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Osip Mandel’shtam’s recognition as a premier Russian poet developed posthumously and largely outside the Soviet Union. The creation of a canonical Mandel’shtam in world poetry is a case study in trans-cultural and trans-linguistic literary history and politics. This position stands in striking contrast to the history of his reputation in the Soviet Union where the period of his deletion from about 1934 lasted in effect well beyond his official rehabilitation in 1956 until the early 1970s. From the 1980s, absorption by a generation of Russian readers who came of age in the 1960s was gradual, nearly silent and clandestine, perhaps largely accomplished by the period of glasnost’.

Mandel’shtam’s elevation to canonical status comprises an important story in the West. How did a poet who was unpublished at home, imperfectly published abroad, acknowledged as difficult, come to be absorbed into the mainstream of European literature as an indispensable poet? This is not to confuse the West and the Russian emigration. Apart from Gleb Struve, the standard bearers for his poetic reputation were not émigrés of the second or third wave whose knowledge of Mandel’shtam for the most part ended in the early 1920s, but rather English and American writers galvanised by a combination

1 For their comments and suggestions I would like to thank Jennifer Baines, Sasha Dugdale, Lazar’ Fleishman, and Andrew McNeillie.

of his poetic art in translation, literary politics and Cold War politics, and a liberal conviction in poets as truth-tellers. This chapter seeks to tell that story with reference to the recovery and interpretation of Mandel’shtam’s legacy; his place as a representative man of his cultural and historical situation; the contribution his critical writing made to his views as a literary thinker; and, centrally, the vexed question of the relation between moral daring, literary profile and political drama as the basis of his authority.

Over the last forty years a surge in interest via translations into French, Italian and German, has marked Mandel’shtam’s discovery across Europe. This chapter will collect and analyse the most extensive, cumulative, and nuanced record of engagement to be found in the world of Anglo-American letters. As a description of the canonical and non-canonical Mandel’shtam, this history of Mandel’shtam’s reputation constitutes a compelling episode full of implications for how we think about the mechanisms of canon formation and poetic afterlives. Dislocations affect literary history. Does literature belong to the time in which it is composed, or to the time when it reaches a readership? The question becomes even more complex, and potentially fascinating, when the reception is across languages and traditions, when a writer becomes almost fully known and recognized outside the mother tongue first.

My data set derives from a comprehensive analysis of the critical writing published in a range of quality literary reviews such as The Times Literary Supplement and The London Review of Books. While I shall also

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4 A proper assessment of the stature of a poet naturally depends on the content of their reception as much as its frequency. But some comparative figures are of use in measuring the penetration of poetic presences and awareness among a readership. On the pages of the TLS for the period from 1930 until roughly 2000 Mandel’shtam (excluding Nadezhda Mandel’shtam) is mentioned about 350 times (for these purposes a mention means anything from a full-blown article to a single-word reference in passing). Khlebnikov is mentioned 79 times, mainly in the 1990s, Tsvetaeva occurs 145 times but only from the 1960s, Maiakovskii and Akhmatova are roughly on a par with Mandel’shtam, although Maiakovskii garners far fewer full-length pieces and is invoked more often within larger contexts such as futurism. Brodskii is mentioned 391 times from the 1960s. Zabolotskii, initially identified by Robin Milner-Gulland in 1967 as the other poet on the launch pad of rediscovery next to Mandel’shtam, occurs 36 times. Pasternak remains in public view from the 1920s, and earns 850 references over the duration. To Pushkin, of course, belong the laurels at 1000 hits. By comparison, Mallarmé stands at 745 references, Goethe a whopping 3000, and Paul Celan 160, the last an interesting
touch on the character and phases of Mandel'shtam studies as a scholarly enterprise, limitations of space mean that the academic side of the story, with its critical views on his poetic technique, and the question of his poetic difficulty, will feature only as subsidiary to the main narrative of reputation building. The abundant topic of Mandel'shtam’s impact on Russian poets and their practice, both abroad and at home, remains a subject for separate study. One conclusion that needs to be stated outright is that the creation of a canonical Mandel'shtam in the broader world of literature developed in parallel to, and often independent of, scholarship about him. Yet both the scholarly and popular traditions created divisions between a canonical and non-canonical Mandel'shtam, the first represented largely by his first two collections, the second present in later poems that were off limits to exegesis such as ‘Stikhi o neizvestnom soldate’ ('Verses on an Unknown Soldier’) or too hot to handle because of political controversy such as ‘Oda’ ('The Stalin Ode’) or sometimes, as in the case of the Voronezh poems, even perceived as un-Mandel'shtamian because of a highly personal quality that looked alien to interpretations that stressed the poet of high culture.

My first section will present a thematic and broadly chronological account of Mandel'shtam’s rediscovery by two literary traditions, and characterise the main elements of the poet’s profile as a writer of lyric and a critic as they developed among American and British readers. The next two sections will argue that while the American and British stories overlap they also diverge in emphasis, and also through their implied understanding of what matters in poetry and why poets matter. What separates the two traditions is a difference in their relation of lives to lines, and the relation of life to context. The reputation of a foreign poet, extrinsic to the domestic literary canon, can depend on political circumstances. The first section proceeds thematically, with some deviation from chronological order. The next section will identify how the canonical Mandel'shtam has imposed an expectation of accessibility and an unwillingness to consider difficulty or political controversy; and finally, a brief section will provide a thumbnail sketch of the post-Soviet reception — an on-going story, to be sure.

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counter to the expectation that Celan’s reputation now eclipses that of the Russians hands down. Brodskii’s status among the bean-counters looks impressive when we note that Seamus Heaney stacks up at 585 mentions and Derek Walcott 153 times.
While the present essay does aim to trace patterns in the story, and corroborate them amply, I would not want to insist that the divisions between biographical and poetic approaches, or between the English and the American receptions, are absolutely hard and fast. On both sides of these literary maps, readers were sensitive to the interplay of life and literature, text and context. Nevertheless, I would like to argue that the patterns that emerge in the history of reading Mandel'shtam reflect from decade to decade larger convictions about poetry and poets: the times shape Mandel'shtam’s reception and Mandel'shtam was one voice shaping the times. At a narrower level, the story is part of the chapter of Russia Abroad and the recovery of silenced voices in the diaspora. But more broadly it is perhaps a rare case history of how a foreign poet became inextricably implicated in the idea of poetry across cultures, and included in other canons. Undoubtedly there was a feedback loop between Mandel'shtam’s publication, critical reception, scholarly assimilation in the West, and writing about him by the likes of Iosif Brodskii, Seamus Heaney and many others, and the development of poetic craft in Russia.

**Mandel'shtam Regained**

Outside Russia, the reception of Mandel'shtam constitutes a multifaceted phenomenon, deeply embedded in different Anglo-American and European circumstances within the larger context of the Cold War and its associated literary politics.\(^5\) Coming in the wake of Pasternak’s plight and the Zhivago affair, readers invested the recovery of Mandel'shtam

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\(^5\) A comprehensive scholarly treatment of this aspect of cultural politics and the Cold War is sorely needed, all the more so as embargoed archives and formerly classified documents become available. Hence as widely reported in the popular press and the *New York Times*, a newspaper of record (see Jeff Himmelman, ‘Peter Matthiessen’s Homegoing’, *New York Times Magazine*, 3 April 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/06/magazine/peter-matthiessens-homegoing.html) the personal files of contributors to the *Paris Review* such as Peter Matthiessen, a founder of the magazine, and George Plimpton its editor, have revealed ties to the CIA and the Congress for Cultural Freedom. For the broader context of how culture was weaponised, see David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), especially Part V, ‘Art Wars’ (pp. 507–611). His discussion focuses on the performing art and Hollywood, and there are no entries in the index for literature and poetry, much less Mandel'shtam.
with a sense of historical urgency and moral imperative. Initially the search was on for the instantiation of the Russian poet in its purest embodiment: an emblem of artistic innovation and traditionalism fully committed to the truth and autonomy of art and prepared to sacrifice him or herself for those values. In the Soviet Union, the Thaw and the death of Akhmatova as the supreme relic of the Silver Age, and the efforts of individuals and small communities, stimulated the recovery of a lost tradition within which Mandel'shtam was reputed to be perhaps the greatest master. The truncation of the Thaw did not check momentum on the Western side of the Iron Curtain among detractors and admirers of the Soviet Union, both sides having acknowledged Stalinism as a cultural and human tragedy.

Between 1930 and 1967 Mandel'shtam’s name never appeared more than a handful of times in the TLS. Maurice Bowra, then recognised as a translator of Russian verse, showed unusual awareness in reproaching anthologists such as Marc Slonim for omitting Mandel'shtam from his 1933 anthology, also lamenting the inadequate representation of Belyi, Khlebnikov, Gumilev, Pasternak, Tsvetaeva, Akhmatova, Maiakovskii, Esenin and Bagritskii in The Oxford Book of Russian Verse. Reminiscing in 1995 about that span as a ‘blackout period’, Clarence Brown recalled a conversation he had in the 1950s with the composer Arthur Lourié about Mandel'shtam as a figure ‘whom he [Lourié] deemed to have been irretrievably forgotten’. By 1950, early research into acmeism had yielded some basic information about Mandel'shtam. Excerpts from the two collections published in his lifetime suggested to readers


7 For a vigorous account of the poet in Eastern Europe as a moral beacon, see most recently Clare Cavanagh, Lyric Poetry and Modern Politics: Russia, Poland and the West (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); for an alternative view that is sceptical or even antagonistic to the moral hero approach, see G. S. Smith, ‘Russian Poetry: The Lives or the Lines?’, The Modern Language Review, 95 (October 2000), xxix–xli.


