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# Russian Refractions of Spanish ‘National Soul’: Konstantin Bal’mont and the Poetics of Vitalism

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At the turn of the twentieth century, the Russian symbolist poet Konstantin Bal’mont devoted himself to translating the dramatic works of Calderón de la Barca. The poet’s translation project was part of his general enthusiasm for Spanish culture. Although this interest was to a large extent informed by existing imagological representations of the Spanish national character, it was also driven by Bal’mont’s original thought on the idea of ‘wholeness’ (цельность), which is prominently represented in his articles related to these translations, and in his other contemporaneous texts on literature and culture. Comparable with the romantic concept of ‘plenitude’, wholeness has a horizontal as well as a vertical dimension: it refers to the coexistence of diverse, mostly mutually contradictory phenomena on the one hand, and to the intensity of life experience on the other. In addition to Calderón’s dramas, Goya’s etchings were also considered by Bal’mont as typical examples of Spanish wholeness. Bal’mont’s new ideas coincide with a shift from impressionist to vitalist poetics, an example of which is his poem ‘Like a Spaniard’.

## Introduction

In his seminal article on the Russian symbolist poet Konstantin Bal’mont (1867-1942), Vladimir Markov (1969: 259) distinguished a “blue” and a “red” period in the poet’s oeuvre. The former period, characterized by “introvert” poetry (one could also call it *poésie pure*), coincides with the publication of his first four books during the years 1890-98, whereas the latter starts in 1899, with the appearance of the much more extravert, vitalist book *Burning Buildings* (*Горящие здания*). Markov’s distinction, like most periodizations, might seem to be an *a posteriori* one, but in fact it is not. Archival

material shows that Bal'mont's transition from impressionism to vitalism was a conscious one, and that it was meant to last for many years. In a letter he wrote on July 3, 1900, to his friend, the Moscow lawyer and poetry lover Aleksandr Urusov (1843-1900), he remarked:

Вы издавна привыкли видеть во мне поэта голубых и серебристых тонов. Но эта полоса творчества отошла от меня надолго, быть может безвозвратно. Меня давно уже манит другое. Если бы я стал писать теперь стихи в прежнем своем стиле, я стал бы лгать перед собой. Я люблю теперь 'хорохориться', я чувствую для этого силы, я люблю реальную жизнь с ее дикой разнузданностью и безумной свободой страстей. [...] Я хочу прикоснуться к противоречиям мира, чтобы понять их. (RGALI, f. 514, op. 1, ed. chr. 88, l. 32-33).<sup>1</sup>

For many years, you have been accustomed to seeing in me a poet of blue and silvery tones. But this phase of my work has left me for a long time, maybe for ever. For a long time, I have been lured by something else. If I were now to start writing poems in my former style, I would be lying to myself. Now I love to 'swagger', and I feel the power for that. I love real life, with its unbridledness, with its crazy freedom of the passions. [...] I want to touch the world's contradictions, in order to understand them.

It is interesting to note that Bal'mont connected his new poetics and life attitude with the epistemological question of understanding the world's inner contradictions. Ambivalence and contradiction are at the heart of a series of essays and articles on Spanish literature and culture, written by Bal'mont at the turn of the century. The aim of my contribution is to analyze the relation between Bal'mont's vitalist poetics and his imagological representation of Spanish national character, in his discursive texts as well as in his poetry.

An often recurring and important term in Bal'mont's writings – especially in his articles – around the turn of the century is *цельность*, which can be translated as 'wholeness'. This leading principle in Bal'mont's endeavor to grasp the world's contradictions comes close to the idea of 'plenitude', which Arthur Lovejoy, in his book *The Great Chain of Being* (1936), identifies as the basic characteristic of Romanticism. Romantic writers devoted to plenitude would try to express as fully as possible "the abundance of difference" – in the German tradition called "die Fülle des Lebens", one of its properties being dissonance (Lovejoy 1982 [1936]: 293-294).

