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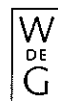
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Approaches to Poetry

Some Aspects of Textuality,
Intertextuality and Intermediality

Edited by

János S. Petöfi and Terry Olivi



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To Cross Or Not To Cross:
Axmatova's "Sacred Boundary"

1. Introduction

The title refers both to the text at hand and to my theoretical quandary, as I find myself approaching Axmatova's programmatically borderline poem with what can be described as a borderline poetics. Having worked for quite a while within the Soviet structuralist fold and then graduated into the post-structuralist beyond, I can best formulate my present position as a study in enlightened eclecticism with an intertextual bent.

1.1 A pre-poststructuralist poetics

My previous theoretical stance and practical analyses were shaped by Russian Formalism with its notions of device (Shklovsky) and invariant function (Shklovsky, Propp); Jakobsonian principles of isomorphism, iconicity, and text-foregrounding; Eisenstein's theme-oriented expressive generativism *avant la lettre*; and multi-level models in linguistics. This pool of ideas was systematized into a model of literary competence called a *poetics of expressiveness* (Shcheglov and Zholkovsky 1976, 1987), based on the concepts of

- *theme*: master invariant of the text;
- *poetic world*: hierarchy of invariants recurrent in an author's texts;
- *expressive devices*: theme-preserving expressiveness-enhancing transformations;
- *derivation*: formulation of the theme-text correspondence in terms of expressive devices;
- *levels*: successive approximations of the text in the derivation (*theme — deep design — deep structure — surface structure*);
- *dictionary of reality*: data base of all derivations, comprising the *referential* and *stylistic* spheres and their further subdivisions, or *codes* (e. g. ideological, psychological, ...; syntactic, phonetic, ...).
- *ready-made objects*: dictionary realizations of clusters of themes and devices.

The model was tested against various works of poetry and prose, yielding a wealth of practical analyses and prompting further refinements of the apparatus.

1.2 Correctives

There were, I believe, several interconnected reasons that led me to discontinue exclusive reliance on the model just described. One had to do with the difficulty of incorporating in it the phenomenon of intertextuality.¹ Another reason was the unwieldy complexity of the format, which increased with every attempt to account for longer or more sophisticated texts and their wider intertexts. A third resulted from the realization that finite closure is hardly a tenable universal, even if we allow for the text's thematic ambiguity: the admission of an open plurality of interpretative perspectives seemed unavoidable. As a fourth reason, I came to accept the fundamental textuality of the critic's discourse itself, with the corollary that derivational analyses were not only conceptually cumbersome but also discursively unnarratable (and, therefore, impractical in the current intellectual climate). None of this amounts to a refutation of the model, but rather suggests a change of tone and emphasis in its use.

The issue of intertextuality can be addressed in the spirit of Riffaterre's (1978) representation of any poem as an expansion and conversion of a known (textual, ideological, cultural) model. Yet, even this schema may be an oversimplification inherited from the structuralists' binary opposition. A strong case has been made by Smirnov (1985) for four-term intertextual homologies, but an unspecified range of possible intertextual designs appears to be an even more attractive (if less strict) theoretical option. The concepts of opposition, homology, and mediation remain staples of poetic analysis, but they should be given freer play in stating the type and degree of interaction between the text's various voices (Zholkovsky 1988, Culler 1975: 174). This naturally brings up the Bakhtinian concept of mutually subversive discourses, in particular the idea that any speech act is oriented toward an explicit or implicit "other voice." The polyphonic principle awaits its adoption in poetic analysis despite Bakhtin's own disregard for poetry as an allegedly monologic opposite of novelistic dialogism.²

¹ In principle, such incorporation does not seem unfeasible if one (a) manages to distinguish clearly between the discourse's *stylistic* concerns proper, its general *intertextual* import, and its specific *subtextual* allusions, borrowings etc., and (b) undertakes to state all these elements at every level of the derivation (Zholkovsky 1983, 1985).

² For Bakhtin's "standard" view of poetry as monologic see the chapter on "Discourse in Poetry and in the Novel" (1981: 275–300, esp. 285). Cf., on the contrary, his earlier work (1986 [1920–1924], esp. pp. 138–157), where he focuses on the interaction between the ethical-cognitive reactions of the hero(es) of a lyrical poem and the author's esthetic "reaction to these reactions." Of particular relevance to our discussion in this early piece are

- the identification of the author's "encompassing reaction" as the source of a poem's "esthetic completion," i. e. closure;
- the actual poetic example used: Pushkin's "For the Shores of Your Faraway Fatherland ...," which happens to be part of the subtextual background of Axmatova's poem under

One important type of intertextual tension is that between the poet and the prevailing discourse of his time. If that discourse is authoritative, it results in political, cultural, moral and other kinds of censorship³ and, as a corollary, the "dialogue" with it results in Aesopian language (Losev 1984, Zholkovsky 1986). Similarly, a poet's evolution can be envisaged as the introduction into his/her poetic world of new elements which both subvert and change it. Especially instructive is the case where the situation *is* Aesopian, as, for instance, in the second period of Pasternak's work, marked by the adaptation of his poetic world to the demands of 1930s' Stalinist ideology (Zholkovsky 1989 b).

