

THE REALM OF HADES AND ITS SYMBOLS IN MANDEL'STAM'S *TRISTIA*:

A TRANSPARENT PATH TO REDEMPTION

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## Abstract

In the present paper I shall try to offer an interpretation of the symbols related to Hades' realm in Mandel'stam's *Tristia*. The importance attached to the adjective "transparent", which turns out to be a clue to deciphering the complex network of allusions contained in the collection of poems, will be especially taken into account. As a result of a detailed research of the mythological and literary sources, it will be shown that Mandel'stam has codified a message of hope in the midst of the apparently gloomy poems of *Tristia*.

Keywords: *Osip Mandel'stam – Tristia – Acmeist poetry – Orphism – Vjačeslav Ivanov – Ancient Greek funerary world*

The references to Hades and to the Greco-Roman netherworld constitute a crucial theme of Mandel'stam's *Tristia* and feature prominently in some poems of the collection.<sup>1</sup> Around this lurid and murky place the Polish-Russian poet constructs an intricate framework of allusions within which to connect the convulsed world of pre- and post-revolutionary Russia with the unanswered questions about the afterlife, in this case about that of the ancient Greeks and, to a lesser extent, the Romans.

## PETERSBURG: A GATE TO TRANSCENDENCE

By way of a preliminary note, some of the poems I shall examine in this paper display fundamentally their afterlife symbolism in the city of Saint Petersburg, which in *Tristia* has changed its name into Petropolis (Петрополь)<sup>2</sup> in the style of Gavrila Deržavin and Aleksandr Puškin. As I shall try to argue, under this name the poet is encrypting and codifying his contemporary Petrograd, which was the city's name from August 1914 until January 1924, as an unreal and worn out landscape covered by a mist of continuous classical reminiscences. So, as a result of the Hellenization of the place name of the city, it is easier for the poet to approach the Greek culture and transform the city into a classical stage where performing the funerary rites of the sacred mysteries becomes possible.

Besides, we find the former official place name, Petersburg, in the gloomy poem which begins "В Петербурге мы сойдемся снова" ("In Petersburg we shall gather again," no. I, 211), written in 1920 and consecrated to the decline of a city where people act as though they had

buried the sun ("Словно солнце мы похоронили в нём," v. 2)<sup>3</sup> and women sing "В черном бархате советской ночи / В бархате всемирной пустоты" ("In the black velvet of Soviet night / In the velvet of universal emptiness," vv. 5 f.) As it has been pointed out,<sup>4</sup> this poem is interwoven with poem no. I, 206 likewise dated 1920, in which the poet develops the theme of decadence and death embodied in Venice:

Венецйской жизни, мрачной и бесплодной,

Для меня значение светло.

Вот она глядит с улыбкою холодной

В голубое дряхлое стекло.

The meaning of Venetian life, dark and sterile,

For me is clear.

Here she looks with a chilly smile

Into a blue decrepit glass.

(no. I, 206, vv. 1–4)

Like the Adriatic Republic, Petersburg, the Venice of the North, is dying because of the new course of events. These two poems are interrelated by lexical echoes, as the references to "black velvet" (no. I, 206, v. 15; no. I, 211, v. 5, 30) or to "candles" (no. I, 206, v. 9; no. I, 211, v. 29) suggest. Moreover, the disturbing image of the executioner's block screened with black velvet drapery ("Черным бархатом завешенная плаха," no. I, 206, v. 15) evokes the "black velvet of Soviet night" (no. I, 211, v. 5) and establishes a new network of nuances, which creates an atmosphere still more suffocating, if that is possible, around the Northern city.

In short, I consider that Mandel'stam uses the old toponym, Petersburg, loaded with connotations associated to the splendor of past times, in order to describe the contemporary Petrograd of the newborn U.S.S.R. However, the city is still populated by ancient deities, like Aphrodite, who carries in her hands a bundle of unfading roses,<sup>5</sup> as an antidote to the surrounding tedium, as though she renounces to leave her accustomed places, and roams about them:

И бессмертных роз огромный ворох  
У Киприды на руках.  
У костра мы греемся от скуки,  
Может быть века пройдут,  
И блаженных жен родные руки  
Легкий пепел соберут.

And a huge mound of deathless roses  
Lying upon Kypris' arms.  
By the bonfire we warm ourselves from boredom,  
Perhaps centuries will pass,  
And blissful women's kind hands  
Will gather up the light ashes. (no. I, 211, vv. 19–24)

It is important to realize that the adjective "Soviet" appears only in vv. 5 and 16 of this poem throughout *Tristia*. In both cases the adjective forms a syntagma with the substantive "night." Thus, the poet creates a sort of link between these two verses and the city whose old place name refuses to vanish in the darkness of "Soviet night." On the contrary, Mandel'stam employs the Greek name of the city, Petropolis, when he aspires to recreate the scenery of his longed-for Hellas. Nevertheless, in spite of its poetical and inspiring name, Mandel'stam's *polis* is not free from the flavor of tragedy and death, as we can observe in the following verses, written in spring 1916, during the Great War and on the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917:

В Петрополе прозрачном мы умрем,  
Где властвует над нами Прозерпина.  
Мы в каждом вздохе смертный воздух пьем,  
И каждый час нам смертная година.  
Богиня моря, грозная Афина,  
Сними могучий каменный шлем.

В Петрополе прозрачном мы умрем, –  
Здесь царствуешь не ты, а Прозерпина.

In transparent Petropolis we shall die,  
Where Proserpine rules over us.  
With every breath we drink deathly air  
And every hour is our last one.  
Sea-goddess, terrible Athena,  
Remove your mighty helmet of stone.  
In transparent Petropolis we shall die,  
Where Proserpine, not you, rules. (no. I, 173)

It must be observed that the adjective "прозрачный" ("transparent") plays a very important role, not only in these verses but also in *Tristia* as a whole, by means of which the poet weaves a subtle net of words and concepts with their own code. The transparency is an attribute of the great city, but it can also be used to refer to the spring which is spreading over Petropolis, as in the parallel poem "Мне холодно. Прозрачная весна / В зеленый пух Петрополь одевает" ("I am cold. Transparent spring / Dresses Petropolis in green down," no. I, 172, vv. 1 f.) Furthermore, this "transparent spring" can adopt nuances, as we find at the beginning of poem no. I, 183: "Еще далеко асфodelей / Прозрачно-серая весна" ("Still far away the asphodels / Transparent-grey spring"); or it can contrast vividly with the darkness of the river Neva in a dying city: "Прозрачная весна над черною Невой / Сломалась" ("Transparent spring has broken over the black Neva," no. I, 192, vv. 13 f.) Besides this, the latter poem contains a prophecy of the death of Petropolis, which turns into a sort of ominous refrain, repeated four times: "Твой брат, Петрополь, умирает!" ("Your brother, Petropolis, dies!" vv. 4, 8, 12, 16). Poem no. I, 192 was written during the German attacks on Petrograd that took place on the eve of the signing of the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the Germans on March 3, 1918. I consider, however, that the murky atmosphere of these verses cannot be

interpreted just from the war's events, but it is in accordance with lexical echoes and conceptual images, as I shall argue.

