

‘Infernal’ subtexts in Brodsky’s poem *The fifth anniversary*

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Abstract. This essay explores the intertextual relationships of Joseph Brodsky’s poem *Пятая годовщина* — an occasional verse dedicated to the fifth anniversary of the poet’s enforced emigration from the Soviet Union. As is common in Brodsky’s poetics, the text is imbued with allusions to other texts, not only from Russian, but from Western *belles lettres*, as well. Through reminiscences of *La Divina Commedia* the lost homeland together with the beloved native city of Leningrad is paralleled with Dante’s “lost and accursed” Florence as well as with the lost St.Petersburg of Mandelshtam and Akhmatova, among others. The Dantean undertones are exposed not only on the semantical level of the examined text but in the metrical and structural aspects of the poem, as well.

The poem *Пятая годовщина* (Бродский 3: 147–150) was written on the fourth of June in 1977 as we can read from its title. It is a rare case in Brodsky’s poetry that the exact date of writing is put down by the author, to say nothing of placing of the date right in the rubric. This gives us reason to assume that the date has a special semantic function in the text. The date works here as a device for decoding the content of the poem. In Minc’s typology of the ‘secondary’ semantics of dates in literary texts, Brodsky’s use of the date not only orients the text in the extratextual, historical time, but it stands for a metonymic sign representing the text in its entirety, as well (МИНЦ 1989: 147).

We can say with certainty, that June 4, 1977 in Brodsky’s poem refers to a concrete event in the poet’s life. Five years exactly have passed at the time of writing of the text, from the day that he was compelled to leave the Soviet Union. Partially due to the date, marking off the significant turn in the history of the poet’s personal

life, a change which endows the whole text with a certain vantage point, *The Fifth Anniversary* could be called an occasional poem — a memorial written for the lost homeland by a poet in exile.

In *The Fifth Anniversary* the situation of the poet in real, historical time and space finds its reflection in many aspects of the text. The position of the poet in enforced migration recalls Dantesque undertones which, in fact, are abundant in Brodsky's poem. Consequently, my presentation is devoted to the study of intertextual relationships of *The Fifth Anniversary* with a focus on Dante's *Divine Comedy* as one of the main subtexts of the poem.

What then relates "PG"¹, a poem picturing life in the Soviet Union in the 1960's and the early '70's, to Dante's *Divine Comedy*? We can take formal aspects of the poem as a starting point. It goes without saying that the appearance itself of *terza rima* is meant to put the reader in mind of Dante. Brodsky employs regular sets of triple rhymes — three-line stanzas with triple feminine rhymes AAA BBB CCC, each section consisting of three tercets.²

In addition to the Dantean *terza rima*, Brodsky's use of Dantean numerology is quite obvious in "PG". As we can observe from the following, the symbol of the Holy Trinity — number three — occurs frequently in relationship with the strictly regular stanzaic and metrical form of the poem: each line has 13 syllables, and consequently, each triplet consists of 39 syllables³. Each section includes three triplets. Furthermore, "PG" is composed of 32 tercets altogether, whereas Dante's *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* are comprised of 33 cantos each. By this figure Dante alludes to the number of years of Christ's earthly life. By adding one canto as a prologue to *Inferno*, Dante made the total of the cantos amount to the holy number of 100 symbolizing perfection in the medieval mind. Brodsky's 32 "cantos" are not without symbolic significance either. The number indicates the age of the poet, five years back, at the moment of his banishment.

¹ Hereinafter *Пятая годовщина* is referred to in the text and in the footnotes as "PG"

² Dante, like Brodsky, employs only feminine rhymes in his *Divine Comedy*. Dante's rhyme structure ABABCBCDC... suggests a continuity which is lacking in Brodsky's use of rhymes.

³ with three exceptions only, all of them consisting of 14 syllables — in Section Two: "Неугомонный Терек там ищет третий берег", Section Three: "Там мучает охранник во сне стыка трехгранник" and in the concluding section: "Эпоха на колесах нас не погонит, босых".

As we can see, the Dantesque content is present in the very “substance of the verse”, to quote Efim Etkind’s⁴ expression; not only in the web of semantic relations manifested in the meanings of sentences, but also in the metrical and structural aspects of the poem, as well as in the poet’s use of grammatical forms and intonational and sound patterns.

The initial theme of the poem as such, a look back at the lost homeland from the perspective of five years of exile, assigns archetypal Dantesque tones to the “PG”. The perspective is set in the first three-line stanza which is graphically separated from the first section which consists of three triple stanzas. Like the above-mentioned prologue added by Dante to the “DC”⁵, it serves — together with a similar isolated *terzina* in the end of “PG” — as an explanatory frame to the visionary voyage back to the native soil:

Падучая звезда, тем паче — астероид
на резкость без труда твой праздный взгляд настроит.
Взгляни, взгляни туда, куда смотреть не стоит.

