

Akhmatova's Later Antipathy to Mikhail Kuzmin and His Absent Presence in *Poem*

Without a Hero

The salaciousness leaves one with a very heavy heart . . . I'd like to have put ellipses in many places . . . It's too exclusively for those with peculiar tastes: 'practicing nincompoops'. Kuzmin has always been homosexual in his poetry, but here he has gone beyond all reasonable bounds.

(Akhmatova in conversation with Chukovskaia,¹ August 1940)

He usually tucks a thing behind his ear,
The lame-footed one with the dry cough . . .
I trust an impure spirit
Does not bring the Lord of Darkness here! . . .
(*Poem Without a Hero*, 1946 version)

He won't even weep for the dead with me,
And does not know what conscience means,
Or for what reasons it exists.
(*Poem Without a Hero*, 1956 version)

After his death Anna Akhmatova's attitude changed toward Mikhail Kuzmin (1875-1936), her former friend and fellow Acmeist poet, to something that strikes a 21st century reader as homophobic antipathy. Despite her forecast that her most ambitious work *ПОЭМА БЕЗ ГЕРОЯ* (*Poem Without a Hero*) would lose audience within a generation of her death, the poem¹ instead attracts continued critical scrutiny including Anderson's *The Word That Causes Death's Defeat: Poems of Memory* (2004) and Feinstein's biography *Anna of All the Russias* (2006) as well as lavish editorial attention of the recent variorum in six volumes edited by T. A. Gor'kova published in Petersburg 1998-2004.²

ⁱ Names are transliterated using the Library of Congress system except in direct quotations and the works cited, where they are given as in the original.

Kuzmin has three absent presences in *Poem Without a Hero*. He had a shadow role, as did Akhmatova, in the events of 1913 that form the “plot” in part one. His 1929 poema *ФОРЕЛЬ РАЗБИВАЕТ ЛЕД* (*The Trout is Breaking Through the Ice*) is a shadow text to her poema begun eleven years later. He is one of the maskers who appear in the poema. Hitherto, except for the third, these presences have been little scrutinized. Kuzmin’s open homosexuality is a factor in Akhmatova’s later appraisals of her old friend, but not in the way one now labels homophobic. Persons interviewed by Malmstad in 1969 argued that her prominence as a poet of witness after *Requiem* in 1938, albeit unpublished, combined with aging, led her to a traditional, conservative and religious morality (Reeder 401) and biographers report these later “homophobic” remarks about Kuzmin as consistent with her development as a poet. This is baffling—as if turning against one’s friend after his death were unremarkable. None remarks how strange this reversal is. Even Kuzmin’s biographers Malmstad and Bologomov, who discuss the evidence more closely than Akhmatova’s do, offer a petty explanation—that the minor poet Anna Dmitrievna Radlova (1901-1949) had in the 1920s become Kuzmin’s closest literary companion, therefore Akhmatova was jealous (292). Radlova was also the dedicatee of his *The Trout is Breaking Through the Ice* in 1929.

In this essay, after laying out the problem with biographical and literary demonstrations, I argue this reversal is revelatory to understanding the poema. I have used the term “homophobia.” This is a latter 20th century valorization that Akhmatova and Kuzmin would not have recognized. Emma Emma Grigorievna Gershtein’s³ (or Gerstein) remarkable autobiographical essays *Moscow Memoirs: Memories of Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelstam and Literary Russia under Stalin* were not published until

1998, in Moscow when she was 95, translated into English by John Crowfoot in 2004. Gershtein offers a sexual paradigm quite different from the currently familiar homosexual/heterosexual orientaitonal binarism. In the section “The High Tide of Revelations,” she discusses Akhmatova’s and the Mandel’shtams’ interests in unconventional domestic relations, what Nadezhda Mandel’shtam called “the complete lack of sexual inhibitions . . . combined with the unparalleled novelty of the days in which we lived” (paraphrased by Gerstein, 391). Elaine Feinstein’s 2006 biography of Akhmatova, although sometimes skeptical of Gershtein’s veracity, is guided by her on several points and adopts from her this sexual paradigm, which she calls the *ménage à trois*. Earlier biographies by Haight (1976) and Reeder (1994) are silent on the topic. Coming into formation among the intelligentsia and bohemian artist circles of the 1905-1920 period and becoming a more common social construction of sexuality in the early Soviet period up to WWII was what we might mistakenly call *ménages à trois*. It is a mistake because for us *ménage à trois* connotes something risqué, probably unstable and, from the view of sexual orientation, transitional for one or more of the participants. If we trust Gershtein, in the early Soviet period, such arrangements were situational and did not seem to arouse consternation. Rarely were they transitional, in terms of orientation, for persons involved. Some were remarkably stable.

Therefore, to understand Akhmatova’s reversal toward Kuzmin, we must understand her own experiences through time in various *ménages à trois* and the sexual paradigm that undergirds those arrangements. Monas and Krupala’s work on the Nikolai Punin archive at the University of Texas led in 1999 to *The Diaries of Nikolay Punin 1904-1953*. Punin’s diaries have not been absorbed by Akhmatova biographers, and

therefore they give us a more intimate insight than the biographers do into how his “marriage”⁴ to her (c.1926-1938) was lived as the couple shared their apartment with his first wife, Anna Ahrens Punina, their daughter and sometimes Akhmatova’s son. Late-20th-early-21st-century definitional systems, whether based on the homo/hetero binarism of gay-lesbian studies, the heteronormativity of queer theory or the nuances of performativity theory are inadequate to this description. We must historicize our notion of how we interrogate gender relations not just gender, and sexual relations not just sexual orientation. This brings an explicitly interdisciplinary inquiry to what seems a biographical footnote. Akhmatova’s “problem” with Kuzmin’s sexual choices shapes her textual choices in the poema.

Akhmatova first met Mikhail Alekseevich Kuzmin in 1909 probably at the poet Viacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov (1866-1949) and his wife Lidiia Dmitrievna Zinov’eva’s (pseudonym: Zinov’eva-Annibal) (1866-1907) fashionable literary salon “The Tower.” In 1906 Kuzmin’s initial reception was cool but he soon became a regular. He and Ivanov for awhile were almost inseparable with Kuzmin a member of the household and briefly were probably lovers. Young and unpublished, Akhmatova’s first visit was by contrast a sensation. After she recited her poem, Ivanov led her across the room to sit beside him at his table. Earlier Kuzmin had also come to know Nikolai Stepanovich Gumilev (1886-1921) at the Tower and on November 26, 1909 joined him in Kiev for a public performance. Akhmatova was staying in Kiev at the time and after the reading, Gumilev was finally successful after failures over several years in getting her to agree to marry him (Reeder 30).

The poems she read at the Tower were among those that in 1912 became her first book *Вечер* (*Evening*) for which Kuzmin wrote an enthusiastic introduction. Between 1909 and 1915, the two poets worked in the same milieu. In the fall of 1911 a group formed the Poets' Guild and its journal *Гиперборея* [*Hyperborean*]. Their monthly meetings were lively discussions of recent publications and the state of Russian poetry. Akhmatova was secretary. Eventually a group of six including Gumilev, Akhmatova and Mandel'shtam started "Acmeism." Kuzmin became associated with Acmeism because his famous 1910 essay «О прекрасной ясности» ("On The Beautiful Clarity") became a sort of manifesto for the movement. It defined some of the main tenets and set the canon of writers whom the Acmeists celebrated as models. Important essays by Gumilev and Mandel'shtam furthered the movement. In opposition to Russian Symbolism, Acmeism argued that poetic utterances should not pretend to point to the unknown and mystically unknowable, but to the experienced and known. It championed clarity of language and diction with juxtaposition of vivid images to create emotional effects. In his 1923 essay "Storm and Stress," Mandel'shtam called the Acmeists "the younger Symbolists," who "soberly assess[ed] their strengths and weaknesses, [and] repudiated the mania for the grandiose" (*Mandelstam Prose*, 107). He identified their opposing counterparts as the Futurists. Citing an eclectic canon of French, Italian and English writers from Dante and Villon to Gautier, Acmeism asserted that great poetry transcended national schools. For Mandel'shtam and Akhmatova this became more important over the years

For Mandelstam at one stage of his life as a poet Acmeism was vitally important; at no stage was it totally without importance. Akhmatova felt the

same To the day of her death she would become incensed at the suggestion, then becoming more and more frequent, that Acmeism was “merely” a later Symbolism, that it had never been more than a slogan That she would have insisted upon the relevance of Acmeism in 1966 cannot be left out of account. (Brown 135-6)

Mandel’shtam made the primary distinction that Symbolism saw the essence of a poem in its music, where Acmeism saw it as “the word” in all its many facets.

In later life Acmeism came to represent, for both, participation in “world culture” and a rejection of the post-1932 Socialist Realist doctrines which saw literature as a material product of the dialectical class struggle. In *Remembering Anna Akhmatova* Anatoli Nayman [Naiman] says that she strove to write in the company of modernist “world literature.”⁵ For both Akhmatova and Mandel’shtam, Acmeism opposed the subjective mysticism of Symbolism and later to the ideological provincialism of Socialist Realism.

Even though later he distanced himself from Acmeism, Kuzmin had a key role in Akhmatova’s formation of fundamental aesthetic values. Outside the Tower and the office of *Giperborea* their paths crossed in other ways. During his desperate affair from November 1911 to March 1912 with a young officer and scoundrel, Sergei Vladimirovich Miller, Kuzmin was a vagabond who sought refuge for the night or the month with this friend and that. Malmstad and Bogomolov state: “[He] had moved back to Tsarskoe Selo on February 21 [1912] at Gumilev’s insistence . . .” (200-201). The “moved back” refers to the previous year when Gumilev returned from his second Abyssinia expedition and in March 1911 Kuzmin had stayed with him and Akhmatova in the household where in

1910 after their wedding they had moved in with Gumilev's mother to shuttle between her modest estate in Slepnyovo and her town house in Tsarskoe Selo (Sampson 24, Malmstad and Bogomolov 199). Domestic arrangements during the Gumilevs' first two years were also transient. Gumilev was away in Africa for several months. They honeymooned in Paris during the summer of 1910. For a few months Gumilev, passionately involved with the ailing Masha Kuz'mina-Karavaeva, accompanied her to Finland in late 1911 and then to Italy in January 1912 where she died (Reeder 45). During his absences Akhmatova stayed with her mother-in-law or went to Petersburg and stayed for various lengths of time with friends. On October 1, 1912 Akhmatova and Gumilev's only child, Lev Nikolaevich (Lyova) Gumilev (d.1992) was born. Three months later, Kuzmin was again staying with them. These details reveal a group of young artists in the full swing of life unfettered by bourgeoisie conventions and reckless with their passions. But as one sorts through details from biography to biography, one is startled at their high level of productivity. All three poets published major volumes in 1912 (Akhmatova's *Вечер (Evening)*, Gumilev's *Чужое небо (Strange Skies, Alien Skies, Foreign Skies)*, and Kuzmin's *Осенние озера (Autumnal Lakes)*).