In this regard it should be noticed that allusions to death and to Greek funerary traditions and deities appear in poems where the adjective "transparent" and the Hellenized place name Petropolis feature conspicuously. It means, if I may so speak, that groups of terms referring to these semantic fields can be found that follow an internal logic. The toponym Petropolis is quoted in poems I, 172; I, 173, and I, 192, and in all of them the adjective "transparent" is also used to qualify the city (no. I, 173, vv. 1, 7), the spring (no. I, 172, v. 1; no. I, 192, v. 13) or a star (no. I, 192, v. 3). Consequently, these associations induce me to consider that Mandel'stam creates a link between the adjective "transparent" and Petropolis, the fading city which Persephone/Proserpine rules over. In addition to this, the verb "to die" is registered in two of these poems in a very distinctive way, as can be seen in the repetition of the same verse, which confers a certain feeling of unease on the rest of the poem: "В Петрополе прозрачном мы умрем" (no. I, 173, vv. 1, 7) and "Твой брат, Петрополь, умирает!" (no. I, 192, vv. 4, 8, 12, 16). In spite of the absence of the direct mention of dying in poem I, 172, its presence is implied in v. 3 through the reference to Medusa, the chthonic and primeval goddess, whose terrifying aspect could turn anyone who looked directly at her into stone: "Но, как медуза, невская волна / Мне отвращенье легкое внушает" ("But like Medusa, the Neva's wave / Stirs up in me a slight repugnance," no. I, 172, v. 3 f.)<sup>6</sup>

In my opinion, the city's transparency, as if it was a crystal-like structure, allows us to glimpse the other side, the realm of Hades and his wife Persephone/Proserpine. Hence, the adjective "transparent" acquires an initiatic and psychopompic new meaning, which has not yet received sufficient attention. In sum, the poet establishes a chain of associations between the crucial terms "Petropolis", "transparent," and "to die/death."

On the other hand, I should like to add, to digress for a moment, that it is revealing to observe that the poet apparently accepts his death voluntarily and without struggle in Petropolis, the Greek city. This acceptance must be contrasted with Mandel'stam's refusal to die that we

find in the poem entitled "Leningrad" (no. III, 21), where the poet rebels against the possibility of an imminent death, invoking the city with its old name as a way of avoiding the ominous new name and appeasing the fate: "Петербург! я еще не хочу умирать" ("Petersburg! I don't want to die yet," v. 7). This autobiographical poem, written in December 1930 after a sojourn in Armenia, shows the emotional state of the poet, who felt strange and persecuted in Petersburg, now metamorphosed by means of the title and the oppressive allusions into Soviet Leningrad.<sup>7</sup> It seems as if Mandel'stam was ready to die in the pagan city, the Hellenic Petropolis, where the netherworld deities would guide him to the afterlife, whereas in Leningrad he was begging for a reprieve in order to escape from an impending death, personified in the poem by Stalin's secret police. This different way of facing death could also be related to the fact that Mandel'stam considered ancient Greece to be the first step and the ancestor of Christianity,<sup>8</sup> and that, consequently, would be the reason why dying in Petropolis in the hope of salvation can be accepted, whereas dying in Soviet Leningrad must be felt as the complete and total annihilation of the being. Hence, the refusal and anguish of the poet are fully justified.

#### THE NETHERWORLD AND ITS ATTRIBUTES

Returning to the theme of transparency and leaving aside the poems concerning Petropolis (nos. I, 172; I, 173; I, 192) and Petersburg (no. I, 211), it must be pointed out that the adjective "transparent" is used profusely in funerary contexts. Thus, the soul seeks in vain for the goddess Persephone across an almost diaphanous ("полупрозрачный," no. I, 209, v. 2) and "defoliated forest," which is populated by "transparent voices" ("И лес безлиственный прозрачных голосов," no. I, 209, v. 11). However, the search is in vain and the soul, confused and disoriented, eventually entrusts itself to Charon, the ferryman of Hades:

Когда Психея-жизнь спускается к тням  
В полупрозрачный лес вослед за Персефой,  
Слепая ласточка бросается к ногам  
С стигийской нежностью и веткою зеленой.

[...]

И в нежной сутолке не зная, что начать,  
Душа не узнает прозрачные дубравы,  
Дохнет на зеркало и медлит передать  
Лепешку медную с туманной переправы.

When Psyche-Life goes down to the shades  
Into a semitransparent forest in Persephone's tracks,  
A blind swallow hurls itself at her feet  
With Stygian tenderness and a green twig.

[...]

And in gentle confusion, not knowing what to begin,  
The soul does not recognize the transparent oak woods:  
Breathes on the mirror and hesitates to hand over  
The copper coin from the misty crossing. (no. I, 209, vv. 1–4, 13–16)

Transparency and the realm of Hades are also tightly connected in poem I, 207,<sup>9</sup> which is coupled with poem I, 209 by internal references, the most remarkable of which is, without a doubt, the repetition of an identical verse in both poems: "С стигийской нежностью и веткою зеленой" ("With Stygian tenderness and a green twig," no. I, 207, v. 12; no. I, 209, v. 4). This interrelation could enable us, so to speak, to unravel some common clues.

So, beside the Ovidian echoes pertaining to the myth of Philomela, Procne, and Tereus (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VI, 426–674), the blind swallow (no. I, 209, v. 3) could be interpreted just as a metaphor of spring,<sup>10</sup> in the present case perhaps a blind and netherworld spring on the basis of the murky ambiance of the poem. Howbeit, if the allusion to the blind swallow is analyzed together with that of the parallel poem no. I, 207 (v. 2), it is possible to outline a new referential context. Thus, the blind swallow (no. I, 207, vv. 2 f.) becomes a dweller of Hades,

which comes back to "the palace of shadows" to "play with the transparent," who are really nothing but the souls of the dead:<sup>11</sup>

Я слово позабыл, что я хотел сказать.

Слепая ласточка в чертог теней вернется,

На крыльях срезанных, с прозрачными играть.

В беспамятстве ночная песнь поется.

I have forgotten the word I wanted to say.

A blind swallow to the palace of shades will return

Upon clipped wings, with the transparent to play.

In unconsciousness a nocturnal song is sung. (no. I, 207, vv. 1–4)

The classical scenery of the underworld is subtly hinted in poem I, 207 via lexical echoes, in the references to unconsciousness ("В беспамятстве," no. I, 207, v. 4) and to absence of the songs of birds ("Не слышно птиц," nr. I, 207, v. 5).

As Homer witnesses in books X and especially XI of the *Odyssey*, the inhabitants of the realm of Hades are νεκύων ἀμενηνὰ κάρηνα (*Odyssey* X, 521, 536; XI, 29, 49), heads of the dead bereft of the μένος, a term that can be translated as "strength" or "vigor". They are images (εἶδωλα) that resemble the dead in shape but lack any physical and intellectual substance.<sup>12</sup> The dead have forgotten who they were in their past life and roam without purpose and consciousness unless they drink the blood of a sacrificed black sheep (*Odyssey* XI, 24–36).<sup>13</sup> Such lack of consciousness is what is implicitly alluded to in Mandel'stam's verse.

Furthermore, the landscape, deprived of the warbling and chirping of birds, reminds us of Lake Avernus, a volcanic crater lake in southern Italy, near Napoli.<sup>14</sup> Its name is derived from the Greek ἄορνος, which was interpreted as meaning "without birds," giving rise to the belief that no bird could fly across it and live because of the poisonous sulfurous vapors emitted by it. Surrounded by dense forests in ancient times, it was represented by the poet Virgil as the entrance to Hades, through which Aeneas descends to the netherworld. Where there are no

birds, it is impossible to hear their songs. In consonance with this desolation, the immortelle, probably a metaphor for poetry, does not bloom ("Бессмертник не цветет," no. I, 207, v. 5).<sup>15</sup> In addition, there is another place not so famous but likewise linked to the underworld, whose name is that of the lake: Aornon (Ἄορνον).<sup>16</sup> Aornon was situated in Thesprotis, south-west of Epirus, in northwestern Greece, and, according to Pausanias (*Description of Greece IX*, 30, 6), there was there an oracle of the dead (νεκρομαντεῖον), where Orpheus committed suicide after having lost his wife's soul, and to which, as Herodotus (*Histories V*, 92, η, 2) points out without naming it, Periander, the tyrant of Corinth, sent messengers to enquire of his defunct wife Melissa about a deposit of money that a friend had left.<sup>17</sup> Pausanias (*Description of Greece I*, 17, 5) tells us that in this region there was a lake named Acherousia, and rivers whose names were Acheron and Cocytus, the infernal ones, which is why he believed that Homer visited this region and decided to give to the rivers of Hades the names of those of Thesprotis.

