

OSIP MANDELSTAM



POEMS



SECOND EDITION

TRANSLATIONS BY ILYA BERNSTEIN

OSIP MANDELSTAM



POEMS



SECOND EDITION

TRANSLATIONS BY **ILYA BERNSTEIN**

BOSTON • 2020

Osip Mandelstam. *Poems*

Translations by Ilya Bernstein

Second edition, revised, with an expanded commentary

ISBN 978-1950319244

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020940894

Copyright © 2005–2020 by Ilya Bernstein

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the written permission of the copyright holder.


Earlier versions of some translations have appeared in *Persephone*, *Circumference*, *Raritan Quarterly*, *Jubilat*, *Ars Interpres*, *Calque*, *Delos*, *Osip Mandelstam: New Translations* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2006), *Osip Mandelstam. Poems* (M•Graphics, 2014).

A portion of the afterword has also appeared in *Delos*.

Cover Design by Paul Kraytman © 2014–2020

PUBLISHED BY M•GRAPHICS | BOSTON, MA

 www.mgraphics-publishing.com

 mgraphics.books@gmail.com

Printed in the United States of America

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I was washing in the yard at night	7
I know not when.	8
Up a little ladder I climbed	9
THE AGE	11
THE SLATE ODE	13
For the rattling valor of ages to come	16
CANZONE	17
LAMARCK	19
Oh, how we love to dissemble	21
TO THE GERMAN LANGUAGE	22
OCTAVES	
I love the formation of tissue (1)	24
I love the formation of tissue (2)	24
When, after destroying the sketches	25
O butterfly, O Muslim maid	25
The saw-tooth paw of the maple	26
Tell me, draughtsman of the desert.	26
Schubert in water, and Mozart in birdsongs	27
Prevailing over nature's induration	27
The minuscule sixth-sense appendage	28
Out of bowls full of pins and pestilence	28
The neglected garden of magnitudes	29
What street is this?	30
Yes, I lie in the earth, moving my lips	31
A wave like any other, that breaks the back	32
When, puffed up like brioche, the goldfinch	33
THE BIRTH OF A SMILE	34
Not mine, not yours, but theirs	35

Idle inside a mountain an idol dwells	36
You're not dead yet, you're not yet all alone	37
What shall we do with the prostration of the plains . . .	38
Do not compare: who lives is beyond compare	39
Today I'm in a spiderweb of light.	40
Where are the bound and fastened moans?	41
As a celestial stone awakens the earth somewhere . . .	42
[ODE TO STALIN]	43
Like Rembrandt, martyr of light and shadow.	47
The curves of open coves, the pebbles, and the blue . .	48
I sing when my throat is wet, my soul is dry	49
Armed with the vision of the subtle wasps	50
Into a lions' den and bondage I am cast	51
VERSES ON THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER	52
Maybe this is a point of mindlessness	58
I am lost in the sky—what to do? (1).	59
I am lost in the sky—what to do? (2).	60
So that sandstone—no stranger to raindrops	61
Blue island made great by potters	63
The Greek flute's theta and iota	64
The pear tree and the bird cherry have taken aim . . .	66
[POEMS TO NATALYA SHTEMPER]	
Slightly unlevel upon hollow ground	67
There are women who belong to the raw earth . . .	68
A NOTE ON MANDELSTAM'S POEMS	71
LIST OF TITLES AND FIRST LINES IN RUSSIAN	103



I was washing in the yard at night.
The stars in the sky were coarsely brilliant.
Not a ray, but salt thrown on an axe—
The barrel cool and full to overflowing.

All the gates are shut and fastened tight
And the earth is threaded-through with conscience.
What more pure foundation can there be
Than the truth of fresh and untouched canvas?

In the barrel, a star melts like salt,
And the water, cooling, becomes blacker—
Bitter fate more bitter, death more pure,
And more frightening the earth—and truer.

1921



I know not when
This little song began—
Who scrapes along it, what thief?
What tinkling mosquito-prince?

I would like to talk
About nothing once more,
To scrape a match, to push
The night awake with my shoulder;

To throw haystacks and haystacks apart,
The wearisome weight of air;
To rend, to tear the sack
Where the caraway is packed.

So that the linkage of blood—
The tinkle of these dried herbs—
Once purloined, might be found
Across time, hayloft, and dream.

1922



Up a little ladder I climbed
To a hayloft in utter disarray—
I inhaled the clutter of space,
The detritus of milky stars.