10 Maurice Bowra, ‘Poets of Russia’, TLS, 2 April 1949, 222.

a poet of Parnassian perfection, an enemy of symbolism devoted to the supremacy of the object and a craftsman of the adamantine ‘word’. First reputations are hard to dislodge. This picture of Mandel’shtam as the acmeist par excellence, mainly the poet of Kamen’ (Stone), persists, discontinuous and unreviewed, from the 1930s till the middle of the next decade. For Geoffrey Hill, whose knowledge of Mandel’shtam began around 1965, access to very few translations and scattered references in literary histories hardened the view of Mandel’shtam as an aesthete, an exquisitely private poet unable to adapt to the regime (rather than consciously being opposed to it or being persecuted by it) who was somehow pushed aside. Further crumbs of information came via the English translation of Il’ia Erenburg’s memoirs in which Mandel’shtam is mentioned alongside Georges Braque, Amedeo Modigliani, Guillaume Apollinaire and Gumilev. A review of an issue of Den’ Poezii (Poetry Day, 1962) published in the TLS cites Tsvetaeva and Mandel’shtam as banned writers who have had a ‘marked influence on young poets’, a statement that looks more like wishful thinking based on the slightest sample. Relatively little had changed between 1949 when Leonid Strakhovsky and Renato Poggioli published Craftsmen of the Word: Three Poets of Modern Russia and The Poets of Russia, respectively. The profile of Mandel’shtam is of a learned poet steeped in classical literature, a writer who believed in art for art’s sake, an otherworldly figure. Each work essentially repackages a view based on Mandel’shtam’s brief period as an acmeist. Among émigré critics, Vladislav Khodasevich’s review of Tristia in 1924 consolidated the critical reception repeated by these later critics. Yet Poggioli’s thoughtful appreciation, based solely on the imperfect editions of the poems and incomplete prose published in 1952, does make two points of note. First, he disassociates Mandel’shtam from mainstream modernists like Eliot and Pound, and, while aware of his learning and his use of allusion, sees him as a visual poet whose use of image is reminiscent of Pablo Picasso and Giorgio de Chirico. This
subjective point will resurface more frequently in literary criticism about his writing than in Mandel'shtam scholarship, focused throughout the 1970s and 1980s on textual allusion rather than visual values. Secondly, and more importantly, Poggioli conveys a rumour about a large body of manuscript poems still extant, suggesting how severely circumstances had hampered knowledge of Mandel'shtam. Unaware of the many poems with a broader contemporary dimension, Poggioli had heard about Mandel'shtam as an otherworldly and destitute figure, the image of him that survived in memoirs of contemporaries from the 1930s, abetted at least by publication of his later letters.

Among Russian readers who become aware of Mandel'shtam from the 1960s, the image of him as an outsider and alien to official literature — essentially the Mandel'shtam of Chetvertaia proza (Fourth Prose) — remained an article of faith, inseparable from how his legacy should be studied. At the Mandel'shtam Centenary Conference held in Moscow in 1991, an event attended by many hundreds even before his re-publication in Russia had occurred, a public debate broke out concerning the formation of a Mandel'shtam Society dedicated to the editing and publication of his works.\(^{15}\) Opponents to the creation of such a society, forgetting that Mandel'shtam was an original member of the Tsekh Poetov (Guild of Poets), saw it as a betrayal of the belief that Mandel'shtam was permanently, in his own words, ‘an outcast in the national family’ (‘otshepenets v narodnoi sem′e’), always marginal and about the marginal. At the 2009 events in Cherdyn’, commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of his exile there, violent disapproval silenced advocates of the view that even in the late 1930s Mandel'shtam sought some sort of accommodation with Soviet power.

The émigré journal *Vozdhushnye puti* (Aerial Ways) featured in its single issue of 1961 an anthology of fifty-two poems Mandel'shtam wrote in exile in Voronezh, adding substantial material to the corpus of his work and also balancing out the range between the acmeist poet and the Soviet victim. By the late 1960s, following the publication of the Struve-Filippov edition and slightly ahead of the publication in English of Nadezhda Mandel'shtam’s two volumes of memoirs, the view emerged that

\(^{15}\) Eyewitness account, Andrew Kahn, Moscow, January 1991.
Mandelstam’s name is no longer only for cognoscenti and is known to most people in the West; his poetry already half-forgotten in the 1920s and misunderstood, without noisy adherents or even spectacular excellences of its own, has established itself next to that of Blok, Pasternak, Maiakovskii, Akhmatova and Khlebnikov as a major expression of the Silver Age of Russian verse.¹⁶

By the 1970s, as David McDuff observed, generational interest had shifted from Pasternak to Mandel’shtam, a seismic change from the celebrated to the unknown.¹⁷ Translations broke the ice of the Mandel’shtam revival from the early 1970s. While Struve and Filippov’s single-volume edition of poems raised attention among émigré circles in the 1950s, there was a gap of about a decade between its appearance and a rippling out to wider circles.¹⁸ Lasting literary reputations are not made quickly, especially across language barriers and an iron curtain. With the publication of successively more comprehensive editions, which hugely expanded knowledge of Mandel’shtam as both poet and critic in the West and eventually Russia, Mandel’shtam’s reputation snowballed. Sidney Monas’s translations of selected essays, containing accessible and learned expositions, were joined by landmark translations into English by Clarence Brown and W. S. Merwin, by James Greene and by Bernard Meares in the early 1980s; the appearance of Jane Gary Harris’s compendious Complete Prose and Letters confirmed Mandel’shtam’s reputation as a world-class critic worth perusal by Western readers for his observations on Western writers.¹⁹ Whatever the merits of these translations as poetic acts, they made a discernible impact.²⁰ Guy Davenport’s appreciation of Mandel’shtam, published in the Hudson
Review, a venerable organ of conservative literary taste, provided a round-up of critical work by Monas and Brown, and also articulated a distinct sense that despite repeated attempts to find reference points for him among canonical writers in Western literature, from François Villon to Pound, ‘Mandelstam is not quite like any other poet so that analogies run into instant trouble’.\(^\text{21}\) Time and again they garnered a great deal of critical attention, much of it overlapping between scholarly journals and highbrow literary magazines that were widely read, like the TLS, New York Review of Books (NYRB) and London Review of Books (LRB).\(^\text{22}\) Clarence Brown, a pivotal figure in the restoration of Mandel'shtam literature in Russian and in English, spent a year in Hampstead (1969–1970) when he became something of an apostle for his cause among influential British literary critics such as Al Alvarez. Translation both spearheaded the reception of Mandel'shtam among poetry lovers, and also became a crucible for questions about translation technique. Brodskii’s ‘Introduction’ to the Meares translations championed a poet he felt was still completely unknown in his native country. But in characterising Mandel'shtam’s verse language for English-language readers, Brodskii also came down hard against renderings that traduced the original form. This occasioned a lively response from no less a poet and critic than Yves Bonnefoy who rejected Brodskii’s argument by proposing a solution at the other extreme. Where ‘world literature’ was concerned, and there is an international and cross-linguistic demand for poets, Bonnefoy argued that the proper compensation for the inevitable loss of exact form could only be translation in free verse, a medium that, \textit{pace} Brodskii, he regarded still as poetry and a viable form for phrases, images and ideas.\(^\text{23}\)

By 1981, in Henry Gifford’s estimation, Mandel'shtam was nothing less than ‘a ferment in the minds of today’.\(^\text{24}\) Another knowledgeable


reader noted in 1967 that the lucky few who had already become aware of the poet of *Kamen*’ would encounter an author who developed strikingly, whose poems become ‘less cold and chiselled, more varied, allusive, personal and close to the life of his epoch’. More conclusively, he offered the view that despite its flaws, anyone with Russian will conclude that ‘this is the sort of edition that should cause literary histories to be rewritten’. When Brown showed Arkadii Raikin a copy of the Filippov-Struve edition on the train to London from Oxford, after Akhmatova received her honorary degree, he let Raikin, moved to tears at the Oxford Encaenia by the sight of Mandel'shtam’s great friend, keep the copy. Numerous comparable stories illustrate the incremental process of reputation creation and consolidation. Conviction about merit is an article of faith, but not absolute faith, because writers have opened a file on Mandel'shtam but not closed it: more editions, more texts, more translations are required as a matter of appreciation and appetite, and in order to establish the scale and shape of his œuvre.

Early attempts to place Mandel'shtam understandably looked to the Western canon for comparison, namely, among Anglo-American (rather than French) modernism, and sputtered fruitlessly. We find a commonplace assumption that as a poet of high culture Mandel'shtam must be like Eliot and Pound, yet there is some surprise to find that, as Donald Davie says, unlike his Western counterparts, Mandel'shtam prefers the bent-in, the rounded-upon-itself, favouring domes, the seashell’s curvature, rather than the modernist preference for the discontinuous and asymmetrical. One recurrent theme that moved to the fore as the Pound-Eliot comparison stalled was the recognition of the small scale, highly delineated and patterned quality of Mandel'shtam’s images. In 1978, D. M. Thomas observed that ‘few poets move so far as Mandelstam in so little space’, yet George Steiner, a perennial promoter of affinities with Paul Celan, opined that while each poem might be sharply drawn there are reticulations, ‘tenacious, elusive bonds’ that form a poetic identity. The reception of Robert Tracy’s bilingual

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version of *Kamen’* consolidated the perception of Mandel'shtam as a Russo-Judaic-Christian multicultural poet, whose voice combined a Pushkinian plasticity and solid verse architecture. Images of stone, lace and enamel scattered through the entire collection revealed a permanent thematic tension between the precariousness of the spoken versus the silent, the lasting versus the ephemeral, the small versus the monumental. John Bayley praised Mandel'shtam as a poet as versatile as W. H. Auden with the same ‘brilliance in gusto’. Heaney, suspicious that Tracy’s euphonious versions were only an echo of their original music (‘Tracy’s ear is not as gifted as Mandelstam’s — whose is?’), sensed that Mandel'shtam possessed ‘the high voltage of associative word-play which one understands to be so distinctive in Russian’. The phrase ‘one understands’ we might read as a hint at the mentoring of his friend Brodskii, whose broadside against free verse translation of Russian poetry written in classical forms caused a stir. His ‘Introduction’ to Meares’s translations also admired Mandel'shtam’s prosody, observing that ‘the presence of an echo is the primal trait of any good acoustics, and Mandelstam merely made a great cupola for his predecessors’. Tracy’s commentaries (highly derivative from work by Mandel'shtam scholars) convinced Heaney and other readers that Mandel'shtam’s poems are ‘as firmly rooted in both an historical and cultural context and in physical reality as Joyce’s *Ulysses* or Eliot’s *The Waste Land’.

