalls, the narcissistic approach to the surrounding world neglects the necessity of a bond with other people. It is a manifestation of self-reflection, of introversion and withdrawal to the “self”. The recognition of the “self” in the “other” manifests itself in Brodsky’s poem in the fact that it is the very same egoistic fascination of the fisherman with his own image that prompts the lyrical subject’s no less self-centred meditations on his present state.

It is worth noting in what an ingenious manner Brodsky equates the exterior space to an interior in the lines quoted above. The “assignment of space” to the new “tenant” - “ордер на пространство” - is a modification of an official document called “ордер на квартиру” [“assignment of apartment” - MK] without which one could not move into an apartment in Soviet times. In the last lines of the poem Brodsky compares the river to a house or home. The concluding two lines suggest, anyhow, that no person is assigned a permanent right to occupy space. The motif of the mirror stands here for the transitoriness of each moment. It carries the reflection of that precise moment only, preserving no images, let alone making them reemerge at another moment:

/.../ Ему
река теперь принадлежит по праву,

⁹⁰ The line “Ему река теперь принадлежит по праву” echoes the opening lines in Pushkin’s poem “Череп”: “Прими сей череп, Дельвиг, он / Принадлежит тебе по праву” (Пушкин 1954, т. 2: 32). I owe this insight to Professor Alexander Dolinin.
⁹¹ Ханзен-Лёве 1999: 109. For “Narcissism” in Russian symbolism, see ibid. 87-113.
как дом, в который зеркало внесли,  
но жить не стали.

What is the role and function of the St. Petersburg setting in the poem? As was already indicated, the few constituents of the chronotope - the bridge, the river (the canal, to be precise) - are typical markers of a genuine Petersburg city-scape. The motives of reflection/mirror image are frequently encountered in the PT. They are traditionally associated with such themes as identity, illusoriness of existence, death or the other world.

As I have tried to show, time is the central theme in Brodsky’s poem. Judging by the lack of meteorological markers, the poet is not interested in imbuing the setting with temporal characteristics. The two depicted scenes are not tied to any particular time of the year. This seems to suggest that the only significant temporal indicator to be taken into account is the mentioned opposition “before - after”. Apart from providing the key to the perspective of the lyrical subject on the theme of parting, the opposition concretises his ruminations on the abstract category of time, which appears in the poem in a metaphorised form as a river. In the last analysis, Brodsky uses the liquid mirror of water as a metaphor of the transitory nature of existence, which consists of successive states of instability92. He does this by proceeding from concrete reality and actual individual experience to his favourite metaphysical meditations about time and space. Thus, Petersburg space is an active, I would like to argue, a necessary agent in the unfolding of the philosophical aspects of the lyric plot.

2.4.1.2 “Мы вышли с почты прямо на канал...”

In an earlier poem, dating from 1962, “Мы вышли с почты прямо на канал...”93, Brodsky portrays another parting in the St. Petersburg city-scape. This time his emphasis is rather on the very process of separation than on its effect. The lyric personae of the poem are two people, re-

92 Quoting Genette, nothing is stable in this existence except instability itself: “Comme l’existence est un écoulement d’années, d’heures, d’instant, le moi est une sucession d’états instables où /.../ rien n’est constant que l’instabilité même.” (Genette 1966: 26).
ferred to by the pronoun “we”. The lyrical subject is the one bidding farewell to his departing friend.

The first quatrain is an exposition of a “common place” of the PT with its canals and clouds. He depicts a genuine city-scape, a cultural space, which begins to merge with natural elements, the clouds:

Мы вышли с почты прямо на канал,
kоторый начал с облаком сливаться /.../.

The locus of leave-taking is the very site from where this scene can be observed. The process of merging of these typically Petersburg elements is described in terms of graphics. The outlines of the natural phenomena passing before the eyes of the protagonists remind the lyrical subject of a Cyrillic letter “п”. This is not the only case when Brodsky likens the appearance of a thing, person or landscape to a letter. The same device of transforming a linguistic sign to a pictorial, iconic symbol is used by Brodsky, for example, in “Декабрь во Флоренции”95. By depicting the vista opening up to his view in terms of a linguistic element, Brodsky’s lyrical subject comes to conceptualise the represented space of parting:

/.../ и сверху букву “п” напоминал.
И здесь мы с ним решили расставаться.

It is as if the letter “п” not only replicates the contours of the main constituents of the landscape - the canal embankments and the cloud - but that it also serves as a semantic centre which draws together the main themes of the poem. The lexicon associated with parting constitutes the main semantic field of the text. The letter ”п” figures in many words that are semantically connected to theme of separation. Some of the words are explicitly stated, some implied in one way or another. First and foremost, the letter “п” is repeated in the laconic statement of the second stanza illustrating the very act of bidding farewell:

Мы попрощались. Мелко семена,
on уходил вечернюю порою.
/.../

94 The poem is dedicated to “А.Н.” The initials may refer to Brodsky’s friend and colleague Anatoly Naiman, who moved to Moscow from Leningrad in the early 1960’s.
95 For a discussion of the use of linguistic/written symbols as pictorial symbols, perceived as direct representations of ideas/objects, see, e.g. Goodman 1978: 102-103. For an extensive analysis of “Декабрь во Флоренции” see Chapter 3.1.
Конечно, что-то было впереди.
Что именно - нам было неизвестно.
Для тех, кто ждал его в конце пути
он так же увеличивался резко.

The letter “п” can be construed as a symbol for several notions that can be defined in spatial terms. First, “п” provides a certain perspective (перспектива) to the presented space (пространство) unfolding in front of the protagonists of the poem. (It may not be a mere coincidence that the Cyrillic alphabet “п” reminds one of a drawing representing classical linear perspective deviating from it only in the fact that “п” lacks “the vanishing point in the horizon” where the lines of the perspective meet.) Secondly, it is from this particular spot with this particular view that the actual, physical separation of the lyrical personae begins. This locus - the post-office by a canal - with a relatively open view to the horizon serves as a starting point for the road/journey (путь) which awaits the other protagonist, referred to as “he” in the poem96. As an iconic sign, “п” seems to reflect the principal structure of the represented space, functioning simultaneously as a thematic indicator in the examined text. It could as well be conceived of as a sign pointing to the original name of the city where the event occurs - to Petersburg.

The separation is described in terms of the growing physical distance between the lyrical subject and “him”. The process of drawing away is conveyed mainly by verbs and adverbs of modality, which are abundant in “Мы вышли с почты прямо на канал...”, compared to other parts of speech, adjectives in particular:

Мы попрощались. Мелко семеня,
on уходил вечернею порою.
Он быстро уменьшался для меня
как будто раньше вчетверо, чем втрое.

Конечно, что-то было впереди.
Что именно - нам было неизвестно.
Для тех, кто ждал его в конце пути,
on так же увеличивался резко.

96 The scene of this particular parting may be on the Moyka where the main post office stands on Pochtamtskaya Street. The huge Neo-classical building with Doric porticoes has an archway, which extends across the street, as its distinctive trait.
“His” moving away is first observed - and the growing distance between the two lyrical heroes measured - from the vantage point of the lyrical subject, who remains immobile on the spot of parting. “His” figure grows rapidly smaller and smaller at a pace which seems to defy the common laws of linear perspective. In the third stanza, the standpoint is suddenly changed. “He” is now seen from the viewpoint of those who wait for him in the end of the road. In their eyes “his” approaching figure seems to grow in the same proportion as it diminishes from the lyrical subject’s point of view.

The last quatrain depicts, once again, the same city-scape with the canal and the post-office from the lyrical subject’s vantage point. “He” is already so far away that his figure seems a mere point fulfilling the function of the vanishing point in a landscape painting with a linear perspective:

Настал момент, когда он заслонил пустой канал с деревьями и почту, когда он все собой заполонил.
Одновременно превратившись в точку.

However, the more “his” figure diminishes, the more it fills the “empty” space which it has left behind. The distance transforms the familiar human figure into a geometrical abstraction - a point with minimal spatial dimensions. Even as this point vanishes in the distance, it is able to cast a shadow on the whole landscape, an immaterial “shadow” of absence which fills the vacuum that “he” as a physical body has left in space. The space, which in the previous stanza was presented from the angle of a reversed perspective, is now pervaded and conquered by the state of “his” absence. Absence, as Nivat has pointed out, is “the only motive of presence” in Brodsky’s poetic universe.

97 The significance of the attribute “empty” - “пустой” - gains special emphasis through the fact that it is the only adjective in the poem. As it also includes the letter “п”, it is immediately associated with the letter “п” as the organising semantic centre in the first stanza. “Empty” as such has been among the most common epithets applied to the city of St. Petersburg throughout its history. It echoes the famous prophesy of Yevdokiya Lopuchina, Peter the Great’s first wife: “Петербургу быть пусту!”, (For legends and prophesies about the end of Peter’s City see, e.g. Синдальовский 1995: 15-16). Brodsky ignores the tradition of the PT. His “empty” is something very personal, a state of mind which is filled by the intensity of the absence of the departee. The inner world is thus projected in the outside reality.

Ultimately, the parting scene, presented from opposite perspectives, can be perceived as an integral geometrical figure in which “the point” through which the lines of the opposite perspectives run serves as the linking element. The figure takes the shape of an hourglass. The upper part of it is represents the view that lies ahead of “him”, while the vista opening up in front of the lyrical subject narrowing toward a point in the horizon, constitutes the lower part of the hourglass.

The parting is thus conveyed in spatial terms by measuring the physical distance of the departee both from his starting point (A) as well as from the point of his destination (B). The distance covered from A to B may be likened to a road/journey (“путь”) in time as well as space. Apart from being an element of space, the road is often encountered as a symbol of time made concrete. “The road of life” is a commonplace spatial metaphor of time.

Конечно, что-то было впереди.
Что именно - нам было неизвестно.

That which lies “ahead” of “him”, which was unknown to both of them at that moment, is, naturally, the future which - at least in the Western mind - is conceived of as being situated somewhere “ahead”, whereas the past is left “behind”. Furthermore, the poet cannot overlook the chronological order of the events described in “Мы вышли с почты прямо на канал...” since the change in circumstances is conveyed in terms of linear movement. Accordingly, the impact of the separation is rendered through a discernible change in the environment, notwithstanding the fact that its effects are felt in the inner world of the lyrical subject.

In both “Прачечный мост” and “Мы вышли с почты прямо на канал...” the urban landscape is sketched with only a few elements. Despite the relative lack of description, the settings are easily recognised as St. Petersburg loci. The settings as such are not connected to any historical period, they are poetic commonplaces, timeless by their nature. The chronotope has a central role in the manifestation of the personal experience of separation and solitude. Moreover, the characteristics of the surrounding space serve to evoke and express profound existential questions concerning time and space, absence and presence, lifting the discussion.

99 Jury Ivask, among others, has paid attention to the fact that Brodsky’s poems seldom seem to be related to the Soviet reality. Despite the fact that St. Petersburg-Leningrad is a recognisable setting in his texts, it is often described without distinctive features that would link it to a particular moment in history (Иваск 1971: 294).
from the level of personal experience to a more universal plane. Brodsky aims at portraying time in terms of space. He makes use of spatial metaphors in expressing emotions, as well as in engaging in metaphysical meditations on riddles of time and existence. His use of “geometry” and ideograms in illustrating the metaphysical meaning of the chronotope - the scene of parting - is without precedent in Russian poetry dealing with the theme of St. Petersburg. The represented urban space is an antimyth in all its laconic neutrality. The landscape gains symbolic profundity through the very same, ostensibly simple, metaphors employed by Brodsky.

2.4.2 St. Petersburg as a Locus of Death

Themes of separation and parting constitute only a prologue to the theme of death, the final parting, which is a recurrent theme in Brodsky’s early Petersburg poetry. The fate of the lyrical hero, for example his future place of death, seems to be predetermined. Exemplary variants of the theme of “the death in St. Petersburg” are contained in the poems “Еврейское кладбище около Ленинграда”, “Стансы”, “Стансы городу” and “Бессмертия у смерти не прошу…”. Brodsky’s first poem about St. Petersburg - Leningrad is, curiously enough, a meditation on a cemetery; “Еврейское кладбище около Ленинграда” was written already in 1958, whereas the other three poems examined in this subchapter date to 1961-1962.

2.4.2.1 “Еврейское кладбище около Ленинграда…”

“Еврейское кладбище…” belongs to the early stage of Brodsky’s “romantic period”\(^{100}\). The early lyrics of Brodsky, the poem under scrutiny included, have been described as “a finely tuned blend of tenderness, precocious resignation and /.../ irony”. “The allusive and complex simplicity” of language ascribed to his early poetry has been observed, as well.\(^{101}\) Sil’vestr\(^{102}\) has paid attention to the almost liturgical solemnity and simplicity of form of the cemetery poem.

\(^{100}\) For a chronological typology of stylistic periods in Brodsky’s poetic oeuvre, see Куллэ 1997: 286-297 (in Бродский I: 283-297).
\(^{101}\) Pawel 1968: 21-22. Pawel pointed out in his account of the poem that the above-mentioned blend of tenderness, resignation and irony might be conceived by “some future alert prosecutor” as signs of “cosmopolitanism” or “Zionism”. (ibid.).
Brodsky names the place being portrayed as well as its location in the first line of the poem. In the following four lines he delineates the “contours” of the place together with its “contents”:

Еврейское кладбище около Ленинграда.
Кривой забор из гнилой фанеры.
За кривым забором лежат рядом юристы, торговцы, музыканты, революционеры.

The image of the crooked fence with its rotten planks is repeated in the next to the last line, whereas the closing line seems to provide a more precise geographical location of the cemetery as regards to the city.\textsuperscript{103} The location of the former is defined in its relation to the latter, in an indirect way, using the route of a tram as a metonymy for Leningrad:

За кривым забором из гнилой фанеры,
в чертырех километрах от кольца трамвая.

The quoted opening and concluding lines of the poem provide a framework for the setting. The remaining lines that they embrace are devoted to the description of the past way of life of those bodies that now lie beside each other in the ground. In addition to mentioning their past, Brodsky deals with their future as well when describing the inevitable transformation of flesh into earth. The underlying theme of the poem can be reduced to the antithesis “material vs. immaterial”. The condition of the fence surrounding the cemetery in the second line suggests the fate of \textit{materia}. It is doomed to decompose and decay, which, according to the poet, is a way - if not the only way - to gain eternal peace:

/.../ голодные старики высокими голосами /.../

\textsuperscript{102} Сильвестр 1980: 45. Brodsky read “Еврейское кладбище” at his first public appearance in March 1959. The liturgical tone of the poem was certainly not muffled, but on the contrary, reinforced by Brodsky’s manner of reciting his texts. Krivulin has described the scandalous impact of Brodsky’s performance - “the new, unprecedented music” - on the divided audience at the poetry reading (see Кривулин 1988: II).

\textsuperscript{103} For a description of Brodsky’s actual visit to the Jewish cemetery near Leningrad, see Бета 2000: 528: “/.../ это кладбище... в общем, это место довольно трагическое, оно впечатлило меня, и я написал стихотворение...Не помню особых причин, просто на этом кладбище похоронены мои бабушка с дедушкой, мои тетки и т.д. Помню, я гулял там и размышлял - в основном об их судьбе в контексте того, как и где они жили и умерли.”
In Brodsky’s “requiem” the dichotomy “material vs. immaterial” can be tracked down in manifestations of another opposition - spatial in its essence - viz. in the antithesis “horizontal vs. vertical”. The organisation of the presented setting is carried out on the horizontal axis, which is thus related to the antipode of materiality in the first polarity; the graves that are organised into lines like seeds of grain on a field, the fence demarcating the area of the cemetery from its surroundings. As a rule, the horizontal axis has a tendency to be tied down to the earth, while the purpose of the vertical is to liberate from the pull of the earth’s gravity. Consequently, all that is connected to the earthly life both of the deceased as well as of those praying for them - their past professions, the experience of cold and hunger - belong to the “ineluctably material world”, that is, the horizontal sphere. The immaterial, vertical aspect manifests itself in the “idealism” and “blind faith” of the dead:

The vertical axis takes an invisible, but audible form. The reading of the Talmud, the old men chanting the prayers with a rising pitch, as well as the flickering candles as symbols of prayers and heavenly light are all actions oriented up towards heaven. The sowing of grain, on the contrary, implies a movement down to the earth.

However, in spite of not sowing the corn, which is a common symbol of rebirth and continuity, Brodsky’s poem suggests that the departed have the seed of life in themselves. In the last analysis, it is not what they did for a living, but what they believed in that matters:

The vertical axis takes an invisible, but audible form. The reading of the Talmud, the old men chanting the prayers with a rising pitch, as well as the flickering candles as symbols of prayers and heavenly light are all actions oriented up towards heaven. The sowing of grain, on the contrary, implies a movement down to the earth.

However, in spite of not sowing the corn, which is a common symbol of rebirth and continuity, Brodsky’s poem suggests that the departed have the seed of life in themselves. In the last analysis, it is not what they did for a living, but what they believed in that matters:

The vertical axis takes an invisible, but audible form. The reading of the Talmud, the old men chanting the prayers with a rising pitch, as well as the flickering candles as symbols of prayers and heavenly light are all actions oriented up towards heaven. The sowing of grain, on the contrary, implies a movement down to the earth.

However, in spite of not sowing the corn, which is a common symbol of rebirth and continuity, Brodsky’s poem suggests that the departed have the seed of life in themselves. In the last analysis, it is not what they did for a living, but what they believed in that matters:

The vertical axis takes an invisible, but audible form. The reading of the Talmud, the old men chanting the prayers with a rising pitch, as well as the flickering candles as symbols of prayers and heavenly light are all actions oriented up towards heaven. The sowing of grain, on the contrary, implies a movement down to the earth.

However, in spite of not sowing the corn, which is a common symbol of rebirth and continuity, Brodsky’s poem suggests that the departed have the seed of life in themselves. In the last analysis, it is not what they did for a living, but what they believed in that matters:

The vertical axis takes an invisible, but audible form. The reading of the Talmud, the old men chanting the prayers with a rising pitch, as well as the flickering candles as symbols of prayers and heavenly light are all actions oriented up towards heaven. The sowing of grain, on the contrary, implies a movement down to the earth.

However, in spite of not sowing the corn, which is a common symbol of rebirth and continuity, Brodsky’s poem suggests that the departed have the seed of life in themselves. In the last analysis, it is not what they did for a living, but what they believed in that matters:
И навек засыпали.
А потом - их землей засыпали /.../

They are now part of the eternal and absolute order, out of time’s reach as it is experienced in life. The state of the dead outside time is implied by the simultaneous, controversial state of forgetfulness and unforgettable attributed to their souls. Recollection and forgetting are parts of one’s personal consciousness and experience of time. As conscious acts they presuppose individual existence. The deprivation of these manifestations of individual consciousness places the object of the poem outside time, in eternity, in the final stanza of “Еврейское кладбище”:

Ничего не помня.
Ничего не забывая.
За кривым забором из гнилой фанеры,
В четырех километрах от кольца трамвая.

If the deceased are now living in the mythical time of eternity, the natural cyclical flow of time appears in the poem in the form of a tram route. The circular form of the final stop of the tram seems to mark the border zone between the timelessness of the cemetery and the repeated cycle of days which governs the life of the city-dwellers. The cemetery surrounded by a fence - the world of ideals, the realm of the dead - and the city of Leningrad, referred to only metonymically, form two enclaves, separated and joined at the same time by a horizontal distance of four kilometres, measured in exact spatial terms. It is precisely these four kilometres that enable the transition from the material to the ideal, and vice versa.

Keeping in mind that one of the aims of the present study is to elucidate Brodsky’s image of his native city from the point of view of the PT, it is appropriate to pay attention to the attributes that Brodsky employs in his poem. Since the quantity of adjectives remains low and some of them are repeated, it does not take much to enumerate them all: “еврейский”,
“кривой”, “гнилой” (repeated thrice and twice respectively), “холодный”, “голодный”, “высокий”. Most of these attributes seem to tend to the less positive end of the spectrum, which as such is characteristic of the PT. One is not utterly convinced, however, that the depicted chronotope is endowed with negative connotations only. Quite the contrary, the Jewish cemetery near Leningrad seems to be a place with which the lyrical subject can identify himself. The ambiguous nature of the presented place seems to recall the tradition of the PT. As Toporov maintains, the PT is full of expressions that evoke negative attitudes towards the city which, strangely enough, do not exclude, but rather assume simultaneous positive feelings of love and loyalty to it. The “negative” and “positive” are mutually dependant in the sense that they not only complement each other but are prerequisites for each other to a certain extent.

The identification with space becomes clearly manifest in another poem by Brodsky, related to the theme of death and the city of St. Petersburg “Бессмертия у смерти не прошу...” examined below. In the final stanza of this poem the lyrical subject utters his wish concerning his future burial place. His will is to rest under a ledger in the Jewish cemetery:

Пусть время обо мне молчит.
Пускай легко рыдает ветер резкий
и над моей могилой еврейской
младая жизнь настойчиво кричит.  

Brodsky declares his loyalty to St. Petersburg, his aspiration to become one with it in death in a place which, as a rule, is not common within the PT. In “Еврейское кладбище” he not only ignores the conventional topoi of the PT by expanding his poetic wanderings to the outskirts of the city but he also brings to the fore the Jewish theme of St. Petersburg, which is of no great importance in the tradition of the PT. Having his focus on the past life of his ancestors, members of an ethnic minority,

105 Топоров 1995: 263.
106 The last lines may be an echo of Pushkin’s “Брожу ли я вдоль улиц шумных...”, where the final stanza reads as follows: “И пусть у гробового входа / Младая будет жизнь играть, / И равнодушная природа / Красою вечною сиять.” (Пушкин 1954, т. 2: 85). They might as well resonate Akhmatova’s lines in “Черепки”: “/.../ Над моей ленинградской могилой / Равнодушиная бродит весна.”
107 Professor Alexander Dolinin has suggested that it might be worthwhile to examine Brodsky’s poem “Еврейское кладбище около Ленинграда” in the context of Bagritsky’s poetry. It might also have connections to Longfellow’s poem of the Jewish cemetery in Newport.
Brodsky comes to create a very personal myth of the city and its surroundings.

2.4.2.2 “Бессмертия у смерти не прошу...”, “Стансы”, “Стансы городу”

While “Еврейское кладбище около Ленинграда...” contemplated the relationship between materiality and immateriality, the three poems elucidated in this subchapter deal with the theme of death from the point of view of the lyrical subject himself. He is concerned with his own fate, which seems to be irreversibly linked with the city of St. Petersburg. The focus of the poet is on the experience of death in life as well as death as an object of the imagination. That experience is conveyed by constituents of city-space that take an active part in communication. It is more than common in Brodsky’s poetry that the urban landscape sets the pace for the meditative strolling of the lyrical hero, triggering his thoughts concerning death and destiny.

Direct naming is the most obvious way of citation, activating the pre-text. Accordingly, the link between the given text and the PT can be established by naming directly, in which case the name functions metonymically, representing the whole corpus of texts belonging to the supertext. Apart from this function, proper names, topographical names in particular, connect the text to the reality of the place being described, reinforcing the extensive dimension of the text. In spite of the fact that all three poems are set in “common places”, familiar from the PT, proper names as topographical markers are not frequently encountered in Brodsky’s texts. In “Стансы городу” there are no places at all called by name, whereas in “Стансы” the locus of future death is uttered in the first stanza:

Ни страны, ни погоста
не хочу выбирать.

На Васильевский остров
я приду умирать.

There is yet another spatial indicator in “Стансы” that points to the location of the lyrical hero - the faded “lines” on the asphalt. The word “lines” has a double meaning in this particular context. With this word the poet may be referring not only to its lexical meaning but also to street names. The streets on Basil Island are called “Lines” (“линии”), implying the strictly geometrical scheme of the city.
Твой фасад темно-синий
я впотьмах не найду,
между выцветших линий
на асфальт упаду.

In the second stanza the meteorological marker “April drizzle” mingles with the “Petrograd smoke” - a combination in which the main characteristics of the stereotypical Petersburg weather are incorporated 108:

И душа, /.../
промелькнет над мостами
в петроградском дыму,
и апрельская морось,
под затылком снежок /.../.

In “Бессмертия у смерти не прошу...” the only proper name is the name of the city, which is not called Leningrad as in “Еврейское кладбище около Ленинграда”, but Petersburg. This time the city is likened to an alarm bell:

Звони, звони по мне,
мой Петербург, мой колокол пожарный.

Despite the infrequency of proper names, the settings of the three poems can without difficulty be identified as genuinely Petersburg poetical commonplaces. Brodsky mentions the river with its embankments, bridges and islands, façades and windows. All four classical elements - water, air, fire and earth - are present in his city. They have a significant role to play in the lyrical subject’s identification with the city, not to mention his final fate.

The poem “Бессмертия у смерти не прошу...”, for instance, serves as a perfect example of a unification of the lyrical subject - endowed with characteristics of “the little man” [“frightened, in love and penniless” - MK] - with the surrounding milieu. The properties of the city are internalised by him to such an extent that he becomes one with the city:

Бессмертия у смерти не прошу.
Испуганный, возлюбленный и нищий, -

108 See, e.g. “дымные тучи” in Blok’s “Петроградское небо мутилось дождем”. I owe this remark to Professor Alexander Dolinin.
но с каждым днем я прожитым дышу уверенней и сладостней и чище.

Как широко на набережных мне, как холодно и ветрено и вечно, как облака, блестящие в окне, надломленны, легки и быстротечны.

И душа, неустанно поспешая во тьму, промелькнет над мостами в петроградском дыму, и апрельская морось, под затылком снежок, и услышу я голос: - до свиданья, дружок.

The theme of bidding farewell is repeated in the final stanza, where the “unpassed” years of his interrupted life are paralleled to two sisters - two lives waving goodbye to the boy who is saying good-bye to his city:

---

110 There are several cemeteries on Basil Island. The Smolensky Cemetery alone has sections for members of the Orthodox, Armenian and Lutheran Churches. There are plans to erect a monument for Brodsky on Basil Island for the 300th Anniversary of St. Petersburg in the year 2003. “Стансы” has, no doubt, influenced the decision to situate the statue there.
111 The two sisters could refer to the two addressees of the poem “E.V.” and “A.D.” One of the addressees is, without doubt, Elena Valikhan, a friend of Brodsky who
И увижу две жизни
далеко за рекой,
к равнодушной отчизне
прижимаясь щекой,
- словно девочки-сестры
из непрожитых лет,
выбегая на остров,
машут мальчику вслед.

The “indifferent fatherland”, as many scholars have noticed, echoes the lines “И опять к равнодушной отчизне / Дикой уткой взовьется упрек...” from Mandel’shtam’s poem “Воздух пасмурный влажен и гулок”.112

The funeral service - “otpevanie” - is carried out by “natural” elements of the urban landscape in “Стансы городу”:

Пусть меня отпоет
хор воды и небес, и гранит
пусть обнимет меня,
пусть поглотит,
сей шаг вспоминая,
пусть меня отпоет,
пусть меня, беглеца, осенит
белой ночью твоя
неподвижная слава земная.

The city, addressed by the pronoun “you”, partakes in the mourning for the lyrical subject’s death. The lyrical subject himself bears resemblance to a typical Petersburg hero. He defines himself as a tearful runaway, a fugitive filled with miserable sorrow113. His wretched life is projected lived in a house with a dark blue façade, depicted in the first stanza of the poem (Гордин 2000: 135).

112 See Лекманов 2000: 355 and Леви́нто́н 1998b: 212. There is another Petersburg poet in whose oeuvre the prophesy of impending death is not of minor importance, namely Anna Akhmatova. Brodsky’s “Бессмертия у смерти не прошу” as well as “Стансы” echo Akhmatova’s “Черепки”, see footnote 106. For reminiscences of Akhmatova on the motif of death in Brodsky’s lyrics, see Леви́нто́н 1998b: 202-203.

113 In the first stanza Brodsky’s lyrical substitute juxtaposes himself with Lermontov, calling the latter “the bowlegged boy” (which Lermontov was). In Gordin’s view such a comparison in such a sad and touching context is possible only because Brodsky felt
against the classical elements of the city, which stands in its immobile
glory and everlasting beauty. The impression of firmness and constancy
attributed to the city is enhanced by the motionless atmosphere of the
white nights. In the final stanza the fleeting night gives its blessings to
the lyrical subject’s union with the city:

/.../ и летящая ночь
эту бедную жизнь обручит
с красотою твоей
и с посмертной моей правотою.

The enigmatic last line seems to suggest that it is only posthumously that
the lyrical subject will be proven right. His life and his posthumous re-
ward and the changeless earthly glory of the city are inseparably linked.
The same interdependence between the future fate of the hero and St.
Petersburg is expressed in “Бессмертия у смерти не прошу...”, in
which Brodsky employs other metaphors of death, such as fire, for ex-
ample. The motif of fire is introduced in the third quatrain in form of a
spider web, which “burns” between the lyrical hero and life:

И осенью и летом не умру,
Не всколыхнется зимняя простынка,
взгляни, любовь, как в розовом углу,
горит меж мной и жизнью паутинка.

a fatal connection between himself and his romantic predecessor (Гордин 1995: 228).
For a detailed discussion of Lermontovian subtexts in Brodsky’s poetry, see Ранчин

114 “Розовый угол” might be read as an actual detail of the poet’s room. Gubin de-
scribes his visit in 1989 to the Muruzi house - to the communal apartment where
Brodsky lived with his parents - as follows: “Комнаты Бродских были переделаны
в изолированные. В меньшей (интерьер которой по стихам известен до деталей,
от “лампы в розовом углу” до бутылки вина, выставленной охлаждаться в
dекабрьскую форточку) /.../.” (Губин 1999: 97).

115 “The burning spider web” could also be conceived of as a metaphor for a specific
object which in the literal sense of the word enables a connection with the whole
world. It could, perhaps, refer to the radio which Brodsky describes in detail in
“Spoils of War”: “When I was twelve, my father suddenly produced to my great de-
light a shortwave-radio set. Philips was the name, and it could pick up stations from
all over the world, from Copenhagen to Surabaja. /.../ One wasn’t supposed to have a
foreign radio, period. The solution was a web-like arrangement under the ceiling
of your room, which is what I made. /.../ Apparently I was not the only one in my
generation who knew how to put two feet of plain wire to good use. Through six
symmetrical holes in its back, in the subdued glow and flicker of the radio tubes, in
the maze of contacts, resistors and cathodes, as incomprehensible as the languages
The first line of the stanza, like the poem in its entirety - “и осенью и летом не умру” - recalls the famous Horatian poem “Exegi monumentum”, which Lomonosov translated into Russian:

Не вовсе я умру

...Я буду возрастать повсюду славой,
Пока великий Рим владеет светом.

Obvious echoes from Pushkin’s ironic reply in “Я памятник себе воздвиг нерукотворный...“ to his Roman predecessor can also be found in Brodsky’s work.

Нет, весь я не умру - душа в заветной лире
Мой прах переживет и тленья убежит -
И славен буду я, доколь в подлунном мире
Жив будет хоть один пьит.116

In Brodsky’s response to the great masters the relationship between the poet and the city is different. While Horace and Pushkin underline the dependence of the glory and fame of the poet on the earthly existence of their cities, Rome and St. Petersburg, respectively, Brodsky conceives of beauty and eternal earthly glory as properties of the city, however illusory they might be in reality. His creative power (and subsequent fame) are not dependent on the existence of the material city, but on the dialogue of the poet with the ambient world, including the literary realities inherent in it.

The motive of fire appears again in the sixth stanza, which is the culmination point of the union of the poet with the city. The lyrical subject is identified with an insect which perishes in the candlelight, whereas St. Petersburg is paralleled to an alarm bell tolling for his death. The acoustic landscape is filled with voices of alarm produced by urban elements:

Лети в окне и вздрагивай в огне,
слетай, слетай на фитилечек жадный.
Свисти река! Звони, звони по мне,
мой Петербург, мой колокол пожарный.117

---

116 Пушкин 1954: 211.

117 The last line is a reminiscence from Donne, which Hemingway chose as a title and epigraph of his novel “For Whom the Bell Tolls”. Hemingway’s novel was extremely popular in the Soviet Union in the beginning of the 1960’s although it was forbidden
What strikes one in these three poems is the degree to which the lyrical subject identifies himself with the St. Petersburg space. It is not only that the hero feels its vastness and openness in his soul or that he breathes in the same rhythm with the winds blowing on the banks of the Neva. It is as if the city corresponded to his deepest sense of himself. The focus of his identification rests in any case on St. Petersburg as a *locus mortis*, of his own death as a rule. The approach of the lyrical subject to life resonates the existential position of a literary hero who belongs to the PT. He is either a sorrowful, romantic meditator or an anxious philosopher who wants to enter into a dialogue with time but is left without definite answers as far as his own future fate is concerned. Notwithstanding the fact that the identification of the lyrical subject with the city-space is rendered through the morbid theme of death, the tone of the poem is not extremely tragic. On the contrary, Brodsky’s early poems can be read as idiosyncratic but optimistic examples of identification of the literary heroes with the St. Petersburg space in the 20th century PT.118

Brodsky’s lyrical subject becomes one with the city precisely through the experience of death in life. Although he sees that his own fate as a poet has been ordained by the city, it is not the destructive forces of the city that will necessarily carry out the execution. Instead, the elements of the city and its urban nature contribute to his reaching his final destination and peace. It is noteworthy that the elements which partake in his burial service are those which belong to the “eternal” St. Petersburg, not to the contemporary city of Leningrad. The rare markers of the Leningrad re-aliia, such as the lines on the asphalt in “Стансы”, make him fall and lose his way, which could be construed as a certain sense of loss of the self. In accordance with the optimistic realisations of the identification of self with space in Russian literature, Leningrad is transformed in Brodsky’s early lyrics into St. Petersburg once more. However, it would be an exaggeration to assert that St. Petersburg figures there as an unambiguous integral whole or as a spatial model of the creative act. Brodsky’s image of the city is far more equivocal already in his early poems, which is reflected in the way his lyrical hero perceives and feels the surrounding city-space.

---

118 For an examination of the dichotomy between optimistic and pessimistic identifications with the city-space, and its various manifestations in the 20th century Petersburg tradition, see Crone 1993: 94-95.
2.4.3 St. Petersburg as a Locus of Fictional Heroes (Fictional vs. Actual Chronotope)

The focus of the following examination of Brodsky’s long poems “Петербургский роман”, “Шествие” and “Три главы” is on the recognisable literary heroes of the PT that occur in the poems. Apart from serving as markers of intertextuality, the introduction of fictional characters into the intra-textual space of a poem calls attention to the problem of distinguishing between the fictional and actual constituents of the represented chronotopes in the texts under examination.

Since the semantics of the possible worlds are based on the assumption that the actual world of ours is surrounded by an infinity of other possible worlds, it is appropriate, according to Doležel, to speak of possible particulars when referring to persons, attributes, events or other issues pertaining to the possible worlds. Fictional particulars, as constituents of fictional worlds, are granted the ontological status of non-actualised possibles as opposed to the actualised possibles of the actual world. However, Doležel wants to emphasise that the actual world as such does not have a different status within the set of possible worlds. It is just one possible world among others.

Fictional individuals, as representatives of non-actualised possibles, are thus ontologically different from actual persons. Neither their existence in the fictional world, nor their properties are not necessarily dependent on actual prototypes. But, in the same way as fictional persons with actual prototypes are connected to each other by a transworld identity, fictional persons can be moved from one fictional world to another, in which case the semantics of transworld identity can be applied to them, as well. A fictional person can have various incarnations in different fictional worlds, and these incarnations are linked to each other by a “counterpart relation”. A presupposition for the counterpart relation is that the counterparts have some essential properties in common, although the fictional persons in different worlds are never identical and may undergo radical alterations when moved from one world to another.

The main marker by which the incarnations of a fictional individual in different possible worlds can be identified is a proper name. A proper name is “a rigid designator” which holds together the different embodiments of the same person in various texts. “A rigid designator”, by definition, denotes the same object in any possible world. Through identifi-

---

119 Бродский I: 48-67, ibid. 79-133, ibid. 37-39, respectively.
121 Ibid. 17-18.
cation of the object, it enables the establishment of a transworld link between the fictional counterparts existing in different worlds. Moreover, explicit utterance of a proper name - a person’s name in particular - is one type of intertextual linking which establishes a metonymic relation between the given text and the implied subtext. Within a metonymic relationship the citation represents not only the whole subtext but its thematics, as well. It often represents the whole literary tradition lying behind the subtext. This is of special significance here, since we are dealing with the tradition grounded by the PT of the depiction of the city of St. Petersburg.

We move now to the components of Brodsky’s chronotopes, with special attention given to the protagonists of his lyrical world from the point of view of their position on the axis actual world - fictional worlds. One main question here is whether the presented settings and persons have their referent in the real St. Petersburg - Leningrad or in the fictional world of the PT. In addition it is useful to ask what kind of links a proper name as a rigid designator can establish between Brodsky’s texts and other non-actualised possible worlds created in other fictional texts.

St. Petersburg-Leningrad can figure as a setting of the lyrical plot/scene on the primary level, and/or as a second-level narrative reality. Whenever the city serves as a primary level narrative reality, it is that St. Petersburg-Leningrad where, quoting Tammi, “the living, thinking and suffering I” is present here and now. On the other hand, the second-level narrative reality refers to the city as an object of dreams, memories or hallucinations. In the latter case, the hero is not immediately present on the spot where the plot evolves, but is reminiscing, dreaming or otherwise producing new fictions about the city. If in the first case the city figures mainly as locus of the narrative, in the latter it emerges as a mental construct.

The narrative realities of Brodsky’s poems seem to embrace both primary and secondary levels simultaneously. It is not always easy to demarcate the present moment of the lyrical subject and the city surrounding him from the reality of the fictional personae who emerge in the city-space. Constituents of chronotopes belonging to different levels of narrative reality seem to overlap in Brodsky’s poetical universe. The si-

---

123 For a discussion of various types of intertextual linking and quotation as well as their functions in a text, see, e.g. Минц 1973: 393-397, Левин 1992: 488-496 and Tammi 1991: 76-90.
125 For Brodsky, in “A Guide to a Renamed City”, the indistinguishable mixture of fictional and real is among the very hallmarks of St. Petersburg: “/.../ the city began
multaneous presence of two realities is expressed with special clarity in the long poem “Шествие”, although “Петербургский роман” bears traces of the two-level reality as well.

In “Шествие” Brodsky introduces a whole collection of fictional heroes from Don Quixote to Prince Hamlet, from Myshkin to the Pied Piper of Hamelin. The structure of the poem, consisting of a series of monologues by manifold literary figures - each followed by ironic commentaries - recalls Tsvetayeva’s poema “Крысолов”126. The masquerade procession of “shadows” also recalls Akhmatova’s “Petersburg tale” “Поэма без героя”. Brodsky wrote his “Шествие” in autumn 1961127. In the last section of the poem he clearly exposes the literary persons as visions, visitors from another realm that appear in the city of St. Petersburg thanks to the presence of a supernatural power that cannot be grasped by the human mind. These visions have been associated with the city from the moment of its creation:

Потому что в этом городе убогом,
где отправят нас на похороны века,
кроме страха перед дьяволом и Богом,
существует что-то выше человека. (Chapter 41)

Давно пора благодарить судьбу
за зрелища, даруемые нам
не по часам, а иногда по дням,

to fall into dependence on the three-dimensional image supplied by literature./.../ Toward the middle of the nineteenth century, these two things merged: Russian literature caught up with reality to the extent that today when you think of St. Petersburg you can’t distinguish the fictional from the real. Which is rather odd for a place only two hundred and seventy-six years old.” (Brodsky 1986: 80).

126 Rein recalls the exact moment when Brodsky for the first time heard Tsvetayeva’s poems “Крысолов”, “Поэма горы” and “Поэма конца” on January 7, 1960. They made such an impression on young Brodsky that he, according to Rein, soon started composing “Шествие” - his own “utterly Tsvetayevan poema” [MK]. (see Рейн 1994: 193 or Рейн 1997b: 18). Judging by the memoirs of S.S. Shul’ts, Brodsky’s first public recitation of the poem in December 1961 made as strong an impact on the audience as Tsvetayeva’s poems had made on the author of “Шествие” (Шульц 2000: 77). For an elucidation of the meter and rhyme schemes of “Шествие”, see Polukhina 1989: 10-11.

127 Zubova has pointed to the affinities of not only “Шествие” but also of Brodsky’s poem “Представление” with Akhmatova’s “Поэма без героя” and Tsvetayeva’s poems. See Зубова 1999: 198. Ivask, too, has paid attention to the similarities in Brodsky’s and Akhmatova’s Petersburg poems, see Иваск 1965: 297.
Kulle has shown that the first level narrative reality can be distinguished by identifying markers which signify the personal time of the hero in the first and last chapters of the poem. In his view, the poet’s personal time comes to a halt while he follows the flow of the procession of the dead before his eyes. Kulle discerns real action and concrete realia and sounds only in the opening and concluding sections of “Шествие”\textsuperscript{128}. Such a dual experience of the poet of real and written time, MacFadyen maintains, makes him as much a participant in the procession as its observer\textsuperscript{129}.

However, if we turn our attention from time to space, the settings of the scenes that depict the passing procession with its manifold figures do not necessarily differ from the settings of the actual Leningrad realia of the 1960’s. It may be, as MacFadyen claims, that the movement of the procession in the city-space, although an apparently forward movement, is actually aimless\textsuperscript{130}. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the very dynamics of the movement serve as a basis for the structural composition of the poem. The wanderings in the urban landscape trigger the thoughts of the poet. As an example of the verisimilitude of the depicted setting, pertaining to the fictional poet portrayed in the poem, I would like to quote a passage from the “Комментарий” in Chapter Seven of “Шествие”:

Вот наш поэт, еще не слишком стар, /.../ он устал
от уложек ночных, их адресов,
путающих предутренних часов,
от шороха дождя о диабаз,
от редких, от недружелюбных глаз,
от рева пронесящихся машин,
от силуэтов горестных мужчин
здесь, в сумраке, от невеселых слов,
от нелюбви, от беспокойных снов,
Бог знает от чего. И от себя.

Although the poet is depicted as part of the unreal procession, his figure coincides with that of the author of the poem. Through the figure of the

\textsuperscript{128} Куллэ 1998: 104.
\textsuperscript{129} MacFadyen 1998: 34.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid. 35.
poet the author is absorbed into the fictional world. He has a double who shares certain of his characteristics, a fictional counterpart. The transworld link between the two poets is established by the identical roles that they occupy. In this way, the ontological contradiction between fictional and actual persons disappears. Consequently, the personal time of the author intermingles with the written time of the poem, emphasising his dual experience of time.

True enough, the portrayal of the St. Petersburg loci is full of markers of the Petersburg Text which underline the simultaneous experience of space and time on two levels of “realities” - in “real” time and space, as well as in “literary, textual realities”. As for meteorological markers, the dominating feature of the prevailing weather is infinite rain, cold and fog. The typical constituents of “the common place” of the PT - iron grilles, backyards, avenues, street lamps - with attributes like “wet” or “soaking wet”, “empty”, “cold”, “dusky” are also present:

Так где-то на рассвете в сентябре бредешь в громадном проходном дворе, чуть моросит за чугуном ворот, сухой рукой ты вытираешь рот, и вот выходишь на пустой проспект, и вдоль витрин и вымокших газет, вдоль фонарей, оград, за поворот все дальше ты уходишь от ворот, /.../ И на углу сворачиваешь в утреннюю мглу. (Chapter 9)

Brodsky’s poem is yet another evidence of the compactness of the vocabulary attached to the PT, as well as of the stability of its spatial and temporal co-ordinates. Moreover, the “common place”, with its typical attributes, is traditionally linked to a certain replicated experience of life, to a particular theme or strong emotion which reflects a certain unified approach to life. Toporov points out the concordance of the material and cultural spheres of the PT, i.e., how the very nature and characteristics attached to the city, with its streets and edifices, correspond to the attributes which are usually assigned some “metaphysical realities”. In his view, the affinity on the level of expression shows how existential atti-

131 Quoting Tsiv’jan: “/.../ как бы далеко, на каких бы жанровых, стилистических и т.п. полюсах ни отстояли друг от друга тексты, один и тот же набор, от туманов и теней до сверкающих шпилей, с удивительным постоянством кочует в течение почти двухсот лет из текста в текст и от автора к автору.” (Цивьян 1994: 125). For a detailed vocabulary of the PT, see Топоров 1995: 313-315.
tudes are intertwined in the PT with the St. Petersburg loci. As an example of the shift from the geographical/material level to the metaphysical level, he mentions the position of St. Petersburg on the edge of the world, which, within the tradition of the PT, is perceived not as a geographical position but as an existential perspective. Life in St. Petersburg means living on the threshold of death, in a place juxtaposed to a dead-end which leaves one without an exit. One has nowhere to go from St. Petersburg since the city is conceived of as the end of the world.132

The dualistic nature of St. Petersburg is manifested in “Шествие”, as well. It is that special sort of dualism, characteristic of the PT, where positive and negative aspects are not mutually exclusive. It is evident, though, that the negative moments predominate in Brodsky’s Petersburg poema. Incidentally, the tendency toward the less positive end of the spectrum is typical for the Russian literature of the 20th century, embraced by the PT133. Brodsky’s heroes suffer from terror, anxiety and solitude134. They are mostly melancholy, filled with sorrowful meditation. In addition, their inner state is directly reflected in the mood of the surrounding city-scape, as the following excerpts show:

В Петербурге снег и непогода,
В Петербурге горестные мысли,
проживая больше год от года,
удивляться в Петербурге жизни. (Chapter 22)

Так обойдется время и со мной.
Мы встретимся однажды на Сенной /.../
и по Садовой зашагает вдаль
мой грозный век, а я, как и всегда
через канал, неведомо куда. (Chapter 26)

В Петербурге сутолка и дрожь,
в переулках судорожный дождь,

132 The isomorphism between a place and emotional experience is reflected on the lexical level in such expressions as “ужас - узость”, in which the terror of life is expressed and enhanced by the narrowness of the space. (Топоров 1995: 282-283).
133 For some examples of the inclination to stress the negative aspects in descriptions of the city and city life in Russian literature of the 20th century, see ibid. 266-271.
134 For some explanations of the motif of anxiety - “тоска” in “Шествие”, see Горбов 1965: 148-149. Gorbov comes to the conclusion that behind Brodsky’s “motives of anxiety“ lies a not totally conscious, not clearly formulated ideal, a kind of “anti-Soviet donquixotism.” (ibid. 149).
влоль реки по выбоинам скул пробегает сумеречный гул.

Этот плач по каждому из нас,
это город вальится из глаз,
это про-летают у аллей скомканные луны фонарей.

Это крик о собственной судьбе,
это плач и слезы по себе,
это плач, рыдание без слов,
погребальный звон колоколов. (Chapter 28)

Notwithstanding the fact that the negative aspects of the PT predominate in Brodsky’s outlook on St. Petersburg, positive sides of the city are not totally lacking. The positive image of the city on the Neva dates back to the odes composed to the unique splendour of Peter the Great’s city in the 18th century and in the first decades of the 19th century. Toporov calls the depiction of the city in a positive light “the ‘I love’ fragment” of the PT, referring to the famous lines by Pushkin in the Introduction to “The Bronze Horseman” 135:

Люблю тебя, Петра творенье,
Люблю твой строгий, стройный вид,
Невы державное теченье,
Береговой ее гранит ./../. 136

Brodsky has scattered his own “люблю” fragments in the text of “Шествие”:

/.../  
Люблю тебя, рассветная пора,  
и облаков стремительную рваность  
над непокрытой влажной головой,  
и молчаливость окон над Невой,  
где все вода вдоль набережных мчится ./../. (Chapter 33)

In addition to the evil, hostile tones attributed to autumn and winter in St. Petersburg, the northern winter of the former capital can evoke in the

136 Пушкин 1954: 466.
poet feelings of belonging and being at home in his city of birth, as van Baak has remarked\(^\text{137}\). It is worth noting that the object of good feelings is not called Petersburg this time, but Leningrad, implying a chronotope of the first-level narrative reality - “here and now”:

Теперь, полгода жить при темноте, 
ладони согревать на животе, 
писать в обед, пока еще светло, 
смотреть в заиндевевшее стекло, 
и, как ребенку, радоваться дням, 
когда знакомцы приезжает к нам.

Настали дни прозрачные, как свист 
свирели или флейты. /.../

Приятно возвращаться в Ленинград 
из путешествий получасовых 
среди кашне, платочеков носовых, /.../

и с цинковым заливом в голове 
пройти у освещенного кафе. (Chapter 34)

As was already indicated, the presence of a second-level narrative reality - “the third dimension” created by the PT, the literary reality - is obvious not only in “Шествие”, but also in “Три главы” and “Гость”, as well as in “Петербургский роман”. “The third reality” is an objective, sovereign reality of its own, a work of art, whose ontological status is provided precisely by the creative act of the author\(^\text{138}\). Furthermore, as entities of “the third reality”, fictional entities of the non-actualised possibles have the same ontological status. This principle of ontological homogeneity is a necessary condition for the coexistence and interaction of fictional persons.\(^\text{139}\) Apart from fictional persons and topographical or meteorological markers that help the reader to relate the texts to the PT, other intertextual allusions are abundant in Brodsky’s poems. One can detect in them several reminiscences of individual texts belonging to the PT. Numerous scholars have paid attention to the evident echoes from

---

\(^{137}\) van Baak 1998: 253-254. Brodsky expresses his love for winter also in stanza XII of “Эклога 4-я”: “Зима! Я люблю твою горечь клюквы / к чаю /.../. Я пою синеву сугроба / в сумерках /.../. И дрова, грохотавшие в гулких дворах сырого / города, мерзнувшего у моря, / меня согревают еще сегодня.” (Бродский III: 201).

\(^{138}\) For a discussion of the independent ontological status of a work of art as conceived of by Russian Symbolists, see Минц 1978: 82.

\(^{139}\) Doležel 1998: 18.
Pushkin and Lermontov, among other potential sources of inspiration in the above-mentioned texts.\textsuperscript{140}

Without going into a detailed analysis of the numerous subtexts, I will focus on the motive of Horseman, which Lotman calls the main marker of St. Petersburg space.\textsuperscript{141} The Horseman is introduced in “Шествие” in at least two disguises, the first of which clearly refers to the Symbolists’ apocalyptic emblem of destruction and rebirth:

\begin{quote}
Но к нам идет жестокая пора,
идет пора безумного огня.
(О, стилизованный галоп коня,
и пена по блестящим стременам,
и всадник Апокалипсиса - к нам!)
Идет пора...Становится темней.
Взгляни на полуплатье полутеней /.../.
\end{quote}

(Chapter 31)

The second equestrian in the text echoes “the Petersburg Tale” of Pushkin, “Медный всадник”, which is regarded as the first manifestation in Russian literature of the dual nature of Peter’s city. With its shades of orange and blood-red, the horseman recalls the rhetoric of the Symbolists as well:

\begin{quote}
Как всадники безумные за мною,
из прожитого выстрел за спиной,
так зимняя погоня за любовью
окрашена оранжевой кровью.

Так что же там! Растущее мерцание,
о Господи, как яростно и быстро.
Не всадника ночное восклицанье
о Господи, а крик МОТОЦИКЛИСТА.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{140} For reminiscences of Pushkin in "Шествие", see Гордон 2000: 145-146, for allusions to Pushkin and Blok, see Ранчин 2001: 240-242, 252-25. For allusions to Baratynsky, see Pilschikov 1993: 218-222, for reminiscences of Lermontov, see Ефимов 1988: 128-9. Kulle has discovered in “Шествие” subtexts from Lermontov, Pushkin, Mandel’shtam, Tsvetayeva, Batjushkov and Blok as well as those from a Polish poet Galchinski. He calls “Шествие”, aptly indeed, “an encyclopaedia of all literary influences” present in the mind of the poet at the time of writing the poem (Кулле 1998: 103).

\textsuperscript{141} Лотман Ю. 1984: 38, or Lotman 1990: 196.
Так гонятся за нами не по следу -
по возгласу, по выкрику, по визгу,
все вертятся колесики по свету
и фарами выхватывают жизни. (Chapter 35-36/1)

The abrupt shift from the literary world of the first quatrain to the actual reality of Leningrad, i.e. to the personal time of the poet living in the 20th century - is realised by replacing the mad horsemen of history and literature with a motorcyclist. What remains the same, however, is the constant experience of a Petersburg hero that he is being pursued. Evgeny, the “little man” of Pushkin’s poema, which is indirectly referred to in “Шествие”, is explicitly named and introduced in Brodsky’s other long poem “Петербургский роман”. In Chapter 26 of the latter poem the lyrical subject encounters a “nocturnal passer-by” who tries to “catch the time”, surrounded by elements of the eternal city; the river as a symbol of time, death and destiny, promenades and façades defying time, standing majestically on the canal embankments:

/.../ бежит полуночный прохожий,
спешит за временем вослед,

горит окно, а ты все плачешь
и жмешься к черному стеклу,
кого ты судишь, что ты платишь,
река все плещет на углу.

Пред ним торцы, вода и бревна,
фасадов трещины пред ним,
он ускоряет шаг неровный,
ничем как будто не гоним.

The identity of the passer-by is revealed in the next chapter:

142 The motive of the illuminated window is associated with creative work as well as with Brodsky’s view of St. Petersburg as the cradle of Russian literature. The same motive appears in Chapter 14, where it evokes Peter the Great’s vision of the city as “a window to Europe”. Here, as in some other chapters of the poem, the Petersburg space is compared to a poet who recreates the city in his works: “О, Петербург средины века / всё будто минули давно, /но озаряя повист ветра, / о Петербург, мое окно // горит уже четыре ночи /.../ О, Петербург, твои карманы / и белизна твоих манжет, / романы в письмах не романы, / но только в подписи сюжет /.../.” (Бродский I: 56).
Гоним. Пролетами Пассажа, свистками, криками ворон, густыми взмахами фасадов, толпой фаллических колонн.

Гоним. Ты движешься в испуге к Неве. Я снова говорю:
я снова вижу в Петербурге фигуру вечную твою.

Гоним столетьями гонений, от смерти всюду в двух шагах, теперь здороваясь, Евгений, с тобой на этих берегах.

Brodsky’s Evgeny is chased by the city itself. The architectural details of the façades are animated. Columns and colonnades haunt him. The pilasters of the Passage provide the rhythm of the pursuit. Together with the noise of the city they drive poor Evgeny to madness. His shadow has been wandering in the city for more than a century. The figure of Evgeny is an example of transworld identity par excellence. If we apply the terminology of the semantics of possible worlds to Evgeny, his figure is an individualised possible person, inhabiting an alternative world - the fictional world of Pushkin’s “Медный всадник”. He is not to be found in the actual world, but his name, Evgeny, as a “rigid designator” refers to an individual of a fictional world. Nevertheless, it would not be difficult to find a referent in the actual world to the locus with its recognisable, sometimes even named, hallmarks of city-space that surrounds him in Brodsky’s textual world.143 Evgeny is a version of Pushkin’s hero transferred into Brodsky’s poem and set in the motorised world of the 20th century Leningrad. Apart from its appearance in “The Bronze Horseman”, this proper name evokes other Russian literary subtexts, as well. The motorcyclist chasing the lyrical hero in “Шествие” alludes to another incarnation of Pushkin’s Evgeny, namely to Mandel’shtam’s hero in “Петербургские строфы”:

143 The theme of pursuit relates the depicted city-scape with similar images from “The Bronze Horseman”. It is only through juxtaposition of the realia woven into Brodsky’s poem with the bunch of textual quotations from a pretext that will disclose the essential semantical content as well as the functions of the depicted realia in Brodsky’s text.
Летит в туман моторов вереница;
Самолюбивый, скромный пешеход -
Чудак Евгений - бедности стыдится,
Бензин вдыхает и судьбу клянет! 144

Brodsky’s Evgeny is, therefore, yet another embodiment of the two former incarnations of the same fictional hero. “Evgeny” in this case is not a mere name, but a code or a mythologeme which, by denoting a fictional person, actualises the potential meanings pertaining to the plot and thematics inherent in the very name 145. Ranchin has also noticed the double identity of Brodsky’s Evgeny. In his view, Brodsky returns Evgeny his original tragic meaning in Pushkin’s poema, which distinguishes his hero from Mandel’shtam’s comic figure. 146 Kulle, on the other hand, sees poor Evgeny, Pushkin’s “passer-by” - who at the same time both tries to catch up with time and run away from it - as a personification of man’s attunement to the motion of time. Actually, the main theme of “Петербургский роман” is time. In the poema the personal time of the poet is connected to the time of the city. According to Kulle, the link is conveyed in the form of a dialogue between the poet and the city, a dialogue which reaches its highest intensity when it touches the literary past, the literary history of St. Petersburg. 147

However, Evgeny, whose name is explicitly uttered, is not the only hero from Pushkin’s oeuvre in Brodsky’s “Петербургский роман”. In addition to other named heroes, like Ljudmila in Chapter 4 or Aleko in Chapter 16, there is yet another figure who appears in several chapters. He is not named, but his figure recalls Pushkin’s Evgeny Onegin 148. He is portrayed as “the unhappy hero from the Petersburg romance” or “the abandoned, careless lover” whose figure coincides with personal traits given to the lyrical subject. The identification of the lyrical subject with Onegin is conveyed in terms of a mirror image:

144 Мандельштам, т. 1: 82. “Петербургские строфы” and “Лютеранин” were the very poems of Mandel’shtam that made an especially strong impression on Brodsky when he first read them in 1960 or 1961. (Volkov 1998: 209).
145 Z.G. Mints has defined the mythologeme as a “свернутый метонимический знак целостных сюжетов” (Минц 1978: 94-95).
148 Evgeny Onegin appears in Mandel’shtam’s “Петербургские строфы”, as well, but unlike in Brodsky’s poema, his identity is not concealed: “Тяжка обуза северного сноба - / Онегина старинная тоска /.../.” (Мандельштам т. 1: 82).
В романе
не я, а город мой герой,
так человек в зеркальной раме
стоит вечерней порой

и оправляет ворот смятый,
скользит ладонью вдоль седин
и едет в маленький театр,
где будет сызнова один. (Chapter 8-9)

The mirror scene is repeated in Chapter 24:

Смеркалось. В комнате героя
трещала печь и свет серел,
бесмовно в зеркало сырое
герой все пристальной смотрел.

Проходит жизнь моя, он думал,
темнеет свет, сереет свет,
находишь боль, находишь юмор,
каким ты стал за столько лет.

In Chapter 18 there is a detailed description of the hero’s room which is
permeated with the atmosphere of Oneginian boredom, “хандра”149:

Трещала печь, героя пальцы
опять лежали на окне /.../
в трельяж и в зеркало второе
всмотритесь пристальной, и вы
увидите портрет героя
на фоне мчащейся Невы /.../
о, в этой комнате наскушит, -
герой угрюмо повторял,
и за стеной худую участь,
бренча, утраивал рояль /.../.  

149 The figure of Onegin emerges in “Три главы”, as well. Here, too, the characteri-
sation of the unnamed hero coincides with the properties of the lyrical subject: “/.../
Уже не суетный, небрежный, / любовник брошенный, пижон, / забывший скуку
побережий / и меру времени - сезон /.../.” (Бродский I: 38).
In his identification of the lyrical subject with Onegin, Brodsky follows Pushkin’s tradition. Onegin, in Brodsky’s typology of Pushkin’s heroes, is the one of the lyrical personae who comes closest to the self-portrait of the poet himself. For Brodsky, the name “Evgeny” in Russian poetry, stands as a synonym for a romantic hero.150

As was mentioned, the image of St. Petersburg-Leningrad in “The Petersburg Romance” is comprised of a mixture of fiction and facts. The poem teems with real street names, actual monuments and buildings that are populated both by fictional characters as well as by characters with actual prototypes. Even when the poet depicts existing St. Petersburg-Leningrad realia, he seems to be looking at them through the prism of the PT. Events are now set in the Leningrad of the 1960’s and now outside time in the literary settings of the Petersburg Text. The non-actualised worlds of the PT are brought to the fore together with occasional banal scenes from quotidian Soviet life. It is difficult indeed to discern the obscure border between the contemporary reality and the literary realities of the possible worlds. It also seems that the worlds are intentionally conflated. The fact that Brodsky employs now old now new street names could be taken as a token of his intention to disclose the simultaneous presence of components from fictional and actual realities in his image of the city. In Chapter 7, for instance, the street begins as Dzerzhinskaya, while in the next quatrain it is called by its old, and present, name, Gorohovaya.

A similar difficulty of drawing a clear line between the “real” and “literary” landscapes applies to the poem “Три главы”. It seems as if the lyrical hero inhabits two worlds simultaneously, both of them being equally real to his perception151. There is one linguistic peculiarity in “Три Главы” which could be understood as a manifestation of the lyrical subject’s experience of belonging to the two coexisting realities in St.

---

150 Brodsky distinguishes three hypostases of Pushkin’s hero: 1) Evgeny, the hero of “The Bronze Horseman”, the first “лишний человек”, the first romantic hero who winds up in confrontation with the society, or, more precisely, with the symbol of the society - the statue of Peter the Great. He represents the impoverished middle class bourgeoisie. 2) Heroes of Pushkin’s prose, small propertied noblemen, such as Grinev and Dubrovsky in “Captain’s Daughter” and in “Dubrovsky”. 3) Pushkin’s Onegin, a representative of high society who is in some way a tautological figure, since in many ways he resembles a self-portrait of the poet. Pushkin’s lyrical hero is a romantic hero with a large component of psychologism. (Эпельбуэн 2000: 149).

151 For an illustration of the merging of “real” and “literary” aspects in the actual lives of Leningrad poets in the beginning of the 1960’s, see Кузьминский & Ковалёв 1986: 10-14.
Petersburg space. I refer to the recurrent use of the prefix “полу-“152 - “half-“, which highlights the “non-wholeness” of things and phenomena that contribute to his conception of the world:

/.../ на шумной родине балтийской 
среди худой полувесны
протарахтят полуботинки
по лестнице полувойны /.../.

The connotation of uncertainty and equivocality inherent in the prefix “half-“ is attributed to the typical conditions in St. Petersburg as regards light and climate, as well as to emotions or existence in general:

И в этом ровном полусвете
смещения равных непогод
/.../ (Chapter 1)

**Полуапрель и полуслякоть,**
любви, любви полупитья,
и одинокость, одинакость
над полуправдой бытия,
что ж переменим, передем,
переживем, полудыша,
о, никогда ни тем ни этим
не примиренная душа /.../.
(Chapter 2)

From the vantage point of the lyrical subject there is no unidimensional, firm reality. Since he lives in several realities which exist synchronously, the moment of his transition from the “real” world to the “literary” world cannot be discerned. Accordingly, referents of his city-image, with its heroes, exist to an equal extent in actual space as on the page in form of an already existing text. The following passage from “Петербургский роман” testifies to the fact that - at least in some instances - the literary reality, i.e. the second level narrative reality or “the third reality” created by the PT, prevails over the immediate, actual reality in Brodsky’s St. Petersburg:

152 van Baak sees, quite appropriately, that Brodsky’s use of the morpheme “полу-“ is part of his “poetics of moderation” signifying “half-tones” and “half-values” as well as indifference, inconclusiveness, mediocrity and inferiority (van Baak 1998: 252).
2.4.4 St. Petersburg as a *Locus of Struggle between Nature and Culture*

As was already indicated, the basic opposition on which the St. Petersburg myth rests is the antithesis of nature vs. culture owing to the city’s location “on the edge” of cultural space. Erecting the city in the wild marshland by a river delta was either seen as a symbol of the triumph of human intelligence over the uncontrollable powers of nature - victory of order or cosmos over chaos - or as a violation of natural order. The latter eschatological interpretation points to a constant struggle between elements of nature and culture, with the ultimate result that the city is doomed to vanish from the earth, destroyed by the vengeance of natural forces.

This dichotomy can occur in various manifestations in literary texts. According to the St. Petersburg myth the struggle is materialised first and foremost in a conflict between water and stone. As was mentioned in Chapter 2.1 above, the St. Petersburg stone is not natural but an artefact endowed with the ability to move and to be moved, contrary to characteristics of immobility and firmness. St. Petersburg stone is laid on a marshland by man. Consequently, stone is conceived of as a transitory
element, while water, which existed before stone, is thought to be eternal in its power to conquer the man-made stone.\footnote{For a characterisation of the St. Petersburg stone in the St. Petersburg myth, see Лотман Ю. 1984: 32-33, or Lotman 1990: 193.}

The polarity “nature vs. culture” can be activated also by such oppositions as “natural - unnatural”, “eternal - doomed”, “chaos/disorder - cosmos/order”, “own - alien”, “concrete - abstract”, “materia - spirit”, “dynamic - static” as well by spatial oppositions like “horizontal - vertical” or “outside - inside”, among others. In what follows, special attention will be paid to the potential materialisations of these oppositions in Brodsky’s poems.

Apart from opposing each other, nature and culture in the PT can be understood as complementary forces or categories. The dichotomy of nature and culture can be depicted in terms of similar categories or they can even merge into each other.\footnote{For a discussion of nature and culture as a) opposing each other, see Топоров 1995: 289, as b) merging into each other, ibid. 294.} The dual character of the relationship goes back to the fact that nature and culture in the PT are of equal value. Neither of them has gained supremacy over the city-space. Furthermore, both categories contain inner polarities. As Tsiv’jan\footnote{Цивьян 1994: 129.} points out, the lexicon of the PT is based on the opposition between nature and culture in such an ambivalent way that the same lexeme can be ascribed to both of the poles, and, respectively, it can acquire opposite values depending on which pole it is attached to. The same kind of ambivalence applies to lexemes inside one of the categories. Toporov\footnote{Топоров 1995: 282-283.} believes that the use of the same lexicon in the depiction of both categories is an outcome of the isomorphic structure of the city and the natural space it occupies. It is characteristic of the PT that the same vocabulary, with its inner contrasts, is employed for manifestations of metaphysical realities as well, such as inner states of the typically St. Petersburg heroes whose mental condition (“ужас”- “horror”) is connected to spatial characteristics of their surroundings (“узость” - “narrowness”\footnote{For examples of manifestations of the relationship between the narrowness of a depicted space and the inner state of horror of a Dostoyevskian hero, see Топоров 1997: 641-643.}), as was mentioned in the previous chapter.

