

SHAPES OF APOCALYPSE
ARTS AND PHILOSOPHY IN SLAVIC THOUGHT

MYTHS AND TABOOS IN RUSSIAN CULTURE

Series Editor:

Alyssa DINEGA GILLESPIE—*University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana*

Editorial Board:

Eliot BORENSTEIN—*New York University, New York*

Julia BEKMAN CHADAGA—*Macalester College, St. Paul, Minnesota*

Nancy CONDEE—*University of Pittsburg, Pittsburg*

Caryl EMERSON—*Princeton University, Princeton*

Bernice GLATZER ROSENTHAL—*Fordham University, New York*

Marcus LEVITT—*USC, Los Angeles*

Alex MARTIN—*University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana*

Irene MASING-DELIC—*Ohio State University, Columbus*

Joe PESCHIO—*University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee*

Irina REYFMAN—*Columbia University, New York*

Stephanie SANDLER—*Harvard University, Cambridge*





SHAPES OF APOCALYPSE

ARTS AND PHILOSOPHY IN SLAVIC THOUGHT

Edited by
Andrea OPPO

BOSTON / 2013

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:
A bibliographic record for this title is available
from the Library of Congress.

Copyright © 2013 Academic Studies Press
All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-1-61811-174-6 (cloth)
ISBN 978-1-618111-968 (electronic)

Book design by Ivan Grave
On the cover: Konstantin Juon, "The New Planet," 1921.

Published by Academic Studies Press in 2013
28 Montfern Avenue
Brighton, MA 02135, USA
press@academicstudiespress.com
www.academicstudiespress.com



Effective December 12th, 2017, this book will be subject to a CC-BY-NC license. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>. Other than as provided by these licenses, no part of this book may be reproduced, transmitted, or displayed by any electronic or mechanical means without permission from the publisher or as permitted by law.

The open access publication of this volume is made possible by:



This open access publication is part of a project supported by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Humanities Open Book initiative, which includes the open access release of several Academic Studies Press volumes. To view more titles available as free ebooks and to learn more about this project, please visit borderlinesfoundation.org/open.

Published by Academic Studies Press
28 Montfern Avenue
Brighton, MA 02135, USA
press@academicstudiespress.com
www.academicstudiespress.com

CONTENTS

Foreword	7
Preface	9
Acknowledgements	15
List of Contributors	16

PART ONE: PHILOSOPHY

Introduction <i>Andrea Oppo</i>	20
The Tilted Pillar: Rozanov and the Apocalypse <i>Giancarlo Baffo</i>	34
Salvation Without Redemption: Phenomenology of (Pre-)History in Patočka's Late Work <i>Riccardo Paparusso</i>	68

PART TWO: LITERATURE

The Sacrament of End. The Theme of Apocalypse in Three Works by Gogol' <i>Vladimir Glyantz</i>	89
Apocalyptic Imagery in Dostoevskij's <i>The Idiot</i> and <i>The Devils</i> <i>William J. Leatherbarrow</i>	122
Black Blood, White Roses: Apocalypse and Redemption in Blok's Later Poetry <i>Irene Masing-Delić</i>	134
Apocalypse and Golgotha in Miroslav Krleža's <i>Olden Days</i> : Memoirs and Diaries 1914-1921/1922 <i>Suzana Marjanić</i>	153

PART THREE: MUSIC AND VISUAL ARTS

The Apocalyptic Dispersion of Light into Poetry and Music: Aleksandr Skrjabin in the Russian Religious Imagination <i>Polina Dimova</i>	175
From the <i>Peredvižniki</i> 's Realism to Lenin's Mausoleum: The Two Poles of an Apocalyptic-Palingenetic Path <i>Chiara Cantelli</i>	203
Theatre at the Limit: Jerzy Grotowski's <i>Apocalypsis cum Figuris</i> <i>Andrea Oppo</i>	225
On Apocalypse, Witches and Desiccated Trees: A Reading of Andrej Tarkovskij's <i>The Sacrifice</i> <i>Alessio Scarlato</i>	244
List of Works Cited	265
Index	278

FOREWORD

The system of transliteration I have used throughout this book—except where book titles or citations were taken from other sources—is the ISO/R 9 (1968) system. The reason for this choice is that, while it may be less accessible for the non-specialist reader because of its many diacritical marks, it is more suitable to the specific needs of this collection. It was necessary, in fact, to standardize names and references taken from a variety of Slavic languages as well as from the essays of this volume themselves—which in some cases were originally written in languages other than English.

The chapters contributed by Giancarlo Baffo, Riccardo Paparusso, Chiara Cantelli, and Alessio Scarlato were translated from the original Italian by Karen Turnbull, who also collaborated with Olga Selivanova on the translation of the Russian text contributed by Vladimir Glyantz, and with Natka Badurina on the translation from Croatian of the chapter written by Suzana Marianić. She also made a general revision of the English language within the book where it was needed.

Andrea Oppo

“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.”

(Revelation 3: 15-16)

PREFACE

Slavic thought has embodied—as perhaps no other thought has—the myth of the “end of all things” as an *actual* event with a precise meaning in relation to the present. From the Christian icon to avant-garde painting, from the nineteenth-century novel to the poetry of the twentieth century, and not omitting theatre, cinema, or music, but above all within the entire domain of Slavic thought, there is a specific contemplation of the concepts of “end of present time” and “end of history” as conditions for a redemptive image of the world. It is not only St. John’s *Apocalypse*—with its roots deeply entrenched in the artistic sensitivity of the Slavic people—which is to be considered here, but also a more general idea which is widespread at all levels of Slavic culture: the apocalypse, as “filtered” through Slavic sensitivity, is largely a form of artistic imagery which suggests, at its very heart, that the highest hope necessarily passes through the annihilation, or transfiguration, of a *kind* of perspective on “earthly things.” To understand this idea means to understand an essential part of Slavic culture, which, however divergent and variegated it may be in general, converges on this specific myth in a surprising manner.

The intent of this collective volume is to investigate the philosophical, literary, and aesthetic idea of apocalypse within some key examples in the arts and thought of the “Slavic world” during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The book, however, does not aim to demonstrate a univocal point of view about this topic—which would indeed be a hard task to undertake. The harking back to the apocalyptic myth, in Russian and Slavic authors, often turns out to be a private, almost idiosyncratic need. In this sense, the conclusions each author has in mind may well be very different, if not antithetical, to those of other authors. This book demonstrates, in fact, the extent of variation between the different *shapes* in which apocalypse has worked in Slavic culture: as an idea, as a narrative text, as an artistic experience. Nonetheless, the reader will easily acknowledge a common, underlying apocalyptic sensitivity, as it were, “applied” to any of these

contributions and working from within in the authors' argumentations. This nearly always operates in the same way, i.e. through the radicalization of a doubt, the breaking down and bringing to collapse of the *whole structure* (of art, of thought), and the shift to a new life, that is, to a "more real life." To assume the "end of all," and only thereafter to seek the most authentic configuration of our life, appears to be, indeed, a peculiar trait of Slavic sensitivity, which acts to various extents in the conceptions of art, of religion, of history, and of politics. In the case of art, it is almost automatic, for every experience of this kind, to posit the end of art, and the exit from it, as a basic condition for the subsequent *beginning of life*. Finally, a number of common references, which are significant to various extents, recur in the experiences here analyzed: from the constant presence of the Bible, to the late Dostoevskij, to the thought of Nietzsche and also to Russian symbolism and sophiology.

To illustrate all this, and for reasons of clarity, the volume has been divided into three sections. The first is concerned with philosophy; the second with literature, and the third with music and visual arts.

The first section deals, in particular, with two authors who, at a distance of nearly a century, represent in some way the two poles of modern apocalyptic reflection in Slavic philosophy. It was Rozanov who started along a certain kind of path, while Patočka is the latest epigone of its reception outside Russia. In between there is Berdjaev, who is largely mentioned in the Introduction, and whose thought is generally apocalyptic and by now classic and well known.

The second section is about literary criticism. In this context, apocalypse is mostly shown as a textual problem, i.e. the way in which St John's text influenced the literary works of many classic Russian and Slavic authors. Gogol' and Dostoevskij are taken here as two eminent, and perhaps the most relevant, examples of this. In Aleksandr Blok and Miroslav Krleža, on the other hand, the textual issues make a significant shift into *life*, in particular the writers' personal lives, as is demonstrated in the two essays dedicated to them, so that the relationship between literature and apocalypse itself is affected and assumes a different perspective.

Finally, in the third section, the way in which apocalypse is definitively dissolved and takes new shapes and dimensions in other arts is considered. In music, theatre, cinema, painting, and figurative arts, what was initially an idea or a text has now become an *event*, which transforms the very

structure of its medium, i.e. the art that was intended to manifest that idea. The experiences of Skrjabin, Grotowski, Tarkovskij and the artistic trends of Russian realism and the avant-garde are clear evidence of this.

For the philosophical section, after a short general introduction by Andrea Oppo on apocalypse as a philosophical idea, in particular within modern Russian thought, Giancarlo Baffo's essay ("The Tilted Pillar: Rozanov and the Apocalypse") examines Vasilij Rozanov's conception of apocalypse by setting it in a wider and more complex context. The investigation starts "ex post," i.e. from the point of view of Merežkovskij, who acknowledges Rozanov to have understood before others the issue of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in Russia, and the way it affected the dawn of the Russian Revolution. A second analysis involves Rozanov's critique of the idea of an exclusively spiritual Christianity, which had also seduced Dostoevskij and Solov'ev, and the connection between such a "refusal of the world" and artistic creation itself. Eventually, those two instances are linked together and clarified in the light of Rozanov's main concept of apocalypse, with its phallic-paternal theory of religion, as it was expressed in his final and very problematic work, *The Apocalypse of Our Time*.

In the second chapter ("Salvation without Redemption: Phenomenology of [Pre-]History in Patočka's Late Work"), Riccardo Papparuso investigates Jan Patočka's idea of "End of History," which starts from a radical reflection on the deep crisis of present time. History, for the Czech thinker, has *already* ended, in that the technical-scientific epoch, while satisfying empty human desires, also shows the devastating non-sense of life. Our time, the time of "Post-History," thus demonstrates a paradoxical comeback of pre-historical actuality, on the one hand, and reveals the apocalypse, as a destructive fury without any promise of redemption, on the other. Nevertheless, for Patočka, a chance of salvation still exists in the very awareness of the mythological roots of this whole process and of the impossibility of redemption.

The literary section opens with a study by Vladimir Glyantz focusing on Nikolaj Gogol' ("The Sacrament of End: The Theme of Apocalypse in Three Works by Gogol'"). The religiously apocalyptic-symbolic value of the works *The Portrait*, *The Nose*, and *The Government Inspector* is taken into consideration here and is, to a great extent, related to the prophecy of the end of the world forecast for 1836 by the Swabian mystic J. A. Bengel. While

highlighting some crucial apocalyptic passages and motifs in those three works, Glyantz's reading also unearths the numerous relationships and meanings hidden within Gogol's texts, his personal life and his expectation of the apocalypse. In the end, thanks also to an analysis of selected Russian criticism on the writer, this essay aims to bring to light the "authentic" and "Russian" Gogol: his—often disregarded—religious views and his deep connection to the Russian culture.

William Leatherbarrow's essay ("Apocalyptic Imagery in Dostoevskij's *The Idiot* and *The Devils*"), a reprint of his original 1982 article, analyzes a number of biblical motifs drawn from the apocalyptic revelations of St. John in *The Idiot* and *The Devils* by Fëdor M. Dostoevskij. This seminal 30-year old study was included because of the importance and actuality of the essay itself, which tackles some decisive textual passages that identify in some way the core of Dostoevskij's apocalyptic thought as it would develop in his late years. According to Leatherbarrow, there is an ongoing use of Christian and apocalyptic mythology and symbolism in Dostoevskij, following the publication of *Notes from the House of the Dead*, which culminates precisely in those two novels. The author of this essay investigates in detail not only the numerous correspondences between the text of *Revelation* and the scenes and dialogues that refer to it in the two novels, but also the socio-political situation in Russia and Europe in the nineteenth century that may have led Dostoevskij to conceive such parallels. Many examples, along these lines, tend to confirm Dostoevskij's pessimism and his belief in the imminent fall of the de-spiritualized western modern world, as well as that of Russia because of the western part it embraced.

The subsequent chapter, authored by Irene Masing-Delić ("Black Blood, White Roses: Apocalypse and Redemption in Blok's Later Poetry"), deals with Aleksandr Blok's use of "illness as metaphor" in his late lyrical poetry and the long poem *The Twelve*. The illness in this case is syphilis. It symbolizes the corruption of the old "brothel world" in which, in the tradition of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, even the best become infected in one way or another. A cleansing and punitive Revolution becomes the sole means to achieve a rebirth of vitality and culture and to redeem the world from omnipresent evil.

The Croatian writer Miroslav Krleža, for whom apocalypse appears to be in many ways both the beginning and the end of his path, is the focus of Suzana Marjanić's contribution ("Apocalypse and Golgotha in

Miroslav Krleža's *Olden Days: Memoirs and Diaries 1914–1921/1922*). The apocalyptic thought of Krleža—a key figure in Croatian and ex-Yugoslavian literature—is here investigated through his literary diaries about World War I. In particular, the *Salome* of legend as opposed to the prophet Johanaan, a symbol of the Yugoslav-Messianicisms, and the biblical motifs of Golgotha are used to illustrate Krleža's personal drama, which lasted throughout his entire life and even beyond it.

The third and last section, on music and visual arts, is opened by a study by Polina Dimova on the composer Aleksandr Skrjabin ("The Apocalyptic Dispersion of Light into Poetry and Music: Aleksandr Skrjabin in the Russian Religious Imagination"). While examining the complex construction of Skrjabin's work and its role within Russian religious philosophy, this essay will also highlight some significant interpretations that Russian thinkers, such as Losev, gave on the composer. In particular, Skrjabin's synaesthetic concept of light and music, and his untimely demise, will be taken into consideration. Finally, this analysis will conclude with the concepts of light, poetry, and music as they emerged from the artistic collaboration between Skrjabin and the Symbolist poet and religious philosopher, Vjačeslav Ivanov.

Chiara Cantelli's chapter, which follows, deals with figurative arts in Russia ("From the *Peredvižniki*'s Realism to Lenin's Mausoleum: The Two Poles of an Apocalyptic-Palingenetic Path"). There is a link, according to the author, between Russian realism of the end of the nineteenth century and socialist art from the Stalinian epoch. This link is represented by Russian symbolism and avant-garde arts. In particular, the author analyzes how Suprematism and Constructivism overcame the mere imitation of life in favour of "life itself." Yet the germs of this revolution, as well as of its underlying apocalyptic-palingenetic aspiration, are nonetheless to be found in the nineteenth century critical realism by the *Peredvižniki*—a true atelier of art as *žiznestroenie*, "building of life."

Andrea Oppo's essay ("Theatre at the Limit: Jerzy Grotowski's *Apocalypsis cum figuris*") examines the Polish director Jerzy Grotowski's last theatrical production *Apocalypsis cum figuris* (1969). Many elements make this work deeply emblematic: from its unconventional structure to the ambiguity of the theme of apocalypse as expressed in its title. By drawing a parallel between Grotowski's ideas and those of Jacques Derrida and Antonin Artaud, this essay intends to shed light on the meaning of this

play, as well as on the Grotowskian apocalyptic vision of theatre in general. As a result of this analysis, a crucial, symbolic presence of Dostoevskij in Grotowski's work will emerge, along with a conception of the apocalypse in a very private, self-related, and extra-artistic way.

Concluding the volume, Andrej Tarkovskij's last work, *The Sacrifice*, and the Russian film director's idea of apocalypse, are the object of an analysis by Alessio Scarlato ("On Apocalypse, Witches and Desiccated Trees: A Reading of Andrej Tarkovskij's *The Sacrifice*"). In *The Sacrifice*, the account of a possible nuclear catastrophe becomes a parable of an idea which is essentially peculiar to Russian philosophy, i.e. the apocalyptic conception of history. While, on the one hand, Scarlato's aesthetic analysis of Tarkovskij's movie brings into focus the different interpretations of the relationship between divine freedom, sacrifice and the end of history, on the other hand, it sets this in a dialogue with the Nietzschean myth of the eternal return and Russian sophiology.

Andrea Oppo

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume has been published thanks to the financial contribution of the National Service for Theological Superior Studies of the Italian Conference of Bishops (CEI).

William Leatherbarrow's essay "Apocalyptic Imagery in Dostoevskij's *The Idiot* and *The Devils*" previously appeared in *Dostoevsky Studies* 3 (1982): 43-51, and is included here, with modifications to its transliteration system and style of citation only, with permission of its author.

I acknowledge my gratitude to the institution to which I belong, the Pontifical Faculty of Theology of Sardinia (Cagliari, Italy), whose unconditional faith in my research and in this work has been essential for me. My special thanks are to Karen Turnbull, the translator of most of the contributions in this book, who made a big effort over several months in being much more than a "simple translator" and put all her skill and dedication into this difficult task, where the most of essays were originally written in a number of different languages—Italian, Russian, Croatian, with references to the Polish and Czech languages too. In this regard, I would like to make a special mention of Olga Selivanova and Natka Badurina, who gave decisive help to Karen with the translations from Russian and from Croatian, respectively. I owe my gratitude also to Greta Manzinali who had a hand in helping to bring this collection together. Finally, I am very grateful to the ASP editors and assistants, most especially Igor Nemirovsky, Sharona Vedol, Deva Jasheway, Kira Nemirovsky, and the Series editor Alyssa Gillespie, for their total support and constructive suggestions on this project. I am also profoundly indebted to Irene Masing-Delić for her encouragement and precious counsel.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Giancarlo Baffo is professor in moral philosophy at the University of Siena (Italy). In his academic research he has dealt mainly with the “Russian religious renaissance” (N. Fëdorov, V. Rozanov, N. Berdjaev) and the inheritance of classic German philosophy in the culture of Slavic and East European countries. He has published several articles and essays, among which are: “Die ästhetische Dimension im Denken Rosenzweigs” in W. Schmied-Kowarzik (Hrsg.), *Der Philosoph F. Rosenzweig* (Kassel: 1986); “Così parlò Juduška. L'antisemitismo di Vasilij V. Rozanov” in G. Massino and G. Schiavoni, eds., *Stella errante. Percorsi dell'ebraismo fra Est e Ovest* (Bologna: 2000); *Semja bytija: Fëdor Eduardovič Šperk* in F. E. Šperk, *Stat'i, očerki, pis'ma* (St Petersburg: 2010).

Chiara Cantelli is professor in aesthetics at the University of Florence (Italy). Along with the history of aesthetics and the socio-symbolic function of artwork in the twentieth century, her main interests concern Russian philosophical and religious thought from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with special attention to the philosophy of icons and Russian avant-garde poetics. Her publications include: *La bellezza salverà il mondo. Saggio su V. S. Solovëv* (Milan: 1996); *Simbolo e icona* (Bologna: 2000); *Storia dell'estetica Occidentale. Da Omero alle neuroscienze* (Rome: 2008), with F. Desideri; *L'icona come metafisica concreta. Neoplatonismo e magia nella concezione dell'arte in P. Florenskij* (Palermo: 2011).

Polina Dimova is a Mellon postdoctoral fellow and visiting assistant professor of Russian and comparative literature at Oberlin College, Ohio. She earned a PhD in comparative literature at the University of California, Berkeley, in 2010, specializing in Russian, German, and English modernism across literature, music, and the visual arts. Her research focuses on the inter-arts in modernism, and she has published and presented on the synaesthetic music of Aleksandr Skrjabin and its literary reception, on the Wilde/Strauss “Salome,” as well as on Bulgarian literature. At UC Berkeley, she taught

twentieth-century Russian literature and comparative literature courses on the intersection of music, literature, and philosophy; on exile, memory, and creativity; on “The Lyric: Word, Sound, Image”; and on “Picture Theory.” She comes from Varna, Bulgaria, and is a proficient violinist.

Vladimir Glyantz is a literary essayist, a writer and a poet. He lives and works in Moscow, where he contributes to various literary magazines and editorial projects. He is a specialist on the work of Nikolaj Gogol', about whom he has written a book, *Gogol' i apokalipsis* (Moscow: 2004), and several articles for journals such as *MOL* and *Slovestnost'*.

William J. Leatherbarrow is emeritus professor of Russian at the University of Sheffield (UK). His research interests are Russian literature of the nineteenth century, especially Dostoevskij, and Russian intellectual history. His recent publications include: *Dostoevsky's "The Devils": A Critical Companion* (Evanston, IL: 1999); *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevsky* (ed.) (Cambridge: 2002); *A Devil's Vaudeville: The Demonic in Dostoevskii's Major Fiction* (Evanston, IL: 2005); *A History of Russian Thought* (edited with Derek Offord) (Cambridge: 2010).

Suzana Marjanić is a scholar in the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb (Croatia). Her interests include oral literature, folk religion and beliefs, zoology and culture, animal rights and theatre/performance art anthropology. Along with several articles on these themes, she has also published the following books in Croatian: *Voices from "Bygone Days": Transgressions of the Worlds in Krleža's Diary Entries 1914-1921/1922* (Zagreb: 2005); *Cultural Bestiary* (Zagreb: 2007) with Antonija Zaradija Kiš; *Folklore Studies Reader* (Zagreb: 2010) with Marijana Hameršak; *Mythical Anthology* (Zagreb: 2010) with Ines Prica.

Irene Masing-Delić is a professor in the Department of Slavic and East European Languages and Cultures at Ohio State University. Her research covers a broad range of Russian prose writers and poets from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She has published books such as: *Exotic Moscow under Western Eyes* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009); *Abolishing Death: A Salvation Myth in Russian Twentieth Century Literature* (Stanford: 1992); *A. Blok's "The Snow Mask." An Interpretation*

(Stockholm: 1970); she is also the author of numerous articles and book chapters.

Andrea Oppo is professor in aesthetics at the Pontifical Faculty of Theology of Sardinia (Italy). His areas of interest include nineteenth-century Russian philosophy and literature; the thought of Šestov, Berdjaev, and Solovëv; narrative as a philosophical problem and the relationship between philosophy and theatre (Beckett, Grotowski, Artaud). He is the author of the books: *Philosophical Aesthetics and Samuel Beckett* (Oxford: 2008); *Estetiche del negativo. Studi su Dostoevskij, Čechov e Beckett* (Cagliari: 2009); *Il silenzio della pietra. Questioni sulla materia e la libertà* (ed.) (Trapani: 2011).

Riccardo Papparuso is a doctoral candidate in philosophy at the University of Siena (Italy). His dissertation is about the thought of Jan Patočka. He studied at the “Archive Jan Patočka” in Prague and in the “Karlova” University in the same city. He is the author of the essay “Assicurazione e fine della storia in Jan Patočka” (Rome: 2009) and is the editor of the Italian translation of Jan Patočka’s *Christianity and Natural World* (Rome: 2011).

Alessio Scarlato is a postdoctoral associate in aesthetics at “La Sapienza” University in Rome (Italy). His field of research mainly concerns film theory and philosophical aesthetics. He is the author of the books: *La Zona del Sacro. L'estetica cinematografica di Andrej Tarkovskij* (Palermo: 2005); *Robert Bresson. La meccanica della grazia* (Rome: 2006); *L'immagine di Cristo, le parole del romanzo. Dostoevskij e la filosofia religiosa russa* (Milan: 2006); *20 gennaio 1942. Auschwitz e l'estetica della testimonianza* (Rome: 2009); *Splendore e miseria del cinema. Sulle Histoire(s) di Jean-Luc Godard* (with A. Cervini and L. Venzi, Cosenza: 2010).

PART ONE

PHILOSOPHY

Andrea Oppo

INTRODUCTION

“Why do men expect an *end*
of the world *after all*?”

Immanuel Kant,
The End of All Things (1794)

In introducing a subject of great generality such as that addressed in this volume, which basically encompasses the entire Russian (and Slavic for the purpose of this study) culture, one is tempted to shelter behind the defining characteristic of collective volumes—in other words, behind their specialist character, and the fact that there may not necessarily be an inter-textual connection between their contributions. Nonetheless, this book has a marked philosophical identity, and philosophy, by its very nature, is driven to investigate things in a general, paradigmatic manner. Thus, however difficult and even controversial it may be, a synthetic approach to the whole issue is required here. The following sections will briefly summarize this within a very general outline, from two different angles: Western thought on apocalypse, and Russian thought on apocalypse.

1. *The Sense of the End*

There are two fundamental ways in which the philosophical meaning of the myth of apocalypse can be understood. These are, in fact, two opposite perspectives that have appeared throughout the history of Western thought (in particular, theological thought), which differ specifically with regard to their concept of “time.”

The first perspective assumes a linear model of temporality, a *chronological*, sequential time (*chronos*), in which apocalypse is considered “the final conclusion” (of history, of life, of time itself). To this extent, the *end* is set in the future and is seen from the viewpoint of present time,

looking *forward*. Reflecting upon the *last things*, from such a perspective, is necessarily concerned with the final meaning of history and of life, i.e. with the “final answers.” The end, in this case, is also the *end*—the aim. Immanuel Kant—perhaps the greatest philosopher of modern times—investigated this problem in a minor essay entitled *The End of All Things* (1794). According to him, the thought of the apocalypse has to do with the question of the last reasons and the meaning of the world and of our existence. Yet, the terror that normally follows any vision of the end is precisely the doubt that “if these [reasons and meaning] should not be attainable, creation itself would appear to those who believe in an end of the world to be as purposeless as a play that has no upshot whatsoever and has no rational design.”¹ Apocalypse is, therefore, as the literary critic Frank Kermode argues,² the paradigm of the final chapter of every narrative work, starting with the most famous one—the Bible. The first book is *Genesis*, the last is *Revelation*. It is only in the latter, in the “conclusion,” that we can see the narrative configuration of the whole. Aristotle said that men die because they cannot join the beginning and the end. As Kermode observes in this regard, “men, like poets, rush ‘into the midst,’ in *medias res*, when they are born; they also die *in mediis rebus*, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems.”³ The End is the Meaning itself. A world with *no end*, as Kant declared, would be a nonsensical world. This is the point of view of the *time-chronos*, which requires a narrative structure with a finale. This finale should essentially be what Theodor Lessing formulated in the title of his work, which is perhaps both the most significant and the most skeptical statement ever made: *History as Giving Meaning to the Meaningless* (1919).

Broadly speaking, apocalyptic thought and literature belong to a rectilinear, narrative view of the world, and have generally been associated to a time of crisis, often linked to the figure of the Anti-Christ, or to

¹ Immanuel Kant, “The End of All Things,” in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1983), 96.

² Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1st ed. 1966]).

³ *Ibid.*, 7.

millenaristic movements, or again to the prophecy of the end of the world, with damnation of the wicked and salvation of the elect.⁴ Even though this concept of absolute end, of apocalypse, lies outside our experience, we nonetheless need a myth of this kind to find meaning or at least *relief* from the tragic, unbearable thought, as Kant says, of our life as “a play that has no upshot.” Analogously, as Lucretius said, we always look at our death as spectators, as survivors (*De rerum natura* III, 885). The eye, as it were, that sees the end of the world as long as it is still able to see, yet is never overwhelmed by it; in this way it stands firm on the edge of that world, which is forever relentlessly crumbling. While St John’s Revelation is indeed the epitome of this idea in Hebraic-Christian religion, it is also the symbol *par excellence* through which the entire Western culture sought to give sense to the notion of “absolute ending.”⁵ The importance that Isaac Newton (*Treatise on Revelation*, 1680) accorded to the Book of Revelation, as well as his attempt to give a rational interpretation to it, must also be seen in this light. Nonetheless—as Kant pointed out in his essay—however meaningful may be the idea of apocalypse and Last Judgment as the end of time within a conception of sequential time, it is not without problems. It is, in fact, a contradiction in terms, i.e. speculating on the passage itself from time to something other than time. The thought that all mutation might cease and we might remain as though suspended in a final gesture, with a last word or feeling, is indeed a repugnant prospect to our imagination: “This thought contains something a bit horrifying, for it leads to an abyss, from which there is no possible return for whosoever falls into it.”⁶ Kant raises here the suspicion that this whole issue is not truly concerned with

⁴ For an historical view on this subject, see Friedrich Otto, *The End of the World: A History* (New York: Fromm International Publishing Corporation, 1986).

⁵ There can be no doubt that *Revelation* is the most represented book of the Bible in the history of Western art. From the portals of gothic cathedrals to the multicoloured miniatures in Mozarabic art, and up to Kandinskij’s coloured glasses, or Dürer’s xylographies of *Apocalypsis cum figuris*, the works inspired by that book are many. For a broad view on apocalypse as an artistic and literary subject see: Gilles Quispel, *The Secret Book of Revelation* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979); Frances Carey, ed., *The Apocalypse and the Shape to Come* (exhb. cat.) (London: British Museum Press, 1999); and John Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans Publishing, 1984).

⁶ Immanuel Kant, “The End of All Things,” op. cit., 93.

the meaningfulness of the world, but is in fact a problem of its relation with time.

The second philosophical perspective on apocalypse, on the other hand, originates from a different model of temporality, derived from a second etymology for the word “time” in ancient Greek—not *chronos*, but *kairos*. *Kairos* is a time in between, the opportune moment, the supreme time to do something. While *chronos* is quantitative, *kairos* has a qualitative nature. A concept of apocalypse within this second meaning of time signifies simply an instant that accomplishes the “end” as a possibility in the present. It is the “time of life,” and not the “time of the world,” which is affected by the *kairotic apocalypse*. In Christian theology, this conception was always of great relevance, since it reveals not so much the future of things as the face of the present, where the *eschaton* is the *parousia* of Christ. Christian eschatology, in the perspective of *kairos*, is the fullness *today*, it is the “already now” of the coming of Christ.⁷ In this sense, the *Eschaton* is an *Eschatos*, a person: the incarnation of Christ. It is, in the end, the essentially personal nature of the eschatological event to be seen in the light of Christianity. “Personal,” in this context, is the opposite of “historical,” in that it sets a condition beyond history. This apocalypse is within history, but at the same time it shows a quality of history that is “other.” Crucial to this view is the idea of “coming.”⁸ The Christological insistence on the idea of “present” is not to be confused with the eternity of the verb *to be* in the Greek philosophical tradition. On the contrary, it is a reorientation of history, its redemption. “First comes last” could be the catchphrase of this alternative concept of apocalypse. The coming (*adventus*, *parousia*) is not the eternal return or the apex of historical time, but is *presence*: a personal presence with an *événementiel* character. It is also a renewed view, a reversed perspective on the present, starting from the end. The very possibility that the “Last” might come “First” reveals this *other* quality of time. A time that is neither *chronos* nor eternity, but *decisive time*, “time of grace.” Although it is within history, this time is nonetheless “other” than history. The end of the world, here, becomes a revolution of the present: not

⁷ Many theologians, such as K. Rahner, P. Tillich, J. Moltmann, H.U. von Balthasar, worked extensively on this idea in the twentieth century.

⁸ Cf. Revelation 1:4: “... from Him who is and who was and who *is to come*.”

a projection of the future, but the coming, now, of the Last event, always in a personal form.

These two perspectives (*to go towards* and *to come*) on the absolute End—both present in Christian tradition and often intertwined—also generate two different exits. On the one hand, as has been argued, the End set in the future, in a chronological view, reveals (or predicts) the ultimate meaning of history, and thus leads to a “philosophy of history.” On the other hand, the End set in the present shows the true face of the “I,” in that it transforms what is “identical” in the “living one.” By dismissing the objectified identity, it opens the subject, the person, to a radical experience of salvation from within. In assuming the point of view of the *not yet* of the Last, the *apocalypse-kairos* is the coming (*parousia*), the *already now*, of life itself.

2. The Russian Idea of Apocalypse

It is certainly in the second perspective outlined above that a peculiar role of Russian thought within the subject of apocalypse can be historically pinpointed. Among Russian thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Nikolaj Berdjaev (1874-1948) is perhaps the most explicitly apocalyptic, in that he not only elaborated an original eschatological thought, but he also extended his analysis to the cultural history and philosophy of the Russian people.⁹ As he was younger than many of the intellectuals of his generation and knew the majority of them personally, Berdjaev is a likely source of any clues towards a wider view on this topic.

According to Berdjaev, although the fundamental trait of the Russian soul is antithesis itself, i.e. the unity of opposites (East and West, despotism and anarchism, paganism and ascetic monastic Orthodoxy, cruelty and kindness, nationalism and universalism, etc.), an ultimate Messianic consciousness emerges over and above any contradiction.

There are two prevailing myths [Berdjaev writes] which are capable of becoming dynamic in the chorus of the peoples: the myth of the beginning and the myth of the end. Among Russians, it was the second myth, the eschatological myth, which prevailed.

⁹ Cf., in this regard, one of Berdjaev’s most famous works: *The Russian Idea: The Fundamental Problems of Russian Thought of the 19th Century and the Early 20th Century* (1946).

Quoting Oswald Spengler, Berdjaev adds, “Russia is an apocalyptic revolt against antiquity,” and “Russian people, in accordance with their metaphysical nature and vocation in the world, are a people of the End.”¹⁰ For the Russian philosopher, although eschatology took various forms, Russian thought is essentially eschatological, since its mission is to be “the vehicle of the true Christianity, that is, of Orthodoxy.”¹¹ Such Orthodoxy, which for Berdjaev must not be identified with the official monastic Orthodoxy, is the true religion of the Russians, in that it is “the expectation... of a new era in Christianity, an era of the Holy Spirit—and this is above all the Russian idea.”¹² Berdjaev is referring to one of the deepest aspirations of the soul—the same as in the *stranničestvo*, a scarcely translatable term meaning the ancient practice of pilgrimage, “a very characteristic Russian thing, to a degree unknown in the West.”¹³ In this regard, he says, with reference to a peculiar quest for truth, the “last” truth and salvation, Russian people are intrinsically religious. Almost as a paradox, he notes that “the coming themes of Russian literature are to be Christian even at times when in their own thought Russian writers reject Christianity.”¹⁴ There is no doubt that, for the Russian philosopher, the Book of *Revelation* had always had great relevance in Russia among both the masses and the intellectuals:

In our thought the eschatological problem takes an immeasurably greater place than in the thinking of the West, and this is connected with the very structure of Russian consciousness which is but little adapted and little inclined to cling to finished forms of the intervening culture.¹⁵

¹⁰ Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, trans. R. M. French (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1992), 208.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹² *Ibid.*, 207.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 212. “A pilgrim walks about the immense Russian land but never settles down or attaches himself to anything. A pilgrim is in search of the Kingdom of God.... In spirit the most creative representatives of Russian culture were pilgrims; Gogol, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Solovyov and the whole of the revolutionary Intelligentsia were pilgrims” (*Ibid.*).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 208.

While Berdjaev expressed his own metaphysical eschatology more systematically in a number of books throughout his life,¹⁶ one of his later works, *The Russian Idea*, may be read entirely as a long and detailed justification of the eschatological motif in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as a key to understanding Russian thought. In this key we find the Christianity-Apocalypse relationship, which is also a crucial issue for Berdjaev himself as a thinker. Admittedly, to formulate such a justification, the Russian philosopher has to make a choice, and take a stand for or against something.¹⁷ He often lists those events that marked a deviation from the true Russian vocation, while recognizing their diverse authentic Russian characteristics and inscribing them within a broader dialectic equally typical of the Russian idea. He points out, for instance, a number of significant stalemates in the self-consciousness of the Russian idea: a kind of Russian messianism, which gave birth to the myth of the “Third Rome,” with its inner imperialistic temptation, is certainly one of these. The often sterile dispute between Occidentalists and Slavophiles—although Berdjaev sympathizes with the latter, and considers Chomjakov his master—is another such impasse, along with all the echoes and debates on Romantic, Feuerbachian and Hegelian themes in Russian society. Finally, there is what Berdjaev calls the “imposition of a new idol,” i.e. the social issue, anticipated by an idealistic humanitarianism in the 1940s and the populist and nihilistic movements of the 1960s, that culminated with the Marxist ideology, to which Berdjaev himself adhered to a certain extent in his youth. All the same, according to Berdjaev, the persistence throughout Russian history – in the face of the collapse of so many other trends—of two thematics, such as *freedom* and *sobornost’*, both already present in Chomjakov, is one of the signs of the existence of a fundamental Russian idea. This is, once again, the eschatological consciousness of Russians, and not only Russians—as can be seen from his reference to the Polish philosopher Auguste Cieszkowski.¹⁸

¹⁶ See, in particular, *The Beginning and the End* (1941), *The End of Our Time* (1933), *The Meaning of History* (1936), and *The Destiny of Man* (1931).

¹⁷ “An intellectually attainable picture of a people can only be sketched by way of selection, which intuitively penetrates into what is most expressive and significant” (Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, op. cit., 208).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 227-228.

Clearly, in his reading of Russian history and culture of the nineteenth century, Berdjaev's views may not reflect those of many historians. His judgments are as clear and understandable as they are sharp and oriented to his own philosophical position. Indeed, there are a number of undervalued issues in his analysis and, whether true or not, an assumption of the religious view as universal and all-encompassing for the Russian culture of the nineteenth century is hardly adequate to a strictly historical reading. Nevertheless, as Aleksej Losev's systematic work demonstrates, the question of myth has a peculiar relevance and status, which go far beyond unbiased historical analysis. For Losev, myth is first of all "an energetic, phenomenal self-affirmation,"¹⁹ and it does not necessarily relate to religious creation. Rather, it is "a dialectically necessary category of consciousness and of being in general."²⁰ Within this framework, which is not far removed from Berdjaev's point of view, we can consider the myth of apocalypse as a *background* (Losev) in which the "religious" intervenes as a dialectic part in relation to the issue of eternity and time. In this sense, Berdjaev certainly takes up a core issue of his times, which entered the scene in the last decades of the nineteenth century. This is the advent of decidedly religious writers such as Dostoevskij and Tolstoj, the spiritual renaissance within the arts and poetry, and the birth of a philosophy which was no longer restricted to the social and the ideological. For Berdjaev, the creative work of Dostoevskij, in particular, "is eschatological through and through. It is interested only in the ultimate, only in what is oriented to the end."²¹ Dostoevskij understood that messianic consciousness is universal (cf. his "Discourse on Puškin") not nationalistic, and concerns Man, his universal vocation, and his aspiration to freedom. The mood of the conversation between Kirillov and Stavrogin, in *The Devils*, is absolutely eschatological. The *starec* Zosima was a forerunner of a new *starčestvo*, and Alëša Karamazov that of a new type of Christian.²² But above all, towards the end of the nineteenth century, a new

¹⁹ Aleksei F. Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*, trans. Vladimir Marchenkov (London: Routledge, 2003), 99, *passim*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

²¹ Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, *op. cit.*, 216.

²² *Ibid.*, 218.

apocalyptic frame of mind arose in Russia which prophesied the end of the world and the appearance of the antichrist.

Berdjaev analyzes some of the philosophers who recognized such a frame of mind. Among these, he gives preference to Fëdorov (“his interpretation of the *Apocalypse* is an effort of genius and unique in the history of Christianity”²³)—a lesser known philosopher whose life and thought attracted the attention both of Dostoevskij and Lev Tolstoj—rather than to Leont’ev or Solovëv. In these three authors, Berdjaev identifies the basis for an imminent cultural renaissance, to which he himself belonged, that at the beginning of the new century would mark a renewed interest in aesthetic consciousness, in a kind of religious philosophy, and bring about a renewed flourishing of poetry. It is in this context that the decisive influence which Nietzsche’s thoughts exerted over Russian intellectuals from 1890 onwards should be placed.²⁴ The organization of *The World of Art* (founded in 1898), in particular, with its leading figures Djagilev and Benois, played a crucial role in the birth of this so-called Silver Age. Within this “Russian renaissance,” Berdjaev recognizes, again, the presence of an eschatological core, which he sees at times as more or less authentic but always, decisively, working from within in any artistic or spiritual creation of that time.

3. Conclusion

In his autobiography, while speaking of his exile from Russia to Germany in 1922, Berdjaev writes:

What, then, is the characteristically Russian “idea” with which I came to meet the West? I think that, in the first place, I brought with me a pronounced eschatological sense of history, which people in the West, Christians and non-Christians alike, have almost entirely lost I bore in me a consciousness of the crisis of historical

²³ *Ibid.*, 224.

²⁴ An obligatory reference here is to the well-known Bernice G. Rosenthal, ed., *Nietzsche in Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986). “Nietzsche seemed to offer a way out of the malaise that had affected Russian culture since the 1880s. Dostoevsky was dead and Tolstoj had passed his prime as a writer Nietzsche’s philosophy appeared to them as a revitalizing force, the opposite of pessimism, passivity, resignation” (*Ibid.*, 9-10).

Christianity. My mind was torn by the conflict between personality and universal harmony, between the individual and the general, the subjective and the objective—a conflict for which I was unable to find any solution within the confines of history.²⁵

For Berdjaev, the main and probably deepest philosophical heritage that Russia brought to the West is an apocalyptic one. But the kind of apocalypse he is referring to, both here and in his entire oeuvre, is not the one which brings the chronological history of the world to a close. The confines of history are not where this *end* occurs. According to him, there is an individual eschatology and apocalypse, and there is an historical eschatology and apocalypse. The intersection of the two is not a mathematical measure, but takes place within the subject. Therefore, Berdjaev says, the end of the world and of history cannot be set in the future, i.e. in a measurable, chronological time—although neither is this end absolutely beyond history. “The end of the world and of history [he says] is both within and beyond the world and history.”²⁶ This antinomy “becomes meaningful when we think in terms of existential subjectivity.”²⁷ Hence, the true meaning of apocalypse must be found in the passage from “historic time” to “existential time.” For Berdjaev, the concept of time is also highly problematical, if not contradictory. Only a view of time that includes human freedom can be the basis of an authentic eschatology. Berdjaev’s idea, in this respect, is that of a creative and active interpretation of the apocalypse:

My interpretation of Christianity is eschatological and I place it in antithesis to historical Christianity. But my interpretation of eschatology is active and creative, not passive. The end of this world, and the end of history, depend also upon the creative act of man.²⁸

Admittedly, in this point he appears closer to Fëdorov than to Solovëv or Leontëv.²⁹ For him, the true end is a human-divine work, which cannot

²⁵ Nicolas Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality: An Essay in Autobiography*, trans. Katharine Lampert (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1950), 252.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 295.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, op. cit., 257.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 297.

attain fulfilment without human freedom. Every human act, be it moral or creative, makes the end of this world begin, and from that event a brand new “other” world takes life. A creative end always means the triumph over the exteriorization and objectification of life: it means the triumph of existential time over historical time. The Russian myth of apocalypse reveals what history is not, namely true *real* life (*nastajaščaja žizn'*), life *here and now*. This is, according to the Russian philosopher, the eschatological conscience which in Russia has always been more clearly expressed than in the Western world. In all this, Berdjaev speaks for himself, but with the appropriate distinctions, he also speaks—both in his autobiography and in *The Russian Idea*—on behalf of his own generation, that of the Silver Age, which he divides into three main trends: a first more philosophico-religious one (S. Bulgakov, P. Struve, S. Frank, S. Trubeckoj, P. Florenskij, L. Šestov, V. Ern, N. Losskij and Berdjaev himself); a second current of a more literary tendency (Rozanov and Merežkovskij); and a third one connected to the flourishing of poetry (A. Blok, A. Belyj, and V. Ivanov). According to Berdjaev, the Russian renaissance of the beginning of the twentieth century, in its entirety, demonstrates the existence of a Russian idea, which is at heart religious and eschatological. Eventually, Berdjaev writes, “in the general Russian conscience the eschatological idea becomes the aspiration to the general salvation.”³⁰

As already mentioned in the Preface, this volume unavoidably contains only a small, selected choice of analyses, and is far from being exhaustive on this account. Its main intention is that of positing, in an outline form, the existence of a common philosophical and apocalyptic sensitivity in Russian and Slavic arts of the nineteenth and twentieth century. In the first section, for example, there are as many omissions as there are Russian Silver-Age philosophers. All of these could as easily have been included as Rozanov. Fëdorov is certainly one of the first whose name comes to mind; or Leont'ev, or Merežkovskij; or indeed, the late Solov'ev of the *Tale of the Antichrist*, and not forgetting Sergej Bulgakov whose last work was precisely a commentary on St John's *Apocalypse*; or again, Berdjaev's dear friend Lev Šestov, since his entire *oeuvre* is clearly definable as “apocalyptic.” Yet, Rozanov is a key author, a precursor in many ways,

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 244.

as far as the apocalyptic theme is concerned, who strongly influenced the forthcoming Russian philosophic-religious renaissance and Pavel Florenskij himself. In the same way, outside Russia, Jan Patočka, an original and deep thinker, can be considered the last epigone of that Russian apocalyptic sensitivity—a significant, and in many ways “necessary” link between the religious, eschatological thematic of Dostoevskij, the “Russian” Nietzsche, and the contemporary German philosophy, in particular that of Husserl and Heidegger. These two authors, Rozanov and Patočka, are certainly good representatives and symbols of the Slavic originality within a kind of apocalyptic thought.

However, since—as Kant himself suggested—the “end of all things” is almost as much a matter of imagination as it is of thought,³¹ the selection of studies in this volume was not meant to present apocalypse as solely a philosophical problem. The other selections in the book follow the same pattern: authors or ideas that are symbolic of the Slavic apocalyptic trait. Indeed, three giants among writers—Gogol, Dostoevskij, and Blok—need no justification in their relationship with the apocalyptic theme in literature. Here again, many other literary authors might have been included³²—not least among them Lev Tolstoj, who, according to Berdjaev, is an apocalyptic thinker himself.³³ The essay on Miroslav Krleža, finally, is an investigation on the essentially eschatological sensitivity of an author crucial to ex-Yugoslavian literature. It also highlights his personal reflections on the same subject which provide the background for his masterpiece, the apocalyptic novel *The Return of Philip Latinovicz* (1932). In the last section of the volume, concerning music and visual arts, references to Russian symbolism and religious philosophy, as well as to Dostoevskij and the “Russian” Nietzsche, are even more evident. Skrjabin’s and Tarkovskij’s experiences are incontrovertible evidence of the presence of such references and their shift into different arts, such as music and cinema. Analogously, the theatrical practice of the Polish director Jerzy Grotowski reaches its pinnacle in the

³¹ Immanuel Kant, “The End of All Things,” op. cit., 94.

³² For a literary approach on this subject with reference to Russian fiction, cf. David Bethea, *The Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

³³ Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, op. cit., 215.

meeting of Dostoevskij's Christ and the "applied interpretation" of a clearly *kairotic* idea of apocalypse. Finally, in the field of Slavic figurative arts, from amongst the quasi-infinite examples of the apocalyptic thematic within it, one was chosen which links apocalypse to a palingenetic experience, where the *active* nature of this process is particularly marked: namely, the significantly historical passage from the realistic art of the *Peredvižniki* to socialist art, via Russian symbolism and the avant-garde.

Overall, if one were to seek a common philosophical root connecting all these contributions, something that could help to sketch out the underlying theme of Slavic reflection on the apocalyptic theme, this might be found precisely in the *kairotic* idea of apocalypse, which Berdjaev's philosophy epitomizes probably better than any other. It would seem that the sensitivity of the Slavic soul plays a significant role in a similar "vote of no confidence" against the reality of progress, of the objectified world, and of the world of nature and of historicization of events. The Slavic lack of faith in this state of things underlines another kind of presence that can be understood in the light of the "truth of the after," i.e. a supreme truth that acknowledges its *kairos*, in a reversed and iconic perspective, and finds the place of this *revelation* in the human subject. Only a free act that can perceive things "ex post," from the point of view of the absolute end, can shut down that apparent world and reveal what that world is not. From this perspective, the myth or thought of apocalypse might no longer pertain to the understanding of the ultimate meaning of things, but it irrefutably concerns the "beginning of personal life." To this extent, both Berdjaev and Kant were right to say that such a process no longer relates to the mere thought of the end. "This" apocalypse does not really concern the "final meaning," the truth of the world, but is a supreme creative act that *comes* to the subject and awakens what Berdjaev, referring to Augustine's *Confessions*, calls *Deus intimior meo*, "God is more intimate to me than I am to myself."³⁴

All the experiences from this book bear witness to how radical and effective this feeling was in the authors under consideration. Far from being a mere concept or a product of imagination, apocalypse, in these cases, is something that *happens*—and it does indeed happen, with all its

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 300, and 1:4 in Augustine's *Confessions*.

consequences. Western artists and thinkers have rarely had the same ease, the same audacity, in bringing about a *real* apocalypse with respect to their own creations, their own life.

THE TILTED PILLAR: ROZANOV AND THE APOCALYPSE*

1. After the Apocalypse: Merežkovskij on Rozanov

A few years after his death, Vasilij Rozanov's intuition, as described in *The Apocalypse of Our Times*, that the authentic essence of Russia—along with Eastern Judaism, of which Russia was so much a part—would both be swept away by the revolutionary storm, returned forcefully to the mind of his former friend and rival, Dmitrij Merežkovskij. The latter, by then exiled in Paris, paid full tribute to Rozanov's perspicacity in an essay of 1928 entitled, *Which of you? Judaism and Christianity*,¹ with a reflection which thematizes the "mystery of the Russian Revolution" from the point of view of a "social demonology."² The question of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, as well as the consequences of events in the aftermath of October 1917, are to be analyzed, according to Merežkovskij, "on a religious level," and not on a "national or political-international" one, just as Rozanov had done "a quarter of a century earlier" in the meetings of the *St Petersburg Society*. This crucial question "was thus posed before 'the Apocalypse,' and here it is, posed once again, in 'the Apocalypse.'"³ In Rozanov's prophetic statement of the problem could be perceived both the crash of approaching thunder, and the din of those who would bear down upon Russia: "It was an evil which we did not heed at that time;

* Translated into English by Karen Turnbull.

¹ Dmitrij S. Merežkovskij, "Kotoryj že iz vas? ludaizm i christianstvo," in *Carstvo Antichrista. Stat'i perioda emigracii*, ed. A. N. Nikoljukin (St Petersburg: RChGI, 2001), 349-363.

² Dmitrij S. Merežkovskij, "Tajna ruskoj revoljucii: Opit social'noj demonologii," in *Carstvo Antichrista. Stat'i perioda emigracii*, op. cit., 470-559.

³ *Ibid.*, 349.

it would be worse if, once again, we did not heed it.”⁴ While the goal of the Revolution was to establish the “Kingdom of the Antichrist,” the categories of religious phenomenology which Rozanov formulated, from *The place of Christianity in history* onwards, served in this context to enable Merežkovskij, who studied them meticulously, to understand how this could have happened and to try to see whether, on a religious level, some form of salvation from the Bolshevik dictatorship could be foreseen for Russia. The crux is that, contrary to the “Judeophobic” tradition that runs through much of the thinking of the “religious Renaissance,”⁵ Rozanov had seen very clearly that “actual” communism does not necessarily proceed from the essence of Judaism. Indeed, as Merežkovskij recognized, reporting from a broad florilegium of Rozanov’s quotations and cryptoquotations, Rozanov had understood—from the very beginning, and with the utmost clarity in *The Apocalypse of Our Times*—that the Messianic waiting of the people of Israel is not aimed at a secular translation in a political-utopian sense, as is the case with the misguided Messianism which is the basis of progressive-revolutionary thought. For Merežkovskij, the latter is, instead, characterized by a demonic mixture “of Aryan with Mongolian, of Europe with Asia, of ‘Eurasia,’”⁶ an ambiguous concept, dear to the hearts of a large number of the Russian *Intelligentsia*, which—in the form of “Scythianism” and “Pan-Mongolianism”—had been flirted with by the great figures of the Symbolist and decadent culture, from Solovëv to Blok. For Merežkovskij, it represented nothing other than a portent of the sinking of “Atlantis”⁷—the metaphorical continent which symbolized Western civilization in one of his last essay-novels—as actually came to pass with the Bolshevik revolution. Rozanov had ingeniously intuited that Atlantis was formed of two souls, the second of which, the Hebrew soul, contains the eternal theogonic turmoil

4 Ibid.

5 See Cesare De Michelis, *La giudeofobia in Russia. Dal libro del Kahal ai Protocolli dei savi di Sion* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2001).

6 Dmitrij S. Merežkovskij, *Carstvo Antichrista. Stat’i perioda emigracii*, op. cit., 359.

7 On these aspects of Merežkovskij’s work, see Aleksandr N. Nikoljukin, “Fenomen Merežkovskogo,” in *Merežkovskij pro et contra*, ed. Aleksandr N. Nikoljukin (St Petersburg: RChGi, 2001), 25-26; on the Atlantis motif, cf. Boris Ju. Poplavskij, “Po povodu ‘Atlantidy-Evropy,’” in *Ibid.*, 365-368.

which can positively fertilize Aryan rationalism, thus preventing it from falling prey to the “religion without God—[of] an anti-religion; Buddhism,”⁸ or, in other words, that “Mongolian-Aryan” para-religion which is Leninism:⁹

The pure Aryan is a genius in art, in science, in philosophy, in politics, it is only in religion that he is not [a genius]... The pure Semitic is a genius in religion: it can be said that, throughout history, he does nothing but create religions; in the worst case—in Egypt, Babylon, Canaan—he creates gods, in the best—in Israel—God. The Aryan teaches the people to know and to doubt, the Semitic to believe and to pray. The former has atheism in his blood; the latter, religion. The former is a “decide,” the latter is father of gods (*bogootec*). To create God, Aryan virility requires Semitic femininity; to leaven the Aryan dough, Semitic yeast is needed; to ignite the Aryan tinder, Semitic fire is necessary.¹⁰

Even Christianity—the best there is, and which will always exist in the world—“is the flower and fruit of this Semitic-Aryan polarity-infatuation,” which, in its harmonic and miraculous fullness, lasted only a moment:

The will which overcame the world: “Thy kingdom come”—came into being in the first Judeo-Christian communities, from Peter and John to Paul. But this is only one point, a flash, an instant. To the daughter of Israel, the Son is only a Lover, and the Groom is the Father. She turned back to the Father from the Son, but could not forgive her “Seducer” (as Jesus of Nazareth is called in the Talmud). And the love ended in hate, the brief union in eternal detachment. But a vestige of love remained in the world; the shadow of love is Christianity, and only from this shadow can we gauge what love once was.¹¹

Only Rozanov, after his brief lapse into anti-Semitism, penetrated to the bottom of the “theo-dramatics” that characterizes the processuality of the religious meta-history of the West:

⁸ Dmitrij S. Merežkovskij, *Carstvo Antichrista. Stat'i perioda emigracii*, op. cit., 350.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 354.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 350-351.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Rozanov, it would seem, understood the mystery of the Judeo-Christian polarity, as no other Christians and no other Jews did; he understood the sacred and terrible mystery of Israel—the immanent-transcendent sex, the sex of man in God...¹²

If the mystery Israel of is circumcision as the wedding ring that joins God to His people, and if the mystery of circumcision is in turn “theogamy” (*Bogosupružestvo*), then Rozanov’s merit lies in having “unashamedly” revealed the risk—disastrous to Aryan-Christian civilization—of the breaking of this sacred bond which has transformed the ancient non-dialectic polarity of the West into an outright split. After the completion of the revolutionary Apocalypse, this truth, which links the “blood of circumcision” inseparably to the “blood of Golgotha,” arises once more in all its dramatic significance:

The Blood of circumcision and the Blood of Golgotha ... here is “the Apocalypse” of all the Judeo-Christian centuries and of the present day. “Shameful wound, *pudendum vulnus*,” says one of the ancient priests about the wound of the castrated god Attis. And the wound of the incision—of the circumcision—between the two Testaments is equally “shameful.” Herein lies the sexual *Noli me tangere* mystery of all Israel; the enflamed tip of the flesh—the “extreme flesh”—the extreme modesty and fear.¹³

For this reason, Rozanov’s shameless courage now takes on, in Merežkovskij’s eyes, an almost providential significance because, in order to teach the entire European civilization, he has taken upon himself the tremendous risk of removing “that veil from the face of Israel”:

Rozanov—the “transcendent shameless one,” the “pre-established” one—was sent into the world to expose this “shameful wound,” because it is nonetheless necessary to lay it bare: from “shameful” it [the wound] may become mortal.¹⁴

While this “wound” had never seemed as lethal as [it did] “in our times, on Russia’s body,” its “gory incision,” according to Merežkovskij, follows two

¹² Ibid., 351-352.

¹³ Ibid., 353.

¹⁴ Ibid.

lines: the first “anti-Christian” one is also fundamentally anti-Semitic and is represented by Weininger, who “like Rozanov, is also Judeo-Christian, but in the reverse order: Rozanov has detached himself, or would like to detach himself from Christianity for Judaism, whereas the other [Weininger] [goes] from Judaism to Christianity.”¹⁵ The point is, once again, of a political-theological nature: for Weininger, in fact, communism represents the pinnacle of the penetration of Judaism and of the “absolute Feminine” into the flow of Western civilization, since “property is connected inextricably with particularity, with individuality”¹⁶ and forms the opposite of the equation represented by the terms “Hebraism-femininity-impersonality.”¹⁷ For this reason, in *Sex and Character*, Weininger distinguishes between “socialism” (Aryan; Owen, Carlyle, Ruskin, Fichte) and “communism” (Judaic; Marx). In reality, Merežkovskij writes, “we know today, from experience, that this is not absolutely the case: the root of communism is Hebraic; the flower and the fruit is Russian, Aryan, or, more precisely, Mongol-Aryan (Lenin).”¹⁸ Along with this, which presents significant points of intersection between the characteristics of Russian “Judeo-phobic” tradition, which can also be seen in the *imjaslavie*, there is, however, another line: “Gogol’, Čadaev, Dostoevskij, Vladimir Solov’ev, Rozanov—all the secret, nocturnal soul of Russia—Semitic-Aryan, Jewish-Christian.” The merging of such diverse figures in a single “family” can be explained, according to Merežkovskij, if one takes into account that the “spiritual contagion” of the Aryan world by the Semitic world occurs at the “deepest [level] of the conscience—in the emotions, in the will, in the blood,” whereas the superficial differences, even striking ones, give way to convergence on the three fundamental pillars of “Semitic religious dynamics”: “theogonic sex” (*bogoroždajuščij pol*); “fixation on the prophetic spirit” and the “desire for the end of the world—for ‘Apocalypse.’ These three forces (*sily*) all act, openly or secretly, in the Semitic-Aryan soul of Russia.”¹⁹ The proof of this can be seen, for example,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 354.

¹⁶ Otto Weininger, *Sesso e Carattere*, (Pordenone: Edizioni Studio tesi, 1992), 399.

¹⁷ Dmitrij S. Merežkovskij, *Carstvo Antichrista. Stat’i perioda emigracii*, op. cit., 354.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 354-355.

in the “mystical delirium,” the “sexual perversion” and the “apocalyptic panic” that characterize the various phases of the oeuvre of Gogol, an “Aryan, frightened out of his wits—as Rozanov had already seen—by the ancient ‘ancestral bogeymen,’” or the extraordinary and terrible experience of Čadaev, who,

according to the gendarmes and the Russians atheists, was also a fool... a worldly Adonis, a ‘womanish prophet,’ a lover of women who loved no-one either because he was born a eunuch, or because he had castrated himself for the Kingdom of Heaven, a poor knight “of the unattainable, for the mind that sees,” *Lumen coeli*, of the *Sancta Rosa*... an Aryan burned to ashes by the Semitic fire.²⁰

Dostoevskij’s same anti-Semitic hysteria is, for Merežkovskij, ambiguous and revealing. “Remember what Dostoevskij wished to be with his anti-Semitic panic: ‘The Jew is coming! The Antichrist is coming!’ and what he was—an angry prophet, epileptic and sentimental, exactly like the purest of the Semites, Muhammad.”²¹ While Solovëv—in whom Merežkovskij early on recognized extraordinary *ante litteram* “ecumenical” merits—was in this sense perhaps the most significantly complete figure:

Remember Vladimir Solovëv, with his face like that of an Old Testament prophet, and his apocalyptic “Tale of the Antichrist,” the three visions of the One [i.e. The Divine Sophia]—whether she be the ancient Semitic Astarte or the Christian Mother of God—the “three appointments” in Moscow, London and Egypt—the ancient desert from whence came Israel, the “prayer for the Jews” before death, and you will, perhaps, understand that if there ever existed, after the Apostle Paul, a Christian who knew that “all Israel” would be saved, that Christian was Vladimir Solovëv.²²

The finishing line of this genealogy of the Russian “Judeo-Christian” soul is Vasilij Rozanov: “Finally, remember, at last, as the one whom everything has reached, and in whom everything is fulfilled—Rozanov, with his lament

²⁰ Ibid., 355.

²¹ Ibid., 355-356.

²² Ibid., 356.

which lacerates the soul of Russia: ‘Which of you?’”²³ Yet, in confirmation of Rozanov’s predictions and pessimism, it was not this second “line” which asserted itself, but the first. In this sense—contrary to the prognosis which Merežkovskij advanced in 1902 in his great book on *Dostoevskij and Tolstoj*, and in his 1905 essay on Dostoevskij, *The Prophet of the Russian Revolution*²⁴—the Revolution turned out to be a triumph of nihilism of the “spirit” over the life-giving heat of the “flesh”:²⁵

But all this wise, mysterious, nocturnal Aryan-Semitic, Jewish-Christian soul of Russia, did not win; the winner is the daytime soul—Aryan only; not Jewish and not Christian—from L. Tolstoj to ... shameful and terrible as it is to say—to Maxim Gor’kij. But even Tolstoj is perhaps “Christian”? Yes, and of the purest kind: he cleansed Christianity of Judaism—of sex, of prophetism, of the Apocalypse, the New Testament—of the Old, the Progeny (*Synovstvo*) of the Fatherhood (*Otčestvo*) Two fatal constellations, two signs which determine the destinies of Russia—the Lion and the Lamb—the Aryan, Buddhist lion and the Semitic-Aryan, Jewish-Christian lamb—the sign of L. Tolstoj and the sign of Dostoevskij. Under one, Russia has fallen into ruin; may she not be saved under the other? Her day of sin has arrived under the sign of the lion; will her holy night be reached under the sign of the Lamb?²⁶

Thus, to the siren-calls of anti-Semitism which emerged once again in Russia (even in those who, among the *Intelligentsia émigrés*, held that Bolshevism had undeniable Hebraic roots), Merežkovskij, following Rozanov’s lead, responds by referring to the foundation constituted by the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4, and repeated by Christ in Mark 12:29:

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ In this essay, Merežkovskij had countered the “new Christianity” announced by the great writer with the “circumcised and Judaized” reactionary orthodox vision which coexists with the former in his work (see Roberto Valle, *Dostoevskij politico e i suoi interpreti. L’esodo dall’Occidente*, [Rome: Archivio Izzi, 1990], 41-46).

²⁵ See Dmitrij S. Merežkovskij, *Tolstoj e Dostoevskij. Vita-creazione-religione*, 2nd ed. (Bari: Laterza, 1947).

²⁶ Dmitrij S. Merežkovskij, *Carstvo Antichrista. Stat’i perioda emigracii*, op. cit., 356-357.

“Which of you two?” Is a tremendous question, but the reply is even more tremendous: “Jesus, not Yahweh”. This means: the Old Testament is annihilated by the New—the Son who kills the Father. I have long since understood this and for a long time now I have responded to my “temptors” of the left: he who is a friend of Israel cannot be other than Christian, and of the right: a Christian cannot be an enemy of Israel. Anti-Semitism is absolute anti-Christianism... Who destroyed Russia? The Jews? No, the Russians. Lenin—a melting-pot of Russian and Mongolian—of the Aryan West with the East, not a Semitic generator of gods, but a Mongolian deicide. Lenin is already “Eurasia.” From Lenin to Rasputin—here is the movement of what is “genuinely Russian,” ah, of that which is “Christian,” of the spirit of the Antichrist, which has destroyed Russia.²⁷

2. The Ambiguous Polarity of the Sacred: Sex and Skopčestvo

Marriage is not just a mystery, but the greatest of all mysteries This is why any church that does not consider this act as a true religious mystery is neither holy nor true; and, on the contrary, a religion, a church, a sect reveals its richness of content in the extent to which it looks on marriage with depth and penetration. The *skopčestvo*, therefore, is the negation of all that is sacred; it is the other pole not only of Christianity, but of all religions. It is not possible to sufficiently reject, to express fully all the negative feelings that it inspires: all humanity, each of God’s creatures ought to rebel against it and rid themselves of it, as their own greatest negation, as a *nefas*, the mere thought of which causes one to tremble.²⁸

Rozanov expresses himself thus in a text of 1896, later included in the work *Apokalipsičeskaja sekta* dedicated to the “flagellators” and the “castrated ones,” the two sects descended from the “old believers” in whom he had gradually come to see the extremes of the tendential denial of the sexuality present in Christianity, in the dual form, on the one hand, of the mortification of the body—as a spiritualizing surrogate of the repression of sexual ecstasy—and on the other hand of “castration” as definitive

²⁷ Ibid., 361.

²⁸ Vasilij V. Rozanov, *Apokalipsičeskaja sekta (Chlysty i Skopcy)* (St Petersburg: Tipografija F. Vajsberga i P. Geršunina, 1914), 15.

“liberation” and “redemption” of the body, that is to say, of the union of man with the Earth.²⁹ The aim of this essay—as of others dedicated to the forms of traditional Russian Christianity—is to declare the impossibility for the *Intelligentsia* of recovering the spiritual heritage of the “old believers,” which many figures of the “religious renaissance” (above all Merežkovskij and Berdjaev, following in the footsteps of Dostoevskij and Solov’ev) studied with interest at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the aim of devising a salvific “Christian policy” for *fin-de-siècle* Russia. As has been noted,

Rozanov wants ... to point out to his reader-interlocutor the inability of the “culture” of Russian Orthodox religion—not only in its official version (the synodal Church) but also in that of the Old Believers—to serve as a basis for the construction of modern man and society.³⁰

As in *The Dark Face*, in fact, Rozanov wishes here to warn against that *duchoborčestvo* that “threw itself into the vertiginous abyss of the new religious consciousness”³¹ and to help dispel the “dream of Christians in spirit,” through analysis of the forms of sectarian ritual, which represent nothing more than a hyperbolic realization of that tendential Christian nihilism which Rozanov never stopped asking himself about throughout the entire course of his work. In this case too, Rozanov’s interest finds a decisive antecedent in various Dostoevskian motifs. As has been noted, in fact, Dostoevskij had always had a great interest in “sectarian” forms of spirituality, to the point that, in *The Devils*, he made Šatov express the apocalyptic desire of the *chlystovščina* for the coming, *hic et nunc*, of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, when “all would become Christs.” In the famous conversation with Stavrogin, Šatov shows himself to be imbued with sectarian millenarianism, maintaining human nature’s irrepressible need for

²⁹ See Laura Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom. A Russian Folktale* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999).

³⁰ Gabriella Schiaffino, “Il volto oscuro. Metafisica del cristianesimo. Alle radici della scrittura di V.V. Rozanov,” in AA.VV., *Vasilij Rozanov. Atti del Convegno internazionale di Gargnano del Garda*, 1-4 October 1990, ed. Jitka Křesálková (Milan: Università degli Studi, 1993), 230.

³¹ Vasilij V. Rozanov, *Apokaliptičeskaja sekta (Chlysty i Skopcy)*, op. cit., 8.

deification (*oboženie*), which leads to an imminent immanent realization of redemption, in which all the “problems” will have been resolved and there will no longer be room for “pauperism.”³² Solov’ev himself, during the course of his life, had demonstrated an ambivalent and controversial interest in the *depositum* of popular religiousness of a sectarian stamp, which in his thinking represents a sort of *pendant* to the idea of the universal Church, which in his mature thought, as we know, is the most authentic incarnation of universal truth. The dialectic between self-deification and ecclesiastically mediated salvation, between personal “enlightenment” (*prosveščenie*) and soteriology based on *sobornost’*, is one of the most interesting aspects of his religious philosophy. As early as 1881, in a lecture whose text was published posthumously in 1906,³³ Solov’ev contrasted “popular faith” with the concept of “personal *prosveščenie*,” understood as the spurious result arising from the secularization of “populist” religiousness, thus associating Western nihilism with the millenarian and anarchic autonomy of sectarianism. Solov’ev writes:

Personal enlightenment requires unconditional truth, but ... does not believe in truth. The people, on the contrary, believe in it, they believe that the truth ... by virtue of its own moral strength can overcome non-truth ... This truth in itself, the valid truth, is God ... Personal enlightenment has repudiated God.³⁴

Of particular interest is the fact that the theocratic idea in this early lecture is still seen as a temporary *remedium peccati*, before the definitive realization of an “immanent” redemption which has the apocalyptic traits of the faith of the *Staroveroy*:

As long as the ideal of absolute divine truth has not yet been achieved, as long as all men have not become Christs and all women

³² Piama Gajdenko, *Vladimir Solov’ev i kul’tura serebrjannogo veka* (Moscow: Progress-Tradicija, 2001), 22.

³³ This public lecture bore the title *Critique of contemporary enlightenment and crisis of the world process* and was produced posthumously through the transcripts of one of the participants (see Piama Gajdenko, op. cit., 22-23).

³⁴ Quoted in Piama Gajdenko, op. cit., 23.

Bogorodicy, the people ... live in the State. But the State never has and never will recognize this external area as something autonomous.³⁵

While, perhaps, in this passage Solov'ev limits himself to saying that the faith of the *narodničestvo* should be “overcome” in favour of a theocracy based on the conception of “unitotality” (since the irreducible autonomy of the sectarian spirit is not able to accept the exteriority of the State's moment in its own anarchic-millenarian *Weltanschauung*), it was sufficient for Michail Bachtin to have included Solov'ev in a line of thought marked by the prosecution of the spirit of *chlystovstvo* in the whole of modern and contemporary Russian culture, which ranges from the philosopher and poet Skovoroda to the “Imaginit” poet N. Kljuev and to the whole avant-garde, a line of thought in which “the Holy Spirit and the Mother of God predominate over the Father and the Son ...”³⁶ While this judgement may apply to a substantial part of the avant-garde culture (in particular to Symbolist poetics), it has been duly noted that the aestheticist *hubris* of the avant-garde is the polar opposite of the universalizing aspiration of Solov'ev's Unitotality metaphysics.³⁷ In his essay *The Great Schism and Christian Politics* (1882-83), Solov'ev had in fact joined Protestantism with *staroverie* under the banner of an “antichristian” and particularistic revolt against the “ecumenical” principle of Orthodoxy (and also of Catholicism):

However much the faith of our Old Believers may differ from Protestantism, it appears that the fundamental principle of both are one and the same: *personal opinion against the universal determination of the Church, the part against the whole.*³⁸

The Old Believers' adherence to the letter of the ritual freezes the spirit of Christianity in the pure past, while the individual ecstatic-prophetic experience of the sectarians (who, although they originate from such experience, also form its inverse in a certain sense) blocks it in an

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Michail Bachtin, “Lekcija ob A. Belom, F. Sologube, A. Bloke, Esenine” (transcribed by R. M. Mirskaja), in AA. VV. *Dialog. Karnaval, “Chronotop”* 2-3 (1993): 139.

