

CHAPTER IV

FLEITA-POZVONOCHNIK

Fleita-pozvonochnik (1915) is devoted to the great love of Maiakovskii's life, Lily Brik. It is a poem of constant, but apparently unrequited, love, love as a personal hell, and it stays within this personal world without exploring the human condition more generally.

Metrical Composition

Like *Liubliu*, which complements it as a minor exploration of the theme in a more contented vein, *Fleita-pozvonochnik* is a monometric poem: the vehicle for the poet's fraught emotion is accentual verse; Maiakovskii here takes the tragic lyric mode in accentual verse, which first arose in early Symbolism, into the domain of pure love poetry.

A problem of classification arises over two lines in Part III in which the rhyme is displaced from the end of the graphical line; they have been considered to end at the graphical break (not at the end of the rhyming word) and have been classified for line length and rhythmical form accordingly. A full rhythmical description is given in Appendix III.

The distribution of the poem's 220 lines of accentual verse according to line length (measured in stresses) in the Prologue and three parts and also overall is given, in percentages, in Table 1.¹

TABLE 1. Line Length

	7	5	4	3	2	1	Lines
Prologue	—	—	62.5	31.2	6.2	—	16
Part I	—	3.3	75.0	20.0	1.7	—	60
Part II	1.6	4.7	57.8	25.0	7.8	3.1	64
Part III	—	3.7	60.0	25.0	7.5	3.7	80
Total	0.5	3.6	63.6	24.1	5.9	2.3	220

The table shows that the leading, four-stress form is even more dominant here than in the accentual verse of *Oblako v shtanakh* (56.5%); this advance is largely at the expense of the three-stress form, while short lines are more

prominent (see Chapter III, p. 83, Table 2). The table also reveals the basic compositional outline of the poem. The Prologue establishes the leading role of the four-stress form and introduces a short line. Part I is the most regular and streamlined in its profile, while Part II is the most diverse; the break in the poem's movement between these two parts is marked by a fall in the percentage of four-stress lines and a sharp rise in the percentage of short lines. Part III closely follows Part II but, with a slight increase again in the percentage of four-stress lines, moves towards a profile which is close to that of the poem overall.

The poem is written in Maiakovskii's standard quatrains. The number of different types of stress scheme and the distribution of the fifty-five quatrains among them are given in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Stress Scheme

	4444	4443	4433	4344	3343	Others	Types	Total
Prologue	1	1	—	—	—	2	4	4
Part I	7	1	2	1	1	3	8	15
Part II	1	1	—	1	1	12	15	16
Part III	5	—	1	1	1	12	15	20
Total	14	3	3	3	3	29	27	55
%	25.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	52.7		

This table shows a profile which in certain respects differs quite strikingly from that of the accentual verse in *Oblako v shtanakh* (see Chapter III, p. 84, Table 3). The four-stress scheme is again the leading form and its role, as could be expected, is enhanced compared with *Oblako v shtanakh* (16.7%), but otherwise there is a great diversity of forms and the ratio of types to total stanzas is almost 1:2. Despite this diversity, however, the 4343 and 3333 schemes are not represented at all; both these schemes might introduce a traditional cadence, and the absence of the former is especially striking because it was the second most common scheme in *Oblako v shtanakh*. The variations from part to part reinforce the compositional outline already evident in Table 1. Part I is again the most regular and Part II even more strikingly diverse, but Part III is now more clearly differentiated from Part II as a synthesis of the preceding, divergent trends.

The distribution of the 220 lines according to rhythmical form is given, in percentages, in Table 3.

This table reveals a profile which is very close in the main to that of the accentual verse of *Oblako v shtanakh*, but ternary rhythm is here notably less prominent and binary rhythm more so (see Chapter III, p. 85, Table 4); at the same time monosyllabic intervals are more frequent here than disyllabic ones,

TABLE 3. Rhythm

	Ac	Tk	Dk	Ty	By	Short	Lines
Prologue	25.0	6.2	62.5	12.5	12.5	6.2	16
Part I	13.3	30.0	55.0	6.7	10.0	1.7	60
Part II	28.1	29.7	31.2	3.1	4.7	10.9	64
Part III	16.2	26.2	46.2	10.0	5.0	11.2	80
Total	19.6	26.8	45.5	7.3	6.8	8.2	220

accounting for 39.0% as opposed to 36.9% of the total, compared with figures of 30.0% and 44.5% respectively in *Oblako v shtanakh*. The more traditional cadence (in tonic verse) of ternary rhythm is thus muted, even avoided, while the relative promotion of binary rhythm very possibly adumbrates the association of the poet's personal love with binary (iambic) metre in *Chelovek*; the experience of love in the two poems is certainly very close, but there is no specific association of binary rhythm with the theme of constraint here. The rhythmical differentiation of the parts complements the compositional outline established in Tables 1 and 2: Part I is the most regular, Part II the most irregular, and Part III is now clearly seen as a synthesis, its rhythmical profile close to that of the poem overall.

