

Towards the concept of semantic halo

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Abstract: This paper is focused on the “semantic halo of meter” («семантический ореол метра»), one of the most recognizable, popular, and widely used concepts in Russian verse studies. After the publication of Kiril Taranovsky’s article “On the Relationships between Verse Rhythm and Theme” (1963), in which the author addresses the issue by looking at the Russian trochaic pentameter and deals with one particular rhythmic variation of the specific meter, most scholars who have adopted Taranovsky’s perspective have overlooked this emphasis therefore effectively shifting focus from rhythm to meter. Mikhail L. Gasparov pointed out that “five semantic shades” are observed around trochaic pentameter. “These are (in the reverse order of relevance): Night, Landscape, Love, Death (triumphant or defied), and Road”. From this perspective, the author analyzes Osip Mandelshtam’s poem “Skilful Lady of Guilty Glances...” (1934; «Мастерица виноватых взоров...»). This poem has attracted a significant number of monographic studies; however, scholars have never examined the poem’s meter and its connection with the semantic halo of trochaic pentameter.

Keywords: semantic halo of meter; trochaic pentameter; poetic language; Osip Mandelshtam; Kiril Taranovsky; Mikhail L. Gasparov; history of science

In memoriam Aleksandr Iliushin (1940–2016)

1. The “semantic halo of meter” is among today’s most recognizable, popular, and widely used concepts in verse study. It refers to the ability of specific meters – apparently not *any* meter, however, – to carry along specific semantic associations or evoke emotive frames. In other words, such meter will have a meaning of its own. As Mikhail L. Gasparov has put it,

Every verse meter, and at times its every variety, has a semantic halo of its own, which is made up of semantic shades (just as the overall meaning of a word is made up of its contextual meanings). These semantic shades are in fact clusters of associations evoked by prior uses of this meter in certain genres, in connection with certain subject matter, and in certain types of register. For the reader, a poem’s

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meter works as a type of subtitle: it helps make predictions about the imagery, motifs, emotions and thoughts which it is built on (Gasparov 1984b: 105).¹

The historical trajectory of the concept, which is in itself captivating and revealing, was traced by Maksim Shapir in his article “The Semantic Halo of Meter: The Term and the Concept” (1991).

Kiril Taranovsky is credited with coining the phrase “the semantic halo of meter”. Its emergence is bound to the appearance of Taranovsky’s article, “On the Relationships between Verse Rhythm and Theme” (published only in Russian in 1963), in which he addresses the issue by looking at the Russian trochaic pentameter. Since its publication, the meter, as indeed the article, has become a classic in how exemplary its treatment of the link between rhythm and content is. One should bear in mind that Taranovsky’s article deals with one particular *rhythmic* variation of a specific meter. The scholar approaches the rhythmic and syntactic aspects of this verse form, discusses the position of the main word stress, and the emergence of regular word boundaries after the third syllable in the line, which is augmented by the typical location of verbs of motion. At the same time, most scholars who have adopted Taranovsky’s perspective – including Gasparov, who wrote mostly about the semantic halo of *meter* in general – have overlooked this emphasis, therefore effectively shifting the focus from rhythm to meter (cf. Lotman 1995: 304–305). The present essay also looks at the semantics of the trochaic pentameter, with its certain rhythmic peculiarities which we address in the concluding part of the paper. In the first section I will give an overview of how trochaic pentameter developed historically and how it was studied, and then I shall offer an interpretation of the metrical semantics of trochaic tetrameter which somewhat differs from Taranovsky’s original vision. Gasparov describes Taranovsky’s work as “having given impetus to the lively scholarly developments in the field” (Gasparov 1984b: 107, cf. also Gasparov 1979: 282); Shapir points out that coming to think in terms of “semantic halo of meter” “was reached [...] by rediscovering what was long since discovered” (Shapir 2015a: 402). According to Gasparov, Taranovsky, when studying the semantics of the Russian trochaic pentameter,

considered a number of poems composed in this meter (which are quite famous but rarely compared: “I go out alone onto the road” [«Выхожу один я на дорогу...»], “Here I am walking [sic!] along a wide road” [«Вот иду (sic!) я вдоль большой дороги...»], “Across the mountains, along dark gorges” [«По

¹ Translations from languages other than English are mine unless otherwise stated.

горам среди ущелий темных...»], “I am setting off on a journey, exposed for everyone’s gaze” [«Выхожу я в путь, открытый взорам...»], “Katiusha was coming on the shore” [«Выходила на берег Катюша...»], “The din has gone quiet. I have come onto the stage” [«Гул затих. Я вышел на подмости...»] and so on) and showed that the meter and rhythm of the poem (including rhythmic and syntactic formulas) and its semantics (the “theme of the road”, both the real and the figurative road, “the journey on the road of life”) mutually converge. He argued that this connection was brought about primarily by the powerful impression that was made on readers and writers by the original model – Lermontov’s “I go out alone onto the road” (Gasparov 1979: 282).

Shapir notes that “the connection between the ‘patterns of rhythm and syntax’ of trochaic pentameter with its ‘theme of the road’ had been discussed academically before 1963 a number of times, including [...] a study by Taranovsky himself” (Shapir 2015a: 397). Taranovsky had pointed to this connection already in his well-known PhD thesis he had defended in 1941, later to come out as a monograph in Serbia in 1953 (see Taranovsky 1953: 274). Besides, Taranovsky refers to Roman Jakobson, who “expressed an opinion that the movement of the rhythm keeps pace with the poem’s thought” (Taranovsky 2000: 374).

Jakobson touches on the semantic function of the trochaic pentameter in his Czech monograph on the verse of the romantic poet Karel Hynek Mácha, which he finished in 1937 and published in 1938. Despite his sweeping general statement that “The connection between the metrical and semantic aspects of verse is far from being a general rule”, Jakobson also points out that “in the framework of a given poetic tradition, there is a tendency to connect meters with a particular semantic sphere and emotional coloring” (Jakobson 1979: 464–465). In particular, he stresses how “already in Russian folklore this clear-cut form is used for the depiction of the dramatic wanderings of strolling players (*skomoroxi*)”. He continues his idea:

We encounter a folklorizing verse oriented toward trochaic pentameter in the XVIIIth century in Sumarokov’s satirical poem “Priletela na bereg sinica”, eloquently opposing a traveller’s impressions from abroad to the situation in his homeland. A peculiar cycle of lyrical mediations sharply interesting the dynamic theme of the road with the sorrowful, static motifs of lonely existence robbed of aspirations and leading to extinction begins in Russian poetry with Lermontov’s poem.

