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The Epic, the Lyric, the Dramatic, and Marina Tsvetaeva's Poema of the End

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THE EPIC, THE LYRIC, THE DRAMATIC, AND MARINA CVETAEVA'S "POEMA OF THE END"

0. Introduction

The issue of genre surrounding Cvetaeva's "Poema of the End" (PE) has received many conflicting interpretations. Efim Etkind suggests that its subject matter belongs to the realm of lyric poetry and places it in Majakovskij's tradition of "overgrown lyrics" (273). Others note that Cvetaeva retains the linearity of plot in PE and in this way, in contrast to the other member of the pair, "Poema of the Mountain", approximates the temporal structure of a traditional narrative poem. Both Olga Revzina and Tomas Venclova emphasize PE's plot-oriented subtexts. Revzina compares its unfolding to that of a folk tale. Venclova proposes the Fourteen Stations of the Cross as the underlying linear principle.

The curious feature of the poem's structure is that all of these polarized readings can be supported by the text itself. It is precisely the combination of the lyric and epic elements that allows Cvetaeva to interpret both poetic genres in her own peculiar way. Cvetaeva's experimentation with what Simon Karlinsky refers to in English as her "longer poems" (207-236) cannot be appreciated without exploring both the epic and lyric poetic extremes. Many aspects of PE are indeed reminiscent of the genre indicated in the title itself. In fact, in the first part of my analysis I would like to contribute to the Revzina/Venclova "side" by discussing another one of PE's plot-oriented subtexts: a gradual unfolding of a sequence of battles, worthy of the eighteenth-century epic canon. However, on top of the organizing principle of plot poetry, as well as of epic content, Cvetaeva superimposes a genuinely lyric structure and subject matter: a single moment of separation between two lovers. The second part of this analysis will contribute to the side of the debate that treats PE as an "overgrown lyric" by focusing on another prominent subtext, also both in terms of structure and content, namely, the biblical "Song of Songs". I will discuss PE's dramatic organization, borrowed from this Old Testament text, as a bridge between the *poèma*'s epic and lyric poetic polarities.

1. Epic Battlefields

Vladimir Propp defines an epic poem in terms of struggle and victory. This struggle is explicitly anti-individual: it is waged in groups and for collective goals (149). The notion of a struggle posits battle scenes as the lowest common denominator of all classical examples in this genre. They are at the center of verse epics both in the Western models shaped by Homer and the home-grown tradition of *byliny*, lays and eighteenth-century *poemy*. The two important structural elements of such poetry are gradation

of presentation and epic concreteness. For the most part, epic action and objects are externalized. Lydja Ginzburg proposes concreteness / externalization as the dominant principle of epic poetry: "Epic verse offers an illusion of physical time and localized space which is furnished with things, in which characters move around and events happen" (97). The setting of Cvetaeva's poema is a concrete city of Prague. The action takes place at a particular hour of the day: "Время: шесть" (1, 356; 'The time: six o'clock'). But more importantly, the component of concreteness is felt most poignantly in the epic tradition's focus on the physical aspects of blood and corpses. The violent physicality of epic verse is crucial in understanding the dynamic between the two interlocutors in PE.

Conflating the epic and the lyric impulses allows Cvetaeva to hyperbolize personal pain into a public event. This aggrandizement of the personal is achieved by constructing a subtextual space of classical epic poetry, i.e., presenting the separation of lovers as a struggle between nations on a battlefield and an ultimate victory of one. Military imagery in Cvetaeva's poem becomes an extended metaphor for the personal situation described in it. Finally, the sequential presentation of metaphoric war battles, like the subtext of the Fourteen Stations of the Cross discussed by Venclova, points to the linear development of the poem's "action."

Venclova notes that Cvetaeva transfers PE's place of action onto the biblical plane (154): sometimes Prague is mythicized as Jerusalem, sometimes as Sodom (i.e., anti-Jerusalem). An epic battlefield is another underlying plane of action. Although the poem is laid out as a dialogue between two lovers, the reader soon realizes that the exchange of lines is really an exchange of blows. The first characterization of the interlocutors' relationship immediately introduces the atmosphere of military opposition:

Братство таборное, –
Вот куда вело!
Громом на́ голову,
Саблей наголо́ (1, 357)[1]

[Gypsy brotherhood. / So this is where it led! / Like thunder on your head, / Like "draw your sword!"]

"Сабли наголо́" is an antiquated command to begin an attack, usually addressed to a cavalry. The effect of changing the case of the expression's nominative "сабли" to instrumental is ambiguous. One could understand the line as containing a peculiar instrumental simile, which echoes the instrumental simile of the previous verse ("Громом..." = как гром; "Саблей наголо́" = как "сабли наголо́"). Filling in all the logical omissions, the verse might be translated into English in the following way: "Like the command 'Draw your sword!'" Hence, their 'Gypsy brotherhood' ("братство таборное") leads to the act of drawing swords. A more literal reading

[1] All references made to "Sočinenija v dvux tomax", unless otherwise noted.

of the instrumental case here, i.e., the instrumental of instrument, is also possible. In other words, the suppressed direct object (some part of a body) is being chopped clear off ("наголо" also has the meaning of cropping something close, though usually hair) *by way of* a sword. Both ways of reading the line, however, conjure up the same battlefield gore. Their 'brotherhood' is compared either to the preparation of the spilling of blood or to the actual act of blood-spilling itself.

