

Десять лет замираний и
криков,
Все мои бессонные ночи
Я вложила в тихое слово.¹
Ten years of calm spells and
shouting,
All my sleepless nights,
I put into a quiet word.

Introduction

The lines which form the epigraph to this article are from Akhmatova's 'Kak velit prostaiia uchtivost' ('As simple courtesy commands'), the third and final poem in the 1913 cycle 'Smiatenie' ('Confusion'). Reproduced out of context, they read like a metapoetic statement, succinctly describing Akhmatova's distinctive method of condensing an excess of intense emotion ('Ten years of calm spells and shouting') into its opposite: a form of expression which is minimal, economic, and restrained ('quiet word'). These lines also serve implicitly to comment on the lyric genre itself: lyric sheds the superfluous, offsetting lack of volume by a correspondingly greater density. Its brevity is a form of artistic restraint and control that relies paradoxically on excess of various kinds – from excess of meaning to excessive self-presentation.²

This article explores ways in which Akhmatova's early poetry combines features of melodrama, a mode of emotional excess, with other characteristics that mute or counter it, to create a paradoxical restrained melodrama. The issue of melodrama merits consideration in relation to Akhmatova not only because it complicates the predominant picture of her poetry as tragic, and furnishes insights into how the peculiar emotional effects of some key lyrics are created, but also because it offers a useful means of considering some of the problems

which arise in situating Akhmatova in relation to modernism. Her early work lacks ostentatious innovation and establishes continuity with the poetry and the prose of the nineteenth century, so that in many respects it 'perpetuated, rather than exploded tradition', as Catriona Kelly notes.³

The discussion is divided into several interrelated sections. It begins with a brief outline of the typical characteristics of Akhmatova's early poetry, and a summary of critical opinion on her in relation to the issue of melodrama, since there are conflicting views on its presence or absence in her poetry. These are followed by a consideration of modernism and the sentimental inheritance, a brief history of melodrama, and an outline of its main characteristics, in order to contextualise an examination of individual lyrics. To lay further ground for readings of Akhmatova's poetry, evidence is advanced to show how Fedor Dostoevskii (the novelist with whom Osip Mandel'shtam believed her work had the greatest affinity) employs melodramatic expression, along with a brief reflection on another possible source for melodramatic features in Akhmatova's lyrics: silent film. Finally, the article culminates in a set of close readings of selected early poems by Akhmatova which explore some of the tensions highlighted above – between melodrama and tragedy, excess and restraint – in order to demonstrate that Akhmatova combines sentimentalist rhetoric and melodramatic emotionalism with impersonality in a way that is peculiarly modern in its self awareness.

Characteristics of Akhmatova's Early Poetry

'As simple courtesy commands', the poem cited above, exhibits various features that critics, including the Formalist trio of Boris Eikhenbaum, Viktor Zhirmunskii, and Viktor Vinogradov, have identified as hallmarks of Akhmatova's style.⁴ It centres on the theme of unhappy love, comprising a miniature dramatic scene between a hero and heroine: an emotional situation

depicted at the point of denouement. This is all narrated in a manner which brings it close to prose:

Как велит простая учтивость,
Подошел ко мне, улыбнулся,
Полуласково, полулениво
Поцелуем руки коснулся —
И загадочных, древних ликов
На меня поглядели очи...
Десять лет замираний и криков,
Все мои бессонные ночи
Я вложила в тихое слово
И сказала его — напрасно.
Отошел ты, и стало снова
На душе и пусто и ясно.⁵
As simple courtesy commands,
[You] came up to me, smiled.
Half-tenderly, half-lazily,
Touched my hand with a kiss —
And the eyes of mysterious, ancient icon faces
Looked at me...
Ten years of calm spells and shouting,
All my sleepless nights,
I put into a quiet word
And spoke it — in vain.
You left, and once again my soul
Became empty and calm.

Akhmatova combines laconism with energy of expression, so that the central part of the poem is built, as Eikhenbaum points out, on 'emotional cries' (*pateticheskie vskriki*), yet much remains unsaid or is elided.⁶ The missing pronoun in line 2 creates narrative ambiguity that is only resolved by the appearance of the second-person pronoun in the penultimate line, and the reader can but speculate as to the nature of the 'quiet word'.

In Akhmatova's early poems generally, emotion is rarely described directly, but rather is generated in the spaces between what is presented. Her reliance on outward signs to convey psychology and emotion, along with the pronounced narrative element and use of dramatic scene, reveals Akhmatova's debt to the tradition of nineteenth-century prose, as Mandel'shtam was first to point out.⁷ Analogies with the theatre are also often pertinent, owing to the use of scene: Akhmatova's poems frequently incorporate stage props, costume, visual gestures, and dialogue in the form of direct speech, so that it is possible to think of an individual lyric as a miniature drama or 'playlet'.⁸

In this particular lyric, Akhmatova plays to the tendency, prevalent among contemporary readers, to identify the persona directly with the poet. She incorporates specific autobiographical referents: the description of the face of the hero, likened to the *lik* of an icon, strongly recalls the physiognomy of Nikolai Gumilev, whom Akhmatova met in 1903, exactly ten years before the date of the poem's composition.⁹ However, giving the poems a concrete biographical and narrative character in this way is primarily an aesthetic device, rather than sincere confession, as Eikhenbaum points out.¹⁰ Akhmatova's early poems introduce a range of different personae and the personal revelation that the poetry seems to promise is ultimately withheld.¹¹

Akhmatova's lyrics often present a self in the process of changing – this is one of the features of the poetry that make her persona such a paradox, or oxymoron.¹² Here, there is a pronounced gulf between the histrionic, suffering heroine described by the middle section of the poem and the dignified, composed one of the final lines. Although the 'quiet word' is

uttered 'in vain' (*naprasno*), a phrase which could indicate a degree of indulgent self pity, the final lines diffuse this impression, conveying the heroine's new sense of calm and release once the hero has departed.

Between Tragedy and Melodrama: Critical Views on Akhmatova

Jeanne van der Eng-Liedmeier suggests, on the basis of poems like this, that Akhmatova deliberately disassociates herself from the sentimental pattern of women's writing (and of writing about women) in her early poetry, finding that 'the conventional type of the sentimental woman, frustrated by an unhappy love' is 'especially repugnant' to her.¹³ This echoes Mandel'shtam, who observed in 1916 that Akhmatova's heroine possesses a hieratic dignity and religious simplicity that distinguishes her from the conventional stereotype of a weak, sentimental woman.¹⁴ Other contemporaries also found that her lyrics resisted the blatant emotionalism, indulgent sentimentalism, or melodrama typically associated with women's poetry. Writing in 1912, Vasilii Gippius described Akhmatova's poetry in terms that suggest emotional reserve rather than excess: 'restrained pain, compressed lips, and eyes on the point of crying'.¹⁵ Nikolai Nedobrovo observed in 1915 that her work was notable for 'high-strung intensity of the emotions' but argued that the force of her poetry does not reside in 'the expression of emotions presumptuously directed at the reader's sensitivity'. He continued:

These torments and complaints, and such extreme humility – is this not weakness of spirit, simple sentimentality? Of course not: Akhmatova's very voice, firm, even self-confident, her very calmness in confessing pain and weakness, the very abundance of anguish, poetically refined, – all bear witness, not to tears over life's trivialities, but to a lyrical soul rather harsh than soft, cruel than lachrymose and clearly masterful rather than downtrodden.¹⁶

Later commentators, with the benefit of a longer view of Akhmatova's career, concur. Writing after her death, in 1969, Vladimir Weidlé summarised her method as follows:

Akhmatova from the very beginning avoided confessions, incantations, and explicit soul-searching. Her lyrical poems were dramatic, but precisely because she worked without the use of "expositions". She wrote only the last act and avoided all melodrama.¹⁷

Similarly, her biographer Amanda Haight asserts that Akhmatova's poetry 'traces the path of her own suffering without melodrama and without self pity'.¹⁸

As these earlier and later contemporaries imply, tragedy is the theatrical genre with which Akhmatova is most closely associated. She shaped both her poetic persona and extra-literary, public image throughout her career by means of reference to tragic heroines from the Bible, antiquity, and the medieval era.¹⁹ Although the image of Akhmatova as tragic figure was compounded and enhanced by the events of her post-revolutionary biography, it was established well before 1917. Mandel'shtam's 1914 lyric, 'Vpoloborota, o pechal' ('Half-turning, oh grief'), was particularly instrumental in shaping the public perception of Akhmatova as tragic heroine. In it, he likens her to Europe's most celebrated tragedienne of the nineteenth century, the French actress Eliza Rachel (1821-58), in her acclaimed performance of Racine's *Phèdre*. Rachel eschewed the exaggerated style typical of the period: her performances were characterized primarily by her clear diction and economical use of gesture. Mandel'shtam's comparison thereby associates Akhmatova and her poetry above all with tragedy, economy, and restraint.

Despite her strong association with tragedy, however, several commentators suggest that Akhmatova's work includes elements of melodrama. Her persona's tendency to 'aggravate an actual drama with the fatality of theater thus probing both her own and pain's possible limits', as Brodsky expresses it, suggests a predilection for melodramatic

indulgence in emotionalism.²⁰ Catriona Kelly remarks that Akhmatova 'retains the melodramatic masochism of her nineteenth-century predecessors', citing Evdokiia Rostopchina (1812-1858) and Iuliia Zhadovskaia (1824-1883) as examples. Kelly's phrase, 'melodramatic masochism', not only suggests a theatrical and exaggeratedly sentimental attitude, but also conveys the idea (like Brodsky) that the heroine derives a degree of perverse pleasure from her own suffering.²¹

F. D. Reeve characterises the heroine of Akhmatova's poetry as 'an imaginary actress on a Romantic stage', describing the famous 'Pesnia poslednei vstrechi' ('Song of the Last Meeting') of 1911 – which he evidently regards as a representative, rather than anomalous lyric – as a 'mini-melodrama'. He argues that Akhmatova 'reshaped both the actual world and the changes in her own life into a third or histrionic time' in her lyrics, suggesting that if 'one's "real" life is the life one acts out', then Akhmatova's was lived in her poetry.²² The notion of 'acting out' is fundamental to melodrama which, in the words of one critic, 'at heart represents the theatrical impulse itself: the impulse towards dramatization, heightening, expression, acting out'.²³ Reeve's analysis emphasises Akhmatova's continuation of, rather than breaking with, Romantic tradition.

