

Title: From Beatrice to Dante: The Poetic Path of Anna Akhmatova
Author: Emily Wang, Princeton University

Many scholars, most notably M. B. Meilakh and N.V. Toporov, have commented on the significance of Dante Alighieri for Anna Akhmatova in terms of her poetics and artistic identity. This paper sheds new light on this discussion by contextualizing Akhmatova's reception of Dante through her first husband, Nikolai Gumilev, whose influence critics have generally neglected even though Akhmatova herself acknowledged it. Gumilev has begun writing about Dante long before she did, first in the 1907 story "Radosti zemnoi liubvi," which he dedicated to Akhmatova, and later in the Beatrice cycle from 1910's "Zhemchuga," which Akhmatova considered to be inspired by her. Gumilev's presentation of a capricious Akhmatova-like figure as an earthly alternative to the sophianic Symbolist Beatrice went on to influence Akhmatova's poetic presentation of herself. In earlier poems like "Epichecskie motivy" ("V to vremia ia gostila na zemle...") (1913) she depicts her muse as a kind of double, a semi-divine source of inspiration not unlike Gumilev's earthly answer to Beatrice. The Dantemuse connection comes to be both reinforced and reinvented when Akhmatova finally separates the muse's identity from her own by explicitly casting herself as Dante, a position she will fight to occupy in later works. In conclusion, this paper will consider how this tension between the roles of Dante and Beatrice informs Akhmatova's infamous "Epigramma" ("Mogla by Biche slovno Dant tvorit' ...") (1957).

eawang@princeton.edu