The first battle is waged in the beginning of Section Two, with the command to attack. In the beginning of Section Five, the speaker alludes to her opponent's physical exhaustion ("Но истерзан, / Но выпит, но изведен" 1, 360; 'And he is tortured, / And depleted, and exhausted'). It is followed by a parenthetical comment military in spirit: "(Орлом озирая местность):..."; '(He surveys the scene like an eagle):...'). The emotional energies spent on this separation are in proportion to the physical strength expended in battle. The eagle simile suggests an image of a "military ace". The verb "озирать" ('to survey') itself carries predatory connotations (e.g., "Волк жадным глазом озирает овец", "Dal'", 2, 582; 'A wolf surveys sheep with a greedy [hungry] gaze'). All of these images contribute to a battlefield situation, but it is made explicit only in the closing paragraph of the section: "Как полководец римский, / Орлом озирая войск / Остаток" (1, 361; 'Like a Roman general, / Eagle-like, surveying the remainder of his troops'). Although there are casualties on his side, and although he is 'spent', his eagle-like demeanor is mentioned in anticipation of crowning him a victor. While the woman-interlocutor calls for nothing short of death in the final stanza of the section ("Смерть – и никаких устройств"; 'Death, and no conveniences!'), he exclaims "Жизнь!" ('Life!') and proceeds to 'assess / survey' (one could say 'cut') his losses.

The loss of the first battle by the woman-interlocutor is finally stated explicitly in Section Six, when she declares him a victor: Битвы сей / Вы – Цезарь" (1, 362; 'Of this battle / You are the Caesar'). She then proceeds to surrender her 'sword', even though her defeat is not so straightforward. The male interlocutor attempts to mask his victory by letting her introduce the idea of separation first. She calls him on this transparent gesture of charity: "О, выпад наглый, / Противнику – как трофей, / Им отданную шпагу / Вручать!" (1, 362; 'Such an insolent thrust, / Presenting your opponent with a sword (as if with a trophy) which she herself had surrendered!').

The denouement of the subtextual battle scene corresponds to the discussion of love in the explicit "action" of the *poèma*. In this episode the interlocutors are searching for a definition of love, but every proposal is either corporeal, destructive, or outright militaristic. The section reads like an attempt at a love lyric that is hopelessly stuck in an epic, military worldview. The first definition of love in Section Five emphatically repeats the word 'blood': "Любовь – это плоть и кровь. / Цвет, собственной кровью полит" (1, 360; 'Love is flesh and blood. / A flower that nourishes on its

own blood'). The first line of this definition suggests a mother-son relationship with the expression 'flesh and blood', an image that is developed later in the poem. However, the combination of the words "плоть" ('flesh') and "любовь" ('love') contains the unscrambling of the term "плотолюбивый" ('carnal'), confining their love to the physical realm. The second part of the definition builds on the corporeal nature of love to arrive at self-inflicted violence. The 'flower', equated to love by its analogous position in the sentence, has to be watered by its own blood in order to survive. Finally, the words "кровью полит", associated anagrammatically with "кроволитие" or "кровопролитие" (the spilling of blood on the massive scale) return to the image of a battle.

The second definition of love – "Любовь, это значит... – Храм?" ('Love is ... A temple?') – is followed by the line: "замените шрамом / На шраме!" (1, 360; 'No, it is rather a scar / Upon a scar!'). The body presented in the first definition ('flesh and blood') turns out to be maimed in the second. Love and physical violence approximate each other acoustically as well. The initial equivalent of love – "храм" ('a temple') – reverberates in the next two lines with "шрам " ('a scar'). The idea of love as a temple is stated rather tentatively: it is followed by a question mark. The female speaker's suggestion to transform an idea of love as a temple into love as a scar is achieved by the simple replacement ("замените!") of one letter for another. The two characterizations, however, cannot be more antithetical. The first posits love as a spiritual entity one prays to and prays in, the second presents love as a sign of physical abuse.

The next definition contains an interesting conflation of love and battle: "Любовь – это значит лук / Натянутый – лук: разлука" (1, 360; 'So love is a bow / Drawn – a bow, a parting'). In the context of the underlying violence of the previous definitions, the proverbial image of a Cupid does not even occur as a first reading. Instead, the verses conjure up a battle with a bow and arrow. While Cupid's arrows are meant to unite, the bow and arrow of this battle suggest opposite camps and separation. Hence, we arrive at an unexpected notion of love as separation, which is already encoded in the wording of this definition, if we exclude all the logical / acoustic steps taken to arrive at it: "Любовь – это значит... разлука" ('Love means... a parting'). The structure of this conversation echoes its paradoxical subject matter, i.e. the belligerent nature of love. The two interlocutors engage in verbal combat, presenting one conflicting definition of love after another.

In light of the military overtones, even the "Любовь – это значит... – Мой" (1, 361; 'Love means ... – Mine'), i.e., the idea of possession, reads like an act of conquering. Indeed, the next section announces his victory over her ("Битвы сей / Вы – Цезарь"; 'Of this battle / You are the Caesar)[2]. As expected at the end of a battle, the wounded are carried off

[2] Cleopatra is possibly an implied double for the woman-speaker of PE. Her char-

on stretchers: "С носилок, / Так раненые..." (1, 362; 'Like the wounded on stretchers...'). The metaphoric end of the battle corresponds to the 'concluding gesture' ("жест конца") in the explicit text, i.e., the proposal to separate. All dialogue up to this point evades the real issue (their separation) and calls it by name only in Section Six. Correspondingly, imagery of blood and violence are concentrated in this section. There are allusions to bloody vengeance ("Кровью горячей / Платят" 1, 363; 'With hot blood / They pay'), to general destruction ("Мрут, а не плачут. / Жгут, а не плачут"; 'They die, but do not cry. / They burn, but do not cry'), to suicide ("Дюйм свинца / В грудь"; 'An inch of lead / Into the chest') and self-inflicted pain ("Зубы / Втиснула в губы... / Самую крепость / В самую мякоть..."; 'I drive my teeth into my lips... / Firmness itself / Into softness itself...'), to execution ("Ведь даже на эшафот / Нас первыми просят"; 'Because even to the scaffold / They invite us to go first'), and, more concretely, to crucifixion ("Последний гвоздь / Вбит"; 'The last nail / Is in'). All of these issues reverberate in other sections of PE, but nowhere else do they come together to this degree. Finally, the female speaker likens her proposal to separate to the first move in chess – a game that is based on the concept of a battlefield. It bears monarchic overtones, with the ultimate goal to conquer the other side's king. Again, out of charity he "lets her go first". In essence, this gesture of transparent chivalry is what deals her the final blow that concludes the first battle.