Solomon Volkov, like Mandel'shtam, draws a comparison between Akhmatova and a well-known actress: this time not a tragedienne, but one of Russia's greatest melodramatic performers of the silent film era, Vera Kholodnaia (1893-1919). He points out that Kholodnaia's films, like Akhmatova's poems, usually represented unrequited, duped, or humiliated love.²⁴ Helena Goscilo also finds that there is a definite resemblance between these two 'picturesque martyrs of the heart'. As she observes, both were 'physically striking, talented, "charismatic", and famous' and 'reputedly emanated "romantic", "feminine" seductiveness'.²⁵ The analogy might be extended further, along the same lines as Mandel'shtam's comparison with Rachel: when Kholodnaia began her career, melodramatic acting was influenced heavily by the gesture-oriented technique developed by French mime

but, under the direction of Evgenii Bauer, she rejected exaggeration in favour of more economical gestures.²⁶ As an actress of the silent era, she was still 'equated with the visibility of intense emotions', but there was a restrained, muted quality to her acting that contributed significantly to her mass appeal.²⁷ As this suggests, melodrama, usually associated with crude exaggeration and excess, can also involve the exercise of restraint in its exposition. There is a thin line between tragedy and melodrama, both of which deal in strong emotions, exposing their protagonists to extremes of suffering, and the relationship of Akhmatova's poetry to these theatrical forms is not altogether clear-cut, as the disparity in critical opinion on the issue of melodrama indicates.

Modernism and the Sentimental Inheritance

As one critic points out, 'If literary theorists still debate the nature of tragedy and disagree on the primary characteristics of Romanticism, we can hardly expect unanimous agreement on a subject as fresh as modernism'.²⁸ However, it is possible to identify some general features which unite various strands of early twentieth-century modernism, however provisionally. One such characteristic is the modernist tendency to attack, reject, or transform the sentimental inheritance. Modernism is generally thought of as bringing the era of sentiment to a close by enacting a break with the eighteenth-century tradition, so that an attack on sentiment constitutes a thread uniting various different modernisms.²⁹ The Imagists, Acmeism's closest counterparts in the West, for instance, treated sentimentality as a 'reviled other' against which to define themselves.³⁰ Ezra Pound advocated a poetics which was 'austere, direct, free from emotional slither' and T. S. Eliot wrote of the separation of the 'man who suffers and the mind which creates', famously characterising poetry as 'not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion'.³¹ The attack on sentiment gives rise in many manifestations of modernism to a suspicion of, or ironic attitude towards melodrama, which continued the sentimental emphasis on feeling with the primary aim of eliciting the greatest possible intensity of emotion. Anton Chekhov and Konstantin

Stanislavskii's naturalistic theatre is one of the clearest early modernist expressions of this reaction against melodrama in the Russian context.

Of course, to argue that Romanticism is dominated by emotion, and modernism is characterised by scepticism about emotion, would be a gross simplification. Some modernists remained closer to Romanticism than others – in Russia, most notably the neo-Romantic Symbolists – and modernist self-consciousness was in any case inherited from Romanticism. As Marshall Brown has argued, for all its claims to sincere confession and its rejection of classical restraint, much Romantic poetry maintains a 'cool distance' from the experience it portrays.³² However, in post-Symbolist modernist poetry, this 'cool distance' can be seen to develop into impersonality, so that the poet deliberately assumes a mask or persona, employing dramatic monologue to express feeling indirectly. Furthermore, this self-consciousness also extends to the way in which the poet uses language and privileges technique over subject matter in the belief that the art resides more in the treatment than the content. Maurice Beebe therefore observes that 'Modernists were not only anti-sentimental but detached and aloof in other ways as well', deploying understatement, irony, and a range of other devices to draw attention to the verbal texture of the work, in an effort to 'make it new'.³³

Melodrama in Russia

Melodrama was a product of, and expression of, modernity, emerging as a distinct dramatic form at the turn of the nineteenth century, in the wake of the French Revolution, and establishing itself across Europe and America as the sentimentalism of the eighteenth century gave way to Romanticism.³⁴ Classical stage melodrama presented its audiences with intense emotional and ethical dramas based on a Manichaeistic struggle between good and evil. It drew heavily on sentimentalism for its means of representation, continuing its attempt to base moral and ethical life in feeling. Central to both melodrama and sentimentalism is 'a singleness of feeling made possible by the paring away of whatever

does not contribute to it'.³⁵ However, melodrama combined the sentimentalist focus on feeling with overt excitement and thrills, sharing with Romanticism a conception of life as drama and grandiose struggle.

Melodrama's popularity quickly spread throughout Europe, and it was as successful in Russia as it was in the West. Russian translations of French melodramas by the likes of René Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt, Louis-Charles Caigniez, and Victor Ducange, played regularly on Russian stages during the nineteenth century, where they were enjoyed by a broad audience.³⁶ Melodrama appealed even to the upper echelons of society – the German melodramatist August von Kotzebue began his career in Petersburg under Catherine II, and was later a favourite of Alexander I – but it flourished especially in the provinces, outside the reach of the Imperial theatre's monopoly.³⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century, it had moved beyond its stage origins and entered other forms of popular culture, especially literature, where it continued to interact intensively with sentimentalism and Romanticism.³⁸ Literary melodrama was particularly popular with female readers and increasingly attracted educated women, broadening the audience demographic.³⁹ Melodrama and the Gothic novel nourished one another, and in turn exerted their combined influence on a number of nineteenth-century realist authors, most notably Dostoevskii in Russia, who renewed the novelistic genre through contact with these popular forms.⁴⁰

Although melodrama continued to be an important feature of indigenous theatrical performances such as mummers' plays and the fairground booth (*balagan*), the pre-revolutionary years saw something of a reaction against melodramatic representations in Russian intellectual theatre, an expression of the modernist tendency to reject melodrama and sentimentalism.⁴¹ In Chekhov's first major play, *Chaika* (*The Seagull*), which enjoyed enormous success when performed under the direction of Stanislavskii at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1898, for instance, the conventions of melodrama are deliberately subverted, so that sensational actions occur offstage, and psychological complexity is brought to its stock characters.

At the same time as melodramatic acting styles in the theatre were being replaced with naturalistic portrayals, however, the advent of cinema provided melodrama with an ideal new home.⁴² By 1913, the year that not only marked the highpoint of modernism in literature, but also the peak of the 'craze for cinema' in Russia: Petersburg had 130 cinemas, and melodrama was the mainstay of the industry.⁴³ The most dominant popular genre throughout the 1910s was the bourgeois or domestic melodrama, which entertained audiences with 'drawing room thrillers' involving 'temptation, seduction, adultery, betrayal'.⁴⁴ Two of Russia's greatest silent film directors, Petr Chardynin and Evgenii Bauer (who discovered Kholodnaia), began their careers in 1909 and 1913 respectively, between them producing scores of popular melodramas in the prerevolutionary years. 1913 also heralded early Russian cinema's biggest commercial success, the film melodrama based on Anastasiia Verbitskaia's sensationalist potboiler, the 'boulevard' novel, *Kliuchi schastiia* (*The Keys to Happiness*), directed by Iakov Protazanov and Vladimir Gardin.⁴⁵

The cultural intelligentsia quickly reconciled itself to the cinema, so that commercial entertainment formed an intrinsic part of Silver Age culture.⁴⁶ The Acmeists, with their love of high culture and of sculpture and painting, might be expected to have disdained mass machine-made entertainment, but in his 1914 poem 'Kinematograf' ('Silent Film'), Mandel'shtam describes the experience of watching a silent film melodrama, displaying palpable enjoyment of the medium whilst treating melodrama itself with considerable irony:

Кинематограф. Три скамейки.

Сантиментальная горячка.

Аристократка и богачка

В сетях соперницы-злодейки.

[...]

И в исступленьи, как гитана,

Она заламывает руки.

Разлука. Бешеные звуки

Затравленного фортепьяно.

[...]

И по каштановой аллее

Чудовищный мотор несется,

Стрекочет лента, сердце бьется

Тревожнее и веселее.⁴⁷

[...]

Silent film. Three benches.

Sentimental fever.

An aristocrat, a rich girl

Embroiled in the schemes of a villainess-rival.

[...]

In a frenzy, like a gypsy

She wrings her hands.

A parting. Furious sounds

From the persecuted piano.

[...]

And along a chestnut-lined avenue

An enormous motorcar tears along.

The reel clatters, [my] heart beats

With increasing alarm and enjoyment.

[...]

Not only had melodrama permeated various forms of artistic production by the early twentieth century, but it had also entered the life of the artistic elite as a prevalent mode of behaviour. The neo-Romantic Symbolists engaged in 'life-creation' (*zhiznetvorchestvo*), blurring the boundaries between life and art to shape their personal lives and their behaviour

aesthetically. They conceived of life in highly Romantic terms; as a scene of dramatic conflict and clash, represented in hyperbolic gestures. As Michael Basker notes, in the Symbolist period, 'erotic encounters and melodramatic responses were a behavioural norm'.⁴⁸ Blok and Andrei Belyi's idealisation of Blok's wife, Liubov', and Valerii Briusov and Belyi's intense rivalry over Nina Petrovskaja each serve to illustrate this melodramatic posturing.⁴⁹ Indeed, Russian Symbolism provides a good example of how, in the Romantic conception of the world, the melodramatic tends to replace the tragic and the theatrical dominates over the dramatic.⁵⁰ In short, melodrama was both a defining feature of cultural production and a distinctive mode of behaviour during the 1910s, and as such formed an essential part of the backdrop to Akhmatova's youth and early career as poet.⁵¹

Characteristics of Melodrama

Sergei Balukhatyi, a critic loosely connected with the Formalist circle, wrote a study of melodrama in 1926 which attempted to determine its basic constructional principles and typical characteristics, on the evidence of French melodramas and the repertory of the Russian theatre of the final quarter of the nineteenth century.⁵² The following summary combines his essential points with those of later critics, especially Peter Brooks, whose 1976 study, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, remains the classic text on melodrama.