³⁷ Piama Gajdenko, op. cit., 23.

³⁸ Quoted in Ibid., 23-24.

abstract present dimension, both united—according, still, to Solovëv—with Protestantism in seeing “the current religious experience, only the present moment of religious consciousness, as it is expressed in the psychic states and moral behaviours of separate people.”³⁹ In the mystique of the “castrated ones,” in particular, God has no other objective existence than in corporeity, galvanized by extreme forms of asceticism, by the individual “Saviours” who continually appear within the sect, to “force,” so to speak, that Redemption which they lack the faith to submit to the objectivity of the Church and to the providential presence of the tradition throughout history. For this reason, the *chlysty* chose, for their own rites, an eloquent denomination, “*radenija*,” whose etymon—an element on which Rozanov would also perceptively focus—recalls the idea of a “laborious effort,” which, in a Promethean manner, and through the efficacy of the solely corporeal *performances*, claims to achieve an ambiguous deification, which eliminates any effective intervention of Grace.⁴⁰

For Rozanov, in his early work, while the “fable” of an exclusively “spiritual” Christianity continues to seduce the best minds of his time, this is due to nothing more than a “fatal philological error”⁴¹ that has marked the entire history of *Christianity*, generating that lethal seduction for the “afterlife”⁴² that finds its most disturbing apocalyptic manifestation in the sectarianism of the “Old Believers.” According to Rozanov, who analyzes Matthew 19:12 in his 1905 text, the origin of the “enthusiasm” in the grip of which Russian sectarian radicalism—from the revolt of the early *Starovery* against the mid-seventeenth century liturgy reforms brought about by Nikon (giving rise to the *Raskol*, the great Orthodox schism) and up to the last offshoots of fanaticism which burst forth in the middle of the twentieth century with the “flagellators” and the “castrated ones”—went as

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁰ “In their eyes,” wrote Solovëv about the *chlysty*, “the Divinity does not have its own permanent shape in this world, and takes shape only through the spiritual activities of man. It is not by chance that these sectarians chose the name of their religious action; this designation expresses the essence itself of their doctrine, the fact, that is, that the Grace of God is obtained only through the Care (*radenie*) of man, in other words it is the product (*proizvedenie*) of the tension of human efforts” (quoted in Piama Gajdenko, *op. cit.*, 24-25).

⁴¹ Vasilij V. Rozanov, *Apokalipsičeskaja sekta (Chlysty i Skopcy)*, *op. cit.*, 116-133.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 26.

far as practising self-castration and mass suicide as a means of attaining liberation from a world regarded as being already irremediably in the hands of the Antichrist, can be largely traced to the misleading translation of the famous passage from the Gospel of Matthew, which, as we know, reads as follows:

For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it. (Matthew 19:12)

According to Rozanov, in the expression of the *Septuagint dià tèn basieian ton ouranon*, the preposition *dià* does not express an adverb of scope (*cel'*),⁴³ but rather a mere “causal circumstance.”⁴⁴ The introduction of the final meaning in the Greek translation would thus be due to the translators’ need to resolve the “undecidable obscurity” of the text in the reader’s favour. But Christ, who in this context refers directly to the rabbinical precepts which were taken from the Shammai’s Talmudic school, in listing the casuistry concerning eunuchs “does *not* indicate an ideal, *nor* an aspiration,” but instead limits himself to repeating what has been specifically foreseen by Jewish legal tradition, juxtaposing the first two cases (“from birth” and “by the hands of men”) with a third case, which connects the condition of infertility to the “Kingdom of Heaven.” The hermeneutical problem is, then, to understand the original meaning of expressions that sound in Greek like “Kingdom” and “Heaven,” seeking to remove the “spiritualizing” incrustation which has caused the misunderstanding in Christian tradition: “What is ‘Basileia’? what is ‘Ouranos’ before Copernicus, after whom everything on the stars became so empty and soulless (*obezodušilos*)?”⁴⁵

In S.N. Trubeckoj’s important work *History of the Doctrine of the Logos*, published in 1906, Rozanov thus finds that at the time of Christ, the two expressions “Kingdom of Heaven” and “Kingdom of God” must have had a univocal meaning, since:

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

in the language of the time “heaven” was constantly used instead of “God,” just as they used other expressions in order not to mention the Holy Name in vain: “I have sinned against *Heaven* and against you” (Luke 15:18); the scribes swore on “heaven,” said “name of Heaven” (*Shem-Shemaim*) instead of the name of God, “fear of heaven” instead of “fear of God.” In this way, the expression “kingdom of heaven” came to be understood not as the sphere in which God exists, not as God’s throne, but as “He who sits on it” (Matthew 23:22). Moreover, in Jewish literature “kingdom” does not designate the Country, but the rule or the *dominion* (*vладыčestvo*).⁴⁶

This ought to have been the reference point for those who knew the Jewish literature of the period in which the doctrine of the Logos was developed between the Palestinian Jews and the Alexandrian Jews, that same period when Christ uttered words that are so enigmatic to the modern ear. If this is true, the last part of Matthew’s verse which is the source of the sectarian “delirium” (but which basically inspired the entire woeful Christian inclination towards asceticism and monasticism) according to Rozanov should be translated more directly as “‘by Divine will’ or ‘because of Divine will,’ or ‘in accordance with the circumstances of Divine will,’ ‘by the will of God.’”⁴⁷ In order to definitively grasp who the eunuchs might be whom Christ, in the certainty of being fully understood, mentioned with an expression which, for Rozanov, was certainly non-judgmental, it is ultimately necessary to refer to the context of rabbinic literature that was surely involved in the “pre-understanding” of the Gospel passage, as confirmed by the testimony of Eusebius. Thus, Rozanov recalled the Talmud tractate *Yebamoth*, where among the list of causes of infertility, which give rise to an impediment to marriage, are in fact enumerated three types of *skopec*: “*Seris kamma*—‘solar eunuch:’ persons who from birth suffer from complete and irreparable virile impotence.”⁴⁸ Here, Rozanov makes a peculiar interpretation, guided by his religion of fertility, which interprets in an objective-privative sense the reference to the sun of the

⁴⁶ Sergej N. Trubeckoj, “Učenie o Logose v ego istorii,” in Sergej Trubeckoj, *Sočinenija* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Mysl’, 1994), 428-429.

⁴⁷ Vasilij V. Rozanov, *Apokalipsičeskaja sekta (Chlysty i Skopcy)*, op. cit., 122-123.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

status constructus, maintaining that he thereby accounts for the singularity of the Talmudic expression that surprises because of its “great antiquity:”

It is known that the Egyptians also worshiped the Sun (the sacred city of Heliopolis), and in parallel in that same era they worshiped Apis (a particular type of bull), the temporal and earthly incarnation ... of *solar force* (*sila*), of the strength of productivity (*proizvoditel'nost*). The “solar eunuch” was the opposite pole of this Apis: he was totally lacking in reproductive force, he had no “sun” within him, no “divine spark” ... no “heavenly ray”, no “celestial fire” (in an Egyptian sense).⁴⁹

Then there was the “*Seris adam*,” the eunuch “by the hand of man”; this concerned for the most part Jewish prisoners who fell into the hands of Eastern rulers who enslaved and castrated them so they could serve the women of the court.⁵⁰ Finally, there was a third category, the “*Seris bidi Shamayim*,” the eunuch “by the will of heaven,” the one which for Rozanov constitutes the heart of the *vexata quaestio*. In this regard, Rozanov recalls that the Talmud’s painstaking accuracy on the conditions of possibility and impossibility of marriage becomes particularly pronounced in the case of a priest who cannot marry a widow, a divorcee, or a woman “deprived of her virginity” neither through rape nor through her own will. Such a woman was called “*muktat ez*” “wounded by a tree,” and the expression indicated a woman who through an “unfortunate fortuitousness” lost her virginity by falling accidentally. But the same could happen to a man who accidentally emasculated himself, as evidenced by the Aggadic literature, which sets out the matrimonial case studies concerning levirate marriage, when such a “eunuch by misfortune”⁵¹ could be faced with the dilemma of marrying the wife of his dead brother or of having to reject her. Certainly, for Rozanov, the Christ who said that not a hair falls from man’s head without the will of God must have considered the case in point, which applied to every completely “accidental” case, according to our understanding, that was not caused “in the mother’s womb” or “by men.” The translation of the last part of the verse (“He who has ears hears”) introduces an “imprudent” term,

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 123-124.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

since Christ speaks in the indicative, referring to a fact already known and not to “indicate an ideal,” or to “recall to the ‘understanding,’”⁵² and it is clear that his “wish,” within a context in which the landmarks of the matrimonial ethics of *Genesis* are reiterated, refers exclusively to the only case—that of adultery—in which divorce is possible, outside of which it is not legitimate to repudiate one’s wife.⁵³ From this fundamental misunderstanding arises the radical moralism of historic Christianity that brought about not only the negative stance of monasticism with regard to sexuality and matrimony but also the self-damaging fanaticism of the *skopčestvo*. But the conclusion that Rozanov draws from this analysis is once again—positively—surprising: while, in fact, the essays of the *Apokalipsičeskaja sekt* arose from the impressions that several famous legal cases against the last *skopcy* awoke in him, Rozanov believes that the sectarians should not be persecuted, given that they themselves only put into effect “anatomically” that which monasticism demands “physiologically,” being led astray, furthermore, by a deceptive translation:

The religion of the spirit, of moral ascesis, of compassion for one’s neighbour, under the influence of this inexact translation could not but lead—and in fact did lead—to strained efforts, sometimes gentle, sometimes brutal, either oblique or direct, to “mutilate” oneself: if not anatomically (Selivanov), then physiologically, in life, in existence (monasticism). And the entire pillar of Christianity tilted to one side...⁵⁴

However, these “obscure mužiki” should not be persecuted, nor should authoritarian missions of “correction of faith” be organized, aimed at the “poor people” completely in the dark about the fatal historical significance of that insignificant preposition *dià*: “... why persecute *them*? And *who* should persecute them? Precisely those who, with an inexact translation, ‘led them into temptation’ ...”⁵⁵ Moreover, for Rozanov, even the extreme mortification practices of the *chlystovščina* (a popular corruption, with an

52 Ibid., 128.

53 Ibid., 130.

54 Ibid., 132.

55 Ibid., 133.

exchange of the liquid consonant, of *Christovščina*, literally *imitatio Christi*, taken as far as self-martyrdom) are not purely a negative degeneration: in his thinking, marked by a programmatic “duplicité,” the phenomenology of the Sacred, even in its most distressing aspects, can never be reduced, psychoanalytically, to a mere symptomatic expression of sexual repression. The proof of this is the *pietas* and interest that Rozanov feels for the rites and living habits of the Russian heretics, which he considered to be the highest degree of that ineffectual spiritualizing denial of corporeity which Christianity introduced into the body of “carnal Israel.” According to Rozanov, in other words, a genuine epiphany of the Sacred occurs in the *chlysty*, which only for historical reasons ends up by causing monstrous effects. In them, in fact, rather than being a passive and empty ritual, prayer becomes an “authentic *communion* with God, it is the convergence of one’s own strengths (*sily*) with divine ones, it is a certain phase of ecstasy, of completed movement.”⁵⁶

The sect’s most relevant ritual display consisted of the *radenija* (from the root of the ancient Russian verb *radet’*, signifying to take care, the *Besorgen* for someone or something, in the case of salvation, accompanied by an apocalyptic and piercing feeling of imminence) during which the “vessels” of the *chlysty*—who called themselves thus in order to emphasize their own exceptional nature in comparison to the “sea” of other believers—sang specific songs and performed frenetic circular dances.⁵⁷ In this ritual, the sectarians carried out actions that are common to all Christianity, but which, in their case, are practiced even “in the *method* itself of salvation;” their “excessive” manner of living the religious experience is in fact characterized by a frenetic care-taking activity, in the same way as ordinary human labour: “The ‘radenie’ is the same as ‘work’ (*rabota*), laborious effort (*trud*), a movement carried out for religious ends; ‘work of Israel,’ as these same ‘chlysty’ call these ‘radenija.’”⁵⁸ Dressed in long white tunics, in the manner of the “redeemed from the Earth” in *Revelation* 14:4, they yield themselves in a furious head-spinning dance “to exhaustion, to complete depletion of their strength, after which they

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

‘stagger like flies.’”⁵⁹ According to Rozanov, this circular movement, which serves to intensify the religious “feeling,” to accelerate the “tempo” and to increase its “tension,” was discovered by the *chlisty* gradually and on their own, without any knowledge of the fact they had been preceded in ancient times by the “Galli,” by the “Korybantes” and by the Greco-Roman “Salii” priests, and earlier still by similar phenomena in Phoenicia and Syria. What is significant is that here, as elsewhere in pagan and Semitic antiquity—but also in Christianity (although actually, paradoxically, in the context of a heresy that appears to take the mortification of sexuality to its greatest extreme)—Rozanov identifies the root and the objective of the ritual in a single Dionysian inebriation, in which, *e contrario*, the body’s *Grosse Vernunft* is still expressed: “We have defined this as religious-Bacchic ecstasy.”⁶⁰ Such ecstasy is not lacking even in *chlystovščina*, which is also a form of asceticism that shies away “from meat, from wine and from conjugal relations;” despite everything, through the circular movement of the body, the sectarian may arouse an “involuntary” state of “psychic inebriation,” as evidenced by the jargon of the rite, rich in colorful, epoptic images, which the *chlisty* themselves explain mysterially thus: “He did not drink with his lips of flesh, yet *he is inebriated*.”⁶¹ To temper their own evangelical spirit, it could happen that, during the ritual gatherings, one would be struck in the face without reacting, and indeed, would turn the other cheek, thus integrally carrying out Christ’s precept, on the basis of a principle which states, in an almost Nietzschean manner, “a *man of God* the more he may bear, the more full he is of divine forces.”⁶² If abused, the sectarian “little god” (*Božek*) remained silent, in order to be able to later say to the offender: “*My God is more,*’ or in other words, ‘*there is more God in me than in you.*” For Rozanov, this expresses the conception of “eternal freedom,” which the sectarians constantly begged for in their prayers; it is, however, an idea which “has nothing in common with the term freedom which we use” and which reveals the decisive paradox of the heresy:

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 12.

Their “freedom” is *the freedom of the spirit from the bonds of the body*. Thanks to this freedom they “contort themselves,” and the soul is then freed in flight—they “prophesy”; but this is an ecstasy, a moment: it passes, and the soul falls once more into the bonds of the body. In a natural way, the thought could have and should have occurred of a *durable way* of liberating oneself from this burdensome shell, from the eternally searing, biting, *living* sin that we carry in our body. And the “radenie” ... is momentary. The external mutilation of oneself draws near, it accompanies every convulsion if the latter is a means of, an *effort* towards, ecstasy. In the end, the last idea—that of a second, necessary and possible “expiation.”⁶³

Thus, slaves to a nominalism dating back to the dawn of the schismatic tradition, the sectarians end up by interpreting all the facts of the Revelation as mere “parables,” not as salvific events that actually happened, but as “an archetype of spiritual relationships within man.” Although they constantly invoke the name of the Redeemer (to the extent that their epithet derives from this), in reality they fall victim to a “tension” directed at the future, which delivers them to the pure nothing of the here and now, to an unbearable earthly “desert” from which it is good to flee as soon as possible. In the essays collected in *Apokalipsičeskaja Sekta*, Rozanov also gathers and comments on the *Poslanija* (“sayings”) and the *strady* (“martyrdoms”) of Kondratij Selivanov,⁶⁴ or in other words the precepts, prayers and anecdotes from the life of Selivanov, which make up an “autobiography” gathered by his students and appear—on the side of the popular religiousness of the uneducated classes—as a sort of *Kreutzer Sonata*, dictated by an illiterate “apostle of purity and love.”⁶⁵

From the *corpus* of the testimonies and documents from the sect, the profile emerges of a wanderer who, travelling throughout Russia, reveals to all the tale of “purity” (*čistota* = castration, as Rozanov rectified it), with the conviction that the Serpent’s head has not yet been crushed by the Seed of Woman. In so doing, Selivanov obeys the schismatic nominalism previously referred to: “*The grace of the doctrine is there, while the grace of*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 134-152 and 153-166.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

the fact, is not. He adduced the fact itself: he completed the second and more difficult half of expiation, and sealed it with his own blood."⁶⁶ The Savior's words in Matthew 19:12—that even the Church interprets “allegorically” (*inoskazatel'no*)—are taken by him in a literal sense, for “lack of virile truth,” without taking into account that the canonical tradition also contemplates the precept of Deuteronomy 23:1 (“He that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord”) while, in fact, only the ideal of the “redeemed” of Revelation 14 returned obsessively in his teachings:

Selivanov was a virgin, not physically, but *because of the very structure of the soul*; of all the ideals of Christianity—love, mercy, meekness—the ideal of *bodily purity* and of *immaculate imagination* was the one which struck him most deeply of all.⁶⁷

Persecuted and arrested by the authorities in various places throughout Russia, called a “sorcerer” as the Judeans did with Christ—as he noted with pleasure in the *Strady*—the “obscure mužik of Tula” had developed his fascinating theory in the manner of a “new mathematical formula,” with which he intended to win followers to “his cause.”⁶⁸ In his tale, according to Rozanov, there is no trace of deception: it is, instead, a “prodigious self-deception on the part of the entire *duchoborčestvo*,” for which one must “supply the psychology,” an illusion of which it is necessary to analyse the “logic.”⁶⁹ How it is possible, indeed, to believe that redemption can be attained in advance by those very persons who—under the illusion of transforming themselves integrally into “the image and likeness” of Christ—in fact, actually go so far as to disfigure that likeness with their own body? “Their crime against God is more terrible than that against humanity: because God *has given* and He is the Only one who can take away even the smallest part of his ‘likeness.’”⁷⁰ What is the point of

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

“hurling oneself on sin like one would hurl oneself with a hunting spear on a bear,”⁷¹ especially since the sin concerned must already have been vanquished, passed, from which we cannot expect to re-merit anything? By castrating themselves, the *skopcy* pursue a goal that has nothing to do with an effort at moral elevation and with the pursuit of an earthly “purity” that attests to the early arrival of the “Kingdom of God” in the concrete canonical sense of the Scriptures. In actual fact, they cultivate a diabolical metaphysical *hubris* that aims to establish them in a spectral “world behind the world,” an authentic *Hinterwelt*, which, in Rozanov’s reading, betrays unequivocal Nietzschean roots:

Now, having forgotten the torments of a fleeting operation, they are pure, *without vice*, unblemished by grave sin (*inaccessible*), proudly raised over our violated world, above sin and malediction; among their kind, they are the men *of the hereafter*.⁷²

Crossing the “threshold of passage into this life of *the hereafter*,” the *skopcy* take definitive leave from the sinful imperfection of the Earth, reaching—in this paradoxical way—the dream of an ambiguous *Übermenschentum*, which represents the exact opposite of the vital concreteness of religion:

“Heaven forgive me, forgive me Earth, forgive me sun, forgive me moon, forgive me lakes, rivers and mountains, forgive me *all of you, earthly elements*” He knows that he will never again look with the same look, the look *of before*, at these elements; which *he* transforms and *they* transform themselves for him. But there now, the act is performed; *this* world—is left behind, and in the *new* world, during the “*radenie*,” these authentic Bacchic songs spread out...⁷³

But for Rozanov, the fact that the sectarians nonetheless demonstrate, although in this perverse way, an irrepressible need for “Dionysian” ecstasy shows that the whole tradition of the schism originates in the “popular” reaction to the prevalence of an abstractly formal spirit in religion and in

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

life itself, that this is the contradictory and tragic “ascent to the ideal, an effort towards the *best*” that ought to be realized immanently but which instead gives rise to a distorted phenomenology in which the creative *vis* of the human soul is nonetheless discharged, dissatisfied with the exteriority of the forms given by a dispirited and abstract tradition:

This is unbearable for the human soul, which then begins to “turn”—“following the course of the sun” or even “counter to the sun”; unbearable, we say: since the nature of the human soul is *life, action, initiative*—since the soul of man is the mystery of God and, above all, a *creative* mystery. Instead, with us every creation, every initiative, action is supplanted by the forms—alas, by the forms that castrate the spirit! What remains to the poor Russian man, what have these last two centuries left him? ... “You will work six days and on the seventh you will go to mass; and in the evening you will drink tea.” This is little, it is truly little! We—composers, artists, writers, we 1500-2000 people—we must not forget the millions who remain ... We can fantasize, infuriate, “wander about” with pen or brush in hand—but the others? They too need to make their own spirit “wander about” in something, in some way.⁷⁴

The conclusion of this text thus brings us back to one of the problems—if not to *the* problem—that would be the most widely discussed in the meetings of the Philosophical-Religious Society of St Petersburg: that of the problematic relationship between the artistic and the religious experience, between life and forms, between Christianity and aesthetics. For the still “enlightened” Rozanov of 1896, the extreme manifestations of sectarian spirituality are the warning-light of a crisis in the Russian Church that assails, in various forms and degrees of intensity, the whole body of the nation, which cannot see it as a steady reference point in the end-of-century tempest. To prevent Russian man from reaching these excesses, the Church and the State must offer the population “noble forms” on which to exercise their own natural creativity, ceasing to guide their own choices on the basis of excessively rationalistic and Westernizing criteria, as had happened since the times of Peter the Great:

⁷⁴ Ibid., 34.

Make man create—otherwise he will die or “will start to turn around.” But so that he does not “whirl dizzily,” so that he does not *degenerate*—reveal the *noble forms* of creation to him. The State, we know, is run exclusively on the basis of utilitarian concepts...⁷⁵

3. The Monophysitism of the Father: the Apocalypse as the Exhaustion of the “Sweet” Christ

During the years 1913/14 (that is, at the time of the Bejlis Affair), Pavel Florenskij had contributed significantly to fueling Rozanov’s momentary—and, so to speak, “sabbatean”—anti-Semitism,⁷⁶ establishing an irremediable contradiction between the Old and New Testaments that would end by making the eschatology of the “Russian idea” hollow to his eyes, depriving it of that primacy that literally obsessed the *Pillar* philosopher in the years before the Revolution and theorizing, in *The Philosophy of the Cult*, the insuperable antinomy between *tolstovstvo* and *rozanovstvo*, or in other words, the radical opposition between moralism and immoralism, which, according to Florenskij, dominate the respective world views of Tolstoj and Rozanov:

Our contemporaries, in their thoughts, simplify man, forgetting his polar, antinomic constitution, and wish to see in him either just a personality, *hypòstasis*, without elementary roots, or else naked elementariness, *ousia*, devoid of any personal self-determination. From this derives either a “Tolstoying” or other type of moralism, which tenaciously refuses to see the elementariness as a substantial part of man ... or, on the contrary, Rozanovian *immoralism*, which

⁷⁵ Vasilij V. Rozanov, *Apokalipsičeskaja sekta (Chlysty i Skopcy)*, op. cit., 34-35.

⁷⁶ In this regard, we permit ourselves to refer to Giancarlo Baffo, “Cosi parlò Juduška. L’antisemitismo di Vasilij Rozanov,” in *Stella errante. Percorsi dell’ebraismo fra Est e Ovest*, ed. Guido Massino and Giulio Schiavoni (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000), 377-406. On the “shadow” cast on Rozanov by Florenskij at the time of the publication of his anti-Semitic pamphlet, *On the Jew’s olfactory and tactile relationship with blood*, see Vasilij V. Rozanov, *Sacharna. Obonjatel’noe i osjazatel’noe otnošenje evreev k krvi*, (Moscow: Respublika, 1998), 276 *et seq.* That pamphlet was later solemnly recanted on his deathbed (on this point, see Michael Hagemester, “Pavel Florenskij und der Ritualmordvorwurf,” in Michael Hagemester and Torsten Metelka, eds., *Materialien zu Pavel Florenskij*, [Berlin and Zepernick: edition Kontext, 2001], Appendix 2, 59-73.)

does not acknowledge the ethical personality as a force of self-determination and therefore sees in all moral standards only an empty and noxious hindrance which is *extrinsic* to elementariness, an obstacle extraneous to man himself.⁷⁷

The desperation of Florenskij's pre-revolutionary thought led—via a close confrontation with Rozanov, which was very overwhelming for the latter—to a theological envy with unequivocal anti-Semitic tendencies, which prophesied the destruction of Christian Russia through the actions of carnal Israel:

We ourselves must complete the cycle of our submission to Israel! Perhaps you are the last Egyptian and I am the last Greek. And like driven beasts we look upon the “triumph of the victors.” In a minute more or a minute less, they will take us, we beasts, perhaps, the last beasts, and will make our blood flow for *kosher* meat. But we must be docile. And really, however you put it, only one thing emerges. The Old Testament provides and continually confirms the promise of a future world dominion. To whom?—to the Jews. And the New? It does not say anywhere to us, to the Christians, that *this* dominion now passes to us, to the Christians, and calls only for us to *bear our own cross patiently*, promising salvation for this. One Testament contradicts the other, but not because they say the same thing, but actually because they both say *something different*, and this is addressed to *different* people. And this deep and radical divergence of the two Testaments, reconcilable only with a high flight of spiritual intuition, as was the case for the Apostle Paul, cuts and burns our flaccid wingless conscience unbearably.⁷⁸

For Rozanov, in *The Apocalypse of Our Times*—against the wishes of Florenskij and against Merežkovskij's posthumous wishes—the enemy once again becomes definitively the Second Person, the “pale” Christ who, as we know, is the negation of light, of heat and, in general, of the physiological life of which, on the contrary, the Old Testament God is the guarantor and bestower, insofar as he is in turn the heir—in Rozanov's particular

⁷⁷ Pavel Florenskij, *Filosofija Kul'ta (Opyt pravoslavnoj antropodicej)* (Moscow: Izd. Mysl', 2004), 139-140.

⁷⁸ Unsigned letter, collected in Vasilij V. Rozanov, *Sacharna. Obonjatel'noe i osjazatel'noe otnošenje evreev k krovi* (Moscow: Respublika, 1998), 367-368.

“philosophy of mythology”—of the vital plenitude of Osiris and Apis. The very necessity of the Second Hypostasis is thus the troubling warning-light of the non-plenitude of the Father, a non-plenitude which is dreaded, for example, in excerpts like the following:

The Son

Therefore, what is the meaning of *the Son is born*? That the Father has *not* completed His work of creation? Or, who knows, that He has not given us all His teaching, or has not bestowed it fully? But He had already issued “the moral law” (on Sinai). He had not only created “glebes of earth,” “the sun and the moon,” “day and night.” But then? What is it about? One cannot help but suspect the father of *insufficiency*, of incompleteness. “The Father is not yet ALL, nor the END.”

Well—then the Son became necessary.⁷⁹

To the end, Rozanov continued to hurl himself against the “sweet Jesus” who has made all the fruits of the world bitter,⁸⁰ in an attempt to exorcise the enchanting moonlight that seemed to have forever extinguished the Sun-Osiris/Horus and the fire-God who speaks from the burning bush. In his last work, *The Apocalypse of Our Times*, this important and tragic crux of Rozanovian thought is expressed suggestively through strikingly effective aphorisms: “Try to crucify the sun. And you will see which of the two is God;”⁸¹ or, in another place, “one more question: which of these two is included in the other—the solar system in the Gospel or the Gospel in the solar system?”⁸²

To the *Sol Invictus* of Egypt, in the unpublished material of *Apocalypse*, is now directly attributed the paternity of the generative human *vis*, which is nothing more than a source of it (“Spermatozoa come from the Sun. They

⁷⁹ Vasilij V. Rozanov, *L'Apocalisse del nostro tempo*, ed. Alberto Pescetto, introduction by Jacques Michaut (Milan: Adelphi, 1979), 94.

⁸⁰ Vasilij V. Rozanov, “Gesù dolcissimo e gli amari frutti del mondo,” in P. C. Bori, P. Bettolo, *Movimenti religiosi in Russia prima della rivoluzione (1900-1917)* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1978), 134-144.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 96.

are the vital force of the Sun [Mysteries of Egypt]⁸³). In direct opposition to this is the Word—seen as a specifically Christian invention, from whose castrating power the Jews are, once again, immune—in an opposition that gives rise to the unshakeable and obscenely explicit opposition between phallus and Word:

September 4, 1917.

Ah—WORD (*Slovo = Verbum*), CURSED word.

Thus, everything ends in literature.

But among the Jews, everything is past in customs, habits, day-to-day living, life.

And it is for this reason, really, that among them not a grain, not a sound was added to—SHOW THE GENDER.

Show the gender of your ENS REALISSIMUM, the root of each source, the root of the being. No, not even of the whole BEING, but the GENERATION of everything. Because the generation is being + being, a being that *grows* forever, like him, my dear. Small and with a large nose.⁸⁴

Like the Nietzschean *Wille zur Macht*, which in these dramatic pages seems to be subjected to a sort of tragic palinode, the metaphysical principle of Rozanov's sexual ontology is a requirement which does not aim at mere conservation, which cannot be not reduced to a paltry *conatus sese conservandi*, but is an inexhaustible generative force that, in procreating, constantly increases the *quanta* of being. In the unpublished parts of *The Apocalypse*, Rozanov calls this principle the "Astarte principle" (*astartičeskij princip*) and it consists in that sort of "erection of the sun" which connotes the East as a Beginning forever renewing itself, which unites in a single bond Sun and phallus, dawn and coitus:

3 October 1917. What is the Astarte principle? It is impossible to say that it "seems," but rather only "being," it "is"; thus the "Astarte principle" is the principle of realism, of being, of the turning of the wheel of effectiveness. It does not contemplate "evil" and "good," unless that "evil" and "good" enter into the same "is." And if the "evil,"

⁸³ Vasilij V. Rozanov, "Tekst 'Apokalipsisa . . .' publikuemyj v pervye," in Vasilij Rozanov, *Apokalipsis našego vremeni*, ed. Aleksandr N. Nikoljukin (Moscow: Respublika, 2000), 110.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 104-105.

or, vice-versa, the “good” enters in the “is”: then the Astarte principle is the greatest “hosanna,” as it may also be the greatest curse. Hence: “Astarte descended into Hades”—and the bulls have ceased to beget, the cows to conceive. “Apis is dead, and a new one has not been chosen”—and in Egypt and in the world “time is suspended.”⁸⁵

These considerations, perfectly consistent with Rozanov’s style, appear in the philosopher’s mind in an occasion that encapsulates not only a “noumenal” element, but also elements of history and of everyday family life: he writes these considerations, in fact, on his return from P. Pavel’s wedding, pleased that, at the same time, his sister had gone to Petrograd to marry. In his eyes, these events are completely insignificant “for Church and State,” and on the contrary expand to a cosmogonic amplitude against the sombre backdrop of history. For relevance, he irreducibly contrasts this with “the current war, that mutilates and tears legs off.”⁸⁶ In this sense, the “Astarte principle” is metaphysically opposed to the entropy of history, which, under the banner of Christianity, advances inexorably to “diminish” Russia and Europe, thus making another truth shine forth that encourages a tragic apostasy:

This [namely history, war] is a—*decline*, there [in Astarteism] is *growth*. “Astarteism” is growth, forward movement of the wheel of the universe, the “rising of the sun,” the “tomorrow of Ra.”

Something more powerful: IT HAS RISEN.

And to this “it has risen” the East (*Vostok*) bows.

“It flows inside” (*vostekaet*).

Here is the whole of the East; start of the “morning,” “of dawn,” “of the principle.”

This is a complete principle, ½ nature, ½ universe. How can one do without it. Impossible. Meanwhile, all Europe does without it, does without it in fact, does without it religiously, and “lets it go a little bit,” without looking. It is quite clear that Christianity lets it pass “in the desert,” that it does not have an “assault battalion” here at its disposal and it is quite clear for this reason, because it is not full. And yet it shows itself as “full truth,” and says “A = A.”

“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.”

“I am the bread of life.”

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Neither the one, nor the other thing.

I am 62 years old and my legs tremble. I am nothing. But yet I say this: it may be that the truth has been revealed TO ME. *Mice*. Lord, it is tremendous when a mouse snatches the host, but it has snatched it.⁸⁷

Similarly, the thought on the absolute metaphysical-ontological primacy of the “Father”—now considered, in an almost systematic manner, as the foundation of all religiousness—appears in Rozanov’s mind during a walk (à la Nietzsche-Balzac, so to speak) with his son:

—Is there not perhaps something that is more than oneself?

I walk with my son, I mount the embankment of the railway. The sun, on the snow, is so hot, and I walk, laugh and question. And at the same time I feel fear, but secretly.

He asks in turn:

—How can this be, Papa?

I too have studied physics, mathematics, chemistry, and everywhere I learned that “*everything* comes from *something*” and that, precisely, “*ex nihilo—nihil*”: and that is why my soul paled when suddenly, with absolute clarity, I heard that “*ex nihilo—quid- quid*.” And, now deeply, inwardly filled with the sun, I return to his question:

—But thus: *I* have you, and at home three daughters, with whom you always quarrel, and Vera in the convent. None of you would exist *without me*: at the same time, *you five are more than me*. So, I am ONLY “*I*,” but how should one consider this: that the *I* is also “*MORE than ONESELF*”?

He’s a smart boy. And he replied:

—Yes. It’s true.

It is surprising that, although I have devoted myself to philosophy, this has never occurred to me in 62 years. “It is so obvious.” “Who investigates himself.”⁸⁸

The affirmation of the oneness of the Father, in the unpublished texts of *The Apocalypse*, led Rozanov to theoretically outline his own paradoxical

87 *Ibid.*

88 *Ibid.*, 303.

and theistic *Wille zur Macht*, programmatically averse to all Overman complacency, the outcome of which is an “A-ontology”⁸⁹ focused on an ultrametaphysical and mystical reworking of the classic *creatio ex nihilo*. Literally, in fact, “the ‘father’ cannot ‘be’”; it is his nature to continually surpass every being, every fact, which he is constantly “more than”:

1) the father *surpasses every plenitude*. And—

2) the father *surpasses in himself every whole*.

Indeed, the “plenitude” is the *possession* of all *one’s own parts*, and the “whole” is the totality of the fractions of the same whole. But the mystery of “fatherhood” lies in the continuous *growth*, in the fact that “tomorrow” there will inevitably be more than there is today.

There is a well-known law of logic, according to which every

A is A

and never can

A become not-A.

There is nothing in the universe that escapes from this logical principle of identity, to which, in this way, the universe is bound and to which it obeys as its own very first foundation. At the same time, the essence of the “father” resides in the continuous and uninterrupted domination of this foundation. Thus, the mystery and the essence of the father lie in the continuous and uninterrupted overcoming, and in a delicate, “natural,” overcoming of all the conditions for the subsistence of the world. This is why “the father” is essentially “not of this world.” Insofar as he “is of this world” and “fulfils the law”—then *eo ipso* he is not the father. The father is a threat to nature and its constant destruction. The father pierces the whole world, like a bull with its horn. The father uses the world, but does not conform to it. The father is much stronger than the world, while the world is not stronger than him and must submit to him. This is what opens the world of noumena to us. The father is a noumenon and “is not of this earth.”⁹⁰

In this sense, the principle of the father, once again fully exemplified by the Egyptian religion of “Osiris-father,” is the basis of every religion, because it is a continuous overcoming and abyssal “breaking down” of every ontological foundation:

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 304 *et seq.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 304-305.

Thus, all religions without exception were in fact *paternal* or *phallic*, and furthermore *there are not, nor can there be* others. The “religious feeling” in the mystery of its nuances, its music, its languor and its depth, as well as of its prophecies and inspirations, arises only from contact with the phallus (*prikosnovenie k fallu*), only from the efforts to embrace the “father.” These may be more profound or less profound: like “the root.” One may be deeper, another may be more superficial: but no *other root is found under religion*.⁹¹

Thus, *religio* is then the direct “prayer” of every being “who urges” starting from the root of the Father, the centre of this “force,” both tough and at the same time very delicate, who does not identify himself with the Being of traditional metaphysics, nor even with an intensively significant power, brutally “materialistic” or atheistically “naturalistic”:

Religio

The GROWTH.

It was, is, will be.

Why, then, “will be”?

Because it is GROWTH ...

Growth means “more.” In the enigma of more is concealed the explanation of the enigma of “progress,” of “development.”

Everything “unravels itself” from the “point” towards the “periphery.” And thus the world has turned from a “God-point” towards a “universe of beauty.”

Is there anywhere, where God is not “in the world”? And where “in God” is there not the “world”? Here they are, joined. “Religio” ... Prayer. There is nothing that does not “pray,” because everything “urges.” Knowing who is urging “from one point”—from the point of the Father.

And a God who is not a Protector does not exist. It is Providence. Because the point knows its circumference, as a hen knows the eggs she is brooding.

Thus arose the sky, the earth and the stars. They “arose” because the world is religion—not because “religion is born in the world.” Quite the opposite, and completely different, because prayer has always, like a sigh and like a shadow, lain in the secret and in the essence of creation. This is why the moon, the stars and the earth appeared, and everything “whirled in the sky.”

⁹¹ Ibid., 305.

It can be said that the sigh was “that vapour,” “that mist” from which “everything” arose. Thus in appearing, everything “began to breathe” naturally.

This is because in the beginning there was the “sigh.” Because the “sigh” was “God.”

God is not being. Nor omnipotence. God is the “first breath,” the “morning.” From which everything issues “afterwards.”⁹²

In one of his last, hallucinatory letters to Hollerbach, in a surprising *excursus* on the history of recent Russian criticism, Rozanov went so far as to re-read the essence of the Abrahamic Covenant in the light of his consolidated phallic-paternal theory of religion. With his renewed change of stance on Judaism, in later years his views also changed—as has been noted—on the *russtkost'* and on the history of Russian literature, which now becomes synonymous with passivity and the subject of negative judgement, to the extent that he was able to re-appraise a number of authors (Ščedrin, Gogol') whom he had previously judged harshly, almost as though the quasi-exclusive philojudaism of this last period led him to reassess, in a single mythological-cultural summary, authors whom he had previously execrated as “foreigners” or “strangers,” who, together with the cream of the national critics, whether Jewish or not, would instead contribute to forming the greatness of the Russian arts.⁹³ What is particularly surprising in this is the fact that

Flekser, Belinskij, Dobroljubov in a single stroke become noumena for Rozanov, showing their passionateness, expressed ... in their passion for masturbation. For this reason, Belinskij and Dobroljubov are called “circumcised.”⁹⁴

In this context, with the fading of every previous mark of “familiarity,” only the solipsistic practice of onanism emerges, highly charged with a mystical-sacred aura, comprehensible within this extreme view of phallicness as the root of the religious, typical of his later writings, which leads Rozanov—

⁹² Vasilij V. Rozanov, *L'Apocalisse del nostro tempo*, op. cit., 107-108.

⁹³ See Henrietta Mondry, “Vasilij Rozanov, evrei i ruskaja literatura,” in Efim Kurganov and Henrietta Mondry, *Rozanov i Evrei* (St Petersburg: Akademičeskij Proekt, 2000), 250-253.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 251.

in yet another contradiction to his previous veneration of marriage and fertility—to define masturbation “*which is supposed to be a vice—as a virtue.*”⁹⁵ Onanists—such as Dobroljubov and Belinskij—are “people who have Abrahamic noumena in them and are called by God to join in alliance with him,” given that “every onanist’ does precisely the same as Abraham and—nothing else: he ‘discovers’ his face before God, the noumenon of ‘the head of his member,’ which in popular medicine is commonly defined as *caput membri.*”⁹⁶ Rozanov’s research on a “will to power” *sine glossa* to oppose nihilistic Christian weakness, therefore, led him to perform—and even to exalt—a practice that he had previously repeatedly stigmatized, and even, as H. Mondry wrote, to propose “his own policy of the body ... at a time in which [it] was, according to Foucault’s definition, institutionalized by the categories of prohibition.”⁹⁷ Without realizing it, and certainly without referring to textual sources which were surely unknown to him, Rozanov actually seems to revert to a *tòpos* of Zoharic literature on the *primum movens* of the sacred mystical nuptials of the world of the higher emanation. As the most recent research confirms, in the Zoharic *corpus* the first act of divine will—that which induces the female part of the supreme “couple” of the sphere of *Azilut* (*Keter*, the crown) to join with the male *Ein-Sof* to give rise to the *creatio ex nihilo* through her fertilization by the latter (albeit in a dimension in which the androgynous nature of the “couple” itself has not yet disappeared)—is precisely an act of erotic self-gratification:

According to Zoharic theosophy, the joint reality of the Infinite, including *Ein-Sof* and *Keter*, is androgynous, and the first act of divine creativity is the stimulation of the spark that corresponds to the penis. The original moment of the divine inscription, however, is mythologized as an act of sexual self-gratification. The motif of autoeroticism which underpins the creation myth in the *Zohar* is based on the bisexual character of the Infinite.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Vasilij V. Rozanov, *Izbrannoe*, ed. Evgenija Žiglevič (Munich: A. Neimanis Verlag, 1970), 558.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 559.

⁹⁷ Henrietta Mondry, “Vasilij Rozanov, evrei i russkaja literatura,” *op. cit.*, 252.

⁹⁸ Elliot R. Wolfson, “Erasing the Erasure/Gender and the Writing of God’s Body in kabbalistic Symbolism,” in *Circle in the Square. Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 69. In this context, Wolfson directly cites a

This “paternal” root, traced to its most remote sources, is irreducibly contrasted with the evangelical person of the “son,” who in Rozanov’s eyes is guilty of having introduced, as it were, a “humanistic” character into the numinous world of the father and the foreign element of the word, the *Verbum*, into the mystical silence of organic noumenality, which the Egyptians and Semites have always perfectly adhered to simply remaining, prejudicially and immediately, in their own “Dasein.” In this sense, the mystification brought about by the “son” is counteracted by the “roar” of the Apocalypse, which comes to restore the “true religion” of paternal “strength,” but also, tragically, to signal the irretrievability of the amoral innocence of creation within Christian civilization:

Thus, the roar of the Apocalypse, at the attempt to exchange this unique and universal root, this omni-terrestrial—in the pan-cosmic substance—root of religion by introducing the “idea of the son” into it, under the guise of the infantile feeling that “in this way it would be more familial,” and that “family is a good thing”—something which is particularly well known by liars “who all their life have renounced the family”. It is precisely here that religion slides into falsehood, into simulation and hackneyed phrases of eloquence ... Just as the religion “of the father” began *without a single word*: and together with this it has spouted unspoken prophecies, inspiration, life, inexhaustibility; so “the religion of the son” or the so-called “evangelical religion” began “through the word,” “in the word” and “round about the word” with an unusually rapid *reduction* (*obmelenie*) of words, with the extinction of all profeticity in itself, with a rapid expiration of the spirit itself ... Almost every religion has resulted in “disputes,” “rivalry,” “rowdiness,” envy, evil life, complete decay of life.⁹⁹

This, for Rozanov, has nothing to do with the “cosmic foundations of religion,” which are valid in a Fëdorovian sense even if there were intelligent life on other planets of the solar system: even there, just as on Earth, the same “phallic and generative” principles would apply and circumcision

Lurianic text which attests that, even in the Kabbalistic school famous for the *Contractio Gottes*, a sort of “sexual self-gratification” actually preceded *tzimtzum*: “Before every emanation, the Ein-Sof pleased himself alone” (*Ibid.*).

⁹⁹ Vasilij V. Rozanov, “Tekst ‘Apokalipsisa...’ publikuemyj v pervye,” *op. cit.*, 305-306.

would dominate unchallenged, “depth of the depths of religion.”¹⁰⁰ And if circumcision is a mark of longevity for the people who practice it or have practiced it, then Christianity was stillborn, receiving, in the Apocalypse, its “death knell.”¹⁰¹ The Apostles, in fact, soon began to quarrel and the hymn on love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 has only concealed the struggle for power waged by Paul against the “supreme Apostle,” Peter. For Rozanov, this example, as well as Christ’s animosity against the Pharisees (Matthew 3:7) and his anger as evidenced in various episodes of the Gospels, are the proof that it was only with the arrival of the “religion of the son” that European civilization was penetrated by that *ressentiment* which forever extinguished the vitality of the religion of the father, and which, as these writings dramatically testify, would have incalculable consequences, even on a theological-political level, in defining the tragedy of the Revolution.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Riccardo Paparusso

SALVATION WITHOUT REDEMPTION

*Phenomenology of (Pre-)History in Patočka's Late Work**

1. A Ruin's History

In Jan Patočka's thought, the "End of History" (*konec dějin*) should not be seen as a definitive completion of the historical process, but rather as a re-emergence of the pre-historic process, or more specifically, as an intensification of those traits which define the non-historic dimension. Prehistoric mankind lived completely absorbed by the concern for satisfying his biological needs. For this reason, he adopted myth as the sole horizon for understanding himself and the reality surrounding him. Myth itself, therefore, represents the centre of gravity of the prehistoric world. Its primary function, in fact, is that of offering meaning (*smysl*) and giving reason to an existence that drains itself in the fight against self-consumption. In this way, it keeps man from the danger of becoming aware of the absurdity of consecrating his life to survival. As long as humanity is mirrored in the mythological tale, it remains within, or even steps back over, the threshold of historical time.

In the essay *Spiritual Foundations of Contemporary Life*,¹ Patočka reconsiders the age of technology as a rational actualization of the desires of myth. Patočka thus recognizes it as the fulfilment of history's insidious process of regression below the inaugural level of historicity. In other words, while satisfying the empty desires that represent the very meaning of the prehistoric world, the technological and scientific age reveals itself as the

* Translated into English by Karen Turnbull.

¹ Jan Patočka, "Duchovní základy života v naší době" (Spiritual Foundations of Contemporary Life), in *Péče o duši* (Care for the Soul), Vol. II (Prague: OIKOYMENH, 1999), 9-28; see also the French version by Erika Abrams, "Les fondements spirituels de la vie contemporaine," in Jan Patočka, *Liberté et sacrifice* (Grenoble: Millon, 1990), 215-241.

most complete maturation of prehistoric essence, as though it were only in the contemporary, over-civilized age that the non-historic world has been able to show its authenticity.

The historic world, thus, *ends*. This does not mean, however, that it fulfils (or reaches) its “end” (*cíl*). It ends in the sense that it fails, crumbles, collapses—and in so doing, it loses even that seed of historicity (*dějinnost*) with which prehistory itself is heavy. Such a conception of the “End of History,” however, betrays the presence of the Christian apocalypse. Patočkian history ends by fading away, since its own fulfilment coincides fundamentally with the “end of the world.” Indeed, in *Christianity and Natural World* (1972)—the work that more than any other calls for a re-interpretation of “Post-History” as a regression to the prehistoric—the Czech thinker emphasizes the intimate relationship between the post-historic “age of technology” and the blind fury of devastation (*zpusťošnost*).²

While the idea of devastation appears, in Patočka’s philosophy, in relation to a “conclusion” that does not absolutely fulfil the historic *telos* and yields no result (*výsledek*), it does not, in fact, redeem the loss, but extends the disruption even further, as though history, paradoxically, had never existed. For Patočka, apocalypse claims to be destruction without promise of redemption.

In the pages which follow, a hermeneutical analysis will be made of the phenomenon of history in Patočka’s late thought by extracting the essence of his conception of Christianity and by giving shape to the idea of apocalypse contained within it. The main motifs of Patočka’s religious idea are offered to the interpreter starting from the space opened by the (self-)demythologization (*odmytologizování*) of Christianity. The urgency of demythologizing Christianity, as Patočka puts it, is neither reducible to an exclusively doctrinal issue, nor is it a matter of exegesis. For the Czech thinker, demythologizing Christianity means that the Christian self-sacrifice exposes human existence, authentically, to the abyssal space of its historicity. Thus, not only is Patočkian Christianity rooted in the historical world, but human history itself is placed in a mutual relationship with the historical development of Christian theology.

² Jan Patočka, “Křesťanství a přirozený svět” (Christianity and Natural World), in *Přirozený svět a lidské existence* (The Natural World and the Movement of Human Existence). Archive Material (Samizdat). Prague (1980): 2.7, 24 pp.

Patočka's argumentation proceeds through a number of definite steps. The first one is that Christianity, in the technical-scientific age, is attempting to resist the overflowing irrationalism deriving from the compulsive objectification of the world. To do so, however, Christianity is obliged to assume a character of apodictic certainty which gives rise to the non-problematic nature of that "given meaning," i.e. that answer which always precedes the question. The following and conclusive step takes place when Patočka, although recognizing this state of decomposition of historicity, undertakes his demythologization of Christianity as a repetition (*opakování*) of the original demythologizing movement of Christianity. In other words, as will be shown more comprehensively later, for Patočka, techno-scientific mankind re-mythologizes both the historical world and Christianity itself precisely by consigning to oblivion its mythic dimension. For this reason, Patočka's demythologizing process can take place in authenticity only by acknowledging the mythical ground as its own original source and inexhaustible legacy.

In unveiling the mythological roots of demythologization, the central core of Patočka's Christianity is shown. This, in fact, is the most incontrovertible evidence of its heretical nature, as Patočka also acknowledges. It is along this route towards renewed interest in the mythical tradition that the Patočkian conception of apocalypse—although never explicitly stated—can be traced.

Apocalypse, for Patočka, is a technical-scientific destructive fury, appeased only by a promise of salvation (*spása*), which is true only because it is void of any chance of redemption. *Hope* (*naděje*) of salvation that invites existence to linger over the mythical ground—the original source of sin, of contemporary corruption—not in order to take the blame for it, but to bring to maturity the germs of historicity and Christian responsibility (*zodpovědnost*) that are sown within it. Such a process would release from the ashes of super-capitalistic catastrophe new possibilities of meaning, which, surging from the depths of the nihilistic desert, foretell their own decay by negating themselves as a *result*, i.e. as the definitive extinction of the suffering of spirit (*duch*).

It would not be possible to further develop the interpretation put forward here without at least a preliminary glance at the idea of history (*dějiny*) as it emerges from the work *Christianity and Natural World*, and also throughout the entire Patočkian reflection on history—which reaches

its pinnacle in the book *Heretical Essays on Philosophy of History*. In this regard, a passage from *Christianity and Natural World* clearly shows Patočka's idea of historical movement in one of its most meaningful argumentations:

I believe that history, in the proper sense of the word, is always a history of a certain kind of setting-upright of man (*napřimění*) over his biological stage. At the same time, this elevation is a fight against all the threats to which man is exposed and which loom over him, starting from his biological basis and from his own historical creations. The latter, in fact, open up ever-renewed possibilities of falling back below the level of freedom that was originally reached.³

While there is indeed a conception of history influenced by Hegelian roots behind these considerations, in Patočka, however, this conception is revealed as a teleology of history animated by a *telos* which takes form as the *meaning* of the historical movement. At the same time, this meaning seems unable to assert itself as the aim (*účel*) which directs the world's history towards fulfilment. Patočka accepts the Hegelo-Husserlian idea of history as a process steered in a certain direction. Nonetheless, he acknowledges the *telos* as having connotations of that possibility (*možnost*), which is freed from its concealment within tradition each time it reaches maturity. In this way, the Bohemian philosopher establishes a philosophy of history in which the aim wears itself out not so much because it is forced to abandon its abstractness to become the facticity of historical action; but rather, more dramatically, because it must reproduce itself each time, over and over again. It is as though the philosophy's condition of latency has condemned the *telos* to an inaccessible loss of memory of the level of maturity it had reached in previous stages of the historical journey. This journey, therefore, is not a progressive acquisition of self-awareness by the spirit, destined to lead to definitive self-representation.

History does not end: for this reason "it is neither possible to establish its law nor to determine its progress or decline."⁴ Rather, history

³ Ibid., 2.7.13.

⁴ Jan Patočka, "Problém počátku a místa dějin" (The Question on The Beginning and Place of History), in *Péče o duši* (Care for the Soul), Vol. III (Prague: OIKOYMENH, 2002), 296.

is something that can be deciphered from its few moments of *élan* (spurts), punctuated by undercurrents of decline (*úpadek*), which cast the spirit beyond its inaugural manifestation and force it to drag itself along in an unending attempt to re-appropriate its beginnings (*počátek*). This process concludes, it *ends*, but only in that it collapses into a state of catastrophic technical-scientific enchantment, and thus of pre-historical latency of the spirit, which, however, does not coincide with definitive completion—as if it were the apex of an upside-down finalism—but nonetheless leaves open a passageway into history.

Since the beginning, human life, like animal life, has drained itself in the effort to satisfy its needs. At the same time, however, historical man devised concepts which could distance life from the biological level. In this way, life is freed from mere concern for self-preservation, and can be directed at other subjects. Yet contemporary societies, in which reality is conceived as a totality, give the central position once more to a life absorbed by self-consumption, thus eliminating authentic humanity. As though man's focus on biological life had established itself at the beginning of history, and had re-emerged at its end. Our dilemma lies precisely in this oscillation How is it possible that man, having emerged from the pre-historical stage and crossed the historical process, could have returned to that biological level?⁵

Prehistoric humanity—as it is argued by Patočka in the heretic essay entitled *Reflections on Prehistory*—leads an existence totally overwhelmed by the concern for fulfilling its biological needs. In so doing, it acknowledges mythic-poetical narrative as the sole referent of its comprehensibility. Myth, and the divine power it evokes, are the centre of gravity of the prehistoric world. They give meaning to an existence immobilized in a non-problematic state, which has drained itself in the effort to resist consumption. In the above-mentioned heretical essay, the thematization of the prehistoric dimension is backed up by the interpretation of the myth of humankind's creation as set out in *Gilgamesh's* epic, in which the meaning lies in the conception of human existence as being irretrievably destined—in accordance with divine will—to work (*práce*), in order release

⁵ Jan Patočka, "Křesťanství a přirozený svět," op. cit., 2.7.8-2.7.9.

the divinity from the burden of daily prostrations.⁶ The emblem of Patočka's mythical understanding of the divine can be seen in his interpretation of the Atramchasis myth, as posited in the heretical essay *Reflections on Prehistory*. Here, an unbridgeable gap intervenes between human life and the sacred dimension.

A human here is a life perennially threatened, dedicated to death, and devoted to work... In the margins of humanity seen from this perspective, however, there appears as its opposite a life which escapes this constant menace, a life which can experience various types of need and for that reason is triumphant over even the most acutely felt needs: such a life is not a human but a divine life.⁷

Mythical man cannot bear death (*smrt*) as his own destiny. For this reason, he must establish with the divine, the master of his mortal destiny, a purely economic relationship that exalts care for the biological life as the only existential possibility and that is regulated by the "orgiastic rhythm" (*orgiastické*) of sacrifice (*obět*). As a regulating principle of human mortality, the sacred order is accepted by humankind as a demonic dimension, blandished by means of a sacrificial rituality fuelled by orgiastic behaviour. The latter, by virtue of the exceptional nature of its forms, appears to offer a possibility of elevation, compared to the flattening of "the profane with which humans deal 'economically.'"⁸ In reality, however, by confusing the search for "happiness" with the pursuit of "pleasure," of enjoyment, the orgy exacerbates the emptiness of the "sphere of need," and sinks existence even deeper than work does.

It is the dimension of the demonic and of passion. In both, humans are placed at risk; however, they are not simply escaping from themselves into the "public realm" It is not a self-estrangement but rather being swept along, enraptured. Here we are not escaping from ourselves but, rather, we are surprised by something, taken aback, captivated by it, and that something does not belong among

⁶ See Jan Patočka, *Kaciřské eseje o filosofii dějin*, (Prague: Edice Petlice, 1975); also in *Peče o duši* (Care for the Soul), Vol. III, op. cit., 11-144. English Translation by Erazim Kohák: Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, ed. James Dodd (Chicago/La Salle: Open Court, 1996), 16-20.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

things and in ordinary days in which we can lose ourselves among the things that preoccupy us.⁹

Seduced by the ecstatic enchantment, mythical man cherishes the illusion of crossing the threshold of historicity, but in fact only increases his prehistoric condition of identification with animal life. This is the inescapable destiny of raw natural life, as well as of the members of vast family groups—the ancient Eastern civilizations—which structure the working processes, but remain rooted to the non-historicity of the profane—the private.

“The idea of sacrifice is mythico-religious in its origin.”¹⁰ When speaking of sacrifice we refer to a mythological dimension of meaning, which in turn is regulated by the economic expression of the sacrificial act, that is, of an act of deprivation aimed at safeguarding, or enhancing, biological life. On the basis of his own mythical-poetic creations, prehistoric man saw the divine as a power which determines his mortality, and thus destines him to the suffering brought about by work that is aimed solely at achieving protection from the threat of definitive consumption. It is in order to defer fulfilment of this threat that mythical man carries out the sacrificial act or renunciation “for something or someone,” which in its accomplishment is intended to obtain from “someone”—the divinity—the filling of the biological void that the divinity itself continues to deepen.

While mythological sacrifice is constituted by its economic character, this trait does not appear only in the sacrificial act performed by man in the face of sacred orders, but rather in the immolation through which the divine itself creates humanity. The sacrifice for something or someone, in fact, is a sacrifice insofar as it is preceded by the human sacrifice through which the divinity exempts itself from self-corrosion caused by work. Consider the

⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁰ This essay was written originally in German (see Jan Patočka, “Die Gefahren der Technisierung in der Wissenschaft bei E. Husserl und das Wesen der Technik als Gefahr bei M. Heidegger” [Varna, 1973], 1979/29/=4F/4, Archive Material [Samizdat]); it was subsequently translated into Czech by Ivan Chvatík (see: “Nebezpečí technizace ve vědě u E. Husserla a bytostné jádro techniky jako nebezpečí u M. Heideggera”, in *Peče o duši*. Vol. III, op. cit., 147-160). It is quoted here from the English translation by Erazim Kohák “The Dangers of Technicization in Science according to E. Husserl and the Essence of Technology as Danger according to M. Heidegger” in *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, 327-339), 336.

description of the origin of human life set out in Genesis and in the myth of Atramchasis, as interpreted by Patočka in *Reflections on Prehistory*. In both stories, human life is represented as a being to whom the divine spirit assigns mortality in order to unload upon him the divinity's own burden of work. In this way, the divinity obtains immunity from the consumption that work triggers in the very moment it is satisfied. At the basis of the creation of humanity lies the divine desire for complete biological satisfaction. In other words, the need for the definitive extinction of need itself.

It can be argued, stretching a point in Patočka's thinking, that sacrifice for something or someone does not actually produce any advantage, since it is no more than a desperate attempt to delay an immolation which has already been effected, and to which divine will guarantees effectiveness by periodically casting upon humanity catastrophes that call to mind the unbreakable ties between existence and work. "Evil," Patočka writes, "is in the world by the will of the gods."¹¹ An evil completely devoid of moral purpose, since it is sustained by a purely economic motive: the eternal well-being of the sacred and of the theocracy that embodies its will.

2. The A-Historical Politician

On the basis of Patočka's explicit considerations, history, or rather the possibility of history—historicity—flourishes on the ground of the original Greek *polis*. In accordance with, and perhaps in amendment of, Patočka's thought, the life of the *polis* clearly indicates historicity, yet without guaranteeing it that authentic openness (*otevřenost*) that can be seen, on the contrary, in the abyss which was opened up by the original Christian event. History begins its course in the moment in which existence is no longer limited to simple delineation of conscientious life as a restraint to the process of reification, but recognizes responsibility as its inalienable destiny, taking it on as a fundamental *duty* (*úloha*). He who does not perceive death as something hurled from the outside—seeing it instead as a force arising from deep within himself that imposes its own possibility—is responsible. Thus, by comparing himself to finiteness (*konečnost*), the responsible man takes hold of himself, and is invested with that state of being which will

¹¹ Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, op. cit., 19.

always, without fail, be characteristic of him. While existence wins “firm ground” for itself by exposing itself to the duty of death, man cannot, however, benefit from this “in order to revolve exclusively around his own person (*osoba*). The person is sacrificed every time.”¹²

As Patočka asserts—both referring to and distancing himself from Heidegger, in a line of thought akin to Levinas’—death is “the experience of the being in itself and in others.”¹³ The anticipation of death is aroused by an act of self-sacrifice, which existence—until then absorbed by its concern for conservation—carries out in order to respond on behalf of an “other.” In the eyes of those who are determined to renounce their own biological solidity, this “other” remains incalculable and therefore cannot comply with the mythological demand for restitution. According to Patočka, in his own take on the analyses contained in Hannah Arendt’s *Active Life*,¹⁴ entry into history—and therefore the original assumption of responsibility as the fundamental duty of humanity—coincides with the establishment of the Athenian *polis*. In contrast to the situation in ancient Asian civilizations, the *polis* is a community that the people recognize as “their own work”; not as “the effect of absolute power exercised by primordial sovereign forces,” but as a space that men create “for one another,”¹⁵ a public space where everyone feels a fundamental duty to act with and for others—for their fellow citizens and for their successors. This duty, since it cannot be encoded by the signs of its own private dimension or of the currently inhabited *oikos*, does not guarantee biological support, but represents instead a potential threat to the survival of those who act for it or sacrifice themselves for it. And it is precisely because he accepts such a risk that the *politician* obtains something much greater than mere satisfaction: the recognition (*uznání*) of a man by his peers.

However, because it is based on recognition, political life keeps existence stranded on its original mythological ground. The struggle (*zápas*) for recognition is not guided by biological filling. Instead, it is driven by the ability of existence to objectively judge its own degree of elevation

¹² Jan Patočka, “Duchovní základy života v naší době,” op. cit., 23.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

¹⁵ Jan Patočka, “Problém počátku a místa dějin,” op. cit., 284.

compared to an animalistic dedication to the imperatives of bare life. One might wonder, however, whether this *struggle* follows in the same circular economic path as that of sacrifice for something or someone, and demands the same act of restitution. Does *life* not constitute, for recognition, a different configuration, or rather, a condensation, of that completely prehistoric self-renunciation which has always been guaranteed by the foreknowledge of a probable increase? It could be said that this suspicion—that the dawn of history has been wrongly equated to the original manifestation of a Greek nature—was driven by several significant, though fleeting, considerations that Patočka put forward in *The Question on the Beginning and Place of History*. In order that men can act on behalf of the public interest, with a view to obtaining the recognition of their peers, the politician *requires* a guarantee of emancipation from the worry of satisfying life's pressing demands. For this reason, the action is necessarily sustained by the productive activity of the *oikos*, and therefore by the rituality directed at those "subterranean gods" who act "in the dark" precisely in order to regulate "the most elementary and basic biological functions."¹⁶ The Greek *polis* is a society which is still prehistorically configured. It gives rise to history only in the sense that it offers existence the necessary conditions for historicizing the world and for activating that process of extracting—from tradition—the possibility of responsibility, which overlaps with historicity and the *telos* of history. Only once the divine-humanity has been abandoned on the cross will this history reach the first level of maturity, the first real opening.

According to the most important interpreters of Patočka's *Heretical Essays*,¹⁷ it is only through the historicization of existence that a person may be revealed to be religious. Nonetheless, a comparison of *The Question on the Beginning and Place of History* and *Christianity and Natural World* suggests that, from Patočka's point of view, only the process of denaturalization of religious feeling can project existence into a truly

¹⁶ Ibid., 295.

¹⁷ See for example: Ludger Hagedorn, *Překročit mýtus a osvícenství. Náboženství u Jana Patočky*, in *Myšlení Jana Patočky očima dnešní fenomenologie*, ed. Ivan Chvatík (Prague: OIKOYMENH, 2009), 371-473. English edition: Ludger Hagedorn, "Beyond Myth and Enlightenment: On Religion in Patočka's Thought," in Ivan Chvatík and Erika Abrams, eds., *Jan Patočka and the Heritage of Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 245-261.

historical dimension. Existence may able—in that sequence of struggles which leads to the crystallization of the first Athenian *synoikismo*—to acknowledge responsible life as the fundamental duty of humanity. But only the Christian conquest of mythical sacredness through forgetful renunciation of itself enables existence to make the choice of responsibility entirely feasible.

3. The Mythical Roots of Demythologization

Patočkian Christianity internalizes a certain Kantian-Protestant tendency, establishing itself above all as a superlative demythologizing force which leads to complete purification of its orgiastic element. It stands out, in a Kantian manner, as the supreme judge of morality. Patočka recognizes Christianity as a condition which allows the possibility of an authentic overturning of myth, of complete neutralization of its demonic, orgiastic aspect. It does so by catching the original nucleus in a sacrificial act, which, by interrupting the economic circuit of the original ritual ceremony, breaks down the mythical ground that it travels through at the same time. In other words, the heart of Christianity lies, for the Bohemian philosopher, in a sacrifice which, as such, drains the sacrificial action of its purpose. The reason for such considerations can be found in *Four Seminars on the Problem of Europe*, a text based on a recording of a series of private meetings that Patočka held in 1973.¹⁸ Discussing the crisis spawned by the process of absolute technicalization of the world, he identifies the renewal of the abandonment caused by Christ's self-sacrifice (*sebeobětování*) as the sole possibility for overcoming the supremacy of "availability" and of "mere presence."

Why have you abandoned me? The answer is in the question. What would have happened if you had not abandoned me? Nothing would have happened. Something happens only when I abandon myself. You abandoned me so that there would be nothing that I could still hold on to.¹⁹

¹⁸ See Jan Patočka, "Čtyři semináře k problému Evropy" (Four Seminars on the Problem of Europe), in *Péče o duši*. Vol. III, op. cit., 374-423. See also the French version by Erika Abrams, "Séminaire sur l'ère technique," in Jan Patočka, *Liberté et sacrifice* (Grenoble: Million, 1990), 259-275.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 413.

Christ's self-sacrifice coincides with a radicalization of the immolation. This immolation—enacted in the name of an “entirely unreal” person, and bearing a message addressed to everyone and everything, and therefore to no one—accounts for an undetermined “other” that, unlike the mythological divinity, disappoints the expectation of restitution. Christ, nailed to the cross, bemoans the incomprehensibility of the abandonment (*opuštění*), its lack of direction, because a sacrifice aimed at *nothing* has been settled on, a sacrifice that overcomes the myth insofar as it exposes the thoughtless abyssal state of nothing[ness], thereby indicating the “ground of the appearing of all that is active” that mythical man inhabits, without however recognizing its signs.²⁰

Thus, the original act of Christianity triggers the historical movement because, as a “sacrifice for nothing,” it defuses the logic that governs the mythic dimension, and thus releases the possibility of responsibility, the historical *telos*, for the first time. The responsible spirit first appears in the crystallization of the original Athenian *polis*, although it remains closed within itself. It is only in Christianity, however, that the responsible spirit becomes real, embarking at the same time on a process of reciprocal identification. While the end already exists in the beginning, the “sacrifice for nothing” brings to the surface the epilogue that has always been insinuated in that beginning. But if the beginning is only a *possibility*, the end that exists within it cannot be the final fulfilment that the possibility—*precisely because it is a possibility*—cannot earn. At the same time, this involves the threat that it might sink back into its pre-original sleep. Indeed, the very task of neutralizing the immediate understanding of the divine violates the essential core of the natural world, preparing the ground for that process of objectifying forgetfulness of the “world of life,” resulting in technical-scientific nihilism. While the original event of Christianity gives historicity its most emphatic boost, its annihilation opens the way to a (post-historical) era that therefore cannot be interpreted as a definitive extension of the possibility of responsible life, but corresponds instead to an advanced state of decomposition of historicity, which drives existence back into a prehistoric condition.

²⁰ Jan Patočka, “The Dangers of Technicization in Science according to E. Husserl and the Essence of Technology as Danger according to M. Heidegger,” *op. cit.*, 332.

Confirmation of the aforementioned theory can be found in *Four Seminars on the Problem of Europe*, and in several passages of *Spiritual Foundations of Contemporary Life*. Here, Patočka, following Heidegger's lead, identifies the essential core of technique in *nothing* technical, but rather in *Gestell*, in the interpellation which causes man to liberate and accumulate "all the effectiveness potentially contained in things."²¹ In this way, it is possible to avail oneself of the world as a reservoir, a *fund* (*Bestand*) of potential forces or energies, to be used for an ever-increasing expansion of life. We humans, provoked by *Gestell*, "no longer have before us objects that allow themselves to be known," "that stand before us as independent objects of perception."²² Our relationship with reality exhausts itself fairly comprehensively in an "order that concerns itself exclusively with obtaining a return (*výkon*) from things."²³ As Patočka writes:

Gestell is simultaneously the creation of a humanity that does nothing other than carry out these orders ... to the point that he loses sight of everything that does not fit into this system, which is not an order capable of ensuring the ordinary functioning of needs and of their satisfaction.²⁴

But the most profound reasons for the decline of contemporaneity into complete consecration to biological functioning lie in the relationship that the capitalist super-civilization maintains with the mythological horizon. Contemporary humanity reacts to the state of rootlessness and emptiness into which it has fallen with an even more tenacious attachment to life than that manifested by prehistoric existence. In fact, super-civilized existence—more stripped of its *own* than was mythological man, who outlined the possibility of responsible life without ever bearing its burden—is aware with ever-increasing intensity of the waning of its biological life. For this reason, existence invests the greatest part of the efficiency achieved in an attempt to bring about something that, in the ancient oriental myths, remains—according to Patočka in *Heretical Essays*—no more than an inaccessible

²¹ Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, op. cit., 116.

²² Jan Patočka, "Čtyři semináře k problému Evropy," op. cit., 388.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 391.

source of inspiration for (divine)-human conduct—an unattainable desire: immortality.²⁵ In this context, consider the story of the demigod, Gilgamesh, who

on the way to the one man who, by unanimous agreement of the gods, had been rendered immortal... exhausted by great deeds, cannot resist what is gentlest of all: he yields to sleep, the brother of death, the gradual exhaustion which, like fatigue and aging accompanies life.²⁶

By expelling the embryonic manifestation of the resolve for death from mythicalness, mankind of the technical-scientific era does not simply take a step backwards, below the original level of historicity, but brings to fruition the constitutive features of the original mythicalness. Thus, after being stripped of its pre-original mythical membrane through Christian radicalization of the sacrifice, the human world sinks once more into the prehistoric-ness of the mythological dimension. It is for this reason that Patočka, looking at his own era—which we still inhabit—felt called by the need to thematize the task of *demythologizing Christianity*.