‘The recovery of Mandelstam has become something marvellous’: Thomas is among the earliest to see in the survival of his work evidence

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of ‘a miracle that the worst of times produced the best of poets’. For many, Russian poets, and Mandel'shtam best of all, embodied an ideal of lyric that was further ennobled by the troubled circumstances of its production. Yet British critics show a clear priority in the ordering of art and life in which the value of a writer’s art precedes interest in the life-story. It seems nearly axiomatic that admiration of great poets as victims must necessarily follows their rediscovery first and foremost as masters of the lyric. Appreciation of the life seems largely to have taken inspiration from the lines rather than vice versa. The miracle of recovery and rediscovery of a lost voice became a topos often recounted from the late 1960s until the early 1980s. Typically those who write about him also validate his personal importance to them. Virtually each time this happens the writer rehearses the story of the lost poetry, Nadezhda Mandel'shtam’s loyalty and tenacity (Heaney calls her magnificently a ‘guerrilla of the imagination’), how she kept the poetry alive, who it was that read clandestine copies, the writing of the Voronezhskie tetradi (Voronezh Notebooks), who it was that kept copies, Mandel'shtam’s arrest and exile, and so on. While the effect is one of awe, the propensity to repetition conveys an impression that writers with an interest in sharing their discovery recognise that establishing foreign poets abroad and in translation takes extraordinary effort. Within this frame narrative of miraculous poetic survival there is an underlying curiosity about the political relation between poetry and power, and a wish to know why they were victims, what sort of poetry incurs such sanction. But for the most part in the British context there also appears to be a lingering and long ungratified wish to appreciate the aesthetic dimension first. In 1992, Anatoly Naiman on the pages of the TLS sounded a note about sacrifice, rather than aesthetic worth, that had been mainly latent but unexpressed among British appreciations of Akhmatova, Pasternak, Mandel'shtam, as well as Platonov, that ‘never has such a high price been paid for such a small handful of words that remained free, and never have so many lives been devoted to such a cause’.

When, at a Cambridge gathering in 1981, a decade after the English publication of Mrs Mandel'shtam’s Hope Against Hope, Monas pronounced

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him ‘the most sought-after poet of the twentieth century’, the view that he is a central figure in the Russian poetic canon looks like a certainty, summed up by Gifford: ‘By this time, many of the audience must have felt that Mandelstam may well be the supreme poet of this age — into which, after almost fifty years, we are still locked’.37 One participant was Brodskii. He ended the meeting by reading the ‘Stikhi o neizvestnom soldate’ (‘Verses on an Unknown Soldier’), a poem whose dense system of allusion, scientific reference, and formidable obscurity looks like a far cry from the beloved poet of *Kamen*’ and *Tristia*. Brodskii’s choice was clearly deliberate, a gesture at moving discussion on. Arguably, 1981 marks a point of closure in the first phase of Mandel’shtam’s reception and an opening of the next chapter in which Brodskii played an important role in refocusing attention on Mandel’shtam as an engaged, difficult and rhetorically complex poet who had been misunderstood by critics, who were absorbed by sub-textual diversions, and by readers, who used Mandel’shtam to perpetuate a myth of poetic sacrifice.

Thanks to the publication of his prose in English in several instalments, culminating in Harris’s comprehensive collection for Ardis, Mandel’shtam’s work as an essayist became a more prominent part of his legacy.38 The popularity of this part of his creation stands to reason. For readers such as Helen Vendler, reluctant to assume greatness on the basis of clumsy poetic translations, his prose offered compensation as well as a more secure touchstone by which to judge the quality of his thought, values and language.39 Too tactful to comment directly on the poetry translations, Heaney, friend of both Vendler and Brodskii, drew amply on a prose which ‘itself is bursting with eagerness to break out as a sequence of poems’.40 In admiring Mandel’shtam’s gift for metaphor and image, he turns Mandel’shtam’s critical values back on to himself: ‘What Mandelstam said of Darwin’s style applies here perfectly to his own: the power of perception functions as an instrument of thought’.41

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37 Quoted by Gifford in ‘Surrounded with Fire’, 700; *ibid*.
41 *Ibid*. 
Access to Mandel'shtam through his prose was, therefore, not seen as second best.\textsuperscript{42} Furthermore, his critical writings came to serve quickly as a reliable source of opinion, and he is often invoked as an authority on the question of ‘the use of poetry’. Lawrence Lipking has remarked that ‘poets are the carriers of literary history’.\textsuperscript{43} Mandel'shtam fulfilled that role. Unlike Khlebnikov, a ‘poet of the future’, Mandel'shtam appears both timeless and highly contemporary. Here is a Mandel'shtam who is a big-picture critic, who makes out of literature one of a set of coordinated cultural systems that includes architecture and philology, and that are about the preservation of ‘a home for humanity’ and the endurance of monuments to the human spirit. Elsewhere, readers of the poetry who are understandably concerned to find an analogous figure to Mandel'shtam, one recognisably modernist in technique yet traditionalist in outlook, will regularly reach for Eliot and W. B. Yeats. The former looks like a surer bet when seen from the viewpoint of these Eliot-like preoccupations with the mind of Europe and continuities of tradition under threat.\textsuperscript{44} Mandel'shtam’s criticism appealed to readers for a further reason. The immediacy with which he wrote about his poetic milieu was gripping. Writings about the connections between poetry and history and poetry and politics took the reader straight into the vortex of historical change in the 1920s. For poets like Christopher Middleton, Heaney, and especially Hill, Mandel'shtam’s essays served as a hotline to history. Where Mandel'shtam scores over others is in conveying history as personal experience. Blok loomed magisterial and distant, Maiakovskii spoke to the world as though he were addressing a political meeting, but Mandel'shtam ‘invokes the single reader alone with his conscience’.\textsuperscript{45}

The appreciation of Mandel'shtam rode other trends in literary study. From the late 1970s, new criticism waned as both new historicism and critical theory revolutionised the academic study of literature. Mandel'shtam slotted into both trends outside the sub-discipline

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Ibid}.
of Russian poetic study where structuralist approaches focused on intertextual study became an entrenched methodology. In this broader context, two essays garnered repeated attention. ‘O sobesednike’ (‘On the Interlocutor’, 1913) and ‘O prirode slova’ (‘On the Nature of the Word’, 1922) offer a theory of poetry that fit the times like a hand and glove. The first presented a version of a reader-response theory that looked timely in the context of the emergence of the Konstanz school of criticism. Many poetic treatments and tributes to Mandel'shtam, alongside the burst of translation activity, have a peculiarly personal quality. There was an appeal (and poetic justice) in the retrieval of a long-lost poet who was himself a theorist of reader-response as transhistorical conversation. As though they had absorbed the lessons of ‘O sobesednike’, writer after writer wished to enter into dialogue with him. Mandel'shtam’s discussion of the interlocutor was the theory by which to judge his success as a poet and the value of ahistorical reader response. It was also one measure by which to describe what sort of poet he is. In this respect, he is more like Akhmatova than one might have expected, because his style and his story have a particularly personal and counter-cultural quality. It is also as a reader of Dante that Mandel'shtam earned most plaudits as a critic and literary theorist. As Gifford remarks, ‘Mandelstam sends modern poets to school with Dante’. Gabriel Josipovici instinctively brackets the ‘Razgovor s Dante’ (‘Conversation on Dante’) with Marcel Proust’s On Reading Ruskin, and Heaney named the ‘Razgovor s Dante’ one of his books of the year in 1996. The essay seems repeatedly to have captured the interest of poets from Brodskii to James Fenton to Derek Walcott. At the level of cultural theory, the essay triangulated the relationship between Mandel’shtam and Eliot, creating an equivalence of stature for the two moderns via Dante and generating stimulating, albeit imperfect, comparisons with

Eliot’s idea of Hebraic and Christian culture. These estimations paved the way for the reception of the ‘Razgovor s Dante’ as an instant classic (and published as such in the *NYRB* *Forgotten Classics* series) among several constituencies. For a readership without Russian, intrigued by the Russian tradition and its points of contact with the Western tradition, the link to Dante proved significant. According to the Oxford Italianist Martin McLaughlin, ‘for that alone Mandelstam deserves to be remembered’. Furthermore, Mandel'shtam’s experience as an exile lent authenticity to the role of poetry as a form of consolation. In a review of some new Dante translations, the *Economist* magazine quoted Heaney as observing that the Dante of Pound and Eliot is ‘not quite the same as Osip Mandelstam’s’, whose jaggedly futuristic ‘Razgovor s Dante’ is also covered in the appraisal.\(^5^1\) Persecuted by Stalin, he speaks from the bookless wastes of internal exile and identifies with the embittered Florentine, driven from his native city by political conflict. Mandel'shtam’s Dante is vividly particular, local and spontaneous, his emotion resounding still in the sounds of his words. Eliot’s Dante, by contrast, is Latinate and Olympian, evoking in ‘the mind of Europe’ a ‘sublime vision of universal order’.\(^5^2\) The review observes that the essay ‘wasn’t printed until three decades later, in 1967, when an edition of 25,000 copies appeared in Moscow and quickly sold out — the first of Mandelstam’s works to appear after the Thaw’, a point that was not lost on Fenton. He praises Mandel'shtam’s view that a command of complex linguistic and intellectual resources ought to give poets credibility as good authorities even among the truly powerful. And while Fenton shies away from romanticising the martyrdom of Russian poets, he nonetheless speaks for many left-leaning intellectuals in using Mandel'shtam’s authority (and the historic nature of his fate) to express the view that the Russians might be unique in appreciating poetry on an enviable scale, given the comparative enormity of print runs accorded the most famous poets. Mandel'shtam’s Dante essay exercised a particular influence on Heaney, who appreciated it particularly as

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a discussion of inspiration articulated through the special phonetic rules of poetic craftsmanship. He also dwelled on it as a manifestation of poetry as an ethical defence of the non-utilitarian in life.\(^\text{53}\) He sees a Mandel’shtam gripped by Dante’s metaphorical genius rather than moved by self-identification with him as an exile; who demonstrates why poetic influence is not only about sound and allusion but also about poetic relationships as ethical touchstones: ‘the Dante whom he would come upon in the Thirties and who would help him to live by the pure standard while false currency swirled all around him like blinding chaff’.\(^\text{54}\) By pure coincidence, this conclusion comes very close to Lidiia Ginzburg’s description seventy years earlier of how, in reading the essay, Mandel’shtam seemed to merge entirely with his poetic inspiration.\(^\text{55}\) What Ginzburg calls ‘creative realisation’ (‘tvorcheskaia realizovannost’\(^\text{5}\)) presciently identified the attraction of the essay to later generations.

