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Silver Spoons in their Mouths—The Legacy of the Russian Silver Age in the works of Nabokov, Pasternak and Viktor Erofeev

by

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A Thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures
University of Toronto

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For Tony and Dasha
ABSTRACT

Thesis Title: "Silver Spoons in their Mouths--The Legacy of the Russian Silver Age in the Works of Nabokov, Pasternak and Viktor Erofeev"

Degree: Ph. D.

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This dissertation examines the phenomenon of literary influence and the transmission of literary tradition with particular application to the cultural heritage of the Russian Silver Age and its refractions in later writings. The Silver Age (1890-1917) has distinct historical and political boundaries (the waning years of the Romanov dynasty) as well as cultural confines. Hence, attitudes to the Silver Age—both in the Soviet Union (post-communist Russia) and abroad—became highly politicized and laden with ethical and moral overtones. It is demonstrated that the perceptions of the Silver Age and its legacy have been neither uniform nor constant. This period went through various stages of being rejected, then re-evaluated and upgraded to the status of the Silver Age in Russian literature and culture; subsequently it received belated, though wide,
recognition for its tremendous contribution to the evolution of Russian culture. At present it is undergoing further revision and re-evaluation.

The larger part of this dissertation is devoted to a discussion of various strategies that Nabokov, Pasternak and Erofeev employed while assimilating the legacy of the Silver Age into their writings. These include "heuristic imitation" and transposition (Nabokov), "translation" (Pasternak), and overt parody (Erofeev). It is suggested that each of the chosen approaches was dictated not only by the inclinations of each particular writer and aspects of their personal lives, but also by varying attitudes to the Silver Age that were current at the specific spaces and times when Nabokov, Pasternak and Erofeev embarked on writing their novels.

It is shown that the inclusion of the legacy of the Silver Age into succeeding cultural phases has been a gradual and complicated process. However, despite a lasting and widespread assumption that the Bolshevik revolution and subsequent political and cultural developments brutally interrupted the "normal" course of literary evolution and thus consigned the Silver Age heritage to oblivion, the present study suggests otherwise. In fact, the abysmal rift between pre- and post-revolutionary cultures appears to have been beneficial in that it gave rise to an entire cultural apparatus (or even institution) that has been seriously engaged in the re-production of the Silver Age's legacy for a contemporary audience, thus securing its vitality during later periods.

This study offers new insights into the phenomenon of literary influence and throws new light on the ways in which cultural memory operates in modern Russian/Soviet society.
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The author was born in Moscow where she pursued her studies of Western European and American literatures at Moscow State University. Her M. A. thesis was on the subject "Specifics of Translation of Modern Drama." After graduation, she worked as a translator and interpreter for the Soviet/Russian Academy of Sciences.

While studying for her Ph. D. at the University of Toronto she has acquired a strong and diverse background in both 19th and 20th century Russian literature and culture, along with an appreciation of literary theory. Her minor fields were comparative literature and literary theory, Czech literature and language, and Slavic linguistics. She has presented papers at departmental colloquia, major conventions and specialized conferences. She was an initiator and co-organizer of a North American student conference, and a series of colloquia at the University of Toronto. Her teaching experience includes two consecutive lectureships in first-year Russian language at the University of Toronto.

In 1998 the author was awarded a two-year Postdoctoral Fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) which she will hold at the Department of Slavic and East European Languages and Literatures of the Ohio State University. There she will supplement the findings of her dissertation by looking more widely at the ways in which cultural memory manifests itself. The combined results of her studies will be presented as a book.
with the provisional title "'Mixing Memory and Desire'—The Strategies of Appropriation."

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Ol’ga Glagoleva was always willing to read and discuss portions of my dissertation, and has been both a skeptical and a compassionate friend.

The final version benefited from the careful and critical reading of Irene Masing-Delic.

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband and daughter who not only courageously helped me through with my studies, but have been a continuous reminder that "life is elsewhere."
NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION, CITATION AND TRANSLATION

In transliterating Russian names and titles I have used the Library of Congress system with slight modifications:

a) with e and ë rendered as e consistently throughout (even in the beginning of the words and between the vowels);

b) with у and ю rendered as y;

c) with ы and ыо rendered as ya and yu;

d) the endings -skiy and -iy/yy in the surnames are rendered as -sky and -y respectfuUy (Trotsky instead of Trotskiy and Bely instead of Belyy, etc.);

e) the names Chaliapin, Diaghilev, Eisenstein, Maxim Gorky and Scriabin are spelt according to the most common spelling.

All ellipses that are in square brackets in quotations are mine, while those without brackets are the authors'.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.
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INTRODUCTION

Poetic history [...] is [...] indistinguishable from poetic influence, since strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves.

Harold Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence.

Modern literary theory tends to consider the phenomenon of literary influence in terms of assimilation, appropriation and digestion of the works of earlier authors within those of later ones. The transmission of literary tradition frequently not only does not exclude but even necessitates a critical attitude by the younger generation towards the works of their predecessors and an intention
to outscore them.¹ Russian literature is no exception. The classical case study is Dostoevsky's appropriation of Gogol's legacy in The Village Stepanchikovo And Its Residents [Selo Stepanchikovo i ego obitateli] (1859).² By intentionally reducing "Gogol" to the victimized and victimizing home-brewed writer Foma Opiskin, whose literary and other influence does not exceed the circle of some senile old ladies, Dostoevsky successfully purged himself from the burdening influence of his illustrious predecessor—who was inadvertently present in Dostoevsky's early fiction—and he thus secured for himself a piece of land within Russian literature as yet uninhabited by Chichikov's dead souls. And when he cultivated his soil with some tools stolen from Gogol's estate, he did so not in order to continue the Gogolian tradition, but because he felt that he could put those tools to even better use.

According to Harold Bloom, the author of some of the most influential books on the theory of literary influence and literary tradition, the attitude of an artist towards the achievements of his/her predecessors is an explosive mixture of admiration, jealousy

¹ "Tradition is not only a handing-down or process of benign transmission; it is also a conflict between past genius and present aspiration, in which the prize is literary survival or canonical inclusion. [...] Poems, stories, novels, and plays come into being as a response to prior poems, stories, novels, and plays, and response depends upon acts of reading and interpretation by the later writers, acts that are identical with the new works." Harold Bloom, The Western Canon (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995) 8.

and "the anxiety of influence." The artist evokes the earlier work not so as to repeat it or to establish some special bond with it, but in order to "swerve" from it and produce something essentially new out of this contact.\(^3\)

When the Acmeists vehemently criticized the Symbolists in the 1910s for their addiction to mysticism, detachment from mundane experience and failure to live in the three-dimensional world, and instead cultivated an obsession with the "real," material world,\(^4\) they did so not out of piety towards their declining predecessors, but to expose the novelty of their own ideas and to emphasize their own superiority over their former teachers. In such a rebellious mood there was no time to consider what was fair and ethical. Thus, in the early twenties Osip Mandel'shtam—who was at that time himself preparing to switch from poetry to prose writing—was particularly vicious towards Andrey Bely, whom he compared to "a grande dame, discharging dazzling brilliance of universal charlatanism [. . .]," and Bely's novels he likened to "exhibition pavilions [. . .] soon to be dismantled."\(^5\) As Bloom reminds us, "[p]oets are neither ideal nor common readers [. . .] They tend not to think, as

\(^3\) See his Anxiety of Influence (1973); A Map of Misreading (1975); Poetry and Repression (1976) and The Western Canon (1994).


\(^5\) Mandel'shtam, "Pis'mo o russkoy poezii," Ob iskusstve 212-3.
they read: 'This is dead, this is living, in the poetry of X.' [. . .] For them, to be judicious is to be weak, and to compare, exactly and fairly, is to be not elect."6

By the 1930s, however, Mandel'shtam had changed his negative view of Bely.7 This happened not because Bely by the end of his life started to behave differently or adopted a different way of writing, but because in the thirties Bely and everything he stood for—a pre-revolutionary culture that rightly or wrongly received the name of the Russian Silver Age (1890-1917)8—acquired in the eyes of Mandel'shtam and many other intellectuals a distinct aura of martyrdom and a veneer of respect.

Mikhail Gasparov describes the poetics of the Silver Age as identical with Russian modernism, this being expressed through the activity of three major literary groupings that established themselves in the period from 1890 to 1917; these are Symbolism, Acmeism and Futurism, plus the activity of a growing number of people towards the end of this period who did not belong to any of these trends, but shared some of their aesthetic principles. Instead of concentrating on the differences between the three leading


7 See his 1934 cycle "Stikhi pamyati Andreya Belogo."

8 For a thorough discussion of this term see Omry Ronen, The Fallacy of the Silver Age (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997).
movements, as is often the case, Gasparov emphasizes their fluidity and interconnectedness and suggests that:

[... к] 1917 г. очертания основных направлений уже настолько расплылись, что все не желавшие прослыть отсталыми одинаково свободно пользовались 'символистскими вздохами и футуристическими криками'.

In the broader context the Silver Age roughly coincided with the "Aesthetic Age"\(^\text{10}\) or fin de siècle experienced in many Western European cultures, which ended with the outbreak of World War I. Like the same period in Western European culture, the literature of the Russian Silver Age was characterized by an extraordinary richness in talents, diversity of themes and approaches, and, above all, by a disregard for the political or moral implications of their work that used to constrain artists of the Realistic tradition. The platform that united many, otherwise different, people was the notion of "art for art's sake." The image of the artist was no longer that of a servant of society. He turned into a Nietzschean loner, a superman who lived above, and apart from the rest of the world. His preferred dwelling was an elevated mountain cave,\(^\text{11}\) from which he


\(^\text{10}\) This term comes from Harold Bloom's The Western Canon.

\(^\text{11}\) Cf.:

Я вновь один в своей пещере горной.
Над головой полет столетий быстрый.
А. Белый,
observed the flow of eternity and preached occasionally to the masses. As Nikolay Berdyaev remarked, "[i]t was, after all, a movement of the cultural elite, detached not only from the processes which took place among the masses of the people, but also from the processes which took place among the wider circles of the intelligentsia; there was a resemblance to the romantic and idealistic movement of the beginning of the nineteenth century."12

Roger Keys has reviewed all possible terms that have been used to describe Russian literature of the beginning of the twentieth century. He has discarded "the phrase 'Silver Age'" on the grounds of it being "an unsatisfactory term which tends to substitute a predetermined value-judgment regarding the quality of the work written during the period for an objective description and evaluation of that work."13 I am going to use this term precisely for the reasons that led Keys to reject it. It is my intention to show that the favorable "value-judgment" implied by the use of "Silver Age" in referring to this period influenced the ways in which the legacy of this period was appropriated in later works. In this dissertation I will examine changes in the perception of the Silver Age that have

12 Quoted in Ronen 12.

occurred over the last eighty years with particular emphasis on the study of various strategies that were employed by Russian intellectuals in order to integrate the cultural legacy of the Silver Age into their writings. As a historian of culture, I intend to view the Silver Age as a cohesive "cultural text" and describe the ways in which this text has been "re-written" and re-structured within subsequent cultural contexts. Up to this point no attempt has been made to study the Silver Age from this perspective.

What makes the study of the Silver Age so interesting from the viewpoint of literary influence and transmission of literary tradition is its extraordinary temporal frame. In contrast to the Russian Golden Age (the first third of the nineteenth century), the Silver Age has very distinct historical and political boundaries as well as cultural confines (i.e. the epistemological and cultural crisis of the late nineteenth century on one side, and extreme avant-gardism and Socialist Realism on the other). It arose as an antidote to the period of political and social stagnation of the 1880s and was swept away by the turbulence of World War I, the subsequent February and October revolutions of 1917, and the further years of Civil war.

The feeling that the old world was coming to an end around 1910-1917 was shared by many European artists. Despite small differences in their estimation of exact dates, their writings show "continuity in the perception of the crisis."14 Russian artists felt

the gaping rift even more acutely, because the long prophesied Apocalypse, with World War I, the 1917 revolutions and the Civil War, turned into a somber reality and the former prophets had to abandon their imaginary caves and freeze to death in the wind-swept caves of their apartment-buildings. By the late-twenties some representatives of the Silver Age were already dead (Blok, Bryusov, Gumilev, Gershenzon, Rozanov and Sologub) and many emigrated of their own will or were forced to emigrate (Berdyaev, Bal'mont, Bunin, Gippius, Ivanov, Khodasevich, Merezhkovsky, Remizov, to name but a few). The rest were adjusting to the new Soviet environment and either slowly turning into personae non gratae, (Bely, Kuzmin, Pyast, Akhmatova, Mandel'shtam and

15 See Evgeniy Zamyatin's short story "The Cave" ["Peshchera"] (1920) and Olga Forsh's The Crazy Ship [Sumasshedshiy korabl'] (1930).

16 Blok's sudden death (August 7, 1921) was seen by many as a tragic closure of a whole epoch in the Russian culture. Here is how Mikhail Kuzmin recorded in his diary (August 8, 1921) the immediate reaction of his milieu to this event: "Пришла О. Н. и уговорила нас идти на панихиду. Хорошо сделали, что пошли. Все били. Плачут. Слово «поэт» и «нежность», конечно, неотъемлемо от него. Многие оплакивали свое прошлое, целую полосу артистической жизни и свою, м. б., близкую смерть." Mikhail Kuzmin, Dnevnik 1921 goda, Minuvshhee 13 (1993): 475. A similar sentiment is conveyed in Nina Berberova memoirs: "Останавливалось движение, теплый ветер дул с моря, и мы шли и шли, и, наверное не было в этой толпе человека, который бы не подумал—хоть на одно мгновение—о том, что умер не только Блок, что умер город этот, что кончается его особая власть над людьми и над историей целого народа, кончается период, завершается круг российских судеб, останавливается эпоха, чтобы повернуть и помчаться к иным срокам. [. . .] я говорю о двухсотлетнем периоде русской литературы; я не говорю, что она кончилась,—кончилась эпоха." Nina Berberova, Kursiv moy (Moscow: Soglasie, 1996) 157-58
Pasternak) or gaining more and more recognition from the state, like Aleksey Tolstoy, Gorodetsky and Mayakovsky.

The fact that the end of the Silver Age coincided with political upheavals such as the 1917 revolutions and Civil war, gave rise to the long-lasting popular belief in the "unnatural" course of Russian literary evolution. Its "normal" course (i.e. continuation of the Silver Age into the 1920s and 1930s) was seen as having been brutally interrupted by pro-Bolshevik social and political developments. This concept gained particular prominence among Russian intellectuals residing in the Soviet Union, and encouraged in them feelings of moral responsibility with regard to the preservation of the pre-revolutionary cultural heritage. Thus, by the late 1920s, for writers such as Akhmatova, Mandel'shtam, Pasternak and Kuzmin, the burning question (also faced by many European modernists): whether to get out from under "the dead weight of tradition or forever mourn the loss of an infinitely precious infinitely distant history"—was solved in favor of the latter. If responsible Russian writers had been typically preoccupied with the preservation of cultural traditions, then after the 1917 revolution they became the sole bearers of cultural memory.18 Within Soviet culture which was totally geared towards the future (except for the

17 Cavanagh 5.

18 For a detailed discussion of this aspect of Russian literature see Dmitriy Segal, "Literatura kak vtorichnaya modeliruyushchaya sistema," Slavica Hierosolymitana IV (1979): 1-35.
short period of NEP), there were no other means of stirring nostalgia for, and therefore awareness of, the *temps perdu*. When something is not remembered, it disappears. In *Doctor Zhivago* (1945-55), a novel largely devoted to questions of memory, and particularly cultural memory, Pasternak depicts the following situation: The same day little Yura forgets to recall his father in his prayers, his father commits suicide a few miles away from the estate, where Yura has been invited to stay with his uncle.

The key idea of Mandel'shtam's ethics and aesthetics--"to remember," that first appeared in his essays of the early 1920s--was shared to a greater or lesser extent by many of his contemporaries in the Soviet Union. Talented writers and poets, the bulk of whose work was written after the 1917 revolution, have been traditionally presented by scholars as conscientious keepers and preservers of Western and Russian cultural traditions. Akhmatova's *Poem Without a Hero* [*Poema bez seroya*] (1940-66) about the rupture between the Silver Age and "the real--not the calendar--Twentieth Century" is particularly notable in this respect. Even in Akhmatova's life-time, it was generally considered to be a carefully encoded message about the past that required a similarly careful deciphering on the part of the reader, as amply demonstrated by many of Akhmatova's scholars and admirers.

For writers like Vladimir Nabokov who started to write seriously only after emigrating to Europe, the legacy of the Silver Age was an umbilical cord that tied them to Russian literary tradition. Nabokov's striking impoundment of Kuzmin's *Wings*
[Kryl'ya] (1906) in 1930 in his short novel, The Eye [Soglyadatay]--which I discuss in Chapter II--can be fully appreciated only against the background of Nabokov's being cast by some literary critics into the role of a pariah with respect to the "great" Russian literary tradition. Nabokov's "allegiance" to the aesthetics of the Silver Age should be also seen as his response to the general criticism of this period which was voiced in the writings of young émigré writers, like Yuriy Terapiano and Nikolay Otsup.19

Such concern with the immediate cultural heritage, rather than its expected digestion and appropriation, points to an interesting phenomenon, that came into being as the result of a highly politicized attitude towards the legacy of the Silver Age, an attitude overlaid with various ethical and moral overtones. While by the mid thirties a growing nostalgia for temps perdu on the part of émigré writers resulted in their joint positive re-evaluation of this period, the attitude to the Silver Age of writers who remained in Russia and did not share Socialist Realist values was much more ambivalent. On the one hand a growing awareness of the distinctly totalitarian character of the Soviet State gave rise to complaints about the loss of personal and artistic freedom that pre-revolutionary literature used to enjoy; on the other, the irresponsible, highly individualistic and hedonistic behavior of

19 Terapiano and Otsup criticized representatives of the Silver Age for their "art for art's sake" aesthetics and catholicity of tastes and approaches--characteristics that were held against Nabokov as well. This is discussed in more detail in Chapters I and II.
literati during the turn of the century was still held to be accountable for the atrocities of the subsequent periods.20

Open battling with previous tradition, however, was virtually impossible in the 1930s in Russia, since many of its representatives had met with tragic deaths or were persecuted by the authorities. In such a situation it was more important to preserve what was left than attack or rebel against it.21 In the preservation of the effaced and forgotten, political revolt against the present substituted for artistic revolt against the past. Writers were looking up to European or "classical" Russian literature for their sources of inspiration, while recalling their older contemporaries and peers in numerous poems, written often after the death of the addressees. In the 1930s any "sophisticated" mockery of the Silver Age--such as one can find in the memoirs of Bely or Georgiy Ivanov, for example--was regarded by most of their contemporaries as indecent behavior. This unhealthy prohibition against wrestling with tradition that many artists seem to have imposed on themselves, resulted either in the conscientious smuggling of numerous quotations and references to

20 See the opening paragraph in section 5, Chapter I.

21 Already back in 1923 Akhmatova was "outraged" at Ivanov-Razumnik's decision to open his Critical Miscellany [Kriticheskii sbornik] (1925) with Blok's "Without a Deity, Without Inspiration" ["Bez bozhestva, bez v dokhnoven'ya"] (1921), a polemic piece directed against the Acmeist movement in general and against their leader Nikolay Gumilev in particular. Akhmatova was enraged not so much with Blok's caustic and often unfair remarks but with the fact that his article was going to be published after Gumilev's tragic death. Discussed in Ronen 67-8.
forgotten or forbidden names, events and literary sources into their own works—as can be seen in Akhmatova's *A Poem Without a Hero*—or in abrupt breaks with recent tradition. When Boris Pil'nyak started recycling his earlier works in an attempt to create something new out of material that he had used before—something that is particularly evident in his last completed work, *The Doubles* [*Dvoyniki*] (1933)—such a forlorn consumption of his own flesh resulted in the production of a monstrously disjointed work, which nevertheless is a powerful monument to the tragically uprooted literature of his time. Pasternak's slow build-up towards the big novel *Doctor Zhivago*, for which a succession of shorter works published in the late 1930s had laid a foundation, should be considered in the same vein. It was only in the mid 1940s when the Silver Age started to make its way back into Russian culture, that Pasternak found it possible to commence his revision—or in Pasternak's words, his "translation"—of its legacy into the modern language of his time. A few years earlier Akhmatova embarked on a long re-visitation of her cultural past which would take her over twenty years to write. It opens with a charmingly (almost childish) apologetic "first dedication":

```
.................................
... а так как мне бумаги не хватило,
я на твоем пишу черновике.
И вот чужое слово проступает
и, как тогда снежинка на руке,
```
One may recall that Pushkin and Dostoevsky were infinitely less scrupulous (and much less bashful) in using either drafts or final copies of Karamzin and Gogol', respectively. The inevitable disembodiment and effacement of the original text is gently portrayed by Akhmatova as the melting of a snowflake, that perishes "trustingly, with no reproach."

The strong sense of moral obligation towards the legacy of the Silver Age in the Soviet Union started to subside and give way to a healthier curiosity, admixed with amiable irony and sarcasm, only in the works of the so-called "shestidesyatniki" (writers whose coming of age coincided with the 1960s), particularly in the works of Andrey Bitov and, to a lesser extent, Vasiliy Aksenov. This new approach to the Silver Age reached its apogee in the writings of their younger colleagues, such as Sasha Sokolov, Viktor Erofeev and Viktor Peleavin.

It is my contention that a fluidity in the perception of the Silver Age determined the appropriation of its legacy in later works. Harold Bloom's Freudian model of literary influence is based on a family of two—that is, a poet always wanting to rid him/herself of the influence of his poetic father(s) in order to prove him/herself. In dealing with the influence of the Russian Silver Age on later writings, this model should be expanded by adding an ethical

22 Anna Akhmatova, Stikhotvoreniva i poemy (Leningrad: Sovetskiy pisatel', 1984) 585.
component too. What if this "father" is portrayed by neighbors or relatives as a criminal, or as an unjustly persecuted person? What if there was no father at all?

Speaking about the etymology of the Russian word "влияние" (influence), Viktor Shklovsky reminds us that when this word was introduced into the Russian Language, "Karamzin was speaking about 'влияние в' (flowing into--in-fluence). Only later did people start talking about 'влияние на' (influence upon)." 23 With this observation in mind, the purpose of this dissertation is seen as twofold: to show (1) how the legacy of the Silver Age has been flowing into later cultural phases; and (2) its influence upon later works. My purpose is not so much to track the continuity, as to trace the ways in which the Silver Age was internalized by later authors, such as Vladimir Nabokov, Boris Pasternak and Viktor Erofeev.

The reason, why I have chosen these authors and not others, is, first of all, because they had to be exceptionally talented people for "weaker talents idealize; figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves." 24 Secondly, I believe that the works of these particular authors, each separated by some 25 years from one another, illustrate different ways of dealing with the legacy of their predecessors. In addition these authors address different aspects of this legacy, aspects that for a variety of reasons were at the

24 Harold Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence 5.
forefront of literary discussion at the times that the works of these authors were in a state of gestation.

Chapter I--"Does Silver Tarnish?"--presents a general overview of the ways in which attitudes to the Silver Age and its legacy have been changing over the last eighty years. Using this chapter as a springboard, I move to specific case studies. In Chapter II--"Okryleennyy Soglyadatay" [The Winged Eavesdropper]--I offer possible explanations for Nabokov's interest in Kuzmin's "legacy" in the early 1930s and show how different thematic blocks, collisions and motivations for the actions of the characters in Kuzmin's *Wings* (1906) were transmuted by Nabokov in *The Eye* (1930). Nabokov's literary "affair" with Kuzmin is shown to be responsible for the birth of his archetypal character--an ambivalent, sexually inverted émigré loner--whose strivings and misfortunes became the main focus of most of his subsequent works.

In Chapter III--"On the Border of Two Centuries" I consider *Doctor Zhivago* as a product of Pasternak's "translation" of the Silver Age's esoteric legacy for his contemporary readers (1945-55). Chapter IV--"The Apocalypse Revisited"--shows how Viktor Erofeev revisits the Silver Age tradition of messianic and eschatological writing and draws out another turn-of-the-century version of the Apocalypse in his novel *Russian Beauty* (1982). Detailed conclusions of each investigation are presented at the end of each chapter. The Conclusion offers a final brief summation.
CHAPTER ONE: DOES SILVER TARNISH?
(CHANGES IN THE PERCEPTION OF THE SILVER AGE
OVER THE PERIOD FROM 1917 TO 1997)

As Matei Calinescu amply demonstrated, "modernity," as we
know it now, has not one but a number of different faces--namely
modernism, avant-garde, decadence, kitsch and, more recently,
postmodernism. None of these manifestations of modernity (except
for the last, which emerged in the 1960s) was really the invention of the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Rather, these concepts were re-interpreted and already foregrounded in the political and cultural climates that prevailed at the turn of the century in Europe, South and North America. In Russia the period when "modernity" revealed its different faces most clearly was the Silver Age (1890-1917). Despite some recent expressions of discontent with this term, I personally believe that it should and will survive if only for the sake of 'simplification' (which modern readers inevitably seek for), that is, to give a degree of coherence to the variety of literary movements, groups and individuals that were active during the Russian fin de siècle. From the vantage point of the current fin de siècle, it is less important to hunt for what separated such diverse people as Merezhkovsky, Andreev, Kuzmin, Mayakovskv, Shestov, Bely, Severyanin, Gippius, Khodasevich, Bunin, Artsybashev, Berdyaev, Blok, Rozanov, Verbitskaya, Solov'ev, Gershenzon, Tsvetaeva, Klyuev, Bryusov, Sologub--to name but a few--than to look for the denominator that they had in common. What united these people was not so much the aesthetics of


26 See Ronen's The Fallacy of the Silver Age, which finishes with the following statement: "The pious hope of the author of the present study is that, perhaps, more awareness of the history of this misnomer might help exorcise its pallid, deceptive, and meddlesome ghost." See also Roger Keys's The Reluctant Modernist: Andrey Bely and the Development of Russian Fiction, 1902-1914 16-18.
European Modernism, as their joint "search for modernity," a search for new artistic forms and expression.