Lermontov (1841): *Vyхожу один ja na dorogu* (Alone I walk out on the road) [...].

Tjutčev (1865): *Vot bredu ja vdol' bolšoj dorogi* (Thus I drag myself along a wide road) [...].

A. Blok (1905): *Vyxožu ja v put', otkrytyj vzoram* (I walk out on the way open to my gaze) [...].

The poem of Esenin written just before his suicide (1925): *Do svidanja, drug moj, do svidanja* (Farewell, my friend, farewell) [...].

B. Poplavskij, a young poet recently deceased (1936): *Sneg idet nad goloj esplanadoj. Kak drev'jam xolodno nagim! Im dolžno byt' ničego ne nado. Tol'ko by zasnut' xotelos' im* (Snow is falling on the bare esplanade. How cold the naked trees must be! Perhaps they need nothing, they wish no more than to fall asleep) [...].

Without any doubt, the more recent poems reveal the operation of the order thematic, verbal, metrical and compositional models (that is the external relation), but the intrusiveness of echoes from this models is prompted by an internal relation, namely by the actual suitability of the meter for a certain imagery: verse structure becomes a direct component of symbolism; meter in itself gains meaning (Jakobson 1979: 465–466).

In his 1963 study, Taranovsky on two occasions makes reference to Jakobson's article quoted above (see Taranovsky 2000: 374, 381–382). In his letter to Shapir from 12–14 June 1991 the senior scholar is quite explicit: he “didn't really consider the link between the theme [of the road] and the rhythmic movement of the trochaic pentameter”, and “came across the link in Jakobson's major 1938 Czech article” (see Shapir 2015a: 399). After making an analysis of Lermontov's famous poem, “I go out alone onto the road”, where he develops his colleague's line of thought, Taranovsky concludes that it

evoked not only a whole series of “variations on the theme”, in which the *dynamic motif of the road* is opposed to the *static motif of life*, but also a whole series of poetic meditations on life and death in the direct contact of a lonely individual with the “indifferent nature” (which is at times replaced with an indifferent urban landscape) (Taranovsky 2000: 381).

Jakobson, however, was not the first “to trace the link between rhythm, syntax, and the semantics of this particular meter”, as Shapir shows (Shapir 2015a: 399). The evidence seems to suggest that Osip Brik was the first who pointed out the connection between the Russian trochaic pentameter and the “theme of the road” during the discussion of his talk delivered at a meeting of the Moscow Linguistic Circle on 1 June 1919. Shapir made a transcript of the proceedings of this meeting in the late 1980s and quoted a relevant passage

in his article “The Semantic Halo of Meter: The Term and the Concept”. Igor Pilshchikov published the proceedings of the meeting with an extensive commentary in 2017. Brik’s contribution goes like this:

About the trochaic pentameter it is interesting to note that it evokes a specific sort of association. See Lermontov’s “I go out alone onto the road”, or Blok’s “I am setting off on a journey, exposed for everyone’s gaze”, or Tiutchev’s “Here I am trudging along a wide road” (Pilshchikov 2017b: 169).

To be sure, Brik did not introduce the “theme of the road” directly; he used a more general phrasing. Still, all the three examples Brik adduced were later repeated by Jakobson (see above for quotation) and Taranovsky, with reference to the former. However, while Jakobson took an active part in the session of the Moscow Linguistic Circle where Brik’s talk was discussed – although he omits to acknowledge his colleague and forerunner in his work – Taranovsky did not learn about Brik’s observations before 1991’s insight coming to him from Shapir. Taranovsky was rather sceptical about how original these observations could be. He neglected the point about a possible thematic link between the poems of Lermontov, Tiutchev, and Blok, as apparently the scholar thought the shared rhythmic pattern to be of larger importance. Even this point, in Taranovsky’s argument, is framed in this manner: “[Brik] noted the tendency for weaker stress in the first ictus, while the second is fully stressed. The contrast is so dramatic that one cannot fail to notice it” (Taranovsky’s letter to Shapir of 12–14 June 1991)². Among writers and students of verse from the epoch of late 1910s – early 1920s, it was Sergei Bobrov, rather than Brik, who mattered more to Taranovsky from this perspective (see Taranovsky 2000: 378, note 13; 402, note 44).

Later on, according to Gasparov, Taranovsky “expanded his scope, systematized his material, offered an explanation” and therefore elaborated “a new approach [...] to the problem of the relationship between form and content in a poetic text” (Gasparov 2000: 419). Shapir is more sceptical in justification: he describes Taranovsky’s contribution as “merely expanding the range of instances illustrative of the different aspects of the semantics of the trochaic pentameter”. As Shapir, the radical polemicist, puts it: “Taranovsky’s assemblage is quite far from being exhaustive” (see Shapir 2015a: 398–399).

This assemblage has been further expanded by other scholars, including those who are critical of Taranovsky’s vision. Thus, Kirill Vishnevsky, who once

² Photocopy of the letter from Shapir’s personal archive courtesy of Tatiiana Levina.

claimed that “no element of verse has intrinsic semantic features” (Vishnevsky 1977: 159), elsewhere broadens the corpus of trochaic pentameters to 168 texts, including five-foot-trochaic lines from poems with lines of variable lengths³, although he accounts for the larger share of the “Lermontovian cycle” (Taranovsky’s coinage) by reference to “particular historical circumstances”, including Lermontov’s direct influence on the subsequent poetic tradition. In contradiction of sceptics, Gasparov replies that this case is not of simple, direct, one-way influence, as “not only can a meter be a sign of a number of themes; a theme can be signified through a number of meters [...]. In every meter, however, it tends to present itself in a somewhat modified mode” (Gasparov 1979: 284; cf. Tarlinskaja, Oganeseva 1986 and Tarlinskaja 1989). Defining the semantics of a meter is similar to defining the semantics of a word, so it can be ascertained

by inductively selecting, grouping, and systematizing as many as possible instances of its use [...]. In some cases subject matter comes to the fore, in others – emotive emphases (Gasparov 1979: 284–285).

