Hanna Ruutu

Patterns of Transcendence
Classical Myth in Marina Tsvetaeva’s Poetry of the 1920s

Academic dissertation to be publicly discussed, by due permission of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Helsinki, in auditorium XII on the 20th of January 2007 at 10 o’clock

Helsinki 2006
Acknowledgments

This study would not have been completed without the generous support of my advisor, Professor Pekka Pesonen. I thank him for the opportunity to embark on this challenging and rewarding journey into poetry. His kind advice, unflinching belief in me and constant encouragement were of vital importance. The Department of Slavonic and Baltic Languages and Literatures at the University of Helsinki kindly provided not only the facilities for conducting this study but also a fruitful and encouraging atmosphere. I especially wish to thank my friends and colleagues there for making my working days inspirational and pleasant.

Funding, guidance and support were also provided by the University of Helsinki, the Finnish Graduate School for Literary Studies as well as the research project of the Finnish Academy “St.Petersburg/Leningrad: History – Narration – Present.” I thank all of them and only wish that this book was worthy of all the support it was given, both financial and mental.

I have benefited from the enlightening commentary various readers accorded my manuscript. I extend my deepest gratitude to Professor Olga Hasty for her penetrating discussion of my work at various stages, especially the final one; and to Dr. Karin Grelz for her insightful suggestions and encouragement. Helpful comments along the way were also given by Dr. Timo Suni and Dr. Irina Shevelenko, as well as other researchers of Tsvetaeva and Russian literature who discussed my papers at conferences and seminars. I remain indebted to Dr. Nely Keinänen, whose precise and infallible feel for nuances made the process of language-checking the manuscript a sheer joy, and whose generous attention extended far beyond mere questions of language and style. Needless to say, the remaining errors are mine.

My greatest thanks go to my family and friends. My mother and sisters did all they could to keep me in high spirits even during the most difficult moments. My grandmothers provided me with brilliant advice, constant support and red wine whenever I needed it. And, finally, I wish to thank my husband Juha for his unconditional, all-encompassing love.

Helsinki, 1 December 2006

Hanna Ruutu
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## I INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 7

1. SCHOLARSHIP .................................................................................................................. 8
2. TSVETAEVA’S SOURCES ............................................................................................... 11
3. THE PLOT OF TRANSCENDENCE .................................................................................. 16
   3.1. Eros ......................................................................................................................... 17
   3.2. Initiation: The Folklore Poemas ............................................................................ 19
   3.3. Posle Rossii ............................................................................................................ 21

## II MORTALS, MEDIATORS AND SPIRITS: THE CLASSICAL PERSONAE.......................................................................................................................... 28

1. THE SIBYL .......................................................................................................................... 28
   1.1. The Prophetess as Poet ............................................................................................ 30
   1.2. The Cliff-like Mediator ......................................................................................... 37
   1.3. Prophetic Motherhood ......................................................................................... 41
2. PHAEDRA .......................................................................................................................... 45
   2.1. Passion and Creation .............................................................................................. 47
   2.2. Aspiring to the Transcendent ............................................................................... 54
3. EURYDICE ........................................................................................................................ 62
   3.1. The Denial of the Earthly ...................................................................................... 63
   3.2. Balancing the Physical and the Spiritual ............................................................. 66

## III EMPOWERING ABANDONMENT: THE CYCLES ................................................................... 71

1. “PROVODA” .................................................................................................................... 72
   1.1. Mythical Voices in Polyphony ............................................................................. 73
   1.2. The Abandoned Poet ............................................................................................. 79
2. “ARIADNA” ..................................................................................................................... 85
   2.1. Abandoned or Conceded? .................................................................................... 88
   2.2. Choral Commentary ............................................................................................... 93

## IV EARTHLY AND DIVINE LAWS: THE LYRICAL TRAGEDIES .............................................. 97

1. ARIADNA .......................................................................................................................... 100
   1.1. Ariadne and Aphrodite ......................................................................................... 102
   1.2. The Earthly Hero and Heavenly Heroine ......................................................... 105
   1.3. Theseus ................................................................................................................. 108
      1.3.1. The Eager Adventurer ................................................................................. 108
      1.3.2. Understanding the Spiritual ....................................................................... 111
   1.4. Bacchus .................................................................................................................. 116
2. FEDRA .............................................................................................................................. 118
   2.1. Phaedra .................................................................................................................. 119
      2.1.1. Predestined Passion .................................................................................... 120
      2.1.2. Suicide as Transcendence ........................................................................... 125
   2.2. Hippolytus .............................................................................................................. 128
      2.2.1. The Companion of Artemis ........................................................................ 128
      2.2.2. The Heritage of the Amazon ....................................................................... 130

## V CONCLUSION .................................................................................................................... 135

REFERENCES .................................................................................................................. 143
INDEX ............................................................................................................................... 156
I INTRODUCTION

The poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva (1892-1941) is filled with speakers, images and stories from earlier literary traditions. One of Tsvetaeva’s most significant sources of inspiration was the Classical tradition: allusions to Classical works are evident in her early poetry of the 1910s, and become even more significant in her mature poetry of the 1920s. Indeed, in this period, Classical tales provided a central source for both her lyrical work, i.e., the shorter lyrics of her last collection Posle Rossii (containing poems written in 1922-1925, published in 1928) and for the longer verse tragedies Ariadna (1924) and Fedra (1927). There are also allusions to the Classical tradition in her subsequent oeuvre, e.g., in her prose works of the 1930s, as well as in her literary essays and memoirs.

The present study focuses primarily on the poems in Posle Rossii which allude most directly to the Classical context, and on the two lyrical tragedies which are based on Classical tales. I am interested in how Tsvetaeva appropriates this Classical material, how she changes the myths to suit her thematic and aesthetic purposes: the myths enter into dialogue both with the Classical tradition, with subsequent rewritings of the mythological sources and, most importantly, with Tsvetaeva’s own oeuvre. She embues the mythological material with themes and connotations which lie at the very core of her own authorial myth; she uses this material to discuss her conceptions of the nature of poetry itself and the definition of the poet in this world. Beginning in 1920-22, Tsvetaeva began in her poetry to develop a plot of transcendence, which draws crucially on Classical personae, specifically the ways these characters negotiate a dialectic between the physical and the spiritual. Metaphorically, then, this plot of transcendence reflects the position of the poet/creator between these realms. I hope that by examining this plot in Tsvetaeva’s Classical works, we can better understand why the author makes such extensive use of this inherited material for a short period in her career, and how this material shapes and is in turn shaped by her poetic concerns.

Before analysing these Classical texts, I shall briefly present an overview of previous scholarship (Section 1) and then an overview of Tsvetaeva’s sources of the Classical tradition (Section 2). I shall then discuss the emergence of the plot of transcendence in Tsvetaeva’s works
(Section 3). As shall be discussed, this concept is rooted in the Platonic ladder of Eros, which was instituted in her her folklore poèmas, and similarly underlies the collection Posle Rossii.

1. SCHOLARSHIP

Tsvetaeva scholarship began with Simon Karlinsky’s groundbreaking studies,¹ which provide extensive analyses of Tsvetaeva’s entire lyrical oeuvre in the context of her biography, an approach which has governed Tsvetaeva studies for a long time and become exceedingly popular in Russia.² In recent years, however, studies with a more textual approach have been in vogue, ranging from an examination of a single theme, motif, poem or collection³ to the elucidation of her whole poetic oeuvre and its principles.⁴ Lately, the angle of scholarship has shifted to the influence of other writers, the literary tradition or of contemporary culture on Tsvetaeva,⁵ including considerations of gender.⁶ Important references for the present study have also been provided by the more general approaches to Tsvetaeva’s and her contemporaries’ use of myth in their poetry.⁷

No comprehensive examination of Tsvetaeva’s use of Classical myths, taking into account both the lyrics and the lyrical tragedies, has thus far been available, however. The most detailed study is Olga Hasty’s monograph on the Orphic myth in Tsvetaeva’s poetry (Hasty 1996), where she traces the emergence of Orpheus in Tsvetaeva’s poetry from the cycle “Stikhi k Bloku” in the 1910s through to the female personae of

¹ Karlinsky 1966, Karlinsky 1985a.
² Among biographically oriented studies the most important are Taubman 1989, Shevitsuer 1988, Saakiants 1997, Kudrova 1997.
the 1920s, Eurydice and the Sibyl. Concluding with the poème “Novogodnee”, Hasty discusses how the interdependent antinomies of the physical and the spiritual underline Tsvetaeva’s entire poetic universe, up to the level of the individual poetic word, which is allowed to reflect the structure of her poetic system. As argued by Hasty, the kaleidoscopic reformulations of the same characters, motifs and themes allow the author to emphasise various details of the Orphic myth, generating new interpretations of the source myth each time. It is exactly this potential of renewal and interconnectedness which is at the heart of Tsvetaeva’s mythopoetic thought. In her poetry, details of the surrounding world are organised along mythic plots, irrespective of spatial and temporal limitations, evidencing a prominent movement from the specific to the universal. Taking Hasty’s study as a point of departure, I will examine further the position of the Classical material in Tsvetaeva’s poetry from the point of view of the dialectics of the physical and the spiritual. The processes of reformulation and interdependence, identified by Hasty, also govern Tsvetaeva’s use of Classical myth.

Another central source is Michael Makin’s study of Tsvetaeva’s use of inherited literary sources in her oeuvre (Makin 1993). This intertextual study traces Tsvetaeva’s appropriation of various textual sources throughout her lyrical oeuvre. Makin also examines Classical sources, noting that Tsvetaeva’s use of the inherited literary and cultural tradition peaks in the collection Posle Rossii, written during the period under examination in the present study. While Makin discusses the influence of Symbolism and Romanticism on Tsvetaeva’s poetry, even including a chapter on Tsvetaeva’s Classical tragedies and their relationship to Symbolist drama, he does not examine Tsvetaeva’s use of these sources in the context of her broader poetic development, especially the plot of transcendence, which is the focus of my study.

Irina Shevelenko (2002) discusses Tsvetaeva’s poetic development in the context of contemporary culture and the most central discourses of modernism. In this study, Tsvetaeva’s creative philosophy is examined in relation to her poetics and authorial myth. Shevelenko presents important insights on the Classical material in Tsvetaeva’s œuvre and discusses some of these texts in the context of the author’s entire creative development. In this work, Tsvetaeva’s Classical poems on Eurydice and Phaedra are discussed in the context of Tsvetaeva’s relationship with
Pasternak and in the context of her oeuvre of the period. Even the two Classical tragedies are viewed against Tsvetaeva’s creative development of 1922-1926, and Shevelenko also focuses on the central themes underlying the two lyrical dramas. Most importantly, Shevelenko demonstrates the significance of the principle of transcendence for Tsvetaeva’s oeuvre of the 1920s, though she does not examine the links between this theme and specifically the Classical myth. This is partly due to the focus of her study, which extends from the beginning of Tsvetaeva’s literary career to its very end.

Tsvetaeva’s Classical allusions have also been treated separately in shorter articles. A pathbreaker in research of Tsvetaeva’s Classical motifs is K.A. Medvedeva (1974), who provides an overview of the poems on the Sibyl, Orpheus and Eurydice as illustrations of Tsvetaeva’s conception of the poet. Aminidav Dykman (1993) concentrates on the motif of the poppy in Tsvetaeva’s poems, while Sibelan Forrester (2000) examines the Daphne motif in Tsvetaeva’s childhood memoirs. The “Provoda” cycle has inspired several articles and in-depth analyses from various angles. Ieva Vitins (1987) uses a more traditional approach to Tsvetaeva’s own work and poetics, discovering among others the underlying Psyche myth in the cycle. Paul Waszink (1995) develops a detailed analysis of the first poem and its various alternating speakers. Finally, Bruce Holl (1996) provides a reading of the cycle through the Lacanian philosophy of the birth of language. The Psyche myth in Tsvetaeva’s oeuvre has also more recently been examined by Roman Voitekhovich (1999; 2005). The article on “Sivilla” by Olga Hasty (1986b) provides a fine close reading of the cycle, taking into account its intricate structure. Laura Weeks’s article (1990) offers an analysis of Tsvetaeva’s implicit use of the Kore myth in the poems to her daughter Ariadna, stressing the mother-daughter relationship in her reading.

Tsvetaeva’s Classical lyrical tragedies have also served as material for literary studies. In addition to the aforementioned chapter on Tsvetaeva’s Classical tragedies in Makin’s study (1993), N.O. Osipova’s work (2000: 229-251) contains a chapter on the dramas. Osipova examines the tragedies in the context of Russian culture at the beginning of the 20th century, nevertheless stressing the archaic traits uniting Tsvetaeva’s tragedies with their Classical predecessors. To my knowledge, one dissertation has been written on the tragedy Ariadna (Lafoy 1981). This
dissertation provides a translation of the work into French and also includes an extensive commentary on the tragedy’s relationship to the Classical tradition. Although helpful in identifying intertextual parallels, Lafoy does not engage in profound close reading or textual analysis of the tragedies. The article by Tomas Venclova (1986) comparing Viacheslav Ivanov’s tragedy Prometei with Tsvetaeva’s Ariadna remedies the situation through insightful close reading of the works. Venclova reveals the oppositional constructs underlying Tsvetaeva’s tragedy, discussing its relationship to the Symbolist tradition. He concludes that Tsvetaeva’s approach to and use of the mythological sources differs significantly from Viacheslav Ivanov’s. Andrew Kahn’s (1994) article also provides a useful examination of Ariadna’s structure and the position of the choruses in it. Kahn perceptively discusses the dependence of Tsvetaeva’s choruses on the Classical tradition, also noting that they display various distinctly Tsvetaevan principles both in structure and in thematics. Fedra, on the other hand, has been studied less. R.D.B. Thomson’s (1989) article on Fedra consists of an analysis of the tragedy in the context of Tsvetaeva’s oeuvre and her creative dialogue with Boris Pasternak, stressing the interplay of passion and physicality evidenced by the tragedy.

Despite the abundance of studies on Tsvetaeva’s use of Classical myths, her Classical poems and lyrical tragedies have thus far not been examined as a whole. By highlighting the transformations to which the myths are subjected, I will show how they are made to conform to Tsvetaeva’s poetic system and what they add to it.

2. TSVETAeva’S SOURCES

Before discussing Tsvetaeva’s appropriations of the Classical tradition, it is essential to first understand the background against which they can be viewed. No single work of a particular author bears a decisive import on Tsvetaeva’s appropriation of the myths. Nevertheless, the likely literary contexts range from the Classics to her contemporaries.

Marina Tsvetaeva was undoubtedly introduced to the Classical tradition early in her childhood. Two overtly identified sources were 19th century German rewritings of the Classical myths, Gustav Schwab’s Die schönsten Sagen des klassischen Altertums (1837) and Heinrich Stoll’s Die
Sagen des klassischen Altertums (1862). However, they were far from being her only sources of Antiquity. Her extensive knowledge of the Classical tradition is apparent in her oeuvre in various ways, for example in allusions to the ancient realia or as detailed knowledge of the family tree of certain heroes. One of her notebooks even mentions two other German sources, one by Preller and the other by Karl Wilhelm Göttling, Gesammelte Abhandlungen aus den Klassischen Altertum (1851). However, no further notes allude precisely to these two works, and they are only briefly mentioned in the notes.

It is probable that Tsvetaeva knew the most central Classical sources, such as Ovid’s Metamorphoses, Homer’s The Iliad and Odyssey and Sophocles’ tragedies. Even though these works are sporadically mentioned in Tsvetaeva’s correspondence, her notebooks contain no evidence on her reading these works. The same can be said of Plato, although it is evident that Tsvetaeva was familiar with his works as well. Given the centrality of these texts in the Classical tradition and her own upbringing in the home of a Classical scholar, it is not far-fetched to assume that her knowledge extends beyond the retellings of Stoll and Schwab and even includes the major Classical sources in Russian translation. As can be seen in Tsvetaeva’s notebooks of 1923, the period when she started working on her two Classical tragedies, she conducted in-depth research on the Theseus myth with the help of various sources. The most important of these was Euripides’ tragedy Hippolytus, to which several of the comments in the notebook allude (see NZK 2: 303-307). Other Classical allusions can be detected in her

---

8 See Tsvetaeva’s letter to Iurii Ivask of 4 April 1933 (SS 7: 381) and her letter to Rainer Maria Rilke of 22 August 1926 (SS 7: 73).
9 Tsvetaeva’s father was a professor of Classical Studies at the University of Moscow; her correspondence from the 1920s testifies that she extensively read Classical sources (for instance, Ovid and Homer) and was familiar both with Nietzsche’s The Birth of Tragedy and with Viacheslav Ivanov’s Dionysian theories. (See Makin 1993: 269-271.)
10 The work, although unnamed in Tsvetaeva’s notebooks, could be either a retelling of the Odysseus-myth or the Ilias in German by Friedrich Preller.
11 See NZK 1: 156, 366 for mentions of Ovid and Sophocles; NZK 2: 392 for a mention of Homer.
12 For sporadic notes on Plato, see NST: 64, 236, 328.
13 It is also possible that in addition to Hippolytus, Tsvetaeva was also familiar with Euripides’ The Bacchantes (see Voitekhovich 2000: 239). The construction of Tsvetaeva’s Fedra and Euripides’ Hippolytus is surprisingly similar. Both begin their drama with a divine eulogy praising Hippolytus, continuing in Act II to
tragedies as well, such as the Anacreontic and Horatian streaks analyzed by Roman Voitekhovich (2000), but these are most often in the form of motifs. The influence of the Classical tradition as a whole is visible especially in Tsvetaeva’s use of the choruses. Interestingly, the choruses are entirely absent in Tsvetaeva’s Classicist predecessor, Jean Racine’s Phèdre. We could therefore say that in reinstituting them, Tsvetaeva was in fact re-archaising her expression.15

Although the French Classicist drama of the 17th century does not apparently provide a central influence for Tsvetaeva, a brief examination of Tsvetaeva’s Fedra in comparison to Jean Racine’s Phèdre (1677) is nevertheless in order.16 It should be assumed that she was familiar with Racine’s play, although her notebooks bear no testimony of this. As discussed by Rose Lafoy, Fedra does not reveal traces of the rather academic and unflexible style of Classicism. Tsvetaeva’s use of soliloquies and choruses differs from the French Classicists, as does the structure of her play. Her characters and style combine elements from various stylistical ranges, which would have been unheard of for Classicism (Lafoy 1981: 193). However, there are thematic parallels between the two

14 For an enumeration of the affinities between Tsvetaeva’s Ariadna and the Classical antecedents, see Lafoy 1981: 195-199 and Osipova 2000: 232-233. Although scholars have been inclined to interpret other traits in Tsvetaeva’s tragedies as Classical in origin, such as the long soliloquies and monologues (see Makin 1996: 262-294, Kahn 1994), they can be found in other works as well. As Roman Voitekhovich (2000: 233) perceptively notes, the single traits of Tsvetaeva’s tragedies that can be characterised as purely of Classical origin are the use of choruses (although with modifications) and the parodos. All the other traits – polymetric structures, the use of long monologues and short staccato-typed dialogues, agon and stichomythia – are encountered in her other longer works as well. Also, according to Makin (1993: 278), Tsvetaeva’s Ariadna and Fedra have much more in common with the archaic Attic tragedy than with subsequent literary predecessors (the Baroque and symbolist versions of Classical material).


16 For a detailed analysis of Tsvetaeva’s Fedra in the context of Baroque drama, see Osipova 2000: 243-245.
plays, namely in the treatment of the main protagonist’s innocence and the wetnurse’s position as an orchestrator of the tragic chain of events.

The style of Tsvetaeva’s lyrical tragedies also shares traits with 19th century neo-classical drama and the Russian translations of Classical literature.\(^{17}\) Her use of compound adjectives is clearly adopted from either Russian translations of Homer (for instance, Gnedich’s translation of the *Iliad*), or possibly from the symbolists’ classical plays (see Lafoy 1981: 145-147).

German Romanticism provided another important source of Classical mythology for Tsvetaeva. An avid reader of Goethe, Heine and Hölderlin, Classical mythology was frequently mediated through these authors as well as through the German anthologies mentioned above. These especially affected Tsvetaeva’s choice of specific myths in her poetry, as seen in this extract from the essay *O Germanii* (1919):

> Я, может быть, дикость скажу, но для меня Германия — продолженная Греция, древняя, юная. Германцы унаследовали. И, не зная греческого, ни из чьих рук, ни из чьих уст, кроме германских, того нектара, той амбrozии не приму. (SS 4: 545.)

While writing her tragedies, Tsvetaeva was particularly interested in Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*, which could have influenced her conception of Bacchus in *Ariadna*.\(^{18}\) It is entirely possible that she was also inspired by Goethe’s classical tragedy *Iphigenia* (1787) and Hölderlin’s *Der Tod des Empedokles* (see Makin 1993: 263).

Symbolist neoclassical drama, especially the plays of Innokentii Annenskii and Viacheslav Ivanov, forms the immediate Russian tradition against which Tsvetaeva’s tragedies can be viewed. As several scholars have noted, the differences between these works and Tsvetaeva’s plays

---


\(^{18}\) Tsvetaeva’s interest in Nietzsche’s philosophy is illustrated by an extract from her letter to the critic Aleksandr Bakhrakh in September 1923, when she was working on *Ariadna*:

> Друг, просьба: пришлите мне книгу Ницше (по-немецки) – “Происхождение Трагедии”. (Об Аполлоне и Дионисе). У меня никого нет в Берлине. Она мне сейчас очень нужна. (SS 6: 618.)
are striking. Tsvetaeva’s Classical plays draw on different principles than the plays of these Symbolists, who were scholars choosing marginal Classical subjects to display their erudition. Tsvetaeva, on the other hand, worked with well-known, famous myths. However, the influence of the Symbolist tradition is embedded in the core of her poetic system, appearing especially in the dialectical juxtaposition of the physical and the spiritual and in the impact of this dialectic on individual existence. As shall be discussed below, Tsvetaeva’s interpretation of this dialectic is tied to the Platonic concept of Eros, mediated through Russian Symbolism.20

Images and characters from Classical myth are found in Tsvetaeva’s oeuvre from the very first collections. However, their importance grows in Remeslo (1922), and by 1923 they become exceptionally significant. In Posle Rossii the Classical mythological characters no longer appear as mere metaphors but as personae, expressing the central constituents of Tsvetaeva’s poetic system. Her most important Classical texts were written in a relatively short period of time. The first Classical persona entering her oeuvre is the ancient prophetess of the Sibyl. The two first poems of the “Sivilla” cycle were written on the 5th and 6th of August 1922. They were followed almost half a year later by “Fedra”; the two poems of the cycle were written on the 7th and 11th of March 1923. The two first poems of the cycle “Provoda” were written shortly thereafter, on the 17th and 18th of March the same year. The poem “Evridika – Orfeiu” was written on the 23rd of March 1923. The first poem in the “Ariadna” cycle was completed on the 14th and the second on the 21st of April 1923. And only thereafter, on the 17th of May 1923, did she write the third and final poem of the cycle “Sivilla.” After this, Tsvetaeva’s interest shifted to more extensive lyrical forms, and she started to plan the lyrical tragedies on Classical subjects. Judging by her notebooks, she began the dramatic trilogy on the Theseus myth the following autumn; the first notes for “Tezei” are dated September 1923. The first of the

15 For a thorough examination of Annenskii’s and Ivanov’s neoclassical dramas in the context of Tsvetaeva’s Classical plays, see Makin 1993: 265-268 and Osipova 2000: 231-240, and on a comparison of Ivanov’s Tantal and Prometei with Tsvetaeva’s tragedies, see Venclova 1985. On Annenskii’s tragedies and their differences compared to Tsvetaeva’s Ariadna, see Kahn 1994: 164-165.
20 For a discussion on the Platonic worldview as a structural composite of Tsvetaeva’s tragedies, see Voitekhovich 2000: 241.
resulting two tragedies, *Ariadna*, was written relatively quickly during the period starting in October 1923 and completed a year later, in October 1924. The writing process was more sporadic with *Fedra*. Tsvetaeva started to plan it at the same time as *Ariadna*, in the autumn of 1923, continuing a year later in the autumn of 1924. However, the writing process was interrupted several times, for instance by her *poema Krysolov*, which she worked on from March to November 1925. *Fedra* was eventually completed in the summer of 1927.

Tsvetaeva’s poetry began to change at the beginning of the 1920s, with the Russian Revolution as a turning point. As the material surroundings and the society around her became gradually more and more difficult to cope with, the poet increasingly turned to literary sources, seeking new forms of expression. Plots offered by the literary and cultural tradition were used as a vehicle for her poetic concerns and authorial myth. This development continued and reached its peak during the first years of her emigration to Europe, as will be discussed in the following section.

3. THE PLOT OF TRANSCENDENCE

In order to understand how Tsvetaeva uses classical material in her subsequent oeuvre, it is necessary to understand her creative development of 1920-1922. It is precisely during these years that Tsvetaeva’s view of the role of the poet starts to take shape, culminating in the emergence of a new authorial myth. The interdependent dialectic of the physical and the spiritual and the effect of this dialectic on individual existence became exceedingly central in Tsvetaeva’s oeuvre in the beginning of the 1920s. In addition to the poems in *Remeslo*, this dichotomous principle governs the folklore *poemas* of the period. These works introduce the plot of transcendence in Tsvetaeva’s poetry, a plot which has considerable bearing on her subsequent oeuvre. Before examining the folklore poems, however, let us examine how Tsvetaeva’s understanding of the dual division of the world is dependent on the Platonic ladder of Eros.
3.1. Eros

Tsvetaeva’s new mythology of the self focused on the relationship between sex and creation.21 Indeed, sexuality had been a central concern of the Russian modernist movements, most widely discussed by the Symbolists at the beginning of the 20th century.22 One of the most important veins of this discussion was the dialectical relationship between the physical and the spiritual, based on Plato’s Symposium. In Plato’s text, Eros is discussed from various points of view, proceeding from the humorous to the absurd. Various aspects of love and the divinity Eros are revealed through the various stories, until finally Socrates tells a story which was told to him by the priestess Diotima. The essence of this story is that through a gradual process, a human being can liberate himself from ordinary physical love and attraction, thus arriving at a stage of pure contemplation of beauty, the highest form of experiencing Eros:

This is the right way of approaching or being initiated into the mysteries of love, to begin with examples of beauty in this world, and using them as steps to ascend continually with that absolute beauty as one’s aim, from one instance of physical beauty to two and from two to all, then from physical beauty to moral beauty, and from moral beauty to the beauty of knowledge, until from knowledge of various kinds one arrives at the supreme knowledge whose sole object is that absolute beauty, and knows at last what absolute beauty is. (Plato 1951: 94.)

In other words, the attainment of supreme knowledge entails a movement from physical attraction towards an understanding of love as an all-encompassing, spiritual phenomenon.23 This dialectic was picked up by the Russian Symbolists and interpreted in various ways.24

---

21 This intertwining of the themes of love and creation is evident in Remeslo and continues in Posle Rossii. On Tsvetaeva’s self-mythologizing, see Shevelenko 2002: 135-139.
22 Prior to the Revolution, love and eroticism were treated by the Russian Modernist community in two ways: there were mystical-ascetic tendencies of interpretation; and also mystical-erotic. The first approach concentrated on the transcendence or transformation of sex as a whole, whereas the second implied the attainment of a higher truth through sexuality (Shevelenko 2002: 159-160).
23 See also Knabe 1999: 24-25.
24 For the relevance of Plato’s Symposium in Russian Symbolism see Matich 1994 and Bogomolov 1991.
The dialectical relationship between the physical and spiritual was profoundly ingrained in the creative philosophy of Russian Symbolism. The most probable influence on Tsvetaeva concerning Platonic ideas was the poet and artist Maksimilian Voloshin. Voloshin discussed Plato’s conception of Eros in a lecture “Puti Erosa” in 1907. In his interpretation, physical experience was vital for final attainment of the immaterial, spiritual sphere of existence. According to Voloshin, movement on the Platonic ladder was dialectical. The material understanding of love was destined to feed the immaterial axis of creation, and vice versa. This was expanded in Voloshin’s lecture up to the scale of the world order:

Все развитие мира представляет два одновременных и диаметрально противоположных течения: постоянное нисхождение и постоянное восхождение – мировая инволюция и мировая эволюция. (Voloshin 1999: 17.)

Similarly, man contained in himself the dichotomy of the physical and the spiritual, uniting these two poles in his own being. According to Voloshin, two partially contradictory forces thus operate inside each individual: that of sex (пол), striving towards the physical, and that of Eros, striving to transform the physical essence of man into spirit, uniting him into a whole. In Voloshin’s view, only death, which can also be symbolically understood, liberates humans from this dual existence, opening their eyes to a new understanding (Voloshin 1999: 20-21). In this respect, death entails a profound transformation of the creative essence from the material to the immaterial plane of existence. Unlike Plato, for whom the movement along the ladder of Eros was unidirectional, with humans striving only upwards towards the immaterial, Voloshin also recognised movement downwards along the ladder of Eros: the physical dimension (пол) was treated as a prerequisite for attaining the immaterial Eros. The key concept for Voloshin (1999: 30) is Eros’s ability to generate spiritual products out of the physical dimension: "Ерос стремится всю

---

25 On the manifestations of the erotic philosophy of the Russian Symbolists (Valerii Briusov, Viacheslav Ivanov) both on their art and life-creation, see Bogomolov 1991. Descent was a central characteristic of the decadent conception of art.

26 Voloshin’s ideas naturally develop the conceptions of Viacheslav Ivanov on Eros, but the most probable influence on Tsvetaeva was nevertheless Voloshin himself, due to their close friendship during the early stages of her career.
The transformation of the material essence into the immaterial through the creative act is thus the core of Voloshin’s interpretation of Eros, and this had considerable impact on Tsvetaeva’s subsequent understanding of the poet’s mission and status. Tsvetaeva never quoted Voloshin’s lines or alluded to these concepts overtly in her writings. However, her poems testify to a deep understanding of the dichotomy of pol/Eros. Especially when her own authorial myth starts to develop in a new vein at the beginning of the 1920s, the relationship of the physical and the spiritual becomes particularly important.

3.2. Initiation: The Folklore Poemas

Tsvetaeva’s folklore poemas from the beginning of the 1920s are the first instance where she applies the Platonic scheme in her oeuvre. Later, her use of this pattern becomes more varied and flexible, but its foundations are already being laid during this early period. To begin, the dialectic of the physical and the spiritual is central for her evocation of the poet’s birth, which is often portrayed in a Romantic colouring of the poet as an electee of the transcendent creative force, often personified. The individual’s difficult relationship with the opposing realms of the physical and the immaterial is solved by means of transcendence: the mortal lyrical subject is carried away from her physical boundaries by the creative force. However, this transcendence inevitably entails a departure from the earthly realm for the mortal subject, and the effect of the creative force on the lyrical subject can even be perceived as destructive.27 Hence, this immaterial creative force is sometimes presented as demonic, which is the consequence of an earthly perspective on it. As discussed by E.B. Korkina (1987: 162), Tsvetaeva’s four folklore poems – "Tsar’-Devitsa" (1920), "Na krasnom kone" (1921), "Pereulochki" (1922) and "Molodets" (1922) – form a cycle, and can therefore most aptly be interpreted together. Their unity grows out of common metaphors and symbols, along with the underlying thematic whole: the lyrical subject’s fate of transcending physical boundaries and being united with the spiritual.

27 This implies important connotations with Voloshin’s concept of Eros. See Shevelenko 2002: 175.
The immaterial forces, descending from the immaterial to retrieve their mortal objects, are given various guises in the poèmas. In "Tsar-Devitsa", the sleeping, passive tsarevich is courted by the warrior-like Tsar-Maiden, who arrives from the heavens to retrieve her loved one.28 In fact, the movement of the Tsar-Maiden from her original, aphysical position, turning into a physical being for her union with the Tsarevich, and her final return to the immaterial state parallels that of Eros; the sleeping Tsarevich symbolizes creation, and the physical stepmother in this scheme alludes to pure sex (pol) (Shevelenko 2002: 171). The final union of these two partly contradictory forces is thus possible only in the immaterial realm and not on this Earth, which is vital to Tsvetaeva’s understanding of the Platonic scheme. In "Na Krasnom kone", unearthly force and creative genius is symbolized by a rider, arriving on a red horse to carry the lyrical subject from the physical realm to the spiritual. At the end of the poem, the rider is characterised not as a Muse but as genii (spirit), and is clearly paralleled to the creative ethos.29 Importantly, the rider on his horse of fire gains clear demonic implications. The union of the lyrical subject and her genius is characterised as "horrible", and his actions have a destructive effect on the mortal subject. "Pereulochki", too, introduces the character of a sorceress, working her magic on the lyrical subject. "Pereulochki" is constructed in the form of a ladder, which further implies its connections with the Platonic scheme, with the incantations and magic proceeding from one level to the next, from the Earth to the skies, until the transformation of the object of sorcery is complete.30 Again, the nature of this unearthly force is evil.

"Molodets" proceeds still further in this vein. Indeed, this poèma is essential for understanding Tsvetaeva’s Classical poems, as it immediately precedes the cycle "Fedra" in her oeuvre. Based on a folktale by Afanas’ev, Upyr’, Tsvetaeva treats the source text with considerable fidelity. In this work, the role of the immaterial force is played by the

28 For a reading on Tsar-Devitsa’s plot as an illustration of the creative thematics in Tsvetaeva’s poetry, see Korkina 1987: 163-164 and Faryno 1985: 111-238.
29 In Tsvetaeva’s understanding, Eros was viewed as extrasexual, more spiritual than physical, and union with him engendered creation (Shevelenko 2002: 174).
30 The sorceress’s temptations can be interpreted in the same vein as those of the rider-genius of "Na Krasnom kone" – the temptations of art, leading the soul away from Earth by means of words (Shevelenko 2002: 196). See also Faryno 1985: 260-350, 400-401.
vampire – once again a demonic, evil force who liberates the maiden Marus’ia from the earthly realm. Although faithful to the original story, Tsvetaeva nevertheless stresses several aspects and interpretations of the tale which make it clearly adhere to her authorial myth. As in the poem "Na Krasnom kone", the underlying theme is the same – love for an unearthly force and the readiness of the mortal subject to sacrifice everything for this love. The new and central modification Tsvetaeva makes in this work is interpreting the plot of transcendence through the theme of love. This revelation was of great consequence to her subsequent poetic oeuvre, especially Posle Rossii.31 Most importantly, "Molodets" enables the poet to discover how characters who are not creators in the inherited tradition can nevertheless be used as similes or metaphors for the poet. This has profound implications for Tsvetaeva’s use of Classical myth and her interpretation of, for instance, Phaedra and Ariadne.

Tsvetaeva’s folklore poems of the 1920s are all structured on the same underlying plot: the union of the mortal with an unearthly force, a force which can be interpreted as creative. Implicitly discussing the emergence of a creative force, the individual is placed in a position where she or he has to react to this dual division of the world into the spiritual and the physical realms. The poems of Posle Rossii negotiate this problematic in various ways.