And I thought: Why awake
The swarm of drawn out sounds,
In this eternal wrangle why chase
Wondrous Aeolian scales?

The Big Dipper's stars are seven.
The earth's good senses are five.
The darkness swells and tinkles,
And grows and tinkles again.

A hay wagon, enormous, unyoked,
Athwart the universe stands.
The ancient chaos of the hayloft
Will tickle, prickle a man...

Not with our own skin's scales—
Against the hair of the world we sing.
We tune our lyres as if
Rushing to grow a fleece.

Scythemen restore to the nest
Finches that fall to the ground—
I will fly from furrows that burn
And return to my own row of sounds.

To make the linkage of blood
And the dried out tinkle of grass
Part ways: the one—made firm,
The other—a dream mirage.

1922

THE AGE

My age, my beast, who will discover
How to peer into your eyes
And with his own blood glue together
The vertebrae of two centuries?
Blood-the-builder gushes
From the throat of earthly things,
While a freeloader merely trembles
On the threshold of new days.

A creature must sustain its backbone
For as long as its life lasts,
And in an unseen spinal column
Undulates a playing wave.
Like a child's tender cartilage
Is the age of infant earth—
And like a lamb, life's headmost part
Has been sacrificed once more.

In order to free the age from bondage,
To begin the world anew,
The joints of days, gnarled and knotted,
Must be tied together by a flute.
It is the age that makes undulations
In the sorrow of human beings
And in the grass an adder breathes
Like a golden measure of the age.

Buds will swell again as always
And green sprouts will spurt,
But your backbone has been broken,
My wonderful pitiful age!
And with a meaningless smile,
You look backward, cruel and weak,
Like a beast that used to be agile,
On the tracks of your own feet.

Blood-the-builder gushes
From the throat of earthly things,
And the ocean's cartilage splashes
Its hot fish against warm shores.
And from the elevated bird net,
From the humid heaps of blue,
Indifference, indifference
Spills over your mortal wound.

1922

THE SLATE ODE

*We will know only from the voice
What it was that scratched and struggled...*

From star to star — a mighty bond,
The flinty path from the old ballad.
The flint, the air — their common tongue —
Flintstone and water — ring and horseshoe.
Upon the soft shale of the clouds
Appears a milky slate stone drawing —
Not the discipleship of the world,
But mere delirium of sheep dreaming.

We sleep upright in thickest night
And have a sheepskin hat to warm us.
The spring trickles back into the rock
In chains of speech that whirl and warble.
Written by fear, written by shifts,
Using a milky lead pencil,
This is the ripening rough draft
Of running water's own disciples.

Goat cities of the precipice,
The mighty layering of flintstones;
And even so, another ridge —
Sheep churches and habitations!

They heed the sermon of the plumb,
Water instructs them, time erodes them—
And they have saturated long ago
The air and its transparent forest.

Like a dead hornet beside the hive
The bright day is swept out in shame
And night-the-vulture carries back
Burning chalk and feeds the slate stone.
To erase the impressions of the day
From the iconoclastic panel
And like a chick to brush away
Visions that are already transparent!

The fruit matured. The grapes grew ripe.
The day raged as it always rages.
With gentle games of knucklebones
And with the coats of angry sheep dogs.
Like litter from the icy heights—
The underside of green impressions—
The hungry water runs,
Twisting and playing like an animal,

And like a spider it crawls toward me—
Where every bond is splashed by moonbeams,
On an astounding ascent,
I hear the shrieking of the slate stone.
I break the night, the burning chalk,
To make a hard immediate record,
I exchange noise for an arrow's song,
I tune my strings for strident fury.

Who am I? Not a mason, no,
And not a roofer or a shipwright—
A double-dealer, with twin souls,
Friend to the night, herald of the daylight.
Blessed is he who has called flint
A disciple of the running water,
And who has fastened, on solid ground,
Latchets around the feet of mountains.

And now I study the diary,
The scratches of a slate stone summer,
The flint, the air—their common tongue,
With sediments of light and darkness.
And I desire to thrust my fingers
Into the flinty path from the old ballad
As into a wound—to form a bond
Between flint and water—ring and horseshoe.

1923, 1937



For the rattling valor of ages to come,
For the high tribe of men,
At the feast of the fathers I have forfeited my cup,
And my joy, and my honor as well.

A wolfhound-age leaps up on my back,
But I am not a wolf by blood.
Better find me a coat of Siberian steppes
And stuff me inside, like a hat...

