

Title: *Axe and Yarn: The Discussion of Poetic Stance in Acmeist Poetry of the 1920s*
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Abstract:

The paper examines the motifs of axe and weaving/textile in the later works of the leading Acmeist poets – Nikolai Gumilev, Anna Akhmatova, and Osip Mandelstam. I argue that in the early 1920's these motifs, linked to Acmeists' everlasting interest in Pushkin's legacy, became emblematic of poetic stance and poetic self-sacrifice, while being at the same time gendered (different forms of weaving, yarn or fabric mostly appear in connection with the female voice, and the axe, in connection with the male voice). I consider Nikolai Gumilev's last narrative poem *Star Terror* [Zvezdnyi Uzhas] (1920) as the starting point of the Acmeist post-revolutionary discussion of poetic voice and poetic fate. While dealing with the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution, the Acmeists became particularly preoccupied with the task of defining their poetic and political stance. They maintained that the Revolution and the following Red Terror created an ideal historical situation for the artist to complete his "lifecycle" by sacrificing himself. Gumilev's own life exemplified this theory, as in 1921 he was arrested for suspected participation in an anti-Bolshevik conspiracy and pleaded guilty, although the fact of his involvement with the conspiracy is debated to these days. I demonstrate that after Gumilev's execution, the theme of poet's political stance takes an important turn in both Mandelstam's and Akhmatova's poems, as both of them discuss the conscious choice of self-sacrifice over externally inflicted death. The multitude of poems developing this topic were tied into a single discourse by the recurring images of axe and textile.