

Caught between Art and Crisis: Identity in Mandelstam's "Art of Parting"

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Abstract

Osip Mandelstam (1891-1938) will always be one of the most eminent as well as controversial names of Russian literature till date. Being the advocate of Acmeist poetry, Mandelstam's poetry mostly emphasized his individual urges, and concerns rather than the politically infused voices. While his contemporary authors like T.S. Eliot and James Joyce were engaged in their contribution to modern literature, Mandelstam was struggling to determine his identity as an independent poet and political spokesperson for the ruling regime at that period. In fact, his struggle to define his identity was entirely streaming during his poetic career, from a wider perspective. The approach towards 'art of parting', not only restricted in the case of "Tristia" but also that of his own life, had left an unforgettable trace on his poetic career emphasized with mythological reverberation. His attachment with his own Jewish origins as well as his Russian upbringing had also caused further anxiety and trouble for Mandelstam. Such attachments have always been questioned and criticized not only by the Russian regime but also by his peers, incidentally. In this paper, Mandelstam's uncontrollable suffering from identity will be discussed with special reference to his first title poem from the 1922 collection *Tristia*.

Keywords: Identity, struggle, poetry, politics, parting, attachment



Acknowledged for his advocacy as an Acmeist poet in Russian Literature, Osip Emilievich Mandelstam (1891-1938) metamorphosed himself as a non-conformist identity due to his endless struggle in an ambiguous situation, where he found himself entangled between hereditary and political reasons. Although Mandelstam strongly supported the Bolsheviks — who dedicated themselves to uproot the then ruling authority—towards the beginning of his literary career, with time however as a mature poet he articulated his personal urges and concerns through poetry rather than surrendering to the politically infused voices. The art of separation that he was longing to comprehend as well as appreciate can be determined as a result of his hostility towards Joseph Stalin and the Communist government after 1917. “Tristia” the poem, published in the collection called *Tristia* (1922) by Osip Mandelstam, can be treated as an anticipatory verse poem from a biographical perspective which he was speculating to face during his own lifetime, and eventually he did receive his banishment in various forms causing him to embrace death untimely.

From the beginning of his poetic journey, readers might notice another overview of Osip Mandelstam different from his objectives, but subsequently he started to take control over his own poetic vocation without any external indulgence as has been attempted several times by the Communist government of Stalin. Eimear McBride wrote an article, (“*It gets people killed*”: *Osip Mandelstam and the perils of writing poetry under Stalin*) in “The New Statesman” that:

...Mandelstam had been initially supportive of the ideals of the Bolsheviks and sought to embrace the spirit of revolution. He soon became disillusioned, however, by the increasing demands of the regime for poetry to serve the political and collective, rather than the personal and the human. (McBride, 2017)

Since 1917, he was struggling desperately to settle down his identity between an independent poet and a political spokesperson of the ruling regime. His dissociation from politics during the Bolshevik Revolution marked him as the non-conformist author of all times. Neither he did find any aesthetic satisfaction in politics nor was he prepared to run away from his surroundings, that eventually made him an authentic spokesperson of nonconformity. Due to this course of his engagement, Stalin regime compelled him to be ostracized from his own country, exiled from his own nation, resultantly pushed him hard to embrace his untimely death at the age of forty-seven in Joseph Stalin's labour camp.

To perceive Osip Mandelstam's identity and his literary stature, readers must explore the biographical context that moulded him since his early years as an author. Despite his Russian upbringing since 3rd January 1891 in St. Petersburg, there is another lineage that Osip Mandelstam was nourishing within himself was his Jewish ancestry. Being surrounded with two distinguished cultures side by side was challenging enough for any individual, as happened with Mandelstam. He could not seemingly overlook his Jewish identity just so he was born and brought up in Russia. Moreover, as a sensible individual he was made to decide which lineage to prefer over another and thus from the early phase of his life Mandelstam accustomed to find himself in critically undefinable situations, which led him perhaps to experience parting or separation through his own life. With this preordained tension in his cultural identity, Mandelstam has learned to proceed in life with such differences. His expertise in French, German and Italian language has further added variations in the making of Osip Mandelstam, the poet. Hence, one can



understand how broadly he was trying to spread his wings—his identity—rather than confining himself within the four walls of his given identity.