In sum, leaving aside the classical reminiscences and returning to the landscape described by Mandel'stam, it seems as if in this dreary place the only creature that could live and thrive there were a blind swallow.

It is, moreover, interesting to remark that the unique reference to Antigone, attested not only in *Tristia* but also in the rest of the poetical work of Mandel'stam, is found in a double allusion in poem I, 207 (vv. 10, 22). Her appearance in this poem can be explained on the basis of the myth, in which Antigone, risking her life, dares to bury her brother Polynices, regardless of Creon's decree according to which the corpse of Polynices must be left outside the city to rot and be eaten by pests. In short, she prefers to worship the underworld deities rather than to respect the human laws. Antigone's presence is not just a poetic device to reinforce the Greek ornamentation of the poem, but it is provoked by the biographical circumstances of the tragic heroine, whose father, Oedipus, stabbed his own eyes out. So, one might be tempted to interpret the yearning for shyness we find in the poem from this point of view: "О, если бы вернуть и зрячих пальцев стыд, / И выпуклую радость узнавания" ("Oh, to bring back the diffidence of see-through fingers / And the convex joy of recognition," vv. 13 f.) This shame or diffidence

can only be the nostalgic and tactile longing for pristine purity, once the incestuous parents have stained their progeny<sup>18</sup> and, metaphorically, deprived them of sight, constraining them to grope for the objects in search of happiness. Thus, the poet connects, as it were, the illustrious blindness of Antigone's father with that of the swallow and gathers up in the last stanza all the crucial concepts of the poem: the she-transparent one ("прозрачная"), the swallow, an enigmatic girlfriend,<sup>19</sup> and Antigone, as though all of them were ultimately the same. Poem I, 207 ends, as we would have expected, in a blind Hades, with the memory of a Stygian sound, not of its vision:

Все не о том прозрачная твердит,  
Все ласточка, подружка, Антигона...  
И на губах, как черный лед, горит  
Стигийского воспоминанье звона.

The transparent one does not insist on it,  
Always the swallow, the dear one, Antigone....  
And on the lips like black ice burns  
The memory of Stygian sound. (no. I, 207, vv. 21–24)

This ominous sound, "звон", is the same which, in conjunction with the Aonids (a nickname for the Muses),<sup>20</sup> the mist and the primordial abyss (no. I, 207, vv. 15 f.), has frightened the poet, and which confers an atmosphere of a certain anxiety on the poem. It must be explained that the word I have interpreted as "abyss" corresponds to the Russian "зиянье." The term "зиянье" is related to the verb "зевать," which means "to yawn," in the same way that in the Greek language the nouns χάος ("chaos, as first state of the Universe, the nether abyss") and χάσμα ("yawning chasm, gulf") are etymologically kindred to the verbs χαίνω and χάσκω, whose first meaning is "to yawn, to gape."<sup>21</sup> Consequently, Mandel'stam's "зиянье" could be equated to Hesiod's unfathomable χάσμα (*Theogony* 740), the yawning chasm or abyss of Tartarus, the deepest region of the netherworld, a dank pit, surrounded by a wall of bronze and a

three-fold layer of night, and according to Homer "as far beneath Hades as heaven is high above earth" (*Iliad* VIII, 16).

Another example of the relation between the adjective "transparent" and the underworld setting can be found in poem I, 183, where the funerary flavor is obvious from the beginning from the reference to the asphodels linked to transparency: "Еще далеко асфodelей / Прозрачно-серая весна" ("Still far away from the asphodels / Transparent-grey spring," vv. 1 f.). Spring is still far away and apparently has not arrived yet, maybe because misery and death rule over the roses' blackness (no. I, 183, vv. 11, 19) or over the blackness of the ships' sails (no. I, 183, vv. 15, 31). Unlike the roses' immortality (no. I, 211, v. 19), the roses' blackness presumably alludes to death, whereas that of ships' sail reminds us of the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. As told in the myth, Theseus promised his father, King Aegeus, that if he killed the Minotaur he would return with a white sail instead of the black one that the ship carried when departing on the journey from Athens to Crete, but Theseus forgot to put up the white sail, so when the king saw the black one, he thought that his son was dead and threw himself off a cliff into the sea. Henceforth, this sea was known as the Aegean Sea in memory of Aegeus, King of Athens.

Furthermore, deities and symbols of the afterlife play an important part in this poem, as is evident from the allusions to Persephone (no. I, 183, v. 6), to the reign of dead (no. I, 183, v. 7)<sup>22</sup> and to a burial urn carried by a boat that, necessarily, has to belong to Charon, the miser ferryman who transported the souls of the recently deceased across the Styx (no. I, 183, vv. 9 f.) So, this is not an appropriate place for the spring, even for a transparent one whose grey nuances fit well with the surrounding blackness. In consequence, spring is far away not only from Hades but even from this "no man's land" which constitutes the asphodel<sup>23</sup> meadows, where the souls of heroes wander without purpose among the crowds of less distinguished and anonymous dead that were neither virtuous nor evil during their lifetime, and shriek in the netherworld like bats, bereft of human voice. Besides, the first two verses of poem I, 183 can be related to poem I, 216 (v. 1) in which a "нежный луг" ("tender meadow") is trodden by dancing shades.<sup>24</sup> However,

according to Homer, the asphodel meadows were not a gentle or pleasant place, as can be inferred from the verses where the epic formula κατ' ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα is found (*Odyssey* XI, 539, 573; XXIV, 13). Nevertheless, many of the ancient Greek poets and Homeric interpreters understood the adjective ἀσφοδελός to mean "flowery," "fragrant," "fertile," or "lush," and described the asphodel meadows as a "paradise." In short, Mandel'shtam's "tender meadow" might be included in this exegetical tradition.<sup>25</sup> In any case, even if the "tender meadow" can be equated to the asphodel meadows, it seems, however, to be a suitable place for the shadows, but not for the spring, which prefers to remain far away.

Similarly, in the poem *Tristia* (no. I, 197), the eponymous poem of the collection, a "прозрачная фигурка" ("transparent figurine," no. I, 197, v. 25) evokes in the poet women's ability to prophesy, and in the present case to prophesy about the Erebus, the personification of primordial darkness and a region of the underworld:

Да будет так: прозрачная фигурка  
На чистом блюде глиняном лежит,  
Как беличья распластанная шкурка,  
Склонясь над воском, девушка глядит.  
Не нам гадать о греческом Эребе,  
[...]

Thus it will be: A transparent figurine  
On a clean dish of earthenware lies,  
Like a flattened squirrel's pelt.  
A girl leans over the wax and gazes.  
Ours is not to prophesy about Greek Erebus,  
[...]