Summing up his argument about the making of a meter’s semantics, Gasparov takes one step further in the analogy between lexical meaning of a word and the emergence of the semantic halo of a meter out of a range of semantic shades:

No writer coins his/her own words; s/he receives them from the forerunners, marked by earlier usages; the writer’s success is about putting those earlier usages to his/her own end. Similarly a verse meter, with extremely rare exceptions, can only be “someone else’s”, can only be received from forerunners [...]. This is typical of how historical and cultural continuity works. We often use figurative phrases like “memory of the word”, “memory of the genre” etc.; there is no smaller reason to speak of “memory of the meter”, which in turn is also part of “cultural memory” (Gasparov 2012: 12–13).

In his article “Dobroliubov’s Art of Verse”, Aleksandr Iliushin made his own contribution to compiling the corpus of trochaic pentameters with relevant semantics by pointing out two poems by Nikolai Dobroliubov (a famous Russian literary critic, poet and revolutionary democrat). In these poems,

³ This is, strictly speaking, not entirely admissible, as when analyzing verse, most scholars leave out lines of poems of the same meter but with variable lengths, deeming them different in rhythmical terms. There are 137 instances of regular five-foot trochees to have been indexed – see Vishnevsky 1985: 97, 99, 110–113.

trochaic pentameters are mixed with other meters. Iliushin also added four more poetic texts featuring pure trochaic pentameters which had not been acknowledged before. The reference to Lermontov's source made in the ironic key is obvious "I am leaving pensively the classroom..." [«Выхожу задумчиво из класса...»]. The other three texts contain build on the same set of motifs: life *vs.* death, travelling *vs.* sedentary life, love. Such are "I have come to you, ardent with passion" [«Я пришел к тебе, сгорая страстью...»], "The sun has cast its light on mountains' summits" [«Солнце осветило гор вершины...»], "You have fallen like the grass of the field" [«Пала ты, как травка полевая...»] (see Iliushin 1986: 27).

The love motif merits special emphasis, as neither Brik nor Jakobson or Taranovsky have highlighted it. As it is obviously present in a number of "Lermontovian cycle" poems in the later poetic tradition, the semantics of the meter in question should be broadened to include extra motifs. Gasparov points out the erotic element surfacing in its semantic halo beyond Lermontov's direct influence – it is rather driven by a generically elegiac tone:

The theme of love is inherited from Lermontov's two poems: they shaped the theme which would surface, more often than others, in elegiac trochaic pentameters: landscape description (typically nocturnal, which is usually – and independently of Lermontov – augmented by erotic motifs) and meditation on the life's journey and on death (Gasparov 1984a: 170).

Mihhail Lotman, who spent considerable time working on the semantics of meter in Russian poetry of the second half of the nineteenth century (predominantly in Afanasy Fet's and Nikolai Nekrasov's compositions), devotes one section of his work to trochaic pentameters. He remarks:

A considerable proportion of elegiac poems in trochaic pentameters are built around a complex opposition (the so-called "ambivalent antithesis") between the themes of motion *vs.* immobility, the temporal *vs.* the eternal, the disharmonious *vs.* the harmonized. Typically in describing this semantic shade, only the theme of the road is stressed (although Taranovsky highlights the antithesis of "motion" *vs.* "immobility"), but quite often the "Lermontovian cycle" includes – even in trochaic pentameters – poems where the theme of the road does not surface (thus, for example, Fet has an entire set of poems which follow closely Lermontov's elegiac frame and include such images as "night", "stars", "grave", and even "oak", but lack the motif of motion) while the theme of the road may appear in texts totally alien to Lermontov's tradition (as e.g. in most of Nekrasov's trochaic pentameters) (Lotman 1988: 134–135).

Although Gasparov did state that “the peculiar character of shaping today’s semantic haloes of meters does not yield itself easily to generalizations at present; it is alive and in flux, and has not yet become history” (Gasparov 1984b: 111). In his major work (which, as he puts it, “must have offered a reconsideration of the central charges brought against the entire framework of studying semantic haloes of meters”) he singles out, for trochaic pentameter,

five semantic shades which are more specifically construed than most meters considered earlier. These are (in the reverse order of relevance): Night, Landscape, Love, Death (triumphant or defied) and Road (Gasparov 2012: 368).

One should bear in mind that this study analyzes “more than two hundred Russian poems written in trochaic pentameters in the nineteenth century”. Twentieth-century poetry is left deliberately beyond the scope of Gasparov’s study; as the scholar explains, “the material is overabundant, singling out the ‘Lermontovian tradition’ is easy, but describing how it relates to other traditions is significantly more difficult” (Gasparov 2012: 336). The Russian National Corpus lists 1167 texts whose meter is indicated as trochaic pentameter and which, similarly to Lermontov’s “I go out alone onto the road” has alternate rhymes, where the first line has a feminine clausula and the second line has a masculine clausula.

2. In what follows, I will discuss Osip Mandelshtam’s poem “Skilful Lady of Guilty Glances...” (1934; «Мастерица виноватых взоров...», henceforth “Masteritsa...”). Anna Akhmatova considered it “the best love poem of the twentieth century”, and Tamara Silman, who studied the poem’s multi-layered lexical semantics, described it as “belonging among the most powerful pieces of love poetry” by Mandelshtam (see Sil’man 1977: 164 ff).

This poetic work has attracted a significant number of monographic studies: as is typical in Mandelshtam studies, every major poem is treated in at least a few articles. At the same time – and quite surprisingly – there has been no study of the poem’s meter. Patriarchs of verse theory Taranovsky and Gasparov failed to address the topic despite their sustained interest in Mandelshtam’s poetry, which they address in dozens of publications. Taranovsky limited his discussion of “Masteritsa...” by one remark (though an extended one) where he makes a few targeted points about the semantics of its meter:

The poem “Masterica vinovatyx vzorov” reflects Mandel’shtam’s brief infatuation with a young poetess, Marija Petrovyx, in 1934. [...] the water in “Masterica” has erotic connotations (for example, *poluxleb ploti*). This aspect of water symbolism

is frequently found both in Western European poetry [...] and in Russian [...]. The most puzzling problem of “Masterica” is the fish imagery. [...] fish became, in the poet’s imagery, an analogue of his human wishes: he asks his addressee to feed them with *poluxleb ploti*. In this poem, too, the water imagery is connected with the motif of death (“Nužno [sic!] smert’ predupredit’, usnut”). This is not surprising: the themes of water, dream (or sleep), and death are inseparable in poetry (see already in the first quatrain: *utoplennica-reč*). In the last quatrain, the poet calls his beloved: “Ty, Marija, – gibnuščim podmoga”. Thus, he compares his beloved to the Holy Virgin Hodigitria [sic! meaning Hodegetria]. There are several famous icons of Bogorodica-Odigitrija (Putevoditel’nica) in Russia (Taranovsky 1976: 149).