Osip Mandelstam's stand as a creative person, during the tenure of 1917 to 1923, manifested him as the more challenging yet profound individual than before. His initial association and involvement with the Bolsheviks was an instinctive decision that he had taken in his life, as Mandelstam himself expressed later in his life through his works. Instinctive or may be premature decisions were taken, as he expressed, because he was quite young who did not contemplate minutely. As Brown has reflected on this same regard that:

Mandelstam's early poetry is written entirely in the spirit and manner of Symbolists, the dominant masters of his formative years, but by the time the first collection of his poetry came out in 1913 he was already identifiable as one of the new group of Acmeists. (Brown, 1986)

Being one of the chief exponents of Acmeist movement, Mandelstam wanted to disqualify the traits of what Symbolist poets used to practice, and introduced instead a more elucidated expression of poetic language by getting rid of the mysticism and obscurity while translating his thoughts through poetic voice. Mandelstam began writing when he was still in secondary school and his association with the Acmeist Movement or the Guild of Poets had begun during his years as a student, and during this time met Nikolai Gumilev and Anna Akhmatova. Gradually Mandelstam had begun to occupy one of the significant positions in the new literary practice, and consequently he became one of the chief pioneers of the Acmeist Movement. Unlike the Symbolist practitioners, the main objective of this movement was “to rise only to the level of towers we can build ourselves”, without dealing with unnecessary vagueness and excessive metaphysical elements in the poetry. As Brown has observed:

It was the mysticism of the Symbolists, their fascination with the occult and the other world, to which the Acmeist objected. They offered instead a poetry of this world, a celebration of the rose, as they said, for its own petals and perfume rather than for its supposed symbolic link to love in this world or the next. The Acmeists were far from rejecting the religious values of Symbolists, but they refused to turn poetry into a church or themselves into hierophants.... (Brown, 1986)

Just as the poem “Tristia” (1922) would talk about the real suffering of the nation and its people, the very way in which Mandelstam wanted to translate reality into poetry without referring to the mysticism of anything unreal. Everything that is real and sound about this world has been the core subject of concern for the Acmeis poets.

In the poem titled as “Tristia” the readers cannot help but reminisce about Ovid's work with identical titles, accounting for the interconnected notions of exile, separation, struggle, identity. Ovid's first volume of *The Tristia* had been composed while he was in the journey to exile, which depicted his journey or travel experience in a very didactic manner. The narrative of departure or separation could be allusive to the mythical references of Aeneas and Odysseus, where both the mythical heroes were experiencing their individual journey towards exile. Ovid's conscious self-reflection could be traced through these mythical allegories, and according to readers' reaction, they are suggesting more than just mere self-reflection.



Ovid, as an individual and as a poet, was immensely affected by the unpredicted exile. In fact, during his exile, all the emotional turmoil and anxiety found their expression through his literary compositions. It was indeed a great shock for Ovid to be able to accept this punishment to survive, but the exile notwithstanding confirmed the orthodoxy of Emperor Augustus himself and his court of law. The following volume of *The Tristia* had been composed in the manner of a request or an earnest urge towards Emperor Augustus so that his exile could come to an end. As a form of self-assessment, he denies all accusations against him. The last three volumes of *The Tristia* were chiefly occupied by Ovid's lamentation for not being able to return to his homeland and pass his remaining years slowly during his exile among the Thracian Getae. These volumes also recorded his acknowledgement of the fact that he would never be able to return, and this separation from his motherland became a major reason for his lamentation.

With an unambiguous mindset, Ovid unravelled the verse narrative of “Tristia” and emphasized cautiously on what he himself has learned or experienced amidst the backdrop of violence and war:

I've learned the art of parting in the midst
Of open-headed lamentations in the night. (Mandelstam, ll.1-2)

The word “parting” or separation is centering around ideas like violence, insecurity, threat, homeland, partition and etc., which essentially imparted a sense of negation or cancellation, at the same time. However, Mandelstam expressed this idea of “parting” in association with periphrasis to enhance the value of parting, which can be learned as a lesson. This learning-lesson of “parting” has metaphorically manifested the process of unlearning, by which space would be created for newly acquired learning. The time he has employed since his birth to know, to nurture and to cherish every knowledge around him, has been played backward here, to unlearn the things he has learned all these years, to detach himself from all these things with which he associated himself dearly, to abstain himself from embracing things as his own. In short, the poet involuntarily prepared to embark on a journey which compelled him to be the stranger to all those things he has been closely attached with so far.