(no. I, 197, vv. 25–29)

So, in the same stanza (vv. 25–29)<sup>26</sup> allusions to transparency and to the underworld landscape are again intimately connected and, besides, they are highly enhanced by the fact that

the transparency of a wax figurine begins the stanza, whereas the dark Erebus, the opponent of transparency, closes the sequence. In addition to this, the last verse of the poem (v. 32) recapitulates the stanza and somehow equates women's dying to divination, perhaps a hint of Cassandra's fate, who in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (vv. 1256–83) faces death while foreseeing her own doom and the series of vindictive murders Agamemnon's assassination will cause.<sup>27</sup> "А им дано гадая умереть" ("For them [*sc.* women] is given to die while prophesying," no. I, 197, v. 32). In sum, the poet has, in poem I, 197, again subtly interwoven some of the recurrent themes of the work *Tristia*: transparency, underworld, and dying.

In spite of the grim ending of poem I, 197, the ominous force of Erebus is, as it were, somehow counteracted in the next poem, to which it is linked<sup>28</sup> by the mention of "святыя острова" ("holy isles," no. I, 198, v. 28), seemingly the Fortunate Isles, or the Isles of the Blessed, which are described as a paradise according to the canons of classical mythology. It seems as if Mandel'stam wanted to leave open a door for hope in the midst of the anxiety about the future that the contemporary political and social changes had prompted.

On the other hand, what is "transparent" cannot be seen, and it is therefore "invisible" to our eyes just like the Kingdom of Hades,<sup>29</sup> a noun whose etymology apparently has this meaning, at least for native Greek speakers as can be inferred from Plato's opinions about the subject (*Gorgias* 493b; *Cratylus* 403a).<sup>30</sup> In support of this etymology it can be claimed that Hades' most prized possession was a helmet of invisibility (Ἄϊδος κινέη), given him by the Cyclopes when released by Zeus (Pseudo-Apollodorus, *The Library* I, 2, 1) and worn by Athena, Hermes, or Perseus. So, it could be argued that, on the basis of the equating of "transparent" with "invisible," Mandel'stam might have created the framework in which transparency takes on funerary and underworld associations.

Grounded in this conceptual equation, the seemingly decadent and "transparent Petropolis" could become an "invisible Petropolis." At this point, it would be worthwhile to remind ourselves that in Russian folklore invisibility is the attribute *par excellence* of Kitež,<sup>31</sup> the mythical town that miraculously became invisible and sank into Lake Svetlojar, in the Nižnij

Novgorod region, thus escaping destruction by the Mongols, who invaded Kievan Rus in the middle of the 13th century. So, Kitež turned into a mystical holy haven for the Orthodox faith, especially for the Old Believers, which was against Islam, the religion of the invaders. Hence, I might venture that "invisible" Petropolis, as well as fabulous Kitež, would retain for the poet a halo of sacredness after the loss of its status as a capital and even of its name, a fading halo that would link the city with a world irretrievably lost.

## PERSEPHONE, DIONYSUS, AND THE CLASSICAL WAYS

### OF REDEMPTION

Finally, returning to the poetic framework for the realm of Hades, it is worth taking into account poem I, 208,<sup>32</sup> which is subtly interconnected with poem I, 198, as I shall try to show. In this poem the afterlife goddess Persephone takes on new aspects that permit her to structure the collection of poems around her as she functions as a sort of meeting point between the topics pertaining to the world of the dead and those related to Orphic beliefs, which are recurrent in the work.<sup>33</sup> Within the funerary imagery, the veiled hint of Charon's barge (v. 4) must be taken into consideration, as well as an allusion to transparency, which is found "в прозрачных дебрях ночи" ("in the transparent thickets of the night," v. 10), one of the places where "пчелы Персефоны" ("Persephone's bees," v. 3) dwell and whisper. These bees feed on mint (v. 12), a plant consecrated to Persephone, the goddess that, in a jealous attack, transformed the nymph Minthe, mistress of her husband Hades, into this plant, as Strabo<sup>34</sup> or Ovid<sup>35</sup> confirm, the latter in an indirect way.

After the neoplatonist Porphyry,<sup>36</sup> bees were the souls of the dead. Likewise, according to the late lexicographer Hesychius, bees were deemed to be αἱ τῆς Δήμητρος μύστιδες, the initiate devoted to Demeter, mother of Persephone, who, in her turn, was one of the most important goddesses of Orphism and mother of Orphic Dionysus.<sup>37</sup> So, through the mediation of bees and their honey Persephone softens her gloomy character and takes on a new redeemer aspect through which the bees, probably a metaphor of the souls of the dead, transmute their

honey into sun, and consequently transcend their earthly existence, as can be observed in the final verses of poem I, 208:<sup>38</sup>

Возьми ж на радость дикий мой подарок –  
Невзрачное сухое ожерелье  
Из мертвых пчел, мед превративших в солнце.

Take for joy my wild gift,

A homely and dry necklace

Of dead bees who transformed honey into sun (no. I, 208, vv. 13–15)

The last word of the poem, "sun," inserts itself into a fundamental network where metaphors pertaining to "black sun" and to "night sun" claim attention. In both epithets it has been observed as an Orphic influence<sup>39</sup> that refers to Dionysus Nyktelios, the "Dionysus of the night sun."<sup>40</sup> Broadly speaking, the imagery of both suns, particularly that of the "night sun," has to be related to Vjačeslav Ivanov, classical philologist and erudite symbolist poet, who exerted a great sway on Mandel'stam, especially in his youthful years. Ivanov employs the image of "night sun" in several works such as in the articles 'Мысли о символизме' ('Thoughts about symbolism'), 'Орфей' ('Orpheus'), in the essay 'Взгляд Скрябина на искусство' ('Skryabin's View of Art'), and in the poems 'Ночное солнце' ('Night Sun') and 'Сердце Диониса' ('Dionysus' Heart') among others.<sup>41</sup> Though their relationship suffered many ups and downs, due to the fact that Mandel'stam refused Symbolism to embrace Acmeism, the poet however had to return to Ivanov's writings about classical themes when he decided to study Classical Greece in-depth in order to write *Tristia*.<sup>42</sup>

Hence, the presence of Persephone/Proserpine constitutes a uniting element that interconnects two fundamental motives in the collection of poems *Tristia*: the netherworld and Orphism. Orphic religion is alluded to not only by the veiled references to Dionysus Nyktelios, but also by the direct mention of Orpheus (no. I, 211, v. 25).<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, this allusion, as well as the allusion to Eurydice (no. I, 210, v. 19), have been reasonably associated with the

performance of Glück's opera *Orfeo ed Euridice*, the poet's favorite opera, that took place in the Mariinskij Theater of Petrograd in 1920.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, in spite of the referential context, the appearance of Orpheus and Eurydice, with her death and irreparable loss, seems to transcend anecdotal events and take on a global meaning linked to the *leitmotiv* of a world definitely extinguished, which is personified by the city of Saint Petersburg, a mirror and paradigm of the dramatic period in which the work was written.<sup>45</sup>

In Orphic tradition, Dionysus, son of Zeus and Persephone, is killed and devoured by Titans, probably inspired by Hera's jealousy. Zeus slays the Titans with his thunderbolt and Dionysus recovers his integrity. As we human beings come from the Titans, who have eaten Dionysus, we have within a divine part, namely the part ingested by the Titans, which desires to reintegrate itself with its original source. However, we have a negative part, a direct inheritance from the Titans, our ancestors. Orphic rituals enable us to expiate the guilt inherited from the Titans, and consequently avoid the punishments of afterlife and the cycle of reincarnations. In addition, Plutarch suggests that there must have been a work dedicated to Dionysus Nyktelios, which probably described the mourning for the god's death and the orgiastic rites in honor of his rebirth.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of Plutarch's witness, the existence of such a work, perhaps an epic poem called Νυκτέλια, cannot be proved. In this hypothetical poem the initiates would be instructed in the symbolic meaning of the night, which should be explained by the opposition night/day, shadow/light,<sup>47</sup> an opposition that can be observed in the Mandel'stamian oxymora "night sun," and to a lesser extent "black sun." On the other hand, this interrelation of opposite qualities can be traced back to Ivanov, who closes his poem 'Ночное солнце' ('Night Sun') with the following command: "В полночь зови незакатный свет!" ("At midnight call the never setting light!" v. 7).<sup>48</sup>

In sum, from this point of view, the Orphic sun of poem I, 208 (v. 15), created by the honey of dead bees, should be understood as a sun of salvation that, under the appearance of a Dionysus reborn, would set us free from the continuous and numerous gloomy metaphors that dot Mandel'stam's *Tristia*.