## A Special Relationship to Mandel’shtam: Divergences in the British and American Stories

However attuned to Mandel’shtam’s historical period, the critical reception in Britain tended to dwell on the poetry and resist cult-building. Attention to the life and Mandel’shtam’s status as a poet-martyr surfaces intermittently and late, mentioned with respect but overshadowed by interest in his work. From the early 1970s Mandel’shtam had become a formative poet for translators. Mick Imlah, well-placed in various editorial jobs, observed that ‘fashion is certainly shifting in translation’s favour; so much new British poetry alludes to Mandelstam, Montale, Trakl, Neruda and Seferis that it is unsophisticated as well as impoverishing not to know their work’.\(^\text{56}\)


If Mandel’shtam studies never took root in British graduate culture, it may be that the academic study of Mandel'shtam was inhibited by the degree to which public figures and men of letters such as Davie, Hill, Bayley and others had appropriated him to the ranks of poet as moral witness, the good antithesis to Pound. Jennifer Baines was perhaps alone among her generation to pursue the course she took, sanctioned to a degree by the confidence and support of Nadezhda Mandel’shtam. Cold War rhetoric was far less extreme among the British intellectual classes of the 1960s, whose leftist sympathies were no secret, and this translated into a different sense of purpose for a journal like the TLS, which had a genuinely different editorial policy and mission by comparison with the NYRB. In that context, devotees of Mandel’shtam such as Davie, Donald Rayfield and the translator Greene pursued their initiative to broaden his readership. Ronald Hingley’s Nightingale Fever of 1981 took brickbats for enforcing groupthink among poets of a notably different cast. Yet the book provided evidence of the bond between Pasternak, Akhmatova and Mandel’shtam as three writers who shared integrity and a conviction that poetry must ‘deal boldly with substantial things’. This left an imposing question: how was it possible to write poetry in the adverse conditions of the 1920s and hardening ideological hostility of the early 1930s? Yet in the late 1970s caution remained about adopting a vocabulary of martyrdom and sanctification that might obscure links between writers and a context that, while fraught, required further investigation. Thomas argued that Akhmatova and Mandel’shtam were indifferent to failure and numb to the world around them, but Jeffrey Wainwright in PN Review took a different view, arguing that ‘too much criticism of Soviet literature has been inevitably and crudely ideological, concluding complacently that these writers’ fate demonstrates the natural and unalterable antipathy between socialism and artistic sensibility’. British readers sidestepped

contentious issues of martyrdom that were part of the American reception from the start.

Instead, there is a pronounced tendency to portray Mandel’shtam as a poet of inner freedom able to sustain his own core values from the stoic simplicity he articulated in poems of the 1920s such as ‘Umyval′sia noch′iu na dvore’ (‘I Am Washing Myself at Night in the Courtyard’) well into exile. Perhaps optimistically, Gifford sees Mandel’shtam a decade later still ‘faithful to that vision’ when he appreciates the ‘black earth’ in ‘Chernozem’ (‘Black Earth’): ‘what he expressed here toward the end of his life arose from perceptions formed in that Tiflis courtyard’.61 Similarly, Heaney and Brodskii buck the academic trend in Mandel’shtam studies by noting how much of his early poetry infiltrates the later poetry. While sub-textual criticism in this same span of about twenty years continued to move centrifugally out of the poems, amassing its vast body of external sources, readers more focused on a different idea of poetic and moral personality described a practice of self-allusion that sustained Mandel’shtam in the ‘cultural and human wilderness in which he found himself in the 1930s’.62 This was the poet saving himself as much as saving the European verse heritage obliterated by Soviet literary politics. That strategy was aptly summed up by Brodskii: ‘Only a poem could permit itself to remember another poem’.63 For these critics the resumption of poetic creativity was an assertion of power and also a posture of sanity, ‘oases of calm strength and beauty in a mad and murderous world’.64

Can poetry resist tyranny with sanity and beauty? In 1974, an editorial in the TLS, offering solidarity, restated a traditional critical shibboleth about Russian writers and politics, opining that ‘a Pushkin, a Turgenev, a Tolstoi, a Mandelstam, a Solzhenitsyn form a state within a state. Theirs is the haunting alternative conscience’.65 Yet the tendency among

65  ‘Commentary’, TLS, 15 February 1974, 159.
the poetry mavens was to wonder whether it would be more productive to write about a common commitment to culture and humanity:

The use of poetry as Mandelstam sees it [...] is to keep a home for humanity, to make possible that lightness of allusion, that intimacy of tone, by which moral judgments are most successfully conveyed. [...] The most hopeful sign in our dark and criminal century has been the endurance of the word in the writing of the best Russian poets. They have raised a monument not so much to themselves as to the human spirit.66

The interchange of aesthetic and ethical values and their relative status is one intriguing element in the establishment of a canonical Mandel’shtam. Seamus Heaney exemplifies wariness about valorising the moral narrative over the poet’s work in saying of Mandel’shtam and Zbigniew Herbert that ‘the admirable thing about those lives is precisely that they demand to be read as lives, not just as literary careers’.67 Geoffrey Hill, fully alert to, and persuaded by Mandel’shtam’s example, is determined to argue that Mandel’shtam’s greatness resides in an unfaltering capacity, once restarted in 1931, to sustain his art and voice, to produce words and rhythms that survive hauntingly on their own merit.68 In the late 1970s, joyous delight greeted the publication in translation of Mandel’shtam’s memoir Shum vremeni (The Noise of Time), and similarly the Puteshestvie v Armeniiu (Journey to Armenia), appreciated as evidence that the trip had set him free’.69 Thomas regarded it as ‘blackest comedy’, while Heaney revelled in Mandel’shtam’s ‘pure happiness’ and rejoiced to see that the poet of Kamen’ had regained his faith in the durability of language, citing Mandel’shtam’s own dictum in the Puteshestvie v Armeniiu that ‘the Armenian language cannot be worn out because its boots are made of stone’.70 If Bruce Chatwin, the most fashionable of all connoisseurs of beauty, was prepared to write about Nadezhda Mandel’shtam and to introduce the translation of the

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67 Quoted in the Editorial, PN Review, 74 (July–August 1990), 4.
*Puteshestvie v Armeniiu* it was a sure sign that Mandel’shtam had become indispensable as a touchstone for certain values. Chatwin found in the *Puteshestvie v Armeniiu* and the *Chetvertaia proza* together a remarkable instance of creative psychology, noting the genetic link between the ‘angry, elliptical and cathartic’ essay and conversely the ebullient style of the *Puteshestvie v Armeniiu* in which ‘Mandelstam’s old trust in the resources of language, his identification with the clarity and Classical aura of the Mediterranean, his rejoicing in the “Hellenic” nature of the Russian inheritance, the ebullient philological certitude of his essay “On the Nature of the Word”’ — all was revived by his physical encounter with the ‘Armenian language and landscape’.

We see among British critics a new consensus that the response of Russian poets to their difficult cultural situation is one of the highest sanity and courage rather than reckless martyrdom. If Mandel’shtam’s reputation as a charismatic poet began in the early 1980s to emerge on the American side, no such characterisation attached to the equally sympathetic but differently nuanced reading of his actions, manner and, above all, poetry among British poets and critics. The emphasis fell more on Mandel’shtam’s rational choices, points of ambivalence (an approach also advanced in scholarship by Mikhail Gasparov that went unnoticed by most Russian language critics). John Bayley surmised that when Mandel’shtam republished ‘Sumerki svobody’ (‘Let Us Praise the Twilight of Freedom’) in 1928 he deleted the two references to the ‘Soviet night’ ‘in the interests of discretion and concealment’.

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72 Heaney, ‘Osip and Nadezhda Mandelstam’, 5
73 Ibid., 6.
of revolution’ was committed to ‘changing continuity’, to a form of repetition in which ‘form counts for less than impulse’. For those who read Mandel'shtam’s understanding of culture not merely as a regret for the past but as expansive, this provided a view of history as dynamic change that could not be excluded from poetry and, if anything, was its proper subject matter. Seamus Heaney reminds us that Mandel'shtam’s essay ‘Gumanizm i sovremennost’ (‘Humanism and the Present’), published in 1923 in the Berlin émigré newspaper Nakanune (On the Eve) expressed hope for the post Civil War settlement; it is possible that Mandel'shtam was putting a brave face on it. While Heaney admits that in retrospect the piece ‘takes on a tragic and ironical colouring’, he entertains the possibility that Mandel'shtam, ambivalent or fooled, harboured an optimistic view of the Revolution, hedging and hoping that extremes would be reversed and the commitment to a socialist ideal might be attainable free of Bolshevik dictatorship.

It is because such readers are aware of how difficult it is to decipher political intentions at such a distance, that they refrain from valorising a moral narrative that assigns clear-cut intentions. Reviewing Heaney’s book The Redress of Poetry, the editorial in PN Review (1990) refers to his ‘beloved Mandelstam’ as one of a select set of poets ‘show how poetry’s existence at the level of art relates to our existence as tens of society — how it is of present use’. Yet this view is more communitarian than political or ideological; if anything it endorses a more aggressive retreat from any party programme by arguing that

there should be no difference in kind between the ‘artistic space’ (as opposed to the political space) of Mandel’shtam and Sidney, of Herbert and Bishop; the differences are in the occasions the poets respond to, in the vigour and valour of the achieved artefact, the completeness or otherwise of the transfigurations through words.