While the next line — “... in the midst/ Of open-headed lamentations in the night.” — unveils the concrete reality of the moment, the poet draws readers attention towards the heinous violence which emerged after 1917. “Lamentations in the night” over dead bodies, which have been tortured devastatingly, may not have excited him a bit, but rather made him avoid the scenario by acquiring the knowledge of parting. By distancing himself from the ongoing sufferings as well as violence, Mandelstam wanted possibly to reflect over reality by his own individual interest and objectives, rather than submitting to the same interest as that of his literary peers and the mass. That very distance, he believed, would most probably allow him to flourish satisfactorily in his poetic journey- whereas these sufferings and violence might become the subject of his poetic mission. One must note that Mandelstam never deliberately wanted to involve himself in these activities of distancing himself from his own nation or run away like an escapist, instead he was sort of compelled to choose that path of separation, since he did receive rigid intervention by not submitting to the political demands of Russian regime. The “art of separation” that Mandelstam consciously maintained in his relationship with the regime, has eventually led him to get separated from his own country, which he never expected. His initial



engagement with the regime might have caused a claustrophobic ambience consequently for him to breathe freely, which led him to part ways from the Russian regime eventually.

“Of open-headed lamentations” in the middle of the night not only merely accounting the ongoing violence in the city but could also be a threat for the poet who might end as one of those dead bodies if he failed to reconcile with the government. In both ways, none of the situations could be accepted by the poet, yet he was aware of the fact that his constant unreconciled conflict with the ruling power would deteriorate the political scenario of his country, which he could not allow to happen as a sensible citizen. Hence, he had to surrender to the demands of the Communist regime led by Stalin.

The wait for the impending danger made the citizens behave like oxen when they stayed silent to eat their food for a longer period. As the city vigil was going on, citizens were waiting just like those domestic animals for something to happen. In fact the animal reference to ox conveys its mythological connection which shares not only its mythical base but also its ritualistic history simultaneously.

The oxen graze, and so the wait persists –
The end of city vigil is in sight,
I’m honoring the cockerel night tradition, [...] (Mandelstam, ll.3-5)

References to animals, at times in different sections of this poem, beside human beings are trying to imply perhaps their resembling situation with humans, the lack of sensibility amongst humans, the sense of losing decision-making capability, and to stay underground waiting helplessly for something to happen. Just as animals live their life and have food comfortably before the sacrifice, without knowing their upcoming demise, without doing anything to save themselves. Likewise, the individuals presented here including the poet himself are indulging themselves into mourning of the dead kins and waiting silently for their own time to arrive.

Yet Mandelstam through his individual choice, through “art of parting” has intended to discard this useless reason of equalizing man and animals by separating his vocation from the rest. Either they were patiently waiting for some danger to occur or maybe they were waiting for some saviour to come to their rescue—the readers in fact are still unaware of the forthcoming incidents depicted in the following lines. Moving from oxen, the poet next has focused his attention upon another animal reference of ‘the cockerel night tradition’ which suggests the fruitful anticipatory power of cock as a bird which is aware of the avid details of the coming days. Like a soothsayer, the bird is aware of the future and for which reason cocks are considered to be the ominous birds that bring both good and bad news in a household; also the crowing of cocks can also act as warnings according to popular belief. ‘The cockerel night tradition’ signifies more like a chance or a scope or even as a hope to be able to survive desperately; without any proper justification, this practice has long been believed among various cultures and traditions since time immemorial. With his responsive self, the poet imparts his respect towards this cultural practice, hoping that it would disclose some positive outcome while everything else, especially when science fails to protect.

When, taking up road’s sorrow in travail,
The tear-stained eyes gazed off with premonition
And muses’ song fused with a woman’s wail. (Mandelstam, ll.6-8)



At times of war or communal violence what gave hope to humanity are such rituals or practices, since science was busy to take hold over the situation to disarm the ruling power, to destroy its identity- as the Bolsheviks were preparing to diminish the Czar domination. Therefore, rituals, practices, or cultural beliefs came to the rescue of the helpless humanity. 'Road's sorrow' metaphorically indicates sorrow of life, as road may signify both journey and life simultaneously which are occupied with variables like-pleasure, suffering, anxiety, tension and so on. The time-frame depicted by the poet was a complicated juncture for all the authors of his time, when their intention to draw inspiration from the Muses has somewhat been contradicted.