No one has suggested a sexual liaison between Gumilev and Kuzmin, but their friendship early on was strong. Kuzmin was with Gumilev on the night he successfully won Akhmatova's hand in marriage. Gumilev wrote favorable reviews of a number of Kuzmin's books including no less than three reviews of *Autumnal Lakes*. He was the first reviewer to recognize that in Malmstad and Bogomolov's words

. . . Kuzmin . . . expressed the views of a gay community that was now taking its rightful place in society: "Kuzmin occupies one of the first positions among

contemporary poets . . . Furthermore, as the spokesman for the views and emotions of a whole circle of people who are united by a common culture and who have quite justly risen to the crest of life's wave, he is a poet with organic roots." (200)

Later according to Akhmatova, Kuzmin cooled toward Gumilev. Even so in 1925 over three years after Gumilev's execution by the Bolsheviks, Kuzmin scoured his own diaries to help a young researcher, Pavel Nikolaevich Luknitskii (1902-1973), who was writing a biography of Gumilev. Luknitskii wrote:

She [Akhmatova speaking to Luknitskii] said that it was evident at once that Kuzmin was indeed a real man of letters and the she would thank him very much when they met Kuzmin really had acted nobly when he gave me [Luknitskii] what he could. One had to take into account his [Kuzmin's] dislike for Nikolay Stepanovich [Gumilev] . . . [Akhmatova] had complimented him [Kuzmin] highly—that too was noble: one had to take into account her dislike for Kuzmin. (qtd. in Malmstad and Bogomolov 223)

Luknitskii's standard of nobility here is a writer's deferential honor for another writer as "person of letters" regardless of personal, aesthetic or political differences. Because Akhmatova adhered to this standard throughout her career—one thinks of how she honored the memories of writers so unlike her as Velimir Khlebnikov (1885-1922), Vladimir Vladimirovich Maiakovskii (1894-1930) and Marina Ivanovna Tsvetaeva (1892-1941)—her later antipathy toward Kuzmin's memory is all the more surprising. The "dislike" Luknitskii refers to goes back to 1923 and has been alleged to be the seed of Akhmatova's later "homophobic" antipathy. According to Reeder, in 1923 Kuzmin

wrote that Akhmatova had outlived her role as a poet in Russian society and was important only as a relic of the past. He warned both Mayakovsky [sic] and Akhmatova that their very popularity was a danger, that they might easily just continue repeating themselves, since they had found styles that were popular with the public. (170)

Kuzmin's forecast was wrong about both. Maiakovskii became the official poet of the Revolution while Akhmatova was driven to public silence. *Anno Domini MCMXXI* in 1922 was her last published book for twenty years. For her, Kuzmin's public warning felt like a public betrayal, and for her, betrayals were past forgiveness. If Kuzmin's warning in 1923 was the seed of her later antipathy, the seed did not bear fruit immediately.

Compared to Akhmatova's two, Kuzmin published eight books after the Revolution, poetry, fiction and essays, the last in 1929. He continued his early success with "gay" themes. *Wings* (1907)—often called the first Russian gay novel—and the cycle "The Alexandrian Songs" from *Nets* (1908) were still in print twenty years after initial publication. On October 11, 1925, Kuzmin celebrated the 20th anniversary of his literary debut with a reading and gathering of literary friends. A picture, now in the Anna Akhmatova Museum (Fontana House) in Petersburg documents the event. Kuzmin is seated in the center, Anna Radlova (the alleged rival) to his right, with Akhmatova directly behind him. Whether her attendance was an act of friendship, respect, or the "nobility of a woman of letters" is hard to say, but her prominence in the picture is striking. The putative rift of 1923 was either patched up or never as "unforgiving" as biographers claim.

After a year in and out of hospitals, Kuzmin died of pneumonia March 1, 1936. His shabby funeral procession included some forty mourners, one of whom, Erikh Fedorovich Gollerbakh (1895-1942), comparing Kuzmin and Oscar Wilde, commented on how few they were. “Remember that seven people walked behind Wilde’s coffin, and then not all of them walked to the end” (qtd. in Malmstad and Bogomolov 138, 437). Akhmatova was ill and sent her fourth husband, Punin, to represent her. Lidiia Iakovlevna Ginzburg (1902-1990) visited the Punins the night of the funeral and recalled that “Akhmatova was upset that she had not been able to attend” (437). Punin commented earlier in the day “We are burying Kuzmin, like Mozart, during a snowstorm” (reported by Ginzberg, qtd. in Malmstad and Bogomolov 138). By having her husband represent her at the funeral, Akhmatova showed “nobility” toward Kuzmin in death and honored him as a man of letters. Whatever strains may have existed between Akhmatova and Kuzmin for the 25 years that followed the “Acmeist moment” in 1912, there is no sign for anything like homophobia on her part.

According to Lidiia Korneevna Chukovskaia (1906-1996) as late as August 1940 (four months before the onset of *Poem Without a Hero* Akhmatova spoke favorably of Kuzmin. Chukovskaia had seen an old copy of Kuzmin’s *The Trout is Breaking Through The Ice*. “I only saw the book briefly, but it seemed to me to be a good book, and I’d like to read it through properly” (137). Akhmatova wanted to see it too, and Chukovskaia promised to bring it. Referring to earlier Kuzmin works, Akhmatova said: “No, I am very fond of *Nets* And *The Guide* also contains a lovely poem about Tsarevich Dimitry. All in all, he is a genuine poet” (137). She went on to say he was never a true Acmeist and similarities between her work and his are superficial. In Chukovskaia’s

account, this appraisal was not acrimonious. Apparently Akhmatova had not seen Kuzmin's last book at the time it was published eleven years earlier. She read it in 1940. This evidence suggests that his article of warning in 1923 and friendship with Radlova were insufficient to cause the later antipathy registered in *Hero* and her reading in 1940 of *Trout*, just weeks before commencing her poem, may be a more direct cause.

Chukovskaia obtained the book and loaned it to Akhmatova. A few weeks later, on 5 September 1940, Chukovskaia reports that she had asked Akhmatova's opinion.

Everything in it is derived from German Expressionism. We didn't know it, and that's why it sounds stunningly new to us. But, really—it's all from there. However strange it may seem, much of the book sounds official, like captions under pictures . . . I liked 'Lazarus' and certain poems, for instance, the one which you also like so much 'The ship is flying over the joyful sea'. The ending is unpleasant though—about two-year olds. The salaciousness leaves one with a very heavy heart . . . I'd like to have put ellipses in many places . . . It's too exclusively for those with peculiar tastes: 'practicing nincompoops'. Kuzmin has always been homosexual in his poetry, but here he has gone beyond all reasonable bounds. Previously, he could not have got away with this: Vyacheslav Ivanov would have turned up his nose . . . But in the '20s there was no longer anybody to be wary of . . . Maybe Villon⁶ would have managed to carry it off somehow, but Mikhail Alekseevich [Kuzmin] could not. It's most repulsive. (152-3)

The poems mentioned come from the latter sections of the book as a whole or to the title poem *Trout*. The "salacious" and "repulsive" homosexuality may refer to the title poem, because, not only does it focus on the circle of homosexual desire, it is in part

Kuzmin's account of his relationship almost two decades earlier with Vsevolod Gabreilovich Kniazev (1891-1913), the prototype for the suicide episode in Akhmatova's *Hero*. Although these events are conflated with details from other relationships including his long "marriage" from 1913 until his death to Iuri Osip Ivanovich Iurkun (1895-1938) a minor poet, both poems cross significant terrain. Kuzmin's and Iurkun's love was complicated by Iurkun's bisexuality and his relationship with the celebrated actress, Ol'ga Nikolaevna Arbenina (1899-1980), who earlier had been courted by both Gumilev and Mandel'shtam. After 1940 Akhmatova's antipathy to Kuzmin became inflexible. Reeder reports that Malmstad says, in interviewing Akhmatova's friends in Leningrad in 1969, he found out that Akhmatova spoke sarcastically, even cruelly, about Kuzmin to others. "They could explain her attitude only as a kind of moralizing, almost prudish view of Kuzmin's homosexuality and the 'sins' of her own youth" (401).

"[F]or reasons that a mysterious, relations soured" in Michael Green's word, and to understand her "souring" from "noble" respect for a fellow person of letters to "homophobic" antipathy, we need to look closely at *The Trout Is Breaking Through the Ice*—published in English in 1980 in an out-of-print translation by Michael Green.⁷ In 1929 he published the book *ФОРЕЛЬ РАЗИВБИЕТ ЛЕД*⁸ (*The Trout Breaks the Ice*, or *The Trout is Breaking The Ice*, or *The Trout is Breaking Through The Ice*).⁹ The volume opens with a poem in 15 sections with the same name. It was written completely in one remarkable week in July 1927. The rest of the book collects poems from 1925-9, and forges new ground since his previous volume *Otherworldly Evenings: Poems 1914-1920*, which was hermetic in cast drawing on a private system of Gnostic symbols. Speaking of the volume as a whole Michael Basker writes:

By the time of *Forel' razbevaet led* [*The Trout is Breaking Through The Ice*] (1929), a more densely metaphorical poetry is instead structured primarily on an ostensible flux of emotional and intellectual associations. This draws on a bewildering array of sources—from *Dracula*, expressionist cinema, and journalistic gossip, to Wagnerian opera, Renaissance poetry and the Lives of the Saints—which ultimately serve to “double”, shape, and transform autobiographical experience (alternately personal-tragic or trivial and second-hand, but frequently defying critical reconstruction) into powerful symbol and myth. (482).

“A more densely metaphorical poetry . . . structured primarily on an ostensible flux of emotional and intellectual associations [that] draws on a bewildering array of sources” could fittingly describe *Poem Without a Hero* as well and no Akhmatova poem before 1940 could as fittingly be so described. Because of the “bewildering flux and array” and the indeterminate final effects of *Hero*, V. N. Toporov coined the term “open form” to describe its difference from her work before it. Citing Toporov, John Barnstead argues that *Hero* (as well as works by Mandel'shtam and Vladimir Nabokov) “came into being” because of “this poetry in his writing” (21). The claim to “open text” is to Kuzmin's work in general, but *Trout* is certainly an apt example.

Trout also overlaps biographical material in *Hero*. Its generative cognitive action is how memory fuses past and present, as in her poema. Malmstad and Shmakov's description could apply to either:

[it] is dictated . . . by the agent of memory itself. It is memory which confuses past and present—or rather, sees both time and nature as indivisible, a frequent

occurrence in Kuzmin's poetry. It is memory which whimsically arranges and rearranges events in a series of associative chains, in which events and the participants in them are treated as motifs or links to be arranged into associative patterns seemingly at will. It is Kuzmin's mature artistic task to recreate and give meaning to his own experience—to transform that experience into a personal myth—by crystallizing these memories around a single thematic pivot, a highly concentrated metaphor . . . (140)

Nowhere does Akhmatova acknowledge these stunning parallels, nor the fact that her repugnant reaction to reading *Trout* came just months before the onset of her own poem. Where the two poems overlap biographical matter, Akhmatova seeks deliberately to replace his version with hers in an act that by not inviting comparison silences his account. Hemschemeyer (1997) suggests that "*Poem Without a Hero* can be seen in part as a polemic against the themes of Kuzmin's *The Trout Breaks the Ice . . .*" (823).

Besides the conversations Malmstad refers to, a clue to Akhmatova's "polemic" against Kuzmin's "salaciousness" may be her much later untitled poem from 1960 "Если б все, кто помощи душевной . . ." ("If all who have petitioned me . . .") in which we find the only time in her verse that she quotes Kuzmin by name with quotation marks around his words.

If all who have petitioned me
For spiritual assistance,—
All the holy fools and the mutes,
The cast off women and the cripples,
All in hard labor and all who kill themselves,—

Were to send a single kopek each,
I would be “more wealthy than all of Egypt,”¹⁰
As the now deceased Kuzmin once said . . .
But they do not send me kopeks,
Rather they share with me their strength,
So that I am more strong than all in the world,
And, even *this*, for me, is not heavy.¹¹

Anatolii Naiman contrasts Akmatova’s use of allusions with T. S. Eliot’s.

Eliot introduced quotations into his verse text here, there and everywhere, showing his hand. Akhmatova does not make collages of this kind. She transplanted the quotations, regenerating them so that the foreign tissue was compatible with her own. (*Remembering* 24-5)

Typically she draws phrases and lines of other poets into her words so as to draw their voices into the texture of hers, but here she polemically separated Kuzmin’s words from hers. She uses quotation marks, and she pits his “more wealthy than all of Egypt” (a misquote) against her own “more strong than all in the world”—where wealth is opposed to strength and an imagined Egypt to the experienced world. What makes Kuzmin’s condition more wealthy and Akhmatova’s more strong? By themselves the lines seem to pit material against spiritual values; but familiarity with Kuzmin’s original poem complicates this dichotomy. Kuzmin’s line comes from the seventh poem in “Love”¹² a cycle in his early sensationally successful 1907 sequence “Alexandrian Songs” from *Nets*, which Akhmatova acknowledged to Chukovskaia to be the work of a “genuine

poet.” The line she quotes is the last in the second stanza, and forms a refrain with variants:

Stanza 1: “more glorious than any man in all Egypt!”

Stanza 2: “more wealthy than any man in all Egypt.”

Stanza 3: “more powerful than any man in all Egypt.”

Stanza 4:” more free than any man in all Egypt.”

Stanza 5: “more fortunate than any man in all Egypt.”

