IN PETERSBURG WE'LL MEET AGAIN
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH
TO THE POETRY OF AKHMATOVA AND MANDELSTAM
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In Petersburg We'll Meet Again: A Phenomenological Approach to the Poetry of Akhmatova and Mandelstam

Thesis directed by Professor Sally Gadow

The thesis explores a phenomenological interpretation of the poetry of Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam. Through their lyric poetry it is demonstrated that the two poets create a cohesive narrative that combines the two important elements of narrative: event-time and place. The event-time is the progression of Russia from its tsarist government and culture to the Stalinist period of government and culture. The place is Petersburg as it is transformed in time and name from St. Petersburg to Petrograd to Leningrad. The two poets diverge in forms of narrative as Mandelstam's remains in a limited 'I' based narrative while Akhmatova expands to a collective 'We' based narrative. Akhmatova succeeds in creating a more cohesive narrative by combining the personal and collective forms while Mandelstam fails. This is caused by Akhmatova's continued connection to Petersburg and Mandelstam's loss of place through exile.
The form and content of this abstract are approved.

I recommend its publication.

Signed

Mary Conroy
AUTHOR'S NOTE

Notation of poems for Mandelstam will consist of translator's title and original poem number from the official Struve and Fillipoff edition. For Tristia, only titles will be given as Bruce Mc Clelland did not use the original numbers from the official text. Since all of Akhmatova's poems come from a single two volume set, only poem numbers are given for her.
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As humans, we experience our existence as narrative. Our lives are stories that we are constantly creating and revising to give cohesion and meaning to our very existence. Many of us keep this as a constantly running narrative that we may tell to friends and family and they will in turn exchange their stories with us. Narrative, then, is not only concerned with a written form such as autobiographies, biographies, histories and novels but also with our mundane and ordinary lives. These daily narratives have the same elements as written narratives: they are concerned with author and audience, past and future, and separate events pieced together. What will be studied in this paper is how the personal daily narrative is embodied and transformed within a work of art, in this case, the poetry of Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam. By choosing these two poets, there is an encounter between the individual's narrative with the radical moments in history, the collective narrative. First, however, it is important to consider the individual's narrative and the important elements
of narrative itself.

Narrative is based in time. It is a movement from the present into the future propelled by the past. Phenomenology provides a useful term at this point, "the horizon of our being." In other words, our being is located in the present but what is past is part of the horizon (retentional gaze) and what is seen as a possible future is the other horizon (protentional gaze). Within these moments of time and events, events bring the source of the narrative. For a phenomenological definition of an event, it is important to turn to David Carr's *Time, Narrative, and History*. Carr writes in his thesis that

The idea of an event is already that of something that *takes* time, has temporal thickness, beginning and end; and events are experienced as elements and phases of other, larger-scale events and processes. These make up the temporal configurations like melodies and other extended occurrences and happenings that are the stuff of our own daily experience. Even though as temporal they unfold bit by bit, we experience them as configurations, thanks to our protentional and retentional 'gaze' which spans future and past. (24)

For the poets concerned, the lyric becomes a depository for these events and as the poet arranges them, they take on a configuration. Both Akhmatova and Mandelstam were very meticulous as to how their poems were to be arranged and the poems were almost always
given a specific date, when censorship allowed it. In a time when history was being written and rewritten, their poems became mini-time-capsules that preserved both personal and national histories.

At the outset, it is important to consider event-time as one of two very important elements in narrative, "Just as we have no experience of space except by experiencing objects in space, so we experience time as events, things that take or take up time" (Carr 25). This sense of time, for Akhmatova and Mandelstam, is also based in a sense of place, the second important element of narrative. This combination of time and place can be seen in their treatment of St. Petersburg as both a historical and literary reality.

Both poets spent their early lives in this imperial city that is historically charged with events. It is also charged with the literature that was written about it and in which it plays a major role. Joseph Brodsky wrote in his essay, "A Guide to a Renamed City," that "it is with the emergence of St. Petersburg that Russian literature came into existence" (76). This combined history of event and literature becomes the retentional gaze for both poets. They are connected to both the historical line of the city as citizens of it but also through the line of poets and writers who
were a part of its artistic history. Akhmatova and Mandelstam acknowledge the importance of Pushkin and the others who passed on the art of writing in its peculiar Russian form. Throughout their works, there are constant allusions to Pushkin, as well as, complete lines taken from his work and placed in theirs to give this sense of connection. Mandelstam would continue to use Pushkin throughout his life and he even accepted a line from Pushkin as a constant theme for his life, "My sadness is luminous." Akhmatova, like Mandelstam, was indebted to Pushkin. For the last two-thirds of her life, she studied and constantly wrote essays on his work. These were the only works she had published while her poetry was banned. Pushkin, then, is the first literary link to the city for them since his "The Bronze Horseman" was the first poem to involve the city and its history.

Pushkin had spent the early part of his life in St. Petersburg and its environs. He received his education in Tsarskoye Selo, literally the "imperial village," which is only a short distance from St. Petersburg. Akhmatova and Mandelstam also spent an early part of their lives there and remembered the connection to Pushkin and themselves. The city is imbued with the sense of the imperial nineteenth century for both poets. Akhmatova wrote in her poem
"In Tsarskoye Selo," in 1911, that it was "an enchanting little town". Mandelstam's poem "Tsarskoye Selo," written in 1912, has the same sense of enchantment and a carefree, spirited existence to it. The poem begins:

Let's go to Tsarskoye Selo
Where reckless, unthinking and free
The lancers grin drunkenly
Vaulting over the saddle bow...
Let's go to tsarskoye Selo.

Barracks, palaces and parks,
Scrap of gun-wadding caught in the trees
And "long life" rolling thunderously
In response to "Good day, lads, good work!"
Barracks, palaces and parks.

Akhmatova also has the same pitch to begin with:

They're leading the horses along the allée
Long are the waves of the combed out manes.
Oh enchanting little town of riddles.

While Mandelstam's poem stays in the eternal, carefree present, the poem could have taken place in either of two centuries, Akhmatova ends hers with a definite sense of time and place:

A dark skinned youth wandering along the [t/o] allées
By the shores of the lake he yearned
And a hundred years later we cherish
The rustle of steps faintly heard.

A layer of pine needles covers
The stumps with a thick, bristly mat...
Here lay his tattered copy of Parnay
And his three cornered hat.

(4)
The last stanzas are, of course, an allusion to Pushkin. St. Petersburg's past and its presence in the poets' childhoods is seen as a paradise, a holy playground and cradle. Mandelstam in his short autobiographical sketch of his early life, "The Noise of Time," wrote this about the city:

And I say now without a moment's hesitation that at the age of seven or eight all this the whole massif of St. Petersburg, the granite and wood paved quarters, all the gentle heart of the city with its overflow of squares, its shaggy parks, its island monuments, the caryatids of the Hermitage, the mysterious Millionaya Street, where there were no passengers and where only one grocery store had wormed itself in among the marble, but especially the General Staff Arch, the Senate Square, and all Dutch Petersburg I regarded as something sacred and festive. (72)

Akhmatova had the same sense of reverence for the city and its environs, including Tsarskoye Selo. It is here in St. Petersburg's physical and metaphysical existence that one can begin to understand narrative's need for event and place.