Authors like Pasetrnak and Akhmatova stopped publishing poems for ten long years, while Mandelstam did not publish anything for five years in response to the contemporary scenario of the country. It seemed the muses too lost interest in providing inspiration to these renowned poets of Russia. In the context of "Tristia", the song of the Greek Muses was not solely meant to offer inspiration rather to remind them of the unfortunate suffering, hardships, struggles and cries of helpless people around them as has been indicated through the 'muses' song fused with a women's wail'. Now this amalgamated new version of muses' song was being posed as a warning to those authors who are composing in this difficult period of humanity- to remind them that they cannot indulge themselves solely in artistic creation, rather make themselves conscious with the ongoing sufferings, cries, struggles around them forced them somewhat to restrain from publication. Mandelstam seemed thankful to the 'cockrel night' for allowing him to be aware of his surroundings as well as to remain focused on his literary vocation without publishing as it might draw further unrest around him. Like every concerned citizen, the poet was worried enough about the coming tomorrows, the future—since nobody knows what lies beyond today. While people are speculating about a safe, secured future for themselves, Mandelstam was maintaining his distance from national politics in every possible way, yet failed to procure his identity in his own country, own city as a poet.

Sharing almost the same fate as Mandelstam in Russia, one of the popular poets of the age, Anna Akhmatova's poetic life remained as eventful as it could become during the Communist regiment. Her works were termed as 'anachronistic' for their uncurtained response over the nation and national politics; her poetry became prohibited and destroyed from publication more than once as their sincere expression made the regime humiliated. As she failed to satisfy the regime and its demands, her son had been imprisoned due to her anti-national activities. Towards the end of her career, she tried to reconcile with the government by writing patriotic poems to show her submission to the interest of the regime. She was arrested and interrogated for her activities and forced to burn her poems *Requiem: A Cycle of Poems* (1964) after whispering them to her friend secretly, who used to memorize the complete work.

So many stones have been thrown at me,
That I'm not frightened of them anymore,
And the pit has become a solid tower,
Tall among tall towers.
I thank the builders,
May care and sadness pass them by.
From here I'll see the sunrise earlier,
Here the sun's last ray rejoices. (Akhmatova, ll.1-8)

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Notwithstanding, her true instinct as an aspiring free poet can be traced through the lines of “Solitude”, where the poet clearly revealed her psychic turmoil inwards and outward. Like a rebel, she continued her enmity with the authorities from time to time.

The second stanza of “Tristia” approaches like a self-contemplation of the author in order to comprehend more about self and ‘parting’ by presenting a set of questions not only for himself but also for his readers. Emphasizing upon the word ‘parting’, Mandelstam was trying some way to face the inevitable reality behind “separation”. To understand the original concept of ‘parting’ from the poet’s perspective is utterly impossible, for it can suggest so many other related issues simultaneously. Apparently from first reading it may seem to the readers that the meaning of ‘parting’ is rigidly constant, but undoubtedly it does change its sense now and then as per its necessity. The preconception of ‘parting’ that he was aware of earlier cannot be appropriate in the context of the future; naturally Mandelstam here appears quite perplexed even to conceive the true nature of separation that he is about to exercise, being afraid that some unexpected revelations are waiting for him in upcoming days.

And who could ever know, on hearing “parting,”
What sort of separation we would face,
What sort of wisdom was the cock imparting,
As flames in the acropolis would blaze [...] (Mandelstam, ll. 9-12)

In fact, his superstitious faith over the crowing of cock did not comfort him at this juncture, because somehow he failed to interpret and receive the possible message that it inclines to convey. Having specified further, the poet added two episodes, the meaning of which he wished to examine on a deeper level.

Regarding the first account (“flames in the Acropolis would blaze”) Mandelstam wanted explicitly to know the actual reason for this state: Why was this mythical city burning? Was it simply because the gods and goddesses were angry about human activities? Was the burning city symbolizing hell? Or maybe this famous Greek city metaphorically represented some modern city of the modern world- registering the fact that time has passed, but the suffering has never changed, whether it was an ancient city or modern city. By referring to the destructive condition of Acropolis—an ancient city—the poet most probably was trying to imagine the same status of his own city; as if by using allusion to the past he was attempting to understand the present situation and vice versa. Most likely the rage of violence was witnessed by poets in different time and space, emphasizing the cruel indulgence of the superior power in a country. By means of threat, the Stalin regime had occupied power over everything including art, literature, music and as a result many had been ostracized as well as eliminated by opposing that authority, including Mandelstam.