Following the decision to separate, paralleled by the male-speaker's symbolic success in military combat, the fighting ceases for the duration of Sections Seven and Eight, as does the verbal battle. In fact, in Section Eight only the female speaker's voice is heard. The bridge is the space for transition, the space of "сплошное между" (1, 367; 'sheer in-betweenness') that allows for reflection ("Прозрения промежуток"; 'An interval of insight'). The second, and final, battle takes place on the outskirts of the city, after the bridge is crossed. Section Eleven reintroduces the terminology of both a game and a struggle, beginning with "Разом проигрывать" (1, 372; 'To lose all at once'). Once again there are allusions to wounds and pain ("Только не вздрагивать, / Рану вскрыв"; 'The main thing's not to flinch / When the wound is exposed'). Here, the setting becomes even more explicitly that of a battlefield. Boots, for example, splash mud around ("Сапогом судьбы, / ...по глине жидкой" 1, 373; 'A boot of fate, / ...along thin mud'). There is an actual field beyond the city limits in the next section ("За городом мы.... Поле..." 1, 374; 'We are beyond the city. ... A field... '), a prototypical setting for a battle. There is the smoking of *mahorka*, the cheapest kind of tobacco usually smoked by soldiers at the front. Crossing the city 'wall' becomes an important event in Section

acter combines many themes that resound in Cvetaeva's speaker. A powerful woman, Cleopatra is both a lover to one Caesar and a military opponent to another. She commits suicide after losing the war to Rome (recall the female speaker's desire to die at the end of the first battle).

Twelve. This boundary between the city and its outskirts, on which the entire section is based, implies an ancient-city fortification ("Перешед вал" 1, 374; 'Beyond the rampart'). There are also images of defense and attack ("Вал и ров": an anti-tank ditch, but also an image of a moat and a wall of a medieval castle), reverberating with an earlier image of dying in a ditch: "...По сим тротуарам в шашку / Прямая дорога в ров / И в кровь" (1, 369; 'These checkered sidewalks / Lead directly into a ditch / And to bleeding'). Here, the city's cobblestones – 'checkered' – are reminiscent of the earlier game of chess. Finally, the ground is covered with corpses, which the speaker stomps on in vengeance – an image worthy in gore of Homeric and Lomonosovian epic battle scenes: "Втаптываю! За Давидов щит – / Месть! – В месиво тел!" (1, 375; 'I trample it in! / David's shield / Avenged! / Into the mash of bodies!').

In the final two sections the second and last battle is concluded, this time in the woman's favor. She interprets the male speaker's crying as a blow to his might ("Где ж вы, двойни: / Сушь мужская, мощь?" 1, 436; 'Where are you now, twins: / Masculine dryness, might?'). It is at this point that she declares her victory: "Нет пропажи / Мне. Конец концу" (1, 375; 'I am invincible. / The end has ended'). Note the diametric opposition between this conclusion and the conclusion of the first battle, when she calls for death and he calls for life. A few lines later she likens herself to a female version of a shrewd politician, Marina Mnišek.

The image of an empress is carried into Section Fourteen, where her triumph is literally crowned: "Слезам твоим – перлам / В короне моей!" (1, 377; 'Your tears are pearls / In my crown'). This coronation occurs at his expense: "Слезам твоим... / Как жемчуг – постыдным / На бронзе бойца" (1, 376; 'Your tears are shameful, as are pearls on a warrior's armor'). The same object, pearls = tears, means two distinctly opposite things for the two players in the context of gender relations, i.e. triumph versus defeat. This configuration is repeated in the final stanza. The female speaker notices the hunched back of her interlocutor as he walks away:

И в полые волны
Мглы – сгорблен и равн –
Бесследно, безмолвно –
Как тонет корабль.

[And into the hollow waves / Of darkness – hunched over, an equal – / Tracelessly, silently / As a ship sinks.]

The adjective "равн" ('equal') is indeed puzzling, especially in light of the fact that we are not presented with a tie. At the end of the poem, the female speaker comes out victorious. In the final verse of the stanza her rival is compared to a sinking ship. He is also disarmed verbally ("безмолвно", 'silently'). So, why equality? One explanation is purely physical: her posture, presumably upright and triumphant, compares in height to a hunched-over man. The number of victories on each side is also equal. Yet, just as tears, equality means two very different things from two

opposing perspectives[3]. For her, reestablishing equilibrium is another form of victory. Conversely, for him, at least from the female speaker's perspective, it is a loss[4].

PE satisfies the first component of Propp's description of epic poetry (struggle and victory). It also adheres to the critic's characterization of the struggle: "The struggle... demands the concentration of all the hero's powers and the ability to *sacrifice* himself[5], but in epic poetry it leads to *success*" (emphasis added, 149). The monarchic descriptions of her victory are reminiscent of an eighteenth-century *poèma*. The main event in PE, however, is diametrically opposed to Propp's discussion of the cause and the goals of epic plot lines. According to Propp, struggle "is waged not for narrow, petty goals, not for personal interests, not for the well-being of the individual hero, but for the people's highest ideals". Although the atmosphere of battle in PE is so palpable that even the image of Cupid is encouraged to be read primarily as a weapon of war, the conflict at the center of the poem is intensely personal and a quintessential subject for a love lyric.