Bal'mont's infatuation with Spanish culture dates back to his long journey through Western Europe with his wife Ekaterina Andreeva, in 1896-97. It was in Spain that he started to study Spanish (letter from Bal'mont to his parents, dated November 1, 1896 –

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<sup>1</sup> Bal'mont's letter, written in Oxford, was a response to letter in which Urusov expressed his dislike of *Burning Buildings*. RGALI stands for the Russian Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow.

RGALI, f. 57, op. 1, ed. chr. 127, l. 54). Very soon after that, he embarked upon the translation of several theater pieces by Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681), and he planned to translate works by several other seventeenth-century Spanish authors. He first asked the Petersburg editor Aleksei Suvorin to publish these translations (letter to Suvorin dated December 6, 1897 – RGALI, f. 459, op. 1, ed. chr. 236, l. 30b-4), but this request was apparently turned down. In the end three volumes containing a total of only six of Calderón’s pieces were published, by the brothers Sabašnikov, in 1900, 1902, and 1912, respectively (Turkevich 1967: 21-22).

### Calderón de la Barca, Goya, and the concept of ‘wholeness’

Bal’mont’s models for tragic wholeness were Calderón and, with sharper demonic overtones, the visual artist Goya (1746-1828). The former was presented from the stereotypical perspective of the ‘passionate’ Spaniard who is led by contradictory, but sincere, emotions. This standpoint allowed Bal’mont to elaborate on wholeness in both a horizontal sense (infinite diversity) and a vertical one (intensity). The emphasis in both cases was on individual psychology, that is, on the microcosmic richness of the human soul.

Bal’mont’s perception of the ambivalence of the Spanish national soul is well epitomized in the title of the introduction to his translation of *El purgatorio de San Patricio*: “From Passions Toward Contemplation”. The “rich psychological ambivalence” that the author claimed could be observed in Spaniards was seen as a combination of two particularly attractive traits: a sense of concrete reality on the one hand, and a proclivity toward abstraction on the other hand (Bal’mont 1900: xi). He related this opposition to a series of dissonant connections, such as that of geniality with childish naivety, of power with tenderness (in Spanish poetry), and of the nightingale’s song with the screaming of the raptor (in the Spanish language) (ibid.). An essential aspect of this contradiction, though, is its relation to the idea of intensity. According to Bal’mont, the wholeness of the Spanish national character can be observed particularly well in love matters. In this respect, the author cited from Calderón’s play *El mayor monstruo, los celos*:

“Когда любовь не есть безумие, она не есть любовь”, восклицает Кальдерон, – и этот возглас, краткий, яркий и дышащий правдой, прекрасен, как все цельное, безупречен в своей красоте, как безупречен вольный коршун, как безукоризнен тигр. (Bal’mont 1900: xxxvi)

“When love is not craziness, it is not love”, Calderón exclaims, and this outcry, short, clear, and exhaling truth, is beautiful like anything whole, and it is flawless in its beauty, just like the free kite is flawless, and like the tiger is unblamable.

According to Bal'mont, in Spanish thought the human passions were the "key to beauty" ("ключ к красоте"). Their overwhelming intensity would imply the autonomization of art: the Spaniards had "once and for all split up the world of ethics and the world of art" ("раз навсегда разорвали мир этики и мир искусства"; 1900: xxxvi). In this context, Bal'mont discussed Calderón's treatment of jealousy in *El médico de su honra*, favoring the tragic life attitude in the Spanish national soul. He considered Calderón's drama to be much more interesting than Shakespeare's *Othello*, where jealousy was depicted "beyond the psychological wholeness" ("вне психологической цельности") of this feeling. The Spanish author, though, showed it as a vital force that was connected with the feeling of honor (Bal'mont 1900: xli-li).