And in the dawning of some brand new life,
Just as an ox chews lazily in his stall,
Why did the cock, the herald of the new life,
Beat with his wings, atop the city wall? (Mandelstam, ll. 13-16)

Later, “in the dawning of some brand-new life” the cock beat its wings which became unfathomable for the poet as if like everyone else he was waiting for its call rather than those beatings. The cock, who is supposed to be the soothsayer of a new day, remained



silent and through its beating it was trying to convey something else that the poet himself could not decipher. So the first two stanzas reveal the fact that, unlike before, the poet had lost his ability to decipher meaning from actions or words who was struggling desperately to get rid of this obstacle, indicating another factor where the readers might imagine that the poet perhaps lost his creative function to decode emotions, thoughts, meanings from the phenomenal world. On that very perspective, Heidegger has discussed in *Being and Time* (1927) the necessity of understanding the self and the cause of human existence through the interpretation of human interactions and incorporation. To understand human existence or the self in a better way, one must examine accurately one's relation with the phenomenal world; otherwise the complete notion of human being could never be acquired. Following the same conception, the readers must not forget what Andrew Davis noted in “An Introduction” of *Osip Mandelstam: Voronezh Notebooks* (2016):

[...] for Mandelstam each thing seen or heard or smelt or tasted or felt functioned immediately as a door, as a point of departure into an underworld of passages, chambers, and hidden connections. Each bit of experience was touched, and then moved through, absorbed, and then moved beyond. The movement of Mandelstam's poetry was toward not the celestial but the chthonic—toward a deeper and deeper exploration of the specific. He did not generalize from experience, and the words attached to that experience, but moved deeper beneath them and within them. (Davis, 2016)

Interestingly the approach of ‘the dawning of some brand-new life’ has been interrupted by the cock ‘beat with his wings, atop the city wall’—suggesting perhaps the impending danger by the beating of wings as an omen to follow. The beginning of a brand-new day or life was being ruined due to some unknown danger. Just, the cycle of day and night is going to run by every means, even though many unpleasant and violent events are going around the city, Mandelstam hoped for renewal of the political condition of the nation. However, the poet's dream was about to be devastated in the form of a superstition, breaking all his dreams for an ideal city.

In every ancient religious ritual, the bull or ox was considered to be the utmost sacrificial offering, as its every body part was dedicated to the almighty's name. To speculate the reason behind mentioning this domestic animal suddenly with a specific activity, the readers might find it apparently clueless to connect between ideas. Yet, after some thorough contemplation they would realize that probably the poet was trying to draw the reader's attention towards the current scenario of the nation where occasionally people are dying, where life is at immense risk, no one knows what lies in future—and then the ox is being introduced, which indicates the role of a sacrificial symbol in almost every religious rituals in pagan times. Here the readers are somehow forced to imagine the connection between man and ox—where human life is in utter danger, on the other hand the animal is getting prepared to be sacrificed. Therefore, both man and animal are here playing the same role—they are being determined as sacrificial symbols in order to achieve something greater in the future. To be more specific, some lives are supposed to be separated from this earthly world to secure the lives of others; these sacrificed souls are being forced to embrace death anyhow, to get disconnected from the earthly lives.

I love simplicity of weaving; round and round,
The shuttle turns, the spindle hums anew.



Look there, ahead, as if the swan's white down,
The barefoot Dalia is soaring towards you! (Mandelstam, ll.17-20)

The reference to Dalia myth in the third stanza unleashes the mythical story of Lithuania, where she has been treated as a goddess of fate, someone who can give and take property as per her wish. She is often times imagined as another goddess called Laima, who predicts the longevity of human life. But Dalia mostly looks after materialistic wealth of human beings that they earn in their whole life- provides decent allotment to everyone. To add further, Dalia executes works as per the direction of Dievas Senelis, the superior god of sky, prosperity, wealth, ruler of gods, creator of the universe (the primordial supreme god of Baltic Mythology, who has different names in different myths).