As one can see, however, the key motifs I discussed in connection with the trochaic pentameter – love, death and road – are present here.

Another prominent student of Mandelstam’s poetry, Yuri Levin addresses the semantics of “Masteritsa...” in a dedicated article; his discussion is now considered classic. The possible link between semantics and meter, however, is not discussed in Levin’s study. This is all the more baffling as, firstly, Levin made his own contribution to the elaboration of the concept of the “semantic halo of meter” (see Levin 1982; I discuss this article below), and secondly, while looking at another poem by Mandelstam “We’ll sit awhile together in the kitchen” (1934; «Мы с тобой на кухне посидим...»), the scholar remarked, making a reference to Taranovsky, that “the ‘wanderer’s’ trochaic pentameter may have contributed” to the overall “vagabond mood” of the poem (Levin 1998a: 26, note 9). It may be important also that the poem “We’ll sit awhile together in the kitchen” is written in a different variation of the trochaic pentameter – the one with masculine clausulae, while in his article Taranovsky studied “trochaic decasyllabic verse (trochaic pentameter with feminine clausulae)” (Taranovsky 2000: 373).

See below the text of Mandelstam’s poem in full with its interlinear translation:

Мастерица виноватых взоров,
 Маленьких держательница плеч,
 Усмирен мужской опасный норов,
 Не звучит утопленница-речь.

Skilful lady of guilty glances,
 Proprietress of small shoulders,
 [You] pacified the man's dangerous spirit,
 Drowned speech no longer sounds.

Ходят рыбы, рдея плавниками,
 Раздувая жабры. На, возьми,
 Их, бесшумно охающих ртами,
 Полухлебом плоти накорми!

Fish move, flashing their fins,
 Breathing with their gills. Here you take them,
 With their silently groaning mouths,
 Feed them with the half-bread of your flesh!

Мы не рыбы красно-золотые,
 Наш обычай сестринский таков:
 В теплом теле ребрышки худые
 И напрасный влажный блеск зрачков.

We are not red-gold fish,
 Our sisterly custom is this:
 Thin ribs in a warm body
 And the vain, wet glow of eyes.

Маком бровки мечен
 путь опасный...
 Что же мне, как янычару, люб
 Этот крошечный, летуче-красный,
 Этот жалкий полумесяц губ...

The journey on the dangerous road is marked
 by the brow's poppy-arch...
 So why am I, as a janissary, in love with
 This tiny, flying-red,
 Miserable half-moon of your lips?..

Не сердчай, турчанка дорогая:
 Я с тобой в глухой мешок зашьюсь,
 Твои речи темные глотая,
 За тебя кривой воды напьюсь.

Do not be angry, my dear Turkish girl:
 I will sew myself with you into a blind sack,
 Swallowing you obscure speeches,
 I will drink my fill with wry water in your name.

Ты, Мария –
 гибнущим подмога,
 Надо смерть предупредить, уснуть.
 Я стою у твердого порога.
 Уходи. Уйди. Еще побудь.

You, Maria,
 are salvation for those who are about to perish,
 I need to sleep in order to forestall death.
 I am standing at the firm threshold.
 Go away. Just go. Yet stay awhile.

13–14 февраля 1934
 (Mandelshtam 2009: 194).

13–14 February 1934

As Gasparov notes, “the vocabulary shapes the semantics of a particular poem, while the meter creates a more general background of the semantic tradition against which we read it” (Gasparov 1979: 283). Is it a pure coincidence that Mandelshtam should have chosen trochaic pentameter for a poem on unrequited love which clearly features the themes of journey on the road of life and death, and also incorporates a whole series of verbs of motion at the beginning of verse lines (“Fish move”, “I am standing”, “Go away. Just go”)?

In his analysis of the poem, Levin notes that its vocabulary groups together into “quite distinct semantic fields” (Levin 1998: 43). At the same time, the scholar underlines the fundamental ambiguity of Mandelshtam’s text:

Everything in the poem performs a balancing act on the hardly perceptible borderline between the inner and outer worlds, between introspection and extraspection, which is the hallmark of its semantic structure (Levin 1998: 36–37).

According to Levin, the key semantic nodes of the poem are

the mutually opposed themes of the “female” (with such attributes as being “weak”, “small”, “guilty”) and the “male” (with such attributes as being “dangerous”); the themes of muteness and the theme of the “underwater”, and of death, which is linked to the latter (Levin 1998: 37).

However, the scholar is mystified by the poem’s ending:

The last lines [of the poem] brim with contradictions and uncertainties. What does it mean – after what has been said – “I need to sleep in order to forestall death”? Does falling asleep mean “to die” or not? What is the “firm threshold” – salvation or death? (Levin 1998: 39).

Mihhail Lotman offers a number of corrections and qualifications to Levin’s analysis; his insights, first published in 1982, were expanded 30 years later. Giving an overview of Levin’s argument, Lotman points out that “[Levin’s] article uses, implicitly yet coherently, the method of establishing semantic oppositions intrinsic to the text, [i. e.] the method developed by literary structuralism”. He also notes that “as a description of the semantic structure of Mandelshtam’s poetry which defies any sort of unambiguity, such an approach can hardly be considered an adequate approach to the object” (Lotman 2012: 130). As a more relevant lens, Lotman offers

the method of contextual and subtextual analysis developed by Taranovsky. [...] Taranovsky builds on the assumption (or, rather, the programmatic statement by the Akmeist poets) that words, as well as other meaningful elements of a poetic text, possess a sort of “memory” of their earlier usages, both in the poetic texts of the same writer and in the earlier literary tradition [...]. The contexts of prior usages of a given word, though not manifestly present in the text, can retain relevance and have an impact on how its semantics is interpreted (Lotman 2012: 130–131).

Lotman limits his discussion with the semantics of the vocabulary of Mandelshtam’s challenging poem and omits to consider the meaning of its meter. Lotman’s analysis and the “semantic map” of the poem he draws (Lotman 2012: 134) contribute, however, to a clearer understanding of the semantic shades which have been already described by the scholars as intimately associated with trochaic pentameter.

