The poetics of personal behaviour: the interaction of life and art in Russian modernism (1890-1920)

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Chapter 3. Life-Creation Strategies of the Russian Symbolists

0.0. Preamble

My understanding of the life-creation project of Russian modernism owes much to the groundbreaking reflections of Vladislav Khodasevich, as he expressed them in the essay “The End of Renata”, devoted to one of the most brilliant figures of Russian life-creation, the prototype of the main female character in Valerii Briusov’s novel “Fiery Angel” (“Огненный ангел”) Nina Petrovskaia, who was also connected by a special relationship to Andrei Belyi. In this interesting memoir-style article, Khodasevich tells: “The Symbolists did not wish to separate the writer from the person, the literary biography from the personal one. Symbolism did not wish to be only an artistic school or literary trend. It constantly strove to become a life-creation method, and this was its most profound, though perhaps unrealizable, truth; but its entire history, essentially, was spent in the constant pursuit of this truth”.

In Khodasevich’s understanding, this life-creation method was fully experimental or, perhaps, exploratory; at its heart lay a fundamental idea of an elusive “synthesis” of different components. As Khodasevich saw it, the alchemical crucible of this phenomenon was in the context of the tragic nonrealization of the initial aspirations of the Symbolist movement, its early confidence in the appearance of a Genius who would combine the real-life and aesthetic layers into a single act of Creativity. In his opinion, Symbolism’s life-creation consisted of “a series of attempts—at times truly heroic—to find a fusion of life and creative work, a sort of philosopher’s stone of art. Symbolism stubbornly sought in its milieu a genius who could merge life and creative work into a single thing”.

Khodasevich continues, amplifying his conception of Russian Symbolism’s life-creation: “Within each individual, the person and the writer struggled to predominate. Sometimes one was victorious, and sometimes the other.... If literary talent proved stronger, the writer won out over the person. If the talent for living proved stronger than literary talent, literary creativity receded into the background and was subdued by creativity of another kind, the real-life kind. At first glance, this is strange, but, in effect, it was logical that at that time and among those people, the gift of writing and the gift of living were valued almost identically”.

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347 “ряд попыток, порой истинно героических, – найти сплав жизни и творчества, своего рода философский камень искусства. Символизм упорно искал в своей среде гения, который сумел бы сплести жизнь и творчество воедино”. See: Ibid.: 21.

348 “Внутри каждой личности боролись за преобладание человека и писателя. Иногда побеждал один, иногда другой. ... Если талант литературный оказывался сильнее – писатель побеждал человека. Если сильнее литературного таланта оказывается талант жить – литературное творчество отступало на задний план, поддавалось творчеством иного, жизненного порядка. На первый взгляд, странно, но в сущности последовательно было то, что в ту пору и среди тех людей дар писать и дар жить расценивались почти одинаково”. Ibid.: 21.
Apropos of this, Khodasevich recalls that Konstantin Bal’mont, when publishing his famous collection “Let us be like the sun!” (Будем как солнце) for the first time, had printed in it a dedication that was quite characteristic in this respect: “To Modest Durnov, an artist who has created a poem out of his own personality”. It was important, Khodasevich believes, that for a “proper” Symbolist poet, “legends should be created about his life, about his personality”. Hence, as Khodasevich reasons, “an artist who creates a ‘poem’ not in his art, but rather in his life, was a legitimate phenomenon at that time”. Here Khodasevich quotes the lines that appear to be very relevant in the same context:

*Out of a poor and random life*

*I made an endless trepidation*  

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It is this “life-creation phenomenon” of Russian modernism to which the analytical description (based on material from the most significant Russian Symbolist authors) of this chapter is dedicated. The analysis of each of the relevant manifestations adduced will not receive equal attention. I consider the centers of the Symbolist phenomenon of life-creation to be the “examples” of Belyi and Blok, the idea of the Eternal Feminine, the complex of the spiritual practices of Argonautism, and the development of Vladimir Soloviev’s gnostic-androgynous ideas and expecations as he understood them through the prism of life-creational utopianism. Indeed, these topics—“the feminine”, “eros”, and “physicality”—will be the focus of my attention.  

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1.0. The philosophical foundation of the phenomenon of life-creation

1.1. Nikolai Fedorov: a forerunner

The Russian philosopher Nikolai Fedorov exerted a considerable influence, it seems, on the destiny of Russian modernism, especially on its “utopian” platform of a life-aesthetic. With respect to life-creation practices, we can glean quite a bit of interest from the philosopher’s treatise entitled “The art of likenesses (of imaginary artistic restoration) and the art of reality (real resurrection)”. 351 In Fedorov’s conception, the “art of likenesses” needed to be transformed into the (utopian) “art of reality”; in this context, the task of art was not the mechanical “reproduction” of life but a new constructive “rebuilding” of it. Thus life must be *created*, including by the means of art and aesthetics; life as a “project” would become the goal of the “common task”. In

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349 “Из жизни бедной и случайной / Я сделал трепет без конца”. Ibid.
351 “Искусство подобий (мнимого художественного восстановления) и искусство действительности (действительное воскрешение)”. See: Федоров 1913: 240.
Fedorov’s words, an aesthetic relationship to reality\textsuperscript{352} suggests the restoration of departed rational beings and their population of many heavenly bodies that are to be fit for this. In Fedorov’s terms: “Aesthetics is a science about the reconstruction of all the rational beings that have existed on the diminutive Earth (this droplet that reflected itself in the whole universe and reflected the whole universe in itself), rational beings for the vivification (and government) of all the immense heavenly worlds that have no rational beings. Indeed, this reconstruction constitutes the beginning of eternal bliss”.\textsuperscript{353}

According to Fedorov, mankind must not be the complaisant slave of nature, the executor/gravedigger for the deathly substance out of which, according to first principles, grows the “putrid root of enmity” so odious to the philosopher, as it is responsible for both the dissociation between persons and their relatively short-lived physical existence. Mankind is destined to learn how to create “another organism” for itself, which will manifest itself as “the union of knowledge and action”. The nourishment of this organism will be “in a conscious way, through a creative process”, in the course of which elemental cosmic substances will be converted into mineral substances, then into the substances of plants, and, finally, into living tissues.

Fedorov advocates and foresees a sort of ideal new reality in which the new kind of person that has come into existence, using his own organs, will make “the aero- and etheronautical [“аэро и эфиронавтические”] means whereby he will travel in the space of the universe and procure for himself the materials for the construction of his own body”.\textsuperscript{354} As we may observe, the spirit and the letter of Fedorov’s doctrine about resurrection are clearly life-creational, fixed on the notion of “creating life” by means of speculation, aesthetics, and mental exertion. This approach and this worldview must have been quite relevant for the majority of the figures active in Russian Symbolism, especially the representatives of the “younger generation”.

1.2. Vladimir Sergeevich Soloviev: Instructive Prophet of Russian Symbolism

The wider philosophical legacy of Fedorov’s younger contemporary, philosopher Vladimir Soloviev, served in turn as a spiritual and “practical” basis for an entire “second generation” of Russian Symbolists. (Belyi, Blok and the members of their circles, and also for Viacheslav Ivanov, whose texts alone, among all of the Symbolists, Soloviev “officially” praised in print).

Soloviev can be considered a sort of “spiritual bridge” between Fedorov and the Russian Symbolists. Soloviev wrote a letter to Fedorov, in which he declared his full commitment to the proposed complex of ideas. “I unconditionally accept your Project, without any reservations, and there is no need to talk about the project itself; but I need to talk about certain of its theoretical foundations or assumptions, as well

\textsuperscript{352} In contrast to the views of Nikolai Chernyshevskii, who studied the issues involved with the relationship between “art” and “reality” in his dissertation. See: Чернышевский 1974.
\textsuperscript{353} “Эстетика есть наука о воссоздании всех бывших на крохотной земле (этой капельке, которая себя отразила во всей вселенной и в себе отразила всю вселенную), разумных существ для одухотворения (и управления) ими всех громадных небесных миров, разумных существ не имеющих. В этом воссоздании и заключается начало блаженства вечного”. See: Федоров 1913: 240.
\textsuperscript{354} See: Федоров 1999: 289.
as about the first practical steps toward realizing it... Since the time that Christianity appeared, your ‘project’ is the first movement of the human soul forward, along the path of Christ. For my part, I can only declare you to be my teacher and spiritual father”.  

Soloviev’s metaphysical utopian ideology strives to transform, as it were, existing physical reality itself, by means of a whole complex of religious and aesthetic notions that he boldly advocates as a philosopher. Soloviev’s concept of the “oneness of everything” ("всеединство") has much in common with Fedorov’s, being conceived as “the life of everyone is for each other in one” and as the “absolute solidarity of all that exists, God is everything in everyone”.  

The material realization of the oneness of everything, in Soloviev’s opinion, is possible only in the form of perfected beauty. In his 1890 article “The general meaning of art” ("Общий смысл искусства"), the philosopher discourses on the “natural beauty” that had already begun the momentous work of transforming the physics of the world of things and of all life. This form of beauty is nothing more than a cloak covering an evil (in the Gnostic “pleromatic” sense of the dark demiurge) natural life, and not a genuine transfiguration of it (not a good transformation). Transforming life is only within the power of a real person-creator, an originator of new complex forms of existence. As Soloviev perceives it, the meaning of art is in the fulfilment of this difficult task. “Perfect art, in its ultimate mission, should embody the absolute ideal not in the imagination alone, but in actual fact – it should animate, should transsubstantiate our real life. If they say that a task such as this goes beyond the limits of art, then one wonders: who set these limits?”. He defines this kind of art as “theurgy” (god-operation or divine work): the realization of godlike goals by a human being. The goal of human existence, Soloviev believes, is the shaping of panhuman organization in the forms of integral creative work (free theurgy), integral knowledge (free theosophy), and an integral society (a free theocracy). The matching of the human being’s personal will to this common goal is, at the same time, the common liberation of mankind as well.  

Soloviev sums up the task of new interrelationships and of the complex system of bonds between art and life: “This [real art, and its main goals—D.I.] is the transformation of physical life into spiritual life, that is, the kind that, first, has its own word within itself, and a Revelation, and is capable of directly expressing itself outwardly; the kind that, second, is capable of internally transforming and animating matter or being truly embodied in it; and, third, that is free of the power of the material process and therefore lasts eternally. Complete embodiment of this spiritual
plenitude in our reality, the realization in it of absolute beauty or the creation of a universal spiritual organism is the higher mission of art”. 358 And with this Soloviev concluded that the fulfillment of this mission will mean the factual “end of days”, that is, the limit of the development of humanity. 359

Aesthetic activity, according to Soloviev, should be used in order combine, in a correct and harmonious synthesis, the immateriality of the “spiritual” and the physics of real life, the physics of human flesh. 360 Another important postulate came down to the Symbolists via Soloviev: a mystical Christian religiosity, that which might be called the “religion of Symbolism”. 361 Soloviev’s concept of bогочеловечество (“Godmanhood” or “humanity of God”) was, as it were, a new attempt to reanimate the New Testament idea of “the Word made flesh”, in the form of materializing the Word into the flesh of the Man-God. The emanation of divine higher powers—the “Word”, according to New Testament and Gnostic/(Neo)platonist spiritual traditions—becomes in the fullest sense “flesh”, reconciling thereby the boundaries of the “speculation” of aesthetics and those of the real physics of life.

In the preceding chapter I already discussed the issue of the physical materialization of the Word that was important in the historical perspective. I mentioned there the concept of removing the dichotomous contradiction between a “thing” and a “word”, 362 when words acquire the status of physical things. This complex process occurs within the suggestive notion of a “symbol” (which constitutes the very essence of Russian Symbolism seen as a movement). The symbol removes and levels the contradiction between a word and a thing, giving the impetus thereby to a new life-creational reality.

By ascribing to art the role of a life-creating form of activity, Soloviev in his own way “chartered”, steered, and defined the entire direction of the spiritual-aesthetic quest of the Russian Symbolists. Art, according to Soloviev, was a unique synthesis and fusion of the “material and tangible” and the “spiritual and ideal”. The peculiar topography of “love”, as he saw it, was also a testimony to the life-creating rationale of his theory. In his treatise entitled “The Meaning of Love” (Смысл любви), written in the period from 1892 to 1894, Soloviev declared a peculiar erotic-utopian philosophical system that he had developed from Plato (primarily from the

358 “Это …есть превращение физической жизни в духовную, т.е. в такую, которая, во-первых, имеет сама в себе свое слово, и Откровение, способна непосредственно выражаться вовне, которая, во-вторых, способна внутренне преображать, одухотворять материю или истинно в ней воплощаться и которая, в-третьих, свобода от власти материального процесса и потому пребывает вечно. Совершенное воплощение этой духовной полноты в нашей действительности, осуществление в ней абсолютной красоты или создание вселенского духовного организма есть высшая задача искусства”. Соловьев 1988: 398.
359 “A task not fulfilled by means of physical life must be fulfilled by the means of human creativity. ...Clearly, the fulfillment of this task must coincide with the end of the entire process of the world”. (“Задача, не исполняемая средствами физической жизни, должна быть исполняема средствами человеческого творчества... Ясно, что исполнение этой задачи должно совпадать с концом всего мирового процесса”). Ibid.
362 The attitude toward a word as a thing was also later proclaimed by some of the major exponents of radical Russian modernism – the Avant-gardists of Russian Futurism.
Symposion) and from Neoplatonism. This included various late-antiquity Gnostic beliefs recounting the possible material embodiment of originally nonmaterial ideas. For Soloviev (and as further assimilated by the younger Symbolists), eros and the physical sex act are endowed with some kind of special transfigurative and “ennobling” meanings/functions that are far removed from the ordinary ones – the procreational biological tasks connected with maternal reproductive capacity.

The ideal human being, according to the Gnostics and their predecessor Plato as reinterpreted by Soloviev, is an androgyne that is equal to God or possessed of Godmanhood—a unique creation that overcomes death. Connected to this, the ideal figure of “Sophia” arises—the fountainhead of beauty, the source and meaning of life for Soloviev, an image that also has obviously androgynous characteristics.

In the memoiristic text known as Recollections of Blok (“Воспоминания о Блоке”) Belyi emphasizes the instrumental inevitability of the new Revolution of the Spirit and of the entire human Transformation, to be related with a New Testament exhortation. Belyi describes the Revolution of Spirit in these terms: “the Revolution of the Spirit draws near: this is stated by the philosophy and poetry of Vladimir Soloviev; the Third Testament still not known by anyone, but no less remarkable, A.N. Shmidt; and the anthroposophic Western impulse that has not yet risen to the surface of life but in its own way is leading up to an encounter with Sophia. Blok, in his first book of poetry is a honer of [this] enormous impulse, approaching it incomparably more decisively than Vladimir Soloviev.... To understand Blok is to understand that everything for him is an explanation of the sound of the Dawn, which is completely real; for him, our times are colored by concreteness; and the departure of the poetry of Blok from the philosophy of Soloviev is a departure into the concreteness of the ‘fact of the dawn’, into the embodiment of the Eternal in life: the symbolists understood this; ... All of the searching for embodiment arose as a problem in the connection of Soloviev and Fedorov with the philosophy of Russian social thought (Lavrov and Gercen). The next stage is the union of Fedorov’s philosophy (the resurrection of the individual) with the profound problem of populism [narodnichestvo], the resurrection of the Collective of the people, like the chorus and orchestra with which Faust ends:

Alles Vergängliche
Ist nur ein Gleichnis;
Das Unzulängliche,
Hier wird’s Ereignis;
Das Unbeschreibliche,
Hier ist’s getan;
Das Ewig-Weibliche
Zieht uns hinan.

See chapter 5 in Masing-Delic 1992: 105-129.

Anna Nikolaevna Shmidt, Soloviev’s mystically inclined follower, considered herself a real, material incarnation of the Sophia about which he had written. See the electronic essay by A.P. Kozyrev, “Sybil from Nizhnii Novgorod” (“Нижегородская сивилла”), which also includes Shmidt’s letters to Soloviev: http://www.ruthenia.ru/marginalia/kozyreff.html. See also Булгаков 1996: 55-82.
... ‘The cleansed Sun of love arises’ (June, 1900) ... Because ‘The Eternal Feminine is now a reality’! In the month that Soloviev would die, Blok wrote, *Now the eternally Young Lady has passed forever, Into the unilluminated mists* [‘То вечно Юная прошла, В неозаренные туманы’].

Dealing with Soloviev’s real-life pursuit of the sacred image of Sophia, one of the first independent émigré researchers of Soloviev, Konstantin Mochul’skii narrates the corresponding biographical story: “He spent four months in Cairo. ... He wrote his mother that he was working on ‘A sort of work with mystical-theosophic-philosophic-theurgic-political content and dialogic form’.” Having left Egypt Soloviev arrived at Sorrento (March), and afterward left for some time to work in the National Library in Paris. As it was already observed by Mochul’skii, a direct echo of Soloviev’s mystical encounter in the desert can be heard in this poem-in-prose:

> “Covered with azure, appeared today in front of me/ My Queen,/ My heart started beating with sweet joy,/ My soul was quietly shining under the rays of the rising day,/ Far away, fading fire was spreading a smoke/ Wicked flames of the earthly fire…”

Mochul’skii summarized this method of narration using the main Solovievian “symbols” dominated there, creating a suggestive apocalyptic picture: “Azure, the dawn, silence and this ‘wicked fire’ of the sun rising above the desert”. After several years, a part of the famous poem “Three Encounters” (Три свидания) would also develop out of these notes.

Soloviev had already ‘glimpsed’ the vision of his divine Sophia in his childhood years – as early as in 1862, at the age of nine:

> Близко, далеко, не здесь и не там,  
> В царстве мистических грез,  
> В мире, невидимом смертным очам,

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365 “Надвигается Революция Духа – так гласят философия и поэзия Владимира Соловьева, никому не известный еще, но немало замечательный Третий Завет А.Н. Шмидт и еще не поднявшийся на поверхности жизни антропософский западный импульс, подводящий по-своему к встрече с Софиею. А.А. Блок в первой книге стихов застрелитель огромного импульса, подходящий к нему несправедливо решительней Владимиров Соловьева. ...Понять А.А.Блока – понять: все есть для него объяснение звука Зари, совершенно реальной; конкретностью окрашено для него наше время; и выход поэзии Блока из философии Соловьева есть выход в конкретности факта зари; в воплощении Вечного в жизнь: это поняли символисты; ... все искания и воплощения возникли проблемой связи Владимира Соловьева и Федорова с философией русской общественной мысли (с Лавровым и Герценом). Следующая стадия – соединение философии Федорова (воскресение индивидуального) с углубленной проблемой народничества, воскресения народного Коллектива, как хора, оркестра, которой кончается Фауст: Alles Vergängliche…. …‘Всходит омытое Солнце любви’ (Июнь 1900 года) ... Потому что, – ‘Вечная Женственность ныне идет!’ В месяц смерти Владимира Соловьева Блок напишет То вечно Юная прошла, В неозаренные туманы”. See: Белый 1997: 109-110.

366 See: Мочульский 1995: 100. (“В Каире он прожил четыре месяца; писал матери, что сочиняет ‘Некоторое произведение мистико-теософо-философо-теурго-политического содержания и диалогической формы’”).


369 For an additional perspective on reading this poem see Kornblatt 1998: 563-584.
В мире без смеха и слез,  
Там я, богиня, впервые тебя  
Ночью туманной узнал.  
Странным ребенком был я тогда,  
Странные сны я видал ...

(“Nearby and far away, neither here nor there, in the realm of mystical dreams, in the world unseen to mortal eyes, in the world of no laughter or tears, There, oh goddess, I came to know you for the first time, one foggy night. / A strange child I was then, / strange dreams I had...”).

His study of the life-shaping Gnostic literature about Sophia was reflected in another Cairo poem, written sometime between November 1875 and March 1876: “My Queen has a high palace, / It stands on the seven golden pillars, / My Queen has a seven-ends crown, / There are countless jewels on it” (“У царицы моей есть высокий дворец, / О семи он столбах золотых, / У царицы моей семигранный венец, / В нём без счету камней дорогих”). Depicting Soloviev’s life Mochul’skii tells, in a sort of ironical mood, that in “a mystical garden, amid roses and lilies”, the princess, like a “Soul in Pleroma”, pines and languishes for her elect, who disappears into a remote land. The princess yearns to go to him for help, but then – “низринуты темные силы во прах” (“the dark powers are cast down into the dust”). This narrative plot is closely linked to the biblical verse: “Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars” (Proverbs 9:1)

Sophia is the Divine Wisdom about which King Solomon speaks in the Proverbs. An important mystical document from about this period is the enigmatic “Prayer for the revelation of the great mystery”, preserved in Solovi’ev’s notebook-album. Father Sergii Bulgakov, when publishing this document for the first time, wrote that the poems of the “Sophia” cycle sometimes do not only have a poetic, but also an, as it were, incantational character. This impression according to him is “indirectly substantiated”, by the fact that “in 1874, when Soloviev was experiencing the first surge of sophian creativity (the second one was in the very last years of his life), he jotted down this incantational ‘Prayer for the revelation of the great mystery’ in his album”. In Bulgakov’s reconstruction it had the following form: “In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Ayn-U-Soph, Jah, Soph-U-Jah. By the unutterable, terrible, and all-powerful name I adjure gods, demons, people, and all living things. Gather together the rays of your strength, stem the source of your desire, and be the communicants of my prayer: that we may be able to capture the pure dove of Zion, that we find the priceless gem of Ophir, and that roses join with lilies in the valley of Sharon. Most Holy Divine Sophia, the essential image of beauty

373 See: Булгаков 1996: 53. (“...в 1874 г., когда Соловьев испытывал первый подъем софийного творчества (второй был в самые последние годы жизни), в альбоме его записана следующая заклинательная ‘Молитва об откровении великой тайны’”).
and the delight of God on high, the bright body of eternity, the spirit of the worlds and the sole queen of all souls...”

Bulgakov did not fail to notice further: “This prayer definitely gives me the impression of being a translation of some Gnostic text, perhaps one found by Soloviev during his studies in the British Museum”.

Konstantin Mochul’skii was one of the critics to notice that in the name of the Gnostic Sophia Soloviev adjoins gods, demons, people, and, in general, all things living at the surface of our existence. In Soloviev’s prayerful narrative we can easily distinguish various biblical, gnostic-cabalistic, and Christian allusions or distinct motifs, which create, as it were, a single spiritual continuum. The active expectation of a miracle and the faith in the propinquity of the ‘revelation of the mystery’ merge within a peculiar life-projecting exhortation. According to Soloviev, “Sophia contains a possibility for self-affirmation or kindling of the will. By its own principle, Sophia demands the real existence of individual essences; such an exist[ence] presupposes their extreme self-affirmation, and presupposes Satan”.

Soloviev’s life-creational metaphysics of love, especially in the Gnostic context that it possesses, does not emphasize a total exclusion of its physical and carnal hypostasis, but as it were delimits this issue conceptually. The goal of sexual love (Eros) for Soloviev is not physical birth but spiritual trans-formation, bodily metamorphosis, the apocatastasis of the resurrection of the dead. A.P. Kozyrev meditates on the philosopher’s inner views and remarks that despite that Soloviev clearly “struggles for transformed corporeality”, in fact “the corporeal state of humankind itself, its mortal body, subject to the power of death and decay, does not evoke love and ecstasy in him”.

In his treatise entitled “The Justification Of The Good: An Essay On Moral Philosophy” (“Оправдание добра: нравственная философия”), the Russian thinker observed that ordinary childbirth and the emergence of children into this world will become unnecessary, and will be overcome as part of the work of rising above the existing ‘wicked’ reality. “In the struggle against an imical reality, one can be victorious only by having undergone martyrdom. From this perspective, the

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374 “Во имя Отца и Сына и Св. Духа. А— Soph, Jah, Soph — Jah. Незречёным, страшным и всемогущим именем заклинаю богов, демонов, людей и всех живущих. Соберите воедино лучи силы вашей, преградите источник вашего хотения и будьте причастниками молитвы моей: да возможем уловить чистую голубицу Сиона, да обретем бесценную жемчужину Офира, и да соединятся розы с лилиями в долине Саронской. Пресвятая Божественная София, существенный образ красоты и сладость сверхсущего Бога, светлое тело вечноности, душа миров и единая царица всех душ…”. See: Булгаков 1996: 53. See also Соловьев 1991-1996. (This rare text by Soloviev is available online: [http://anthropology.rinet.ru/old/soloviev_sofia.htm](http://anthropology.rinet.ru/old/soloviev_sofia.htm) and [http://anthropology.rinet.ru/old/7/sol_sofia.htm](http://anthropology.rinet.ru/old/7/sol_sofia.htm)). Concerning Soloviev’s reputation as a real “medium”, see the recent monograph by A. Kozyrev (Козырев 2007 passim). About Soloviev’s mystical visions, see Benz 1969: 586-590; Widnäs 1970: 125-140. See also Cioran 1977. For additional review of the esoterical “sources” of Soloviev see: Суровягин 1998: 21-49.


379 See the English translation in Soloviev 2005.
fullness of satisfaction in life, embracing physical sexuality as well, is not connected to lust ... [I]n consummated marriage, in which the inner fullness of human existence is ultimately realized through the complete union of this existence with a spiritual material essence, the external birth of children becomes both unnecessary and impossible.\(^{380}\)

In his treatise “The meaning of love” (Смысл любви) Soloviev insisted that physical incarnation and the carnal embodiment of real love can in a certain sense ruin the lovers. Soloviev speaks of this kind of carnal love (“Astartic” love) as something that must not interfere with the ideal, soteriological love, through the agency of which the “ideal human being” is invoked to be conceived and born on the planet.

The unity of the cosmos, that which has always been called the “[feminine]Spirit/Soul of the World” (Душа Мира) in the world’s spiritual traditions, according to Soloviev is by no means a formless and abstract concept, but is closely connected with the image of the “Eternal Feminine”. Soloviev understood divinity, as it were, dually – in a male/female sense of eternal opposition. In the foreword to a collection of his poems, the philosopher illustrates the reasons why subsequently, his followers Belyi and Blok had such wariness toward “carnal sex” and to all physical manifestations and experience of love: “1) The displacement of carnal, animal-human relations into the superhuman domain is a great abomination; 2) Adoration of the feminine nature in and of itself, that is, of the principle of ambiguity and indiscriminateness that is susceptible to lying and evil no less than to truth and goodness, is a most great folly ... 3) True veneration of the Eternal Feminine as having truly embraced the strength of the Divinity from the beginning, having truly encompassed the fullness of goodness and truth, and through them the imperishable radiance of beauty as well, has nothing in common with this stupidity and abomination”.\(^{381}\)

Prince Evgenii Trubetskoi, in his work entitled Vladimir Soloviev’s Contemplation of the World (“Мирозерцание Владимира Соловьёва”), analyses his teacher’s philosophy of carnal versus metaphysical love, and remarks upon the overall programmatic utopianism of Soloviev’s views. Trubetskoi asserts that in the thinker’s treatises devoted to love, many ideas enter into a complex interaction with the conventional Christian worldview, giving rise to an approach to life that is new in

\(^{380}\) “...въ борьбь съ враждебною дѣйствительностью можетъ побдить лишь пройдя чрезъ мученичество. Съ этой точки зрѣнія полнота жизненнаго удовлетворенія, обнимающаго и тѣлесную чувственность, свяжана не съ похотью <...> въ совершенномъ бракѣ, въ которомъ до конца осуществляется внутрення полнота человѣческаго существа чрезъ всѣцѣлое его соединеніе съ одухотворенною материальною сущностью, вышнѣе дѣторожденіе дѣлается и ненужнымъ, и невозможнымъ”. Quoted in Мурьянов 1996: 23.

\(^{381}\) “1) Перенесение плотскихъ, животно-человѣческихъ отношеній въ область сверхчеловѣческую есть величайшая мерзость; 2) Поклоненіе женской природѣ самой по себѣ, т. е. началу двусмыслія и безразличия, воспримчивому ко лжи и злу не менѣе, чемъ къ истинѣ и добрѣ, – есть величайшее безуміе... 3) Ничего общаго съ этой глупостью и тою мерзостью не имеет истинное почитаніе Вечной Женственности, какъ действительно отъ века воспринявшей силу Божества, действительно вмѣстившей полноту добра и истины, а чрезъ нихъ и нетленное сияніе красоты”. See: Соловьев 1974; quoted via Мочульский 1995: 101.
many respects, and conceiving a new kind of cogitation – a philosophy of universal unity (“философия всеединства”).

In this context, Trubetskoi believes that we ought to consider the overthrowing of death and final victory over it as a path to establishing special marital relations. “The utopia of sexual love that provides immortality ... contradicts the very basis of Soloviev’s contemplation of the world. [O]ne cannot simultaneously assert, as he does, that a general path to resurrection, obligatory for all, is the life-creating cross of Christ and that it is also sexual love—that Christ defied death by death, and that we must conquer death through union with the beloved”.382

An important component here is Soloviev’s perception of the sentient essence of God through love of an eternal and immutable image of the innermost Sophian Soul of the World, from whence the salvation of mankind must come. From this also follows the possible achievement of human immortality, triumph over the evil materiality of life by means of “deep veneration of the Eternal Feminine as having truly embraced the strength of the Divinity from the beginning, having ... encompassed the fullness of Goodness and Truth, and through them the imperishable radiance of beauty as well. Eternal beauty will be fruitful, and from it will come the salvation of the world”.383 The Symbolist followers of Soloviev, just as their teacher had done, took up the platonic notion of the duality of love – of the heavenly Aphrodite (Aphodite Urania) and the popular Aphrodite (Aphrodite Pandemos).

According to the platonic myth, it is Pandemos who participates in the continuation and the physical rebirth of the human race, and the mythological Urania is, as it were, the opposite—barren—but on the other hand, she feeds human fantasy and philosophy and gives rise to beautiful artistic images. The herald of Urania, by all appearances, could for the devoted Solovievians seem to be Blok at a certain stage of his life, with his poetically expressed elevated visions, while they called Briusov the materially-erotic and dark slave of Pandemos, with his fundamental bent toward coarse sensuality.

An apologia for the purely spiritual (and, in a certain sense “out-of-body”) principle of human love can be found in Belyi’s relatively early treatise entitled “About theurgy”. It was published in 1903 in the journal Novyi put’, which Blok, as far as we can tell, read attentively at the time. The “theurgical” theme of Belyi bears a direct relation toward his theory of life-creation.384 E. Tarnovskaia points to the dualistic basis of Belyi’s position, as Belyi seemed to be moving away from Soloviev

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382 “Утопия половой любви, дающей бессмертие, ... противоречит самой основе мировоззрения Соловьёва: нельзя одновременно утверждать, как он это делает, что всеобщий, для всех обязательный путь к воскресению есть животворящий крест Христов и что он есть половая любовь, – что Христос попрал смерть смертью, а что мы должны победить смерть через соединение с возлюбленной”. Сс: Трубецкой 1913: 621.
383 “…истинного почитания вечной Женственности, как действительно от века воспринимавшей силу Божества, ... вместившей полноту Добра и Истины, а через них – нетленное сияние Красоты. Вечная красота будет плодотворна, и из нее выйдет спасение мира”. Quoted in Белова 2001: 84-94.
toward Friedrich Nietzsche, where the interlocking basis of all these worldviews might have been a “theurgic life-creationism”, or a sort of “theurgic postulate”. A new mission for the philosopher-artist will be to change life in according with the principles of a new “spiritual” visionary aesthetics. Tarnovskaia notices that rejecting Soloviev and following Nietzsche, Belyi approaches the solution to the problem differently: “in order to complete the feat of rebirth of the world, mankind must itself be reborn. The meaning of art is to re-create the nature of our personality”. With Belyi, Tarnovskaia maintains, human race must overcome the limitations of its existence and become, for itself, “its own artistic form – that is, it must be capable of transformation”. Belyi was comprehending life as “the creation of the artist” in the broad sense of this term, as purely an “aesthetic phenomenon”. According to her Belyi “dreamed” of overcoming the boundaries between life and art, of going beyond the limits of art and creating life itself in reality. The critic maintains that of all the forms of art, by far “the closest to realizing this ideal was drama—‘life, expanded by the musical passion of the soul’”.

In this fundamental early work, Belyi said that ascetic love “Ioannora” (“Иоаннора”) is “the highest form of any love” and that “sensual love”, although it does not in fact completely disappear in asceticism, in some sort of magical way is transformed and becomes qualitatively new. In this essay, Belyi starts speaking of a certain “dividing line” that, as it were, can occur within the mindsets of the most advanced “movers of mankind” that find themselves on a path “to religious and mystical methods”. According to Belyi, certain special combinations of words can exist, words “converted into prayers capable of raising the dead; words spoken by Christ, the apostles, and the prophets”. It is just these kinds of combinations of words that contain the “capability of religious efficacy”; the spiritual science, “theurgy”, contains them, and all the real art of poet/theurgist/life-creators should be directed along this theurgic path, in accordance with its vision.

Belyi and Blok found relatively similar ideas of worldview and life-shaping ideas in Soloviev, and, accordingly, these issues were pondered in their Symbolist circle of young life-creators. One of the central issues that arose in this context was the concept of religious asceticism, which was one of the main pillars of Soloviev’s philosophy of utopian life-creation and which the circle of young Symbolists for the most part added to their repository.

Iosif Mashbits-Verov, one of the pioneers in the “theurgical” line of research on Russian Symbolism, once remarked that for Belyi, “true asceticism was easy, joyous, good, and convincing ... [and] a sort of spiritual epicureanism”. The scholar

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385 About Nietzsche in the context of Blok’s and Belyi’s circle, see Панерный 1979: 84-106.
386 For more details about this, see Тарновская 2003: 384-388.
389 Перевал – “a mountain pass”. An important term for Belyi’s aesthetics and poetics.
390 “...к религиозно-мистическим методам”. Quoted in Машбиц-Веров 1969: 78.
391 “...обращенное в моленья, способные воскресить мертвых, слова, сказанные Христом, апостолами, пророками”. Quoted Ibid.: 79.
393 “...истинный аскетизм – легок, весел, благ, победителен... это своего рода духовное эпикурейство”. See: Машбиц-Веров 1969: 78.
emphasized, however, that in addition to this, asceticism was a sort of “dam” against which the troubled dark waves of a dangerous “orgiasticism” had to break. According to Belyi, and completely in keeping with the general teachings of Soloviev, “in terms of asceticism, the question of sex is projected, as it were, to a very great height, into an extraterrestrial sphere; it carried up into the very heavens, overcoming death. ... In Christianity, death is an external, almost nonexistent boundary ... Death does not frighten us. Those exalted through death pass over into eternal rapture, but ... sexual love becomes a particular instance of Johann’s love’ (‘любовь Иоаннова’), a white ... higher form of any kind of love”. 394

Asceticism and theurgy are the most secretive spiritual keys that, according to Belyi’s theory, can and should create a new life and overcome the chaotic darkness of entropy. In his aforementioned article “About theurgy” (О теургии), Belyi informs the readers of Novyi put’ that “there already are victorious ones” that have “vanquished chaos and darkness”. 395 According to him, these enlightened “victors” are Soloviev and Blok. Belyi tells how “the words of Soloviev, who has understood that the yet unseen but imminent spring is heard already and that it breathes with the breath of Eternity, resound with a cheerful summons”. 396

According to Belyi, we can see in Soloviev’s poetry how “the conquered chaos is growing bright (…) we are already beginning to understand that it is due to HER, who renders help from there, from beyond the chaos... The spirit of music has awakened, the spirits have begun to speak, the mask has been ripped away, and mankind’s path into the heavens, into the absolute, has been signified, the path of the inner conversion—spiritual, mental, physiological, and physical—of mankind... The ‘stairway to godmanhood’ is opening up, the old organization is perishing under the burden of the development of spirituality, and the one who will embody within himself all the power of theurgic hopes must be reborn, and in the state of elevation above history, the door from the world to that which is beyond the world ..., the eternal harmony of the feeling of sonship of God, is being opened”. 397

As Mashbits-Verov rightly observes, theurgy is manifest in Belyi’s early articles in its rather radical, archaic and partially romanticized form – right up to the belief in the real possibility of changing the physical nature of a person and in the potential life-creational “state of elevation” above history. 398

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394 “…в христианстве смерть – граница внешняя, почти не существующая... Нам не страшна смерть. Увенчанные через смерть переходят в вечно вознесение, а ...половая любовь становится частным случаем любви Иоанновой, белой... высшей формой всякой любви”. Quoted in Mashbits-Verov: 1969: 79.
395 “…уже есть побеждающие... победившие хаос и мрак”. See: Белый 1903: 109.
397 “…побежденный хаос просветляется, мы уже начинаем понимать, что это за ОНА, которая подает помощь оттуда, из-за хаоса... Проснулся дух музыки, заговорили сущности, сдернута маска, обозначился путь человечества в небо, в мировое, путь внутреннего изменения человека – духовного, психического, физиологического, физического... Открывается “ступень к богочеловечеству”, старая организация гибнет под бременем развития духовности, передорваться должен тот, кто воплотит в себе всю силу теургических чаяний, и в вознесенности над историей открывается дверь из мира к тому, что за миром... вечная гармония чувства богосыновства”. See: Mashbits-Verov 1969: 81.
Another important thematical subject of Soloviev’s life-creational legacy is linked to his lyrical poetry, to the obviously utopian component of this poetry, and to its “Sophian” (so to speak) ingredient. Soloviev’s half-Christian, half-Gnostic Sophia, as we are able to understand it, clearly coincides with the “younger Symbolist” existential concept of the “Beautiful Lady” (Dama) (or “Maiden” – Deva) and of Blok’s and Belyi’s quasi-apocalyptic “Woman clothed in the sun” (“Жена облечённая в солнце”). Soloviev’s androgynous Sophia has a defining influence on the “mystical” life-creation of Russian Symbolism, at least in its “younger” offshoot (and in this we must include Blok and Belyi, and, to some extent Viacheslav Ivanov as well).

In one of the characteristic texts of the younger Symbolists dedicated to Soloviev, Blok’s important essay “The Knight-Monk” (“Рыцарь-монах”), the younger poet wrote about the life-creation Sophian ideal of the philosopher, bringing this ultimate form of perfection together with the poetic Sophian “manifest” given by Soloviev in the poem “Three Meetings” (Три свидания). Blok remarks that “Soloviev’s poem, addressed directly from himself to Her, Whom he here calls the Eternal Companion, proclaims, ‘I, Vladimir Soloviev, a native of Moscow, have summoned You and have seen You thrice: in Moscow in 1862, after the Sunday Eucharist, as a nine-year-old boy; in London, in the British Museum, in the fall of 1875, as a master’s degree holder in philosophy and an associate professor at Moscow University; and in the desert near Cairo, in early 1876:

Еще невольник суетному миру,
Под грубой корою вещества
Так я прозрел нетленную порфиру
И ощутил сиянье божества’’.

