

Title: The Poet As Child and the 'Childish' Poet: Boris Pasternak and Osip Mandelstam  
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Abstract:

In the first volume of her memoirs, Nadezhda Mandelstam famously claimed that Boris Pasternak and Osip Mandelstam were "antipodes." However, since, as she says, "antipodes are by definition located at opposite poles of the same sphere," it is possible "to draw a line between them." To date, however, few scholars have undertaken this task. In this paper, I argue that childhood and childishness provide a productive lens for doing so: Marina Tsvetaeva famously called fellow poet Boris Pasternak "blessed with the gift of eternal childhood," and Pasternak overtly treats themes of childhood in several of his famous poems as well as in his novella, *The Childhood of Liubers*. Meanwhile, a number of Mandelstam's best-known lyrics feature the theme of childhood or childishness prominently.

Arising from a modernist sensibility, Pasternak's poetic attitude treats the voice of the child as a marker of an unsullied consciousness and an attitude of openness and wonder to the world, an attitude that shares its ontological status with the poet (recall Baudelaire's contention that "le génie n'est que l'enfance retrouvée à volonté"). By contrast, in Mandelstam's case, the use of a childish voice and childish themes in his poetry serve to foreground, instead, his feeling of corporal and political vulnerability vis-à-vis the state (recall «Только детские книги читать» (1908) or «Дано мне тело» (1909)). As a result, while for Pasternak childhood served as an alibi throughout the Soviet era, I argue that for Mandelstam, it served all too visibly as a battleground on which his battle with the state was waged.