The distribution of the 220 lines according to anacrusis is given, in percentages, in Table 4.

TABLE 4. Anacrusis

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Lines
Prologue	25.0	68.7	6.2	—	—	—	16
Part I	45.0	36.7	11.7	5.0	1.7	—	60
Part II	42.2	46.9	9.4	1.6	—	—	64
Part III	35.0	47.5	15.0	1.2	—	1.2	80
Total	39.1	45.9	11.8	2.3	0.5	0.5	220

The table shows a familiar overall profile, with monosyllabic and zero anacrusis the leading forms; there is also a certain movement towards more monosyllabic anacrusis from Part I through to Part III.

The two lines with displaced rhymes are not classified for clausula; the distribution of the other 218 lines according to clausula is given, in percentages, in Table 5.

The table shows the familiar length of clausula in Maiakovskii's accentual verse of this period, with the feminine and dactylic forms accounting for almost 70% of all clausulae. The use of heterosyllabic rhyme has been developed

TABLE 5. Clausula

	m	f	d	h	Lines
Prologue	12.5	50.0	31.2	6.2	16
Part I	16.7	43.3	35.0	5.0	60
Part II	34.3	34.3	28.1	3.1	64
Part III	33.3	35.9	30.8	—	78
Total	27.5	38.5	31.2	2.8	218

further; there are as many as nineteen such rhymes (17.3%), compared with 11.6% in the homogeneous accentual stanzas in *Oblako v shtanakh*. But the major innovation lies in the extensive use of a heavy hypermetrical stress in the clausula. This device has been found only rarely up till now, but here it is used eleven times (three times in the Prologue, four times in Part I, just once in Part II, and three times in Part III); it derives originally from comic verse, but here, following Khlebnikov and Severianin, it is used in a quite different mode. It is curious that three of the eleven lines with a hypermetrical stress in the clausula are binary in rhythm, because subsequently, in *Chelovek*, Maiakovskii uses this device specifically in association with the iambic theme. The table also shows a move towards more masculine clausulae after Part I (compare the complementary movement in the anacrusis).

The number of different types of clausula pattern and the distribution of the fifty-three quatrains (excluding the two which involve lines with displaced rhymes) among them are given in Table 6.

TABLE 6. Clausula Pattern

	fmfm	mdmd	ffff	Others	Types	Total
Prologue	1	—	—	3	4	4
Part I	—	1	3	11	12	15
Part II	4	3	—	9	10	16
Part III	5	3	1	9	10	18
Total	10	7	4	32	20	53
%	18.9	13.2	7.6	60.4		

In the ratio of types to total stanzas (about 2:5) Table 6 reveals a considerable variety, with the highest ratio in Part I (and the Prologue). In counterpoint to its rhythmical character, it is Part I which displays the greatest variety and novelty in the area of rhyme; the traditionally common fmfm (AbAb) scheme is relatively prominent in both Parts II and III but absent from Part I.

The broad rhythmical trends in the poem's accentual verse have revealed a classical tripartite composition, with the contrasting themes of the first two parts brought together in the final part, the synthesis; whereas there is a sharp break between Parts I and II, Part III follows on more closely from Part II. This compositional symmetry accords with the self-conscious conception of the poem as a work of art, a gift for the poet's beloved.

Commentary

Unlike *Oblako v shtanakh*, *Fleita-pozvonochnik* does not readily divide into passages within the parts. Instead, each part develops a theme; in the first two parts this involves expansion or variation on a simple theme, while in the final part the contrasting themes of the first two parts are brought together and a more dynamic composition is generated. Although the parts do not divide into passages, they can be divided into rhythmical segments in order to show how the theme develops. The concern for compositional symmetry is evident within the parts too in the repetition or reworking of the first stanza in the last.

Prologue (ll. 1–20)

TABLE 7

	Long	5	4	3	Short	Ac	Tk	Dk	Ty	Lines
1)	—	—	10	5	1	4	1	10	2	16

The Prologue introduces the poem as a farewell concert played on the poet's nerves, on his backbone flute, and serves, as in *Oblako v shtanakh*, as an overture to the rest of the poem. It provides a distinctive introduction to the rhythmical variations and contrasts of the poem, with only a single line of *taktovik* rhythm (but with two binary lines); it also establishes the leading role of the four-stress form and introduces both a short line and the device of a hypermetrical stress in the clausula. As in the Prologue to *Oblako v shtanakh*, there is a discernible trend towards shorter line length over the four stanzas, a cadence that prepares for the move into the poem proper, and the final stanza ends with the short, two-stress line:

1121f Из тела в тело веселье лейте.
 022(1)d Пусть не забудется ночь никем.
 2121f Я сегодня буду играть на флейте.
 14d На собственном позвоночнике.