On the other hand, the bees were a symbol of poetic talent in classical Antiquity as must be inferred from the recurrent scene<sup>49</sup> of bees that perch on the lips of future poets when they are still in the cradle or that, in the case of the young Pindar, even build a honeycomb on his lips according to Pausanias (*Description of Greece* IX, 23, 2),<sup>50</sup> or feed him with honey as Philostratus (*Images* II, 12, 2, 4) states.<sup>51</sup> So, I might venture that the bees, by means of their poetic force, defy death, which is the same as saying that poetry, incarnated in the honey, reveals itself as immortal.

Besides, honey plays an important role as an element of cohesion in the conceptual structure of *Tristia* and this permits us to follow a possible path in the collection of poems taken as a whole. First of all, we must remind ourselves that honey, along with milk and wine, constitute a usual offering in Dionysian rituals, as can be observed in Euripides' tragedy *Bacchae* (vv. 704–711) where the Bacchantes strike the earth and the rocks, causing springs of milk and wine to leap forth, and even the ivy thyrsi to drip honey. Previously, in the parodos, the earth oozes milk, wine, and the nectar of the bees (Euripides, *Bacchae* vv. 142–144). So, the honey of dead bees (no. I, 208, v. 15) interconnects a series of poems and enables us to shed a new light on their exegesis on the basis of its symbolic character as a sign of regeneration. At this juncture, the lexical echoes become again a fundamental clue for establishing the internal groups of linked texts; accordingly, poems I, 198 and I, 208 refer to each other in a series of repeated words: "мед" ("honey"), "медуница" ("lungwort"), and "радость" ("joy").<sup>52</sup>

It is obvious that the poet has purposely created a well-assembled speech, where every piece performs its function. Consequently, the call to hope we find in the last verses of poem I, 208 is interwoven, as it were, with the mention of the holy islands of poem I, 198 (v. 28). These linked allusions permit to suggest that Mandel'stam is encrypting an encoded message of salvation amid the general murkiness of the poems devoted to underworld motives.<sup>53</sup> Besides, it cannot be a coincidence that it is precisely the same stanza, where the holy islands are alluded to, that the poet has concentrated in poem I, 198 all the terms related to poem I, 208: "мед," "медуница," and "радость." In addition, it is especially interesting that the typical products of

the Dyonisian rituals (as we have already seen, honey, wine, and milk) are all cited in the short and paradisiacal description of the isles, which closes the poem:

Поит дубы холодная криница,  
Простоволосая шумит трава,  
На радость осам пахнет медуница.  
О, где же вы, святые острова,  
Где не едят надломленного хлеба,  
Где только мед, вино и молоко,  
Скрипучий труд не омрачает неба  
И колесо вращается легко?

A cold fountain waters the oaks  
The bareheaded grass murmurs.  
For the joy of wasps the lungwort smells.  
Oh, where are you, holy isles?  
Where they do not eat broken bread,  
Where there is only honey, wine and milk,  
Creaking labor does not darken the sky,  
And the wheel turns round with ease. (no. I, 198, vv. 25–32)

At this point, it would be appropriate to remember that poem I, 198 is linked to poem I, 197. So, it could be suggested now that the negative force of the Erebus (no. I, 197, v. 29) is not only counteracted by the presence of the "holy isles" (no. I, 198, v. 28), as has been previously pointed out, but also by the Dyonisian and Orphic allusions found in poem I, 198. Accordingly, poem I, 197, which is the eponymous poem of the collection, takes on a new interpretation by means of these interrelated meanings. Thanks to this interpretation, the poem *Tristia* adopts a new tone of redemption and hope, which spreads over the whole collection because of the central importance of this poem.<sup>54</sup>

Finally, before drawing conclusions, I must return to a fundamental figure in the work: Persephone. As has already been seen, the goddess, who generally adopts a grim character throughout the collection, unites two important themes of *Tristia*: that of the underworld and that of Orphic beliefs. So, the goddess acts as a bridge between two worlds, and it is because of her importance in the Orphic tradition that the terrible goddess of the underworld and Hades' wife takes on an unusual and amiable aspect. The presence of Persephone in the "Orphic" poem I, 208 gives me my cue to propose a subtle change in the goddess' personality. In accordance with the posthumous behavior of the dead bees, whose honey becomes sun, Persephone reveals herself under a positive aspect, maybe that of Dionysus' mother. In short, the ominous goddess of previous poems has become a salvific deity, which leaves the door open to hope.

In sum, I dare to propose that poem I, 208 helps us to interpret the netherworld allusions in *Tristia* from a positive point of view, in which redemption is possible. Moreover, Mandel'stam is like a goldsmith, who has designed a harmonic and well-balanced speech, where every reference fits in, as for example the intricate web of hints and lexical echoes, which apparently make no sense at a first glance. From this perspective, I consider that, throughout the collection of poems, Mandel'stam has counteracted some of the negative aspects with the presence of positive ones, as in the case of the Erebus (no. I, 197, v. 29) which is counterweighted with the "holy isles" (no. I, 198, v. 28). This tendency to appease or soothe the disgusting features of concepts or places could be the cause that prompted the oxymoron "Stygian tenderness" (no. I, 207, v. 12; no. I, 209, v. 4), as if the poet wanted to rule the threatening force of the Styx by means of apotropaic tenderness.

#### CONCLUSIONS

As it has been shown, Mandel'stam has dotted his work *Tristia* with a series of allusions to the netherworld, whose ultimate meaning I have tried to unravel.

I consider that the great importance attached to the adjective "прозрачный" ("transparent") in the encoded imagery of the afterlife has been sufficiently pointed out. Because

of its transparency, the real world, especially Petropolis and the spring, leaves a door open to observe the other side. Besides, "transparent" could equate to "invisible," a classical etymology for the noun Hades, which turns the term into an appropriate epithet for the Greek realm of the dead.

Moreover, Mandel'stam has designed a network of positive and negative allusions that are subtly interconnected so that *Tristia's* netherworld offers a polyvalent interpretation, where the grim and desolate landscape is enlightened by a series of terms that counteract it.

In addition, Persephone/Proserpine plays an ambiguous role; so, in spite of the gloomy character of the goddess (especially in poem I, 173), Persephone/Proserpine becomes a deity of salvation, as she functions as one of the basic gods of the Orphic religion.

In short, I am of the opinion that Mandel'stam has encrypted a message of hope, while not renouncing a global sense of oppression and despair. This ambiguity could be a part of a deliberate procedure by the poet to describe a convulsed period in the history of Russia, which was at that time torn between chaos and destruction, on the one hand, and hope and progress, on the other.

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<sup>1</sup> The *editio princeps* of *Tristia* was published in Berlin, 1922 (although it has the cover date 1921), by Petropolis Press, without the author's consent. The second edition, entitled *Вторая Книга* (*Second Book*), appeared in Moscow, 1923, published by Krug Press, with a print-run of 3,000 copies: cf. Strakhovsky (1947: 68) and Lekmanov (2003: 101 f.)