Melodrama is ultimately concerned with moralising; it teaches, punishes and rewards. It does this by dramatising the struggle between polarised ethical forces; hence its typical cast of dastardly villains and virtuous heroes and heroines. Its primary distinguishing feature is emotion, so that everything is subordinated to the central aesthetic goal, which is to elicit the greatest possible intensity of feeling. Action must therefore be exciting, and justified by the force of emotion. This produces plots which centre on emotional situations and are constructed with unexpected twists and sudden reversals, along with psychologically primitive characters with clear functions (victim, villain). It can be often difficult to differentiate tragedy and melodrama, since both depict powerful emotions, subjecting their

protagonists to terrible suffering, and both can be spectacular. However, most critics agree, following Aristotle, that tragedy portrays a divided human being, usually of heroic stature, who is confronted with a moral dilemma or choice, whereas melodrama centres on an 'undivided' human being, usually an ordinary person, who is pitted against powerful forces in the face of which he or she is helpless.⁵³

The monologues and dialogue of the characters in melodrama take the form of impassioned speeches, with copious exclamations and expressive vocabulary. As Brooks observes, melodrama 'needs a rhetoric that can infuse the banal and the ordinary with the excitement of grandiose conflict'. It must 'maintain a state of exaltation, a state where hyperbole is a "natural" form of expression because anything less would convey only the apparent (naturalistic, banal) drama, not the true (moral, cosmic) drama'.⁵⁴ For this reason, melodrama makes repeated reference to 'pure and polar concepts of darkness and light, salvation and damnation'.⁵⁵ Paradoxically, however, melodrama frequently, and especially at climactic moments, has recourse to non-verbal means – gesture and mime – to express its meanings and to convey what words are inadequate to communicate. To articulate and call forth strong emotions, it makes extensive use of what Brooks calls a 'text of muteness', where psychological and moral conditions are revealed in clear, visible signs.⁵⁶ Historically, this recourse to silent gesture is a legacy of melodrama's roots in pantomime, where the spoken word is rarely used towards the formulation of significant messages and is largely confined to emotional utterance and outbursts.⁵⁷ Consequently, exaggerated gestures and facial grimaces assume great importance in conveying meaning, and melodrama operates according to a visual code of postures of the body, hand movements, and facial expressions.⁵⁸

The fact that melodrama has a 'bad reputation' and most often refers to cheap and banal soap-opera type products, need not, as Brooks remarks, 'decrease its usefulness: there is a range from high to low examples in any literary field'. He aims to rehabilitate melodrama as a descriptive category, arguing that melodrama proper is centrally relevant 'to defining the adjective, to controlling and deepening its broader meaning, and [...] to an understanding of an important and abiding mode in the modern imagination'.⁵⁹ Brooks argues that the nineteenth-century novel, as practised by authors such as Honoré de Balzac, Charles Dickens, and Dostoevskii, is a repository for a range of melodramatic effects. In particular, it shares melodrama's assumption that physiognomy and physical gestures have a natural eloquence: 'Many of the most highly charged meanings [...] come to use through gesture, are postulated as being expressed through gesture'.⁶⁰ Although Brooks does not offer close readings of Dostoevskii, he acknowledges that he is a writer who 'puts melodramatic representations to most effective use'.⁶¹ This is aptly illustrated by the final moments of the confrontation between Aglaia and Nastas'ia Filippovna, witnessed by Myshkin and Rogozhin, in *The Idiot*:

But that was all he [Myshkin] had time to say, struck dumb by Aglaya's terrible look. There was so much suffering in that look [...] that he threw up his hands in despair, uttered a cry, and rushed after her. [...] She could not endure even the brief moment of his hesitation, covered her face with her hands, cried, 'Oh, my God!' and ran out of the room [...].

The prince, too, ran, but in the doorway he was clasped by a pair of hands. The distracted, distorted face of Natasya Filippovna was staring at him, and her lips, which had turned blue, moved, asking:

'After her? After her?'

She fell unconscious in his arms. He raised her, carried her into the room, laid her in an arm-chair, and stood over her [...]. There was a glass of water on the table.

Rogozhin [...] snatched it up and sprinkled some water on her face. She opened her eyes and for a minute did not know what had happened. But suddenly she looked round, gave a start, and rushed up to the prince.

'Mine! mine! she cried. 'So the proud lady has gone, has she? Ha, ha, ha!' She laughed hysterically.⁶²

One of the most striking features of this passage is the prevalence of exaggerated physical gestures. The reader's attention is repeatedly drawn to what the characters are doing with their hands and with their eyes. Other emotionally charged physical gestures and reactions include rapid movement towards and away from others, fainting, shuddering, and hysteria. As Virginia Woolf remarked of the Dostoevskian novel, 'everything is done to suggest the intensity of [...] emotions. They turn pale; they shake with terror; they go into hysterics'.⁶³ Much of the action is mute, as it is in stage melodrama: for instance, the moment at which Nastas'ia faints into Myshkin's arms and Rogozhin tries to revive her with water is a pure dumb-show episode. Dostoevskii points to the inadequacy of words to express the terms of this emotional drama, emphasising the silences of his characters: Myshkin is 'struck dumb'. The spoken word, when used, is largely confined to emotional outbursts. Characters shriek and cry out inarticulately, or ramble hysterically. The whole scene is extraordinarily intense, and Dostoevskii makes considerable use of melodramatic expressionism to make clear that this encounter represents an emotional and moral turning point for his characters.⁶⁴

This 'text of muteness', with its dramatic postures, expressive hand movements, and exaggerated facial expressions, serves to link the nineteenth-century novel with silent film, which also uses these as its primary vehicles of meaning. Indeed, many early film productions were adaptations of classic nineteenth-century novels, eliding much of the narrative to depict solely the major scenes.⁶⁵ Both film and the nineteenth-century novel present themselves as particularly likely sources for any melodramatic elements in Akhmatova's poetry, which shares with them a predominantly metonymic, visual orientation.

While the influence of the nineteenth-century novel on Akhmatova is generally acknowledged, the relationship of her poetry with film has largely been neglected.⁶⁶ All the evidence suggests, however, that Akhmatova appreciated film greatly, and various cinematic techniques, particularly simultaneity, are employed in her poetry. She told her friend Natalia Roskina that she 'had fallen in love with the cinema at an early age', frequenting the cinema 'before films were even considered to be an art'.⁶⁷ Her memoir of Amedeo Modigliani and of Paris in 1910-11 makes an approving and telling reference to silent film and its methods of representation: "'Velikii nemoi'" (kak togda nazyvali kino) eshche krasnorechivo bezmolvstvoval' (The 'Great dumb one', as people called the cinema back then, was still eloquently silent').⁶⁸

Melodrama and Akhmatova's Early Lyrics

Brooks treats melodrama as a 'mode' and not a genre; this offers a useful approach for a discussion of Akhmatova's poetry because it suggests that melodrama can be located in a broad range of literary forms and texts.⁶⁹ Other critics adopt a similar attitude, thinking of melodrama as a 'cluster concept'.⁷⁰ All the same, there are some obvious difficulties involved in examining lyric in the light of melodrama. Melodrama embroils innocent protagonists in sensational plots with multiple peripeties, and although lyric poetry always implies a narrative (and Akhmatova exploits this particularly effectively), narrative is not its primary concern, plot only being important in so far as it contributes to an understanding of the moment depicted. Lyric therefore lacks the kind of extended context which allows a fleshed-out sense of character and action. Melodrama is a mode of excess, but a generic requirement of lyric is that it jettisons the superfluous. Perhaps most importantly, lyric poetry involves control, and even when a lyric appears to be expansive and unrestrained, this is illusory.

However, as a result of its brevity, lyric often prizes excessive statement, dealing in extremes, and like melodrama, creating intensity of feeling by discarding anything that does not contribute to it. One of Akhmatova's most condensed poems, composed in 1910, operates on this tension between brevity and excess:

Хочешь знать, как все это было? —

Три в столовой пробило,

И прощаясь, держась за перила,

Она словно с трудом говорила:

«Это все... Ах, нет, я забыла,

Я люблю вас, я вас любила

Еще тогда!»

— «Да».⁷¹

Do you want to know how all this happened?

It struck three in the dining room,

And, taking leave, holding on to the banister,

She spoke as though with difficulty:

"That's all... Ah, no, I forgot,

I love you, I loved you

Still then!"

— "Yes".

Akhmatova's 'backwards glance' (to borrow Mandel'shtam's expression), at nineteenth-century prose is evident here.⁷² The details of the striking clock and banister create a 'reality effect', succinctly setting the scene in a domestic interior. The poem manifests a strong narrative element and hints (through the phrase 'Still then!') at a potentially melodramatic plot, involving intrigue or betrayal. Gesture plays a key role in conveying emotion – the

heroine holds on to the banister, presumably for support. Her speech is expressive of strong feelings, and culminates in a breathless exclamation in line 7.⁷³ The caesura in the middle of line 5, when she trails off momentarily, is followed at the end of the line by another brief pause, and then in the next line by an *enjambement*, so that her monologue gathers pace and rises to a crescendo. The rising intonation is intensified by the use of the same –ylo, -ilo, -ila, -yla rhyme in six of its eight lines. Line 7 is short, with only two stresses rather than the pattern of three that has established itself, so that a natural silence, creating a dramatic pause, falls after ‘Still then!’

In his discussion of Akhmatova’s syntax, Eikhenbaum highlights the exclamatory elements of her poetry, noting that these are often marked by punctuation, as here. The ‘basic manner’ (*osnovnaia manera*) of the early Akhmatova, he asserts, is thus characterised by a combination of conversational (*razgovornaia*) or narrative (*povestvovatel’naia*) intonation punctuated by passionate, emotional outbursts (*pateticheskie vskrikivaniia*). These stand out as a result of their emotional force to such an extent that they serve as the compositional centre of a poem, influencing everything around them.⁷⁴ Eikhenbaum’s findings have a direct bearing on the issue of melodrama because it is largely these ‘emotional outbursts’, combined with attention to visual, physical gestures, that create a melodramatic tonality.

