

# **THE GENERIC INTERTEXT OF PSALMS IN THE POETRY OF MARINA TSVETAEVA (1892-1941)**

Sarah Ossipow Cheang

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates the presence of the genre of psalms in Tsvetaeva's poetry by means of Alastair Fowler's theory of the historical persistence of literary genres throughout history. The main argument is that in her intertextual use of psalms Tsvetaeva develops further some of their typical features such as the expression of bafflement at God's passivity or an over-familiarity in addressing God; although these features are already present in psalms, they are not given a full-blown realisation because of the religious restrictions reigning at the time and context in which they were composed.

Chapter One presents the theoretical tools used in this research, namely the concomitant concepts of intertextuality and genre: intertextuality focuses on how texts differ from one another, while genre theory highlights the resemblance existing between a set of texts. Taken together these concepts offer a balanced and multisided approach.

Chapter Two presents the psalms and outlines its importance in Russian poetry. It also discusses Tsvetaeva's spiritual outlook.

Chapter Three demonstrates that the integration of the generic intertext of psalms into Tsvetaeva's poetry results in the modification of their praying function: Tsvetaeva's psalm-like praises to God contain a veiled expression of doubt that is absent from the praises of the Psalter; another change of the praying function of psalms performed in Tsvetaeva's poetry consists in the implicit denunciation of the absence of a feminine voice in this genre.

Chapter Four shows that Tsvetaeva's mixture of the psalmic intertext with the genres of diary-writing, epistolary writing and folk songs creates a fruitful interaction between the universal tone of the psalmist and the private concerns voiced in diary, letters or folk laments.

Chapter Five shows that in her poetry Tsvetaeva develops further some typical features of psalms such as the theme of the sacred land and that of God's passivity.

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## Introduction

Over the last few decades, the poetic spell of Marina Tsvetaeva's voice has fascinated readers and literary critics. The unique quality of Tsvetaeva's writing was not missed by the poet Iosif Brodskii (1940-1996), who proclaimed her the best poet of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the richness and creativity of Tsvetaeva's language together with her ability to coin startling formulae by associating highly paradoxical concepts have produced a wealth of issues worthy of scholarly investigation. Among them, Tsvetaeva's use of intertextuality constitutes a particularly fertile ground. Eagerly absorbing many different artistic works from her early childhood, Tsvetaeva naturally reinterpreted them in her mature years. Thus, it is no wonder that both her poetry and prose are full of reminiscences of other texts, taken not only from the literary heritage but also from the musical or pictorial spheres.<sup>2</sup> However, the majority of Tsvetaeva's references are directed toward other literary texts. In fact, the scope of her literary

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ipmce.su/~tsvet/WIN/writer/brodsky/volk02.html> Accessed August 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Concerning the link between Tsvetaeva's work and music, see: Elena Aizenshtein, *Postroen na sozvuchiakh mir. Zvukovaia stikhiia Mariny Tsvetaevoi* (St Petersburg: Neva, 2000); Dzhamilia Kumukova, 'Ideia "dukha muzyki" v estetike M. Tsvetaevoi i russkikh simvolistov', *Marina Tsvetaeva – epokha, kul'tura, sud'ba. Desiataia tsvetaevskaia mezhdunarodnaia konferentsia (9-11 oktiabria 2001)*, edited by Irina Beliakova (Moscow: Dom-muzei Mariny Tsvetaevoi, 2003), pp. 61-6; Marie-Luise Bott, 'Shubert v zhizni i poezii Mariny Tsvetaevoi', *Chuzhbina, rodina moia'. XI Mezhdunarodnaia nauchno-tematicheskaiia konferentsiia (9-10 oktiabria 2003)*, edited by Irina Beliakova (Moscow: Dom-muzei Mariny Tsvetaevoi, 2004), pp. 212-38.

Concerning the link between Tsvetaeva's creation and the visual arts, see: Nina Osipova, "'Tantseval'naia" poetika M.I. Tsvetaevoi v khudozhestvennom kontekste Serebrianogo veka', *Marina Tsvetaeva v XXI veke XV and XVI Tsvetaevskie chteniia v Bolsheve* (Moscow – Bolshovo: Strategiia, Muzei M.I. Tsvetaevoi v Bolsheve, 2005), pp. 236-47; Nina Osipova, "'Poema vozdukha" M.I. Tsvetaevoi kak suprematicheskaiia kompozitsiia', *Marina Tsvetaeva – epokha, kul'tura, sud'ba*, pp. 49-60.

culture stretches from the Greek Antiquity to modernist poetry. This multitude of texts crossing over in Tsvetaeva's writing helps the poet's endeavour to create a multifarious artistic universe reflecting the complexity of her inner world.

Among the conflicting impulses expressed in Tsvetaeva's poetry, the issue of faith and atheism is particularly remarkable and that is why the specificity of Tsvetaeva's work is well characterised by a reversal of Pushkin's famous line from his poem 'Bezverie' (1817) in which the lyrical hero expresses the difficulty in believing in God wholeheartedly: 'ум ищет божества, а сердце не находит'.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, Tsvetaeva's work manifests an emotional longing for a divine transcendence that cannot be fulfilled intellectually. Interestingly, the inner conflict between faith and incredulity is broached in the Bible where it is voiced by the authors of the lyrical prayers that are gathered in the Psalter and that is why in the present study I set out to demonstrate that even though Tsvetaeva does not overtly point to the presence of the genre of psalms in her poetry, this genre constitutes an undeniable layer of a significant number of her poems. In this perspective, it is worth remembering Tsvetaeva's life-long interest in the Bible, which is reflected by numerous references to this text. As will be shown in Chapter One, although the intertextual presence of the Bible in Tsvetaeva's writing attracted the attention of several scholars, the body of works on the specific issues raised by Tsvetaeva's integration of the biblical genre of psalms into her highly idiosyncratic poetry is rather scant. In the present research, I argue that the lack of research on this topic constitutes a gap in the scholarship on Tsvetaeva and I propose to shed light on some of the issues arising from the

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<sup>3</sup> <http://ilibrary.ru/text/352/p.1/index.html> Accessed September 2007.



examination of the discreet but powerful presence of the genre of psalms in Tsvetaeva's poetry. The specificity of this topic makes necessary a preliminary discussion on the theoretical tools used to analyse the resurgence of psalms in Tsvetaeva's works and that is why Chapter One, devoted to the explanation of the main theoretical concepts used in subsequent chapters, is unusually long.

In analysing the role played by the genre of psalms in Tsvetaeva's creation, it is also important to remember that psalms are not confined exclusively to the Bible and that they came to constitute a literary genre of its own in all European literatures.<sup>4</sup> As a result, Chapter Two will present the biblical specificities and literary qualities of the genre of psalms and show the place it occupied in Tsvetaeva's cultural horizon. In short, the first two chapters of the present study introduce a rather lengthy but necessary preliminary material that makes possible the analysis of the intertextual presence of the genre of psalms in Tsvetaeva's poetry conducted in Chapters Three, Four and Five.

Lastly, I must justify the fact that when I refer to a passage of the Bible, I usually quote it in the English version of the *Authorized King James Version* (although I occasionally put the Russian version in parallel). At first sight, this decision might seem absurd, since despite being an accomplished polyglot who could easily switch from Russian to French and German, Tsvetaeva did not speak English. However, the use of the English version is consistent with the fact that intertextuality differs from source analysis in that it is not concerned with finding

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<sup>4</sup> Aminadav Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry. A History* (Geneva: Éditions Slatkine, 2001), p. 9.

out how the precise and unique passage of a text is quoted into another text; on the contrary, intertextuality is more about unveiling how the ‘code’, poetics and/or message of past texts are imperceptibly integrated in new texts. Furthermore, it is also consistent with the peculiar status of the Bible in European and Russian cultures, which consists in its indelible strangeness; as the scholars Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett judiciously remark, ‘for Europe the Bible has always been a translated book. More than that: it is a book whose translated, and therefore foreign, status has always been a conspicuous part of our civilization’s historical identity – in a social, literary, and even religious sense’.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, there is plenty of evidence that Tsvetaeva read the Bible in several languages. Indeed, it is attested that she owned an eighteenth century exemplar of a French Bible;<sup>6</sup> in addition, she tried to acquire a German version of the sacred text, as testified by the following extract of a letter written to her friend, the poet Boris Pasternak (1890-1960) in November 1922: ‘Пастернак, у меня есть к Вам просьба: подарите мне на Рождество Библию: немецкую [...] не большую, но не карманную: естественную. [...] Буду возить ее с собой всю жизнь!’ (VI, 227).<sup>7</sup> This passage shows not only Tsvetaeva’s strong interest in the Bible but also her awareness that the inexhaustible meaning of the sacred book demands

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Introduction’ to *The Bible. Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, edited and commented by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. xix. Unless specified otherwise, all subsequent quotations from the English Bible will be taken from this edition.

<sup>6</sup> *Marina Tsvetaeva. Katalog iubileinoi vystavki*, edited by Lev Mnukhin (Moscow: Rossiiskii mezhdunarodnyi fond, Dom Mariny Tsvetaevoi, 1992), p. 195.

<sup>7</sup> All the references given in the body of the text refer to the following edition of Marina Tsvetaeva’s works: *Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh*, edited by Anna Saakiantz and Lev Mnukhin (Moscow: Terra, 1996-1998).

a never-ending reading. It is exactly in this spirit that the present study approaches the issue of Tsvetaeva's intertextual use of the genre of psalms, for I do not pretend to exhaust the issue nor to provide the best and unique way of analysing it; on the contrary, my aim is to demonstrate that Tsvetaeva's poetry testifies to the fact that there are numerous and various ways in which the ancient text of the Bible can be incorporated into modern poetry.

## **Chapter One**

### **1.1. Aim and Method of the Present Study**

The present study sets out to analyse the reminiscence of the genre of psalms in the poetic works of Marina Tsvetaeva. This chapter discusses the question of which theoretical framework is best suited to do so and shows that the use of a combined approach, which takes into account a variety of theories, is the most productive way of interpreting the link between Tsvetaeva's poetry and the Psalter. In short, the present investigation relies on the related concepts of genre and intertextuality.

Intertextuality can be defined, broadly speaking, as a phenomenon whereby a text is present in another text either explicitly or implicitly.<sup>8</sup> In other words, 'intertextuality is the name often given to the manner in which texts of all sorts [...] contain references to other texts that have, in some way, contributed to their production and signification'.<sup>9</sup> Although they shed light on the very basis of intertextuality, namely the fact that texts interact with one another, these two definitions clearly indicate the necessity of specifying this concept more rigorously if one wants to avoid it being too vague and nebulous to be a fruitful heuristic tool. Indeed, because it covers a wide array of different phenomena, on the one hand, and is understood variously by various critics, on the other hand, the

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<sup>8</sup> David Duff, *Modern Genre Theory* (Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), p. xiv.

<sup>9</sup> *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*, edited by Peter Childs and Roger Fowler (London – New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 121.

notion of intertextuality cannot be used without being specified. As the scholar Heinrich Plett remarks ‘almost everybody who uses it understands it somewhat differently’.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Plett makes it plain that the multiple senses attributed to this term are far from convergent: ‘For some it represents the critical equivalent of postmodernism, for others the timeless constituent of any art; for some it marks the textual process as such, for others it is restricted to certain exactly defined features in a text; for some it is an indispensable category, for others again it is altogether superfluous.’<sup>11</sup> Given the numerous and sometimes contradictory ways in which the concept of intertextuality is understood, it is useful to recall how it appeared in the field of literary studies and what impact it had. The aim of this overview is not to give a full and exhaustive presentation of the countless ways in which the notion of intertextuality is used but to outline the major and most productive intertextual approaches, and, more importantly, their relevance in the scholarship on Tsvetaeva.

Finally, insofar as the aim of this research is to demonstrate that the spirit and poetics of the genre of psalms partly inform Tsvetaeva’s poetry by interpreting the way in which the latter simultaneously intersects with the former and diverges from it, it also makes sense to tackle this task from a generic perspective. In this regard, the theory proposed by the critic Alastair Fowler (1930-) on the persistence and changes of literary genres throughout history<sup>12</sup> is

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<sup>10</sup> Heinrich Plett, ‘Intertextualities’ in *Intertextuality*, edited by Heinrich Plett (Berlin – New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), pp. 3-29; p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Heinrich Plett, ‘Preface’ in *Intertextuality*, p. v.

<sup>12</sup> Fowler, A. *Kinds of Literature. An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

particularly appealing because it enables the critic to link a specific text to a genre that might not be obviously perceptible and thus to relate the text examined to the corpus of texts made up by the historical tradition of the identified genre.

## 1.2. The Original Formulation of the Concept of Intertextuality and its Foundation in Bakhtin's Thought

The term intertextuality was coined by the thinker Julia Kristeva (1941-) in an essay entitled 'Le texte clos' ('The Bounded Text'),<sup>13</sup> in which she insists on the fact that literary creation never amounts to a sheer solitary and individual action; on the contrary, willingly or not, authors always integrate into their writing other texts preceding or contemporary to their own. Kristeva formulates this idea in the following terms:

'The *text* is defined as a trans-linguistic apparatus that redistributes the order of language by relating communicative speech, which aims to inform directly, to different kind of anterior or synchronic utterances. The text is therefore a *productivity* [...]; a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another'.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Le texte clos', *Langages*, 12 (1968), pp. 103-25.

<sup>14</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'The Bounded Text' in *Desire in Language*, translated by Thomas Gora and others, edited by Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), pp. 36-63; p. 36.

By defining the text as a “trans-linguistic apparatus”, Kristeva highlights her departure from the structuralist mode of thinking that had strongly influenced the generation of French intellectuals of the 1960s, to which she belongs.<sup>15</sup> As she puts it herself, ‘[in the 1960s] my position was that mere structure was not sufficient to understand the world of meaning in literature [...]. Two more elements were necessary: history and the speaking subject’.<sup>16</sup> These two elements are encompassed in her conception of text as *productivity*. Kristeva considers that the text’s productivity stems from the presence in it of ideologemes, i.e. the crystallisation in the text of the conflicting socio-cultural meanings a word contains at any historical time. According to Kristeva, an important characteristic of the ideologeme is that ‘it does not refer to a single unique reality but *evokes* a collection of associated images and ideas’.<sup>17</sup> For example, in an intertextual text the presence of the word God does not refer exclusively to the religious and transcendental concept of an almighty and divine principle but also to discourses that deny the existence of God. As the theoretician Graham Allen remarks, such a conception of the text implies that ‘we must give up the notion that texts present a unified meaning and begin to view them as the combination and compilation of

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<sup>15</sup> In brief, structuralism seeks to unveil the inner structure of the phenomena it examines, be it anthropology or literature, and takes its model in the works of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1916), which describes language as a system of differential and non-referential signs. As an eminent linguist, Kristeva recognises the groundbreaking work of Saussure, yet she does not apply a sheer linguistic model to her analysis of the text, because she considers that its cultural context is as important as its internal structure. Such a stance also contrasts sharply with the view of the Russian Formalist School asserting that the right way to interpret a literary work is to unveil the literary devices it uses. Again, as an erudite and well-read literary critic, Kristeva does not fail to appreciate the fruitful analyses of Russian Formalism. Yet, she still considers that the cultural context of an artistic work should not be overlooked as it is by both structuralism and Russian formalism.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Noëlle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (New York – London: Routledge, 2004), p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Julia Kristeva, ‘From Symbol to Sign’ in *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi, translated by Seán Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 62-73; p. 72.

the social text'.<sup>18</sup> It is precisely in order to undermine the belief that a text is a closed and self-sufficient structure and to emphasise the inevitable presence in it of meaningful traces from its cultural context that Kristeva resorts to the thought of the thinker Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975). As she puts it, 'Bakhtin was one of the first to replace the static hewing out of texts with a model where literary structure does not simply *exist* but is generated in relation to *another* structure.'<sup>19</sup> In other words, the appeal of Bakhtin's theory lies, for Kristeva, in his criticism of the structuralist and formalist approaches to literary criticism, because of their almost exclusive focus on the internal workings of the text and their disregard for the many ways in which texts can interact with external factors. By contrast, Bakhtin's main concern is to analyse the extent to which a text produces meaning by negotiating its position among the multitude of already existing texts. In order to do so Bakhtin creates the concept of dialogism, which can be explained in the following terms: '[...] all discourse is in dialogue with prior discourses on the same subject, as well as with discourses yet to come, whose reaction it foresees and anticipates'.<sup>20</sup> Bakhtin's assertion of the inherently dialogical nature of language and literature is informed by his recognition that the very acquisition of language is possible only thanks to the fact that language is transmitted to the individual by other individuals. This is the reason why Bakhtin insists on the fact that the language available to a speaker or writer is always already charged with

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<sup>18</sup> Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 36-7.

<sup>19</sup> Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue, and Novel' in *Desire in Language*, pp. 64-5.

<sup>20</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin. The Dialogical Principle*, translated by Wlad Godzich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. x.



the meanings with which it was endowed by others.<sup>21</sup> Hence, even though every utterance of a word is unique, it has to position itself in relation to previous utterances of the same word. As soon as it is pronounced or written, the word enters into a dialogue with other words. As Allen puts it, ‘from the simplest utterance to the most complex work of scientific or literary discourse, no utterance exists alone’.<sup>22</sup> Thus the choice of a certain word among a series of synonyms is never an innocent one. For example, by choosing to refer to a house by means of the term “abode” or “home”, one chooses between two different registers of the English language, the juridical and the familiar. A failure to master the different registers of a language amounts to a failure to use socially adapted language. In his writings, Bakhtin designates the existence of these various lexical registers, dialects, professional idiolects, and so on, by the term *heteroglossia*. A good explanation of this concept is given by Allen’s etymological comment on this neologism: ‘Given that *hetero* stems from the Greek word meaning ‘other’ and that *glot* stems from the Greek for ‘tongue’ or ‘voice’, we can define *heteroglossia* as language’s ability to contain within it many voices.’<sup>23</sup> Yet Bakhtin’s novelty does not lie in the discovery of various linguistic registers and layers, a fact that was recognised well before him, but in the recognition that this state of affairs implies the coexistence of different points of view on the world. Indeed, the theoretician sheds light on the fact that a particular language or idiolect embodies a particular way of apprehending reality.

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<sup>21</sup> Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin. The Dialogical Principle*, p. 48.

<sup>22</sup> Allen, *Intertextuality*, p. 19.

<sup>23</sup> Allen, *Intertextuality*, p. 29.

In their study of Bakhtin's thought, the scholars Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson stress this point: 'The important thing to understand is that for Bakhtin these different "languages" are not just a matter of, let us say, a professional jargon. [...]. No, what constitutes these different languages is something that is itself extralinguistic: a specific way of conceptualizing, understanding, and evaluating the world.'<sup>24</sup>

In Bakhtin's theory, literature is a medium that enables the dialogic nature of language to thrive by representing it. At the same time Bakhtin considers that there is a gradation in the way the dialogical impulse of language manifests itself: the novel displays the highest possible state of linguistic dialogisation, while lyrical poetry contains its lowest degree and that is why Bakhtin sees it as essentially monologic. Indeed, unlike the novel, Bakhtin says, poetry's primary purpose is not to represent various ways of conceptualising and apprehending the world but to create or recreate the uniqueness of a single consciousness.<sup>25</sup>

Bakhtin's assertion that the poet's language is univocal and one-sided, implies that poetry cannot dialogically represent conflicting world views: because it is immersed in its own and exclusive linguistic element, poetic language is impervious to elements from other discourses. This is a serious limitation to the intertextual potential of poetry. In fact, it entails accepting that poetry cannot produce a dialogical representation of texts that are not primarily poetic such as

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<sup>24</sup> G. S. Morson and C. Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin. Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 141.

<sup>25</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, edited by Michail Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), pp. 259-422; p. 285.

social, historical, political or religious texts. It is worth discussing this issue through the example of Tsvetaeva's poetry.

Bakhtin's assessment of poetic language has become a controversial issue, which has been challenged by many critics. Schematically, there are two opposing lines of criticism regarding Bakhtin's assertion of the essentially monologic quality of poetry: some critics consider it as a rhetorical move aimed at emphasising the importance of novelistic writing,<sup>26</sup> while others insist on its epistemic validity.<sup>27</sup> A full investigation of the diverging interpretations of Bakhtin's theory would constitute a book in itself. What matters, here, are the different applications of Bakhtin's theory to Tsvetaeva's poetry. In this perspective, it is worth mentioning the American critic Catherine Ciepiela who refutes the line of criticism that denies the relevance of Bakhtin's distinction between dialogism and monologism by stressing that the presence of different voices and languages in a single text does not grant it a dialogical status. In doing so, she remains faithful to Bakhtin's remark stating that 'the point is not the mere presence of specific linguistic styles, social dialects, ect. [...] the point is the *dialogical angle* at which they [...] are juxtaposed or counterposed in the work'.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Concerning the necessity of not taking Bakhtin's distinction too rigidly, see: Allen, *Intertextuality*, pp. 26-7; Ken Hirschkopf, 'Dialogism as a challenge to Literary Criticism' in *Discontinuous Discourses in Modern Russian Literature*, edited by C. Kelly and others (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), pp. 19-35; Iurii Lotman, *Analiz poeticheskogo teksta: Struktura stikha* (Leningrad: Prosveshchenie, 1972).

<sup>27</sup> Catherine Ciepiela, 'Taking Monologism Seriously: Bakhtin and Tsvetaeva's "The Pied Piper"', *Slavic Review* 53 (1994), pp. 1010 - 24; David Danow, *The Thought of Mikhail Bakhtin: From Word to Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991); Michael Eskin, *Ethics and Dialogue in the Works of Levinas, Bakhtin, Mandel'shtam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Paradoxically Erskin argues that the monologism of poetry is a more efficient medium to challenge authoritative discourses.

<sup>28</sup> Ciepiela, 'Taking Monologism Seriously: Bakhtin and Tsvetaeva's "The Pied Piper"', p. 1010.

It is precisely on this point that Ciepiela constructs her argument, in which she makes clear that the reason why scholars are prone to discard Bakhtin's distinction too quickly is that they fail to distinguish between the presence of various voices in a text on the one hand and the dialogisation of these different discourses on the other hand.<sup>29</sup> Thus Ciepiela sets out to demonstrate that the presence of various languages in a poetic work does necessarily imply the its dialogisation and she illustrates this view through the example of Tsvetaeva's lyrical satire *Krysolov* (1925).<sup>30</sup> Although it is set in the Middle Ages, Tsvetaeva's lyrical satire overtly addresses issues contemporary to her, as shown by the mocking depiction of the rats, who are described as red revolutionaries spoilt by their victory and unable to resist the corruption of mind entailed by political power. In this satire Tsvetaeva also mocks the inhabitants of Hamelin, depicted as spiritless philistines, and ridicules their sense of moderation, which, in her view, testifies to the Hameliners' mediocrity. The only character spared sarcasm is the musician, who is endowed with the magical power of music. It is no wonder, then, that the wandering piper of Tsvetaeva's *poema* epitomises the condition of the artist, who, despised and misunderstood, is doomed to solitude.

Ciepiela applies Bakhtin's theory to her reading of *Krysolov* and remarks that 'all of the poem's central conflicts – between narrator and characters, and among different characters – are enacted as discursive conflicts, as so many "wars of

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<sup>29</sup> Ciepiela, 'Taking Monologism Seriously: Bakhtin and Tsvetaeva's "The Pied Piper"', p. 1014.

<sup>30</sup> The plot of this text is based on a famous legend set in the medieval town of Hamelin, which is plagued by an invasion of rats. The burgomaster promises to marry his daughter to the person who can rid the town of the rats. A wandering musician succeeds in doing so by enchanting the rats and leading them away, yet he is denied the burgomaster's daughter. To avenge himself, the musician enchants the town's children and leads them to a pond where they drown.

words””.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, it is hard not to admire Tsvetaeva’s extraordinary ability to hear the subtleties of various ways of speaking and to reproduce them in a breathtakingly creative way. For example, as the critic Michael Makin highlights, ‘bureaucratic Soviet titles are brilliantly parodied, producing such forms as *glavkhvost* (‘tail-head’) [...] and *glavsvist* (‘shrill-head’)’.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the scholar Angela Livingstone observes that in Tsvetaeva’s lyrical satire ‘German words and phrases fit naturally with the surrounding text, suggesting a liking for Germany, or at least for its language, which might seem at odds with the scorn being poured on the German townsfolk’.<sup>33</sup> Yet, according to Ciepiela, Tsvetaeva’s masterful ability to play with the different languages represented in *Krysolov* does not mean that this is a dialogic text in the strictest sense, because ‘the languages themselves are sharply differentiated: the townspeople’s commercial speech is rendered in German and the rats’ political rhetoric in Russian’.<sup>34</sup> This means that even though the different characters use different languages, associated with different world views, they do not really engage with one another. The resulting effect, Ciepiela remarks, is that of a “deaf dialogue”. This leads Ciepiela to the conclusion that “‘The Pied Piper’ is ultimately about the conflict of the poet’s language and these warring social languages. Throughout the poem, Hamelin

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<sup>31</sup> Ciepiela, ‘Taking Monologism Seriously: Bakhtin and Tsvetaeva’s “The Pied Piper”’, p. 1017.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva: Poetics of Appropriation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 254-5.

<sup>33</sup> Marina Tsvetaeva, *The Ratcatcher*, translated, commented and introduced by Angela Livingstone (London: Angel Books, 1999), p. 16.

<sup>34</sup> Ciepiela, ‘Taking Monologism Seriously: Bakhtin and Tsvetaeva’s “The Pied Piper”’, p. 1022.

represents the world of social and ideological conflict that the poet seeks to escape. [...].<sup>35</sup> Reformulating her conclusion in Bakhtinian terms, Ciepiela asserts that ““The Pied Piper” narrates the triumph of monologism over dialogism, of the poet’s truth over the truths of the market “square”.<sup>36</sup> This remark is echoed by the scholar Mariia Luiza Bott who makes the following observation: ‘Цветаева обыгрывает самые разные языковые пласты и стили: церковнославянизмы и просторечие, аббревиатуры политического языка и стаккато советских лозунгов. Но ведущей всегда остается неповторимая авторская речь’.<sup>37</sup> As Bott observes, although Tsvetaeva plays with a multitude of linguistic layers and styles in her writing, her authorial voice always predominates. It is precisely because, ultimately, the poet’s voice always prevails over any other voices that Ciepiela is right to assert the presence of a monologic impulse, in a strictly Bakhtinian sense, in Tsvetaeva’s writings.

It can be concluded from the above examination that Bakhtin’s distinction between monologism and dialogism is useful, because it highlights Tsvetaeva’s ultimate stance, namely that poets are outsiders who, because of their engrossment in the world of art, can never fully adhere to the specific ideologies of established political or social groups.<sup>38</sup> It appears, then, that

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<sup>35</sup> Ciepiela, ‘Taking Monologism Seriously: Bakhtin and Tsvetaeva’s “The Pied Piper”’, p. 1022.

<sup>36</sup> Ciepiela, ‘Taking Monologism Seriously: Bakhtin and Tsvetaeva’s “The Pied Piper”’, p. 1023.

<sup>37</sup> Mariia-Luiza Bott, ‘Muzykal’nyi obraz khudozhnika i ego vremeni’, *A.S. Pushkin – M.I. Tsvetaeva. Sed’maia tsvetaevskaia nauchno-tematicheskaiia mezhdunarodnaia konferentsiia*, edited by Valentin Maslovskii (Moscow: Dom-muzei Mariny Tsvetaevoi, 2000), pp. 273-97; p. 73. My emphasis (S.O.C.).

<sup>38</sup> This state of affairs does not imply that Tsvetaeva does not feel concerned with ethical issues. As the critic Ute Stock argues, as a poet Tsvetaeva chooses to take individual ethical stances [*The Ethics of the Poet: Marina Tsvetaeva’s Art in the Light of Conscience* (Leeds: Maney Publishing, 2005), p. 101.].

Bakhtin's distinction between monologism and dialogism helps to clarify Tsvetaeva's views on the role of the artist.<sup>39</sup> In doing so, though, one approaches poetry from an exclusively ideological point of view. This is what Ciepiela proposes and calls "the study of textual politics".<sup>40</sup>

Contrasting to Ciepiela, the critic Donald Wesling argues that Bakhtin simplifies the complexity of poetry because he overlooks the disruptive potential of rhythm.<sup>41</sup> The critic demonstrates this argument with the example of Tsvetaeva's first poem of the cycle 'Provoda' (1923), entitled 'Verenitseiu pevchikh svai' and dedicated to Pasternak. In order to refute Bakhtin's assertion that rhythm reinforces the monologism of poetry 'by creating an unmediated involvement between every aspect of the accentuated whole',<sup>42</sup> Wesling shows that 'Verenitseiu pevchikh svai' is characterised by a strong linguistic instability created by the recurrent non-coincidence of the sentence with the line on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the use of words divided by dashes that 'violate the very basis of Russian prosody by requiring more than one stress per word'.<sup>43</sup> These rhythmical devices result in a constant disruption of the poetic flow, which becomes highly unpredictable for the reader. Hence, Wesling concludes that the analysis of 'Verenitseiu pevchikh svai' demands a particularly active involvement

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<sup>39</sup> For an enlightening article on Tsvetaeva's and Bakhtin's ethical assessment of artistic creation, see: Sobolevskaia, E. 'Iskusstvo i otvetstvennost': M. Tsvetaeva i M. Bakhtin', *Chuzhbina, rodina moia' XI Mezhdunarodnaia nauchno-tematicheskaiia konferentsiia (9--10 oktiabria 2003)*, edited by Irina Beliakova (Moscow: Dom-muzei Mariny Tsvetaevoi, 2004), pp. 95-102.

<sup>40</sup> Ciepiela, 'Taking Monologism Seriously: Bakhtin and Tsvetaeva's "The Pied Piper"', p. 1022.

<sup>41</sup> Donald Wesling, *Bakhtin and the Social Moorings of Poetry* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2003), p. 105.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Wesling, *Bakhtin and the Social Moorings of Poetry*, p. 102.

<sup>43</sup> Wesling, *Bakhtin and the Social Moorings of Poetry*, p. 110.

from the reader and thus invalidates Bakhtin's claim that lyrical poetry is a dead genre to be relegated to literary history.<sup>44</sup> Wesling's demonstration is convincing and shows that Bakhtin's reluctance to recognise the complexity of poetry and to tackle it, means that it is not possible to resort solely to his theory in the present study.

### 1.3. Kristeva's Broadening of Bakhtin's Thought

Unlike Bakhtin, Kristeva does not refute the richness of poetry. As she emphasises, what differentiates her theory from that of Bakhtin is the fact that she does not limit polyphony to the semantic level but extends it to the syntactic and phonic aspects of the text.<sup>45</sup> Thus she considers that the alliterations, assonances and repetitions of a poem encourage readers to produce free associations and, in so doing, to bring other texts into their reading of the poem. Furthermore, Kristeva also rethinks Bakhtin's categories through a psychoanalytical framework. Indeed, taking Bakhtin's opposition between the monologic and dialogic impulses of language as a point of departure, she reformulates it in terms of a new distinction between the semiotic and symbolic modalities of language. As McAfee remarks, 'to help understand the distinction between semiotic and symbolic, the reader could imagine mapping that dichotomy onto more familiar

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<sup>44</sup> For another article whose findings invalidate Bakhtin's assertion that a poetic text constitutes a closed and self-sufficient entity, see: Edward Stankiewicz, 'The Open Forms of Tsvetaeva's Verse' in *Freedom and Responsibility in Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert Louis Jackson*, edited by Elizabeth Cheres Allen and Gary Saul Morson (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1995), pp. 221-38.

<sup>45</sup> *Julia Kristeva. Interviews*, edited by Ross Mitchell Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 189.



dichotomies; such as the distinctions between nature and culture, between body and mind, between the unconscious and consciousness, and between feeling and reason'.<sup>46</sup> To put it differently, the symbolic modality of language corresponds to a logical and grammatically regulated way of speaking, whereas the semiotic has to do with the manner in which unconscious drives make their presence felt in the language.<sup>47</sup> In fact, the semiotic corresponds to the unconscious memory of the preverbal and pre-oedipal state in which the infant has not yet come to the realisation of his/her separation from the mother's body. As the critic Anne-Marie Smith explains, 'the semiotic draws upon a sort of corporeal memory to which psychoanalysis commonly refers as 'mnemonic traces', a reminiscence of the play of energy and drives – both destructive and pleasurable – experienced in the body with great intensity before the achievement of real and symbolic separation from the mother, of subjectivity'.<sup>48</sup> In Kristeva's theory, the semiotic is informed by what she calls *chora* or the ordering of the drives, which is a preverbal rhythm made up of sounds and movements. The *chora* can also be defined as 'the unrepresentable place of the mother'.<sup>49</sup> The semiotic stage ends when the infant starts to differentiate him/herself as an autonomous entity and acquires language. Yet, Kristeva insists, the semiotic is never completely forgotten and, even though it predates language, it keeps marking the symbolic of its hidden presence. This is especially obvious in avant-garde poetry in which, as John Lechte remarks: 'what

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<sup>46</sup> MacAfee, *Julia Kristeva*, p. 16.

<sup>47</sup> Kristeva, 'Desire in Language' in *The Portable Kristeva*, edited by Kelly Oliver (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 93-115; p. 101.

<sup>48</sup> Anne-Marie Smith, *Julia Kristeva. Speaking the Unspeakable* (London – Virginia: Pluto Press, 1998), p. 16.

<sup>49</sup> John Lechte, *Fifty Contemporary Thinkers* (London – New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 142.

the artist makes explicit is also manifest during the child's acquisition of language. Thus in cries, singing, and gestures, in rhythm, prosody and word-plays, or in laughter, the child presents the raw material to be used by the avant-garde poet.<sup>50</sup> Tsvetaeva expresses the same idea in her comment on Pasternak: 'He doesn't yet know our words. His speech [...] doesn't quite make sense, and it knocks you over. At the age of three, this is common, and is called "a child"; at twenty-three it is uncommon, and is called "a poet".'<sup>51</sup> Incidentally, this view explains Tsvetaeva's habit of writing down in her notebook the half-correct half-incorrect words uttered by her young daughter.<sup>52</sup>

In her theory Kristeva also stresses that because of its heterogeneity of meaning, poetic discourse is the best medium to signify the 'crises and impossibilities of transcendental symbolics'<sup>53</sup> such as ruling ideologies or religions. In fact, Kristeva even goes as far as boldly asserting that 'poetic language [is] knowingly the enemy of religion',<sup>54</sup> which relies on dogma that cannot be proved wrong. By contrast, poetic texts do not comply with a singular use of language but are polysemic and susceptible to signification of contradictory meanings. Hence, texts that are significantly semiotic, such as avant-garde poetry, typically arise in time of spiritual crises.

By contrast to the semiotic, Kristeva depicts the symbolic as a rational principle striving to unity and obedient to the Law. From a psychoanalytical point

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<sup>50</sup> Lechte, *Fifty Contemporary Thinkers*, p. 142.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted by Taubman, *A Life Through Poetry Marina Tsvetaeva's Lyric Diary* (Columbus: Slavica, 1989), p. 20.

<sup>52</sup> Marina Tsvetaeva, *Neizdannoe. Zapisnye knizhki v dvukh tomakh, tom pervyi 1913-1919*, edited by E. Korkina and M. Krutikova (Moscow: Ellis Lak, 2000), p. 24.

<sup>53</sup> Kristeva, 'Desire in Language', p. 108.

<sup>54</sup> Kristeva, 'Desire in Language', p. 94.

of view, the symbolic stage corresponds to the child's realisation of his/her separation with the mother, which enables him/her to enter a structured society and acquire language. Kristeva considers the semiotic and the symbolic as two different modalities of language that are always present in almost every single utterance.<sup>55</sup> Thus what differentiates one type of text from another is precisely the way in which the text balances the proportion of semiotic and symbolic it contains.

As was just shown, for Kristeva it is not only in the social and intersubjective realm that language is divided and heterogeneous, as Bakhtin holds it, but within the space of the individual psyche itself. In this perspective, it is worth mentioning that a late and interesting development of Kristeva's thought is the recognition that the unconscious makes each individual a stranger for him-/herself.<sup>56</sup> According to Kristeva, the ability to recognise and approach one's own unconscious not only exiles the individual from the realm of his/her consciousness but also, at the same time, enables him/-her to develop his/her creative potential, since, as she insists, 'writing is impossible without some kind of exile'.<sup>57</sup>

Now that the main concepts of Kristeva's theory of intertextuality have been exposed, its relevance for the interpretation of Tsvetaeva's work can be discussed. Interestingly, Kristeva herself commented on this issue in her book *Des Chinoises* where she remarks that in her writing Tsvetaeva is especially receptive to the

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<sup>55</sup> *The Portable Kristeva*, edited by Kelly, p. 34.

<sup>56</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p. 271.

<sup>57</sup> Julia, Kristeva, 'A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident' in *The Kristeva Reader*, p. 298.

semiotic.<sup>58</sup> This observation is strikingly resonant with Tsvetaeva's own comments on the nature of her writing. Indeed, it is worth remarking that Tsvetaeva had an intuitive understanding of the distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic modalities of language and their articulation within poetry. This intuition is nowhere more evident than in her assertion that the elemental force of inspiration should be bridled by the formal constraints of the formula. As she puts it herself: 'Две любимые вещи в мире: песня и формула. (То есть [...] стихия – и победа над ней)' (IV, 527). Moreover, Tsvetaeva's assertion that she is always translating the body into the soul (VII, 69) matches Kristeva's view that the symbolic is always informed by the semiotic. In addition, Tsvetaeva's subtle analysis of the aetiology of her poetic calling developed in her essay 'Mat' i muzyka' (1934) indicates that she was acutely aware of the fact that the figure of the mother played a fundamental role in her constitution as a poet. As the following quotation makes clear, to become a poet saved her from being overpowered by her mother: 'После такой матери мне оставалось одно: стать поэтом. Чтобы избыть ее дар мне – который бы задушил или превратил меня в преступителя всех человеческих законов' (V,14). In 1940, i.e. at the end of her life, Tsvetaeva, once again highlighted the link between poetry and maternal influence in the following assertion: 'Мать – сама лирическая стихия' (V, 6). Finally, Tsvetaeva's conception of the poet as an intrinsically exiled individual is consistent with Kristeva's claim that writing is possible only in exile.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Des Chinoises* (Paris: des femmes, 1974), pp. 45-7.

<sup>59</sup> Kristeva, 'A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident', p. 298.

Despite the many resonances between Tsvetaeva and Kristeva, there are remarkably few critical studies approaching the former with the theoretical framework of the latter. A notable exception is the scholar Alexandra Smith, who resorts to Kristeva in her demonstration that Tsvetaeva's return to Russia in 1939, far from being a return to her motherland, amounted to yet another exile.<sup>60</sup> Referring to Kristeva's assertion that exile is a condition of creativity,<sup>61</sup> Smith demonstrates that the struggle Tsvetaeva encountered while she was trying to deal with the oppressive atmosphere of the repressive and authoritarian Soviet society compelled her to undertake the translation of Baudelaire's poem *Le voyage* 'in search for a new style that could help her mark her own estrangement and achieve a sense of novelty'.<sup>62</sup>

Another critic resorting to Kristeva is Ute Stock. However, Stock uses the former's theory episodically rather than as the overarching theoretical framework. In her article 'Marina Tsvetaeva and the Discourse of Exile' Stock uses Kristeva's concepts to comment on Tsvetaeva as a human being rather than to explicate her poetry. For instance, she draws a parallel between Kristeva's warning against the potentially destructive effect of the intrusion of the semiotic within the symbolic and Tsvetaeva's fear of succumbing to an 'overfatigue of the brain' leading to mental illness.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Alexandra Smith, 'Towards Poetics of Exile: Tsvetaeva's Translation of Baudelaire's *Le Voyage*' in [http://ars-interpres-2.nm.ru/a\\_s\\_an\\_2.html](http://ars-interpres-2.nm.ru/a_s_an_2.html) Accessed in August 2006.

<sup>61</sup> Kristeva, 'A New Type of Intellectual: the Dissident', p. 298.

<sup>62</sup> Smith, 'Towards Poetics of Exile: Tsvetaeva's Translation of Baudelaire's *Le Voyage*'.

<sup>63</sup> Ute Stock, 'Marina Tsvetaeva: the Concrete and the Metaphoric Discourse of Exile', *Modern Language Review* 96 (2001), pp. 762-77; p. 774.

Lastly, the critic Christiane Hauschild proposes a convincing interpretation of Tsvetaeva's *poema Molodets* (1924), which she analyses in the light of Kristeva's theory.<sup>64</sup> Because of my limited mastery of German, I will not go into the details of this investigation, but it is worth mentioning some of its findings, because it is a remarkably fruitful application of Kristeva's theory to Tsvetaeva's poetry. As Hauschild demonstrates, in *Molodets* Tsvetaeva turns the traditional folkloric fairytale *Upyr'* into a provocative and blasphemous text by evoking heretical discourses of the beginning of the twentieth century such as those of the sect of the *khlysty* or *bespopovtsy*.<sup>65</sup> In Kristeva's terms, this means that Tsvetaeva develops the ideologeme of heresy. Moreover, by setting the heroine's reunion with the vampire, a demonic force, in a church, Tsvetaeva subverts the original tale, which depicted the victory of the holy over evil. The process whereby an author subverts a traditional text is consistent with Kristeva's conception of modern poetry as being a revolutionary practice.<sup>66</sup>

To conclude, let us say that the critical works applying Kristeva's theory to Tsvetaeva prove the relevance of such an approach. However, in the context of the present investigation on the reminiscence of the genre of psalms in Tsvetaeva's poetry, Kristeva's conception of intertextuality will not be sufficient. As the theoretician John Frow remarks, although Kristeva's 'conception of the text is dynamic, it is not historical. It fails to allow for the diachronic interplay of norm and transformation, because the point of reference (the material which is to

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<sup>64</sup> Christiane Hauschild, *Häretische Transgressionen. Das Märchenpoem «Molodec» von Marina Cvetaeva* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2004).

<sup>65</sup> Hauschild, *Häretische Transgressionen*, pp. 103-50.

<sup>66</sup> Hauschild, *Häretische Transgressionen*, p. 21.

be transformed) lies outside the literary system.’<sup>67</sup> Even though Kristeva’s theory is extremely helpful and interesting, it cannot constitute the overarching theoretical framework of the present study, because the analysis of the resurgence of the genre of psalms in Tsvetaeva’s poetry necessitates a theory that takes into account the specifically literary category constituted by genre.

Before broaching genre theory, it is worth mentioning Bloom’s theory of anxiety of influence,<sup>68</sup> which shares with Kristeva’s thought its reliance on psychoanalytical concepts. Unlike Kristeva, Bloom pays particular attention to the diachronic succession of writers making up literary history. Indeed, the cornerstone of his theory of anxiety of influence, exposed in the eponymous book, is the idea that every poem written by a strong poet constitutes a ‘deliberate misinterpretation [...] of a precursor poem’.<sup>69</sup> An important point to make, here, is Bloom’s distinction between weak and strong authors, which takes it as axiomatic that the former are stuck in disempowering admiration of their predecessors and tend to write in a poor imitative way; by contrast, Bloom considers that strong poets do not accept easily coming after their brilliant predecessors and try to deny the originality of the literary elders by misreading them in such a way that they can create a space which will allow them to prove their originality. The conceptualisation of literary history as an ongoing battle of strong poets struggling to be recognised for their originality leads Bloom to redefine the worn-out concept of influence, which is no longer understood as the

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<sup>67</sup> John Frow, *Marxism and Literary History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 127.

<sup>68</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry* (London – Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

<sup>69</sup> Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 43.

transmission of typical features from a previous poet to his/her successor but, on the contrary, as the denial of the worthiness of the predecessor's poetics, expressed by means of a highly noticeable departure from him/her.

Would Bloom's theory be productive for investigating the presence of a psalmic intertext in Tsvetaeva's poetry? Although the feeling of competition with God often expressed by Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine may prompt one to apply Bloom's theory in order to examine Tsvetaeva's reworking of the genre of psalms, several aspects of Bloom's theory make its application to the present research inadequate. The main objection is that Bloom's insistence on the notion of conflict excludes from his investigation the idea that authors can be productively indebted to their predecessors, not only in negating them but also by reasserting some of their qualities, developing them further and, ultimately, surpassing them. In other words, Bloom's vision tends to associate 'meaning and authority with [chronological] priority';<sup>70</sup> in my view, such a bias prevents the critic from acknowledging the fact that a later poet may be able to reuse an already-known literary device in a new but no less interesting way. In a word, Bloom's overemphasis on the notion of struggle is not compatible with an essential thesis of the present investigation, namely that in her poetry Tsvetaeva not only reuses and occasionally negates the genre of psalms, but also further develops some of its features; for instance, the erasure of the hierarchy between humans and God, which is only fleetingly and briefly evoked by the psalmist, is pushed to its very limits by Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine.

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<sup>70</sup> Graham Allen, *Harold Bloom. A Poetics of Conflicts* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p. 30.



#### 1.4. Genre Theory and its Relevance in Interpreting Tsvetaeva's Works

The previous section highlighted the idea that the concept of intertextuality makes it impossible to read a text as a complete and self-sufficient unit. As Allen summarises, intertextuality is such 'a useful term because it foregrounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence'.<sup>71</sup> Likewise, genre theory is concerned with the activity of grouping together a potentially countless number of texts. Thus in the present section, I will demonstrate how modern genre theory fruitfully complements the intertextual approaches presented so far and enables the critic to shed light on Tsvetaeva's complex use of literary genres.

As is the case with intertextuality, genre theory is concerned with connecting a singular text with other texts. Given that it shares with intertextuality a similar focus on the relationship between texts, it is not surprising that genre theory faces the same pitfall, namely the definitional instability of its main concept. As the French theoretician Laurent Jenny observes, 'if the notion of genre is unclear, it is because it is applied to different textual realities [...] which are not of the same scale'.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, as Jenny explains, the sonnet and the *Bildungsroman* constitute literary genres, yet the criteria applied to define them are radically different: the constitutive element of the genre of sonnet is its codified metrical form; by contrast, the main feature defining a *Bildungsroman* is

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<sup>71</sup> Allen, *Intertextuality*, p. 5.

<sup>72</sup> <http://www.unige.ch/lettres/franco/enseignements/methods/genres/glintegr.html> Accessed in August 2006. My translation (S.O.C.).

thematic, namely the representation of the maturation of a young and inexperienced hero.<sup>73</sup> Jenny's examples illustrate perfectly the difficulty at the heart of genre theory, i.e. the variability and disparity of criteria considered relevant to group various texts under the heading of a genre. This difficulty is made worse by the fact that over time some generic names come to designate completely different types of texts. Fowler exemplifies this phenomenon as follows: 'Perhaps the most extreme of all is the change in nomenclature and grouping of comic works. Medieval comedy, as everyone knows, is liable to be not only nondramatic but unfunny. True, it shares a few features with ancient and Renaissance comic forms: colloquial style, a happy outcome, and the presentation of an *imago vitae*. Still, the use of the same term for the *Divina Commedia* and the *Comedy of Errors* is a little confusing, to say the least.'<sup>74</sup> These few observations clearly indicate that, as it is the case with intertextuality, the notion of literary genre does not have an unequivocal definition. Moreover, the function critics ascribe to the concept of genre is also variable. Originally conceptualised by Aristotle (384 – 322 B.C.), whose *Poetics* remained the classical reference until the twentieth century, the notion of genre was used for centuries as a normative and taxonomic principle that was meant not only to describe the formal and thematic features of various groups of texts but also to order them hierarchically.<sup>75</sup> In this classical conception, the description of literary genres

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<sup>73</sup> <http://www.unige.ch/lettres/framo/enseignements/methods/genres/glintegr.html> Accessed in August 2006. My translation (S.O.C.).

<sup>74</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p.136.

<sup>75</sup> For a historical account of genre theory, see: Gérard Genette, *The Architext*, translated by Jane Lewin (Berkeley – Los Angeles – Oxford: University of California Press, 1992); Heather Dubrow,

serves the purpose of laying down the rules enabling authors to write exemplary works. This understanding of genre was criticised by the German Romantics, whose insistence on the uniqueness and originality of singular literary works was incompatible with the principle of categorisation implied in the notion of genre.<sup>76</sup> The Romantic scepticism regarding the relevance of literary genres was renewed at the beginning of the twentieth century by the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) who considered literary genres as empty categories overshadowing the real issues of art, namely the problem of intuition and that of expression.<sup>77</sup> To sum up, let us say that the bulk of criticism arguing against the usefulness of genre theory is directed against an understanding of genre that is normative, classificatory and essentialist. In other words, the fiercest opponents of genre theory condemn it as a discipline that pretends to explain the diversity of literary phenomena by means of a set of immutable rules and a systematic ordering of the multiplicity of works. By contrast, contemporary genre theory does not consider genre as a prescriptive and taxonomic tool but as an interpretative one. In fact, contemporary genre theory holds that despite the multifarious aspects covered by the concept of genre and its definitional instability, it is virtually impossible to ignore it in interpreting literary texts. The critic John Reichert formulates this position in the following terms: ‘whenever we

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*Genre* (London – New York: Methuen, 1982); Yves Stalloni, *Les genres littéraires* (Paris: Nathan, 2000).

<sup>76</sup> Adrian Marino, ‘A definition of Literary Genres’ in *Theories of Literary Genre*, edited by J. Strelka (University Park – London: Pennsylvania University Press, 1978), pp. 41-55; p. 51.

<sup>77</sup> *Encyclopedia of Literary Critics and Criticism*, edited by Chris Murray (London – Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), pp. 270-4.

try to communicate our understanding of something to someone else (and this is surely an important aspect of criticism) we make use of generic language, saying what kind of thing something is, and perhaps how it differs from other things of the same kind'.<sup>78</sup>

In focusing on the interpretative function of genre, contemporary genre theory demonstrates the difficulty of embarking on a critical examination of a text without having some knowledge of the basic and implicit assumptions of its genre. Thus in her examination of the concept of literary genre, the critic Heather Dubrow makes an experiment demonstrating to what extent a generic label influences the reception of a literary work. The experiment consists in reading the opening paragraph of the same text twice: the first time assuming that it belongs to a detective novel, and the second assuming that it belongs to a *Bildungsroman*.<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, Dubrow shows that the two readings differ dramatically, because 'as we interpret the paragraph we are inevitably [...] responding to generic signals'.<sup>80</sup> For instance, in the first case, the mention of a clock showing the wrong time is perceived 'as a clue that might later help to identify the murderer'.<sup>81</sup>

This example makes plain that the reason why one's reading of a text is influenced by the knowledge of its genre is that this knowledge provides what the German literary historian Hans Robert Jauss (1921-1997) calls a 'horizon of

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<sup>78</sup> John Reichert, 'The Limits of Genre Theory' in *Theories of Literary Genre*, pp. 57-79; p. 58. My emphasis (S.O.C.).

<sup>79</sup> Heather Dubrow, *Genre* (London – New York: Methuen, 1982), pp. 1-3.

<sup>80</sup> Dubrow, *Genre*, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> Dubrow, *Genre*, p. 1.

expectation' enabling readers to orientate their interpretation of the text.<sup>82</sup> As Jauss puts it, 'just as there is no act of verbal communication that is not related to a general, socially or situationally conditioned norm or convention, it is also unimaginable that a literary work set itself into an informational vacuum, without indicating a specific situation of understanding'.<sup>83</sup> Jauss' recognition of the necessity of some basic notion of genres in literary activity is now widely accepted; this new understanding of the interpretative aspects of genre explains that 'in the last past half of the twentieth century generic theory has reemerged as a critical force'.<sup>84</sup> This observation is useful in that it highlights the revival of a two-millennia-old tradition. Yet, it is important to specify that a distinction needs to be made between Western and Russian scholarship on genre. Indeed, the former was not very active during the first decades of the twentieth century, because it had been weakened by Croce's virulent attack. By contrast, Russian literary critics of the first half of the twentieth century insisted on the importance of genre and their ideas have been highly influential in the latest renewal of interest in genre theory.<sup>85</sup> It is not surprising, then, that Fowler takes the Russian Formalists' explanation of the role played by literary genres as a point of departure. It is worth specifying that Fowler refers only to two of its

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<sup>82</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, 'Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature' in *Modern Genre Theory*, pp. 127-47.

<sup>83</sup> Jauss, 'Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature', p. 131.

<sup>84</sup> Ralph Cohen, 'Genre Theory, Literary History, and Historical Change' in *Theoretical Issues in Literary History*, edited by David Perkins (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 85-113; p. 85.

<sup>85</sup> For instance, Robert Holub writes that 'by widening the concept of form to include aesthetic perception, by defining the work of art as the sum of its devices and by directing attention to the process of interpretation itself, the Russian Formalists contribute to a novel manner of exegesis closely related to reception theory' [*Reception Theory. A Critical Introduction* (London – New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 16].

representatives, namely Viktor Shklovskii (1893-1984) and Iurii Tynianov (1894-1943). Incidentally, it might seem strange that Fowler does not include Vladimir Propp (1895-1970), since his typology of folkloric fairytales can be seen as the basis of the structuralist trend of genre theory. In fact, Fowler's choice is consistent with his anti-structuralist stance.

In Shklovskii's view, literary evolution is explicable by the process whereby generic forms to which readers are accustomed are replaced by new forms more able to sharpen the readers' perception. As the theoretician puts it, 'genres collide so that the feeling of the world is preserved'.<sup>86</sup> This implies that the dynamics of literature stem from the necessity to keep foiling readers' expectations. Consequently, Shklovskii challenges the classical understanding of genre, implying that it is made up of immutable rules, and asserts that genre is better thought of as 'a constantly shifting and evolving mechanism'<sup>87</sup> in which forms that used to be non-literary become literary and come to replace those that have lost their artistic power of defamiliarisation by being repeated too often. The process whereby a so-far neglected genre comes to the fore of literature is called by Shklovskii the 'canonisation of the lesser genres' and is illustrated by Fedor Dostoevskii's elevation of 'the devices of the cheap novel to the level of a literary norm' and Aleksandr Blok's canonisation of 'the themes and rhythms of the "gypsy song"'.<sup>88</sup> For Shklovskii these generic changes are not a smooth

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<sup>86</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'O soderzhanii' in *Izbrannoe v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1983) II, pp. 288-93; p. 291. My translation (S.O.C.).

<sup>87</sup> *The Edinburgh Encyclopaedia of Modern Criticism and Theory*, edited by Julian Wolfreys and others (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), p. 117.

<sup>88</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, 'Literature Without a Plot: Rozanov' in *Theory of Prose*, translated by Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), pp. 189-205; p. 190.

evolutionary process; on the contrary, the critic describes them in terms of a forceful battle for power and the predominating genre is metaphorically depicted as a reigning king.<sup>89</sup> This understanding of literary evolution as a constant struggle is consistent with Shklovskii's argument that literary forms do not change in a linear way but by leaps; he expresses this view metaphorically by stating that literary legacy is transmitted 'not from father to son but from uncle to nephew'.<sup>90</sup>

Although Shklovskii's ideas on genre are interesting, contemporary critics agree with Frow's observation that they rely too heavily on a mechanistic model that tends to oversimplify the complexity of literature.<sup>91</sup> In this regard, it is important to note that the theoretician Tynianov elaborated Shklovskii's ideas so that they would give a more accurate picture of the complexity of generic changes. In his article 'Literaturnyi fakt' (1924) Tynianov remarks that it is impossible to give a static and exhaustive definition of any given genre because genres are not made up of rigid and immutable categories.<sup>92</sup> To illustrate this point Tynianov recalls that Pushkin's *poema Ruslan and Liudmila* (1820) was revolutionary in the sense that it did not conform to what was considered, at Pushkin's time, to be the traditional rules of *poema*, i.e. the lofty representation of a historical hero. Consequently, critics refused to consider it a *poema*.<sup>93</sup> Commenting on this refusal, Tynianov observes that critics contemporary to

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<sup>89</sup> Shklovsky, 'Literature Without a Plot: Rozanov', p. 190.

<sup>90</sup> Shklovsky, 'Literature Without a Plot: Rozanov', p. 189.

<sup>91</sup> Frow, *Marxism and Literary History*, p. 87.

<sup>92</sup> Tynianov, 'Literaturnyi fakt' in *Arkhaisty i novatory* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985), pp. 5-29; p. 7.

<sup>93</sup> *Literaturnaia entsiklopediia terminov i poniatii*, edited by A. Nikoliukin (Moscow: NPK "Intervak", 2001), p. 782.

Pushkin saw in *Ruslan and Liudmila* a failure to conform to the generic system of *poema*.<sup>94</sup> This observation is a typical example of the Formalists' view of literary evolution as 'a constant battle between old habits of reading and new procedures of writing'.<sup>95</sup>

In his demonstration of the definitional flexibility of genres Tynianov also takes the example of Pushkin's *poema Tsygany* (1824), which shocked the nineteenth century critics by its representation of a gypsy as the main character instead of a noble and heroic figure. Commenting on the generic status of *Tsygany*, Tynianov remarks that in Pushkin's text 'the genre is unrecognizable, and yet, something significant enough was preserved, so that this "non-*poema*" remained a *poema*'.<sup>96</sup> The element preserved, Tynianov concludes, is not what is perceived to be one of the defining features of the genre, i.e. the representation of a historic and heroic character, but one of its secondary characteristics, namely its size. Generalising this observation, Tynianov asserts somewhat paradoxically that the preservation of a genre from one epoch to another is assured by means of the permanence of some of the genre's secondary features.<sup>97</sup>

In his theory Tynianov also stresses the importance of a systemic approach. Indeed, as the critic Peter Steiner remarks, Tynianov conceives 'the entire culture

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<sup>94</sup> Tynianov, 'Literaturnyi fakt', pp. 5-29; p. .6.

<sup>95</sup> Michael Holquist, 'Bakhtin and the Formalists: History as Dialogue' in *Russian Formalism: A Retrospective Glance*, edited by Robert Louis Jackson and Stephen Rudy (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1985), p. 82-95; p. 88.

<sup>96</sup> Tynianov, 'Literaturnyi fakt', p. 7. My translation ( S.O.C.)

<sup>97</sup> Tynianov, 'Literaturnyi fakt', pp. 7-8. . My translation (S.O.C.)



as a complex “system of systems” composed of various subsystems such as literature, science and technology. Within this general system, extraliterary phenomena relate to literature [...] as an interplay among systems determined by the logic of the culture to which they belong. Thus, among all the pretenders to dominance in the literary system, the one that converges with the developmental tendencies of the overall cultural system becomes the victor.<sup>98</sup> Tynianov’s approach to literary genres from a systemic point of view enables him to underline the relativity of the notion of genre and to assert that ‘a work, pulled out of the context of a given literary system and transferred into another one, takes on a different coloration, [...], loses its genre, in other words, its function is transformed’.<sup>99</sup> This means that the same literary constituents function differently in different genres. Indeed, for Tynianov the function of a generic component depends on the manner in which it correlates with the other elements of the genre.<sup>100</sup> Tynianov illustrates this phenomenon by remarking Lomonosov uses archaism to highlight the elevation of the work by producing a high style and lofty tone. By contrast, some poets use archaisms in an ironic way. In such cases, the archaism should not be understood as an indicator of high style but rather as a sign of the author’s critical attitude toward lofty speeches. What enables the reader to differentiate between a serious use of archaism and an ironic one is ‘the semantic and intonational system of a given work’.<sup>101</sup> Interestingly, this is

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<sup>98</sup> Peter Steiner, *Russian Formalism. A Metapoetics* (Ithaca – London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 112.

<sup>99</sup> Tynianov, ‘Oda kak oratorskii zhanr’ in *Arkhaisty i novatory*, p. 49. My translation (S.O.C.)

<sup>100</sup> Tynianov, ‘O literaturnoi evoliutsii’ in *Arkhaisty i novatory*, p. 33. My translation (S.O.C.)

<sup>101</sup> Tynianov, ‘O literaturnoi evoliutsii’, p. 34.

precisely what Dubrow demonstrates with the experiment mentioned earlier, in which the same extract is read completely differently, according to the genre it is supposed to belong to.

Another instance of Tynianov's insistence on the relevance of a systemic approach is found in his essay 'O literaturnoi evoliutsii' (1927), in which he asserts that 'whether a fact is *literary* or not is a function of its differential quality (i.e., whether it is related either to the literary or the extraliterary series)'.<sup>102</sup> According to Tynianov the literary and extra-literary series can be linked thanks to the concept of the orientation ('ustanovka') which defines the way in which a work, or a corpus of works, relates to the extra-literary world of everyday life ('sootnesenost' s bytom').<sup>103</sup> To illustrate this concept, Tynianov chooses the odes written by Mikhail Lomonosov (1711-1765) and shows that the ode's orientation is oratory, since odes were destined to be declaimed at court.<sup>104</sup> As a result, the laws of oratory discourse become the organising principle of the genre of the Russian ode of the eighteenth century. This means that all the other components are subordinated to the dominant principle of oratory discourse. The concept of orientation is important because it accounts for the way in which extra-literary discourses enter the sphere of literature. As far as genre evolution is concerned, Tynianov considers that a genre evolves when its orientation, which constitutes the organising principle of the works belonging to the given genre, becomes irrelevant and obsolete, because it has been automatised. At this stage,

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<sup>102</sup> Quoted by Peter Steiner in *Russian Formalism. A Metapoetics*, p. 106.

<sup>103</sup> Tynianov, 'O literaturnoi evoliutsii', p. 43.

<sup>104</sup> Tynianov, 'O literaturnoi evoliutsii', p. 43.

the genre loses its relevance and a new genre appears, which tends to have an organising principle that contrasts sharply with its predecessor. For instance, when the dominant principle of oratory discourse became outdated, it was replaced with its opposite, i.e. the principle of intimacy found in letters. Thus, the extra-literary system of correspondence entered literature and the 'letter, which used to be a document, becomes a literary fact'.<sup>105</sup>

To conclude, let us say that Tynianov's examination of the notion of genre still resonates with contemporary literary criticism because, implicitly, it relies on 'the whole notion of the intertext, [i.e.] the relational aspect of textuality that provides the linchpin of postmodernist poetics'.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, Tynianov's assertion that 'the feeling of genre'<sup>107</sup> is an indispensable component of literary interpretation makes him a precursor of the latest developments in genre theory.

In light of what has just been said, it is not surprising that Fowler's inquiry into the notion of literary genres owes to Shklovskii and Tynianov its main axiom, i.e. the idea that genre is a flexible concept. Indeed, the theoretician builds the whole argument of his study on the basis that 'the character of genres is that they change'<sup>108</sup> and asserts that 'only variations or modifications of convention have literary significance'.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Tynianov, 'Literaturnyi fakt', p. 22.

<sup>106</sup> Michael Quinn, 'Iurii Tynianov' in *Encyclopedia of Literary Critics and Criticism*, edited by Chris Murray (London, Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), pp.1107- 11; p. 1110.

<sup>107</sup> Iurii Tynianov, 'Literaturnoe segodnia' 'in *Istoriia literatury. Kritika* (St Petersburg: Azbuka-klassika, 2001), pp. 435-58; p. 436. My translation (S.O.C.)

<sup>108</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 18.

<sup>109</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 18.

Although Fowler acknowledges the Russian Formalists' contribution to his own outlook on literature, the critic does not embrace their theories blindly.<sup>110</sup> Thus he departs from them when it comes to describing the process whereby literary genres form, mix, evolve, disappear and, sometimes, unexpectedly reappear. Indeed, Fowler disagrees with Shklovskii's assertion of an 'inevitable course of generic development, from the stage of "perceptibility" [...] to the stage of mere conventional recognition'.<sup>111</sup> The weakness of this scheme, Fowler says, is that it focuses solely on one factor of degeneration, or, to put it differently banalisation.<sup>112</sup> By contrast, Fowler's demonstration of the flexibility of genre relies on the idea that the reason genres are resilient to automatisisation is that they keep transforming.

Fowler praises Tynianov's theory of genre and recognises that, intellectually, he is greatly indebted to it,<sup>113</sup> yet he still expresses some scepticism regarding Tynianov's neat and all-encompassing picture of generic modifications. As he puts it: 'Tynianov conceives the literary system much too tightly. The reality is less orderly [...]. Far from being complete "orders" exactly filling the structure of literature, we have to rest content with a human clutter (or creative *disorder*) of overlapping systems. Indeed, there is no evidence that genres form systems at all, as distinct from loose groupings. [...]. In short, Tynjanov's theory of generic evolution is too Darwinian'.<sup>114</sup> As this extract indicates, what Fowler refutes is the deterministic aspect of Tynianov's view of genre. Furthermore,

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<sup>110</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 51; p. 158.

<sup>111</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 164.

<sup>112</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, pp. 164-5.

<sup>113</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 250.

<sup>114</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, pp. 250-1.

Fowler also disagrees with Tynianov's assertion that generic changes are explainable solely by an agonistic process in which new forms fight old forms by arguing that Tynianov's overemphasis on the notion of struggle between genres masks the fact that, as will be shown further, 'both generic groupings and individual works seem often to achieve their effects through concord rather than conflict'.<sup>115</sup>

Fowler sees the interest of genre theory in that its concepts contribute to both literary creation and interpretation. Indeed, far from considering that the interest of genres lies exclusively in their ability to surprise the reader, Fowler considers that sometimes genres are to be valued because they offer a well-known literary matrix enabling the writer to order his experience during composition.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, even the generic knowledge of a well-known genre can be artistically stimulating because it offers 'a challenge by provoking a free spirit to transcend the limitations of previous examples'.<sup>117</sup> Fowler also insists on the fact that genre is a fruitful interpretative tool. Indeed, the theoretician makes it plain that awareness of the genre of a work influences the reader's interpretation and he illustrates this phenomenon by remarking that 'if we see *The Jew of Malta* as a savage farce, our response will not be the same as if we saw it as a tragedy'.<sup>118</sup> Fowler's recognition that genre is an active component of both literary creation and literary interpretation leads him to the conclusion that 'genre is ubiquitous in

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<sup>115</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 250.

<sup>116</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 31.

<sup>117</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 31.

<sup>118</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 38.

literature, as the basis of conventions that make literary communication possible'.<sup>119</sup>

As Fowler's observations indicate, the critic is in tune with contemporary genre theory in that he sees literary genres as conveyors of meaning. Indeed, as was already said, Fowler considers that genre theory relates to the interpretative aspect of literature and that is why he asserts that 'to have any artistic significance, to mean anything distinctive in a literary way a work must modulate or vary or depart from its generic conventions, and consequently alter them for the future'.<sup>120</sup> These departures and alterations constitute the very topic scrutinised by Fowler who considers that the transformative quality of genre is of primary importance. As the critic puts it: 'The changes in genres go far beyond modification of this characteristic or that. In the course of time, whole repertoires of recognizable features alter.'<sup>121</sup>

Before introducing Fowler's description of the processes involved in the transformation of literary genres, it is important to indicate what constitutes a genre in Fowler's theory. In doing so, Fowler reiterates Tynianov's observation of the definitional elusiveness of genre and asks: 'What sort of thing is genre [...] to continue recognizable from period to period and yet always be changing?'<sup>122</sup> In answering this question Fowler refutes the idea that genre is a list of necessary and repeatable features and demonstrates the definitional elusiveness of literary genres by taking the example of tragedy, which, he remarks, differs significantly

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<sup>119</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 36.

<sup>120</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 23.

<sup>121</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 47.

<sup>122</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 36.

from one period to another.<sup>123</sup> Consequently, he tries to find out whether there are some ‘common features that might be necessary elements of tragedy’<sup>124</sup> and concludes that it is not possible to pinpoint a single feature that would be present in all tragedies. Although Fowler’s demonstration is not exhaustive, since the task of examining every single tragedy written over more than two thousand years is not realistic, the examples provided are convincing enough, because they concern features usually considered as typical of tragedy. Thus Fowler wonders whether the representation of the fall of a great man could be the defining element that would be present in all tragedies and concludes that this is not the case, since modern tragedies do not necessarily represent the main protagonist as a great man.<sup>125</sup> Another feature that is associated with tragedy is an unhappy ending. Even though most tragedies end unhappily, Fowler remarks that some Greek tragedies end happily.<sup>126</sup> Fowler goes as far as to dismiss the seriousness usually associated with tragedy, since there exist some tragedies which display some comic features.<sup>127</sup> Given the difficulty of finding a single feature that would be present in all instances of the genre, Fowler raises the hypothesis that this problem could be resolved by ‘dividing tragedy diachronically, or into subgenres. [...] If so there will have to be several definitions: of Athenian tragedy, medieval *de casibus* tragedy, domestic tragedy [...] modern tragedy, and many others’.<sup>128</sup> At first sight, this approach seems to be satisfactory, yet, Fowler does not accept this

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<sup>123</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>124</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 39.

<sup>125</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 39. It is regrettable that Fowler does not provide some examples to illustrate this statement.

<sup>126</sup> See Richmond Lattimore, *Story Pattern in Greek Tragedy* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1969), p. 13 n. 39.

<sup>127</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 39.

<sup>128</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 40.

solution to the definitional elusiveness of genres because ‘on the whole, multiplying classes will not serve. For the same logical problem returns on a different scale. Each subgenre has too much variety too elusively and mutably distributed for definition to be feasible. We can specify features that are often present and felt to be characteristic, but not features that are always present’.<sup>129</sup> This statement highlights the impossibility of relying on the presence of at least one constant and immutable definitional feature and constitutes the very basis of Fowler’s approach to genres.

In order to overcome the obstacle posed by the definitional elusiveness of genres, which is due to the impossibility to pinpoint elements that are infallibly present in every single representative of a genre, Fowler resorts to the theory of family resemblance that was developed by the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951). As the critic argues, the way in which Wittgenstein justifies his analogy between language games and game in general fits perfectly the phenomenon involved in labelling a number of works as belonging to a certain genre. Wittgenstein phrases his explanation as follows: ‘These phenomena [i.e. language games and games in general] have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all – but they are *related* to one another in many different ways. [...] We see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing ... I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than ‘family resemblance’; for the various resemblances between members of a family [...] overlap and criss-cross in the same way. And I shall

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<sup>129</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 40.



say: 'games' form a family'.<sup>130</sup> Applying this idea to his investigation of literary groupings, Fowler argues that genres form a family. This implies that the 'representatives of a genre may be [...] regarded as making up a family whose septs and individual members are related in various ways, without necessarily having any single feature shared in common by all'.<sup>131</sup> Finally, let us add that Fowler also justifies the validity of this approach by stressing the fact that literary genres are not sealed-off groups with clearly demarcated boundaries; on the contrary, genres have blurred edges which overlap.

Now that Fowler's principle of generic grouping has been exposed, it is worth presenting his views on the formation of literary genres. As is the case with genealogy, it is frequent that the origin of a genre is lost in the past. Yet in many cases an examination of the genre's history indicates that its earliest phases seem 'to have been ritualistic, if not actually part of the religious rites associated with common situations'.<sup>132</sup> In the case of the genre of psalms and their literary paraphrases, which constituted a widespread genre in the Russian literary culture of the eighteenth century and, as will be demonstrated, is an important intertext of Tsvetaeva's poetry, the religious origin of the genre is obvious: indeed, psalms are used by both Jews and Christians as part of the religious service. At this stage, it is worth specifying that to approach a text that belongs to or is closely linked with the Bible entails that it is important to remember the spiritual function of scripture. As Fowler underlines, to ignore this aspect of the Bible, even in the

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<sup>130</sup> Quoted in Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 41.

<sup>131</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 41.

<sup>132</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 149.

context of a literary study, would amount to distorting its specificity.<sup>133</sup> That is why in the second and third chapters of the present study, I will investigate the problems posed by the religious origin of psalm paraphrase when it is used by Tsvetaeva as a generic intertext and integrated in a highly unorthodox text.

To come back to Fowler's theory, let us present his examination of the various ways in which generic changes occur. Inasmuch as genres' modifications are countless, Fowler does not pretend to give an exhaustive review of the potential ways in which genres change. Nevertheless, the critic remarks that some phenomena tend to be consistent factors of change. Fowler lists the following genre-modifying processes as those that are particularly common:

Topical Invention: this concept means either the addition of a new theme or the development of a minor motif into a dominant theme. Fowler illustrates this genre-modifying process with Cervantes' introduction of the modern theme of the windmill into the romance.<sup>134</sup> He illustrates the other manifestation of topical invention, i.e. the development of a minor motif as follows: 'Student life was a well-established minor topic of the novel (Thackeray; the *Bildungsroman*) long before the university novel subgenre'.<sup>135</sup> As will be shown in the fifth chapter of this study, the concept of topical invention is useful in that it enables the critic to analyse how Tsvetaeva develops minor themes of psalms such as that of God's passivity, and the glorification of a sacred space.

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<sup>133</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, pp. 13-4.

<sup>134</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 170.

<sup>135</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 170.

Combination of Repertoire: it is regrettable that this category is unclearly and hazily defined by Fowler who defines it as the use of the typical themes of one genre within another. Ultimately Fowler asserts that a successful combination becomes imperceptible.<sup>136</sup> Given Fowler's unconvincing explanation of this phenomenon, I will not use this category.

Aggregation: Fowler defines this as an 'additive process [...] whereby several complete short works are grouped in an ordered collection – as the song in song cycle or the ballads in a ballad opera'.<sup>137</sup> The critic illustrates this process with Stevens' *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird* where 'thirteen haiku-like momentary lyrics became in aggregate meditative and metaphysical'.<sup>138</sup> An important point made by Fowler is that the generic nature of a work composed as an aggregate is not identical to the generic nature of the parts composing it, as the epistolary novel testifies. This statement is particularly relevant regarding Tvstaeava, since, as will be shown in Chapter Four, to interpret one of her poems in isolation or in the larger context of her collections of verses produces different interpretations of genre.

Change of scale: Fowler distinguishes two different types of change of scale: the first is one is *macrologia*, i.e. the process of magnifying a typical element of a genre. To illustrate this phenomenon, Fowler gives the example of the *Divina*

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<sup>136</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 171.

<sup>137</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 171

<sup>138</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 172.

*Comedia* where the epic descent into hell is enlarged to such an extent that it forms one third of the work.<sup>139</sup> The second way of modifying the generic scale of a work is by minimising it; this process is named *brachylogia* and can be illustrated with Marvell's *Nymph Complaining* that 'summed up the minor idyll by condensing its main variants'.<sup>140</sup> In Fowler's view, this type 'is formally more interesting [...] since in condensing it must find ways to suggest the original features not explicitly present'.<sup>141</sup>

Change of function: Fowler defines this as an innovative use of well-established literary conventions and comments on this process as follows: 'In ancient literature, the most minute change of function was enough to alter genre [...]. In modern periods, change of function has tended to be more drastic.'<sup>142</sup> In order to illustrate what a change of function amounts to, Fowler chooses the example of the English poetry of the seventeenth century that used Petrarchist conventions in order to convey religious concerns; as a result, 'the human beloved was replaced by the divine lover, the School of Love by the School of the Heart'.<sup>143</sup> As will be shown in the third chapter, this genre-modifying process is relevant for analysing Tsvetaeva's poetry, since she uses the intertext of psalms for a function that was not intended, namely to praise her fellow-writers, on the one hand, and to raise doubts regarding God's ultimate omnipotence on the other.

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<sup>139</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 172.

<sup>140</sup> Quoted in Duff, *Modern Genre Theory*, p. 236.

<sup>141</sup> Quoted in Duff, *Modern Genre Theory*, pp. 235-6.

<sup>142</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, pp. 173-4.

<sup>143</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 174.

Counterstatement: Fowler comments on this as follows: ‘in smaller genres, this [...] may take the form of rhetorical inversion, whereby dispraise is modeled on inverted praise, malediction on valediction, and so forth’.<sup>144</sup> Concerning bigger genres, the critic stresses that counterstatement tends to produce “antigenres” as antitheses to existing genres; Fowler illustrates this phenomenon in the following way: ‘all the types of Biblical epic developed during the Divine Poetry movement answered the pagan epic repertoire feature by feature. To the national or legendary action of Virgilian epic, they opposed the redemptive history revealed in Scripture: to invocation to the pagan Muse, they opposed invocation of Urania, or the Holy Spirit – or prayer to God’.<sup>145</sup> This genre-modifying process will shed light on Tsvetaeva’s poems in which she praises God, while, at the same time, she hints at his flaws.

Inclusion: Fowler calls inclusion ‘a process as ordinary as embedding in syntax’ that results in a ‘literary work enclosing another within it’.<sup>146</sup> To illustrate this process Fowler gives the example of ‘*The Faerie Queen* that contained ‘triumphal pageants, tapestry poems [and] metamorphoses’. A genuine generic modification is accomplished when the matrix form has become conventionally linked with the genre. Interestingly, Fowler underlines the fact that inclusion is one of the most universal genre-modifying processes and remarks that ‘inclusion is found in all literary periods, in a wide variety of genres of all sizes’. This concept will not be of particular relevance in the present study.

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<sup>144</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 175.

<sup>145</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 175.

<sup>146</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 188.

Generic mixture: According to Fowler, generic mixture corresponds to the combination of typical features and devices traditionally associated with different literary genres. To illustrate this point the theoretician gives the example of English tragicomedy, the influence of which is still perceptible in the drama of Samuel Beckett (1906-1989).<sup>147</sup> As will be indicated below and commented upon in Chapter Four, generic mixture is an especially relevant category for Tsvetaeva's poetry, which draws from numerous genres and mixes them creatively.