In Bal'mont's discussion of Calderón's dramas, the above-mentioned development from passion to contemplation represents the idea of a horizontal wholeness that is oriented toward ambivalence. The protagonist of both *El purgatorio de San Patricio* and another of Calderón's plays, *La devoción de la Cruz*, is a brigand who, having led a dissolute life, repents and chooses the path of Christ. For the main character in *La vida es sueño*, the passionate and cruel king, Segismundo, abstraction from earthly matters has quite an absolute character, as the king comes to understand that life is nothing more than a dream. Quite naturally, Bal'mont associated this line of thought with the Indian concept of the empirical world as an illusion ("mâya") (1900: lxxi-lxxii). Indian motifs had played a crucial role in *Silence* (*Тишина*, 1898), the poet's last book from his 'blue' period.

Two years later, in an article on *La devoción de la Cruz*, Bal'mont treated the passion topos with regard to the problem of good and evil. The article showed his disagreement with Merežkovskij's article 'Calderón' (1891), in which the emphasis had been on the religious theme of love for God (Merežkovskij 1995: 391). As Bal'mont put it, Eusebio, the protagonist of *La devoción de la Cruz*, lived in his own world, which was "full of passion" ("полный страсти мир"), a world where good and evil were experienced as equivalent forces (1901: 315). The author argued that Calderón, in his rendering of the brigand, already touched upon the thematics that Poe, Dostoevskij, Baudelaire, and Nietzsche would work out later. The representation of evil in an amoral key was grounded by Bal'mont in the principle of intensity: not only Calderón, but Spanish sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama writers in general were seen to prefer "the type of man who delivers himself to 'evil' in the name of love for 'evil' itself" ("тип человека, отдающегося 'злу' во имя любви к самому 'злу'"; 1901: 314). By putting "evil" between quotation marks, Bal'mont stressed the separation between the ethical and the artistic category – a thought he had already expressed in the above-mentioned introduction to *El purgatorio de San Patricio*. The vitalist ethos aestheticizes evil, annihilating the traditional connection of goodness and beauty.

In the following years, the vertical aspect of Bal'mont's wholeness principle would gain even more importance. This observation becomes clear in two essays dated 1903:

‘The Feeling of Individuality in Poetry’ (‘Чувство личности в поэзии’) and ‘Calderón’s Drama of the Individual’ (‘Кальдероновская драма личности’) (Bal’mont 1904: 11-25 and 26-42). In both cases, the concept of individuality refers to the self-realization of a psychologically rich, energetic individual with a great deal of willpower. It is interesting to note that in the latter essay, Bal’mont returned to the ideas he had formulated in his introductory article four years earlier, this time rejecting the perspective of abstraction and asceticism in favor of a Dionysian flush of life (Bidney 1998: 52-53). Again, Segismundo’s idea of life as a dream was compared with Indian thought, albeit through the prism of Helena Blavatsky’s book *The Voice of the Silence* (1889), from which Bal’mont cited extensively. To the Indian ideal of withdrawal from material life, he replied in a vitalist manner:

Кто восстает на полновольность наших хотений, тот восстает на жизнь. А что же может быть слаще жизни, при всех ее мучениях, при всей жгучей боли, связанной с каждым наслаждением. (Bal’mont 1904: 40)

Those who stand up against the full freedom of our desires, stand up against life. And what can be sweeter than life, in spite of its torments, in spite of the burning pain that accompanies each pleasure.

In fact, he pleaded for the Nietzschean *amor fati* or love of fate: one should love life in the complex, dissonant totality of its manifestations (i.e., in its wholeness of a horizontal kind)<sup>2</sup> and with a maximal intensity (vertical wholeness). In both aspects, the aesthetic element was of great importance: on the one hand, Bal’mont wrote that one had to dare to contemplate “the infinity of possible ways, as well as the beauty of their diversity” (“бесконечность путей, и красоту их разнообразия”; 1904: 40); on the other hand, he argued that in severe pain one’s powers of observation would increase, and that an individual who had understood “Beauty” (with a capital) would not be afraid of suffering.

