

Title: The Narrator as Ambient Noise: the Process of Text Creation and the Narrator's Present Tense in Osip Mandelstam's *The Egyptian Stamp*
Author: Carmen Finashina, Northwestern University

Many scholars have commented on the palimpsest nature of Osip Mandelstam's *The Egyptian Stamp* (Brown, Terras, among others), noting how the work participates in the Petersburg tradition through various motifs and stylistic elements. In this way, the text does not stand alone as an aesthetic or literary statement, but acts rather as an apertured object which dips into other texts inside (and perhaps outside) of the tradition. I would argue that this intertextuality is only one aspect of the text's interpenetrative potential: the text is also interactive internally, advancing the process of text creation—that is, the narrator's associative mental wandering and the physical act of penmanship—as relevant and even integral to the final narrative. In this paper I will explore how this 'here-and-now' of the narrator—what I have called the narrator's 'ambient noise'—is not, for Mandelstam, something to be filtered out in the production of a vacuum-sealed textual artifact, but rather something to be consciously accepted and preserved. It bleeds into the narrative as surely as the author's doodles blot the manuscript's pages; thus the final text is not a sealed capsule but a porous, interactive material which reflects the multiple layers of textual creation and narrative scenario. This paper posits that Mandelstam's method of ventilating the narrative of the *Egyptian Stamp*—i.e. the tale of Parnok in the Kerensky summer of 1917—with the narrator's, or rather, perhaps the physical writer's, present tense, is two-pronged: first, he consistently emphasizes the physical dimensions of script and manuscript-making, and second, he explicitly accommodates the personal interjections, asides, sidebar commentaries, and aesthetic or metaphoric superimpositions in the text.

thecarhorn@gmail.com