THE CONSTRUCTION OF POETIC IDENTITY IN THREE WOMEN POETS: POZZI, MISTRAL, AND AKHMATOVA

A Thesis by

Ineta Strems-Tregear

Bachelor of Arts, Wichita State University, 2009

Submitted to the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literature and the faculty of the Graduate School of Wichita State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

May 2012
©Copyright 2012 by Ineta Strems-Tregear

All Rights Reserved
THE CONSTRUCTION OF POETIC IDENTITY IN THREE WOMEN POETS: POZZI, MISTRAL, AND AKHMATOVA

The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Liberal Studies

________________________
Wilson Baldridge, Committee Chair

________________________
David Soles, Committee Member

________________________
Eunice Myers, Committee Member

________________________
Francisco Flores-Cuautle, Committee Member
DEDICATION

To my husband, my sons
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Wilson Baldridge for his support and mentorship throughout my years at Wichita State University as a student, a teacher, and the long journey of my dissertation. I am truly indebted to his humanness, professionalism, encouragement, and resolute dedication to the critique of my writing. Thank you.

I would also like to thank Dr. Francisco Flores-Cuautle, my Spanish professor during my Master’s program, whose fervor of the language, brilliant teaching, and kindness has been a great source of inspiration to me.

I would like to thank Dr. Susan Matvejeva—a mentor in my Russian writing and a friend. I am so thankful for her intellect and the many hours Susan has spent advising me.

I am earnestly obliged to Dr. Eunice Myers, also one of my Spanish professors, for her enthusiasm, encouragement, and for welcoming me to the Spanish department.

I would most sincerely like to thank Dr. Soles, my official advisor in the Master’s program, whose encouragement has been invaluable and a very significant part of my journey. I will always be grateful to him and will always remember him.

And finally, I would also like to thank my friends, Brenda and Jason for listening to me talk nonstop of my dissertation and for their endless support.

Last but certainly not least, I am grateful for all of my dear students who have reminded me to pause and laugh along the way.
ABSTRACT

This paper explores the construction of poetic identity in three women-poets: Catherine Pozzi, Gabriela Mistral, and Anna Akhmatova by studying relationships between the poets’ life and their poetry. It is focused on tragic or controversial situations in these poets’ lives and the reflections of these situations in images of love and suffering in their poems. My intention is to show that biographical approach retains its value in literary criticism under condition that its limitations are acknowledged. The dark, intertextual, and mysterious images of love and suffering in Pozzi’s poems reflects her poetic identity, which was formed as “sum-total” (Leslie Fiedler) of her knowledge of literature, philosophy, religion, and science; her cultural and intellectual environment; her sophisticated personality together with her sensitivity and long physical struggle with incurable illness. I can only speculate on Mistral’s possible lesbian identity by analyzing her poetry because poetic identity and biographical facts are not the same. Some expression of suffering of her poems certainly relates to the image of “other” woman that Mistral wanted to kill. Akhmatova’s famous cycle Requiem is autobiographical, but it would be a mistake to reduce the poem to the tragic story of her life. Requiem includes many poetic identities: poetic “I”, but also “we” who can be Russian women, those who suffered with Akhmatova, or those who mourned their dead in other historical times, or unnamed peasant woman who was crying on the river Don, or even Virgin Mary when she was staying in silence next to her dying son. We conclude in thesis that there is no direct connection between the poets’ life and their poetic identities; this connection is always mediated. But learning about poets’ live experiences adds more to the meaning and understanding of their poetry.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. IMAGES OF LOVE AND SUFFERING IN THE POETRY OF CATHERINE POZZI</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. LESBIAN IDENTITY IN GABRIELA MISTRAL’S POETRY: A CONTROVERSY</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. BIOGRAPHICAL FACTS AND POETIC IDENTITY IN ANNA AKHMATOVA’S <em>REQUIEM</em></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix I. Poetry of Catherine Pozzi</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2. Poetry of Gabriela Mistral</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 3. Poetry of Anna Akhmatova</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

What are the relationships between the poet’s life and her poetry? How important are studies of these relationships for understanding the poetry? Leslie A. Fiedler, in his well-known essay “Archetype and Signature: A Study of the Relationship between Biography and Poetry,” reinstated values of the biographical approach as an important method of literary criticism. Fiedler shows the limitations of anti-biographical criticism: he argues that the impact of individual factors could not be disregarded in contemporary literary criticism because poetry is a result of a “sum-total of individuating factors in a work, the sign of the Persona or Personality, through which an Archetype is rendered, and which itself tends to become a difficult subject as well as a means of the poem.” (Fiedler 262). It is impossible to draw parallels between the work the poet writes and the work he lives, between the life he lives, and the life he writes. By recognizing the sophisticated complexities of “individuating factors” in poetry, the biographical method allows one to achieve “new ways of connecting the Poet and the poem... the lived and the made, the Signature and the Archetype.” (Fiedler 273).

In my study, I explore selected poems of three very different poets: French: Catherine Pozzi, Chilean: Gabriela Mistral, and Russian: Anna Akhmatova. It is my intention to show the appropriateness of the biographical method for literary analysis of the poems. In my exploration of the connection of the poetry and the poet, I rely on the concepts of identity as described by Jonathan Culler in Chapter 8: “Identity, Identification, and the Subject” of his Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction (Culler 148-181).
First, I will talk about Catherine Pozzi and the impact of her life situations on the construction of her poetic identity as expressed in her poetry. I understand “poetic identity” as a personal “signature”, a recognizable yet dynamic “fusion” that is formed as Fiedler’s “sum-total” of many internal and external factors. I will show that the “sum-total” of Pozzi’s education, broad interests in literature, philosophy, religion, and science; her cultural and intellectual environment; her sophisticated personality together with her sensitivity, long physical struggle with incurable illness, and failure in relationship with men, contributed to the creation of the dark, intertextual and mysterious poems (Chapter 1).

Then, I will speculate on construction of a Mistral’s possible lesbian identity; although it didn’t become the main characteristic of her poetry, it brought certain poetic images and topics to her work. Some of her poems could be interpreted in terms of a struggle between her personal and social identities (Chapter 2).

Finally, I will talk about Anna Akhmatova, adding efforts to interpret well-known facts of her biography, the impact of her historical and social context to her multi-faceted poetic identities as they expressed themselves in her poetic cycle Requiem. (Chapter 3).
CHAPTER 2
IMAGES OF LOVE AND SUFFERING IN THE POETRY OF CATHERINE POZZI

Catherine Pozzi’s life has heavily influenced the topics of her poetry. Pozzi was born to a wealthy family and received a good education. This helped her to learn how to write and gave her a way to publish her poetry. She did not have good relationships with men and suffered a lot in her relationships. She was also in pain from an illness with which she struggled for most of her life. This pain and suffering is what she wrote about. She wrote about her struggles in her journals and these struggles become figures in her poetry. Six of her most famous poems are “Ave,” “Vale,” “Nyx,” “Maya,” “Nova,” and “Scopolarmine.” “Ave” and “Vale” were written during her relationship with Paul Valéry and talk about the pain she suffered in that relationship. “Nyx” was the last poem she wrote. “Nyx” talks about her past love and relationships and her impending death. Pozzi’s poetry has been compared to the works of Louise Labé and Petrarch. Labé and Petrarch both wrote about pain and suffering, but they focused on love while Pozzi focused on death and the end of all things, including relationships. Pozzi’s poetry is very different because it was influenced by sixteenth century writers, but was written in the early twentieth century during a period of multiple literary movements.

“Nyx” was the last poem that Catherine Pozzi wrote before she died in 1934 from Tuberculosis. The poem is full of symbolism. The name “Nyx” is Greek for night. “Nyx” was first talked about in Hesiod’s “Theogony.” Nyx was a woman who struggled a lot. Nyx is night and night is dark. The dark refers to trouble, death, depression, and loneliness. After looking at Pozzi’s life and relationships, it is easy to see why she chose the name of “Nyx” for her poem. Pozzi was in a dark time: she was alone and dying. She was suffering from tuberculosis and in a
lot of pain. She was having “visions” from the medications she was taking. Stopa-Hunt says Nyx is a “...literally subjunctive quietus, mooted rather than expected. Yet it is still like an unsteady domino: lightly touched, death’s image precipitates a cascade of unknowing”. The lyrical voice imagines “dying ‘Sans avoir su d’où je vous possédais [without having known when I possessed you], and this is the first of many ignorances, since she also cannot know...” (Stopa-Hunt 1).

Pozzi starts “Nyx” with “O vous mes nuits, ô noires attendues” [Oh you my nights, oh long awaited darkness]. “Nuits” is a direct reference to “Nyx.” She makes this poem personal by using “mes.” The poem is then made into her story. The “Nyx,” the “death” we are reading about is more than Pozzi’s own death, it is the dimension of erasure and absence in the poem. The second part of this line is a reflection of her struggle in life. For Pozzi, death is not quick, nor a surprise: it is something long awaited; “ô noires attendues”. Waiting for death indicates a drawn out struggle and in Pozzi’s case this struggle was with her health and tuberculosis.

The next line of Nyx is “O pays fier, ô secrets obstinés” [Oh proud land, oh steadfast secrets]. The poem was written in the tradition of Louise Labé and in 16th century French, “pays” referred to one’s homeland. In Nyx this homeland is death. “Pays” is derived from the Latin “pagus.” “Pagus” was an area controlled by a medieval count. In Pozzi’s poem that medieval count is “Nyx.” The “secrets obstinés” are the ones that haunt people in life. These steadfast secrets could be identified as the transgressions that follow people through life. The transgressions Pozzi could be referring to are her various love affairs including the one with Paul Valéry.

The next line in Nyx says “O longs regards, ô foudroyantes nues” [Oh longing looks, oh thundering clouds]. According to Stopa-Hunt, death is like love for Pozzi; she draws a world
inflected by the tumults which drove ‘Ave’ and ‘Vale’: the night is a thing of lover-like ‘long regards’ and ‘secrets obstinés’. The universe itself has become that immeasurably responsive and fascinating other being, the shell which Pozzi again and again holds to the self’s ear. The last lines are less definitely oriented towards loss.” Pozzi looks at death with yearning. She accepts death and cannot wait for it to come. The “foudroyantes nues” are a reference to her struggle with tuberculosis. She knows that the worst is to come, like a storm brewing in the distance. The last line of the first stanza, “O vol permis oute les cieux fermés” [Oh flight allowed beyond the closed –in skies]. The “vol” that she speaks about is her journey to the afterlife. The “cieux fermés” are closed because she still is alive and has some time: her “vol” is currently delayed.

Pozzi starts the second stanza with “O grand désir, ô surprise épandue” [Oh great desir, oh surprise poused forth]. For Pozzi the “grand désir” she is waiting for is death. Death is her freedom from her pain and suffering in life. In order to understand the second part, you have to trace the word “épandue” back to its origins. “Épandue comes from the Latin word ‘pandere’ which means to spread, unfold, extend. In this case, the surprise would be unfolding, “pouring fort.” Pozzi desires death, yet she does not fully understand what death is or what it means to die. For her it is a surprise spreading out before her eyes.

The next line in this stanza is “o beau parcours de l’esprit enchanté” [Oh beautiful journey of the enraptured spirit]. The journey that she speaks of in this line could refer to one of two things. The journey could be talking about the course of one’s life or afterlife. Since this line is positive, it can be said that she is referring to the journey after death. She speaks of the “beau parcours” with neither pain nor struggling. Rather than “l’esprit” being depressed or
upset, “l’esprit” is described as “enchanté.” Note the allusion to the chant, that is, to the musical dimension of the poetic utterance.

Pozzi continues by saying “O pire mal” [Oh worst ill] in the third line of the second stanza. For Pozzi the worst ill has been life. She has failed at love. She is in poor health. She has spent the majority of her life in pain and struggling. She continues to say “ô grâce descendue” [Oh grace descended]. This is a reference to her “esprit enchanté.” Her soul has now been lifted from her body and her pain and struggling has ended. She ends this stanza by saying “O porte ouverte où nul n’avait passé” [Oh open doors through which no one had passed]. This is the very end for her.

Pozzi spends the third stanza questioning her life. She starts the stanza by saying “Je ne sais pas pourquoi je meurs et noie/Avant d’entrer a l’éternel séjour” [I do not know why I die and drown/Before entering the eternal abode]. Everyone dies and each day we are alive and dying, but Pozzi does not know why she is suffering. She does not know why she has to die the way she does. She is miserable and would prefer to go peacefully rather than to continue struggling.