2. Love Songs

A fundamental structural principle of the epic is the linearity of its narrative (or at least the ability to reconstruct the order of events in twentieth-century reincarnations of *poèma*). One could conclude that the subtextual level of unfolding battles in sequential order points to the linear structure in PE, and away from lyric atemporality. However, it is essential never to lose sight of the fact that these subtextual planes (Fourteen Stations of the Cross, war in two battles) are layered on top of each other and occur simultaneously. In other words, they exist not on the level of plot, but

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[3] The existing translations of PE struggle with this image. Nina Kossman and Andrew Newcomb translate the line "сгорблен и равн" simply as 'hunched over', omitting the second, problematic component of the phrase altogether. Alyssa Dinega also omits the word "равн" ('equal'), translating the line as 'hunched and cowed'. Hana Vrbová, in her Czech translation of PE, avoids the notion of equality completely, translating the line as "Shrbený, blízký, cizí" ('hunched over, a close one, a stranger'). All of the above translations sacrifice the essential content of the female speaker's victory, i.e., the ultimate establishment of equality between her opponent's stature and her own. Only Elaine Feinstein's translation, 'hunched and level', comes close to the original.

[4] Revzina views PE in terms of binary oppositions. In the first part, oppositions such as man-woman, life-death; left-right, up-down, happiness-unhappiness, etc. are established (list on page 62). In the second part, after the crossing of the bridge, oppositions are neutralized. Note that Revzina's argument for the neutrality of the primary opposition of "man-woman" towards the end of the *poèma* misses the essence of the female speaker's victory, which is presented entirely from the point of view of a woman and in the context of traditional gender distinctions. Without this opposition, one would miss the speaker's ultimate success in the war she wages throughout the poem.

[5] Some of the images of self-sacrifice were discussed; they are too numerous to examine in detail in the scope of this section.

rather as overly extended metaphors. Hence, one cannot neatly assign PE to the epic tradition based solely on the plot-dominated nature of its metaphoric story-lines. It certainly endows the *poèma* with a gradation of presentation, as opposed to the striking concatenation of individual impressions that make up, to use Etkind's term, "overgrown lyrics" such as "Poema of the Mountain" (Majakovskij's "The Backbone Flute" is another example)[6]. For these reasons PE presents an interesting problem: it uses its origins of epic / narrative poetry to arrive at something that many sense as a protracted lyric poem.

The title itself is structurally loaded with allusions to and deviations from the genre in which it is written. This "poema" skips the first two stages of what constitutes an unfolding of a story (beginning and middle) and goes directly to the 'end'. In turn, the poem of the 'end' expatiates on a single act of ending a love affair. In her notes on PE, Cvetaeva describes it as a "поэма расставания" (4, 372f.: Собрание сочинений в 5-ти томах; 'a poema of separation'). The separation is envisioned as the only event from the very inception, which is afterwards endowed with subtextual plots. The fact that this work is a fragment of a larger whole is suggested not only by the title, but also by virtue of being a sequel (or logically a prequel) to another *poèma* ("Poema of the Mountain").

In examining the generic properties of PE that contribute to its vague identification as "lyric" in some scholarship, it is important to address the third category of verse that is regarded in the nineteenth century as completing the paradigm for all poetry: the dramatic. The dramatic principle is pivotal for the layout of Cvetaeva's poema. In fact, in its presentation PE approximates a dramatic poem: it is an exchange of utterances, lacking only the explicit identification of voices.

Discussions of dramatic poetry tend to overlap in the opinion that it is a hybrid of lyric and epic tendencies. Hegel observes that dramatic poetry synthesizes "both the primitive poetic days of the epic proper and the independent subjectivism of lyrical outpourings". Although Hegel claims a perfect "conciliating union of the principles of epic and lyric" (Aesthetics, 1159), these two principles are sensed as polar opposites in many other discussions of the topic. Goethe, in his notes to "West-östlicher Divan", explores the interplay of the three poetic categories in Greek tragedies. The poet claims that drama engages lyric and epic elements in an antagonistic relationship. As the action begins to unfold, the chorus subsides. Conversely, when the chorus is foregrounded, the plot becomes secondary (179-181). Belinskij, in "Разделение поэзии на роды и виды", also explains dramatic poetry as the blending of epic and lyric elements. Drama

[6] As Barbara Herrnstein Smith observes, the element of gradual unfolding in poetry is not confined to narrative verse: "A poet may, as in narrative verse, use the passage of time as a structural principle, and temporal sequence in one form or another may be found in lyric poetry as well" (117). However, the need for such clarification in itself confirms the divide between the poetic forms along these general principles.

presents events of the past as they unfold in the present. Epic distance is erased. The lyric principle resides in the multiple first-person utterances. Nietzsche compares the epic to Apollonian and the lyric to Dionysian impulses, and traces the interaction of the two in tragedy ("The Birth of Tragedy", chapters 5 and 6)[7]. The view that drama takes the epic in the direction of the lyric (by abolishing both epic distance and the third-person narrator) is reiterated by Jane Ellen Harrison, who claims that the Archaic Greek dithyramb in tragedy "was considered to be a rather elaborate form of lyric poetry" (quoted in Lahti, 254).

Cvetaeva's element of the dramatic in PE performs a similar, intermediary function. What makes this *poèma* formally dramatic is also what makes it lyric: it is comprised of immediate impressions of first-person utterances. In this respect, another subtext becomes crucially important for the *poèma*'s structure: "The Song of Songs" ("The Song"). PE contains an exact quote from "The Song": "Как печать / На сердце твое, как перстень / На руку твою..." (1, 362; 'Like a seal / on your heart, like a ring / On your hand'). This reference corresponds not only word for word to the original, but also section for section. It is the sixth verse of the last chapter of "The Song", consisting of fourteen verses altogether. In Cvetaeva's fourteen-section *poèma* it also appears in Section Six.