(“A captive yet to the mundane world/ under the coarse crust of substance/ I have sighted the imperishable purple attire/ and sensed the radiance of the Divine”.)

In this essay, Blok debates the question of the roots of Soloviev’s life-creation aesthetics in the mystical settings of the past, and in particular, in the Middle Ages: “Look at the kind of inscription that we read above the portrait of the knight-monk. Like medieval inscriptions, it serves not as an interpretation, but rather as an affirmation of the whole picture...” Blok contends that this poem written at the end of Soloviev’s life indicates, actually, the new point where the (new) life begins. Blok suggests henceforth that “approaching the study of Soloviev’s creations, we must not

399 See for example, Kornblatt 1991: 487-496.
400 The only Russian Symbolist poet of whom Soloviev publicly “supported”.
401 “…Позма Вл. Соловьева, обращенная от его лица непосредственно к Той, Которую он здесь называет Вечной Подругой, гласит: ‘Я, Владимир Соловьев, уроженец Москвы, призывал Тебя и видел Тебя трижды: в Москве в 1862 году, за воскресной обедней, будучи девятилетним мальчиком; в Лондоне, в Британском музее, осенью 1875 года, будучи магистром философии и доцентом Московского университета; в пустыне близ Каира, в начале 1876 года’’. See Blok, “The Knight-monk” (“Рыцарь-монах”) first published in the collection entitled О Владимире Соловьеве (Moscow, 1911). (Quoted in Блок 1962-а: 452).
rise up to it, but do the opposite: take it as a starting point; only in the light of this image, which becomes clear after a second, derived one is extinguished by death, can we grasp the essence of the teachings and personality of Soloviev. This image is given to life itself; it is not an allegory in any sense of the word".

Blok’s very reference to this life-creational Gnostic theme in Soloviev, and the peculiar spiritual accent that we can sense in this essay, as several studies have shown, are far from coincidental. Blok himself, to no small degree, was also interested in what we might call “Gnostic life-creation”—a complex of soteriological ideas that speak of some sort of utopian physical salvation (or a Fedorov-style resurrection from the dead) of the life of the world by means of summoning the otherworldly feminine image of the incarnated Sophia. (Whatever she might be: the Soul of the World languishing in Pleroma, or the Beautiful Lady, or the Woman Robed in the Sun, or the mythopoetic whore-companion of Simon Magus (“Симон-Мар. Волхв”), or the ambivalent “Neznakomka” => the Unknown Lady-whore, the ephemeral visitor of the nocturnal dives and taverns of St. Petersburg).

As Zara Mintz once observed, referring to the (Goethean) ideas of the “eternal feminine” that Soloviev (and, through his inspiration, the later Symbolists)

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403 “…приступая к изучению творений Соловьева, мы должны не подниматься к ней, а обратно: исходить из нее; только в свете этого образа, ставшего ясным после того, как второй, производный, погашен смертью, можно понять сущность учения и личности Вл. Соловьева. Этот образ дан самой жизнью, он – не аллегория ни в каком смысле...”. Ibid.: 452-453.


405 About Soloviev’s soteriology, see in particular Сабиров 2003: 148-153. Another important Russian Symbolist philosopher was also quite interested in the figure of the ideal creation of androgyne. A regular at Ivanov’s “Tower” and the formal chairman of many of their famous meetings, Nikolai Berdiaev wrote a special essay about Russian symbolism’s period of Sturm und Drang that was taking place at the “Ivanov Wednesdays”. About this period, see the recent collection: Шишкин 2006. The issue of Berdiaev’s mystical views on the questions of the “androgyne” and “sex” of the ideal person was the subject of a recent monograph (Черный 2004). Exactly like Soloviev, Berdiaev was interested in “Gnostic” life-creation, and pondered this aspect in his treatise The Meaning of Creativity: An Attempt at Justification of Mankind, where he operates with such terms as “Adam Kadmon”, “pleroma”, and the like. Both Berdiaev and Soloviev were attracted by the possibility offered by life-creationist Gnosticism for an original discussion of the ideal quality of a new human nature, the possibility of comparing and drawing it close to a perfect divine ideal. Distinct theosophist and (incipient) anthroposophist overtones were already becoming remarkably and distinctly audible. Yu. Chernyi observed that for Berdiaev the main goal of his creative anthropology was developed in the idea of the divine Artist, a new person-Creator. It was also significant, as Chernyi observes, that this implied “Anthropos” is an androgyne, a person combining the male and female natures within himself. In reference to Berdiaev’s Symbolist philosophy the scholar states that “the bisexuality of the androgyne in Gnostic tradition is acknowledged to be the main sign of his wholeness and divinity”. See: Черный 2004: 23. Berdiaev (Бердяев 1930: 31-47) regards ideal Gnostic androgyne as a goal to which mankind can aspire, also in the context of the German mystic Jakob Böhme, whose significance in the history of worldwide esoteric thought can hardly be overrated. The Sophian landscape, directly responsible for the life-creationist theory of Solovievan-symbolist androgyne, is a place where Soloviev and Berdiaev intersect. As the latter wrote, “The teaching about Sophia is in Böhme inseparable from the teaching about the androgyne, that is, about the primeval wholeness of man. Sophianism, essentially, androgyne. Man has an androgynous, bisexual, male-female nature. Sophia, i.e., the Virgin, is intrinsic to man”. See: Бердяев 1930: 40.

406 On this subject, see my recent article on the theme of “urbanistic prostitutes” in Blok, Briusov, and Baudelaire: Ioffe 2008: 19-47.
developed, a clear connective link between the “ideal” image of the Russian philosopher and the fundamental “aspirations of the symbolists of a certain period can hardly be called coincidental”: These ideas, according to Mintz, had a completely logical and fundamental basis in their general life-utopian metaphysical worldview. The fundamental peculiarity of the symbolist sense of the world “defined the orientation toward myth and ‘neomythological’ tendencies”. Mintz stressed the overwhelming importance of “pan-aestheticism – the notion of Beauty as the profound essence of the world (a notion most closely tracing back to Friedrich Schelling’s ideas of Weltseele, Goethe’s die ewige Weiblichkeit, and Vladimir Soloviev’s Sophia), as its higher value and the most active transforming force of existence (‘Beauty will save the world’)

Symbolist life-creation, according to Mintz (she was a pioneer of the scholarly understanding of this phenomenon), directly arises from a purely Solovievan method of thinking and, so to speak, from the whole structure of existence of this group of people. Perhaps the most important feature for the Symbolist aesthetic utopia was the equating of knowledge of the world with its figurative-symbolic form, visible to the eye, and with the permanent process of creation, the creativity of everyday life. Art, as indeed any creative effort, in and of itself always creates a new reality that possesses, after the image is created, a sort of newly-objective realness that is then more clearly accessible to the scrutiny of others.

This new reality, embodying the ideals of the artist, to a certain degree turns out to be in many ways more forceful and perfected than natural reality; but, in addition, symbolists allot it a peculiar capability of overcoming or triumphing over the tragedy of material existence. A crude and poor life is transformed into a “delightful legend”—into a created legend (so to speak, as for example in the terms used by Fedor Sologub), not only in the artistic text itself but also in the realness of empirical reality. At least, this is how it stands in the symbolist artist’s desired understanding of this reality, in his sort of “transformed understanding” of it. I refer here to a peculiar symbolist concern about the life-creator artist who engages surrounding people in his aesthetic activity. And this life-creating concern opposes to the traditional literary approach which first and foremost championed the “introspection”, rather than the “outward” action of art.

This kind of transformation of the “the ideal” into the “everyday/real-life reality” among the symbolists was at times directed toward a radical restructuring of one’s way of life and of the real psychosomatic personality of the artist itself. In this respect, Soloviev’s understanding of the world, as far as we can judge, took its teachings about the utopian restructuring of the external empirical world of things even further. We see that in many cases there is a specific interweaving of symbolist aesthetic utopianism and Soloviev’s metaphysical philosophy. A most significant aspect turns out to be the fundamental accent placed on the special transformative power of art—that which would later be called “life-building” in the Russian avant-garde’s leftist aesthetics.

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408 Ibid.
409 And also, frequently, of the “audience”—the reader or hearer—that interpreted the artist.
410 This question is addressed to some degree by the next chapter.
2.0. The Elder Symbolists

2.1. The case of Valerii Briusov

A 1905 article of Briusov’s that is important to my discussion, “The Holy Sacrifice” (Священная жертва), proclaims an ideal of art that openly stands in a life-creation vein. As Briusov set forth in this article, art is obliged to actually work with the physical existence of its creator for aesthetic praxis. Briusov demands of the poet to “diligently bring forth his ‘holy sacrifices’ not only with the verses, but with every hour of his life, every feeling – his love, his hate, his achievements and his downfalls”.[411] Briusov urges the poet to create not only his books, but rather his life. Briusov calls the poet “to keep the flame of the altar ever-burning, like the fire of Vesta, let him kindle it into a great bonfire, not fearing that even his life will be consumed in it. We will cast ourselves onto the altar of our deity. Only the priestly knife that cleaves the breast gives one the right to be called a poet”.[412]

In this context, I should also mention the deviant behavior of Briusov and Bal’mont, their turbulent real-life activities that included episodes in which the two together, attempting to imitate the “accursed” French poets, would make the circuit of city bordellos celebrating a “decadent” practice of ultimate drunkenness. In the latter half of the 1890s, they “demonically” went around to the bordellos during the nights. (This is documented by the characteristic passages from the relevant days in Briusov’s diary, and in several letters along with his autobiographical reminiscences).

The issue of Briusov’s life-creationist eroticism and his declarative decadent style logically comes to the forefront of my discussion. The ultimate relation of life-creational eroticism to the poet’s oeuvre was reflected already in his early “monoverse” which became immediately famous. “Could you cover your pale thighs please…” (“О прикрой свои бледные ноги”). This line was considered to be shockingly provocative and frivolous for its time.

In his Diary, Briusov straightforwardly links his decadent life-creation interest with unrestrained bohémien drunkenness and a fashionable at that time longing for esotericism and spiritism.[413] The documentary-style diary of the poet notes: “Yesterday I returned home and lounged around. Had been with E.A. (and Julia, apparently) at the Aleksandrovs’. I didn’t behave wickedly, but all right, only I got drunk at dinner and made a sloppy end to it. If I learned anything at all at Christmas, then it was to get drunk, or, rather, to drink vodka with a cool head. The devil knows what happened. ... There was a séance on the 3rd (nowadays I’m harping about spiritism everywhere). Almost the same as on 23.10.92. The only thing, I’m very fed-up with the kisses. I’ve got to contrive a meeting, but that’ll be later. [...] ... 13th

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[412] “Пусть хранит он алтарный пламень неугасимым, как огонь Весты, пусть разожжёт его в великий костёр, не боясь, что на нём сгорит и его жизнь. На алтарь нашего божества мы бросаем самих себя. Только жреческий нож, рассекающий грудь, даёт право на имя поэт”. See: Брюсов 1905: 29.

[413] All the related contextual details see in Богомолов 1999-д: 279-310.
[January] Yesterday at the séance, my heart trembled again”. The same attitude towards “sex” and alcoholic adventures was quite characteristic of Briusov’s behaviour during his youthful years. He would mention in his diary: “…Yesterday after a meeting we went to a bordello, I was together with the same Sasha. There were several comic occasions. On our way home we were reading a mourning poster devoted to someone’s funeral”.

Briusov’s decadent life-creation knew no restricting boundaries. His complete detachment, according to his diary, with the “passage of time” and his “growing up”, only intensified: “Yesterday I was at a party at the gymnazium, I even bought gloves for it (alas, they should have been white, but I bought yellow ones). I was bored, of course. The best time was when I was sitting downstairs with NN in the window and we were kissing, I even got an erection then. In Turgenev’s language, I ‘felt as one with...’ In Russian, ‘my pecker stood up’. We also kissed on the way back, but I was already fed up with this licking, for some reason. ... Feb. 6th] Was at a séance yesterday. Got brazenly fresh with El[ena] Andr[eevna]. It was good. I felt up her legs, almost up to her cunt. By now, grabbing her tits is just a joke to me. We sat down together at the table, and she pushed my hands away. I went for it again, she did the same thing. Then, playing it cool, I slid over to Verochka and starting feeling her up. She was glad; by the way, I was pretending to feel her up, more than anything. Then I turned around to El. Andr. She had calmed down, and I started to [illegible] her. I misbehaved with no limits. And to tell you the truth, it was so much more pleasant with Verochka, even though she’s scrawnier”.

Briusov’s fervently “symbolist” decadence comes across as a fusion of worship of the French masters and of imitation of their “aesthetics of life”, boldly mixed up with a most radically experimental (for the times) eroticism and overall physiological “poetics of fleshliness”. Briusov observes: “After dinner, i.e., when we had had some drinks, E.A. and I found ourselves alone. At first we hid under a map of Moscow and kissed there, then we casually slipped out to another room. I remember

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414 “Вчера возвращался домой и шатался. Были с Е.А. (и Юлей, очевидно) у Александровых. - Я держал себя не блестяще, но хорошо, только за ужином напился и конец провел безалаберно. Вообще если я чему научился на Рожд<ество>, то это пьянствовать или, вернее, пить хладн<окровно> водку. Черт знает что такое. ... Третьего дня был сеанс (я теперь всюду твержу о спиритизме). Почти то же, что и 23.10.92. Только поцелуи мне уж очень приелись. Надо изобрести свидание, но это в будущем. <...> ... 13 <января> Вчера на сеансе у меня сердце задрожало”. Quoted via Богомолов 2004-a: 192.

415 “Вчера после заседания пошли в бардак, и я опять обретался с Сашей. Много комичных случаев. Возвращаясь домой читал траурный плакат о смерти”. Quoted via Богомолов 1990: 151.

416 “Был вчера в г<и>м<на>з<ии> на вечере, даже перчатки купил ради этого (увы, следовало белые, а я купил желтые). ... Конечно, скучал. ... Лучшее время - когда сидел внизу с Ел. Андр. на окне и целовались, там даже была эрекция. На яз<ыке> Тургенева 'почувствовал себя наедине с...'. По-русс<ким> - 'хуй встал'. Целовались и на возвратном пути, но это лизание что-то уже очень приелося. <...> 6.2 Вчера был на сеансе. ... С Ел.Андр. стал нагло дерзок. Это хорошо. Шупал ее за ноги, чуть не за пизду. Хватать ее за груди для меня уже штуки. ... Сели за столом я с ней, а она отталкивает руки. Я еще, она опять. Тогда я хладнокровно отодвинулся к Верочке и начиная ей шупал. Она рада; впрочем, я больше делал вид, что шупало. Потом поворачиваясь к Ел. Андр. Она смирилась, и я повел <1 нрзб.> нее. Безобразничал до беспредельности. ... А правду сказать, насколько мне было приятней с Верочкой, хотя она и костлявее.<...>”. See: Богомолов 2004-a: 192.
we were lying in each other’s arms, and I was babbling some kind of incoherent decadent explanation; I was talking about the moon slipping out from behind a cloud, about a pagoda smiling in the streams, about the diamond of a fantasy that was burning up in the form of an adolescent daydream. However, she agreed to see me on Friday and Sunday. Today, under the influence of all that, [I was] in madly good spirits, and even went myself to take my Mallarmé translations to the Russkoe obozrenie editor’s office”.

The entire life-creationist text of Briusov’s diary, which conveys all the erotic details and perturbations of its author’s life, is in a similar spirit and style of the overall narrative: “But be more careful... Be reasonable. Don’t allow yourself excess. Kisses – that’s your limit. OK?... 15th [March] Well, we saw each other... We had a room at Savrasenkov’s. That was brave for a young girl. We kissed endlessly and crushed each other in embraces. I went so far as to unbutton her blouse and to kiss her tits”.

Alcohol-fed agitations, and all manner of nighttime adventures coupled with erotic life-building, define Briusov’s entire “life text” of this period: “I left the house at 2. ... At home I’d drunk beer and vodka, but that’s nothing. At the ‘Italia’ I drank two belts of vodka, then a glass of wine, and at the ‘Bier-Halle’, there was a round of beer. I got to the editor’s office] in a good mood. They asked me to drop by tomorrow. I left to go meet [E. A.]. Anything’s fine for a drunk. I was feeling like I loved E. A. and believed in myself. We got to Savras[enko’s]. It’s even hard to describe what we did. We didn’t fuck, only due to my discretion. We lay on top of each other, side by side, and I took off her [illegible], I pulled up her skirt above her knees. Hell knows what else! We left each other at 6:30”.

Sex, the eros of bodily contact with a woman, and the “decadent” alcoholism, all play a dominant role in Briusov’s diary. At times, it is “terrible” for Briusov to think about and “describe” what he is doing in his real life, his “conquests” of the alcohol narcotic and of erotic folly, which proceed in keeping with the French bohemian-decadent model of life of a Parisian poet (or artist). Briusov tells in his diary: “I sit down and get drunk specially for the tryst... 3 hours. I had about 10 shots and I was already half in love with E. A. again. I’ll stop in at the ‘Italia’, too, and I’ll

417 “…после ужина, т.е. когда выпили, нам удалось с Е.А. остатся вдвоем. Сначала мы прикрылись планом Москвы и целовались за ним, потом хладнокровно ушли в другую комнату. Помню, что мы лежали в объятиях друг друга, а я лепетал какое-то бессвязное декадентское объяснение, говорил о луне, выпливающей из мрака, о пагоде, улыбающейся в струях, об алмазе фантазии, которая сгорела в образе юной мечты. ... Однако она назначила мне свидание в пятицу и воскресенье. Сегодня под влиянием всего этого в безумно радостном настроении духа, и даже лично отнес в редакцию ‘Русс<кого> Обозр<ения>’ свои переводы из Маллармэ”. Ibid.: 191.

418 “Но осторожнее... Будь благоразумен. Не позволяй себе лишнего. Поцелуи - вот твой предел. Иди... 15 <март> ... Ну-с, было свидание... Поместились мы у Саврасенкова. Для девицы это смеяло. Целовались бесконечно и мили друг друга в объятиях. Я дошел до того, что расстегнул ее кофту и целовал грудь”. Ibid.

419 “Вышел из дома в 2 ... Дома выпил я пива и водки, но ничего. В ‘Италии’ выпил 2 рюмки водки, потом стакан вина, в “Bier-Halle” - кружку пива. В редакцию пришел навеселе. Попросили зайти завтра. Пошел на свидание. Пьяному все хорошо. Чув<ст>вуя: что люблю Е.А. и верю в себя. Пришли к Саврасенкову. Для девицы это было смело. Целовались бесконечно и мили друг друга в объятиях. Я дошел до того, что расстегнул ее кофту и целовал грудь”. Ibid.
be completely in love. The hell with it. It’s a pity I had a wet dream at night (or in the evening) [...] 16th, Fri[a]ly. At home. At the ed[iyor’s] office. A tryst. We lay on the bed in the hot[el] and felt each other up, but we didn’t fuck. Why not? I don’t know. It was lucky, but I must confess that I’ve already lost my good sense and gone that far. What we have done generally, is terrible to think about”. 420 Briusov’s sincere frankness reaches its apogee when he describes how he experiences an orgasm and directs his semen directly into his pants, not even trying to hide this: “Could I really not be allowed to call her Lelia now? Oh! Lelia! At first, it turned out lousy. I was so tired, in tussling with her I let go about 5 times in my pants, so I hardly came afterwards, but that’s OK”. 421

Along these same lines, I would like to mention another Briusov text, first published not so long ago, that is very important for the “prostitution/bordello/erotica” topic. Briusov’s ‘autobiographical’ novella “The Decadent” was written in the period of his “symbolist maturation”, when the poet was still quite young. 422 We adduce these fragments from Briusov’s intimate diary in order to emphasize yet again the overall concentration of his “biographical practice” on the sphere of the forbidden “underbelly”. We may easily distinguish there his clear focus on the issue of sexual life and on the consequent disruptions of the taboos accepted in the society at that time. With his concentration on corporal life-creation, Briusov intentionally violated many established conventions of “accepted” and “permitted” behavior, invariably following the French models well-known to him, foremost of which were Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Verlaine. The physical and behavioral structure of his actions was conceptually parallel, as well as his verbal and poetic sphere of working (wherein he had from the beginning followed the “French canon” that he found so alluring). 423

Bal’mont was perhaps Briusov’s closest companion in his nocturnal youthful “decadent” “drunken” wanderings about Moskow in the 1890s. 424 In Briusov’s diary

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420 “Сижу и специально для свидания напиваюсь пьян. ...3 часа...Выпил рюмок 10 и уже наполовину опять влюблен в Е.А. Зайду еще в ‘Италию’ и буду совсем влюблен. ... Черт возьми. Жаль, что ночью (вечером) была поллюция. ... 16 П<ят>т<ница>. Дома. В ред<акции>. Свидание. Лежали в № на кровати и щупали друг друга, однако не еблись. Почему? Не знаю. Это счастливый случай, а должен сознаться, что я уже потерял благоразумие и добивался этого. Что мы вообще делали – это страшно подумать”. Ibid.

421 “Неужели мне и теперь нельзя называть ее Лелей? ... О! Леля! ... Сперва вышло дело дрянь. Я так устал, в борьбе с ней спустил раз 5 в штаны, так что еле-еле кончил потом, но это ничего”. Ibid.


423 On the strong connection between Briusov and the French poetry, see the general works of Georgette Donchin and Joan D. Grossman (Donchin 1958; Grossman 1985). See also Briusov’s correspondence with the French poet René Ghil, recently published by Roman Dubrovin. See the entire publication in Дубровкин 2005.

424 Briusov’s drunkenness grew into a pernicious habit, and then into morphine addiction as well. This turned into narcotic dependency (which the Bolsheviks partly used to their advantage when they compelled him to work for them). This peculiar type of alcoholic intoxication was shared by Konstantin Bal’mont. According to his wife’s reminiscences, even a small quantity of liquor led to unpredictable and “tumultuous” consequences. There was one famous incident in the St. Petersburg cabaret, “The Stray Dog” (“Бродячая собака”), when the poet was honored upon his return from abroad. The event ended with a scandal. See the description of this by Vladimir Piast (Пиасть 1997: 181-184). See also Шульц, Склярский 2002: 64-65.
entry for September 28, 1894, we can read about the endless bohemian wanderings and carousings: “With Lang I participated in [name of esoteric circle of Moscow spiritists] [and] made the acquaintance of Bal’mont. After the carousing, after we had finished the first session, Bal’mont and I wandered about the streets drunk until 8:00 in the morning, and we swore eternal love to each other”. 425 A little later, in December of the same year, “I was at Bal’mont’s and wandered around everywhere with him, all night”. 426 In December 1895, Briusov notes in his diary, “Bal’mont just dropped by, exultant, delirious, and Poe-like. A lot of his mood was ‘put on’, of course, but he cheered me up, distracted me. It was as if a ray of moonlight had slipped out from among the clouds and and scorched the waves with a fleeting kiss”. 427 Still later, in the winter of 1896, this very same theme continues: “On Sunday I had fallen into such despair that I couldn’t even read Edgar Poe... I found my coat and decided I’d run somewhere, despite my rheumatism. I ran into Bal’mont at the port. A delirious evening followed—people I didn’t know, taverns, wine, arguments...”. 428

It was Bal’mont in particular who encouraged the development and intensification of Briusov’s interest in all kinds of “fallen women” (whom Briusov called “boulevard fairies” / “бульварные феи”) that were later so significant for his urban aesthetic. This has much to do with the later phases of Briusov’s “schoolboy” interest in his own body, “demonic” prohibited contact between the sexes, and all the issues involved with corporality and “ignoble” encounters with women. Briusov wrote retrospectively, as a mature man, about his first youthful experiments in this direction. He was eager to tell about the early steps he made in his youth that were directed toward getting intimately close to the prostitutes of the city: “My hunger for getting close to a woman finally vanquished all kinds of timidity. I had already made an attempt in the spring. In the evenings I would go down to the school’s association, and got quite a fill of seeing the boulevard fairies. I also familiarized myself with the way to get to know them...A girl and I drank a bottle of port. Then, after I had paid her two roubles, to her surprise, I left”. 429

The very same obsessive erotic attitude towards women was cultivated by Bal’mont in his famous poetry collection “Let us be like the sun!”). Two of the poems in the original edition represented a life-creationist hymn to the feminine genitalia (a topic that will be explored below in context of Aleksandr Blok). Bal’mont was

425 “Принял с Лангом участие в О.Л.З.Л. и познакомился с Бальмонтом. После попойки, закончившей первое заседание, бродили с Бальмонтом пьяные по улицам до 8 часов утра и клялись в вечной любви”. See: Брюсов 2002: 35.
426 “Был у Бальмонта и проблуждал с ним всю ночь”. Ibid.: 36.
427 “Сейчас заходил Бальмонт, ликующий, безумный, эдгаровский. Многое, конечно, в его настроении делано, но все же он оживил, увлек меня. Точно луч лунный проскользнул между туч и обжег минутным поцелуем волны”. Ibid.: 39.
428 “В воскресенье я дошел до отчаяния, даже не мог читать Эдгара По... ... я надел шубу и решил бежать, несмотря на свой ревматизм. В дверях встретил Бальмонта. Последовал безумный вечер, незнакомые мне люди, трактиры, вино, споры”. Ibid.
429 “Моя жажда сближения с женщиной, наконец победила всюю робость. Еще весной я сделал попытку. Я ходил вечерами в гимнастическое общество и вдоволь насмотрелся бульварных фей. Присмотрелся и к способу вступать с ними в знакомство. ... Мы выпили с девушкой бутылку портвейна. Потом, заплатив ей два рубля, я ушел к ее удивлению”. Ibid.: 208.
praising there the unique sensual beauty of female private parts, basing his narrative on his real-life experience. Bal’mont wrote:

Мы с тобой сплетемся в забытьи: 
Ты — среди подушек, на диване,  
Я — прижав к тебе уста мои,  
На коленях, в чувственном тумане.

Спущены тяжелые драпри,  
Из угла нам светят канделябры,  
Я увижу волны, блеск зари,  
Рыб морских чуть дышащие жабры.

Белых ног, предавшихся мечтам,  
Красоту и негу без предела,  
Отданное стиснутым рукам,  
Судорожно бьющееся тело.

Раковины мягкий мрак любя,  
Дальних глаз твоих ища глазами,  
Буду жечь, впивать, вбирать тебя  
Жадными несытыми губами.

Солнце встанет, свет его умрет.  
Что нам Солнце — разума угрозы?  
Тот, кто любит, влажный мед сберет  
С венчика раскрытой скрытой розы.

(“We’ll embrace in forgetfulness / You, among the pillows, on the sofa / Me, pressing my lips upon you / On my knees, in a sensual mist / Pulled down are heavy curtains / Chandeliers are shining in the corner / I will see waves, glimmer of morning / Barely breathing gills of sea fishes / Infinite beauty and languor / of white legs, lapsing into dreams/ The body twitching in convulsion / Surrendered to grasping hands / Loving the shell’s soft murk / Searching for your distant eyes with mine / I will burn you, imbibe you, suck you in / With my greedy, hungry lips / The Sun will rise, its light will die away / What’s the Sun to us, threats of reason? / He who loves will gather the damp honey / from the corona of an open, hidden rose”).

The other poem was banned by the tsarist censorship from the first publication (the text was replaced by another one). Bal’mont tells there:

Как жадно я люблю твои уста,

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This collection of poetry was initially dedicated to M. Lochvitskaia, a fellow poetess with whom Bal’mon had a vibrant love affair at that time. See Фидлер 2008: 236-238.


See the details in Богомолов 2005: 167-182.
Не те, что видит всякий, но другие,  
Те, скрытые, где красота — не та,  
Для губ моих желанно — дорогие.

В них сладость неожиданных отрад,  
В них больше тайн и больше неги влажной,  
В них свежий, прямой, пьяный аромат,  
Как в брызгах волн, как в песне волн протяжной.

Дремотная, в них вечно тает мгла,  
Как в келье, в них и тесно и уютно,  
И красота их ласково — тепла,  
И сила их растет ежеминутно.

Их поцелуй непреходящ, как сон,  
И гасну я, так жадно их целуя.  
Еще! Еще! Я все не побежден...  
А! Что за боль! А! Как тебя люблю я!  

(“How avidly I love your lips! / Not those that everyone can see, but other ones / Those, hidden ones, whose beauty is of a different kind / That to my lips are precious and desired / There’s sweetness of sudden pleasures in them / More secrets and more moist bliss / There’s a fresh, piquant, heady fragrance in them / Like in the splashes of waves, like in the slow song of waves / A somnolent haze perpetually melts in there / Like in a monk’s cell, it’s tight and cozy in there / Their beauty is tender and warm / And their strength waxes with every minute / Their kiss is lasting like a dream / And I fade kissing them so avidly / More! More! More! I am not conquered yet... / Ah! What a pain! Ah! How much I love you!”)

Pursuing corresponding erotical sensations Briusov is realistically detailed in the descriptions of his physical contacts with the representatives of the oldest profession, fully in keeping with the same kind of experience as his friend Bal’mont and their Western literary precursors and models of life-creation he imitated (Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and others), who likewise took an interest in the decadent and dissolute “life on the boulevard”. Briusov writes in his diary, “It was getting late. The boulevard was almost empty. ... I went up to some girl that suited my notions – strange ones, I must say – about loveliness. I’m sorry that I’ve forgotten her name. ... Finally, we came to an agreement, and left. We drank port again, then I sidled up to her and started to unfasten her bodice. ... She pushed me aside and went behind a partition to undress. I tried to make myself believe that this was the moment for which I had so long waited, but everything was excruciatingly empty and stupid”.

434 “Становилось поздно. Бульвар пустел. ... Я подошел к какой-то девушке, отвечавшей моим – странным, впрочем, – понятиям о миловидности. Мне жаль, что я забыл ее имя. ... Наконец мы сговорились и пошли. Мы опять пили портвейн, потом я подсел к ней и стал расстегивать ее лиф. ... Отстрианила меня и ушла за перегородку раздеваться. Я старался внуширить себе, что это
As a sober-minded child of his times, the pioneer of Russian symbolism was constantly afraid of endangering his own health by falling victim to one of the widespread venereal diseases usually associated with prostitutes: “I hungrily memorized what kind of physical sensations that night had evoked in me, but I was afraid that I would find out I had a venereal disease. ... I didn’t know much about what the diseases were like, and I was blindly, stupidly afraid, I was afraid for several months in a row. Hypochondria dozens of times made me picture myself sick. I fell to my knees and prayed”.435

It is obvious that his entire erotic conception of the woman, the merging of eros and potential “creativity”, gave Briusov’s aesthetics a powerful impulse toward his elaborate “management” of his own physical life.

Along with Bal’mont’s lyrical excercises, one can justifiably conclude that Briusov (particularly with respect to the excerpts from his diary given just previously) can rightly be considered one of the central and most important Russian poetic erotomaniacs. The most explicit of his texts, the poem “We are two trunks set ablaze by a lightning storm” (“Мы два грозой зажженные ствола”), have been examined by Nikolai Bogomolov.436 In my context several of his other poems are quite significant as well, particularly, the notable poem “Violet”, first published by Aleksandr Emel’ianov-Kokhanskii in a collection (without any indication of Briusov as the real author):

Толпимая засухой летней,  
Фиалка в лесу погибала  
И к небу с мольбою последней  
Свои лепестки обращала...  
По небу суровая туча  
Без капли дождя проносилась,  
И молния вспышкой могучей  
Угрюмо по черни змеилась...  
Но стало ей в роце зеленой  
Цветок погибающий жалко,  
И капельки влаги студеной.  
Упали над бедной фиалкой. 437

(“Tormented by the drought of the summer; / a violet was dying in the woods / and with her last prayer / turned her petals to heavens... / A grim storm cloud without a drop of rain was sweeping along the sky / and lightning with a powerful outburst / was gloomily writhing in the black firmament... / But it felt sorry for / the dying flower in the green woods / and drops of cold moisture fell over the poor violet.”).

та минута, какой я ждал так давно, но было все мучительно пусто и глупо”. See: Брюсов 2002: 37.
435 “Я жадно изучал, какие физиологические переживания вызвала во мне эта ночь, но боялся, что откроется венерическая болезнь... Я не очень знал, какие бывают болезни, и боялся слепо, глупо, боялся несколько месяцев подряд. Мнительность рисовала мне десятки раз, что я болен. Я падал на колени и молился”. Ibid.
I will discuss later the hidden erotic connotations of the poetic image of the “violet”, in the context of Blok and his poem with the similar name. Clearly connected to this theme, too, is Briusov’s 1908 poem “The Scarlet Rose” (Алая роза):

Лаской тайной и усталой
Дай прощанье обмануть!
Розой полной, розой алоей
Над моей мечтой побудь!

Я целую утомленно
В предвкушении тоски
Розы нежно наклоненной
Огневые лепестки.

Как пчела, вонзаю жало
В сладко пахнущий цветок,
Розы полной, розы алоей
Выпиваю пряный сок.

... Ах! Как мигов было мало!
Как был краток каждый миг!
К розе полной, к розе алоей,
Упоенный я приник.

Лепесток, другой и третий
Гаснет в жаркой ласке губ...
Ночь плывет. В холодном свете
Расторопна ты – как треп.

(“Let me deceive the parting / with a secret and tired caress! / Be the blooming, crimson rose / above my dream! // I tiredly kiss, / anticipating my yearning, / the fiery petals / of the tenderly bowed rose. // Like a bee I insert my sting / in the sweetly smelling flower, / drink the heady juice / of the blooming, crimson rose. // ... // Ah! How few moments we had! / How short was each moment! / Enraptured, I nestled close to / the blooming, crimson rose. // Petal after petal die out in the hot caress of my lips... / The night floats. In the cold night / you lie outstretched like a corpse”).

It appears that Briusov, not camouflaging in the least, is describing some kind of oral sex act. The nature of this erotic imagery may be guessed completely unambiguously. This motif reaches a culmination in a true “hymn to cunnilingus”,

438 In his brief commentaries, Vasilii Molodiakov mentions the name of Mirra Lokhvitskaia, a provocative writer of the same times, whose own poetical line “Embody me as a pale rose, a tea rose, O poet!” (“Розой бледной, розой чайной, воплоти меня поэт!”) was addressed to Bal’mont.
being very close in its major metaphoric junctions to the Bal’mont’s texts quoted above. In a poem written in 1910, entitled “At the Feast” (“На пиру) Briusov writes:

“Move over, girl, on this couch / There isn’t enough room for two / My fingers like the feeling / Of your skin and the fluff of your hair / Around us all are wreathed with roses / The slaves are serving goblets of wine / But I am, through the perfumed smoke, imbibing just a single odour… / What comes between us? A few tissues! / I can feel body warmth / Through them and pick up the poison / Of scents flying past my nostrils /… / Oh, will I not imbibe then with all my body / With my hands, breast and tongue / With all my shivering essence / All that is concealed in your smell / Acrid, full of spicy fire / It will enter my mouth, enter my soul / Like sisters we will be intertwined / And quivering as a single being / I will inhale and imbibe your odour / With your liquid I will drink my fill… / I swear, I swear with a solemn oath: / I’m your man! Or maybe a woman, too!”

Ibid.: 28-29.
In this text Briusov is celebrating a poetical act of oral sex with a woman. In quite the same way as it was with Bal’mont, this poetical “act” arose from Briusov’s overall life-creation system of the “biographical text”, revealing the poet’s intimate communication with a “dear friend” whose identity might be the subject of further speculations.

Briusov’s long and complex love affair with Nina Petrovskaia can justifiably be called one of the important landmarks of the symbolist attitude toward erotic “creation of life”. The corresponding empirical event passes through the prism of the aestheticized (symbolist, decadent, demoniacal, erotomaniacal) ideas of the person/artist (writer, poet, or creator). Briusov was eleven years older than Petrovskaia (the wife of the future publisher of the “Gryphon” almanacs, Sergei Sokolov), and, at the time they met, was at the real zenith of his fame as a publisher of literary/artistic journals related to Russian symbolism. Their first meeting took place in a mutual acquaintance’s sitting room, where the symbolists had occasionally gathered in late winter of 1903.

Using the general life-creational pattern Briusov also embodied the self-fashioning role of “high priest of Symbolism”, making the myth of the Magus of Decadence explicit, as it were. As a result of meeting Petrovskaia, Briusov sensed a kindred spirit in her, and subsequently rendered her image and her “demonic” feminine nature in his large-scale life-creational novel “Fiery Angel”. Briusov would remark that: “in order to write Your novel, all I have to do is remember You, believe in You, love You”. Later he would address to his loving friend: “Nina, I am begging you, please have longing for something! This is my highest desire!”

Petrovskaia would later remark in return: “[Valery] please understand, simply understand, – I am not capable of doing anything, when I am not with you”.

Briusov realizes that utilizing the story of their passionate relationship he can in fact try to create something substantial in length, and spiritually significant. The major goal was to emplot all the existent Symbolist ideas about writing the “historical novel” in concrete working practice. Briusov would not hesitate to immerse himself into this demanding work. According to the proposed scheme, Petrovskaia was summoned to serve as his inspirational decoy, his enlightening beacon, illuminating the tricky novelistic path. In a well-known letter to her Briusov admits that ‘love’ and ‘creativity in prose’ became two new enchanting worlds for him. In one of these worlds, he tells, “you have drawn me away quite far, into fairytale countries, into unheard-of lands into which others rarely penetrate. Let us hope that it will be the same in this other world as well”.

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441 See Aleksandr Lavrov’s introductory article in the new collection of Briusov-Petrovskaia correspondence: Лавров 2004: 10. See also Гарэтто 1992: 8-129; see also another recent book-length publication devoted to this topic: Kern 2006.
443 “Нина, Нина! Пожалуйста, просто пойми, я не могу ничего, когда я не с тобой”. See: Брюсов, Петровская 2004: 381.
445 “в одном ты увлекла меня далеко, в сказочные страны, в небывалые земли, куда проникают редко. Да будет то же и в этом другом мире”. See: Брюсов, Петровская 2004: 301.
The outline of their life-creation novel began to be fleshed-out, and, as Petrovskaia later observed, Briusov matured\textsuperscript{446} a large number of serious historical studies and materials about medieval European history and forbidden magic. All this was rethought, reconsidered and spilled over into the physical-life canvas of the book’s resulting narrative. The ‘demoniacal principle’ that is so obvious in “Fiery Angel” and portrayed in it in such a vivid way, could be evidently felt in the germ of the personal relationship between Briusov and Petrovskaia. Petrovskaia herself remarked that once she told Briusov, “I want to fall into your darkness, irrevocably, for ever. ... You see, Valerii Iakovlevich, the background of ‘mute blackness’ has, after all, surrounded us, and there is no way out of it, so I have to go into it. You are already in it, and now I want to go to the same place”\textsuperscript{447}. The dark world of demoniacal decadence also served, as the foremost core of their “mutually destructive” passion and of all their perplexed relationship which was a clear outcome of the life-creation program of living.