Pozzi ends the third stanza by saying “Je ne sais pas de qui je suis la proie/Je ne sais pas de qui je suis l’amour” [I do not know whose prey I am/I do not know whose love I am]. Again, Pozzi is questioning her death. She does not understand why she must suffer and why she cannot die simply. In the first of these two lines she portrays herself as a victim, in her words “la proie.” The last line is a reflection upon her relationships with people in the past. All her romantic relationships were failures. She was not very close to people. Her world was very dark and lonesome.
In “Nyx” there are three themes: Love, Death, and Suffering. In her article, “Un néant follement attifié” : modernité de Renée Vivien et Catherine Pozzi” Elisabeth Cardonne-Arlyck writes about “Nyx”:

“... Louise Labé, à qui Pozzi dédia son dernier poème, Nyx : “A Louise aussi de Lyon et d’Italie. “C’est retourner à une forme qui a traversé le temps. Or il s’agit bien dans le poème d’un futur retour à une nouvelle forme de soi, à travers la dissolution de la mort- réunification de soi en un amour, ‘vive unité sans nom et sans visage ‘, qui ne saurait être que divin. La préciosité à la fois énigmatique et brillante du poème, faite de parallélismes et de répétitions, de termes abstraits et d’oxymores, figure de la pensée paradoxale (‘cœur de l’esprit’, ‘centre du mirage’), son déploiement soutenu, de vers en vers, en un seul souffle, sa circularité finale, en font l’équivalent de ce ‘seul trésor’ dont il célèbre le désir et l’obtention au-delà de la mort. En sa perfection formelle, le poème donne pour acquis ce à quoi il aspire, de même qu’il imagine un retour à un amour ‘ qui [passe] la mémoire ” (Cardonne-Arlyck, p. 120) [Louise Labé, to whom Pozzi dedicated her last poem “ Nyx”: ‘To Louise also from Lyon and Italy. “It’s a way of returning to a form that had traveled through time. Non, in the poem, it is indeed about a future return to a new form of the self, by way out of the dissolution of death-reunification of the self within a love, ‘a living unity, nameless and faceless,’ which could only be divine. The virtuosity is at once

1 Labé had fled her hometown of Lyon for Italy in 1564 during the Plague. By 1565 she was in very bad health and suffering. She died in 1566 from this illness. No one knew more about suffering and a painful death than Louise Labé.
brilliant and enigmatic of the poem, made of repetitions and parallelisms, oxymorons and abstract terms, which configure paradoxical thought (the heart of the mind: “certes of the mirage”) it is sustained unfolding, from line to line, in a single breath, its final circularity, make of it the equivalent of this “only treasure” of which it celebrates the desire and obtention beyond death. In its formal perfection, the poem makes a done deal of that to which it aspires, in the same way that it imagines return to a love “that exceeds all memory.” (120)

Pozzi’s poem appears to be only about death, but after reading the poem again, it is also about love and romantic relationships and the struggles with each. Pozzi had struggled with tuberculosis for 24 years. She knew that her life was ending soon, just as she knew her relationship with Valéry would end when she wrote “Ave” and “Vale”. Every beginning has an end and this was her final goodbye. The very first verse of “Nyx” is her call, her willingness to answer death. The second verse is similar, but in this verse she looks back on her life and the “beau parcours de l’esprit enchante.” In the final verse, she has answered death and is willing to die but does not know why it has to be today. She is confused and it seems that she is unsure of the purpose of her life.

If we look at the poem from the perspective of her relationships, we see the same thing. The difference is that in the end she is lost, alone, and confused. In the first verse, again, she accepts her end. She knows it is coming. This is true of all relationships, as they end because of death or separation. “O long regards,” are a recollection of the past. “ô foudroyantes nues” are the fights, the arguments that usually occur at the end of a failed relationship. “O vol permis outre les cieux fermés” is the journey, the struggle that every woman, every person must take
to move on from their previous relationship. The second verse is much like the first, but it is more of a tale or a chronology of a relationship. At the beginning there is a lot of desire, passion, and surprise. The journey is beautiful, but then things go bad and that is the ill she talks about. At the end of the second verse, she has accepted the fact that the relationship is over and she is ready to start moving on: “O porte ouverte où nul n’avait passé.” In the final verse of this poem, Pozzi is left brokenhearted. She says “Je ne sais pas pourquoi je meurs et noie.” Her world as she knew it has come to an end. With this end, her outlook on life is negative; it seems to have lost all meaning: “Je ne sais pas de qui je suis la proie, je ne sais pas de qui je suis l’amour [ I do not know whose prey I am/ I do not know whose love I am].

Elisabeth Cardonne-Arlyck (op. cit. p. 120 ) says about “Nyx,” “Opter pour l’ode et le décasyllabe, c’est déclarer son appartenance à la plus ancienne tradition, grecque et médiévale, ainsi qu’à la Renaissance de Louise Labé...” [“To opt for the ode and the ten syllableline, is to declare one’s belonging to the most ancient traditions, Greek and Medieval, as well as to the Renaissance of L.L”], The poems “Nyx, Labé’s Sonnet II, and Petrarch’s Sonnet 88 are written using the Petrarchan Sonnet. Petrarch’s Sonnet 88 consists of four stanzas. The first two stanzas consist of 4 verses each and the last two stanzas consist of three verses each. The Sonnet is in the “A-B-A-B” format, meaning that the last words rhyme in both the first and second verses and the third and fourth verses. Petrarch’s Sonnet 88 looks like: “A-B-B-A,” “A-B-B-A,” “C-D-E,” “D-C-E.” Labé used a similar form of the Petrachan Sonnet. Her Sonnet consists of four stanzas, as well. Like Petrarch’s the first two stanzas have four verses each and the last two stanzas have three verses each. The difference is with the rhyming format. Labé’s Sonnet is similar to Petrarch’s because the first two stanzas are in the “A-B-B-A” format, but the difference is the
Catherine Pozzi’s poem “Nyx” at first resembles Labé’s where each one of her verses starts with “O” and the format is very similar, but is different, and Petrarch’s poem like Pozzi’s and Labé’s starts most lines with “Se.” Pozzi’s poem has 3 stanzas, each having four verses. Pozzi does not use the standard “A-B-B-A” format as Petrarch and Labé do. Instead she creates a variation and her poem looks like: “A-B-A-B,” “A-B-A-B,” “C-D-C-E.” This is very similar to Petrarch’s and Labé’s, but a shorter version. The repetition (anaphora) underscores the insistent nature of emotion the poem conveys.

Two of Pozzi’s poems on the topic of suffering and love that could also be related to “Nyx” are “Ave” and “Vale.” John Taylor noticed that the theme of Ave is “l’amour absolue”, which “magnificently coalesces with metaphysical, cosmological, even mathematical concerns.” He says the poem is written by a woman who is dead and talking to her lover in the future. He says that “No ave, or ‘salutation’ is without its vale, or ‘adieu.’ With her own ‘Vale’, Pozzi constitutes a similar diptych of affirmation and negation, of amorous praise and the acknowledgment of love’s demise. ‘The great love that you had given me,’ she laments, ‘the wind of days has broken its rays.’” According to Stopa Hunt, Ave “...is as much a meditation upon death as an address to the ‘Très haut amour’ [The love most high] invoked at both its opening and its end.” (Stopa-Hunt 1)

“‘Vale’ imagines a où l’angoisse est désir’ [paradise where anguish is desire], and Pozzi’s paradoxical or doubled structures often intensify her descriptions of loss and dissolution. In the exchange of gifts which ‘Vale’ relates, ‘La grande amour
que vous m’aviez donnée’ [The great love you had given me] is matched by its woeful twin ‘cette amour que je t’avais donnée/Pour la douleur” [this love I had given you/for pain].

Sebastian Hayes says that Pozzi believed in reincarnation and the “‘très haut amour’ commemorates a liaison of cosmic proportions, spanning several individual lives, thus, her strange admission of ‘not knowing who you are or whence you came’. ” He says that the poem is about her relationship with Paul Valéry, whom she saw as her ‘double.’ Valéry wrote about their relationship in his journal,

“What was strange about these lovers, about their love, was that both of them felt that what was happening was not a particular affair between two persons, not the love of one individual for another, but rather something imposed on them, a perfect understanding between two living systems. This was so because they considered with the utmost seriousness, not to say with tragic intensity—what most people dismiss as a matter of opinion, a mere speculation—namely that the very essence of their condition as human beings was to be metaphysical events (literally, thinking events).”

“Nyx” Intertextuality

Catherine Pozzi’s poem, “Nyx” is related to Louise Labé’s poem, “Sonnet II,” and Petrarch’s “Sonnet 88.” All the poems are written in a similar if not the same way using different forms of the sonnet. Labé’s Sonnett II is like Pozzi’s poem in that it discusses a past

---

relationship. In the first verse, one can feel Labé’s pain and suffering, her longing, to be with her former lover again. She loves this man passionately, uncontrollably and wants nothing more than to be with him. She is waiting and hoping for the chance to continue their relationship. This leads the reader to believe that Labé’s lover is the one who ended the relationship as she still is obsessed with the man. It is interesting how much she wants to be with him, but she knows how mean and hurtful he can be. She describes his eyes as “Ô beaux yeux bruns” [Oh beautiful brown eyes]. Her suffering is not limited merely to the daytime or her daydreams, but to her dreams at night to the point that they are nightmares. Labé says “Ô tristes plaints, Ô désirs obstinés, Ô temps perdu, Ô peines dépendues” [Oh sad complaints/Oh obstinate desirs/Oh waited time/Oh correlative sorrows]. Those are the nights that she is able to sleep, as one can imagine this is a very troubled and disturbed woman who spends her nights weeping and praying for her lover’s return. This woman is suffering immensely. This is repeated in the last line, “N’en est sur toi volé quelque étincelle” [No spark flew off onto you] where she is hoping and praying that he might feel the passion and desire that is burning within her depths and come back to her. Labé says “Ô pires maux contre moi destinés!” [Oh worst ills fated against me] meaning that she does not see happiness in her future. For her, she has loved, she has lost this love and is now damned for the rest of her years.

Petrarch’s Sonnet 88 is similar to both those of Louise Labé and Catherine Pozzi. Petrarch’s sonnet starts with the line “S’amor non è, che dunque è quel ’ sénto?” [If love does not exist, then what is it I am feeling?] For Pozzi, love has both a beginning and an end. For her it is the natural cycle of all things, everything is born and it dies. There are good times and there are bad times. At times we are left confused and upset when relationships end. For Labé, love is
suffering. For her, if there is not pain and misery, there is no love. She knows what she wants, but she cannot have it. The passion, the fire is at the very heart of her existence. It is combined with hope that fuels her every waking moment. Like the women, Petrarch is suffering. Why is he suffering? What is he feeling? This he does not know. He asks these questions at the beginning of his Sonnet. He insists that such feelings could only be love. That one only feels these emotions and pains when in love. He is also very confused because for him love should be sweet, sensual, and passionate, but for him love is turmoil. Love as Labé and Pozzi experienced it consists in simultaneous “highs” and “lows.” He is miserable without love, but at the same time he is miserable with love. Not only does love cause heartache, but it causes many emotions inside human beings, desire, passion, fire, burning, that are liable to drive a person insane.

The *Yale Anthology of 20th-Century French Poetry* lists Catherine Pozzi’s poems in the section “1897-1915: Symbolism, Post-Symbolism, Cubism, Simultanism.” She wrote poems that were “inspired by sixteenth-century Italian poets, she often expressed a desire to return to a period in which thought and feeling were melded, before the intervention of the seventeenth century and what T. S. Eliot called the “dissociation of sensibility.” (69). At the time that Pozzi wrote her poetry, Symbolism and Modernisme (or Surrealism) were the main movements in European literature.

The theme of love and suffering became the main focus of Pozzi’s poetry. Pozzi had a very difficult life. She struggled a lot, but it helped her and was good for her poetry. She used 16th century poets and poetry and combined those with the literature movements, realism and symbolism, to develop a poetry that was her own. Only one of her poems was published during
her life. The others were published after her death. During the 1980s and 1990s her work began to get attention. Her style and the topics of her poetry are why they have become more popular today.
CHAPTER 3
LESBIAN IDENTITY IN GABRIELA MISTRAL’S POETRY: A CONTROVERSY

Gabriela Mistral needs little introduction. She is considered one of the world’s greatest poets and her works have been translated into many different languages. Her works are still being discussed and analyzed today. Salvador Dinamarca says that “es un hecho bien conocido que Hispanoamérica cuenta con buenos poetas desde los tiempos más remotos de su historia y [hay] dos ingenios de extraordinario valor, Rubén Darío en el siglo XIX y Gabriela Mistral en el XX” (48, p.?). In this section I want to show that although Mistral wrote many poems on children and education, and she created only a few poems that express her search for a lesbian identity, the latter poems are crucial to understand Mistral’s poetry as a whole. Through reading a series of Mistral’s poems that focus on a hypothetical lesbian identity, and by reviewing Mistral’s life, I want to show that although Mistral kept her private life private- and only a few of her poems express a hypothetical lesbian identity- the main focus of her work was not only children and education, but the search for a female identity.

Mistral was born April 7, 1889 in Vicuña, Chile and baptized as Lucila de María del Perpetuo Socorro Godoy Alcayaga and died January 10, 1957. Mistral’s family did not have a lot of money. These humble beginnings helped to shape the person Mistral was to become and influenced her work and works. At age 15 she took a position as a teacher at a rural schoolhouse. It was while working as a teacher that Mistral met Romelio Ureta. The details of Ureta’s life are a mystery. It is known that he committed suicide, yet no explanation was given. He had only a note in his pocket dedicated to his lover, Lucila Godoy Alcayaga.
At the age of 19, Lucila Godoy Alcayaga began to use the name Gabriela Mistral. Some researchers have stated that Mistral took this name from Frédéric Mistral, a French Provencal poet. One of her earliest critics, Armando Donoso, says: “...qué audacia la de esta mujer. Poner al lado de su nombre el apellido de Federico Mistral, el inmenso poeta de la Provenza... ¡qué audacia!” (Muziganga Ibarren 75-76). Mistral, herself, explained that she took the name from the (wind) Mistral which she says was “...el viento fuerte que tanto tiempo después me ha azotado la vida” (Figueroa 217).