The conclusion to *Calderón’s Drama of the Individual* is an apologia for vitalism. In Bal’mont’s opinion, the relation between man and transcendent reality did not consist as much in the passive surrendering of the subject to the Absolute, as in the active striving to “be” like the Absolute – which would give the subject the highest degree of autonomy. The author made an appeal to be like God, who likes darkness as much as light, but also “to be like the Sun” – a clear reference to his own, much acclaimed book

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<sup>2</sup> Compare with Bal’mont’s essay on William Blake, ‘The Forefather of Contemporary Symbolists’ (‘Праотец современных русских символистов’), in which it is stated that the English poet and visual artist blessed everything in life, because “life is a wholeness that one has to understand and to love as such” (“мир есть цельность, которую нужно понять и полюбить как таковую”; 1904: 48). The article appeared in the same book by Bal’mont in which *Calderón’s Drama of the Individual* was included, namely *Mountain Tops* (*Горные вершины*).

of poetry *Let Us Be Like the Sun* (*Будем как Солнце*), which he had published in 1903. In his article, he wrote:

Будем как Солнце, которое со всеми нашими звездами уносится к далекому созвездию Геркулеса, но живет для себя. (Bal'mont 1904: 41)

Let us be like the Sun, which moves away to the remote constellation of Hercules together with all our stars, but lives for its own sake.

The sun-like hero, endowed with all the major qualities of Nietzsche's superman, had already been evoked by Bal'mont in an article on Goethe, titled 'The Chosen One of the Earth' ('Избранник земли', 1899). But whereas Goethe represented the impassivity of artistic Apollonianism, the solar imagery surrounding the picture of future man as seen through the prism of Calderón's dramas clearly had a Dionysian character and echoed the sun motif in *Also sprach Zarathustra*.

The second essay from 1903, titled 'The Feeling of Individuality in Poetry', shows an application of the same wholeness concept to the poetic genre. The two dimensions of this concept constitute the kernel of what Bal'mont regarded as artistic individuality. The intensity topos resulted in the ideal of living in and for the moment, which in its turn would cause the annulment of the course of time:<sup>3</sup>

Только цельность хороша, только душа, которая так ярко чувствует, что может воскликнуть: для меня нет ни вчера, ни завтра. (Bal'mont 1904: 11)

Only wholeness is good, only a soul that feels in such a bright manner that it can exclaim: for me neither yesterday nor tomorrow exists.

As Bal'mont put it, such a kind of wholeness must be praised in any case, even were it to end in a tragic defeat (1904: 12).

Another genius who in Bal'mont's opinion should be conceived of as "a true Spaniard" (*истый испанец*) was the visual artist Francisco Goya. As Bal'mont argued in his essay 'The Poetry of Terror' ('Поэзия ужаса'), Goya's nature was too passionate to show any interest in questions of a moral order (1904: 5). Whereas with respect to Calderón the justification of evil had above all been motivated by the idea of intensity, Bal'mont in this case referred to the horizontal dimension of vitalist wholeness. Discussing Goya's collection of etchings called *Los Caprichios*, he depicted the latter as

своего рода художественная теодицея, гармоническое оправдание зла – бесконечным разнообразием его оттенков, гимн красоте чудовищного, которая потому и встает, как красота, что она неисчерпаема. (Bal'mont 1904: 7)

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<sup>3</sup> Here again, it is Goethe who comes to mind ("Werd'ich zum Augenblicke sagen: / 'Verweile doch! du bist so schön!' [...]", 1969: IX, 52; the protagonist's words in his conversation with Mephistopheles, in the first part of *Faust*).

a kind of artistic theodicy, a harmonious justification of evil by the endless diversity of its nuances, a hymn to the beauty of the monstrous, a beauty that arises because it is inexhaustible.

In this way, he observed a double neutralization of traditional oppositions: not only of the opposition between good and evil, but also of that between beauty and monstrosity.

The latter neutralization was the object of a short article by Bal'mont (published in the same book, *Mountain Tops*) bearing the title 'About Monsters' ('О чудовищах'). Here, the author defends ugliness as an attractive aesthetic category, because of the "dullness" of uniformity ("Нам скучно однообразие"; 1904: 206). This kind of defiance of the age-old Western concept of beauty is symptomatic of Decadent poetics. As can be seen already in the works of Charles Baudelaire, strangeness and surprise are characteristics shared by beauty and monstrosity (Grava 1956: 52).