3.3. Posle Rossii

Tsvetaeva’s emigration from Moscow to Berlin on the 15th of May, 1922 signalled a profound change in her life as well as in her poetry. The first years of emigration, the period from 1922 to 1925, proved to be highly productive for the poet. This productivity is illustrated by the poems in the collection Posle Rossii (published in its entirety in 1928 in Paris), by the longer poems "Poëma kontsa" and "Poëma gory", as well as by the Classical tragedies Ariadna and Fedra (which were both begun in 1924, although Fedra was only completed in 1927). After completing “Molodets” in 1922, Tsvetaeva begins seeking new plots in a wide range

31 In Tsvetaeva’s mature poetry, the treatment of love becomes synonymous with the treatment of creativity. Compared with the previous folklore poems, "Molodets" shifts the focus from the actual transcendence: while earlier the focus was on the movement from sex to Eros, here it is on the fatal nature of the union of the mortal and the immaterial force. (See Shevelenko 2002: 235-237.)
of literary works and traditions. Indeed, the literary sources of Posle Rossii comprise the Old Testament, Classical Greek literature, Shakespeare, Russian Classicism and German Romanticism (see Makin 1993: 217). However, irrespective of the source texts, the primary motivation of the poems is always rooted in Tsvetaeva’s own poetic system. The new plots borrowed from the literary and cultural tradition emphasise different aspects of the same transcendent plot we saw in the folklore poèmes.

In Posle Rossii, the difficult relationship between the physical and the immaterial, the individual’s reactions to these realms, as well as the poet’s position vis-à-vis these realms underwent significant changes. Importantly, the discourses of love, creation and transcendence intertwine inseparably in the poems. Even though the stresses regarding the dichotomy of the physical and the spiritual in the individual poems might be entirely contradictory, the collection as a whole forms a synthesis of the central question the poet was posing at the time: how to find a balance between these two realms. In Posle Rossii, the focus is no longer on separating the two dimensions but on demonstrating their simultaneous necessity for the creative impulse. Thus, the collection’s movement from the affirmation of physical passion to an aspiration towards the immaterial – and vice versa – contributes to the discussion of the poet’s position on Earth.

The poems from 1922 which open Posle Rossii can be seen as a continuation of the poetics of Remeslo and the ladder of Eros. These poems either affirm the poet’s solitary path, negating earthly passion, or, on the other hand, view the experience of physical love as a necessary prerequisite for attaining the spiritual, creative dimensions. Between these two opposite interpretations, several intermediary combinations are possible, emphasising various aspects of the dialectics of the physical and the immaterial in individual experience. The opening poem of the collection, "Est’ chas na te slova" (1922), demonstrates that creation

32 Naturally, the biographical events in Tsvetaeva’s life also had a considerable impact on her treatment of this problematic. Thus, for instance, her affair with Konstantin Rodzevich in 1923 paradoxically resulted in poems which asserted the solitary path of creation, ultimately evoking the poet’s withdrawal from earthly happiness and physical passion. (See Shevelenko 2002: 266-276.) Tsvetaeva’s epistolary relationship with Boris Pasternak, again, resulted in poems affirming the existence of an equal Earthly counterpart for the poet, whereas prior to this exchange the poems had focused on the poet’s solitary existence (see Shevelenko 2002: 241).
depends on the coexistence of the physical and the spiritual. Built on intertwining images alluding to these two realms, the poem nevertheless ends by proclaiming that the poet has been orphaned on Earth:

В напрасную струну
Прах – взмах на простыню.
Дань страху своему
И праху своему.

Жарких самоуправств
Час – и тишайших просьб.
Час безземельных братств.
Час мировых сиротств.

(Tsvetaeva 1990: 279.)

The poem’s opening lines clearly signal the creative problematic, all the while forwarding the motifs of Earthly life and physical existence. Impressionistic by nature, the poem does not question the physical existence of the poet as a prerequisite for creation, but simply postulates this situation as a fact. The poem focuses precisely on the alteration of the physical and the immaterial, where both of these realms shape the poet’s existence, and ends in proclaiming the union of the speaker and the addressee precisely in the immaterial, not on this earth.

Poems emphasizing Earthly experience are equally prominent in Posle Rossii. As shall be discussed below, even some of the Classical poems belong to this group, for instance, the "Fedra" cycle, which gives voice to the speaker’s emotions of torturous and overwhelming passion. Even the poems "Ofeliia – Gamletu" and "Ofeliia – v zashchitu korolevy" (1923) emphasise the value of physical passion as a prerequisite for transcendence, yet at the same time lamenting the tragically short-lived existence of the heroine. A joyous affirmation of female passion and exhilaration of life is the 1922 poem "Zdravstvui! Ne strela, ne kamen’," which professes the joys of Earthly existence and physical passion, which are celebrated instead of transcendent reality. Similarly, the 1923 poem "Rano esche – ne byt’!" emphasises the necessity of Earthly experience, even though it also recognises the need for escaping the Earth’s physical confines. Significantly, this poem follows "Na naznachennoe svidan’e" in the collection, which is, again, oriented towards transcendence,
presenting Earthly existence as painful, the two counterparts destined to be separated in real life, only being united in the transcendent.33

Earthly experience can also be interpreted as dangerous, even life-threatening. Thus, for instance, the poem "Akhill na valu" (1923) presents the destructive outcome of passion, resulting in the Classical maiden Polyxena’s death on Achilles’ funeral pyre. Likewise, the speaker of the poem following it, "Poslednii moriak" (1923), discusses the dangers of Earthly passion, yet pleads for yet another moment of life before succumbing to death:

Как та чахоточная, что всех
Просила: еще немного

Понравься!.. (Руки уже свежи,
Взор смутен, персты не гнутся...)
Как та с матросом — с тобой, о жизнь,
Торгуюсь: еще минутку

Понравься!...

(Tsvetaeva 1990: 366.)

Even if the poem evokes life as ultimately sordid and painful, the speaker nevertheless cherishes it, unwilling to give it up. The transcendent realm is not presented in the poem at all, the emphasis being rather on physical existence.

A considerable number of poems in Posle Rossii, however, discuss Earthly experience as inferior to the spiritual dimension. This is often expressed as a certain discomfort in the attitude towards one’s own body, as for instance in "Zhiv, a ne umer" (1925), or as a celebration of the spiritual over the physical, as in "Pela kak strely i kak moreny" (1924). The speaker of the poems is often striving towards the spiritual, transcendent realm, longing to leave the physical confines of the Earth behind and viewing herself solely as a creature of the spirit instead of a physical being. The celebration of the immaterial is aptly professed by the poem "Dusha" (1923), which affirms the poet’s creative abilities:

---

33 See Shevelenko 2002: 256-257.
И покамест — счета — кипами,
И покамест — сердца — хрипами,
Закипание — до — кипении
Двух всененных — крепись — крыл.

Так, над вашей игрой — крупно!
(Между трупами — и — куклами!)
Не обшупана, не куплена.
Полыхая и пля-ша —

Шестикрылая, ра-душная.
Между мнимыми — ниц! — сущая,
Не задушена вашими тушами
Ду-ша!

(Tsvetaeva 1990: 315-316.)

In a typically Tsvetaevan construct of opposition, the fleeting, immaterial, dynamic and invincible soul of the poet is juxtaposed with static and empty physical entities (symbolized by the doll and the corpses). The entire structure of the poem and its relying on jocular and triumphant wordplay and dancing rhythmical structures demonstrates the poet’s creative ethos. The aspiration towards transcendent heights is clearly professed in the flight of the winged soul, an image alluding to the myth of Psyche and Eros and thus testifying to the underlying Platonic ladder in the poem.

What the poems of the collection discuss as a whole is the position of the creator between the earthly and the immaterial, her birth and existence between these realms, uniting them in her own being. As formulated by Irina Shevelenko, the cornerstone of Tsvetaeva’s creative philosophy at the time was not the denial of Earthly life and one’s own physical being, but exactly the impossibility of denying it entirely, which resulted in her viewing herself as an intermediary, as a "mountain." The poet’s answer to the call of life was creation, not full participation in the call itself (Shevelenko 2002: 254, 259). This intermediary position is apparent even in Tsvetaeva’s treatment of traditional texts, such as the Classical myths.

The poems on Classical material appear in Tsvetaeva’s oeuvre exactly at the moment which signals a profound change in her poetics and in her philosophy at the time was not the denial of Earthly life and one’s own physical being, but exactly the impossibility of denying it entirely, which resulted in her viewing herself as an intermediary, as a "mountain." The poet’s answer to the call of life was creation, not full participation in the call itself (Shevelenko 2002: 254, 259). This intermediary position is apparent even in Tsvetaeva’s treatment of traditional texts, such as the Classical myths.

The poems on Classical material appear in Tsvetaeva’s oeuvre exactly at the moment which signals a profound change in her poetics and in her

34 For a reading of this poem in the context of Tsvetaeva’s authorial myth, see Faryno 1985: 393.
life, stemming in part from her rejoining her husband in Prague. From
the Classical tradition, she could borrow and adapt virtually unlimited
plots of transcendence for her own creative purposes. The first Classical
character entering her poetry, the Sibyl, displays a rather direct
connection to creativity. Later, personae such as Phaedra, Ariadne and
Eurydice appear in the collection, discussing creation more implicitly.
This major group of Classical poems, written in 1923, are also to be read
in the context of Tsvetaeva’s ongoing epistolary relationship with Boris
Pasternak; this exchange with another poet enabled Tsvetaeva to seek
suitable patterns and models from myth to express unsatisfied passion,
loneliness and abandonment, negotiating them into creative potential.
Tsvetaeva’s “Classicistic” phase continues thereafter with the more
extensive literary genre of two lyrical tragedies founded on the Theseus
myth. In these works, the balance between the physical and the spiritual
is discussed implicitly in the relationship between the gods and the
mortals. A central question for the author in Ariadna is how to judge
Theseus’s act of abandoning Ariadne; in Fedra, the stress is on
unreciprocal and unrequited physical passion, paving the way for the
heroine’s future transcendence.

The present study aims to elucidate Tsvetaeva’s use of the Classical
material as an illustration of her creative philosophy of the 1920s.
Interesting in this respect are the changes of emphasis introduced to
Classical myths as they are subjected to Tsvetaeva’s own poetic
worldview. How are these models made to conform to the poet’s own
creative principles and how does she shape the original myths? How are
the dialectics of the physical and the immaterial negotiated in the
appropriation of the inherited material? My approach is a textual close
reading of the works in the context of Tsvetaeva’s own oeuvre and her
creative principles. As necessary, I will also discuss the relevant tradition,
such as the Classical, Romantic or Symbolist context. In brief, I shall show
how Tsvetaeva uses Classical myth in developing a plot of
transcendence, the roots of which can be found in the preceding narrative
poems on folklore subjects. Crucial in this respect is the Platonic scheme,
underlining Tsvetaeva’s conception of the dual division of the world into
the earthly and the divine.

The poems discussed in the next chapter are the first instance where
Tsvetaeva uses Classical mythological heroines as personae. As I shall
discuss, each of these lyrical speakers emphasises a different aspect of the dichotomy of the physical and the spiritual, illustrating the various reactions of the individual to these realms.
This chapter focuses on personae from Classical myth appearing in *Posle Rossii* and functioning as the poet’s masks – namely, the Sibyl, Phaedra and Eurydice. Tsvetaeva’s Classical personae enter into dialogue with the original myth and with her own poetry, at times distancing themselves from the tradition, at other times reinforcing it. The plot of transcendence and poetic election, recurrent in Tsvetaeva’s folklore poems, can be detected even here. The Sibyl, discussed below in Section 1, expresses the position of the poet as mediator between the tangible and transcendent realms. This persona stresses disembodiment and the independence of the poetic voice. Interestingly, the prophetess is also linked to motherhood, which adds a new emphasis to the original myth. Phaedra, discussed in Section 2, emphasises the physical realm and carnal passion as a starting-point for the creative impetus. Eurydice, discussed in Section 3, is again further removed from the physical realm, evoking an eternal, aphysical existence in the netherworld. From the point of view of creation, this nevertheless entails that her previous Earthly existence is not forgotten. Thus the Classical personae provide different perspectives on the individual’s position between the physical and the spiritual realms.

1. THE SIBYL

Tsvetaeva’s cycle discusses the transformation of an ordinary mortal into a creator, adopting the Classical tale of the Sibyl as a vehicle for this theme. The Sibyl was the first Classical persona chosen by Tsvetaeva. She completed a three-poem cycle “Sivilla” (1922-23, SS 2: 136-138) and

---

35 Tsvetaeva herself sheds light on her use of the inherited literary material in the essay *Poet o kritike* (1926):

Вот – моя задача, когда я бралась за “Молодца”. Вскрыть суть сказки, данной в костяке. Расколдовать вещь. А совсем не создать “новую форму” или “народную форму”. Вещь написалась, я над ней работала, я слушала каждое слово (не взвешивала – выслушивала!) (SS 5: 296.)

36 The first two poems were completed on the 5th and 6th of August 1922, whereas the third was finished only on June 17th of the following year and later added to the cycle.
some separate poems on the tale, thus making the prophetess one of the most prominent Classical personae in her poetry at the time. Even though the “Sivilla” cycle has been analysed several times (see Hasty 1986b, Hasty 1996: 83-109, Medvedeva 1974, Kiperman 1992, Lane 2006), it has not yet been considered in terms of Tsvetaeva’s use of Classical myth on the whole. The cycle evokes the Sibyl using the imagery of verticality, emphasising the prophetess’s orientation towards the transcendent. In the cycle’s first poem the mortal maiden is metamorphosed into a tree as the divinity possesses her, while in the second poem she is evoked as a cliff. In the third poem she is allowed to speak for herself, lamenting the mortals’ unfortunate fate of having to be born into the physical realm. Tsvetaeva’s appropriation of the prophetess provides a starting-point for her reconfiguration of the other mythical personae. I shall also consider the tradition underlying Tsvetaeva’s interpretation of the Sibyl, namely Rainer Maria Rilke’s adaptation of the myth. Relying on Hasty’s thorough and insightful reading of the cycle, I shall examine the poems as the first instance where Tsvetaeva uses a Classical persona as a vehicle for her conception of the poet’s genesis, role and mission and of the nature of her art.

37 The Sibyl also inspired the earlier poem “Vekami, vekami” (1921, SP 1990: 229). This persona becomes even more prominent in the collection Posle Rossii: the poems “Eto peply sokrovishch” (1922, SP 1990: 307) and the cycle “Derev’ia” (1922-23, SP 1990: 297-303); especially its sixth and ninth poem evoke the prophetess.

38 Hasty 1986b and Hasty 1996 provide a thorough close reading of the cycle’s themes, metrical structure and imagery in the context of Tsvetaeva’s use of the Orphic myth to illustrate her creative philosophy. Medvedeva’s study (1974) is to be commended for being the first to introduce the theme of Tsvetaeva’s Classical personae, examining the cycle in the context of her poems on Eurydice and Orpheus. However, her analysis remains rather superficial. Kiperman’s (1992) reading of the cycle in parallel to Pushkin’s poem “Prorok” sheds light on the dialectics of the balance between the will of the individual and divine election in both poets’ creative philosophy. Lane 2006 examines the cycle in comparison with Rainer Maria Rilke’s poem “Eine Sibylle”.

39 On Tsvetaeva’s joining of verticality and creation and its parallels with the German Romantics, see Hasty 1996: 104.

40 On tree imagery symbolising the poet, see Revzina 1982. The mountain, a governing symbol for instance in Tsvetaeva’s “Poëma gory” (“Poem of the Mountain”, 1924, SS 3: 24-30), is also connected to the pattern of transcendence.

41 For a more thorough examination of this question, see Lane 2006.
1.1. The Prophetess as Poet

Tsvetaeva’s primary source for her interpretation of the Sibyl was Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (Hasty 1996: 108; Medvedeva 1974: 13). The tale is there retold as follows: the god of creation and poetry, Apollo, fell in love with the Sibyl, promising to grant her any wish in exchange for the gift of prophesy which he bestowed on the maiden. The Sibyl asked for as many years of life as there were grains of sand in a heap, which eventually led to painful longevity in a decaying body until she wished to die. Her voice, however, remained unaltered and as young as before (see Ovid 1961: 341-342).

The links between Tsvetaeva’s Sibyl and the Romantic tradition become evident when we take into account Rainer Maria Rilke’s poem “Eine Sibylle” (1907). Even Rilke’s poem evokes the prophetess in images of nature, and it has important points of contact with Tsvetaeva’s cycle.

Eine Sibylle

Einst, vor Zeiten, nannte man sie alt.  
Doch sie blieb und kam dieselbe Strasse  
täglich. Und man änderte die masse,  
und manzählte sie wie einen Wald

nach Jahrhunderten. Sie aber stand  
den Abend auf derselben Stelle,  
schwartz wie eine alte Citadelle  
hoch und hohl und ausgebrannt;

von der Worten, die sich unbewacht  
wider ihren Willen in ihr mehrten,  
immerfort umschrieen und umfolgen,  
während die schon wieder heimgekehrten  
dunkel unter ihren Augenbogen  
Sassen, fertig für die Nacht.

(Rilke 1962: 324.)

Rilke’s poem continues the unity of the prophetess-tree and the words, evoked as birds, landing on its branches to roost. The poem evokes an eternal, self-sufficient prophetess, separated from her surroundings, presented as part of nature, but possessing an inherent, almost mystical unity with words, which act their will upon her. The Sibyl–poet is the medium for the divine word, and it is only to her that the prophetic
vision is accorded. The maiden’s existence throughout the centuries, in a
timeless, transcendent state removed from mundane, linear time, is
inherited by Tsvetaeva as well, as is the tree image evoking the
prophetess. A further metaphor shared by the two poets is the Sibyl’s
gaze, which Tsvetaeva frequently evokes as a state of perception under
the eyelids (pod vekami; in Rilke, this is evoked as unter Augenbogen).42
Even the image of the fortresslike cliff, appearing in the second part of
Tsvetaeva’s cycle, is reminiscent of Rilke’s alte Citadelle, burned-down
and hollow. It is clear that Tsvetaeva inherits from Rilke the kenotic
imagery, emphasising the prophetess’s role as an empty vessel for the
divine word, as well as her isolation from the mundane which is
emphasised by the second poem of her cycle. What separates Tsvetaeva’s
interpretation from the Romantic tradition, however, are the erotic
connotations of the Sibyl’s union with the divinity appearing in the first
poem. Furthermore, Tsvetaeva departs from Rilke in the third poem’s
connotations of Christianity, motherhood and the Sibyl’s independence,
as she is allowed to speak for herself, professing the unfortunate birth of
the infant into the world. As Tora Lane (2006: 31) concludes, the parallels
between the two poems appear as integrated figures instead of quotes,
the poems sharing a common figural skeleton.

42 On the image of blind clairvoyance in Tsvetaeva’s cycle and its ties to the
Romantic tradition see Hasty 1996: 92.
И вдруг, отчаявшись искать извне:
Сердцем и голосом упав: во мне!

Сирия: вещая! Сирия: свод!
Так Благовещенье свершилось в тот

Час не стареющий, так в седость трав
Бренная девственность, пещерой став

Дивному голосу...
— так в звездный вихрь
Сирия: выбывшая из живых.

(SP 1990: 292-293.)

The first poem can be divided into three parts.\(^43\) The first three stanzas, paralleled and united by the same structure of repetitive evocations of the Sibyl’s name, present an external view of the heroine, describing and setting the scene. Stanzas 4-6 present the god Apollo taking possession of the maiden, creating a juxtaposition of the passive prophetess and the active divinity. Interestingly, the only explicit appearance of the first person singular, “I”, occurs precisely at the end of the sixth stanza, disappearing entirely from the poem after that. The final three stanzas return to a general, descriptive tone, once again ritually evoking the Sibyl’s name and celebrating her new role and identity as a prophetess. The first poem, and the cycle as a whole, continue the plot of transcendence begun in Tsvetaeva’s folklore poëmas. Here, however, the force arriving to claim the mortal maiden is not as concrete as before, but rather the emphasis is put on the union and coexistence of the mortal and the divinity. Nevertheless, this union entails a rather violent disembodiment of the mortal maiden, a process described in the first poem of the cycle.\(^44\)

The Sibyl is from the beginning characterised in terms of draught and aridity, as the entering divinity encompasses her whole being, leaving it devoid of her former life as an ordinary mortal. The incantation-like first three stanzas emphasise the Sibyl’s existence as an emptied-out vessel, a

\(^{43}\) For a thorough analysis of the poem’s metrical and stanzaic structure, see Hasty 1986.

\(^{44}\) On Tsvetaeva’s lyrical speakers’ need to be liberated from bodily confines, see Faryno 1985: 399-400.
medium, with the Russian prefix -вы signifying the emptying process. As the maiden’s former existence comes to an end, she becomes detached from life, half-existent. Burnt out by the purifying fire of the creative spirit, the Sibyl is now ready to be encompassed by the divine voice. The birds in the first stanza, evocative of Rilke’s metaphor for words, also carry connotations of the soul.45

Tsvetaeva’s poem evokes the divinity’s entering the maiden’s consciousness in erotic tones, although the end presents her transcendence into the immaterial realm. The maiden’s asexuality and the beginning of her departure from her previous life as a mortal is connoted by the second line of the second stanza, with the drying out of her veins. This implies the loss of her mortal body, which is forever altered and brought to another dimension of existence through contact with the divinity. The “zealous man” alludes to the divinity, now possessing the maiden entirely (Hasty 1996: 90). In the third stanza the Sibyl is characterised as the “mouth of fate and destruction”, an overt metaphor of her turning into a seeress. Her separation from the ordinary crowd unites her with Tsvetaeva’s concept of the poet, an idea developed further in the second poem of the cycle.

From the first lines onwards the Sibyl is characterised in images alluding to a tree. This evokes the prophetess’s mediating stance between the physical world and the spiritual, creative realm.46 Even this orientation towards an expansive time frame creates a parallel between the Sibyl and the poet. In the third stanza the Sibyl is described as “a tree among maidens”, which stresses her singularity and exceptionality, but also evokes the prophetess as a mediator between the timeless world of the divine and the physical world. This image is repeated in the following stanza, where the Sibyl is characterised as a “sovereign tree in a bare forest”, alluding to her superiority to others.

The encompassing of the Sibyl by the creative divinity Apollo, her kenosis, begins in the fourth stanza, where the fire first roars through the tree. Rich in creative and inspirational connotations, the fire burns out the

45 See Frazer 1993: 670-672.
46 The bond between the tree and the lyric speaker of Tsvetaeva’s poetry is constant throughout her oeuvre, ranging from a totem relationship to a personified union of the tree and the poet (Revzina 1982: 144). See, for instance, the cycle “Derev’ia” (1923, SP 1990: 297-303), in which the trees convey the poetic message to the speaker, who appears as a modern-day prophet, reading signs of the future on branches and leaves.
residues of the Sibyl’s former life, leaving her empty for the divine to inhabit her. The fire image possibly even contains Christian tonalities, as the appearance of God often took the form of fire (for example, the Bible’s burning bush, or the flame of Annunciation). In the fifth stanza the divinity of inspiration enters the disembodied Sibyl. Described as a sudden, unexpected movement, the divinity is characterised in terms of activity and force, contrasted with the Sibyl’s static, passive and emptied-out existence as a tree. Significantly, the divinity first appears “beneath the eyelids”. Apart from the obvious Classical connotations of soothsaying, this image in Tsvetaeva’s poetry often evokes the poet’s ability to turn inward in search of higher, more profound knowledge, which she then transmits to the world. This Romantic-inspired concern for “transcendent perception”, or the “imaginative eye” lies at the heart of Tsvetaeva’s poetic world (Hasty 1996: 92).

The crucial turning-point in the Sibyl’s apotheosis occurs in the sixth stanza, where instead of seeking outward appearances, she suddenly turns inward: “heart and voice fallen: within me!” (translation Hasty 1996: 88). Interestingly, the first-person pronoun “me” only appears here, as otherwise the poem takes an external view of the heroine, a generalizing voice only describing the situation from the outside. The sixth stanza starts off in the deictic formulation “And suddenly”,

In general, the association of fire-related epithets with the speaker of Tsvetaeva’s poetry is frequent to the extent that fire can be considered one of her governing traits. See the frequent use of fire imagery connected with inspiration in the poema “Na krasnom kone”. A suitable example is also the 1918 poem “Chto drugim ne nuzhno – nesite mne:”, saturated with Romantic imagery of fire, flame and inspiration. The first poem of the 1923 cycle “Poety” continues this tradition.

For a discussion of the Biblical subtext in the poem, see Lane 2006: 26, 28.

For instance, the poem “Evridika – Orfeiu”, discussed below in Section 3, evokes the transcendent sight acquired by the heroine in the underworld, and the cycle “Derev’ia”, in which the Sibyl is also present, contains the image of closed eyelids as a prerequisite for creation:

Чтоб вновь, как некогда,
Земля – казалась нам.
Чтобы под веками
Свершились замыслы.

Чтобы монетами
Чудес – не чваниться!
Чтобы под веками
Свершились таинства!
(SP 1990: 303-304.)
bringing the whole event closer to the reader, describing the divinity’s movements around the milieu, and his falling into the Sibyl, taking possession of her. The exclamation “vo mne!” closing the stanza reveals an element of surprise, perhaps evoking the startling effect of the event on the Sibyl. Hasty shows that the first person pronoun signals the Sibyl’s (and, consequently, the poet’s) comprehension of the event, indicating that she is now ready to enter her inner self as the main source of inspiration and clairvoyance (Hasty 1996: 93).

After this sudden rift in the generalizing perspective of the poem, the speaker returns in the seventh stanza to a celebratory and incantatory evocation of the Sibyl’s name. Here, the images of “soothsayer” and “vault” are attributed to the prophetess instead of the images of aridity and emptiness which opened the poem. The first line as a whole indicates that the Sibyl has accepted and embraced her new role, an interpretation further emphasised by the characterisation of the event as the Annunciation in the following stanza. The vault is again an image implying an otherworldly, transcendent and creative connection, this time of the Sibyl and the god Apollo, or, ultimately, of the poet and the creative force. The characterisation of the event described as the Annunciation creates a parallel between the Biblical Virgin Mary, who was told on this very day that she would be the mother of a divine child. Even this image is probably inspired by Rainer Maria Rilke and

50 As Olga Hasty (1996: 93) notes, the Russian word svod suggests drawing together and supporting, which accentuates the Sibyl’s state of connectedness. She, vault-like, connects past, present and future and unifies the fragmentation of the mundane world, the mortal and divine realms.

51 In the third poem of the “Provoda” cycle, the vault (perceived as the heavenly vault) unites the two poets, the speaker and the addressee, in an ethereal union:

Зная, что доколе свод небесный,
   Доколе зори к рубежу –
   Столь явственно и повсеместно
   И длительно тебя яжу.

(SP 1990: 327.)

The image of an arch (in Russian: arka, which is synonymical to svod, vault) can also be seen as a recurring leitmotif in the correspondence of Tsvetaeva and Pasternak, alluding to their eternal poetic union. This is evident in Tsvetaeva’s letter to Pasternak of 19 November 1922:

Я не люблю встреч в жизни: сшибаются лбом. Две стены. Так не проникнешь. Встреча должна быть аркой: тогда встреча – над.

Закинутые лбы? (SS 6: 226.)

52 The paralleling of the prophetess with imagery of the Virgin Mary only occurs in this cycle.
his “Verkündigung” from *Das Buch der Bilder* (1902, 1906). Interestingly, Rilke’s poem contains a characterisation of the Virgin Mary as a tree (see Hasty 1996: 94-95). The parallel between Mary and the Sibyl enhances the immortal and transcendent dimension of the prophetess’s fate. The emphasis here is on the union of the mortal and the divine, shared by both the heroines. The Annunciation also entails a change of the world order and the annihilation of death, thus forming interesting parallels with the Sibyl’s extratemporal existence. The paralleling of the Sibyl and the poet with the Virgin Mary further implies the asexual union of the creative spirit and the elected, resulting in the birth of an eternal offspring, poetry.\(^{53}\)

The temporal image “unaging hour” opening the penultimate stanza accentuates the erosion of temporality, paving the way for the Sibyl’s solitary detachment in the second poem. This image could also allude to the concept of cyclical time, opposed to linear temporality.\(^{54}\) The concept of mythical time can well be attributed to the poem’s single, never-ending and unique hour, the drawn-out moment of the divinity’s entering into the maiden’s consciousness. “Ephemeral maidenhood”, again, evokes fleeting, linear temporality and human existence, but also the Virgin Mary, whose life is forever altered once the birth of Christ is announced to her. The importance of the divine voice encompassing the maiden is evoked in the final stanza, where the maiden is characterised as a cave for the divine voice. This image has its source in the Classical tradition, where prophetesses were essentially perceived as vatic, emptied-out beings, impersonal vessels for transmitting the divine message.\(^{55}\) The second poem emphasises this vatic character of the Sibyl even more explicitly.

The final line of the eighth and the first, truncated line of the ninth stanza evoke the Sibyl’s transcendence into the immaterial realm. The apotheosis of the mortal maiden is completed in the final two lines, in which the Sibyl is perceived in an astral whirlwind, among the stars, as

---

\(^{53}\) For a more detailed discussion of the erotic implications of the poem, especially related to the Sibyl’s coexistence with the divinity, see Hasty 1996: 95-96, 106-107.

\(^{54}\) Olga Hasty (1996: 94) relates the image to the moment of the Annunciation, a moment not finite but drawn into perpetual being.

\(^{55}\) Michael Makin (1993: 222) interprets Tsvetaeva’s appropriation of the Sibyl myth as emphasising her position as a “repository of cultural values and, by implication, a poet”.

36
“departed from the living”. In a state of inspiration, the poet has now turned inward, seeking the creative essence within herself. Being freed from her physical constraints, she is portrayed as a vatic voice, oriented towards the extratemporal and the eternal.56 It is all the more surprising, then, that the final poem of the cycle should present the Sibyl herself as the speaker, evoking her own stance for the first time in the cycle. As we are going to see, even though the prophetess has left the world of the living, she still shares the possibility of communicating with it, even in other ways than prophetic visions.

1.2. The Cliff-like Mediator

The Sibyl’s disembodied state governs the second poem of the cycle, where she is evoked as a cliff and as a mountain, housing the divine voice.57 Interestingly, the prophetess’s name, a central structural composite of the first poem, is not evoked once in the second, which testifies to her departure from the mundane realm (Hasty 1996: 97). She is only referred to in the second person singular “you”, which adds to the detached perspective governing the poem. Thus, the authorial voice discusses the prophetess’s fate as a divine mouthpiece, at the same time implicitly evoking the poet’s position in the world.

2

Каменной глыбой серой.
С веком порвав родство.
Тело твое – пещера
Голоса твоего.

Недрами – в ночь, сквозь слепость
Век, слепотой бойниц.
Глухонемая крепость
Над пестротою жниц.

Кутают ливни плечи
В плащ, плесневеет гриб.
Тысячелетья плещут
У столбняковых глыб.

56 The Sibyl’s disembodiment forms a parallel with Tsvetaeva’s appropriation of Eurydice, discussed below.
Горе горё! Под толщей
Век, в прозорливых тьмах –
Глиняные осколки
Царств и дорожный прах

Битв...

(SP 1990: 293-294.)

The Sibyl’s extratemporal perspective allows her to perceive the changing centuries, kingdoms and life of common mortals from a distance. Her aging body, housing the prophetic voice, is evoked as a grey cliff, closing in around the prophetess.\(^{58}\) Naturally, the images of mountain, cliff and cave are also rooted in the Classical tradition. The Cumaean Sibyl was frequently reported as residing in a cave, secluded from the community, in loneliness, only meeting the occasional passers-by who consulted her for help and prophecies. The almost violent separation of the prophetess from mundane time, encompassed by her visions and prophecies, is evoked in the second line of the first stanza.

In this poem, the voice is a central constituent uniting the Sibyl and the poet.\(^{59}\) The importance of the prophetess’s never-aging voice as opposed to her withering body is implicitly paralleled to the eternal voice of the poet.\(^{60}\) The voice’s independence from its physical source is testified to in an extract from Tsvetaeva’s notebook from May 1923, when she was completing the cycle’s third poem:

---


\(^{59}\) Irina Shevelenko (2002: 243, 246) also stresses the central position of the Sibyl in Tsvetaeva’s self-mythologization of the time, based precisely on existence outside temporal boundaries, the affinity with nature and the association of the grey colour, traits which are shared both by the persona and the author. See also Medvedeva 1974: 20-21.

\(^{60}\) See, for instance, the poem “Est’ schastlivtsy i schastlivitsy” (1934), also containing Classical imagery:

Если Орфей не сошел в Аид –
Сам. а послал бы – голос

Свой, только голос послал во тьму,
Сам у порога – лишним
Ветвь – Эвридика бы по нему
Как по канату вышла...

(SP 1990: 656.)
As can be seen in the poet’s notes, Tsvetaeva considered the Sibyl’s voice to be her central attribute. Also significant is her emergence in Tsvetaeva’s appropriation in the form of a cliff, disembodied and detached from mortal life. On the other hand, the Sibyl’s affinity with nature is also worth noting in this extract, as well as in the cycle as a whole. She is pointedly perceived by Tsvetaeva as an intricate part of her physical surroundings; her voice is alluded to as that of the grass and the brook, her body is likened to a cliff. This emphasises the voice’s independence from the human body and its likeness to a natural force. As analysed by Olga Hasty, Tsvetaeva’s emphasis on the insubstantial and her focus on the voice and spirit over the flesh are essential for her interpretation of the Sibyl:

Although itself invisible, the voice depends on physiological apparatus for its production. It needs, moreover, a defined space in which to resound even after it leaves the body that has produced it. Thus the voice is in a peculiar situation of simultaneous dependency on the body and the visible world and freedom from them. As such, it becomes a metonymic representation of the poet, who finds himself in an analogous situation mediating between the visible and the invisible world, between his inner space and that of the outside world.

(Hasty 1996: 108.)

The Sibyl’s visions and prophecies, appearing involuntarily and independently of time and place, are evoked in the second and third stanza. The imagery of night and depth alludes to the all-encompassing
visionary trance, placing its carrier outside temporality, only testifying to
events out of her reach and conveying them to the surroundings. Not
unlike the Romantic concept of the poet, the Sibyl is portrayed as isolated
and exceptional compared to ordinary mortals (symbolised here by the
motley and colourful harvesters and juxtaposed to the prophetess as a
mute, grey fortress). Apart from the prophetic visions, the closed eyelids
also evoke the poet's creative abilities. The frequent evocation of
blindness in the two first lines of the second stanza, as well as the epithet
"deaf-mute" of the third line carry various implications. Firstly, they all
emphasise the remoteness and detachment of the Sibyl from the crowd,
stressing the fact that she cannot be touched or reached by them in her
solitude. Secondly, the imagery alludes to the Sibyl's prophetic trance.
Thirdly and most importantly, though, these details allude to the
loneliness of the creator: the poet is perceived as deaf-mute, because she
only hears the messages of a higher order, mute because she cannot
convey them adequately to the surrounding "mob", and blind, because
she only sees inward to the transcendent depths which reside in her. 61
Everything here emphasises the distance between the poet-creator and
the crowd, which is unable to comprehend the poetic message.