This melodramatic quality is reinforced by the sense, often conveyed in Akhmatova’s poetry through the use of costume and precisely described settings, that the heroine is acting a role or playing a part. This creates a theatrical – rather than merely dramatic – impression. Here, for instance, there seems to be an exaggerated and histrionic quality to her speech and it might plausibly be inferred, from the use of the phrase ‘as though’ (*slovno*), in conjunction with the direct speech that follows, that she is insincere and merely wishes it to appear as though she is struggling to contain her emotion, so that her behaviour is affected, a deliberate pose, calculated for effect. There is something artificial about the

claim, 'That's all...Ah, no, I forgot', especially given that what she professes to have forgotten to mention turns out to be her love for the hero.⁷⁵

However, there is a pronounced tension in this poem between the heroine's melodramatic outburst and the reaction of the speaker. Her breathless speech is set in relief and undercut by the tersely monosyllabic response, 'Yes', so that the melodramatic intensity is abruptly flattened and muted by the poem's truncated closing line. Other features also serve to undercut the impression of melodrama: although it works as a visible sign of emotion in the same way, Akhmatova's minimal use of gesture is some considerable distance from the wild gesticulations of Dostoevskii's characters. Yet, paradoxically, the very brevity of the poem creates density of meaning. Akhmatova's apparently clear, prosaic language conceals a high level of ambiguity. The reader is forced to speculate, to try to recreate the situation, to fill in the gaps. There is uncertainty as to the identity of the speaker and the addressee. It is unclear who speaks the final word, and in what tone. The hints at a plot involving betrayal or deception are never explained. As indicated above, the sincerity of the heroine's behaviour is difficult to determine – 'as though' might signal insincerity, but it might equally suggest that the speaker is overcome with emotion and trying to bring it under control, gripping the banister for support.

A productive way of reading this poem is suggested by Marshall Brown's identification of 'two voices' in lyric. Illustrating his point with examples of Romantic poetry, Brown argues that the division of voice between the person who feels emotion (the speaker) and the poet who makes verse amounts to a form of sceptical restraint which precludes the possibility of any pure confessional lyric of experienced emotion. Even the Romantic lyric, then, which is thought of as pure, sincere confession, transmits both emotion and knowingness about emotion. In effect, Brown argues that we can detect, within an individual poem, the separate voices of the persona and the poet: 'There is a speaker and there is a poet who gives the speaker voice. And there is a poem, which is a combination of the two voices – speaker and poet'.⁷⁶

For all that the heroine of the poem seems to resemble Akhmatova herself in terms of diction and social class, this lyric is actually highly impersonal: it is a dramatic monologue, probably in a male voice, if we assume that the speaker was a participant in the scene described (although this is by no means certain). In any case, the speaker cannot easily be identified with the poet since it is not clear who is speaking. Brown's identification of two voices in lyric is complicated greatly by the structure of this poem, because the most distinctive voice within it belongs to a third figure, the heroine, whose speech is reported by the speaker. The poem is thus comprised of at least three voices and the speaker does not express emotion directly at all. Yet despite this distancing mechanism, the poet's presence is felt strongly throughout because of the text's self-conscious verbalism (its brevity) and technical display (the use of rhyme). The first line even serves on a metapoetic level as an ironic commentary on the poem's laconism: it promises an explanation that the truncated poem does not deliver. In other words, there is a striking contrast between the heroine of the poem's behaviour and the poet's treatment of her subject. The heroine's speech is melodramatic, and the underlying structure of the (albeit fragmentary) plot can be seen as melodramatic, but the poet's stance is not. The subject matter is relatively banal, but the treatment of it is distinctively modernist, drawing the reader's attention to verbal texture.

One of Akhmatova's best known early lyrics, of January 1911, gives more extended treatment to the theme of parting:

Сжала руки под темной вуалью...

«Отчего ты сегодня бледна?»

-- Оттого, что я терпкой печалью

Напоила его допьяна.

Как забуду? Он вышел, шатаясь,

Искривился мучительно рот...

Я сбежала, перил не касаясь,
Я бежала за ним до ворот.

Задыхаясь, я крикнула: «Шутка
Все, что было. Уйдешь, я умру».
Улыбнулся спокойно и жутко
И сказал мне: «Не стой на ветру».⁷⁷

[She] wrung [her] hands under the dark veil...
“Why are you so pale today?”
— Because I made him drink
Sharp grief until it made him drunk.

How can I forget? He went out, staggering
Mouth twisted painfully...
I ran downstairs, not touching the banister,
I ran after him as far as the gate.

Panting, I shouted: “A joke
That’s all it was. Leave, and I’ll die”.
He smiled calmly and terribly
And said to me: “Don’t stand in the wind”.

Much of the language in this lyric is hyperbolic, even clichéd. For example, the metaphor “Because I made him drink/Sharp grief until it made him drunk’ (lines 3-4) – which is almost literalized by the man’s staggering and his distorted face in the following stanza, as though he has been poisoned – along with the exclamation ‘How can I forget?’ (line 5) and, in the

final stanza, the words 'Leave, and I'll die', lend the poem a highly charged emotional atmosphere. The heroine's speech once again takes the form of emotional outbursts, and the breathlessness which is such an inherent characteristic of Akhmatova's verse and which, here, is motivated by action (the rushed descent of the stairs), compounds the melodramatic effect.⁷⁸

Nancy Anderson remarks that, in its visual orientation, this poem resembles a scene in a film.⁷⁹ This observation is supported by its monochrome quality (there are no colour epithets) and the central stanza comprised entirely of mute action. The movements described even have a jerky quality that is reminiscent of early cinematic narrative.⁸⁰ Yury Tsivian notes that staircases (which are present in both 'Do you want to know' and '[She] wrung her hands') feature prominently in coming-and-going scenes in early cinema.⁸¹ As in stage or film melodrama, as well as the nineteenth-century novel, the terms of the emotional conflict are conveyed mainly through physical signs: a series of exaggerated, rather theatrical gestures.⁸² Here, Akhmatova focuses particularly, as does Dostoevskii in the passage from *The Idiot* quoted earlier, on what characters are doing with their hands, and on their facial expressions, describing their movement away from and towards one another. When the man stumbles back from the heroine, his face twisted in agony, in lines 5 and 6, his movements have what Brooks describes as 'the metaphoricity of gesture'; that is, they evoke meanings beyond their literal configuration.⁸³ The facial grimace and staggering are redolent of emotional shock, possibly even disgust and horror. Lines 7-8 convey the heroine's haste and desperation in running after the male character, giving the telling detail that she did not touch the banister, suggesting that she rushed headlong downstairs in her desperation to prevent the man from leaving.

We as readers are not privy to the full circumstances of the plot in this lyric, but our reading exerts pressure on the surface of things, revealing meanings implicit in the gestures described. Reeve quotes the last stanza of this lyric to illustrate how Akhmatova's speaker

resembles an actress on a Romantic stage 'where the characters speak to each other in heightened contrasts, setting forth dramatic extremes – life and death being the most extreme'.⁸⁴ Romantic theatre, as Brooks points out, is melodramatic 'and must be so', and the heightening, and invocation of polar, extreme concepts here is indeed highly melodramatic.⁸⁵ As in melodrama, 'gestures within the world constantly refer us to another, hyperbolic set of gestures where life and death are at stake'.⁸⁶ Other features of the poem point to its underlying melodramatic structure: pale faces and veils, both of which feature in 'Szhala ruki', are very much part of the melodramatic code, which routinely hints at hidden relationships and masked identities.⁸⁷ Pallor is a stock indicator of guilt in melodrama (revealing the legacy of sentimentalism), as it is here. The presence of a central mystery, the 'joke' (*shutka*), is suggestive of a melodramatic plot – a cruel intrigue or betrayal, of which the male figure is the innocent victim – and the heroine's words 'Uidesh', *ia umru* connote suicide, that virtually indispensable element of melodrama.

A pronounced degree of self-consciousness and narcissism is discernible on the part of the speaker of this lyric. Although she describes the pain that she has inflicted upon the hero, she does so in terms that put herself at the centre of the drama and suggest a certain indulgence in emotionalism: 'How can I forget?'. The poem is, however, prevented from slipping into blatant melodrama by the final lines, in which the man's cold and calm response cuts through the woman's rising hysteria and inflated rhetoric, setting it in relief. The pattern is identical to 'Do you want to know' in this respect. Despite the lack of precise autobiographical referents, it would be plausible to identify the heroine directly with Akhmatova herself, but once again, the poem reveals itself as a dramatic monologue: an impersonal, distancing effect from the emotional scene is created by the ambiguity of grammatical person in the opening line which results from the omitted pronoun, and the poem hovers between first- and third-person narration. Melodrama, which is present in the plot structure, use of gesture, and the tenor of the heroine's behaviour and speech, is thus distanced and contained by the poet's treatment.

‘Pesnia poslednei vstrechi’ (‘Song of the Last Meeting’), composed in September 1911, and declared by Viacheslav Ivanov to be ‘an event in Russian literature’, is the poem which Reeve describes as a ‘mini-melodrama’:

Так беспомощно грудь холодела,
Но шаги мои были легки.
Я на правую руку надела
Перчатку с левой руки.

Показалось, что много ступеней,
А я знала – их только три!
Между кленов шепот осенний
Попросил: «Со мною умри!

Я обманут моей унылой,
Переменчивой, злой судьбой».
Я ответила: «Милый, милый!
И я тоже. Умру с тобой...»

Это песня последней встречи.
Я взглянула на темный дом.
Только в спальне горели свечи
Равнодушно-желтым огнем.⁸⁸

My breast grew cold so helplessly,
But my steps were light.
I put my left-hand glove

On to my right hand.

It seemed as though there were many steps,

But I knew – there were only three!

Among the maples an autumn whisper

Asked: “Die with me!

I am betrayed by my melancholy,

changeable, wicked fate”.

I answered: ‘Darling, darling!

I am too. I will die with you...”

This is the song of the last meeting.

I looked at the dark house.

Only in the bedroom candles burned

With an indifferent-yellow flame.