Even before he perceived it as a doctrinal issue, the demythologization of Christianity appeared to the Bohemian philosopher as an urgent call to renew the original Christian break-through (*prolomení*) of the nature of myth, since it is only through such an action that technicalized man can outline his sole chance of salvation from the descent into mythical a-problematicness which technology forces him into. “The experience of sacrifice”—which for Patočka always signifies the sacrifice for nothing, carried out on the cross—“is now one of the most powerful experiences of our epoch.”²⁷ All Patočka’s work on the radicalization—in a Christian sense—of the sacrificial procedure arises as a response to the question that he asks in the last paragraph of his 1973 text on technology (technique), before beginning his analysis of the essential core of modern technology: “How, in actual fact, can he who is saved, *save himself*?”²⁸ Insofar as it is the

²⁵ Cf. Jan Patočka, “Duchovní základy života v naší době,” op. cit., 20-21-22.

²⁶ Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, op. cit., 20.

²⁷ Jan Patočka, “The Dangers of Technicization in Science according to E. Husserl and the Essence of Technology as Danger according to M. Heidegger,” op. cit., 337.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

history of responsibility, history can only have been the *history* of Christian responsibility and the Christian history of *responsibility*. For this reason, the “man with soul”—on whom Patočka builds all his hopes of a new spirituality—will not be able to bring about a repetition of the experience of radicalization of sacrifice unless he first asks himself how it had been possible for the historical world to set up a new, modern, mythological dimension.

On the basis of a few considerations set out in *Christianity and Natural World*, it can be hypothesized that, at the heart of the re-mythologization of humanity marked by a technical-scientific understanding of being, there lies that forgetfulness of the spiritual depth with which mythicalness is heavy, despite its dominant a-problematic-ness. The contemporaneous state of indifference of existence with regard to what concerns it most nearly—its being, its “ground”—corresponds to the sinking of the natural world (*přirozený svět*) into a state of *déficience*.²⁹ The estrangement of man—whose destiny is irrevocably bound to that original opening—from what is always his “own,” and its consequent de-problematization and re-mythologization, therefore spring from a devastating indifference about the natural world.

In the text in question, Patočka exposes the *essence-in-variation* of the natural world in an opening to the sacred that—by virtue of its irremediable immediacy—is peculiar to mythical conscience.³⁰ For Patočka, the Husserlian *Lebenswelt* is not merely a pre-categorical underlayer which continuously spouts forth epistemic activity.³¹ The natural world is seen as pre-thematic because it is an historical world. It is historical in the sense that its *essential* aspect corresponds to the action of raising—from a state of being flattened on its own ground—which historicizes existence, *our life*.³² To the extent that this opening is marked by the traces of mythical

²⁹ Cf. Jan Patočka, “Křesťanství a přirozený svět,” op. cit., 2.7.5.

³⁰ Ibid., 2.7.6-7.

³¹ Patočka’s translation of *Lebenswelt* as *přirozený svět* (natural world) is the result of a stylistic choice aimed at overcoming the harshness, as well as the limited usefulness, of its literal translation: *svět našeho života* (the world of our life). I am indebted to Ivan Chvatík’s “recollection” for this linguistic clarification.

³² Cf. Jan Patočka, “Křesťanství a přirozený svět,” op. cit., 2.7.4.

understanding of the sacred and the divine, however, the natural world is historic only as mythicalness, which lacerates itself every time, calling for the existence within itself to bring its historicity to maturity. The world of our life is the mythicalness, which releases the historical spirit within that it has always heralded, regulating the flow of its manifestations.

The considerations Patočka set forth in *Christianity and Natural World* expose an element which is hidden among the pages of the Bohemian philosopher's most famous work on the world of life, *The "Natural" World and Phenomenology*.³³ Here,

there always is the polarity of that to which I belong and which is essentially near (as distinct from what is only actually near), and of that which is essentially far, foreign, so that in its very being the world is dichotomized between the familiar and the alien.³⁴

In this passage, the polarity between ownership and foreignness is fundamentally related to perception—that is, it is conceived as the guarantor of perceptive faith (guarantee that the current objective manifestation faithfully represents an object's identity). In a 1960 text, *Prostor a jeho problematika*, however, this polarity is seen as the governing principle of the relationship with the world that characterizes mythical existence. "Mythical man orients himself with reference to an absolute point," with reference to his relationship to the "beginning," to the "axis of the world," taking this absolute as his *own* centre.³⁵ At the same time, however, this appropriation of the beginning exposes him to "that [state of] being that is completely different, far beyond our sphere, beyond proximity, beyond our normal

³³ Cf. Jan Patočka, "Přirozený svět a fenomenologie" (1967), in *Fenomenologické Spisi II* (Phenomenological Works) (Prague: OIKOYMENH, 2009), 202-237. English translation: "The 'Natural' World and Phenomenology," in Erazim Kohák, *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings*, op. cit., 239-273.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 251.

³⁵ Cf. Jan Patočka, "Prostor a jeho problematika" (Space and Its Problems), in *Umění a filosofie* (Art and Philosophy). Archive Material (Samizdat). Prague (1985): 1-37. See also the French version "L'espace et sa problématique" by Erika Abrams, in Jan Patočka, *Qu'est-ce que la phénoménologie?* (Grenoble: Million, 1988), 13-81.

personal relationships.”³⁶ It exposes him to “what is, at heart, the veiled and all-encompassing nature of the periphery, which is called up and placed at the centre.”³⁷ The natural world evolves and develops, transformed and altered by the various ways of understanding the historicizing opening that forms the *essential* aspect. In this process of change, however, a *continuum* becomes apparent—mythicalness, in fact—which, while it offers and modulates itself through historical transformation, remains untouched by that very transformation. While the uprooting of the natural world results in increasing estrangement with regard to one’s *own* existence, the contemporaneous re-centring of self-comprehension on the mythicalness corresponds to a dissipating effect on that same mythic heritage, under the influence of the Christian defusing of sacred circularity.

Today, both in the lows of daily routine and in life’s highs, primitive experiences or naive superstitions no longer tell us anything. We no longer feel they belong to us; they have been made irrelevant by the most important event that ever happened in the religious domain, the event that freed man towards what Christianity considers the authentic relationship with God.³⁸

Like an unmasking of the mendacity that dominates religious feeling ruled by mythological narrative, the Christian decision to abandon draws a veil of indifference over the naivety of the original existential dimension. Radical self-sacrifice opens the “the abysmal realm of the prayer for the enemy.”³⁹ Self-sacrifice serves no purpose when it is “self-denying love, self-forgetting love.”⁴⁰ Sacrifice for nothing is therefore radical, since it is an *oblivious sacrifice* of oneself—a sacrifice which forgets both the *sacrifice* and the mythical ground which the sacrificial ritual itself corresponds to.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Jan Patočka, “Křesťanství a přirozený svět,” *op. cit.*, 2.7.7.

³⁹ Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, *op. cit.*, 131.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

“In its essence,” Christianity “has no tendency towards radical objectivization.”⁴¹ Its essence is, however, permeated by a constitutive tendency to forget the myth, which prepares the process of covering the mythical-natural world by means of which the world’s technical-scientific disposition re-mythologizes existence. In the very moment that it brings the beginning of history into effect, the original Christian event gives the world a push towards the a-problematic nature of the prehistoric mythological dimension, rediscovering itself, at the end of history, transformed into a radically objectivized (and therefore mythologized) Christianity.

Today’s relationship with God highlights the gravity of the fact that God Himself, the divine, is no more than the expression of the world in which we live, whose essential component is objectivization.⁴²

In the last stages of his production, Patočka tried laboriously to confront a Christianity that—by radicalizing its nascent self-sacrificial movement to the point of completely dispersing mythical obscurity—has led to full expression of the *positive* Platonism which it inherited from its constitutional relationship with the entire evolutionary line of Greek (Socratic-Platonic) thinking. Clearly rejecting the immediacy of the mythical opening to the sacred, that same theology—which in a more orthodox tone calls itself the defender of tradition—escapes the moment of pre-thematic feeling which precedes self-sacrifice, declaring its non-economic nature. Contemporary religious feeling has fallen into a paradoxical situation: on the one hand we can no longer accept the contents of the opening to the sacred which, because it is immediate, is plain to see; but on the other hand,

whenever we try to live our relationship with God seriously, we ask ourselves whether we are not rooted in a certain tradition that can repeatedly prove itself and lay claim to the modern world.⁴³

Paradoxically, tradition overlaps with the grounds of immediate—mythical—opening to the sacred. It can be said, in light of this consideration, that from a Patočkian point of view, Christianity can only reclaim its de-

41 Jan Patočka, “Křesťanství a přirozený svět,” op. cit., 2.7.23.

42 Ibid., 2.7.8.

43 Ibid.

mythologizing ability—and thus give new life to responsibility and to historical duty—by overcoming that paradox, or in other words, by recapitulating the traces of its origins in the mythical dimension. For humanity, the sole possibility of salvation from descent into the prehistoric dimension lies in renewal of the original de-mythologizing movement. This process, however, can only be achieved by recovering and preserving the mythical ground as humanity's never-ending source and indissoluble heritage.

The Christian opening to the sacred arises from a mythical foundation precisely because biological life—which represents both the source and the ultimate goal—is corroded within economic sacrifice, or sacrifice for something or someone. “A person does not sacrifice something that is indifferent to him, something that does not concern him: a genuine sacrifice is always a sacrifice in an absolute sense.”⁴⁴ There is no sacrifice that has not always been a self-sacrifice. Absorbed in satisfying a need, the mythical sacrificer offers the divine a renunciation of something—which, in the process, itself plays a decisive role—only insofar as he has already calculated its amortization and offset: an improvement in the condition of someone—a child—or of something—the community, the homeland. In fact, through this loss, accepted in the name of something or of someone, man paradoxically gains.⁴⁵ The expectation of such a result gives meaning to the suffering endured in the effort of carrying out the act, strengthening the biological condition of he who surrenders, thereby confirming the consummation in its role as the foundation of existence.

However, among the assets at its disposal, mythical existence sacrifices only that which it is not indifferent to, something that touches it, which concerns the life of man in an *absolute* sense. That which man destines to the sacrificial altar is something whose value exceeds the mere ability to fill the void created by need. The sacrificer aims at the growth of his own biological life through something that, appearing precisely among the folds of the nakedness of life, points to what belongs most profoundly to man: his own being.⁴⁶ He can aim at an increase of his state of rootedness

⁴⁴ Jan Patočka, “The Dangers of Technicization in Science according to E. Husserl and the Essence of Technology as Danger according to M. Heidegger,” *op. cit.*, 336.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*: “.... the sacrifice intensifies our being” wrote Patočka, following on the definition of the

only by acknowledging preeminent value in that which exceeds the circuit of satisfaction, by delving into precisely that biological depth, that abyss, where there is nothing to hold on to. In this sense, the sacrifice for something or someone has always been a sacrifice of life, but “in an *absolute* sense.” That Patočka is referring here to mythic, economic sacrifice, recognizing that it holds a certain power of manifestation, is demonstrated by the lines that immediately precede the phrase quoted above. “Sacrifice for something or someone presupposes the idea of a difference of order between the being of humans and the being of things.”⁴⁷ Thus, the nullification brought about by Christian self-sacrifice reveals “the foundation of the manifestation of all of reality” in the pre-original sacrifice, which has not yet been invested with kenotic absolutization. Existence, on the other hand, demonstrates its ability to broaden the horizons of manifestivity, within which—because it is open in response to the indefinability of the other—there appears a backdrop of irreparable unavailability.

The process of self-consumption triggered by work is prehistoric, but at the same time it historicizes, invests with responsibility and therefore demythologizes.⁴⁸ The movement of anchoring life to itself, from which poetic creativity receives its original impulse, and to which mythic images confer meaning—exhausts itself. Since the dawn of time, it has been preparing a process of de-mythologization, supporting and nurturing it until it reaches its peak; until the lament for the abandonment suffered on the cross; until that cry of incomprehension at divine will; until the utterance of that “why?” in which appears the impossibility of taking root (*zakoření*), halts the binding of existence to its natural centre of gravity, and drains the meaning from the mythical projections that emanate from it. Indeed, from that “why?” perhaps there still resounds the unbridgeable distance between prehistoric life and the divine that controls mortality, and therefore that terrible, desperate—mythical—urgency of consecration to bare biological life.

sacrificed for something as not being indifferent, as touching the sacrificed (*Ibid.*).

47 *Ibid.*

48 Cf. Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, *op. cit.*, 16.

PART TWO

LITERATURE

Vladimir Glyantz

THE SACRAMENT OF END

*The Theme of Apocalypse in Three Works by Gogol' **

Few works by other Russian writers have been as closely connected to their authors' religious views as those of Gogol'. Soviet scholars have often pointed out that *The Government Inspector* and *Dead Souls* are, in fact, no more than satires of the Russia of landlords and serfs as it was during the reign of Nikolaj. But academics and soviet theorists have perhaps focused less on the deepest symbolism of Gogol's works. One may object that in the first half of the nineteenth century, symbolism had not yet begun to make its mark on Russian literature, and this is certainly the case if we consider it in terms of a dominant literary trend. Historically speaking, however, symbolism dates back more than 100 years. The Christian Church service, for example, is deeply symbolical. The language of symbols was used by Masonic literary authors in their works. In the second half of the seventeenth century, the preacher and church activist Simeon Polockij had already "admitted the rhetorical postulate calling for four levels of meaning to be identified in every text: literal, allegorical, tropological and anagogical."¹

In this article, we will examine the "anagogical" aspects, or, in other words, the symbolic meaning of Gogol's texts. For reasons of space, Gogol's early works and his later apocalyptic reflections have been omitted.

1. Different Readings of the Various Versions of The Portrait

The Portrait was first published in 1835 in the short-story collection "Arabesques." The main character of the story, a painter, creates a surprising

* Translated from Russian by Olga Selivanova and revised by Karen Turnbull.

¹ Aleksandr M. Pančenko, *O russkoj istorii i kul'ture* (St Petersburg: Azbuka, 2000), 195.

and forceful portrait of a money-lender with “vivid eyes.” The money-lender has great personal interest in the portrait: if the painter’s art manages to capture at least a part of the money-lender’s life in the portrait, he will not have to be present at the forthcoming Judgement Day, which he is terrified of and wishes to postpone or avoid altogether. During the final sitting, the money-lender dies. But just as he had foreseen, a part of his life remains in the portrait, not merely in paint but captured in a supernatural way. At the heart of the story is the idea that a work of art can be, and often is, a testimony of sin. For Gogol, it would seem, the devil willingly binds himself to talent. Terrible things start happening in the artist’s family. The late money-lender often appears to the artist, embarrassing him with sacrilegious offers. An attempt is made to burn the evil image, but to no avail: the burnt portrait reappears once again in its place. An attempt to talk to a priest is punished by the death of the wife and younger son. It is only when the artist begins painting images of saints and notices that their faces take on a diabolical expression that he is finally able to understand that the supernatural ability which he acquired when painting the money-lender’s portrait has now become an evil skill: his paintbrushes have been cursed. The artist goes to live in a monastery, where he spends years doing penance, and having at length become an enlightened monk, he reveals a secret to his eldest son, who has come to visit him.

My son!—he said after a long pause, almost immobile and staring at the sky—The time is getting nearer when the one tempting the human race will be born into the world. It will be a terrible time: it will happen before the end of the world. He will gallop by on a giant horse, and those who remain faithful to Christ will undergo terrible suffering. Listen, my son: *the antichrist has been wanting to be born for a long time...* He is already in the process of being born, but only a part of him has forced its way into this world. He chooses a man to latch on to, and reveals himself through people whom the angel shunned at birth, and they are marked with a terrible hatred for all and for everything God has created. The terrific money-lender whom I, like a fool, dared to depict with my cursed paintbrush was exactly like that. It was him, my son, *it was the antichrist himself...* Marvel, my son, at the terrible power of the devil. He *is trying to penetrate everything*: our actions, our thoughts and even the artist’s inspiration. This devilish spirit, living invisibly without an image on Earth, will claim innumerable victims. It is the black spirit that

storms into our lives even in the moment of the purest and holiest thoughts My son, this is a disaster for poor mankind!"²

What is meant by the assertion that “the antichrist has been wanting to be born for a long time”? Does it mean that he has existed for a long time but cannot be incarnated before a certain date? There is a complicated question concerning the likeness between Antichrist and Christ:—In what way? How? To what extent will Christ’s antagonist resemble him?³—Gogol’ understands and resolves this question rather mechanically, and therefore incompletely. Only the *idea* of Antichrist has existed for a long time, but this idea has not yet acquired its *desire for action*. Gogol’ has not formulated a clear idea here about the antichristian power’s numerous attempts to conquer the world. The image of Antichrist as a character from the future is in many ways hypothetical. In trying to describe him negatively, Gogol’ builds on part of the Credo, which states that Christ “was born from the Father *before the beginning of time*,” or in other words, that he existed not only long before His embodiment, but even before “the clock started ticking.” St. Efrem Sirin, however, refers to the Antichrist in a different way: “Indeed, his power will be born from a desecrated maiden, but *this doesn’t mean that he will be incarnated*.”⁴ Saints have predicted that the Antichrist will not be incarnated in a form resembling the embodiment of God, and that the embodiment of God is absolutely exceptional and unique.

The prophecy of the artist monk in *The Portrait* attracted the attention of the great Russian emigrant thinker, Dmitrij Ivanovič Čiževskij.

It seems to me—wrote the scholar in the article “Unknown Gogol’”—that the only possible explanation of Gogol’s strange words about

2 Nikolaj V. Gogol', *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pisem v 17 tomach* (Moscow-Kiev: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskoj Patriarchii, 2009), vol. 7, 316-317. Subsequent quotations (except where otherwise indicated) will be taken from this edition.

3 Traditional iconographic depictions of the antichrist—such as the frescoes created by Luca Signorelli between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in the cathedral of the Italian town Orvieto—at most make his image similar to the image of Christ, giving him a proud, gloomy, unconfident expression (see *Mythological dictionary* [Moscow: 1990], 52). Also see the modern interpretation of this subject by the Russian painter Il'ja Glazunov.

4 Efrem Sirin (Saint), *Tvorenija*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Izdatel'skij otdel Moskovskogo Patriarchata, 1993), 255 (Reprinted edition).

the Antichrist in the first edition of *The Portrait* is that he was aware of the prophecy of Jung-Stilling and of his apocalyptic novel *Victory Song*.⁵

During the eighteenth century, the Swabian mystic Bengel had prophesied that the apocalypse would take place in 1836. In the nineteenth century, his ideas were repeated by another German mystic and specialist in spiritual issues: Heinrich Jung-Stilling. The latter was well known in Russia thanks to the translations of Aleksandr Fëdorovič Labzin, a Russian mason who promoted his works. Labzin had published a Russian version of Jung-Stilling's apocalyptic novel *Victory's Narrative* or *The Triumph of Christian Faith*, and Čiževskij deduced that Stilling's novel had probably influenced Gogol' to a certain degree.

Unfortunately, there is no proof that Gogol' knew of Jung-Stilling's apocalyptic novel. But, according to the words of the scholar Il'ja Vinickij, "although there are no direct proofs that Gogol' knew Stilling's works, the indirect proofs are considerable enough to believe that it is quite possible."⁶ One such indirect proof is the fact that Gogol' wrote both *The Portrait* and *The Nose* during a specific period which he was distinctly aware of—but which he never discussed. Both stories, produced prior to 1836, were written as though in honour of some grand future event. In this regard, it is significant that the date of the first edition of *The Government Inspector* is 4 December 1835.

During the period of Golycin's "Ministry of Spiritual Affairs," the libraries of educational institutions were obliged to stock books such as those by Jung-Stilling, and other mystic literature in general. However, whether or not Gogol' read the works of the German mystic is not important. He was influenced by the powerful eschatological expectations which permeated the society he lived in, and if he genuinely believed in Jung-Stilling's prophecy, then his soul must have been open to such a belief long beforehand. As a very young man, he wrote a letter home advising his mother on how she should raise her younger daughter, Ol'ga (October 1833):

⁵ Dmitrij I. Čiževskij, "Neizvestnyj Gogol'," in Dmitrij I. Čiževskij et al., *N.V. Gogol': Materialy i issledovanija* (Moscow: Nasledie, 1995), 213.

⁶ Il'ja J. Vinickij, "Nikolaj Gogol' i Ugroza Svetovostokov," in *Voprosy literatury* (Sentjabr'-Oktjabr' 1996): 177.

Teach her the rules of religion. That is the basis of everything ... Tell her more about future life. Using the most colourful possible ... terms, describe to her the joys and pleasures which await the righteous, and what terrible cruel sufferings are in store for the sinful. For God's sake, tell her about it as often as possible, every time she does something bad or good. You will see what favourable consequences it will bring about ... I experienced it myself. As a child, I asked you to tell me about Judgement day and you spoke of the marvels in store for righteous people in such an understandable and touching way, and described the eternal sufferings of the sinful so impressively that it shook me and aroused all the sensitivity in me. It sowed the seeds which later produced *my most spiritual thoughts*.⁷

In the above-mentioned article, Čiževskij speaks of the mysticism which was widespread during Aleksandr's reign and which characterized Tsar' Aleksandr I himself. Just prior to the launch of the French invasion of Russia, the Russian Emperor discovered the Apocalypse for the first time, and he sought out and found its most skillful expositors. It was in this context that the baroness Krüdener became close to him. Apart from studying the Apocalypse together, the baroness also arranged the introduction of Jung-Stilling to Aleksandr I. According to Dmitrij Čiževskij, "without the influence of the latter, the idea of the 'Holy Alliance,' which was linked in Aleksandr I's mind to the necessity of uniting the world's Christian forces before its impending end, would not have emerged."⁸

Significantly, both Aleksandr I and Gogol'—who, while he was not strictly contemporaneous with Aleksandr, was perhaps [strongly] influenced by the mystical trends prevalent towards the end of his reign, and thus lagged behind his own times in a certain sense—sought their own understanding of Christianity. As a result of similar quests, which most members of educated society participated in to some extent, the idea of the Millennium reign of Christ (chiliasm) was once again revived. This ancient heresy is based on a misinterpretation of Revelation (Revelation 20:4-6). A glance at the pages of the Church History reveals that chiliasm was first denounced in 255 AD in Alexandria, and that the Second Ecumenical Council finally forbade the teaching of Millenarianism in 381 AD. But these are acts of

⁷ Nikolaj V. Gogol', *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pisem v 17 tomach*, op. cit., Vol. 10, 226-227.

⁸ Dmitrij I. Čiževskij et al., *N.V. Gogol': Materialy i issledovanija*, op. cit., 212.

the Church, and confidence in the church fell sharply during Gogol's lifetime.

Above all, Aleksandr pondered over how to construe current events with regard to the Apocalypse. He interpreted Napoleon's invasion as the realization of St John's Revelation, happening before his very eyes. Previously, at the time of the Tilsit peace treaty, the Russian Church had likened Napoleon to the "Beast of the Apocalypse." According to his contemporaries, the emperor's character and behaviour formed a reasonable basis for such a hypothesis. Furthermore, many Russians associated the 1812 invasion of Moscow by Napoleon's troops and the terrible fire in the ancient capital with Moscow's 666th anniversary. Even Pope Pius VII called Napoleon "Antichrist" in one of his messages to believers while imprisoned in Fontainebleau in 1813: "Don't believe this Antichrist" he warned, and even tried to excommunicate Napoleon from the Church. The Pope used the word "antichrist" literally, it should be pointed out, and not merely for the sake of eloquence.⁹

The reader may wonder why we are describing the times of Aleksandr I in such detail. The reason is that, according to Čiževskij, "Gogol' enters 'the new age' as a descendant of 'Aleksandr's era.'"¹⁰ He "lags behind" because he corresponds more closely to the spiritual sensitivities of the previous era. Later, in *Dead Souls*, when it seemed that the immediate danger of the End had passed, Gogol' laughed at the "fashionable mysticism of that time (that is, during the era of Aleksandr I)." But if we examine Gogol's Christianity closely, we see that it nonetheless remained under the influence of the Apocalypse both before 1836 as well as after that date: apocalyptic motifs are present, for example, even in "Selected passages from correspondence with his friends," which is one of Gogol's later and more optimistic works. This is a paradox with regard to the topic we are examining.

Such an unexpected thought might never have occurred to Čiževskij, but for a hint from Gogol' himself (in the above-mentioned passage from *The Portrait*). Moreover, this was a work by the young Gogol', before he had acquired maturity. As a side note, this passage represents the rare case of

⁹ On this subject, see Ljubov' V. Mel'nikova, *Armija i Pravoslavnaja cerkov' Rossijskoj Imperii v epochu napoleonovskih vojn* (Moscow: Kučkovo pole, 2007), 316-318.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 208.

a direct statement in Gogol's works. Even during his childhood, Gogol' was typically reserved; his classmates at the Lyceum nicknamed him "secretive dwarf." In the revised version of *The Portrait* (1842), there was no longer even a trace left of the direct apocalyptic statement. Why? If we compare the earlier and later versions, we discover that not only *The Portrait* but also other works written before 1836—the year of the unmaterialized end of the world—were reconsidered in some way, resulting in new versions. So how exactly did he revise them?

In the final version of *The Portrait*, a tertiary character, a local officer, is named "Varuch Kuz'mič," whereas in the early version this character was nameless. Varuch [Baruch] is the name of an Old Testament prophet, who, in the second century AD, and also during Gogol's times, was considered to be the author of two Apocalypses (in the twentieth century, Sergej N. Trubeckoj confidently described Varuch as the author of the Apocalypse). Varuch, in Hebrew, means *blessed*. Aleksandr I, after the defeat of the French invaders, was also honoured with the epithet "blessed."

Nor is this local officer's patronymic—"Kuz'mič"—merely fortuitous: it calls to mind the old man Fëdor Kuz'mič, who, according to the historical legend (which has many supporters in the scientific community), was in fact the former emperor Aleksandr I in disguise, after having faked his own death in Taganrog. By adding the name Varuch Kuz'mič, Gogol' seems to be "pupating" the previously apocalyptic motifs of *The Portrait*. Only a reminder is left of them. In his use of the name "Varuch," I sense Gogol's disappointment, his farewell to a wonderful idea, an end to considering himself a Messiah. The Varuch Kuz'mič of the new version of *The Portrait* is an allusion to the transformation of the former emperor Aleksandr into the old man Fëdor Kuz'mič. Gogol' could not have known (he did not live long enough), but it is interesting to note that the original inscription on the old man's gravestone said: "Here lies the body of the Great Blessed old man Fëdor Kuz'mič, who passed away on 20 January 1864."¹¹

Shortly before Napoleon's invasion, the "emperor Alexander" read the New Testament for the first time, and it was the *Apocalypse* that most deeply impressed him—wrote the archpriest Georgij Florovskij—....

¹¹ Georgij Vasilič, *Imperator Aleksandr i starec Feodor Kuzmič*, reprinted recreation of the edition of 1911 (Moscow: 1991), 138-139.

and since then, he began to trust and to investigate all kinds of interpretations and interpreters of the unsolved and symbolic “Revelation,” which accompanied him all his life It was for the purpose of interpreting the *Apocalypse* that two priests from Balta, Feodosij Levickij and Feodor Lisevič,¹² were later summoned to the capital Under the influence of this mood, the Holy Alliance was conceived and concluded... as a presage of the Millennium reign Of course, it is surely not a coincidence that the day of the Feast of the Cross was chosen.¹³

The victory in the Patriotic War, considered a victory over the *beast*; the feeling many people had of already living “inside the closed apocalyptic circle”¹⁴ with the Millennium Reign about to arrive; the construction of the huge new buildings covered with ecumenical symbols (this was the idea behind construction of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior on the Vorobëv Hills): things which had all been undeniably real until a short time previously, suddenly crumbled. What had been hoped for—the Cathedral, the Millennium, the advantages of the Holy Alliance—turned to dust.

Today it is difficult to judge what feelings were aroused by the failure of the prophecy of the End of the world—whether of relief or of disappointment, but the tense apocalyptic expectations must have brought a certain amount of agitation and excitement into the lives of the “last” Christians. Yet the relief produced by the postponement of the final day was diminished by the confusion it wrought in people’s lives by depriving them of a familiar and longstanding expectation, even though the predicted apocalypse had been a source of anxiety. For Gogol’, the collapse of his obsession with the apocalypse left nothing but emptiness, and he dealt with this through the use of irony: the name “Varuch Kuz’mič” represents not only the former emperor/old man whom Gogol’ held responsible for the prevalent apocalyptic awareness and the confusion consequent to

¹² The reader who wishes to fully feel the spirit of that fascinating time may be interested to know that both priests—Feodosij Levickij and Feodor Lisevič—considered themselves “devoted witnesses” of the “Revelation” (Revelation 11:1–11).

¹³ Georgij Florovskij, *Puti russskogo bogoslovija* (Vilnius: 1991), 131. Reprinted recreation of a Paris edition of 1937.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 129.

its repudiation, but also represents the emptiness and confusion Gogol' himself felt.

The irony in the name of the local officer belongs to Gogol' the writer. But Gogol' the person would continue to listen to the growing rumble of a storm which did not break until the very end of his days.

2. The Nose: A Humorous Story or...?

Impostors and imposture have been rarely seen as crucial topics in Gogol', yet looking closely at his subjects one can see many indications of his interest in this matter. For example, Popriščin from *Diary of a Madman*, who considers himself the king of Spain, is an impostor; the businessman Čičikov also acts like an impostor by introducing himself as a landlord from Cherson; Chlestakov is another such impostor, although not of his own will; and the nose, in the novel of the same name, must surely be the most original of Gogol's impostors. In this novel, the eponymous hero escapes from the face of its owner, Major Kovalev, by obtaining a false passport "issued in the name of an official," and misappropriating the uniform of a state councillor. The noseless Kovalev's own nose announces to him:

I am a person in my own right. Furthermore there cannot be any close relations between us, for to judge by the buttons on your uniform you must serve in the Senate, or perhaps in the Department of Justice. Whereas I am in the Academy.¹⁵

The humour in this situation arises not only from the incongruity of a minor body part arguing with the person it belongs to, but also because the nose has overtaken that person in rank by obtaining a much higher position than the one it held when it formed a part of the major. Kovalev is a mere collegiate assessor (in military rank, a major). As for the nose, the author says: "From his cockaded hat it was apparent that he pretended

¹⁵ Nikolai V. Gogol, "The Nose," in *Plays and Petersburg Tales*, trans. Christopher English (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 43-44. [Translator's Note: the author's quotes from *The Nose* are taken from: Nikolaj Gogol', "Nos," in *Sovremennik. Literaturnyj žurnal A.S. Puškina 1836-1837* (1988)].

to the rank of state councillor,¹⁶ which is a General's rank. But the nose is not just a "comic object" (Jurij Mann), but also a frightful and horrifying one. "A person" consisting of only a nose is an extremely distorted form of physical anomaly. The simplest explanation, however, is that the nose's illicit detachment from its body and its attempt to live its own brighter destiny merely reveals Major Kovalev's own subconscious and his ambitions. In the face of this, it would conceivably not be wrong to assert that a foretaste of the subjects which Freud eternally explored can be perceived in Gogol's creations, and to conclude that Gogol's is perhaps both deeper and more complicated.

The first version of *The Nose*¹⁷ lost significant portions of its text, and various changes were imposed on it through censorship. For the most part, we will examine the novel as it was when it first became available to Russian readers. However, we will also refer to the passages excluded by the censors, which are rather important ideologically. The novel's final version only appeared once these passages had been reinstated.

The tale opens on the following situation: "On *April 25th* [let us remember this date!] an extraordinarily strange occurrence took place in St Petersburg."¹⁸ The barber Ivan Jakovlevič asks his wife Praskovija Osipovna for a taste of the fresh bread she has baked. Some scholars¹⁹ interpret the further development of the character of Ivan Jakovlevič as a parody of the Liturgy, and the small corresponding section is called "The Barber's Liturgy." The similarity (although caricatural) actually exists, but let us not hasten to draw conclusions. Here is the text:

For the sake of decency Ivan Jakovlevič put a tailcoat on over his shirt [author's note: a reminder of the priest's robe] picked up a *knife*... Having cut the loaf in two halves, he looked *inside* and... saw something white. Ivan Jakovlevič poked it carefully with the knife He stuck in his finger and extracted—a nose!²⁰

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁷ See Nikolaj V. Gogol', "Nos," in *Sovremennik. Literaturnyj žurnal A.S. Puškina 1836-1837*, 3 (1988).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁹ For instance, Mikhail Weisskopf from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

²⁰ Nikolaj Gogol', "Nos," in *Sovremennik*, op. cit., 139.

In his *Interpretation of Divine Liturgy*, bishop Vissarion (Nečaev) wrote: "After that, the priest marks with a spear the part necessary for sacrament in the *middle* of the Eucharistic bread This part is called Lamb of God, as it embodies Jesus Christ."²¹

For Gogol' the Christian, parody of the Liturgy is a sacrilege. But the *polysemy* of Gogol's allusions opens up many possibilities for interpretation. Furthermore, it is possible that only the Liturgy of Preparation—the initial part of the Mass—and not the whole ceremony of Liturgy, is meant here. The barber's wife baking bread can be likened to one of the minor characters behind the scenes who participate in the process of the Mass: the special woman who bakes the liturgic bread. There were specific rules fixed by the ecclesiastics which obliged them to "choose as bakers of liturgic bread" either "widows living in *purity*" or virgins no younger than 50 years of age.

Praskovija Osipovna was far from being "a widow living in purity." She accompanies the act of baking bread, which is associated with the baking of liturgical bread, with complaints of an erotic nature, addressed to her husband—"Soon he'll be in no condition to carry out his duty"—which offend the sanctity as symbolized by the bread. Moreover, she is a brawler, and the entire scene is filled with her invective, addressed largely to her husband: "Scoundrel, drunkard," "dry stick," "the rake, the villain," "piece of filth, blockhead," etc. It is obvious that the "sacrament" for which Praskovija Osipovna bakes bread is the contrary, in its aims and character, of the sacrament of Eucharist. The "terrible drunkard" husband is a good match for his scandalous wife. In his message to the Corinthians, Apostle Paul wrote: "Nor drunkards, nor revilers ... shall inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Corinthians 6:10). The barber and his wife are the living embodiment of these evangelical antiheroes.

Young Gogol's *anticlericalism* is sometimes mentioned in connection with *The Nose*. But I do not think it is relevant to the parody motifs of the novel. The impostor of the end of the world, the antichrist, who will unlawfully appropriate Divine dignity, will be a living parody of Christ himself. Gogol' laughs at the imitator. The writer had a firm, but not immutable, conviction that the spirits of evil, because of their characteristic

²¹ Vissarion Episcop Nečaev, *Tolkovanie na Božestvennyju Liturgiju* (Sergiev Posad: Svjato-Troickaja Sergieva Lavra, 1996), 19-20 (Reprinted edition).

pride, cannot stand mocking. “Laugh, laugh at the devil...” Gogol’ wrote to his close friend Ševyrëv, “as it is an inexhaustible source for a Russian comic! So chase the enemy with your inexhaustible wonderful laugh and you will do people good being in favour of the eternal intelligence contained in Christ.”²²

“Where did you cut that nose from, you butcher?”²³—Praskovija Osipovna shouts at her husband, threatening to report him to the police. In order to rid himself of Kovalev’s nose, which got into the bread in an unexplained way (although Kovalev is the barber’s client), Ivan Jakovlevič goes out into the street, and at an opportune moment throws it from the bridge into the river.²⁴ Kovalev, having discovered the disappearance of his nose, starts searching for it. When finally he finds his nose, it is almost unrecognizable:

a carriage stopped at the entrance; the doors opened and, stooping, a gentleman in uniform sprang out and ran up the stairs Two minutes later the nose emerged. He wore a gold-braided uniform, with a high stiff collar; he had on buckskin breeches, and by his side hung a sword.²⁵

In the uncensored version, the place where Kovalev next catches up with the missing nose was Kazan Cathedral. Here, it is necessary to say a few words about Gogol’'s relationship with censorship. In connection with the forthcoming publication of *The Nose*, the writer foresaw possible quibbling on the part of the censors. On 18 March 1835, Gogol’ wrote to Pogodin: “I am sending you the nose... In case your stupid censor says that the nose can’t be in Kazan Cathedral, I guess we can move it to a catholic one.”²⁶ As we can see, it was thus the image of a Christian cathedral that was crucial for the author to preserve in his novel. There was an opportunity (as was revealed in the publication of the uncensored version) to use the nose praying in the

²² Nikolaj V. Gogol’, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pisem v 17 tomach*, op. cit., Vol. XIV, 211.

²³ Nikolaj V. Gogol’, “The Nose” in *Plays and Petersburg Tales*, op. cit., 37.

²⁴ Some scholars perceive a hidden parody of the Lord’s baptism in this scene.

²⁵ Nikolaj V. Gogol’, “The Nose” in *Plays and Petersburg Tales*, op. cit., 42.

²⁶ Nikolaj V. Gogol’, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pisem v 17 tomach*, op. cit., Vol. XI, 14.

cathedral as a sign of the forthcoming end—"the abomination of desolation, [which] stand[s] in the holy place" (Matthew 24:15). The date of the event is also important. As mentioned previously, the first publication contained the date: "April 25th of this year." There were also other dates: "23rd of April 1832" and "23rd February of this year," until Gogol' finally established a definitive significant date: "March 25th."²⁷ In the Church calendar, this is one of the greatest Christian holidays: Annunciation.

But as expected, the censors did not allow the scene in Kazan Cathedral. Gogol' moved the action to Commercial Square, and did so in an almost negligent manner: some elements of the uncensored version remained untouched. Kovalev addresses his own nose, which seems to be deciding on a purchase in Commercial Square: "And just look where I've found you—in a church."²⁸ This seeming negligence, which escaped censorship, appeared only once, in the magazine publication. The likelihood is very small that it was purely by chance that Gogol' did not exchange "in a church" for "at Commercial Square," since a bit further in the first publication we find a further element of the uncensored version. Kovalev "turned his attention to the ethereal young lady who... *bowed* her head slightly and *put her little white hand ... to her forehead*."²⁹ In other words, she was crossing herself and bending down, in a rather quaint manner at that, as she would have done in church, although she, like the nose, had been moved to the middle of Commercial Square. The image is ambiguous and incongruous, and as a result, the censored version explodes with new, unexpected meaning: it implies that, *at the church*, one can choose and buy

²⁷ The Russians traditionally gave the date of 25 March an additional apocalyptic significance distinct from the main significance of Resurrection. Stepan P. Ševyrëv, who was very close to Gogol', wrote in his *Istorii ruskoj slovesnosti, preimyščestvenno drevnej* (Part 4, 83): "The night of the coming March 25 of 1492 was hard. After the end of the three years of the Antichrist's reign, which the contemporaries found in the teaching of the Jew Skaria and his followers in Novgorod and Moscow, fearful people were filled with horror waiting for the worldwide sound of the trumpet of the archangels Michael and Gabriel. One can imagine with what joy those people woke up on the day of Resurrection..." (quoted from: Stepan P. Ševyrëv, *Rossija pered vtorym prišestviem. Materialy k očerku ruskoj eschatologii* [Sergiev Posad: Svjato-Troickaja Sergieva Lavra, 1993], 18). I suppose that in shifting the accident with the barber to another day Gogol' knew, probably from Ševyrëv, about the apocalyptic shades of Revelation.

²⁸ Nikolai V. Gogol, "The Nose," in *Plays and Petersburg Tales*, op. cit., 43.

²⁹ Nikolaj Gogol', "Nos" in *Sovremennik*, op. cit., 148.

goods, and that furthermore the church contains the whole Commercial Square. The Temple of the Lord thus becomes a commercial place. This image of modern Christianity as belonging too much to this world and appearing like a big market is typical of Gogol', and one can draw a clear evangelical parallel here, as we can see by comparing it with Matthew 21:12, 13:

And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves and said unto them: "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." (cf. Joshua 56:7; Hebrews 7:11)

The new variant acquires a new meaning: the trading market with its material abundance is the object of worship of modern humanity. In a letter from Gogol' to Balabina (April 1838), we find this:

Today I have found the courage to go into one of the Roman churches, those wonderful churches that you know, where the sacred half-darkness breathes, and where the sun shines down from the top of the oval dome like the sacred spirit, like an inspiration in their midst, where two or three figures praying on their knees not only don't distract one, but seem to be giving wings to prayer and thoughts. I had the courage to pray for us there (as one can only really pray in Rome) *And a prayer in Paris, London and Petersburg is like a prayer at a market.*³⁰

Let us now look at the uncensored version for a moment. In this version, the nose also plays the role of a religious impostor, aspiring not only to physical but also to religious autonomy. While Major Kovalev "felt so upset that he was in no condition to pray... the nose had completely hidden his face in his big stand-up collar and was praying in an attitude of utmost piety."³¹

A great Russian philosopher—Vladimir Solov'ev—who, like Gogol', had a deep apocalyptic sensitivity, wrote in his *Three Conversations*:

³⁰ Nikolaj V. Gogol', *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pisem v 17 tomach*, op. cit., Vol. XI, 145, 151.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, 45.

... undoubtedly, antichristianity, which according to the biblical point of view, both Old Testament and New Testament, presents the last act of the historic tragedy, will be not a simple absence of faith or negation of Christianity or materialism and things like that, but will be a *religious imposture*, when human forces, which in action and in substance are alien and directly hostile to Christ and His Spirit, will appropriate his name.³²

“There were few people praying inside the church”—Gogol’ wrote in the uncensored version of *The Nose*. This is surprising, for such an important Christian holiday as Annunciation, while at the same time the streets are full of people walking. Such disparity between those praying and those participating in a great holiday is noteworthy. But we should not be deceived by the vivid exterior picture. Gogol’ could be describing our own times rather than his contemporary period. Let us not forget Gogol’s subtext: the almost empty Kazan Cathedral on the day of Annunciation and the nose which is standing there “in prayer” symbolize both apostasy (the apostasy of the majority) and “the abomination of desolation, standing in the holy place.” It is almost as if Gogol’ has seen into the future, when Kazan Cathedral has become the Museum of the history of religion after the revolution (1932), and has become the place where the abomination of desolation truly is.³³

Theophylact of Ohrid wrote: “For some, the ‘abomination of desolation’ means the Antichrist, as he will be emptying the world, destroying the churches and will reign in the temple of god himself.”³⁴ The nose, introducing himself as an important official and a human, does not trick only the common people. In such a perverted caricature form, with no fear at all, he stands before the eyes of God Himself—he is lying to Him, he is mocking Him. He appears in a *supernatural way*, which contradicts the Annunciation in a comic way. Let us return once again to the phrase from

³² Vladimir S. Solov’ev, *Sočinenija v 2 tomach* (Moscow: Mysl’, 1988), Vol. 2, 707-708. (Italics by Vl. Solov’ev).

³³ In 1923, the rural group “Optina pustyn,” under the cover of which existed a monastery (a unique centre of Russian spirituality), was closed down. The former monastery fell under the control of “Glavnauka,” and as an historical monument was called the “Optina Hermitage.”

³⁴ Theophylact of Ohrid, *Blagovestnik, ili Tolkovanie Blažennago Feofilakta, Archiepiskopa Bolgarskago, na Svjatoe Evangelie* (Moscow: Skit, 1993), Vol. 1, 215.

an early version of *The Portrait*: “Listen, my son, the antichrist has been wishing to be born for a long time, but can’t because he must be born in a *supernatural way*...” and compare this with 2 Thessalonians 2:8, 9: “Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and *lying wonders*...”

The autonomous existence of the nose and all his adventures represent these “lying wonders.” But the nose does not act in a vacuum, he acts in an atmosphere of specific expectations:

At that time people’s minds were particularly receptive to all manner of extraordinary phenomena rumour had Collegiate Assessor Kovalev’s nose taking a daily stroll along Nevsky Prospect at three o’clock sharp. Every day a large crowd of inquisitive onlookers would gather. Someone said that the Nose had been seen at Junker’s emporium, and such a crush of people collected around the shop that the police had to be called in Then a rumor sprang up that Major Kovalev’s nose took its walk not on Nevsky Prospect but in the Tavrishesky Gardens ... Some of the students from the Surgical Academy set off to see for themselves.³⁵

None of the gapers manages to satisfy their curiosity. All of them were, to use the Russian expression, “left with a nose,” meaning they were outwitted or tricked.

Compare, also, Matthew 24:23-26:

Then if any man shall say unto you: “look, here is Christ,” or “there”; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you: “behold, he is in the desert,”—go not forth; “behold, he is in the secret chambers,”—believe it not.

The nose successfully pretends to be an important person, and for a long time remains undiscovered. Gogol’ describes how easily deceived are those who “expect the supernatural,” and the chaos that the masses create when expecting false miracles. Such chaos is of great help to any illusionist seeking

³⁵ Nikolai V. Gogol, “The Nose,” in *Plays and Petersburg Tales*, op. cit., 57-58.

to hoax. But what is important for us is that the artistic parallel with the evangelical text finally becomes apparent, and this revelation unmask the infernal nature of the nose. And yet, the nose is not the antichrist himself. Instead, it is no more than a symbol, a sign, a preliminary image of the idea of antichrist. In the same way, St. Ignatij (Brjančaninov) called Napoleon "a premonition of antichrist." *The Nose* is another of Gogol's attempts to solve, not explicitly but in an artistic way, a problem that is also found in the early version of *The Portrait*. What were considered by some critics to be archaic problems, gave rise to an absolutely innovative aesthetic when described by Gogol'. Gogol' was not merely a symbolist before the birth of symbolism: in *The Nose*, he also becomes a surrealist before surrealism emerged.

From the works of saints, we know that the antichrist will be born from a false virgin who is in reality a mother-whore. *The Nose* has a corresponding motif: the pretty girls who visit Kovalev are whores. This gives rise to a motif, not completely articulated but instead implied, of the loss of the nose because of a certain loathsome disease. One of these women who (according to the implication) caused Kovalev's illness must be that very "mother-whore." She essentially "gives birth" to the situation of the loss of the nose in a physiological sense and its new status as a symbolical meaning (as the symbol of antichrist). "And, I'm sure you agree, it would be rather unseemly for me to walk around without a nose. It would be all right for some market woman, selling peeled oranges on the Voskresensky Bridge, to sit there with no nose..."³⁶—explains Kovalev to his own nose. The market women were former whores, who in the recent past had been "pretty ones" such as those who still visit the major. The lack of a nose is the consequence of their former profession. Their new profession alludes to their previous one. They used to sell their body by disrobing, and now they sell "naked" oranges, if we can so call them. This exterior connection of the new profession with the old one, the shameless "stripping" in a different form, symbolizes their incorrigibility, their final fall. Gogol's attitude to such women was not very merciful.

Gogol', who frequently said more than was allowed, also often conveys more than he himself had intended. His genius overcomes not only

³⁶ Ibid., 43.

the external prohibitions but his own inner limitations. Here is an example of an unplanned interpretation. The bridge where the market women sell their wares is a symbol of the union of earthly and heavenly reality. The former whores who have repented and started on the path of redemption find shelter on *Voskresenskij (Resurrection)* bridge, which leads to salvation “For the Son of man is come to *save that which was lost*” (Matthew 18:11). Furthermore, when interpreted this way, Voskresenskij Bridge moves from the level of dead toponyms to the symbolic level. It revives, at least in part, the Event of Resurrection itself.

The explicit prophecy of the early version of *The Portrait* could not be rendered in the same way in the humorous context of *The Nose*. The humour does not make Gogol’s allusions clearer, but rather makes the guesswork more hesitant. “Don’t be horrified,” the humour falsely consoles: “It is just a joke.” The ambiguous nature of the humour gives rise to unexpected, sarcastic shades. In mocking the evil forces and introducing hints of the Gospel into his text, Gogol’ seemingly fails to notice that his laughter partly concerns the Archetypes, which are sacred for any Christian. *The Nose* contains hints and allusions concerning all the fundamental moments of the life of the Saviour—from Theophany to punishment, insults, the Calvary suffering, his last words on the cross and even the Resurrection. But these are the main contents of the Divine Liturgy. According to the Reformed Liturgy, the Church decided to serve the Liturgy so that it contained all the *Sacrament of Embodiment of God’s Son*, all His deeds which he revealed to us from the beginning to the end, that is from His Birth and up to and including the Resurrection.³⁷ This is an example of how allusions of this kind escape control of their own accord, as the antichrist—unlike Christ—will have nothing similar to Calvary and the Resurrection.

It may be thought that some of the *inaccuracy of the symbolical images*, their inexactness, is the consequence of the *young Gogol’s* imperfect knowledge of the Bible and of the Divine Liturgy. But even if one interprets Gogol’s intentions in the most positive light, the dissonance remains a dissonance. And who can exclude the contrary undesirable interpretation that Gogol’, according to Mikhail Weisskopf, was parodying the Liturgy in

³⁷ Cf. “Smysl’ i značenie pravoslavnogo christianskogo ežednevnogo Bogosluženija,” in *Pravoslavnyj cerkovnyj kalendar’* (Moscow: 1994) (see “Novaja Skrižal’” Part 2, chapter 6, paragraph 30).

The Nose? But there is also a detail in the novel that justifies the author. The allusions to the main events of Christ's life are in disorder; they do not follow the evangelic sequence, and in this way belie the nature of the Son of God. Gogol' left a clue which enables us to ascertain that he is laughing at the impostor. In his later years, Gogol' not only recognized the peccancy of his earlier novels, but he was also sincerely horrified by himself. He never revisited his earlier works with the intent to correct them stylistically. Rather, his aim, albeit unavailing, was to attempt to recreate them, to rid them of their inappropriate meanings. But *The Nose* cannot be corrected *a little*. A completely different text with the opposite meaning would have to be written. "That's why I also want to pray to God so that he will give me the force to make up for my previous bad deeds, even in the sphere of writing, by means of a better action and achievement"—sighed Gogol', writing to his personal priest, Father Matthew.³⁸ In fact, Gogol' produced such an antithetical text shortly thereafter, in his *Meditations on Divine Liturgy*, which was written as if to make up for the sins of his youth.

3. Neither Theatre, nor Comedy: What Then? (The Premiere of The Government Inspector)

On 7 October 1835, in a famous letter, Gogol' requested Puškin to: "Be so kind as to give me the plot of the comedy consisting of five acts and I swear it will be funnier than the devil himself."³⁹ And on 4 December of the same year, the first version of *The Government Inspector* was ready. Right from the beginning of the comedy, Gogol' reveals the *spiritual meaning* of the forthcoming inspection. The Mayor, in the presence of the officials, reads Čmychov's letter aloud:

Amongst other things, I hasten to warn you that a government official has arrived here with instructions to inspect the entire province, and especially our district... And since I know that, like everyone, you've committed the odd little sin, because you're a clever man and don't

³⁸ Nikolaj V. Gogol', *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pisem v 17 tomach*, op. cit., Vol. XV, 17.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, 33.

like to let things slip through your fingers... I would advise you to take precautions, as he could arrive *at any time*.⁴⁰

A little later the Mayor makes the following comment: “The worst thing is, no-one knows where he is coming from, nor on which day and at what hour.” The corresponding reference in the Gospel is called “the warning to remain alert.” For instance, Matthew 24:42: “Watch therefore: for ye know not *what hour* your Lord doth come.” And Luke 21:36: “Watch ye therefore, and pray *always*, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”⁴¹ From the very first words of the comedy, one can see reminders of the eschatological 24th chapter of Matthew, which is also called the Little Apocalypse.

In the second scene of the same act, the Mayor tells the postman: “That’s what the matter is: probably if he hasn’t come [yet, it means that] he is *near* here,” and turning to Ljapkin-Tjapkin: “I don’t care about your hares now, my good friend [he is speaking about hunting]. That cursed incognito is on my brain. So any moment the door may open and in walks...”⁴² Thus, Gogol’ writes first: “*near* here”; and second: “*So ... the door may open*.” In the Gospel we find: “*So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors*” (Matthew 24:33). But it is notable that these *two* clearly significant groups of words are heard, although not in the same act, and at a considerable distance from each other. *The only* character uniting these words—like clues scattered throughout the text—is the one who pronounces them: the Mayor. The writer scattered them on purpose, in order to avoid clarity. It is obvious that in this case Gogol’ *didn’t want to be understood*. But if the apocalyptic subtext was addressed to neither the spectator nor the reader, then who was he addressing? The answer will be found only once the ideology of the comedy and the peculiarities of Gogol’s initial expectations have been investigated in detail.

The first noun of the second act of *The Government Inspector*—the act in which Chlestakov appears—is the word “*devil*.” “*The devil* take it! I’m

⁴⁰ Nikolai V. Gogol, “The Government Inspector,” in *Plays and Petersburg Tales*, op. cit., 249-250.

⁴¹ Cf. also Matthew 24:44, 50.

⁴² Nikolaj V. Gogol’, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pisem v 17 tomach*, op. cit., Vol. VII, 386. [Translator’s Note: from now on we follow the author’s quotations from the Russian text of Gogol’s *The Government Inspector*].

so hungry.”—says Chlestakov’s servant, Osip. *The last* phrase of the act—the Mayor’s reproach to Bobčinskij—is: “Devil! Couldn’t you find some other place to fall in? Sprawling out here like a lobster!”⁴³ In this way, the second act is fenced in on both sides by a sort of infernal frame. What is inside this “frame”?

“Well, go on, the *deuce* take you.”⁴⁴—says Chlestakov to Osip. “I am so ravenously hungry. I took a little stroll thinking I could walk off my appetite. But, *hell*, it clings.”⁴⁵ He says to the waiter: “You measly suckling pig. Why can they eat and I not? Why the devil can’t I eat, too? Am I not a guest the same as they?”⁴⁶ After tasting the dish, he says: “The devil knows, but it isn’t roast beef. It’s roast iron, not roast beef...” He complains to the Mayor: “And the soup—what the devil have they put into it...” etc. Chlestakov’s fast, which he is obliged to stick to because of a loss at cards, is an almost clear but inverted allusion to Christ’s forty days of fast in the desert. For that matter, Chlestakov sees the town as a desert: “What a terrible town! In the other ones there is at least something and *here there is nothing at all.*”⁴⁷ Chlestakov is the complete opposite compared to Christ. Christ prayed in the desert. Chlestakov also “prays” in his perverse way, mentioning the devil at every occasion. When he whistles, it is an aria from Meyerbeer’s opera, “Robert le Diable,” popular at that time: “Dance Infernale.” Later, in the “cheating scene,” he even claims authorship of “Robert Le Diable.” Christ was tempted by the devil in the desert but remained firm. “Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and *ministered unto him*” (Matthew 4:11). What is the result of Chlestakov’s “fast”? Mayor: “If you really are in want of money, I’m ready *to serve* you.” Chlestakov: “Lend me some, lend me some.” Mayor: “There’s just two hundred rubles [Giving him the money].”⁴⁸ Christ stood firm against temptation because he maintained his connection with the Father through prayer, and did not contradict His

⁴³ Ibid., 406.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 396.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 399.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 397.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Vol. IV, 243.

will. Chlestakov cannot withstand temptation, as he opposes his father (symbolically, the Father). In the 1842 version:

My father wants me. He is angry because so far I haven't made headway in the St. Petersburg service You see, my *father* is stubborn and stupid—an old dotard as hard as a block of wood. I'll tell him straight out, "Do what you will, I can't live away from St. Petersburg."⁴⁹

In this context, Petersburg is a symbol of *all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them* (from the third temptation of Christ). According to Gogol', the arrival of the fake government inspector (antichrist) will be commonplace and trivial. Only after the announcement of Bobčinskij and Dobčinskij (who act as if they were false prophets) does everyone in the town (the world) accept him as a real government inspector (on a symbolical level, Christ). Falsely imitating the humility of Christ, he stays in the worst room, "under the stairs." It should be recalled that Gogol' harboured a special affection for stairs as a symbol of spiritual ascent. Thus "under the stairs" holds the additional meaning of being cast down by God.

Chlestakov arrives in the town on the day of Vasilij the Egyptian. Religious censorship would not allow the use of a real church holiday dedicated to a real saint in a *comedy*. But Gogol' copes with censorship in a masterly way by making practical use of its prohibitions. Chlestakov's arrival coincides with the day of a non-existent "saint." This is one more presage of the end of the world. Compare this to Revelation 13:7: "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them..." Moreover, preparations for the false holiday began before the appearance of Chlestakov (the antichrist). The citizens (and in a broader sense, humanity) had been preparing for the coming of the "son of death." A fight between travelling officers in the room under the stairs marks, in a particular way, the place where Chlestakov will be staying. From the Revelation of John we know that "one of [the] heads" of the beast seemed as if "it were wounded to death," "and his deadly wound was healed." (Revelation 13:3).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 244.

Bobčinskij, who was eavesdropping, was hit on the nose by the door. Chlestakov asks: "What has happened? Have you hurt yourself?" Bobčinskij replies: "Oh, it's nothing—nothing at all—only a little bruise on my nose. I'll run in to Dr. Hübner's. He has a sort of *plaster*. It'll soon pass away."⁵⁰ Some time later, Chlestakov remarks: "I believe you fell? How's your nose?", and Bobčinskij answers: "It's all right. Please don't trouble. It's dried up, dried up completely."⁵¹ In other words, "his wound was healed." In a comedic sense, it would be entertaining enough if the eavesdropping Bobčinskij was hit on the nose, but from the point of view of dramaturgy it is not necessary to continue talking about it until it heals. *This excessive* information draws attention to its deep symbolism and is necessary not just for its own sake but for the allusion to the Apocalypse, and so that the necessary note could be heard in the symbolical score: "his wound was healed." Chlestakov's concern for a "small" man, which seems rather unnecessary, is also justified symbolically: the behaviour of Chlestakov-antichrist should be typically attentive to men (just as Christ was).

St. Efreim Sirin described other similar signs, typical of the anti-christ:

The devil will have such an image that everyone will like him, he will appear modest, gentle, hating ... the lie, detesting idols, preferring goodness, kind, loving the poor, gentle to the highest extent, constant, nice to everyone; respecting especially the Jewish people as the Jewish will be waiting for his coming.⁵²

Vladimir Solov'ëv's interpretation of this passage of the Apocalypse (as retold by Evgenij Trubeckoj) is extraordinary in its mystic intuition:

⁵⁰ Ibid., Vol. VII, 406. The passage in which Bobčinskij is hit on the nose and his "wound" is inflicted is connected not only with the Revelation of John. The "wound," along with the plaster, are connected with the novel by Osip Senkovskij "Bol'soj vychod y satany": "The old, disgusting devil came ... with a big plaster stuck on his back, under his tail ... Anyone ... would easily guess ... that it must be the evil spirit of rebellions, revolts, riots ... He was called Astarot." Telling Satan about the revolutions, the devil mentions: "Now I am dangerously *wounded* again..." (See: Osip I. Senkovskij, *Sočinenija Barona Brambeusa* [Moscow: Sov. Rossija, 1989], 237-239).

⁵¹ Nikolaj V. Gogol', *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pisem v 17 tomach*, op. cit., Vol. VII, 427.

⁵² Efreim Sirin (Saint), *Tvorenija*, op. cit., Vol. 2, 255.

According to his [Solov'ev's] interpretation—Trubeckoj writes—“the wound” means a fault in the mental scope of the modern people denying Christ, their natural lack of capacity to understand something sacramental, mystic. In our days the “mystery of unlawfulness” cannot take place due to the *absence of understanding of this mystery*: the Antichrist's mission is paralysed by the fact that the vision of the world of his followers is just a big *wound, a hole in the head*. But at the end of the centuries this wound will be healed; having received the mystic power, the Antichrist will magically influence humanity and only then the whole *land* will bow to him, imprisoned and enchanted by his supernatural charm.⁵³

According to the interpretation of the Fathers, the Antichrist will come from the Dan tribe and be born of a whore mother, a false virgin. He will become known at the same age as Christ was when he became known, and his power will last for 42 months. He will possess phenomenal abilities. Having received all his power from the devil he will be capable of creating miracles. “And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men” (Revelation 13:13). He will be accepted by the great majority of humanity. At first it will be difficult to recognize him because, as already mentioned, he will imitate Christ well in his gentleness, philanthropy and performance of (exterior) miracles. In fact, as Evgenij Trubeckoj says: “Absolute evil is a full and global falsification of the good.”⁵⁴

As for Chlestakov, he is “a skinny young man of about twenty-three.” He has one very strange quality: “The words burst from his mouth unexpectedly.”⁵⁵ There is something reminiscent of a mechanism, like a mechanical doll which is assailed by *alien* words. The antichrist hiding behind Chlestakov is the character of *The Government Inspector*, who remains a subtext and unseen by us, but Gogol' still managed to laugh at him by laughing at Chlestakov (recalling the words from the letter to Puškin: “...funnier than the devil himself”). Chlestakov is an external everyday expression of the idea of the antichrist; an incarnation to laugh at.

⁵³ Evgenij N. Trubeckoj, *Mirosozercanie VI. S. Solov'eva*, Vol. 2 (Moscow: Medium, 1995), 281 (Italics by E. Trubeckoj).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁵⁵ Nikolaj V. Gogol', *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pisem v 17 tomach*, op. cit., Vol. VII, 378.

It is interesting to note how, according to the wonderful Russian thinker, Aleksej F. Losev, the antihero of Solov'ev's *Tale of the Antichrist* was associated with precisely the image of Chlestakov. Losev wrote:

Having read Solov'ev's novel about the antichrist, anyone would say: right, that is not what man is aspiring to, and these are not the cheap victories that mankind is dreaming of, no matter what scientific knowledge, what arts and what exterior power this *Chlestakovian* personality had to establish the common good.⁵⁶

In *The Government Inspector*, Gogol' uses numerous allusions to the Last Judgment, although for reasons of space we will not describe them fully here. Nor is it possible to comment in detail on a very important topic in apocalyptic fiction—the “cheating” scene. However, we must at least mention the most important element in this regard: Chlestakov boasts of his almost incredible creative power, thanks to which it takes him only *one evening* to create novels, operas, and ballets. Librettos, scores, hundreds and thousands of entire magazines stream forth from his “creative” workshop: “To be honest all the magazines that exist are edited by me.”⁵⁷ “I have an extraordinary facility for thought.”⁵⁸ Chlestakov brags of his own genius. This is where his phrase, “I am on an intimate footing with Puškin”⁵⁹ originates: from the genius which characterizes *both* of them. St. Ignatij (Brjančaninov) described the antichrist as “[t]he greatest genius of all geniuses.”

But when the end of the world failed to materialize in 1836, Gogol' made considerable corrections to the text of the comedy. In the 1842 version, he excluded the evangelic allusion: “So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors” (Matthew 24:33). Chlestakov, however, acquires a new phrase: “Oh, I don't like to joke . . . I tell everyone: *'I know myself, I know myself? I am everywhere, everywhere.'*” This recalls the words of the apostle Paul: “But we will not boast of things without *our* measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God

⁵⁶ See the introductory essay by Aleksej F. Losev to: Vladimir S. Solov'ev, *Sočinenija*, op. cit., Vol. I, 31.

⁵⁷ Nikolaj V. Gogol', *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pisem v 17 tomach*, op. cit., Vol. VII, 415.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. IV., 256.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto *you*.” (2 Corinthians 10:13). But Gogol’ is suggesting more than just unreasonableness. The logic of unrestrained cheating and rampant boasting leads Chlestakov far astray. Having sought to usurp all possible human stations, up to and including the highest ranks, he starts to wish for something greater than merely human. The phrase “I am everywhere, everywhere” implies an obscene inflation of personality, a man who aspires to omnipresence, even though he says it under the influence of alcohol. This is quite a clear reference to the final imposture and self-proclamation. Compare John 5:43: “I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come *in his own name*, him ye will receive.”

Gogol’s contemporaries also reproached him for the fact that it was strange that the Mayor, who had “tricked three governors,” mistook the young, inexperienced Chlestakov for an important official. But those who fear exposure of their shady deals often lose their perspicacity. As the Apostle says:

And then shall that Wicked be revealed... whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. *And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie...*” (2 Thessalonians 2:8-11)

From the “most hollow” Chlestakov, the officials (or in other words, humanity) create a significant nobleman (antichrist). But there is one item of particular interest. In the final version of the comedy, there seem to be fewer direct allusions to the Gospel, and yet the newly introduced texts, despite recalling the New Testament in a less direct manner, do not weaken the apocalyptic fiction, but in fact make it stronger. In the works of any other writer who, like Gogol’, uses allusions, these tend to be inadvertent, rather than intentional.⁶⁰ But Gogol’s Gospel references are systematic and

⁶⁰ This rule has its exceptions. For example, the eighth line of the ode of A. S. Puškin, “Vol’nost’” [Freedom] which reveals conscious references to the book of the prophet Isaiah, or the poems that Filaret (Drozdov), the Metropolitan of Moscow, included in the festive paroemia. The paroemia was created in connection with the celebration of the victory over the French synchronously with Christmas. For more details, see Vasilij Morov, *Oda Puškina “Vol’nost’”*

indeed are often the factor that creates his plots. At all events, they form a well thought-out and organized group, which Gogol' uses to highlight the contrast between the common everyday things that are laughed at and the real ontological depth. Gogol' was aware that these two opposing sides of life nonetheless form a kind of contradictory union. It is characteristic of Gogol' to give this careless mode of life a different, serious dimension. In the meeting between these two sides of life, it can suddenly be seen that in the roots of changeable life there is always an unchangeable sacred source, no matter what it looks like on the exterior. And the growing dissonance between the real deep life and the common life results in a growing divergence of the deformed life from the standard. Čiževskij's next remark is, from my point of view, of primary importance:

It cannot be excluded that Gogol's eschatological hopes are connected with his expectations that *The Government Inspector*—one year before the end of the world! [author's note: in reality, it was written in 1836]—would have a particular influence on the destiny of Russia, and on his flight to Rome when these expectations didn't come true.⁶¹

Čiževskij does not fully reveal his very important guess, which essentially suggests that Gogol' seemed to have been hoping for some event which he expected at the premiere of the comedy. Having a deadline, he did not want to wait for the long-term educational effect, which never occurs immediately. Something was to happen during the premiere itself, suddenly, seen by everybody, without excluding that it was to happen in a *miraculous* way. Gogol', who believed in the effectiveness of art rather than in equating his revelations to religious truths, is not alone in this regard, as this was the prevailing spirit of the times. "The questions of philosophy of art were the most interesting issues for young thinkers," according to the archpriest Florovskij, "and in artists they saw real creators of life and prophets; they expected the *transformation ... of reality* through art."⁶² Gogol' "fled" to Rome not because the premiere was a failure, but because the event he

i "Arzamas" (Moscow: Novoe zercalo, 2009).

⁶¹ Dmitrij I. Čiževskij, "Neizvestnyj Gogol'," op. cit., 213.

⁶² Georgij Florovskij, *Puti russkogo bogoslovija*, op. cit., 244.

was hoping for did not happen at the time of the premiere. The date of his departure from Russia is significant: 06.06.1836 (three sixes again!). And why to Rome? Clearly it was not just because it is the Mecca of artists, but rather because it is “much closer to God.”

The completion of the first version of the comedy, with some revisions, took place on the eve of the Great Fast of 1836. It is known that, during the fast, entertainments and performances were officially prohibited. On 18 January 1836, Gogol' wrote to his friend M. Pogodin:

I am sorry that I still haven't sent you the comedy! It was absolutely ready and revised but I must at all costs rewrite several scenes. It won't take long because I decided *in any case to stage it for the sacred holiday*. By the fast it will have been completed and during the fast the actors will have time to study their roles to perfection.⁶³

To fully appreciate the meaning of the words “stage it for the sacred holiday” one should know about Gogol's specific attitude to the “greatest of all holidays”—Resurrection. Several times over the course of his life, he took rather important steps on that specific date. Reconstructing Gogol's logic, I would suppose that, in his opinion, the particular life-giving energy of Resurrection would bolster any good action during that period of time. God's blessing catalyzes human efforts. God himself guarantees success. From the recollections of Gogol's contemporaries, we know that the premiere was a success. But Gogol' was as disappointed as if it had been a complete failure. This indicates that the author was not seeking fame, loud acclamation, or scandal. Knowing Gogol's secretiveness, there is no point in expecting clear explanations from him of that painful and inadequate reaction to the premiere and to the subsequent rumours which overwhelmed him. Whether one desires it or not, Gogol' follows a path beset with guesses and suppositions.

Igor' Zolotusskij, the author of a wonderful book about Gogol', writes:

He expected the ceiling to collapse, but it did not. He was waiting for catharsis, an explosion of despair of the soul, for repentance, for

⁶³ Nikolaj V. Gogol', *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pisem v 17 tomach*, op. cit., Vol. XI, 37.

insight into the truth which is shown in its bitter and sad scenes on the stage. But nothing happened.⁶⁴

However, this is still not the whole truth. One cannot deny the significance that Gogol' assigned to art. And yet, taking into account the openly apocalyptic tone of the comedy, I will conjecture, that the vice exposed by the actors ought to have been crushed not only by art, but by the joint effort of the artist and God. Gogol' was not expecting the simple repetition of habitual theatre forms. In this case, another, New Theatre, ought to have arisen for the first time, with the sky suddenly crashing down at the end. The mystery of art, combined with the mystery of God's presence and His direct interference. It would not be at all surprising if Gogol', at his premiere on the Resurrection day, was expecting something colossal, something that he wrote about with such pain and such emotion in the article "Holy Resurrection":

And having let out such a heart-rending cry, they would fall down at the feet of their brothers, begging them to take at least one day off out of a succession of other days, to spend at least one day not adhering to the customs of the 19th century but to the customs of the Eternal Century, to have just one day to hold and embrace man as a guilty friend hugs a generous person ... If only one could wish that, if only one could make oneself to do this by force, to grasp this day the way a drowning person seizes a plank! God knows, perhaps thanks to this single wish a ladder will come down to us from the skies and a hand which will help us fly up its steps will be held out to us.⁶⁵

Was not the famous ending of the Mute scene invented with this very idea of letting Heaven have its word once human passions are over on the stage? Gogol' set the duration of the pause at one and a half minutes. And in the "Passage from the letter written by the author soon after the premiere of *The Government Inspector* to one literary critic," Gogol' says "the curtain should not be lowered for 2-3 minutes."

⁶⁴ Igor' Zolotusskij, *Gogol'* (Moscow: Molodaja Gvardija, 1998), 178.

⁶⁵ Nikolaj V. Gogol', *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pisem v 17 tomach*, op. cit., Vol. VI, 202.

In this cosmic context, the actors' *performance* (in rehearsal) at the time of the Great Fast, which was going on at the same time as the unseen but genuine fast of the whole population, took on the semblance of the symbolic repentance enacted by all of humanity before the Last Judgment, and the text of the comedy was transformed into a description of the sins of humanity. Gogol' planned the premiere as a part of the Holy Resurrection, as an earthly act of the universal cosmic mystery with the expectation of a probable merciful resolution of the destiny of humanity on *that* day. Gogol' tries to construct an unseen, particular dramaturgy of the End, and even dares to make it theatrical. His aim of overcoming, or of becoming the ally of, not just the element but the Divine Activity in its action seems even more daring or even impertinent. It would be difficult to find *mundane* reasons for the great disappointment Gogol' felt after the premiere (archpriest Vasilij Zen'kovskij even calls the failure of *The Government Inspector* "a *disaster*").

