In histories of early-twentieth-century Russian literature, particularly those focusing on the Acmeists, the year 1912 has taken on almost legendary dimensions. On New Year’s Eve 1912, the illustrious Stray Dog cabaret—home away from home for bohemian Petersburg—opened its doors. This was the year that Ivanov and Bely retreated to the isolated bastion of the journal *Works and Days* (Trudy i dni),¹ the year of Ego-Futurism and Igor Severianin’s first notoriety, and, in December, of Cubo-Futurism’s audible *Slap in the Face of Public Taste* (Poshchechina obshchestvennomu vkusu). In 1912, Gumilev took over the literature section of the premier art journal of the day *Apollo* (Apollon) and the poetry journal *The Hyperborean* began its short-lived print run. Under the imprint of the Poets’ Guild were published Akhmatova’s first book *Evening* (Veche) and Zenkevich’s *Wild Porphyry* (Dikaia porfira), while almost the entire print run of Narbut’s *Hallelujah* (Alliluiia) was confiscated for “pornography.” The book’s scandalously earthy poems had been set using a Church Slavonic typeface.² This was also the year that the work of Gumilev and Gorodetsky’s Poets’ Guild distilled, in late fall, into the more coherent movement
that would announce itself to the world in the publications of the Acmeists in early 1913. And this of course was the year of Mandelstam’s much-flaunted “conversion” to the new movement, the year he would write such early masterpieces of Acmeism as “Hagia-Sophia” (AIia-Sofiiia) and “Notre Dame.”

Zhirmunsky, in 1916, penned the classic definition of the Acmeists as preodolevshie simvolizm (they who have overcome Symbolism). However, it would perhaps be more accurate to call them preodolevaiushchie (they who are overcoming). The Acmeists of course had their moments of bravado: “From this day forth, not a single line by Sologub, Briusov, Ivanov or Blok will be printed in Apollon,” Mandelstam is said to have boasted around town in January 1913, raising the ire of Sologub’s wife, A. N. Chebotarevskaya. Still, Mandelstam at least once referred to the members of the new movement in print as “younger Symbolists” [mladshie simvolisty] (II, 341–42). This is a nomenclature that feels almost paradoxical after the strongly anti-Symbolist memoirs of Nadezhda Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova. Mandelstam noted too that “Viacheslav Ivanov himself aided much in the formulation of Acmeist theory” (II, 257). In his book Kniga ob akmeizme, Oleg Lekmanov presents convincing evidence for an overarching balance between the this-worldly and the otherworldly in Acmeism, and even proposes that the choice by Gumilev and Gorodetsky of six so distinct and disparate poets may represent a conscious attempt at collective balance. On the trembling scales of Acmeist balance, Mandelstam’s poetry of 1912, particularly as he chose to organize it in his collections beginning in 1915, consciously represents a process of prolonged and elusive “overcoming.”

A. G. Mets, following Nikolai Khardziev, remarks on the arrangement of poems by year but without regard to month and day in the second edition of Stone (1916; released Dec. 1915). This structure makes the need to search for a compositional principle within each year apparent. Even if we are to assume that the poems are arranged in the closest approximation of chronological order, we must take into account the following: the reader acquainted with the first edition of Stone, which was constructed on different compositional principles, would have sensed the new ordering as a shift; and the exclusion of four previously published poems written in 1912—two are precisely dated and the dating of the other two is highly likely—certainly had an impact on the overall composition. What is more, we have precise dates for only three of the 12 poems included in Stone (1916) under the year 1912. Therefore we have no serious foundation to assume that these poems are arranged specifically in chronological order (though we have no information refuting such a supposition either). Careful analysis of the poems marked 1912 in the second edition of Stone will show that the general prin-
principle of grouping poems by year (and only by year) allowed the poet to create a dynamic and sophisticated compositional structure, at the same time leaving intact the general picture of his development.

Within the year 1912, the poems of Stone can be divided into six contrasting but connected pairs:

1. “Ia vzdragivaiu ot kholoda”  
2. “Ia nenavizhu svet odnoobraznykh zvezd”
3. “Obraz tvoi, muchitel’nyi i zybkii”  
4. “Net, ne luna, a svetly tsiferblat”
5. “Peshekhod”  
6. “Kazino”
7. “Paden’e—neizmennyi sputnik strakhia”  
8. “Tsarskoe selo”
9. “Zolotoi”  
10. “Liuteranin”
11. “Aiia-Sofiia”  
12. “Notre Dame”