The tendency might also reflect a dominant leftist tilt to the politics of the British literary establishment. It takes an overtly right-wing anti-communist like A. L. Rowse to prove an exception to the rule by seeing

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in Mandel’shtam a victim of Marxism, ‘a Marxism that has spread to England’s shores’.79

From the premise that Mandel’shtam should be valued primarily as a craftsman of verse language, other conclusions followed. It was felt that he had been harassed and marginalised because he followed his bent for aesthetic rather than political art. The willingness to acknowledge a moral dimension to his verse and behaviour was tempered by a fear that political statement would distort the meaning of his poems and overshadow his poetic greatness. Even from the start, then, a poet like Geoffrey Hill, alive to poetry as acts of witness and conscience, makes the ‘Fedra’ (‘Phaedra’) poem from *Tristia* his touchstone. In that connection, Hill and many others accord proper respect to Nadezhda Mandel’shtam’s memoirs (which enjoyed dramatisation and staging in 1983), but wish to distance her testimony from the poems themselves.80

Because Mandel’shtam had acquired a readership and a profile of his own, discussions of Nadezhda Iakovlevna and Mandel’shtam within the British context tend to be separate, treating her as a great writer in her own right. To call him merely a victim is to group with him the anonymous millions caught up in the terror machine; yet to read him at the level of the ‘bitch pack’, Bayley’s tart phrase for *publitsistika* focused on domestic detail and banal domestic rows, was in his view no great addition to the claims of his art.81 We see that a distinct reluctance to make heroic claims, or to perpetuate the line that Mandel’shtam was a holy fool, followed from an aversion to moralizing about poetry. Most treat the Stalin epigram as a mistake rather than deliberately suicidal although, praised as ‘brave and brilliant’, it serves as a cornerstone of the defence of poetic free speech.82 Donald Rayfield, unusually positioned as both scholar and gifted literary journalist, goes against the current in arguing that from 1910 Mandel’shtam had been spoiling for a fight against the state, and that his anti-Stalinism grew out of

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82 Hugo Williams, cited in John Mole, ‘Daisy chains and trains’, *TLS*, 1 February 2002, 11; the poem was included for display in the Poems on the Underground exhibition.
antipathy for absolute regimes. For Gifford, the careers of Pound and Maiakovskii presented the two most instructive counter-examples of political poets to Mandel'shtam as a poet of pure art as well as poet of conscience. He quotes Tsvetaeva’s dictum that ‘Mayakovsky does not forgive powerlessness’, there is a sense in which their betrayal of art for the sake of political programmes spells a loss of a moral compass that whether tragic or farcical meant each writer forfeited some degree of respect in posterity. On this argument, poetry vitiated by political delusion or principle loses its authority because it offers no outside perspective and can therefore not be taken too seriously as a critical judgement on the age. There are sins of commission as well as misjudgment. The explicitly anti-democratic stance Pound took in praising Mussolini, his contempt for the people, look objectionable when juxtaposed with Mandel'shtam’s solidarity with the masses, and his alienation from literary life. As Gifford says, when much of Pound outside the *Pisan Cantos* and much of Maiakovskii are set against Akhmatova’s *Requiem* and Mandel'shtam’s ‘Voronezh poems’, they look marginal rather than like central statements made from the margins. Such an approach does not overplay the heroism; if anything it aims to anchor it in a commitment to literature and language that was betrayed and compromised by the times.

Such views come close to an understanding of Mandel'shtam as exceptional, but also exceptionally rational, shown by one of his most perceptive contemporary commentators. For Lidia Ginzburg, who in the 1930s confined her most astute writings about Mandel'shtam to her notebooks, two forces were at play in Mandel'shtam’s creative psychology and ethos. The ability to write poetry, even against his better judgement and sense of self-preservation, was an organic part of his personality that defined him as a genuine poet in the highest existential sense. Derek Walcott in a poem written for Brodskii, ‘Forest of Europe’, celebrates the ‘divine fever’ of Osip Mandel'shtam (‘a fire whose glow warms our hands, Joseph’). Ginzburg, Hill and Walcott, to name a few, supported a view of Mandel'shtam as aware and

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dignified despite being trapped by the tide of history and circumstance. When confronted by political isolation and assailed by loneliness, Mandel'shtam’s ethical worth, in this cumulative trend, lies in the record of honest responsiveness to the times; and in the conclusion that he remained true to himself by deliberate decision. All adherents of the ‘noble victim’ paradigm are close, but the distinctions they draw point to a significant and possibly fundamental difference of opinion. This idea of Mandel'shtam as a smart person — not just the poetic id to his widow’s superego — challenges a very different portrait of Mandel'shtam, shaped by the larger idea of how poets should behave, as a ‘fool figure’, the latest instantiation of the Romantic ideal of poet as semi-insane visionary. More recently, Grigorii Kruzhkov expressed his consternation about a fashion of speaking of Mandel'shtam as an ‘odd little man or urban lunatic’, citing the monument to him in Voronezh as a grotesque piece of iconography, a monument to a distorted image.\(^85\)

While the Anglo-Irish reception of Mandel'shtam diverges from the tendency observed by G. S. Smith, it is undoubtedly true that biography could be an irresistible narrative means when put to service of ideological ends. Peter France expressed his anxiety that hero-worship had come to overshadow Mandel'shtam’s reputation, noting that ‘Nadezhda Mandelstam’s splendid memoirs have probably appealed far more to the English-speaking public than her husband’s poetry even though this was their \textit{raison d’être}.\(^86\) This reaction seems to convey a warning from the British perspective about the phenomenon of Mandel'shtam’s reception among American readers. Smith’s dictum about ‘lives rather than lines’ is borne out more on the American side of the equation. The American reception, largely as it can be traced through the pages of the \textit{Paris Review}, the \textit{New York Times} and the \textit{NYRB}, is more monolithic. It is the story of a single poetic David versus the Soviet Goliath or a parable for the Cold War antagonism of the mass collectivised state and inhuman killing machine versus Western liberal democracy in which individuals are not done to death for their formal choices and love of art. That is putting it crudely, but there is a view of Mandel'shtam that coheres with the anti-Soviet posture of establishment culture in these years.

\(^85\) Personal communication (Moscow, May 2013).
By contrast with the more apolitical English perspective, the American reception almost always began at the end of Mandel'sh'tam's life, firmly associated with anti-totalitarian values and heroic resistance. While he was never made into a spokesman for anti-communism, his widow's celebrity cast a long shadow. From the early 1960s until about 1981, Mandel'sh'tam as a victim overshadowed Mandel'sh'tam the poet. The selection of ten poems in translation made by Olga Carlisle and Robert (thoroughly hated by Nadezhda Mandel'sh'tam for their rewritings) published in December 1965 were landmarks, among the very first to appear in English.\(^7\) The NYRB, perhaps the premier establishment literary and cultural highbrow magazine of the age gave Mandel'sh'tam top billing as the cover item and the subject of three stories. No more authoritative and passionate advocate could be found than in the dazzling essay Isaiah Berlin provided at the start, while a memoir by Akhmatova followed the translations. Berlin, Akhmatova and, above all, Robert Lowell, made the most powerful trifecta imaginable in adding a forgotten poet to the canon of world literature from outside his native land and language. But from the start, and even before the sensational publication of Nadezhda Mandel'sh'tam's memoirs in 1970, the biographical narrative tinges the literary image. Lowell and Carlisle commented that the poems were 'among the last by Ossip Mandelst'amm [sic], [and] written during the apocalyptic days of the great Stalinist purges in the Thirties'. The set included versions of 'Sokhrani moiu rech' ('Preserve My Speech'), 'Net, ne spriatat'sia mne ot velikoi mury' ('No, I Cannot Escape This Grand Nonsense'), the Stalin epigram (said in the notes to have caused Mandel'sh'tam’s arrest), 'My s toboi na kukhne posidim’ ('We Will Sit in the Kitchen’), two poems ('Den’ stoial o piati golovakh’; ‘Ot syroi prostyni govoriashchaia’) presented as two parts of a single lyric called ‘Chapaev’.\(^8\) Lowell invented and affixed titles, including ‘The Future’ as the rubric over ‘Ne muchinistoi babochkoiu beloi’ (‘My Body, All that I Borrowed from the Earth’). That was the final poem chosen by Lowell and Carlisle who see it as a message from the Russian poet to those later readers who will be final comrades. Lowell and Carlisle gave emphasis to Mandel'sh'tam as the isolated outcast of totalitarianism well before the Parnassian poet of


Kamen’ appeared on the American poetic radar. This was the trend that the NYRB helped to establish and perpetuate. Their profile anticipated the wave of acclaim that followed on the publication of Nadezhda Mandel’shtam’s first volume of memoirs in the early 1970s. In a banner review of Hope Against Hope, Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, the chief book critic of The New York Times, saluted the author’s moral courage. But what he found most remarkable was the ‘very idea that a man could be persecuted so for writing a poem’.  

We see two separate impulses, different in origin but complementary and compatible, joining forces on the pages of the NYRB from the 1970s. Clarence Brown’s work set the academic seal on Mandel’shtam’s reputation as a poet, picking up where Poggioli left off and conclusively establishing his claims on posterity. Yet this literary appreciation was subordinated to the role of poet-martyr that suited the firmly anti-Soviet and vocally pro-dissident editorial slant of the NYRB, who rightly celebrated the devastating accomplishments of his widow. The joint article published by Brown and Nadezhda Mandel’shtam in October 1970 printed an account of the Stalin-Pasternak telephone call about Mandel’shtam. It takes up the story as published anonymously in 1958 in The New Reasoner, a version written by D. P. Costello. There was probably never any doubt that poetry mattered to Russians, an aspect of Soviet life that appealed to Western cultural commentators, especially on the Left. Michael Ignatieff comes close to glamorising oppression as an ideal creative state. He voices, perhaps unexpectedly, a nostalgia for the courage and daring bred by oppression:

When one looks back at it now, the Stalin-Mandelstam story, terrible as it is, cannot fail to awaken a certain dubious nostalgia. For centuries, censorship was the deference the Western state offered to the only power which stood in the state’s way, the power of the word. Dictatorship respected the word, even as it silenced it. The freedoms which have

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followed the abolition of censorship in Russia and the West seem bleak: the word has lost its power.\textsuperscript{91}

In that respect Mandel’shtam’s fate looked like an exemplary tale. What makes such a gloss tolerable, if it is, was the fact that readers considered it to have been authorised not only by the guardian of his legacy but by the poet himself. Nadezhda Mandel’shtam in her memoirs attributes to her husband a remark that has been widely reproduced after their English-language publication, ‘Why do you complain?...Poetry is respected only in this country — people are killed for it. There is no place where more people are killed for it’.\textsuperscript{92}

To be sure, the connection between inspiration and political repression can be contested. What was riveting, and might have constituted emotional proof of the claim that poetry was a life and death matter, was the drama of the Mandel’shtams’ life in the 1930s as evidence became available: the players were Pasternak, himself a victim, Bukharin, Stalin, and Nadezhda Mandel’shtam, who recounted the story based on what Pasternak had told her. This version aimed to correct many fundamental misapprehensions about events; it was written in 1965 and the fact that it took a full five years to be published abroad was in itself a small detail that told a story about heroism and the effectiveness of the Iron Curtain. As Brown wrote, ‘Stalin’s telephone call to Pasternak on that summer evening in 1934 is probably, in certain circles, the most celebrated use of the instrument since Alexander Graham Bell asked his assistant what God had wrought’.\textsuperscript{93} This was heady stuff in the context of Cold War politics, and it established the shape of Mandel’shtam’s reputation among this influential readership. Vladimir Nabokov, who had in the 1930s sweetly celebrated pre-revolutionary Mandel’shtam in The Gift,


\textsuperscript{92} Nadezhda Mandel’shtam, \textit{Hope Against Hope}, translated by Max Hayward (New York: Atheneum, 1970), p. 190 (as reported by her in the chapter ‘The Fatal Path’ (‘Gibel’nyi put’)). Although essentially apocryphal and taken on trust, the comment has been often repeated, e.g., Osip Mandel’shtam, \textit{Poems from Mandelstam}, translated by R. H. Morrison (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1990), p. 18, and used to frame the value of the poet’s legacy (‘a poet of towering proportions’, p. 22), implicitly enhanced because feared by the state.