In addition to his observations regarding genre-modifying processes, Fowler raises the question of the persistent influence of some genres long after they have reached their artistic apogee. According to the literary critic this phenomenon occurs when a well-established and easily recognisable genre becomes less perceptible but still influences literary creation. In Fowler's terminology, this influential but not immediately perceptible genre is called a mode and defined as 'the extension of notionally fixed genres such as tragedy, comedy or elegy into more plastic categories (tragic, comic, elegiac) that modify and combine with other genres'.<sup>148</sup> Fowler illustrates this phenomenon with the example of Thomas Hardy's novels, which, clearly do not belong to the genre of tragedy but which, nevertheless, express a tragic feeling.<sup>149</sup> Frow proposes an even clearer definition of what Fowler means by mode: 'modes are understood as the extension of certain

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<sup>147</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, pp. 187-8.

<sup>148</sup> Quoted in David Duff, *Modern Genre Theory*, p. 17.

<sup>149</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 167.

genres beyond specific and time-bound formal structures to a broader specification of ‘tone’. [...] Rather than standing alone, modes are usually qualifications or modifications of particular genre (*gothic* thriller, *pastoral* elegy, *satirical* sitcom). [...] The modes start their life as genres but over time take on a more general force which is detached from particular structural embodiments: tragedy moves from designating only a dramatic form to refer to the sense of tragic in any medium whatsoever’.<sup>150</sup> Here, let us specify that the concept of mode focuses on the state of the genre; by contrast, the concept of modulation designates the active phenomena whereby a genre is turned into a mode; as Fowler observes, the list of these phenomena is inexhaustive but they often include the reproduction of typical moods or the inclusion of specific motifs.<sup>151</sup>

As will be argued in Chapter Two, from a general point of view Tsvetaeva’s poetry clearly modulates the genre of psalms. Taken in isolation, though, many poems display more specific relations to psalmic poetry and that is why they will be analysed by means of Fowler’s concepts of genre-modifying processes such as topical invention, change of function, counter-statement and generic mixture.

Before reviewing the critical literature concerning Tsvetaeva’s use of literary genres, it is worth noting Frow’s remark that ‘Bakhtin uses the term ‘novel’ in a consistently modal rather than a generic sense’.<sup>152</sup> Indeed, in his “genealogical search” for the origin of Dostoevskii’s type of novelistic writing, Bakhtin asserts that some features of Dostoevskii’s novels were already present, although in an

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<sup>150</sup> Frow, *Genre*, p. 65.

<sup>151</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 191.

<sup>152</sup> Frow, *Genre*, p. 67.

embryonic stage only, in the menippean satire of Greek Antiquity.<sup>153</sup> Likewise, the present study argues that the infamously blasphemous streak of Tsvetaeva's poetry, far from being a pure negation of the religious text, can be considered as evidence of Tsvetaeva's acute receptivity to biblical writing and of her receptivity to the muffled cries of revolt, which occasionally edge on blasphemy, found in some psalms. Hence, the next chapter will start with a presentation of the genre of psalms, which will be followed by the demonstration that Tsvetaeva's modulation of psalms can be fruitfully explained by means of three of Fowler's concepts of genre-modifying processes: change of function; generic mixture and topical invention.

To conclude, let us say that the choice of Fowler's theory for interpreting the generic intertext of psalms in Tsvetaeva's poetry is justified by the fact that this theory highlights the possibility for a genre to remain highly influential, even after having reached its artistic apogee. As will be shown, this aspect of Fowler's theory is of paramount importance for the present study, since I argue that Tsvetaeva's poetry can fruitfully be read as a modern variation on both biblical psalms and the literary paraphrases they inspired. Consequently, an awareness of the historic development of the genre of psalm can shed a new light on some significant aspects of Tsvetaeva's works such as the hotly debated issue of the blasphemous streak of her poetry.

### 1.5. Review of Critical Works on Tsvetaeva's Use of Genres

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<sup>153</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 99. The main difference between Bakhtin and Fowler lies in the fact that for the former the only active modern genre is the novel, whereas the latter considers that any genre is potentially able to last for several centuries.



Commenting on Tsvetaeva's writing, it is impossible not to mention the generic heterogeneity of her works. Indeed, it is a well-established fact that in her poetry Tsvetaeva resorts to a great variety of genres that are used within the broader generic framework of lyrical poetry. The most noticeable genres are: autobiography, epistolary writing, folkloric songs, prayers, lamentation, elegy and odes. Although unconventional writing was not Tsvetaeva's exclusive domain and was, in fact, a relatively widespread phenomenon at the beginning of the twentieth century, as testified by the iconoclast tendencies of the futurists, Tsvetaeva distinguishes herself by not belonging to any literary school and remaining truly faithful to her personal approach. Indeed, Tsvetaeva never strove to accommodate the taste of literary critics and always followed her poetic inspiration without any other considerations. In short, Tsvetaeva did not feel the necessity to abide by established literary conventions. Not surprisingly, critics have not failed to note the generic diversity characterising Tsvetaeva's poetry. This fact was well spotted by D. S. Mirsky (1890-1939), a friend of Tsvetaeva and literary critic, who commented on the peculiarity of her poetry in the following terms: 'Цветаеву очень трудно втиснуть в цепь поэтической традиции [...]. Анархичность ее искусства выражается и в чрезвычайной свободе и разнообразии форм и приемов, и в глубоком равнодушии к канону и вкусу'.<sup>154</sup> Present-day critics also point out the generic peculiarity of Tsvetaeva's poetry. For instance, the

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<sup>154</sup> D. S. Mirsky, 'O sovremennom sostoianii russkoi poezii' in *Uncollected Writings on Russian Literature*, edited by G. Smith (Berkeley: Berkeley Slavic Specialities, 1989), pp. 87-117; p. 102.

literary commentator Michael Naydan highlights Tsvetaeva's propensity to mix different genres in a particularly intricate way in the poetic collection *Posle Rossii*; as the critic puts it: 'Among other verse forms, it contains meditative lyrics, metapoems, love poems, laments, incantations, and gypsy songs.'<sup>155</sup> Likewise, the scholar Diana Lewis Burgin observes the generic complexity of Tsvetaeva's writing and exemplifies it by the following remark on the 'Lettre à l'Amazone' (1934): 'the narrative of "Letter to the Amazon" switches constantly between epistle, polemic, diatribe, dramatic dialogue, lyric, and fictionalized autobiography'.<sup>156</sup> In the same vein, the critic O. Kalinina highlights the difficulty of pinpointing the generic specificity of Tsvetaeva's prose, which oscillates between essays, memoirs, and lyrical prose.<sup>157</sup> The same idea is expressed by the scholar Svetlana Boym who describes Tsvetaeva's autobiographical writing as being 'polygeneric' and 'intergeneric'.<sup>158</sup> Similarly, the critic Natasha Kolchevska depicts the generic specificity of Tsvetaeva's autobiographical story 'Dom starogo Pimena' (1933) as follows: 'it merges elements of autobiography and family chronicles, fact and fiction, social commentary and individual psychology, mythifying lyricism and historical

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<sup>155</sup> Marina Tsvetaeva, *After Russia / Posle Rossii*, translated by Michael N. Naydan with Slava Yastremski, edited and commented by M.N. Naydan (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis, 1992), p. 273.

<sup>156</sup> Diana Lewis Burgin, 'Mother Nature versus the Amazons: M.T. and Female Same-sex Love', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 61 (1995), pp. 62-88; p. 68.

<sup>157</sup> O. Kalinina, *Avtobiograficheskaia proza M.I. Tsvetaevoi o detstve poeta* (Saratov: Izdatel'stvo saratovskogo universiteta, 2004), p. 5.

<sup>158</sup> Svetlana Boym, 'The Death of the Poetess' in *Death in Quotations Marks* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 191-240; p.240.

analysis, biographical fact and poetic fiction'.<sup>159</sup> It becomes clear, then, that Tsvetaeva's liberty in handling different literary and extra-literary genres and her ease in juggling them is partly due to her utmost independence with regard to the generic conventions of her time. In this regard, the following remark made by Tsvetaeva in a biographical outline penned down in her 1928 notebook and entitled 'Moia sud'ba kak poeta' is particularly telling: 'В до-революционной России самовольная, а отчасти *невольная* исключенность из литер<атурного> круга – из-за рожденного отвращения ко всякой кружковщине'.<sup>160</sup>

The role played by genres in Tsvetaeva's poetry has been variously interpreted by contemporary scholars. The first notable study of Tsvetaeva's use of genres is Bott's demonstration that poems such as 'Idesh' na menia pokhozhii' (1913), the cycle 'Stikhi k Bloku' (1921) and the *poema* *Novogodnee* (1927) are all composed out of a communicational situation that corresponds to that of the epitaph.<sup>161</sup> More recently, the role played by the genre of *poema* in Tsvetaeva's poetry has attracted considerable critical attention. The most extensive analysis on this topic is found in E. Titova's book "*Preobrazhennyi byt*": *opyt istoriko-literaturnogo kommentariia desiati poem M. Tsvetaevoi*,<sup>162</sup> in which the scholar examines the modifications the genre of *poema* undergoes under Tsvetaeva's pen.

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<sup>159</sup> Natasha Kolchevska, 'Mothers and Daughters; Variations on Family Themes in Tsvetaeva's *The House at Old Pimen*' in *Engendering Slavic Literatures*, edited by Pamela Chester and Sibelan Forrester (Bloomington – Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 135- 57; p. 137.

<sup>160</sup> Tsvetaeva, *Neizdannoe. Svodnye tetradi*, edited by E. Korkina and I. Shevelenko (Moscow: Ellis Lak, 1997), p. 46.

<sup>161</sup> Marie-Luise Bott, *Studien zum Werk Marina Cvetaevas: das Epitaph als Prinzip der Dichtung M. Cvetaevas* (Frankfurt am Main – New York: Peter Lang, 1984).

<sup>162</sup> E. Titova, "*Preobrazhennyi byt*": *opyt istoriko-literaturnogo kommentariia desiati poem M. Tsvetaevoi* (Vologda: Rus', 2000).

The interest of Tsvetaeva's idiosyncratic use of the genre of *poema*, Titova remarks, is that she always mixes it with other genres in an unusual manner. Thus Titova observes that in her *poema Charodei* (1914), which depicts Tsvetaeva's friendship with the Symbolist poet Ellis (1879-1947) during the summer of 1909, Tsvetaeva mingles the genre of *poema* with that of memoir, since she recreates an episode of her personal past.<sup>163</sup> As Titova notices, this fact contrasts sharply with the traditional instances of the genre.<sup>164</sup> The second *poema* examined by Titova is *Na krasnom kone* (1921), which constitutes an allegory of the poet's fate.<sup>165</sup> Commenting on this text, Titova judiciously observes that in it Tsvetaeva draws inspiration from the sacred art of icon-painting. Thus the critic convincingly argues that the three meetings between the lyrical heroine and the horseman are depicted like a vision, and represented in a pictorial way which recalls the icon-frames narrating the main events of a saint's life.<sup>166</sup> Consequently, Tsvetaeva creates an icon-like poem for a purely artistic purpose, namely that of depicting the artist as a saint-like figure devoted not to God but to poetry.<sup>167</sup> This observation leads Titova to the conclusion that the mysterious horseman of *Na krasnom kone* is an emblematic figure embodying Tsvetaeva's belief that poetry is a means to attain perfection while remaining outside the religious sphere, i.e. outside God's influence.<sup>168</sup> At this stage, it is important to stress that Tsvetaeva's

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<sup>163</sup> Concerning the autobiographic orientation of Tsvetaeva's poetry, see: Taubman, *A Life Through Poetry*.

<sup>164</sup> Titova, "Preobrazhenyi byt", p. 13.

<sup>165</sup> The poet's fate is embodied by a horseman who demands that the lyrical heroine sacrifices successively her doll, lover and son.

<sup>166</sup> Titova, "Preobrazhennyi byt", p. 18.

<sup>167</sup> Titova, "Preobrazhennyi byt", p. 20.

<sup>168</sup> Titova, "Preobrazhennyi byt", p. 22.

inspiration from a religious form of art is particularly relevant for the present study, since in it I will examine, precisely, the influence of a religious text, the psalms, on Tsvetaeva's creation. Interestingly, my conclusion will differ from that of Titova, since I will show that Tsvetaeva's use of the intertext of prayers in general and psalms in particular betrays her inability to completely rid her poetry of the idea of God.

Titova carries on her investigation of Tsvetaeva's mixture of *poema* and other genres in her analysis of *Poema gory*. As the critic argues, here Tsvetaeva composes a poetic work in which the particularities of the *poema* are related and assimilated to those of the lyrical cycles Tsvetaeva wrote in the early twenties<sup>169</sup> and which are characterised by the fact that in them the poet tries to unveil the many different meanings of the term constituting their title.<sup>170</sup> For instance, in *Poema gory*, which depicts the parting of two lovers as a spiritual journey, the whole artistic work is focused on the concept of the mountain, which stands as a metaphorical representation of the spiritual elevation entailed by the lovers' separation.<sup>171</sup>

Titova also examines *Poema kontsa* and observes that this *poema* mixes some typical features of traditional Greek tragedy, such as the presence of a choir, i.e. a mass of anonymous and dull figures, with the romantic theme of the parting of lovers that also constituted the topic of *Poema gory*.<sup>172</sup> As Titova underlines, the fact that Tsvetaeva chooses to treat the same topic in two different generic

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<sup>169</sup> During this period Tsvetaeva wrote the following works: 'Sivilla', 'Derev'ia', 'Bog' (1922) and 'Fedra', 'Ariadna', 'Provoda', 'Poet', 'Oblaka', 'Ruch'i' (1923).

<sup>170</sup> Titova, "Preobrazhennyi byt", p. 29.

<sup>171</sup> Titova, "Preobrazhennyi byt", pp. 31-2.

<sup>172</sup> Titova, "Preobrazhennyi byt", p. 38.

frameworks demonstrates her awareness of the fact that the genre in which a work is written influences the interpretation of its content. Thus, despite the fact that *Poema gory* and *Poema kontsa* share a common theme, Tsvetaeva's artistic aim is completely different in the two texts. The main function of the former *poema* is to develop the semantic possibilities contained in its title so that the lovers' parting becomes identified with a spiritual journey; by contrast, the main aim of *Poema kontsa* is to represent the inevitably confrontational aspect of an event such as ending an amorous relationship. As Titova remarks, to emphasise this aspect of the plot Tsvetaeva uses devices reminiscent of classical dramas such as the presence of a choir representing ordinary people, which contrasts with the heroic personality of the lyrical heroine.<sup>173</sup>

In a different vein, Tsvetaeva also mixes the *poema* with the genre of the musical drama, as Titova demonstrates in her analysis of *Krysolov*, where she underlines that every single theme treated in this *poema* is ultimately related to the idea of musicality and represented by means of a musical leitmotif;<sup>174</sup> in fact, the characters' degree of musical receptivity is equated with their ability to perceive the spiritual aspect of life, and lack of musical receptivity represents a prosaic outlook on life.<sup>175</sup>

Lastly, Titova studies yet another way in which Tsvetaeva uses the genre of *poema*: its combination with essayistic prose in *Popytka komnaty* (1926), *Poema lestnitsy* (1927), and *Poema vozdukha* (1927). According to Titova, Tsvetaeva was attracted to this genre because its flexibility enables authors to

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<sup>173</sup> Titova, "Preobrazhennyi byt", p. 41.

<sup>174</sup> Titova, "Preobrazhennyi byt", pp. 45-56.

<sup>175</sup> Titova, "Preobrazhennyi byt", pp. 52-3.

focus on individual experiences without requiring a specific type of utterance.<sup>176</sup>

The interesting point about Tsvetaeva's interest in essayistic writing is that she manages to transfer the specificities of this prose genre, i.e. a personal meditation which can take any formal feature, into poetry, as shown by the three *poemy*. As Titova demonstrates, auto-definition and auto-expression, which are typical features of the essay, are also a striking characteristic of Tsvetaeva's three *poemy*.<sup>177</sup> Thus, the real subject of *Popytka komnaty*, in which Tsvetaeva describes the room where her imagined meeting with Pasternak would take place, is not the room itself but the hypothetical meeting of two great poets, herself and Pasternak. In *Poema lestnitsy* Tsvetaeva also describes a physical space, i.e. a staircase in a poor apartment block. Such a theme may seem odd, yet Tsvetaeva's mastery consists precisely in describing the stairs in such a way that they become animate, as do the things on and around them. The *poema* describes how both the stairs and objects revolt against their materiality and catch fire as a result. As Titova remarks, this fire signifies the author's wish to liberate the world from the deceptive physicality of matter and to reassert the importance of the spirituality contained in personal thoughts and feelings.<sup>178</sup> In other words, although the essayistic principle of personal meditation is not obvious at first sight, it constitutes the very core of *Poema lestnitsy*. Finally, in *Poema vozdukha* the meditative and speculative principle typical of essayistic writing is indisputable, since its subject is a meditation on the journey into the other world, which cannot be known by the living but only glimpsed.

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<sup>176</sup> Titova, "Preobrazhennyi byt", p. 58.

<sup>177</sup> Titova, "Preobrazhennyi byt", p. 67.

<sup>178</sup> Titova, "Preobrazhennyi byt", p. 67.

To summarise, Titova concludes that by integrating the meditative principle of essayistic writing into the genre of *poema* Tsvetaeva successfully universalises it,<sup>179</sup> i.e. enables it to treat topics that are not specific but that apply to all readers.

Finally, Titova examines the influence of historical chronicles on Tsvetaeva's *poema* *Perekop*, which narrates the last battle of the civil war in 1920. In this *poema* Tsvetaeva follows the historical principle of chronicles, and that is why she composes a chronological structure that follows the unfolding of events in *Perekop*.<sup>180</sup> The most remarkable feature of this work, in Titova's view, is that in it Tsvetaeva's lyricism blends organically with epic.<sup>181</sup>

Titova's thorough examination of the various generic mixtures undergone by the genre of *poema* in Tsvetaeva's work is especially valuable because it demonstrates her ability to combine seemingly incompatible genres in a subtle and creative way.

As this overview of Titova's book indicates, Tsvetaeva's different treatments of the genre of *poema* confirm Tynianov's observation, which constitutes the basis of Fowler's theory and which states that most of the time it is some of the secondary features of a literary genre, such as its size, which are conserved over time, rather than its so-called defining features such as specific themes. Titova's analyses are also consistent with Fowler's assertion stating that in writing within a specific genre an author can alter it to such an extent that the genre is hardly recognisable.<sup>182</sup> This is precisely what happens in *Poema lestnitsy*

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<sup>179</sup> Titova, "Preobrazhennyi byt", p. 67.

<sup>180</sup> Titova, "Preobrazhennyi byt", p. 81.

<sup>181</sup> Titova, "Preobrazhennyi byt", p. 81.

<sup>182</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 47.



which depicts a run-down staircase; at first sight, such a topic would hardly be associated with the literary genre of *poema*, yet Tsvetaeva succeeds in writing a *poema* about it by adding a meditative streak that allows her to go beyond the mere visual description of the stairs and to express in an indirect manner her wish to exist as a spirit only. This meditation gives more consistency to the apparent subject announced in the title and gives the author enough thought to write a piece which fits the size of a *poema*.

Another analysis of Tsvetaeva's use of the genre of *poema* is V. Khaimova's article 'Liricheskaja poema M. Tsvetaevoi na fone romanticheskoi poemy A. Pushkina',<sup>183</sup> in which the critic puts Tsvetaeva's lyrical *poemy* into a historical perspective and compares their poetics with that of Pushkin's romantic *poemy*. This comparison enables Khaimova to conclude that the narrative thread, which was a typical element of the former, almost disappears in some of Tsvetaeva's actualisation of the genre.<sup>184</sup> Hence, in the main lyrical *poemy* written by Tsvetaeva, the central organising principle of the text is not novelistic but lyrical, since it is centred around the author's meditation on her personality.<sup>185</sup>

The interesting point of Khaimova's analysis is that it highlights the continuity between Pushkin and Tsvetaeva's actualisations of the genre of *poema* and pays a particular attention to both its persistence and its mutability. Indeed, as was said, Khaimova starts by noting that in his *poemy* Pushkin introduces a lyrical

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<sup>183</sup> V. Khaimova, 'Liricheskaja poema M. Tsvetaevoi na fone romanticheskoi poemy A. Pushkina', *A.S. Pushkin – M.I. Tsvetaeva*, pp. 189-203.

<sup>184</sup> Khaimova, 'Liricheskaja poema M. Tsvetaevoi na fone romanticheskoi poemy A. Pushkina', p. 190.

<sup>185</sup> Khaimova, 'Liricheskaja poema M. Tsvetaevoi na fone romanticheskoi poemy A. Pushkina', p. 191.

principle in the narration of novelistic topics. As the genre evolves, the novelistic aspect of the genre lessens in importance, while the lyrical principle becomes overwhelming. Such an analysis confirms Fowler's theory, according to which one of the ways in which a genre changes over time is by magnifying one of its typical elements. Khaimova's analysis is interesting because it highlights how the nineteenth century *poemy* written by Pushkin differ from those written by Tsvetaeva. In doing so Khaimova illustrates Fowler's assertion about the mutability of genres over time.

Another contribution to the question of Tsvetaeva's treatment of the genre of *poema* can be found in O. Skripova's article 'Siurrealisticheskoe mirovospriatie i zhanr liricheskoi poemy (Marina Tsvetaeva "Popytka komnaty")', in which the critic examines the generic structure of Tsvetaeva's *poemy*.<sup>186</sup> In these works, Skripova observes, it is still possible to perceive the romantic apprehension of the world, which presupposes that the lyrical hero is aware of the eternal clash between a dream of perfection and a flawed reality which serves as the main motivation for creation. However, Skripova makes it clear that the interesting point about the persistence of a romantic apprehension of the world in Tsvetaeva's *poemy* is that it is expressed by means that are typical of modernist writing such as the dream-like poetics, similar to that of surrealist authors, used in *Popytka komnaty*. Thus Skripova concludes that Tsvetaeva's *poemy* differ from the traditional genre of *poema* to the extent that they become what can be dubbed meta-*poemy*, because by reproducing the dream-like aspect of

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<sup>186</sup> O. Skripova, 'Siurrealisticheskoe mirovospriatie i zhanr liricheskoi poemy (Marina Tsvetaeva "Popytka komnaty")', *Marina Tsvetaeva – epokha, kul'tura, sud'ba*, pp. 73-83.

her inspiration Tsvetaeva unveils the hidden mechanism of her creation and gives a reflexive account of the processes involved in the writing of *poemy*.<sup>187</sup>

Another article concerning Tsvetaeva's original use of the genre of *poema* is 'The Epic, the Lyric, the Dramatic and Marina Cvetaeva's "Poema of the End" by the critic Ludmila Shleyfer Lavine.<sup>188</sup> Lavine argues that 'conflating the epic and the lyric impulses allows Cvetaeva to hyperbolize personal pain into a public event'.<sup>189</sup> Thus, the critic examines the means by which Tsvetaeva transforms a highly personal confrontational situation such as the parting of lovers into an anti-individual poem reminiscent of the epic genre. In her analysis Lavine stresses that the main devices used by Tsvetaeva to give an epic coloration to her work are military vocabulary<sup>190</sup> and linear narration.<sup>191</sup> In Tsvetaeva's *Poema kontsa*, these devices are accompanied by a sense of atemporality typical of lyrical poetry.<sup>192</sup>

Lavine carries on her analysis of the generic heterogeneity of *Poema kontsa* by demonstrating that it also displays some typically dramatic features. Referring to Goethe's claims 'that drama engages lyric and epic elements in antagonistic relationship',<sup>193</sup> the critic explains that this is exactly what happens in *Poema kontsa* and asserts that 'what makes this *poema* formally dramatic is also what makes it lyric: it is comprised of immediate impressions of first-person

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<sup>187</sup> Skripova, 'Siurrealisticheskoe mirovospriiatie i zhanr liricheskoi poemy (Marina Tsvetaeva "Popytka komnaty")', p. 82.

<sup>188</sup> Ludmila Shleyfer Lavine, 'The Epic, the Lyric, the Dramatic and Marina Cvetaeva's "Poema of the End"', *Die Welt der Slaven* XLIX (2004), pp. 95-112.

<sup>189</sup> Lavine, 'The Epic, the Lyric, the Dramatic and Marina Cvetaeva', p. 96.

<sup>190</sup> Lavine, 'The Epic, the Lyric, the Dramatic and Marina Cvetaeva', pp. 96-101.

<sup>191</sup> Lavine, 'The Epic, the Lyric, the Dramatic and Marina Cvetaeva', p. 101.

<sup>192</sup> Lavine, 'The Epic, the Lyric, the Dramatic and Marina Cvetaeva', p. 101.

<sup>193</sup> Lavine, 'The Epic, the Lyric, the Dramatic and Marina Cvetaeva', p. 102.

utterances'.<sup>194</sup> Moreover, Lavine remarks that *Poema kontsa* contains 'many lines in the spirit of stage directions – descriptive statements on setting and gestures – [which] are integrated into the text without special punctuation to call attention to them as such'.<sup>195</sup> It appears, then, that Lavine's demonstration of the generic entanglement of *Poema kontsa* confirms Fowler's assertion that the overlapping of genres is a fruitful literary phenomenon.<sup>196</sup>

The critic Ilya Kutik proposes yet another perspective on Tsvetaeva's use of literary genres in his examination of the importance of the ode in Tsvetaeva's work.<sup>197</sup> Arguing against the generally accepted definition of the ode as an exclusively lyrical genre, Kutik demonstrates that from the outset, i.e. from the eighteenth century, Russian odes had unconsciously integrated an epic quality. Relying on Bakhtin's definition of the epic, Kutik summarises it as follows: 'the underlying principle is that in an epic work details stand metonymically for a much larger piece of the world'.<sup>198</sup> Kutik starts by establishing the presence of this feature in the Russian odes of the eighteenth century: their task, the critic remarks, 'was to shape any event (a battle, a coronation, a birthday) as an epic one; i.e. as a finished fragment of something which is bigger and has no end'.<sup>199</sup> This fact leads Kutik to the logical conclusion that the Russian odes of the eighteenth century had indeed been partly shaped by an epic poetics. After mentioning the decline of the genre of the ode in the nineteenth century, Kutik

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<sup>194</sup> Lavine, 'The Epic, the Lyric, the Dramatic and Marina Cvetaeva', p. 103.

<sup>195</sup> Lavine, 'The Epic, the Lyric, the Dramatic and Marina Cvetaeva', p. 105.

<sup>196</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 54.

<sup>197</sup> Ilya Kutik, *The Ode and the Odic: Essays on Mandelstam, Pasternak, Tsvetaeva and Mayakovsky* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 1994).

<sup>198</sup> Kutik, *The Ode and the Odic*, p. 4.

<sup>199</sup> Kutik, *The Ode and the Odic*, p. 6.

observes that in the twentieth century, ‘the solemn ode was gradually resurrected in Russian poetry, not as a full-blown genre, but primarily on the lexical and intonational levels. The ode became what one might call an echo genre.’<sup>200</sup> At this point, it is particularly important to stress Kutik’s assertion that modernist poetry does not reproduce odes as such but only borrows from them their vocabulary and tonality. This observation fits perfectly with Fowler’s definition of a genre’s modulation that is ‘a selection or abstraction from kind [a historical genre]. It has few if any external rules, but evokes a historical kind through sample of its internal repertoire.’<sup>201</sup>

Let us see now, how, according to Kutik, the odic manifests itself in Tsvetaeva’s writings. The critic starts his enquiry by reflecting on Tsvetaeva’s essay ‘Poet-al’pinist’ (1934), which was written as a poetic obituary for the prematurely deceased poet Nikolai Gronskii (1909 –1934); in this essay, Tsvetaeva proposes a close reading of Gronskii’s unpublished *poema* on mountains entitled *Bella Donna*. However, Kutik judiciously remarks that in ‘Poet-al’pinist’ Tsvetaeva also aims to identify herself with the odic tradition.<sup>202</sup> In order to do so she asserts a spiritual lineage starting with Gavriil Derzhavin (1743-1816), from whom she inherits the spirit which she, in her turn, transmits to Gronskii.

In more concrete terms, Kutik also observes that Tsvetaeva’s favourite punctuation mark, namely the dash, is ‘an outgrowth of the odic style’,<sup>203</sup> indeed,

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<sup>200</sup> Kutik, *The Ode and the Odic*, p. 14.

<sup>201</sup> Kutik, *The Ode and the Odic*, p. 51

<sup>202</sup> Kutik, *The Ode and the Odic*, p. 110.

<sup>203</sup> Kutik, *The Ode and the Odic*, p. 140.

Kutik reminds us of the fact that the dash appeared for the first time in Russian verses in Derzhavin's famous line from the ode 'Bog'(1784) which reads: 'Я царь – я раб – я червь – я Бог'.<sup>204</sup> Another example of the odic influence in Tsvetaeva's poetry highlighted by Kutik is Tsvetaeva's *poema Novogodnee* (1927), written as a letter-obituary celebrating the creative spirit of the Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926). As Kutik notes in *Novogodnee* 'the lexicon [...] is clearly related to that of the odic 18<sup>th</sup> century, as are the odic devices of "enumeration" and "onomatopoeia"'.<sup>205</sup> In addition, the critic also remarks that *Novogodnee* contains 'allusions to Derzhavin and, sometimes, to Lomonosov, not always in the form of quotations but mostly as general odic and aesthetic strata of poetic vision'.<sup>206</sup> These examples are convincing enough to agree with Kutik's argument for the presence of the odic in Tsvetaeva's poetry. At this stage, it is useful to remember that, ultimately, Kutik's demonstration aims at proving the presence of an epic quality in the tradition of Russian odes which Tsvetaeva's poetry inherits. As was already said, the critic relies on Bakhtin's definition of the epic, as a metonymical type of poetry. Thus, in order to demonstrate the presence of an epic element in Tsvetaeva's poetics Kutik analyses her use of metonymy. In order to do so, he comments on the third poem of the cycle 'Maiakovskomu' (1930). Kutik observes that in this poem Tsvetaeva's mention of Sinai in the second stanza gives a mythological dimension to the historical event that inspired

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<sup>204</sup> Quoted in *The Garnett Book of Russian Verse*, edited by Donald Rayfield and others (London: Garnett Press, 2000), p. 11.

<sup>205</sup> Kutik, *The Ode and the Odic*, p. 135.

<sup>206</sup> Kutik, *The Ode and the Odic*, p. 135.

her to write the cycle, namely Maiakovskii's death; interestingly, Kutik notices that this enlargement of scale is announced by the mention in the preceding stanza of Maiakovskii's 'hobnail boots [...] [that] represents a force which impels a walker to go uphill'.<sup>207</sup> Hence Kutik concludes that 'Tsvetaeva's use of a close-up (a detail) leads the poem to a big plan (the Biblical and epic), and simultaneously gives it an opportunity to include the entire context of her poetry. We find an example of such an opening out towards her own poetry in the third and the fifth stanzas. Indeed, the lines "В сапогах, в которых, понаморщась, / Горю нес – и брал – и клял – и пел –" and "Горю горя своего народа" refer to Tsvetaeva's "Poem of the Mountain" ('Поэма горы')'.<sup>208</sup>

Kutik's analyses of the appearance and development of the genre of odes in Russian poetry and the active influence of this genre on Tsvetaeva's poetry confirms Fowler's assertion regarding the constant evolution and interaction of literary genres. Moreover, as was said earlier, Kutik's description of the way in which the classical genre of ode swayed the modernist poetry of the early twentieth century corresponds to Fowler's concept of a genre's modulation. Finally, Kutik's examination of the subtle way in which Tsvetaeva integrates the specificity of the Russian ode, i.e. its epic coloration, into her own modernist poetics proves that, despite her scorn for established literary schools, Tsvetaeva was very skillful at discerning the most subtle generic features of her time. This is a particularly valuable point because it indicates that Tsvetaeva's highly unusual mixing of genres, which will be discussed in Chapter Four, is far from chaotic.

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<sup>207</sup> Kutik, *The Ode and the Odic*, p. 123.

<sup>208</sup> Kutik, *The Ode and the Odic*, p. 124.

Finally, it is also important to mention Vladimir Aleksandrov's article 'Zhanrovoe svoeobrazie poezii M. Tsvetaevoi'<sup>209</sup> in which the critic examines the influence of the folk song on Tsvetaeva's poetics. The critic considers that the folk song is the overriding genre among the variety of genres present in Tsvetaeva's work. Evidence of the dominant presence of the folk song is, according to Aleksandrov, the frequency with which Tsvetaeva uses the poetic device of parallelism, which is a typical feature of folk songs.<sup>210</sup> Aleksandrov illustrates this observation with an example taken from Tsvetaeva's *poema-skazka* 'Tsar'-devitsa' which opens with an exemplary type of parallelism used in folk songs: 'Как у молодой змеи – да старый уж / Как у молодой жены – да старый муж'.<sup>211</sup> In the context of this work the use of folk parallelism is not surprising, since Tsvetaeva writes in the spirit of fairy-tale, i.e. of popular oral literature. By contrast, the use of parallelism in poems that are not orientated on folkloric genres is more surprising, Aleksandrov remarks.<sup>212</sup> For instance, the critic analyses the presence of parallelism in the poem 'Daby ty menia ne videl –' (1922) made up of three five-line stanzas, which repeat a similar structure three times.<sup>213</sup> Such a composition, Aleksandrov concludes, testifies to the presence of the genre of folkloric song on the compositional level, even when the theme of the poem is not overtly folkloric. Interestingly, Aleksandrov's assertion of a strong influence of folkloric oral songs in Tsvetaeva's poetry reinforces my hypothesis

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<sup>209</sup> Vladimir Alexandrov, 'Zhanrovoe svoeobrazie poezii M. Tsvetaevoi' in *Den' Poezii Mariny Cvetaevoi*, edited by Barbara Lennkvist and Larisa Mokrobodova. (Åbo, Finland: Dept. of Russian, Åbo Akademi University, 1997), pp. 85-102.

<sup>210</sup> Alexandrov, 'Zhanrovoe svoeobrazie poezii M. Tsvetaevoi', p. 89.

<sup>211</sup> Alexandrov, 'Zhanrovoe svoeobrazie poezii M. Tsvetaevoi', pp. 89-90.

<sup>212</sup> Alexandrov, 'Zhanrovoe svoeobrazie poezii M. Tsvetaevoi', pp. 93-94.

<sup>213</sup> Alexandrov, 'Zhanrovoe svoeobrazie poezii M. Tsvetaevoi', pp. 93-94.



that the genre of psalms is an important component of Tsvetaeva's work, since, as the following chapter will show, psalms had paramount importance for Russian folkloric culture. Hence, my thesis is consistent with Aleksandrov's assertion.

As was just shown, the overwhelming majority of the studies on Tsvetaeva and genre deal with the main issues tackled by Fowler's theory, namely the fact that genres are fluid categories which change over time and mix between themselves. The absence of clear-cut genres does not mean that it is futile to examine the generic specificities of Tsvetaeva's poetry. On the contrary, an awareness of the different generic aspects of a work helps to broaden and deepen its interpretation by allowing the critic to relate the text to a whole series of other texts. Indeed, as the theoretician Thomas Beebee judiciously puts it, 'the truly vital meaning of a text are often contained not in any specific generic category into which the text may be placed, but rather in the play of differences between its genres'.<sup>214</sup> Thus it is important to bear in mind the generic diversity of Tsvetaeva's poetry while interpreting the psalmic intertext of her works. As will be shown further, Tsvetaeva does not mix genres randomly, arbitrarily or pointlessly; on the contrary, the various genres that criss-cross in her works always contribute to make them highly meaningful, while, at the same time, highly original, because of their unusual combinations.

To conclude, it is worth noting that the majority of research on Tsvetaeva's use of literary genres focuses on her *poemy* or on her prose. By contrast, the present investigation proposes to analyse the generic specificity of her poems. In

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<sup>214</sup> Thomas Beebee, *The Ideology of Genre* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 249-50.

addition, it is of paramount importance to stress that there is a lacuna in the critical investigation of Tsvetaeva's use of genre, since there is no systematic study examining the influence of the genre of psalm in Tsvetaeva's poetry.<sup>215</sup> Given Tsvetaeva's life-long interest in the Bible and in so far as the genre of psalms was of paramount importance in the formation of Russian poetry and provided a significant generic framework for some of Tsvetaeva's favourite poets such as Derzhavin or Akhmatova, the lack of systematic studies on the issue of Tsvetaeva's integration of the genre of psalm into her poetry clearly constitutes a gap in the scholarship on Tsvetaeva. The following chapters constitute an attempt to fill this gap by examining some of the major issues arising from Tsvetaeva's mixing of a modernist poetry with the genre of psalms.

#### 1.6. Review of Critical Works on Tsvetaeva and the Psalter

Inasmuch as psalms belong to the Bible, and given the scarcity of critical works examining the link between the Psalter and Tsvetaeva's poetry, it makes sense to start this section by reviewing the studies on the broader issue of Tsvetaeva's intertextual use of the Bible and then to focus on the critical comments regarding the link between Tsvetaeva's work and psalms.

One of the earliest studies of the biblical layer of Tsvetaeva's poetry was undertaken by the Polish scholar Jerzy Faryno in his analysis of Tsvetaeva's

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<sup>215</sup> This lacuna can be explained by the fact both the genre of psalms and psalm paraphrases tend to be forgotten from the major theoretical classifications of literary genres.

three-poem cycle 'Magdalina' (1923).<sup>216</sup> This study is particularly interesting in that it examines to what transformations the biblical character of Mary Magdalene is subjected once transferred from the New Testament into Tsvetaeva's poetry. Thus Faryno convincingly demonstrates that, far from simply retelling the story of Magdalene as a mere spiritual healing by Christ,<sup>217</sup> Tsvetaeva depicts it as a substantial transmutation of both Christ and Magdalene occurring during the process of Magdalene's transfiguration from a charnel being into a pneumatic-aquatic one, i.e. an air-like and watery entity; ultimately, this transformative process turns Mary Magdalene into a mythological representation of the world-containing womb.<sup>218</sup> This demonstration enables Faryno to conclude that in 'Magdalina' Tsvetaeva retains from the Bible the idea of transformation but complicates it by depicting a transformation involving the modification of Mary Magdalene's whole being rather than her soul only. Faryno's interpretation demonstrates how Tsvetaeva mixes the biblical character of Magdalene with the mythological representation of Mother-Earth. Moreover, Faryno also highlights that Tsvetaeva's treatment of Mary Magdalene is neither entirely faithful to the Gospels nor to the apocrypha that describe her as a preacher.<sup>219</sup> This means that with her poetic cycle Tsvetaeva really engages dialogically with the existing texts on Magdalene and proposes her own poetic view on this figure.

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<sup>216</sup> Jerzy Faryno, *Mifologizm i teologizm Tsvetaevoi ('Magdalina' – 'Tsar-Devitsa' – 'Pereulochki')* (Vienna: Institut für Slawistik der Universität Wien, 1985).

<sup>217</sup> The main characteristic of this biblical character lies in her transformation: she was a woman infamous for being a sinner and was possessed by evil spirits before being delivered from them by Christ and becoming not only one of his followers but also an elect person who was the first to witness Christ's resurrection.

<sup>218</sup> Faryno, *Mifologizm i teologizm Tsvetaevoi*, p. 72.

<sup>219</sup> Faryno, *Mifologizm i teologizm Tsvetaevoi*, p. 70.

Another examination of Tsvetaeva's use of biblical material is proposed by the scholar Michael Makin in his monograph *Marina Tsvetaeva: Poetics of Appropriation*. Here, the critic analyses the biblical intertext of Tsvetaeva's poetry in the wider context of the 'inherited text', i.e. any well-known and culturally established text, be it a play, a tale or another poem. The conclusion of this systematic and thorough investigation is twofold: in her early plays Tsvetaeva remains faithful to her sources,<sup>220</sup> while in other works she disrupts and transforms the original text by establishing 'a tension between familiar inherited material and the new work'.<sup>221</sup> Tsvetaeva's treatment of the biblical text falls into the second category, Makin asserts. To argue this point, he interprets the poem 'I ne placha zria' (1916), in which the lyrical hero/-ine takes the parable of the Prodigal Son, told in the New Testament, as a point of departure and modifies its conclusion by substituting an ongoing wandering for the return back home. In doing so, Makin observes, Tsvetaeva transgresses the taboo on the alteration of religious texts.<sup>222</sup> Moreover, the critic adds that Tsvetaeva's designation of the biblical parable as a mere tale ('skazka') is disrespectful.<sup>223</sup> This observation leads Makin to the conclusion that 'I ne placha zria' is characteristic of Tsvetaeva's trend to propose 'irreverent and sometimes explicitly blasphemous, versions of sacred texts'.<sup>224</sup> In my view, Makin's assertion of Tsvetaeva's blasphemous treatment of the religious text on the basis of this particular poem is exaggerated.

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<sup>220</sup> Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 262.

<sup>221</sup> Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 166.

<sup>222</sup> Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 31.

<sup>223</sup> Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 32.

<sup>224</sup> Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 32.

Although this poem does challenge the parable of the Prodigal Son by referring to it, and expressing a disbelief regarding its happy ending, it does not genuinely blaspheme, if one considers that Tsvetaeva refers to it as a didactic story, which the parable is by definition, and expresses her disagreement regarding the assertion it makes. In other words, although she expresses a different point of view on life from the one asserted in the parable, Tsvetaeva's text is not blasphemous in the sense that it does not mock it or imitate it in a debased way. What it does is to propose an alternative story differing from the parable. It remains true, though, that Tsvetaeva's poem can be disturbing in its representation of unrepentant unlawfulness. Furthermore, it is also true that in other texts, Tsvetaeva displays a tendency to represent the religious text in a blasphemous way. According to Makin, this is the case in 'V polnolun'e koni fyrkali', the last poem of the cycle 'Daniil' (1916), which ends with a scene representing a red-haired girl setting fire to a Bible. Consequently, Makin considers that 'this is [...] an experiment with revision of sacred texts, verging on blasphemy'.<sup>225</sup> Although Tsvetaeva does indeed depict a sacrilegious scene, it is still worth remembering that Tsvetaeva's representation of a blasphemous act performed by a lyrical heroine to whom she refers in the third person singular, does not necessarily imply that Tsvetaeva either identifies with it or approves it. In fact, the scene, which is indeed highly blasphemous, is described in a neutral way.<sup>226</sup> Hence, in this poem Tsvetaeva's ultimate position remains ambiguous.

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<sup>225</sup> Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 33.

<sup>226</sup> 'Рыжая девчонка Библию / Запалила с четырех концов' (I, 315).

Another poem analysed by Makin is ‘Neobychnaia ona! Sverkh sil!’ (1921) in which Tsvetaeva refers to the Annunciation. As Makin remarks, Tsvetaeva’s treatment of this scene is undeniably and clearly subversive: while the biblical episode (Luke I: 26-38) represents Mary being troubled by the news that she bears the son of God, in Tsvetaeva’s poem, it is Gabriel who is troubled at the sight of Mary, who, it is implied, provokes such a strong erotic feeling in the Archangel that he becomes speechless.<sup>227</sup> Thus Makin observes that Tsvetaeva’s poem ‘subverts the inherited story, suggesting that Gabriel is overcome by sexual desire, and fragments the source: the monologue trails off into silence, and the poem ends without a neat conclusion, on omission points’.<sup>228</sup> Consequently, Makin fairly concludes that in ‘Neobychnaia ona! Sverkh sil!’ ‘the rewriting of the sacred text is clear, and highlighted by blasphemous changes to the original’.<sup>229</sup>

In his assessment of Tsvetaeva’s use of biblical material, Makin stresses the presence of a blasphemous impulse in Tsvetaeva’s poetry. Yet, as was shown with the analysis of the poem ‘I ne placha zria’, the issue of Tsvetaeva’s blasphemous impulse is sometimes more complex than it appears at first sight. This is due to the fact that Tsvetaeva’s treatment of biblical material is often ambiguous. Furthermore, Makin omits to mention poems which faithfully convey the biblical message such as ‘Molitva lodki’ (date unknown) or ‘Blagodariu, O Gospod’ (1918). Consequently, it is one-sided to categorise Tsvetaeva’s poetry as merely blasphemous and it is worth considering what its ambivalence signifies.

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<sup>227</sup> Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, pp. 194-5.

<sup>228</sup> Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 195.

<sup>229</sup> Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 195.

As the following chapters show, a good way to analyse Tsvetaeva's ambiguity toward the Bible is to examine her use of the psalmic intertext. This will lead to the conclusion that Tsvetaeva's ambivalence, far from contradicting the Bible, echoes it, since, as will be shown in Chapter Two, several psalms express the believers' fleeting and temporary doubts concerning God's never-failing righteousness.

Regarding Tsvetaeva's ambivalence toward the sacred text, it is also worth mentioning the analyses of *Poema kontsa* (1924) and *Poema gory* (1924) conducted by the scholar Tomas Venclova, who raises precisely the issue of Tsvetaeva's ambiguous use of biblical material. According to Venclova, *Poema kontsa* and *Poema gory* form a diptych not only because of their common autobiographical origin<sup>230</sup> but also because they are both genetically linked with the Bible.<sup>231</sup> As Venclova argues, it is fruitful to read *Poema gory* and *Poema kontsa* as artistic reworkings of the Old and New Testaments. In other words, the former *poema* is related to the myth of humanity's fall after its first sin and its expulsion from paradise, while the latter recounts the story of its redemption by means of Christ's sacrifice. Thus, Venclova remarks that at the beginning of *Poema gory* Tsvetaeva associates the mountain where the two protagonists stand with the biblical paradise.<sup>232</sup> However, the critic demonstrates that this is an

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<sup>230</sup> These two *poemy* were written by Tsvetaeva as a way of outpouring her feeling of distress following the break-up of her extra-marital liaison with the sculptor Konstantin Rodzevich in the last months of 1923.

<sup>231</sup> Tomas Ventslova [Venclova], 'Poema Gory i Poema Kontsa M.T. kak Vetkhii i Novyi Zavet' in *Marina Tsvetaeva: One Hundred Years. Papers from the Tsvetaeva Centenary Symposium, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts, 1992*, edited by Viktoria Shveitser and others (Oakland, California: Berkeley Slavic Specialties, 1994), pp. 147-61; pp. 148-9.

<sup>232</sup> Ventslova, 'Poema Gory i Poema Kontsa M.T. kak Vetkhii i Novyi Zavet', pp. 150-1.

inverted paradise in which traditional paradisaal features are exchanged for their opposite and where the garden of Eden is transformed into a hostile desert.<sup>233</sup> As Venclova observes, the depiction of a debased paradise is followed by the retelling of the original sin that is given in both mythological and parodic terms and assimilated to a descent into the lower world, as the mentions of Persephone, the Greek goddess of the underworld, testify.<sup>234</sup> At the same time, Tsvetaeva's introduction of the motif of wandering into the wilderness<sup>235</sup> links her text with Exodus and enables her to identify the mountain with God and the poet with Moses.<sup>236</sup> In this context the mention of the commandment forbidding adultery is not surprising. Yet, Venclova observes that Tsvetaeva subjects this commandment to an inversion of meaning, in accordance with her conviction that poets have a special status and that it is in their nature not to submit to any rules whatsoever, even divine ones.<sup>237</sup> Furthermore, Venclova also notices that the cursing tone prevailing in the remaining part of the poem is reminiscent of the prophets' accusatory harangue of Babylon.<sup>238</sup> This observation leads the critic to the

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<sup>233</sup> Ventslova, 'Poema Gory i Poema Kontsa M.T. kak Vetkhii i Novyi Zavet', p. 151.

<sup>234</sup> Ventslova, 'Poema Gory i Poema Kontsa M.T. kak Vetkhii i Novyi Zavet', p. 151.

<sup>235</sup> Venclova does not give any specific example but he might have had in mind the following lines referring to Hagar (the maid of Abraham's wife who gave him his first son) who was chased out of Abraham's house after Isaac's birth: 'Еще горевала гора: хотя бы / С дитятком – отпустил Агарь!' (III, 26).

<sup>236</sup> Ventslova, 'Poema Gory i Poema Kontsa M.T. kak Vetkhii i Novyi Zavet', pp. 152-3.

<sup>237</sup> Ventslova, 'Poema Gory i Poema Kontsa M.T. kak Vetkhii i Novyi Zavet', p. 153.

<sup>238</sup> Ventslova, 'Poema Gory i Poema Kontsa M.T. kak Vetkhii i Novyi Zavet', p. 153.



conclusion that the composition of Tsvetaeva's *poema* repeats that of the Old Testament, from the Genesis to Prophets, on a highly reduced scale.<sup>239</sup>

As was just shown, Venclova argues that *Poema gory* represents a miniature version of the Old Testament and inverses its values: while the biblical paradise is idyllic, Tsvetaeva's version of it is desolate. Similarly, while the Old Testament enjoins people to obey God's Commandments, the lyrical heroine of Tsvetaeva's poem stresses the artist's need to disobey any rule in order to be creative. By contrast, Venclova interprets *Poema kontsa* as a representation of a redemptive and cathartic cry composed after the model of Christ's passion. Thus, the critic demonstrates that the last evening shared by the lovers is depicted in terms of the Last Supper, as shown by the simultaneous use of the images of flesh and blood recalling the Eucharistic sacrament instituted during the Last Supper.<sup>240</sup> Another example provided by Venclova is the episode of Judas' betrayal of Christ by kissing him; according to the critic, this episode is echoed in Tsvetaeva's description of the lovers' last kiss.<sup>241</sup> Venclova also demonstrates that the mocking of Christ is evoked in *Poema kontsa* by associating the motif of laughter with that of death.<sup>242</sup> In addition, Venclova argues that the crucifixion is hinted at in the last episode of Tsvetaeva's *poema*; finally, the critic interprets the depiction of three young girls mocking the lyrical hero as a blasphemous parody of Christ's Descent

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<sup>239</sup> Ventslova, 'Poema Gory i Poema Kontsa M.T. kak Vetkhii i Novyi Zavet', p. 153.

<sup>240</sup> Ventslova, 'Poema Gory i Poema Kontsa M.T. kak Vetkhii i Novyi Zavet', p. 154.

<sup>241</sup> Ventslova, 'Poema Gory i Poema Kontsa M.T. kak Vetkhii i Novyi Zavet', p. 154.

<sup>242</sup> Ventslova, 'Poema Gory i Poema Kontsa M.T. kak Vetkhii i Novyi Zavet', p. 154.

from the Cross where he was being mourned by the women who had anointed him.<sup>243</sup>

To conclude, let us say that Venclova's article is particularly interesting because in it the critic not only shows the saturation of Tsvetaeva's diptych with biblical motives and references, but also provides a valuable insight into the facility with which Tsvetaeva integrates biblical material into highly idiosyncratic and intimate poetry. Finally, it underlines the ambivalent status of the sacred text in Tsvetaeva's works: it is admired and considered worthy of providing a model of writing on the one hand, and debased and presented as an object of laughter on the other hand.

Another article worth mentioning is 'O evreiskoi teme i bibleiskikh motivakh u Mariny Tsvetaevoi' written by the critic Iudith Kagan.<sup>244</sup> Kagan gives important clues regarding Tsvetaeva's understanding of the Old Testament and insists on the importance of remembering Tsvetaeva's profound respect for Jewish people. Thus, analysing the poem 'Evreiam' (1916),<sup>245</sup> Kagan underlines the importance, for Tsvetaeva, of the indestructible link between Judaism and Christianity and the impossibility of being a genuine Christian without recognising the value of Judaism. This idea is clearly expressed the following lines of Tsvetaeva's poem: 'В любом из вас [евреев] [...] Христос слушнее

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<sup>243</sup> Ventslova, 'Poema Gory i Poema Kontsa M.T. kak Vetkhii i Novyi Zavet', p. 159.

<sup>244</sup> Iudif Kagan, 'O evreiskoi teme i bibleiskikh motivakh u Mariny Tsvetaevoi', *De Visu*, 3 (1993), pp. 55-61.

<sup>245</sup> The official date of redaction is 1916 but Kagan suggests that it was probably written during the Civil War.

говорит, чем в Марке / Матфее, Иоанне и Луке'.<sup>246</sup> Moreover, Kagan interprets Tsvetaeva's mention, in the same poem, of the burning bush from which God addressed Moses<sup>247</sup> ('О купина неопалимых роз') as a metaphorical representation of the poet. Finally, Kagan remarks that the paradoxical formula "Тетто избраничеств", "the Ghetto of the chosen/elect", coined by Tsvetaeva in *Poema kontsa*, expresses her belief that Jewish people and poets share a similar fate because, in her view, both are elected by God and doomed to suffer for their faithfulness,<sup>248</sup> be it to God or to poetry.

Kagan's demonstration of the emblematic role given to the figure of the Jew in Tsvetaeva's poetry is confirmed by I. Meshcheriakova, who also stresses Tsvetaeva's expression of sympathy to the Jews expressed in her poem 'Evreiam'.<sup>249</sup> Furthermore, in his article 'Deux recours à la Bible: Cvetaeva et Brodskij' the French scholar Georges Nivat explains Tsvetaeva's identification of the poet with other figures of the Old Testament such as Job or David by the fact that they incarnate the victory of spirituality over physicality.<sup>250</sup>

In his article 'Biblical Motifs in the Poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva',<sup>251</sup> the critic Aminadav Dykman also examines the influence of the Old Testament on Tsvetaeva's poetry. His analysis is especially interesting not only because it

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<sup>246</sup> Kagan, 'O evreiskoi teme i bibleiskikh motivakh u Mariny Tsvetaevoi', p. 57.

<sup>247</sup> Exodus 3:2-4.

<sup>248</sup> Kagan, 'O evreiskoi teme i bibleiskikh motivakh u Mariny Tsvetaevoi', p.59.

<sup>249</sup> I. Meshcheriakova, 'Bibleiskie motivy v tvorchestve M.Tsvetaevoi 1910-kh godov', *Borisogleb'e Mariny Tsvetaevoi. Shestaia mezhdunarodnaia nauchno-tematicheskaiia konferentsiia (9-11 oktiabria 1998 goda)*, edited by Valentin Maslovskii (Moscow: Dom-Muzei Mariny Tsvetaevoi, 1999), pp. 193-201.

<sup>250</sup> Georges Nivat, 'Deux recours à la Bible: Cvetaeva et Brodskij', *Cahiers du Monde russe* 39 (1998), pp. 594-603; p. 596.

<sup>251</sup> Aminadav Dykman, 'Biblical Motifs in the Poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva', *Jews and Slavs*, 2 (1994), pp. 235-46.

confirms the interpretation proposed by the critics mentioned so far, but also because Dykman develops their argument further. As was just shown, most critics stress Tsvetaeva's predilection for strong-minded spiritual figures of the Old Testament such as Job or David who are identified with the poet. In the same vein, Dykman convincingly demonstrates that the third poem of the cycle 'Otroki' (1922) reveals Tsvetaeva's identification with Hagar.<sup>252</sup> According to Dykman, it is because she is both an outcast and a chosen individual that the figure of Hagar appeals to Tsvetaeva, who sees the poet as an elect person who is doomed to suffer in fulfilling his/her poetic calling. Moreover, Hagar's fertility is understood by Tsvetaeva, Dykman writes, as a symbolic representation of the creative act of composing poetry. The critic convincingly justifies this interpretation by showing that it fits Tsvetaeva's own description of poetry, which reads as follows: 'Каждый стих – дитя любви, / Нищий, незаконнорожденный. / Первенец – у колей / На поклон ветрам положенный'.<sup>253</sup>

Finally, it is also worth mentioning that Dykman notices a formal resemblance between the style of biblical poetry and that of Tsvetaeva. Thus he asserts that 'any Hebrew-speaking reader will not fail to recognize something surprisingly "Hebraic" in many of her poems'.<sup>254</sup> According to the critic, one of Tsvetaeva's poetic features that is strikingly reminiscent of the poetics of the

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<sup>252</sup> Hagar was the Egyptian maid of Abraham's wife, Sarah; because she was sterile, it was Hagar who gave birth to Abraham's first child Ishmael; yet, she was outcast in the desert, after Sarah gave birth to Isaac; finally, 'an angel came to her [...] saved her and the life of her child [Dykman, 'Biblical Motifs in the Poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva', p. 245]'.  
<sup>253</sup> Dykman, 'Biblical Motifs in the Poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva', p. 246.  
<sup>254</sup> Dykman, 'Biblical Motifs in the Poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva', p. 235.

Bible is the use of a succession of nominal sentences such as that found in the poem 'Zveriu – berloga' (1916).<sup>255</sup>

The stylistic aspect of Tsvetaeva's use of Biblicisms is also investigated by I. Shmel'kova in her article 'Bibleizmy v poezii M. Tsvetaevoi',<sup>256</sup> in which Shmel'kova interprets the saturation of biblical expressions found in Tsvetaeva's poetry as a testimony to her extensive erudition and belief in the divine nature of poetry. Unlike Kagan, Shmel'kova does not consider that the frequency of biblical expressions in Tsvetaeva's poetry betrays genuine religious concerns.<sup>257</sup> Instead, she explains Tsvetaeva's excellent knowledge of the Bible from an early age by the fact that religious education was a compulsory part of the curriculum any educated person would go through in Tsvetaeva's time.<sup>258</sup> Thus Shmel'kova observes that Tsvetaeva uses biblical references in order to create striking and colourful comparisons, as, for instance, in the cycle 'Stikhi k Chekhii' (1938) where she compares the Czech people with Moses' tables engraved with the Ten Commandments ('Процветай, народ, – / Твердый, как скрижаль').<sup>259</sup> In addition, Shmel'kova also remarks that Tsvetaeva often refers to the Bible in her love poetry. The critic illustrates this point with Tsvetaeva's poem 'Popytka revnosti' (1924), in which the lyrical heroine harangues her former lover with contempt for preferring mere physical attraction to the purity of her love. As

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<sup>255</sup> Dykman, 'Biblical Motifs in the Poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva', pp. 235-6.

<sup>256</sup> I. Shmel'kova, 'Bibleizmy v poezii Tsvetaevoi' in *Bibliia i vozrozhdenie dukhovnoi kul'tury russkogo i drugikh slavianskikh narodov*, edited by Petr Dmitriev (St Petersburg: Petropolis, 1995), pp. 214-26.

<sup>257</sup> Shmel'kova, 'Bibleizmy v poezii Tsvetaevoi', p. 214.

<sup>258</sup> Shmel'kova, 'Bibleizmy v poezii Tsvetaevoi', p. 215.

<sup>259</sup> Shmel'kova, 'Bibleizmy v poezii Tsvetaevoi', p. 216.

Shmel'kova argues, biblical references here enable the poet to emphasise the moral and spiritual superiority of the lyrical heroine, identified with Lilith who was, according to the Judaic tradition, the first wife of Adam. In doing so the lyrical heroine proclaims herself the first and unsurpassable woman of her addressee.<sup>260</sup> In the examples quoted so far, the use of biblical reference is always intended to reinforce the solemnity and value of what is stated. However, Shmel'kova also examines instances in which Tsvetaeva uses biblical references in a critical and ironical way, as shown by the debasement of God expressed in the following lines: 'Бог согнулся от забот и затих' or 'Бог в блудилище'.<sup>261</sup> Shmel'kova explains the overt disparagement of God expressed in such lines by the fact that Tsvetaeva considered the poet's creative task to be as holy as God's creation. Hence, her tendency to draw a sign of equality between poets and God and her occasional lack of reverence for God.<sup>262</sup> Furthermore, Tsvetaeva's belief in the divine mission of poetry also explains her tendency to portray other poets as god-like figures.<sup>263</sup> This particularity is nowhere more evident than in the following lines addressed to Akhmatova: 'Тебе одной ночами кладу поклоны, – / И все твоими очами глядят иконы'.<sup>264</sup> Moreover, Shmel'kova echoes many other critics in asserting Tsvetaeva's divinisation of Blok, whom she addresses like a saint or, as shown by the following line, in which Tsvetaeva defines Blok

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<sup>260</sup> Shmel'kova, 'Bibleizmy v poezii Tsvetaevoi', p. 220.

<sup>261</sup> Shmel'kova, 'Bibleizmy v poezii Tsvetaevoi', p. 223.

<sup>262</sup> The same has been noticed by Veronika Losskaia, 'Bog v poezii Tsvetaevoi', *Vestnik Russkogo Khristianskogo Dvizheniia* 135 (1981), pp. 171-80; pp. 172-3; Dinega, *A Russian Psyche*, p. 120; Ute Stock explains Tsvetaeva's sense of rivalry toward God by Tsvetaeva's conviction that both the poet and God 'share the constant striving towards ever higher realms' [*The Ethics of the Poet*, p. 152].

<sup>263</sup> Shmel'kova, 'Bibleizmy v poezii Tsvetaevoi', p. 224.

<sup>264</sup> Shmel'kova, 'Bibleizmy v poezii Tsvetaevoi', p. 225.

by means of the terms Christ used in order to depict himself: 'Было так ясно на лике его: Царство мое не от мира сего'.<sup>265</sup> Shmel'kova concludes that Tsvetaeva's contradictory use of biblical references is consistent with the spirit of her poetry, which is all about merging opposites and incompatible emotions and thoughts.<sup>266</sup> Although well conducted and convincingly argued, Shmel'kova's analysis of Tsvetaeva's use of biblical material discredits too easily the hypothesis of the presence of real spiritual concerns. By contrast, the examination of Tsvetaeva's reworking of psalms proposed in the next chapters argues that it is precisely Tsvetaeva's inability to abandon the idea of divine transcendence that compels her to draw inspiration from the Bible.

Another issue fruitfully investigated by contemporary scholars is Tsvetaeva's use of biblical onomastics. The first contribution on this issue is Sibelan Forrester's article 'Not Quite in the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Subtext in Marina Cvetaeva's Opus',<sup>267</sup> in which, the critic scrutinises the role played by the names Ivan and Mariia in Tsvetaeva's works and shows that they are deeply connected not only with the biblical figures of John and Mary but also with Tsvetaeva's own parents who were named, precisely, Ivan and Mariia. In short, Forrester analyses how Tsvetaeva creates mythological connections between herself and religious and historical figures in a way that legitimises her poetic career. Thus, beginning with the name of Ivan, Forrester points out that this was the name of Tsvetaeva's father. Consequently, it also forms the basis of

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<sup>265</sup> Shmel'kova, 'Bibleizmy v poezii Tsvetaevoi', pp. 225-6.

<sup>266</sup> Shmel'kova, 'Bibleizmy v poezii Tsvetaevoi', p. 226.

<sup>267</sup> Sibelan Forrester, 'Not Quite in the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Subtext in Marina Cvetaeva's Opus', *Slavic and East European Journal*, 40 (1996), pp. 278-96.

Tsvetaeva's patronymic (Ivanovna).<sup>268</sup> At this stage, Forrester shows Tsvetaeva's insistence on the significance of this name for her fate is declared in the poem 'Krasnoiu kist'iu' (1916), in which the lyrical heroine, standing for Tsvetaeva, reveals that she was born on the day of Saint John the Theologian.<sup>269</sup> As Forrester remarks, in doing so Tsvetaeva implies that 'the omens of her birth suggest a special devotion to language',<sup>270</sup> 'John the Theologian is traditionally credited with authorship of the Fourth Gospel [...], [which] begins with the famous "Iskoni bē slovo", insistently identifying Christ as God's Word and the Word as the source of creation'.<sup>271</sup> Moreover, Forrester reminds us that John was particularly close to Christ, who offered him to his mother Mary as a replacement of himself (John 19:25-26). The accumulation of John's attribute as a bearer of the divine Word and a surrogate son for Mary after Christ's death, combined with the fact that he is the saint of Tsvetaeva's birthday, makes him particularly prominent in Tsvetaeva's personal mythology. Indeed, as Forrester judiciously observes, these facts form a conjunction of factors encouraging Tsvetaeva to identify with John and allowing her 'to be what she failed to be at birth [...]: a son to Marija – both Bogorodica Marija and Marija Aleksandrovna Meijn [Tsvetaeva's mother who had dearly wished to have a boy]'.<sup>272</sup> Yet, Forrester

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<sup>268</sup> Forrester, 'Not Quite in the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Subtext in Marina Cvetaeva's Opus', p. 280.

<sup>269</sup> Forrester, 'Not Quite in the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Subtext in Marina Cvetaeva's Opus', p. 280.

<sup>270</sup> Forrester, 'Not Quite in the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Subtext in Marina Cvetaeva's Opus', p. 281.

<sup>271</sup> Forrester, 'Not Quite in the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Subtext in Marina Cvetaeva's Opus', p. 281.

Forrester, 'Not Quite in the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Subtext in Marina Cvetaeva's Opus', p. 281.



does not fail to note that Tsvetaeva's identification with one of the Apostles remains problematic in terms of gender.<sup>273</sup> This is particularly apparent in Tsvetaeva's cycle 'Ioann' (1917) in which the lyrical heroine's identification with John undergoes 'a complex shifting of gender and point of view',<sup>274</sup> which leads to the final representation of a feminised Ioann.<sup>275</sup> This is an important point, which will be developed in the present study where I argue that by intertextually integrating the genre of psalms into her poetry Tsvetaeva feminises it.

Another contribution on Tsvetaeva's use of biblical onomastics is proposed by the critic E. Muratova,<sup>276</sup> who remarks not only that the majority of Biblical names mentioned by Tsvetaeva come from the Old Testament but also that David is mentioned more often than any other name.<sup>277</sup> According to Muratova, despite the fact that David lived to a very old age, Tsvetaeva's interest lies in the figure of the young David and that is why she tends to refer to him as a symbol of youth and liveliness.<sup>278</sup> Moreover, Muratova stresses that the most attractive feature of David, for Tsvetaeva, is his artistic inspiration, which is linked with the activity of the soul as indicated by the following comparison: 'Час души – как час струны

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<sup>273</sup> Forrester, 'Not Quite in the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Subtext in Marina Cvetaeva's Opus', p. 282.

<sup>274</sup> Forrester, 'Not Quite in the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Subtext in Marina Cvetaeva's Opus', p. 282.

<sup>275</sup> . Thus, in the last poem, of the cycle, 'Vstrechalis' li v potselue' Ioann's depiction emphasises his feminine attributes such his long hairs 'Иоанна кудри, как струи / Спадают на грудь Христа // [...] Иоанна руки, как крылья, / Висят по плечам Христа' (I, 358).

<sup>276</sup> E. Muratova, 'Rol' mifologicheskikh i bibleiskikh imen v poetike Mariny Tsvetaevoi', *Chuzbina, rodina moia*, pp. 457-62.

<sup>277</sup> Muratova, 'Rol' mifologicheskikh i bibleiskikh imen v poetike Mariny Tsvetaevoi', p. 457.

<sup>278</sup> Muratova, 'Rol' mifologicheskikh i bibleiskikh imen v poetike Mariny Tsvetaevoi', p. 458.

Давидовой'.<sup>279</sup> In addition, Muratova judiciously remarks that in the poem 'Liutnia' ('The Lute') (1923) Tsvetaeva refers to David's music which, in the Bible, soothes Saul's tormented soul. By contrast, in 'Liutnia' David's lute appears as an incarnation of creative terror ('tvorcheskii uzhas').<sup>280</sup> In doing so Tsvetaeva values David's creation in a way opposite to that of the Bible, since instead of soothing Saul's tormented soul David reproduces its terror in his music. As a result, Muratova concludes that Tsvetaeva's symbolic use of biblical onomastic does not amount to a mere unequivocal equivalence between a name and the qualities traditionally associated to it, because they are transformed by Tsvetaeva's particular worldview.<sup>281</sup>

At this stage, it is worth mentioning that in his article on Tsvetaeva and the Bible, Dykman also comments on the importance of David in Tsvetaeva's poetry. Indeed, interpreting the poem 'Est' schastlivtsy i schastlivitsy' (1934) in which the poet refers to David singing by the dead body of Jonathan,<sup>282</sup> Dykman highlights Tsvetaeva's insistence on the fact that David's songs are his sole means of expressing grief. As he puts it: 'all the "счастливыцы и счастливицы"' [i.e. David's peers] wept and mourned together, but King David alone was one who created, or was forced to create, the poetry of his lamentation'.<sup>283</sup> This observation is interesting in that it can explain the fact that the majority of Tsvetaeva's poems intertextually related to the Psalter are linked to psalms of lament, as will be shown in the following chapters. Finally, it is also worth

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<sup>279</sup> Muratova, 'Rol' mifologicheskikh i bibleiskikh imen v poetike Mariny Tsvetaevoi', p. 460.

<sup>280</sup> Muratova, 'Rol' mifologicheskikh i bibleiskikh imen v poetike Mariny Tsvetaevoi', p. 461.

<sup>281</sup> Muratova, 'Rol' mifologicheskikh i bibleiskikh imen v poetike Mariny Tsvetaevoi', p. 462.

<sup>282</sup> Samuel 2:17.

<sup>283</sup> Dykman, 'Biblical Motifs in the Poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva', p. 242.

mentioning Smith's suggestion that Tsvetaeva saw in David an incarnation of the magical forces of being, as is thought in the cabbalistic tradition.<sup>284</sup>

To conclude on this overview of the critical literature on Tsvetaeva's use of the biblical intertext, let us say that there is a unanimous agreement regarding the undeniable importance of the Bible in her poetry. Some critics such as Shmel'kova and Muratova highlight the fact that Tsvetaeva's recurrent use of the biblical intertext is partially linked to the fact that she started to write at a time when the Bible still constituted a well-known and widely-shared cultural text. As a result, Shmel'kova sheds light on Tsvetaeva's ability to use biblical figures or expressions in a rhetorical way, i.e. in order to reinforce the expressivity of her verse. Although this is sometimes true, in the following chapters, I will argue against Shmel'kova's assertion that Tsvetaeva had no genuine religious concerns. Indeed, one of the conclusions of the forthcoming analysis is that Tsvetaeva's modulation of psalms enables her to ponder the issue of religious faith. In doing so, I will also show that, contrarily to Makin's assertion, Tsvetaeva's use of the religious intertext is not exclusively blasphemous and that in some rare but significant instances Tsvetaeva proves surprisingly faithful to the spirit of the Bible. In this regard, it is worth observing that Tsvetaeva's ambivalence toward the Bible was brilliantly demonstrated by Venclova. In the present study, I will push this idea further by arguing not only that Tsvetaeva's poetry undoubtedly betrays her ambivalence toward the Bible and religion but also that this very ambivalence is already present, albeit in an embryonic stage, in the biblical book

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<sup>284</sup> Aleksandra Smith, 'Poslednee stikhotvorenie Mariny Tsvetaevoi kak poeticheskoe zaveschchanie', *Chuzhbina, rodina moia*, pp. 324-31; p. 329.

of the Psalter. In other words, the main point of my argument is that Tsvetaeva's apparently contradictory use of biblical material is consistent with the spirit of the psalmist who does not fear to express, although only momentarily, his doubts regarding the existence of an omnipotent and never-failing God.

Having reviewed the critical literature regarding the role of the Bible in Tsvetaeva's work, it is now worth examining how critics have perceived the peculiar intertextual place and role occupied by the Book of Psalms in Tsvetaeva's poetry. In this regard, the critical observations regarding Tsvetaeva's predilection for the figure of King David are especially relevant, since David is the presumed author of most of the lyrical prayers found in the Psalter. Hence, it reinforces the hypothesis, according to which the poetic genre of the psalms constitutes a significant intertext of Tsvetaeva's writings. Yet, there are no systematic studies or in-depth investigations of that topic, even though several critics mention its relevance. For instance, as early as in 1922, the literary critic Iurii Bratov wrote an article entitled 'V Berline ptakhi poiut', the overall theme of which is a complaint about ungifted pseudo-poets publishing their works. In this context, Bratov names Tsvetaeva as a counter-example, i.e. as a genuine poet, and he comments on her verses with the following remark: 'ритм, размер, напевность и рифмы стиха дышат не земной любовью и читаются, как псалмы Давида'<sup>285</sup>. Despite not developing a full-blown argument, it is clear that in drawing a parallel between psalms and Tsvetaeva's poetry Bratov has in mind two aspects of the the Psalter, a formal and an emotional one. Concerning the

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<sup>285</sup> Iurii Bratov, 'V Berline ptakhi poiut' in *Marina Tsvetaeva v kritike sovremmenikov. Rodstvo i chuzhdost'*, edited by Lev Mnukhin (Moscow: Agraf, 2003), pp. 103-4; p.104.

former, i.e. the rhythmical, prosodic, melodic and rhyme-related phenomena, I should specify that since biblical poetry does not use rhyme nor specific meter,<sup>286</sup> it is difficult to link Tsvetaeva's poetry and psalms in that regard. Yet, there exist, indeed, some formal features, such as the presence of nominal sentences or parallelisms that are present in both the Psalter and Tsvetaeva's poetry. The significance of this resemblance will be discussed in the next chapters.

Concerning Bratov's second point, i.e. the presence of a similar emotional imprint in both the Psalter and Tsvetaeva's poetry, it is worth remarking that this fact can be fruitfully investigated by means of Fowler's concept of a genre's modulation, i.e. the transmission of the emotional tone typical of a genre to other genres that can be historically far remote from the genre-source but that, nevertheless, display unmistakable signs linking them with the original genre.<sup>287</sup>

At this stage, it is interesting to note that Bratov's comment on the similarity between Tsvetaeva's poetry and psalms is also echoed by the French scholar Chantal Houlon-Crespel who explains it by the fact that psalms are characterised by a great variety of ways to address God.<sup>288</sup> The critic has a very good point, here, and I will develop it in the following chapters by showing that it is precisely the boldness of the psalmist's address to God that struck a chord with Tsvetaeva.

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<sup>286</sup> James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry. Parallelism and its History* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 1. The absence of meter in biblical poetry is also demonstrated by Donald Vance in *The Question of Meter in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001).

<sup>287</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 191.

<sup>288</sup> Chantal Houlon-Crespel, 'Marina Cvetaeva: une mystique de notre temps? Résonnances bibliques et spirituelles au coeur de sa poésie', *Revue des études slaves*, 75 (2004), pp. 191-98 ; pp. 193-4.

The link between biblical psalms and Tsvetaeva's poetry is also commented upon by Dykman in the previously reviewed article. It is worth reading Dykman's comments attentively, for they are particularly enlightening. For instance, the critic observes that Tsvetaeva's poem 'Udarilo v vinogradnik' (1935) reads 'like a periphrasis of part of Psalm CXLVIII', because both texts praise the beauty of nature in a similar idiom.<sup>289</sup> This is an important point, since it shows that, despite its mostly tragic tone, Tsvetaeva's poetry is also able to convey an almost religious awe at the sight of the natural world. This interpretation, Dykman adds, is consistent with Tsvetaeva's mentions of psalms in a draft version of her cycle 'Derev'ia' (1922) where the lyrical heroine praises the magnificent sight offered by trees.<sup>290</sup>

Oleg Kling is yet another scholar worth mentioning when it comes to the link between the Psalter and Tsvetaeva's poetry, since he astutely notices that in her poem 'Sobiraia liubimyykh v put'' (1916) Tsvetaeva hints at psalm 90<sup>291</sup> (traditionally recited by Orthodox believers in times of danger) and mixes it not only with other prayers but also with a spell-like tone and magical formula. As a result, the poem ends up as a hybrid prayer addressed to the Virgin,<sup>292</sup> hence, the critic's conclusion that the poem reflects Tsvetaeva's combined belief in paganism and Christianity widespread in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth

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<sup>289</sup> Dykman, 'Biblical Motifs in the Poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva', p. 243.

<sup>290</sup> Dykman, 'Biblical Motifs in the Poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva', p. 244. This remark is echoed in Shmel'kova, 'Bibleizmy v poezii Tsvetaevoy', pp. 217-8 and Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 217.

<sup>291</sup> This means 91 for the Western numeration of the Psalter.

<sup>292</sup> Oleg Kling, *Poeticheskii mir Mariny Tsvetaevoy* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo moskovskogo universiteta, 2001), p. 50.

century.<sup>293</sup> The mixture of different types of discourses is an important point and I will investigate its importance in Chapter Four, devoted to Tsvetaeva's integration of a psalmic intertext into wider generic frameworks such as diary-writing, epistolary writing and folk poetry.

Finally, Hauschild gives an arresting analysis of Tsvetaeva's use of psalms in the *poema Molodets*.<sup>294</sup> As the critic remarks, in the last scene of Tsvetaeva's tale, Marusia and her soon-to-be husband enter the church while the priest and the congregation sing the psalms that are routinely sung in the Vespers. The interesting point is that in this scene Tsvetaeva skilfully interweaves extracts from the liturgical psalms with the voice of the swain, i.e. the demonic vampire, heard only by Marusia. Hence, Hauschild remarks, the address to God, which is voiced in the psalms, receives answers from a demonic instance rather than from a divine one.<sup>295</sup> This indicates that Tsvetaeva subjects the psalms' situation of enunciation, in which the psalmist addresses God, to a radical transformation, for in Tsvetaeva's text, the place of God is usurped by the vampire. Moreover, in his replies the swain inverts the discourse of the psalms in such a way that the enemies of faith mentioned in them come to designate the congregation reunited in the church.<sup>296</sup> In other words, the last scene of *Molodets* is a convincing illustration of Kristeva's assertion that poetry is a particularly fertile ground for

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<sup>293</sup> Kling, *Poeticheskii mir Mariny Tsvetaevoi*, p. 50.