The search for the text's subtexts should include, along with its predictable antecedents in the native and world poetic tradition, prosaic and even unliterary texts (of manifestoes, documents, the other arts, the "practical series," etc.; Ronen 1983). Furthermore, the preoccupation of Slavists with specific *subtextual* sources has to be transcended, making room for structural, stylistic, mythological, psychoanalytic, archetypal, and other generalized *intertexts* (Laferrriere 1978: 120 ff., Zholkovsky 1987). A successful combination of the two approaches is instanced by the study of "semantic haloes" (*oreoly*) of Russian meters (Taranovsky 1963, Gasparov 1976, 1979, 1982, 1983, 1984). A meter's thematic potential, stored in its memory, is discovered through a comprehensive analysis of all the poems written in that meter. This means that in choosing a meter the poet is confronted with a generalized set of options (rather than individual subtexts), which can be followed, subverted, overcome, recombined, etc. (cf. Bloom 1975).

The idea of assigning a text an unordered assemblage of readings was broached in Barthes' *S/Z* (1974 [1970]), as yet from within the immanent concept of the text as a sum-total of its codes. In "standard" poetics-of-expressiveness analyses, similar limited polyphony was admitted in the form of the centrally controlled variety of the theme's projections onto the text's levels and codes. It now seems preferable to accept a loose set of readings, perhaps mutually related but not necessarily coordinated in an unambiguous manner, each stating the posture taken by the text *vis-à-vis* the respective discourse convention (genre, code, ideology).⁴

analysis (cf. Note 14);

— the comparisons (on pp. 150–152) with the treatment of the author-hero interaction in more "novelistic" types of poetry (Heine's lyrics; Puškin's own *Eugene Onegin*).

For remarks on Baxtin's changing views on poetry see Emerson 1988: 504; 1989.

³ Cf. Freud's (1969) censorship metaphor.

⁴ Recent focus on the pragmatics of literary discourse owes much to the impact of Austin's (1975) work on performatives but it also had strong forerunners in the fields of literary and art theory, such as Baxtin, Eisenstein (see Zholkovsky 1984: 35–52), Burke (1957), and the American New Critics.

Without claiming definitiveness, one can suggest the following types of context that should supplement the components of the text itself (i. e. its "zero-degree" context) as a tentative

In what follows I offer readings of some aspects of a poem by Anna Axmatova (1889–1966) and demonstrate some parts of the outlined program. The exposition will be less rigorous than before, but, alas, not as discursive as my newly found post-structuralism would imply.

2. The text

2.1 The original

N. V. N.

Est' v blizosti liudej zavetnaja čerta,
Ec ne perejti vlyublennosti i strasti, —
Pust' v žutkoj tišine slivajutsja usta,
I serdce rvetsja ot ljubvi na časti.

I družba zdes' bessil'na, i goda
Vysokogo i ognennogo sčast'ja,
Kogda duša svobodna i čužda
Medlitel'noj istome sladostrast'ja.

Stremjaščiesja k nej bezumny, a ee
Dostigšie — poraženy toskoju ...
Teper' ty ponjal, otečego moc
Ne b'eťsja serdce pod tvoej rukoju.

(Axmatova 1976: 91)

2.2 A literal translation⁵

In human intimacy there is a sacred boundary,
It cannot be crossed by romance or passion, —
Though lips be fused together in awful silence
And the heart break asunder with love.

Friendship, too, is powerless here, and so are years
Of sublime and fiery happiness,
When the soul is free and alien
To the slow languor of voluptuousness.

format for intertextual studies:

- the specific subtext(s) engaged by the text;
- the genre in which the text is written and which it most likely is trying to reshape;
- the system of the author's invariants, which the text may also be reviewing;
- the influential contemporary context, a love-hate relationship with which informs the text;
- the mythological or psychological archetype that manifests itself in the text, probably with innovative variation;
- the text of the author's life and work, of which the given literary text forms a special version.

For attempts of multi-contextual analysis see Zholkovsky 1989 a, c.