Mandelstam tackles the idea of how place and event effects the poet in his poem "Petersburg Stanzas." In this poem, the setting is St. Petersburg, both past and present. The first stanza describes the city, "Above the yellow loom of the government buildings/ the swirling snow fell thick through the day" and then he
continues with a description of the young man in the poem who could either be himself or Pushkin in the past, "Pulling his overcoat close, a law student swings/ His arm out and wide, and settles back in his sleigh." The poem, throughout its following verses, continues to waver between past and present but at the last, Mandelstam accepts the past and moves into the present of pre-revolutionary Russia:

A line of motors rushes through the haze, 
Ashamed of his poverty, his walk sedate, 
Queer proud Evgeni, with his absurd ways 
Breathes gasoline and curses at his fate. 
(Stone 42)

Here in this poem the reader begins to see the beginning of Mandelstam's boredom and fear of the present and what is to come. Slowly, over the works of both poets this sense begins to creep into their writing. The brilliant St. Petersburg of their childhoods becomes an uncertain place of the present. The intense feeling of the entanglement of these emotions of ennui and fear begins in 1911. Mandelstam writes:

In my gently dying heart 
There is quiet contending 
Between twilight drawing on 
And daylight ending.

A copper moon stood above 
Woods that night filled with darkness.
Why is there so little music  
And why such stillness?  
(Stone 24)

By 1913, intense fear of the future begins:

In old stories they wait for the wolf; [t/o]  
we wait to die,  
And I fear the dying among us will begin  
With that fellow there, of the twitching [t/o]  
scarlet grin  
And the fringe of hair dangling across his eye.  
(Stone 44)

In 1914, Mandelstam began to realize the dangerous  
change he had felt earlier. In the poem "Europe," he  
sees the inevitable change of the century, from the  
nineteenth century to the twentieth century nightmare:

Europe of Caesars! Since Metternich took aim  
Pointing his goose quill pen at Bonaparte  
Your mysterious map is changing before my eyes  
After a century for the first time.  
(Stone 68)

With the fear, a sense of questioning came to  
Mandelstam. Peter's city did not seem to be the  
insulated and safe reality he had known as a child:

Tell me who will deaden my consciousness [t/o]  
with wine,  
If reality is Peter's creation.  
The granite, the bronze horseman?  
(Stone 45)

Here Mandelstam is questioning the validity of the  
imperial past that is still trying to survive in the
modern world. It seems to have become a relic of the past, like the bronze horseman of Peter the Great. The idea, founded by Peter the Great, of St. Petersburg being a window to the modern west is shattered by its adherence to eighteenth century culture. A new era is beginning to arrive through the western window of St. Petersburg and Mandelstam writes in his poem "The Admiralty":

Our three dimensional cage is shattering,  
All the seas of the world are opening for [t/o] us now.  

(Stone 48)

The year 1910 is also the time of the beginning of fear and ennui for Akhmatova. In her poem "First Return," Akhmatova experiences this heavy tedium:

The heavy shroud is placed on the ground,  
The solemn bells are droning,  
And once again my spirit is troubled and [t/o] and oppressed  
By the weary tedium of Tsarskoye Selo.  
Five years have passed. Here everything [t/o] is dead and dumb,  
As if the world had come  
Like a forever exhausted theme  
The palace comes to rest in its mortal dream.  

(53)

For both poets, the sense of time has seemed to have stopped and along with time their own narrative has ceased. History has brought them up to the year 1914 and then there is nothing to write of, only the past.
There is a foreboding sense of the end, as if all the time had been used up by the glorious past.
The entry of Russia into World War One changed both the emotions and the visions of the two poets. It began a movement towards personal narrative combining with a present national history. At first, it was experienced only by the individual. Akhmatova experienced the event of the World War as a loss of her beloved male friends and husband to the war effort:

We met for the last time
On the embankment, where we had always met.
The Neva was high
And they were afraid the city would flood.

He spoke of the summer, and he also said
That for a woman to be a poet was absurd.
I can still see the tsar's tall palace
And the Peter and Paul fortress!---

Because the air was not ours at all,
But like a gift from God--so miraculous
And at that moment was given me
The latest of all my mad songs.

(72)

the sense of danger is brought about by the prospect of the Neva flooding St. Petersburg as it had done so many times in the past, but there is also the sense
of loss as Akhmatova is looking back and can "still see the tsar's tall palace/ and the Peter and Paul fortress!---". In 1914, the thought of the loss of the past had begun to change into a reality and by 1915, it had become true. A poem written at this time reflects Akhmatova's feeling of loss:

We thought: we are beggars, we have nothing
So that each day became
A remembrance day---
We began to compose songs
About God's great munificence
And about how rich we once had been.

The painful loss of a place as it once had been in time becomes the first turning point for Akhmatova. At this point of destitution, she realizes her true vocation, that of the poet. Petersburg becomes the tomb out of which she rises as a fully realized poet, both in structure and commitment:

My blissful cradle was
A dark city on a menacing river
And the triumphal marriage bed,
Over which young seraphim
Held bridal wreathes---
Was a city loved with bitter love.

Solium of my prayers
You were misty, calm, severe.
There my betrothed first appeared to me,
Pointing out my shining path,
And my melancholy Muse
Led me as one leads the blind.
The war also became a focal point of change for Mandelstam. Earlier, he had written poems that dealt mostly with the themes of the glory of the past or poems that played with philosophical or religious ideas. In one of the last poems of Stone, Mandelstam relates to the past as something beautiful and wholesome, a vision from Norman Rockwell:

"Ice cream!" Sun. Light airy cakes.  
A clear glass tumbler of water, icy cold.  
Our dreams take flight, into a chocolate [t/o] world,  
Of rosy dawns on milky alpine peaks.

But as the boy peers into the "chest of lovely frozen things; with greedy intentions," Mandelstam asks:

What will he choose? The gods themselves [t/o] can't say.  
A diamond tart? A wafer filled with cream?  
But under his slender spoon the divine ice,  
Glittering in the sun, will soon melt away.

The "divine ice" for Mandelstam is the reckless and carefree days of St. Petersburg, now, in 1914, melting away.

This idea of an end is important in understanding the idea of the narrative, for, "A sequence, a series, or a process can theoretically be endless, but an event, an action, or an experience is something that begins and ends" (Carr 47). The poems before and
during World War One figure as a time-place event that has come to an end for Akhmatova and Mandelstam. Both feel cruelly cut off from the past experience of their lives. This is evident in Mandelstam's next book *Tristia*. Sadness and death pervade the book. St. Petersburg, the happy paradise of Mandelstam's youth, has become a necropolis as it has changed both its name and its government. World War One brought a new name to the city as the Russians felt that St. Petersburg sounded too German while they were at war with Germany and its allies. The name was changed to the much more Russian sounding one: Petrograd. After this change, another one took place. Russia was being torn apart both from forces on the outside of the country, the war, and forces angry with the tsar's regime on the inside. In March of 1917, the tsarist government was destroyed, and a new government took the reins of power, the Provisional Government. This Provisional Government eventually gave way to the Bolsheviks, after the October Revolution of the same year. St. Petersburg, or as it was then beginning to be called Petrograd, was the center for all these momentous transformations that would effect the whole Russian Empire.

The year of 1917 was a year of frenetic activity for most Russians in the two capitals of Petrograd and
and Moscow. However, for Mandelstam and Akhmatova, the time seemed lifeless. Their world had come to an end. The wild and art filled evenings at cabarets such as the Wandering Dog had ended. The cabaret was quiet as the streets were filled with the activity of the noise of the revolution. Everything had given way to political and economic issues. The arguments between the different schools of art during the Silver Age of literature no longer seemed important in the artistic circles. The world of the arts that Akhmatova and Mandelstam were familiar with seemed to be going through a death that would never allow it to recover. While most writers and artists glorified the Revolution of 1917, these two poets wrote dirges and jeremiads. An early poem in *Tristia* begins the cycle of mourning:

I.