The compulsory preoccupation of previous generations of writers with Russian social problems at the turn of the century gave way either to debates about universal issues--Faith, Life and Death--or to the scrutiny of motivations behind every operation of the human psyche and body. Striving to understand the nature of every quirk of the psyche was regarded as an infinitely more commendable enterprise, which required a lot of talent and sophistication, than that of looking for a cure for social illnesses. Such joint scrutiny, and digging into the souls, of particular individuals brought unexpected results. Thus, in The Petty Demon [Melkiy bes] (1907) Fedor Sologub revealed the distinctly a-social nature of evil. Evil, according to Sologub, is not caused by social factors, but nests in every individual because it is inherent in human

27 Such a distinct characteristic of European or South American modernists--their initial striving to break away from tradition--was less typical of Russian modernists. The latter started their activity by unearthing the treasures hidden in previous cultural traditions, by translating and studying works of earlier artists, and promoting them to the status of "eternal companions." Cf. Dmitriy Merezhkovsky's Eternal Companions [Vechnyye sputniki] (1888-97) and On the Reasons for the Decline and New Trends in Contemporary Russian Literature [O prichinakh upadka i o novykh techeniyakh v sovremennoy russkoy literature] (1892-93), that laid the aesthetic foundation for Silver Age culture.

28 The phrase "search for modernity" comes from the subtitle of Laura Engelstein's book The Keys to Happiness (Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia) (Ithaca/London: Cornell UP, 1994).
The search for new forms and means of expression was prompted by the radical changes in cultural and social life that took place in Russia thirty years prior to the October revolution. Traditional institutions such as family and marriage were invested with new social and cultural meanings, while phenomena such as sex, femininity, masculinity, homosexuality, prostitution, race, etc.,—which up to this point had been kept in the background—were foregrounded and received the status of legitimate social and cultural constructs.

In describing the literature comprising the Silver Age, the temporal, historical component of this definition—"Age"—is as important as the laudatory "Silver." For despite its "art for art's sake" aesthetics, the literature of the Silver Age was nevertheless imbued with the social and political concerns of its time. Like Marxists, many representatives of the Silver Age were longing for radical changes in human nature and social order, which they associated not so much with political revolt as with "the creative potential of human beings, manifested in two areas of human activity, art and love." Although seemingly apolitical, through their writings literati of this period contributed to the general "mood of emotionality, disorientation and dissatisfaction with the


present, in short a revolutionary mentality, which ultimately served to further the goals of the left." As Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal astutely observes:

Despite their concern for freedom, many artists tended to a utopian extremism which eschewed compromise, insisted on the hopelessness of parliaments [...] and denounced all constitutions as farcical. [...] Not only did the politicized artists fail to appreciate the need for realistic solutions [...] but they weakened the positions of those who would introduce a constitutional order in Russia; their influence subtly deflected intellectual energies away from practical solutions. After 1905 especially, art featured mystical and apocalyptic themes. Revolution was exalted in poetry, prose and music; it was "in the air," thus intensifying the tendency to defer solutions, to reject piecemeal reform, to wait for the revolution, to destroy, rather than to build. [...] Thus, ironically, and unwittingly, the aesthetes fostered a mood of revolutionary maximalism which the Bolsheviks were able to exploit. Given the lack of constructive action [...] deterioration had gone so far that by 1917 only radical solutions seemed appropriate.32

Recent debates, however, with regard to cause and effect of Silver Age aesthetics and that of Socialist Realism have overemphasized this relationship.33 A perception of continuity


32 Ibid.

33 See, for example, Irina Gutkin's "The Legacy of the Symbolist Aesthetic Utopia: From Futurism to Socialist Realism," Creating Life. The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism, ed. Irina
between the two is only to be expected, since Bolshevik and Silver Age aesthetics—developing concurrently from 1890 to 1917—were often informed by the same sources, for example Nietzsche's philosophy.  

Representatives of both the Silver Age and Marxism shared the "consciousness of decadence" that was nourished on the perceived "advanced putrefaction of modern-day capitalism, and of its dying culture." Both saw the Apocalypse, or its manageable modern version—revolution, as a welcome end to the old history and an opening into the future—whether Communist (for the Marxists) or Art-dominated (for the representatives of the Silver Age).

Although often grazing in the same meadows as future Socialist Realists, the Silver Age literati frequented other places as well. One of the most striking peculiarities of Silver Age culture is its omnivorousness, its unique ability to synthesize and syncretize otherwise incompatible phenomena, which gave rise to later accusations of ideological eclecticism:

[На фоне сложного переплета общественных отношений начала XX века в России, того переплета, который чреват был Октябрьской революцией, мысль буржуазной интеллигенции блеснула]


35 Calinescu 153-4.
The Silver Age of Russian literature did not lay itself open to subsequent transformation into the Iron Age of Socialist Realism. The relationship between them is both synchronic and diachronic. It can be best described with the help of the Jakobsonian dominant. While in the twenty years prior to the October revolution diversity in themes and approaches as well as aesthetization of life in general were considered to be the norm, after 1917 paucity both in life and artistic activity, adherence to one method only, etc. became the new aesthetic criteria, the dominant of that time.

It will suffice to mention that Russian modernists were virulently attacked by Marxists as early as 1908 for the hyper-individualistic character of their writings, for a preoccupation with Eros (unbecoming for responsible writers), and for conveying a profound feeling of disbelief in progress and in the human mind.37

What for the Russian people was a familiar idea, particularly


prominent under Stalinism—that literature should play a secondary role to ideology and serve the goals of social improvement—was put forward not in the 1920s or 1930s, but as early as 1905 (or 1860 for that matter). In his article "Party Organization and Party Literature" ["Partiynaya organizatsiya i partiynaya literatura"] Lenin contended:

Долой литераторов беспартийных! Долой литераторов сверхчеловеков! Литературное дело должно стать частью общепроletарского дела, «колесиком и винтиком» одного, единого, великого социал-демократического механизма, приводимого в движение всем сознательным авангардом всего рабочего класса. Литературное дело должно стать составной частью организованной, планомерной, объединенной социал-демократической партийной работы.38

Between 1900 and 1910 such extreme claims, as well as criticism and berating of modernists, were only cases of wishful thinking among the many extraordinary ideas expressed at the time. In the late 1920s this wishful thinking gave way to strict orders for compulsory imitation of the prescribed canon.39 The institutionalization of one literary canon was precipitated by a

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38 V. I. Lenin, "Partiynaya organizatsiya i partiynaya literatura," O literature i iskusstve (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1957) 42-46, particularly 43. [Lenin’s emphasis]

39 The fact that the Socialist Realist literature traces its provenance back to Maxim Gorky’s novel, Mother [Mat’] (1906), is not an anachronism. Between 1900 and 1910 such a novel was a rarity, while in the 1920s similar novels constituted a literary canon, having become the norm.
marked shift in the early twenties from artists' preoccupation with the inner sphere to the social sphere, which manifested itself in numerous projects in which artists willingly collaborated with the Socialist state. Aesthetization of social and political life replaced the previously dominant aesthetization of private life. Later on, the state and the artistic world confirmed their dedication to each other by working out a matrimonial agreement, i.e. the doctrine of Socialist Realism. As Jakobson reminds us, literary evolution is "not so much a question of the disappearance of certain elements and the emergence of others as it is a question of shifts in the mutual relationship among the diverse components of the system, in other words, a question of a shifting dominant."40

The Silver Age tradition, however, did not recede quietly into the background; its end was punctuated by the premature deaths of some of its most representative figures, like Blok, Gumilev, Rozanov, Bryusov, Gershenzon and Sologub, and was later echoed by the tragic deaths of their younger colleagues, like Esenin, Mayakovsky, Mandel'shtam, Pil'nyak and Tsvetaeva. It was not Socialist Realism as such that was particularly lethal to the recent Silver Age tradition—in many ways its attitude to the art of the

past was considerably more tolerant and preservationist than the attitude of the extreme avant-garde of the 1920s. What was lethal, however, was the distinction that was made by its proponents between good/progressive/useful and bad/regressive/useless art. The literature of the Silver Age was consigned to oblivion as the decadent epitome of the second category. Certainly, many writers who were active during the Silver Age continued writing for many years after the revolution, but their activity fell outside the then acceptable aesthetic norms. This can be seen in the unanimously negative response—both inside and outside the Soviet Union—to the belated products of the Silver Age, such as Mikhail Kuzmin's masterpiece, The Trout Breaks the Ice (Forel' razbivaet led) (1927) or Andrey Bely's later novels and memoirs. The creative writings of those writers who emigrated after the revolution, as well as those of Pasternak, Akhmatova and Mandel'shtam, were barely known to the average Soviet reader. It was not only the texture and the quality of their writings that "failed" them, but the quality and texture of their lives that were

41 On the relationship between the Socialist Realism and tradition see Groys, Utopiya i obmen 39-50.

42 One of the most striking responses came from Anna Akhmatova, who reportedly described "The Trout" as "a highly bourgeois book":

Я давала Ахматовой кузинскую «Форель» [...] Возвращая книгу,
она поморщилась:
— Здесь очень много накручено. Кроме того... очень буржуазная
книга. (Lidiya Ginzburg, Chelovek za pis'mennym stolom (Sovetskiy
impregnated with ideas that were no longer powerful or popular after the Bolshevik revolution. As Vadim Kreyd summed up these developments:

Действительно, контраст между серебряным веком и предшествующим ему безвременьем разительный. И еще разительней этот контраст и прямо-таки враждебность между серебряным веком и тем, что наступило после него,—временем демонизации культуры и духовности. [...] Все кончилось после 1917 года, с началом гражданской войны. Никакого серебряного века после этого не было, как бы нас ни хотели убедить. В двадцатые годы еще продолжалась инерция, ибо такая широкая и могучая волна, каким был наш серебряный век, не могла не двигаться некоторое время, прежде чем обрушиться и разбиться. Еще живы были большинство поэтов, писателей, критики, философы, художники, режиссёры, композиторы, индивидуальным творчеством и общим трудом которых создан был серебряный век, но сама эпоха кончилась. Каждый ее активный участник осознал, что, хотя люди и остались, характерная атмосфера эпохи, в которой таланты росли, как грибы после грибного дождя, сошла на нет. остался холодный лунный пейзаж без атмосферы и творческие индивидуальности—каждый в отдельной замкнутой творческой келье своего творчества. [...] Серебряный век эмигрировал. [...] Но и в русской диаспоре, несмотря на полную творческую свободу, несмотря на изобилие талантов, он не мог возродиться. Ренессанс нуждается в национальной почве и в воздухе свободы. Художники-эмигранты лишились родной почвы, оставшиеся в России лишились воздуха свободы.43

But should one blame the Bolsheviks alone for the interruption of this "Silver" Age of cultural vitality, and for denying Soviet citizens access to the wealth of pre-revolutionary culture, as is implied in Kreyd's article and many other articles on the period? The erasing of this whole period from the map of Russian culture, which was accomplished by the late thirties, can and should no longer be attributed solely to the machinations and arbitrariness of Party bureaucrats and the oppressive totalitarian regime. As Mikhail Epshteyn shows, Russian literature and Russian culture as a whole are characterized by a cyclical development. Epshteyn singles out the following four cycles in the history of Russian literature: (a) 1730-1840; (b) 1840-1920; (c) 1920-1990; (d) 1990-?. Each cycle consists of the following four phases: social, moral, religious and aesthetic. Epshteyn convincingly demonstrates that each cycle reveals a systematic repetition of these four phases. Thus, according to Epshteyn, the receding of the aesthetic phase of the second cycle (which coincided with the larger portion of the Silver Age) in favor of the social phase of the third cycle (which was best expressed through the early works of Socialist realist writers) was

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only to be expected in view of the cyclic nature of the development of Russian literature.45

The fact that the process described by Epshtein was typical of the whole of Russian literature and was not restricted spatially to the Soviet Union, can be illustrated with the works of Russian émigré writers. Aleksey Tolstoy’s novel The Sisters [Sestry] (1919-21), written and first published in emigration, paints an unflattering picture of cultural and political life in Russia between 1913 and

45 Vladimir Paperny sees Soviet civilization as the product of the subsequent alternation of the Cultures "One" and "Two." Vladimir Paperny, Kul’tura "Dva" (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1996).

46 Epshtein 98.
1918. Tolstoy's characters are all pleasant but idle people, longing for the cleansing Apocalypse, or at least for a much more radical development of the sexual revolution. In the opening section of his novel Tolstoy revisits and debunks the myth of Petersburg as a mysteriously pernicious and haunted place--an idea entertained in the works of many representatives of the Silver Age--and shows instead that the problem with Petersburg, and with the whole of Russia, lay in the indolence and corruption of its ruling classes, and in the irresponsible behavior of its intellectuals who indulged themselves in an artificially aestheticized life-style. World War I and the October revolution are presented as a well deserved punishment of the educated classes for their mishandling of political and social situations.

Tolstoy is particularly hard on one of his characters--the famous poet Aleksey Bessonov--who drinks heavily, senselessly seduces naive or vulnerable women, and spends only rare hours in raptures of creative activity during which he contemplates the future fate of Russia. Like most intellectuals of his time, Bessonov associates the realization of his wildest dreams with the "narod-bogonosets" (the Chosen [common] People):

Бессонов переживал хорошие минуты. Он писал о том, что опускается ночь на Россию, раздвигается занавес трагедии, и народ-богоносец чудесно, как в «Страшной мести» казак, превращается в бооборца, надевает страшную личину. Готовится всенародное свершение Черной обедни. Бездна раскрыта. Спасения нет.
The above quotation is a parody on the writings of many representatives of the Silver Age who expected the positive transformation of human beings to come as a result of a world-consuming Apocalypse. Bessonov meets his own apocalypse at the front, in 1916. He dies, however, not on the battlefield but by the hand of one of his own. The beloved "narod-bogonosets" takes the shape of a Russian soldier, who strangles Bessonov out of fear that the latter is going to report him as a deserter. Since Tolstoy intended Bessonov's character to be identified with Aleksandr Blok—the poet whose works and life style became virtually synonymous with fin de siècle Russia—his death can be interpreted as symbolizing the sordid demise of Silver Age culture as a whole.  

47 Aleksey Tolstoy, Khozhdenie po mukam (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1950) vol. 1, 70.  
48 This is discussed in more detail in Chapter IV.  
49 Tolstoy's unsympathetic portrayal of "Blok" can be attributed to the fact that the last installment of his novel for Sovremennye zapiski was finished in August 1921, prior to the poet's death.  
50 It is not fortuitous that apart from his striking resemblance to Blok, Bessonov also embodies distinct characteristics of other representatives of the Silver Age culture. Thus, his first name--Aleksey--is identical with that of Tolstoy, who wrote a number of poems and works of prose under the influence
Although writing his novel in Berlin in the heyday of European Modernism, Tolstoy demonstrates unexpected loyalty to and affinity with the Russian Realist tradition, particularly with the works of Lev Tolstoy. It is not fortuitous that the name of Aleksey Tolstoy's sympathetic character is Ivan Il'ich (later to become a prominent figure in the Red Army), like that of Leo Tolstoy's famous character, who--though on his deathbed--became a truly transformed human being, by ceasing to think selfishly about himself and instead starting to care for others (The Death of Ivan Il'ich, [Smert' Ivana Il'icha] (1886)). Numerous discussions between the heroine Dasha and Ivan Il'ich--including the guessing of words by their first letters--are painstakingly copied by Aleksey Tolstoy from similar episodes between Kitty and Levin in Lev Tolstoy's Anna Karenina (1877). It looks as if the modernistic "disarray," its license to twist and smash everything into incongruous bits and pieces, was rejected by Aleksey Tolstoy for having led in his opinion to disarray in real life in the form of the war and revolution.51 Probably by casting these events in a realistic mold, he was hoping to

of Decadents and Symbolists. Although Blok, like Bessonov, served in the medical unit, it was another poet, Muni (S.V. Kissin) who actually committed suicide in 1916 while serving in the medical unit in Minsk.

51 See my subsequent discussion of Nikolay Berdyaev's accusations directed against "Futurists" in the early 1920s ("Futurists" for Berdyaev included all modern trends in art, literature and philosophy) for causing--by means of their creative activity--the "crisis of Humanism," which revealed itself in the Bolshevik revolution (Nikolay Berdyaev, Smysl istorii (Paris: YMCA-PRESS, 1969) 202-221.
"translate" the meaningless chaos into some comprehensible pattern, anticipating that his orderly organized fictional world would eventually provide some peace and quiet to the real one.

Unlike Tolstoy's later works, *The Sisters* can not be suspected of having been influenced or supervised by the Bolshevik authorities. In fact Tolstoy was often reprimanded for not coming up with a sympathetic portrayal of the Bolshevik movement in this novel. In any case, his grotesque description of the life of Russian intellectuals in the 1910s is no different from a similar description found in the work of Vladislav Khodasevich, whose integrity was legendary. Here is how the latter describes this period in 1926:

Like Aleksey Tolstoy, Khodasevich came to appreciate if not the style of Lev Tolstoy, then the outlook of his characters. His essay "About Annensky" ["Ob Annenskom"] (1935) is built on a

contrast between the actual life and death of the famous Symbolist poet Innokentiy Annensky (1856-1909)--particularly the way the theme of death was projected into his poetry--and that of Lev Tolstoy's Ivan Il'ich Golovin. Having admitted that Annensky--by virtue of being a poet--was infinitely more subtle as a person than Tolstoy's character, Khodasevich nevertheless sadly concludes that the miracle experienced by Ivan Il'ich shortly before his death, remained unknown and practically inaccessible to Annensky. Thus "an ordinary man" [обыкновенный человек] turns out to be morally superior to "an extraordinary human being, the poet" [не обыкновенный человек, а поэт].

The dull uneventful life of Tolstoy's "ordinary" and relatively educated character who died a simple death in his own bed in the gloomy 1880s--the period traditionally associated with stagnation in cultural and political life--suddenly became a model to follow for Russian émigré writers, disillusioned with the alleged ideological impotence of Silver Age culture. Although prefacing his article "A Man of the Thirties" ["Chelovek 30-kh godov"] (1933) with an epigraph from one of Aleksandr Blok's poems, the young poet and literary critic Yuriy Terapiano from the outset attests to the unbridgeable gap between his own and the older generation, acknowledging World War I and subsequent revolutions as having erected an insurmountable barrier between them.

Terapiano props up his denunciation of the cultural legacy of his immediate predecessors in favor of Lev Tolstoy by the all too familiar discussion of one's duty to adhere to the "truth" both in life and art, arguing that a man of the thirties "has learnt to distrust himself [and therefore] demands telling the truth from himself, [being always] severe and earnest [with himself]." And since there can be only one truth, Terapiano starts campaigning against any sign of diversity and richness, while promoting austerity and paucity both in lifestyle and as an aesthetic principle.

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54 Yuriy Terapiano, "Chelovek 30-kh godov," Chisla 7-8 (1933): 211.

55 Terapiano 211.
In his campaign for aesthetic abstinence and unification Terapiano was not alone. Another relatively young poet and literary critic of that time, Nikolay Otsup, in his 1930 article to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Andrey Bely's birth, makes every effort to present Bely as a cultural and intellectual anachronism. Otsup's "Bely", dancing wildly in the Berlin of the early 1920s, is perceived by the author as a peculiar extraterrestrial, whose habits, gestures and, especially, language are barely comprehensible to his contemporaries. Otsup is particularly critical of Bely's versatility, of his inability to adhere to one idea only.

Ничего у Белого не просто. В самом деле и на стуле не может повернуться просто так, чтобы повернуться. Непременно по самым высоким соображениям. Белого можно бы назвать олицетворением переходной эпохи. Он успевает всего коснуться, но не успевает быть хозяином одной какой либо идеи, одного чувства. Все мелькает перед ним и в нем. Он слишком многих понимает, слишком многому сочувствует: всюду умеет оставить частицу

56 Terapiano 212.
Otsup's pigeonholing of Bely as a writer who--because of his inner fragmentation--belongs to "the transitional period" and for whom, accordingly, there would be no room in the post-transitional period, echoes the Soviet criticism of Bely and of "fellow-travelers" in general. They were traditionally reprimanded for their fragmented vision and inability to identify themselves unequivocally with the Party. The words "transitional period" were coined by the Bolsheviks, such as Lev Trotsky, himself the mastermind behind the creation of the wholesome "new men" of the radiant future, who never missed a chance to berate intellectuals for their indecisive behavior.

Our policy in art during a transitional period, can and must be to help the various groups and schools of art which have come over to the Revolution to grasp correctly the historic meaning of the Revolution, and to allow them complete freedom of self-determination in the field of art, after putting before them the categorical standard of being for or against the Revolution.58

To do justice to Trotsky's campaign against the vacillating position of many an intellectual with regard to the October


revolution, one has to remember that intellectuals themselves provided ample evidence of their ambiguous attitudes. It is sufficient to mention that the last section of Bely's *Recollections of Blok* [Vospominaniya o Bloke] (1922) is entitled "The Doubles" ["Dvoyniki"], and that testimony to his own dubious behavior as well as to that of his contemporaries abounds in his later works. While searching for what went wrong in the life of his generation prior to World War I, Khodasevich—anticipating the famous passage from Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*—concludes that the tragedy lay in this generation's continual oscillation between the two worlds, immanent and transcendent.59 The proffered means of ending this precarious existence between two realities were radical indeed: either an unreserved transformation into a wholesome superman, or death. Thus, the tragic drowning in 1912 of the painter Nikolay Sapunov in the Gulf of Finland was presented fifteen years later by Vladimir Pyast as a welcome relief "from the excessive—for any human being—tortures of the split personality" [от чрезмерных для живого существо мучений раздвоенности].60 In 1924 Trotsky offered "help" to disoriented people like Andrey Bely; in 1930—at the time that Otsup was ridiculing Bely's unstable behavior—Trotsky needed help himself. Having been accused by the Bolshevik Party of diverging from orthodox Leninism, he was forced to live in exile

59 Khodasevich, *Nekropol'. Literatura i vlast'. Pis'ma B.A. Sadovskomu* 74.

60 Vladimir Pyast, *Vstrechi* (New York: Orfey, 1986 [1929]) 243. [Pyast's emphasis]
where he found refuge in writing memoirs, a preoccupation for which he used to condemn Bely back in the early twenties.61

Trotsky's project of producing psychologically and physically superior "new men," whose psyche was no longer contaminated with bourgeois culture, did not fall into oblivion with his own disgrace. Lidiya Ginzburg in her 1930 diary entry recorded psychological transformations that she observed in her contemporaries under the influence of social changes:

61 Trotsky 46-55.

62 Ginzburg, Chelovek za pis'mennym stolom 95-96.
The upbeat tone of this entry leaves no doubt that Ginzburg was welcoming the dissolution of an intellectual-individualist (or was it simply an individual?) and--in the best scenario--his/her eventual transformation into a political animal, who valued physical fitness, scorned preoccupation with eternal, or internal, problems and "perceived life from the social point of view."

As this brief analysis shows, by the early 1930s, as a result of the joint activity of many Russian intellectuals, both those residing in the Soviet Union and abroad, the Silver Age with everything it stood for--the unprecedented diversity in themes and approaches, individualism and determined rejection of traditional moralizing--was excluded from the then approved boundaries of Russian culture. In other words--its legacy was openly rejected by both its very representatives and its rightful heirs. When Viktor Erofeev, states somberly that the pregnancy of Russian society with the Silver Age ended in a "miscarriage,"63 we should not blame solely the Soviet authorities for this. In many instances the "unborn child" was purged by its own "parents."

The many examples of artists claiming allegiance to Pushkin's cultural legacy which reached its peak in 1921-1937,64 should be seen in light of the same fervor for turning one's back on the


immediate past--be it bosom friends, inappropriate relatives or cultural traditions--that consumed the Russian populace at that time. In his 1931 article "Gumilev and Blok" Khodasevich makes denunciation of the past almost a precondition for acquiring the status of a new "Pushkin." By delivering his farewell "Pushkin Speech" in 1921, Blok was identified by many with Pushkin himself. Khodasevich's record of this event is no exception. His "Blok", however, also spent an hour and a half after the formalities of the evening were over in reminiscing about his Symbolist past and in confiding to Khodasevich that he could hardly understand his own early poems, so foreign did they appear to him in 1921.

 [...] перешли к раннему символизму. О той эпохе, о тогдаших мистических увлечениях, об Андрее Белом и С. М. Соловьеве Блок говорил с любовной усмешкой. Так вспоминают детство. Блок признавался, что многих тогдаших стихов своих он больше не понимает: «Забыл, что тогда значили многие слова. А ведь казались сакральными. А теперь читаю эти стихи, как чужие, и не всегда понимаю, что, собственно, хотел сказать автор».