⁵ All subsequent quotes are from this version.

Those striving towards it [the boundary] are insane, while those
Who have reached it [are] stricken with anguish ...
Now you have understood why my
Heart does not beat under your hand.

(Revised from Obolensky 1965: 317)

2.3 A poetic translation

With closest friends there is a secret line ...
Passion and love can't cross it or deny it,
Although in grisly silence lips combine
And hearts are torn to pieces by love's riot.

Friendship is helpless here ... So are the years
Of even a supreme, bright happiness ...
When these, our souls, are free and foreigners
To the lazy languor of voluptuousness.

Those who strive for it are insane ... Those who
Gain it are stricken by anguish and yearning.
Now you know why my heart which still loves you
Can never tremble under your hand's turning.

(Markov and Sparks 1967: 270)

3. Structure

3.1 Referential motifs

The poem openly states its theme: the unbridgeable intimacy gap — the *zavetnaja čerta* that can be translated approximately as “sacred [secret, inviolate, specially designated] boundary [line, mark, limit].” This border line cannot be crossed even under the pressure of the strongest forces of emotional fusion (lust, love, friendship), whether in moments of amorous passion or in long-term relationships. It manifests itself in the heart's lack of physical response to the caressing hand and in the soul's spiritual freedom (to the point of alienation) from the body's sensuality. At best it can be reached, not transcended, but this and even mere striving towards it are punished with mental breakdown.

3.2 Stylistic motifs

The boundary motif has as its age-old stylistic counterpart various run-on effects, which dramatize the conflict between linguistic and verse boundaries. Axmatova's poem is a sophisticated exercise in run-ons. The first stanza has none; the second has two, which are prominent but not extreme: (“years/of ... happiness;” “alien/to ... voluptuousness”); and the third (which, referen-

tially, treats of reaching the fatal boundary) boasts a series of spectacular run-ons and pauses. The text of stanza III is interrupted by pauses after *bezumny*, “insane” (end of clause); after *ee*, “it” (end of line; *lit.* “... while those who it/have reached ...”); after *dostigšie*, “who have reached [it]” (end of the grammatical subject group in the second of two coordinated parallel clauses); after *ponjal*, “understood” (end of clause); after *moe*, “my” (end of line).

The acuteness of two of these ruptures is enhanced by inverted word order: *ee/dostigšie* rather than the normal *dostigšie ee*; the convoluted *moe/ne b'iet'sja serdce* (*lit.* “my/not beats heart”) instead of *moe serdce ne b'iet'sja*. In fact, the inversions serve as icons of both the separating obstacles and the powerful drive towards fusion, which, in a sense, does take place as the sentences succeed in being completed.

The final crossing is undertaken on the poem's narrative frame. The last two lines, appearing after an ominous three dots, turn out to be direct speech, addressed by the poem's lyrical ‘I’ to its lyrical ‘you’ (actually, the intimate second person singular *ty* is used) in the here and now rather than in the impersonal and indefinite meditative present of the rest of the poem. The transition again both succeeds (stylistically the switch is very effective) and fails: in a different mode and under even more daunting circumstances the speaker reasserts the same denial.

4. Intertexts

4.1 The poetic world

A poet's text is usually just another variation on his/her recurrent motifs — a sentence, as it were, written according to the grammar of the entire oeuvre. This 1915 poem is one of the most widely anthologized gems of Anna Axmatova's early period, typical of that period and her style in general.⁶ It is vintage Axmatova in many respects:

- the profound mistrust of love and happiness;
- the blunt honesty, sometimes with a touch of exhibitionist coyness, with which she addresses sex, death, the human condition;
- the poem's elegant narrative *pointe*, which involves the addressee and is fleshed out with a striking physical gesture;⁷

⁶ On Axmatova's poetic world see Shcheglov 1979. The book of verse *Belaja staja* (*The White Flack*, 1917), in which the poem was later included, is marked by the influence of Pushkin (Zhirmunskij 1973: 79). The poem is dedicated to N. V. N[e]dobrovo], Axmatova's friend and critic (see Axmatova 1976: 461), but the discussion of the biographical context is omitted from the present analysis.

⁷ Axmatova's poems often open or end with similar tableaux, in particular, with close-ups of lovers' hands, e. g.: *Kak nepoxoži na ob"jat'ja/Prikosnoven'ja etix ruk* (“How unlike embrace/Are the touches of these hands”); *On snova trouul moi koleni/Pošti ne drognušej rukoj* (“Again

— the consummately regular poetic diction (meter, rhyming) that disguises stylistic and versificational innovations (e. g. the narrative surprise at the end; the irregular line length of the six- and five-foot iambs) and provides a perfect background for the modest but telling play of run-ons and pauses.