The vocabulary of the PT used in descriptions of natural and cultural spheres is limited\footnote{For the details of this vocabulary, see Топоров 1995: 314-315. For the use of the vocabulary in Dostoyevsky’s “Преступление и наказание”, see Топоров 1997: 604-617.}. For the reason that only certain lexemes

\begin{itemize}
\item For a characterisation of the St. Petersburg stone in the St. Petersburg myth, see Лотман Ю. 1984: 32-33, or Lotman 1990: 193.
\item For a discussion of nature and culture as a) opposing each other, see Топоров 1995: 289, as b) merging into each other, ibid. 294.
\item Цивьян 1994: 129.
\item Топоров 1995: 282-283.
\item For examples of manifestations of the relationship between the narrowness of a depicted space and the inner state of horror of a Dostoyevskian hero, see Топоров 1997: 641-643.
\item For the details of this vocabulary, see Топоров 1995: 314-315. For the use of the vocabulary in Dostoyevsky’s “Преступление и наказание”, see Топоров 1997: 604-617.
\end{itemize}
and expressions elucidating specific aspects of the spheres are selected to illustrate them, the actual St. Petersburg reality can never be reflected in a text in its completeness. Thus, aside from being functional, the whole vocabulary of the PT picturing St. Petersburg realia is simultaneously mythological in that it portrays not only the real city but also - pars pro toto - the myth of the city. 

I will now proceed to take a look at the possible realisations of the opposition “nature - culture” as they occur in three St. Petersburg poems by Brodsky, all dating back to the end of the 1960’s, namely “Отрывок” (1967), “Почти элегия” (autumn 1968), and “С февраля по апрель” (1969-1970). “Отрывок” will be cited according to the version published in the second edition of Brodsky’s “Собрание сочинений”. It is longer than the version of the first edition, where the last stanza is omitted. According to Kulle’s typology, these poems are representatives of “the Neo-classical” phase in Brodsky’s oeuvre. The common features in the imagery, themes and prosody of these poems epitomise the co-existence of romantic irony and metaphysics. In fact, both “Прачечный мост” and “Отрывок” are written in blank verse. The versification of “С февраля по апрель” is more diverse. The first poem in the cycle consists of iambic dimeters and iambic pentameters, while in the second poem the poet returns to the use of iambic pentameter.

2.4.4.1 “Отрывок”

All three poems begin by outlining in a few words the weather prevailing in the city. It is only after bringing to the fore St. Petersburg’s typical natural forces - wind and rain - that Brodsky introduces the man-made elements of the chronotope, i.e., the colonnades of the Neo-classical façades. In “Почти элегия” and “С февраля по апрель” the focus in the setting unfolding in the texts is on the same building, explicitly named in both poems - the Stock Exchange situated on the Strelka, at the tip of Basil Island - which serves as a springboard for the poet’s meditation on the city:

---

159 For a discussion of the lexicon’s ambivalent nature, as well as of its functional and mythological essence, see Цивьян 1994: 129.
162 Unrhymed iambic pentameter.
В былые дни и я пережидал
холодный дождь под колоннадой Биржи.
И полагал, что это - Божий дар.
И, может быть, не ошибался.

("Почти элегия")

Морозный вечер.
Мосты в тумане. Жительницы гrota
на кровле Биржи клацают зубами.

("С февраля по апрель")

The former Stock Exchange, built in style of a Greek temple, which in
Soviet times was transformed into the Naval Museum, was Brodsky’s fa-
vourite building in the city163. It is worth noting that in these poems he
calls the impressive edifice by its old name, “the Bourse”, referring to its
former function. Rigsbee164 is of the opinion that the Stock Exchange is
meant to represent to any Leningrader the pre-Revolutionary era and that
its introduction to the text contributes to the elegiac tone of “Почти
элегия”165. Furthermore, he sees the opening scene, with its tiny human
figure standing next to the huge columns of the Stock Exchange, as a
juxtaposition of commonplace, shape-shifting reality in the form of a
human figure and a manifestation of the Ideal - as a contrast of weakness
and strength.

A similar scene with a classical colonnade is presented in “Отрывок”
where, unlike in the other two poems, the palace along the façade of
which the lyrical subject is walking is not explicitly situated in the city-
space. Nevertheless, it can be identified as a genuine St. Petersburg
landmark - a palace built in Neo-classical style. Its location in the con-
crete city-space can be defined by the details given by the poet in the
next lines:

Ноябрьским днем, когда защищены
от ветра только голые деревья,

163 See Brodsky 1986:465. See also Chapter 3.2 below.
164 Rigsbee 1999: 58.
165 France believes that the opening lines of “Почти элегия”, with their classical St.
Petersburg city-scape, recall the old poetic tradition they point to - the golden age of
Russian poetry, an era which is also evoked by the allusion to Derzhavin and Pushkin
in the second stanza of the poem: “И только ливень в дремлющий мой ум...”
(France 1982: 204). In another of his accounts France calls Brodsky’s elegy “a sort of
wistful yet ironic homage to a collapsed tradition” which entails subversive allusions
to classics, but at the same time, reaches out towards them. (France 1990: 103).
а все необнаженное дрожит,
я медленно бреду вдоль колоннады
dворца, чьи стекла чествуют закат
и голубей, слетевшихся гурьбою
к заполненным окурками весам
слепой богини.

Apart from the classical city-scape, what all the three poems under ex-
amination have in common are prevailing meteorological conditions; Brodsky’s St. Petersburg is windy, cold, foggy and rainy - the typical
characteristics of St. Petersburg climate - expressed with the very same
vocabulary of the PT. Furthermore, it seems as if only the objects be-
longing to the cultural sphere suffer from the cold and damp breeze
blowing from the Baltic sea, while the elements of nature are protected
against the harsh conditions, notwithstanding the fact that the trees in the
parks and along the prospects are actually elements of city nature,
planted by man. However, all that is “imported” to this northern capital
from the south - be it columns or sculptures - shivers from cold, includ-
ing man, who can try to protect himself from the cold by dressing
warmly.

Brodsky thus makes a clear distinction between cultural objects and
natural elements, although at first glance, when examining his mode of
representation of the mentioned categories, it might seem that he deliber-
ately blurs the boundary between them. A cultural object is more often
than not presented as linked to a natural phenomena or embraced by
them, as we can witness in the quoted above lines from “Почти элегия”; the Bourse is tightly linked to the pouring rain, and their com-
bination is conceived as something positive at that. In “С февраля по
апрель”, correspondingly, the unnamed bridges are embraced by fog. A
similar encounter or intersection of culture and nature takes place in
“Отрывок”, as well. The windows on the façade meet with celebration
the last rays of sunlight at sunset, and the pigeons - which might be
called “creatures of nature” with the same reservations as those in con-
sidering urban parks as part of real nature - that gather by the sculpture of
an ancient Greek goddess, who is a representative of culture par excel-
rence. Culture and nature seem to be in such an intensive interaction with
each other in Brodsky’s St. Petersburg that it would be difficult to imag-
ine one without the other. Elements of nature play an equal part in the
“cultural” composition of the image of the city-scape.

The urban landscape depicted in the first stanza of “Отрывок” has a
real toponymical basis. The scene can be recognised not merely as a clas-
sical St. Petersburg commonplace. Topographical signposts supplied by the poet are sufficient to indicate the precise location of the lyrical subject as well as the actual *locus* of the lyrical narrative. The colonnade and sculpture of the blind goddess on the façade of the palace coincide with the decoration on the façade of the Senate and Synod buildings, designed by Rossi, on Decembrist Square, just beside Falconet’s equestrian statue of Peter the Great. The blindfolded goddess with a scale in her hand, to whom Brodsky refers, is Themis, the goddess of justice in Greek mythology. The bandage covering her eyes is a symbol for the impartiality of her judgement whereas the scales are an emblem of jurisdiction. She is usually illustrated with a sword in her other hand, indicating the merciless execution of the sentence when evil - when placed in the scales of Themis - outweighs the good. One of the four statues, called “Правосудие” - “Justice”, niched in the façade of the Senate, resembles Themis.\(^{166}\)

In the second stanza of “Отрывок” the antithesis of nature and culture is expressed in terms of time:

\begin{center}
Старые часы
показывают правильное время.
Вода бурлит, и облака над парком
не знают толком что им предпринять,
и пропускают по ошибке солнце.
\end{center}

The clock, a cultural object, is capable of showing the right time in spite of its old age. Time measured by a clock is a mere convention, an invention of man, which is opposed here to natural phenomena, which are assumed to be capable of reflecting the cyclical flow of time, the seasons. There is no doubt of the prevailing season, though. It is late autumn, November to be precise, as we can see in the opening line. The powers of nature set the air, clouds and water into motion. But unlike the clock, the animated clouds hesitate and make a mistake in their assessment by letting through a ray of sunlight - a rare phenomena in the November sky in St. Petersburg. When it comes to measuring time, the works of this clock seem to be more reliable than the signs of nature.

The last stanza does not present any particular place in the city but the poet introduces instead a metaphor for the northern metropolis that is

\(^{166}\)For architectural details of the Senate and Synod building, see Раков 2000: 74, 244 or Крюковских 2001: 167. Incidentally, Mandel’shtam mentions the statue of Themis on the Senate in his prose work “Феодосия”: In “Бармы закона” Tsygal’sky’s poetry reminds the author of “почерневшую от дождя Фемиду на петербургском Сенате.” (Мандельштам т. 2, 1993: 399).
often encountered in literary works ascribed to the PT - that of a theatre. St. Petersburg, conceived of as a theatre, activates the polarity “artificial - natural” that has been connected to the city since its founding. The duality attributed to the city owes to its eccentric location on the edge of Russian cultural space. It replaces the antithesis “earth - heaven”, activated in cities situated concentrically in their relation to the surrounding cultural space. In spite of the fact that a concentric city may not be located in the geographical centre, it is nevertheless conceived as the centre - *axis mundi* - located on the intersection of earth, heaven and the underworld. The artificial nature of St. Petersburg is enhanced by the striking incongruity of its architectural splendour with the surrounding marshland. And, indeed, taken together, its huge architectural ensembles remind one of a gigantic stage decoration.

Awareness of the artificiality of St. Petersburg, according to Lotman¹⁶⁸, is part of the city’s self-evaluation of its culture. The theatricality of the city-space is expressed, for instance, in the demarcation between such spaces as “the stage” and “behind the scenes”, which are mutually exclusive; “behind the scenes” does not exist from the point of view of the stage, while for the former the stage existence appears as mere play and convention. Life conceived of as a play suggests, naturally, the constant presence of an assumed spectator - an external observer, who is looking in from the outside.

Peter the Great was indeed a utopian builder whose city was intended to function as an urban “theatre” for ritualising the new society¹⁶⁹. In the Soviet times it became a stage for ritualising yet another completely reformed society imbued with utopian ideology. Little wonder that the city-dwellers, in Brodsky’s opinion, identify themselves rather with spectators than actors. The plot of the play - which has actually become a banal, meaningless ritual with form but no content - is too familiar to be of interest. It is the outstanding stage decoration that makes an impression on him:

Порадуемся же, что мы всего лишь зрители. И что сюжет спектакля нас увлекает меньше декораций -

¹⁶⁷ For a discussion of concentric and eccentric locations of cities, see Лотман Ю. 1984: 30-32, or Lotman 1990: 191-193. For symbolism of “the centre”, see Eliade 1993: 16-23.
¹⁶⁹ For a discussion of the utopian qualities of St. Petersburg, see, for instance, Holquist 1972: 554-555.
пожалуй, лучших в мире. Никогда
никто не вынудит родившегося здесь
под занавес раскланиваться - разве
лишь ветер, налетающий с залива.
Его пощечины милей аплодисментов.

As Tsiv’jan\textsuperscript{170} asserts, theatricality in textual representations implies
transition from the verisimilitude of the depicted details to the symbolic
or metaphorical level of the setting, a shift from reality to stage setting.
This shift coincides in Gasparov’s typology\textsuperscript{171} with the metaphorical, or
better still, the periphrastic level of a poetic text, according to which a
single metaphorical image - theatre in this particular case - appears as an
organising unit for the structure of the imagery of a given text. In fact,
Brodsky does not present a particular urban chronotope as a “mis-en-
scène”, but attributes theatricality to the city, if not in its entirety, at least
to the majestic “palace quarters” of its centre. He turns the identifiable,
physical city-space to a symbolic space of existence where one remains a
happy onlooker. Maybe it is precisely because they are spectators, in-
stead of taking active part in the drama of history, that the inhabitants of
St. Petersburg - according to Brodsky - are never obliged to receive ap-
plause after the performance. Yet there is one power which even the
spectator cannot resist, the wind from the Baltic, which at times forces
one to make a bow, as a sign of obeisance, obedience and gratitude for
the chance to have been born in this very city, where the decorative,
static urban milieu is animated by the dynamic powers of untamed na-
ture.

2.4.4.2 “Почти элегия”

While in “Отрывок” as well as in “С февраля по апрель” the St. Pe-
tersburg setting summarised here, functions as the immediate \textit{locus} of the
lyrical plot unfolding “here and now”, “Почти элегия” opens with im-
gages of the past life of the lyrical subject. The city-scape portrayed here
figures as an object of reminiscences, representing thus the second-level
narrative reality. The dreamlike atmosphere attached to the bygone days
is conveyed with Biblical parallels, which lead the entire poem further
away from the real plane of the opening scene portrayed in the first two
lines:

\textsuperscript{170} Цивьян 1997b: 185.
\textsuperscript{171} Гаспаров 1984: 97-98.
В былые дни и я переживал
холодный дождь под колоннадой Биржи.
И полагал, что это - Божий дар.
И может-быть, не ошибался. Был же
и я когда-то счастлив. Жил в плену
у ангелов. Ходил на вурдалаков.
Сбегавшую по лестнице одну
красавицу в парадном, как Иаков,
подстерегал.

The explicit motif structure of the first stanza consists mainly of non-concrete motifs, such as heavenly inhabitants, angels and vampires as well as Biblical persons. The only corporeal thing in the stanza is the Exchange which, too, is associated, though implicitly, with the heavenly sphere. The verticality of the columns of this Russian Parthenon, the poet’s conviction that standing under the shelter of the colonnade was “God’s gift” (not to mention the consonants and vowels shared by “Биржа” and “Божий дар”, and Brodsky’s placing of the words in the end of the lines and capitalising them), bring forth the unavoidable association of the Bourse with “Божий храм” - “God’s shrine”.

As for the Biblical imagery, France sees the parallel to Jacob as an overt allusion to Jacob waiting at the well for Rachel (Gen. 29: 9-12). In his view, Brodsky could perhaps also be hinting here at Jacob’s ladder, as well (Gen. 28: 12-22). I would be inclined to support the latter suggestion. Brodsky offers the reader his interpretation of the Bible, relating the story about Jacob’s ladder to the love life of the lyrical hero living in modern times. His ironic tone arises from the parodic juxtaposition of the lyrical subject’s corporeal love with the mythological Biblical images. This does not, in my view, undermine the significance of the experience.

The ladder is a link between heaven and earth, an entrance to heavenly life on earth that enables communication with God. In Brodsky’s poem the ladder figures as an entrance to the heaven of love, in both the

---

172 Vinokurova interprets the imagery of the first stanza as the poet’s protest against the miraculous made-up world, against its invented hierarchy according to which nature, or love, is beautiful, although in fact it appears as something clearly indecent. She sees “Почти элегия” as a manifestation of the “real”, harsh, ironic Brodsky who does not let the “sublime deceit” take hold of him. (Винокурова 1998: 125).
173 France 1982: 204.
174 “И увидел во сне: вот, лестница стоит на земле, а верх ее касается неба; и вот, Ангелы Божии восходят и нисходят по ней.” (Бытие 28: 12-22).
physical and the emotional sense of the word. But, as it seems, his ladder of love did not produce the desired results, but ended with loss of love with all its sorrowful consequences.

Куда-то навсегда
ушло все это. Спряталось. Однако
смотрю в окно и, написав “куда”,
не ставлю вопросительного знака.
Теперь сентябрь. Передо мною - сад.
Далекий гром закладывает уши.
в густой листе
налившиеся груши
как мужеские признаки висят.
И только ливень в дремлющий мой ум,
как в кухню дальних родственников - скаред,
мой слух об эту пору пропускает:
не музыку еще, уже не шум.

The layout of the poem on the page manifests the rupture in the love relationship. Brodsky begins the line telling about the vanishing of the past days not at the left margin, but in the middle of the line. By doing this, he interrupts the flow of the iambic pentameter. He truncates a line in the middle by putting a period and by dividing it into two separate lines, starting the following sentence in the middle of the next line. The unexpected gap in the visual experience of the poem indicates a rupture in time as well. It implies the distance between the past displayed in the preceding lines and the present moment. The visual impression that is created by this device could also be compared to stairs or a ladder which now leads from the heavenly spheres back to earth, the gap implying a position in between. Stairs as such do suggest a border or a space between outside and inside, as well.

The “here and now” of the lyrical subject - unlike the past which, except for the stairs, was set outside - is presented in terms of an interior. The lyrical subject, whose meditations on love and poetic creation we can follow, is separated from the outside world by a window. This window does not merely represent a boundary between the inner and outer space, but is also a device of estrangement that makes it possible for one to take a look at one’s life from a distance. The world outside figures

175 Unlike stairs, a window, which also acts as a borderline between interior and exterior space does not belong to both spaces, but is ascribed to inner space. For discussion of the boundary between opposition “inside-outside” as an essential element of spatial metalanguage, see, for instance, Лотман Ю. 1992а: 397-399.
solely as a symbol for his pondering upon the transformation of an existential experience to a poetic word. As Rigsbee aptly put it, “Почти элегия” asks which has more power, the actual human loss of love or the potential poetic gain from the experience, however painful\textsuperscript{176}.

Each element of the landscape observed by the poet standing by the window bears symbolic value. These elements connect the present moment to the past by giving new birth to the experience of the past life in words. The actual object of description is the creative process pictured in terms of nature. The park in September, with its heavy rain and thunder, are acoustic images of “the raw material” of poetry not yet moulded into verses. The ripened/swollen pears hanging down in the thick leaves, compared to emblems of virility, have obvious erotic connotations reminding the lyrical subject of the pleasures of flesh drained away with the apparent loss of love. All the promises it entailed remained unfulfilled.

On the other hand, fruit as such stands for creative act and its results. Pushkin used this symbol of poetic creation in his “Осень”:

\begin{quote}
И пробуждается поэзия во мне:
Душа стесняется лирическим волненьем,
Трепещет и звучит, и ищет, как во сне,
Излиться наконец свободным проявленьем -
И тут ко мне идет незримый рой гостей,
Знакомцы давние, плоды мечты моей.
\end{quote}

(Stanza X)\textsuperscript{177}

Brodsky establishes a link with Pushkin’s poem by an even clearer allusion in the lines:

\begin{quote}
И только ливень в дремлющий мой ум,
как в кухню дальних родственников - скаред,
/.../.
\end{quote}

In fact, Brodsky’s citation is polygenetic. It is an excellent example of a quotation which activates several literary subtexts from Russian poetry. It refers not only to Pushkin’s “Осень”, but to Derzhavin’s poem “Евгению”, too, from which Pushkin chose the following line as the epigraph of his poem\textsuperscript{178}:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{176} Rigsbee 1999: 58.
\textsuperscript{177} Пушкин 1954: 150.
\textsuperscript{178} For a discussion of allusions to Derzhavin and Pushkin in Brodsky’s “Почти элегия”, see France 1982: 204-205. See also Винокурова 1998: 125.
Чего в мой дремлющий тогда не входит ум?

There are more echoes of Pushkin’s works to be discovered in Brodsky’s poem\textsuperscript{179}. Let us focus our attention, however, on the last two lines, in which the whole process of creation is compressed into two words depicting its initial stage - “шум”, (“noise”) - and, accordingly, the final result of the procedure - “музыка”, (“music”):

/.../ мой слух об эту пору пропускает: 
не музыку еще, уже не шум.

The word “шум”/“noise” is in Pushkin’s poetic language often associated with poetic inspiration. France sees it in Brodsky’s elegy as a way of moving from a muted lament for passing time to a veiled celebration of the power of poetry.\textsuperscript{180} Vinokurova, on her part, sees the last line as a reference to Blok’s essay “О назначении поэта”, where the poet maintains that the main function of an artist is to catch the sounds coming from the depths of the universe and to turn this “noise” into “music”.\textsuperscript{181}

There is yet another poet that the last line could resonate, \textit{viz.} Mendel’shtam and his early poem “Silentium”:

Она еще не родилась,
Она и музыка и слово.
И потому всего живого

\textsuperscript{179} To mention some of the possible allusions, “Куда-то навсегда / ушло все это. Спряталось. Однако, / смотрю в окно и, написав “куда” / не ставлю вопросительного знака” echoes Pushkin’s “Евгений Онегин”, namely the lines where Pushkin “quotes” Lensky’s scribbling on paper before the duel: “Куда, куда вы удалились, / Весны моей златые дни?” (Пушкин 1954, т. 3: 98). The lines could as well refer to Derzhavin’s “Евгению. Жизнь званская”: “Ах! где ж, ищу я вокруг, минувший красный день?” In both pretexts the key word “куда” is followed with a question mark! Brodsky’s “далекий гром закладывает уши” (the distant thunder that fills the ears) could resonate the passage in Pushkin’s “Пророк” where the seraphim touches the ears of the poet, providing him with the gift of prophetic hearing: “/.../ Моих ушей коснулся он, - / И их наполнил шум и звон: / И внял я неба содроганье, И горний ангелов полет /.../.” (Пушкин 1954, т. 2: 13). It could recall as well the final lines of Derzhavin’s “Евгению. Жизнь званская”: ”/.../ и ты, будя твоим пером / Потомков ото сна, близ севера столицы, / Шепнешь в слух страннику, вдали как тихий гром: / ‘Здесь бога жил певец, Фелицы’”.

\textsuperscript{180} France 1982: 204.

\textsuperscript{181} Винокурова 1998: 125.
Quoting Taranovsky, Mandel’shtam’s music is not our human music but rather “metaphorical music: the spontaneous language of being. /.../
Man’s most sublime spiritual experience lies in merging with the original essence of life, the primeval harmony of the universe”. Brodsky opposes a world of subjective experience, with all its ugly affairs, to Mandel’shtam’s objective world of beauty. Still, notwithstanding the brutality of Brodsky’s world-picture, it is the very “dirt” of the world that produces poetry, the aesthetic value of which cannot be measured by ordinary expressions such as “beautiful” and “vulgar”. The power of poetry, manifested in both Mandel’shtam’s and Brodsky’s works, lies in its ability to reverse the destructive flow of time which makes things vanish for good and thus give them a renewed existence in the possible worlds of words.

2.4.4.3 “С февраля по апрель”

The cycle “С февраля по апрель” consists of five poems. In the following, I shall concentrate on the two first poems, in which the St. Petersburg loci have a central role as far as the motif and thematical structures are concerned. The third poem of the cycle “Шиповник в апреле” portrays a fierce struggle between an element of nature - a wild rose - and culture, represented by an iron grille. The struggle, which results in the defeat of the rose bush, along with the shrub’s violent attempts (which can be compared to pedophagia - eating its own fallen leaves with its roots) to reproduce the leaves and buds every spring, can be construed as a symbol of poetic creation. Like the depicted plant, poetry has to dig its roots to the past experience which was once part of oneself and transform it into words with no less painful efforts. The fourth poem “В
эту зиму с ума я опять не сошел...” combines the theme of insanity - typical of the PT for that matter - with motives of poetic creation and wintertime. In it, Brodsky draws a parallel between the awakening of poetic inspiration and nature’s rebirth in spring. The use of similar tropes and characteristics in representations of the lyrical subject’s inner space and the surrounding urban landscape testifies to the isomorphic structure of the essence of the presented objects. The juxtaposition of inner, i.e. mental space with outer space as such belongs among the distinguishing features of the PT. The last poem of the cycle “Фонтан памяти героев обороны полуострова Ханко” exposes in a fascinating way the complementary nature of the connection between natural and cultural elements in Brodsky’s poetry. The dry fountain, which is not capable of fulfilling its proper function due to man’s negligence, is assisted by nature. The constant St. Petersburg rain will guarantee that it shall never run out of water. In it, representatives of opposing categories not only complement, but compensate for each other.

The first part of the cycle “С февраля по апрель” is comprised of a series of scenes picturing the wintry city-scape. Topographical names are sufficient for reconstructing the route taken by the lyrical subject. Although this poem is one of the rare occasions where the lyrical subject is not explicitly present in the space, the choice of sites reveals that the poet operates within a narrow range of space. The walk starts from the former Exchange on the Strelka:

Морозный вечер.
Мосты в тумане. Жительницы грота

“Шиповник цветет”: “/.../ Шиповник так благоухал, Что даже превратился в слово /.../.” (Ахматова 1986, т. 1: 223).


188 Mikhail Lotman sees the poem as an excellent illustration of the opposition “nature - culture” in Brodsky’s poetics. The fountain, as a cultural object, is both a sign and a thing, i.e. material object of the urban space. In its function as a sign it should signify water. A fountain out of use suggests the incompleteness of its function as a sign, which is compensated for by the natural element of rain. Consequently, what may be conceived as oppositions on the level of empirical representation may be merged into one on the semiotic level of interpretation, figuring simultaneously as signifier and signified. (Lotman M. 1994: 119-120).
Brodsky plays with short form adjectives “бесчеловечен” and “безлюден”, using them as attributes of a crossing. The latter is the correct word to describe the deserted streets while the former, with its meaning “inhuman”, assigns to the crossing a characteristic normally applied to humans. The sailors with their lantern suggest the present function of the building of the former Stock Exchange. Nowadays it is the seat of the Naval Museum.

In the second stanza the eye of the poet moves to the Rostral Columns situated on the square in front of the Exchange. The two 32-meter-high red columns used to function as lighthouses at the same time as they highlighted the position of the Exchange as the centre of the port. They continue the naval theme in Brodsky’s text:

В глубинах ростра  
вороний кашель. Голые деревья,  
как легкие на школьной диаграмме.  
Вороны гнезда  
чернеют в них кавернами. Отрепья  
швыряет в небо газовое пламя.

The Rostral Columns are decorated with bronze sculptures illustrating figureheads of ships. The “crow’s cough” caught by the poet’s ear comes from deep inside the figurehead, combining once again a cultural object with a creature of nature. The lights on the top of the columns Brodsky calls the rags of a gas flame. The veracity of the scene to the smallest detail cannot be dismissed. The principle on which the construction of similes is based - that of characterisation of the natural elements by juxtaposing them to a cultural phenomena - enhances the immobility of the portrayed landscape: The naked trees look like lungs on a school dia-

---

189 Brodsky refers here to the end façades of the Exchange which have allegorical sculpture groups on the attic designed by Shchedrin and Prokof’ev. The building itself (by the French architect Thomon) is planned in form of a Greek Doric temple surrounded by 44 fluted Doric columns. For more architectural details of the building, see, for instance, Ward 1989: 84, Раков 2000: 106-107. Both sculptural compositions on the attic have half-spherical windows as their background, which might have caused Brodsky to see them as if appearing from a cave.
The view on the river with street lamps scattered along its embankments is compared to an unbuttoned blouse. In both cases an element from the sphere of human life is introduced as that part of the simile to which the element of nature is compared. This does not entail, however, any animation or anthropomorphisation of natural elements. The juxtapositions are based on purely visual impressions:

Река - как блузка,
на фонари расстегнутая. Садик
дворцовый пуст. Над статуями кровель
курится люстра
луны, в чьем свете император-всадник
свой высеребрил изморозью профиль.

Now he has moved from Basil Island across the Neva along the Palace Bridge to the very centre of imperial St. Petersburg. The palace garden, written in lower case, may be a reference to the small park between the Admiralty and the Hermitage. With “the statues of the roofs” Brodsky is no doubt referring to the Winter Palace, (the State Hermitage Museum), the roof of which is adorned with a row of mythological figures. Then he moves to the Senate Square (alias Decembrist Square) where the cold has frosted the statue of “The Bronze Horseman” shimmering with silver in moonlight. The brilliant light of the moon is acculturated - if not domesticated - by depicting it in terms of a crystal chandelier. The whole landscape has come to a standstill. Brodsky’s equestrian statue is frozen

190 Brodsky uses the same motives and similes in “A Guide to a Renamed City”. In his essay he stresses the incompatibility of the “little man” with the imperial surroundings: “/.../Trees in parks and public gardens look like school diagrams of human lungs with black caverns of crows’ nests. And always in the distance, the golden needle of the Admiralty’s spire tries, like a reversed ray, to anesthetize the content of the clouds. And there is no way of telling who looks more incongruous against such a background: the little men of today or their mighty masters...To say the least, both feel quite uncomfortable.” (Brodsky 1986: 90-91).

191 According to Kreps, Brodsky in his comparisons of this kind [“trees like lungs”, “river like a blouse”- MK] juxtaposes things so distant from each other within the given poetic tradition that he has to clarify the comparison by extending it beyond the key words in order to make it comprehensible. It is only through this, partly metaphorical, extension that the logical motivation of the comparison is exposed. (Kpenc 1984: 79) In my view, the visual similarity between parts of the metaphors, which becomes evident when the tropes are examined in their entirety, provides sufficient motivation for Brodsky’s similes.

192 The opening line of Brodsky’s poem “В Италии” tells about the statues on the roof of the Winter Palace, as well: “И я когда-то жил в городе, где на домах росли / статуи /.../.” (Бродский III: 280).
into immobility, as if expecting to be immortalised in this posture, with its outlines sharpened by moonlight playing on the glittering frost on its bronze surface. This scene is yet another example of the intermingling of nature and culture. Neither is deprived of its sovereignty, nor is the boundary between them obscured. The peaceful co-existence of antithetical poles is instead a goal thus improving the aesthetic image of the city as well as complementing each others’ deficits.

In the last stanza of the first poem the poet shifts his gaze from the statue to the buildings of the Old Imperial Senate and Synod, (nowadays the site of the Russian State Historical Archives) on the west side of the Senate Square:

И барку возле
одним окном горящего Сената
тяжёлым льдом в норд-ост перекосило.
Дворцы промерзли,
и ждет весны в ночи их колоннад,
как ждут плоты на Ладоге буксира.

The scene depicting the Senate Square in the poem “Отрывок”, which was examined above, coincides with the last scene portraying the Senate Square in the first poem of the cycle “С февраля по апрель” quoted above. Brodsky starts the cycle with a depiction of the very same spot on the Strelka which figured as the opening scene in “Почти элегия”. Judging by these facts we could come to the conclusion that the poet’s eye operates within a rather limited range in the city-space. Furthermore, he closes the first poem of the cycle with the same motifs of navigation which opened it, not introducing the actual element of water until the last stanza. The ice-covered Neva and Lake Ladoga are chosen to represent water in this poem. The barge, rafts and tug-boats are still shackled by ice, waiting for the spring to free them from its bonds. The barge, squeezed between heavy ice near the Senate, is twisted. Using navigation terminology, Brodsky informs the reader what direction its bow is pointing in; instead of the common “северо-восток” meaning “north-east”, he imitates a professional mariner’s manner of expressing the course of the vessel - “норд-ост”\(^{193}\). There are no dynamic elements in the last stanza; nothing moves, even the palaces on the English Embankment are petrified in the cold of winter night in expectation of spring-time.

\(^{193}\) For a discussion of the motif of the sea in Brodsky’s, “poet-mariner’s” works, see, e.g. Лотман М. 1990 *passim* and Лотман М. 1992 *passim*. 
In the second poem of the cycle we can sense that the longed-for spring is approaching. The melted snow and the ice drift are signs of its approach. We can also feel the ceaseless movement of nature which, in the form of wind, attacks trees as well as human beings. We can see the bright red sun setting behind a park. It spreads shadows on the grass which “liquidate the fire” of the sunset in the sky while the sun disappears behind the horizon. The dynamic elements of nature seem to set man into motion and activity. The emergence of lively human beings and animals, instead of immobile statues, distinguishes the scenes of the second poem from the first.

In the first stanza an old woman sits knitting a red sweater while a sheepdog runs around her in circles. The second stanza pictures a schoolboy who makes the ornaments of the iron grille, fencing the park, sing with his stick. Both stanzas, filled with motion, have the touch of a pastoral idyll set in an urban milieu. In springtime the air is filled with sounds, and the colour scale is brighter than in winter. If in the first poem of “С февраля по апрель” each stanza had a separate source of light which afforded some illumination in the darkness of the night, the two first stanzas of the second poem in the cycle are brightened by red spots - be it the setting sun or a red knitting.

В пустом, закрытом на просушку парке
старуха в окружении овчарки -
в том смысле, что она даёт круги
вокруг старухи - вяжет красный свитер /.../

Мальчишка, превращающий в рулады
посредством палки кружево ограды,
бежит из школы, и пунцовый шар
садится в деревянную корзину,
распластывая тени по газону;
и тени ликвидируют пожар.

In the first poem the elements of culture and nature were intertwined, forming a majestic compositional whole. In the second text of the cycle, man-made culture is brought to the foreground, while nature constitutes a no less determinate background. These natural events and cultural objects act as elements of the dynamic worlds pictured in the poem. Although Brodsky does not reveal the exact name or location of the place where these events occur, it is possible to situate it in the map of St. Petersburg. The topographical indicators that he employs, such as “park”,
“lace of the grille”, “canal”, “bridge” would suggest that the chronotope of the second poem is set in the Summer Garden and its immediate surroundings.

In the last stanza of the poem Brodsky - who tends to work from the specific to the general, from the material/naturalistic towards abstractions or conceptualisation - pays homage to the visual sense, which is in one’s service free of charge. All the things that he sees around make him feel happy and self-aware. The joy of life is manifested in the fourth poem of the cycle, as well. There, as in the second poem, this joy is realised in the rewarding co-operation of the eye with the ambient St. Petersburg reality:

/.../ Шум ледохода
и зеленый покров
различаю - и значит здоров.
С новым временем года
поздравляю себя
и, зрачок о Фонтанку слепа, 194
я дроблю себя на сто.

The shift from the real plane to the level of abstraction can be discerned toward the end of the second poem where birds - creatures of nature - are said to be so rare that spring that their addresses have to be recorded in a notebook and names entered into an ecclesiastical calendar. The ritual of providing birds with individual identities and a permanent dwelling place makes them part of the cultural sphere. One might assume that instead of speaking of sparrows or swallows Brodsky is referring here to his fellow bards who have managed to survive and nourish their poetic gift through the long winter, and that his notion of vision embraces the poetic vision, as well:

Из всех щедрот, что выделила бездна,
лишь зренье тебе служит безвозмездно,
и счастлив ты, и несмотря ни на
что, жив еще. А нынешней весною

194 The encounter of the eye with the element of water in an urban setting is a recurring image in Brodsky’s poetry. It also occurs in the Italian settings of “В Италии” and “Венецианские строфы 2”. In the latter poem, the Italian laguna in Section VIII reminds him of its St. Petersburg counterpart: “/.../ Плещет лагуна, сотней / мелких бликов тусклый зрачок казня / за стремление запомнить пейзаж, способный / обойтись без меня.” (Бродский т. III: 240). For a discussion of water imagery, the North and creation of poetry in Brodsky’s poetics, see, for instance, van Baak 1998: 259-262.
так мало птиц, что вносишь в записную их адреса, и в святцы - имена.

As we have come to realise when analysing Brodsky’s St. Petersburg poetry, it is difficult to find supporting evidence for the statement that nature and culture are as opposite in his poetic universe as they are in the tradition of the PT. They are, instead, complementary categories, coexisting in peace within the boundaries of the city-scape. It is worth noting that in the poems examined above, nature denotes the natural elements in the urban environment. Except for those powers of nature that are related to weather and seasons, almost every “element of nature” has been touched and moulded by man. This may be one of the reasons for the peaceful symbiosis of the two categories in Brodsky’s St. Petersburg. However, this symbiosis does not mean that the oppositions are deprived of their recognisable characteristics. On the contrary, the boundary between nature and culture is sharpened by bringing them into close connection with each other. Natural and cultural elements in Brodsky’s St. Petersburg are equal parts of an artistic composition which aims at balance and perfection. In spite of its harshness, nature can put the last touches to the man-made beauty of the urban landscape. In Brodsky’s poetic universe nature possesses the same aesthetic status as cultural artefacts.

195 When Brodsky was asked about the essence of nature and culture, he replied that he conceives of them being basically the same thing. Brodsky cites the opening line of Mandel’shtam’s poem “Природа - тот же Рим и отразилась в нем” and continues that he cannot add anything to Mandel’shtam’s words. However, he distinguishes two different approaches towards nature. One can either run naked around à la D.H. Lawrence and “be natural”, or one can conceive of nature as a composition, as Mandel’shtam does in the quoted poem. It goes without saying that the latter alternative is nearer to Brodsky than the former. (Veit 1992: 100).
This chapter is devoted to the study of the meaning of the notion of paradise - and of its antithesis hell - in Brodsky’s St. Petersburg-Leningrad poetry. Some of the poems that should be considered in this context have been studied previously, however, none of the previous accounts focused on the city of St. Petersburg as such, nor on their allusions to the Dantesque themes and motifs. My intention is not to offer a detailed reading of the examined poems and essays in their entirety, but to concentrate precisely on the themes of paradise and hell that offer themselves when the texts are read in this light. Paradise and hell are employed here as metaphors, as a heuristic device for examining the poetic topography of Brodsky’s native city. Like all explanatory models, this approach will make it possible to call attention to some details of the image of St. Petersburg in Brodsky’s works that might otherwise escape notice.

Paradise as a concept appears quite frequently in Brodsky’s prose and poetry, but its usage is somewhat multifaceted, signifying various things in various contexts. As Kreps has observed, Brodsky rejects the traditional Christian concepts of paradise and hell. He does not accept the ready-made hypothesis that they offer, but creates poetic visions of them that are more congenial to his own world-view. Consequently, Brodsky has, in my view, at least three versions of paradise, three manifestations of “the life beyond”, which can all be traced in his texts and which can be associated with his native city, namely St. Petersburg as Paradise Lost, Paradise as a road and Paradise as a dead-end. Some of these manifestations of paradise will be touched in detail in the following subchapters.

Paradise and/or hell are present in these texts at various levels. On the lexical level they appear in their most explicit form as certain lexemes - nouns or attributes - traditionally ascribed to paradisiac and/or infernal vocabulary. One example of the use of paradisiac vocabulary in Brodsky’s St. Petersburg poetry is the poem “От окраины к центру”, written in 1962 (Бродский I: 201-204). Since several scholarly accounts have been dedicated to it, there is no need to give a detailed analysis of its urban pastoralism here. This poem has been discussed by Mac

---

197 For a discussion of the three manifestations of paradise in Brodsky’s prose and poetry, see Кёнёнен 1998: 267-281.
198 One example of the use of paradisiac vocabulary in Brodsky’s St. Petersburg poetry is the poem “От окраины к центру”, written in 1962 (Бродский I: 201-204). Since several scholarly accounts have been dedicated to it, there is no need to give a detailed analysis of its urban pastoralism here. This poem has been discussed by Mac
prosody, in which case the most obvious referent is Dante and the terza rima of his “Divine Comedy”. Dante’s impact on the formation of the Christian image of paradise and hell has been the most powerful of any poet. Not only the “Divine Comedy”, but also the numerous illustrations of it - not to mention paintings inspired by Dante’s visionary poema - have shaped the notion of paradise and hell in the Western mind over the course of centuries. Consequently, it seems relevant to start the discussion of Brodsky’s notion of paradise/hell with a poem which can be conceived of as his most lucid commentary on Dante, viz. “Декабрь во Флоренции”. In focussing on Florence, this poem is unique among Brodsky’s numerous poems picturing urban landscapes, including several poems on other ancient Italian cities, such as Rome and Venice.

3.1 ”Декабрь во Флоренции” - A Postcard from Florence?

Many scholars have taken an interest in Brodsky’s poem ”Декабрь во Флоренции”. This interest is partly due to the setting of the poem - the golden city of Florence as a paradigm of classical, especially Renaissance, art and architecture. In part, this interest also arises from the extraordinary metrical aspects of the poem: the use of terza rima, the very elaborate rhyme scheme, the use of compound rhymes along with enjambment, with which Brodsky achieves some original effects which fascinated the poet himself. Brodsky recalls the process of writing of “DF” as follows: Я помню когда написал, был в полном восторге от себя, от своих рифм. Previous accounts of the poem have categorised it among Brodsky’s numerous travelogues. But others, for instance David Rigsbee, have seen “DF” as belonging to the genre of the self-

201 Here and hereafter, the abbreviation “DF” stands for “Декабрь во Флоренции” (Бродский III: 1997: 111-113).
203 Rigsbee 1999: 111.
elegy, or as a “philosophical diary in verse”\textsuperscript{204} with its bitterly elegiac tone and introspective meditations.

Let us first take a look at Brodsky’s poem as a travelogue in verse. Such phrases as ”жанр путешествий”, or “стихотворение путеводитель”, or even ”жанр стихотворения глазами туриста”\textsuperscript{205}, have been used to describe this poem. First of all, it is obvious that the city presented in the text is Florence, although it is identified as such only in the title. Brodsky introduces the city to the reader not so much by describing the actual places that surround the lyrical subject, as by naming certain places, often the ones that are unmistakably recognisable as landmarks of Florence - the “musts” of every tourist visiting the capital of Tuscany. In addition to introducing places directly by their names, for example, the river Arno flowing through the city, the Ponte Vecchio crossing the Arno or the Palazzo della Signoria in Section Two, Brodsky refers to certain edifices and monuments through an allusion to a person who is in some way connected with it - be it Filippo Brunelleschi in Section Eight, whose masterpiece is the Duomo, the famous dome of Santa Maria del Fiore, characterised by Brodsky as ”громада яйца, снесенного Брунелески”.

In descriptions of places, this kind of elliptic representation, the implicitness surrounding the explicitness of a proper name - the naming of Brunelleschi without naming the totality, the cathedral itself - presupposes the presence of an implied reader who is at least to some extent familiar with the object of description. This concerns depictions of famous Italian cities, Rome, Venice and Florence in particular. In the context of Western literature and art, a voyage to Italy is always perceived as a return to the sources of European culture. The impact of Italian architecture and art on Western culture has been so profound and extensive that Italian scenes seem familiar even to one who has never seen them in their original environment. Later, when visiting Italy, one will come across “familiar” sights and things - that one knows fragmentarily - in the totality of their natural surroundings.\textsuperscript{206}

The same process takes place in Brodsky’s poem; in the final analysis, all these Brunelleschis, Cellinis and Lorenzos form both a spatial and temporal synthesis in which the actual Florentine realia are linked with their historical background and which, in turn, will give rise to various impressions and associations. Realia turn into symbols. It is more than common in travelogues that Italian sights, art works and interiors take on

\textsuperscript{204} See Полухина 1993: 230.
\textsuperscript{205} Крепс 1984: 178-180.
\textsuperscript{206} Martinet 1996: 8-10.
symbolic value. But again, the synthesis itself, as well as the emanation of symbolic significance, would not be possible without an implied reader with the capacity to fill in the lacunae of the elliptic, metonymic text with his own impressions or memories. Actually, the less explicit the depiction, the more familiar the place and vice versa - the more detailed the presentation, the more unfamiliar, the more "strange" the place is to the reader’s experience.  

In an account of a journey the referents of the text are situated both in extra-textual space, in the depicted city, and in intra-textual space, in the poetical constituents of the (re)constructed textual universe. Brodsky’s Florence is rewarding for a reader who is capable of following in his imagination the route taken by the lyrical subject of the poem. As a consequence, the reader may share the visual impressions of the city-scape which evolves in the process of his wanderings. In descriptions of voyages to Italian cities one of the principal motives is the observation of historical layers in the surrounding city-scape. Each of the famous cities has its own significant period of time, with which it is constantly associated. Florence is appreciated for its Renaissance philosophers, scholars and artists. Furthermore, each of them has come to symbolise a particular kind of space in European literary tradition. Florence, for instance, surrounded by the Tuscan hills, is characterised as a clearly demarcated, enclosed space - an impeccable, perfect realm of its own, opposing the undetermined, vague Venetian space, which is conceived as being under constant transformation.

Do the above-mentioned features of typically Florentine time and space manifest themselves in Brodsky’s "postcard" from Florence? As was already noted, the use of metonymic, elliptical expressions is characteristic of this poem. If we take Section Six, for example, where we find the lyrical subject sitting in a cafe, observing the view opening up behind the window, we read the following description of the things that catch his eye:

Солнечный луч, разбившийся о дворец, о купол собора, в котором лежит Лоренцо, проникает сквозь штору /.../.

He sees a cathedral with a cupola and someone - Lorenzo by name - lying inside, whom he cannot see but whom he knows to be there. It may well

207 Ibid. 6, 12.
208 Ibid. 4-9.
be that our lyrical subject has just visited the church, and exhausted, gone into a cafe for a cup of espresso.

Lorenzo is, without doubt, Lorenzo de Medici, the Duke of Urbino, who is buried in the Medici Chapel of the Church of San Lorenzo. It is worth mentioning that Lorenzo’s tomb, with its famous statues presenting Dawn and Dusk - as is the statue of Lorenzo himself, “the Thinker”, represented in profound meditation - are all masterpieces of Michelangelo. Both Lorenzo and Michelangelo associate the setting of Brodsky’s poem with the golden past of the city, to the period of the Italian Renaissance. Besides, based on these fragmentary clues we can locate the cafe on the Piazza San Lorenzo. As we have seen, by merely identifying a thing, or a historical figure in this particular case, by its proper name, Brodsky invokes a whole historical period that has not only become the symbol of the city, but which the poet himself esteemed highly209. These kinds of chains of associations, rooted in direct references to names, places, as well as other reminiscences that may lead through other allusions to various interpretations, are abundant in Brodsky’s poetry.

Visual perception is the sense of a tourist par excellence, and with its help this ideal tourist tries to understand the life around him. Brodsky’s lyrical subject is no exception in this respect, for it is mainly through visual impressions that he conveys the Florentine genius loci. But what distinguishes a tourist’s look from the gaze of a non-tourist? How does his gaze select its objects? It often happens in travel accounts that the author or, as in Brodsky’s poem, his lyrical subject, is reduced, pars pro toto, by a single characteristic, most often to his eyes. Brodsky’s “poetics of subtraction”210 is not a new device in the context of travelogues, if we take into account that the same poetic device was used by such authors as D.H. Lawrence, among others, in his travel books on Italy211. Brodsky’s “tourist” is ”all eyes” in Section Two, where

Глаз, мигая, заглатывает, погружаясь в сырьи сумерки, как таблетки от памяти, фонари /.../.

---

211 Martinet 1996: 15.
and in Section Six:

В пыльной кофейне глаз в полумраке кепки
привыкает к нимфам плафона, к амурам, к лепке /.../

The tourist’s eye is said to catch all that is unique or astonishing in his new surroundings. His eye focusses on things and phenomena that have something fascinating in them, be they disgusting or strange or extraordinary, beautiful or splendid. The main thing is that they strike the eye of the passing tourist by their absorbing appearance.

However, the lyrical subject in “DF” not only tells us what he sees around him during his walk in the centre of Florence, but he pays attention also to the gaze of other living creatures. In Section Three he sees:

В полдень кошки заглядывают под скамейки, проверяя, черны ли тени.

Further down in the same section a girl with golden curls falls a prey to "the insatiable gaze of the young market sellers"\(^{212}\). The emphasis on visuality gives an impression that looking and being looked at are essential aspects of the Italian lifestyle. Paraphrasing Auden’s Italian poem “Good-Bye to Mezzogiorno”, we could say, that “for southerners living means to-be-visible-now, while northerners mean by life a Bildungsroman”. The significance of the visual sense could, perhaps, be a consequence or, for that matter, a reason for the inversion of the interior and exterior spaces that, according to Martinet\(^{213}\), is characteristic of the Italian space portrayed in travelogues. The inversion takes place in the mind of the observer. Martinet mentions the façade of \textit{Santa Maria del Fiore} as an example of the inversion, which, with its mosaics, reminds the tourist of its interior. Or, as in Brodsky’s poem, where life is actually lived outdoors, on the streets which are crowded and full of noise. The presented interiors, like the staircase and apartment portrayed in Section Five are half empty, almost ghostly silent places, not to mention the cafe with its dust and dirty marble in Section Six\(^{214}\).

\(^{212}\) For the English version of “\textit{December in Florence}” translated by the author, see Brodsky 2000: 130-132.
\(^{213}\) Ibid. 6.
\(^{214}\) L. Loseff sees the dusty coffee-house with its dirty marble together with the dampness and greyness of the colouring of Brodsky’s Florence as conforming to the generally colourless, formless tone of his foreign landscapes (Loseff 1991: 37).
As a matter of fact, Brodsky does not focus on interiors or exteriors as such, but on lines between spaces. How many doors, windows, façades, surfaces and thresholds appear in his Florence! On the other hand, after his laconically expressed discovery of the beauty of the city, right in the beginning of the poem the lyrical subject makes a conscious gesture that draws a line between him and the surrounding reality. By raising the collar he restricts his gaze, prevents it from wandering and turns his eyes straight forward or up to the sky to the silhouettes of the cupolas. His gaze is selective, it fixes on certain objects only.

The selection of the objects Brodsky describes in “DF” has caused some scholars to conclude that the poem is actually about his situation as an exile rather than a travelogue. Aleksei Losev, among others, maintains that exile is the exact opposite of travel, that the gaze of an exile is directed into his own inner world, where he sees the fleeing images of his homeland. In this view, the constituents of Brodsky’s Florentine landscape are picked up by the poet because they remind him that he is not at home. They remain alien to him and he himself remains an outsider in the surrounding alien world. The eyes of a tourist, in Losev’s words, see constantly new, different places, whereas an exile always sees the same place, called the non-fatherland. It is precisely in this difference of the gazes that the elegiac aspects find their form of manifestation in “DF”.

3.1.1 “Florence - St. Petersburg” Parallel

The comparison of Florence to St. Petersburg - the native city of the poet - is implicit throughout the poem, albeit expressed in some instances by means of indirect allusions and various subtexts. The name of the city, St. Petersburg-Leningrad, is not once uttered. The outlines of the lost Russian city appear simultaneously within the represented space of the Florentine loci. It is in these instances that the gaze of the lyrical subject, protected from the world by his raised collar, turns from the surrounding reality into the inner world of his personal experience, from the surrounding landscape into the intimate mindscape. The most obvious reminiscences of the St. Petersburg city-scape are in Section One, where the city is described as ”вторая Флоренция с архитектурой Рая”. The expression “the second Florence” implies a certain characteristic that has been attributed to St. Petersburg right from its founding. It has always been defined in terms of some “other” city, in this particular case in

---

terms of Florence. Another allusion to the Russian city is in Section Eight where the cupola of the Dome

/.../ вызывает слезу в зрачке, наторевшем в блеске куполов.

The last section as a whole, with its theme of non-return, could be looked upon as an archetypal lamentation of an exiled poet, separated from his native language:

Есть города, в которые нет возврата. 
Солнце бьется в их окна, как в гладкие зеркала. То есть в них не проникнешь ни за какое злато. 
Там всегда протекает река под шестью мостами. 
Там есть места, где припадал устами тоже к устам и пером к листам. И там, рябит от аркад, колоннад, от чугунных пугал; на языке человека, который убыл.

As for the thematics of the poem, it seems to be an inversion of the common theme in Russian literature of the past centuries, namely that of "Italy in St. Petersburg". What Brodsky actually does here is to write about the presence of St. Petersburg in Florence. However, he does not do this by depicting Italy through St. Petersburg, which - according to Toporov\(^\text{216}\) has never occurred within the Russian literary tradition. St. Petersburg may be outlined by means of the Italian code embedded in it, but it is not possible to do the opposite.

The Florentine layer of the theme of "Italy in St. Petersburg" in Russian literature is presented to a great extent with Dantean overtones. The figure of Dante, with his tragic destiny as a banished poet and with his "Divine Comedy", dominates the image of Florence in Russian belles lettres, especially in the works of Mandel’shtam.\(^\text{217}\) In the motto of Brodsky’s poem, taken from Akhmatova’s poem "Данте", the theme of an exiled poet is revealed. The line chosen by Brodsky as an epigraph - "Этот, уходя не оглянулся..." - once again emphasises the motive of a glance, in this case a glance back to the past.

Before going into a detailed analysis concerning the numerous Dantean allusions in Brodsky’s Florentine poem, it is perhaps, worth not-

\(^{216}\) Топоров 1990: 49-50. 
\(^{217}\) Ibid. 78-80.
ing that Brodsky, almost without exception, refers to the most familiar passages in the “Divine Comedy”, not only in ”DF”, which is the most Dantesque of Brodsky’s poems, but also in his other works, such as ”Пятая годовщина”, ”1972 год”, ”Я входил вместо дикого зверя в клетку”, ”Двадцать сонетов к Марии Стюарт” and ”Келломяки”, among others.

As examples of Brodsky’s most obvious reminiscences from Dante’s Comedy in ”DF”, one could mention the ”atmosphere of the wild forest” with its beasts in the first section, which refers to the prologue in the first canto of Inferno. ”The second Florence with its architecture of Paradise”, as well as the sixth section’s goldfinch with its terzine sounding in the air of the city of Ravenna - Dante’s burial place - are obvious allusions to Alighieri. The love that can move stars in Section Seven is taken from the last canto of Paradise, from the very end of the “Divine Comedy”. Consequently, the dwelling of an exiled poet on his ”non-return” to the beloved city in the last section, which we quoted above, refers simultaneously to Brodsky’s St. Petersburg and to Dante’s Florence. The parallels between the biographies of the two exiled poets are catalogued in the final section. The plural form in the beginning of the section discloses the doubling of the object of description:

Есть города, в которые нет возврата /.../
в них не проникнешь ни за какое злато.

The gold suggests the fact that Dante was offered a possibility to return to Florence provided that he paid a reasonably large sum of money as a fine for his alleged ”crimes”.

The Dantesque loci in the Florentine landscape of Brodsky are to be found in Section Two, where he mentions two actual sites connected to Dante’s destiny:

/.../ твой подъезд в двух минутах от Синьории
намекает глухо, спустя века, на
причину изгнанья: вблизи вулкана
невозможно жить, не показывая кулака /.../.

The Palazzo della Signoria was the seat of the Republican Government, where the decision on Dante’s banishment was made. In fact, Dante was

218 Kline 1990: 81.
a member of the Signoria for some time before his enforced exile. In the lines ”твой подъезд в двух минутах от Синьории” Brodsky refers most probably to Dante’s home museum, Casa di Dante, situated on Via Dante Alighieri.

As we have seen, the structure of the whole poem is based on the principle of double exposure, of superimposition of one poet upon the other and of one city upon the other - Dante Alighieri and Joseph Brodsky, Brodsky’s St. Peters burg and Dante’s Florence. The image of Brodsky’s St. Petersburg emerges from beneath the image of Dante’s native city. However, hidden in the text there is a third layer that has been exposed and analysed in detail by David Bethea. In addition to Dante, the poem has a second addressee embedded in the epigraph - Mandel’shtam and his poem “Ленинград”, written in December 1930. As Bethea notes, nearly every detail in the poem is simultaneously Dantesque and Mandel’shtamian. Moreover, the details of Mandel’shtam’s “Ленинград” are scattered throughout Brodsky’s poem: the notion of forbidden return, the tears of recognition, the streetlamps, the themes of death and memory emerge in both poems, not to mention the month of December, which coincides with the time of Mandel’shtam’s “return” to his city.

Thus, Brodsky’s poem, depicting a walk that the lyrical subject takes through Dantesque sites in Florence hides in itself not only Brodsky’s St. Petersburg, but the presence of another banished poet and his city of St. Petersburg-Leningrad. It is said to be typical of Brodsky to search for archetypal doubles. Dante certainly suits well as an archetypal banished poet, Mandel’shtam is not a bad option, either. The elaborate threefold structure is reflected in the lexical and thematical content of the poem. If we now take a closer look at the motives which we identified above as reminiscences of the “Divine Comedy” (DC), we will soon discover that many of them appear to relate to Mandel’shtam’s poetry.

Let us first examine the strange atmosphere of a forest prevailing in Florence conveyed in the first section of the poem. As was noted, it is an allusion to the first canto of the DC, to the prologue in which Dante in his dream loses his path in the wild forest where he is confronted by

221 Ibid. 68.
222 The search for doubles, according to Venclova, allows the poet to examine himself from above or to see himself “in the past tense” - “завершенное время”, as if his life was already completed (Венцлова 2000:359). On Brodsky’s doubles, see, e.g. Полухина 1996: 391-407.
three wild beasts: a leopard, a lion and a horrifying she-wolf\footnote{The three beast are allegorical figures for sins; leopard/panther/puma stands for pleasure and incontinence, lion symbolises pride, ambition and violence, and she-wolf is a symbol of avarice and fraud.}, who blocks his way up to the height. (\textit{Inf. Canto I}: 31-54). Brodsky’s lyrical subject is not said to be lost, but it would not be hard to imagine him losing the right way in this city, where the air is full of steam, exhaled through the doors opening to the streets on the banks of the Arno. It is these doors that spit out the pairs in love whom Brodsky calls ”a new kind of quadruped”\footnote{See Brodsky 2000: 130.}, i.e. modern beasts. There is also an allusion to a certain age, when one no longer takes an interest in looking at people, but raises one’s collar, which recalls the age of the middle-aged (35 year-old) Dante at the beginning of his journey to the underworld. All these motives go back to the often-cited first canto of the DC (\textit{Inf. I}: 1-6):

\begin{quote}
Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
chè la diritta via era smarrita.
Ah, quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte,
che nel pensier rinova la paura!\footnote{If not mentioned otherwise, here and hereafter all quotations from the DC in English are taken from Geoffrey L. Bickersteth’s translation (Oxford 1965) which follows the meter of the original : ”Midway upon the journey of our life / I woke to find me astray in a dark wood, / confused by ways with the straight way at strife./ Ah, to find words, if such there be, that could / describe this forest wild and dense and dour, / by which, in thought, my terror is renew’d!”}
\end{quote}

A more direct allusion to the opening lines of the DC is to be found in Brodsky’s poem ”\textit{Келломяки}”, written six years after the Florence poem. ”\textit{Келломяки}” can be ascribed to the poet’s St. Petersburg poetry, since it describes a place situated not far from St. Petersburg on the Karelian Isthmus where many eminent Petersburgers used to have their villas and where the ordinary city-dwellers, Brodsky among them, used to, and still do, spend their summer holidays.\footnote{Kellomäki is the original Finnish name for Komarovo, a village situated on the Karelian Isthmus to the north-west of St. Petersburg. The region used to be Finnish territory before World War Two. Brodsky lived in Komarovo in autumn and winter of 1962-1963 with Marina Basmanova. He rented the dacha of the deceased academian Berg in close vicinity to Akhmatova’s cottage (Volkov 1998: 221). Brodsky, too, used to spent his summers on the Karelian Isthmus as a boy. Apart from Kellomäki, places like Terijoki, Raivola and Uusikirkko were familiar to him by their
The motive of going astray appears in the opening line of the poem:

Заблудившийся в дюнах, отобранных у чухны /.../.

The other mentioned Dantean motives appear in Section Nine of “Келломяки”:

В середине жизни, в густом лесу,²²⁷
человеку свойственно оглядываться - как беглецу
или преступнику: то хрустнет ветка, то всплеск струи.
Но прошедшее время вовсе не пума и
не борзая²²⁸, чтоб прыгнуть на спину и, свалив
жертву на землю, вас задушить в своих
нежных объятиях /.../.²²⁹

Finnish names. By choosing the original Finnish name instead of the Russian Komarovo, Brodsky stresses that the region is Finnish, not Russian. Brodsky’s view on the actual political question whether Karelia - the “dunes snatched from the witless Finns” - should be given back to Finland, was absolute. On his second and last visit to Finland in August 1995 he found it strange that Finns did not lay claim to “their own land” (Mallinen 1995: 46).

²²⁷ The motive of the midway of the road emerges in Brodsky’s poems of the beginning of the 1970’s, in such texts as “1972 год” (Бродский III 1997: 16-19), “Письма римскому другу” (Бродский III: 11) and “20 сонетов к Марии Стюарт” (Бродский III 1997: 63-71). The motive serves as a symbol of transition to the metaphorical realm of death. The loss of the native country and the consequent linguistic isolation, the separation from the past life as well as various metamorphoses of the “I” are all implications of the point of border-crossing. (Ранчин 1993: 478-479). The opening lines of Inferno (1: 1-2) are quoted by Mandel’shtam, too, in his “Четвертая проза”, where he renders the rather infernal atmosphere as well as the poet’s struggle for survival under the Soviet regime. Mandel’shtam’s judges, however, do not bear resemblance to terrifying beasts, but are awkward geese, incapable of realising the consequences of their acts.: “In mezzo del cammin del (sic) nostra vita - на середине жизненной дороги я был остановлен в дремучем советском лесу разбойниками, которые назвались моими судьями. То были старцы с жилистыми шеями и маленькими гусиными головами, недостойными носить бремя лет.” (Мандельштам 1994, т. 3 : 176).

²²⁸ The Hound appears in Inf. I: 100-111. It has been seen as a herald of a new era that will, according to Virgil’s prophesy, chase away the she-wolf and bring justice and peace to the world. The Hound is often perceived as a reference to a potential reforming Pope or a future emperor, under whose rule moral virtues will flourish. It has also been understood as a sign of the Saviour who will come to redeem the world from sin.

In "Келломяки" Brodsky expresses in explicit Dantean terms the same motives that were only implied in "DF". In the latter poem, however, the context of Dante’s native city helps the reader to trace the origin of the less clear Dantean allusions to their sources in the DC. In both poems Brodsky plays with the motives of the "Comedy" right from the first stanza, as Batkin230 has observed.

As we know, Dante imagines himself as the protagonist of the story, a poet-seer who actually discerns the wild beasts in the prologue of Inferno while still wandering in the world. The beasts are allegorical symbols for sins that have lured him away from the right path. In the quoted lines (Inf. I:3) the expression "essere smarrito/a", is usually translated as “to be lost”. However, essere smarrito/a has the meaning "to be confused", as well. Consequently, Dante does not imagine himself simply as one who has lost the right way, but as one who could not see it clearly. His power of vision has been dimmed by his own aberration.231

One could well imagine that the steam exhaled by “the gaps of the doorways” would obscure the vision of the lyrical subject, but that it would nevertheless be possible for the eye to witness, in these exceptional circumstances, some incredible things. In point of fact, Brodsky’s portrayal of the city in the first section of "DF", despite being emphatically located in this world, bears a resemblance to Dante’s poetry of visions. It has traits of a phantasmagorical, transcendental vision of a gate from the material world to the world of the spirit which, according to the medieval conception, becomes manifest in the allegorical symbolism and narration.

The doors are mouths that swallow air and spit out from their gaps "a kind of new quadruped", exhaling steam into the cold winter air 232. However, these “beasts” are not supersensual beings, but delusions; they are visual impressions of the couples in love walking on the Arno that the hero’s mind in his loneliness transforms into animals. As Yury Lotman233 has noted, the juxtaposition of “real human beings” vs. “brutish creatures in human disguise” is common in the DC. It emerges, for instance, in canto XIV of Purgatory, where Dante refers to the nature of Florentine citizens by calling them “wolves”. Dante witnesses more than

230 Баткин 1997: 313.
231 Introduction to The Divine Comedy by G.L. Bickersteth (see Dante 1965: xxxix).
232 In his poem about Moscow, the Third Rome, "Когда в теплой ночи..." Mandel’shtam has a similar trope with an allusion to the imagery of Dante’s "Comedy:" /.../ И театров широкие зевы /Возвращают толпу площадям /.../ Льются мрачно-веселые толпы / Из каких-то божественных недр." (Мандельштам, т. 1, 1993: 136).
once, when visiting the rings of Hell, the fusion of human beings with bestial creatures, in which process a human being is ultimately deprived of his human shape.\(^{234}\)

Brodsky’s characterisation of the beasts as “a kind of new quadruped” testifies to the fact that they differ from the beasts met by Alighieri. If not totally different, in any case, they are representatives of a new era, a new generation of sinners. In fact, when Alighieri laments “with face raised” the corruption of Florence, he addresses the city-dwellers as “the new men”\(^{235}\). The attribute “new” could, perhaps, be construed as a reference to another masterpiece of Dante, viz. “La vita nuova”. It is precisely in “La vita nuova” that Dante developed the “stil nuovo” of his poetry, according to which the origin of poetic expression lies in the poet’s immediate and individual world of experience, and not, say, in philosophical or theological meditations.

In the beginning of this chapter we called attention to the elaborate rhyme scheme of “DF”. It is most typical of Brodsky’s poetry that the meanings of the words on the lexical level of the text that are highlighted by placing them in rhyming position always contribute to the contents of the poem on the semantic level. The rhymed words become signs that refer beyond themselves.\(^{236}\) The rhymes of “DF” are of particular interest in the light of Brodsky’s statement concerning Dante’s rhyming.\(^{237}\) He maintains that Alighieri never rhymed mundane, harsh words with the names of Christian saints since he believed that rhyming transformed the rhymed words causing their meanings to merge. On the basis of his view on rhymes it would be justifiable to ask what sort of metamorphosis takes place on the level of prosody in the first section of “DF”? Metamorphosis

\(^{234}\) See, e.g. Inf. 25.

\(^{235}\) See Inf. 16: 73-76: “‘La gente nova e’ subiti guadagni / orgoglio e dismisura han generata, / Fiorenza, in te, si che tu gia ten piagni.’ / Così gridai con la faccia levata /.../”. (“‘Florence, in thee new men and sudden inflows/ of wealth have bred pride and excess which brook/ no curb, so that e’en now they swell thy woes.’/ Thus, with face raised, I cried /.../”).

\(^{236}\) Venclova (Венцлова 2000: 363-364) points out that for Brodsky metres are spiritual quantities. Poetic metre corresponds to the rhythm of breathing, while rhymes conform to the train of thought evolving in time. Venclova compares Brodsky’s poetics to the “semantic” poetics of the Acmeists which suggests that each element of the poetic text is a semantic element. For an analysis of Brodsky’s “Ночной полет” with its focus on the semantic weight and independence of the rhymed words, see Галацкая 1990 passim.