In 1914, the young Gabriela Mistral, unknown in the world of literature at the time, won first prize in the “Juegos Florales” contest in Santiago, Chile. The judges of “Juegos Florales” voted unanimously for Sonetos de la muerte. Interestingly, Mistral never received her prize. She sat with the audience listening to a young man read her sonnets. In the same year, Sonetos de la muerte, thirteen sonnets in total, were published in ZIG-ZAG magazine. During this time period, no one could imagine that a woman would be capable of writing something such as this. It is she, Gabriela Mistral, a learned woman that was capable of playing and carrying out this game with men in such a way that she not only won competitively, but at the same time she was able to express with great success her concerns and her most profound sexual thoughts and desires.

In 1922, she published her first book of poetry, “Desolación.” The following year she published her “Lecturas para mujeres.” In 1924, she would publish “Ternura: canciones de niños,” followed by “Nubes blancas y breve descripción de Chile” in 1934. Then in 1938 she published “Tala,” and in 1941, “Antología: selección de Gabriela Mistral” was published in ZIG-
ZAG magazine. In 1945, Mistral became the first Latin American woman to win the Nobel Prize in literature. She had become a great poet and diplomat who represented Chile.

Mistral is referred to as “the mother of the nation” “…because of her poems for and about children” (Rohter 1). According to Jaime Quezada “she is a part of our national patrimony, and everyone thinks that they know her” (Rohter 1). How can Mistral be a “national figure” and “the mother of the nation” when she was a lesbian? Homosexuality contradicts the views and beliefs of most Chileans who are Catholic. Sidonia Carmen Rosenbaum touches on the subject in her book Modern Women Poets of Spanish America when she discusses the subject of maternity and Gabriela Mistral. In summarizing Mistral, Rosenbaum states that the purpose of love “…is not to appease desire, to satisfy carnal appetites, but soberly to give thought to the richest, the most precious, the most sacred heritage of women: maternity. That is woman’s only reason for being in this world” (Rosenbaum 184). She goes on to state that women are born with a natural instinct to mother and for the woman who never marries or has children of her own, this instinct is stronger and the woman “…feels more maternal towards all children” (Rosenbaum 184). She says that is why teaching was always a “sacred profession” for Gabriela Mistral. Rosenbaum goes on to discuss Mistral’s “Teacher’s prayer” in which “…she asks God to make her more maternal than the mothers so that she may ‘love and defend,’ as they do, those who are not flesh of her flesh…” (Rosenbaum 185). She then goes on to show how the maternal instinct is seen in all aspects of nature. She uses the example of the Earth and how it is a “mother” or “maternal” towards all of humankind, providing it with food, shelter, and life. For Rosenbaum then it would appear that anyone could be a mother towards anyone,
but in particular women have a special “maternal instinct” they are born with. Mistral, even though she has lesbian tendencies, was born with a “maternal instinct.”

Her works are full of raw emotion and power. They tend to be about and directed towards women. Her works are complex and involve many layers: the main focus and direction of most modern analyses and discussions are towards Gabriela Mistral, herself. Like her poetry, she was a complex woman and had many layers. She kept her private life very private, leaving many critics to guess. One aspect in particular is that of her sexual identity; who was she sexually?

Modern critics suggest she was a lesbian and that her poetry focused on her identity as a lesbian woman. What is known is that Mistral never married, nor had children. Elizabeth A. Marchant states that Mistral was against marriage. (Marchant, page?) Marchant explains that Mistral was linked to several different men, including Romelio Ureta, but at the same time she suggests doubt about these relationships. Some researchers have even gone so far as to say that Romelio Ureta did not exist and is nothing more than a play on the word Uterus. It is true that Mistral did spend her life working with and for women and that she surrounded herself with women. Marchant refers the reader to Volodia Teitelboim who suggests that the reason for this was due to her failed relationships with men going back to her father, who walked out on her when she was three years old. Other critics have suggested that the reason Mistral surrounded herself with women was because she was involved with women. A good example of this is the Mexican film “La Pasajera” by Francisco Casas which suggests that Mistral was involved with her secretary, Doris Dana. Others still reference her letters exchanged with Victoria Ocampo which, they suggest, remind them of Virginia Woolf’s writing. The fact is that
the only person who knew who and what Gabriel Mistral was, was Gabriela Mistral. When questioned about the rumors that she was a lesbian, however, Mistral denied them. Therefore it would seem the only real “evidence,” or “proof” that researchers have about Mistral’s identity as a lesbian is the poetry itself.

One (dubious) reason researchers have chosen to focus on Mistral’s sexual identity so much is for the sake of controversy. The debate is that “…Mistral can be seen as the mother of… [Chile]… (as a mythical, maternal, and national figure). However, Mistral’s lesbian identity perceived in her poetry challenges the maternal, conservative, vision that Chileans have of their national laureate poet. This is the reason that “…the literary detectives are hard at work in their search for new material that can clarify the question of Mistral’s sexual orientation” (Rohter 3).

According to the “Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, & Queer Culture,” examples of Mistral’s lesbian identity can be most clearly seen in the work “Sister” in Desolación. According to Elizabeth Marchant, examples of her lesbian identity can be found in “Locas mujeres” in Lagar and “Encargo a Blanca” in Desvario. (Marchant (1954) p?). Some of these are the works that will be most closely examined in this paper.

No poem clearly expresses Mistral’s identity more than that of “Sister:”

Sister

Today I saw a woman plowing a furrow. Her hips are broad, like mine, for love, and she goes about her work bent over the earth.

I caressed her waist; I brought her home with me. She will drink rich milk from my own glass and bask in the shade of my arbors growing pregnant with the pregnancy of love. And if my own breasts be not generous, my son will put his lips to hers, that are rich.
“Sister” is not a descriptive poem of a pregnant woman. The poem is full of lust. She starts the poem by describing the woman’s body, but adds to that by saying that her hips were made for love and discussing how she was bent over. Mistral does not say much, but what she does say leaves enough to the imagination. It’s not enough for Mistral to admire the woman from a distance, but then she goes up to her. Rather than simply keeping their meeting cordial, she takes her home with her where they begin “unspeakable” acts between each other.

Another example of this type of Mistral’s writing is “Catalan Women:”

Catalan Women

“The old sea of nuptial songs
will call them over and over virgins.
Maybe all of them are one
whom they call Nausicaa.”

For Mistral it is not enough to say that she thinks Catalan women are beautiful or that she admires Catalan women, but she describes them lustfully. She refers to Catalan women as virgins, who may be identified with Nausicaa. Nausicaa is a character from Homer’s *Odyssey* who had great beauty. In the first stanza (written like Homer’s *Odyssey*) Mistral evokes an image of the archetypal Ur Woman, a virgin, as in the ancient epic, Mistral sees Nausicaa as a central oneness, in the same way the poet herself took on the role of “Mother of Chile.” Through Mistral’s use of the first person, she in a sense becomes Nausicaa, taking care of the children of Chile much the same way that Nausicaa took care of Odysseus on his journey.

The next poem, “Encargo a Blanca,” has almost a similar tone and meaning to it.

Message to Blanca
For Blanca Subercaseaux
I don’t know if I can come
Let’s see if I can read you, sister.
I’ll arrive, if I do, on a mild wind,
so as not to freeze your plains,
or at the edges of your dream,
with love, and without a word.

Blanca Subercaseaux was a writer and a friend of Mistral’s. Of Subercaseaux Mistral writes “allá adentro nunca tuve entre mis numerosas amistades, sino una sola alma con quien hablar: la preciosa criatura que se llama Blanca Subercaseaux de Valdés. Nada más, nada más” (Figueroa 94). The poem is very sensual. She talks about arriving “en aire dulce.” Mistral and Subercaseaux have a close relationship; Mistral refers to her as “Hermana” and speaks to her in the “tu” form. It is clear that they love one another. There is a certain amount of intimacy between these two women that one does not find between just friends. It would seem as though they were almost lovers.

Elizabeth Marchant says “Titles of the « Locas mujeres » poems suggest their tones and themes: « La otra, » « La abandonada, » « La ansiosa, » « La desasida, » « La desvelada, » « La fervorosa, » « La fugitiva, » « La que camina. » Though Mistral was known as the “spiritual mother” of Latin America, no mother figures appear in these portraits. Rather, most of the female subjects of “Locas mujeres” are lonely wandering women...often they are angry...” (Marchant 61). The women in these poems are miserable. They are struggling or fighting against something. A perfect example of this would the poem “La Otra;”

The Other
I killed a woman in me:
She was the blazing flower
of the mountain cactus;
she was drought and fire,
ever cooling her body.

Marchant says that according to Guillén de Nicolau this poem is an “autoretrato” [self-portrait]. According to Marchant in “La Otra” the poet, Mistral, kills a part of herself, but what is interesting is that this part that she kills, this “other” continues to live on. Marchant says that “for Guillén de Nicolau, the female voice killed in this poem is the one who suffers in Mistral’s painful poetry, especially in the poems of Desolación” (Marchant 61). She then goes on to make the connection that Desolación contains the “Sonetos de la muerte,” which were said to have been based on the death of her lover Romelio Ureta.

The poem is an “autoretrato,” and discusses her “other.” It would seem that the “other” made mention of in this poem is her lesbian identity. The first stanza makes mention of killing a woman inside her that she did not love. During a time when homosexuality was not accepted, nor was it openly discussed it is easy to see why someone would want to hide their true identity and would not want to be homosexual. Marchant points out that she uses the words drought and fire to describe this other. That is only part of the picture. When reading the entire stanza on can see that the “flor” that she is speaking about is her vagina, the source of her lustful feelings about women. She refers to her entire body as a “mountain cactus” and the drought and fire that Marchant points out is the lustful desires hidden within herself. She ends this stanza by saying “nunca se refrescaba.” She never allowed herself to openly and fully explore
these Lesbian desires, thus, her body continued to burn with passion and desire. This poem becomes a declaration of her inner pain and inner struggles.

The next poem in this group that Marchant discusses is “La abandonada.” According to Marchant, “La abandonada deliberately destroys all that she and the “tú” to whom she addresses herself once had:

The Abandoned Woman

I’m burning all that we had:
the wide walls, the high beams-
ripping out one by one
the twelve doors you opened
and closing with ax blows
the cistern of happiness.

_Transl. Randall Couch_

Marchant says that in this poem Mistral is angry and feels abandoned. This is clearly seen throughout the poem. It would also seem that this poem, too, is a description of her struggles with her sexuality and with love. The woman in this poem is very hurt and wants to rid herself of everything and start anew. She refers to this time in her life as “mi noche” which is symbolic of darkness, misery, and trouble. Mistral wants to wake up in the morning and forget about the past, but that cannot be done as seen in this poem. She continues to struggle with these feelings.

Another interesting poem to examine in this collection is “La bailarina.” In this poem Mistral discusses how the ballerina “...está danzando la danza del perder cuanto tenía” (Mistral 42). This poem could also be described as an “autoretrato.” Mistral is discussing how she has to let go of who and what she is in order to become who or what the people want her to be; “sin nombre, raza ni credo, desnuda de todo y de sí misma, da su entrega, hermosa y pura,
de pies volardores” (Mistral 42). She continues on to say “El nombre no le den de su bautismo” (Mistral 42). She cannot use her real name which is why she uses her pen name, Gabriela Mistral. If she uses her real name, there is always going to be that fear that someone will find out her true identity. She in turn becomes this sort of “Sonámbula” that she mentions in the poem. She says that “mudada en lo que odia, sigue danzando sin saberse...” (Mistral 43). This poem really describes Mistral and her life. There were two individuals, the one individual born Lucila who was a lesbian and desired woman, and then there was Gabriela Mistral, an internationally known poet who did not know love, who represented her country and was considered the “mother” of her country.

Mistral knew how to manipulate literature in order to benefit her. She knew how to use language in a certain way, as a game, to speak to all that was important to her, including her homosexual desires. She explains this in the first three stanzas of her poem “La Contadora:”

The Storyteller

When I walk all the things
of the earth awaken,
and they rise up and whisper
and it’s their stories that they tell.

La Contadora is written in the first person and that would indicate that Mistral is the one who is speaking. There is no dialogue and no audience is named. It would seem that Mistral is speaking directly to the reader of the poem. The poem is titled La Contadora and it would seem that Mistral is talking about a storyteller and since the poem is written in the first person that storyteller would be Mistral, making the poem autobiographical. The tone of the poem does not seem serious, but playful with the use of such words as “ronronean” and “zumban.”
Mistral could have used concrete imagery to tell her story; she could have simply said I am not a writer, I am a storyteller, but that was not Mistral’s style. Instead Mistral uses abstract imagery to tell her tale. The first verse is the most interesting and the most important that attempts to identify who Mistral is as a storyteller. She says that when she walks everything of the Earth stops, stands, and whispers. Everything of the Earth would not do this for a simple storyteller. This verse seems to allude to Mistral’s identification as a motherly figure. In this poem Mistral is representative of Mother Earth who deserves respect and who listens to the stories of the people just as Mistral came to be known as the Mother of Chile. In the next two verses Mistral continues to describe how she and where she has collected some of her stories and how they “corren mi cuerpo o en mi regazo ronronean. Zumban, hiervan y abejean.” As the Mother of Chile she listened to the stories and tales of the common person and retold them to the world in order to help and benefit her countrymen. Mistral did not forget her roots or her people and chose to use her fame to help others.