As per mythological account, Dalia can be seen in different shapes and forms like-woman, lamb, dog, swan or duck. The act of weaving was represented as an explicit reference to Greek mythology of fate sisters—Lachesis, Clotho, Atropos—who determine the fate of humans on earth, by weaving with threads almost similar to the function of Dalia. According to myth, Clotho spun the thread of human fate, Lachesis dispensed it, Atropos cut the thread of human life respectively. Here the poet was quite enjoying the whole sight of weaving, spinning and threading which offers both visual delight to some and death sentences to others. Through his literary agency, Mandelstam wanted to voice for himself and against the threatening power of political authority. Political ideology did not support the philosophical context of that same ideology; ideas or concepts were malfunctioning to achieve the personal goals of the authority, while pretending to secure the public interest through their activities. As a result of such malpractices, not only poets like Osip Mandelstam had suffered but also its citizens. To quote the words of Davis in this connection:

All of Mandelstam's poetry is excavated from the midden of his experience. This is its fundamental, invariable, characteristic, and essential principle. There was little of the theoretician and nothing of the mystic in him; he was the most earthly of men. (Davis, 2016)

To be more specific, this poem "Tristia" so far not only addressing Mandelstam's own poetic purposes, but also that of the common people; the notion of parting is not only applicable for himself and the nation, but also applicable for voicing the separation between freeman and captivated man, between free society and enchanted society, between free nation and suppressed nation. Imagining themselves as gods of fate, they treated individual subjects as trivially as a thread; and being so, they can decide all the movements of every human identity, shorten their tenure as a living creature by pronouncing death as per their wish.

With lucidity the movement of threading has been depicted ("I love simplicity of weaving; round and round ...") including visionary image and verbal sound. The more readers get engrossed in such an experience, the better presence of Dalia or swan or the goddess of fate can be perceived. As if she was investigating carefully the future of human beings, including the poet. Having glorified initially the artistry of weaving, the poet gradually unfolded the harsh reality about human identity, how meaningless it can become into the hands of powerful entities, like gods or authority.

Our life is poor and meagre at its core,



The language of our joy is insufficient!
 All's happened once, all will repeat once more,
 The sole delight - a flash of recognition. (Mandelstam, ll.21-24)

And then versification of his inner voice (“our life is poor and meagre at its core ...”) became the desperate outburst of Mandelstam as a human being, more than a poet. Here the poet openly equated himself with other common people despite his specific identity as an author, since he knew very well that ultimately his identity as a human comes first even before as a poet. In fact, through the privilege of his poetic voice, he was able to draw the reader's attention to the fact that he genuinely followed Marxist ideology, unlike national authorities who were pretending to showcase their support.

So let it be: a shape, transparent, round,
 Lies in the middle of a clean clay plate,
 And, like a squirrel's pelt stretched out,
 A girl looks at the molten wax, dismayed. (Mandelstam, ll.25-28)

The last stanza of “Tristia” begins with the poet's confidence and confirmation (“So let it be”) of the fact that he was ready to embrace everything which will come on his way, yet he did not share what premonition he was having at that time and that unexpected thing can happen not only to the poet, but also to the people of the same nation. Subsequently, an unknown form has been described without any specificity: “... a shape, transparent, round, / Lies in the middle of a clean clay plat”. That spatial form or mode of existence he has depicted is nothing but an identity which he was aspiring to become, despite every adversity. Amidst all negativity he has dreamt to have a form, a round shape probably signifying the circle of life or the circle of nature, which has enough transparency to manifest into any other format, so that it could not be restricted with life, with form. The poet did not want his life to be intervened by others; rather he wanted it to be absolutely free from botheration so that he could contemplate on his poetic vocation as a whole.

These first two lines are specifically more focused on his identity as well as individuality, and he believed by following his instinct he could fulfil both his poetic desires and his individual tranquility, simultaneously.

The Grecian Erebus is not for us to guess.
 Warm wax for women is like bronze for men.
 Our fate is cast in battles, not at rest.
 But they will die, divining till the end. (Mandelstam, ll.29-32)

Having mentioned ‘The Grecian Erebus’, the poet disclosed the explicit distance between the mortal and immortal—something impassable, invincible, unreachable, a grand disconnection which cannot be merged. In fact, by trying to remove that gap or distance is also meaningless from the poet's perspective—and hence the poet has remarked ‘The Grecian Erebus is not for us to guess’. Since mortals are not potent enough like those heavenly figures, it would be worthless to reach out for that impossible. For that same reason, the poet has made a resemblance between ‘warm wax’ and ‘bronze’—as both are not easily attainable. Meanwhile, the series of animalized ease he has been pointing out one by one, to compare them meaningfully with his poetic purpose, was accounting for the fact that the fate of Russian people was not like those creatures who can spend time according to their wish. Rather, their fate was being tied with wars and battles, where they

are the mere instruments for battles. However, Mandelstam personally believed that those who have been playing the roles of predators or gods will be the ones to embrace death in the end after role-playing for so long.