\(^{237}\) See Генис 1999: 252.
as a common denominator of Brodsky’s poetic universe is encountered in his other poems as well\textsuperscript{238}.

The first terzina of the opening stanza consists of one compound rhyme and two single word rhymes; ”пар; но - попарно - Арно”. The key to the semantics of the tercet is to be found in the rhyming words; the figures who emerge in pairs from the steam on the river Arno. The steam and vapour rising from the river imply cold, frost and dampness, They can be taken as meteorological markers of the Petersburg Text, as qualities that are characteristic of the climate of St. Petersburg\textsuperscript{239}.

Двери вдыхают воздух и выдыхают пар; но ты не вернешься сюда, где, разбившись попарно, население гуляет над обмелевшим Арно /.../.

In the cold winter weather the steam rises from the river, which is obviously not frozen over. The river in Brodsky’s poem is called the Arno, but the moment it becomes associated through the rhyme with the word ”попарно”, its referent is doubled. Another river, located ”in the second Florence” - a much deeper and wider one than its Italian counterpart at that, is brought to mind immediately. The polarity “paired - unpaired”, repeated in Section Seven, is part of the structure of the poem based on doubling. Apart from this function it also implies the major subjects of the poem - those of loss and separation - perceived as lasting, inevitable companions of love.

/.../ напоминая новых четвероногих. Двери хлопают, на мостовую выходят звери. Что-то вправду от леса имеется в атмосфере этого города. \hspace{1cm} (Section I)

The second triplet ”Двери - звери - (в атмо)сфере” moves the setting to the literary landscapes of the “Divine Comedy”. Doors serve as an en-

\textsuperscript{238} Metamorphosis as such is a common motif in Brodsky’s poetry. For a discussion of metamorphosis in Brodsky’s works, especially its relationship to Ovid’s “Metamorphoses” see, e.g. Ичин 1996: 229, 247.

\textsuperscript{239} To mention some examples from texts traditionally included in the notion of the Petersburg Text: ”И тяжелый валит пар” is a quotation from Mandel’shtam’s poem dedicated to the Petersburg winter, ”Чуть мерцает прозрачная сцена”, in which the Russianness of the city is juxtaposed with its Italian features. The most widely quoted “steam” is, without doubt, Annensky’s famous ”желтый пар петербургской зимы” from his poem ”Петербург”.
trance to other worlds, to spheres beyond life, where Dante wanders in the three parts of his divine universe.

Это - красивый город,
где в известном возрасте просто отводишь взор от человека и поднимаешь ворот. (Section I)

In the third triple rhyme of the first section ”город - взор от - ворот” the main themes of the poem are exposed in a fascinating way. Brodsky uses compound rhyme, the rhyming of the last syllables being phonetically exact [go --rot] - [vzo-r-ot] - [vo-rot]. The rhyming words, their last syllables to be precise, seem to summarise the other major theme of the poem - the relation of the poet to language, which finds its manifestation in the text in various references to the mouth (рот, уста, губы). In certain periods of life and under certain circumstances, i.e. in certain cities, the gaze that hides behind the collar turns inside and is converted into speech. (“в(о) рот”). By excluding from its range of vision/horizon the potential eyecatchers of the surrounding world, the collar functions as a borderline of the inner space, where the lyrical subject sees himself standing by the gate of another city (у ворот города). All the words in the poetic text which bear a phonetic resemblance to the word “ворот” (such as возврат, воротиться/вернуться, взгляд от, подворотня with the consonants в - р - т - (з)) are entangled in the thematics of return and introspection, which - in the “language of the eye” - is equated to the past.

The motives of mouth and eye - word and gaze - are in abundance in Brodsky’s poetry, ”DF” making no exception in this respect. The first three sections are dominated by eyesight, the visual sense, notwithstanding the fact that in the second section the eye obtains properties of the mouth; “the pupil blinks but gulps the memory-numbing pills of opaque streetlamps”241. In Section One, as we already observed, the eye “sees” the houses as animate breathing, gasping creatures. In Section Five the

240 It seems to be characteristic of Brodsky, (as well as of his lyrical substitute), to prefer architectural settings to people. This inclination can be discerned in his relationship not only towards Florence, but to other cities as well. See Brodsky’s explanation of his predilection for architecture, concerning Venice (Volkov 1998: 192): “There are no people for me. Naturally, the Italians are enchanting /.../ In fact, though, the people aren’t that interesting. You know more or less what to expect from them /.../. Ultimately, people are incomparably more synonymous than art /.../. People are connected with the city, of course, but they might not coincide with it at all.”

241 See Brodsky 2000: 130.
stairs of the house are described in similar terms: the lyrical subject climbs the teeth-stairs to the apartment-hard palate.

Тело в плаще, ныряя в сырую полость рта подворотны, по ломаным, обветшальным плоским зубам поднимается мелким шагом к воспаленному нёбу с его шершавым неизменным “16”. (Section V)

Climbing the stairs towards the ”throat” (”нёбо”), where speech originates, is easily associated to the ascent to ”heaven” (”небо”), the birthplace of the logos. The speech apparatus of a poet, the hard palate, is analogous to the sky in Mandel’shtam’s ”Я больше не ребенок!” where the lyrical subject exclaims:”Я говорю за всех с такою силой, / Чтоб нёбо стало небом, чтобы губы // Потрескались, как розовая глина.”242 This is a cry of a spiritual exile who thus asserts his oneness with ”everyone”. According to Leiter 243, the image of the palate becoming the sky suggests the vastness and freedom inherent in the human organ of articulation. It could also indicate, as Przybylski244 convincingly asserts, Mandel’shtam’s perception of existence, which, in his view, was closer to speech than to consciousness.

Section Four is devoted to the theme of poetic creation. In the process of writing the poet is transformed into the scratch of a pen or to marks of a pen on paper.

Человек превращается в шорох пера по бумаге, в кольца, петли, клинышки букв и, потому что сколько, в запятые и точки. (Section IV)

242 Мандельштам, т. 3, 1994: 57. According to Zubova, the elimination of opposition between “небо - нёбо” is characteristic of modern poetry and is based on philosophy: “/.../[устранение оппозиции], имеющее явную философскую основу в сближении духовного и телесного, а также в описании человека как мироздания и мироздания как органа речи.” (Зубова 2000: 72).
243 Mandel’shtam’s poem is included in ”Отрывки из уничтоженных стихов” (Т.3 1994: 57), see also Leiter 1980: 183.
244 Przybylski 1987: 200-201. In this poem, written in June 1931, speech becomes a remedy for time. ”Я больше не ребенок” sounds like a comment on Mandel’shtam’s ”Ленинград” by its plain statement of the facts: you cannot return to the St. Petersburg of your childhood, but as a poet you can immortalise it in your poetic speech.
Correspondingly, in Section Eight, where we return to the present-day Florence, the figure of a traffic policeman is compared to a Cyrillic letter.

Полицейский на перекрестке
машет руками, как буква “ж”, ни вниз, ни вверх /.../.  (Section VIII)

In Section Four we witness an opposite transformation, letter “м” obtains a form of a human face, a letter is turned into a person.

Только подумать, сколько
раз, обнаружив “м” в заурядном слове,
перо спотыкалось и выводило брови!  (Section IV)

In the metamorphoses that are carried out in contrary directions - either from a human figure to a letter, or from a letter to a human shape - the letter as a graphical figure is transformed into a visual image, an image-sign, an ideogram.245 Brodsky uses the same device also in his other St. Petersburg poems, e.g. in the poem “Мы вышли с почты прямо на канал...”246. It is more than common in his poetry that letters of the alphabet accumulate, through their visual shape, a whole range of semantic meanings, meanings that are tied to the immediate context of their position in the given text. In “DF” the orientation to visual impressions of the alphabet seems to represent different things in the two opposite cases quoted above.

First, the policeman in Section Eight, resembling a letter ”ж”, waving his hands ”ни вниз, ни верх”, ”neither down, nor up” is a pure visual impression based on the swift movement of his hands (probably due to the chaotic traffic or the Italian temperament). Moreover, not surprisingly, Dante is hidden in the movement of his arms. Up and down are the directions of the movement in the DC. In Purgatory Dante goes up in space, in Hell his direction is downwards. These are “the other-worldly” directions, whereas the policeman, with his movements ”neither up nor down”, apparently belongs to the “horizontal” reality, where any metaphysical vertical movement seems to be excluded.247

245 An ideogram or ideograph is a written symbol directly representing an idea or an object, see Goodman 1978: 102-3.
246 For a discussion of the poem, see Chapter 2.4.1.2 above.
247 Brodsky saw in the “six-handed” letter ”ж ” now a fly, now the goddess Shiva with her many limbs, see, e.g. “Муха”(Бродский III: 283, 287), or even a thick garden, see “Мексиканский дивертисмент: Гуэрнавака” (Бродский III: 92).
In the second case, in Section Four, the transformation process of the alphabet “м” not only takes place in the opposite direction, but apart from this, it is the writing person, the lyrical substitute of the poet, who eventually, in the process of writing, turns into what he scribbles:

Человек превращается в шорох пера по бумаге, в кольца, петли, клинышки букв и, потому что скользко, в запятые и точки. Только подумать, сколько раз, обнаружив ”м” в заурядном слове, перо спотыкалось и выводило брови!
То есть чернила честнее крови, и лицо в потемках, словами наружу - благо так куда быстрей просыхает влага - смеется, как скомканная бумага. (Section IV)

In their elucidations of the first lines of the above stanza, several scholars have come to the conclusion that this is yet another example of a metaphor, common in Brodsky’s poetics, of the transformation of the lyrical subject into the word. This metaphor made its appearance especially in the poems written in emigration. It is thought to reflect the significance of language in the writing process; the poet is a medium of language, it is language that dictates the text to the poet, not vice versa. Furthermore, in Brodsky’s view, the word, logos, is the beginning, it existed before anything else, even before time, not to mention space. In accounts dealing with his poetry written after 1972, with the poem under scrutiny, in particular (As a rule, “DF” is conceived as a poem in exile par excellence), many scholars have singled out the significance of the mother tongue for the exiled poet. Language is conceived of as the only homeland that a banished poet has. This perception is, of course, not a new one within literature. It was actually launched by Dante in one of his public letters. Brodsky, on his part, is in agreement with his great Italian predecessor on this point in defining exile as a condition where one is left with oneself and with one’s own language. For him exile is primarily a linguistic event. An exiled writer retreats into his mother tongue.

As for the lines quoted above, they may be understood as a sign of the lyrical subject’s identification with his text. Occasionally he has to put a

---

248 See, e.g. Полухина 1993: 236.
249 See Burckhardt 1999 (1956): 61, 100. Rather than speaking of its disadvantages, Dante underlines the positive sides of exile - the chance and opportunity for an exile to find a new spiritual homeland in language and culture.
halt to writing by placing a comma or a full stop which is actually due - not simply to the slippery surface of the paper, as he affirms - but to the fact that “the pen takes you always further than your thoughts”, i.e. one’s mind is not capable of keeping pace with the incessant flow of letters generated by the language. What we witness here is a birth of a poetic identity, an artistic becoming of the writing self. Judging by Brodsky’s lines, this is not a permanent but a temporary state. The depiction of this “metamorphosis” with its slipping pen reminds one of a child who is absorbed in practising penmanship.

The author’s notes to the English version of ”DF”, first published in the collection of poems under the title “A Part of Speech”, claim that "the unwitting pen /strays into drawing - while tackling an /”M”- some eyebrows”, is an allusion to the medieval conception, according to which facial features represent letters in the phrase OMO DEI. However, it is mentioned only in the notes to Brodsky’s “Collected Poems in English” that the habit of distinguishing the letters which form OMO in the features of the human face - the temples, nose and forehead are supposed to represent the letter ”м”, and the eyes the two O’s placed within each side of the ”м” - originates in the “Divine Comedy”, in Purg. XXIII: 31-33:

Parean l’occhiaie anella sanza gemme;  
chie nel viso delli uomini legge ‘omo’  
ben avria quivi conosciuta l’emme.

As Patterson maintains, home for an exile takes on its sense through movement toward it, but as it is approached, it recedes, it is “bleached” into a “distant elsewhere”. Home consists not only of familiar places but of familiar faces, too, the features of which also tend to recede as time goes by.

But whose facial features are reflected in the letter “м”? Bethea, in his enlightening analysis, relates “м” to Marina Basmanova, the ad-

---

253 “The eye-pits were like rings without the gem; / he that reads ‘omo’ in the human face / would here with ease have recognized the M.” Incidentally, Brodsky mentions the rings in the first line of the stanza: Человек превращается в /.../ кольца, /.../”
255 Bethea 1994: 71-72. Polukhina’s and Loseff’s interpretation according to which the face on the crumpled paper belongs to the lyrical subject, to the poet himself,
dresser of Brodsky’s love poetry for more than two decades. This interpretation is, without doubt, the most obvious one, but others are possible. Even in this small detail of the text, the ambiguity of addressees is apparent. Taking into consideration the complicated intertextual structure of the poem - its Mandel’shtamian layer in particular - we cannot overlook the possibility that “м” might as well refer to Osip Mandel’shtam himself.

In Mandel’shtam’s lyrics “eyebrows” is a recurrent motive, related often to architectonic forms and patterns, to cupolas and arches. The poem "В разноголосице девического хора..." which in its thematics continues the theme of “Italy in Russia”, serves as an example of this poetic connection. It belongs to Mandel’shtam’s cycle of poems on Moscow:

В разноголосице девического хора
Все церкви нежные поют на голос свой,
И в дугах каменных Успенского собора
Мне брови чудятся, высокие, дугой.

If we are to believe Marina Tsvetayeva’s words, this particular poem, together with the other poems of the cycle, is addressed to her. And, indeed, it is evident that we are dealing with a love poem, in which the object of affection and nostalgia is a Russian beauty in the midst of cold northern winter - possibly a lady by the name Marina.

И с укрепленного архангелами вала
Я город озирал на чудной высоте.
В стенах Акрополя печаль меня снедала
По русском имени и русской красоте.

In this early poem, written in the winter of 1916, the gentle Florence is compared, not to St. Petersburg, but to Moscow. There, under the

---

256 Mandel’shtam, т. 1, 1993: 120.
258 Mandel’shtam’s poem on the theme of “Florence in St. Petersburg” "Слышиу, слышиу ранний лед...”, in which the lyrical subject has been reduced to a mere shadow wandering in his hometown, dates from a much later period of the poet’s creative life. It goes back to 1937. In most cases Mandel’shtam’s “Italian” cultural-historical context eventually winds up at the city of St. Petersburg, see Топоров 1990: 79.
golden cupolas of the Kremlin, perhaps as a symbol of an all-uniting and omnipotent love, a peculiar ecumenical unification takes place; in its temples the Russian Orthodox soul and the Catholic Italian soul seem to merge:

Что православные крюки поет черница:
Успение нежное - Флоренция в Москве.

И пятиглавые московские соборы
С их итальянскою и русскою душой
Напоминают мне явление Авроры,
Но с русским именем и в шубке меховой.

It would seem possible that the face on the paper takes features of two poets, the initials of whose names embrace the alphabet “M”; poets whose destiny, with all its tragedy, can be described as sheer hell. Both Mandel’shtam and Tsvetayeva lived in emigration. The former in internal exile, banished from St. Petersburg, the latter abroad, in Paris and in Prague, among other places. Despite hardships, neither of them lost their creative power. No wonder then that Brodsky compares the works that Tsvetayeva wrote while in emigration to Dante’s “Divine Comedy”259.

One could claim that the purpose of the transformation of a letter into a visual image differs from the previous case of an ideogram, in which a human figure was likened to the letter “ж”. The accentuated visuality of the very process of writing depicted in Section Four seems to represent the creative process in its entirety, which in its sincerity is cruel and incorruptible. It exposes to light facts which one would prefer not to be reminded of, which would rather be kept under the surface of the Lethean waters. In spite of all his efforts to forget, Brodsky cannot help the fact that “ink is more honest than blood”. The face appearing on the paper laughs like “a crumpled paper”. The laugh reveals the fact that the face belongs to a longed-for woman, to the double of Beatrice - that beloved guide of Dante in Paradise, the “donna angelica”- whose sacred laugh, “lo santo riso” (Purg. XXXII:1-6), dims all of Dante’s senses with the exception of sight. After ten years of separation and longing, his deceased beloved once again unveils her face to his eyes.260

259 "Dante left Florence and because of that we have the Divine Comedy /.../ And the best Russian poet of this century (in my opinion), Marina Tsvetaeva, wrote her finest poems while living for almost twenty years outside Russia.” J.Brodsky: ‘To be continued’ PENewsletter, no. 43 (May 1980), p.10, see Polukhina 1999: 91.

260 Like Dante, Brodsky, too, avoids sentimentality: Brodsky compares a laughing face to a crumpled piece of paper, while Dante describes with gentle self-irony how his...
3.1.2 The Constellation “Dante - Mandel’shtam - Brodsky”

If we follow the thematical analysis of Mandel’shtam’s “Ленинград” written by Yury Levin⁴⁶¹, we see that the core of Brodsky’s poem, like that of Mandel’shtam’s, is to be found in the three encounters that take place in the text. The first meeting is between the lyrical subject/a poet and his city. The second encounter is between him and some persons associated with the city, and the third theme of Mandel’shtam’s poem is described by Levin as “я в этом городе” (“I in this city”).

The meeting with the city in “DF” is an encounter with Florence and St. Petersburg-Leningrad, the object of the rendezvous is doubled. The features of the Italian city repeat the outlines of its Russian counterpart. A similar doubling of the object takes place in Mandel’shtam’s poem, which begins as a return to the Leningrad of the 1930’s, but suddenly the city takes the shape of the poet’s childhood’s St. Petersburg. The addressee of “DF”, the “you” in the first section “who will not return here”, is doubled, as we have already indicated, signifying both Dante and his Russian companion in misfortune - Mandel’shtam. Brodsky’s rendezvous with people in his poetic city turns out to be a meeting with deceased colleagues, i.e. with the same kind of “голоса мертвецов” as Mandel’shtam’s acquaintances remaining in his Leningrad. More or less of a sepulchral nature also are the historical figures from Lorenzo to Brunelleschi that Brodsky mentions in his elegy.

The chains of associations constructed by Brodsky in this realm of the dead are drawn with virtuosity. As Ranchin has noted⁴⁶², the reminiscences in Brodsky’s poetry are just the visible tip of the iceberg of subtexts. Various subtexts constitute a chain which leads from one cited work to others that are not explicitly alluded to in his text. As an example of an alternative chain of association brought forth by a hidden subtext, let us take a second look at Lorenzo in Section Six of “DF”.

We have already identified Lorenzo as referring to the sepulchre of Lorenzo de Medici located in the Medici Chapel of the church of San Lorenzo. However, after discovering the Mandel’shtamian subtext, a different interpretation becomes possible. If we assume that Brodsky’s Lorenzo is not Lorenzo de Medici lying in San Lorenzo, but instead his namesake Lorenzo Ghiberti, a Renaissance architect and sculptor whose gaze fastened on Beatrice’s laughing face. He was enchanted with her smile to such an extent that the other goddesses had to remind him of their presence: “/.../ only when leftward by those goddesses / I was compelled to turn aside my face, / hearing them murmur a ‘Too fixed thy gaze!’.” (Purg. XXXII: 7-9).

tomb is situated in the church of Santa Croce, we might find here a link to Mandel’shtam’s as well as Dante’s cities and works. Lorenzo Ghiberti designed the famous “Gates of Paradise”\(^\text{263}\), the eastern doors to the Baptistry, *alias San Giovanni* on *Piazza de Duomo*, the favourite church of Dante. According to Burckhardt\(^\text{264}\), Dante was baptised in this church, and this was where he would have liked to be crowned as the poet laureate of Florence. “*Il mio bel San Giovanni*” - a quotation from the “*Divine Comedy*”, appears as the epigraph of Akhmatova’s poem “Данте” which, apart from recalling Alighieri alludes to Mandel’shtam, as well. The “Gates of Paradise” by Ghiberti are regarded as a prototype of the northern gates of the Kazan Cathedral in St. Petersburg, the cupola of which is perceived as a modification of Brunelleschi’s “egg” in Florence\(^\text{265}\). As is well known, Mandel’shtam has a poem about the Kazan Cathedral, which, as an architectural whole, bears resemblance to St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome. In his poem “На площадь выбежав, свободен / Стал колоннады полукруг, - / И распластался храм Господень, / Как легкий крестовик-паук”\(^\text{266}\). Mandel’shtam does not mention the gates, but he does call attention to the non-Russian atmosphere of the edifice, despite the fact that it was built by the Russian architect Voronihin. The special atmosphere surrounds the visitor upon entering the portico, which makes one feel like a Russian in Italy.

А зодчий не был итальянец,
Но русский в Риме, - ну так что ж!
Ты каждый раз, как иностранец,
Сквозь рощу портиков идешь.

Consequently, Lorenzo has a double identity, not unlike the addressee of the poem. A double, or in some cases, a triple structure seems to underlie the whole poem. One shell is hidden inside another - Brunelleschi’s cupola, made of red brickwork, conceals the golden domes of St. Petersburg.

The third theme distinguished by Levin in Mandel’shtam’s “*Ленинград*” - the theme of the lyrical subject in the city - is part of the double exposure as well. “I” becomes “you” through the shared biogra-

\(^{263}\) A note to “*December in Florence*” in J.Brodsky: *Collected Poems in English* (Brodsky 2000:514) maintains, mistakenly in my opinion, that the ”architecture of Paradise” refers only to Ghiberti’s bronze doors of the Baptistry in Florence. St. Petersburg’s architecture is not taken into account as a potential referent.

\(^{264}\) Burckhardt 1999: 145-146.


\(^{266}\) Мандельштам, т. 1, 1993: 101.
phy of the three poets, and consequently Florence becomes Leningrad in its two manifestations - the Leningrad of Brodsky’s youth and the St. Petersburg-Leningrad of Mandel’shtam’s works. If the spatial model of the Dantesque universe in the “Divine Comedy”, as Yury Lotman maintains, resembles a continuum consisting of some paths of individual destinies which intersect each other, in Brodsky’s poem the great number of coincidences in the lifepaths of the three main heroes make it look more like a three-lane highway.

Levin’s third theme, the “‘I’ in this city”, deals with separation and non-return in “Декабрь во Флоренции”. Brodsky’s play with pairs becomes evident in Section One, where “разбившись попарно, население гуляет напоминая новых четвероногих”. The whole seventh section centres around the themes of separation, loss and loneliness:

Выхыхая пары, вдыхая воздух, двери хлопают во Флоренции. Одну ли, две ли проживавший жизни, смотря по вере, вечером в первой осознаешь: неправда, что любовь движет звезды (Луну - подавно),
ибо она делит все вещи на два -
даже деньги во сне. Даже, в часы досуга,
мысли о смерти. Если бы звезды Юга двигались ею, то - в стороны друг от друга.

Everything in the world of the lyrical subject is divided in two, even his ruminations on death. This might, perhaps, suggest his understanding of his banishment as his first death and his life in exile as his second incarnation. In fact, Brodsky’s statement about the positive aspects of emigration echoes this view. Brodsky perceived emigration as a state in which the writer during his lifetime already shares the same destiny with his works; both stand, deserted, on the shelf, collecting dust. This, according to him, is an experience of the life beyond. One no longer speaks in the name of a nation, but just for oneself.

The first life is yet another echo of the DC. In the underworld Dante has to assure the shadows of the deceased, who will not cease wondering about Dante’s form, which differs from theirs, that he still belongs to the “first life”, although he was given a chance to visit the “second life” - life

after death. Unlike the souls of the departed, Dante breathes, and a ray of light is refracted when it meets his body, whereas light penetrates the immaterial “bodies” of the souls who, apart from this, cast no shadow. Besides, the synecdochal “body in a cloak”, used by Brodsky in Section Five to depict the lyrical subject, which is usually conceived as part of Brodsky’s poetics of estrangement and subtraction, obtains another meaning in the Dantean context. It is parallel to the description of Dante’s figure and attire in the realm of shadows. Consequently, the wording serves here as an indication of the lyrical subject’s status as opposed to that of the dead souls, including the two main addressees of the poem.

As was already indicated, the love that moves the stars is a reminiscence from the concluding line of the last canto of Paradise. In addition to the opening lines of the DC, the concluding one is probably the most often cited passage of Dante’s masterpiece. Brodsky’s lyrical subject seems to have lost his faith in the all-uniting power of love, be it divine love or earthly love. Life is comprised of losses and separations, if we are to believe in Brodsky’s astrology. The catalogue of separations that he provides in “DF” proves that he, too, is familiar with what Mandel’shtam aptly called “the science of separation”. As we know, the motive of stars play an extremely important role in the poetics of Mandel’shtam’s paraphrase “И море и Гомер - все движется любовью” in “Бессонница. Гомер...”. I owe this observation to Professor Alexander Dolinin.

---

269 For Dante’s response to one of the shades who is wondering about his presence in Purgatory, see Purg. VIII: 58-60: “’Oh’, diss’io lui, ‘per entro i luoghi tristi / venni stamane, / e sono in prima vita, / anch’altra sì andando, acquisti’”. (“’Oh!’ was my answer, ‘through the abodes of pain / I came this morning: in first life am I, / though the other by so journeying I may gain.’”)

270 See, e.g. Inf. XXIII: 88-96 Dante’s answer to the hypocrites who ask him who he is, curious to know why he does not carry the heavy leaden stole on his shoulders: “Costui par vivo all’atto della gola; / e s’e’ son morti, per qual privilegio / vanno scoperti della grave stola?” Poi disser me: “O Tosco, ch’al collegio / dell’ ipocriti tristi se’ venuto, / dir chi tu se’ non avere in dispregio”. / E io a loro: “I’ fui nato e cresciuto / sovra ‘l bel fiume d’Arno alla gran villa, / e son col corpo ch’ i’ ho sempre avuto.”(’/...’/’seems living, for beneath his breath’s control / his throat works; and by what immunity / go they , if dead, without the ponderous stole? / O, Tuscan, brought to the congress’ - this to me - / ‘of the hypocrites, who go thus sorely clad, / scorn not to tell us what thy name may be.’ / ‘Born was I in the great town, and from lad / to man grew up, on the fair stream men know / as Arno, and am with the body I’ve always had.’”).These lines are echoed in Brodsky’s other poems about St. Petersburg, namely in Section Three of “Поздень в комнате”: “Я родился в большой стране, в устье реки.” (Бродский III: 173-179) and in “Я родился и вырос в балтийских болотах...” (Бродский III: 131). See also Chapter 5.1.1 below.

271 Brodsky’s polemic allusion to Dante can be also connected to Mandel’shtam’s paraphrase “И море и Гомер - все движется любовью” in “Бессонница. Гомер...”. I owe this observation to Professor Alexander Dolinin.
del’shtam, as well. Stars in his poems of the 1920’s instil distrust, hostility and fear in the poet. Stars are cold and indifferent to man. The stars with their sharp rays and edges cause metaphysical pain. In his St. Petersburg poetry the ambiguous character of the stars is connected with the indefinite fate of the city. The death of the city, Petropolis, is depicted as a cosmic drama. Brodsky shares Mandel’shtam’s negative view on the heavenly light. Stars are either indifferent to man’s desires, or, worse still, they seem to emanate anxiety and pain - an attitude which resonates Auden’s meditation on stars in “The More Loving One”.

The theme of pain expressed by means of tropes, runs through Mandel’shtam’s “Ленинград”. On the lexical level the theme manifests itself through numerous expressions, including the following:

Я вернулся в мой город, знакомый до слез, 
До прожилок, до детских припухлых желез.

Ты вернулся сюда, так глотай же скорей
Рыбий жир ленинградских речных фонарей,
/.../
Я на лестнице черной живу,
И в висок
Ударяет мне вырванный с мясом звонок,

И всю ночь напролет жду гостей дорогих,
Шевеля кандалами цепочек дверных.

As Levin points out, the theme of pain is rendered with physiological undertones. When linked with the theme of childhood, it acquires an additional touch of vulnerability and insecurity. In “Ленинград” certain places serve as metaphors for pain: the typically St. Petersburg light of the riverlamps is juxtaposed to fish liver oil or the sound of the doorbell which hits the lyrical subject in the temples in yet another locus - familiar from the Petersburg Text - the back stairs where the safety chain of the door turns into the heavy, painful chains of a prisoner. Especially the two

---

272 For Mandel’shtam’s star symbolism, see, e.g. Ginzburg 1989: 124-125, Przybylski 1987: 141-143.
273 “Looking up the stars, I know quite well / That, for all they care, I can go to hell, / But on earth indifference is the least / We have to dread from man or beast. /.../.” (Auden 1979: 237).
first stanzas portray St. Petersburg as the poet’s infantile disease\textsuperscript{276} (unlike in the previously mentioned poem “Я больше не ребенок...”).

Similar reminiscences of the disease are to be found in Brodsky’s Florence, too; The fish-oil of the riverlamps together with the swollen ironpills now appears in the form of pills that are supposed to numb memory:

Глаз, мигая, заглатывает, погружаясь в сырые сумерки, как таблетки от памяти, фонари /.../.

(Section II)

We may nevertheless assume, that Brodsky’s lyrical subject is not exactly in the same position as the lost souls in Dante’s Hell. Although he too is tormented by memories of the past, it is the beautiful memories, not the painful ones, that make him want to forget. The “pills of the streetlamps” by the river Arno assume the role of the river Lethe, which washes away the painful memories of the past life. The Arno - for one who is used to the deep Neva - is too shallow to swallow the memories. They would not sink deep enough, but would disturbingly return back to the surface. The disturbing memory is aroused by the surrounding visual stimuli. The ”medicine” against his memory is swallowed by the eyes, not by the mouth, precisely for the reason that the purpose of the ”pills of the streetlamps” is to dull the vision of the lyrical subject, which is oriented towards the not so distant past to which he has no return. He tries to prevent himself from seeing beyond the surrounding reality to the lost world of his life in Leningrad. One is in danger of becoming lost in the world of one’s memories, in one’s past, in the same way as Dante went astray in the prologue of his Comedy. The world of memories is located in the mind. It is that mindscape consisting of the details of St. Petersburg-Leningrad space which lives within the lyrical subject.

In addition to the memory-numbing pills of the streetlamps, Brodsky tries other remedies for his infantile disease, homesickness, as well:

\textsuperscript{276} In this respect Mandel’shtam’s view of the city coincides with the thoughts of his hero Parnok in “Египетская марка”: “Он думал, что Петербург - его детская болезнь и что стоит лишь очухаться, очнуться - и наваждение рассыпается: он выздоровеет, станет как все люди; пожалуй, женится даже...”(т. 2, 1993: 491). But, as Przybylski maintains, Mandel’shtam knew that he would not become like everyone else. The two simultaneously existing forms of the same city - the mythic St. Petersburg of his childhood and the real Leningrad, divided the personality of the poet, turning part of his being into an alien ”you” who emerges in “Ленинград” (Przybylski 1987: 144-147).
В пыльной кофейне /.../
Солнечный луч /.../
проникает сквозь штору и согревает вены
gрязного мрамора, кадку с цветком вербены;
и щегол разливается в центре проволочной Равенны.

(Section VI)

He, almost in passing, mentions a flower of verbena growing in the pot in the dusty cafe warmed by a ray of winter sunlight. Owing to its iron content, verbena was used as herbal medicine. Verbena’s old Russian name “железняк” discloses its connection to Mandel’shtam’s “childish swollen iron” that one had to take when young, in order to prevent anaemia, a common disease among children, especially in winter-time. Anaemia leads the thoughts to blood and veins; Brodsky replaces Mandel’shtam’s ”прожилки” with veins of an inanimate material, namely marble (”вены грязного мрамора”), which are invigorated by the warmth of the sun.

Not forgetting the double exposure of Brodsky’s poem, the verbena flower can, naturally, be associated as well with the city of Florence and its banished poet. The name of the city, Florence (<flora), Firenze in Italian, originates from the word ”fiore” denoting ‘a flower’. A white lily is depicted in the coat of arms of the capital of Tuscany. Furthermore, in medieval Florence verbena was used in treaty rituals by kings and princes. It might well be that the decision to banish Dante from his native city was sanctified with a bunch of verbena. Besides, it may be worth noting in this connection that Dante was a member of the Doctors’

---

277 “Железняк” (verbena officinalis) also appeared in fairy-tales. With its help one could break iron locks and bolts. See В. Даль: Толковый словарь живого великорусского языка. Т.1 A-З 1989: 532.
278 The opposite phenomenon of blood petrifying to veins in a piece of marble is more common in Brodsky’s poetry, see e.g. “Римские элегии” (Бродский III 1997: 227-232). For a comprehensive elucidation of the theme of petrification in Brodsky’s poems with classical motifs, see Ungurianu 1996: 168-170, 177, 181.
279 In the English version of ”December in Florence” Brodsky assigns the attribute “snow-white” to the verbena flower. The colour links the flower not only to the Northern winter, but also to the DC; in Par. XVI: 150 Dante mentions the lily, symbolising the just and invincible city of Florence, which ”on the lance was never seen / reversed, nor through division tinctured gules.”
and Pharmacists’ Guild, notwithstanding the fact that he joined it only in order to be able to partake in the work of the city council\textsuperscript{281}.

It seems obvious that Brodsky had many reasons to choose the flower of verbena to decorate the interior of the Florentine cafe. One of the motives was, perhaps, the phonetic similarity of verbena with the Latin word for logos, word - verbum, verba, yet another association that brings together scattered details which at first sight might seem to be of minor significance. The connection of seemingly loose, independent motives by means of phonetical resemblance\textsuperscript{282} - as we already observed when examining the semantic chains of rhymes that appear to function as thematic summaries - reinforces the assumption that in Brodsky’s poetry nothing is arbitrary. Each and every word, name, sound, pause or punctuation mark has a meaning that contributes to the creation of his entire poetic universe.

Such being the case, the numerals that appear in “DF” - which could otherwise be perceived as a mere parody on Dante’s medieval numerology - are not without significance when seen in the light of the revealed subtexts in Mandel’shtam’s poetry. Numerals emerge in Section Five, which depicts a visit of the lyrical subject to an apartment:

Mounting the stairs is, again, an allusion to a widely quoted passage from the DC (Par. XVII: 48, 54-60), in which Cacciaguida predicts the future life of Dante in exile:

/.../ tal di Fiorenza partir ti convene. /.../

\textsuperscript{281} As Lagercrantz (1966: 146) notes, despite of his membership in the Pharmacists’ Guild, Dante was never known to have grown any medicinal herbs, (such as verbena), as chemists and doctors used to do at that time.

\textsuperscript{282} “Цветок” could also refer to the other “М”, one of the hidden allusions to poets in “DF” - Marina Tsvetayeva (< цветок). As a matter of fact, ”вёрбена” bears a phonoetical resemble to “вёрба” - the willow. Tsvetayeva identified herself with the willow, calling herself e.g. ”вёрбная птица /.../ пополам расколота” in the poem “Между воскресеньем и субботой.”.
Tu lascerai ogni cosa diletta
più caramente; e questo è quello strale
tu lascerai ogni cosa diletta
che l’arco dello essilio pria saetta.
Tu proverai sì come sa di sale
lo pane altrui, e come è duro calle
lo scendere e ‘l salir per l’altrui scale.\textsuperscript{283}

As mentioned above, the directions of Dante’s movement in the DC are vertical. He descends to Hell and ascends the mountain of Purgatory till he reaches the earthly Paradise. From there he continues up to the rings of Paradise in heavenly spheres. Brodsky’s lyrical subject ascends, too, albeit not to heaven. His destination is an apartment which is pictured by means of a metaphor of a sore mouth\textsuperscript{284}. His “hard palate-heaven” lacks every distinguishing divine attribute apart from “two numbers eight” that “surround” the hero in the vestibule. Rigsbee\textsuperscript{285} has interpreted those eights as referring to the symbol of infinity if laid in a horizontal position. Up to the present, I have come across only one attempt to elucidate the significance of the preceding number “16” in the same stanza\textsuperscript{286}. It might simply be, of course, that “16” refers to the number of the apartment.

Stanza Six in Mandel’shtam’s “Ленинград” and Brodsky’s episode of a visit to a Florentine apartment narrated in Section Five share the motives of “stairs” as well as that of “the ring of a doorbell”, albeit the depicted situation, the position of the lyrical subject in particular, is drastically different in the two texts:

\textsuperscript{283} “.../ thyself from Florence driven forth must be. /.../ Thou shalt leave each thing that most tenderly / thou lov’st; and this, of arrows from the bow / of exile, is the first that it lets fly. / Thou shalt make proof how salt the taste doth grow / of others’ bread, and how it tires the feet / still up, still down, by others’ stairs to go.”

\textsuperscript{284} A similar metaphor, drawing a parallel between a staircase and a sore palate, is to be found in “Венецианские строфы (1)”: “/.../ и подъезды, чье нёбо воспалено ангиной / лампочки, произносят ‘а’.” (Бродский III: 236).

\textsuperscript{285} Rigsbee 1999: 111.

\textsuperscript{286} In Ranchin’s view, the number “16” is an allusion to the following lines in Khodasevich’s poem “Баллада”: “Смотрю в штукатурное небо / На солнце в шестнадцать свечей.”. Ranchin asserts that the metaphor used by Khodasevich and Brodsky stresses the feelings of isolation and captivity that one develops when surrounded by artificial objects in the mortal world (Ранчин 2001: 378). Apart from being based on what I take to be a mistaken analysis of Brodsky’s lines (due to insufficient evidence of the linkage between the two texts), Ranchin’s interpretation fails to take into account the ambiguous character of material objects in Brodsky’s poetry. Material objects, cultural objects in particular, are not invested with exclusively negative values.
Я на лестнице черной живу, и в висок
Ударяет мне вырванный с мясом звонок /.../.

“Ленинград” was written in 1930 when the Mandel’shtams returned to Leningrad for a short period of time after having been in Armenia. They stayed a couple of months in the apartment which belonged to Yevgeny Emilevich Mandel’shtam, Osip’s brother, on Basil Island. The house No. 31 on the Eight Line is the place where “Ленинград” was actually written. However, the number of the apartment situated on the fifth floor was not “16”, but “5”. Both of the doorbells pictured by Brodsky and Mandel’shtam, respectively, had certainly seen better days. In “Ленинград” the mere impression of a torn-out bell, ”вырванный с мясом”, evokes a sensation of pain. Brodsky’s hoarse bell that has not been used for a long time is a signal to enter an apartment, the interior of which is left undescribed.

Apart from ”Ленинград”, Mandel’shtam has another poem with back stairway, namely ”Слыши, слыши ранний лед...”288, which we included among the poems where the St. Petersburg-Florence parallel emerges through evident allusions to the DC, indicating the shared destiny of an exiled poet:

С черствых лестниц, с площадей
с угловатыми дворцами
Круг Флоренции своей
Альгери пел мощней
Утомленными губами.

287 The exterior of house No. 31 is, according to Aleksandr Kushner, that of a typical St. Petersburg building from the beginning of the 20th century. In 1991 a plaque was placed on the wall to commemorate Mandel’shtam’s centenary, with an inscription - the first line of his “Ленинград”. Kushner depicts the interior of apartment No. 5 as follows: ”Не знаю, хотел бы Мандельштам и в самом деле вернуться сюда сегодня, - не уверен. Фасад подкрасили, привели в порядок ... но лестница, парадная лестница /.../, но квартира ... Впрочем, квартира и тогда, наверное, была страшноватой. /.../ Дикая, запущенная коммуналка. /.../ Сначала тусклая передняя, потом узкий, заставленный вещами коридор. /.../ Здесь на выкрашенной в темную касторовую краску двери черного входа сохранился закрашенный железный желобок для цепочки (самой цепочки уже не было). Вот он, его можно было потрогать! /.../ - неопровержимое, железное свидетельство абсолютной поэтической достоверности /.../. Что до самой черной лестницы, то кто же не знает этой чудовищной, одуряющей смеси, головокружительного запаха кошек и картофельных очисток!” (Кушнер 2001).

The attribute that Mandel’shtam attaches to the stairs - "черственный" - "hard or stale", is normally associated with bread. He thus manages to incorporate in one line both archetypal symbols of exile - alien bread as well as alien places. Most of the adjectives which Brodsky attributes to the stairs leading to the “palate-apartment” seem similarly out of place: "ломанные", "обветша́лые", "плоские" - “broken”, “decrepit”, “flat” teeth, “the inflamed palate” with its "шершавый", "неизмени́нный" - "scabrous", “sure-as-fate” number ”16”. Furthermore, such an accumulation of adjectives is rarely encountered in Brodsky’s poetical oeuvre. All these epithets seem to allude to the many steps on these stairs, implying simultaneously - by means of the oral imagery - the many words that have burst out from a banished poet’s throat in the course of centuries. Furthermore, the adjective "ломанный" may be associated with both the material referent of the trope, i.e. with the depicted space, as well as with its immaterial referent, i.e. speech. When used in reference to language, "ломанный" - “speaking with a foreign accent”, “in broken language” - obtains a connotation which suggests that one is not in one’s own linguistic environment²⁸⁹.

Despite the fact that Brodsky’s poem lacks direct allusions to the metaphor of “the bitter bread of exile”²⁹⁰, it would not be difficult to imagine that the inflamed palate might have been caused by swallowing the “stale bread of exile” - the fate allotted exclusively to poets in enforced emigration. It may also be an outcome of the pleas of the poet that were evoked by the very condition of exile.

However, it is not only the peculiar epithets attributed to the stairs that Mandel’shtam’s poem invoking ”Florence in St. Petersburg” has in common with Brodsky’s “DF” which, in its part, calls forth the theme of

"St. Petersburg in Florence". In both of these poems the eye takes over the function of the mouth\(^{291}\). In Mandel’shtam’s "Слышу, слышу ранний лед..." the lyrical subject - now present in his city only as a shadow - "gnaws" with his eyes the grainy St. Petersburg granite, in the same manner as the gaze of Brodsky’s lyrical substitute “swallows” the pills of the streetlamps. In Glazova’s\(^{292}\) words, the hard granite evokes not only the bitter bread of exile granted to the one who climbs another’s stairs, but it stands for all the past suffering that the poet subsequently ‘grinds’ into the material of his poetic work. As a consequence of his effort, the hard grains are transformed into the unsweetened bread of poetry. Moreover, the more the poet suffers, the more powerful his voice - the voice of Dante gains strength as his lips tire. The same logic applies to Brodsky’s conception of poetry - and suffering as one of its incentives. The sorer the throat of the poet, the coarser his voice - the further his song will carry in space and time.

### 3.1.2.1 Speech vs. Scripture

As was already indicated, the numbers in “DF” can be construed as a parody on Dante’s magic numbers.\(^{293}\) However, the manifold connections to Mandel’shtamian subtexts, (which we tried to clarify above), point to Mandel’shtam as a potential source of Brodsky’s numerology. Mandel’shtam writes in “Ленинград”:

Петербург! Я еще не хочу умирать:
У тебя телефонов моих номера.

Петербург! у меня еще есть адреса,
По которым найду мертвцев голоса.


\(^{293}\) On Dantean numerology, see, e.g. Благой 1977: 149, Lagercrantz 1966: 121. Beatrice’s divine nature was expressed by the number "3", associated with the holy trinity. The number “9” ("3 x 3") is another one of Dante’s divine numerals. In “DF” the number “9” is embedded in the organisation of the text. It is divided into nine sections, each of them consisting of nine lines.
As Levin\textsuperscript{294} points out in his account, contrary to common conceptions, the voices correspond to addresses in "Ленинград" and not to telephone numbers as one would expect.\textsuperscript{295} Furthermore, the addresses belong to the voices of the deceased, which is an oxymoron as such. Meetings with old acquaintances could, in principle, be possible if one still recalls their addresses, but since it is the dead who occupy the apartments, an actual meeting is out of question. If we follow the analogy of Mandel'shtam's poem, according to which an address corresponds to a voice, in our investigation of Brodsky's enigmatic line, the "шершавое, неизменное " number ”16” appears to be both an address and a voice. Indeed, the adjective ”шершавый” is often used in connection with the word ”tongue”, ”язык” - a fact which already relates the numerical to the speech act and, eventually, to the theme of poetry.

In Mandel'shtam's view, living poetry is analogous to speech or sound, as was already mentioned. He linked existence with speech. Existence is incomplete if we cannot hear it. Sound is the living form of the word, whereas the word that does not resound remains an abstraction. He believed that the poet must speak, not write, because the spoken word is the only defence against time, which unavoidably devours culture.\textsuperscript{296} Hence his searching for the voices of the dead.

Death, together with other forms of absence, has a language of its own, at least in Brodsky's poetical realm. Silence is the principal language of death. In "DF" it appears in Section Five, epitomised in the image of a doorbell which has lost its voice:

Пугающий безголосьем,  
звонок порождает в итоге скрипучее ”просим, просим”:
в прихожей вас обступают две старые цифры “8”.

It finally manages to produce a sound and by this action it resurrects the voices of the dead poets. While Mandel'shtam is orientated toward speech, it could seem that Brodsky’s predilection is for written text, as

\textsuperscript{294} Левин 1998b: 20.  
\textsuperscript{295} As in Mandel'shtam’s "Ленинград", it is the city that keeps the phone book of its citizens, see "К Урании": "Вон они, те леса, где полно черники, / реки, где ловят рукой белугу, / либо - город, в чьей телефонной книге / ты уже не числишься.” (Бродский III: 248). Mandel'shtam’s lines resonate also in one of Brodsky’s “Ovidian” poems, “Отрывок”: "Назо, Рима не тревожь. / Уж не помнишь сам / тех, кому ты письма шлешь. / Может, мертвецам.” (Бродский II: 100). For a discussion of the poem, see also Ungurianu 1996: 166.  
\textsuperscript{296} Sicher 1989: 42, Przybylski 1987: 201.
Ranchin suggests\(^\text{297}\). The last line of Section Eight could serve as a test piece which enables a more detailed examination of Brodsky’s supposed inclination to scripture.

О, неизбежность ”ы” в правописании ”жизни”!

Bethea’s\(^\text{298}\) account of “DF” pays attention to the fact that ”ы” appears actually in the pronunciation of the word “жизни”, not in its spelling, as Brodsky maintains. He relates the inevitability of the emergence of ”ы”, instead of ”и”, to the theme of separation, which penetrates all layers of life, even writing. In my view, the line quoted above could also be perceived, once again, as a reference to Dante. As is well known, Dante wrote the DC using the dialect of Tuscany, i.e. a vernacular which subsequently formed the basis for the Italian literary language. It may be that with this line Brodsky wanted to highlight the great impact that spoken language has on the development of literary language, let alone the language of poetry, with its capability to incorporate the whole stylistic richness of the spoken language. Besides - who knows - maybe ”жизни” will one day indeed be written as it is pronounced, i.e. with the letter “ы”. Considering Bethea’s elucidation, that would even seem to be a more correct way to spell this word since this spelling is better suited to actual life seen as a succession of partings and separations. Brodsky’s outlook on life as a chain of separations becomes evident in the concluding section of “DF”:

---

\(^{297}\) In Ranchin’s view, Brodsky’s orientation towards language [conceived of as opposed to speech - MK] is expressed, among other things, in the very poetic devices that I have called ideograms above. Ranchin’s term for the device is “буквописание”. In Brodsky’s poetics, language comes to the fore, it appears as important as the message of communication. It is as if language becomes the creator of the text which leads to the “anonymity” of the author, who ultimately estranges himself from the text (Ранчин 1993: 472). Zubova, in turn, emphasises the fact that in this kind of linguistic imagery - of which the quoted above line from “DF” ( “О, неизбежность ”ы” в правописании “жизни”!) is a representative - language as an instrument of description of the world is transformed into an object of description. Language is conceived of not only as a means of communication, but also as a form of existence of the subject, and, in addition to that, as his essential being. This entails that the poet’s consciousness is formed by language, by the written form of language in particular. In Zubova’s opinion, in the quoted-above line, written by Brodsky: “Сознание фиксируется на художественном и философском осмыслении орфографических правил, формы букв, знаков препинания.” (Зубова 2000: 15-18). Contrary to Ranchin, Lotman argues that Brodsky’s seeming penchant for the written form of the text is deceptive (Лотман М.1995: 321, 329).

\(^{298}\) Bethea 1994: 72; ”ы”’s ‘inevitability” in the spelling of ”жизни” is due to the fact that ”ы” is written separately, while ”и” is written together in one stroke.
The presence of the letter "ы" unites the words "язык" and "убыл". The letter "ы", in its essence, is a sign pertaining to the language of absence, which materialises in the two meanings that the verb "убыть" can be assigned. This letter “ы” stands for absence in space, absence with a touch of finality, demise. The language of absence presents itself in this life as well, in the lyrical substitute’s existence “here and now”, which seems to consist primarily of his awareness of the things that are missing. Thus, Brodsky’s literally false statement about the inevitable appearance of “ы” in the spelling of “жизни” may be metaphorically, or even metaphysically true. As Goodman maintains, these kinds of false assertions may mark the way to new associations, or they may also expose precisely those things or ideas which they do not say, i.e. they function as trenchant metaphorical examples of unuttered features and feelings.

Furthermore, when considering the difference between written and spoken texts, one could come to the conclusion - having in mind Mandel’shtam’s perception of speech as a sign of life - that Brodsky’s view on this issue coincides with that of Mandel’shtam. For Mandel’shtam, sound represents the living form of the word, whereas a word which does not resound remains an abstraction or mere calligraphy. Existence is incomplete if it cannot be heard. The people “there”, in the “distant elsewhere”, in Brodsky’s “lost paradise” talk in his own tongue, while he himself can resort to its written form only. Even in written form, on a sheet of paper, with no concrete referent, or audience for that matter, the Cyrillic letters seem to lose there semantic value, to the point that they turn into detached units, mere figures, unable to form complete words with comprehensive meaning. What has become the lyrical subject’s form of existence - the rustling pen and its scribbles on the paper - re-

300 Goodman 1978: 18.
301 Przybylski 1987: 201, see, e.g. "Разговор о Данте": "Поэтическая материя не имеет голоса. //...// по той простой причине, что она существует лишь в исполнении. Готовая вещь есть не что иное, как каллиграфический продукт, //...// не что иное, как буквеница, вполне соизмеримая с чернильницей.” (Мандельштам, т. 3, 1994: 259).
flects actually his grievance for another, more real life in his native city. It is a form of existence that he conceives of as an inevitable replica of the fates of Dante or Mandel’shtam.

In fact, Dante’s yearning for his hometown reappears as a symbol of attachment to life in Mandel’shtam’s poetry. Dante’s attachment to Florence signifies the very essence of love of life, which finds its form of manifestation in such poems by Mandel’shtam as "Не разнят меня с жизнью..." and "Не сравнивай: живущий неравным". In yet another Dantesque poem, "Мы будем помнить и в летейской стуже, /Что десяти небес нам стоила земля...", Mandel’shtam refers to the price of our earthly life - it is worth all ten heavens of Dante’s Paradise. You have to pay a high price for your existence, as Brodsky states in Section Eight of “DF”, rhyming "high price" with "life":

/.../ репродукторы лают о дорогоизне.
О, неизбежность "ты" в правописанье "жизни"!

While the last section of Brodsky’s poem is a catalogue of the things that he was forced to leave behind in his native city, in "Я входил вместо дикого зверя в клетку", a poem written on his 40th birthday, Brodsky seems to compile a list of all the things that he has had to give up or to go through in order to make up for life up till that special moment - “the midway upon the journey of life”. He was obliged to ”quit the country that bore and nursed” him and, subsequently, he had no alternative but to munch the ”stale and warty” bread of exile.

Mandel’shtam deals in his “Разговор о Данте” with an incident in the “Divine Comedy” which testifies to the strain and pain that it causes the exiled poet to talk about Florence to his former fellow citizens, who now inhabit Inferno.

302 Ibid. 194-195.
303 Cf. “Темза в Челси” where the “high price of life” is listed as a feeling of the astonished lyrical subject towards life: “Как ты жил в эти годы?” - “Как буква ‘г’ в ‘ого’.” / “Опиши свои чувства”. - “Смущался дорогоизне”. / “Что ты любишь на свете сильней всего?” - / “Реки и улицы - длинные вещи жизни”. (Бродский III: 77). In the last stanza of the poem reminiscences from Mandel’shtam’s “telephone numbers” in “Ленинград” are echoed. We can also detect in it an allusion to the “two lives” of the lyrical subject: “Город Лондон прекрасен. /.../ И когда в нем спишь, номера телефонов прежней / и текущей жизни, слившись, дают цифирь / астрономической масти.”
Вопрошают трое именитых флорентийцев. О чем? Конечно о Флоренции. /.../ Ответ получается лапидарный и жестокий - в форме выкрика. При этом у самого Данта после отчаянного усилія дергається подбородок и запрокидывается голова - и это дано ни более ни менее как в авторской ремарке: “Così gridai colla faccia levata”.

Apart from appearing as the motto of “Разговор о Данте”, the expression “with face raised”- “запрокинув голову”, is employed by Mandel’shtam in one of his “Goldfinch” poems, “Мой щегол”, я голову закину...”, yet another December poem where the poet is identified with the bird. The goldfinch appears also in Section Six of Brodsky’s poem depicting Florence:

/.../ ощущая нехватку в терцинах, в клетке
dряхлый щегол выводит свои коленца.
/.../
и щегол разливается в центре проволочной Равенны.

Without going into a detailed examination of the obvious connections of Brodsky’s goldfinch to both Dante and Mandel’shtam, I refer the reader to Bethea and Ranchin, who have provided excellent analyses of the subject. However, the fact that bird symbolism, which we find in abundance in Mandel’shtam’s poetry, is closely tied to the themes of poetry and writing cannot be overlooked. Mandel’shtam reminds the reader of the organic connection between the act of writing and birds. He does not forget that the poet’s instrument, his quill is actually a feather formed into a pen for writing. In Mandel’shtam’s view, Dante Alighieri did not forget this origin of his pen either:

Иногда, очень редко, он [Данте - МК] показывает нам свой письменный прибор. Перо называется ”penna”, то есть участ-

---

304 See “Разговор о Данте” (Мандельштам т. 3, 1994: 235-236). Mandel’shtam is referring to cantos 67-78 of Inf. XVI: “/.../ cortesia e valor di se dimora / nella nostra citta si come sòle, / o se del tutto se n’è gita fora; /.../ Così gridai con la faccia levata; / e i tre, che ciò inteser per risposta, guardar l’un l’altro com’ al ver si guata.” (“/.../ tell us if courtesy and valour, the same / as ever, dwell within our city, or / whether she now has wholly banished them; /.../ Thus, with face raised, I cried; and the three took / my words, when heard, for answer, and each one/gazed at others, as at truth men look.”)

вует в птичьем полете /.../ Перо рисует каллиграфические буквы, выводит имена собственные и нарицательные. **Перо - кусочек птичьей плоти.** Дант, никогда не забывающий происхождения вещей, конечно, об этом помнит. **Техника письма с его нажимами и закруглениями перерастает в фигурный полет птичьих стай.**

Neither bird metaphors nor ”flying figures of flocks of birds ” are unknown in Brodsky’s poetry. He, too, does not forget the origin of things and phenomena. The voice of his decrepit Florentine goldfinch finally carries all the way up till Ravenna; even the dead poet will obtain a voice precisely by means of enigmatic calligraphies, such as ”кольца, петли... ”м”, ”ж”, ”ы” and others that his pen has produced on paper.

Florence was a starting point for Dante’s journey on earth, Ravenna his final destination. These two cities are linked together by the song of the goldfinch - the song which arises to a considerable extent as a result of the enforced emigration of the poet-bird. Brodsky’s starting point is the city of St. Petersburg-Leningrad, Florence being just one stop on the journey. Nevertheless, the capital of Tuscany is a place which appears in Russian poetry to a large extent as the symbol of the unforgettable, unattainable, cursed native city of an exiled poet. In this respect Brodsky remains true to the tradition.

His native place can be found anywhere, since its location is no longer tied to a particular space. It does not refer to itself only through things of the material world, but it lurks behind the writing, as well. Its presence can be discovered in various texts, in biographies of other authors, as well as in individual linguistic signs.

There is no reason why emigration could not be compared to life written with ”ы”, with a sense of separation and death in it, bearing in mind that Mandel’shtam has likened life in emigration to the circles of Hell. With Dantean tones he describes exile as a condition in which one is constantly surrounded from each side by the presence of the lost city of birth:

Городолюбие, городострастие, городоненавистничество - вот материя inferno. Кольца ада не что иное, как сатурновы круги эмиграции. **Для изгнанника свой единственный, запрещенный и безвозвратно утраченный город развеян всюду** -

---

The main purpose of this examination of the intertextuality of "Декабрь во Флоренции" was to show how Brodsky’s Florentine poem acts as a focal point, drawing together several meanings, integrating the most diverse subtexts, of which the Dantean and Mandel’shtamian layers are the main components. “DF” contains reminiscences of other poetic texts, secret doubles which move from Florence towards the lost home in St. Petersburg. This poem is neither a mere travelogue, nor a simple juxtaposition of the good old hometown with the strange, indifferent location abroad, as it has sometimes been seen. The aching and nostalgia for home is present, but not overwhelming. The presence of St. Petersburg in the capital of Tuscany does not erase the unique outlines of the Florentine city-scape. Florence exists on its own right, it is not a poor shadow of St. Petersburg. Moreover, it is as if by peeling away the Florentine cover and revealing the outlines of St. Petersburg-Leningrad underneath, Brodsky is searching not only for his past, but also for a firm link that connects the Russian texts and poets, (himself included), whom he regards highly, with their Italian inspirations.

Apart from poetry, one of the links that connects these two worlds is architecture. In fact, it is to a great extent to architecture that Russian literature owes the birth of the myth of the Italian St. Petersburg. The Italian character of St. Petersburg found its most visible manifestation in the city architecture, which the Silver Age poets raised to the symbol of beauty. This Italian “architecture of paradise” has its counterpart in the image of St. Petersburg in Brodsky’s works. For Brodsky exile meant banishment from an architectural paradise. What lies behind the paradisiac façades of “the second Florence” will be treated in the next chapter.

In the final analysis, Losev is correct in claiming that Brodsky, like his great Italian predecessor, sees his lost city everywhere, that his gaze is that of an exile and not that of a tourist. But there is more to this than he suggests. Despite the image of St. Petersburg-Leningrad that emerges from beneath the Florentine landscape, there are a number of other things in this centre of the Italian Renaissance that attract his eye so strongly that he holds them in esteem and even identifies himself with. The identi-
lication with the Florentine space often takes place with Dante and the "Divine Comedy" as mediators. I would rather agree with George L. Kline, who sees in Brodsky’s poetry, despite the sense of loss, separation and estrangement, a courageous acceptance of the pain and absurdity of human existence - a kind of being-at-home in homelessness - a condition that he shares with his great predecessors.

3.2 St. Petersburg as Paradise Lost

“The second Florence with paradisiac architecture” in “Декабрь во Флоренции” refers to the “paradise” from which the poet was expelled, i.e. to the city of St. Petersburg-Leningrad. St. Petersburg’s association with paradise has its origin in the foundation of the city. It was Peter the Great himself who repeatedly referred to his newly founded city as “парадиз”. In his notion of paradise some traditions from old Russian culture were integrated with commonplace Western conventions. As Lessing Baehr indicates, the eighteenth-century Russian paradise “megamyth” was the product of various classical, biblical and patristic traditions that gradually merged into one myth depicting the good life, including the myth of the ideal place. The myth of St. Petersburg as a spatial correlative for the ideal life was reflected in Russian literature of the 18th century, but by the beginning of the 19th century the motives of "Paradise Lost", as well as those of an Iron and Bronze Age, had come to replace the Paradise and the yearned for Golden Age.

In Brodsky’s works the paradisiac origin of St. Petersburg is reflected most clearly in his autobiographical descriptions of the Leningrad of his childhood, namely in the essays “Less than One”, “In a Room and a

311 Brodsky’s own commentary to “DF” can be conceived as evidence of his yearning to be identified with the Florentine space: “Когда пишешь стихи о каком-нибудь месте, пишешь так, как будто там живешь /.../. Но в таком случае, если стихотворение написано, даже уехав из этого места, ты в нем продолжаешь жить. Ты это место не то что одомашниваешь, а становишься им.” (Бродский 1995: 174).
312 Kline 1990: 78.
313 The history of St. Petersburg, according to the myth, is a closed system. Its existence is nothing more than a momentary breakdown of cosmos/order into chaos. Thus construed, the city has its origin in the chaotic Underworld, which explains the eschatological aspect inherent in the St. Petersburg myth. The city owes its "paradisiac" nature to the visions of Peter I who, as a demiurge, transformed the chaos into order (Топоров 1995: 295).
Half”, as well as in “A Guide to a Renamed City”. It is in these essays, written in English, that the urban landscape momentarily obtains traits of its idyllic ideal origin.

In the essays, the manifestations of paradise are related to the history of the city’s origin, to its architecture and to the element of the sea. The myth of genesis, of the birth of the city and its “creator” Peter the Great, is an essential part of the so-called St. Petersburg myth. As was mentioned in Chapter 2, in the figure of Peter the Great, idea (spirit) gains victory over materia, and materia is shaped according to the idea. The distinction between idea and materia, which is of utmost importance in Brodsky’s poetic philosophy is expressed in various polarities in his texts. In connection with the city of St. Petersburg, idea is made manifest precisely in the city architecture, in the combination of nature and art envisioned by Peter I. The origin of St. Petersburg is mythical and sacred to Brodsky. In Brodsky’s essays, Peter I, despite his brutality in realising his idea, is pictured as a great visionary with the power to make his dream come true in the material world. Or, as Holquist puts it, Peter was a utopian who was in a position to implement his total - and totalitarian - vision embracing social, religious as well as aesthetic spheres of life. Consequently, St. Petersburg, and all it stood for, was utopian by nature.

Apart from its architecture, the value of St. Petersburg for Brodsky as the embodiment of Peter the Great and his ideas lies in the history of the city’s imperial fleet and in Russian literature which, in Brodsky’s opinion, had its rise in this city on the banks of the Neva. Sea and fleet signify vastness, breadth, a clear space (простор). The sea for Brodsky is an infinite space which nevertheless is not chaotic. On the contrary, in its associations with the imperial fleet, the sea signifies the highest level of organisation, which would be impossible to achieve on firm ground. Vastness, liberty, dimensions reaching far into the distance are features of mythopoetical space as such. The experience of freedom in space is included in the very notion of vastness.

In Brodsky’s essays freedom and military order are not mutually exclusive qualities. The sea for him is not an unpredictable destructive

---

315 Brodsky 1986: 466.
316 Holquist 1972: 542.
317 St. Petersburg as a metaphor for utopia in Brodsky’s poetry is dealt with in Chapter 4 below.
318 Brodsky 1986: 76, 78.
319 “/.../ this Navy indeed was a vision: of a perfect, almost abstract order, borne upon the waters of the world’s oceans, as it could not be attained anywhere on Russian soil.” (Brodsky 1986: 466).
force of nature. Unlike space, water in Brodsky’s view does not try to push man aside, it does not conquer territory from land and it does not have a tendency to expand horizontally beyond its boundaries. However, Brodsky combines this typically romantic view of the sea as a metaphor of freedom and yearning with the rational idea that the sea is under the control of man. Simultaneously it remains as a way to another, different, unknown but inviting world. The sea does not menace Brodsky’s St. Petersburg in the form of floods. Instead of being engulfed by water the city is overwhelmed by a flood of architectural styles:

In the epochs following Peter’s, they started to build, not separate buildings but whole architectural landscapes. Russia opened the sluices and the baroque and classicism gushed into and inundated the streets and embankments of St. Petersburg. Organ-like forests of columns sprang high and lined up on the palatial façades ad infinitum in their miles-long Euclidian triumph. In acquiring its imperial look, this city was scrupulous to the very last detail: the granite revetment of the rivers and canals, the elaborate character of every curl on their cast-iron grilles, speak for themselves. When you look at the Neva’s panorama opening from the Trubetzkoy bastion of the Peter and Paul fortress, or at the Grand Cascade by the Gulf of Finland, you get the odd sensation that it’s not Russia trying to catch up with European civilization but a blown-up projection of the latter through a laterna magica onto an enormous screen of space and waters that takes place.