This structure (in any case immanent within the book’s composition) is given a particular visual boost in the pairing of these poems, through to the beginning of “Tsarskoe selo,” on facing pages.\(^{11}\) As Sergei Averintsev has noted, a similar compositional structure, juxtaposing poems on facing pages, was used by Paul Verlaine in his book *Parallèlement*. Averintsev, in fact, contrasts Mandelstam’s compositional principles to this “obvious, i.e. somewhat mechanical” structure.\(^{12}\) Nonetheless, it seems that Mandelstam from time to time takes advantage of this technique in the 1916 edition of Stone, and not only among the poems marked 1912. What is more, a clear tendency toward more frequent and pronounced pairings marks the later editions of Stone (1923, 1928). This is most readily apparent in the edition of 1923, in which no dates of poems are given. There, Mandelstam places
“Onto the mother-of-pearl shuttle” (Na perlamutrovyi chelnok, 1911) right after “Inexpressible sadness” (Nevyrazimaia pechal’, 1909). (Both poems feature rays of sun filtering into a room and delicate fingers presented in close-up; both are in the same meter and have an enclosing rhyme scheme and the same number of strophes.) There, “That evening the lancet forest of the organ did not hum” (V tov vecher ne gudel strel’chatyi les organa, 1917) meets “Bach” (Bakh, 1913); “Europe” (Evropa, 1914) meets “The Hel- lenes mustered for war” (Sobiralis’ elliny voinoiu, 1916); a vision of a French “Abbot” out of the novels of Flaubert or Zola (Abbat, 1915) meets a fragment of an Old French epic (“Aymon’s Sons” [Synov’ia Aimona, 1922, from the twelfth- or thirteenth-century Les quatre fils Aymon]). Each of these is clearly a meaningful pairing.

It is not at all surprising that Mandelstam paid special attention to the compositional pairing of his poems. As has been noted many times, a rich “dualism” characterizes his poetry on all levels, from oxymoronic turns of phrase to compositional reversals and ideological double-voicedness in individual poems or the genetic splitting of the famous twin poems (dvoi-chatki).

The group of poems marked 1912 in the edition of 1916 begins with two four-quatrains poems about stars, consisting of four stanzas each, “I shudder from the cold” and “I hate the light.” In the first, the lyric persona, not without some irony, accepts the Symbolist concept of “connection” (sviaz’) and submits to the orders of the stars, which threaten to mortally wound him, piercing his heart with a pin/ray descended from above. In the second, he expresses his hatred for the “monotonous”—an epithet easily readable here as “Symbolist”—stars and himself threatens to wound the breast of the now not “mysterious,” but “empty,” heavens with the upwardly thrust needle of his thought and verse. The first poem is written in three-ictus dol’nik, a meter with strong Symbolist, and especially Blokian, associations. The second is in a logaoedic meter. Rhythmically they are similar, but the musical freedom of the first meter contrasts with the more rigid structure of the second, and if in the first we sense a dancing syncopation, in the second we feel the rhythmic force of repeated blows.

These poems are followed by two short, two-stanza poems constructed upon verbal anecdotes (“‘Lord!’ I said by accident, / Myself not thinking to say it” [‘Gospodi!’ skazal ia po oshibke, / Sam togo ne dumaia skazat’]; “What time is it, they asked him here— / And he replied to the curious: ‘eternity!’” [Kotoryi chas, ego sprosili zdes’— / A on otvetil liubopytnym: ‘vechnost’!]). The first poem continues Symbolist debates surrounding the living “word-symbol” and the dead “word-term.” Its opening (“Your
image, agonizing and unstable, / I couldn’t perceive in the fog” [Obraz
tvoi, muchitel’nyi i zybkii / Ia ne mog v tumane osiazat’]) evokes the early
poetry of Blok, in which the agonizing struggle of the lyric hero to hold on
to the image of the heroine, often hidden by fog and constantly threaten-
ing to alter her appearance (“izmenish’ oblik Ty!” [I, 99]), is a leitmotif.
The second poem was long considered the poetic credo of Mandelstam as
Acmeist. Incidentally, already Clarence Brown saw in the two tercets of
“No, not the moon” the ending of a nonexistent sonnet. In Stone (1916),
they were printed opposite the two quatrains of “Your image, agonizing and
unstable.”

These are followed by a pair of sonnets united by the image of the abyss.
The first of these remains within the sphere of influence of Symbolism (about
which see chapter 5 below), while, in the second, the poet demonstrates a
bold freedom in manipulating Symbolist clichés, transforming them and
infusing them with new content. The next pair—“Falling is the constant
companion of fear” and “Tsarskoe selo”—encompasses a radical contrast in
tone, composition, and theme. Thus, “Falling is the constant companion
of fear” might be considered the quintessential transitional poem, the last
“Symbolist” poem of the collection. It should be noted that, in this pairing,
tension and alarm are supplanted by ironic playfulness, just as, in the previ-
ous two poems, the “light intoxication” of “modest life” [op’ianen’ e legk(oe)
[. . .] zhizni nebogatoi] takes the place of drama and “insurmountable fear”
[nepobedimyi strakh].