The motif of a star is familiar from the “DC”. Dante closes each section of his three-level universe with the word *le stelle* — the stars. For him they represent the familiar coordinates that emerge after his gloomy wanderings in *Inferno* and *Purgatory*. In the end of the “DC” it is the stars that are moved by the real living force of love.⁶ Brodsky’s other ‘Dantesque’ poem *December in Florence*, echoes this particular passage of Dante’s *Comedy*.⁷ Brodsky’s star, the fall of which the lyrical “I” is

⁴ See Loseff 1989: 194.

⁵ Hereinafter *The Divine Comedy* is referred to in the text and footnotes as “DC”.

⁶ *Inf.* 34: 136–139: “/.../ salimmo sú, ei primo ed io secondo, /tanto ch’io vidi de le cose belle / che porta il ciel, per un pertugio tondo;/ e quindi uscimmo a **riveder le stelle.**” (“We mounted up, he first, I following,/ till of the lovely things that heaven bears / I beheld some, through a round opening; and thence we emerged to **re-behold the stars**”). *Purg.* 33: 142–145: “Io ritornai da la santissim’onda / rifatto sí come piante novelle/ rinnovellate di novella fronda, / puro e disposto a **salire a le stelle.**” (“From that most holy wave I came away / refashioned, like new plants no blemish mars,/ made new again with new leaves: pure as they,/ and ready now for **mounting to the stars**”).

⁷ *Par.* 33: 141–145: “A l’alta fantasia qui mancò possa; / ma già volgeva il mio disire e il velle / si come rota che igualmente è mossa/ **l’amor che move il Sole e l’altre stelle.**” (“The high-raised phantasy here vigour failed;/ but rolling like a wheel that never jars, / my will and wish were now by love impelled,/ **the love that moves the Sun and th’other stars.**”). Compare to Brodsky’s lines in Stanza VII of *Декабрь во Флоренции*: “/.../ **неправда, /что любовь движет**

witnessing has something ominous in it, although he is thus given a chance to make a wish upon a shooting star⁸. The seeing of a celestial light of a falling star or a planet provides him with a visionary power of having a look, though a reluctant one, to the remote place which he left five years past. The distance between “here” and “there” is shortened by the sharp-eyed vision of a banished poet. His reluctance can be explained, at least in part, by the fact that atmospheric phenomena, comets in particular, are commonly thought to portend disaster.

But his clarified vision echoes also the imagined vision of a poet-seer *à la* Dante, endowed with insight into the truth of things that are far both in terms of space and time. In fact, the prologue in “PG”, as part of the composition of the poem, is characteristic of visionary poetry of the Middle Ages. It usually begins with a rendering of how the author either in a dream or in a vision was offered an opportunity to experience the things, often transcendental or supersensual by nature, which he subsequently depicts in his poem. The vision or the dream with its “fantastic”, transcendental aspects serves as a frame for the following representation, raising it often to the level of allegorical symbolism.

The perspective and subject matter of *Пятая годовщина* — an insight into the lost homeland — may be conceived as incorporating in a way typical of Brodsky some common motives of medieval visionary poetry, such as a visit to a supersensual state or to the Underworld, or a search for a lost beloved, which in this particular case is replaced by the lost homeland. The empty gaze of the lyrical subject begins to fill up with successive visions of landscapes that from his present point of view belong to “the distant elsewhere”. True enough, one can always assert that the clarity of the poet’s vision is not due to any supernatural powers but inherent in the very distance between the object and the observer⁹.

звезды (Луну — подавно)/ ибо она делит все вещи на два — /даже деньги во сне. Даже, в часы досуга,/ мысли о смерти. Если бы звезды Юга /двигались сю, то — в стороны друг от друга.” (Бродский 3: 113)

⁸ The motif of a falling star appears also in the poem *В озерном краю*, written in Ann Arbor in the year of Brodsky’s emigration from the USSR (Бродский 3: 25). It, too, seems to escape the wishes of the lyrical persona: “/...И ежели ночью /отыскивал звезду на потолке, / она, согласно правилам сгоранья, /сбегала на подушку по щеке / быстрее, чем я загадывал желанье.”

⁹ Radyshevsky, examining the main themes of Brodsky’s poetry in the light of Buddhist philosophy, argues, on the contrary, that the vision, and the desire of the lyrical persona to look “where there’s no use to look at”, testifies to the fact that

There is one more aspect in the composition of "PG" that recalls Dante's "DC". It is the word "there" ("там") which occurs 40 times in Brodsky's poem, 24 times in the position of an opening word of a line, of which 13 times beginning a *terzina*. Dante, too, often began a number of successive stanzas with the same word¹⁰.