*La Contadora* is short and humble like Mistral was. She does not say I am Mother Earth or I am Mistral now bow down to me. Instead she says when she walks they rise up, a sign that she is respected. The poem is not fancy or elaborate like a Shakespearean sonnet. Instead the poem is written in blank or free verse. Mistral makes use of a consonance rhyme scheme throughout the poem. She uses onomatopoeias such as “zumban” to make a connection between poetry and nature. This poem is typical of Mistral because she mixes many different styles to make them her own style, to make it her.

In this poem, Mistral talks about how she is a storyteller. She talks about how she collects her stories comparing them to a walk in the woods. During this walk, the woods speak
to her. They tell her about the things they saw or what she refers to as the stories that were left behind. She talks about gathering these stories and using “sounds” from nature she tells how they buzz, purr, and boil throughout her body until a story is formed and once that story is formed, it is never forgotten and does not leave her. In a sense using nature, she is telling how her stories are based upon real people and events.

Mistral never outright stated that she was a lesbian because doing so would have meant an end to her career during that time. Dr. Peña says that “Mistral’s Sonetos do not yield to an easy reading, but work towards redefining gender roles” (Peña 3). Traditionally the sonnets could be read as an ode to a boyfriend by his girlfriend, except the “boyfriend” is never clearly identified as the boyfriend or male for that matter. On “…the contrary, hints are given that the poet explores intimacy with some ‘Other’ lover” (Peña 3). This abstraction at the same time makes her poetry universal and appeals to many because she could be talking about a man, she could be talking about a woman, or she could very well be talking about something not even related to sexuality or relationships.

Based upon the work of Rosenbaum, Mistral is seen as a “the mother of a nation,” not because, as Rohter points out, her poems are for and about children, but because of her work as a teacher and an educator. Mistral came from very humble beginnings. Throughout her life she loved and lost and she suffered hard times, but in no way did she allow that to interfere with her life. If anything that made her stronger. As a teacher in Chile she taught so many young children in her lifetime. She cared for and nurtured these children as if they were her own. She showed these children love something that young children from lower income backgrounds do not always receive. As an educator she helped to set the standard. She was invited by the
Education Minister in Mexico to help develop the curriculum for young girls. As Rosenbaum pointed out, at times that curriculum even seemed somewhat contradictory to her own personal beliefs because the curriculum focused on the woman’s place in the home, rather than trying to excel and make something more of themselves as she did. Summing up, she can be considered at the same time “the Mother of Latin America” and an emancipated woman and artist who expressed through poetry her anxiety for acquiring a unified identity as an artist and passionate mother, and, arguably, as a lesbian woman.
In this chapter, I will talk about Anna Akhmatova’s *Requiem*, adding efforts to interpret well-known facts of her biography, the impact of her historical and social context to her multi-faceted poetic identities as they expressed themselves in her poetic cycle *Requiem*. It is known that Akhmatova’s poetry is often based on the facts of her or her friends’ biographies; it describes recognizable places together with mythical or religious figures. One can say that Akhmatova uses intertextuality and allusions as one of her favorite techniques. In her laconic and energetic style, few words are used to create images, the interpretation of which involves knowledge of Russian and European history and literature; Russian folklore, the Bible, music, in short: the cultural and social environment in which Akhmatova lived; and, of course, poetries that influenced her writing.

The biographical facts of Anna Akhmatova’s life are known due to her own writing and that of critics who described her life in their books, together with the memoirs of Akhmatova’s contemporaries. Anna Akhmatova was born Anna Gorenko June 23, 1889 and died March 5, 1966. Like Catherine Pozzi, Akhmatova grew up in a well-established family, but unlike Pozzi and like Mistral, Akhmatova’s father walked out on the family when she was only 16 years of age. Like both Pozzi and Mistral, she began to write poetry at a very young age. Her father did not approve of her writing poetry and so she began to use her grandmother’s last name, Akhmatova. She studied in St. Petersburg, where she met Nikolay Gumilev, her first husband and father of her only son. She was already famous when the Bolshevik Revolution changed her life forever by throwing her out of the privileged and secure upper class at which time she
became a persecuted outcast. Living in bitter poverty and constant fear of arrest, doomed to forced silence, Akhmatova suffered tremendously as a mother, wife, woman, and poet during the Revolution and the Great Terror. Most people in her intellectual and poetic circle were executed or imprisoned; humiliated, tortured physically and morally. Her first husband Nikolay Gumilev was executed as a member of anti-Bolsheviks group in 1921. Her common law husband Nukolay Punin died in prison. Her son Lev was arrested three times and spent 18 years in prisons. Akhmatova was one of few Silver Age poets who survived the Great Terror and WWII. She survived not only physically, but as a moral human being, and a poet.

One of the best testimonies to Akhmatova’s resistance to the evil and cruelty of the Great Terror is her poem Requiem. Akhmatova began writing it in 1934; its main parts were written in 1938-1940, and almost twenty years later, in the 1960s, she finalized her work.

Requiem is written in the way of a Catholic Requiem Mass, or as a funeral elegy. On first reading the poem seems very simple and straightforward. It seems to be autobiographical being centered on the story of imprisonment of the poet’s son. After re-reading the poem the reader sees many images and references inside the poem; historical references, religious references, and references to other works of literature. Some facts of Akhmatova’s life are recognizable in the poem: the night arrest of Nikolai Punin (I “Uvodili tebya na rassvetе”); her visit with her son in prison (IX “Uzhe bezumie krylom”). However, it would be wrong to reduce Requiem to Akhmatova’s personal tragedies.

Akhmatova’s poem includes at least three stories: (1) a personal one (the Poet and her son); (2) that of Russian women (wives, mothers, sisters of victims of Stalin’s terror and their loved ones, executed and deceased in hard labor), and (3) that of the Virgin Mary (Mater’
Bozh’ya) and Jesus Christ (Iisus Khristos) in the Russian Orthodox tradition. In some poems, Akhmatova identifies her poetic “I” with herself: in her past as she was in her young years; at present in the time she wrote the poem; or looking at herself from the future as she did when she revised Requiem in the 1960s. Sometimes she expresses her poetic “I” as “we” (Russian women, victims of terror, wives of 17th century Streltsy) identifying herself with millions of suffering Russian women, and sometimes when she says “Mother” it refers to the Mother of God and she writes about “a high cross” that is prepared for an imprisoned son.

The poem has a complex structure. It includes an epigraph, a prologue, a dedication; ten chapters (main parts of the poem), and a two-part epilogue.

Introductory Parts

Akhmatova added the “Epigraph” at the time of Khrushchev’s Thaw, in 1961, when she was hopeful that Requiem could be published. She was looking back at bad times already gone at a distance of twenty years:

No, not under a foreign heavenly-cope, and
Not canopied by foreign wings –
I was with my people in those hours,
There where, unhappily, my people were.

Transl. D.M. Thomas

In the Russian literary tradition, opposition between the intelligentsia and the people, the poet and the public is considered as morally wrong. Soviet officials and population compared emigration to treason. Saying that she was in Russia during the Terror, Akhmatova said that she did not emigrate as did the intelligentsia to foreign countries where they were defended by “alien wings” from the Great Terror. The twice repeated word “alien” (chuzhdyj)
refers to the oppositions of “Russian--Foreign” (also: we – they; ours – their). The epigraph announces a later identification of the poetic “I” with “We” (Russian women, Russian people, Russian country).

In 1957, Akhmatova added “Prologue”, a short piece of prose. In “Prologue”, she is looking to the past, explaining that she was asked to write Requiem by a woman that was staying behind her outside of a prison in Leningrad where Akhmatova was waiting for seventeen months to hear about her son’s fate. Millions of Russian women were waiting outside prisons for endless months and years; and many of them never saw their husbands, sons, and fathers alive.

Why did Akhmatova want to let readers know she was asked to write Requiem? Some critics say that this is a reference to Mozart’s Requiem that was composed on commission of a man dressed in black who ordered the mass for a sick composer but never came back to accept the music. Mozart believed that Death itself ordered him to write a requiem for his own funeral. (Katz 1994)

Other critics speculated that Akhmatova wanted to establish her role as a chronicler of the Great Terror; a very prominent role for such a literature-centric culture like the Russian (Zholkovsky 2010).

Another interpretation may be suggested if we follow ideas of Joseph Brodsky. He believed that the real meaning of Akhmatova’s Requiem is not in a description of horrors of the Great Terror, but a split between Akhmatova-mother and Akhmatova-poet. A real suffering excludes words. Women outside a prison do not talk; they are in torpor; if they say something, they whisper. Akhmatova-poet writes a poem about her suffering. For Brodsky, as a mother of
an imprisoned son, she put herself in an unthinkable situation. The poet-mother should feel guilty that she is able to write poetry about this event; to choose words; to look for rhymes, to use the professional skills that made her a poet; her son is arrested, in prison, tortured, sentenced and sent to hard labor, and she has already created a memorial service for him as if he were dead.

“The writer can suffer his grief in a genuine way, but the description of this grief is not genuine tears or gray hair. It is only an approximation of a genuine reaction, and the awareness of this detachment creates a truly insane situation. Requiem is constantly balancing on the brink of insanity, which is introduced not by the catastrophe itself, not by the loss of a son, but by this moral schizophrenia, this splitting – not of consciousness but of conscience. This splitting into sufferer and writer.” (Brodsky 227)

Akhmatova wrote Requiem when her son was alive, she may have felt guilty. It is known that her son reproached her, and that their relations were not easy ones when he returned after 18 years of hard labor, torture, and prisons. Saying to readers in the Prologue that she worked on Requiem because the unnamed woman asked her, she justified her writing by requests from other people. It may have eased feelings of personal guilt as she felt responsible for her sons suffering.

Whether this interpretation of the 1957 edition is true or not, Requiem became a powerful poetic memorial for all victims of the Great Terror.

The next introductory part, the “Dedication”, sets the scene. It is a time of darkness and despair, so much that even the rivers, which are typically seen as a source of life, have stopped flowing: “Mountains bend beneath that boundless sorrow, /And the mighty river
stops its flow.” This is Russia under Stalin’s regime where there is no life, only pain and suffering. Akhmatova uses folklore inspired images of women’s grief saying that their grief was so enormous that mountains bended and a river stopped flowing. It is a metaphor of life stopped in its normal way and entered into another, catastrophic dimension.

Akhmatova evokes the daily ritual of Russian women who would go visit their imprisoned family: “Still the sickening clank of keys, the pacing/Of the sentries with their heavy steps.” She compares this ritual to going to Mass: “We’d rise, as for early Mass, each morning,/Cross the callous city, wend our way...” The “Dedication” establishes the “protagonist” or “hero” of the poem: “Woman.” She talks about all women’s pain and suffering by not writing the poem as a first-hand account. In turn the woman is a nameless woman, she is a mother, a wife: “And at once the tears come rolling,/Cut off from the world, quite on her own,/Heart reduced to shreds, and almost falling,/Just as if some lout had sent her sprawling,/Still...She staggers on her way...Alone...”

“Prelude” is the last introductory part of Requiem. In this part, Akhmatova alludes to life for millions of Russians under Stalin. Russians were not happy during this time in history except for, according to Akhmatova, the dead: “It was a time when only the dead / could smile, delivered from their wars,” The “Prelude” was written on or shortly before the assassination of one of the leaders of Communist movement, Sergey Kirov. After the assassination the Great Terror began. It is for these reasons and more that Akhmatova describes Leningrad, the capital, as “incongruous.” Eventually prisons were built and many people were arrested for various, and oftentimes illegitimate reasons. They were not imprisoned in Leningrad. At times they were put on a train and sent to other parts of Russia either to work in hard labor camps or to sit in an
overcrowded cell. Akhmatova relates this process: “The long lines of the newly
condemned/Heard the engines’ shrill whistles go sputtering/A brief song of farewell to their
friends.” She creates an image of Russia “twisted in pain.” Note that she refers to Russia in the
feminine, “In her innocence...” Russia is now seen as a woman, a woman in pain and suffering.
She mentions the faceless executors of the Great Terror’s machine coming to crush Russia and
the “Black Marias” or train cars that were used to carry away the prisoners.

Central Part of *Requiem*

The next ten chapters are short poems that form the main part of *Requiem*. The poems
are connected by a plot that started with the arrest of a loved one and finished with his death
on the Cross. Images of son and husband are blurred as well as poetic identity of the poem’s
“hero”. The poems are full of latent citations, metaphors, allusions, references to religious and
folklore motifs. Professor Leyderman pointed out that in “Requiem” Akhmatova found “an
absolutely unique way of equalizing the author and protagonist. She "interbred” the genre of
the poem, a relatively new literary form, with one of the oldest genres of Russian folklore -
crying (prichet)” There are many types of funereal mourning in Russian folklore. Leyderman
believes that Akhmatova chose a specific type of funeral mourning – “maternal prichet”; the cry
of a mother over her son (Leyderman 221-224).

“In principle, any dialogic crying, weeping, in any, there are two central figures -
mourner and the deceased. But in the maternal prichet howler – a mother, and the deceased -
her son, her blood. And in no other type of crying is there such a close relationship, a tight
seam between subject and object, as here.” (Leyderman 219)
The hero of the first poem is a woman, who may be the Poet, or a 17th-century “streletskaia zhenka” (a wife of a 17th century soldier) whose husband is taken away at dawn. The husband is arrested; not dead yet, but she cries for him as for the dead because she knows that his execution and torturous death is imminent.