Moreover, "Blok", as seen by Khodasevich ten years after the described event, is endowed with all the positive characteristics of a new "man of the thirties,"--self-disciplined, simple, earnest and, above all, truthful. In short, he represents all those features, that were foreign to Silver Age aesthetics and ethics, but, as we remember, were vehemently advocated by Yuriy Terapiano in 1933:

65 Khodasevich Nekropol'. Literatura i vlast'. Pis'ma B.A.Sadovskomu 87.
Blok's aesthetic confrontation with Gumilev and his cohort in 1920-21—as depicted by Khodasevich—acquires the shape of a political struggle between the noble and crystal-clear figure of Blok and the corrupt Acmeists. Without noticing, Khodasevich employs the all too familiar rhetorical devices of the Bolsheviks:

Говорил много о себе, как будто с самим собою, смотря вглубь себя, очень сдержанно, порой полунамеками, сомнительно, спутанно, во за его словами ощущалась суровая, терпкая правдивость. Казалось, он видит мир и себя в трагической обнаженности и простоте. Правдивость и простота навсегда остались во мне связаны с воспоминаниями о Блоке. [...] Он прочитал лишь несколько стихотворений—с проникновенно простотой и глубокой серьезностью, о которой лучше всего сказать словом Пушкина: «с важностью».

66 Ibid., 87.
To appreciate the drastic changes that took place over the period of 1921-31, one has to compare Khodasevich's "Blok"-cum-"Pushkin" with Bely's protean "Blok" of 1922, upon whom Bely--not unlike Dostoevsky with his "Pushkin" of 1880--generously bestows the virtues of "the noble, new and beautiful man, capable of comprehending everything and everybody [вседомый]," and whose works "are equally accessible to specialists, stylists, to studying young people, workers, all Russians, the French, the Germans. . ."68

Despite Bely's subsequent efforts to dethrone Blok in his later writings, the latter was quickly promoted in Soviet Russia to the position of "Mister Silver Age," the only representative of this period about whom it was permissible to speak openly with warmth and reverence. This view of Blok as being the best representative of his time--almost an anomaly--whose legacy deserved preservation, was also shared by émigré literary circles. Blok's exceptional talent, but above all, his attractive appearance and personality--and particularly his "timely" death in 1921--made him a perfect

67 Ibid., 90-1.

68 Andrey Bely, Vospomnaniya o Bloke (Moscow: Respublika, 1995) 16.
intermediary between the old and new cultures, through whom the Silver Age eventually made its glorious comeback. The rumors of Blok intentionally starving himself to death when he came to recognize the true horror of the Bolshevik revolution, reconciled him immediately with those whom he had previously alienated by writing his allegedly pro-revolutionary *The Twelve [Dvenadtsat']* (1918). While outside Russia Blok was eulogized as one of the first victims of the Bolshevik revolution, Soviet critics strove to portray him as a poet of the revolution. For the latter he was a perfect example of how the a man from the old world--a member of the gentry in Blok's case--could gradually turn himself into a "new" one, albeit at the cost of his own life. By contrast, all the eulogizers were emphasizing Blok's phenomenal ability to transgress different barriers, including those erected by politics and time. The myth of

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70 "И пока он говорил, чувствовалось, как постепенно рушится стена между ним и залом," Khodasevich remarks about Blok presenting his "Pushkin Speech" in 1921. Nekropol'. Literatura i vlast'. Pis'ma B.A.Sadovskomu 87. See also A. Z. Shteinberg's account of twenty-four hours that he spent with Blok, while imprisoned by the Bolsheviks in February 1919. Shteinberg attests to Blok's unique ability to appeal to different people--in this case mainly political prisoners--to live up to the image of a perfect "famous [Russian] writer," whatever that might be: "Между тем, весть о том, что здесь известный писатель Блок, уже успел облететь обе камеры и вокруг нашего стола собралась целая куча народу. Многие спрашивали, где он, и на чепухах подходили к койке, на которой он дремал чтобы взглянуть на него, и снова отходили в раздумье, однозначно делая своими впечатлениями. Не все они знали о нем раньше, хотя бы по наслышке. многие только слышали о нем и уже совсем не многие читали его. [...] Но всем было как-то отрадно знать, что вот здесь, на этой «Гороховой два» вместе со всеми «известный писатель» и, взглянув на него, все уже
"Blok" had nothing to do with the real man--each person saw what he or she wanted to see in his biography and his writings. Thus, Blok's ambivalent position in the Soviet aesthetic hierarchy allowed Pasternak to announce in Safe Conduct [Okhrannaya gramota] (1931) his decision to give up the typically Symbolist pursuit of the "life of a poet," and to refer to the Symbolist Blok as his mentor in this endeavor. The myth of Blok, however, was powerful enough to keep the door to the Silver Age ajar, and Andrey Bely was the first to realize that.

71 My perception of Blok as a cultural intermediary was influenced by Yuriy Lotman's "K postroyeniyu teorii vzaimodeystviya kul'tur," Izbrannye stat'i v trekh tomakh vol. 1 (Tallin: Aleksandra, 1992) 110-20.

72 For a good sampling of different points of view on Blok see Aleksandr Blok v vospominaniyakh sovremennikov v dvukh tomakh, ed. Vladimir Orlov (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1980), and Pamyati Aleksandra Bloka, 1890-1980 (London: Overseas Publications, 1980).
Andrey Bely's project of depicting intellectual life in Russia some thirty years prior to the Bolshevik revolution was a truly evolving one. It was conceived in 1921-22 as a monograph devoted solely to the life of the recently deceased Aleksandr Blok (Recollections of Blok [Vospominaniya o Bloke], 1922-23), but the work quickly outgrew the genre restrictions of "hagiography" that Bely initially imposed on himself, and by 1934 had grown into three volumes, each corresponding roughly to a period of less than ten years--On the Border of Two Centuries [Na rubezhe dvukh stoletiy] (1930), The Beginning of the Century [Nachalo veka] (1933) and Between Two Revolutions [Mehdu dvukh revolyutsiy] (1934). Bely was by no means the only one to indulge himself in reminiscing about temps perdu. However, the position of Bely's memoirs in Russian literature of the 1920s and 1930s is remarkable.

As stated in his own introductions this succession of memoirs testifies to Bely's numerous attempts to re-evaluate and even re-enact and re-construct for post-revolutionary readers the complex picture of cultural life in Russia from the late nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century. An astoundingly talented person himself, Bely was intimately familiar with many poets, writers, philosophers, artists, musicians and simply interesting people who were active at that time. Whatever scholars might say now about the reliability of his memoirs, Bely in the 1920s and early 1930s
imposed upon himself the literal role of a pontifex, by quickly throwing a number of bridges over the rapidly growing rift between pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary cultures. It is appropriate therefore that his death in 1934 was lamented in the émigré world by Fedor Stepun as the death of "the last of [his] kin":

In his noble undertaking to serve as an intermediary between the tragically split cultures, Bely faced a number of problems, one of which was his potential readership. As Boris Groys and Katerina Clark convincingly demonstrated, even at the time of the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1921-28)—a period of ideological laxness and small-scale capitalist development in Russia—the vast majority of its citizens had no interest whatsoever in high-brow theater, art or works of literature.74 "The masses were not going to the very

73 Fedor Stepun, Vstrechi (Munchen: Tovarishchestvo zarubezhnykh pisateley, 1962) 162. [Stepun's emphasis]

74 "Уже начиная с введения НЭП, в стране возник новый художественный рынок и новый читательский спрос со стороны новой нэпманской буржуазии, которой авангард был чужд и эстетически, и тем более политически. Именно в период НЭПа, т.е. с 22-го года, а вскоре не в тридцатые годы начинается закат авангардистского движения, которое к концу 20-х годов утрачивает в стране всякое влияние, хотя и продолжает
cultural institutions which, in theory, the Revolution had freed them to enjoy. [...] Everyone was watching American films" with Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford.⁷⁵ According to Clark, the Party functionaries in their decisions on which trends and approaches in art should be favored at the expense of others, were forced to take into account public demand and popular taste.⁷⁶ Theirs was a difficult task, since as a direct result of the October revolution, a relatively small group of art consumers—which consisted mainly of producers themselves and of their enlightened peers—was replaced overnight by the whole population whose tastes did not coincide with those of the sophisticated elite. In this situation, the development of the Socialist Realist canon—with the prescribed portrayal of good, strong and straightforward "heroes" proving themselves victorious under the most challenging conditions—emerged partially in response to the growing need for "home-made" uncomplicated adventure plots that appealed to average Soviet citizens.⁷⁷ Thus in his speech at the First Writers' Congress of 1934, Samuil Marshak—who mainly spoke about books for young readers—"defined socialist realism as travel and adventure literature, a

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⁷⁶ Ibid., 196.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 197-200.
formula that he said he derived from the readers' letters about the literature they preferred."78

These new readers allegedly spoke the new language. By 1928 a number of politicians, artists and linguists on numerous occasions proudly spoke of the fact that a "new" (proletarian) language had come into existence as a result of the dramatic political, social and cultural changes that had taken place after 1917. It was even suggested that young people of the late twenties were virtually unable to understand the language of pre-revolutionary intellectuals.79 By the late 1920s, the active vocabulary of Russian speakers was, on the one hand, significantly depleted, because various words were no longer recalled in everyday situations, since the notions and objects that they denoted had become obsolete; on the other hand, the language was continuously enriching itself with new words denoting the new realia that were unknown to older generations.80 The generation gap, the need of translation from one

78 Ibid., 345, 69n.

79 Ibid., 224.

80 A similar situation exists in today's Russia. Thus the narrator in Yuriy Polyakov's satire, The Goat in Milk [Kozlenok v moloke] (1996), while describing the pre-perestroika life of Russian men of letters for the post-perestroika readers, repeatedly makes jokes at the expense of the alleged generation gap: "какой-то там сомнительный творческий метод, похожий на искусственный мед, который я однажды ел в несуществующей уже ГДР. Ныне выросло целое поколение, понятия не имеющее, что такое соцреализм и с чем его едят. А люди постарше, даже неплохо в свое время подрабатывающие на этом творческом методе, если и вспоминают о нем, то как о давно усопшем родственчике, часто дававшем на мороженое, но при этом все время читавшем нудные нотации. . ." Yuriy Polyakov, Kozlenok v moloke (Moscow: Kovcheg, 1996) 173.
language into the other as well as the relativity of any experience—including cultural—was recognized by some representatives of the dying tradition. Thus, in 1929 Vladimir Pyast prefaced his reminiscences about the literary activity of the beginning of the century with the following remarks:

Наш читатель, жаждущий вновь жизни, именно жаждет разнообразных знаний и в том числе о «старой», непосредственно предшествовавшей нашей эпохе жизни. Могу ему помочь лишь в одной области,—в области чисто литературной, и, то только в одной ее полосе, на которую падали лучи в моем тогдашнем восприятии.—В зависимости от того, ведь, на каком пункте находится человек, кажется ему освещенным то или другое место.81

It is with all these changes in mind and particularly in view of the "new" Soviet reader, that Bely wrote his memoirs:

За истекшее тридцатилетие мы пережили глубокий сдвиг; такого не знала история предшествующих столетий; современная молодежь развивается в условиях, ничем не напоминающих условия, в которых воспитывался я и мои сверстники; воспитание, образование, круг чтения, остатки, психология, общественность,—все иное; мы не читали того, что читают теперь; современной молодежи не нужно обременять себя тем, чем мы переобременяли себя; даже поступки, кажущиеся дикими и предосудительными в наши дни, котировались подчас как подвиг в мое время.82

81 Pyast, Vstrechi 5.
82 Andrey Bely, Nachalo veka (Moscow: Soyuzteatr, 1990) 17.
It was not only a desire to please the authorities, but also the vision of his potential reader that motivated Bely in the 1930s to portray himself and his generation as romantic rebels against the pre-revolutionary stagnant way of living—and therefore—as allies of the Revolution.

The fact that Bely in his memoirs was less preoccupied with telling the "truth" about his generation (a fact which puzzled and upset some of his admirers and supporters), and more with whether this generation was going to be remembered at all by modern readers, along with his tendency to tell the same story more than once and each time in a different way—all of this points directly to a continued process of digestion, assimilation and processing of the cultural legacy of the Silver Age that took place in his writings. Bely was not simply trying to remember, he was re-enacting, re-

narrating and--what the modern scholar of cultural memory calls--"re-presenting" the past.

Such looking back and remembering has to confront some difficult problems of representation in its relationship to temporality and memory. [. . .] Re-presentation always comes after, even though some media will try to provide us with the delusion of pure presence. [. . .] The past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory. The fissure that opens up between experiencing an event and remembering it in representation is unavoidable. Rather than lamenting or ignoring it, this split should be understood as a powerful stimulant for cultural and artistic creativity.84

In Russian literature a similar observation was made by Anna Akhmatova in her highly biographical A Poem Without a Hero:

Но была для меня та тема
Как раздавленная хризантема
На полу, когда гроб несут.
Между «помнить» и «вспомнить», другие,
Расстояние—как от Луги
До страны атласных баут.85

The whole poem arose from this fissure between "remembering" and "re-presenting." Apart from being conducive to creativity, such re-


85 Anna Akhmatova, Stikhotvoreniva i poemy (Leningrad: Sovetskiy pisatel', 1984) 613.
narration, re-enacting, re-presentation and re-processing of the old is essential for the preservation of cultural memory and for the preservation of literary tradition. Bely in the 1920s and 1930s presented a unique twofold system. His books were written simultaneously by a representative of the dying tradition and by a "new" writer—his rival—determined to overcome this old tradition. Bely's "creative memoirs" along with Osip Mandel'shtam's autobiographical The Noise of Time [Shum vremenii] (1925), Vladimir Pyast's barely known memoirs Encounters [Vstrechi] (1929), Georgiy Chulkov's The Years of Pilgrimage [Gody stranstviy] (1930) and Boris Pasternak's egocentric Safe Conduct [Okhrannaya gramota] (1931) were a tangible memory-bond that tied pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary cultures together. Bely may have caricatured his contemporaries, but at least a later generation could learn of their existence. In this perspective, Bely's

86 Yuri Tynyanov in "Dostoevsky and Gogol" stipulates that "literary tradition" or "continuity" should not be seen as a smooth line, connecting the younger and the older generations, rather it should be conceived as a "struggle" between them. Tynyanov, Arkhaisty i novatory (Munchen: Wilhelm Fink, 1967) 412. In this respect Bely's deliberate twisting of the ideas of his contemporaries, which verges on making them sound ridiculous and obsolete, is in agreement with the normal development of literary evolution.

87 This can be also seen in Bely's 're-writing' of his pre-revolutionary novel, Petersburg into the post-revolutionary novel, Moscow. Khodasevich was the first to point to the mirror-like connection between these two novels in his "Ableukhovy-Letaevy-Korobkiny." See his Literaturnye stat'i i vospominaniya.
memoirs stand as a unique witness to the Symbolist era in Russian cultural history."⁸⁸

A few days prior to Bely's death⁸⁹ Literaturnaya gazeta published "Marcel Proust" ["Marsel' Prust"], the last article by Anatoliy Lunacharsky who had died in France in the late December, 1933. In this article, with some obligatory bows towards Marxist-Leninist criticism of the bourgeois Proust, Lunacharsky marvels at Proust's ability to digest his past, to renew it and bring it to life for the reader in the form of his "auto-biographical" novels:

Важно именно то изумительное переваривание прошлого, которое идет в его 77 желудках и которое все это прошлое постоянно обновляет и углубляет.⁹⁰

Lunacharsky compares Proust's "memoirs" with Goethe's Dichtung und Wahrheit and praises both writers for their commitment to the "inner structure" [внутренняя стройность] of their works, rather than to the telling of the "exact truth" [точная правда] about their lives.⁹¹ Lunacharsky's perceptive comments on Proust can be easily applied to Bely's memoirs as well. Bely's capacity to process and translate human experience was really unique. It is ironic that Bely's obituary written for Izvestiya by Pil'nyak, Pasternak and Sannikov, in which


⁸⁹ Bely died on January 8th, 1934.

⁹⁰ Literaturnaya gazeta 5 Jan. 1934.

⁹¹ Ibid.
he is sympathetically portrayed as a person of high "aesthetic and moral tension/voltage [напряжение]," is immediately followed by a short piece with the dreary title: "The End of the Competition for the Best Radio-Receiver/Transmitter" [Конкурс на лучший радиоприемник закончился].

With the demise of memoirs as a genre in Soviet literature, which almost coincided with Bely's death, the natural process of digestion, appropriation and assimilation of the cultural legacy of the Silver Age on any considerable scale came to a halt in the Soviet Union. A significant effort to preserve the cultural past was undertaken by Khodasevich, Georgiy Ivanov, Berdyaev, Otsup, Makovsky, Stepun, Valentinov, Gippius—to name but a few—but this body of work remained largely unknown to the Soviet reader. The new Soviet literature was oriented towards the future, not to a past which—it was expected—would shortly be forgotten. For years to come the cultural legacy of the Silver Age was never considered with anything approaching the depth that Bely explored in his memoirs.

92 Izvestiya 9 Jan. 1934.

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In Soviet Russia, what is usually described as a merciless purge of the legacy of the Silver Age in the succeeding period (1918-1940), resulted from the unique political, social and cultural situation of the post-revolutionary period. While fin de siècle culture was obsessed with the glorious past, often seeing itself as a rather inferior projection of distant epochs, revolutionary culture, with its promises of future improvement of existing world order, naturally regarded the past as inferior to the present, not to mention the future. Inevitably, post-revolutionary views as to the high point in cultural evolution differed from pre-revolutionary views. Andrew Baruch Wachtel perceptively observed that the Russians have a unique tendency to assign periods of happiness and cultural prosperity--such as golden or silver ages--to definite positions within historical time.

Descriptions of a lost golden age, of course, form a constant cultural/mythological pattern, from ancient Greece through the Renaissance and into the modern world. The Russian version of the golden-age myth is unusual only in that it places the golden age practically in historical time, as opposed to the "sometime" more typical of mythic chronology. [. . .] Ideological battle was, therefore, not between [a] happy and unhappy [. . . version of the golden age] but rather between a view that placed the golden age
in the immediate past and one that set it in the immediate future.94

Thus, when after the revolution the surviving representatives of the Silver Age tradition were nostalgically looking back to Pushkin, whose life and work were for them synonymous with the Golden Age of Russian literature, their revolutionary-minded counterparts were at the same time dethroning Pushkin and pushing him off "the steamboat of modernity." The pro-revolutionary writers cared little for antiquity or for the present, when so many wonderful things were expected to happen in the immediate future.95 Their rejection, nay destruction, of the past was not all that difficult to accomplish for a number of intellectuals were by that time greatly disillusioned with Russian literature and culture, blaming it, like the writer and philosopher Vasilii Rozanov, for leading to general confusion and unrest. Russian literature, in terms of its main themes—according to Rozanov—was "such a loathsome thing [такая мерзость]," because it was traditionally "preoccupied with only 'how they loved' and 'what they talked about'" instead of guiding and educating people.96


95 Mandel'shtam in his "Word and Culture" [Slovo i kul'tura] (1921) came up with a peculiar cross of the two trends, "Итак, ни одного поэта еще не было. Мы свободны от груза воспоминаний. Зато сколько радостных предчувствий: Пушкин, Овидий, Гомер." Osip Mandel'shtam, Ob iskusstve (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1995) 204.

A similar dissatisfaction with modern civilization, the state of art and thought in general—which brought Europe in 1914 to the brink of the Apocalypse was shared by Rozanov's contemporaries, Mikhail Gershenzon and Nikolay Berdyaev. While in early 1917 Gershenzon suggested that the horror and the glory of World War I revealed to everybody the "conservatism" of human nature, which—despite general beliefs at the time—had resisted the ameliorating impact of progressive science and technology, Berdyaev in his 1919-20 lectures, delivered in Moscow for the students of the Vol'naya Akademiya, accused the culture of the nineteenth and early twentieth century for leading to what he termed "the crisis of Humanism." This crisis, according to Berdyaev, was caused by the hyper-individualistic orientation of modern culture, which reached its apogee in Friedrich Nietzsche's construct of the Superman. Since, Berdyaev argued, the rise of the Superman was expected to result from mercilessly overcoming imperfect human nature, humanism was imperceptibly replaced by its antipode--anti-humanism. Another nineteenth-century personality to blame for this crisis was Karl Marx who, not unlike Nietzsche, denied the value of each and every human being, instead dissolving individuals in the collective. Marx "preaches coercion with regard to man and thy neighbor in the name of erecting a non-human, superhuman kingdom of


98 Berdyaev, Smysl istorii 186-7.
collectivism." Thus Berdyaev invested his hopes for the radiant future of mankind in neither the god of Decadence nor that of Socialism.

Both modern philosophers and modern artists were scorned by Berdyaev for their distinctly "anti-Renaissance" traits. Modern art is blamed by Berdyaev for dispatching man as the "greatest objet d'art," it tears man into pieces or merges him with and dissolves him in the material world, as happens in the paintings of Picasso or in Andrey Bely's *Petersburg* (1916). Modern artists, according to Berdyaev, undergo bouts of "creative impotence [...] and envy of the more wholesome periods in the history of human culture." "Man no longer has wings. [...] He reached the end of modern history by being deeply disillusioned, damaged, fragmented and creatively exhausted." However, a special feature of Russian culture lies in the fact that it arrived at its decline through by-passing the true Renaissance experienced earlier by all other European cultures. A remote chance of experiencing some sort of a Renaissance flickered up for Russia during the age of Pushkin, but it was too short a period.

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99 Ibid., 189.

100 Ibid., 206-13.

101 Ibid., 207-8.

102 Ibid., 211.

103 Ibid., 213-14.

104 Ibid., 220-21.
to produce a substantial impact, according to Berdyaev. The rest of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth were too immersed in the mundane, and even the thirst of Russian culture for "religious transformation was stricken by some sort of unhealthy dreaminess." Nonetheless, the absence of a recent cultural Renaissance that can be re-visited is not to the disadvantage of the under-civilized Russian people, since--more than Western people who are so attached to the material world--they recognize their critical situation and can find a way out. In this conclusion that a golden age is drawing on for Russia, Berdyaev joins forces with the Marxists, for his cultural Renaissance as well as their golden era of communism were expected to take place in the immediate future.

Only some years later, when expectations of reaching the golden age--be it the communist paradise or the new spiritual Renaissance--wore really thin, the mythological prosperous time was again identified as having occurred in the past. This idea was developed by the late twenties when the Russian fin de siècle was upgraded by Berdyaev to "the time of great intellectual and spiritual excitement"--in short--"philosophical, artistic and mystical renaissance." By the late thirties he had further promoted this

105 Ibid., 220-21.
106 Ibid., 268.
107 Ibid., 268-69.
108 Berdyaev is quoted in Ronen, The Fallacy of the Silver Age 10.
period to the status of not only an artistic but also a religious and spiritual Renaissance. In the 1930s apart from Berdyaev, many émigré Russian intellectuals joined in praising and admiring this period and this reached its apogee in Sergey Makovsky's eulogistic collection *On the Parnassus of the Silver Age* [*Na parnase serebryanogo veka*] (1962).

Whether the twenty years prior to the Bolshevik revolution should be referred to as the "Silver" (or "second Golden" or even "Platinum") Age of Russian culture is not so important for this dissertation. What is important is that by the 1940s this term became current. And what is even more important: this period had redeemed itself in the eyes of the beholders or--in post-Stalinist jargon--it has been rehabilitated. What happened is best described by Lidiya Ginzburg's perceptive observation about how one's vision of a certain object or of a person can change abruptly overnight. (The following passage was written in connection with Mayakovsky's suicide in 1930.)

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110 See Vladimir Veydle, "Tri Rossii," *Sovremennye zapiski* LXV (1937): 304-322. In this article Veydle explicitly describes the period preceding the revolution of 1917 as the Silver Age of Russian culture.

111 See Ronen's exhaustive discussion in his *The Fallacy of the Silver Age*. 
Within the Soviet Union the attitude to the Silver Age among the intelligentsia was far more ambivalent than attitudes abroad. Even from the vantage point of the 1970-s Nadezhda Mandel'shtam held the Silver Age responsible for the macabre developments of the 1920-s and for the purges of the 1930-s:

Характерно, что почти у всех символистов десятых годов, в том числе и у Вячеслава Иванова, можно найти апологии жестокости. Я нашла у Вячеслава Иванова: «Жестокости свойственно светлое выражение лица», а жертва «вливает... световую энергию мучителя». Элита учил благосклонно относиться к жестоким сверхиндивидвидуалистам, не подготовила ли она русскую интеллигенцию, элиту, к принятию идей террора?

112 Ginzburg, Chelovek za pis'mennym stolom 92.

113 Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, Vtoraya kniga: vospominaniya (Moscow: Moskovskiy rabochiy, 1990), 333.
Like Terapiano's "men of the thirties," Nadezhda Mandel'shtam unreservedly dissociates from Silver Age culture both herself (on the basis of age—she insists on calling herself a "little girl" [she was born in 1899] throughout the greater portion of her narrative about the 1920s) and Osip Mandel'shtam (1891-1938). Mandel'shtam is excused by her from any "liability" on the basis of "being perpetually misunderstood both by the Symbolists and the connoisseurs of collectivism."114

Such an unforgiving attitude towards the Silver Age, nevertheless, did not stop Nadezhda Mandel'shtam from being "hurt" by the ambiguous "first dedication" of Akhmatova's A Poem Without a Hero.115 She resented Akhmatova's composite suicidal protagonist of the long poem about the murky atmosphere of the early 1910s—whose portrait was informed by a number of different people—and wanted him to be modeled unequivocally after her late husband alone. In her disappointment, she goes as far as accusing Akhmatova of egocentrism and double-dealing and reprimands her for her uncritical admiration of Silver Age "beauties" such as Ol'ga Glebova-Sudeykina and others. Although greatly impressed by the poem as a whole, Nadezhda Mandel'shtam associated its weakness with

114 Ibid., 333.

115 Nadezhda Mandel'shatam devoted a special chapter, "'Poema bez geroya' i moya obida" to this matter in her Vtoraya kniga: vospominaniya.
Akhmatova's ambivalent attitude toward the Silver Age—admiration and compassion admixed with overtones of the Last Judgment—and was bewildered by her willingness to adhere to the Symbolist literary canon:

What Nadezhda Mandel'shtam failed to appreciate was that the popular attitude to the Silver Age changed significantly over the twenty years during which Akhmatova was working on her poem. The poem was a life-long project for Akhmatova; she sensed its first flicker as early as 1917 and kept on writing or polishing and readjusting its various portions from 1940 until her death in 1966.