A double approach to wholeness emerges from the article. On the one hand, Bal'mont emphasizes the total, encompassing character of artistic representation, which should provide room for the lofty and the low, for monstrous as well as traditionally 'harmonious' reality. Between the two poles of this modern concept of beauty, there would be coherence, which implies that the 'diabolic' worldview, typical of the early phase of Russian symbolism, is undermined (Hansen-Löve 1998: 29). In Bal'mont's view (1904: 206), the low strata of reality ("то, что внизу," as he calls it) are a terrifying reflection ("отраженье") of higher reality ("то, что вверху"). This view can be considered a variation on Dmitry Merežkovskij's well-known motif of the double abyss, which served as an existential metaphor for the infinite reality surrounding man.

On the other hand, monstrosity, as Bal'mont saw it in Goya's etchings, would constitute an autonomous, infinitely diverse cosmos on its own:

Мы ликуем, перелистывая альбомы Гойи, потому что за этой энциклопедией Поэзии Чудовищного мы чувствуем беспредельность, и, соприкоснувшись с ней, яснее ощущаем свою бесконечную душу. (Bal'mont 1904: 207)

We jubilate while browsing Goya's albums, because behind this encyclopedia of the Poetry of the Monstrous we experience boundlessness and, having touched upon it, we get a clearer feeling of our infinite soul.

In other words, for Bal'mont the monstrous was a hypostasis of the Absolute, containing the contradictory qualities of both the repelling *mysterium tremens* and the irresistibly attractive *mysterium fascinans*. This diabolic reality, then, would correspond with the microcosm of human soul.



## Wholeness and vitalism in Bal'mont's poem 'Like a Spaniard'

The first book of Bal'mont's 'red' period – containing the first examples of his vitalist poetics – is called *Burning Buildings: Lyric of the Contemporary Soul* (*Горящие здания: лирика современной души*, 1899). The concept of 'wholeness' occurs several times in it, but even more conspicuous are the motifs of fire, blood, and the color red – which makes Markov's designation of the new period in Bal'mont's poetical development all the more apt.

In this section, I will concentrate on the poem 'Like a Spaniard' ('Как испанец') as an example of both literary imagology and poetic vitalism. In the first place, however, a few words should be said about the book's subtitle, and about its structure, which was designed by the poet as an amalgam of contradictory parts.

The subtitle *Lyric of the Contemporary Soul* is explained by the epigraph for the whole collection of poetry: "Мир должен быть оправдан, / Чтоб можно было жить" ("The world must be justified, / so that one be able to live"; Bal'mont 1994: I, 215). This auto-citation, from Bal'mont's homonymous poem in *Burning Buildings* called 'The World Must be Completely Justified' ('Мир должен быть оправдан весь', 1994: I, 267), almost literally refers to a passage in *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* where Nietzsche discusses "der rein ästhetischen Weltauslegung und Welt-Rechtfertigung" as an alternative to Christian morality (Nietzsche 1968: III, 1: 12; see also Lane 1986: 201). Bal'mont's book is itself an example of such an aesthetic justification of the world, whereby ambivalence and contradictions function as typical attributes of the complex 'wholeness' of existence – and particularly of the wholeness of the human soul.

*Burning Buildings* consists of twelve mutually contrasting sections, the first and the last of which stand out because they each contain only one poem (understandably, with a programmatic character). If one reads the book from the second to the eleventh section, the development of the lyrical hero shows the transition from an initially vitalist stance to much more introvert, impressionist lyricism and, at the end, a high degree of abstraction from empirical reality (represented by motifs from Indian philosophy and contemporary theosophy). The general outlook, then, is that of the history of a human soul that makes its way "from passions toward contemplation", to cite the title of Bal'mont's aforementioned article about one of Calderón's plays. Nevertheless, the coda of the book – a poem about the lyrical hero having transformed into Lucifer – is in a vitalist key. In fact, ambivalence is at the heart of *Burning Buildings*, as the central section (the sixth one, which is also the longest) bears a conspicuous epigraph taken from another great work from the Golden Age of Spanish theater, namely Tirso de Molina's *La venganza de Tamar*: "¿Quién sois vos que habláis así? – Un compuesto de contrarios" ("Who are you, that you speak like this? – A compound of opposites") (Bal'mont 1989: 174; see also Markov 1988: 116).