According to Venclova, the number of sections in PE corresponds to the Fourteen Stations of the Cross. In fact, Venclova ascribes the "двойчатка" ('twin / dual') principle of "Poema of the Mountain" / "Poema of the End" to the division of the Bible into the Old and New Testaments. The critic suggests that PE's organization is based on the linear progression of the New Testament (subsequently, the lack of linearity in "Poema of the Mountain" is likened to the Old Testament, 149f.). The significance of number fourteen, however, could also be attributed to "The Song". The presence of the Old Testament in general (the Jews, David, Solomon) is just as significant in PE as it is in "Poema of the Mountain". In fact, the woman speaker's battle with her seemingly insurmountable opponent is framed in terms of David and Goliath, even as their love affair is presented as another version of the Song of Solomon. The defining role of "The Song" for PE, both structurally and thematically, undermines the clear-cut distribution of the two *poemy* into the two books of the Bible.

The presence of biblical love songs seems to complicate the *poèma*'s claim to the epic tradition. These two planes - war, fought in two battles, versus love lyrics - pull PE in opposite directions along the generic continuum. The militarism examined in the previous section of this paper stands in direct opposition to the subtext which will be explored here. The battlefield subplot expands the private moment of separation to epic

[7] "The Birth of Tragedy" is devoted to the genesis of lyric poetry. According to Nietzsche, the poetry of the first Greek lyric poet Archilochus is characterized by belligerent "drunken outbursts of desire", i.e., it is on the side of the Dionysian. Conversely, the orderly progression of epic verse coincides with the Apollonian principle.

proportions, attributes global importance to it, at least from the point of view of female speaker[8]. "The Song", on the other hand, is often claimed to be a collection of wedding hymns, celebrating a private love between a man and a woman.

This Old Testament subtext has profound consequences for the *poèma*'s larger organization. "The Song" is one of the most non-linear books in the Bible. It lacks temporal progression and a single narrative voice. It is a compilation of first-person lyric utterances, predominantly in the present tense. The distribution of pronouns reflects a lyric structure, i.e. some indistinct "I" addresses some indistinct "you". This is precisely the organizing principle of PE. The fact that Solomon and his bride are often assigned to these pronouns is as secondary to the text as the biographical figures behind Cvetaeva's *poèma*.

In the eighteenth century, several scholars proposed that "The Song" is a drama. This impression might have been shaped by two Greek manuscripts which assign speakers to the various verses of the book (s. Gordis 1954, 10). The dramatic structure of PE seems to be directly influenced by the layout of the biblical text. The frequent confusion between who is speaking in the *poèma* is a deliberate ambiguity adopted from "The Song". Even the grammatical gender in the Russian translation of "The Song" does not always clarify this issue, especially in the use of the imperative mood and in the descriptive passages[9]. In the biblical text, this confusion conveys to the reader the inseparability of the interlocutors' souls. In PE, on the other hand, repetitions engage the two voices in constant opposition, even when the content of the argument cannot be readily attributed to any single voice.

Some of the utterances in "The Song" can be read as stage directions (e.g., "вот, голос моего возлюбленного, который стучится:" 5: 2; 'the voice of my beloved, who is knocking'). The phrases to which I have referred as "parenthetic commentary" in my earlier discussion of PE can be ascribed to the dramatic convention of stage directions. Sometimes these stage directions are clearly marked by parentheses, such as "Нам с вами нужно бы... / (Озноб)" (1, 358; 'We ought to... (chills)'), ("Орлом озирая местность)" (1, 360; 'Surveying the terrain like an eagle') or "(Эшафот и площадь)" (1, 361; 'A scaffold and a square'). More often

[8] Belinskij proposes that the length of epic poetry is due to the significance of the event depicted: a formative moment in history. Correspondingly, the shortness of lyric poetry reflects the less significant nature of its subject matter: a private life (300). A neo-Aristotelian Elder Olson explicates lyric poetry in the same spirit, "defining lyric as a mimetic (rather than expressive) genre, distinguished not so much by its own brevity as by the brevity of that which it imitates" (quoted in Mark Jeffreys' "Ideologies of Lyric", 201). This insight sheds light on the dynamics of PE. It is also by virtue of length that private events in Cvetaeva are inflated to gigantic proportions.

[9] Not only do scholars disagree on the gender of speakers in certain passages of "The Song", sometimes the number of speakers is debated. Some claim there are two participants, the woman who tends the gardens and the shepherd, while others propose that there is a third personage – King Solomon (Gordis, 11).

they are implied by other forms of punctuation, such as a colon: "Вполоборота:" (1, 359; 'Half turned:'), "Вкрадчивее и тише:" (1, 363; 'In a more insinuating and quiet manner:'), "Внятно и громко, / Взгляд в вышину:" (1, 364; 'Loud and clear, / Glancing up:'), etc. Many lines in the spirit of stage directions – descriptive statements on setting and gestures – are integrated into the text without special punctuation to call attention to them as such. For example: "Взгляд широко-разверстый," (1, 363; 'A wide gaze') or "Тропою овечей – / Спуск. Города гам" (1, 376; 'A descending sheep-path. / Hubbub of a city').

Stage directions in PE can be divided into two types. The first type deals with setting and the delivery of one's lines. The directions describing the setting / place of the action are closer to the component of external space in epic verse. PE makes use of external settings repeatedly: the city of Prague, which is further split into more localized spaces (an embankment, a bridge, a cafe, etc.). On the other hand, external space is constantly internalized. There is a great amount of oblivion to the outer world unless it reflects the speakers' emotional states. For instance, the line that marks the point of the couple's arrival at a bridge reads: "Последний мост" (1, 366; 'The last bridge'). The seemingly objective stage direction – "a bridge" – is qualified by an adjective that carries meaning only for the two participants. It is the last time *they* cross a bridge. The same type of internalization applies to "*Наша* молочная" (1, 369; '*Our* creamery', emphasis added). In the lines "Эти улицы – слишком круты: / Расставаться – ведь это вниз" (1, 372; 'These streets are too steep: / To separate is to go downhill, after all'), certainly Prague's hilly streets that lead down to the central train station serve to localize the couple spatially. But more importantly, the analogy "to separate is to go downhill" rings primarily with some type of a spiritual descent that accompanies their act of separation.