Anaphoric words like "there", "here", "then" and "when", repeated at the beginning of two or more successive lines often emerge in literary texts in which the paradise myth has been used as a rhetorical structuring principle. According to Lessing Baehr (1991: 7–8), in messianic or prophetic narratives describing a future paradise, spatial adverbs "here" and "there" or chronological adverbs "now" and "then" have often been sufficient to mark the opposition between paradise and hell. The prophetic pattern is distinguished by its use of a first-person variant of the descriptive pattern like "There I saw" or "I saw", frequently used by Alighieri, as well. Since the prologue to "PG" sets the focus and perspective of the poem, emphasizing the fact that all that will follow are perceptions of the eye (although those of the mind's eye), Brodsky does not have to repeat the verb "to see" in the following stanzas.

Section One begins with a familiar Dantesque *locus* — the wood which was the scene of the prologue in the "DC". Only this time it is not the hero that has lost his way in the murky wood of errors, but the train in the second line pushing ahead on the plain in search for a destination:

**Там хмурые леса стоят в своей рванине,
Уйдя из точки "А", там поезд на равнине
стремится в точку "Б". Которой нет в помине.**

Brodsky's choice of the words picturing the forests which "frowning", "stand decked out in their rags and tatters"¹¹ gives a human shape to the trees. If the forests are perceived not only as referring to the vast

he has reached the condition ascribed to the illuminated, which the masters of Zen call the "inertia of memory", i.e. that you are already aware of the truth, but it is your old "I" who wants to take a look back (Радышевский 1997: 304).

¹⁰ See Bickersteth's introduction to the "DC" 1965: xxxv and, e.g. *Inf.* 5: 100–108 or 13: 1–9, *Purg.* 12: 25–63; here Dante begins four consecutive stanzas with the word "*vedea*" ("mine eyes saw") in describing the life-like sculptures on the tombstones. See also *Par.* 19: 115–147 or 20: 40–70. In *Par.* 19: 114–123 Dante uses the word "*li*" meaning "there" to open three successive *terzine*.

¹¹ The translation of "PG" in Brodsky's *Collected works in English* is made by the author, see Brodsky 2000: 241–244.

Siberian woodlands, but as depicting the masses of citizens comprising the “unanimous” population of the former fatherland of the author, (as we can witness in the poem *Laguna*¹²) it cannot escape the attention of a reader, tuned to read the poem in the light of *The Divine Comedy*, that the scene might as well be taken from Dante’s *Inferno*¹³. Furthermore, Brodsky’s dark, cheerless forests sound astoundingly similar to the “дремучий советский лес” of Mandelstam in *Четвертая проза*.¹⁴

Both of the presented *loci*, forests and plains cover vast areas of the Russian territory. They bear symbolic significance since they are often conceived as characterizing some main aspects attached to the mental landscape of the so-called “Russian soul”. Russian soul, ‘*shirokaja dusha*’ or ‘*shirokaja natura*’ with its breadth, depth and openness, is said to correspond to the Russian landscape mirroring the unlimited, boundless space. This idealized image of the national soul is promoted by the Russian self-stereotypes.¹⁵

However, the space that reigns supreme does not only have positive impacts on its inhabitants. Medvedev (1999: 16–18) argues, quite convincingly, that Russia’s space is not just quantitatively vast, but that it is also qualitatively infinite, amorphous and contradictory. Furthermore, endless space is seen as undemanding, forgiving and thus contributing to the irresponsibility of its inhabitants. Medvedev

¹² A trope of the same kind can be found in Brodsky’s poem *Лагуна* where few readers would fail to recognize under its Venetian disguise allusions to the Soviet Union: “[...] Звук отрицает себя, слова и /слух; также **державу ту, /где руки тянутся хвойным лесом** /перед мелким, но хищным бесом /и слону леденит во рту.” (Stanza VIII, Бродский 3: 45)

¹³ As for the Siberian woods, it would be tempting to combine the “forests in rags” with the falling asteroid in the prologue. As is known, the brightest fireball — a meteor of considerable duration and brightness — ever recorded fell on Tunguska, Siberia in 1908 causing the destruction of forest over an area about 2000 square kilometres, leaving behind forests “standing in rags”. As construed, the train would evidently be the Trans-Siberian railroad. Furthermore, the forest can be read as referring to a constant opposition of ‘Russia — The West’ manifesting the geographical or geopolitical theme in Brodsky’s poetry expressed paradigmatically in opposing sets of images, such as ‘The Wood — The Sea’, ‘Cold — Heat’ and Stagnation – Movement’, see Loseff 1991: 27.