Let me no more look at the coward, at the mire,
At the bloody bones in the wheel,
Let the blue foxes blaze the whole night through
In their primordial beauty for me.

Lead me into the night, where the Yenisei flows
And the pine tree reaches the star,
Because I am not a wolf by blood
And can only be killed by my like.

17–18 March 1931, end of 1935

CANZONE

Is it true that I will see tomorrow —
How my heart beats leftward, glory beating! —
You, the bankers of the alpine landscape,
You, the holders of the gneiss's assets?

With the eagle eye of a professor —
Egyptology and numismatics —
There are birds there that are sullen and crested
With tough meat and broad breastbones.

That is Zeus ingeniously adjusting
With his cabinet-maker's magic fingers
His extraordinary onion-glasses —
A gift to the seer from the psalmist.

He looks through those binoculars of Zeiss's —
A precious present from King David —
And makes out all of the gneiss's wrinkles,
Every pine tree, every gnat-sized village.

I will leave the land of the Hyperboreans
To saturate my destiny with eyesight.
I will say "selah" to the protector
Of the Jews for his raspberry kindness.

The unshaven mountains aren't clear yet,
And the stubble of the brushwood prickles,
And the valley is fresh, clean as a fable,
And green to the point of wincing.

I like field binoculars for giving
A compounding interest to vision.
Only two colors in the world have not faded:
Yellow jealousy and red impatience.

26 May 1931

A NOTE ON MANDELSTAM'S POEMS

IN 1930, MANDELSTAM WROTE: "I have no manuscripts, no notebooks, archives. I have no handwriting, because I never write. I alone in Russia work from the voice." Mandelstam's manuscripts and notebooks have survived, but his statement about working from the voice is corroborated by witnesses. Here is how Viktor Shklovsky, Mandelstam's neighbor for a time in 1920, described him: "With his head thrown back, Osip Mandelstam walks around the house. He recites line after line for days on end. The poems are born heavy. Each line separately." And here is how Sergey Rudakov, a young critic who visited Mandelstam in exile in Voronezh, described him in 1935: "Mandelstam has a wild way of working... I am standing in front of a working mechanism (or maybe organism, also) of poetry... The man no longer exists; what exists is—Michelangelo. He sees and understands nothing. He walks around mumbling: 'Like a black fern on a green night.' For four lines, four hundred are uttered, literally... He does not remember his own poems. He repeats himself and, separating out the repetitions, writes what is new."

I wonder if this way of writing, which may well have been Mandelstam's practice from the beginning, might account for that rare acoustic quality which all his poems share, regardless of when they were written. From first to last, they are poems that contain no noise: their only accompaniment is silence. Composed of lines that were arrived at only after a hundred alternatives had been spoken out loud and pushed aside, they indeed feel "born heavy"—if this is understood to mean born pregnant, born already heavy with something yet unborn, an unborn meaning or another unborn poem. An echo of expect-

tancy is audible even in Mandelstam's earliest poems. It unfolds around them in silence line after line, urging those who hear them—even if they hear them only in their minds while reading them in silence—to listen more closely.

It remains just as audible in his last poems. I think it was the most indelible quality of his poetic voice, which stayed with him from beginning to end, even as his voice learned to become open to stronger and longer-lasting inspirations.

Speaking of his own growth as a poet, Mandelstam always named Nikolai Gumilev as his mentor. Gumilev, an adventurer-poet, five years older than Mandelstam and a world traveler—and eventually a decorated hero of the First World War—was the originator of the Acmeist movement to which Mandelstam adhered in his youth. In a review of Mandelstam's first book (1914), Gumilev pointed approvingly to a change that occurs partway through the collection, when Mandelstam “opens the doors of his poetry to all the phenomena of life that live in time, and not only in eternity or in the instant.” I think it likely that these words stayed with Mandelstam and that he himself understood his poetic development—and Gumilev's role in his life—in these terms, as an opening of the doors to what is more alive.

This collection of translations opens with a poem that Mandelstam wrote after learning that Gumilev had been shot. In August 1921, Gumilev was arrested for participating in a conspiracy to overthrow the government—the charge most likely fabricated, the conspiracy most likely nonexistent—and summarily executed, along with dozens of others. Mandelstam was in Tiflis, Georgia, at the time, staying in a house without running water, as Nadezhda Mandestam described it in her memoirs, but with a barrel in the yard that was regularly filled with water from a spring. “The coarse homespun towel that we brought from the Ukraine also found its way into the poem.” The poet's death, the

death of a friend and mentor, inspired a stark vision of the earth as a stage for a sacrifice.