<sup>294</sup> Hauschild, *Häretische Transgressionen. Das Märchenpoem «Molodec» von Marina Cvetaeva*, pp. 137-41.

<sup>295</sup> Hauschild, *Häretische Transgressionen. Das Märchenpoem «Molodec» von Marina Cvetaeva*, pp. 138-9.

<sup>296</sup> Hauschild, *Häretische Transgressionen. Das Märchenpoem «Molodec» von Marina Cvetaeva*, p. 136.

the expression of spiritual crisis.<sup>297</sup> To sum up, Hauschild's interpretation of Tsvetaeva's *Molodets* exemplifies Kristeva's assertion, according to which a revolution in poetic language always goes hand-in-hand with a revolution in subjectivity. By depicting a situation in which the prayers of the believers are answered by the demon Tsvetaeva represents a world in which evil is no less powerful or attractive than God and where ambiguity reigns.

In light of this review, it is necessary to specify which points will be developed further in the present analysis and what new aspects of Tsvetaeva's poetry I will unveil. To begin with, the present study will systematise and deepen the comments that have already been made on the link between the Psalter and Tsvetaeva's poetry. As was said, one of the aims of the present research is to demonstrate that the resemblance between psalms and Tsvetaeva's poetry is far from accidental and testifies to Tsvetaeva's receptivity to the Bible and to her interrogations regarding the importance of religious faith and the role it should or should not play in artistic creation. As will be shown, inasmuch as the genre of psalms addresses the issue of religious faith in a highly lyrical way, it had a profound impact on Tsvetaeva's poetry and constitutes a significant intertext of many of her poems.

In addition, unlike any previous analysis, I propose to approach this issue from a generic point of view by referring to Fowler's theory of the way in which ancient genres can influence contemporary genres. The advantages of applying Fowler's theory are the following: firstly, thanks to its concept of a genre's

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<sup>297</sup> Kristeva, 'Desire in Language', p. 94.



modulation it enables the critic to investigate what, at first, seems to be a coincidental similarity of tone and which turns out to be a feature testifying of a deep kinship between psalms and Tsvetaeva's poetry; secondly, Fowler's concept of a genre's change of function will make possible to investigate further Tsvetaeva's need to resort to a prayer-like form in order to address not only God but also other human beings and or natural beings such as trees; thirdly, Fowler's concept of generic mixture will make possible the demonstration that by mixing features typical of the genre of psalms with other genres such as folk poetry, diary-writing or epistolary writing Tsvetaeva brings the issue of faith into the heart of these genres; fourthly, Fowler's concept of topical invention enables Tsvetaeva to amplify the psalmist's muffled cries of revolt and to voice more assertively his doubts regarding God's presence or absence in a poetics attuned to her time.

Finally, let us say that the ultimate aim of the present study is to argue that psalms did not only have a mere occasional and transient influence on Tsvetaeva's writing; on the contrary, an analysis of the traces psalms left in Tsvetaeva's poetry indicate that they marked her work profoundly. This conclusion does not invalidate the fact that Tsvetaeva had a tendency to treat the religious texts blasphemously, but I will nuance this observation by demonstrating that this tendency does not come from a straightforward rejection of the religious text but, on the contrary, testifies to Tsvetaeva's fine ear to both the psalmist's muffled cry of revolt present in some psalms and his genuine praise of the divine order. The next chapter highlights the coexistence in psalms of both expressions

of praise that go together with occasional expressions of anger and/or revolt. This is an important point because, as will be shown, the tone of Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine also oscillates between these two poles. This particularity of Tsvetaeva's poetry was noted by Ivask who characterised her verses as follows: 'Поэзия Цветаевой – это поэзия хвалы и хулы'.<sup>298</sup>

Concerning the laudatory tone of Tsvetaeva's poetry, it is important to note that, unlike the psalmist, she directs her praises not exclusively toward God but also toward fellow poets, nature and even things. Consequently, when she resorts to a psalmic form, Tsvetaeva modifies its main function, since it is meant to praise God exclusively. Chapter Three will investigate this issue via Fowler's concept of the change of function of a genre.

As was already mentioned, in her laudatory poems Tsvetaeva expresses her admiration of the divine indiscriminately, and not exclusively to the Judeo-Christian God. In Chapter Four, Tsvetaeva's religious syncretism will be linked with her tendency to mix literary genres. In other words, Chapter Four will shed light on Tsvetaeva's intertextual use of the genre of psalms by means of Fowler's concept of generic mixture.

Finally, in the poems, in which the lyrical heroine complains toward God, Tsvetaeva amplifies the muffled cries of revolt and despair of the psalmist. This fact will be examined in Chapter Five by means of Fowler's concept of topical invention, which designates the phenomenon whereby a genre develops some of its minor generic feature(s) over time.

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<sup>298</sup> Quoted in Seweryn Pollak, 'Slavosloviia Mariny Tsvetaevoi' in *Actes du Ier colloque international (Lausanne, 30.VI.-3.VII. 1982)*, edited by Robin Kemball and others (Bern: Peter Lang, 1991), pp. 179-91; p. 179.

### 1.7. Generic Signals Indicating the Presence of a Psalmic Intertext in Tsvetaeva's Poetry

It is worth ending the present chapter with a final justification of the main assertion of the present research, namely that Tsvetaeva's poetry is partly informed by the presence of a psalmic intertext. In order to do so, let us resort to Fowler's concept of generic signals, which are the factors indicating that a particular work belongs to a specific genre.<sup>299</sup>

The theoretician distinguishes the following types of generic signals: generic allusion, titles, and opening topics. Concerning generic allusion, Fowler specifies that when they take place within the context of a genre's modulation, then, their signals are very diverse and thus impossible to list comprehensively. In addition, the markers indicating the presence of a modulated work within another work are usually very discrete and can easily slip the reader's attention. As Fowler puts it: 'a mode announces itself by distinct signals, even if these are abbreviated, unobtrusive, or below the threshold of modern attention. The signals may be of a wide variety: a characteristic motif, perhaps; a formula; a rhetorical proportion or quality [...]. Alternatively, the modulation may pervade much [...] of the work'.<sup>300</sup> In the following chapters, I will highlight the generic allusions indicating the presence of the modulated genre of psalms in Tsvetaeva's poetry and show that most of the time they correspond to those listed by Fowler. The

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<sup>299</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, pp. 106-29.

<sup>300</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of literature*, p. 107.

theoretician specifies that formulae often serve as a generic marker and this is precisely what happens in some of Tsvetaeva's poems modulating the genre of psalms by means of the lyrical heroine's expression of an urgent call to God. Inasmuch as the address to God is typical of psalmic poetry, the lyrical heroine's call to God prompts the critic to associate such poems with the genre of psalm;<sup>301</sup> as will be shown in Chapter Two, the generic allusion hinted at by means of an invocation of God is reinforced, when it is combined with other features typical of psalms such as nominal sentences, parallelisms or characteristic images.

Fowler also mentions that a characteristic motif can constitute a signal indicating the presence of a modulated work; in Tsvetaeva's poetry the presence of a psalmic modulation is perceptible thanks to the presence of the motif of God's sleep, the motif of being buried alive and the motif of the holy land that originate in the Psalter.

Finally, Fowler's observation that titles can give away important generic information is especially relevant in the present research, since Tsvetaeva's designation of some of her poems as prayers ('Molitva'; 'Eshche molitva'; 'Molitva lodki'; 'Molitva moriu'; 'Molitva v stolovoi') creates another obvious link between them and psalm.

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<sup>301</sup> This is the case of poems such as 'Molitva'; 'Eshche molitva'; 'Molitva lodki'; 'Ty dal nam muzhestva'; 'Sviaz' cherez sny'; 'Beloe solntse, i nizkie, nizkie tuchi'; 'Bog! – Ia zhivu ! – Znachit ty ne umer'; 'O slezy na glazakh'.



## **Chapter Two**

Inasmuch as my research aims to shed light on the role played by the generic intertext of psalms in Tsvetaeva's poetry, it is important to stress that psalms constitute a literary genre and that they played a role of paramount importance in the development of Russian poetry. To do so, I will first present the original biblical genre of psalms and then highlight its historical and religious significance; the second part of this chapter will outline the way in which the originally religious type of texts that make up the Psalter entered the sphere of Russian literature and show how it evolved from the eighteenth century until the Silver age; as will be shown, the genre of psalms appears to be particularly resilient to the passing of time, since it has survived for over three centuries under different guises.

Finally, let us add that since the content of psalms is overridingly religious, it would be incomplete to embark on an investigation of Tsvetaeva's intertextual use of this genre without discussing the complex issue of her spirituality and that is why the third part of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of Tsvetaeva's religious outlook.

### **2.1. The Genre of Psalms in the Bible**

The book of Psalms is an anthology of religious and lyrical prayers belonging to the Old Testament. Although many of these poems are traditionally attributed to King David, ‘it is not known when or how the collection of psalms came into existence’.<sup>302</sup> Concerning the book’s designation, it is worth mentioning that its Hebrew title is ‘*Tehillim* (praises), for praise is a central feature’<sup>303</sup> of these lyrical prayers. Interestingly, it is not this term which came to designate the Book of Psalms in the major Greek versions but ‘another Hebrew word, *mizmor* (“song”), found often in the title of individual psalms, as *psalmos*, and they gave the book the title *Psalmoi* (“Psalms”). [...] Another popular English title, “Psalter” comes from [...] *Psalterion* meaning “stringed instrument”’.<sup>304</sup> The Russian Language uses the term ‘psalom’, meaning a psalm, used in the expression ‘Kniga psalmov’. The term Psalter is translated either by ‘Psaltr’’, which designates the Psalter as a biblical book, or by ‘Psaltyr’’, which refers to a copy of the Psalter.<sup>305</sup>

Although the Psalter is part of the Old Testament, Christians of all confessions use it extensively as both a book of prayers and a collection of hymns to be sung during church services. Indeed, Catholic and Protestant services use it on a daily basis.<sup>306</sup> Likewise, the Orthodox liturgy relies heavily on the Psalter, as the scholar Shimon Markish remarks: ‘в русской православной церкви они [Псалмы] входят в состав любого, даже самого краткого чина службы [...]

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<sup>302</sup> Carroll and Prickett, ‘Notes to the Old Testament’ in *The Bible*, p. 354.

<sup>303</sup> Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academy, 2001), p. 22.

<sup>304</sup> Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*, p. 22.

<sup>305</sup> *Oxford Russian Dictionary. Fourth edition*, edited by Marcus Wheeler and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>306</sup> Jean-Pierre Prévost, *A Short Dictionary of the Psalms* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1997), p. ix.

«Псалтирь» прочитывается целиком каждую неделю церковного года'.<sup>307</sup>

The first translation of the Bible into Slavonic was made by Saints Cyril and Methodius in the ninth century A.C.<sup>308</sup> It took several centuries, then, before the Bible, including the psalms, was translated into Russian in what is known as the Synodal translation, which was fully completed by 1876 and which remains until now, the Russian version officially recognised by the Orthodox church.<sup>309</sup>

Finally, it is important to specify that the Russian Orthodox and Catholic numbering of the psalms differs from the Protestant and Hebrew one.<sup>310</sup> In the present study, I will follow the latter; whenever the former is used, it will be indicated by means of a star\*.

### 2.1.1. The Psalter's Characteristic Features

One of the most striking features of the psalms is their diversity and their ability to express the whole range of human emotions. Thus, in some of them the psalmist gives free rein to his anger and feeling of revolt, whereas in others he sings the fairness of his God and the harmonious beauty of the divine creation. Moreover, it is not uncommon that this change of mood occurs within a single psalm. As the scholar Mark Vincent explains, a particularly 'disconcerting feature of the Psalms is the way in which the whole mood and direction of a Psalm can be

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<sup>307</sup> Shimon Markish, "«Gospod' – sila moia i pesn'...»" in *Kniga Psalmov*, introduced by Shimon Markish, translated by Naum Grebnev (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 1994), pp. 5-16; p. 5.

<sup>308</sup> M. Rizhskii, *Istoriia perevodov Biblii v Rossii* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1978), p. 19.

<sup>309</sup> Rizhskii, *Istoriia perevodov Biblii v Rossii*, p. 161.

<sup>310</sup> *The Cambridge Companion to the Bible*, edited by Howard Clark Kee and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 239.



switched completely in the space of a verse'.<sup>311</sup> Stretching from sheer despair to pure jubilation, the songs of the Psalter have been able to move people from all times in a great variety of circumstances. Scholars studying this corpus of poems have tried to categorise them in order to get a better insight into their workings and structure. A landmark of research in psalms studies is Hermann Gunkel's monograph *Introduction to Psalms. The Genre of Religious Lyric of Israel*<sup>312</sup> that paved the way to the so-called 'form critical' approaches. Although it was first published in 1933, the main generic categories of this analysis remain valid today. As the critic Robert Alter observes, 'probably no single aspect of Psalms has received more scholarly attention in recent generations than the issue of genre. The pioneer studies were done earlier in the [twentieth] century by the German founder of biblical form-criticism, Herman Gunkel. [...] The efforts of form-criticism have clearly enhanced our understanding of Psalms because in no other area of biblical literature is genre so pronounced'.<sup>313</sup>

According to Gunkel's analysis, psalms belong to one of the following genres: Individual Lament; Communal Lament; Individual Thanksgiving Song; Praise (or Hymns); Royal Psalm; Wisdom Psalm; Songs about God's Enthronement; Prophecy in the Psalms.<sup>314</sup> In the context of the present study, I will focus mainly on the genre of lament, mainly individual. Occasionally, I will also refer to the genres of praise and that of thanksgiving. The primary focus on

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<sup>311</sup> Mark Vincent, *Exploring the Psalms* (Birmingham: The Christadelphian, 2001), p. 71.

<sup>312</sup> Hermann Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms. The Genre of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, edited by Joachim Begrich, translated by James Nogalski (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1998).

<sup>313</sup> Robert Alter, 'Psalms' in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1987), pp. 244-62; p. 246.

<sup>314</sup> Alongside these types, Gunkel also mentions the following minor genres: Saying of Blessing and Curse, Pilgrimage Song, Victory Song, Thanksgiving Song of Israel as well as The Legend and The Torah.

the genre of lament has a twofold justification: firstly, because it occupies a predominant place within the economy of the Psalter<sup>315</sup> and, secondly, because it is the genre of psalms that is the most frequently echoed in Tsvetaeva's poetry. The secondary focus on the genre of praise and thanksgiving is justified by the fact that, ultimately, all psalms, whatever their specific genres, are destined to praise and thank God. Moreover, these genres also resonate in Tsvetaeva's poetry, as will be shown further. I leave aside the other genres, because Gunkel's description of them is aimed at emphasising the specificity of their cultic origin, which is an aspect that is not only irrelevant for the present study but which is now discarded by contemporary biblical scholarship.<sup>316</sup>

### 2.1.2. Psalms of Individual Lament<sup>317</sup>

Given their predominance in the Psalter, it is particularly useful to visualise the common pattern of the psalms of individual lament. According to Gunkel's analysis, these psalms voice an individual complaint that usually displays the following elements: 1) an appeal to God; 2) a complaint; 3) a plea; 4) a justification; 5) a sudden change of mood triggered by the assurance of being

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<sup>315</sup> Thus John Day remarks [*Psalms*, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992, p.19] that laments are so overwhelmingly dominant that they have been dubbed 'the backbones of the Psalter'; this is confirmed by Bullock [*Encountering the Book of Psalms*, p. 149]: 'the Psalms of lament [are] the largest category in the Psalter'.

<sup>316</sup> See, Alter, 'Psalms', pp. 246-7.

<sup>317</sup> Gunkel considers the following Psalms as individual; lament: 3; 5; 6; 7; 13; 17; 22; 25; 26; 27:7-14; 28; 31; 35; 38; 39; 42; 43; 51; 54; 55; 56; 57; 59; 61; 64; 69; 70; 71; 86; 88; 102; 109; 120; 130; 140; 141; 142; 143; 144. Moreover, Gunkel points out that parts of the Book of Job (3:3-26; 6:2-7:21; 9:25-10:22; 13:23-14:22; 16:6-17:9; 19:7-20; 23:2-17) and that of Jeremiah (11:18-20; 15: 15-21; 17:12-18; 18: 18-23; 20) also contain this type of lament.

heard. Sometimes they also express wishes and curses. Inasmuch as these features are especially emblematic of individual psalms of lament, it is worth defining them in greater detail.

In the appeal, the lamenter addresses God by one of his names.

In the complaint the psalmist tells of his suffering which is caused either because of an illness, or some persecution from enemies or else the feeling of estrangement due to exile from the native land, considered as holy. In fact, whatever the apparent reason for lamentation, the main cause of suffering generally stems from the impression that God has abandoned the lamenter. Thus Bullock asserts that the crisis compelling the psalmist to pray is rarely ‘disassociated from spiritual or psychological anguish caused by the psalmist’s own doubts and uncertainty’.<sup>318</sup> Consequently, Gunkel notices ‘that the agitated complaints of the inwardly shaken person sometimes forget the distance between God and human. Sometimes, the complaint brings an accusation against God’.<sup>319</sup> For instance, the lamenter of psalm 10:11 exclaims: ‘Why standest thou afar off, O Lord?, why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?’; another illustration of the psalmist’s accusatory tone can be found in psalm 42:9: ‘Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?’

In the plea the lamenter tries to attract God’s attention, and that is why he often uses the imperative (‘look’, ‘listen’, ‘see’, ‘hear my speech’). A particular case is the plea for gracious intervention. Gunkel remarks that if this plea ‘appears when the affirmation of being heard is omitted, as though YHWH is sleeping,

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<sup>318</sup>Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*, p. 149.

<sup>319</sup>Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, pp. 156-7. My emphasis (S.O.C.).

then the petition attempts to pull him out of his sleep: “wake up”<sup>320</sup> Frequently, the plea depicts ‘multiple portrayals of praying’,<sup>321</sup> the role of which is to highlight the urgency of the prayer. It is not uncommon that a plea contains one or several reproachful questions whereby the psalmist seeks to find out when the end of his suffering will come.

In the justification the lamenter justifies his conviction that God should and will intervene by bringing forth a ‘rationale for divine intervention’.<sup>322</sup> As Gunkel observes, ‘generally, the grace, steadfastness, righteousness, name, or speech of YHWH emerges, which is understandable since one would hope for help based upon these qualities’.<sup>323</sup> The commonest way of justifying the plea is the expression of confidence. As Gunkel remarks, ‘very frequently the psalmist speaks in simple and therefore very moving words: “I trust you”’.<sup>324</sup>

Lastly, it is not uncommon that psalms of lament end with a sudden change of mood. Such ends are linked with the assurance of being heard, which usually triggers a significant change of mood stemming from the fact that the psalmist does not have any more doubt regarding the realisation of his plea.<sup>325</sup> Thus it is not unusual that, toward the end of the lament, the psalmist’s mood improves so dramatically that he becomes enthusiastic and ‘already voices the thanksgiving

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<sup>320</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 159. (psalms: 7:6; 35:23; 59:4-5-).

<sup>321</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 161. (psalms: 88:1, 9; 102:2; 142:2,3,6)

<sup>322</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 170.

<sup>323</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 170. (psalms: 5:8; 6:4; 25:6, 11; 31:3; 35:24; 69:13, 16; 71:2; 109:21; 119:27, 40, 58, 107, 116, 169, 170).

<sup>324</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 171. (psalms: 13:6; 16:1; 25:2; 26:1; 31:7, 14; 55:23; 56:4; 57:2; 119:42, 66; 143:8).

<sup>325</sup> (psalms: 5:12; 7:11; 13:6; 52:9; 55:23; 61:5-8).

song that he will sing after deliverance occurs. That is how the thanksgiving song enters the genre [of lament]’.<sup>326</sup>

Having defined the most significant elements making up the individual lament, it is worth specifying that the main difference between the individual and communal lament lies in the cause of the situation deplored in the prayer. In communal lament, the objects of complaints ‘are almost exclusively *political* in nature’<sup>327</sup>, i.e. related to crises such as wars. By contrast, individual laments are not concerned with any historical or political crisis, but with personal crisis. Hence, ‘the language of individual psalms is situational, occasional, and highly existential’.<sup>328</sup>

To conclude, let us say that the diversity of elements making up the individual lament enabled the psalmist to be creative by varying the way he used these elements and that is precisely why ‘each lament has some degree of uniqueness’.<sup>329</sup> This point has been noted by the overwhelming majority of contemporary biblical scholars and it is now widely accepted that the different genres of psalms described by Gunkel are, in fact, flexible categories with a supple structure thanks to which the psalmist creates each time a distinctly different piece. Consequently, Alter is right to assert that ‘we are likely to perceive the poetic richness of Psalms more finely if we realize that there is a good deal of refashioning of genre in the collection, even, when the recurrence of

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<sup>326</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 185. (psalms: 13:6; 22:25; 28:6-7; 31:23; 54:6; 56:12; 59:17; 69:34; 71:14-16, 20; 86:12-13; 144:9-10).

<sup>327</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 88.

<sup>328</sup> Carroll and Prickett, ‘Notes to the Old Testament’ in *The Bible*, p. 355.

<sup>329</sup> J. Clinton McCann, ‘The Book of Psalms’ in *The New Interpreter’s Bible in Twelve Volumes* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), IV, pp. 641-1280; p. 645.

certain formulas tells us that a particular generic background is being invoked'.<sup>330</sup>

Secondly, it is worth observing that psalms of lament overlap with other types of psalms, as shown by the fact that some laments end in praise.

### 2.1.3 Psalm of Praise<sup>331</sup>

The praises of the Psalter are usually made up of the following three parts: a 'call to rejoice and sing'<sup>332</sup> in God's honour; the core text, which often starts with a sentence establishing the reason compelling the psalmist to rejoice 'and thus provides the particular content of the song of praise'<sup>333</sup> and an eulogy of God, generally addressed in the third person.<sup>334</sup>

From a stylistic point of view, praise of God is often made in 'the form of nominal sentence', i.e. in the form of a sentence in which the verb is omitted.<sup>335</sup> Praises are also characterised by, 'the enthusiasm for the majesty of God, [which] flows in many rhetorical questions: 'How majestic is your name!' (psalm 9:2), for example.'<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Alter, 'Psalms', p. 246.

<sup>331</sup> Gunkel also refers to praise with the term hymn. According to Gunkel's classification the following psalms into the category of psalms of Praise: 8; 19; 29; 33; 46; 47; 48; 65; 67; 68; 76; 84; 87; 93; 96; 97; 98; 99; 100; 103; 104; 105; 111; 113; 114; 117; 122; 124; 129; 135; 136; 145; 146; 147; 148; 149; 150.

<sup>332</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 23. My emphasis (S.O.C.).

<sup>333</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 29.

<sup>334</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 32.

<sup>335</sup> Unfortunately, this feature is often lost in the English translation.

<sup>336</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 38.

Another observation made by Gunkel is that sometimes the praise is indirect, as, for instance, in psalms blessing righteous people ('blessed is the one who'). As Gunkel puts it, in such cases, 'the hymn praises the pious one and the people who may call such a God their own'.<sup>337</sup> For example: 'Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance' (psalm 33:12). At other times, the praise demonstrates that nothing can supersede God, as is stated in the following passage: 'For all gods of the nations are idols: but the Lord made the heavens' (psalm 96:5).

Finally, it is worth adding that the overriding tonality of psalms of praise is that of 'enthusiasm, adoration, reverence, praise and exaltation'.<sup>338</sup>

#### 2.1.4. Psalms of Thanksgiving<sup>339</sup>

Similarly to the psalms of lament, thanksgiving psalms can be attributed either to a single speaker or to the community. In the present study, the focus will be on the individual thanksgiving psalms, since they are those most fruitfully comparable with Tsvetaeva's lyrical poetry. Individual thanksgiving psalms often display the following elements: an introduction in which the psalmist communicates the intention and the content of the song: 'I will thank you'; 'I will praise you'; 'Give thanks';<sup>340</sup> an explanation of the reason for offering thanks,

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<sup>337</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 38.

<sup>338</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 47.

<sup>339</sup> According to Gunkel's classification, the following psalms belong to this genre: 18; 30; 32; 34; 40:2-12; 41; 66; 92; 100; 107; 116; 118; 138; Isa: 38:20.

<sup>340</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 201.

called by Gunkel the narrative, which is often directed to a third party<sup>341</sup> and is generally made up of three parts: the psalmist's recalling of his distress, his call to God and his deliverance;<sup>342</sup> a conclusion in which the psalmist often asserts that only God is able to save him.<sup>343</sup> The proclamation of God's ability to come to the rescue is directed towards other people and speaks of God in the third person.

To conclude about thanksgiving psalms, let us note that, like the psalms of praise, they express jubilation and that is why these two types of psalms are fairly similar. As Gunkel remarks, 'the difference is that the thanksgiving songs rejoice about the specific act which God has just done for the one offering thanksgiving, while the hymns, [i.e. praises], sing the great deeds and majestic characteristics in general'.<sup>344</sup> In this research, I will treat thanksgiving psalms as a type of praise, since, ultimately, the discursive act of giving thanks amounts to praise.

Although it is useful to be aware of the specificities of the different varieties of psalms, it is equally important to provide a broad definition of the genre that can be applied to every single instance of psalms. In this perspective, I propose the following definition: a psalm is a lyrical prayer in which the author praises God and/or calls for his help. Stylistically, the psalmist uses parallelisms pervasively and often resorts to nominal sentences. Alternatively, it is possible to resort to Alter's definition in which he establishes that 'a "psalm", *mizmor*, is an act of singing or chanting, a way of using the language, with or without actual

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<sup>341</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 201.

<sup>342</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 202.

<sup>343</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 205.

<sup>344</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 208.



musical accompaniment, rhythmically and regularly, to implore, to admonish, to reflect – and, above all, to celebrate’.<sup>345</sup>

#### 2.1.5. Parallelism as a Typical Stylistic Feature of the Psalms

Parallelism was first singled out as a typical device of biblical poetry by the scholar Robert Lowth (1710-1787).<sup>346</sup> Ever since, it has been considered as one of the most striking characteristic features of the Psalter. Parallelism manifests itself in various ways and the traditional scholarship on biblical poetry distinguishes between the three following types of parallelisms: firstly synonymous parallelism, in which the second part of a sentence reformulates a meaning similar to that of the first part, as, for example in psalm 5:9: ‘The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way’; secondly, antithetic parallelism in which the first and second parts of the sentence express an opposite meaning, for instance in psalm 102:26: ‘they shall perish, but thou shalt endure’ or in psalm 104:8: ‘they go up by the mountains; they go down by the valleys’; thirdly, synthetic parallelism in which the second part of a sentence develops the thought expressed in the first part, for instance in psalm 150:4: ‘Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instrument and dance’.<sup>347</sup> Contemporary scholarship, however, focuses more on the idea that biblical parallelism aims at

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<sup>345</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985), p. 133.

<sup>346</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, p. 3.

<sup>347</sup> *The Cambridge Companion to The Bible*, p. 237.

specifying the sense of a statement by reformulating it and contrasting it.<sup>348</sup> This view is succinctly summarised by Alter who remarks that the semantic parallelisms of the Bible tend to display a pattern in which ‘the characteristic movement of meaning is one of heightening or intensification [...] of focusing, specification, concretization, even what could be called dramatization’.<sup>349</sup> For instance in the parallelism found in psalm 17:1, the first syntagm serves the lamenter to call for God’s attention to his cry, while the second syntagm specifies that this cry is a prayer: ‘attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer’.

#### 2.1.6. Imagery of the Psalms

Psalms are very rich in their use of poetic images, most of which are recurrent and function as symbolic designations of abstract concepts. The first image to appear in the Psalter is that of a tree representing, metaphorically, the righteous. Commenting on it, William Brown observes that ‘the tree standing at the entrance of the Psalter is a powerful image that sets in relief the plethora of botanical figures featured in the subsequent psalms, including images of withering and flourishing, as well as fertility’.<sup>350</sup>

Images of the city of Zion, another name for Jerusalem, and that of Mount Zion are crucial, because these places are considered sacred. As the critic Robert Cohn observes, Jerusalem is referred to not as a mere human settlement but as

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<sup>348</sup> Clinton and McCann, ‘The Book of Psalms’, p. 652.

<sup>349</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, p. 19.

<sup>350</sup> William Brown, *Seeing the Psalms. A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville – London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 75.

God's place of dwelling.<sup>351</sup> Consequently, it is depicted as a secure place, as psalm 48:13-15 testifies: 'Within her citadels God has shown himself a sure defence'.<sup>352</sup> Furthermore, the mountain on which Jerusalem sits is associated with the idea of a God-given fertility, as shown by psalm 104:13 quoted by Cohn: 'From the lofty abode thou waterest the mountains; / the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy work'.<sup>353</sup>

Contrasting with the spatial elevation of the mountain, the image of the pit or grave is often used by the psalmist in order to express suffering. They also serve the poet as a way of describing a death-like situation. As Alter remarks, 'illness and other kinds of dangers, perhaps even spiritual distress, are represented as a descent into the underworld from which the Lord is entreated to bring the person back or, in the thanksgiving poems, is praised for having brought him back'.<sup>354</sup> For instance, in psalm 88:4, the author says: 'I am counted with them that go down to the pit'. In addition, the psalmist's sufferings are also designated with images of drought and/or thirst. For instance, the author of Psalm 63:1 cries to God as follows: 'my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee'.

Another frequent image is that of tears which conveys both a realistic reference to crying and the idea of penitence.<sup>355</sup> For example, the author of psalm 42:3 asserts: 'My tears have been my meat day and night'.

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<sup>351</sup> Robert Cohn, 'Mountains in the Biblical Cosmos' in *The Shape of the Sacred Space: Four Biblical Studies* (Ann Arbor: Scholars Press, 1981), pp. 25-41; p. 29.

<sup>352</sup> Cohn, 'Mountains in the Biblical Cosmos', p. 39.

<sup>353</sup> Cohn, 'Mountains in the Biblical Cosmos', p. 34.

<sup>354</sup> Alter, 'Psalms', p. 259.

<sup>355</sup> *The Psalms. Ancient Poetry of the Spirit*, introduced by Lawrence Boadt (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1997), p. 42.

At this stage, it is important to bear in mind that some of these images are ambiguous and that their meaning depends on the particular situation in which they are used. A good example of this phenomenon is to be found in psalm 42. Here, as the scholar David Clines observes, ‘in the first strophe the image is that of water as life; in the second, of water as death. In the first strophe, water is life for the thirsty hart in the desert; [...] in the second strophe, however, the psalmist knows himself to be overwhelmed by hostile water which, like the water he craves, also comes from God’.<sup>356</sup>

#### 2.1.7. The Psalms’ Significance

An important function of the Psalter is its liturgical use. As was said earlier, psalms are sung regularly in the liturgy of both the Jewish and Christian religions. Such use of the Psalter highlights the fact that its primary function is prayer. At this stage, it should be specified that psalms of lament constitute a particular type of prayer because they have a twofold goal: to ask for help and praise God at the same time. The critic Harvey Guthrie highlights the predominant role of the former goal in the following terms: ‘in content it consists of a crying out by an individual to God in time of need: sickness, physical or spiritual oppression, fear of imminent death. Whatever the occasion [...] the misfortune is attributed directly to God, who is, therefore, called upon for

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<sup>356</sup> David Clines, ‘Story and Poem: The Old Testament as Literature and Scripture’ in *On the Way to the Postmodern. Old Testament Essays* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 225-39; p. 234.

deliverance'.<sup>357</sup> Guthrie also observes that by expressing his distress, the psalmist hints at God's failure to maintain a cosmic order; hence Guthrie remarks that 'the suppliant draws attention to his plight in striking figures by which he seeks to show Yahweh how, in his case, the powers of darkness have usurped authority in the cosmos'.<sup>358</sup> In other words, the lament also serves the purpose of 'testing' God and putting into question his universal reign. This state of affairs explains why psalms of lament often refer to the discourses of the non-believers. As the scholar Herbert Levin argues, the psalmist reproduces the voice of the people whose speeches discredit the idea of God's supremacy in order to strengthen his faith by facing the menace of other people's worldviews and managing to overcome the threat they represent to his belief.<sup>359</sup> In other words, psalms also stage the struggle of the individual to keep his faith in times of crisis.

Another important function of psalms is catharsis. The person reciting or singing any given psalm can invest it with his own feelings and experiences and is able, then, to make sense of his own situation via the shared and canonical sacred text. This aspect of psalms is precisely what makes them so popular and has been fully appreciated over the centuries. The cathartic function of psalms is especially relevant for the psalms of lament, because of the intensity of suffering expressed by their authors. As the scholar Richard Kelvin Moore puts it, 'as we identify with

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<sup>357</sup> Harvey Guthrie, *Israel's Sacred Songs. A Study of Dominant Themes* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1966), pp. 11-2.

<sup>358</sup> Guthrie, *Israel's Sacred Songs*, p. 124.

<sup>359</sup> Herbert Levine, 'The Dialogic Discourse of Psalms' in *Hermeneutics, the Bible and Literary Criticism*, edited by Ann Loades and Michael McLain (London: MacMillan Academic and Professional, 1991), pp. 145-61; p. 152.

the authors of the psalms of lamentation, and [...] how they reacted to pain, and how they resolved their pain, then we can understand better our suffering'.<sup>360</sup>

Psalms of lament perform yet another function which is designated by the critic Walter Brueggemann with the expression 'spirituality of protest'.<sup>361</sup> This expression refers to the psalmist's capacity of voicing a feeling of revolt at the sight of injustice. In other words, Brueggemann's definition of psalms of lament as a spirituality of protest designates the psalmist's ability not to resign himself to silently witnessing a pitiful state of affairs but, on the contrary, to voice his indignation. As Gunkel puts it, 'it is a sign of strong spirit and a truthful conscience when the singer of Ps 26, like Job, rebels against the idea of guilt and protests his innocence vehemently'.<sup>362</sup> Incidentally, let us note that the psalmist's promptness to express his anger contrasts sharply with the Christian virtue of humility.

To assess correctly the importance of the psalms, it is also important to bear in mind the following remark made by the scholar Carleen Mandolfo: 'the Psalter is in a unique position in that it is the only biblical book that can be read almost exclusively as the words of humans to God'.<sup>363</sup> To put it differently, the particularity of the Psalter lies in the fact that it represents a human address to the divine and that is why Alter remarks that 'whatever themes the various psalms treat [they] are caught in the heavily charged field of relationship between man

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<sup>360</sup> Richard Kelvin Moore, *The Psalms of Lamentation and the Enigma of suffering* (Lewiston; Lampeter: Mellen Biblical Press, 1996), p. 115.

<sup>361</sup> Ann Weems, *Psalms of Laments*, with a foreword by Walter Brueggemann (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), pp. ix-xvii; p.xiv.

<sup>362</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to the Psalms*, p. 137.

<sup>363</sup> Carleen Mandolfo, *God in the Dock. Dialogic Tension in the Psalms of Lament* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), p. 13.

and God. Thus, longing, dependence, desperation, exultation become elements in a series of remarkable love poems – once more, cutting across psalmodic genre – addressed by man to God'.<sup>364</sup>

In addition, Alter also pays attention to the fact that, implicitly, the psalms demonstrate the double nature of language, which can either represent faithfully the situation it refers to or, alternatively, misrepresent it. As the scholar puts it: 'the psalm-poets [...] are acutely aware of the contradictory character of language. [...] There is never any radical scepticism about the efficacy of language in the Bible because of [the fact that] God [...] remains the ultimate guarantor of language. But if speech can be used to express true feelings (the supplication) and to name the truth (the thanksgiving psalm), it may also be turned into a treacherous instrument of deception'.<sup>365</sup> The psalmist's awareness of the double-edged quality of language is well expressed in psalm 52:4 where the psalmist addresses the dishonest as follows: 'Thou lovest all devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue'. Another telling example is the psalmist's description of his enemies in psalm 55:21: 'The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords'.<sup>366</sup>

The denunciation of idolatry is yet another message conveyed in psalms. Thus in psalm 81:9 God proclaims himself as a unique divine principle and reminds his people of the interdiction of honouring other gods: 'There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god'. Likewise, the

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<sup>364</sup> Alter, 'Psalms', p. 260.

<sup>365</sup> Alter, 'Psalms', p. 261.

author of psalm 97:7 attacks idolatry in the following terms: ‘Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols’.

Finally, it is worth mentioning Bakhtin’s remarks on the genre of psalms, which result from his investigation of the difference between the ethic and aesthetic act. According to Bakhtin, prayers based exclusively on the confessional principle are not an aesthetic act but an ethic act that distinguishes itself from the former, because the other to whom it is addressed is God’s encompassing consciousness that does not leave any space for a distinct other.<sup>367</sup>

Such is not the case, Bakhtin says, of the genre of psalms, because in them the confessional principle is counter-balanced by the expression of the psalmist’s confidence, which contains the seed of dialogism, since it addresses God as a distinct other able to understand him. Bakhtin depicts this phenomenon in the following terms: ‘Когда организующая роль от покаяния перейдет к доверию, становится возможной эстетическая форма [...]. Предвосхищая верою оправдание в Боге, я мало-помалу из *я-для-себя* становлюсь *другим* для Бога, наивным в Боге. На этой стадии [...] находятся псалмы [...]; становится возможным ритм, милующий и возвышающий образ и проч. – успокоение, строй и мера в анитисипации красоты в Боге. Особенно глубокий образец самоотчета-исповеди, где организующая роль переходит от покаяния к доверию и надежде (наивная исповедь), – это покаянный псалом Давида’.<sup>368</sup>

Bakhtin’s comments are interesting not only because it shows the theoretician’s

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<sup>367</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Avtor i geroi, k filosofskim osnovam gumanitarnykh nauk* (St Petersburg: Azbuka, 2000), p. 49.

<sup>368</sup> Bakhtin, *Avtor i geroi*, p. 166.



recognition that even a lyrical genre such as psalm can be dialogic but also because it highlights the rich artistic potential of the genre of psalms.

#### 2.1.8. Gender and the Genre of Psalms

The issue of the link between gender and the genre of psalms is especially relevant because, as will be shown in the following chapters, when Tsvetaeva integrates the genre of psalms in her poetry, she tends to feminise it.

It is not unusual that a specific literary genre finds itself associated with a particular gender. In this regard, the genre of psalms is particularly representative, since it is strongly associated with a male figure, namely David, the presumed author of the majority of psalms. Moreover, as will be shown further, there is no well-known female writer among the authors who wrote psalm paraphrases during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The absence of any mention of female authors in the Psalter itself and in the tradition of psalm paraphrases inspired by this biblical text contributed to the popular perception of this genre as typically masculine. Thus in his analysis of psalms, Gunkel insists on the fact that lament psalms were performed exclusively by men;<sup>369</sup> by contrast, the critic observes that folkloric funeral laments (dirges) were sung predominantly by women. Moreover, Gunkel mentions the fact in communal laments the expression of a feeling of loss, stemming from the psalmist's sorrow for the woes of the holy city of Zion, indicates that such psalms probably originate in the very feminine genre of the dirge. This observation leads

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<sup>369</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 126.

Gunkel to the conclusion that ‘the originally secular [and feminine]<sup>370</sup> genre of the dirge has been transformed into a religious poem’ performed by men.<sup>371</sup>

At this stage, it is worth observing that the contemporary biblical scholar John Eaton takes a less rigid approach in discussing the issue of the psalms’ gender and does not hesitate to stress the existence of female psalmists by referring to psalm 68:25:<sup>372</sup> ‘The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; among them were the damsels playing with timbrels’. This passage constitutes the only extract from the Psalter presented by Eaton as a demonstration of the existence of female psalmists and that is why Eaton’s assertion is not entirely convincing; moreover, the passage quoted by Eaton makes clear that the women were not among the singers but the musicians. In other words, they accompany musically the men performing the proper psalms. Even though I do not question Eaton’s assertion of the fact that the Israelite society from which the Bible emerged highly valued women singers,<sup>373</sup> I argue that until recently the genre of psalms was perceived as a masculine one. This fact explains why, to my knowledge, no psalm paraphrases were written by well-known Russian female authors during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

### 2.2.1. The Psalter in Russian Culture

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<sup>370</sup> My specification (S.O.C.).

<sup>371</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 96.

<sup>372</sup> John Eaton, *The Psalms. A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (London – New York: T&T Clark, 2003), p. 8.

<sup>373</sup> Eaton, *The Psalms*, p. 8.

The importance of the Psalter in Russian culture is worth outlining because of Tsvetaeva's deep attachment to her native country and her strong interest in Russia's historical and cultural specificities.<sup>374</sup>

As was said earlier, the Psalter was translated into Slavonic by Saints Cyril and Methodius in the ninth century. Interestingly Dykman indicates that it 'was the only book of the Old Testament [which] they chose to render into that language.'<sup>375</sup> The predilection of Russian people for the Psalter is still perceptible today, since the Book of Psalms is often the only text from the Old Testament to be annexed to the separate publication of the New Testament. This fact testifies to the special place occupied by the Psalter in Russian culture, since its appearance in the ninth century. Indeed, once translated into Slavonic, the Psalter rapidly gained a widespread popularity. The following extract highlights the overriding influence of the Psalter in Russian everyday life: 'с укоренением христианства на Руси Книга Псалмов становится любимой книгой народа. По Псалтире учатся грамоте; без псалтири не обходится благочестивый книголюб; Псалтирь читается над покойником. Вся старо-русская письменность переполнена ссылками на Псалтирь'.<sup>376</sup> In addition, the psalms were also reflected in miniatures, sculpture, applied arts and architecture.<sup>377</sup> All this stresses the fact that psalms were well integrated in every day life. Moreover, Dykman also indicates that important stages of human life were marked by reading of the

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<sup>374</sup> The following entry taken from Tsvetaeva's notebook illustrates her deep attachment to the Russian cultural heritage: 'Я в России XX века – бессмысленна. Все мои партнеры (указываю на небо или в землю: там' [Tsvetaeva, *Neizdannoe. Zapisnye knizhki v dvukh tomakh, tom pervyi 1913-1919*, p. 313.].

<sup>375</sup> Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry. A History* (Genève: Éditions Slatkine, 2001), p. 10.

<sup>376</sup> *Psaltir' na slavianskom i russkom iazykakh*, introduced by an unnamed author (Rome: Vatikanskaia tipografiia, 1950), p. xiii.

<sup>377</sup> Lutsevich, *Psaltir' v russkoi poezii*, pp. 8-9.

Psalter: ‘it became customary for a Russian believer to turn to the Book of Psalms in all extraordinary occasions: Psalms were read for the healing of the sick and for the dead, as well as for the newly-born or the newly-wed’.<sup>378</sup> Such popular appropriation of the Psalter is fully understandable, given the predominance of religious culture up to the beginning of the twentieth century. By contrast, the use of the Psalter both as a way of predicting the future and in magical rituals is more surprising. Although forbidden by the official church, the habit of predicting what the future holds by resorting to the Psalter has been extremely resilient and has survived until now.<sup>379</sup> Interestingly, the scholar William Ryan explains the persistence of such a custom by the fact that, in the past, the Psalter was the most easily available text among the biblical books: ‘the practice of psalmomancy may have had its popularity in Muscovy reinforced by the fact that the Psalter was the sacred text most likely to be found in an ordinary household’.<sup>380</sup>

### 2.1.3. The Psalms in Russian Literature

A short historical view of the importance of psalms for Russian literature is useful because Tsvetaeva knew well the literary tradition preceding her. Moreover, Russian psalmic poetry is clearly reflected Tsvetaeva’s poems such as ‘Molitva’ (1909), ‘Mirovye nachalos’ vo mgle kochev’e’ (1917) or ‘Naprasno

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<sup>378</sup> Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, p. 12.

<sup>379</sup> Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, p. 13; Andrei Turilov, ‘Bibleiskie knigi v narodnoi kul’ture vostochnykh slavian (K istorii Psaltyri kak gadatel’noi i magicheskoi knigi)’, *Jews & Slavs*, 2 (1993), pp. 77-86.

<sup>380</sup> William Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight. A Historical Survey of Magic and Divination in Russia* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), p. 312.

glazom – kak gvozdem’ (1935). Finally, to present a brief outline of the role played by psalms in Russian poetry is also necessary, because my argument that a significant number of Tsvetaeva’s works modulate this genre is based on Fowler’s theory of the historical resilience of genres and could not be made without a preliminary presentation of the place and evolution of the genre of psalms in Russian literature.

As was said earlier, the Psalter had a paramount influence on the early stages of Russian literature. In this section I will give a short historical account of the role played by psalms in the formation and evolution of Russian literary poetry. This part will not include extended interpretations of particular poems but give an overall picture of the interrelations between the Psalter and Russian literature. In doing so, I will rely on two major, recent and reliable studies on the origin and development of psalmic poetry in Russia: Aminadav Dykman’s monograph entitled *The Psalms in Russian Poetry* (2001) and Liudmila Lutsevich’s book *Psaltyr’ v russkoi poezii* (2002). Both authors focus on the eighteenth century, which saw the apogee of the genre of psalm paraphrase. However, both authors stress that the influence of this genre remains perceptible today.<sup>381</sup>

As was just mentioned, poetic paraphrases of the lyrical prayers of the Psalter came to form a major literary genre during the eighteenth century. The birth of the Russian genre of psalm paraphrase is usually considered to be the publication by the Russian monk and poet Simeon Polotskii (1629-1680) of his

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<sup>381</sup> Lutsevich, *Psaltyr’ v russkoi poezii*, pp. 17-8; Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, p. 257.

versified version of the Psalter in 1680.<sup>382</sup> Polotskii's Psalter is known as *Psaltyr' rifmotvornaia*; the author himself entitled it *Psaltyr' tsaria i proroka Davida*. By referring to the supposed author of the psalms, i.e. King David, in the title, Polotskii hints at the fact that his role as a translator is to give as accurate a translation as possible. Although this might have been the overt aim of Polotskii, his version of the Psalter made history because he was the first Russian poet daring to approach the Psalter from an artistic point of view rather than from an exclusively religious one. As the critic A. Sidorov remarks, in *Psaltyr' rifmotvornaia*, for 'the first time one encounters a book destined for the intelligent reader and book-lover rather than for the church'.<sup>383</sup> The scholar Ilya Serman describes the artistic approach used by Polotskii in the following terms: 'Simeon approached his work as a poet for whom Psalms were only a material enabling him to express a new and personal content by means of the usual formulae and images of the religious style. Simeon, like [...] all the Russian poets after him who resort to Psalms, brings to them something personal, new semantic nuances, new images and ideas, absent from the original, [...] adding a new emotional content to the paraphrase'.<sup>384</sup> Inasmuch as the Scriptures are considered by many Orthodox believers as a sacred text that should not be altered in any way, it is not surprising that Polotskii's Psalter was perceived by many of its contemporary

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<sup>382</sup> Elsewhere in Europe this genre was already thriving. As Lutsevich indicates [*Psaltyr' v russkoi poezii*, pp. 94-5 ; 104-5]: in Western Europe this genre appeared in the sixteenth century with Martin Luther's translation of the Psalter into German in 1524. In France, the tradition of Psalm paraphrases was started by the poet Clément Marot in 1539.

<sup>383</sup> Quoted by Dykman in *The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, p. 21

<sup>384</sup> Ilya Serman, 'Le mouvement littéraire et la vie littéraire au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle' in *Histoire de la littérature russe. Des origines aux lumières*, edited by Efim Etkind and others (Paris: Fayard, 1992), pp. 211-54; p. 253. My translation (S.O.C.).

readers as blasphemous.<sup>385</sup> Yet, by today's standards, this text is extremely faithful and respectful of the original.<sup>386</sup> This is an important observation, for it stresses the fact that the concept of blasphemy – or heretical manipulation of sacred texts – is relative and changes from one epoch to another.

Despite its cold, if not outraged, official reception Polotskii's Psalter started a tradition, namely that of the artistic versification in Russian of the official Slavonic prose version of the Psalter used by the Russian Orthodox Church; this precedent was followed by the overwhelming majority of poets in the eighteenth century. As the critic Victor Terras observes, 'the total number of versified psalms completed by the end of the [eighteenth] century exceeds one thousand separate texts'.<sup>387</sup> Hence, the scholar Alexander Levitsky concludes that psalm paraphrases 'became one of the most important literary undertakings of the period'.<sup>388</sup> Most critics stress that the success of this genre is paradoxical because the eighteenth century was characterised by the opening of Russian society to the rationalist ideas of the West following the reforms of Peter the First.<sup>389</sup> Consequently, Dykman remarks, it would have been logical that 'the endeavour of Psalm-transposition begun by Simeon Polotsky would find no followers'.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, p. 47.

<sup>386</sup> Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, p. 45.

<sup>387</sup> Victor Terras, *A History of Russian Literature* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 116.

<sup>388</sup> Alexander Levitsky, 'Preface' in *Vasilij Kirillovic Trediakovskij Psalter 1753* (Paderborn – Munich – Vienna – Zurich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1989), pp. vii-viii; p. vii.

<sup>389</sup> For a detailed discussion of this paradox see: Liudmila Lutsevich, 'Sekuliarizatsiia i sakralizatsiia v XVIII v. (Stikhotvornoe pereloženie psalmov)' in *Problemy izučeniia russkoi literatury XVIII veka* (Samara: "NTTZh", 2003), pp. 91-111; Ilya Serman, 'Stikhotvornye pereloženiia psalmov i preodolenie razryva kul'tur v russkoi literature XVIII veka', *Jews and Slavs*, 2 (1994), pp. 103-11; Iurii Lotman, 'Rol' i mesto literatury v soznanii epokhi' in *Iz istorii russkoi kul'tury. Tom IV (XVIII-nachalo XIX veka)*, edited by A. Koshelev (Moscow: Iaziki russkoi kul'ture, 1996), pp. 84-94; p. 89.

<sup>390</sup> Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, p. 51.

The critic Lebedeva gives a reasonable explanation of the phenomenal success of psalm paraphrases in the eighteenth century by reminding us that the educated people of that time used to learn to read with the Psalter.<sup>391</sup> Another explanation is proposed by the scholar Iurii Lotman who stresses that Russian authors did not abandon the belief in the sacred status of the Word itself.<sup>392</sup> Hence, even though authors of the eighteenth century had genuine aesthetic, philosophical and scientific concerns, they remained attached to a mythical conception of the holiness of language as and that is why the genre of psalm paraphrase struck a chord with them. Yet another interesting explanation is formulated by Serman who understands the poets' eagerness to write psalm paraphrases as a result of the desire to overcome the gap between the simple people, who knew psalms by heart thanks to Church services, and the educated elite.<sup>393</sup> Most critics, however, link the success of psalm paraphrases to the fact that this genre was one of the few current at the time in which poets could express deep personal feelings in an acceptable way. Indeed, as Lutsevich remarks, most critics agree that the universal human content found in psalms was highly valued by the poets; in other words, the genre provided a safe framework in which poets could express their deeply personal experiences, moods and feelings in a veiled manner at a time when intimate poetry did not exist as a literary genre.<sup>394</sup> To put it differently, it is

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<sup>391</sup> <http://infofolio.asf.ru/Philol/Lebedeva/lomon.html#1> Accessed in November 2005.

<sup>392</sup> Lotman, 'Rol' i mesto literatury v soznanii epokhi', p. 89.

<sup>393</sup> Serman, 'Stikhotvornye perelozheniia psalmov i preodolenie razryva kul'tur v russkoi literature XVIII veka', pp. 103-11.

<sup>394</sup> Derzhavina, 'Stikhotvornye perelozheniia M. V. Lomonosova' in *Lomonosov i russkaia literatura*, edited by A. Eleonskaia and others (Moscow: Nauka, 1987), pp. 89-199; p. 189; Iurii Stennik, *Pushkin i russkaia literatura XVIII veka* (St Petersburg: Nauka, 1995), pp. 173-4.



safe to assert that what appealed to the poets of the eighteenth century were not only theological and religious issues addressed in the psalms, but also their lyrical form and emotional content. This is an important point, because, as will be shown in subsequent chapters, Tsvetaeva pushed this tendency to the extreme, using a psalm-like form with a highly personal content. Finally, it is worth noting that the typical metre used in lyric poetry, i.e. the iambic tetrameter, was first introduced in Russian poetry by the poet Aleksandr Sumarokov (1717-1777) precisely in the genre of psalm transpositions.<sup>395</sup>

Now that the cultural context of the appearance of psalm paraphrases is clear, it is time to give a formal account of the state of this genre in the eighteenth century. As Levitsky observes, psalm paraphrases, or periphrastic psalms as Dykman calls them, were designated by the generic name of ‘spiritual ode’ (‘dukhovnaia oda’). The identification of psalm paraphrases with the wider genre of ode was a move initiated by the poets themselves, because they saw a deep kinship between the genre of ode and the biblical psalms. For instance, in a theoretical essay on the ode, entitled ‘Rassuzhdenie ob ode voobshche’ (1734), the poet Vasilii Trediakovskii (1703-1769) asserts that psalms should be considered as the ultimate model of the ode, because they treat a noble topic, that of the man’s relationship with God, by means of a rich set of images and a lofty style.<sup>396</sup> The frequent use of slavonicisms involved in psalm paraphrases is also what motivated Mikhail Lomonosov’s assimilation of psalm paraphrases to the

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<sup>395</sup> Lutsevich, *Psaltir’ v russkoi poezii*, p. 372.

<sup>396</sup> Lutsevich, *Psaltir’ v russkoi poezii*, pp. 133-4.

solemn genre of ode.<sup>397</sup> Incidentally, the fact that poets felt impelled to give a generic name to their psalm paraphrases and did not rest content with the designation 'perelozhenie' indicates that whatever their degree of faithfulness to the original, authors were aware that they also approached psalms from an artistic point of view.

To come back to the designation 'spiritual ode', it is worth remarking that, originally, this expression was used to refer to texts that were tightly bound up with the original text of the Psalter.<sup>398</sup> This means that the generic name of spiritual ode would designate only poetic texts paraphrasing the Psalter and overtly indicating in the title of the poem the psalm-source with the expression 'perelozhenie Psalma...'. Incidentally, the use of the term 'perelozhenie', which literally means transposition, rather than 'paraphraz' (paraphrase), is explainable by the fact that poets were putting into verse the prose of the Slavonic version. Once firmly established, though, the genre of spiritual odes started to lose its exclusive link with the Psalter and gradually came to designate almost any type of text treating religious matter. Here, it is important to note that this phenomenon corresponds to Fowler's concept of generic modulation, i.e. the phenomenon whereby a literary work reproduces the spirit of a genre without necessarily resorting to most of its explicit formal prescriptions.<sup>399</sup>

The loosening of the link between the Psalter and the genre of spiritual ode can be illustrated by Lomonosov's poetic meditations on the natural phenomenon

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<sup>397</sup>Terras, *A History of Russian Literature*, p.127.

<sup>398</sup> Levitsky, 'Preface' in *Vasilij Kirillovic Trediakovskij Psalter 1753*), p. vii.

<sup>399</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 56.

of aurora borealis entitled ‘Veчерnee razmyshlenie o Bozh’em velichestve pri sluchae velikogo siianiia’ and ‘Utrennee razmyshlenie o Bozh’em velichestve’ (1751). As Dykman remarks, in these two works the scientific observation of natural phenomena is allied to the expression of awe before God, who, in Lomonosov’s view, created the natural world. It is understandable, then, that Lomonosov expressed his admiration for the natural wonders by means of a psalmic idiom.<sup>400</sup> In other words, Lomonosov blended the genre of scientific enquiry with that of praise to God, as indicated by his introduction of a lexical range drawn from the Psalter into a speculative meditation on the effect of extraordinary lights.<sup>401</sup>

Another striking example of the loosening of the link between the Psalter and the genre of spiritual ode can be found in the poetry of Gavriil Derzhavin (1743-1816). For instance, Dykman underlines that Derzhavin did not feel necessary to specify that his poem ‘Setovanie’ (1807) is a paraphrase of psalm 101\* (102).<sup>402</sup> Another novelty brought by Derzhavin is the introduction of a lower style into the genre. Thus, commenting on the poem ‘Setovanie’, Dykman writes: ‘The most extraordinary thing about this enchanting poem is its metre: anacreontic hemiambus [i.e. iambic trimeter] [...] within the classicist classification of poetic genres, the Anacreontic poem was related to the “middle” style, to epicurean odes and love songs, and had nothing to do with the “high”

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<sup>400</sup> Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, p. 124.

<sup>401</sup> For example, Dykman remarks that ‘the combination враги встают (“enemies rise [against us] [used by Lomonosov] is a direct borrowing from the idiom of the Psalter’. The same holds true for Lomonosov’s expression ‘Твое [...] имя славим гласно’ [...] a variation on the current psalmic formula “и вознесем имя его вкупе” (“let us praise his name together”), as in psalms 32(33):4’ [*The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, p. 125].

<sup>402</sup> Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, p. 247.

style to which the Psalms transpositions belonged'.<sup>403</sup> Yet, the choice of this metre is consistent with the trend consisting in accentuating the personal note of the Psalter: as Dykman explains, the iambic trimeter intensifies the personal tone that is perceptible in many psalms. As a result, 'the extraordinary combination of "domestic tone" communicated by the Anacreontic metre [...] and religious pathos makes Derzhavin's late Psalm transpositions a unique phenomenon in the tradition of poetic Psalms adaptation'.<sup>404</sup> The fact that Derzhavin did not feel obliged to mention that his poem 'Setovanie' is a psalm paraphrase might be due to his belief that poetic inspiration comes directly from God.<sup>405</sup> Hence, his altering of the original text is divinely legitimised.

Derzhavin displays yet another sign of the loosening of the link between the Psalter and the genre of spiritual ode in 'Bog' (1784). This text is a theological meditation on God in which Derzhavin uses a psalmic idiom without referring to any biblical psalm in particular. For instance, the identification of the poet with a worm in Derzhavin's famous line 'Я царь – я раб – я червь – я Бог!'<sup>406</sup> is undeniably inspired by the psalmist's exclamation 'Я же червь, а не человек',<sup>407</sup> which is translated as follows in the English version: 'But I am a worm, and no man'.

Although the importance of psalm paraphrases declined during the nineteenth century, this genre did not disappear but underwent two major

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<sup>403</sup> Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, p. 249.

<sup>404</sup> Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, p. 253.

<sup>405</sup> Lutsevich, *Psaltir' v russkoi poezii*, pp. 440 -1.

<sup>406</sup> Quoted in *The Garnett Book of Russian Verse*, p. 11.

<sup>407</sup> *Bibliia* (Moscow: Rossiiskoe bibleiskoe obshchestvo, 2001), p.615 (psalm 21:7\*). All subsequent quotations from the Russian version of the Bible will be taken from this edition.

modifications: the introduction of political content, on the one hand, and romantic appropriation on the other.

The introduction of political content into psalm paraphrases was a direct consequence of the historical events that unfolded early in the century: the preparation and failed attempt at introducing a constitutional monarchy undertaken by a group of young aristocratic men (the Decembrists), who after the death of Alexander I (1777-1825) in December 1825 demanded the enthronement of Constantine (1779-1831) instead of Nicholas I (1796-1855); the former was much more open-minded to democratic ideals than the latter but had renounced the right to the throne. Following the failure of this attempt, some participants were executed and others exiled to Siberia. This entailed an acute sense of injustice among many progressive young aristocrats and reactivated the feeling of lack of liberty that had provoked the attempt in the first place.<sup>408</sup> Hence, it is understandable that the Decembrist poets found solace in psalms expressing the distress provoked by exile and imprisonment.<sup>409</sup> In this regard, the predilection of Russian poets for Psalm 136\* (137) in which the psalmist is exiled to Babylon is highly emblematic.<sup>410</sup> Another reason explaining why Decembrist poets felt close to the prayers of the Psalter is that they held high political ideals, while remaining deeply religious. Moreover, Terras remarks that ‘Decembrists were of the opinion that literature had a civic mission – to inculcate patriotism and civic responsibility. This meant that literature should concentrate on serious and lofty

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<sup>408</sup> Terras, *A History of Russian Literature*, pp. 168-9.

<sup>409</sup> Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, pp. 262-4.

<sup>410</sup> <http://rubakin.zavetspisok.ru/himich.htm> Accessed in November 2006.

topics and cultivate genres appropriate to them such as the patriotic ode'.<sup>411</sup> Interestingly, it was fairly common to blend the patriotic ode with the spiritual. This is precisely what Fedor Glinka (1786-1880) did in his paraphrase of the first psalm of the Psalter, entitled 'Blazhenstvo pravednogo' (1824). As Dykman demonstrates, Glinka's paraphrase 'abounds in key expressions which clearly belong to the political idiom of the Decembrists'.<sup>412</sup>

As was mentioned previously, in the early nineteenth century psalms were not only given political meaning but they also provided a convenient form in which poets could express romantic feelings. A good example of such romanticisation of psalms is Nikolai Iazykov (1803-1847)'s poem 'Blazhen, kto mudrosti vysokoi' in which, as Dykman observes, 'Yazykov turned the conflict between the righteous man and the ways of the wicked to a typical *Romantic clash* between the Romantic hero and the idle, mundane society, so often bitterly ironized by many of the Russian Romantics'.<sup>413</sup> Hence, it is fair to assert that the Romantic creation of poems using prayer-like features originated from the genre of the spiritual ode. However, in the nineteenth century the fact that a poem used the formal framework of a prayer no longer necessarily entailed that its content expressed explicit piety. Thus Aleksandr Pushkin (1799-1837) integrated liturgical texts such as psalms into his poetry in an idiosyncratic way. Although he valued Lomonosov's psalmic poetry as a perfect didactic model to be emulated by

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<sup>411</sup> Terras, *A History of Russian Literature*, p. 171.

<sup>412</sup> Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, pp. 263 - 4.

<sup>413</sup> Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, p. 260.

any young poet eager to master the art of creative writing,<sup>414</sup> Pushkin's intertextual approach to psalms is far removed from that of his highly-respected predecessor in that he does not resort to the practice of psalm paraphrase but organically blends psalms into his own poetry. As the critic I. Surat remarks, when he resorts to the biblical text Pushkin does not paraphrase it nor does he try to establish a clear resemblance to it, but he merges it with his own text in a particularly organic way, namely by making his own the existential experience of biblical figures such as David or Job.<sup>415</sup> In this perspective, it is important to highlight Surat's observation that Pushkin identified with David.<sup>416</sup> The scholar explains this identification as follows: 'Псалтирь – самая личностная и лирическая книга Писания, это первородная лирика, еще не отделившая от молитвы, близкая духу пушкинской лирики своей непосредственной исповедальностью'.<sup>417</sup> In other words, Pushkin feels a kinship with the direct and sincerely confessional tone of the psalmist.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the genre of psalm paraphrase became more marginal. Yet poems reminiscent of this genre were still being written.<sup>418</sup> At this stage, the constraints of the genre had become so loose that a precise reference to the psalms or any other biblical texts was not any more a

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<sup>414</sup> B. Romanov, 'Psalmopevets David i russkaia poezii' in *Psaltir' v russkoi poezii* (Moscow: Novyi kliuch, 2002), pp. 5-58; p. 21.

<sup>415</sup> I. Surat, 'Bibleiskoe i lichnoe v tekstakh Pushkina' in *Koran i Bibliia v tvorchestve A. S. Pushkina*, edited by S. Schwarzband and D. Segal (Jerusalem: World Association for the Study of the Interaction of Cultures, 2000), pp. 109-20; p. 110; p. 117.

<sup>416</sup> Surat, 'Bibleiskoe i lichnoe v tekstakh Pushkina', p. 117.

<sup>417</sup> Surat, 'Bibleiskoe i lichnoe v tekstakh Pushkina', p.117.

<sup>418</sup> Among them are: 'O Gospodi, poshli dolgoterpen'e' (1855) and 'Ne veriu, Gospodi, chto ty menia zabyl' (1857) by Lev Mei; 'Gospod', menia gotovia k boiu,' (1857); 'Mol'ba' (1861) by Aleksei Pleshcheev; 'Est' i v moem stradal'cheskom zastoe' (1865) and 'Vse otnial u menia kazniashchii Bog' (1873) by Fedor Tiutchev; 'Psalmopevets David' (1881) by Konstantin Romanovich.

condition *sine qua non* of the genre. In other words, poets did not necessarily rework a particular psalm but created poems the composition, style and spirit of which recalled the lyrical prayers of the Psalter. The phenomenon whereby a genre is made perceptible in a work without imposing its normative rules and referring to its source of inspiration but by merely expressing the genre's mood and spirit is precisely what Fowler calls a generic modulation.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a significant revival of interest in psalms due to the renewal of religious faith that characterised the Silver Age. This expression designates, roughly, the period from the 1895-1925 and is, 'arguably the most complex in the entire history of Russian literature'<sup>419</sup> because of the profusion of different literary schools that thrived during this period.<sup>420</sup> Their common denominator, however, is that they all resulted from a 'rebellion against the materialist legacy of the 1860s'.<sup>421</sup> The historian Bernice Rosenthal depicts the rebellious impulse of this period as follows: 'The Silver Age which had originated as a protest against industrialism, positivism [and] rationalism [...] created a mood of emotionality, disorientation, and dissatisfaction.'<sup>422</sup> The sense that surrounding reality is not sufficient for the soul is nowhere more perceptible than in the literary movement called symbolism. In this brief presentation of the role of psalms in the literature of the early twentieth century, I will focus mainly

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<sup>419</sup> Evelyn Bristol, 'Turn of a Century: Modernism, 1895-1925' in *The Cambridge History of Literature*, edited by Charles Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 387-457; p. 387.

<sup>420</sup> As Victor Terras puts it [*Poetry of the Silver Age* (Dresden-Munich: Dresden University Press, 1998), p. 1]: 'Symbolism, Acmeism, several versions of Futurism, Imaginism, Constructivism, and a variety of minor schools virtually coexisted within the period of a single generation'.

<sup>421</sup> Bristol, 'Turn of a Century: Modernism, 1895-1925', p. 387.

<sup>422</sup> Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *Dmitri Sergeevich Merezhkovsky and the Silver Ages: the development of a revolutionary mentality* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), p. 7.



on symbolism, because it influenced Tsvetaeva more than any other artistic school.<sup>423</sup> In addition, symbolist poets were especially receptive to religious thought, since as Terras remarks, they were guided by a belief in ‘art’s affinity to religion’.<sup>424</sup> The analogy between art and religion that was made by the symbolists originates in their belief that there existed a higher reality beyond the visible world. As Terras puts it, ‘the phenomenal world of common experience was understood to offer the artist’s intuition symbols of a higher, ideal reality’.<sup>425</sup> Thus the symbolists strove to make perceptible their experience of the invisible world in their artistic work. The parallel between poetry and religion also stems from the fact, highlighted by Terras, that most poets of the Silver Age, regardless of their artistic orientation, shared ‘a mystic, Johannine reverence for the living word – which may in fact become a magic word’.<sup>426</sup> It is no wonder, then, that poets such as Konstantin Bal’mont (1867-1942), Valerii Briusov (1873-1924) and Andrei Belyi (1880-1934) in Moscow and Dmitrii Merezhkovskii (1865-1941), Viacheslav Ivanov (1866-1949) and Aleksandr Blok (1880- 1921) in St Petersburg, displayed a keen interest in religious topics. Paradoxically, their religiosity developed in the shadow of Nietzsche’s philosophy proclaiming, among other things, the death of God<sup>427</sup> and the importance of individual achievement. Nietzsche’s criticism of Christianity had a paramount influence on the philosophical and religious beliefs of the time. As the critic Edith Clowes

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<sup>423</sup> Oleg Kling, ‘Poeticheskii stil’ M. Tsvetaevoi i priemy simvolizma: pritiashenie i ottalkivanie’, *Voprosy literatury* 3 (1992), pp. 74-93.

<sup>424</sup> Terras, *Poetry of the Silver Age*, p. 9.

<sup>425</sup> Terras, *Poetry of the Silver Age*, p. 9.

<sup>426</sup> Terras, *Poetry of the Silver Age*, p. 54.

<sup>427</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, translated and introduced by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 41.

remarks, 'the Symbolists' reading [of Nietzsche] spurred each of them to the definition of personal [spiritual] outlook'.<sup>428</sup> Nietzsche's influence is one of the main reasons why, despite their marked interest in religion, the symbolist poets also expressed a feeling of unease with the concept of religion, as the literary critic Evelyn Bristol observes.<sup>429</sup> Indeed, the feeling of unease experienced by symbolist poets stems from the fact that they did not channel their religiosity into a single doctrine, such as that of the Orthodox Church. As the scholar Aleksandr Etkind remarks, in their spiritual quest most writers and poets of the beginning of the twentieth century did not rely on official religious confessions.<sup>430</sup> On the contrary, in their yearning to express the presence of a transcendent principle existing beyond the phenomenal world, symbolist poets resorted to 'religious symbols, Christian, of course, but also pagan [...] Christ, the cross, roses and lilies, but also Satanic powers and witchcraft, and images from Slavic, Scandinavian, Greek, and even Indic mythology'.<sup>431</sup> This syncretic trend was introduced by Merezhkovskii who sought a new faith in which 'art and religion were to be united in a new synthesis based on an interpretation of Christianity which included paganism'.<sup>432</sup> The endeavour of the symbolist poets to explore various, and sometimes exotic, religious traditions is expressed very well in the following lines by Bal'mont, taken from his poem 'Samoutverzhdenie' (1904): 'I know the Brahma is wiser than all gods with infinite names. / But Brahma is

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<sup>428</sup> Edith Clowes, 'The Mystical Symbolists' in *The Revolution of Moral Consciousness. Nietzsche in Russian Literature 1890-1914* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1988), pp. 115-72; p. 116.

<sup>429</sup> Bristol, 'Turn of a Century: Modernism, 1895-1925', p. 404.

<sup>430</sup> Aleksandr Etkind, *Sekty, literatura i revoliutsiia* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1998), p. 111.

<sup>431</sup> Terras, *Poetry of the Silver Age*, p. 10.

<sup>432</sup> Rosenthal, *Dmitri Sergeevich Merezhkovsky and the Silver Ages*, p. 11.

Indian, while I am Slav. Do our paths coincide?’<sup>433</sup> The symbolist search for religious inspiration is also perceptible in their fascination with the sun. For instance, in his poetry, Merezhkovskii identifies the sun with faith, while ‘Bal’mont extolled his readers to “be like the sun” and V.V. Rozanov enthusiastically described the sun-worshipping religions of the Ancient Near East’.<sup>434</sup> This fact confirms Rosenthal’s observation that ‘mysticism and religion were the logical culmination of the symbolist search for higher truths. The mystery, intuition, and instinct it favored fostered a mood of otherworldliness conducive to spirituality’.<sup>435</sup>

As was just shown, the first wave of Russian symbolism was characterised by a poetic questioning of the role of the transcendental in society and art. These issues were also major concerns for Blok, belonging to the second generation of symbolists, who was an inspirational figure of paramount importance for Tsvetaeva; she expressed the awe-inspiring effect of his poetry on her own works in her cycle ‘Stikhi k Bloku’ (1916).<sup>436</sup> An important aspect of Blok’s understanding of the quasi-religious activity of the poet is his belief that in his spiritual and artistic quest the artist crosses not only holy territories but also

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<sup>433</sup> Quoted in Terras, *Poetry of the Silver Ages*, p. 50.

<sup>434</sup> Rosenthal, *Dmitri Sergeevich Merezhkovsky and the Silver Ages*, pp. 42-3.

<sup>435</sup> Quoted in Wendy Rosslyn, *The Prince, the Fool and the Nunnery* (Avebury: Gower, 1984), p. 14.

<sup>436</sup> Concerning the influence of Blok on Tsvetaeva’s poetry, see: Catherine Ciepela, ‘Leading the Revolution: Tsvetaeva’s *The Pied Piper* and Blok’s *The Twelve*’ in *Marina Tsvetaeva: One Hundred Years*, pp. 111-30; Dinega, *A Russian Psyche*, pp. 35-56; I. Nichiporov, ‘Kudozhestvennoe prostranstvo i vremia v “Blovskom tsikle” M. Tsvetaevoi’, *Marina Tsvetaeva: lichnye i tvorcheskie vstrechi, perevody ee sochinenii. Vos’mia tsvetaevskaia mezhdunarodnaia nauchno-tematicheskaia konferentsiia (9-13 oktiabria 2000 goda)*, edited by Valentin Maslovskii (Moscow: Dom-muzei Mariny Tsvetaevoi, 2001), pp. 51-63; D. Sloane, “‘Stikhi k Bloku’: Cvetaeva’s Poetic Dialogue with Blok’ in *New Studies in Russian Language and Literature Literature* (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers, 1987), pp. 49-58.

infernal ones. As Blok succinctly puts it: ‘Искусство есть чудовищный и блистательный Ад. Из мрака этого Ада выводит художник свои образы. [...] Но именно в черном воздухе Ада находится художник, прозревающий иные миры’.<sup>437</sup>

Given the symbolists’ tendency to resort to unorthodox religious texts and/or traditions, it is not surprising that even though several authors of the early twentieth century wrote works modelled on the traditional genre of psalm paraphrase such as ‘Na motif psalma XVIII-ogo’ (1895) by Konstantin Bal’mont (1867-1942), ‘Psalom Davida’ (1912) by Valerii Briusov (1873-1924), or ‘Psaltir’ (1916) by Ivan Bunin (1870–1954), the majority of poems of the early twentieth century used the psalms not as a proper text-source but as an intertext, as Romanov and Dykman observe.<sup>438</sup> This means that psalms are evoked rather than copied, and argued with rather than merely imitated. In short, in the poetry of the Silver Age psalms tend to be integrated into a polyphonic world where they clash with other religious texts and spiritual views. A good illustration of this phenomenon is Viacheslav Ivanov’s ‘Solnechnyi psalom’ (1911), in which the poet writes the following lines: ‘Я пою тебе славу, живое / Солнце! // И тебе мой псалом, огненное / Сердце!’<sup>439</sup> Commenting on the poem as a whole, Dykman remarks that in this text ‘Ivanov assumed [...] a peculiar double persona of what may be called [...] a “Dionysan psalmist”’.<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>437</sup> Aleksandr Blok, ‘O sovremennom sostoianii russkogo simvolizma’ in *Iskusstvo i revoliutsiia* (Moscow: Sovremmenik, 1979), pp. 167-77; p. 175.

<sup>438</sup> Romanov, ‘Psalmovevets David i russkaia poeziia’, p. 54; Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, p. 266.

<sup>439</sup> Quoted in Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, p. 266.

<sup>440</sup> Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, p. 266.

Dykman's description of Ivanov as a Dionysan psalmist hints at the poet's religious syncretism, i.e. his belief in the relevance of both Hellenistic and Christian religions. In the same vein, in his poem 'K Araratu' (1916), Briusov praises the Armenian Mont Ararat in a way that recalls the Psalter's praise of Mont Zion, while, at the same time, referring to the Hellenic god Khronos. As will be shown further, Tsvetaeva holds a similar belief in the simultaneous relevance of various religious traditions.

Although she does not belong to the symbolist movement, it is important to mention the Acmeist poet Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966). The Acmeist movement was a reaction to the mysticism of Russian Symbolism, which sometimes tended to use obscure language in order to convey the sense of mystery shrouding the invisible reality they were interested in. By contrast, Acmeist poets strove to create a clear and simple poetic language able to express every-day life experiences. This does not mean, however, that the religious aspect disappeared from their poetry, as Akhmatova's works indicate. Indeed, in her poetry, she displays an idiosyncratic approach to the religious text in general and of psalms in particular. Regarding Akhmatova's use of the psalms, it is worth reading the following lines of her poem 'Khoroni, khoroni menia, veter!' (1909):

Хорони, хорони меня, ветер!  
[...]  
Закрой эту черную рану  
Покровом вечерней тьмы  
И вели голубому туману  
Надо мной читать псалмы.

Чтобы мне легко, одинокой,

Отойти к последнему сну.<sup>441</sup>

In this poem, Akhmatova's lyrical heroine addresses the wind and asks aeolian element to support her, as she dies. As in Ivanov's poem 'Solnechnyi psalom', in 'Khoroni, khoroni menia, veter!' Akhmatova mixes Christianity and paganism. The lyrical heroine asserts her Judeo-Christian monotheism by expressing the wish that psalms will be read at her deathbed, as is customary in Orthodox religion. Moreover, this very orthodox plea is formulated in a way that is strikingly reminiscent of the psalms of lament. Indeed the great distress depicted by the lyrical heroine of Akhmatova's poem, who she describes herself as physically frail and psychologically lonely, is similar to that of the psalmist. The same applies to her feeling of being in a death-like state: 'Vidish', veter, moi trup kholodnyi / I nekomu ruki slozhit'. As was said earlier, the feeling of being abandoned is pervasive in psalms of lament. Similarly, the lyrical heroine of Akhmatova's poem describes herself as being forgotten by her relatives ('Rodnye moi ne prishli'). However, despite the fact that the lyrical heroine expects psalms to be read by the mist at her deathbed and expresses this wish in a psalm-like manner, her poem also displays a form of paganism in the sense that in it she addresses the wind rather than God.