They took you away at daybreak. Half waking, as though at a wake, I followed.
In the dark chamber children were crying,
In the image-case, candlelight guttered.
At your lips, the chill of an ikon,
A deathly sweat at your brow.
I shall go creep to our wailing wall,
Crawl to the Kremlin towers.

Transl. D. M. Thomas

She looks back and remembers how she last saw him; “your lips-cool from the kiss of the icon,/Still to think-the cold sweat on your brow…” “Like the wives of the Streltsy, now I come/To wail under the Kremlin’s gaunt towers.” Again, she is playing the role of the widow. A part of her is lost. She is in a lot of pain and suffering very badly, she is “wailing.” She is in mourning.

Akhmatova uses many archaisms in this part, connecting a dark page from Russia’s past to the time of the Great Terror. The Streltsy Rebellion in the 17th century was crushed; savage reprisals with public executions and torture followed; Peter the Great killed five people personally. A cruel story of the Streltsy execution is described in books and Russian art, such as the well-known painting “The Morning of the Streltsy Execution” by Vasily Surikov.

Part two of Requiem describes how life has carried on for a poet, or maybe a village woman, who lives at the river Don (center of a fierce resistance to the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War). The scene is realistic and at the same time fantastic. “Silent flows the silent Don, /Yellow moon looks quietly on.” Nighttime, gloom, the moon, are all references to not just
darkness, but death. A sick, lonely women, who lost her husband and son is seen by the “eyes” of the yellow moon, which is wearing a hat and enters the house. The Moon sees a shadow of a woman; she is now not what she was; only a shadow remains of what previously was her:

“Sees this woman, sick, at home,/Sees this woman, all alone,/ Husband buried, then to see/Son arrested...” The woman asks yellow moon: “Pray for me.”

In the third section, a poetic “I” is split. The lyrical “I” cannot believe what is going on in her life. She cannot believe it can be she who goes through such pain and suffering: “No, this is not me, this is somebody else that suffers/I could never face that...” Even though she is in shock and disbelief, at the same time reality has set in for her. She says “...and, as for what’s happened, /May sackcloth and ashes enshroud it.” She is asking that the wrongdoers beg her forgiveness. She is asking that they undo the wrong that has been done to her. She continues by saying: “And see all the lamps are removed...Night.” Again, she is referring to death. She is in mourning. She is in pain. She is suffering. She sees her son dead and asks others to cover his body with black clothes. She does not want to see it and asks them to take away the lanterns.

No, it is not I, it is someone else who is suffering.
I could not have borne it. And this thing which has happened,
Let them cover it with black cloths,
And take away the lanterns...
  Night.
Transl.D.M. Thomas

Section four is a look back at her life. “You, my mocking one, pet of society” is a direct reference by Akhmatova to Akhmatova, herself. It is she who mocks Stalin and his way of life. It is she who mocks Russia and what it has become. “And gay sinner of Tsarskoe Selo,” again refers to Akhmatova herself. Akhmatova went to school in Tsarskoe Selo and it was her first
husband, Nikolai Gumilev who was from Tsarskoe Selo where she was studying literature at the university. In the next lines Akhmatova says “Had you dreamt, in your sweet notoriety,/Of the future that lay in store-/How you’d stand at the Crosses, three-hundredth/In the queue, each bleak New Year” Here Akhmatova is asking herself if she had ever thought that one day she would achieve fame and success so much that she would be like the average commoner standing before the lines of a prison wall waiting to get in? She continues to question herself, reflecting back, wondering if she ever thought that one day she would know such pain and suffering; “Hug your precious parcel of comforts, /Melt the ice with your hot bright tears.” She continues to ask herself if she ever thought that imprisonment would be the norm in Russia: “There the poplar, used to imprisonment, /Sways aloft. Not a sound. But think/of the numbers rotting here, innocent…” As a child, as a young adult, Akhmatova lived a relatively carefree life in that she did not have to deal with pain and suffering. She did not have to deal with the imprisonment of her son. She did not have to deal with threats and criticism from the government. She was free to lead her life as she saw fit, never thinking one day that there would be a time when she would not be able to.

Section five appears to be a warning of events to come, in particular death. She starts by saying “For seventeen long months my pleas, /My cries have called you home/I’ve begged the hangman on my knees.” Seventeen months is the duration of Akhmatova’s son’s imprisonment. The “hangman” that she refers to is Stalin himself, to whom she wrote constantly, trying to get her son out of prison over the course of his imprisonment. After all of her pleading and no response, Akhmatova has become distraught and confused. As the time passes she begins to lose all hope: “My son, my dread, my own. /My mind’s mixed up for good.” As the time
continues she also begins to question who the good guys are and who are not. Who is going to help her save her son? “...And I’m/No longer even clear/Who’s man, who’s beast...” She begins to fear they are losing time and that death is near for him and the only way he will exit the prison: “...Nor how much time/Before the end draws near./And only flowers decked with dust,/And censers ringing, footprints thrust/Somewhere-nowhere, afar./And, staring me straight in the eye/And warning me that death is night...”

**Section six** is written as a folk lullaby. The poet identifies herself with a simple woman, all Russian women who think, suffering from the destiny of their son. The son is in prison and waits for a sentence. The Mother waits with him and suffers. One week passes after another, and nothing changes. Her son is still imprisoned. The Mother is more distraught and in more pain and suffering than ever before. She fears that her son’s only “release” from prison is in a casket. These lines show confusion: “I shall never grasp what’s done.” She is alone, and talking to her imprisoned son, who is surrounded by four walls: “How those long white nights, dear son,/Watched you in your cell’s seclusion.” In her mind, she sees her son looking at the prison’s window and sees the same white nights that she sees at home. She foresees that the nights are talking about her son’s death on the “high cross”. This is the first time the motive of “high cross” appears in *Requiem*.

**Section seven** is titled “Sentence”; it sets forth the sentencing of a son. The sentencing of a son kills the mother: “And the stony word has fallen heavy/On my breast, which was alive till now.” Even though this act did kill her, somehow, somewhere, she had prepared herself for the worst: “Never mind-for, mark you, I was ready.” However, the mother is strong and determined not to let the sentencing depress her. She was determined to continue on with her
life: “I shall get along somehow.” The only way to continue live is to repress the memory. She tries to think of other things, such as the errands that need to be taken care of tomorrow: “So much to be done before” tomorrow:/Crush the memory till no thoughts remain.” She tells herself that she will stand tall. She will not let her son’s sentencing destroy her. She is determined to persevere: “Carve a heart in stone, immune to sorrow,/ Teach myself to face life once again.” In the last verse she seems to have some doubt, however. In the previous verse she is telling herself that she is going to “face life” and continue on. Even if she is unable to continue on, time will not stop, it will continue on with or without her: “And if not...The rustling heat of summer/Fills my window with its festive verses tone.” In the final two verses, she looks back, sensing she had always known that someday her worries about her son would come true and she will be left alone: “Long ago I sensed that there would come a/Sunny day like this- and empty home.”

Section eight represents one of the lowest points in the mother’s pain and suffering. Section eight is titled “To Death” and can be described as a call to death. The son is sentenced to die; and his grieving mother is dying with him. She recognizes that all individuals will die, but she is asking that death come now and take her away: “You’ll come in any case-then why not right away?” She recognizes that this is the lowest point in her life: “I’m waiting-life has dragged me under.” Therefore it goes back to her opening statement of why wait? Suffering has become unbearable; all that a human being can possibly suffer in one lifetime; she is ready for it all to end: “I’ve put the lamp out, left the door to show the way.” She is in so much pain and is suffering so much that she does not even care how she dies, simply that she does die because she cannot take it any longer. In the next four lines she pictures various methods of
death from an illness to brutal murder. In the last part of section eight, she tells how the death could be a “fable, known ad nauseam/to everyone denounced in error.” In this fable the injustices of the past are corrected. The secret police are brutally terrorized. The Heavens and the Earth open up and swallow them whole in one “…final horror.” The section is concluded with the poetic “I” determined to end her pain and suffering, either with her own death or the death of those who have wronged so many others.

Brodsky wrote that in *Requiem*, the lyrical voice portrays a constant balancing on the wedge of madness.

In section nine, Akhmatova recounts how pain and suffering have driven her hero mad. She has been driven mad to the point that she is dark inside. She is not the same person: “So madness now has wrapped its wings/Round half my soul and plies me, heartless,/With draughts of fiery wine, begins/To lure me towards the vale of darkness.” The poet can no longer feel, she has suffered and endured so much pain and suffering. In the next stanza she realizes that she can no longer fight back. The only thing that she can do is “concede” and continue to suffer: “And I can see that I must now/Concede the victory-as I listen,/The dream that dogged my fevered brow/Already seems an outside vision.” Rather than pleading to individuals for help with her cause, she now turns to her faith. She turns to God and the Saints, asking for their intervention: “And though I go on bended knee/To plead, implore its intercession,/There’s nothing I may take with me,/It countenances no concession.” In the third stanza she tells how her son has suffered. She describes this incident as a “storm.” She recalls her time at the prison: “Nor yet my son’s distracted eyes-/The rock-like suffering rooted in them,/The day the storm broke from clear skies,/The hours spent visiting the prison.” In the final stanza she recalls the
time spent visiting her son in prison: “Nor yet the kind, cool clasp of hands,/The lime-tree shadows’ fitful darting,/The far light call across the land-/The soothing words exchanged on parting.” She was always happy to see her son. For a brief time out of her day, time seemed to stand still. Seeing her son, touching her son, speaking with her son seemed to restore some of her faith.

The poem concludes with section ten, titled: “Crucifixion”. Here a story of a poet’s son and his mother and a story of many mothers and sons of Russian women are transformed into a story of the Mother of God (Bogoroditsa) and the Son of God (Syn Bozhij Iisus Christos). The first part of this section depicts the crucifixion as religious mystery: “The angles hailed that solemn hour and stately, /The heavens dissolved in tongues of fire” It recreates the words of Jesus Christ to his heavenly Father and to his Mother: “And He/Said to the Father: “Why didst Thou forsake Me!”/But to His Mother: “Weep thou not for me...” Imprisonment and torture of the poet’s son became the torture of Christ and the poet’s pain and suffering are compared to that of the Virgin Mary. Familiar Biblical figures appeared around Jesus Christ: Maria Magdalena, St. John, and Virgin Mary.

In the Crucifixion all three plots of Requiem come together. Jesus Christ on the Cross is also millions of sons that died in the GULAG, and the poet’s own son. And Virgin Mary who stood silent when Jesus Christ was dying on the Cross is also all mothers of those who died under Stalin’s rule and the Poet herself as one of the millions of mothers mourning for their sons.

Here again appears a motif of silence. Mary Magdalena cries, but the Mother’s grief is so immense that she stays silent: “Magdalena sobbed, and the disciple,/He whom Jesus loved,
stood petrified. But there, where His Mother stood in silence, No one durst so much as lift their eyes.” It is the same for Akhmatova and the many other women whose husbands and sons were imprisoned. Their friends and relatives cried for them, but their mothers, their wives stood strong. They suffered the most and endured the most pain, but they “stood in silence.” At the time Akhmatova, too, stood in silence, writing her poetry, keeping almost a journal what would become *Requiem*.

Epilogues

The final part of the poem is two-part Epilogue.

**Epilogue 1** is a look back to seventeen months that Akhmatova spent outside of a prison with other women. She takes time to sit back and reflect on what happened during that time period. For much of the poem she describes how she understands the physical effects of pain and suffering: “I’ve learned how faces droop and then grow hollow... How cheeks carved out of suffering and of sorrow, take on the lines of rough cuneiform scripts. How heads of curls, but lately black or ashen, turn suddenly to silver overnight.” The pain and suffering that these individuals endured does not simply make an individual “heartless” or “mad” as Akhmatova has described, but they age a person beyond their years. She ends “Epilogue 1” with a prayer for all of those who have suffered and endured as she did and for those who are continuing to do so.

In Epilogue 2 Akhmatova tells how she will not forget the events that occurred, nor will she forget the individuals who stood beside her at the prison gates: “I’ll think of them everywhere, always, each one. I shall not forget them in dark days to come.” She tells how the government tried to cover things up and essentially kill the past: “I’d like to remember each one
by her name, /But they took the list, and there’s no more remain.” She says that the government will never be able to silence her and should they try, there will be someone to take her place: “And if they should silence my mortified lips, /Let one hundred millions for whom my voice speaks-/Let them take my place, and remember each year/Whenever my day of remembrance draws near.” She continues on to say that should someone decide to erect a memorial someplace to her, she does not want it placed in her hometown. She does not want it in the place that made her happiest. Instead she wants the memorial placed at the walls of the prison where “…they let me stand three hundred hours.” She continues on to discuss how she feels that a new beginning is coming for Russia: “And may the snow, melting, well forth clear and strong.” The snow melting is a sign that spring is near. Spring is the sign for birth and new beginnings. Akhmatova concludes “Epilogue 2” with hope. She has hope that this new beginning for Russia will once again bring peace to her country: “And may the lone prison-dove coo from afar,/And the boats travel silently down the Neva.”
Literary Critics about *Requiem*

*Requiem’s* complexity, its different plots, intertextuality, latent and open citations, blurred, masked and interconnected poetic identities attract continuing efforts of critics to somme with new critical interpretations of this work. With all apparent clarity of its themes and topics, *Requiem* remains a mystery open to different connotations and variety of understanding.