The façades of the palaces tell more about the whole history of western civilisation, about its origins, than about their own history. The history of the Russian empire, together with the present moment, is disclosed only when one takes a look behind the splendid façades, when one shifts one’s attention from form to content. As was noted, the rupture between form and content - a variant of the polarity of idea and materia - was sensed by Brodsky already as a boy when promenading along the streets of his native city and figuring out what life was like behind the granite walls of palaces:

As we made our way through the center of town, he [Alexander Brodsky, J.B’s father - MK] would tell me about this or that façade’s history, about what was here or there, before the war or

---

320 See, e.g. Brodsky 1986: 471.
before 1917. Who was the architect, who was the owner, who was the dweller, what happened to them, and, in his view, why. This six-foot-tall Navy commander knew quite a lot about civilian life, and gradually I began to regard his uniform as a disguise; more precisely, the idea of distinction between form and content began to take root in my schoolboy mind. His uniform had to do with this effect no less than the present content of the façades he was pointing at. In my schoolboy’s mind this disparity would re-fract, of course, into an invitation to lie /.../ deep down, though, I think this taught me the principle of maintaining appearances no matter what is going on inside.322

What made my factory different from my school wasn’t what I’d been doing inside each, not what I’d been thinking in the respective periods, but the way their façades looked, what I saw on my way to class or to the shop. In the last analysis, appearances are all there is. The same idiotic lot befell millions and millions. Existence as such, monotonous in itself, has been reduced to uniform rigidity by the centralized state. What was left to watch were faces, weather, buildings; also, the language people used.323

There were only two places in the whole town where the interior of the house and life inside corresponded to its eclectic appearance. One of the places was the apartment of his family in the so-called Muruzi House on the corner of Liteiny Prospect and Panteleimonovskaya Street (formerly Pestel’ Street) depicted in detail in “In a Room and a Half” 324. The other was the building of the Naval Museum, situated at the tip of Basil Island in the middle of the city. The Museum, the former Stock Exchange, built in the style of a Greek temple, is for Brodsky the embodiment of beauty and harmony. With its harmonious proportions together with its columns, it reminds one of the ideals of hellenism, of the “world culture” for which

322 Ibid. 467.
323 Ibid. 19-20.
324 Brodsky 1986: 458-459: “Oddly, the furniture we had matched the exterior and the interior of the building. It was as busy with curves, and as monumental as the stucco molding on the façade or the panels and pilasters protruding from the walls inside, skeined with plaster garlands of some geometrical fruits. /.../ And this was why, perhaps, after barely a year in that building, we felt we had lived there forever. The sensation that the chests had found their home, or the other way around, somehow made us realize that we, too, were settled, that we were not to move again.”
Mandel’shtam was yearning and which he too was able to find in the St. Petersburg architecture.325

When describing in his essays the monumental classical masterpieces of St. Petersburg architecture - “the architecture of paradise” indeed - Brodsky extols their outward beauty, which is by no means typical of his poetry. His eulogies are most eidetic, visual, inasmuch as the source of his aesthetic experience is the strong visual impression the buildings make on him. The overabundance of space, the exuberance of forms and elaborate details of the façades and cast-iron grilles make the city an embodiment of order with paradisiac features in Brodsky’s eyes. The surrounding classical architectural landscape finds its reflection in Russian poetry, which becomes inseparable from the topoi of the city right from its foundation on the banks of the river Neva:

Such was the history of Russian aesthetics that the architectural ensembles of St. Petersburg, churches included, were - and still are - perceived as the closest possible incarnation of such an order. In any case, a man who has lived long enough in this city is bound to associate virtue with proportion. This is an old Greek idea; but set under the northern sky, it acquires the peculiar authority of an embattled spirit and, to say the least, makes an artist very conscious of form. This kind of influence is especially clear in the case of Russian or, to name it by its birthplace, Petersburgian poetry. For two and a half centuries this school, from Lomonosov and Derzhavin to Pushkin and his pleiad /.../, to the Acmeists - Akhmatova and Mandel’shtam in this century - has existed under the very sign under which it was conceived: the sign of classicism.326

The straightness and impeccable perspective of St. Petersburg streets represent the ideal order of the ideal space as well. Like the sea, streets don’t

---

325 Ibid. 465-467: “/.../ the Navy Museum, located in the most beautiful building in the entire city. Which is to say, in the entire empire. The building was that of the former Stock Exchange: a far more Greek affair than any Parthenon, and far better situated as well, at the tip of Basil Island, which juts into the Neva River where it is at its widest. /.../ A child is always first of all an aesthete: he responds to appearances, to surfaces, to shapes and forms. There is hardly anything that I’ve liked in my life more than those clean-shaven admirals /.../ in their gilded frames /.../, they looked very much the instruments of a perfect, abstract ideal /.../. And one could only wish they ruled human waves as well: to be exposed to the rigors of their trigonometry rather than to a shoddy planimetry of ideologues, to be a figment of the vision, of a mirage perhaps, instead of a part of reality.”

326 Ibid. 83-84.
see to belong to the category of space. Petersburg prospects are open, infinite spaces leading to the horizon, where one may encounter the possibility of a new and different life. Prospect denotes both a broad view - an open horizon - and a future promise. It is as if St. Petersburg streets acquired the dimension of depth - a given quality of water - due to the very impression that they seem to have no end. Wide streets, together with the magnificent façades along them, predominate the image of the city of Brodsky’s childhood.

Paradise goes together with the notion of eternity. In the city of Brodsky’s childhood, eternity is achieved by stopping the motion of time. In space, eternity manifests itself in façades that are frozen in the position they had at the beginning of the 20th century. They are petrified in their eternal external beauty, having nothing in common either with the present or the future:

Once upon a time there was a little boy. /.../ And there was a city. The most beautiful city on the face of the earth. With an immense gray river that hung over its distant bottom like the immense gray sky over that river. Along that river there stood magnificent palaces with such beautifully elaborated façades that if the little boy was standing on the right bank, the left bank looked like the imprint of a giant mollusk called civilization. Which ceased to exist. /.../ The wide river lay white and frozen like a continent’s tongue lapsed into silence, and the big bridge arched against the dark blue sky like an iron palate.

Unlike people, objects are not subject to time in Brodsky’s poetic philosophy, at least not to the same extent as perishable human flesh. This is especially true in the case of the so-called city objects, the man-made objects that constitute the urban landscape. They are never completely devastated by time, they just decay, which is a consolatory idea for our poet. The value of the state of delapidation is in the fact that the traces left by time on walls and pilasters cannot be repeated - they remain unique.

The static monumental urban landscape pictured in Brodsky’s essays brings to mind the Neo-classical traditionalistic movement in the Russian arts at the beginning of the 20th century, the preservationists, who were,

---

327 While open horizontal space is a symbol for future and promise, the vertical axis is the symbol of hope. See Tuan 1997: 124.
328 Brodsky 1986: 32.
329 See, e.g. Степанян 1990: 33.
above all, ardent opponents of futurists. They considered Neo-classical architecture a manifestation of the authentic essence of beauty. For them, too, the exterior features of an edifice had more significance than its function. The façades and palaces depicted by Brodsky mainly fulfil an aesthetic function in addition to the fact that they are visible allusions to the fountainhead of European culture. However, the monumental buildings of St. Petersburg are not used for emphasising or justifying secular power, as happened in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century and later during the period of Stalinist culture. For Brodsky, as for some modernist movements - Acmeism in particular - they are signs of eternal values; harmony and beauty. On the other hand, their petrified appearance betrays the fact that they have become pure abstractions that lack contact with the surrounding reality.

It is this splendid architectural cornucopia that Brodsky was subsequently forced to leave behind. No wonder, then, that the very same architectural forms - silhouettes, cupolas, the play of light and shadows on the surfaces - are the main constituents of his Paradise Lost. The paradisiac aspect of the city is very rarely repeated in his poetry written in emigration. There may be some brief allusions to it, for example the already cited “paradisiac architecture” in “Декабрь во Флоренции”, but on the whole, signs of extraordinary beauty are hardly ever attributed to the city of St. Petersburg, as we shall see from the following elucidation of the poem “Пятая годовщина” - another work by Brodsky with some obvious allusions to the “Divine Comedy”.

---

330 For a discussion of preservationism, the revival of interest in imperial St. Petersburg, see Clark 1995: 54-73.
331 Petrification as such is a way to preserve, to keep the image of the city in one’s memory unchanged. In this respect Brodsky is a preservationist. His iconoclastic strivings are directed against the most insignificant objects in the city-space that can be regarded as symbols of the Soviet regime. His targets are among other things a standard wooden fence bordering each and every flower bed in the country or a horizontal blue stripe on the wall decorating the interior of every public building, be it a hospital, school, prison or factory. The strength of these phenomena is in their frequency, not in their impressive appearance. They underscore the monotony and predictability of reality, they become symbols of the surrounding unidimensional (also in the political sense of the word) reality that sets limits to each individual’s social and personal choices. (see Brodsky 1986: 11-12, 25-26).
3.3 “Пятая годовщина” - The Lost Paradise or the Lost Hell?

“For the world’s beauty is decayd, or gone,
Beauty, that’s colour, and proportion.”
(John Donne: The First Anniversary. An Anatomy of the World)

The poem “Пятая годовщина”, dedicated to the fifth anniversary of Brodsky’s forced emigration, was written on the fourth of June 1977, as its title indicates. Rarely in Brodsky’s poetry is exact date of writing recorded by the author, to say nothing of doing so in the title. This gives reason to assume that it has a special semantic function, the significance of which is enhanced by its occupying such a conspicuous place in the composition of the text. In fact, the date works here as a device for decoding the content of the poem. Mints\(^{332}\) has distinguished two possibilities for “the secondary” semantics of dates in a literary text. A date may orient the given text in extra-textual, historical time, in which case the date placed by the author is a metonymic sign representing the text in its entirety. Apart from this, “the author’s date” can also incorporate and juxtapose different real events that in one way or another are related to the time of writing into the content and structure of the given text. In the latter case the date as a metonymic sign does not refer to the text but activates the broad extra-textual situation embedded in the date.

We can say with certainty that June 4, 1977 in Brodsky’s poem refers to a concrete event in the poet’s life. At the time of writing the text exactly five years had passed since the day that he was compelled to leave the Soviet Union. This date marks a significant turning-point in the personal life of the poet, and its presence in the poem casts the whole text into a certain light. In part for this reason, “Пятая годовщина” could be called an occasional poem - a memorial written by a poet in exile for his homeland.

In “Пятая годовщина” the situation of the poet in real, historical time and space is reflected in many aspects of the text. In this case, unlike in “Декабрь во Флоренции”, the object of representation does not leave room for speculation - it is unambiguously the birthplace of the poet, without any overlaying by images of other cities. Nevertheless, “Пятая годовщина” is not explicitly a poem about St. Petersburg-Leningrad. As is usually the case in Brodsky’s poetry, the name of the depicted place remains unuttered. Furthermore, the scope of the poem

\(^{332}\) Минц 1989: 147.
extends beyond the boundaries of “the Northern capital”. In fact, only Sections VII-IX are clearly about St. Petersburg-Leningrad, while Sections I-VI can be understood to refer to the whole country, to Soviet society in its entirety.333

What, then, relates “PG”334, a poem picturing life in the Soviet Union in the 1960’s and the early ‘70’s, to Dante’s “Divine Comedy”? Once again, we can take formal aspects of the poem as a starting point. It goes without saying that the mere appearance of terza rima immediately points to Dante, although certain details in the rhyme scheme and metre differ from Dante’s usage335. Brodsky employs regular sets of triple rhymes - three-line stanzas with triple feminine rhymes AAA BBB CCC, each section consisting of three tercets. According to Lilly336, Brodsky’s compositional design in “PG” is almost without precedent in Russian poetry. The metre of the poem is the “classical verse” of Russian poetry - iambic hexameter - rarely used in the 20th century Russian poetry. Lilly has observed that Brodsky used iambic hexameter on two other occasions only, namely in a genuine occasional poem “На столетие Анны Ахматовой” and in “Чем больше черных глаз...”.

In addition to the Dantean terza rima, Brodsky’s use of Dantean numerology is more obvious in “PG” than it was in “DF”. As we can observe from the following, the symbol of the Holy Trinity - the number

333 Petr Vail’ is of the opinion that “Пятая годовщина” testifies to Brodsky’s interest in social and political questions, along with such poems as “Представление”, “Post aetatem nostram” and other works like “Мрамор” or “Демократия” (Вайл 1996: 150). Batkin, on the other hand, considers “Пятая годовщина” as Brodsky’s sole significant “political” poem (Баткин 1997: 281). Although the political aspects of its content are not the main concern of this study, it should be noted that “Пятая годовщина” aroused the anger of “patriots” in the Soviet press in 1988. Prominent personalities in the cultural life of Russia - Dmitri Likhachev, among others - stood up for Brodsky, see Гордин 1997: 70, 73.

334 Hereinafter “Пятая годовщина” is referred to in the text and in the footnotes as “PG”.

335 Dante, like Brodsky, used feminine rhymes only in the “Divine Comedy”. His rhyme structure ABABBCDC... suggests a continuity which is lacking in Brodsky’s use of rhymes. In Dante’s work the central verse of a terzina prepares the ear for the verses rhyming with it in the following terzina. The rhymes link the stanzas structurally and weld the whole poem into one whole. (Bickersteth 1965: xxx). Its wholeness and continuity are emphasised by linking the cantos together, whereas in “PG” each terzina forms a separate stanza. Instead of Dante’s hendecasyllables (ten-syllable or five-stressed line) Brodsky employs iambic hexameter.

336 Lilly 1995: 108. For rhyme patterns in “PG” see also Scherr 1990: 183-4, Polukhina 1989: 221 and Baranczak 1990: 212, who concludes that Brodsky’s formal devices serve as a means to overcome reality’s threatening pressure rather than to merely describe it.
three - occurs frequently in relationship with the strictly regular stanzic and metrical form of the poem: each line has 13 syllables\textsuperscript{337}, and consequently each triplet consists of 39 syllables. Each section includes three triplets. Furthermore, “PG” is composed of 32 tercets altogether, whereas Dante’s \textit{Inferno}, \textit{Purgatorio} and \textit{Paradiso} are comprised of 33 cantos each. In this figure Dante alludes to the number of years of Christ’s earthly life. By adding one canto as a prologue to \textit{Inferno}, Dante made the total of the cantos amount to the holy number of 100, symbolising perfection in the medieval mind. Brodsky’s 32 “cantos” are not without symbolic significance either, for this number indicates the age of the poet, five years previously, at the time of his banishment.

As we can see, the Dantian content is present in the very “substance of the verse”, to quote Efim Etkind’s\textsuperscript{338} expression, not only in the web of semantic relations, but also in the metrical and structural aspects of the poem, as well as in the poet’s use of grammatical forms and intonational and sound patterns.

The initial theme of the poem as such, a look back at the lost homeland from the perspective of five years of exile, assigns archetypal Dantesque tones to the “PG”. The perspective is set in the first three-line stanza, which is visually separated from the first section, which consists of three triple stanzas. Like the above-mentioned prologue added by Dante to the DC, it provides - together with a similar isolated terzina in the end of “PG” - an explanatory framework for the visionary voyage back to the native soil:

\textit{Падучая звезда, тем паче - астероид}  
на резкость без труда твой праздный взгляд настроит.  
Взгляни, взгляни туда, куда смотреть не стоит.

The motif of the star is familiar from the DC. Dante closes each section of his three-tiered universe with a reference to \textit{le stelle} - the stars. For him they represent the familiar co-ordinates that emerge after his gloomy wanderings in \textit{Inferno} and \textit{Purgatory}. In the end of the DC it is the stars that are moved by the real living force of love, as we saw in the previous

\textsuperscript{337} There are only three exceptions, all of them consisting of 14 syllables and being placed as third lines of the terzina; The first one is the last line of the first terzina in Section Two: “Неугомонный Терек там ищет третий берег.” The second is the last line of the second terzina in Section Three: “Там мучает охранник во сне штыка трехгранник” and the third is the last line of the last terzina in the concluding section of “PG”: “эпоха на колесах нас не погонит, босых.”

\textsuperscript{338} See Loseff 1989: 194.
chapter.\textsuperscript{339} Brodsky’s star, the fall of which the lyrical subject is witnessing, has something ominous about it, although he is thus given a chance to make a wish upon a shooting star\textsuperscript{340}. Seeing the celestial light of a falling star or planet gives him the power, as a visionary, to behold - although reluctantly - the remote place which he had left five years previously. The distance between “here” and “there” is shortened by the sharp-eyed vision of a poet whose farsightedness, as we observed, he owes to the impeccable perspective of the Petersburg avenues vanishing into the horizon along with the special light of the city\textsuperscript{341}. His reluctance can be explained, at least in part, by the fact that astronomical phenomena, comets in particular, are commonly thought to portend disaster. The reluctance may also refer to the impossibility of driving away the haunting images of his homeland\textsuperscript{342}.

\textsuperscript{339} Inf. 34: 136-139: “/.../ salimmo su, el primo e io secondo, / tanto ch’i’ vidi delle cose belle / che porta ’l ciel, per un pertugio tondo; / e quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle.” (“We mounted up, he first, I following, / till, of the lovely things that heaven bears / I beheld some, through a round opening; and thence we emerged to re-behold the stars.”) Purg. 33: 142-145: “Io ritornai dalla santissima onda / rifatto sì come piante novelle / rinovellate di novella fronda, / puro e disposto a salire alle stelle.” (“From that most holy wave I came away / refashioned, like new plants no blemish mars, / made new again with new leaves: pure as they, / and ready now for mounting to the stars.”) Par. 33: 141-145: “All’alta fantasia qui mancò possa; / ma gia volgeva il mio disio e ’l velle, / sì come rota ch’ igualmente è mossa / l’amor che move il sole e l’altre stelle.” (“The high-raised phantasy here vigour failed; / but, rolling like a wheel that never jars, / my will and wish were now by love impelled, / the love that moves the Sun and th’other stars.”) Cf. Section VII of “Декабрь во Флоренции”:

\textsuperscript{340} The motif of a falling star appears also in the poem “В озерном kraю”, written in Ann Arbor in the year of Brodsky’s emigration from the USSR (Бродский III: 25). It, too, seems to escape the wishes of the lyrical subject: “И ежели ночью / отыскивал звезду на потолке, / она, согласно правилам сгоранья, / сбегала на подушку по щеке / быстрей, чем я загадывал желанье.”

\textsuperscript{341} Brodsky 1986: 89: “And its light. It’s the northern light, pale and diffused, one in which both memory and eye operate with unusual sharpness. In this light, and thanks to the directness and length of the streets, a walker’s thoughts travel farther than his destination /.../ It’s because to walk under this sky, along the brown granite embankments of this immense gray river, is itself an extension of life and a school of farsightedness.”

\textsuperscript{342} With his constant look back, deliberate or intentional, Brodsky differs from the figure of “Dante - Mandel’shtam” characterised in Akhmatova’s poem “Данте” as one who did not look back to his old Florence after having left the city. As noted
But his clarified vision echoes also the imagined vision of the poet-seer à la Dante, who is endowed with insight into the truth of things that are far away, in terms of both space and time. In fact, the prologue in “PG”, as part of the composition of the poem, is characteristic of visionary poetry of the Middle Ages. It usually begins with a rendering of how the author, either in a dream or in a vision, was offered an opportunity to experience the things, often transcendental or supersensual by nature, which he subsequently depicts in his poem. The vision or the dream, with its “fantastic”, transcendental aspects serves as a frame for the following representation, raising it often to the level of allegorical symbolism.

The perspective and subject matter of “Пятая годовщина” - a glimpse of the lost homeland - may be conceived as incorporating, in a provocative and parodic way typical of Brodsky, some common motives of medieval visionary poetry, such as a visit to a supersensual state or to the Underworld, or a search for a lost beloved, which in this particular case is replaced by the lost homeland. The empty gaze of the lyrical subject begins to be filled up with successive visions of landscapes that, from his present point of view, belong to “the distant elsewhere”. True enough, one can always assert that the clarity of the poet’s vision is not due to any supernatural powers but inherent in the very distance between the object and the observer³⁴³. By distancing himself from the object he makes himself see clearer, i.e. “objectively”, since he himself is no longer involved, being not one with the object of representation³⁴⁴. The vision, distance, perspective and focus of the gaze are all important aspects that contribute to the selection as well as to the nature of the images or scenes depicted in the poem. In the final analysis, it is precisely this poetic and symbolic distance that empowers the poet to write about things which are, to a great extent, based on his own experience but

³⁴³ Radyshevsky, examining the main themes of Brodsky’s poetry in the light of Buddhist philosophy, argues, on the contrary, that the vision, and the desire of the lyrical subject to look “where there’s no use to look”, testifies to the fact that he has reached the condition ascribed to the illuminated, which the masters of Zen call the “inertia of memory”, i.e. that you are already aware of the truth, but it is your old “I” that wants to take a look back (Радышевский 1997: 304).

³⁴⁴ However, Brodsky rejects the idea of objectivity as such. In his view it is a sort of blindness that does not distinguish between foreground and background. Furthermore, it is not always the point of view at a distance, but the quality of the vision itself which is responsible for the poet’s ability to perceive his homeland from afar. See Бродский VII: 62.
which - due to the actual temporal and spatial distance\(^\text{345}\) - are no longer within his reach.

There is one more aspect in the composition of “PG” that recalls Dante’s DC. It is the word “там” which occurs 40 times in Brodsky’s poem, 24 times in the position of the opening word of the line, including 13 times at the beginning of a terzina. Dante, too, often began a number of successive stanzas with the same word\(^\text{346}\). Brodsky employs the same device of anaphora also in “Развивающая Платона” - a depiction of his “utopian” city\(^\text{347}\). In contrast to “Развивающая Платона”, in “PG” the referent of the deictic expression “there” is clear. It relates to the place which the lyrical subject was compelled to leave, where he no longer is, and which now is out of reach of his immediate experience. The only means he has of covering the distance and penetrating it is by his extraordinary vision, in the form of images.

Anaphoric words like “there”, “here”, “then” and “when”, repeated at the beginning of two or more successive lines, often emerge in literary texts in which the paradise myth has been used as a rhetorical structuring principle. According to Lessing Baehr\(^\text{348}\), in messianic or prophetic narratives describing a future paradise, spatial adverbs “here” and “there” or chronological adverbs “now” and “then” have often been sufficient to mark the opposition between paradise and hell. The prophetic pattern is distinguished by its use of a first-person variant of a descriptive pattern like “There I saw” or “I saw”, frequently used by Alighieri, as well. Since the prologue to “PG” sets the focus and perspective of the poem, emphasising the fact that everything that follows is based on what the eye perceives (albeit the mind’s eye), Brodsky does not have to repeat the verb “to see” in the following stanzas.

Section One begins with a familiar Dantesque locus - the wood which was the scene of the prologue in the DC. Only this time it is not the hero that has lost his way in the murky wood of errors but the train in the second line, which is pushing ahead on the plain in search of a destination:

\(^{345}\text{Distance, unlike length, is not a purely spatial notion; time is inherent in distance, see Tuan 1997: 119.}\)

\(^{346}\text{See Bickersteth’s introduction to the DC 1965: xxxv and, e.g. Inf. 5: 100-108 or 13: 1-9, Purg. 12: 25-63; here Dante begins four consecutive stanzas with the word “vedea” (“mine eyes saw”) in describing the life-like sculptures on the tombstones. See also Par. 19: 115-147 or 20: 40-70. In Par. 19: 114-123 Dante uses the word “lì” meaning “there” to open three successive terzine.}\)

\(^{347}\text{For a discussion of the use of the pronoun “там” in “Развивающая Платона”, see Chapter 4.3 below.}\)

\(^{348}\text{Lessing Baehr 1991: 7-8.}\)
Там хмурые леса стоят в своей рвании.
Уйдя из точки “А”, там поезд на равнине
стремится в точку “Б”. Которой нет в помине.

Brodsky’s choice of the words picturing the forests, which, “frowning”, “stand decked out in their rags and tatters” gives a human shape to the trees. A trope of the same kind can be found in Brodsky’s poem “Лагуна”, where few readers would fail to recognise under its Venetian disguise allusions to the Soviet Union:

Гондолу бьет о гнилые сваи.
Звук отрицает себя, слова и
слух; а также державу ту,
где руки тянутся хвойным лесом
перед мелким, но хищным бесом
и слюну леденит во рту.350 (Stanza VIII)

If the forests are understood to refer not only to the vast Siberian woodlands but also as depicting the masses of citizens comprising the “unanimous” population of the former fatherland of the author, it cannot escape the attention of a reader, tuned to read the poem in the light of the “Divine Comedy”, that the scene might as well be taken from Dante’s Inferno. Furthermore, Brodsky’s dark, cheerless forests sound astoundingy similar to the “дремучий советский лес” of Mandel’shtam in “Четвертая проза”.

Both of the presented loci, forests and plains, cover vast areas of the Russian territory. They bear symbolic significance, since they are often conceived of as characterising some main aspects of the mental landscape of the so-called “Russian soul”. The Russian soul, “широкая

349 The translation of “PG” in Brodsky’s Collected works in English was made by the author, see Brodsky 2000: 241-244.
350 Бродский III: 45.
351 As for the Siberian woods, it would be tempting to combine the “forests in rags” with the falling asteroid in the prologue. A meteor of considerable duration and brightness, the brightest ever recorded, fell on Tunguska, Siberia, in 1908 causing the destruction about 2000 square kilometres of forest, leaving behind forests “standing in rags”. The train was evidently the Trans-Siberian railroad. Furthermore, the forest can be read as referring to a constant opposition of “Russia - The West”, a geographical and a geopolitical theme that is expressed paradigmatically in opposing sets of images, such as “The Wood - The Sea”, “Cold - Heat” and “Stagnation - Movement” in Brodsky’s poetry, see Loseff 1991: 27.
352 See Chapter 3.1.1 above.
душа” or “широкая натура”, with its breadth, depth and openness, is said to correspond to the Russian landscape, mirroring unlimited, boundless space. This idealised image of the national soul is promoted by Russian self-stereotypes.353

However, the space that reigns supreme not only has positive impacts on its inhabitants. Medvedev354 argues, quite convincingly, that Russia’s space is not just quantitatively vast, but that it is also qualitatively infinite, amorphous and contradictory. Furthermore, endless space is seen as undemanding, forgiving and thus contributing to the irresponsibility of its inhabitants. Medvedev even asserts that Russian space, with its amorphousness and vastness, possesses great destructive potential. Distances are too great to be grasped, and natural boundaries of its vast territory are not delineated. Both of these factors account for a culture with a vague spatial sense.

Examples of limitless, undiscriminating space are to be found in “PG”. In Section Six, for instance, Brodsky describes the landscape as missing distinctive landmarks, and in Section Three only the north winds fills the space of the empty parks in winter. The puddle in the yard in Section Two, twice the size of the United States, could be taken as Brodsky’s ironic hint at the grand scale of everything in Russia. But the most cryptic of the signs attributed to the dimensions of the represented space are the lines about the stray train quoted already above:

/.../ Уйдя с точки “А”, там поезд на равнине стремится в точку “Б”. Которой нет в помине.

Начала и концы там жизнь от взора прячет.

If the lines are understood as a metaphor of the incomprehensible vastness of the territory, one could easily discover here a variant of the image, common in Brodsky’s poetry, of a set of tracks - two parallel lines that vanish into the horizon - leading nowhere355. This vastness, as such,

353 For Russian soul and its relation to Russian space, see e.g. Hellberg-Hirn 1999: 56-57, 61 and Pursiainen 1999: 72.
355 This could be construed as a continuation of the theme of superlatives. Medvedev commented that “Russia possesses the longest roads which lead nowhere, the greatest number of seas on which no one sails, and the longest frontiers on which no one lives and hardly anyone crosses” (1999: 16). Batkin has found another interpretation of the train in “PG”. In his view the train moves from point “А” to point “Б”. Point “B” stands for void, i.e. the train is moving towards a place without time, since for an exile time is replaced by space. (Баткин 1997: 278-279).
is an attribute of empire which, by definition, suggests limitless space. Apart from lacking spatial limits, empire as a concept transcends temporal boundaries as well. It is a system which has the potential to encompass all spheres and phases of human life.

Still on the metaphorical level, the striving of the train to reach its destination in non-existence can be read as a metaphor for the aimlessness of any action inside the boundaries of the place being represented. In fact, the images that Brodsky’s eye catches of his former fatherland (and present “fartherland”) are not always static by nature. In almost each of them Brodsky discerns some dynamics or activity which, almost without exception, is rendered by an imperfective form of the verb in the present tense. The present tense imperfective aspect denotes habitual actions or general statements. The verb form used here indicates that the scenes or episodes either occur with certain frequency, or are continuing processes without an end. On the other hand, as Pärli356 has shown in an article discussing Brodsky’s cycle “Часть речи” - in which the majority of the verbs is also in the imperfective form of the present tense - that the use of this particular verb form is not rare in Brodsky’s poetry. Pärli connects it with time which reigns “always”, and, referring to Vinogradov, she defines it as action which is beyond limitations of time. Not unlike in “Часть речи”, Brodsky employs verbs in “PG” that indicate a permanent condition of whatever he is describing, rather than give an account of events that unfold over time. Pärli distinguishes between “действие” and “деятельность” (“act” and “activity”). In her opinion, verbs in Brodsky’s poems - even when they express dynamic action - describe characteristics of an act, the location of which remains unspecified, rather than actually disclose the power and impact inherent in the action. Moreover, the act is usually conveyed in very general terms. The real action, with manifestations of its effects, emerges in other parts of speech.357

Brodsky attaches traits of lethargy to “the state of affairs” prevailing “there”. The apathetic state of mind of its inhabitants seems to have tainted the elements of nature as well as the signs of cultural and urban life, which languish in the same sluggish inactivity as the forests depicted

---

357 Ibid. 415. In her treatment of the cycle of poems “ Часть речи “ Пярли writes the following: “Преобладают глаголы, обозначающие “положение дел” в мире. Не действия, а деятельность. Даже те из них, которые выражают активные действия, скорее описывают свойство (“Север крошит металл”), где нелокализованное действие обобщено. Активность и результативность действия можно чаще, чем в собственно глаголах, наблюдать в причастиях, в отглагольных образованиях, характеризующих имя.”
Apart from the obvious connotation of monotony, the humming sound of a bee could be construed as a symbol of society, an organised collective in which the individual is sacrificed for the unity of the community, as well as for the whole species, *homo sovieticus* in this particular case.

The stagnation of life is enhanced by deanimating nature and the animal world. They are deprived of their organic essence and turned into inanimate “things” or to “collector’s items”:

> У рыбьей чешуи в воде там цвет консервный. (Section III)

> Пшеница перешла, покинув герб, в гербарий. (Section IV)

The dynamics of “PG” actually arise from a certain dualism that marks the poem in its entirety. The text seems to be constructed of oppositions or extremes. The dualism starts with the points “A” and “B” that the train fails to connect to each other, and it continues in the opening line of the

---

358 Incidentally, in the beginning of Canto XVI of *Inferno*, which, as a whole, incorporates Dante’s lament and anger over the corruption of Florence, he compares the sound of the waterfall to the humming of bees: “Gia era in loco onde s’udla ‘l rimbombo / dell’acqua che cadea nell’altro giro / simile a quel che l’*arnie fanno* rombo, /.../”. (By now I’d reached a place where the dull boom / of water plunging down to the next ring / *resounded like a beehive’s raucous hum /.../”*.) (*Inf.* 16: 1-3).

359 These two lines read in English as follows: “There owls hoot late at night on matters vain and ashen. / No leader seems quite fit to stop green leaves’ ovation.” L. Loseff, explains the second line as a reference to a common image on Soviet television and newsreels: the leader struggling to quell from the stage the enthusiastic applause of his immense audience (Brodsky 2000: 520).
following terzina, which claims that “there”, life conceals beginnings and ends out of view.

Там хмурье леса стоят в своей рванине.
Уйдя из точки “А”, там поезд на равнине
стремится в точку “Б”. Которой нет в помине.360

Points “A” and “B” seem to be taken from an elementary school mathematics textbook, while “beginnings and ends” recall the “Пятая элегия” of Akhmatova’s “Северные элегии” - “The Northern Elegies” - which she originally called the “Leningrad Elegies”. As Leiter361 points out, the earlier title is particularly appropriate, since the image of the city plays a central part in this cycle of poems.

Akhmatova’s “Северные элегии” continue the theme of distortion of natural, genuine proportions as well as the enforced changes of the original directions in the flow of life. The most obvious allusion is the one to “Пятая элегия” concerning the veiled knowledge of “the beginnings and ends”362 of our lives:

Мне ведомы начала и концы,
И жизнь после конца, и что-то,
О чем теперь не надо вспоминать.

In Akhmatova’s text the poet is the chosen one who is given knowledge of such things that one normally has no access to. She, like Dante, is shown what life beyond can be all about. Poets possess a rare ability to choose the right moment to quit the realm of non-existence and when to be born into this world of ours. All this secret knowledge is revealed in Akhmatova’s “Первая элегия”:

360 It is worth noting that the inner rhyme is broken in the last verse of the terzina. “B” does not rhyme with the “A’s” of the preceding lines, which enhances the general impression of rupture reflecting the poet’s relation to his homeland as well as to its imperial extensions, which have lead to a dead-end. I owe this observation to Professor Mikhail Lotman.
361 Leiter 1983: 118.
362 In addition to recalling Akhmatova, Brodsky’s line “Начала и концы там жизнь от взора прячет” is also reminiscent of the opening line of the Prologue in Blok’s “Возмездие”: “Жизнь - без начала и конца.” The association with paradise/hell as well as the outstanding gift of an artistic eye to catch and evaluate what is essential in life is also present in Blok’s poema: “Но ты, художник, твердо веруй / В начала и концы. Ты знай, / Где стерегут нас ад и рай. / Тебе дано бесстрастной мерой / Измерить всё, что видишь ты. / Твоей взгляд - да будет тверд и ясен.” (Блок 1999: 21).
Так вот когда мы вздумали родиться
И, безошибочно отмерив время,
Чтоб ничего не пропустить из зрелищ
Невиданных, простились с небытьем.

Brodsky’s “epoch on wheels”\textsuperscript{363}, in turn, is an allusion to Mandel’shtam’s and Akhmatova’s times, when the new “motorised” era of automobiles reached St. Petersburg, an era which is reflected, for example, in Mandel’shtam’s “Петербургские строфы”\textsuperscript{364}. It is the very same epoch that irreversibly changed the direction of their paths of life. This shift is evoked in the opening lines of Akhmatova’s “Пятая элегия”:

Меня, как реку,
Суровая эпоха повернула.
Мне подменили жизнь. В другое русло,
Мимо другого потекла она,
И я своих не знаю берегов.

The forcibly reversed flow of the river is a metaphor for a sudden unexpected change in life. This image finds a counterpart in some of Brodsky’s tropes that symbolise the unsolvable puzzle of one’s own fate.\textsuperscript{365} It

\textsuperscript{363} Brodsky’s notion of the “epoch on wheels” refers most obviously to the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, whereas the barefooted poet-pedestrian recalls the 19\textsuperscript{th} century which, according to Brodsky, was the last period in the history of mankind “when its scale of reality was quantitatively human”. The human scale of reality applies to man’s relation with space as well. At that time the relationship with space was based on the pace of one’s own step, whereas the invention of the engine “chipped a lot from the reality of space and soiled what remained with abstractions /.../”. Brodsky sees the invention of the engine with the subsequent acceleration of pace - with its “curtailing effects on any form of commitment or concentration” which has led to the uncapability of the modern reader to grasp 19\textsuperscript{th} century poetry - as “the real, not the calender, end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century.” (Brodsky 1988: xii-xiii).

\textsuperscript{364} “Letit v tuman motorov vereniца; / Самолюбивый, скромный пешеход - / Чудак Евгений - бедности стыдится, / Бензин вдыхает и судьбу клянет!” (Мандельштам, т. 1, 1993: 81-82).

\textsuperscript{365} The same metaphor applies to his parents’ life as well. See Brodsky 1986: 481-483: “Had they looked for a motto for their existence, they could have taken a few lines from one of Akhmatova’s “Northern Elegies”: Just like a river / I was deflected by my stalwart era /.../ A deflected river running to its alien, artificial estuary /.../ I am a tributary of a turned, deflected river. /.../.”[The words in boldface indicate emphasis - MK]. Brodsky also cites these lines in an interview made by A. Mikhnik where he also describes the consequences of the sudden turn in people’s lives in an
is reflected in Section One of “PG” in the line which alludes to the lines of Akhmatova, quoted above, as well as to Pushkin and Lermontov:\footnote{For a discussion of allusions to Pushkin in “PG” see Ranchin 1998b: 38. For allusions to Pushkin and Lermontov see Polukhina 1989: 221. In Ranchin’s view the image of the river Terek in Brodsky’s poetry, in contrast to tradition, is a sign of confinement and banality, a poetic cliché (Ranchin 2001: 331).}

Неугомонный Терек там ищет третий берег.

According to Lev Loseff, the “third shore” signifies an absurd, useless endeavour, similar to the Russian expression the “fifth corner”\footnote{The “fifth corner”, in Russian police jargon, is what the interrogating policemen invite the suspect to find in order to escape a beating (Brodsky 2000: 520, 526).}. Similar efforts to escape one’s fate that are doomed to fail are implied in the last line of Section Seven, which, in turn, is a paraphrase from the “Divine Comedy”, a fact that seems to have escaped the attention of Brodsky scholars:

Там думал и умру - от скуки, от испуга.
Когда не от руки, так на руках у друга.
Видать, не рассчитал. Как квадратуру круга.

“Squaring the circle”\footnote{It is worth noting that Brodsky does not use this expression in his English version of “PG” but writes instead: “Today I see my error. / I see that I was wrong /.../.” The word “error” is, of course, an allusion to the DC, only not to Paradise, but to the prologue of Hell - which makes a difference.} in the DC is a metaphor for an attempt to solve a problem that is bound to fail. At the end of the Paradiso, Dante compares himself to a geometrician facing an unsolvable puzzle in a vision of Christ whose changing appearance inside a circle suggests his two natures in one Person:

Qual è ‘l geomètra che tutto s’affige
per misurar lo cerchio, e non ritrova,
pensando, quel principio ond’elli indige,
tal era io a quella vista nova /.../. (Par. 33: 133-136)

As geometrician, trying as best he can
to square the circle, but without the clue
he needs to guide him, ends where he began;
so I, before that marvel strange and new /.../.369

This effort to square the circle is as futile as the train’s efforts to reach its destination in circumstances where the flow of life, in its reversed absurdity, entails a rupture in the logic of thought and, consequently, in the relationship of cause and effect. The chain of generations stands for Brodsky as a manifestation of continuity. In his essays370 he likens himself to the effect, while the role of the cause is allocated to his parents. In “PG” we have episodes illustrating, albeit in a laconic and vague way, the chain of generations, which can be construed as a guarantee of some future, notwithstanding the general absurdity of life in the Soviet Union:

Там одиночка-мать вывозит дочку в скверик.
/.../

369 The exact translation of Dante’s expression “misurar lo cerchio” would be “to measure a circle”. After reading A.M. Vandelli’s commentary to the passage in question in La Divina Commedia it becomes clear that by measuring, Dante refers to the very problem of squaring a circle; Dante compares his efforts to those of a geometrician who tries in vain to find a solution to the problem of squaring a circle, but fails because he does not have the knowledge of the exact relation of the diameter to the circumference. Dante yearns to understand something which is beyond human comprehension: “D[ante] sforzava di vedere, così come il geometra, tutto intento a tentar di risolvere il problema della quadratura del circolo, non riesce a trovare il dato che gli bisognerebbe, cioè l’esatto rapporto tra il diometro e la circonferenza. D[ante] vo-leva comprendere ciò che mente umana non può.” (Dante Alighieri 1979: 923). It is evident that Brodsky’s first acquaintance with the DC was through Lozinsky’s translation. Lozinsky employs the expression “измерить круг” instead of “квадратура круга”, see Данте Алигьери: Божественная комедия . Перевод Лозинского. (Серия “Всемирная литература”. “Художественная лит-ра”. Москва 1967: 524).
370 See, e.g. Brodsky’s contemplation of the relationship of a child to his parents: “/.../ the reality of his own manufacture, is less valid than the reality of his abandoned nest. That if there ever was anything real in his life, it was precisely that nest, oppressive and suffocating, from which he so badly wanted to flee. Because it was built by others, by those who gave him life /.../. Yet, for all his skill, he’ll never be able to reconstruct that primitive, sturdy nest that heard his first cry of life. Nor will he be able to reconstruct those who put him there. An effect, he can’t reconstruct his cause.” (Brodsky 1986: 472).
Different generations, grandparents and parents on the one hand, and children and grandchildren on the other, are representatives of the dualities or extremes that Brodsky tries to join together in the poem. As he is irrevocably absent from his place of birth and does not know where he will die, Brodsky is unable to bring invisible beginnings and ends together. The same idea emerges already in “Отрывок” - a poem completed in 1964 - which shows a tension between one’s fate - understood as a given position in life - and a deliberate attempt to define one’s standing in the world, not conceived of as a consequence of a more or less haphazard destiny, but rather that of a conscious choice, notwithstanding the fact that the latter may eventuate in occupying the position of an outsider. This tension, at least in Brodsky’s poetry, invariably entails an element of caricature, a suggestion of self-parody:

Я не гожусь ни в дети, ни в отцы.
Я не имею родственницы, брата.
Соединять начала и концы
занятие скорей для акробата.
Я где-то в промежутке или вне.
Однако я стараюсь, ради шутки,
в действительности стоя в стороне,
настаивать, что “нет, я в промежутке”...372

The motives of beginning and ending that mark both “Отрывок” and “PG” and underlie the dialectical thematic structure of the latter poem have various sources, as we have tried to show above. “PG” is yet another example of Brodsky’s strategy of textual polygenesis. He is referring not only to Akhmatova’s or Mandel’shtam’s poetry, or to his own works. Similar contemplations on man’s ignorance of the origins of life as well as of the life hereafter can be found in John Donne’s poems “The First Anniversary” and “The Second Anniversary”. As the similarity of the three titles indicates, Brodsky’s commemoration of the fifth anniversary thus expands beyond the borders of Russia and its writers. Donne - whom Brodsky frequently placed among the poets whose works influ-

371 This line, in Professor Dolinin’s opinion, refers to Socialist Realism’s picture of Pavlik Morozov, the young martyr who perished at the hands of kulaks during the collectivisation of agriculture in the 1930’s.
372 Бродский II: 101.
enced him\textsuperscript{373} writes in his “Second Anniversary. Of the Progress of the Soule” as follows:

Poore soul in this thy flesh what do’st thou know.
Theu know’st thy selfe so little, as thou know’st not,

\textbf{How thou did’st die, nor how thou wast begot.}
Theu neither knowst, how thou at first camest in,
Nor how thou took’st the poysn of mans sin. \textsuperscript{(254-258)}\textsuperscript{374}

Compared to the amount of metaphors of an ending, those that are unmistakably of a beginning are rare in “PG”. The metaphor of a bird, if understood literally, relates to both opposites:

Покойник там незрим, как тот, кто только зачат.
\textbf{Иначе - среди птиц.} Но птицы мало значат. \textsuperscript{(Section I)}

The “beginning” of a bird is, as a rule, an egg out of which it is born, but how can it be thought of after it dies? It may be that Brodsky’s referent shifts here from creatures of nature to cultural creations, in which case the life beyond obtains a visible form in a text of a poet-bard:

Я вырос в тех краях. Я говорил “закурим”
\textbf{их лучшему певцу.} Был содержимым тюрем. \textsuperscript{375}

\textsuperscript{(Section VII)}

In addition to the reminiscences from Akhmatova’s “Пятая элегия”, which we discussed above, allusions related to the endings in her “Первая элегия” and “Третья элегия” are to be found in Brodsky’s text:

Видать, не рассчитал. Зане в театре задник
\textbf{важнее,} чем актер. Простор важней, чем всадник.

\textsuperscript{(Section VII)}

Akhmatova’s lines dwell on the potential life which had no possibility to be realised because of the abrupt change of its direction. They also speak of the absence of the starring actor from the scene of life:

\textsuperscript{373} See, e.g. Глэд 1987: 178 and Birkerts 1982: 91.
\textsuperscript{374} Donne 1985: 361.
\textsuperscript{375} According to Yevgeny Rein, Brodsky wrote on the margin of this particular line in the gift copy of his collection “To Urania” that this line is a reference to the recipient of the gift. Рейн 1996: 149 or 1999: 143-144.
О, как я много зрелищ пропустила,
И занавес вздымался без меня
И так же падал. Сколько я друзей
Своих ни разу в жизни не встречала /.../ ("Пятая элегия")

In these lines both poets parallel life with a stage production. Life which had no chance to materialise due to historical circumstances leads to the absence of the actor from the stage. St. Petersburg, with its fantastic panoramas provides a perfect backdrop for a drama, a backdrop more endurable than the life of its protagonists. In the last two sections of “PG”, reminiscences from Akhmatova are simultaneously reminiscences from two other Petersburg poets - Pushkin and Mandel’shtam:

Скрипи, мое перо, мой коготок, мой посох.
Не подгоняй сих строк: забуксовав в отбросах,
эпоха на колесах нас не догонит, босых.

Мне нечего сказать ни греку, ни варягу.
Зане не знаю я, в какую землю лягу.
Скрипи, скрипи перо! переводи бумагу.

Compare to Akhmatova:

Перо скрипит, и многие страницы
Семеновским припахивают плацем. ("Первая элегия")

Я не в свою, увы, могилу лягу. ("Пятая элегия")

The motive of a scratching pen appears in Pushkin’s poetry, and Akhmatova’s use of it is most obviously a paraphrase of Pushkin’s lines. But Akhmatova’s “page” - with its faint odour of Semyonovsky Square - an evident analogy to Brodsky’s “paper”- reveals yet another manifesta-

---

376 For a discussion of the recurrent motif in Brodsky’s poetry of “скрипящее перо” and its allusions to Pushkin and Khodasevich, see Ранчин 1998а: 85-86 and Ранчин 1998с: 74. Words referring to Mandel’shtam (and Dante) are those in rhyming position; “посох” and “босых”. These words describe two barefooted poet-pilgrims who have the ability to discern the truth of things. See, e.g. Mandel’shtam’s “Посох”;
“Посох мой, моя свобода - / Сердцевина бытия, / Скоро ль истиной народа / Ста- нет истина моя? /.../” (Мандельштам, т. 1 1993: 104). Brodsky is referring here to Akhmatova’s poem “Данте” as well as to its two addressees. See Chapter 3.1.1 above.
tion of a sudden turn of fate in the life of a writer whose many works contribute to the myth of St. Petersburg in Russian literature. “Первая элегия” is full of references to Dostoyevskian sites, with special allusions to his Siberian imprisonment and to his mock execution on Semyonovsky Square. It was on this very square that Dostoyevsky waited for the execution of his death sentence, which was suspended at the last moment. In this particular place Dostoyevsky’s life took an unexpected turn. This event is inseparably associated with St. Petersburg realia in Akhmatova’s lines.

It seems difficult for Brodsky’s lyrical subject to submit to his fate, to the idea of dying outside the borders of his native city. He had “promised” in his early poem “Стансы” that he would return to die on Basil Island377. St. Petersburg-Leningrad as a locus where the poet suffers in expectation of death is so ubiquitous in Russian letters that Uvarov’s378 statement, according to which a Russian poet always dies in St. Petersburg even in case he actually happens to die in New York, seems not to be exaggerated. Uvarov continues that it seems as if it were a peculiar predestined purpose of St. Petersburg to provide “a sepulchre” for Russian poets. He calls death “the metaphysical dominant” of the city, and he sees this as part and parcel of the “Petersburg discourse” based on antinomies, the antithesis “life vs. death / birth vs. death” being one of its essential manifestations.

The ignorance of both Akhmatova and Brodsky of the place of their death to come or of the name which would be inscribed on the tombstone was compensated for by their certainty that the life of a poet - his/her poetical identity embedded in poems - is not subject to the laws of nature, but will go on living no matter which soil will cover the corpse of the author.379 In the final analysis, this is all that matters. The remaining, inaccessible knowledge of the life beyond belongs to the same category of knowledge as “squaring a circle” or “finding a third shore”, i.e. to knowledge which is kept secret from the human mind until the other re-

377 “Ни страны, ни погоста / не хочу выбирать./ На Васильевский остров я приду умирать.” These lines by Brodsky are probably among those that are best known and most frequently cited by natives of St. Petersburg. For a discussion of St. Petersburg as a locus of death, see Chapter 2.4.2 above.
378 Уваров 1996: 190-192, 204-206.
379 Creating one’s poetical identity is a way of creating oneself existence beyond life. It provides a counter argument to Donne’s contemplation on man’s ignorance which we quoted above and which continues as follows: “Nor dost thou, (though thou knowst, that thou art so) / By what way thou art made immortal, know.” (J.Donne: “The Second Anniversary”, lines 259-260, see Donne 1985: 361).
ality is reached. Like Akhmatova ascertains in “Третья элегия” addressing the following words to a deceased life companion of her youth:

Теперь ты там, где знают всё /.../.

As we have seen, themes related to the antipodes of beginnings and endings in “PG” originate from various sources, embracing a range of works by Russian and by Western poets. Vladimir Toporov has called a similar phenomena - an allusion or quotation which simultaneously refers to a certain whole consisting of various texts of the same author, or that of various poets linked together by a common theme - “соборная цитата” - “a cumulative citation”380. Ranchin, not without justification, ascribes the use of this device - typical of Acmeists, Mandel’shtam and Akhmatova in particular - to the mechanisms of intertextuality characteristic of Brodsky’s poetics.381 Bethea’s expression of the “triangular vision”382 of Brodsky, which emerged in the treatment of the poem “Декабрь во Флоренции”, points to the same distinguishing feature of Brodsky’s texts.

3.3.1 “Пятая годовщина” as a Generalised Image of Soviet Life

The first part, Sections I-VI of “Пятая годовщина” are dedicated to the country and life in the USSR, whereas Sections VII-IX depict Leningrad. Brodsky does not separate these two, but sees Leningrad as an integral part of the country, thus contradicting the tradition which tends to contrast St. Petersburg to Russia.

As was observed, the “lyric plot” of the poem is presented mainly by verbs in imperfective forms of the present tense, which places the represented action outside time. The activity does not evolve in time, but instead seems to repeat itself forever, without any distinctive moments of

380 One could also apply Mints’s term “полигенетичность” - “multigenesis”, or “polygenesis” to Brodsky’s system of citations, when one refers to his simultaneous usage of various sources of allusions, including sources from various cultural contexts. See Минц 1973: 402-407. See also Chapter 2.2 above.
382 “The triangular vision”, as conceived of by Bethea, suggests that a Russian source is invoked in a Western source in such a way that both sources comment on each other. In so doing they imply a third source, which is Brodsky himself. (Bethea 1994: 49-50).
being either completed or leading to any discernible results. In their
timelessness the first six sections differ from the remaining Sections VII-
X, which focus on the lyrical substitute’s former life in his hometown,
employing both perfective and imperfective forms of verbs in the past
tense. Aside from this, the present position of Brodsky’s lyrical substitute
outside the city is rendered in the present tense.

In addition to their timelessness, the episodes portrayed in the first six
sections are given in terms of a “general presentation”. They resemble
the reports of a journalist who does not seem to have a personal relation-
ship to what he is describing. The scenes and those present lack any dis-
tinctive features, likewise the landscape that surrounds them. There are
no particulars in the first part of the poem. All of the characters are gen-
eralised prototypes that portray scenes from the daily life of a Soviet citi-
zeen. In many cases there is no subject at all, but the “activity” is con-
veyed using various passive constructions (such as verb forms in imper-
fective third person plural or second person singular, as well as short
forms of the perfective passive participles) to express impersonal mean-
ings.

Там, наливая чай, ломают зуб о пряник.
/.../
Там говорят “свои” в дверях с усмешкой скверной.
 (Section III)

Там, лежучи плашмя на рядовой холстине,
отбрасываешь тень, как пальма в Палестине.
 (Section V)

Там украшают флаг, обнявшись, серп и молот.
Но в стенку гвоздь не вбит и огород не полот.
Там, грубо говоря, великий план запорот. (Section VI)

This kind of impersonal, estranged representation without any proper
names or specified locations raises the story to the level of an abstraction
or idea, notwithstanding the exact verisimilitude of the presented scenes.
Timelessness as such is a quality of distant places, Utopias and Edens,
envisioned as a rule by the human mind in remote and inaccessible
places383. No one can deny the fact that the world Brodsky describes in
these lines does not conform to the reality of life in the Soviet state. In

383 For a discussion of the association of remote places with remote past and timelessness
in different cultures, see Tuan 1997: 118-125.
fact, according to Kagansky, "timelessness” and the “general “ nature of events as such are peculiarities of Soviet space. He regards Soviet space as a materialised slogan, a supertext which, in all its eventfulness, serves linguistic purposes. The interpreters of “the text” live within the boundaries of this space as its constituents, and their survival is dependant on their capability to interpret the events correctly. Soviet space is an arena for events whose significance emanates from a superspatial and supertemporal centre. Consequently, all events start to resemble theatre. Events that characterise the space in its entirety are deprived of their particularity as well as of a specific localisation in space and time. To quote Kagansky’s words, they “take place in nowhere and never”.

This leads to a certain paradox in Brodsky’s poetic description; when writing about things and phenomena that appear in materia, the image that he “sees” is given down to the smallest concrete detail. However, the particulars that he introduces, be they details of a landscape or those of an animated object, have no characteristics which would help to distinguish them from other similar objects. Thus, the scrupulous realism in the representation of particulars turns the objects into “universals” that cover the entire depicted space. The “universals” in the case of “PG” would denote the state ideology, which, with its norms and laws, aims at reducing one’s personal life to conform to a certain mode of thinking and behaviour. The characters are personifications, while the scenes and sceneries of “PG” are all materialised consequences of state totalitarianism, reflections of its devastating impact on all spheres of life.

In a certain sense, history corresponds to the original “myth” of St. Petersburg, according to which materia was penetrated and moulded by Peter the Great’s idea. Idea overcame the power of materia. In Soviet Russia the tendency to materialise the idea went so far that materia was “idealised”, or better still, “ideologised”. As a result of ideologisation materia loses its moral neutrality, which is precisely the aspect that Brodsky values in material objects. Thus, the “hammer-hugging sickle” which adorns the banner is transformed into a symbol of the state. Hammer and sickle are no longer real tools to be used in harvesting and building. Paradoxically, the idealisation/ideologisation of the material world tends toward abandonment of corporeality itself.

Brodsky’s view of language was that it is used by the writer to state the truth. Instead language contains and reveals the truth in spite of, and often contrary to, writer’s intentions. This facet of Brodsky’s poetics was elucidated in the previous chapter in an examination of “Декабрь во Флоренции”. In “PG” Brodsky’s focus on language as a creator of an
alternative space - an alternative existence for the lyrical subject - is made manifest in Sections VII-X. Sections VII-IX picture an alternative life which in many respects resonates Akhmatova’s “Northern Elegies”; the life that could have been possible had not the state officials decided to send the poet into exile. The last sections depict the fate of an individual inscribed in language instead of space and time.

If the portrayal of Soviet life in the imperfective present tense is ironic, the reflections on the former presence as well as the present unpredicted absence of the lyrical substitute are rendered with absolute seriousness and intensity. Brodsky’s irony arises from the same contradiction that used to mark literary works which had the paradise myth as their model, i.e. the conflict between paradisiac form and the infernal content, which was employed purposefully as a tool of irony, along with the first person syntactic structures, such as “there I saw”385. As was indicated, the poet-seer’s focus on the visual sense in “PG” is inherent in the very word “там”/ “there”, in which direction his empty gaze is “tuned”.

Brodsky employs other rhetorical devices that resemble those used in other depictions of visions of paradisiac places as well. Literary works picturing such a place are often plotless, since plot depends on change and disequilibrium. Furthermore, myths of paradise frequently entail that preference be given to groups as well as to social or communal spheres of life over individuals or personal and private spheres. Quoting Lessing Baer386, in such works the words “mine” and “yours” are associated with what is undesirable, whereas the word “ours” bears connotations of what is good and just. “We” usually predominates over “I”. The disjunction between “ours” and “not ours” emerges at the end of “Развивая Платонопа”, where the poet, an alien element in society, is judged and banished from his “utopian” city-state. In “PG” a similar distinction appears in Section Three:

Там говорят “свои” в дверях с усмешкой скверной.387

Society is divided into two categories, into those one can trust and into the hypocrites who “vote in favour” - calling to mind the unanimous forest of hands - against their own will:

---

386 Ibid. 9-10.
387 Polukhina (1989: 222, 300) observed that the expression “There they say ‘It’s one of us’ in the doorway with a nasty grin” means, at the lexical level, a transformation of a cliché into a metacliché - a typical device in Brodsky’s poetics, discovered by Tomas Venclova.
Бродский’s hypocrites - not unlike those depicted in the DC, for whom Dante designated a special place in Hell where they roam in their gilded leaded cloaks\(^{388}\) - go to church in penitential tears to ask for forgiveness.

Despite the gloomy atmosphere prevailing in “PG”, the Soviet realia provide chances for making puns. In Section One, for instance, Brodsky rhymes the word “бемоль” with “моль”:

The music resounding painfully in the temples is, according to Petru-shanskaya\(^{389}\), the famous “Marche funèbre” from Chopin’s Sonata in B minor\(^{390}\). And, indeed, in his essay “Размышления об исчадии Ада”\(^{391}\) Brodsky mentions the frequency with which it was played on the Soviet radio, usually on occasion of the death of a high state official, Stalin among others. The pun lies not in the word itself but in the manner how

\(^{388}\) In Dante’s universe hypocrites dwell in the seventh circle of Hell together with other untruthful men, such as deceitful civil servants, seducers and flatterers. A description of the circle is to be found in *Inferno* (Inf. 23: 91-92, 97-99): “/.../ [Dante is] brought to the congress /.../ of the hypocrites, who go thus sorrily clad /.../.” Dante asks them: “Ma voi chi siete, a cui tanto distilla / quant’ i’ veggio dolor giù per le guance?/ e che pena è in voi che sì sfavilla?” (“But you, whose bitter woe / distils thus down your cheeks, say who are you? / what penalty is it that on you glitters so?”).

\(^{389}\) Петрушанская 1997: 225.

\(^{390}\) The piece is called “бемольная соната” in Russian, see ibid. Chopin’s *Marche funèbre* would link the poem to “Посвящение” of Akhmatova’s “Поэма без героя”: “И ветерком повеяло родным.../ Не море ли?/ Нет это только хвоя / Могильная, и в накипанье пен / *Все ближе, ближе... / Marche funèbre...*” Tsiv’yan, among others, discovers a number of evidence testifying to O. Mandel’shtam’s being the dedicatee of Akhmatova’s poem (Цивьян 1997: 743) - a fact, which would strengthen the connection of Mandel’shtam with the theme of music in Brodsky’s poem (see footnote below). In my opinion, in addition to Chopin, Brodsky could as well refer here to the famous opening chords of Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto in B-flat minor. He mentions in his essay “Less than One” “the continuous Tchaikovsky on the radio” among those characteristic of Soviet life which could “drive one crazy”. (Brodsky 1986: 26).

Brodsky transforms it. As Petrushanskaya observed, Brodsky conjugates the masculine word “моль”, meaning “minor”, employing a case ending in the instrumental case of a feminine noun - “бемолью”. This way he makes it homonymous with the word “моль”, signifying “moth”. The rhymed “homonyms”, even if not genuine, are both immediately associated with presence and absence, time and death. The coat hanging in the wardrobe, eaten by moths, is a visible sign of absence, a kind of remaining shadow of a person who has left.\(^{392}\) In spite of the puns and the satiric tone “PG” is written in a minor key; the depicted objects are either marked by the destructive flow of time or by the indifference of man to his environment, not to mention the visible impacts on life of the senseless plans of the centralised regime.

The last of the three lines quoted above is, of course, a reminiscence from the prologue of Pushkin’s poema “Руслан и Людмила”. The allusion to Pushkin closing the first section, with its semantic connection through rhyme to the theme of music, has convinced Kats\(^ {393}\) that the motive of the grand piano in Brodsky’s poem has its roots in the literary space of Russian poetry, rather than in the physical realia of Soviet Russia.

Brodsky’s play with words manifests itself in Section Five as well. The whole section is full of puns and allusions, most obvious of which recall Lermontov’s poems picturing the East as he perceived it with its palm trees and deserts. As a rule, Lermontov’s image of the East was mainly based on his impressions of the Caucasus. This is yet another proof of the pervasively literary nature of Brodsky’s visions of past life.

I will not proceed into a detailed analysis of Lermontov’s poetry as Brodsky’s subtext, but will focus my attention on puns which are only partly revealed in the Russian text. In order to grasp them one has to resort to the parallel reading of the English version of “PG”.

Там лежучи плашмя на рядовой холстине, отбрасываешь тень, как пальма в Палестине. Особенно - во сне. И, на манер пустыни,

392 The combination of the theme of music and clothes gives us reason to assume that these lines might allude, once again, to Mandel’shtam. The poem in question would be “Жил Александр Герциевич…”, which is about a Jewish musician who played by heart “одну сонату вечную”. Its fifth quatrains, in which the furcoat stands as a symbol for death, is worthy of special note: “Нам с музыкой-голубою / Не страшно умереть, / Там хоть вороньей шубою / На вешалке висеть…” (Мандельштам т. 3, 1994: 47).

393 For a discussion of the motif of the grand piano in Brodsky’s poetry, see Кац 1998:70-71 or Кац 1995: 165.
There even when you lie flat on a sheet of cotton,
your shadow dwarfs a palm in Palestine, begotten
most likely in a dream. There deserts lie well-trodden
by sugar bowls’ houseflies, which trek on foot, old-style.
There under rakish roofs small windows squint hostile.
**The world map is replaced there by a large Holstein**
a-mooing on a hill, awash in sunset’s slobber,
There steel mills far away belch heavy smoke and clobber,
though no one needs all that; no matter drunk or sober.394

(Section V)

The entire scene of the first tercet resembles a painting of a Biblical landscape with a desert and a palm tree, next to which a bare-footed poet-pilgrim with a staff in his hand could well emerge. The impression of a painting arises from the selection of the words. The Russian word for a sheet “холстина” is a diminutive of the word “холст”, which apart from signifying a linen cloth, denotes a painting on canvas. It is synonymous with the word “полотно”, used by Brodsky in an ambiguous sense in his poem “Развивая Платона”.395 The biblical atmosphere is enhanced by the presence of a human figure lying on the cloth who casts a shadow, impressive in its size and intensity. Dahl’s dictionary396 gives the word

395 For an elucidation of the meaning of the word “полотно” in “Развивая Платона”, see Chapter 4.2 below.
396 “Холст - холстина ; простая, грубая ткань, льняная и конопляная, толстое полотно. /.../ Пора мне подъ холстинку, подъ холстъ, въ могилу. Се Даль: Толковый словарь живого великорусского языка в четырех томах. Т. 4 . Москва
“холстина” yet another meaning - that of a tomb - the body of the deceased lies under the linen cloth. The man portrayed in Brodsky’s poem is, nevertheless, alive, since he is lying on the sheet, not under it. The motive of cloth reoccurs in the next stanza as well, this time in the guise of the word “пеструха”. It is derived from the adjective “пестрый” meaning a combination of many colours, for instance a motley cloth. Although this is the literal meaning of the word “пеструха”, it is also a nickname for a spotted cow or a hen. The meanings of the words “холстина” and “пеструха” are incorporated in the English version of the poem in one word - “Holstein” - a breed of black-and-white dairy cattle, raised originally in Holland and Germany. Brodsky’s attempt to present a “cartographic” coverage of the domain of Soviet rule as well as the implied inclination of the totalitarian system to a coarse distinction between “blacks” and “whites” with such an imagery, undermines the credibility of his effort.

The second pun in Section Five plays with the words “сахарный песок” and “пустынь”, which immediately bring to mind the sandy Sahara desert, although it is not mentioned in the text. The vastness of the desert is reduced to a single sugarbowl by replacing the poet-pilgrim with a fly crossing the sweet desert of sugar. Despite the fact that the sand desert of the Sahara and the palm trees in Palestine are associated with the warm climate of the south, Brodsky does not forget that the land of his vision is located in the north. In wintertime the hyperborean winds blow in its empty parks, where one huddles in stairways for some warmth in Section Three.

Зимой в пустых садах трубят гипербореи /.../. (Section III)

Hyperborea is actually a name for a paradisiac country situated “beyond the North” originating from Greek mythology. The Hyperboreans were a fortunate, virtuous people living somewhere beyond the north wind in continual bliss, enjoying a never-ending springtime. Brodsky’s “hyperboreans” is a pun, in which the name of the tribe is given a deliberately incorrect pseudo-Classical meaning. The word is also associated with the Petersburg poets of the Silver Age, Acmeists in particular, who published a literary journal called “Гиперборей” during the years 1912-1913. And, indeed, Brodsky’s north wind seems to resonate a quatrain in Man-


397 “Пестрый - пеструха; пестрый, рыбой или щедровитый // Пеструха, пеструшка; кличка пестрой коровы или курицы. /.../.” (Ibid. t. 3: 104).
del’shtam’s poem “Канцона”\textsuperscript{398}. There is yet another reminiscence of Mandel’shtam in the same section, characterising the climate of the northern capital.

Зимой в пустых садах трубят гипербореи,
и ребер больше там у пыльной батареи
в подъездах, чем у дам. И вообще быстрее
нащупывает их рукой замерзшей странник.
Там, наливая чай, ломают зуб о пряник.
Там мучает охранник во сне штыка трехгранник.

От дождевой струи там плохо спичке серной.
Там говорят “свои” в дверях с усмешкой скверной.
У рыбьей чешуи в воде там цвет консервный.

(Section III)

The match recalls the same motif in Mandel’shtam’s “Кому зима - арак и пунш голубоглазый”\textsuperscript{399}:

Немного теплого куриного помета
И бестолкового овечьего тепла;
Я все отдам за жизнь - мне так нужна забота, -
И спичка серная меня б согреть могла.

In Mandel’shtam’s poem, quoting Taranovsky’s\textsuperscript{400} words, “the sulphur match becomes an analogue of the human sympathy so badly needed by the poet”. Brodsky’s lyrical subject’s search for warmth can also be construed as referring not only to the harsh climate, but also to the lack of trust and genuine sympathy between people.

All in all, the representation of the Russo-Soviet realia in “PG” on the lexical surface embraces two levels which, at first glance, seem to be contradictory, but which, in the final analysis, complement each other. The generalised scenes and figures that seem profoundly realistic are intertwined with literary scenes which emerge in the form of reminiscences from lyrical works which every Russian knows by heart. As is common

\textsuperscript{398} “Я покину край гипербореев, / Чтобы зреньем напить судьбы развязку /.../.” (Мандельштам 1994 т. 3: 51-52).

\textsuperscript{399} Мандельштам т. 2 1993: 36-37.

\textsuperscript{400} Taranovsky 1976: 31.
in Brodsky’s poetics, it is always not easy to tell the boundary between the literary landscape and the actual reality.

3.3.2 Language as Homeland

The last four sections, together with the epilogue, comprise, if not entirely without some self-irony, a serious contemplation of the lyrical subject’s fate as a poet with its astonishing turns and unforeseen consequences. Since the perspective of the exiled poet on his native city coincides with that of the expelled Dante on his cursed Florence, we have good reason to begin the examination of the last part of the poem again with the more or less obvious allusions to Dante that emerge in Section Nine.

In this section the poet asserts that there are general rules that regulate the life of the state along with its citizens. The lyrical subject openly confesses that he deliberately has not observed the rules of the majority, for, in his opinion, they entail lies and hypocrisy. He, as a proponent for pluralism and personal freedom, has wanted to set up a system of values of his own.