“More strong” is not in Kuzmin’s list of desirable conditions. In “Love” acceptance by his male beloved is what would make the lyric persona’s condition “more glorious, wealthy, powerful, free and fortunate than any man in Egypt.” In Akhmatova’s tightly structured poem, the strength of fellow-sufferers, which they send to her instead of petitions, or kopeks, is what makes her “more strong than all in the world.” Thus, the polemic is about fundamental views of poetry at least as much as between material versus spiritual values. Kuzmin is not an apologist for materialism; instead, he celebrates the individual experience of love, its longing and occasional attainment, as a worthy “condition” in and of itself. Akhmatova’s early poetry did so too, and her early celebrity was based on her success, poem after poem, in exploiting the personal mode, but beginning with a few poems about the hardships of WWI and the civil war that appeared in her third book (1917) and culminating in *Requiem* (1938-1940) she also strove to speak for “fellow-sufferers” in a larger community and larger world. Although *Trout* and *Hero* cover overlapping biographical ground, the erotic world of desire, betrayals and occasional attainments is an end in itself for Kuzmin, but for Akhmatova it points to the larger political and historical world—one she had come to see as morally flawed and

portentous of tragic retributions. Seemingly, therefore, he is charged with “salaciousness” not because his poetry is offensive or pornographic, but because his erotic milieu points only to the possibility of individual transcendence.

Of the 360 or more texts and shadow-texts, self references and quotations, intertexts and first-and-second-hand allusions that weave the texture of *Hero*, none has been less scrutinized than *Trout*. One critic who does comment on the two poems is Tjalsma in an essay “The Petersburg Poets.” He sees 1913 as “an image of an ideal” Modernist moment. He argues that Akhmatova sharply distinguished between «ПОМНИТЬ» and «ВСПОМНИТЬ,» that is between remembering and re-collecting or recovering

To recover—in memory—the past, when Russian culture itself may have possessed the Hellenic quality of which Mandelstam [sic] wrote, becomes a question of the survival of the culture itself. Petersburg in 1913 becomes almost an image of the ideal, and the forms of memory become critical—not simply to recall, but to restore, to create anew. This is achieved by Kuzmin in his “Forel” [“Trout”] and by Akhmatova in her “Poema bez geroia,” [*Poem Without a Hero*] where she writes of “remembering” and “recollecting” (‘pomnit’ and ‘vzpomnit’). The former is likened to Luga, the undistinguished little Russian town near Petersburg, and the latter to that most theatrical of cities, Venice. In Akhmatova’s “Poema” this recreation is almost complete: Kuzmin, Kniazev, Blok, Gumilev, Chaliapin, Pavlova . . . the cast of characters goes on and on. This is the last great monument of Petersburg Modernism. (84)

For Akhmatova the writing of *Hero* was an act of recuperation-recollecting-recovery-retrieval, far more psychologically crucial than simply recalling something regrettable from the past with hope for reconciling oneself with it. At various times it occupied and preoccupied her from December 1940 until her final years. Her “re-collection” was written in competition with Kuzmin’s similarly motivated “re-collection.” The competition was for **high stakes**: nothing less than which of their “pasts” would win out, and for her, perhaps, an agon of authorial authority. Timenchik takes the claim even further as Malmstad and Shmakov report it:

. . . Akhmatova’s poem draws heavily on details from Kuzmin’s cycle and is in large part a polemic against it. (R. Timenshik suggested this in a paper given at a student conference held at Tartu University in 1967; only a summary of his paper is available in *Materialy XXII nauchnoi studnecheskoi konferentsii*, Tartu, 1967). This may explain Akhmatova’s statement, in Part Two (line 91) of the “Poema bez geroia,” that “I will be accused of plagiarism.” (138-9)

For her 1913 led to—perhaps even caused—the retribution that is the present; for him 1913 could be redeemed through the transformation of a lost beloved into a reunited beloved, and betrayal into transcendence—in the present.

Akhmatova’s dislike of Kuzmin’s book as told to Chukovskaia in 1940 was in part her dislike of German expressionism, which she associated with “salaciousness.” Like his her style had grown away from the dogmas of Acmeism, which she and Kuzmin had both espoused. Her turn to phantasmagoria would seem to run counter to her commitment to clarity. As early as her wartime Tashkent, readers of the first drafts of *Hero* complained of obscurity. The poema exploits surrealistic devices and plays reality

against imagining, including effects that approach expressionism. One wonders whether her complaint against Kuzmin's expressionism is not in part a repudiation of the influence of his poema on hers.

Before we return to her "homophobic" antipathy and its effects within the poema, we need to acknowledge the remarkable achievement of *Trout*. Although Malmstad and Shmakov in 1976 printed the long out-of-print Russian text and analyzed it in "Kuzmin's "The Trout Breaking through the Ice," the poem had not, as far as I know, been translated into English until 2006.¹³ Like *Hero* it is not an easy first read, but its problems are of a different order. Where Akhmatova is allusive with abrupt changes of voice and verse forms, elliptical and teasing, Kuzmin's poema section by section is straightforward. To understand how the 15 sections fit into a whole is the challenge.

Besides two prefaces and an epilogue, *Trout* consists of 12 Удара ("stabs" or "thrusts"¹⁴). The overarching metaphor is a trout captured beneath the frozen surface of a stream that slams its tail upward against the ice to break open an air hole—a metaphor of striving for freedom. The relentlessness of the stabs also suggests a thrusting toward the release of orgasm. The 12 stabs are separate poems forming a cycle. They vary in length and formal features. Midway, stab 6 stands as the apex of the poema's architecture. In the form of a border ballad, it is the longest section, oddly set in Scotland. Settings vary from a glittering performance of *Tristan and Isolde* at the Petersburg opera, to a remote Carpathian hunting lodge, to a back alley gambling club, to Scotland, and persons who appear more than once do so with individuals from unrelated sections. Separate sections have clear narratives, but they do not link up into an overarching story. In the epilogue, Kuzmin asks, then matter-of-factly answers, in a bantering tone with his reader:

Can't you tell? Right from the start
I tried to make a record of twelve months
And simply show how each encounter went
As I lightly explored the circle of desire.
And here is what turned out! . . .

Just how the 12 stabs represent distinct months is hard to say, but that they “explore the circle of desire” is exactly right, although not as lightly as his banter suggests. The separate sections plot emotional points and expose a fantasy that closes the circle of the narrator’s desire for his beloved. The circle begins as a dream in which former lovers return uninvited, blending different men and periods in the dreamer-narrator’s mind. Subconsciously the composite lost-beloved is thus still an object of desire and closure to the past has not been attained. Lev Vladimirovich Loseff in his summary of attempts to identify the dedicatee of the first dedication in *Hero* enunciates a general principle to which scholars of Akhmatova’s poema typically adhere.

Thanks to the special character of the poem, all students of it do not so much argue with each other as complement each others findings. The consensus among the critics is that Akhmatova’s basic strategy was to make several real life prototypes merge into each and every human image of her poem. (91)

Truly, the historico-cultural referentiality is so dense that we can never be certain that we have not missed one or more references. But with great certainty we can state that none of her “personages” can be tracked down to one single prototype—there are always more. (95)

Except for the ballet libretto based on the same material, multiple prototypes are exploited by Akhmatova nowhere else to the degree they are in *Hero*. They are pertinent to *Trout* as well—another parallel between the two poems. At the outset of *Trout* the lost-beloved who appears to the narrator-dreamer partakes of multiple prototypes in the phantasm of a dream setting a direct impetus for the phantasmagoria at the outset of *Hero*—each poem announcing a cast of composites from the past?

The first stab is set at the opera where the narrator's attention splits between a stunningly beautiful lady and Tristan who is dying and hoping beyond hope to reunite with Isolde. Wagner's story exfoliates a fantasy of desired reunion in which the separated lovers do physically reunite, but in doing so first Tristan dies then Isolde. As we will see, Kuzmin's poem offers a different but just as startling outcome for the plot of desired reunion. Tristan's scene is in act 3, so Kuzmin's "stab" is set late at the performance; nevertheless a stunning beauty enters the box and captures his gaze, so that his attention is split. She is a sensation of beauty. At the end of the performance, as the narrator departs the theater he sees her again and as they jostle in the lobby he suddenly notices her escort, a man of twenty years. Subtly the reader realizes that the two men have been lovers and that the younger man seeks not to acknowledge that they have ever met. His age, association with the color green and in particular his green eyes identify him strongly with Kniazev. Thus this emotional moment is very close to the phantasmagoric material in chapter one of *Hero*, and the beautiful woman equates with actress-dance Ol'ga Afanasevna Glebova-Sudeikina (1885-1945), who in real life had seduced Kniazev away from Kuzmin almost twenty years prior to *Trout*, and who is the "heroine" of Akhmatova's poem, albeit a composite with prototypes in Sudeikina, the

ballerina Tamara Platonovna Karsavina (1885-1978), the famed Petersburg beauty Salomeia Nikolaevna Andronikova-Halpern (1888-1982) and perhaps others including some aspects of herself.

The stabs or sections of Kuzmin's poema are "emotional moments"—points or months that plot the circle of desire. They are not autobiographical chapters, and even though in stab 1 the beloved is closest to Kniazev, within the full circle of 12 stabs, the beloved is better seen as a projected ideal. The emotional pang at the opera is not simply because the beloved brushes off the narrator but because the narrator lost his youthful beloved to a woman. Kuzmin on a number of occasions developed passions for men who were bisexual in practice, including his long "marriage" (1913-1935) to Iuri Iurkun, with whom he lived at the time he wrote *Trout*. Iurkin maintained a simultaneous relationship with Ol'ga Arbenina from 1920 until Iurkun's execution in 1938. By the mid-1920s she joined Iurkun and Kuzmin in a *ménage à trois* that also included Iurkun's mother who had lived with the two men for several years. The anxiety at the heart of *Trout* is not Tristan's anxiety that because he transgressively loved his lord's wife he irreparably lost her, but rather that any lover Kuzmin might have will be wooed by a woman and therefore irreparably lost.

As the cycle proceeds, a blood-ritual love-exchange between the narrator and the composite-beloved (stab 2) is consummated, only to have the beloved leave. This departure in stab 3 occurs abruptly while the two men read Shakespeare's sonnets. One wonders if they were reading the torturous group in which Shakespeare's poet-persona, the golden haired youth and the dark lady are bound in a confusing triangle that seems to

climax with the youth and the lady leaving the older-poet-persona alone. The sonnets thus exfoliate a narrative of the expense of an unattainable longing to reunite.

In stab 4 the men share a blissful domestic moment at breakfast. But stab 5 introduces Elinor who has joined the men in a *ménage à trois*. Her presence slowly draws the beloved away. She seems innocent walking in the morning garden, but she slowly has made the household “her green country!” And the section ends with the question:

Whose idea was it that peaceful landscapes
Cannot be arenas of catastrophe?

Stab 6, the Scots ballad, at first seems a *non sequitur*. Ervin Green, a “goodly mariner,” leaves his home and betrothed Annie Ray.¹⁵ He returns years later, an old man. As they reunite and are married, mysteriously he turns back to his younger virile self. Annie is unnerved by the power he seems to hold over her. She asks is his soul at peace with the Lord and his reply is evasive. Even in reunion, the mariner’s last words leave undecided how willing Annie is, or could be, in taking back her youthful beloved. The mariner says:

Like Satan—I can destroy your soul
If I should so desire;
But likes of you, love I will,
Till death, my wife, transpires.

This ballad’s plot is heterosexual; like *Tristan* it leads to reunited lovers; but the fantasy is unsatisfactory. Tristan and Isolde’s transgressive love is re-consummated in death. Ervin Green and Annie Ray’s betrothal is consummated in belated marriage under the menace he holds over her choice. Kuzmin’s circle of desire stabs on seeking a better

outcome better than Tristan's fatal, Shakespeare's unattainable, or Annie Ray's sinister reunions.

Even as the Ervin Green ballad seems a digression from the poet-narrator's plotting of the stages of his circle of desire, serving as a foil to his narrative much as *Tristan* and the sonnets, it simultaneously forms a "chapter" in his narrative. Green is the color Kuzmin associates with Kniazev,¹⁶ as does Akhmatova in the first dedication to *Hero*. The composite-beloved is always bisexual, as was Kniazev. Ervin Green is the composite-beloved seen in his heterosexual manifestation from the viewpoint of Kuzmin. Green's love for Annie Ray distances her from him, ages him, and imparts to him an aura of menace and doom—all of which troubles their re-betrothal. From Annie's side, he gives himself to her but his mysterious unsettledness bars any sort of soul-mating or transcendence. She seemingly accepts this "bad bargain" as the best she can hope to have.