The second type of stage directions in PE, the description of the manner in which the interlocutors deliver their lines, allows for further internalization in this *poèma*. The utterances continuously cross the boundary between the outer and the inner[10], to the point of being labeled "silent" at times: "Мысленно: милый, милый..." (1, 418; 'Silently: my dear...') or "Я, без звука: / 'Любовь – это значит..'" (1, 422; 'I [say], without a sound: / 'Love is...'). What is interesting about the last example is that it is fully furnished with the conventions of direct speech, a colon and quotation marks. The only component missing is the actual sound of voice. The following example epitomizes the outer-inner confusion:

[10] Revzina notes that the switch between real and imaginary dialogues is accompanied by a switch between the first-person plural and the first-person singular forms of address. In other words, the outer dialogue is stuffy and proper, while the inner one is characterized by an absence of all laws of propriety and, hence, by basic human connection.

(Молча: слушай!
Хотеть – это дело тел,
А мы друг для друга – души
Отныне...) – И не сказал. (1, 361f.)

[(Silently: listen! / To want is the business of bodies, / We, on the other hand, are souls to each other / From now on...) And yet he didn't say it.]

In other words, the male speaker delivers the above lines "while being silent" at the same time. Not only does he "not say" these verses, but the female speaker taps into his voice zone and projects her thoughts onto him. In turn, the content of this thought itself concerns the conflict between the outer and the inner, the physical and the spiritual, the "body" and the "soul". This stanza is repeated later in the same section, with slight alterations: "Хотеть, это дело – *мех*, / А мы друг для друга – тени / Отныне..." (1, 362; 'To want is the business of others, / We, on the other hand, are shadows to each other / From now on...'). This time, however, the lines are intended for the female speaker's voice, which emphasizes the real source of "his" earlier "unspoken" utterance.

The setting for the *poèma*'s action is in many ways befitting of epic poetry, e.g., the emphasis on the city's fortification makes sense in the context of battle space. However, the crossing of the city border is also an allusion to the "The Song"'s setting. The background for declarations of love constantly moves between pastoral places and the city in the biblical text. He is a shepherd and she is a gardener who sometimes finds herself in a city palace, sometimes has dreams of walking the city streets to find her beloved. The space of "action" in PE also transitions from city landmarks to its outskirts. For the bride and groom in "The Song", the mountainous bucolic space means reunion, underscored by the coming of good weather: "Дождь миновал, перестал; цветы показались на земле; время пения настало..." (2, 11f.; 'The rain passed, it ceased, flowers appeared on the ground, a time of singing came...'). Conversely, the lovers' separation in PE occurs in the hilly field, under a pouring rain: "Частой гривою – / Дождь в глаза. – Холмы. / Миновали пригород. / За городом мы... (1, 374; 'Rain, like thick mane, / in our eyes. Hills. / We passed the outskirts. / Now we are beyond the city'). Similarly, the nurturing image of a shepherd in "The Song" is transformed into a destructive force in PE. Multiple references to sheep in the poem are in the context of slaughter and sacrifice (e.g., "Жизнь, – только выкрестов терпит, лишь / Овец – палачу!" 1, 375; 'Life tolerates only converts into Christianity, only / Sheep for the butcher')[11].

[11] In terms of the biographical facts behind the text, it is customary to view PE as inspired by a three-month affair between the poet and Konstantin Rodzevich. However, around the time of PE's composition, Cvetaeva also had a passionate correspondence with Pasternak. Allusions to the Old Testament and the world of the Hebrews, as well as the contemporary setting of Prague's Jewish Quarter, is important also in light of this correspondence. Recall that Pasternak literally comes from a family of converts from Judaism to Christianity (compare the above verses, as well as

As seen in the above description of "The Song"'s idyllic setting, the outer world comments on the emotional states of the bride and groom: the passing of the rain and the appearance of birds and flowers sets the scene for the lovers' reunion. In PE, this topos is taken even further: the inner and outer space are constantly merged. This tendency is almost explicitly addressed by the following "stage direction": "Рвет и бесится / Дождь. Стоим и рвем" (1, 374; 'Rain tears and rages. / We stand and tear'). As the first description spills over into the second by way of enjambment, the weather conditions invade (or 'tear' into) the emotional state of the interlocutors. The violent downpour comments on the violent nature of their separation, emphasized by the repetition of the verb "рвать". Every element of background gives the female speaker a chance to expand on her grief and to sublimate it into poetry. For instance, the suburban setting ("пригород") provides her with material for three subsections (two sections) in which to dissect the concept morphologically, acoustically, and semantically. The objects of the external world, as well as time dimensions, are metonymically confused with the speaker's inner state:

Загород, пригород:
Дням конец.
Негам (читай – камням),
Дням, и домам, и нам. (1, 372)

[The outskirts, the suburb: / End to all days, / To bliss (read: to stones), / To days, and to houses, and to us.]

As with Cvetaeva's larger poetics, prototypes provide opportunity for deviations from them in PE as well. The two participants in Cvetaeva's "drama" explicitly do not fit into the roles assigned to them in "The Song": 'bride' and 'groom'. The bride's utterance from "The Song", which carries into the poem word for word and is made to fit even metrically, is used in a directly antithetical context to the original. Cvetaeva's female speaker is bitterly reminded of the words from the biblical wedding song ("as a ring upon your finger") by her interlocutor's suggestion: "Колечко на память дать?" (1, 363; 'Shall I give you a ring to remember me by?'). The uniting image of a ring on one's finger in the original text is transformed into a token of separation in PE.