\textsuperscript{93} Brown and N. Mandel’shtam, ‘The Nature of the Miracle’, 24; the episode was repeatedly picked up by later commentators as clinching proof of the moral defence of art argument or the battle between ‘poetry’ and ‘force’.
in his interview for the *Paris Review* (1967) expressed a scepticism that looks understandable when seen against this background: ‘Today, through the prism of a tragic fate, Mandelstam’s poetry seems greater than it actually is’. The metropolitan literary base, defined by the journals cited here, continue to relate to Mandel’shtam primarily for his political value and status as a martyr. By contrast, American universities incubated increasingly active Mandel’shtam studies as a sub-field of Russian poetics. Yet discussion of the political and moral implications of Mandel’shtam’s writings were virtually taboo in a field dominated by structuralist approaches.

The creation of a more rounded image of Mandel’shtam awaited the appearance of new translations such as offered by Brown and Merwin, and then Tracy’s versions of *Kamen*. Yet the initial martyr image survived reliably well into the 2000s. For instance, numerous pieces in the *New York Times Book Review*, encompassing everything from Maia Plisetskaia’s autobiography to Orlando Figes’s cultural history, literature often spuriously invoke the ‘grim fate’ of Mandel’shtam. His name became a byword for a certain exemplary fate. On 30 September 2001, Margo Jefferson included Mandel’shtam alongside Tom Clancy, Robert Ludlum and Doris Lessing as the author of one of the ‘texts of our time’ post- 9/11 for *Kamen*. A translation of ‘Pust’ imena tsvetushchikh gorodov’ (‘Let the Names of Flowering Cities’), wrongly dated to 1917 (rather than 1914), cements his relevance as a poet to a besieged city. In 2010, Michael Scammell argued that the brilliance of Mandel’shtam,

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95 In connection with the Stalin epigram, Anne Carson accords Mandel’shtam a cameo appearance in her ‘TV Men: Akhmatova (Treatment for a Script)’, *PN Review*, 126 (March–April 1999), 14–15.
96 Orlando Figes, ‘A Double Game with Stalin’, *NYRB*, 12 January 2012, 33. Here and in other reviews Figes essentially perpetuates what might be called the ‘New York Review of Books narrative’. That trajectory of appreciation probably dates to a piece by Isaiah Berlin that raises the theme of the poet’s sacrifice but pays equal attention to a remarkably insightful and vivid appreciation of Mandel’shtam’s qualities as a writer, a balance that will recede as the political narrative comes to dominate (Isaiah Berlin, ‘A Great Russian Writer’. Review, *The Prose of Osip Mandelstam*, translated by Clarence Brown, *NYRB*, 23 December 1965, 1–2. This text is followed by ‘A Portrait of Mandelstamm [sic]’ by Akhmatova that pays tribute to him as a ‘tragic figure’ who continued to write works of ‘untold beauty and power until the very end of his life’, works that were largely unknown and unavailable).
Akhmatova and Pasternak was the product of the Russian philosophical and literary tradition rather than political pressure. In journalistic criticism, this statement was more exception than rule.

The reception of Mandel'shtam and the story of his acceptance into a canon of great European writers occurred on a fault line between the American and British literary and academic establishments on the representation of his victimisation as the factor that determined his reputation. While from about 1981 champions like Heaney and Brodskii were perhaps going into overdrive to establish Mandel'shtam’s reputation, it now looks clear that at least in the US and starting from the mid-1960s, martyrology had overtaken Mandel'shtam’s art. As well as taking aim at academic scholarship on Mandel'shtam, about which he was publicly disparaging, Brodskii targeted the preference for lives over lines. The degree to which ‘Mandel'shtam’ had become a dissident brand assumed a degree of anecdotal absurdity in 1991 when the Modern Language Association rejected a proposal for a panel on Mandel'shtam at its annual convention. Grounds for refusal concerned the unsuitability of discussions built around single authors, seen as unfashionable at a moment when the death of the author as a theoretical premise was persuasive, at least to some. However, as a concession the committee recognized that Mandel'shtam was a rather special case, given his fate, and were prepared to allow a panel on Mandel'shtam and Nelson Mandela.

Non-Canonical Mandel'shtam

Within the English and American context, the poetry composed before 1926 constituted the canonical Mandel'shtam. In the early 1990s, nearly thirty years after Poggioli’s speculation about imperfect editions, two decades after Baines’s study, and a decade after Peter France’s overview of later Mandel'shtam in his book chapter, the message about a different sort of poet began to get through. Thomas saw in both Akhmatova and Mandel'shtam ‘new standards of poetic austerity and “hardness” with which to survive’, and also detected a greater poise about history than could be found in Blok, and perhaps a degree of fatalism. This idea of

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poetic sangfroid would be taken up later by Heaney who spoke of the ‘common sense of the craftsman’, and grouped Mandel’shtam with other poets (notably Rilke in his lecture ‘The Sound of Poetry’) whose poems are always rooted in real life, whose art does not exist for its own hermetic ends. This sense of Mandel’shtam as an experiential poet both at odds with, yet within, Soviet life, increased with the publication of more late Mandel’shtam in the original and in translation.

Critical assessment of the poems faced resistance among three constituencies. For a variety of reasons impossible to discuss here, scholarly methods devised to analyse earlier poems made little headway with the later works, which in the minds of some devotees were of a difficulty bordering on madness. English language readers fond of the modernist poet of classical archetypes found it hard to identify, and identify with, Mandel’shtam’s mature voices and changing poetics. And, finally, adherents to what I would call the ‘moral valour school’ had grave misgivings about poems on Soviet and national themes, most especially the controversial ‘Oda’.

Attachment to the canonical reputation of Mandel’shtam as defined primarily by his earlier work was pervasive, further reinforced by a sense of poetic prudence from readers restricted to reading him in translation. Frank Kermode cast the dynamic of canon formation as question of aesthetic choice guided by the pleasure of change. Conversely, modification to the canonical might occasion the displeasure of change. Negative reaction partly reflected hostility to the translations of Richard and Elizabeth McKane, which looked on a text-by-text basis more problematic than versions of the same poems as produced by the likes of Brown and Merwin who, for good or ill, had arguably created a single consistent style for Mandel’shtam. Previously the proportion of late, difficult poems to familiar, earlier poems had remained relatively small in anthologies, whereas there was now a larger body of texts whose tone was hard to judge, whose moral resilience no longer looked absolute. The imperfect state of the texts, reflecting the absence of reliable Russian

100 Heaney’s appraisal of Mandel’shtam’s craft is taken up in the editorial of the PN Review, 63, September–October 1988, p. 1.
101 As reported in Harry Guest, ‘Cantos at Kantō’, PN Review, 62, July–August 1988, 23.
103 Pilling, ‘Before Yesterday, and After’, 56.
editions (a point importantly trailed by Baines) was compounded by the highly erratic quality of the translations. No stranger to difficult poetry, John Pilling, writing for the *PN Review* worried whether translation had made the *Voronezhskie tetradi* poems look more elusive than they might actually be, but also expressed a sense of deprivation brought about by poems that seemed only half finished, by writing that lacked the poise and finish associated with Mandel'shtam. Resistance to the experiential poet or to a late style is a manifestation of the tug of familiarity with a writer the English poetic establishment thought it knew well. Even poems that Russian had internalised as classics, such as the Muscovite poems, ‘K nemetskoi rechi’ (‘To the German Language’), ‘Stikhi o russkoi poezii’ (‘The Verses on Russian Poetry’), in English engendered feelings of ‘bafflement and elation at being granted this kind of intimacy with the mercurial laboratory of Mandel'shtam’s sensibility’. The reception is not uniformly blinkered. Pilling, for one, ekes out a more positive view of the second of the *Voronezhskie tetradi* in which ‘most readers will look for the finesse they associate with Mandel'shtam, though this is different in kind from that found in the pre-1925 poetry’. Still, in 1991 Pilling clearly found it hard to overcome his sense of estrangement from a poet whose chief accomplishment was to preserve intact in the lyrics of *Tristia* both world culture and that longing for world culture, whereas the fragmentation of that culture with its uncomfortable alloying of the Soviet in the later poems confounds. By contrast, in a piece published in the *TLS* five years later, the poet Lachlan Mackinnon, while scathing about the translations which encouraged the view that Mandel'shtam had become an hysteric, clearly felt it was time to grasp the nettle and acknowledge that Mandel'shtam’s poetry was ‘notoriously difficult’, ‘allusive, elliptic and deeply attentive to both the acoustics and the etymology of its own language in ways that must defy translation’.

This cautious rowing back from first impressions of a late style possibly distorted through translation was a positive step. Moreover, Mackinnon relates none of this difficulty of the late lyric to biographical circumstance — he notes that the poems are ‘encrusted by legend’ — but adduces instead Brodskii’s view that

104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
in the later poems, especially in the ‘Stikhi o neizvestnom soldate’, we witness an ‘incredible psychic acceleration’. For Mackinnon, the appearance of Mandel’shtam’s late style was a moment to celebrate an ‘uncannily great poet, possibly the greatest of our century’. By the late 1990s the moment was ripe for an adjustment to his reputation, if not a full-blown reconsideration of it in the context of his full oeuvre as well as a more dispassionate consideration of the impartiality of Nadezhda Mandel’shtam’s memoirs. The disappearance of the authorities of the older generation, including Brodskii, and the rise of cultural studies, brought to a halt a new dynamic in the reassessment of Mandel’shtam.