The utmost flowering of this real-life literary/everyday demonism, of all the erotic life-creation of Briusov and his muse, takes place in 1904, as Petrovskaia subsequently recalled: “Towards the autumn [of that year] Briusov proffered me a goblet of dark astringent wine, in which his soul was dissolved like Cleopatra’s pearl, and said, ‘Drink!’ I drank it, and was poisoned for seven years”\textsuperscript{448}. Briusov observed in his own diary, later published (in a slightly censored form) by Nikolai Ashukin, “For me it was a tempestuous, dizzying year. Never had I experienced such passions, such torments, such joys. The majority of the experiences are embodied in the poems in my book \textit{Stephanos}. Some of them became part of the novel \textit{Fiery Angel}, as well. At times I was quite ready to discard the former directions of my life and take up new ones, to start my whole life over again. As far as literature went, I almost didn’t exist for that year. ...Only the connection with Belyi remained, but the connection was more that of two enemies”.\textsuperscript{449}

Petrovskaia in turn recalled, “He divined in me the organic affinity of my soul with one half of his, the ‘secret’ half that people around him didn’t know, the one that he both loved in himself and, more often, fiercely hated”.\textsuperscript{450} To carry out his plan of work on the historical novel that he had conceived, Briusov needed to not only study


\textsuperscript{447} “Я хочу упасть в Вашу тьму, бесповоротно и навсегда... Вот видите, Валерий Яковлевич, – обступил ведь фон ‘глухой черноты’, и уйти некуда, – нужно, значит, войти в него. Вы уже в нем, теперь я хочу туда же”. See: Петровская 1992: 67.

\textsuperscript{448} “В эту осень Брюсов протянул мне бокал с темным терпким вином, где как жемчужина Клеопатры была растворена его душа и сказал – Пей!.. Я выпила и отравилась на семь лет”. Ibid.: 69.

\textsuperscript{449} “Для меня это был год бури, водоворота. Никогда не переживал я таких страстей, таких мучительств, таких радостей. Большая часть переживаний воплощена в стихах моей книги \textit{Stephanos}. Кое-что вошло и в роман \textit{Огненный Ангел}. Временами я вполне готов был бросить все прежние пути моей жизни и перейти на новые, начать всю жизнь с нуля. Литературно я почти не существовал за этот год. ... Связь оставалась только с Бельм, но скорее связь двух врагов”. See: Брюсов 2002: 155.

and master a massive amount of literature about the every-day life of sixteenth-century Germany, but also, more importantly, to create new veritable kinds of prototypical, real-life models for the images that he intended to write about.

In the summer of 1905, Briusov and Petrovskaia took a trip to the Finnish lake. Saimaa, where Briusov was preoccupied with writing a cycle of his new poems. Reminiscing about this later, he observed: “That was the apex of my life, its highest peak, from which, like once for Pizarro, two oceans opened up to me—my past and my future life”. Referring to Petrovskaia he wrote in his diary: “You had raised me to the zenith of my heaven. And you enabled me to see the ultimate depths, the ultimate secrets of my soul. And everything that was in the crucible of my soul became superheated with frenzy, madness, despair, and passion, and was poured out, as into a gold ingot, into a single, endless, eternal love”.

Petrovskaia corroborates her own feelings of the total uniqueness of her real-life essence for the formation of the literary character of “Renata” in Briusov’s novel. Her ruminations confirm the aptness and the success of Briusov’s choice in finalizing his image of Renata after Petrovskaia: “He found much in me that he required for the novel’s image of Renata: despair, a lifeless yearning for a fantastically beautiful past, a readiness to fling my own devalued existence into any bonfire whatsoever, religious ideas and expectations turned inside out, poisoned by demoniac temptations... a detachment from everyday life and people, almost a hatred for the material world, an organic spiritual homelessness, a hunger for death and dying; in short, all the favorite poetic hyperboles and feelings concentrated in one creature—in a modest beginner journalist”.

Petrovskaia was to all appearances almost the most ‘classic’ femme fatale, constructing and modelling her outer appearance severely, taking the need to represent demoniac, romantic decadence as a point of departure. She figures just this way in the memoir-style narratives of her contemporaries, for example, those of Bronislava Runt (Pogorelova): “I hardly knew her at all, but I remember her from casual meetings at lectures and assemblies. A deliberate languor, a decadent hair style fluffed up from the part. Her attire had some pretension to stylishness and originality”.

Another contemporary, the critic A. A. Timofeev, wrote: “You know

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453 “Ты вознесла меня к зениту моего неба. И ты дала мне увидеть последние глубины, последние тайны моей души. И все, что было в горниле моей души буйством, безумием, отчаяньем, страстью, перегорело и, словно в золотой слиток, вылилось в любовь, единую, беспредельную, навеки”. See Ibid.
454 “Во мне он нашел многое из того, что требовалось для романтического облика Ренаты: отчаяние, мертвенную тоску по фантастически прекрасному прошлому, готовность швырнуть свое обесцеленное существование в какой угодно костер, вывернутые наизнанку, отравленные демоническими соблазнами религиозные идеи и чаяния... оторванность от быта и людей, почти что ненависть к предметному миру, органическую душевную бездомность, жажду гибели и смерти, - словом все любимые поэтические гиперболы и чувства, сконцентрированные в одном существе – в маленькой начинающей журналистке”. See: Петровская 1992: 57.
455 “Я с ней почти не была знакома, но по случайным встречам на лекциях и собраниях помню ее. Деланная томность, взбитая, на пробор декадентская прическа. Туалеты с некоторой претензией на стильность и оригинальность”. See: Погорелова-Рунт 1953: 176-198.
her, of course—this little ‘woman in black’, always in black. Luxuriant hair, combed back from the part in the middle, a dark face, big black eyes, a black silk dress with a train”. 456

K.G. Loks, in turn, noticed that: “[She was] a young woman whose outer appearance was impossible to define[, ... since] her face merged to such a degree with all the peculiarities of her figure, clothing, and the way she carried herself. ... It was all somewhat artificial, forced; you felt that, in a different situation, she was another person. Totally in black, in black Swedish gloves, with her black hair combed back over her temples, she was, so to speak, all one color. ... Someone called her “The Russian Carmen””. 457 One might say that Petrovskaia made explicit in her own life the very notion of the “demonic woman” of Russian decadence, the concept of which emigrant memoirist Teffi would much later ridicule in her story of the same name.458

Petrovskaia planned her love-affair with Belyi to serve as an apparent competing rival of Briusov’s, in part as an effective means of radical (and risky) “reanimation” of Briusov’s affection for her. But her wily efforts to force Briusov to ignite again his passion for her in a tempestuous way, was in vain. As Khodasevich observed in “The End of Renata”, the essay devoted to Petrovskaia (quoted at the very beginning of this chapter): “Briusov grew cold. ...Nina went from one extreme to another, first loving Briusov, then hating him. But at both extremes she gave herself over to despair. For two whole days, without food or sleep, she lay on a sofa, her head covered with a black shawl, and cried. Her trysts with Briusov, it seems, took place in an atmosphere that was no easier. Sometimes fits of rage would overtake her. She would break furniture, beat on things”.459

One of the most undoubtably important incidents in this regard, and specifically tinged in a “life-creationist” manner, was the abortive attempt on

456 “Вы конечно знаете ее — эту маленькую ’женщину в черном’, вечно в черном. Пышные волосы, расчесанные пробором посередине, темное лицо, большие черные глаза, черное шелковое платье с шлейфом...”. See: Тимофеев 1908: 5.
457 “Молодая женщина, внешность которой нельзя было определить.... до такой степени ее лицо сливалось со всеми особенностями фигуры, платья, манеры держаться... Все было несколько искусственное, принужденное, чувствовалось, что в другой обстановке она другая. Вся в черном, в черных шведских перчатках, с начесанными на виски черными волосами, она была, так сказать, одного цвета. ... ’Русская Кармен’ — назвал ее кто-то...”. See: Локс 1994: 79.
458 See her description in this text: “The demonic woman differs primarily from the ordinary woman in her manner of dress. She wears a black velvet cassock, a chain on her forehead, a bracelet on her leg, a ring with a hole in it ’for cyanide, which they will surely will send her next Tuesday,” a stiletto behind her collar, beads on her elbow, and a port of Oscar Wilde on her left garter. She also wears ordinary objects of a lady’s attire, except that they are not in the right place, where they are supposed to be. Thus, for example, the demonic woman allows herself to put a belt only on her head, an earring on her forehead or her neck, a ring on her thumb, a watch on her leg. At the table, the demonic woman does not eat anything. In general, she does not eat anything—why? The demonic woman can assume the most varied positions in society, but for the most part, she is an actress. Sometimes, she is simply a divorcée. But she always has some kind of secret, or else some kind of strain or breakdown that one must not talk about, that no one knows and must not know—why? Her brows are raised in a tragically pointed manner, and her eyes are half-lowered”. See original in Тэффи 1995: 19-20.
459 “Брюсов охладевал... Нина переходила от полосы к полосе, то любя Брюсова, то ненавидя его. Но во все полосы она предавалась отчаянию. По двое суток, без пищи и сна, пролеживала она на диване, накрыв голову черным платком, и плакала. Кажется, свидания с Брюсовым протекали в обстановке не более легкой. Иногда на нее находили приступы ярости. Она ломала мебель, била предметы”. See: Ходасевич 1992: 25.
Briusov’s life, which took place in the Polytechnical Museum on 14 April 1907, at a Belyi lecture (which is particularly symbolic in this context). Briusov wrote about this to Zinaida Gippius: “At [Belyi’s] lecture, a certain woman (I don’t want to call her by name) came up to me, suddenly pulled a Browning pistol out of her muff, put it up to my chest, and pulled the trigger. This was during the intermission, there were quite a few audience members around. ...Ellis and Serezha Soloviev managed to grab the hand she was holding the revolver in and to disarm her”.

Briusov’s life-creationist love affair with Petrovskaia, although it was the strongest one for its heat of passion, was nonetheless not the only one of this kind. Briusov’s life-creationist relationship with another of his tragic “flames”—Nadezhda L’vova—ended with the girl’s suicide and the accusations against Briusov that the dead girl’s brother levelled.

Andrei Belyi, Briusov’s protagonist and his rival in the triangular “love affair” with Petrovskaia, has also left us some observations regarding this life-creationist topic. Belyi defined Briusov in these words (among others): “It was not easy for me to fight with Briusov: at times, the ‘magus’ Briusov would be revealed to me, not shrinking from hypnotism, and scouring through dubious occult books like a lynx through the forests, in a hunt for methods for an extremely suspect psychological experiment; his inner face was revealed to me—gloomy, reminiscent of the face of the ‘stranglers’ that he portrayed in the drama *Earth*. He was alien, unpleasant, even more than that—disgusting—this ‘Briusov’ that was settled inside Valerii Briusov, at times making the great poet a vehicle of the demon-possessed man from Gadarah”.

The whole plot of the ensuing poetic (and quite dramatic) “jousting” duel with Belyi is also, undoubtedly, embellished with openly mythopoetic shades. Baldur and Loki—Briusov and Belyi, that is—enact the symbolic exchange of “arrows” with poems. In effect, this was in fact the conventional “denouement” of the love triangle, which transitioned into a sort of virtual and conventional “battle” between Briusov and Belyi over Petrovskaia.

We find a detailed description of all these collisions, although inevitably an also indirect one, and, as it were, veiled, in Briusov’s *Fiery Angel*, as well as in the reminiscences of the heroine herself—Petrovskaia. The issues surrounding this whole “mythopoetic” duel-in-verse that arose from the complex relationships with Petrovskaia and that was played out between Briusov and Belyi have been studied by Vladimir Papernyi.

In the context of Belyi’s aesthetic views, this type of mythopoetic life-creation was fully justified in the discussion on the subject of the

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460 “На лекции Бориса Николаевича, подошла ко мне одна дама (имени ее я не хочу называть), вынула вдруг из муфты браунинг, припястила мне к груди и спустила курок. Было это во время антракта, публики кругом было немало... Эллис и Сережа Соловьев успели схватить руку с револьвером и обезоружить...”. See: Литературное Наследство, vol. 85: 694.
461 About this, see Лавров 1993: 5-11.
complex interrelations between the “ego” and the “alter egos” that function in the permanent workings of the creative consciousness.

The division of the creative subject into a series of co-positioned ‘kinetic-character’ hypostases allowed Belyi to focus on several myth-creating models that were, as it were, “embodied” in the life of a poet. These models of the various communicating “egos” symbolize, in part, the suggestive consciousness of a transgressive life-creationist mask (mentioned in the preceding chapter). In Belyi’s theoretical terms: “There is no ego that is expressed linearly in a personality, but rather in the gradation of personalities, each of which has its own role; the problem is direction, the harmonious dialectic in the currents of contrasts and contradictions of the ego in the personality at stages of development, by degrees of understanding of this ego by others. ... In every human ego there are two egos – an inert one, and a higher one. The first step in ‘life building’ (since creation and life do not exist, but rather ‘life-creation’) is the creation of a system of the world of art. The second is the creation of oneself according to the image and likeness of this world. The inert ego stands guard and does not allow life building to take place. Hence the dramatic nature of life, the impossibility of making one’s way into the realm of freedom. Therefore ‘life-creation’ is an act of sacrifice”.464 To this might be added a variety of other quite characteristic quotations as well, which convey approximately this same stance from Belyi in the context of the Briusov erotic life-creation incident.

2.2. The Life-Creation Project of Zinaida Gippius and Dmitrii Merezhkovsky

The peculiar type of marriage-relationship of the Merezhkovsky’s couple raises the primary question of the “gender identity” of Zinaida Gippius, which in the present context is particularly important. Indeed, problems of gender and “corporality” shaped practically the entirety of Gippius’s complex aesthetic system, beginning with the masculine gender of her “lyrical hero” in poetry and her creation of a virtual personality, the chronicler and essayist “Anton Krainii”, and extending to the deepest layers of her creative work, which were densely entangled with everyday life and behavior. Who was Gippius? More female, or more male? What accounts for the masculine gender of the attribution of her many texts (both of poetry and prose), for example, the said “Anton Krainii”? The issue of her sexual identity was a physiological aspect that troubled a great many of her contemporaries. Let us recall this comment by a female contemporary, Nina Berberova: “…she was not really a

\[464\] “…никакое я по прямой линии не выражаемо в личности, но в градации личностей, из которых каждая имеет свою роль; вопрос о режиссуре, о гармонической диалектике в течениях контрастов и противоречий я в личности по эпохам развития, по степеням понимания этого я другими…. В каждом человеческом я есть два я - косное и высшее. Первый шаг ‘жизнестроительства’ (т.к. нет творчества и жизни, но – ‘жизнтворчество’) - создание системы мира искусства. Второй - создание себя по образу и подобию этого мира. Косное я стоит на службе и не допускает осуществления жизнестроительства. Отсюда - драматичность жизни, невозможность пробиться в царство свободы. Поэтому ‘жизнтворчество’ есть жертвоприношение…”.” See: Белый 1994: 420-421.
Dealing with the same topic, Friedrich Fiedler mentioned in his diary that according to Semen Vengerov “Zinaida Merezhkovskaia was a virgin”. Fidler recorded that “before they agreed to marry they allegedly decided to take oath to live one with the other as brother and sister. No one, not even Flekser (i.e. Akim Volynskii – D.I) had ever real sex with Zinaida. She is a virgin”.\footnote{465}

Commenting on strange bodily practices of this family Friedrich Fiedler observed in his diary: “The Merezhkovksys also live in Paris. … When Gippius sits down she has her husband on her right and Filosofov on her left. They put their hands on Zinaida’s knees and raise their frozen gaze upwards. They recite for many times: We are naked! We are naked! We are naked!”\footnote{466} Mikhail Zolotonosov (in his book about Merezhkovsky’s brother)\footnote{467} noted the presence, among Gippius’s female accessories on her dressing table, of a strange glass dildo.\footnote{468} The way how Gippius perceived her “body” corresponds directly to the entire structure of her art, and is fully in line with the whole complex of issues in her understanding of creativity.

Gippius’s aesthetic program, so it seems, was to a large extent aimed at simultaneously being a “woman within a man” and “man within a woman”. Enraptured with the “ideal” of the androgyne, she, without announcing this fact, came close to Soloviev’s “Sophian life-creation”, wherein the universally important function of saving the world is reserved for the androgynous image of Sophia, and the ancient gnostic-soteriological tradition. To all appearances, Gippius possessed physical and mental characteristics that set her apart, as it were, from the usual “gender” aspect of other people, both women and men. Her appearance was at times described by contemporaries with rather grotesque brush strokes that at the same time hinted at a certain aspiration of Gippius’s toward a provocative “hellishness”, emphasizing her extremely complex attitude toward her body. Many contemporaries tried to pose and answer the question of what might actually be concealed “under her skirt”. Apparently, the author of the following parody was interested in this last question:

Я – молодая сатиресса,
Я – бес.
Я всю живу для интереса
Телес.
Таю под юбкою копыта

\footnote{466} The full relevant quotation is: “She created artificially all her outward traits, her calmness and her femininity. Deeply inside herself she was not calm at all. And she also was not a female”. (“…Она несомненно искусственно выработала в себе две внешние черты: спокойствие и женственность. Внутри она не была спокойна. И она не была женщиной”). See: Берберова 1996: 187.

\footnote{467} “Зинаида Мережковская – девственница. Перед вступлением в брак она и Мережковский якобы договорились жить друг с другом как брат и сестра. Никто, даже Флексер, не имел с ней половой связи. Она – девственница”. See: Фидлер 2008: 441.

\footnote{468} The elder brother was convicted pedophile Konstantin Sergeevich Merezhkovskii, a biologist who was scandalously judged for molesting minors.

И хвост...
Посмотрит кто на них сердито
- Прохвост!  470
(“I am a young female satyr, I am a petty devil/ I cultivate my interest in body and sex/ I hide under my skirt hoofs and a tail/ If someone would care to notice this – he’d be damned”).

The complexity of the corporeal and creative identity of Gippius is emphasized in her diaries, for example in her 1893 diary published as Contes d’amour: “In my thoughts, my desires, and in my soul, I am more a man; in my body, I am more a woman. But they are so merged together, that I don’t know anything”. 471 The tragic aspect of Gippius’s “misalignment” with the “objects of craving” surrounding her is clearly evident in her complex relationship with the “third member” of their quasi utopian “Merezhkovskii commune”. As far as we are able to judge, Gippius was sexually attracted to Dmitrii Filosofov, who, insofar as several memoirists tell, was a homosexual.

The physical aspect of their relationship may become more evident from a note Filosofov assertedly wrote to Gippius in July, 1905. Bringing that personal note to public attention Zlobin informs that “when everyone else in the house was already asleep, [Gippius] appeared in his room. He turned her back out rather roughly, and afterwards wrote her a note: ‘The memories of our intimate encounters are physically disgusting to me. ...Despite my terrible yearning for you with all my soul, with all my being, a certain abhorrence for your flesh has arisen in me, rooted in something purely physical. This is getting close to being a sickness. Here is an example: today, you smoked with my cigarette holder, and I can no longer smoke with it, because of a feeling of specific disgust’”. 472

At a deeper level, Gippius’s attitude toward homosexuality was, we must assume, extremely complicated. When she was travelling through Europe, she wrote in her diary, “Oh, Taormina, white and blue city of the most laughable of all loves— pederasty!” 473 In fact, she and Merezhkovskii met two homosexuals there: a certain von Gloeden (an older man, an artist-photographer, possibly of Dutch origin) and a younger person named Henri Briguet, with whom, Gippius later confessed she, “could very pleasantly fall in love”. This is how she narrates this event in her diary: “Briguets’s slim, tall body, with incredibly blue eyes and a gentle face. Very, very

470 This poem is sometimes attributed to Aleksandr Amfiteatrov. The date of its composition could possibly be 1907: in addition to the connection with Gippius, this was the year when the first edition of Aleksandr Kondrat’ev’s mythopoetical novel Satiressa was published.
472 “...когда в доме все еще спали, [Гиппиус] явилась к нему в комнату. Он довольно грубо отправил ее назад и после написал ей письмо: ‘...мне физически отвратительны воспоминания о наших сближениях. [...] При страшном устремлении к тебе всем духом, всем существом своим, у меня выросла какая-то ненависть к твоей плоти, коренящаяся в чем-то чисто физиологическом. Это доходит до болезненности. Вот пример: ты сегодня курила из моего мундштука - и я уже больше не могу из него курить из чувства специфической брезгливости’”. See: Злобин 2004: 326-373.
beautiful. He’s about 24, no older. Faultlessly elegant, maybe there’s just a tiny, tiny bit of something... another woman would say saccharine, but to me, no, it’s feminine. I like this, and from their outer appearance, I sometimes relish gay people ...I like the deceit of possibility in this: a hint of being both sexes, as it were, he seems both a woman and a man. This is terribly familiar to me”.474 This “familiarity” of being at the same time “a woman and a man” underlines once more the intense and constant longing of Gippius toward the unreachable “androgynous ideal”. These “androgynous ideas” correspond to the general program of life-creation in Russian modernism.475

Purely lesbian experiments were not alien to Gippius. What is more, the theme of lesbian aesthetics is almost the first one to come to mind in the context of all her creative work476 (both in poetry and in prose). Briusov notes in his diary, “Kartashev was here, and m-lle Overbek, too, Zin[aid]a’s former lover”; and, elsewhere: “Hanging around Zinochka, too, was Liza Overbek, a girl for lesbian petting; [she was] scrappy, boring, and ugly, and prattled on in French. When she deserted [Gippius], by the way, she showed up at Liudmila’s [Nikolai Minskii’s wife], offering her services to her as well”.477 Referring to the same period of time Friedrich Fiedler recollected: “Merezhkovskaiia... was reciting her poetry; she was accompanied by Ms Overbek. They arrived together with her from Italy not long time ago”.478 Further in his diary Fiedler noted: “Zinaida is a lesbian. Her lover is the lady-musician Overbek. And Zinaida does not hide that fact from no one. Once she made a clear scene of jealousy to Overbek in front of everybody. Gippius had her reasons for that, as Vengerov tells, he saw with his own eyes one personal love-letter written by Overbek to some other woman. This letter had explicit content exposing the sexual nature of their relationship”.479

Very little is known about Dmitrii Merezhkovsky’s sexuality, with the exception of his “love affair in letters”480 (and, to all appearances, not only in letters) with Liudmila Vil’kina. Friedrich Fiedler recorded in his diary: “Lately, Vil’kina devotes to Merezhkovsky [her new] scalding poems. Zinaida Nikolaevna has all

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474 “…тонкая, высокая фигура Briguet с невероятно голубыми глазами и нежным лицом. Очень, очень красив. Года 24, не больше. Безукоризненно изящен, разве что-то, чуть-чуть, есть... другая бы сказала - приторное, но для меня - нет, - женственное. Мне это нравится, и с внешней стороны я люблю иногда педерастов [...] Мне нравится тут обман возможности: как бы намек на двуполость, он кажется и женщиной, и мужчиной. Это мне ужасно близко”. Ibid.

475 On this see Григорьева 2008: 353-381.

476 Incidentally, this attitude should be balanced by reference to the self-fashioning “mythologem” exploited in Western culture and literature in the figure of George Sand.

477 “Был Карташев и m-lle Овербек, бывшая любовница Зины [Гиппиус]”...; “При Зиночке состояла и Лиза Овербек, девица для лесбийских ласк, тощая, сухая, некрасивая, ленчающая по-французски. Впрочем, она, перебегая, появлялась и у Людмилы [жены Минского], предлагая свои услуги и т.д.”; See: Брюсов 2002: 144.

478 “Мережковская... декламировала... свои стихи; ее сопровождала мисс Овербек, с которой она недавно приехала из Италии”; See: Фидлер 2008: 238.

479 “Зинаида – лесбиянка. Ее возлюбленная – музыкантиша Овербек. Она сама (то есть Зинаида) никоим образом этого не скрывает; однажды она устроила Овербек на глазах у всех недвусмыслену сцену ревности. И у нее были для этого основания – Венгеров сам видел любовное письмо Овербек к одной женщине, не оставляющее никаких сомнений по поводу сексуального содержания их отношений”. See: Фидлер 2008 : 441.

possible reasons for jealousy. Before that time, Vil’kina was herself somewhat jealous to Zinaida Nikolaevna, because Merezhkovsky was in fact flirting with her. [Vil’kina] was, perhaps, the only woman whom Merezhkovskii really loved, - that what was Vengerov said.\footnote{В последнее время Вилькина посвящает жгучие стихи Мережковскому, так что у Зинаиды Николаевны есть все основания для ревности. Ранее Вилькина испытывала ревность к Зинаиде Николаевне, поскольку Минский за ней ухаживал. Она была, наверное, его единственной настоящей любовью, - сказал Венгеров”. See: Фидлер 2008: 441.}

A somewhat similar affair occurred between Gippius and the literary critic Akim Volynsky.\footnote{Сee: Гиппиус 1993: 274-342.}
The Merezhkovskys circle in 1900 was occupied in discussion of new forms of sensuality and sexuality, as (before them) Soloviev had no less been, preoccupied with the possibility of creating a new, ideal physical life by way of radical modifying human sexual practices.

Actively participating in the circle of Gippius and Merezhkovsky\footnote{See also Матич 1999: 106-118.} were the most outstanding cultural heroes of their time. Such as Vasili Rozanov, Aleksandr Benois, Petr Pertsov, Vladimir Gippius, Walter Nouvel’, Sergei Diagilev, and Dmitrii Filosofov. Many of them had an openly homosexual orientation. In her message of a new type of love, Gippius precludes the necessity of the usual standard sex act, suggesting that one experiment with the body in all possible ways, and allocates special significance to “the kiss”. In kissing, both participants are “equalized”, according to Gippius; that is, no matter which sex they are, they physically possess the same organs—the lips and tongue (as opposed to the such different sexual organs used by each of the participants in the usual sex act of copulation). The main idea of the Merezhkovskys’ religious quest of that time was: with the help of an erotic utopia and of the so-called New Church of Love, to save mankind and to offer healing from the vicious circle of birth and death.\footnote{For the newly-published minutes of their religious-spiritual meetings, see Николюкин 2005.}

2.3. The Special Status of Life-Creation in Fedor Sologub

Several types of extravagant mania, a penchant for perversity and a traumatic childhood all imposed their noticeable stamp on Sologub’s identity as a writer. The ambiguity in his sexual identification, his latent attraction to masochistic and sadistic themes, and a special sort of transgendering, are all evident in many episodes of his main novel, the most successful of all of them, The Petty Demon (“Мелкий бес”).

In this major text, the important role that human corporality plays in Sologub’s universe becomes manifest; this can be supported by a considerable number of quotations. The most characteristic ones concern the incidents which in one way or another are related to the various problems in the aberrant life of the main protagonist of the novel, Peredonov, and of the majority of the gloomy inhabitants of the narrated Russian provincial town.

Often, in Sologub’s work, in contrast to the vividly portrayed repulsive abnormality, there also arises a sort of beautifully unattainable “classic” cult of pristine, harmonious Beauty (in the Platonic-Solovievian sense). For the type of symbolist writer that Sologub was, the contemporary age was perceived as an abomination, an illegitimate distortion of the original (ancient) strict beauty of the
human body, and, as a result, of harmonious and happy human condition. In a widely-quoted citation Sologub tries to characterize the physical appearance of his heroine Varvara. “Varvara was staggering out of drunkenness; her face would arouse disgust in any new, fresh person, because of its flaccid expression of lust. But her body ... was beautiful, like the body of a tender nymph, but stuck onto it, by the force of some kind of despicable sorcery, was the head of a shriveled-up harlot. And this captivating body, for these two drunks and dirty little people, was only a source of debased temptation. That what happens in our days quite often: the beauty will lie scorned and desecrated”.

At the same time, and by quite the opposite “defamiliarizing” contrast, a certain young widow, the “petit-bourgeois” Grushina, in the masked costume of Diana, demonstrates a body that was “boldly uncovered”. As Sologub puts it: “[... It was beautiful—but what contradictions! On her skin were flea bites; her manners were coarse, and her words were of unbearable vulgarity. Yet again, physical beauty was desecrated”.

The entire world of Sologub’s female protagonist Liudmila is the blindly insatiable worship of the bestial physicality of a despised human body. In the author’s view it usually was “shameful to have a body” and his heroine Liudmila tells, therefore, that “even little boys cover it up”. We also see how “Liudmila hungrily stares” at Sasha’s “naked back”. The voluptuous view of her wonders: “there is so much beauty and corporal charm in this world ... People shut themselves off from so much beauty—why?”.

The utopian worship of an ideal, empirically unattainable, and partially genderless, conventional beauty is inextricably connected with the ideas of the elder Russian symbolists, participants of the journal Severniy vestnik. They wrote there about the new “rehabilitation of the flesh”, about a sort of “sanctity of the human corporeality”, and related ideas. Sologub’s heroine Liudmila perceives the same corporal worship as very attractive and seductive (“I am a heathen, a sinner. I should have been born in ancient Athens”). As Zara Mintz and Masbitz-Verov once observed, Sologub draws Liudmila together with paganism as an old sensual religion being dominant and popular once: “Her hot lips kissed [him] as if [he were] an adolescent deity, in a quivering, secret devotion to the Flesh that was bursting into bloom”.

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485 “… Варвара шаталась от опьянения и лицо ее во всяком свежем человеке возбуждало бы отвращение своим дрябло-похотливым выражением, но тело у нее было прекрасное, как тело у нежной нимфы, с приставленною к нему, силою каких-то презренных чар, головою увивающей блудницы. И это восхитительное тело для этих двух пьяных и грязных людышек являлось только источником низкого соблазна. Так это и часто бывает, - и воистину в нашем веке надлежит красоте быть попранной и поруганной”. See: Сологуб 2004: 268.

486 “…тело … так смело открытое <…> было красиво, – но какие противоречия! На коже - блошьи укусы, ухватки грубы, слова нестерпимой пошлости. Снова поруганная телесная красота…”. Ibid.


489 The full quotation of the relevant episode is: “In a hurry Liudmila was kissing Sasha’s hands from shoulders to the tips of his fingers. Sasha was not preventing her from doing this, he was excited, deeply immersed into passionate cruel desires. Liudmila’s kissess were heated with excitement… [she felt like] her hot lips were fondling not just a simple boy, but an adolescent god, tenderly serving blossoming of his mysterious flesh...”. (“…Людмила торопливо целовала Сашины руки от плеч до пальцев, и Саша не отнимал их, взволнованный, погруженный в страстные и жестокие
The universum of a “stylized” antiquity has yet another characteristic feature: it appears to be closely linked with the real nucleus of art, with a sort of perpetual festival, with a travestied game intended to sweep away the traditional boundaries between life and a “performance”. Peredonov makes identification (partially linguistic/poetic) of a festival [праздник] with idleness [праздность]. As Sologub elsewhere observed via the Utopian inner speech of his character, in three hundred years, “people won’t be working themselves”, since “there will be machines for everything”. The human body will be therefore able to live longer and more happily. Besides that Sologub’s oeuvre also offers a rich material for studying the transformations of real life into a play, into a “whimsical” art, a sort if carnivalesque masked theater. There should be remembered the writer’s main characters’ – Liudmila and Sasha’s constant “ambiguous” games and stylization of the “antiquity”, Sasha’s fanciful obsessive cross-dressing, and, in general, the whole ambivalent theme of the masquerade.

The major novel of Russian symbolism, *The Petty Demon*, in general acquires a utopian complex of ideas about the sensual transformation of the real world by creative art. The novel turns out to be a part of the indirect context of symbolist “life creation”, many of the episodes that are depicted in the novel relate to the experimental theatricality in the Russian fin de siècle. We should adduce here the “private theater for myself”, the reanimation of the *commedia dell’arte*, and of all baroque theater in general, which was promoted in Nikolai Evreinov’s energetic work of approximately the same period of time.

The illustration of one of the novel’s main parallel plots—the problematic and “forbidden” liaison of Liudmila and Sasha offers a provocative stratum of ancient mythology. As recent research shows, it has a complex, ambivalent and polysemantic nature. Many of Sologub’s mythopoetic images relate to various Old and New Testament concepts. A peculiar sign-system with a travestied life-creationist coloring is created by many of Liudmila’s teasing games. In those games Sasha was compelled to constantly undress and change his costume, to become, a “fisherman with naked legs”, and then appearing in the “chiton of a barefoot Athenian boy”. One of the central motifs here was undoubtedly the aspect of the physical “nakedness” of one or another limb of the boy’s body. It may also be evident (as observed in scholarship),

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491 Compare: “Seldom, Liudmila kissed his naked hands, Sasha did not resist, he was laughingly looking upon Liudmila. Sometimes he was even putting hands to her lips and openly demanding: Kiss me! … they especially liked those [masquerade] costumes sewed by Liudmila: dress of a fisherman with naked legs boy’s chiton which also left the legs naked”. (“Иногда Людмила брала его руки, обнаженные и стройные, и целовала их. Саша не сопротивлялся и смеючись смотрел на Людмилу. Иногда он сам подставлял руки к ее губам и говорил: - Целуй! …неравнился ему и ей иные наряды, которые шила сама Людмила: одежда рыбака с гольными ногами, хитон афинского голоногого мальчика”). See: Сологуб 2004: 141.
that the relationship between Liudmila and Sasha are revealed through the
iconography of the late-antiquity romance of Longus, Daphnis and Chloe.492

As it was already mentioned in previous scholarship the complicated
development of the relationship between a youthful adult girl and a younger
schoolboy may be projected onto the erotically provocative path of the “shepherd and
shepherdess” from idyllic childish friendship to the ambiguous mature physicality and
all the dramatic events of the characters. The “innocent”, relationship that occurs
before the “sexual awakening” prove to be for Liudmila and Sasha the source of
complicated experiences that are often at the limits of “the permissible”, which draw
the heroes and the reader into a sort of “rapprochement” with their constrained
passion. This “rapprochement” proceeds through a succession of irresolvable and
incomprehensible yearnings: “they were both half-naked, and connected with their
liberated flesh was both desire and wary shame—but what was this mystery of the
flesh about? ... Sasha became afraid, and impossible desires painfully tormented
him”. The entire paradigmatics of sensual “body-love” becomes the most dominant
theme in Sologub’s text; the Symbolist quest for the “new sexuality” dictates his
major interests in the novelistic discourse.493

492 This work was very popular among the “elder symbolists” of the Severnyj vestnik circle, to which
Sologub belonged de facto. Merezhkovskii devoted his special essay to it. See this topic described in
493 See the following characteristic description: “…Her body smelled with Iris, a bloom of a plant,
having showy flowers and sword-shaped leaves... That was a sultry, swelteringly hot scent related to
her flesh, and it was disturbing... This smell was casting drowsining somnolence over Sasha, it was
evaporating an exhalation of the unseen low moist... Liudmila was parching with thirst, pining and
sighing, looking upon his dark-skinned face... She put her head on his naked knees, her blond curls
were touching his dark skin. She kissed Sasha’s body. The aroma of his bare torso was strong. It
merged with the scent of his young skin, making her head giddy. Sasha was lying and ambiguously
smiling... An unclear longing was filling him up and was tormenting him with a sweet unknown
enjoyment. When Liudmila kissed his foot and knees, her tender touches were exciting his hidden
languid sleepy desires. He wanted to do something to her. But did not know what exactly to. To kiss
her foot? Or, perhaps, rather to beat her up, to strike her strongly with long elastic bushes... What
exactly does she want? Both of them were half-naked had their flesh liberate and uncovered. The
repressive abashment was related to that somehow. What is intimate the secrecy of the flesh? How it
may be possible to sacrifice one’s own body and blood as a sweet offering to the shameful desire?
Liudmila was languishing and rushing near his legs, she was pale because of her impossible desires,
simultaneously feeling hot and cold. She was passionately whispering: Don’t I have luxuriant hair?
Touch me tenderly, fondle me with your passion... Put away my bracelets, bangles and necklace! Sasha
was terrified, all the impossible desires were fiercely tormenting him”. (“…Ирисом пахло ее тело,-
запах душистый, плотский, раздражающий, навевающий дремоту и лень, насыщенный
испарением медвежьих вон. Она томилась и вздыхала, и глядела на его смуглое лицо... Она
положила голову на его голые колени, и ее светлые кудри ласкали его смуглую кожу. Она
целовала Сашину тело, и от аромата, странныго и сильного, смешанного с запахом молодой
кожи, кружилась ее голова. Саша лежал и улыбался тихою, неверно улыбкою. Неясное в нем
зарождалось желание и сладко томило его. И когда Людмила целовала его колени и стопы,
нежные поцелуи возбуждали томные, полносиные мечтания. Хотелось что-то сделать ей, милое
или большое, нежное или стыдное, - но что? Целовать ее ноги? Или бить ее, долго, сильно,
длинными гибкими ветвями? …Что же ей надо? Вот они полуобнаженные оба, и с них
освобожденною плотью связано желание и хранительный стыд,- но в чем же это таинство
плоти? И как принести свою кровь и свое тело в сладостную жертву ее желаниям, своему
стыду? А Людмила томилась и металась у его ног, бледная от невозможных желаний, то
пываем, то холодей. Она страшно шептала: ...У меня ли не пышные волосы! Ласкай же меня!