Reeve writes:

Complete with the referents of Akhmatova’s early poems – house, candle, darkness, trees, stairs, clothing, and even a conversation with the spirit of death [...] the poem is a mini-melodrama. The present is made to consume the past, exactly as on stage, and the natural world is turned into a meticulously lit setting for an emotional drama between a protagonist – the self, or heroine – and everyone and everything else.⁸⁹

Although the ‘autumn whisper’ need not necessarily be thought of as the ‘spirit of death’ but simply as the anthropomorphised, rustling, dry leaves of the maples, the Gothic-influenced

description of the dark house does indeed create a melodramatic setting. The inflated, hyperbolic rhetoric, and the prevalence of breathless exclamations, marked by punctuation ('there were only three!'), also support this reading. The speaker's reliving in memory of a painful emotional moment suggests a certain sentimentality, a 'clinging to an emotional experience which has become a pleasurable end in itself', and thus conveys the 'melodramatic masochism' that Kelly ascribes to her.⁹⁰

This poem, however, also displays features which, while they undoubtedly make the poem dramatic, cannot necessarily be thought of as melodramatic. Despite the fact that the lyric centres upon a moment of emotional intensity, heightened through the marked contrasts and extremes (light and darkness, life and death) typically found in melodrama, the persona's feelings are conveyed not by an extravagant or histrionic gesture such as those employed by Dostoevskii in the scene from *The Idiot*, but by the tiny, yet eloquent mistake of putting a glove on the wrong hand. Moreover, the poem ends not on a hyperbolic or inflated note, but a muted one, with candles burning in the bedroom with an 'indifferent-yellow' flame, symbolising the dampening of passion. The poem presents an emotional drama and rises towards the breathless pitch of melodrama, but at the same time resists it and retreats from it.

The following lyric, also of 1911, exhibits key features of melodrama, combining inflated rhetoric with expressive gesture:

Я и плакала и каялась,
Хоть бы с неба грянул гром!
Сердце темное измаялось
В нежилом доме твоём.
Боль я знаю нестерпимую,
Стыд обратного пути...

Страшно, страшно к нелюбимому,
Страшно к тихому войти.
А склонюсь к нему нарядная,
Ожерельями звеня;
Только спросит: «Ненаглядная!
Где молилась за меня?»⁹¹

I cried and I repented,
If only thunder would burst from the sky!
[My] dark heart grew exhausted
In your uninhabitable house.
I know the unbearable pain,
The shame of the way back...
It is dreadful, dreadful to go back to the unloved one,
Dreadful to go in to the silent one.
But I will lean over to him, dressed in my finery,
Necklaces ringing;
He will only ask: "Beloved one!
Where have you been praying for me?"

This short poem implies a narrative involving adultery and betrayal. It begins in the past tense, with the speaker recollecting her tearful penitence as she made her way home after a liaison with a lover (that this is its cause can be inferred from the subsequent references to pain and shame). There is a sudden shift to the present tense in line 5 and then a perspective opens on to the future in line 9, as she imagines the ensuing scene with the man she has betrayed, presumably a husband. At the centre of this lyric is an emotional outburst, marked by punctuation. The words 'pain' (*bol*) and 'shame' (*styd*) – which fall on the first

syllables of successive lines – stand out, giving the poem its intonational force. The word ‘dreadful’ *strashno*, which is repeated twice in consecutive lines, also falls in this position, so that pain, shame, and dread are strongly emphasised, even hyperbolically so.

Like ‘Song of the Last Meeting’, this poem presents an emotional drama between a protagonist – the self, or heroine – and everyone and everything else. There are strong moral-religious overtones, conveyed by the references to shame and pain, sin and prayer. The speaker, it is suggested, has committed adultery under the cover of attending church. The lyric employs vocabulary redolent of death and the grave – ‘uninhabitable [*nezhilyi*] house’, ‘dark heart’ – thereby invoking the melodramatic polar extremes of life and death, light and darkness, salvation and damnation.

This lyric incorporates a significant and eloquent mute action: the heroine envisages herself leaning over to the male protagonist (to kiss him?). This would ordinarily be a solicitous, affectionate gesture, but here it signifies betrayal and hypocrisy. As in melodrama, and in the nineteenth-century novel, gesture serves as shorthand for psychology and emotion but, as in ‘Song of the Last Meeting’ or ‘Do you want to know’, the gesture is on a small scale. Other features of the poem serve to undercut any melodrama even further. For instance, the moral dynamic is mirrored neither by the external world (‘If only thunder would burst from the sky!’) nor by the spatial arrangement, according to which the speaker stands above the male figure. The heroine’s clothing does not reflect her shame: she is elegantly dressed. The weeping, penitence, and pain, combined with her fear at returning, all contrast with the heroine’s composure in the imagined scene at the end of the poem. This implies a governing of the emotions, a controlling of the impulse towards melodrama. Melodrama is thus both suggested and resisted in this lyric, which, like the others discussed here, rises to a pitch of emotional intensity and then flattens out.

Akhmatova's Romantic self-consciousness, apparent here through the use of estrangement, has a highly paradoxical effect, in that it acts both to generate melodrama and to contain it. Sam Driver observes:

The first half of this poem is a quite direct expression of lyrical emotion, yet even in this early work there is already evidence of a peculiar device which later becomes typical and which lends an odd kind of objectivity to the expression. By this device, the persona of the poem is displaced, as though she stands apart from herself, observing herself in suffering.⁹²

Driver asserts that this estrangement 'permits an emotional distance, a degree of restraint and a certain objectivity in the expression of intense lyrical emotion. This device [...] is one of the main reasons that Akhmatova's almost exclusive treatment of the difficult subject of love's pain avoids any impression of mawkishness'.⁹³ This technique, as Driver's remarks indicate, reduces melodrama by creating distance from the emotions depicted. The closing lines of 'I wept and I repented', in which the heroine imagines herself leaning over, necklaces jangling, effectively prevent the poem from lapsing into an excess of sentiment.

Yet while the poem itself is rendered less melodramatic by means of this device, the persona's attitude towards her experience becomes appreciably more so. As well as emulating the common psychological experience of dissociation or standing outside oneself at moments of heightened emotion, the estranged stance produces the impression of 'melodramatic masochism'; the sense that the persona voyeuristically watches herself suffer.⁹⁴ A tendency on the part of the speaker towards self-dramatization, histrionics and theatricality is intimated: once again there is something perceptibly self-indulgent about her expression and attitude towards her experience, the way she relives her own agony.

At first sight, like so many of Akhmatova's early poems, this lyric is deceptively simple. However, upon closer inspection, it is possible to find hints of insincerity and

affectation in the heroine's internal monologue. A note of self pity can perhaps be detected in the words 'I know the unbearable pain', and the exclamation 'If only thunder would burst from the sky!' might be read as an indication that the heroine has a taste for self-dramatization, expressing her desire for pathetic fallacy of the most clichéd variety, and suggesting her narcissism and egocentrism in willing the natural world to mirror her internal, emotional one (as it would according to the conventions of melodrama, where everything is pressed into the service of conveying strong emotion).

However, the heroine's emotional speech is combined, once again, with a form of narrative ambiguity. The line 'If only thunder would burst from the sky!' provides a moment when the two voices of lyric can be detected. On the one hand, it might be read as expressive of the heroine's desire for judgement for her adultery or, according to the reading outlined above, for her inner drama to be reflected in the natural world. However, it also speaks metapoetically of the poet's refusal to give her subject melodramatic treatment: she indicates a possible way of dealing with her subject matter but rejects it, opting instead to depict intense emotion with subtlety and a degree of objectivity.

A further example of melodrama performed with restraint is provided by the cycle 'Confusion' of 1913, the final poem of which was quoted at the beginning of this article, and the first poem of which reads:

Было душно от жгучего света,
А взгляды его – как лучи.
Я только вздрогнула: этот
Может меня приручить.
Наклонился – он что-то скажет...
От лица отхлынула кровь.
Пусть камнем надгробным ляжет
На жизни моей любовь.⁹⁵

It was stuffy from the bright light,
And his glances — like rays.
I only shuddered: this one
Could tame me.
He [has] leaned over — he will say something...
The blood drained from [my] face.
Let love lie like a gravestone
On my life.

The action of the poem is mute, and the brief scene is related predominantly through physical signs. These features, along with the poem's monochrome quality and the abrupt tense shifts, which render the narrative jerky and elliptical, invite comparison with silent film. The speaker pales and trembles like a sentimental, melodramatic heroine – or, indeed, like a Dostoevskian character – and her turns of phrase are hackneyed and banal ('And his glances — like rays', This one/Could tame me'). This impression is reinforced by the clichéd rhyme 'blood/love' (*krov'/liubov'*) and the image of love lying like a gravestone on the heroine's life.

Once more, the two voices of lyric can be detected. Akhmatova seems almost to be highlighting the heroine's propensity for melodrama, and treating emotion with scepticism by giving her theme an unconventional treatment. The poem is more an analytical reflection on emotion than the direct expression of it. Owing to the extreme brevity of this lyric, information is elided and withheld, so that the man's words are not reported and we only 'see' their effect on the heroine. Moreover, the absence of a pronoun in line 6 introduces a level of impersonality and objectivity, so that the speaker once again seems strangely dissociated from herself. The tense shifts create the effect of simultaneity, so that the

moment is presented both as it is experienced and as it is relived in memory. These devices all serve to rein in the poem's inherent melodrama.

It is instructive to compare this lyric with poems by Rostopchina and Zhadovskaia, the two nineteenth-century women poets to whom Kelly likens Akhmatova. The first stanza of Rostopchina's 'Posle bala' ('After the ball'), the fourth poem of her long work of 1847, 'Neizvestnyi roman' ('An Unknown Love Affair') reads:

Бывало, плакала я в освещенных залах,
И я одна была на многолюдных балах...
Под цепью радужной алмазов дорогих,
Под розовым венком, бледна и молчалива, –
Дрожа, – таила я волнение чувств своих,
Отчаянье тоски ревнивой...⁹⁶

I would often cry in brightly lit rooms
And I was often alone at crowded balls...
Beneath a chain of expensive, iridescent diamonds,
Beneath a rose garland, pale and silent, –
Trembling, I would hide my feelings of agitation,
The despair of jealous longing...