Stab 7 is the bucolic "Premonition? Memory?" (line 17) of the narrator watching a young naked swimmer dive from a cliff who like Narcissus emerges from the water embarrassed. As the swimmer again dives underwater he lashes against the undertows near the bank and his beating arms are compared to a struggling trout. Metaphorically, is the beloved stabbing and thrusting to get back to the man he abandoned? The poem suggests that reunion, if it is to occur, is because both parties, perhaps subconsciously, will it, and seek it. If the struggling Narcissus is the lost-beloved, does stab 7 imply that even in the "unsettlement" of his heterosexual accommodation to a woman such as Annie Ray, subconsciously he is swimming against undertows to get back to the man of his initial blood-rite consummation?

Stab 8 is more surreal than others. A motorcar arrives. The narrator expects it is his long-absent beloved, but the man who steps from the car is unfamiliar. The stranger offers to stay, but the narrator-lover responds “But can’t you see: not possible!” Five days later a letter arrives from Grinoke, Scotland—the town where Ervin Green in stab 6 stayed.

Stab 9 retrospectively implies the previous rejection by the lyric persona is misprision and that the stranger was indeed the beloved whom he failed to recognize. It registers the narrator-lover’s attempts to while away his loneliness, but he questions whether Grinoke really exists, and whether one must “learn to endure / Ervin Green, the mariner” who will never return, or whose return may be one fraught with sinister forebodings. Stab 10 has him in despair. He seeks out “light amusements” in the back alleys of Petersburg, tries gambling, and meets a man who invites him to visit his “small museum” of bizarre collections. This man is compared to Dr. Caligari in the German 1919 expressionist movie, *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari*¹⁷ (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*), and is the only section of the poema to draw on expressionist imagery. While looking at the strange exhibits in this bizarre cabinet, the narrator realizes that:

I had been seeking for my second half

All day and trust there’s light at tunnel’s end.

Isn’t he clear at a glance?—A twin!

The strange host leads him deeper into the museum where suddenly the lost lover is discovered. The narrator realizes that “this twin” is the man he had pledged love to in the Carpathian hunting lodge and who then abruptly left him while reading Shakespeare’s sonnets. As they face each other in mutual recognition, the section ends. Stab 11 is a

lyrical duet between two reunited voices—a re-consummation in which the physical blood exchange has become two voices merged into a single transcendent aria. And in Stab 12 the two men drive home along the Neva riverbank to resume their domestic life together.

Unlike the reunion fantasies that drive the plots of *Tristan* and the ballad of Annie Ray, *Trout* offers a fantasy unprecedented in previous poetry. The triangle harks back to Shakespeare's sonnets in order to reverse Shakespeare. Kuzmin's homoerotic passion is not simply physical attraction or sexual consummation; it is a pledged bonding and soul-mating. If the pledge is in earnest, *Trout* argues, no matter what woman or span of time or space intervenes, or mishaps and misprisions occur, the bonded men will in their "twin-ness" find each other and reunite. A secondary aspect of Kuzmin's myth of homoerotic bonding is that the relationship is best experienced in egalitarian domesticity. Kuzmin sublimates phallic eros while displaying mystic bonding and egalitarian domestic ease. If the home to which they return is the one broken in stab 4, is "Elinor" a part of the reconstituted *ménage*? Apparently this question no longer matters. She may share the domestic space in an unsettled ("doomed") physical relationship with the beloved, but the re-consummated male bond is on a level no longer vulnerable to her threat. This outcome probably reflects the psychological stasis Kuzmin achieved in his "marriage" to Iurkin during their last decade which included Arbenina in their domestic arrangements. *Trout* in effect celebrates Kuzmin's "*ménage à trois*."

Is this celebration what Akhmatova found salacious? Kuzmin's view of egalitarian homosexual bonding may hark back to the English "gay movement" of the previous generation and the writings of Edward Carpenter. As noted earlier,

Gollerbach's description of Kuzmin's funeral likened him to Oscar Wilde and the second introduction to *Trout* refers to Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

And even without the rain,
Oh, you, Mister Dorian—
Do you so freely take
A place upon the divan?

Dorian Gray is also one of the maskers who pops up in Akhmatova's poema. Kuzmin knew Wilde's work and was involved in a production of his play *Salome*, and may well have been exposed to Carpenter's ideas. Carpenter and John Addington Symonds derived their ideas of a superior homoerotic bond between men from Plato (Lauritsen and Thorstad, 31-3). Walt Whitman was influenced by Carpenter's book of poems *Towards Democracy* (1883) with its celebration of lofty egalitarian comradeship, and Kuzmin may have been too. Translations of Whitman had already sent a jolt through Russian poetry inspiring both Kuzmin and Mayakovsky in quite different ways. The notion that an idealized Platonic bond between men is superior to any model of male-female relationship, with the implication that sexual relations between a man and a woman are ephemeral, for all its Platonic pedigree, would be heresy to Akhmatova. The various *ménages à trois* in which she lived never included two men attracted to each other, nor among her dozen or more lovers has even one been identified as bisexual. In life as well as in her hundreds of love poems, her dynamic is relentlessly heterosexual.¹⁸ The dramatic tension of her poems focuses on the early stages of discovery, subtle seductions and initial consummation, not on long-term survival or even domesticity.

The second aspect of *Trout* that may have offended Akhmatova as heresy is Kuzmin's version of his relationship with Kniazev c.1913. By sublimating Kniazev into the –composite belowvd that celebrates Kuzmin's *ménages à trois* with Iurkin, he seems to be in denial regarding Kniazev's suicide or any role he had before or after it. Akhmatova's version is merciless in its placing blame. In *Hero* the 21 year old Kniazev is callously seduced and then rejected as the plaything of a slightly older and considerably more experienced woman. His suicide is tragic because he is so much the naïve victim. Akhmatova's sense of self blame and complicity arises from her belief that she should have done something to prevent events from going as far as they did, either by offering better advice to the youth, or by getting her friend Sudeikina to stop the game, or both. Did she also fault Kuzmin for a similar complicity? Self blame may also rise from a sense that as Sudeikina's "double," she too played similar games. She may have blamed herself for Kormarovsky's¹⁹ suicide as well as for Gumilev's attempt in 1908 before their marriage.²⁰ What strikes one about Akhmatova's version of the Kniazev affair—so central to the emotional core of Chapter One of the poema—is that Kuzmin is completely written out of the story. Kniazev's obsession with Sudeikina and her betrayal of him are cast exclusively as heterosexual attractions and desires. Feinstein summarizes the biographical facts quite differently from Akhmatova's telling in *Hero*:

Knyazev [sic] was a strikingly handsome Cornet of the dragoons, who wrote poetry Kuzmin, then thirty-eight, met Knyazev on Sunday, 2 May 1910, at Pavlovsk, and was immediately attracted to his good looks. Throughout 1911, they had a passionate sexual relationship and Kuzmin wrote a number of explicitly erotic love poems to the young man. (45)

Kniazev wrote poems to Kuzmin and the two men printed them in 1912 in a joint volume called *The Arrow's Prick* (Reeder 382). He also wrote poems to and about Sudeikina which may be the manuscript poems alluded to by Akhmatova that she had kept almost thirty years as mentioned in the first dedication of the poema. Feinstein goes on:

In the summer of that year, Kuzmin and Knyazev [sic] lived with Sudeikin [with whom Kuzmin had formerly had a relationship] and his wife Sudeikina, because Sudeikin wanted to paint a picture of the two men together. Sudeikin and his wife enjoyed an open marriage, which allowed them both to pursue their own proclivities, and it soon became apparent that Knyazev was much taken with the pretty Sudeikina. His affair with Kuzmin came to an abrupt end, though there was a brief emotional reconciliation. This is the background to Knyazev's jealous attachment to Sudeikina which led to him shooting himself when he watched her returning home with another lover. (45)

The betrayal took place on 1 January 1913 but Kniazev did not put the Browning revolver to his chest until 29 March 1913 and this was after he returned to his company of dragoons in Riga (Malmstad and Bogomolov, 221). In *Hero* the suicide takes place immediately upon discovery of betrayal, January 2; however, it would not be until 5 April that the real Kniazev died in a Riga hospital. His body was brought back to Petersburg for burial. Akhmatova and Sudeikina attended the Catholic funeral and burial where the boy's mother confronted Sudeikina and said to her face "God will punish those who made him suffer!" (qtd. in Malmstad and Bogomolov, 221). Six months later Akhmatova wrote of the funeral in an untitled poem that begins: «Высокие своды костела . . .»

The high arches of the Catholic church

Are bluer than the rigid skies . . .

Forgive me, fun-loving boy,

That for you I was bringer of death—

For the roses from the circular grounds,

For your letters of absurdity,

For how you became dull and pallid

From one who had beamed audaciously.

I assumed: you were deliberate—

Wanting to be like an adult.

I assumed: one knew that one should not,

For a bride, love a mere coquette.

But all turned out of no avail.

At the return of the cold season,

Coldly you watched me come and go—

Any time—any location—

As if I had hoarded up the signs

Of my disdain. Forgive me!

Later you took the vow of pain,

To drink it to the full. But why?

And at last when death held out its hands
To you . . . tell me, what came next?
Under the blue of a collar band
I did not know the throat so weak.

Forgive me, fun-loving boy,
My little martyred owl!
From this church today
Returning home is impossible.

November 1913

*Tsarskoe Selo*²¹

Already in 1913 the self-blame displayed almost thirty years later in *Hero* was voiced already in the Kniazev funeral poem. Kuzmin did not attend the funeral but the Kniazev family, for several years, kept their door open to him. About ten years later when he saw Kniazev's mother in a chance encounter on 28 September 1922, according to his diary entry, "Knyazeva hailed me. Anya [her daughter] has taken the veil, Kirill [her son] is under arrest. Had Vsev[olod Kniazev] not quarreled with me, he would not have shot himself—that is her opinion" (qtd. in Malmstad and Bogomolov, 221). Kniazev's mother blamed Sudeikina not Kuzmin, for her son's suicide. By contrast, for the rest of both their lives, Akhmatova blamed Kuzmin, but not for the suicide but for being unfeeling.

He won't even weep for the dead with me,
And does not know what conscience means,

Or for what reasons it exists. (*Poem Without a Hero*, 1956 version)

These lines enshrine her judgment. She seems unable to envision, much less empathize, with his personal loss. In her view allusions to Kniazev in *Trout* and Kuzmin's blending of him into the composite-beloved may have confirmed that as late as 1929 Kuzmin had still not "wept for the dead" young dragoon as Akhmatova's "conscience" prescribed he should.

True, Kuzmin was reticent about his loss, but when he did write of it, he neither wept nor castigated himself as Akhmatova seemed to think he should. His memorial poem, number 6 in the cycle ПЛЮД ЗРЕЕТ ("Ripe Fruit"), is full of consolation.

At times in us we trace
An unfamiliar silence,
But in it there lurks
The crowning rest of bliss.
Pensively on lofty rungs,
Our angel gazes down,
Where a gold haze hangs
Between the trees of autumn.
Later our horse, spurred on,
Will neigh its glad hello
And along the road, untrodden.
Dash on with spunk and gusto.
Don't be embarrassed by delays,
My fond, fond friend,

And don't let the uneasy pace
Impede our circle's end.
All will happen as destined,
A guide is leading us on.
For the hours here unfilled,
We'll taste honey of heaven.

1913²²

The beautiful young dragoon who died in a Riga hospital in 1913 haunted him as late as the writing of *Trout*, just as it haunted Akhmatova in *Hero*. *Trout* and *Hero* each register its writer's response to Vsevolod Kniazev, but these responses are opposite. Critics have commented on this connection but only as a minor footnote.

Besides Kniazev a number of other parallels and similarities stand out, some of which have already been noted. Together they argue a much greater level of intertextuality between the poem and Kuzmin's than Akhmatova or her scholars have acknowledged. At least eighteen such parallels are worth noting.

1. Basker's textural description: ". . . densely metaphorical poetry . . . structured primarily on an ostensible flux of emotional and intellectual associations [that] draws on a bewildering array of sources" (482).
2. Tjalsma's distinction between "remembering" and "recollecting," discussed earlier, applies to both works.
3. Loseff's principle of multiple prototypes for personages who appear in the poem applies to both.
4. Both poems have a pair of introductions and end in epilogues.