The three strands of the meaning of the poem which Lotman puts into the centre of his “semantic map” are the intricately interwoven elements of “speech” (importantly, not any sort of speech but primarily a lie, untruth), “death”, and “water”. They all work towards the making of the distinctive semantics of trochaic pentameter. Lotman concludes his analysis by stating that “the other semantic centre, which is not revealed on the lexical level, is love” (Lotman 2012: 139). While not introduced directly, “love” turns out to be closely connected with “water”:

[...] particularly prominent are the contexts coming from the poems, to which [“Masteritsa...” is linked with] other contextual allusions [...]. No less important, somewhat surprisingly, are [Mandelshtam’s] translations: “This is water ebbing” (from Barbier) and “When the earth falls asleep and the sweltering day ends” (from Petrarch). These are the relevant passages (italics added):

Water is inconsistent in speech,
Half-hard, half-sweet; how is it
That one and the same *beloved lady* is *double-faced*?
A thousand times a day, to my own astonishment,
I must *die*, in reality...

(“When the earth falls asleep” [«Когда уснет земля и жар отпышет...»], 1934–1935).

Semantic motifs here are the same as in “Masteritsa...”: *water – speech – love – deception – death* (Lotman 2012: 132–133).

Sofia Poliakova draws attention to the same aspect of the semantics of water in the poem under consideration; she believes that “[Mandelstam’s] poem is entirely reliant on the erotic theme; its tragic trajectory is between ‘Just go’ and ‘Yet stay awhile’” (Poliakova 1997: 100):

Water is symbolically ambivalent in poetry: it is simultaneously love, life, light, warmth, speech (as manifestation of life) and death, darkness, muteness (as manifestation of death), coldness (Poliakova 1997: 92).

Concluding the discussion of the love theme, which remains practically unseen on the lexical level of “Masteritsa...”, it is important to quote Sergei Averintsev’s judgement: “If we describe the elementary principles of Mandelstam’s poetics [...], the ‘centre of gravity’ will move to the negative assertions; it is crucial what Mandelstam *has not*” (Averintsev 1990: 213). Shapir suggested one correction: “Mandelstam is predominantly characterized by what he has in small quantity” (Shapir 2015b: 33).

To sum up the scholarship thus far, we understand, at least to a certain extent, Mandelstam’s complex antinomy between love and death (both semantic shades are very important for Russian trochaic pentameter). We may also add an (indirect) theme of the road: cf. Taranovsky’s remark, where the line “You, Maria, are salvation for those who are about to perish” (which is, *inter alia*, a paraphrase of the title of a famous church in Venice *Santa Maria della Salute* – see Levin 1998: 44, note 27; Taranovsky 1976: 149; Taranovsky 2000a: 100) is interpreted as a reference to the icon image of Virgin Hodegetria (‘She who shows the way’ [«Путеводительница»]):

The second line of the last stanza (“I need to sleep in order to forestall death”) is not entirely clear. The “firm threshold” refers to a solidly made decision; the resolutely sounding line suggests it is a decision to forsake love. The author’s excited and doubting tone in the next line, however, speaks against this (Poliakova 1997: 99).

It is revealing that these words are the verbs of motion which are prominent in other poems by Mandelstam:

[...] “go away” and “just go” form a natural connection in the semantic net. On the one hand, “*Ruining* myself [...] As moth flying to a midnight light, / I want to *go away*” (“To German Speech” [«К немецкой речи»], 1932), or “How can I *escape* from this festive *death*?” (“Venice life” [«Венецийская жизнь»], 1920);

cf. however “To *stay for a while* and to play with people!” (“Stanzas” [«Стансы» («Я не хочу среди юношей тепличных...»)], 1935) (Lotman 2012: 139).

It is common knowledge in Mandelshtam studies that his poetics is based on shifts: supplanting one nominal element for another (often a proper name: “Not Helena – another one” [«Не Елена – другая»]); on change (often motivated by phonetic considerations: “Not Salome, no, but a straw” [«Не Саломея, нет, соломинка скорей»]); and, on confusing or forgetting words (“I have forgotten the word I was about to say” [«Я слово позабыл, что я хотел сказать»]). These are hallmarks of Mandelshtam’s style. In “Masteritsa...”, the poet follows the same strategy of concealing the central themes and placing them all into the subtext, disguising them through misguiding vocabulary:

[...] in such cases, it is useful to think in terms of a “semantic anagram” [...].

Thus, the semantic structure of the poem in question is to a large degree mapped onto the intersection of two oppositions: “life” vs. “death” and “truth” vs. “untruth”. However, the entire narrative and, consequently, the vocabulary is centred exclusively around the second members of the oppositions (Lotman 2012: 139).

Lastly, we should always bear in mind the core feature of Mandelshtam’s poetics; for him,

not only is text the ultimate goal for the word, but the opposite is also true: the word is the ultimate goal for text. More than that: word is the ultimate goal for the entire enterprise of writing (Lotman 1996: 61).

In this light, the verse “*The journey on the dangerous road* is marked by the brow’s poppy-arch” [«Маком бровки мечен путь опасный»] may be interpreted as a direct reference to the theme of the road, which bears all the relevant connotations of the semantics of the trochaic pentameter. As Levin notes, “in terms of narrative development, the 5th [stanza of the poem] adds specificity to what has been said in the 4th [stanza] about the journey *on the dangerous road*: the journey proves detrimental [...], as it has to do with the untruth” (Levin 1998: 39). Evgeny Soshkin points out that this line simultaneously encrypts and stands for a number of idiomatic phrases which connote challenging one’s fate (i.e. a variation of life viewed as a road/journey):

The “brovka” [“brow/edge”] has a strong correlation with the “put’ opasnyj” [“journey on the dangerous road”] as implied in the idiom “khodit’ po brovke” [“to walk on edge”]. Because of the “half-moon”, “janissary”, and the yataghan concealed in the “MECHen” [“mech” – sword], the other hyponym of the same idiom is brought into equation – “run the blade” (Soshkin 2015: 250).

The very character of the poem’s ambiguous message comes as the ultimate intellectual challenge for the critics and scholars may have contributed to their partial neglect of the meter of “Masteritsa...” This is also a characteristic example of how the two directions of research – studying the poetic text as a set of formal features, on the one hand, and as a complex semantic unity, on the other, – did not meet each other before. In his article on how Petrograd and Moscow formalists interpreted Aleksandr Potebnja’s concept of the “inner form of the word”, Igor Pilshchikov notes that “the polemics of the formalists against Potebnja resulted eventually in the delineation of poetic semantics and verse semantics” (Pilshchikov 2017a: 53). Speaking about Mandelshtam’s “Masteritsa...” we can see, on the one hand, such scholars as Taranovsky and Gasparov, who deal with the semantics of verse forms and the concept of the “semantic halo” (at the same time both are experts in Mandelshtam’s poetics). On the other hand, however, such prominent researchers as Yuri Levin and Mihhail Lotman analyze Mandelshtam’s poem only from the point of view of its poetic semantics (meanwhile both are high professionals in verse studies).