The setting of the speaker's recollections is a brightly lit, crowded ballroom. She describes her loneliness in the crowd, and recalls how she has in the past hidden her agitation. At first sight, there is an obvious kinship between the poems of Rostopchina and Akhmatova: both use objects and costume to set the scene, and both deal with the theme of unhappy love. The setting of both these poems is a brightly lit, stuffy, crowded room, and their heroines are equally pale, silent, and trembling. However, the differences in the poetic

approach to a similar subject are pronounced. Rostopchina describes emotion directly ('The despair of jealous longing'), but Akhmatova presents despair and longing quite differently. Although she uses the same conventional and narrow sentimental rhetoric, involving paling cheeks, trembling, and so on, she introduces a pronounced degree of impersonality by omitting a pronoun, so that the heroine seems to be watching herself from a distance ('The blood drained from [my] face').⁹⁷

A short lyric of 1847, entitled 'Vzgliad' ('The Glance'), by Zhadovskaia reads:

Я помню взгляд, мне не забыть тот взгляд! –
Он предо мной горит неотразимо:
В нем счастья блеск, в нем чудной страсти яд,
Огонь тоски, любви невыразимой.
Он душу мне так сильно волновал,
Он новых чувств родил во мне так много,
Он сердце мне надолго оковал
Неведомой и сладостной тревогой!⁹⁸

I remember that glance, I cannot forget that glance!
It burns irresistibly before me:
It contains the gleam of happiness, the poison of marvellous passion,
The flame of longing, inexpressible love.
It disturbed my soul powerfully,
It gave birth to so many new feelings in me,
Long did it bind my heart
With a mysterious and delightful anxiety!

Again, there are similarities in style and subject matter between Akhmatova's and Zhadovskaia's lyrics. In both these poems, the man's glances, or looks, are the focus of interest, and they each deal with the effect of his intense gaze on the heroine. Zhadovskaia's first line consists of the kind of emotional outburst – with a rising intonation, marked by punctuation – as is often encountered in Akhmatova's poetry. However, Zhadovskaia's lyric never retreats from this emotional pitch: instead it retains it, so that the last line consists of another exclamation. Akhmatova employs the same conventional rhetoric as Zhadovskaia, describing the intensity of the gaze in terms of burning light ('burns' in Zhadovskaia; 'like rays' in Akhmatova) but her treatment is much more restrained and indirect. The eight lines of Zhadovskaia's poem elaborate on the 'glance': it is irresistible, containing a gleam of happiness, the poison of passion, longing, inexpressible love, and it creates a sense of agitation in the heroine, arousing new feelings in her and binding her with a mysterious and delightful anxiety. In a poem of the same length, Akhmatova condenses the effect of the gaze to the brief and enigmatic formulation, 'This one/Could tame me'. The conventionality of her subject matter, rhetoric, and behaviour of her heroine, merely serve to throw into relief the poet's sparse, unconventional treatment of them.

The second lyric of Akhmatova's cycle opens with an emotional outburst:

Не любишь, не хочешь смотреть?

О, как ты красив, проклятый!

И я не могу взлететь,

А с детства была крылатой.

Мне очи застит туман,

Сливаются вещи и лица,

И только красный тюльпан,

Тюльпан у тебя в петлице.⁹⁹

Aren't you in love, don't you want to look?

Oh, how handsome you are, damn you!

And I cannot fly.

But since childhood I have had wings.

A mist clouds my eyes,

Things and faces merge together,

And [there is] only the red tulip,

The tulip in your buttonhole.

Following this exclamation, the speaker describes a mist clouding her eyes and blurring her vision. She seems, in fact, to be experiencing the kind of dizziness and tunnel vision that can precede a fainting fit. In the cycle as a whole, therefore, the speaker shudders, blanches, and apparently falls into a faint. However, Akhmatova's refusal to state directly what is happening creates a distancing, estranging effect, reducing and diffusing any impression of melodrama. In other words, the heroine's emotionally excessive, melodramatic behaviour is strangely at odds with the means used to render it.

Conclusion: the Person that Suffers and the Mind which Creates

The aim of the above discussion is not to suggest that all Akhmatova's poetry is inherently melodramatic: elements of melodrama seem to cluster particularly in poems of what Eikhnenbaum calls her 'initial manner' of the collections *Večer* (*Evening*) and *Chetki* (*Rosary*), but thereafter a more pronounced tragic sense emerges in response to the course of Russian twentieth-century history.¹⁰⁰ It is striking that melodramatic features tend to be most apparent in those lyrics in which the main protagonist (who is not always the speaker) is an aristocratic young woman who closely resembles Akhmatova herself in terms of diction and social milieu. Reeve writes of the early verse:

Like anybody, a poet must make do with his own experience. The imagery in these early poems suggests that Akhmatova's was very restricted (the biography confirms it) and that, borrowing puppets from the Romantic tradition, she was looking for ways to embody in the imagination the storm of emotions within herself.¹⁰¹

The young Akhmatova's own predilection for melodramatic expression and behaviour is apparent from her letters to Sergei von Shtein, widower of her sister Inna, concerning Vladimir Golenishchev-Kutuzov, a student with whom she fell passionately in love in 1905. In a letter of 1906, Akhmatova wrote:

My dear Shtein, if only you knew how stupid and naïve I am! I'm even ashamed to admit to you: I still love V. G.-K. And there is nothing, nothing in life apart from this feeling.

I have cardiac neurosis from agitation, perpetual torments and tears. [...] I suffer such nervous attacks that it seems sometimes as though I am already dying.¹⁰²

The letters to von Shtein reveal a strong inclination on Akhmatova's part towards self-dramatization and indulgence in grandiose emotional states. As Wendy Rosslyn observes, Akhmatova longed for Kutuzov 'with an insistence bordering on emotional violence', and her attachment to him was 'almost hysterical'. When von Shtein sent her Kutuzov's portrait in response to her insistent requests, Akhmatova's thanks were 'effusive to the point of utter disproportion'.¹⁰³ Elaine Feinstein regards this histrionic, 'over-dramatic' tone of Akhmatova's early letters as a product of 'adolescent affectation', pointing out that the young Anna Gorenko had only recently left school.¹⁰⁴

The letter quoted above is indeed recognisably that of a young girl narcissistically absorbed in her own emotional world (although Akhmatova's approach to her experience may also have been partly conditioned by the Symbolist cultural context). Others are

similarly replete with clichéd, inflated and hyperbolic forms of expression concerning the emotions. Akhmatova writes, for instance: 'All the time I am silent and cry, cry and am silent'; 'I haven't slept for a fourth night'; 'It's easy to die'; 'I am poisoned for life', the bitter poison of unrequited love!. Will I be able to live again?'.¹⁰⁵ These exclamations closely resemble the poetic emotional outbursts in the poems discussed above: 'I made him drink/Sharp grief until it made him drunk'; 'How can I forget?'; 'Leave, and I'll die'; 'Let love lie like a gravestone/On my life'; 'Ten years of calm spells and shouting/All my sleepless nights'. The physical effects of emotion that Akhmatova describes in her letters also suggest parallels with the behaviour of her lyrical heroine. Yet, in her poetry, the poet's attitude is distanced and analytical, and melodrama is always combined with features that counter its effects, so that it is less obviously perceptible.

The most distinctive of these features are Akhmatova's use of estrangement and narrative ambiguity: the former create the impression that the speaker is watching herself from without, while the latter offers an external perspective on her. Estrangement is a device which (as Driver points out) becomes typical in the later poetry, as is apparent in works like *Rekviem*, which highlights and thematizes the speaker's sense of dissociation from self in the face of trauma. Reflecting upon *Rekviem*, Brodsky observes:

When someone is weeping, that is the weeper's private affair. When someone writing weeps, when he is suffering, he actually gains something from the fact that he's suffering. 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 itself 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. The splitting into sufferer and writer.¹⁰⁶

In Akhmatova's early poetry, too, the often perceptible distinction between the different voices of the speaker or protagonist whose experience is portrayed, and the poet who gives them expression, brings to mind – as does Brodsky's distinction between 'sufferer and writer' – Eliot's famous remarks about the 'man who suffers and the mind which creates'.¹⁰⁷ However, despite some affinities in this regard, Akhmatova's attitude towards feeling, on the evidence of the poetry, is ultimately quite distinct from Eliot's. Michael Bell points out that the extreme self-consciousness of Eliot's impersonality ultimately throws it into question. He detects a fear of, or condescension towards, feeling in Eliot's claim that poetry is 'not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion'.¹⁰⁸ Akhmatova displays no such fear or condescension. She writes in a poem of 1915:

Нет, царевич, я не та,
Кем меня ты видеть хочешь,
И давно мои уста
Не целуют, а пророчат.

Не подумай, что в бреду
И замучена тоскою
Громко кличу я беду:
Ремесло мое такое.¹⁰⁹

No, tsarevich, I am not the one
That you want to see in me,
And my lips have long since

Not kissed, but prophesied.

Don't think that in delirium,
And tormented by grief
I loudly cry out my misfortune:
Such is my craft.

Although Akhmatova often encourages the reader to identify persona with poet by 'narcissistically arranging the narrative around her own person', as Alexander Zholkovsky expresses it, here she warns strongly against equating the two.¹¹⁰ Yet, despite emphasizing the idea of impersonality in this way, she does not advocate an 'escape' from emotion like Eliot. Instead she advances what amounts to a defence of strong feeling in poetry, even if she implies that this can only be what Brodsky calls the 'approximation of a genuine reaction'.

Melodrama is one of the primary devices in Akhmatova's arsenal for conveying strong feeling, but its presence in her poetry is masked by other elements. Balukhatyi concludes his discussion of melodrama by pointing out that its pure, primordial principles can be masked, weakened and complicated by other features, such as realistic psychological motivation.¹¹¹ A melodramatic skeleton, he observes, can be concealed beneath a layer of convincing psychology so that the feeling of melodramatic style is lost and a work can be perceived as belonging to a 'higher genre'.¹¹² Melodrama, in other words, can be disguised, rendered subtler and less readily perceptible. Balukhatyi's remarks refer specifically to drama, but a similar process of modification characterises the way in which melodrama finds its way into Akhmatova's poetry, and the restraint with which melodrama is performed in her lyrics certainly helps to explain why her work is more commonly associated with the 'higher genre' of tragedy.