For all groups of readers invested in Mandel’shtam as a certain type of poet, perhaps the greatest trial, and acid test, of received opinion surrounded attempts to understand the ‘Oda’. Since its publication in 1975, the ‘Oda’ continues to cause consternation. Among Mandel’shtam scholars it is almost a no-go area, a toxic battle ground. In 1981, Heaney wisely guessed that any attempt to describe Mandel’shtam’s politics of compromise as principled, rather than desperate, would unleash discord among his readers. Nobody should underestimate the degree to which, for reasons that remain mysterious and must be to a degree culturally determined, certain questions elicit almost elemental emotions rather than principled debate. Within the many pronouncements on Mandel’shtam’s life and fate, differences in emphasis and vocabulary articulate two poles of opinion. The division concerns the degree of complicity and awareness that Mandel’shtam exhibited with respect to his own position, and therefore the degree to which the outcome was the result of heroic defiance or blindness. In other words, is Mandel’shtam a martyr or, like Pasternak and Khlebnikov, an example of the poet as fool (iurodivyi)?

At just the moment when interest in the Stalin poems, epigram and ode, began to cause debate and real controversy in Anglo-American circles, we see a determined resistance among the hard-core Mandel’shtamovedy (Mandel’shtam specialists) of the 1980s to deliberating the place of these

poems in his oeuvre and evaluating their impact on his reputation. At the London conference, Gasparov opined that there was much more to be said about both the Stalin epigram and ode and Mandel'shtam’s intentions, but that the time was not ripe. Even the suggestion that critics might discuss intentions, rather than list allusions, caused division and open hostility among the panellists, as recorded in the published transcription of the event. Gasparov’s illuminating, albeit incomplete, remarks acknowledged that nobody was prepared to face the possibility that Mandel’shtam’s politics were more complex than the ‘moral valour’ school permitted. On the grounds that such discussion would cause considerable pain, he curtailed his remarks. The value of his intervention lay in the powerful suggestion that it was simplistic to view the ‘Oda’ as a taboo subject because it was a craven or desperate act of submission. Instead, he went one step further in hinting that Mandel'shtam might have been struggling to keep faith with some forms of socialism. The second speaker to tackle the topic was Brodskii who throughout the proceedings adopted a consistently sceptical view of Mandel'shtam studies, at one point accusing the scholarship of simply missing out the poetry altogether and failing to pay attention to how Mandel'shtam’s art worked because the obsession with subtextual sources had completely blinded it to elementary questions of critical reading. In the 1980s and the 1990s Brodskii’s close readings of a large range of Russian, English and American poets made him a much lauded revivalist of the art of close reading in the New Critical style, and he clearly took a dim view of the gap between his style of interpretation and a critical school that in his view misunderstood how poetry was written and how it signified, and failed to appreciate its true power. He had allies such as the editor of the PN Review, who supported Heaney’s similar credo that only through close encounters with poetic language and form would readers experience the living centre of poems, and that ‘questions of expressive forms and diction, theme […] lead towards the

larger questions that an intrepid reader might wish to call “moral”. The poets cited included Hill, C. H. Sisson and Davie, but once again Mandel'shtam provides the most challenging examples of the tense knot between the moral and the poetic. Pundits repeatedly adduce (and misquote) Mandel'shtam’s dictum, as said to Akhmatova, that only in Russia is poetry taken seriously because only Russia truly persecutes its poets. At the London meeting Brodskii stated his view that the ‘Oda’ was one of Mandel'shtam’s very greatest poems, and one of the greatest anti-Stalinist statements ever written, far more subversive than the notorious epigram. This statement was of a force and ostensible perversity — and Brodskii’s authority and conviction too imposing to contest — as to reduce the group to a stunned silence (after tart exchanges between members of the audience, also recorded).

On the Anglo-American side of the fence, other impassioned life-long advocates of Mandel'shtam grappled with the question, properly recognising that the combined evidence of biography and psychology, historical circumstance, and the texts themselves opened the late political poems to multiple readings, all troubling but for different reasons. J. M. Coetzee reads the ‘Oda’ not as an abject self-abasement but as a genuine ode of praise written emphatically in the conditional tense, a hedging of bets that attempts, on the one hand, to perform the ritual tribute of the genre and, on the other hand, to maintain a stance of totally contradictory irony. Such an interpretation, I would argue, implicitly groups Mandel'shtam with the likes of other Russian poets such as Gavrila Derzhavin and Pushkin willing to produce rhetorical statements of praise that bear the risk of moral compromise in the hope of a political breakthrough. While this view stops short of Brodskii’s compelling argument about the parodic and deadly subversiveness of the ‘Oda’, it advocates a need to start with the lines and read the poem as a complex verbal statement rather than to begin from the life and work inward. For at least one reviewer of Coetzee’s essays his explanation — or expiation — was insufficient to draw the moral sting of an act of compromise, a ‘desperate strategy’ used ‘to fabricate

the body of an ode without actually inhabiting it’. Davie, a lover of Mandel’shtam and an early champion in English, read the poem for the first time when reviewing Gregory Freidin’s scholarly monograph *A Coat of Many Colors*. Disillusioned by the ‘Oda’, he publicly lambasted Mandel’shtam and said he had lost all respect for him. The extreme response from a distinguished scholar of Pound, an expert reader of complex poetic statement and rhetoric, is disillusion in inverse proportion to erstwhile hero-worship. It makes it clear that once Mandel’shtam was seen as a political poet, regard for him as a poet who remained ethical because his work was non-political, was a premise that might be open to question. Valentina Polukhina in a letter to the *TLS* had earlier hammered home the message that ‘from the classic model lives of Mandelstam, Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova’, we should all know ‘that the degree of the poet’s lack of well-being in Russia almost always directly depends on his or her non-conformism’.

For Davie, Freidin’s reading of Mandel’shtam as a kenotic poet could not be reconciled with the ‘Oda’ as an act of self-abasement. Mandel’shtam, whose art he cherished for its love of life, whose image he worshipped as a victim of involuntary suffering, had to forfeit his moral stature and relevance. The sentence Davie imposes upon Mandel’shtam as a charismatic poet of self-sacrifice, whose praise of Stalin he reads as betrayal, is revulsion and expulsion. This distinguished lifelong advocate of the cause of Russian poets and Russian poetry turns belatedly against what he calls on the same pages the ‘inflation’ with which ‘groupies’ invested the lives of Russian poets and no longer sees any point in reading their lines. Mandel’shtam ‘cannot be so easily taken as a model by English language poets’, and Davie in his disillusion warns that we should be ‘prudently aghast at how Russian intelligentsia, before and

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after the Revolution, accorded to their poets (and also their musicians, notably Aleksandr Scriabin) the privileges of the mystagogue, the sage, and the scapegoat’. The outrage stands strikingly alongside the refusal to speak of the Stalin poem that marked the 1991 London conference, with the exception of Brodskii’s reading of it as a highly subversive work and among Mandel’shtam’s greatest poems. Davie was not alone in finding in one instance of disenchantment reasons to reconsider the equation of life and lines, and the potential cost to the proper appreciation of poetry on its own merits. Mandel’shtam’s name is likely to continue to be used as shorthand for the victim of totalitarian ideology and repression — and enlisted in the ranks of firm anti-Communists.

At the other end of the spectrum, and in Russian but still on the this side of the vanished Iron Curtain, the poet Vladimir Gandel’sman read the ‘Oda’ as an experimental work, a defiant statement of poetic freedom almost detached from aspects of political content and risk. But the forum for this type of reference may have shifted decisively to the realm of popular literature. Mandel’shtam continues, justifiably, to be seen as a poet devoured by the ‘wolfhound age’ that he so uncannily named. Now the standard-bearers of this view are commercial writers like Laurent Binet, whose 2011 novel about Reinhard Heydrich, HHhH, bears an epigraph from ‘Vek’ (‘Century’). The historian Anthony Beevor’s edition of Vasily Grossman’s war journalism begins similarly, while Robert Littell’s 2010 The Stalin Epigram pits Mandel’shtam in a face-to-face encounter with Stalin himself. By 2005, this antagonism to poetry that must be tested for its value by stories of persecution and assaults on integrity has hardened into what has been called ‘the Mandel’shtam syndrome’, a damning tag for the hold that Eastern European poetry had on the minds and hearts of its readers. It suggests that an appetite for lines over lives, a position I have described as the starting point in

the previous cycle of appreciation, finally began to obtain in a more
globalised literary field extended across borders.

Coda: Mandel'shtam at Home

There are numerous accounts of Mandel'shtam’s disappearance from
the printed page in Russia. In his Paris Review interview of 1982, Brodskii
said that Mandel'shtam was

still largely unpublished and unheeded — in criticism and even in private
conversations, except for the friends, except for my circle, so to speak.
General knowledge of him is extremely limited, if any. I remember the
impact of his poetry on me. It’s still there. As I read it I’m sometimes
flabbergasted.121

On the basis of the documentary reception presented here, with strong
evidence of a writer now firmly in the canon of translated European
poets, this despairing outburst of frustration by Brodskii expressed
the transcultural gap between appreciation at home and abroad. Yet
Russian conversations about Mandel'shtam were taking place, texts
were circulating, an invisible accumulation of regard was happening.
Putting one’s finger on his rescue from oblivion is more a question
of disconnected dots on a timeline than the steady snowballing effect
we see in the West. There comes a moment when, as he predicted in a
famous letter to Yuri Tynianov of 1937, Mandel'shtam, while modestly
summing up his poetic life as a mixture of the ‘important and trivial’,
concluded that after twenty-five years of ‘coming up against’ Russian
poetry (or ‘forming a crust on’ since the verb he uses can mean both) he
felt that ‘my poems will soon pour into and dissolve into it, changing
something in its structure and composition’.122 Mandel'shtam’s afterlife
abroad made him a canonical figure in America and the United
Kingdom before that prediction came true in Russian. His stature as a
classic of the Russian canon is perhaps an unfolding story, although that
chemical reaction he predicted now seems irreversible. If in fact it seems

sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh, edited by A. G. Mets, 3 vols. (Moscow: Progress-
almost more a matter of alchemy than the logic of literary history, it is
obviously because political circumstances in Soviet Russia constrained
the formation of a critical consensus before the 1990s.