There is no mutual agreement among critics even upon such things as its title and genre. There has been much debate as to whether *Requiem* is actually a requiem or an elegy; or does the title refer to something else? Two researchers who have debated this matter are Sharon M. Bailey in “An Elegy for Russia: Anna Akhmatova’s *Requiem* and Boris Katz and Anna Akhmatova’s “To What Extent Is *Requiem* a *Requiem*? Unheard Female Voices in Anna Akhmatova’s *Requiem*. In Katz’s chooses to focus on the definition of a requiem as the musical aspect of the Roman Catholic Liturgy. Bailey defines a requiem as “…a mass for the dead or a musical composition in honor of the dead” (Bailey 325). Instead of focusing on Akhmatova’s *Requiem* as a requiem, she decides to define it as a “funeral elegy” which is “…the literary equivalent of a requiem [that] is traditionally a poem written on the occasion of a death [that serves] the dual function of commemorating the deceased and contemplating the nature of death in general” (Bailey 325).

In Bailey’s article, the author struggles with the idea that *Requiem* is indeed a funeral elegy because there is no death that has occurred. Akhmatova writes about her son’s arrest; and in Russia at that time an arrest usually ended in death, but not for Akhmatova. Her son’s arrest is nothing more than background information. *Requiem* is about Akhmatova’s struggle, her pain and suffering during this time. Bailey describes Akhmatova’s pain and suffering as
mournning the loss of a loved one. She says that there is this feeling of helplessness like the Virgin Mary in that she could only do so much for her son. Bailey quotes Peter Sacks who says “an elegist’s language emerges from, and reacts upon, an originating sense of loss” (Bailey 327). She takes this information along with the information of other researchers to say that an elegy is “…more accurately defined as a poem about loss” (Bailey 328). Bailey says that Requiem is not only a poem about the loss of her son, but of the loss of her childhood. She says that as you look at the poem as a voice of all women at the time that there is also a loss of “…the most fundamental of social functions, speech” (Bailey 329). Bailey says that women during this time have lost their “individuality” and their “identity.” According to her it is this loss that makes Requiem a funeral elegy.

Katz says that the reader should look at Requiem from the musical aspect. Akmatova had a passion for music. She uses music throughout her poetry, especially in Poem without a Hero. He says that “Akhmatova scholars often neglect these musical sources” (Katz 255). He says that when the reader first reads the poem, the reader immediately thinks of the musical setting of the Catholic liturgy. He says that when you look at Akhmatova’s background with music, the reader thinks then of Mozart’s Requiem. Katz says that it is not that simple and that Akhmatova’s Requiem needs to be examined more. He points out that when the reader looks at Akhmatova’s favorite opera, Mussorgsky’s Khovanshchina, there are many similarities between the “protagonist” of Akhmatova’s Requiem and Mussorgsky’s Marfa: “…Marfa stands on the stage in silence listening to the funeral bells. Marfa is a strong, determined woman…” (Katz 257). He says the story of Marfa can be seen clearly in the “Epilogue” and “4” of Akhmatova’s Requiem. That is not all. Katz says that the references that Akhmatova makes to standing at the
crosses are a direct reference to St. John’s Gospel. He says that by doing this, Akhmatova not only becomes Marfa, but she becomes Mary Magdalene, too. He says that this is the most important “face” in Akhmatova’s poetry. It is the key to her *Requiem*. According to Katz, Akhmatova’s *Requiem* is not a requiem and “…the title *Requiem*, in [his] opinion illustrates Akhmatova’s typical manner of hiding one source under the name of another one, for it was another Catholic prayer that served as verbal and musical subtext for Akhmatova’s *Requiem*” (Katz 260). He goes on to state that *Requiem* is the Akhmatova’s Russian version of Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater*.

It is agreed by these two researchers that *Requiem* is not a requiem. Instead it is an elegy that details the mourning for and loss of her son. It is an elegy based on the *Stabat Mater*. It this way, Akhmatova not only becomes the voice of all women and their pain and suffering, but she becomes the Virgin Mary, “…the religious prototype for all mothers who must watch helplessly while their children suffer, somehow fulfilling an incomprehensible destiny” (Reeder 213).

The Virgin Mary gave birth to Christ. She raised him and cared for him. She, too, was there when her son was arrested. She was there for the trial. She was there for the crucifixion. She prayed and begged for mercy, to no end. Surely she was going crazy inside, but she never stood down. As Christ had asked of her, she remained silent. Mary became the symbol of all women’s pain and suffering. In this way, Akhmatova uses religion to write her poetry. The “hero” is woman. The theme is women’s suffering. Like Mary, she stood by her son’s side throughout his life. She had periods of craziness and there were times where she seemed to lose hope or faith; Yet she was there daily at the prison visiting her son. She begged
continuously for mercy, only to be tortured for seventeen long months. Like Mary she suffered, she was in pain. Milivoje Jovanovich supports this idea citing Nekrasov’s “…portrayal of the wives of Decembrists who followed their husbands into exile at the beginning of the nineteenth century…” (Reeder 212).

André Levinson in his article “Anna Akhmatova- Marceline à la russe “confirms this idea. He compares Akhmatova to Marceline, who according to Levinson, Baudelaire says “was a woman, was always a woman, and was nothing but a woman” (Levinson 76). He goes on to say that in every poet from Sappho to Akhmatova, the theme is love and “there exists but a single, sorrowful epilogue: the lament of the forsaken” (Levinson 76). It was Mary who lamented for Christ and now it is Akhmatova, who is lamenting for her son. Levinson continues to state that even Labé lamented: “Ou es-tu donc, ô âme bien aymée ?” Catherine Pozzi followed in Labé’s foosteps, lamenting for the forsaken in her poem “Nyx.” All of these women suffered greatly. He says that everything about Akhmatova “…has a double meaning” (Levinson 78), yet through it all she is a woman. He goes on to say that “…no longer [is] Marceline speaking, nor Akhmatova, nor Louise Labé; it is the Eternal Feminine giving vent to her eternal cry” (Levinson 79). Who else represents the “Eternal Feminine,” but none other than the Virgin Mary, herself? There are those who disagree stating that the hero of “Requiem” is not women, but the people, the Russian people, in general. Akhmatova’s literary secretary, Anatoly Naimon, says that “the hero of this poetry is the people. Not a larger or smaller plurality of individuals called ‘the people’ for political, nationalist, or other ideological reasons, but the whole people, every single one who participates in what is happening on one side or the other…” (Reeder 211).
Sharon Bailey says that the foundation of the elegy is the idea of mortality. Both the reader and the poet will have the same fate. She says “the loss felt by one individual (the poet) only becomes a compelling theme, when it appeals to similar sentiments in another individual (the reader)” (Bailey 330). Bailey concludes that Akhmatova does not achieve this with *Requiem*. According to Bailey, *Requiem* applies to only a small audience, principally Russians, who went through the same things that Akhmatova did and can relate to them. That brings up the question that if this is true, then why are more and more people reading Akhmatova’s poetry?

One of Bailey’s answers to this question is the style in which Akhmatova wrote *Requiem*. *Requiem* is written as a narration. With the historical references and notes it places the poem in a set period of time. Instead of becoming immortal and applicable to many generations, Akhmatova’s poem is a “story” of how life used to be. For an individual who wants to learn about the past and what people went through, they can simply read one of Akhmatova’s poems to find that understanding. Joseph Brodsky writes, “[It is] autobiographical indeed, yet the power of *Requiem* lies in the fact that Akhmatova’s biography was all too common. This requiem mourns the mourners...This is a tragedy where the chorus perishes before the hero” (Bailey 333).

Bailey’s other answer to the above question is that *Requiem* uses the “pathetic fallacy” in which a mourner desires to “…involve the whole world in his own particular sorrows” (Bailey 334). She says that Akhmatova achieves this with the use of references such as Mountains bowing down, rivers not flowing, visits from the moon, and white nights keeping watch over the son. She says that a mourner’s perception of life and the universe becomes twisted and
changed with death: “death comes out of season, spring branches wither and freeze...” (Bailey 334). She says that people try to change things in order to be supreme to nature.

Bailey has put a lot of thought into her ideas, but perhaps too much thought. *Requiem* is written as a narrative. *Requiem* does make use of the pathetic fallacy. These cannot be the only reasons that *Requiem* and other poems by Akhmatova are increasing in popularity. The poem’s hero is a woman. The theme is love and suffering. As Levinson pointed out, the one theme that has lasted over so many generations is that of love and the “lament of the forsaken.” Billions of people in the world are women. Many of whom are wives and mothers. Those wives and mothers know what it is like to suffer; they know pain. These women know what it is like to fall in love and to give birth to children. They know what it is like to stand by their husbands and children no matter what the issue is. They know what it is like and understand loss; whether it is the loss of a husband through divorce, death, or because of war. They too understand the loss of children either because of death or because of a family fight or because of war. Women know and understand. Bailey cannot say that the poetry of Akhmatova is not immortal because it is locked in time due to the historical references she makes. Roberta Reeder confirms this by quoting Anatoly Naiman who said that the *Requiem* is “…not Soviet poetry, but simply poetry: it could be personal only if it dealt with individuals, their lives, their moods, and their selves in accordance with the officially sanctioned formula of ‘joys and sorrows’” (Reeder 212). Even today there are still wars and there are still governments similar to Stalin’s Russia. The sad fact is that there will always be. As there will always be women’s suffering, it is something immortal to which every generation can relate.
Requiem is an important literary work because as Bailey noted it is a first-hand narrative of what happened in Russia during the time of Stalin’s reign. Susan Amert in “Akhmatova’s ‘Song of the Motherland’: Rereading the Opening Texts of Rekviem notes that Vasilii Lebedev-Kumach wrote “Pesnia o rodine” in 1935 and that it is “an exemplar of the propagandistic genre of the ‘mass song…’ spoken in the first-person plural and purports to represent the voice of the people” (Amert 384). With that said, Akmatova’s Requiem can be considered a type of “…‘mass song…’ spoken in the first-person plural…to represent the voice of the people” (Amert 384), as well. The difference is that as Amert notes, Lebedev-Kumach’s work was propaganda. It was meant to promote Stalin and his regime. Akmatova’s Requiem tells the story of what really happened to people under Stalin.

It is well-known that Akhmatova was against Stalin and his government. Stalin, in fact, made many attempts to silence her. Akhmatova’s poetry was not published in Russia for many years, much of it after her death. Instead it was published in Germany and the United States. Some have even suggested that the reason for her son’s arrest and imprisonment was an attempt by Stalin to prevent her from writing anti-Stalin poetry and instead persuade her to write pro-Stalin poetry. That did not stop her.

According to Akhmatova, living in Russia under Stalin was one of the worst times ever. It was better to be dead than alive: “only the dead were smiling, glad of their release.” She goes on to discuss how Russians were taken away from their families and many times imprisoned. Other times they were put on trains and sent away to hard labor camps. She describes in detail what that did to the family, leaving children behind to cry at night and women sitting alone in the dark. She describes visiting family and friends in prison. Life was hell for Russia during this
time. Akhmatova refused to give in to Stalin and write pro-Stalin poetry. She was determined to let the world know what was going on in Russia.

Boris Katz has said that the only way to examine Akhmatova’s poetry is by looking at it intertextually. He says that is the only way someone will be able to fully understand what she is talking about in her poetry. He has shown how looking at *Requiem* from the musical aspect provides an entirely different meaning to the poem, but meanwhile the same themes are still there: “love” and the “lament of the forsaken,” as talked about by Levinson. The original *Stabat Mater* and Akhmatova’s “Crucifixion” are very similar. The *Stabat Mater* starts: “At the Cross her station keeping, stood the mournful Mother weeping, close to her son to the last.” *Crucifixion* ends: “But there, where His Mother stood in silence, /No one durst so much as lift their eyes.”

Susan Amert says that the poems are intertextually related to Dante and Pushkin and the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church. With the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church, Amert says it is the idea of the face. She says that “the Russian Orthodox Church teaches that the face embodies the highest spiritual qualities and values, reflecting the divine in human beings” (Amert 377). She goes on to say how a faceless woman is a soulless woman; a woman without an identity and without any sort of individuality. According to Amert, it accurately describes the women of Russia during this time. She says that it more accurately describes Akhmatova, as well, because she was unable to publish her work in Russia during that time. Akhmatova may have been a writer, but she was a nobody in Russia and Stalin intended to keep it that way. This can be seen in *Requiem* where Akhmatova is treated not as someone who is famous for her writing, but as a common woman whose son was arrested just like
everybody else and who was made to wait in line every day and suffer just like the rest of Russia’s women. She was nameless.

Amert says that *Requiem* is similar to the experiences of Dante in his ninth circle of Hell. In the ninth circle of Hell, Dante describes the fear that he has when he sees Satan. This is similar to the fear that Akhmatova and many other women felt when they saw Stalin or the military as they came to take their husbands and sons away. She says that “Dante’s fear deprives him of life yet does not kill him” (Amert 379). This is very similar to the lines in *Requiem*: “Sees this woman, sick at home, /Sees this woman, all alone.” The woman is home, depressed, suffering. She is sick with fear. She cannot move. She does not know what to do with her life. She does not know how to help her son. She is frozen in time, just as Dante was frozen. Amert says the most crucial link between the two works is when Dante says that “…his mission is to preserve a memory of the dead” and Akhmatova says that her aim is to “…preserve for posterity the memory of those who suffered in the Ezhovshchina” (Amert 379).