Where is dream, where is reality? Where are the usual conjectures and the scientific hypotheses and proofs?

Some of Father Sergej Bulgakov's thoughts about art make a suitable commentary on what ought to have happened in an unseen way during the premiere of *The Government Inspector*. Father Sergej wrote: "Art wants to become not only consoling but acting, not symbolic but transforming."⁶⁶

In my *History of Russian Philosophy*—wrote Vasilij Zen'kovskij, a priest and philosopher, and a profound and original specialist on Gogol'—I can point out one feature which is characteristic of Russian educated society of the 19th century in general, "the theurgic anxiety," which became especially noticeable and powerful at the time when the church vision created during the Russian middle ages lost its influence In the 19th century, historical philosophical thought among educated Russians ... began to acquire a *theurgic* character. This term, created by neoplatonists of the 4th century, includes a magical moment; if "theurgy" in essence means "God's action," in the magic and occult movements of late Hellenism, this term acquired the meaning of "action to influence God," that is, it has a purely magical meaning This complicated complex of ideas also influenced Gogol' the idea of Divine Action in history only

⁶⁶ Sergej N. Bulgakov, *Svet nevečernij* (Moscow: Sozercanija i umozrenija, 1994), 320.

made Gogol's "theurgic anxiety" stronger, it enforced the necessity of taking as active a part in the reformation of Russian life as possible. It was revealed for the first time in the aesthetic utopia of Gogol', connected with *The Government Inspector*.⁶⁷

Aesthetic utopia is no longer a comedy or even a tragicomedy, but a much more complicated and universal project. What happens on the stage is merely the visible part of this project, but there is also an invisible one—the human expectations and superhuman consequences. In reality, the subtext of Gogol' could be called the *intertext* (it corresponds to the series of formal features of the intertext) were it not for its particular, almost magic, goal—an *action to influence God*. Gogol' felt that *the time is short* (1 Corinthians 7:29), and that extraordinary efforts should be made by humanity in order to make God show mercy and cancel a decision that has already been taken. At some point, he saw himself as the one whose role it was to beg in favour of humanity.

The true tragic nature of *The Government Inspector* becomes apparent only at the end. "It's no longer a joke and the position of many persons is almost tragic."⁶⁸ After the words of the gendarme referring to the arrival of the authentic government inspector, "everyone is thunderstruck." "A cry of amazement bursts from the ladies simultaneously. The whole group suddenly shifts positions and remains standing as if petrified."⁶⁹ The meaning of being "petrified," of stopping all movement, the meaning of this freezing is in the end of the story itself: it is no longer possible to go back or to change anything.

One of the author's last interpretations of *The Government Inspector* is contained in a letter from Gogol' to Aleksandra O. Smirnova (6 December 1849):

Remember that everything in this world is a lie, everything seems to be not what it really is. In order not to be cheated by people, we should see them the way Christ orders us to see them. I wish God would help you in that! It's difficult, very difficult for us to live, for we

⁶⁷ Vasilij V. Gippius and Vasilij V. Zen'kovskij, *N. V. Gogol'* (Sankt Peterburg: Logos, 1994), 329-330.

⁶⁸ Nikolaj V. Gogol', *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pisem v 17 tomach*, op. cit., Vol. IV, 478.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 300.

who forget every minute that our actions will be *judged* not by the senator but by the One, Who cannot be bribed by anything and Who has an absolutely different opinion about everything.⁷⁰

“Do we not have here a complete set of meanings: not just the real one which was clear to everyone, but also the misunderstood *mystical meaning* of *The Government Inspector*, which no one has understood until now, as it seems?”⁷¹—wrote Merežkovskij about this letter.

People may say that Gogol’ made a rather significant mistake. He did and yet he did not. He made a mistake about 1836, but, absolutely correctly and with a great intuition, he also sensed the tendencies of recent history which, at the conjunction of the two centuries, led—in Vladimir Solov’ev’s words—to the “epilogue” of History. According to Igor’ Zolotusskij, Gogol’ wanted not just to write, but “to influence.” I would add that he wanted to act. And this desire to act was directly connected with his apocalyptic expectations, with his sense of the hot and smelly breath of the “last days” wafting over him.

4. Conclusion

I have previously mentioned that this era was a time of amateur religious activities and consequently, from a religious canonical point of view, projects such as the premiere of Gogol’s *The Government Inspector* were not just illicit; they were almost on the level of magic. So why has Gogol’ come to be considered an orthodox writer and activist in the history of Russian culture?

In my book, *Gogol’ and Apocalypse*,⁷² the main stages of the writer’s spiritual development are examined in all their controversy and complexity. This article, however, covers only his early works, which also coincide with the period when the end of the world was expected. Gogol’ became orthodox gradually and very slowly. It is necessary to overcome one’s

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 15, 285.

⁷¹ Dmitrij S. Merežkovskij, *Estetika i kritika* (Moscow: Char’kov, 1994), Vol. 1 (see the article “Gogol’”), 558.

⁷² See Vladimir Glyantz, *Gogol’ i Apokalipsis* (Moscow: Eleks-km, 2004).

delusions and prejudices. It is necessary to pass through the purgatory of “modern” critical thought, with all its mocking and insults. It is necessary to go beyond great pain in both its direct and its figurative senses. Indeed, the word “pain” will not seem merely figurative if we recall that Gogol’ burned his manuscript of the second volume of *Dead Souls* on two occasions (in 1845 and in 1852). Among the cultural activists of Gogol’s times, I cannot see a single example of faith in the impact of art to equal the strength of Gogol’s faith. I cannot see a single attempt to interfere in any way and to influence the fate of the world as it awaited its punishment, even if this punishment was well deserved. Admittedly, this is a Quixotic quality, but Gogol’s “windmills” are much more serious than those that peopled the sad knight’s imagination.

To correct the mistakes which resulted from the false expectation of the imminent end of the world in 1836, Gogol’ produced new revised versions, although apocalypse was not excluded from these. Gogol’s main religious intuition was not wrong, and perhaps in the same way our world today, running late and breathless on its last lap, is also rapidly reaching the finishing line.⁷³

⁷³ Finally, I would like to offer my deepest apologies to readers whose Christian feelings may have been offended by the comparison of literary and religious texts. Unfortunately, it would have been impossible to demonstrate the necessary proof without doing so.

William J. Leatherbarrow

APOCALYPTIC IMAGERY IN DOSTOEVSKIJ'S
THE IDIOT AND *THE DEVILS*

Dostoevskij's period of penal servitude in Siberia, amongst the lowest depths of criminal humanity, wrought a decisive change in both his personality and his art. His estrangement from naive utopianism, from the belief that human nature was capable of sustaining a paradise on earth, whether erected upon a rational, moral or social order, was caused, or at least accelerated, by this profound personal experience. It is to this event, too, that we must ascribe Dostoevskij's development as a Christian artist in the years following his return from Siberia. Robert L. Jackson has argued that Dostoevskij's fictional memoirs of his prison experiences, *Notes from the House of the Dead* (1860), are "the pivotal literary and spiritual work in Dostoevsky's writing career" and "a kind of programmatic statement of a Christian poetics of insight and transfiguration," which becomes the binding vision of Dostoevskij's mature fiction.¹

Parallel to Dostoevskij's emergence as a Christian writer is his developing use of Christian mythology, symbolism and allegory in the works written after *The House of the Dead*. His commitment to a Christian ideal was expressed in the weaving of Christian motifs into the fabric of his art. Thus the conversion of Raskol'nikov is implicitly likened to the raising of Lazarus; Dostoevskij's ethical ideal, the "positively good man," Prince Myškin, is developed as a latter-day Christ; an attack on the intellectual contagion of Russia's radicals is couched in the parable of the Gadarene swine (*The Devils*); and the family drama of the Karamazovs is a microcosm of metaphysical conflicts. There are, of course, many other such examples,

¹ Robert L. Jackson, *The Art of Dostoevsky. Deliriums and Nocturnes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), XI.

large-scale and small, embedded in the fictional world of the mature Dostoevskij.

Within this pattern of biblical motifs, imagery and allegory drawn from the apocalyptic revelations of St. John occupy a particularly significant place, and reveal much about the nature of Dostoevskij's Christian vision. This apocalyptic colouring emerged suddenly in Dostoevskij's works of the 1860s, and appears to be linked to his increasing awareness of the nature of Western European society. *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* (1863), which chronicles Dostoevskij's first trip abroad in 1862, draws apocalyptic conclusions from the widespread materialism, rationalism, and capitalism which Dostoevskij had observed in the major European capitals. Thus, for example, London and its Crystal Palace, erected for the world exhibitions of 1851 and 1862, are compared directly to Babylon and a "prophecy from the Apocalypse."² Moreover, there is a pressing sense of imminent doom in Dostoevskij's descriptions of European life. In *Crime and Punishment* too, disturbing apocalyptic echoes are to be found, suggesting the passing of the present order. While in Siberia Raskol'nikov dreams of a plague, or trichina, which infects all but a few in Europe with madness:

New kinds of germs (*trichiny*) appeared, microscopic creatures which lodged in the bodies of men. But these creatures were spirits endowed with reason and will. Those infected with them at once became possessed and insane. But never before had people considered themselves so wise and so unshakably right as these infected men... Whole populations, whole towns and nations were infected and went mad... Fires began, famines began. Everyone and everything was being destroyed...³

Not only is the whole tenor of this passage apocalyptic, but certain details are also clearly drawn from Revelation, in particular the outbreaks of pestilence, famine and fire. A puzzling feature of Raskol'nikov's dream is that plague comes from the east, from Asia, whereas, given Dostoevskij's political views, we might well have expected it to originate in the West.

² Fëdor M. Dostoevskij, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij v tridcati tomach*, Vol. V (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972), 70. (This edition is hereafter designated as *PSS*.)

³ *PSS*. Vol. VI, 419-420.

Such a minor inconsistency does not, however, detract from the dream as an indicator of Dostoevskij's apocalyptic vision.

But the two most apocalyptic of Dostoevskij's works are *The Idiot*, completed in 1869, and *The Devils*, completed in 1872.⁴ Both possess a distinctive, urgent, almost hysterical tone not matched by Dostoevskij's other great novels. In *Crime and Punishment* one feels that the spiritual disease that afflicts Raskol'nikov has not yet spread to everyone in the novel, and the work ends with a promise of reconciliation, not the threat of Armageddon. *The Brothers Karamazov* too ends with a promise, as Alëša and the children meet over little Iljuša's grave and pledge loyalty to his memory. But *The Idiot* and *The Devils* end with the eruption of that death and violence which has threatened throughout both novels. In *The Idiot* the murder of Nastas'ja Filippovna precipitates the return of Myškin to darkness, and the hope contained in Stepan Trofimovič's last pilgrimage, which concludes *The Devils*, is not enough to offset the orgy of murder and suicide that accompanies it.

Interestingly, these two most apocalyptic of Dostoevskij's novels belong to that protracted period which the author spent abroad. He had fled Russia in early 1867 to escape debts and improve his health, and he was not to return until July 1871. Perhaps we can trace the hysteria of these two novels partly to the fact that Dostoevskij was separated from the Russia he was trying to describe and kept in touch through newspapers, hardly the source of a balanced picture of life's texture. Moreover, Dostoevskij—touchy, overwrought and profoundly nationalistic—was compelled to spend his period of separation from Russian roots in Western Europe, that bustling, over-commercial, over-industrialized seat of rationalism, socialism and revolution, a source of plagues which since Peter the Great had been threatening to engulf his own native land. For Dostoevskij, Western Europe was a most eloquent symbol of modern man's spiritual decline, and it was from this vantage point that he made his observations of Russia. *The Idiot* ends on a revealingly anti-Western note as Mrs. Epančina

⁴ The aim of the present paper is not to provide an exhaustive analysis of apocalyptic motifs in Dostoevskij's works, but merely to indicate a profitable line of research. The material presented here is based largely on the treatment of these themes in my book: *Fedor Dostoevsky* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981).

cries: "It's time we came to our senses. And all this, all this life abroad, all this Europe of yours, it's all just a delusion, and all of us abroad are just a delusion... Mark my words, you'll see for yourself!"⁵

As Solženicy'n was to do more than a century later, Dostoevskij marks his period of unwilling "exile" in the West with a bitter warning that the quest for material security without the framework of a governing moral principle will mean the fall of Western civilization, and he expands his warning to include Russia's westernized ruling classes. From its earliest conception *The Idiot* was intended to portray the decline of a Russian family through its emphasis on material, rather than spiritual, riches. This idea survives and is expressed most vividly, if somewhat ridiculously, in the character of Lebedev, that comic mouthpiece of serious ideas. At the Prince's birthday gathering (Part III, Ch. 4) Lebedev, a self-styled interpreter of the Apocalypse, is goaded into an attack upon the spiritual vacuum of modern society: "All of this as a whole is damned, sir? The whole spirit of these last few centuries of ours, taken as a whole with its scientific and practical emphasis, is perhaps indeed damned, sir!"⁶ Modern man in his relentless drive to satisfy the demands of reason, egoism and material necessity has lost the sense of spiritual well-being to be derived from an ideal which provides moral and metaphysical certainty. Modern man has no faith; only science, industry, commerce and capital. Lebedev complains that it is folly to try to erect a material fortune upon a basis of spiritual poverty, and directs this particular criticism at contemporary socialists with their "carts bringing bread to the whole of humanity, without a moral basis for this action" (a quotation that combines a well-known statement by the Russian socialist, Alexandr Herzen, with Christ's injunction that man should not live by bread alone).⁷ In a deliciously irreverent anecdote Lebedev goes on to tell of a twelfth century man who, after twenty years of cannibalism, confessed and went to the stake for his sins. What was it, asks Lebedev, that drove him to confession despite the tortures that awaited him?

⁵ PSS. Vol. VIII, 510.

⁶ Ibid., 310.

⁷ Aleksandr I. Gercen, *Sobranie sočinenij v tridcati tomach*, Vol. XI (Moscow: Izd-vo AN SSSR, 1954-1966), 402.

There must have been something much stronger than the stake and the flames, stronger even than the habits of twenty years? There must have been an idea stronger than all misfortune, famine, torture, plague, leprosy and all that hell which mankind could not have endured without that binding idea which guided men's hearts and enriched the waters of life. Show me something resembling that force in our age of vice and railways... Show me an idea that binds mankind today with even half the force as in those centuries... And don't try to intimidate me with your prosperity, your riches, the infrequency of famine today and your rapid means of communication! There is more wealth now, but less strength; the binding idea is no more; everything has grown soft; everything and everyone is over-coddled!⁸

Lebedev's frenetic ravings reveal the polemical core of the novel. His preposterous tale of the spiritually sound cannibal contains the germ of Dostoevskij's own apocalyptic vision of modern Europe, doomed by its spiritual flabbiness to wallow in the trivia of material well-being without the governing force that gives life purpose. Lebedev's ideas are rescued from ridicule when they are repeated in essence by the novel's seriously conceived hero, Prince Myškin. In a conversation with Ippolit late in the novel, Myškin characterizes nineteenth century man as a spiritual nomad, devoid of certainty:

Men in those days (I assure you I've always been struck by this) were not at all the same people as we are now, not at all the same race. They were a different breed. People in those days were somehow motivated by a single idea, but nowadays they are more nervous, more developed, more sensitive. They seem to be motivated by two or three ideas at the same time. Modern man is broader, and I swear this prevents him from being such an integrated creature as he was in those times...⁹

Myškin's subsequent violent outburst against socialism and Catholicism at the soiree where he is introduced to the Epančin family's friends is a further development of this view of contemporary European man:

⁸ PSS. Vol. VIII, 315.

⁹ Ibid., 433.

Why, socialism too is the child of Catholicism and the essential catholic nature! It too, like its brother atheism, was born of despair, in opposition to Catholicism as a moral force, in order to take the place of the lost moral force of religion, to quench the spiritual thirst of parched humanity!¹⁰

In his conclusions, however, Myškin is more cautious than Lebedev, who sees nothing but damnation as a consequence of mankind's spiritual poverty. Lebedev finds a symbol of mankind's state in the vivid apocalyptic image of the four horsemen:

We are in the time of the third horse, the black one, and of the rider with the balance in his hand, for everything in our age is weighed in the balance and settled by agreement, and people are only seeking their rights: "a measure of wheat for a penny, three measures of barley for a penny," and with all this they still want to keep a free spirit, a pure heart, a healthy body and all the rest of God's gifts. But they won't keep them by demanding their rights alone, and there will follow the pale horse, and he whose name is Death, and after him comes Hell...¹¹

This apocalyptic image dominates the novel; it is taken up and embellished by a whole network of lesser references to *Revelation*.¹² These echoes of the central image do not always lend themselves to precise interpretation or to close analogy with the events and characters of the novel, but they do serve to sustain in the reader's mind the apocalyptic note struck by Lebedev, and thus to colour the way he looks at the events of the novel. For example, there is an unsettling resemblance between the Apocalypse's central concern with judgement and condemnation and the same themes as represented in the situations and characters of *The Idiot*. In this way Myškin's anecdotes about the execution he witnessed in Lyons and the friend who was condemned to death only to be reprieved at the last moment, as well as Ippolit's view of himself as condemned by nature, all fit into the apocalyptic frame of the novel.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 451.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 167-168.

¹² Robert Hollander, "The Apocalyptic Framework of Dostoevsky's 'The Idiot,'" *Mosaic* 7 (1974): 123-139.

Moreover, the fallen state of nineteenth-century Europeanized Russia may be compared quite closely to the fall of Babylon described in the Apocalypse. Chapter 18, Verse 2, for instance, describes a Babylon that has become “the habitation of devils” and “a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.” For Dostoevskij, peering myopically at Russia from distant Europe, his native land appeared indeed to teem with all kinds of devils—socialists, nihilists, and atheists—and he was to incorporate this idea in the very title of his later novel, *The Devils*. But the Russia depicted in *The Idiot* is also overrun with a multitude of “unclean and hateful birds”: there is the moneylender, Pticyyn, whose name derives from the Russian word *ptica*, meaning “a bird”; there is the mendacious Lebedev himself (*lebed’*—“a swan”), as well as the avaricious Ganja Ivolgin (*ivolga*—“an oriole”).

In other proper names too echoes of Lebedev’s explanation of the Apocalypse may be detected. For example, the image of the third horseman is revived in “The Scales,” the name of the hotel where Myškin arranges to meet his young friend Kolja, shortly before Rogožin’s attack. Furthermore, the person who protects Mrs. Epančina as a protegee, who is regarded as an arbiter of taste by the false society she inhabits and whose blessing Myškin has to receive before he can be welcomed in society, is a certain Princess Belokonskaja, whose name suggests the fourth horse, Death (*belo*—“white”; *kon’*—“horse”).

Such are the perhaps rather cheap devices used by Dostoevskij to fashion the corrupt society depicted in *The Idiot* into a nineteenth-century equivalent of doomed Babylon, awaiting only the arrival of the Lamb, the Son of God, and the terrible judgement he will bring. As we might expect, Dostoevskij’s Babylon, like its biblical equivalent, is presided over by a “whore,” the wilful Nastas’ja Filippovna, seduced as a young woman by the businessman, Tockij, and now bent upon a perverse revenge involving her own destruction. Details from the biblical account of the fall of Babylon are strikingly revived in Dostoevskij’s novel. Chapter 18 of Revelation, for example, describes how

the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her (the whore), shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning... And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her... and shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing. (Verses 9, 11 and 15.)

In Dostoevskij's apocalypse the kings of the earth are, as Ganja Ivolgin recognizes, the merchants themselves, the men of money; and three of them—Epančin, Tockij and Pticyn—at the end of Part I bemoan the self-destructive course pursued by Nastas'ja Filippovna, yet at the same time are afraid of her and stand to one side.

Nastas'ja Filippovna's deliberate self-abasement, her urge to confirm her fall from innocence publicly by scandalous scenes and by parading herself as "Rogožin's slut" are all part of an elaborate, if perverse and indirect, scheme of revenge against those who have abused her, a vengeance which she knows will culminate in her own death at the hands of Rogožin. As Pticyn remarks to Tockij at the end of Part I, this behaviour is similar to that of the Japanese warrior who disembowels himself before his enemy as a form of aggression. Yet, alongside her desire for vengeance, which is nurtured by deliberately sharpening her consciousness of her fallen state, Nastas'ja Filippovna yearns also for her own lost innocence. This, of course, a paradoxical state, for innocence and vengeance cannot coexist. Yet Nastas'ja Filippovna persists in longing for both, a situation dramatized in the way she is equally drawn throughout the novel to two men: to Myškin, who sees only her innocence, and to Rogožin, who confirms her fallen state and her right to revenge. It is fitting that the novel's allegorical nature, the clear linking of its themes with similar ones to be found in the Apocalypse, should also include the divided nature of Nastas'ja Filippovna; for, as well as being the fallen woman at the heart of this modern Babylon, she is also, as her surname, Baraškova, implies, associated with the Lamb (*barašek*—"lamb"), the Bible's symbol of innocence and forgiveness. The Lamb, the Christ-figure, to be introduced into Dostoevskij's apocalyptic allegory is the novel's meek and saintly hero, the idiot Prince, Lev Nikolaevič Myškin.

The climate of *The Devils* is also unmistakably apocalyptic. As in Revelation a series of catastrophes presages the final disaster of the fete and its aftermath. The outbreaks of incendiarism and cholera in the district call to mind the scourges of fire and plague which accompany the Last Judgement. The apocalyptic mood is sustained by Karmazinov, who compares the decline of Western Europe with the fall of Babylon¹³ and by

¹³ PSS. Vol. X, 287.

Kirillov, who confesses that he reads the Apocalypse at night to Fed'ka the convict.¹⁴ Moreover, the warning of the Apocalypse that “there will be time no more” and that the old heaven and earth will yield to the new is grotesquely echoed in Kirillov's belief that at the moment he takes his own life and proclaims the deification of man, time will be frozen and a new era of human life will arrive.¹⁵

This apocalyptic note is struck not just by those characters and situations at the centre of *The Devils*. The general climate of Russia in the novel is apocalyptic, and moral confusion is the dominant feature of an age which lacks a unifying faith. Pëtr Verchovenskij details this moral confusion and the spiritual rootlessness of contemporary man when he describes to Stavrogin his plans for harnessing these features to his drive for power. He explains how in the present age even the best men lack conviction, how people no longer think for themselves and are consequently the slaves of any strong will:

Listen... Do you realize that we are very powerful already? It's not just those who kill and burn... who belong to us. Listen, I've reckoned them all up: the teacher who laughs with his children at their God and at the home which nurtured them is already ours. The lawyer who defends an educated murderer by pleading that he is more developed than his victim and had no choice but to kill in order to get money, he too is already ours. Schoolboys who kill a peasant for the thrill of it are ours. The juries who acquit criminals without distinction are ours. The prosecutor who trembles in court because he is not liberal enough is ours, ours. Administrators, writers—oh, there are lots and lots of us, and they don't know it themselves! On the other hand the readiness of schoolboys and fools to obey has reached the highest point... Do you realize how many we shall win over with just a few shabby, ready-made ideas?¹⁶

In another passage from the Apocalypse, cited in *The Devils*, the Laodiceans are rejected by God for being “neither cold nor hot.” Pëtr intends to take advantage of a similar ethical half-heartedness among

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 282.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 187-189.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 324.

contemporary men by creating and spreading the legend of Stavrogin as a mysterious and majestic figure who is at present in hiding, but who will in time emerge and rescue his people from chaos. Pëtr is convinced, perhaps with justification, that in times of uncertainty people will cling even to the most unlikely myth if it promises a return to order. At the right moment Pëtr will spring his protege into a position of supreme power.

Here again Dostoevskij's debt to Revelation is unmistakable. Chapter XIII of the Apocalypse describes a time to come when the earth will be ruled by a beast with supreme power who is worshipped for his mystery and majesty. The way is paved for this beast by a false prophet who "exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast" (Verse 12). The false prophet, moreover, "maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men," deliberately deceives, inflames the myth of the beast, and destroys all who do not believe his fabrications.

It is difficult not to see in these figures the "wild beast," Nikolaj Vsevolodovič Stavrogin, and his false prophet, Pëtr Verchovenskij. The notions of supremacy and power are contained in their names—*verchovenstvo* means supremacy; *Nikolaj* suggests conqueror of nations; and *Vsevolod* means master of all. Pëtr's first appearance in the novel is to announce the arrival of Stavrogin, whom he plans to make men worship. On the night of the fete he too makes fire come down to earth by organizing the incendiarism which claims the lives of Lebjadkin and his sister. He too is a master of deceit and duplicity, which he practises most successfully on the Governor's wife and the members of the discussion circle. And finally he too disposes most adroitly of Šatov and whoever else rejects his deceptions. Moreover, the beast from Revelation has ten horns (Stavrogin's name is constructed around *rog*, meaning "horn") and possesses great physical strength (Revelation 13:2), which corresponds to Stavrogin's much-mentioned strength. Symbolism such as this enlarges the significance of Pëtr and Stavrogin, the two main sources of chaos and destruction in the novel. They outgrow their functions as political intriguers and acquire metaphysical characteristics. They are indeed the devils, reaping what is due to them in the spiritual wilderness of nineteenth-century Russia. As in *The Idiot*, the apocalyptic colouring of *The Devils* is deepened by the use of minor symbols and references, which although of limited intrinsic interest do nevertheless sustain an even apocalyptic texture throughout the

novel. The frequency of proper names derived from birds, which in *The Idiot* pointed to the biblical description of Babylon as “the habitation of devils and a cage for every unclean and hateful bird” and suggested that Russia was doomed to a similar fate, is met again in *The Devils*. Indeed, the Stavrogin estate, from which so much of the novel’s discord originates and where the murder of Šatov takes place, is named *Skvorešniki* and suggests *skvorečnik*, a sort of birdcage.¹⁷ The surnames Drozdov, Lebjadkin and Gaganov all take their roots from the names of birds: *drozd* (“thrush”); *lebed’* (“swan”); and *gaga* (“eider”). Maria Lebjadkina expresses her disappointment in Stavrogin by describing him as a *falcon (sokol)* who has changed into an owl (*filin*);¹⁸ and when at the end of the novel Varvara Petrovna rushes to be with the dying Stepan Trofimovič, she offensively dismisses his companion, Sofija Matveevna, as an “odd bird” and a “crow” (*vorona*). Only after recognizing the Bible-seller as a good woman does she address her more respectfully.

Stavrogin and Pëtr are at the centre of the novel’s apocalyptic design, yet, as we have seen, neither’s name fits into the tradition of bird references. However, Stavrogin’s name does have apocalyptic connotations: his surname has clearly diabolic implications, whereas a form of his first name, Nikolaj, is actually found in Revelation as the Nicolaitans, an heretical sect practising immorality and idolatry, condemned by John 2:6, 15.¹⁹

In a working paper of this kind to draw firm conclusions from Dostoevskij’s persistent use of apocalyptic motifs in the fiction of his middle years would clearly be unwise. Yet these motifs are there and they are prominent, and this would seem to disclose Dostoevskij’s lack of enthusiasm for the utopianist’s dream of a future heaven on earth. Indeed, one could go further and suggest that apocalyptic imagery serves in Dostoevskij’s art as a counterbalance to the recurring image of the Golden Age, experienced by several of Dostoevskij’s characters, including Stavrogin himself.

¹⁷ *Skvorečnik* derives from *skvorec*, a starling, and is a sort of bird-box. The key word used in Russian translations of the Bible is *pristanišče*, a refuge, which is closer to *skvorečnik* than the English “birdcage.”

¹⁸ *PSS*. Vol. X, 218.

¹⁹ George A. Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. III (New York/Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 547-548.

The dream of the Golden Age, when men live in a state of harmony with each other and with creation, illumines the dark corners of Dostoevskij's fictional world, but it is a retrospective ideal rather a prophetic one. In the kind of Golden Age which Dostoevskij sensed in Claude Lorrain's painting, "Acis and Galatea," we are returned to the sinless paradise which mankind experienced in Genesis, before the fall from grace. It is a paradise that has been lost, and which depicts man before the capacity for evil was developed in his nature. In the contemporary world described in Dostoevskij's novels, such a dream of innocence palpably fails to accord with human nature. In *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* Dostoevskij had acknowledged that men "don't have a nature capable of brotherhood,"²⁰ and this lies at the heart of what for Dostoevskij was the moral failure of utopianism. It does not recognize that the capacity for good and evil is inherent in the nature of man. Until human nature is transfigured by religious experience the kind of primitive harmony described in images of the Golden Age must remain an alluring dream. Revelation is not about the perfectibility of the present order, but its destruction, not paradise on earth, but in a world to come: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away." (Revelation 21:1) If the dream of the Golden Age looks wistfully back to the dawn of man and his innocence, then Dostoevskij's apocalyptic vision acknowledges his sinful nature and anticipates the terrible judgment that stalks him. Paradise awaits the chosen, but in the next world, not in this.

²⁰ PSS. Vol. V, 81.

Irene Masing-Delić

BLACK BLOOD, WHITE ROSES

Apocalypse and Redemption in Blok's Later Poetry

One “cool autumnal evening” in 1920, Aleksandr Blok and Nadežda Nolle-Kogan, friend and “patron” of the poet at the time,¹ took an after-dinner walk in the Summer Gardens in Petrograd. They sat down on a park bench and “that evening Blok told [her] what it was that for many long years had burdened and oppressed his soul and cast a dark shadow over even the bright days of his life.”² He made her promise never to betray his secret, and she did not. It may, nevertheless, be assumed that Blok either told her that he had suffered from venereal disease all his adult life, and that he now had syphilis, or that he had constantly feared that he would contract, or already had, the disease.

One reason for assuming that Blok told Nolle-Kogan his “venereal secret” is that she was not his first confidante and others, unlike her, recorded his “(near-)confessions.” In his *Reminiscences*, Andrej Belyj, for example, tells how they met in February 1912 in Petersburg, in a “squalid restaurant with few customers,”³ where Blok told him that he had recently had “a bout of a mysterious ailment.” He further told him that the doctors even suspected an “unpleasant illness” and that he had been given injections for it, but that it had turned out to be something completely different, something “to do with nerves.”⁴ The Blok-biographer Avril Pyman writes

¹ She arranged two poetry readings in Moscow for Blok, one in 1920 and one in 1921.

² Nadežda Nolle-Kogan, “Iz vospominanij,” *PRO ET CONTRA, Ličnost' i tvorčestvo Aleksandra Bloka v kritike i memuarach sovremennikov* (St Petersburg: Izd. Russkogo Christianskogo Gumanitarnogo Instituta, 2004), 522-523.

³ Andrej Belyj, *Vospominanja o Bloke* (Moscow: Respublika, 1995), 389.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 395. The poet's wife, Ljubov' Blok, in her controversial and incomplete memoirs, is unclear on her husband's health. She dismisses his premarital venereal diseases as fortunately “non-

that in January 1912 Blok “was treated for syphilis” with the new cure Salvarsan, although the doctor “tactfully gave the illness another name.”⁵ She is most likely right in doubting that “Blok was fully aware, at least at the time, of his own danger.”⁶ Temporarily reassured by the diagnosis of “nerves” on this occasion, Blok at other times reveals deep-seated anxieties about having syphilis, without fully admitting these to others or to himself. In late 1908, for example, he was planning a “drama about a writer” and outlined the following dream of the protagonist’s that was to be included in the text:

“[He] rushes out [of his room], clasp[ing] his forehead.—How strange everything around me is. I’ve had a dream. A curtain parted before me. Syphilitics were dragging themselves uphill. And suddenly [I realized]—I was there too! Save me!” [Somebody answers:] “The child mustn’t hear” and then the “writer” resumes: “Nightmares are encircling me.”⁷

That this writer-protagonist voices personal fears seems likely.

Turning to the *Diaries*, we have an entry from 25 October 1911, recording his “painful scurvy,” sick gums and “loose” teeth. That night he sees the full moon as “terrifying” (*užasna*) and has a Baudelairean vision of the world as a “naked, grotesque corpse” bathed in moonlight.⁸ Troubled

fatal” for a vigorous youth. During his last illness, she considered the “state of his ‘psyche’” “abnormal,” but not “clinically” so (he smashed objects, including a bust of Apollo whose “dirty mug” he had taken a dislike to). She told Blok’s doctor about her concerns, possibly intimating a neural-syphilitic condition, but perhaps not (see Ljubov’ Blok, “I byli i nebylycy o Bloke i o sebe,” in *Dve liubvi, dve sud’by, Vospominaniya Bloke i Belom* [Moscow: XXI Vek–Soglasie, 2000], 79; and 119-121).

⁵ See Avril Pyman, *The Life of Aleksandr Blok*, Vol. II: *The Release of Harmony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 147. Syphilis did pose “a diagnostic dilemma,” since “it both looked like other diseases and acted in concert with them.” Sufferers often acquired a “laundry list of diagnoses as well as a reputation for neurasthenia.” Blok had such a “laundry list” and was diagnosed as being “neurasthenic.” See Deborah Hayden, *POX, Genius, Madness, and the Mysteries of Syphilis* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 62 and 55.

⁶ Avril Pyman, *The Life of Aleksandr Blok*, Vol. II: *The Release of Harmony*, op. cit., 147.

⁷ Aleksandr Blok, *Zapisnye knižki* (Moscow: Chudožestvennaja literatura, 1965), 70.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

again by “scurvy,” re-diagnosed as “gingivitis” (once more “tactfully?”),⁹ he is “horrified beyond description” when he suddenly notices a servant girl’s “nasal voice coming out of her toothless mouth.”¹⁰ He classifies her as a sample of the “human species” with an admixture of “*unknown* lower life forms” and states that this “degeneration” to lower species is more unbearable than “syphilis in human form.”¹¹

Blok’s strategies for evading the real issue, i.e. his own fears, seem fairly transparent. He denies that the servant has syphilis (and she may not have had it), claiming she represents something worse: evolutionary regression. The recurring problems he himself has with sick gums and loose teeth seem forgotten, apparently, because they could not possibly result in tooth loss or be linked to “regression.” Syphilis is still a “human” ailment and, as such, more “acceptable” than the unnatural regression to lower life forms that he sees in the girl and other people he has observed recently (a colonel with an unnaturally fat neck who also inspired him with “unspeakable horror”).¹² It is syphilis the diarist sees and fears, however—in the servant, in the fat-necked (goiter?) colonel, and—himself. It is *syphilis* which creates the horrifyingly grotesque “lower life forms” the poet has observed, not least among the syphilitic folk in the countryside around his estate.¹³ It is syphilis and not “regression” (or syphilis as regression), which marks the body with terrifying malformations that he himself may well come to display some day. “Toothless laughter” has disfigured the youthful poet’s vision of the ideal world of beauty where he once was *servus* to the *Regina* incarnating that Ideal, but even “toothless laughter” is preferable to the “silence of diurnal night.”¹⁴ It is then that the inescapable consequences of “regressive” disfiguration are mercilessly revealed and the silence of death is deafening: “Life, return at least your toothless laughter/ So that I may not perish in the silence” (*Verni mne, žizn’, choť smeč bezzubyj,/ Čtob v tišine ne iznemoč’!*).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Cf. Aleksandr Blok, *Sobranie sočinenij*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Gos. Izdat. Chudožestvennoj Literatury, 1962), 169.

¹⁴ Cf. Aleksandr Blok, *Polnoe Sobranie sočinenij i pisem*, vol. III (Moscow: Nauka, 1997) 47.

How much syphilis, both as illness and metaphor, seems to have been on Blok's mind is also intimated in a diary entry of 29 May 1913, where the disease is not mentioned, but the fear is palpable. Just before he is to meet with his publisher M. Tereščenko, the poet examines his face in a mirror and notes that "there's some kind of scab on [his] cheek" (*parš*).¹⁵ He seems to fear that he has a chancre, or a sore that could be perceived as such. It is thus perhaps not fortuitous that the mongrel dog following the twelve red guards in the apocalyptic poem *The Twelve* is a "*paršivij pēs*," i.e. covered with the infectious sores, scabs and chancres of the Old World. Usually seen as a symbol of the diseased and corrupt past, the mongrel threatens the pure Future—the infections he carries could threaten the twelve red guards, perhaps even Christ's "immunity" (*nevredim*) to death. Even though Kat'ka, the prostitute who still prefers Old World customers to red guard Petrucha, lies as "fuckmeat" (*padal*) on the snow,¹⁶ killed by her jealous proletarian lover, the infections of the "brothel world" are not entirely overcome. Cadavers too are dangerous to the living, as are unclean "dogs." In Revelation (22:14), these animals are barred from "entering through the gates to the city [of Life]."

The transition made above from Blok's personal fears (his appearance) to a well known image (the mangy dog) in one of his most famous works is to make clear the following: this essay does not trace Blok's personal "history of illness" in an attempt to prove that he died from syphilis as a result of an "immoral life." I have no wish to "lower" his personal and civic image.¹⁷ Instead, this essay examines syphilis as a widely feared illness of the time,¹⁸ one which also deeply concerned Blok for a variety of reasons, one of these being that he used it as "metaphor" in his

¹⁵ Cf. Aleksandr Blok, *Zapisnye knižki*, op. cit., 208.

¹⁶ This translation of *padal*' is Peter Scotto's. He has kindly permitted me to use passages from his translation of *Dvenadcat'* (for *The Saint Petersburg Review*) which is in press.

¹⁷ That syphilis still is perceived as a "demeaning" illness emerges from a recent tome (547 pp long) on Heinrich Heine. It denies that he was prone to sexual excesses and suggests that he died of tuberculosis rather than syphilis. See Henner Montanus, *Der kranke Heine* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1995).

¹⁸ For European parallels, see Lyn Pykett, ed., *Reading Fin de Siecle Fictions* (London: Longman, 1996).

work.¹⁹ The disease's "loathsome sores" (expression taken from Revelation 16:2) add to the connotations of the imagery for the "terrible world" myth in volume III of his poetic trilogy and the later long poems of volume V.²⁰ This myth posits that being "terrible," the world must undergo the "terrors" of the Last Judgment—the *Strašnyj sud* that befits a *Strašnyj mir*. My paper argues that Blok saw the "brothel civilization" of the Old World—one he was part of in the *poète maudit* tradition—as the product of a putrefying *bourgeois civilization* exuding disfiguring degenerative diseases (physical and spiritual); it argues further that he believed that the bourgeois betrayal of life-giving *culture* justified historical "Retribution," namely Revolution as Apocalypse.²¹ The Redeemer Class, the Proletariat, must sit in judgment of the Old World bourgeoisie, and eliminate the *malaises* it cultivated, such as decadence in all forms.²² Only then would it proceed to the creation of a New World Culture, guaranteeing the defeat of Death and victory of Life Eternal. As Revelation promises, after the destruction of Evil, there will be a "new heaven and a new earth" and "no more death, nor sorrow" (21:1, 4). Blok's Revolution will realize the promises religion never did.

The poet himself does not belong to the redeemable, even less to the redeemers, although *intelligently* siding with the working class were "eligible" for those categories. As already stated, he belongs to the *maudits* as a vampiric carrier of "brothel diseases," who spreads this infection to the innocent—and not so innocent. This fact, however, does not diminish his hatred of those who built a world where the "miasmas" of infection touch all.

¹⁹ In the sense Susan Sontag treats illness in her essay *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Picador; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988).

²⁰ Quotes from Blok's poetry are from the as yet incomplete *Polnoe Sobranie sočinenij i pisem* (20 vols), op. cit.

²¹ Contemporarily Georgij Čulkov speaks of the poet's reaction to the 1905 revolution as already focused solely on the destruction of "The Well-Fed Ones" and their "disgusting pigsty" (Georgij Čulkov, *Valtazarovo carstvo* [Moscow: Izd. "Respublika," 1998], 493). Blok's hatred of the bourgeoisie had further intensified by 1909; in a letter to Vasilij Rozanov he speaks of the "state apparatus" as "disgusting, dribbling, stinking old age, a seventy-year old syphilitic" whose very handshake defiles the "best representatives of the Russian Revolution crowned by a halo." Quoted in Andrej Turkov, *Vse eto bylo, bylo, bylo ...* (Moscow: MIK, 2007), 91.

²² As Hayden points out, Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*, include the notion of *mal-aise*. Baudelaire suffered from syphilis. See Deborah Hayden, *POX, Genius, Madness, and the Mysteries of Syphilis*, op. cit., 112.

In Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (which made a deep impression on Blok), the "transformation of the pure into the depraved" is a "repeated motif,"²³ and innocents (like Lucy Westenra) and morally upright people (like Mina Harker) fall victim to invisible, but all-destructive, contamination. Unsuspectingly, they are "made" into vampires, or infected with unclean blood, breaking out in sores. Blok's poet, who really is a "child of goodness and light,"²⁴ in a similar vein, was infected with vampiric "black blood," becoming "guiltlessly guilty."

"Blackness" is a quality the poet shares with the exploited Russian folk, however, (sometimes referred to as *černaja kost'*—the "black-boned" ones). As peasants, they were "trampled" into the black soil of Mother Earth, while the exploiters were free to create cultural values. Later, many rural folk were turned into the urban proletariat and made "impure" in a worse sense: by being drawn into the vices of urban life as the bourgeoisie made them victims of their civilization of pleasure and disease, self-indulgence and degeneration. The "child-of-light" the artist once was and the deceived and "used" folk (the exploited peasant and factory worker, the urban prostitute) are destined to make common cause when the lifeless civilization of Gogolian "dead souls" collapses. The exploited folk and betrayed artist are, in equal measure, "black diamonds,"²⁵ i.e., "coal" awaiting their transformation into diamonds under the "pressure" of historical events. Chemistry teaches that diamonds and coal are structurally related minerals, and the symbolist philosopher par excellence, Vladimir Solov'ev, made this fact the point of departure for his "coal turning into diamond" imagery. It implies that mankind may reach perfection (the diamond), however imperfect it currently is (coal). This philosophical-visionary concept will be discussed further below. The Solov'ev admirer Blok used the image of coal transforming into diamonds repeatedly. This is perhaps due in part to his father-in-law, the chemist Dmitrij Mendeleev, who, beyond

23 See Henryk Baran, "Some Reminiscences in Blok: Vampirism and Its Antecedents" in *Aleksandr Blok Centennial Conference*, ed. Walter N. Vickery (Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1984), 48. Blok read the 1897 novel in the fall of 1908. Discussing related themes, Olga Matich's focus is on the image of the vampiric Muse (cf. Olga Matich, *Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia's Fin de Siecle* [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005]).

24 Cf. Aleksandr Blok, *Polnoe Sobranie sočinenij i pisem*, op. cit., Vol. 3., 57.

25 *Ibid.*, 64.

creating his famous Periodic Table of Elements, was specifically interested in Russia's rich mineral deposits, which he thought should be brought to light and exploited as soon as possible. It is this transformation from "coal to diamond" in the human sphere that the Revolution is all about in Blok's first ecstatic visions of events. It is this transformation that, crowned with the white roses of purity and covered with jewels that withstand decay, Jesus Christ blesses in the finale of *The Twelve*. In other words, it is a retribution-redemption myth that the current paper explores, tracing the poet's path from a doomed brothel world and grotesque menagerie of "regressing life forms" to the endless vistas of cosmic freedom where the degradable "coal" of the mortal flesh is made into the diamond of immortal matter which is "immune" to corruption and disfiguration. Let us now turn to some characteristic settings of the Old World.

The well-known poem "Humiliation" (*Uniżenie*)²⁶ is set in a brothel—the quintessential image of the Old World. Every item of "this house" exudes uncleanliness—from the faded sofas to the dusty curtain tassels. "Infection" is felt everywhere as a pornographic journal is said to bear the imprint of "non-human" hands (presumably belonging to "lower life forms") and the "dirty" door-bell, we are told, was pressed by the hand of a "scoundrel" (*Podlec*),²⁷ most likely a syphilitic whose very touch is infectious. Another setting Blok depicts is "hell," and not so much a Dantean one, in spite of the obvious allusions to *Inferno* offered in the *terzinas* of "Song of Hell" (*Pesn' ada*),²⁸ as a modern hell of vice and disease, where various "miasmas" have made the stones so "slippery" (*skol'zkie*) that gliding and falling²⁹ into sleazy depravity is inevitable. It is a modern vampire's, i.e. a poet's, hell. A stream carries the "corpses of friends and women" past his glance. Apparently these have been "depleted" by the "faded youth" he has met in hell whose fate it is to drink blood from his paramour's "white shoulder"³⁰ having first

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19 (1913).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-13.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

pierced it with an amethyst ring. The poet is not the youth's moral mentor, however,—they are doubles, prone to the same vices.

Feasting on the beloved's blood offers the “melancholy vampire”³¹ the poet has met, or “is,” no pleasure. The vampire finds his compulsive ritual “horrifying” (*Užasnym*),³² but *must* indulge in it. A question that comes to mind is this: is the vampiric compulsion perchance hereditary in a somewhat Ibsenesque sense (*Ghosts*)? Is the amethyst ring an heirloom marking an inherited degeneration, imposed by fluids /miasmas/ that pass from father to son, making both of them their helpless victims? In the long, largely (auto-)biographical poem *Retribution* (*Vozmezdie*, 1910-1921), the poet takes a ring off his dead father's hand, possibly acknowledging their “hidden innermost similarity.”³³ His father too “drank blood” joylessly³⁴ and so does his son, repeating the circles of hellish predestination, in spite of his rejection of paternal “sick demonism.” In *Retribution*, the poet's father is presented as a tired bird of prey, drinking the “live blood”³⁵ of those near and dear without relish.

A “vampiric age,”³⁶ inevitably, breeds “vampires.” Purity is constantly threatened and its escape from contamination almost miraculous. The poet from “In the Restaurant” (*V restorane*, 1910), who sends an unknown girl a “black rose” in a glass of champagne,³⁷ most likely has “black blood”; it is red roses that signal non-vampiric love. The subsequent poem is titled *Demon* and, if this sequence is read as a continuing “narrative,” the poet would turn into a Lermontovian-Vrubelian “Demon,” given a chance to capture the girl. It is the girl's frightened flight that saves her from the fatal embrace of his lethal “vampiric” kiss—the fate Lermontov's unfortunate Tamara suffered. The fact that she is in the company of a gentleman and

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Cf. Aleksandr Blok, *Polnoe Sobranie sočinenij i pisem*, op. cit., Vol. 5, 56.

34 Ibid., 42.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Cf. Aleksandr Blok, *Polnoe Sobranie sočinenij i pisem*, op. cit., Vol. 3, 16.

dines in a fine restaurant emphasizes that purity is an upper-class privilege in Blok's world, but it is rare there as well.

"Vampiric hell" and modern civilization intersect and overlap, as *The Dance of Death* cycle (*Pljaski smerti*, 1912-1914) reveals. The "undead" protagonist of the first poem, who rises from his "coffin" in the mornings,³⁸ may even be worse off than his counterpart in hell. In his urban *beau monde* setting, he must "pretend to be alive, alive," which to the "dead souls" of the Old World, he proves by telling a "scabrous anecdote, wiggling his behind."³⁹ The city at night has one advantage over the diurnal one: it liberates from pretense and allows the diseased to seek counter-poisons to the ones that have devastated their once healthy bodies. Helped by a "skeleton" with a "black mouth,"⁴⁰ their raid on an apothecary store is successful: two "women without noses" receive a stolen phial from a cupboard labeled *Venena*.

The upper classes can buy purity for their sheltered maidens, as well as pleasure by corrupting innocence; perhaps they even hope to partake of innocence while perverting it—prostitutes were frequently seduced and abandoned country girls. In poem 4 of the cycle, a prostitute and a debauchee (with a white shirtfront and a red flower in his lapel) "cross the threshold" [to a brothel].⁴¹ This upper-class patron of brothels may not even be a despicable bourgeois, but rather a refined member of the cultured classes, perchance a poet. He seems accompanied by his nobler double, a "handsome warrior" (*strojnyj latnik*), who once may have sworn to defend the honor of his *Beautiful Lady* unto death—the betrayal of this "first love" is an all-pervasive theme in volume III. Whether this is a fallen *poète maudit* who demonstrates solidarity with the exploited by visiting lower class establishments or a bourgeois imagining he is ennobling the fallen by his "elevating" presence,⁴² the destruction of this brothel world—already

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴² As the "aristocrat" of a vulgar movie described in poem 6 of the cycle *The Life of My Friend* (*Žizn' moego prijatelja*) who, kissing a girl from the lower classes, imagines he is "elevating her to his own level" (*Ibid.*, 32; the italics are the poet's).

“rotting” from inside—is inevitable. The last poem of the cycle shows that this civilization in various stages of putrefaction still exists only because the “rich” are, as yet, in control. Their tsar is retreating into the world of fairytales, however. There is a new tsar emerging out of the dark shadows of historical non-existence and approaching the illuminated stage of history. The new one does not wear a crown, but a tattered cap, like Maksim Gor’kij’s famous barefoot tramps (*bosjaki*); he is smiling, but his smile is not “good-natured.”⁴³ In fact, it does not at all bode well for the “brothel world.”

In a “vampiric age,” the majority inevitably become “vampires” who can be subdivided into different categories. There are those who, as always, just want to be “well-fed” and do not mind feeding off others, i.e. the bourgeoisie. Their eventual fate will be to “rot alive,” having “overfed” their flesh.⁴⁴ Then there are the demonic vampire-sorcerers, who cast their spells over Russia, keeping her in a state between life and death, an eternal dream-state where nothing ever changes, so that the rich may remain “evilly triumphant.”⁴⁵ These are the senile and syphilitic leaders of the land with the super-vampire Pobedonoscev on top of the scale.⁴⁶ “God’s best creation,”⁴⁷ women, are also vampires, when gripped by and inviting unbridled lust, however beautiful they may be. They too have been corrupted by the “terrible world” of degraded “love,” and their blood too is “black”. And then there is the complex category of those who both inherited and contracted the “diseases” of the modern world and who lead a divided existence in twilight border regions (like Lermontov’s *Demon*). The poet is their representative.

On one hand, he leads a brothel-existence while saturating his verse “with the invisible poison” exuded by the “(un-)dead,”⁴⁸ and hoping to imbue his readers with revulsion for the existing order. Staying within the *status quo*, he feeds his own and others’ indignation at the iniquities of the old

43 Cf. Aleksandr Blok, *Polnoe Sobranie sočinenij i pisem*, op. cit., Vol. 3, 24.

44 Ibid., 59.

45 Ibid., 24.

46 See Henryk Baran, “Some Reminiscences in Blok: Vampirism and Its Antecedents,” op. cit.

47 Cf. Aleksandr Blok, *Polnoe Sobranie sočinenij i pisem*, op. cit., Vol. 3, 37.

48 Ibid., 47.

brothel world and indicts this evil. Creating revulsion for and indignation at the old world of injustice is his contribution as a poet to the eventual redemption of his land. To be a poet implies shouldering responsibility for the world and for oneself. On the other hand, as an individual, he tries to keep alive the better hypostases of his self, such as the “handsome warrior,” the “sailor” who missed out on his Argonautic journey,⁴⁹ Siegfried forging his sword of justice, and the “child of goodness and light.” They are obscured by his demonic doubles, but they “exist.” This nobler double is usually ill-fated, however. Like Hamlet, another positive double, he is bound to die from some “poisoned dagger” or other in a “rotting” society,⁵⁰ but at least *he* knows what is “right”: his “blood turns cold/ When wily intrigue weaves its cunning nets” (*Cholodeet krov’/ Kogda pletet kovarstvo seti*).⁵¹ His feelings for Ophelia are pure like first love, even though she may have betrayed him. The verse collection *Iambis* (1907-1914) conveys the “indignation”⁵² that the “poisoned” poet still is able to feel, although he has become inured to all manifestations of corruption. His hatred for evil allies the “good child” he really is with the “good child” that the exploited *narod* really is. Both *feel* what is right even when they act wrongly, and both know that in a “new world” they could lose the stigmata of “blackness.” The stains of the past could miraculously disappear—as did Mina’s facial sore in *Dracula*. “See the snow is not more stainless than her forehead! The curse has passed away!” her dying defender against Dracula, Mr. Morris, exclaims.⁵³ Can *black blood* be as miraculously cured? In Blok’s *Terrible World of Retribution*, the process of redemption is more tension-filled than in the gothic horror novel, as well as ultimately undecided in regard to outcome. The first phase of redemption is found in the cycle *Black Blood* (1909-1914) where the poet reaches the apogee of evil; here we do have a gothic tale of unspeakable horror but also sudden transformations.

49 *Ibid.*, 13.

50 *Ibid.*, 61.

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Ibid.*, 55.

53 Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, ed. Roger Luckhurst (New York: Oxford University Press [Oxford World’s Classics], 2011), 350.

In this cycle, the poet's vampiric demonism is carried to such extremes that he crosses the borderline to murder. In a Dostoevskian vein, this crime reveals the full extent of his defilement, "propelling" him into remorse and expiation, enabling him to escape perdition. Experiencing the full extent of his evil, he comes to see the light. He understands that lust has blackened his blood and enslaved him. Enslavement and liberation is the main theme of the cycle which presents the encounters he has with an "insatiable" woman—or, more probably, with several women of the same vampiric kind. The poet "despises" his paramour's "very name"⁵⁴ and does not want to taste the bliss of her "snake paradise," but his "falls" appear inevitable.⁵⁵ In section 8, hatred for the seductress has reached such intensity that he "kills" her and drinks her blood.

Or is it a nightmare the poet has—one so horrifying that it "cures" him? The setting of this poem suggests some kind of Dracula castle; there is mention of "my castle,"⁵⁶ heavy carpets and draperies, candles and coffins, and of course the drinking of blood, which all seem to indicate a new version of the *Song of Hell*. Even the amethyst ring returns. All this intimates that the poet may be dreaming rather than committing an actual murder. If so, the last poem of the cycle (9) where the poet no longer is in a "castle," but at his home, from which he has thrown out a venal woman, marks an awakening from nightmares. As if to confirm this awakening, dawn replaces the chilly, windy night. The poet understands, with the help of this "emblem" of his youth (rosy dawns marked the cult of the *Beautiful Lady* of his early verse) that he is finally free, having "Exchanged base lust/ For a better fate" (. . . *na lučšuju dolju/ Ja nizkuju strast' promenjal*).⁵⁷

The poet's "better fate" is not linked to a return to the past, however (which is impossible since youth "has passed"),⁵⁸ but to the growing commitment to his *Homeland* (the cycle *Rodina* 1907-1916). It is to the "theme of Russia" that he "consciously and irrevocably dedicates his life,"

⁵⁴ Aleksandr Blok, *Polnoe Sobranie sočinenij i pisem*, op. cit., Vol. 3, 35.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 38.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 43.

Blok states in correspondence with K. Stanislavskij in 1908.⁵⁹ There can be no doubt that *Rodina* becomes the counter-theme to the theme of the “terrible world,” which is steeped in moral dissolution and economic-political corruption. As much revulsion as the latter evokes, that much hope the former instills. “New America” (*Novaja Amerika*, 1913), one of the poems in the cycle, even anticipates a kind of “Soviet” faith in a bright future built by a proletariat determined to take charge of its own fate.

The poem deals with a journey in time and space from pre-Petrine and Finnish lands to contemporary industrialized landscapes in the coal-rich south, in the past often invaded by Tatars.⁶⁰ Most relevant to the present discussion are the lines: “Black coal is our underground messiah,/ Black coal is the tsar and bridegroom here” (*Čěrnij ugol’—podzemnyj messija,/ Čěrnij ugol’—zdes’ car’ i ženich*).⁶¹ Clearly the poet is not only speaking of coal when using images such as “messiah” and “tsar and bridegroom,” however beneficial rich coal deposits may be for Russia’s future. These images refer to those who bring the black coal out of the “dirt” of the earth—to the “Tatars” of today, the Proletariat. This work-force is perceived as just a grimy “substance” in the old world, barely distinguishable from the black coal they excavate, but it will become the “diamond” that the Redeemer and new “Tsar” of Russia must be. The marriage of Russia, the bride (*nevesta*) and the Proletariat (*car’ i ženich*) will take place and this event, historically, will be the Revolution. The new Tsar is still hovering in the shadows as in *The Dance of Death* discussed above; he is still uncouth “coal,” but positive transformations will take place in the New World where “base” substances will turn into noble ones in a magnum opus of transformation. Coal will become diamond, a “dark” people will become illumined.

Writing about the triumphant Revolution a few years later, the poet holds out two scenarios. The poem *The Scythians* (January 1918) implies that there could be Revolution without Retribution. It is addressed mainly to the West, but also the West in Russia, i.e. the upper classes. There

⁵⁹ See volume III, 901; the emphasis is his.

⁶⁰ See my detailed discussion of this poem in “Who Are the Tatars in Aleksandr Blok’s ‘The Homeland’? The East in the Literary-Ideological Discourse of the Russian Symbolists” in *Poetica* 35 (2003): 123-153.

⁶¹ Cf. Aleksandr Blok, *Polnoe Sobranie sočinenij i pisem*, op. cit., Vol 3, 182.

could be a “fraternal feast”⁶² which would put an end to Russia’s flow of “black blood” (*oblivajas’ černoj krov’ju*),⁶³ or there could be total destruction (wreaked by “Asian hordes,” whom the Russians will no longer bar from reaching Europe). In the slightly earlier long poem *The Twelve* (*Dvenadcat’*, January 1918), the destruction of the old world (without “hordes”) is envisioned as a “merciless” Russian affair (*ničego ne žal’*).⁶⁴ *The Twelve* envisions a “new heaven and a new earth,” or, more precisely, the path to these traveled by a new, incorruptible “diamond-mankind.” Hence the twelve “apostles” of Revolution, representatives of the folk, are ready for “everything,”⁶⁵ shouldering the role of judges which the Biblical Revelation reserves for the divine sphere. The Jesus Christ whom they oppose and struggle with, not realizing that He is the one who is leading them “forward,” does not shoulder the role of Judge of the People. Blok’s Revolution-Apocalypse not only makes “the last the first” and vice versa, but also overturns the functions of the divine/spiritual and human spheres. The folk is the Judge of this Apocalypse. Let us now examine the narrative of the poem (*poema*) consisting of twelve parts.

In the first part, the retribution theme is presented satirically and nothing worse befalls the old world than cruel mockery. The “fat-bellied” clergy, the fur-clad rich, the cowardly *intelligent* are all intimidated and mocked by the crowd which we do not see, but hear: “Why d’you look so glum and lowly/ Comrade priest?” (*Čto nynče neveselyj/ Tovarišč pop?*),⁶⁶ or “a dame done up in Persian lamb” “Thwack!—stretched flat on her rear-end!” (... *barynja v karakule; Poskoľznulas’/ I–bac—rastjanulas’*).⁶⁷ All the representatives of the old world are “womanish” characters (longhaired priests, women and intellectuals) devoid of courage and nobility, who deserve the humiliations to which they are subjected. As the formerly “first” fall to the ground on slippery ice and themselves predict their

⁶² *Ibid.*, 80.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, 9.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

imminent demise and burial (“—Oh, these Bolsheviks will drive us to the grave!” [—*Okh, Bol’sheviki zagoniat v grob*⁶⁸]), the formerly “last” appear on the scene. They are represented by those who were the most exploited of the exploited in the old “brothel-world”: the prostitutes. Elevated to the status of “comrades,” they discuss client tariffs. They also seem to have been parodically elevated to “wise virgins” as they secure their future as citizens equal to all, whereas Katja, the prostitute who still allows the bourgeois to pay her with *kerenki*, would seem to belong to the foolish “virgins” who fritter their assets away. That the scene invites not only unkind laughter but also pending terrors is marked by the stark landscape, above all the apocalyptic “black, black sky.” It is a “comical” dance of death we are witnessing, but it is a lethal dance nevertheless.

We meet the “apostles” implied by the title *The Twelve* in the second part. The theme of mockery is here intensified to blasphemy as “fat-arse Holy Russia” is threatened with a round of bullets. Old *Rus’* always was a “brothel” and it still is we learn from the red guards; they imply that Kat’ka and her bourgeois Van’ka are engaged in one of the world’s oldest occupations: fornication. The third poem counterbalances the vision of a dissolute and unclean world with the threat of a “world-wide conflagration” (*mirovoj požar*)⁶⁹ that will rid the world of the bourgeoisie and the “terrible world” it created. The red apostles ask the Lord (*Gospod’*) to bless their undertaking, either out of old habit, or perhaps they already darkly realize that the “new earth” will need a new deity—an indestructible humankind hard as diamond.

The next section presents Kat’ka’s and Van’ka’s trivial rendez-vous. We see purely “carnal” love, as Kat’ka obviously has fallen for such masculine attributes as broad shoulders and black mustaches (as well as *kerenki*). Van’ka with his “idiotic physiognomy” clearly does not look for more than a “fat-cheeked little mug” and broad behind—*Tolstomorden’kaja*. Kat’ka’s face⁷⁰ forms a famous pendant to Russia’s *tolstozadaja* back side.⁷¹ Kat’ka

68 *Ibid.*, 7.

69 *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, 12.

70 *Ibid.*, 13.

71 *Ibid.*, 12.

represents that hypocritical Russia that claimed to be “holy,” but was not—most likely she prayed for many clients in church before starting work.

Part 5 tells of Kat'ka's and Petrucha's violent past and of Petrucha's jealousy. To his misfortune, he loves the “whorish” Kat'ka. His and his comrades' attempts to eliminate bourgeois Van'ka in part 6 fail, and Kat'ka is killed instead. “She's dead! She's dead”—a “cadaver” as the entire old world may soon be. Offering a counterpoint theme to the disfigured corpse (shot through the head), the revolutionary hymn of heroic vigilance is voiced: the temporal is contrasted with the lasting. In part 7, individual grief is contrasted to the collective resolve. It is needed against the threat that the past still poses, and in part 8, vengeance on the bourgeoisie is vowed. In part 9 we see a *buržuj* with his nose hidden in a collar on the crossroads of history; and next to him the unclean *parš-ivyyj pës*, whose sores would seem to defy healing.

In part 10, the snowstorm displays its violent force and the apostles invoke the “Savior” (*Spase*),⁷² but just as a divine name “taken in vain” (—*Och, purga kakaja, Spase!*). Possibly however they dimly sense His presence in the “pillar of snow” (not fire) that seems to lead them forward. By part 11, the often discussed transformation of the “anarchic” red guards to majestic warriors of the Revolution has taken place. The poet himself betrayed the “warrior” (*strojnyj latnik*) he once was, but the “black masses” of the folk are being transformed into something nobler than they once were: judges of the collapsing old world and defenders of the new. They follow their (blood-) red flag, ready for “anything” in the name of the New World. They are aware that the (diabolic) “fierce enemy” may awaken at any time to halt their progression toward the Future of Justice and Joy, which must be defended at any cost.

In the climactic twelfth part, the warriors do become aware of His presence: someone seems to be hiding behind the red flag unfurling in the snowstorm and in the snowdrifts piling up. They command the Unknown Presence to “come out” of the snowdrift where they think he is hiding (*Vychodi!*),⁷³ but no one does, at least not visibly so. Besides the twelve there is no one around except for the “scurvy” (*šeludivyyj*) and “scabby”

⁷² *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, 18.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 19.

(*paršivyyj*) dog that will not “get lost” even when threatened by bayonets. The twelve encourage their invisible leader to “surrender alive” but when this exhortation has no effect, they release volley after volley of bullets, also apparently to no effect. The last images are of suspended action or a film shot in slow motion where the cadre is lifted out of temporal narrative sequencing and halted in a different time dimension. The “hungry wolf” (the dog seems to have become more dangerous), the “forever” forward-marching red guards, and diagonally above them and the whirling snows, Jesus Christ “walking” in the air, form a procession moving towards vistas of endless space and timeless eternity. The divine Leader is adorned by his famous “white wreath of roses” (like a “Catholic” Christ) and covered with precious stones—pearls and surely diamonds also. “Immune to bullets” and merged with the “laughing” snowstorm he seems to be “mocking” the twelve.⁷⁴

We remember that in part 1 the Old World was being mocked—is the New World now being ridiculed as well? Is Christ laughing at the naïve notion that he can be killed? Is this mocking laughter a challenge to “march forward forever” without yielding to temptation? Does he intimate that the Twelve should not regress to scurvy-canine life forms, but transcend themselves by laughing at everything “all too human” (Nietzsche)? Unlike Revelation, *The Twelve* has no “real” finale.

Can we speak of any Redemption then? As I have argued before,⁷⁵ Jesus Christ is actually not immune to bullets throughout part 12, but is killed at some point (as Christ was when he was crucified). He comes out of the “grave” however, the “cold snowdrift” in which he was “buried,” when the twelve call him out (*Vychodi!*), replaying the biblical scene of the resurrection of Lazarus. In this *poema* of reversals, it is not Christ who resurrects mankind, but mankind which resurrects Christ, or the Image-Idea of Immortal Humanity. The scene where Christ is “resurrected” is somewhat reminiscent of a novel Blok admired in which a similar “resurrection scene” is enacted—Gor’kij’s *Confession* (*Ispoved’*, 1907). There a folk collective

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ See my *Abolishing Death: A Salvation Myth in Russian Twentieth Century Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992). This work also contains a discussion of the coal-diamond transformation in Solov’ev and Blok.

“calls” a dying child back to life and here the “black messiah” of an uncouth and “dark” people is beginning to understand—however darkly—that it is acquiring power over life and death, over its own fate, beginning to control culture, as well as the forces of nature, the very elements (*stichii*) that the bourgeoisie “contaminated.” The “coal” is beginning to absorb “light” and once it is saturated, the “diamond” will begin to sparkle. The poem’s Jesus Christ is the image of the light-filled humankind that will create a better world without tears because it is superior to the old one. It will be in control of nature, not least its own nature.

It should not be forgotten, however, that the “scab-covered cur” has not been eliminated. Perhaps, in the Faustian tradition, the vulgar Van’ka, Kat’ka’s lover, is even inside the mangy dog, as Mephisto was inside the black poodle that followed Faust. The rhyme *pës-Christos* seems to intimate that the balance between “regression” and endless progress is tipped only slightly in favor of Christ, in spite of the latter’s apparent victory and mockery of everything “old.” At least the tension of uncertainty remains.

The Christ of Blok’s poem is not only indestructible but also beautiful, androgynously so, in fact. In his famous essay “The Meaning of Love” (1894), Solovëv envisioned the future “human diamond” not only as light-filled, but also as androgynous in the sense of two true lovers together forming the perfect union of the Feminine and Masculine. *The Twelve*’s Christ does not symbolize a pan-masculine world but points to a world where sexuality has ceased to be debauchery, lust and disease and has become life-giving Beauty. Personifying woman’s beauty and loving wisdom and man’s courage and spirituality—Sophia and Logos—Christ points the way to the sublimation of Eros, to Solovëv’s “erotic utopia” (Zenkovsky),⁷⁶ where procreation is superfluous, since the human being has become immortal.

Blok’s Revelation is thus not a purely secular one, but combines historical-realistic elements with mystical ones. The relationship between the two poles is a question which is too complex to answer within the limited space of an article. What may be stated here in conclusion, however, is that Blok has a great deal in common with both the French “decadent”

⁷⁶ Vasilii Vasilevich Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, Vol. 2 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 515.

tradition of Baudelaire and the “naturalist school” of Zola (*Nana*), as well as English Gothic. The French legacy fruitfully complicates his neo-romantic and Germanic model of the world, adding bitter remorse, hate-filled resentment and palpable fears to the romantic vision of “pure Beauty.” The plaster bust of Apollo,⁷⁷ which he smashed shortly before his death, to him perhaps represented a fake and lying bourgeois world that claimed to value beauty, but reduced it to mass-producing the Greek god of harmonious art in cheap plaster. To smash the “bourgeois lie” is a French decadent legacy opposed to admiring fake and smug art, as the bourgeois everywhere do in Blok's world. Whatever the case, the procession we see at the end of *The Twelve* clearly has a long way to go yet before all black blood has been absorbed by white snow, and before the Twelve will enter the realm to which the Christ, wreathed in white roses, is calling them.

⁷⁷ Cf. note 2.

Suzana Marjanić

APOCALYPSE AND GOLGOTHA IN MIROSLAV KRLEŽA'S
OLDEN DAYS

*Memoirs and Diaries 1914–1921/1922**

“The Revelation sings a new
world where the sea is no more
(Revelation 21:1)”

J. Chevalier, A. Gheerbrant

Miroslav Krleža's *Olden Days* (*Davni dani*)—artistic memoirs and diaries relating to the period from 1914 to 1921/1922—is considered in Croatian literature to be the only diary of a literary nature from the entire dystopian period of the First World War. It thus covers the “carcinogenic” period of 1914–1921/1922, “when the angel of death hovered over all this muddy landscape,”¹ when everyone *rattled on* about “sharpened knives, as if they were something completely normal” (DD, 262). Krleža began writing his diary—“a play with a thousand characters”²—at the age of 21, precisely in the apocalyptic year that the First World War began.

In his historical essay entitled *Thirty Years Ago (1917–1947)* [*Prije trideset godina (1917–1947)*], which formed part of the diary-memoir structure of *Olden Days* in its first edition of 1956, Krleža noted the lack of a Croatian account of the First World War³ because, as he wrote in his diary entry for 15 September 1916, it concerns a period in which *all*

* Translated from Croatian by Natka Badurina and Karen Turnbull.

¹ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1918–22: Davni dani II* [*Diary 1918–1922: Olden Days II*] (Sarajevo: NIŠP Oslobođenje, 1977), 22.

² Marijan Matković, *Razgovori i pogovori. O pjesnicima, slikarima i odlascima* (Zagreb: Znanje, 1985), 187–188.

³ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I* [*Diary 1914–1917: Olden Days I*] (Sarajevo: NIŠP Oslobođenje, 1977), 398.

the thinkers failed to act, and allowed themselves to sink into a silence of ethical indifference. In the entry for 28 October 1915, in which he declares that Jules Massenet's musical compositions on the theme of Goethe were still waiting to be exposed as nonsense, Krleža wrote his own apocalyptic vision of history: "In truth, history has never before seen such a criminal, murderous, perverse, sick civilization. No civilization to date has ever been lacerated by such contradictions."