(1, 199, 1. 17)²

Part I (ll. 21–105)

TABLE 8

	Long	5	4	3	Short	Ac	Tk	Dk	Ty	Lines
21)	—	—	17	3	—	1	7	12	2	20
47)	—	—	12	3	1	4	3	8	1	16
69)	—	2	16	6	—	3	8	13	1	24

In Part I the poet hero explores the root causes of his love and establishes its mode. In the opening stanza, which is repeated as the last stanza of the part, he already defines his love as a personal hell imposed from above:

0113(0)f Версты улиц взмахами шагов мну.
 1111(1)d Куда уйду я, этот ад тая!
 122d Какому небесному Гофману
 031d выдумалось ты, проклятая?!

(l. 21)

In the rest of the part he expands on his theme: his love has been imposed by a malevolent God, it is a situation that he can hardly endure, it is a torment that he would exchange for any other variation that Divine Judgement might impose. Similarly, each stanza offers a variation or expansion on the basic rhythmical theme. This is the most regular part of the poem, both in line length and rhythm, and the verse is most regular in the opening stanzas, which set the theme. A shift to a looser variation on the theme in the middle of the part is marked by the promotion of shorter lines to the head of the stanza:

021f Это ему, ему же,
 41f чтоб не догадался, ктò ты,
 0342f выдумалось дать тебе настоящего мужа
 3221f и на рояль положить человечьи ноты.

(l. 47)

This looser variation accompanies the descent into the reality of the poet hero's situation. Towards the end of the part there is a little more diversity in the line length in preparation for Part II.

Part II (ll. 106–200)

TABLE 9

	Long	5	4	3	Short	Ac	Tk	Dk	Ty	Lines
106)	1	1	10	5	3	8	7	2	1	20
138)	—	1	26	9	4	8	10	18	1	40
195)	—	1	1	2	—	2	2	—	—	4

In Part II the poet places his love in its historical context, the War, and then projects it far and wide in the future; this is the most diverse and irregular part of the poem. The new rhythmical theme is already clear in the opening stanza:

1215m	И небо,
	в дымах забывшее, что голубѡ,
1232f	и тучи, ободранные беженцы точно,
0313m	вызарю в мою последнюю любовь,
043h	яркую, как румянец у чахоточного.

(l. 106)

The power of love to overcome war is most strikingly expressed in the second line of the third stanza, the only long line in the poem:

01224f	Даже если,
	от крови качающийся, как Бахус,
0111121f	пьяный бой идет —
	слова любви и тогда не ветхи.
0223d	Милые немцы!
	Я знаю,
	на губах у вас
03f	гётевская Гретхен.

(l. 118)

This seven-stress line recalls the extended line in the Prologue of the *Tragedy*: ‘и у вас / вырастут губы / для огромных поцелуев / и язык, / родной всем народам’ (l. 152); the extension beyond the expected ending of the metrical line at ‘идет’, which would make a normal three-stress line, again expresses the ability of words of love to reach beyond national barriers and boundaries into a common language. The poet moves on to reject traditional love poetry and puts forward instead his new heroine (‘накрашенную, / рыжую’ (l. 136)).

Then, in a long series of parallel stanzas, he asserts his constancy: he will follow his beloved wherever she goes and his love will endure whatever his fate (‘Будешь за море отдана...’ (l. 145); ‘В зное пустыни вытянешь караваны...’ (l. 149); ‘Короной кончу? / Святой Еленой?...’ (l. 178); etc.). Each stanza is again a variation or expansion of the basic rhythmical theme, but in a somewhat more regular vein than in the opening stanzas (compare the shift into a looser variation in the middle of the first part). Finally, after ten such stanzas, the end of the part is marked by a return to the earlier, more irregular rhythm:

0333m	Слушайте ж, забывшие, что небо голубѡ,
061f	выщегинившиеся,
	звери точно!
01322m	Это, может быть,
	последняя в мире любовь
042h	вызарилась румянцем чахоточного.

(l. 195)

This stanza reworks, rather than simply repeats, the opening stanza; the poet hero's love is now perhaps the last love the world will ever see.

Part III (ll. 201–316)

TABLE 10

	Long	5	4	3	Short	Ac	Tk	Dk	Ty	Lines
201)	—	—	3	—	1	1	—	2	1	4
205)	—	—	4	2	2	1	1	4	1	8
215)	—	—	21	10	1	5	6	20	5	32
265)	—	3	14	3	4	5	11	4	1	24
302)	—	—	6	5	1	3	3	5	—	12

In Part III, the longest part, the threads of the poem come together in the present, the present both of the actual creative process and of a meeting with the poet hero's beloved. The opening stanza, which projects the actual creation of the verse, brings together the contrasting rhythmical themes of the preceding parts, with a zero interval in the first line, two *dol'nik* lines, and a short last line:

1101m Забуду год, день, число.
 1221d Запрусь одинокий с листом бумаги я.
 1222m Творишь, просветленных страданием слов
 31d нечеловечья магия!