As was just shown, unorthodox religious belief was typical of the Silver Age and that is why, during this period, poets were eager to express religious feelings but, at the same time, they distanced themselves from the official church. Rozanov expressed this highly idiosyncratic approach of religion in the following

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<sup>441</sup> Anna Akhmatova, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh* (Moscow: Ellis Lak, 1998-2002 ), I, 15.

terms: 'Мой Бог – особенный. Это только мой Бог и еще ничей...' 'Мой Бог - бесконечная моя интимность, бесконечная моя индивидуальность...' <sup>442</sup>

Similarly, when they resorted to the biblical psalms, they would do it in a highly personal way. A good illustration of this frame of mind is formulated by the poet Bal'mont: '[...] пою псалмы, мои псалмы, мое приношение моему Господу, который — и не библейский, и не евангельский, и не египетский, и не индусский, а мой, мой, одного меня' <sup>443</sup>

To summarise, let us observe that although psalm paraphrases were initially dubbed spiritual odes in order to highlight the metaphysical and religious concerns of their authors, the poetic texts paraphrasing psalms broach a far wider range of issues than the original psalms, thanks to the fact that they were adjusted to contemporary realities such as the development of science or political and personal circumstances. Moreover, almost all poets accentuated the psalms' personal undertones. These two phenomena correspond to Fowler's concept of topical invention, which explains the evolution of a genre thanks to its ability to develop further a minor motif/theme of a genre or to add new topics to its repertoire. In addition, Fowler's concept of generic mixture also sheds light on the persistence of psalmic poetry. Generic mixture appeared early in the history of the genre, since it is already present in Lomonosov's 'Vechnee razmyshlenie...' where the author blends the genre of scientific treatise with that of poetic meditation using a psalmic idiom. The same holds for the Decembrists' endeavour to add political thought into psalm paraphrases. Another type of generic mixture

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<sup>442</sup> Quoted in Iza Kresikova, *Tsvetaeva i Pushkin: esse i etudy* (Moscow: ROI, 2001), p. 118.

<sup>443</sup> <http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2005/73/aza5.html> Accessed September 2006.

is Derzhavin's introduction of a metre usually used in love songs in his poem 'Setovanie' which enables him to blend a formal feature of love poetry with the content of the spiritual ode.

Another modification undergone by the genre of psalm paraphrases is that of change of function. This phenomenon is perceptible in the poetry of the Silver Age where authors addressed in psalm-like manner not only the Christian God but a whole pantheon of divinities and thus shifted the function of psalm-like poetry, which no longer consisted exclusively in lauding the monotheist Judeo-Christian God but also encompassed the expression of a nebulous spiritual awe. This fact explains why, during the Silver Age, psalms tended to be used as an implicit intertext rather than an overt model.

It is legitimate to wonder now whether there is any firm evidence that Tsvetaeva read some of the psalm paraphrases mentioned in this chapter. Although, to my knowledge, there are no direct quotations by Tsvetaeva of any of the specific works referred to, it is highly likely that she had come into contact with at least some of them. A strong indication pointing to Tsvetaeva's knowledge of the spiritual poetry of her predecessors can be found in her collection *Posle Rossii* (1928) where she puts the following citation taken from Trediakovskii as the opening epigraph of the book:

‘От сего, что поэт есть творитель, не наследует, что он лживец: ложь есть слово против разума и совести, но поэтическое вымышление бывает по разуму так, как вещь могла и долженствовала быть.’<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> Tsvetaeva, *Knigi stikhov*, p. 545



Trediakovskii's extract<sup>445</sup> underlines that poets are not interested in reproducing a scientifically exact depiction of the object/subject treated in their works but strive to convey as accurately as possible its unpalpable essence and/or spirit. Hence, they use a metaphorical language, which enables them to invent unexpected associations. This is particularly relevant in the case of Tsvetaeva's spiritual poetry where she very boldly compares God with a growing baobab in her *poema Novogodnee* (III, 135). In this comparison Tsvetaeva reveals her belief that true spirituality is an ever-evolving principle. This is a particularly interesting point, because it is consistent with Fowler's theory stating that in order to persist throughout history, a literary genre needs to be flexible enough so that it can be transformed and adjust to new cultural contexts.

Another indication that Tsvetaeva was probably well acquainted with the genre of psalm paraphrase is the fact that she had a passion for the eighteenth century, which saw the apogee of the genre.<sup>446</sup> In addition, it is also fair to assume that Tsvetaeva knew the psalmic poetry written by contemporaries such as Briusov, Bal'mont or Akhmatova since she had read many of their works. Tsvetaeva expressed her admiration for Akhmatova in a very candid way in the poem 'Anne Akhmatovoi' (1915). Moreover, compelling evidence of Tsvetaeva's knowledge of Briusov and Bal'mont is found in her essay 'Geroi truda' (1925) in

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<sup>445</sup> As the translator Michael Naydan remarks Tsvetaeva gives an approximative quotation of the extract, which was taken from Trediakovskii essay 'Mnenie o nachale poezii i stikhov voobshche' (1749) [Tsvetaeva, M. *After Russia / Posle Rossii*, p. 264, note 58].

<sup>446</sup> Thus she wrote in her notebook: 'Я – VVIII век + точка по нем.' [Tsvetaeva, *Neizdannoe. Zapisnye knizhki v dvukh tomakh, tom pervyi 1913-1919*, p. 313.].

which she compares Bal'mont with Mozart, the inspired artist and opposes him to the "Salieri"-like Briusov, the laborious artist.<sup>447</sup>

### 2.2.1. Tsvetaeva's Outlook on Religion

Although investigating an author's faith is usually irrelevant in interpreting his/her poetry, it is not the case with the present study, because the intertext examined here is, precisely, about the problem of faith. To put it differently, let us say that the aim of the present section is less about examining Tsvetaeva's faith *per se*, and, more about stressing the fact that Tsvetaeva's relentless questioning of God cannot be ignored in relation to her intertextual use of psalms.<sup>448</sup> In fact, what really matters is not to find a definite answer to the question of Tsvetaeva's belief in God but to highlight her expression of constant oscillation between faith, or a longing for faith, and atheism. This frame of mind, I suggest, made her especially receptive to the lyrical prayers of the Psalter, which stage, among other things, the psalmist's struggle to keep faith in God in the face of adversity. Thus the reason why Fowler's concept of genre modulation makes it possible to point out a psalmic resonance in Tsvetaeva's poetry is because the lyrical heroine's expression of an internal crisis of faith is also present, although in an embryonic stage, in the psalms.

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<sup>447</sup> Marina Tsvetaeva, *Plennyi dukh* (St Petersburg: Azbuka, 2000), p. 82.

<sup>448</sup> This is consistent with Fowler's assertion that it is inept to interpret the Bible without taking into account its spiritual nature.

### 2.2.2. A Brief Characterisation of Tsvetaeva's Spirituality

In many respects, Tsvetaeva's spirituality reflects her epoch. As was just shown, most poets of the Silver Age approached religion in a highly idiosyncratic way. As a result, each poet had a personal view of religion and that is why this view needs to be specified individually when it comes to analysing the role played by religious concerns in their poetry and it is precisely what the present section intends to do regarding Tsvetaeva's religiousness. Inasmuch as Tsvetaeva considered writing poetry as an equivalent to writing a diary,<sup>449</sup> the following characterisation will take into account not only critical analyses and Tsvetaeva's own statements but also her poetic works.

The granddaughter of an Orthodox priest, Tsvetaeva was baptised and raised as Orthodox, which is why she had acquired a respectably good knowledge of the Bible by the age of ten.<sup>450</sup> Although her father was the son of an Orthodox priest, an unconventional religious open-mindedness reigned in the Tsvetaev household; this was due to the fact that her parents valued spirituality in itself and never displayed any sign of parochialism.<sup>451</sup> Tsvetaeva's belief in the existence of God was significantly shaken at the age of ten, when she was staying in Nervi with her convalescent mother who befriended a group of exiled revolutionaries. Tsvetaeva was highly receptive to their atheist views and responded to them with enthusiasm. The following year, though, she was sent to a Catholic boarding

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<sup>449</sup> In her foreword to her collection *Iz dvukh knig* (1913) Tsvetaeva asserts: 'Мои стихи – дневник' (V, 230).

<sup>450</sup> Anastasiia Tsvetaeva, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Izografus, 2003), p. 93.

<sup>451</sup> Viktoriia Shveitser, *Marina Tsvetaeva* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2002), p. 38.

school where she zealously adhered to the Catholic faith.<sup>452</sup> At this stage, it is worth pausing to remark that, although there is nothing more natural for a young person than to engross oneself in respectively contradictory schools of thought, Tsvetaeva's tendency to oscillate between faith and atheism remained a characteristic feature of her religious outlook throughout her life and it marked most of her poetry. Thus, in her mature years Tsvetaeva's attitude toward religion remained ambivalent. For instance, her correspondence shows that she respected the main religious Orthodox festivals<sup>453</sup>; furthermore, she prayed, had her children christened<sup>454</sup> and taught them to pray.<sup>455</sup> Given that Tsvetaeva had a strong dislike of hypocritical behaviour,<sup>456</sup> it is highly unlikely that she would have behaved in such a way without a minimum of conviction. Yet, ultimately, her faith was not strong enough to prevent her from committing suicide, in a fit of understandable despair, in August 1941.

In fact, Tsvetaeva's spirituality is a complex issue not only because it underwent several stages from her youth to her mature years but also because both her poetry and personal statements give an ambiguous and contradictory

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<sup>452</sup> Mariia Razumovskaia, *Marina Tsvetaeva. Mifi deistvitel'nost'* (London: Overseas Publications Interchange, 1983), p. 34.

<sup>453</sup> For instance, in her letter written to Anna Teskova 2 May 1937 she commemorates Easter by greeting her friend with the traditional formula: 'Христос Воскрес'; moreover, an entry of her notebook lists the way in which she celebrated Easter from 1915 to 1920 [Tsvetaeva, *Neizdannoe. Zapisnye knizhki v dvukh tomakh, tom vtoroi 1919-1939*, p. 91.].

<sup>454</sup> For a vivid depiction of Tsvetaeva's son christening, see: Marina Tsvetaeva, *Neizdannoe. Svodnye tetradi*, pp. 379-80.

<sup>455</sup> Marina Tsvetaeva, *Neizdannoe. Zapisnye knizhki v dvukh tomakh. Tom pervyi (1913-1939)*, pp. 207, 269.

<sup>456</sup> In fact, Tsvetaeva found it morally unacceptable to boast of one's faith or pretend that one's God is best as indicated by the following extract from a letter addressed to the writer Roman Gul' (1896-1986) and written in February 1923, where she criticises the philosopher Berdiaev for using the expression "Russian God": 'Словесничество. – [...] «Русского Бога» топлю в Днепре, как идола.[...] Это все – лицемеры, нищие, пристроившие к Богу, Бог их не знает, он на них плюет. –Voilà-' (VI, 520).

picture of her faith. Consequently, there is no critical consensus on this issue and scholars assessing the question of Tsvetaeva's religiousness differ dramatically in their conclusions. Thus, some critics regard Tsvetaeva as a poet devoid of genuine faith, while others insist on her profoundly personal and original belief in God. Among the former, let us mention P. Struve who considers that Tsvetaeva was intellectually willing to believe in God, but did not succeed in experiencing faith.<sup>457</sup> Struve explains Tsvetaeva's failure to find faith by the string of early deaths she witnessed during her youth and the fact that she was trying to attain faith through her senses, instead of undertaking a spiritual search. In Struve's view, this fact explains Tsvetaeva's propensity to worship and idolise historical or artistic figures.<sup>458</sup> In my opinion, Struve's article is unconvincing, not because it concludes that Tsvetaeva tragically lacked faith, but because it misinterprets her writing by focusing on her occasional sensualist verses<sup>459</sup> at the expense of the overriding sense of spiritual quest expressed in her work. Indeed, Struve's argument that Tsvetaeva sought faith through sensuality ignores the fact that, ultimately, Tsvetaeva was much more interested in spiritual exchange than in a mere physical union and she makes it clear in the following extract of a letter to her friend Maksimilian Voloshin (1877-1932): 'Тело другого человека – стена, она мешает видеть его душу' (VI, 47).

Concerning Struve's assertion that Tsvetaeva was intellectually willing to believe in God but emotionally unable to do so, let us stress that the present study

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<sup>457</sup> P. Struve, 'Tragicheskoe neverie', *Vestnik Russkogo Khristianskogo Dvizheniia*, 135 (1981), pp. 164-70; p. 168.

<sup>458</sup> Struve, 'Tragicheskoe neverie', p. 169.

<sup>459</sup> Interestingly, Struve does not specify which poems by Tsvetaeva he finds too sensualist.

argues exactly the opposite, namely that Tsvetaeva was emotionally willing to believe in God but found it difficult to reconcile this feeling with a rational frame of mind. Hence, the crisis of faith, doubts and searching that made her receptive to the poetry of the Psalter.

Struve's assertion of Tsvetaeva's lack of faith was convincingly refuted by the scholar Veronika Losskaia.<sup>460</sup> After demonstrating that Tsvetaeva considers poets as beings who are equal to God, because of their demiurgic power, Losskaia attempts to reconcile Tsvetaeva's cycle 'Bog', which is deeply respectful, with her well-known blasphemous tendencies. The critic resolves this contradiction by asserting that in both her life and writing Tsvetaeva fought lie and stagnation, which means that she opposed any principle overshadowing the genuine principle of God.<sup>461</sup> Thus, Losskaia considers that Tsvetaeva's provocative attitude toward religion was fairly superficial and that her life and poetry testify to her authentic religious quest.

Losskaia's examination of Tsvetaeva's religiousness is convincing. Moreover, Losskaia's observation that Tsvetaeva undertook a genuine spiritual quest, as opposed to a hypocritical display of false piety, is interesting because it indicates the presence of a common characteristic between psalms and Tsvetaeva's poetry, namely the fact that in both corpora the speaker directs his/her invectives toward what he/she perceives to be a false religious stance. As

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<sup>460</sup> Losskaia, 'Bog v poezii Tsvetaevoi', p. 176.

<sup>461</sup> Losskaia, 'Bog v poezii Tsvetaevoi', p. 178.

was said earlier, this is one of the reasons why Brueggemann considers that psalms of lament express a spirituality of protest. Consequently, the present study will confirm Losskaia's view that Tsvetaeva sought real spirituality, with the significant difference that I will investigate this issue through an intertextual interpretation and reveal the hidden but significant presence of the genre of psalms in Tsvetaeva's poetry. In addition, unlike Losskaia, I will not give any ultimate answer concerning the outcome of Tsvetaeva's quest. While Losskaia confidently asserts that Tsvetaeva's poetry testifies to her genuine faith in God, I will demonstrate that Tsvetaeva's poetry betrays not faith but rather a conflicting feeling akin to nostalgia for faith. In this perspective, psalms constitute an intertext enabling Tsvetaeva to think over the issue of God and provide a model (or counter-model) of many of her poems.

When it comes to discussing Tsvetaeva's relationship to religion, it is difficult to avoid a reflection on Nietzsche's philosophy, because of its very significant impact on the religious thought of Tsvetaeva's time. It is not surprising, then, that the critic Ute Stock demonstrates that 'for Tsvetaeva, Nietzsche was an important touchstone'<sup>462</sup> and constituted one of the elements of Tsvetaeva's spiritual and philosophical outlook during her formative years. Drawing a parallel between Nietzsche's and Tsvetaeva's spiritual thought and highlighting the fact that both fiercely value the concept of individuality,<sup>463</sup> Stock also insists on the fact that contrarily to the German thinker, Tsvetaeva could not bring herself to a total abandonment of the concept of the existence of a

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<sup>462</sup> Stock, *The Ethics of the Poet*, p. 16.

<sup>463</sup> Stock, 'Tsvetaeva kak myslitel', (M.Tsvetaeva i F. Nitsshe)', *Marina Tsvetaeva: lichnye i tvorcheskie vstrechi, perevody ee sochinenii*, pp. 93 – 100; p.95.

transcendence.<sup>464</sup> At the same time, she shared with Nietzsche the belief in man's ability to overcome his limitations.<sup>465</sup> Interestingly, it is precisely Tsvetaeva's eagerness to access a transcendent principle that makes her, ultimately, impossible to classify as a Nietzschean author, although she knew and had absorbed some of Nietzsche's most important claims and among those, the idea of God's death. Consequently, it is not surprising that Stock stresses Tsvetaeva's ambiguous and contradictory approach to the problem of the transcendence: 'С одной стороны, предполагая, что достижение абсолютной истины невозможно, эта этика [этика Цветаевой] старается разработать способ суждения, который не нуждается в трансцендентном авторитете. С другой стороны, Цветаева тоскует по той жизненной уверенности, которую дает нам такой авторитет. Поэтому она сознательно игнорирует абсолютный отказ Ницше от бессмертия'.<sup>466</sup> Having recognised Tsvetaeva's nostalgia for transcendence makes it easier to explain why, despite overt claims that she does not believe in God, she frequently resorts to a poetics that is reminiscent of prayers in general and of psalms in particular. In psychoanalytic terms, this corresponds to a return of the repressed that manifests itself in art. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that Tsvetaeva was fully aware of the fantasising function fulfilled by art as the following extract of a letter to her friend Ada Chernova testifies: 'В жизни, Аленька, *ни-че-го* нельзя, – nichts – rien [...] *Из этого* – искусство'; the critic Irma Kudrova, who quotes this letter, comments on it as follows: 'Иначе говоря, искусство *вбирает* – и, если угодно, *восполняет*, *возмещает* человеку

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<sup>464</sup> Stock, *The Ethics of the Poet*, p.17.

<sup>465</sup> Stock, 'Tsvetaeva kak myslitel', p. 95.

<sup>466</sup> Stock, 'Tsvetaeva kak myslitel', p. 98. My emphasis (S.O.C.)



невозможное в реальной жизни: дает простор порывам, поневоле стиснутым. Дает свободу заглушенным желаниям’.<sup>467</sup> It is no wonder, then, that even though Tsvetaeva hardly believed in immortality in real life, the realm of poetry enabled her to express a deep longing for a divine transcendence and eternal life.

Whatever Tsvetaeva’s ultimate religious stance, it is impossible to ignore the centrality of the concept of God in her poetry. This state of affairs is highlighted by the critic M. Lebedeva, who summarizes it in the following terms: ‘Тема Бога-Творца занимала [...] Цветаеву на протяжении всей творческой биографии’.<sup>468</sup> In other words, Tsvetaeva’s conflicting feelings regarding religion are reflected in her poetry. Thus, some works depict the religiously provocative stance of the lyrical heroine. For instance, in ‘Zapovedei ne bliuda, ne khodila k prichast’iu’ (1915), the lyrical heroine claims loudly her refusal to follow the biblical commandments; likewise, the lyrical heroine of ‘Babushka’ (1919) asserts proudly that to sin made her happy. By contrast, other poems testify to Tsvetaeva’s deep-seated religious and spiritual concerns. For example, in ‘Blagodariu, o Gospod’ (1918), the lyrical heroine thanks God for being alive with a simplicity that betrays a very sincere feeling of gratitude; similarly, in ‘Ia schastлива zhit’ obraztsovo i prosto’ (1919), the lyrical heroine asserts that to follow God’s laws makes her happy. Finally, a third category of poems is constituted by works in which the lyrical heroine mentions God in a highly

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<sup>467</sup> Irma Kudrova, *Prostory Mariny Tsvetaevoi* (St Petersburg: Vita Nova, 2003), p. 15.

<sup>468</sup> M. Lebedeva, ‘Stikhotvornyi tsikl M.I. Tsvetaevoi’ “Ioann”, *Konstantin Bal’mont, Marina Tsvetaeva i khudozhestvennye iskaniia XX veka*, edited by Pavel Kupriianosvkii (Ivanovo: Ivanovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1996), pp. 143-4; p. 144.

ambiguous way. For instance, in 'Kak zhguchaia, ottochennaia lest' (1915) the lyrical heroine depicts God as a powerless and speechless being. In a slightly different vein, in the poems 'Bog sognulsia ot zaboty' (1916) and 'Chtoby doiti do ust i lozha' (1916) the lyrical heroine asserts that her love of people overshadows that of God.

As this brief overview shows, Tsvetaeva's religiousness is best characterised as constantly transforming, ambiguous and indeterminate. In other words, Tsvetaeva's attitude toward faith is elusive and seems to escape any fixed definition. This fact is reflected in her three-poem cycle 'Bog' (1922) in which she makes it clear that no concept or definition will ever be able to reflect God, as she writes: 'О, его не привяжете / К вашим знакам и тяжестям! [...] Ибо бег он – и движется' (II, 157-8). Here, it is worth mentioning the judicious observation made by Losskaia who remarks that Tsvetaeva's refusal to pinpoint any feature as a fixed characteristic of God corresponds to the approach of negative theology that endeavours to get a better knowledge of God not by defining what God is but by observing what he is not.<sup>469</sup>

Tsvetaeva's unwillingness to express overtly a definitive point of view on God explains why her life and works are marked by both bold and provocative claims of atheism,<sup>470</sup> on the one hand, and a strong attraction and profoundly ingrained respect for religious spirituality, on the other hand. In fact, it is fair to suggest that Tsvetaeva's refusal to publicly acknowledge her religious position

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<sup>469</sup> Losskaia, 'Bog v poezii Tsvetaevoi', p. 176.

<sup>470</sup> For instance Tsvetaeva's letter to Rozanov in March 1914 where she asserts: 'Я совсем не верю в существование Бога и загробной жизни. [...] Отсюда [...] полная неспособность природы – молиться и покоряться.' (VI, 120)

could be due not to a contempt of faith, but, on the contrary, to an overwhelming awe of the divine, as the following statement seems to indicate: ‘я никогда не дерзну назвать себя верующей, и это – молитвой’(V, 517). Tsvetaeva wrote this enigmatic statement in her prose notes penned during her mature years. The first striking feature of this quotation is Tsvetaeva’s use of the verb ‘derznut’, meaning to dare. At this stage, it is interesting to note that Tsvetaeva opted precisely for this verb and not for its synonym ‘smet’. This choice is telling, because these two verbs belong to two different stylistic registers. ‘Smet’ is a neutral Russian term, whereas ‘derznut’ belongs to the Slavonic layer of Russian language; consequently, by choosing it Tsvetaeva endows her statement with a sense of solemnity and loftiness, which stresses that the matter discussed is a serious and important one. Now, let us interpret the proper content of Tsvetaeva’s assertion. Taken in isolation, the first part of the sentence does not sound particularly enigmatic. Indeed, if one reads the syntagm ‘ia nikogda ne derznu nazvat’ sebia veruiushchei’ as a self-contained unit, its meaning is relatively clear and simple: the author of the sentence would never dare to name herself a believer. Yet, if one takes into account the fact that the verb ‘derznut’ is connoted with the idea of impertinence (sharing a common etymological root with the related term ‘derzit’, meaning to be impertinent) Tsvetaeva’s use of this term in connection with the negation ‘nikogda’, indicates that she would never dare to call herself a believer, because to do so would be arrogant. This fact alone indicates Tsvetaeva’s undeniable respect for faith in itself and for those who have faith. Finally, let us note that the ambiguity of Tsvetaeva’s statement betrays her

reluctance to make a clear and ultimate statement about her faith. Interestingly, the ambiguity of the syntagm is amplified by the second part of the sentence in which Tsvetaeva writes that her assertion (of not daring to call herself a believer) plays the role of a prayer. In other words, what Tsvetaeva says is that in the very act of refraining herself from any claim of faith Tsvetaeva performs a prayer. Undoubtedly, this is a highly paradoxical assertion, yet, it indicates that Tsvetaeva was, indeed, in search of faith but that she had such a high respect for it that she could never consider herself to be good enough to attain it. The relevance of this interpretation is confirmed in Tsvetaeva's essay 'Iskusstvo pri svete sovesti' (1932), in which she draws a distinction between spontaneous self-expression, characterised by simplicity and sincerity on the one hand and art, characterised by sophistication and artificiality on the other. In order to illustrate the quality of spontaneous expression, Tsvetaeva quotes some verses composed by a nun from the Novo-Devich'ii monastery in Moscow and comments on them with the following statement:

‘[...] Монашка несостоятельности начала и не заметила, [...] ибо моя монашка не поэт-профессионал, который готовый душу черту продать за удачный оборот [...] а: чистый сосуд Божий [...].  
Эти стихи мои любимые из всех, которые когда-либо читала, когда-либо писала, мои любимые из всех на земле. Когда после них читаю (или пишу) свои, ничего не ощущаю, кроме стыда’ (V, 358).

This passage is interesting, because it betrays Tsvetaeva's view that art is incompatible with a pure religious undertaking. Indeed, in Tsvetaeva's outlook

the poetic quest implies a full exploration of all possibilities of language, including those that are bound to sound, or be, sacrilegious. That is why she asserts that poets would sell their soul for the sake of a good formulation. Moreover, in the same essay, she also makes clear that poetic creation involves a play with the artificiality of language and its magical power. This view is repeated in her essay 'Poet i vremia' (1932) in which she asserts that in poetry the sound of verses is more important than their meaning: 'Есть нечто в стихах, что важнее их смысла – их звучание'(V, 333). In the same vein, Tsvetaeva goes as far as asserting that poetry is a highly deceptive art, as the following statement, taken from a letter to Pasternak, indicates: 'Все стихи и вся музыка – обещания обетованной земли, которой нет. Поэтому – безответственно и беспоследственно Они – *сами-то*'(VI, 244). As was shown earlier, Tsvetaeva opposes the deceptive aspect of artistic creation with the spontaneous creation of those whose heart is pure such as children or those whose life is fully devoted to religious spirituality such as the nun at the Novo-Devich'ii monastery. Interestingly, by confiding that she values the naïve verses composed by the nun more than any verses she wrote herself or read, and by recognising that she feels ashamed of her own creation compared to that of the simple-hearted nun, Tsvetaeva betrays a undeniable longing for a genuine faith. At the same time, she is profoundly convinced that she is fated to be a poet and by virtue of this predestination belongs to another system of values that those applicable for ordinary individuals. She expressed this very clearly in the following extract of a

letter written to her friend the writer Gul': 'Стихи, Гуль, третье царство, вне добра и зла, так же далеки от церкви как от науки' (VI, 534).

In fact, Tsvetaeva considers that poetry belongs to a peculiar realm, which has its own values. Thus, commenting on the link between the creative act and her unorthodox religious stance, Tsvetaeva explains that artists cannot be judged according to common standards of morality, because they belong to the special realm of poetry, which she depicts spatially as an intermediary space between the inferno and the heaven:

'Между небом духа и адом рода искусство чистилище'(V, 362).

Here, it is worth noting that in this description Tsvetaeva still defines the poetic space by means of a religious concept, namely that of purgatory. In doing so, she makes it clear that the poets' license not to abide by religious or moral laws in their creation is not a free gift but is to be paid by their sufferings. Even though Tsvetaeva does not specify these sufferings, a very likely one is the suffering entailed by the poets' inevitable isolation and loneliness and their longing for the harmony that would provide an unconditional faith in God. Not surprisingly, both Tsvetaeva's biography and poetry testify to the fact that Tsvetaeva experienced these feelings very acutely. For instance, a strong sense of isolation is expressed in poems such 'Eshche molitva' (1910) or 'Toska po rodine! Davno'(1934). Moreover, Tsvetaeva's correspondence makes it plain that the feeling of loneliness expressed in her poetry is a reflection of what she

experienced in real life.<sup>471</sup> Concerning her longing for faith, Tsvetaeva expresses it explicitly in a letter addressed to her friend Vera Bunina and written in April 1934, where she comments on the autobiography of the mystic St Thérèse de Lisieux (1873- 1897) with the following assertion: 'Любить Бога – завидная доля' (VII, 271). This sentence highlights Tsvetaeva's wish that she could simply believe in God without questioning his existence but her mindset and poetic calling did not enable her to acquire such unconditional faith. This state of affairs explains Tsvetaeva's receptivity to the genre of psalms, which expresses, among other things, the speaker's crisis of faith.

### 2.2.3. The Blasphemous Impulse of Tsvetaeva's Poetry

So far, it has been shown that Tsvetaeva's attitude toward religion is highly ambivalent: on the one hand she does not hesitate to treat religious themes provocatively, while, on the other hand she never totally dismisses God and remains deeply attached to religious spirituality. In order to understand better how these opposite tendencies converge in Tsvetaeva's works it is worth discussing further the blasphemous impulse of her writing, which results from the concomitant presence of the three following factors: Tsvetaeva's lack of unconditional faith, the overwhelming power of her artistic inspiration and her fascination with the figure of the devil. The first factor was demonstrated in the

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<sup>471</sup> See the letter to Ol'ga Kolbasina-Chernova 4 April 1925: 'А чем – я живу? Во-первых – глубоко, до дна – одна' (VI, 731).

previous section. Concerning the second factor, i.e. the intensity of her poetic imagination, Tsvetaeva comments on it in her essay 'Iskusstvo pri svete sovesti' in which she defines the state of poetic inspiration in the following terms: 'Искусство есть то, через что стихия держит – и одерживает [...] состояние одержимости' (V, 369). In this extract, Tsvetaeva defines art as a creative principle, which is subordinated to an obsessional elemental force ('stikhiia'). Here, it is important to link Tsvetaeva's conviction that artistic inspiration amounts to being possessed by the elemental force; interestingly she considers that the elemental force compelling her to write her works inspired by Russian folk culture is sinful, as she writes in the following extract: 'Все мои русские вещи стихийны, то есть грешны. Нужно различать, какие силы im Spiel. Когда же мы, наконец, перестанем принимать силу за правду и чару за святость' (V, 362). In this extract, Tsvetaeva asserts that her works on Russian folklore such as her *poemy* *Molodets* or *Tsar'-devitsa* are sinful because they are inspired by the elemental force. As a result, the usual societal and religious taboos do not apply to the characters of these works and that is precisely why Tsvetaeva does not hesitate to represent the reunion of Marusia, the main heroine of *Molodets*, with her demonic lover in a sacrilegious and apotheosis-like scene which takes place in a church. Commenting further on the concept of poetic inspiration Tsvetaeva deplores the wide-spread tendency to misunderstand its magical nature and confuse it with holiness. An important point to make, here, is that Tsvetaeva's public assertion of the sinful nature of her *poemy* seems to run counter to her private commentary on *Molodets*, formulated in a letter addressed



to her friend the poet Boris Pasternak in which she wrote: ‘Я не знаю, что такое кощунство’ (VI, 249). These contradictory statements are interesting because they highlight once again Tsvetaeva’s deep uncertainty concerning the religious issue. It is clear, though, that she considered a truly religious attitude incompatible with poetic inspiration. Tsvetaeva’s view of the sinful nature of artistic creation partly explains her fascination with the devil. Hence, the previous presentation of Tsvetaeva’s religiousness as an oscillation between faith and atheism is a little too schematic. Indeed, a more accurate description of Tsvetaeva’s faith does not rely simply on a dual pattern but rather on a triadic one, since, apart from faith in God and atheism, Tsvetaeva was strongly attracted by the figure of the devil. In 1935 she wrote the autobiographical essay ‘Chert’<sup>472</sup> in which she describes the profound infatuation with the devil that marked her childhood. An especially striking feature of this memoir is that in it Tsvetaeva describes the devil not as a cultural or legendary figure but as a real being whom she would meet in her step-sister’s room. This means that the young Tsvetaeva experienced her visions of the devil as real encounters and not as imaginative events. Thus she writes in the opening paragraphs:

‘Черт жил в комнате у сестры Валерии [...]. Он сидел, я – стояла. И я его любила’ (V, 32).

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<sup>472</sup> The following critical works are devoted to this memoir: Pamela Chester, ‘Engaging Sexual Demons in Marina Tsvetaeva’s “Devil”: The Body and the Genesis of Woman Poet’, *Slavic Review* 53 (1994), pp. 1025-45; Mara Négron Marreo, ‘Crossing the mirror to the forbidden land (Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* and Marina Tsvetaeva’s *The Devil*) in *Writings Differences. Readings from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous*, edited by Susan Sellers (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988), pp. 66-70; Svetlana El’nitskaia, ‘Tsvetaeva i chert’ in *Stat’i o Marine Tsvetaevoi* (Moscow: Dom-muzei Mariny Tsvetaevoi, 2004), pp. 9-32.

In its simplicity, this extract may appear pretty insignificant. Yet, it is worth paying attention to the way in which Tsvetaeva describes her encounter with the devil, for it highlights the fact that Tsvetaeva did not question the reality of the devil's presence in her step-sister's room as an unbelievable event but, on the contrary, accepted it as something natural. Consequently, she uses active verbs in the indicative mode and in the imperfective aspect ('zhil', 'sidel'). The immediate acceptance of the devil by the young Tsvetaeva betrays the feeling of kinship Tsvetaeva felt for this figure. This may be why the devil appears to the young girl in familiar surroundings rather than in some unknown and frightening places. Even though she was not afraid to secretly acknowledge feelings of love for the devil ('ia ego liubila'), the young Tsvetaeva was fully aware of transgressing a religious taboo, when she was compulsively associating the name of God with that of the devil thus linking them as an inseparable pair. The following extract depicts very well Tsvetaeva's unusual linguistic game:

С Чертом у меня была своя, прямая, отрожденная связь, прямой провод. Одним из первых тайных ужасов и ужасных тайн моего детства (младенчества) было: «Бог – Черт!» Бог – с безмолвным молниеносным неизменным добавлением – Черт. [...]. Это была – я, во мне, чей-то дар мне – в колыбель. «Бог – Черт, Бог – Черт, Бог – Черт», и так несчетное число раз, холодея от кощунства и не можа остановиться, пока не остановится мысленный язык. «Дай, Господи, чтобы я не молилась: Бог – Черт», – и как с цепи сорвавшись, дорвавшись: «Черт – Бог! Черт – Бог! Черт – Бог!» – по ледяной клавиатуре собственного спинного хребта и страха. (V, 43).

This extract is interesting not only because in it Tsvetaeva asserts that she had a special and direct connection with the devil, but also because it shows that she was not fully able to control it, as indicated by her inability to stop repeating the two monosyllabic nouns ‘Bog’ and ‘Chert’. In confessing her inability to stop her linguistic game at will, Tsvetaeva implies that the devil had a real power over her. Here, it is worth remarking that Tsvetaeva recalls that the recognition of her powerlessness to stop repeating ‘Bog – Chert’ would make her feel filled with terror and make her realise the blasphemous nature of her game. This aspect is reinforced by the fact that the compulsion to associate God verbally with the devil would manifest itself even during her prayers. This fact leads to a paradoxical situation in which Tsvetaeva implores God to enable her to resist the temptation of associating him with the devil during her prayers (‘Dai Gospodi, chtoby ia ne molilas’: Bog – Chert’). As a result, the very concept of prayer becomes ambiguous. Instead of being a time exclusively devoted to God, it became a moment fraught with the anxiety of not being able to keep the thought of the devil away. Interestingly, in order to keep this anxiety at bay, the young Tsvetaeva would resort to a rationalistic explanation reassuring her that her failure to confess her secret linguistic game would not entail her sudden death at the time of communion, which was, according to her mother, the fate awaiting those who do not confess their sins. Tsvetaeva remembers her childhood rationalisations in the following way:

‘До глубины я, конечно, в такую смерть не верила, ибо умирают от диабета, и от слепой кишки, и еще раз, в Тарусе, мужик, от молнии, и если

гречневая каша – хоть бы *одна* гречика! – вместо горла попадет в то, и если наступить на гадюку...от *такого* умирают, а не...' (V, 45).

This extract is interesting in that it shows an often overlooked aspect of Tsvetaeva's frame of mind, namely her ability to reason in a rigorously logical and rationalistic way. Indeed, even though critics usually highlight Tsvetaeva's predilection for irrational matters, it is a well-attested fact that Tsvetaeva's mindset was also characterised by a strong ability to think in logical terms and perform rigorous analytical operations. Tsvetaeva expresses very well the coexistence, in her mind, of this twofold mindset in the following statement: 'Стих только тогда убедителен, когда проверяем математической [...] формулой'.<sup>473</sup> Here, it is important to underline that by asserting that a verse is convincing only when it can be as precise as a mathematical formula, Tsvetaeva sounds as a forerunner of Kristeva's theory, according to which language is always informed by both an instinctual urge and a cultural one. Indeed, by asserting that a verse, which is inspired by the elemental force, needs to go through the test of a mathematical formula, Tsvetaeva makes clear, as does Kristeva, that the raw material of sensations and emotions is largely insufficient in order to create good art and that it is precisely the tension between the exactitude of a cultural form and the chaos of the elemental force of inspiration that creates an artistic impact. In the context of the present discussion of the blasphemous impulse of Tsvetaeva's poetry, it is fair to conclude that Tsvetaeva's difficulty in

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<sup>473</sup> Quoted by Pietro Zveteremich in 'Ob otnoshenii mezhdu fonemoi i grafemoi v poezii M. Tsvetaevoi' in *Marina Tsvetaeva: Actes du 1er colloque international (Lausanne, 30.VI. - 3.VII.1982)*, pp. 284-94; p. 286.

separating God from the devil reflects the unresolved conflict between the antagonist forces of an elemental impulse and a cultural one. This interpretation is reinforced by the demonstration made by the critic Pamela Chester, who asserts that in 'Chert' the figure of the devil stands for Tsvetaeva's sexuality.<sup>474</sup> In addition, Tsvetaeva's difficulty in separating God from the devil can also be understood as the poet's awareness of the double-edged aspect of language: indeed, language is sometimes used in order to express sincere feelings and thoughts, while, at other times, it is distorted, notably by artists, in a way that is not necessarily compatible with morality. In this context, the intertext of psalms becomes fully relevant, for, as Alter remarks, psalms cannot avoid the representation of the deceptive way in which language can be used, even if it is disapprovingly. In Tsvetaeva's poetry, the representation of the inherent ambivalence of language is magnified and that is why Tsvetaeva's poetry is characterised by a striking ability to reunite incompatible principles such as the corporeal and spiritual, the devil and divine, the instinctual and formal, excess and restraint, passion and dispassionateness, as El'nitskaia underlines.<sup>475</sup> Interestingly, Tsvetaeva herself summarised this aspect of her writing in a line of her *poema* 'Charodei' (1914), in which she describes the poet Ellis with an exclamation that is emblematic of her own poetry: 'Я между Дьяволом и Богом / Разорван весь' (III, 11).

To come back to the essay 'Chert', it is important to note that despite the reassurance provided by her rationalistic explanation, the thought of God would

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<sup>474</sup> Chester, 'Engaging Sexual Demons in M.T.'s «Devil»: The Body and the Genesis of Woman Poet', pp. 1025-6.

<sup>475</sup> El'nitskaia, 'Tsvetaeva i Chort', p. 15.

still trigger a feeling of fear in the young Tsvetaeva. The poet expresses this fact in a very straightforward way: ‘Бог для меня был – страх’ (V, 48). Interestingly, the fearful feelings associated with the thought of God contrast sharply with those related to the devil. Indeed, while the former is perceived as a threat, the latter is perceived as a loving and familiar figure. As the poet puts it: ‘Бог был чужой, Черт родной’ (V, 48). Consequently, it is worth getting a better picture of how the devil was perceived by Tsvetaeva. According to El’nitskaia’s comparative examination of the typical features held by Tsvetaeva’s devil in the various works in which he appears, he is commonly endowed with a phenomenal and/or supernatural force.<sup>476</sup> Other characteristics are his arrogance, aloofness and scornfulness.<sup>477</sup> These characteristics definitively fit the general expectation of a demonised principle. By contrast, El’nitskaia also mentions the fact that in some poems Tsvetaeva’s devil is characterised as an artist or an outcast, who has lost any family ties and experiences utter loneliness.<sup>478</sup> This is an important point because, as was said previously, the speaker of many psalms of lament is depicted in exactly the same terms.<sup>479</sup> Hence, the following question arises: are these overlapping characteristics mere coincidence, which should be discarded as purely accidental, or are they significant in the overall picture of Tsvetaeva’s poetic universe? In light of what has just been said, it is fair to assert that the overlapping characteristics of the devil figure with that of the psalmist are not

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<sup>476</sup> El’nitskaia, ‘Tsvetaeva i Chort’, pp. 9-32.

<sup>477</sup> El’nitskaia, ‘Tsvetaeva i Chort’, p.17.

<sup>478</sup> El’nitskaia, ‘Tsvetaeva i Chort’, p.17.

<sup>479</sup> The same holds for the poem by Akhmatova that was quoted in Chapter Two, p.138 of the present study.

coincidental and that, in Tsvetaeva's poetic universe, these two figures are not entirely contradictory. This point of view is in line with Losskaia's interpretation of the concluding lines of 'Chert', in which Tsvetaeva addresses the devil as follows:

‘Ты не сделал мне зла. Если ты, по Писанию, и «отец лжи», то меня ты научил – правде сущности и прямоте спины. [...] Если искать тебя, то только по одиночным камерам Бунта и чердакам Лирической Поэзии. Ты прямая линия непреклонности, живущая у меня в хребте’(V, 54).

Commenting on these lines, Losskaia observes that in them Tsvetaeva endows the devil with the God-like power to infuse essential truth.<sup>480</sup> To put it differently, Tsvetaeva's devil is associated with an essential righteousness that is usually attributed to God. Such an association makes it clear that although Tsvetaeva knows the Bible, which states that the devil is the source of all lies, she does not take it at its face value and interprets it her own way. Thus, far from considering the devil as a malevolent figure, she sees him as a model of integrity ('menia ty nauchil – pravde sushchnosti'). Undeniably, such a position is unacceptable from an orthodox point of view.

In fact, Tsvetaeva's devil shares with the psalmist not only his lyricism, but also, his occasionally rebellious spirit. In this perspective, it is not surprising that in her cycle 'Poety' (1923), Tsvetaeva refers to the biblical figure of Job, who shares many characteristics with the psalmist,<sup>481</sup> as the quintessential embodiment

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<sup>480</sup> Losskaia, 'Bog v poezii Tsvetaevoi', p. 178.

<sup>481</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 121.

of the poet's fate. As she puts it: 'Есть в мире Иовы, что Иову / Завидовали бы – когда бы: / Поэты мы – и в рифму с париями' (II, 185). This choice is significant not only because Job shares many characteristics with the psalmist, but also because Job's fate is to be torn apart between God and the devil, which is also the fate of poets who strive for spiritual transcendence but cannot strictly abide by God's laws because of the nature of their creative task which links them with the devil.

Another aspect of Tsvetaeva's blasphemous tendency worthy of discussion is her propensity to idolise and deify historical and artistic figures. This point is especially relevant, because an important theme of the psalms is the denunciation of idolatry.<sup>482</sup> Tsvetaeva's propensity to put people on a pedestal is tellingly illustrated by the following episode from her biography: as a teenager, Tsvetaeva put the image of Napoleon, the object of her boundless admiration, in an icon-frame.<sup>483</sup> By using for her own personal cult of an historical figure an item destined by Orthodox religion to hold holy images, Tsvetaeva definitely betrays a blasphemous tendency. Yet, one should be careful not to infer from this episode alone that Tsvetaeva's use of religious texts is blasphemous. In this regard, it is worth considering 'Stikhi k Bloku' (1916), the poetic cycle she wrote in honour of Blok, since it has repeatedly been described as blasphemous; interestingly, scholars highlighting Tsvetaeva's exaggerated admiration of Blok partly rely on Tsvetaeva's daughter's comment that her mother considered Blok 'not as a

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<sup>482</sup> Present Chapter, p. 69.



brother in the stringed craft', but as a poetic deity'.<sup>484</sup> Taking this assertion as the starting point of her interpretation, Dinega concludes that Tsvetaeva's poems to Blok display not only a religious-like sense of awe but also a blasphemous attitude consisting in the deification of the poet, who is referred to in a way that is traditionally used for God.<sup>485</sup> The same idea is echoed in the characterisation of Tsvetaeva's poems to Blok made by the critic Viktoriia Shveitser: 'Она [Цветаева] славит Бога в молитвенном преклонении [...]. Цветаева обожествляет Блока. Святость, страдание, свет – вот понятия, связанные для нее с Блоком, и хотя слово «Бог» не названо, оно окрашивает цикл'.<sup>486</sup> It is worth discussing further Tsvetaeva's use of liturgical language and God-like address to a fellow poet, because this issue will also arise when it comes to her intertextual treatment of psalms. Let us start by rereading the opening poem of the cycle:

Имя твое – птица в руке,  
Имя твое – льдинка на языке,  
Одно единственное движение губ,  
Имя твое – пять букв.

Мячик, пойманный на лету,  
Серебряный бубенец во рту.

Камень, кинутый в тихий пруд,  
Всхлипнет так, как тебя зовут.  
В легком щелканье ночных копыт  
Громкое имя твое гремит.  
И назовет его нам в висок  
Звонко щелкающий курок.

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<sup>484</sup> Quoted by Dinega, *A Russian Psyche*, p. 49.

<sup>485</sup> Dinega, *A Russian Psyche*, p. 49.

<sup>486</sup> Viktoriia Shveitser, *Byt i bytie Mariny Tsvetaevoi* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2002), pp. 212-3.

Имя твоё – ах, нельзя! –  
Имя твоё – поцелуй в глаза,  
В нежную стужу недвижных век,  
Имя твоё – поцелуй в снег.

Ключевой, ледяной, голубой глоток...  
С именем твоим – сон глубок.

The link between 'Imia tvoe' and religious language is the first striking feature of this poem. Indeed, it begins with an enunciation of the syntagm 'Your name...' which, inevitably, evokes the religious expressions referring to the sanctification of the name of God. Indeed, as the critic Catherine Chvany remarks, in repeating the expression 'your name' Tsvetaeva links her poem with 'the Lord's Prayer's *Da svjatitsja Imja Tvoe* (Hallowed be Thy Name)'.<sup>487</sup> On the semantic level, this poem is made up of a succession of images representing the evocations conjured up by the thought of Blok's name. In doing so, Tsvetaeva represents Blok as a celestial singer who is not given free rein, as indicated by the image of a bird standing on a hand (line 1) and that of a ball caught during its flight (line 5). Tsvetaeva's evocation of Blok's name also hints at its soothing power, since the act of pronouncing the name is associated with eating a sweet (line 2; 6). On the other hand, the second stanza describes how sounds of the surrounding world resound with Blok's name, while in the third stanza Blok's name is associated with the idea of interdiction and embrace. Finally, Blok's name is linked with a deep sleep. This image provides the whole poem with a new

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<sup>487</sup> Catherine Chavany, 'Translating one Poem from a Cycle: Cvetaeva's 'Your Name is a Bird in my Hand' from 'Poems to Blok' in *New Studies in Russian Language and Literature*, pp. 49-58; p. 53.

perspective, since it enables to interpret the images, to which Tsvetaeva links Blok's name, as dream-like representations that are not, by nature, logically or morally motivated.

At this stage, it is important to stress an important point highlighted by the critic Irina Shevelenko who remarks that the device consisting in evoking Blok rather than naming him demonstrates Tsvetaeva's poetic assimilation of the Eastern Christian mystical belief in *imiaslavie*,<sup>488</sup> i.e. the belief, rooted in the tradition of the Old Testament, stating that the name of God possesses special power.<sup>489</sup> Thus, in the poem above, Tsvetaeva applies this belief to the name of Blok, who is evoked but not named. Interestingly, Shevelenko considers that Tsvetaeva's poetic device of applying the concept of *imiaslavie* to Blok is not motivated by an overwhelming passion for Blok but rather by an artistic quest. As she puts it: 'Руководит ею [Цветаевой] не истовое преклонение перед Блоком, а логика поставленного поэтического эксперимента. Запрет на произнесение имени, творчески увлекший Цветаеву, превращает Блока в божество, к которому теперь и надо обращаться к таковому'.<sup>490</sup> In other words, Shevelenko makes clear that Tsvetaeva's God-like address to Blok does not stem from sheer idolisation of Blok but also from the richness of Tsvetaeva's artistic creativity. This point of view is shared by the critic Olga Peters Hasty who asserts that the interest of 'Imia tvoe' lies in the fact that in this poem Tsvetaeva

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<sup>488</sup> Concerning the concept of *imiaslavie* and its impact on Tsvetaeva's approach of proper names and that of poets contemporary to her, see: K. Zhogina, ' "Poetika imeni" M.I. Tsvetaevoi, Marina Tsvetaeva: *lichnye i tvorcheskie vstrechi, perevody ee sochinenii*, pp. 276-90.

<sup>489</sup> See: Irina Shevelenko, *Literaturnyi put' Tsvetaevoi* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2002), pp. 123-6.

<sup>490</sup> Shevelenko, *Literaturnyi put' Tsvetaevoi*, p. 124.

unveils the rich and colourful deployment of images contained in the unnamed name of Blok.<sup>491</sup> In doing so, the critic remarks that Tsvetaeva ‘draws on that complete interpenetration of language and myth that lies at the heart of all mythic thinking [including that of the Bible] and informs lyric poetry’.<sup>492</sup> Finally, it is important to insist on the fact that Tsvetaeva’s assertion of the dream-inducing quality of the poem made clear in the line ‘S imenem tvoim – son glubok’ legitimises the boldness of its evocations, since dreams are, by definition, a place of transgression of the established moral code. Incidentally, let us note that Tsvetaeva defines not only this poem but poetry as a whole in terms of a dream-like logic; as she puts it: ‘Состояние творчества есть состояние сновидения’ (V, 366). This fact alone implies that it is almost inevitable to find a blasphemous streak in Tsvetaeva’s poetry, since the function of dreams, and by extension of art, is to provide a space in which unlawful impulses can be safely explored. Thus it is safe to assert that poetry provides Tsvetaeva with a space in which she can express her longing for a transcendental principle and that is why she often resorts to religious language.

To conclude let us say that it is impossible to deny that Tsvetaeva’s poetry can be interpreted as blasphemous, since, strictly speaking, it does use religious symbols in a context that is not religious and thus matches the dictionary definition of blasphemy. Yet, this interpretation overlooks the fact that poetry is an imaginary and fictional space in which the artist is allowed to experiment with all aspects of language and to think afresh some metaphysical issues such as the

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<sup>491</sup> Olga Peters Hasty, ‘Tsvetaeva’s Onomastic Verse’, *Slavic Review* 45 (1986), pp. 245-56; p. 251.

<sup>492</sup> Peters Hasty, ‘Tsvetaeva’s Onomastic Verse’, p. 256.

fusion of good and evil that have been questioned by various religious traditions. Indeed, Tsvetaeva was too aware of the diversity and richness of various religious traditions to feel bound by a sense of allegiance to a single confession. Moreover, both as a poet and as a person, Tsvetaeva always disliked the freedom-restraining spirit of institutions, be it educational or religious. This frame of mind is soundly expressed in her correspondence. For instance, in a letter to her Czech friend Anna Teskova Tsvetaeva voiced succinctly her reluctance to submit to any institutionalised form of religion by defining herself as a Church outsider. As she puts it ‘Я человек вне-церковный’ ( VI, 405).

#### 2.3.4. Tsvetaeva’s Syncretism

The previous sections highlighted not only that Tsvetaeva’s approach to God and religion is highly personal but also that her artistic appropriation of religious texts is incompatible with the canonical interpretations of any given confession. Consequently, Tsvetaeva is receptive to the spirituality of several religious traditions. In this regard, the following extract taken from a letter addressed to the literary critic Aleksandr Bakhrakh (1902-1985) is particularly telling: ‘Да, о моем дне, начало которого в костеле: кончается он всенощной в русской самодельной церкви [...]. Я – дома во всех храмах [...]. Но больше всего я люблю пустые храмы [...] где душа одна ликует’ (VI, 605). These few lines clearly indicate that because of her artistic frame of mind, which encourages her to approach issues from a variety of point of views, Tsvetaeva is

reluctant to submit to any form of authority apart from poetic inspiration; a similar idea is repeated in a personal note made by Tsvetaeva in 1925, which reads as follows: ‘И католическая душа у меня есть (к любимым) и протестантская (в обращении с детьми), – и тридцать три еретических, а вместо православной – пусто. Rien’.<sup>493</sup> Tsvetaeva’s reluctance to submit to any form of authority apart from poetic inspiration is probably the reason why she describes her soul as being partially heretical. This is confirmed in the following statement, taken from her correspondence: ‘[Я] ненавижу каждую торжественную, казенную церковь’ (V, 433). In addition, Tsvetaeva’s rejection of the official authority of the Church as a religious body explains why she was never afraid of being accused of blasphemy and did not consider the items and texts used in the liturgy of Orthodox services such as icons and traditional prayers as unusable outside the liturgy. Moreover, Tsvetaeva goes as far as identifying herself with a heretic. As she puts it: ‘Я неистощимый источник ересей. Не зная ни одной, исповедую их все. Может быть и творю’ (V, 530). In this statement Tsvetaeva recognises her unorthodox approach to religion and associates herself with heresy; yet, at the same time, she is careful not to associate herself with any specific heretic movement and thus to preserve the singularity of her spiritual outlook. At this point, it is worth referring to the remark made by the scholar Svetlana Liutova who specifies that, etymologically, the term ‘heresy’ comes from the Greek word ‘eres’ meaning ‘choice’.<sup>494</sup> Liutova’s reactivation of the etymological concept of heresy is especially suitable in order to describe the

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<sup>493</sup> Tsvetaeva, *Neizdannoe; Svodnye tetradi*, p. 350.

<sup>494</sup> Svetlana Liutova, *Marina Tsvetaeva i Maksimilian Voloshin: estetika smysloobrazovaniia* (Moscow: Dom-muzei Mariny Tsvetaevoi, 2004), p. 13.

nature of Tsvetaeva's religious approach, which is, ultimately, best characterised as eclectic. As Tsvetaeva puts it:

‘Многобожие поэта. Я бы сказала: в лучшем случае наш христианский Бог *входит* в сонм его богов’ (V, 363).

Here Tsvetaeva makes it plain that her poetry draws inspiration from several different religious traditions. Indeed, in her works she refers not only to the Orthodox canonical text of the Bible, but also to apocrypha, sectarian customs and other religions such as the ancient Greek pantheon. In this regard, it is worth noting that Tsvetaeva's upbringing introduced her to a syncretic understanding of religion. Indeed Greek mythology was transmitted to her by her father, Ivan Tsvetaev, an internationally renowned Professor of Ancient History, and it constituted a very important part of the spiritual luggage the young poet received in early years.<sup>495</sup> This cultural legacy had a long-lasting influence on Tsvetaeva's spiritual outlook and explains why she wrote numerous works on classical themes.<sup>496</sup> Moreover, the critic Olga Peters Hasty convincingly demonstrates that Tsvetaeva saw the mythological figure of Orpheus as the embodiment of the poetic spirit.<sup>497</sup> According to Hasty, Tsvetaeva's identification of the poet with Orpheus is motivated by the fact that she sees Orpheus journey into the underworld as an emblem of the intermediary space, between earth and sky,

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<sup>495</sup> Anna Saakiantz, *Marina Tsvetaeva. Zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (Moscow: Ellis Lak, 1997), p. 9.

<sup>496</sup> *Khvala Afrodite* (1922); *Sivilla* (1922); *‘Evridika – Orpheiu’* (1923); *‘Ariadna’* (1923); *‘Fedra’* (1923); *‘Akhil na valu’* (1923); *‘Tak – tol’ko Elena gliadit nad krovliami’* (1924).

<sup>497</sup> Olga Peters Hasty, *Tsvetaeva's Orphic Journey in the Worlds of the Word* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1996).

occupied by poetry.<sup>498</sup> In addition, Hasty also argues that Tsvetaeva identifies Orpheus with the poet, because his myth, in which the musician meets his deceased muse in the underworld but fails to bring her back to life, depicts the experience of loss and renunciation that any inspired poet goes through.<sup>499</sup> As the critic puts it, for Tsvetaeva ‘the defining act of the poet is self-sacrifice’.<sup>500</sup> It is not surprising, then, that in her poems devoted to Blok Tsvetaeva assimilates her fellow poet with both Orpheus and Christ. Hasty explains this merging of Orpheus and Christ in Tsvetaeva’s poetic representation of Blok by the fact they share the fate of experiencing an abject mortality (Orpheus’ dismemberment and Christ’s crucifixion) with a radiant divinity in a spirit of self-sacrifice.<sup>501</sup> In other words, Tsvetaeva’s motivation for identifying the poet with either Christ or Orpheus is due to the fact that both are figures who bridge this world with the other world. At this stage, it is important to remark that a similar logic underpins Tsvetaeva’s unconscious identification of the poet with the figure of the psalmist. Indeed, like Orpheus, the psalmist does not hesitate to mention the fact that he has lived in the realm of death.<sup>502</sup> Furthermore, as is the case with the Greek bard, the psalmist’s experience of the underworld compels him to express himself in a lyrical way. In addition, the corporeal sufferings of Christ and Orpheus are also typical of the psalmist, who often complains of extreme physical ailment.

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<sup>498</sup> Peter Hasty, *Tsvetaeva’s Orphic Journey in the Worlds of the Word*, p. 8.

<sup>499</sup> Peter Hasty, *Tsvetaeva’s Orphic Journey in the Worlds of the Word*, p.12.

<sup>500</sup> Peter Hasty, *Tsvetaeva’s Orphic Journey in the Worlds of the Word*, p.12.

<sup>501</sup> Peter Hasty, *Tsvetaeva’s Orphic Journey in the Worlds of the Word*, p.15.

<sup>502</sup> For instance in psalm 10:13 the poet thanks God for lifting him up ‘from the gates of death’; similarly in psalm 18: 4-6 the poet recalls how God rescued him from ‘the sorrows of death’ and ‘the snares of death’; likewise, in psalm 56:13 the poet recalls that God delivered his ‘soul from death’.



## Conclusion

As was shown at the beginning of this chapter, in the eighteenth century the genre of psalm entered the field of Russian literature and started to be paraphrased poetically. At this stage, although it maintained its initial function of praying to God, it also started to fulfil other functions, such as creating an artistic impact and meditating on autobiographical and/or political events. All these functions were already present in biblical psalms, but their importance was secondary and minor. Revived at the beginning of the twentieth century, the genre of psalms was no longer a model to be imitated but had become a proper intertext fully integrated into the protean forms of the spiritual poetry written by the poets of the Silver Age.

The last sections of the chapter demonstrate that the link between psalms and Tsvetaeva's poetry cannot be justified exclusively by Tsvetaeva's religiousness. On the contrary, it is far more productive to approach this issue from an intertextual point of view and show that the assertion of a generic continuity between psalms and Tsvetaeva's poetry is justified by the fact that psalms provide Tsvetaeva with a generic framework that matches her view of poetry as a space in which one can get in touch with the divine, although often at the price of personal suffering, and explore the question of transcendence by means of a lyrical language that also allows the expression of intimate feelings.

### **Chapter Three: Change of Function of the Psalmic Intertext in Tsvetaeva's Poetry**

As was said in Chapter One, Fowler considers that a genre is not a fixed and immutable form but, on the contrary, a flexible category, which is able to transform itself over time to the extent of becoming hardly recognisable while remaining significant.<sup>503</sup> The transformative quality of literary genres enables them to adjust to new epochs and contexts. In doing so, they remain productive, even when their presence is not necessarily perceived by readers or, even, authors, who frequently resort to a genre unconsciously.<sup>504</sup> One of the ways in which a genre can be transformed is by modifying its function. As Fowler explains, the modification of the function(s) of a genre is performed by using the well-established conventions of the genre in an innovative way.<sup>505</sup> Inasmuch as generic conventions are countless and variable, the functions of genres depend on their literary, cultural and historical specificities. Concerning the psalms, their ultimate function is to assert God's omnipotence. In addition, psalms also fulfil the function of imploring God for help and praising his deeds. This double function makes it clear that psalms are prayers. Hence, to modify the function of the genre of psalms means that the elements marking the text as a prayer such as the address to God, the call for help and the expression of God's praise, will be subjected to innovative use.

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<sup>503</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 47.

<sup>504</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 43.

<sup>505</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, pp. 173-4.

The present chapter aims to investigate Tsvetaeva's intertextual treatment of the praying function of the psalms. This will lead to the demonstration that the original function of psalms, namely the assertion of God's omnipotence, is only partially conserved in Tsvetaeva's poetry. Indeed, although Tsvetaeva does occasionally assert God's omnipotence in powerful and convincing terms, she also frequently highlights the uncertainty of God's existence. The interesting point, though, is that the poems casting doubts on God's omnipotence still resort to an intertextual use of the genre of psalms. This fact confirms Fowler's view that a genre can outlive its artistic apogee by a change of function.<sup>506</sup> Indeed, without a modification of the psalms' ultimate function, namely the assertion of God's omnipotence and supremacy, the generic intertext of psalms would not be compatible with Tsvetaeva's poetic universe firstly because the cultural context of her time precludes her from adhering to faith wholeheartedly and, secondly, because in her poetry, the figure of the poet frequently competes with that of God, as was shown by Losskaia and Dinega, who stress Tsvetaeva's belief that the creative power of poets makes them equal to God.<sup>507</sup>

### 3.1. The Modification of the Praising Function of the Psalmic Intertext in Tsvetaeva's Poetry

The present section demonstrates that the unequivocal assertion of God's supremacy typical of psalms of praise is not always conserved in Tsvetaeva's

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<sup>506</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, pp. 57-8.

<sup>507</sup> Losskaia, 'Bog v poezii Tsvetaevoi', pp. 172-3; Dinega, *A Russian Psyche*, p. 120.

intertextual use of them. Indeed, far from reproducing the indisputable proclamation of God's flawlessness that is characteristic of psalms of praise, Tsvetaeva creates poetic praises to God that discreetly display the lyrical heroine's hidden but sneaking feeling of doubt; in addition, her psalm-like praises are not necessarily addressed to God, and when they are they do not praise God for the same reason that the psalmist does. Yet, despite these essential differences, Tsvetaeva still clearly resorts to the generic framework of psalms, when she composes poetic praises. This paradoxical situation stems from Tsvetaeva's ambivalence toward God and her unfulfilled longing for a divine transcendence that was discussed in the previous chapter.

To begin with, let us see how the idea of God's supremacy and omnipotence is expressed in the praises of the Psalter. This stance is clearly asserted in psalm 19:7-14 where the author states the following:

'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise simple. [...]

The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes [...] the judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. [...]

Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret fault. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins [...] then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord'.<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> A similar statements can be found in the following passages of the Psalter: 'the word of the Lord *is* right; and all his works *are done* in truth' (ps. 33:4).

In this extract, the psalmist qualifies God with adjectives such as ‘perfect’, ‘sure’, ‘pure’, ‘true’, ‘righteous’; all these adjectives refer to the idea of God’s flawlessness and perfection. In addition, the psalmist declares that it is presumptuous to question God’s rectitude and that doubting it is sinful. In short, the psalmist proclaims that God’s indisputable righteousness should not be questioned by genuine believers. If one compares this state of affairs with the poetic praises to God written by Tsvetaeva, then it appears that, although they are clearly reminiscent of those found in psalms, they do not respect the idea of God’s infallibility. Thus, despite the apparent similarities between these two corpora of texts, Tsvetaeva’s praises to God perform a radical modification of the psalmic intertext, since they do not conserve its main function, namely the unambiguous proclamation of God’s greatness. To put it differently, let us say that the praising function of the psalmic intertext is significantly altered in Tsvetaeva’s poetry, because it often hints at a potential failure of God. Indeed, instead of being the main aim of Tsvetaeva’s poetry, the proclamation of God’s greatness constitutes only one of its components and to take it in isolation would misrepresent the real nature of her artistic creation, which consists, precisely, in the representation of a universe in which truth can never be pinpointed because of its ever metamorphosing nature.<sup>509</sup> Consequently, praises to God, i.e. to the supposed source of truth, can only be open-ended, and they always presuppose a possible refutation.

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<sup>509</sup> This aspect of Tsvetaeva’s poetic universe is dwelt upon in more detail by Stock [‘Marina Tsvetaeva: the Concrete and the Metaphoric Discourse of Exile’, p.769] where the critic judiciously notices that, tellingly, Tsvetaeva characterises truth as a turncoat.

Let us start, now, the analysis of Tsvetaeva's praises to God. One of the earliest and clearest examples of this type of poems is 'Blagoslovliaiu ezhednevnyi trud' (May 1918), which reads as follows:

Благословляю ежедневный труд,  
Благословляю еженощный сон.  
Господню милость и Господень суд,  
Благой закон – и каменный закон.

И пыльный пурпур свой, где столько дыр,  
И пыльный посох свой, где все лучи...  
Еще Господь, благословляю мир  
В чужом дому – и хлеб в чужой печи.

This poem can be interpreted in two ways depending on the meaning attributed to the verb 'blagoslovliaiu'; indeed, this term means either 'to bless' or in a more archaic sense 'to be grateful for'.<sup>510</sup> If one considers that the lyrical heroine uses the verb 'blagoslovliaiu' in its most common sense, namely meaning to bless, then, the poem, effectively, realises the injunction to bless God voiced by the author of psalm 96:2: 'Sing unto the Lord, bless his name'. The Russian version reads: 'Пойте Господу, благославляйте имя Его' (95\*).

On the other hand, if the poem refers to the second sense of the verb 'bagoslovliat'', then it constitutes a song in which the lyrical heroine thanks God for her fate by praising him for the destiny that befalls her. It is no wonder, then, that the text displays a typical of feature of the thanksgiving psalm, namely the overt assertion of a feeling of gratitude to God; in addition, 'Blagoslovliaiu

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<sup>510</sup> *Slovar' russkogo iazyka*, edited by N. Shvedova (Moscow: Russkii iazyk, 1990), p. 56.

ezhednevnyi trud' resorts to another typical feature of psalms of praise, namely the summary of the reasons compelling the lyrical heroine to praise God.<sup>511</sup> Incidentally, the mixing of rhetorical devices belonging to different types of psalms is a common feature of the Psalter itself.<sup>512</sup>

The link between Tsvetaeva's poem and the genre of psalms is reinforced by the use of similar stylistic devices such as the omission of the verb and parallelism. As was demonstrated by the linguist Roman Jakobson, parallelism is a universal poetic device,<sup>513</sup> however when it is combined with other typical features of psalms such as nominal sentences and a religious theme, it is legitimate to assume that it is partly reminiscent of biblical poetry.

Parallelism is used right from the beginning of the poem, since the first and second lines ('Blagoslovliaiu ezhednevnyi trud / Blagoslovliaiu ezhenoshchnyi son.') form a single grammatical sentence made up of two clauses that have an identical syntactical pattern, since they repeat the same verb with a different object. This parallelism corresponds to the antithetical parallelism found in psalms, since, like them it uses a similar grammatical pattern to convey opposite meaning. Thus the lyrical heroine expresses her gratitude for both her daily labour and nightly sleep.

The third line of the first stanza ('Gospodniu milost' i Gospoden' sud') is also a parallelism, since the two syntagms of the lines are built on a similar syntactic

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<sup>511</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 40.

<sup>512</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 208.

<sup>513</sup> Roman Jakobson, 'Grammaticheskii parallelizm i ego russkie aspekty' in *Raboty po poetike* (Moscow: Progress, 1987), pp. 99-129.

pattern (an adjective referring to God applied to a noun) and plays a similar grammatical role (they designate the object of the lyrical heroine's praise). Let us also remark that this line is nominal, since it omits to repeat the verb 'Blagoslovliaiu', which is implied. Furthermore, the adjective 'gospoden'', the feminine form of which is 'gospodnia' and which means 'belonging to God',<sup>514</sup> is archaic, a fact which gives to the poem a lofty tone. In doing so, Tsvetaeva obviously reinforces the praying tonality of the poem.

The last line of the first stanza ('Blagoi zakon – Kamennyi zakon') is also a parallelism in which the noun is repeated with a different qualifier: the first time the law is said to be good, while, the second time, the law is said to be stony. Inasmuch as the preceding line ends with a comma, it is clear that these qualifications refer respectively to the Lord's grace, which is said to be the goodness of his law, and to the Lord's judgment, which is said to be stony, i.e implacable. By qualifying God's actions in this way, the lyrical heroine approves one of his attributes, namely his goodness, and disapproves the other, namely his rigidity. In doing so, she discreetly introduces a reproachful tone in the very heart of her praise.

The second stanza of the poem is no less saturated with parallelisms than the first. Indeed once again the first two lines make a grammatical parallelism where the adjective dusty 'I pyl'nyi...' is repeated twice to qualify two different nouns, namely a purple piece of clothing and a sceptre that are, in turn, qualified further with a similar syntagm commencing with the adverb 'where'. By contrast, the third line, in which the lyrical heroine thanks God for peace ('Eshche Gospod',

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<sup>514</sup> Vladimir Dal', *Tolkovyi slovar' zhivogo velikorusskogo iazyka* (St Petersburg – Moscow: Tovarichestva M. O. Vol'f, 1903), I (Г– 3), p. 951.



blagoslovliaiu mir’), is not paralleled to any particular line, yet, it still echoes the other lines of the poem in that its two main elements (‘Gospod’ and ‘blagoslovliaiu’) have been mentioned previously. Moreover, there is a grammatical parallelism running from the last word of this line to the last word of the final line: ‘mir / V chuzhom domu – i khleb v chuzhoi pechi’).

To sum up what has been shown so far, the formal similarities between psalms and Tsvetaeva’s poem are: an extensive use of nominal lines and parallelisms, combined with an address to God. At this stage, it is worth analysing further the role played by the psalmic intertext on the semantic level of the poem. As the lyrical heroine makes clear, she happily accepts life’s moments of grace as well as its harshness. Consequently, in the first stanza the lyrical heroine insists on the idea that life is made up of successive moments of opposing states such as the labour of day versus the sleep of night (lines 1 and 2), God’s favour versus his judgement (line 3), the goodness of the divine law versus its harshness (line 4). Through this series of oppositions, the lyrical heroine makes it clear that she thanks God not for the happy time of her life only but rather for its fullness, which implies that she is also grateful for the difficulties she endures. In a word, the first stanza, which relies on the assumption that life is a divine gift, constitutes praise of God’s righteousness. In this sense, its function repeats that of the genre of psalm. Indeed, as was said in the previous chapter, psalms were originally designated with the Hebrew term ‘tehillim’, which means, precisely, praise. At the same time, the certainty of the psalmist’s praise to God is not conserved, since the lyrical heroine evokes the fact that God’s judgement is too harsh by describing it as stony.

The understated sense of uncertainty voiced in the first stanza is reinforced in the second stanza, which reveals the fundamental difference between the lyrical heroine's spiritual outlook and that of the psalmist. The second stanza opens with the lyrical heroine's expression of gratefulness for having 'dusty and worn out purple [clothes]'. It is worth commenting on this possession, because its denomination is a double oxymoron, which is emblematic of Tsvetaeva's habit of creating images conflating incompatible notions. Thus she associates a grey and dull layer of dust with the bright coloration of purple; incidentally, let us note that the noun 'purpur' can also designate an expensive piece of clothing used as a sign of luxury and grandeur.<sup>515</sup> Hence, the lyrical heroine's possession of a 'dusty purple' can be interpreted as an indication that she used to enjoy a life of privilege that, by the time of her uttering of the poem, has become a mere memory. In other words, the lyrical heroine has lost her social status. This idea is reinforced in the second part of the line stating that the piece of purple clothing is falling into holes. In the second line the lyrical heroine repeats that she lost her previous grandeur by describing herself as possessing a 'dusty sceptre' ('pyl'nyi posok'). In other words, she used to be in a position of authority but lost it; as a result, dust has accumulated on her sceptre. Yet, despite the layer of dust, the lyrical heroine's sceptre still shines, as indicated by her mention of rays of light ('gde vse luchì...'). At this stage, it is important to remember that the term 'posokh' can also refer to the walking staff used by pilgrims. Consequently, the light of the lyrical heroine's dusty stick can be explained by the fact that it is guided by God. This interpretation is

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<sup>515</sup> *Slovar' russkogo iazyka*, p. 631: 'Дорогая одежда из красной ткани как признак роскоши и величия'.

reinforced in the last two lines of the poem in which the lyrical heroine appears to be a solitary pilgrim who does not stay at home, as indicated by the fact that she thanks God for her life in the house of strangers and the bread given to her by them. At this stage, it is important to stress that the psalmist usually associates loneliness and self-exclusion with divine malediction. Indeed, as the scholar Richard Kevin Moore remarks, the psalms' authors 'considered isolation evil because [they believe that] fellowship with Yahweh and fellowship with man occurred simultaneously. [...] The Hebrews believed that the person who did not enjoy fellowship with his neighbors could not enjoy fellowship with God'.<sup>516</sup> This view is perceptible in the psalmist's assertion that 'God sets the lonely in families' (psalm 68:6). Moreover, psalms that refer to pilgrimage depict this as communal event rather than individual. As Gunkel remarks, 'the pilgrim acted with those of like mind. One travelled to Jerusalem with others at the same time'.<sup>517</sup> As a result, in the Psalter the feeling of loneliness and foreignness constitute a subject of complaint rather than praise: 'Rid me, and deliver me from the hands of strange children, whose mouth speakeath vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood' (ps. 144; 11). This fact contrasts sharply with Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine's expression of gratefulness to God for being a mere stranger. This difference can be explained in two ways: firstly, Tsvetaeva's depiction of a lone pilgrim is probably influenced by the Christian Orthodox spirituality in which pilgrims do not fear to wander by themselves; secondly, the loneliness of the lyrical heroine also probably stems from

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<sup>516</sup> Moore, *The Psalms of Lamentation and the Enigma of suffering*, p. 12.

<sup>517</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 235.

the fact that Tsvetaeva considers the experience of exile as a necessary condition of creation. As she puts it: 'Всякий поэт по существу эмигрант' (V, 335).

As was just shown, on a stylistic level 'Blagoslovliai ezhednevnyi trud' is highly reminiscent of psalms, since it resorts to typical devices of psalmic poetry such as parallelism and nominal sentences. On the semantic level, however, the link is based more on contrast than on exact resemblance. Indeed, the lyrical heroine's description of God's judgment as stony implies its implacability; in doing so, the lyrical heroine introduces a reproachful tone into the heart of the praise that is utterly foreign to the praises found in psalms. Another contrast between psalmic praises and Tsvetaeva's poem lies in the fact that the lyrical heroine thanks God for both the loss of her previously privileged social status and her homelessness that makes her dependent on strangers; such an assertion contrasts sharply with the original genre of psalms where both loneliness and exile are usually subjects of complaint rather than praise and are seen as God's punishment. A good illustration of the psalmist's belief that exile is the result of God's wrath is found in psalm 107:2 4-27 in which the psalmist remembers how his ancestors' lack of gratitude to God provoked divine anger, which resulted in his refusal to lead the psalmist's ancestors to the promised land: 'Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his [God's] word [...]. Therefore he [God] lifted up his hand against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness: to overthrow their seeds among the nations and to scatter them in the land'. By contrast, the lyrical heroine of Tsvetaeva's poem is grateful for not having a proper home and being a foreigner; this fact reflects

Tsvetaeva's conviction that poets have to endure exile in order to be genuinely inspired.

To conclude, let us remark that in 'Blagoslovliaiu ezhednevnyi trud' Tsvetaeva conserves the praising function of psalms, although her lyrical heroine's scale of values differs from that of the psalmist. Indeed, the latter regards the reassuring familiarity of his home or homeland as blessed, whereas the former sees her blessing in exactly the opposite state, namely in her status of stranger that allows her to tap her artistic creativity.<sup>518</sup> Incidentally, it is worth noting that this poem was written in 1918, i.e. before Tsvetaeva emigrated (1921). This indicates that she felt alienated in her own country. This state of affairs would repeat itself on Tsvetaeva's return to Soviet Russia where once again the feeling of alienation will compel her to artistic creation as Smith convincingly demonstrates.<sup>519</sup>

Another poem in which the praising function of the psalmic intertext is conserved with a marked shift of the object of praise is 'Blagodariu, o Gospod'' (November 1918), which reads as follows:

Благодарю, о Господь,  
За Океан и за Сушу,  
И за прелестную плоть,  
И за бессмертную душу,  
  
И за горячую кровь,  
И за холодную воду,

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<sup>518</sup> Incidentally, it is fair to suggest that the lyrical heroine's loss of material wealth reflects Tsvetaeva's own loss of her financially privileged situation, as indicated by the fact that this poem was written in May 1918, i.e. less than a year after the Bolshevik Revolution, which deprived Tsvetaeva of her previously secure material situation.

<sup>519</sup> Alexandra Smith, 'Towards Poetics of Exile: Tsvetaeva's Translation of Baudelaire's *Le Voyage*' in [http://ars-interpres-2.nm.ru/a\\_s\\_an\\_2.html](http://ars-interpres-2.nm.ru/a_s_an_2.html) Accessed in April 2007.

– Благодарю за любовь.  
Благодарю за погоду.