I am cold. Clear spring dresses
Petropolis in verdant down.
But like a medusa the Neva's wave
Stirs up in me a slight aversion.
Along the north bank,
The 'headlights speed away.
Steel dragonflies and beetles are flying.
Golden pinpoints of light glimmer,
But not one of those stars surpasses
The massive emerald of the waters wave.

II.

We shall die in transparent Petropolis
Where Persephone rules over us.
We drink with every breath the deadly air
And every hour is our last.  
Terrible Athena, goddess of the sea,  
Remove your mighty helmet of stone.  
We shall die in transparent Petropolis,  
Where Persephone rules, not you.

A short distance from this poem in the text, awaits another in the collection in which not only the author is dying but the city itself. This poem brings to an end the event, or experience up until the October Revolution. These events were crystallized into one experience, the experience of St. Petersburg and the past. Now all that has ended:

1.
At a dreadful height, a wandering fire—
But does star really flicker like that?  
Transparent star, wandering fire,  
Your brother, Petropolis is dying.  
...  

4.
Above the black Neva, transparent spring  
Is smashed, the wax of immortality is [t/o] melting.  
0 if you, star, are Petropolis, your city,  
Your brother, Petropolis is dying.

The other two verses that Mandelstam placed between these two end with the same line, "Your brother, Petropolis is dying." It is not until two poems of 1918, among the most powerful and certainly the most famous that he ever wrote, [that] Mandelstam takes leave of the past. The past is conceived as the upper world of light,
air and freedom—the world of Pushkin; the future is the underworld that dominates Tristia throughout in its classical images. (Brown 267)

The same sense of the end also possessed Akhmatova. However, for Akhmatova, the foreboding began early on with the beginning of World War One. Somehow she sensed the ending of the era before the hostilities broke out. In White Flock, she wrote:

How can you bear to look at the Neva? How can you bear to cross the bridges? Not in vain am I known as the grieving one Since the time you appeared to me.

The black angel's wings are sharp, Judgement day is coming soon, And raspberry-colored bonfires bloom, Like roses in the snow. (133)

Unlike Mandelstam, Akhmatova never experiences the complete death of St. Petersburg. The past experience of the time in the city has come to an end but the city itself has not. The end of the past time is reflected in the poem below. Tsarskoye Selo has been transformed into a bitter memory but it is not dead like Mandelstam's Petropolis:

And here left alone, I Am counting the empty days. Oh, my freed friends, Oh, my swans!

And I can't summon you with songs Nor bring you back with tears,
But in the melancholy evening hour,
I'll remember you in prayer.

Overtaken by death's arrow,
One of you fell,
And another, kissing me,
Became a black crow.

But this is what happens: once a year,
When the ice melts,
In Catherine's garden I stand
Beside the pure pond.

And I listen to the splash of wide wings
Over the smooth blue.
I don't know who cut a window
Into the tomb.

(224)

The difference between this poem and Mandelstam's
"dying Petropolis" is the hope of resurrection with
a window cut into the tomb of the past. For Mandelstam,
from 1917 to 1921, the past and the place of its
unfolding has died; whereas for Akhmatova, she under-
stands the death of the past but holds onto the sense
of place and how it allows the retentional gaze to
stay within the horizon of her being. She stays
connected to the city begun by Peter the Great and
continues its tradition within her poetry:

But not for anything would we exchange [t/o]
this splendid
Granite city of fame and calamity,
The wide rivers of glistening ice,
The sunless, gloomy gardens,
And, barely audible, the Muse's voice.

(145)
Through the pain of the death of one set of events that create an experience of the past, Akhmatova was able to move on and continue to write. In fact, in one of the poems she wrote at this time (123), she writes, "One less hope becomes/ One more song."

St. Petersburg/Petrograd became a rallying point for Akhmatova. The place becomes a connection to the past. She is able to maintain a presence within both the past and the present and so her being remains open and so her voice. Loss of experience creates a loss of voice, as Mandelstam was finding, but a connection to past experience leaves one open to the world. Akhmatova would not be swallowed by the dissociation from the past and lack of voice:

That voice opposing total silence
Has conquered silence.
Inside me still, like a song or like grief,
Is the last winter before the war.

I will go there and weariness will fly away.
The cool of the early morning pleases me.
There are villages mysterious and dark.---
Storehouses of prayer and work.

My tranquil and trusting love
Of this place will never be conquered:
There's a drop of Novgorod blood
In me---like a shard of ice in frothy wine.

And this can never be remedied,
Great heat will not melt it,
And no matter what I begin to praise---
You, silent, shine before me.
Even though Petrograd gives life and meaning to Akhmatova as something that "shines before" her, it is also, "used...to evoke the harsher aspects of the poet's fate. It is the 'stern dark city of many waters' (zh. 128); the dark city by the stormy river... quiet and foggy (zh. 126)" (Haight 50). Like her lovers and her husbands, Petrograd both delighted her and plagued her. It had a being of its own that Akhmatova continued to encounter.

Like Akhmatova, Mandelstam would reclaim his voice but only after St. Peters burg had been extinguished and reborn within his work. In 1920, the resurrection of the city begins. Mandelstam accepts the end of the past experience of pre-Bolshevik Russia. In accepting the end, Mandelstam is able to create a cohesive narrative. He is no longer lost in the pathos of the loss of St. Petersburg. The place itself, even though its name and government has changed, becomes a connection to the past and a continuance of it. By the 25th of November, 1920, Mandelstam writes:

1.

In Petersburg we'll meet again,  
As though we had buried the sun there,  
And for the first time utter  
The blessed senseless word.  
In the black velvet of the Soviet night,  
In the velvet of the worldwide emptiness,
The kind eyes of the blessed women still sing,
The immortal flowers still bloom.
(Tristia 57)

The next stanza allows the reader to see the fear inherent in the time of the Soviet takeover but Mandelstam is strengthened both by a sense of place and his art:

2.

The capital arches like a savage cat,
A patrol is standing on the bridge,
A single angry car speeds by in the night,
And cries out like a cuckoo.
This evening I do not need a pass,
I am not afraid of the sentries:
I will pray in the Soviet night
For the blessed and senseless word.

After the sense of impending doom, Mandelstam moves on to another scene, one in which there is a greater sense of civilization and humanity:

3.

I hear a light rustling in the theatre
And a young girl's "Oh!"---
In Kypris arms, a huge bunch
Of immortal roses.
Out of the boredom, we warm ourselves
By a bonfire. Perhaps centuries will pass,
And the hands of the blessed women
Will gather up the light ashes.

The last line echoes a line from Pushkin and so it is a connection to the past while the idea of women gathering the ashes comes to symbolize the importance
of memory and its keeping. Here Mandelstam begins to understand the importance of the past in creating a cohesive narrative. It is the bleakest moments of the civil war (1918-1921) that Mandelstam and Akhmatova begin to rise from the ashes of their past lives. Whereas most people began to lose faith in the Revolution and the future during the civil war and its hardships, Akhmatova and Mandelstam began to see the power within the individual to survive. Akhmatova described the dark times of 1921 in the city in her memoir of Mandelstam:

All the old Petersburg signboards were still in place, but behind them there was nothing but dust, darkness, and yawning emptiness. Typhus, hunger, executions, darkness in the flats, damp firewood, people so swollen as to be unrecognizable. In Gostiny Dvor one could pick a large bouquet of wild flowers. The famous Petersburg wooden paving was rotting. From the basement window of Kraft's one could still catch the smell of chocolate. All the cemeteries were in ruins. The city had not simply changed, it had in fact turned into its opposite. But people loved poetry (mainly the young) almost as much as now. (Haight 57)

The bleakest times have brought about conversion to many people in Humanity's history. It was the same for Akhmatova and Mandelstam. The effects of conversion become an influence on a person's
narrative, for,