The erosion of linear time continues in the second poem of the cycle.
Historical time seems accelerated in the following stanzas, where visions
of future destruction are transmitted through the Sibyl to the ordinary
mob. The rain in the first line of the third stanza emphasises the grey
colour presiding over the entire cycle, and also evokes the Sibyl's
loneliness. Rain changes things by nature: the fungus molds (possibly an
evocation of the ephemeral quality of mortal existence), the millenia
splash in water at the feet of the immortal, everlasting cliff, the Sibyl. An
island-like, solitary existence and her prophetic visions, changing at
breathtaking speed, are the only definite constituents of the prophetess's
existence. Apparently this is even the cause of the speaker's outburst
"Woe to the mountain" in the fourth stanza, which can also allude to the
prophetess's solitary state. The Sibyl's premonitions, and at the same
time the relentless course of history, are evoked in the shattered
kingdoms and battles, the images closing the poem.

61 On blindness as a central image for Tsvetaeva, see Medvedeva 1974: 24. The
image contains important ties with the archetypal poet, Homer.
The second poem of the cycle also emphasises the Sibyl’s detachment from both her body and her physical surroundings. Her voice, even though presented as a central constituent of the prophetess’s existence, is not heard in the poem. Her separation from the mortal crowd seems irrevocable and complete. By contrast, the third poem of the cycle evokes the prophetess’s own voice for the first time, without the external distance which has characterised the two first poems, which only look at the prophetess from the outside.

1.3. Prophetic Motherhood

The third poem of the “Sivilla” cycle is the Sibyl’s monologue to an infant, where she laments the mortal burden of being born to physicality, departing from the immaterial realm. In this free variation on the character of the Sibyl, Tsvetaeva addresses the themes of birth, death and creation from a motherly point of view, adding a new dimension to her interpretation of the ancient prophetess.

3
Сивилла – младенцу:

К груди моей.
Младенец, льни:
Рождение – паденье в дни.

С заоблачных нигдеших скал,
Младенец мой,
Как низко пал!

---

62 This echoes the Classical tradition from Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus*, Scene V:

Not to be born surpasses thought and speech.
The second best is to have seen the light
And then to go back quickly whence we came.
The feathery follies of his youth once over,
What trouble is beyond the range of man?
What heavy burden will he not endure?
Jealousy, faction, quarreling, and battle –
The bloodiness of war, the grief of war.
And in the end he comes to strengthless age,
Abhorred by all men, without company,
Unfriended in that uttermost twilight
Where he must live with every bitter thing.
(Sophocles 1955: 73.)
Ты духом был, ты прахом стал.

Плач, маленький, о них и нас:
Рождение – паденье в час!

Плач, маленький, и вперед, и вновь:
Рождение – паденье в кровь.

И в прах.
И в час...

Где зарева его чудес?
Плач, маленький: рожденье в вес!

Где залежи его щедрот?
Плач, маленький: рожденье в счет.

И в кровь.
И в пот...

Но встанешь! То, что в мире смертью
Названо – паденье в твердь.

Но узришь! То, что в мире – век
Смежение – рожденье в свет.

Из днесь –
В навек.

Смерть, маленький, не спать, а встать.
Не спать, а вспять.

Вплавь, маленький! Уже ступень
Оставлена...
– Восстань в день.

(SP 1990: 294-295.)

Construed as the Sibyl’s monologue to the child, symbolically understood as the (divine) word that the prophetess gives birth to, the poem contains repeated questions and evocations to the addressee “you”.

63 Olga Hasty (1996: 94-96) recognises here a further parallel between the Sibyl and the Virgin Mary, identifying the child-addresssee of the poem as Christ, the speaker thus predicting the future resurrection of Christ into eternity.
poem, the birth becoming a negative cessation of being, and death, on the other hand, gaining epithets of a new beginning. This concept also contains Nietzschean undertones. Nietzsche’s Birth of Tragedy relates the old story of King Midas encountering Dionysus’s companion Silenius in the woods. Silenius says that the state of non-existence is the ultimate happiness, but that this out of reach for the human race:

Miserable, ephemeral race, children of hazard and hardship, why do you force me to say what it would be much more fruitful for you not to hear? The best of all things is something entirely outside your grasp: not to be born, not to be, to be nothing. But the second-best thing for you – is to die soon. (Nietzsche 1993: 22.)

Repeatedly urging the infant to cry about his sordid fate, the speaker-prophetess evokes the constituents of mortal life which she sees as most significant and plaintive. Perceiving birth as a fall downwards from the firmament to the Earth, the Sibyl proceeds to other obstacles hindering the free spirit’s existence – time and physicality (appearing in images of blood, weight, count and sweat). Even though linear time is often viewed as confining in Tsvetaeva’s œuvre, the evaluation of physicality in her poetic worldview is more ambivalent. Nevertheless, here the epithets connected with mortal existence emphasise the limitations of the physical realm.

The entire tone of the poem changes in the ninth stanza, where the opening word “But” creates a juxtaposition to what has previously been said. Here, the Sibyl’s affirmation of the liberation inherent in death gains

64 The same reversal can be noted in Tsvetaeva’s treatment of Hades in the poem “Eurydice to Orpheus”. However, even though contrary, the antinomies of the realm of the spirit and that of the flesh are interdependent in the shaping of existence. This is why the same imagery often signals antithetical phenomena, for instance, the fall signals entry to both life and death, whereas the closed eyelids signify a new opening into enlightenment (Hasty 1996: 103).

65 The examples of such a treatment are numerous. For instance, the poem “Khvala vremeni” from 10 May 1923 (SP 1990: 342) deals explicitly with the poet’s existence outside time. In the same way, the cycle “Derev’ia” evokes the hurt done to the speaker by time, juxtaposing time and eternity:

Но знаю – лечите
Обиду Времени –
Прохладой Вечности.
(SP 1990: 303.)
full force. As Irina Shevelenko (2002: 263) notes, the poem starts off as a lament and closes as a hymn. Characterising death as a “fall into firmament” and thus reversing the traditional mythical understanding of death as a fall, the poem’s speaker instead affirms the spiritual existence which awaits the infant after death. With the conviction spurred by the prophetess’s extratemporal perception, only awaiting liberation from earthly bounds, she characterises closing her eyelids as a birth into light and eternity. Denying the traditional characterisation of death as sleep, the Sibyl evokes in the twelfth stanza death as a return to the realm the child has been forced to leave when he was born. The poem’s ending emphasises transcendence and implicitly alludes to Lethe; urging the child to swim, the Sibyl now says that they will leave the final step behind and resurrection into day has begun. The closure of the poem can be read as a vision of death for the infant. This death, as the entire transcendence of the prophetess into the immaterial realm, is envisioned in clearly Platonic lines, resulting in the attainment of higher knowledge and a disembodied, spiritual state.

Tsvetaeva’s most significant alterations to the original myth are the Sibyl’s explicit ties with poetic election. Especially the first poem of the cycle discusses the way the divinity encompasses the mortal maiden, emphasising her aphysical existence after the union has taken place. The Sibyl’s disembodiment is essential in order to be encompassed by the divine voice; indeed, the second poem of the cycle strongly evokes her separation from the mundane. This develops the Romantic stance of the poet as prophet, and emphasises the isolation and solitary existence of the creator. Another key feature of Tsvetaeva’s interpretation of the prophetess is the change of temporal dimension, as seen in the second poem of the cycle; the Sibyl’s detachment from linear time and her continuous existence through many centuries contribute to her position outside time and history, even though she testifies to their course.

Interestingly, Zhenia Kiperman (1992: 99) perceives these encouraging affirmations as resounding much like the divinity’s calling upon the future prophet.

Michael Naydan (1984: 161) interprets these lines as a return to paradise from whence the child has arrived on Earth. The same motif of return to a pre-birth state can also be found in the poem “Drevniaia tshcheta techet po zhilam” (1923; SP 1990: 370) in which the speaker reaches beyond the Earthly bounds to the netherworld, whose limit in the poem is the river Styx.

Kiperman (1992: 98) has read the poem as a deification of the spirit, though the analysis does not parallel this development with the Platonic subtext.
Tsvetaeva’s stress on the Sibyl as a vatic entity, housing the divine voice, and, furthermore, this persona’s connection to the Biblical Virgin Mary, also extend her appropriation of the myth in a wholly new direction: interpreting the ancient prophetess as mother. Nevertheless, the governing characteristic of the Sibyl’s fate is that of transcendence of both physical boundaries and the temporal dimension, culminating in an apotheosis into the immaterial realm. Uniting in herself both the earthly and the divine, the Sibyl constitutes a perfect example of a Tsvetaevan poetic mask, acting as a mediator between this and the other world. As I shall discuss in the following section, Tsvetaeva’s second Classical persona provides a different perspective on the poet’s existence: her Phaedra re-institutes the importance of the physical for the creative process.

2. PHAEDRA

Tsvetaeva completed a lyrical cycle on Phaedra in March 1923, following the completion of her poëma “Molodets”. Tsvetaeva imbued this inherited folklore tale, originally not containing creative implications, with a plot of transcendence, metaphorically interpreted as a tale of the poet’s birth. This experience enabled her to begin using characters who are not creators in the original tradition as extended metaphors for the poet, which had significant consequences for her treatment of the Classical myth from “Fedra” onwards. Tsvetaeva’s Phaedra evokes different concerns than the Sibyl, stressing the physical confines of the body, torturous passion and the aspiration towards the spiritual. In Tsvetaeva’s cycle, physical passion engenders creation, even if the emotion in the end is left unconsummated.

Tsvetaeva’s ongoing correspondence with her fellow poet, Boris Pasternak, provides an important background for the cycle, as it belongs to the two poets’ creative dialogue. This epistolary exchange colours much of Tsvetaeva’s poetic oeuvre of the period. However, as Irina Shevelenko (2002: 239) stresses, Pasternak’s literary influence on Tsvetaeva’s creative development should not be exaggerated; her poetic techniques had already begun to develop in their own, specific vein before she read Sestra moia zhizn’ or Temy i variatsii, and continued to develop thus, irrespective of the creative correspondence between the two poets.
1923, culminating in discussion about a possible meeting in Berlin, where Pasternak was staying with his family. In the letter dated 10 February 1923, Tsvetaeva asks Pasternak not to leave for Russia without meeting her (DNV 2004: 37). Tsvetaeva’s emotional attachment to her fellow poet, the projected meeting and, finally, the fact that it did not materialize, provide an important background for Tsvetaeva’s cycle “Fedra” as well as for her poems on Hamlet and Ophelia. As it was, Pasternak replied to Tsvetaeva’s ardent letters requesting a meeting with a short and polite message dated 22 February, indicating that he was also impatient to meet her, in spite of circumstances which might delay the event (DNV 2004: 44). After receiving this letter, on 28 February, Tsvetaeva wrote her two Hamlet poems and, on 7 March, completed “Zhaloba”, the first poem of “Fedra”. However, before the entire cycle was finished, Tsvetaeva received a letter from Pasternak announcing that he was leaving for Russia with his wife on 18 March 1923 (DNV 2004: 44-45). Thus, in spite of their mutual wishes, the meeting of the two poets did not take place then, but was postponed by Pasternak until 1925 in Weimar. Having abandoned the hope of a meeting, Tsvetaeva’s reaction is reflected in the second poem of the “Fedra” cycle, entitled “Poslanie”. The emotions of unresolved passion and longing, motivating the entire cycle, have their specific origins in Tsvetaeva’s biography.

I shall explore the Phaedra cycle first and foremost through the interplay of eros, physicality and creation, which form the core of Tsvetaeva’s authorial myth in the 1920s. The cycle focuses on Phaedra’s unrequited emotions which are evoked in painful physical images.

---

70 “Fedra” has mainly been analysed in the context of Tsvetaeva’s poetic dialogue with Pasternak, though these readings usually focus only on the second poem of the cycle. Alyssa Dinega (2001: 108-110) provides a gender reading, focusing on the dialectics of the body and the spirit, and concentrating on the images of Psyche in the second poem of the cycle. However, her reading fails to consider the underlying Platonic scheme, and her anticipations of how the cycle fits into the dialogue of the two poets are speculative (since the correspondence between the two poets was only published subsequently). Irina Shevelenko’s (2002: 248) analysis situates the poem aptly within the collection Posle Rossii and within Tsvetaeva’s exchange with Pasternak, affirming that in the guise of Phaedra Tsvetaeva was searching for a new myth in which to situate both herself and Pasternak. Roman Voitekhovich (2005: 74-75) identifies the role of Psyche, underlining the speaker’s acknowledgement of emotions; Phaedra remains in Voitekhovich’s reading an innocent victim of her soul, which is also an important leitmotif in the subsequent lyrical tragedy.

71 The Phaedra-myth was also adapted by other Russian modernists. The most
However, as frequently happens in Tsvetaeva’s lyrics, the painfully unrequited love generates the poetic impetus, as intense emotions push the speaker towards self-expression. Addressing the difficulty of creation and finding a commensurate expression for her tormenting passion, Phaedia is allowed to express her unrequited love for Hippolytus in tones which emphasise the violent effects of the emotion, even as she strives to reach the addressee on a more spiritual level.

2.1. Passion and Creation

The first poem is a complaint, construed on Hippolytus’s name and evoking the associations it arouses in the speaker’s mind. Despite Tsvetaeva’s fidelity to the original myth, the cycle contains a significant change of emphasis in the interpretation of Phaedia and Hippolytus. Phaedia expresses her torturous emotions towards her stepson in physical and violent tones, bordering on the masculine. Hippolytus, by contrast, appears in the cycle as weak, virginal and boyish, or even androgynous. Such gender reversal is typical for Tsvetaeva’s oeuvre and can be observed in her poëma “Tsar’-Devitsa” (1920) and in several of the shorter lyrical works, among others. Correspondingly, Tsvetaeva’s cycle emphasizes Phaedia’s strength and decision, opposed to Hippolytus’s passivity and youth.

“Zhaloba” opens with a wordplay on Hippolytus’s name, repeated throughout the poem. The name generates several of the images, following a frequent onomastic pattern of Tsvetaeva’s poetry. There, important contemporary poet in this respect was Osip Mandel’shtam, yet his approach differs acutely from Tsvetaeva’s. Mandel’shtam’s 1916 poem on Phaedia (Mandel’shtam 1993: 118) is closely related to the Racinean tradition both in the quotes from Phèdre and in the imagery governing the poem. His poem does not evoke Phaedra’s voice at all; instead, the tragic events are commented on by a chorus. Tsvetaeva’s cycle, on the contrary, is focused on the suffering voice of the heroine. It is nevertheless possible that Mandel’shtam’s use of the chorus in this poem has influenced Tsvetaeva’s use of the chorus in the cycle “Ariadna”, discussed below in Chapter III. On Tsvetaeva’s and Mandel’shtam’s relationship, see Saakiant 1997: 82-89.


73 Such gender reversal is missing from Tsvetaeva’s subsequent tragedy Fedra, discussed in Chapter IV of the present study. Even if Phaedra is there likewise tormented by her divinely induced passion, her attitude towards Hippolytus remains reverent and admiring. The tragedy re-institutes Hippolytus in his traditional role as a chaste warrior, the fiancé of Artemis.

74 Cf. Tsvetaeva’s self-mythologization of her own name, Marina. See also the cycles “Stikhi k Bloku” (1916) and “Stikhi k Akhmatovoi” (1916), both governed
the name often carries the essence and mythic significance of its bearer, determining his fate (Hasty 1986a: 245). Even in “Zhaloba” the incantational repetition of Hippolytus’s name throughout illustrates the hero’s effect on the speaker’s existence. In mythological and shamanistic tradition, the pronouncer could also exert a certain power over the object through naming him. Therefore it can also be tentatively stated that through the repeated pronouncing of Hippolytus’s name, Phaedra attempts in the first poem to possess her loved one, subjugating him to her will.\(^{75}\) This interpretation counteracts the poem’s title (Zhaloba, meaning “a plaint”) and emphasises the intensity of Phaedra’s utterance. Irrespective of Phaedra’s suffering, which is apparent in the poem from the beginning, a closer reading of the metaphors foregrounds the speaker’s strength and resolve.

\[\text{Fedra}\]

\[1\]

\[\text{Жалоба}\]

Ипполит! Ипполит! Болит!
Опаяет... В жару ланиты...
Что за ужас жестокий скрыт
В этом имени Ипполита!

Точно длительная волна
О гранитное побережье.
Ипполитом опалена!
Ипполитом клянусь и брежу!

\(^{75}\) According to Olga Hasty (1986: 253), the name “... is also a sort of an Achilles heel through which power can be gained over the individual”. That this was realized by Tsvetaeva is furthermore evidenced by the Akhmatova cycle, in which Tsvetaeva first relegates Akhmatova’s name to nothingness, then claims for herself the credit for giving her a new name (Hasty 1986a: 254). Alyssa Dinega (2001: 57-71) has also analysed Tsvetaeva’s poems to Akhmatova in this vein. See also Faryno 1985: 393-394.
Руки в землю хотят – от плеч!
Зубы щебень хотят – в опилки!..
Вместе плакать и вместе лечь!
Воспалаюсь ум мой пылкий...

Точно в ноздри и губы – пыль
Геркуланума... Вяну... Слепну...
Ипполит, это хуже пил!
Это сушу песка и пепла!

Это слепень в раскрытый плач
Раны плещущей... Слепень злится...
Это – красною раной вскачь
Запаленная кобылица!

Ипполит! Ипполит! Спрячь!
В этом пеплуме – как в склепе.
Есть Элизиум – для – кляч:
Живодерня! – Палит слепень!

Ипполит! Ипполит! В плен!
Это в перси, в мой ключ жаркий,
Ипполитова вза-мен
Лепестково – ключ Гарпий!

Ипполит! Ипполит! Пить!
Сын и пасынок? Со-общник!
Это лава – взамен плит
Под ступнею! – Олимп взропщет?

Олимпийцы?! Их взгляд спящ!
Небожителей – мы – лепим!
Ипполит! Ипполит! В плащ!
В этом пеплуме – как в склепе!

Ипполит, утоли...

(SP 1990: 322-323.)

The “hidden terror” evoked by the speaker in the first stanza portends
the tragic dénouement of Phaedra’s incestuous and forbidden love, but can
also imply a re-evaluation of passion by the speaker. Phaedra’s
experience of unrequited passion is depicted using brutal and painful
imagery, generated from the first stanza by Hippolytus’s name – the
name contains the essence of the object of Phaedra’s love, this horrible
passion inducing Phaedra’s torments and illness. The fever and the outright pain of the first stanzas gain an aggressive tone in the third stanza, as Phaedra’s hands are reaching the ground and her teeth want to grind stone to pieces. This imagery is reminiscent of a prisoner’s attempts to break out from the confines of his cell, and the overt allusion to a crypt (sklep) further foregrounds the imminent danger of Phaedra’s love.

The torturous physical imagery apparent throughout the cycle is reflected in the metaphors of the horse and gadfly. Tsvetaeva chooses pejorative terms in this instance; kobylitsa, mare, is still neutral, but kliacha signifies a worn-out, tortured hack. The image underlines Phaedra’s suffering and her hopeless situation. The introduction of the horse-and-rider imagery in the cycle, emphasised in the second poem in connection with the speaker’s self-affirmation, can be interpreted as an anticipation of the forthcoming tragedy, Hippolytus’s death caused by his own horses. On the other hand, the wound paining the mare expands to a symbol of the distorted and tormenting passion induced by the gods in the speaker. However, the wound also contains creative contents, as it is often evoked in the context of a marking, unalterably impregnating its carrier.

These implications are more in evidence in the latter part of the cycle, but they can also be found underlying the poem “Zhaloba”. The wound is a symbol of Phaedra’s destructive passion, induced by the divinities, but there is also the implication that it is a permanent mark of a poetic fate. The danger and threat liken Phaedra’s fate to that of the poet, a captive of immaterial, creative forces according to the transcendent plot.

Interestingly, in the sixth stanza the tonality of the speaker’s lament seems to change. Whereas the poem’s first five stanzas are governed by a plaintive and desperate tone, in the sixth stanza the speaker urges Hippolytus to hide her. This plea is expressed in more revengeful tones, arising from an image of emprisonment. It surges from the speaker herself, who says her attire is like a crypt. This crypt, evidently, alludes to Phaedra’s role and position as the stepmother of Hippolytus and the wife of Theseus. Phaedra expresses a similar desire for disembodiment as

---

76 As can be seen, for instance, in the poem “Ne nado ee otklikat’”, written one month before the Phaedra cycle in February 1923.

77 This particular image recalls Osip Mandelshtam’s Phaedracycle:

“Как этих покрывал и этого убора
Мне пышность тяжела средь моего позора!”
(Mandel’shtam 1993: 118.)
the Sibyl; nevertheless it is exactly this physical torment and the pain of unrequited passion which propel her towards self-expression.

The revengeful images in the poem emphasise the destructive side of passion, consuming its object. Even Phaedra’s evocations of the Harpy’s beak and imprisonment relegate the addressee Hippolytus to the role of victim – yet at the same time, Phaedra herself is victimised by her divinely induced passion. Here, Phaedra joins the line of strong, female speakers in Tsvetaeva’s poetry, addressing the weaker male. The concept of assertive, powerful and all-encompassing female desire, overwhelming its addressees, appears repeatedly in Tsvetaeva’s poetry of the 1920s.

Phaedra characterises Hippolytus as “son and stepson”, which emphasises his youth and inferiority as opposed to her, who is clearly more powerful in her suffering. Phaedra thus dominates the poem, just as she seeks to dominate Hippolytus in Tsvetaeva’s appropriation. (See also Thomson 1989b: 66).

---

78 Elena Aizenshtein (2000: 101) notes that the image of the Harpy can contain an allusion to Pasternak’s poem “Vokzal”, although she doesn’t present a thorough comparison of the poems in question.

79 Examples in Posle Rossii are the Hamlet–Ophelia poems, where the virginal and indecisive Hamlet is reproached by the affirmative Ophelia for his lack of passion and his scornful attitude towards love. The three Hamlet poems are “Ofelia – Gamletu” (1923, SP 1990: 321, “Ofelia – v zashchitku korolevy” (1923, SP 1990: 321-322) and “Dialog Gamleta s sovest’iu” (1923, SP 1990: 345). For an indepth analysis of the three Hamlet poems, especially from the point of view of creation, see Hasty 1996: 56-82. Interestingly, “Ofelia – Gamletu”, written only days before the Phaedra cycle, even evokes the same adjectives for Hamlet as Phaedra does for Hippolytus: Devstvennik and Zhenonenavistnik (virgin and woman-hater). These two male counterparts are thus rendered negative for their lack of passion, which distances them from the realm of the living, who embrace love and creation. Ophelia, again, functions as the poet’s mask. The Hamlet–Ophelia poems and “Zhaloba” form a lyrical reply to Pasternak, empowering female desire over indecisive male addressees. See also Thomson 1989b: 65-66. Even Theseus in Ariadna can be paralleled to these weaker male heroes, even though his growth in the tragedy is incontestable.

80 The antithetical and charged relationship of an all-encompassing stepmother and a passive, weak stepson appears also in the poema “Tsar’-Devitsa” (1920). The stepmother’s aroused eroticism is contrasted with the tsarevich’s pronounced lack of interest in women. (See Kroth 1979: 573.) Tsvetaeva herself envisioned a link between the poema’s czarevich and Hippolytus in her letter to Aleksandr Bakhrahh in July 1923:

Да мой жüngling никого не любит. Я только таких и люблю, он любит гусли. Он брат молодому Давиду, и еще больше – Ипполиту (вместо гуслей – кони!). Вы думаете – я так же не могла написать Федру? (NST: 184.)
The poem’s feminine imagery adds to the creative implications of Phaedra’s unrequited love. In addition to the obvious sexual connotations of the poem’s image of the “hot source” of Phaedra’s passion, a poetic interpretation is also forwarded. The creative essence in Tsvetaeva’s oeuvre is at times intertwined with the feminine body and even likened to childbirth. Naturally, the motherly connotations are in this poem complicated by the passionate stance of the stepmother. There is also a connection between the feminine “hot source” of the speaker’s bosom and the aspiration towards retribution and affirmation of her own strength, professed in the final four stanzas of the first poem. Phaedra’s emotions range from tormenting passion to violence, forming clear parallels between an all-encompassing, even destructive eros and the desire for creation.

The dimension of fate underlies the poem, enhancing the tragic outcome of Phaedra’s passion and suggesting that she is not solely to blame for her destructive emotions. This overwhelming passion is compared to an ungovernable natural phenomenon. For instance, the evocation of the city of Herculaneum, destroyed by a volcanic eruption, brings a dimension of unpreventable tragedy to Phaedra’s lust, along with its erotic connotations. The lava, appearing at the end of the poem, repeats this volcanic metaphor, enhancing the destructive outcome of forbidden love. In general, volcanic imagery in Tsvetaeva’s oeuvre is

---

81 For instance, the cycle “Provoda”, written a couple of days after the Phaedra cycle, closes with a comparison between the birth of a poem and a child, stating the ultimate predilection of transcendent, eternal poetry over the physical, earthbound offspring:

/.../
Знай, что чудо
Недр – под полой, живое чадо:

Песнь! С этим первенцем, что пуше
Всех первенцев и всех Рахилей...
Недр достовернейшую гущу
Я мнимостями пересилю!
(SP 1990: 331.)

82 The image of a volcano is repeated a little later in Tsvetaeva’s oeuvre in the poem “Rashchelina”, evoking the images of Etna and Empedocles. Even there it can be read as a symbol of destructive desire, capturing its object and keeping him imprisoned:

Сочетавшись с тобой, как Этна
С Эмпедоклом... Успи, свидетел!
А домашним скажи, что тщетно:
Грудь своих мертвецов не выдаст.
connected with powerful emotions and sexual connotations, appearing especially in her mature work. Bearing in mind that creativity, according to the plot of transcendence in Tsvetaeva’s folklore poèmes, is also potentially destructive, a parallel is formed between the poetic ethos and the Greek gods, empowering or destroying mortals at will. Phaedra’s passion is engendered by the divinities, and, similarly to the creative ethos, it is not a matter of choice for the persona. The image of lava beneath one’s feet in the eighth stanza with its emphasis on treacherousness and volatility can be interpreted as an expression of imminent danger, procured by the unlawful emotion. Even the images of cliff and wave, opening the poem, carry connotations of fate and creation.\footnote{For instance, in Tsvetaeva’s memoirs of the poet and painter Maksimilian Voloshin Zhivoe o zhivom (1932), the cliff, the cave and the waves appear connected with Orpheus and a concrete locus in the Crimean landscape, a cleft providing a hidden and mythical pathway to the antique bard, the ultimate poet. See also Hasty 1996: 234-235.} In the final complete stanza the speaker denies the divinities the right to judge her tormenting emotions, indicating that even the gods are constricted by the mortals and remain passive facing their fates.\footnote{The affirmation “nebozhitelei – my – lepim!” can be interpreted as an acknowledgement of power, a certain hubris in which the mortal speaker is superposed to any unearthly divinity. On the other hand, there are also Biblical allusions in this statement, bearing in mind that the lepit’ verb is usually used in the context of forming something out of clay, thus indicating an implicit parallel with the creation of man. The roles are thus reversed and the speaker-creator-poet is the one creating the divinities.}

The entire poem intertwines the imagery of Phaedra’s external surroundings (the cliff, the wave, the dust and the sand) with physical imagery (the wounded mare, Phaedra’s hands, teeth, lips). In its entirety, the poem discusses the dialectics of the physical and the spiritual, viewing physical torment as giving impetus to creative effort. Implicitly discussing the emotional pain of being abandoned by the fellow poet Pasternak, on the surface the first poem professes the need to be freed from emotional agony through the physical satisfaction of passion. However, implicit in the poem’s metaphors is acknowledgement of power and a desire to reach the addressee through one’s own creative abilities.

---

(SP 1990: 347.)
The common theme shared by the poem “Rashchelina” and the Phaedracycle is release from a lover and transformation of suffering into power (Thomson 1989b: 72).
The first poem of the Phaedracycle is deeply rooted in the Classical persona’s desperate, yet powerful emotions. The torturous images of pain and suffering set the scene for an apparent change of tonality in the second poem, which evidences the speaker’s desire to depart from the physical plane and strive towards transcendence and spirituality.

2.2. Aspiring to the Transcendent

The second poem is construed as a letter from Phaedra to Hippolytus and even entitled “Poslanie”. An important biographical background to the poem is its position within the Tsvetaeva-Pasternak correspondence. As testified by the order of the letters, Tsvetaeva embarked on the writing of “Poslanie” after receiving Pasternak’s letter of 6 March 1923, indicating his imminent departure with his wife from Berlin to Russia (see DNV 2004: 44-45). Tsvetaeva’s reply on 9 March indicates that her traveling to Berlin before Pasternak’s departure is impossible, due to family circumstances and the difficulties of getting a visa (DNV 2004: 46). Even if Tsvetaeva’s only choice was to admit the facts, the emotional outcome of Pasternak’s departure was incontestable, as the letter testifies:

A теперь просто: я живой человек, и мне ОЧЕНЬ больно. Где-то на высотах себя — нет, в глубине, в сердцевине — боль. Эти дни (сегодня 9-ое) до Вашего отъезда я буду очень мучиться. (DNV 2004: 48.)

This situation and the emotions it prompted are reflected in the second poem of the “Fedra” cycle, completed on 11 March. This poem can justly be read as Tsvetaeva’s send-off to her fellow poet, discussing her own position and her longing for an equal counterpart, but also professing the creative energy springing from the physical torments of unrequited love. The title signals a lofty, elevated atmosphere, which can be opposed to the first poem whose imagery was much more physical. Bearing the biographical context in mind, the poem can be read as an acknowledgement of emotions towards its addressee, although it expands to encompass the more profound problematics of poetry and self-expression, as such departing from the mythological context.

85 Signifying a message or an epistle, the title evokes strong Biblical connotations.
ПОСЛАНИЕ

Ипполиту от Матери – Федры – Царицы – весть. Прихотливому мальчику, чья красота, как воск От державного Феба, от Федры бежит... Итак, Ипполиту от Федры: стенание нежных уст.

Утоли мою душу! (Нельзя, не коснувшись уст. Утолить нашу душу! Нельзя, припадая к устам, Не припасть и к Психе, порхающей гостье уст... Утоли мою душу: итак, утоля уста.

Ипполит, я устала... Блудницам и жрицам – стыд! Не простое бестыдство к тебе вопиет! Просты Только речи и руки... За трепетом уст и рук Есть великая тайна, молчанье на ней как перст.


(Не своей ли?) – Сумей же! Смелей же! Нежней же! Чем В вощаную дошечку – не смуглого ль сердца воск?! – Ученическим стилем знаки врезать... О пусть Ипполитову тайну устами прочтет твоя

Ненасытная Федра...

(SP 1990: 323-324.)

The androgynous treatment of Hippolytus is again in evidence. At the beginning of the poem, Hippolytus is described in quasi-feminine terms and appears incontestably weaker than the speaker: he is objectified and characterised as a boy, a virgin and a beauty. The presentation of the hero as a boy instead of, for instance, a warrior makes Phaedra in contrast appear more powerful. Significantly, in the first line of the poem Phaedra characterises herself first as Mother, only then as Phaedra, and thirdly as
Queen, thus revealing the persona’s search for an appropriate definition for herself in relation to the addressee. As we shall see, she later settles for the identity of a rider-Amazon, which parallels the identity of the hero. In addition to being characterised as a virgin and an adolescent, Hippolytus is also evoked as a rider and a hater of comfort, elements in the original myth: the hero’s cunning way with horses was stated many times, as was his ascetic way of life as a hunter, worshipping Artemis. However, the cycle does not evoke these details of his character, but leaves them aside, thus highlighting the youth and “boyishness” of the addressee.86 The first stanza is detached and general; Phaedra, the speaker, is referred to by name, not by the 1st person pronoun “I”. This parallels the tone of a traditional epistle, containing an introductory address at the beginning before turning to the discussion of one’s own thoughts. The characterisation of Hippolytus as a “capricious boy” adds an emotional colouring, departing from the detached, external point of view. This tone can perhaps be explained as an intertwining of the authorial voice and the persona’s utterance.

Physical metaphors are calmer in “Poslanie” than the painful imagery of wounds and suffocation in the first poem. The body is no longer viewed as a prison or a site of torment. Here, the most prominent physical images are those of lips and breasts, images which lie at the center of Tsvetaeva’s whole poetic worldview, where they are often intertwined. The images of lips and breasts in her poetry often unite the poles of the physical and the transcendent, alluding to sexuality or mortal love (as in the poem “Evridika – Orfeiu” which will be discussed in the next Section), or, on the other hand, carrying connotations of creativity and poetry (as in the cycle “Ariadna”, treated in the next Chapter). Both ideas are present here. The speaker of the second poem harbours a more spiritual approach to her tormenting emotions, attempting several times to reach the soul of Hippolytus (or offer him her own soul) precisely through contact with his lips. The physical consummation of passion would, in Phaedra’s view, enable the spiritual union of the two. The images of “touching the lips”, of “quenching the lips” and “the shivering of lips and hands” are all indicative of hidden, repressed passion. The

86 Here the Phaedra cycle clearly differs from the subsequent lyrical tragedy Fedra, where the hero’s governing characteristics are exactly those of hunter and electee of Artemis.
persona’s wish to “hear Hippolytus’s babble at his very lips” emphasises Phaedra’s attempted motherly attitude, all the while revealing sexual connotations. The poem’s speaker balances between (attempted) spirituality and (existing, but repressed) physical passion, indecisively turning from one pole to the other. For instance, a repeated wish to deny “ordinary” physical passion is professed several times in connection with whores and promiscuous women. Phaedra clearly wishes to see her emotions as something purer than carnal lust, emphasising the spiritual side of her love (perceptable in the repeated reference to Psyche, the emblem of the soul) and downright denying that her passion should be regarded as lust.  

A distinction between ordinary physical lust and using passion as a vehicle for attaining the spiritual Eros is evident here. Alluding to the soul, the evocation of Psyche brings a higher dimension to Phaedra’s passion. The inclusion of the Eros myth in the poem alludes to the transcendent world, the spiritual dimension which Phaedra attempts to reach. According to the Symbolist interpretation of the Platonic ladder, however, this ideal realm is often reached through the consummation of physical passion. This is also Phaedra’s wish, and is why she seeks to reach Hippolytus primarily through contact with her lips (along with physical contact, also implicitly connoting speech and poetry).