In the context of parting or separation, Seamus Heaney's versification of the popular story from mythology would be accurately appropriate. Just like the mythical figure of Antaeus as appeared in the poem "Hercules and Antaeus", Mandelstam struggled desperately to return to his own land, to get inspiration and experience the sense of completeness:

Hercules has the measure
of resistance and black powers
feeding off the territory.
Antaeus the mold hugger

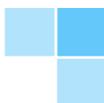
is weaned at last
a fall was renewal
but now he is raised up
the challenges intelligence. (Heaney, ll.5-12)

As a stronger opponent, Hercules disclosed the secret behind the unimaginable superpower of Antaeus, the giant and tricked him in return to make his surrender to the superiority of the mythical hero, Hercules. But the Stalin regime, like the Herculean hero, not just demeaned him by force, including to that disowned him from his human rights as a citizen and uprooted him to accentuate his own heroic glory ("Hercules has the measure of resistance/ and black power/ feeding off the territory"). Thus, the adversity between Mandelstam and the Stalin regime can be mythically reiterated through the retelling by Irish poet Seamus Heaney.

Mandelstam's great early success and initial sympathy with the revolutionary changes sweeping Russia were followed by a period of increasing isolation and disillusionment with the form those changes were assuming. By the mid-1920s he had been reduced to silence. Prevented from publishing his poetry and condemned to translation to make a living, he struggled both internally and externally to find his place in the new world that was coming into being around him. (Davis, 2016)

Around the 1920s, Mandelstam himself was experiencing a life of ambiguity, struggle, identity crisis, while his contemporary authors like T. S. Eliot and James Joyce were narrating those similar subjects in their works, emphasizing the anxiety of modern man. Further, his desperation could be noticed in one of his untitled poems published in *Osip Mandelstam: Voronezh Notebooks* (written circa July 21, 1935–May 30, 1936):

Not as a butterfly, white as flour,
Will I return to the earth my borrowed dust—
I want my body, intelligent form,
In street and country to be transformed:
Vertebrate body, charred to ash,
Conscious of its own specific size. (Mandelstam, ll.1-6)



By recreating another version of “Tristia” Mandelstam perhaps imagined the same kind of future in his course for future. Even though his banishment from the country never resulted from misunderstanding, yet his literary account of the exile in “Tristia” translated into reality when all his literary activities got postponed. Comparing the lines of from another untitled poem published later in Nov 1933 with “Tristia”, readers would perceive the inner turmoil of his poetic identity which was constantly under threat:

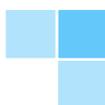
We live, with no sense of the country beneath,
At ten paces, our speeches cannot be perceived,
But whenever we can, we whisper in terror
Of the kremlin mountain dweller.
During his opposition with the Stalin [...] (Mandelstam, ll.1-5)

Even after ten years nothing has changed, rather his prediction about the future and about his identity eventually materialised. People were still living in chaos, losing their lives effortlessly, being threatened occasionally to follow the directions of the authorities.

Therefore, parting ways from his own country, people, geographic locale played a crucial role in his life, that separation or detachment made him feel like a person with incomplete, insufficient, fragmented identity, who was disconnected from all those things which he never wished for in his life. During his exile in Cherdyn, Mandelstam in fact committed suicide out of his desperate urge to return to his country; also he has lost at that time his mental stability, became paranoid that someone would kill him for his resistance. Mandelstam by means of his nativity and aboriginal connection with Russia and Jews never desired to run away from his land and origin. Unlike Akhmatova, he never attempted to reconcile with the regime, whereas the Stalin regime felt threatened and challenged before his implacable poetic vocation at the same time, and decided to create every form of disagreement or nuisance to stop him raising his voice through his literary actions. Even though Mandelstam was finding his independent identity through this poem by condemning the malpractices of political power, yet in reality all his aspirations resulted in vain, marking his unfortunate demise itself as the last chapter of “the art of parting”. Mandelstam recorded in “Tristia” his own history ahead of his time, as if he could have sensed his future quite intensely. As an Acmeist poet, Mandelstam admired his life and his profession heartily, without knowing that one day he would be forced to get separated from both just for the reason of his intention to exhibit what is true and real, like other Acmeist poets. However, this lesson of parting eventually took him far away from his life, identity and poetry all at once.

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