A multiplicity of activities and projects, spread out over time and even existing simultaneously in the present, calls for an active reflection that attempts to put the whole together. The most striking occasion for such reflections are those radical conversions, usually religious or political, in which a new view of life, of oneself, and of one's future projects and prospects secures a break with and a reinterpretation of one's past. (Carr 76)

While many of the artists of the time had converted unflichingly to Bolshevism, Akhmatova and Mandelstam had a different conversion. Their conversion was a refusal to accept the new and avant garde political, economic and artistic ideals. They questioned both the past and the present and saw the inherent good and evil in both. This was unlike the new Bolshevist artists such as Mayakovsky, who denounced the whole past as corrupt and unacceptable to the present. They believed the new system would be the savior of humanity. Akhmatova and Mandelstam were able to reinterpret their past, find it worth preservation, and carry it into the present. Although this saving of the past would be frowned upon in the twenties, Akhmatova and Mandelstam persevered with its preservation. While history and national narrative was being destroyed by the government, these two poets
saved it. In a poem of 1921, Mandelstam perceives the saving of the past as a grain held within granaries. He also envisions the poet's power to guard history as a way for the poet to heal the diseased present. The poem begins with the locus of St. Isaac's, a famous cathedral in Petersburg:

Beneath a veil of milky white
Stands Isaac's like a hoary dovecote,
The crozier irritates the grey silences,
The heart understands the airy rite.

The wandering spectre of the centennial requiem,
The grand bearing of the shroud
And in a worn out seine, the Gennesarian gloom
Of the Lenten week.

The old testament smoke on warm altars,
And the final orphaned cry of the priest,
A regal, humble man: clean snow on his shoulders
And the savage purple mantles.

The eternal cathedrals of Sophia and Peter,
Storehouses of air and light, the possessions
Of the ecumenical granary
And the barn of the new testament.

The spirit is not drawn to you in sorely troubled times,
Here drags the wolf's track of unhappiness
Along the cloudy steps;
We will never change it:

For the slave is free, fear is overcome,
And preserved beyond measure
In the cool granaries, in deep combines,
Is the kernel of deep full faith.

(Tristia 95)
There are two important allusions in this poem. First, Genessarian comes from the biblical town or region northwest of the Sea of Galilee. It is mentioned in Luke 5:1, Matthew 14:34 and Mark 6:53. The verse is as follows: "...they came into the land of the Gennasaret. And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about and brought unto him all that were diseased." At first Gennaseret was filled with the sick but then the healer arrived. For Mandelstam, this healer is the poet, the one that allows humanity to see the truth in the darkest of times. The other allusion is to the episode that immediately proceeds this verse. It is of the scene of Jesus walking on the water during the storm and the faith needed for Peter to do the same. Here the episode parallels the situation of Mandelstam. He was living through one of the darkest times of Russian history, as Peter was living through a torrential storm. Both had to discover the "Kernel of deep, full faith" to continue. Mandelstam does discover this faith within but it is not the faith in a godhead but faith in his art, its ability to preserve his narrative and faith within humanity itself, to survive the appalling conditions. This preservation of narrative helped to bring out meaning and plan to his life: to preserve the true
history against the false. This becomes the
turning point of personal narrative:

the category of meaning is thus central
for the understanding of the course
of life because it encompasses and
orders the things we value and the
purpose we pursue. Meaning in this
sense is precisely the Zusammenshang
or coherence sought by all under-
standing. (Carr 77)

Mandelstam remained in the Soviet Union, unlike many
of the other artists that emigrated, because the
country itself was a point that was connected to
his personal narrative. More important than the
country, however, was his beloved city of Petersburg.

Akhmatova would also not leave, even though the
horrors of the Revolution would become almost un-
bearable. A poem of 1917 details her emotions:

And all day terrified by its moans,
The crowd churns in agonized grief,
And across the river, on funeral banners,
Sinister skulls laugh.
And this is why I sang and dreamed,
They have ripped my heart in half,
As after a burst of shots, it became still,
And in the courtyards, death patrols.

(P234)

Petrograd was the scene of the beginnings of the
Revolution. First, the Provisional Government took
over in a somewhat bloodless revolution but an un-
easiness lingered over the capital. The threat of
the German invasion caused much anxiety and a few months after March, there was a general feeling of dismay as the Provisional Government seemed to be following many of the same policies as the tsarist government had. Even though the bleakness infected the capital, Akhmatova continued to see the beauty of her beloved city:

How I loved you, how I love to look
At your chained shores,
At the balconies, where for hundreds of years
No one has set foot.
And verily you are the capital
For us who are mad and luminous
But when that special, pure hour
Lingers over the Neva
And the May wind sweeps
Past all the columns lining the water,
You are like a sinner turning his eyes,
Before death, to the sweetest dream of Paradise.

Petrograd, for Akhmatova, was a link to her personal narrative. Many friends wanted her to emigrate to protect herself, even as early as the autumn of 1917. Her good friend or perhaps her lover, Boris Anrep, was leaving for England in the late autumn of the year of the Revolution. He almost convinced her to accompany him but at the last minute she decided against it. At that time, she wrote this poem that states her desire to stay with her homeland:
When in suicidal anguish
The nation awaited its German guests,
And the stern spirit of Byzantium
Had fled from the Russian church,
When the capital by the Neva,
Forgetting her greatness,
Like a drunken prostitute
Did not know who would take her next,
A voice came to me. It called out [t/o]
comfortingly
It said, "Come here,
Leave your deaf and sinful land.
Leave Russia forever.
I will wash the blood from your hands,
Root out the black shame from your heart,
With a new name I will conceal
The pain of defeat and the injuries."
But calmly and indifferently,
I covered my ears with my hands,
So that my sorrowing spirit
Would not be stained by those shameful [t/o]
words.
(236)
CHAPTER 3
LENINGRAD, ANOTHER NAME

After the civil war, during the twenties, the Soviet Union was in an odd state. There was a shift back to a market economy on a small scale, giving birth to the notorious nepmen, and a freedom in the arts that would last until 1928/29. The slow censorship began early for Akhmatova and Mandelstam, even though for other poets it was abated for about five more years. At the time, futurism was in the avant garde and it seemed to suggest the modernity that the Soviets so much desired in their whole new culture and society. Akhmatova's and Mandelstam's involvement in Acmeism, early on in the century, put them in the category of a movement that was passé. They were the first ones to feel the force of censorship. Akhmatova experienced it first, for by

1925, according to Akhmatova, an unofficial Communist Party resolution banned any further publication of her work. Although the ban was never made public, for the next fifteen years none of her poetry was published in the Soviet Union. (Haight 80)
The ban on Mandelstam's work would not begin until the late 1920's, but by 1924 he began to see the possibility of the banning of his work was also inevitable:

> Not long now till the simple song
> Of the wrongs of earth is cut off,
> And a tin seal put on the lips.  
> (Selected 140)

The twenties became a time for both poets to revise their past work. This is an important element of a personal narrative because, "we are composing and constantly revising are autobiographies as we go along" (Carr 76). The twenties were a time for both poets to re-examine the plan for their lives and how that plan fit into the history that was happening all around them. Unlike the Soviets' one gaze towards the future, Akhmatova and Mandelstam had a full horizon of being encompassing both the retentional and protentional gaze.