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Utopian and life-creational, particularly perverse, Sologub’s “created legend” (творимая легенда) also made itself felt in the life and daily routine of the author himself.\textsuperscript{494} In the form of a “sorcerer”, Sologub succeeded to “cast a spell” over Viacheslav Ivanov and supposedly did not allow the latter to leave his own apartment. Important to this topic are the memoirs of Elena Dan’ko, published in the almanac \textit{Litsa}, about Sologub’s “demonic peculiarities” and his varied occult and unusual odd jokes (“practical jokes”).\textsuperscript{495} Here I should also mention Sologub’s strange life-lasting obsession with young boys, whom, as the writer himself observed, “one often has to flog”. The signs of concealed sadism mixed with repressed pedophilia in Sologub’s life-creation find colorful affirmations in his various texts.\textsuperscript{496}

3.0. The “Younger Generation” of Russian Symbolists

3.1. Andrei Belyi: The Helmsman of Russian Life-Creation

Highly important in the context of my discussion is Belyi’s programmatic article “Art”. In this essay Belyi gives his original definition of art, with a direct reference to life-creation. Belyi proclaims that “art is [should be] the art of living. ... I must define art as the ability to live. ... Art is a totality of norms of behavior that predefine the theoretical issues of reason. \textlangle...\textrangle Life is personal creation. \textlangle...\textrangle The ability to live is unbroken creativity, it is an instant that stretches into eternity. The creation of life is the secret of personality. The ability to live is individual creativity, and the obligatory rules for living are but masks behind which personality hides. A life understood in such laws is a jolly masquerade”.\textsuperscript{497}

No less important for me is Belyi’s 1908 essay, “Symbolism” (published in his book of essays, \textit{The Green Meadow} (“Луг Зеленый”)), wherein he ruminates specifically about how one should overcome, in an ideal artistic form, the contradiction between “the word” and reality. He tells the readers the old maxim that the form of a work of art is inseparable from the content. To him it means this: “a creative image is a symbol, the content is already reflected in the form”. Bely explains his position: “the experienced fullness of destruction or of living serves as content and meaning; the prerequisite for any symbolist artist is the consciousness from experience that humanity stands at a fatal boundary… the duality between life and the word, between the conscious and the unconscious, has been taken to its limit;

\textsuperscript{494}For a large number of the relevant examples from Sologub’s real biographical practice, see Margarita Pavlova’s recent monograph: Павлова 2007.

\textsuperscript{495}For additional material see the general introductory exposition in Greene 1986.

\textsuperscript{497}“Искусство есть искусство жить. ... Я должен определить искусство умением жить. ... Жизнь – это совокупность норм поведения, предопределяющих теоретические вопросы разума. ... Жизнь – есть личное творчество. ... Умение жить есть непрерывное творчество, это маргенирование растущееся в вечность. Творчество жизни есть тайна личности. Умение жить есть индивидуальное творчество, а общеобязательные правила жизни – маски, за которыми прячется личность. Жизнь, осознанная в законах, есть веселый маскарад…”. See: Белый 1994: 167; 241.
the escape from duality is either death, or inner reconciliation of the contradictions in new forms of living... Art is now an important factor in the salvation of humanity": 498

Other characteristic and relevant statements can be found in Belyi’s 1911 essay “The Song of Life” (Песнь жизни): “Art (Kunst) is the art of living. ... But preserving life is prolonging it; prolonging of any kind is creativity; art is the creation of life”. 499

In that same year, Belyi spoke about his idea that the word must follow the Gospels’ path of prefiguration. Literature as art must strive toward realization of corporeal physicality, and the artist-creator himself will give birth, in a sovereign way, his own form in this art. Belyi believes that the word of human consciousness “must have flesh”. He then argues that this “flesh must possess the gift of speech”. Following the gospel-tradition he openly writes that “the word must become flesh. The word made flesh is both a symbol of creation and the genuine nature of things. ... The two paths of art merge into a third path: the artist must become his own form: his natural ‘ego’ must merge with his creation, his life must become artistic. He himself is ‘the word made flesh.’ The existing forms of art lead to tragedy for the artist: victory over tragedy is the transubstantiation of art into a religion of life”. 500

Belyi’s ideas on life-creationist transformation/incarnation can be illustrated by the examples from his physical behavior and his aesthetical programs “implanted” into his “life-practice”. I shall try to create a picture of the special relationship between “life” and “art” in his biography.

3.2. Argonautism

One important conceptual field of the mythogenetic masks of the Russian symbolists’ life-creation was “argonautism”, the unusual activities of a particular group of young people who grouped themselves around the figure of the literary innovator Andrei Belyi (he was quite “popular” and even “fashionable” at that time among the advanced connoisseurs of literature). 501

498 “Тезис – форма художественного творчества неотделима от содержания – означает следующее: поскольку творческий образ есть символ, постольку в форме уже отражается содержание: содержанием служит переживаемая полнота уничтожения или жизни; предпосылка всякого художника-символиста есть переживаемое сознание, что человечество стоит на роковом рубеже, что раздвоенность между жизнью и словом, сознательным и бессознательным доведена до конца; выход из раздвоения или смерть, или внутреннее примирение противоречий в новых формах жизни... искусство есть ныне важный фактор спасения человечества”. See: Белый 1994: 257-258.

499 “Искусство (Kunst) есть искусство жить. <...> Но сохранение жизни – в продолжении ее; продолжение чего бы то ни было есть творчество; искусство есть творчество жизни”. Quoted in Белый 1994: 167. See also Юрьева 2000: 89-117.


501 Aleksandr Lavrov was the first who had studied this phenomenon at large: Лавров 1978: 37-170. See also Keys 1996: 163-171.
The “collective effort” of the inspired Moscow youth in the first half of the 1890s was focussed on the search for the miraculous “Golden Fleece”. They were seeking after a metaphysical discovery which would determine the “salvation” of humanity, and this quest later became the genuine jewel of symbolist life-creation. The quintessence of this group paradigm⁵⁰² can be found in Belyi’s poetic expression of the challenge: “Let us fly off to reach the sky-blue cerulean azure!” (Отлетим в лазурь!). Quite a few curious details about the practical plans for outfitting the “Argo vessel” (bound for the mythical “Colchis”) can be found in one of Belyi’s diaries, which has thus far been only partially published under the title Material for a Biography. Intimate one. (“Материал для биографии. Интимный”). Another (indirect) source might be Belyi’s still not completely published notes that he had given the provisional title “With a View to a Diary” (Ракурс к дневнику).

Additional illustrative material to that provided by Aleksandr Lavrov is included in a multifaceted fundamental theme directly tied to argonautism – that of the Wife-Sophia-Virgin (Жена-София-Дева), worked out by Blok and Belyi (the younger symbolist adherents of Soloviev). What I have in mind here is Blok and Belyi’s symbolist polysemantic life-creationist sign/concept of the “Woman Clothed with Sun” (Жена Облечённая в Солнце). One can observe a relatively direct apocalyptic reference to Revelations, Chapter 12 (KJV):

1 And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars:
2 And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.
3 And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.⁵⁰³

The Woman clothed with Sun in the 12th chapter of Revelations can be seen as a symbol of the Church, of the “mysterious presence” of Jesus Christ in the world. Several details point to this, including the crown of twelve stars—a sign of the completeness of the universal unity of people. At the same time, Christian poets and thinkers from early antiquity have regarded this image to be a symbolic portrayal of the Most Holy Theotokos, the Mother of Christ. From the times of the apostles, the Most Holy Virgin is herself considered to be both a symbol of the Church and the Mother of all who become, so to say, “sons of God in Christ”.

It is important to understand what the “semi-inexpressible” (полу-несказанный) life-creationist image of the Woman Clothed with Sun might mean in Belyi’s particular context.⁵⁰⁴ This image can be interpreted in the historically unique

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⁵⁰² Lavrov’s pioneering article, which reconstructs the “Argonaut myth” of Russian symbolism and uncovers many hidden peripeties of the “group-oriented” and “life-text” modes of Belyi and his confreres, unfortunately does not analytically describe two important aspects. It does not address: a) the essence of the Argonaut myth itself, in the classical (historical) consciousness and through the Renaissance until modern times, and b) what published sources were available at the time, which Belyi might have relied on when constructing his “group mythologem”.

⁵⁰³ The conventional Russian Synod translation (Откровение Иоанна Богослова – глава 12) is: “1 И явились на небе великое знамение: жена, облечённая в солнце; под ногами ее луна, и на голове ее венец из двенадцати звезд. 2 Она имела во чреве, и кричала от болей и мук рождения. 3 И другое знамение явилось на небе: вот, большой красный дракон с семью головами и десятью рогами, и на головах его семь диадим”.

⁵⁰⁴ For the “Sun-relation” of ancient Egypt in Belyi see: Schmidt 1986.
chronotope contained within it, as well as in the broadly understood context of
Russian folklore. Moscow scholar Monika Spivak, in her article about Belyi’s
ambivalent “object of desire”, would ironically write “Someone else’s (чужая)
‘Woman Clothed in Sun’”.

The multidimensional historical reality that corresponds to this topic is also
tied to Soloviev’s literary legacy, wherein his words about the denomination of the
Goethe-inspired “Eternal Feminine” are significant. It is important to remember
that, for Belyi (for example, in his poem “Christ is Risen”(Христос вкрес)), the
Woman Clothed with Sun is meaningfully personified with a feminine image of
Virgin-Russia. And it is just this Woman, according to legend, who conquers the
Dragon (or Snake, the Beast, or such like). Bely clearly equates Russia with the
image of this mighty lady:

Россия,
Страна моя -
Ты - та самая,
Облечённая солнцем
Жена,
К которой
Возносятся
Взоры...
Вижу яственно я:
Россия, Моя, -
Богоносица,
Побеждающая Змия...

(“Russia, You’re my country, You’re the same, the [holy] Woman Clothed with
Sun…You hold the God within you, and you will defeat the [deadly] Serpent…”).

In order to understand this life-creationist topic in Belyi (and in Blok), we must not
fail to observe that the Woman Clothed with Sun represents a well-known apocalyptic
image (as well as icon). This theme can also be described in a historical-

505 See: Спивак 1999: 174-199. For the additional details see also Лавров 1995 passim.
506 Compare Soloviev’s “Preface to the third edition” in The Poems of Vladimir Soloviev, St.
Petersburg, 1900, XIV-XV: “The woman clothed with sun is tormented by births: she must reveal
the truth, give birth to the word, but the old serpent is gathering his last strength against her and trying to
drown her in the toxic floods of a specious lie and of plausible deceptions. All of this was foretold, and
the end was foretold: at the end, Eternal beauty will be fruitful, and from it will come the salvation of
the world, when her deceitful likenesses disappear like the sea-foam that gave birth to the vulgar
Aphrodite. My poems do not serve the latter with a single word, and that is the only inalienable virtue
that I can and should acknowledge in them”. (“Жена облечённая в солнце, уже мучается родами:
она должна явить истину, родить слово, и вот древний змий собирает против нее свои
последние силы и хочет потопить ее в ядовитых потоках благовидной лжи, правдоподобных
обманов. Все это предсказано, и предсказан конец: в конце Вечная красота будет плодотворна,
и из нее выйдет спасение мира, когда ее обманчивые подобия исчезнут, как та морская пена,
которая родила простонародную Афродиту. Этой мои стихи не служат ни единым словом, и вот
единственное неотъемлемое достоинство, которое я могу и должен за ними признать…”). See
also a recent Polish study: Rzeczycka 2002.
cultural/religious context, which would supplement and amplify the existing interpretations (Minz and Lavrov). The whole concept of the multidimensional “Feminine Sacral Image” is important for all the life-creation of the Russian symbolists (archetypes include: Maria, Sophia, Bride, and others). Related to it are the cult of the Great Goddess Cybele and the imagery associated with her. There are also non-European religious/mythological narratives about the “Female Sun” that are extremely interesting.

The question of exactly which other scholarly works thematically relevant to his topic (the reconstruction of Belyi’s argonautism) Aleksandr Lavrov might have added to his description warrants separate discussion. The general history of the Argonaut myth in the Middle Ages has been studied in various scholarly works, and the very concept of “argonautism”, including what I might call the “life-creationist variant”, has been known for a long time in the humanities.

I will point out several contextual peculiarities of the life-creationist myth about the Argonauts and the Fleece that have not usually attracted attention in the context of Belyi. According to esoteric alchemist legend, the Divine Dew descended in the form of a peculiar “moist fog” and was “absorbed” by the wool of the Fleece, which was in the house of the Christ’s “earthly father” the carpenter Joseph. The Virgin Mary then lay against this Fleece, and was allegedly “imperceptibly impregnated” by the Holy Spirit (in the form of the Divine Dew), which, of course, did not thereby compromise her immaculate Virginity. It is well-known, after all, that the tiniest particles of a moist substance (as in the case of sperm) can penetrate through (or diffuse into) the hymen without damaging it, and, if the sperm reaches the woman’s uterus, conception can ultimately result as well. It is precisely this somatic, corporeal-“medical” theme that is exploited in the context of the Divine Dew, the Fleece, and the Virgin Mary. Involved in this is an identification of the biblical “Fleece of Gideon, the Jew” with the mythological “Golden Fleece” of Jason, the Greek. There is a brief discussion of this issue in the work of the Dutch scholar Helena Maria Elisabeth de Jong.

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508 See, for example, several contributions in Benko 1997. This interesting work of Stephen Benko contains a relevant chapter, “The Woman Clothed With Sun and Pagan Mythology” (pp. 87-131), which includes many interesting in our context smaller subchapters such as “Astral motifs”, “Water”, and the like.

509 A subject studied by M.J. Vermaseren and his academic school. See Lane 1996 for some additional material.

510 See, for example, the fundamental work: Никитина 2001.

511 Worth mention, for example, is the concise descriptive monograph by Antoine Faivre, retired Professor of the History of Western Esotericism at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Golden Fleece and Alchemy, first published in French in 1990 in Paris and Milan (Faivre 1990). I have also used the various supplemental “appendices” and invaluable illustrations of the English edition (Faivre 1993).

512 See (passim) Dominguez 1979, and Liez 1998. See also Célérier 1990.

513 For a scholarly bibliography of “international Lebenskunst” see: Иоффе 2005: 170-179. See also Сарычев 1991.

514 As opposed to the “Heavenly” one i.e. God the Almighty.

515 To put that plainly: the hymen is “technically” not an obstacle to pregnancy, as contemporary medical dictionaries and popular references specifically state.

516 See: De Jong in Maier 1969. For a discussion of her work in preparing this treatise, see Maier 1969: 8-9. (In particular, she bases her work on the treatise of Willem Minnens, Aureum Vellus.)
In the time of the Russian symbolists there were known various accounts of the Greek Argonauts (those of Apollonius of Rhodes and Valerius Flaccus), as well as of the historical Burgundian “Order of the Golden Fleece”. These publications could have been accessible to the symbolist life-creationists and to their “helmsman” Andrey Belyi.

3.3. Belyi, Margarita Morozova, and the Service of the Beautiful Lady

Belyi created his second Symphony approximately one year after the first one, and this work, it would seem, offers testimony to the further development of the young author in a philosophical and romantic/religious sense. As Aleksandr Lavrov had pointed out, around 1901 the author’s consciousness appears to manifest a certain ever-intensifying drift in the direction of mystic/apocalyptic and messianic aspirations, toward some sort of undefined expectations, in a sense, of something “totally new” and purifying. As Lavrov had noted there was a younger-Symbolist effort to “hasten the revolutionary upheaval” of all the foundations of the spiritual and physical organization of human life. Belyi apparently conceived his “symphonies” which were so particularly radical for that time in the Russian tradition as a quite adequate literary genre for expression of his feeling of, as Lavrov puts it, “intoxicating novelty” he sensed “in the air”. Lavrov suggests that Bely perceived his oeuvre of that period of time as a sort of future prototype of the imminent

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517 Duke Phillip of Burgundy founded around 1420 a knightly order known as the “Order of the Golden Fleece” (Ordre de la Toison d’Or). The French term “Toison d’Or” figured as a parallel title in Nikolai Riabushinkii’s journal Zołotoe Runo. An order like this must have been the conceptual-historical “prototype” of the Russian symbolist “Group of Argonaut-Seekers” about which Aleksandr Lavrov has written. What is more, Lavrov himself clearly regards the group as an “order”: “the order of argonauts at the dawn of the [new] century” (“...орден аргонавтов на заре века...”) see Лавров 1978: 145.

518 We might also point out several potentially available for the time of Russian Symbolists publications (among these are the seventy-page 1904 brochure, contemporary to symbolist argonautism, about the Order of the Golden Fleece, entitled Liste nominale des chevaliers de l’ordre illustre de la Toison d’or, as well as a number of other books of that time. See also publications such as: Exposition de la Toison d’or, 1907, Bruges; Les chefs-d’oeuvre de l’art flamand à l’Exposition de la Toison d’or, Les arts anciens de Flandre dédié a sa majesté le roi des belges, étudiés par un groupe de savants sous la direction de Camille Tulpinck. Association pour la publication des Monuments de l’Art Flamand, 1908, and some others.

519 About a similar type of poetic worldview, see Grossman 1973: 247-260.

520 See his pioneering article: Лавров 1991: 3-27.

521 And their highly experimental form.

A syncretic form of creative work\textsuperscript{523} that would satisfy the demands of a new mystical
transformation of life.

In August of 1902, Belyi wrote his friend Emilii K. Metner, the prolific literary
critic and also a musicologist: “The ‘symphonies’ have no future as they are now; but
as an intermediate stage on the journey toward the formation of some kind of
undoubtedly important form, they are significant. This is the beginning of the end
of poetry, properly speaking. In becoming ‘symphonicized’, does life not aspire to the
future?”\textsuperscript{524}

Scholars usually admit that as opposed to Belyi’s “First Symphony”, the
Second one is quite a bit more openly autobiographical;\textsuperscript{525} it is largely based on a re-
conceptualized notion of the “human document”, which should be important to
anyone studying the life-creation of Russian symbolism. Aleksandr Lavrov notes that
Belyi portrays everyday Moscow life, but also endows it with a sort of intimate
snapshot of his own inner life in 1901.\textsuperscript{526} For Belyi, this period signifies a sort of
beginning of the “Era of Dawnings” (Эпоха зорь), and symbolizes the next stage of
his multiplicate spiritual evolution. In retrospective analysis, as Lavrov observes, this
time was later to prove quite significant to his personal aesthetic and philosophical
outlook. Belyi later wrote the following in his memoirs, making a specific connection
between the apocalyptic figure of Margarita Kirillovna Morozova and the notion of
the Sophia of Wisdom: “That year, in my experience, was like the only year of its
kind ...[F]or me, that year was a year of maximal mystical exertion and mystical
discovery; all of summer 1901, I was visited by happy discoveries and ecstasies; that
year, I became fully aware of the spirit of the Invisible Friend, of the Sophia of
Wisdom. There was more: that whole year was colored for me by my first profound,
mystical love, the only one of its kind, for M.K.M., whom I did not, however, confuse
with the Heavenly Friend; in many moments, M.K.M. was only an icon for me, a
symbol for the face of The One whose spirit came down to me”\textsuperscript{527}.

\textsuperscript{523} For more detail, in the context of the overall musical-synthetic spirit, see Olja Tikles’s book:
Тилкес-Заская 1998. It would be tempting to tie the ideas of “synthetic” creation in the arts to
Russian Wagnerism (Gesamtkunstwerk), but we must not forget, also, that Belyi more than once said
that his early “symphonies” were inspired by Grieg’s music. See: Bartlett 1995: 141-147.
524 “Симфонии не имеют будущности как таковые; но как промежуточная стадия на пути к
образованию какой-то безусловно важной формы - они значительны - Это начало конца поэзии в
собственном смысле. <...> “Симфонизируясь”, жизнь не устремляется ли в будущее?” Belyi to
Metner, Moscow, 1902 (РО РГБ Ф.167. Карт.1. Ед.6. Л.1об) (Quoted via Лавров 1991: 19). For the
context that subsequently follows, see also Безродный 1998. The Belyi-Metner correspondence has
still not been published in full. See the fragments presented in Nivat 1977: 92-134. As Aleksandr
Lavrov notes, publishing the letters between Metner and Belyi would be a huge project: “The
correspondence of Andrei Belyi with Emilii Metner would occupy ... an enormous volume — one of
the most significant sources on the history of symbolism. This is about three hundred letters, and, what
is more, letters that are not random, not ordinary, but meaningful both in an idealistic-aesthetic way
and for a characterization of the journal-publishing activities of the symbolists” (conversation with
Lavrov, published by Nadezhda Grigor’eva in Zvezda, no. 12, 2000). For comparison, see Metner’s
correspondence with Blok in Фрумкина, Флейшман 1971: 384-399.
525 See for example, Силард 1967: 310-321.
527 “…Этот год, переживался мною как единственный год в своем роде <...> для меня этот год
был годом максимального мистического напряжения и мистического откровения; все лето 901
года меня посещали благие откровения и экстазы; в этот год осознал я вполне вenie
Belyi also wrote later about his encounter with Morozova during this period, which was so symbolically important: “My eyes fell upon M.K.M. at a symphony concert, during a performance of a Beethoven symphony ... Hence the momentary whirlwind of experiences that I described in the poem ‘First Encounter’. From that moment, this was completely and concretely revealed to me: all of Soloviev’s teachings about the Sophia of Wisdom, his whole cycle of poems to Her; and my deep and pure love for M.K.M., whom I didn’t even know and whom I watched from afar at symphony concerts, was becoming a symbol of superhuman relationships; it was becoming clear to me that the mystery of new love is the mystery that constructs the Future Church of St John with the offsprings of Love... A snowstorm, music, She, M.K.M., the Revelation of John—these were the leitmotifs of that month”.

Based on the observations of Lavrov and John E. Malmstad I can say that the many romantic experiences in the “Symphony”, and the spiritual quest of its main internal hero, the character Musatov, have an openly autobiographical subtext. The abbreviation “M. K. M.” in this text is, of course, the object of Belyi’s mystical infatuation, Margarita Kirillovna Morozova. He was not actually formally and personally acquainted with her by the time, but she embodied the life-creationist prototype of the author’s “Female fairy-tale” (Сказка). After Lavrov’s studies we can take Musatov’s entire picturesque, mystical utopia in the “Symphony” to be a reflection of the quite specific myth-creational expectations of Belyi and his circle, especially those of Belyi’s close friend at that time, Sergei Soloviev.

Belyi will confess retrospectively that in February 1901: “Our hopes for some sort of a Transfiguration of the world are maximal”. He unveils that he was “beginning to think that we are on the frontier where history ends, where the ‘resurrection of the dead’ is beginning to take the place of history. ... The newspapers say a new star is blazing up in the sky (it soon burned out); they print the sensational report that this start is supposed the same one that accompanied the birth of the infant Jesus; Serezha comes running up to me, excited, saying, ‘It’s already started’. For three days we think that events of huge apocalyptic significance have already begun; we mold our mystical symbolism in terms approximately like these: the Comforter Spirit will have the very same incarnation in history that Christ had; he will be born as an infant; his mother is a woman who will be the symbol of the Church (The Woman clothed with Sun), giving birth to a new word, a third Testament.... The blazing up of the start was a Sign for Serezha and me that the

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‘infant’ had already been born; the debunking of Musatov’s utopia yet again has a living prototype—March of 1901; ...I continue to write her letters, I walk by her house, and sometimes I see a boy of amazing beauty in the window of the house; I decide, ‘That is her son’; S.M. Soloviev jokes with me that ‘That is the infant who is to feed the people with an iron rod’". 530

As Lavrov shows, the events occurred during March of 1901 provide a solid ground for establishing the connection between Belyi and Morozova in their “mystical love affair”. This is how it appears in Belyi’s own extensive description, when he narrates his life-creationist “chivalrous” service to his Beautiful Lady. Belyi tells that “the leitmotif of my mystical love for M.K.M. is growing”. He observes: “it is beginning to cover everything else; I hear Fet’s and Lermontov’s poetry in a transformative way; in all of Fet’s love poems, there is the spark of a single love: the love of the World Spirit for the Knight; I sense myself to be this knight—simultaneously a knight of the Heavenly Vision and Its earthly icon; this earthly icon is M.K.M. Besides at the concerts, I am starting to see her on the Arbat and on Denezhnij Lane, at the times that she returns home ... [T]he leit-motif of this is Blok’s yet-unwritten line that I will encounter in seven months’ time: I am illuminated: I wait for your steps. ... [I]n a perfect mystical state of illumination, I write M.K.M. a long letter in which I initiate her into the object of my cult; I write about Nietzsche in it, about Vl[adimir] Soloviev, and about the fact that we are waiting for the events of an enormous future to be accomplished; I sign myself ‘Your Knight’; and with dread, I wait for an encounter with her at one of the symphony concerts; at the concert, M.K.M. casts a glance at me, from which it becomes clear to me that she knows that I am the author of the letter, and that she is not angry with me”. 531

530 “…наши ожидания какого-то Преображения светом максимальны; мне начинает казаться, что уже мы на рубеже, где кончается история, где за историей начинается ’восстание мертвых’; и тут-то по газетам на небе вспыхивает новая звезда (она вскоре погасла); печатается сенсационное известие, будто эта звезда та самая, которая сопровождала рождение Иисуса младенца; Сережа прибегает ко мне возбужденный, со словами: ’Уже началось’. Нам три дня кажется, что уже начались события огромной апокалиптической важности; мы формулируем нашу мистическую символику приблизительно в таких терминах: Дух Утешитель будет иметь в истории такое же воплощение, как Христос; он родится младенцем; его мать — женщина, которая будет символом Церкви (Жены, облечённой в Солнце), рождающей новое слово, третий Завет <...>. Воссияние звезды было Знаком для нас с Сережей, что ’младенец’ уже родился; развенчание мусатовской утопии опять же имеет жизненный прообраз - март 1901 года; ...я продолжаю писать ей письма, я хожу мимо ее дома, и однажды в окне дома вижу изумительной красоты мальчика; соображаю: ’Это ее сын’; С.М. Соловьев шутит со мною: ’Это и есть младенец, которому надлежит пасти народы железом железным’”. Ibid. See also in the “sun” context Aleksandr Lavrov’s essay about Belyi’s uncompleted, lost text, entitled “Sun – the divine Child” (Дитя – Солнце): Лавров 2007б: 89-104.

531 “…вырастает и начинает все покрывать лейтмотив моей мистической любви к М.К.М.; поэзия Фета и Лермонтова мне звучит преобразовательно; во всех любовных стихотворениях Фета — отблеск одной любви: любви Мировой Души к Рыцарю; я ощущаю себя этим рыцарем — одновременно рыцарем Небесного Видения и земной иконой Её; эта земная икона – М.К.М. Кроме концертов я начинаю видеть ее на Арбате и в Денежном переулке, в часы когда она возвращается домой... лейт-мотив этого времени еще не написанная строчка Блока, с которой я встретился через семь месяцев: Я озарен; я жду твоих шагов. ... в совершенном мистическом озарении я пишу М.К.М. длинное письмо, в котором я посвящаю ее в предмет моего культа; в нем пису о Ницше, о Вл. Соловьеве и о том, что мы ждем свершений огромного будущего; я
In Belyi’s second *Symphony*, the whole empirical world seems to be wholly subordinated to the laws of time and causality;\(^{532}\) it is unusually suggestive and alogical, essentially illusory, and, as it were, meaningless in terms of form. Lavrov noted\(^ {533}\) that in Belyi’s work, this world appears in a rather chaotic combination of *simultaneously* existing phenomena not always connected to each other in any way except for their identical inconsistency in the face of “great Eternity, reigning Eternity”. Lavrov suggests that in the imagination of such a “mystical observer” as Belyi was, all of everyday Moscow life rises up not only as a sort of allegory of invisible higher meanings, but also as a collection of disorderly, mutually estranged realia mated with each other either by the mediation of differing kinds of *strange associations* or simply by random physical proximity. Belyi’s close associate and a companion-in-arms of the time, Emili Metner, would later write that “the motifs weld phantasmaroria and everydayness into a single whole; in trying to understand the impression, you notice with amazement that the former is no less real, and sometimes indeed more real, than the latter”.\(^ {534}\)

As it can be noticed, in the second *Symphony*, the author’s ‘post-Romantic’ irony is somehow transformed into a multilayered complex narrative used for creating of the “new Legend”. Lavrov points out how the ‘holy’ Symbolist harbinger and “prophet” Vladimir Soloviev playfully appears on Moscow roofs, sounding a horn and heralding the rising “sun of love”. Together with him traveling about the city’s streets in a carriage is the ephemeral and indistinct beauty named “Fairytale”(*Сказка*), an ephemeral “blue-eyed nymph” manifested in the mystical aura of the “Eternal Feminine”.\(^ {535}\) The portrait of this legendary “age of dawns” (Эпоха зорь) Moscow in Belyi’s Second symphony is tinged throughout by a certain feeling of “Eternity”, by a vividly hinted attitude toward the life-creating plane of his literary activities during that early period.

The *Second Symphony*, and Belyi’s early “not signed” letters to Morozova can be interpreted as components of a certain “single text of behavior and life”, as variations of differing genres on the life-creation theme that filled the entire inner horizon of the author and of his lyrical hero. Belyi wrote Morozova in March, 1901: “I have found a living symbol, an individual banner – everything that I was seeking but for which the time of completion has not yet come. You are my Aurora, my vision of the future. You hold within yourself events yet to come. You are the philosophy of the new era. ...When I had approached the abyss, had reached the end, a great portent appeared in the sky: a Woman clothed with sun; under her feet was the moon, and on her head, a crown of twelve stars (John). The mystery has been revealed”.\(^ {536}\)
3.4. The Episode with the Eternal Feminine and the Blok family

Aleksandr Blok, his young wife Liubov’ Dmitrievna, and Belyi together represent one of the fundamental episodes of symbolist life-creation. At first, Belyi and his comrades in the life-creation circle regarded the Bloks as nunciates of a certain Ideal Seraphic Luminiferous pairing for which they all had been hoping. As time passed, Blok explicitly ceased to correspond to his own part of this ideal, and thus Belyi tried to discern “independently” signs in Liubov’ of the Woman clothed with Sun and of the Goethe/Soloviev Eternal Feminine character. All of this led to Belyi being erotically attracted to Liubov’ (Zinaida Gippius once had cautioned Belyi, in a letter: “don’t get carried away with Blok’s wife”).

This did not, so far as we can tell, result in any genuine physical “consummation”. However: Liubov’ observed in her memoirs, “I had let my hair down”, and that she was already prepared to give herself to the poet physically, but something did not go as it should have gone, and she fled from Belyi before the two of them actually got into the clutches of a real physical connection.

In June 1905, Belyi left the Shakhmatovo estate, haven truly fallen in love with Liubov’ (as far as we can tell) and, in doing so, complicated his relationship with the Bloks in many ways. As V.N. Orlov was first to notice, from that point onwards, this “personal conflict” would be closely interwoven with

...Осененная реющей влагой,
Распустила ты пряди волос.
Хороводов твоих по оврагу
Золотое кольцо развилось...

(“Being touched by the moist nature of Autumn, you let your hair go; the golden ring of this hair-dance was playing around in your gullies”). See Блок 1960-a: 24.

The relevant fragment of her memoirs goes as following: “…this dangerous and sweet poison of mutual gazing… these senseless touches… can this happen again to me, but this time with another man? … I was excited no less than was Boria (Belyi)…On all the occasions when we left were alone we passionately kissing each other and could not get satisfied. …once I even came to his apartment… Playing with fire I let him to take away all the combs and hair-pins… my hair let lose and fell down as a golden rain… but then an awkward movement spoiled everything, I came to be sober again and rushed to the staircase, hurrying to get out of his house…” (“отрава сладкая взглядов, это проникновение в душу без взгляда, даже без прикосновения руки, одним присутствием – это может быть еще раз и с другим? …Я была взбудоражена не менее Бори. Не успевали мы оставаться один на один, как никакой уже преграды не стояло между нами и мы беспомощно и жадно не могли оторваться от долгих и неутолимых поцелуев. …я даже раз поехала к нему. Играя с огнём, уже позволяла вынуть тяжелые черепаховые гребни и шпильки, и волосы уже упали золотым плащом… Но тут какое-то нелогическое и неверное движение … – отрезвило, и уже волосы собраны, и уже я бегу по лестнице…”). See: Блок 2000: 77.

See for instance: Орлов 1963: 447-517. Belyi was sending plenty of flowers to Liubov’ Dmitrievna, as she describes this later, saying that “not just [usual small] baskets of flowers, but real ‘Bugaev’s forests’ were emerging in our living room” [because of Belyi]. (“Не корзины, а целые ‘бугайные леса’ появились иногда в гостиной…”). See: Блок 2000: 53.
ideological/literary and aesthetic discourses and disagreements. At times, it would be almost impossible to determine the boundary between the layers of aesthetics and those of real life.

The memoirs and the diary entries of Evgenii Ivanov are quite helpful in reconstructing all the real-life events in this triangle. As Orlov has observed, on the one hand, Ivanov was one of Blok’s closest personal friends; on the other, he knew much of the inside story of Liubov’s affairs, and recorded much of this that is significant to our subject of symbolist life-creation. In his published letters to Blok, Belyi consciously tries to understand how it is possible to reconcile his poetic “ego” and his overall utopian-metaphysical interests with ordinary married existence, and how he can participate (given this existence) in reshaping the innermost nature of humankind.

The final part of one of these letters is preoccupied with a more abstract questioning of the concept of the “secret” that only Belyi and Blok could understand: “I am talking to you as the one who is vested with the responsibility for the purity of a certain Secret that you are betraying or getting ready to betray. I am warning you—where are you going? Wake up! Or give up the Secret, forget it. You can’t be with a god and with a devil at the same time”. Belyi had an answer for this: “Where do you get the idea that I am a mystic? I’m not a mystic, but have always been a hooligan, I think. I am not sure, maybe my real place is not at all with you, the Visionary the one who knows the way, but rather with Gor’kii, who doesn’t know anything, or with the decadents, who also don’t know anything”. In response to this missive, Belyi apparently was very upset, and announced, as it were, a break of all his relations with the Bloks. As Vladimir Orlov once noticed, as a token of this new situation, Bely had even symbolically posted to Liubov’ the lilies she had given him earlier, which had long before shriveled up, wrapping them in black crepe paper. According to her own later memorized account, Liubov’ supposedly decided, remorselessly, to burn these lilies in the stove.

Following Orlov’s narration of this “hostility-friendship”, despite all the animosity and all the complications, by December 1st Belyi decided to come to St. Petersburg, where, from his hotel on the corner of Karavannaia Street and Nevskii Prospekt, he was sending Blok different kinds of emotional epistles. Some of them were quite affectional: “I simply want to embrace you and kiss you fervently. I love you, my dear”.

Just after this, with the word “but” underlined thrice, Belyi meaningfully wrote, “But, until I can see you outside of your home, I can’t be with...”

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541 See: Орлов 1963: 446-458.
544 “Отчего Ты думаешь, что я мистик? Я не мистик, а всегда был хулиганом, я думаю. Для меня и место-то, может быть, совсем не с Тобой, Провидцем и знающим пути, а с Горьким, который ничего не знает, или с декадентами, которые тоже ничего не знают”. See: Белый, Блок 2001: 173.
you, I can’t see you”.  

Belyi understood that he could not afford really to face meeting Liubov’. Nor could he really meet with Blok’s mother, Aleksandra Kublitskaia-Piottukh, to whom he had also written numerous affectionate letters that are quite interesting in the context: they emphasize the special connection between Belyi and Blok’s mother, which was possibly even unwittingly erotic(!).

As Orlov stresses, Belyi set up a meeting with Blok in, as it were, a “neutral” physical territory, the famous Palkin Restaurant. Both of the Bloks came together and, as far as we can tell, there was some sort of explanation and clarification of relations, which apparently ended with yet another formal reconciliation between Belyi and the Bloks. Nevertheless, Belyi still apparently preferred to draw his own arbitrary “assumptous conclusions” from this meeting, to the effect that Blok supposedly would not attempt to actively raise any obstacles to the development and realization of Belyi’s romantic relationship with Liubov’. Belyi later sent Liubov’ a whole hydrangea bush (= a “Куст”; a different “bush” would later appear in Belyi’s life-creationist short story of the same name) as a token of their genuine Feeling and their special astral connection.

Both Belyi and Sergei Soloviev, during the initial stage of their creative work, thought that Blok and his wife were consciously (and more than purposefully) trying to create a sort of “myth” from their direct real life, to validate a new sort of mystic-aesthetic program in the fabric of their actual daily existence. Belyi later missed something that he had always esteemed and considered somewhat of a “big deal”—this had actually been only an unsuccessful bizarre “comedy”. According to Orlov, Belyi will be able to see how the Great Heavenly Queen and “The Woman” that he (as well as Soloviev) so deeply esteemed, and which he so devotedly loved and venerated, will transform herself into a laughable degenerate “comedienne”. Her seraphic fellow-companion, a mighty theourgos was no longer a theourgos nor a pale-visaged “Seraph”, for he had gone to a blasphemous practice and created the disgusting (in Belyi’s and Soloviev’s opinion), grotesque, and insulting play, The Puppet Show (“Балаганчик”). In this performative satirical text, related by its genre to commedia dell’arte, Belyi and his friends were bitingly and mercilessly ridiculed by Blok: their passionately high-flown ideas were denigrated and labeled in an openly mocking and pejorative key, and they themselves were paraded in as caricatured “puppet show mystics” (“мистики балаганчика”).

We can recognize the entire situation in which Blok, Belyi, and Liubov’ ended up in the plot of the play itself, in the comic triangle of Pierrot ⇔ Harlequin ⇔ Columbine. We also know that the Bloks’ aforementioned close friend, Evgenii Ivanov, was keen to observe in a March 1906 diary entry spelling out that, as Orlov suggests, might have been communicated by Liubov’ herself: “Sasha noticed where the whole affair was headed, and portrayed all of it in The Puppet Show”.

548 “Но пока не увижу Тебя вне Твоего дома, не могу быть у Тебя, не могу Тебя видеть”. Ibid.
549 See the published correspondence between Kublitskaia-Piottukh and Belyi (1860-1923, 61 letters) in Белый, Блок 2001: 523-582. As regards Blok’s perplexed relation to his mother see: Emerson 1990.
550 This was Belyi’s ordinary habit of using “flower-messages” in his personal affairs. See the previously mentioned quotations from Liubov’ Blok’s memoirs about the “Bugaev’s flowers”. In Russian, one must remember, the word “bush” (куст) does not have the erotic obscene connotation it has in English.
In her memoirs, which have now been published in relatively complete form, Liubov’ notes that as spring of 1906 approached, her family life “was already completely shattered”. As she later recalled it, from the very beginning, the basis of her relationship with Blok had been somehow consciously “false” and bombastic. From her recollections it becomes obvious that their marriage, on the sexual level, turned out to be, mildly speaking, rather difficult: on Blok’s part, there was only, as Liubov’ says, “a short flash of sensual enthusiasm”, but it “soon, in the first two months, flickered out”. But Blok endeavoured to, as he said, “devise a form” suitable to the complicated situation of the interpersonal relations that they had.

The development of these relations, according to Blok, was according to the original idea supposed to proceed in the same vein of Vladimir Soloviev’s life-creationist metaphysics of a “carnal utopian program”. Blok’s detached semi-romantic faith in a divine Lady as an “earthly incarnation of the Eternal Feminine” came into irresolvable conflict with corporeal human physicality and with the bodily functional form that the “palpably real” Liubov’ had in their empirical reality. One of the characteristic “younger” symbolist Argonauts (although he failed to completely materialize this way), Sergei Soloviev was very close at the time to both Blok and Belyi. He wrote later to Blok, “May God bless you and your bride, and may no one understand anything, and may people face what they will not understand with a reproof”.