At the same time, let us emphasize that we are dealing with a poem in trochaic pentameter featuring the theme of a turbulent (“dangerous”) journey on the road of life, which is also apparently pernicious in its deathly manner. The latter is “not only opposed to the static theme of desperation of life, but also [...] is furnished with other emphases, such as e.g. the theme of love [in our case unrequited. – *M. T.*] and separation” (Taranovsky 2000: 391).

3. Concluding his article, Taranovsky asks a question of whether the link between meter and semantics is the one made “naturally” or “conventionally”. Both theoretic possibilities were already formulated by Jakobson:

There are many cases where the same author uses identical metrical and strophic form in poems of entirely heterogeneous types, and of quite different emotional tuning and themes. On the other hand, in the framework of a given poetic tradition, there is a tendency to connect certain meters with a particular semantic sphere and emotional coloring [...]. A particular poetic form can – either because of its origin or through mere convention – be so closely associated with a particular literary school, with a certain poetic genre, with a

certain national or social background, that in a new use it evokes the impression of a kind of metrical quotation [...]. The Russian trochaic pentameter, a relatively rare form, juxtaposes two strong downbeats, especially strong because weak downbeats surround them (the first is preceded and the second is followed by them): — \cup — \cup — \cup — \cup — \cup (—). Certainly this sharp asymmetry, this brokenness of the rhythmical step, this vehement interruption of usual, regular periodicity, renders the meter especially appropriate for the theme of agitated walking (Jakobson 1979: 464–465).

According to Shapir, Taranovsky consistently failed to distinguish between the two. In the opening part of his article, the scholar submits that the “expressive haloes” take their shape “in different historical contexts across national literary traditions (either independently or under foreign influence)” (Taranovsky 2000: 372); however, he – much to his own surprise – remarks in his conclusion: “It is impossible to account for all these facts exclusively in terms of influences and interactions. One faces the necessity to assume the existence of a whole range of convergent phenomena [...] one has to make the assumption of a synaesthetic connection between the rhythmic movement of Russian trochaic pentameter and the rhythm of human walking pace” (Taranovsky 2000: 401; cf. Shapir 2015a: 400–401).

Building on Taranovsky’s insights Gasparov refutes “organic” interpretations and has total confidence in the historical explanation:

We will attempt to distinguish the metrical-semantic aspect of the problem from the rhythmical-semantic and to show that the “historical” explanation, which relies solely on the concept of literary tradition, is in itself sufficient and compelling (Gasparov 2012: 336).

I would argue, however, that in describing origins and functioning of a specific semantic halo it may be more productive to think in terms of “genetic (contact) influence” vs. “(typological) patterns of cultural memory”. In this regard, the subtitle of the major book by Gasparov, where he attempts to draw a bottom line of years of research, is illuminating: *Meter and Meaning. On One Mechanism of Cultural Memory* (1999).

In closing of his article, Taranovsky claims that “studying verse meter in connection with poetic semantics presents interest not only for theory and history of literature, but for semiotics at large” (Taranovsky 2000: 403). The scholar never followed up on this statement of his; it gave rise, however, to a dedicated article by Levin who treats the dynamics of historical developments

in a meter's semantic halo as "a manifestation of one of the semiotic mechanisms of culture":

There emerges – by way of either invention or borrowing from another culture – a new cultural code, which is in principle semantically void. At the time of its birth and later on, however, it becomes "pregnant" with the meaning, which is typically brought about by the appearance of a *chef-d'oeuvre* model. A paradigmatic masterpiece which uses the code establishes itself as a prominent cultural fact. The subsequent use of the code presupposes – consciously or unconsciously – drawing on the semantics (subject matter) of the model. The code is not void and flexible anymore; it is increasingly filled with lexical and syntactical associations, it becomes "genre-bound", it begins to function as a "blueprint" or "subtitle", and the combination of "the code + the meaning" is elevated to the status of a canon or literary template (Levin 1982: 152–153).

From this perspective, "Masteritsa..." is part of a curious cultural puzzle. It is clear that, for the trochaic pentameter, Lermontov's "I go out alone onto the road" works as the *chef-d'oeuvre* model. A scholar approaching the issue from a historical vantage will focus on instances of Lermontov's direct impact on Mandelstam. This has been done in a large number of studies, among which most prominent are Taranovsky's discussion of the "Concert on Railway Station" [«Концерт на вокзале»] (with a direct allusion to Lermontov in the line "And not a single star is speaking" [«И ни одна звезда не говорит»]) – see Taranovsky 1976: 14–15; cf. also Taranovsky 2000: 401, note 41), or the detailed analysis of the "Slate Ode" by Omry Ronen and Gasparov, who find a direct allusion to the "I go out alone onto the road" in the line "The chalcedony road from the old song" [«Кремнистый путь из старой песни»] – see Ronen 1983: 13, 51, 61–62, 73–76, 147–148; Gasparov 1995: 161–163, 175).

At the same time, when approaching the poetic texts written in trochaic pentameters which form the so-called "Lermontovian cycle" from the perspective of cultural universals, we notice that the corpus is heterogeneous. If anything, it is a hierarchic structure, with a few highlights which are placed, for one reason or another, at dominant nodes – in other words, they are widely known and highly representative of the semantics of the meter in question (it is hardly fortuitous that they tend to attract most scholarly attention). What are the texts that, apart from the tone-setting "I go out alone onto the road", which can be counted as belonging here? At the very least, they are Tiutchev's "Here I am trudging along a wide road", Blok's "I am setting off on a journey, exposed for everyone's gaze", and Pasternak's "Hamlet" ("The din has gone quiet. I have come onto the stage"). Taranovsky readily included the latter into the list:

Even in the post-war poetry there is at least one poem which entirely belongs to the “Lermontovian cycle” and which also, as it were, seals it off for our time. It is Pasternak’s remarkable “Hamlet” (Taranovsky 2000: 400).