The early twenties were fraught with much more pain and anxiety for Akhmatova than for Mandelstam. Mandelstam's energy was going towards his work while Akhmatova struggled with the loss of many of her beloved ones. First, there were the friends that had emigrated to England and France, not so painful because there was the hope that she would see them
again. There was no such hope for her ex-husband Gumilyov. A shock came to Akhmatova just after she had reestablished a friendship with Gumilyov, after their bitter divorce. In August of 1921, Gumilyov was arrested and shot for alleged complicity in an anti-Bolshevik conspiracy, the Taganstev affair. Akhmatova recorded this event in a poem written days later:

You are no longer among the living,  
Cannot stand up from the snow.  
There were twenty-eight with bayonets,  
Five bullet wounds.  
What a bitter present I sewed for my love.  
How the Russian earth  
Loves the taste of blood.  
(208)

That same August, the esteemed Russian Symbolist poet, Alexander Blok, died suddenly. This was a great shock to Akhmatova, as she had met and revered this man. In a short span of time most of the great artists had disappeared from the newly formed Soviet Union, either from emigration or death. The voices of these people comes back to Akhmatova in a poem of 1921 that has as its place the gardens of Tsarskoye Selo. It is no longer a place of ennui, as in the early part of her poetic career, and it is neither a place of mourning, as in the poems of the teens, but it is a place of echoes and of connections to people
both living and dead:

All the souls of my loved ones are on [t/o]
high stars above
How good it is that there is no one [t/o]
left to lose
And one can weep. The air of Tsarskoye Selo
Was created for the echoing of songs.

By the bank a silver willow
Touches the bright September waters.
Arisen from the past, silently
My shade comes to meet me.

Here so many lyres hang on the branches.
But it seems there is a place for mine [t/o]
as well.
And this shower scattered and sunny,
Is comfort and good news to me.

(405)

Here Akhmatova has established herself in a line
of poets. The narrative of her life begins to take
on a cohesive whole as she sees herself as part of a
tradition. She will sing like the poets of the past
and when her time to leave the earth arrives, she
will hang up her harp as well. This is the first time
that Akhmatova acknowledges herself as a poet worthy
to record the historical narrative. The struggle to
continue, though, is heavy. While her sense of
place, Petrograd, and her friends have disappeared.
Akhmatova realizes that she must move into the
future. A poem following the proceeding one, in the
way that Akhmatova arranged her text, shows the
struggle she felt in Tsarskoye Selo in 1921:
Like the fifth act of a drama,
The autumn wind is blowing,
Each flower bed in the park
Resembles a fresh grave.
The simple funeral feast has been held,
And there is nothing more to do.
Why do I linger as if a miracle
Will happen soon?
Thus with a frail hand it's possible to hold
A heavily laden boat to the pier.
Bidding farewell to the one
who is standing on the shore.

After such a great sense of loss, Akhmatova turned to
what she still had: memory and her beloved city.
The chaos of the early twenties created an unquenchable
thirst for the sense of place in her poems. The poems
of the late twenties locate Akhmatova in Petrograd
which had once again changed its name. This time
it was after another founder, not the founder of a
city like Peter the Great, but the founder of a new
order, Lenin. Leningrad, Lenin's city took over
Peter's city.

Even with the name change, the city itself
connects Akhmatova to past and present, serving as
a focal point for her creative genius and her personal
narrative. A poem of 1927 connects Akhmatova to a
past line of writers as does 405; however, this time
she mentions names and images not just the idea of
harps hanging from a tree:
Here the exile of Pushkin began,
And Lermentov's exile ended.
Here the scent of mountain herbs is delicate,
And just once I caught a glimpse
By the lake, in the plane tree's thick shadows
In that cruel twilight hour---
Of the shining, unquenchable eyes
Of Tamara's immortal lover.

(303)

Following this poem, two others show the revision of her past sentiments of Leningrad. Instead of a place stagnant in time, it now becomes the paradise of childhood transformed in time into a place of fear:

If moonlight terror overflows,
The whole city is in a poison suspension.
Without the least hope of falling asleep,
I see through the green haze
Not my childhood and not the sea,
And not the marriage flight of butterflies
Over the bed of snow white narcissus
In that sixteenth year...
But the forever frozen circle dance
Of cypresses above your grave.

(304)

While this poem of late 1928 shows Akhmatova's dismay, by 1929 she revises her personal narrative of place by reembellishing Leningrad with beauty. This poem follows from past to Akhmatova's present in 1929. First, she turns to her early years in the first two stanzas:

This city beloved by me since childhood,
Seemed to me today
In its December silence
Like my squandered inheritance.
Everything that came easily,
That was so easy to give away:
Burning emotions, the sound of prayer,
And the blessing of the first song—

Then in the middle of the poem, Akhmatova expresses the years of the Revolution, civil war and early twenties like this: "Everything flew off like transparent smoke/ Decayed in the depths of the mirrors." The fourth stanza ends with a line that speaks to Akhmatova's desire to be a national poet, "And listened to my native tongue." Akhmatova returns to her sense of place, neither as it was in childhood nor as it was during her time of anxiety but as it is in the present. The poem ends with a new sense of peace and strength:

Then with freshness wild and strong,
Happiness fanned my face,
As if an old dear friend
Had just stepped onto the porch with me.

A new sense of optimism was beginning for Akhmatova right before the most troubling time of her life, the Stalin era.

The Stalin era begins the turning point for Akhmatova as she leaves her personal narrative that depends on the narrative "I" and the pure lyric form for the collective narrative that depends on the
narrative "We" epic form. One critic noticed this shift in Akhmatova's work of the early thirties, "The 'I' has become 'we'. Only because this 'we' was not the one favored by Marxist critics the shift was largely ignored or taken to refer to a very small group of people" (Haight 75). In actuality, Akhmatova's "We" became a voice for all the citizens of the Soviet Union and Leningrad under the unbearable yoke of Stalin. Here, in the darkest of times, Akhmatova realized the importance of her works:

In a time when a poem on a scrap of paper could mean a death sentence, to continue to write, to commit one's work to the faithful friends who were prepared to learn poems by heart and preserve them, was only possible if one was convinced of the absolute importance and necessity of poetry. Once a life saving necessity for Akhmatova herself, her work now became so for those around her: at first for a few close friends, then for the wider and more impersonal circle, until it no longer seemed to have anything to do with her as a private individual or even as a poet in the usual sense of the word. (Haight 99)

Mandlestam, on the other hand, did not leave his personal narrative style. This does not make his poetry less powerful or convincing, but it does leave the question as to why he was not able to exchange the "I" for the "We". Perhaps the answer lies
in the two very different conditions of the poets. Akhmatova was never really threatened with exile herself, even though her son was sent to prison camps because of her works. Unlike Akhmatova, Mandelstam was constantly threatened with the possibility of being exiled or even worse, being sent to a prison camp. Akhmatova remained attached to a sense of place, Leningrad, and this gave her the ability to connect with a group of people, while Mandelstam was exiled from the city, losing a sense of place and connection.

Even before his first arrest and exile to Voronezh, Mandelstam wrote in December 1930 a poem that pictures himself locked out of Leningrad:

I've come back to my city. These are [t/o] my own old tears,
My own little veins, the swollen glands [t/o] of my childhood.

So you're back. Open wide. Swallow
The fish oil from the river lamps of Leningrad.

Open your eyes. Do you know this December day,
the egg-yolk with the deadly tar beaten [t/o] into it?

Petersburg! I don't want to die yet!
You know my telephone numbers.

Petersburg! I've still got the addresses:
I can look up dead voices.

I lie on the back stairs, and the bell,
Torn out nerves and all, jangles in my temples.
And I wait till morning for the guests that I love,
And rattle the door in its chains.