4.2 *The tradition*

In the historical perspective, Axmatova's poetics is a modernist version of the Russian romantic tradition, in particular, of that neo-classicist mold into which it was cast by Puškin, the playfully harmonious reconciler of opposites, on the one hand, and Baratynskij and Tjutčev, the self-corrosive metaphysicians, on the other.⁸ From Puškin, her worshipped model, Axmatova inherits an obsession with exploring all possible mediations between passion and impassivity,⁹ but she pushes his mortification of vitality to deliberate extremes in the spirit of Baratynskij's and Tjutčev's philosophical disillusionment.

Within the modernist camp, Axmatova is part of the Acmeist, moderately conservative reaction to Symbolism, as distinct from Futurism's aggressively radical exploding of the entire nineteenth-century tradition. While sharing in the general decadent atmosphere of the times, Acmeism, especially Axmatova's brand, prided itself on both bringing poetry down to earth from Symbolism's otherworldly heights and maintaining its idealistic adherence to higher values. One of the noted hallmarks of Axmatova's poetics, her allusive reliance on the stereotypes of the nineteenth-century psychological novel (Eixenbaum 1969: 140), is representative of both these tendencies: it is a move toward prosaization and narrativization of poetry (begun by the great civic poet Nekrasov¹⁰); yet, it confines itself to the love-and-adultery aspects of the novelistic paradigm (steering clear, for instance, of its streetwise and criminal aspects poetically promoted by Majakovskij).

he touched my knees/With [his] hand that almost did not tremble"; *Kak bespomoščno, žadno i žarko gladiš*/Xolodnye ruki moi "How helplessly, avidly and heatedly is [he] stroking/My cold hands"; and the like.

On Axmatova's use of narrative *pointes*, 'you,' and detail see Eixenbaum 1969: 140–143.

⁸ On Axmatova's Baratynskij and Tjutčev connection see Eixenbaum 1969: 139 (of particular relevance to the analyzed poem could be two Tjutčev's lyrics that treat of love, parting, and death and use the same "There is ..." formula: "V razluke est' vysokoe značen'e ..." ["There Is in Separation a Sublime Meaning ..."], 1851, first publ. 1914; "Est' i v moem stradal'českom zastoe ..." ["There Is in My Suffering Stagnation ..."], 1874). This leaves out, among the great nineteenth-century poets, Lermontov and Fet, both of whom were very important for the Symbolists and, one or the other or both, for Majakovskij, Pasternak, and Mandel'stam in Axmatova's own post-symbolist generation; it was probably Lermontov's demonically overstated 'I' and Fet's gushingly lyrical poetic personality that Axmatova had to resist.

⁹ On Pushkin's poetic world, especially on the motif of 'love without hopes and desires' see Zholkovskiy 1979, 1984: 69–75, 159–178.

¹⁰ On the "novelization" of poetry in Nekrasov–Annenskij–Axmatova see Magomedova 1989.

The poem under analysis reflects these intertextual presences by

- the soberly resigned acceptance of limits to the grand utopian claims about human nature;¹¹
- the delicate balance of order/disorder in the structure, which echoes the provocatively blasé blend of indifference and sensuality in the plot;
- the characteristic mix of lofty philosophizing with the physical vividness of the narrative *poïnte*.

The last item also deserves special generic attention.

¹¹ As an example of such claims in the immediately preceding (and still lingering) poetic discourse see the 1904 poem "Steklo" ("Glass") by a founder of Russian Symbolism, the famous woman poet Zinaida Gippius that treats of a symbolic dark glass dividing the lovers ("us"), yet ends on a note of faith in the future union:

V stranc, gde vse neobyčajno,
My spleteny pobednoj tajnoj.
No v žizni našej, ne slučajno,
Raz'edinjaja nas, leglo
Mež nami temnoe steklo.

...

Uslyšit Bog. Krugom svetlo.
On dast nam sil razbit' steklo.

(In the land where everything is unusual
We are intertwined by a victorious mystery.
But in our life, not accidentally,
Dividing us, there lay down
Between us a dark glass.

...

God will hear [us]. It is light all around.
He will give us the strength to break the glass.)

(Gippius 1910: 55)

Characteristically, the divine otherworldly forces work here against the obstacles of life on this earth and for the partners' intertwining (in body and soul) and the eventual breakthrough in communication. In Axmatova's poem, on the contrary, the couple's real circumstances seem to promote fusion, while the fundamental laws of the human condition perpetuate the boundaries. Inverted are also the respective value systems: Gippius prizes a complete union of souls, Axmatova, the freedom that comes with boundaries and alienation ("When the soul is free and alien to/The slow languor of voluptuousness").