In the forties the Silver Age was already slowly wedging its way back into official Soviet culture. At the beginning of 1945, Novyy mir published Lev Nikulin's recollections of his meetings with the famous singer Fedor Chaliapin (No 2-3); the year finished with the publication of Vsevolod Mamontov's "Reminiscences About

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116 Nadezhda Mandel'shtam 360.
Artists" ["Vospominaniya o khudozhnikakh"] (No 11-12). In his essay Mamontov recalled not only the politically correct and "progressive" "Itinerants," like Polenov, Repin and Levitan, but typical fin de siècle artists, like Vrubel', Serov, Ostroukhov and Korovin. The 1945 publication of a small portion of Akhmatova's A Poem without a Hero under the title "Nineteen-thirteen" alerted Russian readers to the idea of Silver Age culture.117 This culture was making its comeback in preparation for the 1946 jubilee to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Blok's death that took place in Moscow and Leningrad.118

Although these celebrations of a by-gone era hitherto scorned, were followed immediately by the infamous "Party Resolution" with regard to the literary periodicals Zvezda and Leningrad, a number of scholarly and fictional works were stimulated by this event. Among them, and not the least important, was Pasternak's Doctor Zhivago (1945-1955). According to Pasternak, upon being asked to write an article about Blok, he wrote a whole novel instead.119 Although Blok's is the only Silver Age name that is openly mentioned in Doctor Zhivago, in his later autobiographical essay "People and Situations" ["Lyudi i polozheniya"] (1956-57/67) Pasternak tenderly recalls the names of many representatives of the Silver Age. The fact that this essay, full of nostalgic overtones and with the opening section inconspicuously called "Mladenchestvo" (evoking Vyacheslav Ivanov's

117 See Ronen 19.

118 See Chapter III.

119 This is discussed in detail in Chapter III.
1918 long poem of the same name), was intended for publication in 1957, shows the considerable changes that had occurred in the perception of this period since the time of the last publication of Bely's memoirs.120

In the late 1950s to early 1960s scholarly studies of Blok's legacy refrained altogether from portraying him solely as a pro-revolutionary poet. As the editors of the first Blokovskiy sbornik (1964) put it, their intention was to introduce their readers not to the legend but to a "living [живой] human being."121 It was claimed that the life of Blok should be studied in all its complexity and within the broad context of his time. The search for the "true" Blok allowed the editors to include the previously unpublished memoirs and letters of Blok's contemporaries in their edition. This volume also contained Avril Pyman's impressive fifteen-page bibliography of non-Soviet scholarly articles on Blok. If the 1964 Blokovskiy sbornik was focused on Blok alone, the second 1972 sbornik featured a number of either comparative studies such as Shmakov's "Blok and Kuzmin" and Bel'kind's "Blok and Vyacheslav Ivanov," or studies that showed Blok in contact with other artists and intellectuals of his time, like Dongarov's "Blok, the Editor of Bal'mont." For some time, the politically correct Blok served as a pretext for smuggling in

120 As it turned out, this essay was published only ten years later in Novyy mir 1 (1967).

121 Blokovskiy sbornik (Tartu: Tartuskiy Gosudarstvenny universitet, 1964) 4.
names and works that were still castigated and deemed unacceptable, such as Mikhail Kuzmin's *Wings* [Kryl'ya].

The interest of the general public in the Silver Age was growing. Thus, in 1964 the periodical *Moskva* published a series of articles devoted to its various representatives\(^{122}\) and its May issue featured the first review of Akhmatova's *A Poem Without a Hero*. Its author, Korney Chukovsky, whom Yuriy Aleksandrovich called in 1908 "the fosterling [ныкормыш] of Decadent journals,"\(^{123}\) came up with an astute analysis of Akhmatova's use of historical and poetic times and granted her the privilege of looking back at the Silver Age not only with anger, but with love and nostalgia, since the latter were only to be expected in a poem about personal youthful experiences:

Взирая с «башни сорокового года» на далекое время, Анна Ахматова судит его суровым судом, называет его и «бесноватым», и «грешным», и «блудным», проклинает созданных им «краснобаев», «лжепророков и магов», но было бы противоестественно, если бы она, как и всякий человек, вспоминая свои юные годы, не испытывала к ним ничего, кроме враждебного чувства. Ненависть к этой эпохе сочетается в поэме Ахматовой с глубокой подспудной любовью. Эта любовь объяснима [...]\(^{124}\)

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\(^{122}\) See Shumakov, "Ivan Bunin y Tartu," (No 11), and Kuleshina, "Dinastiya Benua," (No 12).

\(^{123}\) Yuriy Aleksandrovich, *Posle Chekhova: Ocherk molodoy literatury poslednego desyatitiya 1898-908* (Moscow: Obshchestvennaya pol'za, 1908) 72.

Such changes in the perception of the Silver Age and the restoration of its legacy—in however small doses—within Russian culture could have been responsible for Akhmatova's inability to stop revising her Poem Without a Hero.\textsuperscript{125} The reviving of old issues that had been muffled for quite some time must have re-opened some old wounds.\textsuperscript{126} She must have suffered from acute bouts of "anxiety of influence," an anxiety which occasionally forces its way through ("так и знаю: обвинят в плагиате [. . .] вовсе нет у меня родословной" [for certain: they will accuse me of plagiarism [. . .] I don't have any pedigree]). She endeavored within one poem to overcome once and for all the influence of her former 'mentors' and poetic rivals, like Blok, Gumilev, Kuzmin, Mandel'shtam and

\textsuperscript{125} Cf. the following excerpt from Akhmatova's "letter to N.N." (May 27, 1955) which for five years was an integral part of the poem and later was deleted by the poet, "В течение пятнадцати лет поэма неожиданно, как припадки какой-то неизлечимой болезни, вновь настигала меня, и я не могла от нее оторваться, дополняя и исправляя, по-видимому, оконченную вещь. [. . .] И не удивительно, что З. [. . .] сказала мне: "Ну, Вы пропали! Она вас никогда не отпустит." Lidiya Chukovskaya, \textit{Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatovoy} vol. 2 (Moscow: Soglasie, 1997) 139. See also an entry (November 19, 1960) in the diary of Lidiya Chukovskaya: "—Новая строка в "Поэме",—объявила она; и в ответ на мое восклицание: «Вы же уверили меня, "Поэма окончена".—Да, да, а теперь я продлила себе срок до 1 января. . . Надо исправить еще кое-что. . ." Chukovskaya, \textit{Zapiski}, vol. 2, 435.

\textsuperscript{126} Cf. Akhmatova's "letter to N.N.", "Вы не можете себе представить, сколько диких, нелепых и смешных толков породила эта петербургская повесть. Строже всего, как это ни странно, ее сулили мои современники, и их обвинения сформулировал, может быть, точнее других, в Ташкенте X., когда он сказал, что я сию какие-то старые счеты с эпохой (десятие годы) и с людьми, которых или уже нет, или которые не могут мне ответить. Тем же, кто не знает этих счетов, поэма будет непонятна и неинтересна. . ." Chukovskaya, \textit{Zapiski}, vol. 2, 139.
As time went by, the body of the poem continued to expand as a result of a vast influx of poetic material that it had to process. Akhmatova's derogatory remarks, highlighted by Chukovsky, should not be taken only in a literary sense. They attest as much to her discontent with the historical, political and cultural atmosphere prior to the outbreak of World War I, as to her discontent with the state of the poetry of that period, resulting in its subsequent demise in the 1920s--a state that she aspired to amend with her own poem. This must have been a nightmarish endeavor, for as Nadezhda Mandel'shtam testified, "Akhmatova could never stop worrying about her poem. She thought that the [existence of the] poem was justified only if it were far better than anything else." [Ахматову никогда не покидало беспокойство относительно поэмы. Она считала, что поэма оправдана, только если она лучше всего остального].

The repetition of the consonant clusters "p-b-g" as can be seen in "предвоенной, блюдной и грозной" is not only an abbreviation of 'Petersburg'--which according to Lev Loseff, is the implied hero of Poem Without a Hero--but as, Loseff subtly

127 Hidden and obvious references to the texts of Akhmatova's predecessors and contemporaries are discussed in numerous studies devoted to Poem Without a Hero. It will suffice to mention the more recent ones, such as articles by Nivat, Loseff, Tsiv'yan and Ivanov in Akhmatovskiy sbornik 1, ed. Serge Déduline and Gabriel Superfin (Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 1989); commentaries of R. D. Timenchik to his edition of Akhmatova's Poema bez gerova (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo MPI, 1989); and Inna Lisnyanskaya, Shkatulka s troynym dnom (Kaliningrad: Luch-1, 1995).

128 Nadezhda Mandel'shtam 360. [emphasis added]
observes, also of the three initial letters of the title of the poem (Poema bez geroya). Thus, it is only logical to suggest, that the main theme of Poem Without a Hero is the poem itself—which is anyway obvious from the title—while its hero, if there is one, is its creator, a genuine outsider, who by the act of sheer writing wrestles heroically with tradition.

Although allegedly devoted to the preservation of the Silver Age of Russian culture, Akhmatova's project was authoritarian in nature. The evidence of this can be found in her attempts at becoming the sole custodian of the interpretation of literary life at the beginning of the century and in her damning remarks about other interpretations of this time. The latter can be seen in her criticism of Doctor Zhivago—Pasternak's own version of the 1910s and 1920s—which she claimed to be weak and highly improbable. Along with Bely's memoirs, Pasternak's Doctor Zhivago and Nina Berberova's The Italics are Mine [Kursiv moy] (1969/72),

129 Lev Losev (Loseff), "Geroy 'Poemy bez geroya'," Akhmatovskiy sbornik 109-122.

130 Cf. "Можно даже сказать, что сюжетом [пьесы] является история художественной неудачи, история о том, как не удавалось написать или дописать «Поэму без героя», повесть, сотканную из черновиков, наметок, отброшенных проб, нереализованных возможностей" (Roman Timenchik, introduction ["Zametki o 'Poeme bez geroya'"], Poema bez geroya, by Anna Akhmatova (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo MPI, 1989).

131 Cf. "В последние годы Ахматова «ваговаривала пластинку» каждому гостю, то есть рассказывала ему историю акмеизма и собственной жизни, чтобы он навеки запомнил их и повторял в единственно допустимом ахматовском варианте." Nadezhda Mandelshtam 369-70.
Akhmatova's *Poem Without a Hero* was one of the last attempts by writers born of the Silver Age tradition to overcome this tradition from within by eating their own flesh, so to speak. Any subsequent attempts at assimilation and internalization of Silver Age literature have been undertaken by people for whom this period meant not life, but literary history.

6.

The complex structure and texture of Akhmatova's *A Poem Without a Hero* provoked a number of first-rate scholarly analyses. "Akhmatova and Kuzmin" ["Akhmatova i Kuzmin"] by Roman Timenchik, Vladimir Toporov and Tat'yana Tsiv'y an is one of them. What rapidly turned this analysis into a classic was not so much its numerous insights into the creativity of both poets, but a detailed reconstruction of the social, historical and particularly cultural background of the 1910-s, that was pertinent to the appreciation of the literary works in question (Akhmatova's *A Poem Without a Hero* and Kuzmin's *The Trout Breaks The Ice*). The authors of this and other similar studies belonged to a new generation of Soviet scholars and writers for whom the multifaceted Silver Age was a welcome relief from the gray monotony of Socialist Realism. For these young people the Silver Age was like a newly found exotic oasis, lit up by every

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hue of the World of Art Movement, and populated exclusively by free-spirited artists.\textsuperscript{133} These "products" of Khrushchev's "Thaw" were bound to find kindred spirits in the inhabitants of the "Stray Dog" [Brodyachaya sobaka] cabaret, whose adventurous lives and deeds they were determined to uncover.

Comparative studies such as "Akhmatova and Kuzmin" were a product of a specific cultural situation in the 1960s and early 1970s, which favored the eradication of many cultural, geographical and temporal barriers.\textsuperscript{134} Another typical period piece which was immensely popular was Il'ya Erenburg's memoirs, \textit{People, Years, Life [Lyudi, gody, zhizn'] } (1961-66). Even though the accuracy of some of Erenburg's reconstructions leaves much to be desired, he nevertheless contributed to the restoration of a greater cultural picture of the first half of the twentieth century than had previously been admitted. His narrative moves freely from one epoch to another, flows back and forth between various European countries and back to Russia or the Soviet Union, bringing together seemingly

\textsuperscript{133} The older generation was far less enthusiastic about this period as can be seen from Korney Chukovsky's diary of 1959: 'Говорил с Маршаком о поэтах-символистах, почти все их фамилии начинались на б. Брюсов, Белый, Бальтрушайтис, Блок.

\textsuperscript{134} Vladimir Paperny attributes this to the manifestation of Culture One (1917-1935; 1955-1977), which has a tendency to expand horizontally--rather than vertically--as is typical of the preceding Culture Two (1935-1955). See Paperny, \textit{Kultura "Dva" } 72-99.
disconnected people and weaving a single cultural blanket covering the whole of Europe. In the 1960s and the 1970s, the Silver Age, to a certain extent, loses its definite geographical outlines. Thus, in Ada (1969) Nabokov stops looking back nostalgically at Russian estates lost in the 1917 revolution and instead moves his typically Silver Age Ardis and its inhabitants to America. A similar intention was already present in Pnin (1957) in its mocking description of "The Pines," a North American villa that every other summer generously opened its doors to "liberals and intellectuals who had left Russia around 1920." In the same novel Nabokov has a mediocre poet, Liza--an overt parody of Anna Akhmatova--first move to Europe and then to North America, where he puts her and her spouse in charge of psychoanalytic studies.

Thanks to officially sanctioned memoirs (like those of Erenburg) and particularly to smuggled or samizdat copies of Doctor Zhivago, of Nabokov's novels and of the memoirs of Bunin and Berberova coupled with photo- or hand-written copies of some pre-revolutionary editions, the Silver Age acquired in the eyes of the Soviet intellectuals strong associations with political and artistic freedom and democracy. This can be seen in numerous allusions to Bely's Petersburg in Vasily Aksenov's seminal work, The Burn [Ozhog] (1969-1975) in which he describes the strivings of his


136 On Akhmatova's reaction to these particular passages in Pnin see Chukovskaya, Zapiski, vol. 2, 458.
generation for moral freedom and spiritual perfection; or in Venedikt Erofeev's short story "Vasily Rozanov through the Eyes of an Eccentric" ["Vasily Rozanov glazami ekstsentrika"] (1978). In the latter "[t]he author represented the momentous meeting of Russian independent culture of the sixties and seventies with the 'Silver Age' as the only 'hope' for a contemporary intellectual who was planning to do away with himself, disillusioned as he was with the truisms of rationalism. The unforeseen but long-awaited contact with Vasily Rozanov's dizzying paradoxes put everything in its place."137

"The long-awaited contact" with the cultural past as well as the ways in which this past can be assimilated and internalized became one of the major themes of Andrey Bitov's Pushkin House [Pushkinskiy dom] (1965-1970).138 In it, Bitov tells the story of the Odoevtsev family in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Significantly, all the men in this family are professional students of literature. One day, the stilted atmosphere in this family is suddenly perturbed by a number of seemingly disconnected but actually related events. When "Uncle" Dickens ("Uncle" Mitya, the mysterious neighbor of the Odoevtsev family) returns home from his place of imprisonment that he had been in and out of the last twenty years, Leva (the main


138 Pushkinskiy dom was first published in the Soviet Union in Novyy mir only in 1987.
character and Bitov's alter ego) and his parents excitedly rejoice over his liberation. Although I have not seen it noted before, it should not take long for the reader to identify Uncle Dickens--some hybrid between Solzhenitsyn's Ivan Denisovich and Dionysus--with the Silver Age; even his personal belongings suggest this analogy. It turns out that the best, the most exquisite things that the Odoevtsevs possessed ("a mirror, oval, in a frame of gilt-and-black grapevines; a table lamp with two little carved Negro cupids (they were augurs); and a long polished mahogany chest") were in fact not theirs, but were given to them on loan by Uncle Dickens. The word "silver" is also mentioned frequently enough in the subsequent description of the Uncle's appearance to alert the 'quick-witted' reader:

Despite his many years of imprisonment and his considerable age--Uncle Dickens was an officer in the Tsarist army--he is extremely elegant and attractive, making young Leva feel clumsy and boorish:

Andrey Bitov, Pushkinskiy dom, Imperiya v chetyrekh izmereniyakh, vol. 2 (Khar'kov/Moscow: Folio/TKO AST, 1996) 29-35. [emphasis added]

Ibid., 28-9 [emphasis added]. How much the Uncle's appearance owes to that of Blok becomes clear if we compare Uncle Dickens with the revised 1962 'version' of the poet's appearance as
The Uncle's unexpected return produces a healthy effect on the Odoevtsev family. Leva's estranged parents are reunited and gaze lovingly at each other, they "fawn on the old man; his foul language so forbidden in the family, seemed to caress their ears. Their faces were smoothed, clear, almost as in the wedding picture, the way faces seem to become at the first possibility of love. [. . .] That possibility was youth. [. . .] The air in the apartment shifted again, as though there were a certain piled-up little room, which they had always remembered but forgotten, and it had been shoveled out. . ."142 Leva is equally obsessed with the Uncle, to the extent of cherishing a dream that the latter was his real father, and spends his time studying pictures taken in the Uncle's youth.

With the Uncle's release from imprisonment, everything that was previously forbidden or forgotten--these words are almost interchangeable in Bitov's narrative--starts gradually filtering back, filling in the gaping holes in people's memories and even in Leva's upbringing. Leva is particularly mesmerized by the Uncle's featured in Korney Chukovsky's memories: "Рядом с ним мы, все остальные,—подкидыш без предков и уют. У нас не было подмосковной усадьбы, где под столетними дворянскими липами варилось бесконечное варенье; у нас не было таких локоно, таких предков и праредов, такой кучи игрушек, такого белого и статного коня. . . Блок был последний поэт-дворянин, последний из русских поэтов, кто мог бы украсить свой дом портретами делов и праредов. [. . .] И обличье у него было барское: чинный, истовый, немного надменный. Даже в последние годы—без воротника и в картузе—он казался переодетым патрицием." Korney Chukovsky, Sovremenniki: Portrety i etyudy (Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 1963) 446-7.

142 Pushkin House 24-26 [emphasis added].
accommodation, that was "made to be sneaked into by children despite a ban. A book forbidden in childhood—that's exactly what Uncle Dickens's tiny apartment was like. [ . . .] Leva loved to be left there for a moment by himself, on a settee created for uncomfortable sitting, to leaf through a monograph sweet and small as a childish sin, about Beardsley, let's say, but also to examine the forbidden little room he had missed out as a child. And the books that he borrowed and returned to Uncle Dickens (which served as the occasion for his visits) were also a filling in of his childhood: *Aphrodite, L'Atlantide, The Green Hat.* When could he have read them, except under the bedcovers by flashlight?"143

For quite a while the Uncle plays an important role in Leva's maturing by contributing inadvertently to the formation of his literary tastes and the personal attachments in his life. He is the only one to whom Leva can turn for money in order to keep up a rather costly relationship with the love of his life, the dazzling Faina. Dickens' grudging willingness to subsidize this enigmatic relationship is only to be expected, since both he and Faina are related through their Silver Age connection. As Irene Masing-Delic suggested, Bitov's Faina traces its provenance to the female character of Aleksandr Blok's poetic cycle "Faina," which to a certain extent reflected Blok's real-life infatuation with the beautiful actress Natal'ya Volokhova.144

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143 Ibid., 29-32 [emphasis added].

Despite the Uncle's undeniable virtues, such as the reportedly untarnished quality of his silver-rich personality, his portrait is far from being solely complimentary. He often swears fouly and jabs "his tiny fist into the janitor's ribs" while the latter is helping him to carry his chest.¹⁴⁵ As one finds out, he can be obnoxious, capricious and difficult to deal with. His pronouncements, however eye-opening they sound to the Odoevtsevs, have no practical implications:

И не то, чтобы дядя Митя что-нибудь особенное говорил. Он был хорош, пьяня, все большей определенностью и трезвостью к миру. «Говно»,—вот был итог, но чуть ли не светлело от этих диалоговых итогов, потому что сомнений каждый раз не возникало: он был точен и прав.¹⁴⁶

The powerlessness of the attractive Uncle is emphasized by his toothlessness, the narrator repeatedly attracts attention to his barren mouth. After the Uncle's death, the Odoevtsevs are introduced to his sister who puzzles them with her short fat fingers, ungracefulness and almost hyperbolic greediness. As far as the Uncle's literary legacy is concerned, Leva is equally stunned by the naiveté and bad quality of the Uncle's poetry, and of the works of prose that were handed over to him by his mother for a professional evaluation.

¹⁴⁵ Pushkin House 25.
¹⁴⁶ Pushkinskiy dom 31.
If our identification of Uncle Dickens with the Silver Age is correct, then we might say that in Pushkin House Bitov not only testifies to the ways in which the legacy of the Silver Age was assimilated in the 1960s-1970s, but offers a certain antidote against the spreading infatuation with it, which was hailed by many as a panacea for many social and cultural diseases. However attractive the idea of finding a father in the easily lovable Uncle Dickens might seem to Leva to begin with, by the end of the novel it becomes clear that as a custodian of Pushkin House—the epitome of Russian literature in general—he also has to come to grips with his own father and his grandfather, Faina, a betrayed Jewish colleague and his Dostoevskian double Mitishat'ev, to name but a few. Not that Uncle Dickens is abandoned or dethroned—by the end of the book we are even told that he can be resurrected in the future with the help of some literary devices if we have further need of him—he is simply history, a literary history.

7.

A growing awareness of the cultural legacy of the Silver Age laid its mythology open to scrutiny, which was only to be expected in the process of its appropriation and assimilation. As becomes clear from the analysis of Viktor Erofeev's Russian Beauty (1982), nothing remained sacred for the future proprietors.

147 See my discussion of this novel in chapter IV.
Erofeev's contemporary, Sasha Sokolov, in *Palisandria* (1985) attacks a wide-spread notion that the Silver Age was continued after the revolution in Russian émigré circles. When the main character Palisandr Dal'berg is sent abroad by the Soviet leader Yuriy Andropov to establish links with old Russian emigrants, who in the public mind were held to be responsible for preservation of the Russian cultural tradition, he finds himself in an abode for senile men and women. It does not take him too long to discover that the only thing that ties all these people to the lost tradition is the sado-masochism and perverted sex which they practice in memory of similar practices in fin-de-siècle cultures. As it turns out, the old émigrés cannot give anything new to Palisandr. On the contrary, his re-discovered androgyny is heavily abused by them and is responsible for livening up the otherwise dull existence of their institution. Sokolov shows that the contact between the two cultures is unnecessary and virtually impossible on any meaningful level. At best it is approximated when Palisandr—a keen collector of graveyards—is appointed by the new Soviet government as a "manager of the Russian Cemetery Diaspora" [комендант Российского Кладбищенского Зарубежья] which gives him the opportunity to transport his vast collection back to the Soviet Union.

In her short essay that was originally disseminated among Leningrad intellectuals in the mid 1980s, Elena Ignatova looks back on her generation's predilection for worshipping the Silver Age
during the 1960s and concludes that it was largely done out of ignorance and failure to analyze the "Age" soberly and unemotionally:

Культура «серебряного века», на мой взгляд, не так однородна и светла, как представлялось в наши юношеские шестидесятые. Мы же тогда принимали ее как аксиому, как единое целое. И сейчас работаем, во многом повторяя «зады» начала века: с эстетизацией самовольства, порой, порока, зла. Мы пытаемся обжить руины этой культуры, словно варвары, громоздящие из обломков своих храмов их слабые подобия. И разве мы иногда не предлагаем читателю вместо духовного хлеба «камень», и «камень,» из чужих руин?\(^{148}\)

However, while by the mid 1980s the legacy of the Silver Age had been partially assimilated and already rejected by some writers and intellectuals, their works and the Silver Age itself were still inaccessible to the broad reading public. This situation changed almost overnight.