Some further information on *Olden Days*: These anti-war notes were first published in 1956, with the subtitle *Writings, 1914–1921*.⁴ In the second 1977 edition, the publication was expanded to cover the political and historical situation in 1922.⁵ Under the description "Doppelleben [double life]"—indicating the rift Krleža perceived between his bourgeois/civilian life and the military uniform, or rather, the historic uniform of the school of reserve officers of the *domobrani*⁶—this wartime and post-war diary forms a fully-fledged part of the body of testimonial literature about war. Seeking to describe the overall context of the first worldwide massacre, the diary's first-person narrator is shown not only as an introspective storyteller, but also as an extrovert chronicler with artistic-memoir pretensions, speaking with the voices of Odysseus, representing the Croatian soldiers, and of Penelope, representing the Croatian war widows.⁷ It should be pointed out that Krleža's diaries (*Diaries 1 to 5*), together with *Writings from Tržič*

⁴ Miroslav Krleža, *Davni dani. Zapisi 1914–1921* in *Sabrana djela Miroslava Krleže*, Volumes 11–12 (Zagreb: Zora, 1956).

⁵ This is the edition which was published to mark the writer's 85th birthday: *Jubilarno izdanje u povodu 85. godišnjice autorova rođenja* (Sarajevo, 1977), in two volumes: *Dnevnik 1–2*. The titles of the two volumes are: *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I* and *Dnevnik 1918–22: Davni dani II*.

⁶ The *domobrani* are members of a Croatian military body which was established following the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, and abolished with the dissolution of the Empire in 1918. Until its defeat in 1945, the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) adopted this name for its armed forces (cf. Velimir Visković, ed., *Krležijana 1* [Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod "Miroslav Krleža," 1993], 163–164).

⁷ As well as its diaristic content as a synthetic and literary diary (Viktor Žmegač, "Krležina dnevnička proza," *Umjetnost riječi* 1 [1988]: 39–53), *Olden Days* also contains a "book" of aphorisms "*Much For Nothing*" (*Mnogo pa ništa*) in which the individualist anarchism influence of Max Stirner can be seen. *Olden Days* also contains outlines of future works and of unfinished projects, such as a play about God, a planned short story or novelette on the theme of the Assumption, a play about Baudelaire, and a possible play about Scheherazade.

(*Zapisi sa Tržiča*, Sarajevo 1988), represent a quarter of the author's entire output.⁸

As well as being driven by the historical globally apocalyptic situation, Krleža was also moved to write *Olden Days* after experiencing a Golgotha of his own. The year 1913 was decisive for him, because during this year he carried through his resolve to escape from the Ludoviceum military academy (the Royal Hungarian Ludovica Military Defence Academy) in Budapest. From 1908 to 1913, that is, from the age of fifteen and until he was twenty, Krleža had lived under the military discipline of the Hungarian military schools, first as a student of the Royal Hungarian school for cadets in Pécs (from 1908 to 1911), and subsequently as a cadet at the Ludoviceum academy in Budapest (from 1911 to 1913).⁹ In tandem with his ripening plan of escaping the Ludoviceum academy after having realized that the military profession was not his true calling, in 1913 Krleža also developed a double-faceted political conviction, which chimed with his oft-mentioned *antithetical carousel*: this was a combination of love for Croatia, inspired by the ideas of Ante Starčević,¹⁰ and—paradoxically—by a sentimental perception of the Yugoslav union.¹¹ In April 1913, in pursuit

⁸ Krleža's diary writings (*Dnevnik 1–5*, Sarajevo 1977) cover the period from 1914 to 1969, or in other words, 55 years of the author's life.

⁹ See Đorđe Zelmanović, *Kadet Krleža: školovanje Miroslava Krleže u mađarskim vojnim učilištima* (Zagreb: Školske novine, Sveučilišna naklada Liber, 1987). Krleža's state of military anabasis was preceded by another personal Golgotha: following a conflict with professor and class director, Dragutin Müller, at the royal Great High School in the lower town of Zagreb, in 1906 Krleža moved to another high school in the upper town. But there, too, he had a number of clashes with the teachers, and furthermore failed three fourth-year exams, which left him feeling humiliated and offended with his situation in Zagreb, which he thus decided to leave in 1908, in order to continue his formal education in the Hungarian military school in Pécs (cf. Enes Čengić, *S Krležom iz dana u dan (1980–1981)*. *U sjeni smrti* [Zagreb: Globus, 1985/IV]: 276).

¹⁰ Ante Starčević (1823–1896) was a Croatian politician, and the most fervent supporter of Croatian independence in the Croatian Sabor (parliament). He was firmly opposed to any form of administrative or government connection between Croatia and Austria and Hungary, and this formed the basis for the Party of Rights, which he founded in 1861 with Eugen Kvaternik. Today, he is known as the "Father of the Fatherland" (cf. Velimir Visković, ed., *Krležijana 2* [Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod "Miroslav Krleža," 1993], 347–348).

¹¹ Stanko Lasić, *Krleža: kronologija života i rada* (Zagreb: Grafički zavod Hrvatske, 1982), 102. Stanko Lasić considers the constructive principle both of Krleža's literary work, and of his

of his vision of a Yugoslav union, Krleža left the Ludoviceum academy for Paris, whence he travelled, via Marseilles and Salonika, to Skopje, with the intention of enlisting as a volunteer in the Serbian army, which was then encamped at Bregalnica in anticipation of the Serbian war with the Bulgarians. More specifically, Krleža tried twice to enlist in the Serbian army during the Balkan wars (first and second, 1912–1913): in 1912 he was turned down, and in 1913 he was accused of being an Austro-Hungarian spy, and sent back to the Austrian authorities in Zemun. His experiences in the battle of Bregalnica gave rise to his disillusionment with the political concept, prevalent at the time, of a Yugoslav union led by Serbia. Krleža realized that the battle of Bregalnica

is perhaps the most tragic event of this whole war: Dostoevsky's prediction—namely that the natives of the Balkans, if only they had possessed guns and cannons, would have savaged and slaughtered themselves to extinction—has come to pass for the second time at Bregalnica!¹²

All Krleža's *Illyrian* ideals were thus destroyed at Bregalnica, and rather than an Austro-Hungarian¹³ *Algiers*,¹⁴ he now discovered a southern, Serbian Slavic *Algiers* of an expansionist state power.¹⁵ Thus in 1913, Krleža returned to Zagreb as a deserter, and a definitive rift grew between the father—Miroslav Krleža *senior*, an employee of the Austro-Hungarian Empire—and son, Miroslav Krleža *junior*: in the father's eyes, his son was "a deserter, a nothing and no-one, and his living shame."¹⁶ It was from this

personality, to be antithetic (Ibid. and Stanko Lasić, *Krležologija ili Povijest kritičke misli o Miroslavu Krleži. Knjiga 1. Kritička literatura o Miroslavu Krleži od 1914. do 1941* [Zagreb: Globus, 1989], 39-40 and 343).

¹² Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 248.

¹³ Ibid., 276.

¹⁴ Ibid., 235.

¹⁵ By his *Oriental* metaphors (e.g. Balkan Judea, Croatian Algiers), Krleža denotes the colonial state of the Southern Slavic countries of that time, their cultural and political shipwreck. His words in his diary entry of 22 February 1917, at 11 o'clock in the "Bauer" café were: "I hate this Croatian Algiers of ours, to despise our Algiers means to be aware that it is that, in other words, Algiers, that I do not want to be."

¹⁶ Stanko Lasić, *Krleža: kronologija života i rada*, op. cit., 109.

standpoint—of both a global and a personal Golgotha—that Krleža began to write his *Olden Days* artistic memoir. The following year, 1914, was also a turning point for Krleža from several points of view: the beginning of the war and the collapse of the Second International, which vanished “like a spirit from a spiritualist séance.”¹⁷ This was also, in fact, the year in which the first of Krleža's works were published: *Legenda* (*Književne novosti*, 1914, vols. 1, 2, 3, 4); *Maskerata* (*Književne novosti*, 1914, 16); *Zaratustra i mladić* (*Savremenik*, 1914, 6); and *Fragmenti* (*Književne novosti*, 1914, 21).

But before going further, let us look more closely at the collapse of the Second International: for Krleža, the beginning of the infernal simultaneity of the First World War also meant the loss of absolute faith in the Second International—the “monumental marble goddess which, according to Marx, would save Europe from destruction”¹⁸—but which rather than promoting internationalism had bowed to the policy, or the strategy, of defending individual or national interests. Stanko Lasić identified these events as having played a major role in forming Krleža's beliefs and in his support for the Leninist model. Regarding the chronology of events in Krleža's life in that apocalyptic year which saw the beginning of the First World War, it must be pointed out that in August of 1914 he received notice of his call-up from the Austro-Hungarian military authorities, but was rejected because he weighed only 46 kilos. Despite this, he enlisted in December 1915 and was sent to the reserve officers' school (25th regiment of the *domobrani*). Furthermore, with regard to his biography during the war years, briefly summarized here on the basis of Stanko Lasić's chronology of Krleža's life and works,¹⁹ it should be highlighted that Krleža spent the months of July and August of 1916 on the frontline at Galicia (on the Eastern Front), as one of the masses of *kanonenfutter* [cannon-fodder]²⁰ at the same time as the first Brusilov Offensive. During his months in Galicia, which unfortunately are not recorded in *Olden Days*, Krleža kept with him some cyanide pills which he had been given at Lovran (in the Kvarner Gulf, near Rijeka) “by

¹⁷ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1918–22: Davni dani II*, op. cit., 283.

¹⁸ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 417.

¹⁹ Stanko Lasić, *Krleža: kronologija života i rada*, op. cit., 115-118, 123-125.

²⁰ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 126 (see the diary entry of 17 January 1918).

a pharmacist whom he had befriended: he intended to commit suicide in the event that he was seriously wounded or found himself in some other difficult situation.”²¹ From this fragmentary information on Krleža’s life up to 1916, it can be seen clearly that the three wars—the two Balkan wars (of 1912 and 1913) and the First World War—metonymically represented in *Grand Master of All Knaves* (*Veliki meštar sviju hulja*), had a major influence on his personal development.²²

In short, *Olden Days* can be seen as an activistic testimonial literature about war, which documents and is dedicated to these war-time Odysseus and Penelope. This male-female combination is drawn from Krleža’s text *Motif for a novelette* (*Motiv za noveletu*, from *Olden Days*) about a young woman, “a sort of Penelope,” who realizes that all her *prosci* (suitors) were in fact *prasci* (swine);²³ it is also drawn from the essay *Behind the Scenes of 1918* (*Iza kulisa godine 1918*),²⁴ in which Krleža noted that now none of our Penelopes—who are not warriors, but who wage war—still “believes that her Ulysses might one day return, crowned with a laurel wreath.”²⁵

Nonetheless, in his contemplation on the essence of man as a suffering being, continually exposed to the apocalypse of war in an eternal return, Krleža questioned the utility of his own diary writings:

How vacuous is the vanity that drives man to jot down these imaginary notes which are intended to be a kind of posthumous letter, letters of dismissal, as it would seem. By whom? I have none. Would it not be more dignified to die without leaving any mark?²⁶

²¹ Velimir Visković, “Životopis Miroslava Krleže,” in Miroslav Krleža, *Vražji otok* (Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, Matica hrvatska, HAZU, 2000), 152.

²² Cf. Zlatko Sudović, *Filmski portret Miroslava Krleže* (Zagreb: Zagreb Film, 1978).

²³ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 31–32.

²⁴ Krleža included this essay, which was published for the first time in the *Republika* magazine (1967, 7–8), in the second edition of *Olden Days* (cf. Velimir Visković, ed., *Krležijana 1*, op. cit., 145).

²⁵ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1918–22: Davni dani II*, op. cit., 132.

²⁶ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 126.

1. The Krležian Subversion of "Political Allegory": the Apocalyptic Salome as Inception

In the context of the negation of omnipresent militarism, *Olden Days*, which is in essence the author's aesthetic and theoretical *magnum librum*,²⁷ can also be read as a manifesto of the poetic-ethical transgression of the culturogenesis concepts of modernism and of Croatian modern art. This is demonstrated, for example, in a literary discussion on Scheherazade and Heliogabalus (diary entry of 11 May 1916), which Krleža had imagined (without ever completing it in writing) as a literary variation on Wilde's motif, and which dealt with the victory of Scheherazade's astral strategy over Heliogabalian politics. In addition, the above-mentioned poetic-ethical transgression is expressed in the song *I dream of the shadow of an unknown woman* (*Sanjam o sjeni nepoznate žene*, in the entry dated 17 February 1917), in which the diarist asks the question which contains the words of the diary's title: "Where are those olden days of song à la Verlaine?" For Krleža, *Olden Days* represents the gradual relinquishing of the poetics-ethics of modernism, which was represented metonymically as a Balkan Judaea.²⁸ This is, in fact, demonstrated in his dramatic composition, *Salome* (the fragment of *Salome* in *Olden Days*), which was written in a style that obsequiously followed the literary models which were fashionable at the time. In short, in *Olden Days*, Krleža marked his own literary *shift* from the political allegory about the Balkan Judaea, to which *Salome* had formed a prelude, to the style of a documentary, a poetic-ethics dedicated to the *barbaric motifs* of the "imperial-royal Kroatenlager [Croat camp] of the *domobrani* [Home Guards]."²⁹

It is significant that the diaries open with a fragment of *Salome* (26 February 1914), which acts as a symbolic-poetic prelude to the Jewish pentalogy. Thus, the *Jewish pentalogy* is the first syntagm of *Olden Days*.

²⁷ Vesna Stančić, "Saloma u kontekstu Krležine dramske riječi," in *Dani Hvarskog kazališta VIII. Miroslav Krleža* (Split: Književni krug, 1981), 108.

²⁸ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 183: "We live in imperial and royal Judaea."

²⁹ Bruno Popović, *Tema krležiana: monografska rasprava*. (Zagreb: Izdanja Centra za kulturnu djelatnost, 1982), 24.

The text of *Salome* was not finished until 1963,³⁰ 49 years later, but as can already be seen from the first fragment published in the diaries, it was presented as an anti-biblical and anti-Wildean political farce, in which Salome finds herself in a “love” triangle between a Roman (whose name, in the final version, is Kajo) representing aggressive political strategy, and an Athenian who cultivates the myth of sublime art which “has no purpose other than that of ennobling life.”³¹ It deals, thus, with the conflict between the strategy of the Grand Master (history seen as war) and the aesthetic strategy of the Eternal Feminine (history seen as aesthetics)—a conflict in which Salome chooses neither of the two, since she considers the strategy of a Second Athenian—according to whom life is made of blood and is nothing but a *mad murder*—to be boring and pessimistic. In the second fragment of *Salome* in *Olden Days* (27 March 1918), Salome chooses the prophetic strategy of Johanaan (John the Baptist) who—paradoxically and contrary to his prophetic work—is characterized by a speech made *in absentia*: it is only “as a subtext, that the voice of the Prophet echoes through the scene” and utters his own name, in such a silent manner that “it is scarcely heard ... almost like a sigh.”³² Krleža removes the power of speech, the ability to convince others, from this misled prophetic Messianism, thus unmasking its lie. In Krleža’s work, the lie of Yugoslav mythology and Messianism is condemned to aphasia. In the final version of the *legend*, Salome, after a sleepless night passed in search of Johanaan’s astral Truth, reaches a definitive consciousness of his profound union, his roots, with the *canine* earth: “immediately afterwards... his crude and primitive side spoke: my wife, my children, my home, my life, my interests.”³³ This signals the end of Salome’s obsession with the prophet, in whom she recognized an apocalyptic lie—the political prophet’s lie of Yugoslav Messianism—

³⁰ *Salome, a legend in one act (Saloma, legenda u jednom činu, Forum, 1963, 10)*. Krleža used the generic term *legend* for his early dramatic work to describe his particular literary type of dramatic vision. He published a book of drama texts under the title *Legende (Legends)* in 1933, which contained *Legenda, Michelangelo Buonarroti, Kristofor Kolumbo, Maskerata, Kraljevo* and *Adam i Eva*. In the 1967 edition of *Legende (Legends)*, *Saloma* was also added.

³¹ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 11.

³² Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1918–22: Davni dani II*, op. cit., 65, 71.

³³ Miroslav Krleža, *Legende [Legends]*, op. cit., 306.

just as, in 1914 at the Venice Biennale, Krleža had become aware of the end of his own enthusiasm for the Yugoslav Messianism of the sculptor Ivan Meštrović, in whose model for the *Temple of Vidovdan* he perceived dangerous racial ideologemes. As was observed above, Krleža's experiences in the battle of Bregalnica gave rise to his disillusionment with the political concept—prevalent at that time—of a Yugoslav union led by Serbia.

Unlike Wilde's *Salome* (*Salome*, 1893), who is portrayed in a moonlight which symbolizes an atmosphere of morbidity and eroticism, the spirit of Krleža's *Salome* is aimed at an astral strategy, at overcoming servile, adulatory, enslaved, submissive and cynical existence. She feels all the senselessness of the *canine* life on Earth:

For a very long time I have been tormented by always the same thought, that is, that the 'Earth' is in fact as stupid as a dog, with its desire to inseminate itself. And yet it does so. It grew in the dark and it rapes itself with ever the same rhythm. It copulates with itself and, strangest of all, this damned planet is not yet bored with itself, and I ask myself what it always finds so interesting about sniffing around its own tail.³⁴

More than anything else, *Salome would like to die* (thus ends the first fragment). Krleža transforms the mythical archetype of the *Ouroboros* into the symbol of the Earth-dog which bites its own tail, into a *canine* metaphor of the eternal return of the sore points of human history in the course of the global historic apocalypse. *Salome's* astral strategy could, in a certain sense, be compared to the "star morality" described in Nietzsche's "*Joke, Cunning and Revenge*": *Prelude in German Rhymes*, in which Nietzsche maintains that in the field of astral morality, the stars can disregard the dark.³⁵

Krleža's *Salome* is thus an intertextual polemic regarding the Bible and Wilde's *Salome*; it is also the author's showdown with the prophetic and racial nationalism of Yugoslav Messianism³⁶ as well as with the literary aestheticism of the era. *Salome's* character is an interplay of three culturogenesis concepts: the Bible, Oscar Wilde's aestheticism, and the

³⁴ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 12.

³⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Vesela nauka* [The Gay Science] (Belgrade: Grafos, 1984), 33.

³⁶ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 339.

“Eternal Feminine” (*das Ewig-Weibliche*) which means little (or nothing) from the perspective of the squalid soiled feather bed of war.³⁷ Compared with Wilde’s Salome, who is seen as a *late-Romantic vampire*,³⁸ and who, in her infinite sensuality, reveals an aesthetic amorality,³⁹ Krleža’s Salome, on the contrary, rejects her own “Eternal Feminine” and her aesthetic sensuality: she does not care whether hippopotamus semen can be used as precious face cream because “a woman’s skin is the least important thing! The stars are important.”⁴⁰ Like Krleža’s Scheherazade—who, through her narrative lie, triumphs over political Heliogabalism—Krleža’s Salome is revealed as a female will to power, the feminine which destroys masculine power, nullifying the Messianic ideologeme masks of the people’s prophet-tribunes, and sacrificing herself, the actress of her own life, to the *scandalous desert of the spirit*. It is certainly possible to apply Flaubert’s famous remark to Salome’s sidereal strategy: *Salomé, c’est moi!* So it is no accident that Krleža opens his *Olden Days* with a fragment from the legend of *Salome*, whose name means *peace* in Hebrew, the word with which Krleža battles against the apocalypse of World War One in writing *Olden Days*.

With the anti-prophetic concept of John the Baptist, who is a silent provincial and illiterate cleric, Krleža exposes the policy of falsehood of all political prophets, in particular of the political Messiahs of Yugoslav racial nationalism, led by the spectres of the symbolism/myth of Kosovo⁴¹ and of Vidovdan⁴² and of the *milk of Kosovo*—“that milk on which we people of Croatian zagorje were never suckled.”⁴³ Krleža counters Meštrović’s

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 228. Cf. 17 February 1917.

³⁸ Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 562-565.

³⁹ Cf. Viktor Žmegač, *Težišta modernizma: od Baudelairea do ekspresionizma* (Zagreb: Sveučilišna naklada Liber, 1986), 55.

⁴⁰ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 11.

⁴¹ *Translator’s note*: The Battle of Kosovo (1389) between the Ottoman Empire and the Serbs holds an important place in Serbian national history.

⁴² *Translator’s note*: Vidovdan, meaning “Vid’s Day,” is the feast-day of St Vitus, celebrated on 28 June. The Serbian Orthodox Church honors the Serbs who fell during the Battle of Kosovo on the same date.

⁴³ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 135.

Temple of Vidovdan with the theme of “details,” the theme of the historical perspective of “here and now” in which the Austro-Hungarian Colonel Slavko Štancer of the Twenty-fifth Regiment⁴⁴ has lost his right hand, the theme of Slavko Štancer’s “imbecility of borders,” the theme of the anecdote, since “the whole of Europe is today ... a very bloody story.”⁴⁵

In this context, Krleža debunks the re-mythologization of the Kosovo myth as a Yugoslav myth that served as a mythological-poetic matrix for the artistic debates of the Yugoslav ethno-nationalists, and above all of Ivan Meštrović, to whose name Krleža added, in his diary entry of 1 May 1918, that of the writer Ivo Vojnović. The latter is at the heart of a space-time analogy between Judaea and Croatia, in the character of the illiterate prophet Johanaan:

Judaea. Count Ivo in this Judaea today: Johanaan. [Vates]. Not bad! In grand style, in fact. On a completely empty stage, this *charmant* [charming] Count plays the role of the prophet. *Perditio tua ex te* [Destruction is thy own from you]!⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Slavko Štancer (1872–1945), a Croatian General and Austro-Hungarian Colonel, and was later also active in the army of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH). He was captured in Austria in 1945 and sentenced to death in Zagreb (cf. Velimir Visković, ed. *Krležijana 2*, op. cit., 425). *Translator's note*: Štancer was a veteran of the First World War, during which he lost his right hand.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 151. In the text of the diary entry “A drunken night in November 1918” (*Pijana novembarska noć 1918*), written in 1942, Krleža further transforms the figures of Salome and Johanaan: Salome now becomes she who “until yesterday was a good Croatian and a proper lady, and tonight is a democratic Yugoslav woman, with a single ideal of the Karađorđević Dynasty on her lipstick-coated lips,” while Johanaan is a metonym of the bloody severed heads of the *domobrani* (Krleža, Miroslav. *Dnevnik 1918–22: Davni dani II*, op. cit. P. 149). Salome is thus described negatively as a metonym for three real women who were contemporaries of Krleža: Zofka Kveder-Jelovšek, Zlata Kovačević-Lopašić and Olga Krnic-Peleš who as the three tricolour Vestal Virgins (fairy Ravijojla) had “excluded him from the ranks of the people,” (*ibid.*, 163) on that *drunken night in November* (13 November 1918, to be exact) in their role as fervent supporters of the Yugoslav union, like those ghosts of Vidovdan which Krleža objected to. The text of “A drunken night” was published for the first time in the magazine *Republika* (1952, 10-11) and later included in *Olden Days* (cf. Velimir Visković, ed., *Krležijana 2*, op. cit., 149). *Translator's note*: Fairy Ravijojla in Serbian epic poems is connected to Prince Marko (Kraljević Marko Vukašinović), who was the best known hero in South Slavic oral epic poems. During the First World War, Prince Marko was one of the central figures of the Yugo-Messianistic concept of the anticipated “promised Land” (cf. Suzana Marjanic, “Two of Krleža’s Poetical/Ethical Subversions in Bygone Days,” *Narodna umjetnost* 35/1 [1998]: 292).

⁴⁶ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1918–22: Davni dani II*, op. cit., 81. In other passages of *Olden Days*,

From the perspective of 1916 (the afternoon of 16 April), Johanaan is thus presented as Ivan Meštrović, who in the late spring of 1914 had appeared at the Venice Biennale as a prophet with his *Temple of Vidovdan*; and from the perspective of 1918 (1 May) Johanaan becomes Count Ivo Vojnović, to whom Krleža also attributes a manner like that of D'Annunzio.

The opening sentence of the entry for 11 May 1916 is an ironic description of the atmosphere in which the diary's narrator becomes aware of the need to create another type of literary discussion: "The moonlight scatters over all the night and—in my mind—I write my Scheherazade, in memory of Oscar Wilde and in honour of Bakst." This sentence can also be read as Krleža's subversion with regard to secessionist poetics (Oscar Wilde, Lev Bakst), from which he now distanced himself in the name of activist art. Krleža described his own poetics as an interweaving of the Expressionist cacophony of *Kraljevo* (a single-act play written in August 1915, as Krleža wrote in one of the entries in *Olden Days*) and of the *curse* counterpoint of the *domobrani*; as the poetics of documentation of the *barbarian motifs* of the "imperial-royal Kroatenlager of the domobrani" in the pandemonium of the First World War; as the poetics of the "worn-out masses of the people" on the Golgotha of the domobrani, the victims of the "imbecility of Slavko Štancer and company";⁴⁷ as the poetics of the office of Štancer's battalion at 232 Ilica Street;⁴⁸ as the poetics, finally, capable of representing the reality of the *Arbeiterhilfskompanie* (the Austrian army corps which Krleža himself was part of). The rallying call "Not Zarathustra, but the twenty-fifth regiment of the domobrani of Krajiška Street"⁴⁹ reiterates his repudiation of Zarathustra's aestheticism ("*l'art pour l'art*," or art for art's sake) and of the dominance of a superior man, distant from the masses—a superior man whom Krleža recognizes in the Messianic prophets of Yugoslavism,

these two artists were not the only ones portrayed in the role of Johanaan: other "adepts of this strange aesthetic cult" also appeared: Kosta Strajnić, Dimitrije Mitrinović, Milan Marjanović, Andrija Milčinić, Franjo Rački, Dragutin Prohaska (Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 134) (cf. Mate Lončar, "Saloma Miroslava Krleže," in *Miroslav Krleža*, ed. Vojislav Đurić [Belgrade: Prosveta, 1967], 271).

⁴⁷ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 158.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 159 and also Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1918–22: Davni dani II*, op. cit., 46.

⁴⁹ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 158.

and in the aesthetic strategies far removed from the actual Golgotha of the domobrani.⁵⁰

2. Krleža's Golgothas

Having considered the historical and personal Golgothas, let us reflect further on Krleža's literary Golgotha. Biblical themes, and especially the *topos* of Golgotha, form one of the main focuses of his entire body of work. His obsession with the theme of Golgotha during the First World War led Krleža to draw closer spiritually to the pictorial work of Ljubo Babić, who was also the set designer for the first performance of the play *Golgotha* in 1922, directed by Branko Gavella—the very first performance of any work by Krleža. On 9 May 1916 (a diary entry in *Olden Days*), writing of Ljubo Babić's pictorial poetics, Krleža pointed out that Babić, with his cosmopolitanism, had been able to free himself from Meštrović's secessionist ornamentalism, from that enhanced anatomy that “seeks to be colossal, but in fact is only Viennese and secessionist, with exaggerated bulging muscles.”⁵¹ Krleža drew attention to Babić's distance from the Messianic ideologemes and the chaos of the Viennese Secession-influenced work of Ivan Meštrović (for example, in Babić's *Udovice* [Widows], 1912, or *Narikače*—[Women mourning the dead], 1913), who had taken on the *fatal role of the prophet*⁵²—a distance which led Babić to symbolize the tragedy of war with the macabre motifs of black flags (*Black Flag*, 1916). Thus, Krleža himself acknowledges the closeness of the motifs of his own art to Ljubo Babić's painterly motifs, like the black flags and crucifixes of his Rembrandtesque Golgotha (Babić, *Golgotha*, 1916, 1917)—crucifixes which “extend like the mast of a sinking ship, which is being sucked into

50 The narrator of the diary ironically accuses his own *Salome* (which was completed, let it not be forgotten, only 49 years later) and the literary debate on Scheherazade and Heliogabalus as being merely variations in the manner of Wilde, and refuses to transform them into finished works, leaving them as mere incrustations in the body of his diary.

51 Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 153. Regarding Krleža's repudiation of the Messianic ghosts of Meštrović's art at that time, see Suzana Marjanić, *Glasovi "Davnih dana": transgresije svjetova u Krležinim zapisima 1914–1921/22* (Zagreb: Naklada MD, 2005), 58–64.

52 Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1918–22: Davni dani II*, op. cit., 297.

the roaring vortex of an incomprehensible historical flood,⁵³ and which re-emerged in discursive or iconographic forms of artistic expression as *warnings* in the immediate post-war period.⁵⁴

With regard to *Olden Days*, the Golgothan motif is explicitly referred to in the aphoristic diary entry *Golgotha*, as well as in the entry entitled “The first performance of ‘Golgotha’ on 3 November 1922 (written on 4 November 1922),”⁵⁵ along with numerous anamorphic Golgothan motifs which appear throughout the *Olden Days*, such as Krleža’s above-mentioned reflection on the affinity of his own poetics with the symbolism of Ljubo Babić’s crucifixes.

In his aphoristic diary entry, *Golgotha* (from the aforementioned “book of aphorisms” *Mnogo pa ništa*),⁵⁶ which was written following in the footsteps of Max Stirner’s individualist anarchism and creative Nothing—and here I would like to mention the etymology of Golgotha from *gulgoleth* in Hebrew (skull), and that of Calvary from the Latin *calvaria* (empty skull)—Krleža developed an anamorphic Stirnerian analysis of power, according to which man, in an era of politics and of political liberalism in particular, does not act according to his own interests, but only in accordance with the interests of the State and the nation, which have been declared to be “his [thing].”⁵⁷ Krleža’s Calvary in 1916 served the interests of

⁵³ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 242, 298.

⁵⁴ Aleksandar Flaker, *Riječ, slika, grad: hrvatske intermedijalne studije* (Zagreb: HAZU, 1995), 163. The motif of Golgotha arises often in Krleža’s work (cf. Tomislav Ladan, “Lirska topika Miroslava Krleže,” *Kolo* 6 [1968]: 42–51; Darko Gašparović, *Dramatica krležiana* [Zagreb: Cekade, 1989], 71). In this instance, we can recall, in particular, the prose poem *Golgotha* (*Književnik*, 1928, 2), a lyrical variation on the death of Christ, who is named, in an expressionist manner, Man (with a capital “M”). The howling of a dog, as well as the motif of the leper seen as a jester, form the backdrop to this work on the theme of Golgotha: “Somewhere below the castle walls, a hound howled, and the leper’s bell could be heard. Silence reigned” (Miroslav Krleža, *Poezija* [Zagreb: Zora, 1969], 451).

⁵⁵ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1918–22: Davni dani II*, op. cit., 381–392. This entry concludes the diary of 1922, and was published for the first time in the *Borba* magazine (V/1965), and Krleža included it in the second edition of *Olden Days* (cf. Velimir Visković, ed., *Krležijana 2*, op. cit., 232).

⁵⁶ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 177.

⁵⁷ Max Stirner, in his work *The Ego and Its Own* (*Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, 1844), distinguished between three types of liberalism: political liberalism (driven by the concept of the state

“the twenty-fifth regiment” under a grandiose and cynical Church *pardon*: “We’re going to the front, we will be shot in the arms and in the legs, but afterwards, with mathematical certainty, eternal apotheosis will follow.” To Stirner’s revelation of the attributes of *political freedom* (subjugation to the State)—with the ideological call of *Die for the nation*—Krleža added his own thoughts on the eternal return of Golgotha: “And yet, to remain on Golgotha and to know that this is the same variation as ever, on the same equally repulsive subject, almost from the beginning: the law of the universe and of God.” And just as the universe is the result of mechanics in the sense of the Kant-Laplace nebular hypothesis published in 1796, so, in the same way, one dies “in the context of pure geometric combinations” for mere chimeras: “As things stand today, it could be said of the universe that it is the masterpiece of a complete idiot, who didn’t have a single human thought in his head other than the laws of mechanics.”⁵⁸

Faced with a dog’s life as “cannon fodder,” and in the face of the cynical attitude of the *forces in power*,⁵⁹ Krleža established the figure of the *free man* who will rebel against the Idea of this sanguinary world zoo. *The only thing that can save us* from the shipwreck of the world (Krleža uses the metaphor of a shipwreck to represent the apocalyptic disintegration of humanity in *Crime*) is *steadfast faith in the victory of human reason*. The tiger (a Krležian zoometonym which stands for all the animalizations of the *miles gloriosus*), which in heraldic symbolism represents fury and power, like Mr Götz and Bramarbas (Mr Götz, in the *subalterns’* room, seems like a tiger among mice),⁶⁰ will cynically send the mice of the people, the

and the nation); social liberalism (drawn from the idea of society) and human liberalism (critical) which completes the make-up of the “lump” and the new faith in Humanity (Man becomes the God of all). Karl Marx pointed out that what Stirner—or, as he calls him in his polemics, “saint Max”—called social liberalism was, in fact, communism (Karl Marx, *Nemačka ideologija. Kritika najnovije nemačke filozofije u licu njenih predstavnika Fojerbaha, B. Bauera i Štirnera i nemačkoga socijalizma u njegovim različitim prorocima*, Vol. 1 [Belgrade: Kultura, 1964], 224).

⁵⁸ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 177, 187, 194.

⁵⁹ Cf. Peter Sloterdijk, *Kritika ciničkoga uma* (Zagreb: Globus, 1992).

⁶⁰ Cf. Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 165, 177. The rights which Götz von Berlichingen insists upon are taken from the era of the rights of the iron fist, as glorified in the works of Justus Möser. Goethe depicted the historical Götz as a man consumed with the *hubris* of the *Sturm und Drang*. Bramarbas (from the Spanish “bramar”—to bellow or roar), is

subaltern-mice, to the battlefields of Golgotha, of Galicia (on the Eastern Front): “That which, for this dull-witted ox who is about to be transported, ought to seem ‘totally lighthearted’, this crocodilian imbecilic delirium that—God permitting—he will not kick the bucket, that too is war!”⁶¹

Krleža’s *Golgotha* is the first work in his dramaturgy to have a distinctly political tone, a trait which can also be seen in his dedication “to the shades of Richmond and Fortinbras,” Shakespearean characters who carry the torch of rebellion against violence.⁶² The proletarian play of *Golgotha* is usually considered to be part of a dramatic triad written between the end of World War I and 1923; along with *Golgotha*, this triad includes the war play *Galicija* (*Galicia*) and the “pastoral” expressionist play *Vučjak*.⁶³

In the above-mentioned diary entry, “The first performance of ‘Golgotha’ on 3 November 1922,” Krleža mentions the writer Zofka Kveder-Demetrović, describing her as *a poet and wife* of Juraj Demetrović, “well-known ideologist and Marxist leader, now acting as royal commissioner to the former provincial government.” Demetrović was convinced that *Golgotha* was “an animadversion against him personally as a lapsed socialist.”⁶⁴ On the circumstances of this hearsay, Krleža noted: “Out of nothing, a rumour arose that spread about the city as such rumours do, that beneath the mask

the protagonist of the play (*Jakob von Tyboe or the boastful soldier*, 1723) by Ludvig Holberg, the father of Danish theatre, and serves as Krleža’s metonym for the character of the *miles gloriosus*. With regard to the pedagogic-military characters of the *A(u)strojaguaric* monarchy [*Translator’s note*: Krleža used the jaguar to symbolise the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s Balkan policies]—Corporal Frišt, Captain Götz, and Lieutenant Tomašević, see Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 66, 73, 77; and Suzana Marjanić, *Glasovi “Davnih dana,”* op. cit., 83, 222, 223, 420.

⁶¹ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1918–22: Davni dani II*, op. cit., 42.

⁶² Darko Gašparović, *Dramatica krležiana*, op. cit., 70-71.

⁶³ *Translator’s note*: This play is set in the fictive village of Vučjak (representing Duga Rijeka, where Krleža lived from the autumn 1920 to summer 1921); the name (from the Croatian—*vuk* [wolf]) suggests the *eternal wolfishness* of Croatian villages (in Krleža’s Oriental metaphor—“the Croatian village like Central Asia”) at that time.

⁶⁴ According to Dunja Detoni-Dujmić, Zofka Kveder’s ultimate spectacular enthusiasm for the Yugoslav ideal and for the Pan-Serbian hegemony was, in part, the consequence of her marriage with Juraj Demetrović, “man of politics and Croatian regent, and fervent supporter of the ideology of a single Yugoslav nation” (Dunja Detoni-Dujmić, *Ljepša polovica književnosti* [Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1998], 195).

of Kristijan was hidden Juraj Demetrović, and he himself was convinced that it was so.”⁶⁵ While Zofka Kveder-Demetrović, in the above-mentioned entry “A drunken night in November 1918” (*Pijana novembarska noć 1918*), is sarcastically described as one of the three tricolour Vestal Virgins (the fairy Ravijojla) representing the Kingdom of SHS,⁶⁶ her husband, Juraj Demetrović, is correlated to the *yellow* denial of Christ in the diary entry *The first performance of ‘Golgotha’ on 3 November 1922*. Indeed, *Golgotha* depicts the conflict within the labour movement between the *red* line (Pavle as a representation of Christ), inspired by the ideals of the October Revolution, and the *yellow* line, accused of opportunism (Kristijan as a representation of Judas), whose supporters asked only for improvement of their living conditions.⁶⁷ Krleža wrote the play in the period between 1918 and 1920/1921, when he was active in the SRPJ(k)—the Yugoslav Socialist Workers’ Party (of the Communists), later called the KPJ (the Yugoslav Communist Party)—and often gave speeches during public meetings.⁶⁸

In short, *Golgotha* deals with the situation created within the European labour movement after the October Revolution, and with the conflicts and divisions within the Second International and the Third International. It was mentioned at the beginning of this text how disappointed Krleža was

⁶⁵ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1918–22: Davni dani II*, op. cit., 384. It is interesting to note that, in this diary entry, Krleža does not mention the fact that *Golgotha* inspired the admiration of Stanislavskij and his fellow artists of the Moscow Art Theatre (MHAT) (cf. Foretić, Dubravko. *Borba sa stvarima. Krležin teatar 1972–1986. Bilješke kazališnog suputnika* [Zagreb: Hrvatsko društvo kazališnih kritičara i teatrologa, 1986], 13). To the contrary, he noted only that “Stanislavskij has come to us with Čechov. Čechov today—we have already experienced these things, and yet he triumphantly resists, against all logic” (Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1918–22: Davni dani II*, op. cit., 388–389).

⁶⁶ *Translator’s note*: Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes from the Croatian *Kraljevina (Kingdom) Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*. King Alexander I changed the name to Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929.

⁶⁷ In this regard, *Golgotha* shows both Kristijan’s refusal of direct action in a Bakuninist sense of collectivist anarchism (he describes his own concept in Marxist terms) and, at the same time, the individualist anarchism actions of Pavle (Miroslav Krleža, *Drame (Vučjak, Galicija, Golgota)* (Sarajevo: NIŠRO Oslobođenje, 1988), 294, 281).

⁶⁸ Velimir Visković, ed., *Krležijana 1*, op. cit., 301. See the diary entries *Kraljevica 18. IV. 1920, iz govora pred Hreljinskom Gradinom* (Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1918–22: Davni dani II*, op. cit., 315–321) and 23. IV. 1920. *Kraljevica, Brodogradilište* (Ibid., 330–331). Cf. also Nikola Batušić, *Riječ Mati Čina: Krležin kazališni krug* (Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, 2007), 232.

about the crisis in the Second International, from which ensues an ethical interpretation of *Golgotha* on the subject of betrayal. The biblical archetype is also found here in the case of Ksaver, representing Ahasuerus, who does not offer help to Pavle (the representation of Christ) in a critical moment, just as, in medieval tradition, Ahasuerus refused to give Christ the water he requested on the way to Golgotha. These parallels (Pavle—Christ, Kristijan as a problematic leader, a betrayer—Judas, and Ksaver as a coward—Ahasuerus) and that of Andrej, who takes over Pavle's role (as Christ) after his death, suggest that Krleža went beyond the proletarian naturalism of the play by introducing elements of mystical expressionism, where ideology, as recognized by the literary critic, Mirjana Miočinović, is placed in a symbolic relationship with theology.⁶⁹ Or, as Darko Gašparović observes with respect to Ksaver's spiritual catharsis when he becomes aware of the burden of the betrayal, *Golgotha*, which takes place in Central Europe before Easter of 1919, "with regard to the dominant structural element, ceases to be a political play in the strict sense of the term, and becomes a drama of naked human existence."⁷⁰ In other words, Mirjana Miočinović states that with that play, very early on, Krleža was among the first to have a presentiment that the disoriented masses could easily become prey and victim to any sort of ideology that promised them salvation from the hell of social injustice. Just as Klara Zetkin emphasized at the executive meeting of the Communist International held in Moscow in 1923: "observed from the historical standpoint, Fascism is a phenomenon that emerges because the Proletariat does not know how to continue its revolution"; for Zetkin, Fascism is an ideological and political victory over the working class movement.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Mirjana Miočinović, *Pozorište i giljotina. Rasprave o drami* (Belgrade: Edicija REČ, 2008), 266. Cf. also Radovan Vučković, *Krležina dela*, op. cit., 161, 163, 171 and Ivica Matičević, *Raspeti Juda: pristup biblijskom predlošku u drami hrvatske avangarde* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1996), 129.

⁷⁰ Darko Gašparović, *Dramatica krležiana*, op. cit., 80.

⁷¹ Mirjana Miočinović, *Pozorište i giljotina*, op. cit., 274.

3. Conclusions on Krleža's Negation of the Apocalypse of the First World War

In the first fragment of *Salome*, in the opening pages of *Olden Days* (26 February 1914), and in the single-act play *Kristofor Kolumbo* of 1918,⁷² which has the thematic characteristics of politics and revolution in common with *Golgotha*,⁷³ Krleža fights against the curse and absurdity of the circle, of the eternal return as a lethal form of human existence, believing deeply that there must be a way open to the stars. Kolumbo's words on the astral strategy of the journey without return recall Salome's sidereal projections: "There can be no novelty in a circle. There can be no novelty in a return"; and later: "Even if the Earth is round, my thoughts are not a circle! I think tangentially! For you, the circle is faith in the return!"⁷⁴

In this sense, the historical apocalypse in *Olden Days* bears the stamp of the Nietzschean concept of eternal return, represented by Krleža with the zoometaphor of the Earth as a dog biting its own tail, harking back to the negative archetype of the *Ouroboros*. The transformation of

⁷² In the 13 December 1917 entry in *Olden Days*, Krleža draws a parallel between "Christopher Columbus' winged ship" and "the inter-astral cannonade of Leninist guns and powder," which according to Kolumbo need no cannon-fodder, because "they are shooting not sequins, but meteors!" Lenin's cruiser *Aurora*, with which the Winter Palace was taken on 8 November 1917, figures in Krleža's historiosophical projections as Kolumbo's celestial ship *Santa Maria*, the mytheme of the dawn (*Aurora*) of humanity. Krleža links the political and spiritual points of view of the New with the mythemes of Christian soteriology: "When Lenin appeared with his theses, there was not a single man among us, in the sense of a man capable of thinking politically, who did not feel something that could only be expressed with *biblical pathos*: *The tomb is open. The International is resurrected. Dawn has broken and everything has become clear.*" Cf. Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, 417 and 483. The manuscript of the legend, *Kristofor Kolumbo*, completed in 1917 while still under the influence of the events of the October Revolution, is dedicated to Lenin and to Trockij. In the published version of the following year, however, Krleža removed this dedication (Ivan Očak, *Krleža—Partija: Miroslav Krleža u radničkom i komunističkom pokretu 1917–1941* [Zagreb: Spektar, 1982], 37). Namely, as Krleža wrote in the text *Napomena o Kristovalu Kolonu* [Comment on *Kristoval Kolon*] (published in the magazine *Književna republika*, No. 5–6, 1924), when he was writing that drama/legend in 1917, he perceived Lenin's revolutionary role as following in the tracks of Stirner's anarcho-individualism and a Bakuninist sense of collectivist anarchism.

⁷³ *Srpski književni glasnik*, 1922, VII.

⁷⁴ Miroslav Krleža, *Legende* (Zagreb: Zora, 1967), 158.

the *Ouroboros* (the serpent/dragon that bites its own tail) into the symbol of the Earth-dog reflects Krleža's state of mind on witnessing cataclysmic carnage for the first time (26 February 1914). Krleža's alchemical archetypal mandala—represented zoometaphorically by Kudrov⁷⁵ as the Earth-dog which grasps its own tail, and also by a monkey which bites its own tail—can be interpreted as a zoometonym of the cyclical historicism of Man, and furthermore as an ironic paraphrase of Darwinism and dialectical materialism as theories of progress. The idea of evolution set out by Krleža, who demonstrates that man is still a monkey, is an unconscious return—through anxiety—to cyclical forms of thought.⁷⁶ Krleža's thoughts on these analogies between the human and the bestial clearly belong to the negative anthropological concepts of man (as well as to speciesism), which demonstrate that man is not in essence *homo sapiens*. In the context of his philosophical concept of negative anthropology, Krleža sees man's historicism, in a phylogenetic sense, as a series of epochs which are criss-crossed with the Tracks (Footprints) of the Ape (Man-Beast). Or, as Krleža comments in a passage of *Olden Days* on the subject of eternal duration: "Absolutely nothing has changed from the days of the Lombards and the Franks up to the present time: the Franks and the Hungarian barracks of the *domobrani*—it's all just one continuum."⁷⁷ Thus, Krleža began writing his diaries in the very year in which it once again became clear that Man was still an Ape (in Krleža's essentialist sense)—an Ape which, even after it has learned to fly, throws bombs on other apes.⁷⁸ All of which confirms the eternal return of the bloody celebrations of the slaughterers (in the service of power) in which is mirrored the propitious time (the *kairos*), the time of eternity of Plautus (and of Schopenhauer) and of Hobbes' diagnosis, as amended in a zoometaphorical sense—*homo homini lupus est* (the *eternal wolfishness* over us and within us).

Besides these historical apocalypses, Krleža was later also involved in numerous personal apocalypses. Even after his death, he was the victim of a systematic demonization of everything that had to do with communist/

⁷⁵ *Translator's note*: the word "kudrov" in Croatian signifies a curly-haired dog.

⁷⁶ Denis de Rougemont, *Zapadna pustolovina čovjeka* (Belgrade: Književne novine, 1983), 157.

⁷⁷ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*, op. cit., 151.

⁷⁸ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1918–22: Davni dani II*, op. cit., 21.

socialist ethics and aesthetics. This happened during the nineties, when some historians of Croatian literature sought to radically redefine literary values, in accordance with the prerequisites imposed by ethnonationalist politics and ideology. Within the bounds of these new dogmatic criteria, the above-mentioned historians sought to demote Krleža, who at that time was generally known only for his role as *Marshal* Tito's writer, and overwrite his position as one of the greatest Croatian authors by replacing him with Mile Budak, an *insignificant* writer from a literary point of view and more than dubious ethically, given his status and role in the era of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH). On the occasion of this mental apocalypse by the above-mentioned historians of Croatian literature, who had forgotten how Krleža had rebelled against all forms of political tutoring, Mirko Kovač, a Serbian writer and film director, said:

The fact that today they want to replace him with Mile Budak, this can only be done by someone who acts against himself, against his own culture and his own people. Budak—a war criminal, who signed all those discriminatory laws and the law on the extermination of Jews—today, to put such a person in Krleža's place, only someone who brings society to ruin can do that.⁷⁹

Krleža wrote prophetically: “Even when I die, they will still find enough reasons to say that I did not die as I should have done.”⁸⁰ Thus, after his death, Krleža enters a different poetics of the apocalypse, marked out once again as an *homo sacer*, to use Giorgio Agamben's concept—as a literally outlawed man—a person without civil rights, who can be, as in Krleža's case, poetically/ethically killed off without the assassin (the *solid majority* of literary historians—powerful, although fortunately not too numerous) ever being punished.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Mirko Kovač, (URL), “Nedostaje nam veličina jednog Krleže” (Conversation with Ševko Kadrić): (http://www.orbus.be/proza/proza_06.htm).

⁸⁰ Miroslav Krleža, *Dnevnik 1958–69* (Sarajevo: NIŠP Oslobođenje, 1977), 499.

⁸¹ Or, as Andrej Nikolaidis observed in his book on the poetics of the apocalypse—*Homo sacer*, in this world dominated by the English language, becomes *Homo Sucker* (Andrej Nikolaidis, *Homo Sucker: poetika apokalipse* [Zagreb: Algoritam, 2010], 107).

PART THREE
MUSIC
AND VISUAL ARTS

Polina Dimova

THE APOCALYPTIC DISPERSION
OF LIGHT INTO POETRY AND MUSIC

Aleksandr Skrjabin in the Russian Religious Imagination

Who can say: conquered or conqueror
Of him, whom—falling silent in the graveyard of miracles—
The abode of the Muses mourns with the whispering of its laurels?¹

The spring Sun shone above, as the funeral songs blended with the joyful paschal hymns in a peculiarly meaningful fashion ... And suddenly the coffin with the “burned Icarus” or Lucifer resting in it seemed solemnly jubilant; [Skrjabin’s] life was a grandiose myth, as if a legend of the utmost human daring and the punishment incurred. This man wanted to set the world on fire, but ended up burning himself because of a trifle ... He was happy and shone all his life. Like a radiant moth, he flew toward the fire in his ecstatic thirst unaware of it himself.

The funeral took place the next day ... Everything seemed to happen on its own account. Submerged in flowers, the coffin floated over the crowd, and the funeral procession curiously enough seemed again strangely joyful; the pace was brisk, not somber, and it often seemed to me that the crowd would any minute dash into a flight with the coffin in its hands.²

¹ Vjačeslav Ivanov, “Pamjati Skrjabina,” in “Vzgljad Skrjabina na iskusstvo,” *Sobranie sočinenij (SS), Collected Works*, Red. D. Ivanov i O. Deschartes. Vved. i primech. O. Deschartes, Vols. 1-4. (Bruxelles: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1971), Vol. 3, 189. Translated by Michael Wachtel as “In Memory of Skriabin,” in “The ‘Responsive Poetics’ of Vjačeslav Ivanov,” *Russian Literature* XLIV (1998): 309-310.

² Leonid Sabaneev, *Vospominanija o Skrjabine* (Moscow: Muzsektor Gosizdata, 1925), 311. My translation. All subsequent translations are my own unless otherwise specified.

A sense of mourning, foreboding, and bewilderment haunted the Russian intellectual world bereft of Aleksandr Skrjabin upon his untimely death on 14/27 April 1915. The Russian virtuoso pianist and composer of Wagnerian aspirations had been superstitiously pleased to have been born on Christmas (25 December/6 January 1871), and had [furthermore] died during Easter time. He had fashioned his life as that of a Messiah, and his death was interpreted in mystical terms as a miracle in its own right. In his reminiscences, Leonid Sabaneev, one of Skrjabin's closest friends, could not resist reading the mystical significance of Skrjabin's death. The funereal atmosphere oscillates between lament and joy, music and light, and death and resurrection. The spring Sun rejoices, suffusing the funeral with divine light. The paschal hymns resonate with exultation, as if they celebrated the advent, departure, and resurrection of the new prophet of light. Skrjabin's death is construed as the burning of a radiant moth (*lučezarnyj motylěk*) in the apocalyptic fire meant to ignite the world with his later music and thought. For his ecstatic luminous yearning, Skrjabin earns his due punishment, just as the hubris of the light-seeking Icarus and Lucifer leads to their fall from the light. The hand of a miraculous, fairy-tale, divine agent orchestrates the memorial service, which seems to happen without human intervention, "on its own account": "vsë delalos'... samo saboju." The funeral procession accelerates its pace, ready to soar up in a Skrjabinian flight (*vzlët*).³ Sabaneev's description of the funeral encapsulates the mythopoetic significance of the composer's life, death, and work as defined by apocalyptic music and light. The mythologized artist pursued light and transfiguration throughout his creative life.

This essay examines the complex construction of the figure and work of Aleksandr Skrjabin in Russian religious philosophy. Recent scholarship on the subject has been devoted exclusively to a search for parallels and for possible influences of Russian religious thought and Western philosophy and mysticism on Skrjabin's artistic output. The overarching concepts of the Russian religious renaissance and Symbolist theory, heralded by the Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovëv, such as theurgy (divine action), collectivity,

³ On the motif of flight in Skrjabin's music, see Susanna Garcia, "Scriabin's Symbolist Plot Archetype in the Late Piano Sonatas," *19th-Century Music* 23.3 (Spring 2000): 284-285.

oneness, and ecstasy, have shaped the research on the composer's art and thought.⁴ In contrast, the present essay traces the posthumous refashioning of Skrjabin's persona and music by Russian religious thinkers, as they construed the most culturally resonant aspects of Skrjabin's life and work. After an overview of various Russian religious interpretations of Skrjabin's death and appraisal of his evocations of sonic light, this article will focus on the concepts of light, poetry, and music in the verse of the Symbolist poet and religious philosopher Vjačeslav Ivanov, who was both a formative influence on and an interpreter of Skrjabin's work.⁵ Skrjabin and Ivanov collaborated during the composer's final years and conspired to stage the apocalyptic *Mysterium*. Savoring the manifestations of divine light synaesthetically dispersed in Skrjabin's poetry and music, Ivanov retrospectively inscribed the artist in his own aesthetic theology and cast him as an Orphic figure, interweaving the composer's synaesthetic music with his own Symbolist poetics of light.

1. Skrjabin and Russian Religious Philosophy

Aleksandr Skrjabin had enchanted Russian artists, intellectuals, and religious thinkers alike. His multifaceted persona conflated subtle pianistic virtuosity with Wagnerian ambitions of an aesthetic transformation of the world that surpassed those of Wagner himself. His impeccably groomed

⁴ On the parallels between the thought of Skrjabin and that of the Russian religious philosophers (from Solov'ëv to Berdjaev), see Natal'ja Andreeva, "Skrjabin. Estetiko-filosofskij kontekst chudožestvennykh novacii Skrjabina," in *Učenyje zapiski*, Vypusk 5 (Moscow: Memorial'nyj muzej A. N. Skrjabina, 2005), 44-60. On ecstasy and occultism in Skrjabin, see Marina N. Lobanova, "'Ekstaz' i 'bezumie': Osobennosti dionisijskogo mirovosprijatija A. N. Skrjabina," *Voprosy filosofii* 3 (March, 2007): 159-170. For a discussion of Skrjabin's music in connection with the Symbolist idea of the Eternal Feminine in his late piano sonatas, see Susanna Garcia, "Scriabin's Symbolist Plot Archetype in the Late Piano Sonatas," op. cit., 273-300. For an integrated approach to Skrjabin's music, the Silver-Age cultural context, and Symbolist theory, see Richard Taruskin's invaluable and insightful study "Scriabin and the Superhuman: A Millennial Essay," in *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1997), 307-359.

⁵ In his cultural and musical analysis, Taruskin chooses to rely on Vjačeslav Ivanov as a faithful interpreter of Skrjabin's work rather than critically examine Ivanov's writings on Skrjabin as an act of myth-creation (cf. Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, op. cit., 319-320).

dandyism and his fragile and easily excitable disposition were eclipsed by a penchant for mysticism and otherworldliness: "I am God./ I am no one."⁶ A decadent artist, a symbolist composer, a solipsistic thinker, and a self-deifying mystic enamored with theosophy, Skrjabin had accelerated the intensity of apocalyptic anticipation in the early 1910s with his work *The Preparatory Act* (*Predvaritel'noe dejstvo*) to the ultimate religious-aesthetic *Mysterium* (*Misterija*), which was intended to obliterate the world.⁷ These grandiose projects were meant to prepare humanity for the final transfiguration of the world and ultimately realize it, but both were left incomplete. Fervently pursuing his megalomaniac aspirations, Skrjabin conspired to stage this final religious total artwork in India, where composer, musicians, dancers, and audience would all join in to bring about the Apocalypse. Skrjabin's dream of mankind's last mystical celebratory feast of music, poetry, lights, colors, dance, sculpture and architecture was cut short and stolen from us with his demise. His death left the Russian religious thinkers and Symbolist artists baffled in the aftermath.

Skrjabin's fate inevitably became the subject of philosophical interpretations, and questions proliferated. What would happen with the Mystery to which Skrjabin had devoted his life's work? Was Skrjabin "conquered" by death or was he its "conqueror," as his close friend and adviser Vjačeslav Ivanov asks in his poetic tombeau "In Memory of Skrjabin"?⁸ Was his death a miracle in its essence? Was Skrjabin's demise a numerological anticipation of a future Mystery to come? According to Father Pavel Florenskij, Skrjabin's *Mysterium* did not fail with the composer's death, but would in fact be realized thirty-three years after

⁶ "Ja Bog./ Ja ničto." Various formulations and modifications of this dialectical statement are interspersed throughout Skrjabin's notebooks. See Aleksandr Skrjabin, "Zapisi A. N. Skrjabina," *Russkie Propilei*, vol. 6, edited by Michail Geršenzon (Moscow: Izd. M. i S. Sabašnikovych, 1919), 140-144 and 154.

⁷ In the following pages, I will use *The Mysterium* as a general umbrella term when discussing Skrjabin's life-long vision of the Apocalypse, whereas I will refer more specifically to *The Preparatory Act* when examining the work of his last years, especially the verse he wrote for his final incomplete opus. My reference to one opus will also implicate the other.

⁸ Vjačeslav Ivanov, "In Memory of Skriabin," in Michael Wachtel, "The 'Responsive Poetics' of Vjačeslav Ivanov," op. cit., 309-310.

that death, that is, a Christ's life span away from Skrjabin's demise.⁹ Leonid Sabaneev remembered Florenskij's mystical calculation, and, in 1948, exactly thirty-three years after Skrjabin's death, he was reminded of it when he heard about Florenskij's death in a concentration camp in Siberia. The otherwise skeptical music theorist Sabaneev concluded: "The Mystery had been consummated—not for Skrjabin but for Florenskij himself."¹⁰ Laden with mythopoetic significance, Skrjabin's death continued to perpetuate its prophetic momentum well into the twentieth century, and in fact Florenskij was executed as early as 1937 in Solovki, whereas official Soviet accounts insisted on 1943 as the year of his death. At the other end of the spectrum, skeptics maintained that Skrjabin's death was a failure of the transfiguration of reality. The impossibility of comprehending the mystical significance of Skrjabin's life and death, or of settling on an interpretation of his passing away, troubled the Russian intellectual mind.

The complex and often contradictory reactions of Russian religious thinkers to Skrjabin's fate encapsulate the seductive overlaps and dramatic divergences between his intuitions in *The Mysterium* and the Russian philosophical understanding of the Apocalypse. At the *fin de siècle*, the Russian Symbolists actively sought ways to transfigure reality with their philosophical and artistic projects. Their goal was to transcend individuality and achieve collectivity and all-unity, or the reintegration of the material world with the spiritual world, as the Russian religious philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev (1853-1900) would have it. The fusion of the human senses, the arts, and human beings would take place in a utopian religious, erotic, and aesthetic act. This heady, ecstatic blend of the Symbolist mystical unison underlay Skrjabin's conception of *The Mysterium*.

Skrjabin's evolving thoughts on his apocalyptic project are preserved in his posthumously published notebooks, which also contain the complete poetic text of *The Preparatory Act*. His notes reveal engagement with German Idealist philosophy and disclose Fichte's special influence on the composer. Though highly derivative, Skrjabin's utterly subjectivist reflections testify to the theoretical basis of his mystical and religious

⁹ Leonid Sabaneeff, "Pavel Florensky—Priest, Scientist, and Mystic," *Russian Review*, 20.4 (October 1961): 314-315.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 315.

thought that informed his vision of *The Preparatory Act* to *The Mysterium*. The eclecticism and self-aggrandizing—indeed, self-deifying—tendencies of Skrjabin's ideas provoked the diametrically split responses of the Russian religious thinkers. Skrjabin became an embattled figure promising divine light and transfiguration to such thinkers as Vjačeslav Ivanov, while tempting the religious mind of others with dark light, or what Aleksej Losev and Father Georges Florovskij condemned as Satanism. Still, albeit shocked by the satanic overtones of his oeuvre, the Russian religious philosophers all agreed on the depth and significance of Skrjabin's mystical experience, as manifested in his music, ideas, and sudden portentous death.¹¹

In his philosophical treatise "Skrjabin's Worldview" (*Mirovozzrenie Skrjabina*), written between 1919 and 1921, Aleksej Losev¹² (1893-1988) sets out to expound on Skrjabin's mystical and musical vision. The essay torturously enacts the controversial reception of Skrjabin in the mind of a single Russian philosopher. In his text, Losev subliminally soars to the peaks of adoration while simultaneously checking himself and casting his hero into the abysses of condemnation. The philosopher initially affirms the undeniable depth of Skrjabin's mystical experience and the enthralling power of his music, but then disapprovingly ponders the composer's philosophical inadequacy in capturing its complexity.¹³ As Losev

¹¹ Ivanov was a staunch supporter of Skrjabin's art, as we shall see in the second half of this chapter when I discuss his essay "Skrjabin's View on Art," while Florenskij was interested in his concept of *The Mysterium*, despite having some reservations regarding Skrjabin's synthesis of the arts and ambition to go beyond the limits of music in his art. See Vjačeslav Ivanov, "Vzgljad Skrjabina na iskusstvo," op. cit., 172-189. On the connections Florenskij drew between Skrjabin's ideas of *The Mysterium* and his own idea of "The Orthodox Rite as a Synthesis of the Arts," see Nicoletta Misler, "The Religious Ritual as Social Event," *Event Arts and Art Events*, ed. Stephen C. Foster (Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1988), 159-174 and Pavel Florenskij, "Chramovoe dejstvo, kak sintez isskustv," *Makovec* 1.1 (Moscow: Mlechnyj put', 1922): 28-32. On Florenskij's views of Skrjabin, see also Leonid Sabaneeff, "Pavel Florenskij," op. cit., 315 and nn23-24 in *Vjačeslav Ivanov: Archivnye materialy i issledovanija* (Moscow: Russkie slovari, 1999), 105-106. On the other hand, Losev and Florovskij emphasized the satanic impulses behind Skrjabin's music. See Aleksej F. Losev "Mirovozzrenie Skrjabina," in *Strast' k dialektike* (Moscow: Soveckij pisatel', 1990), 256-301; and Georges Florovsky, "On the Eve," in *Ways of Russian Theology, Collected Works*, vols. 5-6, ed. Richard S. Haugh, trans. Robert L. Nichols (Belmont, MA: Nordland Pub. Co., 1979), 270-271.

¹² Aleksej F. Losev, "Mirovozzrenie Skrjabina," op. cit., 256-301.

¹³ While the young Aleksej Losev was enchanted with Skrjabin's music, Losev's reservations

articulates the stages of the world process evolving toward *The Mysterium*, he fluctuates between a lacerating analysis of Skrjabin's trivial and naïve relativistic thought, and sheer awe at the profundity and richness of the composer's mystical experience. While delineating the final ecstatic stage of *The Mysterium*, as recorded in the text to *The Preparatory Act*, Losev pinpoints the erotic sensuousness of lights, colors, moans, and music that evoke the transfiguration of reality in Skrjabin's imagination. The philosopher questions the composer's vision of the Apocalypse by drawing attention to its demonic implications, which could have arisen only from a pagan worldview. Yet, Skrjabin's spellbinding music, coupled with his sinful Satanism, elicits an almost pagan veneration in Losev himself, as he repeatedly calls Skrjabin a genius, although presumably a demonic one. Losev's essay is thus punctuated with vehement criticism and reluctant admiration for the tragically courageous composer, whose music the philosopher would always love.¹⁴ Unable to cope with his own profoundly ambivalent reactions to Skrjabin and his music, Losev ultimately condemns the self-deifying theurgic artist as a Satanist.

From the beginning of the essay, Losev vacillates between dialectical binaries, trying to delimit Skrjabin as an artist, mystic, and thinker.¹⁵ In

towards it grew after the composer's death and the 1917 revolution. See Losev's notes on Skrjabin from 27 May 1914, and compare his unrestrained enthusiasm ("Scriabin's Second Symphony enchanted me with its incredible complexity") with the growing suspicion towards the composer in Losev's 1919-1921 essay. Aleksej Losev, *Ja soslan v XX vek*, ed. A. A. Tacho-Godi (Moscow: Vremja, 2002), 429.

¹⁴ Losev's second wife, Aza Tacho-Godi remembers his love for Skrjabin's music. A. A. Takho-Godi, "Aleksei Fedorovich Losev," *Soviet Studies in Philosophy* 28.2 (Fall 1989): 39. Quoted in Bernice G. Rosenthal, "Losev's Development of Themes from Nietzsche's 'The Birth of Tragedy,'" *Studies in East European Thought* 56.2/3 (June 2004): 207n5.

¹⁵ Losev identifies three abstract concepts underlying Skrjabin's mystical experience: *anarchical individualism*, *mystical universalism*, and *erotic historicism*. In his dialectical method, the philosopher goes on to synthesize these philosophical abstractions into the composer's life-long vision of *The Mysterium*. As a Messianic artist, Skrjabin extends his individualistic psyche over the cosmic world (universalism) and strives toward its end (historicism). Losev suggests that, in a mystical-philosophical gesture of utter solipsism, Skrjabin's theurgic self encompasses all preceding and future stages of the world process leading toward the eroticized vision of the Apocalypse (in a Christian sense), which, for that matter [or "furthermore"], Ivanov, Solov'ëv, and Skrjabin shared. See Aleksej Losev, "Mirovozzrenie Skrjabina," op. cit., 256-270. Interestingly, Skrjabin likely formulated his early ideas of the transfiguration of the

his extreme solipsism, according to Losev, Skrjabin's "I" encompasses the cosmos, conflating the individual and the universal. His paganism and Christian apocalyptic thought intersect in the realm of the demonic. His heroic daring and tragic courage are informed by excruciating aristocratic refinement, as well as by petty bourgeois sensibility. Even Skrjabin's demonic genius manifests itself as paltry, not titanic. Ultimately, *The Mysterium* dialectically embodies both the attainments of European culture and its negation. We could use Losev's dialectical method to explain the fluctuations in this reading of the composer.¹⁶ Losev suggests that Skrjabin's genius lies precisely in this marriage of thesis and antithesis in his art, thought, and persona, and so the artist fulfils the synthesis of the flowering and collapse of Western civilization. However, towards the end of the essay, unassimilated abstract constructions such as "pagan-Christian-solipsistic atheism" disrupt the text and defy Losev's neatly dialectical method.¹⁷ Losev's dizzying dialectics appears to be psychologically rooted in his inability to grasp Skrjabin's deeply unsettling music and put it into orderly categories:

While listening to Skrjabin, you would want to throw yourself into some abyss, jump out of yourself, and do deeds unheard-of and horrendous. You'd want to destroy, beat up, kill, and be yourself torn to pieces ... All drowns in erotic Madness and Rapture.¹⁸

Losev's pagan experience of Skrjabin's music is overwhelmingly decadent, or, shall we say, Dionysian. Losev's constant slippage into pagan worship is

world independently of his predecessors, perhaps partly based on his philosophical discussions with Prince Sergej N. Trubeckoj, who was a student of Solov'ev's. On Skrjabin and Trubeckoj, see Marina N. Lobanova, "'Ekstaz' i 'bezumie,'" op. cit., 161. In any event, the idea of an aesthetic and erotic transfiguration of reality was in the air during the Russian Silver Age.

¹⁶ From his early work on Skrjabin to his Marxist-Leninist dialectics, Losev strove for the centripetal integration of ideas into an organic whole. His thought draws together a multiplicity of ideas to produce not abstract concepts but one living organism, an organic concept, which, according to Losev, crystallizes into the vision of *The Mysterium* in Skrjabin's thought. On Losev's dialectical method, see Caryl Emerson, "On the Generation that Squandered its Philosophers (Losev, Bakhtin, and Classical Thought as Equipment for Living)," *Studies in East European Thought* 56 (2004): 97, 102-108.

¹⁷ See Aleksej F. Losev, "Mirovozzrenie Skrjabina," op. cit., 295.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 292.

annihilated in one final gesture when he conclusively settles his accounts with Skrjabin. In a zealous flourish, he proclaims that, for a Christian, it is sinful to listen to Skrjabin's music, as it corrupts the soul and awakens erotic shudders and bodily delights. In a rhetorical tour de force, Losev declares anathema on the composer, who dialectically epitomizes the highest achievements, as well as the downfall, of Western civilization: "You don't pray for Satanists; you anathematize them."¹⁹

With the benefit of hindsight, Father Georges Florovskij (1893-1979) astutely sums up the two conceptual poles that inform Skrjabin's reception in the Russian religious mind. Florovskij, like Losev, emphasizes the composer's indisputable, highly charged "mystical experience" (*mističnyj opyt*) and immediately establishes its counterpart in the composer's Satanism.²⁰ He describes Skrjabin's mystical experience as a vision without a God—problematic, ambiguous, and seductive—forever tempting the Russian religious philosophers to reflect on Skrjabin's music and fate. Florovskij thus claims that the demonic reigns supreme in Skrjabin's music. In his satanic pursuit of Apocalyptic destruction and the end of history, the composer finds his own death. Thus, Skrjabin's mystical experience united the Russian Orthodox philosophers and the philosophically inclined Symbolists in their interpretations of his persona and oeuvre, while religion, philosophy and aesthetics pulled them apart.

The most important juncture of this stark religious divide concerning Skrjabin's art and thought emerges in the varying interpretations of his musical, poetic, and visual constructions of light and fire. In the Russian philosophical mind, Skrjabin's images and concepts of fiery illumination received a dramatically split reception, which alternated between divine (uncreated) light and false demonic light (the fire of hell).²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., 301.

²⁰ Georges Florovsky, "On the Eve," op. cit., 270. See also the original in Prot. Georgij Florovskij, "Nakanune," in *Puti russkogo bogoslovija* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1981), 486-487.

²¹ In Eastern Orthodoxy, the opposition between divine uncreated light and created Satanic light can be traced back to Gregory Palamas's doctrine of uncreated energies. They emanate from God's essence and can be perceived by the saintly, pure ascetic, who can be penetrated by divine light and undergo the process of theosis or deification. According to Palamas, Christ's disciples experienced God's light or uncreated energies on Mount Tabor at the Transfiguration. Often in monastic tradition, however, ascetics are tempted by demons manifesting themselves

In his late period (1909-1915), Skrjabin's music acquired enigmatic dissonant translucency, mystical subtlety and scintillating texture, which delineated the process of rarefaction and dematerialization towards the transfiguration of reality. This would be a transfiguration of matter into light by apocalyptic fire. Skrjabin sought to capture his favorite mystical images of light and fire in his music through shimmering trills and tremolos; in his lighting design for his synaesthetic symphony *Prometheus: A Poem of Fire*, musically notated in the score for a keyboard of colorful lights (*Luce*); and in his philosophical diary and his verse for *The Preparatory Act to The Mysterium*.²² Skrjabin's works iridescently glitter with expression marks conveying the luminous quality of his music: *lumineux and flamboyant, étincelant, flot lumineux, fulgurant*; "luminous and dazzling," "sparkling," "luminous wave," "flashing like a lightning."²³ Nonetheless, the profound ambiguity of Skrjabin's sonic world lies precisely in his musical images of light that emerge both as mystically divine in their radiant sound vibrations (in ecstatic trills and tremolos) and as demonic in the underlying dissonance of Skrjabin's mystic world defined by the most jarring musical

in the guise of dazzling radiance. Yet this false light of hell would test a monk's humility, and the demons would inflict punishment on the unenlightened for their pride. I would like to thank Viktor M. Zhivov for providing me with insightful leads during a conversation that took place in Berkeley, CA, in May 2011, on the topic of light in Eastern Orthodox theology and bringing to my attention monastic examples of the experience of false, demonic light.