In the second stanza the identification of the speaker becomes more ambivalent. An inserted statement in brackets can signal the presence of an authorial voice, further balanced by the aforementioned creative connotations of Psyche. Even the change from the first person singular moi to the first person plural nashu reveals a more collective and general perspective. Here the “we” evokes the entire, generalized passion of all womankind, seeking unity with the loved one and affirming again that

---

87 The Psyche myth is often used by Tsvetaeva for self-mythologizing purposes, as argued by Alyssa Dinega (2000). In Tsvetaeva’s epistolary oeuvre this myth often appears juxtaposed to the Biblical heroine Eve, whose role is to emphasise the corporeal, overtly sexual realm. An excerpt from Tsvetaeva’s letters shows spiritual and corporeal love as antithetical, through the opposition of Psyche and Eve:

Пойми меня: ненасытная исконная ненависть Психеи к Еве, от которой во мне нет ничего, а от Психеи — все. Психею — на Еву! Пойми водопадную высоту моего презрения. (Психею на Психею не меняют.) Душу на тело. (SS 6: 263.)

88 For a thorough discussion on the position of Psyche in Tsvetaeva’s oeuvre of the period, see Voitekhovich 2005: 75-77.
only through physical contact can the spiritual dimension be attained. A similar case of an inserted utterance belonging to an external source appears in the fifth stanza. There the word “Ustydis’”, placed in quotation marks, signals the intrusion of an external voice and places the persona in a dialogic position, compelled to react that it is too late (– No ved’ pozdno!). This “Shame on you!” can be interpreted in several ways. It may be the persona’s interior commentary to herself, seeking to halt the confession before it is too late. On the other hand, it could envision Hippolytus’s reaction to the confession (either in prolepsis or analepsis). The judgement could also be attributed to a common crowd, judging Phaedra’s passion.

From the tension between the physical passion and the aspiration towards the transcendent arises the theme of self-expression and poetry. What was hidden in the first poem of the cycle, or only sporadically hinted at through the images of empowerment, becomes more overt in the second part. Already its title announces that the poem’s main focus is on voicing the emotions and self-expression, a letter to the object of Phaedra’s passion. As we saw in the previous Section, the first poem of the cycle warns of the danger of losing the creative essence through the imagery of suffocation and blindness, and the second poem continues this problematics. The imagery of “the moaning of lips”, “the shivering lips” and most of all the “great secret” and “silence” all evoke the difficulty of self-expression alongside their obvious sexual connotations. The entire structure of the poem reflects the creative process with its repeated colloquialisms, rewording Phaedra’s message (for instance, the repetition of the word “Itak”, reminiscent of oral expression). The speaker is constantly changing her mind in search of a more precise expression, denying what she has said earlier and seeking more adequate wording. The image of “the great secret” (velikaia taina) of the third stanza can be interpreted in several ways. Firstly, it can be read as Phaedra’s secret passion, the unlawful emotions she harbours for her stepson which have to be hidden from others. Secondly, the image’s elevated style evokes a positive assessment of her passion, which the persona wishes to regard as something higher than carnal lust. Thirdly, according to the cycle’s biographical background and Tsvetaeva’s ongoing creative exchange with Boris Pasternak, the velikaia taina can allude to the emotions the author harboured for her “corresponding friend and brother beneath the
connotations, which further stresses the complex intertwining of Eros
creation. It should be noted that the stylus also contains erotic
paralleled with the dark heart, emphasising the interplay of emotions and
mind. They mainly signify all kinds of non-verbal shouting (such as
moaning or howling)\(^9^0\), as well as insecurity (such as the shivering lips or
the blabber of lips), silence or inadequate action (such as the image in the
final stanza of carving signs with an apprentice’s pen). The image of
carving signs in the wax of the heart is especially interesting, since it
overtly suggests the difficulty of creation, and at the same time the
impossibility of entirely reaching the loved one, indicating that a cleft
remains between the two individuals. At the same time, however, there is
an implied Biblical allusion; as noted by Elena Aizenshtein (2000: 354) it
paraphrases Psalm 21:15: \textit{serdtse moe sdelalos’, kak vosk, rastaialo posredi
vnutrennosti moei.}\(^9^1\) Although the whole Biblical extract evokes the
subject’s torments and faith in God in a time of trouble, this verse
describes the utter weakness resulting from pain and anguish. The
images of torment are very similar to those found in Tsvetaeva’s cycle,
and could be seen as indicating a certain loss of self. However, the
outcome of the waxen heart image in Tsvetaeva’s poem seems to indicate
the opposite: the plate on which the apprentice’s \textit{stylus} writes is
paralleled with the dark heart, emphasising the interplay of emotions and
creation. It should be noted that the stylus also contains erotic
connotations, which further stresses the complex intertwining of Eros

\(^{89}\) See her dedication to her collection of verse \textit{Remeslo}, sent to Pasternak in 1923:
\textit{Moemu zaochnomu drugu – zaoblachnomu bratu – Borisu Pasternaku”} (Aizenshtein
2000: 104).

\(^{90}\) Such imagery is prominent even in “Provoda”, treating further Tsvetaeva’s
problematic stance towards Pasternak’s leaving Europe for Moscow. In the
cycle’s first poem, the fragmentary and sometimes enigmatic howls of the
intertwining voices are clearly connected with the questions of creation and
present a threat to the poet. As stated by several scholars, the first poems of the
cycle deal with the poet’s concern of guarding her own voice in a polyphonic
contemporary world and in the crossfire of traditional heroines and their
suffering (see Dinega 2000: 562-564; Vitins 1987: 145). I will discuss this poem in
the next chapter.

\(^{91}\) In the \textit{King James Bible}, these lines are found in Psalm 22:14: “I am poured out
like water. All my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax; it is melted
within me.”
and creativity in the poem. Despite the evident efforts to utter her thoughts and create a letter for Hippolytus, Phaedra (and, implicitly, the poet) seems doubtful of her success in the end, recognising the inadequacy of her wording and claiming that her pen is only that of an apprentice.

The tragic fate inherent in the myth is foregrounded in the second poem of the cycle. The uncontrollability of the events engendered by Phaedra’s passion and the forces of the divine are implied in the horse-and-rider imagery. For instance, Phaedra’s characterisation of Hippolytus as a rider in the fourth stanza is repeated in the fifth stanza’s affirmation “I am a rider too” (la naezdnitsa tozhe!), seeking to establish a balance between herself and Hippolytus. An allusion to the Amazons, the horse-women, figuring frequently in Tsvetaeva’s work of the 1920s, also underly the imagery. The breast imagery of the poem further conveys the existence of the Amazon symbol behind Phaedra’s self-assertion, at the same time alluding to the female line of inheritance. The Amazon represents a desired female role, warrior, which also alludes to Hippolytus’s roots. Phaedra’s evocation “I am a rider too” expresses the desire that she and Hippolytus would be equal, as well as her wish to embrace a different female fate. The image of the rider can also be seen as containing allusions to creation, evoking the authorial perspective alongside the aspiration towards self-affirmation.

The horses appear in the fifth stanza as symbols of fate, alluding to events already in motion, leading towards doom. As the entire fifth stanza insists, the tragedy is unpreventable and, even though striving to express her emotions to Hippolytus, Phaedra is well aware of the destruction that will ensue. The “last splash” again evokes sea imagery, alluding to the beginning of the cycle with its cliff and wave symbols.

---

92 The Amazons, cutting off their left breast in order to be able to shoot better from horseback, are among the most central androgynous figures in Tsvetaeva’s oeuvre and are perceived as highly charged. See Kroth 1979: 569, Gove 1977: 247.
93 The female tradition and Hippolytus’s relationship to his deceased Amazon mother are further developed in Tsvetaeva’s tragedy Fedra, discussed in Chapter IV.
94 The horse-and-rider image has a creative connotation in Tsvetaeva’s poetry. Examples of this are, for instance, the courageous, male-like Tsar-maiden from her 1920 poëma “Tsar’-Devitsa” and the poetic genius of the poëma “Na krasnom kone” (“On a Red Steed”; 1921), arriving from the heavens on a fiery horse to retrieve the speaker.
rooted in the concept of poetic fate. Furthermore, the “steep crest” (отвесный гребень) extends this metaphor, гребень, in Russian being used both for the sea wave, the hill and, interestingly, the horse’s mane. Implicitly, гребень also forms a parallel with the word ступень, hinting once again at the existence of the ladder of Eros underlying Phaedra’s monologue. Phaedra’s leap from the heights into dust is a courageous embracing of fate. She has already lost control over her passion, which is evoked by the metaphors of the bolting horses and the leap down from the cliff. The approaching destruction, however, is given a specifically creative content. Firstly, the imagery of the union of the speaker and addressee highlights the erotic. In Phaedra’s leap, overwhelming, dangerous passion is again in evidence, as well as the embracing of one’s fate, heedless of the tragedy it may bring. Through a passionate union, the speaker desires to attain the spiritual, transcendent dimension. The inserted voice (Не своei ли?!? ) opening the fourth stanza emphasises the equality of the couple in the speaker’s mind. The passionate queen and Hippolytus have merged to the extent that she no longer treats them as separate beings. This creates an equality between the two, even if the poem ends in Phaedra’s signature, where she still characterises herself as ненасытная (insatiable). The cycle leaves overt the result of Phaedra’s plea for consummation, which adds to its creative potential.

The Phaedra cycle derives its energy from the dialectics of the physical and the spiritual, of eros and creation. Perhaps more centrally than any of Tsvetaeva’s other Classical personae, it is Phaedra who expresses the individual’s difficulties balancing these poles. Read in the context of the original myth, Phaedra’s tormented emotions are foregrounded. The physical, painful imagery of the first poem becomes somewhat calmer in the second, even if the ensuing destruction and tragedy are apparent even there. According to Platonic logic, the consummation of physical passion is a necessary prerequisite for attaining the spiritual, transcendent realm; tragically, the denial of the consummation of earthly love also signifies that the speaker is denied its immaterial experience. From the realization of this underlying rule springs the desperate tone of the speaker’s address in the entire cycle. In the end Phaedra’s lot is death, which is envisioned as a desperate leap from a cliff. Correspondingly, it is precisely this unconsummated desire that propels her to transcend the boundaries of the material world through death, an act envisioned as
creative. The next Classical persona, Eurydice, complements Phaedra, since she exists entirely in the spiritual realm and re-evaluates physical eros from that perspective.

3. EURYDICE

Tsvetaeva’s source for the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice is Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Ovid focuses on Orpheus’s heroic descent into the netherworld and only portrays Eurydice as a feeble, indecisive spirit, already irrevocably separated from physical existence. Eurydice remains silent, in contrast to the active hero, who expresses himself poetically and even moving the lords of the underworld with his song (see Ovid 1961: 246-247). By contrast, Tsvetaeva’s poem “Evridika – Orfeiu”, written on 23 March 1923, gives the traditionally passive Eurydice a voice of her own, allowing her to utter her dissatisfaction with Orpheus, who arrives to disturb her peace in the realm of the dead. The modernist predecessors underlying Tsvetaeva’s treatment of the Eurydice tradition are especially Valerii Briusov’s poem “Orfei i Evridika” (1903-04) and Rainer Maria Rilke’s lyric “Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes” (1904).

Close readings of Tsvetaeva’s Eurydice are numerous. K.A. Medvedeva (1974) examines the cycles in the context of the poems on the Sibyl and Orpheus, providing only a superficial view on the works in question. Bettina Eberspächer (1987: 127, 135) views Eurydice as a

---

95 Orpheus figures centrally in Tsvetaeva’s poetry of the 1920s, for instance in the poems “Tak plyli: golova i lira” (1921, SP 1990: 241), “Po naberezhnym, gde sedye derev’ia” (1923, SS 2: 229) and “Est’ schastlivtsy i schastlivitsy” (1934, SP 1990: 656), which all portray the Greek bard in his traditional role as the quintessential singer and poet.
96 I am compelled to disagree with Michael Naydan (1984: 167), who claims that Tsvetaeva’s Eurydice does not actively control her destiny compared to Phaedra and Ophelia. In my opinion she can fully be paralleled with the two, as she is presented in the poem taking an active and independent stance.
97 Tsvetaeva’s appropriation has important points of contact with both these authors. Briusov’s poem (1973: 385-386) has a similar dialogic construction, yet giving voice both to Orpheus and to Eurydice while trying to exit from Hades. However, his Eurydice is a weaker speaker than Tsvetaeva’s, and the leading presence in the poem is again Orpheus. What is nevertheless interesting is Eurydice’s referring to Orpheus as her brother, which links the poem with Tsvetaeva’s. Rilke’s version of Eurydice (Rilke 1962: 300-301) shares the same tendency towards asexuality as Tsvetaeva’s persona, and the poem also contains similar imagery to Tsvetaeva’s. See also Hasty 1996: 30, 52; Shevelenko 2002: 250.
persona irrevocably separated from the physical realm, emphasising the reaction of the speaker towards the living Orpheus. The most thorough and exhaustive reading of Tsvetaeva’s Eurydice in the context of the Orphic myth was conducted by Olga Hasty (1996: 29-55). In her reading, Hasty emphasises the interrelations of the physical and the spiritual realm, of eros and creation, informing Tsvetaeva’s creative philosophy. In contrast to previous readings of the poem, Hasty shows that Eurydice is not irrevocably separated from her former, physical existence, but that Orpheus’s appearance in the netherworld agitates her profoundly, which is mirrored in the poem’s structure. This testifies to the complex and profound interdependence of eros and spirituality for poetic creation in Tsvetaeva’s conception. Irina Shevelenko (2002: 249-251) situates the poem in Tsvetaeva’s creative dialogue with Boris Pasternak, also identifying the existence of an authorial voice behind the voice of the persona. Relying on Hasty’s and Shevelenko’s insightful readings, I shall focus on the tension between the body and disembodiment in Tsvetaeva’s Eurydice and on the implications of this dialectics on creativity. I shall also attempt to point out the points of convergence with the Classical personae discussed above. The tension between physical passion and the spiritual essence, evoked by the Tsvetaevan Phaedra, also shapes the poem discussed here. From the perspective of the netherworld, Eurydice’s stance on the earthly realm naturally differs from the passionate queen discussed in the previous Section. In the same way as the Sibyl, encompassed by the divinity and thus having left her former life, Tsvetaeva’s Eurydice professes the loss of body in death, denying her retrieval back to life. This persona exemplifies the position of a speaker who has already reached a new understanding and perspective on mortal existence, viewing her former life from the immaterial beyond.

3.1. The Denial of the Earthly

In Tsvetaeva’s appropriation, Eurydice comments on her freedom of existence in Hades and says she does not want to leave that realm.98 Her monologue transforms Orpheus’s heroic attempt to retrieve her back to

---

98 Eurydice is not the first Tsvetaevan poetic persona who is reluctant to return to the living. She is related to Tsvetaeva’s version of the Biblical Jairus’s daughter. Even this persona is utterly reluctant to obey Christ’s call and return to the physical world from the realm of death. On the parallels between Eurydice and “Doch’ Iaira”, see Hasty 1996: 39-43.
life into a self-willed, importune act. However, as has been discussed, her denial of the earthly is not total; judging by the agitation evident in the rhythmical structure of the poem’s third, fourth and fifth stanzas, she still remembers her past passion, which makes her denial all the more tragic.99

Эвридика – Орфею:

Для тех, отженивших последние ключья
Покрова (ни уст, ни ланит!..),
О, не превышение ли полномочий
Орфей, нисходящий в Аид?

Для тех, отрешённых последние звенья
Земного... На ложе из лож
Сложившим великую ложь лицезренья,
Внутрь зрящим – свидание нож.

Уплечено же – всеми розами крови
За этот просторный покой
Бессмертья...
До самых летейских верховий
Любивший – мне нужен покой

Беспамятности... Ибо в призрачном доме
Сем – призрак ты, сущий, а явь –
Я, мёртвая... Что же скажу тебе, кроме:
– “Ты это забудь и оставь!”

Ведь не растревожишь же! Не повлекусь!
Ни рук ведь! Ни уст, чтоб припасть
Устами! – С бессмертьем змеиным укусом
Кончается женская страсть.

Уплечено же – вспомни мои крики! –
За этот последний простор.
Не надо Орфею сходить к Эвридике
И братьям тревожить сестер.

(SP 1990: 324.)

The heightened generality of the speaker’s address has already been discussed by Irina Shevelenko. Characterising the poem as Eurydice’s monologue (as indicated by the poem’s title, ending in a colon), Shevelenko points out that the third person plural governing the first two stanzas creates an effect of overall generality of experience. She also identifies the existence of “an authorial voice behind the scene” (автorskii golos “за кадром”), perceived most clearly in the treatment of the themes, which cannot be appointed solely to the voice of the persona. (Shevelenko 2002: 250-251). The poem’s first two stanzas are resounding, generalizing the netherworld existence and emphasising the fact that Eurydice is now a member of the group of spirits. Implicitly stressing the opposition between life and death, the speaker demonstrates the position of someone who has already crossed the boundary between the material and the immaterial.

The poem’s imagery unites Biblical and Classical allusions. The archaic verbs отшеник’ and отришик’, belonging to the Church Slavonic lexicon, evoke the turn away from earthly life. Eurydice starts her monologue by describing the irreconciliable rift between earthly existence and the immaterial afterlife, where she now is. The metaphor “last shreds of the shroud” can thus allude to Eurydice’s living body, whose physical constraints she has now left behind, becoming pure spirit. This position is further emphasised in the statement about not having lips or cheeks. The shroud can also allude to the limited perspective of the physical realm. Passage into death irrevocably changes one’s relationship to the body, as the spirits acquire new understanding in the immaterial beyond.

The second stanza evokes the speaker’s altered perception of earthly existence, subjected to a negative assessment when it is viewed from the underworld. Earthly ties are portrayed as restraints – звено implies, alongside its abstract significance of tie, the rings of a chain binding the mortals to Earth. In the second stanza, Hades is characterised in

---

100 The metaphor can be interestingly paralleled with Phaedra’s evocation of her attire (and, consequently, body) as a prison in the poem “Zhaloba”, discussed previously: В этом пеплум – как в склепе!

101 The characteristics of the physical realm, professed by Eurydice, are very similar to those forwarded by the Sibyl in the third poem of the “Sivilla” cycle. Both of the personae present the physical realm in terms of both temporal and physical constraints, creating an opposition with the atemporal expanses of the beyond. Of course, the difference is that the Sibyl acquires these expanses
Biblical tones by the speaker as the “bed of beds”, evidently signifying a final resting place, yet with sexual implications. A characterisation of earthly existence, lozh litsezreniia connotes the futility of mortal perception and remains opposed to the novel vision acquired in the realm of death. Even the futility of physical mortal relationships as professed by the speaker is implied in this metaphor.\(^{102}\) As the speaker of the poem argues, earthly existence is forgotten on the Hadean plains, whereas the emergence of Orpheus in this unlimited peace is evoked as a knife, cutting into the peace of the spirits. The residents of Hades are referred to as “inward-seeing”, which attributes a clearly creative role to the deceased spirits. This “inward sight” links Eurydice to the Tsvetaeva’s Sibyl, who also seeks inspiration within herself.

### 3.2. Balancing the Physical and the Spiritual

In the third stanza, Eurydice’s tone of adress changes significantly when she starts to express herself through the first person pronoun “I”. It is here, argues Olga Hasty, that her insecurity towards Orpheus’s descent and apparition in front of her in his flesh-and-blood existence starts to bring her off balance. This agitation is also underlined by the poem’s rhythmic structure, with the \textit{enjambments} breaking off the lines and stanzas in the most unexpected places. The most striking of these enjambments is the one between stanzas three and four, creating a break before and after the word “amnesia” (bespamiatnosti). This rift demonstrates Eurydice’s agitation when she encounters the living Orpheus in the realm of death (Hasty 1996: 47-48). Eurydice overtly pleads for the peace of amnesia, which in itself shows that she still remembers her past life on Earth. She thus becomes a persona existing in an intermediary position between life and death, existence and creation, a poetically charged location in Tsvetaeva’s œuvre.\(^{103}\) Read from the

---

\(^{102}\) This conception parallels that professed by Bacchus somewhat later in \textit{Ariadna}, and it further enhances Eurydice’s otherworldly perspective. However, as shall be discussed, her evaluation of the earthly is more ambivalent than that of the divinity.

\(^{103}\) According to Bettina Eberspächer, Tsvetaeva’s Eurydice illustrates the author’s concept of the irresolvable antinomies between life and poetry. Poetry as such cannot be separated from the poet’s earthly existence and therefore it cannot attain the desired state of transcendent perfection. (Eberspächer 1987: 66)
Platonic perspective, Eurydice has already proceeded through death to a higher understanding of the mortal realm, viewing her past physical life from the perspective of the timeless, immaterial realm. Nevertheless, even physical passion retains its importance, since on the one hand it propels Orpheus’s descent into the netherworld, while on the other hand it prompts Eurydice’s ardent monologue to the bard.

“Eurydice to Orpheus” also contains a significant poetics of reversal. Hades, the traditional netherworld, becomes instead similar to a higher, divine realm. Furthermore, from the altered perspective of the speaker, the poles of life and death are accordingly revised. Eurydice strives to convince Orpheus of the fact that, perceived from the realm of death, he, the living one, is a ghost and she, the deceased, is instead reality. The spondees of the line emphasise the impossibility of recreating the earthly ties of Orpheus and Eurydice in the realm of death (Hasty 1996: 50).

Eurydice’s characterisation of Hades as a “ghostly house” emphasises her straightforward and comfortable relationship with her new realm. Indeed, Eurydice’s denying Orpheus the right to bring her back to life gains intensity in the following lines. In Tsvetaeva’s striking rewriting of the myth, Eurydice bluntly forbids Orpheus from remembering her, orders him to leave her where she is and finally, in the fifth stanza, intensely proclaims that she will not follow him. In order to convince Orpheus, Eurydice continues to emphasise her aphysicality; she no longer has a body and is now pure spirit, which underlines the impossibility of equality with the tangible, living hero.104 The absence of the body is paradoxically expressed in sexual tones – Eurydice claims that she does not have lips or hands, exactly the parts of the human body which often evoke sexual connotations and physical passion in Tsvetaeva’s poetry and which are so central for Phaedra. As discussed by Irina Shevelenko (2002: 251), these lines also contain a clear note of regret in addition to denial. Even if the poem’s speaker has chosen the “peace of amnesia”, she cannot entirely forget the physical passion of her past life as a mortal. Whether Eurydice actually regrets something she has not experienced is left open in the poem; according to Ovid, she died so

127, 135). Irina Shevelenko (2002: 251) interprets Eurydice’s position as “the tragic in-between”.

104 K. A. Medvedeva (1974: 22-24) also notes this absence of body and existence of voice, which she thinks is one of Tsvetaeva’s central poetic oppositions during this period.
suddenly after the marriage to Orpheus that it remains unclear whether their union actually was consummated. Therefore the speaker of Tsvetaeva’s poem actually regrets the mere prospect of physical passion.

The final stanza becomes more balanced, as the speaker returns to the same universal tone of the two first stanzas, reminding Orpheus that she has paid the price for her residence in the underworld and suffered the painful passage of death. The two last lines sound much like a rule which is not to be broken, sketching the relationship of Orpheus and Eurydice in asexual and dispassionate tones. The fact that Orpheus has emerged in the underworld by means of his song is actually proof of his right to be there – the only thing Eurydice strives to prevent is her own return to the world of the living. The generalizing last lines of the poem in fact testify to all the poets’ ties to the spiritual realm and provide, in fact, a justification of Orpheus’s appearance in the netherworld by means of his song. His remaining task is to recreate the immaterial in the creative act, nevertheless keeping it distinct from the physical realm he inhabits (Hasty 1996: 51-52). As Hasty (1996: 54-55) compellingly argues, Eurydice’s monologue highlights the crucial interdependence of eros and creation in Tsvetaeva’s poetic system. As with the other oppositional constructs governing her poetry, even eros and poetry are not reconciled in her verse; instead, they are destined to remain in a position of dynamic tension, which feeds her poetry.

The emphasis given to Eurydice’s free-willed refusal to return to life is rooted in Tsvetaeva’s biography, especially in her non-meeting with Pasternak, which she continually viewed as an incentive for creation. In the much cited extract from Tsvetaeva’s 1926 letter to Boris Pasternak, where she discusses the relationship of Orpheus and Eurydice, the interpretation of the Hadean encounter emphasises the remnants of passion still guiding the heroine’s behaviour:

(Я бы Орфей сумела нанувъ: Не оглядывайся! Оборот Орфея — дело рук Эвридики. (“Рук” — через весь коридор Аида!) Оборот Орфея — либо слепость ее любви, невладение ею (скореи! скореи!) — либо — о, Борис, это страшно — помнишь 1923 год. март. гору, строки: Не надо Орфею сходить к Эвридике И братьям тревожить сестер —)
Notably, even “Evridika – Orfeiu” belongs to the ongoing creative dialogue of the two poets. Sent by Tsvetaeva to Pasternak in a letter in 1924 (DNV 2004: 72), the poem is also tied to the subsequent cycle “Provoda”, as seen in Tsvetaeva’s notebooks (NST 1997: 130). The poem was originally included in “Provoda”, but in the final composition of Posle Rossii it follows the cycle, but is not part of it. Nevertheless “Eurydice to Orpheus” shares many common points with the cycle. Whereas “Provoda”, which I shall return to in the next Chapter, mainly deals with the speaker’s longing and reaching for the addressee, Eurydice by contrast refuses to follow her lover, thus emphasising the independence of the female creative persona. According to the myth, although he loses Eurydice permanently, Orpheus actually gains a poetic union far stronger than any physical union made possible if he had succeeded in retrieving her. Nevertheless, this movement towards disembodiment also governs “Provoda”, which also discusses creation from the point of view of longing and reaching out for the addressee. Having already attained the incorporeal state in the afterlife, Eurydice’s repeated assertion that she does not have hands, lips or cheeks can be interpreted mainly as an attempt to deny the importance of her corporeal existence.

Functioning as the poet’s masks, these Classical personae highlight different aspects of the position of the individual between the physical and the spiritual spheres. The poet frequently has to establish a balance between the demands of her calling and of her own physical being. The Sibyl is arguably the persona with the most obvious ties to creation; the entire cycle reflects the poet’s birth, her atemporal and aphysical existence and her final transcendence into the immaterial, following closely the plot of transcendence from the folklore poèmas. The Sibyl’s
plot of transcendence also remains the closest to the original Platonic conceptions of the soul’s development towards more profound spiritual understanding. Phaedra, by contrast, modifies this scheme as it was instituted by the Symbolists. Shifting importance to physical experience and passion, the cycle as a whole stresses the creative energy derived from unrequited longing. Eurydice, the persona already existing in the transcendent afterlife, also recognises the necessity of physical experience, as seen in her agitation upon encountering Orpheus. The physical and the spiritual, although divided, remain interrelated and interdependent, with the individual creator constantly placed in a dialogue with these realms.

The position of the Classical characters in the cycles “Provoda” and “Ariadna” differs from the personae poems, shifting emphasis to the fragmentation of both the body and the creator’s voice. Nevertheless, the dual division of the world underlies these cycles as well.
III EMPOWERING ABANDONMENT: THE CYCLES

After using Classical heroines as personae, Tsvetaeva turned to using them as images and symbols in the first two poems of her cycle “Provoda”. Here, the Classical heroines appear as voices, intertwining with the voice of the lyrical “I”, creating an interesting erosion of temporality in the poem. The cycle as a whole discusses the speaker’s emotions of abandonment and reaching out for the addressee, though it nevertheless ends with a strong affirmation of creativity. The cycle “Ariadna” continues this discussion of an abandoned woman, though here the point of view is closer to that of the Classical heroine. Discussing two possible interpretations of Theseus’s abandoning his love, the cycle also paves the way for Tsvetaeva’s discussion of this theme in her classical tragedy Ariadna. The cycle declares the speaker’s revengeful position towards the addressee, though it ends with clear implications of transcendence.

Both cycles are part of Tsvetaeva’s poetic dialogue with Boris Pasternak, implicitly discussing his departure for Russia before meeting her, and presenting options for coming to terms with the situation. Especially the first two poems of “Provoda” are prompted by her fellow poet’s departure from Berlin: the first was written on the eve of Pasternak’s announced departure (17 March, 1923), while the second was written on the actual day (18 March, 1923).105 “Ariadna” is temporally further removed from Pasternak’s actual departure, as its first poem was written on 14 April and the second on 21 April. However, it is thematically related to “Provoda”, as it was generated by the same biographical situation. In the cycles, the pain of abandonment enables the individual’s transition to a higher, immaterial stage. The cycles share the tendency to derive creative power from abandonment, and both foreground the movement from the physical to the spiritual, emphasising in the process the fragmentation of the body.

105 In his letter of 6 March 1923, Pasternak wrote that his departure was to take place on 18 March, so their meeting was postponed until 1925 in Weimar. However, he did not actually depart until 21 March (See DNV 2004: 44, 579).
1. “PROVODA”

Tsvetaeva’s ten-poem cycle “Provoda”\textsuperscript{106} (1923) has already been analyzed in depth by many scholars.\textsuperscript{107} I shall focus only on the cycle’s first two poems, since these deploy characters (or voices) from Classical mythology. I shall examine the position of these mythological voices in the poem and discuss how they contribute to the erosion of temporality and physical boundaries. The poem’s Classical heroines have frequently been read as archetypal images of abandonment and unrequited love (see Ciepiela 2002, Vitins 1987: 145, Dinega 2002: 116, Zaslavsky 1998: 166, Thomson 1989b: 67). However, they can also be interpreted through the central theme of the cycle, poetry and creation, and the question of the independence of the “I’s” voice. Creative doubt, expressed by the “I” in the first two poems, is violently affirmed at the end of the cycle, as the torment of abandonment, resulting in physical agony and disembodiment, has enabled the speaker to become a creator. The emotional pain of abandonment that governs the first poems of the cycle is in its continuation translated into creative energy, which is why the cycle ends in a forcefully affirmative position. The first poem’s polyphonic structure even implicitly negates the creative doubts of the authorial voice, with its intertwining mythological voices, eroding temporal and spatial constraints.

\textsuperscript{106} The Russian pun inherent in the title of the cycle has been duly noted by several scholars (Vitins 1987: 144; Zaslavsky 1998: 166; Holl 1996: 33; Dinega 2002: 114). It is also a central structural principle of the work: both significations of the Russian words \textit{provoda} (wires) and \textit{provody} (farewell) are present in the poem, which has often been read as a send-off to Boris Pasternak departing from Europe for the Soviet Union.

\textsuperscript{107} Vitins 1987 examines the cycle through the underlying myth of Psyche and Eros, discussing it in the context of the Tsvetaeva–Pasternak dialogue. This vein of analysis is developed by Dinega 2000 and Dinega 2002, which provide a gender perspective on the poem and stress the independence of the female poet, while also foregrounding the movement towards physical disintegration in the cycle. Zaslavsky 1998 likewise reads the poem in the context of the Pasternak exchange, examining it along with other poems of the period (“Dvoe”, “S morja”). The Pasternak exchange is also the perspective provided by Thomson 1989b. An entirely different approach is offered by Holl 1996, who examines the cycle through Jacques Lacan’s psychology of the birth of language. The first poem’s complicated speaker structure is examined in depth by Waszink 1995.
1.1. Mythical Voices in Polyphony
The first poem of the “Provoda” cycle intertwines the present day setting with the mythical context. It begins with an evocation of telegraph wires, the modern muse. The “I” recognises that these wires now constitute the foundation of the world in the same way that Atlas in Classical mythology used to carry the globe on his shoulders:

Провода

Des Herzens Woge schäumte
nicht so schön empor, und würde
Geist, wenn nicht der alte stumme
Fels, das Schicksal, ihr entgegenstände.

1

Вереницею певчих свай,
Подпирающих Эмпиреи.
Посылаю тебе свой пай
Праха дольного.

По аллее
Вздохов – проволокой к столбу –
Телеграфное: лю–ю–блю...

Умоляю... (печатный бланк
Не вместит! Проводами проще!)
Это – сваи. на них Атлант
Опустил скаковую площадь
Небожителей...

Вдоль свай
Телеграфное: про–о–щай...

Слышишь? Это последний срыв
Глотки сорванной: про–о–стите...
Это – снасти над морем нив,
Атлантический путь тихий:

Выше, выше – и сли–лись

Обернись!.. Даровых больниц
Заунывное: не выйду!
Это – проводами стальных
Проводов – голоса Аида
Удаляющиеся... Даль
Заклинающее: жа–аль...

Пожалейте! (В сем хоре – сей
Различаешь?) В предсмертном крике
Упирающихся страстей –
Дуновение Эвридики:

Через насыпи – и – рвы
Эвридикино: у–у–вы.

Не у–

(SP 1990: 325-326.)

The poem repeats the dichotomous division of the world into the divine, transcendent heights and the mortal lows. The appeal to the addressee opening the poem follows Classical conventions, alluding to the medium of transmitting the message (poetry), and at the same time evoking the realm of the gods (The Empyrean heights). The message itself is humbly characterised as “a portion of valley dust”, which already testifies to its origins in the physical realm instead of the spiritual. This division is also reflected in the imagery. For instance, the telegraph poles and the Empyrean mountain act as intermediaries, connecting the two realms. The mortal, physical world is represented by the valley, inhabited by the speaker and her “dust”, as well as the charity hospitals. In this poem the mortal “I” remains in the concrete, physical world, whereas the telegraph wires take on part of the poet’s mediating role. The image of poetry as dust contains Biblical undertones, signifying something unimportant, transient and perishable, which also creates a parallel with the human body. This image of poetry is in opposition to the Romantic, Pushkinian and Horatian tradition (exegi monumentum) of poetry as an eternal monument outlasting its creator,\(^\text{108}\) and also announces from the beginning the speaker’s doubts about the success of her creative task.

The poet’s message is followed on its journey through the telegraph wires, a modern-day “alley of sighs”. Interestingly, the phrase uttered by

\(^{108}\) Tsvetaeva was nevertheless an avid student of this tradition in her earlier work, as seen in her poem “Moim stikham, napisannym tak rano” of 1913 (SS 1/1: 178).
the speaker, “I lo-o-ve”, divided and extended as it is by dashes, even graphically evokes the extended form of the telegraph wires and the fragmentary form of their message. On the other hand, as will be discussed, the fragmented phrases evoked in the poem belong at the same time to two dimensions, the Classical realm and the present, and it is not always easy to identify the speaker. The final word liu–iu–bliu of the first stanza and the first word of the second, Umoliaiu, can both be attributed to the I, speaking in the present, pleading with the addressee to listen. Also, the doubts about the success of the message (and, consequently, of poetry) are explicitly uttered for the first time immediately after the plea to the recipient, paralleling authorial concerns. The speaker’s characterisation of her message as too vast and extensive to fit on a printed sheet has been read as doubting the value of printed poetry (see, for instance, Holl 1998: 35). The speaker wants to find an adequate means of transmitting her message, since all traditional means seem inadequate. Here, the telegraph wires nevertheless seem flexible enough, as they extend both vertically and horizontally, uniting both the divine and earthly realms. The telegraph poles are like modern-day pillars of the Earth, supporting the world, and in the poem’s cosmogony they belong to a higher order than the mortal realm. Consequently, it is no wonder that the speaker should prefer them over the concrete and static format of a printed sheet. In their elasticity, these wires are more suitable for conveying her message to the departed addressee.109 The next lines further elaborate the image of telegraph wires as a basis for the

109 The concept of the message overarching conventional means is recurrent in Tsvetaeva’s poetic dialogue with Pasternak. See, for instance, the 1923 poem “Stroitelnitsa strun – pristruniu...”, addressed to Pasternak and containing oblique allusions to his poetry (for instance, nature-imagery frequent in Pasternak’s oeuvre, such as rain, thunder and downpours). In general, direct Pasternakian allusions are almost non-existent in Posle Rossii, as argued by Michael Makin (1993: 218).