This highlights how verses can interact with each other, though it is doubtful that one poet influenced another directly. So the theme of unrequited love is added to the trochaic pentameter by Tiutchev, and Mandelshtam’s poem follows this theme and can be put between Blok and Pasternak. On one hand Mandelshtam writes the word “vzory” (“gazes”/“glances”) in the end of the line, as Blok did earlier (cf. «Выхожу я в путь, открытый взорам...» – «Мастерица виноватых взоров...»); on the other hand, Mandelshtam’s poem anticipates the Shakespearian theme, which was added to the trochaic pentameter by Pasternak. Scholars had already noticed the Shakespearian allusions in “Masteritsa...” Mikhail Bezrodny mentions “why Mandelshtam gave himself in to temptation of Hamlet game” (Bezrodny 1996: 129–131) and draws attention to the image of Ophelia in the poem. Oleg Lekmanov makes the points:

In Mandelshtam’s works of 1930s the Hamlet theme was [...] unobviously continued in the poem “Skilful Lady of Guilty Glances” (1934) [...].

In the last stanza of this mysterious poem a distinct reminiscence from Hamlet’s monologue appears: “I need to sleep in order to forestall death” (cf. “To die, to sleep; / To sleep: perchance to dream”; act 3, scene 1), and in the first [stanza] there is a hint at Ophelia: “Drowned speech no longer sounds” (Lekmanov 2005: 264–265).

However, at no point is cultural memory seen as a mechanism for a cure-all. If we step back from the typological patterns to the historical point of view, one characteristic feature of the rhythm of trochaic pentameter is featured and deserves attention: its connection with the theme of the road. This was one of the key points of the observations made by Taranovsky, specifically the caesura after the third syllable and the frequently skipped stress on the first ictus, which is motivated by the caesura. Taranovsky draws attention to this point (see Taranovsky 1953: 283–285):

In a variety of poems written in trochaic pentameters the first line has a word boundary before the fourth syllable, which coincide with a cadence. In other words, such poems start from short (three-syllable) phrases consisting of two terms, for example “Noch tikhá” [“The night is quiet”] (Taranovsky 2000: 401–402).

This observation leads Taranovsky to a hypothesis on a natural connection between the rhythm of trochaic pentameter and the theme of the road: “such ‘rhythmical footstep’ of verse really corresponds to an abrupt gait of a human being: as if somebody made one step (or three steps) and stopped for a fraction of an instant” (Taranovsky 2000: 402). In 1982, Mihhail Lotman offers some remarks not only to Levin’s analysis of “Masteritsa...”, but also some corrections to Taranovsky’s ideas about trochaic pentameter. As an example Lotman takes Maximilian Voloshin’s poem “Northeast” [«Северовосток»] and draws attention to a constant word boundary after the third syllable. Lotman insists on its literary thematic representation without any connection with a human footstep (see Lotman 1982: 89–90).

It was Boris Eikhenbaum, however, who was the first to point out this feature in Lermontov’s poem. In his view the anapestic anacrusis bears more significance than even the caesura in the line’s opening:

Among his [Lermontov’s] later poems there is one which, in terms of its metrical structure, is extremely rare in the poetry of his contemporaries and which, at the same time, tends toward melodious patterns. It is “I go out alone onto the road” [...]. The rhythm in “I go out alone onto the road” features, first of all, a constant caesura: in all lines we see a masculine caesura after the second stress, which is constantly supported by the syntax. Besides, in the poem [...] the pre-caesura part of every line, due to a weak or omitted first stress, forms in most cases, as it were, the anapestic movement (⊔⊔—: vykhozhu, skvoz’ tuman, i zvezda, v nebesakh etc.). Alongside the strong caesura after the stress, this provides for a particular rhythmic impression (as if a combination of an introductory anapaestic foot with the iambic trimeter, i.e. ⊔⊔— | ⊔— | ⊔— | ⊔— | ⊔). Interestingly, the word groups in the parts [of verse lines] after the caesura tend to [form] three-beat groups instead of iambic divisions: “odin ja | na dorogu” ($3_2 + 4_3$), “s zvezdoyu | govorit” ($3_2 + 3_3$), “v sijan’ji | golubom” ($3_2 + 3_3$), “tak boľno | i tak trudno” ($3_2 + 4_3$), “ot zhizni | nichego ja” ($3_2 + 4_3$), “svobody | i pokoja” ($3_2 + 4_3$), “zabyt’sja | i zasnut” ($3_2 + 3_3$), “sklon’alsja | i shumel” ($3_2 + 3_3$). The resulting sustained rhythmic parallelism makes for an entirely remarkable character of the trochaic pentameter (Eikhenbaum 1922: 114–116).

The same feature of the rhythm was also highlighted during the discussion of Brik’s paper on 1 June 1919. This, as already noted, was the earliest venue where a case was made for a specific metrical halo of the trochaic pentameter:

[Ivan] Rozanov believes that it would be promising to study iamb in parallel with trochee. Apparently, each meter’s nature comes out more conspicuously in

comparison with another meter. It is interesting why there are so few examples of trochaic pentameter? It is also of note that the second stress in the trochee is most stable. Thus, Pushkin's anacreontics show no instances of omitted stress in the second foot. At the same time, the first stress is always omitted [...]. Why is that?

Brik. This is exactly what distinguishes trochee from iamb. [...] As regards the stability of the second stress, it can arguably be explained by the absence of stress on the previous [foot]. Stress becomes stable wherever it is preceded by the absence of stress. In iamb we have a dual tendency: on the one hand, the first unstressed syllable solidifies the first stress, on the other hand, the stability of the second stress undermines the first one.

Rozanov. Greeks used to make their anacreontics out of anapest plus iamb. Pushkin, by placing anapests of some sort at the beginning of his trochees, rendered the Greek patterns quite faithfully (Pilshchikov 2017b: 168–169)⁴.

To make it clear, when Eikhenbaum speaks about the “three-beat groups”, he means a “beat” as one syllable of “metrical word” (Gasparov’s terminology). So according to Eikhenbaum, “three-beat groups” are two metrical words, each composed of three syllables (3 syllables + 3 syllables in lines with a masculine clausula: “v siján’ji | golubóm”, “zabýt’sja | i zasnút” etc., or 3 syllables + 3 syllables + 1 “non-metrical” syllable in lines with a feminine clausula: “odin já | na dorógu”, “tak ból’no | i tak trúdno” etc.). The anapestic anacrusis contains two ictuses of five, the last three ictuses provide the “three-beat groups”: if there are 6 (+1) syllables after the caesura, there could be only two metrical words, each composed of three syllables. And vice versa, there could be three metrical words, each composed of two syllables (i.e. iambic words). Therefore, from the point of view of word boundaries, such lines as “Spit zeml’ja | v siján’ji golubom” may be interpreted as “anapest | + amphibrach + anapest”, not as “anapest | + iamb + iamb + iamb”.