True, Gippius cultivated also the eternal tension of unrequited, unconsummated, or otherwise unresolved love and to an extent Axmatova shared in this continuation of the romantic tradition, but there is a crucial difference. For Gippius (and other Symbolists), love as a real or virtual union of (two or more) persons or souls, promised from above, is a symbol of ultimate — whether Platonic, Christian, Fedorovian, or Socialist — communality (see Matich 1990). Axmatova, especially in this poem, views such expectations as futile attempts to invade inviolable privacy. Thus, her position is basically dystopian, i. e. both conservative (reverting to bourgeois individualism) and innovative (transcending the utopian claims). Rather than exulting in the newfound freedom, she states it as a sad but given reality.

4.3 Genre

The poem's general tenor is signaled from the start by the formulaic *Est'* «...» ("There is in ..."), which opens scores of similar philosophical musings in Russian poetry.¹² This meditative genre welcomes negated predicates, adversative constructions, controversial arguments, irreverent and downright decadent conclusions. What makes Axmatova's poem so distinctly her own is the way it handles its particular paradox.

The effect of the finale does not boil down to the pattern outlined above: an oxymoronic physical *exemplum* of the expounded philosophical thesis providing an unexpected narrative twist and a boundary crossing. Axmatova's recourse to the methods of prosaic composition is not merely technical; it follows the most fundamental principle of novelistic discourse: that of subverting the pretensions of the dominant voice by exposing its less than noble origins.

While ostensibly providing the dissertation about limits to intimacy with an example from the speaker's and addressee's own experience, the concluding remark actually weakens the case by showing the authoritatively objective impersonal statement for what it is — a personal opinion of somebody involved in the disputed issue, nursing a trauma, and holding forth about sour grapes.¹³ The credibility of the speaker's haughty philosophical posture

¹² To give some examples: Batuskov: *Est' naslaždenie i v dikosti lesov ...* ("There is pleasure in the wildness of forests ..."); Baratynskij: *Est' milaja strana, est' ngol na zemle ...* ("There is a dear land, there is a corner in the world ..."); Lermontov: *Est' reči — zvučen'e ...* ("There are speeches — [whose] meaning ..."); Tjutčev: *Pevučest' est' v morskix volnax ...* ("There is melodiousness in sea waves ..."; see also Note 8); Fet: *Est' noči zimnej blešk i sila ...* ("There is the brilliance and force of the winter night ..."); Blok: *Est' minuty, kogda ne trevožit ...* ("There are minutes, when it troubles not ..."); Annenskij: *Est' ljubov', paxožaja na dym ...* ("There is love that resembles smoke ..."); Mandel'stam: *Est' temnostej nezlyblemaja skala ...* ("There is the unshakable scale of values ...").

¹³ Cf. Vinogradov's (1976: 138–139) similar observation about this poem and also Eixenbaum's (1969: 131) remark on Axmatova's "predilection for contrasting combinations of ... prosaic and ... colloquial intonations with solemn expressions and intonational pathos;" in more general terms, this is, of course, an instance of Baxtinian dialogism (both Vinogradov and Baxtin are brought to bear on Axmatova's and Annenskij's "novelization" of lyrical poetry in Magomedova 1989; on the "dialogue" between Baxtin and Vinogradov irrespective of Axmatova and novelization see Perlina 1988).

In the present analysis the possibilities of Baxtinian approach are barely touched upon (see also Note 2). A more consistent effort in that direction would have to consider the dialogic interactions between the autonomous consciousnesses of the heroine, the hero, and the speaker of the poem (Baxtin's "author"). Even more stimulating could prove an attempt to read Axmatova's treatment of boundaries and death (see section 5.1) in light of Baxtin's views (as aptly formulated in Emerson 1988: 508, 510, 514, 516) on death as the ultimate closure; on closure as the opposite of the always desirable unfinalizability; and on "benevolent demarcation" as the ideal and possible solution to the "conflict between an organism and its surroundings." Incidentally, this last, somewhat utopian assumption — Emerson's (1988: 516–517, 520) arguments notwithstanding — places Baxtin together with the Symbolists, and not with the more skeptical Axmatova (see Note 11).

is further undermined by her spatially low position "under the hand" (and presumably other bodily parts) of the addressee. Still, the subversion stops short of explosion: the final lines maintain the stoically dignified tone of the rest of the poem.