The poem “Like a Spaniard” is written in a melodious anapestic tetrameter, combining an *aabb* end rhyme with the occasional internal rhyme. It is part of the vitalist second section of *Burning Buildings* called ‘Reflections of the Glow’ (‘Отсветы зари’), and it contains two of the book’s leitmotifs – namely blood and the color red – from the very first stanza:

Как испанец, ослепленный верой в Бога и любовью,  
И своею опьяненный и чужою красной кровью,  
Я хочу быть первым в мире, на земле и на воде,  
Я хочу цветов багряных, мною созданных везде. (Bal’mont 1994: I, 226)

Like a Spaniard, blinded by his belief in God and by love, / Drunk from his own as well as from someone else’s red blood, / I want to be the first in the world, on earth, and on the water. / I want scarlet flowers, created by me everywhere.

In this stanza, just as in those that follow it, several stereotypical qualities of the Spanish national character are evoked: passionate love, religiosity, and – as a negative hypostasis of passion – cruelty.<sup>4</sup> Bal’mont would repeat this idea of the passionate, cruel Spaniard in his essay ‘On Cruelty’ (‘О жестокости’), which was written in 1907 and published a few years later in his book *The Sparkling of the Sea* (*Морское свечение*):

С детских дней я привык, научаемый повседневной речью, думать, и даже быть уверенным, что среди Европейских народов есть один, который несомненно первенствует в области чувства, именующегося Жестокостью. Черная маска, кинжал, бархат и кровь, бледные лица и шпаги, убийство, романтика. Ну, конечно, я говорю об Испанцах. Их ревность, их фанатизм. (Bal’mont 1910: 159)

Since my childhood, everyday speech has led me to think, and even to be convinced, that among the European nations there is one that undoubtedly occupies the first place as far as the feeling called Cruelty is concerned. A black mask, a dagger, velvet and blood, pale faces and epees, murder, romanticism. Of course, I am talking about the Spaniards. Their jealousy, their fanaticism.

Whereas cruelty, together with amorous and religious fervor, pertain to the traditional image of Spaniards existing in Russian as well as in other northern cultures (Kataeva 1994: 42), the representation of the Spaniard as an ambitious conqueror of the world seems relatively new from the viewpoint of imagology. In fact, the Spanish thirst for territorial expansion receives the most attention throughout this poem. The second stanza shows the lyrical hero dreaming about his future discovery of primeval forests, and about the sky above Peru turning red with a “glow” (“заревом”). In the third

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<sup>4</sup> A female version of Spanish all-consuming love can be found in Bal’mont’s next book, *Let Us Be Like the Sun*, in a poem called ‘Anita’ (1994: I, 445; see Metz 2009: 31-32).

stanza, we see him longing for copper, gold, balsam, diamonds, and rubies from the territories that he will be colonizing.

The urge for expansion in 'Like a Spaniard' can be interpreted from a larger symbolic perspective: it would refer, then, to the human striving for ever-new experiences. This kind of interpretation is confirmed by a passage in the already mentioned essay 'The Feeling of Individuality in Poetry', in which Bal'mont – with regard to the Spanish as well as the English national character – describes the colonization of America as the work of "untamable seekers of the new" ("неукротимых искателей нового", 1904: 14). The essay states that, besides the import of gold and jewelry, the discovery of the New World also means an enrichment of the Spanish national psyche. Bal'mont observed a profoundly Spanish "infatuation with the insatiable power of one's own personality, which exclaims: 'It's not enough! I want more, more!'" ("влюбленность в ненасытную силу своей личности, которая кричит: 'Мало! Еще! Еще!'" ; 1904: 14). This love for the intensity of one's own inner world is reflected in the second verse of the poem.