(l. 201)

The narrative now gets immediately under way, and the tension between the two rhythmical themes generates a movement of shifts from one to the other, not a variation or expansion of a single theme as in the first two parts. When the poet hero arrives to see his beloved he is coldly received, and the form of the verse soon breaks down:

112f Сегодня, только вошел к вам,
 122f почувствовал —
 в доме неладно.
 1212³ Ты что-то тайла в шелковом платье,
 1221d и ширился в воздухе запах ладана.
 0f Рада?
 12f Холодное
 “очень”.
 1213f Смятением разбита разума ограда.
 2413d Я отчаянье громозжу, горящ и лихорадочен.

(l. 205)

In the first stanza the rhythm is still very regular (*dol'nik*), but three-stress lines are promoted to the head of the stanza, while the rhyme in the third line

(‘вошел к вам’ — ‘шелковым’) has been displaced from the end of the line. In the second stanza, however, there is a striking breakdown in the form of the verse with a one-stress first line, a two-stress second line, and irregular rhythm in the third and fourth lines; the last line rhymes with both the first two lines (‘рада’ + ‘очень’ — ‘лихорадочен’), a type named ‘summary’ by Shtokmar.⁴

Following this breakdown the form of the verse consolidates to a certain extent in the middle of the part, but rhythmical shifts still occur as the poet hero alternates between the rhetorical address of his beloved and narrative description. At the same time the less regular rhythm tends to be accompanied by greater regularity in the stress scheme, and vice versa.

Another breakdown, however, is precipitated by the coldness of her kiss, which is immediately followed by the entry of her husband:

1d	Захлопали
02213m	двери.
	Вошел он,
	весельем улиц орошен.
0141f	Я
	как надвое раскололся в вопле.
0512/02212m	Крикнул ему:
	“Хорошо!
	Уйду!
	Хорошо!

(1. 270)

A one-stress line is again promoted to the head of the stanza, and the very division into metrical lines is weakened by the possibility of additional rhymes (‘вошел он’ — ‘орошен’ — ‘хорошо’ — ‘хорошо’).⁵ For the rest of his speech, however, the poet hero manages to put on a brave face and the form of the verse consolidates:

1122f	Твоя останется.
	Тряпок нашёй ей,
0222f	робкие крылья в шелках зажирили б.
1302/1212f	Смотри, не уплыла б.
	Камнем на шее
1122f	навесь жене жемчуга ожерелий!”

(1. 280)

Given the unusual alternative stressing, ‘уплыла’, which Gasparov adopts by analogy with Maiakovskii’s stressing practice elsewhere,⁶ both the rhythm and stress scheme would be completely regular. But in the stanza following the form of the verse breaks down again with a particularly striking enjambement at the end of another one-stress opening line:

0d	Ох, эта
01222d	ночь!
	Отчаянье стягивал туже и туже сам.

131d	От плача моего и хохота
0123d	морда комнаты выкосилась ужасом.
	(l. 286)

Following the renewed breakdown the verse remains rhythmically irregular as the narrative is brought to a conclusion in the next two stanzas.

Then, in the last three stanzas, the verse moves into a finale which rounds the poem off as a work of art; this finale is played out on the poem's key notes. In the third last stanza binary rhythm is given prominence:

2321f	Вызолачивайтесь в солнце, цветы и травы!
1111m	Весеньтесь, жизни всех стихий!
211/0111f	Я хочу одной отравы —
111m	пить и пить стихи.
	(l. 302)

The penultimate stanza returns to a more irregular rhythm and includes the final example of a hypermetrical stress in the clausula as well as another displaced rhyme:

0331(1)d	Сердце обокравшая,
	всего его лишив,
042d	вымучившая душу в бреду мою,
112	прими мой дар, дорогая,
0242d	больше я, может быть, ничего не придумаю.
	(l. 306)

The displacement of 'больше', rhyming with 'его лишив', is a striking effect. In the final stanza, which both invokes and realizes the poem's creation, the opening stanza of the part is transformed:

0124m	В праздник красьте сегодняшнее число.
1112d	Творишь,
	распятью равная магия.
031m	Видите —
	гвоздями слов
11d	прибит к бумаге я.
	(l. 311)

The stanza's profile fixes the poem's contrasts and tensions, while its cadence, with a shorter third line and a short last line, signals the poem's conclusion.