И если гром у нас – на крышах,
Дождь – в доме. ливень – сплошь, –
Так это ты письмо мне пишешь,
Которого не шлешь.

Ты дробью голосов ручьевых
Мозг бороздишь, как стих.
(Вместительнейший из почтовых
Ящиков – не вмести!) (SP 1990: 350.)
divinities’ residence; they are modern-day Atlants carrying upon them the “galloping square of heaven-dwellers”. By the end of the second stanza, the attitude of the “I” has also changed, from passionate confessions of love to resigned and accepting farewells, which she now sends to the addressee “you” by means of the wires.

The poem continues in the same vein, evoking the mythical, abandoned Classical personae. In a deathbed plea, the speaker conveys her guilt, apologizing for the audacity of her message. The “last retch of a torn throat”, implying the source of her voice and, consequently, poetry, once again questions her creative success. On the other hand, as argued by Alyssa Dinega (2002: 115), the image could also connote Tsvetaeva’s entry into poetic maturity and allude to her independence vis-à-vis the threat imposed upon her own, independent voice by Pasternak’s poetry. The following three lines move away from the authorial perspective, returning once again to the cosmogony of the telegraph wires, now controlling the Earth and waters. Here, the “I” evokes all the dimensions controlled by the wires. The message is extended everywhere – the spatially horizontal scale is governed by “riggings” and a “sea of meadows”, whereas the “Atlantic path” implies a direction of distance over the sea. “Higher, higher,” by contrast, alludes to the vertical plane, reaching for the transcendent realm, higher on the ladder of Eros. All the world’s spatial dimensions are governed by the wires, which carry the essence of poetry. The wires are even capable of regenerating mythical dimensions, as can be seen in the next line, which can be seen as Ariadne’s (or, to be exact, as both the Classical heroine’s and the “I’s”, as I am going to argue later). Ariadne’s “re–e–turn, / Turn around!” has been read as a plea uttered by the abandoned heroine on Naxos, begging Theseus to return to her (see also Holl 1996: 36; Vitins 1987: 145).

In addition to being attributed to Ariadne, the heroine’s plea for the addressee to turn around could even belong to Eurydice, bearing in mind

---

110 See, for instance, the poem “Lety podvodnyi svet” (SP 1990: 297), written in May 1922, which evokes the images of a lancet cutting the singer’s throat and the thorn resting there, symbolizing poetry and the difficulty of creation. The poem “Liutnia”, written in February 1923 (SP 1990: 318), also intertwines Biblical elements with the problematics of creation. Many of the poems dedicated to Pasternak evoke the image of a loss of voice, for example “Ne nado ee otklikat’”, written in February 1923 (SP 1990: 313) and “Net, pravdy ne osparivai” (SP 1990: 314) also written in the same period (Vitins 1987: 155).
Tsvetaeva’s interpretation of the original myth, which stressed the importance of Eurydice’s conscious desire to stay in the netherworld. A parallel would thus form between the charity hospitals and the mythological netherworld – Eurydice, implicitly, refuses to leave Hades or, in the words of the poem “Evridika – Orfeiu”, “the ghostly house” (SS 2: 183). The subsequent voices transmitted by the telegraph wires would then be the voices of Hades bidding farewell to Orpheus (and, simultaneously, to the recipient of the message, “you”). The voices of Hades emphasise distance, creating a parallel with the endless plains of the netherworld and the present-day geographical distance between the site of the “I” and that of the recipient “you”. With very brief allusions, Tsvetaeva’s lines evoke here the mythical situation where Orpheus has just turned around, having failed in his mission, while the shadows of Hades (and with them, Eurydice), utter wails of disappointment and sorrow before disappearing into the darkness, beyond Orpheus’s reach. Interestingly, the message is complicated by the fact that zhal’ can also allude to Eurydice’s death from a snakebite if it is read as an imperative form of the verb zhalit’ (to sting).

In the final stanzas of the first poem, the Orphic myth is the primary subtext underlying the discussion of creativity. The “I” seems to doubt whether her plea has accomplished anything. She indicates that the mythological voices have already stifled her own voice so much that the recipient cannot distinguish hers from the others appearing in the poem (see Vitins 1987: 145; Dinega 2002: 116-117, Waszink 1995: 119). The setting is again the Hadean netherworld, with the “pre-death cries of the stubborn passions” alluding to the mythical event of Eurydice’s death. Earthly passion and death are paralleled in the poem’s closing stanzas, and death is symbolized here by mounds and ditches, alluding to funeral mounds and graves.111 The mounds and ditches are also constituents of the poem’s cosmogony, where the dual relationship of heights and lows is repeated throughout. The symbols of height, implying creation and transcendence, are for instance the vertical telegraph poles and wires, and those of mortal lows are the charity hospital, the voices of Hades and, finally, the funeral mounds and ditches.

Interestingly, the final, fragmented utterance of a Classical voice can be interpreted in various ways, rendering the end of the poem ambivalent. The utterance has mainly been interpreted as “Don’t leave”, which would belong both to Eurydice and the “I” (Zaslavsky 1998: 165, Waszink 1995: 115-116). Alluding to Eurydice, the phrase would also parallel the Hadean voices disappearing into the vastness as Orpheus’s turning prevents him from succeeding (see Vitins 1987: 146). However, the fragmentary quality of the utterance parallels the doubts professed in the beginning by the “I” and the authorial voice about the possibility of poetic utterances conveying the essence of human emotions. Thus, the line could be interpreted as the speaker’s final attempt to stifle her emotions, exercising the kind of detachment characteristic of Greek tragedy. Instead of following the example of the abandoned and passive Classical heroines, she stifles her final plea and exits in mid-phrase (see Dinega 2002: 116). Closing the poem in mid-word emphasises the fragmentary nature of all the resounding and intertwining voices in the poem. The final message is also ambivalent; it remains unclear whether the negation should be read as an utterance of the Classical voices or as a phrase of the “I”/authorial voice wishing to prevent the departure of the addressee “you”. In all probability, both of them exist simultaneously.

In terms of the alterations between the poem’s various speakers, it is clear that the appearance of Classical voices contributes to the erosion of linear temporality. The two temporal dimensions exist simultaneously, with the “I” in the present experiencing the same kinds of emotions, despair and abandonment, as the Classical heroines in their mythological past. Interestingly, Tsvetaeva’s notebooks contain a commentary on the creation of the poem which emphasises the universality of individual emotions and suffering, a theme stressed by the poem’s intertwining polyphonic voices:

(Стихи: Ипполит – Провода – и к “Вереницею певчих свай” – пометка:)

НБ! Видите, начав в упор. потонула, растворилась в общей жалобе – одного (одной) – за всех. Так и в жизни.
Будьте терпеливы, вынесите буйство первых дней. – выпьется! (NST: 128.)

The poem’s “I” expresses a fear that her voice might be lost and undecipherable in the chorus of Classical voices. However, these other
voices are not actually competing with her voice in the poem, but 
contributing to an atmosphere of universal suffering; the speaker in the 
present experiences the same abandonment as the Classical heroines in 
the myths. Moreover, what is essential for Ariadne and Eurydice in 
Tsvetaeva’s appropriation is precisely their transcendent fates. As the 
poem “Eurydice to Orpheus” indicates, Eurydice exists in Hades only as 
an immaterial shadow, joining other Tsvetaevan personae, such as the 
Sibyl, giving the immaterial and independent voice a clear preference 
over physical existence. Even Ariadne’s final destiny, to transcend into 
the divine realm as Bacchus’s spouse and, ultimately, to become a 
constellation, emphasises the transformation from the physical to the 
spiritual plane. The mythical voices in the poem, irrespective and 
independent of the physical apparatus carrying the voice, are juxtaposed 
to the speaker, who is still in the present-day “valley of sighs”, still 
bound to the material realm and her body. In the continuation of the 
cycle, disintegration and disembodiment is also the fate of the “I”, whose 
physical body literally becomes the site of abandonment in the second 
poem. Here, the movement towards transcending the material realm is 
only hinted at by the fragmentary, ethereal voices and the telegraph 
wires, extending indefinitely. The speaker’s emotions are generalized, 
expanding into a mythical, universal dimension.

In the second poem of “Provoda”, Classical characters no longer 
appear as voices, but as more traditional images and symbols. 
Nevertheless, this poem also develops the theme of an individual 
suspended between the physical and the spiritual, and continues the 
speaker’s path towards disembodiment.

1.2. The Abandoned Poet

The second poem of “Provoda” illustrates the creative doubts of the 
“I” both in its structure and thematics, evoking once again subtexts from 
the Classical and literary tradition. The poem is the monologue of an “I” 
(the authorial voice) to an addressee, whose first stanza even imitates the 
ruptures, fragmentation and deictics of oral speech. Tragic Classical 
couples form a background for the speaker’s attempt to convey her 
message to the recipient. The dashes, which extended the pleas in the 
first poem, have now disappeared, replaced by fragmentary and 
truncated phrases illustrating the speaker’s insecurity.
Чтоб высказать тебе... да нет, в ряды
И в рифмы сдавленные... Сердце — шире!
Боюсь, что мало для такой беды
Всего Расина и всего Шекспира!

“Всё плачали, и если кровь болит...
Всё плачали, и если в розах — змеи”...
Но был один — у Федры - Ипполит!
Плач Ариадны — об одном Тезее!

Терзание! Ни берегов, ни вех!
Да, ибо утверждаю, в счете сбившись,
Что я в тебе утрачиваю всех
Когда-либо и где-либо невывших!

Какия чаянья — когда насквозь
Тобой пропитанный — весь воздух свыкся!
Раз Наксосом мне — собственная кость!
Раз собственная кровь под кожей — Стиксом!

Тщета! во мне она! Везде! закрыв
Глаза: без дна она! без дня! И дата
Лжет календарная...
           Как ты — Разрыв.
Не Ариадна я и не...
        – Утрата!

О по каким морям и городам
Тебя искать? (Незримого — незрчей!)
Я проводы вверяю проводам.
И в телеграфный столб упершись — плачу.

(SP 1990: 326.)

The first stanza starts as if in mid-phrase, but the speaker’s utterance is cut off after three words and she starts over with the colloquial expression da net. The poem’s elliptic nature contributes to a conversational, fragmentary form, which is juxtaposed with exclamatory eloquence (France 1982: 135). The speaker’s fear that poetry might not be an adequate vehicle for the intensity of her emotions appears in spatial metaphors, presenting the lines and rhythm of poetry as too narrow for expressing the heart. Even such classic writers as Racine and Shakespeare
are too limited to express the “I’s” emotions (see also Holl 1996: 37). At the same time, the speaker is increasingly impatient, as evidenced even in the language which becomes more and more synthetised and elliptical, with all the redundant elements omitted and the punctuation emphasising impatience (Lipking 1988: 195).

The citation opening the poem’s second stanza is cryptic, and its source has never been identified. The appearance of an inserted voice in an otherwise monologous poem adds a dramatic touch, connecting it with other poems of the same period, namely the dialogic structure of the second poem of the “Ariadna” cycle. Even here, the overall generality of the inserted phrase “Everyone cried...” with its parallel constructions is reminiscent of the chorus of a Classical tragedy, which comments on the onstage events and the protagonist’s emotions in a more general tone. Here, the chorus’s commentary alludes to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, more precisely to the heroine’s death by snakebite. The roses would thus symbolize the mortal love of the heroine and the happiness of the newlyweds, though also anticipating the tragedy of the heroine’s premature death, grieved by “everyone”. However, there could be other interpretations as well. It is possible that Tsvetaeva is alluding to a concrete source, perhaps even to a translation of Racine or Shakespeare (Ciepiela 2002). In any case, the inserted voice functions as a mask directly from Antiquity. In addition to the chorus, it can be attributed to a single character from mythology, for instance to Eurydice or to Orpheus. The “I” is dialogically situated against this “other voice” in the poem, as the next line seems to comment on the previous one, starting with the conjunction “but”. Therefore, the first two lines of the second stanza suggest the inescapable tragedy of the separation of lovers, while the two subsequent lines emphasise the mythical dimensions of such suffering, evoking tragic but eternalized couples – Phaedra and Hippolytus, and Ariadne and Theseus. Accordingly, physical, torturous passion and unrequited love function even here as an incentive for creation.

112 Peter France (1982: 135) suggests that the quotation might be Tsvetaeva’s own invention.
113 The chorus, a central component of the Classical tragedies, was also adapted by Tsvetaeva herself in her subsequent tragedy Ariadna, which was beginning to take shape in July 1923 and completed in October 1924.
Although the poem alludes to the mythical dimensions of the speaker’s suffering, it nevertheless also focuses on its concrete physical implications for the speaker. The imagery of the third stanza, shoreline and buoys, alludes to the tale of Ariadne and Theseus, the sea being its central element. The metaphor of finding no strands or buoys connotes the “I’s” overwhelming emotion. As illustrated by the imagery in the fourth stanza, the speaker experiences the pain of her separation as physical, though this pain also takes on mythical dimensions. The speaker breathes the air of abandonment, with which the disappeared lover-addressee has now merged. Her longing for him is so great that the air is now her only means of contacting him. This abandonment produces creative energy, while the speaker’s physical self undergoes a state of fragmentation. The poem’s metaphors emphasise this disintegration: the body is now presented as a topography, with the speaker’s own bones evoked as Naxos and the blood in her veins as Styx.

The “I” claims that her despair is mainly caused by the vanity of an abandoned person, which seems to erode all the higher purposes of her torment and despair. However, the futility of the circumstances is overwhelming and all-encompassing, “bottomless” and “dayless”. The image of a lying calendar date has sometimes been attributed to Tsvetaeva’s biography, given that Tsvetaeva began the cycle “Provoda” on the very day Pasternak indicated in his letter that he would depart from Berlin for Russia (Vitins 1987: 143; Dinega 2002: 113; Ciepiela 2002: 5). This would reflect the speaker’s inability to believe that she has, in fact, been abandoned, and that her message can now reach its recipient only through the telegraph wires. Even the characterisation of the addressee “you” as “The Break” directly alludes to Pasternak’s verse cycle by the same title (Vitins 1987: 147). These allusions make the biographical context even more explicit. The speaker’s claim that she is not Ariadne can be interpreted as a rejection of the mythical heroine’s fate and passive position as one abandoned on Naxos. It also implies that the “I” is not a mythical heroine but a living woman of flesh and blood,

---

114 This stanza of “Provoda” can aptly be paralleled with the subsequent “Ariadna” cycle: similar physical metaphors are used in the description of loneliness and abandonment.
115 As indicated in the commentaries on the Pasternak-Tsvetaeva correspondence, the actual departure only took place a couple of days later (DNV 2004: 579).
an independent creator who is equal to the addressee. This interpretation is further supported by the following poems of the “Provoda” cycle, which progress from despair and loss to prominent self-assertion and a conviction of the speaker’s own creative abilities.

In concluding the search for self-definition, the speaker ends the penultimate stanza with the word “utrata” (loss). This characterisation of herself as “loss” and of the addressee as “the break” creates a parallel between them, as these abstract concepts are complementary. Razryv, “break”, evokes a sudden, violent and physical rift, whereas utrata, “loss”, implies a more permanent state, overwhelming, all-encompassing and everlasting. On the other hand, “loss” could characterise the whole situation and signify that the addressee is now forever absent, with only the telegraph wires allowing them to be in contact. And, finally, “loss” can be interpreted as a disappointed statement about the whole affair, the “I” regretting what could have been but now will never be. This interpretation contradicts the progression of the subsequent cycle, however, in which the “I” regains balance and independence, ending in creative affirmation. On the other hand, this regret coheres with the cycle’s first two poems, which are governed by the emotions of despair and rejection. All in all, the concept of loss is central for Tsvetaeva’s authorial myth, often shaped by renunciation and resignation from earthly love, generating the creative impulse.116

The final stanza closes the poem in resignation, with the speaker’s doubts about reaching the addressee.117 There is a return to sea imagery,
with the speaker now attempting to look for the addresssee at sea and in cities, yet doubting the success of such an enterprise. Notably, the “I” characterises herself as blind, which unites her with the Romantic concept of the blind poet, originating in Homer. Blindness signals a higher contact, materialized in another dimension, not the physical: within the poet herself, as she turns inwards in search of the addresssee. However, this particular poem does not yet imagine that such contact will ever succeed, ending as it does in a hopeless image of the speaker leaning on a telegraph pole crying. The agents transmitting the (poetic) message are only the telegraph poles, and the success of the message reaching its goal remains unresolved. However, the governing theme of the rest of the cycle is not the impossibility of creation (as in the first poems) but creative affirmation. The final, tenth poem of the cycle testifies to the superiority of the creative “I” over the “common mortals”, giving life to an eternal child, poetry, as opposed to a child of flesh and blood.118

This triumph of the transcendent over the quotidian is the “I’s” ultimate goal. The eternal offspring, poetry, which is the result of the poets’ separation – or, more precisely, a physical separation reinforcing spiritual, creative union – is more valuable to her than a physical meeting in real life. Ieva Vitins (1987: 144) and Alyssa Dinega (2002: 113-128), who extends Vitins’ analysis, have seen the cycle’s whole dynamics as relying on the mythical pattern of the love of Psyche and Eros. In the same way Psyche only falls in love with Eros at the very moment the god flees from her, Tsvetaeva’s “I” embraces the full dimensions of her unsatisfied emotions towards the addresssee only at the moment when the relationship has become impossible to fulfill in real life (Vitins 1987: 144). Important parallels with Tsvetaeva’s appropriation of the Sibyl are also evident here; first and foremost, both the Sibyl and Psyche come into contact with an invisible deity, who engenders their transformation from the physical into the spiritual. The same movement towards disembodiment is experienced by the speaker, whose longing for the invisible addresssee begins to transform her into an aphysical state. This process appears in the second poem as the disintegration of the speaker’s homeland and for the ideal poetic counterpart Pasternak are intertwined in Tsvetaeva’s poetry.

body into mythical topographical emblems of abandonment. The only thing remaining for the poem’s “I” is to tolerate absence and separation, turning agony into creative energy.

The mythological voices of “Provoda”, appearing as fragmentary utterances in the polyphonic structure of the first poem and as images of unquenchable love and torment in the second, bring the speaker’s emotions of despair to universal dimensions. Poetic creation is often called forth by an emotional trauma to which the poem is a reaction and a reply, as well as a remedy. This is also the case with the cycle “Provoda”, starting in a desperate cry of farewell to the addressee, but ending in joyous affirmation of the speaker’s creative powers. A similar intermediary stage that has to be endured in order to attain the immaterial is abandonment, presented by the cycle “Ariadna”.

2. “ARIADNA”

Marina Tsvetaeva completed her two-poem lyrical cycle on Ariadne on 21 April, 1923. Following “Provoda” in Posle Rossii, the cycle is the last instance of Classical mythology in the collection, and is followed by “Poèma zastavy”, which shifts the emphasis towards contemporary reality. The cycle “Ariadna” was also prompted by Pasternak’s departure. By evoking Ariadne’s position as an abandoned woman, and by trying to come to terms with Theseus’s act of abandoning the classical heroine, Tsvetaeva implicitly discusses her own situation as the one who was left behind.

Tsvetaeva’s main sources for the Ariadne myth were, in addition to Ovid’s brief retelling, the more elaborate versions provided by Gustav Schwab and Heinrich Stoll. Compared to these traditional 19th century sources, Tsvetaeva’s cycle presents a much more psychological portrayal of the heroine’s agony, and also focuses more on her empowerment. Furthermore, whereas Ovid, Stoll and Schwab only briefly mention the complaining princess on Naxos (see Ovid 1962: 199; Stoll 1862: 173; Schwab 1962: 173),

119 Tsvetaeva sent the cycle to Pasternak in 1924 in a group of poems which she identified as directly related to her fellow poet (DNV 2004: 72-92). Among others, “Evridika – Orfeiu”, several poems of “Provoda” and “Sivilla – mladentsu” can be found in this letter.
120 Laura D. Weeks (1990: 582) notes that Tsvetaeva’s portrait of Ariadne differs in many respects from Schwab, suggesting that she also used other sources for her appropriation of the myth.
Schwab 1957: 278), Tsvetaeva’s cycle parallels the situation to the fate of the poet, whose authorial voice is also heard in the cycle. As I discuss later in Chapter IV, she continued to elaborate on the same myth in October 1923, embarking on a dramatic trilogy on the Theseus myth. Surprisingly, however, Tsvetaeva’s lyrical tragedy Ariadna does not treat the maiden’s abandonment and loneliness at all, but proceeds straight to Theseus’s return to Athens and the tragic event of his father’s suicide, who erroneously believes that his son has died. Tsvetaeva’s lyrical cycle, by contrast, provides a different perspective on Ariadne’s abandonment, with its atmosphere of grief, loneliness and violent metaphors governing her existence on Naxos. Tsvetaeva established a direct connection between the two works in one of her notebooks written the same year, when she was working on the cycle and the project of a dramatic trilogy on Theseus was forming in her mind:

Быть оставленной —
В предутренний час истом
Предоставленной другом — богу:
Небожителю — божеством

(Около “Оставленной быть” — и уже формула всего Тезея.)

(NST: 138.)

The extract also highlights the transcendence plot in the cycle and in the play. Even though Ariadne’s transcendence is not overtly described in the cycle, it becomes apparent through a close reading of the images. In my analysis I shall explore how this pattern in fact turns Ariadne’s fate into a creative one.

121 This draft proves that Tsvetaeva accorded specific importance to Ariadne’s fate as forsaken by Theseus on the island and handed over to the divinity. Tsvetaeva’s comment in brackets was added only in 1932, proving that she viewed the poem as a rough draft for the entire lyrical tragedy.
122 See also Naydan 1984: 167.
123 The cycle has thus far not been examined in the context of the dialectics of the physical and the spiritual in Tsvetaeva’s poetry of the 1920s. Michael Naydan (1993: 228-229) examines the cycle in the context of the source texts forming its basis (e.g. Ovid) and in the context of Posle Rossii. Roman Voitekhovich (2005: 30) mentions Ariadne as one instance of Tsvetaeva’s appropriation of the Psyche myth, but does not provide a reading of the cycle. Laura D. Weeks (1990: 581-583) briefly examines the cycle in the context of
The speaker’s position differs in the two parts of the cycle. The first poem could be viewed as the persona’s monologue, yet its overarching generality and the fact that a 1st person singular “I” is not evoked once would contribute to the interpretation of an authorial voice governing the poem, discussing Ariadne. The second poem, however, evokes a dialogue of two or several unidentified interlocutors, which links the cycle to the forthcoming drama. In the first poem, Ariadne thus becomes the poet’s mask in the same way as, for instance, the Sibyl or Eurydice, as discussed in the previous chapter; in the second, her fate is perceived from the outside and she is not allowed to speak for herself. This creates an interesting tension in the cycle.

The myth of the abandoned maiden had also been treated earlier by Tsvetaeva’s predecessors, and it was also elaborated on by other Russian Silver Age poets.¹²⁴ In my opinion, the most interesting example of this tradition from the point of view of Tsvetaeva’s cycle is Valerii Briusov’s two-poem cycle written in 1918, “Ariadna” (Briusov 1974: 27-29).¹²⁵ One of the features of Briusov’s cycle which can be paralleled with Tsvetaeva’s is the presentation of Ariadne as a ghost or a vision, becoming an apparition which Theseus sees even after he abandons her. In addition, the image of the lamenting maiden, tearing her hair, is evoked both in Briusov and in the second poem of Tsvetaeva’s cycle. Furthermore, the white foam of the sea appears in both poems. These parallels testify of Tsvetaeva’s awareness of the tradition, though her cycle departs from the external approach of Briusov’s appropriation, which only addresses Ariadne in the second person singular “you”. Tsvetaeva’s appropriation, on the other hand, brings the experience of the abandoned closer to the reader, organically intertwined with the authorial voice of the poet.

¹²⁵ Briusov’s oeuvre contains two other poems on the myth, “Nit’ Ariadny” (1902, Briusov 1973: 275-276) and “Tezei Ariadne” (1904, Briusov 1973: 389-399). It seems to me, however, that the possible influences of Briusov’s poems are more in evidence in Tsvetaeva’s lyrical tragedy Ariadna.
2.1. Abandoned or Conceded?

The first poem of the “Ariadna” cycle discusses two possible interpretations of Theseus’s act of deserting her on Naxos. The voice resounding in the poem can arguably be said to be the author’s, implicitly discussing her own emotions of despair and longing for the departed fellow poet, Pasternak. Ariadne’s despair and resentment facing her loneliness are significantly different from the overall portrait of the calm and faithful heroine encountered in Tsvetaeva’s play, discussed in Chapter IV. However, a closer examination reveals that Ariadne’s fate can be interpreted even here in another vein than what the painful metaphors would imply. Indeed, the first poem of Tsvetaeva’s cycle does not present the heroine as helpless or weak, lamenting her fate, as the traditional versions of the myth do.\(^{126}\) On the contrary, the metaphors are instead intense and affirmative, emphasising the derivation of power from abandonment and suffering.

The two stanzas of the first poem focus on Ariadne’s grief and despair after being abandoned on Naxos. The first lines of the two stanzas provide two different possibilities for interpreting and evaluating

---

\(^{126}\) I am compelled to disagree with Michael Naydan (1984: 168), who interprets the cycle as illustrating Ariadne’s pain and longing for Bacchus. Firstly, it is unclear whether the object of Ariadne’s longing is the divinity or the mortal hero Theseus, and in my opinion it is most likely to be Theseus. Secondly, even in her suffering, Ariadne is by no means weak, as I am going to argue in the following.
Theseus’s deed; Ariadne is viewed as either left (ostavlennoi) or conceded (ustuplennoi). Indeed, how to interpret Theseus’s deed is precisely what Tsvetaeva was puzzling over at the time of writing her trilogy Tezei. As seen in her notebooks, Tsvetaeva is not certain whether to judge Theseus as a coward for abandoning Ariadne and scorning love or whether he actually abandons the maiden for selfless and heroic reasons, enabling her to transcend the mortal world and become a divinity (see NSV 1997: 265). It should also be noted that Tsvetaeva wrote a third, omitted stanza for the poem, which provides a clear answer to this question, though this stanza was not included in the final poem. In this omitted stanza, Theseus is condemned:

Тезей, ты оставил! Тезей ты как вор
[...]  
Веленью Дионисову распостер  
Подругу. Клейми же, бессмертный позор  
Тезей – бессмертного труса!

(NST: 138.)

Here, Theseus is characterised as a coward for abandoning Ariadne out of his fear of Bacchus. Ariadne’s transcendent fate does not appear as an ideal, as the stanza presents the earthly perspective on the act of abandonment; scorning earthly love, Theseus’s deed is shameful, because he has simply handed over his love to the divinity.

Heavily relying on parallelisms, rhetorical questions, paronomasia and exclamation, the style of the cycle’s first poem is reminiscent of 18th century Russian classicists.127 It is also possible that the underlying source for this particular poem is Ovid’s Heroides, containing a monologue in which Ariadne laments her fate (Makin 1993: 228). A closer examination of the metaphors reveals other subtexts as well, such as the Bible. Allusions to Doomsday add a tone of retribution to Ariadne’s existence on Naxos.

The first physical and violent metaphor compares Theseus’s abandonment to a blue tattoo carved in the breast of a sailor.128 It implies

---

127 On the parallels between Tsvetaeva and Derzhavin, see Crone & Smith 1995.  
128 This technique of physical images also differs from the male Silver Age poets, who often sought to emphasise their Classicist knowledge and erudition. It is
that the vision of Ariadne, after being forsaken by Theseus, will follow the hero relentlessly throughout his remaining life, through the seven seas and all his journeys. A host of similar violent images and metaphors can be found in Tsvetaeva’s poetry, where they often evoke unrequited love or the ending of a relationship. The physical pain of carving a tattoo onto someone’s breast is paralleled with the emotional pain of abandonment experienced by the persona and evoked, implicitly, by the authorial perspective. The tattoo can also be paralleled to the wound image in the sense of a permanent marking of a poetic fate. The poetic implications inherent in Ariadne’s destiny become clearer as empowering images are foregrounded.

The image of the seven seas adds to the folkloric, fairytale-like atmosphere of the poem. Apart from its various mythical and mystical connotations, the number seven is central in Tsvetaeva’s oeuvre especially in respect to the theme of creation and in her self-mythologization as a poet. The sea imagery is obviously rooted in the

noteworthy that Tsvetaeva’s cycle does not start with a Classical allusion, but with the quality of being abandoned. (Weeks 1990: 582.)

129 In many of the Posle Rossii poems, written in the same year as the cycle under examination, love is symbolized by a wound. This is apparent for instance in the cycle “Fedra” and the poem “Rashchelina”, discussed above. Also, as I discussed earlier, even in the poem “Evridika – Orfeiu” the images of knives and the rose’s blood serve the same purpose, the problematic encounter of two individuals in an atmosphere of death and the netherworld. The tension between body and disembodiment is recurrent in her poetry of the period.

130 This view can also be found in the second act of Tsvetaeva’s drama Ariadna, where Theseus offers his life to King Minos. He emphasises that the greatest offer is actually inherent in the fact that, dying unknown as prey to the monster, several immortal and heroic deeds are left undone, and the poets’ eulogies remain unwritten, as the hero is not to be eternalized in art:

– Водопады од.
Царь, как в пропасть, в тебя швыряю!
Ибо злейшее, что теряю
Днес – не воздуш и не перстов
Ошупь – эхо в груди певцов!
(SS 3: 594.)

This motif of everlasting art figures throughout Tsvetaeva’s work. The most famous examples are the poems “Idesh, na menia pohozhii” (1913, SS 1: 177), “Moim stikhham, napisannym tak rano” (1913, SS 1: 178), “Znaiu, umru na zare!” (1920, SP 1990: 152), and “Vskryla zhily: neostanovimo” (1934, SP 1990: 436). This motif is also frequent in her autobiographical prose essays of the 1930s.

131 Tsvetaeva’s poems in which the number appears in a symbolic context are also numerous. See, for instance, “Sem’ kholmov – kak sem’ kolokolov!” (1916,
background myth, clearly implying a monotonous existence and loneliness. The sea can in this respect be seen to evoke a state which always remains the same, reminiscent of the waves, repeating themselves incessantly. Naturally, the sea is also a constant element in the myth of Theseus. However, the obvious connotations of monotonous existence and boredom are intertwined with a clear desire for revenge, as the speaker expresses a desire to encounter the addressee in the shape of a ninth wave, sweeping the seafarers off the dock. According to an old legend, there are nine large waves in every storm, with the ninth and last of them being the mightiest and most perilous. It is therefore obvious that the image of the ninth wave in the poem alludes to death, the ending of a relationship, but also to the transcendence of the boundaries between life and death. All of these motifs are central to Tsvetaeva’s interpretation of Ariadne.

The first poem is divided into two parts, with different imagery in each part. The first stanza, discussing the position of an abandoned woman, is dominated by physical images, evoking suffering and loneliness. The second stanza, discussing the possibility of transcendence, contains Biblical allusions, focusing on the ending of one’s former life and the beginning of a new one. Another important content is that of fame and creativity, as images of soothsaying and prophecying are brought into the poem.

The Biblical context is also apparent in the first stanza’s iaevlennoi byt’ semi okeanami, alluding to the persistent and monotonous characteristic of loneliness. This metaphor also signals the exceeding of spatio-temporal and physical boundaries, implying that the speaker of the poem now exists outside the tangible realm, in the immaterial, also perceived as an ideal realm of creation. This transcendent implication becomes even stronger later, in the poem’s second stanza, where the trumpets of prophecy appear and allude overtly to the Bible’s Book of Revelation and Doomsday. These images emphasize the end of the speaker’s former life, and the transition to a new existence. Blowing the trumpets would signal Ariadne’s joyous entrance to the divine realm. Furthermore, the metaphor of the lips of prophecies can be interpreted as signifying speech

SP 1990: 102) from the “Poems to Moscow” -cycle and “Semero, semero” (1921, SP 1990: 235).
and, consequently, poetry, a message which is transmitted to future generations, heedless of temporal and spatial constraints.

The speaker also refers to herself as being bought at a high price, which is exacted of her – loneliness starts to take its toll on her mind, indicating a quite concrete effect of the hero’s act of abandonment. In a quasi-feministic turn, the poem seems to indicate that Bacchus has bought Ariadne from the mortal hero Theseus at a price exacted specifically from the heroine; it is she who is made to suffer in the trade, and this high price is precisely one she has to pay, not the deserter or the divinity.\textsuperscript{132} Still, it could be argued that were it not for the monotonous and solitary suffering, the speaker would not acquire the higher existence in store for her. These torments are necessary for her to be transformed into a creator.\textsuperscript{133} Finally, interpreted through the concept of the Platonic ladder, Theseus’s rejection of Ariadne provides a prerogative for the heroine’s future transcendence. Therefore, even the image of “falling out of one’s wits” (umoisstuplenie) can be seen as a positive state, rendering creation possible.\textsuperscript{134} Ariadne’s solitude and suffering on Naxos are necessary intermediary stages through which the heroine has to pass before reaching the immaterial.

\textsuperscript{132} On the hand, in the tragedy Ariadne is portrayed as an offer which is demanded from Theseus by Bacchus, which becomes clear at the end of their dialogue in Act IV:

\begin{verbatim}
ВАКХ
Остров жертвенный: Наксос.
Уходи безоглядно:
Чтоб ни шаг и ни вздох...
(SS 3: 621.)
\end{verbatim}

In the play it is Theseus who has to pay the price for Ariadne’s immortality and transcendence into the divine. He has to relinquish his affections for the sake of the higher fate reserved for the maiden.

\textsuperscript{133} This imagery can be connected to the romantic motif, frequently used by the symbolists, in which the poet’s torments take on definite Christian resonances; the poet’s creative agonies are paralleled to Christ’s temptations in the desert. Taken together, various drafts of the cycle in Tsvetaeva’s notebooks seem to forward a similar concept of being bought:

\begin{verbatim}
Оставлена, брошена
[...]
– Пусть так. но не дешево
Уступлена, куплена...
(NST: 138.)
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{134} One could also tentatively claim that this ”senseless” state has ties with the Nietzschean concept of creation, Dionysian creative ecstasy, which entails liberation and a complete forgetting of one’s former self, ecstatic intoxication and becoming one with the elements.
Without providing a conclusive answer to the problem of evaluating Theseus’s act, the first poem ends in a positive affirmation of the permanence of the fate of the conceded maiden. The second poem proceeds to discuss the event from an external perspective, departing from the sphere of lyricism and adding a dramatic construction to the cycle.