One of the achievements of Gorbachev's *perestroyka*, was that the Russian people were made aware of their political and cultural history. The new revelations about the political and cultural past received priority on the pages of scholarly and popular journals and newspapers. Thus, the 1988-89 issues of the highly popular weekly *Ogonek* featured numerous secret documents and photographs illustrating the lives of Stalin, Brezhnev and other members of the Party elite. These 'hot' materials were printed side by side with poetry starting with selections from the "dekulakized" Tvardovsky—

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who as it turned out "had never forgiven that"--then moving to various poets of the Silver Age whose poetry needed no political justification to be interesting. The issues were decorated with wonderful reproductions of paintings by members of the World of Art Movement. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, following numerous publications that emphasized the hardships endured by its many representatives in the Soviet period, the Silver Age truly became a popular symbol of democratic development and of moral and artistic freedom. The reading public for the first time rejoiced together with refined literary scholars, who started producing one article after another on various artistic figures. This craze for the re-discovered pre-revolutionary culture made its way even into the introductory article on the Silver Age written by sober academics such as Vyacheslav Ivanov, Toporov and Tsiv'yan. There they enveloped their fascination with the Silver Age in religious mysticism by stressing the esoteric properties of its legacy:

Телекологическая доминанта остается почувствованной и тем более прочувствованной и пережитой как свое назначение лишь немногими. И о том, какой духовный ресурс в нашем будущем пути составляет наследие «Серебряного века», догадываются далеко не все. Не случайно, что впервые входящие в этот храм или уже успевшие стать неофитами прежде всего оказываются поражены богатейшим разнообразием открывающейся картины, обилием ее быстроменяющихся слов и типов, общим впечатлением яркости и мощностью цветения творческого гения.149

Publishing houses promptly responded to the ravening thirst for information by printing many previously forbidden and forgotten literary texts and philosophic treatises. The flow of information appearing in the newspapers was so exhilaratingly new that many people sorted and filed it systematically in their homes.

However, the fact that the "truth" about Russia's cultural history tended to be presented along with the "truth" about Russia's political history resulted in these phenomena becoming permanently entangled in the eyes of beholders. The Silver Age was like a territory, once annexed by a foreign power and now re-united with the mainland--parallels with the now unified Germany immediately come to mind. In such a situation the euphoria of reconciliation with the past eventually gives way to torturing queries and concerns. Renewed interest in the Silver Age and its position within Russian cultural history stemmed to a large extent from various popular attempts to re-evaluate the past, particularly the experience of the October revolution which has been blamed by many for all subsequent misfortunes that befell the Russian people. In such reconstructions the evaluation of the period immediately preceding the revolution plays a major role. The famous study by Boris Groys in which he patently demonstrates kinship and continuity between the Avant-Garde movement and Socialist Realism makes

150 See his Stil' Stalin (1988), translated into the English as The Total Art of Stalinism.
one ponder over the existence of similar links between the fin de siècle and the Stalinist culture of the 1930s. Such a revisionist attitude to the legacy of the Silver Age was advocated, among others, by the journalist Boris Paramonov. In his recent interview for Literaturnaya gazeta Paramonov took credit for extending a special service to Russian speakers in 1989 while working for Radio Liberty, by exposing the traps that people, infatuated with the ideas entertained by popular figures of the fin de siècle, might have fallen into:

Содержание моих мыслей в то время [...] полагаю, было достаточно нестандартным. Я работаю на радио с 86-го года, и когда с перестройкой в России началось возрождение культурных имен и сюжетов в процессе поисков альтернатив коммунизму, я поставил себе целью этот процесс прокомментировать, и вот в каком плане. В застойные годы философско-религиозные произведения деятелей серебряного века были чрезвычайно полезным чтением в качестве противоядия господствовавшему идеологическому штампу, но приехав на Запад и поставив все это прочитанное в контекст нормальной, так сказать, цивилизованной жизни, начинаешь понимать, что все это—интеллектуальные фантазии. [...] Я просто хочу сказать, что когда со всех сторон стали говорить, что надо идти за истиной к деятелям серебряного века, я поставил себе целью описать этот путь как уже пройденный и приведший к трагедии. Все эти люди, конечно, крайне интересны, ярки, талантливы, но, как говорится, темные гении—что Бердяев, что Флоренский или тот же Вячеслав Иванов, совершенно зловещая фигура. [...] Главная моя идея была такая: большевизм в России не является чем-то абсолютно чуждым общему культурному развитию начала века XX века. Наполнение русской культуры жизнью было единым. Это был один поток. Установка на тотальное преобразование бытия была свойственна и
In the past decade the near-surface cross-cultural and cross-temporal studies of the Silver Age, so typical of the 1960s because of the abundance of new information about this period, coupled with rising nationalism, have given way to meticulous excavation of the lives of its representatives. The amount of diverse information that has come to light could not but affect the general public. Even before becoming intimately familiar with works by representatives of the Silver Age, people searched for some guidelines on whether to look back on it with nostalgia or with anger and contempt—in other words, "does and can Silver tarnish?" Now, even more than at the time of Freud's revelations about the important function of suppressed memories of childhood, people are invited to probe their childhood memories in search of any trace of physical or intellectual abuse. In Russia, as usual, the personal is intricately interwoven with the public. For many Russians, looking back into their past is indistinguishable from scrutinizing the past of their "Motherland."

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152 Freud's books are an integral part of the display in all Russian bookshops and kiosks.
Probing the past by digesting and analyzing previously concealed official documents, personal diaries, memoirs, official and private letters, professional and amateur photographs, and on the basis of these new discoveries, rejecting that past or reconciling oneself with it—all this has been on the agenda of many Russian newspapers and "thick" journals for the last thirteen years. The literary *De Visu* was specifically brought to life in 1992 to accommodate professional and public thirst for unknown materials related to the Russian Silver Age:

However, during my recent (1996-97) trips to Moscow and St. Petersburg and my analysis of the recent Russian press, I have noticed a distinct decline of interest in this subject. Despite continuous publication of previously unthinkable oeuvres of the Silver Age, like Zinov'yeva-Annibal's notorious *The Tragic Menagerie* [*Tragicheskii zverinets*] and *Thirty-three Abominations* [*Tridtsat' triruoda*] (1907/1997), public curiosity has shifted from the beginning

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of the twentieth century to the eighteenth and even seventeenth centuries. Accordingly, recent issues of Ogonek feature classical portraits of Borovikovsky and Levitsky, which are now re-interpreted with regard to their latent erotic qualities; while Literaturnaya gazeta discusses a surprisingly large number of newly released movies and theatrical performance based on the lives of Peter the Great, his son Aleksey or even Peter II. The weekly Book Review concentrates primarily on books devoted to Derzhavin, Karamzin, Catherine the Great and other figures of this period. Its lengthy publication on the Silver Age with the suggestive title "All That Glitters Is Not Silver: Decadent Poetry of the Beginning of the Century and Modernity" ["Ne vsyo to serebro, chto blestit: dekadentskaya poeziya nachala veka i sovremennost'"] by Nikolay Trifonov, contains nothing new but an out-of-date Marxist-Leninist analysis of early twentieth-century poetry and works of prose. In conclusion, Trifonov calls for a revision of the current positive attitude to the legacy of the Silver Age:

Наше столетие подходит к концу. Подводя его итоги (и социально-политические, и культурные), надо кое в чем пересмотреть и укореняющую историю его литературного развития: как академическую, так и школьную, уточнить и исправить некоторые традиционные оценки. В частности, следует говорить о начале столетия как о Серебряном веке русской литературы отнюдь не в прямом значении этого понятия, а только в очень узком, условном смысле, в кавычках.154

Thus, we see that the pendulum has already started to swing back with respect to the importance of the legacy of the Silver Age. Is Trifonov correct in his contention that the value of this legacy has been overemphasized in the ten years succeeding perestroyka? Or is the excitement about it cooling because the legacy has in fact taken root and is now seen to occupy its rightful place in the landscape of Russian literature? Whatever is true, one thing is certain: the process of integration would have happened much more quickly and considerably less dramatically if it were not for the political upheavals that brought the Silver Age to its close and thus influenced its assimilation within subsequent cultural epochs. This process might also have been less complicated, had later writers felt sufficiently at ease to creatively challenge their predecessors and thus lift the veil of mystery that came to obscure the whole period.

What follows in this thesis is an attempt to address the problem of the protracted process of assimilation of the Silver Age into Russian culture through an analysis of the works of Nabokov, Pasternak and Erofeev, who endeavored to digest and internalize its legacy in their novels which were written at different intervals after the close of the Silver Age. Had the works of these three authors become familiar to the mass of Russian readers at the time of their completion, the Silver Age would probably have been less of a terra incognita (either worshipped or denigrated, exactly because not known) than it has been until very recently.
CHAPTER TWO: OKRYLENNYY SOGLYADATAY--
THE WINGED EAVESDROPPER
(NABOKOV AND KUZMIN)

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, although steadily turning into one of the most prominent (and definitely one of the most publishable) Russian émigré writers, Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977) was nevertheless subjected to severe criticism. Uncertain how to classify his works, the critics labeled them poor imitations of
French and German originals. Sirin-Nabokov rapidly gained the reputation of a trickster, seeking cheap success with his readers. Georgiy Ivanov, whose review of Sirin's *Mary, King, Queen, Knave, The Defense* and *The Return of Chorb* appeared in the first issue of the Parisian journal *Chisla*, described his works as "trite, banal, not lacking in virtuosity, however", and lamented about "our wretched critics" and "undemanding reading public" who contributed to the success of the "Sirins" of this world.\(^\text{155}\) Ivanov portrayed Nabokov as "an impostor" and an outcast, who could not possibly belong to the great Russian tradition.\(^\text{156}\)

If in the earlier years of his career, suffering from the imposed loss of his motherland and the tragic death of his beloved father, Nabokov found refuge in writing patently imitative works of poetry,\(^\text{157}\) in maturity he resorted to claiming decidedly unconventional sources for his inspiration. Thus, in *The Gift* [*Dar*] (1938) Nabokov's *alter ego*, Fedor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, insists on "borrow[ing] [his] wings" [. . .] of artistic inspiration "[f]rom conversations with [his] father, from daydreams in his absence, from


\(^{156}\) Ivanov's opinions were shared by Georgiy Adamovich and the Merezhkovsky-Gippius circle. See Nina Berberova, *Kursiv moy* (Moscow: Soglasie, 1996) 286.

the neighborhood of thousands of books full of drawings of animals, from the precious shimmer of the collections, from the maps [and] from all the heraldry of nature and the cabbalism of Latin names [. . .]."\textsuperscript{158} Not withstanding these claims, one should not ignore another possible supplier of Nabokov's "wings," namely the famous fin de siècle writer and poet Mikhail Kuzmin (1872-1936), whose novel \textit{Wings [Kryl'ya]} was successfully appropriated by Nabokov in \textit{The Eye [Soglyadatay]} (1930).

In the late 1960s, to Alfred Appel's question, "In which of your early works do you think you first begin to face the possibilities that [. . .] reach an apotheosis in the 'involute abode' of \textit{Pale Fire}?"—Nabokov gave the least expected answer, "Possibly in \textit{The Eye} [. . .]."\textsuperscript{159} Before now scholars have evoked this famous replica to justify a preoccupation and fascination with this lesser known novel by Nabokov. However, there is still much more to be said about this underrated work which indeed marks a turning point in Nabokov's writing career and provides an insight into the makings of his \textit{Weltanschauung}, that was shaped at the time when this novel was in a state of gestation.


WHY KUZMIN?

When Kuzmin's novel *Wings* appeared in the literary journal *Vesy* in 1906, it brought its author "instant fame and notoriety."\(^{160}\) This was not fortuitous. Far from portraying homosexuals as doomed and tragically misunderstood (as would have been expected), Kuzmin in his work presented a picture of a homoerotic paradise, readily accessible to those who so desired. Having gone through a number of trials and tribulations, the young homosexual Vanya Smurov is gradually led to understand that there is nothing unnatural or perverse in any activity in itself: "[w]hat is important in every action is one's attitude toward it, its aim and also the reasons behind it; actions in themselves are merely the mechanical movements of our bodies and cannot offend anyone, much less the Good Lord" (107).\(^ {161}\) Smurov's maturation is presented as a spiritual journey, by the end of which he comes to appreciate love and beauty.\(^ {162}\)


\(^{161}\) All English quotations from *Wings* are from Mikhail Kuzmin, *Selected Prose and Poetry*, ed. and trans. Michael Green (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1980); page references are given in parenthetical notes in the text.

\(^{162}\) See Gennadiy Shmakov, "Blok i Kuzmin (Novye materialy)," *Blokovskiy sbornik* (2) 341-364; see also Klaus Harer, "Kryl'ya M.A. Kuzmina kak primer 'prekrasnoy legkosti'," *Amour et érotisme dans*
The publication of *Wings* became a significant event in the cultural life of Russia in the 1900s and gave rise to various debates and discussions. The impact of the novel on the reading public was equivalent to Chernyshevsky's *What is to Be Done? [Chto delat'?]*.\(^{163}\)

Thus, upon his return to Russia from France, the artist Aleksandr Benua attributed the disturbing changes that he found in his friends--they were no longer concealing their homosexuality--primarily to the influence of "new young people" like Kuzmin.\(^{164}\)

However, despite his popularity--often scandalous--Kuzmin was largely misunderstood by his contemporaries; because of the deceptive "lightness" (or as Markov puts it, "non-vodka-like quality")\(^ {165}\) of his poetry and works of prose, he was often assessed as a second-rate author, whose works belonged to the literary salons. For many of his readers Kuzmin became the symbol of "art for art's sake"--an unrewarding position within a literary tradition, the main virtue of which has been seen as that of educating and guiding its readers, rather than of entertaining and amusing them. Interestingly, the husks of these accusations were articulated

\(^{163}\) Aleksandr Blok, *O literature* (Moscow: Federatsiya, 1931) 135.


twenty years later by the very same Georgiy Ivanov, in a section devoted to Kuzmin in his pseudo-autobiographical Petersburg Winters [Peterburgskie zimy]. This collection of "feuilletons" was published in Paris in 1928 and it is very likely that Nabokov was familiar with it. Kuzmin is presented as a light-weight author whose talent came in useful when the "progressive" reading public became weary of complex and esoteric Russian Symbolism and demanded simplicity. Ivanov's "Kuzmin" is more concerned with his wardrobe than with what to write or how to write; he writes effortlessly and mindlessly and immediately sends off his works to the publisher. "Why bother re-writing them--my handwriting is impeccable," he confides in "Ivanov."166

As was shown in Part I, Ivanov's critique of Kuzmin was part of a larger campaign against the cultural legacy of the Silver Age and everything it stood for, which was launched by Vladislav Khodasevich and was carried on by the younger literati such as Yuriy Terapiano and Nikolay Otsup. If Khodasevich in his 1928 article "The End of Renata" ["Konets Renaty"] attested soberly to the ultimate failure of the Symbolist "life-creating" project,167 then Otsup, Terapiano and their group were much more aggressive in their advocacy of simplicity and truthfulness both in life and in art.

In such an austere environment, openly hostile to any artistic activity that was not pursuing identifiable ideological purposes, the


167 Vladislav Khodasevich, Nekropol'. Literatura i vlast'. Pis'ma B.A. Sadozskomu (Moscow: SS, 1996) 19-29.
"light-weight" Kuzmin (with his legendary inability and unwillingness to adhere to any particular school or movement) should have appeared a perfect father-figure to a seemingly fatherless and rootless aesthete like Nabokov.\textsuperscript{168} Nabokov and Kuzmin were first paired by Andrew Field\textsuperscript{169} and later by Gennadiy Shmakov\textsuperscript{170} and Vladimir Markov.\textsuperscript{171} The similarities perceived between these two authors are, however, very general in nature. Kuzmin and Nabokov are matched either because of their mutual disregard for the didactic, ideological function of literature or because of stylistic innovations that they have in common. Nabokov himself never made any open statements of his attitude to Kuzmin's

\textsuperscript{168} There was also a family connection in Nabokov's latent identification with the author of the first Russian novel about homosexuals. In the early 1900s Nabokov's father, Vladimir Dmitrievich (a recognized authority on criminal law), argued on many occasions for the decriminalization of homosexuals, maintaining (not unlike Kuzmin) "that homosexuality was neither inherently abnormal nor morally reprehensible." Laura Engelstein, \textit{The Keys to Happiness} (Ithaca/London: Cornell UP, 1994) 67-71. V.D. Nabokov's interest in homosexuality was not purely theoretical, for many members of his family, including his son Sergey, were homosexuals.


\textsuperscript{170} Gennadiy Shmakov, foreword ["Dva Kaliostro"], \textit{Chudesnaya zhizn' losifa Bal'zamo grafa Kaliostro} by Mikhail Kuzmin (New York: Russica Publishers, 1982).

oeuvre. Kuzmin's name is not listed in the indexes of books written by or about Nabokov. The links between Nabokov and Kuzmin are, however, much closer than would appear at first sight.

John Barnstead exposed a complicated system of references to Kuzmin's various works in Nabokov's short story "Lips to Lips" ["Ustak ustam"] (1929/1931). In a footnote to his paper he also mentions that the name of the protagonist in Kuzmin's Wings, Vanya Smurov, reappears in Nabokov's The Eye, but that it is divided between two characters: Smurov, the protagonist, and the girl he loves, who bears the nickname, Vanya. In fact the last name of Kuzmin's protagonist comes from Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov: Smurov is a little left-handed boy befriended by Alesha. Smurov's first name is never revealed to the reader of Dostoevsky's novel, so the combination "Vanya Smurov" is unmistakably Kuzminian. Nabokov cunningly preserves references to both literary sources: his Smurov is described by one of the characters as a "sexual lefty" (сексуальный левша) (85).


174 All quotations from The Eye are from Vladimir Nabokov, The Eye (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966); page references are given in parenthetical notes in the text.
Allusions to Kuzmin in *The Eye* are clearly there, but they are camouflaged, which probably explains why Kuzmin's name, apart from the footnote in Barnstead's article, has not been mentioned in connection with this novel. In giving the name "Vanya" to the object of Smurov's unrequited love, Nabokov provides it with etymological explanations. The girl is reported to be nicknamed "Vanya", as a result of her "demand[ing] to be called 'Mona Vanna' (after the heroine of some play or other)" (37).175 Another allusion that is intentionally left open to different interpretations occurs when Smurov's mistress, Matilda, invites him home to borrow the book, Arianne, Jeune Fille Russe [о какой-то русской девице Ариадне] (15). Arianne, Jeune Fille Russe was correctly identified by Barton Johnson as a novel written by Jean Schopfer but, in Johnson's words, it "does not seem to have thematic implications for *The Eye* as a whole."176 The pairing of Matilda and Ariadne, though, brings to mind Kuzmin's *The Gentle Knight* [*Tikhiy strazh*], written in 1915 and reprinted by "Petropolis" in 1924.177 Here the longing of a dying


Matilda Petrovna for her son is mockingly compared to the suffering of the mythological Ariadne, deserted by Theseus.\textsuperscript{178} Each of the three opening paragraphs of The Gentle Knight starts with the name Matilda, rare to a Russian ear. These paragraphs tell about Matilda's burdensome love for her son. Nabokov evokes the general mood of this section in the following passage that comes near the beginning of The Eye:

Matilda, who would inquire coyly if I wrote poetry; Matilda, who on the stairs or at the door would artfully incite me to kiss her, only for the opportunity to give a sham shiver and passionately whisper, 'You insane boy . . .'; Matilda, of course, did not count. (17-18)\textsuperscript{179}

\begin{commentary}

\textsuperscript{178} Mikhail Kuzmin, Podzemnyye ruch'i: Romany, povesti, rasskazy (St. Petersburg: Severo-Zapad, 1994) 397. Matilda's parting with her husband and her immediate starting of an affair with Smurov evokes the reckless tone of Kuzmin's poem "Ariadna" (Parabolas) [1923], "У платана тень прохладна, Тесны терема князей.— Ариадна, Ариадна, Уплывает твой Тезей! [. . .] Чередою плод за цветом, Синий пурпур кружит вниз, — И, увенчан вечным светом, Ждет невесты Дионис."

\textsuperscript{179} This passage, probably alludes also to Kuzmin's novella, The House of Cards [Kartonnyy domik] (1907) where the name Matilda Petrovna appears for the first time: "If you find it amusing when Matilda sits on your stomach and says she's a chimera, when in one evening you have ten of the silliest tête-à-têtes of the most compromising kind, when you listen to as many as twenty poets--then we've had a very good time. But, between ourselves, all that has palled to a considerable degree." Kuzmin, The House of Cards, Selected Prose and Poetry 143.

\end{commentary}
Nabokov’s depiction of the relationship between Smurov, Matilda and her husband Kashmarin (which frames the "main" story) also sets The Eye in an unmistakingly Kuzminian context. Here is the gist of what happens. Having learnt of Matilda’s unfaithfulness, Kashmarin loses control and beats up Smurov. Humiliated, Smurov attempts suicide. Kashmarin, however, finds out that Smurov was not his wife’s first—or even last—lover; he divorces her and puts his energy into looking for his former rival. Not only does he succeed in locating Smurov, he also offers him his guidance and protection with the possibility of future trips to Italy. Smurov accepts Kashmarin’s proposal with gratitude. A situation similar to this one is described by Kuzmin in his novel Travelers by Land and Sea [Plavayushchie-puteshestvuyushchie] (1915)\(^{180}\), in which the two former contestants for the attention of a woman finally see through to her 'shallowness' and develop a special relationship between themselves. In Kuzmin’s fictional world a conventional love-triangle (two men competing for one woman) is turned upside down, and it is usually a man and a woman who both fancy one man.\(^ {181}\) Similar love-triangles are outlined in Wings. Vanya has to

\(^{180}\) On references to Travelers by Land and Sea in Nabokov’s "Lips to Lips" see Barnstead.

compete (not seriously, of course) for Stroop's attention, first, with the "absolutely revolting" Nata, and then with the more sophisticated Ida Gol'dberg.

One of the striking things about The Eye is the photographic quality of its fictional world. The characters are either shown as if posing for the taking of a picture or are perceived by the narrator as static photographic images. In The Eye the world of the photograph takes precedence over 'real' life. It is not the photograph which reflects everyday life but vice versa. For example, Smurov breaks into Vanya's apartment in order to see whether she still cherishes the picture that showed him and her together. He starts suspecting that his love is unrequited not because his common sense tells him so, but because he finds himself missing from that picture--Vanya has carefully cut him out. Incidentally, Georgiy Ivanov remarked in 1928 that Kuzmin's "treacherous 'beautiful clarity' [prekrasnaya yasnost'] was responsible for imparting a lifeless-photographic quality to the meaningless "jabber" of his uninteresting characters [...]"

As this brief analysis shows, the Kuzminian subtext in Nabokov's The Eye, although obscured, is nevertheless recoverable. Although Nabokov was most unlikely to have been aware of this, the title of his novel--Soglivadatay (translated by Nabokov himself as The Eye)--comes from Kuzminian vocabulary. In May 1906--a few months prior to the publication of Wings--Kuzmin wrote in his diary about one of the soirées at Vyacheslav Ivanov's:

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182 Georgiy Ivanov, Peterburgskie zimy 101-2.
Nabokov's Smurov combines the distinctive characteristics of both writers. Like Nabokov he is a Russian émigré and works as a tutor for a Russian family in Berlin. Like Kuzmin he is endowed with an effeminate appearance. "[H]is frailness, his decadence, his mincing gestures, his fondness for Eau de Cologne, and, in particular, those furtive, passionate glances" that he allegedly directs at men, convince one of the characters that Smurov is a homosexual (85).

Both Kuzmin and Nabokov contributed—not without the help of others—to the creation of the myth about their Doppelgänger personalities. Kuzmin, for instance, claimed that his "I" comprised three different personae. With Nabokov's Smurov the myth of the elusive soul reaches its apogee; there are as many


different Smurovs as there are different people that come into contact with him. Each of the passers-by goes away with his own unique image of Smurov. Nabokov's Bildungsroman tells about Smurov's learning to cope with his chameleonic personality.

THE BILDUNGSROMAN

Like Wings,186 The Eye belongs to the genre of the Bildungsroman. A typical Bildungsroman recounts the story of the moral development of an initially unsophisticated protagonist—often an orphan—who eventually finds his place in life. Following the literary canon, both Smurovs unexpectedly find themselves in an unknown, even hostile, environment. The mother of Vanya Smurov in Wings dies suddenly, and he is looked after, first, by his mediocre relatives from St. Petersburg, then by some Old Believers, then by a teacher of Greek, and, finally, he is left under the protection and guidance of the Russified Englishman, Stroop. Nabokov's Smurov not only loses all of his relatives, but is forced to emigrate, and—on the one hand—to live among indifferent Germans, and—on the other—to be in touch with equally detached and suspicious compatriots.

Kuzmin's Bildungsroman was written in the heyday of the Symbolist movement and was informed by the conception, popular

186 See Markov, "Beseda o proze Kuzmina."
among Russian Symbolists, that the ultimate goal of enlightened men and women should be not procreation but continuous striving towards spiritual rebirth or resurrection. In this context homoerotic love (as a form which denied procreation) was seen as an effective vehicle in the process of accelerating this rebirth.\textsuperscript{187}

In agreement with this theory, Vanya's advancement in life is shown metaphorically as the development of a fetus within the mother's womb. The novel opens with Vanya's traveling from the provinces to St. Petersburg in a train car with "misted windows" and concludes with his famous opening of the window in Canon Mori's house. The open window shows the reader that Vanya is reborn as a "completely transformed being," who accepts the role of Stroop's companion and beloved one. In the larger portion of the book, however, Vanya sits snugly in rooms with windows closed or even moves into a dark cellar with the Old Believers. This, apparently, stems from Vanya's unwillingness to part company with the comfortable protection of the womb; the second birth--admission of one's homosexuality--is not all roses.

At the beginning of the story, Nabokov's Smurov also feels the need to return and hide himself in a well sheltered space. Having been severely beaten by Kashmarin, Smurov decides to take his own life. He delays his decision, however, and resolves "for five minutes at least, to sit in safety", and goes "to his former address" [tuda, \textsuperscript{187} See Olga Matich, "The Symbolist Meaning of Love: Theory and Practice," Creating Life. The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism, ed. Irina Paperno and Joan Delaney Grossman (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994) 24-50.}
gde zhil ran'she] (25). Smurov's desire to return to the place where he lived previously, together with the description of "the familiar room" cluttered with various vessels that the landlady keeps filling up with water for no particular reason, is suggestive of his craving to re-enter his mother's womb.