Of no little interest here, too, is Vladimir Soloviev’s poem “The Three Feats” (Три подвига), which, in a compressed form, encompasses the mystical life-creationist conception of a religious and moral Transformation of the world, the persistent dream of the young symbolists. The first feat, of the mythical Pygmalion, is that of penetrating the “rough bark of matter” and “animating inert matter”; the second feat, of the mythical Perseus, is the “destruction of moral evil”; the third feat, and clearly the main one for our context, is that of the great mythical über-poet Orpheus, is the victory over death itself. Besides this, Soloviev’s poem possibly contains a certain supplementary meaning that bespeaks the contrast of a profound, perfect Christian chastity (and fleshly asceticism) to a diabolical “Astarteanism”. The path to a truly “higher”, “eternal”, and “holy” love, expressed in the conquest of Eurydice, can be found only through the victory over, and the elimination of, the venomous fire-breathing “dragon of lust”:

У заповедного предела
Не мни, что подвиг совершен,
И от божественного тела

552 See: Блок 2000: 52.
553 “My life with my husband during the Spring 1906 was already absolutely shattered. A short flash of his sensual enthusiasm in my direction during the Winter and Summer before the wedding soon, in the first two months, flickered out. This happened without taking my virginity away from me”. (“Моя жизнь с мужем весной 1906 года была уже совсем расшатанной. Короткая вспышка чувственного его увлечения мной в зиму и лето перед свадьбой скоро, в первые же два месяца, погасла, не успев вырвать меня из моего девического неведения…”). See: Блок 2000: 52.
Не жди любви, Пигмалион!
Нужна ей новая победа:
Скала над бездной висит,
Зовет в смятеньи Андромеда
Тебя, Персей, тебя, Алкид!
Крылатый конь к пучине прянул,
И щит зеркальный вознесен,
И - опрокинут - в бездну канул
Себя увидевший дракон.555

(“At the secret precinct / Don’t think your great deed is accomplished / And from the
divine body / Don’t expect love, oh Pygmalion! She needs yet another victory: / The
cliff is hanging over the abyss / Distressed, Andromeda is calling / Upon you,
Perseus, upon you, Alkides! The Winged horse leaped to the brink of the chasm / The
mirror-shield is risen up / And having seen his own reflection / The overturned
dragon fell down into the abyss”).

Blok, so it seems, expressed to a greater degree the overall attitude556 of the
extraordinary significance of Vladimir Soloviev’s ideology of the Eternal Feminine.
This idea was perceived as a life-propagating essence summoned to transform the
entire world of living. Blok wrote about the considerable significance that Soloviev
had for the shaping of the poet’s aesthetic of feminine imagery. Speaking of
Soloviev’s philosophical program closely related to his identity as a person, Blok
tells: “Only in the light of this image, which became clear after the second, derived
one was extinguished by death, can one understand the essence of Vladimir
Soloviev’s teachings and personality. This image is provided by life itself, and is not
in any sense an allegory; even were it the object of scholarly study, its very essence is
nonanalyzable: it emanates an incorporeal golden light”.557

Insofar as we can judge, Soloviev considered sensual love to be a great
challenge to the human soul that unites the person with God and with what Soloviev
called the “universal being”. Plato, who was for Soloviev such an important
thinker,558 likewise described this function of love. “The world hungers for
redemption”, wrote Aleksei Losev, the indirect disciple of Soloviev (and of Plato!), in
his relative early programmatic article, “Eros in Plato”, which recalled the
Christian/Platonic hope for a new meaning of human love. “It is not within the
powers of a person to conquer evil matter, with its space and time demolished into
pieces. This redemption is only within the powers of God, who in his unbegotten love
would come down from the heavens and, becoming a man, would transform mortal

556 Held in common with Belyi himself, and with the whole Moscow group of young Argonauts.
557 "Только в свете этого образа, ставшего ясным после того, как второй, производный, погашен
смертью, можно понять сущность учения и личности Владимира Соловьева. Этот образ дан
самой жизнью, он не аллегория ни в каком смысле; пусть будет он предметом научного
исследования, самое существо его неразложимо: он излучает невещественный золотой свет”.
human nature. This is true Eros, uniting two souls from the beginning, and then, all of mankind, for universal unity”.

The end result of the entire theurgic “Godmanhood” love affair was supposed to be the complete deification of the person (“обожение человека”) which suggested not only his spiritual immortality but also physical imperishability, that is, a kind of transformation of the person’s nature whereby his spiritual and physical characteristics would be retained in an eternity of objective-ontological integrity.

In accordance with this, Blok, from the very first months of his marriage, insistently and consistently admonished his young wife and tried to convince her that in harmony with his overall worldview, they should not desire physical intimacy: this would imply a sort of animalistic and reprehensible “Astarteanism”, a descent into everything “dark”, into dirty things that would profane their Spirituality. However, we must particularly note that as Blok further developed his concept, he by no means totally rejected the carnal aspect of relations with women. Although he followed a straightforward logic of “non-desecration” of The One who must be Pure and Chaste as a Wife, Blok nonetheless was quite interested in sharing his erotic pastimes with various St. Petersburg prostitutes, the tavern denizens personifying his descriptions of the appearance of his famous “Unknown Woman” (Незнакомка), who was dichotomously from two worlds.

In St. Petersburg taverns and brothels of varying types and kinds, as Liubov’ herself later wrote, Blok discovered “the complete freedom to live out his earthly passions on the side, under the sign of a vulgar Aphrodite”. Orlov observes how Liubov’ Dmitrievna recalls Goethe’s “venomous observation” regarding “the romantics’ mystical feeling of love” when an “unrealistic attitude toward women” degenerates into dark erotic ambiguities and, inevitably, leads the poet into a brothel. Summing this perplexed situation up, Orlov remarks that in late 1905 and early 1906 Liubov’ Dmitrievna was in the situation of a wife not desired erotically, sensually, or physically, when Belyi re-appeared on the horizon of their family as a sort of “demon-tempter”.

Following Orlov’s recounting of this affair, we can note that from the point as Belyi saw it, Liubov’ Dmitrievna should ultimately reject Blok, who in fact did not desire her physically, and should join her life with Belyi. She must understand that Belyi will not fail to esteem her fittingly as a real Woman, including the physical side

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560 “Not the worshipped god-like female lover was introducing Blok into real life, but rather a [purchased with money] randomized one, bought only for one night or for several minutes or hours. And then came a shameful, firesome suffering… [Even] Aphrodite Urania and Pandemos, separated by an abyss did not fulfil the needed role in his life…”. (“Полная свобода изживать свои земные страсти на стороне, под знаком Афродиты площаднной”. The same “Aphrodite-topic” was continued: “Не боготворимая любовница вводила его в жизнь, а [куп.] случайная, безликая, купленная на [одну ночь] несколько [часов] минут. И унизительные, мучительные страдания… [Даже] Афродита Урания и Афродита площадная, разделенные бездной… не сыграли той роли, которую должна была бы сыграть…”). See also other characteristic passages like: “Carnal love and copulation with a woman for Blok meant only one thing since his school-years: paid sex with a prostitute, and inevitable outcome, the [veneral] desease”. (“Физическая близость с женщиной для Блока с гимназических лет это – платная любовь и неизбежные результаты – болезнь”). All quotations via Мурьянов 1996: 51-52.
561 See: Орлов 1963: 611.
of her. 562 Belyi tried to communicate with her like a real “earthly woman” whose marriage to Blok was to a large extent a strange “lie”. 563 We know that at this point, Belyi had just come into his late father’s inheritance and gotten some money from the sale of the family estate: he and Liubov’ planned to depart for Italy, they were discussing the possibility of their going there together.

As Orlov narrates their story, based largely on the memoirs of Liubov’ Blok and Blok’s mother, at some point, they were all on the way home from a performance of Wagner’s Parsifal, Blok was riding with his mother in a sledge, and Liubov’ and Belyi were together in a carriage on the wharf. Liubov’, it appears, confessed her love to Belyi, and they began to plan their trip together. A love affair continued between them. This relationship as Liubov’ Blok tells, included kisses, but was not taken, however, to its logical physical conclusion, and the climax never came.

In his memoirs, Belyi in his turn wrote about Liubov’, denoting her with the letter “Щ”. Belyi tells: “Щ confessed that she loved me and... Blok, too; the next day, she doesn’t love me, nor Blok; the day after that, she loves him like a sister and me ‘in an earthly way’; the next day, everything is the opposite; my skull is cracking, and my brains scrambled, from all these complications; finally, Щ loves only me; if she says the opposite later, I am to fight her to the death (hers and mine); I swear an oath to her that I will break down all the obstacles between us, or else I will do away with myself. At this point, I go to Blok and say, ‘I need to talk to you’”. 564

As Orlov notes, in the subsequent clarifying conversation, Belyi’s impression was that Blok somehow absorbed and accepted everything, as everything was stated relatively calmly. Blok supposedly may even have announced that he was almost “glad” about what was happening between Belyi and his wife. Evgenii Ivanov had seemingly recalled Liubov’s somewhat confused and involved account of things: “I love [Belyi] and love [Blok] too, what am I to do? What can I do? If I go away with [Belyi], what might [Blok] do? ... [Belyi] needs me more. Without me, he might die. [He] and I have exactly the same thought: our souls are two halves that can be put together. And I can’t stay together with [Blok] for who knows how long, any more”. 565

562 As Liubov’ Blok will later memorize: “He (Belyi) was certainly right in telling that only he loves and appreciates me as a living woman in flesh and blood, and only he will manage to surround me with such veneration that every woman seeks, expects and desires”. (“Конечно, он был прав, что только он любит и ценит меня, живую женщину, что только он окружит эту меня тем обожанием, которого женщина ждет и хочет”). Блок 2000: 51.

563 In Liubov’ Blok’s own description: “Belyi was tormented in despair, but he was ultimately correct in observing a lie in our relationship with Blok”. (“…был прав А. Белый, который разрывался от отчаяния, находя в наших отношениях с Сашей ложь”). See: Блок 2000: 51.

564 “Щ. призналась, что любит меня и... Блока; а через день: не любит – меня и Блока; еще через день: она любит его, как сестра, а меня – ‘по-земному’; а через день все – наоборот; от такой сложности у меня ломается череп и перебалтываются мозги; наконец, Щ. любит меня одного; если она позднее скажет обратное, я должен бороться с ней ценой жизни (ее и моей); даю клятву ей, что я разрушу все препятствия между нами, иль - уничтожу себя. С этим яюсь к Блому: ‘Нам надо с тобой говорить’”. See: Белый 1990-а: 77.

565 “Я Борю люблю и Сашу люблю, что мне делать, что мне делать? Если уйти с Б.Н., что станет Саша делать... Б.Н. я нужнее. Он без меня погибнуть может. С Б.Н. мы одно и то же думаем: наши души это две половинки, которые могут быть сложены. А с Сашей вот уже сколько времени идти вместе не могу.” See this rendered in Иванов 1964: 400; (Quoted in Орлов 1963: 627).
However, after a relatively short time, Liubov’ wrote to Ivanov that she, in spite of all this carnal temptation, had made a final decision and that a few days earlier she had sent Belyi a letter in which “she said, firmly, that everything was finished between them”.\footnote{See: Иванов 1964: 399.} In the wake of all these events, Belyi wrote Blok in April 1906: “You know my attitude toward Liuba, that it is thoroughly saturated by the ineffable. That Liuba is closer to me than any other person, a sister and a friend. She truly understands me, I recognize myself in her, transformed and whole. I recognize myself in Liuba. I need her spirit in order to climb out of those abysses where death is: I always struggle with chimeras, but the chimeras have surrounded me”.\footnote{“Ты знаешь мое отношение к Любе: что оно все пронизано несказанным. Что Люба для меня самая близкая из всех людей, сестра и друг. Что она понимает меня, что я в ней узнаю самого себя, преображенный и цельный. Я сам себя узнаю в Любе. Она мне нужна духом для того, чтобы я мог выбраться из тех пропастей, в которых - гибель. Я всегда борюсь с химерами, но химеры обступили меня”. See: Белый, Блок 2001: 121.}

Belyi continues, by now making a direct reference for Blok to the fact that Liubov’ could be identified with the very idea of “physical salvation” for himself: “My salvation has become embodied in Liuba. She holds my soul in her will. I surrendered my very soul to Liuba, its death or salvation, and now, still not knowing what she might do with my soul, I am soulless, tormented, and anxious. I need Liuba for ineffable journeys ... in ‘Secret’ I have fallen in love with her”.\footnote{“…спасение мое воплотилось в Любу. Она держит в своей воле мою душу. Самую душу, ее смерть или спасение я отдал Любе, и теперь, когда еще не знаю, что она сделает с моей душой, я - бездушен, мучаюсь и тревожусь. Люба нужна мне для путей несказанных .. в ‘Тайне’ я ее полюбил”. Ibid.}

It was also important for Belyi to try to shape in Blok what was, from Belyi’s viewpoint, the right attitude toward what might happen on a “physical level” between himself and Liubov’. In the same letter, he tells to his ‘enemy-friend’: “You should regard my relationship to Liubov’ only from two opposite points of view, or believe in the ineffability of my relationship to Liuba. ... But if one were to measure my whole relationship to Liuba with an external standard (you have the right to do this), then one would have to deny all the ineffability of my closeness to Liuba and would have to say, ‘This is simply infatuation’. ... But I do not recognize your right to look at it all ‘too simply’, to veto my relationship with Liuba. Then, Sasha, a drama would begin, the one which would have to end with the death of one of us”.\footnote{“Ты должен взглянуть на мои отношения к Любови Дмитриевне только с двух противоположных точек зрения, или поверить в несказанность моего отношения к Любе; ... Если же все мои отношения к Любе мерить внешним масштабом (Ты на это имеешь право), тогда придется отрицать всю несказанность моей близости к Любе, придется сказать: „Это только влюбленность”. ... Но я признаю Твое право взглянуть на все 'слишком просто', налагать veto на мои отношения к Любе. Только, Саша, тогда начинается драма, которая должна кончиться смертью одного из нас”. Ibid.} As Orlov observes, about this situation Liubov’ Dmitrievna herself would later admit, “It was very difficult... One of them is not a [real] husband. Belyi is a temptation”.\footnote{“Очень тяжело... Один - не муж. Белый – искушение”. Quoted via Орлов 1963: 629. Compare also: Иванов 1964: 404.} After some time, Liubov’ would “officially” inform Belyi that their relationship and their “mystical love” affair was actually some kind of dissolute “nonsense” and that she did not want him to be physically present in St. Petersburg in the autumn, as they had...
apparently agreed previously; she told him that her life-creation heroine was Ibsen’s Hilda, who, as she said, “has a healthy conscience that she obeys”.  

Many years later, Liubov’ retrospectively pondered the way her life had unintentionally come to be structured in this episode, and wrote about it in terms that were cruel and merciless to herself: “At that time, I strove to arrange life as I needed it to be, comfortable. … I only thought about how to avoid, as it were, this love that I no longer needed”.  

As the events unfolded, the Bloks went away to Shakhmatovo, their estate; there, rather heavy postal envelopes arrived, containing amazing letters that, as Orlov points out, sometimes went to as many as one hundred pages. Among Belyi’s other attempts to communicate with Liubov’ he accused her of “filthy”, dull philistinism, and upbraided her for a behind-the-times, outdated predilection for all things ordinary, and for the inability to comprehend the new revolutionary life-creation philosophy that Belyi wanted to preach to the world at that time. He also announced that he originally wanted to publish his “symphonies” with a dedication to his “sister and friend L[jubov’]. D[mitrievna]. B[lok]”.  

At about this time, Belyi was conceiving his fourth “symphony”, entitled “Goblet of Blizzards” (Кубок метелей) in the idea and subject-matter of which we can detect hints of the emotional drama taking place in him at about the same time. The main hero of this work, Adam Petrovich, who in a Belyi-esque chivalrous vein is in love with the mystical “Fiancée” Svetlova, undergoes extremely painful ordeals, such as old-fashioned madness and even temporal death, in order to find (in the spirit of Fedorov and Soloviev) a sort of utopian “eternal life”.

Some time later, the Bloks decided to go to Moscow, in order to try to “have it out” with Belyi in some way. Blok’s mother even feared that Belyi, being completely insane, might even attempt to try to assassinate Blok, considering him his dangerous direct rival. As we know, the three of them arranged a specific meeting in the fashionable “Prague” Restaurant, which was located not far from the main root of the Arbat Street. Their long conversation, as far as we can tell, was pointed at an attempt to try to bring this whole perplexed and disturbing story to an end and to soothe all these raging passions of the parties involved. At the Bloks’ demanding request, Belyi was supposed to do his utmost to calm down and, generally speaking, to leave them and their family in peace.

After this meeting Blok wrote Belyi to inform him: “I had wanted to dedicate my collection Unexpected Happiness (“Нечаянная радость”) to you, like the previous work. This would be a lie now, because I have ceased to understand you.

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571 “…имеет здоровую совесть, которой она и последует”. See the details in Орлов 1963: 623-624.
573 See: Орлов 1963: 621-625. The current whereabouts of these letters is difficult to determine: Liubov’ possibly destroyed them later, or they could have been destroyed in the arson fire set by vandals during the wave of revolution, which damaged the estate.
575 See: Ibid.
577 See: Орлов 1963: 625. See also the same episode observed in Лавров 1995: 15.
Only because of this am I not dedicating this book to you”. 578 As Orlov observed, Belyi rather bitterly and tragically perceived what was happening, and did not go out of his apartment for days on end, lying on his bed in a mask that covered his face. 579 All this was closely witnessed by the fellow symbolist Ellis, who at that time was quite often among the persons of this circle. We can assume together with Orlov that Ellis also had some part in Belyi’s subsequent emotional decision to proceed and challenge Blok to a duel. Furthermore, Ellis, apparently as Belyi’s “second”, went to Shakhmatovo himself in order to formally convey this challenge to Blok. The combined efforts of the Bloks supposedly changed Ellis’s mind fundamentally, and they dispelled the necessity of the very idea of such a strange duel. Then Ellis in turn went back to Belyi’s, and probably convinced Belyi to back out of the duel. 580 In his later memoirs Belyi wrote that at the time, he was in a terrible spiritual and real-life crisis and frequently considered suicide as a way out of the situation that had arisen; specifically, he had even wanted to throw himself from the Troitskii Bridge into the Neva, but then reconsidered this, thinking that it would be better to wait for dawn and then attempt to drown himself by going out to the middle of the river and jumping off a boat; he even wrote a farewell letter to his mother. 581

The three participants of this life-creational affair probably then jointly decided that they should voluntarily refrain from seeing each other for a year, and “afterward” they would try to meet and attempt to start living “in a new way” again. 582 Belyi left for Moscow, and then made motions to go abroad, probably to Munich. In August of 1906, Blok wrote Belyi quite sincere letters about their recent past: “This summer, for the most part I have not thought about you at all, or when I did, with boredom and hatred. The whole time, everything that involved your relationship with Liuba was incomprehensible to me, and often inconsequential. I cannot say even a word about this matter, and often, it is as if this hadn’t even existed”. 583

Shortly after this, Belyi’s quite interesting and vaguely allegorical short story, “The Bush” (Куст), was published in the September 1906 issue of Zolotoe runo. 584 Orlov, again, was the first to address this episode from the point of its “life-creational” subtext, proposing a direct relation between the lives of Belyi + Bloks on the one hand and the aesthetical plane on the other. A life-creative intention was hidden in the rather strange creature “Johnny” (Иванушка), an imbecile character
“with a tired heart” who has fled from the rostrum from which he had flung “dynamite words” (динамитные слова) into the crowd, and who later retreats “into the fields”. In the “untamed nature” (so to speak) of these same fields, Belyi’s hero discovers some sort of strange magic bush, which the author has endowed with a deformed, anthropomorphic appearance partially reminiscent of a caricatured and grotesque image of Blok: “A dry reddish face, the crusty skin covered with sunburn”. 585

Then “a sort of unearthly beauty” appears in the story, that was a market gardener’s daughter – “a ‘swan’ girl with ‘hair of greenish gold’”, who was “endowed with a bewitching, ‘frightening charm’”. 586 The ugly evil magic bush is persistently holding the beautiful poor girl by force and hiding her from “Johnny-the-imbecil” (Иванушка). It turns out, however, as the plot is developing, that the girl herself is no more and no less than the very “twin-soul” of poor Johnny, who “is gripped by the heat of passion”. 587 And although the market gardener’s daughter tries to save her ‘twin-soul’ and push the naive Johnny away, he engages in a courageous and suicidal battle with the diabolical bush, a battle from which, as one can imagine he will by no means emerge victorious. 588

This transparent and stylized allegory, presented in a grotesque and exaggerated manner, was more or less incomprehensible at the time to everyone except the concrete actors of these real-life dramatic events. Orlov justly points out that when she read “The Bush”, Liubov’ Blok took it as a pointed insult and wrote to Belyi to completely break off any relationship whatsoever. At this point, the “life-creation episode” of Belyi’s attachment to Liubov’ as the earthly incarnation of the “Eternal Feminine” in the physical body of a real woman, can be considered to be completely finished.

3.5. The final episodes of Life-Creation in Belyi

A special esoteric variation of (meta-)symbolist life-creation finds its embodiment in a “spiritual pairing”, in Belyi’s first “formal” marriage, to Asia Turgeneva. It is at about this time that Belyi becomes, quite significantly, associated with the founder of anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner, and that his participation in the construction of the Goetheanum began. For Belyi, anthroposophy was a sort of new continuation of all of his previous life-creation, an attempt to build a “New Life” by means of the synthetical anthroposophic art (or “cult”), and he wanted to participate in it as fully as he could.

The latter life-creationist “passages” of Belyi’s biography are linked to the small Swiss town of Dornach; during this period, Belyi actually became a true “anthroposophic mystic”. 589 It is well known that around the middle of the decade

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585 “сухое лицо красноватое, корой – загаром покрытое”. Quoted via Орлов 1963: 631; See also Белый 1995: 264-274.
587 Ibid.
589 On the “mystical” interests of Belyi, see the recent monograph by Monika Spivak: Спивак 2006-а. See also Козлик 1983: 10-107. For the additional relation with Western esoteric thought see chapter
beginning in 1910, Dornach became a sort of center for various mystically-oriented intellectual Europeans. It was in just this little town that Dr. Rudolf Steiner decided to settle. Steiner was the creator of the anthroposophic movement, the adherents of which strove to, insofar as they could, modify and free their consciousness and achieve an enlightened knowledge of certain higher spiritual worlds that were imperceptible to the ordinary “unsanctified” individual. The ideas in Steiner’s work fit in splendidly with the life-creationist dreams of Russian symbolism, at least in the recension of Belyi (and also, partly, that of Maksimilian Voloshin and Viacheslav Ivanov).

In Dornach, under Steiner’s direction, a group of his followers from various countries (including Russia) set about to empower his occult “idea” in materially monumental forms, to transform his spiritual cultural message into life. Gradually they all became involved in building the main anthroposophic temple known as the “Goetheanum”. This building was designed to accommodate within itself the speculations and hopes of many mystically inclined Europeans, and to present the aspect of a majestic “temple of the Spirit”, destined to become a sort of universal anthroposophic center. Belyi, too, was among those who directly participated in the building of this life-creationist project. Belyi met Steiner for the first time in 1912, and from that moment Steiner became a great practical and spiritual guide for Belyi. Despite his somewhat poor knowledge of German, and taking advantage of the support and favor of Steiner’s wife, Marie von Sievers, Belyi accompanied Steiner through Europe, listening to his lectures and taking up his spiritual practices. By 1914, he had already settled down stably in Dornach along with his new wife, Asja Turgeneva.

Together with Steiner’s other disciples and adherents, Belyi took a very active part in the construction works involved in erecting the spiritual temple of the anthroposophists. (It is known that Belyi devoted a lot of time, in particular, to the carving of wood for cornices and other details of the Temple). During this period, Belyi was actively engaged in the most diverse occult and anthroposophic practices: he meditated, willfully trained his memory, and also, following Steiner’s instructions, strove to draw nearer to the attainment of the secrets of the spiritual world and of the functioning of the human ego.

In 1916, because of the continuation of World War I, Belyi returned to Russia. His main literary archive, meanwhile, remained in Dornach. This included books given to him and inscribed by Steiner and his wife, diverse manuscripts, letters, photographs. As recent scholarship by Monika Spivak has shown, this archive also included a large number of mystical drawings executed in color, in which Belyi...
mirrored his anthroposophic visions, occult fantasies, and his experience of obscure spiritual feelings. It was precisely in Dornach, under the influence of Steiner’s ideas and instructions, that Belyi turned to the practice of intimately autobiographical writing, closely starting to scrutinize his ‘pre-natal’ past. There he began his first extensive autobiographical text, “Kotik Letaev”, in which he described the unique sensations of a child stepping out into the huge unknown world and assimilating as much of it as he could (the child senses warmth and light, his own body, and the unexplored, cosmically immeasurable space lying beyond its limits). Many of Belyi’s drawings from that time are devoted to the theme of individuation and the genesis of a core ego. Spivak notes that there was a mystical background common to all Belyi’s late creative work and his painterly drawings as well, the same source of inspiration and of iconographic imagery should be traced to Steiner’s teachings.

Nikolai Vasilievich Kuz’min wrote in his reminiscences: “Once, on my way to see [Belyi], in a newspaper kiosk I bought an issue of a particular German journal, where they had published snapshots of Steiner’s ‘Revelations Building’ in Dornach, and a group of builders – the admirers, male and female, of Steiner. Belyi had himself once participated in the construction of the ‘Revelations Building’, then left Switzerland for his homeland at the height of the building project, during the first world war. Upon seeing the snapshots, [Belyi] became terribly upset. Especially when, in the group of ‘builders’, he made out Asja Turgeneva, his first wife, who had remained in Dornach ‘at the Teacher’s feet’. He looked at the snapshots, exclaiming and commenting, trying to make out his acquaintances in the groups. In general, he had avoided conversations about Steiner and his Dornach period, although the portrait of the ‘Teacher’ hung above his writing desk”. 594

Belyi’s marriage to Asja coincides with the period of his intense spiritual quests. The feeling of a certain kind of esoteric emptiness that followed him in these years found “appeasement” in Asja, who in and of herself was a sort of life-creationist image of “the” Asja who was depicted in Ivan Turgenev’s texts, as if incarnating her in the body of a real woman. In 1910, Belyi and Asja left Russia for Europe – to go to Austria, and then to Italy. The “Musaget” publishing house, which had been organized not long before that, rendered financial assistance in the preparation and realization of this trip.

The recent study of Georgii Nefediev shows the mystical, initiational, and, on the whole, clearly life-creationist nature of Belyi and Asja’s journey. A few years after their voyage, the enigmatic lady known by the name of Anna Rudol’fovna 595

593 See Спивак 2006-б (el. pub.).
595 In the formulation of the researcher: “Without doubt, Belyi developed ... an initiate’s itinerary, and not just ‘Baedeker-style’.” See Нефедьев 2002: 170-171.
Mintzlova appeared in the Russian capitals, an event of no little significance.\(^{596}\) According to the material presented by Nefediev, it was Mintzlova who tried to confirm Belyi in his path toward a Rosicrucian kind of anthroposophic initiation, which was supposedly to take place somewhere in Italy.\(^{597}\) In all likelihood, Mintzlova’s shallow “fairy tales” (as Belyi called them subsequently in his later memoirs, where Mintzlova is on the whole subjected to a rather pejorative appraisal) about certain mysterious teachers and enigmatic Rosicrucian brothers drove Belyi to engage in a genuine quest for these “paths” to esoteric initiation, which also ultimately led him to his anthroposophic apprenticeship with Steiner in 1912.\(^{598}\)

As Nefediev points out,\(^{599}\) the gist of Mintzlova’s suggestion, in Belyi’s own words, was as follows: “Future events are calling for the rebirth of a new Rosicrucianism, only illuminated by the forces of the old; a new chivalry is arising; in Russia, the vessel must be a collective, a lodge *sui generis*; and in Moscow and St. Petersburg there must be found two persons grouping [around themselves] the people who will bind themselves as brothers to take their stand under the banners of spiritual light. …Thanks to the efforts of Belyi and Emili Metner, one lodge was in fact created at the ‘Musaget’ publishing house, under the auspices of ‘Orfeus’ (the division that published mystical-religious literature)”.\(^{600}\)

A special chapter in the history of Russian symbolism’s life-creation is concentrated in the notorious person of Mintzlova: this chapter has purely occult and esoteric coordinates. The story shows how popular, in the symbolist milieu, the expectations were for the possibility of saving and illuminating the earthly flesh of human nature through enigmatic occult knowledge accessible only to the chosen and “initiated”. Not only Belyi and Viacheslav Ivanov aspired to be such “initiates”: other symbolists wanted this, too – Voloshin, Briusov, Mikhail Kuzmin, and to some degree, even Blok.

At the end of 1910, when Belyi and Asja had passed through Vienna, where they had viewed the impressive Gothic cathedrals, they stayed in Venice for a while, then proceeded to Rome and Naples, and afterward set out for Sicily, where they spent some time in Palermo. In early 1911, they departed from Palermo, sailing to Tunis. In his later conceived “Travel Notes”, Belyi tried to present the whole trip he took in late 1910 and early 1911 in the form of a deliberate journey logically leading

\(^{596}\) On Mintzlova’s specific influence on Belyi and other Russian symbolists, see Nikolai Bogomolov’s essay “Anna-Rudolph” (Богомолов 1999: 21-110). See also Carlson 1988: 63-79.

\(^{597}\) See Нефедьев 2002: 170-171.

\(^{598}\) The “Mystical Triangle” (or “triple alliance” see Carlson 1988: 63-79) formed in 1909 by Mintzlova, Viacheslav Ivanov, and Belyi, had as one of its intrinsic goals the creation and construction of several Rosicrucian lodges in Russia (to be grouped around Belyi and Ivanov). The Masonic and “conspiratorially utopian” aspirations of this Russian symbolist circle are likewise relevant to the entire problematics of life-creation.

\(^{599}\) See: Нефедьев 2002: 171.

\(^{600}\) “События будущего апеллируют к возрождению нового розенкрейцерства, лишь освещенного силами старого; новое рыцарство возникает; в России сосуд должен быть: коллектив, *sui generis* ложа; и нужно, чтобы в Москве, в Петербурге нашлись два лица, группирующих тех, кто себя связут братьями, чтоб стать под знаменем духовного света; <...>. Одна из лож, усилами Белоего и Э.К. Метнера, была практически создана в книгоиздательстве ‘Мусагет’ на базе ‘Орфея’ – редакционного отдела, занимавшегося выпуском мистико-религиозной литературы”. See Ibid.
him to Dornach, to Steiner’s system of viewing the world. As Belyi himself wrote, “The thread of events that were still fresh at that time and like a fairy tale drove us through the [various] countries; after [seeing] the Lord’s grave, and after vast Dornach, we can allow ourselves a little luxury: meditating a bit about Giordano, Copernicus, and Galileo; at that same time, Ramón [Llul] tempted us; the spirit of Dante beckoned, too; the mystical building of John the Baptist slowly matured”.  

As is well-known, Belyi’s dramatical split with Asja took place subsequently, and a difficult time for Belyi ensued: his day-to-day misfortunes in Berlin, and the eccentric, unsettled state of his domestic life (graphically described in the part of Marina Tsvetaeva’s self-writing dealing with Belyi). Later on (during Soviet times) came his second marriage, to the writer and eminent anthroposophist Klavdia Nikolaevna Vasilieva. This marriage essentially continued and concluded the whole theme of Belyi’s anthroposophic life-creation, but now in a much more secretly hidden, veiled way, determined by the reigning totalitarian Soviet regime. 

3.6. Variants of Aleksandr Blok’s Life-Creation. His Heavenly Lady – His Wife, Liubov’ Blok

As I already noted, one of Blok’s most important life-creationist ideals and aspirations (in the beginning stage of his formal entry into literature) was the “Solovievian myth”, with its mystical-utopian expectation of a Sophian Virgin-Lady-Saviour who would be able to break the vicious cycle of deaths (and births) and bring human life to a new cycle of existence. Very instructive in this respect is a note that Blok recorded in his notebook on September 26, 1901: “As a sign of this, I dreamed a prophetic dream. Something had snapped in time, and She appeared to me plainly, or else she was turned to me, and a mystery was revealed. I dreamed that my family had walked away, but I had kept going, and I abruptly stopped in the doorway in front of her. She was alone, and stood up to meet me and then suddenly reached out her hands and vaguely said something strange about my coming with love to her. But I had Soloviev’s poems in my hands, and gave them to her, but suddenly they were no longer poems but rather a paltry German book – and I stumbled. But she kept holding her hands out to me, and my heart leapt. And at that second, on the border of clairvoyance, I of course awoke”.  

Blok quite definitely associated the image of this enigmatic luminous Maiden (in the conception of “young” symbolism, the Beautiful Lady and the Maiden of the Rainbow Gates) with Liubov’ Dmitrievna Mendeleeva-Blok.
When he met this interesting girl (from an estate next door to his grandfather’s), Blok at once noticed something that from his point of view was unusual in her face and in her “inner” comportment, something that corresponded to and was in keeping with his profound and inexpressible spiritual aspirations at the time. An (amateur) photograph has been. The photo shows a scene from their home-theater: a quite young girl (Liubov’) in the costume of Ophelia stands facing the viewer, and, on his knees beside her, Hamlet (Blok) is contemplating her. A memoirist describes this “home theater” as follows: “They both had amazing faces. ... Never in any girl’s face had I seen such an expression of innocence as there was in hers. That half-childish face, a little high-cheekboned, with unattractive features, was beautiful. And his face was that of a man who had seen a heavenly vision”. Significant here is the mention of Blok’s “heavenly vision” and of its possible material embodiment in Liubov’s earthly image.

In a diary entry from 1902, Blok reveals his life-creationist attitude toward the problem of the corporeal, toward the utopian striving to “overcome” all the baser inclinations of the body and of “physical sexual contacts”, and to break through, with the help of his own creative expertise, to a new form of life-creation that would not consist only of words, would not be the hostage of “words” but would spill over into a sphere of the “new” matter of some kind of enlightened existence. In a certain sense, Blok was “rebelling” against “words”, in favor of the new creation of life that he had just been contemplating and had proclaimed in the broadest strokes. He told that: “I do not want physical hugs and embraces, because embraces ... are only a transient shock. Later comes ‘habit’, a foul monster. I do not want words. Words have existed, and will exist; words are endlessly fickle, and no end of them is in sight. Anything you might say will remain in [the realm of] theory. There will be no more fright. There will be no more CONTEMPT (in many forms). Is it true that I would surrender EVERYTHING (i.e., the mystery and contemplation) for a single thing? It is true. ‘Synthesis’—that is, of course, what you will achieve later. The main thing is to assimilate ‘reality’ and further operate on it. Corpus ibi agere non potest, ubi non est! (The body cannot act in a place, where it is not! Lat[in],) I want über-words and über-embraces. I want what WILL exist”.

As we see, Blok, still at a rather early stage, is making an attempt to reach a sort of “synthesis” of life-and-creativity; he says openly in his diary that he wants to be able to operate with reality and to master a new capability for an enlightening physical action. He perceives life through a prism of mystical aesthetics, through an ambition for new forms of creativity that will present themselves if he succeeds in

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604 “У обоих удивительные лица. ... Никогда, ни в каком девичьем лице я не видела такого выражения невинности, какое было у нее. Это полудетское, чуть скуластое, некрасивое по чертам лицо было прекрасно. А его лицо – это лицо человека, увидевшего небесное видение”. See: Павлович 1964: 458.

“acquiring” Liubov’; 606 however, this conquest is to be achieved not through the “physical embraces” that he rejects, but rather through a special kind of mystical-contemplative feeling, which brings us directly to Vladimir Soloviev and his Sophia.

As is the case with Zinaida Gippius, much of the “mutual” erotic life-activity for Liubov’ was also related to the principle of the “kiss”. Liubov’ Dmitrievna Blok herself wrote: “It would not have been hard for me to surrender to the excitement and ardor of this meeting, but the unfamiliar mystery of long-lasting kisses torrentially brought me to life, conquered me, and transformed my fiercely proud young-girl independence into a slavish womanly submissiveness”. 607 Later on in this same fragment of her retrospective self-narration, Liubov’ confirms what for us is an significant “vector” of the life-creation phenomenon, when the “act” and “behavior” pass from the text into life, from “words” and “aesthetics and poetics” into the concrete reality of physical human beings.

In her perception, the entire atmosphere developing around her infused her with a sense of an unusual ‘happening’, a sense of some kind of inner predestination to a mutual existence with Blok: “The whole surroundings, all the words ... the world that had been living only in words was now incarnated. As it was for Blok, too, all reality seemed transformed to me, mysterious; it had burst into song, and was full of significance. The air enclosing us rang with those rhythms and those subtle melodies that Blok later captured and included in his poems. If earlier I had learned to understand him and to live through his thoughts, now a tenth sense was also added, through which a woman in love understands her beloved”. 608 Or, in another place: “Dear, dear beloved ... you should not kiss my feet and my clothes in your letters: kiss my lips the way I want to kiss – for a long time, and ardently” 609

In his letters, Blok calls Liubov’ “The Dawn”, “Angel”, “Eternal Immutable Truth”, “The New Triumph”, “Saint”, “The Sun of my World”, “Pearl”, and other names characteristically in this vein. Especially important in the context of the overall young-symbolist myth about the Burning Bush and the Woman Clothed with Sun are the appellations that Blok gives his wife in 1903, with characteristic words that testify to his conception of her in a strikingly “apocalyptic” context: “Your burning face ... I kiss your burning footsteps. I passionately await you, my Fiery Princess, my Blaze”. 610

606 The voluminous correspondence between the Poet and his Lady was fully published in 1978 (in so far as that was possible at the time) by V.N. Orlov in Literaturnoe nasledstvo, vol. 89. (See Блок 1978).

607 “…мне не трудно было было отдаться волнению и жару этой встречи, а неведомая тайна долгих поцелуев стремительно пробуждала к жизни, подчиняла, превращала властно гордую девичью независимость в рабскую женскую покорность”. See: Блок 1978: 56.

608 “Вся обстановка, все слова... мир, жививший тогда только в словах, теперь воплощался. Как и для Блока, вся реальность казалась мне преображенной, таинственной, завораживающей, полной значительности. Воздух, окружающий нас, звенил теми ритмами, теми тонкими напевами, которые Блок потом улавливал и заключал в стихи. Если и раньше я научилась понимать его, жить его мыслью, тут прибавилось еще то десятое чувство, которым влюбленная женщина понимает любимого”. Ibid.

609 “Милый, милый, ненаглядный... не надо и в письмах целовать ноги и платье, целуй губы, как я хочу целовать – долго, горячо”. Ibid.: 163.