Commenting on this poem, Kling remarks that its simplicity betrays its author's sincere feeling of gratitude toward God.<sup>520</sup> It is not surprising, then, that it is written in the same vein as 'Blagoslovliaiu ezhednevnyi trud'; likewise, in 'Blagodariu, o Gospod'' the lyrical heroine praises God in a straightforward way and that is why the stylistic composition of the poem also borrows from the genre of psalm the poetic devices of nominal sentence and parallelism. Parallelism is used in the third and fourth lines; these two lines, however, are clearly antithetical: in the third line the lyrical heroine thanks God for the charms of the flesh, while in the fourth line, she thanks God for giving her an immortal soul. The lyrical heroine's feeling of connectedness with both her physical and spiritual selves indicates a willingness to experience all aspects of being; moreover, the allusion to her passionate nature also points to the fact that her drive to experience various facets of life is incompatible with a religiously prescribed and predictable behaviour. Yet, the lyrical heroine does not hesitate to thank God for her propensity to be unpredictable, since she thanks him for the weather and love, which are metaphorical representation of life's unpredictability. Consequently, it is possible to conclude that in the first stanza of 'Blagodariu, o Gospod'', Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine modifies the psalmic intertext by shifting the focus of praise. Indeed the certitude provided by faith in God's wise ordering of the world that prompts the

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<sup>520</sup> Oleg Kling, *Poeticheskii mir Mariny Tsvetaevoi*, p. 97.

psalmist's praise<sup>521</sup> is replaced by the lyrical heroine's feeling of gratitude towards God for letting incertitude and unpredictability reign over her life.

The second stanza of 'Blagodariu, o Gospod'' is also saturated with parallelisms. Thus the fifth and sixth lines constitute a grammatical parallelism in which the two lines express opposite meanings: indeed, in the fifth line the lyrical heroine thanks God for her hot blood, which is clearly a metonymical designation of her passionate temperament, while, in the sixth line, she thanks God for cold water, a statement which can be understood as a figurative way of designating the sharp, rigorous and lucid rationality necessary to create art from the raw material of feelings. Interestingly, these two antithetical frames of mind are interdependent in artistic creation. This fact is implicitly asserted by the reunion of the mention of passionate feelings with that of a rational mind in a grammatical parallelism. Let us note here that in hinting at the interdependence of a cold rational mind with its passionate and irrational counterpart Tsvetaeva anticipates Kristeva's views on language stating that discourse is always informed by both an instinctual urge and a cultural one.

To conclude, let us say that this poem undeniably relies on the psalmic intertext in that it is made up on a series of clauses that are all devoted to thanking God. Moreover, the presence of stylistic devices such as parallelism and nominal sentences also point to the presence of the psalmic intertext. However, unlike the psalmist the lyrical heroine does not thank God for being a guarantor of a safe life;

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<sup>521</sup> As can be seen from psalm 33:2-5: 'Praise the Lord [...] For the word of the Lord is right; [...] the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord'; similarly the praise sung in psalm 64:5 reads as follows: '[...] O God [...] who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth'.

on the contrary, she thanks him for reinforcing her creative potential by enabling her to experience different and contrasting aspects of life.

So far, I have shown that genuine praises to God are an integral part of Tsvetaeva's poetry. Yet, although they display obvious intertextual links with the genre of psalms, Tsvetaeva's praises differ in their function, because either they introduce a reproachful element in the very heart of the praise or because they modify the reason compelling the lyrical heroine's to praise God. These alterations are explicable by the fact that, unlike the psalmist, Tsvetaeva's creative impulse is not driven by a strictly religious frame of mind but rather by an artistic sensibility.

The poem 'Bog – prav' (May 1918) constitutes yet another praise to God written by Tsvetaeva in 1918. In this work Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine expresses a hidden feeling of ambivalence toward God, which stems from the impossibility of understanding him. The poem reads as follows:

Бог – прав  
Тлением трав,  
Сухостью рек,  
Воплем калек,  
  
Вором и гадом,  
Мором и голодом,  
Срамом и смрадом,  
Громом и градом.  
  
Попранным Словом.  
Проклятым годом.  
Пленом царевым.  
Вставшим народом.

The first line of the poem clearly announces that the remaining text is a meditation on God's righteousness. In other words, the poem overtly presents itself



as praise of God. In addition, the fact that the poem is entirely composed of nominal phrases and parallelisms also clearly indicates that it uses the praises of the Psalter as a generic intertext. To be more precise, the assertion of God's righteousness links this poem with both psalms of praise and thanksgiving in which the author lauds God's goodness. As was said, the mixture of praise and thanksgiving is not uncommon in the Psalter; this can be illustrated by psalm 92: 1; 4-5 in which the singer asserts the following:

'It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name,  
O most High: [...]

For thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of  
thy hand.

O Lord, how great are thy works!'

Even a cursory reading of these lines makes it plain that they contrast sharply with the praise to God made by Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine's in 'Bog – prav'. The psalmist's praise is motivated by his experience of the beneficial acts of God; on the contrary, the lyrical heroine's assertion of God's rectitude originates in her witnessing of a land in utter desolation presumably brought about by God. The lyrical heroine's belief that the desolation she is witnessing is the result of God's will is clearly indicated by the fact that all the lines following the assertion of God's rectitude constitute a nominal sentence in the instrumental case, which means that the desolation described by the lyrical heroine is a manifestation of God's righteousness. In the first stanza, the benevolent actions of the divine is said to be perceptible in the putrefaction of grasses, the dryness of rivers and the screams of

cripples; in the second stanza, God's rectitude is said to be manifested in the figure of a thief, in the presence of vermin, in death itself, in the feeling of shame, in stench, in thunder and in hail. Finally, in the third stanza, God's rectitude is manifested in the profanation of the sacred word, in the cursed year in which the imprisonment of the tsar happened and, finally, in a popular uprising. The motivation of God's rectitude by means of a long series of images depicting not only a truly desolate situation but also a state in which lawlessness and deception reign is rather puzzling. Consequently, it is fair to wonder whether this poem is not ironic praise, in which the lyrical heroine's justification of her assertion of God's rectitude serves to refute the opening line. To put it differently, it is fair to wonder whether the initial assertion of God's rectitude is used in order to underline the opposite, i.e. God's cruelty. This hypothesis is counterbalanced by the fact that, being conscious of the highly ambiguous status of her poem, Tsvetaeva accompanied it with the following note: '(NB! Очевидно, нужно понять: Бог *все-таки* прав, прав – *вопреки*'.<sup>522</sup> Hence, although this poem praises God, its ambiguity makes it clear that the lyrical heroine's praise is rooted in doubts. It appears, then, that in 'Bog – prav' Tsvetaeva's intertextual use of the praises of the psalms is extremely ambiguous because of the extreme desolation depicted in the poem. Commenting on this poem, Shevelenko proposes a convincing interpretation by suggesting that the God invoked by the lyrical heroine is a figurative way of referring to the ineluctable course of history, which is proclaimed right only because one cannot discuss its inexorability.<sup>523</sup> I agree with this interpretation,

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<sup>522</sup> Tsvetaeva, *Knigi stikhov*, p. 368.

<sup>523</sup> Shevelenko, *Literaturnyi put' Tsvetaevoi*, p. 16.

which reinforces the demonstration of Tsvetaeva's ambivalent use of the generic intertext of psalms.

Yet another poem in which the praising function of the psalmic intertext is modified is 'Ty dal nam muzhestva – ' (September 1918). In this text, the modification consists in tingeing the praise with irony. The poem reads as follows:

Ты дал нам мужества –  
На сто жизней!  
Пусть земли кружатся,  
Мы – недвижны.

И ребра – стойкие  
На мытарства:  
Дабы на койке нам  
Помнить царство!

Свое подобье  
Ты в небо поднял –  
Великой верой  
В свое подобье.

Так дай нам вздоху  
И дай нам поту –  
Дабы снести нам  
Твои щедроты!

To begin with, it is important to note that 'Ty dal nam muzhestva –' is not uttered by a single lyrical heroine but by a community, which refers to itself with the pronoun 'we' and addresses God with the pronoun 'you', as is typically the case in psalms of thanksgiving.<sup>524</sup> Furthermore, this poem reproduces another characteristic of thanksgiving psalms, namely the narration of the specific beneficial

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<sup>524</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 86.

actions realised by God.<sup>525</sup> Thus in the first two stanzas, the community reminds God of his past magnanimity, which manifested itself in God providing the members of the community with unwavering courage and unbeatable physical strength, expressed through the image of firm ribs (line 5). The narration of God's greatness carries on in the third stanza, which reminds us of God's divine power by mentioning his ability to raise people to the sky. In a word, the first three stanzas of the poem sound like unreserved praise to God proclaiming his greatness. This state of affairs changes radically in the fourth stanza in which the community's members indirectly complain of God's inaptitude to act effectively by asking him to provide them with sufficient endurance, metaphorically designated by breath and sweat, to sustain his generous gift, namely their ability to act courageously and strongly. The effect of such a request is to cast a doubt on the assertion made in the preceding stanzas. Indeed, by confiding to God that they do not have enough stamina to endure his gift, the community's members discredit the very idea of God's omnipotence, since it implies that his gift was inadequate. To conclude, let us remark that in the traditional psalms the mention of God's past deeds is often used to incite God to repeat them and that is why their benefits are said to be everlasting, as can be seen in psalm 105:1;5;8: 'O Give thanks unto the Lord [...] make known his deeds among the people. [...] Remember his marvellous works that he hath done [...]. He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations'.<sup>526</sup> By contrast, in Tsvetaeva's poem 'Ty

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<sup>525</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 208.

<sup>526</sup> Similarly, the author of psalm 103 25-27 addresses God as follows: 'Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens *are* the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure [...] they shall be changed: But thou *art* the same, and thy years shall have no end.'

dal nam muzhestva –’ the mention of God’s past deeds is not used in order to praise them but, on the contrary, to discredit them as inadequate.

In the poems analysed so far the change of function performed by Tsvetaeva on the psalmic intertext amounts to the introduction of ambivalence into the very heart of the praise. Another possible change of function is to direct praise seemingly addressed to God to another addressee. This is precisely what happens in the poem ‘Vse velikolep’e’ (1921) where the lyrical heroine sings wholeheartedly the greatness of her unnamed addressee as an unsurpassable being; in doing so, she implies that her addressee is God. The poem reads as follows:

Все великолепье  
Труб – лишь только лепет  
Трав – перед Тобой.

Все великолепье  
Бурь – лишь только щебет  
Птиц – перед Тобой.

Все великолепье  
Крыл – лишь только трепет  
Век – перед Тобой.

‘Vse velikolep’e’ is the sixth poem of the cycle ‘Uchenik’ (‘The Pupil’). Taken out of context, this text sounds like strikingly simple and, at the same time, elaborate praise addressed to an unnamed creative principle (‘You’), who seems to be God, as suggested by the fact that it is always written with a capital letter. In

other words, the poem reads as a proclamation that natural forces are only infinitesimal phenomena compared to God's divine force. Interestingly, the rhetorical device consisting in asserting the supremacy of God by showing that nothing can compare to him is typical of the Psalter.<sup>527</sup> For instance, the author of psalm 40:5 asserts God's ungraspable supremacy in the following terms: 'Many, O Lord my God, *are* thy wonderful works *which* thou hast done [...] they are more than can be numbered'. To put it differently, the best earth can offer is only a minimal fraction of the divine splendour. This is exactly what the lyrical heroine expresses in the first stanza, where she asserts that trumpets, which sound loud for ordinary people, sound like the hardly audible babble of grass when compared to God. In the second stanza, the disproportion between earth's scale and that of God is expressed by the assertion that the splendour of tempests appears as no more impressive than the birds' twitter when it is compared to God. Finally, the idea of God's overwhelming force is expressed with the assertion that the splendour of wings appears as the hardly perceptible trembling of eyelashes when compared to God's potential.

Now it is important to note that the interpretation according to which the pronoun 'You' refers to God is made on the assumption that no other person or principle can be so overwhelmingly powerful, and because it is always written with a capital letter. Yet, when this poem is approached in a scholarly way, i.e. by taking into account the commentaries it triggered in both its author and critics, it appears that at first 'Vse velikolep'e' was not conceived as a prayer praising God's creation. Commenting on this cycle, Saakiantz indicates that its addressee was Sergei

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<sup>527</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 38.

Volkonskii (1860-1937), the grandson of a Decembrist, who was a respected author and whom Tsvetaeva befriended in the late 1910s and early 1920s.<sup>528</sup> Saakiant's remark is based on the fact that in an original copy of the 1936 publication of this cycle in the collection entitled *Remeslo* Tsvetaeva dedicated the cycle to Volkonskii and added the following note: 'Я тогда не проставила посвящения – чтобы его не смущать. Люблю его до сих пор' (II, 494). Tsvetaeva's remark that she deliberately omitted to dedicate this poem to Volkonskii indicates her awareness of the disproportion of the lyrical heroine's admiration for her addressee. Indeed, while the expression of boundless admiration is acceptable when it is directed to God, it sounds excessive when it is addressed to a fellow writer. This state of affairs was spotted by Saakiant's who remarks that the lyrical heroine of 'Vse velikolep'e' falls short of deifying her addressee.<sup>529</sup> At this point, it is important to remember Tsvetaeva's assertion that even when they were not initially written or addressed to God, her poems are, ultimately, directed to him. As she puts it: ' [...] все мои стихи – к Богу если не обращены, то: возвращены' (IV, 135-6). This is an interesting point, since it reinforces Fowler's assertion that the choice of a genre is often unconscious.<sup>530</sup> In the present case, Tsvetaeva wrote a poem to express her admiration to her friend Prince Volkonskii, yet this poem turned out to be written in the generic framework of a prayer highly reminiscent of the praises addressed to God in psalms, as indicated by the fact that its glorified addressee is always referred to by using a capital letter.

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<sup>528</sup> (II, 494).

<sup>529</sup> Saakiant's, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 248.

<sup>530</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 43.

Tsvetaeva's admiration for Volkonskii is particularly telling in the present discussion of a few but masterfully written praises to God in the overall corpus of Tsvetaeva's poetry. An important clue to the significance of the generic intertext of psalms of praise in Tsvetaeva's poetry is found in her essay 'Kedr' (1923), which is a panegyric review of Volkonskii's biography *Rodina*, in which Tsvetaeva makes the following comment describing the land Volkonskii used to own before emigrating from Russia:

‘Дерево, это псалом природы. Дерево в саду бесполезно, деревя жизнь – славу петь, парк же кн. Волконского равнялся 250 десятинам, – 250 десятин бесполезности, 250 десятин славы Божьей’.<sup>531</sup> (V, 261)

This extract is important, because in it Tsvetaeva not only refers to the genre of psalms but also expresses what this genre represents for her. She starts by asserting that ‘a tree is a psalm of the natural world’. This arresting comparison is explained figuratively in the sentence that follows it where Tsvetaeva asserts that the life of the tree consists in singing God's glory. To put it differently, let us say that Tsvetaeva considers that the majestic and imposing beauty of trees is a testimony to the creative power of God. By specifying that the function of psalms is to praise God and by comparing this genre with the arboreal world, Tsvetaeva gives a fresh actualisation of the comparison found in the opening psalm of the Psalter in which the righteous man is compared to an eternally blossoming tree. In addition, in equating psalms with praise Tsvetaeva betrays not only that she is acquainted with

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<sup>531</sup> My emphasis (S.O.C.).



the genre of psalms but also that she is aware of the fact that their ultimate function is to glorify God. Interestingly, Tsvetaeva also specifies that this type of creation is a free endeavour, since it is not aimed at yielding any palpable benefit. Thus she asserts its uselessness. This term hints at Tsvetaeva's refusal of a utilitarian approach to art. Incidentally, Tsvetaeva was equally critical of aestheticism. As she puts it: 'Эстетство, это бездушие' (VI, 573). In other words, Tsvetaeva considers that artistic creation should always be motivated by a genuine spiritual striving and should not be aimed at a mere aesthetic effect. Furthermore, artistic creation is of no use in the real world of pragmatic and political necessities and that is why Tsvetaeva proclaims that its very uselessness is praise to God.

As was just demonstrated, in her use of the generic intertext of psalms Tsvetaeva significantly alters their praising function. Thus sometimes she shifts the focus of praise and that is why she expresses gratefulness for being in a state that usually compels the psalmist to complain as is the case in 'Blagoslovliaiu ezhednevnyi trud' and 'Blagodariu, o Gospod''; at other time, instead of being unequivocal and overtly addressed to God, Tsvetaeva's praises contain nagging doubt as is the case in 'Bog –prav' and 'Ty dal nam muzhestva –'. In these instances, the modification of the praising function of the psalmic intertext overlaps with another genre-modifying process described by Fowler, namely the counter-statement which is a process whereby the main message of a genre is inverted. As Fowler puts it, this process is based on the idea of an 'inversion, whereby dispraise is modeled on inverted praise, malediction on valediction'<sup>532</sup>. Lastly, contrarily to what happens in psalms, Tsvetaeva's poetic praises of an unsurpassable principle

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<sup>532</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 175.

are not necessarily overtly addressed to God as was shown in the analysis of ‘Vse velikolep’e’. These modifications confirm Fowler’s assertion that one of the ways a genre can survive its literary apogee is by modifying its function so that it can adjust to new artistic developments. Thus, the genre of psalms is kept alive in Tsvetaeva’s poetry where it constitutes an intertext. In the previous chapter I showed that the artistic context of Tsvetaeva’s time was characterised by a highly idiosyncratic approach to religion and spirituality together with a relentless interrogation of the very existence of God that was triggered by both Nietzsche’s assertion of the death of God and an especially harsh historical situation. In addition, it is important to remember that the artistic context in which Tsvetaeva writes is modernism, which presupposes a fragmented consciousness<sup>533</sup> and thus makes it difficult to adhere wholeheartedly to a single faith. Consequently, it is possible to interpret Tsvetaeva’s ambiguous praises to God as a testimony to her longing for an unconditional faith that is not attainable in the cultural context in which she creates. As a result, Tsvetaeva creates praises to God, without, however, being able to conceal certain unease with the concept of unequivocal praise that presupposes an unshakeable faith.

### 3.2. The Modification of the Complaint Function of the Psalmic Intertext

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<sup>533</sup> Astradur Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1990), p. 152 mentioned by Alexandra Harrington in *Reassessing the Poetry of Anna Akhmatova. From Modernism to Postmodernism*, doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham (2002), p. xxviii.

This section aims to demonstrate that the change of the complaint function of the psalms performed by Tsvetaeva in her intertextual use of them lies in the fact that although Tsvetaeva's lyrical hero/-ine can often be identified with the psalmist, unlike the biblical poet, he/she is often deprived of any hope of divine redemption, because of his/her involvement in artistic creation, which disregards religious morality. Another change of function the psalmic complaint is subjected to in Tsvetaeva's poetry concerns the object of deploration, which comes to include feminine experience that is left out of traditional psalms.

In analysing the modification of the complaint function, I intend to show that in Tsvetaeva's poetry the figure of the lamenting psalmist stands as an emblem of the poet. Indeed, in 'Est' v mire lishnie, dobavochnye' (1923) the second poem of the cycle 'Poety', poets are compared to Job. As Gunkel remarks, many of Job's speeches to God are composed of psalms of lament<sup>534</sup> and that is why it is legitimate to understand the mention of Job in Tsvetaeva's cycle devoted to the figure of the poet as an indirect indication of a generic link between psalms of lament and Tsvetaeva's poetry. A careful reading of 'Est' v mire...' confirms this interpretation:

Есть в мире лишние, добавочные,  
Не вписанные в окоем.  
(Нечислящимся в ваших справочниках,  
Им свалочная яма – дом).

Есть в мире полые, затолканные,  
Немотствующие – навоз,  
Гвоздь – вашему подолу шелковому!  
Грязь брезгует из-под колес!

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<sup>534</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to the Psalms*, p. 121; 137.

Есть в мире мнимые, невидимые:  
(Знак: лепрозариумов крап!)  
Есть в мире Иовы, что Иову  
Завидовали бы – когда б:

Поэты мы – и рифму с париями,  
Но выступив из берегов,  
Мы бога у богинь оспариваем  
И девственницу у богов!

As Olga Peters Hasty observes, the cycle 'Poety' is so rich that it is fair to assert that this is an inexhaustible text.<sup>535</sup> The multiplicity of possible interpretations also means that several intertexts can be detected. Hasty judiciously remarks that Pushkin's 'Poet' (1827) is perceptible in Tsvetaeva's 'Est' v mire', which reproduces the two radically different states of mind the poet is said to experience in Pushkin's text, namely the uninspired and the inspired.<sup>536</sup> The modification Tsvetaeva performs on this intertext, according to Hasty, lies in the fact that 'Tsvetaeva's primary intent [...] is not to present two different guises of the poet predicated on the presence or absence of inspiration, but to emphasize that the images applicable to the poet, and the way these images are construed, depend on the beholder'.<sup>537</sup> This is a subtle interpretation of Tsvetaeva's text, with which I fully agree. At the same time, it is worth observing that Tsvetaeva's poem also clearly reveals an intertextual link with the genre of the lament psalm.

Before drawing a parallel between this poem and psalms of lament, let us mention the interpretation of the overall cycle proposed by the critic Susanna

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<sup>535</sup> Olga Peters Hasty, 'Marina Tsvetaeva's cycle *Poety*' in *Marina Tsvetaeva: One Hundred Years*, pp. 131-46; p. 145.

<sup>536</sup> Hasty, 'Marina Tsvetaeva's cycle *Poety*', p. 139.

<sup>537</sup> Hasty, 'Marina Tsvetaeva's cycle *Poety*', pp. 131-146; p.139.

Witt,<sup>538</sup> in which she indicates an intertextual link between this poem and Lermontov's 'Prorok' (1841), arguing that its lyrical hero shares with Tsvetaeva's poet the fate of a pariah surrounded by hostility.<sup>539</sup> This interpretation is convincing, but it is worth observing that Lermontov's prophet resembles more the figure of the lamenting psalmist than that of the prophet. Indeed, Lermontov's lines in which the prophet is depicted as person despised by everybody ('Смотрите [...] / Как презирают все его'),<sup>540</sup> clearly echoes the psalmist's depiction of himself as an object of contempt who is 'despised of the people' in psalm 22: 6-7; the Russian version reads: 'Я [...] презрение в народе' (21: 6\*). As a result, I propose to argue that in 'Est' v mire...' the poet is not identified with the prophet but with the lamenting psalmist. The reason why I consider this interpretation more accurate is twofold: firstly, because Tsvetaeva herself refuses the straightforward identification of the poet and the prophet by making the following assertion: 'Пророчество в поэте как соприсутствие, не как сущность – как поэзия в пророке' (VI, 556); secondly, because the biblical figure of Job, to whom Tsvetaeva compares the poet in her poem, is much closer to the psalmist than the prophet.<sup>541</sup>

Let us start, now, the proper interpretation of the poem. In the first stanza of 'Est' v mire...' Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine describes figuratively the poet as a social outcast. The theme of social exclusion is clearly expressed by the assertion that poets are unwanted and superfluous ('lishnie, dobavochnye'); in fact, their

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<sup>538</sup> Susanna Witt, "'Poety" Mariny Tsvetaevoy: popytka analiza i istoriia odnogo posviashcheniia' in *Den' poezii Marina Tsvetaeva*, pp. 24-45.

<sup>539</sup> Witt, ' "Poety" Mariny Tsvetaevoy: popytka analiza i istoriia odnogo posviashcheniia', p. 41.

<sup>540</sup> Quoted by Tamara Zhmurskaia in *"Um ishchet bozhestva". Bibliia i russkaia poeziiia XVIII-XIX vekov* (Moscow: Rossiiskii pisatel', 2006), p. 6.

<sup>541</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 121.

oddity is such that they are not even expected to be seen in an ordinary horizon of expectation, as indicates the second line: ‘Ne vpisannye v okoem’. This assertion is commented in the two following lines, which are placed in brackets. In this passage, the lyrical heroine reasserts the social isolation of poets by remarking that they are not mentioned in directories and live in a pit full of rubbish. Interestingly, the poets’ characterisation as social outcasts living in a pit immediately links them with the figure of the lamenting psalmist who frequently describes himself in a similar situation.<sup>542</sup> For instance, the author of psalm 69:8 complains of being alienated from his family in the following terms: ‘I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother’s children’. Concerning the pit, it is mentioned in psalm 88:6 where the lamenter addresses God as follows: ‘Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit’.

In the second stanza, made up of a series of metaphorical designations of poets, the idea of a link between poets and the lamenting psalmist is reinforced. To begin with, poets are said to be hollow and shaken (‘polye, zatolkannye’); they are also compared to wild ground (‘Nemotstvuiushchie –’) and it is specified that their wilderness cannot be tamed; this idea is expressed through the image of manure (‘navoz’) and that of a nail (‘gvozd’) that tears the hem of the silk garment of the poem’s addressee. These vivid images make it plain that poets are repulsive for ordinary people, who perceive them as disturbers of the comfortable and luxurious lives they enjoy and that is why, in the fourth line of the stanza, poets are metaphorically represented as mud that splashes from wheeled vehicles. At this point, it is worth remembering that, like poets, the lamenting psalmist of many

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<sup>542</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 148.

psalms of lament is depicted as an object of repulsion excluded from society, as can be seen in psalm 69:20: 'I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; for comforters, but I found none'.

Not surprisingly, the poets' resemblance to the lamenting psalmist is also noticeable in the third stanza, where poets are said to be ignored because of their leprosy spots. Once again the poets' characterisation as individuals rejected because of their sickness echoes psalms of lament in which the lamenter is rejected by his community because of his illness. Such is the case, for example, in psalm 88:4, 8 where the lamenter complains of both isolation and extreme physical frailty: 'I am a man *that hath* no strength. [...] Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me'.

The implicit link between the figure of the poet and that of the lamenting psalmist becomes explicit in the third line of the second stanza in which poets are compared to Job in the following terms: 'Est' v mire Iovy, chto Iovu / Zavidovali by – kogda b: // Poety my – I rifmu s pariiami'.<sup>543</sup> An important point to note, here, is that the two terms of this comparison are not equal. Indeed, it is fair to say that in this comparison Job is used as a referential unity of measure rather than as equivalence. To put it differently, the assertion that poets would envy Job's fate implies that the latter's sufferings are more bearable than that of the former. Interestingly, this assertion is not properly justified in the stanza itself; this can be explained by the fact that in poetry biblical figures are commonly used as a

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<sup>543</sup> The fact that Tsvetaeva refers to poets as a unique entity can be explained by her view, expressed in the essay 'Epos i lirika sovremennoi Rossii' (1933) according to which all poets express the same things in a different manner. As she puts it: 'Поэзия не дробится ни в поэтах, ни на поэтов [...] по существу, нет поэтов, а есть поэт, один и тот же с начала и до конца мира' (V, 375).

figurative designation of an abstract notion; for instance, the name Cain is commonly used as a symbol of fratricide or Solomon as a symbol of wisdom.<sup>544</sup> To some extent, this is what happens in Tsvetaeva's poem where the designation of Job triggers the association with the idea of undeserved suffering. However, this state of affairs needs to be nuanced, because the highly polemical and controversial status of the figure of Job does not allow the reader to associate a unique abstract notion with him. Indeed, in neither biblical exegesis nor in works of philosophy and literature is there agreement concerning the meaning of Job's undeserved suffering. As the biblical commentator Dmitrii Shchedrovitskii observes, some thinkers consider Job as the bearer *par excellence* of a rebellious spirit, whose questioning of God's actions edges on blasphemy, while other thinkers consider him an inflexibly righteous person who displays an exemplarily unfailing faith.<sup>545</sup> How, then, are we to interpret Job in Tsvetaeva's poem? A clue is given in the fourth stanza, in which the comparison between Job and poets is explained by the fact that they are pariahs and thus share with Job the fate of being socially excluded. However, at this stage the lyrical heroine highlights the fact that poets also differ from Job by introducing a three-line sentence, which concludes the poem and begins with the oppositional particle 'But', where it is asserted that poets are like rivers that have overflowed ('vystupiv iz beregov'); this metaphor is particularly important because it describes poets as an elemental force (water) that overcomes a limit (the river bank). The identification of poets with an elemental force that cannot be restrained makes it plain that poetic activity entails a transgression of limits, be they linguistic, moral or

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<sup>544</sup> E. Muratova, 'Rol' mifologicheskikh i bibleiskikh imen v poetike Mariny Tsvetaevoi', *Chuzbina, rodina moia*, pp. 454-62; p. 457.

<sup>545</sup> Dmitrii Shchedrovitskii, *Besedy o knige Iova* (Moscow: Oklik, 2005), p. 3.



religious. In the light of the comparison between poets and Job, the assertion of the poets' propensity to transgress established rules implies that, unlike Job, poets do not stop short of blasphemy but, on the contrary, overstep taboos, whatever their nature. This interpretation is reinforced in the two concluding lines of the poem in which poets are said to 'contend with goddesses for the god and with gods for the virgin'. These verses indicate a sudden change of the cultural paradigm invoked until now. While the mention of Job refers unequivocally to the Judeo-Christian tradition, the designation of a god, written without a capital letter and repeated in the plural and feminine forms, indicates clearly that the cultural horizon has shifted toward polytheism. Interestingly, there is no specification regarding the divinities evoked, which leaves room for interpretation. In this regard, it is worth noting the chiasmic structure of the last two lines in which poets contend firstly with feminine divinities for a masculine divinity ('boga u bogin'') and then, conversely, contend with masculine divinities for a feminine being ('devstvennitsu u bogov'). The interchangeable place occupied by the feminine and masculine in this passage reveals Tsvetaeva's ideal of the poet as a being with both feminine and masculine gender. Indeed, as the critic Svetlana Boym remarks, in Tsvetaeva's outlook artists are characterised by 'a general fluidity of sexual identities'.<sup>546</sup> Consequently, poets' tendency to 'burst their banks' refer to their propensity to transgress such societal and religious taboos as homosexual or extramarital love, which are forbidden in the Judeo-Christian tradition. This interpretation is confirmed not only by the fact that

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<sup>546</sup> Svetlana Boym, 'Loving in Bad Taste. Eroticism and Literary Excess in Marina Tsvetaeva's 'The Tale of Sonechka' in *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 156-76; p. 167.

‘extramarital relationships were conducted by Tsvetaeva without concealment’,<sup>547</sup> but also by the fact that the poem ‘Est’ v mire lishnie...’ was written the same year as Tsvetaeva’s affair with Konstantin Rodzevich. In other words, ‘Est’ v mire lishnie...’ expresses the poets’ striving to overcome social and religious boundaries, metaphorically expressed with the image of a river overflowing its banks. As a result, poets cannot expect redemption and this fact explains why their fate is said to be worse than that of Job. In addition, the poets’ hopelessness also reinforces the hypothesis that the lamenting psalmist is a better fit to represent the suffering of the poet than the prophet or even Job; this hypothesis finds confirmation in psalm 88, well-known for its colorful depiction of the lamenter’s sufferings which, contrarily to those of Job, are not at any point alleviated by God’s intervention; to paraphrase the scholar W. Barnes: psalm 88 is the story of Job half-told, i.e. tragedy without compensation.<sup>548</sup> As the interpretation of ‘Est’ v mire...’ shows, in Tsvetaeva’s poetic universe poets hold a similar position, because they are doomed to suffer for their creation without being able to hope in God’s ultimate support. Furthermore, their blasphemous propensity to contend with the divine precludes them from choosing the reassuring path of divine salvation.

At this stage, it is interesting to note that by asserting the poets’ drive to experience the spiritual as well as sensual aspects of life, Tsvetaeva confirms Kristeva’s assertion that poetry is a language overwhelmingly determined by irrational and unconscious impulses, i.e. what Kristeva calls the semiotic. However, according to Kristeva’s theory, any text, however irrational, also expresses a

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<sup>547</sup> Karlinsky, *Marina Tsvetaeva. The Woman, her World and her Poetry*, p. 137.

<sup>548</sup> Mentioned by Moore in *The Psalms of Lamentation and the Enigma of Suffering*, p. 46.

rational and culturally acquired language such as that found in the religious, legal or scientific discourses. As was said previously, Kristeva designates this aspect of language as the symbolic.<sup>549</sup> In Tsvetaeva's poem, the symbolic is embodied in the figure of Job, or the lamenting psalmist, whose presence is used not only as a point of comparison but also as a cultural anchorage from which poets overtly distance themselves. As a result, it becomes clear that even when they are addressed to God, Tsvetaeva's complaints fulfil a different function than that found in the complaints of the psalmist: the latter are aimed at being rescued from adversity by God, whereas the former usually stress the lyrical hero/-ines' unsuitability for redemption.

Tsvetaeva's cycle 'Derev'ia' (1923) is also worth examining, since in it the lyrical heroine laments her feeling of isolation and loneliness due to her estrangement from her peers in language that is saturated with references to both psalms and the traditional genre of psalm paraphrase, as Makin remarks;<sup>550</sup> the critic, however, does not elaborate on this statement nor does he proceed to analysis of the psalmic intertext. Consequently, it is worth reading the first poem of the cycle and interpreting its intertextual link with the genre of psalm. This examination will once again confirm Fowler's assertion that the change of the traditional addressee of a genre is often linked with a modification of its function.<sup>551</sup> In the cycle 'Derev'ia' the lyrical heroine expresses a complaint devoid of the expectation of being ultimately rescued by a God-like principle; on the contrary, the lyrical

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<sup>549</sup> See Chapter One, p.26 of the present study.

<sup>550</sup> Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 217.

<sup>551</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, pp. 173-4.

heroine simply gives an artistic outlet to her feeling of alienation, which, it appears, is alleviated at the sight of trees.

In her commentary on ‘Derev’ia’ the critic T. Radomskaia interprets Tsvetaeva’s treatment of trees as a poetic demonstration that she considered them a place where humans can meet God.<sup>552</sup> The interpretation proposed in this section brings a nuance to Radomskaia’s position by arguing that although Tsvetaeva’s trees are endowed with spirituality, they cannot be equated to the monotheist God.<sup>553</sup> Indeed the lyrical heroine’s gesture of addressing trees instead of God testifies to her reluctance to plead with him, as the psalmist does; the lyrical heroine’s unwillingness to address God and thus to remain entirely faithful to the genre of psalms can be explained by the fact that she associated this genre with the male figure of David and thus perceived it to be overwhelmingly masculine. By contrast, in her poems inspired by psalms Tsvetaeva strives to balance the widespread association of the genre with an exclusively masculine voice by linking it with feminine experience. In this perspective, it is worth referring to the critic Nina Osipova who links the poetics of the cycle ‘Derev’ia’ with a feminine way of apprehending the world: ‘В цветаевском цикле в деревья вселяется душа лирической героини [...]. Деревья, принимая душу лирической героини, как бы вбирают в свою стихию весь стихотворный “код” цветаевской лирики, а поэтому радостно-гимническое отношение к лесу (романтический принцип

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<sup>552</sup> T. Radomskaia, *Marina Tsvetaeva: “Beregite gnezdo i dom...”*: *stranitsy russkogo likholetia tvorchestve poeta* (Moscow: Sovpadenie, 2005), pp. 158-9.

<sup>553</sup> This interpretation is confirmed by Revzina’s demonstration, mentioned by Osipova, that the cycle is saturated with pagan images [Nina Osipova, *Tvorchestvo M.I.Tsvetaevoi v kontekste kul’turnoi mifologii Serebriannogo veka* (Kirov: Viatskii gosudarstvennyi pedagogicheskii universitet, 2000), p. 255, note 31].

природности) неотделимо от трагической дисгармонии лесного мира, сложная символика которого на всех уровнях была связана с символикой женского начала.<sup>554</sup> The first poem of the cycle reads as follows:

В смертных изверясь,  
Зачароваться не тщусь.  
В старческий вереск,  
В среброскользящую сушь,

— Пусть моей тени  
Славу трубят трубачи! —  
В вереск-потери,  
В вереск-сухие ручьи.

Старческий вереск!  
Голого камня нарост!  
Удостоверясь  
В тождестве наших сиротств,

Сняв и отринув  
Ключья последней парчи —  
В вереск-руины,  
В вереск-сухие ручьи.

Жизнь: двоедушье  
Дружб и удушье уродств.  
Седью и сушью,  
(Ибо вожатый — суров),

Ввысь, где рябина  
Краше Давида-Царя!  
В вереск-седины,  
В вереск-сухие моря.

This poem is an excellent example of the linguistic dexterity Tsvetaeva achieved in her mature poetry. It is no wonder, then, that the critic Jane Taubman

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<sup>554</sup> Osipova, *Tvorchestvo M.I. Tsvetaevoi v kontekste kul'turnoi mifologii Serebriannogo veka*, pp. 42-3.

considers it, as ‘one of Tsvetaeva’s greatest achievements’.<sup>555</sup> Indeed, both its melodic and lexical aspects are highly original and create a truly enchanting effect. The spell-like quality of the poem is due to the frequent repetitions of the term ‘veresk’ (heather), which is variously compounded to other terms by means of a hyphen. The term ‘veresk’ is subjected to the following variations: starcheskii veresk (senile heather) (line 3), veresk-poteri (heather-losses) (line 7), veresk-sukhie ruch’i (heather-dry streams) (line 8), veresk-ruiny (heather-ruins) (line 15), veresk-sediny (heather-grey-hairs) (line 23), veresk-sukhie moria (heather-dry seas) (line 24). At this stage, it is important to remark that the playfulness of the lyrical heroine’s language provides her with a space in which she finds refuge from her feeling of oppression from her peers. As was repeatedly said, alienation from one’s peers is also a theme treated in psalms of lament. Thus, right from the opening lines, it is possible to link this poem with psalms. However, on its own this parallel is insufficient to establish an undeniable link between the genre of psalms and this poem. The Derzhavinian tonality of ‘V smertnykh izverias’’ is another aspect of the text pointing to the implicit presence not only of biblical psalms but also of the genre of psalm paraphrase. The strong intertextual link between Tsvetaeva’s poetry and that of Derzhavin is fruitfully analysed by the scholars Anna Lisa Crone and Alexandra Smith who highlight Tsvetaeva’s insistence in her essay ‘Poet-alpinist’ (1934) on a literary lineage binding her with Derzhavin and Gronskaia.<sup>556</sup> In their

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<sup>555</sup> Jane Taubman, *A Life Through Poetry. Marina Tsvetaeva’s Lyric Diary*, p. 169.

<sup>556</sup> Anna Lisa Crone and Alexandra Smith, ‘Cheating Death: Derzhavin and Tsvetaeva on the Immortality of the Poet’, *Slavic Almanach: The South African Year Book for Slavic, Central and East European Studies* 3 (1995), pp. 1-30; pp. 2-3.

analysis, Crone and Smith also observe that in her endeavour to establish a literary continuity between Derzhavin and her Tsvetaeva describes Derzhavin as a river.<sup>557</sup> This fact can explain the lyrical heroine's identification with the water-like heather (veresk-sukhie ruch'i; veresk-sukhie moria); in addition, the plant shares with the lyrical heroine a feeling of orphanhood ('V tozhdestve nashikh sirotovtv'), which can be understood as yet another element hinting at the presence of the intertext of psalms in the poem, since the psalmist often complains of loneliness and abandonment. It is also worth noting that in line 21 the lyrical heroine asserts the severity of the leader ('vozhatyi – surov') without giving any other specification; this fact suggests that the lyrical heroine refers to the ultimate leader, i.e. God.

In the last stanza of the poem the so far implicit link between 'V smertnykh izverias'' and the genre of psalm becomes explicit through the lyrical heroine's assertion that she aspires to reach poetic heights in which the rowan tree is more beautiful than King David, i.e. the presumed author of many psalms. This is an enigmatic statement; yet, it becomes understandable if one takes David as a figurative designation of the genre of psalms and if one remembers that in Slavic mythology and folk songs, the rowan tree symbolises feminine melancholy and that the bitter taste of its berries symbolises women's unhappy love.<sup>558</sup> It is possible, now, to see that what David's poetry lacks, according to the lyrical heroine, is a feminine voice.<sup>559</sup> Indeed, as was said previously, originally psalms of lament were

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<sup>557</sup> Crone and Smith, 'Cheating Death: Derzhavin and Tsvetaeva on the Immortality of the Poet', p. 13.

<sup>558</sup> C. Tolstaia, *Slavianskaia mifologiya* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2002), p. 419.

<sup>559</sup> An interesting examination of the image of the rowan tree in Tsvetaeva's poetry is made by the critic Galina Vanechkova: 'Simvol "riabina" v poezii Mariny Tsvetaevoy i ego perevod', *Československá Rusistika* 5 (1982), pp. 197-201.

exclusively sung by male speakers;<sup>560</sup> likewise the Russian tradition of psalm paraphrase is overwhelmingly constituted by male authors. Hence, the lyrical heroine's assertion that she aspires to a poetry in which the rowan tree is more beautiful than King David can be understood as her desire to counter-balance the overriding masculine expression of the genre by integrating into it a more feminine point of view. In this perspective, it is not surprising that Tsvetaeva resorts to folk songs, signified by the mention the rowan tree,<sup>561</sup> because these songs are a traditional a medium through which women express their experience of unhappy love and solitude. This interpretation is confirmed by both 'Kogda obidoi opilas'' (1923), the second poem of the cycle 'Derev'ia' and 'V gibel'nom foliante' (1915). Before analysing these poems, it is worth pausing and pondering how Tsvetaeva apprehended the issue of gender. Not surprisingly, her position on that matter is ambiguous. I do not pretend here to analyse it exhaustively but it is still important to note that Tsvetaeva thought about the link between gender and creation throughout her life. For instance, in 1912 she published a poetic collection, entitled *Volshebnyi fonar'* beginning with an address to the readers where she depicts her new publication as a specifically 'feminine book'.<sup>562</sup> By contrast, in 'Geroi truda' (1925),<sup>563</sup> her essay on Briusov, Tsvetaeva famously refuted the relevance of the gender issue in literature; as she put it: 'Женского вопроса в творчестве нет: есть женские, на человеческий вопрос, ответы, как-то: Сафо – Иоанна д'Арк, Св.

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<sup>560</sup> Chapter 2 of present study, pp. 70-1.

<sup>561</sup> As Vanechkova remarks, the following songs 'Chto stoish', kachaias', tonkaia riabina' and 'Ural'skaia riabinushka' are particularly popular ['Simvol "riabina" v poezii Mariny Tsvetaevoi i ego perevod', p.198].

<sup>562</sup> Tsvetaeva, *Knigi stikhov*, p. 99: 'Милый читатель [...] Прочь размышленья! Ведь женская книга / Только волшебный фонарь'.



Тереза – Беттина Брентано. Есть восхитительные женские вопли («Lettres de M-lle Lespinasse»), есть женская кисть (Rosa Bonheur), но все это – уединенные, о женском вопросе и не подозревавшие, его этим неподозрением – уничтожавшие (уничтожившие)’ (IV, 38). Despite her overt denigration of the relevance of gender for the artist, Tsvetaeva did not hesitate to assert that her poetic creation provided her with the sense of womanhood that she lacked in real life, as testified by the following extract of her personal notes: ‘Женственность во мне не от пола, а от творчества.’<sup>564</sup> These few observations make clear that although she was reluctant to acknowledge it, Tsvetaeva felt it impossible to exclude altogether the issue of gender from her poetry. In the present study, I focus on the poems in which Tsvetaeva links the issue of gender with the genre of psalms, as is the case in ‘V gibel’nom foliante’ that reads as follows:

В гибельном фолианте  
 Нету соблазна для  
 Женщины. — Ars Amandi  
 Женщине — вся земля.

Сердце — любовных зелий  
 Зелье — вернее всех.  
 Женщина с колыбели  
 Чей-нибудь смертный грех.

Ах, далеко до неба!  
 Губы — близки во мгле...  
 — Бог, не суди! — Ты не был  
 Женщиной на земле!

It is important to note that this poem was written in 1915. This year can be considered a landmark in Tsvetaeva’s outlook on gender, since it was not only the

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<sup>564</sup> Tsvetaeva, *Neizdannoe; Svodnye tetradi*, p. 78.

year of Tsvetaeva's relationship with the woman poet Sof'ia Parnok (1885-1933) but also the year of the first posthumous edition of the work of Karolina Pavlova (1807-1893).<sup>565</sup> Concerning Tsvetaeva's interest in her female predecessor, it is worth referring to Venclova's study<sup>566</sup> in which the critic proposes a well-documented account of the long-lasting influence played by Pavlova in Tsvetaeva's poetry, which is explicated by the fact that 'from an early youth Cvêtaeva sought an authoritative model according to which she could compose the biography and image of a woman poet.'<sup>567</sup> Interestingly, one of the reasons Tsvetaeva felt close to Pavlova, Venclova convincingly argues, was that both poets expressed a marked desire 'to neutralize (or transcend) the opposition *masculine / feminine*'<sup>568</sup> but failed to do so 'within the limits of the given cultural code'.<sup>569</sup> This is an interesting point because the poem 'V gibel'nom foliante' is a poetic meditation on the inadequacy of cultural representations of women, in which the lyrical heroine demonstratively rejects the culturally well-established form constituted by the genre of individual lament. Indeed, in the final lines of the poem the lyrical heroine addresses God in a way that, at first sight, sounds highly similar to psalms of lament, since it is a direct address to God followed by a petition made in the imperative. However, there is a significant difference: in traditional psalms of lament, the author asks God to judge

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<sup>565</sup> Taubman, *A Life Through Poetry*, pp. 48-9.

<sup>566</sup> Tomas Venclova, 'Almost a Hundred Years Later: Toward a Comparison of Karolina Pavlova and Marina Cvêtaeva' in *Essays on Karolina Pavlova* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2001), pp. 187-214.

<sup>567</sup> Venclova, 'Almost a Hundred Years Later: Toward a Comparison of Karolina Pavlova and Marina Cvêtaeva', p. 190.

<sup>568</sup> Venclova, 'Almost a Hundred Years Later: Toward a Comparison of Karolina Pavlova and Marina Cvêtaeva', p. 197.

<sup>569</sup> Venclova, 'Almost a Hundred Years Later: Toward a Comparison of Karolina Pavlova and Marina Cvêtaeva', p. 197.

his situation fairly and to intervene in order to restore order in his life and even save him, as the following examples testify: 'Arise, O Lord; save me' (psalm 3:7); 'Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness' (psalm 5:8); 'Judge me, o Lord, according to my righteousness' (psalm 7:8); 'Judge me, O Lord my God, according to thy righteousness' (psalm 35:24); by contrast, Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine enjoins God not to judge, i.e. not to get involved in her life. In doing so, she implicitly refutes the relevance of the most important generic feature of the psalm of lament, namely the plea to God to intervene. This refusal of God's judgement and intervention is most likely to originate in the lyrical heroine's view that the Judeo-Christian tradition of considering women as the source of sin does not allow a fair assessment of the feminine condition. In short, 'V gibel'nom foliante' suggests Tsvetaeva's awareness that at the time of the poem's writing female authors had not yet found a fair recognition of their value, because of the traditional Judeo-Christian association of woman with the idea of sin. Interestingly, in the first stanza of the poem, the lyrical heroine also dismisses the relevance of the discourse on love proposed by Ovid and that is why she refers to his *Ars Amandi* and asserts the irrelevance of this text by suggesting that women do not need to approach love in intellectual terms, because they experience its fullness in their earthly experience. A variation on this theme is given in the next stanza, in which the lyrical heroine suggests that women do not need aphrodisiacs, because they experience heartfelt love. However, the lyrical heroine specifies that despite their profound and sincere ability to love women are considered essentially sinful (Zhenishchina s kolybeli / Chei-nibud' smertnyi grekh). This assertion leads to the lyrical heroine's rejection of the

traditional values attributed to men and women by the Judeo-Christian tradition, which she expresses by directly addressing God. However, instead of asking him to apply his wisdom and assess the situation, as does the psalmist when he laments his woe, Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine pleads with God to refrain from judging, because of his ignorance of the feminine condition. This is a very demonstrative gesture indicating the lyrical heroine's view of the inappropriateness of the association of women with sin. It also betrays the lyrical heroine's lack of faith in God's omniscience.

The interpretation of 'V gibel'nom foliante' shows that Tsvetaeva considers psalms of lament insufficient because their voice is exclusively masculine. Hence, in the first part of her poem 'V smertnykh izverias' she expresses the idea that folk songs constitute a complementary genre because they predominantly voice feminine issues. As a result in 'Kogda obidoi opilas'', the second poem of the cycle 'Derev'ia', Tsvetaeva no longer opposes psalms to folk songs but figuratively blends these two different genres by referring to her personal psalm, which ostensibly associates the typically feminine bitterness of the lyrical heroine's experience, symbolically represented with the image of the rowan tree, with the genre of psalm. The text reads as follows:

Когда обидой – опилась  
Душа разгневанная,  
Когда семижды зареклась  
Сражаться с демонами –

Не с теми, ливнями огней  
В бездну нисхлестнутыми:  
С земными низостями дней,  
С людскими костностями –

Деревья! К вам иду! Спастись  
От рева рыночного!  
Вашими вымахами ввысь  
Как сердце выдышано!

Дуб богоборческий! В бои  
Всем корнем шествующий!  
Ивы-провидицы мои!  
Березы-девственницы!

Вяз – яростный Авессалом,  
На пытке вздыбленная  
Сосна – ты уст моих псалом:  
Горечь рябиновая...

Right from the beginning the lyrical heroine expresses a strong feeling of bitterness in her description of what compels her to soothe her incensed soul among the trees: as she confesses, it is after promising seven times to give up fighting the demonic forces hidden in the humdrum of daily routines and people's rigidities that she flees to the trees and seeks spiritual salvation from the roar of market. An important point to note is the lyrical heroine's remark made in line 3 and 4 where she hints at the fact that the demonic forces of civilisation she flees are not those demonic forces manifested by downpours of fire that have disappeared into a chasm. This is a rather enigmatic comment and worth finding out which are demonic the forces said to have vanished. It is possible to interpret the demonic downpours of fire as a metaphorical designation of artistic creativity that, although it is also linked with a demonic force, would not force the lyrical heroine to flee. Indeed, contrary to the rigid monotony of everyday life, artistic creation is marked by a constant mobility and vividness, figuratively represented by means of the image of showers of fire.

It is worth stressing the fact that the lyrical heroine promises seven times to stop fighting against the oppression she feels in the pragmatic world of daily routines before realising the uselessness of such a promise and joining the arboreal world. This is an interesting point because it can be related to psalm 12 which describes the utter isolation of the righteous man, who is said to be ultimately saved by God, whose speech has been purified seven times before being uttered, as the psalmist says. Let us read an extract of psalm 12 and see how it resonates with Tsvetaeva's poem:

Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men.

[...]

For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.

The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.

Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.

The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted.

This passage shows well that, like Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine, the psalmist feels surrounded by inimical people. Thus he insists on the necessity to prevent the seven times purified words of God from being spoilt and that is why he suggests making them unreachable for people. Now, it is possible to see that in Tsvetaeva's poem the qualities attributed to God by the psalmist are also mentioned but they are not embodied by a single entity; on the contrary they are distributed between the

trees and the lyrical heroine. Indeed, the divine ability to protect is associated with the trees, while verbal creation, associated with the fire and the number seven, is the attribute of the lyrical heroine.

At this stage it is important to stress that the image of the tree is intimately linked with the genre of psalm. Indeed, in the biblical passage that narrates David's first performance of a psalm, those who chant psalms are compared to trees in the following way: 'Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him [...] Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually [...] Then shall the trees of the wood sing out at the presence of the Lord'.<sup>570</sup> Furthermore, the opening psalm of the Psalter establishes equivalence between the righteous man and an ever blossoming tree by asserting that like the latter the former thrives for ever: 'he shall be like a tree [...]; his leaf shall not wither'.<sup>571</sup> Now, let us highlight that in Tsvetaeva's poetry the image of the tree is ambivalent. Even though it often stands for majestic beauty and elevated spirituality, it can also represent a dark principle: for instance, in her cycle 'Bog' (1922) Tsvetaeva depicts the forest as a dark place ( '– тѣмѣн, ох тѣмѣн лѣс', (II, 158)). Interestingly, the dark aspect of trees is also expressed in the last two stanzas of 'Kogda obidoi opilas'' where the lyrical heroine reflects her mixed feelings towards God by associating different types of trees with her conflicting religious attitudes. Here, it is important to stress that in Slavic mythology trees are seen as sexual entities. Thus the oak stands for a masculine principle, while the birch symbolizes feminine qualities<sup>572</sup> as does the willow. Tsvetaeva was well aware of this link, as shown by the following statement: 'Ива – душа и облик

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<sup>570</sup> 1 Chronicles 16: 9, 11, 33.

<sup>571</sup> Psalm 1:3.

<sup>572</sup> Tolstaia, *Slavianskaia mifologiya*, p. 134.

женщины!’<sup>573</sup> In the poem, the trees associated with a masculine principle are those representing the God-defiant side of the lyrical heroine. Thus the oak represents the part of the lyrical heroine, which resists the idea of an omnipotent God, since it is said to be an entity that fights with God (‘Dub bogoborcheskii’), as does the elm, which is associated with David’s rebellious son Absalom. At the same time, the lyrical heroine also feels close to trees connoted by femininity such as birches and willows. Thus, it is possible to argue that by mixing trees associated with a masculine principle with those associated with a feminine principle, the poem reflects Tsvetaeva’s conviction of the necessity of overcoming gender limitation. This interpretation is confirmed in the next and final stanza where the lyrical heroine proclaims that the pine is her personal psalm and then characterises it as being as bitter as rowan berries: ‘Sosna – ty ust moikh psalom: / Gorech’ riabinoiaia...’ This is an especially important line not only because it confirms that the genre of psalms is present as an intertextual entity in this poem but also because by asserting that the content of psalm is similar to the bitterness of the rowan berries, it asserts the necessity to integrate feminine experience into the generic framework of psalm. Incidentally, the pine was Tsvetaeva’s favourite tree; as she puts it: ‘Сосны – мое до безумия любимое дерево’.<sup>574</sup> Hence, Tsvetaeva’s identification of a pine with a psalm shows that she highly valued this genre.

As was just shown, the present chapter demonstrates that Tsvetaeva’s modification of the function of the psalmic intertext consists in the creation of poetic praises to God in which the praising function is presented in such a way that

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<sup>573</sup> Tsvetaeva, *Derev’ia! K vam idu*, edited by Natal’ia Lartseva (Petrozavodsk: PetroPress, 2002), p. 72.

<sup>574</sup> Tsvetaeva, *Derev’ia! K vam idu*, p. 18.



it is tinged with doubts; on the other hand, the complaint function is modified in such a way that it highlights the limitations of the intertext, namely its ignorance of the feminine specificity. Yet, at the same time, Tsvetaeva again and again resorts to the intertext of psalms; such a persistence testifies to the fact that, even though its original form needs to be modified in order to resonate with the values of Tsvetaeva's personal outlook and cultural context, Tsvetaeva was receptive to the psalms' universal appeal and that is why she revives this genre by making it an intertext of her poetry. This fact confirms Fowler's assertion that a literary genre can remain alive, centuries after its artistic apogee, as long as it is able to adjust to new literary contexts by modifying itself.

## **Chapter Four: Generic Mixture**

The aim of the present chapter is to analyse the way in which Tsvetaeva blends the psalmic intertext with other literary genres; this investigation will enable me to show that when it is mixed with other genres, the psalmic intertext is partly altered. To put it differently, the following examination sheds light on the alterations which the psalmic intertext undergoes when it is mingled with other genres. Ultimately, examining the place of the psalmic intertext within the overall generic economy of Tsvetaeva's poetry will make it possible to unveil the significance of this specific intertext for Tsvetaeva. As will be shown, psalms provide her with a model reinforcing the lyrical heroine's meditation on the issue of personal and/or universal suffering and its relation to faith. Concretely, I will analyse how Tsvetaeva modulates the genre of psalms within the following genres: diary-writing; epistolary writing and folk songs.

According to Fowler, generic mixture corresponds to the combination of typical features and devices traditionally associated with different literary genres. This is what happens, for example, in the genre of tragicomedy, which mixes tragic and comic elements into a single work.<sup>575</sup> Concerning the genre of psalms, it is important to note that generic mixture is especially relevant, since it is a significant feature of both the original biblical psalms and their literary paraphrases. Indeed, taken in isolation from literary history, the original genre of biblical psalms is

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<sup>575</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, pp. 187-8.

composed of different types of psalms such as the lament psalm or psalms of praise. However, it is not unusual for these types to mingle and that is why many laments end with praise, while it is relatively common that the psalmist praising God remembers a lament of the past.<sup>576</sup> This is an interesting fact because it reproduces, within the genre of psalms, the phenomenon of generic mixture that happens at the macro-level of literary history, where genres are in constant interaction. It is no wonder, then, that the genre of psalm paraphrase has been mixing with other genres for centuries. In fact, even before it became a distinct literary genre, psalm paraphrase was commonly found in ancient Russian literature and chronicles.<sup>577</sup> After becoming a genre on its own in the eighteenth century, psalm paraphrase soon started to mingle with other genres such as the scientific treatise, as in Lomonosov's spiritual poetry<sup>578</sup> or the political pamphlet, as is the case in Glinka's elegiac odes.<sup>579</sup>

This chapter demonstrates that Tsvetaeva's psalmic modulation is inseparable from the genre-modifying process of generic mixture. The ability of the generic intertext of psalms to blend harmoniously with other genres explains why it is well integrated into the various generic frameworks of Tsvetaeva's poems. As was said earlier, Tsvetaeva resorts to a multitude of genres and that is why it is difficult, if

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<sup>576</sup> Psalm 40 is a striking example of the psalmist's tendency to mix complaint with praise, as testified by the following extract: 'I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song into my mouth, even praise unto our God [...]'.  
<sup>577</sup> Lutsevich, *Psaltyr' v russkoi poezii*, pp. 39-57.  
<sup>578</sup> L. Efimova, 'Evoliutsiia zhanrov dukhovnoi liriki v tvorchestve russkikh poetov XVIII v.' in *Zhanrovoe svoeobrazie russkoi i zarubezhnoi literatury XVIII – XX vekov*, edited by O. Serdiukova (Samara: Izdatel'stvo SPGU, 2002), pp. 3-9; p. 5.  
<sup>579</sup> V. Bazanov, *Poeticheskoe nasledie Fedora Glinki (10-30-e gody)* (Petrozavodsk: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo Karelo-Finskoi SSR, 1950), p. 58.

not impossible, to pinpoint a single dominant genre in her writing; it remains true, though, that whichever is the main generic framework of Tsvetaeva's poems, a significant number of them<sup>580</sup> resort to typical features of the genre of psalms and that is why it is fair to say that Tsvetaeva's poetry modulates this genre. As said in Chapter One, a genre's modulation consists in the preservation of certain characteristics of a genre within another generic framework, which incorporates the modulated genre. Fowler explains the link between generic mixture and modulation in the following way: 'Generic mixtures need not be full-blown hybrids. In fact, it is more usual for one of the genres to be only a modal abstraction with a token repertoire. We shall call such mixture "modulation". In modulation, the proportion of modal ingredient may vary widely, which leads to correspondingly various effects, from overall tones to touches of local color'.<sup>581</sup> Insofar as the phenomenon of modulation always implies two genres, namely the genre modulated and the genre in which the modulation occurs, a genre's modulation cannot be realised without generic mixture.

#### 4.1. Tsvetaeva's Integration of the Psalmic Intertext within the Broader Generic Framework of Diary-Writing

This section consists in a concrete examination of Tsvetaeva's marked tendency to mix genres through the analysis of her integration of the intertext of

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<sup>580</sup> In the present study I analyse thirty one poems related in one way or another to psalmic poetry. This sample, however, is not exhaustive and could be expanded.

<sup>581</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 191.

psalms into her diary-like poetry. To do so, I will first stress the importance of the diary genre in Tsvetaeva's approach and then show how this particular generic framework contributes to Tsvetaeva's successful integration of the psalmic intertext into her poetry. An attentive reading of works such as 'Molitva' (1909), 'Eshche molitva' (1910), 'Molitva v stolovoi' (date unknown), 'Molitva lodki' (date unknown), 'Molitva moriu' (date unknown), 'Ia prishla k tebe chernoi polnoch'iu' (1916), 'Mirovye nachalos' vo mgle kochev'e' (1917), 'Dorozhkoiu prostonarodnoiu' (1919), 'Kogda zhe, Gospodin' (1922), 'O slezy na glazakh' (1939) will underline that they are comparable not only because they all participate in one way or another to the diary orientation of Tsvetaeva's poetry but also because they all broach the issue of human suffering. The recurrence of this theme undoubtedly compelled Tsvetaeva to resort to the psalmic intertext. Indeed, as was said in Chapter Two a fruitful way of interpreting psalms of lament is to recognise that they constitute a timeless meditation on human suffering. The poems interpreted in this section prove that Tsvetaeva did not miss this point. Moreover, her subtle integration of psalms into the wider framework of diary-writing shows that she understands the relevance of the genre in her meditation about the specificities of her personal life.

From the very beginning of her poetic career Tsvetaeva highlighted the diary orientation of her poems. Indeed, by dedicating *Vechernii al'bom* (1910) to the memory of Mariia Bashkirtseva (1864-1884),<sup>582</sup> the author of a spectacularly

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<sup>582</sup> Tsvetaeva expresses her boundless admiration for Bashkirtseva in letter to Rozanov (7.03.1914) in which she writes: 'Марию Башкирцеву я люблю безумно, с безумной любовью' (VI, 119).

successful diary published after her early death, Tsvetaeva hinted at a link between her lyrical poetry and the genre of diary-writing. A couple of years later, Tsvetaeva reasserted the importance of the diary-orientation of her poetry in her foreword to *Iz dvukh knig* (1913), her third collection of verse, in fact a selection of some already-published poems, where she explicitly associates her poetry with the genre of personal diary; as she puts it: 'Мои стихи – дневник, моя поэзия – поэзия собственных имен'.<sup>583</sup>

The diary orientation of Tsvetaeva's collections is perceptible in the fact that their poems are often dated, follow a chronological order and express a strong sense of intimacy that was previously unseen in the mainstream of Russian poetry. In doing so, Tsvetaeva transgressed an unspoken rule of the literary establishment, stating that, to become available to the public, an artistic text should avoid focusing on the apparently trifling details of the author's personal life and strive to generalise it so that his/her personal experience becomes universal enough to enable the public to relate to it. This is obviously not the case in *Vechernii al'bom*, which abounds with poems depicting scenes of the author's family life written in a charmingly childish and naïve manner. Indeed, even a cursory reading of Tsvetaeva's first collection makes it plain that she happily oversteps the tacit literary rule. Tsvetaeva's innovation attracted the attention of the main literary figures of her time and almost all of them noticed the novelty of her intimate tone, even though they assessed it differently. For example, the acmeist poet Nikolai Gumilev (1886-1921) wrote:

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<sup>583</sup> Tsvetaeva, *Knigi stikhov*, p. 174.

Много ново в этой книге: нова смелая (иногда чрезмерно) интимность; новы темы, напр. детская влюбленность; ново непосредственное, бездумное ликование пустяками жизни. И, как и надо думать, здесь инстинктивно угаданы все главнейшие законы поэзии.<sup>584</sup>

Here, it is difficult not to notice Gumilev's insistence on the novelty of Tsvetaeva's first collection. Although Gumilev does not speak directly of literary genres, the three aspects of Tsvetaeva's poetry in which Gumilev considers that she innovates correspond to what Fowler calls a generic indicator, i.e. a feature that is commonly used to define a genre.<sup>585</sup> Indeed, the tone, theme(s) and mood of a literary work are, most of the time, connected to its genre. For instance, the genre of the classical ode implies a lofty tone, an elevated theme and enthusiastic mood. In the light of this observation, it is worth coming back to Gumilev's comment on *Vechernii al'bom*. Tsvetaeva's innovations being either too new or too idiosyncratic to be related to any established literary genre, Gumilev asserts that she has instinctively, as opposed to conventionally, grasped the main rules of poetry. By contrast, Briusov considered that in *Vechernii al'bom* Tsvetaeva displayed an undisputable breach of literary conventions by being far too personal. Although it has already been quoted by many critics, it is worth reproducing an extract from Briusov's (in-)famous review, since it is especially relevant to the question of genre:

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<sup>584</sup> N. Gumilev, 'Pis'ma o russkoi poezii' in *Marina Tsvetaeva v kritike sovremennikov. Rodstvo i chuzhdost'*, two volumes, edited by Lev Mnukhin and others (Moscow: Agraf, 2003), I, pp. 29-30.

<sup>585</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 60.

Стихи Марины Цветаевой [...] всегда отправляются от какого-нибудь реального факта, от чего-нибудь действительно пережито. Не боясь вводить в поэзию повседневность, она берет непосредственно черты жизни, и это придает ее стихам жуткую интимность. Когда читаешь ее книгу, минутами становится неловко, словно заглянул в чужую квартиру и подсмотрел сцену, видеть которую не должны были посторонние. [...]. Получаются уже не поэтические создания [...], но просто страницы личного дневника.<sup>586</sup>

Briusov is reluctant to fully accept the literary and artistic values of Tsvetaeva's poetry because of its overtly personal and intimate tone, which he links with the genre of diary-writing. Inasmuch the diary form is generally considered as extra-literary, unless it is a faked and literarily stylised diary, Briusov does not accept its relevance in a poetic work. At this point, it is important to be aware of Briusov's self-contradictory stance and the gender discrimination it implies. Indeed, as Taubman judiciously remarks 'it was not the intimacy of Tsvetaeva's verse *per se* which discomforted Briusov. As a pioneer of Russian "decadence" Briusov himself had introduced into his works intimacies of a different sort – primarily sexual – previously taboo in Russian poetry. In his condescension to the "homeyness" and "elegant trifles" of her subjects, there is the clear disdain of the traditional "poet-seer" for the *feminine* intimate life.'<sup>587</sup> This remark is especially valuable for it raises once again the question of the connection of gender with genre. In this regard, it is worth noting that in his article devoted to autobiographical forms of writing (which include the diary) the French critic Claude

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<sup>586</sup> V. Briusov, 'Novye sborniki stikhov' in *Marina Tsvetaeva v kritike sovremennikov*, I, pp. 27-29; p. 28.

<sup>587</sup> Taubman, *A Life Through Poetry*, p. 34.



Burgelin also notices how intimate literary genres tend to be ostracised from the field of literature, especially when associated with women's writing.<sup>588</sup> This observation explains Briusov's disdainful attitude to Tsvetaeva's expression of her feminine experience, which he considered an inadequate topic.<sup>589</sup> In this perspective, it is worth quoting Tsvetaeva's defence of Akhmatova's poetry, which was also oriented toward the diary genre: 'О творчестве Ахматовой. – «Все о себе, все о любви!». Да, о себе, о любви – и еще – изумительно – о серебряном голосе оленя, [...], об адском танце танцовщицы, – и так, без конца. [...] И Ахматова, не написав ни одной отвлеченно-общественной строчки, глубже всего – через описание пера на шляпе – передаст потомкам свой век'.<sup>590</sup> This statement highlights Tsvetaeva's belief that to compose intimate poetry is far from being a shallow and egocentric endeavour; on the contrary, Tsvetaeva proclaims the ability of the poet to convey essential truths in a simple way. To come back to the criticism addressed to Tsvetaeva, it is worth noticing that most critics, including Briusov, underestimated the truly artistic value of her early poetry and overestimated its spontaneity. I argue that although it is orientated toward the diary genre, Tsvetaeva's poetry is not a genuine diary, since it is made up of well-structured poems. In this regard, the following observation made by the scholar Gary Saul Morson on Dostoevskii's *The Diary of a Writer* applies equally to Tsvetaeva's diary-like poetry: '*The Diary of a Writer* is not simply a diary of a

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<sup>588</sup> Claude Burgelin, 'L'autobiographie, genre métis' in *L'autobiographie en procès. Actes du colloque de Nanterre, 18-19 octobre 1996*, edited by Philippe Lejeune (Paris: University Paris X, 1997), pp. 143-54; p. 146.

<sup>590</sup> Tsvetaeva, *Neizdannoe. Zapisnye knizhki v dvukh tomakh, tom pervyi 1913-1919*, p. 150. My emphasis (S.O.C.).

writer. It is, again, not a writer's notebook, but a literary work in the form of a writer's notebook – a distinction no less hermeneutically significant than that between nonliterary and literary familiar letters. We need only glance at the real notebooks for this literary notebook to see the difference between real and scripted spontaneity, between ellipticality to the point of incoherence and digressiveness or disconnectedness recognizable as metaliterary topoi.<sup>591</sup> This fundamental difference between the genuinely intimate diary of ordinary people and that of writers is also stressed by the critic Philippe Lejeune, an eminent specialist in diary-writing who, similarly to Morson, remarks ordinary diaries do not display any structure or literary artifice.<sup>592</sup>

Finally, let us note that, unlike Briusov, the poet and thinker Maksimilian Voloshin (1877 -1932) did not consider the diary orientation of Tsvetaeva's collection as a flaw but rather as a good quality. As he puts it: 'Это очень юная и неопытная книга – «Вечерний альбом». [...] Ее нужно читать подряд, как дневник, и тогда каждая строчка будет понятна и уместна'.<sup>593</sup>

Let us analyse now how Tsvetaeva integrates the psalmic intertext in her diary-like poetry through the analysis of the poem 'Molitva', which reads as follows:

Христос и Бог! Я жажду чуда  
Теперь, сейчас, в начале дня!  
О, дай мне умереть, покуда  
Вся жизнь как книга для меня.

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<sup>591</sup> G. S. Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre. Dostoevsky's Diary of a Writer and The Traditions of Literary Utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 60.

<sup>592</sup> "Cher cahier..." *Témoignages sur le journal personnel*, edited by Phillipe Lejeune (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), p. 12.

<sup>593</sup> M. Voloshin, 'Zhenskaia poeziia' in *Marina Tsvetaeva v kritike sovremennikov*, I, pp. 23- 27; p. 24.

Ты мудрый, ты не скажешь строго:  
– «Терпи, еще не кончен срок».  
Ты сам мне подал – слишком много!  
Я жажду сразу – всех дорог!

Всего хочу: с душой цыгана  
Идти под песни на разбой,  
За всех страдать под звук органа  
И амазонкой мчаться в бой;

Гадать по звездам в черной башне,  
Вести детей вперед, сквозь тень...  
Чтоб был легендой – день вчерашний,  
Чтоб был безумьем – каждый день!

Люблю и крест и шелк, и каски,  
Моя душа мгновений след...  
Ты дал мне детство – лучше сказки  
И дай мне смерть – в семнадцать лет!  
(26 сентября 1909) (I, 32).

In my view, Dinega's interpretation that 'Molitva' 'sounds as an elaborate, self-consciously ironic bluff'<sup>594</sup> is erroneous and that is why I intend to show that this poem is a convincing demonstration that right from the beginning of her career Tsvetaeva did not hesitate to write overtly and sincerely in the framework of personal poetic prayer and to adjust it to her artistic demands.

The date of the poem indicates that 'Molitva' was written on Tsvetaeva's seventeenth birthday and thus constitutes a poetic record of her frame of mind on that day. In this respect, Tsvetaeva's poem displays a typical feature of diary-writing, namely the genre's ability to mirror 'the attitudes, feelings, and thoughts of

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<sup>594</sup> Dinega, *A Russian Psyche*, p. 19.

individual days'.<sup>595</sup> Another feature of diary-writing present in 'Molitva' is the fact that in it the author records what she considers to be an important event of her life, i.e. her parting with childhood, symbolised by her seventeenth birthday. In short, 'Molitva' displays two typical features of diary-writing, namely the transcription of some of the fleeting thoughts occurring to the author during a particular day and the recording of an event significant in the author's life-chronology.

Having shown the presence of the genre of diary-writing in 'Molitva', let us examine now how it mixes with some of the characteristic features of psalmic poetry. To begin with, the designation of the poem as a prayer in its title immediately establishes a link with psalms, because they are, by definition, prayers. The opening line of the poem reinforces this connection, since it is made up of a direct address to God, which is characteristic of prayers in general and psalms in particular. Moreover, the lyrical heroine's assertion that she longs for a miracle ('ia zhazhdu chuda') is formulated in terms that are typical of the Psalter where the psalmist often refers to his quest for God in terms of spiritual thirst; for instance, in psalm 42:2 he says: 'My soul thirsteth for God' and in Russian: 'Жаждет душа моя к Бору' (41:3\*). Concerning the mention of a miracle, it is worth noting that implicitly refers to God, since only a divine instance can realise miracles. It appears, then, that the poem's first line is saturated with a psalmic-like idiom. The only discrepancy is the mention of Christ, which never appears in psalms, because they antedate the Christian era. Let us remark that by calling on Christ as well as

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<sup>595</sup> William Matthews, 'The Diary: A Neglected Genre', *The Sewanee Review* 2 (1977), pp. 286-300; p. 288. Here, let us note that I disagree with Matthews' further assertion stating that there is no introspective or extrospective thought in the genre of the diary.

God the lyrical heroine indicates that she seeks to communicate with the human face of the divine.

The second line of the poem is also reminiscent of psalmic poetics in that its threefold reformulation of the idea of immediacy recalls the principle of semantic heightening that lies at the heart of psalmic poetry, as was said in Chapter Two.<sup>596</sup> Thus the second line of the poem is made up of three lexemes that all refer to the lyrical heroine's feeling of urgency to see an immediate realisation of her request to die, expressed in the poem's third and fourth lines.

The second stanza opens with the lyrical heroine's reply to the anticipated answer of God: 'Ty mudryi, ty ne skazhesh' strogo: / – «Terpi, eshche ne konchen srok»'. Interestingly, the citation of God's words is also highly reminiscent of psalms.<sup>597</sup> For instance, in psalm 46:10 the author repeats God's injunction to obey him: 'Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth'; likewise the author of psalm 50 reports a lengthy divine speech which calls 'the people away from self-centeredness to proper relationship with God',<sup>598</sup> who asserts his readiness to help as follows: 'call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me' (psalm 50:15). In 'Molitva', however, far from deterring the lyrical heroine from her self-centeredness and thus reinforcing God's authority, the quotation of God's words emphasises the lyrical heroine's egocentrism that is typical of her age. Thus, having

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<sup>596</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, p. 19.

<sup>597</sup> Levine, 'The Dialogic Discourse of Psalms' in *Hermeneutics, the Bible and Literary Criticism*, pp. 147-52.

<sup>598</sup> Clinton and Mc Cann, 'The Book of Psalms', p. 881.

reported God's predictable negative answer to her plea to send her an early death, the lyrical heroine immediately commands him not to utter his reply. To put it differently, she enjoins God not to profess to her his way, but to follow her wishes. This injunction is followed by the lyrical heroine's justification consisting in the assertion that her excessive eagerness to experience life to the full is a God-given quality.<sup>599</sup> As she puts it: 'Ty sam mne podal – slishkom mnogo'. Here, it is worth noting that the reproachful tone of the lyrical heroine's justification also echoes the genre of psalms. As was already said, reproachful questions to God are voiced in the overwhelming majority of psalms of lament. For instance, in psalm 2:1 the author addresses God by asking him 'Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing?', while the lamenter of psalm 22:1 cries to God '[...] why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?' Moreover, the act of justifying one's plea to God is also typical of psalms. Yet, while psalms of lament are based on the psalmist's plea to bring an end to his suffering, Tsvetaeva's 'Molitva' is based on her wish to extend her current happiness. It appears clearly, then, that the lyrical heroine uses formal features of the genre of psalms, while modifying its content by getting rid of the psalms' traditional moral and replacing it by a romantic outlook focusing on the intensity of personal experience.

In the last stanza, the lyrical heroine summarises the whole poem by highlighting her drive to experience the many different aspects of life in the following terms: 'Liubliu i krest, i shelk, i kaski'. In the first line, the lyrical heroine

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<sup>599</sup> Interestingly, Tsvetaeva expresses a similar position in her already quoted letter to Rozanov in March 1914 in which she writes: 'Я совсем не верю в существование Бога. [...] Но ведь я не виновата. Если Бог есть – Он ведь создал меня такой!' (VI, 120).

repeats the idea evoked in line eleventh where she proclaims that she is attracted by suffering by mentioning her love of the cross; interestingly, the lyrical heroine's attraction to suffering does not imply that she avoids the glittery world of feminine fashion, which she designates metaphorically with the mention of silk; finally, given her boldness, it is not surprising that the lyrical heroine is also attracted to adventurers, metaphorically designated with the mention of helmets. Concluding this enumeration, the lyrical heroine explains the presence of such diverse endeavours by the inconsistency of her spiritual life. As she puts it: 'My soul is the trace of instants...' ('Moia dusha mgnovenii sled...'), which implies the possibility, for each instant to have a different emotional colouration. This assertion is worth noticing, because it indicates the presence of another common feature between Tsvetaeva's 'Molitva' and the genre of psalms, namely the sudden change of mood.<sup>600</sup> However, in psalms of lament the sudden change of mood is very codified in that it goes from despair to jubilation,<sup>601</sup> whereas in 'Molitva' the lyrical heroine's volatility of mood does not display any logical or distinct pattern. In this regard, it confirms Matthews' observation, according to which 'better than any other kind of personal document, the diary reflects the shifts and inconsistencies of ordinary human behaviour.'<sup>602</sup>

In the context of *Vechernii al'bom*, 'Molitva' is clearly linked with 'Eshche molitva' (1910), the last poem of the collection, in which Tsvetaeva also

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<sup>600</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 180.

<sup>601</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 180.

<sup>602</sup> Matthews, 'The Diary: A Neglected Genre', p. 288.

reworks the genre of psalms within the broader generic framework of diary. The poem reads as follows:

И опять перед Тобой склоняю колени,  
В отдаленье завидев Твой звездный венец.  
Дай мне понять, Христос, что не все только тени,  
Дай не тень мне обнять, наконец.

Я измучена этими длинными днями  
Без заботы, без цели, всегда в полумгле...  
Можно тени любить, но живут ли тенями  
Восемнадцати лет на земле?