Nabokov's Smurov commits suicide in the outer darkness, and the last thing that he remembers is, "a delightful vibrating sound [. . .] It was immediately replaced by the warble of water, a throaty gushing noise. I inhaled, and choked on liquidity; everything within me and around me was aflow and astir" (28). The flowing water is reminiscent of the breaking of uterine water. Subsequent mention of Smurov's "incomprehensible sensation of tight bandages" and the fact that he finds himself surrounded by neighbors, ("mummies like [himself]"(29)) brings to mind not only "the semblance of a hospital" (29) but, more precisely, that of a maternity ward. Nabokov, however, stages the "resurrection" of his Smurov in the first, and not in the final chapter as might be expected. By doing this he strips this act of its symbolic and philosophical implications. The second birth is presented not as a desired culmination—the outcome of the character's moral revival—but only as a motivation of the plot.

THE PLATONIC THEME

As Donald Gillis showed, Kuzmin's discourse on homoerotic love echoes the second speech of Socrates in Plato's Phaedrus about
the nature of the relationship between the "lover" and his "beloved one." The nature of the relationship between the "lover" and his "beloved one." For the sake of "simplification", Socrates describes the soul of the lover as a charioteer in charge of two horses. One horse is beautiful in appearance and is always obedient, "it is a lover of honor [. . .] It needs no whip but is driven simply by a word or command." The other--the epitome of lust--is, however, "crooked in conformation [. . .] deaf and barely responds to a combination of whip and goad." When the lover first sees the beloved one, he is overcome with lust and the charioteer has a difficult task taming his obstinate horse. Gradually, however, the lover learns to rid himself of his unbecoming, base emotions, and his efforts are amply rewarded. The lover is allowed to take "care of all his darling's needs and treats him like an equal of gods [. . .] and the darling himself naturally becomes a friend to the one who cares for him."

Socrates speaks mainly about the actions of the lover, who first starts growing wings himself--as a result of contemplating the beauty of his darling--and then returns "the stream of beauty" to the beloved one, thereby helping his soul to regain its wings too.

190 Plato, Phaedrus 253E.
191 Plato, Phaedrus 255A.
192 Plato, Phaedrus 255C-D.
In Wings Kuzmin chose to elaborate on the story of the beloved, which is only briefly outlined by Socrates. In Socrates' speech the beloved one was initially convinced by his friends that it is shameful to be associated with his lover. Similarly Vanya Smurov also has to see through all the "false" accusations against Stroop (for instance, Stroop's alleged responsibility for Ida Gol'dberg's suicide), "and as time goes along destiny and increasing maturing lead him to accept" Stroop as his lover.193

The relationship between Smurov and Kashmarin in Nabokov's story has all of the necessary Platonic ingredients. Kashmarin is at first described as "savagely jealous" and as a likely owner of rolling eyes, who "gnash[es] his teeth and breath[es] heavily through the nose" (16). His portrait evokes the description of Plato's "bad" horse with its "bloodshot eyes". Smurov's only recollection of their first encounter was Kashmarin's "heavy bright-knobbed cane with which he would tap on the floor" (14). When they meet for the second time, Kashmarin allows his emotions to overtake him, he refuses to shake hands with Smurov and beats him up instead. Kashmarin's repeated thrusting of a "thick black cane" at Smurov in the presence of the two boys, eagerly condoning his violence--"[t]here he was, teeth bared, cane upraised, and behind him, on either side of the door, stood the boys"--is suggestive of the gang-rape with the stick as a phallic instrument (23).

193 Plato, Phaedrus 255A.
In the last scene, however, we are introduced to a totally different Kashmarin. Not only has he parted company with his gruesome stick, but he humbly begs Smurov for his forgiveness: "I'm trying to apologize for my vile temper. I couldn't live at peace with myself after our--uh--heated discussion. I felt horrible about it" (101). Encouraged by the silent approval of Smurov, who blushes like a boarding-school girl, hiding his face in a bunch of flowers, Kashmarin invites Smurov to see him the next day at the Hotel Monopole\textsuperscript{194} to discuss their future arrangements. This episode is almost an exact replica of a similar scene between Stroop and Vanya in the concluding portion of Wings. The "lovers" express their gratitude to their "beloved ones" in almost identical words: "I am so grateful that you agreed to come", says Stroop [...] (107); Kashmarin exclaims, "I'm so glad, so very glad I ran into you" (102). Both Stroop and Kashmarin urge their "beloved ones" to give them the definite answers by the next afternoon and morning, respectively; and while Stroop and Vanya are already living in Italy--a Mecca for Russian homosexuals--Kashmarin reassures Smurov that "trips to the Riviera and to Italy are not to be ruled out" (102).

Kashmarin--despite all evidence of his spiritual growth--is nothing but a parody of a genuine Platonic lover such as Stroop, however. He appears briefly only at the very beginning and the very end of the novel and, in Smurov's words, is important only as a bearer of "yet another image" of himself (102). One third through The

\textsuperscript{194} Halfway through the narrative, Vanya is told that Stroop "can be reached at the Four Seasons Hotel" in Munich (75).
Eve, however we learn from the narrator that he is seriously engaged in spying on Smurov. He sits in the back of the same room as Smurov and eyes him shamelessly. Smurov produces a strong and lasting impression on the narrator:

He was not very tall, but well proportioned and dapper. His plain black suit and black bow tie seemed to intimate, in a reserved way, some secret mourning. His pale, thin face was youthful, but the perceptive observer could distinguish in it the traces of sorrow and experience. His manners were excellent. A quiet, somewhat melancholy smile lingered on his lips. He spoke little, but everything he said was intelligent and appropriate, and his infrequent jokes, while too subtle to arouse roars of laughter, seemed to unlock a concealed door in the conversation, letting in an unexpected freshness. (40)

The enchanted narrator resolves to continue spying on Smurov and his eyes tell him that Smurov was "obviously a person who, behind his unpretentiousness and quietness, concealed a fiery spirit" (43).

The statements of the "observing" narrator betray at first that he is not totally indifferent to Smurov--"I definitely liked him" (44)-- then, that he becomes addicted to his "espionage" to the point of admitting that he has been experiencing "an excitement new [to him]" (59). The narrator stealthily pursues Smurov like a shadow. He peeps at him in the bookstore, "I see him . . behind the counter in his neat black suit, hair combed smooth, with his clean-cut, pale face" (49); then he listens to Smurov's breath-taking adventures in the Crimea. Even after learning of Smurov's deficiencies--Smurov is a proven liar--he can not stop regarding him with affection.
The bizarre behavior of Nabokov's narrator is explicable in the light of the same theory that informed the behavior of Kuzmin's characters, that is Plato's theory of love. Contemplation of any form of beauty—particularly that of a beloved one—195—is an essential means of achieving immortality in Plato's myth of the winged soul, "for sight is the keenest of the sensations coming to us through the body."196 At the sight of his beloved, the lover

is awestruck, as though he were gazing upon a god [. . .] He is warmed by the effluence of beauty he receives through his eyes, which naturally moistens the wing-feathers. As he grows warmer, the follicles, which had earlier hardened and closed so that the feathers could not sprout are softened; and as the nourishing moisture flows over them, the shafts of the feathers swell and begin to grow from their roots over the entire form of the soul, which was feathered all over before [. . .] The soul of the one who is beginning to sprout feathers itches and is irritated and excited as it grows its wings.197

It does not take too long for the reader to realize that Smurov and the narrator are, in fact, one and the same person.

195 Plato stipulates, that "[e]ach person selects his love from the ranks of the beautiful according to his own style" (Phaedrus, 252D).

196 Plato, Phaedrus 250D.

197 Plato, Phaedrus 251A-251C.
The narrator's love for Smurov is called narcissism. As Irina Paperno shows, the story of the Greek fair-headed youth Narcissus—who fell in love with his own reflection—was extremely popular with Kuzmin. At the beginning of Wings Vanya's behavior is clearly reminiscent of that of Narcissus. Twice he is shown absorbed in examining his own reflection in the looking-glass and each time it coincides with someone's mentioning the name of his future lover, Stroop, who at this point is still a complete stranger to Vanya. Later, with the development of their mutual attachment and attraction to each other, he stops looking in the actual mirror, and relies on Stroop to provide him with the needed reflection, for, in Plato's words, the 'beloved one' "is seeing himself in his lover as in [a] mirror." Psychoanalysts would describe Vanya's narcissism as "primary," typical of any child's normal development. When Vanya matures, his feeling of self-sufficiency gives way to the growing need for another male person—Stroop. Stroop, as we are

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198 Paperno, "Dvoynichestvo i lyubovnyy treugol'nik: poeticheskiy mif Kuzmina i ego pushkinskaya proektsiya" 60.

199 Plato, Phaedrus 255D; for a more detailed discussion of this theme see Gillis.

told, "values [Vanya's] heart's noblest aspirations, [and] will never deny [him] his understanding and affection" (74).

With Nabokov's protagonist, the situation is totally different. Being a penniless and friendless Russian emigrant in Berlin, he lives under constant stress. He lacks confidence and is lonely. He looks in the mirror, but the sight of "[a] wretched, shivering, vulgar little man in a bowler hat" is repulsive to him (26). This "little man" commits suicide, giving birth to the mysterious Smurov and his shadowy admirer. Not being adequately loved, Smurov goes through yet further fragmentation. The fact that the name of Kuzmin's character--Vanya Smurov--is broken down by Nabokov into that of an attractive girl, Vanya, and that of Smurov-the-narrator, can be seen as Nabokov's usual playing games with his readers. On the other hand it can be viewed as ultimate proof of Smurov's self-fragmentation. In the long run, it is not the reader who is deluded, but Smurov himself, who--because of the missing or misleading mirrors--remains unaware of his outlines, confusing Vanya with his missing half. At the end of the story, however, both men are happily reunited.

As I pushed the door, I noticed the reflection in the side mirror: a young man in a bowler carrying a bouquet, hurried towards me. That reflection and I merged into one. I walked out into the street. (97)

Only his falling in love with himself finally makes Smurov "invulnerable" to the threats of the outside world--"[w]hat does it
matter that I am a bit cheap, a bit foul, and that no one appreciates all the remarkable things about me—my fantasy, my erudition, my literary gift [. . .] I am happy that I can gaze at myself [. . .] " (103). Thus he conveniently readjusts Plato to his own needs.\textsuperscript{201}

\textsuperscript{201} It is usually assumed that it was Nabokov’s intention to portray Smurov as a failure—both as an artist and as a human being. I disagree with this. By carefully piecing himself together, Smurov-Narcissus attains a degree of integrity and peace within himself that is favorable to creativity. Smurov, as a character at any rate, did not fall into oblivion. He came back to life in the happily self-centered Fedor Konstantinovich Godunov-Cherdyntsev of The Gift (unlike "nameless" Smurov this character is not only given a name but a patronymic and a double-barreled surname), who by the end of the book is a picture of real happiness and confidence: "It is easier for me, of course, to live outside Russia, because I know for certain that I shall return—first because I took away the keys to her, and secondly because, no matter when, in a hundred, two hundred years— I shall live there in my books—or at least in some researcher’s footnote." Apart from the fact that both narratives are recounted by the interchanging Ich/Er-narrators, the protagonists in both novels are young Russian émigré writers; both novels also take place in the Berlin of the mid-1920s. The mysterious Marianna Nikolaevna from The Eye reappears in The Gift as Marianna Nikolaevna, Zina’s mother. Fedor’s latent homoerotic attachment to Koncheev—the scene of the naked Fedor meeting with the dressed up "Koncheev" with a stick [sic!] in the "Grunewald" (Part V) is particularly suggestive—is usually overlooked by the critics. Fedor’s lonely sunbathing in Grunewald was equally informed by similar scenes of Michel’s suntanning from André Gide novel The Immoralist (1902). In this novel Michel resorts to naked sunbathing in a secluded spot (leaving his devoted wife at home) as a means of recovery from TB, the disease that was only an outward manifestation of his inner suppression of homosexual desires. It is not fortuitous that Nabokov’s Sebastian Knight (The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, [1941]) also suffered from a mysterious disease that eventually drove him away from his girlfriend, Clare Bishop. Gide’s groundbreaking work was well known to Kuzmin and apparently also to Nabokov.
It is no accident that Nabokov's Bildungsroman about Narcissus' quest for identity was fashioned after Kuzmin's Wings—the story about the moral development of a homosexual. What Nabokov's "emigrant" and Kuzmin's "homosexual" do have in common is their isolated position with regard to the rest of society. In many ways, Nabokov's Smurov is the same Vanya Smurov from Wings, but placed in the context of an emigrant. While Kuzmin's Smurov gradually comes to grips with his "estrangement" from society by reaching out to similarly oriented people, in order to survive in extreme conditions (like being uprooted and living in a foreign country), Nabokov's Smurov directs his love totally towards himself. If for Kuzmin's Smurov narcissism is only an intermediate stage in his growing up, then for Nabokov's Smurov it is the only state which allows him to sustain his integrity and survive. Smurov's behavior is in agreement with Freud's observation that a person's "narcissistic attitude" increases his/her resilience and diminishes his/her "susceptibility to influence."

Narcissism--love of oneself--is in many ways similar to homoerotic love, because in both situations the lover and the beloved are of the same gender. In his seminal study--"On Narcissism: An Introduction" [1914]--Freud suggested that narcissism often

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203 Freud 3.
accompanies what he terms "other disorders," like homosexuality.\textsuperscript{204} Freud was not alone in this assumption. In the 1910s and 1920s a number of scholars (Löwenfeld, Rank and Sadger among others) expressed their belief in a direct correlation between homosexuality and narcissism. Sadger, for example, described homosexuality as "the narcissistic perversion par excellence."\textsuperscript{205} It is most unlikely that Nabokov could have been totally unaware of these discussions. It is noteworthy that in their discussions of narcissistic traits, the scholars drew their conclusions both from their work with actual patients and from analyses of literary texts.\textsuperscript{206} Science and literature went hand in hand in their construction of the twentieth century myth of Narcissus.\textsuperscript{207} It will suffice to mention that in The Eye Nabokov explored the traumatic effects of emigration on the mental state of a young person—which he would know only too well.

\textsuperscript{204} Freud 3, 18.

\textsuperscript{205} Havelock Ellis, Studies in the Psychology of Sex vol. 3 (New York: Random House, 1936) 363-4.


\textsuperscript{207} Hermann Hesse's Narcissus and Goldmund [Narziss und Goldmund] about the spiritual and sensual progression in life of the young Goldmund was published in the same year as Nabokov's The Eye.
himself\textsuperscript{208}—long before the famous revelations of Heinz Kohut, who showed that any "external shifts, such as moves from one culture to another; from private life into the army; from the small town to the big city" are traumatic to one's ego and serve as a precondition for a growing need of exaggerated love for oneself\textsuperscript{209}

\textit{IN KUZMIN’S SHADOW}

The question of whether \textit{The Eye} was intended as a parody of Kuzmin’s \textit{Wings} is a tricky one. Even if it were meant as such,

\textsuperscript{208} Nabokov’s 1965 foreword to \textit{The Eye} betrays his intimate links with his protagonist. In it Nabokov describes Mukhin—Smurov’s lucky rival for Vanya’s attention—as "a nasty prig, fought in 1919 under Denikin, and under Wrangel, speaks four languages, affects a cool, worldly air, and will probably do very well in the soft job into which his future father-in-law is steering him" (8-9). The actual text of \textit{The Eye} does not offer any support for such an "unfair" characterization, unless we assume that this foreword was written by the aging Smurov himself. The foreword strikes this reader as being unnaturally didactic and unnecessarily repetitive: it brings to mind Nikolay Gogol’s tedious explanations of how the reading public and theater-goers should have perceived his \textit{Inspector General}. Nabokov finishes his introduction almost with a threat: "The plot will not be reducible in the reader’s mind—if I read that mind correctly—to a dreadfully painful love story in which a writhing heart is not only spurned, but humiliated and punished" (10).

\textsuperscript{209} Kohut 623. See Andrew Field’s discussion of Nabokov as Narcissus in \textit{VN: The Life and Art of Vladimir Nabokov}, (London: Macdonald Queen Anne P, 1987) 12, 27-30, 58, 80-81, 82, 139. Field, however, does not consider \textit{The Eye} in the light of the myth of Narcissus.
Nabokov's contemporaries certainly failed to recognize its "target text" and Nabokov did not assist them in this endeavor. It would seem that Nabokov (who was notoriously secretive about the works that truly influenced him in the course of his career) took a long time to rid himself of the influence of this particular predecessor.

Kuzmin's presence can be detected not only in *The Eye* and in *The Gift*, but also in the strangely homoerotic poem "How I love you" ["Kak ya lyublyu tebya"] (1934) which bears a striking resemblance to corresponding portions of Kuzmin's long poem *The Trout Breaks the Ice* (1928). Nabokov's rather fond recollections of his homosexual uncle, Vasiliy Rukavishnikov, in *Speak Memory* and *Drugie berega* (1954) are remarkably reminiscent of the canonical descriptions of Kuzmin. Kuzmin can be also recognized in Konstantin Ivanovich Chateau (Pnin, 1953), "a subtle and charming scholar [... with] mild melancholy caribou eyes, the auburn goatee [... and] long frail fingers" whose article Pnin forwards to his Akhmatova-like future wife in the 1920s. As we are told, in his article Chateau (not unlike Kuzmin in *Wings* and Nabokov in *The Eye*) "brilliantly refutes [... the] theory of birth being an act of suicide on the part of the infant."210

Maybe it was only in *Pale Fire* (1962), the main theme of which is apparently Harold Bloom's "anxiety of literary influence," that Nabokov managed to shed Kuzmin's influence. In this later parodic re-writing of *The Eye*, Charles Kinbote fails spectacularly in his

endeavor to influence and enliven the artistic imagination of his illustrious neighbor John Shade, despite his frenzied activity (involving incessant discussions, eyeing, spying and eavesdropping). Not only does he not see any trace of his personal story in Shade's last poem (the only word that resonates through the whole poem is "shade"!), even his perceived physical resemblance with Shade is completely bogus. Shade looks not like Kinbote, but like Judge Goldsmith, a resemblance which costs him his life in the end. Shortly before the tragic accident, Kinbote—not unlike Kuzmin's lyrical hero from "The Trout Breaks the Ice"—rescues his "dearest friend" Shade from the influence of his 'mediocre' wife by inviting him to his house to recite his completed poem. Like Kuzmin's protagonist, he literally leads Shade (whose feet are numb) to his house. Not surprisingly, he brings him death, instead of life. After Shade's death Kinbote, agonizing over his literary "non-influence," flies away and possibly commits suicide.

CONCLUSIONS

As this chapter shows, Nabokov's discourse on alienation was informed not only by the mythology of the Silver Age (via Kuzmin), but the contemporary discourse on narcissism as a scientific phenomenon and by his own experience as an emigrant. The result of such amalgamation was a literary character that later became the hallmark of Nabokov's fiction.
Smurov is the first lonely "sexual lefty" among Nabokov's numerous perverted characters. The happy homosexual couple from *Mary [Mashen'ka]* (1926) is an exception rather than the rule. Latent or evident perversion of any kind in Nabokov's characters--such as Sebastian Knight, Charles Kinbote, Humbert Humbert, to name but a few--appears to be a product of their social isolation, and not the other way around. For certain, in *The Eye* Smurov's narcissism and alleged homosexuality are unequivocally presented as a direct consequence of his enforced emigration and alienation. Suffering from finding himself in the unrewarding position of a rootless Russian emigrant in a hostile Berlin, Smurov does not feel himself at home in the company of his compatriots. His pupils openly dislike and despise him. The owner of the book shop, Weinstock, seriously believes that Smurov is a Soviet spy, while Vanya's family strive to expose him as a liar or a petty thief. It is only after having been irrevocably rejected by Vanya that Smurov throws himself under Kashmarin's protection. Latent homosexuality therefore becomes for Nabokov an additional marker of the émigré-outsider, signaling his exceptional position vis-à-vis an unfriendly environment.

*The Eye* is in many ways a product of Nabokov's transfer of Kuzmin's *Wings* into the cultural environment of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Both authors were exploring a similar theme--alienation--but in different contexts: the context of Russia at the turn of the century for Kuzmin, and the context of emigration for Nabokov. By creatively appropriating one of the important cultural texts of the preceding tradition, Nabokov was able not only 'to write
back to its opponents but to rid himself of imitative features, unavoidable at the stage of apprenticeship, and glide smoothly into a more gratifying craftsmanship. "The Eye" is a perfect example of what Thomas Green termed "heuristic imitation." "Heuristic imitations come to us advertising their derivation from the subtexts they carry with them, but having done that, they proceed to distance themselves from the subtexts and force us to recognize the poetic distance traversed."\(^{211}\)

\(^{211}\) Thomas M. Green, *The Light in Troy* (New Haven/London: Yale UP, 1982) 40. [Green's emphasis]
THE SILVER AGE IN TRANSLATION

The entry on Boris Pasternak (1890-1960) in Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya (vol. 19, 1975) presents no surprises. Here, as is to be expected, Pasternak receives only lukewarm praise
for his portrayal of Lenin in Malady Sublime [Vysokaya bolezn'] (1924) and for his long narrative poemas devoted to the Russian revolution of 1905 (Lieutenant Schmidt [1926-27] and The Year Nineteen Five [1925-27]). His poetic world is described both as full of contradictions and as being close to nature and to some unidentified eternal problems. Despite the deep moral and psychological crisis that Pasternak allegedly suffered in the 1950s while writing his "anti-Soviet" novel Doctor Zhivago, he managed eventually to see through his mistakes and set out to rectify them. This noble undertaking was, however, cut short by his death in 1960.

What is, in fact, remarkable about this conventional entry is that it is accompanied by Pasternak's picture squeezed between that of Louis Pasteur (the famous French biologist and physician, 1822-95) and that of Enrique Pastorino (leader of the Uruguayan Communist Party and recipient of the Lenin Prize for Strengthening Peace Between Nations, b. 1918). Inadvertently captured in this page of encyclopedia Pasternak's position as intermediary between the late nineteenth-century and mid twentieth-century cultures is the subject of this Chapter.

The title of this Chapter--"On the Border of Two Centuries"--is meant to evoke Andrey Bely's attempt at translating the Silver Age's esoteric legacy for a Soviet audience in On the Border of Two Centuries [Na rubezhe dvukh stoletiy] (1929) (one of several such endeavors mentioned in section 3 of Chapter I, and which are pertinent to the following discussion). The idea of transposing one culture into the language of another was not an invention of the
Soviet period. It lay behind many projects of the Silver Age, such as those of Sergey Diaghilev and the "World of Art Movement," of Kuzmin, Merezhkovsky and Bryusov, to name but a few. The aesthetic principles of such translations were worked out by Merezhkovsky in his *Eternal Companions* (*Vechnye sputniki*) (1888-97). In this work Merezhkovsky found features of Decadent aesthetics in the writings of Goethe, Calderón, Flaubert, Pliny, Marcus Aurelius, Ibsen, Euripides, Pushkin and Dostoevsky. By describing such diverse cultural figures as Decadents or at least as precursors of decadence, Merezhkovsky made their writings more accessible to his contemporaries and promoted them to his readers' "eternal companions."

Белий's memoirs were written in the same vein. In them, he tried to justify his contemporaries in the eyes of Soviet readers by portraying them either as alleged Marxists or as romantic rebels who, as such, contributed to the advent of the Bolshevik

212 Dmitriy Sergeevich Merezhkovsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy*, vol. XVII (Moscow: Sytin, 1914) 5-6. [Merezhkovsky's emphasis]
revolution. Konstantin Fedin's own *Eternal Companions* [Vechnye sputniki] (1937-53), in which he invited fellow writers to follow Gogol's lead in regard to his vivid descriptions of the "enemy [of the people]" were undoubtedly modeled after Merezhkovsky's work of the same title.

Гоголь! Вечный спутник отрока, юноши, мужчины и женщины, школьника, недавно овладевшего грамотой, и старца, умурденного знанием жизни. [...] чудесный гений Гоголя, превозмогающий время, протягивает руку нашим современным писателям и зовет их к высокому мастерству изображения врага во всех его обличьях, как звал он к этому великую русскую литературу классиков. Он воистину—наш вечный спутник.214

The list of such cunning interpretations and adaptations of the pre-revolutionary cultural heritage for contemporary needs might also include Maxim Gorky's *The Life of Klim Samgin* [Zhizn' Klima Samgina] (1925-36), Fedin's *Early Joys* [Pervye radosti] (1944/46) and *No Ordinary Summer* [Neobyknovnoe leto] (1948) and Aleksey...