5. Subtexts

Axmatova's general focus on the Puškinian tradition makes Puškin a likely source of direct quotations; her post-symbolist stance privileges the texts of her immediate predecessors; while her novelistic strategy suggests reliance on prosaic hypograms, possibly to be found in the works of Baxtin's *novelist par excellence*, Dostoevskij — all the more so, given his special interest in threshold situations and the problematic of transgression. Indeed, two references to Puškin, one to Annenskij, and one to Dostoevskij seem to underlie the poem's linguistic texture.

5.1 Lexical subtexts

The leitmotif image of 'uncrossable boundary' — and, in fact, the entire 'there is ...' phrase — may have been consciously or unconsciously borrowed from Puškin:

No nedostupnaja čerta mež nami est'.
Naprasno čuvstvo vozbuždja ja.

(But an unattainable boundary is between us.
In vain did I agitate my feeling[s].)

(Puškin 3: 20; "Pod nebom golubym strany
svoej rodnoj ..." ["Under the Blue Sky of
Her Native Land ..."]; 1826)

Yet, despite the obvious thematic, linguistic and metrical affinities,¹⁴ the difference is pronounced. In Puškin, the boundary is drawn between the

¹⁴ Metrically, both poems use six-foot and shorter iambs. Linguistically, "Under the Blue Skies ..." may have been a source of the vocabulary of Axmatova's poem — along with other Puškin's texts, among them his later response to the same death (of his ex-lover Amalija Riznič), the 1830 poem "Dlja beregov otčizny dal'nej ..." ("For the Shores of Your Faraway Fatherland ...") [Puškin 3: 257]). In particular, this latter poem has "my hands growing cold as they tried to keep you from leaving" (*Moï skladejnuštie ruki/Tebja staralis' uderžat'*), an image somewhat akin to the lover's hand in the poem under discussion and Axmatova's other similar hands (see Note 7).

As for the key phrase *zavetnaja čerta*, "sacred boundary," it may have come from yet another Puškin farewell to a former beloved, although there the phrase is used differently

speaker and his old love who has now expired in a foreign land; in Axmatova, it cuts across all loving couples, even in moments of utmost intimacy.

Incidentally, the motif of 'death,' central to the Puškin poem and apparently absent from Axmatova's (but, in fact, implicit in the general mood of disillusioned resignation and soul's estrangement from the body), is subtly reinforced by another subtext. The wording of the second line seems to rely on a covert quote from the Book of Job: "... [his days are determined ...], and Thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass ..." (14: 5). Although the noun ("bounds," in Russian *predel*) is lexically different from Axmatova's (*čerta*, "boundary"), the negated main verb ("to pass," *perejti*) is the same, as is the general syntactic and semantic structure; as a result, a sense of terminal irrevocability is imparted to the sad observations of Axmatova's speaker.

A chronologically closer elaboration on the 'fatal boundary' is found in a 1904 poem by Axmatova's acknowledged mentor Innokentij Anneskij

Navisnet li plamennyj znoj,
 Il', penjas', rasxodjatsja volny,
 Dva parusa lodki odnoj,
 Odnim i dyxan'em my polny.

Nam burja želan'ja slila,
 My svity bezumnymi snami,
 No molča sud'ba meždu nami
 Čertu navsegda provela.

I v noči bezzvezdnogo juga,
 Kogda tak privol'no-temno,
 Sgoraja, kosnut'sja drug druga,
 Odnim parusam ne dano.

(Whether the fiery heat hangs over,
 Or, foaming, the waves disperse,
 Two sails of one boat,
 We are filled with one and the same breath.

The storm has fused our desires,
 We are woven together by insane dreams,
 But silently has the fate between us
 Drawn forever a boundary.

— to mean the traces of the beloved's handwriting:

Sveršilos'! Temnye svernulisja listy;
 Na legkom peple ix zavetnye čerty
 Belejut ...

(It has happened! Dark sheets have rolled [withering];
 On their light ashes [your] sacred marks
 Look whitened ...)

(Puškin 2: 373; "Sožžennoe pis'mo"
 ["The Burned Letter"]; 1825)

And in the night of the starless south,
 When it is so freely dark,
 Burning down, to touch each other
 Is denied only to the sails ...)