In Mandelshtam’s poem, out of the 24 lines at least 16 – i.e. two thirds – conform to the tendency towards anapestic anacrusis. If one regards the borderline instances (“metrically ambiguous” words) as having weaker stresses on the first ictus (“Íkh, bessúmno ókhajuschikh rtámi”, “Ètot króshechnyj, letúchekrásnyj”, “Ètot zháلكij polumés’ats gúb”, “Nàdo smért’ predupredít, usnút”), their number reaches 20. Furthermore, we find ten lines that have a caesura after the third syllable in Mandelshtam’s poem, which is more than one third. Their bigger part is in the first and two last stanzas – the ones portraying the key traits of the heroine of the poem. Four of these ten lines follow the trend to

⁴ Cf. also Pilshchikov’s commentary (note 83) that Rozanov’s considerations regarding Pushkin’s trochaic tetrameter anticipate Eikhenbaum’s insights into Lermontov’s trochaic pentameter.

creating “three-beat groups” (“Málenkikh | derzhátel’nitsa plékh”, “Ne zvuchít | utóplennitsa-réch”, “Ne sercháj | turchánka dorogája”, “Ja stojú | u tvjórdogo poróga”), the other four could be described as “anapest | + iamb + iamb + iamb” (“Usmirjón | muzhskój opásnyj nórov”, “Ja s tobój | v glukhój meshók zashjús”, “Za teb’já | krivój vodý nap’jús”, “Ukhodí. | Ujdí. Eshchjó pobúd”). Finally, two lines skip the stress on the third ictus, and, from the point of view of word boundaries, differ from the both types (described above): “Chtò zhe mné | kak janycháru, l’júb”, “Nàdo smért’ | predupredít’, usnúť”.

Shaped in this way, the rhythm of “Masteritsa...” reveals a stronger link to another poem by Mandelshtam, which equally addresses the unrequited love of Maria Petrovykh and relies on a similar image of small/narrow shoulders (see Lotman 2012: 132). This poem is composed in its entirety in anapestic tetrameters (cf. the anapestic anacrusis in many lines in “Masteritsa...”):

Твоим узким плечам под бичами краснеть,	Your narrow shoulders are to redden under scourges,
Под бичами краснеть, на морозе гореть.	Redden under scourges and to burn in frosts.
Твоим детским рукам утюги поднимать,	You child-like arms are to lift heavy irons,
Утюги поднимать да веревки вязать.	To lift heavy irons and to sew mail-bags.
Твоим нежным ногам по стеклу босиком,	Your tender soles are to walk barefoot on glass,
По стеклу босиком, да кровавым песком.	Barefoot on glass and blood-stained sand.
Ну, а мне за тебя черной свечкой гореть,	And I am here to burn for you like a black candle,
Черной свечкой гореть да молиться не сметь.	Burn like a black candle and not dare to pray.
1934 (Mandelshtam 2009: 306)	1934 (Mandelshtam 1991: 67)

Both the poem’s meter and its imagery forcefully evoke the oeuvre of another major nineteenth-century poet – Nikolai Nekrasov, famously “a poet of ternary meters” (cf. Gasparov 1984b: 110). Quite memorably, he conjured up the “scourged muse” in his poetry. The meter of many of Nekrasov’s texts is also trochaic pentameter. As Vadim Baevsky notes, while in the early 1850s Nekrasov used this meter exclusively for parodies (originally on Lermontov

and later on contemporaneous writers), in the mid-1870s he started using trochaic pentameters in serious contexts. Compare also Gasparov's remark that "Lermontov [...] came up with new forms for the old romantic subject-matter. Following this, it only took Nekrasov to come along and rely on these forms as old, re-used for new realistic subject-matter – an act of re-framing, taking apart the once-single unit" (Gasparov 1984b: 112). Moreover, "As he turns to solemn themes, Nekrasov comes closer to Lermontov's rhythm" (Baevsky 1975: 156).

Mandelstam's reliance on Nekrasov's poetry became the object of academic study only recently. Fedor Uspensky, who dedicated a detailed study to the "Nekrasov's strand" in Mandelstam's poem "The flat is as quiet as paper" [«Квартира тиха, как бумага...»]⁵, sums it up like this:

Mandelstam's poems on Russian poetry and the texts composed in their orbit are, *inter alia*, a list of his "mentors" in poetry, of his sources; he explicitly declares that they made a major influence on his work. In the case in point, Nekrasov's input can be regarded as an enlivening performative framework, as it is strongest where his name is pronounced – among the poems with civic and political agenda, which quite unexpectedly sprout from the texts on Russian poetry (Uspensky 2010: 337).

We should add also that Levin reveals in the last stanza of "Masteritsa..." a deeper semantic layer, which can be referred to as "man and State' and has to do with the poet's experience of the oncoming state terror" (Levin 1998: 40, note 26). On the other hand, it may be Nekrasov who "prompted" Mandelstam an idea to use trimeters breaking up trochaic pentameter. Within his own aesthetic hierarchy, as is known, Nekrasov closely associated the two meters:

The original sketches of Nekrasov's poem ["The Hideous Year", written in trochaic pentameter – *M. T.*] were inspired by Victor Hugo's *L'Année terrible*. In 1872 Anna Butkevitch read it to her brother [i. e. Nekrasov – *M. T.*], and [Hugo's] peculiar romantic Alexandrines [...] were reflected either in [Nekrasov's] anapestic trimeters [...] or [his] trochaic pentameters (Baevsky 1975: 150–151).

⁵ Incidentally, it shares a ternary metric framework: it was composed in amphibrachic trimeters in November 1933, that is only three months earlier than the poems addressed to Maria Petrovych (see Mandelstam 2009: 183).

Just as “scholarship was finding its way” to the concept of the “semantic halo” “simultaneously through many paths” (Shapir 2015a: 402), similarly, many prominent students of Mandelshtam’s poetry, who have explored the semantics of one of his most mysterious poems, did not consider the significance of the meter of “Masteritsa...”. It makes me hope that the remarks above will become useful addenda to the work of my great forerunners.⁶

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