In "The Song", the bride and groom repeatedly address each other as brother and sister, while at the same time making references to their romantic status (e.g., "Пленила ты сердце мое, сестра моя, невеста" ('You captivated my heart, my sister, my bride') or "О, как любезны ласки твои, сестра моя, невеста" (4, 9f.; 'Oh, how pleasant are your caresses, my sister, my bride'). In PE, the numerous allusions to sibling and, more

"Жизнь. Только выкрестами жива! / Иудами вер!" 1, 375; 'Life. It sustains itself only on converts into Christianity! On Judases of faiths!'). Hence, even this seemingly abstract digression on the dark nature of humanity encodes a more biographical dialogue with an antagonistically-positioned love object.

generally, to blood ties, emphasize the bitter irony of leaving out the other component of the biblical union ("Брат стоим с сестрой," 1, 374; 'So we stand, brother and sister'). The speaker declares that their union is tighter than that of Siamese twins: "Близнецы Сиама. / Что – ваш союз?" (1, 367; 'Siamese twins. / Can your union compare to ours?'). The image of Siamese twins reverberates later in the text, contributing to the speaker's inability to parse or comprehend the verb 'to separate': "Расставаться – ведь это врозь, / Мы же – сросшиеся" (1, 372; 'To separate means to go in different directions, / But we are connected at the joints [grown into each other]'). Here, the paradox of their separation is underscored acoustically as well: "врозь" ('apart') and "сросшиеся" ('grown together' / 'into each other') share the same sound segments (r-o-s) yet mean opposite things. The one reference to a wedding ceremony in PE is left unfinished: "Новобрачными по коврику..." (1, 365; 'Newlyweds, walking along the runner...'). The logical conclusion to the sentence is something like "быть нам не суждено" ('we are not fated to be').

In the biblical text, the interlocutors' harmony is emphasized by repeated declarations of love that travel from one voice to the other (e.g., "возлюбленный мой" / "возлюбленная моя" ('oh, my beloved'), "прекрасен ты" / "прекрасна ты" ('you are lovely'), etc.). This consonance is in contrast to the mistrust and disagreement with which declarations of love are received in PE. The form of exchanging "sweet nothings" is indeed reminiscent of "The Song". But rather than affirming, these repetitions are antagonistic and insecure in the *poèma*: "И знаю – не скажет первым. / – Не любите? – Нет, люблю. / Не любите!..." (1, 360; 'And I know he won't say it first. / 'You don't love me?' 'Why, of course I do.' / 'You *don't* love me!...'). These lines lead into the section that in turn becomes an argument about the meaning of love.

In Section Five the female speaker tries to reconstruct a definition of love from the recess of her memory: "Любовь – это значит: жизнь. / Нет, иначе называлось / У древних..." (1, 361; 'Love is life. / No, the ancients called it something else...'). The three dots suggest that the answer is not spelled out in the text, but is just beyond it, on the tip of the speaker's tongue. Given the predominance of Jews and the Old Testament in the *poèma*, it is logical to equate the 'ancients' of the above lines with the Hebrews. "The Song" indeed provides a definition of love: "и знамя его надо мною – любовь" (2, 4; 'and his banner over me is love'). It is plausible that the female speaker is reminded of this definition as they bicker over the nature of love. The identification of love with a banner points to the *poèma*'s main digression from its biblical subtext. In "The Song", this definition emphasizes the union of lovers (being under the same banner). In light of PE's polarization of lovers into warring camps on a battlefield, the implied 'banner' would be the one raised by both sides as they position to attack each other.

The conflation of love and war, however, is not completely alien to "The Song" either. Numerous comparisons to a beloved's physical beauty come from the military sphere. Consider the following description: "шея твоя – как столп Давидов, сооруженный для оружий, тысяча щитов висит на нем – все щиты сильных" (4, 4; 'your neck is like the pillar of David, built for weapons, thousands of shields hang from it, all shields of mighty men'). There is a direct reference to David's shield in the *poèma*'s section on the Jews. The notion of attack and defense that the biblical comparison evokes permeates PE, albeit the principle actors in Cvetaeva's text are fighting on opposite sides. Finally, it is important to note that military similes in "The Song" are spoken by a man to describe a woman's beauty. In PE, it is the female speaker that continuously presents the meeting with her beloved in terms of combat.

In the penultimate stanza of the *poèma*, several meta-literary issues – concerning both its subtext and its poetic genre – are brought to the surface. Here the speaker explicitly acknowledges that the product of their separation (i.e. the poem) is a worthy contender for "The Song" (as the author of PE is a worthy contender for the alleged author of the biblical text):

Нам, птицам безвестным
Челом Соломон
Бьет, ибо *совместный*
Плач – больше, чем сон! (1: 377).

[Though we are obscure birds, / Even Solomon bows to us / Because a *mutual* / *Lament* (or more literally 'a cry') is more than a dream]

The 'dream' in the last verse is most likely an allusion to "The Song"'s recurring dream of the female speaker about losing her beloved. Hence, the poem is 'bigger than' ("больше чем") its biblical subtext precisely because the female prototype's fear of losing her beloved finally consumes the male participant in PE, as Cvetaeva's speaker gets her partner to participate in lamenting the end of their love affair. On the more literal level, the final two verses refer to her "victory", i.e. inducing him to join her in crying. "Совместный плач", however, also works as a commentary on the *poèma*'s larger structure, that is, if "плач" is defined as a poetic 'lament'. Like "The Song", PE is an on-going ('mutual') interchange of first-person utterances.

The primary meaning of the 'mutual lament / cry' makes sense only in Sections Thirteen and Fourteen, i.e., when he joins her in crying. However, the suggestion in the above two verses that the *poèma* is indeed their version of "The Song" encourages the reader to apply the phrase "mutual lament" not only to the literal act of crying, but to the entire work. Even though the male speaker is not crying earlier in PE, the generic definition of the word 'lament', namely a first-person, present-tense emotive utterance, is applicable to the entire text. Though laments are often included in epic poetry, they present a sharp contrast to the plot-oriented past-tense narration that canonically aims at objectivity. Cveta-

eva's *poèma* seems to amplify precisely this lyric element of the epic tradition, marginalizing the action-driven components of epic poetry.