Mandelstam returned to Gumilev in a poem written ten years later, “To the German Language,” also included in this collection. Several years after Gumilev’s death, Mandelstam stopped writing poems. During the second half of the 1920s, he wrote only prose. What “reawakened him” to poetry again in 1930, as his wife writes, “was a meeting with a young biologist, Boris Kuzin,” with whom he formed a close friendship. Mandelstam himself wrote in a letter about Kuzin: “His personality permeates... the whole recent period of my work. To him and only to him I owe... the period of the so-called ‘mature Mandelstam.’”

While “To the German Language” is dedicated to Kuzin, the figure whose image flits across its stanzas is Ewald Christian von Kleist, a minor German poet and cavalry officer of the eighteenth century, whose verses appear in the poem’s epigraph. Yet behind both of these figures rises the enduring outline of a third, who was both an army officer-poet and the first friend to have awakened Mandelstam when he “slept without form or feature” two decades earlier—Gumilev. Commemorating Mandelstam’s “second awakening,” which marked not only his return to poetry in 1930 but also a far more fateful opening of the doors in his poetry “to all the phenomena of life that live in time,” the poem looks back to the first.

While Gumilev was Mandelstam’s mentor as a poet in human or spiritual terms, influencing his understanding of the relation between poetry and life, the poet who had the greatest influence on Mandelstam’s understanding of the relation between poetry and language, in my view, was Velimir Khlebnikov. Writing about Mandelstam’s and Khlebnikov’s early days during poetry readings at the Stray Dog Cabaret before the First World World, a contemporary recalls Mandelstam, “as usual, talking,

talking, and... suddenly stopping. ‘I can’t go on,’ he said, ‘because in the next room Khlebnikov is being silent.’”

For some time in 1922, a few months before his death, Khlebnikov came for dinner every day to the Mandelstams’, who shared their food rations with him. As Nadezhda Mandelstam recounts: “such attentive care as Mandelstam showed for Khlebnikov, he never showed for anyone.” One more anecdotal detail will illustrate the connection between the two poets. In March 1938, leaving for the sanatorium that would soon become the scene of his final arrest, Mandelstam took with him a volume of Dante, a volume of Pushkin, and the collected works of Khlebnikov (as well as the poems of Shevchenko, given to him as a present at the last minute).

What did Mandelstam learn from Khlebnikov? He answers this question himself very straightforwardly in his “Remarks on Poetry,” written in 1923. “Poetic artillery batteries talk to one another with volleys of fire,” Mandelstam writes, punning on the most canonic name in Russian poetry, which derives from the Russian word for cannon, *pushka*, “completely unfazed by the indifference of the time that separates them. In poetry, it is always war... Commanders of roots, like commanders of troops, take up arms against one another. The roots of words wage war in darkness, depriving each other of nutriment and earthly juices.”

How are we to understand “commanders of roots”? Khlebnikov envisioned poetry as being endowed with a power to affirm semantic resemblances between words that resemble each other phonetically. To dramatize this vision, he eventually imagined a whole mythology for language, in which primordial roots with primordial meanings — which were not etymological roots, but sounds that recurred as kernels in actual words — branched out over time into words whose meanings had no apparent con-

nection, but whose family resemblances could nonetheless be brought out in poetry.

But one need hardly follow him into this story of linguistic origins to appreciate the fact that readers who have lived their whole lives with the words “canon” and “cannon”—and who, every time they see or hear one of these words, inevitably see or hear in it a phantom of the other—might come to associate them not just phonetically, but semantically also; so that the kernel of sounds which these words share becomes loaded in their minds with an indefinable meaning that is common to both. But though indefinable, this meaning is not inaccessible: one might expect it to be taken as more than just a pun, for instance, if one were to describe the great books of a country as the cannon of its language firing through history...

Or one can make the same point, but in a way that puts more emphasis on the poet’s own ability to create new meanings: even where no overlap in meaning between phonetically overlapping words yet exists in anyone’s mind except the poet’s before the poem is written—since the phonetic similarities uncovered by Khlebnikov were indeed often far less familiar than the one I have just mentioned—the poet, by affirming such an overlap, can bring its intelligible meaning into being.