5. Both identify personages (often dead) from the past by telltale phrases rather than name, or assign them fictional names.
6. Both associate “green” or a “green haze” with the Kniazev figure.
7. The overarching structure of each is built from disparate sections not one narrative, however sketchy.
8. Both use an array for verse forms, line lengths and rhyme schemes.
9. At the beginning “guests” from the past intrude unexpectedly upon the poet (maskers to Akhmatova, guests for tea to Kuzmin). T. A. Gor’kova specifically remarks on the parallels between section 2 of Kuzmin’s poema and opening lines of part I of Akhmatova’s (3, 522).
10. Oscar Wilde’s Dorian Gray is a masker to Akhmatova and a guest for tea to Kuzmin.
11. Both place settings in sophisticated Petersburg milieus—masquerade for her, opera for him.
12. Both poemy play levels of reality and imagining off against each other with considerable uncertainty and ambiguity. And both question whether particular details are dreamt or witnessed.
13. Both poemy play levels of the past and the present off against each other with considerable uncertainty and ambiguity in a representation of the presentness of the present as only fully comprehensible because of the weight of the past that defines it.
14. Both poemy intrude editorial comments about the poema’s design in the authors’ own voices, creating polyvalent textual displays. In doing so, both artfully and deliberately toy with Pushkinian devices developed in some of his poemy which also

intrude self-effacing editorial comments. Until 1940 Akhmatova had not exploited the Pushkinian poem in this way.

15. Akhmatova introduces the trope of the “double” or the “other” in order to suggest her own complicity in the actions of her “heroine”—Sudeikina. Kuzmin uses the trope of “twins” to suggest a psychic bond between himself and the man with whom he desires to reunite—a bond that weathers time, distance and intervening relationships.
16. Both works deploy Pushkin’s device of direct understated banter with the reader. Akhmatova had not used this device before *Hero*.
17. Despite Akhmatova’s condemnation of German expressionism, both poets exploit various devices associated with surrealism and expressionism, such as bizarre dream sequences, personages with multiple identities or references, persons who allude to recognizable historical or mythic personages, abrupt illogical and unexplained shifts of time and place, phantasmagorias and characters who shift their identities. German expressionism cited E. T. A. Hoffmann as one of its precursors, and Akhmatova alludes to Hoffmann or characters from his stories a number of times.
18. At least one image seems borrowed directly from Kuzmin by Akhmatova. Stanza XII of Part Two describes the type of the 19th century coquette with reference to a society painter of the time, Karl P. Briullov (1799-1852):

She drops a small lace handkerchief,
And with languid winks, from under her strap,
She beckons a Briullovian shoulder.

Compare Kuzmin’s description of the beauty at the opera in Stab 1.²³

No one had seen how he had entered the hall

And happened to be sitting in a box
With the young beauty like a Briullov canvas.
Such women inhabit only novels,
Or chat together as if projected on a screen . . .

That Akhmatova's text has a close intertextual relationship to Kuzmin's is beyond question. To grasp the force of her suppression of any acknowledgement, let us return to the Kniazev situation again.

Whatever transpired late in 1912, the Sudeikin household, in which three men had at various times had sexual relations and two of them concurrently were involved with the one woman, was an emotionally and sexually charged environment. The Sudeikins may have comfortably accepted the "rules" of their open marriage, and Kuzmin may have learned to weather intense infatuations and fickle betrayals, but the 21 year old cadet was out of his element. He turned to Akhmatova as confidante (attested by several poems she wrote at the time²⁴) seeming always to be cast in the role of the bewildered victim—victim of a charged sexual environment he was not disposed to or mature enough to handle.

That environment was a *ménage* of multiple persons who sought open but intense relationships "swinging" back and forth between partners and genders. I hypothesize that Akhmatova's experiences in such *ménages* led her eventually to reject them, whereas Kuzmin was able to establish a degree of domestic security as celebrated in *Trout*, which later in life she found salacious. If I am correct, this then is the core of her later antipathy, not his homosexuality. In order to test this hypothesis, I must document *ménages à trois* as a style of living that emerged in pre- and post-Revolution Russia, part

of a short-lived “sexual revolution” whose shape was influenced by three historically specific conditions: a liberated and radically experimental Bohemian intelligentsia, early Bolshevik legislation, and the material conditions of life under the economic deprivations that followed the Revolution.

The Bohemian intelligentsia and Raznochinets²⁵ who gravitated to St. Petersburg and Moscow during the early 20th century came from all over Russia. Some were of peasant and non-Russian ethnicities but most came from the administrative class or lesser gentry. They were bright young independent artists and intellectuals who supported themselves on small family stipends and occasional income from publications, exhibits, lectures, performances and the like. Many included in their education trips and study in Western Europe. Paris, Venice and the German university cities were common to their backgrounds. They had a western perspective to their tastes in literature, art and music, but also revered the Russian tradition. They were attracted to avant-garde trends, but shared no single ideology. Many lived a scrappy but rarely desperate existence prior to the 1918 revolutions. They lived with a sense of privilege and believed in their essential social function. Anti-establishment would be inappropriate to describe their sense of their social role. Some held radical and anarchist ideas, but these were a minority.

Economically, many lived on the margin of the middle class, but they did not perceive themselves to be a marginal nor marginalized group, say, as the Beatniks in 1950s America did. Even those who experienced financial straits could often afford a servant. Those who felt compelled to share living quarters afforded comfortable dining and travel when they chose. They economized by rejecting bourgeois ostentation, willing to live in less prestigious districts of their cities, and by helping each other if a person had

a bad spell. They opened apartments or homes, or set up shared households. This pattern of fluid living arrangements continued throughout the post-revolution period and became a norm for many artists, actors, writers and even professors and teachers. Some of these shared households were economic conveniences but others were built on emotional and sexual bonds. Often the households included a parent, aunt, sibling or other relative of one or more members, and as the people aged their own children as well. Edward Brown cites oral accounts by Lili Brik that argue these open domestic relations were seen by some as authorized by literary precedent.

The critic Chernyshevsky [sic] was held in high esteem by Mayakovsky [sic], by the Briks and by the *Lef* group as a whole. Chernyshevsky's fictional account of a sensible and practical *ménage à trois* in the novel *What Is to Be done?* [1863] Served as the principal model for the domestic arrangements worked out by Mayakovsky and the Briks, though there were indeed other nineteenth century models. (304)

Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevskii (1828-1889) was an editor, reformer, social critic and novelist. His novel, *What Is to Be done?* maintained its popularity as an expression of liberal rational and enlightened human choices unencumbered by bourgeoisie conventions. The story leads to a situation in which the heroine Vera marries Lopukhov, her brother's friend, in order to avoid an arranged marriage with an older man chosen by her father. They establish a household with separate rooms to protect their independence. When Vera falls in love with Kirsanov, Lopukhov fakes suicide and leaves, so that they can marry. Later he reappears with a wife, and the two couples form a single household. The Socialist didacticism of Chernyshevsky would not have appealed to Akhmatova or

Kuzmin, but the novel's precedent of self enlightened independent domestic arrangements would have struck a chord just as it did with Maiakovskii and the Briks. Feinstein sees a parallel between the Petersburg/Petrograd Bohemians and the Bloomsbury group in London, and at least one person, Akhmatova's lover Boris Anrep, moved between both groups, having an affair with Lady Ottoline Morrell, and finally settling permanently in London (63, 78). The stable social system in England versus the volatile revolutionary conditions in Russia make the two "sexual revolutions" distinct and different.

The Bohemian economic marginality and eschewal of bourgeois ostentation created conditions in which sexual and emotional *ménages à trois* could thrive—and did. I use the term *ménage à trois* with caveats. Some arrangements involved three (or more people) over a period of time but members moved in and out of the household; the bond was emotional and/or sexual but not consistently domestic. Some included more than three persons. *Ménage à trois* connotes for us something risqué, probably unstable and from the view of sexual orientation transitional for one or more of the participants, none of which typically characterizes the *ménage* type I describe. Ol'ga Vsevolodovna Ivinskaia (b.1912), Pasternak's third "wife" discusses his beliefs about relationships at the time he was setting up a home with her but still continuing his household with his second wife and children. She says he "was sickened in every way by all theorizing about 'the rights of the senses,'" and rejected strict morality based codes and the free love dogmas for governing personal relations. He says "There can be no rules about such things: life itself is the only arbiter . . ." (19). Pasternak may well speak for many who

took part in the *ménage* type I describe: Kuzmin, Akhmatova, Maiakovskii. Pasternak in fact moved between two household and two “wives” for much of his final years.

Unlike the London Bloomsbury group’s merely social/sexual “revolution,” in 1917 (March and October) Russia saw a political revolution as well, and by the end of 1917 Bolsheviks controlled administrative and legislative functions. Bolshevism saw its role as the vanguard for revolution elsewhere in the world and sought to impact international congresses as rationally progressive, anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois. For instance it sent delegations to the International Congresses of the World League for Sexual Reform in 1921 (Berlin), 1928 (Copenhagen), 1929 (London) and 1930 (Vienna) (Lauritsen and Thorstad, 66). In December 1917 the government passed sweeping “reforms in sex-related matters” and “ushered in a new atmosphere of sexual freedom” (Lauritsen and Thorstad, 63). Dr. Grigorii Batkis, the Director of the Moscow Institute of Social Hygiene, published a pamphlet describing the new sexual order in the Soviet Union and presented it in 1923 to the World League For Sexual Reform. It represents Bolshevik doctrine at the time. Batkis’s pamphlet was published in German in 1925. He argues that the revolution grew out of the broad masses’ yearning for economic independence.

In the first period of the war, women won economic independence both in the factory and in the country—but the October Revolution first cut the Gordian knot, and instead of mere reform, it completely revolutionized the laws. The revolution let nothing remain of the old despotic and infinitely unscientific laws; it did not tread the path of the reformist bourgeois legislation which, with juristic subtlety, still hangs on the concept of property in the sexual sphere, and ultimately

demands that the double standard hold sway over sexual life. These laws always come about by disregarding science. (qtd. in Lauritsen and Thorstad, 63-4)

To abolish the property concept of sexual matters and the double standard, Bolshevik legislation did several remarkable things. Women and men were equal under law. They could initiate and dissolve marriage. The church's role in marriage was abolished, and couples simply applied to a state clerk and were granted a license. Either spouse could initiate divorce and it was granted without litigation. Property disputes were the purview of the appropriate court but divorce was not contingent on a resolution to such a dispute if it arose. The state provided protection of children whose parents could not. Ideologically the legislation was intended to weaken the institutions of church and family which were seen as pillars of the capitalist system. Childcare became a shared responsibility between parents and state and a wide system of orphanages was established for children whose parents could not afford them.

Batkis's pamphlet, with italics in the original, enshrined a fundamental principal regarding sexual matters: "*It declares the absolute non-interference of the state and society into sexual matters, so long as nobody is injured, and no one's interests are encroached upon*" (qtd. in Lauritsen and Thorstad, 64). This principal was also applied without discrimination to non-heterosexual relations.

Concerning homosexuality, sodomy, and various other forms of sexual gratification, which are set down in European legislation as offenses against public morality—Soviet legislation treats these exactly the same as so-called 'natural' intercourse. All forms of sexual intercourse are private matters. Only when there's use of force or duress, as in general when there's an injury or

encroachment upon the rights of another person, is there a question of criminal prosecution. (qtd. in Lauritsen and Thorstad, 64)

Although marriage licenses remained the right of one woman with one man, the policies for allocating housing space, which were based on the importance of one's service to the state not one's private resources, for a time treated same-sex couples equal to both married and unmarried heterosexual couples. Formal marriage was so weakened by this legislation that many couples at all levels of society entered into and dissolved "marriages" without applying for either a license or a divorce. Co-habitation defined marriage as much as legality did. Akhmatova for instance at various times referred to four husbands. With Gumilev she had an Orthodox Church wedding and obtained a state divorce; with Shileiko, she obtained a post-revolution license, but whether there was ever a legal divorce is not clear. With Lourié and Punin, the relationships were defined by co-habitation. Punin's legal marriage to his first wife Anna Ahrens Punina was never dissolved during either his "marriage" to Akhmatova or his third wife. The legal category of bigamy almost vanished during the post-revolution period.

Some argue the Bolsheviks did not really take a liberal view toward homosexuals and that the legislation was cosmetic to be used as propaganda abroad, but Lauritsen and Thorstad point out that in the first edition of *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* in 1930, the extensive piece on homosexuality was built on the work of the early "gay rights" pioneer in Germany, Magnus Hirschfield and to a lesser extent Freud (64) and was far in advance of information on homosexuality in major reference books in the West.