(Annenskij 1959: 155; "Dva parusa lodki
 odnoj" ["Two Sails of One Boat"]; 1904)

To be sure, the figurative vehicle of the 'boundary' theme — the "two sails" metaphor — is different, as is the meter, amphibrachic trimeter. But Axmatova could have been influenced both by the lexical theme (*čerta*, "boundary") and the overall rhetorical contrast between the boundary and the manifestations of passionate reciprocity that effectively underscores the idea of permanent but incomplete union.¹⁵ The probability of a direct textual link is made even stronger by the immediate context of Annenskij's "Two Sails ..." in his collection *Kiparisovyj larec* (*The Cypress Box*, 1910), where two meditations on love open with the same "There is ..." formula.¹⁶

In any case, Annenskij's poem is a relevant specimen of the decadently poignant 1900's treatment of fatal love that Axmatova was steeped in, reenacted and reworked in her own way.¹⁷ Read against the "Two Sails ...," Axmatova's text displays a remarkable shift from the heartrending but essentially monologic lamentations to a dialogic opening up of romantic discourse.

Finally, a possible subtext for the 'boundary' image is yielded by *Crime and Punishment* (III, 3), Dostoevskij's master text on trespassing:

... i dojdeš' do takoj čerty, čto ne perešagneš' ee — nesčastna budeš', a perešagneš' — možet, ešče nesčastnec budeš' ...

(... you come to a certain limit and if you do not overstep it, you will be unhappy, but if you do overstep it, perhaps you will be even more unhappy ...)

(Dostoevskij 1973: 174; 1989: 192)

The likelihood of this connection is enhanced by

- the richness of the common denominator (the entire picture of being unhappy both on reaching and on crossing the fatal boundary) and
- a previous reference in the same conversation to the precarious distinction (*čerta*) between the normal, the "deranged" (*pomešannye*, cf. Axmatova's *bezumny*, "insane"), and the truly "sick" (*bol'nye*, cf. *poraženy toskoju*, "stricken with anguish").

¹⁵ Annenskij's strain in Axmatova's style was noted by Eixenbaum (1969: 139); with "Two Sails ..." the poem in question shares a number of lexical and referential motifs ("fused desires," "woven together," "insane," "fiery," etc.).

¹⁶ In *The Cypress Box*, "Two Sails ..." immediately precedes the poem "Dve ljubvi" ("Two Loves"), which begins *Est' ljubov', posozhaja na dym ...*, "There is love that resembles smoke ...;" and several pages later these poems are followed by "Nevozmožno" ("Impossible," 1907), a metaphoric declaration of love for the sounds of the title word, opening with *Est' slova — ix dyxan'e, čto svet ...*, "There are words — their breath is like color ..." (Annenskij 1959: 155–158).

¹⁷ Cf. Note 11 on a Gippius poem.

As a result, the poem's subtextual aura reinforces the existential connotations of the fatal boundary by associating its hazards with crime (in addition to insanity and death, as before). And, of course, the Dostoevskij connection foregrounds the text's dialogicity.

5.2 *A structural subtext*

The poem's dominant pattern, the play with run-ons and pauses, finds its denouement in the two concluding lines — to be precise, in the segment between the last two and most striking boundaries: ..., *otčego moe*!..., "... why my/..." This phrase stands out as an epitome of uneasy isolation thanks both to the effectively enforced surrounding pauses and the nonsensical combination of two strange bedfellows: a conjunction and a displaced adjective. And by standing out it brings to mind a similar conclusion of a Puškin classic:

I serdce vnov' gorit i ljubit — ottogo,
Čto ne ljubit' ono ne možet.

(And [my] heart again burns and loves — for the reason
That not love it can not.)

(Puškin 3: 158; "Na xolmax Gruzii ležit
nočnaja mgla ..." ["Upon the Hills of
Georgia Lies Night Haze ..."]; 1830)

The similarities are many:

- the general pattern of stops and syntactic subordination, as well as the actual conjunctions (*otčego*, "why" — *ottogo* "for the reason", which are as similar in Russian as, say, "wherefore" and "therefore" in English);
- the negation of the verbs ("does not beat"/"cannot not love");
- the rhyming pattern (alternation of masculine and feminine *O*-rhymes;
- and the central "heart" (*serdce*) lexeme and image.¹⁸

But what Axmatova does is make Puškin's effects even more pronounced: — by moving the conjunction inside the line, she is able to add a second dangling word (the adjective *moe*, "my") and thus literally give greater pause to the demands of passion;¹⁹

¹⁸ The poems as wholes also exhibit similarities: Puškin alternates iambic hexameters and tetrameters, while Axmatova gradually moves from hexameters to pentameters; and both shift from *A*- to *O*-rhymes. In this latter respect, the difference is noteworthy, too. In Puškin's stanza I the two vowels alternate, in II, there are only *O*-rhymes. Axmatova starts with eight *A*-clausulas, after which follow four *O*-clausulas, so that yet another boundary, this time in the sphere of rhyme vocalism, is drawn. On Axmatova's foregrounding of vowels see Eizenbaum 1969: 120 ff.