2.2. Choral Commentary

The second poem is constructed as an exchange of fragmented lines between several unidentified voices. The cycle combines lyrical and dramatic structures, creating a tension between the two poems. Whereas the first poem is written in regular amphibrachic tetrameter, the second is fragmentary and dialogic in structure. The imagery of the two poems also differs; while the first poem is filled with physical images and Biblical allusions, the imagery of the second is rooted in nature. The voices discuss Ariadne’s situation and fate. Interestingly, included in a group of poems Tsvetaeva sent to Boris Pasternak in 1924, the title of the second poem was “Antifon” (DNV 2004: 81). Even though the poem has been interpreted as a dialogue of Theseus and Bacchus (see Makin 1993: 229), this preliminary title indicates that the utterances in fact belong to a chorus, commenting on mythical events in the Classical tradition. This choric structure links this poem to Tsvetaeva’s subsequent lyrical tragedies. The intertwining of various cultural contexts (here, Classical mythology and the Orthodox tradition) is also typical of Tsvetaeva’s poetry in this period.

2
– О всеми голосами раковин
Ты пел ей...
   – Травкой каждою.

– Она томилась лаской Вакховой.
– Летейских маков жаждала...

– Но как бы те моря ни солоны.
Тот мчался...
   – Стены падали.
Evoking Ariadne’s despair, the poem hints that the divinity’s attentions to her were not well received. Sea and nature imagery continues to be central here, emphasizing the ephemeral quality of human life, the shortness of its span and fleeting youth. The chorus discusses Bacchus’ courting of Ariadne, metamorphosed into various elements of nature. Nevertheless it is clear that Ariadne does not accept the god’s love, but instead seeks death. The poppies of Lethe, in addition to death, indicate the forgetting of one’s life on Earth as a living person. Thus the second poem of the cycle includes the same motif of transcendence as the first poem. Ariadne’s solitary lingering on Naxos prepares her for her future transcendence. The last lines of the second poem contain the image of uprooted hair falling into the sea; tearing one’s hair as a sign of despair and sorrow is a Classical convention, and also prominent in the Biblical context. Ariadne’s grief on Naxos implicitly becomes like ritual mourning for a lost love.

135 On the image of the poppy in Tsvetaeva’s poetry, see Dykman 1993:166-174. Dykman argues that the image in Tsvetaeva’s poetry combines both the contexts of Slavic folklore and that of Classical myth. In this poem, however, I suggest that only the Classical content is evoked.

136 The Biblical allusion refers in the first place to the Old Testament heroine Rachel, who also appears frequently in the works of Tsvetaeva’s Modernist contemporaries Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandel’shtam. The last poem of the “Provoda” cycle, written only a couple of days before the completion of the first poem of the “Ariadna” cycle, ends with an overt allusion to Rachel. “Provoda” ends in creative affirmation, enabled by the torments of abandonment. “Ariadna” discusses the same theme from a feminine perspective, ending in disembodiment and transcendence. In “Provoda”, the speaker has been abandoned by her fellow-poet, which accentuates the theme of creation:

```
Знай, что чудо
Недр – под полой, живое чадо:

Песнь! С этим первенцем, что пуще
Всех первенцев и всех Рахилей...
– Недр достовернейшую гущу
Я мнимостями переселию!
(SP 1990: 331.)
```
The theme of death is also present in the poems discussed here. In the first poem it figures as the destructive force of the ninth wave, sweeping the innocent off the deck. Death also figures as the Doomsday motif arising from the allusion to the Book of Revelation. In the second poem, death is evoked in the allusions to the Lethean poppies, the crumbling walls and the tearing out of one’s hair in mourning. In a Platonic vein, in Tsvetaeva’s oeuvre death is evidently linked with creation, as it is understood as a passage from the material to the immaterial plane. The cycle, in turn, seems to focus mainly on Ariadne’s grief and longing for death and absolution from her suffering, but these emotions can arguably be read as initiating the heroine on the difficult path of being a poet. Notably, the uprooted hair falls in the foam of the sea, metonymically indicating its everchanging waves, and thus forming a link to the sea imagery in the first poem of the cycle. Interestingly, the image of seafoam forms a parallel with the birth of Aphrodite, again emphasising the transcendent interpretation of Ariadne’s destiny. Consequently, we can interpret Aradne’s fate in the final lines as a transcendence, through pain and suffering, to a spiritual level, proceeding up the Platonic ladder. In order to reach immortality, she must experience significant hardships in this intermediate stage of being abandoned on Naxos.

An analysis of the cycle’s metaphors reveals that Tsvetaeva’s interpretation of Ariadne contains a wholly new vein beyond simply lamenting an abandoned heroine. Thus, the physical and desperate images of the first poem are turned into a preparation for transcendence, gaining tones of affirmation and empowerment. In fact, almost all the metaphors can be interpreted as an acknowledgement of one’s own force, which does not correspond to the traditional interpretation of the weak, passive heroine lamenting her fate. The first poem’s violent metaphors implicitly evoke the empowering quality of abandonment. The ephemereality of earthly life and the passage from the material to the immaterial is accented by the imagery of the second poem, which emphasises impermanence, longing for death and oblivion.

“Provoda” and “Ariadna” thus evoke abandonment in Classical mythology and in the speaker’s existence, an abandonment which is nevertheless shown to induce creative strength. The two first poems of
“Provoda”, however, only discuss the speaker’s loneliness and despair – empowerment only appears in the continuation of the cycle, which is not the subject of the present study. The first poem of “Ariadna”, by contrast, shows how the heroine derives power from her solitary and revengeful position; the poem ends in a triumphant and everlasting prophecy. Another important process perceptible in both cycles is the movement towards disembodiment. In the second poem of “Provoda”, this is accomplished by means of the disintegration of the body into a topographical site of longing and torment. In the second poem, the heroine’s loneliness on Naxos is discussed by a chorus, forwarding images of nature instead of physical imagery. Evoking Ariadne’s hair falling into the foam of the sea, the chorus alludes to the forthcoming transcendence from the physical to the eternal. The central question addressed by both cycles is abandonment as an intermediary stage through which an individual must pass on Earth before being able to transcend to the spiritual. In the Classical tragedies discussed in the next Chapter, the focus is shifted to the earthly hero Theseus, whose act of abandonment is given an entirely different evaluation.
IV EARTHLY AND DIVINE LAWS: THE LYRICAL TRAGEDIES

In addition to using Classical myth in her shorter lyrics, Tsvetaeva created two lyrical tragedies focusing on the myth of the Athenian hero Theseus. These tragedies are the culmination of her “Classicism,” her last – most extensive – works entirely construed on a mythological tale. Foregrounding the division of the world into the divine and the mortal realm, the tragedies develop and discuss the same concerns evoked in Tsvetaeva’s poetry of the period. Nevertheless the emphasis of the two tragedies differs greatly from one another.

Tsvetaeva displayed her talent as playwright relatively early in her career. Infatuated with the theatrical life of Moscow of the 1910s, she had written several romantic plays for the Vakhtangov studio, with themes ranging from the adventures of Casanova to the love affairs of the French duke of Lauzun. These plays were completed in 1918-1919. Tsvetaeva did not return to drama until 1924, when she wrote the verse tragedy Ariadna. A second play, Fedra, was planned at the same time, but the writing process was delayed by other projects, and Fedra was only finished in 1927. These plays were originally planned as part of a trilogy called Tezei (Theseus), but in the end she only completed the first two plays. Indeed, Ariadna was initially named Tezei; Tsvetaeva changed the title in the off-print of the first publication, indicating that Tezei should be the title of the trilogy, while its first part should be Ariadna.

Previous studies on the tragedies have focused on their respective overall plots, structure, themes and imagery, as well as their ties to the literary tradition (Lafoy 1981, Makin 1993, Venclova 1984, Voitekhovich 2000) or their compositional strategies (for instance, the role of the

---

137 Another projected name for the trilogy was Gnev Afrodity (The Wrath of Aphrodite), which nevertheless appears only in one of Tsvetaeva’s notes: Нельзя “Гнев Афродиты” п.ч. вроде “Гнева Диониса” Нагродской, еще потому, что так может называться явно-плохая вещь. Лучше просто: Тезей. (NST 1997: 304.)

138 Roman Voitekhovich (2002) discusses the birth of Tsvetaeva’s two Classical tragedies. Relying on Tsvetaeva’s published notes, he argues that the third play on Helen of Troy was never completed because the dramatic plot was already exhausted by the two first parts (Voitekhovich 2002: 184). On the other hand, the reception of the two tragedies could have discouraged Tsvetaeva from writing the third part. Ariadna did not receive much attention from critics, and Fedra was reviewed, not always favourably, by Vladimir Weidle, Georgi Adamovich, Vladimir Nabokov and Vladislav Khodasevich (Karlinsky 1966: 264-265; Karlinsky 1985a: 184).
Tsvetaeva’s Classical poems of the period. They have also less often been investigated in the context of Tsvetaeva’s oeuvre of the 1920s and her authorial myth. This question was addressed for the first time by Irina Shevelenko (2002). Taking Shevelenko’s erudite discussion as my point of departure, I examine further the position of the individual in the dialectic world divided into the material and immaterial realms, showing how this division is reflected on the level of themes, motifs and imagery connected to the main protagonists. As I pointed out in Chapters II and III, Tsvetaeva’s Classical lyric poetry of 1922-23 evidences a movement towards disembodiment and transcendence and back to emphasise earthly existence. I will demonstrate here that the same tendencies can be detected in the two tragedies. Especially Ariadna is patterned on the transcendent fate of the heroine and on the spiritual growth of the hero. Fedra is less dependent on the spiritual, focusing instead on physical passion.139 However, even there the heroine strives towards a spiritual union with her loved one, which would be enabled by consummation of her passion, which is entirely in keeping with Platonic logic.

Even though the projected trilogy was based on the Theseus myth, the hero’s position in the two tragedies is different. Ariadna presents Theseus as one of the main protagonists, whereas in Fedra he is reduced to the position of a commentator, situated on the edges of the drama. Discussing the original plans for Tsvetaeva’s two tragedies, Roman Voitekhovich recognises the originality of the author’s initial understanding of the Theseus myth. She united two of the most famous episodes in the hero’s life, the expedition to Crete and the tale of his wife Phaedra and son Hippolytus, envisioning the first as the reason for the second. Thus,

139 This judgement relates to Tsvetaeva’s own characterisation of the dramatic trilogy in a letter to Anna Tesková dated 28 November 1927:


Сколько любовей и все несчастные. Последняя хуже всех, потому что любил куклу... (SS 6: 361.)

The identification of Ariadné as the soul and Phaedra as passion reveals the core concepts of the two tragedies.
Theseus plans to marry Phaedra only because she is Ariadne’s sister. (Voitekhovich 2002: 178.) All the same, the tragedies also spring from Tsvetaeva’s lyric poetry of the period, especially the works inspired by Pasternak’s departure discussed earlier in this thesis. We can see this link in Tsvetaeva’s treatment of the dualistic division of the world and by the presence of the same themes in the tragedies as in the poetry, although in the drama they are given a different emphasis. Compared with the preliminary notes of the plays and the resulting works, significant differences can be detected especially in the character of Theseus. Although in the first drafts Theseus is condemned for his lack of passion (see Voitekhovich 2002: 183), the final play Ariadna nevertheless depicts the character as growing, developing into a tragic hero who deserves compassion. At the end of Fedra, he is allowed to overtly pronounce his new knowledge of the dichotomous world order, ending the tragedy on a note of reconciliation.

What unites the tragedies is their depiction of a dual world order, where mortals are always subject to the will of the divine. The exalted position of the divine realm compared to the mortal world is also significantly tied to Tsvetaeva’s concept of the creative ethos, which is often viewed as demanding and even demonic. The opposition of earthly and divine law is also central to her appropriation of the Classical myth.140 Whether the characters are in fact aware of this or not, the dramatic events revolve around the will and decisions of the divine.141 The entire tragic chain of events is caused by Aphrodite’s wrath and her punishment of Theseus for scorning love and abandoning Ariadne. Tsvetaeva’s notes from this period show that she focused from the beginning on the relationship of the protagonists to their immortal protectors and protectresses:

---

140 This opposition is especially central in Ariadna in the evaluation of Theseus’s abandonment of the heroine (see Shevelenko 2002: 279).
141 The mortals’ tragic ignorance of divine will is, incontestably, also a central component of the Classical source myths. The protagonists of the Classical Greek tragedies remain blind to the divine will ruling over their destinies, and they are largely incapable of interpreting the omens that are offered to them (Lafoy 1981: 202-203).
The divinities’ role in the structure of the plays is twofold: on the one hand, they are the protagonists’ protectors, seeming to help them. On the other hand, they are also merciless and destructive rulers over the mortals’ fates. In the Classical tradition, the relationship of a divine protector and his/her protégé was always a double-edged sword: divine election often ended in tragedy for the chosen mortals, and the gods often only used them for their own purposes (Lafoy 1981: 108, 110). Interestingly, Bacchus in Ariadna is accorded a position similar to that of the immaterial forces in Tsvetaeva’s folklore tragedies, enabling their mortal targets to be transcended into the spiritual realm. Ariadne’s fate continues the repeated plot in Tsvetaeva’s oeuvre of the 1920s: the battle between the physical and the spiritual for the soul of the lyrical subject and the subject’s final transcendence into the immaterial (see also Shevelenko 2002: 278). However, it is noteworthy that the actual transcendence into the immaterial is not described in either of the plays, except through the experiences and utterances of those left behind on Earth, most importantly Theseus.

1. ARIADNA

Tsvetaeva’s verse tragedy Ariadna is symmetrical in structure. Its first Act presents the background of the events in the exchange between the

---

142 Interestingly, Tsvetaeva’s preliminary sketch does not seem to imply as close a protectorship between Phaedra and Aphrodite as between Ariadne and Aphrodite. This is apparent also in her final play Fedra, in which the relationship of the main protagonist and the divinities is less evident, but instead the bond between Hippolytus and Artemis is foregrounded.

143 This motif of divine perfidy is prominent in Tsvetaeva’s Classical tragedies, evoked most clearly in Fedra’s closing act, where the unfortunate hero Theseus recognises that the tragic events were the doing of the Gods.
Choruses, the Stranger and the hero Theseus. The central thematic content – the juxtaposition of the mortals and divinities, the ephemerality of human existence, and creative tonalities – are apparent in their speeches, and will be repeated later in the course of the drama. Act II introduces Ariadne, portrayed from the beginning as closely connected with the divine essence. The central event of this act is the confrontation of Theseus and King Minos, ending in Ariadne’s giving the hero her magical ball of thread and sword. Act III contains darker motifs of death and doom, as Ariadne waits for Theseus at the entrance of the labyrinth. Once again Ariadne’s faith in the divinities, especially in her protectress Aphrodite, is evoked. As Theseus appears unscathed from his confrontation with the Minotaur, the two enter a dialogue of short, fragmentary phrases, Theseus attempting to convince Ariadne to depart with him while Ariadne resists. Finally, she decides to follow Theseus, which closes the Act. Act IV consists mainly of Theseus’s and Bacchus’s dialogue over the sleeping Ariadne. Whereas Theseus professes the pleasures of mortal, physical passion, Bacchus highlights the characteristics of the transcendent, divine realm. The opposition of ephemeral human existence and divine eternity is the central theme of this act, which ends in Theseus’s abandoning the maiden. Act V closes the dramatic structure, as the central motifs of divine protectors and their relationship to mortals is professed once again by Aegeus and his seer. Questioning the seer whether Theseus is alive and not receiving a clear answer, Aegeus is eventually told by the messenger that the ship approaching Athens carries a black sail, a sign of Theseus’s death. In despair, the king throws himself off the cliff, leaving his son to witness the tragedy upon his return back home. In the end, Theseus must recognise the vengeance of Aphrodite, who is solely responsible for the events.

The protagonists in Ariadna are placed in different positions facing the dichotomous worldview. Theseus is one of the two main protagonists, as the whole drama focuses on his quest. Indeed, Tsvetaeva’s notebooks reveal that the author was more interested in Theseus’s character than in Ariadne’s. Theseus starts off as a more or less ordinary earthly hero, embarking on courageous adventures, saving the maidens and young men of Athens. He is oriented towards the tangible,
concrete and material. Theseus’s love for Ariadne and his final dialogue with the divinity Bacchus, however, open his eyes to new understanding, enabling him to grow. The second main protagonist, Ariadne, is presented in images and allusions connecting her clearly with the immaterial. Many of the basic themes of the original myth are retained, for example the theme of love versus rejection, the impossibility of love even for two lovers destined for each other, and, finally, death, sacrifice and inescapable fate. A central force at the heart of the drama is the divinity Bacchus, who professes the forces of the transcendent realm, completing Theseus’s change and Ariadne’s fate.

1.1. Ariadne and Aphrodite
Ariadne is governed by her relationship to the divine realm and, consequently, she can be characterised as a spiritual heroine. Her connection to her protectress Aphrodite is evoked from the beginning, and her overall orientation as a protagonist evokes faith in divine ordination and rule. She is also, for most of the play, detached from physical images, although in her discussion with Theseus she also shows an interest in earthly love. Compared with traditional retellings of the myth, Tsvetaeva’s Ariadne is a much more central and active character. Whereas traditional versions of the myth concentrate on Theseus’s heroism, Tsvetaeva’s lyrical tragedy shifts some of the importance to Ariadne. Her final fate, to be transported into the immaterial realm by Bacchus, can be interpreted in a clearly poetic vein.

From the beginning of the play, Ariadne is portrayed as possessing a significant bond with the divine realm. As she appears in the drama, her speech focuses on the power of her protectress Aphrodite to select for her

---

144 Tomas Venclova (1985: 102) states that Ariadne can be characterised as self-enclosed and self-sufficient. Rose Lafoy (1981: 112) also claims that Tsvetaeva’s Ariadne combines characteristics of independence, obstinacy, spontaneity, intuition and passion.

145 Interestingly, Tsvetaeva’s notebooks contain a psychological interpretation of Ariadne’s role in the vanquishing of the Minotaur.

Аriadна, рукой Тезея, убивает зло, освобождая отца. Ариадна – освободительница. (NZK 2001: 307.)

This streak is not however very prominent in the final version of the tragedy, which is more oriented towards Ariadne’s and Theseus’s relationship and towards the final transcendence of the former. Minos disappears from the drama after Act II, after which he is only briefly mentioned in Ariadne’s and Theseus’s dialogue of Act III.
a faithful lover, emphasising the ability of the divine to rightfully rule over the mortals’ destinies (see SS 3: 589-590). The close connection between Ariadne and her protectress is duly noted by Rose Lafoy (1981: 112), who indicates that in the Classical tradition, Ariadne was often considered an impersonation of Aphrodite. Ariadne’s first monologue suggests her explicit vertical bond with the divine, as she throws the ball up and down, belonging at the same time to the mortal world and the divine realm (see also Venclova 1985: 103; Kahn 1994: 177, Lafoy 1981: 113). The heroine even explicitly professes the desire to escape the limited world of mortals and be joined with the eternal one. She is elected firstly by her protectress Aphrodite, who has given her the powerful ball of thread, and symbolically also by the lyrical ethos.

In Ariadne’s first monologue Aphrodite implicitly takes the place of her mother, which strengthens the bond between them. This impression is further balanced by the structure of the monologue, containing lines in quotation marks which could be interpreted as belonging to the protectress (Lafoy 1981: 113, Kahn 1994: 178). In the monologue, the protectress’s lines evoke a keen interest in Ariadne’s choice of husband, promising to protect him against all evil if he is worthy. Emphasising the rightful choice, Aphrodite characterises Ariadne’s future husband as “an earthly god” (bogom zemnym, SS 3: 590). Ariadne is herself also characterised in divine terms, first by Theseus in Act II, when she suddenly appears with the magical thread and sword (za boginiu tebia priniav, SS 3: 597), then again at the end of Act III when her name is revealed to Theseus (V krasote tvoei bogoravnoi, SS 3: 610). The divine epithets are finally repeated in Act IV by Bacchus, when Ariadne’s transcendence and elevation from the mortal state to that of goddess become apparent. Thus the connection between Ariadne and her divine protectress is further enhanced in terms of parentage and similarity.

Ariadne’s faithful tribute to her protectress contains the seed of her destruction. As the reader already knows, the wrath of Aphrodite is

---

146 As analyzed by Roman Voitekhovich (2000: 236), in the beginning of Ariadne’s speech it seems that she is referring to a fiancé among the Olympians, not among earthly men. That she is envisioning a mortal lover becomes clear only at the end of her monologue. This orientation towards a heavenly groom, e.g. Bacchus, already from the beginning would reflect Ariadne’s status as a transcendent protagonist.

147 Interestingly, Ariadne is even characterised by her younger sister Phaedra in Fedra as bogoravnaia (god-like) (SS 3: 647).
induced precisely by Theseus’s subsequent infidelity and abandonment of the heroine on Naxos. Therefore the opening lines of the eulogy, seemingly positive and celebrating the divinity, are turned into an evocation of the opposite and are read in an ominous light, foregrounding doom. As is known, Aphrodite does not protect Theseus against all harm, but instead destroys his family and happiness, casting a curse far into the future. This double-edged protectorship lies at the core of Tsvetaeva’s interpretation as well, forming a constant undercurrent of her tragedies.

Ariadne’s faith in the divine is further evoked by the heroine’s monologue in Act III by the labyrinth entrance (SS 3: 599-601). Here, Ariadne functions as an internal narrator of the drama as it unfolds (Kahn 1994: 178). She interprets the sounds (or lack thereof) from the labyrinth, following Theseus’s battle with the Minotaur from a distance. Even though the monologue also evokes the protagonist’s distress at the unknown result and her worry for the hero, a good part of the monologue is filled with a tribute to her protectress. Once again the heroine turns to the divinities, pleading for the goddess to guard the hero in the darkness. Ariadne even offers her own life in trade for Theseus’s at the end of her speech. Interestingly, Aphrodite’s full name “heavenly Aphrodite” (Afrodita nebesnaia, SS 3: 601) is in the entire play only pronounced in this monologue, alluding implicitly to the Platonic and Symbolist subtext. The stress here is on the spiritual stance of the goddess, not on the interpretation of Aphrodite as a goddess of earthly beauty and love.

148 In the plans for the tragedy in Tsvetaeva’s notebooks the characterisation of the monologue is similar to that of the final play:


149 The evocation of the two Aphrodites relates to Pausanias’s speech in The Symposium:

Now what are the two Aphrodites? One is the elder and is the daughter of Uranus and had no mother; her we call Heavenly Aphrodite. The other is younger, the child of Zeus and Dione, and is called Common Aphrodite. (Plato 1951: 45.)
1.2. The Earthly Hero and Heavenly Heroine

The juxtaposition of the main protagonists of the play further reflects Ariadne’s orientation towards the transcendent and Theseus’s orientation towards the earthly. In Act III, Theseus and Ariadne engage in a central dialogue, as Theseus tries to convince Ariadne to depart with him. In the dialogue, Theseus professes Earthly passion and the joys of the mortal life. According to drafts in Tsvetaeva’s notebooks (NST 1997: 297), it is Ariadne who tries to explain the schemes of the divine to the mortal hero. Notably, in the course of the long discussion where Theseus tries to assure Ariadne of the strength of his emotions and convince her to leave with him, the two interlocutors repeatedly speak past each other. Ariadne constantly utters riddles which Theseus is unable to interpret. The opposing attitudes of the protagonists are enhanced by the imagery connected to them. Theseus frequently professes dynamism and movement, constant action – either he is sailing somewhere, or changing things; on the whole, he is oriented towards heroism. Ariadne, however, is static; her thoughts and actions are eternal, encompassing more abstract themes. Interestingly, the imagery in her lines contains clear allusions to the Platonic world order, such as the evocation of dreaming, mirrors, the world of shadows and footprints, which is juxtaposed to the real, material world (see Voitekhovich 2000: 238). She has no past and no future, as she claims at the beginning of the play in her discussion with Minos. This, of course, predicts her final destiny as the eternal bride of Bacchus (see also Venclova 1985: 102-103; Kahn 1994: 180-182).

Ariadne constantly refers to the tragic outcome of the future relationship in prophetic tones.150 Her lines contain a clear warning, as she strives to explain to Theseus the power of the divinities to decide the fates of the mortals. Often her warnings focus on the dangers of mortal love and passion:

АРИАДНА
Преступишь страсть.
Горлёнкой твоей страшусь
Быть. Зменного укуса
Яственнее, мужем сим
Быть мне брошенною! Дым –
Страсть твоя. Костер из стружек –

150 See also Osipova 2000: 241.
Passion is frequently presented as destructive and threatening. It is either a rock, fire, suffocating smoke or a weight. Nevertheless, it seems that Ariadne’s attempts at denial would be less ardent if they did not also contain a degree of interest in Theseus and earthly passion. The evocation of physical imagery in her speeches indicates that she is not entirely unaware of the emotions of mortal love.151

In her attempt to convince Theseus of the futility of his love, Ariadne frequently uses images of death and departure from the physical world. In addition to serving as a warning, these could be read as an anticipation of Ariadne’s future transcendence from the earthly to the immaterial realm.152 She tries to emphasise that the ultimate fate of Theseus lies elsewhere. It becomes clearer that the heroine knows the outcome of the tragedy in advance and tries to warn the hero of the wrath of the Gods:

ARIADNA
No Пеннородной
Памятлива кость. Запродан
Ей, моих коснувшись уст.
Знаешь ли о том, что пуст –
Зрак ее! И без провеса –
Цепь!

ТЕЗЕЙ
У самого Зевеса
Выхвачу! Из-под зениц –
Выхвачу!

---

151 See, for instance, Ariadne’s speech where she tries to convince Theseus of his unpredictable fate (SS 3: 606). These lines contain the imagery of breasts, muscles and fever, although here connected with the heavenly divinities’ passion for the mortals.

152 Roman Voitekhovich (2000: 242) writes that Ariadne’s speech is actually already divine; she frequently utters riddles, and her utterances always have a double meaning, in which they remind of the divinities’ utterances. One signification is for mortals, and the other is for the divine (for herself).
Striving to make Theseus understand the decisive will of the divinities, Ariadne explains that when loving her, Theseus abandons himself to Aphrodite. At the peak of his powers, the hero nevertheless exhibits a typical human *hubris*, claiming that he is stronger than the divine. Ariadne, again, characterises the mortals as ephemeral and weak, ending in the conviction that Theseus will eventually abandon her. Ariadne’s decision to finally follow Theseus and fulfill her fate is motivated in the play firstly by the long discussion with the hero, and secondly by the motif of fate which cannot be avoided. In addition, Ariadne’s own awakening feelings and interest in the hero could be considered a factor. Ariadne’s final lines of Act III are prophetic: before abandoning her home, she urges Theseus first not to leave her, then to be faithful. As becomes clear, Theseus doesn’t fulfil either of her requests. Ariadne’s almost desperate demands can be read as an attempt to avoid the forthcoming tragedy. Torn between loyalty towards her protectress Aphrodite and the intense emotions kindled by Theseus, Ariadne can only follow the object of her affections – not so much because she wants to but because that is her fate.

In the climactic Act IV Ariadne is portrayed as sleeping throughout the decisive dialogue of Bacchus and Theseus, thus emphasizing the opposition between the concrete, dynamic and mortal hero and the

---

153 Ariadne’s evaluation of human existence parallels that of Bacchus in the culminating dialogue with Theseus in Act IV.
spiritually-inclined, eternal heroine, and indeed presaging their separation at the end of the act. Ariadne’s sleep contains remnants of the various Classical interpretations of her fate, perceived sometimes as dying from sorrow on the island, sometimes as continuing her life as the bride of Dionysus (Lafoy 1981: 148-149). It is possible to interpret Tsvetaeva’s appropriation of Ariadne’s fate as creative transcendence. In order for her to attain this fate, significant growth is demanded from the mortal hero Theseus. He is the protagonist who changes in the process of the play, starting off in a boyish display of courage and ending in absolute grief for his lost love and, eventually, loss of his father, as I will discuss in the next section.

1.3. Theseus

1.3.1. The Eager Adventurer

Theseus, the main protagonist of the projected trilogy, differs from the other characters in his ability to develop and change in the course of events. His governing trait in the first three Acts is his orientation towards the tangible realm. He is continually incapable of recognising the forces of fate and the role the divinities play in the lives of the mortals. However, in his discussion with Ariadna in Act III and, finally, in his discussion with Bacchus in Act IV, the paths of the divine are opened to him, resulting in his ceding Ariadne to her divine fate. He perceives his tragic ignorance only at the end of the play, having lost both his love and his father in the webs of the divine. In spite of his selfless act of ceding Ariadne to a higher fate, he is made to suffer from his ignorance and mortal hubris, only to recognise his subordination to the gods at the end. His ability to develop and grow in the process of the play nevertheless makes him more dynamic than Ariadna, who is only oriented towards the transcendent throughout the play. Judging by Tsvetaeva’s notebooks, the author was much more interested in the character of Theseus than in Ariadna. The main question for Tsvetaeva is whether Theseus abandons

---

154 Interestingly, N.O. Osipova (2000: 237) interprets the heroine as a hypostasis of the Romantic and Symbolist notion of the eternal feminine, or the “sleeping soul” (spiashaia dusha). Even if the parallels between Blok and Tsvetaeva in this respect (Osipova 2000: 238-241) could be more convincing, the approach is certainly interesting and could be further developed in the future.

155 Theseus’s mortal hubris is recognised by both Andrew Kahn (1994: 183) and Rose Lafoy (1981: 66).
Ariadna out of cowardice or so she can achieve the higher fate of her
destiny. In her notes and in the several versions both of the tragedy and
of the cycle “Ariadna”, Tsvetaeva was exploring the different
perspectives on abandonment offered by the original myth. As we know,
the cycle “Ariadna” judges the events in an entirely different way than
the subsequent tragedy. (See NST 1997: 299-300).

From the beginning of Tsvetaeva’s Ariadna, Theseus appears as an
earthly hero. As in the original myth, he seeks adventure, saving the
Athenian youths from perishing in an offering to the Minotaur. Interestingly, this Act also juxtaposes Theseus’s mortal father and
immortal protector. Aegeus’s resignation and indifference are
counteracted by Theseus’s eagerness to depart on his quest, while his
immortal father, Poseidon, promotes his quest by arriving in Athens in
the guise of a stranger. The stranger mainly questions the Athenian
people about their fate in the hands of an indecisive and passive king, but
he also encourages them to stand up for themselves. Poseidon’s ardent
rousing of the Athenian townspeople even resembles revolutionary
action and could thus be seen as a considerable modernisation (Lafoy
1981: 101). It is noteworthy that in the final lines of the play the drowned
Aegeus, covered with seaweed, merges concretely with the element of
the sea as he is carried into the town. This image creates a concrete
parallel between Aegeus and his protector, but also emphasizes the tragic
culmination of the plot in evoking the image of a corpse covered with
algae.157

In Act II Theseus is juxtaposed with another father, Ariadne’s. King
Minos of Crete enters the play mourning his son Androgeus. Theseus’s
arrival in Crete and his courageous demand to proceed to the labyrinth
nevertheless enable Minos to recognise in the hero traits of his deceased
son. Finally, Theseus is allowed to trade his life for Androgeus’s in the
labyrinth. In the dialogue with Minos, Theseus displays traditionally
heroic images. Even creative undertones appear in passing, as Theseus
argues for the value of his self-sacrifice in images that emphasise the
eternity of heroic deeds. Dying young, several deeds are left undone, and

156 Andrew Kahn (1994: 181) aptly characterises Theseus’s key themes as anger,
honor and the sword.
157 See also Lafoy (1981: 204).
the poets’ eulogies remain unwritten. The monologues of Theseus and Minos evoke several images of the dualistic world order, such as mentioning the divinities, the depths of the sea, and the heights of the mountains (SS 3: 594-595). The relationship of father and son is further strengthened at the end of their discussion, with Theseus partly taking the place of Minos’s dead son.

The hero’s mortal hubris reaches its peak in Act III when Theseus has slain the monster and re-emerges from the labyrinth. He is filled with triumph, which he does not attribute to any higher force but only blindly to himself. Theseus answers Ariadne’s worried inquiries in short, fragmentary phrases, which clearly emphasise the hero’s mood at the peak of his strength. Interestingly, he alludes at one point to himself as immortal:

ТЕЗЕЙ
Сражен!

АРИАДНА
Цел?

ТЕЗЕЙ
Всем сердцем
Смерть приняв!

АРИАДНА
Цел?

ТЕЗЕЙ
Бессмертен.

(SS 3: 602.)

The hero’s self-characterisation as immortal after his single-handed heroic deed opposes him to the spiritual Ariadne. He short-sightedly attributes his success only to himself and his mortal powers. Lacking the characteristics of spirituality and divine election, Theseus is fully rooted in the earthly, physical world. He is full of blind assertion of his physical passion for the heroine and does not heed her warnings about the power of the divinities. The heroine’s attempts to convince him to leave are

---

158 On the parallels of this motif to the Classical tradition, namely Horace, see Voitekhovich 2000: 235.
unsuccessful. At the end of the discussion Theseus is even ready to commit suicide if the maiden does not consent to leave with him. Though this dialogue is interrupted by the chorus of the saved maidens and youths, it is exemplary in its acute juxtaposition of the hero and heroine, which reflects the central dichotomous structure of the play. This discussion with Ariadne, however, is the first step in Theseus’s development towards spiritual growth and a deeper understanding of the position of the immaterial in life.159

1.3.2. Understanding the Spiritual

The main dramatic turn, sealing Ariadne’s fate as well as Theseus’s development as a character, occurs in Act IV. Theseus’s monologue over the sleeping Ariadne manifests the first traits of the change in his understanding, and his realization of the spiritual development of the soul. His growth is completed by the dialogue with Bacchus, where Theseus first defends his earthly passion, though he eventually sacrifices it in order for Ariadne to reach a higher fate. Tsvetaeva’s notebooks demonstrate that she spent a great deal of effort on this Act. According to the scene’s preliminary notes, the ultimate question for her was how to evaluate the act of abandonment. This is how the dialogue is sketched in November 1923:


Somewhat later, in August 1924, when Tsvetaeva was writing the culminating scene, the dialogue is envisioned in more detail, but the interpretation of the scene on Naxos still remains overt:

И. вступление Диониса. Основа: вкрадчивость.
Либо – А всё-таки ее отдашь! (уступишь, покинешь)
Вахх хочет Ариадну. Как бог, он может ее отнять, но он, очевидно, хочет и Тезея, он хочет доброй воли Тезея к жертве
ш---ш Легко отдать жизнь за родину, как ты этого хотел.

159 See also Voitekhovich 2000: 237.
The final version of the play settles for the latter interpretation: Theseus renounces his love so that Ariadne may reach the higher destiny available to her, and become eternal as Bacchus’s spouse.¹⁶⁰

This transcendence is envisioned in terms of the Platonic ladder of Eros, as we can see in the first monologues of Act IV, where Theseus begins to develop from an ordinary hero towards a man with a deeper understanding of the spiritual. According to Platonic logic, his experience of physical passion with Ariadne opens up the the path towards the recognition of absolute beauty for him, pointing to the existence of higher steps on the ladder of Eros. For the first time, Theseus becomes fully conscious of the immaterial dimension, which was professed by Ariadne in their earlier dialogue. The monologue also contains a concrete hint of the Platonic subtext:

ТЕЗЕЙ

Сквозь цепную жимолость
Сна – слушай завет:
Зем-ля утолима в нас,
Бес-смртное – нет.