¹⁴ “In mezzo del cammin del nostra vita — на середине жизненной дороги я был остановлен в дремучем советском лесу разбойниками...” (Мандельштам 1994. Т. 3 : 176).

¹⁵ For Russian soul and its relation to Russian space, see e.g. Hellberg-Hirn 1999: 56–57,61, Pursiainen 1999: 72.

even asserts that Russian space with its amorphousness and vastness possesses a great destructive potential. Distances are too great to be grasped, nor are natural boundaries of its vast territory delineated. Both of these facts account for a culture with a vague spatial sense.

Examples of the limitless, indiscriminating space are to be found in "PG"; in Section VI, for instance, Brodsky describes the landscape as missing distinctive landmarks. The puddle in the yard in stanza II, as big in area as two Americas together, could be taken as Brodsky's parodic hint to the grand scale of everything in Russia. But the most cryptic of the signs attributed to the dimensions of the represented space are the lines about the stray train quoted already above:

Уйдя с точки "А", там поезд на равнине
стремится в точку "Б". Которой нет в помине.

Начала и концы там жизнь от взора прячет. [...]

If the lines are construed — as was suggested above — as being a metaphor of the vastness of the territory which in its endlessness is beyond the limits of the human mind to comprehend, one could easily discover here a variant of a trope, common in Brodsky's poetry, evoking a vista with a railtrack — two parallel lines that vanish in the horizon — leading nowhere.¹⁶

The dynamics of "PG" actually arise from a certain dualism that marks the poem in its entirety. The text seems to be constructed on oppositions or extremes. The dualism starts with the points "A" and "B" that the train fails to connect to each other, and it continues in the opening line of the following *terzina* which claims that "there" life conceals from sight beginnings and ends. Being reminiscences of other poems, on the level of textual space, both of the lines refer beyond the boundaries of the intra-textual space of this particular poem; "A" and "B" are allusions to Mandelshtam's poem *Нет, не спрятаться мне от великой стены...* while "beginnings and ends" recall *The Fifth Elegy* of Akhmatova's *Northern Elegies*.

¹⁶ This could be construed as a continuation to the theme of superiority of everything. Quoting Medvedev "Russia possesses the longest roads which lead nowhere, the greatest number of seas on which no one sails, and the longest frontiers on which no one lives and hardly anyone crosses" (1999: 16). Batkin has found another interpretation for the train in "PG". In his view the train moves from point "A" to point "B" which stands for void, i.e. towards a place without time, since for an exile time is replaced by space (Баткин 1997: 278–279).

When examined in the context of the mentioned subtexts together with some self-referential allusions to his own works, “A” and “B”, “beginning” and “end” elevate the dualism of the text to a metaphysical level. Mandelstam’s poem is first and foremost about the meaninglessness of life in expectation of the impending destruction of culture, as well as about the fear of both physical and spiritual death under the pressure of totalitarianism:

**Мы с тобою поедem на “А” и на “Б”
Посмотреть, кто скорее умрет [...]**

Akhmatova’s *Northern Elegies*, as another obvious subtext of Brodsky’s “PG”, in its turn, continues the theme of distortion of natural, genuine proportions and the original directions of the flow of life. The most obvious allusion, as was noted, is the one to *The Fifth Elegy* concerning the veiled knowledge about “beginnings and ends”¹⁷ of our lives:

**Мне ведомы начала и концы.
И жизнь после конца, и что-то,
О чем теперь не надо вспоминать.**

In Akhmatova’s text, the poet is the chosen one who is given knowledge of things that one normally has no access to. She, like Dante, is shown what life beyond can be all about. Furthermore, the opening lines of Akhmatova’s *Fifth Elegy* resonate in Brodsky’s text as well:

**Меня, как реку,
Суровая эпоха повернула.
Мне подменили жизнь. В другом русло
Мимо другого потекла она,
И я своих не знаю берегов.**

The reversed by force flow of the river is a metaphor for a sudden unexpected change in life which finds a counterpart in some of Brodsky’s tropes that symbolise the unsolvable puzzle of one’s own

¹⁷ In addition to Akhmatova, Brodsky’s line “Начала и концы там жизнь от взора прячет” recalls also the opening line of the Prologue in Blok’s *Возмездие*: “Жизнь — без начала и конца.” The association with paradise/hell as well as the outstanding gift of an artistic eye to catch and evaluate the essential in life is also present in Blok’s *поэта*: “[...] Но ты, художник, твердо веруй / В начала и концы. Ты знай, / Где стерегут нас ад и рай. / Тебе дано бесстрашной мерой / Измерить всё, что видишь ты. / Твой взгляд — да будет тверд и ясен...” (Блок 1999: 21).

fate.¹⁸ It is reflected in Section One of "PG" in the line which simultaneously alludes to the lines of Akhmatova, quoted above, as well as to Pushkin and Lermontov¹⁹:

Неугомонный Терек там ищет **третий берег**.