Amert also says that *Requiem* is related to Pushkin’s “Posviashchenie” [Dedication]. One of the ways that the two are related is the language that they use. Amert quotes Pushkin’s “gore” and Akhmatova’s “gory.” She says that there is a “phonological similarity” between the two and goes on to quote more similar words used by the two. She says that both poems “…conjure up scenes of captivity…” (Amert 381) but the difference is that Akhmatova’s poem takes place during the reign of Stalin and Pushkin’s during the reign of Nicholas I. In Pushkin’s version of the story the people in prison are let go and the prison is torn down. In Akhmatova’s story the people continue to suffer. Another difference is that life outside of the prison means
“freedom” in Akhmatova’s poem and life outside of the prison is no different from life inside the prison in Pushkin’s poem.

Amert continues to list many other works to which Requiem is intertextually related, one of which is Lebedev-Kumach’s “Pesnia o rodine,” mentioned above. She says that some of Akhmatova’s lines are directly related to those in Lebedev-Kumach’s. She said that Akhmatova uses them to mock him and his pro-Stalin propaganda.

Other critics describe Requiem as a “…confirmation of Akhmatova’s faith” (Reeder 212). Roberta Reeder in Anna Akhmatova: Poet and Prophet compares Akhmatova’s Requiem to the works of Dostoyevsky and Berdyaev stating that in the Orthodox tradition, “…suffering is an important aspect of life, by which one’s faith is tested” (Reeder 212). She says that at no time did Akhmatova doubt her faith and that it was her faith she turned to during the hardest times. This would explain why Requiem is written like a Catholic requiem. This would explain Akhmatova’s religious references. In a way Reeder suggests that Akhmatova’s faith was even strengthened during this time. To support this argument, Reeder turns to the absurdist philosophy of Albert Camus and his Myth of Sisyphus. For Reeder, Camus did not believe in destiny, nor did he believe in God. There is no divine intervention and that according to Camus good and evil coexist and it is up to each individual to decide which path to take. Reeder says that Akhmatova did not do this. She did not choose a path, nor did she believe that her son and husband’s imprisonments were because of their actions, their decisions to turn towards evil. Like the Madonna, Akhmatova did not lose faith, but turned to her faith. She knew deep inside that good would triumph and that she only needed to be patient. Reeder cites the remarks of Joseph Brodsky who stated:
“The degree of compassion with which the various voices of *Requiem* are rendered can be explained only by the author’s Orthodox faith; the degree of understanding and forgiveness which account for this work’s piercing, almost unbearable lyricism, only by the uniqueness of her heart, herself, and this self’s sense of time. No creed would help to understand, much less forgive, let alone survive this double widowhood at the hands of the regime, this fate of her son, these forty years of being silenced and ostracized” (Reeder 212).

Most importantly, *Requiem* stands as a memorial or an elegy to women around the world and the pain and suffering that they go through in life. That is the primary message of the poem, but the poem is also a lot more. The poem is an anti-Stalin piece. The poem is a historical tale of what happened in Russia under Stalin. The poem is an autobiographical story of Akhmatova. The poem can be linked to numerous other pieces of literature and music throughout time. When Akhmatova was alive her work was not allowed to be published in Russia. Now that Russia is changing, her work has been allowed to be published. Since that time she gained even more readers and attention and continues to do so not just in Russia, but throughout the world.
Michael Bakhtin once wrote that “the author-creator...created an autobiography or a confession of the most astonishing truthfulness while at the same time he, as its creator, remains outside the world he represented in his work...It is just as impossible to forge an identity between myself, my own “I” and that “I” that is the subject of my stories as it is to lift myself up by my own hair” (Bakhtin 256). The author creates imaginary worlds that are products of his imagination. In his writing, the poet expresses his poetic identity, his vision of the world.

We cannot recreate the poet’s biography by analyzing his poetry. But learning about poets’ lives and their experiences adds more to the meaning and understanding of their poetry as it has been shown with Catherine Pozzi, Gabriela Mistral and Anna Akhmatova. Readers are suggestible and have an emphatic ability. They interpret poetry according to their own experience and knowledge but they are also hungry to learn about the poet’s experience. It can lead to a primitive association of a poet with “a hero” of the poetry, which is not correct. But studies of a poet’s biography help to create a “connection” between a reader and the poetry. Knowledge that Pozzi wrote Nyx when she was dying adds emotional intensity and compassion to the reading experience, which is a necessary part of esthetic pleasure. Learning that Mistral struggled with her lesbian desires explains an expressive eroticism of the descriptions of women in some of her poems. Analysis of the allusions and intertextuality in Akhmatova’s Requiem helps achieve a deeper understanding of multiple poetic identities in Requiem. In sum, poetic identities of the poets are created by their poetic imagination, but often it is
“impossible to draw a line between the work the poet writes and the work he lives, between the life he lives, and the life he writes.” (Fiedler 260).

Poetry is not just an art, but it is an autobiographical expression of each individual. Arthur Rimbaud in Lettre du Voyant helps us to understand this when he says “Car JE est un autre,” or “because I is another.” The poets discussed in this work are not simply poets, but they are something more. For Catherine Pozzi, her life is surrounded by death, death of relationships, her impending death. She does not write only about death, but in a way is transformed into death. Gabriela Mistral uses various literary techniques to describe her “other” and that is the position of the “Mother of Chile.” This motherly figure is a role that is continually replayed throughout her poetry including the tale of La Contadora where she transforms herself into Mother Nature into order to describe her role as a story teller. For Anna Akhmatova she uses Christianity and is transformed into the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary. There is a specific reason that she uses roman numerals to divide her poem and writes the “Crucifixion” in part “X.” “X” is symbolic of the cross and the persecution of the people are symbolic of the crucifixion of Christ. As a mother, Akhmatova is morning for the imprisonment and loss of her son, just as the Mother of God mourned for the loss of so many people during this time. The women in these poems use their role of the other to not only tell the story of their lives, but to tell the story of their people.
REFERENCES


Petrarca, Francesco. The sonnets of Petrarch. Translated into English by Joseph Auslander.


<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~sorjuana/Commentaries/Mistral/Mistral.html>.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX 1

Catherine Pozzi

Nyx

O vous mes nuits, ô noires attendues
O pays fier, ô secrets obstinés
O longs regards, ô foudroyantes nues
O vol permis outre les cieux fermés.

O grand désir, ô surprise épandue
O beau parcours de l’esprit enchanté
O pire mal, ô grâce descendue
O porte ouverte où nul n’avait passé

Je ne sais pas pourquoi je meus et noie
Avant d’entrer à l’éternel séjour.
Je ne sais pas de qui je suis la proie.
Je ne sais pas de qui je suis l’amour.

Transl. by Howard Fine

Louise Labé

Sonnet II

Ô beaux yeux bruns, ô regards détournés,
Ô chauxs soupirs, ô larmes épandues,
Ô noires nuits vainement attendues,
Ô jours luisants vainement retournée!

Ô tristes plaints, ô désirs obstiné,
Ô temps perdu, ô peines dépendues,
Ô milles morts en mille rets tendues,
Ô pires maux contre moi destiné!

Ô ris, ô front, cheveux bras mains et doigts!
Ô luth plaintif, viole, archet et voix!

Louise Labé

Sonnet II

O beautiful brown eyes, O stolen glances,
O warm sighs, O blossoming tears,
O dark nights, vainly waiting,
O shimmering days, in vain re-lived!

O sad complaints, O obstinate desires,
O hours lost, O sorrows dependable,
O thousand deaths in a thousand snares,
O terrible evils ranged against me.

O laugh, O brow, hair, arms, hands and fingers!
O plaintive lute, violin, bow and voice!
Tant de flambeaux pour arder une femelle!

So many flames, fanning the ardour of this woman!

De toi me plains, que tant de feux portant,
En tant d’endroits d’iceux mon cœur tâtant,
N’en ai sur toi volé quelque étincelle.

Of you I moan, where your flames lick,
Many places, not least my heart it feels,
As if I have stolen your spark of fire.

Pétrarque

Sonnet 88

S’amor non è, che dunque è qué i’ sénto?
Ma s’ègli è amór, per Dio, che cósa, e quale?
Se buona, ond’ è ‘l èffettó aspro e mortale?
Se ria; ond’ è sí dolce ògni tormènto?

If no love is, O God, what fele I so?
And if love is, what thing and which is he?
If love be good, from whennes cometh my woo?
If it be wikke, a wonder thynketh me,
When every torment and adversite
That cometh of hym may to me savory thinke,
For ay thurst I, the more that ich it drynke.

S’ a mia vóglia ardo; ónd’ è ‘l pianto e ‘l lamènto!
S’ a mal mio grado’; il lamentar che vale?
O viva mórté, o dilettòso male,
Còme puói tanto in mè, s’io nòl cónsénto?

If it be wikke, a wonder thynketh me,
When every torment and adversite
That cometh of hym may to me savory thinke,
For ay thurst I, the more that ich it drynke.

E s’io ‘l cónsénto; a gran tórto mi dóglio.
Fra sè contrári vénti in fragil barca
Mi tróve in alto mar senza govérno.

If harm agree me, wherto pleynte I thenne?
If harm agree me, wherto pleynte I thenne?
O quike deth, O swete harm so queynte,
How may of the in me swich quantite,
But if that I consente that it be?

"And if that I consente, I wrongfully
Compleyne, iwis. Thus possed to and fro,
Al sterelees withinne a boot am I
Amydde the see, bitwixen wyndes two,
That in contrarie stonden evere mo.
Allas, what is this wondre maladie?
For hote of cold, for cold of hote, I dye

Petrarch

Sonnet 88

If no love is, O God, what fele I so?
And if love is, what thing and which is he?
If love be good, from whennes cometh my woo?
If it be wikke, a wonder thynketh me,
When every torment and adversite
That cometh of hym may to me savory thinke,
For ay thurst I, the more that ich it drynke.

"And if that at myn owen lust I brenne,
From whennes cometh my waillynge and my pleynte?
If harm agree me, wherto pleynte I thenne?
If harm agree me, wherto pleynte I thenne?
O quike deth, O swete harm so queynte,
How may of the in me swich quantite,
But if that I consente that it be?

"And if that I consente, I wrongfully
Compleyne, iwis. Thus possed to and fro,
Al sterelees withinne a boot am I
Amydde the see, bitwixen wyndes two,
That in contrarie stonden evere mo.
Allas, what is this wondre maladie?
For hote of cold, for cold of hote, I dye
APPENDIX 2

Encargo a Blanca

A Blanca Subercaseaux

Yo no sé si podré venir.
A ver si te cumplo, hermana.

Llego, si vengo, en aire dulce
por no helarte la llanada
o en el filo de tu sueño
con amor, y sin palabra.

Empínate por si me cuesta
hallémonos a media marcha,
me llevas un poco de tierra
por que recuerde mi Posada.

No temas si bulto no llevo
tampoco si llego mudada.
Y no llores si no te respondo
porque mi culpa fue la palabra.
Pero dame la tuya, la tuya
que era como paloma posada.

Message to Blanca

For Blanca Subercaseaux

I don’t know if I can come
Let’s see if I can read you, sister.

I’ll arrive, if I do, on a mild wind,
so as not to freeze your plains,
or at the edges of your dream,
with love, and without a word.

Stand up tall, in case I find it
hard to meet halfway,
and bring me a little earth
to remember my Inn by.

Don’t worry if I don’t have a shape,
or if I look different
And don’t cry if I don’t answer,
for my sin was word.
But give me yours, your word
that was like a dove alighting.

Trans. By Ursula McGuin
La Otra

Una en mí mate: 
yo no la amaba.

Era la flor llameando 
del cactus de montaña; 
era aridez y fuego; 
nunca se referescaba.

Piedra y cielo tenía 
a pies y a espaldas 
y no bajaba nunca 
a buscar “ojos de agua”.

Donde hacía su siesta, 
las hierbas se enroscaban 
de aliento de su boca 
y brasa de su cara.

En rápidas resinas 
se endurecía su habla, 
por no caer en linda 
presa soltada.

Doblarse no sabía 
la planta de montaña, 
y al costado de ella, 
yo me doblaba…

La dejé que muriese, 
robándole mi entraña. 
Se acabó como el águila que no es alimentada.

Sosegó el aletazo, 
se dobló, lacia, 
y me cayó a la mano 
su pavesa acabada…

Por ella todavía 
me gimen sus hermanas,

The Other

I killed a woman in me: 
one I did not love.

She was the blazing flower 
of the mountain cactus; 
she was drought and fire, 
ever cooling her body.

She had stone and sky 
at her feet, at her shoulders, 
and she never came down 
to seek the water’s eye.

Wherever she rested, 
the grass would twist 
from the breath of her mouth, 
the live coals of her face.

Like quick-setting resin 
her speech would harden, 
ever to fall lovely 
as a captive freed.

The plant of the mountain 
didn’t know how to bend, 
and at her side 
I bent and bent…

I left her to die, 
robbing her of my heart’s blood. 
She ended like an eagle 
starved of its food.

The beating wing grew still; 
she bent, spent, 
and her dying ember 
fell into my hand…

Still her sisters keen, 
they cry to me for her,
y las gredas de fuego
al pasar me desgarran.

Cruzando yo les digo:
-Buscad por las quebradas
y haced con las arcillas
otra águila abrasada.
Si no podéis, entonces,
¡ay!, olvidadla
Yo la maté. ¡Vosotras
también matadla!

and the fiery clay
rakes me as I pass

When we meet I tell them:
“Search in the ravines
and fashion from the clay
another burning eagle.