Brodsky’s line “Ну что ж! на все свои законы” is evidently a reminiscence from Baratynsky’s poem “На всё свой ход...”:

На всё свой ход, на всё свои законы.
Меж люлькою и гробом спит Москва /.../.
These lines moved Brodsky to dwell at length on the opposition of Moscow-St. Petersburg in one of his interviews. Brodsky singled out the “European spirit” of St. Petersburg as well as its geographical position “on the edge”. In his view, these two factors were the main reasons for the birth of Russian literature precisely in St. Petersburg instead of Moscow with its “purely Russian patriarchal spirit”. Brodsky interprets Baratynsky’s lines as mockery on Moscow’s attempt to imitate the intellectual and literary life of St. Petersburg and Europe. Taking into account the implicit association of the line “All things have rules to reckon” - Baratynsky as a mediator - with the traditional polarity between “the European St. Petersburg” and “the Russian Moscow”, one could come to the conclusion that the “rules” which the poet chose deliberately not to obey were the ones originating from “the Russian”, i.e. Moscow culture (such as kissing of icons, for example). No wonder then that the face of a Gorgon - in spite of its horrifying appearance - an emblem of the European tradition, seems to be engraved on his memory.

The head of a Gorgon on a certain bridge which seemed “there” “the truth’s most honest version” has been located by Lev Loseff on the

401 Эпельбуэн 2000: 137-139.
402 Ibid.: “В общем, культура, по крайней мере физическая культура, воплощена в Ленинграде в гораздо более высокой степени, нежели в Москве. Исторически Ленинград, или Петербург, всегда противопоставлялся Москве, ее чисто русскому партиархальному духу. Еще Баратынский написал замечательные стихи: [the quoted above lines - MK]. Он высмеивал Москву за ее интеллектуальные и литературные поползновения, за попытку установить салоны, подобные тем, которые существуют в Петербурге или вообще в Европе. Более того, я хотел бы сказать, что литература действительно началась в Петербурге /.../. Почему? Потому что, на мой взгляд, люди, которые оказались в Петербурге, - это первое образованное в европейском смысле русское сословие, они ощутили себя как бы на краю империи, оказались в положении, позволявшем взглянуть на эту империю, если угодно, со стороны. Что прежде всего необходимо писателю - это элемент отстранения. И этот элемент отстранения был обеспечен Петербургом чисто физически, то есть географически. Открытие Петербурга для литературы было как бы открытием Нового Света, подобно открытию Америки; то есть ты как бы оказываясь внутри своей культуры, но и вне ее. И ты смотришь на свою страну, на свою нацию как бы с некой /.../ возвышенности. Высота для последующих поколений, занимавшихся литературой в Петербурге и потом в Ленинграде, была обеспечена именно той культурной традицией, которая сложилась в Петербурге. /.../ Внешность у него [Петербурга - МК] абсолютно европейская./.../ Зачастую кажется, что воздух там иногда пахнет европейским бензином или европейскими духами. /.../ В воздухе много европейских признаков.”
403 Brodsky 2000: 244.
404 See Brodsky 2000: 520.
Engineers’ Bridge in St. Petersburg, which bears images of Perseus’s shield. Nevertheless, they are not the only ones in St. Petersburg space. Shields with the head of a Gorgon line the fence around the Summer Garden on the side of the Moyka, as well. The shields of Perseus can be observed from the Panteleimon Bridge crossing the Fontanka, which has its own Medusa decorating the streetlamps. The Engineer’s Bridge is next to the Panteleimon Bridge. There is a whole constellation of Medusas in and around the Summer Garden. A cycle of poems dedicated to architectural masterpieces of St. Petersburg by Benedikt Livshits includes two poems “Летний сад” and “Дождь в Летнем саду”, where the shields of Perseus are mentioned. Most of the poems of the cycle were published under the title “Болотная Медуза”.

The myth of Perseus is full of visual symbolism. Perseus killed Medusa, the mortal one of the three Gorgons, by using his shield as a mirror. The shield protected him from the Gorgon’s petrifying gaze so that the force that was so destructive to others was made to destroy the monster. The myth is construed as replicating the theme of battle of the Olympian Gods and their descendants with the chthonian powers of the Underworld.

The severed head of the Gorgon, with its horrifying appearance, emerges in other poems of Brodsky as well. In Jukht’s view, it is among the most important details of the poet’s native city. In “PG” Jukht perceives the Gorgon as a metaphor of the numbing effect of the totali-

---

405 The Panteleimon Bridge is a continuation of Panteleimon Street (former Pestel’ Street). The Muruzi House, where Brodsky lived with his parents, is situated at the other end of this street.

406 For sculptures picturing Medusa in St. Petersburg, see Rakov 2000: 162-165. Rakov describes the Gorgons on the iron grille of the Summer Garden as follows: “Острые пики ограды чередуются с овальными щитами, в центре которых, поверх скрещенных мечей, - маска гормоны Медузы. Широко открытые глаза Медузы, в них застыли одновременно злоба и страх. Устрашающе извиваются змеи на голове. Подобные изображения можно видеть и на перилах расположенного поблизости 1-го Инженерного моста, и на торшерах соседнего с ним моста Пестеля.”

407 This cycle of poems is published as an appendix to Gasparov’s account of its poetics, see Гаспаров 1984: 93-105. In “Дождь в летнем саду” Livshits writes: “Но плеск - и ты в гранитном склепе / Шевелишься, и снова нов / Твой плен, и сестры все свирепей / Вопят с Персеевых щитов. /.../ И полон сад левобережный / Мятежным временем медуз.”(Ibid. 103).

408 The Gorgon appears in “Письмо генералу Z.” (Бродский II: 223) and “Желтая куртка” (Бродский II: 381). In the latter poem the face of the Gorgon is explicitly located on the iron grille. For a discussion of the Gorgon motif in Brodsky’s poetry, see Юхт 1998: 424-425.

409 Ibid.
tarian rule on man. On the other hand, however, the lyrical subject emphasises the fact that he has developed a resistance to the power of its mortifying eyes. He is not gorgonised even when he - in his present life, beyond the boundaries of his homeland - comes across its “huge variant”. On the contrary, he considers the monster the most sincere face among his former fellow citizens. The Gorgon is openly evil, it does not hide its true essence. Brodsky seems to prefer inanimate things to people, as was already pointed out in the previous chapter. Works of art, be they poems or sculptures, are honest in their manifestations of truth because they are incapable of pretence or betrayal.

In the Ninth Canto of Dante’s *Inferno*, the poet encounters the three furies, who summon Medusa to turn the unexpected visitors to stone. There his experienced guide, Virgil, covers the eyes of his ignorant companion in order to prevent him from seeing Gorgon’s glance and gives him the following instructions:

> “Volgiti in dietro e tien lo viso chiuso; 
> chè se il Gorgòn si mostra e tu ‘l vedessi, 
> nulla sarebbe del tornar mai suso.”

Così disse ‘l maestro; ed elli stessi

mi volse, e non si tenne alle mie mani, 
che con le sue ancor non mi chiudessi.\(^{410}\)

The encounter with Medusa is followed by lines that have been interpreted as a reference to the allegorical meaning underlying the poet’s words.

> O voi ch’avete li ‘ntelletti sani, 
> mirate la dottrina che s’asconde 
> sotto ‘l velame de li versi strani.\(^{411}\)

But if the St. Petersburg-Leningrad Gorgons are sincere, incapable of deception, what can be said of the “gigantic variant” of the Medusa which he came upon in his present surroundings?\(^{412}\) The answer lies in his poem

\(^{410}\) *Inf. 9: 55-60; “’Turn thee about: thine eyes, quick, hide them, hide; / for, if the Gorgon’s face by thee were seen, / no return upward hence could e’er betide.’ / Thus spake the master: and with anxious mien / turned me himself, not trusting to my hands, / but with his own, as well, closing my een.”*

\(^{411}\) *Inf. 9: 61-63: “O ye of a sane mind that understands, / note the strange verses well, and ponder o’er / the doctrine veiled ‘neath their close-woven strands.”*

\(^{412}\) In some instances it has been perceived, mistakenly in my opinion, as a reference to the Statue of Liberty in New York.
dedicated to Dante’s hometown. In the last section of “Декабрь во Флоренции” which, as was observed, has both Florence and St. Petersburg as its doubled object of representation, Brodsky lists the details of the two cities:

/.../ И там рябит от аркад, колоннад, от чугунных пугал /.../.

(Section IX “Декабрь во Флоренции”)

The Florentine counterpart of the Petersburg iron scarecrow is Cellini’s famous sculpture picturing Perseus holding up the severed head of the Medusa. The colossal bronze statue stands in Loggia dei Lanzi on Piazza della Signoria. The impressive palace was built as an assembly area for meetings of the Signoria, mentioned in Section Two of “Декабрь во Флоренции”, whereas the bust of Benvenuto Cellini - the outstanding Renaissance sculptor and goldsmith, displayed in the central part of Ponte Vecchio - appears in Section Three of the poem. Thus the Gorgon is yet another link connecting the accursed and desired native cities of the two expelled poets.

413 There is, however, another work of art illustrating the head of the Gorgon in Florence - the no less famous painting by Caravaggio depicting Perseus’s shield. The painting, much smaller in size than the statue by Cellini, is located in the Uffizi Gallery.

414 The main theme in Section II of “DF” is that of the poet and the czar/ the poet and the state. It is here that St. Petersburg is referred to as the second Florence with the architecture of paradise: “/.../ и твой подъезд в двух минутах от Синьории / намекает глухо, спустя века, на причину изгнанья: вблизи вулкана / невозможно жить, не показывая кулака; но / и нельзя разжать его, умирая, / потому что смерть - это всегда вторая / Флоренция с архитектурой Рая”. Section III: “На Старом Мосту - теперь его починили, - / где бьютает на фоне синих холмов Челлини, / бойко торгуют вяческой бранзулеткой /.../.” The “bric-a-brac” may be an ironic reference to Cellini’s profession. By repairs made to the Old Bridge, Brodsky probably hints to the fact that the bridge has been reconstructed several times during the centuries that have passed since it was built in the Roman times. It is actually the oldest bridge crossing the Arno in Florence, although its form is no longer the same as it was in Dantean times. The bust of Cellini was laid in the central part of the bridge in the year 1900. Moreover, Cellini with his fragile jewellery is associated in the mind of a Russian reader with the northern winter, thanks to Vyazemsky’s famous lines in the poem “Царскосельский сад зимою”: “Твой Бенвенуто, о Россия, / Наш доморощенный мороз / Вплетает звезды ледяные / В венки пушисто-снежных роз.”. See Epshtein’s elucidation of these lines: “Мороз - Бенвенуто Челлини, то есть мастер ювелирного искусства, художник сверкающей и безжизненной красоты, какою сияют драгоценные камни.” (Эпштейн 1990: 173).
However, we can find a mediator that joins the two cities even closer together, adding to the unity an inkling of the literary environment of the present “new life” of the lyrical subject of “PG”. The literary common denominator is Robert Lowell’s poem “Florence”, which explains Brodsky’s recollection of and sympathy for the iron monster. As we learn from Sergeyev’s article, Brodsky met Lowell in 1975 and had a profound discussion concerning Dante with the latter. Besides, Lowell’s poem, not unlike Brodsky’s verses, contemplates the theme of writing and its potential capacity to penetrate to the truth of things:

I long for the black ink,  
cuttlefish, April, Communists  
and brothels of Florence -  
everything /.../.

Some features of the city call to mind the outlines of St. Petersburg drawn by Brodsky in his poetry:

Oh Florence, Florence, patroness  
of the lovely tyrannicides!  
Where the tower of the Old Palace  
pierces the sky  
like a hypodermic needle,  
Perseus, David and Judith,

---


416 Сергеев 1997: 153 - Brodsky writes in a letter dated 21.5.1975, addressed to the author of the article: “Неделю тому назад имел первый за три года разговор про Данте - так это было с Робертом Лоэллом... Не говорит - бубнит, по звуку невразумительное, по смыслу - весьма дельное.”. For Brodsky’s comments on Lowell, Dante and Florence, see also Birkerts 1982: 116-117. For other comments on Lowell and his poetry, see, e.g. Volkov 1998: 133-136 (Волков 1998: 145-147), Brumm 1974: 234. Moreover, Brodsky’s “Elegy for Robert Lowell” (Бродский IV: 319-312) which is given a detailed analysis by Rigsbee and Weiner (Rigsbee 1999: 119-124, Weiner 1994: 45-58), is partly written in the Dantesque terza rima, which gives Rigsbee reason to compare it to a newly created Dantean underworld which is, in this case, the city of Boston marked with the silent absence of the deceased poet. (Ibid. 122-3).

417 In “Полдень в комнате” Brodsky describes the golden spire of the Admiralty in terms of a needle: “В полдень, гордясь остротой угла, / как возвращенный луч, обезболивала игла / содержимое туч.” (Бродский III: 175).
lords and ladies of the Blood,
Greek demi-gods of the Cross,
rise sword in hand
above the unshaven,
formless decapitation
of the monsters, tubs of guts,
mortifying chunks for the pack.

The Medusa episode in the DC has usually been understood as an allegory of the danger that a human being will confront if he rejects his conscience and allows doubt and unbelief to seize his mind. Consequently, he will become insensitive, lacking the capacity to distinguish between right and wrong. Lowell turns good and evil upside down in his poem; the so-called winners over the evil forces, the bloodstained heroes, are depicted as murderers. They become representatives of power and the victorious in the history, whereas the monsters turn into pitiful, fiercely slaughtered beings with whom the poet would prefer to identify himself. Once again we witness a moment when ink is more sincere than blood in unveiling the essence of things:

**Pity the monsters!
Pity the monsters!
Perhaps one always took the wrong side
Ah, to have known, to have loved
too many Davids and Judiths!
My heart bleeds black blood for the monster.
I have seen the Gorgon.
The erotic terror
of her helpless, big bosomed body
lay like slop.
Wall-eyed, staring the despot to stone,
her severed head swung
like a lantern in the victor’s hand.

Like Lowell, Brodsky, too, gazes into the eyes of the Gorgon without feeling fear or without being deprived of his conscience. For him, too, this personification of evil - reified into a piece of art - represents the archetypal form of evil. In the surrounding reality the falsehood disguises itself as good, or worse still, as the “common good”, whereas the face of the Gorgon displays evil unmasked. For Brodsky the Gorgon becomes a

---

symbol for the real nature of man which materialises itself in human ideologies and endeavours.\textsuperscript{419} The Gorgon, conceived as a materialised truth, differs in this respect from many other statues in Brodsky’s texts, which usually fall victims to the lyrical subject’s iconoclasm precisely because they appear to him as materialised lies.\textsuperscript{420} As for other mythical creatures figuring in Section Nine - the Muses and Parca\textsuperscript{421} - they take the poem to another level, to the world of poetic inspiration, where we find the lyrical subject pondering over his creative powers or, more accurately, on the dependence of his poetical identity on the mythical celestial powers.\textsuperscript{422}

Section Nine as a whole serves as a bridge from the lyrical subject’s lamentation on his absence from his birthplace, which occupies the preceding two sections, to the absolute space of the world of letters outlined in Section Ten and in the Epilogue of “PG”. The finality of his absence is signified by the use of the past tense, as a contrast to the preceding sections, which are written in the “infinite” tense of the present continuous:

| Я вырос в тех краях. Я говорил “закурим” ih лучшему певцу. Был содержимым тюрем. Привык к свинцу небес и к айвазовским бурям. |

\textsuperscript{419} On this point, cf. Brodsky’s opinion of the truth in “Profile of Clio”: “/.../ The truth about things, should it exist, is likely to have a very dark side. Given the humans’ status as newcomers, i.e., given the world’s precedence, the truth about things is bound to be unhuman. /.../ Perhaps the invention of the atom bomb is closer to it [the truth - MK] than the invention of penicillin. Perhaps the same applies to any state-sponsored form of bestiality, particularly to wars and genocidal policies, as well as to spontaneous national and revolutionary movements. /.../But humanity of inquiry is not likely to render its subject human.” (Brodsky 1995: 135). For Brodsky’s discussion of good and evil and their manifestations in the Soviet state, see also Бродский VII: 64-67, Бродский VII: 75-81.

\textsuperscript{420} Ranchin mentions “Памятник” and “Перед памятником А.С.Пушкину в Одессе” as embodiments of “materialised lies” in Brodsky’s early poetry (Ранчин 1993: 483).

\textsuperscript{421} For a discussion of the Muses and Parca as reminiscences from Pushkin and Akhmatova, see, e.g. Ранчин 1998b: 38. The most important allusion, at least in the Dantesque context, is probably the one to Akhmatova’s “Муза”: “Пред милой гостевой с дудочкой в руке. / И вот вошла. Откинув покрывало, / Внимательно взглянула на меня. / Ей говорю: "Ты ли Данту диктовала / Страницы Ада?" Отвечает: "Я". (Ахматова, т. 2, 1986: 173-4).

\textsuperscript{422} According to the myth of the Medusa, when Perseus flew away with Medusa’s severed head, her blood trickled down to the sea and Neptune created from it the famous winged steed called Pegasus, the poets’ source of inspiration. This was Medusa’s contribution to constructive creative activity.
Там думал, и умру - от скуки, от испуга.  
Когда не от руки, так на руках у друга.  
Видать, не рассчитал. Как квадратуру круга.

Видать, не рассчитал. Зане в театре задник важнее, чем актер. Простор важней, чем всадник.  
Передних ног простор не отличит от задних.

(Section VII)

The intensity and astonishment engendered by his unexpected absence are emphasised by the repetition of the statement “I am no longer there” at the beginning of two triplets in the same section, as if it remains difficult for the lyrical subject to comprehend his present position outside.  
His statement reveals only the consequence - the absence - not the very action of departing, which seems to suggest that he is not the actual agent of the act, that it was not his intention to leave the city of his birth, but that it just turns out, to his own astonishment, that he is no longer there:

Теперь меня там нет. Означенной пропаже дивятся, может быть, лишь вазы в Эрмитаже.  
Отсутствие мое большой дыры в пейзаже не сделало; пусть: дыра, - но небольшая.  
Ее затянут мох или пучки лишая, гармонии тонов и проч. не нарушая.

Теперь меня там нет. Об этом думать странно.  
Но было бы чудней изображать барана, дрожать, но раздражать на склоне дней тирана /.../.

(Section VIII)

The content of the “Soviet” scenes unfolding in the preceding sections, located “там”, seem to be defined by the represented space. In fact, it is the various represented loci that seem to give rise to the depicted activity, while in the tercets quoted above it is the temporal perspective that demarcates the theme of the lyric narrative. His present life is not located. His position outside the Soviet Russia remains undefined. The absence of the lyrical subject in St. Petersburg-Leningrad, which is a result of unexpected tragic events, is viewed from a non-localised present.

Absence itself is concretised by likening it to a hole in a landscape painting which can be mended by adding some more colour to the can-
vas. The interstrophic enjambment “большой дыры в пейзаже / не сделало” is an indicator of the sudden rupture in the life of the lyrical subject. Moreover, the hole in the landscape could be hidden by filling it with lichen and moss. As van Baak maintains, lichen and moss are densely connotated indices of a northern landscape with no marked features. Nor does it retain any distinguishable traces of one’s presence. Furthermore, the hole could also be conceived of as a metaphor for a tomb - a hole dug in the earth in advance of the death of the lyrical subject - implying, once again, the tendency of the Petersburg poets to perceive the city as the place for dying par excellence - who, nevertheless, does not know the final destination of his journey on earth, as we can read from the epilogue. The hole could also be understood as a form, as outlines of an object. As Lotman asserts, the form has domination over materia in Brodsky’s poetic philosophy. The essence of an object/thing is in its contours, i.e. in the very form of the hole that it leaves behind in space. The attitude toward the present absence of the lyrical subject is provided by inanimate objects - vases in the Hermitage - which might possibly notice that something is missing, but would not be able to express any sense of loss. The experience of absence conveyed by negation - “I am no longer there” /“Теперь меня там нет” - gives an impression that the purpose of the whole poem was this painful statement. The intensity of the experience is such that it can be compared only to the final absence, to death.

423 For a discussion of intrastrophic enjambments as well as internal rhymes in “PG”, see Polukhina 1989: 220-225. For remarks on hyperstrophic enjambments in Brodsky’s poetry, see Lotman M. 1995 passim, especially pages 318-319.
426 It seems to recall a line in Thomas Hardy’s poem Your Last Drive -“And be spoken of as one who was not” on which line Brodsky dwells in his essay “Wooing the Inanimate”; “In [this line - MK] one detects the sense not so much of a loss or unbearable absence as that of all-consuming negation. “One who was not” is too resolute for comfort or, /.../ for discomfort, and negation of an individual is what death is all about. /.../.” (Brodsky 1995: 357). The overwhelming sense of a loss may result from the fact that, in Brodsky’s view, in Russia (as opposed to Western Europe) everything is for life, be it the apartment, the town or the country. (Brodsky 1986: 477). Moreover, Brodsky’s words on Hardy’s poems could be applied to his own “Fifth Anniversary”. They explain the polarity of the impersonal tone of the first part and the intense personal anxiety of the last part of the poem: “/.../ For all its riches of detail and topographical reference, the cycle has an oddly universal, almost impersonal quality, since it deals with the extremes of the emotional spectrum.” (Brodsky 1995:361).
Notwithstanding the constant consciousness of absence from the place where one, in all likelihood, should have been even at the moment when writing down the poem, Brodsky’s lyrical subject does not deny the reality of his banishment, but creates for himself an alternative reality on a sheet of paper. Poetry represents for him absolute space where he “does not need a guide”. Unlike Dante, “here”, in his own realm of writing, he can manage without the help of a Virgil:

и без костей язык, до внятных звуков лаком,  
судьбу благодарит кириллицыным знаком.  
На то она судьба, чтоб понимать на всяком  
нечере. Предел мой - пространство в чистом виде.  
В нем места нет столпу, фонтану, пирамиде.  
В нем, судя по всему, я не нуждаюсь в гиде.  
/.../  
Мне нечего сказать ни греку, ни варягу.  
Зане не знаю я, в какую землю лягу.  
Скрипи, скрипи перо! переводи бумагу.  

(Section X)

If at the end of Akhmatova’s “Первая элегия”, as Leiter\footnote{Leiter 1983: 123.} concludes, the generalised “Dostoyevsky’s Russia” has narrowed to a single, ominous St. Petersburg landmark - that of Semyonovsky Square - Brodsky’s generalised “Soviet Russia”, despite its immense vastness, has shrunk to a mere sheet of paper. Nevertheless, its dimensions are infinite. It is not just a flat surface, but has a reality of its own of immense depth. Language - the Logos - is the origin and measure of its dimensions in the absolute. The quoted passage is very similar to Section Four in “Декабрь во Флоренции”, discussed in the previous chapter. Once again it reminds the exiled poet of the chance of obtaining a new spiritual homeland through poetry in language, by creating a private existence. The landscape of this spiritual homeland is much more profound, sovereign and rich in its meanings than the concrete reality manifested in materia. This shift of reality signifies a transition from the world of objects/things to the world of signs. As Mikhail Lotman\footnote{Lotman M. 1994: 119 -120; Lotman conceives of the Gorgon as an embodiment of the idea of petrification as well as that of an exit from life. The Gorgon’s face is a sign in which the signifier and the signified merge into one.} maintains, this transition, which actually means a shift from the empirical world to the world of
ideas, is a continuous process in Brodsky’s semantics. It entails the simultaneous disappearance of the lyrical subject from the empirical reality of objects.

In spite of the infernal overtones of the poem, Brodsky ends “PG” in almost a major key. The nostalgic tone is muted by the “acoustic landscape” evoked by the scratch of the poet’s pen on paper. In this sense the poem’s thematic tension from a quite ominous beginning to an idiosyncratic happy end, corresponds to Dante’s perception of “a comedy”\textsuperscript{429}. The poem as a whole cannot be reduced to a description of an earthly, materialised hell, if only because of the last sections. The Word, the mother tongue included, remains incorruptible. It provides the poet with tools for seeing with disillusioned clarity the essence of things, be they events of the past life, or things to be dealt with in the present, sometimes even in the unknown future. Poetry does not make the poet immortal, as we read in the final lines of “PG”, but his verses may thus have a chance to outlive their author.

Мне нечего сказать ни греку, ни варягу.\textsuperscript{430}

Зане не знаю я, в какую землю лягу.\textsuperscript{431}

\textsuperscript{429} See, e.g. Zubova’s elucidation of Brodsky’s “Представление”; “Называя свою поэму комедией /…/, Данте пользуется средневековой терминологией: комедия, как он поясняет в письме к Кангранде, - всякое поэтическое произведение среднего стиля с устрашающим началом и благополучным концом, написанное на народном языке; трагедия - всякое поэтическое произведение высокого стиля с восхищающим и спокойным началом и ужасным концом.” (Зубова 1999: 203, 197).

\textsuperscript{430} The expression “ни греку, ни варягу” is a paraphrase from “путь из Варяг в Греки”, signifying the transcontinental waterway from the northern Baltic Sea down to the Black Sea via the Neva, Volhov, Lovat, Dvina and Dnepr rivers. In the spiritual sense these “poles” represent the two elements that formed the basis of the old Russian state and culture. The Varangians, the Northmen, who under Rurik established a dynasty in Russia in the 9\textsuperscript{th} century, brought with them the “northern pagan barbarism”, which then merged into the “Hellenistic - Christian spirituality” of Byzantium, brought in from the south. The establishment of St. Petersburg at the mouth of the Neva river was conceived of as a new opening of this legendary water route described already by Apostel Andrey Pervozvanny in his chronicle “Пути из Варяг в Греки”. (Лебедев 2000: 62). For Brodsky the Varangian and the Greek have become plain geographical coordinates of a country which, in all its vastness, is indifferent to the fate of its bard. At the same time they represent yet another pair of opposites, of non-meeting ends, which are characteristic of the literary space of “PG” as a whole.

\textsuperscript{431} Although the poet is not aware of his final destination, Brodsky’s opinion about the wished-for fate of all Russians, himself included, in the life beyond can be read from his notes written down in the year 1970: “Страшный суд - страшным судом, но
The poet writes for himself a private existence in language, a reality that embraces those spheres of life which cannot be reduced to a system. Language, with its unique ability to create realities, is Brodsky’s response to any form of ideological totalitarianism.

3.4 Other Insights into “Hell” and “Paradise” - “Похороны Бобо”

A similar shift from the empirical world to the world of signs witnessed in “Пятая годовщина” as well as in “Декабрь во Флоренции” occurs in the poems “Похороны Бобо” and “Мы жили в городе окаменелой водки...”. Variations on the themes of Hell and Paradise associated with the St. Petersburg space appear in both of these texts as well. “Похороны Бобо”, written in 1972, has been discussed a number of times, whereas “Мы жили в городе...”, which belongs to the later period of Brodsky’s oeuvre, has not yet been studied so far. My main concern here will be the antinomy of “hell - paradise” as it emerges on the level of motives, central themes as well as in tropes and images in these two poems.

As the title already indicates, “Похороны Бобо” is about death. The ambiguous addressee of the poem has evoked numerous suggestions as to the identity of the deceased Bobò. This seems to suggest, as Mikhail Lotman\(^\text{432}\) maintains, that Brodsky’s interest lies not as much in the person who passed away as in the very phenomenon of death. What leaves no room for doubt is the fact, that the death of Bobò - as well as her existence in the afterlife - is irrevocably linked to the St. Petersburg topography. Once again, St. Petersburg emerges as a \textit{locus mortis} in Brodsky’s lyrics. Bobò’s death causes the poet to dwell on the potential alternatives for the afterlife.

As a matter of fact, notwithstanding the different identities ascribed to Bobò in published discussions of the poem, they do not contradict each other. Boris Paramonov\(^\text{433}\), for instance, who reads the poem in the light...

\(^{432}\) In Lotman’s view, poems which testify to Brodsky’s particular interest in death include such works as “Похороны Бобо”, “Осенин крик ястреба”, and especially poems “Бабочка” and “Муха”. He adds that it is as if the insignificance of the dead person underlines the significance of death itself (Лотман М. 1997b: 298).

\(^{433}\) Парамонов 1983: 275.
of Jungian psychology, argues that Bobò is a chthonian deity from Greek mythology. Rigsbee\textsuperscript{434}, in turn, discovers in Bobò echoes of a French prostitute in Charles-Louis Philippe’s novel \textit{Bubu du Montparnasse}. For him, Bobò, identified with a butterfly, represents “distracted youth” - her non-commitment and nonchalance to the condition of tyranny that surrounded her in her former existence is a manifestation of a sort of nihilism. Simultaneously, it is a sign of her cultural independence. Bobò’s indifferent attitude towards her own condition remains unchanged in the realm of death. Rigsbee, among others, is of the opinion that in Brodsky’s myth-making, it is precisely the image of a butterfly that supplies the link between life and death. Batkin\textsuperscript{435}, too, perceives Bobò as a butterfly, as a dead butterfly in an empty tin can. The proposed identities do not obscure the thematic core of the poem, which manifests itself in the opposition between “life and life beyond death”, whereas Shrayer’s\textsuperscript{436} identification of Bobò with Anna Akhmatova - which serves as a premise of his elucidation of the poem - seems insufficiently justified.

The identity of Bobò testifies to the fact that the focus of the poem is, indeed, not on the identity of the addressee, but rather on transition of the boundary between life and death. Brodsky’s interest lies in questions like “What would the life beyond be like, if there is any?” The epigraph of Czeslaw Milosz’s poem “\textit{Bobo’s Metamorphosis}”, which reads in English translation as follows: \textit{“The distance between being and nothingness is infinite”}\textsuperscript{437} could well have served as a starting point for Brodsky’s poem. As Kreps\textsuperscript{438} has observed, it is the very concepts of being and non-being, the transition to nothingness, which interest Brodsky more than the opposition of life and death.

\textsuperscript{434} Rigsbee 1999: 60-62, 67.
\textsuperscript{435} Баткин 1997: 39-41. Batkin establishes the semantic link between the name “Bobò” and the expression “делать бо-бо” - to hurt.
\textsuperscript{436} Shrayer 1993: 45-64 or Шраер 1997: 113-137. As Shrayer himself notes, there are no references to Akhmatova’s poetry in Brodsky’s poem. The author of the article explains their absence as a deliberate minus-device (ibid. 64 or 129 respectively) employed by the poet. Nor are there any references to Akhmatova’s biography. Shrayer’s identification of the name “Bobò” with Akhmatova is based on his assumption that the name is used by the poet as a private code so as to hide the name of the real addressee. I find this unconvincing.
\textsuperscript{437} Milosz 1988: 162-166. The motto is taken from \textit{Entertainments Pleasant and Useful (Zabawy przyjemne i pożyteczne, 1776)}.
\textsuperscript{438} Крепс 1984: 205 or Крепс 1990: 9. Kreps maintains that Brodsky is not interested in the physiological process of death. I would like to argue, though, that one of the main themes of Brodsky’s poetry is precisely the process of dying - the impact of time on the body. In this sense his poetry can be perceived as a continuous process of decaying of the flesh (\textit{materia}) as a means to prepare oneself for death.
What is noteworthy for us is the fact that the St. Petersburg topography serves as a backdrop for the meditative stroll of the lyrical subject. Or, more precisely, the geometrical forms of the city-scape - window frames, arches and surfaces - provide the poet with symbols with which the main antinomy of being and nothingness can be evoked. As both Paramonov and Shrayer have noted, the antinomy of two geometrical forms - a circle and a square - underlie the structure of the poem. The roundness of the circle manifests itself above all in the graphics of the name of the addressee “Bobò” with a stressed vowel “o” in the end. The meaning attributed to the stressed vowel “o”, (which, in addition to “Bobò” occurs in many other words of the poem), representing a circle or a sphere - a symbol of perfection since Plato’s times - goes through a metamorphosis, just as the title of Milosz’s poem suggests. It is often juxtaposed with linear forms and angles which distort its genuine roundness and, eventually, empty it from its original meaning of perfection and life. The distorting lines may take the shape of a window frame, a horizon, the spire of the Admirality or an alphabet with no curved lines, such as the “I’s” and “A’s” in the names of “Kiki” and “Zaza”:

Бобо мертва, но шапки недолой.
Чем объяснить, что утешаться нечём.
Мы не проколем бабочку иглой
Адмиралтейства - только изувечим. (Section 1)

Бобо мертва, и в этой строчке грусть.
Квадраты окон, арок полукружья.
Такой мороз, что коль убьют, то пусть из огнестрельного оружья. (Section 2)

Сны без Бобо напоминают явь,
и воздух входит в комнату квадратом. (Section 3)

Бобо мертва. На круглые глаза
вид горизонта действует как нож, но
тебя, Бобо, Кики или Заза

440 Bachelard, for instance, regards roundness as an essential, primitive image of being; “The full roundness” (“la rondeur pleine”) is equalled in his accounts to the “roundness of life” (“la vie ronde”). The roundness of being implies simultaneously highest degree of unity and concentration on the self, but also the notion of isolation (Bachelard 1957: 212, 214).
The image of a knife cutting the round eye in half is reminiscent of Luis Buñuel’s film “The Andalusian Dog”. Keeping in mind that the horizon is a common cultural image of the future, at least in the Western world, Brodsky’s comparison of the line of the horizon to a knife seems to imply a sharp and sudden halt in the flow of time.

Bobò’s metamorphosis takes place on the vocalic level, as was noted. The letter “o” as a signifier of life’s fulfilment and completeness is transformed into a designator of nothingness, emptiness. It is deprived both of life and significance and turned into a zero. The zero implies both Bobò’s present condition of non-beingness as well as the sentiment of loss that her sudden absence from life evokes in the lyrical subject. She, who was everything, is turned into a blob of emptiness. Bobò’s death gives rise to thoughts in the lyrical subject’s mind concerning the potential alternatives of her present location; she might be either in Hell or in emptiness, the latter being a more obvious place for the soul of the departed:

Наверно, после смерти - пустота.  
И вероятнее, и хуже Ада.  

.../

Идет четверг. Я верю в пустоту.  
В ней как в Аду, но более херово.  
И новый Дант склоняется к листу  
и на пустое место ставит слово.  

The quoted lines seem to suggest that the lyrical subject has already become familiar with Hell, and that “life” in Hell is not a very horrifying thought for him. The fact that Hell is capitalised seems to indicate that he refers to a special form of hell, to Dante’s Inferno or to “the hell” which evolves “here and now” in the surrounding St. Petersburg city-scape. The earthly life in the freezing cold city obtains features of Dante’s Inferno, such as spherical forms or the icy coldness reminding of the circles of Dante’s Hell - which explains the lyrical subject’s familiarity with the subject in advance.

One of the main St. Petersburg landmarks - the Admiralty - is associated here with devastation and death, as we can read from the beginning of “Похороны Бобо”. The juxtaposition of the Admiralty needle with a small fragile butterfly is disproportionate. The destructive force attached to the Admiralty contrasts with the traditional mode of representation in Russian poetry of this emblem of the city, which is, as Ospovat and Ti-
menchik point out, closely connected with its main symbol, Falconet’s monument of Peter the Great, imbued with much of the same semantic content as the statue. The motif of the Admiralty needle, as such, derives from Pushkin’s poema “Медный всадник”, where it occurs in the prologue along with the description of the city in the light of the white nights:

И ясны спящие громады
Пустынных улиц, и светла
Адмиралтейская игла /.../.

But, as Levinton maintains, Brodsky’s spire is not placed in the end of the strophe, as is common in the poetry of 20th century Russia. The “elevated” position at the end of the stanza would emphasise its role of the “pointe” - peak, or sharpening of the text towards the end. Nevertheless, as was said, this does not apply to the structure of “Похороны Бобо”. Quite the contrary, the enjambment between “иглой” and “Адмиралтейства” produces the sensation that the needle is bent. Moreover, the alliteration in the words Адмиралтейства” and ”Ад”- both written with a capital “А” suggests the mutual connection of these loci, enhancing the destructive force attributed to the spire.

Another named St. Petersburg locus is pictured in the third stanza of Section Two:

Твой образ будет, знаю наперед,
в жару и при морозе-ломуносе
не уменьшаться, но наоборот
в неповторимой перспективе России.

Rossi’s matchless perspective belongs to Rossi Street, named after the famous Italian architect, whose contribution to the monumental architecture of the city was outstanding. The climatic conditions of extreme heat and cold resonate the atmospheric circumstances of Dante’s Inferno. Brodsky’s neologism “мороз-ломунос” is a pun formed in the same way

---

441 For a discussion of the emergence of the Admiralty needle in Russian poetry, see Осповат, Тимченчик 1987: 310-317. These two scholars call the Pushkinian motif of the needle (quoting Shklovsky’s expression) “the goddess of citations” for its frequent occurrence in prose and poetry. In most cases it appears in the end of a strophe or in the closing line of a lyric text. Thus, it forms an analogy with the silhouette of the city; a poem proceeds to the theme of the spire in the same way as the prospects of the city lead to the Admiralty (ibid. 311-312).
as “Краснонос” - which stands for “мороз”, winter and cold, in Brodsky’s poem “Помнишь свалку вещей...” As Levinton asserts, the theme of frost is concretised in the phrase “мороз-ломонос” because the latter part of the compound word points to the exact geographical location of the lyrical subject, namely to the Lomonosov Square, from which the perspective to Rossi Street opens.

In spite of its shortness, Rossi Street is a paragon of classical harmony. This harmony of proportions, straight lines and colours - the architecture of paradise indeed - becomes filled with the new form of Bobò’s existence, i.e. with emptiness. The roundness of zero as a sign of nothingness embraces the linear forms of the topos. Bobò, whose soul has flown away like a butterfly and left the tin can of its earthly existence, is capable of filling the city landscape simultaneously both with her absolute absence as a physical body, as well as with her no less absolute presence as an eternal soul. Her former status of “being everything” is thus replaced by her “being everywhere”.

The depicted city-scape reflects the emptiness created by her death. The third stanza of the first section with its black river and snow-covered streets resonates with scenes from the Underworld:

Бобо мертва. Кончается среда.
На улицах, где не найдешь ночлега, бельм-бело. Лишь черная вода ночной реки не принимает снега.

The white snow covering the earth is a motive associated with death in Brodsky’s lyrics. It is a variant of the shroud which appears in “Пятая годовщина”. It is a shroud which provides shelter neither to the lyrical subject, nor to the deceased. The black water of the Neva recalls the river Styx as a means of access to the afterlife. The fact that it is not covered with ice despite the cold winter weather might be taken as an indication of the way Bobò died. According to the comments to the English version of “The Funeral of Bobò”, translated by Richard Wilbur, the poem

---

443 Бродский III: 180: “Знаешь, когда зима тревожит бор Красноносом /.../.” As Levinton remarks, “Краснонос” functions here as the proper name of the Frost. It is an allusion to N. A. Nekrasov’s chrestomatic poem “Мороз, Красный нос”. (Левинтон 1998а: 250).
444 Ibid. 250-251.
445 See previous chapter. See also Chapter 4.2 below.
446 Wilbur 1988: 112. It is obvious that Wilbur has his information either from Brodsky himself or from Simon Karlinisky or Carl Proffer, who helped him with the translation. Although Wilbur’s excellent translation is included in Brodsky’s Collected...
concerns a young woman who was drowned under mysterious circumstances in the Gulf of Finland. Interpreting the poem along these lines, the open river would stand for an open grave for the body of the departed Bobò at her “funeral service”. The elements of the city become her final resting place.

The elements pertaining to physical space, such as the perspective, which in Brodsky’s poetics is frequently associated with final disappearance, together with the snow-covered earth and the black river of night, become visible forms of absence, i.e. emptiness. They are deprived of their material form and transformed into abstractions - geometrical figures - in the same way as Bobò has ceased to be a corporeal body in space. As Paramonov’s remarks suggest, roundness, symbolising life and perfection, is replaced by linear forms, which, incidentally, brings to mind the unsolved problem of the squaring of a circle, examined in the previous chapter. Furthermore, Paramonov maintains that the geometric configuration of a square inside a circle - which, he argues, bears resemblance to a mandala, a symbol representing the effort to reunify the self in Jungian psychology - serves as a thematic model for the poem. According to him, this configuration proves that in “Похороны Бобо”, Brodsky manages to overcome the principal contraposition between the square and the circle.

The last stanza of the poem seems to indicate that “the infinite distance between being and nothingness” can be surmounted by means of writing. The premises for poetry are inherent in the very same emptiness which strikes horror into the poet in the face of future.

Идет четверг. Я верю в пустоту.
В ней как в Аду, но более херово.
И новый Данте склоняется к листу
и на пустое место ставит слово.

Poems in English, (Brodsky 2000: 56-57), the very incident that it rests upon is, for some reason, omitted from the notes.

447 Парамонов 1983: 279. The figures of the square and the circle are sometimes applied to illustrate Brodsky’s poetics in its entirety. Nivat, for example, discovers in Brodsky’s poetry “квадрат, в который вписан круг вечности.” (Нива 1988: I-II).

448 Mikhail Lotman expresses the same idea in a more eloquent manner in his article “Поэт и смерть”: “.../ письменность - это последний рубеж бытия и дело поэта стоять на этом рубеже.” (Лотман М. 1998: 204).
As Rigsbee\textsuperscript{449} aptly remarks, Brodsky’s emptiness as an object of belief has not only to do with the meaning of nothingness as Bobò’s new form of existence, but it also serves as a starting point of the poet’s labours. The epithet “empty”, attributed to the “place” on the page over which the poet bends and on which he places a word, testifies to the kinship of the two hypostases of emptiness. Thus construed, emptiness is both a prerequisite as well as a starting point for the emergence of the word and the reality it creates. The “new Dante”\textsuperscript{450} resonates the “new kind of quadruped” from “Декабрь во Флоренции” implying, once again, that the poet, too, has to go through a period of trials and tribulations in this life in order to attain the paradise embedded in the reality of the word. For him man’s existence in historical time is an earthly purgatory or hell, notwithstanding the paradisiac beauty of the St. Petersburg buildings that mark the way of his earthly life.

The only form of paradise that the poet accepts is that of language. The notion of another form of earthly paradise Brodsky takes as an insult to man. His faith in language’s paradisiac potential, in the Russian language in particular, becomes apparent in the essay “Less than One”:

\textit{This country, with its magnificently inflected language} capable of expressing the subtlest nuances of the human psyche, with an incredible ethical sensitivity /.../, \textit{had all the makings of a cultural, spiritual paradise}, a real vessel of civilization. \textit{Instead it became a drab hell}, with a shabby materialist dogma and pathetic consumerist gropings.\textsuperscript{451}

A similar structure, a shift from the concrete level of reality to the level of signs - words and letters - is characteristic to all three poems examined so far under the heading “Paradise - Hell”. This fact could be taken as a

\textsuperscript{449} For some more meanings attributed to emptiness by Brodsky, see Rigsbee 1999: 61-62.

\textsuperscript{450} Apart from being self-referential, “the new Dante, bending over the empty page” echoes the lines from the final stanza of Blok’s “Ravenna”: "Лишь по ночам, склонясь к долинам, / Ведя векам грядущим счет, / Тень Данта с профилем орлиным / О Новой Жизни мне поет." (Блок: Стихотворения, Книга 3-я 1997: 68). Mints points out that the image of Blok’s New Life is two-dimensional, which is reflected in the spelling of the name with a capital initial without quotation marks. It alludes to Dante’s \textit{Vita nuova} at the same time as it serves as a symbol for the future (Минц 1973: 416). Ètkind in his detailed treatment of the motive of “tomb” in “Ravenna”, comes to the same conclusion (Эткинд 1998: 25). In their own minimalistic way (“Идет четверг...”) the last lines of Brodsky’s “sepulchral” poem seem to suggest that there is future life in spite of Bobò’s demise.

\textsuperscript{451} Brodsky 1986: 26.
token of the self-referentiality of Brodsky’s poetry. The poetical device of quoting from one’s own works is suggestive of an aspect in the poetics of Russian modernist writers, Acmeists and Symbolists in particular, called “metapoetic self-commentary” or “autometadescription”\textsuperscript{452}. The terms refer to the poet’s intentional introduction to the poetic text the simultaneous description of the process of writing or the analysis of the text which is being written. The effect of autometadescription is reached by the identification of different temporal or spatial parameters of the poetic text with each other. In the poems examined here, the time of writing is parallel to the time of the narrative. The use of this device is most apparent in “Декабрь во Флоренции”, where in Section Four, the visual spacing of the text on the page evokes the space of the depicted scenes.

It is worth noting that the explicit insertion of a “realm of the word” in Brodsky’s poetry is by no means dependant on the biography of the poet. In “Похороны Бобо”, the theme of literary reality, independent in its relation to the corporeal reality, emerged in Brodsky’s poetry before his emigration. Consequently, this theme cannot be construed simply as a substitute for the lost homeland, but rather as an alternative to the surrounding reality, a much more meaningful world for that matter\textsuperscript{453}.

The shift from reality to signs entails a simultaneous transition from a surrounding reality to an inner realm of the self. The version of Brodsky’s paradise consisting of words appears as a result of the constant movement of the poet, those in space as well as the movements of his mind and soul. The creative act of consciousness is materialised in the word which, for its part, requires the poet’s mind to be in constant motion, as we can read from Brodsky’s “Footnote to a Poem”:

A poetic “paradise” is not limited to “eternal bliss”, and it is not threatened with the overcrowding of a dogmatic paradise. In contrast to the standard Christian paradise that is presented as a kind of last instance, the soul’s dead end, poetic paradise is, rather, a peak, and a bard’s soul is not so much perfected as left in a continual state of motion. The poetic idea of eternal life on the

\textsuperscript{452} For a discussion of “autometadescription” or metaliterary self-commentary (“автотоописание”/“метапоэтический автокомментарий”) in Acmeist poetics, see Левин et al. 1974: 72-73.

\textsuperscript{453} As an example of the superiority of the poetic realm over reality, see “Сумерки. Снег. Тишина..”, written in 1966: “Так утешает язык певца, / превосходя самоё природу, / своё окончания без конца / по падежу, по числу, по роду / меняя.” (Бродский II: 175).
whole gravitates more toward a cosmogony than toward a theology, and what is often put forward as a measure of the soul is not the degree of its perfection essential for achieving likeness and merger with the Creator but rather the physical (metaphysical) duration and distance of its wanderings in time. In principle, the poetic conception of existence eschews any form of finitness or stasis, including theological apotheosis. In any case, Dante’s paradise is much more interesting than the ecclesiastical version of it.  

Brodsky’s view of a poetic paradise has some elements in common with Dante’s Paradise - the main constituent of the latter is light with its reflections and refractions. Quoting Lagercranz, the Dantesque paradise, with its light and eternal movement, is the antithesis of the notion of stasis. It actually reflects the motion of the poet’s inner world. Eternal motion symbolises man’s efforts to attain knowledge. Motion can also stand for man’s attempt to seek and reach for his point of origin - a thought which goes back to Dante, as well and which Mandel’shtam adopted from him. Mandel’shtam treated the poetic text as a concentration of light, whereas for Brodsky it could be said that language stands for light. It is capable of reflecting an infinite amount of different meanings inherent in words whereas concrete reality lacks this capacity. In this sense, the alternative reality created in literature is “a resistance to the imperfection of reality”.

The poetic paradise includes not only the wanderings of the soul in time. In order to create a poetic paradise that is mentally real, the poet must stroll in physical reality. As Brodsky writes in his essay on Tsvetayeva’s lyrics, reality is always a point of departure for her poetic works. The idea of reality as a springboard for poetry applies to a no lesser extent to the author of the essay. As we can read, his wanderings,
both physical and mental, in the city of his birth have generated a whole range of poems and essays which, if only on the basis of their compositional characteristics, can be ascribed to the “genre of walks”. “Pedestrianism” exposes to the reader city-scenes in the order and pace of a poet-pedestrian. Contrary to Ross, who asserts that Brodsky’s sadness and nostalgia are provoked by the state of childhood as well as by “the memory of miracles’ or the ’spiritual-in-art’”, rather than by his childhood in Leningrad, i.e. by the memories of a specific place, I would argue that it is precisely the Leningrad of Brodsky’s childhood and youth, together with the tradition of the St. Petersburg poetry, that not only provokes nostalgia, but also provides him with both a starting point as well as a spiritual point of orientation for many of his lyrical walks.

3.4.1 “Мы жили в городе цвета окаменевшей водки...”

The idea of reality providing a starting point for a poetic text is manifested in another poem about St. Petersburg-Leningrad, namely in “Мы жили в городе цвета окаменевшей водки.. “, completed as late as in 1994. In spite of the fact that the setting of the poem belongs to the remote past, which fact suggests - as Brodsky frequently stated - that it has become a mental reality, the past life in it is conveyed in its plain concreteness. Taking into account the verisimilitude of the details of everyday life, it is not surprising that the English version of the poem is titled “A Photograph”. Brodsky, as a photographer’s son, valued this mode of art highly. He appreciated its possibilities to render the traditional love of an artist for images/figures and spaces (“образ и пространство”). This was an especially important asset in St. Petersburg, which forces one to pay attention to form.461

Let us take a closer look at the images/figures and space which Brodsky portrays in his retrospective “Photograph” of his childhood’s Leningrad.

---

459 Ross 1990: 313.
460 Brodsky 2000: 444.
The city is seen through “a lens of the colour of petrified, frozen vodka” - a frosty glass - which suggests a certain lack of clarity. It is seen as if embraced in mist or frost. The lack of clarity may also point to the delirium of the poet, or it may be hinting at the drinking habits of the inhabitants of the city. The poem opens with a depiction of a poorly illuminated apartment, the outlines of which remain obscure:

Мы жили в городе цвета окаменевшей водки.
Электричество поступало издалека, с болот,
И квартира казалась по вечерам
перепачканной торфом и иссушенной комарами.

These lines reveal a peculiar mingling of the elements of nature with cultural objects of the city. It is as if turf and mosquitoes as elements of the marshland on which St. Petersburg was grounded have penetrated into the apartment - a symbol of cultural life - marking its interior with features of nature. Consequently, “cultural objects” which belonged to the apartment seem imbued with characteristics of flora and fauna, i.e. the hallmarks of the very nature that was meant to be suppressed when the glorious city was erected on Finnish marshland. Furthermore, because it is portrayed in terms of nature, the apartment as a closed space obtains features of an open, unending space - a swamp - which, by definition lacks firmness.

Одежда была неуклюжей, что выдавало
близость Арктики. В том конце коридора
дребезжал телефон, с трудом оживая после
недавно кончившейся войны.
Три рубля украшали летчики и шахтеры.

Another cultural phenomena - money - is also described, albeit indirectly, in terms of natural elements. It seems as though the poet would like to assign to it characteristics of everlasting life by associating it with the firmament of heaven as well as with the profound layers of the earth - the poles of the vertical axis mundi. The three-rouble note, with its images of miners and aviators, is a guarantee of a future life, in the same way as the cheap common utensils of everyday-life - pans in the kitchen - served as the most valid assurance of the continuity of life and of the loyalty of

---

462 Brodsky foresaw a great future for money. Nothing, in his opinion, not even nature, has a greater future than money. For a discussion of Brodsky’s view on the European Community and the logic of money, see Brodsky 1992b: 18-22.
things. The temporal features of the scene depicting the milieu of the poet’s childhood in Leningrad in the 1940’s are portrayed in the image of the telephone which regained its “voice” after a long silence caused by World War Two. The awkward, thick clothes suggest the geographical location of the city in the North.

Я не знал, что когда-нибудь этого больше уже не будет.

Эмалированные кастрюли кухни
внушали уверенность в завтрашнем дне, прямо
превращаясь во сне в головные уборы либо
в торжество Циолковского. Автомобили тоже
катились в сторону будущего и были
черными, серыми, а иногда (такси)
даже светло-коричневыми.

Each and every itemised object that witnessed his childhood appeared to the lyrical subject as embodiments of the future which, most evidently, would prove to be a replica of a chain of similar days. The poem contains only two personal pronouns: “We” in the beginning of the opening line, and “I”, which begins the tenth line of the 22 lines of “A Postcard”. The fact that the pronoun “we” refers to the parents of the lyrical subject is implied in two of the objects presented in the poem. The pans in the kitchen refer to his mother, whereas the father is “made visible” in the motive of the photograph itself, as was already indicated⁴⁶³. The disruption in life caused by the death of the parents as well as by the displacement of the lyrical subject is rendered in a laconic statement in the tenth line of the poem. In this line, as in the opening and closing lines of the poem, the syntax of the sentence coincides with the prosody of the text. These are the rare cases where the grammatical entity, a sentence, forms a line, without any need to divide it into two lines by enjambments or commas, as is usual in Brodsky’s poetry. These three lines, consisting of complete sentences, form the thematic core of the poem:

Мы жили в городе цвета окаменевшей водки.

/.../

⁴⁶³ The pans emerge in Brodsky’s memorial poem for his mother “Мысль о тебе удаляется...” (Бродский IV: 26):”/.../ Правильно: невским струям / отраженье еще одной вещи невыносимо. / Где там матери и ее кастрюлям / уцелеть в перспективе, удлиняемой жизнью сына!” The poem “Памяти отца: Австралия” opens with a depiction of the new apartment of the father in his new incarnation: “Ты ожил, снялось мне, и уехал / в Австралию. Голос с трехкратным / окликал и жаловался на климат / и обои: квартиру никак не снимут /.../.” (Бродский IV: 69).
Я не знал, что когда-нибудь этого больше уже не будет.

Райские птицы поют, не нуждаясь в упругой ветке.

Life in the city is illustrated in grey “muddy” tones. However, the faded colours cannot hide the fact that all the objects on which the poet focuses his lens from the perspective of nearly 50 years speak of the former intimacy and the unique comfort attached to this place. The poem is indeed a representation of the “родимое гнездо”, ”the native nest” that the poet-bird had to fly away from. The poet’s affection for the place is disclosed in the line “I didn’t know that someday all this would be no more”, which is charged with the same kind of “all-consuming”, un comforting negation that was expressed in “Пятая годовщина”. It is the second of the two negative sentences in the whole poem. As to content, the second sentence is analogous to the first one. Both of them speak about the unpredictability of life. Materia, be it hard metal or man, is not aware of its final fate, of its ultimate metamorphosis into nothing.464

Странно и неприятно думать, что даже железо не знает своей судьбы и что жизнь была прожита ради апофеоза фирмы Kodak, поверившей в отпечатки и выбрасывающей негативы.

The comparison of life to prints whose negatives have been lost or destroyed is a metaphor of memory. Memory consists of visions and revisions of the past, but the more time passes, the weaker the memories become. The images of once tangible facts, generated by mind, gradually lose their clarity. They keep erasing imperceptibly each moment in the same way as objects in old photographs are subject to fading.465 The negatives which would enable one to reproduce the images are not avail-

465 The vagueness, formlessness of the insights into the past life is reflected in the formal aspects of the poem. It is written in vers libre with neither strict metre nor rhymes. On some occasions, Brodsky stressed the meaning of metre and rhyme as mnemonic devices, (see, e.g. Montenegro 1987: 534). Moreover, he rejected the idea of the “innovativeness” of vers libre and used it only rarely. In his view, only content can be innovative, and formal innovation can occur only within the limits of form. He argued that rejection of form is actually a rejection of innovation. (Brodsky 1992a: 220-222).
able to one’s mind. The colour scale - ranging from grey to light brown and black - suggests thus, above all, the defects of memory more than the climatic conditions or the shabbiness of life.

Moreover, the monochromatic impression of the scene is related to time, as is common in Brodsky’s poetical philosophy. It is worth noting that in this particular text the usual St. Petersburg landmarks that appear in his earlier poems are missing. Even water, in the form of the Neva or the Baltic sea - the recurrent metaphors of time - is absent. The flow of time is rendered in the linear horizontal motion of cars driving “towards the future”, as well as in the metamorphosis of his mother’s pans in a dream to “a triumph of Tsiovkovsky”. Tsiovkovsky, the famous rocket engineer at the turn of the century, dreamt of the conquest of space with his rockets with rectilinear vertical motion. The motion and direction of the achievements of new technology seemed to instil confidence in the future, a chronological perspective that was not expected to deviate from the logic of linear succession.

But a curve in the fate of the lyrical subject entails a new perspective on life. His present vantage point is that of a bird of paradise - the only bright spot in the monochromatic world of the poem, although the colour of the bird, which is able to sing even when his nest is devoured by time, is not explicitly stated. It may be that its very colourfulness reveals the position of the bird outside the frames of the photograph. Its song is not deprived of nostalgia, but its tone is already tame, estranged. His own absence is not brought into focus, as was the case in “Пятая годовщина”, but the poem concentrates on the disappearance of the components that mark a whole period of time in his personal history as well as in the history of his homeland. This particular bird of paradise is able to sing wherever he is. It knows that the possibility of a paradise lies in the subject matter of its song - in language.

---

466 Tsiovkovsky wanted to reach “beyond the earth” (as the title of his science fiction novel “Вне Земли” indicates), to the “freedom” which is not undermined by gravity’s pull. Clark asserts that his model intersects with the millenarianist scenario of a journey at breakneck speed to a radical otherness, or the Scythian’s call to “renounce time” (Clark 1995: 301-302). The motives of bird, car and aviator that appear in Brodsky’s poem are brought together in the title of Tsiovkovsky’s work “Аэроплан, или Птицеподобная (авиационная) летательная машина”.

467 The myth of the bird of paradise, which originates from the Apocrypha, is associated with the flow of time; One who stands to listen to the enchanting song of the bird forgets about everything else, including the flux of time. Hundreds of years may pass on the earth while he listens to the song.

468 The closing line which exposes the bird as a metonymy for a poet is frequent in Brodsky’s imagery. Cf. the essay “On Derek Walcott”: “In a sense a poet is indeed
Both in “Похороны Бобо” and “Мы жили в городе цвета оха-меневшей водки...” the poet focusses on the theme of time, particularly on future time. The poem about Bobò’s death dwells on the future realms, where a departed soul might repose, whereas the latter poem is about the former life of the lyrical subject, which exists as a faded landscape in the poet’s mind. Brodsky perceives art not as an imitation of life but as a reflection of those elements of existence which transcend “life”, extend it beyond its terminal point. In its attempt to domesticate the longest possible version of time, art actually “imitates” death rather than life. Poetry’s affinity with the notion of afterlife is due to the former’s ability to produce a higher degree of lyricism than would be possible within any human interplay.\(^{469}\) Nevertheless, there seems to be a place where the interplay of the present moment with the unknown future is possible, namely in the poetical space of St. Petersburg. Both poems cover not only that historical moment which they speak about, but embrace also the potential hypostases of the future that prevail in the cityscape. In “The Funeral of Bobò” the afterlife assumes the shape of the classical St. Petersburg landscape, while in “A Photograph” it is materialised in everyday objects, components of the immediate milieu of the poet’s childhood. St. Petersburg, conceived of as a city with a capacity to make its past visible at any moment, seems to possess the key to the future as well. Sedakova\(^{470}\) recalls that the presence of the future in the present moment is expressed in the “Divine Comedy” with one verb - Dante uses frequently a neologism “s’in futura” when he wants to refer to that which lies ahead. Notwithstanding the fact that it lies “ahead”, it signifies something non-linear. Sedakova’s remarks concerning the presence of the future - a trait characteristic of Brodsky’s poems as well - suggest that this something which lies “ahead” emanates in each moment. The painful experience of the future inherent in the present moment is, in her opinion, the reason for poetry’s attraction to forms.

---

\(^{469}\) Brodsky 1986: 103-104 (“In the Shadow of Dante”).

\(^{470}\) Седакова 1996: 15.
4 ST. PETERSBURG AS “UTOPIA”

4.1 “Развивая Платона”

The *locus* unfolding in “Развивая Платона” (“Plato Elaborated”) consists of both static and dynamic motifs. It is not just a static portrayal, a pure “setting” without temporal dimension, comparable to a landscape painting. Its temporal dynamism is manifested mainly by the motion of the lyrical subject, by his “shifts” from one *locus* to another. His actions in the city landscape turn the painting into a story. Most modern poems have both descriptive and narrative elements, but their shares of these elements may vary considerably. In Brodsky’s poetry the share of pure description can be very small indeed, despite the fact that his poetry is often extremely visual in the sense that it can easily be perceived as a visual image.471 This is true of “Развивая Платона” as well.

What we see here is above all an urban landscape with buildings that remind one of the classical architecture of St. Petersburg, however illusory it may be. As to the details of the depicted places, Brodsky is quite terse. It is obvious, in any case, that he knows these places like the back of his hand, in the literal sense of the phrase. He also expects the reader to recognise the city of his dreams by the few details he provides. And indeed, the reader does recognise the textually represented scenery as a genuine St. Petersburg landscape, especially if the reader is familiar with other works by Brodsky where similar landmarks occur. This means that, as readers, we must move beyond the borders of the particular poem under scrutiny in order to find keys to interpret the represented space of the text. In other words, we must step into extra-textual space472.

Instead of going into more details about the space represented in “Развивая Платона”, I would prefer to take a closer look behind some of the separate scenes of the poem. These scenes are connected to each other by the presence and movements of the lyrical subject. To begin with the title of the poem, “Развивая Платона” suggests the presence of a Greek element, a touch of antiquity. As some scholars have noted473 this poem is an allegory of the Platonic ideal city-state and its subsequent

472 For a definition of extra-textual space as construed in the present study, see Introduction 1.1.
realisations in a not too distant history of the human race. As we know, the utopian republic or polis of Plato is often read as a model for a totalitarian political system, based on certain rationalistic principles. According to Plato, political harmony will be achieved if the society is structured according to the cosmic order. This means that society is divided into classes, and each class has its own task to perform for the sake of the common good. In order to perform his part, each citizen will receive a moral and intellectual upbringing which will include music and physical exercise, among other things.

The lyrical subject of Brodsky’s poem resembles a free citizen of a Greek polis who spends his day in athletic contests, theatrical performances, at parties, public meetings, at court sessions, on the streets and agoras of the city. But his life in the St. Petersburg-Leningrad variant of the polis seems to suggest that “the spell of the ideal, though disguised as amusement, is real enough”474. And, indeed, an evening at the Opera House depicted in Section One ends with a confrontation between the tyrant475 and the poet, a confrontation originating in Plato’s Republic. As is well known, the theme of “the czar and the poet” runs through all Russian literature:

Чтобы там была Опера, и чтоб в ней ветеран-
tenor исправно пел арию Mario по вечерам;
чтоб Тиран ему аплодировал в ложе, а я в партере
бормотал бы, сжав зубы от ненависти: “баран”476.

Mention of operas and operatic arias occur in other Petersburg poems of Brodsky as well. In “Пятая годовщина” Brodsky writes that “там в воздухе висят обрывки старых арий”, and in “Полдень в комнате” it is the beauty of the surroundings that makes him utter: “Мысль о пространстве рождает “ах”, оперу, взгляд в лорнет”477.”Mario” is Mario Cavaradossi, a painter and libertarian who is the leading character in Puccini’s opera “Tosca”. Cavaradossi is suspected of conspiring against the tyranny of Scarpia, the chief of police in Rome in the year 1800. Cavaradossi sings the famous aria in which he takes his final leave of life just before he is executed in Castel’ San’ Angelo in the imperial city of Rome. Similarly, Mario’s aria in Brodsky’s poem replicates the conflict between the tyrant and the poet which takes place in the audi-

475 Brodsky’s tyrant bears resemblance to Stalin, who had false fantasies of himself as an opera connoisseur and even a talented performer (Clark 1995: 295).
476 Here and hereafter “Развивая Платона” is quoted by Бродский III: 122-124.
477 See Chapter 5.1.1 below.
ence at the same time. In this scene Brodsky clearly refers to the Platonic proposal that poets who are not subject to the discipline of the political authorities must be banished from the ideal city state. A poet can become a particular danger to the less mentally developed classes of the society in particular, since he stimulates and fosters the irrational element in the soul, and, by strengthening it, tends to destroy the rational part. Consequently, Plato comes to the conclusion that the poet should be sent away “to another city, after pouring myrrh over his head and crowning him with fillets of wool” And the poet is indeed banished from his city, as we discover in the last two strophes of the poem.

И когда бы меня схватили в итоге за шпионаж,
подрывную активность, бродяжничество, мénage-à-trois, и толпа бы, беснуясь вокруг, кричала,
тыча в меня натруженными указательными:
“Не наш!”

The consequence of the charges, which Brodsky, as Kline has observed, reduces to absurdity by placing such capital crimes as espionage and subversion in the same category as the trivial charges of ménage-à-trois and that of vagrancy, is banishment. The outcome of the banishment becomes apparent in Brodsky’s poems “Пятая годовщина”:

Теперь меня там нет. Об этом думать странно.
Но было бы чудней изображать барана,
дрожать, но раздражать на склоне дней тирана,
паясничать. Ну что ж! на все свои законы /.../. as well as in “Декабрь во Флоренции”, where the St. Petersburg realia emerge from behind the Florentine landscape:

478 Mario Cavaradossi is mentioned also in Brodsky’s poem “Fin de siècle”, (Бродский IV: 74) where the aria is compared to a cuckoo’s call: “/.../ арию, что пропел голос кукушки. Теперь он звучит грубо, / чем тот же Каварадосси - примерно как “хоть убей”/ или “более не пей”/....” As is well known, in Russian folklore the call of a cuckoo means death, which is, in addition to the theme of the czar and the poet, another important theme associated with Mario’s aria in Brodsky’s poetry.
479 Plato: Republic 605b.
480 Ibid. 398a-b. See also Kline 1990: 76-77.
481 Ibid.
482 For a detailed discussion of “Пятая годовщина”, see Chapter 3.3 above.
Mario’s aria, which is connected in time to the rule of Napoleon I, hints at the first version of totalitarian rule which, unlike Plato’s utopia, did materialise historically. This is, of course, the French Revolution, which began at the end of the eighteenth century with ideals that coincide in many respects with the objectives of the October Revolution a century later. The French stratum in Brodsky’s poem consists mainly of French words and phrases, such as “Vive la Patrie” in the very end of the poem, and “ложе”, “партер”, “бланманже”, “шпионаж”, “менаж-а-труа”. Furthermore, Brodsky mentions two French painters by name - Ingres and David:

Both of them are identified as Neo-classicists, painters whose works are closely connected to the ideals of the French Revolution. In their art, they hold to the themes and traditions of classical antiquity. David was also a political figure and the arbiter of French art at that time; later he became Napoleon’s court painter. After the fall of Napoleon he was forced to leave France. So he shares the same destiny with the lyrical subject of the poem, which might be one reason for the latter’s identification with David’s paintings. Ingres was David’s pupil.