²² Biographers of Skrjabin (cf. Leonid Sabaneev, *Vospominanija o Skrjabinu*, op. cit.; and Faubion Bowers, *Scriabin: A Biography*, 2 Vols. [Mineola, NY: Dover, 1996]) discuss images of light in his music. Garcia links the motive of light to the erotic theme (see Susanna Garcia, "Scriabin's Symbolist Plot Archetype in the Late Piano Sonatas," op. cit., 283-284). Finally, in a recent study, I focused on the mystical-scientific discourse underlying Skrjabin's and the Russian Symbolists' concepts and tropes of light. See Polina Dimova, "The Poet of Fire: Aleksandr Skrjabin's Synaesthetic Symphony 'Prometheus' and the Russian Symbolist Poetics of Light," BPS Working Paper Series (Berkeley, CA: UC Berkeley, Summer 2009), 1-54. Available at www.escholarship.org/uc/item/25b624gd. Last accessed in January 2013.

²³ On expression markings in Skrjabin, see Hugh MacDonald, "Words and Music by A. Skryabin," *The Musical Times*, 113/1547 (January 1972): 22-25. MacDonald recognizes Skrjabin's expression markings as the only meaningful synthesis of words and music in Skrjabin's works. They suggest "a mood, a prevailing atmosphere, an interpretative hint" (*Ibid.*, 23). They can be hortatory (addressed towards the performer) or programmatic and descriptive. MacDonald emphasizes the importance of single words and phrases, rather than grandiose narratives or poetic works, in conveying the evocative quality of the music.

interval: the tritone, which has carried infernal connotations since the Middle Ages. The dissonant tritone splits the pure consonance of the octave in two symmetrical halves and does not allow for the mutability of the human world. Yet its symmetry delineates the erotic and demonic trajectory towards death in Skrjabin's music.

Indeed, the composer gave Russian thinkers ample reason to doubt the divinity of his music and see it as informed by satanic light. The ambiguity runs through the textual dimension of the music itself. Skrjabin's Piano Sonata No. 7, op. 64 and Piano Sonata No. 9, op. 68 are called, respectively, "White Mass" and "Black Mass." Skrjabin's piano piece *Vers la flamme: poème* ("Toward the Flame: A Poem"), op. 72 starts out in inert terrestrial darkness, imbued with the creeping dark flames of tritone dissonances. Only gradually does the piece unfold to declare its upward celestial strivings. The expression marking *éclatant, lumineux* ("brilliant, luminous") transports us into a continual shimmering ascent of fast tremolos and trills. The effulgent music grasps for higher and higher piano ranges and transcends the sonic realm into the divine luminosity of inaudible heights at the closure. Finally, Skrjabin's two "Dances for Piano," op. 73, *Guirlandes* ("Garlands") and *Flammes sombres* ("Dark Flames"), similarly embody the divine and demonic ambiguity encoded in Skrjabin's musical images of light. Written a year before his death, the two dances are the only musical remnants explicitly marked as fragments of *The Preparatory Act to The Mysteries*. They occupy the diametrically opposed realms of demonic fire or untrue light and the joyous crystalline glittering of refracted sunlight in the garlands.

Nevertheless, Father Georges Florovskij chooses to neglect the divine white light of Skrjabin's music, which Skrjabin calls for at the end of his *Prometheus*: "Sun. I want the Sun at the end!" Instead, he rhetorically construes the composer's Ninth Sonata "Black Mass," along with his *Poème satanique*, op. 36 and *Flammes sombres*, as Skrjabin's *Ninth Symphony*.²⁴ Florovskij thus defines the satanic and the demonic light as the apotheosis of Skrjabin's music, denouncing it as the antithesis of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*.

²⁴ Georges Florovsky, "On the Eve," op. cit., 270.

Within a philosophical framework, Losev poetically examines Skrjabin's satanic shattering and illumination of European Idealistic thought. He sees demonic light in this destructive act:

But, oh, God! What did Skrjabin do with German Idealism!... With his anarchical individualistic mysticism, he shattered it into pieces, madly expanding, deepening and exalting each piece, then shooting all of them in motley fireworks. Playing with each other in a multi-colored fountain, they engaged in a peculiar satanic game of cosmic shudders.²⁵

Skrjabin explodes German Idealist thought into a multiplicity of demonic colors and crashing noises. The burning flames of Skrjabin's ideas synaesthetically disperse in the spectacular shapes, colors, and sounds of the fireworks and illuminate the satanic landscape of his music and thought. The fireworks recall Skrjabin's ideas of music with lights for his symphony *Prometheus. A Poem of Fire* and his aesthetically contrapuntal *Mysterium* of music, verse, dance, and art. In their figurative synaesthetic beauty, Skrjabin's fireworks of music and ideas lure the cosmos into a satanic game.

Losev further locates Skrjabin's Satanism in the composer's ecstatic and erotic imagery of light in the poetic text for *The Preparatory Act*. He argues that, for Skrjabin, "the achievement of ecstasy is the utmost tension of lustful sensuality and penetration by light" and then, in a critical leap, neatly ties fragments of Skrjabin's orgiastic verse full of divine light to the satanic *danse macabre* that follows in Skrjabin's text.²⁶ In Losev's analysis, Skrjabin's "ray of light" loses its pure divine connotations; it is eroticized and reduced to the artist's "I," to Skrjabin as a self-deifying solipsist who identifies with the Sun: ["Shaft of light, white light"].../ "Delicate, it scattered/ In lights and peals/ The abysses resounded/ With sensual moans..."²⁷ In his text, Losev leaves out the ray of light as the referent for

²⁵ Aleksej Losev, "Mirovozzrenie Skrjabina," op. cit., 298.

²⁶ Ibid., 284 and 285. Losev quotes from Aleksandr Skrjabin, "Predvaritel'noe dejstvo," *Russkie Propilei*, op. cit., 218-219 and then from 220-221 ("Song—Dance of the Fallen"; *Pesnja—Pljaska padšich*).

²⁷ Ibid., 285. Quoted in Losev from Aleksandr Skrjabin, "Predvaritel'noe dejstvo," *Russkie Propilei*, op. cit., 218.

the above quote and insinuates “the moan” in its place. However, it is the shaft of light that disperses into colors and sounds and then produces a divine “rainbow,” not a hellish firework. Losev places the emphasis on the sensual moans of the ecstatic being and reads them as satanic, neglecting the creative and transformative potential of divine sunlight. I will return to these poetic images in the second half of this chapter and reinterpret their significance for Skrjabin’s art and thought in conjunction with Vjačeslav Ivanov’s synaesthetic figuration of divine light.

Losev’s and Florovskij’s contradiction-ridden reactions to Skrjabin’s thought, music and ideas of light may make us wonder about Vjačeslav Ivanov’s staunch support and unflagging approbation of Skrjabin’s music and conception of *The Mysterium*. Florovskij’s more sober, skeptical, and critically detached depiction of Ivanov’s views on art can provide us with a clue to a better understanding of the artistic affinities between Skrjabin and Ivanov. Florovskij describes Vjačeslav Ivanov as all-absorbed in antiquity and in art.²⁸ According to Florovskij, “the danger of Symbolism” lies precisely in the transformation of religion into art, and he sees Ivanov’s schemes as aesthetic rather than religious. Florovskij maintains that Ivanov’s main dream is of collectivity, *sobornost’*, but the poet-philosopher approaches this cornerstone idea of Christianity, and of Russian religious philosophy, through the cult of Dionysus as the suffering God. For Ivanov, Christianity manifests itself in the guise of Dionysian experience, in the orgiastic, the Bacchantic, and the ecstatic; he captures it in dithyrambic verse, which Skrjabin tried to emulate when working on *The Preparatory Act*.

In similar terms, Losev construes Skrjabin as a pagan; his aesthetic and mystical thought is based both on the eternity of the Greek cosmos, where God, world, and flesh are identical, and in Christian historicity, where the world process relentlessly moves toward the end of time. Skrjabin rejects circular time and the eternal return of Antiquity, but makes Christian Apocalyptic history central to his thought. Like Ivanov in Florovskij’s view, Losev’s Skrjabin is a pagan and an aesthete, who conflates Christianity and Antiquity in his aesthetic theology.²⁹ For this reason, Ivanov’s and

²⁸ See Georges Florovsky, “On the Eve,” op. cit., 239-240; and Prot. Georgij Florovskij, “Nakanune,” op. cit., 458.

²⁹ Incidentally, Ivanov was Losev’s favorite poet and in no manner deserves to be called a Satanist.

Skrjabin's theurgic aesthetics allowed them to join forces in collaborating on Skrjabin's *Preparatory Act*. Ivanov's Christian paganism or Dionysian Christianity thus informs his casting of Skrjabin as an Orphic Messiah, as we shall see. For Ivanov, the Orphic Skrjabin is a hypostasis of Dionysus as the suffering God, an idea that attracts further Christ-like associations in a typically Symbolist crossover of Christian apocalyptic thought and Greek cosmology.

2. Ivanov's Orphic Skrjabin

In his 1915 commemorative essay upon Skrjabin's death, "Skrjabin's View on Art," Vjačeslav Ivanov creates the myth of Skrjabin as Orpheus relying on the composer's messianic beliefs that he would compose the eschatological *Mysterium*, which would "synthesize all the arts, load all senses in a hypno[tic], [multimedia] extravaganza of sound, sight, smell, feel, dance, décor, orchestra, piano, singers, light, sculptures, colors, visions."³⁰ Ivanov posits that, in its pagan aesthetics, like Orpheus's music, Skrjabin's work conflates all the arts, and his music creates and orders a new world: "Music for Skrjabin, as for the mythic Orpheus, was a fundamental principle, building and setting the world into motion. Music flourishes in words and conjure up images..."³¹ Skrjabin's music abounds in words, images, and sounds. As an Orphic poet-musician, Skrjabin brings together the Apollonian and the Dionysian principles, the visual and the musical. Skrjabin's untimely death parallels Orpheus's descent to the underworld and his violent dismemberment at the savage hands of the raging Maenads: a dismemberment that would regenerate the world. Ivanov imagines the composer demanding the immediate renewal of the world. Yet Fate decrees otherwise: "Fate answered [to Skrjabin]: 'you should die and resurrect yourself alone.' I revere this death," says Ivanov, "remembering that the seed will not come back to life without dying first."³² Thus, in Ivanov's original interpretation, Skrjabin's death regenerates the artist and the world, by sowing the seeds of Orpheus's dismembered body.

³⁰ Faubion Bowers, *Scriabin: A Biography*, op. cit., 185.

³¹ Vjačeslav Ivanov, "Vzgljad Skrjabina na iskusstvo," *SS*, Vol. 3, 175.

³² *Ibid.*, 181.

In actuality, Skrjabin died of a blood infection, and Ivanov never explicitly mentions the dismemberment of the Orphic Skrjabin. Nonetheless, Ivanov's poetic and theoretical practices construe Skrjabin's art as mystically dismembered. In Ivanov's work, the dispersion of light with its corollary proliferation of the arts and the senses metaphorically parallels the scattered body of Orpheus. In his early poetry collection *Transparency* (*Prozračnost'*, 1904), Ivanov conflates light and synaesthesia with the artist figure of Orpheus, and thus prepares Skrjabin's inscription in his Orphic mythology. Early on, Ivanov had fashioned an Orphic figure whose model Skrjabin would poetically emulate in the 1910s and mystically fulfill with his vision of *The Mysterium* and with his death, as commemorated in the poet's essays and poems about the composer.

Ivanov's essay "Skrjabin's View on Art" concludes with a poem dedicated to Skrjabin as a hypostasis of Orpheus:

Памяти Скрябина (1915)

Осиротела Музыка. И с ней
Поэзия, сестра, осиротела.
Потух цветок волшебный у предела
Их смежных царств, и пала ночь темней

На взморие, где новозданных дней
Всплывал ковчег таинственный. Истлела
От тонких молний духа риза тела,
Отдав огонь Источнику огней.

Исторг ли Рок, орлицей зоркой рея,
У дерзкого святыню Прометея?
Иль персть опламенил язык небес?

Кто скажет: побежден иль победитель,
По ком, — немея кладбищем чудес —
Шептаньем лавров плачет муз обитель?

In Memory of Skrjabin

Music has been orphaned. And
Her sister Poetry was orphaned with her.
The magical blossom has died at the border
Of their adjoining kingdoms, and night has fallen darker

On the shore, where the mysterious ark of newly-created days
 Has surfaced. The raiment of the body has smoldered
 From the refined lightning-bolts of the spirit,
 Having given up its fire to the Source of fires.

Did Fate, hovering like a keen-eyed eagle, tear away
 The sacred object from daring Prometheus?
 Or did the language of the heavens set the earth afire?

Who can say: conquered or conqueror
 Of him, whom—falling silent in the graveyard of miracles—
 The abode of the Muses mourns with the whispering of its laurels.³³

In Ivanov's sonnet "In Memory of Skrjabin," both music and poetry mourn for the Orphic artist as a musician-poet after heaven's lighting-bolt has purged and transformed his body into universal fire. Transformation by fire and light enhance the poetic and musical dimension of the Orphic composer, transporting him into the realm of light. This is the realm of the sun god Apollo, Orpheus's father, whose whispering laurels honor the artist at the closure of the poem. Furthermore, Ivanov likens Skrjabin to the light-giving Prometheus, alluding to the composer's own symphonic hero. *Prometheus: A Poem of Fire* prepared Skrjabin's *Mysterium* in its otherworldly ethereal harmonies, as well as in its synaesthetic aspirations to conflate music with light and color.

The sestet of the sonnet poses a rhetorical question about the significance of Skrjabin's death: was Skrjabin conqueror or conquered? Was his "sacred object," his messianic mission, snatched away from him, or did his death purge the whole world by setting it on fire? Skrjabin's victory manifests itself in the posterior positioning of his triumph, at the end of the first tercet and at the end of line 12, as well as in the synaesthetic allusions in the poem to music, poetry, and language as fire (literally, "the tongue of fire").³⁴ Skrjabin is the "conqueror" who purifies the earth by setting it afire.

³³ Vjačeslav Ivanov, "Pamjati Skrjabina," in "Vzgljad Skrjabina na iskusstvo," *SS*, Vol. 3, 189. Translated by Michael Wachtel in "The 'Responsive Poetics' of Vjačeslav Ivanov," *op. cit.*, 309-310.

³⁴ In the handwritten addendum to his essay, Ivanov describes the opening half of the antinomic statements as ironic. Cf. Vjačeslav Ivanov, "Vzgljad Skrjabina na iskusstvo," in *Skrjabin* (Moscow: IRIS-PRESS, 1996), IX, 36-37.

According to Ivanov, Skrjabin reveres all the arts as “instrumental forces, weaving a multicolored cover for the child—the miracle that had to be born in the choral all-unity of *The Mysterium* and become the soul of the new, better age...”³⁵ Ivanov’s metaphor of the multiplicity of the arts as a motley, multicolored veil for the spiritual miracle suggests the prismatic figuration of mystical transfiguration in Ivanov’s thought. Similarly, the spectrum of colors, which here stand for the various arts, can converge in the white light of “the collectively united consciousness, as in a convex lens, gathering light.”³⁶ White light represents both transcendence and death, as enacted in Ivanov’s myth of Skrjabin’s Orphic death. Thus, the typically Symbolist dispersed synaesthetic and inter-artistic light anticipates its apocalyptic transfiguration into synthetic white light.

The prismatic quality of Ivanov’s aesthetics of colorful dispersion of light can be traced back to Vladimir Solov’ev’s religious thought. Solov’ev proposes that, on its way to all-unity (reintegration of matter and spirit), matter is transfigured by illumination (*preobraženie*), and spiritual light becomes incarnated in matter (*voploščenie*).³⁷ Solov’ev exemplifies his aesthetic principle with the evolution of the crystalline structure of the carbon element. For him, dark coal transfigures into the refractive and light-dispersing diamond in the chemical interpenetration of light and matter.

Vjačeslav Ivanov adopts Solov’ev’s idea of the transfiguration of dark coal into illuminated diamond in his cycle *Kingdom of Transparency* (*Carstvo Prozračnosti*). Precious stones inhabit Ivanov’s kingdom of transparency: the diamond, the ruby, the emerald, the sapphire, and the amethyst.³⁸ As in Solov’ev’s notion of spirit as light, Ivanov’s gemstones

³⁵ Vjačeslav Ivanov, “Vzgljad Skrjabina na iskusstvo,” *SS*, Vol. 3, 188.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ For a discussion of Solov’ev’s main aesthetic categories in the essay “Beauty in Nature” (1889) and his mystical realism as a synthesis of scientific and religious views on reality, as well as for an evaluation of his influence on the Russian Symbolist poets (seen in their utopian craving to transfigure reality through art and their use of the metaphor of the incarnation of spirit into matter), see Irina Paperno, “The Meaning of Art: Symbolist Theories,” in *Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Symbolism*, ed. Irina Paperno and Joan Grossman, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994), 13-23.

³⁸ Precious stones and ornate jewelry are a favorite decadent image evoking artifice. Interestingly,

mediate between divinity and humanity by refracting glaring white light and producing iridescent crimson red, green, blue, and violet beams. Thus, the invisible and incomprehensible divine light descends toward humanity in the whole spectrum of colors and lights. Transparent gems enable this vertical communication between matter and spirit.

But what does spiritual and material “transparency” mean for Vjačeslav Ivanov? In her introduction to Ivanov’s *Collected Works*, Olga Shor-Deschartes, who was Ivanov’s closest companion in his later years, his literary executor, and first biographer, offers a lapidary, tantalizing summary:

Vjačeslav Ivanov sets out to examine the nature of that spiritual medium where the incarnations of mystical reality take place. The nature of this medium is oppositional: on the one hand, the medium must be transparent so as not to impede the passing of the sunbeam, which would be halted, darkened, or made invisible by the non-transparent medium; yet, the medium should not be absolutely transparent, as it needs to refract the ray of light—otherwise, *Res* will not be seen, as it is invisible in its essence.³⁹

Rigid, dark, impenetrable matter thwarts illumination, and only the transparent yet refractive spiritual medium of the gem can render the mystical reality of light knowable to mankind. The refraction and dispersion of white light in the transparent medium translates divinity in polychromous human terms. Man can know white light or God only in the multiplicity of colors, and, by extension, in the multiplicity of the senses and the arts, as Ivanov’s essay on Skrjabin and Skrjabin’s synaesthetic work attest.

given my concern with light and, further below, electricity, the magazine *L’Illustration* presented a drawing of a ballerina, poised in dance, girdled and crowned with electric jewels. The illustration clearly articulates the relationship between light, art, and technology in the visual culture of the time. See “Electric Jewels,” *L’Illustration* (1881), reproduced in Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Angela Davis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 72. While decadent imagery associated electricity and jewels with the artificial world, the Russian Symbolists saw them as a part of nature.

³⁹ Vjačeslav Ivanov, *SS*, Vol. 1, 63.

The refractive transparency of the gemstone medium was thought to be enabled by what *fin-de-siècle* culture believed to be luminiferous ether (*efir*), or what Solov'ev called *insubstantial substance* (*veščestvo neveščestvennoe*.)⁴⁰ The inner ether that objects accommodate makes them transparent or opaque, permeable or refractive. In Russia around the early 1900s, the transparency of matter was explained in the following way: light sets ether into vibration, and rigid matter either absorbs or reflects light, unless the vibrating particles of ether can squeeze through the matter's crevices.⁴¹ In that event, they would enter the object and set in motion the inner ether that fills it. Thus, the inner ether transmits and disperses vibrating light. I suggest that, for Ivanov, transparency enacts this transmission by luminiferous ether and the interpenetration of matter and light in the ethereal medium of the gemstone:⁴²

40 Vladimir S. Solov'ev, "Smysl ljubvi," in *Sočinenija v dvuch tomach*, ed. Aleksej Losev, Vol. 2 (Moscow: "Mysl'," 1988), 542.

41 See the entry on "Light," *Svet*, by V. Lebedinskij in Brockhaus and Efron, *Enciklopedičeskij Slovar'*, Vol. XXIX, 1900, 238. I summarize the wave theory of light according to Huygens, as expounded by Brockhaus encyclopedia. It is important to note that the encyclopedic entry does not cast doubt on the notion of ether (luminiferous ether) even when the new electromagnetic theory of light is formulated in the nineteenth century. Now ether has obtained electrical and magnetic characteristics that are as yet unknown, but can be studied with greater precision. The electrical and magnetic dimensions of a transparent medium or, rather, the ether of this transparent medium, can determine the speed of light. According to the article, this shows us most saliently the interpenetration (*vzaimnoe proniknovenie*) of electricity and light as two spheres of natural phenomena (Ibid., 246). In this sense, I want to underscore again the scientific and conceptual permeability of light, electricity, the transparent medium, and ether in the mind of the *fin-de-siècle* Russian intellectual.

42 The notion of transparency as a refractive medium can easily find a counterpart in the *fin-de-siècle* decorative arts and material culture. European *style moderne* and Art Nouveau interior designers focused on the expressive, poetic, and refractive qualities of glass. Tiffany lampshades and windows created a kaleidoscope of lights reminiscent of Gothic stained glass windows: "Iridescent glass flux, shimmering in all colors of the rainbow and creating most delicate nuances, develops a wavy, irregular surface when the substance is compressed before it cools" (quoted in Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*, op. cit., 182). In their gorgeous color and irregularities, Tiffany lampshades "compensated for the monotony of electric light" (Ibid.). Windows acted as a "colored filter," poeticized the room, and "[broke] up the dazzling, formless mass of light from the window" (Ibid., 183). In Moscow, the architect Fëdor Sechtel' employed *style moderne* for the Stepan Rjabušinskij house, begun in 1900. In his colorful treatment of glass, his work bears resemblance to Tiffany's: in the two-story stained glass windows, as well as in the Tiffany-style electric lamp. On Moscow architecture at the turn of

Царство Прозрачности (1904)

Алмаз

Когда, сердца пронзив, Прозрачность
 Исполнит солнцем темных нас,
 Мы возблестим, как угля мрачность,
 Преображенная в алмаз.

Взыграв игрою встреч небесных,
 Ответный крик твоих лучей,
 О Свет, мы будем в гранях тесных:
 Ты сам — и цель твоих мечей!

Всепроницаемой святыней
 Луча божественное Да,
 Стань в сердце жертвенном твердыней,
 Солнцедробящая звезда!

The Kingdom of Transparency

Diamond

When, having pierced the hearts, Transparency
 Fills us in the dark with sun,
 We'll shine upward, as the coal's darkness,
 Transfigured in the diamond.

Excited by the play of celestial encounters,
 We will be within the narrow limits,
 O Light, the respondent cry of your beams:
 You yourself—and the target of your swords.

By the all-penetrating sacredness
 Of the ray's divine 'Yes,'
 Become a stronghold in the sacrificial heart,
 Sun-shattering star!⁴³

the century, see William Brumfield, "The Decorative Arts in Russian Architecture: 1900-1907," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 5 (Summer 1987): 12-27. On the artistic and poetic uses of glass by Émile Gallé and Louis Comfort Tiffany, see Ljudmila Kazakova, "Steklo E. Gallé i L.K. Tiffany kak chudožestvennyj fenomen," in *Evropejskij simvolizm*, ed. Igor' Svetlov (St. Petersburg: Aletejja, 2006), 316-331. The Russian symbolists' interest in the refractive medium's permeability, in its metaphorical transparency, and in its spiritual ability to disperse light certainly bears resemblance to Art Nouveau glass design with its focus on the prismatic qualities of glass.

⁴³ Vjačeslav Ivanov, "Almaz," *SS*, Vol. 1, 754.

Ivanov's "Diamond" illuminates the confined, dark, material lyric "We" with celestial light by the power of ethereal transparency. Physical and spiritual light merge in the metaphor of the human heart. The heart is transformed into a figurative diamond, embracing and dispersing light. Transparency as the interpenetration of matter and light structures the poem. The interlocking rhymes, alternating between feminine and masculine, as well as the interplay of images of light and darkness, set into motion the process of permeation. While in the first two quatrains semantically opposite words are coupled in rhymes—transparency and darkness, the unenlightened "We" and the diamond, celestial and narrow, beams and swords—by the final quatrain of the poem, all rhyming words carry positive connotations: sacredness, Yes, stronghold, and star.

Transparency, all-penetration, and transpiercing carry the semantic and acoustic charge of the poem: *prozračnost'* (1), *pronziv* (1), and *vsepronicaemyj* (9). Etymologically, the Latin prefix "pro-" signifies "forward" movement and unifies the key words phonetically. The voiced forceful fricative "z," also in the final consonant of *almaz*, the diamond as adamant, seems to pierce the texture of the poem with the release of air through a narrow opening between the tongue and the teeth. Similarly, the affricative "c" as a semi-soft consonant in "all-penetrating" (9) relates to "z" in its alveolar position, but is softened as if to suggest the ever-growing permeability and transparency of the human heart. The ray of light has pierced our hearts and illuminates them in a metaphorical process similar to the transfiguration of coal into diamond. In fact, light acts upon both the diamond and the heart, as they become iridescent or radiant.

The celestial encounters and the interplay of matter and spirit in the heart posit the interaction between man and light as a process of perpetual creation of light in man. Indeed, the Russian instrumental case, or, literally, "creative" case, *tvoritel'nyj padež*, pervades "Diamond." Transparency fills us "with sun" in line 1; we communicate with and respond to the light rays "by the play of celestial encounters." Finally, the poetic speaker exhorts "the sun-shattering star" to become a stronghold in the heart *by means of* the "all-penetrating sacredness" of the light ray's "Yes" in the last quatrain. This creative interaction of pervasion and impregnation by light molds the complicated intertwinement of the heart and the diamond, as they merge. The metaphorical heart-diamond becomes a stronghold (*tverdynej*) that breaks the sun into particles and disperses light, "sun-shattering star"

(*solncedrobjaščaja zvezda*) (11-12). In this sense, the poem closes with the dispersion and not the union of light, with the spectrum of colors and not with white light.

Ivanov underscores the violence in the process of interpenetration, or piercing. Our hearts are sacrificed to the penetrating sunbeams. The piercing of the hearts by the light-bearing transparency and the “swords” of its rays brings about the illumination of humans. Additionally, the sun itself is shattered by matter, embodied in the star of our heart as a diamond. In this way, Ivanov’s poem “Diamond” also reveals the violence involved in the scattering of light, as well as in the interpenetration of matter and light. This sacrificial piercing and shattering of both the human heart and the sun evokes Ivanov’s understanding of Orpheus as a divinity who is offered sacrifices and is the sacrifice itself.⁴⁴ Also, *The Kingdom of Transparency* recalls Orpheus’s poetry collection *Lithika*, which contains magical songs on gemstones whose beams are healing.⁴⁵ Perhaps Orpheus is figured in the cycle as both using gemstones and being pierced by their beams, as the receiver of sacrifices and the sacrifice itself. Thus, the sacrificial dispersion of light in “Diamond” draws a parallel between the dismemberment of Orpheus and spiritual ascent and purification. Interestingly, after Orpheus’s sundering in Ivanov’s dithyramb “Orpheus Dismembered” (*Orfej rasterzannyj*, 1904), also from *Transparency*, Orpheus rises as a red sun. This is reminiscent not only of the sun cult of Orpheus, but also of the process of *solificatio*, the alchemical separation of the (Orphic) head from the body.⁴⁶ The chorus of Maenads sings:

⁴⁴ Ivanov’s *Kingdom of Transparency* draws on Orpheus’s *Lithika*, which contains a collection of magical songs devoted to gemstones, the rays of which Orpheus used to heal or to enter the cosmic space. See Lena Szilard, “Orfej rasterzannyj’ i nasledie orfizma,” in Vjačeslav Ivanov, *Archivnye materialy i issledovanija*, op. cit., 214. See note 11.

⁴⁵ For more information on the historical sources for the figure of Orpheus, on his gift as a healer, and on his *Lithika*, see Nikola Gigov, *Gela: Orfevo cvete* (Sofia: Medicina i fizkultura, 1988), 3-45. Gigov translates Orpheus’s name as “magnetic light,” a meaning that powerfully resonates with our discussion of light and electromagnetic phenomena at the *fin de siècle*.

⁴⁶ Lena Szilard, “Orfej rasterzannyj’ i nasledie orfizma,” op. cit., 232.

Он младенец. Вот он в зеркало взглянул: В ясном зеркале за морем лик его, делясь, блеснул! Мы подкрались, улучили полноты верховной миг, Бога с богом разлучили, растерзали вечный лик,

И гармоний возмущенных вопиет из крови стон: Вновь из волн поработанных красным солнцем встанет он. Строя семя, искра бога сердце будет вновь томить.

The infant, lo, he looked into the mirror: in the clear mirror, beyond the sea, his countenance, divided, flashed! We snuck up, seized the sublime moment of plenitude, separated God from the god, tore to pieces the eternal image,

Out of the blood, a wail full of indignant harmonies rose up: He will rise again as a red sun out of the enslaved waves. Ordering the seeds, the divine spark will again let the heart suffer.⁴⁷

Here, Ivanov renders the dismemberment of Orpheus in visual terms, reinforcing the relationship between Orpheus, light, and the sun. Early on in the dithyramb, Orpheus explicitly juxtaposes the ray of light and the divine countenance: “where there is a beam, there is an image/face” (*gde luč, tam lik*). The figurative mirror reflects and separates the embodied face of the god by transforming it into an image. The Russian *lik* encapsulates the meanings of both face and image, and the verse fluctuates between the visual, light-giving image and the embodied Orpheus. The reflected face further “flashes” in the mirror, *blesnul*. By the end of the verse, the corporeality of Orpheus materializes with the separation of the god from the god and the dismemberment of the eternal face. Finally, after Orpheus rises in blood as a red sun, the divine spark, or, shall we say, the divine particle or seed, is sown in the human heart. This metaphor anticipates Skrjabin’s Orphic seed that cannot live without first dying.

To sum up, the dispersion of light is figured as Orphic sacrificial dismemberment; the dispersed light represents the scattered Orphic or divine body. Finally, Ivanov’s figuring of Orphic dispersion of light is synaesthetic. His *Gli spiriti del viso*, also in *Transparency*, reveals the scattered body of the suffering god in nature:

⁴⁷ Vjačeslav Ivanov, “Orfej rasterzannyj,” *SS*, Vol. 1, 804.

Gli spiriti del viso (1904)

Есть духи глаз. С куста не каждый цвет
 Они вплетут в венки своих избраний;
 И сорванный с их памятью ранней
 Сплетаётся. И суд их: *Да* иль *Нет*.

Хоть преломлен в их зрящих чашах свет,
 Но чист кристалл эфиросных граней.
 Они — глядят: молчанье — их завет.
 Но в глубях дали грезят даль пространней.

Они — как горный вкруг души туман.
 В их снах правдив явления обман.
 И мне вестят их арфы у порога,

Что радостен в росах и солнце луг;
 Что звездный свод — созвучье всех разлук;
 Что мир — обличье страждущего Бога.⁴⁸

There are spirits of the eyes. They will not weave every flower
 From the bush into the garlands of their selection;
 And the plucked flower with their early memory
 Intertwines. And their judgment is *Yes* or *No*.

Although the light is refracted in their seeing flower cups,
 Yet the crystal of their ether-bearing facets is pure.
 They look: silence is their bidding.
 But in the depths of the distance they dream of a vaster distance.

They are like a mountain mist around the soul.
 In their dreams the deception of phenomena is true.
 And their harps tell me at the threshold,

That the meadow is joyful under dew and sun;
 That the starry vault is the accord of all separation;
 That the world is the outer appearance of a suffering God.

The first line of *Gli spiriti del viso*, or “Spirits of the Eyes” enacts an enriched synaesthetic translation of *spiriti*. It evokes both (*dUchi*) as spirits and

⁴⁸ Vjačeslav Ivanov, “Gli spiriti del viso,” *SS*, Vol. 1, 785. Translated by Pamela Davidson, in *The Poetic Imagination of Vyacheslav Ivanov: A Russian Symbolist’s Perception of Dante* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 167-168.

perfume (*duchI*) in Russian. This secondary meaning of the enriched translation is reinforced by the flower metaphor that informs the rest of the poem on the level of vision, fragrance, and also of music in the flowers' melodious harps.

The flowers as spirits and fragrance refract light with their cups of petals, literally, "glasses." The flowers thus function as mediators of the divine, as they disperse light into Orphic colors and sounds, similarly to Ivanov's precious stones. These cups seem made of pure crystal that would transmit rather than distort the divine. For a moment, the faint scent of perfume, (*duchI*) resurfaces in the permeable and refractive ether of the blossoms' delicate edges, (*efronosnye grani*). These "ether-bearing facets" are reminiscent of the facets of Ivanov's diamonds. They delineate the permeable border between the human spirits and God and define the territory of ethereal and crystal interpenetration as synaesthetic refraction. Sight and scent are completed with the sounds of the lyre that herald the epiphanies of the eye-flowers. All separation vanishes in "harmony" (*sozvučie*), figuring sound again. Thus, the synaesthetic spirits-eyes-perfumes are able to envision the suffering God scattered in nature. Nature is the suffering Orpheus, and the dispersion of light is the manifestation of the dismembered God.⁴⁹

Vjačeslav Ivanov's poem "Rainbows" (*Radugi*) also performs the scattering of the divine body in the material world through the synaesthetic dispersion of light not only into the whole spectrum of colors, but also into sounds, perfumes, and flavors. Through the spiritual process of refraction, the divine (the Orphic) manifests itself. The mediating rainbows in the poem are both visible, "seven-colored/ ethereal arcs" (...*semicvetnye/ arki efirnye*), and audible, "harmonious spectrums" (*spektry sozvučnye*) and "murmurs of lyres" (*rokoty lirnye*).⁵⁰ Thus, rainbows mediate between God and man, and their synaesthetic light allows mankind to experience the divine; they

⁴⁹ The last line of the sonnet is usually interpreted as referring to the suffering Dionysus. However, as Szilard observes, for Ivanov, Orpheus is a hypostasis of Dionysus. Orpheus also conflates both the Apollonian and the Dionysian principles. See Lena Szilard, "'Orfej rasterzannyj' i nasledie orfizma," op cit., 223. See also the quotation from Ivanov's "Orfej" (*Ibid.*, 217).

⁵⁰ Vjačeslav Ivanov, "Radugi," *SS*, Vol. 1, 750-752.

illuminate matter.⁵¹ We saw Solov'ev's and Ivanov's diamond similarly mediate between the human and the divine, and Solov'ev's essay "Beauty in Nature" figures the diamond as a "solidified rainbow" (*okamenevšaja raduga*) or transfigured matter.⁵² Through a false etymology, the rainbow (*raduga*) semantically resonates with the verb "rejoice" (*radovat'sja, radujus'*) with all its divine connotations of jubilant transfiguration and resurrection.

Interestingly, Ivanov's rainbows emerge not simply as manifestations of light, light beams, and the Sun in the human world of transparency. They also retain a complex relationship to synaesthetic fire. They are "fire-sounding" and "fire-visible" (*ognezvučnye* and *ognezračnye*) and create synaesthetic clusters anticipating Skrjabin's *Prometheus*. The thunderbolt (*molnija*), which accompanies rain and precedes the rainbow, explains Ivanov's insistence on fire imagery in a poem about rainbows. However, unlike Losev's fireworks whose synaesthetic explosions are a token of the demonic, Ivanov's rumbling thunders and flashes of lightning reveal the divine. In its descent toward humanity, Vjačeslav Ivanov's divine radiance refracts into the whole gamut of colors and sounds.⁵³ This pantheistic polychromous and polyphonic dispersion of light illuminates man and can transfigure the world. It resembles the Eastern Orthodox uncreated light or divine energies with their promise of deification. Yet, Losev's and Ivanov's contrasting views on synaesthetic light caution us about the divide between uncreated divine light and false Satanic light that Skrjabin straddles in the Russian religious imagination.

If we now briefly return to Skrjabin's verses from *The Preparatory Act*, which he wrote under Ivanov's guidance and which Losev criticized for their erotic and, consequently, demonic potential, we immediately notice Skrjabin's appropriation of Ivanov's Orphic poetics of light dispersion:

51 On Goethe's influence on Ivanov's conception of the rainbow as mediating between humanity and divinity, see Michael Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition: Goethe, Novalis, and the Poetics of Viacheslav Ivanov* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 86-88.

52 Vladimir Solov'ev, "Krasota v prirode," op. cit., 358.

53 For a discussion of Ivanov's understanding of ascent (*voschozdenie*) and descent (*nischozdenie*) as aesthetic and theurgic principles, see Victor Terras, "The Aesthetic Categories of *Ascent* and *Descent* in the Poetry of Vjačeslav Ivanov," *Russian Poetics*, ed. Thomas Eekman and Dean S. Worth (Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1983), 393-408.

Это луч, белый луч
 В нас распался, певуч
 Своей негой луч
 Своей лаской—могуч.

Хрупкий, он рассыпался
 Светами и звонами
 Бездны огласились
 Сладостными стонами

Заиграли радуги
 Расцвелились сны...

Искрятся алмазами...

Боги в отражениях
 Сны свои дробят...

Shaft of light, white light
 Dispersed in us, singing,
 With its blissful delights,
 With its caress, the great ray reigns.

Delicate, it scattered
 In lights and peals
 The abysses resounded
 With sensual moans

The rainbows danced,
 Colorful dreams blossomed...

Scintillating with the diamonds...

Gods, in the reflections,
 Splinter their dreams...⁵⁴

The ray of white light disintegrates into colors and sounds (*raspalsja, rassypalsja*). The sparkling diamonds and the play of the rainbows reflect the synaesthetic nature of the unfinished *Preparatory Act* for Skrjabin's *Mysterium*. Furthermore, the gods also participate in this process of dispersion and fragmentation as "in the reflections,/ they splinter their

⁵⁴ Aleksandr Skrjabin, "Predvaritel'noe dejstvo," in *Russkie Propilei*, op. cit., 218-219.

dreams”—or is this perhaps a splintering of their bodies, a metaphorical dismemberment through reflections and dreams? Like these gods, Skrjabin was the theurgic artist for Ivanov, presiding over the Mystical ritual of the synaesthetic transfiguration of reality and offering his body and art as a sacrifice.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that Aleksandr Skrjabin was critically torn to pieces in the Russian religious imagination for his double vision of light in his poetry and music, at once synaesthetically divine and demonic, ecstatic and erotic. The Russian religious thinkers Aleksej Losev and Georges Florovskij denounced him as a Satanist, while Vjačeslav Ivanov exalted him as an Orphic Messiah. In his collaboration with Ivanov on the verse for *The Preparatory Act to The Mysterium*, Skrjabin inscribed himself in Ivanov’s poetics of Orphic dispersion of light into poetry and music. The poetry for *The Act* lent the composer an appropriately Symbolist textual dimension, while his synaesthetic symphony *Prometheus* had already configured light as composed of sounds and colors. In a way, Skrjabin prepared his own poetic *tombeau* (literally, tombstone), which Ivanov then carefully wove into a multicolored, musical narrative. Thus, the poet created the Orphic myth of Skrjabin as a theurge and a human sacrifice in an act of life creation, or, shall we say, of death creation.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ For a discussion of Ivanov’s poetic and mythic rethinking or emplotting of his life in the cases of his second wife, Lidija Zinov’eva-Annibal, and her daughter, Ivanov’s third wife Vera, see Robert Bird, “Introduction: From Biography to Text,” in *The Russian Prospero* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2006), 21–26. The sonnet “Ljubov” (1899) from the early “Pilot Stars” (“My—dva groznoj zažžennye stvola”) epitomizes Ivanov’s tendency to mythologize life in retrospect, for it served as the basis for his “Garland of Sonnets,” “Venok sonetov” (1909) that appeared after Lidija’s death in 1907. Thus, Lidija’s death seems to be prefigured in the early sonnet. As Bird puts it: “The result is an almost Talmudic explication of the original poem” (Ibid., 22).

Chiara Cantelli

FROM THE *PEREDVIŽNIKI*'S REALISM TO LENIN'S MAUSOLEUM *The Two Poles of an Apocalyptic-Palingenetic Path* *

1. Is Russian Realism True Realism?

On 27 October 2007, a very beautiful exhibition entitled *Truth and Beauty: Russian Realism* opened in Potenza, Italy. The exhibition brought together 80 works, selected by the Latvian National Museum of Riga, covering a time span of nearly a century, from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1950s. The aim of the exhibition was to show the evolution of Realism in Russia, starting from the works of the so-called *Peredvižniki*, who had initiated the movement, and ending with the propaganda posters of Stalinist Socialist Realism. I did not see the exhibition, but I had the opportunity to admire and study its catalogue,¹ which deeply impressed me. The catalogue included painters whose works, although of a figurative nature, I would never have defined as “realist” because they had contributed legitimately to the artistic renewal that took place in Russia between the last few years of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century, and that culminated in the phenomenon of the avant-garde.

I refer, for example, to figures such as Maljavin and Kustodiev, exponents of *Mir Iskusstva* (*The World of Art*), which was founded in 1898 and was linked to the birth of the Symbolist movement at that time. *Mir Iskusstva* represented the first stage of that magnificent renewal precisely because it rejected the commitment to Realism advocated by the *Peredvižniki* during the period from 1870 to 1890. But I was equally surprised by the

* Translated into English by Karen Turnbull.

¹ Laura Gavioli, ed., *Verità e bellezza. Realismo russo. Dipinti dal Museo Nazionale d'Arte Lettone di Riga* (Venice: Marsilio, 2007).

inclusion of Sar'jan and of Petrov-Vodkin, who started out in the *Golubaja roza* (*Blue Rose*) Symbolist group, which was active from 1906 to 1908. Sar'jan had absorbed the lessons to be learned from Matisse's oeuvre, and could be considered one of the most original fruits of the so-called "Russian Fauvism," since he vividly accentuated Matisse's colour contrasts in the manner of Larionov and Gončarova's Neo-primitivism. Petrov-Vodkin's work, on the contrary, not only combines Classicism and Fauvism, but could also be seen as a modern revisiting of the anti-naturalistic figurative painting of ancient Russian icons. The exhibition also included paintings by Maškov and Končalovskij, founding members of *Bubnovyj Valet* (*Knave of Diamonds*), a group formed in 1910 and disbanded in 1916-1917, that took up the lessons of Cézanne and of the early Cubism linked to Cézanne's work. *Bubnovyj Valet*, in close collaboration with the Neo-primitivist group *Oslinyj chvost* (*Donkey's Tail*), had equally close ties with the most significant workshop of the time from the point of view of creative experimentation: *Sojuz Molodeži* (*Union of the Youth*). This association, which was more or less contemporaneous with *Bubnovyj Valet*, not only brought together all the leading figures of the newly emerging Russian avant-garde, but also included among its members the most extreme group of the time, the *Budetljane*—a neologism signifying "inhabitants of the will be", who were also known as the Cubo-Futurists—some of whom, a few years later, would develop the most daring forms of Russian avant-garde experimentation: from Malevič's Suprematism to Filonov's Analytic Art, and from Matjušin's Organicism to Rodčenko's Constructivism. But the greatest surprise was when I found myself confronted with a painting by Udal'zova, who as a member of both *Bubnovyj Valet* and *Sojuz Molodeži*, had settled on Malevič's Suprematism after Neo-primitivist and Cubo-Futuristic phases.

Struck by seeing all these painters labelled "realists," I wondered whether, in light of their intrinsic connection with the development of the Avant-garde, it would be possible to suggest a redefinition of "Russian Realism," which would differ from the meaning commonly associated with the term "realism": that of an art which, on the basis of the principle of imitation, is intended to objectively and truthfully reflect the reality before our eyes and, by so doing, relinquishes any creative or performative temptation that might divert it from this task. In short, the question I asked myself was: "But is Russian Realism true realism?"

Such a question concerned not only the above-mentioned artists, but the whole tradition of Russian and Soviet Realism, from the original late nineteenth century realism of the *Peredvižniki* (whom the Avant-garde seemed to have swept away and relegated to a niche existence) to realism's renewed lease on life, during the 1920s, within the AKhRR ("Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia") which from about 1925, as Bolshevism progressively took hold, launched the isolation and traumatic liquidation aimed at combating the "abstractions" and "formalism" of the various forms of Avant-garde, thus laying the groundwork for the future development of the art of the regime, Stalinist Socialist Realism. My question, in other words, had revealed an ideal common thread, stretching from the pole of late nineteenth-century Russian Realism to that of the Stalinist regime, that pinpointed the centre-point in the growth curve of artistic renewal as it unfurled from Symbolism up to the ripening and fall of the Avant-garde, and connoted that period as the *trait d'union*—the meeting point—between the two extremes of Russian and Soviet Realist traditions, rather than as their point of separation.

It seemed rather ironic, in light of the *pathos* that criss-crossed that artistic curve like a guiding thread, drawing together the multiple and contrasting artistic movements—a *pathos* which can be summarized thus: passing from imitation of the world to its final transfiguration, in the name of an art that escapes the limits of representation to become not simply a reflection of life but life itself, or—as they began to say at that time—*žiznestroenie*, "life building." A term whose meaning, however, if one looks more closely, signified rather "life re-building." One of the most significant results of that growth curve was to promote an art that, by removing itself from the function of imitation and duplication, claimed for its works not only the value of meaning, but also the value of being. Another—equally significant—aspect that the curve advocated, however, was the consideration that such value was immanent in a world yet to be rediscovered in its archetypal authenticity, which could be re-established through complete restoration and cleansing aimed at purifying reality of all its previous false images, thus becoming one with the advent of a world that had finally redeemed itself. Thus, it was an art that was consciously inscribed within an eschatological-redemptive perspective, and did not claim to be the bearer of the artist's subjectivity. Rather than setting itself up as "the new which is created by the subject on the exclusive premise of

its own powers, that is, as an artifice,”² it offers itself instead as a “revelation of the authentic,” as a “redemption of the existing and of the cosmos.”³

This *diktat*, which took shape in a historically crucial moment for Russia, between the two revolutions of 1905 and 1917, first emerged with Symbolism, in which it found its most complete and consistent formulation in Ivanov’s *realiorism*, an aesthetic platform that promoted an art that, in becoming custodian of the potential for divine beauty and truth that is inherent in the world but obscured by history, also took on the task of redeeming reality from its own dejecta, so as to convert its movement of disintegration into a dynamic of resurrection and thus open the way for the creation of cosmos and nature transfigured into the body of God in a moment soon to arrive. This perspective would have a profound influence on the debate on the essence of the new art which developed within the dramatic development of the Avant-garde both prior to, and especially after the Revolution—in other words, during those years when Russia, shaken to her foundations and now transformed into the Soviet Union, seemed to have reached the hour of Apocalypse, that state of absolute zero clearly illustrated and preconized in 1915 by Malevič’s *Černyj suprematičeskij kvadrat* (*Suprematist Black Square*), which would finally give rise to the restoration of a renewed and uncompromised world, freed both from the false images of the preceding world, and from the false cognitions and concepts that had spawned them.

The Avant-garde presented themselves as not merely the promise or prophesy of a world that would be finally redeemed to itself and completely restored to its authenticity through systematic and radical cleansing, but as its virtual embryo, as a forthcoming reality. Total demolition and reconstruction, Apocalypse and Palingenesis, were thus reciprocally involved in their artistic activities, forming two sides of the same coin. Such a dialectic found its most significant expression in Malevič’s aforementioned *Černyj suprematičeskij kvadrat*: in its capacity as an “abstract form that has swallowed all the diabolic vanity in the world, leaving no trace behind,”⁴ it

² Roberto Salizzoni, *L’idea russa di estetica. Sofia e cosmo nell’arte e nella filosofia* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1992), 11.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Benedikt K. Livsič, *Polutoraglazjy strelec* [1933] (New York: Cehov, 1978), 123.

showed how its true meaning lay beyond the black hole that the world had turned out to be. In other words, its meaning lay in the undivided unity of the white in which it was inscribed, like a hole, and which radiated behind it. *Černyj suprematičeskij kvadrat* thus transforms itself into *Beloe na belom. Belyj kvadrat* (*White on White: White Square*, 1918), acquiring in this way the meaning of a landing point in a space that, since it is an infinite abyss, corresponds on the one hand to the entire interplanetary space that can be explored through flight,⁵ but on the other hand, precisely because it has been conquered through destruction of the obstacles and conventions of the past, gives that flight the nature of a return to the origins of the world, when everything existed as “nothing” until “man came along with all his ideas and his attempts to know the world, thus creating a life constantly conditioned by the problem of ‘what.’”⁶ This nothing is not empty, but is full of infinite vital energies that the subject experiences in the form of a universal excitement, which is aroused in his brain on suddenly discovering, in that flight towards all infinity, that the “skull equals the universe”;⁷ in other words, that reason is not individual but cosmic. The world of Suprematist non-objectivity thus acquires the meaning of reinstatement of the subject in the all-infinite cosmic energy in view of the affirmation-manifestation of that cosmos. Having discovered that “skull equals the universe” because it is permeated with the infinite energy that has turned out to be the cosmos, the subject can only prepare himself to receive that infinite power, and the equally infinite unfurling of life which springs from it.

At the peak of the negation of every *mimesis*, there thus appears, paradoxically, the recovery of a pre-modern type of *mimesis*, aimed at highlighting the aspects of receptivity and respectful acceptance, which seeks to prepare itself for the authentic meaning of things and not take advantage of it. While from the Symbolist viewpoint such acceptance took on the character of a productive synergy between human and divine energies that would become one and the same with advent of a world

⁵ See Kazimir S. Malevič, “Suprematizm” [1919], in *Černyj Kvadrat*, ed. Aleksandra S. Šatskich (Moscow: Azbuka, 2001), 73-74.

⁶ Cf. Kazimir S. Malevič, “Suprematizm. Mir kak bespredmetnost', ili Večnyj pokoj” [1921-1922], in *Černyj Kvadrat*, op. cit., 150.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

transfigured into the body of God, in Malevič's view it is seen as a productive synergy between human energies and the energy of cosmic matter with a view to that matter's dynamic affirmation and transfiguration. Thus it is the cosmos that is realized in the Suprematist flight towards all infinity: in fact, the subject's expansion within the universe until his head matches the entire breadth of the universe corresponds to the movement of a cosmos as an infinite energy that, having entered the subject in order to ignite itself in his skull as universal excitement, reveals itself to be thinking-matter, and thus begins to achieve—by means of the skull, which has been revealed as an integral part of that energy—the absolute state of an organism endowed with perfect life.

White on White is thus revealed as the self-germinating cell of an imminent future spring of a not-yet updated order of life, seen as a dynamic identity between man and the cosmos, which is one and the same with a new economic vision of the world, or in other words, with the advent of a world governed, through art, by a new economy of technology.⁸ While it is true that, in the non-objectual universe opened up by Suprematism, the destiny of the cosmos is to transform itself into a machine, it is also true that such a machine loses its own artificial nature to become a living organism, perfectly integrated into nature.⁹

The entire activity of the Constructivist avant-garde in the Soviet Union during the 1920s is based on Malevič's dream of a revived cosmos transfigured into a Suprematist machine, or a "living machine-organism" endowed with perfect life. The byword of Constructivism was to pass from the representation of reality (even if it were the non-objectual reality of Suprematism), to its direct construction/production as the necessary result of an art which considered itself an authentic "construction of life." This byword—which is intended to transform artistic production into technical production—is, however, affected by the Suprematist idea of a technology that is no longer based on mechanical strength but on the hidden dynamics of natural processes, and that integrates and develops itself with these processes to the point that it creates machines that are revealed as nature and that, in order to so reveal themselves: "in no way ... are born from a project,

⁸ Kazimir S. Malevič, "Suprematizm, 34 risunka" [1920], in *Černyj Kvadrat*, op. cit., 80.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

from an idea that is projected outwards from the mind of man, on a canvas, or on a plot of land or on a workbench," but appear only as "manifestations accepted and confirmed by technologies"¹⁰ of the constructive impulses that emanate from the energy of matter. It is clear from the first Constructivist manifesto, developed in 1920 by Gabo (1890-1977) and Pevsner (1884-1962), that there can be no authentic construction of life except as a direct derivation of a natural action and not as a production of a cerebrally elaborated abstract that is projected outwards from the mind of man.¹¹

Over and above the conflicts that divided not just Suprematism and Constructivism, but also the various Constructivisms that had developed from the original manifesto during the course of the 1920s,¹² we can assert that the Soviet Avant-garde as a whole thought that the impending redeemed world could be achieved through art by a new economy of technology, specifically, an economy that had nothing to do with the economy of bourgeois-capitalist production. The meaning of this new economy of technology can be summarized by Rodčenko's description in a letter he wrote to his wife Varvara during his first and only trip abroad, in May 1925, when he was sent to Paris to set up the Soviet pavilion at the *Exposition des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes*. Upset by the mass of things displayed for sale in that city and by the insatiable desire, both sensual and sexual, that such abundance aroused in the consumer and which culminated in the commodification of women, Rodčenko's letter revealed his conception of the socialist object as opposed to the object of capitalist consumption:

The light from the East is not only the liberation of workers, the light from the East is in the new relation to person, to woman, to things. Our things in our hands must be equals, comrades.¹³

¹⁰ Roberto Salizzoni, "Incontrare l'invisibile," in *Nicea e la civiltà dell'immagine*, Luigi Russo et. al. (Palermo: Aesthetica Preprint, 1998), 93.

¹¹ See Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, "The Realistic Manifesto" (1920), in *The Tradition of Constructivism*, ed. Stephen Bann (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), 8-9.

¹² For a history of Russian Constructivism, see Christine Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1983).

¹³ Aleksandr M. Rodčenko, "Rodčenko v Pariže. Iz pisem domoj," *Novyj Lef* 2 (1927): 20. Quoted by Christina Kiaer, "Rodchenko in Paris," *October* 75 (Winter 1996): 4.

At the heart of the socialist idea of the object as a “comrade”—that is, as a living being treated in the same way as a human being—one can see the new nature of the Constructivist object as a construction of life, aimed at freeing the energies of matter with a view to vitally reinforcing that matter. A construction/liberation, conceived as industrial production, which radically converted the traditional goals of such production: it was not a case of producing dead objects which were infinitely modifiable for use and consumption, but of transforming that production into unlimited production of life that would be one and the same with the advent of a world as a living organism pulsating with perfect life. While the experience of Russian Constructivism, contrary to the Western capitalist dream of unlimited consumption, is based on the dream that upholds the political and social model of Soviet Russia, namely the dream of unlimited production,¹⁴ it is this unlimited production of life that the new Soviet Avant-garde are thinking of. It is here that Suprematism and Constructivism meet, that the Constructivist dream of art as a construction of life ends up as “the Suprematist one... of the machine which turns out to be nature and which, through its functioning, sets the rhythm of the cosmic pulse, forgetting all the uses and functions of what it produces, except those of unlimited expansion and exaltation of the cosmic pulse,”¹⁵ as the pulse of perfect life that no longer knows death.

Thus, while in the Soviet Constructivist Avant-garde the impending renewed and redeemed cosmos corresponds to the constructive development of communism, that development is adopted as a total work of art, a radical reorganization of life according to a single plan dictated by the same laws of the imminent redeemed life. Carrying out that plan was the intention of the Constructivist Avant-garde, who, by virtue of their immanent logic of “construction of life,” planned not to illustrate the forthcoming redeemed life, but to institute it through their own works, since these works were the fundamental cells of that life.¹⁶

¹⁴ On this matter, see Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Roberto Salizzoni, “Icône e quadrati come immagini del mondo della vita,” in *Icona e avanguardia. Percorsi dell’immagine in Russia*, ed. Graziano Lingua (Turin: Zamorani, 1999), 135.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

This is the dream that inspired the Soviet Avant-garde of the 1920s. This dream, in its aesthetic perspective, moves within a two-pronged strategy, which, despite the apparent divergence of its movements, can be distinguished very clearly in its essential components. On the one hand, the constant renewal of an idea of *mimesis* of a distinctly pre-modern nature aimed at emphasizing the aspects of receptivity and respectful acceptance in art, which is intended to prepare for the meaning of the world but not to make use of it; on the other hand, the equally constant attempt to remove from that *mimesis* the device that limited its representations to a state of ontologically weakened reality. In other words, it is an art that rejects all areas of similarity and that, far from establishing itself as a copy of sensitive reality, puts itself forward instead as a space that extracts from things the truth which had slipped away from them and was hidden. Life cleansed of appearances, is thus switched on by the truth of art which, on the one hand, endlessly illuminates itself and calls people to it, and on the other hand, only illuminates the world insofar as it establishes itself as a world in order to embody and fulfil its meaning.

But the idea that whirled in my mind in light of that exhibition in Potenza was that this perspective had nonetheless found the seeds of its potential development precisely in the nineteenth-century Critical Realism of the *Peredvižniki*, and its most fitting culmination in that art of the regime known as Socialist Realism.

2. The Art Workshop as Žiznestroenie: The Critical-Democratic Realism of the Peredvižniki

As we know, the development of Critical Realism in Russia is closely linked to Černyševskij's aesthetic-democratic ideas, which were set out in his university thesis *Estetičeskie otnošenija iskusstva k dejstvitel'nosti* (*Aesthetic Relationships between Art and Reality*), and which can essentially be summarized in two arguments. The first consists in affirming that "The beauty is life,"¹⁷ since life is "the dearest thing that exists in the world for

¹⁷ Nikolaj G. Černyševskij, *Estetičeskie otnošenija iskusstva k dejstvitel'nosti*, in *Sočinenija v 2 tomach*, ed. I. K. Pantin (Moscow: Nauka, 1986), Vol. 1, 76.

man.”¹⁸ It follows that in the relationship between art and life, priority is given to life and not to art, which is beautiful because it imitates life and because, in imitating it, reminds us of life, but which, because it is merely a reproduction of life, can never supplant its model.

But if this is so, what need is there for art? The answer is given to us by portraiture, which denies, moreover, that the aim of art is to fulfil an aesthetic pleasure that would not be satisfied by reality. A portrait of a loved one is not intended to eliminate any eventual aesthetic blemishes, which we either do not notice or which may even be dear to us if we truly love that person,¹⁹ but rather to give us the opportunity to “remember the living person when he/she is not before our eyes and to give some idea of him/her to those who have not had the opportunity to see him/her.”²⁰ It is here that Černyševskij’s second argument comes into play: if art has the ability to give us an idea of the things in life that it represents, it is because it combines image and thought, thus revealing itself to be not only a precious means of explanation and knowledge of reality, but also a judgement of it, thereby becoming one of man’s moral activities.²¹ Aimed at reproducing reality, art is therefore a critical rather than a passive reproduction, and as such can have an effect on life, helping to achieve that potential for truth and justice, identified through people’s way of perceiving life, which will allow it to be *life* in the fullest sense of the word.

During the 1860s, these ideas of Černyševskij’s sowed the seeds of the Critical-democratic Realism in the art of the *Peredvižniki*, who, with the motto “Bring art to the people,” banded together in the so-called *Tovariščestvo Peredvižnych Chudožestvennykh Vystavok* (*Society for Travelling Art Exhibitions*) in 1870. The agenda of the society was outlined in its very name: staging various annual exhibitions in the provincial cities of the Russian Empire in order to present the latest novelties in the field of art to a wider audience. It was thus aimed at a democratization of art, which was consistent with the need to place their creative activity at the service of the people, those simple and humble Russian people whom the *Peredvižniki*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

intended not only to represent faithfully in all their forms of life, but also to raise from their brutalizing condition, exalting those life values—constancy, sense of duty and of sacrifice, sober and austere dignity, humility, altruism, solidarity with one's fellows and authenticity of feeling—that, in the mentality of the time, were considered to be in complete harmony with the democratic-revolutionary ideals of the then nascent Russian populism.²² Indeed, the exaltation of these values was synonymous with the idealization of the ancient Russian peasant community (*obščina*), which, by virtue of its community management of land and its system of self-government, was considered to be the living embodiment of these values and, for this very reason, was portrayed by that populism not only as the bulwark that would save Russia from the entropic forces of modern individualism and from the catastrophic effects of industrial production, but also as the seed of the country's indigenous anti-capitalist and socialist evolution.

"Realism, populism and nationalism"²³ thus formed the principal bases of the artistic activities of the *Peredvižniki*, who, together with their intention to document the painful aspects of the lives of the Russian people, the hard work of the peasants, and their humiliating and inhuman living conditions, also intended to preserve the potential beauty that emanated from those painful aspects in terms of morality and truth. Consider, for example, the touchstone of the *Peredvižniki's* Critical-democratic Realism, Repin's *Burlaki na Volge* (*Boatmen on the Volga*, 1873-74), in which the harsh depiction of the boatmen reduced to the status of mere draft animals, is complemented by full recognition of all their human dignity which the almost unbearable work has nonetheless not managed to break and annihilate. This dignity is expressed above all in the central figure, the boatman Kanin, a defrocked priest whom Repin had befriended during a trip he had taken on the Volga in 1870 in order to observe the life of

²² On "critical acumen" as a specific characteristic of Russian Realism with respect to the corresponding European schools of the time, see Dmitrij V. Sarab'janov, *Russkaja živopis' XIX veka sredy evropejskisch škol* (Moscow: Soveckij chudožnik, 1980), who pointed out that, through their works, the *Peredvižniki* expressed not only compassion in the face of the negative aspects of reality they reproduced, but also a critical reaction.

²³ These are the words with which the critic Vladimir Stasov defines the particular character of the art of that time. Cf. Viktor V. Vanslov, ed., *Russakaja progressivnaja chudožestvennaja kritika vtoroj poloviny XIX-načala veka* (Moscow: Izobrasitel'noe iskusstvo, 1977), 162.

the boatmen. All the strength of the Russian people—all their human dignity, which deserves respect and redemption precisely because it has been humiliated and offended—can be seen clearly in the solemn and wise features that, in spite of everything, shine through Kanin's brutish form (depicted without any comforting idealization), and in the stability of his figure, which stands firm despite the brutalizing effort of that work.

Another example is Makovskij's *Svidanie* (*The Visit*, 1883), depicting a peasant woman visiting her not-yet teenaged son, who has been "sent to work" in the city. She is seen gazing with sad affection at the barefoot and starving child as he avidly eats the loaf of bread she has brought him. The simple and direct description of that gaze, and of the harsh living conditions that form the existence of that child torn from his family, highlights the integrity of the Russian countryfolk and the strength of family affections that give substance to their life, contrary to the modern industrial society that nineteenth-century Russia seemed to have established from the 1860s onwards: a cruel society, dominated by a rapacious and unscrupulous capitalism, that was prepared to break the most intimate and fundamental bonds of human existence by exploiting the children of the simple people under the banner of an illusory progress that, rather than producing goods and services for the benefit of the people, was based on speculation and despoliation of those classes and social structures who had been divested of all protection by the demise of the bureaucratic-feudal system.

The gaze of those people may well have been humble and subdued, yet it was capable of becoming a veritable flash of reproach when, through the *Peredvižniki*'s art, it was portrayed in such a way as to appeal directly to the public. This is the case of Jarošenko's *Kočegar* (*The Stoker*, 1878), one of the first depictions in Russian painting of the urban proletariat. The worker in this full-length portrait is illuminated by the glow from an invisible furnace. He emerges from a dark hall that resembles the antechamber of hell. His almost deformed body seems to be completely burned by the heat of the furnace; his face is sunken; his shoulders, once broad and powerful, are now tired and bowed; his enormous arms are now merely a bundle of swollen veins, as are his knobby hands that grasp the tools of his trade, accomplices in the degradation of someone who had once been a strong and healthy peasant. The man portrayed by Jarošenko is, in fact, one of the many victims of the abolition of serfdom decreed by the reforms of Tsar, Aleksandr I in 1861, which had forced the majority of the peasants—

who were unable to meet the State-established price of redeeming the lands where they had until then lived and worked—to add to the numbers of burgeoning urban proletariat, contributing to the modernization of Russia and boosting its rapid industrial development. Yet from this man's misshapen and brutish body, a spark of life still springs: broken in body but not in soul, it shines unbroken from the stoker's tired but indomitable eyes, which are turned towards and focused on the viewer, seeming to direct at him an interrogative and eloquent reproach: "Now that you see me, what are you going to do? Are you going to merely look?"

The purpose of the *Peredvižniki's* art, however, was not only to denounce an industrial progress that produced nothing but social barbarization, and a modernity that levelled and depersonalized everything inhumanely; it was also a modality of *vision*, a way to grasp that potential for truth and beauty that the Russian people possess and that, in contrast to the urban degradation and to the modern Western capitalism imported into Russia, is found in the very earth that has nourished and sustained the people for centuries, and has shared their sufferings. This is the source of the *Peredvižniki's* love for the landscape, which is no longer the sweetened and dreamlike idyll of academic painting, but the real Russian earth, whose beauty is to be found in the insignificance and ordinariness of daily work. Mjasoedov's *Stradnaja pora. Koscy* (*The Harvest Season: Reapers*, 1887) is an example of this, where the representation of the sunburned mowers harshly marked by their work in the fields also shows their gratitude for the land that sustains and feeds them and, as a participant in their sufferings, repays their dignity in full. In *Sejatel'* (*The Sower*, 1888), also by Mjasoedov, we see a full-length portrait of a peasant, illuminated by the sun, as he walks steadily and confidently toward the viewer, as if he were the true master of the land, upon which he casts the seeds of a new life.

Thus, the *Peredvižniki's* art concentrated on genre scenes and portraits, within which, however, the attention to realistic detail is never an end in itself. This aspect was clearly perceived by Dostoevskij in *Dnevnik pisatelja*, where he expresses his admiration for Repin's *Burlaki na Volge*, and points out that the artist's greatness lies in having rendered the minute details of that work rich with universal significance: these details spoke of the Russian people and of their strength; not the physical strength of muscles at work, as in Gustave Courbet's *Les casseurs de pierre* (1849), but moral and inner strength, which expressed the pride of a people who, for centuries, had

borne their own burden without losing their dignity.²⁴ The *Peredvižniki's* Realism thus arose by overcoming both detail as an end in itself and the genre painting from which it developed, with the aim of offering—through realistic rendering of the particular—an image of reality which is faithful, but at the same time is also richer than a mere photographic-documentary record.²⁵ In this way, it becomes not simply a note-taking of the conditions of life but its driving force, not passive contemplation but active reflection, not inert vision but a spur to action seen as the regeneration of life itself.

The *Peredvižniki's* rejection of the ideal beauty advocated by academic art, and their concern for representation of the “real” life of the Russian people, caught in all their tragic suffering but also in their love of life that goes hand in hand with dedication to work, are driven precisely by the idea of an art capable of serving life and transforming itself into a spur to action. Embodied in this idea is their opposition to academic art, which, having relegated itself to a search for purely formal perfection, far removed from the real problems of existence, they view as an empty and pointless operation, aimed at the most complete detachment, and producing an imaginary world that is no more than pure fiction, an empty and useless form of beauty with which to delight oneself, in which one can seek refuge by completely losing touch with reality.

For the *Peredvižniki*, it was the idea of art as a human activity which made a similar and useless beauty unacceptable: man is an active being, who acts in the world and intends to transform the reality around him through his actions, taking responsibility for the transformations he has produced. To claim art has a dimension of uselessness insofar as it is a human activity

²⁴ See Fëdor M. Dostoevskij, “Dnevnik pisatelja za 1873 god - XI. Po povodu odnoj vystavki,” in *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij v 30 tomach*, Vol. 21 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972-1990), 68-77, in which the famous Russian novelist returns to questions he had already considered during the 1860s on the risks of purely documentary representation. On Dostoevskij and realism, see Robert L. Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form: A Study of His Philosophy of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978) and Claudia Olivieri, *Dostoevskij: l'occhio e il segno* (Soveria Mannelli [CZ]: Rubettino, 2003), 24-25.

²⁵ There is significant evidence, developed during the second half of the nineteenth century, on the conflictual relationship between photography and painting in the age of the great Russian novel. On the issue of “photographic realism,” as well as on how this was dealt with and discussed in Russian literature, see also Stephen C. Hutchings, *Russian Literary Culture in the Camera Age: The Word as Image* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004).

not only thereby degrades it, but makes it an activity unworthy of man. This attitude is illustrated by the stance of the nihilist Pisarev (1840-1868) who, in his essays *Realisty* (*The Realists*, 1864) and *Razrušenie éstetiki* (*The Destruction of Aesthetics*, 1865), concludes with a violent deposition of artistic activity altogether, declaring that a pair of hobnail boots had more value for him than the entire works of Shakespeare,²⁶ and that to use human energy to create musical, visual, and poetic works aimed at aesthetic pleasure was an outright waste, in contradiction “with the principle of economy of material and intellectual forces.” Indeed, he “had no reason to believe that these art forms could make the slightest contribution to the intellectual or moral growth of humanity.”²⁷ Pisarev’s concept is radical, but is nonetheless representative of a widespread attitude in the Russian mentality of the time: the absolute inability of accepting a concept of perfection which, because it is restricted to the field of a pure form, is incapable of transforming itself into reality or of otherwise interacting with it.

Thus art, insofar as it is a human activity, must always adapt itself to the world in which it exists, integrating itself with its products, and in so adapting itself it must have a very clear practical function. Which function? That of recalling us to what we must do and, therefore, to our responsibility to the world in which we live. Showing our shortcomings, defects, deformities, the ills that afflict our world, the suffering that permeates humanity, and the injustices that are perpetrated does not mean we must repudiate the beauty of life, but rather that we must pay it the highest tribute: far from adapting us to the horrors of existence, the portrayal of these horrors compels us instead to overcome them in the name of a life that, only if it is worthy of that name, can be considered truly beautiful. By throwing in our face the infamies and monstrosities that afflict existence and prevent it from truly being life in the full sense of the word, art reminds us that, over and above the progress and the improvements we have made (and which are, perhaps, far from being true progress and improvement), there remains much, or even everything, still to be done, thus recalling us to our responsibility with regard to life.

²⁶ Nikolaj O. Losskij, *History of Philosophy* (New York: International Universities Press, 1951), 63.

²⁷ Dmitrij I. Pisarev, “Realisty,” in *Sočinenija v 4 tomach*, ed. Jurij S. Sorokin (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo chudožestvennoj literatury, 1955), Vol. 3, 114.