According to Lev Loseff, "the third shore" signifies an absurd, useless endeavour referring in Russian to the expression "fifth corner".²⁰ Similar efforts to escape one's fate, to find an exit from the unexpected turn of life, doomed to fail, are implied in the last line from Section VII which, in its turn, is a paraphrase from *The Divine Comedy*, a fact that seems to have escaped the attention of Brodsky-scholars:

Там думал и умру — от скуки, от испуга.

Когда не от руки, так на руках у друга.

Видать, не рассчитал. Как квадратуру круга.

"Squaring the circle"²¹ in the "DC" is a metaphor for a problem which cannot be solved. In the end of *Paradiso*, Dante compares himself to a

¹⁸ Not only his own, but the same metaphor applies to his parents' life, too. See Brodsky 1986: 481–483; "Had they looked for a motto for their existence, they could have taken a few lines from one of Akhmatova's "Northern Elegies": *Just like a river / I was deflected by my stalwart era [...]* A deflected river running to its alien, artificial estuary.[...] **I am a tributary of a turned, deflected river.** [...]" (bolding mine — M.K). Brodsky cites the above-quoted lines of Akhmatova also in an interview made by A. Mikhnik where he also describes the consequences of the sudden turn in people's lives in an abrupt, blunt manner: "В России произошло явление, которого никто не понимает. Когда мы говорит (*sic*) о преступлениях режима, мы не говорим всей правды. Речь не только о том, что истреблены тысячи людей, но также о том, что жизнь миллионов на протяжении нескольких поколений шла по-иному, чем должна была идти. Как писала Ахматова: *Меня, как реку [...]* **Человеческая жизнь потекла другим руслом. И что не прошло бесследно** (bolding mine — M.K). Родились иные инстинкты. Россия сегодня — антропологический зоосад. Разговор с русским может быть интересен, если ты антрополог. Но не тогда, когда ты занимаешься политикой или философией" (Михник 1998: 11).

¹⁹ For discussion of allusions to Pushkin in "PG" see Ранчин 1998b: 38, for allusions to Pushkin and Lermontov see Polukhina 1989: 221.

²⁰ "Fifth corner" in Russian police jargon is what the interrogating policemen invite the suspect to find in order to escape the beating (Brodsky 2000: 520, 526).

²¹ It is worth noting that Brodsky does not use this expression in his English version of "PG" but instead he writes: "Today I see my error. / I see that I was wrong [...]." The word "error" is, of course, an allusion to the "DC", only not to Paradise, but to the prologue of Hell — which makes a difference.

geometrician facing the unsolvable puzzle in a vision of Christ whose changing appearance inside a circle suggests his two natures in one person:

Qual è 'l geomètra che tutto s' affige
per misurar lo cerchio, e non ritrova,
 pensando, quel principio ond'elli indige,
 tal era io a quella vista nova (Par. 33: 133–136)

As geometrician, trying as best he can
to square the circle, but without the clue
 he needs to guide him, ends where he began;
 so I before that marvel strange and new [...].²²

This effort to square the circle is as futile as the train's striving to reach its destination in circumstances where the flow of life in its reversed absurdness entails a rupture in the logic of thought and, consequently, in the relationship of cause and effect.

"PG" is yet another example of Brodsky's strategy of textual polygenesis. His reference is not only in Akhmatova's, or Mandelshtam's poetry, nor is it merely an allusion to his own works. Similar contemplation on the ignorance of man's soul of the origin of life as well as his knowledge of the next life can be found in John Donne's poems *The First Anniversary* and *The Second Anniversary*. As the similarity of the titles indicates, Brodsky's commemoration of the fifth anniversary thus expands beyond the borders of Russia and its writers. Donne

²² The exact translation of Dante's expression "*misurar lo cerchio*" would be "to measure a circle". After reading A.M. Vandelli's commentary to the passage in question in *La Divina Commedia* it becomes clear that by measuring Dante refers to the very problem of squaring a circle; Dante compares his efforts to those of a geometrician who tries to find a solution to the problem of squaring a circle, but he does not manage to resolve it because he does not have the knowledge of the exact relation of the diameter to the circumference. Dante yearns to understand something which is beyond comprehension of the human mind: "Dante si forzava di vedere, così come il geometra, tutto tutento a tentar di risolvere **il problema della quadratura del circolo**, non riesce a trovare il dato che gli bisognerebbe, cioè l'esatto rapporto tra il diometro e la circonferenza. Dante voleva comprendere ciò che mente umana non può." (Dante 1979: 923). It is evident that Brodsky's first acquaintance with the "DC" was through Lozinsky's translation. Lozinsky employs the expression "измерить круг" instead of "квадратура круга", see Данте Алигиери: *Божественная комедия*. Перевод Лозинского (Серия "Всемирная литература". Изд. Художественная лит-ра. Москва 1967: 524).