Без dna наших чаяний
Чан. мысль – выше лба!
Те-ла насышаемы.
Бес-смртна алчба!

[---]

Сквозь заткнанный занавес
Сна – сердцем пробьюсь.
Ду-ша неустанна в нас.
И мало ей уст.

Instead of his former focus only on the earthly realm and passion, Theseus now realizes that the spirit cannot be satisfied merely through the physical experience of love. The evocation of a mirror in the second stanza implies Plato’s conception of earthly existence as a distorting mirror of the ideal world. Nevertheless, in the hero’s long monologue (SS 3: 611-613) he turns towards the Gods, vowing that he will not abandon his loved one, come what may. The monologue is a tribute to the power and intensity of human passion, presenting it as compatible with the spiritual. However, in an intensely dramatic turn, when Theseus’s oath of faithfulness is at its most intense, Bacchus’s voice resounds, claiming Ariadne as his bride. The ensuing dialogue with the divinity completes Theseus’s development as a tragic protagonist.

As the immaterial and powerful Bacchus appears on stage, Theseus is given an entirely new perspective on earthly passion and existence. Human love is now viewed from the divine realm. Bacchus’s speech juxtaposes torturous, ephemeral and painful mortal love and immaterial, eternal, divine existence, ordering the hero to choose between these two realms and thereby decide Ariadne’s fate. The God’s first longer monologue (SS 3: 614) stresses the negative qualities of physical passion, stressing its transience, its superfluous nature, its clumsiness and excessive physicality. The monologue is constructed on an opposition between the words liubit’ (love) and rubit’ (to cut), forming a rhyme pair. Mortal love is envisioned as a clear parallel to heavy labour, concrete work, and death. The imagery in this monologue extends from physical labour (the evocations of cutting wood), to illness (fever, intoxication and death), to torturous physical pain (the tearing of veins, the fallen mare and the curved mouth). Human passion is likened to cutting down trees, clearly indicating the destructive emphasis Bacchus gives to human love.

Contrasted with sordid and torturous human passion, Bacchus then invokes his own divine essence. His next step in convincing Theseus is to profess his own divine origins and superiority, which he accomplishes in short, cryptic lines emphasising his duality (dvuseryi i dvoedonnyi);
When in his subsequent longer monologue (SS 3: 615-616) he continues to deprecate human life and the shortness of mortal existence, he shifts to Ariadne’s point of view. Stressing that Theseus’s passion cannot satisfy the spiritual maiden, he evokes Ariadne’s mortality, and the ephemeral nature of her beauty, which will shortly turn to dust. He symbolizes the mortal life span as a worm, gnawing away at beauty, and then says the same is true of Theseus’s passion. As the hero still attempts to resist, alluding to his courageous deeds of the sword, Bacchus retorts that it has been preordained from the beginning of time that the maiden will belong to him. Juxtaposing eternity and transience, Ariadne’s immortality as Bacchus’s spouse and her life as a fading mortal, he asks the hero to reflect on whether these fates are at all compatible. Finally, Theseus has to choose between passion and the eternal, between a part and eternity:

БАКХ
Сгибнет, в прахе влечь.
Меж бессрочной красой ее
И цветеньем на час.

Между страстью, калечащей,
И бессмертной мечтой.
Между частью и вечностью
Выбирай, – выбор твой!

Уступи, объявивший много.
Деву – богу.

(SS 3: 618.)

Bacchus’s arguments (SS 3: 618-619) center on the new realms and new characteristics Ariadne will possess once her transcendence is complete. To Theseus’s every attempt to emphasize their earthly love, Bacchus curtly points out the novelty of Ariadne’s transformation. These speeches open a new perspective for the earthly hero Theseus, who is now given complete knowledge of the divine, transcendent realm. Finally, having heard all of the new existence Bacchus has in store for the maiden, Theseus makes his choice. In despair, he still questions why the two were allowed to spend one night together, if the maiden was predestined for the divinity. Bacchus replies:
When Theseus, in a final attempt to resist the divinity, claims that abandoning Ariadne is nevertheless not something a man is able to do, Bacchus shortly orders him to become a divinity (SS 3: 620).\textsuperscript{161} In Theseus’s last speech to Ariadne (SS 3: 621) he indicates that Naxos has become the bone of his wings – the metaphor evokes his newly-acquired orientation towards the spiritual.\textsuperscript{162} As Irina Shevelenko points out, Theseus’s love for Ariadne also enables him to understand that Eros is inevitably tragic for a mortal, since the concept entails a striving to exceed the physical boundaries of this world. Interpreted through the plot of transcendence constant in Tsvetaeva’s poetry of the time, the immaterial force wins the battle over the fate of the mortal maiden, as she transcends into the eternal realm. Theseus is left to pay for his crime of scorning mortal love through suffering in Earthly life. (See Shevelenko 2002: 278-279).

In Act V, the full scale of the tragedy is revealed to Theseus. As it turns out, he has been the murderer of his own father, since he forgot to change the black sail out of longing for Ariadne. Although his victorious speech after arriving in Athens still bears traces of his former hubris, the tone changes quickly after he has heard the grievous news. Here, it is the choruses which mainly evoke the desperate and tragic atmosphere reigning over the entire scene. Facing the corpse of his drowned father, now covered with seaweed, Theseus ends by exclaiming his lines of recognition – \textit{Uznaiu tebia, Afrodita!} (SS 3: 632). His awareness of the wrath of the divine is complete.

\textsuperscript{161} Through his growth, Theseus actually develops into a hero worthy of Ariadne; in her opening monologue, the maiden’s protectress Aphrodite was seemingly interested in a man who would be “an earthly god” (\textit{bogom zemnym}, SS 3: 590).

\textsuperscript{162} It is clear that this image also alludes to the Classical tradition of the winged soul, as well as to the myth of Eros and Psyche.
1.4. Bacchus

Tsvetaeva’s interpretation of Bacchus unites the Classical tradition and later Nietzschean influences.\(^{163}\) Firstly, Bacchus appears on stage only as a voice, which is in line with the traditional perception of Dionysus as a masked divinity, appearing throughout Greek drama in various guises (see, for instance, Kerényi 1976: 251). In Tsvetaeva’s play, Bacchus’s identity is gradually revealed to the hero at the very beginning through riddle-like epithets, pinpointing his twofold essence. *Ariadna*’s Bacchus is a divinity of oppositions, which is another instance of the dichotomous structure underlying the entire play. It is particularly interesting that some of Bacchus’s characteristics also connect the divinity to Nietzschean concepts. For example, the god’s claim that he is completely free of all previous borders is clearly Nietzschean.

However, Bacchus can arguably also be examined in the context of the Classical tradition. In Act IV of *Ariadna* (SS 3: 615), Bacchus’s epithets seem to emphasise his double character: he is deceptive and fickle, but also exceptional and original (he is not born of a woman).\(^{164}\) Indeed, according to the Classical tradition, the child Dionysus was born twice, first out of the womb of Semele, and then, for a second time, out of Zeus’ thigh, where the remnants of the shattered child, torn apart by the Titans, were preserved and made whole again (Kerényi 1976: 257). Tsvetaeva’s emphasis on the ambivalent nature of the divinity is inherited from the Classical tradition, since one of the central characteristics of Dionysus in the original myth is precisely this duality. Dionysus unites in himself opposite characteristics, such as masculinity and femininity, gentleness and violence, old age and youth, distance and affinity, madness and wisdom, the civilized and the barbarian (Vernant 1986: 256).\(^{165}\) Dionysus

---


\(^{164}\) On the masked quality of Dionysus and its centrality for the processes of worship, see Vernant 1986: 247-248).

\(^{165}\) Ambiguity arises from the divinity’s twofold origins, born as a contamination of an old Thracian cult and a Hellenic divinity symbolizing the joys and raptures of life (Lafoy 1981: 158).
even plays with all the previously established conventions, blending everything, blurring the vision of the spectators, destroying old borders and views in order to renew and resurrect life in Dionysian ecstasy. Tsvetaeva’s awareness of the tradition enables Bacchus to characterize himself in the following stanzas, alluding to Bacchanalian rituals of worship:

Тот, которого душу пьете
В хороводах и на холмах.
С злыми каторжниками плоти
Бог, братающийся в боях.

Верховод громового хора.
Все возжаждшие, суда!
Одаряющий без разбора
И стирающий без следа.

(SS 3: 615.)

Taking into account the plot of transcendence, Tsvetaeva’s Bacchus can justly be paralleled with a spirit of inspiration, carrying mortals into the immaterial. Earthly restrictions and rules do not apply to him, and his epithets evoke the crossing of boundaries and attaining the unlimited realms of the spirit. He is similar to other creative forces in Tsvetaeva’s oeuvre, forces which help the poet transcend the material world and become initiated into the spiritual. This is also alluded to in the reference to the “extended boundary” (razdvinutaia granitsa). The image could appropriately be understood in Nietzschean terms as a transcendence of the limits of self, experienced in Dionysian ecstasy. Yet it also implies that the boundaries between human and divinity, mortal and eternal, are momentarily erased. Interestingly, Bacchus describes Ariadne’s new existence to Theseus in terms of novelty and change: novye chuvestva, novaia chut’, novaia oshschup’, and, most importantly, Sih ne budet ochei, novyi vzgliad, novaia sut’ (SS 3: 618-619). These new qualities Ariadne acquires after her transcendence can be aptly paralleled with those of the personae discussed previously who are already tied to the transcendent realm: the Sibyl’s prophetic sight and Eurydice’s new, Hadean vision. The unlimited, superior and transcendent existence Bacchus describes in his dispute with Theseus is also central in Tsvetaeva’s “higher realm” of creation. Furthermore, the boundaries between mortal and immortal,
human and divine are erased even more concretely in Ariadne’s ultimate fate. Even if this transcendence is not overtly evoked, it is acutely felt by the mortal hero, relinquishing his chances for earthly happiness as he abandons Ariadne on Naxos.

2. FEDRA

Fedra, the second play in Tsvetaeva’s projected trilogy on Theseus, is less symmetrical in structure than Ariadna. Additionally, it lacks the internal coherence of the earlier play and is less readily analyzed in the creative vein. The drama centers on Phaedra’s overwhelming passion, engendered by Aphrodite in revenge on Theseus. Furthermore, important themes are the fates of the mortals at the hands of the gods, predestination, the female line of tradition evoked mainly by the wetnurse, transcendence and forgiveness. Even though creative implications are less foregrounded, Phaedra’s final monologue is clearly oriented towards the transcendent realm, evidencing the dialectics of the Platonic Eros. The play is founded on the same oppositions between gods and mortals as Ariadna.

Fedra starts with a long chorus of the hunters, praising their profession and their superior companion Hippolytus. Hippolytus, however, does not join the exhilarated atmosphere of his brothers, as his mood is darkened by an ominous nightmare he has just had of his Amazon mother Antiope, killed in battle. The fellow hunters attempt to console the hero, but Hippolytus’s servant recognises in the nightmare an ill omen, which is instantly followed by Phaedra’s appearance on the scene, inquiring how to get back to Troezen. A short discussion follows between the hero and heroine, ending in their introducing themselves. Act II consists of Phaedra’s illness and feverish ravings, surrounded by her maids and the wetnurse. A substantial part of the Act consists of Phaedra’s and the wetnurse’s dialogue, in which the wetnurse incites Phaedra to act on her emotions, confessing them to Hippolytus. In the end, Phaedra finally concedes. In Act III Hippolytus is once again retold the story of his mother’s death by the servant. The dramatic incidents are interrupted by Phaedra’s entrance, confessing her love to the amazed Hippolytus. In the end, she is abruptly rejected by the chaste hero. The final act, Act IV, mainly relates the tragic events: first, the wetnurse
appears on scene, praising Phaedra for committing suicide. Blaming Hippolytus for not accepting Phaedra’s passion, the wetnurse forwards the faulty accusations towards the stepson, instigating Theseus’s wrath and revenge. Hippolytus is killed by the sea monster, dragged to death by his own bolting horses. This death is retold by a messenger and grieved by a chorus of the hero’s friends, once again evoking the actions of the divine in the fates of the mortals. Finally, the wetnurse confesses her part as a catalyst of the tragic events, which in the end compels Theseus to realize the ultimate reasons for the tragedy: Aphrodite’s revenge on him for abandoning Ariadne. His final monologue evokes the order of the world, consisting of highs and lows, of gods and mortals. In an important reconciliative turn, Theseus ends in burying both his wife and son side by side beneath the myrtle, symbolizing eternal love.

2.1. Phaedra

Tsvetaeva’s interpretation of Phaedra focuses on her all-consuming passion. As seen in the author’s notebooks, she was interested from the beginning on the divine origins of this emotion: it was instigated by Phaedra’s own divine protectress Aphrodite, seeking revenge on Theseus for his old sin of abandoning Phaedra’s elder sister Ariadne on Naxos. The whole tragedy is therefore generated by the family tie between Ariadne and Phaedra and the fact that they share a divine protectress. This accentuates the theme of predestination and fate throughout the two dramas. The first drafts of the dramatic trilogy on Theseus (ST 1997: 186-189) introduce the child Phaedra on Crete, either running after her sister Ariadne, joining her on the boat, or swearing revenge after Ariadne’s abandonment on Naxos. However, these scenes were not included in the final tragedy, for Phaedra does not appear in the play *Ariadna* at all.166 Tsvetaeva’s conception of Phaedra seems to emphasise the archaic roots of the myth, focusing on elements of nature, specifically on the plant world.167 This is apparent in a note written in 1926:

---

166 Even Theseus’s position in *Fedra* is weaker than in the original drafts of the play (see NST 1997: 304-305), where he was introduced in the first scenes of the drama. In the final play, however, Theseus enters the stage only at the very end of the action.

167 Thus for instance Phaedra’s death, hanging herself on the myrtle. (See Lotman et al. 1988: 63).
Myrtle is an emblem of Phaedra’s protectress Aphrodite and an ancient symbol of pure love, so this draft can be seen as formulating the emphasis of the entire resulting play. The play discusses Phaedra’s earthly passion without any intervention from the divine (in which it differs from Ariadna), taking its imagery mainly from the material world and nature. Phaedra is an innocent victim in Tsvetaeva’s interpretation, not to be blamed for the tragic outcome. The tragedy is generated by the forces of the divine, inducing her passion.

2.1.1. Predestined Passion

Fate and predestination are manifested in the drama in various ways, ranging from omens and foresight to an evocation of Phaedra’s ancestry, professed by the wetnurse. During Phaedra’s mysterious fever in Act II she utters several omens, alluding to the forthcoming catastrophe. For instance, the repeated image of the horses’ stampeding hooves (konskii skok, SS 3: 643, 644, 645) predicts the tragic death of Hippolytus, killed by his own bolting horses. It also alludes to upcoming fate, a fate which cannot be prevented. A similar ominous sign is the bough (suk, SS 3: 644, 645, 646) with heavy fruit which anticipates Phaedra’s death, hanging herself in despair after confessing her emotions to Hippolytus. Interestingly, the maids characterize Phaedra’s mysterious illness as foreign (khvor’ zamorskaia, SS 3: 645). Implicitly, this characterization would also allude to the hereditary taint of her ancestry. More importantly, the phrase of the maids can be interpreted as saying that Phaedra’s illness is not from this world, that it is sent by the Gods to torture the heroine. The archaic imagery of horses and trees, evidenced by Phaedra’s ramblings, connect her to the culto-magical rituals of

---

168 Tsvetaeva’s notebooks contain drafts on Phaedra’s and Ariadne’s mother Pasiphaë. Apparently in the beginning she was meant to be included as a protagonist in Ariadna, but she was nevertheless later excluded from the final plot. (See NZK 2: 204, 306-307.)
shamanism (Venclova 1985: 105), further emphasizing the archaic core of Tsvetaeva’s interpretation.

The earthly orchestrator of the crime in Tsvetaeva’s interpretation is the wetnurse, the catalyst for the tragedy. She acts as a link to Phaedra’s origins, frequently evoking the curse of her mother and the bond of milk existing between them. In contrast to earlier interpretations of the myth, Tsvetaeva’s interpretation of the wetnurse emphasises archaic and mystical traits. Her character is envisioned in overtly folkloric terms; she is frequently reminiscent of an evil stepmother or a witch.

Accordingly, the wetnurse initiates, almost conjures, Phaedra’s forbidden love. Judging by Tsvetaeva’s drafts for the tragedies, the wetnurse was initially envisioned as a vehicle for Phaedra’s emotions:

У Эврипида всё выдает кормилица, без воли Федры. – Ложь.
– Кормилица только передает. (NZT 2: 305.)

However, the final play strengthens the role of the wetnurse as a seducer in the process of the dramatic events. In the dialogue in Act II, she presents Phaedra with the most elaborate signals and signs of predestination, making it almost plausible to leave her “inherited and old husband” Theseus and follow the call of her own heart. In a clear folkloric turn, the tension revolves on the wetnurse’s tenacious questioning of the name of Phaedra’s love. Crucially, after Phaedra has pronounced Hippolytus’s name aloud, tragedy cannot be avoided.

169 In Euripides’s Hippolytus as in Racine’s Phèdre, frequent allusions to the hereditary taint of Phaedra’s roots are likewise evoked by the wetnurse Oenone. In Hippolytus, the inherited curse is similarly discussed in a long dialogue between Phaedra and her wetnurse.

Nurse:
Your words are wounds. Where will your tale conclude?
Phaedra:
Mine is an inherited curse. It is not new.
(Euripides 1955: 177.)

In Phèdre, this appears for instance in the scene in Act I in which Phaedra uncovers her secret to her wetnurse:

PHÈDRE
Puisque Vénus le veut, de ce sang déplorable
Je péris la dernière et la plus misérable.
(Racine 1933: 25. - My italics.)

170 The tsarevich and stepmother in “Tsar’-Devitsa” (1923) can be seen as a prototype for Hippolytus and the Wetnurse. On the sexual connotations of the tsarevich and stepmother, see Kroth 1979: 573-574.
Having omitted Phaedra’s flesh-and-blood mother Pasiphaë from the play, Tsvetaeva emphasizes instead the hereditary taint of her roots. In the course of the discussion the wetnurse emphasizes the tragedy of the female line and the unhappy fates of the women in Phaedra’s family. The dark curse of Phaedra’s ancestry is evoked by the wetnurse as inducing all future disasters:

КОРМИЛИЦА
Издали, издавна поведу:
Горькие женщины в вашем роду, –
Так и слава вам будет в будущем!
Пасифая любила чудище.
Разонравился царь, мил зверь.
Дщерь ты ей или не дщерь?
Материнская зла кровиночка!

(SS 3: 647. – My italics.)

This description enhances the dark and mystical origins of Phaedra’s passion. Tsvetaeva’s wetnurse enhances Phaedra’s forbidden love and is responsible for inducing her into action. Phaedra is thus innocent, suffering in her passion. She allows herself passively to be manipulated by the wetnurse after her delirious illness. The wetnurse bluntly convinces her that it is plausible to follow one’s unlawful emotions and to seek to fulfil them. Tsvetaeva’s preliminary notes also evoke this:

Роль кормилицы? Не соблазнительница, она только убеждает Федру в удаче, дает ей последнюю уверенность.
Очень важна роль кормилицы. (NZK 2: 305.)

Accordingly, the resulting play presents the wetnurse as an earthly seductress. In the dialogue of the two protagonists in Act II, the wetnurse envisions Phaedra’s union with Hippolytus in clearly erotic terms (see, for instance, her repeated lines: chas’ vozmi, vseh tishe...; chas vozmi, vseh...

171 In Racine’s Phèdre, Oenone’s tragedy is that she actually accelerates the forthcoming catastrophe all the while wishing to help her mistress and save her from tragedy. What unites Racine’s Oenone and Tsvetaeva’s wetnurse is the activity they display when they convince the tormented heroine to confess her emotions. However, the wetnurse’s mystical and folkloristic traits in Tsvetaeva’s tragedy are, by contrast, entirely lacking from the 17th century Classicist Racine.
glushe... to the overt evocation of the union itself: *V kustakh* / *Mirtovykh* – *ust na ustakh!* (SS 3: 655-656).

The wetnurse shares a mystical connection with all kinds of omens, visions, and traditions. She is reminiscent of the healing women of fairytales and folklore. She introduces to Phaedra the “cursed” inherited husband, his previous wives, casting a shadow on her marriage in the present, and even evokes her barrenness in startlingly modern expressions.\(^\text{172}\) Convincing Phaedra to acknowledge her emotions to Hippolytus, the wetnurse evokes Theseus’s past and Phaedra’s origins, striving to demonstrate that her passion is only the latest link in a chain. She emphasises that Phaedra is Theseus’s third wife, that she inherited her husband from her elder sister, and that his previous wives cannot be forgotten because they are not of this world. They are already part of a mystical, immaterial realm and reign forever over the young bride, casting a dark curse upon her. The immaterial realm of the deceased is once again made to rule over the tangible world of the living:

В мужин дом вошла
Женою позднею, женой третьею.
Две жены молодую встретили
На пороге. Не сей земли
Жены – в дом ввели
Молодую. ”Живи, мол, радуйся”.
Две жены молодую за руки
Водят, ночи твои и дни;
Федра, в их тени, 
А ложница темна – их облако. /.../

(SS 3: 650.)

As the wetnurse convinces Phaedra of the justification of her passionate emotions, she eliminates the boundary between herself and Phaedra. This gives the impression that they are two hypostases of one and the same person.\(^\text{173}\) Milk functions as a central, mystical element,

\(^\text{172}\) The motif of childlessness is first apparent in the character of Phaedra (Act II), then repeated in Hippolytus (Act III).

\(^\text{173}\) The unity of mother and child is also a commonplace of the Classical tradition and illustrated by the Kore myth. It constantly underlies Tsvetaeva’s poems for her daughter Ariadna. (See Weeks 1990.) In this case, however, the mother’s role is twisted and distorted by the wetnurse.
uniting the two women. Evoking the bond of milk, the wetnurse makes it plausible for Phaedra to fulfill her own wishes.

Interestingly, the wetnurse’s monologue here focuses on the images of breasts and lips, now evoking the bond between mother (or wetnurse) and child. The ability of the mother’s milk to rule over the world is clearly emphasised. The bond of milk is as strong as kinship through blood, making the nursed child Phaedra the passive receptacle of the wetnurse’s wishes and hopes. The intensity with which the wetnurse makes the heroine the executor of her own wishes and desires (knowing the outcome to be destructive) contains implications of danger.\(^{174}\) She is imbued with sexual connotations, her speeches frequently evoking the concrete, passionate union of the lovers, and on the other hand, her own repressed passion, which she forces onto Phaedra. However, the decisive

\(^{174}\) As formulated by Simon Karlinsky (1966: 262), she “dominates the tragedy and becomes a powerful Mother Nature figure, forcing the child she loves to seek carnal pleasure without regard for the consequences”.

(SS 3: 652-653.)
element behind the tragedy is not the tainted origin of the heroine nor the seductive stepmother figure, but divine will ruling over the mortals. This becomes clear near the end of the Act II, where the wetnurse suddenly replies to Phaedra’s doubts about the success of her charms by opposing Phaedra’s protectress Aphrodite and Hippolytus’s protectress Artemis, indicating that Aphrodite’s charms will guarantee the success of Phaedra’s seduction (SS 3: 659). However, her role as the medium of divine retribution is only uncovered in the very last act of the tragedy.

The wetnurse is necessary for the dynamics of Tsvetaeva’s play inasmuch as she is given responsibility for the events, making Phaedra to a large extent an innocent victim of the forces of fate and predestination. The wetnurse is a twofold character, however; in addition to serving as a catalyst towards an inevitable fate, she also acts as a link to Phaedra’s background, family and past. Notably, by the end of the dialogue with the wetnurse in Act II, Phaedra seems to be in a trance. The wetnurse’s lines acquire an incantational intensity and tonality when she foresees the forthcoming union of the heroine and Hippolytus, hidden in secrecy and darkness. Prophetic also are Phaedra’s words at the end of the act, predicting “the fall of the kingdoms in unaccustomed hands” (царства крошатся / В руках неопытных, SS 3: 661). The wetnurse even overtly alludes to Phaedra’s death and, in fact, implicitly suggests suicide to the tormented heroine.

2.1.2. Suicide as Transcendence

Phaedra’s passion gains clear implications of transcendence in her final confrontation with Hippolytus. In Act III, Phaedra appears in Hippolytus’s lodgings, approaching him with a letter written on slate, which he then breaks into pieces. In Tsvetaeva’s appropriation of the myth, Phaedra’s evocations of passion have a higher aim than mere satisfaction of physical lust. Her rambling and inconsistent offering of her emotions to the baffled and rejecting Hippolytus imply that she is following a fatal path which cannot be altered (SS 3: 669). In her monologue she strives to explain the origin of her emotions as divine, all the while forwarding creative images (see Voitekhovich 2006: 6). Nevertheless, it is clear that while she does declare her love to Hippolytus, exactly according to the Wetnurse’s wishes, she is not converted to the nurse’s faith. Phaedra’s fate is not the consummation of
physical passion, but a transcendent death, envisioned as a liberation from the material to the immaterial in a Platonic vein.

Phaedra’s final lines in the play testify that she knows the outcome of her confession is death. Instead of stressing her physical passion, so clearly evidenced by Tsvetaeva’s cycle of 1923, Phaedra pleads for a single experience of earthly passion, which would enable the two lovers to find spiritual union. The physical consummation of Phaedra’s passion would grant her attainment of the transcendent realm:

О другом, о непробудном
Сне — уж постлано, где лечь нам —
Грежу, не ночном, а вечном,
Нескончаемом. — пусть плачут! —
Где ни пасынков, ни мачех,
У грехов, живущих в детях,
У мужей седых, ни третьих
Жен...

(SS 3: 671.)

When Phaedra evokes never-ending sleep in this monologue, she greets her forthcoming death with a clear note of transcendence. Her speech evokes a new existence without limits or boundaries, and coheres with Tsvetaeva’s conception of the creative realm. These lines can be interpreted through the principles of the Platonic scheme. According to the ladder of Eros, Phaedra now pleads for a single consummation of earthly passion. This experience would serve as a prerequisite for the protagonists’ union in the immaterial. Tragically, the denial of this physical union signifies that Phaedra is denied its higher, immaterial resolution, and is thus destined to remain in the physical realm.

As is clear, Hippolytus nevertheless repels the advances of the stepmother. The scene ends in his curt reply to Phaedra, and the next scene already reveals her corpse hanging from a tree. The earthly union of Phaedra and Hippolytus is not realized. However, having thus been denied one path to transcendence in the union with Hippolytus, the desperate Phaedra chooses another path: she decides to take her own life. The final Act of Tsvetaeva’s tragedy contains a clear note of reconciliation, as Theseus decides to bury the two side by side beneath a myrtle. The Act emphasises Phaedra’s purity and blamelessness, treating
the heroine’s passion with understanding. The chorus of women, appearing in the scene after Phaedra’s death, at once celebrates Phaedra’s death and grieves it. The symbols in this eulogy provide additional evidence for interpreting Phaedra’s suicide in light of transcendence and the attainment of a higher, poetic existence, an interpretation opposed to that of a tragic death and the ending of a life. The chorus starts off in a lamenting tone, referring to the deceased one as sleeping, but the tone of the eulogy changes in the third stanza to a celebration of female desire and the eternal existence of the deceased:

Славьте, славьте страшный плод!
Федры – робость,
Федры – доблесть,
Федрин подвиг, Федрин пот.
Две вечности, две зелени:
Лавр. Мирт. Родства не предали!
[---]

Благословимте ж дерево
Любви, посаду дедову!
Как ты женой Тезеевой,
Так он супругом Федриным. –
Доколе только мирт стоит,
И утро есть, и вечер есть...
Честь веточке, честь миртовой!
Не смертная спишь, – вечная.

(SS 3: 677.)

Phaedra’s unlawful passion, even if unconsummated, is turned to her honour and to an act of bravery, granting her eternal life in the immaterial realm. This interpretation is emphasised by the eulogy’s imagery, which focuses on the image of the tree. This image evokes both the myrtle on which Phaedra has hanged herself as well as the attainment of the transcendent. The image of the myrtle is further expanded to evoke the mythical *arbor mundi*, forming the basis of the world order. The evocation of the diurnal chain of mornings and evenings emphasises the general cyclical structure of life from birth to death, incessantly repeating itself. Celebrating the heroine’s passion and courage to embrace it, the chorus condemns the stepson, reiterating the faulty accusations of the Wetnurse, blaming Hippolytus for advances towards the innocent
stepmother. However, the faulty accusations are in the end revealed and the tragedy ends on a note of reconciliation, as Theseus recognises that the tragedy was instigated by the gods.

2.2. Hippolytus

The key concepts of Hippolytus in Tsvetaeva’s interpretation are his union with his divine protectress Artemis, on the one hand, and with his deceased mother, on the other. He is closely interconnected with the elements of nature, emphasising asexuality and virginality, in which he joins other Tsvetaevan male figures, such as Hamlet or the Tsarevich.

2.2.1. The Companion of Artemis

The tragedy’s first Act, consisting centrally of the eulogy of the hunters, evokes Hippolytus as the elected companion of Artemis. The hunters are worshipping their protectress through the hunt, adjoined to a celibate way of life. The chorus evokes the hunters’ merging with nature and the almost ecstatic joy they experience in the process. Physical images are intertwined with images of nature, forming a whole and emphasizing the ritual quality of the hunt.175 The divine aspects are forwarded even more concretely in the lines where the roles of the hunter and the hunted merge. The men seem to exist in union with nature:

Elenem stanovish’sia, vsled skacha / Eleniu! (SS 3: 634). Hunting is proclaimed an activity performed solely by the male community, despising and negating women and everything that belongs to settled family life:

Хвала Артемиде за рог, за клык,
Последнюю удал, последний крик
Охотника, – охнул, ухнул
Лес. Перевернулся. Корнями в пух!
Хвала Артемиде за мех, за...

175 This exemplifies Tsvetaeva’s archaising approach to the myth, emphasising the ritual characteristics of hunting. In ancient Greece, the hunt often contained sacrificial elements, even though it was generally perceived as opposite to the rites of the Olympian divinities. Hunting was more elemental to the sphere of divinities of the untamed wilderness such as Artemis and Dionysus. It is connected more broadly with the relationship between civilisation and nature, the hunter being simultaneously understood as an animal of prey and the possessor of an art and knowledge unattainable in the animal kingdom (Vernant 1973: 137-139).
The ritual characteristics of the hunters’ eulogy become even more poignant with the evocations of Artemis at regular intervals in the opening chorus. Having pledged themselves to the goddess of hunt and warfare, the hunters have vowed never to enter into marriage and remain forever the chaste fiancés of the divinity. It is only when the forces of the divine are presented in full that the chorus evokes darker tones. The hunter’s short and ephemeral life in the hands of the divine, where he himself becomes prey for the gods, is the focus here. The mortals are repeatedly being hunted in the schemes of the divine, which is an important leitmotif for Tsvetaevan tragedies.176 This is understood and accepted as a rule. The hunters surrender their lives and destinies entirely to the hands of Artemis, their protectress. The eulogy even acquires erotic tones as the virginal hunters surrender their lives to the goddess.

One amongst the hunters’ collective is recognised as superior to all the others, with several epithets connecting him with the divine – Hippolytus, the son of Theseus and mythologically his double and successor. He is elevated several times to the level of a divinity, presented as Artemis’s chosen companion. Thus, he is accorded an exceptional role from the beginning.177 He is shown to be outstanding and superior (see SS 3: 638-639), characteristics comparable to those attributed to Artemis by the chorus, emphasising courage, tenacity and strength. Bearing in mind that Hippolytus and Artemis are the only ones in the collective who

---

176 On the ties between the hunters’ eulogy and the Fragments of Heraclitus, see Voitekhovich 2006.
177 These heroic epithets parallel Hippolytus to Theseus in Ariadna. They are accorded similar roles in the structure of the two plays, which has also been noted by Rose Lafoy (1981: 216). A cyclical structure of the “old king” and the “new king” is at play here, Theseus and Hippolytus acting in the play as two constituents of the same hypostasis.
are explicitly named, it is not far-fetched to state that a parallel exists between the two. This has also been pointed out by Tomas Venclova (1985: 105), who argues that Hippolytus shares many of the features of an autochtonic forest deity, inherently connected with the elements.

In addition to his divine parallels, heroism and action evoked by the hunters’ chorus, Hippolytus also expresses significant ties with the earthly, which have been inherited from his Amazon mother. These make him a psychologically darker character and constitute a significant modernization of the myth.

2.2.2. The Heritage of the Amazon

Hippolytus is overshadowed by the memory of his deceased Amazon mother Antiope, killed in battle, fighting side by side with Theseus. This tragic loss governs the hero’s existence in the guise of misogyny, compelling him to shun women, only seeking the companionship of his fellow hunters. Notwithstanding his character as a brave hunter, Hippolytus is connected with the realm of the spiritual and the imaginary. This becomes evident in the first act of the play, where he has just had an ominous nightmare about his mother’s death in battle.

Tsvetaeva was increasingly interested in the history of Antiope and Theseus, which she suggested was essential for understanding Hippolytus as can be seen in her drafts of the play:

1) Если Ипполита взяла Тезеем насильно – Ипполит должен ненавидеть отца. Ипполит его любит. Стало быть, Ипполита Тезей любила.

   Можно: Тезей увез ее хитростью, и она полюбила его потом.
   (Свылась? слабо.)

   Можно: Тезей победил ее в поединке и этим покорил.

   Можно: Тезей увез ее хитростью, женился на ней, и она, никогда не любя его, чтила в нем отца своего сына и была ему

178 Different sources of Classical mythology give different names for the characters, which is even reflected in Tsvetaeva’s notes. Hippolytus’s mother was Antiope, whereas Hippolyta was an Amazon queen defeated by Heracles, not connected with the myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus. (On Hippolyta, see Graves 1992: 486-491, and on Antiope, see Graves 1992: 353-354.) This inconsistency in the naming probably originated in Tsvetaeva’s source of the Greek myths, the German compendium by Gustav Schwab Die schönsten Sagen des klassischen Altertums (1837), which identifies Hippolytus’s mother as the Amazon queen Hippolyte (Thomson 1989: 338). Even Jean Racine’s tragedy Phèdre mentions the mother of Hippolytus as Hippolyte.
верной женой. (НБ! Не любя Тезея, могла ли она пойти против амазонок? Могла ли, из-за сына — сохранить ему царство?) В чем же тогда проклятие Афродиты? (НБ! Не забывать, что оно относится к Тезею, все другие — средство к покорению его.) Тезей теряет любимую жену (в случае нелюби Ипполиты). Тезей теряет любящую жену (в случае любви Ипполиты). \---/

Решить: дать ли Ипполита сыном трагического или счастливого брака?
Образ Ипполиты, не любящей мужа и сражающейся за сына, — ценной. Ипполита, до конца, вся в женском царстве. Тезей до конца — для нее враг. Ипполита никого не любила, кроме сына. Таков же (отношение к женщинам) — Ипполит. (SS 3: 806.)