610 “Твое горячее лицо... я целую Твою горячий след. Я страстно жду Тебя, моя Огненная Царевна, мое Зарево”. Ibid.
In a letter of November 1902, Blok openly tells his beloved that she is, in his conception, in fact the incarnation of all femininity (which recalls Goethe and Soloviev): “You are all femininity, not having relinquished the woman, and a woman who does not agitate femininity ... I love you so much, no matter what, knowing all and understanding at least the immeasurability of your Superlative Beauty. ...You are the Holy, Exalted, Unattainable One that I cannot think about without fear; you, whose ‘wave of ringlets of light’ is like ‘ripe ear of grain’”. In Blok’s poetry written in that year (1902) there is a perceptible correspondence between the poet’s whole “biographical practice” and his deep inner worldview as reflected in his art. This is evident, for example, in lines from his poem “The secret signs are kindled” (“Разгораются тайные знаки”): “Убегаю в прошедшие миги, Закрываю от страха глаза, На листах холодеющей книги – золотая девичья коса”. (“I flee into the passed moments,/ I close my eyes in fear,/ on the pages of a book that becomes cold,/ there is a plait of a golden maiden”).  

It is interesting that during a certain point (roughly, May 1903) of his “relationship” with Liubov’, Blok was willing nonetheless to think about combining a physical aspect of their love with the exaltedly “unearthly” principle. Later on, the physical component of their marital relationship began to gradually fade. However, in May 1903, he wrote the following to Liubov’, from the German site of Bad Nauheim: “You are lithe as a stem, in love, summoning the night—and that means there will be quiet, the fires will be extinguished—and we will depart, and it will be night, and we two will be alone, and no forces will separate us, and there will be ecstasy and all will be oblivion, the strength of hands intertwined, your kisses, your white teeth, your shoulders, your perfumed breath, movements standing still, beauty, passion, and the madness of long-lasting moments”. 

With Blok, as with Belyi (in the episode with the Morozova letters, when the author/narrator of these letters used verbatim fragments of them in his ordinary publications), there is a very characteristic posture of the “poetic ego” that we can ad hoc bring together with Iurii Tynianov’s concept of the “lyrical hero”. As I have already briefly mentioned, Tynianov introduced the term itself in the context of Blok, in his 1921 article “Blok”. Tynianov wrote: “Blok is Blok’s biggest lyrical theme. This theme is compelling as the theme of the romance of a still-new, unborn (or subconscious) formation. Now there is talk about this lyrical hero. He was inevitable, the legend already surrounds him, and not only now—it surrounded him from the very beginning, it even seemed that it antecedent Blok’s poetry itself, that his poetry only developed and fulfilled the postulated image. All of Blok’s art is personified in this image; when people talk about his poetry, they almost always involuntarily

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611 Text rendered in Блок 1978: 67.


613 Text rendered in Блок 1978: 67.
substitute the human face for the poetry—and everyone has fallen in love with the face, and not the art. ... It is this lyrical hero of which Russia now mourns the loss”.

Subsequently, Tynianov clarified his view further on: “The lyrical hero is the artistic ‘double’ of the author/poet that emerges from the text of lyrical compositions (a cycle, a book of poems, a long lyrical poem, the entire collection of lyrics) as a distinctly outlined figure or a real-life role as a person endowed with distinction, individuality of destiny, or psychological distinctness of his inner world”.

At this point, I can also introduce Sergei Durylin’s description, quite apt in this context, in which Blok’s face is being seen as extraordinarily similar to an actual mask. Durylin recollects: “I once met Blok. At the ‘Musaget’ publishing house, on rhythm [sic]. He sat at a desk and was silent all evening. His face was a mask – it looked like something heavy, made of lime-plaster, permanently stuck to his face. The mask was red and rough. Above it, there was a shock of curly hair. I had never before seen anyone with a face so frozen and masked-over, like cardboard. It was unbearably uncanny to look at him. ... Looking at this cardboard made from a face, saturated with glue and white paint, and smeared with the colors of cheeks, I understood why he had written The Puppet Show. Even snow—exuberant, pure white snow – gave him only a snow mask. And behind the mask, no doubt, it was painful, always painful, incurably painful. After all, it does not let the living body of the face live and breathe”.

Boris Eikhenbaum, one of Tynianov’s close colleagues, fleshed out the life-creationist context of the “heroism” of Blok-as-Poet, as well as the meaning of the significant real-life-theater component of all of Blok’s creative work. This approach included that of the final years of the poet’s life: “For us, Blok’s poetry has become the emotional monologue of a tragic actor, and Blok himself has become this actor made-up as himself. And then the sudden end to this tragedy appeared: the staged death that had all along been being prepared turned out to be a real death. ... And we

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614 “Блок – самая большая лирическая тема Блока. Это тема притягивает как тема романа еще новой, нерожденной (или неосознанной) формации. Об этом лирическом герое и говорят сейчас. Он был необходим, его уже окружает легенда, и не только теперь – она окружала его с самого начала, казалось даже, что она предшествовала самой поэзии Блока, что его поэзия только развила и дополнила постулированный образ. В образ этот персонифицируют все искусство Блока; когда говорят о его поэзии, почти всегда за поэзий невольно подставляют человеческое лицо – и все полюбили лицо, а не искусство. ... Этого лирического героя и оплакивает сейчас Россия”. See: Тынянов 1977: 118. See also Бройтман 1999: 148.


are shocked, like the spectator is shocked when, before his very eyes, in the fifth act of the tragedy, the actor bleeds real blood”. 617

This was seconded by yet another scholar from the same group of Russian formalists, Boris Tomashevsky. In his arguments about the “biographical lyricism” of the symbolists in general Tomashevskii points out the following: “Blok was just this sort of poet with a lyrical biography. It was not for nothing that in the very first year after his death, we have gotten a rich memoirist and biographical literature about him. And this is because his biography was a living and necessary commentary to his works. ... The Blok legend is the inevitable fellow-companion of his poetry. The elements of intimate confession and of biographical allusion must be taken into account in his poetics”. 618

Blok’s lyrical hero and his “poetic-lyrical” and mythological “self” depend on a particular idea of the “Poet’s path”, an issue examined by Dmitrii Maksimov. 619 Maksimov’s student Zara G. Mintz continued the research of her scholarly advisor in her own later articles, which were devoted to the conceptual merging of life and art among the Russian symbolists. In one such article, Mintz believed that the myth about the path of the lyrical hero, in Blok, is part of the “mythologized concept of his creative evolution”, which, in turn, is part of the “global” myth about the “world’s path”. She thought that “the dialectical nature of Blok’s views is reflected in the poetic symbols of his oeuvre”. 620 The special context of Blok’s ideas about the path goes directly back to Vladimir Soloviev and to the way that Blok understood Soloviev in the context of the Poet/Knight/Monk, whose poem-prayers are a visible form of Service to Beauty. The Poet’s peculiar prayerful-knightly manner of living should directly bespeak the kind of unique theurgic-lyrical synthesis in which the author’s specific real-life acts are superimposed upon the telos of his texts, shaping a peculiar continuum of symbolic life-creation.

The first example of Blok’s poetry that established a mutual, two-way vector of correlation between the empirically real and the literarily conceived was, without doubt, his poetic cycle of Poems about the Beautiful Lady. (Indeed, this is possibly also the only pure example, in a conceptual sense, of Blok’s authentic life-creatorist interest, that is, in the way it merges life and creative work, art and reality.) Earlier, Valerii Briusov expressed his own thoughts about the roots of this cycle in Blok’s real life: he observed a sort of reflection of something biographically real, which in his words was “not mysticality, but rather something not fully spoken”. 621

617 “Поэзия Блока стала для нас эмоциональным монологом трагического актера, а сам Блок - этим загримированным под самого себя актером. И вот – наступил внезапный конец этой трагедии: подготовленная всем ее ходом сценическая смерть оказалась смертью подлинной... И мы потрясены – как потрясен зритель, когда на его глазах, в пятом акте трагедии, актер истекает настоящей кровью...”. See: Эйхенбаум 1921: 45.
618 “Таким поэтом с лирической биографией был Блок. Недаром за первый же год после его смерти мы получили богатую мемуарную и биографическую литературу о нем. И это потому, что его биография была живым и необходимым комментарием к его произведениям. ... Блоковская легенда - неизбежный спутник его поэзии. Элементы интимного признания и биографического намека необходимо учитывать в его поэтике”. See: Томашевский 1923: 5. 1923.
In his aforementioned book, Dmitrii Maksimov contends that the connection between early twentieth-century lyricism (and Blok’s lyrics in particular) and an “autobiographical documentary element” is a characteristic new feature of the poetic art of this era. The concept of Poems about the Beautiful Lady as a “lyrical diary” helps us to advance to the level of studying the real artistic relationship of denotative reality to the lyrical text of this whole post-romantic cycle. Blok’s Sophian-Gnostic interest in an appropriate female image also harks directly back to Vladimir Soloviev. The poetic echo of Blok’s “Queen” and “Princess” with the corresponding images from Soloviev’s poetry is obvious. In the Soloviev model, for example, there is the ecstatic poem preserved in the poet’s notebooks from November 7/8, 1902, which begins with exclamations in the spirit of the philosopher’s Cairo visions: “Осанна! Ты входишь в терем! / Ты – голос, Ты – Слава Царицы!” (“Hosanna! (singing praises), you enter the tower-chamber/ You are the voice, You are the Glory of the Tsarina”).

It would seem that the essential meaning of Blok’s life-creationist poetic cycle takes its principle from Soloviev’s ideas about the incarnation of the ideal and its future “synthesis” with the material and about the earthly embodiment of an abstractly ideal higher Beauty. M.F. Mur’ianov observes that Blok compared happiness in love, in a Byzantine or Mediterranean sense, with the anointing of a divine king, quoting a Blok verse from October 14, 1902: “Как с жизнью страстной я, мудрый царь, Сочетаю Тебя, Любовь?” (“How can I, a wise king, combine You, O Love, with passionate life?”).

In the context of this same “Mediterranean/Gnostic” interest of Soloviev’s, Belyi in his reflective memoirs stated, in his characteristic lyrical tone: “We considered that for Blok, meeting [Liubov’], or the Queen’s Princess, was a reflection of the beloved Sophia in an earthly mantle”.

Belyi, in my estimation, was completely justified in insisting on a direct connection between (or even a sort of dependency on) the Gnostic popular interests of the time and the poetic worldview of the younger Blok. These cultural fashions were also traceable to the spirit of Soloviev: “It is striking how Valentinus’s lyrical philosophy is echoed in Blok’s lyrics, down to the finest strokes! ... The Queen is Wisdom, and the Princess, Achamoth ... Everything is that way: even the colors (gold and blue) are the traditional colors of Wisdom ... Languor accompanies Achamoth... The ‘eye’ [око] toward which the Queen extended herself is from our ‘window’ [окно], meaning the blue eye via the Gnostic path; yes, the ‘spiritual love affair’ between the Princess and the Gnostic is envisioned: and the Princess is the Intended; she [says] ‘He will beg forgiveness for your numbers, o queen’. Again—why? Only when Achamoth is in our consciousness transformed into the pleroma will the world and world history end, or the consequences of the imbalance of our once-fallen

623 Quoted in Мурьянов 1996: 27.
624 Ibid.
625 Ibid.
626 “…отображением милой Софии в земной оболочке для Блока считали мы встречу с Л<обовью> Д<митриевной>, иль с Царевной Царицы”. Quoted in Мурьянов: 29.
queen. ... Look at what Blok’s images are transformed into when you approach them with the key of Gnosis”. (Belyi composed these lines as early as year 1922). 627

This type of Gnostic-“dialectical” world outlook (which gives rise to a dichotomic relationship to the material world) apparently implies an assumption of the existence of two types of “the phenomenal”: 1) phenomena that mirror the essences of a higher order and 2) phenomena in which the “ideas” of an imagined “fantastic reality” are embodied (the latter can be understood either as “empty ideas”—delirious fantasies, illusions that have only a “mental” or subjectively psychological reality—or as “ideas” from the (“demonic” or “diabolical”) world that stands in opposition to the divine). Both types, however, are phenomena embodied in the “earthly” forms of time and space, and are perceptible to the senses; they can be “contemplated”. The desire to physically embody the initially incorporeal phantom-like illusion of a poetically intended image is what lies at the heart of the Blok’s main idea for writing his first published poetic cycle. There, in particular such lines as these occur: “О, взойди же предо мною / Не в одном воображеньи!” (“O come forth before me / Not only in my fantasy!”). 628

As Belyi noted in his aforementioned 1921 memorial speech to Blok, Vladimir Soloviev in a most powerful and profound way shaped the life-creationist world of Blok’s early poetry, the poetic universe that was born close on the heels of the end of the Russian philosopher’s earthly journey. (Soloviev died within one year of Nietzsche).

Belyi tells: “Soloviev soon died, in June of 1900. By the time of Soloviev’s death, [Blok] had already realized all his continuity with the entire philosophical path [of Soloviev]: the sounds of the ‘Beautiful Lady’ come out for the first time (‘You, Ever-Young, have gone on to undawned shades’). ...A short time before that, if I am not mistaken, in the beginning of 1900, he had written: ‘I seek salvation! My fires are burning on the mountaintops...’, and it ended like this: ‘There you will come down from distant bright mountains. I await you. I have cast out my soul to you. In you is salvation!’ . Who is this ‘you’? Whether it is humanity, or culture, the new era, theocracy, or the feminine principle of divinity, is another question; the fact is that at this point, he had assumed the tone that subsequently organized the whole movement of symbolists.” 629

627 “Поразительно: какъ повторяется въ лирикъ Блока лирическая философія Валентина: до мелкихъ штриховъ! <...> Царица – Премудрость, Царевна-же – Ахамотъ <...> Все – такъ: и цвѣта (золотой, синій) – традиціонные цвѣта Мудрости <...> Томленье сопутствуетъ Ахамотъ... ... ‘око’, которому всѣ противилась Царевна – изъ нашего ‘окна’ понявшаго синее око стезею гностической; да, загаданъ ’духовный романъ’ межъ Царевной и гностикомъ: и Царевна – Невста; она – Твои числа замолитъ, царица. Опять – почему? Лишь тогда, когда Ахамотъ въ нашемъ сознаніи перенесется въ плэрому, окончится міръ, міровая история, или послѣдствія неравновесія нѣкогда падшей царицы. … Смотрите во что превращаются образы Блока, когда подойдете вы къ нимъ съ ключемъ гнозиса”. Quoted in Мурьянов 1996: 30.


629 “Вскоре умирает Вл. Соловьев, в июне девятисотого года. К моменту смерти Соловьева Александр Александрович уже осознал всю преемственность свою со всей его философской линией, - впервые проходят звуки ‘Прекрасной Дамы’… – ‘Ты, Вечно-Юная, прошла в неозаренные туманы’. …Уже в скором времени, если не ошибаюсь, в начале девятисотого года он пишет: ‘Пусть спасенья! Мои огни горят на высших гор...’; и кончается это так: ‘Там едешь Ты с далеких светлых гор. Я жду Тебя. Я дух к Тебе простер. В Тебе - спасенье!’ Кто это - Ты?
Blok, believing in Soloviev’s utopia, doubtlessly imagined the ultimate earthly embodiment of the ideal to have been manifested “in reality” in the world. This gives rise to a quite peculiar “attitude of art toward reality” in Blok’s cycle—a punctuated correspondence between a given image in the text to a certain unique phenomenon or event of (external or psychological) reality. In this context the correspondence is established with the artist’s maximal precision, the super-artistic precision of the Real Witness of the unspoken materia. Furthermore, it is assumed that the symbolist lyricism of the younger Blok is more closely linked with its specific real-life prototypes than one would expect. With Blok we seem to have a more complex tonality of “everydayness”. The fundamental distinction of this kind of poetics from a purely realistic poetics is self-evident. What is remarkable here is a significant broadening of the ways “the imaginary” has been interpreted. Maksimov defines this as a transition from social-historical narrative to _metahistorical mythologization_. Accordingly, a dilution of the specific, ‘unrepeatable features’ of the artistic image in the generality of the “universal”, should be seen as a significant aspect of the young Blok’s symbolism.

Belyi tells in the fourth chapter of his _Recollections of Blok_: “In 1901, ‘Her’ enlightenment is revealed in full force to Blok. At first he does not name ‘Her’ at all; ‘She’ has no image nor likeness. ‘She’ is ‘She’. The ‘You’ is a radiant vision—‘Eternally-Young’, ‘And You in the distance’, ‘I awaited You’. At first, ‘She’ is for him epithet-less and image-less. The first definition of the Eternally-Young that is more distinct, is: ‘She is the Sunset Maiden, and Mysterious’. ‘Reveal yourself to me without wrath, O Mysterious Sunset Maiden...’. ‘Ever in a single face do I presage You’. What is this face like? ... Radiance, gold and cerulean. ‘You are a radiant vision’, ‘And radiance is near’, ‘You are a radiant temple above the grave’, etc. ... Gold and cerulean are the iconographic colors of Sophia. These colors accompany the icon’s image of Sophia; and in Vladimir Soloviev, She is permeated with a golden cerulean: ‘Oh, how much cerulean there is in you!’. In Vladimir Soloviev, she descends from heaven to earth, bringing her gold and cerulean to us here: _Acknowledge the fact that the Eternal Feminine, in an incorruptible body, is presently descending to the earth._ In this pre-annunciation of ‘Her’ descent to earth, Aleksandr Blok, along with Vladimir Soloviev, is a spiritual maximalist. There is a yearning to combine the summit of thought with the highest point of personality; to embody the philosophy of the new age in life.”
Belyi emphasizes that “for Aleksandr Blok, the revelation of Her face is not a mystical act, but a work of culture that is forthcoming, perhaps even tomorrow, to everyone”.  

It is obvious and reasonable that the main life-creationist heroine, empirical and prototypical, of the Poems about the Beautiful Lady is Liubov’, Blok’s future wife. It is she whom the Knight-Monk Blok, in the most direct way, “worships” and “serves”. The uniqueness of the world of the “Maiden” simultaneously implies the Soloviev-style “universal” meaning of her “appearance” (or “revelation”). The relationship between what is actually portrayed and biographical reality is meant to guarantee the conscientiousness of the “witness to events”, to be an indication of the “universal” and symbolic meaning. The mechanism of the ‘symbolist interpretation’, especially in the first parts of these Poems, is first and foremost grounded in a mythologizing assumption that what is portrayed and its mystical prototypes are the same. This also relates to what Zara Minz called “the poetics of references, rephrasings, and mythologems”.

Tartu scholars often suggested that the image of Blok’s dialogic “You” is characterized in a series of decorating comparisons. In its direct referent, accordingly, we recognize both the “soul of the world” and the Eternal Feminine of Goethe and Soloviev, as well as the Holy Maiden (“The mysterious sunset Maiden”, “Maiden, Dawn, Burning Bush”), and some other epithets that we also find in Blok’s letters to his wife). These comparisons, which suggest the New Testament concept of the “Virgin Mary”, are indeed capable of establishing the identification of this intimately lyrical “You” with the Immaculate Virgin-Theotokos. (The image of dawn is often compared to the Mother of God in the Russian folklore tradition). At the same time, as Mintz points out, this poetic “You” also turns out to be the apocalyptic Woman Clothed with the Sun (in such Blok texts as “Where the testament was, we bowed down ...” и другие), as well as the Beautiful Lady of the “poor knight” (“I enter the dark temples...”) (Вхожу я в темные храмы...).  

In the expanded version of his Recollections of Aleksandr Blok, Belyi provided a precise and accurate description of Blok’s poetic cycle (possibly one of the most characteristic of life-creation in general). Belyi placed Blok’s poetry in the traditional context of the “eternal-feminine” Gnostic mysticism stemming from Soloviev (and, partially, from Schelling and Goethe as well). In the sixth chapter of his Recollections Belyi summarizes: “The Poems about the Beautiful Lady are tinged with a distinct and extremely significant content ... [T]he poet celebrates the advent of the eternally feminine principle of life. In this, he is the continuator of quite a number of figures. Interwoven into the aromatic garland of his poetry are the meditations of Plato, Philon, Plotinus, Schelling, and Vladimir Soloviev, and the hymns of Dante,
Lermontov, and Fet. The ancient gnostics, alongside Greek philosophy, thoroughly
developed a doctrine about the soul of the world and the eternally-feminine principle
of Divinity[635]. In his Weltseele, Schelling attempted to provide a natural-sciences
foundation for the doctrine about the world’s soul. Goethe, Dante, and Petrarch were
able to create a symbol of the eternally feminine from any image, combining the
universalism of gnostic dogmas with individual experiences. ... Vladimir Soloviev, by
combining the reflections of the gnostics with the hymns of the poets, gave us a new
account of the descent of the visage of the Eternal Wife. That is where Blok’s poetry
began. His theme is profound. His goal is significant”.636

3.7. The Life-creationist Eroticism of Blok

The final stage of Blok’s life-creationist practice unfolded in tragic circumstances, in
the world of “dreadful” St. Petersburg urbanism. Blok would be mythopoetically
stamped (by Akhmatova) as the “tragic tenor of the Age” (“трагический тенор
эпохи”). The Blok of this era is the sad and tragic poet of the “Terrible world” (певец
Страшного мира), the frequenter of alehouses and bordellos; in this, Blok emerges
as the obvious continuator of the tradition of Charles Baudelaire.637

Also obvious is the fact that the entire “symbolist eros” had a most direct
relationship to the major life-creation phenomenon of both younger and older
symbolists. We may note here the “bohemian” triangles of Merezhkovskiis
(Merezhkovskii, Filosofov, Gippius, Zlobin), as well as those, involving Ivanov,
Zinovieva-Annibal, Margarita Sabashnikova, Voloshin, Belyi, Petrovskaya, Briusov,
and, later on, Gumilev, or Cherubina da Gabriak (pseud. of Elizaveta Dmitrieva) and
others. All these constitute the framework of the intentional penetration of a real-life
text into a literary text, and vice versa.

We must take particular caution in the conclusions we draw, however, as we
might fall into a sort of methodological reduction. Neither Blok nor Belyi described,
for example, the female body or sex organs as such. Any kind of direct reference to
them would apparently have contradicted the (young) symbolists’ entire system of
perceiving and representing the world. Intimate texts of diaries (those of Briusov, for
example) not meant for publication are an exception. (I should add that, as is apparent
from Belyi’s treatise “Emblematics of Meaning” (Эмблематика смысла), a symbol
is an interweaving of sense and form, and therefore direct reference must be merely to
one of the forms.) We might assume that it does not even function as a circumlocution

635 For an additional perspective see: Finlan 2006: 168-184.
636 “…Стихи о Прекрасной Даме окрашены определенным и весьма значительным
содержанием... поэт воспевает приближение вечно женственного начала жизни. Здесь он
является продолжателем целого ряда имен. В ароматный венец его поэзии вплетены раздумья
Платона, Потина, Шеллинга, Владимира Соловьева и гимны Дантес, Лермонтова, Фета. Древние
гностики вместе с греchеской философией все стороне разработали учение о мировой душе и
вечно-женственном начале Божества. Шеллинг в сочинении Welte seele пытаел дать учению о
мировой душе естественно-научную подкладку. Гете, Дантес, Петрарка снмели из любимого
образа создать симал вечно-женственного, соединив универсализм гностических догматов с
индивиуальными переживаниями. ... Владимир Соловьев, соединяя размышления гностиков с
гимнами поэтов, сказал новое слово о сошествии нам лика Вечной Жены. Тут началась поэзия
637 On this topic see Ioffe 2008: 19-45.
(or a statement of the Other). What occurs in Blok’s creative work is a completely different type and level of deformation of the reality of the “horrible world” from that of, for example, the “last” Russian avant-gardist Daniil Kharms. The connection to a specific object of denotation is so attenuated that it can be interpreted more as an impulse and less as a specific denotatum.

In the latter half of November 1905, Blok began to compose one of the first of his Poems, “Night Violet” (subtitled “A Dream”) (“Ночная фиалка”: “Сон”). The completion of this text dates to the beginning of May 1906. The text is a reflective, somewhat burdensome (for both writer and reader) swampy description of a dreamlike journey undertaken by the author either while awake or sleeping.

The poetics of the “night violet” has hardly been studied in Blok scholarship.638 As regards life-creation it is, however, an extremely important one. The dream to which the subtitle of the poem refers probably actually took place (on the night of November 16, 1905) and was relevant to Blok’s “real life” experiences at this time, such as his nocturnal haunting of “watering holes” and other seedy places, and his sexual contacts with prostitutes. That is, the dream does not so much emerge in the poem in the role of a singularly important impulse, but rather functions as a part of the entire system of things that influenced Blok.639

This “life-creationist” poem of Blok was the subject of a special essay by the late Sergei Jasenskii.640 Quite valuable in this article is the linkage of the genesis of the poem to the life-creationist creative work of Heine overall, and in particular to the book Pictures of Travel. Part Three: Italy (1828). As Jasenskii informs, Blok’s personal copy of this book had the words “night violet” underlined in Blok’s hand.641 As the scholar cautiously formulates it, this is where the latent trail begins, the one that leads to the postulated “necrophiliac substrate” of the “night violet” theme on the level of poetics. Jasenskii believes that “the daydream/recollection of the narrator [in Heine’s text] about his beloved Maria, about the night spent beside her body, and about the ‘strange aroma’ of the night violet, apparently intersected in Blok’s consciousness with Her death. (To mention the poems ‘Here it is, the Row of Steps to the Coffin’, 1903 and ‘With a Thin Cloth, the Bride’s Coffin…’, 1904 (‘Вот он – ряд гробовых ступеней”, “Гроб невесты легкой тканью’)”.642

See: Долгополов 1964: 60.

To a large degree, the monograph by L.K. Dolgopolov (1964), in the sections devoted to analysis of the poem’s text, strives to describe the boundary between the author’s “life” and the artistic text of the poem. This is done very carefully and thoughtfully and, despite the limitations of the Soviet censorship, the author succeeds in formulating a relatively adequate interpretation of the text he examines. Dolgopolov argues that “the allegory of Night Violet … is an allegory of thoughts and sensations. It is not an outright parable. The hero of the poem finds himself in the power of the most diverse influences evoked by what is occurring in real life. … Night Violet is a poem of impressions”.

See: Долгополов 1964: 60.

638 The(14,8),(992,989) most eminent contemporary Blok specialists until recent times were Zara Mintz, Avril Pyman, V.N. Orlov, and D. E. Maksimov. Their works are exemplary of Soviet-style textual studies, in which quite a lot in Blok’s personal life is not named. As a rule, authors of traditional Blok monographs have not really tried to interpret Night Violet imagery at all. See, for example, Pyman 1979 v.1: 226-227 and Reeve 1962: 80-81. Bogdan Sagatov has pointed this out, indirectly, in the notes to his own article (which, along with the late Sergei Jasenskii’s text, is, as far as I am aware, the only study dedicated to the iconography of this poem). See Sagatov 1984: 271-287.


640 Ibid.: 71.

641 Ibid.
that I will not try to declare Blok to be a definite “necrophile eroticist”. There is not sufficient proof for such a striking conclusion; notwithstanding, the presence in his poetic universe of the “theme itself”, so it seems, can be assumed on rather legitimate grounds.

It would not be inappropriate (following Jasenskii) to link the overall poetics of “Night violet” to the mystical and life-creationist aesthetic of the German romantics. In addition to Heine, Blok also evidently warmed to a character from a work of the German life-creationist poet Novalis (one of the pioneers of European romantic life-creation), the eponymous hero of Heinrich von Ofterdingen who spent his life “in pursuit of the blue flower”. Blok himself summarized this (in a similar spirit) in his marginal notes, “life will become a dream, and a dream will become life”.

The “German” influence in Blok’s poem is made clearer, as Jasenskii justifiably observes, by the fact that the Russian title of the poem itself, “Nochnaia Fialka”, is a calque from the German Nachtviole; in Russian, the flower is called вечерница. Noting in passing that this word is also a designation for the planet Venus, Jasenskii demonstrates a fundamental identification of the “nighttime flower of the violet” with the longed-for maiden—essentially, the mysteriously-seen object of Blok’s intimate desire. Nonetheless, he unfortunately does not establish any logical connection between the “Venus flower” (the night violet) and the whole cultic complex of ideas and aspectual characteristics that are naturally prevalent in the religious “sphere of Venus”. In addition to the usual details of the (Veneric) discourse of love, I would like to call attention to one special aspect, specifically what the Romans called mons Veneris, the mountain of Venus: is it (and generally, the whole perineal area of the female body, covered with a moss of hair) not the most natural place for the flowers of Venus—namely, the night violets—to grow?

One cannot but agree with Jasenskii’s observations, expressed in these reflections: “Essentially, it [“Night Violet”] is the autobiographical reminiscences of a personal, real-life text”. Also valuable is the conceptual juxtaposition that Jasenskii makes between the poetics of “Night Violet” and the moist topography of the swamps, the Shakespearean “bubbles of the earth” – the marshy and sultry dominant of Blok’s poetry of this period.

Blok’s close friend Evgenii Ivanov observes in his recollections of the poet, somewhat enigmatically, about another erotic, life-creationist biographical aspect of the poem: the peculiar “astringency” of the Night Violet’s “wine”. The “mystery” of the night violet is directly correlated with this gustatory astringency. We read that Ivanov and Blok are drinking wine in a certain “public house” (a tavern): “the wine wasn’t expensive, but it was ‘astringent’, mainly, with the ‘purplish sheen’ of the

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643 It would be logical to recall here the important book that was published during Blok’s life time (and to which Jasenskii does not refer). As might be imagined, this work reflected many “collective ideas” of (among others) the Russian decadents about the mystical layer of German Romanticism. The publication to which I refer is the book (in fact, the debut one) of the 23-year-old Victor Zhirmunskii – German Romanticism and Contemporary Mysticism.


645 Ibid.: 66.
night violet, and the whole mystery was in this”. One can only guess, of course, exactly what kind of enigmatic gustatory astringency is concealed in the whole mystery of the night violet. It is well-known, for example, that at the time Blok was writing this poem, the process of creation itself was for him, in his own manifesto-like words, his “anatomical theater” (“мои анатомический театр”). In this same source, we find Blok’s paradigmatically significant declaration: “In other words, I have already made my own life art”. What exactly does Blok’s “anatomical theater” mean, and how his poetic predilections for certain parts of the female intimate apparatus, among other things, are relevant to it? It is impossible to deny the quite significant real-life subtext of the poem, both on the level of its genesis of creation and from the angle of the specific psychosomatic events that accompanied the writing of it.

To carry out a supplemental attempt at interpreting Blok’s somewhat nebulous life-creationist text, I might utilize the particular memoiristic reports that, in part, served as the original inspiration for my analysis.

In 2001, the Moscow publisher B.S.G.-Press issued a reprint of the three-volume memoir-epic of Roman Gul’, entitled I Took Russia Away: An Apologia for Emigration. In the third volume of the work, entitled “Russia in America”, we find a

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647 “Thus, it was accomplished: my own magical world became the arena of my personal actions, my ‘anatomical theater’ or puppet show, where I myself play a role alongside my amazing puppets (ecce homo!).” (“Итак, свершилось: мой собственный волшебный мир стал ареной моих личных действий, моим “анатомическим театром”, или балаганом, где я сам играю роль наряду с моими изумительными куклами (ecce homo!)”). See Блок 1962: 429.
648 “The complete quotation: “In other words, I have already made my own life art (a tendency that is quite strikingly permeating all of European decadence). Life has become art, I have said the magic words, and, at last, what I (personally) call the Unknown Woman has arisen before me: a puppet beauty, a blue phantom, a miracle of the earth”. (“Иначе говоря, я уже сделал свою собственную жизнь искусством (тенденция, проходящая очень ярко через все европейское декадентство). Жизнь стала искусством, я произвел заклинания, и предо мною возникло наконец то, что я (лично) называю Незнакомкой: красавица кукла, синий призрак, земное чудо”). See Блок 1962-б: 429. Blok links the infernally-erotic, purely demonistic image of his “real-life” heroine to the tradition of Russian artistic diabolicism, which with him acquires an additional connection to his own life-creation, that is, the creation of life through the means of art and the transformation of his own life into art: “The Unknown Woman. She is by no means simply a lady in a black dress with ostrich feathers on her hat. She is a diabolical fusion of many worlds, predominantly of a blue one and a violet one. If I possessed the means of Vrubel’, I would create a Demon; but everyone does what he is allotted to do. What is created in such a way—by the incantational will of the artist and the help of the many minor demons that wait attendance on any artist—has neither beginning nor end: it is not alive, not dead. ... It is the creation of art. For me, this is a fait accompli. ... [W]hat am I to do with these worlds, what must I do with my own life, which from now on has become art, for alongside me lives my creation—not alive, not dead, a dark blue phantom”. (“Незнакомка. Это вовсе не просто дама в черном платье со страусовыми перьями на шляпе. Это – дьявольский сплав из многих миров, преимущественно синего и лилового. Если бы я обладал средствами Врубеля, я бы создал Демона; но всякий делает то, что ему назначено. Созданное таким способом — заклинательной волей художника и помощью многих мелких демонов, которые у всякого художника находятся в услужении, — не имеет ни начала ни конца; оно не живое, не мертвое. ... Это – создание искусства. Для меня это свершившийся факт. ... что мне делать с этими мирями, что мне делать и собственной жизнью, которая отныне стала искусством, ибо со мной рядом живет мое создание — не живое, не мертвое, синий призрак”).” See Блок 1962-б: 429-430.
description of the encounters between Gul’ and Nikolai Valentinov (pseud. of Nikolai Vol’skii), the author of various books including Two Years with the Symbolists. (In that collection of memoirs the curious panorama of Valentinov’s personal contacts with the famous figures of the “younger generation” of Russian symbolists in the 1920s unfolds).

In the third volume of his recollections Gul’ writes about his conversation with Valentinov, which touched on Blok and his “Night Violet”: “To the same degree that Valentinov had a positive attitude toward Belyi and forgave him everything, he hated (truly hated) Aleksandr Blok. [Valentinov] himself told me how he, as the editor of Russkoe Slovo, had imposed a ‘taboo’ on Blok. ... Not understanding this at all, I persisted with [Valentinov] to explain to me the reason for this hatred. One can like or dislike Blok, I said, and there are certain things of his that I don’t like, for example, the ‘Woman clothed with sun’, but Blok is a great poet, and there is no disputing that he, of course, would be an embellishment for Russkoe Slovo. ‘The poet is not the problem. The person is,’ Vol’skii said. ‘I despised him!’ ‘But why?!’, I persisted. Finally, Vol’skii relented. ‘OK, I’ll tell you, but let this be between us. Once, when he was quarreling with Blok and not seeing him, Belyi told me what the “night violets” were meant to imply in Blok’s work. And after that, Blok was physically repulsive to me.’ ‘I can’t imagine what ‘night violets’ are meant to imply’, I persisted. Vol’skii didn’t at all want to say it, but he finally did: ‘OK, I see you’re so intrigued by these ‘night violets’ that I’ll tell you. The ‘night violets’ are supposed to imply a certain small part of women’s genitalia, which, medically speaking, is the clitoris. In vulgar terms, it is the ‘s—l’. And it was these ‘night violets’ (of the prostitutes) that he was so interested in, he loved them. As soon as I heard this from Belyi, of course, Blok physically repulsed me”.

Blok’s poem, although it is rife with obscure passages, nonetheless allows the reader’s attention to focus on a number of recurrent aspects of color, mood, scent, and the general moist, marshy, boggy environment surrounding the journey described by

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649 What is elided here is the word “сикель” (or “секель”), as the clitoris is called in a more “archaic” Russian. See Blinkiewicz 1911: 24-27. See also Drummond and Perkins 1980: 71. The word “sikel’” is found, in particular, in Pushkin’s lyceum poem, “Barkov’s Shadow”. See Philologica, 1996, v.3, 187: “И стариц нежный сикелик / Зардел и зашатался” => “the old ladies’ clitoris grew ardent and aroused”.

the poet, the journey which the lyrical hero or Blok’s lyrical double makes. In it, we encounter key elements of the poetics of this text: moisture; the sponginess and marshiness of the swamp; softish, flexible broken edges; redness, purplishness, blossoming. Prostituted women—women “for sale”—crop up here and there in the poem.

Дождь начинал моросить.
Далеко, у самого края,
Там, где небо, устав прикрывать
Поступки и мысли сограждан моих,
Упало в болото,—
Там краснела полоска зари.651

(“Rain was starting to flow,/ far away, near the border,/ where the Sky got tired to cover/ all the actions and thoughts of my compatriots/ the Sky there fell into a swamp,/ there was a reddish strip of the Dawn”).

The allegory of the female erotic organ (if we examine the physiological aspect of the problem) here might be represented by the reddening band of the dawn’s light. The accent Blok puts seems to be on the prostitute-like females which emerge at the very beginning of the poem (“women abusively decorated with make-up”):

... Разное видели мы:
Он видел извозчики дрожки,
Где молодые и лысые франты
Обнимали раскрашенных женщин...
Над равниною мокрой торчали
Кочерыжки капусты, березки и вербы.
И пахло болотом.652

(“We saw it all differently:/ He saw a cab / where young and bald dandies / were hugging made up women… / All over a wet plain / Cabbage stalks, small birches and pussy-willows were bristling / And it reeked of swamp”).

Alongside the particular significance of the swamp-like imagery in Blok’s poetics,653 we should also pay attention here to such physiologically denoted marker-words as in the “moist plain”, and the “protruding cabbage stalks”. The moist plain embeds the cabbage stalks into itself. Perhaps one could speculate here about the poet’s unconsciously mythopoetic recourse to the archaic erotic mythologem of “moist mother earth”—including a representation of the earth as the female sex organ (the uterus).654 Similar motifs continue later on: “...На болоте, от кочки до кочки, /

652 Ibid.
653 Among the characteristics of the swamp are the fluid sucking of an object into itself, as well as moisture—a sultry moisture that originates from rising vapors and inner liquid discharges.
654 See: Рабинович 1994: 466-467. V.I. Zazykin’s recent article is important, with its essential up-to-date bibliography on this issue: Зазыкин 2002: 39-88. Compare Zara Mintz’s more “chaste” interpretation of the earth in the context of Blok’s poem Her Arrival (Ее прибытие): “[In Blok’s text], ‘earth’ is not only the traditional romantic image of happiness achieved and the antonym of the ‘stormy
Nad stoychey i rzhavoy vodoy…” (“Near a swamp, on hummocks and tussocks, upon the stagnant and rusty waters…”)

The urban prostitutes turn out to be definitely significant to Blok’s “late” (life)creation. These antimonically infernal Unknown Women are latently present in many of Blok’s creations, and even here, do not allow themselves to be ignored:

В час презренья к лучшим из нас,
Кто падений своих не скрывая,
Без стыда продает свое тело
И на пыльно-трескучих тротуарах
С наглой скромностью смотрит в глаза,
Что в такой оскорбительный час
Всем доступны виденья.
Что такой же бродяга, как я,
Или может быть ты, кто читаешь
Эти строки с любовью или злобой,
Может видеть лилово-зеленый
Безмятежный и чистый цветок,
Что зовется Ночью Фиалкой.