И поют ведь, и пишут, что счастье вначале!  
Расцвести всей душой бы ликующей, всей!  
Но не правда ль: ведь счастья нет вне печали?  
Кроме мертвых, ведь нету друзей?

Ведь от века зажженные верой иною  
Укрывались от мира в безлюдье пустынь?  
Нет, не надо улыбок, добытых ценою  
Осквернения высших святынь.

Мне не надо блаженства ценой унижений,  
Мне не надо любви! Я не грущу – не о ней.  
Дай мне душу, Спаситель, отдать – только тени  
В тихом царстве любимых теней. (I, 97-8)

‘Eshche molitva’ displays numerous features typical of psalms. In the opening line Tsvetaeva introduces a characteristic device of psalms of lament, namely the depiction of the act of praying in which the lyrical heroine describes herself kneeling in a prayer-like position. As was previously said, in the original psalms of lament portrayals of the act of praying are an important component serving to highlight the urgency of the prayer.<sup>603</sup> For instance, in psalm 88:9 the lamenter

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<sup>603</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 161.



depicts his religious commitment as follows: ‘Lord, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee’.

The second aspect of the poem that echoes psalms of lament is the address to God in which the lyrical heroine addresses Christ rather than God. In doing so, she insists on the human dimension of the divine addressee, preferring it to its unreachable counterpart.<sup>604</sup> The modification of the form of address is an important point, since it betrays Tsvetaeva’s perception of the Old Testament as being more difficult to approach than the New Testament; as she puts it in her correspondence: ‘Какая тяжесть – Ветхий завет! И какое освобождение – Новый’ (VI, 528). To come back to the link between ‘Eshche molitva’ and psalms of lament, it is worth noting that the lyrical heroine’s plea to Christ to enlighten her and to send her a companion (‘Dai ne ten’ mne obniat’’) is comparable to the traditional petition of the psalms in that it is made in the imperative and thus indicates a sense of urgency similar to that expressed by the lamenting psalmist, who does not hesitate to urge God to pay attention to him, as in the following passage: ‘Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry’ (psalm 88:2). In addition, the lyrical heroine’s inquisitive tone, which manifests itself in a series of questions to the divine addressee, is also characteristic of psalms in which the lamenter expresses his bafflement at the harshness of his fate in an interrogative way. Typical of that phenomenon is psalm 10:1, in which the Psalmist starts his prayer with a series of questions: ‘Why, standest thou afar off, O LORD? Why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?’ In other psalms, questions are insistently repeated throughout the

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<sup>604</sup> Incidentally, Tsvetaeva’s tendency to seek the human aspect of the divine was also noted by the critic O’lga Revzina who asserts the following: ‘Цветаева «очеловечивает» Бога’ [‘Russkaia natura Mariny Tsvetaevoi, *Marina Tsvetaeva. – epokha, kul’tura, sud’ba*, pp. 301-9; p. 308].

prayer; this is the case of Psalm 42:2; 10 in which the lamenter's recurring questions signify his distress: 'When shall I come and appear before God? [...] Why are thou cast down, O my soul? and why are thou disquieted within me?'

It is also important to observe that the time at which the lyrical heroine's discourse takes place in 'Eshche molitva' is night, which corresponds to the moment at which several psalms of lament are uttered. Indeed, by using expressions such as 'all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears' (psalm 6:6) or 'When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night' (psalm 63:6) or else 'my sore ran in the night' (psalm 77:2), the psalmist emphasises the intensity of his pain in an expressive way aimed at convincing God of the necessity to help him. Concerning Tsvetaeva's poem, the fact that the lyrical heroine's prayer takes place at night is made clear by her mention, in the second line, that the sky is lit by the stars. Besides, the lyrical heroine also hints at the fact that she is sleepless, as shown by the second stanza in which she complains of tiredness and days that do not end. Incidentally, let us note that the importance of the night in Tsvetaeva's poetry is a well-known fact that can be illustrated by her following verse: ' [...] Будет утром – холодный ученый // Тот, кто ночью поэт' (I, 86). Although night is sometimes associated with the idea of transgression of the law or burning passion,<sup>605</sup> it is also associated with a special time at which genuine spirituality is given free rein to express itself. For instance, in 'Do pervoi zvezdy', Tsvetaeva links night-time with praying, as the following assertion by the lyrical

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<sup>605</sup> For instance, the critic B. Nichiporov remarks that in the poem 'Mimo nochnykh bashen...' (1916) the motif of the night is connected to that of an overwhelming elemental force [ 'Avtobiograficheskii mif v "moskovskoi" poezii M. Tsvetaevoi i B. Okudzhavy', *Marina Tsvetaeva – epokha, kul'tura, sud'ba*, pp. 168-80; p. 169.].

heroine testifies: 'Ia budu molits'ia [...] do pervoi zvezdy' (I, 146). Hence, Kudrova is right when she remarks that the importance of nocturnal time results from the fact that at night nothing visible impedes inner meditation.<sup>606</sup> The importance of this detail should not be overlooked, since, as has just been shown, night is a time in which several psalms of lament are set.

Finally, another characteristic that 'Eshche molitva' shares with psalms of lament is the significant change of mood that occurs in the lyrical heroine's discourse. Indeed, by the end of the poem, the lyrical heroine denigrates the command she made at the beginning, namely to send her someone to love. As was said in the interpretation of 'Molitva', volatility of mood is present in both diary-writing and psalms. In the former genre, this phenomenon can be explained by the diarist's spontaneity, while in the latter genre it is due to the psalmist's confidence that his plea will be followed by a divine intervention putting an end to his suffering. For instance, in Psalm 28:1; 7 the lamenter starts by expressing his fear and despair to God by asserting 'if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit'; however, this sombre tone disappears and the lament concludes with the lamenter's indication that his 'heart greatly rejoiceth'. Even though volatility of mood in diary and psalms are motivated differently, in both cases it reflects the human psyche's contradictoriness.

Having demonstrated an intertextual link between 'Eshche molitva' and the genre of psalms, it is worth examining, now, which transformation the psalmic intertext undergoes when it is integrated into the diary orientation of Tsvetaeva's poem. To begin with, let us note that while the psalmist always complains in fairly

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<sup>606</sup> Kudrova, *Prostory Mariny Tsvetaevoy*, p. 167.

general terms that makes it easy for anybody suffering from any pain to identify with, Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine has a fairly specific complaint, namely her inability to relate to living people, which is due to the intensity of her inner life; in other words, she finds it is easier to relate to absent people and she designates them with the term shadow. Interestingly, the lyrical heroine's difficulty in relating to people alive reflects Tsvetaeva's own social awkwardness. A good example of Tsvetaeva's reluctance to adjust to 'real life' because of the overwhelming importance of her 'shadow' companions is described by Tsvetaeva's sister who depicts Tsvetaeva's passion for fictional or dead people at the time of her early poetry in the following terms: 'Все, что погибало, влекло Марину [...] Марина в то время жила только книгами. [...] Каждый погибавший герой книги и каждый внезапно умиравший, о ком она слышала, – были ее сверстниками, ее спутники.'<sup>607</sup> However, the lyrical heroine feels dissatisfied with this uniquely cerebral relationship and that is why she begs Christ to give her someone to embrace. Yet, just after expressing her plea, the lyrical heroine refutes its validity and asserts herself to be above sensual love ('Мне не надо любви! Я не грущу – не о ней) and asserts that she is happy to remain in the realm of shadows. As was said, such a sudden change of mood recalls the typical change of mood occurring at the end of psalms of lament. Despite this resemblance, though, it is clear that the lyrical heroine's plea is precise and does not allow a wide range of people to identify with it, contrarily to that of the psalmist. This state of affairs is important to note, because the specificity of the lyrical heroine's affliction links the poem with another genre, namely that of diary-writing. The diary orientation of the poem is

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<sup>607</sup> Anastasiia Tsvetaeva, *Vospominaniia*, p. 351.

reinforced in the eighth line of the poem, where the lyrical heroine mentions her age (she is eighteen years old). Such information portrays a very specific profile of the lyrical heroine, namely that of a girl at the end of her teens and approaching adulthood. In a word, the type of experience felt by the lyrical heroine can be related to that of feminine teenage anguish. This means that in 'Eshche molitva' Tsvetaeva transforms the psalmic intertext by specifying the circumstances of the complaint and adjusting it to the particularities of her personal experience, that of a girl gradually acquiring maturity. Consequently, the complaining tone of psalms is here associated with a particular situation, which emphasises the individual rather than universal aspect of the complaint.

So far I have shown that *Vechernii al'bom* contains two poems that are intertextually linked with the genre of psalms, namely 'Molitva' and 'Eshche molitva'. At this stage, it may be tempting to dismiss the importance of the psalmic intertext in this collection, because of the fairly limited number of poems using it. To do so, however, would be a mistake. Indeed, the fact that 'Eshche molitva' constitutes the very last poem of the collection means that, in some ways, it plays the role of epilogue. Thus it is significant that in 'Eshche molitva' the lyrical heroine links her poetic inspiration, which compels her to relate to imagined or dead people rather than with the living, to God and addresses him with a cry for help. In doing so, Tsvetaeva concludes her first poetic collection with a prayer comparable to those found in psalms of lament and indicates the presence of a not yet fully developed link between the genre of psalms and her poetry.

Tsvetaeva's second collection of verses, entitled *Volshebnyi fonar'* (1912), also successfully mixes the genre of diary with the intertext of psalms; at the same time, it carries on the meditation on the process of growing up started in *Vechernii al'bom*. The collection is divided into three parts, retrospectively entitled 'Detochki', 'Deti rastut' and 'Ne na radost''. The title of the third part makes it plain that Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine expresses her regret at having outgrown childhood. This idea is well conveyed in the early poem 'Podrastaiushchei' (date unknown), which ends with the lyrical heroine's self-addressed expression of her sadness at parting with her early years in the following terms: 'Zachem pererosla, družhok, / Svoiu ty kolybel'?' (I, 107). It is worth, now, examining how Tsvetaeva integrates the psalmic intertext into this diary-like context. In order to do so, let us start by interpreting the poem 'Molitva v stolovoi', which opens the third part of the collection. The poem reads as follows:

Самовар отшумевший заглох;  
Погружается дом в полутьму.  
Мне счастья не дано, – ему  
Отдай мое счастье, Бог!

Зимний сумрак касается роз  
На обоях и ярких углей.  
Пошли ему вечер светлей,  
Теплее, чем мне, Христос!

Я сдержу и улыбку и вздох,  
Я с проклятием рук не сожму,  
Но только – дай счастье ему,  
О, дай ему счастье, Бог!

As Fowler remarks, titles are of considerable importance in conditioning the reader's generic expectations.<sup>608</sup> The poem's title, 'Molitva v stolovoi', does, indeed, give valuable information regarding the generic specificity of the text by informing the reader that the poem constitutes a prayer. Another common feature between the poem and psalms is the lyrical heroine's address to God, named as God in the fourth line and as Christ in the eighth. Moreover, the lyrical heroine addresses God in the imperative requesting him to intervene in her earthly life, as does the psalmist.

To come back to the poem's title, it is worth bearing in mind that its second part diminishes the spiritual orientation of the poem and introduces the idea of domesticity, by the mention of the dining room. In terms of generic expectations, the mention of the dining room is important, because it links the poem with another genre, namely that of diary-writing, which is characterised, precisely, by subject matter relating to the day-to-day life of the author. The two types of writing invoked in the title are not contradictory; on the contrary, in some way, prayer and diary writing complement each other because they both relate to the intimate and private life of the lyrical heroine. This is consistent with the observation made by the scholar Philippe Lejeune who observes, in his history of the diary genre, that at first diaries were primarily constituted by prayers.<sup>609</sup> The original contiguity of these two genres is reactivated by Tsvetaeva's poem in which the diary orientation, implying a focus on homely matters, is reinforced by the fact that the prayer itself is

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<sup>608</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 96.

<sup>609</sup> *Le Journal intime. Histoire et anthologie*, edited by Philippe Lejeune and Catherine Bogaert (Paris: Les éditions Textuel, 2006), p. 87.

made for the sake of the samovar. At first, this fact seems rather odd and it might prompted some readers to dismiss it as a mere *exercice de style*, i.e. poetic practice consisting in composing a fake prayer for an object that is not genuinely worthy of it by virtue of its inanimate status. Yet, instead of dismissing Tsveltaeva's prayer for the samovar, it is worth attempting to interpret it in light of the overall context of Tsveltaeva's artistic mind. A first explanation concerning Tsveltaeva's prayer for a samovar lies in her belief that everything matters or, to put it differently, that all things are worth being artistically recorded. Tsveltaeva expresses this view very well in the foreword to *Iz dvukh knig* (1913), her third collection of verses: 'Нет ничего не важного! Говорите о своей комнате: высока ли она, или низка, и сколько в ней окон, и какие на них занавески, и есть ли ковер, и какие на нем цветы [...]' – все это будет телом вашей оставленной в огромном мире бедной, бедной души'.<sup>610</sup> This citation is interesting in that it reveals the nature of Tsveltaeva's relationship to the inanimate surrounding world. Far from seeing it as devoid of spirituality, she believes that the close interaction of human beings with the world of things results in the latter's ability to embody and perpetuate the soul of the former. To put it differently, let us say that Tsveltaeva considers the world of things as a medium through which spirituality expresses itself and that is probably why she notes feelings of kinship with the world of objects, as she puts it: 'Я охотно отказываюсь [...] от родственности в жизни, но с вещью (Ding) я роднюсь' (VI, 349). This remark echoes another statement by Tsveltaeva where she asserts

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<sup>610</sup> Tsveltaeva, *Knigi stikhov*, p. 174.



feeling closer to things than to people: ‘Мне хорошо только со старыми людьми – и вещами.’<sup>611</sup>

In her mature poetry, this surprising affinity between the world of things and high spirituality finds another poetic expression in her cycle ‘Stol’ (1933-35). To come back to ‘Molitva v stolovoi’, let us say that it is possible to interpret the lyrical heroine’s plea to God to send happiness to the samovar as an indirect way of expressing her feeling of alienation from both herself and people. As was said earlier, loneliness and isolation are often what motivates the psalmist’s complaint. For instance, in psalm 38:12 the lamenter asserts: ‘my kinsmen stand afar off [me]’, in the same vein the author of psalm 69:8 complains of being alienated from his family: ‘I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother’s children’. In the case of ‘Molitva v stolovoi’, however, the lyrical heroine replaces the proper complaint about her solitude by engrossing herself in the materiality of her surroundings. This strategy is made possible by resorting to the genre of diary-writing, which presupposes attention to apparently trifling details of the author’s everyday life such as the furniture of her house. To put it differently, let us say that in ‘Molitva lodki’ Tsvetaeva’s lyrical heroine avoids the direct designation of her feeling of alienation and loneliness and expresses her isolation in an indirect way, namely by praising an inanimate object.

Another poetic prayer of *Volshebnyi fonar’* which has a psalmic intertext is ‘Molitva lodki’. The poem reads as follows:

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<sup>611</sup> Marina Tsvetaeva, *Derev’ia! K vam idu*, p. 58.

В тихую пристань, где зыблются лодки,  
И отдыхают от бурь корабли,  
Ты, Всемогуший, и Мудрый, и Кроткий,  
Мне, утомленной и маленькой лодке,  
Мирно приплыть повели.  
В тихую пристань, где зыблются лодки,  
И, отдыхая, грустят корабли. (I, 129)

Taken in isolation, there is no feature betraying the fact that ‘Molitva lodki’ is part of a poetic diary. The very absence of indication that the poem belongs to a wider work that is to be read as a poetic diary indicates Tsvetaeva’s burgeoning ability to transcend the limitations of the generic framework of the diary by universalising the expression of her feelings. This is an interesting point, since it reverses Tsvetaeva’s initial trend, which consisted in making clear the specific circumstances prompting her to write a poem. By contrast, ‘Molitva lodki’ resorts to the romantic metaphor of a frail boat lost in a tempest. This romantic idiolect is allied with a psalmic intertext, since the poem’s main message is identical to that of psalms of lament and can be summarised as the lyrical heroine’s call for help to God. As Radomskaia notes, ‘Molitva lodki’ betrays Tsvetaeva’s yearning for a totally sincere spirituality that matters more than the enchanting but deceiving world of poetry<sup>612</sup> and that is why this poem illustrates the soul’s ability to address God, i.e. to pray.<sup>613</sup> In this perspective, it is worth observing that the adjectives ‘Almighty’ and ‘Wise’ used in line 3 are typical biblical epithets qualifying God. In addition, line 3 also displays a semantic parallelism and thus points to the presence

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<sup>612</sup> It is worth noting Tsvetaeva’s view that when they create poets submit to an inspirational force which leads them ‘away from matters of conscience’, as the critic Angela Livingstone remarks [‘Introduction to *Eight Essays on Poetry by Marina Tsvetaeva*, translated, introduced and annotated by Angela Livingstone (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1992), p.17.], see Chapter Two of the present study, pp. 94-102.

<sup>613</sup> Radomskaia, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 143.

of the genre of psalms at an intertextual level. Indeed, the fact that semantic parallelism is used in the third line of the poem, i.e. in the very line where the lyrical heroine addresses God directly and specifies his nature by asserting not only his omnipotence but also by specifying that this quality is associated with both wisdom and meekness, makes it very likely that it modulates the genre of psalms.

To conclude, let us note that Tsvetaeva's mixing of a romantic depiction of the lyrical heroine's feeling of vulnerability and the genre of psalms is consistent with the history of the genre, since, as was shown in Chapter Two,<sup>614</sup> romantic poets happily used a psalmic idiom to convey their feelings.

Finally, let us note that *Volshebnyi fonar'* contains yet another lyrical prayer that fruitfully reworks the psalmic intertext, a poem is entitled 'Molitva moriu', which reads as follows:

Солнце и звезды в твоей глубине,  
Солнце и звезды вверху, на просторе.  
Вечное море,  
Дай мне и солнцу и звездам отдаться вдвойне.

Сумрак ночей и улыбку зари  
Дай отразить в успокоенном взоре  
Вечное море,  
Детское горе мое усыпи, залечи, раствори.

Влей в это сердце живую струю,  
Дай отдохнуть от терпения – в споре.  
Вечное море,  
В мощные воды твои свой беспомощный дух предаю! (I, 148)

Once again, this poem makes it clear that Tsvetaeva overcomes the general rule of diary- writing consisting in depicting a specific situation by generalising her

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<sup>614</sup> Chapter Two, p.79 of present study.

feelings and expressing them metaphorically. Indeed, the only indication concretely relating the poem with the genre of diary is given in line 8 where the lyrical heroine describes her pain with the assertion that it is a childhood grief. At the same time, the omission of any specific details concerning the lyrical heroine's pain masks the diary orientation of the poem; by contrast, the psalmic intertext becomes more detectable, although, at first, it seems to be expressed from a pantheist rather than Judeo-Christian vantage point. This impression comes from the fact that the lyrical heroine's prayer is addressed to the sea. Yet, an attentive reading of the poem shows that the hidden presence of psalms of lament is far stronger than it initially appears. Indeed, the shortest definition of a lament psalm is a cry for help to God. Similarly, 'Solnste i zvezdy v tvoei glubine' is a cry for help addressed to an overwhelming principle, which is not God but the sea. What compelled Tsvetaeva to compose a prayer addressing the sea rather than God? One way of answering this question is to relate the lyrical heroine's address to the sea to Tsvetaeva's spiritual uncertainty, which might prevent her from addressing God directly. In this perspective, it is possible to argue that the lyrical heroine's address to the sea amounts to an indirect address to God. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that Psalter depicts God's power to command the sea, as the following lines taken from psalm 29 testify: 'The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the Lord is upon many waters'. Consequently, despite a rather significant change of addressee, it is legitimate to assert that "Solnste i zvezdy..." contains a psalmic intertext.

Another element pointing to the psalmic intertext is the lyrical heroine's demand to pour a stream of living water into her heart. This request is highly telling, since in the Bible, living water stands as a metaphor of God himself; the equivalence between God and water is expressed in Jeremiah 2:13, where God asserts: 'For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, that can hold no water.' Although the book of Jeremiah does not belong to the Psalter, this text is generically linked with it, as the scholar Walter Baumgartner demonstrates.<sup>615</sup> In a similar vein, the French translator of the Bible André Chouraqui writes: 'This book [Jeremiah's] stands at the origin of a new literary genre, the influence of which is found in Psalms. Perhaps, never until then [Jeremiah], had man analysed himself with such fervour, passion and truth in order to express his doubts, torments, distress, anxieties.'<sup>616</sup> This commentary on Jeremiah's lamentations and the genre of psalms is interesting because it gives a clue to the relevance of the psalmic intertext for Tsvetaeva's poetic diary. Although they are separated by millennia, there is more than one point of intersection between the psalms and Tsvetaeva's poetry. These two corpora overlap not only in their lyricism and emotional intensity but also in the relentless self-questioning of their respective speakers that goes hand-to-hand with his/her quest for understanding the transcendental divine principle, be it the monotheist God or another instance. In this perspective, it is no wonder that the generic intertext of psalms blends harmoniously with the diary

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<sup>615</sup> Walter Baumgartner, *Jeremiah's Poems of Lament* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988).

<sup>616</sup> *La Bible*, translated and presented by André Chouraqui (Lonrai: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001), pp. 822-3. The translation of the commentary from French into English is mine (S.O.C.).

orientation of Tsvetaeva's poetry; indeed both genres enable the writer to develop an introspective questioning of his/her earthly status that easily allies itself with the establishment of a dialogue with a transcendental principle sought by both the psalmist and Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine.

As it matured, Tsvetaeva's poetry started to be more sophisticated and the genre of diary-writing became less obviously perceptible, thanks to her ability to veil the exact circumstances of the precise thought, feeling or event triggering a poem. Moreover, Taubman remarks that from 1916 onward Tsvetaeva started to experiment 'with a persona who was self-evidently not Tsvetaeva'.<sup>617</sup> Even though the biographical component of her works became less immediately detectable, it remained an important component of her poetry that is frequently linked with the psalmic intertext. In this perspective, it worth analysing the poem 'Ja prishla k tebe chernoi polnoch'iu' (1916), which reads as follows:

Я пришла к тебе черной полночью,  
За последней помощью.  
Я – бродяга, родства не помнящий,  
Корабль тонущий.

В слободах моих – междуцарствие.  
Чернецы коварствуют.  
Всяк рядится в одежды царские,  
Псари царствуют.

Кто земель моих не оспаривал,  
Сторожей не спаивал?  
Кто в ночи не варил – варева,  
Не жег – зарева?

Самозванцами, псами хищными,  
Я дотла расхищена.

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<sup>617</sup> Taubman, *A Life Through Poetry*, p. 73.

У палат твоих, царь истинный,  
Стою – нищая!  
27 апреля 1916 (I, 301)

This poem belongs to *Versty I*, Tsvetaeva's fifth collection of verse, which gathers together poems written in 1916, one of the most productive years of her poetic career. Commenting on this book Makin remarks, quoting Karlinsky, that 'in the poems of that year she "rises to her full stature"'.<sup>618</sup> Furthermore, Makin also notices that in the collection *Versty I*, religious and biblical allusions become much more numerous than in her previous works.<sup>619</sup> This does not mean, however, that the diary orientation of Tsvetaeva's poetry disappears entirely; indeed, as the translator Robin Kemball remarks, the 'chronological layout [of the collection] endows the volume with the character of a diary in verse, which is doubtless as Tsvetaeva intended it should be'.<sup>620</sup> At the same time, the biblical intertext becomes more perceptible and it adds to the intimately personal layer a range of widely shared cultural themes and characters. A typical example of the combination of a private concern with a culturally- shared religious frame of mind is the poem 'Kanun Blagoveshchen'ia' (1916) in which Tsvetaeva addresses the Virgin with a plea to keep her daughter out of the temptation to artistic writing, which is associated with black magic. Although it is obviously inspired by Christianity, since it is a prayer addressed to the Virgin, this poem does not rely on the psalmic

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<sup>618</sup> Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 27.

<sup>619</sup> Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 29.

<sup>620</sup> 'Translator's Introduction' to Marina Tsvetaeva, *Milestones*, translated, introduced and commentaed by Robin Kemball (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2003), pp.xiii-liv; p. xvii.

intertext. By contrast, in ‘Ia prishla k tebe chernoi polnoch’iu’ Tsvetaeva resorts to the psalmic intertext in a particularly striking way, as will be shown further. Concerning the real-life event that triggered this poem, critics agree that it was written as a result of the feelings of remorse and hopelessness that overtook Tsvetaeva at the end of her love affair with Parnok. Saakiant’s description of the mood of the poem is worth mentioning, because it conveys very well the intensity of the lyrical heroine’s emotional vulnerability: ‘[Это] пронзительное «покаянное» стихотворение к мужу – «воплъ» тоски, любви и мольбы о помощи, в котором обнажены чувства человеческие – в сиротстве, в беде, в одиночестве.’<sup>621</sup> As was already said, extreme emotional distress is also typical of psalms of lament. Although the similarity between the mood of the lyrical heroine and that of the psalmist is far from sufficient to assert the presence of the psalmic intertext in ‘Ia prishla k tebe...’, it constitutes a clear indication of the compatibility of the former’s tonality with the state of mind of the latter. An attentive reading of the poem confirms this initial perception.

The first stanza of the poem is saturated with elements reminiscent of psalmic poetry. The first line displays a typical element of psalms of lament, namely the specification that the time in which the complaint is performed is night. As was said previously,<sup>622</sup> it is not uncommon for the psalmist to specify that his prayer is uttered during the nighttime.<sup>623</sup> For instance, the author of psalm 77:6 mentions night as a time of spiritual meditation, as he puts it: ‘I call to remembrance in the night: I commune with my own heart: and my spirit made diligent search’. Gunkel

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<sup>621</sup> Saakiant, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 88.

<sup>622</sup> Present study, p. 152.

<sup>623</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 128.



explains the psalmist's insistence on the importance of nighttime by observing that 'if the sleep that is craved does not occur, then one feels the pain even more, thus, reawakening internal suffering, concerns and questions'.<sup>624</sup>

The second line is also reminiscent of psalms of lament in that the lyrical heroine addresses her unnamed addressee, namely Tsvetaeva's husband Sergei Efron, not only as a tsar but also as her ultimate saviour ('Za poslednei pomoshch'iu'). This line echoes numerous passages of the Psalter where the psalmist describes God, precisely, as the sole instance capable of saving him from his woe; in this regard, it worth quoting psalm 20:1; 6: 'The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble; [...] the Lord saveth his anointed; he will hear from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand'.

In the third line of the poem the lyrical heroine describes herself as a tramp who has forgotten her kin; this is also highly reminiscent of psalms of lament, since in them it is not uncommon that the psalmist complains of having become a stranger to his own relatives. For instance, in psalm 38: 12 the lamenter asserts: 'my kinsmen stand afar off [me]'

Finally, in the last line of the first stanza a sinking ship represents metaphorically the lyrical heroine's emotional suffering, presumably stemming from a sense of a loss of meaning and direction in her life. This metaphor is remarkable for three reasons: firstly because Tsvetaeva had already used the image of a boat to convey human vulnerability in 'Molitva lodki', in which she reworks the genre of psalms, while distancing herself from the psalmist by identifying with a

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<sup>624</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 128.

boat; secondly, as was then said, it is a typically romantic device to use a metaphor representing a natural element such as the sea to depict inner turmoil; thirdly, the idea of a destructive and overwhelming flow of water is also present in psalms where it represents God's wrath. For instance, in psalm 69:1 the lamenter exclaims: 'I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me'; in psalm 88:19 inimical people are depicted like water: 'They came round me daily like water; they compassed me about together'; in psalm 124: 4 the flow of water is also associated with a malevolent force: 'Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul'.

As was just shown, in the first stanza of 'Ia prishla...' Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine expresses her psychological distress in terms similar to those of the psalmist. Not surprisingly, this is also the case in the third stanza, with the only difference that its lines are closer to communal psalms of lament than to individual ones. Indeed, in the third and fourth stanzas, the lyrical heroine depicts herself as the unrecognised owner of a vast land, where villages are plagued by the vacuum of authority stemming from the lack of an official and recognised ruler ('V slobodakh moikh – mezhdutsarstvie') which entails a moral and spiritual fall ('Chernertsy kovarstvuiut') and a carnival-like blurring of social functions. The lyrical heroine expresses her sense of emotional turmoil by associating it with a land in which anybody can dress in tsarist outfits and where huntsmen rule society. This depiction of a socially and morally chaotic land is indeed reminiscent of psalms of communal laments, which, as Gunkel observes, broach the issue of social crisis such as war or

political instability.<sup>625</sup> For instance, in the communal psalm of lament 79:4 the speakers deplore the loss of their social status and authority as follows: ‘We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us.’

The interest of the fourth stanza is a mixture of individual and communal laments, since the lyrical heroine complains personally of the numerous attempts to depose her (‘Kto zemel’ moikh ne osparival’) or to destroy the land itself (‘Kto [...] Ne zheg – zapeba?’).

In the last stanza, once again, the verses sound very similar to individual psalms of lament, especially because of the hyperbolic nature of the lyrical heroine’s description of her suffering. Indeed, the first two lines of the stanza give the picture of a person who has been devastated by predatory impostors (‘Samozvantsami, psami khishchnymi, / Ia dotla raskhishchena’). Likewise, the psalmist compares his suffering to the pain of being attacked by ferocious animals, as the following passage from psalm 57:4 testifies: ‘My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword.’

In the two concluding lines of the poem the lyrical heroine describes herself as a beggar standing at the threshold of the true tsar’s dwelling (‘U palat tvoikh, [...] / Stoiu – nishchaia!’). This image is also reminiscent of psalms of lament, since the gesture taken by the lyrical heroine amounts to an ultimate reliance on God as far as her fate is concerned. This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that the lyrical

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<sup>625</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 88.

heroine addresses her saviour as the true authority ('tsar' istinnyi'). This expression recalls the psalmist's way of referring to God as a King; for instance, the author of psalm 24:7-8 writes: 'Lift up your heads [...] and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty'.

As was shown, the poem 'Ia prishla k tebe...' is saturated with the mood and images typical of psalms of lament. At the same time, it constitutes an entry in Tsvetaeva's poetic diary, since the secret addressee of the poem was Tsvetaeva's husband Efron, who is offered a remorseful plea and asked to forgive Tsvetaeva's love affair with Parnok. One of the means enabling the critics to link 'Ia prishla k tebe...' with this episode of Tsvetaeva's life is the date of the poem, which coincides with the end of the relationship. Another clue is the fact that the poem is dedicated to Efron. An important point to note here is that these indications are paratextual, i.e. they are not situated in the core text of the poem but on its margins. This means that although the poem is grounded in diary-writing, the highly individual and private aspect of this genre does not affect the core of the poetic text, which can be read equally fruitfully, when it is taken in isolation. In this perspective, the psalmic intertext proves to be particularly useful, because it enables Tsvetaeva to universalise her emotions and that is why it is possible to interpret the lyrical heroine's plea for forgiveness as a speech to God.

The poems interpreted so far show that in Tsvetaeva's poetry the balance between the personal and the universal varies from one poem to another; her mature poems play increasingly interesting combinations of these two domains. From this point of view, it is worth analysing the poem 'Mirovye nachalos' vo mgle

kochev'e' (January 1917), which opens the second volume of *Versty*. The poem reads as follows:

Мировое началось во мгле кочевье:  
Это бродят по ночной земле – деревья,  
Это бродят золотым вином – грозди,  
Это странствуют из дома в дом – звезды,  
Это реки начинают путь – вспять!  
И мне хочется к тебе на грудь – спать. (I, 331)

The most striking feature of this poem is its description of the transformations of the natural order of the world. The fact that this text was composed in January 1917 makes it plain that its depiction of the reversal of the natural order is related to the anticipation of an imminent revolution. Although revolutionary events are not mentioned directly in 'Mirovye nachalos'...', the imminent collapse of an entire world is expressed very distinctly through the eschatological tonality of the poem. The impression that the picture depicted relates to the end of the world is due firstly to the fact that the phenomena take place in darkness and secondly that the phenomena described refer to a total lack of stability. Indeed, the poem's assertion that the world has become nomadic, followed by the depiction of wandering trees and grapes together with moving stars and rivers flowing backwards creates an extraordinary universe ruled by unknown forces and where anything could happen. The poem's depiction of a dark time is worth noting because in psalms darkness represents a sign of God's wrath. For instance, in 88:6 the lamenter exclaims: 'Thou [God] has laid me [...] into darkness'; similarly the author of psalm 107: 10-11

writes: 'Such as sit in darkness [...] bound in affliction and iron; because they rebelled against the words of God'.

Concerning the image of the rivers flowing backwards, it is important to stress that although it is absent from biblical psalms, it nevertheless belongs to the tradition of psalmic poetry, since Trediakovskii, whose poetic works were well known to Tsvetaeva,<sup>626</sup> refers precisely to this image in his description of the psalms, which reads as follows: '[В псалмах] реки возвращают вспять к своим истокам; моря расступаются и убегают; холмы скачут; горы тают, как воск, и исчезают [...]: все естество приходит в движение, и колеблется от лица своего Зиждителя'.<sup>627</sup> Interestingly, Tsvetaeva not only uses the image of the river flowing backwards but also associates it with the depiction of the motion of the entire natural world, exactly like Trediakovskii's depiction of the psalms. Concerning Tsvetaeva's combination of darkness with wandering, it is worth noticing that it also echoes psalm 82:5 where the wicked are said to 'walk on in darkness: [while] all the foundations of earth are out'. This is especially remarkable, since psalm 82 depicts God's judgment of all other entities pretending to be deities.<sup>628</sup> This means that by creating an eschatological atmosphere and reusing similar images, Tsvetaeva insists on the crucial importance of the moment depicted in terms of her existential status: will she live in a chaotic world or in an orderly one? Yet, the very last line of the poem contrasts greatly with the overall cosmological atmosphere of the poem, since in it the lyrical heroine addresses an unnamed but particular addressee and asserts her wish to sleep on his/her chest.

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<sup>626</sup> See, Chapter Two, p. 163 of the present study.

<sup>627</sup> Quoted in Lutsevich, *Psaltyr' v russkoi poezii*, p. 286. My emphasis (S.O.C.).

<sup>628</sup> *The New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 1006.

Such a sudden shift from the macro-level of the world's destiny to the micro-level of the lyrical heroine's deeply intimate desire to sleep on her addressee's chest is worth noting because it demonstrates once again Tsvetaeva's ability to use different genres in a subtle way, namely by mixing harmoniously a genre that universalises the human experience, i.e. psalms, with a genre that individualises it, i.e. diary-writing

The poem 'Dorozhkoiu prostonarodnoiu' (1919) is yet another instance in which Tsvetaeva fruitfully combines the diary orientation of her poetry with the psalmic intertext. Before interpreting it, it is worth putting it in its wider context: 'Dorozhkoiu prostonarodnoiu' belongs to *Lebedinyi stan*, Tsvetaeva's collection of verse that gathers together the poems written during 1917 and 1921. The title is a metaphoric designation of the White army, in which Tsvetaeva's husband was fighting. The initial creative impulse compelling Tsvetaeva to write this collection was praise for those fighting against the armies of the Soviets. Concerning the diary-like form of the collection, it is worth referring to Kling who describes it accurately: '«Лебединый стан» – это поэтический дневник, в котором стихи расположены по хронологическому принципу [...]. И от года к году [...] от стихотворения к стихотворению меняется тональность «белой темы».'<sup>629</sup> However, despite this overtly political theme, the majority of poems are not strictly political; rather, they depict the frame of mind of the poet at the sight of the chaos and violence unleashed by the revolution and civil war. Tsvetaeva comments on this fact in her typically paradoxical way: 'Вдохновенная идеей добровольчества, я о ней забывала с первой строчки – помнила только строку – и встречалась с ней

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<sup>629</sup> Kling, *Poeticheskii mir Mariny Tsvetaevoi*, p. 91.

лишь по проставлении последней строки [...]. Залог действительности так называемых гражданских стихов именно в отсутствии гражданского момента в процессе писания, в единоличности момента чисто-стихотворного.<sup>630</sup>

Tsvetaeva's insistence on the importance of every single moment in the creative process of *Lebedinyi stan*, fits perfectly with the rule of diary-writing, in which authors immortalise the moments they consider important as they come along. Given the extreme intensity of the social and political turmoil that befell Russia during this period, it is no wonder that *Lebedinyi stan* proposes a personal meditation on events and the social estrangement Tsvetaeva felt as an artist living in a world where pragmatic realities such as finding food to eat and wood to heat her home became increasingly important. Makin assesses how Tsvetaeva balances the private and public domains in *Lebedinyi stan*, when he observes that in it 'the account of the Revolution and the Civil War is presented as a personal, and even avowedly false version, just as the White campaign is itself shown to be based on illusions'.<sup>631</sup> I fully agree with Makin's comment that, although she records historical events, Tsvetaeva does not pretend to do it objectively; instead, she uses her poetic receptivity to make sense of the violent dissensions tearing her country apart. In other words, far from striving for historical and political objectivity, Tsvetaeva remains faithful to her poetic subjectivity. Thus she does not interpret the conflict between the Red and White armies as the result of a long historical process that exploded violently but as the confrontation between nihilist and destructive principles, comparable to the Mongol armies of the Middle Ages, and an

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<sup>630</sup> Tsvetaeva, *Knigi stikhov*, p. 767.

<sup>631</sup> Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 41.



enlightened one, divinely blessed. At this stage, it is interesting to note that Tsvetaeva temporarily suspends her highly critical view of institutionalised religion and composed prayers in support of the Orthodox Church, as in the poem ‘Za otroka – za golubia – za Syna’ (1917) in which the lyrical heroine enjoins the Russian people not to forget their religion: ‘Помолись, церковная Россия!’ (I, 341). Although, the lyrical heroine’s encouragement to the clergy might seem surprising, it is consistent with Tsvetaeva’s belief that it is the poet’s duty to always be on the side of those who lose the battle for social, material or spiritual supremacy. Tsvetaeva summarises this stance with the following poetic statement: ‘Враг – пока здоров, Прав – как упал’ (II, 100). Consequently, Tsvetaeva’s depiction of the White army, the tsar and the clergy as the bearers of divine truth stems from her understanding of their inevitable defeat, as the critic V. Telitsyn notes.<sup>632</sup> In this context, the poem ‘Dorozhkoiu prostonarodnoiu’ is particularly striking, because it makes it plain that, even at a time when Tsvetaeva loudly and overtly proclaims her allegiance to Orthodoxy, which was then under threat, she could not repress the overriding force of her artistic inspiration, which is not wholly compatible with a religious attitude demanding a complete submission to God. Indeed, in ‘Dorozhkoiu prostonarodnoiu’ Tsvetaeva resorts to the psalmic intertext to express her divided loyalties between a truly religious impulse and an artistic one. The poem reads as follows:

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<sup>632</sup> V. Telitsyn, ‘“Lebedinyi stan”: Russkaia smuta glazami poeta’, *“Lebedinyi stan”, “Pereluochki” i “Perekop” Mariny Tsvetaevoi, chetvertaia mezhdunarodnaia nauchno-tematicheskaiia konferentsiia (9-10 oktiabria 1996)*, edited by Ol’ga Revzina (Moscow: Dom-muzei Mariny Tsvetaevoi, 1997), pp. 129-35; p. 134.

Дорожкой простонародною,  
Смирною, богоугодною  
Идем – свободные, немодные.  
Душой и телом – благородные.

Сбылися древние пророчества:  
Где вы? – Величества? Высочества?

Мать с дочерью идем – две странницы.  
Чернь черная навстречу чванится.  
Быть может, вздох от нас останется,  
А может – Бог на нас оглянется...

Пуст будет – как *Ему* захочется:  
Мы не Величества, Высочества.

Так, скромные, богоугодные,  
Душой и телом – благородные,  
Дорожкой простонародною –  
Так, доченька, к себе на родину:

В страну Мечты и Одиночества –  
Где *мы* – Величества, Высочества. (I, 493)

At first sight, there is no striking resemblance between ‘Dorozhkoiu prostonarodnoiu’ and the psalms. Yet, an attentive reading of the poem shows not only that it recreates a typical situation of the psalmic genre, namely the author’s isolation among an inimical crowd, but also that the lyrical heroine is aware of this state of affairs.

In numerous psalms, the author complains of the arrogance of the unrighteous. For instance, the author of psalm 10:2-7 formulates it as follows: ‘The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor [...]. For the wicked boasteth of his heart’s desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth. The wicked, through the pride of countenance, will not seek after God [...] under his tongue is mischief and vanity’. In psalm 31:18, the author also complains of the arrogance of the unrighteous and

pleads with God to terminate it: 'Let the lying lips be put to silence; which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous'. In the same vein, the author of psalm 73:6 deplores the unfounded pride of unrighteous people by asserting that 'pride compasseth them about as a chain', while the author of psalm 94:4 laments the unduly boastful behaviour of wicked people and wonders 'how long shall they utter and speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves'.

Similarly to the psalmist, the lyrical heroine of 'Dorozhkoiiu prostonarodnoiu' complains of the hostility of an arrogant mob hostile to their righteousness. Indeed, like the psalmist, the lyrical heroine depicts herself, together with her daughter, as humble and God-fearing persons. Thus the first stanza of the poem insists on their meekness and integrity and represents them walking humbly on the right path. Incidentally, let us note that the theme of the right path is fundamental in the Psalter, which opens, precisely with a blessing of those following the right way (psalm 1:1). The depiction of the lyrical heroine and her daughter as righteous in the first stanza is followed by a couplet proclaiming that ancient prophecies have been realised and that the noble people have vanished; such proclamations obviously hint at the fact that the lyrical heroines live in a time of troubles. In the context of the collection, the ancient prophecies can be understood as God's punishment of humankind because of the excesses committed during the revolution and civil war.

In the third stanza, the lyrical heroine not only specifies her status by saying that she is a mother making a religious pilgrimage with her daughter but also

expresses her isolation from the surrounding people, depicted as arrogant and hostile. The lyrical heroine opposes herself to people devoid of spirituality by using the Russian term ‘chern’’, which designates shallow-minded people unable to elevate themselves above earthly concerns. The term ‘chern’ has a particular resonance in the context of Russian poetry, since it was used by Pushkin in his poem ‘Poet i tolpa’ (1828) in which he describes the isolation of the poet due to the people’s complete lack of receptivity toward poetry. An important point to note, here, is Pushkin’s final lines of the poem where he asserts the existence of a link between poetry and prayer: ‘Мы [поэты] рождены для вдохновенья / Для звуков сладких и молитв’.<sup>633</sup> Let us note, here, that Pushkin’s assertion of the predestination of the poet to pray does not mean that the poet is bound to an official religion but testifies to the spiritual aspect involved in poetic creation, which lies in its detachment from everyday bustle and that is why Pushkin asserts that poets are not destined to engross themselves in earthly matters: ‘Не для житейского волненья / Не для корысти, не для битв, / Мы рождены [...]’ Hence, by introducing Pushkin’s intertext, Tsvetaeva merges the figure of the isolated and religiously righteous pilgrim with that of the poet. In addition, the lyrical heroine alludes to the fact that the opposition between the righteous poet and the deaf crowd is fraught with lethal consequences; as she puts it: ‘Mozhet byt’, vzdokh ot nas ostanetsia’. The laconic assertion that her encounter with the mob may leave her with breath clearly refers to the Russian expression ‘ispustit’ poslednii vzdokh’, i.e. to die. Another potential outcome of her encounter with the mob is, according to the lyrical heroine, to be rescued by God. As she puts it: ‘A mozhet – Bog na nas

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<sup>633</sup> <http://feb-web.ru/feb/pushkin/texts/push17/vol03/y03-141-.htm> Accessed in September 2007.

oglianetsia...’ This is an especially interesting line, since it both refers to and modifies a typical situation of the Psalter, namely that of God’s looking at the righteous. In many psalms God is summoned to look at the righteous’ pitiful situation so that he can intervene. For instance, in psalm 25:18 the author exclaims: ‘[God] look upon mine affliction and my pain’, in Russian ‘Призри на страдание мое’ (24: 18\*); similarly, the author of psalm 80:14 cries: ‘O God [...] look down from heaven’, in Russian ‘Боже [...] призри с неба’ (79: 15\*); likewise the author of psalm 119:132 prays God: ‘Look thou upon me, and be merciful’, in Russian ‘Призри на меня и помилуй меня’ (118: 134\*). The psalmist’s command to God to look at him, always formulated in the imperative, is expressed in Tsvetaeva’s poem in a much more nuanced way. To begin with, instead of using the verb ‘prizret’’, which means, according to the dictionary compiled by Vladimir Dal’, to look at someone with attention, sympathy and compassion,<sup>634</sup> Tsvetaeva’s lyrical heroine uses the verb ‘oglianut’sia’ meaning to glance back; moreover, this verb is used with the adverb ‘mozhet byt’ indicating that she considers that the possibility of salvation from the mob thanks to God’s intervention is relatively unlikely. In the next couplet, the lyrical heroine seems to submit to God’s will, since she paraphrases the Lord’s Prayer in which the believer proclaims the supremacy of God’s will and recognises God’s authority by addressing God as follows: ‘thy will be done’,<sup>635</sup> the Russian version of which is ‘да будет воля твоя’.<sup>636</sup> Ultimately, however, the lyrical heroine’s submission to God’s will does not prevail, since the

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<sup>634</sup> <http://dictionaries.rin.ru/cgi-bin/detail.pl?sel=dal&word=%CF%D0%C8%C7%D0%C5%D2%DC> Accessed in September 2007.

<sup>635</sup> <http://www.prayerguide.org.uk/lordsprayer.htm> Accessed in August 2007.

<sup>636</sup> <http://www.christusrex.org/www1/pater/JPN-russian.html> Accessed in August 2007.

path she is following is that of artistic inspiration, which leads her to the land of Dreams and Solitude ('V stranu Mechty i Odinochestva') where the only authority she submits to is imagination.

At this stage, it is worth remarking that 'Dorozhkoiu prostonarodnuiu' contains a disguised, yet heavily autobiographical content. When she was writing this poem Tsvetaeva lived alone with her daughters in highly precarious material conditions. In addition, her truly artistic and deeply poetic frame of mind contributed to her feeling of alienation from society, reflected in the poem with the opposition between the noble and the mob. Moreover, like her lyrical heroine, Tsvetaeva found an outlet for her feeling of oppression in the realm of imagination.

As was just shown, the poem 'Dorozhkoiu prostonarodnuiu' successfully mingles two generic intertext: that of the diary, which enables the reader to interpret it in light of Tsvetaeva's autobiography and that of the psalms, which sheds light on the spiritual frame of mind of the poet who shares with the psalmist the experience of alienation from the mob and thus fleetingly hopes about God's support; ultimately, however, the lyrical heroine differs from the psalmist in that she prefers to rely on her imagination to alleviate her pains rather than on a divine intervention.

Tsvetaeva's implicit refutation of the ultimate message conveyed by the generic intertext of psalms and her scepticism regarding God's ability to manifest himself in a way that would give her hope and reinforce her faith became increasingly perceptible in her poetry and found various expressions in poems such as 'Kogda zhe, Gospodin' (1922) or 'Sad' (1934). In the late thirties, Tsvetaeva's hope of finding faith was shaken further by the rise of political violence associated

with fascist political regimes and the atmosphere of violence reigning at the time contributed to her feeling that religious hope was no more than a fallacious and illusory wish. As a result, she expressed her outrage at the war by pushing the psalmic intertext beyond its limits, i.e. by magnifying the muffled cry of revolt of the psalmist to such an extent that it became an outright denigration of God's righteousness. This phenomenon is nowhere more evident than in her poem 'O slezy na glazakh', written in March 1939:

О слезы на глазах!  
Плач гнева и любви!  
О Чехия в слезах!  
Испания в крови!

О черная гора,  
Затмившая – весь свет!  
Пора – пора – пора  
Творцу вернуть билет.

Отказываюсь – быть.  
В Бедламе нелюдей  
Отказываюсь – жить.  
С волками площадей

Отказываюсь – выть.  
С акулами равнин  
Отказываюсь плыть –  
Вниз по течению спин.

Не надо мне ни дыр  
Ушных, ни вещей глаз.  
На твой безумный мир  
Ответ один – отказ. (II, 360)

The diary orientation of 'O, slezy na glazakh' is easily perceptible, since in it the author does not hide that it is a reaction to the latest political and historical

events, i.e. Germany's invasion of Czechoslovakia and the civil war raging in Spain. This is an especially remarkable fact, given Tsvetaeva's usual aloofness from both political life and current events. However, understanding the violence and brutality of unfolding events, Tsvetaeva felt compelled to react to them. Incidentally, let us note the extreme intensity of the lyrical heroine's feelings is expressed by recurrent exclamation marks (one at the end of each line of this stanza).

The link between the diary orientation of the poem, which records the author's reaction to contemporary events, and the psalmic intertext is made clear right from the first stanza in which the lyrical heroine specifies that her sense of outrage is due to the woes of Czechoslovakia and Spain. At the same time, the complaining and revolted tone of the first stanza clearly recalls the passages of the Psalter<sup>637</sup> where lamenters express their bafflement at God's apparent injustice without concealment; a good example is psalm 74: 'O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? Why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture? [...] O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? Shall the enemy blaspheme for ever? [...] Forget not the voice of thine enemies: the tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually'.

In the second stanza the link between psalms of lament and 'O slezy na glazakh!' is once again perceptible. The mention of the black mountain eclipsing all light can be interpreted as an inversion of the motif of divine light representing spiritual enlightenment, which is often referred to in psalms, as can be shown in the following extracts: 'Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us' (psalm



4:6); ‘Consider and hear me, o Lord my God: lighten mine eyes’ (psalm 13:3); ‘For thou wilt light my candle: the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness’ (psalm 18:28).<sup>638</sup>

In addition, the idea that God’s wisdom is spread from a mountainous place is also found in psalms, as the following example testifies: ‘Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised [...] in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion’ (psalm 48:1,2).<sup>639</sup> Contrasting with the psalms, where the mention of the holy mountain triggers a call for God’s praise, in Tsvetaeva’s poem the mention of the black, i.e. demonic mountain, is followed by the injunction to renounce the supposedly God-given life. This injunction is made via an intertextual allusion. As Karlinsky remarks, Tsvetaeva’s formula ‘about respectfully returning one’s entrance ticket to the Creator’ is borrowed from Dostoevsky’.<sup>640</sup> This is an interesting fact, since Dostoevskii’s main concern was, precisely, to try to meditate on the incompatibility between the irrationality of faith, which enables one to believe despite life’s unfair treatment of many innocent people, and the rationality of atheism, which explains the presence of evil in the world in logical terms. Dostoevskii formulated this dilemma as follows: ‘Я – дитя века, дитя неверия и сомнения [...] Каких страшных мучений стоило и стоит мне теперь эта жажда верить, которая тем сильнее в душе моей, чем более во мне доводов противных.’<sup>641</sup> In other words, Dostoevskii’s dilemma lies in the fact

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<sup>638</sup> Other examples can be found in the following passages of the Psalter: 27:1; 34:5; 36:9; 37:6; 43:3; 44:3; 56:13; 74:16; 89:15; 90:8; 97:11; 105:39; 119:130; 136:7.

<sup>639</sup> Other examples can be found in the following passage of the Psalter: 30:7; 36:6; 72:3; 74:2; 78:54, 68; 87:1; 104:8; 125:1; 125:2; 133:3.

<sup>640</sup> Simon Karlinsky, *Marina Tsvetaeva. The Woman, her World and her Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 226.

<sup>641</sup> Quoted in Lui Allen, *Dostoevskii i Bog* (St Petersburg: Iunost’, 1993), p. 4.

that his longing for faith is inversely proportionate to the number of rational arguments demonstrating God's non-existence. By referring to Dostoevskii in her poem 'O slezy na glazakh', Tsvetaeva obviously highlights the relevance of this dilemma for herself. The allusion to Ivan Karamazov's denigration of God indicates that at that historical moment Tsvetaeva had lost faith.<sup>642</sup> As a result, it is no wonder that the psalmic intertext is pushed beyond its limits: indeed, the lyrical heroine repeats the sense of revolt at the sight of injustice that is a leitmotif of the psalmist, yet instead of expressing her belief in God's ultimate intervention, she proclaims her refusal to live in his world.

Finally, let us add that Shevelenko interprets Tsvetaeva's thorough loss of faith expressed in this poem by the fact that, at the time of writing, she felt she could no longer dedicate her time to poetry, because she had to look after her persecuted family.<sup>643</sup> In this perspective, it is fair to assume that, as long as she felt able to compose poetry, Tsvetaeva retained a certain faith, because her activity linked her with a transcendental principle. When writing poetry became impossible, she lost her hope in the potential existence of a divine principle.

To conclude the interpretation of Tsvetaeva's blending of diary-oriented poetry with a psalmic intertext, it is important to stress that such a combination proves Tsvetaeva's particular receptivity to the literary tradition of psalm paraphrase, since it was often used by poets precisely as a means of indirectly

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<sup>642</sup> Concerning the link between Dostoevskii and Tsvetaeva, see: L. Kertman, "‘Ne Ponadobivshiisia’ Dostoevskii (Mir Dostoevskogo v sud’be i tvorchestve Mariny Tsvetaevoi)", *Stikhiia i razum v zhizni i tvorchestve Mariny Tsvetaevoi; XII Mezhnunarodnaia nauchno-tematicheskaiia konferentsiia (9-11 oktiabria 2004)*, edited by L. Vikulina and others (Moscow: Dom-muzei Mariny Tsvetaevoi, 2005), pp. 141-8.

<sup>643</sup> Shevelenko, *Literaturnyi put' Tsvetaevoi*, p. 437.

expressing concerns in their personal lives. Dykman makes clear that this phenomenon was present right from the beginning of this traditional genre and that is why he asserts that ‘many of the Russian [eighteenth century] poets who worked on the Psalms directed their Psalms transpositions towards the expression of personal sentiments’.<sup>644</sup> In the same vein, the critic Tamara Zhirmunskaja stresses Trediakovskii’s eagerness to use the genre of psalms to express his emotional turmoil.<sup>645</sup> Likewise, in her analysis of Lomonosov’s paraphrase of psalm 26\*, Lutsevich shows that it suffices to add a small detail in order to turn the generalising psalm into a biographical one.<sup>646</sup> In Tsvetaeva’s case, it is important to underline that in her use of the psalmic intertext she pushes the initial tendency to express distress within the framework of the psalms to the extreme; thus instead of the discrete autobiographical elements present in the traditional psalmic poetry of her predecessors, the autobiographical component becomes a major feature. This does not mean, however, that it eclipses the psalmic intertext. On the contrary, even if it becomes less perceptible, the psalmic intertext remains an active component of Tsvetaeva’s poetry, allowing the lyrical heroine to avoid an exclusively soliloquist poetic meditation by providing her with a genre in which personal introspection is allied to a dialogue with a transcendental principle. This interpretation is in line with Bakhtin’s view that pure introspection is unsustainable in literature because of the intrinsically dialogic nature of language that compels authors to find an other instance to whom they can address themselves. In the cases of highly

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<sup>644</sup> Dykman, *The Psalms in Russian Poetry*, p. 106.

<sup>645</sup> Tamara Zhirmunskaja, “*Um ishchet bozhestva*”, *Bibliia i russkaia poeziia XVIII-XX vekov* (Moscow: Rossiiskii pisatel’, 2006), p. 14.

<sup>646</sup> Lutsevich, *Psaltyr’ v russkoi poezii*, p. 274.

introspective genres, this external instance is bound to be God. As Bakhtin puts it: 'The deeper the solitude with oneself [...] the clearer and more essential is one's referredness to God...Where I do absolutely not coincide with myself, a place for God is opened up.'<sup>647</sup>

As was shown in this chapter, the psalmic model provides Tsvetaeva with a generic framework within which her lyrical heroine can ponder the issue of suffering, whether they originate in the process of growing up ('Molitva'), in loneliness ('Eshche molitva', 'Molitva v stolovoi', 'Molitva lodki', 'Molitva moriu'), in marital difficulties ('Ia prishla k tebe chernoi polnoch'iu'), or in social and political crisis ('O slezy na glazakh').

Finally, it is important to highlight that Tsvetaeva's mixture of diary-oriented poetry with the generic intertext of psalms confirms Fowler's assertion that generic mixture enables a genre, the literary apogee of which has gone, to remain active by associating itself with other genres and adjusting to new circumstances. This process, however, does not realise itself without a modification of the generic intertext. Indeed, the analysis undertaken in this section demonstrates that by integrating the psalms into her poetry, Tsvetaeva magnifies its personal tone. As a result, the psalmic intertext becomes entangled with the specific circumstances of Tsvetaeva's life such as her difficulty of growing up or relating with others, the pain provoked by her affair with Parnok or her outrage at the sight of injustice endured by the Czech people; all these specific issues are obviously foreign to the original genre of psalms; at the same time, the psalmic intertext enables the poet to depict

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<sup>647</sup> Quoted in Tull, 'Bakhtin's Confessional Self-Accounting and Psalms of Lament', *Biblical Interpretation* 12 (2005), pp. 41-55; p. 45.

not the events themselves but the feelings they triggered and to ally them with a spiritual mediation on faith. Furthermore, in integrating the intertext of psalms into her idiosyncratic poetry Tsvetaeva also magnifies the muffled cry of revolt of the psalmist. Consequently, instead of being a fleeting and temporary thought, the sense of revolt against God becomes the overriding theme of ‘O, slezy na glazakh’.

It is also significant that Tsvetaeva’s blend of a highly biographical poetry with the psalmic intertext corresponds not only to Fowler’s concept of generic mixture but also to that of topical invention, which designates how a genre remains active by developing further a relatively minor aspect of the original genre. This is an interesting fact, because it shows that genre-modifying processes occasionally overlap in the same way as genres do.

Lastly, it is worth remarking that Viktor Shklovskii pinned down the genre of psalms as the historical ancestor of all other intimate and lyrical genres. The critic formulates this idea in the following terms: ‘В искусстве рассказывает человек про себя, и страшно это, не потому страшен человек, а страшно открытие человека. Так, было всегда и “в беззаконии зачат» псалмов страшное признание’.<sup>648</sup> In this quotation Shklovskii refers to psalm 51:5 in which the lamenter confesses his status to God in a strikingly direct and straightforward way. The passage reads as follows: ‘Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me’. Shklovskii’s reference to this passage as the prototype of the author’s unveiling that occurs in artistic creation makes it possible to conclude that one of the reasons why Tsvetaeva resorts to the psalmic intertext is that psalms are a poetic genre in which the author does not endeavour to compromise with the

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<sup>648</sup> Quoted in *A. Akhmatova M. Tsvetaeva*, edited by L. Strakhova (Moscow: Olimp, 2002), p. 584.

sincerity and intensity of his emotions. It appears, then, that Tsvetaeva's attraction to the poetics of psalms is partly motivated by the same reason that Pushkin's,<sup>649</sup> namely by the emotional and personal undertone of the Psalter. This view is confirmed by Brodskii's assertion that Tsvetaeva is the most sincere Russian poet; as he puts it: 'Цветаева действительно самый искренний русский поэт'.<sup>650</sup>

#### 4.2. The Integration of the Psalmic Intertext into Tsvetaeva's Epistolary Poetry

The previous section showed the importance of the genre of the diary in Tsvetaeva's poetic writing. A neighbouring genre is the literary letter, which also reflects the writer's outlook on the surrounding world. A brief examination of the history of this genre is particularly relevant in the present study, since it constitutes another striking illustration of Fowler's assertion that literary genres are time-resistant entities that can exist for centuries thanks to their transformative nature. This phenomenon is obvious in the genre of the literary letter, the origin of which goes back to Greek and Latin classical literature. As the critic T. Mal'chukova notes, although writing letters was originally an extra-literary activity only, it was transformed into a poetic genre by the Roman poet Horace (65-27 BC).<sup>651</sup> The critics Peter Childs and Roger Fowler also consider Horace's versification of the prosaic and extra-literary genre of letter as a landmark in literary history; as they remark, Horace's epistles were 'addressed to friends, patrons and fellow-poets in a

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<sup>649</sup> See Chapter Two, pp. 78-9. of the present study.

<sup>650</sup> <http://www.ipmce.su/~tsvet/WIN/writer/brodsky/volk02.html> Accessed in August 2007.

<sup>651</sup> T. Mal'chukova, *Zhanr poslaniia v lirike Pushkina* (Petrozavodsk: Petrozavodskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1987), pp.15-17; p. 15.

style that approximated to the informal candour and civility of conversation, allowing the poet to expatiate freely in a personal manner on moral and literary themes. Among the principal themes of Horatian epistle, for instance, are the pleasure and virtue of friendship, the values of self-knowledge and integrity of mind [...] and general or specific reflections on the art and status of poetry'.<sup>652</sup> Under the guise of the poetic epistle, the letter-inspired poem became a literary genre. In a slightly different vein, love letters, which are far more personal and intimate, also entered the field of literature in the great French epistolary novels of the eighteenth century such as Rousseau's *La nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) or Laclos' *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782). These works are worth mentioning, given Tsvetaeva's good knowledge of both classical and French literatures and her predilection for the eighteenth century.

In the context of Russian literature, the gradual transformation of the letter into an artistic medium is also an important literary phenomenon, which was fruitfully interpreted by Tynianov. According to him, the integration of the letter into literature results from an evolutionary process whereby dominating genres are replaced by minor genres in an ongoing transformation of the literary system. Concretely, Tynianov considers that the loftiness of the oratorical odes dominating at the beginning of the eighteenth century started to erode when Derzhavin introduced elements of the low register of Russian language together with comical features.<sup>653</sup> A result of this lowering of the high genre of the ode, Tynianov remarks, was the elevation of minor and marginal genres such as the song and the

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<sup>652</sup> *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*, edited by Peter Childs and Roger Fowler (London – New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 250.

<sup>653</sup> Tynianov, 'Literaturnyi fakt', pp. 5-29; pp. 20-1.

letter. The epistolary genre was particularly suited to succeed the oratorical ode as a prominent genre, because it accentuated the opposite principle: instead of universalising, it professed the importance of personal matters. In Tynianov's view, this fact is of paramount importance, since it enabled a refreshment of the reading habit and thus created a renewed interest in an active and heuristic reading, as opposed to an automatised one. The critic describes the entry of the letter into literature in the following terms: '[...] Недоговоренность, фрагментарность, намеки, «домашняя» малая форма письма мотивировали ввод мелочей и стилистических приемов, противоположных «грандиозным» приемам XVIII века. Этот нужный материал стоял вне литературы, в быту. И из бытового документа письмо поднимается в самый центр литературы'.<sup>654</sup> In addition Tynianov adds that, conversely, extra-literary letters started to integrate typical literary devices and thus would be partly made up of poems and/or short stories.<sup>655</sup> Although Tynianov's view of a well-defined and clear pattern consisting in the replacement of a predominant genre by a previously minor genre is slightly too mechanistic, his depiction of the blurring of boundaries between the forms of literary and extra-literary letters in Russian literature of the eighteenth century is particularly relevant here because it corresponds to Fowler's concept of generic mixture.<sup>656</sup> It is not surprising, then, that Fowler also stresses the interrelation between poetry and epistolary writing, when he remarks that poetic addresses such

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<sup>654</sup> Tynianov, 'Literaturnyi fakt', p. 21.

<sup>655</sup> Tynianov, 'Literaturnyi fakt', p. 22.

<sup>656</sup> This is not surprising if one bears in mind that Fowler takes Tynianov's idea of a logical and general evolution of the generic system as a point of departure. As was said previously Fowler agrees with the idea of the interaction and constant evolution of genres but unlike Tynianov, he sees it as a random phenomenon. Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 235; pp. 250-1.



as those found in odes inevitably modulate the genre of epistolary writing, because they borrow a few but significant features from it, namely an intimate tone and an epistolary rhetoric and integrate them into the genre of ode or lyrical poetry.<sup>657</sup> Incidentally, the phenomenon of generic mixture whereby some elements of epistolary writing are incorporated into poetry, while extra-literary letters become poeticised, corresponds precisely to what happens in Tsvetaeva's writing, which is characterised by a mutual exchange of the properties of literary and extra-literary letters occurring in both poetic works and personal correspondence. The critic A. Akbasheva describes the mutual influence of personal letters and artistic writing as follows: 'в письме [...] непрерывно производится отбор, пропуск, т.е. совершается процесс самоорганизации. Из хаоса или потока жизни выделяется наиболее значимое для пишущего в соответствии с его личностью, идеалам [...]. А это для любого человека – шаг в сторону художественности. Письма же большого поэта – звено в его художественной системе [...]'.<sup>658</sup> Here the critic qualifies the poet's letter as a link in the chain of elements making up the overall characterisation of his/her work. Tsvetaeva herself was acutely aware of the intermediary role occupied by the letter in her writing as the following observation testifies: 'Письмо – не литература. Нет, литература – письмо.'<sup>659</sup> Commenting on this remark, the critic Irina Fedorchuk notices the high

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<sup>657</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 108.

<sup>658</sup> A. Akbasheva, 'Zhanr pis'ma v khudozhestvennoi sisteme Mariny Tsvetaevoi' in *Zhanrovое svoeobrazie russkoi i zarubezhnoi literatury XVII – XX vekok: Sbornik statei* (Samara: Izdatel'stvo SGPU, 2002), pp. 168-72; p. 170.

<sup>659</sup> Tsvetaeva, *Neizdannoe. Svodnye tetradi*, p. 190.

status occupied by the genre of the letter in Tsvetaeva's works.<sup>660</sup> It is worth adding here that Tsvetaeva's assertion that literature is a letter reflects the fundamental place occupied by the addressee in her poetry; indeed, many of her poems are composed as an address directed to beloved people, admired artists or God. This characteristic of Tsvetaeva's poetry was highlighted by Catherine Ciepiela who stresses that 'engaging a projected addressee is a basic impulse' of Tsvetaeva's creation.<sup>661</sup> To put it differently, Tsvetaeva's comment on the letter-like quality of literature reveals the fundamental reliance of her poetry on the presence of another being, to whom it is addressed.

Tsvetaeva's attraction to the letter is partly explicable by the fact that it provides her with a remote addressee and enables her to feel in touch with others, while at the same time it allows her to remain isolated in her safe and personal universe, since it does not imply a face-to-face dialogue. In this regard, it is worth mentioning Tsvetaeva's letter to Pasternak, written in November 1922, in which she comments on her predilection for epistolary writing in the following terms: 'Мой любимый вид общения – потусторонний: сон, видеть во сне. А второе – переписка. Письмо, как некий вид потустороннего общения, менее совершенно нежели сон, но те же законы. Ни то, ни другое – не по заказу: снится или пишется не когда *нам* хочется, а когда письму хочется быть написанным [...]. (Мои письма всегда хотят быть написанными!) [...] Я не

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<sup>660</sup> Irina Fedorchuk, "“Kvadrata pis'ma: chernil i char!” (Deviat' zhenskikh pisem Mariny Tsvetaevoi)", *Na putiakh k postizheniiu Mariny Tsvetaevoi, Deviat' zhenskikh pisem Mariny Tsvetaevskaiia mezhdunarodnaia nauchno-tematicheskaiia konferentsiia (9-12 oktiabria 2001 goda)*, edited by O'lga Revzina (Moscow: Dom-muzei Mariny Tsvetaevoi, 2002), pp. 316-24; p. 316.

<sup>661</sup> Catherine Ciepiela, 'Inclined toward the Other: on Cvetaeva's Lyric Address' in *Critical Essays on the Prose and Poetry of Modern Slavic Women*, edited by Nina Efimov and others (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), pp. 117-34; p. 119.

люблю встреч в жизни: сшибаются лбом. Две стены. Так не проникнешь.' (VI, 225-6).<sup>662</sup> Here it is especially worth noting that although Tsvetaeva's addressees are usually her living contemporaries, she defines the letter as a means of communicating with the other world. This paradox betrays Tsvetaeva's propensity not to adjust herself to the real characteristics of her addressee and to rely entirely on the fanciful perception she has of him/her. This tendency was observed by the literary critic Aleksandr Bakhrakh (1902-1985), to whom Tsvetaeva addressed numerous letters and who commented on Tsvetaeva's style of letter-writing as follows: 'Вообще, она редко писала тому живому человеку, имя которого значилось на конверте письма. Она неизменно обращалась к некоему полупризраку, созданному ее воображением.'<sup>663</sup> This remark makes it clear that Tsvetaeva's letters are considered partly artistic, because the approach to writing them is truly artistic, i.e. it resorts to imagination and composition (Tsvetaeva used to draft her letters).<sup>664</sup>

Having established the importance of the epistolary model for Tsvetaeva, it is worth examining how she blends it with the psalmic intertext. To begin with, let us note that right from the start of her poetic career the epistolary model played a significant role in Tsvetaeva's artistic creation. Indeed, *Vechernii al'bom* was not only a lyrical diary but also, according to Tsvetaeva's own comment, a work of art published in order to fulfil the role of a letter to her friend Vladimir Nilender (1883-1965), a poet and the translator of Heraclitus into Russian, whom she had stopped

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<sup>662</sup> Emphasis is mine (S.O.C.).

<sup>663</sup> Aleksandr Bakhrakh, 'Tsvetaeva i ee epistolarnoe tvorchestvo' in *Marina Tsvetaeva: Actes du 1er colloque international*, pp. 380-7; p. 382.

<sup>664</sup> Bakhrakh, 'Tsvetaeva i ee epistolarnoe tvorchestvo', p. 381.

meeting, after he proposed to her. As Tsvetaeva explains, the impulse that compelled her to publish *Vechernii al'bom* was to communicate remotely with Nilender; as she puts it: 'взамен письма к человеку, с которым лишена была возможности сноситься иначе'.<sup>665</sup> The epistolary modulation of the collection is reflected in the fact that the majority of poems of the second part of the collection, entitled 'Liubov'', are devoted and addressed to Nilender. Incidentally, the title of the entire collection (*Vechernii al'bom*) is also linked with Nilender, since it refers to Tsvetaeva's own album in which she would transcribe her conversations with him.<sup>666</sup> To come back to the second section of the collection, let us stress that the epistolary orientation is highlighted right from the beginning, since it opens with an epigraph, constituted by a quotation from St John's first epistle (1 John 4, 18): 'в любви нет страха, но совершенная любовь изгоняет страх, потому что в страхе есть мучение; боящийся не совершен в любви'. Concretely, Tsvetaeva's poems aim at resolving the pain entailed by the end of her romantic friendship with Nilender; in order to do so the young poet meditates on the nature of love. In the context of Tsvetaeva's mixing of the epistolary genre with the psalmic intertext, the most significant poem is 'Sviaz' cherez sny' (date unknown), which reads as follows:

Всё лишь на миг, что людьми создается,  
Блекнет восторг новизны,  
Но неизменной, как грусть, остается  
Связь через сны.

Успокоенье... Забыть бы... Уснуть бы...

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<sup>665</sup> Viktoriia Shveitser, *Byt i bytie Mariny Tsvetaevoi* (Moscow: SP Interprint, 1992), p. 77.

<sup>666</sup> Quoted in Saakiant, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 15.

Сладость опущенных век...  
Сны открывают грядущего судьбы,  
Вяжут навек.

Всё мне, что бы ни думал украдкой,  
Ясно, как чистый кристалл.  
Нас неразрывной и вечной загадкой  
Сон сочетал.

Я не молю: «О, Господь, уничтожи  
Муку грядущего дня!»  
Нет, я молю: «О пошли ему, Боже,  
Сон про меня!»

Пусть я при встрече с тобою бледнею, —  
Как эти встречи грустны!  
Тайна одна. Мы бессильны пред нею:  
Связь через сны.

In this text the epistolary modulation of the poem is not immediately perceptible. In the first two stanzas the lyrical heroine meditates on life's transience and highlights the ephemeral nature of human endeavours; mortality, however, can be counter-balanced by the power of dreams in which it is possible to keep alive what is gone. In the third stanza, the epistolary modulation of the poem can be detected by the fact that the lyrical heroine implicitly addresses her friend by introducing the first person plural pronoun ('nas', line 11). The address-like nature of the poem becomes explicit in the fifth stanza where the lyrical heroine uses the second person pronoun ('s toboi') and thus makes it clear that her reflection on love is addressed to her unnamed friend. It appears, here, that although the poem was conceived as a letter-like address to Nilender, Tsvetaeva uses the epistolary genre only as a modulated genre, i.e. as a secondary genre, rather than as the dominating genre of the poem, which is, as was mentioned, a poetic meditation on love.

At this stage, it is worth noting that the treatment of the psalmic genre in ‘Sviaz’ cherez sny’ is similar to the epistolary one in the sense that it does not constitute the main generic framework of the text; in fact, the psalmic intertext is localised in the third stanza in which the lyrical heroine notices that her personal prayers differ from traditional prayers by their content: instead of asking God to send relief from suffering, as in the case in traditional psalms of lament, Tsvetaeva’s lyrical heroine pleads with God to keep her image alive in the mind of her beloved by sending him a dream about her. In addition, let us remark that by using the archaic adjective ‘griadushchii’ (line 14) instead of the neutral ‘budushchii’ the lyrical heroine accentuates the seriousness of her address to God by formulating it in an elevated style.

These few comments on ‘Sviaz’ cherez sny’ show that in this poem the epistolary genre is discretely blended with the psalmic intertext within a broader generic framework, namely the poetic meditation. Concerning the whole collection of *Vechernii al’bom*, let us say that here the psalmic intertext is only introduced and not yet fully developed as is the case in Tsvetaeva’s mature poetry.

Another significant poem that modulates fruitfully both the epistolary and psalmic genres is ‘Naprasno glazom – kak gvozdem’ (1935), the second poem of the cycle ‘Nadgrobie’, which was written to immortalise and celebrate the young poet Gronskii, whom Tsvetaeva had befriended and whose premature death in Paris shocked the Russian community.

Напрасно глазом – как гвоздем,  
Пронизываю чернозем:

В сознании – верней гвоздя:  
Здесь нет тебя – и нет тебя.

Напрасно в ока оборот  
Обшарываю небосвод:  
– Дождь! Дождевой воды бадья.  
Там нет тебя – и нет тебя.

Нет, некоторое из двух:  
Кость слишком кость, дух слишком дух.  
Где – ты? где – тот? где – сам? где – весь?  
Там – слишком там, здесь – слишком здесь.

Не подменю тебя песком  
И паром. Взявшего – родством  
За труп и призрак не отдам.  
Здесь – слишком здесь, там – слишком там.

Не ты – не ты – не ты – не ты.  
Что бы не пели нам попы,  
Что смерть есть жизнь и жизнь есть смерть, –  
Бог слишком Бог, червь – слишком червь.

На труп и призрак – неделим!  
Не отдадим тебя за дым  
Кадил,  
Цветы  
Могил.

И если где-нибудь ты *есть* –  
Так в нас. И лучшая вам честь,  
Ушедшие – презреть раскол:  
Совсем ушел. Со *всем* – ушел. (II, 325)

The poetic dexterity of this poem, its deep metaphysical meditation and rich intertextual background makes it a complex text that has not failed to attract the attention of critics. In the present examination of how the epistolary modulation combines with the psalmic intertext, it is impossible not to mention Iurii Lotman's interpretation, since it goes right to the heart of the issue of Tsvetaeva's use of the

psalmic intertext. Indeed, observing that the whole poem is constructed on the irreducible opposition between the concepts of spiritual and material principles,<sup>667</sup> Lotman remarks that neither of these two poles is depicted as belonging to the elevated poetic sphere.<sup>668</sup> An illustration of this view is given in the lyrical heroine's assertion that 'God is too much God, worm too much a worm' ('Bog – slishkom bog, cherv' – slishkom cherv'). Here it is particularly important to stress Lotman's judicious observation that this verse is a polemic with psalmic poetry in general and more particularly with the seventh line of psalm 21\* (22).<sup>669</sup> Unfortunately, Lotman only mentions Tsvetaeva's polemical hint and does not develop this line of thought. In the context of the present study, it is obviously relevant to develop Lotman's remark further. The intertextual link with psalm 21\* (22) lies in the fact that both texts use the image of a worm as a metaphor for the extreme frailty of man. In psalm 21\* (22), the psalmist's desperation at the apparent unresponsiveness of God in a moment of extreme harshness leads him to momentarily lose faith in his own humanity and thus in his eligibility for God's help. As a result, the psalmist contrasts his fate with that of his ancestors, whose humanity made them eligible for God's support, and exclaims: 'Our fathers trusted in thee [...] and thou did deliver them. [...]. But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.' By contrast, Tsvetaeva does not use the image of a worm as a metaphor of the dehumanising effect which extreme suffering produces in the individual's consciousness, as is the case in psalm 21\* (22), but, on the contrary, as an indicator of the frailty inherent in humankind due to

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<sup>667</sup> Iurii Lotman, *Analiz poeticheskogo teksta* (Leningrad: Prosveshchenie, 1972), pp. 235-47.

<sup>668</sup> Lotman, *Analiz poeticheskogo teksta*, p. 239.

<sup>669</sup> Lotman, *Analiz poeticheskogo teksta*, pp. 244-5.



its mortality. Hence, Lotman is right to assert that Tsvetaeva enters a polemic with the Psalter in this poem. The polemic centres on the incompatibility between the physical and inevitable degradation and disappearance of the individual caused by death and the idea of an eternal, divine principle. To put it differently, Tsvetaeva borrowed from the Psalter the image of a worm, yet, far from presenting it as a temporary degradation of an individual who is ultimately rescued by God, Tsvetaeva uses it as a indication of the loss of faith in the divine that can be triggered by the sudden and untimely death of a young and promising person.