In the poems discussed above, though, melodrama is not simply disguised or concealed. It meets with resistance and is treated with irony and scepticism, as Akhmatova's streak of Romantic self-consciousness tips into modernist impersonality. Akhmatova's use of sentimental rhetoric and melodramatic emotionalism is, in this way, peculiarly modern in its self-awareness. Her poetry provides a good example of a modernist transformation of the sentimental inheritance: she uses melodrama to create emotional intensity, but simultaneously implicitly rejects it by establishing distance from it and bringing emotion under control, containing and analysing it. Style and technique are more important than subject matter. If modernism's originality resides, as has been suggested, in 'the ways in which it makes the transformative act of translation, adaptation, repetition its real content', then Akhmatova's creation of a paradoxical impersonal melodrama, or a restrained melodrama, reveals her as quintessentially modernist from the outset.¹¹³

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¹ Anna Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, ed. by M. M. Kralin, 2 vols (Moscow: Pravda, 1990), I, 45.

Translations into English are my own, unless otherwise indicated – AH.

² See Stephen Reckert, *Lyra Minima: Structure and Symbol in Iberian Traditional Verse* (London: Kings College, 1970) on the combination of brevity and density in lyric. Margaret

Dickie's 'Dickinson's Discontinuous Lyric Self', *American Literature*, 60 (1988), 537-553 explores the relationship between brevity of form and excess of self in Emily Dickinson's work. See also Jane Donahue Eberwein, *Dickinson: Strategies of Limitation* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), pp. 544 and 551 for a consideration of the relationship between artistic restraint and excess in lyric.

³ 'Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966)', in her *A History of Russian Women's Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 207-23 (p. 222).

⁴ See Eikhenbaum, 'Anna Akhmatova: opyt analiza', in his *O poezii* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1969), pp. 75-147; Vinogradov, *Anna Akhmatova: O simvolike - o poezii* (Munich: Fink, 1970); Zhirmunskii, *Tvorchestvo Anny Akhmatovoi* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1973).

⁵ See note 1 above.

⁶ Eikhenbaum, p. 112. Vinogradov characterises Akhmatova's poetry as one of hints and emotional reticence, p. 137.

⁷ He claimed that Akhmatova brought all the complexity and richness of the Russian nineteenth-century novel to the lyric: 'Otryvok iz neopublikovannoi stat'i o russkoi literature i "Al'manakhe Muz"', in *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by G. P. Struve and B. A. Filippov, 2 vols (Washington: Inter-language Literary Associates, 1964-66), II, 487. Similarly, Zhirmunskii comments that the simplicity and authenticity of the emotions in Akhmatova's poetry were a continuation of the realist tradition of the nineteenth century (p. 25), A. I. Pavlovskii observes that Akhmatova does not abandon the school of Russian psychological prose, *Anna Akhmatova: ocherk tvorchestva* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1982), p. 7, and Joseph Brodsky finds that her poetry 'displays all the emotional subtlety and psychological complexity of nineteenth-century Russian prose', 'Introduction', in Anna Akhmatova, *Poems*, trans. by Lyn Coffin (New York: Norton, 1983), pp. xiii-xxxi (p. xix).

⁸ Janet Tucker, *Innokentij Annenskij and the Acmeist Doctrine* (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1986), p. 98.

⁹ S. Shwartzband notes that the cycle 'Smiatenie' is 'wired for sound' by Gumilev's poem 'Somnenie', 'Anna Akhmatova's Second Book, *Chetki*: Systematic Arrangement and Structure', in *The Speech of Unknown Eyes: Akhmatova's Readers on her Poetry*, ed. by Wendy Rosslyn, 2 vols (Nottingham: Astra Press, 1990), I, 123-37 (p. 127).

¹⁰ Eikhenbaum, p. 146. Kees Verheul concurs, observing that in Akhmatova's early poetry a specific autobiographical perspective is largely absent – the 'ten years' mentioned in this poem is an unusually precise reference – and in general 'no explicit identification is made between the person of the author and her poetical *alter ego*', *The Theme of Time* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p.63.

¹¹ See Ihor Levitsky, 'The Poetry of Anna Akhmatova', *Books Abroad*, 39 (1965), 4-9 (p. 7).

¹² Eikhenbaum, p. 136.

¹³ 'Reception as a Theme in Axmatova's Early Poetry', *Dutch Contributions to the VIII International Congress of Slavists* (Amsterdam, John Benjamins: 1979), pp. 205-231 (p. 227).

¹⁴ See 'On Contemporary Poetry', in Osip Mandelstam, *The Collected Critical Prose and Letters*, ed. by Jane Gary Harris (London: Collins Harvill, 1991), pp. 105-107 (p. 107).

¹⁵ 'Anna Akhmatova 'Vecher'', in *Desiatye gody*, ed. by R. D. Timenchik and K. M. Polivanov (Moscow: MPI, 1989), p. 80.

¹⁶ Anna Akhmatova', trans. by Alan Myers, *Russian Literature Triquarterly*, 9 (1974), 221-36 (p. 257 and p. 266).

¹⁷ 'Anna Akhmatova: In Memoriam', *Russian Review*, 28 (1969), 11-22 (p. 12).

¹⁸ *Anna Akhmatova: A Poetic Pilgrimage* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 194.

¹⁹ Among her ancient doubles are Cassandra (after Osip Mandel'shtam's poem of 1917), the Boiarynia Morozova, Dido, Salome, Joan of Arc, Cleopatra, Rachael, and Michal, daughter of Saul: see the poems 'Posledniaia roza' (1962), 'Kleopatra' (1940), and the cycle 'Bibleiskie stikhi' (1921-22). In most cases the cause of these figures' tragedy was an unhappy love affair. See T. V. Tsiv'ian, 'Antichnye geroini – zerkala Akhmatovoi', *Russian Literature*, 8 (1974), 103-19 (p. 106).

²⁰ Brodsky, p. xxiv.

²¹ She writes that 'Akhmatova retains the melodramatic masochism of her nineteenth-century predecessors; but she employs similar devices in order to signal its contingency', p. 211. The 'but' in this sentence makes its meaning opaque, unfortunately.

²² 'The Inconstant Translation: Life into Art', in *Anna Akhmatova 1889-1989: Papers from the Akhmatova Centennial Conference, Bellagio Study and Conference Center, June 1989*, ed. by Sonia I. Ketchian (Oakland, California: Berkeley Slavic Specialties, 1993), pp. 149-69 (p. 154).

²³ See Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. xi.

²⁴ Cited by Helena Goscilo in 'Playing Dead: The Operatics of Celebrity Funerals, or, The Ultimate Silent Part', in *Imitations of Life: Two Centuries of Melodrama in Russia*, ed. by Louise McReynolds and Joan Neuberger (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 283-319 (p. 293). See also B. B. Ziukov, *Vera Kholodnaia* (Moscow: Isskustvo, 1995), p. 183.

²⁵ Goscilo, p. 293.

²⁶ Louise McReynolds, 'The Silent Movie Melodrama: Evgenii Bauer Fashions the Heroine's Self', in *Self and Story in Russian History*, ed. by Laura Engelstein and Stephanie Sandler (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 120-40 (p. 132).

²⁷ Goscilo, p. 287.

²⁸ Maurice Beebe, 'What Modernism Was', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 3 (1974), 1065-84 (p. 1065).

²⁹ See Michael Bell, *Sentimentalism, Ethics and the Culture of Feeling* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 2-3 and 160.

³⁰ Damon Marcel DeCoste, "'A Frank Expression of Personality'? Sentimentality, Silence and Early Modernist Aesthetics in 'The Good Soldier'", *Journal of Modern Literature*, 31 (2007), 101-23 (p. 104). On connections between Acmeism and Imagism, see Elaine Ruskino, 'Russian Acmeism and Anglo-American Imagism', *Urbandus Review*, 1 (1978), 37-49.

³¹ Respectively, in 'A Retrospect', in *Toward the Open Field: Poets on the Art of Poetry, 1800-1950*, ed. by Melissa Kwasny (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), pp. 247-56 (p. 256), and 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *Points of View* (London: Faber and Faber, 1941), pp. 23-34 (p. 34). Pound's essay was originally published in 1913 and Eliot's in 1919.

³² 'Negative Poetics: On Skepticism and the Lyric Voice', *Representations*, 86 (2004), 120-140 (p. 129).

³³ Beebe, p. 1076.

³⁴ The term was originally coined by Jean-Jacques Rousseau to designate a drama accompanied by music, but it was René Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt (1773-1844), the 'Corneille of the Boulevards', who produced the first representative corpus of plays.

³⁵ Robert Bechtold Heilman, *Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of Experience* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1968), p. 185.

³⁶ For an account of stage melodrama in the Russian context, see Julie A. Buckler, 'Melodramatizing Russia: Nineteenth-Century Views from the West', in McReynolds and Neuberger, pp. 55-78.

³⁷ See Richard Stites, 'The Misanthrope, the Orphan, and the Magpie: Imported Melodrama in the Twilight of Serfdom', in McReynolds and Neuberger, pp. 25-54.

³⁸ McReynolds and Neuberger, p. 9. Melodrama and the Gothic novel informed and fed into one another. Brooks writes: 'Melodrama shares many characteristics with the Gothic novel, and not simply in the subjects that were traded back and forth between the two genres. It is equally preoccupied with nightmare states, the clausturation and thwarted escape, with innocence buried alive and unable to voice its claim to recognition. Particularly, it shares the preoccupation with evil as a real, irreducible force in the world, constantly menacing outburst' (pp. 19-20). Verheul cites the gothic horror story as a prevalent intertext of Akhmatova's early verse, p. 41.

³⁹ McReynolds and Neuberger, p. 10.

⁴⁰ See Brooks, pp. ix-xi.

⁴¹ See Gary Thurston, 'The Impact of Russian Popular Theatre', 1886-1915, *The Journal of Modern History*, 55 (1983), 237-67 (p. 242 and p. 244) and Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 16-22 on popular entertainment.

⁴² McReynolds and Neuberger remark that 'movies and melodrama were made for each other' (p. 16), and Brooks notes that the closest modern model to stage melodrama itself is silent film (p. 79).

⁴³ See Denise Youngblood, *The Magic Mirror: Moviemaking in Russia 1908-1918* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), p. 10 and Yuri Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception*, trans. by Alan Bodger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 12.

⁴⁴ Stites, *Popular Entertainment*, p. 32.

⁴⁵ Youngblood argues that the cultural importance of *Kliuchi* cannot be overemphasised, as it revolutionised Russian film making (p. 58). The film was the greatest box-office success known to the pre-revolutionary cinema: tickets were sold days in advance and standing room only signs were permanently displayed. See Jan Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 63.