In the light of the intensity with which the Spaniard lives his adventurous life, moral norms appear as relative, and ambivalence as well as volatility become essential values. The latter can be seen in the fourth stanza, in which the lyrical hero rushes from one bliss into another ("от счастья к счастью"; 1994: I, 226). Absolute mobility is the spatial correlate of such volatility: the Spaniard travels across oceans and deserts, and chases enemies "everywhere" ("всюду"). The final stanza (the fifth) epitomizes the desire to constantly change one's position, in both a geographical and an ideational sense:

И, быть может, через годы, сосчитав свои владенья,  
Я их сам же разброшу, разгоню, как привиденья,  
Но и в час переддремотный, между скал родимых вновь,  
Я увижу солнце, солнце, солнце, красное, как кровь. (Bal'mont 1994: I, 227)

And when many years later I count my possessions, / I will maybe scatter them  
myself, chase them like ghosts, / But in the hour before sleep, when I am amidst  
my native rocks again, / I will see the sun, the sun, the sun red like blood.

Despite the hero's maximal volatility, the final verse shows an unchangeable ethos, namely the vitalist ecstasy with which the poem started. Blood, the red color, and the sun/fire constitute a cluster of motifs associated with warmth and life energy. The 'red blood' is an image that Aleksandr Blok would eagerly make fun of in one of his parodies (Begak, Kravcov & Morozov 1980: 189), but the pleonasm clearly had an emotional overtone – as well as a euphonic character because of the alliteration. Red is an index of the tragic, intense experience of life, in particular of earthly reality as opposed to metaphysics, which is associated with the color blue (Malej 1999: 40). The telluric aspect of the red blood is reiterated further on in the poem, when blood occurs in the enumeration of natural resources longed for by the lyrical subject, immediately after the rubies and just before the corals, both related to the blood motif: the Spaniard wants

to see “blood spouting from the breasts of defeated potentates” (“[к]рови, брызнувшей из груди побежденных властелинов”; 1994: I, 226).

In addition to red, a more vivid color – scarlet – is also used in the poem. This happens in the fourth stanza, in which the Spaniard persecutes his enemies “under the scarlet flash of the day” (“под багряной вспышкой дня”) – an almost expressionist rendering of a momentaneous time experience – as well as in the first stanza, which has already been cited: the lyrical hero wants to see “scarlet flowers” (“цветов багряных”) “created” by him everywhere. The latter motif endows the lyrical hero with demiurgic qualities: he is the creator of a new material and aesthetic reality. The fact that the ideal of intensity is linked with creative activity allows for a metapoetic interpretation of the poem: the Spaniard symbolically stands for the superhuman artist that Bal’mont has in mind.

Significantly, the blood-red flower’s attractiveness is the theme of a poem called ‘The Color Red’ (‘Красный цвет’), which comes just after ‘Like a Spaniard’ in *Burning Buildings*. Here, the lyrical hero describes how he feels his blood “singing” (“кровь поет во мне”) when he gazes at red poppies, carnations, roses, and “lilies [...] covered with blood of the scarlet moon” (“лилии [...] [о]кровавленные багряною луной”; 1994: I, 227).

Finally, Bal’mont’s poetic image of the passionate Spaniard is – not surprisingly – connected with attributes of the element of fire: the “glow” above Peru, the scarlet “flash” of the day, and the “burning heart” (“жарким сердцем”) with which the colonizer longs for natural resources and for blood. The predominant manifestation of this element, though, is the sun motif, which appears three times in the last verse of the poem (with an effective pause between the second and the third “солнце,” as the caesura of the verse falls between them). Starting from 1899 – the year of publication of *Burning Buildings*, which marks the beginning of Bal’mont’s ‘red’ period – both the sun and fire would have a conspicuous mythopoetic function in the poet’s oeuvre, sharing such properties as vitality, passion, eternal youth, and beauty.

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