(“In the hour of contempt to the best among us / Who, never concealing their downfalls / Sell their bodies without shame / And on dusty and stridulous pavements / Look straight into eyes with impudent modesty, / That in such an insulting hour / All can see visions / That a vagabond just like me / Or maybe you who are reading / These lines with love or rage, / Can see a lilac-green / Serene and innocent flower / That is called a Nocturnal Violet”).

sea’ or struggle and sufferings. ’Earth’ here is also a concept derived from a democratic, realistic understanding of the world, the antonym of ’sky’... ’Earth’ is also the motherland, an image ... that would be destined to occupy such an important place in Blok’ poetry”. See: Минц 2004: 63. The literature devoted to the chthonic aspect par excellence of the mythology of the earth, its rootedness and native connection with the “lower” pantheon of the world of the dead and with the subterranean realm, is incredibly extensive (going back as far as Altheim’s older study: Altheim 1931). In his well-known monograph about the enigmatic Dacian god-figure Zalmoxis, Mircea Eliade linked the chthonic nature of this character (found at least as far back as Herodotus) to the etymology of its name, deriving Zalmoxis from the common root zamml- ‘earth’ (Thracian zemelen) - from the common Indo-European indication of ‘soil’ or ‘earth’: ghemel -zam. It is also no coincidence that this god, as he was “dying away”, escaped underground – via a cave. See Eliade 1972: 44-45.

655 See the series of measuredly skeptical articles by Mikhail Bezrodnnyi: Безродный 1986; 1987; 1988; 1989. Hilary Fink’s essay provides a possible intuitively-philosophical subtext to the image of Blok’s Unknown Woman: Fink 2000: 79-91. Among other things in this essay, the “Kierkegaardian” pun in Blok’s famous “they shout in vino veritas” (p. 81-82) is extremely interesting. See also Йованович 1980: 43-58; and Bowlt 1975: 352-359. Compare Mintz’s summarizing statement: “The heroine of the ‘second volume’ [Unknown Woman] is indeed closely connected to her predecessor, The Beautiful Lady, while at the same time clearly separated from her, counterposed to her as a sort of an ‘antithesis’”. See Минц 2004: 77. In some other place Mintz tells: “Her [i.e., the Unknown Woman’s] innocence and modesty turn out to be a sham; she is a prostitute, a ‘licentious maiden’; her lodging, which had seemed like a temple, is now a bordello, a house with red doors. For Blok, the appeal of the ‘fallen maidens’ is one of the chief motifs”. See: Минц 2004а: 40-41.

Without doubt, this fragment is central to my analysis, since, in one section, it unambiguously links into a single whole both of these constituent elements: 1) essentially, it is all about prostitutes; 2) in direct conjunction with them, it mentions some kind of purple/lilac flower called the “Night Violet”. The allegorical naming of the female sex organ with an archetypical word for a flower is in fact completely normative in literature, having become almost a sort of “commonplace”. Furthermore, Roman Gul’ (according to Valentinov) mentioned precisely this: the “night violets”, which symbolized the clitorises of the prostitutes. To those Blok was so strongly and obsessively attached. And, in fact, as we see, the act of knowing the “Night Violet” through vision and touch can take place, according to Blok, precisely at a certain prostitutes’ time—which is, of course, predominantly at night, not in the daytime. And the Night Violet, in particular its swampy flowering, as we can see, is in some imperceptible way connected to prostitutes and their activities—to the physical scent of their essence.

I should add that a whole series of Blok’s alliterative self-characterizations in the text (for example, “a wanderer, like me”, which apparently reflects Blok’s well-known nocturnal “wanderings” among the seedy places in St. Petersburg; his visits of the licentious maidens; alcoholic frenzy; and others) allow us to conclude that this “literary text” represents a living correlate to the “real-life biographical text” of its author, portraying, as we can assume, certain real circumstances enveloping the poet at this period of his life. By this I mean the circumstances attendant to his writing of the poem, wherein were reflected the poet’s real life and concrete details that in particular describe what really occurred (as previously mentioned) on November 16, 1905, as well as the dream that he dreamed around that time.

Also important is the text of a letter Blok wrote to his close friend, Evgenii Ivanov, on December 3, 1905: “Dear Zhenia, I am now happily sitting at home and not going to see Merezhkovskiis. And you are probably there. If you only knew what has happened to me this week! I have gone out twice a day: first to the Public Library (Vengerov gave me work, and then [I went] to the ‘literary meetings’), from which I came home in the morning, drunk. ... On November 16th, I dreamed something that I am still feeling even now. Such amazing dreams happen only once a year or two”.

Russian Authors of the 20th Century: A Bibliographical Dictionary has a detail about the period of interest to me that establishes a more acceptable scholarly consensus that is relevant at least to Russian authors as regards the topic of eternal feminine imagery. The dictionary states that the single and all-encompassing image of the Eternal Feminine “disintegrated in Blok’s consciousness” into various feminine aspects. These include “the enigmatic ‘Unknown Woman’, the ‘vulgar prostitute’, and simply a woman he might meet”. And with an “inexorable logic”, the veil falls

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657 “Милый Женя. Сейчас с радостью сижу дома и не иду к Мережковским. А ты верно там. Если бы ты знал, что было со мной всю неделю! Два раза в день ходил: сначала в Публичную библиотеку (Венгеров дал работу, а потом на ‘литературные собрания’, откуда пьяный, возвращался утром. ...16 ноября мне приснилось нечто, чем я живу до сих пор. Такие изумительные сны бывают раз в год - два года...”. See: Блок 1963-б: 141-142.

from Blok’s eyes, and the “inexorable features” of insane deformity “torment the beautiful face”.  

Let me add, however, that the image of “Unexpected joy” (Нечаянная радость) was far from unambiguous to Blok. Without doubt, part of the construct of this issue was the paradigm of an iconic conceptualization of the Theotokos, relating to the famous icon of “Unexpected Joy” (a joy that there were no hopes of achieving). The popular tradition holds the icon of the Divine Mother called “Unexpected Joy” that usually depicts a kneeling youth at prayer. The story about the healing of this youth of his carnal passion through this holy icon is described in the works of Saint Dmitrii of Rostov, The Drenched Fleece (Руно Орошенное). In this story, the youth was as usual praying before the image of the Immaculate Virgin when he suddenly noticed that the picture had, as it were, come to life: the wounds of Jesus Christ had opened, and were really bleeding. And then the youth saw the abyss of his descent into sin revealed, then, in tears, lengthhily begged the Virgin and the Savior to forgive him. Finally he was given the gift of the unexpected joy of forgiveness and abandonment of his sins.  

Obviously, the issue of a carnal fall from grace, and the complex of ideas about overcoming the “bodily passions” disturbed Blok quite a bit.

We should also consider the symbolic characterization of Blok’s Unknown Woman prostitute by Iurii Annenkov: “Students in St. Petersburg, all sorts of students, knew Blok’s ‘Unknown Woman’ by heart. Also the ‘girl’ Wanda, who hung about the entrance of the ‘Kvisiana’ Restaurant and whispered to the young passersby, ‘I’m that there UnKNOWN Woman. You wanna get ta KNOW me?’ The ‘girl’ named Murka from ‘Jar’, who would cajole on Bol’shoy Prospekt, ‘Pencil-guy! Would you please treat your Unknown Babe? I’m freezing’. Two girls from the same household on Pod’icheskaia Street, Son’ka and Laika, dressed like sisters, would wander down Nevsky [Prospekt] (from Mikhajlovskaya Street to Liteiny Prospekt and back) with black ostrich feathers attached to their hats. They would smile and say, ‘We’re a pair of Unknown Ladies. You can get an electric dream while you’re awake. You won’t regret it, you, a cucumber-with-a-beard…’.”  

Remarkably, in her commentaries to the Unknown Woman O.A. Kuznetsova did not include the significant list of published scholarly or any other extensive materials about this suggestive text. Characteristically, the commentators to Blok’s collected works edition interpret the “Unknown woman” in a strange and quite limited way. Several times, they recall the query of N. Abramovich, “Who is this

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660 On the importance of the “drenched fleece” story for the development of Russian life-creation (in the contexts of alchemy and Argonautism) see my article: Иоффе 2005: 129-135. There are several Russian icons called “Unexpected Joy”.
unknown woman?”, but for some reason do not seem to want to find a firm, comprehensible answer to it. American scholar Daniel Rancour-Laferriere analyzed the antinomic poetic metaphysics of many Russian authors in his essay, “Reconciling the Genius of Pure Beauty with the Babylonian Harlot”, where he provides a psychological basis for the possibility of a one-time existence in Pushkin’s consciousness of a “delightful vision” and of “Miss Kern, who with God’s help I screwed the other day”. 663

In her recent work Olga Matich quite deliberately insists on the “fallenness” and overall antithetical “infernal” quality of the image of Blok’s Unknown Woman, which I also mentioned just previously: “The poet identifies the antithesis of symbolism with his lady under a veil. She is called the ‘Unknown Woman’, a mysterious woman from a St. Petersburg street through whose modern-day face the ancient Maiden shines. ... She arrives clothed in silk garments, in mists and perfume that suggest antiquity. ...Symbolizing her connection to the underground world and death, the feathers on her hat are ‘funereal’. She is the dead body of history, the resurrection of which the poet discovers behind the dark veil”. 664 The image of the “Unknown Lady” is therefore closely related to the urban eroticism of Symbolism. 665

Taking this conceptualization of the life-creationist “Night Violet” text as a point of departure, in the light of Blok’s theme of the prostitute clitoris (feminine sensuality) as discussed above, I can now attempt to look into other selected aspects of this poetic text.

И запомнилось мне,  
Что в избе этой низкой  
Веял сладкий дурман,  
Оттого, что болотная дрема  
За плечами моими текла,  
Оттого, что пронзан был воздух  
Зацветаньем Фиалки Ночной,  
Оттого, что на праздник вечерний  
Я не в брачной одежде пришел,  
Был я нищий бродяга,  
Посетитель ночных ресторанов... 666
(“And it stuck in my memory / That in this squat log house / A Sweet, befuddling haze was hanging / Because the marshy drowsiness / Was flowing behind my shoulders / Because the air was full / With the blossoming of Nocturnal Violet /

665 Quite significant appears to be the connection between mythopoetic images of the “whore” and the urbanistic poetry of the internation symbolist movement in Sharon Hirsh’s book, recently published by Cambridge University Press, Hirsh 2004. (See especially, the fourth and fifth chapters, “The Sick City” and “The City Woman”, 103-217.) I also analyze the topic of the “urban woman” and the poetics of European symbolism in a recent essay: Ioffe 2008: 19-47. There exists a scholarly bibliography on the theme of “cities-as-harlots” (important since biblical times). A characteristic and successful example is the recent article by Sergei Nekliudov, which studies this issue based on Russian materials: Неклюдов 2005: 361-386.  
666 See Блок 1960: 27.
Because to that evening festival / Not dressed for a wedding I came / A tramp and a beggar was I / A regular of night taverns…

In the context of the woman’s sexual scent, which accompanies any adequate contact between the active “objects of desire”, it is interesting to note expressions of the ambivalently designated sexual presence of a woman in an enclosed space, such as these: “the sweet thorn-apple”; the “swampy slumber” of the evening celebration, permeated with the flowering of the night violet. With this last expression (flowering of the night violet), in my opinion, Blok had in mind the implicit arousal of the female genitalia of a particular woman—perhaps one that he had met during his usual urban wanderings. Further on, following the development of the theme of the “night violet”, we encounter another telling scene:

...и прядет и прядет королевна,
Опустив над работой пробор.
Сладким сном одурманила нас,
Опоила нас зельем болотным,
Окружила нас сказкой ночной,
А сама все цветет и цветет,
И болотами дышит Фиалка,
И беззвучная кружится прялка,
И прядет и прядет и прядет.... 667

(“…And the princess keeps spinning / bowing her parted hair over her work / She has befuddled us with sweet sleep / Besotted us with the potion of mire / Encircled us with her nightly tale / While herself she keeps blooming / And the Violet is breathing with mires / And her soundless distaff is spinning / And spinning and spinning and spinning..”).

Spinning and the rotation of the spindle have an explicitly sexual overtone in general, 668 and particularly in this text, since the violet begins to open and blooms as if in parallel to the whole process of spinning. This nocturnal tale has a perceptibly “swampy taste”.

Я сижу на болоте.
Над болотом цветет,
Не старея, не зная измены,
Мой лиловый цветок,
Что зову я - Ночною Фиалкой.

667 Ibid.
668 The sexually marked allusiveness of the image of the spindle can be speculatively discerned, for example, in fairy tales. This is particularly true of the tales of Charles Perrault, wherein the famous initiational “puncturing” of the girl has a peculiar sexually marked meaning of phallic penetration. On the mechanism through which this psychology is shaped, see (in addition to the well-known work of Erich Fromm), for example, Дикман 2000 (especially the chapter “Fairy tale motifs in dreams and fantasies”, 62-87). For an analysis of the poem’s images using various elements of Jungian philosophy and psychology, see Sagatov 1984: 271-287.
(“I sit by a swamp / Over the swamp is blossoming / Knowing neither age nor treason / My lilac flower / That I call The Nocturnal Violet.”)

In my opinion, Blok metaphorically compares the lilac flower of the night violet to some sort of feminine corporeal nature:

Но Ночная Фиалка цветет,
и лиловый цветок ее светел.
И в зеленой ласкающей мgle
Слышу волн круговое движенье,
И больших кораблей приближение..
Так заветная прялка прядет...
...Что нечаянно Радость придет
И пребудет она совершенной.
И Ночная Фиалка цветет.669
(“Yet Nocturnal Violet blossoms / And fair is its lilac flower / And in the green caressing haze / I can hear the round-going motion of waves / And the big ships approaching... / This is how the secret distaff is spinning... / ...That the Joy will suddenly come / And abide forever in perfection/ And Nocturnal Flower is blooming”).

We can only speculate about the precise nature of this “joy” that will come and that will be perfect. Alongside the explicit reference to the Icon of the Mother of God, an entire suggestive array of intersubjective meanings arises here.

This would be an appropriate point at which to turn to Belyi’s Berlin memoirs about Blok. Belyi’s reminiscences are remarkably in tune with the statements of Roman Gul’, which in fact constituted the basis for my interpretation of “Night Violet”. In the first issue of the émigré journal Epopeja, of which he was the founding editor, Belyi consciously sets aside a certain space for a description of the text of this poem. From these meditations on Belyi’s friend/enemy, we can draw out something that is significant to the subject of the nature of Blok’s night violets.

Belyi emphasizes the importance in Blok’s poem of the sultry “slippery swamps” for the growth of the Night Violet.670 In a special section of his memoirs, titled “Night Violet” in a way suggesting a small subchapter, Belyi describes a certain episode from his association with Blok that, in my opinion, can be regarded as a sort of reconstruction of that which Valentinov much later recounted to Gul’.

Belyi observes in his memoirs: “on one occasion, Blok was especially trusting with me. We were having tea in the dining room; he took me to his bedroom, saying that he needed to impart something to me privately, without Liuba there; he sat me down on the sofa and then tried to express to me that he had just arrived at an amazing, very important inner realization; this realization was tied to his perception of a dark purple flower that smelled strongly of violets: ‘You know, it smells so sultry: the purple color is so night-like...’”. Belyi goes on to develop this subject further (he refers to Blok as “A.A.”): “A.A., bending down to me with excitement,  

669 See Блок 1960: 27.
kept trying to tell me that he had learned a lot from live-entering [вживание] a acrid-smelling violet-colored or dark-lilac shade; this shade somehow strangely distracted him from what was happening; and some kind of dark, lilac-colored, new, most enormous world was revealed to him. What was this violet color? And then A.A. looked at me inquisitively. But I was confused.  

Subsequently, the scene intensifies: “While Blok was quietly and excitedly telling me again about his experience of that dark-lilac color, I was feeling uneasy: it was if someone had put a brazier full of coal in the room; I could smell the fumes; it was like Lucifer’s fumes; I glimpsed a second time the ‘jaws of the night’ that had once before burst open before me, from having a conversation with Blok in a meadow; I saw Blok receding into deep night; I knew that I couldn’t answer him, because Blok wouldn’t believe me, and would be offended; I answered, ‘Yes, that lilac shade has the utmost exquisiteness’”.  

Nonetheless, the situation was far from improving, and Belyi started to feel even worse: “And it got stuffy again; ... and this confusion—the dark-lilac shade, the violet color, the infernal smell; I felt crushed by A. A.’s frankness with me. ... [H]e didn’t see my secret thoughts: consternation for Blok, being led into the ‘dark-lilac’ night from the blinding rosy-gold atmosphere; then he read ‘Night Violet’ to me in its unfinished form; in it, he expressed the experience of the ‘lilac’ color and of the new realizations connected to this ‘lilac’”.

Belyi continues: “The Night Violet, and the sensation of the lilac color was a maturing leitmotif for Blok at that time; and the Night that he wrote was born from that leitmotif: ... I sat on the sofa with Blok for a very long time that night; he read the draft of ‘Night Violet’ to me, excitedly emphasizing his perceptions of the lilac color; and I was suffocating; ... We sat there together for a long time; then it got quiet, and we returned to tea; he was silent: the sensation of what I had learned was weighing on me; [Liubov’ and Blok’s mother] were looking at us; they knew: they must not ask...”

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671 “Однажды Блок был особенно доверчив со мною; сидели в столовой, за чаем; повел в свою спальню, сказал, что ему нужно что-то поведать, отдельно, без ‘Любы’; меня усадив на диван, он пытался мне выразить, что теперь он пришел к удивительному, очень важному внутреннему узнанью; узнанье свяжилось с восприятием сильно-пахнущего фиалкою темно-лилового цвета: – ‘Ты знаешь, он пахнет так душно: лиловый цвет такой и ночной...’. И далее Белый продолжает и развивает всё ту же тему: ‘...А.А., наклоняя лицо надо мною с волнением все пытался сказать, как он много узнал от вживания в едко пахучий фиалковый, темно-лиловый оттенок; оттенок его как-то странно увел от прошедшего; и открылся ему такой темный, лиловый и новый, огромнейший мир. Что такое фиолетовый цвет? И – А.А. посмотрел на меня испытующе. Я же смутился”. See: Белый 1922б: 264.

672 “...пока А.А. тихо, взволновано пересказывал мне восприятие этого темно-лилового цвета, я чувствовало нехорошо себя: точно поставили в комнату полную углей жаровню; угар я почувствовал; тот угар Люцифера; “паста ночи”, которая мне растаянулась однажды от разговора с А.А. на лугу, я увидел вторично; увидел А.А. уходящим в глубокую ночь; знал: ответить ему не могу, потому, что А.А. – не поверит, обидится; я ответил: – Да, в этом лиловом оттенке - предел утонченности”. Ibid.: 278-279.

673 “И опять стало душно; ....и это смешенье - темно-лиловый оттенок, фиалковый, люциферический запах; так откровенною со мной А.А. был раздавлен. ... не видел моих тайных мыслей: испуга за Блока, ведомого в ‘темно-лиловую’ ночь из слепительной розово-золотой атмосферы; тут он прочитал мне ‘Ночную Фиалку’ свою в неотделанном виде; он выразил в ней переживания ‘лилового’ цвета и новых узнаний, соединенных с ‘лиловым’”. Ibid.: 281.
about the conversation the two of us had had; I was unhappy, and suffocating; and I left as soon as I could. Blok still hadn’t noticed anything; he had evoked an oppressive impression in me by acquainting me with his ‘lilac secret’’.  

There is also the fragment from the “Berlin” edition of Belyi’s memoir entitled Beginning a Century (“Начало века”), which helps to clarify some of the significant events in this context. Belyi wrote (again, referring to Blok as “A.A.”):

“And indeed, it was not without reason that A. A.’s obsession with the VIOLET SHADE frightened me in 1905: just six years later, his inhalations of the SHADE into himself expelled a most bitter phrase about the identification of this colorful tint that had taken place within him: ‘LILAC WORLDS engulfed Lermontov, too... And Gogol’. THEY ALL DIED FROM THEM: And Vrubel’, and Komissarzhevskaya’. I remembered all of this in my conversation with A.A.; and I toyed with the thought that these LILAC worlds carried him off into the night! Night became a threshold and an ordeal... I recalled what Mintslova had said about the forces that destroy us: and about the ENEMY that destroys us, I knew, A.A.’s obsession with Strindberg, the author of HELL, was an attraction to a person that had experienced something akin to what A.A. had... This HELL, and all the DEVILS connected to it that were HAUNTING HIM, manifested themselves in my imagination as the experience of a threshold”.

As we can see in Belyi’s reminiscences, as well as in the text of the poem itself, the concealed unnamable “thing” has at least two perceptible and significant qualities: a dark-purple color and a pungent odor that can be associated with a “slippery swamp”, which causes a suffocating effect on a person that “sniffs” it.

Moreover, when one takes into account the things linked with the images of night life and “sex for sale” in Blok’s creative universe, one may believe that what is meant is indeed the clitoris of prostitutes—of these infernal urban “unknown women” in whom, as far as we can tell, Blok was so obsessively interested. On the basis of the junctions of motifs and semantics, we can conclude that this “purplishness” and these “night violets” are in fact related to the theme of “frightening” femininity perceived as “hell”, “mother earth”, and a muddy/slippery
chthonic swamp. Furthermore, I should add that (as is well-known) the subject matter of swamps is usually linked to the wider mythological complex of St. Petersburg and the “Petersburg text”. It is quite likely that precisely this connotation is specifically to be found in Night Violet. As Zara Mintz observed, Blok’s themes of the city, the swamps, and all sorts of poisonous effluvia, combined with love for sale, can refer back to the quite real contaminations and textual subcurrents from Gogol’ and Dostoevskii and their descriptions of “infernal” Petersburg.

This is how Blok’s life-creationist mode is pieced together, a mode in which he approaches quite closely in his erotic-somatic and poetic creativity the additional strategies of mystical gnosticism, which combines the vulgar matters of physiology with a mystical (and literal) deification of a human.

The theme of the “frightful” violet-colored narcotic mist from which the Night Violet flower grows is far from isolated in Blok. In his article, “From the Square to the Green Meadow” (“С площади на Луг Зеленый”), he in particular records: “The rider sees a milky fog with a violet-colored gleam. A gigantic unheard-of flower—the Night Violet—is staring him straight in the eyes with the gigantic wide-eyed gaze of a bride. And there is beauty in this gaze, and despair, and happiness such as no one on earth has known, since when one has known this happiness, he will forever circle and circle around the swamps, from hillock to hillock, in a violet-colored fog, under a big green star”.

There exists an extensive scholarship devoted to the semantics of color which relate to those “lilac worlds” of Blok. Blok himself would write about all the relevant poetic “counterparts” and about “life that becomes art” in his article, “On the Current State of Russian Symbolism”. One cannot understand the detailing and emphasis on the physical pungency of the Night Violet’s lilac color in isolation from Blok’s symbolist perception of the world, which theurgically constructed these most “frightening lilac worlds”: “If these worlds exist, and everything described could have and did take place (but I cannot know that), then it would be strange to see us in a...” Scholarly concept developed by the late academician V.N. Toporov.


In the context of the “Simonian” construction of the poetic “lyrical myth” in Blok, we must remember the work of D.M. Magomedova, which provides the reference to the poet’s autobiographical myth-creation: Магомедова 1997: 70-77.

Blok describes his views on the symbolism of color with regard to ‘Russian Symbolism’ in his apocalyptically-tinged 1905 text “Colors and Words” (which can also be compared to Belyi’s treatise entitled “Sacred Colors”). For a general descriptive account that enumerates all the basic colors encountered in the three volumes of Blok’s collected works, see Милер-Будницкая 1930: 79-144.

See also N.A. Fateeva’s recent article “Три цвета: голубой, черный, красный. Поэзия Блока как источник интертекстуальных заимствований” (елтр. pub, http://www.humlang.newmail.ru/articles/blok.htm), as well as Kirill Taranovsky’s seminal studies rendered in Тарановский 2000. Also important, in the context of the general discussion of Blok’s color worlds, is the systematic overview in a German monograph: Peters 1981.
different state from the one in which we are now; drink, be happy, and call out to life, they invite us—but our faces are scorched and distorted by the lilac twilight”.

This is probably a reference to the same ‘hellish flame’ that Blok recalled in his article, using Briusov’s imagery: “Like Dante, the subterranean flame must burn your cheeks”. Blok dauntingly asks, “Why has the golden sword grown dim, the lilac-blue worlds surged and merged with this world, producing chaos, making art from life, banishing the blue phantom from its depths and desolating the soul?”. Thus Blok’s lilac worlds are explicitly “evil signs” of an erotic Inferno, of the “symbolic diabolicalness” as it was studied by Aage Hansen-Löve. Scrutinizing the poetical imagery of Russian Symbolism, Hansen-Löve discusses the lilac theme in the second volume of his Russian Symbolismus. I will quote here some of his observations that link the mystically perceived demonic violet color (that of a violet) with the “unexplained” lilac worlds (including those described eschatologically in an apocalyptic transgression) of what Hansen-Löve defines as Russian “cosmic and mythopoetic symbolism”. The German scholar argues that “the violet or lilac color begins to acquire significance only at a critical moment for mythopoetical symbolism, in the transition toward carnivalesque destruction”. Here one cannot help but think, he holds, of “the predominance of the violet and brownish-gold semitones in symbolist painting, for example in Vrubel’, in the distinctness of such semitones as there are in Blok’s destructive palette. With Bal’mont and [Sergei] Gorodetskii, this process is still hidden in the even-valued multicoloredness of the world of colors, in which the lilac color of the violet is only one of many sign-bearing colors; in Blok, Belyi, and Voloshin, the violet (or lilac) color early on is the most general reflection of a sort of demonic darkening of the dark and light blue colors”. Further on in the same text, the author speaks of the special transformation to which the symbolic series of colors in the poetics of these artists is subjected: “Blok’s poem To Boria (‘Bope’) demonstrates the transformation of mythopoetic color symbolism into a grotesque, carnival form”. As Hansen-Löve points out, some scholars trace the unique color

682 “…если эти миры существуют, а все описанное могло произойти и произошло (а я не могу этого знать), то было бы странно видеть нас в ином состоянии, чем мы теперь находимся; нам предлагают: пой, веселись и призывай к жизни, а у нас лица обожжены и обезображены лиловым сумраком”. Blok, “О современном состоянии русского символизма”, in Блок 1962а: 432. On this subject, see also Богомолов 1999-а: 186-203.


686 “Фиолетовая или лиловая окраска начинает приобретать значение только в переломный момент для мифопоэтического символизма…. Здесь невольно приходит на ум преобладание фиолетового-коричневато-золотистых полутонов в символистской живописи, к примеру, у Врубеля в точности таких же, что на деструктивной палитре Блока. У Бальмонта и Городецкого этот процесс еще сокрыт в равноценной многоцветности мира красок, где лиловый цвет фиалки – лишь один из многих значащих цветов; у Блока, Белого и Волошина фиолетовый (лиловый)-поначалу было общее отражение некоего демонического потемнения синего и голубого”. See: Hansen-Löve 2003: 448-449.

687 “A sparse snow is falling; The light signal is in front of us; the light is green; the sky is burning wuth lilac; the violet color is on the snow”. (“Редкий падает снежок /Перед нами-
symbolism of Blok’s cycle *Bubbles of the Earth* (“Пузыри земли”) and particularly the use of such colors as black, violet, and light blue, to the overall symbolism of (Free-)Masonry, noting the fact that at the time Blok was actively studying the works of 18th-century Freemasons (namely, Bolotov and Novikov’s 1904 article). It will be interesting to note, together with the German scholar, that “the main symbolic color for the Freemasons was in any case not violet, as the researchers suggest, but light blue or turquoise”.

And thus, if we regard “Night Violet” as being equal to a lilac color, alongside the “clitoral” version, we must necessarily, by all means correlate this with Blok’s symbolist ‘diabolical’ views. This complex period was directly contiguous with the notion of “eschatological” passage of time, the period of “the threshold” – the time of the first Russian revolution.

In his analysis of Blok’s essay “On the Current State of Russian Symbolism” (О современном состоянии русского символизма) Bogomolov observes: “Coming to the forefront are visual images forced to depict the new [lilac] worlds in which the artist ended up. Let us recall that their original color was purplish-lilac, but later, bluish-violet twilights begin, signifying chaos and even death. Nonetheless, Blok decisively insists on the objectivity and reality of these worlds”.

It appears that Blok’s overall utopian life-creationist aspirations, which I have traced from the early stage of his creative work, gradually develop into new forms of “hidden” intent and of the clandestine desire to reconstruct life with the aid of available material (the physical body and the verbal sign of poetry). *Night Violet*, which I have analyzed *sub specie* Blok’s life-creation and the physiological “esthetics of the lower part of the body”, might be just such an example.

### 3.8. Life-Creationist Transformations in Viacheslav Ivanov

In borrowing and developing Soloviev’s idea of mystical theurgy as a “re-creation” of existing reality, Ivanov shares all the symbolist ideas (of the Merezhkovskiis and their circle) about creating a New, Ideal, God-Equal man. In a similar way, he experiments with “sexual triangles” and uses (although possibly only on the level of intent) homosexual experiments as well. His wife (a writer completely in her own right), Lidia Zinovieva-Annibal, participated in these experiments, supported him in them, and they both attracted various meaningful participants.

After the relative failure to attract the poet Gorodetsky into their sensual life-creationist triangle, they took Margarita Sabashnikova, the young wife of poet Maksimilian Voloshin, into this arrangement. After Zinovieva-Annibal’s death, Ivanov distanced himself from the theosophic-anthroposophic circle symbolized by the figures of Anna Mintzlova and Sabashnikova, her ward. Ivanov selected his

stepdaughter Vera as a continuator of the “spirit” of his late wife, as a mystical “channel” for connecting to her “life beyond the grave” (a role that earlier had been filled by Mintzlova herself).

The myth-creating lifestyle at the Ivanovs’ “Tower” house on Tavricheskaia Street (House 25, Apartment 24) led to the rise of the peculiar meetings known as the “Wednesdays” (or “Ivanov’s Wednesdays”), codified by their frequent chairman, Nikolai Berdiaev. It is well-known that these “Wednesdays” were a “unique” sort of literary-philosophical meetings that took place at this house in the early 1900s. Ivanov and his family had moved to St. Petersburg in July 1905, and already by September, the Ivanovs had begun to arrange friendly meetings for guests on Wednesdays. In this context, Ivanov wrote Briusov on September 20, 1905: “Wednesday is our friends’ day”. The first “Wednesdays” had taken place at the end of August.

As time progressed, the friendly creative gatherings at the Ivanovs’ “Tower” (so called because guests were received in the angular semicircular room on the sixth floor) began to be transformed into rather well-attended nighttime meetings with a set order and well-defined playful rituals. The meetings very soon became quite famous among all the “fashionable” circles of St. Petersburg at the time. Guests usually arrived at the Tower no earlier than eleven o’clock at night, and dispersed “[at the hour of guests’ leaving] when the fat old sun beat down on the roofs”. The first of these “Wednesdays” to be conducted in the spirit of the “new style” of which Belyi also speaks in his memoirs, took place on December 7, 1905; Zinovieva-Annibal described this evening in a letter to M.M. Zamiatinina dated December 11, 1905. The essence of this “new style”, apparently, was the establishment of a special duty for the formal “front-man”, who steered the course of all the intellectual disputations taking place (the meetings usually began with these disputes). We know that Nikolai Berdiaev often assumed the role of chairman at the meetings.

Among the themes that immediately began to play a role in these “Wednesdays”, some were very significant to life-creation. Concepts such as “art and socialism”, “romanticism and the contemporary soul”, “happiness”, “individualism and new art”, “the actor of the future”, “religion and mysticism”, “solitude”, and “mystical anarchism” were passionately debated and discussed. After the disputations, poetry was usually recited, often in a theatrical fashion. Most of the reminiscences state that almost all of the poets who attended the meetings read their own works. A notoriously famous “Wednesday” took place on the night of December 28, 1905. On that Wednesday a police squad unexpectedly showed up at the Ivanovs’ and subjected the twenty-seven guests participating in the meeting to a meticulous search. This nighttime search occasioned Merezhkovskii’s writing of a famous

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690 See the recent informative collection: Шишков 2006. See also Бердяев 1916: 95-100.
693 See Ханзен-Леве’s essay “Искусство как игра” (1996: 8-21).
694 “…в час расхода гостей, когда толстое солнце палило над крышами”. On this see Belyi’s memoirs (1990-a: 82).
696 Vladimir Piast’s letter to Belyi see Ibid.: 236. See also later recollections about this event in Пяст 1997: 107-118.
newspaper pamphlet, in which he requested that the Minister of Internal Affairs return his hat that the soldiers performing the searches had allegedly stolen.

A good description of the makeup of the participants in the Tower meetings at this period is given by a letter written by Zinovieva-Annibal to M. Zamiatnina. This letter is dated January 19, 1906, and describes the meeting on January 18. One can learn many interesting “insider” details from this text and build one’s understanding of what was usually happening there during the weekly meetings. Also important in the context of this letter is the list compiled by Ivanov of all the participants who were present at the meeting. Among the names we find many ‘cultural heroes’ of the era like Berdiaev, Blok, Briusov, Filosofov, Gorodetskii, Kuzmin, Sologub, Aleksandr Kondratiev, Walter Nouvel’, Vladimir Piast, and Aleksei Remizov. Those present were divided in the list by conventional ‘professional’ categories such as “composers”, “artists”, “actors”, and “poets”.697

Besides the people who were already named, there were of course, many others who were part of the cultural, philosophical, and artistic elite of the era who frequently attended Ivanov’s Tower. Andrei Belyi in his memoirs noted that “poets, sectarians, philosophers, god-seekers, and correspondents” had all been present. Piast remarked that, in time, “meta-artists”, “meta-musicians”, and “meta-writers” (as he labelled them)698 began to show up. After some time passed, Berdiaev wrote that the meetings at the Ivanovs’ “lost their intimate character and became too well-attended”.699 The “Wednesdays” continued up until December 1906, when Zinovieva-Annibal became seriously ill with pneumonia. After her return from the hospital in the spring of 1907, only a few scattered meetings were held. In the fall of that year, on October 17, Zinovieva-Annibal died after contracting scarlet fever; as Berdiaev had put it, “the soul [of the ‘Wednesdays’] died” along with her.700

In 1908, the “Wednesdays” were temporarily resurrected, but by then their original character had clearly changed. Blok wrote in a letter to his mother, “The Wednesdays are not the same any more – they are dull and somewhat boring”.701 The general makeup of the attendees changed, as well: particularly, future participants of the Poets’ Workshop began to show up, people such as Anna Akhmatova, Nikolai Gumilev, E. Ju. Kuz’mina-Karavaeva, Osip Mandel’shtam; Aleksei Tolstoi and Velimir Khlebnikov also came. Khlebnikov satirically and allegorically described one of these latter-period “Wednesdays” in his poem, “I Saw the Pitch Boiling” (“Передо мной варился вар”).702

We can conclude that Ivanov’s Tower was one of the most significant centers of St. Petersburg’s literary and life-creationist bohemian life,703 a place where writers together with all kinds of other artists were meeting, living and discussing their aesthetical and philosophical issues.

698 See: Пяст 1997: 75. See also Шруба 2004: 61-62
700 “…умерла душа Сред”. Ibid.: 99.
701 “Среды стали уж не те – серо и скучновато”. See the letter dated 30 November 1908 in Блок, Письма к родным, Ленинград, 1927, vol. 1, 236
703 For the erotic context, see also Пономарева 1988: 87-90.
In the Tower, but outside the “serious Wednesdays”, several other aesthetic circles of a bit more playfully “secret” and “intimate” nature also took shape. One of these was the myth-creating and life-creationist “Hafiz Tavern” or “society of Hafizites”. Each one of the participants in this “society” played his or her own role and had a special mythological name attached to him or her—that is, a sort of theatricalized life-creationist mask. All of this theatricalization of everyday life, like the so-called “Tower Theater” (in which Meyerkhol’d took part) that grew out of it, comprised the essence of the model of life-creation that Ivanov (and his wife, when she was alive) took out into the world. In general, it is firmly established and known that the “friends of Hafiz” constituted a sort of friendly literary circle that existed in 1906 and 1907 in St. Petersburg.

As it is reported in various sources, among the regular members of the Hafizites’s circle were Sergei Auslender, Lev Bakst, Berdiaev, Gorodetskii, Zinovieva-Annibal and Ivanov themselves, Kuzmin, Nouvel’, and Konstantin Somov. The meetings (or “suppers” [вечери], using the word usually limited to ‘The Christ’s Supper) took place in the Tower. The first convened on May 2, 1906, and the next four followed in quick succession. Judging by the correspondence of the participants in the “society”, the Hafizites’ meetings continued on through the first half of 1907. The circle is mentioned for the last time in an August 20 1907 letter from Nouvel’ to Kuzmin: “So, there will no longer be any Hafiz. That’s certain. But maybe something will come up to ‘take its place’. That would be interesting”.