After “Tsarskoe Selo,” we encounter two genre scenes. The first, “Gold
Ruble,” depicts a typically Symbolist milieu. The second, “Lutheran,”
sketches a staid funeral scene. It is the more Acmeist for its Protestantism,
reinforced through a rejection of “chosenness” and immediacy of connection
to the deity. However, the final image, of humanity as candles, burning, invis-
able, in the stark light of day, accrues on the poem’s backdrop of this-worldly
religiosity a remarkable spiritual depth and power:

И думал я: витийствовать не надо,
Мы не пророки, даже не предтечи,
Не любим рая, не боимся ада,
И в полдень матовый горим, как свечи.

And I mused: no need for oratory,
We are no prophets, not even forerunners,
We don’t love heaven, don’t fear hell,
And burn in the blanched noonday like candles.
Finally, this portion of *Stone* comes to a singular climax with the two cathedral poems. The first, “Hagia-Sophia,” bears certain distinctly Symbolist traits, even given the overarching Acmeist associations of the poetry of architecture (see below); the second, “Notre Dame,” is among the most striking poetic manifestoes of Acmeism. The general principal of composition within each pair, excluding “Falling” and “Tsarskoe selo,” appears to be thematic and compositional similarity and tonal and “ideological” contrast. In addition, the first poem of each pair displays a greater pull upon the poet of the Symbolist poetics and worldview.

Moreover, while the poems “I shudder from the cold” and “Your image” in important ways challenge the poetics and theory of Symbolism, they, along with the other poems situated in our Symbolist column, unquestionably demonstrate a greater gravitation toward Symbolism than those with which they are paired. One might say that these poems, with the exception perhaps only of “Hagia-Sophia,” continue the conversation of the Symbolists themselves about poetry, taking, however, an ever more radical “reformational” stance, something that clearly cannot be said about the poems to which they are contrasted. In any case, in moving to the left-hand side of our diagram—and, more often than not, the left-hand page of the open book—we time and again confront the necessity of recapturing poetic territory in which the poet had already seemed firmly ensconced on the previous page.

In this sense, the poems of 1912 in *Stone* (1916) can be visualized as a pendulum, swinging between the poles of Symbolism and Acmeism, with each full swing moving gradually further toward the Acmeist pole. The first edition of *Stone* (1913) presents another structure entirely: here, “No, not the moon” does serve as the fulcrum upon which the book turns, separating Acmeist from Symbolist texts. In this earlier edition, “Your image” and “Pedestrian,” both poems from what we have called the “Symbolist” side of the later edition’s pendulum, fall on the Symbolist side of this divide. Notably, “Pedestrian” is located before, rather than after, “No, not the moon” (as in the later edition). In addition, “I hate the light,” which comes before any of those poems but on the “Acmeist” side of the pendulum in the later edition, is placed in the second half of the earlier edition, among the Acmeist poems. The nature of this reshuffling strongly buttresses our hypothesis about the pendulum composition at the center of *Stone* (1916).

Gumilev, in his review of *Stone* (1913), notes the division of Mandelstam’s book into two “sharply divided sections: up to 1912 and after that year.” Later, in his review of *Stone* (1916), he inaccurately (from a strict, compositional standpoint at least) continues to call “No, not the moon” the breaking point: “from this time forward, the poet becomes an adept of the
literary movement known as Acmeism.” As I will demonstrate more fully in the next chapter through an analysis of four poems located at the Symbolist “backswing” of the pendulum, in Stone (1916), Mandelstam presents not a miraculous conversion to the faith of Acmeism, but a prolonged struggle between Acmeism and another artistic system with a continuing pull on the poet. This likely made sense from Mandelstam’s vantage point at the end of 1915. By then, the triumphantly Acmeist “Notre Dame” could no longer function as even a conditional end-point in his poetic development, and the poet’s new openness toward elements of the Symbolist poetics was becoming more and more apparent.

The swinging pendulum at the center of Stone (1916) represents the poet’s inner struggle—torn between two poetics. However, this compositional arrangement is just as much an aesthetically reconstructed view of his poetic evolution as is the sharp turn from Symbolism to Acmeism depicted in the 1913 edition. Therefore, in the pendulum structure at the heart of Mandelstam’s collection, we observe not only struggle, but also aesthetic play with the poet’s own distance from, and connection to, Symbolism.