David’s most famous painting is, without doubt, “The Death of Marat”. In Soviet encyclopaedias, Marat is depicted as a great statesman and revolutionary hero, as “злодейски убитый ‘Друг народа’”, whereas in Western sources his image is quite the opposite. It was Marat who used to draw up lists of “the traitors of the nation” and had thousands of people executed. Whatever the truth, by drawing a parallel between “полотно” and “родимое пятно” and emphasising the parallel by placing them in rhyming position, Brodsky seems to indicate that there was something extremely familiar to him in the works of these Neo-

483 For a detailed discussion of “Декабрь во Флоренции”, see Chapter 3.1 above.
484 Incidentally, Brodsky, characterises his deceased friend in “На смерть друга” as “обожатель Энгра” (Бродский III: 58).
classical French masters, something that had surrounded him from the day of his birth. In this way, by means of analogy, he builds a bridge that connects antiquity through the Revolutionary French Republic to the Soviet Socialist Republic of his youth. On the other hand David and Ingres awaken not only revolutionary associations, but they are linked with the imperial theme. In the mind of those who live in St. Petersburg they - Ingres in particular - serve as signs of the Empire style, which has a prominent place in the St. Petersburg architecture.

Factory chimneys function in “Развивая Платона” as symbols of an atheistic state. Constituting the vertical axis of the city-scape, connecting the earth with the sky, they have taken on the role of the church bells which no longer toll to tell the people that it is Sunday. Most of the St. Petersburg-Leningrad realia of the poem relate to a totalitarian system and especially to its means of silencing poets. The depiction of a library in Section Two serves as a good example of the rules and restrictions to which writers had to submit if they wanted their works to pass the acts of censorship:

Там была бы Библиотека, и в залах ее пустых я листал бы тома с таким же количеством запятых, как количество скверных слов в ежедневной речи, не прорвавшихся в прозу. Ни, тем более, в стих.

485 Marat and Brodsky were both born on May 24. The birthmark could be taken as an allusion to Marat, if we could assume that Brodsky was aware of this coincidence. It is more probable, though, that Brodsky refers here to the classical painters of the Soviet era, particularly to his namesake Isaak Brodsky, a painter who was celebrated as the “David of the Russian Revolution”. His works served as models for the new Soviet culture, especially in the 1920’s. (For a discussion of I. Brodsky and the Russian Revolution, see Clark 1995: 191.) The fact that one can always find similarities between different historical eras, which Brodsky obviously wants to emphasise here, is even more clearly stated in his poem “Fin de siècle”: “Но, присматриваясь к чужим чертам, / ясно, что там и там // главное сходство между простым пятном / и, скажем, классическим полотном / в том, что вы их в одном // экземпляре не встретите.”(Бродский IV: 76). Apart from analogies between historical periods Brodsky hints here at one of the main characteristics of the future as he sees it: mass production of things as well as people will lead to the predominance of reproductions over originals. For a discussion on Brodsky’s outlook on the future, see Chapter 5.1.2 below.

486 I owe this observation to Professor Mikhail Lotman.
The missing words, replaced by commas, may be an allusion to the words and expressions of oral speech not allowed in the printed text which should follow the standard of the written literary language.\textsuperscript{487}

The scene in the living room described in Section Three of “Развивая Платона”, with its fireplace and other details, recalls at first glance a homely idyll from the good old times:

Там должна быть та улица с деревьями две ряда, 
подъезд с торсом нимфа в нише и прочая ерунда; 
и портрет висел бы в гостиная, давая вам 
представление 
о том, как хозяйка выглядела, будучи молода.

Я внимал бы ровному голосу, повествующему о вещах, 
не имеющих отношения к ужину при свечах, 
и огонь в камельке, Фортунатус, бросал бы багровый 
отблеск 
на зеленое платье. Но под конец зачах.

A closer look at the details of the scene suggests the destiny of one particular poet whom Brodsky knew personally - Anna Akhmatova. The portrait hanging on the wall is, without doubt, the famous portrait - the only one of the many that has survived - drawn by Modigliani in 1911 when Akhmatova was a twenty-two year-old beauty. “Ровный голос” tells us both about her manner of speaking as well as about her poetic diction. In his poem “На столетие Анны Ахматовой” Brodsky attributes the epithets “ровный и глуховатый” to Akhmatova’s language\textsuperscript{488}.

\textsuperscript{487} On the other hand, the commas bring to mind Dostoyevsky, the “master of subordinate clauses”, who did not hesitate to lay bare the darker sides of the human mind and, consequently, whose prose did not conform to the dictates of socialist realism. In fact, Brodsky’s characterisation of Dostoyevsky’s language in his essay “Catastrophes in the Air” is the antithesis to the language of books he describes in the quoted above lines: “.../ with its feverishly accelerating sentences conglomerating in their rapid progress, bureaucratese, ecclesiastical terminology, lumpen argot, French utopists’ mumbo-jumbo, the classical cadences of gentry prose - anything! all the layers of contemporary diction /.../. And language repaid him a hundredfold. Its subordinate clauses often carried him much farther than his original intentions or insights would have allowed him to travel. In other words, he treated the language not so much as a novelist but as a poet /.../. His art was anything but mimetic: it wasn’t imitating reality; it was creating, or better still, reaching for one.” (Brodsky 1986: 278).

\textsuperscript{488} “Бог сохраняет все; особенно - слова / прощения и любви, как собственный свой голос. / В них бьется рваный пульс, в них слышен костный хруст, / и
In “Развивая Платона” the subject of conversation of the two interlocutors is not romantic affairs (because Brodsky says it is not a dinner by candlelight that they discuss), but more probably the tragic lot of a poet under the rule of tyranny. The symbol of persecution is the flame, greater than the flame of a candle, which burns the poet’s manuscripts to ashes. As we know, during the period of the Great Terror, Akhmatova used to burn the manuscripts of her poems after a trusted friend had learned them by heart.489 What about the crimson stains on a green dress? Brodsky here repeats the colours of Beatrice’s dress as Dante described her in “Purgatory”; Akhmatova quoted these lines of Dante in her last public appearance in October 1965:

Sopra candido vel cinta d’uliva  
Donna m’apparve, sotto verde manto  
Vestita di color di fiamma viva.  

(Purg. 30:31-33)490

In his poem “Развивая Платона”, Brodsky blends phenomena and characters from different historical periods in such a way that the chronology of events to which he refers becomes meaningless. In his poem, Plato’s ideal city, which remained a utopia, materialises itself in the ideologies of the French and the Russian Revolutions. This seems to imply that Brodsky’s notion of time is cyclic, but we will take a closer look at the question of time and especially to the last strophe in Section Three concerning time in the following chapters.

заступ в них стучит; ровны и глуховаты, / затем что жизнь - одна, они из смертных уст / звучат отчетливей, чем из надмирной ваты.” (Бродский IV: 58).
489 Brodsky begins the poem dedicated to Akhmatova’s centenary with the very same motifs of fire and manuscripts that become symbols of the destructive forces of a political system, and he presents the poet’s creative power as its counterforce which will survive in spite of persecution: “Страницу и огонь, зерно и жернова, секиры острие и усеченный волос /.../”. For a discussion of “На столетие А.А-ой”, see, e.g. Loseff 1999: 225-239 or Lilly 1993: 211-219.
490 ”В венке олив, под белым покрывалом, / Предстала женщина, облачена / В зеленый плащ и в платье огне-алом.” (Transl. by Lozinsky). Анна Ахматова: “Слово о Данте” (Ахматова 1986, т. 2: 183-184). This same passage is associated through Akhmatova with Mandel’shtam as well. Akhmatova describes in her diaries how Mandel’shtam reacted when she recited the very same passage about Beatrice’s appearance from “Purgatory” in 1933 when the Mandel’shtam’s had returned to Leningrad for a short stay. She writes that Osip Emilyevich burst into tears since he could not take these verses of Dante uttered in the voice of Anna Andreyevna (see, e.g. Мандельштам, т. 1 1993: 18-19).
4.2 The “Audenesque” Realm of “Развивая Платона”

One direct indication of the presence of W.H. Auden in Brodsky’s “Развивая Платона” is the figure of Fortunatus, who, apart from being the addressee of the poem, shares the same position of addressee in Auden’s poem “Under Sirius”. Brodsky’s statements about when and how he became acquainted with Auden’s works are somewhat confused. On one occasion he asserts that he read them first while in inner exile in Norenskaya in 1964. In Volkov’s “Conversations with Brodsky” he says that he learned about Auden from an acquaintance named Andrey Sergeyev, a translator of English poetry who claimed that Brodsky’s works resembled Auden’s. Sergeyev recalls that Brodsky started to read Auden’s poems in 1965 after being released from exile. Brodsky adds that by the end of his “existence in the Soviet Union”, i.e. the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, he knew Auden “more or less decently” and that he regarded Auden rather as a relative, as a member of his “mental family”, than as a master. In spite of the fact that Brodsky prefers to see his relationship to Auden as one of affinity, rather than of influence, it cannot be denied that traces of the latter are to be found in his poetry. Brodsky’s library, which remained in Leningrad after his forced expulsion from the country in 1972, contains four collections of Auden’s poetry. In one of them there is the following inscription by Auden himself, which could well have served as a source of inspiration for Brodsky’s “Развивая Платона”:

In praise
of praising
Where we are
Which is where we were
and are not. (June 13th, 1971 W.H. Auden)

---

493 Сепреев 1997: 143. See also the text of a postcard from Brodsky to Sergeyev from Vienna dated 20 July 1972 with a description of Auden’s appearance. He draws a surprising parallel between Auden and Akhmatova: “Оден...удивительно похож на А[нну] А[ндреевну] - особенно, взглядом, хотя - слегка обалделым...Морда напоминает пейзаж.” (ibid.150).
496 Муравьева 1998: 255.
Brodsky writes about Auden’s significance for him both as a human being and a poet in his essays “On September 1, 1939” by W.H. Auden and “To Please a Shadow”497. Auden’s outstanding role is also evident in various interviews with Brodsky498.

Fortunatus, the addressee of Auden’s “Under Sirius”, is a 6th century Latin poet, Venantius Fortunatus, from the Gallic outskirts of the Roman Empire. He was a writer of occasional verses who later in life took holy orders and became Bishop of Poitiers499. In addition to “Under Sirius”, Auden wrote a sequence of poems which is related to Venantius Fortunatus through its epigraph, viz. “Horae Canonicae”. The motto of “Horae Canonicae” - “Immolatus vicerit” (“the sacrificed one triumphs”) - is taken from Fortunatus’s “Hymn to the Holy Cross”, an Easter hymn which is sung in Roman Catholic and Anglican churches on Maundy Thursday.

As Mendelson500 has written in his most enlightening book “Later Auden”, the poem “Under Sirius”, written in 1949, seems pleasant but pointless when read in isolation from the poems written just before and after it, having in mind, among others, “Memorial for the City”, written before “Under Sirius”, and “Horae Canonicae”, the first three poems of which were written just after “Under Sirius”. All three verse works were first published in 1951 in a volume of poems called “Nones”. Although Brodsky’s Audenesque subtext in “Развивая Платона” is disguised in the metonymical figure of Fortunatus, the striking resemblance of the themes of Brodsky’s “Развивая Платона” with those of Auden - history and civilisation - cannot be overlooked. In Auden’s poetic symbolism civilisation is depicted as a city, especially in “Nones”, where the city stands out as the dominant symbol of the whole volume. Consequently, the city, signifying civilisation, man’s social achievement, is one of the main constituents of Auden’s landscape symbolism, his

497 Brodsky 1986: 304-356 and 357-383; in “To Please a Shadow” Brodsky says that his purpose in writing in English is to be closer to Auden, “to the man whom I considered the greatest mind of the twentieth century” (ibid. 357).
498 See, e.g. Volkov 1998: 125-152 or Birkerts 1982: 102-3, 108, 110-111, 118-119, or Montenegro 1987: 538-539 where Brodsky said, among other things, the following: “Essentially, what you do love in a poet like Auden is not the verses. Obviously you remember, you memorize, you internalize the verse, but you internalize it and internalize it /.../ until the point comes when he occupies in you more of a place perhaps than you yourself occupy. Auden, in my mind, in my heart, occupies far greater room than anything or anybody else on the earth /.../.” Bethea quotes the passage about Auden from Montenegro’s interview in Bethea 1994: 138-139.
“paysage moralisé”\textsuperscript{501}. Another central theme in Auden’s works is the polarity of history vs. nature, suggested by the theme of city/ civilisation.

Auden’s extended musings on what he calls “the City”, its historical origins and present complexities, are regarded as his greatest works in the late forties and fifties. An initial exploration of this subject was “Memorial for the City”, written in 1949, the same year as “Under Sirius” and placed right before it in W.H. Auden: “Selected Poems”, published in 1979. Since this poem is not without significance in its relation to “Развивая Платона”, I shall focus on it in the next chapter.

“\textit{Horae Canonicae}” embraces elements of a “meditation on the city” as well, although its focus is on “the murdered victim excluded from the prosperous city”\textsuperscript{502}. The sequence comprises seven poems, each in a different metre and style. Each poem is named after the initially eight canonical hours of prayer of the Roman Catholic Church: Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, Nones, Vespers, and Compline. Matins begins at 3 a.m. and the last, Compline, at midnight. Taking place every three hours, they punctuate the day from dawn to dusk. The hours of prayer follow the events of Good Friday from the moment of Jesus’s arrest through his death on the cross. Auden changed the original scheme of the eight prayer services slightly by reducing their number to seven. He omitted “Matins” and placed “Lauds”, sung at sunrise, at the end of the sequence. By this shift, in Mendelson’s view\textsuperscript{503}, Auden provided the sequence of poems with two beginnings - “Prime”, which opens the cycle, represents, among other beginnings, the Fall of Man, whereas “Lauds” symbolises the dawning of a new day with all its risks and hopes. Consequently, the structure of the sequence is cyclical and repetitious. The theme of Christ’s suffering becomes manifested throughout the cycle during the seven moments of the day during which the lyrical subject examines his consciousness.

As was already indicated, the city in Auden’s poetry stands for civilisation. Civilisation signifies, above all, social order, social contacts and division of labour. The symbol of the city with its variants provides Auden with an opportunity to ruminate on the subject of history, as well. In his earlier works, such as “\textit{New Year Letter}” and “\textit{In Time of War}”, among others, Auden had delineated the great changes in the history of mankind. Now, however, at the end of the 1940’s, chronological history

\textsuperscript{501} For more about Auden’s landscape symbolism, see, e.g. Spears 1963: 194, 310-11.
\textsuperscript{502} Mendelson 1999: 279.
\textsuperscript{503} Ibid. 333-334.
with its turns and upheavals has disappeared from his writings. He re-
places chronological history with analogical history and, accordingly, his
poems now have their focus on the present moment and on its relation to
history. According to Mendelson\(^{504}\), the purpose of Auden’s look back at
the historical past was to demonstrate that it was simultaneous with the
present in relation to the absolute. Auden seeks for parallels and connec-
tions between events that occur not only in different historical periods,
but also between those that occur on a local, human scale as well as on
the large scale of history, evolution and cosmology.

The idea of historical parallels and analogies comes close to the idea
of “repetitive revolutions” in Brodsky’s “Развивая Платона” as dis-
cussed in Chapter 4.1. The common denominators of the basic themes
become more evident when we consider that when planning “Horae
Canonicae” Auden drafted a detailed scheme which was meant to be the
basis of the thematic structure of his sequence of poems. In this draft he
portrays history as a series of revolutions, each of them with its charac-
teristic hero. He got the idea for this from Rosenstock-Huessy’s “Out of
Revolution” (1938), a book which, with its vast tracts of history and with
its unique insights, had such a strong influence on Auden that the poet
was under the impression that it was written especially for him. “Out of
Revolution” is an eccentric, panoramic study of history, actually a thou-
sand-year scheme of revolutionary history, with a teleological linear vi-
sion of a series of unique events culminating in the Second Coming.\(^{505}\)

In Auden’s drafts for “Horae Canonicae” each canonical hour is as-
associated with a revolutionary event in secular history. “Prime”, for ex-
ample, sung at 6.00 a.m. corresponding to the moment when Jesus was
denied by his disciples, is associated with the French Revolution of 1789.
Accordingly, “Terce” is linked with the Industrial Revolution of 1776,
“Sext” with the English Revolution of 1649 and finally “Lauds”, which
closes Auden’s cycle but is sung at sunrise symbolising the moment
when Jesus was arrested, is, in Auden’s chart tables, connected with the
Russian Revolution of 1917.

The chart tables drafted by Auden portray a linear sequence of events
that take place during one day, on Good Friday, from the morning prayer
“Lauds” to the midnight service of “Compline”. But this was not all.
Auden added to the scheme a table of sacraments and later events which
he called “The Prophecy” or “The Proclamation”, among others. Only a
fraction of his drafted programme remained in the final form of “Horae
Canonicae”. The events of Good Friday and the prayer hours of the day

\(^{504}\) Ibid. 306-7.

\(^{505}\) Ibid. 260-261.
remained intact, although some of the events are presented in a half-concealed form.506

Instead of echoing Rosenstock-Huessy’s thousand-year scheme of revolutionary history in “Horae Canonicae”, Auden alludes to it more clearly in the second section of his poem “Memorial for the City”, which records the history of the city from the Papal Revolution of 1075 to the late romantic revolution. The symbol of the former is the rise of “the New City” which occurred with the separation of secular power from papal control. The realm of “the Conscious City” is the one for which the lonely heroes of Romanticism died. These two “cities” form the two poles between which Auden places “the Sane City” of the Renaissance, the 18th century “Sinful City” as well as “the Glittering City” of the 19th century. The third section of the poem opens with an image of “the Abolished City”, the post-war (and post-Christian) city in Germany which Auden had seen with his own eyes just after the end of the Second World War.507

Auden’s depiction in Section II of “Memorial for the City” of “the Rational City”, the ideal of the French Revolution, where secularism is taken to its extreme together with the ideas of egalitarianism and utilitarianism, is of special interest to us, taking into account its possible influence on the revolutionary undercurrent of Brodsky’s portrayal of his Ideal City:

In a national capital Mirabeau and his set
Attacked mystery; the packed galleries roared
And history marched to the drums of a clear idea,
**The aim of the Rational City**, quick to admire,
Quick to tire: she used up Napoleon and threw him away;
Her pallid affected heroes
Began their hectic quest for the prelapsarian man.508

As was pointed out above, “Memorial for the City”, “Under Sirius” and “Horae Canonicae” are closely linked together by a similar thematic structure. They all deal with civilisation, the relationship between history and nature, as well as with the position of man in the process of

---

506 For Auden’s chart tables for “Horae Canonicae”, see Mendelson 1999: 311-313.
508 Auden 1979: 192. Here and hereafter, all quotations from Auden’s poems are from W. H. Auden: *Selected Poems* 1979, ed. by E. Mendelson.
history with its changing claims on man both as an individual human being as well as a member of society - a citizen. Below, I shall consider these three poems as a thematic whole and focus my attention on the themes and motives which appear to have a connection to Brodsky’s poem “Развивая Платона”.

Apart from its reference to Fortunatus, Brodsky’s poem includes neither direct allusions to nor straightforward quotations from Auden’s works. Auden’s poetic realm can be sensed in the poem rather as a substratum, as an underlying reality that structures the poem on its thematic and temporal levels. I presume, for example, that the analogy of historical events that Brodsky advances goes back to Auden. Auden’s three poems have a common denominator, they all represent a “paysage moralisé” - a landscape in which the historical events become related to personal experiences, emotions, as well as to the role of an individual within a society. Within “le paysage” ethical and existential problematics are intertwined with the crucial questions of consciousness and personal responsibility. All these are depicted in the scenery of “Развивая Платона” as well, not necessarily in an explicitly manifested form, but rather as a partly concealed kernel that expands the poem’s “existential” dimension.

Each one of Auden’s poems has its own thematic connection to the city-state thematics in Brodsky’s poem. The works of the two poets in question seem to share certain motives, and it is evident that they have much more in common as regards to their worldview as a whole than would appear at first glance.

4.2.1 “Memorial for the City”

Like Brodsky’s ironic view of a utopian city, “Memorial for the City” also looks toward a vision of a just city. Its orientation is to the future, although most of its attention is devoted to unjust cities/city-states of the present and past. In the same manner as Brodsky’s city, Auden’s city embraces both the Christian community and European civilisation as a

---

509 The three poems under examination are not an exception in Auden’s œuvre. The majority of his works portray a “moralised landscape”. The fact that Brodsky uses this common denominator in his essay on Auden’s “September 1, 1939” testifies to his awareness of it. In fact, he replaces the attribute moralisé of Auden’s “paysage” by a more suitable one, in his opinion: Brodsky seems to prefer the notion of “paysage démoralisé” in describing Auden’s city-scape of New York, at least in this particular case (See Brodsky 1986: 337).
whole. One of Auden’s concerns is to trace the history of Christendom with the focus on the Christian idea of the soul’s redemption through suffering.\footnote{For more about Auden’s city symbolism, see, e.g. Fuller 1998: 417-21 and Mendelson 1999: 322-328.}

At the end of the 1940’s and in the 1950’s Auden was preoccupied with the relation of nature and history, a theme that very often manifested itself in form of a contemplation of the subject of time. In his “Memorial for the City” he distinguishes between the Christian world and the Classical world in respect to their attitudes towards time. In Part One of the poem he refers to “Homer’s world” which is “not ours”. Our world is “Post-Virgilian”, i.e. a Christian City:

\begin{quote}
The crime of life is not time. Even now, in this night Among the ruins of the Post-Virgilian City Where our past is a chaos of graves and the barbed-wire stretches ahead Into our future till it is lost to sight, Our grief is not Greek: As we bury our dead We know without knowing there is reason for what we bear, That our hurt is not a desertion, that we are to pity Neither ourselves nor our city; Whoever the searchlights catch, whatever the loudspeakers blare, We are not to despair.\footnote{Auden 1979: 191.}
\end{quote}

Fuller\footnote{Fuller 1998: 418.} points out that “the Post-Virgilian City” and “Our grief is not Greek” underline the Rosenstock-Huessyan idea that pagan histories (Greeks among them) picture life as a decline, or as a cycle, whereas Christendom, which “the Post-Virgilian City” stands for here, promoted the sense of linear succession of time. Mendelson comes to the same conclusion, but his choice of words makes the state of affairs sound even more irrevocable: “The Post-Virgilian city /.../ has learned once and for all a Christian sense of linear, historical time, which it can refuse or deny but never forget”.\footnote{Mendelson 1999: 324.} The principle of causality, the cause and effect relationship, is intrinsic in the conception of time as a linear process. Auden’s stanza “there is reason for what we bear” implies man’s awareness of the consequences of his deeds. Moreover, man has a possibility to make choices since he is provided with a will of his own.
Auden’s views on time, which emerge in this poem as well as in his other lyric works in a poetical disguise, are more clearly expressed in his essay “Nature, History and Poetry”. He divides temporal events into two classes, natural events and historical events. Natural events are recurrent and occur necessarily according to law, whereas historical events occur only once. They are unique and they do not necessarily happen according to law, but voluntarily, or as a result of provocation. The latter are caused by subsequent historical events since they provide them with a motive for occurring.\textsuperscript{514}

As Mendelson\textsuperscript{515} points out, although this distinction seems quite straightforward, its hidden polemical purpose was to counter Auden’s temptation to believe that historical events can also occur by necessity, that history has a predestined goal. Auden wanted to treat this temptation as at least a poetical possibility in “Horae Canonicae”, a sequence of poems which he was inclined to organise following cyclical and archetypal patterns.

It is possible to find in Brodsky’s “Развивая Платона” reminiscences of Auden’s division of time into natural, repetitive phenomena and historical, unique events. When compared to Auden’s “Memorial for the City”, where the linear continuum of time oriented from the past (which is described as “a chaos of graves”) to the future is symbolised by a desolate, devastated city-scape with “a barbed wire stretching ahead into our future till it is lost to sight”, Brodsky’s definition of time sounds emotionally dry and laconic to the extent that it seems to be a truism the poem could very well do without\textsuperscript{516}:

Время, текущее в отличие от воды
горизонтально от вторника до среды /.../.

These lines seem to suggest that time has a direction and that the days of the week follow each other in a certain order, albeit as a monotonous chain of days that are so alike that one cannot tell one from the other. Anyhow, the dawning of Sunday, the day of rest, can be distinguished from other days of the week, as the lyrical subject does, “Noting the absence of smoke from the brick factory chimneys”\textsuperscript{517}. Like Auden’s city, that of Brodsky is an image of a secularised society. In it, time passes

\textsuperscript{514} Mendelson 1999: 310-311.
\textsuperscript{515} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{516} Brodsky’s laconic tone here resonates the depiction of time in his “Йорк”, a poem dedicated to W. H. Auden: “За средою наступает четверг, и т.д.” (Бродский III: 164).
\textsuperscript{517} Brodsky 2000: 140 (transl. by George L.Kline).
horizontally from the past through the present moment toward the future. It keeps on running incessantly. The flow of time seems to be a phenomenon that literally takes place in front of the eyes of the lyrical subject. It remains external to him, something that he can only witness and record, but with which he cannot interfere in any concrete way. This manner of looking at time as if it were running by itself coincides with the way anyone might conceive and describe his experience of the flux of time.

Mikhailova maintains that the perception of time seen as moving along on a horizontal plane/space passing now more slowly now more rapidly before the observer who envisions himself standing on a static platform, is typical of the Russian mentality. I would like to add that it corresponds to the perception of time in the Western mind in general. Moreover, these lines serve as an excellent example of the two metonymically related meanings that Paducheva assigns to the lexeme “time”. “Time one” denotes the infinite process of movement of the world on the temporal scale (“время течет”/”time flows”), while “time two” signifies a particular period of such a process (“от вторника до среды”/”from Tuesday to Wednesday”). The relation of “time one” to “time two” is analogous to that of a whole to a part. Consequently, “time two” has a lot of hyponymes, such as Tuesday and Wednesday, evening and spring, among others, whereas “time one” has none.

The perception of time as something which runs along regardless of anything, according to which things are not only said to happen at a certain moment in time, but time is comprehended as an objective constituent part of the perceptual world, became common only in the modern times. In antiquity, for instance, the Greeks’ view of time differed from ours. Aristotle, among others, was of the opinion that time as such does not exist. We only conceive of time as a real factor which contributes to various processes of change both in ourselves as well as in our surroundings. In his view, the present moment is understood as a boundary between the past and the future - a conception which provides time with an objective direction.

Aristotle’s view does not diverge from that of Plato, who asserts in Timaeus that time as such exists merely as one of the qualities of the universe brought forth by the circular movement of the heavenly sphere. Plato defines time as a “moving image of eternity” which connects the

---

521 Plato: Timaeus 37d-e.
universe with its eternal model. Space, in turn, exists in its own right, forming frames for the visible order of things, whereas time constitutes just one characteristic of this order.522

In Brodsky’s poem the permanent character of space is contrasted to the transient nature of the traces of time on its surface, as if time itself would consider them (i.e. changes) without significance from its own eternal point of view:

“Time, which /.../ would /.../ smooth out every wrinkle and then, in the end, wash its own tracks away,”523. In the final analysis horizontally flowing time, no matter how slow its movement is, leaves space untouched by removing the traces left by the passing moments. The traces of time appear to be fugitive, temporary, the changes that occur return to their origin. In Brodsky’s metaphor the wrinkles of time are part of the category of space, a feature ascribed to the depicted space itself. At the same time they constitute a visible sign of the impact of time on materia, the human body included.

If time runs horizontally, as Brodsky claims, his view of time is in line with the common-sense conception of time in the Western mind. In relation to the human body, time’s flow is conceived of as coming from behind. That is where our past lies, behind our back. The present moment is here in our very hands, whereas the future lies in front of us.524 But if water, contrary to time, does not flow horizontally, its movement has to be either vertical or cyclical. Water is Brodsky’s most frequently used metaphor for time. In most cases it is depicted as a horizontally flowing river, canal or sea with an open, wide horizon. The imagery that Brodsky employs in the quoted above lines of “Развивая Платона” reminds one

522 Withrow 1999: 59. Moreover, in Plato’s view, in spite of being eternal and indestructible, eternally existing space, which provides a place to dwell for everything that is born, is not accessible to the senses. It may be apprehended by the mind through some kind of illogical reasoning, but on the whole it is hard to believe in the existence of pure space (Timaeus 52b). For more on Plato’s conception of space, see, e.g. Топоров 1997a: 463-464.
523 Brodsky 2000: 141 (Transl. by George L. Kline).
524 As was noted by Jangfeldt (1995: 200), among others, in order to distinguish passing time “at hand”, where the lyrical subject is still present, from the absolute time, Brodsky capitalises “pure” absolute Time, which has no subject.
of a seashore or a river bank washed by waves. Wave after wave, water washes the shore, erasing the footprints, leaving the sand smooth.

The vertical flow of water could be assigned to falling rain which, all the same, notwithstanding its verticality, erases the traces of man and his history from the surface of the earth. This would mean that time is equal to water and that they both contribute to the effacement of the personal life of man from history’s memory. What remains intact is space - earth. In the opening lines of “Memorial for the City” Auden expresses a very similar idea of the earth, indifferent to time and its changes:

The eyes of the crow and the eye of the camera open
Onto Homer’s world, not ours. First and last
They magnify earth, the abiding
Mother of gods and men; if they notice either
It is only in passing: gods behave, men die,
Both feel in their own small way, but She [the earth, space - MK]
Does nothing and does not care,
She alone is seriously there.

The crow on the crematorium chimney
And the camera roving the battle
Record a space where time has no place. \(^ {525}\)

Auden pictures here a landscape during a battle as it is recorded by the eye of a crow together with a lens of a camera. The latter is capable of stopping time for an eternal moment. Both of “the lenses” witness unfortunate events of war that keep recurring in the history of mankind, simply because “That is the way things happen; for ever and ever”. Earth/space neither feels nor preserves any traces of personal history. History keeps repeating itself over and over again, regardless of the individual. This infinite repetition of recurrent events is a manifestation of a cyclical notion of time. The idea of recurring forms of cultures and societies, which is present in both Auden’s and Brodsky’s poems, was common in ancient Greek philosophy. It may be found in Plato’s as well as in Aristotle’s writings \(^ {526}\).

“Келломяки”, another poem by Brodsky, contains a description of the waves of the sea which harden into wrinkles on the sandy seashore. They

---

\(^ {525}\) Auden 1979: 190.

resemble the wrinkles on space in “Развивая Платона” that are flushed away by flowing time:

Мелкие, плоские волны моря на букву “б”,
сильно схожие издали с мыслями о себе,
набегали извилинями на пустынный пляж
и смерзались в морщины. 527

In Section Eight of the same poem there is an enigmatic statement concerning time:

С точки зрения времени, нет “тогда”:
есть только “там”. И “там”, напрягая взор,
pамять бродит по комнатам в сумерках, точно вор,
шаря в шкафах, роняя на пол роман,
запуская руку к себе в карман.

It is this “там”/”there” alone, a spatial adverb, that exists from the point of view of eternally existing time. “Тогда”/”then” would suggest a human perspective on time, a dimension of personal historical time. The same “там” appears to be the only definition pointing to the location of the presented chronotope not only in “Развивая Платона”, but in “Пятая годовщина” as well. 528 Paraphrasing Auden’s “Memorial for the City” in all these poems, Brodsky records a space in which time seems to have no place. 529

Apart from being perceived as a linear process, the running of time which “flows horizontally, threading its way from Tuesday to Wednesday” can be comprehended as a cyclical repetition of days, weeks and years. This conception of time would correspond to Auden’s notion of

527 Бродский III: 243-247. Kellomäki is the original Finnish name for Komarovo, a village near St. Petersburg on the Karelian Isthmus, where Brodsky met Akhmatova for the first time in 1961 or 1962. See Chapter 3.1.1 above.
528 For a detailed discussion of “Пятая годовщина”, see Chapter 3.3. For the deixis “там” and its meanings, see Chapter 4.3.
529 Space with no time could, perhaps, be juxtaposed to Proust’s notion of “pure time”, which according to Frank, is no time at all. It is perception of space in a moment of time within which both past and present are grasped simultaneously. Time is thus endowed with the value and characteristics of space (Frank 1991: 26-27). In Brodsky’s poem time is presented as a continuum in which distinctions between past and present are wiped out by the horizontally moving flux of time. It is also worth noting that Wednesday and Thursday as working days do not possess any aspect of verticality inherent in Sunday and other holy days. Brodsky’s concept of time seems to be secular. (I owe the last observation to Professor Mikhail Lotman).
natural events that follow the rhythm of natural phenomena occurring again and again in space. In order to apply the notion of cyclical time to Brodsky’s text however, the attribute “horizontally”, attached by Brodsky to the mode of time’s movement, should be understood, perhaps, in the sense of a spiral form which consists of cycles of days following one another successively. Consequently, time that erases wrinkles and its own traces would equal tides that occur repetitively about every twelve hours following the phases of the moon.

The idea of time as such - due to its abstract nature - is apprehensible by the mind only, as Augustine realised. Because of the abstractness of the notion of time, we are inclined, if not compelled, to rely upon the more concrete notion of space in our efforts of the treatment and description of time. Most often this is done by using spatial metaphors, which are capable of rendering time in a more concrete, a more apprehensible form. Mikhailova is of the opinion that the sense of sight is always chosen as a medium to depict the movement of time. Consequently, temporal shifts are conceived and described as shifts in space. Due to the process of spatialisation, time gains not only a concrete, but a concrete, spatial form.

Correspondingly, linguistic expressions usually descriptive of concrete space serve to describe the qualities of abstract time. The verbs used to indicate movement in space are the same ones which are applied by extension to indicate passage in time: time runs, flows, flies, comes to a halt, etc. In Brodsky’s poem, in a similar way, time is described as “flowing from Tuesday to Wednesday”, “текущее от вторника до среды”: “текущее” is derived from the verb “течь”, which denotes the flowing movement of water, while “от” and “до” in their original meanings refer to a movement from one location to another. The fact that the expressions of temporal relations are derived from spatial terms and thus gain a spatial manifestation implies the primary status of space as a mod-

[530] Confessions, Book 11/ Chapter XIV: “For what is time? Who can easily and briefly explain it? Who can even comprehend it in thought or put the answer into words? /.../ If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks me, I do not know. /.../” Quoted from Augustine: “Questions about Time”, 1979: 58. (transl. & ed. by A.C. Outler).


[532] For a discussion of “spatialisation of time” in connection with mythopoetical chronotope, see also Топоров 1997а: 460-470. Cf. the notion of the chronotope in Бахтин 1975: 235-236. In the chronotope, time and space are intertwined. Space is “temporalised”, becoming part of the plot which unfolds in time.
elling category with respect to time, owing to the central role of spatial organisation in the human mind.\(^{533}\)

According to Toporov\(^{534}\), the spatialisation of time is a typical trait of a mythopoetical chronotope. The spatialised time now rendered in a spatial form, receives in this process the status of a new dimension of space. Simultaneously with its “spatialisation”, time is endowed with a feature of space - extension. Time becomes extensive and it is somehow “placed outside”. Precisely this process is depicted in Brodsky’s poem. Time is conceived as a linear movement, articulated in a spatial language and, indeed, it appears to have no connection to the lyrical subject’s inner experience of time.

Time has one special characteristic in Brodsky’s “Развивая Платона”. It seems to be an active subject which, apart from running and erasing its own traces, is capable of producing a complete change in the appearance of the city, as we can read from the following lines:

И когда зима, Фортунатус, облекает квартал в рядно,
я б скучал в Галерее, где каждое полотно
- особенно Энгра или Давида -
как родимое выглядело бы пятно.\(^{535}\)

 Apparently time is not just a passive background, but contributes actively to a visible change in the city-scape. Brodsky writes here about winter, a season that has special significance for him. He sees winter as the most abstract of all seasons. It smoothens and softens the contours of things as well as of whole landscapes. When the distinct outlines are covered by “the shroud” of snow, the manifold constituents of space, as well as of different parts of it, become equal to each other. The borders that divide space into hierarchical sections are wiped away by rendering them invisible - hidden under a monotonous, immobile white cover. It is not merely for the sake of the rhyme that Brodsky has chosen “рядно” as the metaphor for snow. In this particular poem the white cloth covering the earth is associated with paintings in a gallery on which the lyrical subject would fix his gaze when wandering, bored, through the familiar halls of the museum.

A similar analogy of winter with a white cloth appears in “Келломяки” where “winter considered the drying sheets its own linen”

\(^{533}\) See, e.g. van Baak 1983: 112-113.

\(^{534}\) Топоров 1997а: 460.

\(^{535}\) In the English version of “Plato Elaborated”, translated by George L. Kline, this line has preserved its original meaning and imagery: “And when winter, Fortunatus, threw its coarse shroud over the square /.../.” (Brodsky 2000: 141).
The white cloth brings to mind a shroud which is used to cover a corpse. As a matter of fact, the colour white, snow and winter are in Brodsky’s poetical imagery constant companions of the theme of death. Vanshenkina calls aptly Brodsky’s snow cover “the harbinger of glaciation” that causes the clear contours of objects to vanish. This signifies a real menace to the soul of the object itself, since Brodsky is of the opinion that the more distinct the contours of a thing are, the more real its presence in a landscape.

The theme of winter and cold continues in the next stanza of “Развивая Платона”, which depicts a scene in a cold St. Petersburg evening as seen from the point of view of the lyrical subject sitting by the window:

В сумерках я следил бы в окне стада
мычащих автомобилей, спнующих туда-сюда
мимо стройных нагих колонн с дорическою
прическою,
безмятежно белеющих на фронтоне Суда.

What relates this stanza to the theme of cloth in the previous one is the word “спнующих” from the verb “сновать”, which is used here to describe the quick movement of the cars to and fro in front of the Greek columns of the Court. It so happens that the verb “сновать” also refers to warping a cloth as well. The passage quoted above creates the impression of weaving - the moving cars with their beams of light zigzag horizontally, like threads, among the vertical “threads” of the immobile columns. It is the very same sense of cross-movement that is to be found also in Brodsky’s other poems, for instance in “Йорк”, a poem dedicated to W.H. Auden.

The nude Doric columns, which come from the south and are unaccustomed to winter, stand benumbed by the cold. In “Развивая Платона”, however, they submit to their fate, unlike the columns in “Эклога 4-я (зимняя)” where the colonnade thirsts for a take-over. In the latter poem it is the inhabitants of the city that have had to reconcile

536 “Келломяки”, Section V, Бродский III: 244.
537 Ваншенкина 1996: 41. For a discussion of the significance of the contours of “things” and their relation to the space - “devouring” things in Brodsky’s poetics, see also Лотман Ю. 1993: 299-300. See also Chapter 5.1.2.1 below.
538 Polukhina comes to the conclusion that this cross-movement of vertical and horizontal lines, which is manifested in various ways in “Йорк”, is a configuration of the cross, see Polukhina 1989: 98.
themselves to the cold. The southern origin of the columns implies the symbolic value invested in them in Brodsky’s lyrics. They are signs of imperial rule, the archetype of which is ancient Rome.

In spite of the fact that Auden’s cities are almost without an exception set in southern landscapes, they share features with Brodsky’s ideal city. In the first stanza of Section III in his poem “Memorial for the City”, for instance, Auden’s description of the barbed wire extending through the city resembles the wanderings of Brodsky’s lyrical subject in the city of his dreams amidst the singled-out edifices, whose appellations are capitalised. One of the common landmarks of the two cities is the Court which, in Auden’s post-war city, in contrast to Brodsky’s white columns shining in the dusk, is burnt-out:

Across the square,
Between the burnt-out Law Courts and Police Headquarters,
Past the Cathedral far too damaged to repair,
Around the Grand Hotel patched up to hold reporters,
Near huts of some Emergency Committee,
The barbed wire runs through the abolished City.540

The Court, of course, incorporates the theme of justice which, in Section One of “Развивая Платона”, is ironically hinted at by juxtaposing the Code of Hammurabi to the regulations of a football match.541

---

539 Бродский III: 200, Section VIII: “Холод ценит пространство. Не обнажая сабли, / он берет уроцища, веси, грады. / Населенье сдается, не сняв треуха. / Города - особенно, ые ансамбли, / ые пилястры и колоннады / стоят как пророки его триумфа, // смутно белен. Холод слетает с неба / на парашюте. Всяческая колонна / выглядит пятой, жаждет переворота.” A similar image of naked columns surrounded by snow can be encountered in “Полдень в комнате” as well. See Chapter 5.1 below.


541 “Изо всех законов, изданных Хаммурапи, самые главные - пенальти и угловой.” The Code of Hammurabi is a Babylonian legal code dating from the 18th century B.C. or earlier - instituted by Hammurabi - dealing with criminal and civil matters. The Code includes the right of the upper layers of society to defend themselves and their property according to the famous lex talionis. The poor people, such as slaves, were deprived of this right. Brodsky refers to the Code in his “imperial” verse work “Post aetatem nostram” (Бродский II: 397-405), where in Section Six the scene on the stadium is depicted in the following way: “Цель состязанья вовсе не в убийстве, / но в справедливой и логичнои смерти. / За-коны драмы переходят в спорт.” and in Section Eight where the wandering Greek asks a boy why they are thanking the czar. The boy replies: “За новые законы против
The barbed wire extends not only through the city but continues beyond its borders to the countryside, separating villages as well as hills, or for that matter, two friends from each other. It does not look backwards, nor does it diverge from its linear course, but its irreversible course seems to lead to the same irrevocable result, as horrible in its finality as that of Brodsky’s linear passage of time, erasing its own traces:

Across the plains,
Between two hills, two villages, two trees, two friends,
The barbed wire runs which neither argues nor explains
But where it likes a place, a path, a railroad ends,
The humor, the cuisine, the rites, the taste,
The pattern of the City, are erased.\(^{542}\)

Like time, the barbed wire both separates and isolates. Neither time nor the barbed wire feels obliged to give any explanations nor reasons for its acts. On the contrary, they seem totally indifferent to man and his wishes as concerns their “undertakings”.

The barbed wire in Auden’s poem runs not only through the city, but through the human mind as well. It appears in our dreams. It causes us to stumble and fall. But behind the wire we can see our image as if in a mirror. The reflection of the face that we see has lost all its personal traits, it is a face of a person who could be anyone, anywhere, anytime:

Behind the wire
Which is behind the mirror, our Image is the same
Awake or dreaming: It has no image to admire,
No age, no sex, no memory, no creed, no name,
It can be counted, multiplied, employed
In any place, at any time destroyed.\(^{543}\)

A man without distinct features is a constant figure in Brodsky’s poetical realm, especially in his poems written in emigration. Although the barbed wire that runs through Auden’s city is predominantly a symbol of human evil, for Auden it is also a means to describe the history of mankind and its recurrent efforts to achieve social utopias on earth, efforts that have always led to bloodshed and the destruction of civilisations. In

нищих.” As a rule, the theme of justice occurs in Brodsky’s poetry usually together with the theme of empire.

\(^{542}\) Auden 1979: 193.

\(^{543}\) Ibid.
this sense, on the thematical level, and partly on the structural level, as we noticed above, “Memorial for the City” bears a resemblance to Brodsky’s poem “Развивая Платона”.

4.2.2 “Under Sirius”

“Under Sirius”544 deals with another cultural parallel between two historical periods. Auden draws here an analogy between the decadence of the later Roman Empire and the post-war Western world.545 The poem depicts a traditional reign of madness under Sirius, the Dog Star, in a vaguely late-Roman setting in a southern, Mediterranean landscape; a dull and meaningless period of time when the poet has lost his inspiration and the army drowses in a state of passivity. The whole landscape of the poem is filled with an atmosphere of “nothing happening” - a period of time as well as a both physical and mental condition which is best conveyed being “between event”.

Yes, these are the dog-days, Fortunatus:
The heather lies limp and dead
On the mountain, the baltering torrent
Shrunk to a soodling thread;
Rusty the spears of the legion, unshaven its captain,
Vacant the scholar’s brain
Under his great hat,
Drug as she may the Sybil utters
A gush of table-chat.546

Fortunatus dreams now about an apocalyptic end of the world, now about the second coming, about something that would suddenly put an end to these dull days, about an Event with a capital letter that would set in motion both the poet’s thoughts and the static landscape surrounding him which reflects the empty dull minds of its inhabitants. In Auden’s poetic symbolism, the landscape often represents a mental landscape, one’s

545 As in Auden’s verse in general, the city symbol is universalised, the central image is usually that of ancient Rome fused with the present. Consequently, the state of the present civilisation constitutes a recurrent parallel with Rome in a state of collapse, see Spears 1963: 194.
character and beliefs, as well as one’s emotional state and situation. As a
rule, he does not make a clear distinction in his “psychic geography”
between inner and outer spaces, but their interpenetration is constant.

Auden reminds the dreaming Fortunatus that although “It is natural to
hope and pious, of course, to believe /That all in the end shall be well”,
he has to remember that “/.../ first of all, /.../ So the Sacred Books fore-
tell, / The rotten fruit shall be shaken”, i.e. that the paradisiac dreams of
the former shall not come true until the advent of the judgement day,
when each one has to answer for himself in the final inquiry of the Pan-
tocrator Christ.

The poem seems to tell about the past, it seems to look back into history,
as does Brodsky’s “Развивая Платона”. For Auden, conscious ethical
choices, made personally and deliberately, if possible, in full awareness
of their consequences, determine the course of history. Auden’s constant
preoccupation with time - his dedication to the present moment together
with its parallels in history - can be explained by the fact that this was his
way of seeking causes for the present condition in history in order to act
better in the future. Auden makes a distinction between a poet’s recol-
lections of historical events and those of “serious historians”. The former
are “capable of deeds, of choosing to do this rather than that and accept-
ing responsibility for the consequences whatever they may turn out to
be” while the latter “care for coins and weapons”. Auden’s addressee,
Fortunatus, a historical person, a poet at that, is facing a moment when he
has to make a conscious existential choice. Either he acts as a truly inde-
pendent individual, using his own free will, or he chooses to be one of
those who refuse their chance to take personal responsibility and who,
consequently, end up in Hell at the Last Judgement. The question is
about an existential, an ethical or - especially in Auden’s later poems, in-
cluding “Under Sirius” and “Horae Canonicae”, about a religious
choice. The questions Auden poses to Fortunatus are the ultimate ones:

---

547 Spears 1963: 141- 142, 195: In “New Year Letter” Auden renders the inner space
in a way which reminds one of the blank sheet of paper in Brodsky’s “Пятая
годовщина”, in which he depicts “space in its pure form”, where the lyrical persona
“does not need a guide”. Cf. Auden: “There are two atlases, one is public, the other is
the inner space / Of private ownership, the place / That each of us is forced to
own, / Like his own life from which it’s grown, / The Landscape of his will and
need / Where he is sovereign indeed, / The state created by his acts.” (quoted
from Spears 1963: 144).

548 For Auden’s vision of time and history, see Mendelson 1979: ix-x and Hunt 1976:
225-237.

How will you look and what will you do when the basalt
   Tombs of the sorcerers shatter
And their guardian megalopods
   Come after you pitter-patter?
How will you answer when from their qualming spring
   The immortal nymphs fly shrieking
And out of the open sky
The pantocratic riddle breaks -
   "Who are you and why?"

Fortunatus, uncertain what to wish for, is perhaps himself part of the
  rotten fruit that must be shaken. Spears regards Fortunatus as a
   “disillusioned naturalist longing for, yet fearing the supernatural; an
Everyman reluctant to confront ultimate issues.”\textsuperscript{550} If he fails to respond,
  he will not be among the reborn but among those “who refused their
  chance”. The last stanza of “Under Sirius” is vital for an understanding
  of its connection to Brodsky’s “Развивая Платона”:

For when in a carol under the apple-trees
  The reborn featly dance,
There will also, Fortunatus,
  Be those who refused their chance,
Now pottering shades, querulous beside the salt-pits,
  And mawkish in their wits,
To whom these dull dog-days
  Between event seem crowned with olive
And golden with self-praise.

The dull days under Sirius\textsuperscript{551}, the Dog Star, that might seem golden in
retrospect - together with the Sybil in the first stanza of Auden’s poem -
refer to the prophecy of Sybil in “The Fourth Eclogue” of Virgil, in
which the Roman poet dreams about the birth of a divine child together
with an approaching period of peace, the Golden Age under Saturn
which soon will come back again. In the subsequent Christian readings in

\textsuperscript{550} Spears 1963: 195.
\textsuperscript{551} Sirius, the Dog Star, though being the brightest-appearing star in the heavens, pre-
dicted bad times for the ancient Egyptians. Its yearly appearance was related to the
approaching floods of the Nile as well as to the beginning of the new year.
the light of their similarity to the prophesies of Isaiah, Virgil’s lines have been interpreted as predicting the coming of the Messiah.\textsuperscript{552}

In his expectation of golden times Virgil assumes the role of a visionary, as does Sybil in the late-Roman setting of Auden’s poem and Brodsky’s lyrical subject in Section Four of “Развивая Платона”. While the predictions of Virgil’s Sybil of Cumae represent a millenarian dream of eternal happiness, Auden’s and Brodsky’s visions of the future are less hopeful. The visionary characters themselves are not even in a mental or physical state to see clearly: Auden’s Sybil, stupefied with a drug, is able only to utter “a gush of table-chat”, while Brodsky’s lyrical subject, drunk, between hiccups, claims to be able to foretell the future by the cracks on the pavement:

И там были бы памятники. Я бы знал имена
не только бронзовых всадников, всунувших в стремена
истории свою ногу, но и ихних четвероногих,
учитывая отпечаток, оставленный ими на
населении города. И с присохшей к губе
сигаретою сильно за полночь возвращаясь пешком к себе,
как цыган по ладони, по трещинам на асфальте
я гадал бы, икая, вслух о его судьбе.

Brodsky’s use of the possessive pronoun “его”/“its” leaves the question open whether he is predicting the future of the city, (город), or that of its population (население), or maybe he is referring simultaneously to both. All in all, the setting portrayed by Brodsky is reminiscent of the late Roman landscape where “Under Sirius” is set. The architecture of Brodsky’s city with its equestrian statues recalls its imperial nature. The apathetic inactivity characteristic of Auden’s poem - another distinctive sign of Brodsky’s image of the empire - is rendered more clearly in Brodsky’s “Пятая годовщина”.

\textsuperscript{552} Virgil’s “Fourth Eclogue”: “Now the last age by Cumae’s Sibyl sung has come and gone, and the majestic roll of circling centuries begins anew: justice returns, returns old Saturn’s reign, with a new breed of men sent down from heaven. Only do thou, at the boy’s birth in whom the iron shall cease, the golden race arise, befriend him, chaste Lucina; ‘tis thine own Apollo reigns./...’”. Brodsky chose Virgil’s lines concerning the great times impending for the epigraph of his version of “Эклога 4-я”: \textit{Ultima Cumaei venit jam carminis aetas: Magnus ab integro saeclorum nascitur ordo.”} (Бродский III:197).
The final stanza in Brodsky’s “Развивая Платона” does not bother Fortunatus with ultimate issues. Instead, it leaves the reader somewhat puzzled, asking himself: What is meant by the spatial opposition изнутри-снаружи, “from inside” - “from outside”? What is the lyrical subject stepping into? What does “la Patrie” denote? In any case it becomes clear that whatever his choice is, he belongs neither to those “who refused their chance” nor to those to whom the dull dog-days of secularism in the realm of “Under Sirius” will seem in retrospect “golden with self-praise”:

/.../ я бы втайне был счастлив, шепча про себя: “Смотри,
это твой шанс узнать, как выглядит изнутри
то, на что ты так долго глядел снаружи;
запоминай же подробности, восклицая “Vive la Patrie!”

The lyrical subject is perfectly aware of his chance. By the act of not refusing it - unlike “the lost souls, now pottering shades” in Auden’s Dan-tesque landscape - he makes a conscious decision to enter a place/space which he has been looking at only from the outside for a long time. His choice is such that it makes him happy, although he has just been excluded from the surrounding society. The Russian word used by Brodsky “шанс” is, of course, of French origin, thus joining the other French words in the poem. In Russian dictionaries the meaning of the word “шанс” is positive, endowed with the meaning of a possibility of something happening by a fortunate chance/accident, that of success and of the possibility of something coming true. The choice of the word seems paradoxical in the context of the poem. In it, the lyrical subject, in spite of being part of a dream, ends up being judged by the crowd.

Another astonishing thing is the line where he reminds himself to memorise the details now when he finally “gets in”. It would be tempting to explain this passage as a probably unconscious allusion to Virgil’s “Georgics”, where the Roman poet expresses his concern for the fact

---


554 It is interesting to note that Brodsky’s account of the impression that Virgil’s “Georgics” made on him in his essay “Letter to Horace” coincides with the lines in “Развивая Платона” about “time running horizontally from Tuesday to Wednesday”; “/.../the Georgics’ impersonal drone /.../is still appealing. Because of its implicit objectivity and explicit similarity to the monotonous clamor of days and years; to the sound time makes as it passes. The very absence of story, the absence of
that while time in its flow irrevocably escapes, we human beings are stuck in descriptions of the details of our lives. Nevertheless, in Virgil’s view, the smallest details are not without significance. It is the duty of the poet to highlight even the minor details along with the great historical lines. In a good poem the details of everyday life survive equally alongside great historical events. Thus the word is triumphant and overcomes the fleeing time.\(^\text{555}\) In his autobiographical essay “In a Room and a Half” Brodsky bemoans the memory’s undependability, its inability to recall all the details of everyday life, i.e. memories of those we have loved most:

I hear these admonitions and instructions, but they are fragments, details. Memory betrays everybody, especially those whom we knew best. It is an ally of oblivion, it is an ally of death. /.../ You can’t use it to reconstruct anybody, even on paper. What’s the matter with those reputed millions of cells in your brain? What’s the matter with Pasternak’s “Great god of love, great god of details”? On what number of details must one be prepared to settle?\(^\text{556}\)

In “Развивая Платона” Brodsky challenges the memory by giving himself orders in the imperative mood\(^\text{557}\) to retain all the details of his exceptional experience.

Virgil’s view echoes one of the prominent features of Auden’s poetics as well. In his poetry the personal and public meet. Although they seem to tell more about the public, common history, one may find in them most private experiences and emotions. The same applies to Brodsky, whose poems - “Развивая Платона” being no exception in this respect - often embrace whole historical periods while simultaneously being based on personal experience and charged with emotion hidden behind the mask of reasoning and restraint. The scene unfolding in the last stanza of the poem is a good example of this. On a universal level these lines refer to

555 For a discussion of Virgil’s “Georgics”, see, e.g. Suhonen 1995: 135-136.
556 Brodsky 1986: 492. Brodsky quotes here Pasternak’s lines “Всесильный бог деталей, Всесильный бог любви” from the poem “Давай ронять слова...”.
the expulsion of a lyrical subject, (a poet) from the city, as well as to the confrontation of an individual (a poet) with a crowd. However, as readers we are well aware of the fact that these ironic lines also recall the verdict given to Joseph Brodsky, the poet-parasite, in the real historical Lenin-grad of the 1960’s.

The traditional confrontation of the crowd and the poet is as closely related to the themes of empire and tyranny in Russian poetry as the already mentioned opposition of the czar/tyrant and the poet. The crowd, playing the role of judge and persecutor, leads us back to Auden, this time to his sequence of seven poems “Horae Canonicae”

4.2.3 “Horae Canonicae”

The bestial crowd constitutes the setting of the last scene of Brodsky’s poem. All landmarks of the city have vanished, the lyrical subject is surrounded by his persecutors, who form a faceless mass. Their index fingers are pointing at him, the victim, and they are shouting in one voice the verdict: “Не наш!“ - “The Outcast”. In Sections One and Two of “Sext” representing the moment of crucifixion at noon in “Horae Canonicae”, Auden praises vocation, secular power, human progress - all featuring a modern society - without which, “at this noon, for this death, there would be no agents”, i.e. for the predicted death of the victim whose name is not mentioned once in the cycle. Those who have the power to judge are described as possessing the Greco-Roman virtues of “Fortitudo, Justicia, Nous”- courage, justice and intellect (Auden deliberately omits the fourth cardinal virtue of the citizens of Plato’s ideal city, that of wisdom). These people are scoundrels, of course, but the same people are to be thanked for the “courtesies of the city: without these judicial mouths” life would be miserable in some remote hut village and “there would be no authority to command this death”.

In Section Three of “Sext” we come across an extensive characterisation of a crowd which, in its likeness to the mob that appears in Brodsky’s poem, seems to be universal. A mob like this you could find anywhere:

Anywhere you like, somewhere
on broad-chested life-giving Earth,
/.../

---

The crowd stands perfectly still,
its eyes (which seem one) and its mouths
(which seem infinitely many)
expressionless, perfectly blank.
/.../
the crowd sees only one thing
(which only the crowd can see),
an epiphany of that
which does whatever is done.
Whatever god a person believes in,
in whatever way he believes
(no two are exactly alike),
as one of the crowd he believes
and only believes in that
in which there is only one way of believing.
/.../
but the crowd rejects no one, joining the crowd
is the only thing all men can do.
Only because of that can we say
all men are our brothers,
superior, because of that,
to the social exoskeletons /.../.

At midday, at the time of crucifixion, the crowd stands still and expressionless until three p.m., (which marks the time of the death of Christ) when the mob is already scattered. The dispersed crowd is pictured in the next poem of the sequence, in “Nones”:

The wind has dropped and we have lost our public.
The faceless many who always
Collect when any world is to be wrecked,
Blown up, burnt down, cracked open,
Felled, sawn in two, hacked through, torn apart,
Have all melted away: not one
Of these who in the shade of walls and trees
Lie sprawled now, calmly sleeping,

_Harmless as sheep, can remember why_

_He shouted or what about_

So loudly in the sunshine this morning;

All if challenged would reply

- _“It was a monster with one red eye,_

_A crowd that saw him die, not I.”_

The crowd denounces its judgement but rejects the responsibility for the consequences of its deed.

These lines could well serve as an aftermath to the events in Brodsky’s poem. Both poets treat the crowd as a personification of human negative potential, neglect of the sense of responsibility and personal duty, forming a contrast to the protagonist of “Развивая Платона”, who knows in advance that his return to the city of his dreams will unavoidably lead to his perishment. Mikhail Lotman calls this urge to be lynched by the bestial mob “пo меньшей мере, странное желание судьбы” and indeed, one cannot help thinking that the lyrical subject’s strange desire is dictated by destiny. He sets out on a pilgrimage towards his death in order to fulfil the prophesies of the earlier poems, such as “Стансы городу” or “Стансы”, both written in 1962, in which the hero proclaims: “Да не будет дано / умереть мне вдали от тебя /.../” or “Ни страны, ни погоста / не хочу выбирать, / На Васильевский остров / я приду умирать /.../”, respectively. Apart from the biblical undertones of his sacrifice, the lyrical hero bears a clear resemblance to Virgil’s hero Aeneas, (to whom Brodsky has more than once compared himself) who takes his destiny into his own hands and, consequently, as Toporov maintains, “makes” the future he is destined to face by his own acts and behaviour. He does this in order to change both himself and the future, i.e. his destiny, since, when the moment will approach when he will have to confront destiny, he wants to meet its expectations and, consequently, to be one with it to such an extent that the future and destiny could really become “his own”.

Furthermore, Aeneas happens to possess the rare knowledge of destiny’s ways of revealing itself - that it does not disclose itself all at once, but reveals its secrets gradually, only under some special circumstances.

559 Лотман М.1992: 239.
560 Бродский I: 168.
561 Ibid. 209.
562 For a discussion of these poems, see Chapter 2.4.2.2 above.
564 Топоров 1993: 168.
where “question and answer in some secret way intersect in the same place and time”. No wonder Aeneas is “Destiny’s grateful disciple” who not only comes to learn its strategies but also enters into a dialogue with it within a certain “общее с судьбой диалогическое пространство”. Toporov adds that this dialogue, or entering a common space with one’s fate, as such, is an act of faith, by which he means the freedom of choice Aeneas dedicated his life to, thus resigning himself consciously to the will of fate.\(^\text{565}\) Such being the case, freedom and fate appear not to be mutually exclusive categories.

The confrontation of the crowd with the lyrical subject in the ideal city constitutes the intersection of spatial and temporal co-ordinates, the point “there”, “finally” where destiny is both revealed and actualised in “Развивая Платона”. Apart from being the prosecutor, the personification of human evil which - quoting both Auden’s “Terce” and “Sext” - forms “the machinery of our world” and without which “at this noon, for this death, there would be no agents”, the mob gathered to give the verdict act here as an agent of destiny itself. It occupies the other half of the dialogic space which arises between the agent of the fate and its fulfiller - the object and subject of the fate - i.e. the deliberate victim. As a matter of fact, the last two stanzas of “Развивая Платона” involve two forms of dialogue; one is given aloud, even shouting, while the other takes place in the hero’s mind and, notwithstanding its muteness, is rendered in a whispering voice.

The lyrical subject is condemned by the crowd as an alien element; the “people’s tribunal” cries “poking me with their work-roughened forefingers, ‘Outsider! We’ll settle your hash!’”\(^\text{566}\), suggesting the traditional banishment of a poet from the polis. The faceless, lingering crowd cries its judgement in the hero’s mother tongue, in Russian, whereas his response is in French, in an alien language that bursts out from the mouth of a man who is just being sentenced to be incarcerated as an outsider. The Russian “не наш” is the very language that Brodsky refers to in the last lines of “Декабрь во Флоренции”\(^\text{567}\), written in the same year of 1976 as “Развивая Платона”:

\begin{verse}
Есть города, в которые нет возврата /.../
в них не проникнешь ни за какое злато.
/.../
\end{verse}

\(^\text{565}\) Ibid. 112-113.
\(^\text{566}\) Quoted from the English translation of “Plato Elaborated” (Brodsky 2000: 142).
\(^\text{567}\) For a more detailed analysis of “Декабрь во Флоренции” and its connection to St. Petersburg-Leningrad, see Chapter 3.1.1 above.
там толпа говорит, осаждая трамвайный угол,  
на языке человека, который убыл.

In contrast to these lines, in “Развивая Платона” he finally manages to reach his destination, he returns, albeit in his dreams, to his city, despite the menacing crowd, or - as peculiar as it seems - with its assistance. But, strange enough, by the triumphant French exclamation “Vive la Patrie!” Brodsky seems to condemn himself to an isolation that separates him from the rest of the “population”, a linguistic isolation which at first glance would appear to be even more painful to a poet than a purely spatial or temporal isolation. It seems, anyhow, that Brodsky’s lyrical subject is as grateful as Virgil’s hero for this almost wished-for predestined end, for the opportunity to meet the requirements of destiny at last. This would explain his unmotivated joy in the face of personal tragedy.

The secret of his peculiar sense of delight in the face of persecution may also lie in the irony which accompanies the pronouncement of the slogan from the French Revolution. While Auden in his “Horae Canonicae” assigned the persecutors the classical virtues of the dwellers in Plato’s ideal city, the attributes of Brodsky’s “homeland” echo the democratic values of Liberté, Égalité and Fraternité launched by the French Legislative Assembly. Its decree, dated June 1792, solemnly proclaims that “in all the communes an altar to the Fatherland shall be raised” on which shall be engraved the Declaration of Rights, with the inscription “the citizen is born, lives, and dies for la Patrie”. He is, again, fulfilling his duty, this time not to destiny but to the state, to his homeland and to his fellow citizens.

Someone has to undergo the sacrifice, which does not correspond to victimisation in Brodsky’s philosophy of history. On the contrary, victims are those who raise their index fingers to point at the one chosen to be sacrificed. Victims are those who put the blame on “history” or

568 The linguistic isolation could be conceived as a form of manifestation of the aesthetic isolation that Brodsky writes about in his essay on Mandel’shtam. The aesthetic isolation of a poet, which appears as a result of the increased clearly personal tone of his poetic voice, acquires physical dimensions because “no choir likes it”; “When a man creates a world of his own, he becomes a foreign body against which all laws are aimed: gravity, compression, rejection, annihilation.” (Brodsky 1986: 133-134). Moreover, in Brodsky’s view, a writer’s attitude towards language is the only form of patriotism, and, consequently, “treason” for him is a matter of linguistic infidelity, not of patriotic infidelity. (See, e.g. the essay “Писатель - одинокий путешественник...”, Бродский VII: 63-64).

“circumstances” for whatever they do. They are the ones who blindly obey without questioning the ethical righteousness of their acts. They hide themselves in a crowd, becoming one with the faceless mass, resembling a herd of animals in their unanimity of behaviour. The undifferentiated crowd both in Auden’s as in Brodsky’s works is treated as an antithesis of an individual personality, but not only that. The mob stands also for pure power in its impersonal essence. Its main characteristic is facelessness. As Auden asserts, only the crowd sees - as no one person can see - force and power in its pure elemental form. In “Sext” power is not named directly, but the poet refers to it by his use of the vocabulary of Christian myths. The crowd always finds its victim. In the same poem Auden takes up Kierkegaard’s statement that the “’crowd’ is an abstraction and has no hands; but each individual has ordinarily two hands.”

In Brodsky’s poem, unlike in Auden’s, the mob is poking the hero with their work-roughened forefingers. Nevertheless this does not necessarily suggest its less abstract nature. The adjective “work-roughened” could be taken as an indication to the poet’s homeland, to “the paradise of the united workers”. On the other hand the poking finger is part of the motive of the hand, which appears in the poem in its various manifestations right from the opening lines:

Я хотел бы жить, Фортунатус, в городе, где река
высывалась бы из-под моста, как из рукава - рука,
и чтоб она впадала в залив, растопырив пальцы,
как Шопен, никому не показывавший кулак.

Placing the words “река - рука” (“кулак”) in rhyming position, Brodsky indicates their metaphorical significance and connection to each other. The flow of the river from under the bridge is compared to the hand protruding from a sleeve. The landscape in which the ideal city is

---

570 Brodsky says in his “Speech at the Stadium” delivered as a commencement address at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in 1988: “Of all the parts of your body, be most vigilant over your index finger, for it is blame-thirsty. A pointed finger is a victim’s logo - the opposite of the V sign and a synonym for surrender./.../ try not to blame anything or anybody: history, the state, superiors, race, parents, /.../The moment that you place blame somewhere, you undermine your resolve to change anything./.../.” (Brodsky 1995: 144).