writes in his *Second Anniversary. Of the Progress of the Soule* as follows:

[...] Poore soul in this thy flesh what do'st thou know.
Thou know'st thy selfe so little, as **thou know'st not,**
How thou did'st die, nor how thou wast begot.
Thou neither knowst, how thou at first camest in,
Nor how thou took'st the poyson of mans sin. [...]
(254–258, Donne 1985: 361)

In the last two sections of “PG” reminiscences from Akhmatova are simultaneously reminiscences from two other St.Petersburg poets — Pushkin and Mandelshtam²³:

Скрипи, мое перо, мой коготок, мой посох [...]
Мне нечего сказать, ни греку, ни варягу.
Зане не знаю я, в какую землю лягу
Скрипи, скрипи перо! переводи бумагу.

Compare to Akhmatova:

Перо скрипит, и многие страницы
Семеновским припахивают плацем. [...] (*Первая элегия*)
“Я не в свою, увы, могилу лягу” (*Пятая элегия*)

The ignorance of both Akhmatova and Brodsky about the place of their death-to-be or about the name which will be inscribed on the tombstone is compensated by their knowledge about the fact that the life of a poet — his/her poetical identity embedded in poems — is not submissive to the laws of nature, it will go on living no matter which land will cover the corpse of the author.²⁴

²³ For discussion of the recurrent motif in Brodsky's poetry of “скрипящее перо” and its allusions to Pushkin and Hodgevich, see Ранчин 1998a: 85-86 and Ранчин 1998c: 74. Words referring to Mandelshtam (and Dante) are those in rhyming position; “посох” and “босых” picturing two barefooted poet-pilgrims provided with the ability to see to the truth of things. See e.g. Mandelshtam's *Посох*: “Посох мой, моя свобода — / Сердцевина бытия, / Скоро ль истиной народа / Станет истина моя? /.../” (Мандельштам, т. 1 1993: 104). Brodsky is referring here to Akhmatova's poem *Данте*, as well, and to its two addressees.

²⁴ The poetical identity is a way of creating oneself existence beyond life. It provides a counter argument to Donne's contemplation on man's ignorance which we quoted above and which continues as follows: “Nor dost thou, (though thou knowst, that thou art so) / **By what way thou art made immortall**, know. /.../” (J. Donne: *The Second Anniversary*, lines 259–260, see Donne 1985: 361).

While the first six sections of “PG” can be read as an allegory of the USSR, depicted in infernal, rather than paradisaic, terms although not without a touch of irony — ironic deferral is a narrative constant in Dante’s pilgrimage as well, especially in *Inferno*²⁵ — the last four sections together with the epilogue comprise, if not entirely without some self-irony, a serious contemplation of the lyrical substitute’s fate as a poet with its astonishing turns and unforeseen consequences. The pilgrimage of the eye around the lost homeland prefigures a variant of an earthly hell. Since the perspective coincides with that of the expelled Dante to his cursed Florence we have good reason to start again the examination of the last part of the poem from the more or less obvious allusions to Dante that emerge in Section Nine.

[...] Ну что ж! **на все свои законы:**
я не любил жлобства, не целовал иконы,
и на одном мосту чугунный лик Горгоны

казался в тех краях мне самым честным ликом.
Зато столкнувшись с ним теперь, **в его великом**
варьянте, я своим не подавился криком

и не окаменел. [...]

The head of a Gorgon on a certain bridge which seemed “there” “the truth’s most honest version” has been located by Lev Loseff²⁶ to indicate to the Engineers’ Bridge in St.Petersburg which bears images of Perseus’s shield. Nevertheless, they are not the only ones in the St.Petersburg space. The shields with the head of a Gorgon line the fence around the Summer Garden on the side of the Moyka, as well. There is a whole constellation of The Gorgon Medusas in and around the Summer Garden.²⁷

The myth of Perseus is a myth about the impact of looking on something as well as that of being looked at by someone. The lyrical subject emphasizes the fact that he has acquired resistance to the

²⁵ For a discussion of allegory’s relation to irony see e.g. Kelley 1997: 5.

²⁶ See Brodsky 2000: 520.