¹⁹ On the passion-restraining pauses, with special reference to the ending of "Upon the Hills of Georgia ...," see Zholkovsky 1979: 86–87.

- and, of course, she converts drastically the meaning of the finale: Puškin's pauses and overall emotional restraint notwithstanding, his speaker's heart "burns and loves" even when far away from his beloved (in Georgia), whereas in Axmatova's poem, the heart "beats not" even "under [the partner's] hand."

5.3 *Subtexts in dialogue*

To summarize, Axmatova's intertextual focus on Puškin is actualized through two specific subtexts: lexical, which launches the poem as its leitmotif, and structural, which determines and caps the poem's composition. As a result, Axmatova's text turns into a quasi-dialogue²⁰ between the two Puškin sources, one ("Under the Blue Sky ...") supplying the image of 'boundary,' the other ("Upon the Hills of Georgia ..."), the 'will to fusion.' The dialogue proceeds from radicalizing the stance of the first borrowing ('unattainability of the boundary') to a complete reversal of the second ('transcendence of unattainability by love'), inspired, perhaps, by the mood of Annenskij's subtext ('relishing unattainability') and by the subversiveness of the Dostoevskij reference.

The link established between the two Puškin subtexts relies, among other things, on their metrical similarity, echoed in Axmatova's poem. All three use combinations of six-foot and shorter iambs: both Puškin poems alternate iambic hexameters and tetrameters, while Axmatova has a less regular sequence of hexameters (predominantly in stanza I) and pentameters.

6. Conclusion

My analysis has engaged some of the relevant structural and intertextual aspects of the poem, leaving out some others, for instance, the semantic "halo" of its meter, the poet's biography, the underlying psychological and mythological archetypes. Even the coverage of those types of intertext that have been discussed cannot claim completeness: conspicuously absent are possible classical and European intertexts, while the adduced Russian ones could prove to be no more than the tip of the iceberg. But, however limited in scope, the analysis does illustrate my approach and, hopefully, sheds light on the poem. The major point was to show how a structuralist's interest in themes, invariance, and formal patterns can be reconciled with intertextual

²⁰ The concept of 'quasi-dialogue,' as opposed to dialogue proper, was introduced by Smirnov (1985: 22 ff. *et passim*.) to refer to intertextual relations creatively established in a later text between two previous texts; see also Zholkovsky 1988.

concerns and the emphasis on discourse pragmatics. As for the rest, would it not be tactless to probe too exhaustively into a poem that insists on the inviolability of boundaries?

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Paintings and Poems: A Synthesis of Methodological Reflections on the Work of Luis Feito

0.1 Comparing and attempting to bring together, methodologically and strategically, the analysis of painting to that of literature — or that of a picture to that of a book of poems — is not an eccentric or pointless occupation. There already exists a certain tradition of exercises in comparative analysis of the arts, which could be considered as a "weak" one. These types of activities have principles and objectives which are almost completely opposed to the spirit of scientificity that has stimulated the development of modern sciences, including the humanistic ones, such as philosophy, linguistics, and even poetics and the theory of literature and art. We think of the evolution of linguistic and analytical thought which has most affected our discipline since Wittgenstein as being the linguistic and semiotic ideal of scientificity *par excellence*, with explicit, canonical models such as N. Chomsky and his followers' generative-sentential one, or J. S. Petöfi's model of the macrotext.

0.2 As a reminder of only some of the most recent directions in that long tradition, I will mention that of the comparative historiographical study of the arts, which was carried out especially during the first thirty years of this century (P. van Tieghem, 1921), as well as the much more recent one of the semiology of art, with a linguistic base (O. Calabrese, 1985). The historiographical comparison of one section of the arts to another corresponded to the universalist plan of the "Geistesgeschichte", within the ambitious and noble, general program of The History of Culture. The Kantian and Hegelian, idealistic basis for this historiographical project perhaps did not go into the common psychological angle implied in comparative criticism as systematically as it did the objective and positivist tendency in the analysis of artistic texts which began by calling itself formalism. It should be pointed out that it is often necessary to remind linguists and even critics and literary theorists, that "formalism" was a German and central European trend in artistic criticism rather than a Russian school of literary criticism: the "formal method" school of Sklovsky, Tynjanov, Eikhenbaum, etc. ... In any case, this should be considered a late arrival within the great European formalist expansion of the Kantian aesthetic (I. Ambrogio, 1968).