“At the risk of sounding too elementary,” Mandelstam continues in the essay quoted above, “simplifying my subject as much as possible, I would describe the negative and positive poles in the state of poetic language as prolific morphological blossoming and the hardening of morphological lava beneath a semantic crust. Poetic speech is vitalized by the roaming, polysemic root.” What Mandelstam learned from Khlebnikov was to pay attention to roaming, polysemic roots, those clusters of sounds in a language that are “proto-semantic”—not just pure sounds, yet not yet hardened into any particular meaning—clusters of

sounds that remain open to many meanings and fluctuate easily among them.

In Khlebnikov, attention to what is proto-semantic in language was all-absorbing from the beginning. Of course, in itself sensitivity to potential semantic affinities between similar-sounding words was hardly anything new in poetry. One finds it in every line of Shakespeare or Pushkin. But Khlebnikov elevated it into the central trope of his work, singlemindedly prioritizing it over every other aspect of rhetoric.

The starting point of such a trope is the same as the starting point of a pun: but whereas a pun contents itself with a laugh, turning its back on any further significance that a coincidence of sounds might be imagined to have, Khlebnikov's approach was precisely to amplify this significance into material for poetry, a material with a unique semantic potency, drawing on a realm of meanings that everyone lives with, but that are impossible to talk about.

As Mandelstam wrote about Khlebnikov in the same essay: "He has marked out pathways for the language's development, transitional, intermediary ones, and this historically nonexistent trajectory in the destiny of Russian speech, realized only in Khlebnikov, has become preserved in his *zaum* [the "transsensical" language of Khlebnikov's proto-semantic coinages], which is nothing other than transitional forms that have not yet had time to become covered over with the semantic crust of a rightly and righteously developing language."

This vision of language, and of poetry's relation to language, which Mandelstam was only able to describe discursively in this essay from 1923, finally found its way into a magnificent poem written by him over a dozen years later, "Not mine, not yours, but theirs..." The poem not only formulates the vision, but also incarnates it, inwardly alive with morphological blossoming.

While Khlebnikov's insights influenced Mandelstam early on by informing his thinking about poetry, it was not until his exile in Voronezh (1935–1937) that Mandelstam came to assimilate them as skills, to incorporate them fully into his own voice. As he wrote in a letter about another poem composed shortly after “Not mine, not yours, but theirs...”: “In this piece, employing very modest means, I have used the letter ‘shch’ and something else to make a (material) lump of gold. The Russian language is capable of miracles if only the poem obeys it, learns from it, and boldly wrestles with it. How every language honors a poet’s wrestling with it, and with what coldness it repays indifference and feeble subordination!”

I have not attempted to translate the alchemy referred to here—the gold that Mandelstam made out of the sound “shch,” though real, is not fungible, not least because this sound does not even exist in English. But the approach has become indistinguishable from Khlebnikov’s, though the voice remains purely Mandelstam’s, with all the acoustic qualities I described at the beginning of this note.

This is true of all the poetry Mandelstam wrote in Voronezh. In the poems written during these years, particularly during his last half-year there, one still recognizes Mandelstam’s aspiration to compose poems that feel born heavy with unborn meanings. But now this aspiration has become combined with such caring attention to the “polysemic root” as Mandelstam had never shown before. The outcome is like nothing else in Russian poetry. From this last half-year come half the poems in this collection.

Mandelstam confronted Khlebnikov’s ideas not only in prose during the 1920s, but also in poetry, as can be seen from two poems from 1922: “I know not when / This little song began” and “Up a little ladder I climbed.” Both of them branch off

from a short poem by Khlebnikov, which begins: “A little song [*pesenka*] is a little ladder [*lesenka*] into another heart” (1921). In these poems, Mandelstam contemplates a poet’s role with respect to meanings already contained in language independently of the poet—whose only task might be to stir up language so that its inherent meanings, however incoherent, begin to resonate—and draws two opposite conclusions, one in favor of and one against such an approach to poetry. The subject of both poems is that *lesenka* which is also a *pesenka*, that ladder which is also a little song: a musical scale.

Mandelstam filled his poems with deliberate ciphers during these years. The mosquito-prince in the first poem is immediately recognizable to Russian ears as Prince Gvidon from Pushkin’s “The Tale of Tsar Saltan,” who becomes transformed into a mosquito in the tale. Grigory Amelin and Valentina Morderer, who wrote what in my opinion is the best and most imaginative book ever written about Mandelstam’s poetry, *The Worlds and Collisions of Osip Mandelstam* (2001), have marvelously solved the riddle of Prince Gvidon: the tinkling mosquito-prince is Guido of Arezzo, the inventor of modern musical notation, who named the notes of the musical scale...