“If you can’t do it, then,
too bad! Forget her.
I killed her. You women
must kill her too!”

_Couch 32-3_
La Contadora

Cuando camino se levantan
todas las cosas de la Tierra,
y se paran y cuchichean
y es su historia lo que cuentan.

Y las gentes que caminan,
en la ruta me la dejan
y la recojo de caída
en capullos que son de huellas.

Historias corren mi cuerpo
o en mi regazo ronronean.
Zumban, hierven y abejean.
Sin llamada se me vienen
y contadas tampoco me dejan.

The Storyteller

When I walk all the things
of the earth awaken,
and they rise up and whisper
and it’s their stories that they tell.

And the peoples who wander
leave them for me on the road
and I gather them where they’ve fallen
in cocoons made of footprints.

Stories run through my body
or purr in my lap.
They buzz, boil, and bee-drone.
They come to me uncalled
and don’t leave me once told.
APPENDIX 3

Анна Ахматова

РЕКВИЕМ
(1935-1940)

Нет, и не под чуждым небосводом,
И не под защитой чуждых крыл,-
Я была тогда с моим народом,
Там, где мой народ, к несчастью, был.

REQUIEM
(1935-1940)

No foreign sky protected me,
No stranger’s wing shielded my face.
I stand as witness to the common lot,
Survivor of that time, that place.

1961

ВМЕСТО ПРЕДИСЛОВИЯ

В страшные годы ежовщины я провела семнадцать месяцев в тюремных очередях в Ленинграде. Как-то раз кто-то "опознал" меня. Тогда стоящая за моей женщиной, которая, конечно, никогда не слыхала моего имени, очнулась от свойственного нам всем оцепенения и с-просила меня на ухо (там все говорили шепотом): - А это вы можете описать?

И я сказала:
- Могу.

Тогда что-то вроде улыбки скользнуло по тому, что некогда было ее лицом.

1 апреля 1957, Ленинград

ПОСВЯЩЕНИЕ

Перед этим горем гнутся горы,
Не течет великая река,
Но крепки тюремные затворы,
А за ними "каторжные норы"
И смертельная тоска.
Для кого-то веет ветер свежий,

Ленинград, 1 April 1957

DEDICATION

Such grief might make the mountains stoop,
reverse the waters where they flow,
but cannot burst these ponderous bolts
that block us from the prison cells
crowded with mortal woe.....
Для кого-то нежится закат -
Мы не знаем, мы повсюду те же,
Слышишь лишь ключей постылый скрежет
Да шаги тяжелые солдат.
Подымались как к обедне ранней,
По столице одичалой шли,
Там встречались, мертвых бездыханней,
Солнце ниже, и Нева туманней,
А надежда все поет вдали.
Приговор... И сразу слезы хлынут,
Ото всех уже отделена,
Словно с болью жизнь из сердца вынут,
Словно грубо навзничь опрокинут,
Но идет... Шатается... Одна...
Где теперь невольные подруги
Двух моих осатанелых лет?
Что им чудится в сибирской вьюге,
Что мерещится им в лунном круге?
Им я шлю прощальный свой привет.

Март 1940

ВСТУПЛЕНИЕ

Это было, когда улыбался
Только мертвый, спокойствию рад.
И ненужным привеском качался
Возле тюрем своих Ленинград.
И когда, обезуем от муки,
Шли уже осужденных полки,
И короткую песню разлуки
Паровозные пели гудки,
Звезды смерти стояли над нами,
И безвинная корчилась Русь
Под кровавыми сапогами
И под шинами черных марусь.

I

Уводили тебя на рассвете,
За тобой, как на выносе, шла,
В темной горнице плакали дети,

For some the wind can freshly blow,
For some the sunlight fade at ease,
But we, made partners in our dread,
Hear but the grating of the keys,
And heavy-booted soldiers’ trad.
As if for early mass, we rose
And each day walked the wilderness,
Trudging through silent street and square,
To congregate, less live than dead.
The sun declined, the Neva blurred,
And hope sang always from afar.
Whose sentence is decreed?... That moan,
that sudden spurt of woman’s tears,
shows one distinguished from the rest,
as if they’d knocked her to the ground
and wrenched the heart out of her breast,
them let her go, reeling, alone.
Where are they now, my nameless friends
from those two years I spent in hell?
What specters mock them now, amid
the fury of Siberian snows,
or in the blighted circle of the moon?
To them I cry, Hail and Farewell!
March 1940

PROLOGUE

That was a time when only the dead
could smile, delivered from their wars,
and the sign, the soul, of Leningrad
dangled outside its prison-house;
and the regiments of the condemned,
herded in the railroad-yards,
shrank from the engine’s whistle-song
whose burden went, “Away, pariahs!”
The stars of death stood over us.
And Russia, guiltless, beloved, writhed
under the church of bloodstained boots,
derunder the wheels of Black Marias.

I

At dawn they came and took you away.
You were my dead: I walked behind.
In the dark room children cried,
У божницы свеча оплыла.
На губах твоих холод иконки,
Смертный пот на челе... Не забыть!
Буду я, как стрелецкие женки,
Под кремлевскими башнями выть.

[Ноябрь] 1935, Москва

II

Тихо льется тихий Дон,
Желтый месяц входит в дом.
Входит в шапке набекрень,
Видит желтый
месяц тень.
Эта женщина больна,
Эта женщина одна.
Муж в могиле, сын в тюрьме,
Помолитесь обо мне.

1935

II

Quietly flows the quiet Don;
Into my house slips the yellow moon.
It leaps the sill, with its cap askew,
And balks at a shadow, that yellow moon.
This woman is sick to her marrow-bone,
This woman is utterly alone,
With husband dead, with son away
In jail. Pray for me. Pray.

III

Нет, это не я, это кто-то другой страдает.
Я бы так не могла, а то, что случилось,
Пусть черные сукна покроют,
И пусть унесут фонари....
Ночь.

1939

III

No, not mine: it’s somebody else’s wound.
I could never have borne it. So take the thing
that happened, hide it, stick it in the ground.
Whisk the lamps away....
Night.

IV

Показать бы тебе, насмешнице
И любимице всех друзей,
Царскосельской веселой грешнице,
Что случится с жизнью твоей -
Как трехсотая, с передачею,
Под Крестами будешь стоять
И своей слезою горячею
Новогодний лед прожигать.
Там тюремный тополь качается,
И ни звука - а сколько там
Неповинных жизней кончается...

1939

IV

They should have shown you-mocker,
delight of your friends, hearts’ thief,
aughtiest girl of Pushkin’s town-
this picture of your fated years,
as under the glowering wall you stand,
shabby, three hundredth in the line,
clutching a parcel in your hand,
and the New Year’s ice scorched by your tears.
See there the prison poplar bending!
No sound. No sound. Yet how many
Innocent lives are ending....

72
1938

V

Семнадцать месяцев кричу,
Зову тебя домой,
Кидалась в ноги палачу,
Ты сын и ужас мой.
Все перепуталось навек,
И мне не разобрать
Теперь, кто зверь, кто человек,
И долго ль казни ждать.
И только пыльные цветы,
И звон кадильный, и следы
Куда-то в никуда.
И прямо мне в глаза глядит
И скорой гибелью грозит
Огромная звезда.

1939

VI

Легкие летят недели,
Что случилось, не пойму.
Как тебе, сынок, в тюрьму
Ночи белые глядели,
Как они опять глядят
Ястребиным жарким оком,
О твоем кресте высоком
И о смерти говорят.

Весна 1939

VII

ПРИГОВОР

1938

V

For seventeen months I have cried aloud,
calling you back to your lair.
I hurled myself at the hangman’s foot.
You are my son, changed into nightmare.
Confusion occupies the world,
and I am powerless to tell
somebody brute from something human,
or on what day the word spells, “Kill!”
Nothing is left but dusty flowers,
the tinkling thimble, and tracks
that lead to nowhere. Night of stone,
whose bright enormous star
stares me straight in the eyes,
promising death, ah soon!

VI

The weeks fly out of mind,
I doubt that it occurred:
how into your prison, child,
the white nights, blazing, stared;
and still, as I draw breath,
they fix their buzzard eyes
on what the high cross shows,
this body of your death.

VII

THE SENTENCE
И упало каменное слово
На мою еще живую грудь.
Ничего, ведь я была готова,
Справлюсь с этим как-нибудь.
У меня сегодня много дела:
Надо память до конца убить,
Надо, чтоб душа окаменела,
Надо снова научиться жить.
А не то... Горячий шелест лета,
Словно праздник за моим окном.
Я давно предчувствовала этот
Светлый день и опустелый дом.

[22 июня] 1939, Фонтанный Дом

VIII

К СМЕРТИ

Ты все равно придешь - зачем же не теперь?
Я жду тебя - мне очень трудно.
Я потушила свет и отворила дверь
Тебе, такой простой и чудной.
Прими для этого какой угодно вид,
Ворвись отравленным снарядом
Иль с гирькой подкрались, как опытный бандит,
Иль отрави тифозным чадом.
Иль сказочкой, придуманной тобой
И всем до тошноты знакомой,-
Чтоб я увидела верх шапки голубой
И бледного от страха управдома.
Мне все равно теперь. Клубится Енисей,
Звезда Полярная сияет.
И синий блеск возлюбленных очей
Последний ужас застилает.

19 августа 1939, Фонтанный Дом

IX

Уже безумие крылом
Души накрыло половину,
И поит огненным вином
И манит в черную долину.
И поняла я, что ему
Должна я уступить победу,
Прислушиваясь к своему
Уже как бы чужому бреду.
И не позволит ничего
Оно мне унести с собою
(Как ни упрашивай его
И как ни докучай мольбою):
Ни сына страшные глаза

That taste of opiate wine!
Lure of the dark valley!
Now everything is clear.
I admit my defeat. The tongue
of my ravings in my ear
is the tongue of a stranger.
No use to fall down on my knees
and beg for mercy’s sake.
nothing I counted mine, out of my life,
Is mine to take:
Not my son’s terrible eyes,
Not the elaborate stone flower
Of grief, not the day of the storm,
Not the trial of the visiting hour,
not the dear coolness of his hands,
not the lime trees’ agitated shade,
not the thin cricket-sound
of consolation’s parting word.

4 may 1940

CRUCIFIXION

“Do not weep for me, Mother,
When I am in my grave.”

1
A choir of angels glorified the hour,
The vault of heaven was dissolved in fire.
“Father, why hast Thou forsaken me?
Mother, I beg you, do not weep for me....”

2
Mary Magdalene beat her breasts and sobbed,
His dear disciple, stone–faced, stared.
His mother stood apart. No other looked
Ученик любимый каменел,
А туда, где молча Мать стояла,
Так никто взглянуть и не посмел.

1940, Фонтанный Дом

ЭПИЛОГ

1
Узнала я, как опадают лица,
Как из-под век выглядывает страх,
Как клинописи жесткие страницы
Страдание выводит на щеках,
Как локоны из пепельных и черных
Серебряными делаются вдруг,
Улыбка вянет на губах покорных,
И в сухоньком смешке дрожит испуг.
И я молюсь не о себе одной,
А обо всех, кто там стоял со мною,
И в лютый холод, и в июльский зной
Под красною ослепшею стеною.

2
Опять поминальный приблизился час.
Я вижу, я слышу, я чувствую вас:
И ту, что едва до окна довели,
И ту, что родимой не топчет земли,
И ту, что красивой тряхнув головой,
Сказала: "Сюда прихожу, как домой".
Хотелось бы всех поименно назвать,
Да отняли список, и негде узнать.
Для них соткала я широкий покров
Из бедных, у них же подслушанных слов.
О них вспоминаю всегда и везде,
О них не забуду и в новой беде,
И если зажмут мой измученный рот,
Которым кричит стомильонный народ,
Пусть так же они поминают меня
В канун моего поминального дня.
А если когда-нибудь в этой стране
Воздвигнуть задумают памятник мне,
Согласься на это даю торжество,
Но только с условьем - не ставить его
 Ни около моря, где я родилась:
 Последняя с морем разорвана связь,
 Ни в царском саду у заветного пня,
 Где тень безутешная ищет меня,
 А здесь, где стояла я триста часов
 И где для меня не открыли засов.
 Затем, что и в смерти блаженной боюсь
 Забыть громыхание черных марусь,
 Забыть, как постылая хлопала дверь
 И выла старуха, как раненый зверь.
 И пусть с неподвижных и бронзовых век
 Как слезы, струится подтаивший снег,
 И голубь тюремный пусть гулит вдали,
 И тихо идут по Неве корабли.

Около 10 марта 1940, Фонтанный Дом

To casting in my name a monument,
I should be proud to have my memory graced,
But only if the monument be placed
not near the sea on which my eyes first opened-
my last link with the sea has long been broken-
nor in the Tsar’s garden near the sacred stump,
where a grieved shadow hunts my body’s warmth,
but here, where I endured three hundred hours
in line before the implacable iron bars.
Because even in blissful death I fear
To lose the clangor of the Black Marias,
To lose the banging of that odious gate
And the old crone howling like a wounded beast.
And from my motionless bronze-lidded sockets
May the melting snow, like teardrops, slowly trickle,
And a prison dove coo somewhere, over and over,
As the ships sail softly down the flowing Neva.

March 1940

Transl. by Stanley Kunitz with Max Hayward