<sup>2</sup> Poems I, 172; I, 173, and I, 192. Mandel'stam's poems will be referred to in the paper by their number in the Nerler, Nikitaev, Freidin, Vasilenko (1993–97) edition of his works. All the translations from Russian and Ancient Greek are mine.

<sup>3</sup> As Van der Eng-Liedmeier (1974: 188) proposes: "[...] the buried sun [...] characterizes the artistic creativity of the Petersburg past as a totality, and at the same time the artists who lived and died in that city."

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ivask (1976: 254).

<sup>5</sup> According to Ivask (1976: 260, no. 8), the immortality of flowers refers to poetry, as in many of Puškin's poems.

<sup>6</sup> The reference to Medusa could also be explained as a reference to jellyfish, the marine coelenterate, due to the fact that the Russian word *meduza* has both meanings and to the fact that it is written in lower-case letters. Nonetheless, Iverson (1976: 37) proposes a mythological interpretation of the passage: "The poet senses apocalyptic upheaval in the menacing waves of the Neva; not even shimmering stars can dispel the threat of the 'Medusa-like' waves [...]."

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<sup>7</sup> Zeeman (1988: 99-102) remarks on the overall mood of fear, persecution, and absurdity that can be felt throughout the poem, as well as the subtle irony of the poet, who, though considering himself a possible "prisoner-to-be" of Stalin's repressive apparatus, the frightening NKVD, "puts Stalin's police in a slightly ridiculous light."

<sup>8</sup> According to Cavanagh (1995: 127): "His Christianity [...] grows not from Judea's stony soil but on the fertile ground of ancient Greece: The seed of [Christ's] death, having fallen on the soil of Hellas, miraculously flourished: our entire culture has grown from this seed' (CPL, 94). And those who partake of this Hellenic Christian culture become the ancient world's 'legitimate heir[s]' (CPL, 93)." CPL corresponds to O. Mandel'stam, *The Complete Critical Prose and Letters*, ed. J. G. Harris, tr. J. G. Harris and C. Link, Ann Arbor, 1979.

<sup>9</sup> According to Freidin (1987: 203): "The poem's plot, then, may be summarized as a search for the forgotten word in the course of which the speaker undergoes an ordeal of descent into the underworld. Paradoxically, the death of the poet recovers the word. Without undermining the principle of eternal recurrence, the closure describes that phase of the cycle when the speaker's sojourn in the Avernus has become a memory of one who had died and through death was reborn."

<sup>10</sup> In Russian folklore, the swallow is associated with the arrival of spring, as it can be observed in the saying, "Одна ласточка весны не делает" ("A swallow does not make a spring"), and that is the reason why this bird is the carrier of the key of the new spring and symbolizes its beauty and the goodness. The image of the swallow as messenger of good weather can be found in one of the most famous examples of old popular Greek lyric, the *Song of the Swallow*, which begins: "Now came, the swallow came / Bringing fair seasons / And a good year [...]." About this song, cf. Martín Vázquez (1999). On the other hand, Terras (1966: 255) points out that a relation can be traced between the swallow and the human soul in Greek culture that is implicit in Mandel'stam's poetry.

<sup>11</sup> Concerning Homer, Clarke (1999: 148) remarks: "The dead in Hades are like shadows and dreams, σκιῇ εἴκελον ἢ καὶ ὀνείρω (xi. 207); they drift around as shadows, σκιαὶ ἀΐσσοουσιν (x. 495)."

<sup>12</sup> Burkert (1985: 195) vividly describes the εἶδωλον as "a phantom image, like the image reflected in a mirror which can be seen, though not always clearly, but cannot be grasped [...]." According to the LSJ Lexicon (1940: s.v. εἶδωλον, A 3), the word εἶδωλον can refer to the "image reflected in a mirror or in water, Pl. *Sph.* 226b, Arist. *Div. Somn.* 464b9." Maybe, the reason why the soul breathes on the mirror in poem I, 209, vv. 14 f. must be found in this meaning: thanks to the reflection of its image in the looking glass (εἶδωλον) when the soul exhales its breath, it becomes an inhabitant of Hades (εἶδωλον).

<sup>13</sup> On this subject Bremmer (1983: 84) maintains: "The souls of the dead lacked the psychological attributes of the souls of living. [...] Neither do the dead possess a *noos* (10. 494-495) or a *menos*—the dead are called 'menos-less heads' (10. 493-95 (*sic*), 521, 536). The only exception is Teiresias (10, 493-496)."

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Freidin (1987: 204).

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ivask (1976: 260, no. 8).

<sup>16</sup> The place name is in both cases the same, but in Ἄορνος the masculine noun λιμήν must be inferred, whereas in Ἄορνον we might probably understand the neuter noun χωρίον.

<sup>17</sup> On this place Hirschfeld (1894: s.v. Aornos, 3) remarks: "[...] vielleicht nur aus dem Namen abgeleitet, dass dortige Ausdünstungen den Vögeln verderblich wären, Plin. n. h. IV 2."

<sup>18</sup> Mandel'stam deals with the theme of incest, especially in poem no. I, 203, which has plenty of allusions to Judaism: "Вернись в смесительное лоно" ("Return into the incestuous lap"). According to Cavanagh (1995: 136), in his first works the poet had a critical opinion about the religion of his ancestors and identified attachment to the past and traditions as a sort of incest. Likewise, Nadežda Mandel'stam, his widow, reports that Mandel'stam "used to say that all Jews are related by blood, and that all marriages between Jews are incestuous." (cf. Cavanagh, 1995: 137).

<sup>19</sup> It would be possible to find, in the image of the girlfriend or the dear one ("подружка"), an allusion to Antigone as the bride of Haimon or, preferably in this netherworld context, as that of the god of the dead, Hades. As Segal (1983: 167) points out: "Antigone, however, is a Kore who does not rise again to new life. She refers to herself repeatedly as 'bride of Hades', a term that makes the analogy with Persephone unmistakable, particularly as the association with Persephone was a regular feature of funerary practices and funerary epigrams for girls who died young."

<sup>20</sup> This designation is related to Aonia, the ancient name of Boeotia, the region of Central Greece containing mountain Helicon, where two springs devoted to the Muses run, the Aganippe and the Hippocrene. This nickname is first attested in Ovid (*Metamorphoses* V, 333; VI, 2), the inspirational poet of Mandel'stam's *Tristia*. The epithet "Aonian" with the meaning of "Boeotian" was popularized by Callimachus and used in Latin, for the first time, by Catullus. Cf. Hollis (2007: 411). It is worth remarking that there was a literary magazine named *Ipokrena*, seemingly named after the Boeotian spring, which was briefly printed in Petrograd from October 1917 until the beginning of 1918. Mandel'stam published several poems in *Ipokrena*, for example numbers I, 172 and I, 173.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Vasmer (1953–58: s.v. зиять) and Chantraine (1968–80: s.v. χείνω and χείος).

<sup>22</sup> In this grim landscape, there is no place for the slight glimmer of hope or love, not even for "seductive, suntanned arms" (v. 8). These arms remind us of poem I, 174 (v. 17) where the poet kisses the suntanned elbow of the addressee of the poem, the poetess Marina Cvetaeva, with whom he was in love. Cf. Vitins (1987: 275 f.)