214 Konstantin Fedin, *Sochineniya v shesti tomakh*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1954) 552-53.
Tolstoy's *Road to Calvary* [*Khozhdenie po mukam*] (1919-43). The authors of these novels reinterpreted the cultural life of pre-revolutionary Russia from the vantage point of the 1920s and 1930s and plunged their intellectual protagonists into the heart of revolutionary activity. Such transpositions differed greatly from those sought after by Merezhkovsky and his associates, of course. While representatives of the Silver Age mediated primarily between one "high" culture and another, their Soviet counterparts were no longer expected to speak the language of the gods or for that matter of the lower classes. They were encouraged to translate their "otherworldly" language into what was thought to be the most accessible language—i.e., the one prescribed by those now in power.215 As Katerina Clark observes:

As the Russian intelligentsia went into the Revolution, they hoped to function as Hermes figures who might mediate between the language of a higher truth and that of the imperfect world around them. Many were particularly attracted to the possibility that they might act as the great demystifiers. Now [in the 1930s], however, their role was closer to that of the comprador. By comprador I mean that special institution that emerged in the era of European economic domination in Asia. The comprador was the non-

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215 As Olga Forsh attested in 1930, not only mature literati, but small children were equally engaged in the art of re-interpretation: "На подоконнике сидели два недомерка второй ступени. Они разбирали «Мертвые души» с социальным подходом и уже окончательной непричастностью к гнилым навыкам старого быта.
— Ну, кто по-твоему будет Чичиков?
— А черт его знает кто. Ты знаешь?
European who mediated between the local people and the European commercial enclave. He spoke two languages, the vernacular (his own language) and that of the particular European community he served. Originally, he spoke the European language only haltingly. Over time, he became increasingly fluent in it.

By the 1930s, the typical Soviet intellectual had become a comprador in that his task was to mediate between the language of high culture, which he spoke "natively," and that of his masters, the language of ideology and power. At first, he might speak the latter imperfectly, but in time the successful comprador passed more and more for a member of the elite group. He could enjoy many of its privileges (cream cakes), but only as long as his linguistic skills proved useful.216

Although not motivated by Soviet cream cakes in his zealous drive to explain his own life and that of his generation for the modern reader, Bely fell into the trap of filling a position midway between the Soviet establishment and those intellectuals who came of age at the dawn of the twentieth century. Thus he recorded in his memoirs:

Bely's resolution to recollect his literary youth in a new language, comprehensible to the majority, echoed linguistic debates of the period 1926-1950. According to those, one unified language was expected to supersede the existing multiplicity of languages as a result of Soviet cultural developments. These ideas were articulated by the linguist Nikolay Marr (1864-1934) and his followers who, as true Marxists, believed that a subsequent global "hybridization" [скрещение] of various languages would result from the further economic and social integration of different peoples. Needless to say, not only were different nations expected sooner or later to speak one and the same language, but people of different social strata as well. In the new society both the erstwhile privileged and underprivileged were encouraged to acquire one universal language (and an equally universal art), befitting the builders of communist society. While the communist Tower of Babel was still under construction, many intellectuals hastened to plug the gaps in its structure if not with their own bodies, then with the body of their artistic work.

Hence, in his memoirs Bely looks back at his past through the eyes of his supposedly young, morally and physically fit readers, and from their perspective he suddenly sees that his illustrious peers

217 Andrey Bely, Nachalo veka (Moscow: Soyuzteatr, 1990) 17.

218 See Clark 212-23.
were seemingly "[b]rought up in such traditions that stink, in an anti-hygienic environment, without physical culture, normal leisure or joyful songs and camaraderie, and never stood a chance of devoting [themselves] to what healthy natural instincts drew [them] towards [. . .]." They all "started [their] lives half crippled," Bely concludes.²¹⁹ He even identifies himself with his potential readers in stating that what he is depicting in his memoirs "is neither close to us, nor contemporaneous" [что я показываю, вам и не близко, и не современно].²²⁰

Despite considerable concessions to the tastes of his various readers, Bely failed to meet their expectations. On the one hand, his detailed subjective descriptions of a variety of cultural figures and literary movements remained foreign to the average reader; on the other hand, many intellectuals were appalled by his cavalier treatment of earlier cultural tradition. Similarly, Mayakovsky's willingness in the 1920s to tune his poetic voice to the ears of his less sophisticated contemporaries provoked outbursts of displeasure among some of his contemporaries:

Маяковский дал улице то, чего ей хотелось. Богатства, накопленные человеческой мыслью, он выволок на базар и— изысканное опошил, сложное упрости, тонкое огрубил, глубокое обмелил, возвышенное принизил и втопил в грязь.²²¹

²¹⁹ Bely, Nachalo veka 18.

²²⁰ Bely, Nachalo veka 17.

As someone who was at various stages close to both Bely and Mayakovsky, Pasternak was well aware of the pitfalls awaiting any cultural mediator. This emerged in the following comments written in the 1950s:

As the last excerpt shows, the search for a new language and means of rendition and the death of the searcher were for Pasternak bound by a cause-and-effect relationship. As his letters reveal, he was equally unimpressed by the undertakings of Aleksey Tolstoy and


Sergey Eisenstein who exerted themselves in portraying Peter the Great and Ivan the Terrible as precursors of Stalin. It was common knowledge that Stalin was keenly interested in the lives of these particular rulers, so both Tolstoy and Eisenstein strove to portray them as heroic but tragically misunderstood makers of the new Russia who had been driven, maybe against their will, to persecute the unworthy for the benefit of the worthy. Such non-factual reconstructions of the past and falsified redemptions of Stalin's predecessors were meant to give a redeeming interpretation to the deeds of the current leader.

A RELUCTANT INNOVATOR

Unlike Fedin, Tolstoy and many others, Pasternak failed in the 1920s and 1930s to produce the major prose work that he longed to do, or to transport his intellectual characters (with a few exceptions, such as those of "Aerial Ways" ["Vozdushnye puti"] and "Malady Sublime" [1924]) across the watershed of World War I or the Bolshevik revolution. By confining the timeframe of his fictional

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225 This is not to say that Pasternak really did not want to write about contemporary issues. He did, but for a number of reasons (some of which are discussed in the following pages), his efforts did not come to fruition in the 1930s. His big prose work, that he kept
work to pre-Bolshevik Russia, he apparently sought to avoid highlighting and testing pre-revolutionary aesthetic and moral ideals against the new post-revolutionary background. In his autobiographical Safe Conduct [Okhrannaya gramota] (1931), Pasternak similarly shunned any serious revisions of the legacy of his predecessors, claiming that all along he desired to repeat their findings—albeit, "more swiftly, heatedly and wholly"—rather than supplant or depose them.

Although in this excerpt Pasternak reported the feelings that he allegedly experienced in the 1910s, his mere recollection of them

announcing in his letters to friends and colleagues, for a long time had remained nothing but a handful of disjointed fragments till he finally embarked on writing Doctor Zhivago in 1945. For a thorough account of Pasternak's striving to turn into a truly contemporary writer in the 1920s and to a certain extent in the 1930s see Christopher Barnes, Boris Pasternak. A literary Biography. Volume 1, 1890-1928 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 348-80; and Volume 2, in press with Cambridge UP (Chapters 1, 2 and 3).

reinstated their relevance to his outlook in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{227} Symptomatically, Pasternak endowed his favorite artistic figures and his later character Yuriy Zhivago with a similar reluctance to oust their predecessors and impress their audience with an innovatory style or techniques. Thus, the work of Chopin, according to Pasternak was "original throughout not because of its being different from the work of his rivals, but because of its kinship with nature," Chopin strove to emulate in his music.\textsuperscript{228} Similarly, we are told that Yuriy Zhivago in the 1920s aspired "to achieve an unnoticeable [незаметный] style" that would free him of the reputation of a trickster and jarring innovator and would "enable the reader or hearer to master the content without noticing the means by which it reached him."\textsuperscript{229}

Only well into the 1950s did Pasternak allow himself any overt negative remarks about his eminent predecessors. Thus, when asked in 1958 which of his fellow-writers managed to weather nicely in the 1920s, Pasternak (at that time himself the author of a full-length novel) dismissed Andrey Bely on the grounds of his being

\textsuperscript{227} The only thing that Pasternak openly acknowledged as requiring replacement in 1930 was the title of Scriabin's Poème de l'Extase: "[Скрябин] приехал, и сразу же пошли репетиции «Экстаза». Как бы мне хотелось теперь заменить это название, отдающее тую мыльной оберткой, каким-нибудь более подходящим!" (Ibid., 153).

\textsuperscript{228} Boris Pasternak, "Shopen," \textit{SS}, vol. 4, 404.

\textsuperscript{229} All English quotations from \textit{Doctor Zhivago} are from Boris Pasternak, \textit{Doctor Zhivago}, trans. Max Hayward, and Manya Harari (London: Collins Harvill, 1988) 394. Hereafter references to this edition are given in parenthesis.
always "too hermetic and too limited" [слишком герметичным, слишком ограниченным].

As we showed in Chapter I, such grating remarks about the generation of "fathers" or elder "brothers" (in the case of Bely) were virtually impossible in the late 1920s and 1930s in the face of a political campaign against most representatives of Russian Modernism; indeed, Pasternak would have seen himself as an endangered product of this very culture. Apart from political and moral pressures, the belated or protracted nature of Pasternak's rebellion in the 1950s is explicable also in the light of his personal relationship with his father, a recognized artist in the Realist vein, Leonid Osipovich Pasternak (1862-1945).231

In the early 1910s, Leonid Pasternak failed to understand his son's youthful thirst for experimentation, the source of which he succinctly identified with the influence of Boris' new bohemian friends, such as Vladimir Mayakovsky and his "cesspool."232 When his

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231 I am grateful to Christopher Barnes for bringing this to my attention.
parents set out to emigrate in 1921, Pasternak and his brother Aleksandr decided to stay in Russia. According to Pasternak's later statements, at the time of Leonid's departure from Russia, they were at odds with each other; they even had a quarrel [поссорились], over their differing perception of post-revolutionary reality. Ten years later, however, Boris' views of Russia's socialist achievements changed radically and he felt remorse over their quarrel.\textsuperscript{233} Thus, \textit{Safe Conduct} (written exactly at the time in question) may also be seen as a story of the prodigal son. In this mythologized account of his coming of age, Pasternak replaced the actual father with a sort of composite cultural construct (Rilke-Scriabin-Cohen-and, finally, Blok), whose influence—though oppressive—nevertheless, proved irresistibly magnetic. The narrator succeeded in running away from his spiritual fathers, Scriabin and Cohen; a few years later, however, the prodigal son returned and remained at home. In Pasternak's own words, "soon after the February revolution" he "returned home [.]... utterly shaken" and resolved to shed the influence of his coeval Mayakovsky—one of the most innovative and influential contemporary poets—and from then on to look up to a representative of the older generation, namely the poet Aleksandr Blok, as a possible role model.\textsuperscript{234}

\textsuperscript{232} Christopher Barnes, \textit{Boris Pasternak. A literary Biography. Volume 1 1890-1928} 183, 200, 216.

\textsuperscript{233} Varlaam Shalamov, "Pasternak," \textit{Vospominaniya o Borise Pasternake} 609-10.
Despite the many kilometers separating them after 1921, the authoritarian figure of Leonid Pasternak remained a looming presence in his son's life. Even at the age of fifty-one Boris still claimed to feel crushed on measuring his achievements against those of his father.

Only after his father's death in May 1945, did Pasternak finally feel free to "distinguish himself from all others." A few months later, he suddenly felt the urge--and, more importantly, the ability--to write his major work of prose, which grew into the novel, Doctor Zhivago (1945-55).

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Subsequently, in 1958, after the novel's completion, Pasternak was undoubtedly content with his accomplishment:

Yet, in the midst of his work on the novel, Pasternak insisted on describing all his recent work as an exercise in translation of distant epochs into the modern language of the late 1940s and early 1950s, rather than as pure innovation or as a continuation of preceding tradition.

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236 The title of this novel underwent various mutations till it finally crystallized in 1948 as Doctor Zhivago. To avoid confusion, we shall refer to it as Doctor Zhivago throughout.


In light of these quoted excerpts from Pasternak's correspondence, one might conclude that his re-interpretation of pre-revolutionary artistic life for a contemporary audience would not essentially differ from the achievements of Fedin, Tolstoy and even Bely. Like them, Pasternak recognized the gaping chasm between pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary culture, and endeavored to bridge this by his own up-to-date "translation." Like Bely, too, Pasternak chose the life and art of Aleksandr Blok as a pivot for this project. Even one of the provisional titles for Doctor Zhivago ("On the Border" ["Na rubezhe"]) was recognizably redolent of Bely. Nevertheless, as we shall see, in his "translation" Pasternak chose not to follow in Bely's wake, and their apparent similarities of approach are largely superficial.

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BLOK'S 1946 ANNIVERSARY

By the mid 1940s and early 1950s when Pasternak was writing his novel, it was no longer necessary to justify and defend (much less, attack) pre-revolutionary culture to the extent that seemed imperative in the late 1920s and 1930s. By the end of World War II many of its representatives and heirs were already dead, and the rest were left to die, perhaps in poverty, but at least, relatively peacefully. Moreover, as was shown in Chapter I, by the early 1940s the Silver Age's contribution to the development of Russian culture was gaining recognition abroad as well as in the Soviet Union.

Particularly pertinent to Pasternak was his involvement in preparations for the 1946 jubilee to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Aleksandr Blok's death. As a result of the joint efforts of Soviet officials, literary scholars, museum workers, artists and numerous admirers, Blok—who was hailed by Pavel Antokol'sky as "the consciousness of Russian poetry"—was now revived. Blok's eager mythologizers provided him with both a suitable pedigree and with suitable heirs. He was consistently described as a unique representative of the Russian gentry, who succeeded in hastening its decline from within, and his famous lines—"We, the children of Russia's terrible years"—were evoked more than once in various

speeches and presentations. A later poet who was most frequently coupled with Blok was Vladimir Mayakovsky.

Александр Блок—великий поэт. Если взять самые выдающиеся явления русской поэтической культуры в их исторической последовательности, в связи с оказанными ими влияниями на ход развития отечественной поэзии, то имя Блока нужно поставить после имен Пушкина, Лермонтова, Некрасова, перед именем следовавшего за ними Владимира Маяковского.242

In fact, the latter’s appearance was seen as a form of answer to Blok’s call for “retribution.”243 Blok’s own copy of Mayakovsky’s A Cloud in Trousers [Oblako v shtanakh]—personally signed by its author—was proudly displayed at a memorial exhibition in Pushkinskiy Dom in Leningrad.244

Blok, however, was no longer portrayed exclusively as a revolutionary-minded superman, hungering for the horrors of the Last Judgment. The organizers of the Leningrad exhibition strove to present him as an outstanding, but nevertheless human, being whose life and death were manifested not so much in apocalyptic revolutionary events, but by an unfinished cigarette and other snapshots of his final days:


Such an obsession with Blok's death rather than his life was not fortuitous in the Soviet climate, particularly following World War II, when considerable efforts were made to rationalize the often meaningless deaths of millions of civilians, not to mention the military. As is often the case, and in Soviet lore particularly, only death can ultimately validate human life and artistic activity and endorse them with meaning. If there could be doubts about the purpose of Blok's bohemian life, his death was seen as utterly meaningful both by his friends and adversaries. The Soviet public was thus invited to celebrate Blok as a lone yet remarkable mediator between two irreconcilable epochs, who, on behalf of an entire pre-revolutionary culture, leaped towards the October revolution in an effort that eventually "rendered him lifeless."

Ibid.
If Blok's death went relatively unnoticed by the Soviet rulers in 1921, the literary establishment of 1946 set out to rectify that mistake. This was facilitated (and perhaps particularly inspired) by the fact that in 1944 Blok's remains, along with those of his grandfather, mother and wife, were dis-interred if not for Fedorovian resurrection, then at least for a re-burial in a place more appropriate for Russian literati—the special section of the Volkovo cemetery known as "literatorskie mostki."

To this new grave crowds of people came to lay flowers on the 7th of August, 1946. Scholars Evgen'ev-Maksimov and Vladimir Orlov, poets Anna Akhmatova, Vsevolod Rozhdestvensky and Nikolay Braun, writers Evgeniy Shvarts and Yuriy German—to name but a few—took part in the memorial events at the Volkovo cemetery and in evening celebrations and a concert at Leningrad's Bolshoy Drama Theatre. Here, many poets, including Akhmatova—at that time a member of the "Municipal Blok Committee"—recited poetry dedicated to or inspired by Blok.247

In his 1946 review of a forthcoming collection of memoirs about Blok, his cousin Georgiy Blok dismissed hitherto published

246 Konstantin Fedin, "Aleksandr Blok," Aleksandr Blok v vospominaniyakh sovremennikov v dvukh tomakh, ed. Vladimir Orlov (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1980) 418-9. This portion was written in 1941. Fedin's emphasis.

memoirs because of their authors' alleged bias and preconceptions. In his opinion, such failings were particularly noticeable in Andrey Bely's recollections. The forthcoming memoirs, by contrast, Blok hailed as virtually flawless and marked by a sobriety and objectivity made possible by the time lapse since the poet's death.  

Hence, what happened in 1946 can be seen as a considerably "improved" and better orchestrated wake for one of Russia's greatest poets, who was now symbolically resurrected to a Soviet-style immortality and literary afterlife.

This rejuvenated Blok was now available for mass consumption. Preparations for the anniversary celebrations were marked not only by the launching of a special issue of Literaturnoe nasledstvo devoted to Blok, a new collection of memoirs, and suitably revised and updated biographical monographs, but by mass production of a variety of portraits of Blok. Leningrad sculptors were also commissioned to produce "new busts of the poet," and musical publishers issued a special edition of Blok settings for voice and piano by Soviet composers.

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250 Ibid.

251 Aleksandr Blok v pesnyakh i romansakh sovetskikh kompozitorov (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1946).
To enhance public understanding and appreciation of Blok's legacy, a new two-volume edition of his writings was scheduled to appear in 1946-47. As a member of the editorial board, Pasternak had occasion to work closely with Blok's texts and he was also asked to write an article on the poet, for which he immediately started accumulating material, mainly by slowly re-digesting the Berlin Alkonost edition of Blok's writings (1923). The article, however, was never finished and nothing of it was published in Pasternak's lifetime. As he explained in the spring of 1947, he abandoned the project in favor of working on his novel Doctor Zhivago.

Летом просили меня написать что-нибудь к блоковской годовщине. Мне очень хотелось написать о Блоке статью, и я подумал, что вот этот роман я пишу вместо статьи о Блоке. (У Блока были пополнения гениальной прозы—отрывки, кусочки.)

Я подчинился власти этих сил, этих слагаемых, которые оттуда—из Блока—идут и движут меня дальше. В замысле у меня было дать прозу, в моем понимании, реалистическую, понять московскую жизнь, интеллигентскую, символистскую, но воплотить ее не как зарисовки, а как драму или трагедию.252

252 Lidiya Chukovskaya, "Otryvki iz dnevnika," Vospominaniya o Borise Pasternake 410.
In the novel which, according to Pasternak himself, was inspired by Blok's personal life and art, his named presence was reduced to a bare minimum however. At some point in the narrative we are told that "young people in both capitals were mad about Blok" (80); Yuriy Zhivago is described as having promised Gordon an article about Blok for his journal (which he would never write); and later, shortly before his death, he recalls Blok's writings. But there are no more detailed mentions than these, and Yuriy is in fact the only literary figure portrayed in the entire novel.

Unlike his numerous contemporaries who in their effort to preserve the past saw a need to "modernize" it, Pasternak chose the opposite procedure. The biography of the Silver Age poet Yuriy Zhivago is presented not as an inferior blueprint for the story of a future builder of communist society, but as a projection of events that took place over the previous nineteen hundred years, including the Biblical story of Jesus Christ, the legend of Faust and the tragedy of Hamlet. Instead of bringing his story of an artist closer to contemporary events, Pasternak related it to the events of the past in which, in his view, it had originated.

Pasternak's composite image of Zhivago-cum-Blok-cum-Christ-cum-Faust-cum-Hamlet may have related to Bely's earlier
(1922) memoirs of Blok, in which he constantly drew parallels between Blok and other universal literary characters, such as Christ, Hamlet and Faust.

A. A. [...] выглядел если не Гамлетом, то Фаустом.


Он сотворил свою краткою человеческой жизнью вечную память в сердцах тех, кто его знал и любил. И этот памятник нерукотворный живее, бессмертнее и долговечнее тех памятников, которые будут ему поставлены из материалов и напечатанных о нем трудов. Этот памятник—его бессмертная жизнь, ибо мы в Богу родимся, во Христе умираем и в Святом Духе возрождаемся.

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254 To be sure, the images of Christ, Hamlet and Faust played an important role in Blok's own writings. For a good overview of these themes in Blok's works see Avril Pyman, The Life of Aleksandr Blok, Volumes I and II (Oxford/London/New York: Oxford UP, 1979/1980).


256 Ibid., 322. [Bely's emphasis]
Whatever the source of Pasternak's backward (as opposed to forward) translation, he followed its principles consistently. This "backward" translation is particularly noticeable in his treatment of Blok's poetry when integrating it into the texture of his novel. An example of these parallels thus arising is offered by extracts from Blok's verse of 1902 and from Pasternak's prose text:

**BLOK (1902)**

Явился он на стройном бале
В блестящее смокнутом кругу.
Огни зловещие мигали,
И взор описывал дугу.

Всю ночь кружились в шумном танце,
Всю ночь у стен сжимался круг.
И на заре—в оконном глянце
Бесшумный появился друг.

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[...] Мелькали жолтые огни
И электрические свечи.
И он встречал ее в тени,
А я следил и пел их встречи.

Когда внезапно смущены,
Они предчувствовали что-то,
Меня скрывали в глубины
Слепые темные ворота.

**PASTERNAK (DOCTOR ZHIVAGO)**

Но вместо Фадея Казимировича из-за перегородки вышел кто-то другой. Это был плотный, бритый, осаннистый и уверенный в себе человек. Над головою он нес лампу, вынутую из резервуара. [...] между девушкой и мужчиной [Лара и Комаровский] происходила немая сцена. Они не сказали друг другу ни слова и только обменивались взглядами. Но взаимное их понимание было пугающее волшебно, словно он был кукольником, а она послушно движением его руки марионеткой.

Улыбка усталости, появившаяся у нее на лице, заставляла девушку полузакрывать глаза и наполовину разжимать губы [...]
И я, невидимый для всех,
Следил мужчины профиль грубый,
Ее сребристо-черный мех
И что-то шепчущие губы.

*****

При жолтом свете веселились,
Всю ночь у стен сжимался круг,
Ряды танцующих двоились,
И мнися неотступный друг.

Желанием поднимало груди,
На лицах отражался зной.
Я проходил с мечтой о чуде,
Томимый похотью чужой... [...]

Юра пожирал обоих глазами. Из полутмзы, в которой никто не мог его видеть, он смотрел не отрываясь в освещенный лампои круг. Зрелище порабощения девушки было неисповедимо таинственно и беззастенчиво откровенно.

Противоречивые чувства теснились в груди у него. У Юры сжималось сердце от их неиспытанной силы.

Это было то самое, о чем они так горячо год продолювали с Мишей и Тоней под ничего не значащем именем пошлости, то пугающее и притязивающее, с чем они так легко справлялись на безопасном расстоянии на словах, и вот эта сила находилась перед Юриными глазами, досколько вещественная и смутная и снисходая, безжалостно разрушительная и жалующаяся и зовущая на помощь, и куда девалась их детская философия и что теперь Юре делать? (63-64)

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257 Aleksandr Blok, Sobranie sochineniy v vos'mi tomakh, vol. 1 (Moscow/Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1960) 221, 224, 227.

258 All Russian quotations from Doctor Zhivago are from Boris Pasternak, SS, vol. 3. Figures in brackets correspond to the page numbers in this edition. [emphasis added]
As these juxtaposed texts suggest, Blok's early poems and Pasternak's mature prose are related.\(^{259}\) In the drafts for his unfinished article on Blok Pasternak copied the lines "При желтом свете веселишься, Всю ночь у стен сжимался круг" and remarked that their theme was echoed in a number of Blok's poems from the same cycle.\(^ {260}\) Even more remarkably, there seems to be a reverse relationship between Blok's verse and Pasternak's later prose, in which it appears that it is not Pasternak's text that is derived from that of Blok (as would be expected), but vice versa. Indeed, Pasternak seems to restore the situation that notionally inspired the otherwise obscure poems, providing a context from which they might have derived, and thus clarifying their meaning for contemporary readers.

The fact that even Blok's mature poetry (not to mention his earlier work) could benefit from some kind of a "facelift" or renovation was apparent even to readers such as Lidiya Ginzburg, who as early as 1932 stated in a diary entry that Blok already seemed to her out of date:

\(^{259}\) Pasternak-Blok parallels have been studied by a number of scholars. See for example, Henry Gifford, "Pasternak and the 'Realism' of Blok," *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, Vol. XIII (1967); and Irene Masing-Delic, "Zhivago's 'Christmas Star' as Homage to Blok," *Aleksandr Blok: Centennial Conference*, ed. Walter N. Vickery and Bogdan B. Sagatov (Columbus: Slavica Publishers, 1984) 207-24 among others. The purpose of this chapter, however, is not to expand these studies by pointing out yet more instances in which such parallels can be observed, but to explore Pasternak's strategies of assimilation of any "foreign" text in the texture of his novel.

\(^{260}\) Boris Pasternak, "K kharakteristike Bloka," *SS*, vol. 4, 706.
Symptomatically, some peasants, with whom the famous educator Adrian Toporov discussed in 1928 Blok's poem "As Soon as the Velvety Blackness of the Sky Begins to Twinkle" ["Lish' zaiskritsya barkhat nebesnyy"], found it difficult to follow, because the poet allegedly failed to spell out what "he" thought and felt, and what the woman "he" longed for thought, and why "they" did have so much "trouble".

Лежал бы и лежал под этот стих. Подумаешь, какая драгоценност! Хоть бы лице девушки, как следно описал. Это стихотворение—мерзлое. У Фета "Шопот"—не то. Там любовь и природа.

[...]. Само по себе стихотворение радует, а мысли в нем нет. Чем человек страдал—не описано.