The Khrushchev Thaw was too brief to be of more than limited benefit
to the restoration of Mandel’shtam’s work, especially his unpublished
later poems. The year 1965, however, did see the first public readings of
his poetry in thirty-two years held at Moscow University. Participants
included not only veteran contemporaries such as Kornei Chukovsky
and Il’ia Erenburg but the still unpublished Varlaam Shalamov, a
zek (labour camp prisoner) who read Mandel’shtam in clandestine
manuscript copies. Nadezhda Mandel’shtam finally felt the time was
ripe to publish new editions based on the substantial archive she had
so remarkably preserved throughout the Soviet period. But the very
substantial textual problems sorely tested the editorial abilities of Nikolai
Khardzhiev, whose flawed Biblioteka poeta edition (1973; 1974) appeared
well after the Thaw had ended and was quickly withdrawn as a political
misjudgment and excoriated in the émigré press as textologically
unreliable. As a result only handwritten or samizdat copies continued
to circulate, making the question of Mandel’shtam’s reception in late
Soviet Russia a matter of random interest. The children’s writer and
poet Marina Boroditskaia (b. 1954) records that Mandel’shtam, the last
of the great Silver Age poets to become accessible because he was ‘the
most forbidden’, eclipsed Pasternak and Akhmatova in her affections,
and that numerous poems from Tristia were easily memorised by radio
listeners even at a time when his name was still unprintable. Grigorii
Kruzhkov, the poet and gifted translator of English poetry, discovered
Mandel’shtam’s verse only in the late 1970s and came to see him as the
equal of Pasternak, both classics worthy to stand alongside Pushkin and

123 ‘Posmotrim, kto kogo pereuptriamit…’. Nadezhda Iakovlevna Mandel’shtam v pis’maakh, vospominaniakh, svidele’stvaakh (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo ACT, 2015), 214.
their first encounter with Mandel’shtam’s poetry in underground copies from
the late 1950s and through the 1960s, in some cases thanks to access to Nadezhda
Mandel’shtam who moved to Moscow in ř9̃ś. This handful of readers were
inevitably from the urban intelligentsia and often, as it happened, trained scientists
and mathematicians.
125 Marina Boroditskaia (personal communication, 11 May 2013, Oxford).
Evgenii Baratynskii, together with if slightly ahead of other beloved poets such as Blok, Georgii Ivanov, and Akhmatova.  

A generation later the phenomenon of Mandel’shtam as a quietly-absorbed revelation recurs, his reader base and place in the canon growing outside official literature from the ground up, almost reader by reader. The poet and academic Mariia Falikman first read some of Mandel’shtam’s late and most difficult poems, and found the rhythmic irregularities disturbing (a topic for scholarly discussion by Iu. D. Levin at roughly the same time). The publication of Nadezhda Mandel’shtam’s memoirs, with quotations from Mandel’shtam’s verse, expanded her awareness to a fuller range of poems and changes in his poetic vision and technique. By turning back to the earlier verse as texts became available during the perestroika period, Falikman began to make sense of the experimental quality of his later lyric and to acknowledge him as an influence on her own poetry.

Public events only served to formalise, and possibly expand, a truth hidden from distant advocates like Brodskii. Namely that, after his rehabilitation in 1956, Mandel’shtam steadily attracted the interest of a new generation of poetry readers despite the formidable obstacles they faced, including the absence of sound editions. By the time of the Mandel’shtam Centennial Celebration held in Moscow in 1991, a banned poet had become canonical even before most of his works could be published in his native country. To anyone who attended this particular event, however, it would have been very clear that among the large educated class of Russians-Muscovites and others Mandel’shtam was already a classic and much-loved figure; he was in the minds and on the tongues of hundreds of conference attendees who, often from the audience, fed speakers lines of his verse. With the newfound freedoms of perestroika, a generation of Mandel’shtam devotees such as Pavel Nerler and Iurii Freidin responded to obvious demand by producing new editions and making determined efforts to absorb a Western legacy of Mandel’shtam scholarship and foster home-grown studies. In the same year, a star of the new generation, Viktor Krivulin, provided an introductory essay to new English translations of poems from the

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126 Grigori Kruzhkov (personal communication, 11 May 2013, Oxford).
127 Mariia Falikman (personal communication, 13 May 2013, Oxford).
1930s, presented as *The Moscow Notebooks*, an invented title. Less than twenty years later, *Vozdukh* (*The Air*), founded in 2006 and the most impressive contemporary journal to publish new poetry and poetic criticism, took its epigraph from Mandel’shtam, whose name appears frequently on its pages as an acknowledged master but also interlocutor for contemporary poets.

A detailed reconstruction of this internal reception of Mandel’shtam, as told more consecutively through memoirs and anecdotes, would, I surmise, multiply the reactions cited above in fascinating detail. While entities like the Mandel’shtam Society (*Mandel’shtamovskoe obshchestvo*) have used a questionnaire to collect data about Mandel’shtam’s readership, including information about their preferences among his works, the evidence suggests that his canonical reputation remains uncontested among literary elites in both Moscow and St Petersburg, dovetailing with *perestroika* rather than being unleashed by political change. Within post-Soviet Russia, Mandel’shtam was inherited silently as part of a tradition that was being reconstituted because his life made him morally impeccable and his poems continued to strike a chord. While Nadezhda Mandel’shtam’s own legacy has now become the subject of debate, the questions about image manipulation that now accompany studies of Akhmatova do not assail Mandel’shtam.

Even a slender sample of websites, interviews in poetry magazines and private correspondence strongly attests to the view that Mandel’shtam remains central and essential because he is both classical and experimental. It is these dual qualities that are seen to make a poet generative beyond his own time. In this sense, the idea of the canonical

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129 From their original publication in Russian, Nadezhda Mandel’shtam’s books were given classic status along with Solzhenitsyn for their look into the Soviet system as much as their contribution to poetry. See Gleb Struve, ‘Nadezhda Mandelstam’s remarkable memoirs’, *Books Abroad*, 45: 2 (Winter 1971), 18–25. The ‘cult’ of Nadezhda Iakovlevna was more or less sanctioned in an anecdotal piece by Clarence Brown, ‘Every Slightest Pebble’, *LRB*, 25 May 1995, 24–27; inevitably her reputation, and Mandel’shtam’s image, have subsequently become entangled in evaluations of other memoirists, most especially that of Emma Gershtein, on which see Rachel Polonsky, ‘Beneath the Kremlin Crag’, *TLS*, 14 May 2004, 9; Pavel Nerler, ‘V poiskakh kontseptsii: kni\oga Nadezhdy Mandel’shtam ob Anne Akhmatovoi na \one perepiski s sovremennikami’, in *Nadezhda Mandel’shtam, Ob Akhmatovoi* (Moscow: Novoe izdatel’stvo, 2007), pp. 7–108.
acquires another dimension to merely historical significance. In his manifesto for *Vozdukh*, the editor Dmitrii Kuz’mín wrote eloquently about the relation between major and minor poets, and the work of literary histories to account for secondary and tertiary byways and even dead-ends. He cites Mandel’shtam as the measure of poetic greatness, a sound yet remarkable judgement when we think how little his poetry was known before the 1970s. By comparison, it is instructive to see how other poets interviewed in *Vozdukh* identify Brodskii as a classic, a great poet who, in the words of Aleksei Tsvetkov and Tat’iana Shcherbina, shut down traditions, unlike Nikolai Zabolotskii or Mandel’shtam who are cited as living sources for new poetry. Mandel’shtam’s reticulations to the Pushkinian tradition of lyric do not camouflage an avant-garde trend that leads Alexander Skidan to associate his later poetry with Velimir Khlebnikov and Konstantin Vaginov. Important poet-critics like Brodskii and Ol’ga Sedakova each in their own way anticipated the impasse by rooting the authority of the poet firmly in artistic genius. For Brodskii, the moral stature of a writer could only be a matter of consideration if it depended on aesthetic statements, and if poetry formulated ideas in ways that remained true to his ideals of poetry. For Sedakova, who, like Brodskii, admires the capacity of the poet to de-familiarise and make us see, the great moral stability of Russian poetry lay not in its martyrology but rather in its escapism to a greater appreciation of reality, in which few can compete with Mandel'shtam’s ‘intelligence of sight, of hearing’ (umnost’ samogo glaza, slukha).

Arguably, the true measure of Mandel’shtam’s post-Soviet reception, present of course in the now large body of scholarship, memoir-literature and biography of Russian Mandel’shtamovedenie, will be in his influence on poets and their lyric writing — in other words his contribution to the creation of a new canon. Meanwhile, outside the virtual reality of literature, physical landscapes now feature Mandel’shtam and tangibly...

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bear witness to his newly established place. In a now famous letter to Tynianov, written just a year before his final arrest, Mandel'shtam declared that he was not a ‘ghost’ and was still ‘casting a shadow’. Once he became a non-person, he was of course not even a shadow since his writings were left unpublished, unmentioned and unstudied. In the post-Soviet period, acts of commemoration have restored him to the cityscapes of St Petersburg and Moscow, his new textual presence in monuments and texture. Like Pushkin, whose celebrated imitation of Horace boasted that his posthumous fame would reach the entire extent of Russia’s vastness, effigies of Mandel'shtam exist nearly at both ends of Russia. The first of three monuments erected to the poet was in Vladivostok, his final scheduled destination, and is located at 41, ulitsa Gogol’.

In Moscow, the unveiling in late November 2008 of a statue commemorated the seventieth anniversary of Mandel'shtam’s death in a transit camp on the way to the Far East; a bust of Mandel'shtam, undertaken at the initiative of a group led by the poet Oleg Chukhontsev, was unveiled at 5, ulitsa Zabelina. This is the site of the communal apartment block where the Mandel'shtams were frequent overnight guests of his brother, Aleksandr. The bust, on top of a slender black marble column, is the work of the sculptors Dmitrii Shakhovskoi and Elena Munts. It bears as an inscription the opening lines of the poem ‘Za gremuchiui doblest’ giadushchikh vekov’ (‘For the Ringing Renown of Future Ages’). The third statue is in Voronezh, a full-sized bronze statue by Lazar Gadaev unveiled in November 2008 near the house where the Mandel'shtams lived from 1934–1937. Like the other representations, the image of the poet fixes his characteristic gesture of tilting his head back, his eyes shut as though in a trance, a posture that contemporaries note in memoirs and even in poetry (Tsvetaeva, among others). The figure stands in front of a handsome stone on which his name and dates are inscribed in gilt letters. A number of historic plaques indicating the poet’s places of residence have been installed in St Petersburg and Moscow. In June 2009, under the aegis of the Mandel'shtam Society of Moscow, a group travelled to Cherdyn’, the original place of the

132 A concise timeline of the monument’s history and its opening can be found online at http://polit.ru/article/2008/08/27/vladivostok.
Mandel'shtams exile before their transfer to Voronezh, to unveil a slate tablet on the outside wall of the hospital where Mandel'shtam broke his arm after jumping from a window.

Fig. 6.1 Memorial plaque on the outside wall of the hospital in Cherdyn’. © Andrew Kahn, CC BY 4.0.