One repercussion of this legislation was that for the Bohemian intelligentsia, the social and sexual experiments in living arrangements that they had attempted before the

Revolution were no longer subject to state control. State sanction was bestowed which no other European country at this time had as fully as the Soviet Union. For a brief while, this group, however else they might have struggled with poverty, illness and censorship, lived “liberated” lives in their domestic and sexual interactions. The short-lived Bolshevik “sexual revolution” extended well beyond the intelligentsia and Bohemian subcultures at least as far as the rights of women in marriage and divorce.

The third factor to shore up experiences of *ménages à trois* was the new Soviet system of allocating living quarters amid chronic housing shortages. Shortages in urban living quarters plagued the entire Soviet era but were worst during the periods following each of the great wars. During the 1920s and 1930s the situation was exacerbated by collectivization and industrialization. Resources were allocated to heavy industry so that housing construction always lagged. In some places existing housing was knocked down to clear space for factories, trams and railways and not replaced. Peasants were driven off their land through five-year plans, droughts and forced relocations, to work in newly built factories. The larger more commodious residences, such as the historic palaces in Leningrad or the middle class apartments blocks built in the 1890s and 1900s in Moscow, were divided into communal quarters where two to four households with one or two rooms each shared a common cooking area and bathroom. In older structures toilets were often outbuildings in a rear courtyard along with sheds to store fire wood. As families grew, their space remained constant. Communal rooms were passed down in the family. Newly married couples often lived with parents due to long waiting lists for rooms. Anyone who has seen the movie version of *Doctor Zhivago* or read Lidiia Chukovskaia’s *Maria Petrovna* is familiar with such communal households. Former serfs, factory

workers and professionals jostled around each other, while a Committee Chairman set kitchen schedules, assigned tasks, resolved conflicts and assessed fines on persons who were not communal enough. Bickering was common. A person who lost employment could be voted out of her quarters on the charge of parasitism. There was little privacy.

Artists and intellectuals if they maintained good status in respective unions, such as the Leningrad Writers' Union, qualified for space in communal halls that often included dining facilities, but those who were not accepted into membership, who were expelled, or who, like Akhmatova in 1934 protesting the treatment of novelists Boris Andreevich Pil'niak (1894-1938) and Evgenii Ivanovich Zamiatin (1884-1937), refused membership were doomed to a precarious existence. As late as the 1964 Joseph Brodsky could be found guilty of parasitism and sent to a Siberian camp.

Artists and intellectuals without regular employment and without union membership led nomadic hand-to-mouth lives as the Mandel'shtams did after Osip's first exile to Voronezh or Nikolai Alekseevich Kliuev (1884-1937) and Velimir Khlebnikov (1885-1922) in their final years. Moving into a friend's household even to dividing a room with a screen was one solution.

Thus, the Bohemian sexual and relationship experimentation of the 1910s along with the early Soviet legislation governing marriage, gender equality and the status of homosexuals reinforced by the housing shortage and the fact that most people in cities lived in communal households, fostered conditions in which persons inclined to try various *ménage à trois* arrangements could with relative little fear of ostracism. Without narrating the evidence or analyzing the inner dynamics of these households, among major writers of the period, we can list the following examples.

- Mikhail Kuzmin's arrangement with Sergei and Ol'ga Sudeikin in the early 1910s.
- Gumilev's and Akhmatova's brief inclusion of Kuzmin in their household in the early 1910s.
- Vladimir Maiakovskii's place in the home of Osip and Lili Brik from the early years after the Revolution until his suicide.
- Nikolai Klyuev's role in Sergei Aleksandrovich Esinin's (1895-1925) life both between and during his various marriages and affairs, from the time they met in the early 1910s until Esinin's suicide.
- Sergei Borisovich Rudikov's (1909-1944) residence with Osip and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam during the Voronezh years in the mid-1930s.
- Mandel'shtam's simultaneous relationships with his wife and Mariia Sergeevna Petrovykh (1908-1979).
- The years of Pasternak's uneasy transition from his first to his second marriage.
- Pasternak's two household after commencing his relationship with Ol'ga Ivinskaia.
- Kuzmin, Iuri Iurkun and Ol'ga Arbenina whose shared life lasted over a decade.
- Akhmatova's and Sudeikina's shared apartment with Artur Vincent Lur'e (or Lourié or Lurye) (1892-1966) in the early 1920s.
- Akhmatova's marriage to Nikolai Punin while he continued to live with his first wife, Anna Ahrens, and their daughter—a household that lasted over 20 years.

This list reflects only poets who have been well-researched since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Similar lists of novelists, playwrights, screenwriters, musicians, composers, dancers, actors, painters, sculptors and other intellectuals could be compiled.

In light of *ménages á trois* as a domestic-sexual formation during the Soviet period, as I reflect on Akhmatova's antipathy to Kuzmin reflected in *Hero's* erasure of him, I offer this explanation. The siege of Leningrad during WWII and refuge in Tashkent displaced Akhmatova from familiar if never optimal domestic arrangements which for most of her life had been built on *ménages á trois*. In her experience such arrangements always led to abandonment. These *ménages* left her psychologically scarred and when she returned to Leningrad she made an about face, living the remainder of her life without spouse in a way that evolved into the *grande dame* and matriarch of Russian poetry. Kuzmin's longevity and success in a *ménage á trois* celebrated in the erotic affirmation of *Trout*, because of her failed relationships, became for Akhmatova anathema. To punish his psychological and domestic "victory," she suppressed his text's intertextuality with her own and among her maskers assigned him the mask of Satan.

Three domestic abandonments prepared her for her post-Tashkent matriarchal grandeur. Akhmatova, Artur Lur'e and Sudeikina in the early 1920s shared a household. Gershtein describes this period.

Later I learned that the composer Artur Lurye [sic] had been her third husband; Punin was her fourth. Whereupon Lyova [Akhmatova's son Lev Gumilev] with a certain bravado and evident exaggeration said that Mama had had four official husbands. We now know all, thanks to the *Poem without a Hero*, that after divorcing Shileiko Akhmatova lived with Sudeikina and they were then joined in the same apartment with Artur Lurye (their life together is described most vividly in Yury Annenkov's [Iurii P. Annenkov (1889-1974)] reminiscences). From much later conversations with Nina Olshevskaya [Nina

Antonovna Ol'sheveskaia-Ardova (1908-1991)] I learned that Akhmatova told her in confidence; "We could never decide which of us he was in love with." At the beginning of the 1920s Lurye emigrated to the West, and Sudeikina followed some time after. Akhmatova remained in Russia. These facts are widely known. (Gerstein 389)

She and Lur'e became lovers well before the summer of 1921. Their *ménage* with Sudeikina has fired speculation among people who knew the events only from conversations with Akhmatova later in life. Feinstein in her 2006 biography says:

Her sexual involvement with Lurye [sic] is not in doubt; indeed Akhmatova refers to him as one of her "husbands." The exact nature of this *ménage à trois* in Lurye's flat on the Fontanka has been disputed. Perhaps, as Anatoly Nayman [sic] thought, Lurye was simply the fortunate possessor of an unequalled harem. If so, sharing a lover with Sudeikina would give an important new meaning to Akhmatova recognizing Sudeikina as her double. However, there have been others, including Yevgeny Rein [Evgenii Borisovich Rein (b.1935)], who have suggested an additional erotic element in the relationship between Akhmatova and Sudeikina. Emma Gershtein—who only came to know Akhmatova well many years after this period—was emphatic nonetheless in her declaration that Akhmatova would have had no idea how to conduct herself in a sexual situation of the kind Rein suggests. (92)

Lourié and Sudeikina went to Paris; he later moved to New York. After considering immigrating too, Akhmatova chose to stay in the Soviet Union, often citing the choice as a commitment to be with her people no matter what.

She lost track of both friends and although she revered her memories, their immigration was seen as abandonment, like Anrep earlier. Sudeikina made puppets of literary figures that after her emigration Akhmatova kept in a chest. Hemschemeyer (1997) comments on the group of Faust, Don Juan, Dapertutto and Jokanaan who appear as maskers in the poema:

These are all puppets left with Akhmatova by Sudeikina before emigrating from Russia in 1924. These puppets were kept in a special place and shown to friends only on special occasions. They not only portrayed legendary historical figures but also had features in common with famous contemporaries. Faust was identified with Vyacheslav Ivanov, Jokanaan with Shileiko, Dapertutto with Meyerhold. (840)

There are at least two photographs of Sudeikina with her puppets: (1) housed in the Moscow collection where she has a rather pensive look and is turned to the left (Reeder, between pages 238-239); (2) housed at the Akhmatova Museum in Petersburg where she has a pile of puppets in her right arm while her left lifts one over her left shoulder and her frontal pose seems more playful (Popova and Rubinchik, 88). Shortly before beginning the poema, Akhmatova learned that Sudeikina was still alive and living in Paris. Learning this was one of the poema's impetuses. The poema's second dedication is to her.

In the 1960s Lur'e and Akhmatova resumed correspondence. Among his most popular works was *Rosary: Ten Songs* (1914) from her poems. Akhmatova made drafts for a ballet libretto whose fragments she gathered under ИЗ БАЛЛЕТА «ТРИНАДЦАТЫЙ ГОД» (From the Ballet "The Fortieth Year") and sent him at least one draft. The ballet plot replicates the Sudeikina-Kniazev-suicide plot in a setting of

midnight maskers. T. A. Gor'kova prints the facsimile of six pages of full music score by Lur'e (3, 370-376).²⁶ Therefore, despite the breakup of their household in 1922 and subsequent break in communication, as the poem grew after 1944, both Lourié and especially Sudeikina maintained strong presences in it—unlike the suppression of Kuzmin and his poem. Kuzmin and Sudeikina had also lived together with her husband, and did so at the time in 1913 of the events which are recalled in Akhmatova's poem. In the erotic configurations of Kuzmin-Sudeikin-Sudeikina and Akhmatova-Lur'e-Sudeikina *ménages*, Kuzmin and Akhmatova shared parallel roles. They were sexually involved with one of the other members, whereas one member, Sudeikin, Lur'e, was involved with both of the others. If competition for attention or jealousy came into play for either Kuzmin or Akhmatova, Sudeikina was the object of the competition. Because of each's sexual orientation, neither was inclined to take Sudeikina as a possible sexual partner. How could Akhmatova not have reflected on the striking parallel between hers and Kuzmin's *ménages* with Sudeikina?

While the distant shadow of the Akhmatova-Lur'e-Sudeikina *ménage* is cast across the poem, Akhmatova's marriage to Punin was a fresh and daily situation during the period of its composition. This is the second abandonment that grounds the poem. From 1926 when their marriage commenced, Akhmatova lived at Punin's apartment on the Fontanka, the Fontana House, along with his first wife Anna Arens Punina and their daughter Irina. Akhmatova helped raise Irina, and continued to live with the Punina women after she separated from Punin in 1938. He returned to his first wife, and later took a third wife. Forced from his positions at the Academy of Art and the university, Punin was imprisoned in 1949. He died in the camp Abez in Vorkutlag in 1953. Anna

Arens Punina died in 1943. When Akhmatova returned to Leningrad after the war she resumed domestic relations in the Punin apartment which sometimes included her son, Lev. He was rearrested in 1949. Irina had a daughter who grew up in the house too. Even though Punin dissolved his marriage to Akhmatova in 1938, they continued to care about the other's welfare. When he and Punina were evacuated from Leningrad their train passed through Tashkent. Akhmatova greeted them during a rest stop handing them an armful of roses. This occasioned passionate letters from Punin, which she kept for the rest of her life. During both his imprisonment in 1938 and his sentence to camps in 1949, she sent him parcels and tried to make his life bearable. All accounts paint their marriage as stormy. The *ménage* survived its various permutations for 20 years, but Akhmatova after 1938, even earlier by some accounts, was treated like a pariah with often limited food and fire wood. Akhmatova biographers portray Punin as disloyal and a household tyrant. His recently edited diaries (1999) balance this picture by showing the complexity of emotion and artistic communication between the two—and the passion. Despite its stresses, in her role as matron after the war she continued to live with the Punina women and eventually became the family matriarch.