<sup>23</sup> The name "asphodel" designates any of several Mediterranean liliaceous plants of the genera *Asphodeline* and *Asphodelus*, having linear leaves and pale lavender florets. This plant was sacred to underworld gods, especially to Persephone, and was associated with death, perhaps because of its aspect. As Wagler (1896: s.v. Ἀσφόδελος) states: "Der ganze traurigernste Eindruck, den die Pflanze macht, mochte schon die alten Beschauer unwillkürlich an den bleichen Tod, an das halbdüstere Dämmerlicht des Hades erinnern [...] Mit der Thatsache, dass sich der Beschauer der durch ihre starre, düstere Schönheit auffallenden Pflanze eben durch diesen Anblick an den Hades gemahnt

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fühlte, mochte es wohl zusammenhängen, wenn man den ἄ. zur Gräberpflanze machte, vgl. Porphyry. bei Eustath. Odys. XI 573f." About the quotation of Porphyry, cf. Reece (2007: 396 f.)

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Terras (1966: 258) and Iverson (1976: 36).

<sup>25</sup> Reece (2007: 389) reports that this paradisiacal and bucolic image of the asphodel meadows is frequent "among the post-Renaissance English poets, especially those of the Romantic tradition, who painted colorful pictures of 'happy souls who dwell in yellow meads of asphodel.' [Pope's *St. Cecilia's Day*, 74]."

<sup>26</sup> In this passage, Mandel'stam is recreating a traditional Russian form of divination, carried out by girls or women, who melted candle wax on the surface of a shallow dish to form random shapes in order to foresee the future, as in Puškin's *Eugene Onegin* (V, 8), where Tatyana tries to discover her future by means of this divination art.

<sup>27</sup> This veiled reference to Cassandra is not out of place: in Mandel'stam's *Tristia*, poem 188 is dedicated to Priam's daughter, whose predictions no one believed. In the poet's imagery, Cassandra probably alludes to Anna Achmatova, with whom the poet, who fell in love easily, maintained a close and ambiguous friendship in this epoch (1917), as the poetess herself reports. Cf. Struve, Filipoff (1967–69: vol. I, 439).

<sup>28</sup> Apart from the classical references, poems I, 197 and I, 198 are somehow interrelated by means of the unusual adjective "простоволосый" ("bare-headed"), which appears in poems I, 197 (v. 2) and I, 198 (v. 26). The fact that both poems were published in Kiev in 1919 in the literary journal *Hermes*, as well as their contiguity in the order of the poems of the collection, could confirm the possible link.

<sup>29</sup> Frisk (1960–72: s.v. ἄιδης) considers that, although there are several plausible etymologies, the most accepted one interprets the term as "invisible" and "not to be looked at" ("unsichtbar", "nicht anzusehen").

<sup>30</sup> Plato, *Gorgias* 493b: τὸναντίον δὴ οὗτος σοί, ὦ Καλλίκλεις, ἐνδείκνυται ὡς τῶν ἐν Ἄιδου –τὸ αἰδὲς δὴ λέγων– οὔτοι ἀθλιώτατοι ἂν εἶεν, οἱ ἀμύητοι, καὶ φοροῖεν εἰς τὸν τετρημένον πίθον ὕδωρ ἐτέρῳ τοιοῦτῳ τετρημένῳ κοσκίνῳ. "So this person, Callicles, takes the opposite view to yours, for he declares that of all who are in Hades—meaning the invisible—these uninitiated are the most wretched, and will pour water into a leaky jar with a sieve which is leaky too."

Plato, *Cratylus* 403a: ὁ δὲ Ἄιδης, οἱ πολλοὶ μὲν μοι δοκοῦσιν ὑπολαμβάνειν τὸ αἰδὲς προσειρησθαι τῷ ὀνόματι τούτῳ, καὶ φοβούμενοι τὸ ὄνομα Ἰλίουπωνα' καλοῦσιν αὐτόν. "And Hades, people in general appear to imagine that the invisible is connected with this name and so they call him Pluto by their fears."

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Sánchez Puig (2003: 143). Although in Mandel'stam's poetry there is no reference to the place-name Kitež, it appears, however, in Cvetaeva's poem 'По нагориям' ('Over the hills'), in which the city serves as a mystical connection to the underworld and chthonic realm of the dead, from which there is no return. About this poem, cf. Pankenier (2004: 614).

<sup>32</sup> Concerning this poem, cf. Nilsson (1974: 1-85).

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<sup>33</sup> Terras (2001: 56 f.) enumerates some Orphic elements in this poem: "Mint is a plant sacred to Persephone, ambivalent deity of springtime and the nether world. [...] Mandelstam's bees, an ancient symbol of poetic creativity, are justifiably associated with Persephone, since the Greeks believe that bees died in fall with the rest of nature. Mandelstam's bees are associated with night and death, [...] Thus, in orphic fashion, night and death create the sweetness of love and sunshine."

<sup>34</sup> Strabo, *Geography* VIII, 3, 14: πρὸς ἔω δ' ἐστὶν ὄρος τοῦ Πύλου πλησίον ἐπόνυμον Μίνθης, ἣν μυθεύουσι παλλακὴν τοῦ Ἄιδου γενομένην πατηθεῖσαν ὑπὸ τῆς κόρης εἰς τὴν κηπαίαν μίνθην μεταβαλεῖν, ἣν τινες ἠδύοσμον καλοῦσι. "Towards the east, near Pylus, there is a mountain, named after Minthe, who, according to the myth, was the concubine of Hades, and being trampled by Kore, was transformed into the garden mint, which some call *hedyosmos* (sweet-smelling mint)."

<sup>35</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* X, 728–731: *An tibi quondam / femineos artus in olentes vertere mentas, / Persephone, licuit, nobis Cinyreius heros / invidiae mutatus erit?* "Was it not allowed to you, Persephone, to transform woman's limbs into fragrant mint? Shall the transformation of the hero, blood of Cinyras, be grudged to me?"

<sup>36</sup> Porphyry, *On the Cave of the Nymphs* XVIII: πηγαὶ δὲ καὶ νάματα οἰκεῖα ταῖς ὑδρίασι νύμφαις καὶ ἔτι γε μᾶλλον νύμφαις ταῖς ψυχαῖς, ἃς ἰδίως μελίσσας οἱ παλαιοὶ ἐκάλουν ἠδονῆς οὔσας ἐργαστικάς. ὅθεν καὶ ὁ Σοφοκλῆς οὐκ ἀνοικεῖως ἐπὶ τῶν ψυχῶν ἔφη "βομβεῖ δὲ νεκρῶν σμήνος ἔρχεται τ' ἄνω." ("Springs and streams are appropriate for aquatic nymphs and still more for nymphs-souls, which the ancient particularly called bees, as being the efficient causes of pleasure. Hence Sophocles did not say inappropriately about the souls: *The swarm of dead hums and rises* [= fr. 879 Radt].")

<sup>37</sup> Although Demeter is the fundamental deity in Eleusinian cults, she however plays a basic role in Orphism, probably due to her aspect as mother of Persephone, as it can be seen in tablet no. 12 (Bernabé, Jiménez San Cristóbal = fr. 492 Bernabé), from Thurii, which initially was considered a Sicilian Orphic poem in honor of Demeter. On the other hand, Persephone features prominently in Eleusinian beliefs. That is the reason why some Orphic tablets have been related to Eleusinian mysteries. Cf. Bernabé, Jiménez San Cristóbal (2008: 41 f., 67 f., and 137–150).

<sup>38</sup> Regarding this poem, Gillis (1976: 158) points out: "Persephone is spring here. She is the over-abundant Κόρη bringing life and beauty to the earth, and her delight at returning to earth from Hades pervades the poem." Freidin (1987: 199) cunningly points out several phonemic echoes that appear in the most conceptually loaded words of the poem: "The poet's 'magic' was especially effective in its paronymic play, for the poem was skillfully orchestrated around such clusters as PCHOLY—Po TSehui—S oLnTSe (bees—kisses—the sun). The penultimate tercet ends with a tour de force of such wordplay, encompassing paronymic, folk-etymological, and allusive homologies: *vreMia*, Medunitsa, Miata (time, honeysuckle, mint)."