Art is a paradox: on the one hand, it is programmatically mimetic and a faithful reflection of reality. On the other hand it claims, equally programmatically, that it does not exhaust itself in this mimesis, but transforms itself into a spur to action on life by unmasking the defects and distortions of existence through this accurate reproduction. Within this paradox, the activity of the *Peredvižniki* lies along the apocalyptic-transfigurative path identified at the beginning of this essay as the cipher of the artistic renewal that evolved from Symbolism and the Avant-garde. In taking on the charge of safeguarding life's potential for beauty, which coincides with the values and forms of life of the Russian peasants, yet without turning its gaze—and the hand that follows that gaze—from the suffering that imprisons that potential, the art of the *Peredvižniki*, while aspiring to step beyond the limitations of mere representation to become an urge for concrete and effective regeneration of life, brings that urge into effect not as “production of the new” but as “redemption of the existing.” For this reason, what Nikolaj Berdjaev wrote about Russian literature can also be applied in relation to the art of the *Peredvižniki*: “Russian artists are devoured by a thirst to graduate from creating works of art to creating a perfect life.”²⁸

It is this thirst, which translates into a demand for concretely reconstructive/transfigurative redemption, that came to the fore in the *Peredvižniki*'s art, as the philosopher Solov'ev perceptively observed in the last decade of the nineteenth century, when he elaborated a religious aesthetic of an apocalyptic-palingenetic nature that, following the example set by the *diktat* of Dostoevskij's “Beauty will save the world,” assigns to art the task of realizing the absolute ideal of a life that is perfect not only in imagination but also in reality. In that period of the 1890s when the latest European conquest in the aesthetic-artistic field—that of the art for art's sake movement—was beginning to take hold in Russia, Solov'ev called on the Russian people not to yield to this seduction, referring to precisely that criticism of ideal beauty championed by the Critical-democratic Realism. According to Solov'ev, if we seek to understand the real significance of this artistic current, we notice that it “gives rise to a recognition, unconscious and contradictory, but all the more precious for that, of the universal value

²⁸ Nikolaj A. Berdjaev, *Russkaja ideja* [1946] (St Petersburg: Azbuka-klassika, 2008), 115, 118.

of beauty.”²⁹ In fact, those who seem to be its oppressors in order to replace the ideal-beautiful with the deformed-real, are instead revealed to be those who assign to beauty “the task of saving the world.”³⁰ Rejecting pure art as an idle distraction and despising ideal beauty as an arbitrary embellishment devoid of reality means, in fact, “insisting that real art must be *an important matter*, it means recognizing the ability of true beauty to act on the real world thoroughly and in an incisive manner.”³¹

3. Socialist Realism: Between Propaganda Art and the Realization of a Dream

According to the most reliable interpretations, the Russian avant-garde were finally driven out by the advent of Stalinism, which not only eliminated the last of their most illustrious exponents, but gave rise, in the field of the arts, to a totalitarian art as a simple return to the past and as a mirror of the traditional tastes of the masses. This was Socialist Realism, whose core—art as the mirror of reality—was linked with a new interpretation of the notion of reality itself, symbolically expressed by the Stalinist phrase, “the beauty is our life.”

After all, what else could be said of a reality that had by now begun to conquer even death, and that took the mausoleum erected to Lenin's “eternal memory” as a symbol of this more than imminent defeat?³² Built in 1924, with a wooden structure consisting of three cubes designed by the Constructivist architect Ščusev, and rebuilt in marble between 1929

²⁹ Vladimir S. Solov'ev, “Krasota v prirode” [1889], in *Sobranie Sočinenij v 10 tomach*, eds. Ernst Radlov and Sergej M. Solov'ev (St Petersburg: Prosvěščenje, 1911-1914), Vol. 6, 33.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid. Solov'ev took up this theme once again in “Pervy šag k položitel'noj éstetike” [1894], in *Sobranie Sočinenij v 10 tomach*, op. cit., Vol. 7, 69-80.

³² In this regard, see Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin lives! The Lenin cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), which clearly demonstrates how the cult of Lenin was created in order to offer a concrete vision of the omnipotence of Soviet communism, capable of carrying out the undertaking in which Christianity had failed, or in other words, of overcoming death itself: for the organizers of the cult, preserving Lenin's embalmed remains in a glass sarcophagus was a way to give the impression that “Lenin's death was only an illusion” (Ibid., 37).

and 1930, the mausoleum can be defined as the supreme synthesis of the transfigurative *pathos* that, in the wake of the October Revolution, animated not only the Soviet Avant-garde in its evolution from Suprematism to the various forms of Constructivism and Productionism, but also the entire Soviet culture of the 1920s, in the name of a world that would be truly the world of life and not of death. It is known that

the plans for preserving Lenin's body and for his mausoleum came into existence in an environment profoundly influenced by the philosophy of N. Fëdorov, a contemporary of Dostoevskij, who spent his life to theorizing the inevitability of the resurrection of all the dead through the use of technology—a truly divine instrument when used in this way.³³

Many scholars have identified his “Philosophy of the Common Task” as one of the polar stars of the Soviet culture of the 1920s, considering it a more or less decisive centre of influence not only for literary and artistic figures and environments³⁴ but also for science³⁵ and medicine.³⁶ Some of these were charged with the creation of the complete work of art that was Lenin's Mausoleum, which went hand in hand with the perfect preservation of his body. While the work of preservation was conceived in expectation of his resurrection,³⁷ this was also—according

³³ Roberto Salizzoni, “Incontrare l'invisibile”, op. cit., 96.

³⁴ Cf. Svetlana G. Semenova, *Nikolaj Fëdorov. Tvorčestvo žizni* (Moscow: Soveckij pisatel', 1990), 346-380 and Irene Masing-Delić, *Abolishing Death: A Salvation Myth of Russian Twentieth-Century Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

³⁵ Svetlana G. Semenova, *Nikolaj Fëdorov. Tvorčestvo žizni*, op. cit., 302-343.

³⁶ On the subject of Soviet medical-scientific studies during the 1920s on how to convert death to life, see Anton Kozlov, “La perception de la mort dans la culture russe au tournant du XXe siècle,” *Les Cahiers Slaves* 3 (2001), viewable at the website: <http://www.recherches-slaves.paris4.sorbonne.fr/Cahier3/Koslov.htm> (last accessed 06/11/2011).

³⁷ See, in this regard, Michael Hagemester, *Nikolaj Fedorov. Studien zu Leben, Werk und Wirkung* (Munich: Sagner, 1989), and in particular the reflections on immortality of the Constructivist architect Konstantin S. Melnikov, the designer of the glass sarcophagus for Lenin's eternal preservation (Ibid., 266, Note 106) as well as those of Leonid B. Krasin, a member of the Commission for immortalizing the memory of V. I. Uljanov (Lenin), who, in 1921, on the occasion of L. Ja. Karpov's funeral, declared that he couldn't wait to see his friend once again, since science was at that very moment perfecting the art of recreating dead organisms (Ibid.,

to Hagemeister³⁸—the way it was perceived by many of the Soviet people.

While the body is there, in the Mausoleum, it is not in order to “testify to a past, but to await an urgent, imminent future that Soviet science has within its reach,”³⁹ and if it is preserved to perfection, it is “because it will soon be redeemed from death, and that perfection is already more than a promise.”⁴⁰ On the subject of this redemption from death, which went hand in hand with the building of communism as the *in fieri* accomplishment of the forthcoming redeemed world, Malevič’s reflections after the death of Lenin remain pertinent:

The point of view that Lenin’s death is not death, that he is alive and eternal, is symbolized in a new object, taking as its form the cube. The cube is no longer a geometrical body. It is a new object with which we try to portray eternity, to create a new set of circumstances, with which we can maintain Lenin’s eternal life, defeating death.⁴¹

Lenin’s Mausoleum, a grandiose Constructivist Avant-garde creation, can also be considered, even in its initial 1924 form as three wooden cubes, as the milestone that set out the definitive conditions for the success of Socialist Realism. Although the Mausoleum’s external structure was Suprematist in nature, what it contained, however, was not. Entry into the cube did not, in fact, equate to gaining access to “non-objectivity.” In other words, it did not signify access to the future spring of an imminent side of existence which, although it has not yet occurred, is about to happen, but rather to a spring which, like the image of clearly defined features matching those of

265). On Krasin’s musings, see also Nina Tumarkin, “Religion, Bolshevism, and the Origins of the Lenin Cult,” *The Russian Review* 40/1 (January 1981): 44.

³⁸ Michael Hagemeister, “Russian Cosmism in the 1920s and Today,” in *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, ed. Bernice G. Rosenthal (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 188-189.

³⁹ Roberto Salizzoni, “Incontrare l’invisibile”, op. cit., 96.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Quoted from Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin lives! The Lenin cult in Soviet Russia*, op. cit., 190. On Malevič as the inspirer of the first designs for Lenin’s Mausoleum, see also Robert C. Williams, *The Other Bolsheviks: Lenin and His Critics, 1904-1914* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986).

a real body, had already taken the form of a semi-real present. The embalmed body hadn't the slightest intention of decomposing, thanks to the prodigies of Soviet technology. In other words, it testified to a resurrection which was already present, and which would not withdraw, even for a moment, in a pressing future.

That perfect body, which, despite the passage of time, would not decompose, can be seen as the first block in the cornerstone of Soviet aesthetics, which would crown the efforts of the first Five-Year Plan, or as the parallel between artistic ideal and reality from which the method of Socialist Realism seemingly arose spontaneously: if the Soviet reality, thanks to that Plan, had become beautiful in itself, it was sufficient to mirror it with enough detail in order to create a work which was beautiful by definition, and was made for the sole purpose of commemorating a fulfilled utopia.

As a paradigmatic example of such art, consider the Moscow metro, on which construction was begun in the 1930s by order of Stalin. Capable of connecting all parts of the city, and deep and extensive enough to offer refuge to the entire urban population in the case of attack by air, cool in summer and warm in winter, "the Moscow metro system was palatial architecture for the working class and an interior decoration for the masses,"⁴² where the classical perfection of forms combined with the baroque emphasis of volumes and the photographic meticulousness of details; the whole was upheld up by an imperial style, with pleasant and joyous idyllic settings overflowing with sheaves of wheat, grape vines and zoomorphic bas-reliefs, which provided a suitable backdrop for the Herculean task—of unlimited production—which the socialist collective had undertaken.

How should such art be defined? According to critics, the wonderful world of the Moscow metro was all an illusion, an *ad hoc* world built to hide the failure of socialism on the earth overhead, and far from celebrating an actualized paradise, it had no other purpose than that of obfuscating a reality based on State coercion.⁴³

Thus, it was pure propaganda art, celebrating an inexistent reality and aimed only at mobilizing the emotional energy of the masses: in short,

⁴² Susan Buck-Morss, "The City as Dreamworld and Catastrophe," *October* 73 (Summer 1995): 22.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 19.

it was an out-and-out device, designed to encode the flow of collective desires, which became a sort of fetish capable of bridging the gap between utopian promise and dystopian reality, and clearly not designed to give its beneficiaries a *capacity for conscious action*. It was therefore a product that was as effective in terms of obfuscation as it was second-rate from an artistic viewpoint: a heroic child's tale with a stereotypical happy ending; a showy neoclassical architecture, which in its rhetorical superfetation formed ziggurats that were as massive as they were anachronistic; a neo-classical-Renaissance style of monumental sculpture; a painting passed off as progressive that instead reintroduced the most rigid classifications of genres ordained by European academies since the dawn of their existence. If ever one could talk of the death of art, it was brought about by the Socialist Realism of the Stalinist regime, which, in order to create this fetish, did not hesitate, following a very precise plan, to centralistically usurp the entire stylistic legacy of the past to produce an art dedicated to simulation, to quotation and to the most stereotyped eclecticism.

In reality, that art was not only propaganda: Socialist Realism arose rather from the same dream that had animated the aesthetic reflections outlined in Avant-garde poetics:⁴⁴ that of a world that would be truly a world of life, cleansed of prejudices and appearances. We have seen how this dream is composed from the point of view of its aesthetic strategy: to reclaim an idea of *mimesis* of a decidedly pre-modern nature, while trying nonetheless to remove any limits that confine artistic representation to the space of a mere appearance or of a weakened reflection of reality, so as to give life to an art that would be not a likeness but rather a recollection of truth that has slipped away, and would thereby present itself in the light of a living, liberated, and redeemed cosmos. This cosmos cleansed of appearances, according to the Avant-garde, ought to be engendered through the truth of an art that would be able, on the one hand, to endlessly illuminate itself and draw people towards it, and on the other hand, to illuminate the world insofar as it is indeed a world. My hypothesis is that only from such an aesthetic programme, which was conceived as all-encompassing, can we truly thoroughly understand the art of Socialist Realism, according to

⁴⁴ I take my cue here from Boris Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin. Die gespaltene Kultur in der Sowjetunion* (Munich-Vienna: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1988).

which depicting the *kolkhoz*, with people dying of hunger, is not realism but “petty bourgeois naturalism” which is intrinsically “reactionary,” whereas painting the collective farms as a cheerful joyous paradise of abundance is not propaganda but “superior realism,” a ritual evocation of the paradigm inherent in reality, around which conscience and individual perception must be formed, on pain of the establishment of socialism in one country as the condition for the future liberation of the world.

As can be seen, the idea of *mimesis*, associated in the Stalin era with the so-called Leninist theory of reflection, denotes something completely different from a simple return to figurative easel painting in the traditional sense of the term. We may define it as we wish, without diminishing in any way its character of obfuscating propaganda, but there are no doubts about its visionary nature.

Andrea Oppo

THEATRE AT THE LIMIT

Jerzy Grotowski's Apocalypsis cum Figuris

Few works appear to be as deeply “apocalyptic,” in the fullest sense of the word, as Grotowski’s last theatrical production, *Apocalypsis cum Figuris*. The more one seeks diverse meanings of the very term *apocalypse*, the more likely these are to have already appeared in this play created by the Polish director in 1968 and staged until 1980.

Around 1967, at the pinnacle of his international success, Jerzy Grotowski made an unexpected move: he quit the traditional way of making theatre and turned to a different way, that is, theatre as self-exploration, a means for self-study, and, as he liked to say, a “possibility of salvation.” *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* is the work that opens the way to this path and, at the same time, epitomizes the *end* of a number of other things. As has been said, it was Grotowski’s last production as a director. It is a work in which the plot, script, and even the scenario collapse as elements in themselves, and are entirely woven into the actors’ experience of the moment. The audience itself ceases to be an audience, and spectator is transformed into participant. There is basically no more theatre—or what we traditionally thought of as theatrical elements. Admittedly, it is considered as the conclusion of Grotowski’s theatre and the shift into paratheatrical activity.

Furthermore, when one begins to examine its content, it is fairly evident that *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* is neither concerned with symbolism nor with any reference to whatever we might *consistently* imagine in our mind as “apocalypse.” Equally, it is not the theme of the “end of all things” that is dealt with here. Indeed, the script of this work is not even about a “theme.”

What, then, is the “apocalypse” mentioned in the play’s title? In what sense does Grotowski think of it? Can it be related to any aspects of Slavic sensitivity and culture? These are some of the questions this essay investigates.

At first, the most certain thing we are able to observe is that the play—as reported by some of its interpreters¹—was above all an *experience*, each time singular and unique, made by a group of actors and directed by a playwright. It was something that had to be built up each time, emotionally, on the stage, where the *text* was not the starting point, but was established in the final stage of the work. And even then, it was never an ultimate text, but something always liable to new changes. In *Apocalypsis*, the performance—as Jennifer Kumiega points out—“arose exclusively from improvisational style work”, so that, “without the actors who performed it, it ceases to exist.”² As Grotowski once declared:

In *Apocalypsis* we departed from literature. It was not a montage of texts. It was something we arrived at during rehearsals, through flashes of revelation, through improvisations. We had materials for twenty hours in the end. Out of that we had to construct something which would have its own energy, like a stream. It was only then that we turned to the text, to speech.³

It is evident that we do not have a proper *text* of this event, but, to describe it *à la* Derrida, only *traces* of it—an “echo” of a theatrical performance, handed down by a number of witnesses, which always happened in a different manner and was actually supposed to be this way. The audience was not even a normal audience: very few people attended each show, nobody has seen it twice in the same way, and the spectators, especially those who so wished, were actively (if not unobtrusively) involved in it.

This possibility—Ryszard Cieślak, the play’s main actor, once explained—lies in the very nature of the *Apocalypsis*: it emerged as the idea of the performance developed. *Apocalypsis* is only a title, a certain stream of associations: the rest is open to the unexpected, it awaits, tempts, lures the unpredictable in us and outside of us...⁴

¹ See the report on the making of *Apocalypsis cum figuris* written by Jennifer Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski* (London: Methuen Drama, 1985), 87-105.

² *Ibid.*, 90.

³ *Ibid.* Kumiega reports here an interview of Grotowski given to Ludwik Flaszen: “Conversations with Ludwik Flaszen” (reported by Eric Forsythe), in *Educational Theatre Journal* 30/3 (1978): 320.

⁴ See Ryszard Cieślak, “No-Play Acting,” *The Theatre in Poland/Le Théâtre en Pologne* 8 (1975): 5-6. See also Jennifer Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, *op. cit.*, 104.

Such an *experience* of borderline theatre—which seems, at all events, a private issue, set in the past, rather like an oral, sapiential, and scarcely transmittable event, and where admittedly, as Cieślak pointed out, “*Apocalypsis* is only a title”—has nonetheless influenced, in a decisive way, the theatre of the end of the twentieth century as well as Grotowski's personal research. In some way—and it is hard to figure out exactly how—a private experience became, in the widest meaning, universal.

We might wonder: what does all this mean?

It seems quite a tricky task, i.e. to work on a “given text” (which keeps a name, a fame, an historical influence) while knowing that text has never existed as a “stable text,” nor was that ever the author's intention. The standard philological work is off in this case. There is no *original*, uncorrupted text to restore and bring back into the light here. Had it existed, it would be, for Grotowski, one of the least authentic proofs of his work.⁵ This necessarily faces the scholar with a couple of dilemmas—to say the least. What is the “Grotowskian text”? And how would that be related to the theatrical experience? Only after answering these questions will it be possible to find a key to analyze *Apocalypsis cum figuris*, and eventually understand what apocalypse signifies for Grotowski. In the next section we will proceed, therefore, by dealing with the first question about the Grotowskian text on an entirely theoretical level, assuming a proposed reading that derives from Jacques Derrida. Then, we will move on to discuss some peculiarities of the play *Apocalypsis*. Eventually, we will conclude with an analysis of the idea of apocalypse in Grotowski as derived from the previous assumptions.

1. Speech, Writing, and Trace: Grotowski via Derrida

From what has been pointed out so far, it would seem there are only two options left in our understanding of this case. The first is to pick a written version of *Apocalypsis* and to analyze what is found in *that* script. The second is to consider *Apocalypsis* solely as an oral and singular event and so

⁵ The general idea that theatre may exist even without a text—as its primary essence is constituted by the actor—can be found throughout Grotowski's experience, in his writings and interviews. On this point see, in particular, a crucial interview collected in his main theoretical work, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, ed. Eugenio Barba (London: Methuen Drama, 1991), 55-59 (the book was first published in 1968).

to investigate it accordingly (i.e. through the verbal evidences of witnesses). In the first option, we would certainly betray the author's explicit legacy as well as the true genesis of the work. In the latter, while preserving the pureness of the original experience, we would detract from any artistic property of the work by considering it as something that has neither substance nor *structure* in itself. In both cases, whether with reference to the authenticity or the artistic value of the work, we are missing something. Above all, we are missing Grotowski's ideas, which are the real "text" to investigate here, since they are the source of everything that was produced under his supervision. However, his ideas are contained neither in a specific book, since he claimed his theory to be primarily an oral teaching,⁶ nor entirely in their own "action," i.e. in the experience itself, which is always a *particular kind* of experience. There is a third option, however, which allows us to avoid the irreducibility of the opposition between writing and orality. As previously said, this comes from the French philosopher and critic Jacques Derrida, whose thought seems to fit this case and parts, at least, of Grotowski's general conception of theatre, very aptly.

In many of his works, Derrida sets those two terms—logos and writing, speech and text—in an apparently unsolvable dualism.⁷ In particular, in the first part of *Dissemination* (1972),⁸ while following Plato's reasoning, the French philosopher depicts the logos-writing dichotomy as entirely unbalanced in favor of the first term. Only logos would keep "the truth as the presence (*ousia*) of the present (*on*)."⁹ Writing, on the contrary, "has no essence or value of its own ... It plays within the simulacrum. It is

⁶ As Richard Schechner observes, "Grotowski has written no book. Most of what is published under his name are records of meetings or interviews. Of the fourteen items in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, only four were written by Grotowski.... Of the five great forces in European theatre in the twentieth century—Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Brecht, Artaud, and Grotowski—Grotowski is the least writerly" (see Richard Schechner, "Exoduction," in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, ed. Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford [London & New York: Routledge, 1997], 466).

⁷ Although in different ways and with varied references, this question characterizes all the studies of the early Derrida: starting from his first book *Of Grammatology* (first published in 1967), and passing through *Voice and Phenomenon* (1967), *Writing and Difference* (1967), *Dissemination* (1972), and *Margins of Philosophy* (1972).

⁸ See Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: The Athlone Press, 1981) (originally published as *La Dissémination* [Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972]).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

in its type the mime of memory, of knowledge, of truth, etc.”¹⁰ This is the core of the myth of Theuth, narrated by Plato in the *Phaedrus* (274c-275b), which Derrida takes up in his philosophical argument.¹¹ The myth, as Plato puts it, would establish the incompatibility of what is *written* with what is *true*. The very act of writing is, in fact, a *mise en scène*, and the writer, namely the sophist, is “the man of non-presence and of non-truth.”¹²

But is this what Plato ultimately believes in? According to Derrida, not at all. There is something more in that myth, something the French philosopher demonstrates at the end of his analysis. In pointing out Socrates’ final reply to Phaedrus within the same dialogue (276a and 278a), Derrida underlines the existence of a “third kind” behind logos and writing. It is defined as “another sort of writing” and “as an *inscription* of truth in the soul.”¹³ Hence, also with reference to Plato’s other dialogues, Derrida derives his conception of “psychic writing,” that is capable of “sustaining itself in living dialogue,”¹⁴ which is the *trace*, the law of *pure difference*. For Derrida, there is indeed an apparent contradiction here, which he calls “the written proposal of logocentrism.”¹⁵ Plato *writes* of the primacy of logos, and he does so *after* Socrates’ death. In the manner of Plato—Derrida argues—the linguistics elaborated by Rousseau and Saussure must also exclude writing and draw on it at the same time. In reality, this contradiction (for Plato, as for Rousseau, Saussure, and, ultimately, Derrida) conforms to a constant necessity: what the French philosopher calls “*différance*,” with an intentional spelling mistake in the French language. Logos and writing are

¹⁰ Ibid., 105.

¹¹ At the end of the *Phaedrus*, Plato makes Socrates tell the story of when the semi-God Theuth, the inventor of writing according to Egyptian mythology, for the first time offers his invention to Thamus, the king of gods. Theuth describes writing as a *pharmakon*, that is, a very powerful *potion* for memory and for wisdom (*Phaedrus*, 274e). Such a remedy (*pharmakon*), however, has no value in itself: it will be up to the king to determine its value. Thamus, as Plato relates, did not explicitly refuse that gift, but he downgraded it. He considered it to be not only a useless means, but also a menace and a sin.

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, op. cit., 68.

¹³ Ibid., 149.

¹⁴ Ibid., 154. “... capable most of all of properly teaching the true, as it is *already* constituted” (ibidem).

¹⁵ Ibid., 158.

not the origin, but they are both offspring with similar traits, and they are defined by the shape of *différance*—the *difference as difference*, that which originates any reference, any relationship. Both speech and text are derived from a mechanism that is difficult to distinguish, since they always take on a specific form (voice, text, meaning, reference, etc.). Evidently, something about truth has been lost along the way, since alterity burst into the unity of being: what Derrida calls the original “parricide.” Only an unwritable trace can be retained from that truth. The Derridean approach to the issue of text’s truth is *technically* anti-philological, i.e. there is no *original* evidence to search for and bring to light, as previously pointed out, but only a common *origin* of any evidence, whether the latter is written or spoken.

In a different essay, this time dedicated to Antonin Artaud,¹⁶ Derrida investigates the same issue with specific relation to theatre. While taking on many of Artaud’s ideas, mostly expressed in his *Theatre and Its Double*, the French philosopher believes that the art of theatre, in which text and voice can be found together, is one of the privileged places where the “murder” of the Logos/Father can be better understood. Along with Artaud, Derrida states that western theatre is stillborn; for this reason, it bears a constant “empty place” (Artaud) within itself. Offering an imitation of life on a stage is of no use. Theatre, according to the two French authors, has been always forced to do that which it was not made for. In this sense, it was born right on its own disappearance. The theatre of cruelty is “the void, the place that is empty and waiting for this theater which has not yet ‘begun to exist.’”¹⁷ Cruelty cannot be a representation: “It is life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable. Life is the nonrepresentable origin of representation.”¹⁸ This is the meaning of the expression “theatre and its double.” “Art” says Artaud, as quoted by Derrida, “is not the imitation of life, but life is the imitation of a transcendental principle which art puts

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, “Le théâtre de la cruauté et la clôture de la représentation,” *Critique* 230 (1966): 595-618. The text was reprinted with small variants in Jacques Derrida, *L’Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967). English translation: Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, op. cit., 294.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

us into communication with once again.”¹⁹ The art of theatre should be, therefore, the primordial and privileged place of this destruction of imitation. “Released from the text and the author-god,” Derrida concludes, “mise en scène would be returned to its creative and founding freedom.”²⁰

The origin of theater—Derrida writes—such as it must be restored, is the hand lifted against the abusive wielder of the logos, against the father, against the God of a stage subjugated to the power of speech and text.²¹

In this theatre, speech and writing “will once more become *gestures*.”²² While the word as such is the *cadaver of psychic speech*, only the “Speech before words” (Artaud) is able to push us to that limit where the word is not yet born. All this is a new theatrical writing: not only a phonetic writing, not a mere transcription of words, but, using Artaud’s expression, it is a real “hieroglyphic writing.” It is something very close to a dream, but not in a psychoanalytic sense: cruelty, for Artaud, is conscience. It is pure presence as a “pure difference.” It is to perform, *only once*, a single act of pure presence, as a statement of the impossibility of repetition. The very idea of *parricide* calls for a theatre of cruelty which attempts the impossible fulfillment of representing the unrepresentable: the *second phase of Creation*, as Artaud would say—the one of difficulty and of the Double. In Derrida’s view, Artaud kept himself in the closest proximity to this “limit,” where recovery of the murdered was almost possible; where the empty place was, indeed, the authentic trace of what theatre and truth should have been.

As is known, Artaud was one of the main inspirational sources for Grotowski. On many occasions the Polish director declared that fact, and defined him as a “prophet” and a “great theatre-poet,” as he considered that “theatre should be a creative art in itself, and not just duplicate what literature was doing.”²³ There are, in fact, many similarities between Artaud’s

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 295.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 299.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 301.

²² *Ibid.*, 302.

²³ Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, op. cit., 87. For Grotowski’s opinion of Artaud, see the whole chapter “He Wasn’t Entirely Himself” (*Ibid.*, 85-93).

general theory and the specific applications made by Grotowski. In this regard, critics like Ben Chaim²⁴ even considered Grotowski's entire body of work as an extension of Artaud's project. Although it is beyond doubt that the Grotowski of the paratheatrical period, with the disruption of the representational frame and the abandonment of the distinction between performers and spectators, is to all intents and purposes close to the theatre of cruelty, there are nonetheless significant differences between the two authors. Grotowski claims, "Artaud left no concrete technique behind him" so that "it is impossible to carry out his proposals."²⁵ Simply put, those who do it "reveal a lack of professional skill, a sense of groping, and a love of easy solutions."²⁶ "Does this mean that he was wrong?" Grotowski asks. "Certainly not,"²⁷ he answers. "And yet when Artaud speaks of release and cruelty we feel he's touching a truth we can verify in another way."²⁸

For this reason, Grotowski baptized his group of actors "Laboratory Theatre," to stress the predominant role of research and experimentation over any necessity of performance. Acting, for Grotowski, is to *transgress* the rules and to *provoke* the spectator, in the accomplishment of what he calls a "total act." This is an absolute disarmament by means of which the actor reveals and sacrifices "the innermost part of himself, the most painful, that which is not intended for the eyes of the world."²⁹ The actor, then, makes a total gift of himself. This specific point, namely the actor-audience relationship, is for Grotowski the core of theatrical art.³⁰ The Polish director

²⁴ See Daphna Ben Chaim, *Distance in the Theatre: The Aesthetics of Audience Response* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984). The same idea is shared by Robert Findlay (see Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford, eds., *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, op. cit., 174).

²⁵ Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, op. cit., 86. "I am often asked about Artaud when I speak of 'cruelty,' although his formulations were based on different premises and took a different tack. Artaud was an extraordinary visionary, but his writings have little methodological meaning because they are not a product of long-term practical investigations. They are an astounding prophecy, not a program." (*Ibid.*, 23-24).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 15-25.

here shows a faith in such an act that is unknown to Artaud. "If I speak of a 'total act,' it's because I have the feeling that there is an alternative to 'the theatre of cruelty.'"³¹ "Even if it doesn't protect us from the dark powers," Grotowski writes about the total act, "at least it enables us to respond totally, that is begin to exist."³² While on the one hand, this positive faith on "experiencing the truth" radically differentiates Grotowski and Artaud, on the other hand, the breaking of traditional theatre boundaries and the breaking of the faith in any structure or *text* behind theatre form their most evident point in common (the same point, however, marks a significant difference between Grotowski and Artaud on the one hand, and Beckett on the other, who apparently still keeps the traditional structures of theatre³³).

In this case, the general frame of Derrida's thought about "true writing," makes it easier to understand the Grotowskian relationship between the "total act" and the "text" of a theatre play. For Grotowski, the primacy of the body does not mean absolute faith in pure presence on stage. His idea of theatre is neither a hysterical action nor a form of catharsis. On the contrary, he believes in a singular necessity, a "sense of order" as he calls it, which lies behind the incarnation of a gesture in the body. Quoting Artaud, he writes: "Cruelty is rigour."³⁴ There is a necessary text to guide the actors' performance.

What, then, is the "Grotowskian text"—the one that a reader should look for "behind" *Apocalypsis*? According to the Polish author, it is a call for the total presence, a lost presence: an act that aims to save the pureness of a presence that has become impossible in the "second half of Creation." This is what Grotowski means when saying the actor "begins to exist" in the fullness of a total act—a total *gift*. Although he does not name it thus, Grotowski clearly refers to a pre-existing "text," neither written, and technically unwritable, nor spoken. This text is the "full life," structurally present as an unwritten trace, as Derrida would say. It is that *structure* to which Grotowski relates when he turns to the rigour and necessity of

³¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

³² *Ibid.*, 92-93.

³³ For a detailed comparison between Samuel Beckett and Jerzy Grotowski see my work, *Philosophical Aesthetics and Samuel Beckett* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008), 237-250.

³⁴ Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, op. cit., 93.

balancing spontaneity and discipline. Thus, while working on *Apocalypsis cum figuris* over many years, Grotowski had in his mind a specific *text* of it. As if it were in parallel with Derrida's "psychic writing," Grotowski once called his "text" "the psychic act."³⁵ Like the Derridean *trace* it is never "as such." "In it, or rather towards it," Grotowski said, "man [czlowiek] acts with his living presence."³⁶ Being an irreducible difference, thus a "différance" (the state of presence/absence as the proper nature of the trace), that trace is incompatible with the state of retention. It is, rather, an unrepresentable origin (Derrida), which can only be *set to work*, as Heidegger would say. It cannot be by chance that in a crucial passage of *Apocalypsis*, towards the end, the main protagonist, the Simpleton, using T. S. Eliot's verses, mentions "the unspoken word, the Word unheard/the Word without a word," whose *realm* is never *here*.³⁷

2. Apocalypsis, the Play

It is a fact that, in the years following the classic productions of the Laboratory Theatre, such as *Doctor Faustus* (1963) and *The Constant Prince* (1965), Grotowski's crucial idea of "poor theatre" reached its most mature definition as "what takes place between spectator and actor." "The core of the theatre is an encounter," Grotowski would repeat many times.³⁸ This encounter between actor and spectator, but also between director and actor and, above all, between the actor and *himself*, would become evident, in all its consequences, in the next production, *Apocalypsis cum figuris* of 1968.

If only the "encounter" matters, then as a result the scenic space in *Apocalypsis* is entirely created by the actions of actors and their constantly

³⁵ See the text of a famous conference held by Grotowski at the Town Hall, New York City, on 12 December 1972: Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford, eds., *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, op. cit., 221.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Jennifer Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, op. cit., 262. The poem, which is part of the script of *Apocalypsis* and is quoted by Jennifer Kumiega in her account of it, is taken from T.S. Eliot's "Ash Wednesday V."

³⁸ Ibid., 56. In defining his art this way, Grotowski unequivocally states a distinction between his idea of theatre and that of other authors (certainly Artaud, Beckett, and Brecht, but also Stanislavskij and Dullin).

shifting positions with respect to themselves and to the spectators. With no previously constructed scenic arrangement (so that audience and actors were not addressed in a specific role, but just like in real life they had to conquer and maintain one), there was also no dramatic text to which the actors were called to respond. In the very beginning, the play had no life on its own, but the actors were invited to create it on an almost entirely improvisational basis. This process, which was long, complex and erratic, lasted nearly three years. As Jennifer Kumiega points out, "it was not until the action was finally crystallized that the actors were asked to make a personal search through literature for the texts to which they and their creation responded."³⁹ Most of the reflection from that time happened to be on the New Testament and, specifically, on the figure of Jesus Christ. The lines spoken by the actors turned out to be a number of mingled passages taken from Dostoevskij, T. S. Eliot, the Bible, and Simone Weil. *Apocalypsis* was eventually performed by six actors (five men and a woman), in a completely bare space, surrounded on four sides by the audience, and with two spotlights aimed obliquely at the ceiling. A few props were also on the stage: a loaf of bread, a knife, and some candles. These are, more or less, all the evident elements of the play. The quoted texts by Dostoevskij or Eliot or Weil, at first glance, are not as much help as one might expect since they do not form a coherent plot, but should be viewed in the context of the personal experience of the actors who chose them. There is a video of *Apocalypsis*, made by the Italian film director Ermanno Olmi, which shows clearly how difficult it would be to see this play from the outside. The video itself *epitomizes*, one might say, the intrinsic reasons why Grotowski did not conceive this work for normal, external viewers. It is clear that *Apocalypsis* must be lived from within, either as actors or as involved spectators, without a third option.

A full account of the final script, provided by Jennifer Kumiega, who attended many performances from 1972 to 1978, is instead much more useful and interesting.⁴⁰ Albeit, as the author observes,

³⁹ Jennifer Kumiega, "Laboratory Theatre/Grotowski/The Mountain Project," in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, ed. Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford, op. cit., 236.

⁴⁰ See "Appendix: *Apocalypsis cum figuris*; Translation and personal account," in Jennifer Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, op. cit., 239-271. This is a very precious document about the play, as are Kumiega's personal recollections of the events of *Apocalypsis cum figuris*, after she

for several reasons an objective, definitive description and interpretation of *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris* is not possible. On the one hand there is the factor that during the twelve years it was presented to the public it underwent continual transformation and evolution, so that the performance finally witnessed in 1980 was vastly different from the 1968 closed premiere both in external, structural features and in terms of its inner content and feeling Far more difficult to describe, however, was the structural density of the production: as an art form it was possibly closer to poetry than anything else.⁴¹

According to Margaret Croyden, T. S. Eliot's "method of compressing central metaphors, his utilization of myths and history"⁴² are crucial in this play, and Grotowski's empathy with the English poet can be seen to this extent. As Konstanty Puzyna argues, giving possibly one of the best descriptions of this play:

It is the laws of poetry, not prose, which hold sway here: distant associations, overlapping metaphors, tableaux, actions and meanings continually fading into each other. Once again the imagery is all in actors. It is embodied in gesture and mime, movement and intonation, groupings and place-changes, inward reactions and counter-reactions Meanings are multiplied and telescoped; an actor's face will express one thing, the motion of his hand another, the response of his partner something else again.⁴³

Yet, despite all the multiple levels of significance indicated above, a storyline still exists and, following the lead of Dostoevskij's *Legend of Great Inquisitor*, it deals with the Second Coming: a return of Christ to Earth, in the present day. A group of ordinary people enters the stage, along with the audience, all dressed in everyday clothes. When the actors among that group find a tramp, an idiot, they decide to engage in play-acting at his expense: he

attended numerous performances over many years and also worked on the Polish script of the play. See also Kumiega's above-mentioned essay about the play: Jennifer Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, op. cit., 87-105.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 93.

⁴³ Konstanty Puzyna, "A Myth Vivisected: Grotowski's *Apocalypsis*," in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, ed. Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford, op. cit., 88-90.

is elected to be their Savior. In that moment, the actors finally choose to play the roles of Simon Peter, John, Mary Magdalene, Judas, and Lazarus. Then, there is the Simpleton/Christ, who, just like Dostoevskij's character Idiot, is the innocent victim, the "pure of God," but whose name (*Ciemny*) in Polish means "The Dark One." Faithful to their roles, the actors play the Last Supper, the Betrayal, Golgotha, and the Crucifixion. All actions are centered on the Simpleton who produces in his tormentors jumbled and contrasting feelings: pleasure, rage, pity and final acceptance. However, he himself seems to be consumed by the power of his own role. In the final scene, only he and Simon Peter are left on stage, with the latter in the role of the Great Inquisitor.

Briefly putting aside the question of the interpretation of this plot, it is interesting to underline a number of recognizable elements in *Apocalypsis*. Firstly: a script, or text, totally subordinated to the actors' personal *erlebnis* and, above all, totally subordinated to another underlying text—a trace Grotowski had in mind of a "total psychic act." Secondly: a plurality of possible interpretations given by the multiple levels of meanings and narratives interwoven in the action. And ultimately, almost as a con-tradiction to all these, an extension of Grotowski's manifesto, the "poor theatre" concept, which here is taken to its very limit. Over the years, as the staging of *Apocalypsis* went on, costumes, objects, and even attention to the lighting of the stage were progressively abandoned. This process of elimination implicitly raised the question of the aesthetic value of Grotowski's theatre. The director himself, in fact, pondered that point more than once: "I feel that *Apocalypsis cum figuris* is, for me, a new stage of our research. We have crossed a certain barrier I am not interested in the theatre anymore."⁴⁴

At this point, one might wonder why and how it was possible that a play "that is not a *play*" made Grotowski's fame more than any other? It is indeed, his most acclaimed production all over the world, the one he worked on for thirteen years. Many theatre groups in Europe and America, especially in the seventies, based their work on the principles elaborated by Laboratory Theatre and following this specific experience. Yet, the

⁴⁴ See Jennifer Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, op. cit., 99-100. Grotowski's quotes are taken from two different conferences he held in 1970.

performance has been seen by relatively few people, considering the way it was made—and it has no objective relevance outside the small group of actors who made it. It is clearly something other than a work of art, in the standard sense that we use that term. There has not been and there might possibly never be any artistic appreciation of *Apocalypsis* by a normal audience.

Evidently, Grotowski's *Apocalypsis* counts for what it means, not for what it shows or represents. It is something closer to a manual of instructions or a handbook of practical exercises, which are entirely subordinated to the enacting of their contents. But Grotowski did not leave a book. On the contrary, as we have seen, he was against writing—he was pro oral tradition. He left a vanishing-thing, an echo of an experience that, taken as such, pertained exclusively to those who made it. It is possible that the meaning of this experience lies in the *meaning itself*. In other words, *Apocalypsis cum figuris* “means” its own experience. Beyond any intent of exposure or of representation, the event of something totally authentic, like the thing-presenting-itself, in some way left a trace: an *untraceable* trace, if it can be so said. This is the real script of *Apocalypsis*. Only from the *inside*—since in this case there is no “outside text,” to use Derrida's term—is there a chance to *read* that event.

3. Grotowski's Apocalypse

Apocalypsis cum figuris is indeed a strange case to deal with critically. In analyzing a work of art, it is fairly rare that indirect sources and evidences—like interviews and impressions by its interpreters, or theoretical reflections on it—are more relevant than the direct ones, such as the script or the video of this work. As a matter of fact, Grotowski purposely conceived his production in this way. To understand its meaning, it is therefore necessary to observe this work as he intended it to be, i.e. to apply, as it were, an external eye to the whole story.

In sum, this is what happened. At the end of sixties, after an attested period of uncertainty and creative crisis, Grotowski decided to turn to a paratheatrical experience. He broke down the common boundaries of theatre and abandoned any established artistic convention in order to focus exclusively on the relationship between actors and spectators in search of a free, authentic, and *total* encounter. As reported by some of the protago-

nists of that experience, this turned out to be more difficult than expected, because of the role of the director himself, who was a necessary intruder in that relationship. The whole concept was rethought to include the director as well. After an initial period of serious difficulty for the actors in relation to their director, Grotowski suddenly changed his attitude and decided to let things happen only by listening and observing. "He sat silently," Ludwik Flaszen relates, "waiting, hour after hour... At that point there was no more theatre, because theatre to some extent requires dictatorship."⁴⁵ Whether Grotowski still interfered much or not in the whole process is difficult to say. Just as it is hard to figure out to what extent the final result was his own or the actors' achievement. What is relevant to our comprehension, instead, is highlighting the starting point and general direction of this event. The "day after" having chosen to leave aside the conventional structures of theatre, Grotowski decided to work on the idea of apocalypse.⁴⁶

Why apocalypse? And, above all: which apocalypse? The answer to some extent seems obvious: the collapse of an external structure (i.e. the usual theatrical canons), in order to emphasize just the human being on stage, could only be followed by another breakdown, that is, of the boundaries of subjectivity. Just as the stage was freed from its identity, so the interpreters should be liberated from their own conventions.⁴⁷ In this regard, Grotowski invited them to carry out a personal research on their stories and on their unconscious, to rid themselves of any imposed structure in their minds and feelings. Total liberation should take place through total transgression. Yet, all this was not in order to get to chaos, to hysteria, but to achieve what Grotowski calls "the man as he is"—not "his mask," not "the role he plays," not "his game," or "his image of himself," but "only

⁴⁵ Quoted by Jennifer Kumiega. *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴⁶ As Kumiega suggests (*ibid.*, 91-92), the play's title would come from Thomas Mann's own notes to *Doctor Faustus*, and is related to the novel's main character Adrian Leverkühn who composed his great work, *Apocalypsis cum figuris*, at the age of 35 and intentionally contracted syphilis to deepen his artistic inspiration through madness.

⁴⁷ This is a point Grotowski constantly stated and repeated in his public speeches: "What does it mean: not to hide oneself? Simply to be whole—'I am as I am'—then our experience and life are opening themselves It is not theatre that is indispensable but: to cross the frontiers between you and me" (Jerzy Grotowski, "Holiday," in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, ed. Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford, *op. cit.*, 222-223).

himself.”⁴⁸ The achievement of this *essential man* would be possible “only in relation to an existence other than himself.”⁴⁹ Hence, the Polish director’s continuous insistence on the balance between spontaneity and discipline.

It is evident here that Grotowski must already have had in mind an idea of that “pure presence,” in a Derridean way, i.e. the true existence *before* existence. Far from any symbolism, this is the real “Second Coming” according to Grotowski, and Christ is the key figure in all this. It is a universal myth, rooted within us all, which epitomizes the “Word without a word”—to quote Eliot’s verse in the play—and the Body before bodies.⁵⁰ To this extent, Grotowski’s and Derrida’s views appear to be almost equivalent, although the Polish author believes in a concrete and direct way of accessing that truth.

Apocalypse, for Grotowski, is the fall of the superstructure of identity, in search of the inner and original Christ, the Dostoevskian “Simpleton,” within the Subject. As previously said, all this comes before words, before any text, and stands behind life itself. Since the play—as a specific form of theatrical structure—vanishes, the *play* or strategy of the Ego should similarly be left behind, in order to let the “pure presence” begin to exist. This can be achieved through a total, unmediated, unforeseen “gift” of the actor. Since the relationship, as Grotowski repeated so many times, is the most authentic and last way of staying in this world, the total gift of oneself is the “act” par excellence. The “figurae” named in the play’s title are precisely the *shapes* of relationship in which the apocalypse of the subject takes its form by means of a total act. It is, indeed, always a subjective event: *Apocalypsis* concerned Ryszard Cieślak, Antoni Jahółkowski, Rena Mirecka, and all interpreters of the play, and no one else. Nonetheless, that experience spread throughout the world by virtue of its own significance.

⁴⁸ Grotowski’s words are quoted here by Jennifer Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, op. cit., 162.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ This is how Eugenio Barba, one of Grotowski’s earliest followers, reformulated that concept: it is the “pre-expressive decided body” existing before any particular kind of action or performance, and in this way thus shows the truth that is behind phenomena (cf. Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese, *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* [London: Routledge, 1991], quoted in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, ed. Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford, op. cit., 493).

In the following twenty years, starting from the mid-seventies, other shifts occurred in Grotowski's evolution. He went through a series of phases defined as "Theatre of Sources" (1976-1982), "Objective Drama" (1983-1986), and "Art as Vehicle" (1986-1999).⁵¹ In most of these cases, during the eighties and nineties and until the author's death, theatrical art is far removed from Grotowski's focus. More and more, he took up a kind of spirituality linked to oral traditions, such as Gurdjieff, Hasidism—especially Martin Buber's interpretation of it—the Sufi masters, and Emile Jacques Dalcroze; but also studied the American connections to this tradition, like the gestalt therapists Fritz and Laura Perls or the inventor of psychodrama, Jacob Moreno. A number of Grotowski-influenced groups arose throughout the world, modelled on Hasidic and Gurdjieffian closed-circle communities. For the Polish director, though, theatre was still, and remained so until the end, the main field in which to carry out his experiments, although no longer as product, as a performance, but rather as a process or a practice. Undoubtedly, *Apocalypsis cum figuris* was the turning point of Grotowski's artistic life precisely because it impelled him to leave behind *art*, in order to solely follow *life*.

In this way, a last question arises. Given what apocalypse is for Grotowski, i.e. the total fall and re-birth of the purest "I" by means of an *encounter*, one might ask why just the "apocalypse"? If his main intent was spiritual, why did he pick that idea instead of others: for instance, *freedom*, *awareness*, or *happiness*? Does the very idea of "apocalypse," and the figure of Christ that Grotowski strictly connects to it, hide something different from a "purification," an "openness," a "quest for authenticity," or a "path towards spirituality," as it is meant in an oriental way (in which Grotowski was equally very interested). The apocalypse recalls the end as such, the exposed suffering, the person in need of redemption, more than redemption itself. Above all, it evokes the Cross of Christ, as the ultimate act of his life, since salvation must be found through *that* Cross, and not through other ways. This is the Christian essence of the idea of "final end." How did Grotowski relate to such questions, supposing they were on his mind? A possible answer comes from a controversial passage in *Towards*

⁵¹ For an overview on these periods of Grotowski's research, see in particular *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, ed. Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford, op. cit., 207-494.

a Poor Theatre which has been commented on many times by critics. In this passage, Grotowski quotes a phrase by Artaud, which

holds the very foundation of the actor's art of extreme and ultimate action. "Actors [Artaud says] should be like martyrs burnt alive, still signalling to us from their stakes" Like the mystical prophet Isaiah, he [Artaud] predicts a new possible incarnation. "Then Emmanuel was born." Like Isaiah, Artaud knew of Emmanuel's coming, and what it promised. He saw the image of it through a glass, darkly.⁵²

The idea of apocalypse should be situated between *death* and *salvation*. It is a passage that, while keeping the idea of the "end of all things," also contains in itself another idea of a total, unforeseen "new birth." Before the new birth takes its shape, the *unshaped* figure of apocalypse, which shows things *darkly* and as through a *glass*, is the wait for an encounter. For Grotowski, the figure of Christ is crucial in this interregnum, as Christ is the sacrificial victim who retains within himself the way towards a new beginning. Such a reference to Christianity in its more universal imagery—which is indeed a Slavic trait in Grotowski—would not be as usual in the years following this production. After 1975, new phases in his personal research, as previously mentioned, would take different directions from this. Not surprisingly, the paratheatrical phase is the only Grotowskian phase without a specific label to define it, whereas the others reveal in their very title the meaning of their aim. Appropriately, "apocalypse" might be the name and core of the paratheatrical research. It is not by chance that Dostoevskij, with the two characters derived from Christ that he developed (Prince Myškin and the Christ of the *Legend of Great Inquisitor*), along with the tragic Christianity of T. S. Eliot and Simone Weil, constitute the crucial references of this phase. Dostoevskij's *Legend*, intertwined with the protagonist of *The Idiot*, is without qualification the main frame in which to inscribe the plot of *Apocalypsis cum figuris*. Apocalypse is thus a passage, as it was for Grotowski—towards his own redemption and new targets for his research. In this shift, while abandoning theatre and art in general—and thus living through his own veritable apocalypse—he also showed his deep

⁵² Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, op. cit., 93.

entrenchment in the Slavic idea by linking this crucial time to one of the greatest of Dostoevskij's narratives: the Second Coming, as it is expressed in the *Legend of Great Inquisitor*. After this time, he moved to other, "Far Eastern" territories, in search of more definite or specific contents and experiences to live: "sources," "objectives," and "vehicles." In so doing, he consigned apocalypse to the middle of his life.

Alessio Scarlato

ON APOCALYPSE, WITCHES AND DESICCATED TREES

A Reading of Andrej Tarkovskij's The Sacrifice

1. A Lecture

“Without doubt, the Apocalypse is the greatest poetic work ever created on Earth.”¹ With these words, the Russian film director Andrej Tarkovskij elaborated on the intentions of his interpretation of the *Apocalypse* [Revelation of St John the Divine] during a lecture held in the church of St James, London, in July 1984. This assertion appears to put a stop to any attempt at a theological deciphering of *The Apocalypse*. During his years of exile, however, Tarkovskij stressed the religious dimension of this poetic work with ever-increasing conviction. Indeed, he continued, asserting that the *Apocalypse* is “inspired from on high, it is an event which sets out, in effect, all the divine laws ascribed to man.”² The structure of his speech, if read using the apocalyptic quotations as reference points, is conceptually rigorous.

First Step. The *Apocalypse* consists of images, and not of symbols.³ This dichotomy—a theme on which Tarkovskij wrote many variations—is based on a distinction between the *infinity* of interpretations of an image and the possibility of a univocal interpretation of the symbol, which has its own precise meaning according to a decoding key, or according to prescriptive notions or rules which predetermine how it should be

* Translated into English by Karen Turnbull.

¹ Andrej Tarkovskij, *L'Apocalisse*, translated into Italian by Andrej A. Tarkovskij (Florence: Edizioni della Meridiana, 2005), 17.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

read.⁴ According to a tradition which, from the apophatic definitions of Pseudo-Dionysius onwards, has marked Orthodox Christianity, the Divine plan can only be contemplated and expressed antinomically.⁵ In a single move, Tarkovskij therefore rejects hermeneutical readings (and philosophies of history) which claim to *pinpoint* the end of time. “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand” (Revelation 1:3). The proximity of time impels the *individual* to look within himself, bringing an awareness of responsibility with regard to one’s own life, calling for comparison with those images, without being able to base oneself on a univocal symbol-word, on a Law which might predetermine the meaning of one’s own actions. This move is not surprising, if one considers how *Stalker* (1979) depicted in a post-apocalyptic scenario the slow decay of the Soviet regime and the deformation of the Messianic urge, and how *Nostalgia* (1983) gave an angst-ridden description of the renunciation by the western world—which at that time was swamped in its own idle chatter and intellectual curiosities—of all prospect of radical change. Behind this rejection of revolutionary perversion and of western indifference, we find a long-established tradition in Russian culture—which was charted several times by Berdjaev during the first decades of the twentieth century, starting from the Christ in Dostoevskij’s *The Legend of Great Inquisitor*—and which continued to act below the surface in Russian dissidence, as well as in seemingly offbeat works such as Venedikt Erofeev’s *Moscow-Petuški* (1977)⁶, or films such as Larisa Šepit’ko’s *The Ascent* (1976). Personalism and *sobornost’*, as opposed to western individualism and soviet collectivism.

Second Step. How can responsibility be reconciled with artistic creation? Here, Tarkovskij readdressed the problem of *Andrej Rublëv* (1966). Creation is not a manifestation of the power of the human intellect,

4 This dichotomy is expressed quite incisively in Vjačeslav Ivanov’s early twentieth century essays on *realistic symbolism*, which Tarkovskij explicitly referenced. These essays are now collected in: Vjačeslav Ivanov, *Sobranie Sočinenii*, 4 vols. (Bruxelles: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1971-1987).

5 The most important study on the role of antinomy in defining the Trinity in Russian religious philosophy remains Florenskij’s masterpiece, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters* (1914).

6 English translation: *Moscow to the End of the Line* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1992).

but a talent which in mankind corresponds, in *image* and in *likeness*, to Divine creativity. Art becomes sinful when it strays from its own theurgical dimension, and as in the innumerable avant-garde experiments or in the frantic pursuit of profit, forgets its responsibility to the gift of talent. The eschatological anxiety which drives Tarkovskij leads him, as in the great Russian masters of fiction—Tolstoj and Dostoevskij above all—to not assume that art is an intellectual pleasure whose field of use has been defined since time immemorial, thus reducing it to an inoffensive activity. Rather, art is called into question each time, so that it does not adapt itself to the rules of “this world,” and thus retains its prophetic truth.⁷ The messianic aspect of many avant-garde studies is, however, disregarded by Tarkovskij, and the concept of art as *experiment* is seen as a manifestation of a Promethean anxiety which innervates modern culture.⁸ This is reminiscent of the Russian *Intelligentsia*’s turn-of-the-century debates regarding the 1914 Picasso exhibition in Moscow, and their views on Picasso’s dissected, decomposed and reassembled figures, devoid of direct anthropocentric reference, typical of the “demonic” manner of the avant-garde. Disregarding the divine origin of creative talent leads to the degeneration of an *entirely human* art, whether it be precisely those avant-garde attempts which ended in the illusory reversal developed by the revolutionary movement,⁹ or whether it be works designed to create value: “Art transforms itself either into some sort of formal research or, simply, into a commodity for sale.”¹⁰ While the most radical avant-garde experiments strove not only for new forms but also for a new phase of being, their fulfillment lay in the revolutionary attempt to

⁷ Art is the experience of truth and not solely a presentation of the cognitive powers of the Subject (as in Kant).

⁸ In this regard, see the numerous analyses of *Sculpting In Time* (for example: Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. Kitty Hunter Blair [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986], 36-56, 94-103).

⁹ One author who offered many insights on the dynamics between avant-garde Prometheanism, and the totalitarian desire of the revolutionary movement, is Nikolaj Berdjaev, who between the two World Wars represented the fundamental element of mediation between European culture and Russian religious philosophy. More recently, the subject was tackled, from a culturalological viewpoint, in the numerous essays contributed by Boris Groys (cf. Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992]).

¹⁰ Andrej Tarkovskij, *L'Apocalisse*, op. cit., 19-20.

create a new man—an attempt which consequently forsook the worship of works of art, and instead used art as a tool for the *aestheticization of politics*. On the other hand, reducing art to mere merchandise also disregards the creative element which, although distorted, drives the quests of the avant-garde, and adaptation to *this* world thus becomes its only aim.¹¹

Tarkovskij clarifies the spiritualist boundaries of his thoughts, connecting such humanistic applications of art to the feeling of fear. The origins of society can be found in the need to defend oneself against the aggressions of others and of nature. The touchstone of historical evolution can be found in that capability of defence, or in other words in that ability to progress technologically, which leads to oblivion or disregard of the original gift; freedom. Although approached from the point of view of religion, we find that the same fear of technology dominates much of twentieth century thinking, in Heidegger above all. However, whereas Heidegger saw in technology the destiny and fulfilment of the history of mankind, the Russian traditions to which Tarkovskij refers see in it only the loss of primordial freedom: “We are losing that which we were originally given, and that is the freedom of choice, free will.”¹² The indifference of art as merchandise to its own content and the Promethean fear of art as a revolution are both a result of the loss of original freedom, or in other words, of the *non-necessity* of the creation of the world, and of the possibility of its apocalyptic transfiguration, which should not be considered—in the manner of revolutionary messianism—as the completion of history, but rather as a *deviation* from it, as a *breaking-off*. The places of the *Apocalypse* which Tarkovskij cites thus find their relevance. On the one hand, creativity must be freed from indifference: “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:15-16). On the other hand, creativity must be yoked to an awareness of debt to the Prince of creation: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Revelation 3:19).

¹¹ This outline helps clarify the origin of the numerous Manichaean criticisms of Tarkovskij, who was at heart completely disinterested in Hollywood cinema and also strongly critical of the pursuits of the Soviet avant-garde, in particular of Ejzenštejn, to whom the lessons of *Rublëv* also apply.

¹² Andrej Tarkovskij, *L'Apocalisse*, op. cit., 21.

Third Step. Creativity which is both free and yet aware of its own indebtedness, of its own sin, devotes itself to giving, in love as in sacrifice. The catastrophe of one's own individuality brings images of retribution:

And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together: and every mountain and island were moved out of their places (Revelation 6:13-14).

But these images bring us to the threshold, to the opening of the seventh seal: "And when he [the Lamb] had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour" (Revelation 8:1). The images of catastrophe denote the collapse of our customary space-time. But such a collapse, while it is also experienced as a punishment, allows this suspension, this absence of images, this silence, and thus creates a possible opening for hope, of which the *miracle* of artistic creation is the image. The infinity of interpretations of this image, as mentioned above, is explained however as a *mystery*. Thus, the Angel says to John, "Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not" (Revelation 10:4)—an apparent contradiction, as Tarkovskij quickly pointed out, in a work which, by its very title, displays its revelatory nature. But it is this *closure*, and therefore this vagueness with respect to the end of one's time, which makes the freedom of one's actions conceivable, without being constrained by fear or by concern for one's own existence. "But what counts most is that *I* then stop being interesting to *myself*. And perhaps it is precisely from this that my love for *myself* springs?"¹³

The infinity of the image, and more profoundly still, its mystery, represent the possibility of a newness in time, thus making it possible to free one's own acts from mere self-preservation with a view to achieving freedom of action, or in other words, action which is free and capable of giving without expectation of return.

A few days prior to this lecture, during a press conference in Milan, Tarkovskij announced that he no longer wished to return to the Soviet Union, choosing instead a life of exile, far from his family ties. Around

¹³ *Ibid.*, 27.

this time, after working on one project which remained unfinished (a stage version of *Hamlet*, which he had worked on in 1976) and on a narrative screenplay (*Hoffmanniana*, about the life of Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann), he turned once again to a subject he had dealt with some years earlier in *The Witch*, about a writer who has been diagnosed with an incurable disease, this time transforming the subject into an apocalyptic parable: *The Sacrifice* (1986). He began filming in Gotland, Sweden, on 5 May 1985, and the movie was presented at Cannes, one year later, on 12 May 1986. The concept of *The Sacrifice*, Tarkovskij's most extreme work, may appear similar to that already outlined during the London lecture, and is constructed around the connection between the freeness of giving and freedom of time.¹⁴ But rather than just using images to make his translation of a conceptual framework clearer, Tarkovskij sought to develop a personal involvement (of both himself and his viewers) with his parable, trying to follow up on and highlight the various crossovers that the text permits. It is Tarkovskij himself who suggests this, when he claims to have conceived the film in such a manner that it might be interpreted in various ways: "I think that the spectator is himself able to interpret the events in the film and to analyze all the links and contradictions."¹⁵

2. The Gift of the Tree, the Dwarf's Speech

The film opens with a discordant image: Peter's lament and the Magi's votive offering to Mary. The alto aria, *Erbarme dich*, from Bach's *St Matthew Passion* (scene 39) accompanies the upward movement of the camera as it rises, echoing the composition of Da Vinci's unfinished work, the *Adoration of the Magi* (1481-1482). At the centre, the whirling vortex which, starting with the epiphanic manifestation of Christ, arranges the entire history of mankind. The camera lingers on this centre, and in particular on the Magi's

¹⁴ As was already the case in *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) and in *Andrej Rublëv*, Tarkovskij's films have had, from the first, the Passion as their central theme. The sophianic theme, the theme of the divinity of the Mother-Soul of the World, appears clearly in *Solaris* (1972), and above all in *The Mirror* (1974). In *Stalker* and *Nostalgia*, the theme of the end of the world becomes central, with explicit references to the Revelation of St John the Divine (and in particular the scene of the opening of the sixth seal in Revelation 6: 12-17).

¹⁵ Andrej Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time. Reflections on the Cinema*, op. cit., 224.

gift, and then on the connection which is established with Jesus, whose outstretched hand in the picture almost touches that of the giver. Behind them, the flourishing tree, a laurel, the symbol of triumph; and beyond that, a palm tree, the symbol of martyrdom. The laurel is the axis linking the two planes of the scene which, more than merely signifying the dualism between heaven and earth, also indicate the two directions of time: before Jesus, the host of warring knights and the Temple of Jerusalem which seems engulfed by nature; and after his appearance, devotion, fear, and reflection. Whereas da Vinci opens our eyes to the germinative element of the *new incarnation*, Bach lays the emphasis on the desperate *guilt* of Peter, and of those who deny what they have seen.¹⁶ Yet this is the *unsteady* rock which sustains the followers, the rock on which is built the community of those who gather around the *sacrifice of the Lamb*. Tarkovskij weaves these two notes into his parable; the sophianic joy of the birth and the catastrophic agony, the beauty of creation as the mark of the divine, and the wretchedness of the sinner as the abyss from which gleams the outrage of Evil and the need to fight it which can no longer be ignored.¹⁷

The film's first sequence opens to a second dissonance. On a desolate Nordic seashore on the island of Gotland, Alexander, the protagonist, erects a small tree and tells his young son, Little Man, the parable of a *starec* who bade a young monk to water, day after day, an already desiccated tree. For three years, the youth carried buckets of water up the mountain until, suddenly, the tree sprang into life again, burgeoning with young leaves. Building on this parable, Alexander tries to imagine what might happen if an individual repeated the same action, every single day. His monologue is interrupted by the arrival of the local postman, who hands him a telegram containing birthday wishes, signed by the "Richardians and idiotists"—friends with whom he had shared a theatrical past.¹⁸ The conversation soon

¹⁶ The text of the aria is translated thus: "Have pity, Lord/ Look at my/ tears!/ Direct your gaze here:/ Before you my heart/ and my eyes/ weep bitterly."

¹⁷ With respect to Russian religious philosophy, these are the lines of Solov'ëv, Florenskij and Sergej Bulgakov's Sophianism, and the Christological-apocalyptic line of Solov'ëv's later work, of Dostoevskij and of Berdjaev.

¹⁸ As the story unwinds, it is revealed that Alexander had been a theatre actor, and among the roles he enacted he had excelled in those of Shakespeare's *Richard III* and Dostoevskij's *The Idiot* (a story which Tarkovskij had long worked on, with a view to adapting it for film).

degenerates into a dialogue “beyond time and space” on the subject of God and the eternal return, which is also repeated figuratively: the postman Otto rides his bicycle in circles around Alexander, who continues walking in a straight line. But the dialogue seems to result only in idle chatter, merely a demonstration of the ability of *Logos* to expose the weakness of others’ reasoning. Otto dismisses all Alexander’s knowledge, his teaching and his essay-writing as something *gloomy*, something which shows perpetual waiting without any joy. Alexander, in his turn, considers that what Otto is drawn to—this eternal return which the hunchback dwarf described to Zarathustra in Nietzsche’s work¹⁹—is instead a demiurgic day-dream, unattainable by mankind.

At this point, we turn again to the “Russian” Nietzsche, the Nietzsche who, in the works of Solov’ev, Šestov, and Berdjaev, is portrayed as Dostoevskij’s true interlocutor; the Nietzsche who concentrated the deification of man, and thus a Christological heresy, in his *Overman* character.²⁰ It could not be further removed from positivistic atheism or Feuerbachian materialism, which reduce the theological problem to an anthropological issue. It is equally far-removed from a Heideggerian reading, which traces the history of existence right to its nihilistic end, as demonstrated, for example, in Nietzsche’s thought: a context which allows no faith in the possibility that Christian thought, and its apocalyptic line of thought in particular, might overturn that categorical framework which proclaims that there is nothing at the end of existence. And yet, it is precisely this Heideggerian interpretation of the eternal return which has brought us to a definitive understanding of the eschatological dimension of this enigma.

The instant in which it is decided that everything returns, eternally, leads to the liberation of the instant itself from the bonds of linear time

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and Nobody*, trans. Graham Parkes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 189-194.

²⁰ Not least, among the numerous bibliographies on the “Russian Nietzsche,” is that of Bernice Rosenthal (cf. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture: Ally and Adversary* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994]). This interpretation of Nietzsche’s thought as a sort of *Christological heresy*, the failure of which could be seen already in some of the heroes of Dostoevskij’s novels, can also be found, although with significant differences, in Merežkovskij, Berdjaev, and Šestov, and again in several western interpreters of Dostoevskian thought, in particular in Luigi Pareyson and Sergio Givone.

and to its eschatological fulfilment. The instant is no longer merely the passage between the unfathomable weight of the past and the dreamed-imagined happiness of the future. But can the *overman* drain all interest from that instant, to the point that time collapses within itself? The extreme nearness of the eternal return of the *identical* is seen to be absolute distance if we return to the parable of the *starec*, where, on the contrary, identical repetition opens the way to newness, to the miracle. Whereas in Nietzsche, eschatological plenitude is achieved by displacing tension towards the absolute Future, and therefore by living every instant as a gift, in the parable *one* instant appears as new, as an opening which thus causes a discontinuity. The *overman's* will to power and the monk's daily act are both evidence of a struggle for one's own self, for that "spirit of gravity" which binds us to Earth and to the necessity of Earth. But what Zarathustra prophesied was a demiurgical spirit, a boy "dancing in the cosmos" who self-regenerates. This is an apocalypse whose revelation lies in the enigmatic nature of a feeling that is already completely—and has been forever—in conflict with the outward appearance, rather than in the monk's *laborious awaiting*.

3. Words, words

The action opens on a birthday party. Once again, the gift of birth and the repetition of that gift intersect. The first part of *The Sacrifice* evolves like a *theatrical* scene. This choice of composition probably derives from Tarkovskij's accumulated experience as a theatre director. The presence of collaborators who had also worked with Bergman, such as the lead actor Josephson and the director of photography Nykvist, also led to the creation of an atmosphere which, to the western viewer in particular, might call to mind the Swedish director's films, which were often set in locations similar to that of Gotland island.²¹ However, whereas in Bergman the *theatricality* of the drama prepares the way for a descent into the *body* of those words, in Tarkovskij the *emptiness* of his characters' words is exposed. "Words, words," exclaims Alexander impatiently, after one of his long-winded

²¹ Russian audiences can also compare the set of *The Sacrifice* with the productions of Čechov at the Moscow Art Theatre.

monologues. Yet despite his outburst, he continues to hide himself behind this theatrical prattle, behind words which have already been spoken (in this case, *Hamlet*, Act II, Scene II).

Having greeted the postman, Alexander continues his walk with his son, Little Man, who, having undergone a minor operation on his tonsils, remains silent. Alexander scolds him jokingly, saying “In the beginning was the Word, but you are mute, mute as a fish.” He starts to dissect the subject of the *silence of the word*. Alexander cannot withstand his own intellectual narcissism, and seeks to transmit his knowledge to his son. He repeats ideas which had already formed the basis of previous Tarkovskian works. Death does not exist, but only the fear of death, and this is at the heart of the technological progress that man uses to reproduce defence mechanisms which, although used by man to try and free himself from such fear, only reaffirm the fear by strengthening it. Yet how far from this logic of immunity is the defence of one’s own individuality inside a *house*? Alexander tells his son how he and the child’s mother had discovered the house, and had immediately considered it as their own. He acknowledges that he had prepared himself for a completely different life, and that he now feels he has enchained himself with his own hands. A few years earlier, Tarkovskij had demonstrated his own irrevocable distance from the logic of the Soviet authorities in *The Mirror*, a descent into the heart of a sophianic memory, which, starting from the most hidden inner thoughts on one’s own familial history, then extends to the identity of Mother Russia, and finally to that of the Mother as the germinative womb of existence. The house as the locus of memory to which one can return is now, however, depicted—as was already the case in *Nostalgia*—as a spectre, as a lethal power. The images of the memory seem divided in two, split between the aesthetic seduction of Renaissance beauty (the ruins of Italian artistic treasures) and responsible guardianship, as epitomized by the Russian *mother*, whose face is now mute and sombre. The question is: is maternal sophianic salvation a means to achieve eschatological salvation, or is it an impediment to it? Tarkovskij distinguishes progressively between the two levels, that of sophianic memory and that of the end of time. They are no longer one and the same, as in *The Mirror*, but nor are they contraposed in an irresolvable manner, like two opposite poles. Rather, they tend to intertwine, giving rise nonetheless to the aporetic crux which besets every eschatological argument of a sophiological nature. The end of time ought to

lead to a new heaven and a new earth, yet the defence of memory prevents such a radical novelty. The return to the beginning, salvation in the identity of one's own *house*, is intended, on the one hand, to be a return right to the very germinative point of existence, the instant of *birth*. On the other hand, however, joining the end with the beginning seems to enclose everything within a cycle, which prevents the completely unimaginable *catastrophe* of a new beginning.