In epic verse, the speaker of "laments" is typically a woman who expresses grief over the separation from her beloved and beckons him to come home (e.g., Jaroslavna's lament in the "Lay of Igor's Campaign"). When standing on their own, certain passages in "The Song", such as the bride's repeated dream of awakening without her beloved at her side (3, 1-5, 5, 2-9), can be described as poetic laments. The entire PE, in the voice of the female speaker, is a lamentation for the love that is about to be lost. The important twist on a woman's "lament" in traditional verse epics is that PE's female speaker does not beckon her beloved to come home. On the contrary, she continuously fights the female space of home as the hearth (see Дацкевич, Гаспаров 1992). The nomadic way of life ("братство таборное"; 'Gypsy brotherhood') is her version of home, constantly mobile and changing[12]. The end of the *poèma* pronounces the woman victorious not only because she strikes a blow to his "мужская мощь" (1, 375; 'masculine might'). As she crosses the boundary into the male space of battle and victory, as she reshapes the traditionally male role of an epic narrator, he is brought to engage in a feminine act (and genre) of "lament".

As the poem transitions from the physical realm to the inner, its dramatic mode of presentation is undermined in another important way. Drama allows no room for the temporal and emotional distance of a traditional epic narrator. A purely dramatic form, however, cannot accommodate the dominance of any one lyric "I" either. The stage is customarily shared by other first-person voices. In other words, drama combines elements of the lyric, but its larger organization does not share the lyric principle of a single voice in its entirety. In PE, this basic principle of drama is not adhered to, as the 'mutual lament' claimed at the end of the poem turns out to be not so 'mutual' in practice.

PE uses the fusion of epic and lyric features inherent in the form of a drama, but only to tilt the balance in favor of the latter. Although the text is split into two voices, the female voice is identified with the poet's and progressively subsumes that of her interlocutor[13]. It is her voice that assumes the role of commentator; the "stage directions" are sensed to belong to the female speaker's utterances. She shapes and arranges his lines,

[12] In an answer to a questionnaire, Cvetaeva places special emphasis on her lifelong passion for Puškin's "Gypsies" (Pis'ma, 71). It would indeed be interesting to compare PE to Puškin's text, a task that is beyond the scope of this section. Thematically, Puškin's work challenges the conventional association of women with stasis (in the symbol of home), and in this way informs Cvetaeva's dynamic use of the word "home" (note the transition from immobility to movement in the line "Дом, это значит: из дому", 1, 358). Structurally, Puškin's *poèma* turns explicitly to the form of drama to present its central action.

[13] A similar formal shift occurs in "Vladimir Majakovskij. A Tragedy". Almost all the voices in the play represent parts of Majakovskij.

excludes his voice altogether for sections at a time and, as seen earlier, composes entire stanzas *to be spoken* by him in her imagination. She is the playwright of this drama. In this respect, PE could be seen as a longer variant of Cvetaeva's lyric poem "An Attempt at Jealousy" ("Попытка ревности"). Almost every stanza of this poem poses a question to some distant "you": "Как живется вам с другою" ('How's your life with another woman'), "Встается – как" ('How do you get up in the mornings'), etc. His voice is nonexistent; it is completely subsumed by the speaker, who projects her own impressions of what her imagined interlocutor might say. In form, PE is reminiscent of this later lyric poem.

3. Concluding Remarks

Erich Auerbach's observations on the nature of epic versus biblical narratives shed light on the oscillation between the two modes of poetic rendition in PE. As Cvetaeva crosses the boundary between external and inner/psychological spaces in this *poèma*, the two primary subtexts on which she draws are epic and biblical. In the first chapter of "Mimesis", Auerbach claims that the two types of representations of reality in European literature are modeled on the ancient examples of story telling: the Greek (Homer's epics) and the Hebrew (Old Testament). The Homeric world is excessively externalized; the thoughts of the protagonists are as tangible as their actions. In the Bible, on the other hand, the external setting gravitates to a psychological center; characters are stripped of form and local habitation. Biblical accounts state the minimum to propel the narrative. The space of action is delineated only as much as is required to present the inner world. The latter category illuminates the lyric principle in Cvetaeva's use of "stage directions". On the one hand, the fact that the interlocutors' utterances are contextualized in outer coordinates (Prague) brings PE closer to the convention of epic verse. Thematically, the prominent subtext of battlefields further grounds the poem in the epic tradition. On the other hand, the external setting in PE exists, for the most part, to comment on the emotional world of the two protagonists.

In "A Few Words on Theater" (1922, 6), Cvetaeva remarks that it is precisely this feature of externalization that goes against her poetic convictions. Cvetaeva's views on drama coincide with her use of the epic genre in PE. She compares the external orientation of theater to doubting Thomas who needs to see with his own eyes in order to believe. A poet's craft, on the other hand, 'should be taken at its word' ("верить на слово"). M. Gasparov (1995) sums up Cvetaeva's opposition to theater in the following way: "The main thing in a theatrical play is action. The main thing in a poetic play is a state of mind" (310). The same prejudice is at work in Cvetaeva's transformation of epic poetry (i.e., poetry of action) into poetry of emotional states. In "A Few Words on Theater" Cvetaeva claims that her verse drama "The End of Casanova" is not at all "a drama, but rather a *poèma*" (7). Here, the term "poema" should be understood in

light of Cvetaeva's revision of this genre (i.e., the shift from the outer world to the inner). Her tendency to transform the externalized, "theatrical play" of epic poetry into the inner world of the speaker's "poetic play" is realized most poignantly in "Poema of the End".

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