571 The crowd appears in Brodsky’s poems “Лагуна”, “Fin de siècle”, and elsewhere.

572 Mendelson 1999: 350-351.
located is depicted in terms of human body\textsuperscript{573}. This is another trait that unites Brodsky’s poetics to that of Auden. The latter’s landscapes, especially those which are meant to reflect the state of prehistoric, “ideal” happiness, are often expressed in terms of a landscape that bears a symbolic resemblance to the human body\textsuperscript{574}. In Brodsky’s poetic symbolism the opposition of hand vs. fist carries a special allusion to the hierarchical relationship of a poet and a tyrant, i.e. to the superior power, whose agent is the faceless crowd. The original source and executor of banishment is the tyrant, who is more often identified not by his face but rather with his intellectual deficiencies\textsuperscript{575} or by his spatial location somewhere above the lyrical subject.

Such is the position displayed in the opera house, where the tyrant is sitting up in his loge, while the hero, clenching his teeth in anger, is seated parterre. The same scene, with exactly the same details, is repeated by Brodsky in Volkov’s book “Conversations with Joseph Brodsky”\textsuperscript{576}, where Brodsky sets out to describe how an artist can manifest his resistance to power in a centralised state. The only way to show his disagreement with the supreme ruler is to clench his teeth and to shake his fist in his pocket. The confrontation appears in “Декабрь во Флоренции” as well. Here, showing one’s fist is, at least in retrospect, the only way of survival under those circumstances, notwithstanding the subsequent result of the rebellious gesture, banishment:

\[\text{.../ вблизи вулкана}\
\text{невозможно жить, не показывая кулака; но}\
\text{и нельзя разжать его, умирая /.../}.\]

If the clenched fist is a symbol of the helpless rebellion of a minor citizen against the distant tyrant, its opposite, the open palm does not always

\textsuperscript{573} The juxtaposition of parts of the human body with the environment is not rare in Brodsky’s poetry. For similes in Brodsky’s poetical system, see, e.g. Polukhina 1990: 160-162.

\textsuperscript{574} See, e.g. “The Age of Anxiety”, see also Davenport-Hines 1996: 229.

\textsuperscript{575} See, e.g. “Представление” where the origin of the comparison “тиран - баран” is elucidated: “Пряча твердый рог в каракуль, некто в брюках из барана / пре- вращается в тирана на трибуне мавзолея.” (Бродский III: 296).

\textsuperscript{576} J.B: “Generally this whole idea of an artistic colony is absolutely fictitious. /.../ It’s a way of closing ranks, resisting. /.../ The opposition between poet and tyrant, which is possible only when, say, they meet in the evening at the opera. The tyrant sits in his box, the poet in the stalls. The poet sees himself as a Carbonieri, and in his mind’s eye he’s packing a gun. He mutters something through his teeth and tosses back an angry glance. That’s the whole idea of a bohemia.” (Volkov 1998: 167-168). For a discussion of the theme of “the poet and the czar / tyrant, see ibid. 32, 97-98.
mean death, not in Chopin’s case anyway. Why did Brodsky select Chopin as the personification of non-violence and calm or restraint from revolt? Chopin appears in other poems by Brodsky as well\(^{577}\), but only in “Развивая Платона” his name is related to the city of St. Petersburg-Leningrad. As is well known, Chopin was also forced to live in exile as he could not return from abroad to his native Poland after the Polish uprising was suppressed in 1831. We can hear echoes of his native land along with the nostalgic recollections in the melodies of Chopin’s compositions for piano. In Soviet sources the patriotic tone of his works is emphasised.\(^{578}\) In my view, Chopin hints here at the main object of Brodsky’s poem, the native city, which stands as a metonymy for the fatherland in its entirety and through which he throws some light on the forms of utopia that have been envisioned in the course of history. “Родина”/”native land” as such, does not appear in the lexicon of the poem, it emerges only in its French form - “la Patrie”\(^{579}\) in the closing line - a word which in French, in addition to fatherland, carries the meaning of the native land as well. The allusion to Pasternak and Chopin in Brodsky’s poem “Открытка с Лиссабона”\(^{580}\) supports this view. The combination of Chopin and the fist may well allude to Pasternak’s short prosework “Шопен” in whose second chapter Pasternak writes about Chopin’s Etude in E Major. He renders in words how its melody is closely linked to reality, how it actually is about a real picture or an event. Pasternak goes on to tell a true story about Chopin’s reactions once when the composer’s favourite pupil was playing this piece of music: “Шопен поднял кверху сжатые руки с восклицанием: “О, моя родина!”\(^{581}\) It appears that Brodsky was obviously wrong about Chopin and his fist. It happened at least once that in his painful memories about the native land the composer raised his clenched fist, albeit rather as a sign of despair and nostalgia than of resistance.

\(^{577}\) See, e.g. “Полонез: Вариация”: “Плюс могилы нет, чтоб исправить нос / в пианино ушедшего Фредерика.” (Бродский III: 249).

\(^{578}\) See, e.g. Музыкальный энциклопедический словарь 1991: 640-641.

\(^{579}\) It is more than probable that Chopin himself would have used the French word since he lived in France in exile. He was buried in Paris. The composer’s wish that his heart would be taken to Poland after his death, was fulfilled later.

\(^{580}\) Бродский IV: 41. For a discussion of the motif “крылатое фортепьяно” and its allusions to Pasternak see КаЗ 1995: 163 (or КаЗ 1998: 68). In Brodsky’s “Пятая годовщина” the line “там в сумерках рояль бренчит в висках бемоль” has been interpreted as referring to Chopin’s Sonata No.2 in B-Flat Minor, especially to its famous third movement, Marche Funèbre, which was played on the radio upon Stalin’s death in 1953. See Chapter 3.3.1 above.

\(^{581}\) Пастернак: “Шопен”, see, e.g. Пастернак 1991: 403 -407, (ibid. 404).
I would be inclined to relate Chopin’s études to his nostalgia for the fatherland, in accordance with Pasternak, but in this case I would prefer the *Etude in C Minor No. 12* instead of the *Etude in E Major*. Apart from the fact that its melody resembles the incessant flow of a stormy stream, this étude, known also by the title “Révolutionnaire”, would perfectly fit the “Audenesque” thematics of revolution, implicitly manifested in Brodsky’s “Развивая Платона” 582. In fact, in Pasternak’s view on Chopin’s études, the themes that we have discovered in Brodsky’s “Развивая Платона” - especially in its semantically complicated last stanza - are united. Pasternak characterises Chopin’s études as follows:

Это музыкально изложенные исследования по теории детства и отдельные главы фортепианного введения к смерти /.../, и они скорее обучают истории, строению вселенной и еще чему бы то ни было более далекому и общему, чем игре на рояле.583

4.3 Location and Existence of “The Ideal City”

If Chopin and the implicit “native land” open the poem, the poem ends with explicit praise for the latter - “*Vive la Patrie!*” - with which exaltation, though not without profanatory undertones, the lyrical subject finally reaches his destination. If we apprehend these words, citing Pasternak, as an “introduction”, or speaking in spatial terms, as “leading into death”, they echo Auden’s “*Horae Canonicae*” which, too, are about in-escapeable death.

The lyrical subject in “Развивая Платона” is pushed away from the common space by the blaming forefingers of the crowd. These numberless fingers become here a metonymy of hostile space where there is no place for anyone who does not join the crowd. This reflects a constant feature of Brodsky’s poetics; everything that is represented in large quantities becomes space, hostile by nature, whereas all that preserves its individual traits, like the places, buildings and characters that he depicts in the poem, are eternal. Space is not a mere prerequisite for biological existence, but also a social privilege within a community. The hero is deprived of this right by the two short one-syllable words cried out by the

582 It is precisely in *Etude No. 12* where, according to *Музыкальный энциклопедический словарь*, the theme of the homeland receives “heroic-dramatic” character (ibid. 640-641).
mob: “Не наш!”, which signify the same as “Изгой”/ “Outcast”, “Вон отсюда!”, “Чужой!” - in other words - “our territory is not your territory”. Paradoxically, as was already mentioned, these words seem to give a longed-for permission for the lonely hero to enter into a space which he has not seen for a long time, if ever before. Exclusion is equivalent to entrance:

/.../ “Смотри,
это твой шанс узнать, как выглядит изнутри
то, на что ты так долго глядел снаружи;
запоминай же подробности, восклицая “Vive la Patrie!”

The lyrical hero is provided with the opportunity to change his position as an observer “снаружи”/ “from the outside” to one “изнутри”/ “from the inside”. The move will eventually lead to a parallax - a displacement of the observed object, i.e. the city. Between “inside” and “outside” there is an enduring and universal antithesis. “Inside” is usually associated with such notions as intimacy and privacy, whereas “outside” is considered as being related to characteristics of a public place, to those of exposure and openness. In spite of the fact that the distinction between “inside” and “outside” is a matter of common knowledge, the awareness of it may remain vague. As Tuan 584 maintains, constructed form [a wall, a fence etc.- MK] has the power to heighten this awareness and accentuate the difference in emotional temperature between “inside” and “outside”.

The hero in Brodsky’s poem seems to be well aware of his position on the threshold between “inside” and “outside”, while in the reader’s mind the ambiguous meaning of the opposition gives rise to more than just one interpretation.585 That “inside” of his appears to possess strong centripetal force. Albeit with help from the crowd, it is capable of drawing him from his position as an outsider to the centre. The category of “outside”, or strictly speaking, the position of the lyrical subject somewhere “outside” the city of his dreams, is indicated in the poem by the anaphorical use of the spatial adverb “там”.

On the one hand, if we consider the “outside - inside” polarity within the context of the city-scape that Brodsky depicts in the poem, i.e. in the intra-textual space, it could be said that, on the surface, the picture he

584 Tuan 1997: 107, 110.
585 Ichin, for instance, has interpreted these lines as referring to the fatherland, which “будучи всегда готовой обвинить в шпионаже и крикнуть “не наш!”, сама оборачивается чужбиной.” Consequently, the separation from the fatherland has become a separation from a foreign land (Ичин 1996: 238).
draws seems to depict a place where life seems peaceful and calm, (the scene of arrest and verdict in the final section excluded). The lyrical subject’s strolling in outdoor public places, such as at the football match, on the banks of the river, or on the streets, interrupted by his visits to a living room of an acquaintance, to cafe etc., constitute a deceitfully harmonious whole. As a rule, a harmonious representation of the relationship between the interior and outside world offers a basis for an ideal worldview, characteristic of dreams, wishes, elegiac, idyllic or otherwise idealised reminiscences or their projections into the future\textsuperscript{586}.

On the other hand, if we hold to the first variant of our interpretation, according to which “outside” applies to the position of the speaking subject beyond the boundaries of the object of his description, his present status outside suggests another polarity, namely the opposition “near - distant”. “Outside” denotes “far away”. The definition of the actual location of the city is vague compared to the extent of definition of its actual characteristics. The contours of the city are delineated by the “contents” of city space, viz. the loci listed in the stanzas of the poem one after another, although their order of succession is not significant from the point of view of the narrative. The successive loci, their organisation in space, could be listed in any order without changing the poetic content of the text. As a whole, the scenes illustrated in the text constitute a familiar world of “short distances and definite places”.\textsuperscript{587} In this context the look “изнутри”/”from within” suggests the subject’s becoming part of the space he will very soon occupy, while the position “снаружи”/”from without” suggests a view from the distance, a position that enables one to depict the object as something differentiated from the self. In the final analysis, the simultaneousness of being inside and outside may well be a reflection of Brodsky’s experience in the Soviet Union between his banishment and after the trial in 1964, a period of life that Abel\textsuperscript{588} calls “the years of strange existence as if outside and inside Russian life at the same time”.

“Там” is Brodsky’s favourite designation of the location of the place which he does not call by name but which, nevertheless, can be identified, as in this case of St. Petersburg-Leningrad, by the very characteristics he ascribes to the place. “Там” denotes the city on the Neva not only in “Развивая Платона” but also in “Пятая годовщина” and with the

\textsuperscript{586} For a discussion of the spatial opposition “inside - outside” and its modelling function in the construction of worldviews, see, e.g. van Baak 1983: 60-66.\textsuperscript{587} This is a paraphrase from Auden’s “In Praise of Limestone”, Auden 1979: 185.\textsuperscript{588} Абель 1999: 261.
same frequency at that, as we have witnessed. We come across the deictic demarcator “там” in “Полдень в комнате” as well.

A deictic element, in this case “там”/ ”there”, specifies the spatial location of the object of the speech act from the perspective of the speaking/ writing subject in the context of the discourse, i.e. the poem in question. “Там” belongs among the most “pure” deictic signs in Russian language. It has no fixed meaning, but its semantic contents takes shape in the speech act, in which its relation to the speaking subject as well as to the world where the utterance is made defines its referent. Consequently, the deictic “there” does not fix the meaning of utterance but rather determines the parameters of its actualisation. In other words, it defines the speaking subject, the place of the speech act and their interaction.

By defining the location of the city of his dreams with the word “there”, Brodsky’s lyrical subject specifies his own location as being “not there”, i.e. instead of being “там”, he is “здесь”/ “here”. Wherever that “there” is, it is important that it is out of the reach of his senses. He can neither see it, hear it, smell it nor touch it. All he can do is to imagine its contours, sounds and smells in his mind. However, this does not necessarily mean that the place exists only as a mental image. Rudnev distinguishes between the notions of “здесь” and “там” written with lower case letters, and the capitalised “Здесь” and “Там”. The former are based on sensory information whereas the latter depend upon epistemological information. Neither kind of information may necessarily conform to reality. When dealing with spatial modalities, in addition to the above-mentioned “там/Там”, “здесь/Здесь”, Rudnev distinguishes a third modality “нигде/Нигде” (“nowhere/Nowhere”). The spatial plot begins when these modalities change places, when, for example, “нигде”/ ”nowhere” replaces “здесь”/”here”, or vice versa.

Apart from “здесь”, “нигде” can be opposed to “везде”/ ”everywhere”, as well. In fact, if conceived of as an essentially mental construction - a second level narrative reality, an object of dreams -

---

589 Бродский III: 173-179. For a detailed discussion of “Полдень в комнате”, see Chapter 5 below.
590 See, e.g. Лотман М. 1997а: 83-84.
592 Rudnev defines spatial modalities as follows: "Информация о том, содержит ли высказывание сведения о принадлежности его субъекта к одному актуальному пространству с говорящим (здесь), к разным пространствам (там) или о нахождении его за пределами пространства (нигде) - это пространственная модальность.” (Ibid. 79).
593 Ibid. 84-85.
Brodsky’s utopia seems to “exist” simultaneously “nowhere” and “everywhere”. Brodsky not only leaves the city unlocalised in space, but places it outside time as well. With its abundance of allusions to various historical events as well as with its prophesies for the future it is pan-chronic, not tied to any particular period. Yet, in the very essence of its non-existence it is atemporal, free from the limitations of time.594

Brodsky’s lyrical subject’s image of the city is based either on his former knowledge or on his assumptions of how it would look “там”. This knowledge may be gathered from various sources or it can rely on his former sensory impressions of the place, as seems to be the case in “Развивая Платона”. The city-scape, with its unnamed St. Petersburg landmarks, testifies to the fact, that the city whose features are now attributed to the utopian city of his dreams, has not always been beyond the immediate reach of his senses.

The narrative of the poem ensues at the moment when “Там” replaces “Нигде”, since, by definition utopia595 does not exist. Everything that concerns the ideal city is narrated in the conditional mode. The plot leads to a situation where the lyrical subject is “там”, although pragmatically he is “не там” but “здесь”. Actually, he occupies two different positions at the same time. On the one hand, he is outside of the city, he describes the city of his visions to Fortunatus from his location as an outsider. On the other hand, he is an active protagonist of the events that take place “там”. The use of the first person in itself implies the presence of the “I” “here and now”,596.

“Там”, as well as “Здесь” or “Нигде” (of which only “Там” is explicitly manifested, whereas “Здесь” is embedded in the pronoun “я” and “Нигде” in the notion of utopia), are spatial indicators that apply to a location both in physical space as well as in a mentally constructed space. The use of these indicators amounts to the use of linguistic models of space that reflect the worldview of the speaker/poet.597 “Там” belongs to the relative indicators of space. Unlike absolute indicators of space, it does not necessarily point to a referent with a concrete location. Consequently, it can be used in a non-referential way, for instance, when applied to a mentally constructed space or place. This could be one reason for Brodsky not to name the city; he wants it to be free from the restric-

594 I owe this observation to Professor Mikhail Lotman.
595 Ou-topos <Greek - no-place.
596 Топоров launches the term “вот-здесьсь” to illustrate the position of being “here and now”. For a discussion of the relationship of the first person form “I” with the poetic space of the text, see Топоров 1994: 181-183.
tions of a concrete physical location in the same way as it is free from the
temporal boundaries and from chronological as well as spatial organisa-
tion. The use of “Там” provides him with an opportunity to depict ob-
jects whose locations are either not definite or beyond any definition, or
might remain unknown. The actual location of the objects seems to be of
minor importance. What matters is whether the presented object is “near”
or “far” from the vantage point of the speaking subject.

As far as Brodsky’s poetic text is concerned, in the event that the lyrical
subject is already “Там”, what is the place which he enters in the last
stanza of the poem? It seems to be a place which isolates him from the
others, and the whole scene reminds one of an arrest and imprisonment.
This might be taken as a manifestation of Brodsky’s fascination for the
lack of freedom which, in Boym’s view598, is a fact of life for Brodsky.
She takes it as an expression of his “imperial consciousness”. For Brod-
sky empire is not a choice, it is his fate. The “imperial consciousness” of
the poet entails the internalised and naturalised “eternal laws” of the Em-
pire599 including the Russian and Soviet cultural conflict and, simultane-
ously, the mutual dependency of the tyrant and the poet, a question that
we have already dealt with. As Boym asserts, apart from presenting a
potential threat to the poet’s survival, the tension also ensures the quasi-
religious prestige of culture.

The poet gets his share of the quasi-religious halo of culture as he
identifies himself with the victim in Auden’s “Horae Canonicae”, the
story of whose sufferings with its mockings and imprisonments is re-
peated daily in the history of mankind. In order to avoid grandiloquence
Brodsky uses irony in the depiction of the final scene, both open irony as
well as that expressed in the form of a concealed pun. As was already in-
dicated, the thematic structure of Auden’s “Horae Canonicae” builds

598 Boym 1996: 526-527: “Imperial consciousness is part of the cultural baggage that
the poet carries with him. There is no way to be exiled from the empire; the empire is,
in fact, conducive to poetry. The poet is not looking for a liberal republic of letters /.../
Brodsky is fascinated by unfreedom. For him, unfreedom is a fact of life (a strange
poetic revision of Soviet Marxism, Roman stoicism in Russian translation, and the
proverbial Russian fatalism).”

599 For a discussion of the theme of empire in Brodsky’s poetry, see, e.g. Nivat 1990:
29, Вайль, Генис 1986: 198-206. It is worth mentioning, however, as М. Лотман has
pointed out, that “Развивающая Платона” is an example of Brodsky’s “imperial ima-
gery” with its intermingling of different styles and epochs. Life in the empire is shown
as entirely absurd and senseless. (Лотман М. 1997б: 308). The absurdity is reflected
on the compositional level as well, in rhymes and comparisons which lack all propor-
tions, see Polukhina 1989: 219.
upon Christ’s Passion and ends with the Crucifixion. The end of “the road” of Brodsky’s hero might also be a kind of cross - the prison called “Crosses”/“Кресты” in Leningrad, where Brodsky spent some time between his arrest and judgement in 1964. The pun is perhaps hidden in the French lexicon of the poem, in this case in the exclamation “*Vive la Patrie!*” with which Brodsky closes the poem. In a letter to Andrey Sergeyev⁶⁰⁰, dated 22 June 1971, Brodsky presents the following view from the window of the hospital room where he is at the moment of writing:

Paradoxically, The Cross - “*La Croix*” - would represent a place where the values of the ideal state, suggested by the exclamation “*Vive la Patrie!*”, those of *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* would come true. Or, alternatively the principles can take form as conceived of by “the People’s Republic”, i.e. by “the masses”. As Auden states in his “*Sext*”, an individual is “free” to choose whether he wants to be one of the crowd since “the crowd rejects no one, joining the crowd is the only thing all men can do. Only because of that can we say all men are brothers”. The crowd becomes both a prerequisite as well as a symbol of the high principles of the French Revolution. Brodsky’s irony is cruel, but this is often a result of a crisis, if not a tragic experience of his own life. Besides, the peculiar fascination for the lack or loss of freedom could be understood with the help of two different notions of “*la liberté*” that are present in the Russian linguistic consciousness⁶⁰¹: a) “*воля*”, which is traditionally associated in the Russian model of the world with space, and further, with unlimited movement in space. “*Воля*” as such is aimless and without a defined idea or goal. On the other hand, the notion of b) “*свобода*” is related to intensity. It presupposes a goal-oriented, well-formulated, self-

⁶⁰⁰ Сергеев 1997:150. Andrey Sergeyev introduced Auden’s poetry to Brodsky.

⁶⁰¹ See Топоров 1997a: 468.
absorbed movement. While “вола” is sought after in exterior space, “свобода” is attained internally by repeated limitations and “returns to the self”. In the locus where one strives for “свобода”, freedom and necessity act as a hypostasis to each other, in very much the same way as freedom of choice and destiny did not exclude each other in the worldview of Aeneas.

In the case of Brodsky’s “Развивая Платона”, the recurring return to the self is expressed in the repeated returns of the lyrical subject to a poetic space that bears an unmistakable resemblance to his native city of St. Petersburg-Leningrad. Moreover, “la Patrie” with its “Croix” gives one the possibility of an alternative existence, which in its turn provides one with an opportunity to escape from the surrounding reality. The same can be said for the use of foreign languages in general in Brodsky’s poetry.

4.4 Time and Its Direction

As was indicated above, various notions of time as well as of history, including ones that at first sight seem to run counter to each other, are expressed in both Auden’s and Brodsky’s works. If we compare Auden’s conceptions “historical, linear event/time” and “cyclical, natural event/time”, which we examined in brief in the previous chapter, with Brodsky’s statements concerning time in his essays and interviews, we will see that the two poets have much in common in this respect as well.

“Time that flows from Tuesday to Wednesday” is not only linear by nature - as is Auden’s barbed wire which stands as a metaphor for historical, i.e. linear time - but it has only one direction, running from the past into the future. Consequently, there is no return to the past, be it the past of a nation or that of personal experience. In fact, Brodsky underlines in various contexts the singular nature of every historical occurrence as well as the uniqueness of each individual’s life on earth. He appears to be a dedicated opponent of historical determinism which, according to him, is the ultimate product of rational, linear thinking. He sees the “law of history” as nothing but an attempt to predict the future with the aim of making it more controllable. It provides the individual with the opportunity to free himself from personal responsibility and subject to the role of the victim. Brodsky recognises a victim of history

---

by his/ her gesture; it is the one who is pointing a finger at others - the crowd surrounding the lyrical subject in the last section of “Развивая Платона”.

The first poet to express time’s linearity in poetry, in Brodsky’s view, was Virgil, who appears as a symbol for the beginning of our Christian era “among the ruins of the Post-Virgilian City” in Auden’s “Memorial for the City” - a city which has adopted once and for all a Christian sense of linear historical time. This is a sense of time which, in Mendelson’s words, “can no longer enjoy the Aeneid’s fantasy of unending Roman triumph”. One can try to disregard the experience of Christian time, which teaches that even the disasters have meaning precisely because they are results of conscious human acts, and as such, are subject to judgement. Brodsky has a passage in “Flight from Byzantium” which recalls this “Audenesque” view of time’s linearity. Brodsky, not unlike Auden, attributes the first poetic treatment of linear time to the Roman poet Virgil:

Virgil, it appears, was the first - in literature, at least - to apply the linear principle: his hero never returns; he always departs. Possibly, this was in the air; more likely, it was dictated by the expansion of the Empire, which had reached a scale in which human displacement had indeed become irreversible. /.../ The point is that the linear principle, detecting in itself a certain irresponsibility vis-à-vis the past - irresponsibility linked with the linear idea of existence - tends to balance this with a detailed projection of the future. The result is either a “retroactive prophesy,” /.../ or social utopianism or the idea of eternal life - i.e., Christianity. There is not much difference between these. In fact, it is their similarity, and not the “messianic” Fourth Eclogue, that practically allows one to consider Virgil the first Christian poet. Had I been writing The Divine Comedy, I would have placed this Roman in Paradise: for outstanding services to the linear principle, into its logical conclusion.

Nor does Brodsky believe in other articles of faith of rationalism, such as the inevitability of progress or the notion of the evolution of species. Brodsky compares historians in their quest for a predictable future to natural scientists, calling them “biological determinists” and

---

604 Mendelson 1999: 324.
“Lamarckians”.

Lamarck is actually one of the hidden signposts in "Развивая Платона". Brodsky borrowed the title from Richard Wilbur’s poem "Lamarck Elaborated", as Kline has observed. The epigraph of Wilbur’s poem is taken from Lamarck: "The environment creates the organ". In his theory of evolution Lamarck claimed that organs pass through a constant process of evolution and that not only inherited, but also acquired characteristics are hereditary. In Wilbur’s poem the original source of each of the five senses lies in nature, but there is no counterpart for the human mind to be found in nature. In its originality and mysteriousness it cannot be either controlled or ruled.

Wilbur’s Lamarck provides a hint which points towards Mandel’shtam, to his poem "Ламарк", to be precise. In it the lyrical subject returns on Lamarck’s “moving ladder” of evolution, he descends to the level of reptiles and insects until he shrinks almost totally. In the poem Lamarck, an ardent proponent of nature, disregards the capacities characteristic of human senses only, such as the aesthetic aspect of seeing and hearing which are crucial for perceiving and creating art, be it literature, music or visual arts. Mandel’shtam reverts the “flow” of evolution back to its beginning, to the compound eyes of insects or to the deafness and silence of the spiders’ world. This image of retroevolution, as Segal calls it, turns man into a primitive, allegorical animal. Nature returns and takes the place occupied earlier by culture. In Mandel’shtam’s poetical philosophy this reversal appears usually as a result of the violation of some fundamental ethical norms. In general, “the theme of the reversed flow of time” is characteristic of Mandel’shtam, and in Taranovsky’s view, it is most vividly expressed precisely in “Ламарк”.

---

607 Ibid. 129 ("Profile of Clio").
608 Kline 1990: 76.
609 In Richard Wilbur: Things of this World (1956), see Wilbur 1988: 243. We can witness the impact of the milieu on one’s senses in Brodsky’s St. Petersburg. The city, with the length and directness of its streets, has the rare ability to accustom its inhabitant’s eye to see into the distance. (See, e.g. Brodsky 1986: 89 “A Guide to a Renamed City”). This is a special sort of farsightedness associated with memory. Besides, it has a peculiar quality of bringing back visual images, scenes from the past. Actually, it is the point of view of time itself. Moreover, the more distant or ideal the object of observation, the more keen and detailed is the perception, because it is the very distance that sharpens the sight. (See Brodsky 1986: 240 “Footnote to a Poem”).
610 Сегал 1998: 531 As Segal points out (ibid. 20) this semantic movement back is a manifestation of bringing the central principle of Mandel’shtam’s worldview - the Bergsonian principle of “durée” (длительность) which the poet incorporated into his conception of history in his later poems. For Mandel’shtam history signifies free movement in the space-time of the “durée”.
611 Taranovsky 1976: 122.
In “Развивая Платона” Brodsky has given bestial features to the crowd. Like Auden’s “chimerical” mob, it has lost most of the features that would distinguish it from a herd of beasts. However, the lyrical subject is not always contraposed in relation to the mob. On the contrary, in the first section of the poem he voluntarily joins its “bestial howl” at the football match. In Section Two the hero eagerly exposes his origin - the slumbering monkey in him - that unites him to his fellow citizens. In the first and second stanza of Section Three he, not without sarcasm, refers to the “bronze equestrians” with their horses as “their quadrupeds” - “ихние четвероногие” who have left a lasting imprint on the city-dwellers. Unlike Mandel’shtam and Auden, (whose crowd sees only one thing) Brodsky does not make his crowd mute or blind. It is capable of uttering words that are put into its mouth, at least one-syllable words, such as “Не наш!”.

“The Bronze Horsemen” with their four-footed companions are, of course, the very symbols of the empire in St. Petersburg space. They stand for oppressive power. More than once in the course of history the city-dwellers have been trampled under the hoofs of imperial regimes. Falconet’s statue of Peter the Great combines the Roman equestrian tradition with old Russian Christian symbolism. Ancient imperial Rome is the archetype of empire in the Western mind. No wonder that in Brodsky’s oeuvre the theme of empire occurs most clearly in his poems set in ancient Roman landscapes, such as “Anno Domini”, “Post Aetatem nostram”, “Письма римскому другу” and “Бюст Тиберия”, among others. In contrast to the reflections on Falconet’s statue in “С февраля по апрель”, which dwells mostly on the aesthetics of the monument, in “Развивая Платона” the poet discloses the political and ideological values invested in it, which are for the most part oppressing and destructive.

Brodsky’s rejection of the notion of historical necessity does not mean that he denies the significance of the past. On the contrary, for him memory is a means of overcoming the linearity of time. In the passage

612 For a discussion of Brodsky’s treatment of Falconet’s statue especially in “Петербургский роман” and in “Я родился и вырос...”, see Ранчин 2000: 173-6 or Ранчин 2001: 264-271.
613 See Chapter 2.4.4.3 above.
614 The lines in Section Three of “Развивая Платона”: “/.../зачем нам двадцатый век, если есть уже / девятнадцатый век /.../” are evidence of his interest in the past, especially in the history of literature. Since the quoted statement is about literature, as Derek Walcott has noted (Уолкотт 1996:17 or Уолкотт 1997: 300 or Walcott 1992: 312), Brodsky thus pays homage here to his great 19th-century predecessors.
about time in “Развивая Платона” that has been referred to several times already, he actually reverses the flow of time.\(^{615}\) Time washes its own traces away and frees itself, perhaps, from the successive order of chronology as well. The beginning of the poem seems to suggest that the lyrical subject describes to his addressee, Fortunatus, an imaginary city where he would like to live, that is, a utopia, a place that does not exist. Utopia is by definition orientated towards the future. In the semantics of time, it belongs to the sphere of “expectation”, whereas all that is orientated towards the past becomes part of the sphere of “experience”. Is “Развивая Платона” then a dream or a series of images from the past? The structure of the poem, with its images of particular, carefully chosen buildings and places, reminds one of a technique used by the ancient Greeks and Romans, the art of memory. It is based on Aristotle’s theory of memory and reminiscence, according to which memory is a collection of mental pictures from sense impressions with a time element added, for the mental images of memory are not from perception of things present but of things past.\(^{616}\) The mental images then become the material of the intellectual faculty, the thought that works on the stored images from sense perception. In order to recall things and events from the past, the Greeks connected the things which they did not want to forget as mental pictures of certain places/loci. Either the chosen loci had something extraordinary in them, some kind of irregularity, or else an unforgettable experience was related to these particular places, which distinguished them from others. By going through these places in a certain order, the Greeks were able to call to mind the events or ideas which they had linked to the chosen loci.\(^{617}\) Since it was important to remember the right order of the places, the fifth place was given a special trait in order easily to distinguish it from others.

In Brodsky’s poem the fifth place is the station which indeed is provided with a distinguishing feature - the verb. The railway station “would stand”, “Там стоял бы большой Вокзал”, whereas the other buildings just “would be there” (“там был/была бы”). The choice of the verb “to stand” instead of the verb “to be” provides the station with a greater degree of concreteness and firmness than is given to the other buildings in

\(^{615}\) “Время /.../ в темноте там разглаживало бы морщины / и стирало бы собственные следы.”

\(^{616}\) Aristotle: *De memoria et reminiscencia*, see Yates 1966: 33.

the poem. The capitalised “Station” is a suitable monument to the wandering, exiled poet.  

Each of the chosen loci is attached to the past of the lyrical subject: they all arouse subjective memories of his past life. All the places written with capital letters - the Opera, the Library, the Station, the Gallery and the Court - seem to be loaded with particular meaning connected to the events of the personal life of the lyrical subject. What we witness here, in fact, is a metonymical shift in which the mentioned loci come to signify processes, individual acts or events. They become proper names with a strong sense of intimacy and subjectivity. On the other hand, capitalised words lose their relation to a concrete, real St. Petersburg chronotope. The edifices become abstractions, universals or absolute ideas while their particularity increases. This is a common feature in Brodsky’s poetry. As Mikhail Lotman maintains, unlike Plato, Brodsky’s poetic philosophy emphasises the particular, private and individual in the process of transforming a material thing into an abstract, universal idea. That which is forever lost and, consequently, has become the constituent of “небытие”, gains an absolute nature in his poetic worldview. If we were to find a common denominator for the ideas behind the depicted loci that would incorporate the separate “snapshots” of the poem, the temporal concept of “beforeishness” would certainly do. It is nostalgia for a geographical place, a city with “utopian classical porticoes” - it is la maladie du pays, as much as it is le mal du siècle - longing for something that was but is no more.

Brodsky’s choice of Fortunatus as the addressee of the poem indicates that the poem is more about a return to the past, to the city that can now only be reached by the art of memory, than about a dream to be realised in some vague future. In this case, however, I do not refer to the Latin poet Fortunatus Venantius, but to a mythical character of the Middle Ages who since that time has appeared in various fairy tales. On one of

---

618 Brodsky’s lyrical subject chose the station as his monument earlier in the poem “Петербургский роман” (Chapter 22), written in Leningrad in 1961 (Бродский I: 61).

619 See Падучева 2000: 245. For other metonymical shifts, see ibid. 239-254.

620 Лотман М. 1992: 229, see also Лотман Ю. 1993: 296.

621 The figure of Fortunatus as a reference to a fairy-tale figure has escaped the attention of Brodsky scholars. Polukhina, among others, describes the addressee of “РП” as “Город, в котором живет некий счастливчик (отсюда его имя, Фортунатус).” (Полухина 1989: 147). Accordingly, in the comments to Brodsky’s Collected Poems in English, Fortunatus is defined as deriving from Latin, meaning “born lucky” (Brodsky 2000: 515).
his journeys he met a pasha who showed him a cap with the help of which one could move anywhere in the world. Fortunatus put on the cap and wished to be back home, and there he was.

In spite of the presence of another Fortunatus, the one from the fairy tale, the Audenesque subtext in the poem should not be discarded. “Vespers”, the fifth poem in Auden’s sequence “Horae Canonicae”, provides an interesting insight into the question whether Brodsky’s poem is really a look back into the “golden” days of the past - if he is depicting a lost arcadia - or a utopia, a dream that remains to be materialised in the future. Auden’s poem is evoked by an encounter of two antitypes: the Arcadian, with whom the poet identifies, and the Utopian. The dreamers differ from each other in their orientation in time. The former is dreaming about an aesthetic lost Eden, whereas the latter makes plans for his New Jerusalem, where “the temples will be empty” and the rational virtues will have replaced the “compulsive rituals and superstitious tabus” of Eden. As Mendelson has pointed out, both the Arcadian and his Utopian counterpart seem harmless enough in their wish to deny the reality of the present until their meeting reminds them both of the mechanisms of injustice and murder which their mental escape from the present moment serve.

Was it (as it must look to any god of cross-roads) simply a fortuitous intersection of life-paths, loyal to different fibs,

        or also a rendezvous between accomplices who, in spite of themselves, cannot resist meeting

        to remind the other (do both, at bottom, desire truth?) of that half of their secret which he would most like to forget,

        forcing us both, for a fraction of a second, to remember our victim (but for him I could forget the blood, but for me he could forget the innocence)

        on whose immolation (call him Abel, Remus, whom you will, it is one Sin Offering) arcadias, utopias, our dear old bag of a democracy, are alike founded:

        For without a cement of blood (it must be human, it must be

innocent) no secular wall will safely stand.\textsuperscript{623}

The lyrical subject, the Arcadian, conceives of the world aesthetically, “he”, the Utopian, politically. Consequently, their views recollect two aspects of “the victim”. The Arcadian, in his aestheticising of the event, wishes to forget the blood, while the Utopian would like to disregard the innocence of the victim in his conviction that anyone who is or has been excluded from the city deserves his fate. In a lecture on literary edens, Auden offers the following explanation of the difference between the two opposite figures (without referring to “Vespers”):

The psychological difference between the Arcadian dreamer and the Utopian dreamer is that the backward-looking Arcadian knows that his expulsion from Eden is an irrevocable fact and that his dream, therefore, is a wish-dream which cannot become real. /.../ The forward-looking Utopian, on the other hand, necessarily believes that his New Jerusalem is a dream which ought to be realized so that the actions by which it could be realized are a necessary element in his dream; it must include images, that is to say, not only of New Jerusalem itself but also of the Day of Judgment.\textsuperscript{624}

As appears from this encounter of the antitypes, as well as from other poems by Auden which we have examined above, Auden refused to idealise the past, nor did he idealise the political utopias of the future. For him, a good society is a possibility which is never achieved, but toward which one must work. For him history is a realm of personal and deliberate conscious choices, made in full awareness of the possible consequences.\textsuperscript{625}

Brodsky’s notion of history may seem more pessimistic. Nevertheless, it has some similarities with that of Auden. He, too, stresses the significance of personal choice and personal responsibility, i.e. individuality, a characteristic that he ascribes to a nomad.\textsuperscript{626} One should become a no-

\textsuperscript{623} Auden 1979: 229.
\textsuperscript{624} Quoted from Mendelson 1999: 354.
\textsuperscript{625} See Mendelson 1979: x.
\textsuperscript{626} Brodsky 1995: 134-137. For Brodsky’s outlook on history, see, e.g. “Profile of Clio” (Brodsky 1995 passim): “Every discourse on history’s meaning, laws, principles and whatnot is but an attempt to domesticate time, a quest for predictability. /.../ The only law of history /.../ is chance. /.../ The more one learns history, the more liable one is to repeat its mistakes. /.../ The more you learn from history, the less efficiently
mad, if not physically, at least mentally, since being a nomad provides
the best way of escaping the rationalistic theory of society based on the
rationalist interpretation of history. Moreover, a nomad, as an individu-
alist is able not only to avoid the gaps of the rationalist interpretation of
history, but he can also structure history in his own personal way - in a
chronological or achronological order, making history one’s own in the
same way as the lyrical subject in “Развивая Платона” makes his des-
tiny his own by accepting voluntarily the role of the sacrifice.

So-called historical objectivity consists of subjective views, each and
every one of which is valuable. In the final analysis, Brodsky claims,
men always act individually, subjectively, be they murderers, victims or
bystanders in the course of history. Therefore, he continues, all men and
their deeds should be judged likewise. Given the fallacy of historians, the
deliberate choosing of the role of the sacrifice may be conceived as an
attempt to shed light on history from a more “subjective”, i.e. a more cor-
rect point of view:

Since everything that happens in time happens only once, we, in
order to grasp what has occurred, have to identify with the victim,
not with the survivor or the onlooker. As it is, however, history is
an art of the onlookers, since the victims’ main trait is their si-
lence, for murder renders them speechless. If our poet is referring
to the story of Cain and Abel, then history is always Cain’s ver-
sion. The reason for putting this so drastically is to assert the dis-
tinction between fact and its interpretation, which we fail to make
when we say “history.”

All in all, one could conclude that if “Развивая Платона” is not a mere
look backwards by an Arcadian, it points to the present moment and to
the ethical choice which one has to make in each instant of one’s life.
The significance of the choice is made explicit by allusions to those his-
torical events when the “collective mind” took over the personal experi-
ence and the final result of which was an authoritarian, totalitarian rule.
In this way the past is made present in the current moment. Accordingly,
with its view on the philosophy of history, the poem is also a meditation
on the presence of the future in the present moment, provided history is
interpreted rationally as a linear process with the aim of searching for the

---

you are likely to act in the present. As a data bank for human negative potential, his-
tory has no rival.” (Brodsky 1995: 121-123).

predictable, recurrent historical events that would conform to the predestined “laws” of history.

In fact, Brodsky’s view of history, as it manifests itself in this poem, would correspond to that of Giambattista Vico\(^\text{628}\), the great philosopher of history in the eighteenth century. Although he believed in the existence of historical cycles, he thought that they do not just repeat themselves as such, but that each historical period possesses a general nature, which affects the details of the period in question. It may re-emerge later in other historical periods. This kind of vision renders a possibility of drawing analogies between different historical periods. Vico was of the opinion that history can be comprehended by man because social institutions, languages, habits and laws are all products of the human mind instead of being predestined by any divine force or law. He advanced a theory in opposition to the linearity of evolutionary theory, according to which every society goes through a three-phase development from barbarism through civilisation to destruction. Vico’s view on the return of history, which was not precisely cyclical, has been illustrated by later scholars as a spiral, because history, when returning to a new historical period, never repeats itself but it always takes a form which is different from its previous appearances. There is evidence that Vico’s name was familiar to Brodsky. In his extended essay on time and history under the title “Profile of Clio”\(^\text{629}\) - a name that echoes Auden’s poem “Homage to Clio” - he briefly mentions Vico as an alternative to Marx and other philosophers with a linear way of thinking.

One could come to the conclusion that Brodsky is neither an Arcadian nor a Utopian. Rather, he is an opportunist propagating the significance of seeing clearly both to the past as well as to the dangers of predicting the future as if it were subject to any laws of history. It would be wiser to keep track on the present moment and to be aware of the choices it offers for an individual. A passage by Auden displays the various orientations in time and space in Brodsky’s poem better than any interpretation:

\[
/.../facing in four directions,  
outwards and inwards in Space,  
observing and reflecting,  
backwards and forwards through Time,  
recalling and forecasting.\(^\text{630}\)
\]

Compared to Auden, whose perspective on time - manifested explicitly in “Horae Canonicae” - is basically Christian liturgical, Brodsky’s view on time lacks the consoling ground of Christianity. His hero is alone in the post-Christian world, where time in its secularity and meaninglessness is without any real essence.
5 ST. PETERSBURG AS “VOID”

5.1 “Полдень в комнате”

The poem discussed in this chapter is titled “Полдень в комнате”. It has appeared in two markedly different versions. The first was published in Вестник русского христианского движения (Le Messager) in Paris in 1978. The second, modified version belongs to the collection of poems written in 1970-1980 “Урания”, published by Ardis in 1987. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations are from the second version, which is also the one included in Brodsky’s “Собрание сочинений”. In what follows I will be concerned mainly with the thematic content of the poem.

Gerald S. Smith has provided an excellent analysis of its thematic structure. In his commentary to “Полдень в комнате” he comes up with three major subjects, the first of which deals with abstract concepts of time, space, number and perception. The second concerns St. Petersburg-Leningrad - the poet’s lost native city - a theme that is treated in the imperfective past tense, whereas the third subject, the nature of “the city of the future”, is rendered in the future tense. The meditations on the first subject are expressed in the present tense. As Smith convincingly points out, the tenses of the verbs used in the poem organise the text and help to distinguish its principal thematical subjects. Moreover, he argues that the title of the poem refers only to the first of the three subjects, more precisely to the spatio-temporally defined place in the first section of the poem, i.e., to the room at midday. It seems to be the very place which triggers the ruminations of the lyrical subject, who himself remains unspecified in the first two sections of the lyric work. My own discussion...

---

632 Бродский III: 173-179. Although the poem is said to date from 1978, Rein asserts that Brodsky assumed that it was written earlier, maybe in 1974 or 1975 (as indicated in “Урания”). As to the place where it was written Brodsky had no doubts. It was completed on Plymouth (sic) Road in Ann Arbor, Michigan (Рейн 1997а: 192).
633 For the stanzaic and rhyme pattern in “Полдень в комнате” I refer the reader to Лотман М. 1995: 330.
635 Ibid. 133.
of the problem will depart somewhat from Smith’s classification, despite its useful insights into the thematical construction of the poem.

I shall try to provide a more or less coherent interpretation of the image of St. Petersburg-Leningrad as it emerges in “Полдень в комнате”. As a starting point I shall take the notion of space in the broad sense of the word. As almost always in Brodsky’s poetics, “Полдень в комнате” is set much more in terms of space than time. The following subchapters will be concerned with the different manifestations of space in these texts as well as with their relationship to each other. The question here is whether the poem remains a collage of separate subjects - as it would seem at first sight - or whether the content of the poem arises from the interplay of the seemingly disconnected themes. I explore this issue in full awareness of the risks of providing far-fetched accounts by investing the spatial terms - space, place and void - with connotations that are too specific.

5.1.1 Space as a “Place”

We can discern at least three essentially different manifestations of place in “Полдень в комнате”, provided the notion of “place” is conceived of as a subspecies of “space”. “Place” and “space” have specified common denominators. Like “space”, “place” is understood as a three-dimensional phenomenon and perceived as such. On the other hand, “place” opposes “space” in some important aspects of its characterisation, as is discussed in detail below.

The first “place” in the poem is the room at midday portrayed in Section I and in the first stanza of Section II. The second “place” is the native city of the lyrical subject illustrated in Sections III, IV, VI, VIII, XI and in the last stanza of Section IX, as well as in the first quatrain of Section XIV. Actually, the room described in Section VIII is a specific “place” within “a place”, a counterpart to the room of the first section which, on the contrary, does not seem to have a specified location in space.

I shall first discuss, however, the passages where the city of St. Petersburg-Leningrad figures as the main object of representation - a native place for the lyrical subject, who is now explicitly referred to with the

---

636 This characteristic of Brodsky’s poetics has not escaped the attention of Nivat. See Nivat 1998: 599 and Nivat 1982: 379, 382.
personal pronoun “I”. The theme of the hometown suddenly occurs for the first time in Section III. The theme is continued in Section IV:

III
Я родился в большой стране,
в устье реки. Зимой
она всегда замерзала. Мне
не вернуться домой.

Мысль о пространстве рождает “ах”,
оперу, взгляд в лорнет.
В цифрах есть нечто, чего в словах,
даже крикнув их, нет.

Птица щебечет, из-за рубежа
вернувшись в свое гнездо.
Муха бьется в стекле, жужжа
как “восемьдесят”. Или - “сто”.

IV
Там был город, где, благодаря
точности перспектив,
было вдогонку бросаться зря,
что-либо упустив.

Мост над замерзшей рекой в уме
сталью своих хрящей
мысли рождал о другой зиме -
то есть зиме вещей,

gде не встретить следов; рельеф
выглядит, как стекло.
Только маятник, замерев,
источает тепло.

In Section III Brodsky gives the geographical co-ordinates of his native place. The general definitions, such as “a big country”, where he was born “at the delta of a river which always froze in winter”, are enough to

637 Cf. Dante in reply to the interrogation of the hypocrites about his identity: “/.../
I’fui nato e cresciuto / sovra ‘l bel fiume d’Arno alla gran villa /.../.” (Inf. XXIII: 94-95). See Chapter 3.1.1 above.
identify the place as St. Petersburg-Leningrad. At the same time that he “locates” the city on the map, he provides the lyrical subject with a spatio-temporal context. The city with some of its landmarks is depicted in Section IV. Brodsky picks out the impeccable perspective of its streets as well as the bridge over the frozen river as concrete objects of representation. The memory of the extraordinary beauty of the place evokes a nostalgic tone which culminates already in the first stanza of Section III, where the poet reveals the fact that there is no return home for him. Unlike the chirping bird he cannot come back to his “nest”.

The nest as a metaphor for home is not novel and it occurs in Brodsky’s other texts as well. It is a comparison marked with the idea of return. The bird’s nest as a representation of home as such suggests that the beloved home has been lost. Consequently, the return to the nest implies that the home of the past has become an image of personal loss. The nest-home metaphor is endowed with qualities of simplicity, faithfulness and security, although in its essence it is very fragile. Notwithstanding its vulnerability it is conceived of as an absolute refuge. Brodsky does not say why it is impossible for him to return, whether it is because his nest has been destroyed or he finds himself incapable of making the flight. Nevertheless, as his poems testify, even if he is deprived of his home, he is still able to bring images of it to his mind.

638 This statement could be conceived of as a comment on the opening line of Mandel’shtam’s poem “Ленинград”: “Я вернулся в мой город, знакомый до слез /.../.” (Мандельштам 1994, т. 3: 42-43, see Chapter 3.1.2 above).
639 See, for instance, “Колыбельная Трескового мыса”, where the attempt of a bird that has lost its nest to settle down in a new “place” which has no “ground” is doomed to fail: “Птица, утратившая гнездо, яйцо / на пустой баскетбольной площадке кладет в кольцо.” (Бродский III: 81).
641 Judging by a passage - charged with emotion at that - concerning one’s nest in “In a Room and a Half” it is more likely that the reason for the impossibility of return is that the old nest is gone and that those who built it for him have passed away: “To a varying degree, every child craves adulthood and yearns to get out of his house, out of his oppressive nest. Out! /.../ Into life on his own terms. /.../ Then one day, when the new reality is mastered, when his own terms are implemented, he suddenly learns that his old nest is gone, that those who gave him life are dead. On that day he feels like an effect suddenly without its cause. The enormity of the loss makes it incomprehensible. His mind, made naked by this loss, shrinks, and increases the magnitude of this loss even further. He realizes that his youthful quest for “real life”, his departure from the nest, have rendered that nest defenseless. /.../ What he can’t blame on nature is the discovery that his achievement, the reality of his own manufacture, is less valid than the reality of his abandoned nest. That if there ever was anything real in his life, it was precisely that nest, oppressive and suffocating, from which he so badly wanted to flee.” (Brodsky 1986: 471-472). Cf. the poem “Классический
Most of the city-images in “Полдень в комнате” have found their way into Brodsky’s prose works, mainly “A Guide to a Renamed City”, which was completed a year later than the poem 642. As we can see, the components of the images are familiar from Brodsky’s other St. Petersburg poems, which were examined in the previous chapters. Here again Brodsky invokes the classical landmarks of the city, the colonnades along with the spire of the Admiralty plus the sunset’s reflection on the windows of the palaces:

VI
Там были также ряды колонн,
забредшие в те снега,
как захваченные в полон,
раздетые донага. 643

В полдень, гордясь остротой угла,
как возвращенный луч,
обезболивала игла
содержимое туч. 644

Слово, сказанное наугад,
вслух, даже слово лжи,
воспламеняло мозг, как закат
верхние этажи. 645

Балет” where one distinctive feature of “the better times” is that then one did not have to leave one’s nest: “Классический балет! Искусство лучших дней! / Когда /...// В зрачках городовых желтели купола. / В каких рождались, в тех и умирали гнезда. / И если что-нибудь взлетало в воздух, / то был не мост, то Павлова была.” (Бродский III: 114).

642 For a list of the parallels between “Полдень в комнате” and Brodsky’s three essays on Leningrad, see Smith 1990: 126-127. As Smith notes, the prose parallels are not necessary in order to understand the passages of the poem dealing with the city. They confirm and amplify the text of the poem, converting the general into the specific in a uniquely authoritative way.” (Ibid. 127).
643 See “Эклога 4-я”, Section VIII (Бродский III: 200), “Развивая Платона”, Section II (Бродский III: 123). See also Chapter 4.2 above.
644 “В окрестностях Александрии”: “Каменный шприц впрыскивает героин / в кучевой, по-зимнему рыхлый мускул.” (Бродский III: 241), “Похороны Бобо” (Бродский III: 34), Lowell’s “Florence”; “Where the tower of the Old Palace / pierces the sky / like a hypodermic needle, /.../.” (Lowell 1977: 14). See also Chapter 3.3.1 above.
645 See “Декабрь во Флоренции” (Бродский III: 113). See also Chapter 3.1.1 above.
Once again Brodsky recollects the cold and darkness of the winter, as well as the classical beauty of the city with its architectural splendour, admiring its reflection on the surface of its manifold rivers and canals:

What Brodsky offers to the reader is a “constellation of places” which, taken together, constitute a particular “place” called a city. As was already pointed out above, the idea of a place is closely connected to that of space, and in common experience their meanings often merge. The ideas of “space” and “place” require each other for definition.646 “Place” is more concrete than “space”. It has a particular identity, “a spirit” that is determined by its concrete characteristics, such as its location, and its material and formal constitution. “Place” is thus a qualitative phenome-

---

646 For definitions of the notions of “place” and “space”, see, e.g. Tuan 1997: 6-7, 12, 18, 54, 136-138, 154, 173, 179 and Norberg-Schulz 1976: 6-18.
non, a whole which cannot be reduced to any of its parts without losing its concrete nature, nor can it be described by means of scientific concepts. “Space”, on the other hand, may well be described by means of a mathematic formula, for instance. In other words, places are made up of concrete things that have material substance, shape, texture and colour.

Brodsky’s native city is a “place” par excellence made up of objects that have a bodily, tangible nature. The objects which he describes, the city situated on the mouth of a river, with the details of its urban landscape, the bridge, the impeccable perspective of its streets, its edifices and interiors, have an actual existence in a specified place, in St. Petersburg-Leningrad. Even if they now have become fictional entities, objects of thought, one can be sure that they had an independent existence in the outer world. These objects used to be constituents of that particular world, which formed the setting for the past life of the lyrical subject.

Apart from such objects, places are endowed with such qualities as stability, familiarity, intimacy and security. Undifferentiated “space” is transformed into a “place” when one gets to know it and invests it with meaning and value. Apart from that, a necessary prerequisite for “space” to become a “place” is the definition of its boundaries. “Place”, homeland and city included, is thus a locus of established, personal values. It provides one with an existential stronghold, it is a special type of object in which one can “dwell” on the condition that one identifies oneself with the environment. The objects of identification are concrete properties of the surroundings, usually those ones which one is familiar with already from childhood. As Norberg-Schulz puts it in a beautiful way, such “places” are “homes” or “realities” that “carry our existence”. Consequently, a “place” can be understood both as a tangible world of matter as well as an intangible world of meaning.

If a “place” is a concrete manifestation of man’s dwelling and if his identity depends on his belonging to a place or places, in what way is Brodsky’s lyrical subject “placed” in his native city, how does he belong to it? What kind of symbolic or mythical meanings does he ascribe to his city in “Полдень в комнате”? Judging by the number of poems dedicated to the city in his oeuvre and the grief caused by the impossibility of returning to it, it goes without saying that Brodsky invests the city with immense personal meaning and value. The city stands for him as a symbol of the personal experience of the uniqueness of his existence. Consequently, the city has permanence precisely because his experience of it can neither be repeated nor effaced. The city signifies home. Home is an image which can be reproduced and visualised in its every detail regard-

---

647 Ibid. 50.
less of his own position in the world. The permanence of home is exposed in Section VIII which portrays rooms “там”. Unlike the room presented in the first section, where the lyrical subject reflects on his past, the rooms belonging to the past seem full of signs of dwelling, in spite of the fact that they seem to be deprived of tenants:

Там были комнаты. Их размер
порождал ералиш,
отчего потолок, в чей мел
взор устремлялся ваш,

только выигрывал. Зеркала
копили там дотемна
пыль, оседавшую, как зола
Геркуланума, на

обитателей. Стопки книг,
стулья, в окне - слюда
инея. То, что случалось в них,
случалось там навсегда.

As Smith maintains, the treatment of the past in this poem is specific, autobiographical, descriptive and emotional. Moreover, the theme of the past in Leningrad is rendered in the imperfective past tense, which implies that the portrayed events happened more than once, giving them an element of habit and duration.  

The last sentence “That which happened in them, happened there forever” seems to point back to the past, indicating the repetitious daily routine of home which, according to Tuan, is tantamount to the significance of home. I cannot help quoting his eloquent citation in this connection: “Home is a place where every day is multiplied by all the days before it”. On the other hand, Brodsky’s statement sets a period to the everyday routine. It petrifies the room in the state in which it was left in his impressions. Despite their everyday nature those events no longer repeat themselves since they were unique and characteristic to that particular place and time. And, besides, the common everyday scenes are now deprived of their agents. The image of the room and the events that used to take place under its roof are memo-

---

649 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of “Полдень в комнате” are mine - MK.
ries which, quoting Blanchot, as a rule, have no present. Memory’s main message of the past events is that they once were and that they will never occur again. Furthermore, the “pastness” of memories - as something which have no present - entails that the recollections generated by memory actually never happened for the first time, and yet they are generated over and over again without having an end or a beginning.\textsuperscript{651} Brodsky’s use of imperfective past tense refers to the repetitious nature of remembrances.

The human body is subject to the process of petrification, as well, as we can read in Section XI. A living human being turns into a statue because it is deprived of the warmth of love, which used to protect it from cold. It is the very same affection and care which provided the body with individual traits and made it alive. It had real existence when surrounded by love, care and spoken language.

In the city illustrated by Brodsky in “Полдень в комнате” there are no people, no sounds. The poem conveys a predominantly visual impression of the birthplace of the poet. However, the city used to be filled with life, the sign of which is sound in Brodsky’s poetry. Music and cheers rang out at the opera, a place which, together with recollections of other magnificent sites, still makes the lyrical subject cry out in delight. “There” one used to lie, debate, beg and reject proposals. The lyrical subject, who explicitly identifies himself with sound in Section X of the poem, was part of the vivid auditory space of the city.

Я был скорее звуком, чем -
стыдно сказать - лучом
в царстве, где торжествует чернь,
прикидываясь грачом

в воздухе.

/.../ Но, устремляясь ввысь
звук скидывает балласт:
сколько в зеркало ни смотришь,
оно эха не даст.

For a poet in exile, the city is an archive of memories, a world which is preserved only in his mental realm. It may be that the reason for stabilising the image of the city - transitory by definition - is an attempt to prevent it from being lost in obscurity. Now that he himself is no longer

\textsuperscript{651} Blanchot 1989: 30.
“there”, there is nobody who could confirm his image of the past reality. He is totally dependent on his own recollections. When the day comes when he will have forgotten, or will himself have fallen into oblivion, the individual existence of the city as a mindscape will disappear. In the absence of the right people and things, places are quickly drained of meaning. This is true of St. Petersburg, too, which is gradually transformed in the poet’s mind with the death of his beloved as well as his own prolonged absence from his native place.

The represented objects and sites belong to the past, they no longer exist, but subsist in the same way as incorporeals subsist, tending toward a timeless or abstract existence. The tendency to an existence beyond the limits of place and time is expressed in the concluding passages of the sections, quoted above, which are, almost without exception, devoted to abstract contemplations on time and space, light and sound. The loci depicted in these passages seem to move away from concreteness and corporeality toward abstractions. At the end of Section III, for example, the memories of the beauty of the past city-space are suddenly turned into a meditation on numbers and words:

Мысль о пространстве рождает “ах” /.../.652

В цифрах есть нечто, чего в словах,
даже крикнув их, нет. /.../

Муха бьется в стекле, жужжа
как “восемьдесят”. Или - “сто”.

These lines suggest that numerals have continuity, a quality which is not ascribed to words to the same extent - spoken words are perishable in any case. The uttered word was capable of “bursting the brain into flames” as we can read at the end of Section VI. Now the same brain is described as being in a state of immobility, nothing can get it going in the dead midday lethargy in Section VII. The numbers “80” and “100”, with their zeros, point to nothingness. The number eight, as a sign of infinity, though in vertical position, could be construed as referring to the infiniteness of numbers.

652 This line resonates Mandel’shtam’s poem “В Петербурге мы сойдемся снова”: “Слышиу легкий театральный шорох / И девическое “ах”/.../.” (Мандельштам, т. 1: 149). In the first version of “Полдень в комнате” the line reads as follows: “Там, заглядевшись на деву, ах / произнёс корнет.” (ВРХД 126/1978: 48). Levinton has found in the quoted line a pun on Nekrasov (Левинтон 1998a: 277).
A similar kind of sudden shift in the lyrical plot from a remembrance of a city-scape to a less comprehensible succession of thoughts about time occurs in Section IV. Here the bridge upon the frozen river reminds the poet of a period of time - “the other winter, the winter of things” - when everything is covered with ice or glass, where coldness prevails, without any sign of life. The physical process of transformation of water to ice, from a liquid to a solid state, anticipates the impending change in the form of existence which haunts the lyrical subject in this life, i.e. the transformation of the living organism into a statue. Only the swinging pendulum, as a common image of time, emanates warmth in the coldness. The pendulum could perhaps be interpreted as a metaphor of the lyrical subject, who moves back and forth in his poem from the images of his concrete past to presuppositions concerning the future of things - what will happen to them after they have disappeared as corporeal objects from the scene of life. It is common knowledge that the meaning of time gains emphasis when one is separated from his own surroundings. It is then that one really becomes conscious of time’s flux. The pendulum embodies both the mechanical measuring of time as well as time as it is personally experienced, which is implied to by the warmth of the swing. The pendulum is also a sort of receptacle for all layers of time. Past, present and future are all present in its oscillation. The idea of the simultaneous presence of all layers of time seems to be Brodsky’s own insight, his comment on the relativity of time. This attitude towards time enables him to choose any period of time at any moment in any order whatsoever as object of representation.

Understood in this light, the passages dealing with the city depict reality, the historical, physical universe that used to surround him. His attention is focussed on the reality that was accessible to the senses, or more precisely, the reminiscences of that reality that survive in his memory as a personal realm of experience. From this reality the lyrical subject steps into the future, which is the realm of expectancy, the subjective reality of his image of the future as a form of nothingness. This subjective reality of non-being might have its roots in the present moment. This nothingness seems to consist of things which used to exist but are forever

---

653 Past, present and future are present, sometimes simultaneously, in Brodsky’s poetry. This is explained by the fact that his lyrical plots are mostly confined to the personal experience of the speaker. See, e.g. Weststeijn’s analysis of Brodsky’s poem “Мысль о тебе удаляется...” (Weststeijn 1999: 180).

654 For an example of “time’s relativity” in Brodsky’s poetry see, e.g. “Из Альберта Эйнштейна”: “Вчера наступило завтра, в три часа пополудни. / Сегодня уже “никогда”, будущее вообще. / То, чего больше нет, предпочитает будни /.../.” (Бродский IV: 172).
lost and under a threat to be forgotten for good, the unique outlines of St. Petersburg included. This void is illustrated in those sections of “Полдень в комнате” which Gerald S. Smith in his analysis of the thematic structure of the poem listed under subject one, i.e. meditations on time, space, number and perception. The contemplations on abstractions run through the whole poem beginning from Section I. Only the recurrent theme of the city interrupts the poet’s musings. It is as if the lyrical subject was standing in between the familiar reality of the past and the unknown future. The boundary zone is the prevailing moment, which is still able to evoke images of the past. However, the more remote that past, the more the images are likened to abstractions, the basic constituents of a void.

5.1.2 Space as a “Void”

“Полдень в комнате” opens with a description of a room which reminds one of a still life. Within its frames each component is petrified in eternal immobility - a state where sleep and wakefulness are equal. The place is presented in the present tense, which implies that it is the standstill of the very same room at midday that triggers the lyrical subject’s thoughts towards the void, embodied as air in the poem. Each and every element of the picture tends towards immobility; the ray of the sun which forms the vertical axis between the earth and the sky deadens itself, dust has fallen on immobile cheekbones, and the human body has melted into one with the chair in the shadow that is cast on the wall:

Полдень в комнате. Тот покой,
когда наяву, как во
сне, пошевелив рукой,
не изменить ничего.

Свет проникает в окно, слепя.
Солнце, войдя в зенит,
луч кладет на паркет, себя
этим деревенит.

Пыль, осевшая в порах скул.
Калорифер картав.

655 See Chapter 5.1.
Some elements of the city, as it is recollected, correlate to the present state of things. Thus, for example, the ray of the sun on the floor is equivalent to the needle of the Admiralty in Section VI which "anaesthetises the content of the clouds" at midday. The dust in the room at midday recalls the dust in Section VIII which gathers on the mirrors in the rooms "там", depriving them of the capacity to reflect. It is as if the depicted room representing the present was a mediative state between genuine existence and non-existence, a state where one is on a threshold of absolute emptiness. The void is not deprived of all properties, though. In "Полдень в комнате" it is identified with the element of air and is given several equivalents in Sections II, V and VII.

The standstill suggests that nothing happens in the room. Nothing begins because no initiative seems to be possible in this state of absolute statis.656 Stability is one of the ten characteristics attributed to empty space.

656 The chronotope represented in the first and second passages bears resemblance to literary space, as described by Blanchot. For him literary space ("l’espace littéraire") is the realm to whose conditions each author and reader surrenders himself in the act of writing or reading. He compares it to a void, because it embraces nothing. It is also associated with what Rilke calls "the Open" or "the world’s inner state". This space is marked off by time’s absence, which explains the stasis prevailing within its
As a rule, empty space is stable, without coming to be or passing away. The human being, evidently the lyrical subject, has lost his subjectivity by being transformed into a profile projected on the wall as a shadow. As a result of his merging with the chair he is likened to a centaur, a mythical creature, half man, half horse with four legs. In the shadow, fixed on the wall, the discrete personal features of the face disappear, exposing to the eye the contours of the profile. The outlines of the profile actualise the boundary between being and non-being. According to Pärli, the profile is the ultimate degree of corporeality, beyond which one will be faced with the last phase of the metamorphosis, the process of *materia turning into dust*\(^{657}\). The centaur, who is taking a look back, becomes thus an impersonal third person, an object of representation, just one among the thousands of profiles eternalised in stamps, portraits, coins and silhouettes. The mythical creature functions here also as a sign emphasising the category of the void. Brodsky’s poem “Кентавры III” unveils the possible significance of the centaur as a metaphor of time. It is a hybrid creature in which the past and the future intermingle - the very same categories of time which we classified above among those which, unlike the present, subsist instead of existing\(^{658}\). Consequently, the centaur as a being would not have real existence:

Помесь прошлого с будущим, данная в камне, крупным планом. Развитым торсом и конским крупом.
Либо - простым грамматическим “был” и “буду” в настоящем продолженном. Дать эту вещь как груду скушных подробностей, в голой избе на курьих ножках. Плюс нас, со стороны, на стульях. /.../
Либо
просто в мозгу. Дать это вслух, крикливо,
мыслью о смерти - частой, саднящей, вещной.
Дать это жизнью сейчас и вечной жизнью, в которой, как яйца в сетке,

\(^{657}\) Пярли 1999: 192. For further discussions of the meanings of profile in Brodsky’s poetic philosophy, see Ваншенкина 1996: 38 (profile as a symbol of a special alienated outlook on material world) and Пярли 1999: 191-192 (profile as a signifier of incompleteness, disappearance and something deadly). For a discussion of the dialectic between profile vs. full-face, see also MacFadyen 1998: 144-148.