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<sup>39</sup> It is at least curious that the three components that create this poetic network are contained in the so-called Orphic oath (= *fr.* 619 Bernabé): ναὶ μὴν ἀθανάτων γεννήτορας αἰὲν ἐόντων / πῦρ καὶ ὕδωρ γαῖάν τε καὶ οὐρανὸν ἠδὲ σελήνην / ἠέλιόν τε Φάνη τε μέγαν καὶ Νύκτα μέλαιναν. "Yea, by the ancestors of the immortals, who exists forever, / Fire, Water, Earth, Heaven, Moon, / *Sun* and the great Phanes, as well as *black Night*." (The italics are mine). Nevertheless, in this text, the Sun and the Night are mentioned here as the constituents of the elemental temporal sequence: night/day. On this fragment, cf. Bernabé, Jiménez San Cristóbal (2008: 146).

<sup>40</sup> Regarding this controversial topic, cf. Terras (2001), who seemingly unifies the two solar images, and Lekmanov, Gluchova (2006: 171 f.). Cavanagh (1995: 133–145) considers that the "black sun" is the Apocalyptic one that spells the new era of salvation. However, the image of "night sun" that appears in the enigmatic essay 'Skrjabin and Christianity', also known as 'Puškin and Skrjabin', is an antithetical one, as "it is not the sun of redemption but the sun of guilt", an arcane explanation that has raised many interpretations, as can be found in Freidin (1987: 68–81).

<sup>41</sup> In addition Terras (2001: 52) says: "A Nyktelios appears in Viacheslav Ivanov's drama *Prometheus*, along with other figures symbolic of light."

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Lekmanov, Gluchova (2006: 172).

<sup>43</sup> I quote this verse of poem I, 211 according to the Metz (1995) edition of Mandel'stam's poems: Где-то хоры сладкие Орфея.

<sup>44</sup> Ginzburg (1972: 323, no. 14) points out that the performance that inspired the poet was a repeat of a previous performance directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold in Saint Petersburg in 1911. Consequently, it seems as if the fact that the original performance was released in Tsarist Russia shrouded the mention of this opera in a mist of nostalgia, which corresponds to the character of the verses where the reference is included. In this stanza and in the next one, Mandel'stam is alluding to the Italian opera singer Angiolina Bosio (1830–1859), who died in Saint Petersburg as the result of a bad cold.

<sup>45</sup> Van der Eng-Liedmeier (1974: 187 f.) remarks: "The theme of the opera—the beloved lost through death—is of course linked to the more general theme of happiness buried in the past [...]."

<sup>46</sup> Plutarch, *On the E at Delphi* 388F–389A: κρυπτόμενοι δὲ τοὺς πολλοὺς οἱ σοφώτεροι τὴν μὲν εἰς πῦρ μεταβολὴν Ἀπόλλωνά τε τῆ μόνῳσει Φοῖβόν τε τῷ καθαρῷ καὶ ἀμιάντῳ καλοῦσι, τῆς δ' εἰς πνεύματα καὶ ὕδωρ καὶ γῆν καὶ ἄστρα καὶ φυτῶν ζώων τε γενέσεις τροπῆς αὐτοῦ καὶ διακοσμήσεως τὸ μὲν πάθημα καὶ τὴν μεταβολὴν διασπασμὸν τινα καὶ διαμελισμὸν αἰνίττονται, Διόνυσον δὲ καὶ Ζαγρέα καὶ Νυκτέλιον καὶ Ἴσοδαίτην αὐτὸν ὀνομάζουσι καὶ φθοράς τινας καὶ ἀφανισμοὺς εἶτα δ' ἀναβιώσεις καὶ παλιγγενεσίας οἰκεῖα ταῖς εἰρημέναις μεταβολαῖς αἰνίγματα καὶ μυθεύματα περαίνουσι: "But the wiser, concealing from the vulgar, call the change into fire Apollo because of his solitary state, and Phoebus because of his purity and stainlessness. But as for the passion and change of his conversion and arrangement into winds, water, earth, stars, and the various kinds of plants and animals, they speak in

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a deceptive way as a tearing apart, as it were, and a dismembering. They call him Dionysus, Zagreus, Nyktelios, and Isodaetes, and they relate destructions and disappearances, followed by resurrections and regenerations, which are riddles and tales quite in keeping with the aforesaid transformations."

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Jiménez San Cristóbal (2008: 767–770).

<sup>48</sup> Regarding this imagery, Terras (2001: 53) remarks: "We know that precisely at the time of Mandelstam's intensive contact with Ivanov, the latter was lecturing on Novalis and translating his poetry and, in particular, his *Hymnen an die Nacht*. In the very first of these hymns we find a 'liebliche Sonne der Nacht,' translated as *Mne solntsem ty polunochnym sisiaesh'*, 'You shine for me as a midnight sun' [...]. The not inconsiderable role played by Novalis in Mandelstam's thought [...] is surely due to Ivanov's mediation."

<sup>49</sup> Concerning this theme, cf. Olck (1897: s.v. Biene, cols. 447 f.)

<sup>50</sup> Pausanias, *Description of Greece* IX, 23, 2: Πίνδαρον δὲ ἡλικίαν ὄντα νεανίσκον καὶ ἰόντα ἐς Θεσπιάς θέρους ὄρα καύματος περὶ μεσοῦσαν μάλιστα ἡμέραν κόπος καὶ ὕπνος ἀπ' αὐτοῦ κατελάμβανεν· ὁ μὲν δὴ ὡς εἶχε κατακλίνεται βραχὺ ὑπὲρ τῆς ὁδοῦ, μέλισσαι δὲ αὐτῷ καθεύδοντι προσεπέτοντό τε καὶ ἔπλασσον πρὸς τὰ χεῖλη τοῦ κηροῦ. "When Pindar was a youth, he was once on his way to Thespiæ in summer in the hot season. At about noon fatigue and the sleepiness that follows it seized him; so, just as he was, he lay down a little way from the road. While he was sleeping, bees alighted on him and plastered his lips with their wax."

<sup>51</sup> Philostratus II, *Images* II, 12, 2, 4: αἱ δὲ εἴσω μέλιτται περιεργάζονται τὸ παιδίον ἐπιβάλλουσαι τὸ μέλι καὶ τὰ κέντρα ἀνέλκουσαι δέει τοῦ ἐγγρίσαι. "The bees inside the house take care of the boy, dropping honey upon him and drawing back their stings for fear of pricking him."

<sup>52</sup> The words appear in the following verses: "мед" in poems I, 198 (vv. 4, 30) and I, 208 (vv. 2, 15); "медунница" in poems I, 198 (v. 27) and I, 208 (v. 12); and, "радость" in poems I, 198 (v. 27) and I, 208 (vv. 1, 13). It must be observed that a great number of the occurrences of these terms are found in the final parts of the poems, which probably increases their force.

<sup>53</sup> On the importance of hidden codes in Mandel'stam, Taranovsky (1976: 114) considers: "In order to understand him, one must assimilate his culture. To reveal all his literary subtexts is the fundamental problem which stands before investigators of his poetry."

<sup>54</sup> An example of the subtle interconnection between the poems of the whole collection can be observed also in the presence of oaks in poem I, 198 (v. 25), which obviously is a reminder of the "transparent oak woods" of poem I, 209 (v. 14), a poem packed with afterlife references where the fundamental term "transparent" features prominently. Thanks to these series of linked allusions, I consider that a definite conclusion about the intention of the poet must be inferred by taking into account as many of the nuances dispersed throughout these poems as possible.