²⁷ For sculptures of Medusa in St.Petersburg, see Раков 2000: 162–165. Rakov describes the Gorgons on the iron grille of the Summer Garden as follows: “Острые пики ограды чередуются с овальными щитами, в центре которых, поверх скрещенных мечей, — маска **горгоны Медузы**. Широко открыты глаза Медузы, в них застыли одновременно злоба и страх. Устрашающе извиваются змеи на голове. Подобные изображения можно видеть **и на перилах расположенного поблизости 1-го Инженерного моста, и на торшерах соседнего с ним моста Пестеля** [...]”

power of its mortifying eyes. He is not gorgonized even when he — in his present life, beyond the boundaries of his homeland — comes across its “huge variant”.

Dante encounters the three furies who summon Medusa to turn the unexpected visitors to stone in the Ninth Canto of *Inferno*. There his experienced guide Vergil covers the eyes of his ignorant companion in order to prevent him from seeing Gorgon's glance and gives him instructions:

'Volgiti in dietro e tien lo viso chiuso;
**chè se il Gorgòn si mostra e tu 'l vedessi,
nulla sarebbe del tornar mai suso.**'²⁸

But what is Brodsky referring to with the “gigantic variant” of the Medusa which he came upon in his present milieu of life? The answer lies in his poem dedicated to Dante's hometown. In the last stanza of *Декабрь во Флоренции* which has both Florence and St.Petersburg as its doubled object of representation, Brodsky lists the details of the two cities:

[...] И
там рябит от аркад, колоннад, **от чугунных пугал;**
[...]

The Florentine counterpart of the Petersburg iron scarecrow is Cellini's famous sculpture picturing Perseus holding up the severed head of the Medusa.²⁹ The colossal bronze statue stands in *Loggia dei Lanzi* on *Piazza della Signoria*. Thus the Gorgon is yet another link connecting the accursed and desired native cities of the two expelled poets. However, we can find a mediator that joins the two cities even closer together, adding to the unity an inkling of the literary environment of the present “new life” of the lyrical subject of “PG”. The literary joint is Robert Lowell's poem *Florence* (Lowell 1977: 13–

²⁸ *Inf.* 9: 55–60; “‘Turn thee about: **thine eyes, quick, hide them, hide; / for, if the Gorgon's face by thee were seen, / no return upward hence could e'er betide.**’

²⁹ There is, however, another work of art illustrating the head of the Gorgon in Florence — the no less famous painting by Caravaggio depicting Perseus's shield. The painting, much smaller in size than the statue by Cellini, is located in the Uffizi Gallery.

14)³⁰, which explains Brodsky's recall of and sympathy for the iron monster.

Lowell turns the good and evil upside down in his poem; the so-called winners over the evil forces, bloodstained heroes are depicted in terms of murderers.

Pity the monsters!

Pity the monsters!

Perhaps one always took the wrong side —

Ah, to have known, to have loved
too many Davids and Judiths!

My heart bleeds black blood for the monster.

I have seen the Gorgon.

[...]

Like Lowell, Brodsky, too, has gazed into the eyes of the Gorgon without feeling fear or without being deprived of his conscience. For him, too, this personification of evil — reified into a piece of art — represents the archetypal form of evil. In the surrounding reality the falsehood disguises itself as good, or worse still, as the “common good”, whereas the face of the Gorgon displays the evil unmasked.

The last three sections of the poem ponder upon the present absence of the lyrical substitute from his native city. The experience of absence is conveyed by negation — “I am no longer there” — “**Теперь меня там нет**” which gives an impression that the whole poem was written for this statement. The intensity of the experience is such that it can be compared only to the final absence, to death³¹.

³⁰ Brodsky mentions *For the Union Dead* together with *Quaker Graveyard In Nantucket* and most part of *History* as Lowell's best collections of poems (Бродский 2000: 552).

³¹ It seems to recall a line in Hardy's poem *Your Last Drive* — “**And be spoken of as one who was not**” on which line Brodsky dwells in his essay *Wooing the Inanimate*: “In [this line — MK] one detects the sense not so much of a loss or unbearable absence as that of **all-consuming negation**. “**One who was not**” is too resolute for comfort or, [...] for discomfort, and **negation of an individual is what death is all about**. [...]” (Brodsky 1995: 357). The overwhelming sense of a loss may result from the fact that, in Brodsky's view, contrary to Western Europe, in Russia everything is for life, be it the apartment, the town or the country. (Brodsky 1986: 477). Moreover, Brodsky's words on Hardy's poems could be applied to his own *Fifth Anniversary*. They explain the polarity of the impersonal tone of the first part and the intensive, personal anxiety of the last part of the poem: “[...] For all its riches of detail and topographical reference, the cycle has **an oddly universal, almost impersonal quality, since it deals with the extremes of the emotional spectrum**.” (Brodsky 1995:361).