\(^{658}\) See page 259 above.
Void as such is part and parcel of Brodsky’s poetic universe. Notwithstanding the fact that it may vary in its manifestations, the “substance matter” of emptiness, as is to be expected by its very definition, remains unchanged. “Кентавры III” expresses the same concept of time as “Полдень в комнате”, viz. that the past and the future are embedded in “the present continuous”, that life “here and now” is mixed with the “frequent, tactile and aching” thought of death and the afterlife. The current life recognises itself in the recollections of the past, as we read in Sections XIV and XV of “Полдень в комнате”:

Так, по выпуклому лицу
памяти всеми пятью скребя,
ваше сегодня, под стать слепцу,
опознает себя.

Likewise the future is inherent in the past and present, since in the future “the essence is in the reflected yesterday”.

В будущем, суть в амальгаме, суть в отраженном вчера,
в столбике будет падать ртуть,
летом - жужжать пчела.

---

659 Бродский IV: 46.
660 For various manifestations of the void - “the theme of perishable flesh and matter bordering on the incorporeal void” - in Brodsky’s poetry, see Zholkovsky 1986: 415-416 or Zholkovsky 1994: 141-142, see also Радышевский 1997 passim.
661 The expression “the convex face of memory” recalls Augustine’s passage on memory in “Confessions”: “/.../ When I enter there [the fields and palaces of memory - MK], I require instantly what I will to be brought forth, and something instantly comes; others must be longer sought after, which are fetched, as it were out of some inner receptacle; others rush out in troops, and while one thing is desired, and required, they start forth, as who should say, ‘Is it perchance I?’ These I drive away with the hand of my heart from the face of my remembrance; until what I wish for be unveiled, and appear in sight, out of its secret place /.../.” (quoted from Yates 1966: 46). Brodsky’s trope resonates Mandel’shtam’s “seeing fingers” in “Слово и культура”, too: “Слепой узнает милое лицо, едва прикоснувшись к нему зрячими перстами, и слезы радости, настоящей радости узнаванья, брызнут из глаз его после долгой разлуки.” (Мандельштам т. 1: 215).
662 Translated in Smith 1990: 130.
663 For Brodsky’s use of the grammatical form “суть” in “Полдень в комнате”, see Зубова 1996:113 or Зубова 2000: 213.
The first version of “Полдень в комнате” contains the idea that a human being (a poet) is the agent who carries the experience of the present in form of a reflection on a mirror to the future generations. The mirror in Brodsky’s poetic realm marks the zone where the boundary between the material and immaterial world vanishes. The poet’s role as “действующее стекло” - one of the “dramatis reflectores” - is a strange combination of active passivity. His experiences will nurture him in the days to come:

Всё, что я говорю, могло быть сказано до меня.
Я - лишь действующее стекло,
отражение дня.

Я готов повторить точь-в-точь
коридор, календарь,
комнату в полдень, число и прочь.
пищу для взгляда вдаль.

The moment of real death is at hand when there is no-one left who remembers neither us nor our contribution to life and culture. By that time memory will have disappeared as a cultural possession. At that moment, according to Section XV, our reflection will be scratched away from the amalgam of the mirror, since we are no longer reflected in the mind or heart of anybody. Actually, the moment of sinking to total forgetfulness may occur before or after the physical death.

Мы не умрем, когда час придет!
Но посредством ногтя
с амальгамы нас соскребет
какое-нибудь дитя!

665 I find myself unable to go along with Smith who argues that the “child” who “will scrape us off the amalgam” may thus, by using his fingernail, bring us back to life, or prevent us from dying (Smith 1990: 130-131). I would rather agree with Mikhail Lotman who sees the “child” as a representative of the future generations who, in Brodsky’s poetic realm, claim the space occupied by the preceding generations for themselves. Thus construed, children are barbarians, conquerors and murderers of sorts, albeit unconscious - like the child in “Полдень в комнате”- of their cruel acts (Лотман М. 1998: 189-190).
The future “without us”, i.e. the time when space is occupied by the generations to come, is given special attention in Sections XIII and XV, although the other sections give an inkling of its qualities as well. Without going into details, it suffices to say that Brodsky’s view of the future is utterly pessimistic. The future is crowded with people, not individuals, but a faceless mass that can easily be turned into numbers. Everything in the future will be multiplied, quantity will replace quality, anonymity and impersonality will take the place of uniqueness and individual differences. One will become everyone. Brodsky’s poem “Сидя в тени”666, which is dedicated to the theme of the future, introduces the same ideas concerning the future, using similar motifs as in “Полдень в комнате” but in a more intelligible way:

Новый пчелиный рой
эти улья займет,
производя жилой,
электрический мед.
Дети вытеснят нас
в пригородные сады
памяти - тешить глаз
формами пустоты.  

(Section IV)

In Sections VI-VII and XIII of “Сидя в тени” the future is depicted in terms of multiplicity and darkness, as well as a state of absence of “us”, who are taken as representatives of individuality belonging to a minority in times to come:

/.../ Листва
их научит шуметь
голосом большинства.  

(Section VI)

После нас - не потоп,
где довольно весла,
но наважденье толп,
множественного числа.  

(Section VII)

Будущее черно,
но от людей, а не
оттого, что оно
черным кажется мне.

666 Бродский III: 255-261.
5.1.2.1 The “Void” as Absolute Time and Absolute Space

The void in Brodsky’s poetry is given temporal and spatial qualities.667 As we have tried to show in the preceding chapters, time and space in Brodsky’s poetic philosophy are intertwined to a degree that it would be more appropriate to speak about space-time than about separate concepts of space and time. Furthermore, as Vanshenkina668 points out, the distinction between Brodsky’s two modes of nothingness, absolute time and absolute space, is refuted in the fact that both are fatal in their pure form. It occurs more than once that Brodsky, as we all often do, provides time with spatial characteristics, and he does this in his mode of representing absolute time as well.

One of the characterisations of time with attributes of space, as Yury and Mikhail Lotman669 note, is Brodsky’s view of time as continuation of space manifesting itself in the crossing of the boundary of existence into the unknown future which awaits one after death. When a corporeal, an object for instance, ceases to exist in space, it gains being in time as an incorporeal, the essence of which is invested in its form, in the contours

---

667 Void is the equivalent of space, for example in “Квинтет”: “Теперь представим себе абсолютную пустоту. / Место без времени. Собственный воздух. В ту / и в другую, и в третью сторону. Просто Мекка / воздуха. Кислород, водо-род.” (Бродский III: 153) and in “Назидание”, where the poet is explicitly entitled to determine the criteria of nothingness: “.../ пространство, которому, кажется, ничего / не нужно, на самом деле нуждается сильно во / взгляде со стороны, в критерии пустоты. / И сослужить эту службу способен только ты.” (Бродский IV: 16). Nothingness as absolute time, which surrounds the ultimate dead-end - a form of paradise in Brodsky’s poetics - is described in “Колыбельная Трескового мыса”: “Местность, где я нахожусь, есть рай, / ибо рай — это место безсильно. Ибо / это одна из таких планет, / где перспективы нет. .../ Местность, где я нахожусь, есть пик / как бы горы. Дальше - воздух, Хронос. Сохрани эту речь; ибо рай - тупик.” (Бродский III: 89). For a discussion of the cone as a metaphor of the dead-end, see Ваншенкина 1996 passim. For dead-end / emptiness as a form of paradise, see Кёнёнен 1998: 276-280.
668 Ваншенкина 1996: 37.
669 Лотман Ю. 1993: 297 (the article was written in collaboration with Mikhail Lotman).
which it preserves. The *materia* itself is perishable and turns to dust\(^{670}\). But the existence of an object in time is at risk of sinking into oblivion unless its outlines are recalled as incorporeal ideas, constituents of an inner world of mental images. In order to “survive” they need to be remembered. Furthermore, things/objects as incorporeals - not unlike corporeals - need a place to dwell and belong to in their existence in mental reality:

Каждая вещь уязвима. Самая мысль, увы, о ней легко забывается. **Вещи вообще холопы мысли. Отсюда их формы, взятые из головы, их привязанность к месту, качества Пенелопы, то есть потребность в будущем.**\(^{671}\)

In “Полдень в комнате” emptiness is described in terms of air, as was already indicated. Air is described as nothingness, the equivalent of zero. Brodsky’s understanding of air resembles the view of the Pythagoreans, who identified air with void\(^{672}\). Judged in spatial terms, the air provides no place for dwelling since one cannot “neither stand, nor sit, not to mention lie down” in it. Moreover, it comprehends written numbers better than speech, which means that for Brodsky air is a vacuum, in which sound waves do not vibrate. There is no voice in the void. It is characterised as a substance which is in conflict with everything that is human, but which is all the same necessary for every organic creature whose existence is dependent on breathing it:

Воздух, бесцветный и проч., зато необходимый для существования, есть ничто, эквивалент нуля. (Section V)

---

\(^{670}\) Dust is a sign that marks a material object’s position on the borderline between existence and non-being in Brodsky’s poetical realm. It is the substance matter of any corporeal as well as a metaphor in which the destructive nature common to time and space finds its manifestation. (Лотман М. 1998: 201, Ваншенкина 1996: 37). The essence of dust is exposed in “В этой комнате пахло тряпьем и сырою водой...”: “/.../ всюду лежала толстая пыль, как жир / пустоты, так как в ней никто никогда не жил. / И мне нравилось это лучше, чем отчий дом, / потому что так будет везде потом.” (Бродский III: 295).

\(^{671}\) “Новая жизнь” (Бродский IV: 48).

\(^{672}\) The Pythagoreans construed void as a vacancy, which “distinguishes” natural objects by constituting a kind of separation or division between things next to each other. The view of the Pythagoreans is understood as the beginning of the conception of abstract space or extension. (Jammer 1979: 30).
Air constitutes a kind of a dead-end, a vacuum where the possibility to move in any direction is annulled. Brodsky’s notion of air is a fusion of scientific ideas, often from the realm of physics of chemistry, and eccentric poetic metaphors.

Nothingness turns corporeals to ciphers, qualities to quantities. Like the future, it seems to embrace continuous quantities expressed as infinite series of numbers. As it is defined in mathematical terms, it changes things to mathematical formulas. The lyrical subject accomplishes a most peculiar task. He subtracts from the air “things”, himself included, components of his lost reality. This seems to suggest that the “things” he registers have lost their concrete dwelling place, that the chronotope that was related to the referential world has disappeared. As a consequence of his subtraction, the place that the material things take - or rather the forms or images of the things that he still can retain in his mind - in the present is under a constant threat to be occupied by air, “the embodiment” of ultimate immateriality. Apart from that, when you subtract “things” from something which is equivalent to zero, you are bound to end up with negative entities. Actually, he counts his losses, those things which no longer have material being in his native city, which explains the capability of air to evoke emotions which appear as streams of tears in the passage quoted above.

What is left is pure air - absolute space/time - which has the capacity to dissolve the material things that occur in it. It is infinite by definition

---

673 For a discussion of numerals in Brodsky’s works, see, e.g. Polukhina 1989: 159-169 or Polukhina 1990: 168-169.
and lacks any spatial determination, which means that the being of empty space is a void, that it has no dimensions. Its being is omnipresent and formless. In many respects Brodsky’s concept of nothingness brings to mind the Stoic notion of a void as a “canonical” item included in the class of incorporeals. Stoic thought as such has often been attached to Brodsky’s philosophy of life. His distant manner and moderation in expressing strong emotions when facing hardships of life has been taken as a sign of his ethical position of a Stoic. It is described as his “courage to be” in the world which one cannot change. Brodsky’s essay “Homage to Marcus Aurelius” testifies to the fact that he was acquainted with Stoic philosophy.

In “Полдень в комнате” the void - the air - is an “incorporeal substance”, which has some aspects in common with the Stoic concept of incorporeals. The Stoic theory of space has its basis in Stoic ontology, which makes a sharp distinction between corporeal being and incorporeals. According to it void, time and space belong to the “canonical” items included in the class of incorporeals. Void is understood as a subspecies of space. Space as such has an exceptional status among incorporeals in Stoic thought. Corporeals have existence in a particular place, whereas incorporeals do not exist, they subsist, which means that they have a timeless, abstract existence which can take the shape of a number or an abstract relation, among others. Consequently, incorporeals are “subsistent” as objects of thoughts, imaginary things, of which centaurs are an apt example. However, they ought not to be conceived of as mere “impositions of the mind” since they are not independent of the world of corporeals. As Algra points out, such incorporeals as void are, in Stoic thought, abstractions of aspects of corporeal reality. This being the case, it is possible that Brodsky’s phantasia of the void reveals an aspect of reality, too, but since the assertion - uttered also by Brodsky more than once - “there is a void” belongs to the class of phantasiai which cannot

---

675 For further qualities of a void, see Periäinen 1998: 41-45.
676 Sedakova 1992: 246. In Sedakova’s view, Brodsky’s stoicism implies also a certain gratitude to the material perishable world, manifested in his infinite fidelity to culture in the face of counter-cultural forces, which might be what St. Petersburg - that “martyr-city of the Empire” - required of him (ibid.). Bethea, in his turn, describes Brodsky’s stoicism as “not so much a realist’s response to the injustice in this world as a glimmer of insight from the next”. Bethea compares Brodsky’s stoic attitude to that of Gumilyov - as Nabokov imagined it - before a Bolshevik firing squad: “the wry smile of one who knows something that his killers do not.” (Bethea 1994: 22).
be dealt with by appealing to sense experience only, its truthfulness has to be measured by *logos*.  
So construed, incorporeals as nonmaterial beings are an integral part of the way in which we conceive of the world. They are “somethings” in contrast to “nothings” or “not-somethings” - such as Platonic ideas - which are non-referential objects of thought, according to the Stoics. In Brodsky’s poetical world emptiness is not the essence of space, although it may seem to be the supreme attribute ascribed to his existence at the moment of writing. The very substance of space is, however, exposed in the state when it is filled, occupied by things, people, sounds and events. Hence his *horror vacui vis-à-vis* the linear flux of time which will empty the space from all evidence of his existence in flesh and matter. In its essence, the way Brodsky conceives of space coincides with the image of space in Russian linguistic consciousness, according to which, space cannot be reduced to any primary physical, geometric image. Space is not a mere receptacle of objects. On the contrary, it consists of objects and, in this sense, space is secondary to objects. Ultimately time will turn corporeals to numbers, which in their essence are empty of significance. Since void was once fullness the only method to measure the sum total of the losses is subtraction.

The city of St. Petersburg as a place cannot escape this calculation either. With each “thing”, i.e. an object or a person having no longer material referent “там”, which is subtracted from the place, the city starts to resemble the world of incorporeals. Like incorporeals in Stoic philosophy, Brodsky’s incorporeals do not have an independent existence but are abstractions of corporeal things, consequences of a forced metamorphosis of *materia* to mental images. However, material things, such as buildings, bridges or furniture, seem to have a greater ability to move in time from one period to another either as actual, real things or as reflections in the memories, than people. The dimensions of material, inanimate things,
in their turn, may be distorted and their appearance may decline. Their colours may fade before they vanish for good or, at best, continue their existence as fictional entities in a literary text. It is obvious that Brodsky is not referring to the General Theory of Relativity, according to which the speed of light is the greatest possible speed. Instead he is speaking about laws of memory and forgetfulness, love and separation as well as about creative activity - the transformation of memories to words - in Section IX of “Полдень в комнате”682:

Звук уступает свету не в скорости, но в вещах, внятных даже окаменев, обветшав, обнишав.

Оба преломлены, искажены, сокращены: сперва - до потёмок, до тишины; превращены в слова.

The glance in the final section is a metonymy of a poet. His eye is a vessel, a thing which retains what it takes in - impressions of the past. Subsequently it pours out that which would otherwise be forgotten for the succeeding generations. His gaze is a kind of “visual echo” which holds experience in a twofold manner, by taking and keeping it, and then returning it to the original source of the experience, to the world. Since it seems to possess features of both light and sound (echo), the struggle between the two becomes useless.

Но, как звезда через тыщу лет, ненужная никому, что не так источает свет, как поглощает тьму,

следуя дальше чем тело, взгляд глаз, уходя вперед, станет назад посылать подряд всё, что в себя вберет.

682 Cf. “Watermark”: “Assuming that beauty is the distribution of light in the fashion most congenial to one’s retina, a tear is an acknowledgement of the retina’s, as well as the tear’s, failure to retain beauty. On the whole, love comes with the speed of light; separation, with that of sound. It is the deterioration of the greater speed to the lesser that moistens one’s eye.” (Brodsky 1992: 109).
The location of the eye recalls that of a star on the verge of shrinking away into a black hole. That would mean that its volume would be compressed into zero (“the horizon zero” mentioned in Section XIII). Brodsky says that the eye-star rather “swallows darkness than emanates light”. In other words, by swallowing darkness the mind or memory conquers room occupied by oblivion. The conception that eyes project light goes back at least to Plato\(^{683}\), as does the idea that the soul, when it is freed from its incarnations on earth, returns to its home star, where it becomes part of the divine order\(^{684}\). The Platonic idea of soul’s return is more clearly expressed in another poem by Brodsky, namely in

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Меня упрекали во всем, оскорб}} & \text{я, окромя погody,} \\
& \text{и сам я грозил себе часто суровой мздой.} \\
\text{Но скоро, как говорят, я сниму погоны и стану просто одной звездой.} \\
/{...}/ \\
& \text{И если за скорость света не ждешь спасибо,} \\
& \text{то общего, может, небытия броня} \\
& \text{ценит попытки её превращенья в сито} \\
& \text{и за отверстие поблагодарит меня.}^{685}
\end{align*}
\]

Instead of absorbing and reflecting light from the world, the poet’s gaze is turned into darkness, into non-existence. In Brodsky’s view, it is the place which leaves the eye, not vice versa; at some point - which could imply the time of death - a place ceases to project itself on the retina of the poet’s eye. This is especially true with places like Venice and St. Petersburg, to which the poet possesses a special affinity.\(^{686}\) The most important task of the poet, if we are to believe the lines quoted above, is to pierce the impenetrable armour of nothingness - the invisible wall between being and non-being - and to give glimpses of it to the reader al-

\(^{683}\) See Timaeus 45b-c, 68a-b, see also Brodsky 1995: 372 where he mentions “an old trope about the souls of the dead residing on stars.”

\(^{684}\) Timaeus 41e, 42b-c.

\(^{685}\) Бродский IV: 173.

\(^{686}\) See, e.g. “Watermark”: ”For the eye identifies itself not with the body it belongs to but with the object of its attention. And to the eye, for purely optical reasons, departure is not the body leaving the city but the city abandoning the pupil.” (Brodsky 1992: 110).
ready in this life. In this way he may, hopefully, facilitate the final border crossing, the leap into emptiness.

In terms of astronomy, being positioned on the boundary surrounding a black hole, on and within which no matter or radiation can escape, means standing on an event-horizon where the flux of time comes to a halt. All material that falls through the event-horizon will be destroyed. Fortunately for Brodsky, his worldview is not based on mere physical facts. He presents a counterforce to the “material” nature of spacetime - the “eye-star” as a metonymy of human soul, the role of which is crucial in the perception and interpretation of the “material” world. It is the soul which invokes the spiritual in the material.

All in all we may conclude that the chronotope unfolding in the opening section of “Полдень в комнате” - the same room at midday which is indicated in the title of the poem - could alone serve as a key to the examination of the semantics of the subsequent text. Keeping in mind that the demons of midday (which occur in the writings of the Church Fathers) - apart from dissipating one’s power of concentration - cause one to become absorbed in phantasms (which actually prevent one from reaching one’s spiritual goal). The demons thus help one to see and reach things which are not accessible in any other way. Notwithstanding the fact that Brodsky does not mention the visit of the demons at midday, his visions of the lost home, as well as those concerning the future which he envisions as a void of non-being, are “phantasms”, imaginary visits to “places” which would be out of his reach in a state of absolute wakefulness. And, most importantly, his visits to the past and future suggest that he too, like Anna Akhmatova, is vested with the right of the poet to become aware of what will be “after the end”. The same thoughts concerning the horrible emptiness serve nevertheless as the springboard for the poet’s creative work, as in the poem “Новая жизнь”:

---

687 The same idea is brought to the fore in Brodsky’s essay “In the Shadow of Dante”: “For all our cerebral progress, we are still greatly subject to relapse into the Romantic (and, hence, Realistic as well) notion that “art imitates life.” If art does anything of this kind, it undertakes to reflect those few elements of existence which transcend “life,” extend it beyond its terminal point - an undertaking which is frequently mistaken for art’s or the artist’s own groping for immortality. In other words, art “imitates” death rather than life; i.e., it imitates that realm of which life supplies no notion: realizing its own brevity, art tries to domesticate the longest possible version of time.” (Brodsky 1986: 103-104).

Многое можно простить вещи - тем паче там, где эта вещь кончается. В конечном счете, чувство любопытства к этим пустым местам, к их беспредметным ландшафтам и есть искусство.\textsuperscript{689}

\textsuperscript{689} Бродский IV: 49.
6 CONCLUSION

This study of Brodsky’s vision of St. Petersburg embraces verse works written over a period of 36 years. The fact that some themes and motifs occur repeatedly in these works shows that his image of the city is not “confused” or arbitrary. The recurrent themes, such as the death of the lyrical subject in the city, his own absence or that of a beloved person in the city, among others, invest the city with crystallised, constant meanings. Without exception, his poems set in St. Petersburg are meditations of a first-person narrator and, in most cases the speaker’s contemplation is triggered by a walk, either real or imaginary, in his hometown.

In Brodsky’s lyric oeuvre the experience of separation and death is closely tied to the St. Petersburg topography. The city-space is an organic part of that experience; partings take place in a concrete, carefully delineated place which, with its components, reflects the growing distance in time and space between the lyric subject and his beloved. The conditions of absence and solitude that result from parting are also perceived as characteristics of space, or more precisely, as inevitable consequences of the specific qualities ascribed to the St. Petersburg space.

The theme of death emerges already in the poems dating from the beginning of the 1960’s, in "Стансы городу" as well as in "Стансы". The point of view on this utterly Petersburgian theme is that of a poet who predicts his own death within the precincts of the city. The predetermined fate of the poet is to be buried in St. Petersburg. Moreover, the classical elements of “the eternal” city-scape shall carry out the funeral service, uniting thus the poet’s destiny to that of the city. In these early verses the city stands petrified in its eternal beauty. The lyrical hero, for whom the experience of death in life is a constant companion, identifies himself with the surrounding city-scape. In "Еврейское кладбище около Ленинграда" the polarity “material - immaterial/spiritual” underlies the lyrical subject’s ruminations upon death. This polarity is conveyed with a spatial antithesis “horizontal - vertical” that finds its forms of manifestation in the qualities attributed to the locale presented in the poem. The poem introduces the Jewish theme of St. Petersburg-Leningrad, a theme which is not typical of the image of the city conveyed in the works ascribed to the Petersburg Text.

The impact of the ”third reality” of St. Petersburg, its literary double, on Brodsky’s vision of the city is more apparent in his long poems. "Шествие” and "Петербургский роман” address the city and its myth
as it developed during the two first decades of its literary tradition. In these poems, the actual St. Petersburg *realia* teem with figures from the fictional worlds of the Petersburg Text. Pushkin’s "Медный всадник" emerges in several embodiments, as well as the personification of "the little man" of the Petersburg Text, Evgeny. Both of these literary figures have a polygenetic origin in Brodsky’s poems; they allude simultaneously to more than one subtext. Brodsky’s lyrical subject identifies himself with Pushkin’s heroes. He, too, is now a lonely, bored snobby lover, now a little man chased by a modern equestrian. In Brodsky’s long poems the real chronotopes are mixed with fictional world settings in such a way that it is difficult to distinguish between the two realities. The pan-chronical nature of Brodsky’s image of the city is enhanced by the fact that he addresses the city with several names in one poetic text, thus referring to the different phases in the history of the renamed city. The same applies to the street names as well as to other place names employed by the poet in these poems. Taking into account Brodsky’s obvious conscious play with the traditional *topoi* of the Petersburg Text - rendered with a tone of irony at that - it would not be an exaggeration to assert that, more than merely appropriating the old myth, Brodsky creates his own myth already in his early verse.

The core of the St. Petersburg myth lies in its dual nature, which stems from the unnatural, sudden emergence of the city in the middle of "nowhere". According to this myth, the city of Peter is conceived of either as a victory of ratio/cosmos/order over the powers of nature/chaos/disorder or as an unnatural place doomed to an endless fight for survival against nature. In Brodsky’s poems the polarity of culture vs. nature is missing. In his image of St. Petersburg the cultural elements of the city are embraced by urban nature. Nature and culture seem to complement each other, contributing thus to the harmonious composition of the cityscape, at least in such poems as "Отрывок", "Почти элегия" and "С февраля по апрель". In these poems the geographical scope of the lyrical subject’s walks is limited to the imperial centre of the city. He starts his wanderings from the Strelka on Basil Island and proceeds through the Palace Square to the Senate Square, where the landmark of St. Petersburg space, Falconet’s monument of Peter the Great, is situated. The city-space in these poems is dominated by classical façades with their colonnades, by statues as well as by the presence of the sea. Cold and wind are the recurrent meteorological markers of Brodsky’s Petersburg weather. Apart from the climatic affinities, there is yet another feature in Brodsky’s city which recalls the city-image as it is rendered in the Petersburg Text - the theatricality of the city-space which manifests itself in the poem "Отрывок". Brodsky compares the urban landscape to a decora-
tion, and its citizens strike him rather as spectators of a historical drama than its actors. For him form counts more than content.

In "Почти элегия" the most beautiful building of the city - the former Stock Exchange - together with the memories associated with it, are juxtaposed, albeit in an ironic tone, to biblical imagery. In the second stanza of the poem the city elements symbolise phases of poetic creation. The symbiotic, complementary co-existence of cultural and natural elements of the city-scape is culminated in the cycle of poems "С февраля по апрель" which testify to the fact that Brodsky’s city is not under a threat to be destroyed by the revengeful powers of nature. All in all, if we compare the short lyrics to the long poems examined in Chapter Two, the fictional world is much more tangible in the latter. The short poems are more naturalistic. The extent of reality manifested in them is high when compared to the unreal atmosphere of the _poemas_, where the real world settings exist side by side with the "third reality" - the fictional worlds incorporated into the literary myth of St. Petersburg.

Nevertheless, despite the ostensible resemblance of Brodsky’s St. Petersburg-Leningrad to the tradition of the Petersburg Text on the thematic level, his relationship to the mythical image of the city is more complicated. The themes connected to the city may be the same, but Brodsky gives them an entirely new content in his poetic texts, using them for his own purposes. He exceeds the norms established by the Petersburg Text by the mere scope of his lexicon.

In all poems examined in Chapter Three we witness a tendency, typical of Brodsky’s poetics at large, to work from the specific to the general, from concreteness towards abstractions, from personal experience and perceptions to generalisations. In "Декабрь во Флоренции", "Пятая годовщина" as well as in "Похороны Бобо" and in "Мы жили в городе цвета окаменевшей водки" Brodsky moves from either actual ambient city-scapes, as in "Похороны Бобо", or mental images of the lost city evoked by his memories, as in the other three poems, to the realm of language. The shift from _realia_ to signs entails a transition from real space to a sheet of paper. The poet compensates for the absence of his native city from his present life by creating himself another existence in language. The city which used to surround him becomes a mental realm, an inner space where the paradisiac potential of the city regains its strength in the poetic word. The poetic paradise is a realm whose essence lies in the constant movement of the mind, in the incessant train of thought. Thus the city-image is gradually loosened from its referents in the real world without being deprived of concrete details that are characteristic of its topography.
Brodsky’s strategy of textual polygenesis is exposed above all in his “Dantesque” lyrics "Декабрь во Флоренции” and "Пятая годовицина”. The referents of the texts are either in the surrounding world (as in "Декабрь во Флоренции") or in the past life of the lyrical subject (as in "Пятая годовицина"). Apart from its specific associations with objects in the actual world, the intra-textual space depicted in the poems extends beyond the boundaries of the texts through numerous allusions to other texts by other poets. The allusions can be self-referential as well. In addition to Dante’s “Divine Comedy”, which is an obvious subtext in both poems, Mandel’shtam’s "Ленинград” radiates from within the hidden layers of "Декабрь во Флоренции”. “Пятая годовицина” is provided with new dimensions and depth when its dialogue with Akhmatova’s "Северные элегии” is recognised and taken into account in the analysis of the text. Robert Lowell’s poem "Florence” serves as the uniting link between the two poems.

While in "Декабрь во Флоренции” the image of the city of St. Petersburg - as it emerges from behind Florentine landscape - takes on attributes of a paradise lost, in "Пятая годовицина” the lost fatherland is portrayed without any nostalgic halo. The tone of the portrayal of everyday life in the poet’s former homeland, with its hellish rather than paradisiac aspects, is impersonal and ironic. But the strain is modified when the lyric subject starts to contemplate his own present unexpected absence from the city where he was supposed to live till the end of his days.

In examining the utopian undercurrent of the city-state as envisioned by Brodsky in "Развивая Платона”, one comes to the conclusion that his utopia is not oriented towards the future. On the contrary, the city where he “would like to live” is equal to the city on the Neva where he actually lived until the age of thirty-two when he was forced to leave. His vision of his birthplace is actually formed out of personal memories of the past. The city-state portrayed in "Развивая Платона” reflects Brodsky’s outlook on history. The allusions in the text to some of the major upheavals in the history of mankind - such as the French Revolution or the October Revolution, as well as to the totalitarian rule which they entailed - reveal the intrinsic danger embedded in history when conceived of as a linear teleological process. In Brodsky’s view, historical events are projected into the future as "laws of history”, which inevitably leads to the tendency that certain events, negative ones in particular, repeat themselves in the course of history.

One of the main themes in "Развивая Платона” is the relation between “the poet and the czar”, i.e. the relationship of the ruling power to its bards, as well the role of the people in this conflict. Although the
theme originates from Plato’s “Republic”, Brodsky’s poem seems to be engaged above all in a dialogue with Auden’s cycle of poems “Horae Canonicae”. The references to Auden’s lyrics expand the temporal and spatial schemes of the poem far beyond the confines of St. Petersburg-Leningrad. When Brodsky’s utopian dreamer is juxtaposed to the utopian and arcadian dreamers in Auden’s cycle, some basic differences in the two poets’ worldview become apparent. Auden follows in his cycle a strictly Christian chronology, while time in Brodsky’s poem is secular. In spite of its seeming eventlessness Auden’s time has meaning, whereas time prevailing in Brodsky’s utopia, the setting of which - not unlike Auden’s - is given imperial attributes, is presented as a meaningless flow of successive days which resemble one another. In the final analysis, Brodsky’s utopia, with its Petersburgian features, is a place which does not exist. It is a reflection of the past, a dream or a mental image which, as a projection of the mind, is nowhere and everywhere simultaneously. The vision of the place may not be ideal, but since it stands for the unique experience of the past for the lyrical substitute, it turns out to be the very place where he becomes one with his final fate.

In the poem “Полдень в комнате” musings on such abstract subjects as time, space and non-being take successive turns with the theme of the city, the name of which, like in “Развивая Платона” and in “Пятая годовщина”, is replaced by the spatial adverb “там”. The fact that in this poem the city “on the delta of a river” is depicted as the very city where the lyrical subject was born makes it easy to identify it as St. Petersburg-Leningrad. Moreover, the city is rendered as a place to which there is no return. Once again we come across a poetic portrayal of St. Petersburg which is triggered by the lyrical subject’s ruminations on absence and impossibility of returning to his place of birth. The city as a mental world seems no longer dependent on its physical denotations. The city, which once was “a place of dwelling” par excellence with a corporeal existence, begins to lose its physicality as the memory of it fades away in the mind of the lyrical subject. The unique events that took place there, as well as the material reality which surrounded the lyrical subject, now occupy the air - a metaphor for non-being and emptiness - a void from which they will eventually vanish forever. The poet’s reflections on void which, apart from non-being, symbolises death, afterlife, oblivion as well as the future at large, lend to the city-image the characteristics of a void, i.e. incorporeity and emptiness, nothingness. However, this kind of void, as it is perceived by Brodsky, bears a certain resemblance to the Stoic void, which is not a subsisting incorporeal world of its own, but has origins in corporeal reality. It is comprised of abstractions of aspects of the material
world. And indeed, nothingness in "Полдень в комнате" is space which was once full. It used to be a real place with the familiar people that crowded its streets with its sounds, objects and events, but which now reminds one of a void - a category of incorporeals - which no longer has actual being in a specified place. At the same pace as the number of accumulated irreversible losses increases, the components of the past life become mere abstract forms or numbers, deprived of any material existence.

By way of a summary, I conclude that Brodsky’s concept of literary space embraces both perception and imagination. Visual observations have an essential part in his worldview, although as direct sense perceptions they often appear to have gone through a process of conceptualisation and imagination.

In Brodsky’s poetic world all layers of time can be present simultaneously. His mind seems to be preoccupied with thoughts about the unknown future. On the other hand, judging by the degree of intertextuality in his texts, in which he celebrates both Russian and Western predecessors, he seems to be more interested in a dialogue with deceased colleagues than with the significance of his works for future generations of poets. Brodsky’s city is often placed outside time. It is deprived of obvious connections with actual historical time. As a rule, Brodsky’s poetry, his St. Petersburg poetry included, describes spaces in greater detail than time. Contrary to the vagueness of the characteristics that would set it in a historical context, the city can always be identified by the details of its topography. In the final analysis, the theme of St. Petersburg is an integral part of Brodsky’s poetic production. All the central themes of his oeuvre, be they existential themes concerning love, separation and death or philosophical themes about non-being, space and time, are treated in his St. Petersburg poetry.

Through the abundance of its intertextuality, the image of St. Petersburg is connected not only to the Russian literature but to European and American belles lettres at large. This is one way, typical of Brodsky, to create his own myth of the city from two different standpoints - from within its boundaries in his verse works written before his emigration and from outside in his lyrics completed after the year 1972. His vantage point of a writer in exile who portrays the city as a second level narrative reality, an object of dreams and recollections, whose picture is often rendered as shining through the image of another city, is a distinctive feature which clearly differentiates him from those writers who are rightly said to have written the Petersburg Text. In the Petersburg Text, the city has been written from within the city-space. Owing to the peculiarities en-
tailed by his position of a poet in exile, Brodsky’s image of St. Peters-
burg could have much in common with emigré writings of the first wave. A discussion of his poetry from this point of view is obviously beyond the scope of this study, but it would provide a fascinating starting point for further explorations on this subject.
LITERATURE

Works by Joseph Brodsky


Other Works


Кац 1998 = Борис Кац: “Фоно на пиру Мнемозины: к генезису поэтического образа рояля у Иосифа Бродского”. In Иосиф Брод-


Крепс 1990 = Михаил Крепс: “Ад и Рай в поэзии Иосифа Бродского”. Семья No. 35 (139), (27.8 - 2.9.) 1990: 9.


Минц 1978 = З.Г. Минц: “О некоторых ‘неомифологических’ текстах в творчестве русских символистов”. Творчество А.А. Блока и русская культура XX века. Блоковский сборник III. Ученые
записи Тартуского гос. университета. Ответственный редактор 3.Г. Минц. Тарту 1978: 76-120.


Полухина 1993 = Валентина Полухина: “Ландшафт лирической личности в поэзии Иосifa Бродского”. Literary Tradition and Prac-


Топоров 1984 = В.Н. Топоров: “Петербург и петербургский текст русской литературы” (Введение в тему). Семиотика города и городской культуры. Петербург. Труды по знаковым системам XVIII. (Ученые записки Тартуского гос. университета. Выпуск 664) 1984: 4-29.

Топоров 1990 = В.Н. Топоров: “Италия в Петербурге”. In Италия и славянский мир. Москва 1990: 49-81.


Mallinen 1995 = Jukka Mallinen: “Joseph Brodsky kotimaan portilla”
Suomen kuvalehti No. 37, 1995: 44-46.


Pilshchikov 1993 = Igor A. Pilshchikov: “Brodsky and Baratynsky”. Literary Tradition and Practice in Russian Culture. Papers from an International Conference on the Occasion of the Seventieth Birth-


ПРАЧЕЧНЫЙ МОСТ

F.W.

На Прачечном мосту, где мы с тобой уподоблялись стрелкам циферблата, обнявшимся в двенадцать перед тем, как не на сутки, а навек расстаться, - сегодня здесь, на Прачечном мосту, рыбак, страдая комплексом Нарцисса, таращится, забыв о поплавке, на зыбкое свое изображенье.

Река его то молодит, то старит. То проступают юные черты, то набегают на чело морщины. Он занял наше место. Что ж, он прав! С недавних пор все то, что одиноко, символизирует другое время; а это - ордер на пространство. Пусть он смотрится спокойно в наши воды и даже узнает себя. Ему река теперь принадлежит по праву, как дом, в который зеркало внесли, но жить не стали.

1968

* * *

А.Н.

Мы вышли с почты прямо на канал, который начал с облаком сливаться и сверху букву “п” напоминал. И здесь мы с ним решили расставаться.

Мы попрощались. Мелко семеня, он уходил вечернею порою. Он быстро уменьшался для меня как будто раньше вчетверо, чем втрое.
Конечно, что-то было впереди. 
Что именно - нам было неизвестно. 
Для тех, кто ждал его в конце пути, 
он так же увеличивался резко.

Настал момент, когда он заслонил 
пустой канал с деревьями и почту, 
когда он все собой заполонил. 
Одновременно превратившись в точку.

1962

*   *   *

Еврейское кладбище около Ленинграда. 
Кривой забор из гнилой фанеры. 
За кривым забором лежат рядом 
юристы, торговцы, музыканты, революционеры.

Для себя пели. 
Для себя копили. 
Для других умирали. 
Но сначала платили налоги, 
уважали пристава 
и в этом мире, безвыходно материальном, 
толковали талмуд, 
оставаясь идеалистами.

Может, видели больше. 
А возможно, верили слепо. 
Но учили детей, чтобы были терпимы 
и стали упорны. 
И не сеяли хлеба. 
Никогда не сеяли хлеба. 
Просто сами ложились 
в холодную землю, как зерна. 
И навек засыпали. 
А потом - их землей засыпали, 
зажигали свечи, 
и в день Поминовения 
голодные старики высокими голосами, 
задыхаясь от холода,
кричали об успокоении.
И они обретали его.
В виде распада материи.

Ничего не помня.
Ничего не забывая.
За кривым забором из гнилой фанеры,
в четырех километрах от кольца трамвая.

1958

*   *   *

Бессмертия у смерти не прошу.
Испуганный, возлюбленный и нищий, -
но с каждым днем я прожитым дышу
уверенней и сладостней и чище.

Как широко на набережных мне,
как холодно и ветрено и вечно,
как облака, блестящие в окне,
надломленны, легки и быстроетечны.

И осенью и летом не умру,
не всколыхнется зимняя простынка,
взгляни, любовь, как в розовом углу
горит меж мной и жизнью паутинка.

И что-то, как раздавленный паук,
во мне бежит и странно угасает.
Но выдохи мои и взмахи рук
меж временем и мною повисают.

Да. Времени - о собственной судьбе
кричу все громче голосом печальным.
Да. Говорю о времени себе,
но время мне ответствует молчаньем.

Лети в окне и вздрагивай в огне,
слетай, слетай на фитилечек жадный.
Свисти, река! Звони, звони по мне,
мой Петербург, мой колокол пожарный.
Пусть время обо мне молчит.
Пускай легко рыдает ветер резкий
и над моей могилой еврейской
младая жизнь настойчиво кричит.

1961 (?)

СТАНСЫ

Е.В., А.Д.
Ни страны, ни погоста
не хочу выбирать.
На Васильевский остров
я приду умирать.
Твой фасад темно-синий
я впотьмах не найду,
между выцветших линий
на асфальт упаду.

И душа, неустанно
поспешая во тьму,
промелькнет над мостами
в петроградском дыму,
и апрельская морось,
под затылком снежок,
и услышу я голос:
- до свиданья, дружок.

И увижу две жизни
далеко за рекой,
к равнодушной отчизне
прижимаясь щекой,
- словно девочки-сестры
из непрожитых лет,
выбегая на остров,
машут мальчику вслед.

1962
СТАНСЫ ГОРОДУ

Да не будет дано
умереть мне вдали от тебя,
в голубинных горах,
кривоногому мальчику вторя.
Да не будет дано
и тебе, облака торопя,
в темноте увидать
мои слезы и жалкое горе.

Пусть меня отпойет
хор воды и небес, и гранит
пусть обнимет меня,
pусть поглотит,
сей шаг вспоминая,
pусть меня отпойет,
pусть меня, беглеца, осенит
белой ночью твоя
неподвижная слава земная.

Все умолкнет вокруг.
Только черный буксир закричит
посредине реки,
исступленно борясь с темнотою,
и летящая ночь
эту бедную жизнь обручит
с красотою твоей
и с посмертной моей правотою.

2 июня 1962

ОТРЫВОК

М.Б.

Ноябрьским днем, когда защищены
от ветра только голые деревья,
а все необнаженное дрожит,
я медленно бреду вдоль колоннады
дворца, чьи стекла чествуют закат
и голубей, слетевшихся гурьбою
к заполненным окурками весам
слепой богини.
Старые часы показывают правильное время. Вода бурлит, и облака над парком не знают толком что им предпринять, и пропускают по ошибке солнце.

Порадуемся же, что мы всего лишь зрители. И что сюжет спектакля нас увлекает меньше декораций - пожалуй, лучших в мире. Никогда никто не вынудит родившегося здесь под занавес раскланиваться - разве лишь ветер, налетающий с залива. Его пощечины милей аплодисментов.

1967

ПОЧТИ ЭЛЕГИЯ

В былые дни и я пережидал холодный дождь под колоннадой Биржи. И полагал, что это - Божий дар. И, может быть, не ошибался. Был же и я когда-то счастлив. Жил в плену у ангелов. Ходил на вурдалаков. Сбегавшую по лестнице одну красавицу в парадном, как Иаков, подстерегал.

Куда-то навсегда ушло все это. Спряталось. Однако смотрю в окно и, написав “куда”, не ставлю вопросительного знака. Теперь сентябрь. Передо мною - сад. Далекий гром закладывает уши. В густой листве налившиеся груши как мужеские признаки висят. И только ливень в дремлющий мой ум, как в кухню дальних родственников - скаред, мой слух об эту пору пропускает: не музыку еще, уже не шум.

(осень 1968)
С ФЕВРАЛЯ ПО АПРЕЛЬ
(1969-1970)

1
Морозный вечер.
Мосты в тумане. Жительницы грота
на кровле Биржи клацают зубами.
Бесчеловечен,
верней, безлюден перекресток. Рота
матросов с фонарем идет из бани.

В глубинах ростра -
вороний кашель. Голые деревья,
как легкие на школьной диаграмме.
Вороны гнезда
чернеют в них кавернами. Отрепья
щвыряет в небо газовое пламя.

Река - как блузка,
на фонари расстегнутая. Садик
dворцовый пуст. Над статуями кровель
курится люстра
лунь, в чьем свете император-всадник
свой высеребрил изморозью профиль.

И барку возле
одним окном горящего Сената
tяжелым льдом в норд-ост перекосило.
Дворцы промерзли,
и ждет весны в ночи их колоннада,
как ждут плоты на Ладоге буксира.

2
В пустом, закрытом на просушку парке
старуха в окружении овчарки -
в том смысле, что она дает круги
вокруг старухи - вяжет красный свитер,
и налетевший на деревья ветер,
терзая волосы, щадит мозги.

Мальчишка, превращающий в рулды
посредством палки кружево ограды,
бежит из школы, и пунцовый шар
садится в деревянную корзину,
распластывая тени по газону;
и тени ликвидируют пожар.

В проулке тихо, как в пустом пенале.
Остатки льда, плывущие в канале,
для мелкой рыбы - те же облака,
но как бы опрокинутые навзничь.
Над ними мост, как неподвижный Гринвич;
и колокол гудит издалека.

Из всех щедрот, что выделила бездна,
лишь зренье тебе служит безвозмездно,
и счастлив ты, и, несмотря ни на
что, жив еще. А нынешней весною
так мало птиц, что вносишь в записную
их адреса, и в святцы - имена.

3 ...

ДЕКАБРЬ ВО ФЛОРЕНЦИИ

Этот, уходя, не оглянулся...
Анна Ахматова

I
Двери вдыхают воздух и выдыхают пар; но
ты не вернешься сюда, где, разбившись попарно,
населенье гуляет над обмелевшим Арно,
напоминая новых четвероногих. Двери
хлопают, на мостовую выходят звери.
Что-то вправду от леса имеется в атмосфере
этого города. Это - красивый город,
где в известном возрасте просто отводишь взор от
человека и поднимаешь ворот.

II
Глаз, мигая, заглатывает, погружаясь в сырьe
сумерки, как таблетки от памяти, фонарь; и
твой подъезд в двух минутах от Синьории
намекает глухо, спустя века, на
причину изгнанья: вблизи вулкана
невозможно жить, не показывая кулака; но и нельзя разжать его, умирая, потому что смерть - это всегда вторая Флоренция с архитектурой Рая.

III
В полдень кошки заглядывают под скамейки, проверяя, черны ли тени. На Старом Мосту - теперь его почилили, - где бюстует на фоне синих холмов Челлини, бойко торгуют всяческой бранзульткой; волны перебирают ветку, журча, за веткой. И золотые пряди склоняющейся за редкой вещью красавицы, роющейся меж коробок под несмытыми взглядами молодых торговок, кажутся следом ангела в державе черноголовых.

IV
Человек превращается в шорох пера на бумаге, в колца, петли, клинышки букв и, потому что скользко, в запятые и точки. Только подумать, сколько раз, обнаружив “м” в заурядном слове, перо спотыкалось и выводило брови!
То есть чернила честнее крови, и лицо в потемках, словами наружу - благо так куда быстрей просыхает влага - смеется, как скомканная бумага.

V
Набережные напоминают оцепеневший поезд. Дома стоят на земле, видимы лишь по пояс. Тело в плаще, ныряя в сырую полость рта подворотни, по ломаным, обветшальным плоским зубам поднимается мелким шагом к воспаленному нёбу с его шершавым неизменным “16”. Пугающий безголосьем, звоночок порождает в итоге скрипучее “просим, просим”: в прихожей вас обступают две старые цифры “8”.

VI
В пыльной кофейне глаз в полумраке кепки привыкает к нимфам плафона, к амурам, к лепке; ощущая нехватку в терцинах, в клетке
дряхлый щегол выводит свои коленца. 
Солнечный луч, разбившийся о дворец, о 
купол собора, в котором лежит Лоренцо, 
проникает сквозь штору и согревает вены 
grязного мрамора, кадку с цветком вербены; 
и щегол разливается в центре проволочной Равенны.

VII
Выдыхая пары, вдыхая воздух, двери 
хлопают во Флоренции. Одну ли, две ли 
проживаешь жизни, смотря по вере, 
вечером в первой осознаешь: неправда, 
что любовь движет звезды (Луну - подавно), 
ибо она делит все вещи на два - 
даже деньги во świecie. Даже, в часы досуга, 
мысли о смерти. Если бы звезды Юга 
двигались ею, то - в сторону друг от друга.

VIII
Каменное гнездо оглашаемо громким визгом 
тормозов; мостовую пересекаешь с риском 
быть за-леванным насмерть. В декабрьском низком 
небе громада яйца, снесенного Брунеллески, 
вызывает слезу в зрачке, наторевшем в блеске 
куполов. Полицейский на перекрестке 
машет руками, как буква “ж”, ни вниз, ни 
вверх; репродукторы лают о дороговизне. 
О, неизбежность “ты” в правописанье “жизни”!

IX
Есть города, в которые нет возврата. 
Солнце бьется в их окна, как в гладкие зеркала. То 
есть в них не проникнешь ни за какое злато. 
Там всегда протекает река под шестью мостами. 
Там есть места, где припадал устами 
тоже к устам и пером к листам. И 
там рябит от аркад, колоннад, от чугунных пугал; 
tам толпа говорит, осаждая трамвайный угол, 
на языке человека, который убыл.

1976
ПЯТАЯ ГОДОВЩИНА
(4 июня 1977)

Падучая звезда, тем паче - астероид
на резкость без труда твой праздный взгляд настроит.
Взгляни, взгляни туда, куда смотреть не стоит.

📍

Там хмурые леса стоят в своей рванине.
Уйдя из точки “А”, там поезд на равнине
стремится в точку “Б”. Которой нет в помине.

Начала и концы там жизнь от взора прячет.
Покойник там незрим, как тот, кто только зачат.
Иначе - среди птиц. Но птицы мало значат.

Там в сумерках рояль бренчит в висках бемолью.
Пиджак, вися в шкафу, там поедаем молью.
Оцепеневший дуб кивает лукоморью.

📍

Там лужа во дворе, как площадь двух Америк.
Там одиночка-мать вывозит дочку в скверик.
Неугомонный Терек там ищет третий берег.

Там дедушку в упор рассматривает внучек.
И к звездам до сих пор там запускают жучек
плюс офицеров, чьих не осознать получек.

Там зелень щавеля смущает зелень лука.
Жужжание пчелы там главный принцип звука.
Там копия, щадя оригинал, безрука.

📍

Зимой в пустых садах трубят гипербореи,
и ребер больше там у пыльной батареи
в подъездах, чем у дам. И вообще быстрее
нащупывает их рукой замерзшей странник.
Там, наливая чай, ломают зуб о пряник.
Там мучает охранник во сне штык трехгранник.

От дождевой струи там плохо спичке серной.
Там говорят “свои” в дверях с усмешкой скверной.
У рыбьей чешуи в воде там цвет консервный.

Там при словах “я за” течет со щек известка.
Там в церкви образа коптил свеча из воска.
Порой дает раза соседним странам войско.

Там пышная сирень бушует в палисаде.
Пивная целый день лежит в глухой осаде.
Там тот, кто впереди, похож на тех, кто сзади.

Там в воздухе висят орбрыки старых арий.
Пшеница перешла, покинув герб, в гербарий.
В лесах полно куниц, и прочих ценных тварей.

Там, лежучи плашмя на рядовой холстине,
отбрасываешь тень, как пальма в Палестине.
Особенно - во сне. И на манер пустыни,
там сахарный песок пересекаем мухой.
Там города стоят, как двинутые рюхой,
и карта мира там замещена пеструкой,
мыщащей на бугре. Там схож закат с порезом.
Там вдалеке завод дымит, гремит железом,
ненужным никому: ни пьяным, ни тверезым.

Там слышен крик совы, ей отвечает филин.
Овацию листвы унять там вождь бессилен.
Простую мысль, увы, пугает вид извилин.
Там украшают флаг, обнявшись, серп и молот.
Но в стенку гвоздь не вбит и огород не полот.
Там, грубо говоря, великий план запорот.

Других примет там нет - загадок, тайн, диковин.
Пейзаж лишен примет и горизонт неровен.
Там в моде серый цвет - цвет времени и бревен.

Я вырос в тех краях. Я говорил “закурим”
их лучшему певцу. Был содержимым тюрем.
Привык к свинцу небес и к айвазовским бурям.

Там, думал, и умру - от скуки, от испуга.
Когда не от руки, так на руках у друга.
Видать, не рассчитал. Как квадратуру круга.

Там, думал, и умру - от скуки, от испуга.
Когда не от руки, так на руках у друга.
Видать, не рассчитал. Как квадратуру круга.

Теперь меня там нет. Означенной пропаже
дивятся, может быть, лишь вазы в Эрмитаже.
Отсутствие мое большой дыры в пейзаже
не сделало; пустяк: дыра, - но небольшая.
Ее затянут мох или пучки лишая,
гармонии тонов и проч. не нарушая.

Теперь меня там нет. Об этом думать странно.
Но было бы чудней изображать барана,
дрожать, но раздражать на склоне дней тирана,

паясничать. Ну что ж! на все свои законы:
я не любил жлобства, не целовал иконы,
и на одном мосту чугунный лик Горгоны
казался в тех краях мне самым честным ликом.
Зато столкнувшись с ним теперь, в его великом
варьанте, я своим не подавился криком

и не окаменел. Я слышу Музы лепет.
Я чувствую нутром, как Парка нитку треплет:
мой углекислый вздох пока что в выших терпят,

□

и без костей язык, до внятных звуков лаком,
судьбу благодарит кириллицыным знаком.
На то она судьба, чтоб понимать на всяком

наречье. Предо мной - пространство в чистом виде.
В нем места нет столпу, фонтану, пирамиде.
В нем судя по всему, я не нуждаюсь в гиде.

Скрипи, мое перо, мой коготок, мой посох.
Не подгоняй сих строк: забуксовав в отбросах,
эпоха на колесах нас не догонит, босых.

□

Мне нечего сказать ни греку, ни варягу.
Зане не знаю я, в какую землю лягу.
Скрипи, скрипи, перо! переводи бумагу.

ПОХОРОНЫ БОБО

1
Бобо мертва, но шапки недолой.
Чем объяснить, что утешаться нечем.
Мы не проколем бабочку иглой
Адмиралтейства - только изувечим.

Квадраты окон, сколько ни смотри
по сторонам. И в качестве ответа
на “Что стряслось?” пустую изнутри
открой жестянку: “Видимо, вот это”.
Бобо мертва. Кончается среда.
На улицах, где не найдешь ночлега,
белым-бело. Лишь черная вода
ночной реки не принимает снега.

2
Бобо мертва, и в этой строчке грусть.
Квадраты окон, арок полукружья.
Такой мороз, что коль убьют, то пусть
из огнестрельного оружья.

Прощай, Бобо, прекрасная Бобо.
Слеза к лицу разрезанному сыру.
Нам за тобой последовать слабо,
но и стоять на месте не под силу.

Твой образ будет, знаю наперед,
в жару и при морозе-ломоносе
не уменьшаться, но наоборот
в неповторимой перспективе России.

3
Бобо мертва. Вот чувство, дележу
доступное, но скользкое, как мыло.
Сегодня мне приснилось, что лежу
в своей кровати. Так оно и было.

Сорви листок, но дату переправь:
нуль открывает перечень утратам.
Сны без Бобо напоминают явь,
и воздух входит в комнату квадратом.

Бобо мертва. И хочется, уста
слегка разжав, произнести "не надо".
Наверно, после смерти - пустота.
И вероятнее, и хуже Ада.

4
Ты всем была. Но, потому что ты
теперь мертва, Бобо моя, ты стала
ничем - точнее, сгустком пустоты.
Что тоже, как подумаемъ, немало.
Бобо мертва. На круглые глаза вид горизонта действует как нож, но тебя, Бобо, Кики или Заза им не заменят. Это невозможно.

Идет четверг. Я верю в пустоту.
В ней как в Аду, но более херово.
И новый Дант склоняется к листу и на пустое место ставит слово.

1972

*   *   *

Мы жили в городе цвета окаменевшей водки. Электричество поступало издалека, с болот, и квартира казалась по вечерам перепачканной торфом и искусанной комарами. Одежда была неуклюжей, что выдавало близость Арктики. В том конце коридора дребезжал телефон, с трудом оживая после недавно кончившейся войны.
Три рубля украшали летчики и шахтеры.
Я не знал, что когда-нибудь этого больше уже не будет.
Эмалированные кастюли кухни внушили уверенность в завтрашнем дне, упрямо превращаясь во сне в головные уборы либо в торжество Циолковского. Автомобили тоже катились в сторону будущего и были черными, серыми, а иногда (такси) даже светло-коричневыми. Странно и неприятно думать, что даже железо не знает своей судьбы и что жизнь была прожита ради апофеоза фирмы Kodak, поверившей в отпечатки и выбрасывающей негативы.
Райские птицы поют, не нуждаясь в упругой ветке.

1994
РАЗВИВАЯ ПЛАТОНА

I

Я хотел бы жить, Фортунатус, в городе, где река высовывалась бы из-под моста, как из рукава - рука, и чтоб она впадала в залив, растопырив пальцы, как Шопен, никому не показывавший кулака.

Чтобы там была Опера, и чтоб в ней ветеран-тенор исправно пел арию Марио по вечерам; чтоб Тиран ему аплодировал в ложе, а я в партере бормотал бы, сжав зубы от ненависти: “баран”.

В этом городе был бы яхт-клуб и футбольный клуб. По отсутствию дыма из кирпичных фабричных труб я узнавал бы о наступлении воскресенья и долго бы трялся в автобусе, мучая в жмене руб.

Я бы вплетал свой голос в общий звериный вой там, где нога продолжает начатое головой.

Изо всех законов, изданных Хаммурапи, самые главные - пенальти и угловой.

II

Там была бы Библиотека, и в залах ее пустых я листал бы тома с таким же количеством запятых, как количество скверных слов в ежедневной речи, не прорвавшихся в прозу. Ни, тем более, в стих.

Там стоял бы большой Вокзал, пострадавший в войне, с фасадом куда занятней, чем мир вовне.

Там, при виде зеленой пальмы в витрине авиалиний просыпалась бы обезьяна, дремлющая во мне.

И когда зима, Фортунатус, облекает квартал в рядно, я б скучал в Галерее, где каждое полотно - особливо Энгра или Давида - как родимое выглядели бы пятно.

В сумерках я следил бы в окне стада
мычащих автомобилей, снующих туда-сюда
мимо стройных нагих колонн с дорическою прической,
безмятежно белеющих на фронтоне Суда.

III

Там была бы эта кофейня с недурным бланманже,
где, сказав, что зачем нам двадцатый век, если есть уже
dевятнадцатый век, я бы видел, как взор коллеги
надолго сосредоточивается на вилке или ноже.

Там должна быть та улица с деревьями в два ряда,
подъезд с торсом нимфы в нише и прочая ерунда;
и портрет висел бы в гостиной, давая вам представление
о том, как хозяйка выглядела, будучи молодой.

Я включил бы ровному голосу, повествующему о вещах,
не имеющих отношенья к ужину при свечах,
и огонь в камельке, Фортунатус бросал бы багровый отблеск
на зеленое платье. Но под конец зачах.

Время, текущее в отличие от воды
горизонтально от вторника до среды,
в темноте там разглаживало бы морщины
и стирало бы собственные следы.

IV

И там были бы памятники. Я бы знал имена
не только бронзовых всадников, всунувших в стремена
истории свою ногу, но и ихних четвероногих,
учитывая отпечаток, оставленный ими на
населении города. И с присохшей к губе
сигаретою сильно за полночь возвращаясь пешком к себе,
как цыган по ладони, по трещинам на асфальте
я гадал бы, икая, вслух о его судьбе.

И когда бы меня схватили в итоге за шпионаж,
подрывную активность, бродяжничество, менаж-
а-труа, и толпа бы, беспокоясь вокруг, кричала,
тыча в меня натруженными указательными: “Не наш!”, -
я бы втайне был счастлив, шепча про себя: Смотри, это твой шанс узнать, как выглядит изнутри то, на что ты так долго глядел снаружи; запоминай же подробности, воскликая ‘Vive la Patrie!’”

1976

ПОЛДЕНЬ В КОМНАТЕ

I
Полдень в комнате. Тот покой, когда наяву, как во сне, пошевелив рукой, не изменить ничего.

Свет проникает в окно, слепя. Солнце, войдя в зенит, луч кладет на паркет, себя этим деревенит.

Пыль, осевшая в порах скул. Калорифер картав. Тело, застыв, продлевает стул. Выглядит, как кентавр

II
вспять оглянувшийся: тень, затмив профиль, чье ремесло - затвердевать, уточняет миф, повторяя число

членов. Их переход от слов к цифрам не удивит. Глаз переводит, моргнув, число в несовершенный вид.

Воздух, в котором ни встать, ни сесть, ни, тем более, лечь, воспринимает “четыре”, “шесть”, “восемь” лучше, чем речь.
III
Я родился в большой стране,
в устье реки. Зимой
она всегда замерзала. Мне
не вернуться домой.

Мысль о пространстве рождает “ах”,
оперу, взгляд в лорнет.
В цифрах есть нечто, чего в словах,
dаже крикнув их, нет.

Птица щебечет, из-за рубежа
вернувшись в свое гнездо.
Муха бьется в стекле, жужжа
как “восемьдесят”. Или -“сто”.

IV
Там был город, где, благодаря
точности перспектив,
было вдогонку бросаться зря,
что-либо упустив.

Мост над замерзшей рекой в уме
стально своих хрящей
мысли рождал о другой зиме -
то есть зиме вещей,

где не встретить следов; рельеф
выглядит, как стекло.
Только маятник, замерев,
источает тепло.

V
Воздух, бесцветный и проч., зато
необходимый для
существования, есть ничто,
эквивалент нуля.

Странно отсчитывать от него
мебель, рога лося,
себя; задумываться, “ого”
в итоге произнося.
Взятая в цифрах, вещь может дать тамерланову тьму,
род астрономии. Что под стать воздуху самому.

VI
Там были также ряды колонн,
забредшие в те снега,
как захваченные в полон,
раздетые донага.

В полдень, гордясь остротой угла,
как возвращенный луч,
обезболивала игла
содержимое туч.

Слово, сказанное наугад,
вслух, даже слово лжи,
воспламенило мозг,
как закат верхние этажи.

VII
Воздух, в сущности, есть плато,
пат, вечный шах, тщета,
ничья, классическое ничто,
гегелевская мечта.

Что исторгает из глаз ручьи.
Полдень. Со стороны
мозг неподвижней пластинки, чьи
бороздки засорены.

Полдень; жевательный аппарат
пробует завести,
кашлянув, плоский пи-эр-квадрат -
музыку на кости.

VIII
Там были комнаты. Их размер
порождал ералаш,
отчего потолок, в чей мел
взор устремлялся ваш,

только выигрывал. Зеркала копили там дотемна пыль, оседавшую, как зола Геркуланума, на

обитателей. Стопки книг, стулья, в окне - слюда инея. То, что случалось в них, случалось там навсегда.

**IX**
Звук уступает свету не в скорости, но в вещах, внятных даже окаменев, обветшав, обнищав.

Оба преломлены, искажены, сокращены: сперва - до потёмок, до тишины; превращены в слова.

Можно вспомнить закат в окне, либо - мольбу, отказ. Оба счастливы только вне тела. Вдали от нас.

**X**
Я был скорее звуком, чем - стыдно сказать - лучом в царстве, где тормозит чернь, прикидываясь грачом

в воздухе. Я ночевал в ушных раковинах: ласкал впадины, как иной жених - выпуклости; пускал

петуха. Но, устремляясь ввысь, звук скидывает балласт: сколько в зеркало ни смотрись,
оно эха не даст.

XI
Там принуждали носить пальто, ибо холод лепил тело, забытое теми, кто раньше его любил,
мраморным. Т. е. без лёгких, без имени, черт лица, в нише, на фоне пустых небес, на карнизе дворца.

Там начинало к шести темнеть. В восемь хотелось лечь. Но было естественней каменеть в профиль, утратив речь.

XII
Двуногое - впрочем, любая тварь (ящерица, нетопырь) - прячет в своих чертах букварь, клеточную цифри.

Тело, привыкшее к своему присутствию, под ремнем и тканью, навязывает уму будущее. Мысль о нем.

Что - лишнее! Тело в анфас уже само есть величина! сумма! Особенно в неглиже, и лампа не включена.

XIII
В будущем цифры рассеют мрак. Цифры не умира. Только меняют порядок, как телефонные номера.

Сонм их, вечным пером привит к речи, расширит рот,
удлинит собой алфавит;
либо наоборот.

Что будет выглядеть, как мечтой взысканная земля
с синей, режущей глаз чертой -
горизонтом нуля.

**XIV**
Или - как город, чья красота,
неповторимость чья
была отраженьем своим сыта,
как Нарцисс у ручья.

Так размножаются камень, вещь,
воздух. Так зрелый муж,
осознавший свой жуткий вес,
не избегает луж.

Так, по выпуклому лицу
памяти всеми пятью скребя,
ваше сегодня, под стать слепцу,
опознает себя.

**XV**
В будущем, суть в амальгаме, суть
в отраженном вчера,
в столбике будет падать ртуть,
летом - жужжать пчела.

Там будут площади с эхом, в сто превосходящих раз
звук. Что только повторит то,
что обнаружит глаз.

Мы не умрем, когда час придет!
Но посредством ногтя
с амальгами нас соскребет
какое-нибудь дитя!
XVI
Знай, что белое мясо, плоть,
искренний звук, разгон
мысли ничто хе повторит - хоть
наплоди легион.

Но, как звезда через тыщу лет,
ненужная никому,
что так не источает свет,
как поглощает тьму,

следуя дальше чем тело, взгляд
глаз, уходя вперед,
станет назад посылать подряд
всё, что в себя вберет.

(1978)
Анн Арбор, Мичиган
ABSTRACT

The present study discusses the theme of St. Petersburg-Leningrad in Joseph Brodsky’s verse works. The chosen approach to the evolving image of the city in Brodsky’s poetry is through four metaphors: St. Petersburg as “the common place” of the Petersburg Text, St. Petersburg as “Paradise and/or Hell”, St. Petersburg as “a Utopian City” and St. Petersburg as “a Void”.

This examination of the city-image focuses on the aspects of space and time as basic categories underlying the poet’s poetic world view.

The method used is close reading, with an emphasis on semantical interpretation. The material consists of eighteen poems dating from 1958 to 1994. Apart from investigating the spatio-temporal features, the study focuses on exposing and analysing the allusions in the scrutinised works to other texts from Russian and Western belles lettres.

Terminology (introduced by Bakhtin and Yury Lotman, among others) concerning the poetics of space in literature is employed in the present study. Conceptions originating from the paradigm of possible worlds are also used in elucidating the position of fictional and actual chronotopes and heroes in Brodsky’s poetry.

Brodsky’s image of his native city is imbued with intertextual linkings. Through reminiscences of the “Divine Comedy” and Russian modernists, the city is paralleled with Dante’s “lost and accursed” Florence, as well as with the lost St. Petersburg of Mandel’shtam and Akhmatova. His city-image is related to the Petersburg myth in Russian literature through their common themes of death and separation as well as through the merging of actual realia with the fictional worlds of the Petersburg Text.

In his later poems, when his view of the city is that of an exiled poet, the city begins to lose its actual world referents, turning into a mental realm which is no longer connected to any particular geographical location or historical time. It is placed outside time. The native city as the homeland in its entirety is replaced by another existence created in language.