In contrast to the “crowded” “Wednesdays” that were taking place in the Tower in about the same time frame, the “society of Hafizites” kept its more intimate nature. The nature of this “society” had all the features of a sort of closed “circle of initiates”, and in the organization of the meetings, one can observe many formal aspects of a mythopoetic and literary game. Nikolai Bogomolov, who has extensively studied the Hafizites phenomenon, observes that the participants created their own

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705 Cf. Kuzmin’s diary entry, made retrospectively: “The name ‘Hafiz’ came from Viach[eslav] Iv[anov], who was carried away with Perso-Arabs at that time, I think. Besides, there [was] always an association with cabaret and sophistication, and with old Goethe. Iv[anov]’s secret thought was to create Herrenabend as an outlet away from Zinovieva’s passions. ... Jolliest of all were the preparations, when Somov would fashion costumes for us, from a pile of rags and scraps of material. We all used ‘ty’, like in a masquerade, and everyone had [invented] names. ... We drank wine, read poetry (Viach[eslav] Ivanov wrote them specially, Gorodetskii, too), Nouvel’ played something, we would hold forth, that’s about it. ... There were about seven or eight meetings in all, with different amounts of time in between. Its [i.e., the circle’s] influence, however, if one looks back on it now, was more significant than one might suppose, and it spread far beyond the limits of our circle”. (“Название ‘Гафиз’ принадлежало Вяч. Ив., кажется, в то время увлекавшемуся персо-арбами. Притом тут всегда ассоциация с кабачком и с мудрствованием, и со старым Гёте. Тайною мыслью Ив. было создать Herrenabend как отдушину от зиновьевских страстей... ... Всего веселее были приготовления, когда Сомов из вороха тряпок и материй мастерил нам костюмы. Все были на ‘ты’, как в маскараде, и у всех были имена. ... Пили вино, читали стихи (специально сочинял Вяч. Иванов и Городецкий), Нувель что-то играл, рассуждали, вот и все. ... Всего было собраний семь-восемь с разными промежутками. Влияние его, однако, если посмотреть теперь назад, было более значительно, чем это можно было предполагать, и распространялось далеко за пределы нашего кружка”). Quoted in Кузмин 2007: 98-99.
mythology for the circle, with reference to the ancient Eastern and Greek cultures of “merrymaking” and “love poetry”. The most important aspect of the life-creationist activities of the circle, it seems to me, is the fact that practically all the members had their own attached mythopoetic masks and aliases. Accordingly, Ivanov was called “al-Rumi” or “Hyperion”; Zinovieva-Annibal imagined herself to be “Diotima”; Berdiaev, “Solomon”; Kuzmin was either “Antinous” or “Charicles”; Somov, “Aladdin”; Nouvel was known as “Petronius”, “Corsaire”, or “Renouveau”; Bakst, “Apelles”; Gorodetski, “Zane” or “Hermes”; and Auslender, “Ganymede”. In keeping with this new mythology, St. Petersburg was called “Petrobagdad”, and Ivanov’s apartment ascended to the rank of “tabernacle” of Hafiz. [Double apostrophes in entir paragraph]

This circle of participants was roughly portrayed in Ivanov’s poetic narrative, “To the Friends of Hafiz”, which was subtitled “Second Supper. May 8, 1906, in Petrobagdad. Meeting the Guests”:

Ты, АнтинойwХарикл, и ты, о Диотима, 
И ты, утонченник скучающего Рима —
Петроний, иль Корсар, и ты, Ассаргадон,
Иль мудрых демонов начальник w Соломон,
И ты, мой Алaddin, — со мной, Гиперионом,
Дервишем ЭльwРуми, — почтишь гостей поклоном!
...
Друзьяwизбранники, внемлите: пусть измена
Ничья не омрачит священных сих трапез!
Храните тайну их! – Ты, МузаwМельпомена,
Ты, кравчий Ганимед, стремительный Гермес...

(“You, Antinous-Charicles, and you, oh Diotyma / And you, an aesthete of bored Rome – / Petronius, or Le Corsaire, or you, Assargadon / Or you, the master of wise demons, Solomon / And you, my Aladdin – with me, Hyperion, the Dervish El Rumi / – Will honour the guests with a bow! /.../ My friends, the chosen ones, hark: may no one’s treason / Overshadow these sacred meals! / Pray, keep them secret! – You, the muse named Melpomene / You, Ganymed the cupbearer, and you, swift Hermes...).

Those attending the “suppers” were artistically dressed in a corresponding playful manner, and the setting and atmosphere were extremely theatricalized and unusual. Kuzmin noted details appropriate to this atmosphere in his diary: “Ivanov was already dressed, and Somov was dressing others; he is a born costumer. Perhaps more decorative than anyone was Berdiaev, disguised as Solomon. ... The clothes, and the colors, and sitting on the floor, and the semicircular window in the background, and the lights below, all disposed us to a certain freedom of speech, gestures, and feelings. The clothing, the unusual name, and [addressing each other

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707 Ibid.: 70-71
708 See: Иванов 1974: 738-739
informally as] ‘Ty’ [instead of using the formal ‘Vy’], all change the relations [among the participants].”

In 1906, Kuzmin dedicated his own playful poem to those “suppers” where he describes the setting and the nature of the meetings. It is titled “In a Dainty Garland, the inscription on the Frieze tells ‘This is the Tavern of the Sage and Poet Hafiz’” (Нежной гирляндою надпись гласит у карниза: ‘Здесь кабачок мудреца и поэта Гафиза’):

Мы стояли,  
Молча ждали  
Пред плющом обвитой дверью.  
Мы ведь знали:  
Двери звали  
К тайному дрому безделью.  
....С новым зельем  
Новосельем  
...Тут улыбки лишь пристойны.  
Нам утеха -  
Привкус меха,  
И движеня кравчих стройны.  
В нежных пудрах  
Златокудрых  
Созерцаем мы с любовью,  
В круге мудрых,  
Любомудрых  
Чашы вин не пахнут кровью.  
Мы - как пчелы,  
Вьемся в долы,  
Сладость роз там сбираем,  
Горы - голы,  
Ульи - полы,  
Мы туда свой мед слагаем.  
Двери звали  
(Мы ведь знали)  
К тайному дрому безделью…”.

(“We were standing / We were waiting / At the door adorned with ivy / Since we knew: / The doors were summoning / Us to secret and wise idleness / With a new potion / And a new Home / Only smiles are here becoming / Our delight / Is a taste of fur / And the cupbearers moving nimbly / Tenderly powdered, golden-curly/ We are watching with love / Within the circle of the wise / Of the wisdom-seeking / Cups of wine don’t smell of blood / Like bees we / Swarm in valleys / Gathering there the

709 “...Иванов был уже одет, Сомов одевал других, он врожденный костюмер. Пожалуй, всех декоративней был Бердяев в виде Соломона. <...> И платья, и цветы, и сиденье на полу, и полукруглое окно в глубине, и свечи внизу, все располагало к какой-то свободе слова, жестов, чувств. Как платье, непривычное имя, ‘ты’ меняют отношения”. See: Кузмин 2000-б: 139.

sweetness of roses / Mountains are naked / Beehives are hollow / It’s in there we lay our honey / The doors were summoning / (Since we knew) / Us to secret and wise idleness…”

Intrinsic to the assembled “suppers” of this group were the distinct features of an artistic extravaganza that combined literature, music, and visual art into a synaesthetic life-creationist work of art. In his fragmented diary, Ivanov observed on June 17, 1906: “Hafiz should be made completely an art. Each supper should be contemplated in advance and should flow according to the program we have jointly developed. Socializing among friends should be periodically interrupted by the performance of the next scheduled ‘numbers’ in this program, which are meant for the attention of everyone in the society as a whole. These numbers will be poems, singing, music, dance, storytelling, and the delivery of maxims that can serve also as theses for debates; likewise, several collective activities, the devising of which will also be a responsibility of the organizer of the soirée”.

The private mythology of the circle was reflected in Ivanov’s poetry, as well as that of his “confidants”—Gorodetskii and, as introduced above, Kuzmin. In this life-creationist context, Auslender’s short story “Notes of Ganymede,” is very telling. Gorodetskii has been completely re-embodied there into his character’s mask and has developed a corresponding playful aesthetics of behavior and life.

On the level of truly “open” eroticism, however, not everything in the life and functioning of the circle was so unambiguous. Judging, for example, a 1934 note in Kuzmin’s memoirs, one should not exaggerate the ‘true’ sexual aspect of the circle. Kuzmin was keen to confess that “if one excludes the fact that [Zinovieva-Annibal] was sniveling at Bakst, and [Ivanov] was awkwardly sidling up to Gorodetskii, giggling and losing his pince-nez for a moment, then there was no particular lechery or debauchery that was contrary to ordinary drinking parties”.

As Manfred Schruba has observed, the intent of the “Hafiz parties” was rather more evident in the intellectual and spiritual sphere. The participant in the circle was offered a commented reading, with annotations, of a variety of poems. There were frequent further discussions of various artistic projects that had failed to materialize along with conversations on various themes touching on the general place of religion in the life. Endless discussions were devoted to meditating on the essence of the creative work of the artist, on archaic paganism, Eros, and the like. Not

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711 “…Гафиз должен сделать вполне искусством. Каждая вечеря должна заранее обдумываться и протекать по сообща выработанной программе. Свободное общение друзей периодически прерываться исполнением очередных ‘нумеров’ этой программы, обращающих внимание всех к общине в целом. Этими нумерами будут стихи, песня, музыка, танец, сказки и произнесение изречений, могущих служить и тезисами для прений; а также некоторые коллективные действия, изобретение которых будет составлять также обязанность устроителя вечера”. See: Иванов 1974: 752.

712 Ibid.: 342-343; 738-739.

713 See it rendered for the first time in the journal Весы, no. 9 (1906), 15-22.

714 “Если не считать, что Лидия Дмитриевна сопела на Бакста, а Вячеслав неумело лез к Городецкому, хихикая и поминутно теряя пенсне, то особенного, против обычных застольных вечеров, разврата не было”. See: Кузмин 2007: 97.

insignificant in all this, of course was the life-creationist physical context involved in
the inter-personal experimental system of relationships and liaisons.

In the context of the activities of the Tower and the “Hafiz group”, there were
also supplementary developments in the triangular sexual relationships between
Ivanov, Zinovieva-Annibal, and Gorodetskii, as well as with Voloshin’s nominal
wife, Sabashnikova; here, also, the homosexual romance between Kuzmin and
Somov arose.

Not a few self-fashioning myths took shape around the “Hafiz group”. Quite a
bit of rumor and gossip about the “Hafiz parties” arose both in the literary and meta-
literary beau monde of St. Petersburg–Moscow and that of the Russian emigrants in
Paris. For example, Gippius wrote to Briusov: “I received your brief letter from St.
Petersburg, but I still don’t have the ‘Petersburg impressions’ you promised. And I’m
waiting impatiently, because from who but you would I enjoy hearing about
Viacheslav Ivanov’s new ‘secret’ society? ... [I] thought that you would amuse me
with none other than those secrets”.716

To a great extent, the conception of another, very original “Tower” group
called “Phias” was close to the ideas and spirits of the “Hafizites”. As Manfred
Schruba has pointed out, in opposition to the “Wednesdays” and the “Hafizites”,
“Phias” was more clearly delineated as a “women’s” kind of group.717 This circle
‘lived out’ its existence in November and December of 1906, also in St. Petersburg,
and its meetings were a bit more selectively and intimately “constricted” in their
nature. The meetings were organized by Zinovieva-Annibal and took place in their
apartment in the same Tower, in parallel to the “Wednesdays”. The name of the group
came from a Greek word designating a “bacchic dance” or “a triumphant procession
of male and female bacchanalians”.718 The predominantly female character of the
activities of this group theoretically allows us to suggest the possibility of a lesbian
component in its functions.719 One of the related proofs of the immense significance
of the Bacchic ideas in Ivanov’s private mythology as represented via this circle is
depicted in Ivanov’s poem “Quiet Phias”.720 On his May 4, 1906 gift inscription to
Konstantin Sununnerberg in the poetry collection entitled Transparency
(“Прозрачность”) we read: “For the dearest Konstantin Aleksandrovich Sununnerberg,
[a fellow poet and fellow participant in the Phiases, and torchbearer, Tsakles]”.

According to Sabashnikova, Zinovieva-Annibal aspired to “bring together a
closed group of women, a sort of constellation that would help each soul to freely

716 “…Письмецо ваше из СанктUПетербурга получила, но обещанных ‘петербургских
впечатлений’ нет. А я жду с нетерпением, потому что уж от кого же, как не от вас, будет
нескучно услышать о новом ‘тайном’ обществе Вячеслава Иванова <...> ... я думала, что вы меня
как раз этими секретами позабавите”. See: Брюсов 1994: 294; also Брюсов 1990: 687. For the
719 For a comparison, see some of the material in Пономарева 1988: 87-90.
720 Иванов 1971, vol. 1: 641. There are several useful studies which deal with the role of ‘Dionysian’
and related ideas in Ivanov. By all means, Dionysos and Dionysia, Bacchus and Bacchanalia should be
seen as highly important for Ivanov’s creative universe.
721 See Книги и рукописи в собрании М.С.Лесмана, Москва, 1989, 99. See also Литературное
disclose something natively its own”.722 In a letter of November 11, 1906 to M.M. Zamiatnina Zinovieva-Annibal wrote: “My women’s Phias took shape almost by accident, or rather elementally, in and of itself. I’m waiting for you participate in it”.723 These meetings were initially conceived to be similar to those of the “friends of Hafiz”. Sabashnikova in later life reminisced about that time and that group: “We were supposed to be called by other names and to wear different clothes in order to create an atmosphere that would elevate us above ordinariness”.724

Among the women in the group were also Liubov’ Blok (who used the name “Beatrice” in the group), Sabashnikova (“Primavera”) and Georgii Chulkov’s wife Nadezhda. Zinovieva-Annibal continued to use her “Hafizite” name, “Diotima”, in this circle as well.725 There were also occasional visitors, apparently, like “a certain teacher from the people’s school, who, misunderstanding the essence of the affair, behaved rather bacchically”.726 The “Phias” group was yet another attempt, so to speak, to embody in life the utopian ideas of myth-creation and life-building connected to Ivanov. However, according to Sabashnikova’s regretful and melancholic words, “no new spirituality whatsoever came [out of these meetings]”.727

3.9. The Communal Life-Creation of Maksimilian Voloshin

Maksimilian Voloshin is particularly interesting in my context as a personification of the self-fashioning mask of the Poet who plays the role of the “ancient god”.728 I will also pay attention to the peculiar commune of the Koktebel’ “blockheads” (коммуна коктебельских оборомотов), where we see the all-encompassing theatricalization of daily life that close resembles that in Ivanov’s “Tower”.729 Voloshin’s “Poet’s House” functioned in this respect as a peculiar aesthetic continuum of a holistic kind of “life activity”. This “asylum” (in the desert-like [at that time] area of Koktebel’ and Kara Dag Mountain) played a significant role in Russian cultural life in the first three decades of the twentieth century. The myth-creationist “Crimean text” is particularly interesting in Cherubina de Gabriak’s case.

In her infamous “Confession” Cherubina de Gabriak characterizes the life-creationist conflict that arose between Gumilev, Voloshin and herself, all

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725 See: Шруба 2004: 54.
726 “…одной учительницы из народной школы, которая, превратно понимая суть дела, вела себя несколько вакхически”. See: Шруба 2004: 52.
727 Quoted via Manfred Schruba: Шруба 2004: 54.
728 The other aspect of Voloshin’s life-creation, namely his early interest with transgressive spiritism, mysticism, and later his persistent anthroposophic quests will remain beyond the scope of the current study. On this complex issue see: Богомолов 1999-г: 335-411. The topic of Steinerian mystical Antroposophy with regard to Voloshin’s creation was scrutinized during a special scholarly conference held in Koktebel’ in 2004. See Пронина 2005 (el. pub.).
729 The very same kind of life-creationist abode, but now with completely different rules.
participants of the “Koktebel’ commune”. This conflict would later lead to Voloshin and Gumilev’s real duel.\textsuperscript{730} In her text Cherubina tells “I found out that [Voloshin] loved me, and had loved me for a long time; [but] I laid it all out to him, and did not hide anything from him. He said to me, sadly, ‘Choose for yourself. But if you go to Gumilev, I will despise you.’ The choice was already made, but [Gumilev] nonetheless was still like a sort of perfumed scarlet carnation to me. I kept thinking, ‘I want both of them, why do I have to choose?!’ I asked [Gumilev] to leave, without telling him anything. He took this to be a whim, but he left, and until the autumn (September), I lived the best days of my life. It was then that Cherubina was born. I became totally off-limits to [Gumilev], torturing him and teasing him; but he was patient, and kept asking me to marry him. But I was getting ready to marry [Voloshin]. Why did I torture [Gumilev] so? Why didn’t I make him leave me? This was not greed, it was also love. I have two hearts, and one of them faithfully loved one of them alone, and the other [heart], the other [man]”.\textsuperscript{731}

The Crimea and Koktebel’ were of paramount importance to Voloshin. As Lavrov, who has carefully studied the poet’s relation to this geographical space, observes: “the Cimmerian expanses revealed to Voloshin-as-wanderer not only their timeless features but also the possibility of traveling through time: the poet perceived the Crimea as a part of the Mediterranean that revealed layer after layer of the legend of bygone eras and as a crossroads between the different cultures that left their mark here. For Voloshin, Koktebel’ gradually came to be a \textit{symbolic image of creation} in which all the various ‘faces of the earth’ and the traces of its history and culture accumulated, and the ‘Sad region of Cimmeria’ a universal paradigm of an existence that presented all the unity of diversity and of the unity that absorbed all diversity”\textsuperscript{732}. Koktebel’ gave Voloshin a chance to escape from the ‘mechanical’ civilization that was alien to him into a world of nature, of natural human relationships, and of a connected, organic culture”.\textsuperscript{733} To this we should add the well-known statement that

\textsuperscript{730} See the entire story comprehensively analysed in Кобринский 2007: 97-109.

\textsuperscript{731} “Я узнала, что М.А. любит меня, любит уже давно, - к нему я вранилась вся, от него я не скрываем ничего. Он мне грустно сказала: ‘Выбирай сама. Но если ты уйдешь к Гумилеву - я буду тебя презирать’. Выбор уже был сделан, но Н.С. все же остался для меня какой-то благоуханной, алоей гвоздикой. Мне все казалось: хочу обоих, зачем выбор! Я попросила Н.С. уехать, не сказав ему ничего. Он счел это за каприз, но уехал, а я до осени (сентября) жила лучшие дни моей жизни. Здесь родилась Черубина. Я вернулась совсем закрытая для Н.С., мучила его, смеялась над ним, а он терпел и все просил меня выйти за него замуж. А я собиралась выходить замуж за М.А. Почему я так мучила Н.С.? Почему не отпускала его от себя? Это не жадность была, это была тоже любовь. Во мне есть две души, и одна из них верно любила одного, другая другого”. See her text in Волошин 1990-б: 197.

\textsuperscript{732} “Киммерийские пространства открывали Волошину-странствователю не только свои извечные черты, но и возможность путешествия во времени: поэт воспринимал Крым как часть Средиземноморья, открывавшую слой за слоем предания ушедших веков, как перекресток дорог между различными культурами, оставившими здесь свой след. Постепенно Коктебель становится для Волошина символическим образом мироздания, в котором аккумулируются все многоразличные ‘лики земли’, следы ее истории и культуры, а ‘Киммерийская пещерная область’ - универсальной парадигмой бытия, являющего все единство разнообразия и вбирающего все разнообразие единства. ... Коктебель дает возможность Волошину уйти от чуждой ему ‘механической’ цивилизации в мир природы, естественных человеческих отношений и преемственной, органической культуры”. See: Лавров 2007-а: 261.

\textsuperscript{733} See: Ibid.
the uniqueness of the Crimea lies in, among other things, its special topography and geography. A mini-model of “planet Earth”, “planet Crimea” has within itself almost all the applicable types of spaces: there are mountains, deserts, sea, forests, lakes, and steppes. That is, “all the earth” is literally in it, only compressed, as it were, in miniature.

“Quite seriously”, Voloshin wrote, “I really think that the Koktebel’ landscape is one of the most beautiful landscapes on earth that I have ever seen. Actually, not only should one think about the landscape a lot: one should also do a great deal of comparison. And from all of my extensive wanderings in life, more than anything, I have compared just that – the landscape. Landscapes have the most diverse ages. There are quite young landscapes as well as those of remote antiquity. This is why the landscape, as the face of a country, can also be as diverse as the face of humanity. Everything that the earth has experienced is reflected in the landscape. ... In quite a few aspects, Koktebel’ is reminiscent of the landscape of Greece. It is quite bleak, but at the same time, quite varied”.  

For Voloshin it became vital to emphasize that the specifics of the geographical life of Koktebel’ as it were voluntaristically shaped from themselves a peculiar repository of life-activities; the Koktebel’ landscape, in a myth-creating fashion, resurrected a history lost in time, which conferred a unique and special life-shaping functionality upon the Koktebel’ “blockhead colonists”. It gave them a kind of special energy that was essentially impossible to find in other parts of the Russian Empire. The Koktebel’ poet-colonist was supposed to consider him- or herself, depending on the context, an ancient Greek, or an Italian peasant, or a Genoese merchant. “Kara Dag, with its snowbanks and peaks, is situated in the same position with respect to the Kerch Peninsula as Vesuvius is to the Phlegraean Fields. And its jags and peaks, visible from the deepest Kerch steppes, are a portal to some kind of unknown fantastic country of which one can form an impression from Bogaevskii’s painted landscapes”.  

The “Koktebel’ summers” of the communal life-creationists were described insightfully (although in a relatively cursory way) in the memoirs (recently published in full) of a young observer, Leonid Feinberg. These sojourns should be mentioned as a most significant element in the construction of the “Koktebel’ myth” (and text) within the more widespread “Crimean myth” (and text), both created by Voloshin in those years. The “Poet’s House”, hospitably open to the “erratic stars” of Russian modernism who yearned to visit “planet Koktebel’”, in my opinion becomes the main

734 “…Я все-таки совершенно серьезно думаю, что коктебельский пейзаж - один из самых красивых земных пейзажей, которые я видел. Вообще, о пейзаже нужно не только очень много думать, но и много сравнивать. А я из всех своих обширных странствий в жизни больше всего сравнивал именно пейзаж. У пейзажа есть самый разнообразный возраст. Есть пейзажи совсем молодые и есть - глубокой древности. Потому что пейзаж, как лицо страны может быть также разнообразен, как человеческое лицо. Все, что пережито землей, все отражено в пейзаже. ... Коктебель очень многими сторонами напоминает пейзаж Греции. Он очень пустынен и, в то же время, очень разнообразен. See the “Diary of the Poet’s House”. See: Волошин 2000: 287.

735 “…Карадаг находится в таком же положении к Керченскому полуострову, с его увалами и сопками, как Везувий к Флекрийским полям. А его собственные зубцы и пики, видимые из глубины керченских степей, являются порталом какой-то неведомой фантастической страны, о которой можно составить представление по пейзажам Богдаевского”. Ibid.

736 See the new edition of his reminiscences: Фейнберг 2006: 9-172.
“nucleus” of this context. In Feinberg, we find a quintessential description of the features of Voloshin’s external appearance that shaped the general outlines of his personal life-creationist myth. There we meet the important topic of “resurrecting” remote antiquity and recreating ancient poetics in the personal example of everyday behavior: “The massive solidity of his whole body was striking: not excessive corpulence, but rather strength. He was dressed in some sort of chlamys, brownish-purple in color that went down to his ankles and was belted with some sort of thick cord that was almost like rope. On his bare feet, he had Caucasus-style slippers... One more thing: his thick hair, not curly but with smooth waves in it, was tied back with braided grass. ... [H]is mother was like the leader of an ancient Gallic tribe, and Voloshin himself reminded one of a head Druid priest”.

Ekaterina Bal’mont reminisced about Voloshin’s Paris period, emphasizing the peculiar eccentricity of his external appearance, which never remained unnoticed by people he met (she refers to Voloshin as “Max”): “We lived at her [i.e., the landlady’s] place for two years, and grew quite close to her. She was a Polish woman living in Paris, an intelligent and educated woman. She was very interested in Max when she got to know him better, and she confessed to me that she had not wanted to let us live there because of “ce drôle de bonhomme” (that strange fellow). She was struck by his strange appearance. Despite her experience, she didn’t know what category of people to put him in. Everything about him seemed puzzling and contradictory to her. ...Max would wear wide velvet pants like the workers used to wear at that time, and despite that, he would wear fashionable vests and jackets, but instead of a coat over them, he would wear a hooded cape and a top hat. ‘He looks like a good guy, but there’s something of the charlatan and mesmerist [magnetizer] in him’. In answer to that, I told her that Max really did have a magnetic force in him, by his bare hands he could cure nervous disorders, and that I and many of my...
acquaintances had personally experienced that. Once, while examining our landlady’s palms, he half-jokingly started to talk about her personality and her past, “things that nobody, I mean nobody, knew”; after that, she was convinced that Max was an extraordinary person, a true original, but nonetheless sincere and truthful, which surprised her more than anything else”.  

Various sources of memoir evidence attest to Voloshin’s “assuming a role” in the context of his external appearance. The following, for example, was in an account by Aleksandr Amfiteatrov: “‘For pity’s sake!’ exclaimed M.A. Potapenko (the wife of the famous novelist). What’s he like? A peasant!—shoulders wide as a door, a big old beard like a robbers’ boss, enough red in his cheeks for a whole bunch of country girls doing a round dance, and a booming voice – like he could yell from the left bank of the Seine over to the right bank. And he’s always talking about mysticism and occultism, and in such a dying-out whisper, as if he were worn-out and any moment might die right there in front of you and himself turn into a ghost. You really can’t tell about him—is he putting on airs, playing a role, or is he really crazy? Some kind of miracle-worker he is!”. The term “miracle-worker” is worth noticing here: later, it would become central to the life-creationist “image” of Voloshin’s younger contemporary, Daniil Kharms.

In this sketch of Voloshin’s character and personal manners, the memoirist explains one feature of his existence as a man and a creative person that is quite pertinent to my description: “His behind-their-backs love affair with the imaginary countess [Cherubina de Gabriak] is the best proof of a basic feature in Voloshin’s nature, which I’d call his ‘imagining everything’”. Amfiteatrov continues: “There was a need to ‘imagine’ in him, which he couldn’t help, and completely at odds with
his happiness to be alive, to imagine mainly anything weird, supernatural, or mystical. He imagined with such strength and vividness that he could convince not only others of the reality of his fantasies and illusions, but himself, too, which is quite a bit harder”.

The whole spirit of life at the Koktebel’ house (or, as Barbara Walker prefers calling it, the “colony” or “circle” of the eccentric “blockheads” assembled there) was literally permeated with life-creationist theatricalization. Feinberg confirms this fact from the minutest details of representation of the blockheads’ life at that time (the early 1910s): “Elena Ottobal’dovna came down into the garden from the terrace and started blowing into her little trumpet. Sounds came out of it, some clear and some raucous, devoid of any musical sense at all. It was the call to dinner. I understood this when some woman brought out a pile of dishes”.

Voloshin was perceived and “described” by those around him quite in the spirit of an exhilarating theatricalization, which accentuated the fundamental directions of his mythopoetics. The same attitude can be traced, for example, in the remarkable travestied “Sonnet” written by the fellow-artist Yuliia Obolenskaia:

“Всевластный Киммерии господин, / Средь обормотов ревностного клира / Ты царствуешь, как властный бог Один, / Ты - Коктебеля племенная лира. / Поутру к морю ты идешь один, / Из темноты всходя как солнце мира, / Косматая волочится порфира / За шагом бога скандинавских людин. / Как шпагою, владея всяким метром, / Ты средь поэтов пребываешь мaitre’ом. / Гостеприимен твой убогий кров. / К тебе спешат неведомые иксы, / И, тайны с них сорвав глухой покров, / Из них являешь миру фернампиксы!”.

(“The all-powerful master of ancient Cimmeria,/ Among the blockheads of the zealous clergy/ you reign, as mighty god Odin, you’re the One,/ You are the fiery lyre of Koktebel’,/ You go to the sea alone in the morning,/ You emerge from the dark like the sun of the world,/ The hairy purple is dragged after you/ After the step of the God of Scandinavian ice./ You master metre as you master sword,/ You’re a true maitre of all the poets./ Your squalid abode is always hospitable./ The unknown X-s hurry to you,/ You tear off the impervious cover of mystery,/ And then you show the world the precious stones from Koktebel’”).

Emphasizing the global character of Voloshin’s propensity toward the “playful mystification” of Koktebel’ life and its atmosphere, Feinberg observed:

743 “В нём жила непреодолимая потребность “воображать” - и, совсем вразрез с его жизнерадостностью, воображать по преимуществу что-нибудь жуткое, сверхъестественное, мистическое. Воображал же он с такой силой и яркостью, что умел убеждать в реальности своих фантазий и иллюзий не только других, но и самого себя, что гораздо труднее”. Ibid.
745 “Елена Оттобальдовна сошла с террасы в сад - и начала дуть в свою маленькую трубу. Раздались звуки, то -звонкие, то - хриплые, лишенные какого-либо музыкального смысла. Призыв к обеду. Я это понял, когда какая-то женщина принесла груду тарелок”. See Волошин 1990-а: 272.
746 See Волошин 1990-а: 673.
“Max was amazingly gifted with an ability and an inclination to mystify: to devise some mystification, and to organize it, and to be an active participant in it. ... [O]nce, in 1913, a stunningly executed mystification, of which I was lucky enough to be a witness (but not a participant), ended with the attack of hysteria of the ‘Free Theater’ actress Subbotina, who had come to Koktebel’ at the invitation of her friend Vera Efron. ...The mystification brought Max squarely together with the group of participants, although his basic tendency was to be the observer from the sidelines. ... During the mystification ... the barriers partly broke down. Apart from that, the accomplices in the mystification discovered themselves, their abilities, and their nature, with particular clarity. In a game like that, Max ‘communed with existence’, so to speak”.

Thanks to the successfully planned real-life experiment (truly a “miracle”) and several favorable circumstances, the “blockhead tradition” (обормотская традиция) of Voloshin’s life-creationist “Poet’s House” continued on even into the post-revolution years, right down to the onset of the dark, ruinous Stalinist ‘thirties’. In those more “vegetarian” times, the relatively young “New Regime” of the Bolsheviks watched the figure of Voloshin quite amicably and even somewhat interestingly, since any culturally significant figure from the “ruined world” that did not fight against the new power was not devoid of a certain symbolic value.

The experimental ambitions of “cultured Bolsheviks”, structured around the ideas of building a New Man, which in the ‘twenties’ had still not lost their utopian
urgency, were perceptible in various arenas of the newly-Soviet life and “daily grind.” Against this background, Voloshin’s “creative colony” (or “almost commune”) in Koktebel’ did not look as strange as it might seem to be to someone today. The prominent visitors to the Koktebel’ colony were so numerous that even an ‘approximately complete’ list of these personages would hardly fit the present work. I will only say that an impressive number of “cultural heroes” of the Silver Age visited Voloshin at Koktebel’ over all the years that the house operated. It would be much easier to say who was not in this “blockheads” group. Leading this list are Blok and Sologub – they never visited Voloshin’s Koktebel’.

As Lavrov observed: “Voloshin’s house gradually became a densely populated retreat and a vacation spot for writers... the ‘Koktebel’ Volkhoz’, as Evgenii Zamiatin defined it—‘Voloshin’s Free Magical Farm’. On September 13, 1925, Voloshin informed prose writer A.A. Kipen, ‘I have turned my house into a free colony for writers, artists, and scholars, and this gives me the chance to see Russian literature at my home, without traveling to Moscow and [St. Petersburg].’ ... A stay at Koktebel’, as Voloshin promised in a 1924 letter to A.I. Polkanov, offered its guests the prospect of “free friendly living with a roommate, where everyone ‘fits in’ and becomes a fully legitimate member. But for this, one needs: a joyous acceptance of life, love for people, and contributing one’s share to intellectual life”.749 As the years passed Voloshin’s Koktebel’ garnered fame as a unique cultural center that had no analogues in the country. Poet and translator Georgii Shengeli called it ‘The Cimmerian Athens’. Voloshin once said that Briusov, when he was talking about Koktebel’, declared that ‘nowhere in Russia at present is there such a concentration of remarkably interesting people’”.750

Lavrov suggests a very interesting analogy, comparing the activities at Voloshin’s house with the unique Order of Thelemites, which trace their etiological beginnings back to a François Rabelais text: “Voloshin’s Koktebel’ house was an analogue of the utopian monastic brothers’ Thelemite monastery from Rabelais’s novel; the spirit of creativity and playfulness lived in it, unconstraint prevailed, as did mirth and freedom—the indispensable attributes of a genuine culture. ... Andrei Belyi was right when he called Koktebel’ ‘the whole of the unique life’ of Voloshin, and the poet himself, ‘the creator of byt’ and ‘the host to the only combination of people of its kind, who knew how to unite the most contradictory ambitions by uniting souls in a human way like the mosaic artist composes an unrepeatable picture of the whole from precious stones’”.751 Lavrov observes that it was here, in this rather strange and desolate corner of Eastern Crimean region known to almost no one, that by the will of the fates, Voloshin succeeded to the fullest in realizing “the symbolic precept formulated in the famous lines of Sologub: ‘I take a piece of life, coarse and poor, and I create from it a delightful legend, for I am a poet’”.752

The unique setting and the extraordinary hospitality of the hosts who themselves became a treasure of Art much more valuable than all the everyday and
formal amenities of the place, played more than a small part in the unique sensation of “exteriority” that many guests in the Poet’s House were lucky enough to feel. “Continental” Russia, with all its conflicts and vicissitudes, seemed at times only a distant mirage that existed somewhere far off, essentially on another planet, while in the desolated line of the surf, grass, and severe ridges of the mountains nearby, in the fanciful imagination of the “blockhead” participants, pictures were drawn of the ages that had long ago receded into the distant past, ages that were incomparably more attractive than the one in which they lived. The Koktebel’ house functioned as a sort of a “smelting pot” that swept away the boundaries of formality in socializing, imparting through its own spirit the ambitions for freedom, experiment, and participation in the life-creationist project of the house’s owner. The multicultural conceptual and historical nature of the Crimea, where in a single horizon, the civilizations of the Tauri, Greeks, Romans, Scythians, Khazars, Byzantines, Turks, Tatars, Rusians, Genoese, Ukrainians, and the inhabitants of the neighboring areas all fused together, suited better than anywhere else the ideology of spiritual exploration and real life-building experimentation guided by thoroughly selected details of the carefully interpreted past, the ideology exploited by Voloshin’s Koktebel’ myth. It was as if history breathed from all the invisible pores of Koktebel’s land, endowing its inhabitants with a special creative potential, and making them return again and again to these hospitable shores.

4.0. Preliminary Typology of Symbolist Life-Creation

In the Russian decadent movement, which left its stamp on various forms of aesthetic interaction with reality, we can identify several types of authorial behavior of a general pattern, which from a formal point of view might reflect the basic models of the “life-text” in the period of “heroic” Russian modernism. Based on the written above one can discern the following main rubrics of Symbolist experimental Life-creation:

1) The basis of the philosophy of Russian symbolist life-creation was built from active conceptualization of the legacy of Nikolai Fedorov on the one hand, and of Vladimir Soloviev on the other (more intensively in the case of the “younger generation” of symbolists). The idea of transforming the world through the pure forces of art and through the aesthetic work of the Soul comes from both Fedorov and Soloviev. The new feminine ‘Sophian apocalypse’, founded on a reanimation of ancient Platonic and Gnostic models and of a new/old semi-ascetic attitude toward human physicality and sexuality, is extremely relevant to the younger group of Russian symbolists (Blok and Belyi).

2) The “decadent” “physiological” life-creation of Valerii Briusov’s circle of “Symbolist elders”, which purposefully followed the bohemian/French models of the new urbanistic “accursed” life (alcohol, narcotics, prostitution). An obsession with “urban” prostitute sex in Briusov, Bal’mont, and in particular, in Blok.
3) A quest, and an experimental attitude toward “the sex/gender issue”, and the creation of various “gender” masks, which should largely be associated with the figure of Zinaida Gippius. The androgenous real-life/behavioral mask of the poetess, corresponding directly to her literary work. Exactly the same kind of “experiment” in the arena of sex can be observed among many other symbolist personalities such as Mikhail Kuzmin, Viacheslav Ivanov, Lidia Zinovieva-Annibal, and others.

4) The whole complex of utopias of creative work, of expectations/hopes for a new reality, which is first and foremost related to the “argonautism” of Andrei Belyi’s circle of younger Symbolists. Directly contiguous to this is the “knightly consciousness” of aesthetic service to the “beautiful lady” and of the “transformation into life” of the ideal “fairy tale”. The typologically corresponding “service” to the ‘Beautiful Lady’ in Blok’s early creative work and life. Merezhkovskii’s attempt to create a “new religious consciousness” can be regarded as a phenomenon somewhat parallel to the preceding one.

5) The issue of “ideal marriage”, which constituted in itself the confrontation and mutual life-creation of Belyi and Blok in their attraction to Liubov’ Blok—that is, the variety of a “Woman Clothed with Sun”. The Sophia/Gnostic interest in the development of Soloviev’s teachings also singled out ideal marriage.

6) The playful masks of Russian symbolist life-creation. Mythology, “brought to life” and personified in the form of the theatricalized milieu of Viacheslav Ivanov’s “Tower”. Various types of “masks” for Ivanov, Briusov, Belyi, Blok, Sologub, and Voloshin. Cherubina de Gabriak’s mystification of the plane of history. The activation of mythological masks for Belyi and Briusov, which reaches its quasi-theatrical culmination in their poetic duel—the exchange of “arrows” in the name of the ancient gods.

7) The aspect of “communality” of Russian symbolist life-creation, perceived in the examples of the “community of the poetic farm” in Voloshin’s Koktebel’ and in Ivanov’s “Tower”. Similar attempts to construct a “new lifestyle” represent a linkage with the subsequent chapter of modernist life-creation, namely, with the pragmatic strategies of the Russian Avant-Gardists, which the next chapter will discuss.
Concluding summary of chapter 3

The third chapter of the dissertation is intended to be the main descriptive pillar of my argument. In this chapter I bring together all the major “case-studies” of Russian Symbolist life-creation that constitute the core of my research. Following the seminal life-writing definition of Vladislav Khodasevich with regard to the nature of Symbolist life-creation I discuss the contribution of Nikolai Fedorov and his utopian ideas. I note that Fedorov’s philosophical legacy was especially relevant for the “younger generation” of Russian Symbolism. Along with Fedorov I bring in the corresponding debate on Vladimir Soloviev’s philosophical ideas acclaimed by the prominent life-creationists of Russian modernism. I discuss the main phenomenon of Symbolist Lebenskunst through its most typical representatives. I start with Valerii Briusov’s erotical life-creation. I mention his numerous affairs with prostitutes, his and Bal’mont’s preoccupation with the “purchasable sex”. Both Briusov and Bal’mont were obviously imitating the Western decadent models, bringing them onto Russian soil. I analyze several of their poems that can be held responsible for their nocturnal wanderings and their fascination with prostitutes’ genitalia. I proceed with the life-creationist description of some of the other eminent “elder” Symbolists. I start with the non-traditional “genre-questions” related to Zinaida Gippius and her way of creating her own private reality in her physical life and in the literature. I discuss Fedor Sologub’s deviant behaviour with respect to his life-creation, relying on several memoirs and his major novel *The Petty Demon*. Most of the chapter is devoted to the life-creationist episodes of Andrei Belyi and Aleksandr Blok. I bring in all the necessary life-writing accounts in order to narrate their story in a most detailed way. Apart of Blok and Belyi the chapter covers the Lebenskunst of Viacheslav Ivanov and Maksimilian Voloshin.