The house is the space one must cross, before trying to look at the *nothing of the image*. It is a comforting space, where friends and family expatiate on art and life's choices, taking advantage of the gifts which Alexander receives: a book of icons, an (authentic) print of Europe. The icon represents God's gaze upon us; it is presence—the invisible which bursts into visibility.²² Whereas modern art has taken the route of naturalistic mimesis, which in its turn is shown more and more often by the avant-garde as the self-exposure of the Subject's conscience, the icon rebuts the idea that the image is only a *sign*. Rather, the image is presence, the trace of that which is seen through its magnificent gates. But the world of the icon—which Tarkovskij addressed in *Andrej Rublëv*, the first film he conceived entirely by himself—in *The Sacrifice* now becomes a memory. However, the extent to which the dualism between the realism of the icon and the illusionism of modern art also operates under the surface in *The Sacrifice* is shown in the fact that Alexander abandoned the life he had felt he was destined for—that life of glory and success—because his work as an actor, as a *mask*, had led him to feel that his own identity, his own *face*, was being lost. In other words, God's gaze upon his own essence. It is the illusionism of the theatre that spawned the world of Renaissance perspective, the origin of all modern art, according to the genealogy proposed by Florenskij. Indeed, it was this “art of seduction” which enamoured Alexander's wife, Adelaide, who still regrets the loss of his success. While this dialogue on the relationship between art

²² The tradition of the icon has experienced an enormous revival since the first decades of the twentieth century in a manner combining the revival of the theology of the Eastern Fathers with contemporary aesthetic studies which, at the same time, allowed a dialogue to develop between both that model of representation and the experiments of the avant-garde. Among such studies, Florenskij's *Iconostasis* naturally stands out (see Pavel Florensky, *Iconostasis*, trans. Donald Sheehan and Olga Andrejev [Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996]). Work from 1922; published for the first time in *Vestnik Russkogo Zapadno-Evropskogo Patriaršego Ekzarchata* [Paris], no. 65 [1969]: 39-64).

and life is being played out, Tarkovskij shows (theatrically) what the words conceal: the continuous game of seduction and its ambiguity. Tarkovskij does this by *composing* the space: first, placed between her father Alexander and their family friend Victor, is the daughter Marta; then there is Adelaide. Both women are undecided and irresolute about the feelings they ought to have with regard to Alexander and Victor.

Once again, the postman Otto arrives, complicating the picture. He comes with an authentic print of a map of Europe drawn several centuries ago; a *sacrifice*, as he himself points out, as every gift ought to be. Alexander nostalgically laments a Europe full of the sense of the past, but more interesting still is the anecdote related by Otto. The latter collects extraordinary facts, which he gathers as proof of miracles. Amongst these is a photograph from the war period. A woman and her son had sat for a photo-portrait, which they had subsequently forgotten to collect from the photographer, and of which they had lost sight. The young man then left for war and never returned from the front. Years later, in a different photo-portrait of the woman, the image of the son inexplicably appeared, just as he had looked at the time of the first photo. A photo as evidence of an invisible eternity; an eternity, which in its turn, can return eternally, given the reproducibility of a photographic image. Adelaide is surprised that the mother had not gone to look for the first photo, for the *memory* of her son. But this is not what counts, Otto explains. Images are not merely imperfect copies of the visible, they are not just disembodied ghosts: they can also be the icon of the invisible which surrenders itself. Even photography—which in a direct line of descent is the automation of the image constructed according to the rules of linear perspective—can open to the Other of a mimetic framework, to that which escapes from the re-presentation of the visible.

In Otto's tale, however, the photo gives us not just the glorious, epiphanic aspect of iconostasis; it gives us a *ghost*—something which returns from oblivion. The photo bears witness to an instant which returns eternally. It liberates us from the necessity of the visible, not in order to apocalyptically introduce a completely new instant, on the border between time and other than time, but rather to reveal the funerary dimension of every photo which, in the very moment of snatching an instant from the circle of the contingent, makes it eternal, and freezes it in an *eternal return*.

4. Apocalyptic Visions

Apocalyptic stories are built around various narrative intersections, which we also find in *The Sacrifice*. First, those which gravitate around a *catastrophe of time*: the presence of certain premonitory signs; the separation between Good and Evil in the framework of a conflict; the definition of a group of the elect. Secondly, those which indicate the *end of time*, that is to say, the detection of a new world, which completes and gives meaning to this world, whose “poverty” is brought into focus by the catastrophe.²³ Stories about the *end of time*, which bind in a single nexus both the existential problem of the meaning of death and the ontological problem of the meaning of history (human and cosmic). As we know, the Revelation of St. John the Divine reveals that the elect, or better yet, the Messiah, is Jesus, the Lamb and Son of God. But this text, in its turn, is full of enigmas, arising in part from the difficulty of recognizing the systematic use of a symbology that reinterprets and christologically adapts the Judaic apocalypse (of *Daniel*, in particular). However, the history of the reception of the Revelation of St John the Divine plays on the tension between two different readings: the first, predominant, reading emphasizes the idea that St John’s vision was devoted to a *second coming of Christ*, thus retaining the Messianic tension of Judaic apocalypse; the second reading considers rather that the vision was a re-reading of the soteriological meaning of the Passion of Christ. But if Christ is to return, how is he to be recognized? Or if it has already happened, what becomes of salvation in a world which still appears to live in a state of separation from the divine? Russian culture, deeply marked with an eschatological stamp, tries to answer this type of question by examining the apocalyptic theme from a tragic or an outright revolutionary point of view. Since the time of Čaadaev’s *Philosophical Letters*, the question of the meaning of history in the event of it reaching its culmination has run through this tradition, and is inevitably intertwined with the question of revolution, often considered from an apocalyptic point of view, just as, in their turn, apocalyptic themes (the millenarian expectation of the Kingdom of God, the antichristian characters) are figures which enable historical evolution to be understood.

²³ See Andrea Tagliapietra, *Icone della fine. Immagini apocalittiche, filmografie, miti* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010), 39.

It is such a question which gives rise to the scenes at the *limits of time* in Dostoevskij's novels; to the peregrinations through ghostly cities and the deserts to be built of Platonov, Belyj, and Bulgakov's heroes; to the visions of poets (Blok) and painters (Malevič); until finally the question implodes in later masterpieces of Soviet literature, such as Erofeev's *Moscow-Petuški*.²⁴

Tarkovskij's parable, which in the first part is presented as a Platonic dialogue on the relationship between vision and truth, investigates the subject apocalyptically, tracing the two thematic structures, catastrophe and end, mentioned above. Catastrophe is portrayed with enormous economy: the throb of airplane engines; glasses and walls which tremble; the movement of the characters from one side of the room to the other, meeting in front of the sideboard, from which a jug of milk crashes to the floor. In this way, Tarkovskij outlines a *cross*, which figuratively highlights the horizon across which his characters now move. Then, a televised message, advising of nuclear danger and calling on all citizens to remain in their homes, since there is nowhere safer in Europe. The message is interrupted; communications are broken off. Victor responds to the predictable nervous breakdowns by "treatment" with injections of sedatives. Off to one side, Alexander, talking to himself, declares that he has expected this moment all his life. There had been warning signs: during their walk, Alexander, falling down as a result of the child's practical joke, had had a nightmare vision of a crowd fleeing along a road; in his garden, he had been frightened by a scale model of his house and had repeated, terrorized, the words spoken by Macbeth, who, when faced with *guilt*, when faced with the ghost of the person who has been murdered, tries to deny responsibility: "Which of you have done this?" (*Macbeth*, Act III, Scene IV). The little model house represents the ghost of guilt: the gift which the Son can give to the Father, with the aid of the postman (the angelic figure of the intermediary), and explained by the maid Maria (the mirror wherein God is revealed), it is

²⁴ This 1977 novel-poem—perhaps the most studied late twentieth century work in Russia—is the tragicomic story of a voyage between Moscow and Petuški, a place which quickly takes on the semblance of an unreachable Paradise. The protagonist, Venička, transforms his own daydream, distorted by the fumes of vodka, into a great collective performance, in which the train on which he is travelling is apocalyptically revisited by characters, most of whom are drawn from Russian history, particularly from the soviet era, or from the sacred texts of Christianity.

the representation of the home, of a *sacred* space, separate from the outside world, but which the Father can only fear, forgetting that he is the cause of the gift.

The enemy, the *Antichrist*, remains uncertain. Filmed during the final period of the Cold War, one can see warnings about the risk of the proliferation of nuclear weapons. What emerges is that this is a *total war*, which makes every place unsafe and thus mobilizes every individual, who must in turn decide whether, in the name of his own safety strategies, to accept the complete authority that power calls for. This leads to the choice of complete mobilization through technology, in the hope that it will be able to contain the destructive potential which it has unleashed itself; or else to a recognition that the final day requires that the Self should not seek outside enemies. The Antichrist claims to *locate*, to identify, his enemies, and to unite them under his power, whereas the breath of the Spirit bursts forth unexpectedly, without any possibility of foreseeing or planning it.

The catastrophe splits. On the one hand it continues, and reveals the middle-class comedy of repressed passions between Victor, Adelaide and Marta. On the other, we witness a sacred mystery involving Alexander, the *angel* Otto and the *witch* Maria. This mystery is structured around two moments: Alexander's votive prayer, and Maria's spell. The protagonist, kneeling, turns directly to God to ward off the apocalyptic danger. After reciting the Lord's Prayer, he says:

O God! Save us in this terrible hour ... Let not my children die, nor my friends nor my wife nor Victor, or anyone who loves Thee, believes in Thee, or who does not believe in Thee because he is blind and has not had time to think properly about Thee, or because he has not been really unhappy yet and everyone who at this moment is deprived of hope, of a future, of life, the chance of letting their thoughts come second to Thee, who is filled with fear and senses the approaching end, fearing not for themselves but for those close to them, for those who have nobody to protect them, except Thee; because this war is the last, and terrible, and will leave neither victor nor vanquished; no towns, no villages, neither grass, nor trees nor water in springs nor birds in the heavens... I will give Thee everything I have, I'll leave my family which I love, my home, I will deny myself [Little Man], I'll become dumb, I'll never speak to anyone; I'll deny myself everything that binds me to life; but just make everything as it was earlier, this morning, like yesterday with

none of this sickening, deathly fear! Help me, Lord and I will do all that I have promised Thee!²⁵

Alexander's sacrifice is offered as a *Kenosis of the Logos*. It is addressed directly to the Father, looking straight at the camera. His prayer calls for a response, posing at the same time a two-pronged problem. Insofar as it represents an appeal to God, it proposes an exchange, a gift drawn directly from a logic based on economy-immunity—a victim who takes the evil upon himself, in exchange for the immunity of the community. But insofar as the prayer is addressed to the camera, it reveals the mediate nature of the image, leading the viewer to ask himself whether what he is seeing is the *icon of a sacrifice*, or its *mask*—its theatrical performance. Having “performed” Hamlet's doubts and Macbeth's guilty fright, is Alexander now enacting the madness of the idiot-saint, Prince Myškin? The question is not just of a semiotic nature, but also involves the choice of the nihilistic rather than the Christian dimension of giving oneself, which can be seen as an extreme form of the Subject's will to power which bends the world—as well as the divine—to the laws of its own making and to its own “contracts,” and at the same time can also be seen as a struggle with its own *philo-psychia* (love of life), repeating the obedience of the Son, who humbles himself for love of the Father.

Tarkovskij further complicates this double interpretation with the encounter between Alexander and the witch Maria.²⁶ Once again, the angel-messenger Otto shows the way, directing Alexander towards Maria, the only one who can save him, if he will lie with her. This encounter, like the risk of nuclear catastrophe before it, was presaged by a vision, which can be seen both as a sign of the divine and as a submersion in Alexander's unconscious. In the vision, Alexander struggles through the slush, picking up coins from the ground, when he recognizes the bare feet of his son, shoeless and abandoned. He tries to follow him in order to protect him,

²⁵ Translator's note: The English version of this quote was taken from Andrei Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, trans. William Powell and Natasha Synessios (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 543-544. However, I have replaced the name “the Kid” with “Little Man” for Alexander's son, as it appears in the English subtitles of the film.

²⁶ This episode constituted the heart of the story, *The Witch*, the initial narrative nucleus of *The Sacrifice*.

but finds himself instead before Maria's house, with its door flapping in the wind, and the entrance bricked up.

Maria, taken by surprise, welcomes Alexander. In one of the first shots, his image is reflected in a small mirror, which in turn faces a cross. Maria's house is modest, but contains those signs of piety, such as icons, which are absent in Alexander's home. The camera, with lighting which emphasizes the shadows of the objects, follows the characters, closing in on them and focusing on the details, no longer applying the theatrical, fully-lit viewpoint used in the pre-apocalyptic story. Eventually, Alexander reveals himself through a recollection about his mother, who lived in a small house with a neglected garden. Alexander had decided to tidy the garden, to remove the weeds and prune the dry branches; to make it habitable. But when at last, dressed in his best clothes, he sits at the window where his mother had sat to gaze at the garden, he realizes that he has disfigured it, that through his actions he has destroyed its *beauty*. This parable summarizes Tarkovskij's aesthetic stance, which takes themes that are typical of Russian religious philosophy,²⁷ and applies them to the field of cinema. The dualism between the Promethean concern for composition, for bending matter to the will of the Subject, and humble submission to Nature from which shines the glory of divine beauty—and thus the dualism between the poetics of montage or of the tracking shot²⁸—can be explained in the first instance by the argument (as put forward from the avant-garde cinema of the early twentieth century to the semiotic schools of the 1960s) against any kind of reduction of cinema to a language, a system of signs which can be controlled and organized by the subject. Cinema bears witness. It harbours the traces or—in Tarkovskij's terminology—the sculptures of time. The job of composition must take account of the *gift-like* nature of movie images which, in the same way as icons, show something that both is, and is the image of, at one and the same time. Maria will lie with Alexander, and the sexual act which becomes a mystical union is shown, as always in Tarkovskij's films, by the levitation of the two intertwined bodies.

²⁷ I refer, in particular, to the symbolism of Ivanov and to the dualism between linear and reverse perspective described by Florenskij.

²⁸ In this regard, see Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time. Reflections on the Cinema*, op. cit., 113-124.

More than being just a projection of the imaginative faculty of the Subject, who can thus show it to himself, good is primarily the light of truth. It is a light which, from a Christian point of view, is not only an emanation, as in the neoplatonic view, but also an incarnation. The theological aesthetics of the icon take on a sophiological aspect in the parable of the garden. In Sophiology, the female, germinative, maternal aspect of images as well as their sensual—and thus potentially deviant or diabolical—aspect are studied in accordance with methods which manifest a potential point of intersection between the orthodoxy of the Father's theology of the icon and the modern world. The earth is a womb, a memory to retain, a redeemed body which acts as a brake to the will to power, to the desire for nullification, but at the same time prevents that *nothingness of the image*, that catastrophe which ought to open the way to new heavens and a new earth. This brings us back to the question of the initial dissonance, which now takes shape in the dramaturgy of Tarkovskij's story: is Maria's spell the instrument which allows Alexander's vow to be realized, or is it instead an alternative route? And in this case, is it not a detour into Magism, in a pre-modern form of control of Nature? The Sophiological perspective, deliberately indicated by the messenger Otto, can easily be confused with a Nietzschean Dionysism type of Christian interpretation.²⁹ In this case, the Messianic perspective would have to be reassessed. Creation would already have been saved, even if not entirely redeemed. There is an "orthodox" connection between the kenotic moment and the Sophiological moment, between the repetition of the sacrifice on the cross and the glorious beauty of *agape*. But these two moments, considered singly, show two dissonant impulses, the one towards the rigorousness of ascetic silence, and the other towards the splendour of the cosmos.

5. The Apocalypse of the Vision

The catastrophe is the prelude to the end of time. The parable of *The Sacrifice* appears to conclude in accordance with a rigorous, *economical* logic: the catastrophe is prevented, Alexander keeps his vow by burning down his

²⁹ The same problem troubles the sophianic characters of Dostoevskij's novels, in particular the lame girl in *The Devils*.

house and then withdrawing into a silence that is incomprehensible to his friends and family, who, in a scene bordering on the farcical, hand him over to two nurses who take him away in an ambulance. This is all filmed with a long tracking shot which, due to technical errors, Tarkovskij had to re-shoot, after having rebuilt the set of the house in the space of just a few days.³⁰ Thus, even the story of the filming itself tells of a repetition which opens the way to the fulfilment of an action, to its perfection. But this repetition already existed within the story. Alexander tries several times to set fire to his house before the flames ultimately takes hold. How should this be interpreted? Is it a sign of the *comedy* of madness in Alexander's actions? Or is it rather a sign that an action's ability to be *new*, to not be foreseeable from the chain of events that have happened up to that point, always remains hidden—a mystery which hides and “erases” its own liberty within the folds of existence, within the eternally comic repetitions?

The completion of the parable gives no answers. Instead, it allows the questions which have appeared throughout the story to become even clearer. The first question: Alexander's family awakens, having completely forgotten the risk of apocalyptic catastrophe. That risk can therefore be seen in a spiritualistic light: that same consciousness of the apocalyptic urgency divides and separates. Apocalyptic time is not a measurement of the movement of Nature, but marks every individual, every face that can, from time to time, instant by instant, be confronted with the totality of existence, or rather by the gift-like aspect of that totality, in the face of which he must decide whether to repeat it, thus going against his own instinct for survival, his own interest, or to refuse it. Conceiving apocalyptic fulfilment as something which transforms the materiality of Nature could, on the contrary, subject it to the order it had been meant to subvert, and submit it to the laws of experience that connect and distinguish Subject and Object. Furthermore, if there has indeed been a divine gift, it must remain hidden, it must immediately withdraw from freely giving itself. Thus on the one hand, we can see the risk of catastrophe as real. The gift would be a necessary consequence of the sacrificial offering by a victim. On the other hand, we can see it as a game played by Alexander's imagination, as

³⁰ The episode was remembered by Tarkovskij (see Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, op. cit., 225-227) and was the focus of the 1988 documentary by Michal Leszczyłowski, *Directed by Tarkovsky*.

his final performance. In this case also, the donative nature, which consists in the fact that *everything shall continue as before*, is cancelled out, since Alexander's sacrifice would then be only the descent into madness of a man suffering from a nervous complaint. But both these interpretations can be overturned, and the reasoning behind them combined. The apocalyptic risk cannot be remembered, because otherwise the donative nature would become clear from the fact that something existed. Alexander's silence, although not caused by a real danger, but only by the confusion of his imagination, paradoxically becomes the representation of liberty, because it is not driven by the economic logic of an exchange between sacrificial offering and salvific recompense.

The freedom of the gift is hidden: we can leave the comprehension of this to the responsibility of the viewer, who must decide whether to interpret the parable of *The Sacrifice* through an economic logic, or whether it should hinge on freedom. But more radically still, the tension between the two logics could be resolved by an apocalyptic fulfilment: only this would allow the nature of Alexander's act to be defined as an imitation of the freedom of divine *kenosis*, or as an extreme mask which hides a desire for nothingness. In its turn, however, *The Sacrifice's* ending can itself be interpreted antinomically as a postponement of fulfilment and at the same time as the actual apocalyptic conclusion. It represents a postponement because everything continues as before, and the catastrophe which ought to have been a prelude to the end of time is averted; and it represents a conclusion because the final sequences link the story once again to the initial narrative framework. The ambulance which is carrying Alexander away encounters Maria, who follows it for a distance. Then the camera shifts to Little Man; the son who until now has been mute following the operation on his throat, the son in whose name the sacrifice has been made. Little Man is carrying a bucket of water up the slope beside the seashore, *obeying* the suggestion of his father, who at the beginning of the day had told him the parable of the monk. The tree has come to life. Little Man sits at its foot, and turning to the sky pronounces the *first words*: "In the beginning was the Word. Why is that, Papa?" The words of the beginning connect themselves to the image of the end, the Prologue of The Gospel according to St John is linked to The Revelation of St John the Divine. Once again, as in the beginning, the notes of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* are heard, the camera finally rises from a low viewpoint, which it has focused on until now, and is directed upwards,

past the expanse of the sea until finally it is flooded with light, so that the *life* of the tree is seen as a *cross* which links the heavens and the Earth. The initial dissonant image is repeated, but has perhaps finally found its meaning through the story. The *Logos* is the beginning. But in that “why is that, Papa?” there is the hope that this “primalness” or state of origin does not mean that there is a need for a dialectical mechanism decreeing that anything invisible, from a Hegelian point of view, must be made visible and crucified, and forced into the economic logic of relationships of power and of exchange. Instead, there is the hope that this *Logos* refers to an original gift, to a silent sacrifice which has made that word possible. In the relationship between Alexander’s kenotic silence, Maria’s vital force and Little Man’s obedient word, a complex symbol is at work, which cannot be reduced to the undistinguished unity of dialectical *Logos*. In that *why* there is the hope that the *cross of the Logos* is not just a mechanical repetition of actions, a technically reproducible image, the eternal return of the identical, but is rather the *icon* of the freedom of a Father who gives himself kenotically, in silence. In an apocalyptic sense, in that mechanical repetition of a simple act such as carrying a bucket of water, we witness the miracle, or rather the truth, of the tree, which *like a gift*, freely, sees its leaves unfurl and come to life.

The Sacrifice, 1986

Directed by: Andrej Tarkovskij.

Story and screenplay by: Andrej Tarkovskij.

Cinematography by: Sven Nykvist.

Music by: J.S. Bach, Japanese folk music, Swedish shepherds’
 music from the provinces of Dalecarlie (Dalarna) and
 Härjedalen.

Editing by: Andrej Tarkovskij and Michal Leszczyłowski.

Cast: Erland Josephson (Alexander), Susan Fleetwood (Adelaide),
 Allan Edwall (Otto), Gudrun Gisladdottir (Maria).

Running time: 145 minutes.

LIST OF WORKS CITED

- Andreeva, Natal'ja. "Skrjabin. Estetiko-filosofskij kontekst chudožestvennykh novacii Skrjabina." In *Učenyje zapiski*, Vypusk 5, 44-81. Moscow: Memorial'nyj muzej A. N. Skrjabina, 2005.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- Bachtin, Michail. "Lekcija ob A. Belom, F. Sologube, A. Bloke, Esenine." *Dialog. Karnaval*, "Chronotop" 2-3 (1993): 139 (transcribed by R. M. Mirskaja).
- Baffo, Giancarlo. "Così parlò Juduška. L'antisemitismo di Vasilij Rozanov." In *Stella errante. Percorsi dell'ebraismo fra Est e Ovest*, edited by Guido Massino and Giulio Schiavoni, 377-406. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000.
- Baker, James M. *The Music of Alexander Scriabin*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.
- Bann, Stephen, ed. *The Tradition of Constructivism*. New York (NY): The Viking Press, 1974.
- Baran, Henryk. "Some Reminiscences in Blok: Vampirism and Its Antecedents." In *Aleksandr Blok Centennial Conference*, edited by Walter N. Vickery, 43-60. Columbus: Slavica, 1984.
- Barba, Eugenio and Savarese, Nicola. *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Batušić, Nikola. *Riječ Mati Čina: Krležin kazališni krug*. Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, 2007.
- Belyj, Andrej. *Vospominanija o Bloke*. Moscow: Respublika, 1995.
- Ben Chaim, Daphna. *Distance in the Theatre: The Aesthetics of Audience Response*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984.
- Berdjaev, Nikolaj A. *Russkaja ideja* [1946]. St Petersburg: Azbuka-klassika, 2008.
- Berdyaev, Nicolas. *Dream and Reality: An Essay in Autobiography*. Translated by Katharine Lampert. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1950.
- Berdyaev, Nikolai. *The Russian Idea*. Translated by Reginald Michael French. Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1992.
- Bethea, David. *The Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989.

- Bird, Robert. *The Russian Prospero*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006.
- Blok, Aleksandr. *Dnevnik*. Edited by Andrej Grishunin. Moscow: Soveckaja Rossija, 1989.
- _____. *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pisem* (20 vols). Moscow: Nauka, 1997.
- _____. *Sobranie sočinenij* (8 vols). Moscow: Gos. Izdat. Chudožestvennoj Literatury, 1962.
- _____. *Zapisnye knižki*. Moscow: Chudožestvennaja literatura, 1965.
- Blok, Ljubov'. *Dve liubvi, dve sud'by, Vospominanija o Bloke i Belom*. Moscow: XXI Vek – Soglasie, 2000.
- Bowers, Faubion. *Scriabin: A Biography*. Mineola, New York: Dover, 1996.
- Brown, Malcolm. "Scriabin and Russian 'Mystic' Symbolism." *19th-Century Music* 3.1 (July 1979): 42-51.
- Brumfield, William. "The Decorative Arts in Russian Architecture: 1900-1907." *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 5 (Summer 1987): 12-27.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. "The City as Dreamworld and Catastrophe." *October* 73 (Summer 1995): 22.
- Bulgakov, Sergej N. *Svet nevečernij*. Moscow: Sozercanija i umozrenija, 1994.
- Buttrick, George A., ed. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Vol. III. New York/Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962.
- Carey, Frances, ed. *The Apocalypse and the Shape to Come* (exhb. cat.). London: British Museum Press, 1999.
- Čengić, Enes. *S Krležom iz dana u dan*. Vols. 1-4. Zagreb: Globus, 1980-1985.
- Černyševskij, Nikolaj G. *Sočinenija v 2 tomach*. Edited by Igor' K. Pantin. Moscow: Nauka, 1986.
- Chvatík, Ivan and Abrams, Erika, eds. *Jan Patočka and the Heritage of Phenomenology*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2011.
- Cieślak, Ryszard. "No-Play Acting." *The Theatre in Poland/Le Théâtre en Pologne* 8 (1975): 5-6.
- Čiževskij, Dmitrij I. et al. *N. V. Gogol': Materialy i issledovanija*. Moscow: Nasledie, 1995.
- Collins, John. *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*. Cambridge (UK): Eerdmans Publishing, 1984.
- Corsini, Eugenio. *Apocalisse prima e dopo*. Turin: SEI, 1980.

- Čulkov, Georgij. *Valtazarovo carstvo*. Moscow: Izd. Respublika, 1998.
- Davidson, Pamela. *The Poetic Imagination of Vyacheslav Ivanov: A Russian Symbolist's Perception of Dante*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- De Michelis, Cesare. *La giudeofobia in Russia. Dal libro del Kahal ai Protocolli dei savi di Sion*. Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2001.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Le théâtre de la cruauté et la clôture de la représentation." *Critique* 230 (1966): 595-618.
- _____. *Dissemination*. English Translation by Barbara Johnson. London: The Athlone Press, 1981.
- Detoni-Dujmić, Dunja. *Ljepša polovica književnosti*. Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1998.
- Dostoevskij, Fëdor M. *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij v 30 tomach*. Leningrad: Nauka, 1972-1990.
- Emerson, Caryl. "On the Generation that Squandered its Philosophers (Losev, Bakhtin, and Classical Thought as Equipment for Living)." *Studies in East European Thought* 56 (2004): 95-117.
- Engelstein, Laura. *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom: A Russian Folktale*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999.
- Flaker, Aleksandar. *Riječ, slika, grad: hrvatske intermedijalne studije*. Zagreb: HAZU, 1995.
- Florenskij, Pavel and Ivanov, Vjačeslav. "Perepiska Vjačeslava Ivanova so svjaščennikom Pavlom Florenskim" in *Vjačeslav Ivanov: Archivnye materialy i issledovanija*, 93-120. Moscow: Russkie slovari, 1999.
- Florenskij, Pavel. "Chramovoe dejstvo, kak sintez isskustv." *Makovec* 1.1 (1922): 28-32. *Filosofija Kul'ta (Opyt pravoslavnoj antropodicej)*. Moscow: Izd. Mysl', 2004.
- Florensky, Pavel. *Iconostasis*. Translated from Russian by Donald Sheehan and Olga Andrejev. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996.
- _____. *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters*. Translated from Russian by Boris Jakim. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Florovsky, Georges. *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*. Translated from Russian by Robert L. Nichols. Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1979.

- Florovskij, Georgij. *Puti ruskoga bogoslovija*. Paris: YMCA-Press, 1981.
- Foretić, Dubravko. *Borba sa stvarima. Krležin teatar 1972–1986. Bilješke kazališnog suputnika*. Zagreb: Hrvatsko društvo kazališnih kritičara i teatrologa, 1986.
- Gajdenko, Piama. *Vladimir Solov'ev i kultura serebrjannogo veka*. Moscow: Progress-Tradicija, 2001.
- Garcia, Susanna. "Scriabin's Symbolist Plot Archetype in the Late Piano Sonatas." *19th-Century Music* 23.3 (Spring 2000): 273-300.
- Gašparović, Darko. *Dramatica krležiana*. Zagreb: Cekade, 1989.
- Gavioli, Laura, ed. *Verità e bellezza. Realismo russo. Dipinti dal Museo Nazionale d'Arte Lettone di Riga*. Marsilio: Venice, 2007.
- Gercen, Aleksandr I. *Sobranie sočinenij v tridcati tomach*. Moscow: Izd-vo AN SSSR, 1954-1966.
- Gigov, Nikola. *Gela: Orfevo cvete*. Sofia: Medicina i fizkultura, 1988.
- Gippius, Vasilij V., Zen'kovskij, Vasilij V. N. V. *Gogol'*. St Petersburg: Logos, 1994.
- Glyantz, Vladimir. *Gogol' i Apokalipsis*. Moscow: Eleks-km, 2004.
- Gogol, Nikolai V. *Plays and Petersburg Tales*. Translated by Christopher English. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Gogol', Nikolaj V. *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pisem v 17 tomach*. Moscow-Kiev: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskoj Patriarchii, 2009.
- Grotowski, Jerzy. *Towards a Poor Theatre*. Edited by Eugenio Barba. London: Methuen Drama, 1991.
- Groys, Boris. *Gesamtkunswerk Stalin. Die gespaltene Kultur in der Sowjetunion*. Munich-Vienna: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1988.
- _____. *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Hagemeister, Michael und Metelka, Torsten, eds. *Materialien zu Pavel Florenskij*. Berlin-Zepernick: edition Kontext, 2001.
- Hagemeister, Michael. *Nikolaj Fedorov. Studien zu Leben, Werk und Wirkung*. Munich: Sagner, 1989.
- Hayden, Deborah. *POX, Genius, Madness, and the Mysteries of Syphilis*. New York: Basic Books, 2004.
- Hollander, Robert. "The Apocalyptic Framework of Dostoevsky's 'The Idiot.'" *Mosaic* 7 (1974): 123-139.

- Hutchings, Stephen C. *Russian Literary Culture in the Camera Age: The Word as Image*. New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004.
- Ivanov, Vjačeslav. *Sobranie Sočinenij*. Edited by D. Ivanov and O. Deschartes. Vols. 1-6. Bruxelles: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1971-87.
- _____. *Skrjabin*. Moscow: IRIS—PRESS, 1996.
- Jackson, Robert L. and Nelson, Lowry Jr., eds. *Vyacheslav Ivanov: Poet Critic and Philosopher*. New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies/Slavica Publishers, 1986.
- Jackson, Robert L. *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form: A Study of His Philosophy of Art*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978.
- _____. *The Art of Dostoevsky: Deliriums and Nocturnes*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.
- Kant, Immanuel. "The End of All Things." In *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*. Translated by Ted Humphrey, 93-106. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1983.
- Kazakova, Ljudmila. "Steklo E. Gallè i L.K. Tiffany kak chudožestvennyj fenomen." In *Evropejskij simvolizm*, edited by Igor' Svetlov, 316-31. St Petersburg: ALETEIIA, 2006.
- Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Kiaer, Christina. *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005.
- Kohák, Erazim, ed. *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Kostalevsky, Marina. "The Birth of Poetry from the Spirit of Criticism. Ivanov on Skrjabin." *Russian Literature* 44.3 (Fall 1998): 317-29.
- Kovač, Mirko. (URL), "Nedostaje nam veličina jednog Krleže." (Conversation with Ševko Kadrić: http://www.orbus.be/proza/proza_06.htm).
- Kozlov, Anton. "La perception de la mort dans la culture russe au tournant di XXe siècle." *Les Cahiers Slaves* 3 (2001).
- Krleža, Miroslav. *Davni dani. Zapisi 1914–1921*. In *Sabrana djela Miroslava Krleže*, Vols. 11–12. Zagreb: Zora, 1956.
- _____. *Dnevnik 1914–17: Davni dani I*. Sarajevo: NIŠP Oslobođenje, 1977.
- _____. *Dnevnik 1918–22: Davni dani II*. Sarajevo: NIŠP Oslobođenje, 1977.

- _____. *Dnevnik 1958–69*. Sarajevo: NIŠP Oslobođenje, 1977.
- _____. *Drame (Vučjak, Galicija, Golgota)*. Sarajevo: NIŠRO Oslobođenje, 1988.
- _____. *Legende*. Zagreb: Zora, 1967.
- _____. *Poezija*. Zagreb: Zora, 1969.
- _____. *Vražji otok*. Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, Matica hrvatska, HAZU, 2000.
- Kumiega, Jennifer. *The Theatre of Grotowski*. London: Methuen Drama, 1985.
- Ladan, Tomislav. "Lirska topika Miroslava Krleže." *Kolo* 6 (1968): 42-51.
- Lasić, Stanko. *Krleža: kronologija života i rada*. Zagreb: Grafički zavod Hrvatske, 1982.
- _____. *Krležologija ili Povijest kritičke misli o Miroslavu Krleži. Knjiga 1. Kritička literatura o Miroslavu Krleži od 1914 do 1941*. Zagreb: Globus, 1989.
- Leatherbarrow, William J. *Fedor Dostoevsky*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981.
- Lingua, Graziano, ed. *Icona e avanguardia. Percorsi dell'immagine in Russia*. Turin: Zamorani, 1999.
- Livsić, Benedikt K. *Polutoraglasyj strelec*. New York: Cehov, 1978.
- Lobanova, M. N. "'Ekstaz' i 'bezumie': Osobennosti dionisijkogo mirovospriyatija A. N. Skrjabina." *Voprosy filosofii* 3 (March 2007): 159-70.
- Lodder, Christine. *Russian Constructivism*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1983.
- Lončar, Mate. "Saloma Miroslava Krleže." In *Miroslav Krleža*. Edited by Vojislav Đurić, 249-274. Belgrade: Prosveta, 1967.
- Losev, Aleksei F. *The Dialectics of Myth*. Translated by Vladimir Marchenkov. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Losev, Aleksej F. "Mirovozzrenie Skrjabina." In *Strast' k Dialektike*, 256-301. Moscow: Soveckij pisatel', 1990.
- _____. *Ja soslan v XX vek*. Vol. 2. Edited by Aza A. Takho-Godi. Moscow: Vremja, 2002.
- Losskij, Nikolaj O. *History of Philosophy*. New York: International Universities Press, 1951.
- Lossky, Vladimir. "The Divine Light." In *The Mystic Theology of the Eastern Church*, 217-35. London: James Clarke & Co., 1957.
- Ludwik, Flaszen. "Conversations with Ludwik Flaszen." *Educational Theatre Journal* 30.3 (1978): 301-328.

- MacDonald, Hugh. "Words and Music by A. Skryabin." *The Musical Times*. 113.1547 (January 1972): 22-25.
- Malevič, Kazimir S. *Čěrnjy Kvadrat*. Edited by Aleksandra S. Šatskich. Moscow: Azbuka, 2001.
- Marjanić, Suzana. "Two of Krleža's Poetical/Ethical Subversions in Bygone Days." *Narodna umjetnost* 35.1 (1998): 277-302.
- _____. *Glasovi "Davnih dana": transgresije svjetova u Krležinim zapisima 1914-1921/22*. Zagreb: Naklada MD, 2005.
- Marx, Karl. *Nemačka ideologija. Kritika najnovije nemačke filozofije u licu njenih predstavnika Fojerbaha, B. Bauera i Štirnera i nemačkoga socijalizma u njegovim različitim prorocima*. Vol. 1. Belgrade: Kultura, 1964.
- Masing-Delić, Irene. "The Salvation Model of Blok's The Twelve." *The Slavic and East European Journal* 24.2 (1980): 118-132.
- _____. *Abolishing Death: A Salvation Myth of Russian Twentieth-Century Literature*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992.
- _____. "Who Are the Tatars in Aleksandr Blok's 'The Homeland'? The East in the Literary-Ideological Discourse of the Russian Symbolists." *Poetica* 35 (2003): 123-153.
- Matičević, Ivica. *Raspeti Juda: pristup biblijskom predlošku u drami hrvatske avangarde*. Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1996.
- Matich, Olga. *Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia's Fin de Siecle*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005.
- Matković, Marijan. *Razgovori i pogovori. O pjesnicima, slikarima i odlascima*. Zagreb: Znanje, 1985.
- Matlaw, Ralph E. "Skriabin and Russian Symbolism." *Comparative Literature* 31.1 (Winter 1979): 1-23.
- Meľnikova, Ljubov' V. *Armija i Pravoslavna crkva Rossijskoj Imperii v epochu napoleonovskih vojn*. Moscow: Kučkovo pole, 2007.
- Merežkovskij, Dmitrij S. *Tolstoj e Dostoevskij. Vita-creazione-religione*. Bari: Laterza, 1947 (2nd edition).
- _____. *Estetika i kritika*. Moscow: Char'kov, 1994.
- _____. *Carstvo Antichrista. Stat'i perioda emigracii*. Edited by A. N. Nikoljukin. St Petersburg: RChGI, 2001a.
- Miočinović, Mirjana. *Pozorište i giljotina. Rasprave o drami*. Belgrade: Edicija REČ, 2008.

- Misler, Nicoletta. "The Religious Ritual as Social Event." In *"Event" Arts and Art Events*. Edited by Stephen C. Foster, 159-174. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988.
- Mondry, Henrietta. "Vasilij Rozanov, evrei i russkaja literatura." In *Rozanov i Evrei*, edited by Efim Kurganov and Henrietta Mondry, 155-270. St Petersburg: Akademičeskij Proekt, 2000.
- Montanus, Henner. *Der kranke Heine*. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1995.
- Morov, Vasilij. *Oda Puškina "Voľnost" i "Arzamas"*. Moscow: Novoe zercalo, 2009.
- Morrison, Simon. "Skryabin and the Impossible." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51.2 (Summer 1998): 283-330.
- Nečaev, Vissarion Episcop. *Tolkovanie na Božestvennyju Liturgiju*. Sergiev Posad: Svjato-Troickaja Sergieva Lavra: 1996.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Vesela nauka*. Belgrade: Grafos, 1984.
- _____. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and Nobody*. Translated by Graham Parkes. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Nikolaidis, Andrej. *Homo Sucker: poetika apokalipse*. Zagreb: Algoritam, 2010.
- Nikoljukin, Aleksandr N., ed. *Merežkovskij pro et contra*. St Petersburg: RChGi, 2001.
- Nolle-Kogan, Nadežda. "Iz vospominanij," *PRO ET CONTRA, Ličnost' i tvorčestvo Aleksandra Bloka v kritike i memuarach sovremennikov*. St Petersburg: Izd. Russkogo Christianskogo Gumanitarnogo Instituta, 2004.
- Očak, Ivan. *Krleža – Partija: Miroslav Krleža u radničkom i komunističkom pokretu 1917-1941*. Zagreb: Spektar, 1982.
- Olivieri, Claudia. *Dostoevskij: loocchio e il segno*. Soveria Mannelli (CZ): Rubettino, 2003.
- Oppo, Andrea. *Philosophical Aesthetics and Samuel Beckett*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008.
- Otto, Friedrich. *The End of the World: A History*. New York: Fromm International Publishing Corporation, 1986.
- Paglia, Camille. *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.
- Pančenko, Aleksandr M. *O ruskoj istorii i kul'ture*. St Petersburg: Azbuka, 2000.
- Paperno, Irina and Grossman, Joan, eds. *Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Symbolism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.
- Patočka, Jan. *Přirozený svět a lidské existence*. Archive Material (Samizdat). Prague (1980): 2.7.

- _____. *Umění a filosofie*. Archive Material (Samizdat). Prague (1985).
- _____. *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*. Edited by James Dodd. Chicago/La Salle: Open Court, 1996.
- _____. *Péče o duši*. Vol. II. Prague: OIKOYMENH, 1999.
- _____. *Péče o duši*. Vol. III. Prague: OIKOYMENH, 2002.
- Pisarev, Dmitrij I. *Sočinenija v 4 tomach*. Edited by Jurij S. Sorokin. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo chudožestvennoj literatury, 1955.
- Poplavskij, Boris Ju. "Po povodu 'Atlantidy-Evropy.'" In *Merežkovskij pro et contra*. Edited by Aleksandr N. Nikoljukin, 365-68. St Petersburg: RChGi, 1930.
- Popović, Bruno. *Tema krležiana: monografska rasprava*. Zagreb: Izdanja Centra za kulturnu djelatnost, 1982.
- Pykett, Lyn, ed. *Reading Fin de Siecle Fictions*. London: Longman, 1996.
- Pyman, Avril. *The Life of Aleksandr Blok*, vol. 2, *The Release of Harmony*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- _____. *A History of Russian Symbolism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Quispel, Gilles. *The Secret Book of Revelation*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979.
- Rodčenko, Aleksandr M. "Rodčenko v Pariže. Iz pisem domoj." *Novyj Lef* 2 (1927): 9-21.
- Rosenthal, Bernice Glatzer, ed. *Nietzsche in Russia*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986.
- _____. ed. *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture: Ally and Adversary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- _____. ed. *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- _____. "Losev's Development of Themes from Nietzsche's 'The Birth of Tragedy.'" *Studies in East European Thought* 56.2/3 (June 2004): 187-209.
- Rougemont, Denis de. *Zapadna pustolovina čovjeka*. Belgrade: Književne novine, 1983.
- Rozanov, Vasilij V. *Apokalipsičeskaja sekta (Chlysty i Skopcy)*. St Petersburg: Tipografija F. Vajsberga i P. Geršunina, 1914.
- _____. *Izbrannoe*. Edited by Evgenija Žiglevič. Introduction by Heinrich A. Stammer and Evgenija Žiglevič. Munich: A. Neimanis Verlag, 1970.

- _____. "Gesù dolcissimo e gli amari frutti del mondo." In *Movimenti religiosi in Russia prima della rivoluzione (1900-1917)*. Edited by Pier Cesare Bori and Paolo Bettio, 134-144. Brescia: Queriniana, 1978.
- _____. *L'Apocalisse del nostro tempo*. Edited by Alberto Pescetto. Introduction by Jacques Michaut. Milan: Adelphi, 1979.
- _____. *Sumerki prosvěščenija*. Edited by Aleksandr N. Nikoljukin. Moscow: Respublika, 1990.
- _____. *Sacharna. Obonjatel'noe i osjazatel'noe otnošenje evreev k krovi*. Moscow: Respublika, 1998.
- _____. *Apokalipsis našego vremeni*. Edited by Aleksandr N. Nikoljukin. Moscow: Respublika, 2000.
- Russo, Luigi and others. *Nicea e la civiltà dell'immagine*. Palermo: Aesthetica Preprint, 1998.
- Sabaneeff, Leonid. "Pavel Florenskij-Priest, Scientist, and Mystic." *Russian Review* 20.4 (October 1961): 312-25.
- Sabaneev, Leonid. *Vospominanija o Skrjabinu*. Moscow: Muzsektor Gosizdata, 1925.
- Salizzoni, Roberto. *L'idea russa di estetica. Sofia e Cosmo nell'arte e nella filosofia*. Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1992.
- Sarab'janov, Dmitrij V. *Russkaja živopis' XIX veka sredi evropejskich škol*. Moscow: Soveckij chudožnik, 1980.
- Schechner, Richard and Wolford, Lisa, eds. *The Grotowski Sourcebook*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Schiaffino, Gabriella. "Il volto oscuro. Metafisica del cristianesimo. Alle radici della scrittura di V.V. Rozanov." In *Vasilij Rozanov. Atti del Convegno internazionale di Gargnano del Garda, 1-4 ottobre 1990*. Edited by Jitka Křesálková, 221-240. Milan: Università degli Studi, 1993.
- Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century*. Translated by Angela Davis. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Schloezer, Boris de. *Scriabin: Artist and Mystic*. Translated by Nicolas Slonimsky. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987.
- Scriabin, Aleksandr N. *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire, Op. 60*. London, New York: E. Eulenburg N. 8008, 1980.
- Scriabin, Alexander. "Prométhée. Le Poème du feu, Op. 60." Conducted by Pierre Boulez. Anatol Ugorski, piano. Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus. Deutsche Grammophon, 1999.

- Semenova, Svetlana G. *Nikolaj Fëdorov. Tvorčestvo žizni*. Moscow: Soveckij pisatel', 1990.
- Senkovskij, Osip I. *Sočinenija Barona Brambeusa*. Moscow: Sov. Rossja, 1989.
- Ševyrëv, Stepan P. *Rossija pered vtorym prišestviem. Materialy k očerku ruskoj eschatologii*. Sergiev Posad: Svjato-Troickaja Sergieva Lavra, 1993.
- Sirin, Efrem (Saint). *Tvorenija*. Moscow: Izdatel'skij otdel Moskovskogo Patriarchata, 1993.
- Skrjabin, Aleksandr. "Zapisi A. N. Skrjabina." In *Russkie Propilei*. Vol. 6. Edited by Michail Geršenzon, 120-247. Moscow: Izdanie M. i S. Sabašnikovych, 1919.
- Sloterdijk, Peter. *Kritika ciničkoga uma*. Zagreb: Globus, 1992.
- Solovëv, Vladimir S. *Sobranie Sočinenij v 10 tomach*. Edited by Ernst Radlov and Sergej M. Solovëv. St Petersburg: Prosveščenie, 1911-1914.
- _____. *Sočinenija v dvuch tomach*. Edited by Aleksej Losev and Arsenij Gulyga. Moscow: Mysl', 1988.
- Sontag, Susan. *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*. New York: Picador; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988.
- Stančić, Vesna. "Saloma u kontekstu Krležine dramske riječi." In *Dani Hvarskog kazališta VIII. Miroslav Krleža*, 108-120. Split: Književni krug, 1981.
- Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Edited by Roger Luckhurst. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Sudović, Zlatko. *Filmski portret Miroslava Krleže*. Zagreb: Zagreb Film, 1978.
- Szilard, Lena. "Orfej rasterzannyj' i nasledie orfizma." In Vjačeslav Ivanov, *Archivnye materialy i issledovanija*, 210-249. Moscow: Russkie slovari, 1999.
- Tagliapietra, Andrea. *Icone della fine. Immagini apocalittiche, filmografie, miti*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010.
- Tarkovskij, Andrej, *L'Apocalisse*. Translated into Italian by Andrej A. Tarkovskij. Florence: Edizioni della Meridiana, 2005.
- Tarkovsky, Andrey. *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*. Translated from the Russian by Kitty Hunter Blair. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.
- Tarkovsky, Andrei. *Time Within Time: The Diaries 1970-1986*. Translated from the Russian by Kitty Hunter-Blair. London: Faber & Faber, 1994.
- Taruskin, Richard. "The Music of Alexander Scriabin; Scriabin: Artist and Mystic." *Reviews. Music Theory Spectrum* 10 (Summer 1988): 143-69.

- _____. *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Theophylact of Ohrid. *Blagovestnik, ili Tolkovanie Blažennago Feofilakta, Archiepiskopa Bolgarskago, na Svjatae Evangelie*. Moscow: Skit, 1993.
- Trubeckoj, Evgenij N. *Mirosozercanie Vl. S. Solovëva*. Vol. 2. Moscow: Medium, 1995.
- Trubeckoj, Sergej N. *Sočinenija*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Mysl', 1994
- Tumarkin Nina. "Religion, Bolshevism, and the Origins of the Lenin Cult." *The Russian Review* 40.1 (January 1981): 35-46.
- _____. *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Turkov, Andrej. *Vse eto bylo, bylo, bylo...* . Moscow: MIK, 2007.
- Valle, Roberto. *Dostoevskij politico e i suoi interpreti. L'esodo dall'Occidente*. Rome: Archivio IZZI, 1990.
- Vanslov, Viktor V., ed. *Russakaja progressivnaja chudožestvennaja kritika vtoroj poloviny XIX-načala veka*. Moscow: Izobrasitel'noe iskusstvo, 1977.
- Vasilič, Georgij. *Imperator Aleksandr i starec Feodor Kuzmič*. Reprinted recreation of the edition of 1911. Moscow: 1991.
- Vinickij, Il'ja J. "Nikolaj Gogol' i Ugroz Svetovostokov". *Voprosy literatury* (Sentjabr'-Oktjabr' 1996): 167-194.
- Visković, Velimir, ed. *Krležijana 1*. Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod "Miroslav Krleža," 1993.
- _____. ed. *Krležijana 2*. Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod "Miroslav Krleža," 1993.
- Wachtel, Michael. "The 'Responsive Poetics' of Vjačeslav Ivanov." *Russian Literature* 44 (1998): 303-15.
- Wachtel, Michael. *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition: Goethe, Novalis, and the Poetics of Vjačeslav Ivanov*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994.
- Weininger, Otto. *Sesso e Carattere*. Pordenone: Edizioni Studio tesi, 1992.
- Williams, Robert C. *The Other Bolsheviks: Lenin and His Critics, 1904-1914*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Wolfson, Elliot R. *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

Zelmanović, Đorđe. *Kadet Krleža: školovanje Miroslava Krleže u mađarskim vojnim učilištima*. Zagreb: Školske novine, Sveučilišna naklada Liber, 1987.

Zenkovsky, Vasilii V. *A History of Russian Philosophy*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967.

Žmegač, Viktor. *Težišta modernizma: od Baudelairea do ekspresionizma*. Zagreb: Sveučilišna naklada Liber, 1986.

_____. "Krležina dnevnička proza." *Umjetnost riječi* 1 (1988): 39-53.

Zolotusskij, Igor'. *Gogol'*. Moscow: Molodaja Gvardija, 1998.

INDEX

- Agamben, Giorgio 173
Aleksandr I 93–95, 214
Arendt, Hannah 76; *Active Life* 76
Aristotle 21
Artaud, Antonin 228n6, 230–232,
232n25, 233, 234n38, 242;
Theatre and Its Double 230
Augustine 32; *Confessions* 32
Babić, Ljubo 165, 166; *Udovice* 165;
Narikače 165; *Black Flag* 165;
Golgotha 165
Bach, J. S. 249, 250, 264; *St Matthew
Passion* 249
Bachtin, Michail M. 44
Badurina, Natka 153
Bakst, Lev N. 164
Bakunin, Michail A. 169n67, 171n72
Balabina, Maria P. 102
Balzac, Honoré 61
Barba, Eugenio 240n50
Baudelaire, Charles 135, 138n22,
152, 154n7; *Les Fleurs du mal*
138n22
Beckett, Samuel 233, 233n33, 234n38
Beethoven, L. van 185; *Ninth
Symphony* 185
Bejlis, Menahem M. 56
Belinskij, Vissarion G. 64, 65
Belyj, Andrej N. 30, 134, 257;
Reminiscences 134
Benois, Aleksandr N. 28
Berdjaev, Nikolaj A. 24–32, 42, 177n4,
218, 245, 246n9, 250n17, 251,
251n20; *Russian Idea, The* 26
Bergman, Ingmar 252
Bird, Robert 202n55
Blok, Aleksandr A. 30, 31, 33, 134,
134n1, 135, 135n4n5, 136–138,
138n20n21, 139, 140, 142, 144,
146, 147, 150, 150n75, 151, 152,
257; *Black Blood* 144; *Dance
of Death, The (Pljaski smerti)*
142; *Demon* 141; *Diaries*
135; *Homeland (Rodina)*
145, 146; “In the Restaurant”
(*V restorane*) 141; *Life of
My Friend, The (Žizn'moego
prijatelja)* 142n42; “New
America” (*Novaja Amerika*)
146; *Retribution (Vozmezdie)*
141, 144; *Scythians, The* 146;
Song of Hell 145; *Twelve, The
(Dvenadcat')* 137, 140, 147,
148, 150–152
Blok, Ljubov' D. 134n4
Brecht, Bertold 228n6, 234n38
Brusilov, Aleksej A. 157
Buber, Martin 241
Budak, Mile 173
Bulgakov, Sergej N. 30, 118, 250n17, 257
Čadaev, Pëtr Ja. 38, 39, 256;
Philosophical Letters 256

- Carlyle, Thomas 38
- Čechov, Anton P. 169n65, 252n21
- Černyševskij, Nikolaj G. 211, 212;
*Aesthetic Relationships between
 Art and Reality (Estetičeskie
 otnošenija iskusstva k
 dejstvitel'nosti)* 211
- Cezanne, Paul 204
- Chaim, Ben 232
- Chomjakov, Aleksej S. 26
- Chvatik, Ivan 82n31
- Cieślak, Ryszard 226, 227, 240
- Cieszkowski, Auguste 26
- Čiževskij, Dmitrij I. 91–94, 115
- Courbet, Gustave 215; *Les casseurs de
 pierre* 215
- Croyden, Margaret 236
- Čulkov, Georgij I. 138n21
- D'Annunzio, Gabriele 164
- Da Vinci, Leonardo 249, 250;
Adoration of the Magi 249
- Dalcroze, Emile Jacques 241
- Dante Alighieri 140
- Demetrović, Juraj 168, 168n64, 169
- Derrida, Jacques 226–228, 228n7,
 229–231, 233, 234, 238, 240;
Dissemination 228, 228n7; *Of
 Grammatology* 228n7; *Voice
 and Phenomenon* 228n7,
Writing and Difference 228n7;
Margins of Philosophy 228n7
- Detoni-Dujmić, Dunja 168n64
- Djagilev, Sergej P. 28
- Dobroljubov, Nikolaj A. 64, 65
- Dostoevskij, Fëdor M. 27, 28, 31, 32,
 38–40, 42, 122–124, 124n4,
 125, 126, 128, 129, 131–133,
 145, 156, 215, 216n24, 218,
 220, 235–237, 240, 242, 243,
 245, 246, 250n17n18, 251,
 251n20, 257, 261n29; *Brothers
 Karamazov, The* 124; *Crime and
 Punishment* 123, 124; *Devils,
 The* 27, 42, 122, 124, 128–132,
 261n29; “Discourse on Puškin”
 27; *Dnevnik pisatelja* 215;
Idiot, The 124, 125, 127, 128,
 131, 132, 242, 250n18 *Legend of
 Great Inquisitor* 236, 242, 243,
 245; *Notes from the House of
 the Dead* 122; *Winter Notes on
 Summer Impressions* 123, 133
- Dullin, Charles 234n38
- Edwall, Allan 264
- Efrem Sirin, St. 91, 111
- Ejzenštejn, Sergej M. 247n11
- Eliot, Thomas S. 234, 234n37, 236,
 240, 242; “Ash Wednesday V”
 234n7, 235
- Ern, Vladimir F. 30
- Erofeev, Venedikt V. 245, 257;
Moscow-Petuški 245, 257
- Fëdorov, Nikolaj F. 28–30, 66, 220;
 “Philosophy of the Common
 Task” 220
- Feuerbach, Ludwig 26, 251
- Fichte, Johann G. 38, 179
- Filaret (Drozdov), the Metropolitan of
 Moscow 114n60
- Filonov, Pavel N. 204
- Findlay, Robert 232n24
- Flaszen, Ludwik 239
- Flaubert, Gustave 162
- Fleetwood, Susan 264

- Flekser, Akim L. 64
- Florenskij, Pavel A. 30, 31, 56, 56n76, 57, 178; 179, 180n11, 245n5, 250n17, 254, 254n22, 260n27; “Orthodox Rite as a Synthesis of the Arts, The” 180n11; *Philosophy of the Cult, The* 56; *Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters, The* 245n5
- Florovskij, Georgij 95, 180, 180n11, 183, 185, 187, 202
- Foucault, Michel 65
- Frank, Semën L. 30
- Gabo, Naum B. 209
- Gallé, Emile 194n42
- Gašparović, Darko 170
- Gavella, Branko 165
- Gisladottir, Gudrun 264
- Givone, Sergio 251n20
- Glazunov, Il’ja S. 91n3
- Goethe, J. W. von 154, 167n60, 200n51
- Gogol’, Nikolaj V. 31, 38, 39, 64, 89–101; 101n27, 102, 103, 105–108, 110, 112–121, 139; *Dead Souls* 89, 94, 121; *Diary of a Madman* 97; *Government Inspector, The* 89, 92, 107, 108, 112, 113, 115, 117, 118, 119, 120; *Meditations on Divine Liturgy* 107; *Nose, The* 92, 97–100, 103, 105–108; *Portrait, The* 89, 91, 92, 94, 95, 104–106
- Golicin, Aleksandr N. 92
- Gončarova, Natal’ja S. 204
- Gor’kij, Maksim 40, 143, 150; *Confession (Ispoved’)* 150
- Gregory Palamas 183n21
- Grotowski, Jerzy 31, 225, 226, 226n3, 227, 228, 228n6, 231–233, 233n33, 234, 234n35n38, 235–237, 237n44, 238, 239, 239n47, 240, 240n48n50, 241, 241n51, 242; *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* 225, 226, 226n1, 227, 233, 234, 234n37, 235, 235n40, 236–238, 239n46, 240–242; *Constant Prince, The* 234; *Doctor Faustus* 234; *Towards a Poor Theatre* 228n6, 241–242
- Groys, Boris E. 246n9
- Gurdjieff, Georgij I. 241
- Hagemeister, Michael 221
- Hayden, Deborah 138n22
- Hegel, G. W. F. 26, 71, 264
- Heidegger, Martin 31, 76, 80, 247, 251
- Heine, Heinrich 137n17
- Herzen, Alexandr I. 125
- Hobbes, Thomas 172
- Hoffmann, E. T. A. 249
- Holberg, Ludvig 168n60; *Jakob von Tyboe or the boastful soldier* 168n60
- Hollerbach, Erich F. 64
- Husserl, Edmund 31, 82
- Huygens, Christiaan 193n41
- Ignatij (Brjančaninov), St. 105, 113
- Ivanov, Vjačeslav I. 30, 177, 177n5, 178, 180, 180n11n15, 187, 187n29, 188–190, 190n34, 191, 192, 195, 196, 196n44, 197, 199, 199n49, 200, 200n51n53, 202, 202n55, 206, 245n4; *Collected Works* 192;

- “Diamond” 195, 196; “Garland of Sonnets” (“Venok sonetov”) 202n55; *Gli spiriti del viso* (“Spirits of the Eyes”) 197, 198; “In Memory of Skrjabin” 178, 190; *Kingdom of Transparency* (*Carstvo Prozračnosti*) 191, 196n44; “Ljubov” 202n55; “Orpheus Dismembered” (“Orfej rasterzannyj”) 196; “Rainbows” (“Radugi”) 199; “Skrjabin’s View on Art” 180n11, 188, 189; *Transparency* (*Prozračnost’*) 189; 196, 197
- Jackson, Robert L. 122
- Jahołkowski, Antoni 240
- Jarošenko, Nikolaj A. 214; *The Stoker* (*Kočegar*) 214
- Josephson, Erland 252, 264
- Jung-Stilling, Heinrich 92, 93; *Triumph of Christian Faith, The* 92; *Victory Song* 92; *Victory’s Narrative* 92
- Kanin, boatman 213, 214
- Kant, Immanuel 20, 22, 31, 32, 78, 167, 246n7; *End of All Things, The* 20, 21
- Karpov, Lev Ja. 220n37
- Kermode, Frank 21
- Kljuev, Nikolaj A. 44
- Končalovskij, Pëtr P. 204
- Kovač, Mirko 173
- Kovačević-Lopašić, Zlata 163n45
- Krasin, Leonid B. 220n37, 221n37
- Krleža, Miroslav 31, 153–155, 155n9, 156n15, 157–163, 163n45, 164–168, 170, 171, 171n72, 172, 173; *Behind the Scenes of 1918* 158; *Fragments* 157; *Galicia* (*Galicija*) 168; *Golgotha* 168n60n61, 169, 169n65n67, 170, 171; *Grand Master of All Knives* 158; *I dream of the shadow of an unknown woman* 159; *Kristofor Kolumbo* 171, 171n72; *Legenda* 157; *Maskerata* 157; *Comment on Kristoval Kolon* (*Napomena o Kristovalu Kolonu*) 171n72; *Olden Days* (*Davni dani*) 153, 154, 154n7, 155–160, 162, 163n45, 164–166, 171, 171n72, 172; *Return of Philip Latinovicz, The* 31; *Salome* 171; *Thirty Years Ago (1917–1947)* (*Prije trideset godina (1917–1947)*) 153; *Vučjak* 168; *Writings from Tržič* 154; *Zaratustra i mladić* 157
- Krleža, Miroslav junior 156
- Krnic-Peleš, Olga 163n45
- Krüdener, Barbara Juliane 93
- Kumiega, Jennifer 226, 226n3, 234n37, 235, 235n40, 236n40, 239n44n46
- Kustodiev, Boris M. 203
- Kvaternik, Eugen 155n10
- Kveder-Demetrović, Zofka 168, 168n64, 169
- Kveder-Jelovšek, Zofka 163n45
- Labzin, Aleksandr F. 92
- Laplace, Pierre-Simon 167
- Larionov, Michail F. 204
- Lasić, Stanko 157

- Lenin, Vladimir I. 38, 41, 171n72,
 219, 219n32, 220, 220n37, 221,
 221n41, 224
- Leont'ev, Konstantin N. 28–30
- Lermontov, Michail Ju. 141; “Demon”
 141
- Lessing, Theodor 21; *History as Giving
 Meaning to the Meaningless* 21
- Leszczyłowski, Michal 262n30, 264;
Directed by Tarkovsky 262n30
- Levickij, Feodosij 96, 96n12
- Levinas, Emmanuel 76
- Lisevič, Feodor 96, 96n12
- Lorrain, Claude 133
- Losev, Aleksej F. 27, 113,
 180, 180n11n13, 181,
 181n13n14n15, 182, 182n16,
 183, 186, 187, 187n29, 200,
 202; “Skrjabin’s Worldview”
 (“Mirovozzrenie Skrjabina”)
 180
- Losskij, Nikolaj O. 30
- Lucretius 22; *De rerum natura* 22
- MacDonald, Hugh 184n23
- Makovskij, Konstantin E. 214; *Visit,
 The (Svidanie)* 214
- Malevič, Kazimir S. 204, 206, 208, 221,
 221n41, 257; *Suprematist Black
 Square (Černyj suprematičeskij
 kvadrat)* 206, 207; *White on
 White: White Square (Belyj
 kvadrat)* 207, 208
- Maljavin, Filipp A. 203
- Mann, Thomas 239n46; *Doctor
 Faustus* 239n46
- Marx, Karl 38, 157, 167n57
- Maškov, Il’ja I. 204
- Massenet, Jules 154
- Matisse, Henry 204
- Matjušin, Michail V. 204
- Melnikov, Konstantin S. 220n37
- Mendeleev, Dmitrij I. 139
- Merežkovskij, Dmitrij S. 30, 33, 35,
 35n7, 37, 38; 40, 40n24; 42,
 57, 120, 251n20; *Dostoevskij
 and Tolstoj* 40; *Prophet of the
 Russian Revolution, The* 40;
*Which of you? Judaism and
 Christianity* 34
- Meštrović, Ivan 161–165; *Temple of
 Vidovdan* 161, 163, 164
- Meyerbeer, Giacomo 109; “Robert le
 Diable” 109
- Meyerhold, Vsevolod E. 228n6
- Miočinović, Mirjana 170
- Mirecka, Rena 240
- Mjasoedov, Grigorij G. 215; *Harvest
 Season: Reapers, The (Stradnaja
 pora. Koscy)* 215; *Sower, The
 (Sejatel’)* 215
- Mondry, Henrietta 65
- Moreno, Jacob 241
- Moser, Justus 167n60
- Muller, Dragutin 155n9
- Napoleon I 94, 95, 105
- Newton, Isaac 22; *Treatise on
 Revelation* 22
- Nietzsche, Friedrich 31, 51, 54, 59,
 61, 150, 161; 171, 251, 251n20,
 252, 261; “Joke, Cunning and
 Revenge”: *Prelude in German
 Rhymes* 161; *Wille zur Macht*
 59, 62
- Nikolaj I 89

- Nikon, patriarch 45
- Nolle-Kogan, Nadežda A. 134
- Nykvist, Sven 252, 264
- Olmi, Ermanno 235
- Owen, Robert 38
- Pareyson, Luigi 251n20
- Patočka, Jan 31, 68–73, 75–78, 80–82, 82n31, 83, 85, 87; *Christianity and Natural World* 69, 70, 71, 77, 82, 83; *Four Seminars on the Problem of Europe* 78, 80; *Heretical Essays on Philosophy of History* 71, 77, 80; “*Natural World and Phenomenology, The* 83; *Space and Its Problems (Prostor a jeho problematika)* 83; *Question on the Beginning and Place of History, The* 77; *Reflections on Prehistory* 72, 73, 75; *Spiritual Foundations of Contemporary Life* 68, 80
- Perls, Fritz 241
- Perls, Laura 241
- Peter the Great 55, 124
- Petrov-Vodkin, Kuz'ma S. 204
- Pevsner, Natan (Antoin) 209
- Picasso, Pablo 246
- Pisarev, Dmitrij I. 217; *Destruction of Aesthetics, The (Razrušenie estetiki)* 217; *Realists, The (Realisty)* 217
- Pius VII 94
- Plato 85, 228, 229, 229n11, 257; *Phaedrus* 229, 229n11
- Platonov, Andrej P. 257
- Plautus 172
- Pogodin, Michail P. 100, 116
- Puškin, Aleksandr S. 107, 112, 113, 114n60; “*Vol'nost*” 114n60
- Puzyna, Konstanty 236
- Pyman, Avril 134
- Rasputin, GrigorijE. 41
- Repin, Il'ja E. 213, 215; *Boatmen on the Volga (Burlaki na Volge)* 213, 215
- Rjabušinskij, Stepan P. 193n42
- Rodčenko, Aleksandr M. 204, 209
- Rosenthal, Bernice 251n20
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 229
- Rozanov, Vasilij V. 30, 31, 33, 35,–41, 45–54, 56n76, 57–61, 64–67, 138n21; *Apocalypse of Our Times, The* 33, 35; 57–59, 61; *Apokaliptičeskaja sekta* 41, 49, 52; *Dark Face, The* 42; *Place of Christianity in history, The* 35
- Ruskin, John 38
- Sabaneev, Leonid P. 176, 179
- Sar'jan, Martiros 204
- Saussure, Ferdinand de 229
- Ščedrin, Michail E. 64
- Schechner, Richard 228n6
- Schopenhauer, Arthur 172
- Scotto, Peter 137n16
- Ščusev, Aleksej V. 219
- Šechteli, Fëdor O. 193n42
- Selivanov, Kondratij I. 49, 52, 53
- Šepit'ko, Larisa E. 245; *Ascent, The* 245
- Šestov, Lev I. 30, 251, 251n20
- Ševyrëv, Stepan P. 101n27; *Istorii russkoj slovesnosti, preimyščestvenno drevnej* 101n27
- Shakespeare, William 168, 217,

- 250n18; *Hamlet* 253; *Macbeth* 257; *Richard III* 250n18
- Shor-Deschartes, Olga 192
- Signorelli, Luca 91n3
- Simeon Polockij 89
- Skovoroda, Grigorij S. 44
- Skrjabin, Aleksandr N. 31, 175–177, 177n4n5, 178, 178n6n7, 179, 180, 180n11n13, 181, 181n13n14n15, 182, 182n16, 183, 184, 184n22n23, 185–192, 197, 200–202; “Dances for Piano” 185; *Flammes sombres* (“Dark Flames”) 185; *Guirlandes* (*Garlands*) 185; *Mysterium, The* (*Misterija*) 177, 178, 178n7, 179, 180, 180n11, 181, 181n15, 182, 182n16, 184–191, 201, 202; *Ninth Symphony* 185; *Piano Sonata No. 7* (“*White Mass*”) 185; *Piano Sonata No. 9* (“*Black Mass*”) 185; *Poème satanique* 185; *Preparatory Act, The* (*Predvaritel'noe dejstvo*) 178, 178n7; 179–181, 184–188, 200–202; *Prometheus: A Poem of Fire* 184–186, 190; 200, 202; *Second symphony* 181n13; *Vers la flamme: poeme* (“*Toward the Flame: A Poem*”) 185
- Smirnova, Aleksandra O. 119
- Solov'ev, Vladimir S. 28–30, 33, 38, 39, 42–45, 102, 111, 113, 120, 139, 151, 176, 177n4, 179, 181n15, 182n15, 191, 191n37, 193, 200, 218, 250n17, 251; “Beauty in Nature” 191n37, 200; *Critique of contemporary enlightenment and crisis of the world process* 43n33; *Great Schism and Christian Politics, The* 44; “*Meaning of Love, The*” 151; *Tale of the Anti-Christ* 30; 113; *Three Conversations* 102
- Solženicyn, Aleksandr I. 125
- Sontag, Susan 138n19 *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* 138n19
- Spengler, Oswald 25
- Stalin, Iosif V. 219, 222–224
- Štancer, Slavko 163, 164
- Stanislavskij, Konstantin S. 146, 169n65, 228n6, 234n38
- Starčević, Ante 155, 155n10
- Stasov, Vladimir V. 213n23
- Stepanova, Varvara F. 209
- Stirner, Max 154n7, 166, 167, 167n57, 171n72
- Stoker, Bram 139; *Dracula* 139
- Struve, Pëtr B. 30
- Švarsalon, Vera K. 202n55
- Szilard, Lena 199n49
- Tacho-Godi, Aza A. 181n14
- Tarkovskij, Andrej 31, 244–247, 247n11, 248, 249, 249n14, 250, 250n18, 252–255, 257, 259–262; 262n30, 264; *Andrej Rublev* 245, 247n11, 249n14, 254; *Hamlet* 249; *Hoffmanniana* 249; *Ivan's Childhood* 249n14; *Mirror, The* 249n14, 253; *Nostalgia* 245, 249n14, 253; *Sacrifice, The* 249,

- 252, 252n21, 254, 256, 261,
263; *Solaris* 249n14; *Stalker*
245, 249n14; *Witch, The* 249
- Taruskin, Richard 177n5
- Tereščenko, Michail I. 137
- Theophylact of Ohrid 103
- Tiffany, Louis Comfort 193n42, 194n42
- Tito, Josip Broz 173
- Tolstoj, Lev N. 27, 28, 31, 40, 52, 56,
246; *Kreutzer Sonata* 52
- Trockij, Lev D. 171n72
- Trubeckoj, Evgenij N. 111, 112
- Trubeckoj, Sergej N. 30, 46, 95,
182n15; *History of the Doctrine
of the Logos* 46
- Turnbull, Karen 153
- Udal'zova, Nadežda A. 204
- Varvara — see Stepanova, V. F.
- Vera — see Švarsalon, V. K.
- Verlaine, Paul 159
- Vinickij, Il'ja J. 92
- Vissarion (Nečaev), bishop 99;
Interpretation of Divine Liturgy
99
- Vojnović, Ivo 163, 164
- Vrubel', Michail A. 141; *Demon* 141
- Wagner, Richard 176, 177
- Weil, Simone 235, 242
- Weininger, Otto 38; *Sex and Character*
38
- Weisskopf, Mikhail 98n19, 106
- Wilde, Oscar 159, 161, 162, 164,
165n50; *Salome* 161
- Zen'kovskij, Vasilij V. 118; *History of
Russian Philosophy* 118, 151
- Zetkin, Klara 170
- Zhivov, Viktor M. 184n21
- Zinov'eva-Annibal, Lidija D. 202n55
- Zola, Emile 152; *Nana* 152
- Zolotusskij, Igor' P. 116, 120