As her relationship with Punin came to an end, Akhmatova started another in 1937 with the widowed Dr. Vladimir Garshin (1887-1956). During the war he stayed in Leningrad and did heroic service on behalf of the war's injured and maimed. He and Akhmatova carried on a faithful correspondence during the war and she believed he promised marriage on her return to the city—a proposal she mentioned to close friends. In the first version, section three of the poem is dedicated “To Garshin”—a dedication later changed to “To My City.” On her return, Garshin met her at the station, as planned,

and then they secluded themselves for a couple hours' talk. Akhmatova learned that he had remarried. Akhmatova destroyed his letters and he became a *persona non grata* about whom she never spoke. She removed the dedication to him and deleted other passages which alluded to him. No one knows the exact nature of the conversation that first day back in Leningrad. Garshin may have thought he could salvage his relationship with Akhmatova. Did he propose that she be his mistress? Did he propose some kind of three-way domestic arrangement? Clearly, after almost 35 years of sharing various lovers and husbands with other women, this time Akhmatova was decisive in her "no."

The "no" to Garshin turned out, although she may not have foreseen it fully at the time, to be a "no" to all marriages, lovers and shared domestic-erotic households. Suggestions of post-war "affairs" have not been substantiated.²⁷ In place of suffering wife she embraced the persona of widowed matron. Where the Akhmatova-Lur'e-Sudeikina *ménage* casts a deep shadow across the poem, Garshin's presence is surgically removed. The Punin household hardly touches the poem at all. Vladimir Kazimirovich Shileiko (1891-19300 who was husband number 2, is a faint shadow in a few lines. Gumilev (husband number 1) is an unspoken presence layered in dozens of allusions to several of his poems.

A definitive solution to some of the problems posed here would hinge on information from Akhmatova that does not exist. The evidence marshaled in this essay however supports a strong hypothesis. In place of a conclusion, let this hypothesis therefore stand. Akhmatova's antipathy to Kuzmin and in particular her judgment of *Trout* as "salacious" is related to suppression of acknowledgment of his poem's intertextual connections to hers. Both works engage recollections of similar "plot"

materials, in particular Sudeikina's seduction of Kniazev, but reach opposite moral and psychological positions regarding the erotic and domestic arrangements of a *ménage à trois*. The late antipathy toward Kuzmin which superficially sounds like homophobic attack, in the context of Soviet sexual mores, is better understood as congruent with her "about face" and existential "no" to *ménage à trois* relationships. As she assumed the role of *grande dame* and widowed matron, she looked back on her own youth with a guilt that saw herself as complicitous with the callous and teasing seductions of Sudeikina—her double. Her "about face" was in response to a long series of *ménages à trois*, each ending in abandonment. This history culminated in the end of her marriage to Punin. The failed attempt to build a marriage with Garshin was her last attempt, so that the poet of *Poem Without a Hero*, on her return to Leningrad after the war, became a different woman—a woman who spoke with a larger public voice than she had in any prior work except *Requiem*—a poet no longer charged by the nuanced moments of erotic seduction and rejection, but rather on who song on the high wires of time in its flight as life lived inside retributive history. Kuzmin's poema not only carried the erotic nuance and charge of her early manner, it affirmed the transcendent bonding between men in an erotic union that accommodated the viability of a *ménage à trois* in which one of the men is also involved with a woman. This view of erotic and domestic relations had become anathema to the post-war Akhmatova. Her response was to suppress his poema's connection to hers, to denounce him in conversation, to reject his poema as "salacious" and to assign him the masker-role of Satan in her poema. Her antipathy is too intense to have been caused simply by his dismissive 1923 essay about her and Maiakovskii, or his literary friendship with Anna Radlova that began almost 20 years earlier. In a poema that

imagines the past as uninvited spectral shades, *Trout* casts a shadow across *Hero* qualitatively different from the layers of allusions and references from Pushkin, Blok, Dostoyevskii, Mandel'shtam and many other. Akhmatova invites, as Naiman says, those poets' "transplanted . . . quotations, regenerating them so that the foreign tissue was compatible with her own. Kuzmin was made absent and silent, but like his Satan's tail, it does not stay hidden beneath the fabulous fabric of language she weaves to bury it.

¹ Poema is the word usually used in English for the 19th century Russian genre of a long poem that mixed narrative and reflective elements. Editions of Russian poets typically group their poetry, regardless of chronology, in a section together. In English, works as disparate in style and length as Wordsworth *The Prelude* and Eliot's *The Waste Land* might fit the genre definition of poema. Originally it was always narrative in structure, but cycles of poems around a narrative situation came to be called poetry as well. Both *Requiem* and *Poem Without a Hero* are referred to as poetry.

² Unlike earlier editors, and translators of the poema into English, who present redacted texts drawing from various sources and variants, T. A. Gor'kova's variorum edition of Akhmatova's works, prints four complete versions of *Poem Without a Hero*.
Version 1, pp. 71-100.

1913 ГОД,
ИЛИ
ПОЭМА БЕЗ ГЕРОЯ
И
РЕШКА

The Year 1913,
or
Poem Without a Hero,
And Flip Side

Version 2, pp.101-152.

1913 ГОД,
ИЛИ
ПОЭМА БЕЗ ГЕРОЯ
ТРИПТИХ

1940—1945

Сочинение
Анны Ахматовой

Ленинград

1946

The Year 1913,
or
Poem Without a Hero,
Triptych

1940-1945

A Work By
Anna Akhmatova

Leningrad 1946

Version 3, pp.153-218.

1913 ГОД,
ИЛИ
ПОЭМА БЕЗ ГЕРОЯ

ТРИПТИХ

1940-1945

Сочинение
Анны Ахматовой

Ленинград 1946

THE YEAR 1913,
POEM WITHOUT A HERO

TRYPITCH

1940-1945

A Work By
Anna Akhmatova

Version 4, pp.219-288.

ПОЭМА БЕЗ ГЕРОЯ

ТРИПТИХ

Сочинение

Анны Ахматовой

Ленинград—Ташкент—Москва

1956

POEM WITHOUT A HERO

TRYPITCH

A Work by

Anna Akhmatova,

Leningrad—Tashkent—Moscow

1956

T. A. Gor'kova includes a facsimile reproduction of a handwritten copy of version 1 (57-88). Her version 4 is the same that Hemschemeyer uses for her 1990 and 1997 editions, but the two editions have significant differences.

Besides the variorum approach to the text of *Poem Without a Hero*, T. A. Gor'kova includes 150 pages of notes. Two other texts bear on our reading of the poema: ПИРОЗА О ПОЭМЕ PRO DOMO MEA (*Prose About the Poema: Pro Domo Mea*) (Gor'kova text (1998))—an assemblage of prose pieces that Akhmatova wrote to supplement the poema, and <ИЗ БАЛЕТА ТРИНАДЦАТЫЙ ГОД>> (<*From the Ballet "The Fortieth Year"*>—a collection of conflicting drafts of a ballet libretto based on plot material similar to *Poem Without a Hero*. Each of these has extensive notes as well.

Overall around 400 pages of T. A. Gor'kova's edition is material related to *Poem Without a Hero*.

³ Emma Grigorievna Gershtein (or Gerstein) (1903-2002) was a major Lermontov scholar. She met the Mandel'shtam's in 1928 and became one of their most loyal supporters during the 1930s. She was also a close friend of Akhmatova. In the late 1980s she began publishing short pieces of memoirs that spoke to particular issues in the public record about Mandel'shtam and others, which she felt needed correcting. These works were highly controversial for in effect she brought into doubt Nadezhda Mandel'shtam's reliability in *Hope Without Hope*. She produced other pieces in the 1990s all of which were collected in a substantial book published by Inapress (St. Petersburg) in 1998. For a period in the 1930s she was romantically involved with Akhmatova's son, Lev.

⁴ Nikolai Nikolaievich Punin (1888-1953) was Akhmatova's third husband. He was an art historian and critic. In 1922 he challenged Trotsky's definition of Akhmatova in *Pravda* as an "internal émigré." He was an ardent supporter of avant-garde art but also

interested in the Russian tradition. His book *Andrei Rublyev* (1916) culminated his work since 1913 as curator of the icon collection of the Russian Museum. From 1926 when their marriage commenced, Akhmatova lived at this apartment on the Fontanka, the Fontanna House along with his first wife Anna Evgenevna Arens Punina (her second marriage) and their daughter Irina. Akhmatova helped raise Irina, and continued to live with the Punin women after she separated from Punin in 1938. He returned to his first wife, and later took a third wife. Forced from his positions at the Academy of Art and the university, Punin was imprisoned in 1949. He died in the camp Abez in Vorkutlag in 1953.

⁵ The importance of Naiman's perspective to some Akhmatova scholars is driven home by the fact that before Wendy Rosslyn's translation of his 1989 book into English, published in 1993, Galina Kmetyuk translated about six pages published in *Soviet Literature* under the title "Akhmatova and World Culture." Kmetyuk's excerpt equates to Rosslyn's pages 24-29.

⁶ Malmstad and Bogomolov think that Villon is a mistake. "Akhmatova must have meant Verlaine, not Villon, who never wrote about same-sex love . . ." (222). Verlaine was associated with Symbolism. By contrast Gumilev and Mandel'shtam had placed Villon at the center of the Acmeist canon, Akhmatova and Kuzmin knew both poets and had read Verlaine early in their youth. One explanation for her slip, if it is one, is that besides similarity in name, Mandelstam in an early essay had linked the two. His first published essay (written 1910, printed in *Apollon* in 1913) was «Франсуа Виллон»

(“Francis Villon”) and the first three sentences show where the two names in Russian are even more similar than in English:

Астрономы точно предсказывают возвращение кометы через большой промежуток времени. Для тех, кто знает **Виллона**, явление **Верлена** представляется именно таким астрономическим чудом. Вибрация этих двух голосов поразительно сходная. ((Seryeava 1, 169)

Astronomers are able to predict the return of a comet across a vast span of time. For those who know Villon, the phenomenon of Verlaine surely represents a comparable astronomical prodigy. The vibrations of these two voices is strikingly similar.

⁷ Kuzmin *Selected Prose and Poetry*.

⁸ The Russian verb “разбивает” is in the imperfective mood. Most references to the poema in English translate the title “The Trout Breaks the Ice”; Malmstad and Shmakov translate it “The Trout Breaking Through the Ice.” Their article is one of the most critically insightful in English. Their title is more accurate grammatically; more importantly, it reflects the poema better, for the trout struggles to break through the ice and succeeds only at the end. “The Trout Breaks The Ice” suggests that the action occurs and is over with, but the poema is about the effort and struggle to break through.

⁹ Michael Green’s (1980) information about the publication is partially incorrect (xxvi). He idealizes the last public reading in 1928 by Kuzmin and claims that he read *Trout* at the time; Malmstad and Bogomolov do not confirm this. He says the book was published in Berlin, but “On February 23, 1929, the ‘Writers’ Published House in

Leningrad' (Izdatel'stvo pистelei ve Leningrade) issued two thousand copies . . .”

(Malmstad and Bogomolov 234).

¹⁰ Akhmatova slightly misquotes Kuzmin's line which reads “. . . богаче всех живущих в Египте” (“. . . more wealthy than any man in all Egypt.”).

¹¹ Если б все, кто помощи душевной
У меня просил на этом свете,—
Все юродивые и немые,
Брошенные жены и калеки,
Каторжники и самоубийцы,—
Мне прислали по одной копейке,
Стала б я «богаче всех в Египте»,
Как говаривал Кузмин покойный . . .
Но они не слали мне копейки,
А со мной своей делились силой,
И я стала всех сильней на свете,
Так, что даже *это* мне не трудно.

30 марта 1961. Вербное воскресенье

Ленинград. Красная Конница (Т. А. Gor'kova 2, 101)

¹² The full text and my translation of the poem:

7

Если б я был древним полководцем,
покорил бы я Ефиопию и персов,

свергнул бы я фараона,
построил бы себе пирамиду
выше Хеопса,
и стал бы
славнее всех живущих в Египте!

Если б я был ловким вором,
обокрал бы я гробницу Менкаура,
продал бы камни александрийским евреям,
накупил бы земель и мельниц,
и стал бы
богаче всех живущих в Египте.

Если б я был вторым Антиноем,
утопившимся в священном Ниле, —
я бы всех сводил с ума красотой,
при жизни мне были б воздвигнуты храмы,
и стал бы
сильнее всех живущих в Египте.