In addition, Tsvetaeva's use of the psalmic image of a worm, as a metaphor of human frailty echoes Derzhavin's famous ode 'Bog' (1784) in which the lyrical hero exclaims: 'Я царь – я раб – я червь – я Бог! [...] Твое создание я, Создатель'.<sup>670</sup> As these lines indicate, Derzhavin is much closer to the psalms, since the lyrical hero's feeling of being a worm is temporary and is counter-balanced by his awareness of being, ultimately, a divinely inspired creature made in the image of the God. At this stage, it is worth mentioning D. Akhapkin's assertion that Tsvetaeva's primary intertext is Derzhavin's ode rather than the Psalter.<sup>671</sup> As the critic observes, such a view echoes Viacheslav Ivanov's demonstration of a very strong intertextual link between Derzhavin's ode and Tsvetaeva's poem based on the unusual verse line made up of eight accentuated monosyllabic words:<sup>672</sup> indeed, the metrical pattern of Derzhavin's 'Ia tsar' – ia rab – ia cherv' – ia Bog!' is

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<sup>670</sup> Quoted in *The Garnett Book of Russian Verse*, p. 11.

<sup>671</sup> D. Akhapkin, 'Tsikl "Nadgrobie" Mariny Tsvetaevoy v russkom poeticheskom kontekste', *Borisogleb'e Mariny Tsvetaevoy*, pp. 255-63; p. 259.

<sup>672</sup> Viacheslav Ivanov, 'Sovremennost' poetiki Derzhavina' in *Gavriil Derzhavin 1743-1816. Norwich Symposia on Russian Literature and Culture*, edited by Efim Etkind and Svetlana Elnitsky (Northfield, Vermont: The Russian School of Norwich University, 1995), pp. 406-15; pp. 410-1.

repeated in Tsvetaeva's 'Gde ty? Gde tot? Gde sam? Gde ves?'. In the present discussion of the generic intertext of psalms, the fact that Tsvetaeva was inspired by Derzhavin's text rather than the Psalter is secondary and does not invalidate the demonstration of her high receptivity to psalmic poetry; on the contrary, it reinforces it by showing that Tsvetaeva resorts not only to the original psalms but also to the poetry they inspired.

Having demonstrated the presence of a polemic with psalmic poetry in this poem, it is time to examine how the psalmic intertext mingles with the text's epistolary modulation, which is signalled by the fact that the lyrical heroine addresses Gronskii directly in what appears to be a letter to the deceased. Thus the first stanza ends with a direct address to Gronskii in which the lyrical heroine deplores his absence as follows: 'Zdes' net tebia – I net tebia'. Here it is fair to suggest that the lyrical heroine's realisation of the addressee's absence is precisely what triggers the letter-like direct address, since it enables her to create a dialogue similar to those that occur among living people. Moreover, the fact that the lyrical heroine establishes a dialogue with someone who has passed away coincides with Tsvetaeva's view that in writing letters one creates a link with the other world (VI, 225-6).

The second stanza contrasts with the first in that it asserts Gronskii's absence not from the earth, but also from the sky. This idea is summarised in the last line of the second stanza in which the lyrical heroine asserts her addressee's absence, paradoxically by addressing him directly: 'Tam net tebia – i net tebia'.

In the third stanza, the letter-like direct address is repeated and blended with Tsvetaeva's polemical assertion of the gap between the spirit and flesh that cannot be bridged and that precludes the deceased from finding a place in either realm. This state of affairs suggests that it is futile to address the deceased because they no longer exists. Yet Tsvetaeva justifies her letter-like poem by asserting that the only place where Gronskii still exists is in the memory of his fellow poets. As the lyrical heroine puts it in the last stanza: 'I esli gde-nibud' ty *est*' – / Tak v nas.' Incidentally, this idea is also reminiscent of Horace's poetic meditation on the poet's immortal spirit entitled 'Exegi momentum' which inspired two of Tsvetaeva's favourite poets, namely Derzhavin, who wrote his own version of it in 1795 and Pushkin who also proposes a variation on it in 'Pamiatnik' (1836).

To conclude let us note that Lotman's interpretation that in 'Naprasno glazom – kak gvozdem' Tsvetaeva assigns poetry a space that is separate from both the physical and spiritual realms is reinforced by my observations. Indeed, the assertion of poetry's unique ability to maintain alive the spirit of those who have passed away explains not only Tsvetaeva's attraction to shadows, as she dubs them in her poem 'Eshche molitva', i.e. to the dead, but also the epistolary modulation of many of her poems devoted to the dead. Indeed, by addressing the dead in her poetry Tsvetaeva overcomes the real-life limitations that do not allow her to communicate with those who passed away and recreates a living link between herself and the dead. Incidentally, let us say that the artistic gesture consisting in sending a letter to a fellow-poet who has just died is even more explicit in Tsvetaeva's *poema Novogodnee* (1927), which is addressed to the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke

(1875-1926) and in which the epistolary modulation is clearly expressed in the opening lines: ‘С новым Годом – светом – краем – кровом / Первое письмо тебе на новом / [...] месте’ (III, 132). In this *poema*, however, Tsvetaeva does not directly resort to the psalmic intertext.<sup>673</sup>

The mixing of the psalmic intertext with a poem that modulates epistolary writing is also found in the poem ‘Ne umresh’, narod’ (1939), which belongs to the cycle ‘Stikhi k Chekhii’.

Не умрешь, народ!  
Бог тебя хранит!  
Сердцем дал — гранат.  
Грудью дал — гранит.

Процветай, народ, —  
Твердый, как скрижаль,  
Жаркий, как гранат,  
Чистый, как хрусталь. (II, 362)

The epistolary modulation of this poem is perceptible right from the start, since the lyrical heroine addresses the Czech people in a poem-missive in which she assures them of God’s protection and lauds their priceless qualities such as their warm cordiality, metaphorically designated by the image of a pomegranate, their strength, illustrated with the images of granite and purity referred to via the image of crystal. Concerning the psalmic intertext of the poem, it is worth noting that it reworks the particular genre of communal lament, since, although the poem is

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<sup>673</sup> Likewise, Elena Aizenshtein [ ‘K postanovke problemy “son v zhizni i tvorchestve M. Tsvetaevoi” in *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* (32) 1992, pp. 121-33; p. 125] observes that Tsvetaeva’s *poema Popytka komnaty* (1926) was conceived as a letter answering Pasternak’s letter written to her on 20 April 1926.

uttered by a single lyrical heroine, it is a cry of help for God voiced for the sake of the Czech people, who are experiencing a devastating political crisis, namely invasion by the German army. The lyrical heroine's assertion that God will not let the Czech people die is remarkable because it echoes the psalmist's assertions of his confidence in God that are typical of psalms of lament. For instance, in psalm 25:2 the author asserts his belief in God's ultimate support as follows: 'O my God, I trust in thee: [...] let not mine enemies triumph over me'.

From a stylistic point of view, the poetics of psalms is recalled through the poem's saturation with parallelisms. The first of them is found in the last two lines of the first stanza in which the lyrical heroine expresses the moral integrity of Czech people by means of two lines grammatically identical and which both refer figuratively to the idea of the Czech people's strength of character; this is designated firstly with the image of the pomegranate and secondly with that of granite. Let us note here that there is an intensification in these two images since pomegranates are made up of a soft texture, whereas granite is inflexible. As was shown in Chapter Two, parallelism in which there is a semantic gradation is very common in psalms.<sup>674</sup>

The second stanza reinforces the idea of the Czech people's moral strength and also resorts to parallelisms. Thus in the second line the lyrical heroine underlines the strong spirit of the Czech citizens by figuratively comparing it with a stone board. The term 'скрижаль' is particularly remarkable because it is an archaic and elevated term that is associated with the divine inscription of God's words described in Exodus 32: 15. By comparing the Czech people's strength with the

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<sup>674</sup> Chapter Two, pp. 66-6 of present study.

solidity of the stones on which God inscribed his words, the lyrical heroine reveals that she considers the sacred word of the Bible as a model of longevity. In this perspective, it is no wonder that the lyrical heroine resorts to another stylistic feature reminiscent of biblical poetry and psalms,<sup>675</sup> namely the omission of the verb, as is the case in the last three lines of the poem.

To conclude, let us say that in its use of the psalmic intertext ‘Ne umresh’, narod!’ is not polemical. On the contrary, in this poem the psalm-like poetics used by the lyrical heroine can be interpreted as a last hope in the existence of an ultimate truth, divine or not, that will eventually reward the Czech people, and by extension all those who suffer unfairly.

The present section demonstrated that although God undoubtedly constitutes an important addressee of Tsvetaeva’s poetry, he is by far not its sole addressee. Indeed, a significant number of Tsvetaeva’s poems are addressed to her contemporaries, be they friends, relatives or admired poets. This fact stems from Tsvetaeva’s relentless need to communicate with her peers; the realisation of this need, however, was impeded by her awkwardness in real-life relationships. This state of affairs served to elevate the extra-literary genre of letters into an inspiring model for her poetry. An important point concerning the epistolary modulation of Tsvetaeva’s poetry is that it blends harmoniously with the psalmic intertext. For instance, in her letter-like poem to Gronsii Tsvetaeva uses the psalmic intertext as a point of departure in her meditation on the mystery of death. Finally, Tsvetaeva’s message of support to the Czech people constituted by the poem ‘Ne umresh’,

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<sup>675</sup> Chapter Two, p. 63 of present study.

narod' shows that despite her scepticism, Tsvetaeva still refers to God as the instance granting ultimate justice. As these few examples demonstrate, the psalmic modulation complements the epistolary one in the sense that it provides the lyrical heroine with a culturally shared intertext that is integrated into the specific discourse of the lyrical heroine to her addressee as a model of praise and, at the same time, a subject of meditation.

#### 4.3. The Mixed Origin of Tsvetaeva's Poetic Laments

The present section aims to shed light on Tsvetaeva's peculiar mixing of the psalmic intertext with the folk tonality of the following poems 'Sobiraia liubimikh v put'' (1916), 'Beloe solntse i nizkie, nizkie tuchi' (1916), 'Slezy, slezy – zhivaia voda!' (1918).<sup>676</sup> Obviously, this group of poems is only a sample of Tsvetaeva's poetry inspired by folk songs; yet, the poems chosen are significant enough to give a representative picture of Tsvetaeva's subtle use of this intertext. Indeed, the interest of the poetic works gathered in this section lies in that each poem clearly reflects Tsvetaeva's special affinity with folklore and the way in which it blends with the psalmic intertext.

Tsvetaeva herself insisted on the fact that she felt close to folk culture; as she puts it: 'Каждую народную песню, будь то русская, французская, немецкая, пр. – я неизменно чувствую – *моею*.'<sup>677</sup> Likewise, critics have not failed to note the

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<sup>676</sup> Tsvetaeva's overtly folkloric *poemy* will not be analysed in this section, because they rely on the genre of fairy tale, whereas the folk genre examined in this section is the lament.

<sup>677</sup> Tsvetaeva, *Neizdannoe; Svodnye tetradi*, p. 362.

influence of folk songs on her poetry. For instance, the literary reviewer G. Struve, a contemporary of Tsvetaeva, underlined the folkloric orientation of her verses: ‘Единственное сильное влияние, осязаемое в поэзии Цветаевой, это влияние русской народной песни.’<sup>678</sup> Although this statement is a little far-fetched, inasmuch as scholars investigating the intertextual aspect of Tsvetaeva’s poetry have made it plain that her writing has been influenced by many other traditions such as romanticism,<sup>679</sup> symbolism<sup>680</sup> or even acmeism,<sup>681</sup> it remains true that the folkloric layer of her work constitutes an important intertext of Tsvetaeva’s multidimensional poetry.

In his comment on the importance of folk poetry in Tsvetaeva’s work Iosif Brodskii insists on the overriding importance of the lament; as he puts it: ‘За исключением Н. Клюева, из всей плеяды великих русских поэтов XX века Цветаева стоит ближе других к фольклору, и стилистика причитания – один из ключей к пониманию ее творчества’.<sup>682</sup> Brodskii explains the proximity of Tsvetaeva’s work with folk poetry by asserting that both are constituted by monologues triggered by the absence of an interlocutor. At first sight, such an assertion seems to contradict Ciepiela’s remark that Tsvetaeva’s poetry is marked

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<sup>678</sup> G. Struve, ‘Rets: Marina Tsvetaeva. Remeslo: Kniga stikhov’ in *Marina Tsvetaeva v kritike sovremennikov. Rodstvo i chuzhdost’*, pp.150-153; p.152.

<sup>679</sup> Concerning the influence of Romanticism on Tsvetaeva, see Stock, *The Ethics of the Poets*, pp. 18-23.

<sup>680</sup> Concerning the influence of symbolism on Tsvetaeva, see Kling, ‘Poeticheskii stil’ M. Tsvetaevoi i priemy simvolizma: Pritiazhenie i ottalkivanie’, pp. 74-93.

<sup>681</sup> Concerning the influence of acmeism on Tsvetaeva, see: Alexandra Smith ‘Surpassing Acmeism? The Lost Key to Cvetaeva’s ‘Poem of The Air’’, *Russian Literature* XLV (1999), pp. 209-22; Kling, *Poeticheskii mir Mariny Tsvetaevoi*, pp. 47-8.

<sup>682</sup> <http://tsvetaeva.km.ru/WIN/writer/Brodsky/poeticproza.html> Accessed in August 2003.



by the lyrical heroine's overriding tendency to address others.<sup>683</sup> In fact, Ciepiela's position is compatible with Brodskii's observation in the sense that it is precisely the lack of a satisfactory interlocutor in real life that compels Tsvetaeva to write poetic addresses to others.

Let us analyse, now, the way in which Tsvetaeva blends the intertext of psalms with the modulated genre of folk lament. To begin with, it is worth noting that the discursive act of lamentation is a defining generic feature of both genres. This fact reveals the overlapping of tone between psalmic and the folkloric laments, which share the common characteristic of allowing the performer to express grief. The main difference between these two different types of lamentation is that the former is closely linked with the ritual and ideology of the Judeo-Christian religion, while the second is rooted in folk culture, which in Russia mixes Christian belief with paganism. This peculiarity of Russian folk culture is usually referred to with the term *dvoeverie* (dual faith).<sup>684</sup>

Another significant difference between lament psalm and folk lament lies in the fact that the former is overridingly presented as a masculine genre, while the second is reserved to women. As will be shown, by modulating on these two types of lament at the same time, Tsvetaeva makes the gender differentiation of these two genres obsolete and implicitly demonstrates its artificiality.

Before examining how the psalmic intertext mingles with the folkloric modulation of Tsvetaeva's poetry, it is worth commenting on the link between psalms and folklore in general. In this perspective, it is important to note Gunkel's

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<sup>683</sup> Ciepiela, 'Inclined toward the Other: on Cvetaeva's Lyric Address', p. 119.

<sup>684</sup> David Bethea, 'Literature' in *The Cambridge Companion to Russian Modern Culture*, edited by Nicholas Rzhevsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 161-204; p. 172.

remark that, originally, some psalms of lament appear to be the result of the transformation of the popular genre of the dirge, which was transformed and integrated into the sacred poetry of the Psalter. As the scholar observes, this means that ‘the originally secular genre of the dirge has been transformed into a religious poem’.<sup>685</sup> Such a phenomenon confirms once again the pertinence of Fowler’s theory about the historical persistence of genres that is made possible thanks to their flexibility, which allows them to be modified and adjusted to various cultural horizons. In the context of the present study it is especially interesting to remark that in her poetry Tsvetaeva performs a reversal of the original sanctification of a popular genre, since she extracts psalmic poetry from its religious context and reassimilates it into the genre of folk lament. Not surprisingly, the fact that both psalmic and folkloric laments share several generic features, such as a tragic tone and a mood of despair, makes the mingling of these two genres particularly fruitful.

Let us start by briefly defining the Russian folk lament. The Russian term designating this genre is ‘prichitanie’. Yet simple folk would rather use the term ‘vopl’’, as the scholar V. Bazanov remarks.<sup>686</sup> *Prichitanie* is a lamentation, usually sung by women in the three following circumstances: at funerals, at the departure of sons for the army and at a girl’s wedding. In her analysis of this genre the critic Natalie Kononenko explains that the funeral dirge was the original genre and it was gradually diversified into the lamentation for the departure of recruits and for girls’

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<sup>685</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 96.

<sup>686</sup> V. Bazanov, *Fol’klor i russkaia poeziia* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1988), p. 49.

weddings.<sup>687</sup> The critic further explains that the mourning aspect of the dirge remained even in the two latter types, because for the young recruit enrolling in the Russian army entailed that he was likely not to see his family again because he would have to serve for twenty five years of perilous life; hence ‘lamenting in such occasions seems logical’.<sup>688</sup> Likewise, the system of beliefs underlying the rites of the traditional folk wedding ceremony clearly equates the marriage of the girl with her death as an individual.<sup>689</sup>

Another important point to highlight is Bazanov’s suggestion that folk laments may well have been the first genre in which women could articulate their feelings. As the critic puts it: ‘Возможно, что именно на кладбище впервые раздалась свободная речь женщины, угнетенной в обществе и в семье, не имевшей другой трибуны для высказывания всего, что накопилось за многие годы тяжелой жизни’.<sup>690</sup> Furthermore, the critic also observes that social discontent was often expressed in dirges and that is why dirges were treated as a suspicious genre during the Middle Ages and under Peter I.<sup>691</sup> Finally, another important fact reported by Bazanov about the genre of popular lament is that, despite being primarily a ritualistic genre, it is supple enough to integrate the singer’s everyday concerns. In fact, the genre even possesses a non-ritual variant, in which the singer’s daily reality is reflected. Bazanov describes this variant as follows: ‘Кроме

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<sup>687</sup> Natalie Kononenko, ‘Women as Performers of Oral Literature: A Re-examination of Epic and Lament’ in *Women Writers in Russian Literature*, edited by Diana Green and others (Wesport: Greenwood Press, 1994), pp. 17-33.

<sup>688</sup> Kononenko, ‘Women as Performers of Oral Literature: A Re-examination of Epic and Lament’, p. 21.

<sup>689</sup> Kononenko, ‘Women as Performers of Oral Literature: A Re-examination of Epic and Lament’, p. 24.

<sup>690</sup> Bazanov, *Fol’klor i russkaia poeziia*, p. 76.

<sup>691</sup> Bazanov, *Fol’klor i russkaia poeziia*, p. 71.

причитаний обрядовых [...] были еще плачи «на всякий случай», бытовые, [...] более свободные в своем развитии и в своих постоянных связях с окружающей действительностью». <sup>692</sup>

Concerning the formal features of the folk genre of lament, it is important to stress that it is a poetic genre inasmuch as the songs of lamentation are lyrical; Bazanov comments on this aspect of folk lamentations as follows: ‘their lyricism is harsh, mournful, meditative, but never quieting. Images of grief, sorrow, and hurt jump from one stanza to another forming a unique emotional outburst. This produces a special intonational intensity (one might say, over-intensity)’. <sup>693</sup> Furthermore, it is also worth noting that some epic elements are present, because laments also contain a narrative part necessary for the praise of the departed and the narration of the circumstances of their departure. Ultimately, though, folk laments are not reducible to rigid literary definitions because they are tightly bound to the particular circumstances of the events triggering them. As Bazanov puts it: ‘They do not fit into one style, just as, in general, folklore does not fit the concepts and definitions worked out in literary theory. Here, everything operates in its own way, in a strange interweaving and intermixing, often in eclectic combinations’. <sup>694</sup> On the linguistic level, however, the lamentations are recognisable not only thanks to their use of popular language (*prostorechie*) but also thanks to their use of repetitions,

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<sup>692</sup> Bazanov, *Fol'klor i russkaia poeziia*, p. 71.

<sup>693</sup> V. Bazanov, ‘Rites and Poetry’ in *The Study of Russian Folklore*, edited and translated by Felix Oinas and Stephen Soudakoff (The Hague – Paris: Mouton, 1975), pp. 123-34; p. 130.

<sup>694</sup> Bazanov, ‘Rites and Poetry’, p. 131.

which is the most widespread device of folkloric poetry, as the scholar I. Amroian notes.<sup>695</sup>

Let us see, now, how Tsvetaeva integrates the folk genre of lamentation into her poetry and fruitfully mixes it with the psalmic intertext. A good example of this type of generic mixture is found in the poem ‘Sobiraia liubimyykh v put’ (1916):

Собирая любимых в путь,  
Я им песни пою на память —  
Чтобы приняли как-нибудь,  
Что когда-то дарили сами.

Зеленеющею тропой  
Довожу их до перекрестка.  
Ты без устали, ветер, пой,  
Ты, дорога, не будь им жесткой!

Туча сизая, слез не лей, —  
Как на праздник они обуты!  
Ущечи себе жало, змей,  
Кинь, разбойничек, нож свой лютый.

Ты, прохожая красота,  
Будь веселою им невестой.  
Потруди за меня уста, —  
Наградит тебя Царь Небесный!

Разгорайтесь, костры, в лесах,  
Разгоняйте зверей берложьих.  
Богородица в небесах,  
Вспомяни о моих прохожих! (I, 253)

Right from the start of the poem the lyrical heroine describes a situation similar to those of popular laments. Indeed, when she asserts that she sings songs

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<sup>695</sup> I. Amroian, *Povtor v structure fol'klornogo teksta* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi respublikanskii tsentr russkogo fol'klora, 2005), p. 5.

for the departure of those beloved and dear to her heart, the lyrical heroine situates herself in circumstances typically depicted in popular laments, namely the separation of relatives. Moreover, she refers to herself as the performer of the songs of parting in which she wishes her beloved ones a safe journey. In expressing her wishes the lyrical heroine displays a typical feature of Russian folklore, namely the mixing of a pagan frame of mind with Christianity. Indeed, the lyrical heroine addresses successively various instances such as the wind (line 7), the path (line 8), a cloud (line 9), a snake (line 11) and a robber (line 12), beauty (line 13), her own lips (line 14), fires (line 16), wild animals (line 17); this enumeration of the instances called upon by the lyrical heroine for the protection of her beloved ones clearly indicates a pagan frame of mind which considers natural elements as powerful entities dominating humankind. In addition, the lyrical heroine's specification that she accompanies her beloved to the crossroads is also highly reminiscent of the Slavonic folkloric culture that considers the crossroads as a place fraught with danger, because it is considered to be inhabited by demonic forces.<sup>696</sup> At the same time, the fact that the last entity addressed by the lyrical heroine is the Virgin, mother of God (line 19) indicates that she is also Christian.

Although the psalmic intertext of this poem is not obvious, it is undoubtedly present. Kling judiciously observes that the lyrical heroine makes an approximate quotation of psalm 90\* (91) when she enjoins a dragon to attack (hurt) its own sting so that it cannot hurt her beloved ones; as the critic stresses, this injunction is reminiscent of psalm 90\* (91) which describes how God's protection enables the

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<sup>696</sup> *Slavianskaia mifologiya*, pp. 360-1.

righteous to walk safely past ferocious animals.<sup>697</sup> God's protective power is expressed as follows: '[God] shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet'.<sup>698</sup> As Kling explains, in Russian popular culture psalm 90\* (91) was usually uttered at dangerous times, because it was believed to assure a safe outcome.<sup>699</sup> It appears, then, that in 'Sobiraia liubimyykh v put'' the mixing of the genre of popular lament with the genre of psalm reflects the harmonious coexistence of pagan beliefs with Christianity in the consciousness of the Russian people.

Another poem in which the mixing of the popular lament with the genre of psalm is fruitfully realised is 'Beloe solntse i nizkie, nizkie tuchi', written in July 1916:

Белое солнце и низкие, низкие тучи,  
Вдоль огородов – за белой стеною – погость.  
И на песке вереница соломенных чучел  
Под перекладинами в человеческий рост.

И, перевесившись через заборные кольца,  
Видю: дороги, деревья, солдаты вразброд...  
Старая баба – посыпанный крупной солью  
Черный ломоть у калитки жует и жует.

Чем прогневили тебя эти серые хаты,  
Господи! – и для чего стольким простреливать грудь?  
Поезд прошел и завыл, и завyli солдаты,  
И запылil, запылil отступающий путь...

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<sup>697</sup> Kling, *Poeticheskii mir Mariny Tsvetaevoi*, p. 50.

<sup>698</sup> Stress is mine (S.O.C.).

<sup>699</sup> Kling, *Poeticheskii mir Mariny Tsvetaevoi*, p. 50.

Нет, умереть! Никогда не родиться бы лучше,  
Чем этот жалобный, жалостный, каторжный вой  
О чернوبرовых красавицах. – Ох, и поют же  
Нынче солдаты! О, Господи Боже ты мой! (I, 310-1)

In her autobiographical essay 'Istoriia odnogo posviashcheniia' (1931) Tsvetaeva recalls that she wrote this poem while she was staying in the small provincial town of Aleksandrov with her sister Anastasia. Tsvetaeva depicts the atmosphere that inspired her to write 'Beloe solntse...' in the following terms:

‘1916 год. Лето. Пишу стихи к Блоку и впервые читаю Ахматову.<sup>700</sup>  
Перед домом, за лохмами сада, площадка. На ней солдаты учатся – стрельбе.  
Вот стихи того лета:

Белое солнце и низкие, низкие тучи

[...]

О, Господи боже ты мой!’ (IV, 140-1).

Tsvetaeva's contextualisation of her poem makes it plain that it was composed under the influence of multiple sources of inspiration: the provincial town of Aleksandrov with the scene of the military recruits learning to shoot on the one hand, and the literary influence of Blok and Akhmatova on the other. In addition, I will show that Tsvetaeva also modulates both the genre of folk laments and that of psalms of lament.

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<sup>700</sup> Scholars agree that Tsvetaeva had probably been reading Akhmatova's poetry before 1916. For instance, Veronika Losskaia suggests that Tsvetaeva must have started to read Akhmatova in 1914 [*Pesni zhenshchin: Anna Akhmatova i Marina Tsvetaeva v zerkale russkoi poezii XX veka* (Paris – Moscow: Muzei-kvartira Mariny Tsvetaevoi v Bolsheve, 1999), p. 18].



Let us begin by observing that the real-life setting of Aleksandrov and especially the presence of young recruits echo the circumstances which generate folk lament. In Tsvetaeva's poem, the lyrical heroine does not mourn the departure for the army of a single person, yet the poem is definitely akin to the popular lament, since in it the lyrical heroine magnifies the genre by lamenting all the young men enrolling for the army. In addition, the mention of an old peasant woman designated by the expression 'staraia baba' reinforces the folkloric atmosphere since *baba* designates a folk woman. On a stylistic level, the folk genre of lamentation is perceptible in the lyrical heroine's repetitions of the same term, which is typical of folk songs.<sup>701</sup> For instance: 'i nizkie, nizkie tuchi' (line 1); 'zhuet i zhuet' (line 8); 'i zavyl, i zavyl' (line 11); 'zapytil, zapytil' (line 12).

The psalmic modulation of this poem is noticeable in the last two stanzas. In the third stanza the lyrical heroine addresses God with direct questions regarding the rightness of the event she is witnessing, namely the fatal destiny of young and innocent men. Such a questioning of God is reminiscent of psalms of lament in which the psalmist often expresses doubts regarding God's apparent passivity at the sight of earthly injustice with questions. For instance, the lamenter of psalm 10:1 addresses God as follows: 'Why standeth thou afar off, O Lord? Why hidest thou in times of troubles?'

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<sup>701</sup> L. Nevskaiia, 'Povtor kak immanentnoe svoistvo fol'klornogo teksta' in *Slavianskii stikh; stikhovedenie, lingvistika i poetika*, edited by M. Gasparov and T. Skulacheva (Moscow: Nauka, 1996), pp. 210-15; p. 210: 'Повторение как прием организации фольклорного текста действует на всех уровнях: звуковое уподобление, грамматическое выравнивание, повторение отдельных лексем или цепи синонимов, вплоть до повторения пространственных текстовых фрагментов'.

Another feature typical of psalms of lament is the lyrical heroine's formulation of the wish she had not been born ('Net, umeret'! Nikogda ne rodit'sia by luchshe'), which is formulated at the beginning of the fourth stanza and which echoes Job's cursing of his birth, formulated as follows: 'Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived' (Job 3-3). As Gunkel observes, this passage of Job is identical to a lament psalm.<sup>702</sup>

To summarise on Tsvetaeva's modulation on both the folk lament and psalms of lament, let us say that the presence of the former genre is connected to the events witnessed by the lyrical heroine and the setting of the poem, while the latter genre is perceptible in the way the lyrical heroine addresses God.

As was said, the writing of 'Beloe solntse...' coincided with Tsvetaeva's reading of both Blok's and Akhmatova's poetry, whose influence, far from disturbing Tsvetaeva's harmonious modulation on the folk and psalmic laments, reinforces it. Indeed, Losskaia's judicious juxtaposition of Akhmatova's and Tsvetaeva's poetic responses to the outbreak of the First World War indicates that the seriousness of the situation was not initially grasped by Tsvetaeva, who reacted to this event by writing a poem in which the lyrical heroine asserts her total indifference to unfolding events: 'Война, война [...] Но нету дела мне до царских счетов, / Народных ссор.'<sup>703</sup> Losskaia highlights the contrast between Tsvetaeva's and Akhmatova's poetic reactions by quoting the latter's expression of the distress caused to her by the thought of the suffering people were about to

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<sup>702</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 121.

<sup>703</sup> Quoted by Losskaia, *Pesni zhenshchin*, p. 17

experience because of the war; Akhmatova formulates her worries in 'Molitva' (1915):

Дай мне горькие годы недуга,  
Задыханья, бессоницу, жар,  
Отыми и ребенка, и друга,  
И таинственный песенный дар –  
Так молюсь за Твоей литургией  
После стольких томительных дней,  
Чтобы туча над темной Россией  
Стала облаком в славе лучей.<sup>704</sup>

Losskaia's juxtaposition of the poems suggests that Akhmatova's expression of a deep and heartfelt compassion for the impending suffering of ordinary people might have awakened Tsvetaeva from her aloofness to unfolding events. It is telling that the identification of Akhmatova's lyrical heroine with Russia itself, which leads her to express her readiness to sacrifice her personal happiness for the sake of the people's well-being, is mirrored in Tsvetaeva's poem in which the lyrical heroine generalises the maternal attitude of a mother to her child and laments not for one but for all the soldiers destined to fight in the war. The hypothesis of Akhmatova's influence on the composition of 'Beloe soltnse...' is confirmed by Tsvetaeva's own comment on the issue; in 1936 (IV, 286), Tsvetaeva remembered the imposing weight cast by Akhmatova on the beginning of her poetic career: 'Ахматова! – Слово сказано. Всем своим существом чую напряженное – неизбежное – при каждой строке сравнение нас' (IV, 286). Akhmatova was already a highly-reputed and well-established poet when Tsvetaeva started to publish; it is understandable, then, that she felt it difficult to avoid comparison with

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<sup>704</sup> Akhmatova, *Sobranie sochinenii*, I, 231.

her peer, as Dinega underlines.<sup>705</sup> Although it is fair to suggest that Akhmatova's 'Molitva' of 1915 made Tsvetaeva more receptive to the tragic fate awaiting ordinary people, the manner in which each poet expresses her compassion is at the same time similar and strikingly different. Both lament for the people as a whole rather than for a specific individual and both address their concern over the people's undeserved suffering to God. But Tsvetaeva's way of addressing God differs significantly from that of Akhmatova. In 'Molitva' Akhmatova does not express any doubt regarding God's righteousness but simply and respectfully asks him to concentrate suffering on her. This humble and accepting tone is radically different from that of 'Beloe solntse...' in which the lyrical heroine does not hide the extent of her bafflement and sense of revolt at the sight of impending suffering and asserts that she would rather be dead than witness the sacrifice of innocents. This difference of position is interesting, because it explains why Tsvetaeva, unlike Akhmatova, resorts to the intertext of psalms of lament in the poem 'Beloe solntse...'; the reason is that it is typical of this genre to voice one's lack of understanding of God and the despair that stems from it.

Another clue regarding the influence of Akhmatova's poetry on the writing of 'Beloe solntse...' is given in Tsvetaeva's cycle 'Akhmatovoi' devoted to her and written a month earlier, in June 1916. The first line of the cycle defines Akhmatova as 'the Muse of Lament' ('O, муза плача' (I, 303));<sup>706</sup> the lament-like quality of her poetry is then underlined by a description of the piercing effect of Akhmatova's

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<sup>705</sup> Dinega, *A Russian Psyche*, p. 56.

<sup>706</sup> Concerning the impact of this qualification on Akhmatova herself, who reuses it in 'Epicheskie motivy' (1922), see Shevtser, *Marina Tsvetaeva* (2002), pp. 144-5.

poetic wailing ('И вопли твои вонзают в нас, как стрелы' (I, 303)).<sup>707</sup> As was said earlier, the term 'vopl'' is frequently used to designate folk lament (*prichitanie*). Hence, Akhmatova's influence on Tsvetaeva also contributed to her subtle integration of the genre of folk lament into her poetry.

Incidentally, it is worth noting Dinega's convincing argument that Tsvetaeva's description of Akhmatova as the muse of lamentation enabled her to emancipate herself from the burden of her boundless admiration and thus prevented her from being inhibited by Akhmatova's poetic power; consequently, the critic considers Tsvetaeva's poetic description of Akhmatova as a way of exorcising the overpowering effect of her poetic spell.<sup>708</sup>

Finally, let us add that, as was said earlier, the poem 'Beloe solntse...' was also influenced by Blok's poetry. Saakiantz demonstrates that Blok's poem 'Petrogradskoe nebo mutilos' dozhdem' (1914) narrates the departure of soldiers to the front in a setting similar to that of Tsvetaeva's poems.<sup>709</sup> Obviously, the influence of Blok's poetry is not pure coincidence and can be explained by the fact that Blok himself wrote numerous poems resonating with folk poetry.<sup>710</sup>

Another poem in which Tsvetaeva manages to blend harmoniously the folk and psalmic intertexts is 'Slezy, slezy – zhivaia voda!' (1918):

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<sup>708</sup> Dinega, *A Russian Psyche*, pp. 58-71.

<sup>709</sup> Saakiantz, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, pp. 96-7.

<sup>710</sup> O. Soloshenko, 'O zhanre zaklinanii v poezii Aleksandra Bloka' in *Poeziia A. Bloka i folklorno-literaturnye traditsii. Sbornik dokladov*, edited by E. Belen'kii (Omsk: Pedagogicheskii institut imeni A.M. Gor'kogo, 1984), pp. 29-41.

Слезы, слезы – живая вода!  
Слезы, слезы – благая беда!  
Закипайте из жарких недр,  
Проливайтесь из жарких век.

Гнев Господень – широк и щедр.  
Да снесет его – человек.

Дай разок вздохнуть  
Свежим воздухом.  
Размахни мне грудь  
Светлым посохом! (I, 403-4)

This poem mixes the intertext of folk lament with that of psalm in a particularly smooth way. To begin with, let us note that the motif of tears dominating the first stanza is typical of both genres. Indeed, inasmuch as they both represent a lyrical hero/-ine overwhelmed by grief, it is no wonder that tears are an equally important motif in psalms of lament and folk laments. Thus in psalm 6:6 the poet formulates his complaint by asserting that his bed has been inundated by his tears; in psalm 42:3 he exclaims: ‘My tears have been my meat day and night’; in psalm 126:5 the poet asserts that those who ‘sow in tears shall reap in joy’; likewise, Jeremiah, whose complaints are generically similar to those of the psalmist,<sup>711</sup> describes the extent of his grief by comparing his eyes to ‘a fountain of tears’ (9:1). Like the psalmist, the women performing folk laments do not hide their tears nor those of their relatives. For instance, in the following extract, the performer expresses the intensity of her grief at the loss of her husband by describing the flow of tears rolling down her cheeks: ‘Рути слезушки, горяша, в

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<sup>711</sup> Concerning the demonstration of the psalmic character of Jeremiah’s songs, see: Baumgartners, *Jeremiah’s Poems of Lament*.

быстру реку’,<sup>712</sup> the same performer asserts in her lamentation for the drowned, ‘[Я] слезно плакала’<sup>713</sup> and, then she ends her lament by depicting the blurred vision caused by an excess of tears: ‘Ясны очушки не сахаром насыпаны / Горючима слезами принаполнены’.<sup>714</sup> Laments for the recruit also abound with mentions of tears: for instance, when the mother enjoins her departing son not to cry: ‘И ты не плачь [...] горючмы слезы’<sup>715</sup> or when the same mother observes the irrepressibility of her son’s tears: ‘И молодецки горьки слезы проливает [...] И утирает [...] горючи слезы’<sup>716</sup> and further ‘И он горючима слезами обливается [...] Горючими слезами лицо да обмывает’.<sup>717</sup> Likewise, in the following extract, the performer mentions the tears of her crying daughter on the day of her wedding: ‘И бежат-то все, ведь, слезушки жемчужный’<sup>718</sup>. This series of example makes it plain that by opening the complaint of her lyrical hero/-ine with the motif of tears, Tsvetaeva puts her work under the possible hereditary lineage of both psalms of laments and folk laments. This fact is reinforced by the mention of living water. Indeed, both pagan folk belief and the Judeo-Christian religion refer to living water as a holy element. As Afanas’ev observes, Slavic mythological thought attributed to water miraculous properties such as power and that is why water was referred to as living water.<sup>719</sup> As the scholar puts it: ‘живая вода весенних дождей [...] принимается за божественный напиток,

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<sup>712</sup> *Izbrannye prichitaniia*, edited by A. Astakhova and V. Bazanov (Petrozavodsk: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo Karelo-finskoi SSR, 1945), p. 26.

<sup>713</sup> *Izbrannye prichitaniia*, p. 34.

<sup>714</sup> *Izbrannye prichitaniia*, p. 39.

<sup>715</sup> *Izbrannye prichitaniia*, p. 46.

<sup>716</sup> *Izbrannye prichitaniia*, p. 60.

<sup>717</sup> *Izbrannye prichitaniia*, p. 67.

<sup>718</sup> *Izbrannye prichitaniia*, p. 84.

<sup>719</sup> A. Afanas’ev, *Zhivaia voda i veshchee slovo* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1988), pp. 385-6.

прогоняющий демонов, дарующий красоту, молодость, здоровье и крепость мышц'.<sup>720</sup> Likewise, Jeremiah refers to the holiness of living water, when he equates it with God.<sup>721</sup>

The second stanza is especially remarkable, because unlike the first and third ones, it is not a quatrain but a couplet. As a result, the message conveyed in it becomes particularly significant. Thus the lyrical hero/-ine's assertion of the abundance of God's wrath endured by human beings appears as the dominating idea of the poem. Once again, these two verses are compatible with both the folk and psalmic lament. The interesting point, though, is that the individual said to be suffering ('chelovek') is neither a woman nor a man but, simply, a representative of humankind. Thus by this stage of the poem, the double modulation on the folkloric and psalmic lament is accompanied by an erasure of the gender divide that usually keeps these two genres apart.

The merging of the two genres is continued in the final stanza, the style of which recalls the folk lament, while its revolted and provoking tone is reminiscent of psalms of lament. Indeed, the use of the diminutive 'razok' instead of 'raz' unmistakably relates the stanza to the folk lament, because the language of which is saturated with diminutives. On the other hand, the slightly provocative hints at the fact that God gave too harsh a fate to the lyrical hero/-ine without providing sufficient strength to bear it, expressed in the lyrical heroine's request to give her the opportunity to breathe some fresh air (lines 7-8) implies that God's burden suffocates the lyrical heroine and thus recalls the muffled cries of revolt of psalms

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<sup>720</sup> Afanas'ev, *Zhivaia voda i veshchee slovo*, p. 385.

<sup>721</sup> Jeremiah 2:13.



of lament. In the last two lines the lyrical heroine asks God to alleviate the oppressive feeling she experience as a result of God's wrath by opening her chest with a sceptre of light; this plea can be understood as the lyrical heroine's wish to be enlightened.

To conclude on Tsvetaeva's mixture of the psalmic intertext with the folk genre of lament, it is wort mentioning the following remark she made, while commenting on her *poema Tsar'-Devitsa* (1920): 'Есть чувства временные (национальные, классовые), вне-временные (божественные, человеческие) и до-временные (стихийные). Живу вторыми и третьими. Но дать вторые вне первых (одежды их) иначе как в народных стихах – нельзя.'<sup>722</sup> In other words, Tsvetaeva is attracted to the universal feelings expressed by the psalmist but considers that they are conveyed more convincingly when they are anchored in a folkoric tradition which makes them sound closer to people's everyday lives and language.

In addition, it is important to stress that, in terms of gender, the combination of the psalmic intertext with the folk genre of lament is especially telling, because it mingles a genre dominated by a masculine voice, the psalms, with a genre dominated by a feminine voice, the folk lament. In doing so Tsvetaeva realises in practice her conviction that, ultimately, poetry is concerned with universal human feelings. In this regard, the genre of psalms provides a fruitful intertext, since they treat feelings such as elation and suffering, together with a meditation on the nature of faith. Interestingly, by mixing this genre with the typically feminine genre of folk laments Tsvetaeva demonstrates that, ultimately, what defines humanity, namely

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<sup>722</sup> Quoted in Saakiantz, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 215.

people's ability to feel elation and grief, meditate on these feelings and sublimate them in art, is above any gender differentiation. Tsvetaeva's mixture of the psalmic intertext with the folkloric one is interesting in that it revives both. Indeed, by successfully mixing a specifically masculine genre with a specifically feminine one, Tsvetaeva erases an archaic, traditional and fairly obsolete gender distribution of social roles and thus adjusts these two genres to a modern outlook on gender, which refutes the traditional delimitations. In doing so, she keeps both genres alive, although the time of their apogee has long gone. This matches perfectly with Fowler's theory on the persistence of genres throughout history, which is explained by the critic by their flexibility, which allow them to be modified and adjusted to new cultural horizons.

#### 4.5 General Conclusions On the Presence of Generic Mixture in Tsvetaeva's Poetry

This chapter shows how Tsvetaeva mixes the psalmic intertext with other genres such as diary-writing, epistolary writing and folk lament, while remaining faithful to the broader generic framework of lyrical poetry. This state of affairs confirms Fowler's paradoxical assertion that in the modulation of a genre, 'generic components have to be somewhat discrete in order to have an appreciable effect'.<sup>723</sup> Indeed, as this statement underlines, an important aspect of the phenomenon of modulation lies in its ability to have a powerful impact on a work, despite being a secondary and not always obviously perceptible feature of the literary text in which

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<sup>723</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 191.

it operates. In this regard, it is comparable to the use of subliminal images in the contemporary genre of publicity; although they are not consciously perceived by the public, their impact is powerful. Similarly, an inattentive reader may be oblivious to the presence of psalmic features in Tsvetaeva's poems, yet their presence is no less significant. For instance, the present chapter has demonstrated that although *Vechernii al'bom* does not display numerous features of the genre of psalms, the fact that this intertext is situated at strategically important places in the overall composition of the volume accentuates the spiritual and metaphysical significance of its poetry.

The advantage of using such a discrete form of intertextuality lies in the fact that it does not burden the work with erudite and sophisticated references to the original genre of psalms but still endows the modulated text with the powerful issues dealt in this genre, namely a meditation on human suffering and the related issue of spiritual faith. Furthermore, Tsvetaeva's mixture of the psalmic intertext with the generic intertext of diary-writing is particularly fruitful, because both genres constitute a favourable ground for spiritual introspection. In a different vein, Tsvetaeva's mixture of the generic intertext of psalms with the modulated genre of epistolary writing enables her to avoid creating soliloquy by providing her with a remote interlocutor who, by being present in the lyrical heroine's thought rather than besides her is reminiscent of the God of the psalmist. Finally, Tsvetaeva's mixture of the psalmic lament with the folk one reflects her belief in the necessity of overcoming gender limitations in artistic creation.

The three types of generic mixtures investigated in this chapter do not exhaust the subject, yet they confirm Fowler's view that generic modulation plays a major role in the historical persistence of literary genres by enabling them to adjust themselves to new cultural horizons thanks to their ability to infiltrate other literary genres.

## **Chapter Five: Topical Invention**

According to Fowler's theory of the historical persistence of literary genres, an important factor of generic preservation lies in the fact that literary genres remain active thanks to their transformative capacity, which enables them to be relevant in new cultural contexts by adjusting to them. In the preceding chapters I have analysed the genre-modifying processes of change of function and that of generic mixture. Topical invention constitutes yet another phenomenon enabling genres to persist. Fowler's concept of topical invention designates the process whereby a genre is modified by developing some minor theme(s) or motif(s) of the original genre or by adding new subject matter. As the theoretician puts it: 'Sometimes the topics are entirely novel',<sup>724</sup> while, at other times, the genre-modifying process of topical invention is performed by 'developing a topic already [present] within the repertoire'.<sup>725</sup>

In this chapter I do not argue that Tsvetaeva performs pure topical invention, since she does not write in the genre of psalms; however, I will demonstrate that in her modulation of this genre, i.e. in her peculiar ability to reproduce the spirit of psalms in some of her poems, Tsvetaeva partly modifies this generic intertext by developing some of its traditional themes in a new way. To put it differently, this

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<sup>724</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 170.

<sup>725</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 170.

chapter aims to demonstrate that the modulation of the generic intertext of psalms found in Tsvetaeva's works displays the typical signs of the first type of topical invention conceptualised by Fowler. In the poems analysed below Tsvetaeva modulates the genre of psalms by accentuating some minor motifs of the traditional genre and developing some of its themes in an original manner. For instance, in her cycle of poems about Moscow entitled 'Stikhi o Moskve' (1916), where the lyrical heroine sings the charm of her native city, Tsvetaeva develops the psalmic topic of a sacred space. Indeed, as will be shown, the depiction of a holy city on earth is a typical feature of psalms, which picture Jerusalem as a sacred place. Another topical invention characterises poems such as 'Koli v zemliu soldaty vsadili – shtyk' (1918), 'Bog – Ia zhivu – Bog – Znachit ty ne umer!' (1919) and 'Zavodskie' (1922) where Tsvetaeva develops the theme of God's passivity, which is symbolised in the psalms by the motif of God's sleep. As will be shown, these poems not only echo but also magnify the psalmist's muffled cry of indignation at the thought of God's passivity and thus perform topical invention.

### 5.1. Topical Invention Consisting in Developing Further a Theme of the Original

#### Genre: The Theme of The Holy City

When it comes to identifying some of the constant features characterising a literary genre, it is difficult, if not impossible, to avoid a reflection on the concept of space. Indeed, the way in which authors produce an internal spatiality within their

works gives many clues regarding their genre. In his reflection on literary genres Bakhtin stresses the fact that the spatiality shaping the artistic universe of a literary work unavoidably betrays the its generic identity; as the Russian thinker puts it: ‘поле изображения мира изменяется по жанрам и эпохам развития литературы. Оно различно организовано и по разному ограничено в пространстве и во времени’.<sup>726</sup> As the critic Dagmar Burkhart explains, the reason why specific spatial representations are often an indication of the genre in which a literary work is written lies in the fact that in literature ‘space with the added dimension of cultural memory, becomes a system of signs in which « individuals and whole societies express their own education and inner constitution as well as the geographical details of their surroundings »’.<sup>727</sup>

The spatial representation of the world found in the lyrical prayers of the Psalter is characterised by recurrent references to Zion and Jerusalem. As Jean-Pierre Prevost observes, ‘Mount Zion [...] is particularly dear to the heart of the psalmists. To them it is first and foremost a fortress, proud and impregnable, where the people will always find refuge in times of war and invasion [...]. Zion was also chosen by God to be God’s dwelling place [...]. For the psalmists the importance of Zion is not seen so much from a political as from a sacral point of view: it is a holy mountain, a sanctuary. [...] The psalmists also sing of Zion as the spiritual capital of humanity’.<sup>728</sup> For instance, in psalm 2:6 the author reports a speech in which God

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<sup>726</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Voprosy literatury i estetiki* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1975), p. 470.

<sup>727</sup> Dagmar Burkhart, ‘Spatial Concepts in the Poetry of Anna Achmatova and Marina Cvetaeva’, *Russian Literature* 51 (2002), pp. 145-60; p. 145.

<sup>728</sup> Jean-Pierre Prevost, *A Short Dictionary of the Psalms* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1997), pp. 80-1.

asserts unambiguously that Zion is sacred, because he chose it and made David, his elected King, reign over it: 'Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion'. The sacral aura emanating from Zion is also underlined in psalm 48:2 in which the psalmist insists on the fact that it has the power of making everybody in the world rejoice; this idea is expressed as follows: 'Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion'; further in the same psalm (12), the author enjoins the faithful to walk over the sacred place and, then, proclaim its splendour: 'Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof'. In a similar vein, psalm 74:2 proclaims Zion to be God's place of dwelling; thus the author of this psalm addresses God as follows: 'Remember [...] this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt'. Inasmuch as he considers Mount Zion to be God's place of dwelling, it is not surprising that the psalmist also describes it as an indestructible and eternal place; this is especially perceptible in psalm 125:1: 'They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever'. This idea is repeated in psalm 133:3: '[...] upon the mountains of Zion [...] the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore'.

In this section I intend to show that Tsvetaeva's cycle 'Stikhi o Moskve' develops in a new and original manner the Psalter's motif of the sacred city and its representation as an eternal and divine place. In doing so, I will shed a new light on Forrester's convincing argument that 'in the poems devoted to the architecture of Moscow, Tsvetaeva re-realizes the female body; she revives the church by the presence of a woman's body and language while at the same time the church's



status and aesthetic value lend value to the poet's words'.<sup>729</sup> Thus Forrester demonstrates that in the poem 'Kanun blagoveshcheni'ia' Tsvetaeva represents the church in which the lyrical heroine prays the Virgin as a womb;<sup>730</sup> in the same vein, the critic shows that in the poem 'Zakinuv golovu i opustiv glaza' (1918), 'the cupola [...] convey a complex interplay of church and female body: the architecture peculiar to Moscow and Muscovite Russia is internalized [...]. The narrator's breast holds millstones and Kremlin bell and [...] it is itself a breast'.<sup>731</sup> A similar train of thoughts will lead my interpretation of the poems 'Oblaka – vokrug', 'Iz ruk moikh – nerukotvornyi grad' and 'Moskva – kakoi ogromnyi' which all belong to the cycle 'Stikhi o Moskve' and which, in my view, develop further the psalmic motif not only of a holy place but also of a feminine creative and protective principle associated to it.

In order to interpret Tsvetaeva's cycle correctly, it is worth recalling the context in which she wrote this series of poems. Tsvetaeva's Moscow cycle was written during the spring of 1916, yet, as Shevelenko judiciously remarks, a decisive event in the inspiration of these poems was Tsvetaeva's poetic reading in St Petersburg that took place in January 1916 and during which her idiosyncratic style was perceived as a typical Moscow style by her audience, which was made up exclusively of Petersburgers;<sup>732</sup> this fact led Tsvetaeva to anchor her poetry in the historical and mythical culture of Moscow, which she did masterfully in her cycle

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<sup>729</sup> Sibelan Forrester, 'Bells and Cupolas: The Formative Role of the Female Body in Marina Tsvetaeva's Poetry', *Slavic Review* 51 (1992), p. 232-46; p. 242.

<sup>730</sup> Forrester, 'Bells and Cupolas: The Formative Role of the Female Body in Marina Tsvetaeva's Poetry', pp. 237-8.

<sup>731</sup> Forrester, 'Bells and Cupolas: The Formative Role of the Female Body in Marina Tsvetaeva's Poetry', p. 245.

<sup>732</sup> Shevelenko, *Literaturnyi put' Tsvetaevoi*, p. 103.

‘Stikhi o Moskve’. Moreover, Tsvetaeva’s friendship with the poet Osip Mandel’shtam (1891-1938),<sup>733</sup> a poet whose universe was rooted in the European culture of St Petersburg, reinforced this trend; as Shveitser succinctly puts it: ‘В России они находились как бы на разных полюсах: его петербуржество противостояло ее московскости’.<sup>734</sup> Given the long tradition of opposition and competition between the two cultural centres of Russia, it is no wonder that Tsvetaeva made a point of opening Mandel’shtam’s eyes and ears to the specificity of Moscow and the city’s traditional spirit, which is strongly connected in her cycle to the city’s religious aura. Tsvetaeva’s perception of Moscow as a strongly religious place partly originates in the historical doctrine which appeared during the reign of Ivan III (1462–1505) and that proclaims Moscow as the third Rome, i.e. the sacred city that succeeds to Rome and Constantinople. As the historian Geoffrey Hosking explains, this doctrine claims that ‘from the creation onward God had intended to found a truly Christian empire on earth, and that Rus was [...] destined to fulfil this purpose. Moscow thus became both the “Third Rome” and the “Second Jerusalem”’,<sup>735</sup> Jerusalem being the prototype of any holy city in the monotheist tradition. Under Ivan IV this view was reinforced by Metropolitan Makarii who skilfully edited the existing ‘chronicles from various lands of Rus to create the *Illustrated Digest* (*Litsevoi svod*) as a consistent and continuous narrative tracing Moscow’s heritage back through Kievan Rus to the Roman Empire and to the

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<sup>733</sup> Concerning Mandel’shtam’s influence on Tsvetaeva’s poetry, see: Smith ‘Surpassing Acmeism? The Lost Key to Cvetaeva’s ‘Poem of The Air’’, pp. 209-22.

<sup>734</sup> Shveitser, *Byt i bytie*, (1992), p. 169.

<sup>735</sup> Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia and the Russians. A History* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 107.

ancient Jews'.<sup>736</sup> Tsvetaeva was far from the first author to use the myth of Moscow as the third Rome in her literary works. As the thinker Fedor Stepun (1884-1965) puts it in his article on this topic, the depiction not only of Moscow but also of Russia in terms of a holy place has been a favourite theme for many authors, from the fifteenth century onwards.<sup>737</sup> Among the numerous writers depicting Russia as a holy place are Nikolai Gogol' (1809-1852), Fedor Dostoevskii (1821-1881), Vladimir Solov'ev (1853-1900), Nikolai Berdiaev (1874-1948) and many others. However, an attentive reading of Tsvetaeva's cycle shows that, in comparison to these authors Tsvetaeva is less interested in the messianic aspect of this myth and much more in the literary continuity between David's praises of Jerusalem in the psalms and her poetry on Moscow. Thus the main intertextual link between these two corpora is constituted by the poetic representation of the city's spirituality. In this regard, it is worth quoting Tsvetaeva's own comment on her verses on Moscow, which she made in a letter to her friend Iurii Ivask (1907-1986): 'Да, я в 1916 г. первая так сказала Москву. [...] Но писала это не "москвичка", а бессмертный дух'.<sup>738</sup> In other words, Tsvetaeva explains that in her cycle she expressed not the accidental face of Moscow but its eternal spirit.<sup>739</sup> It is not difficult to see a link here with the psalms' depiction of Zion, the holy mountain, and Jerusalem, the holy city. In this regard, psalm 48 is particularly telling. Even

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<sup>736</sup> Hosking, *Russia and the Russians*, p.107.

<sup>737</sup> Fedor Stepun, 'Moskva – Tretii Rim' in *Pervoprestol'naia dalekaia i blizkaia. Moskva i moskvichi v literature russkoi emigratsii* (Moscow: Russkii mir, 2003), pp. 191-216; p.191.

<sup>738</sup> Quoted by Radomskaia in *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 95.

<sup>739</sup> Radomskaia, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 95.

though it has already been partially quoted, it is worth rereading the most significant lines of this psalm:

1. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness.
2. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion [...]
3. God is known in her palaces for a refuge.  
[...]
8. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever.  
[...]
11. Let mount Zion rejoice [...] because of thy judgments.
12. Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof.
13. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that they ye may tell it to the generation following.

In this and other psalms, Zion is described as a mountain and referred to by means of the expression ‘holy hill’,<sup>740</sup> which highlights that it is a site situated in altitude. The geographical elevation of the site reflects its spiritual elevation. Let us see, now, how the idea of spiritual elevation is expressed in the opening poem of Tsvetaeva’s cycle ‘Stikhi o Moskve’ which reads as follows:

Облака – вокруг  
Купола – вокруг  
Надо всей Москвой  
– Сколько хватит рук! –  
Возношу тебя, бремя лучшее,  
Деревцо мое  
Невесомое!

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<sup>740</sup> See the following passages of the Psalter: 2:6; 48:2, 11; 74:2; 78:6; 125:1; 133:3.

В дивном граде сем,  
В мирном граде сем,  
Где и мертвой – мне  
Будет радостно, –  
Царевать тебе, горевать тебе,  
Принимать венец,  
О мой первенец!

Ты постом говей,  
Не сурьми бровей  
И все сорок – чти –  
Сороков церквей.  
Исходи пешком – молодым шажком! –  
Все привольное  
Семихолмие.

Будет твой черед:  
Тоже – дочери  
Передашь Москву  
С нежной горечью.  
Мне же волный сон, колокольный звон,  
Зори ранние –  
На Ваганькове. (I, 268)

As the critic T. Bystrova remarks, in ‘Oblaka – vokrug’ Tsvetaeva resorts to a typical poetic device used by some of her predecessors such as Konstantin Batiushkov (1785-1855), Apollon Grigor’ev (1822-64) or Mikhail Lermontov (1814-41), namely the depiction of the urban landscape from above.<sup>741</sup> The lyrical heroine depicts a similar spatiality, since she describes a place situated high above the ground and where the sky is dotted by the roofs of religious buildings, namely the cupolas of Orthodox churches. Thus in the poem’s introductory lines Tsvetaeva succeeds in representing Moscow as a place that shares with Zion and Jerusalem

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<sup>741</sup> T. Bystrova, ‘Moskva – zhenshchina (Na materiale tsiklov “Stikhi o Moskve” i “Moskve”’, *Marina Tsvetaeva – epokha, kul’tura, sud’ba*, pp. 292-8, p. 294.

two of their characteristics, namely their elevation and spirituality. Moreover, the mythological link between these two cities is also alluded to: in the third stanza Moscow is designated with the term ‘semikholmie’, which means literally seven hills, and which originates in the historical doctrine of Moscow the third Rome.<sup>742</sup>

The idea of the city’s spiritual elevation is also expressed in the second part of the first stanza where the lyrical heroine raises above Moscow her ‘weightless burden’ (‘bremia nevesomoe’), i.e. her daughter, to whom the poem is addressed. Indeed, the verb ‘voznosit’/‘voznesti’ (to raise, lift up) also refers to the idea of spirituality, since it is used in the expression ‘voznosit’/‘voznesti molitvu’, which means to offer up a prayer. Thus, when the lyrical heroine depicts herself lifting her daughter above Moscow by means of the verb ‘voznosit’’, she produces an implicit comparison between this gesture and the act of praying. In doing so, she establishes a clear intertextual link between the Jerusalem of the Psalter and Moscow by implying that the atmosphere of Moscow incites her to make gesture of praise in a way that recalls the psalmist’s compulsion to praise God in his place of dwelling.

The second stanza of the poem also echoes the Psalter’s depiction of a holy spatiality. The stanza opens as follows: ‘V divnom grade sem / V mirnom grade sem’. From a stylistic point of view, these two lines constitute a striking parallelism in which the syntagm making up the first line is repeated in the second with a change of adjective. Such repetitions are typical of folk style. At the same time, the former line qualifies the city of Moscow as marvellous, while the latter as peaceful.

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<sup>742</sup> As Gor’kova remarks in her commentary of this poem [Tsvetaeva, *Knigi stikhov*, p. 751]: ‘Легенда о том, что Москва построена на семи холмах, возникла в правление Ивана III, когда получила распространение теория о «Москве как о Третьем Риме» (по аналогии с семью холмами Древнего Рима [...])’.

In other words, the second part of the parallelism can be understood as a specification of the first. As was said in Chapter Two, parallelism in which the second part concretises the idea expressed in the first is also a typical feature of psalms.<sup>743</sup> This allows us to assert that in these lines (8 and 9) Tsvetaeva uses a style reminiscent of both folk and psalmic poetry. A similar phenomenon occurs in line 12, which is constituted by the following parallelism: ‘Tsarevat’ tebe, gorevat’ tebe’. Furthermore, the poet also resorts to the Slavonic layer of Russian using the lofty term ‘grad’ instead of the common Russian word ‘gorod’ and the archaic adjective ‘sem’ instead of ‘etom’. Inasmuch as the Church Slavonic layer was originally the language of the Church, Tsvetaeva’s use of Slavonicisms in her depiction of Moscow is obviously intended to express the place’s spirituality. This is also the case of her use of the adjective ‘divnyi’; indeed, in so far as Tsvetaeva was fluent in French and liked this language very much since her childhood,<sup>744</sup> she could not ignore that this term recalls the sonorities of the French adjective ‘divine’ and thus reinforces the connotation of Moscow as a spiritual place.

In the third and fourth lines of the second stanza, the lyrical heroine introduces the idea that she will somehow remain alive in the city even after her death: ‘Gde i mertvoi – mne – / Budet radostno, – ’. This paradoxical assertion fully deserves reflection. Projecting a feeling of joy on to her dead self is an obvious way of denying the destructive power of death and proclaiming the city’s spiritual force

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<sup>743</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, p. 19.

<sup>744</sup> As she puts it in a letter to Ol’ga Kolbasina-Chernova written on 16 January 1925: ‘свое детство – тот особый мир французского духа в доме’ [Marina Tsvetaeva, *Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh* (Moscow: Terra, 1997), vol. 6/1, p. 381]; moreover, Tsvetaeva spent the summer 1909 in Paris where she attended a course on French Literature [Anastasiia Tsvetaeva *Vospominaniia*, p. 309.].

that brings happiness to its inhabitants. The ability to counteract the power of death by bringing an overwhelming feeling of joy obviously refers to a superhuman force that is bound to be of divine origin. In fact, it is reminiscent of the psalmist's mention of the joy brought up by the sight of the restored holy place, described in psalm 126 that reads as follows: 'When God brought back Zion / it was like dreaming: our mouths were full of laughing and singing'.<sup>745</sup> This line is particularly important, since the idea of dream is linked with that of sleep and, by association, with the idea of death as the Russian expression 'vechnyi son' testifies. Although the term 'son' here should be translated by sleep, the fact that Russian language uses the same term to refer to the idea of dream and sleep and that this term is also used to designate death in the expression 'vechnyi son', makes it possible to link the psalmist's assertion of a joyful dream provided by the restoration of Zion with Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine's assertion of joy in death provided by Moscow.

In the third stanza the lyrical heroine enjoins her daughter both to respect the forty times forty churches of the city and to walk all over the city's vast territory made up of seven hills. This is an especially important point to note, since it is highly reminiscent of psalm 48:12, 13 where the psalmist enjoins the faithful to meander in the city in order to acquire the ability to sing it: 'Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following'.

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<sup>745</sup> The Russian version reads as follows: 'Когда возвращал Господь плен Сиона, мы были как бы видящие во сне' (125:1\*).



In the fourth and last stanza, the lyrical heroine states in explicit terms that Moscow is a gift bequeathed from mother to daughter: ‘Tozhe – docheri / Peredash’ Moskvu’. The idea that the city is handed over from one generation to the next is also taken from psalm 48 in which the psalmist enjoins the believer to depict the city’s wonders to another generation. At this stage, it is worth remarking that the gift of a land is a biblical theme of paramount importance. Its very first mention is to be found in Genesis 12:1-3, in which God enjoins Abraham to leave his place of birth so that he can be given a new land. Interestingly, the author of psalm 105:8-15 recalls God’s promise of a gift of a land as follows:

‘He hath remembered [...] the word which he commanded to a thousand generations.

[...]

Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan [...] when they were but a few men in number [...].’

It is clear in this extract that the gift of a land is a divine gesture made by God to a few elected people. Hence, when the lyrical heroine of ‘Stikhi o Moskve’ offers Moscow to her daughter, she symbolically reproduces the divine gesture of offering a land; in doing so, she draws a parallel between herself and God. Incidentally, this state of affairs reflects Tsvetaeva’s belief that poets are, in some ways, equal to God. To come back to the poem ‘Obkaka – vokrug’, let us note that in it the lyrical heroine not only offers Moscow to her daughter but also emphasises the fact her grown-up child will act similarly, offering Moscow to her own daughter when her time comes (Budet tvoi chered: / Tozhe – docheri / Peredash’ Moskvu). In other

words, the lyrical heroine presents the gift of the city as a matriarchal gesture that contrasts sharply with the patrilineal descent described in the Bible. Hence, it is possible to conclude that the topical invention performed in the poem ‘Oblaka – vokrug’ consists in a mirroring of God’s gesture of offering a holy city performed by the lyrical heroine. This gesture, however, presents a significant alteration from the model copied. Indeed, in Tsvetaeva’s poem the line of transmission is no longer masculine but feminine. This means that Tsvetaeva provides a poetic version of the biblical myth where the female contribution to cultural heritage is highly valorised. Incidentally, let us note that a few months after writing ‘Oblaka – vokrug’ Tsvetaeva once again represented the symbolic gift of her city in the opening poem of ‘Akhmatovoi’ (June 1916) which ends with the following lines: ‘И я дарю тебе свой колокольный град / –Ахматова! – и сердце свое в придачу’ (I, 303).

The idea of a symbolic gift of a land is repeated in the second poem of Tsvetaeva’s cycle ‘Stikhi o Moskve’, ‘Iz ruk moikh – nerukotvornyi grad’ where the lyrical heroine represents herself as one of the media through which the divine energy is spread out in the city. Moreover, the theme of platonic love, utterly foreign to psalms, is introduced at the end of the poem, which reads as follows:

Из рук моих — нерукотворный град  
Прими, мой странный, мой прекрасный брат.

По церковке — всё сорок сороков,  
И реющих над ними голубков.

И Спасские — с цветами — ворота,  
Где шапка православного снята.

Часовню звездную — приют от зол —

Где вытертый от поцелуев — пол.

Пятисоборный несравненный круг  
Прими, мой древний, вдохновенный друг.

К Нечаянная Радости в саду  
Я гостя чужеземного сведу.

Червонные возблещут купола,  
Бессонные взгремят колокола,

И на тебя с багряных облаков  
Уронит Богородица покров,

И встанешь ты, исполнен дивных сил...  
Ты не раскаешься, что ты меня любил. (I, 269)

In 'Iz ruk moikh – nerukotvornyi grad' the lyrical heroine offers Moscow to the addressee, her 'wonderful brother', i.e. Mandel'shtam, who is not directly mentioned. In the first line of the poem, the symbolic gesture of offering Moscow is masterfully expressed by Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine who enjoins her addressee to take 'from her hands the city not made by hands'. This formulation creates a strikingly expressive line, which, at first, resounds paradoxical by giving the impression that the 'city not made by hands' was created by the lyrical heroine's skilful hands. Inasmuch as the image of Moscow conveyed in the poem is indeed the result of the Tsvetaeva's creative writing, it makes sense to interpret the paradox of the first line as an assertion of the poet's power of creation or, to be precise, 'recreation' of Moscow.

By using the adjective 'nerukotvornyi' and thus asserting a somehow miraculous creation of her city, the lyrical heroine proclaims Moscow to be a holy

place. This idea is developed in lines 5 and 6 ('I Spasskie — s tsvetami — vorota / Gde shapka pravoslavnogo sniata'), since in them the lyrical heroine hints at the presence of the icon 'The Saviour not made by Hands' ('Spas Nerukotvornyi') that was at the gates of the Spasskaia Tower. As the scholar Tat'iana Gor'kova explains in her note, 'на воротах Спасской башни находилась икона Спаса Нерукотворного. Этот образ был поставлен при царе Алексее Михиаловиче, и тогда же царским указом было повелено впредь [...] ходить этими воротами с непокрытой головой'.<sup>746</sup> Thus, when she refers to the Spasskaia Tower by describing the act of taking off a cap, the lyrical heroine hints at the presence of the icon of 'The Saviour not made by Hands', i.e. at the presence of God's divine and creative power at the very centre of Moscow. Interestingly, according to the legend, the representation of Christ on the icon of 'The Saviour not made by hands' originally appeared in Jerusalem.<sup>747</sup> Consequently, the presence of the icon of 'The Saviour not made by Hands' in Moscow establishes a cultural and historical continuity between Jerusalem and Moscow.

Having established the presence of an intertextual link between the poem and the genre of psalms, let us demonstrate that the topical invention this intertext is subjected to in 'Iz ruk moikh – nerukotvornyi grad' consists in the accentuation of the feminine quality of the divine protection granted by the holy city. This aspect of

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<sup>746</sup> Tsvetaeva, *Knigi stikhov*, p. 752.

<sup>747</sup> According to the legend, the Syrian King Agbar, who was suffering from sickness, sent his servant to Jerusalem and ordered him to reproduce an image of Christ; the servant, however, felt unable to do so when faced with Christ; at that point Christ put a cloth on his face and his features appeared on it. This event led to the King's healing and his baptism [<http://www.cnit.uniyar.ac.ru/frescoes/rus/9-4.2.htm> Accessed in September 2005]. Another useful source of information concerning the history and role of this icon in Russian cultural history is: L. Evseeva and others, *Spas nerukotvornyi v russkoi ikone* (Moscow: Moskovskie uchebniki i Kartolitografiia', 2005).

the poem is particularly perceptible in its second part ( couplets 6-9). Here, the lyrical heroine develops further the representation of the holy city as a feminine space containing God's spirit that is occasionally expressed by the psalmist, who does not hesitate to refer to Jerusalem as a daughter, a virgin or a mother.<sup>748</sup> For instance, the image of Zion as a daughter is unambiguously expressed in the following extracts: '[...] in the gates of the daughter of Zion: I will rejoice in thy salvation' (psalm 9:14); 'Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughter of Judah be glad' (psalm 48:11); on the other hand, the idea of Zion as a virgin is perceptible in the following passage: 'Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined' (psalm 50:2); finally, the idea of the holy city as a mother-like entity is expressed in the following passage: 'And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her' (psalm 87:5). It is also worth recalling that the holy city, represented as a feminine spatiality, is the place of God's dwelling: 'The Lord is great in Zion [...]' (psalm 99:2). Finally, let us add that the feminine aspect of God's spirituality embodied in the image of the holy city is also perceptible in its roundness, expressed by the psalmist in the following extract: 'As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people' (psalm 125:2). The second part of Tsvetaeva's poem develops precisely the theme of a feminine space that has the power to bring to life people's spirituality, as in the poem's last two couplets which describe the spiritual renaissance of the lyrical heroine's companion by depicting how the protective veil of the Virgin enshrouds him and then releases him spiritually regenerated. In the final line, the lyrical heroine addresses her friend and hints at the

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<sup>748</sup> Concerning the archetypal representation of the city with a feminine principle, see V. Toporov, 'Tekst goroda-devy i goroda-bludnitsy v mifologicheskom aspekte' in *Issledovaniia po structure teksta*, edited by T. Tsiv'ian (Moscow: Nauka, 1987), pp. 121-32.

fact that his spiritual renewal could no have happened without her guidance. The representation of a feminine figure guiding her companion through a space that provides him with spiritual regeneration is obviously reminiscent of the figure of Dante's Beatrice, who, 'not only leads Dante to God'<sup>749</sup> but also 'leads him to an understanding of the feminine side of God'.<sup>750</sup> To put it differently, the lyrical heroine sees herself as a spiritual mother, who introduces her masculine poetic peer to the feminine spirituality of Moscow.<sup>751</sup> At this stage, it is important to note that the idea of the presence of a feminine principle in God is present in the psalms, although it is a marginal feature; the author of psalm 22:10 clearly resorts to the image of a feminine figure, whose role is to bring human beings to life, when he describes the life-creating power of God by representing him as a midwife (psalm 22:10): '[...] Thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breast'. Thus, it is possible to conclude that in 'Iz ruk moikh – nerukotvornyi grad' Tsvetaeva amplifies the unusual and exceptional motif of God as a feminine principle, which constitutes a rare motif of the Psalter.

In the eighth poem of the cycle 'Stikhi o Moskve' ('– Moskva! – Kakoi ogromnyi') the psalmic representation of a holy city that protects righteous people exclusively is magnified and Tsvetaeva transforms the idea of restricted access to the holy city expressed in psalms into the representation of a sacred space that welcomes indiscriminately any human being:

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<sup>749</sup> Joan Ferrante, *Dante's Beatrice. Priest of an Androgynous God* (Binghamton – New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), p. 23.

<sup>750</sup> Ferrante, *Dante's Beatrice. Priest of an Androgynous God*, p. 23.

<sup>751</sup> Concerning the issue of Dante's relevance in Tsvetaeva's poetry of the 1920s, see: Galina Petkova, 'Dante – Tsvetaeva: arkhetyipicheskaia figura «voditilia dushi», "Vse v grudi slilos' i spelos'". *Piataia tsvetaevskaia mezhdunarodnaia nauchno-tematicheskaiia konferentsiia (9-11 oktiabria 1997)*, edited by Valentin Maslovskii (Moscow: Dom-muzei Mariny Tsvetaevoi, 1998), pp. 201-6.

– Москва! – Какой огромный  
Странноприимный дом!  
Всяк на Руси – бездомный.  
Мы все к тебе придем.

Клеймо позорит плечи,  
За голенищем нож.  
Издалека-далече  
Ты все же позовешь.

На каторжные клейма,  
На всякую болезнь –  
Младенец Пантелеймон  
У нас, целитель, есть.

А вон за тою дверцей,  
Куда народ валит, –  
Там Иверское сердце –  
Червонное горит.

И льется аллилуйя  
На смуглые поля.  
Я в грудь тебя целую,  
Московская земля! (I, 273)

Even a cursory reading of this poem shows that its main message is that Moscow is a refuge for those who suffer either physically or morally. This idea is conveyed right from the beginning, since the poem opens with the comparison of Moscow with a ‘strannopriimnyi dom’, which is an expression that was used in the nineteenth century to designate a shelter for beggars, invalids, homeless, orphans and destitute.<sup>752</sup>

The lyrical heroine enumerates the categories of people who find refuge in the city of Moscow, which has been depicted as holy in the previous poems of the

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<sup>752</sup> See the note by Gor’kova in Tsvetaeva, *Knigi stikhov*, p. 753.

cycle. The listing of those who seek refuge in the city is worth noticing, because it echoes psalm 15, which opens with the author's question to God concerning the type of people entitled to live in Jerusalem; after this initial question, the entire psalm is devoted to the enumeration of the qualities required in order to be welcomed in God's holy place. Given the relevance of this psalm to interpret 'Moskva! – Kakoi ogromnyi', it is worth reading it in entirety:

Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?

He that walketh upright, and worketh righteousness, and speak truth in his heart.

He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.

In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord.

He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.

He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent.

He that doeth these things shall never be moved.

This psalm is interesting because it characterises Jerusalem as a place open exclusively to the faithful and righteous. This state of affairs contrasts sharply with Tsvetaeva's depiction of Moscow which describes the Russian capital as a universal place of refuge that does not reject anybody. The idea of Moscow welcoming any human being, regardless of social, religious or moral status is conveyed in the first stanza thanks to the use of the pronouns 'vsiak' and 'vse'.



In the second stanza, the lyrical heroine carries on with the list of those who find solace in Moscow and specifies that it includes criminals, shown by the mention of a shameful brand on the shoulders of some of those coming to Moscow. In other word, the lyrical heroine develops further the psalmic idea of a city serving as a refuge by depicting her native city not only as a protective place but also as a redemptive space. In doing so, she performs a topical invention on the psalmic idea of a spiritual spatiality accessible only to the elected and universalises its access.

In the third and fourth stanzas the lyrical heroine explains Moscow's universal welcome by asserting that any defect, be it moral or physical, can be cured in Moscow, because it is a place where the divine force is particularly strong thanks to the presence of the icon of Iver'. The sacral aura of the city is, then, once again asserted by the depiction of Moscow being immersed in a musical flow of alleluias.

To conclude let us say that in her development of the traditional psalmic motif of the holy city Tsvetaeva not only adjusts it to the Russian context but also transforms it in several ways. Indeed, although she conserves the praising tone and enthusiastic depiction of the city's spiritual qualities, Tsvetaeva's treatment of the motif of the holy city differs from that of the psalms in that it accentuates the feminine principle of the city's spirituality and abandons the assertion of exclusivity by depicting Moscow as a place that welcomes universally every single human being. In doing so, Tsvetaeva illustrates her conviction that poetry is a realm that bears a significance that cannot be contained within the limitations of religious morality.

## 5.2. Topical Invention on The Theme of God's Passivity, The Motif of God's Sleep and The Motif of Being Buried Alive

In this section I intend to demonstrate that Tsvetaeva's poetry magnifies the idea of God's passivity expressed in many psalms of lament where it is closely linked with the motif of God's sleep. As Gunkel observes, sometimes the psalmist interprets the apparent passivity of God and his failure to intervene as a result of his being asleep. Consequently, the psalmist's plea is aimed at waking God.<sup>753</sup> For instance, the author of psalm 7:6 enjoins God to act for him in the following terms: 'Arise, O Lord [...] lift up thyself because of the rage of mine enemies: and awake for me the judgement that thou has commanded'.<sup>754</sup> Similarly, the lamenter of psalm 35: 23 calls out to God with the following injunctions: 'Stir up thyself, and awake to my judgement [...] my Lord'.<sup>755</sup> Likewise, the speaker of psalm 59:4,5 implores God to manifest himself with the following order: 'awake to help me' and 'awake to visit all the heathen'.<sup>756</sup> Likewise, the theme of a passive and silent God is present in several of Tsvetaeva's poems, where it is also linked with the idea of sleep. In this regard, the poem 'Koli v zemliu soldaty vsadili – shtyk' (1918) is particularly relevant. The poem reads as follows:

Коли в землю солдаты всадили – штык,

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<sup>753</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 159.