(Selected 221)

The title of the poem is "Leningrad" but Mandelstam denies the name as he uses "Petersburg" throughout this poem and the others that follow. By 1931, the situation was unbearable as Mandelstam awaited his arrest. The night came in January of 1931. Akhmatova, Mandelstam and his wife were in the kitchen reciting poems when the fateful knock on the door arrived. Mandelstam recorded the exact events in a short poem:

You and I will sit for awhile in the kitchen,
The good smell of kerosene,
Sharp knife, big round loaf—
Pump up the stove all the way.
And have some string handy
For the basket, before daylight,
To take to the station
Where no one can come after us.

(Selected 224)

After his first arrest, there came a second right after Mandelstam had been released. In the second arrest, he was sent from Vornezh, a habitable city, to the unthinkable environs of Siberia. During this time, he suffered from attacks of mental illness that could be attributed to the stress of the ordeal. Even though both physically and mentally ill at times, Mandelstam
continued to write in his exile. It was a very personal narrative of his experience but even so he hoped that it would reach others, others even in the future. The poems became a record of one man and his ordeals in history. Mandelstam's greatest desire was that his personal narrative be read and understood by others and this is reflected in his last lyrical poems:

The people need poetry that will be their [t/o] own secret, to keep them awake forever, and bathe them in the bright haired wave of its breathing. 
(Selected 355)

In a later poem, Mandelstam almost becomes desperate for a connection to others:

In the pit, in the watery darkness, I'm slipping toward the frozen pump house. I fall over my feet. I swallow dead air. A fever of crows explodes.

And after that, there I am, gasping, Drumming on an icy wooden tub. Somebody read me! Somebody lead me! [t/o] Somebody heal me! Somebody say something on the jagged stairs. (Selected 360)

One of Mandelstam's last poems deals with the agony of exile and the need of the poet to reach an audience with his narrative. Here Mandelstam identifies with Dante and his exile from Florence. Even though outside
of a place that brought cohesion to his work and
narrative, Mandelstam hopes that his words will arrive
to his comrades and people. In this way there is a
connection to others, but it is still not a collective
narrative because he has not taken up their story
combined with his own but simply his own story. Here
is one of the last poems that Mandelstam wrote before
he disappeared December 27, 1938, en route to Siberia:

I've lost my way in the sky---now where?
Let the one with the sky nearest him answer.
It was easier for Dante's nine fallen
Discuses to ring.

You can't cut me off from life---it dreams
Of killing and caressing at a turn of [t/o]
the same hand,
So an anguish from Florence still fills
The ears, the eyes, the sockets.

No do not oppress my forehead
With the sharp green laurel.
Better to cleave my heart
Into blue shards ringing,

Then when I die, keeping faith
To the last with the lovers,
Every sky in my breast will echo,
Ringing out and up.
(Selected 378)

While both of the poets lived through many of the same
events, Mandelstam was never able to write with a
great knowledge of the narrative of social time.
His exile severed him from human relationships and the
survival of the "I" had become a great concern in the
poetry. Akhmatova, though, during the same tribulations of the Stalin terror was able to transform personal suffering into collective narrative. Akhmatova was able to tap into this narrative social time which, "bears the same relation to social experience and social action as does individual temporality to the experiences, actions and lives of individuals" (Carr 101).

The year 1935 became the crisis point for Akhmatova. Her son Lev had been sent to a prison camp and she, like so many other women of the time in Leningrad, gathered outside the main prison there. These women encircled the prison everyday hoping for information on the status of their loved ones. It is at this moment that Akhmatova begins the collective "We" narrative, for, "that quintessential element of narrative, the crisis or turning point is the stuff of communal life" (Carr 159).

The poem that begins this new form of narrative is entitled Requiem 1935-1940. An example of this epic being formed by the smaller lyric poem is found in the first section where there are only four lines:

No not under the vault of alien skies,
And not under the shelter of alien wings---
I was with my people then,
There, where my people, unfortunately were.

It is in this work that Akhmatova fully realizes three
important issues of the social narrative. First, the importance of history, in this poem Akhmatova gives a specific time within the text itself: "In the terrible years of the Yezhove terror, I spent seventeen months in the prison lines of Leningrad." Secondly, she identifies with a group of people that she is involved with which is very important to this kind of narrative because, "...for the individual, much of what goes on in the social world is the actions and sufferings of groups, not as an external spectacle played out before the individual's eyes but as the function of his or her participation" (Carr 155). At the beginning of the poem, Akhmatova is entering into this participation:

Once someone recognized me. Then a woman with bluish lips standing behind me, who, of course had never heard me called by name before, woke up from the stupor to which everyone [t/o] had succumbed and whispered in my ear (everyone spoke in [t/o] whispers there):

"Can you describe this?"
And I answered: "Yes, I can."
Then something that looked like [t/o] a smile passed over what had once been her face.

In the opening lines Akhmatova also established a sense of place: Leningrad. So here at the beginning of the poem, the two important elements of narrative are established, event-time and place. The transformation of the third element from "I" to "We" is what becomes
so interesting. Almost all of Akhmatova's early poems are written from her perspective but here she allows herself to pick up the emotions and voices of the others. In the section entitled "Dedication", she understands the heartache of the woman who finds out that her loved one has died in the prison system:

The verdict...and her tears gush forth,  
Already she is cut off from the rest,  
As if they painfully wrenched life [t/o] from her heart.  
As if they brutally knocked her flat,  
But she goes on...staggering...Alone...

Akhmatova is able to take all the voices of these women and combine them within her verse. Eventually, she expands the suffering of the women in the present in the Soviet Union to include the suffering of the women in Russia's past. These lines describe the pain of the wives of the Streltsy in medieval Russia:

They led you away at dawn,  
I followed you like a mourner,  
In the dark front room the children were [t/o] crying,  
By the icon shelf the candle was dying.  
On your lips was the icon chill.  
The deathly sweat on your brow...Unforgettable.  
I will be like the wives of the Streltsy,  
Howling under the Kremlin towers.

By section five, the reader begins to understand the women's distress:
The poem, sticking with the idea of collective or social narrative, gives great details of what the time was really like and the specifics of it. "And innocent Russia withered/ Under bloody boots/ And under the tires of the Black Marias," the "Black Marias" being the name given to the cars of the secret police by the people of Leningrad. Other specifics include: "So sickeningly familiar to everyone.---/ In which I glimpse the top of the pale blue hat," the pale blue hat was part of the uniform of the NKVD (the secret police at that time), and Akhmatova even alludes to the location of the labor/prison camps (which was an unmentionable thing to do at the time), "The Yenisey swirls,/ The north star shines." The main section of the poem ends with an expansion into the universal. This is done after Akhmatova has related to Russia's past, the Streltsy women, and given great details of the present situation of her own and other women, thus preserving her own present's history. In the tenth section, however, Akhmatova opens up the suffering of women as wife and mother to a universal drama. Section ten is entitled "Crucifixion". The first stanza does
not record the women's plight but sets the picture:

A choir of angels sang the praises of [t/o]
that momentous hour,
And the heavens dissolved in fire.
To his Father He said: "Why hast thou [t/o]
forsaken me!"
And to his mother: "Oh, do not weep for me!"

Akhmatova has expanded from a national history of the
present to a national history spanning centuries to a
history that spans most of Europe's history. It is in
the second and last stanza of this section that Akhmatova
shows the power of her ability to relate the essence
of any drama. Without a great amount of words, the
stanza shows the unspeakable suffering of the women of
all of history who have waited while their loved ones
have been held prisoner and put to death. Here,
Akhmatova imbues the simple words with great power,
the understatement is astonishing:

Mary Magdelene beat her breasts and sobbed,
The beloved disciple turned to stone.
But where the silent mother stood, there
No one glanced and no one would have dared.