On the film, which is no longer extant, but of which there remain a few stills and a published screenplay, see Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 418-19, and Youngblood, 'The Return of the Native: Yakov Protazanov and Soviet Cinema' in *Inside the Film Factory: New Approaches to Russian and Soviet Cinema*, ed. by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 103-23.

⁴⁶ See Tsivian, pp. 5-10 and Youngblood, p. 7.

⁴⁷ *Sobranie sochinenii*, I, 31.

⁴⁸ 'Symbolist Devils and Acmeist Transformation: Symbolists, Demonism, and the Absent Hero in Akhmatova's *Poem Without a Hero*', in *Russian Literature and its Demons*, ed. by Pamela Davidson (New York: Berghahn, 2000), 401-439 (p. 414). The influence of this

melodramatic context is manifest in Akhmatova's own early biography, before the publication of her first poems under her pseudonym, in relation to the obsessive pursuit of her by the young Nikolai Gumilev. Gumilev attempted suicide on several occasions, despairing at Akhmatova's not taking his love seriously and declining his proposals of marriage: see Haight, pp. 9 and 14. The histrionic tenor of his behaviour during his pursuit of Akhmatova was typical of the wider social and cultural context, in which suicide reached epidemic proportions and could even be regarded as fashionable. See Roberta Reeder, *Anna Akhmatova: Poet and Prophet* (London: Allison & Busby, 1995), p. 383 for a summary of discussion of the suicide 'epidemic'.

⁴⁹ Joan Delaney Grossman explicitly describes the latter as a 'melodrama', 'Russian Symbolism and the Year 1905: The Case of Valery Bryusov', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 61 (1983), 341-362 (p. 349). On the concept of 'life-creation', see *Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism*, ed. by Irina Paperno and Joan Delaney (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) and Svetlana Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks: Cultural Myths of the Modern Poet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

⁵⁰ Brooks, p. 81. Evaluating the Symbolist era from a later vantage point in his autobiography of 1949, the philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev condemns Symbolism precisely for falling victim to the sort of theatricality and spectacular emotional excess usually associated with melodrama. See *Dream and Reality: An Essay in Autobiography*, trans. by Katherine Lampert (London: Bles, 1950), p. 105. In 'Deviat'sot trinadtsatyi god', the first part of *Poema bez geroia*, in which she reflects upon the 1910s with hindsight, Akhmatova suggests implicitly – by means of a highly melodramatic plot involving an innocent 'hero', a villain, and flirtatious actress – that an emotional and behavioural excess characteristic of melodrama was an inherent feature of Symbolist culture, bound up with its narcissism and pervasive theatricality. The unhappy love triangle depicted in *Poem* results in the hero's despairing

suicide upon witnessing the actress's infidelity with a character based upon the biographical prototype of Blok.

⁵¹ She makes passing reference in her early poems to popular culture in the form of the *balagan* (marketplace puppet theatre) and vaudeville in 'Menia pokinul v novolun'e' (1911), in which the speaker is a tightrope walker, and 'So dnia Kupal'nitsy-Agrafeny' (1913).

⁵² See Daniel Gerould, 'Russian Formalist Theories of Melodrama', in *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, ed. by Marcia Landy (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), pp. 118-34 for a useful discussion of Formalism and melodrama. The main Russian texts are Sergei Balukatyi, 'K poetike melodramy', *Poetika I-V*, III, repr. Leningrad 1927 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1970), pp. 63-86, and Boris Tomashevskii, 'Frantsuzskaia melodrama nachala XIX veka', *Poetika*, II, pp. 55-82.

⁵³ See, for instance, Heilman, pp. 15-20.

⁵⁴ Brooks, p. 40.

⁵⁵ Brooks, p. ix.

⁵⁶ Brooks, p. 56.

⁵⁷ Brooks, p. 63.

⁵⁸ 'Hence the performance techniques of a heightened style of acting, with its exaggerated gestures and mannered characterisations, became synonymous with the genre', McReynolds and Neuberger, p. 8.

⁵⁹ Brooks, p. xi and p. ix.

⁶⁰ Brooks, p. 75.

⁶¹ Brooks, p. xiv.

⁶² *The Idiot*, trans. by David Magarshak (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), p. 576. For the full original text, see F. M. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 30 vols (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972-88), VIII, 475.

⁶³ 'Phases of Fiction', in her *Collected Essays*, 4 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1966-67), II, 56-102 (p. 87).

⁶⁴ In fact, it leads to different degrees of damnation or annihilation for them all: Rogozhin subsequently murders Nastas'ia, while Myshkin, who shares moral responsibility for his act, reverts to idiocy, and Aglaia makes an unwise marriage to a Pole masquerading as a count.

⁶⁵ See Tsivian, pp. 166-67.

⁶⁶ A number of studies discuss the relationship between Akhmatova and Dostoevskii in some detail: see for instance Ivailo Petrov, 'Dostoevskii i tvorchestvo Anny Akhmatovoi', *Slavica*, 21 (1984), 161-70 and E. A. Shestakova, 'Akhmatova i Dostoevskii (k postanovke problemy)', in *Novye aspekty v izuchenii Dostoevskogo*, ed. by V. N. Zakharov (Petrozavodsk: Petrozavodskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1994), pp. 335-54. See Alexandra Harrington, *The Poetry of Anna Akhmatova: Living in Different Mirrors* (London: Anthem, 2006), pp. 49-64 on cinematic techniques in the early poetry.

⁶⁷ 'Goodbye Again', in *Anna Akhmatova and her Circle*, ed. by Konstantin Polivanov and trans. by Patricia Beriozkina (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), pp. 162-98 (p. 195).

⁶⁸ Akhmatova, II, 149.

⁶⁹ The focus of Brooks' study is the nineteenth-century novel as practised by Honoré de Balzac and Henry James. He does not try to construct an argument for the direct influence of melodrama on these novelists, but rather suggests that the perception of the

melodramatic in their work can usefully be 'grounded and extended' through reference to stage melodrama (p. 20).

⁷⁰ For instance, Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

⁷¹ Akhmatova, I, 30.

⁷² See the discussion of this poem in Harrington, pp. 45-6 and p. 48 on links with nineteenth-century prose.

⁷³ Eikhenbaum discusses Akhmatova's 'shortness of breath', p. 90.

⁷⁴ Eikhenbaum, p. 110.

⁷⁵ Akhmatova, I, 94.

⁷⁶ Brown, p. 121.

⁷⁷ Akhmatova, I, 28.

⁷⁸ See Harrington, pp. 45-49 for a discussion of this lyric in relation to the Russian nineteenth-century novel.

⁷⁹ Anna Akhmatova, *The Word that Causes Death's Defeat: Poems of Memory*, trans. by Nancy K. Anderson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 11.

⁸⁰ Tsivian, p. 165.

⁸¹ Tsivian, p. 185.

⁸² See Harrington, pp. 47-49 for a consideration of this poem in relation to Lev Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*.

⁸³ Brooks, p. 10.

⁸⁴ Reeve, p. 153.

⁸⁵ Brooks, p. 92.

⁸⁶ Brooks, p. 8.

⁸⁷ See Brooks, pp. 63 and 3.

⁸⁸ Akhmatova, I, p. 30. A description of the meeting at Ivanov's 'Tower' when he made this remark is given by Leonid I Strakovsky, 'Poetess of Tragic Love', *American Slavic and East European Review*, 6 (1947), 1-18 (p. 2).

⁸⁹ Reeve, p. 154.

⁹⁰ Heilman, p. 185.

⁹¹ Akhmatova, I, 44.

⁹² 'Anna Akhmatova: Early Love Poems', *Russian Literature Triquarterly*. 1 (1971), 297-325 (p. 300).

⁹³ Driver, p. 303.

⁹⁴ Vinogradov notes how often in Akhmatova's early poetry there is an implied presence of a mirror, p. 56. The same effect occurs in a number of poems of the early manner. 'Protertyi kovrik pod ikonoi' (1913) hints at a melodramatic plot: the heroine hides fingers that have just been kissed in a gesture of shame, and the smell of tobacco lingers in her tangled hair, all of which connotes infidelity and seduction. Its first two stanzas create the effect of third-person narrative, and even when a pronoun appears in the third stanza, the perspective or point of view remains ambiguous. If the heroine is addressing herself in form of interior monologue, then she exhibits a high degree of alienation and dissociation from self, describing her own profile.

⁹⁵ Akhmatova, I, 45.

⁹⁶ http://az.lib.ru/r/rostopchina_e_p/text_0060.shtml [accessed 02/11/2011].

⁹⁷ See Kelly, p. 84 on the sentimental language of 'feminine prose' of the nineteenth century.

⁹⁸ http://az.lib.ru/z/zhadowskaja_j_w/text_0040.shtml [accessed 02/11/2011].

⁹⁹ Akhmatova, I, 45.

¹⁰⁰ She retained a melodramatic approach to her experience, however, and melodramatic structures can be seen to underpin her presentation of central events in her life. See Harrington, 'Anna Akhmatova's Biographical Mythmaking: Tragedy and Melodrama', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 89 (2011), 455-93.

¹⁰¹ Reeve, p. 153.

¹⁰² Akhmatova, II, p. 177.

¹⁰³ *The Price, the Fool, and the Nunnery: the Religious Theme in the Early Poetry of Anna Akhmatova* (Amersham: Avebury, 1984), pp. 78-9

¹⁰⁴ *Anna of all the Russias: The Life of Anna Akhmatova* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005), pp. 21 and 26.

¹⁰⁵ Akhmatova, II, 177; 178; 179; 184.

¹⁰⁶ Solomon Volkov, *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky*, trans. by Marian Schwartz (New York: Free Press, 1998), p. 227.

¹⁰⁷ 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', p. 34.

¹⁰⁸ Bell, p. 162.

¹⁰⁹ Akhmatova, I, 110. See Kelly, p. 214 and Eng-Liedmeier, p. 224, on this lyric.

¹¹⁰ 'The Obverse of Stalinism: Akhmatova's Self-Serving Charisma of Selflessness', in Engelstein and Sandler, pp. 46-68 (p. 50).

¹¹¹ Balukhatyi, p. 85.

¹¹² Balukhatyi, p. 86.

¹¹³ Stephen Matterson and Daryl Jones, *Studying Poetry* (London: Arnold, 2000), p. 55.