Если б я был мудрецом великим,
прожил бы я все свои деньги,
отказался бы от мест и занятий,

сторожил бы чужие огороды—

и стал бы

свободней всех живущих в Египте.

Если б я был твоим рабом последним,

сидел бы я в подземельи

и видел бы раз в год или два года

золотой узор твоих сандалий,

когда ты случайно мимо темниц проходишь,

и стал бы

счастливей всех живущих в Египте. (Kuzmin *Стихотворения*, 112-4)

7

If I were an ancient conqueror,

I would sweep the Ethiopians and Persians,

overturn the pharaoh,

erect myself a pyramid

higher than Cheops's,

and I would become

more glorious than any man in all Egypt!

If I were a cunning thief,

I would pillage Menkaure's tomb,

sell the jewels to Alexandrian Jews,

buy up lands and mills,
and I would become
more wealthy than any man in all Egypt.

If I were a second Antinoüs,
like he who drowned himself in the sacred Nile, —
I would drive everyone mad with my beauty,
while alive, temples would be built to me,
and I would become
more powerful than any man in all Egypt.

If I were a great sage,
I would live within my means,
turn down offices and engagements,
watch over strangers' vegetable plots—
and I would become
more free than any man in all Egypt.

If I were the least of your slaves,
I would sit underground,
and once a year or twice a year, see
the golden patterns on your sandals
when you chanced to stroll past the dungeon,

and I would become

more fortunate than any man in all Egypt.

¹³ I have translated *Trout* and made it available on my webpage under the title “Mikhail Kuzmin’s *The Trout is Breaking Through the Ice: A Poem of Gay Experience in the Early Soviet Union (Russian Text, Translation and Introductory Essay)*.”

¹⁴ The Russian word “УДАР” is difficult to translate. Malmstad and Shmakov opt for “thrust,” to capture both the trout’s action in attempting to break through the ice, and to evoke sexual innuendo. But “thrust” and “thrust through” are so similar with the completing of action often implied in the action of “thrusting” that the verb seems a bit misleading. The Russian word carries considerable violence and suddenness. It means everything from hit, strike, give a blow, to slam as in slamming one’s fist down. I chose “stab” because one often has to “stab at” something a number of times before breaking through or completing the action, thus, the trout would stab at the ice. In English, “stab” also carries a secondary connotation of “to attempt” as in “He took a stab at it.” Thus, the sections of the poem are “stabs” at telling the story rather than the closure implied by terms like chapter or canto. The sexual innuendo is not as transparent as with “thrust” although more suddenness and violence are evoked, which seem part of Kuzmin’s intention. No single English word is fully satisfactory.

¹⁵ As Malmstad and Shmakov point out Kuzmin draws on a number of literary ballads: Tennyson’s “Enoch Arden” (which also has an Annie Ray), Bürger’s “Lenore” and its various Russian adaptations, and the Scottish border ballads like “The Demon Lover” with their ambiguities about who is living and dead. They also point a debt to

Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which is strong indeed. Not only does Kuzmin emulate Coleridge's ballad form, instead of the typically Russian one, the return of a mariner who has experienced some sort of transformative experience and must tell it, is at the heart of both poems (Malmstad and Shmakov, 130-1). Lermontov's "The Demon" with the theme of a lover who might destroy the woman's soul lies behind the poem as well, although Kuzmin's mariner deliberately renounces his demonic powers and accepts conventional marriage instead.

¹⁶ Another Kuzmin poem is related to his memories of Kniazev and presents the scene in the theater used later in *The Trout is Breaking Through the Ice*. It is poem 4 "At a Performance of the Play *I Have Not a Penny, But Suddenly Three*" from <ИЗ ЦИКЛА "ЗЕЛЕНЬ ДЛОМАН"> ("From the cycle "Green Dolomite") written in 1911-2 during their relationship. Green is associated with Kniazev as it is also in the cycle БИСЕРНЫЕ КОШЕЛЬКИ "Beaded Purses" written in September 1912.

¹⁷ The expressionist silent film classic *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari* (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*) was released in 1919, directed by Robert Wiene. It starred Friedrich Feher, Hans Heinrich, Werner Kraus and Conrad Veidt. Veidt (1893-1943) also played the lead role in *Anders Als Die Anderen* (*Different From the Others*) the 1919 polemical film in defense of homosexual rights. Caligari broke new ground in terms of suspense, camera angles and editing, and the use of surrealistic sets. The story played with narrative perspectives, reality and imagination, sanity and insanity. It was widely viewed throughout Europe and the Americas and quickly established itself as a classic and model. Later the expressionist style came to be associated with German Weimar Republic decadence which Soviet critics condemned as bourgeois and socially

reactionary, even through Soviet filmmakers learned from and borrowed techniques from German expressionist films like *Caligari*.

¹⁸ Both Gershtein and Feinstein discuss claims of Lesbian attractions on the part of Akhmatova for Sudeikina, Faina Ranevskaja (1896-1984) and/or Sofia Kazimirovna Ostrovskaja (1902-1993). They present the claims with considerable skepticism.

¹⁹ Count Vasilii Alekseevich Komarovskii (1881-1914) was “a poet highly esteemed by Akhmatova and her circle, author of *First Pier* (1913) and many posthumously published lyrics in the classicist style. Like here early poems, his work is associated with Tsarskoe Selo. He suffered from schizophrenia” (Hemschemeyer (1997), 787) which probably contributed to his suicide in 1914. Along with Mikhail Lindeberg (n.d.) and Kniazev, commentators have suggested he may be among the composite prototypes for the Dragoon Cornet in *Poem Without a Hero*, because of his suicide and remarks by Akhmatova in “Prose About the Poema: Pro Domo Mea.” For instance in piece 7, commenting on the possibility of a secret “hero” to her poem without one, she writes:

Already he who is recalled in the title and whose protection from Stalin was eagerly looked for, is not actually in the poema, but his absence is the foundation of much of it.

He [Vsevolod Kniazev] is not to be identified with the hero of “The Tsarskoe Selo Lyrical Digression” (Part 1, Chapter 3), and it is better not to introduce into the poema that guiltless Count Komarovskii, [even though] his initials are V. K. And he committed suicide in 1914 in a home for the insane.

Georgii Vladimirovich Ivanov (1894-1958) in Chapter 8 of his autobiographical *Petersburg Winters* fabricates a story about a deranged and mad Komarovskii found by

Akhmatova, Gumilev, Mandel'shtam, Gorodetsky and Ivanov himself on the bench in Tsarskoe Selo where the late Innokentii Fedorovich Annenskii (1855-1909) had often sat. Akhmatova often denounced Ivanov's falsifications but this one especially offended her. (Brown *Mandelstam* 13-16).

²⁰ Aleksei Nikolaevich Tolstoi's (1883-1045) 1921 memoir of Gumilev recounts that in 1908 Gumilev told him that he had attempted to kill himself by swallowing potassium cyanide in the Boulogne woods outside Paris (Sampson, 19). Akhmatova had turned down his proposal of marriage before Gumilev departed for Paris. One of the few direct references to this episode was in a 1917 poem by Gumilev, "Ezbekiah" from the volume *Bonfire*. There is also a more abstract poem called "The Suicide" in his 1908 volume *Romantic Flowers*.

²¹

Высокие своды костела
Синей, чем небесная твердь . . .
Прости меня, мальчик веселый,
Что я принесла тебе смерть—

За розы с площадки круглой,
За глупые письма твои,
За то, что, дерзкий и смуглый,
Мутно бледнел от любви,

Я думала: ты нарочно—
Как взрослые хочешь быть.

Я думала: томно-порочных

Нельзя, как невест, любить.

Но все оказалось напрасно.

Когда пришли холода,

Следил ты уже бесстрастно

За мной везде и всегда,

Как будто копил приметы

Моей нелюбви. Прости!

Зачем ты принял обеты

Страдальческого пути?

И смерть к тебе руки простерла . . .

Скажи, что было потом?

Я не знала, как хрупко горло

Под синим воротником.

Прости меня, мальчик веселый,

Совенок замученный мой!

Сегодня мне из костела

Так трудно уйти домой.

Ноябрь 1913

Царское Село (Т. А. Gor'kova 1, 139)

22

ПЛОД ЗРЕЕТ

6

Находит странное молчание
По временам на нас,
Но в нем таится увенчание,
Спокойный счастья час.
Задумавшийся над ступенями,
Наш ангел смотрит вниз,
Где меж деревьями осенними
Златистый дым повис.
Затем опять наш конь пришпоренный
Приветиво заржет
И по дороге непротрленной
Нас понесет вперед.
Но не смущайся остановками,
Мой нежный, нежный друг,
И объяснениями неловкими
Не нарушай наш круг.
Случится всё, что предназначено,

Вожатый нас ведет.

За те часы, что здесь утрачены,

Небесный вкусим мед.

1913 (Стихотворения, 310-311)

23

Malmstad and Shmakov note:

The woman in the cycle is very little described; she remains throughout a mysterious, fascinating, but destructive figure who plays the role of the obstacle to the poet's reunion with the beloved young man. She is described only once by the poet himself, when she first appears, sitting in the loge of an opera house during a performance of *Tristan und Isolde*: "A beautiful woman, like a canvas of Briullov . . . / Not bothering to adjust the scarlet shawl / Which slipped off her pearly shoulders" (139-40). The poet describes her as a woman surrounded by an air of scandalous affairs, a description that would fit Glebova-Sudeikina. In Akhmatova's "Poema bez geroia," Glebova-Sudeikina, following Kuzmin's description, appears "I bruillovskim manit plechom." In Kuzmin's novel *Plavaiushie-puteshestvuiushchie* (1915) [*Travelers by Sea and by Land*] many scenes are set in a cabaret modeled on the famous Petersburg Bohemian cabaret the Wandering Dog [the Stray Dog] (called "the Owl" in the novel) where Glebova-Sudeikina regularly appeared; one of the women is described as "recalling a portrait of Briullov" and her beautiful shoulders are mentioned as well. All these details point to Glebova-Sudeikina as the figure

Kuzmin had in mind when drawing the portrait of the woman in the cycle. However, Anna Radlova, to whom the cycle is dedicated, was famous for her beautiful shoulders and for the shawls with which she tantalizingly covered them. Therefore, quite possibly Kuzmin was thinking of Glebova-Sudeikina's role in the Kniazev affair when he drew the portrait but described Radlova as well. And then, of course, it was Arbenina, also an extremely beautiful woman, for whom Iurkun left Kuzmin. For these reasons it is safest to call these portraits composite and resist the temptation to press for one identification. Kuzmin himself, in the cycle's conclusion, hints at his method and the attendant danger for commentators: "The dead got mixed up with the living." In fact, whether the woman sitting in the opera house is even the same as the woman (Ellinor) for whom the young man leaves the poet is never made absolutely clear, but one can infer it is so. (Malmstad and Shmakov, footnote 20, 139-140)

²⁴ Besides the funeral poem quoted, two untitled poems are immediate records of Kniazev's confidences with Akhmatova: "Мальчик сказал мне: «Как это больно!»" ("To me the youth said: "This hurts!")") and "Каждый день по-новому тревожен," ("Each day is worrisome all over again . . .").

²⁵ Raznochinets emerged in 19th century Russian as an identifiable group of non-aristocrat intellectuals. As a distinct type, a Raznochinets typically prided himself on his reading and learning as his entrée into society and position, not family or class.

²⁶ The music T. A. Gor'kova prints (3, 371-376) is without date or explanatory notes; whether it is all the music Lourié wrote is unclear. The title page to the score reads:

Памяти

О. А. Глебовой-Судейкиной

Артур ЛУРЬЕ

Заклинания

Музыка

К

«Поэме без героя»

Анны Ахсатовой

(Отрывки)

In Memory Of

O. A. Glebova-Sudeikina

Artur Lourié

Invocation

Music

For

“Poem without a hero”

By Anna Akhmatova

(A fragment)

(T. A. Gor'kova 3, 37)

²⁷ Leiter in 1983 believed the encounter with Isaiah Berlin made them lovers (127) but Dalos (1999) and most biographers of Akhmatova and Berlin do not concur. The allegations of Lesbian attractions (to Faina Ranevskaya and/or Sophia Ostrovskaya) would have occurred in Tashkent or after the war, but Gershtein and Feinstein both dismiss them. Berlin, Ranevskaya and Ostrovskaya are the only persons linked to Akhmatova as possible “lovers” after Garshin.

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