In "Epilogue I", Akhmatova reveals herself as the poet
as witness:

I learned how faces fall,
How terror darts from under eyelids,
How suffering traces lines
Of stiff cunieform on cheeks,
How locks of ashen blond or black
Turn silver suddenly,
Smiles fade on submissive lips
And fear trembles in a dry laugh.

In "Epilogue II", Akhmatova changes from a witness to a participant, from an "I" narrative to a "We" narrative which is what the poem is all about:

Once more the day of remembrance draws near.
I see, I hear, I feel you:
The one they almost had to drag at the end,
And the one that tramps her native land [t/o]
no more,
And the one who, tossing her beautiful head,
Said "Coming here is like coming home."
I'd like to name them all by name,
But the list has been confiscated and [t/o]
is nowhere to be found.
I have woven a wide mantle for them all [t/o]
by name,
From their meager, overheard words.

As a poet using a collective narrative, Akhmatova has created a lasting narrative of this event. She has given it cohesion and imbued it with meaning like her earlier personal lyrics. She has triumphed in this form, the collective narrative, but in her next great epic, she takes the form even further.

Akhmatova's greatest triumph poetically is Poem Without a Hero. Here the poet herself explores time, narrative and history. The work spans pre-Revolutionary Russia, especially the year 1913, all the way to the
end of World War Two. The actual composition of the poem spanned the years from 1940 to 1962. The very first section of the poem touches both a place in Leningrad and a place in history. The motto "DEUS CONSERVAT OMNIA" was on the coat of arms at the Fountain House where Akhmatova lived from 1926 to 1941 and 1944 to 1952, it also appears as the very first epigraph for the poem. Right after this epitaph is a quote from Pushkin, from the last stanza of Evgeny Onegin, "Some are gone and others are far away". Here, "Pushkin is bidding farewell to his poem and speaking about his first readers" (Hemschemeyer p. 771). Akhmatova has identified a sense of place by the motto from the Fountain House and Pushkin's quote. After these lines, the true body of the poem begins. Akhmatova writes, "The first time this poem came to me was on the night of December 1940, in the Fountain House, having sent that autumn, one small fragment as a messenger...". At the end of this section, "In Place of a Forward", Akhmatova demonstrates her connection to the past and her ability as a poet to create a collective narrative: "I hear their voices and remember them when I read the poem aloud, and for me this invisible chorus is an everlasting justification of the work".
The poem has three dedications before the main corpus. Each dedication relates to someone who has disappeared in the past, either by death or emigration. The first dedication is in memory of Vsevolod Knyazev, a young poet and officer of the guard who committed suicide over the love of Olga Glebova-Sudeikina, a singer, dancer and actress. The suicide was before the outbreak of World War One and Akhmatova witnesses it as both as a symbol for all the young men that were to die in the war and the revolution and as a futile act of a dying romantic era of pre-Revolutionary Petersburg. Akhmatova feels the approach of the coming years of the war and the Revolution:

---and there was a greenish haze
and the wind of our native land began to blow
---Isn't it the sea?
   No, it is only pine needles
on the grave, and, in boiling foam,
closer, ever closer...
March Funèbre...
Chopin...

The second dedication is for Olga Glebova-Sudeikina. She was an artist like Akhmatova and represents for Akhmatova the brilliant light of the active arts in St. Petersburg before the Revolution of 1917. Sudeikina also comes to symbolize for Akhmatova the part of her that wanted to emigrate to Paris and join the other artists there. Akhmatova
wrote this poem when she heard of Sudeikina's death in Paris in 1945. The last stanza shows the warmth Akhmatova felt both for the woman and their time in the past:

I sleep---
I dream of our youth,
The cup that passed him by:
Waking, I'll give it to you,
If you want, as a souvenir,
Like a pure flame in a dish of clay
Or a snowdrop in an open grave.

For the dedication, "Third and Last", Akhmatova moves to the future. The epigraph is from Zhukovsky from the ballad Svetlana, "the heroine, trying to divine the future, sits before a mirror with a candle at midnight and sees a messenger. He takes her to her fiancé, who is dead---then she wakes up the next day and finds out that her beloved is alive" (Hemschemeyer p. 771). The poem is Akhmatova's look to her future visit by Isaiah Berlin that would both renew her life but also cause great hardship as it would be the cause for her son's return journey to a labor camp and her expulsion from the Union of Soviet Writers in 1946. Taken within a greater scope, Akhmatova also saw this event as the beginning of the Cold War for her and her country and the world. The first part of the poem shows the energy that Berlin's visit set up for Akhmatova:
Long enough have I frozen in fear,
Better to summon a Bach Chaconne,
And behind it will enter a man,
He will not be a beloved husband to me
But what we accomplish, he and I,
will disturb the twentieth century.

In the middle of the poem, Akhmatova gives the reader
the pure facts of the first visit:

He will come to me in the Fountain Palace
To drink New Years wine
And he will be late this foggy night.

Then, at the end, Akhmatova reveals the disastrous
result of the visit:

But its not the first branch of lilac,
Not a ring,
Not the sweetness of
Prayers
It is death that he bears.

These dedications have a personal narrative style to
them; however, as soon as the dedications end, Akhmatova
once again enters the collective narrative. In her
"Introduction", she becomes a medium through which
the throng of the past speaks. She is the witness that
lives through time and transforms it into narrative:

FROM THE YEAR NINETEEN FORTY
AS IF FROM A TOWER, I SURVEY EVERYTHING
AS IF BIDDING FAREWELL AGAIN
TO WHAT I PARTED FROM LONG AGO
AS IF CROSSING MYSELF
AND THEN DESCENDING TO
DARK VAULTS.
Immediately in "Part One", Akhmatova gives a place and time for the poem. The title is "The Year Nineteen Thirteen: A Petersburg Tale". "A Petersburg Tale" relates directly back to Pushkin who used it as a subtitle for "The Bronze Horseman", a romantic narrative about the founding of St. Petersburg. Akhmatova's narrative now becomes a complex interweaving of times and allusions all centered in St. Petersburg.

The epigraphs for the first chapter are interesting in that Akhmatova uses a quote from her own earlier work Rosary, that was written in 1913, and a quote from Pushkin. Once again she interweaves the personal with the collective narrative.

Akhmatova gives the scene for her poem, like stage directions in a play, before the verse begins, "New Year's Eve. The Fountain House. Instead of the expected guest, the shades from the year 1913, under the guise of mummers, pay a visit to the author". Akhmatova becomes the voice for these people of the past, for the past that has been cleansed by the Soviet authorities. She wishes to resurrect the true history. Unlike the history espoused by the government:

As the future ripens in the past,
So the past rots in the future---
A terrible festival of dead leaves.
(79-81)
The collective narrative of the poet allows the past to continue to be a part of the retentional gaze and remain on the horizon of being, both for the individual and the group. Akhmatova sees how this can continue to exist:

There is no death—everyone knows that,
   It's insipid to repeat it,
   But what exists—-let them tell me.

The eyes are open and the forehead pale...
   It means that gravestones are fragile...
   It means that granite is softer than wax.