The ambivalence toward Khlebnikov’s approach to poetry expressed by the coupling of these two poems would resurface in some of the poems Mandelstam wrote during his last half-year in Voronezh—more about them below—although by then this particular ambivalence would feed into a broader ruefulness about poetry, which Mandelstam referred to in one poem as “the cause of all my troubles.” But by the end of his Voronezh period, Khlebnikov had become a palpable presence in all of Mandelstam’s work. In fact, I believe he can be identified directly as the hero of Mandelstam’s poem about Prometheus, “Where are the bound and fastened moans?”

LIST OF TITLES AND FIRST LINES IN RUSSIAN

«Умывался ночью на дворе...»	7
«Я не знаю, с каких пор...»	8
«Я по лесенке приставной...»	9
Век («Век мой, зверь мой, кто сумеет...»)	11
Грифельная ода («Звезда с звездой—могучий стык...») ...	13
«За гремучую доблесть грядущих веков...»	16
Канцона («Неужели я увижу завтра...»)	17
Ламарк («Был старик застенчивый как мальчик...») ...	19
«О, как мы любим лицемерить...»	21
К немецкой речи («Себя губя, себя противореча...») ..	22
Восьмистишия	
«Люблю появление ткани...» (1)	24
«Люблю появление ткани...» (2)	24
«Когда, уничтожив набросок...»	25
«О бабочка, о мусульманка...»	25
«И клена зубчатая лапа...»	26
«Скажи мне, чертежник пустыни...»	26
«И Шуберт на воде, и Моцарт в птичьем гаме...» ...	27
«Преодолев затверженность природы...»	27
«Шестого чувства крошечный придаток...»	28
«В игольчатых чумных бокалах...»	28
«И я выхожу из пространства...»	29
«Это какая улица?..»	30
«Да, я лежу в земле, губами шевеля...»	31
«Бежит волна-волной, волне хребет ломая...»	32
«Когда щегол в воздушной сдобе...»	33
Рождение улыбки («Когда заулыбается дитя...»)	34
«Не у меня, не у тебя—у них...»	35

«Внутри горы бездействует кумир...»	36
«Еще не умер ты, еще ты не один...»	37
«Что делать нам с убитостью равнин...»	38
«Не сравнивай: живущий несравним...»	39
«Я нынче в паутине световой...»	40
«Где связанный и пригвожденный стон?...»	41
«Как землю где-нибудь небесный камень будит...»	42
[Ода] («Когда б я уголь взял для высшей похвалы...»)	43
«Как светотени мученик Рембрандт...»	47
«Разрывы круглых бухт, и хрящ, и синева...»	48
«Пою, когда гортань сыра, душа—суха...»	49
«Вооруженный зреньем узких ос...»	50
«Я в львиный ров и в крепость погружен...»	51
Стихи о неизвестном солдате	52
«Может быть, это точка безумия...»	58
«Заблудился я в небе— что делать?...» (1)	59
«Заблудился я в небе— что делать?...» (2)	60
«Чтоб, приятель и ветра и капель...»	61
«Гончарами велик остров синий...»	63
«Флейты греческой тэта и йота...»	64
«На меня нацелилась груша да черемуха...»	66
[Стихи к Н. Штемпель]	
«К пустой земле невольню припадаю...»	67
«Есть женщины сырой земле родные...»	68

Osip Mandelstam's is one of the dozen luminous names in Russian poetry. Mandelstam (1891–1938) began as one of the more original poets of the Russian avant-garde before the First World War, but his extraordinary growth as a poet over the next quarter-century set him a great distance apart from almost all of his contemporaries. By the 1930s he was writing the most memorable poems in the language. This collection includes translations of fifty poems by Mandelstam, mostly from the 1930s, along with an extended commentary on the poems and on Mandelstam's poetics.

The translations were guided by the belief that the most important thing about a poem is neither its meaning nor its sound, but whatever in it makes its readers memorize it. Accordingly, they aim to capture some of the re-readability of the originals, with the hope of making English-language versions of Mandelstam's poems that at least point to that which invites memorization in his work, and which in the best cases may be memory-worthy in their own right.



Ilya Bernstein is a poet and translator. His poetry collections include *Attention and Man* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2003) and *Distances and Sounds* (Ars-Interpres, 2020).

M-GRAPHICS PUBLISHING

www.mgraphics-publishing.com
info@mgraphics-publishing.com

ISBN 978-1-950319-24-4



9 781950 319244