<sup>754</sup> My emphasis (S.O.C.).

<sup>755</sup> My emphasis (S.O.C.).

<sup>756</sup> My emphasis (S.O.C.).

Коли красною тряпкой затмили Лик,  
Коли Бог под ударами – глух и нем,  
Коль на Пасху народ не пустили в Кремль –

Надо бражникам старым засесть за холст,  
Рыбам – петь, бабам – умствовать, птицам – ползть,  
Конь на всаднике должен скакать верхом,  
Новорожденных надо поить вином,

Реки – жечь, мертвецов выносить – в окно,  
Солнце красное в полночь всходить должно,  
Имя суженой должен забыть жених...  
Государыням нужно любить – простых. (I, 396-7)

This poem belongs to the collection *Lebedinyi stan* and, as Tsvetaeva specifies,<sup>757</sup> was written on the third day of Easter 1918. Yet, far from being an elated song chanting Christ's resurrection, 'Koli v zemliu...' is a desperate poetic statement expressing the lyrical heroine's feeling that the world has gone mad. To be more precise, let us remark that the first quatrain serves as an introduction stating the facts observed by the lyrical heroine, while the two following quatrains are a depiction of what the lyrical heroine considers to be the logical outcome of the state of affairs described in the introductory stanza. The lyrical heroine's initial stance consists in describing several facts that all point out the chaos Russia was experiencing as an aftermath of both the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917 and World War I. The image of soldiers having thrust their bayonets into the soil is interesting because it clearly refers to the unfolding events Tsvetaeva was witnessing. Indeed if one remembers that 'Koli v zemliu...' was written during the Spring of 1918 it makes sense to interpret the image of bayonets thrust into the soil

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<sup>757</sup> Tsvetaeva, *Knigi stikhov*, p. 367.

as the lyrical heroine's awareness of the humiliation felt by most of Russian people at the news of their country's separate peace agreement with Germany concluded in Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918.<sup>758</sup>

In the second line of the poem the lyrical heroine alludes to the loss of spiritual values typical of her time by referring to the veiling of the icon of Nicholas the Miracle-Worker on Red Square, which was made in preparation of a military parade, as specified in the commentary on this poem by Gor'kova;<sup>759</sup> the third line provides the evidence that the psalmic theme of God's passivity undergoes a topical invention in Tsvetaeva's poem, since in it the lyrical heroine deplores God's passivity by mentioning his deafness and muteness, even though the unfolding events of violence and religious denigration should provoke a strong divine reaction. Finally, the concluding line of the stanza adds yet another example of the spiritual disintegration that was reigning at the time by mentioning the ban on the celebration of Easter in the Kremlin's cathedrals.

As was just said, in the third line of the poem the lyrical heroine characterises God as deaf and mute because he does not react to a situation in which assaults are made on his basic commandments such as not to kill and to respect religion; the lyrical heroine formulates this view as follows: 'Koli Bog pod udarami – glukh i nem'.<sup>760</sup> Here, it is worth noticing the lyrical heroine's attempt to soften this rather

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<sup>758</sup> For a clear historical account of the events leading to the signature of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, see: Roger Bartlett, *A History of Russia* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), pp. 200-1. For an enlightening analysis of the discontent provoked by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, see: Lesley Milne, 'Novyi Satiricon, 1914-1918: The Patriotic Laughter of the Russian Liberal Intelligentsia during the First World War and the Revolution', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 4 (2006), pp. 639-65; pp. 658-661.

<sup>759</sup> Tsvetaeva, *Knigi stikhov*, p. 366.

<sup>760</sup> My emphasis. (S.O.C.).

radical assertion with the use of the hypothetical particle 'koli'; yet, inasmuch all the lines of the stanzas use this particle to describe real and historically attested events (the raging war in line 1; the covering of the icon of Nikolas the Miracle-Worker in line 2 and the interdiction to celebrate Easter in the Kremlin cathedrals in line 4) it becomes clear that the use of the hypothetical particle 'koli' is a rhetorical means enabling the lyrical heroine to voice her thought of God's passivity in a seemingly moderate way. The interesting point, though, is that the lyrical heroine's bafflement at God's apparent passivity recalls the psalmist's complaint regarding God's inactivity. A striking example of such a complaint can be heard in psalm 10, which opens with the following lines: 'Why standest thou afar off, O Lord? Why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?' Thus, even though Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine does not address God directly, unlike the psalmist, her comment may be understood as a desperate attempt to provoke a divine reaction. Similarly, it is possible to understand the lyrical heroine's assertion of the necessity to turn the world upside down by reversing the usual order of things made in the second and third stanzas as a way of testing God's unresponsiveness. This interpretation is confirmed by the grammatical structure of the poem in which Tsvetaeva proves her poetic dexterity by creating a twelve-line poem within the space of a single grammatical sentence in which the first stanza stands as a subordinate proposition exposing some facts, while the two following stanzas stand as the main proposition made up of a depiction of the potential consequences triggered by the facts exposed in the first stanza. The entire poem can be summarised as the lyrical heroine's assertion that if God does not manifest himself even when appalling events are

taking place, then, the idea of an ultimate wisdom maintaining a minimum of social stability disappears leaving free reign to an unbridled chaotic force. Incidentally, it is worth noting that the depiction of this potential chaos seems to fit Bakhtin's description of carnival as a momentary inversion of social status and role. As the critic Michael Gardiner summarises, Bakhtin insists on the ability of medieval carnival to break down 'the formalities of hierarchy and the inherited differences between different social classes, ages, and castes, replacing established traditions and canons with a 'free and familiar' mode of social interaction based on the principles of mutual cooperation [...] and freedom'.<sup>761</sup> In 'Koli v zemliu...' social inversion is indeed a predominant theme, as shown by the telling mention of young female ruler in love with ordinary men (line 12). Yet, ultimately Tsvetaeva's carnival-like depiction does not fit Bakhtin's idea, because it is not bound up with the idea of regeneration.<sup>762</sup> On the contrary, the lyrical heroine makes clear that, if it lasts too long, God's silence and unresponsiveness will be responsible for the irruption of a chaotic and degenerative force provoking a radical inversion not only of social roles but also of the natural order reigning on earth; in the poem, this chaotic force is represented by such unnatural phenomena such as fishes' ability to sing (line 6) or the consumption of alcohol by newborns (line 8).

To conclude, let us say that 'Koli v zemliu...' is also a meditation on the link between faith and social order. It is not surprising, then, that Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine echoes the psalmist when she cries her indignation at God's passivity in

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<sup>761</sup> Michael Gardiner, 'Bakhtin's Carnival: Utopia as Critique' in *Bakhtin, Carnival and Other Subjects. Selected Papers from the Fifth International Bakhtin Conference. University of Manchester, July 1991*, edited by David Shepherd (Amsterdam – Atlanta: Rodopi, 1993), pp. 20-47; p. 33.

<sup>762</sup> Gardiner, 'Bakhtin's Carnival: Utopia as Critique', p. 33.

time of harshness. As was said previously, the psalmist usually avoids lingering on the theme of God's passivity. A notable exception to this rule is psalm 88, which is entirely devoted to describing the lamenter's woe. An important point of this psalm is that in it the lamenter attempts to persuade God to relieve him from his death-like situation by asserting that unless he is brought back from his death-like isolation from society, he will not be able to praise God and publicise his greatness. Thus he asks God the following rhetorical questions: 'Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? And thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?' (psalm 88:12). Interestingly, the implicit strategy of Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine's plea is very similar, because it also tries to bring God into action by describing the consequences of a failure to do so. In this perspective, it is worth noting that in her notebook recording her thoughts from 1916 to 1918 there is an entry in which Tsvetaeva expresses an idea similar to the psalmist's assertion that it is thanks to living human beings that the idea of God is kept alive on earth; as Tsvetaeva puts it: 'Человек – единственная возможность *быть* Богу.'<sup>763</sup>

Another poem, which develops the theme of God's passivity and uses the motif of God's sleep is 'Bog! – Ia zhivu! – Bog! – Znachit ty ne umer!' Incidentally, let us remark that although it was written in October 1919, this poem was not included in the collection *Lebedenyi stan* in which Tsvetaeva gathered the works she composed between 1917 and 1921. The poem reads as follows:

Бог! — Я живу! — Бог! — Значит ты не умер!  
Бог, мы союзники с тобой!  
Но ты старик угрюмый,

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<sup>763</sup> Tsvetaeva, *Neizdannoe, Zapisnye knizhki, v dvukh tomakh. Tom pervyi 1913-1919*, p. 169.

А я — герольд с трубой.

Бог! Можешь спать в своей ночной лазури!  
Доколе я среди живых —  
Твой дом стоит! — Я лбом встречаю бури,  
Я герольд войск твоих.

Я твой герольд. — Сигнал вечерний  
И зорю раннюю трублю.  
Бог! — Я любовью не дочерней, —  
Сыновне я тебя люблю.

Смотри: кустом неопалимым  
Горит походный мой шатер  
Не поменяюсь с серафимом:  
Я твой Господен герольд.

Дай срок: взыграет Царь — Девица  
По всем по селам! — А дотоль —  
Пусть для других — чердачная певица  
И старый карточный король! (I, 486)

This poem takes the minor motif of God's sleep found in psalms and amplifies its significance by transforming it into a major thematic thread. To put it differently, the poem performs a topical invention by developing further the idea of God's passivity, symbolised in the motif of God's sleep. In the first line the lyrical heroine proclaims that, contrarily to what she thought previously, God is not dead. As was said earlier, Russian language associates death with the idea of an eternal sleep in the expression 'vechnyi son'; consequently, it is possible to link the lyrical heroine's mention of God's death as a way of referring to his passivity, which, in turn, amounts to being asleep. Likewise, the lyrical heroine marks her surprise at being alive by using an exclamatory mark at the end of the syntagm stating that she is alive ('Ja zhivu!'). In the second part of the first line, the lyrical heroine implies



that she is still alive thanks to divine intervention, since she asserts that her being alive proves that God is not dead. Yet, despite this assertion of God's active presence, the motif of God's sleep is not confined to the introductory line but, on the contrary, developed throughout the poem. Although Tsvetaeva borrows this motif from the genre of psalms, she uses it in a strikingly different way.

Before commenting on the motif of God's sleep, which is overtly mentioned in the first line of the second stanza, it is important to examine how Tsvetaeva's poem integrates some typical features of the genre of psalms, while, at the same time, openly departing from it. The tension between the intertext of psalms and Tsvetaeva's poem is perceptible right from the beginning of 'Bog! – Ia zhivu!...' Indeed, the opening word of the poem, which is 'God', corresponds to that of many psalms of laments, which usually begin with an invocation to God. However, this initial similarity is immediately followed by a sharp contrast between the way in which the lyrical heroine relates to the God she has just invoked and the approach of the psalmist.<sup>764</sup> Indeed, the author of psalms generally expresses himself in such a manner as to make clear his entire dependence upon God's will. This relationship is revealed by the fact that the psalmist's call to God is usually associated with a verb in the imperative. For instance, psalm 6 opens as follows: 'O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure'; psalm 54 begins in a similar way: 'Save me, O God, by thy name, and judge me by thy strength'; in a similar vein the author of psalm 56 starts his prayer as follows: 'Be merciful unto

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<sup>764</sup> This fact makes already clear that the poem performs a topical invention on the psalmic genre, since it takes one of its features but uses it differently; such a device is very similar to Fowler's definition of topical invention, as an innovative use of a theme or motif of a genre Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 170.

me, O God: for man would swallow me up'. At first sight, the use of the imperative may seem surprising, for it might sound too authoritative in the mouth of the lamenter. However, by using the imperative, the psalmist shows clearly that the subject of the verb, i.e. the one who has the power to act and make things change, is God. Thus, using the verbal form of the second person singular, while addressing God, even if it is with a rather forceful imperative, does not contradict the biblical hierarchy that implies man's dependence on God. At this stage, it becomes particularly interesting to compare the psalmist's way of addressing God with that of Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine in 'Bog! – Ia zhivu! -....'. Indeed, the first thing she utters, after her invocation of God, is that she is alive. Here, it is especially important to pay a special attention to the poem's opening line that reads as follows: 'Bog! — Ia zhivu! — Bog! — Znachit ty ne umer!'. The saturation of this verse with punctuation marks gives valuable information on the reversal of the biblical hierarchy operated by Tsvetaeva. Thus the invocation of God is not followed by a verbal form that addresses God with the second singular person but by the first person pronoun I ('Ia'). Moreover, this pronoun is written with a capital letter, because of the exclamation mark that precedes it. As a result, in their graphic representation, the terms 'Bog' and 'Ia' are shown to be equally important, since they are both written with a capital letter; at this stage, it is worth noting that this would not have been the case, had Tsvetaeva used a comma instead of an exclamation mark. Incidentally, this state of affairs is good confirmation of the paramount importance of punctuation in Tsvetaeva's verses. The critic Pietro Zveteremich describes this phenomenon very well: 'Как произнесение

цветаевской поэзии [...], так семантическая нагрузка распределяются по разным составляющим элементам стихов, будь они строки, слова или просто маленькие единицы: слоги, глоссеммы, фонемы-графемы. Иногда, даже дефис, тире, запятая или акцент могут таить в себе значения определенной фразы или даже целого стихотворения'.<sup>765</sup> This observation applies perfectly to the poem above where the lyrical heroine asserts her equality with God by inserting an exclamation mark between the terms 'Bog' and 'Ia'; as a result, Tsvetaeva erases the graphic representation of the traditional hierarchy reigning between God and her lyrical heroine, since it enables her to write 'Ia' with a capital letter. This is a particularly interesting point, for, even though it is, from a religious point of view, blasphemous, or at least, provocative to assert one's equality with God, the roots of this phenomenon lie in the Psalter itself. Indeed, as Gunkel notes, in some psalms of laments, 'the agitated complaints of the inwardly shaken person sometimes forget the distance between God and humans'.<sup>766</sup> Such an attitude is perceptible in psalm 22:2 where the lamenter deplores God's lack of receptivity: 'O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not'. The psalmist's impulse to address God as an equal is amplified in Tsvetaeva's poem, where the punctuation enables the poet to accentuate openly the equality of God and the lyrical heroine.

To come back to the first of line of the poem 'Bog! – Ia zhivu!...', it is also important to note that the syntagm 'I am alive' is isolated by two dashes. An abundant use of dashes is also very typical of Tsvetaeva's poetry. Their function

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<sup>765</sup> Pietro Zveteremich, 'Ob otnoshenii mezhdu fonemoi i grafemoi v poezii M.Tsvetaevoi' in *Marina Tsvetaeva: Proceedings of the 1st International Marina Cvetaeva Symposium*, pp. 284-93; p. 290.

<sup>766</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 156.

varies considerably from one instance to another. In her analysis of Tsvetaeva's use of punctuation marks, T. Novikova observes that, broadly speaking, the poet uses dashes in order to obtain the following effects: a) expressivity of the verbal flow; b) compression of her discourse into a laconic form; c) differentiation of words or syntagms that are linked to different semantic or tonal layers of the text; d) designation of the line break due to the infringement of the rhythmical unit; e) accentuation of the most important details on the expressive and semantic level; f) intensification of the expressiveness of the text.<sup>767</sup> Let us see now which of these functions are fulfilled by the dashes in the syntagm 'Bog! — Ia zhivu! — Bog!' In this syntagm, the centrality of the lyrical heroine's self is highlighted by the dashes isolating the assertion 'I am alive' that is surrounded, in both ends, by the exclamation 'God!' As the rest of the poem will confirm, here the dashes enable Tsvetaeva to clearly distinguish between the two instances that are God and the lyrical heroine's self (this corresponds to the function c, above). Having highlighted that the two main protagonists of the poem are God and the lyrical heroine's self, Tsvetaeva finishes the line as follows: '— Znachit ty ne umer!' In this case, the dash accentuates the link of causality between the assertion 'I am alive' and 'it means that you did not die'. The latter assertion can be interpreted either as the lyrical heroine's recognition that God is alive because he saved her from a near-death situation; alternatively, the assertion that God is not dead because the lyrical heroine is alive can also be understood as a reversal of the biblical hierarchy reigning between God and man that is expressed in traditional psalms of lament

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<sup>767</sup> T. Novikova, 'Emfaticheskie funktsii znakov prepiniia v poezii M.Tsvetaevoi', *Marina Tsvetaeva – epokha, kul'tura, sud'ba*, pp. 386-92; pp. 386-7.

where the one praying sees God as the ultimate force able to maintain him alive. For instance, in psalm 64:1 the author implores God as follows: ‘O God [...] preserve my life’; similarly, the lamenter of psalm 69 starts his prayer as follows: ‘Save me, O God’; in the same vein, psalm 140 begins with the following plea: ‘Deliver me, O Lord [...] preserve me from the violent man’. By contrast, Tsvetaeva’s lyrical heroine’s formulation ‘Ja zhivu! [...] — Znachit ty ne umer!’ seems to imply that God’s life is dependent on that of the lyrical heroine. This reversal of the biblical hierarchy is confirmed in the second line of the poem: ‘Bog, my soiuzniki s toboi!’ Indeed, the lyrical heroine’s assertion that God and she are allies, which is addressed directly to God, is reminiscent of the biblical concept of the divine covenants, i.e. ‘an explicit sworn agreement [between God and humans] defining the term of their relation’.<sup>768</sup> In the Bible, the concept of covenant refers to God’s expressed promise to protect humankind and is present in both the Old Testament (Genesis 6:18; Ge 15:9-21; 17.1-27) and in the New Testament (John 31:31-4 and Mark 14:24).<sup>769</sup> The common point between the biblical concept of covenant and the idea of alliance evoked in the poem is that of a mutual commitment. However, the lyrical heroine demonstratively stresses the fact that she does not submit to the biblical hierarchy by purposely designating the mutual commitment of God and herself with the term ‘soiuz’, which can be used to designate any kind of alliance; in doing so, the lyrical heroine avoids the religiously connoted term ‘zavet’. Moreover, the biblical covenants are always the result of God’s initiative, by contrast, in Tsvetaeva’s line ‘Bog, my soiuzniki s toboi!’, it is

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<sup>768</sup> *Illustrated Dictionary and Concordance of the Bible*, edited by Geoffrey Wigoder (New York — London: MacMillan Publishing, 1986), p. 246.

<sup>769</sup> Nick Page, *The Bible Book* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 37.

the lyrical heroine who takes the initiative and announces to God that they have formed an alliance. This state of affairs confirms the view highlighted by Losskaia and Dinega that a certain rivalry towards God is perceptible in Tsvetaeva's poetry. In this light, the last two lines of the quatrain are also telling: 'No ty starik ugrumyi, / A ia — gerol'd s truboi.' In this passage, the lyrical heroine's sense of superiority towards God is unambiguously expressed. Indeed, the syntactical and metrical construction of these two lines shows a clear opposition between the divine instance 'No ty' and the lyrical heroine 'A ia'. Moreover, on a semantic level, there is a clear debasement of the figure of God, who is trivially described as a sullen old man; by contrast, the lyrical heroine depicts herself with the image of a herald. By attributing to herself the function consisting in announcing important events, the lyrical heroine takes up a role that is reminiscent of that of the prophet. However, it is once again significant that Tsvetaeva chooses the term herald instead of that of the prophet, for it indicates her distance from the biblical tradition, even though she writes a poem in which the lyrical heroine addresses God directly and thus inserts herself in the traditional genre representing humans' dialogue with God, namely the genre of psalms.

As was just shown, in the first stanza of the poem 'Bog! – Ia zhivu!...' the generic intertext of psalm is clearly subjected to the phenomenon of topical invention that is perceptible in the amplification of the psalmist's mention of God's sleep: indeed, when she refers to God's potential death, the lyrical heroine pushes the idea of God's passivity conveyed by the motif of God's sleep to its very limit. Furthermore, the lyrical heroine also reinforces the psalmist's repressed impulse to

address God as an equal by depicting him in terms denying the divine omnipotence and invulnerability usually associated with the divine.

The first stanza of the poem is also important, because it ponders on the idea of God's death; indeed, when she asserts that God has not died, the lyrical heroine implies the possibility of his mortality. This idea obviously resonates with the philosophical currents of the time when this poem was written and it is easy to recognise that the thought involved here is that of Nietzsche; indeed, the assertion of God's death is one of the thinker's most well-known statements.<sup>770</sup> It is also a well-documented fact that Nietzsche's philosophy was popular in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. In her thorough examination of the influence of Nietzsche on the Russian authors of Tsvetaeva's time, Clowes remarks that for most artists writing during the first decade of the last century, 'Nietzsche's provocative works epitomized the revolt against convention'.<sup>771</sup> This observation is also valid for Tsvetaeva, whose knowledge of and interest in Nietzsche is confirmed by her correspondence and prose writing.<sup>772</sup> A particularly important point to stress is that Tsvetaeva read the German philosopher from the beginning of her poetic career; indeed, as she remembers in her correspondence, she read *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, which contains the assertion of God's death, at the young age of fifteen (VII, 602); moreover, Tsvetaeva even confesses that she has the same frame of mind as the German philosopher; as she puts it succinctly: 'И рода мы – одного' (VII, 602). This is an important point, because it indicates that Tsvetaeva felt a similarity

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<sup>770</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for All and None*, edited and translated by Adrian del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 5.

<sup>771</sup> Clowes, *The Revolution of Moral Consciousness. Nietzsche in Russian Literature 1890-1914*, p. 1.

<sup>772</sup> On Tsvetaeva and Nietzsche, see Stock, *The Ethics of the Poet*, pp. 16-8.

between her spiritual outlook and that of Nietzsche. Yet, as was said in Chapter Two, Tsvetaeva differs from him in that she cannot bring herself to abandon the idea of the existence of transcendence definitively. Stock's mention of Tsvetaeva's nostalgia for a transcendental truth is fully relevant in the context of the poem 'Bog! – Ia zhivu – Bog! – Znachit ty ne umer'.<sup>773</sup> Indeed, it is difficult to disagree with the critic, for, as was said earlier, by asserting 'Znachit ty ne umer', Tsvetaeva obviously hints at the Nietzschean assertion of God's death and refutes it. At the same time, it is clear that the idea of the eternal and divine principle Tsvetaeva longs for does not match the traditional figure of the biblical God, as shown by his debasement through the image of a sullen old man. Clearly, Tsvetaeva has an ambivalent attitude towards the biblical God; this explains why she keeps returning to it and represents it in many different ways.

The second stanza of the poem 'Bog! – Ia zhivu...' is of paramount importance for the present argument, because in it Tsvetaeva reuses the motif of God's sleep that originates in psalms of lament. As was said earlier, in the biblical context of the Psalter, the motif of God's sleep is brought forward by the lamenter, who endeavours to catch God's attention by using formulae such as 'awake for me' (psalm 7:6) or 'awake to my judgement' (psalm 35). Not surprisingly, Tsvetaeva's treatment of this motif is radically different; thus, she writes: 'Bog! Mozhesh' spat' v svoei nochnoi lazuri!' (My emphasis. S.O.C.). This line carries on with the lyrical heroine's 'usurpation', as it were, of God's power initiated in the first stanza. Indeed, while in the biblical order of thing, humans submit to God's will, in

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<sup>773</sup> Stock, 'Tsvetaeva kak myslitel', p. 98.



Tsvetaeva's line, it is the lyrical heroine who has the power to control God, as proved by the fact that she allows God to sleep. Moreover, the reversal of the psalmic situation is also obvious in the fact that instead of trying to arouse God out of sleep, as the biblical lamenter does, the lyrical heroine of Tsvetaeva's poem, on the contrary, encourages him to sleep. Moreover, the oxymoron 'in your night azure' reinforces the idea of God's sleep and blindness: by equating the azure sky with a night sky, Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine hints at God's inability to see what is clearly visible in broad daylight. It is important to note, here, that the idea of God's inability to see when the sky is clear is a direct and complete reversal of the psalmist's assertion of God's power to see through the night that is expressed in psalm 139:12: 'Yeah, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee'. However, Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine does not express any disappointment when she asserts God's grossly impaired vision; on the contrary, she feels elated by the possibility of taking over the divine duty of maintaining alive the belief in an eternal and transcendental principle on earth; thus Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine asserts: 'Dokole *ia* sredi zhivyykh – / Tvoi dom stoit! [...]'. Here, it should be noted that the idea of the centrality of the lyrical heroine's self that was expressed in the syntagm 'Bog – *ia* zhivu! – Bog!' is repeated in the second line of the second stanza ('Dokole *ia* sredi zhivyykh –') in which Tsvetaeva attracts the attention of the reader to the importance of the lyrical heroine's self by writing the first person singular pronoun 'I' ('*ia*') in italics.

So far, the analysis of 'Bog! – *ia* zhivu!...' has highlighted a complete reversal of the biblical hierarchy between God and humans that manifests itself via the

poem's punctuation, the lyrical heroine's tone and the motifs of God's sleep and sight. This situation carries on until the middle of the second stanza, where a significant shift in the lyrical heroine's way of relating to God occurs:

[...] — Я лбом встречаю бури,  
Я барабанщик войск твоих.

Я твой горнист. — Сигнал вечерний  
И зорю раннюю трублю.  
Бог! — Я любовью не дочерней, —  
Сыновне я тебя люблю.

By asserting her ability to bravely face life's difficulties, illustrated by the image of her frontal confrontation with tempests, the lyrical heroine implicitly recognises that she is not above them. In other words, she indirectly confesses her human vulnerability, as opposed to God's divine invulnerability. Secondly, by introducing herself to God as the drummer of his armies, the lyrical heroine represents her status as subordinate to that of God. Furthermore, the representation of the lyrical heroine as God's trumpeter enables the critic to link her with the figure of the psalmist, who overtly enjoins his peers to express God's greatness by singing psalms and playing the trumpet, as the following extracts testify: 'Sing aloud unto God our strength [...]. Take a psalm [...]. Blow up the trumpet' (psalm 81: 1-3); 'Praise ye the Lord [...] Praise him with the sound of the trumpet' (psalm 150: 1-3). In positioning herself as a musician of God, the lyrical heroine reviews her previous assertions of being equal to God and recognises his ultimate superiority. This is an interesting phenomenon, since a sudden change of mood is also typical of psalms, as was said in Chapter Two. At this point, it is important to

stress that the image of the drummer, used by the poet to indicate the lyrical heroine's subordination to God, is far from neutral in Tsvetaeva's poetry. On the contrary, Tsvetaeva uses it several times as an emblem of her poetic self. For instance, in an undated poem written before 1913 and entitled 'Baraban', she writes the following lines: 'Женская доля меня не влечет [...] Быть барабанщиком! Всех впереди! / Все остальное обман' (I, 146). In this extract, Tsvetaeva's poetic persona, embodied in the image of the drummer is clearly opposed to that of her gender. In other words, in her early poetry Tsvetaeva overtly opposes her feminine self to her artistic self, represented by the figure of the drummer.<sup>774</sup> In a way, this is still the case in the poem 'Bog! – Ia zhivu!...', although the opposition between the lyrical heroine's female gender, which is overtly declared only in the penultimate line of the poem ('Pust' dlia drugikh – cherdachnaia pevitsa'), and her poetic self is implicit rather than explicit. This particular aspect of 'Bog! – Ia zhivu!...' was demonstrated by the critic Anya Kroth who observes that in the poem 'Tsvetaeva consciously employs masculine grammatical forms to describe a female figure [...]. The poem is remarkable in that, except for the last stanza, every member in the series of nouns denoting the authorial "I" is masculine in gender: *soiuznik, gerol'd, barabanshchik, gornist, volonter*'.<sup>775</sup> The link between the psalmist and the lyrical heroine reinforces this trend, since, as was said previously, psalms of lament were overwhelmingly sung by men.

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<sup>774</sup> In this regard, I agree with Dinega's interpretation of 'Barban' as metaphorical representation of Tsvetaeva's fight 'against her own internalization of societal and poetic conventions [of genders] that impede her path into poetry' [*A Russian Psyche* p. 22].

<sup>775</sup> Anya Kroth, 'Androgyny as an Exemplary Feature of Marina Tsvetaeva's Dichotomous Poetic Vision', *Slavic Review* 38 (1979), pp. 563-82; p. 570.

To come back to 'Baraban', it is also worth noting that it portrays the drummer as someone who is ahead of everybody; this fact shows that Tsvetaeva considers the poet-drummer to be an elect person. In November 1918 Tsvetaeva once again resorted to the image of the drummer in the two-poem cycle entitled 'Barabanshchik'. The most relevant lines of this work, as far as the present analysis is concerned, are those of the first poem's first stanza: 'Barabanshchik! Bednyi mal'chik! / Vpravo-vlevo ne gliadi! / Prokhodi pered narodom / S Bozhim gromom na grudi' (I, 445). Once again, the drummer is associated with the masculine gender; however, what matters above all in this extract, is the indication that the art of the drummer-poet is divinely inspired and represents God ('S Bozhim gromom na grudi'). Hence, the shift that occurs in the tenth line of 'Bog! – Ia zhivu!...' can be explained by the fact that the lyrical heroine ultimately acknowledges the divine origin of her creative faculties. Consequently, it is not surprising that the third stanza reinforces the idea of the lyrical heroine's subordination to God by depicting her as his bugler. Having asserted her identity as a musician of God, the lyrical heroine specifies that her creativity manifests itself in a cyclical manner, since she uses her music as a way of marking the beginning of the day and the fall of the night. As she puts it: 'Signal vechernii / I zoriu ranniuiu trubliu'. By specifying that she celebrates both sunrise and sundown the lyrical heroine emphasises her attraction for seemingly opposite concepts. This is an interesting point, since it can be related to Tsvetaeva's blurring of the gender difference in the treatment of the poem's lyrical heroine that was observed previously. Kroth comments on this aspect of Tsvetaeva's poetry: 'Various "dualistic" manifestations of Tsvetaeva's

poetic vision are not so much twofold representations of externally conflicting principles as they are integral, though antithetical parts of a whole, of a one'.<sup>776</sup> This observation confirms Tsvetaeva's own theoretical position on the gender divide, which can be summarised in her claim that there is no specifically feminine issue in art: 'Женского вопроса в творчестве нет' (IV, 38). In the context of the analysis of 'Bog! – Ia zhivu...' the gender issue is relevant because it sheds light on the lyrical heroine's way of relating to God and explains the initial rivalry the lyrical heroine expresses thanks to her subtle use of the psalmic motif of God's sleep. In this perspective, it is important to note the lyrical heroine's declaration to God that she loves him as a son rather than as a daughter, because it makes clear that she identifies herself with a masculine principle rather than with a feminine one. Given the poem's insistence on the lyrical heroine's blurred gender, it is worth wondering why the lyrical heroine asserts that her love for God is that of a son rather than that of a daughter. Here, it is fair to assume that an important factor compelling Tsvetaeva to identify her lyrical heroine's love for God as similar to that of a son originates in her own experience of being a daughter and of being a mother to two daughters and a son. Concerning the former, it is not exaggerated to say that as a child Tsvetaeva felt very strongly that her gender was an obstacle to her mother's love. In her autobiographical prose Tsvetaeva depicts very well her mother's disappointment at having a daughter and her own feeling of not being loved unconditionally. In this regard, the introductory sentence of her essay 'Mat' i muzyka' (1934) is particularly telling:

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<sup>776</sup> Kroth, 'Androgyny as an Exemplary Feature of Marina Tsvetaeva's Dichotomous Poetic Vision', p. 581.

‘Когда вместо желанного, предрешенного, почти приказанного сына Александра родилась только всего я, мать, самолюбиво проглотив вздох, сказала: «По крайней мере, будет музыкантша’. (V, 10)

The important point to note is that in the same essay the figure of the mother is depicted as a God-like figure, as shown by the fact that her overwhelming passion for music is depicted in terms recalling God’s power to flood earth (Genesis 7): ‘Мать затопила нас как наводнение. [...] Мать музыкой залила нас, как кровью, кровью второго рождения’ (V, 20). Furthermore, in her essay ‘Chert’ Tsvetaeva narrates how her mother forbade her access to her step-sister’s bookshelves by associating it with the tree of knowledge mentioned in Genesis 2:

‘[...] В комнате Валерии, обернувшись книжным шкафом, стояло древо познания добра и зла [...]. Черт в Валерину комнату пришел на готовое место: моего преступления – материнского запрета.’ (V, 36)

In her recollection of the maternal interdiction to read the books owned by her step-sister Tsvetaeva clearly depicts her mother as a God-like figure. As Chester remarks, in this passage Tsvetaeva rewrites the biblical scene of the original sin and feminizes ‘the entire set of characters: her mother is assigned the role of God Almighty; the serpent is played by Valeriia [Tsvetaeva’s step-sister]. Adam is edited out’.<sup>777</sup> The association of the figure of the mother with that of God makes possible to interpret the assertion made by the lyrical heroine of ‘Bog! –Ia zhivu-

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<sup>777</sup> Chester, ‘Engaging Sexual Demons in Marina Tsvetaeva’s “Devil”: The Body and the Genesis of Woman Poet’, p. 1031.

...’ that she loves God as a son rather than as a daughter as a reflection of Tsvetaeva’s belief that a son will be rewarded more generously for his love than a daughter. As a result, it is possible to conclude that in Tsvetaeva’s mind the figure of the son, more than any other, embodies the idea of unconditional love;<sup>778</sup> by contrast, the figure of the daughter is marred by Tsvetaeva’s experience of her mother’s insufficient love toward her and her own tragedy of losing her two-and-a-half-year-old daughter Irina in the civil war, because she could not afford to buy enough food to feed her.<sup>779</sup> Furthermore, it is important to stress that in the context of the poem ‘Bog! – Ia zhivu!...’ the lyrical heroine’s overt differentiation between a daughter’s love and that of a son is made in the context of a dialogue with God. In this perspective, it becomes clear that by asserting her filial love for God, the lyrical heroine also draws an implicit comparison between herself and the son of God, i.e. Christ. It is not difficult, here, to interpret this implicit comparison as the lyrical heroine’s assertion that she is ready to suffer for the sake of the divine task she was elected to accomplish, namely artistic creation. Finally, let us add that the father/son type of relationship which provides the model of the lyrical heroine’s relationship towards God also explains the lyrical heroine’s feeling of rivalry with God, since, in psychoanalytical terms, sons are on competitive terms with their fathers. This state of affairs appears clearly in the fourth stanza, in which the lyrical heroine states her

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<sup>778</sup> This interpretation is confirmed by the following paper written by the critic Tatiana Zilotina, ‘The Son Figure in Marina Tsvetaeva’s Writings in the Light of Heinz Kohut’s Self-Psychology’ in *West Virginia University Philological Papers* (49) 2002, pp. 63-70.

<sup>779</sup> Tsvetaeva’s belief that a son is bound to be more loved by his mother than a daughter is also demonstrated by Kolchevska’s analysis of Tsvetaeva’s autobiographical essay ‘Dom starogo Pimena’ in her article ‘Mothers and Daughters; Variations on Family Themes in Tsvetaeva’s *The House at Old Pimen*’, pp. 135-57.

belief that by realising her divinely inspired artistic fate she becomes a being almost as powerful as God. She formulates this idea as follows:

Смотри: кустом неопалимым  
Горит походный мой шатер.  
Не поменяюсь с серафимом:  
Я твой Господен волонтер.

The lyrical heroine's conviction that her poetic craft elevates her to a God-like status is revealed by the fact that she uses a typical attribute of God in order to describe herself, namely resilience against the destructive power of fire. Indeed, the lyrical heroine depicts the tent accompanying her on her journeys as a blazing bush that does not consume itself; this image is obviously borrowed from Exodus 3 where God addresses Moses via a burning bush that is not reduced into ashes by the flames but keeps burning. By attributing to herself the divine power of mastering the devastating element of fire, the lyrical heroine makes it plain that she possesses a God-like quality. Furthermore, the lyrical heroine's assertion that she possesses a tent recalls the biblical episode describing how the Jews covered the Ark of the Covenant with a tent (Exodus 40, 3). This is an important point, because the lyrical heroine referred to the concept of an alliance with God at the beginning of the poem. In this perspective, it is worth adding that the tent is also an important motif of 1 Chronicles 14-15 which narrates how David was elected king by God and describes how he placed God's Covenant in a tent (1 Ch. 15:1, 2). The remarkable point about this biblical episode is that it is precisely on the day when David put God's Covenant in a tent that he sang his first psalm, as is said in 1 Chronicle 16: 7-



36: ‘Then on that day David delivered first his psalm to thank the Lord’, 1 Ch. 16: 7); not surprisingly, this psalm is praise to God in which David enjoins his people to revere God: ‘Give thanks unto the Lord [...] Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him’ (1 Ch. 16:7, 9). Thus by depicting her tent as a burning bush that does not consume itself Tsvetaeva merges the figure of God with that of David; in doing so, she stresses the fact that by virtue of their creative power poets are equal to God; this stance amplifies the psalmist’s occasional oblivion to his subordinate status and that is why it matches Fowler’s concept of topical invention, which designates the phenomenon whereby a minor theme of a genre gradually becomes major. In other words, the marginal illustration of the possibility of a dialogue of equals occasionally found in the psalms becomes one of the major thematic threads of Tsvetaeva’s poem.

The last stanza of the poem is interesting because it expresses once again the idea of an equal status shared by God and the lyrical heroine. It reads as follows:

Дай срок: взыграет Царь — Девуца  
По всем по селам! — А дотоль —  
Пусть для других — чердачная певица  
И старый карточный король!

Similarly to the preceding stanza, the first word of this fifth and final stanza is a verb in the imperative. Although the lyrical heroine’s addressee is not mentioned, the reader can logically deduce that the poet carries on her speech to God. Interestingly, this time the imperative serves to plead God to give her enough time (‘Dai srok’) so that her artistic creation can successfully mature and ripen. In

pleading with God, the lyrical heroine likens herself to the author of psalms of lament. However, the remaining part of the stanza sounds far removed from any psalm of lament, since the lyrical heroine associates herself with the folkloric character of the Tsar-Maiden. In doing so, she makes it very clear that ultimately what matters for her is her ability to create a fanciful universe similar to that of traditional fairy tales. Moreover, the mention of the folkloric character of the Tsar-Maiden is especially remarkable, since in *Tsar-Devitsa* (1920), Tsvetaeva's own version of the popular tale, the characters of the young tsar and that of his fiancé are depicted in such a way that they appear to possess an androgynous nature. This fact points to Tsvetaeva's ultimate belief that artists should be able to manifest both masculine and feminine principles. As was shown in the previous chapter, the same belief informs Tsvetaeva's mixture of the intertext of psalms with that of folk poetry.

In the second part of the last stanza, the lyrical heroine develops her thought on artistic creation further by remarking that her creative gift is not necessarily recognised by others; as she puts it, other people might simply take her for an amateurish singer whose artistic quality is as unreal as the royal status of a king on a playing card: 'Pust' dlia drugikh — cherdachnaia pevitsa / I staryi kartochnyi korol'!' The lyrical heroine's depiction of other people's perception of her echoes her own perception of God as an obsolete figure of authority. Indeed, it is important to note that the lyrical heroine's assertion that she is perceived as an 'old king on a playing card', is reminiscent of the third line of the first stanza in which she

addresses God as a 'sullen old man'. In doing so, Tsvetaeva reasserts the fact that the poet, because of his creative power, is somehow a peer of God.

To conclude, let us repeat that in 'Bog! – Ia zhivu!...' the presence of the psalmic intertext is confirmed by a series of elements, which, taken together, weave a poem that echoes psalmic poetry. The most emblematic of these elements is the motif of God's sleep; although this image is mentioned only once, its symbolic meaning, i.e. the idea of God's passivity, is developed throughout the whole poem. Moreover, the assertion of God's passivity enables the lyrical heroine to take over some of God's function and thus makes it possible for her to meditate on the status of the artist, who shares with God the ability to create. Thus, even though the way in which the lyrical heroine integrates the motif of God's sleep in her poem is far removed from the original genre of psalms, it is linked with it by virtue of being a reflection on the nature of God and his relationship with human beings. Furthermore, the provocative tone of the poem is typical of psalms of laments. However, in the original psalms, the provocative tone is aimed at awakening God and reminding him of his duty to reward the righteous and help those who are unfairly persecuted. By contrast, Tsvetaeva uses a provocative tone in order to bring into question God's omnipotence.

As was just shown, in 'Bog! – Ia Zhivu!...' Tsvetaeva develops in an original way the theme of God's passivity taken from the genre of psalms. Yet this fact does not imply that the overall generic framework of the poem is that of psalms. This becomes clear if one remembers that the psalms of lament are best defined as a cry for help to God, whereas Tsvetaeva's poem can be characterised as a modern

reflection on the nature of artistic creation and its connection with an elusive divine principle.<sup>780</sup> Consequently, it is fair to say that in ‘Bog! – Ia Zhivu!...’ Tsvetaeva modulates the genre of the psalms and performs a topical invention consisting in treating in a new way the psalmic theme of God’s passivity, embodied in the motif of God’s sleep. This topical invention triggers another one, namely the development of the idea of equality between God and the poet, which is occasionally and fleetingly expressed by the psalmist.

Lastly, it is worth recalling that, according to Fowler, the choice of a literary genre is often unconscious.<sup>781</sup> As a result, Tsvetaeva’s reworking of psalms of lament in ‘Bog! – Ia Zhivu!...’ might be partly explained by a series of factors of which Tsvetaeva was not aware. Indeed, the comparison of the poem’s first line with some statements Tsvetaeva made in her notebook at approximately the same time clearly indicates that the poet was compelled by the circumstances of her daily life to create in a framework reminiscent of the psalms of lament. In this perspective, it is worth comparing Tsvetaeva’s poetic assertions with the utterances she made in the private sphere of her notebook. To do so will shed light on Fowler’s observation that generic operations are partly unconscious. The first thing the poet asserts in the opening line of the poem ‘Bog! – Ia Zhivu!...’ is that she is alive. Not only does she realise this fact, but she also emphasises it by putting an exclamation mark following its assertion. For readers who do not know Tsvetaeva’s biography, the lyrical heroine’s sense of amazement accompanying the realisation that she is

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<sup>780</sup> Incidentally, let us note that Tsvetaeva’s belief in the impossibility to depict God in a definite way because of his elusiveness is not unlike Kristeva’s assertion that the place of the mother, the original *chora* forming the semiotic modality of language, is unrepresentable.

<sup>781</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literatures*, p. 25.

still among the living may come either as a surprise or be perceived as a poetic pose. In reality, nothing could be further from the facts. Indeed, the year 1919, when Tsvetaeva composed this poem, can easily be described as one of the darkest of her life. To briefly summarise the well-known circumstances of that year, let us recall that Tsvetaeva was struggling alone to support her two daughters without any substantial financial resources in Soviet Moscow. Here, it is important to recall the fact that Tsvetaeva felt totally alienated not only from the society in which she lived but also from her past and from her husband, about whom she knew nothing apart from the fact that he was fighting with the White Army. This feeling of isolation and alienation is perfectly conveyed in the following note: ‘Девятнадцатый год, ты забыл, что я женщина... Я сама позабыла про это! Так, в...[пропуск в рукописи] Москве погребенная заживо, Наблюдаю с усмешкой тонкой, Как меня – даже ты, что три года охаживал! – Обходить научился сторонкой.’<sup>782</sup> In order to describe her situation, Tsvetaeva finds no other image than that of herself buried alive. It goes without saying that such an image is a metaphor of Tsvetaeva’s feeling of despair, manifesting her growing sense of being cut off. At this stage it is important to note that in psalms of laments it is not uncommon to find similar statements whereby the psalmist compares himself to either a present or past inhabitant of Sheôl, i.e. the realm of death. For instance, the author of psalm 18:4,5 remembers being in the firm grip of death: ‘The sorrow of death compassed me [...] the snares of death prevented me’; in a similar vein, the lamenter of psalm 22:15 says: ‘My strength is dried up like a potsherd, [...] thou hast brought me into the

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<sup>782</sup> Quoted by Saakiantz, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, pp. 184-5. My emphasis (S.O.C.).

dust of death'; in the same vein, the author of psalm 31:12 asserts: 'I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind: I am like a broken vessel'. It is in psalm 88: 2-6, however, that the psalmist's feeling of being buried alive is expressed in the most strikingly expressive way: 'Let my prayer come before thee [...]. For my soul is full troubles and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. I am counted with them that go into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength: Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom you remember no more: they are cut off from thy hand. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deep'. An important point to note, here, is that both Tsvetaeva's note and the genre of psalms associate the concept of death with that of loss of memory. Indeed, in her note, Tsvetaeva complains that the harshness of the year 1919 was such that her status of woman was forgotten; similarly, the psalmist deplores that his stay among the dead is bound up with him being forgotten by God. One might object, here, that it is mere chance that both Tsvetaeva and the authors of psalms describe the harshness of their situations in terms of a death-like state and, then, link this fact with the idea of being forgotten. At first sight, this objection may seem to be partly justified; however, such objection ignores an important fact, namely the existential kinship between the psalmist's concept of death and the deep-seated psychological motivation of Tsvetaeva's assertion that she was buried alive in the Soviet Moscow of 1919.<sup>783</sup> Indeed, it is important to bear in mind that the psalmist's concept of death does not merely imply being reduced to sheer nothingness but supposes a lingering state of being cut off from the society to which he used to belong. As Robert Martin-Achard observes, the authors of the Psalter perceived death as a state

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of rejection or excommunication. This is precisely what Tsvetaeva felt in 1919 when she wrote: ‘Я абсолютно déclassée. [...] Я действительно *абсолютно*, до мозга костей, — вне сословия, профессии, ранга. За царем — цари, за нищим — нищие, за мной — пустота’.<sup>784</sup> Moreover, Martin-Achard gives a summary of what death meant for the psalmist in the following terms: ‘Two particularly important characteristics of the world of the dead, according to the Hebraic Bible, ought to be underlined: Sheol is a land of *silence* and *oblivion* ; it is a place without exchange and without memory. [...] There is no continuity between « the land of the living » and the other world; the bridges are broken between the former and the latter; [...] The psalmists evoke this world of absence where no communication is possible’.<sup>785</sup> As was just said, Tsvetaeva felt the existence of an unbridgeable gap separating her from her past, embodied in the fate of her missing husband; as a result, it is fair to suppose that one of the unconscious motivations compelling Tsvetaeva to resort to a poetic framework reminiscent of the psalms of lament in ‘Bog! – Ia Zhivu!...’ was partly due to the tormenting silence and apparent obliviousness from the person who intimately connected her with her past.

Finally, the topical invention performed by Tsvetaeva in her poem ‘Bog ! – Ia zhivu-...’ is not due to mere chance but to the fact that the psalmic motif of being buried alive refers to a ‘vestigially mythological plot’ as Robert Alter puts it, to which Tsvetaeva was particularly perceptive.<sup>786</sup> In the present case, this plot is that of death and rebirth. As the critic observes, in psalms ‘illness and other kinds of

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<sup>784</sup> Quoted by Saakiantz, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 186.

<sup>785</sup> Robert Martin-Achard, *La mort en face selon la Bible hébraïque* (Geneva: Labor & Fides, 1988), p. 77. My translation (S.O.C.)

<sup>786</sup> Alter, ‘Psalms’, p. 259.

dangers, perhaps even spiritual distress, are represented as a descent into the underworld from which the Lord is entreated to bring the person back or, in thanksgiving poems, is praised for having brought him back. The effectiveness of this vestigially mythological plot is that it can speak powerfully to so many different predicaments, in the psalmist's time and ever since – [...] for those who feel the chill threat of literal extinction here and now for those who have suffered one sort or another of inward dying'.<sup>787</sup> Incidentally, let us note that the mythical plot characteristic of psalms is also present in the myth of Orpheus, which constitutes another fundamental intertext of Tsvetaeva's poetry, as Hasty brilliantly demonstrates.<sup>788</sup>

Another poem in which the theme of God's passivity comprised in the psalmic intertext is subjected to the genre-modifying process of topical invention is 'Stoiat v chernorabochei khmuri' the first part of a two-poem cycle entitled 'Zavodskie' written by Tsvetaeva in September 1922, while she was living in Czechoslovakia.

Стоят в чернорабочей хмури  
Закопченные корпуса.  
Над копотью взмечают кудри  
Растроганные небеса.

В надышанную сирость чайной  
Картуз засаленный бредет.

Последняя труба окраины  
О праведности вопиет.

Труба! Труба! Лбoв искаженных

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<sup>787</sup> Alter, 'Psalms', p. 259.

<sup>788</sup> Olga Peters Hasty, *Tsvetaeva's Orphic Journey in the Worlds of the Word* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1996).



Последнее: еще мы тут!  
Какая на-смерть осужденность  
В той жалобе последних труб!

Как в вашу бархатную сытость  
Вгрызается их жалкий вой!  
Какая заживо-зарытость  
И выведенность на убой!

А Бог? — По самый лоб закурен,  
Не вступится! Напрасно ждем!  
Над койками больниц и тюрем  
Он гвоздиками пригвожден.

Истерзанность! Живое мясо!  
И было так и будет — до  
Скончания.  
— Всем песням насыпь,  
И всех отчаяний гнездо:

Завод! Завод! Ибо зовется  
Заводом этот черный взлет.  
К отчаянью трубы заводской  
Прислушайтесь — ибо зовет

Завод. И никакой посредник  
Уж не послужит вам тогда,  
Когда над городом последним  
Взревет последняя труба. (II, 150-1)

In 'Zavodskie' Tsvetaeva uses the motif of God's sleep in a much more radical way than in the poem 'Bog! – Ia zhivu !...'. As was shown previously, this work still displays, right from the start, several typical components of the laments found in many psalms such as the address to God and the petition made in the imperative; consequently, the insertion of the motif of God's sleep takes places in an overall context that is overtly reminiscent of psalmic poetry. By contrast, in 'Zavodskie' the elements signalling the topical invention of the psalmic intertext are far less obvious. Indeed, the poem opens with a grim description of an industrial

suburb (first quatrain), which has no link whatsoever, at least at first sight, with the lyrical prayers of the Psalter. Moreover, the couplet that follows elaborates on the first stanza's depiction of a gloomy atmosphere dominating the suburb. Such a description of the malevolent atmosphere reigning in a working-class urban area is much more attuned to the expressionist movement of the beginning of twentieth century than to the genre of psalms. Indeed, the first six lines of the poem can be fruitfully interpreted as testimony to Tsvetaeva's acquaintance with the expressionist movement that was then predominant in both German cinema and literature. Given Tsvetaeva's well-known fascination for the newly-appeared cinematic art<sup>789</sup> and her attested knowledge of German expressionist literature,<sup>790</sup> it is important not to ignore the perceptible presence of an expressionistic tone in 'Zavodskie'. Indeed, this cycle is clearly swayed by 'the wide influence [...] [of] cinematic masterpieces [such as]: Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920), F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) [...]. Along with their much-imitated visual patterns of sinister shadows, these films reveal a shared obsession with automatized, trance-like states, which appears in expressionist literature too: a common concern of expressionism is with the eruption of irrational and chaotic forces from beneath the surface of a mechanized modern world'.<sup>791</sup> The first element of this definition, i.e. the 'visual pattern of sinister shadows, is undoubtedly present in the first stanza of 'Zavodskie', as can be seen in the first two lines of the

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<sup>789</sup> Concerning Tsvetaeva's passion for the cinematic art, see: Lev Mnukhin, 'Epistoliarhoe iskusstvo Mariny Tsvetaevoi' in *Marina Tsvetaeva i Frantsiia* (Paris – Moscow: Institut d'Études Slaves, Russkii put', 2002), pp. 67-81; p. 72.

<sup>790</sup> Leonid Katsis, 'Marina Tsvetaeva: nemetsko-evreiskii i nemetskii ekpressionizm', *Marina Tsvetaeva – epokha, kul'tura, sud'ba*, pp. 84-92.

<sup>791</sup> *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, edited by Chris Baldick (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 78. My emphasis (S.O.C.).

poem, which describe factory buildings, blackened with smoke, in a sombre light with a strong emphasis on the darkness of the whole picture. Using four different terms referring to the idea of blackness ('chernorabochei'; 'khmuri'; 'Zakopchennye'; 'kopot'iu'), Tsvetaeva creates a visual picture in which the predominance of dark colours is highly reminiscent of the expressionist 'visual pattern of sinister shadows'. In this context, Tsvetaeva's use of the adjective 'chernorabochii' is particularly justified, for it connotes both the poor worker, who is the implied protagonist of the poem, and the dark, if not black, atmosphere that constitutes his environment. Moreover, the second feature, typical of expressionist art, namely the interest in 'the eruption of irrational and chaotic forces from beneath the surface of a mechanized modern world', is also perceptible in the fifth and sixth lines of Tsvetaeva's poem that read as follows: 'V nadyshannuiu sirost' chainoi / Kartuz zasalennyi bredet'. The irrational, here, is expressed by the metonymic designation of a worker walking down the street through the image of a wandering cap. Furthermore, the idea of irrationality is reinforced by the use of the verbal form 'bredet' (the cap trudges) the spelling of which resembles that of the conjugated verb 'bredit' (he/she is delirious).

Nothing up to the sixth line reminds the reader of the intertextual presence of the genre of psalms of lament. However, this state of affairs changes in the seventh and eighth lines. Here, the vocabulary chosen by Tsvetaeva to convey the idea of a group of poor people crying out for justice, enables her to create a subtle biblical atmosphere. Indeed, by mentioning 'the last smokestack of the city's outskirts',<sup>792</sup> Tsvetaeva successfully conveys the idea of a desolate and deserted place; in this

context, the fact that the lyrical heroine specifies that the smokestack cries out for justice by means of the substantive ‘pravednost’’, instead of its synonym ‘spravedlivost’’, is especially telling, since the former term is connoted with the idea of a sacred and religious fairness, while the latter merely refers to secular justice. Moreover, using the verb ‘vopiiat’’, just after the evocation of a desert place and of divine justice, is far from innocent, because this term belongs to the elevated register of Russian language that is made up of words of Slavonic origin, i.e. used originally in an ecclesiastical context. Thus by using the verb ‘vopiiat’’, Tsvetaeva undoubtedly seeks to recreate a biblical atmosphere in these two lines; this is exactly what happens, since the verb ‘vopiiat’’, is closely associated, for a Russian speaker, with the expression ‘glas vopiiushchego v pustyne’ that designates an unanswered cry. As I. Guri remarks, although this expression has become a Russian idiom, it was originally borrowed from the Bible, to be precise, from Isaiah, 40.3<sup>793</sup> where the prophet assures his people of God’s responsiveness by informing them that God has heard the voice crying in the desert; the biblical passage reads as follows: ‘The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high-way for our God’, the Russian version reads: ‘Глас вопиющего в пустыне: приготовьте путь Господу, сделайте прямыми в степи стези Богу нашему’. This is an important point, because even though it contrasts sharply with the desolate atmosphere of ‘Zavodskie’, the intertextual presence of Isaiah 40:3, in which the prophet expresses a positive message by promising God’s ultimate responsiveness, implies that the lyrical

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<sup>793</sup> I. Guri, ‘Bibleiskie frazeologizmy v sovremennom russkom iazyke’, *Jews and Slavs*, (1) 1993, pp. 120-31; p. 122.

heroine has not entirely given up her hope of seeing the harsh fate of the working population being eventually rewarded. Furthermore, it is also interesting to note that Tsvetaeva associates the image of the smokestack with the biblical figure of the prophet. In doing so, she hints at the fact that the industrial world depicted in German expressionist films could benefit from a reflection on God, while preserving the atmosphere typical of German expressionism. Thus Tsvetaeva successfully manages to evoke a biblical atmosphere in a literary context that is, initially, far removed from the Bible. Indeed, in the space of only two lines, the poet creates a powerful image of a desolate place, reminiscent of a desert, in which the voice of the oppressed cries out to God claiming justice. Inasmuch as psalms of lament are constituted by cries of distress to God, it appears clearly that this genre constitutes a hidden layer of the poem.

Tsvetaeva's modulation of the psalms of lament in 'Zavodskie' becomes more overtly perceptible in the fifth stanza of the poem in which the lyrical heroine exclaims:

Как в вашу бархатную сытость  
Вгрызается их жалкий вой!  
Какая заживо-зарытость<sup>794</sup>  
И выведенность на убой!

In the two first lines of this quatrain, Tsvetaeva describes how the pitiful wail of the smokestack gets its teeth into the velvet repleteness of rich people. The important point, here, is that Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine addresses the rich directly,

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<sup>794</sup> My emphasis (S.O.C.)

using the possessive pronoun 'vash'. Moreover, the exclamation mark at the end of these two lines indicates that the lyrical heroine is taking up the defence of the poor. In doing so, she is consistent with the ethics found in psalms which regard poor people as righteous.<sup>795</sup> Furthermore, the presence of the psalmic intertext is reinforced in the second part of the quatrain, in which the lyrical heroine compares the feeling of living in the suburb with that of being buried alive, as she puts it: 'Какая заживо-зарытость'. As was shown in the interpretation of the previous poem, the feeling of being buried alive echoes the psalmist's representation of suffering through the image of himself being left alive in the realm of the dead.<sup>796</sup>

Having demonstrated the presence of the psalmic intertext in 'Stoiat v chernorabochei khmuri', let us show that this intertext undergoes a topical invention whereby the psalmist's repressed feeling of defiance towards God found in some psalms becomes a major constituent of Tsvetaeva's poem. This phenomenon is particularly perceptible in the following stanza, which reads as follows:

А Бог? — По самый лоб закурен,  
Не вступится! Напрасно ждем!  
Над койками больниц и тюрем  
Он гвоздиками пригвожден.

In the stanza above, the lamenter does not address God directly, as the psalmist does. However, the question 'And what about God?' can be interpreted as a potential question asked by the reader in order to argue against the hopeless world depicted by the poem's lamenter. Interestingly, the introduction of an opponent

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<sup>795</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, p. 150.

<sup>796</sup> See, present study, pp. 228-9.

arguing against the lyrical hero/-ine in a polyphonic manner is a typical feature of psalms where, as Levine observes, ‘the poets struggle to reconcile what other people say with their own sense of what is real’.<sup>797</sup> Thus a typical pattern is the psalmist trying not to be subverted by the discourse of the unfaithful arguing the irrelevance of God in everyday life. For instance, in psalm 73:11 the author quotes those who assert they can act with impunity because they do not believe in an omniscient all-seeing God; as they put it: ‘How doth God know? And is there knowledge in the most High?’ In psalms the discourse of the unfaithful is a marginal one, whose function is to reinforce the psalms’ proclamation of God’s existence by being proved wrong. This state of affairs contrasts sharply with Tsvetaeva’s poem ‘Stoiat v chernorabochei khmuri’ where the sceptical discourse is dominant and only occasionally put into question, as further analysis shows. Indeed, in her/his reply to the question of the potential saving power of God, the lyrical hero/-ine, asserts that God is blind to the plight of the needy, for he is engrossed by his own personal concerns, using the metaphor of a God immersed in smoke up to his brow (‘Po samyi lob zakuren’). The reference to the smoke, here, is particularly important, since it can refer to several sources: the smoke produced by industrial world, the smoke stemming from items of worship such as incense or candles and finally the smoke coming from God himself. The smoke emanating from God is mentioned several times in the Psalter. For instance, in psalms 18:18 the author, presumably David, explains how God saved him by blinding his enemies with smoke blown out of God’s nose: ‘There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire

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<sup>797</sup> Levine, ‘The Dialogic Discourse of Psalms’, p. 146.

of out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it'; in the same vein, the author of psalm 37:20 describes how the unfaithful will be destroyed by the heat of fire and turned into smoke: 'the enemies of the Lord shall be as fat lamb: [...] into smoke shall they consume away'; in a slightly different vein, the speaker of psalm 74:1 deplores his misery by comparing his situation with being surrounded by smoke: 'O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever, why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture'; similarly, the author of psalm 102:3 complains about the harshness of his fate by describing its effect as that of a consuming fire producing smoke: 'For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth'. However, smoke in Tsvetaeva's poem, far from indicating God's power, refers to his powerlessness as suggests the following line of the quatrain where the lyrical heroine claims that it is futile to wait for God's help, since he is bound not to react; as she puts: 'Ne vstupitsia! Naprasno zhdem!'. In the last two lines, the lyrical heroine mentions God's iconic presence in hospitals and prisons where crucifixes are nailed above the beds. This remark is rather ironic, since the lyrical heroine implies that God's iconic presence in desolate places is ineffective by omitting to tell of the beneficial effect of the presence of God's representation on the sick and/or jailed people. In other words, the lyrical heroine suggests that God's passivity is especially remarkable in places of suffering such as hospitals and prisons. In doing so, the lyrical heroine elaborates on the implicit reproach made by the psalmist to God when he uses the motif of God's sleep. Thus by integrating and developing originally the psalmic theme of God's passivity into a poem that is written in an expressionist way Tsvetaeva regenerates a fundamental feature of the



genre of psalms. The most significant difference between the psalmist's and Tsvetaeva's treatment of the theme of God's passivity lies in the fact it constitutes only a repressed thought of the former's outlook that is occasionally voiced but only to be swiftly refuted; by contrast, the lyrical heroine's discourse is dominated by her scepticism regarding God's ability to support those who need it. In other words, in the poem 'Stoiat v chernorabochei khmuri' the weight given to a positive assertion of God and its refutation is inversely proportional to that of the Psalter. At this stage, it is important to stress that even though the ultimate meaning of the psalmic intertext is reversed in 'Stoiat v chernorabochei khmuri', the poem is still clearly indebted to the genre of psalms, as proves the lyrical heroine's use of a biblical quotation and her dialogue with an opposing voice, arguing against her stance on God, which is a typical feature of psalms. As a result, it is possible to conclude that in 'Stoiat v chernorabochei khmuri' Tsvetaeva demonstrates once again that Fowler's insistence on the fact that typical feature(s) of a genre can preserve its memory by being an active component of another genre is well-founded.

Lastly, it is worth dwelling on 'Sushchestvovaniia kotlovinoiu' (1925), which is yet another poem illustrating topical invention whereby the theme of God's passivity is expressed through the image of being buried alive. The poem reads as follows:

Существования котловиною  
Сдавленная, в столбняке глушизн,  
Погребенная заживо под лавиною  
Дней – как каторгу избываю жизнь.

Гробовое, глухое мое зимовье.

Смерти: инея на уста-красны –  
Никакого иного себе здоровья  
Не желаю от Бога и от весны. (II, 255)

Right from the beginning of the poem, the lyrical heroine expresses a feeling of despair of rare intensity. Thus in the first line, she refers to her life as a ‘hollow existence’; she elaborates by explaining that the emptiness of her life squeezes her life-force to such an extent that it stuns her into a stupor-like state. Here, it is worth noticing Tsvetaeva’s creation of the neologism ‘glushizna’ used at the end of the second line. This term conveys perfectly the idea of an incommensurable despair, since it takes its linguistic root ‘glushi’ in pejorative terms such as ‘glushitel’’, which means a person trampling someone else aspirations.<sup>798</sup> With such a level of hopelessness, it is hardly surprising that the lyrical heroine considers her life as a non-life and that is why she does not feel alive but, on the contrary, identifies herself with a person being in an indeterminate state between life and death. Her perception of being half-alive and half-dead is expressed in the third and fourth lines of the first stanza where she asserts that she is ‘buried alive under the avalanche of days’. It is not difficult, here, to recognise the psalmic motif of the lamenter’s stay among the dead. Interestingly, Tsvetaeva’s lyrical heroine carries on with this idea in the second stanza, which opens with a metaphorical designation of her life as a sepulchral, godforsaken hibernation, i.e. stagnation. Finally, the lyrical heroine indicates frankly that she is already under the power of death rather than life in the second line of the second stanza.

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<sup>798</sup> *Slovar’ sovremennogo russkogo literaturnogo iazyka v dvatsati tomakh*, edited by K. Gorbachevich (Moscow: Russkii Iazyk, 1991-), III, p. 159.

It is important to stress that the last two lines of the poem constitute the lyrical heroine's commentary on the death-like situation she is experiencing. Interestingly, instead of voicing her indignation and calling for help to get out of her lifeless existence, the lyrical heroine confides her resignation by saying that she does not ask God for a better fate. Even though it may seem insignificant, the lyrical heroine's insistence that she does not seek God's help is of paramount importance, because it enables the critic to link this text with psalms of lament where the lamenter complains of being in the realm of death. In such psalms, the author's depiction of his death-like state is always accompanied by a call to God for help. Thus by explicitly specifying that she does not call God for help, while she is experiencing a death-like state expressed in terms very reminiscent of those of the psalmist, Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine refers implicitly to her loss of faith and the irrelevance of the psalmic ultimate stance of hope for herself.

In order to explain the hopelessness of 'Sushchestvovaniia kotlovinoiu' and the lyrical heroine's non-receptivity to the idea of a potential improvement of her situation it is important to remember that Tsvetaeva's poetry is always inspired by biographical facts. Putting this poem into the context of Tsvetaeva's life in January 1925 does effectively shed some light on her intertextual denigration of the psalmic message of hope. Indeed, the poem was written two weeks before Tsvetaeva gave birth to her son in dire material conditions. The following extract of a letter written by Tsvetaeva at the time of the poem's writing underlines her gloomy frame of mind:

Боюсь, что беда (судьба) во мне, я ничего по-настоящему, до конца, т.е. *без* конца, не люблю, не умею любить, кроме своей души, т.е. тоски, расплесканной и расхлестанной по всему миру и за его пределами. Мне во всем – в каждом человеке и чувстве – тесно, как во всякой комнате, будь то нора или дворец. Я не могу жить, т.е. длить, не умею жить во днях, каждый день, - всегда живу *вне* себя. Эта болезнь неизлечима и называется: душа.<sup>799</sup>

Tsvetaeva's confession that she cannot open herself enough to genuinely love another person and that she is ultimately unable to turn her soul outward, because she is too engrossed in herself explains her implicit refutation of the ultimate message of hope conveyed by the psalms in her poem 'Sushchestvovaniia kotlovinoiu'. Although painful, Tsvetaeva's position is understandable inasmuch as she considers her inner sufferings, which constitute her soul, as her source of inspiration. Hence, to be delivered of her suffering would imply to be happy at the price of renouncing artistic creation. Such an eventuality is not conceivable for Tsvetaeva because the intensity she feels at creating poetry cannot be matched by any other experience. Hence, her non-willingness to be cured of her 'soul', i.e. the sufferings stemming from being an artist.

Once again, the analysis of 'Sushchestvovaniia kotlovinoiu' demonstrates the relevance of Fowler's assertion that a literary genre can outlive its artistic apogee by incorporating some of its elements into another genre. In the case of 'Sushchestvovaniia kotlovinoiu', it is the motif of being alive in the realm of death that is brought back to life. However, this motif does not serve the lyrical heroine to

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<sup>799</sup> Saakiant, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, p. 402.

attract God's attention as it does in psalms; on the contrary, it serves to refute God's relevance. This fact is particularly interesting, since it exemplifies another genre-modifying process pinpointed by Fowler, namely that of counterstatement, which is a phenomenon consisting in the semantic inversion of the meaning of a work in another work. This fact is important, because it shows that not only genres overlap with one another but also genre-modifying processes. This is precisely what happens in 'Sushchestvovaniia kotlovinoiu' which modulates the genre of psalms by performing a topical invention where the development of the psalmic motif of being alive in death is treated in such a way that it comes to contradict the ultimate message of the Psalter, which asserts that it is worth invoking God in times of necessity. In doing so, Tsvetaeva performs the topical invention consisting in developing in a new way a motif/theme of the original genre; as was just shown, this topical invention appears to be bound up with another genre-modifying process, namely that of counterstatement.

As was demonstrated in this chapter, Fowler's genre-modifying concept of topical invention makes possible the demonstration that in her poetic treatment of Moscow Tsvetaeva reactivates the psalmic theme of the holy city, while at the same time transforming it. Thus in 'Oblaka – vokrug' the psalmist's injunction to create sings of praise to Jerusalem and thus its spirituality to new generations is mirrored in the lyrical heroine's symbolic gift of Moscow to her daughter. The topical invention performed in this poem lies in the fact that instead of being masculine, the line of descent is feminine. Similarly, the topical invention performed in 'Iz ruk

moikh – nerukotvornyi grad’ consists in developing the unusual and rarely expressed motif of God as a feminine principle, which is found in psalm 21:10. Finally, in ‘–Moskva! – Kakoi ogromnyi’ the topical invention performed on the psalmic theme of the holy city consists in developing further the feminine qualities of God and transforming the city’s electiveness into inclusiveness

The second part of this chapter sheds light on the topical invention performed on the theme of God’s passivity. As was shown, in ‘Koli v zemliu soldaty vsadili – shtyk’ the representation of God’s passivity is portrayed as the origin of the social chaos reigning in Russia during the civil war. By contrast, in the poem ‘Bog! – Ia zhivu!...’ the topical invention performed on the theme of God’s passivity consists in the poetic demonstration of the artist’s equality with God. Finally, in poems such as ‘Stoiat v chernorabochei khmuri’ and ‘Sushchestvovaniia kotlovinoiu’ the psalmist’s whispers of indignation against the apparent passivity of God is pushed beyond its limit and end up in the lyrical heroine’s outright refutation of God.

## **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that the generic intertext of psalms is a significant feature of Tsvetaeva's poetry that can be unveiled thanks to Fowler's theory of the historical persistence of genres. This theory enables the critic to read the discrete generic traces typical of psalmic poetry and to interpret them systematically. To put it differently, this thesis proves the relevance of Fowler's assertion that 'sometimes readers can grasp a genre with mysterious celerity, on the basis of seemingly quite inadequate samples, almost as if they were forming a hologram from scattered traces'.<sup>800</sup> Indeed, many of the poems analysed in the present investigation seem far removed from the genre of psalms,<sup>801</sup> yet an attentive reading shows not only that this genre partly informs their composition but also that an awareness of its intertextual presence significantly enriches the overall understanding of Tsvetaeva's work, notably by shedding a new light on the coexistence of seemingly incompatible principles such a blasphemous impulse and a rare ability to express religious awe. Furthermore, the genre of psalms plays a particularly important role in Tsvetaeva's poetic universe because it provides her with a generic framework allowing the expression of both a longing for a divine transcendence and scepticism about the traditional God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. As a result, she keeps coming back to the aesthetic form of prayers and psalms, while modifying them. As

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<sup>800</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 45.

<sup>801</sup> For instance 'V smertnykh izverias'', 'V gibel'nom foliante', 'Kogda obidoi opilas'', 'Sviaz' cherez sny', 'Naprasno glazom – kak gvozdem', 'Sobiraia liubimyykh v put'', Beloe solntse, i nizkie, nizkie tuchi', 'Oblaka – vokrug', 'Koli v zemliu soldaty vsadili – shtyk' or 'Stoiat v chernorabochei khmuri'.

was shown, Tsvetaeva's transformations of the psalmic intertext can be productively interpreted by means of the following concepts of Fowler's theory designating different ways of altering a genre and thus making it more adjusted to new cultural contexts: change of function; generic mixture and topical invention.

In Tsvetaeva's poetry, the modification of the praying function of the genre of psalm manifests itself in the fact that instead of being an ultimate proclamation of God's righteousness, many of Tsvetaeva's poems express the lyrical heroine's inability to assert God's omnipotence wholeheartedly. This phenomenon can be observed in poems such as 'Blagoslavliaiu ezhednevnyi trud' or 'Blagodariu, O Gospod'' which are obviously composed after the genre of psalms of praise but transform them by modifying the object of praise. For instance, the lyrical heroine of 'Blagoslavliaiu ezhednevnyi trud' thanks God for being a stranger, a fact that contrasts sharply with psalms, since their authors usually lament the status of foreigner. Similarly the lyrical heroine of 'Blagodariu, O Gospod'' thanks God for the unpredictability of her fate; by contrast, the psalmist's stance is to thank God for providing a law that he can follow. Another transformation of the psalmic praise performed by Tsvetaeva is the introduction of doubts in the very heart of the praise, as is the case in 'Bog – prav' and 'Ty dal nam muzhestva' or the praise of fellow poets in a manner usually reserved for God, as is the case in 'Vse velikolep'e'. These modifications of the psalmic praise performed by Tsvetaeva partly originate in her conviction that artists cannot create fruitfully, unless they explore unknown territories; this fact explains why her lyrical heroine expresses gratefulness for



being a foreigner. Hence, Tsvetaeva's poetry confirms Kristeva's view that in order to create an artist must experience exile.

In her modification of the function of psalms Tsvetaeva also alters the complaint typical of psalms of lament. Once again, she does so by partly shifting the object of the complaint. Thus instead of the unspecified spiritual and physical suffering deplored by the psalmist, Tsvetaeva's lyrical heroine laments the irredeemable fate of the artist in 'Est' v mire lishnie, dobavochnye' and the inappropriate judgment applied to women in the Judeo-Christian tradition in the poem 'V gibel'nom foliante'. Finally, Tsvetaeva demonstrates the obsolescence of dividing complaints into religious and spiritual ones performed by men in psalms and feminine ones performed by women in dirges by creating 'Kogda obidoi opilas'', a poem that refers simultaneously to these two neighbouring genres. The same idea is reflected in Tsvetaeva's mixing of the folk lament and the psalms of lament realised in poems such as 'Sobiraia liubimyykh v put'', 'Beloe solntse i nizkie, nizkie tuchi', 'Slezy, slezy – zhivaia voda!'.

In her appropriation of the generic intertext of psalms Tsvetaeva also mixes them with the genre of diary. In doing so she magnifies the personal overtones of this genre, as can be seen in works such as 'Molitva', 'Eshche molitva', 'Molitva moriu', 'Ia prishla k tebe chernoi polnoch'iu', 'Mirovye vo mgle nachalos' kochev'e', 'Dorozhkoiu prostonarodnoiu', 'Kogda zhe, Gospodin', 'O slezy na glazakh!'. Here, it is important to note that Tsvetaeva's reinforcement of the personal tone of psalms in her poetry reflects her receptivity to a feature that has always been typical of the genre.

Another generic mixture accomplished by Tsvetaeva is the blending of an epistolary modulation with a psalmic one, as was shown in the interpretation of ‘Sviaz’ cherez sny’, ‘Naprasno glazom – kak gvozdem’ and ‘Ne umresh’, narod!’.

In these poems Tsvetaeva resorts to the intertext of psalms either as a model to be argued with as is the case in ‘Sviaz’ cherez sny’, ‘Naprasno glazom – kak gvozdem’, or as source of hope in time of hopelessness as is the case in ‘Ne umresh’, narod!’.

Tsvetaeva also transforms the psalmic intertext by means of topical invention, i.e. by developing in a new way a theme already present in the original genre. In this regard, her cycle ‘Stikhi o Moskve’ is particularly telling, since in it she treats the psalmic theme of the holy city but instead of depicting it as an exclusive place reserved for the morally righteous only, she represents it as an universal place of redemption and accentuates the idea of a feminine protectiveness associated with the city. Finally, Tsvetaeva performs yet another topical invention by developing further the psalmic theme of God’s passivity. Thus in ‘Koli v zemliu soldaty vsadili shtyk’ Tsvetaeva’s lyrical heroine depicts the chaotic and potentially lethal consequences of a real and prolonged absence of God. By contrast, the lyrical heroine of ‘Bog! – Ia zhivu...’ develops the psalmic theme of God’s passivity by linking it with the artist’s ability to create, while the lyrical heroine of ‘Stoiat v chernorabochei khmuri’ develops the theme of God’s passivity in the context of the urban despair of the industrialised world in which invocation to God only accentuates its irrelevance. Lastly, in the poem ‘Sushchestvovaniia kotlovinoiu’ the theme of God’s passivity is associated with the motif of being buried alive. The

main point of this poem, however, lies in the lyrical heroine's loss of faith that contrasts with the psalmist's ultimate proclamation of God's omnipotence.

As the present study shows, the interpretation of Tsvetaeva's work by means of Fowler's concepts of genre-modifying processes such as change of function, generic mixture and topical invention enables the critic to reveal the discreet presence of the genre of psalms in Tsvetaeva's poetry and thus to enrich and deepen one's understanding of her work. The analyses conducted in this thesis demonstrate Fowler's assertion that apparently forgotten genres can still be active and play a substantial role in contemporary genres by being transformed and adjusted to new cultural contexts.

Finally, the insistence on Tsvetaeva's spiritual incertitude confirms Kristeva's assertion that because of its heterogeneity of meaning, poetic discourse is the best medium to signify the 'crises and impossibilities of transcendental symbolics'<sup>802</sup> such as ruling ideologies or religions.<sup>803</sup> Lastly, let us add that a fruitful development of the present analysis would be to investigate the interplay of Kristeva's categories of semiotic versus symbolic in Tsvetaeva's poetry.

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<sup>802</sup> Kristeva, 'Desire in Language', p. 108.

<sup>803</sup> Kristeva, 'Desire in Language', p. 94.

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