Notwithstanding the constant consciousness of absence from the place where one, in all likelihood, should have been even at the moment when writing the poem, Brodsky's lyrical "I" does not deny the reality of his banishment, but creates himself an alternative reality on a sheet of paper. Poetry represents for him the absolute space where he "does not need a guide", i.e. unlike Dante, "here", in his own realm of writing, he can manage without the help of a Vergil:

Предо мной — пространство в чистом виде.

В нем места нет столпу, фонтану, пирамиде.

В нем, судя по всему, я не нуждаюсь в гиде.

If in the end of Akhmatova's *First Elegy*, like Leiter (1983: 123) concludes, the generalized "Dostoevsky's Russia" has narrowed to a single ominous St.Petersburg landmark — that of the Semyonovsky Square — Brodsky's generalized "Soviet Russia" is shrunken to a mere sheet of paper. Anyhow, the dimensions of it are infinite. It is not just a flat surface, but a reality of its own with immense depth. The language — the *Logos* — is the origin and measure of its dimensions in the absolute.

In the final analysis, notwithstanding many details that point to the allegoric genre, the poem as a whole cannot be reduced to an allegory of an earthly, materialized hell, if only because of the last stanzas. The Word, the mother tongue included, remains uncorruptable. It provides the poet with tools for seeing with disillusioned clarity to the essence of things. It does not make the poet immortal, as we can read from the final lines of "PG", but his verses may thus have a chance to outlive their author.

Мне нечего сказать **ни греку, ни варягу**.³²

Зане не знаю я, в какую землю лягу.

Скрипи, скрипи перо! переводы бумагу.

³² The expression "ни греку, ни варягу" is a paraphrase from "путь из Варяг в Греки" meaning the transcontinental water way from the northern Baltic Sea down to the Black Sea via the Neva, Volhov, Lovat, Dvina and Dnepr rivers. In the spiritual sense these "poles" represent the two elements that formed the basis of the old Russian state and culture; Varangians, the Northmen, who under Rurik established a dynasty in Russia in the 9th century, brought with them the "northern pagan barbarism", which then merged into the "Hellenistic — Christian spirituality" of Byzantium brought in from the south. The establishment of St. Petersburg in the mouth of the Neva river was conceived as a new opening of this legendary water route described already by apostle Andrei Pervozvanny in his chronicle "Пути из Варяг в Греки" (Лебедев 2000: 62). For Brodsky the Varangian and the Greek have become plain geographical coordinates of a country which, in all its vastness, is indifferent to the fate of its bard. At the same time

Although the poet does not know his final destination, Brodsky's opinion about the wished-for fate of all Russians, himself included, in the life beyond can be read from his notebook concerning the year 1970 (Бродский 1990: 8): “Страшный суд — страшным судом, но вообще-то человека, прожившего жизнь в России, следовало бы без разговоров помещать в рай.”

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they represent yet another pair of opposites, of non-meeting ends, characteristic of the literary space of “PG” as a whole.

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“Инфернальный” подтекст стихотворения Бродского “Пятая годовщина”

В данной статье изучаются интертекстуальные связи стихотворения Иосифа Бродского “Пятая годовщина”, посвященного пятой годовщине вынужденной эмиграции поэта из Советского Союза. Как это свойственно для поэтики Бродского вообще, текст насыщен аллюзиями на другие тексты, как из русской, так и из западной художественной литературы. Реминисценции из “Божественной комедии” создают параллелизм между потерянной родиной с любимым родным городом Ленинградом и дантовской “потерянной и проклятой” Флоренцией, а также с Петербургом Мандельштама, Ахматовой и др. Дантовские полутона наблюдаются не только на семантическом уровне анализируемого текста, но и при рассмотрении метрических и структурных аспектов стихотворения.

Brodski luuletuse “Viies aastapäev” infernaalne alltekst

Artiklis uuritakse Jossif Brodski luuletuse “Viies aastapäev”, mis on pühendatud poeedi sunnitud emigratsiooni viiendale aastapäevale, intertekstuaalseid seoseid. Nagu see on omane Brodski poetikale üldiselt, on tekst küllastatud allusioonidega teistele tekstidele nii vene kui ka lääne kirjandusest. Reministsentsid “Jumalikust komöödiast” loovad parallelismi, ühelt poolt, kaotatud kodumaa koos armastatud kodulinna Leningradi ja, teisalt, Dante “kaotatud ja neetud” Firenze vahel, aga ka seoseid Mandelštami, Ahmatova jt Peterburiga. Dantelikke pooltoone võib täheldada mitte ainult analüüsitava teksti semantilisel tasandil, vaid ka luuletuse meetriliste ja struktuursete aspektide vaatlemisel.