As can be noted from this elaborate sketch, Tsvetaeva focused from the beginning on the psychological veracity of the characters. In the case of Hippolytus, she enhanced the importance of the female line as opposed to the earlier rewritings of the myth, where such a theme is less prominent.179 In this draft, the author's focus is precisely on the strength of the Amazon mother's love for her son, which alone compels her to defend Theseus's kingdom against her own tribe. Settling for the problematic, loveless relationship between Theseus and Antiope, Tsvetaeva indicates that this same streak is inherited by Hippolytus in the form of misogyny, counter-balanced by his dedication to his late mother.

As Hippolytus relates his nightmare to his servant, close parallels are drawn between the hero, his mother and the element uniting them, nature:

Сон мне
Снился. Тяща мне всех жен
Сущих — мать посетила сон
Мой. Живущая в мне одном
Госпожа посетила дом

179 In Racine’s tragedy, the link between Hippolytus and his mother is evoked in passing in the hero’s lines in Act I, significantly using the same image of mother’s milk carrying the essence of Hippolytus’s pride.
C’est peu qu’avec son lait une mère amazone
M’ait fait sucer encor cet orgueil qui t’étonne;
(Racine 1933: 18.)

In Tsvetaeva’s tragedy this motif is evoked and repeated in various ways, emphasising physicality. As discussed above, this bond of mother’s milk governs Phaedra’s relationship with her wetnurse. In Hippolytus’s case, these instances are less frequent but appear nonetheless.
Hippolytus’s dream adds to the supernatural character of the deceased mother. She is evoked in Hippolytus’s monologue in terms of nature imagery, such as the oxymoron “silence full of thunder”, the trunk-like eyebrows, the stony will etc. These images underline the mother’s apparition in the middle of the forest where Hippolytus resides with his companions. She arises in his description as a force of nature, devoid of motherly, nurturing traits. Although appropriate for an Amazon warrior, it also contributes to the hero’s amazement and mystically respectful attitude towards his mother. The importance of continuing the mother’s heritage is also clear: Hippolytus is now the only vessel for his mother’s ashes; he is the only one who can continue her tradition, as it is only his body that houses his mother’s memory. In an important dramatic turn, the servant recognises in Hippolytus’s dream an ill omen, directly followed by Phaedra’s entrance on scene, asking for directions back to Troezen.

Hippolytus’s connection to his deceased mother is repeated in Act III just before Phaedra enters his lodgings. Importantly, both of Phaedra’s encounters with Hippolytus are preceded by an evocation of the hero’s motherly inheritance and his misogyny, which adds to the dramatic tension. In Act III, the servant retells the history of Antiope’s death in a long monologue, narrating the events of the battle. Significant emphasis is put on Antiope’s singular position at Theseus’s side against her own tribe: Amazonka – protiv / Plemen, – plot’ protiv ploti / Sobstvennoi, t’my muzhevrazh’ei / Dshcher’ (SS 3: 663). The rest of the narrative monologue only reports the events and the mother’s heroism in a hectic and excited rhythm. More importantly, the servant bluntly gives the reason for
Antiope’s turning against her own tribe as wanting to fight for the good of her son: *Protiv roda – radi syna / Za synovnie Afiny / Pala – materinstva zhertva / Chistaia* (SS 3: 664). In a clear modernization of the myth, Hippolytus becomes conscious of the fact that he has to be the one to end his family line. In Tsvetaeva’s interpretation, the hero is clearly grieving the fact that he is unable to pass on the traditions of his parentage, nor the country which was given to him or the strength that runs in his family.\(^\text{180}\) However, his wish for offspring does not neutralize the hatred he professes for womankind. When Phaedra enters Hippolytus’s lodgings, she is strongly rejected by the baffled hero. The result of Phaedra’s confession in Act III and the effect it has on the hero remain strangely obscure. Hippolytus clearly denies the whole confession, only answering with utter contempt: *Gadina* (reptile, vermin; SS 3: 671).

Phaedra and Hippolytus are paralleled in the structure of the drama. They are both marked by the hereditary taint they carry: Phaedra’s roots are evoked as cursed, whereas Hippolytus grieves for his mother and cherishes her memory.\(^\text{181}\) Both protagonists are governed by the past in the present. Hippolytus’s hatred for women is the straight influence of his mother’s hatred for men. His relationship with the deceased mother and the influence she still has on him are thematically paralleled with Phaedra’s relationship with her wetnurse and the ambivalent influence she continually exerts on her. Thus, female inheritance is also a central theme at the core of this tragedy. The mothers and wetnurses in the play and their power over the protagonists evidences the physical realm and counterbalances the transcendent, divine protectors and protectresses of the play.

Tsvetaeva’s Classical tragedies expand the same principles that govern her lyric poetry of the 1920s. Examining the laws of existence, the plays accord a specific importance to the fates of the mortals in the schemes of the divinities. Both tragedies focus on the theme of divine retribution, the recognition of which ends both plays. Interestingly, the structuring principles are allotted a double perspective in the tragedies; earthly passion is viewed both from the divine realm and from the point

\(^{180}\) That Hippolytus consciously and willingly chooses the fate of the independent, childless, misogynistic hunter is interestingly juxtaposed with the recurrent motif of the female tradition, in which the bond of milk, uniting the women, is central.

\(^{181}\) On this parallel, see also Thomson 1989: 344 and Karlinsky 1966: 262.
of view of the mortal protagonists. The same applies to the divine realm, which is viewed both from the mortal realm and from the divine (by Bacchus in *Ariadna*).

In *Ariadna*, the central oppositions governing the play appear in the opposition of the two main protagonists. Ariadne’s ties with the spiritual, divine realm are evoked from the beginning and are illustrated even in her speeches. Theseus, on the other hand, is rooted in the physical realm, unable to perceive the immaterial dimensions of existence until these are revealed to him in the dialogue with Bacchus. Bacchus’s role consists essentially of revealing to Theseus the divine realm, instituting his development into a tragic character rooted in the earthly realm. Whilst Theseus, in an act of self-sacrifice, cedes his loved one to a higher fate, he is nevertheless punished for his crime of abandonment in his earthly life – hence, the death of his father Aegeus and the first retribution of Aphrodite.

*Fedra* shifts the importance from the spiritual to the physical. The play is governed by a strong penchant towards the earthly, which is reflected in the character of the Wetnurse, envisioned as an earthly seducer. Also, the frequently developed motif of the mothers’ heritage, governing both Phaedra and Hippolytus, can be seen as a distinctly earthly force. However, the two main protagonists both unite the physical and immaterial streaks in their character. The innocent Phaedra, although governed by her physical earthly passion, nevertheless strives for a transcendent reality, as is clear from her final speeches. Hippolytus, too, is governed both by the tradition of his earthly Amazon mother and by his role as an electee of Artemis, who thus also shares traits with the divine. The final Act of the tragedy establishes a balance between the realm of the mortals and that of the gods. The chorus of women celebrates Phaedra’s passion, evoking female desire as holy. On the other hand, Theseus’s recognition of the part played by the gods in the events is overtly confessed. These two forces, divinely induced passion with an earthly manifestation and divine revenge, eventually form a whole. In the final monologue of the tragedy, Theseus establishes a world order, consisting essentially of divine rule and the mortals’ execution of these orders. Fate and predestination are the governing forces of the mortals’ lives, and the deceased Phaedra and Hippolytus are left blameless in their suffering.
V CONCLUSION

In appropriating Classical myths, Tsvetaeva focuses on the ways individuals negotiate between the physical and the spiritual realms. Her lyrical subjects react variously to this dichotomous reality, which allows for a flexible perspective on the division of the world. Her interpretation of the myths is governed by her own artistic principles, which shape the source material to suit her creative purposes. The constant change of emphasis, apparent in the works examined in this study, is rooted in Tsvetaeva’s understanding of the essence of lyric poetry, as expressed in her letter to Boris Pasternak in 1923:


In this kaleidoscopic manner, Classical mythological characters allow the author to emphasise various themes at the core of her authorial myth, including poetic election, the affirmative and powerful stance of unrequited passion, empowerment enabled by abandonment, the transition between body and disembodiment, and finally, creative transcendence. Central to Tsvetaeva’s rewriting of the source material is her propensity to apply the same elements in different combinations, which gives a different resolution in each case. This fluidity is a central structural principle of Tsvetaeva’s poetry and accounts for the different conclusions derived from the same elements, also apparent in her treatment of Classical myths.

Tsvetaeva’s use of these myths enters into a dialogue with both the original Classical sources as well as the Romantic retellings of them, and also contains important Neo-Platonic implications, transmitted through Russian Symbolism. The ladder of Eros, along which the individual was allowed to reach the immaterial sphere, underlines Tsvetaeva’s conception of the plot of transcendence, an extended metaphor for the poet’s coming-into-being. This plot is instituted in her folklore poèmes at the beginning of the 1920s and developed in the Classical poems discussed in the present work. However, as my reading of these works
shows, the plot of transcendence and the individual’s relationship to the dual worldview are both flexible: in addition to movement upwards from the physical realm to the spiritual, the ladder also implies movement downwards, allowing the author to emphasise the physical realm. In other words, Tsvetaeva’s interpretation of the myths often contains a double perspective: the immaterial realm is often discussed, evaluated and envisioned from the material realm and the earthly realm, in turn, is similarly accorded an unearthly perspective.

Tsvetaeva’s Classical personae evoke various instances of the dialectical plot of transcendence. The ancient prophetess, the Sibyl, provides a useful prototype for examining the poet’s coming-into-being, and also most closely follows the plot of transcendence, even if the emphasis is on the union and coexistence of the mortal and the divinity and on the effect of this coexistence on the lyrical subject’s life, which was not treated by the folklore poèmas. The cycle’s first poem discusses the union of the mortal with the immaterial creative force and the mortal’s transcendence beyond temporal and physical boundaries, losing her body as she turns into a seeress. The second poem exemplifies the prophetess-poet’s existence in isolation, separated from the mortal realm and from her former existence, as a mouthpiece for the prophetic visions which the creative divinity bestows upon her. Somewhat surprisingly, though, the third poem of the cycle allows the prophetess to speak directly to an infant, evoking important connotations of motherhood and condemning mortal existence for its physical hardships. The entire cycle ends in the vision of a transcendent fate for the prophetess and child, evoking their entrance into the aphysical beyond in a distinctly Platonic vein. Emphasising disembodiment, the cycle suggests the superfluous nature of the human body for the poet’s creative mission.

The importance of physical experience for creation, however, is re-instituted by the next Classical persona, Phaedra, who proclaims an all-consuming, torturous and destructive passion. Pleading with the object of her affections, Hippolytus, for the consummation of her earthly desire, Phaedra implicitly seeks transcendence, which she eventually attains through suicide. This emphasis is only hinted at in Tsvetaeva’s cycle “Fedra”, but it is more overtly developed in her lyrical tragedy on the myth. The poem “Evridika – Orfeiu”, on the other hand, presents the
perspective of an individual who has already reached the transcendent state and the expansive beyond. Viewing physical passion from her aphysical state, Eurydice nevertheless cannot relinquish her mortal past entirely, which is evidenced by the structure of the poem. Placing the earthly realm in dialogue with the perspective of eternity, Eurydice juxtaposes the vast expanses of the spiritual to the confined and limited existence of the mortals. Yet, her judgement also resounds with regret. The fact that she is devoid of her body in the netherworld, only existing in spiritual form, nevertheless renders her retrieval back to life impossible.

The cycles “Provoda” and “Ariadna” demonstrate the empowering effect of abandonment on the speakers. Even if the two first poems of “Provoda”, which were the focus of this work, mainly present the painful outcry of the lyrical “I” to the departed addressee, the entire stress of the rest of the cycle proceeds from physical disintegration and despair to the affirmation of the creative force. Eventually, the torments of being abandoned ultimately enable the speaker to create and complete her development from a desperate victim to an affirmative poet, equal to her addressee. In the first two poems of the cycle, the speaker’s tormented longing for the addressee enables her to transcend physical and temporal constraints, a process which institutes her development into an empowered creator. The cycle “Ariadna” discusses the fate of the Classical heroine from a twofold perspective. The abandoned maiden’s fate is viewed in the first poem of the cycle as either that of a woman who has been deserted or one who has been conceded. The metaphors of the first poem nevertheless evoke connotations of violent affirmation and force, which depart from traditional treatments of Ariadne. The second poem presents the chorus of the Classical tragedies, commenting on the abandoned maiden’s fate in fragmentary speeches and hinting at her ultimate transcendence of physical boundaries. Thus, in both cycles abandonment induces creative energy and transcendence both of the body and of the material realm.

In the poems of the collection Posle Rossii, discussed in Chapters II and III, the mortals’ position between the earthly and the divine realms is discussed from various angles, and both the Sibyl, Phaedra, Ariadne and Eurydice function as the poet’s masks. “Provoda” evokes the Classical
mythological characters merely as fragmentary voices or images, intertwining with the voice of the “I” and enabling the speaker’s emotions to be projected up to universal dimensions. Both abandonment and unrequited physical passion are presented as necessary intermediary stages which the individual has to endure and examine to the full before reaching an immaterial existence. Unconsummated passion enables the protraction of longing into eternity and transcendence into the immaterial beyond. A further important paradigm, negotiated in all the poems, is the tension between the body and disembodiment, which prefigures and illustrates the subjects’ eventual transcendence. The Sibyl, Eurydice and the cycle “Provoda” all evoke the lyrical subjects’ loss of their human body as a consequence, if not a precondition, for the creative state. However, the evaluation of physicality is more complex than it would appear from these poems; Eurydice as a spirit still harbours the memory of her past existence and earthly passion, and Phaedra evidences the creative impetus inherent in physicality. Even Ariadne’s solitary state as an abandoned woman is sketched in images of physical torment, nevertheless resulting in the fragmentation of her body as she transcends into eternity.

The transition from the human body to an ethereal, disembodied state is usually presented in imagery of the tangible world. In the case of the Sibyl, the prophetess’s body in the first poem is presented as a burnt-out tree, and in the second her distance from the ordinary mortals is emphasised in her existence as a solitary mountain. Vatic imagery is given a different emphasis in Phaedra’s case, since she is rooted in her mortal physicality and her body is evoked as a prison. This can aptly be paralleled with Eurydice’s conviction that mortal existence is akin to being chained to earth. Seeking unity with her loved one through a physical union, Phaedra evokes the image of lips, which is also the metaphor underlying Eurydice’s conception of physical passion: in a state of pure spirit, she has lost her lips and hands. In the case of the two poems of the “Provoda” cycle, the lyrical subject’s disembodiment and fragmentation is again projected onto a mythical level, as the fragmentary mythical voices enter the present-day setting in the first poem and in the second poem the body of the speaker undergoes a transformation into sites of mythical abandonment. The vertical images of the tangible world that can be paralleled with the tree imagery of the Sibyl cycle, appear in
“Provoda” as the telegraph poles, rooted in earth but reaching for the creative realm. These are just a few examples of the fluidity of Tsvetaeva’s poetic system, where similar images are subjected to constant kaleidoscopic reconfiguration, in search of ever new emphases and fluid interpretations of the same phenomena.

It is interesting that Tsvetaeva’s disembodied speakers, even in their most immaterial state (the Sibyl, Eurydice), still evidence ties to their earthly shape and existence. This is why the Sibyl still possesses the ability to communicate with the mortals and Eurydice is disconcerted at Orpheus’s appearance in the netherworld. The cycles “Provoda” and “Ariadna”, focusing on the creative empowerment resulting from abandonment, also evoke disembodiment from various angles. In “Provoda”, the tormenting and unsatisfied longing for the addressee results in the fragmentation of her body into mythical geographical sites and an all-encompassing, limitless state of a seeress and creator. In “Ariadna”, the lyrical heroine’s agony on Naxos is given two perspectives: a revengeful state inducing physical torment but engendering creation, on the one hand, and an external perspective of a chorus, viewing the heroine’s grief from a distance. The lyric poetry discussing the various approaches of the speakers to their body, whether in their physical or disembodied states, illustrates the importance of these two poles in Tsvetaeva’s poetic system. Even in a fragmented and disembodied state, her speakers still generate creative energy precisely from this opposition between the physical and the spiritual which propels their utterances. The importance of the body for the creative mission also makes it impossible to view the spiritual realm as an absolute ideal.

Tsvetaeva’s two more extensive works on the Classical material, the lyrical tragedies Ariadna and Fedra, discuss the pattern of transcendence from a broader perspective. The dichotomous division of the world into the physical and the spiritual is embedded in the very structure of the tragedies. The entire dramatic chain is governed by the rule of the divine realm over that of the mortal realm; important forces behind the events, guiding the actions of their mortal protégés, are Aphrodite and Poseidon in Ariadna and Aphrodite and Artemis in Fedra.

Examining the opposition between earthly and divine laws, Ariadna
focuses on the development of Theseus from an adventurous hero into a tragic character, who realizes the importance of the spiritual dimension for human existence. The other main protagonist, Ariadne, is juxtaposed to his orientation towards the concrete throughout the play. Ariadne is a spiritual heroine, whose bond with the immaterial is evoked and strengthened throughout the drama. In the final Act, Theseus enters into a dispute with the divinity Bacchus, who in the end carries Ariadne to the immaterial realm. This conversation completes Theseus’s education on the spiritual essence governing human existence. He nevertheless has to pay for his crime of abandoning Ariadne according to earthly laws, the divine retribution culminating in the suicide of his father Aegeus.

Fedra emphasises the significance of physical passion as a central force guiding the mortals’ fates. This work is less dependent on the plot of transcendence than Ariadna, but even Phaedra’s suicide is ultimately interpreted as a transcendence into the immaterial realm, departing from physical boundaries. A central force in inducing the passionate stepmother into confessing her unlawful emotion to Hippolytus is the Wetnurse, who gains folkloristic and magical connotations in Tsvetaeva’s appropriation. Hippolytus is connected both to his divine protectress Artemis on the one hand, and to his deceased mother Hippolyta, on the other, thus turning him into a hero oriented towards the hidden, mystical realm of omens and signs. On the whole, Fedra stresses the earthly perspective, in opposition to Ariadna’s orientation towards the divine and spiritual. Finally, Phaedra’s ultimate fate can be interpreted as an escape from the physical boundaries. Unconsummated passion enables the lyrical heroine to transcend into the immaterial beyond.

Tsvetaeva’s lyrical tragedies expand the same principles which are evident in her shorter lyrical oeuvre of the period, namely the position of the individual in the dichotomously divided world which is guided by the oppositional laws of the mortals and the gods. It is clear that Theseus solves this dilemma through resignation and conceding his earthly love to the divinity; on the contrary, Phaedra’s passion is left unrequited, the protraction of longing taking her out of the mundane and into the eternal through her suicide. Ultimately, these two decisions provide two complementary paths to transcendence, even if Theseus’s resignation actually opens the transcendent path not to him, but to the one he loves the most – Ariadne. Interestingly, Tsvetaeva’s tragedies contain a double
perspective on the division of the world, which is another instance of the flexibility of her poetic strategy. These perspectives are represented by her protagonists. Viewed from the mortal realm, the divine realm is perceived both as ideal, protective and positive (Ariadne) and as negative and threatening (Theseus). Earthly passion, in turn, is valued and praised by Theseus, but perceived as utterly inferior and incomplete by the divine Bacchus, who represents the spiritual realm in the tragedy. Ultimately, in *Ariadna* the effect of the divine realm on earthly love is destructive, even if it enables the mortal heroine to be carried into the eternal realm, completing her creative fate. In *Fedra*, the earthly perspective on the unearthly realm prevails throughout, and the power of the divinities both to sanction and to protect is evoked throughout the play. The drama foregrounds earthly passion, which is also accorded a double perspective: in the speeches of the Wetnurse, the earthly seducer, passionate love is cherished and hailed, whereas the chaste hero Hippolytus shuns the emotion entirely. Phaedra, the main protagonist, balances between these two perspectives; her final monologue shows that she ultimately seeks a single experience of earthly passion in order to transcend to the next level of spiritual existence. Evoking the mortal perspective on the divine realm, Theseus’s closing monologue re-establishes the dual world order, recognising the gods as the tools of fate and the sources of the tragic events. In summary, Tsvetaeva’s tragedies present a dialectical and flexible treatment of the dichotomous worldview lying at their base. Neither of the two realms is perceived as ideal, as the protagonists of both plays evoke various perspectives on the interrelations of the earthly and the divine.

In addition to providing a suitable framework in which to situate her creative enterprise, the Classical material enabled Tsvetaeva to discuss implicitly her relationship with Boris Pasternak. With the exception of the Sibyl, all the poems and lyrical cycles treated in the present study were inspired by Tsvetaeva’s exchange with her fellow poet. Tsvetaeva’s cycles and poems on Phaedra, Ariadne and Eurydice, with the obvious addition of “Provoda”, all provide a necessary outlet for her feelings of abandonment and unrequited passion which were instigated by Pasternak’s departure for Russia in March 1923. This biographical context helps us understand why, at this particular point in her career, Tsvetaeva
so extensively used inherited sources in her poetry. The introduction of Classical myth in her poetic system enables her to universalise her own emotional and creative concerns. Most importantly, the Classical material is an instance of the archetypal pattern of Tsvetaeva’s entire mature oeuvre – the ultimate question of the poet’s coming-into-being, her existence, poised between the demands of her calling and those of the physical reality around her, and her creative work as a whole. In other words, myth provides her with a suitable pattern to interconnect the various details of existence. What makes these particular myths exceptionally appropriate for her creative rewriting is, on the one hand, the pattern of transcendence already inherent in some of the myths (the Sibyl, Ariadne, Eurydice) and, on the other hand, the themes of unrequited, unconsummated passion (Phaedra) and abandonment (Ariadna), which are thoroughly adapted by the author into her own poetic system. These myths help her to clarify at a precise moment in her career why her relationship with Pasternak was destined to remain an encounter only in spirit and not in the tangible realm. And indeed, this is just one instance of a repeated pattern in the poet’s life where she denied herself earthly happiness for the sake of a higher, creative union. Tsvetaeva’s use of the myths continues the Symbolist principles of myth-creation and life-creation, as concrete events and details of her life are constantly transformed into myth. She treats the textual and the biographical details as homogenous material in her creative process, which makes her interpretations of the myths highly personal.

The completion of *Fedra* signals Tsvetaeva’s shift from lyrical works to prose. After the intensely productive years of 1922-1925, when most of the works treated in this study were written, Tsvetaeva’s lyrical productivity gradually tapered off. Her attention shifted to prose, resulting in literary essays and memoirs of her childhood and of her contemporaries. These works develop and discuss the same creative concerns, containing various approaches to the creator’s birth, mission and position, often with the help of Classical myth. Discussing appropriations of Classical material in Tsvetaeva’s prose remains beyond the scope of the present study, but would provide a fruitful starting point for future explorations.
**REFERENCES**

**Tsvetaeva**


**Tsvetaeva Translations and Works by Other Authors**


Tsvetaeva 1992  

Tsvetaeva 1998  

Voloshin 1988  

Voloshin 1999  

**Other Sources**

Aizenshtein 2000  

Antokolskii 1988  

Azadovskii 1992  

Azadovskii 1994  

Bell 1982  

Bershtein 2000  

Bogomolov 1991  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher/Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
El'nitskaia 1996


El'nitskaia 1998


Emig 1995


Faryno 1985


Forrester 1992


Forrester 1996


Forrester 2000


France 1982


Frazer 1993


Freidin 1987


Frye 1973


Gasparov 1992


Gasparov 1992b

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title and Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Kagan 1994

Kahn 1994

Karlinsky 1966

Karlinsky 1985a

Karlinsky 1985b

Kerényi 1976

Kiperman 1992

Kling 1992

Knabe 1999

Knapp 1992
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Mints 1979 Мисц, З.Г. О некоторых “неомифологических” текстах в творчестве русских символистов. Творчество А.А. Блока и русская культура XX века. (Блоковский сборник III.) Учёные записки Тартуского государственного университета. 459. Тарту: ТГУ, 1979, 76-120.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher/Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


Waszink 1995

Weeks 1990

Zaslavsky 1998
INDEX

Adamovich, Georgii, 97
Afanas’ev, Aleksey, 20
Euripides, 12, 13, 102, 121
Graves, Robert, 8, 37, 47, 60
Heldt, Barbara, 8
Heine, Heinrich, 8, 14
Heraclitus, 129
Holl, Bruce T., 10, 72, 75, 76, 81
Homer, 12, 14, 40

Bakhrakh, Aleksandr, 14, 40, 51
Bogomolov, Nikolai, 17, 18
Bogomolov, Nikolai, 17, 18

Boym, Svetlana, 8
Briusov, Valerii, 18, 62, 87

Ciepiela, Catherine, 72, 81, 82, 84
Derzhavin, Gavrila, 89

Clowes, Edith, 116
Crone, Anna Lisa, 8, 77, 89

Dike, Gregory, 8
Dykkman, Aminidav A., 10, 94

Eberspächer, Bettina, 8, 66
Efron, Ariadna, 10, 123
El’nitskaia, Svetlana, 8

Eberspächer, Bettina, 8, 66
Efron, Ariadna, 10, 123
El’nitskaia, Svetlana, 8

Euripides, 12, 13, 102, 121

Faryno, Jerzy, 8, 20, 25, 32, 48
Forrester, Sibelan, 8, 10
France, Peter, 80, 81, 83
Froh, James, 33
Freidin, Gregory, 8

Gasparov, Boris, 8
Gasparov, Mikhail, 8
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 8, 14

Gove, Antonina Filonov, 8, 37, 47, 60
Graves, Robert, 130

Göttling, Karl Wilhelm, 12

Nabokov, Vladimir, 97
Naydan, Michael, 8, 44, 62, 77, 86, 88

INDEX

Adamovich, Georgii, 97
Afanas’ev, Aleksey, 20
Euripides, 12, 13, 102, 121
Graves, Robert, 8, 37, 47, 60
Heldt, Barbara, 8
Heine, Heinrich, 8, 14
Heraclitus, 129
Holl, Bruce T., 10, 72, 75, 76, 81
Homer, 12, 14, 40

Bakhrakh, Aleksandr, 14, 40, 51
Bogomolov, Nikolai, 17, 18

Boym, Svetlana, 8
Briusov, Valerii, 18, 62, 87

Ciepiela, Catherine, 72, 81, 82, 84
Clowes, Edith, 116
Crone, Anna Lisa, 8, 77, 89

Dike, Gregory, 8
Dykkman, Aminidav A., 10, 94

Eberspächer, Bettina, 8, 66
Efron, Ariadna, 10, 123
El’nitskaia, Svetlana, 8

Euripides, 12, 13, 102, 121

Faryno, Jerzy, 8, 20, 25, 32, 48
Forrester, Sibelan, 8, 10
France, Peter, 80, 81, 83
Froh, James, 33
Freidin, Gregory, 8

Gasparov, Boris, 8
Gasparov, Mikhail, 8
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 8, 14

Gove, Antonina Filonov, 8, 37, 47, 60
Graves, Robert, 130

Göttling, Karl Wilhelm, 12

Nabokov, Vladimir, 97
Naydan, Michael, 8, 44, 62, 77, 86, 88

INDEX

Adamovich, Georgii, 97
Afanas’ev, Aleksey, 20
Euripides, 12, 13, 102, 121
Graves, Robert, 8, 37, 47, 60
Heldt, Barbara, 8
Heine, Heinrich, 8, 14
Heraclitus, 129
Holl, Bruce T., 10, 72, 75, 76, 81
Homer, 12, 14, 40

Bakhrakh, Aleksandr, 14, 40, 51
Bogomolov, Nikolai, 17, 18

Boym, Svetlana, 8
Briusov, Valerii, 18, 62, 87

Ciepiela, Catherine, 72, 81, 82, 84
Clowes, Edith, 116
Crone, Anna Lisa, 8, 77, 89

Dike, Gregory, 8
Dykkman, Aminidav A., 10, 94

Eberspächer, Bettina, 8, 66
Efron, Ariadna, 10, 123
El’nitskaia, Svetlana, 8

Euripides, 12, 13, 102, 121

Faryno, Jerzy, 8, 20, 25, 32, 48
Forrester, Sibelan, 8, 10
France, Peter, 80, 81, 83
Froh, James, 33
Freidin, Gregory, 8

Gasparov, Boris, 8
Gasparov, Mikhail, 8
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 8, 14

Gove, Antonina Filonov, 8, 37, 47, 60
Graves, Robert, 130

Göttling, Karl Wilhelm, 12

Nabokov, Vladimir, 97
Naydan, Michael, 8, 44, 62, 77, 86, 88
Nietzsche, Friedrich, 12, 14, 43, 92, 116, 117
  *The Birth of Tragedy*, 12, 14, 43

Osipova, N.O., 10, 13, 15, 87, 105, 108
Ovid, 12, 30, 62, 67, 85, 86, 89
  *Heroïdes*, 89; *Metamorphoses*, 12, 30, 62

Pasternak, Boris, 10, 11, 22, 26, 35, 45, 46, 51, 54, 58, 59, 63, 68, 69, 71, 72, 75, 76, 82, 83, 85, 88, 93, 135, 141, 142
  *Sestra moia zhizn’*, 45; *Temy i variatsii*, 45; “*Vokzal*”, 51
Plato, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 25, 44, 46, 57, 67, 95, 98, 104, 112, 113, 118, 135, 136
  *Symposium*, 17, 104
Preller, Friedrich, 12
Pushkin, Aleksandr, 29, 74
  “*Prorok*”, 29

Racine, Jean, 13, 80, 81, 121, 122, 130, 131
  *Phèdre*, 13, 102, 103, 110, 121, 122, 130
Revvzina, Olga, 8, 29, 33
Rilke, Rainer Maria, 12, 29, 30, 31, 33, 35, 62
  “Verkündigung”, 36
Rodzevich, Konstantin, 22
Ronen, Omry, 8
Rosenthal, Bernice Glatzer, 116

Saakiants, Anna, 8, 47
Schwab, Gustav, 11, 85, 86, 130
  *Die schönsten Sagen des klassischen Altertums*, 11, 130
Shakespeare, William, 22, 80, 81
Shevelenko, Irina, 8, 9, 10, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 38, 44, 45, 46, 62, 63, 65, 67, 98, 99, 100, 115
Shveitser, Viktoria, 8
Sivovolov, B.M., 8
Smith, Alexandra, 8, 63, 74
Socrates, 11
Sophocles, 12, 41
  *Oedipus at Colonus*, 41

Stock, Ute, 8, 116
Stoll, Heinrich, 11, 85
  *Die Sagen des klassischen Altertums*, 11
Sunj, Timo, 8
Szillár, Lena, 116

Taubman, Jane, 8
Tesková, Anna, 98
Thomson, R.D.B., 11, 51, 53, 72, 83, 130, 133
Tsivgun, Iu., 8
Tsvetaeva, Marina
  *Ariadna*, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 21, 26, 66, 81, 86, 87, 90, 92, 97, 98, 99, 100-118, 119, 120, 129, 134, 139-141; *Fedra*, 7, 11, 13, 16, 19, 21, 26, 47, 60, 97, 98, 99, 100, 103, 118-133, 134-139-141, 142; *Krysolov*, 16, 118; *O Germanii*, 14; *Poet o kritike*, 28; *Posle Rossii*, 7, 8, 9, 15, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 46, 51, 69, 75, 83, 85, 86, 137; *Remeslo*, 15, 16, 17, 22; *Tezei*, 15, 97; *Zhivoe o zhivom*, 53; “*Akhill na valu*”, 24; “*Ariadna*”, 15, 47, 56, 70, 71, 81, 82, 85-96, 137, 139; “*Chto drugim ne nuzhno – nesite mne*”, 34; “*Derev’ia*”, 29, 33, 34, 43; “*Dialog Gamleta s sovest’iu*”, 51; “*Doch’ laira*”, 63; “*Drevnaia tshcheta techet po zhilam*”, 44; “*Dusha*”, 24, 25; “*Est’ chas na te slova*”, 22, 23; “*Est’ chastlivtsy i chastlivtsy*”, 38, 62; “*Eto peply sokrovishch*”, 29; “*Evidrika – Orfeiu*”, 15, 34, 43, 56, 62-69, 77, 79, 85, 90, 136; “*Fedra*”, 15, 20, 23, 38, 45-62, 65, 90, 136; “*Idesh, na menia pohozhii*”, 90; “*Khvala vremenii*”, 43; “*Lety podvodnyi svet*”, 76; “*Liutnia*”, 76; “*Moi’m stikhom, napisannym tak rano*”, 90; “*Modolets’*”, 19, 20, 21, 28, 45; “*Na krasnom kone*”, 19, 20, 21, 34, 60; “*Na naznachennoe svidan’e*”, 23; “*Ne nado ee otklikat’*”, 50, 76; “*Net, pravdy ne osparivai*”, 76; “*Novogodnee*”, 9; “*Ofeliia – Gamletu*”, 23, 51; “*Ofeliia – v zaschituu koroleyu*”, 23, 51; “*Pela kak strely i kak moreny*”, 24; “*Pereulochki*”, 19,
20; “Po naberezhnym, gde sedye
derev’ia”, 62; “Poëma gory”, 21,
29; “Poëma kontsa”, 21; “Poety”,
34; “Poslednii moriak”, 24;
“Provoda”, 15, 35, 52, 59, 69, 71,
72-85, 94, 95, 137, 138, 139, 141;
“Rano esche – ne byt’!”, 23;
“Rashchelina”, 52, 53, 90;
“Russkoi rzhi ot menja poklon”,
83; “Sem’ kholmov – kak sem’
kolokolov!”, 90; “Semero,
semero”, 91; “Sivilla”, 10, 15, 28-
45, 65, 85; “Stikhi k Akhmatovoi”,
47; “Stikhi k Bloku”, 8, 47;
“Stroitelnitsa strun – pristruniu”,
75; “Tak plyli: golova i lira”, 62;
“Tsar-Devitsa”, 19, 20, 47, 51, 60,
121; “Vekami, vekami”, 29;
“Vskryla zhily: neostanovimo”,
90; “Zdravstvui! Ne strela, ne
kamen’”, 23; “Zhiv, a ne umer”,
24; “Znaiu, umru na zare!”, 90

Venclova, Tomas, 8, 9, 11, 15, 97,
102, 103, 105, 121, 130
Vernant, Jean-Pierre, 116, 128
Vitins, Ieva, 8, 10, 59, 72, 76, 77, 78,
82, 84
Voitekhovich, Roman, 10, 13, 15, 46,
57, 86, 97, 98, 99, 103, 105, 106, 110,
111, 116, 125, 129
Voloshin, Maksimilian, 18, 19, 53

Waszink, Paul M., 10, 72, 77, 78
Weeks, Laura D., 10, 85, 86, 87, 90,
123
Weidle, Vladimir, 97

Zaslavsky, Olga, 8, 72, 78, 84