(161-63/ 171-73)

Before the second chapter, Akhmatova has a section entitled "Interlude" with a subtitle "Across the Landing". This is a section completely devoted to the voice of the others. Akhmatova writes before the verse, "Somewhere around here (but thoughtless, shameless, nonchalant, the masqueraders babble on...) lines like these wander around, but I don't let them get in the main text". The section is important because Akhmatova allows the collective voice to enter into the work without much of her own artistic interference. With the short interlude ended, Akhmatova begins "Chapter Two". This section brings alive Akhmatova's friend Sudeikina to show the carefree existence of the year 1913. Sudeikina, a dancer as well as an actress, dances through the scenes of the
verse. There are plays being performed and symphonies and even facts about Russia's past seen to flow across the vision. The first of Peter the Great's building of St. Petersburg:

\begin{quote}
And all around us is the old city Piter
That (as people said then)
Wore the hide of the people thin.
\end{quote}

(229-31)

The second is of the defeat of the Russians by the Japanese early in the twentieth century:

\begin{quote}
From the Summer Garden the fifth act Wafts...The phantom of Tsushima's hell Is here as well.
\end{quote}

(260-62)

Besides having the history well placed, Akhmatova reveals that, "Everyone who is needed is in place" (259). This includes Blok, and allusion to Lermentov and of course the beloved Pushkin.

All of these memories of Russia were ready to be wiped out as a decadent past but Akhmatova realized that these events will not be lost, even though they are "there at the mouth of the Lethe-Neva" (286). "Chapter Three" allows Akhmatova to explore the idea of the poet's preservation of the collective narrative, especially in the sense of the local narrative of a city. The second epigraph of this section comes
from Mandelstam's *Tristia* and reinforces the idea of returning to a place as an essence of time, "In Petersburg we'll meet again/ As if it were there we buried the sun". The "stage directions" for the poem are given as: "Petersburg 1913, a lyrical digression. Last reminiscence about Tsarskoye Selo". Akhmatova describes 1913 this way:

> bonfires warmed the Christmas holidays,  
> and carriages slid off the bridges,  
> and the whole mournful city floated  
> toward some mysterious goal  
> with the Neva's current or against it—  
> only away from its graves.  
> The galernya Arch darkened  
> in the Summer Garden the weather vane [t/o] squealed  
> and the silver crescent moon brightly [t/o] chilled  
> over the Silver Age.  
> (351-60)

This section contains lyrical poems that deal with the ending of an era but it ends with a question addressed to the Muse:

> Won't you say to me once more  
> The word  
> that conquers death  
> And solves the riddle of my life?

The word is "memory", that which gives words to the poet to write, to create the narrative of her life and the life of the nation. The theme of memory and a continuous narrative enlivens the "Fourth and Last
Chapter" of "Part One". Akhmatova becomes the consciousness and conscience of the people and their embattled narrative:

It is I—your old conscience
who found the burned story
And on the edge of the windowsill
In the house of the deceased
I laid it---
and tiptoed away...
(446-51)

The end of an era and the narrative seem to end with these lines. It seems as if the poet has abandoned her work but Akhmatova includes an epilogue that brings the reader to the second part of the epic:

ALL IS IN ORDER: THERE LIES THE POEM
AND, AS USUAL, IT HAS FALLEN SILENT
BUT WHAT IF SUDDENLY A THEME BURST FORTH
KNOCKS ON THE WINDOW WITH ITS FIST---
AND FROM AFAR, RESPONDING TO THIS APPEAL,
COME THE TERRIBLE SOUNDS---
OF GURGLING, GROANS AND SCREAMS
AND A VISION OF CROSSED ARMS...
(452-59)

"Part Two" is an intermezzo entitled "The Other Side of the Coin". Akhmatova brings the reader up to the present of the poem in the 1940's. The intermezzo brings interest to the whole cycle because it shows how the poet's narrative can be stifled from forces outside of the poet. Akhmatova first shows the problem of censorship:
My editor was dissatisfied.
Swearing to me that he was ill and [t/o]
occupied,
He got an unlisted phone number
And he grumbled.
(1)

The eighth and ninth stanzas show this sense of silence.
While akhmatova was censored, no one from the literary
establishment approached her door as this would be
political and artistic suicide:

No one knocks at my door,
Silence guards silence,
And the mirror dreams only of the [t/o]
mirror.
(9)

In an astounding move, Akhmatova moves from her own
silencing to the silencing of so many by the government.
With a great insight, Akhmatova creates this feeling
of the disappearance of so many and their voices
visually on the page: In three stanzas, the reader
understands the impact of the Stalinist terror:

10.

11.

12.

And the decades file by,
Tortures, exiles and deaths...[t/o]
I can't sing
In the midst of this horror.

56
Akhmatova, by the time she wrote *Poem Without a Hero*, understood the important elements of narrative. Combining her personal narrative with the collective narrative of her people, she had intertwined past and present. By this time she had become part of a community and she had become a leader of it. Her communal story was pitted against that of the Soviet government and

Is it not the case that much communal activity at all levels, from the smallest and most intimate to our huge modern states consists in the clash of the incompatible story-lines, a battle over which account of who we are and where we are going...(Carr 157).
Akhmatova took this clash of histories in stride, preserving her own account. By preserving the narrative, she was completing the narrative horizon. Past and present had been preserved and now the important element of the protentional gaze, the future, would enter into the narrational act and horizon. Akhmatova offers and envisions its reception:

And then let an unknown man
From some future century
Stare at me audaciously,
And give me a fleeting shade,
An armful of wet lilacs
Just as the thunderstorm passes away.

"Part Three" has the subtitle "Epilogue" and shows Akhmatova's connection to Leningrad, even at the time that she had to evacuate it in June of 1942. Unlike Mandelstam's, however, her exile would not rob her of the sense of a collective narrative. In fact, it would bind her closer to the city. The epigraphs ring with the connection to the city. The first one is from Pushkin's "The Bronze Horseman", it reads, "I love you creation of Peter". Her own dedication is simple: "To my city". The "stage directions" show the plight of the city and Akhmatova's empathy with it:

White night of June 24, 1942. The city is in ruins. From the harbor to Smolny, everything is flattened. Here and there old fires are still smoldering. In the
Sheremetev garden, the lindens are blooming and the nightingale is singing. One third-story window (behind the crippled maple) has been blown out, revealing black emptiness. From the direction of the Kronstadt comes the rumble of the heavy artillery. But in general silence prevails. The voice of the author, seven thousand miles away pronounces....

At first, this last section shows impending separation by personifying inanimate objects of the city:

From dusk to dawn,
The old maple looks into the room
And, foreseeing our separation,
Stretches out to me as if to help.

(8-11)

Akhmatova, unlike Mandelstam, overcomes this separation by means of narrative. Through narrative, both place and time, past, present and an intended future, can be saved. The narrative of place and time, the social narrative, insures the survival of the individual by connecting her to narrative. Perhaps the most moving lines are when Akhmatova becomes one with St. Petersburg-Petrograd-Leningrad:

And not becoming my grave,
You, granite, infernal, clear to me,
Grew pale, benumbed and still.
Our separation is imaginary:
We are inseparable,
My shadow is on your walls.
My reflection in your canals,
The sound of my footsteps in the [t/o]
Hermitage Halls

59
Where my friend walked with me,
And in the ancient Volkov Field
Where I can freely weep
Over the silence of common graves.

Akhmatova was able to weep freely over the common graves, she had been able to transcend personal narrative for the social. However, Mandelstam was not able to weep for a common grave as his own came so early in the winter of 1938. The difference in the narratives of these two poets is that of the transcendence of the personal narrative, and although Mandelstam's work does reach the reader, Akhmatova's records the pain of a people and preserves it in memory in a more powerful fashion. She has become a writer of epic poetry. Through her, readers gain a view of the social past while through Mandelstam, they only see the tribulations of an individual. Akhmatova became a part of Petersburg and its narrative while Mandelstam is an exile ever waiting for return.
EPILOGUE

The city of Leningrad once again has a new name. On October 1, 1991, the city brought back the name its founder gave to it almost three hundred years ago. St. Petersburg is St. Petersburg again and as Mandelstam said some fifty years ago, "In Petersburg we'll meet again".
BIBLIOGRAPHY