"Он", видно к "ней" не подходил, не говорил с "ней". Не выражается это в стихе, как надо бы.

[...] Маленько неполно описано.262

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261 Lidiya Ginzburg, Chelovek za pis'mennym stolom (Sovetskiy pisatel': Leningrad, 1989) 118.

262 A. Toporov, Krest'yanne o pisatelyakh (Moscow/Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1930) 236-7.
In the same collection Toporov published an account of how his sophisticated peasants (note their ability to draw parallels with Fet) reacted to Pasternak's long poem *Spektorsky* (1924/30). In the event they were unable to stomach more than the eight opening lines because they were so appalled by their fuzziness and incomprehensibility.\(^{263}\) Here are some of their comments:

—Не дала я этому стиху ума. Калина-малина, куричье гавно, а более ничего не сказано.
—Ничу нет понятного. Ничу к толку не производено. Весь стих как стриженная курица—страшная! Не писать бы ему такие. Книгу замарали этим стихом. Что хотел сказать автор—не понял я.
—Слова русские, понятные, но в них нет материала.
—Связанных слов нисколько нетути. Добрый человек скажет одно слово, потом завяжет его, еще скажет, опять завяжет. Передние, середние и задние—все завяжет в одно. А в этом стиху слова, как сквозь решето, сыпятся и разделяются друг от друга.
—Я прямо остервенелся. Покою нету! Такой азарт у меня от раздражения, что сейчас бы задушил автора собственными руками.\(^{264}\)

One should not, in fact, underestimate the value of the comments of these particular readers. As Evgeniy Dobrenko amply demonstrated,

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\(^{263}\) The fact that peasants had problems with this particular work of Pasternak is significant. For it was in this work (as well as in other long narrative poems of this period) that Pasternak hoped to reach new artistic heights by combining the events of one personal life with those in the history of the nation (see Christopher Barnes, *Boris Pasternak. A literary Biography. Volume 1*, 348-80).

\(^{264}\) Toporov 267-9.
it was readers like Toporov's peasants who were ultimately responsible for the shaping of the aesthetics of Socialist Realism. Their opinion was crucial in determining which literary works were worth publishing and which should be taken out of circulation.265

From the late 1920s onwards266 Pasternak was very much aware of his failure to write easily accessible literary works--a "shortcoming" which, as his numerous letters show, he increasingly tried to rectify in the 1930s and 1940s.267 In 1947 he confessed to Vsevolod Ivanov that "accessibility" [доступность] was one of the key qualities he pursued in Doctor Zhivago, and that he hoped the work would be read "in one gulp by anyone" [взахлёб любым человеком].268


266 It is not fortuitous that Zhivago dies in 1929, more or less at the time when Pasternak himself felt the urge for a drastic change of his style and mode of poetic expression.

267 This is discussed in detail in Barnes, Boris Pasternak. A Literary Biography. Vol. 2.

268 Boris Pasternak, SS, vol. 3, 659. The fact that Pasternak—at least at some stages—was prepared to go quite far in an effort to make his novel accessible can be illustrated with the following poem. In the drafts, this poem was composed by Zhivago while sawing wood with his third wife Marina:

Раз у новорища
В праздник Рождества
С бедною Марияей
Я пилил дрова. (SS, vol. 3, 618)
Hence, what Blok left intentionally oblique and elusive, received a form of "substantiation" in Pasternak's Doctor Zhivago. For instance, the ball scenes (the mysterious background of Blok's poetry of autumn 1902) materialized a few pages after the Chernogoriya hotel scene into the Christmas party episode at the Sventitskys'. At this party Lara attempts to murder Komarovsky, and Yuriy observes the two of them from a distance, having previously been denied admission to their magic "circle." Pasternak seems to have inherited Blok's obsession with the word "circle" [круг]. However, if for Blok "circle" usually meant a circle of light mysteriously separating the observer from the objects of his "espionage," Pasternak managed to preserve and explore its various connotations. Thus, the chapter where Yuriy first sets eyes on Lara is called "Девочка из другого круга" [A Girl from a Different World/Circle]. The first implication of this title, fully supported by the narrative, is that Lara comes from a middle-class, petty bourgeois background that is different both from that of Yuriy's upper-class and of Pasha Antipov's proletarian worlds. Still, as we find out, Yuriy's (and Pasha's) problems in his relationship with Lara eventually arise not from their social differences but from her...

269 Again, as in Blok's poems, words such as "circle" and "wall(s)" abound in the description of the Sventitskys' party. But unlike Blok, they are totally "justified" by the context: "Мимо жарко дышащей елки, опоясанной в несколько рядов струящимся сиянием, шурша платьями и наступая друг другу на ноги, двигалась черная стена прогуливающихся и разговаривающих, не занятых танцами. Внутри круга бешено вертелся танцующие" (83). [emphasis added]
inability to break out of Komarovsky's "enchanted circle," his magical sexual powers.270

A very revealing instance of how Blok's poetry was digested and assimilated by Pasternak's prose comes in the scenes which show Yuriy Zhivago at the funeral service for Tonya's mother Anna Ivanovna. The "source" text for the following episode I believe to be the two poems written by the young Blok on the occasion of his grandfather's death in July 1902.

BLOK
Мы вместе ждали смерти или сна.
Томительные проходили мглы.
Вдруг ветерком пахнуло из окна,
Зашевелся лист Священной Книги.

[...] Но было сладко душу услышать
И в отходящем увидать веселье.
Пришел наш час—запомянуть и любить,
И праздновать иное новоселье.

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PASTERNAK
От горя, долгого стояния на ногах и недосыпания, от густого пения, и ослепляющего света свечей днем и ночью, и от простуды, схваченной на этих днях,
у Юру в душе была сладкая неразбериха, блаженно-бредовая,
скорбно-восторженная.

Десять лет тому назад, когда
хоронили маму он безутешно плакал
[...] пораженный горем и ужасом. [...] Внешний мир обступал Юру со всех сторон, осознательный, непроходимый и беспорный, как лес, и оттого-то был Юра так потрясен маминой смертью, что он с ней заблудился в этом лесу и вдруг остался в нем один, без нее. [...]
Не бойся умереть в пути.
Не бойся ни вражды, ни дружбы.
Внимай словам церковной службы,
Чтоб грани страха перейти.
Она сама к тебе сойдет.
Уже не будешь в рабстве тленном
Манить смеющийся восход
В обличье бедном и смиренном.
Она и ты—един закон,
Одно веселье Высшей Воли.
Ты не навеки обречен
Отчаянной и смертной боли.\textsuperscript{271}

Совсем другое дело было теперь.
Все эти двадцать лет школы,
средней и высшей, Юра занимался
древностью и законом Божьим,
преданиями и поэтами, науками о
прошлом и о природе, как семейной
хроникой родного дома, как своей
родословной. Сейчас он ничего не
боялся, ни жизни, ни смерти, всё на
свете, все вещи были словами его
словаря. Он чувствовал себя стоящим
на равной ноге со всеми и совсем
по-другому выставал панихиды по
Анне Ивановне, чем в бывшее время по
своей маме. Тогда он забывался, робел
и молился. А теперь он слушал
заупокойную службу как сообщение,
непосредственно к нему обращенное и
прямое его касающееся. Он
вслушивался в эти слова и требовал
от них смысла, понятно выраженого,
как это требуется от всякого дела, и
ничего общего с набожностью не было
в его чувстве преемственности по
отношению к высшим силам земли и
неба, которым он поклонялся как
своим великим предшественникам.
(88-9)

\textsuperscript{271} Aleksandr Blok, Sobranie sochineniy v vos'mi tomakh, vol. 1, 202-3.
Again, as we can see, Pasternak’s text is far more “complete” and exhaustive than that of Blok. While Blok’s lines, "but it was sweet to observe his soul[‘s departure] and detect the merriment [on the face] of the deceased" [но было сладко душу уследить и в отходящем увидать веселье], would be difficult to comprehend since they are enclosed in the haze of a typically Symbolist poem, they are not only "recycled," but also fully motivated in Pasternak’s "derivative" text. The sensations of sweet merriment and peacefulness that overcome Yuriy during the funeral are first meticulously explained by his state of delirium resulting from influenza and a general state of exhaustion; then they are accounted for by his education and a recently acquired philosophical outlook the formation of which the reader is allowed to follow. Hence, just as Blok "prescribed," Yuriy manages to negotiate the barriers raised by his fear of death, and to heed the actual message of the funeral service.

Pasternak’s treatment of Blokian texts is not so much a process of adaptation and simplification as a conscientious effort to recreate the situation that gave rise to this or that poetic impulse, and by doing this to gain understanding of Blok’s poetic work and to help others understand it. In Pasternak’s own words, in writing his novel he sought "to understand Moscow life, that is the life of the intelligentsia, particularly of those related to the Symbolist

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movement" [понять московскую жизнь, интеллигентскую, символистскую].

For most of his later life Pasternak felt drawn towards prose writing, and was perpetually dissatisfied with his poetic achievements alone. As he explained to Varlaam Shalamov in 1954, poetry by definition could not stand on its own. It had to be accompanied by works of prose to achieve its fullest comprehension and recognition.

Почему поэту важно писать прозу? Поэт Пушкин воспринимается вместе с его прозой, на ее фоне понимается. Не все можно сказать стихами. Стихи Лермонтова понимаются, чувствуются тоньше, точнее, лучше, если помнить о его прозе. Сама проза—материал для лучшего понимания стихов. А вот Верлен, который не писал прозу, требует для полного восприятия—современной ему французской живописи.

Therefore, Blok who wrote little fictional prose, might have appeared to be in need of a novel or a long story to his credit. One might indeed suggest that Doctor Zhivago—particularly those passages discussed above—was precisely that prose work which Blok never wrote himself, but probably (according to Pasternak)


274 Varlaam Shalamov, "Pasternak," Vospominaniya o Borise Pasternake 618. As was pointed out by a number of scholars, some of Zhivago's poems can be related directly to specific episodes in the prose sections of the novel.
should have written, so as to ensure his place in the culture in the second half of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{275}

2.

Blok's legacy was not the only one "translated" in Pasternak's novel, however. Thus the detailed description of the shop-keeper Ol'ga Galuzina (who is introduced for no apparent reason and later disappears without trace) accounts not only for Blok's but also for the painter Boris Kustodiev's mysterious predilection for the color lilac.\textsuperscript{276} Kustodiev was famous for his portraits of the wives of

\textsuperscript{275} When in 1947 Pasternak claimed that Blok's prose (rather than his poetry) was particularly inspiring to his endeavor, he probably had in mind the long poem Retribution [\textit{Vozmezdie}]. This poem (which took Blok over ten years to write and still remained unfinished) is usually published along with its drafts and various outlines written in prose. The latter--apart from providing insight into Blok's creative method--contain a key to understanding the obscure/fragmentary portions in the poetic text. Apparently, Pasternak was particularly dependent on Blok in the initial phases of his work on the novel: it was originally conceived as the story of Innokentiy Dudorov, the unfortunate son of a revolutionary terrorist and a Caucasian Princess. A character of similar sort is briefly outlined in Blok's "Confession of a Heathen" ['\textit{Ispoved' yazychnika}'] (1918), in which this character dies prematurely following a boat accident. Although a few sentences from Blok's story grew into a whole section in Part I of Doctor Zhivago, as work progressed Dudorov ceased to be the main character and was only occasionally highlighted, mainly in negative contrast to the protagonist Yurii Zhivago.

\textsuperscript{276} The fact that the following passage relates to Blok is pointed out by V. M. Borisov and E. B. Pasternak in Boris Pasternak,
merchants and shop-keepers, whom he dressed up in strikingly rich lilac clothes against a lilac background. So, if anybody in the 1950s wondered about the reason for all this lilac color, Pasternak gave a plain explanation in the following passage:

Although Galuzina subsequently vanishes from the narrative, her image, like that of Blok’s Eternal Feminine, proves a guiding light for her dim-witted son Terentiy, saving him miraculously from almost certain death.

On a broader scale, Pasternak’s novel about the fate of an artist at a time of political and cultural uncertainty and upheaval...

**SS, vol. 3, 703.** The text that they quote to support their statement, however, does not account either for Pasternak’s choice of a specific social background for Galuzina or for the intensely visual imagery that pervades this particular excerpt from Doctor Zhivago. The other possible “sources” might have been Mikhail Vrubel’ or Scriabin, in fact, lilac/mauve/violet was a general “period” color.
seems partly indebted to one of the key texts from the Silver Age, Dmitriy Merezhkovsky's novel *The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci* [*Voskresshie bogi (Leonardo Da-Vinchi)*] (1901). Both Leonardo and Yuriy are portrayed not only as free-spirited intellectuals consumed by a lofty passion for art, but above all, as human beings, who often have to resort to rather menial jobs in order to provide for their near and dear ones. Both are extremely lonely figures, although surrounded by occasional and even devoted disciples. Most of Leonardo's major scientific discoveries remain unappreciated by his contemporaries, and many of his works of art (like some of Yuriy's) are lost in either war, fire and flood, or some other natural disasters. Both characters move from one geographic locale to another, opting to stay out of politics, but, if necessary, they do not shun financial support and protection from powerful benefactors. They also both lack willpower and lose their lovers either through death or some unidentified causes, and in any case, they both prefer to immortalize them in art, rather than take care of their actual needs.

Closer to the end of the novel, in Book Fifteen ("The Most Holy Inquisition"), Merezhkovsky tells briefly of Leonardo studying anatomy in Milan in association with a certain Marc Antonio, "one of the first savants of Europe."277 This Marc Antonio "had consecrated himself to the service of science when scarcely a youth [. . .] Neither

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the games of childhood, nor the passions of youth diverted him from this strict service. He had come to love a maiden; but, deciding that it was impossible to serve two masters--love and science--had given up his bride and definitely forsaken the world. Even in his childhood he had impaired his health with excessive studies."  

In many ways, the character of Marc Antonio reads like a blueprint for a chain of similar characters in narrative verse and prose, culminating in the character of Pavel Antipov.

Not unlike Zhivago and Antipov-Strel'nikov (and to a certain extent, Gordon, and Dudorov), Leonardo and Marc Antonio are antipodes. If Leonardo "[a]t the outposts of knowledge [. . .] sensed a mystery, which, throughout all the manifestations of the universe, drew him to it," Marc Antonio only "feared it." The learning of Leonardo was directed toward God, the learning of Marc Antonio was directed against God, and his lost faith he was fain to supplant with a new—a faith in the reason of man. [. . .] The one was only a scholar, the other both a scholar and an artist. Leonardo knew and loved,—and his love deepened his knowledge. His drawings were so exact, and at the same time so beautiful, that it was difficult to decide where art ended and science began; the one entered into the other, blending


279 Compare this with Pasternak's remark about Yuriy and Misha Gordon's different responses to the philosophical ideas of Yuriy's uncle Nikolay Vedenyapin: "Yura advanced and developed under the influence of his uncle's theories but Misha was cramped by them." (68)
together into one indivisible whole."280 Like Antipov-Strel'nikov, Marc Antonio is zealously fanatical. "Leonardo felt that this compassionate man, were he to be given power, would send men to be burned at the stake in the name of reason, even as his enemies the monks and the churchmen burned them in the name of God."281 No wonder, that the tale of Marc Antonio serves as an introduction to the deeds of the "Most Holy Inquisition." What was sketched out by Merezhkovsky only briefly, develops into one of the major themes in Doctor Zhivago, that is the conflict between a true artist, highly sensitive to all mysteries of nature, and a rigid proponent of a single scientific or political doctrine. However, although Antipov-Strel'nikov is endowed with Marc Antonio's fanaticism and an all-consuming devotion to his course, his behavior is also fully motivated and well grounded in the circumstances of his life. Pasternak furnishes him with a believable, if elaborate, metamorphic chain: giggling Patulya/Pasha is transformed into the serious and diligent student Pavel, then into Lara's hypochondriac husband Antipov, and finally into the grim revolutionary, Antipov-Strel'nikov.

A thrifty "translator," Pasternak transports his watermelon to the Chernogoriya Hotel from an equally dismal hotel in Anton Chekhov's "The Lady with the Lapdog" ["Dama s sobachkoy"] (1899). In this story the aging lovelace Gurov seduces an unhappy and


281 Ibid., 544.
vulnerable young woman in her hotel room. When the love-making is over, the "lady" feels crushed by the new experience while Gurov finds the whole situation awkward and above all boring. Instead of talking his partner out of her gloomy mood, he starts eating a watermelon. These nuances in the characters' moods and behavior are conveyed in a few laconic sentences.

—Нехорошо,—сказала она.—Вы же первый меня не уважаете теперь.

На столе в номере был арбуз. Гуро отрезал себе ломоть и стал есть не спеша. Прошло, по крайней мере, полчаса в молчании.282

In Doctor Zhivago not only the watermelon grows in size, but the text devoted to its consumption also increases in length.

Очень часто [Ларе] вспоминался первый вечер их приезда в Москву с Урала. [...] На столе в номере ее опечалили неимоверной величины арбуз, хлеб-соль Комаровского им на новоселье. Арбуз казался Ларе символом власти Комаровского и его богатства. Когда Виктор Ипполитович ударом ножа раскроил надвое звонко хрустнувшее, темно-зеленое, круглое диво с ледяной, сахаристой сердцевиной, у Лары захватило дух от страха, но она не посмела отказаться. Она через силу глотала розовые душистые куски, которые от волнения становились у нее поперек горла.

Although it is Lara who eats the watermelon, while Komarovsky is portrayed as the owner of a ferocious bulldog, the pattern of her (submissive) and his (dominant) behavior in this episode is recognizably Chekhovian. The sensual description of the cutting of watermelon (first deflowering and then forced oral sex) is preemptive of Lara's future relationship with Komarovsky. Pasternak, however, left no chance for future feminists to treat themselves to his watermelon scene (as has often been the case with Chekhov). He not only produced a far more impressive account of the dangers harbored by a juicy watermelon, but forestalled any attempt to savor this scene by exposing Komarovsky as a blatantly pompous and uncaring male (in case the reader has not grasped this him/herself) who uses his power to exploit and dominate fragile and often naive women.

The scope of this Chapter does not allow us, however, to digress into discussing Pasternak's treatment of the legacy of many more fin de siècle figures in Doctor Zhivago. Even the preceding discussion of Blok, Chekhov and Merezhkovsky does not do justice to the whole wealth of intertextual parallels, transformations and shifts, already uncovered by many Pasternak scholars over the last forty years.  

283 For a good summary of studies published prior to 1986 on the subject of intertextuality in Doctor Zhivago see Neil Cornwell,
about his own magnum opus, as Nabokov said about his novel The Gift: "Its heroine is not Zina [Lara in Pasternak's case], but Russian literature."²⁸⁴ Our task here was simply to point to some general tendencies in Pasternak's treatment of the works of his immediate predecessors.

3.

As the brief analysis above shows, in Doctor Zhivago Pasternak painstakingly translates the Silver Age's esoteric legacy, by


reconstructing the initial context and by restoring missing links and filling in gaps. However, as we have seen, the names of Blok, Kustodiev, Merezhkovsky, Chekhov, and other cultural figures of the period are not explicitly mentioned at the moment of such translation. Pasternak’s method of transposition was not of Fedorovian literal resurrection (a propaganda illusion of which was created with Blok’s re-burial in 1946)–he did not resurrect Blok’s protagonists, or Blok himself to make them participate in modern life—but a mnemonic resurrection only. As Yurii explains to the dying Anna Ivanovna:


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As Irene Masing-Delic vividly demonstrated, Fedorovian fantastic ideas, albeit unidentified, were behind many Soviet projects. Irene Masing-Delic, Abolishing Death (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992). On the principles of Fedorovian resurrection see Chapter IV.
If this is so, however, why—as many critics have already asked—should this novel, allegedly devoted to life, start with a funeral? I think that recognition of the identity of the deceased is one of the keys to the novel. The question "Who is being buried?" thus requires an answer.

The 1946 collection of memoirs about Blok featured reminiscences of Viktor Shklovsky which he later incorporated in his semi-autobiographical *Once Upon a Time* [*Zhili-byli*] (1966). It was Shklovsky's recollections of his meetings with Blok that were particularly praised by Georgiy Blok in his review article discussed above.286 Although the full text of his memoirs was published only in the 1960s, like *Doctor Zhivago* they were well known and widely circulated among intellectuals. In these memoirs Shklovsky describes his own and his coevals' pitiful efforts to help organize a decent funeral for Blok and preserve his memory. They posted home-made announcements and embarked on an expedition to find the gypsum, needed for Blok's death mask. None of these tasks was easy. Even the funeral itself acquired some grotesque overtones due to confusion about the identity of the deceased. Shklovsky's memoir impressions compare negatively with other accounts of this

286 G. Blok, "Vospominaniya ob Aleksandre Bloke."
event. He exerts himself to underline the shabbiness of the whole enterprise: very few people in attendance, the coffin carried by a worn out pair of horses, etc. The account concludes on a slightly positive note only in a sense that years later Blok was allowed to lie among those dear to him—all of them, Shklovsky emphasizes, famous people in their own right. But let us return to the grotesque aspects highlighted by Shklovsky. The collation of the opening passage of Doctor Zhivago with the concluding portion of Once Upon a Time is highly revealing:

ONCE UPON A TIME

Шли и шли и пели «Вечную память», и, когда останавливались, казалось, что ее по-заложенному продолжают петь ноги, лошади, дуновения ветра.

Прохожие пропускали шествие, считали венки, крестились.
Любопытные спрашивали: «Кого хоронят?» Им отвечали:
«Живаго»—«Вот оно что. Тогда понятно»—«Да не его. Ее»—«Все равно. Царствие небесное. Похороны богатые».

DOCTOR ZHIVAGO

На похороны пришло немного народа.
Гроб тихо везли обессиленные лошади через весь город [...] Речь на могиле не говорили [...] Я забыл сказать, что по дороге нас много раз спрашивали люди, которые видели, что везут гроб и за ним идет сравнительно большое количество людей:
— Кого хоронят?
— Блока,—отвечали мы.
И все спрашивающие говорили, как будто желая для себя уяснить до конца уже понятный ответ:
— Генриха Блока?

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287 See footnote 16 in Introduction.
Although Pasternak describes the funeral of the fictional Mariya Zhivago and Shklovsky the funeral of the real Aleksandr Blok, the coincidence of so many details can scarcely be purely accidental.

288 Viktor Shklovsky, Zhili-byli (Moscow: Sovetskiy pisatel', 1966) 159-60. [emphasis added]
Characteristically though, Pasternak's description is far more detailed and elaborate.

What is the function of these coincidences? It would appear that just like as Pasternak wanted to return Blok's poetry to its "origin" (i.e. to the context from which it derived), he likewise wanted to return Blok's body to where it belonged--back to earth.

In this way Pasternak, effectively, repaired the damage done to Blok's legacy by that Soviet propaganda machine which strove to resurrect him in 1946 and proclaim him as the "consciousness of Russian poetry" (meaning primarily the 1940s).

By not writing his article on Blok in 1946 (although he had the material for it), Pasternak, in effect, declined the role of official interpreter of his writings for the Soviet reader, i.e. he refused to function as a "comprador." Nor did he allow his character Yuriy Zhivago to become one. In the greater part of the novel Zhivago serves successfully as the medium between "God" ("Lord! [...] Why hast Thou admitted me to Thy presence [...]?") and the mortal world.

Zhivago should be identified neither with Andrey Bely, nor Aleksandr Blok. Yuriy's patronymic, Andreevich, along with the name and patronymic of his former guardian and later father in law, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich, indicate that he relates to them diachronically rather than synchronically.

Запели «Со духи праведных». Началась страшная гонка. Гроб закрыли, заколотили, стали опускать. Отбабанил дождь комьев, которыми торопливо в четыре лопаты забросали могилу. На ней вырос холмик. На него въехал десятилетний мальчик. (7))

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289 Zhivago should be identified neither with Andrey Bely, nor Aleksandr Blok. Yuriy's patronymic, Andreevich, along with the name and patronymic of his former guardian and later father in law, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich, indicate that he relates to them diachronically rather than synchronically.
The problem of refusing or accepting an official stance assumes crucial form in 1929, when he is employed by his half-brother Evgraf a representative of the Soviet system, to write poetry in more comfortable surroundings. Zhivago not only accepts this invitation but even prepares himself for work in a government institution.

Further episodes in the novel which show Zhivago living as a recluse, so that nothing should distract him from writing good poetry, are highly reminiscent of similar passages in his close friend Vsevolod Ivanov's novel Taking Berlin (Pri vzyatii Berlina) (1945). Ivanov's protagonist Viktor Mikheev is a painter and, like Zhivago, at some stage finds himself in love with two women at once. In 1942 he sees Stalin at a Moscow plant, and three years later General Bursakov asks him to paint a portrait of Stalin in a panoramic setting to boost the moral of workers at the plant. Like Evgraf, General Bursakov insists on Mikheev's leaving his home and moving into a specially prepared big room where he would sleep and work without interruption for the next few weeks. Mikheev is provided with all the necessary equipment including imported coffee. Mikheev goes through all the agony and rapture of artistic creativity, and finally manages to produce a portrait which brings him recognition as one of the most talented painters of his time.\textsuperscript{290}

\textsuperscript{290} Vsevolod Ivanov, "Pri vzyatii Berlina," Novyy mir 1-6 (1945).
Significantly, Zhivago's apartment, which he receives from Evgraf for an indefinite period of time in exchange for Yuriy's formalizing his relationship with his third wife Marina and their two little daughters, is compared by Pasternak to "[a] painter's studio," while his notebooks are compared with "unfinished pictures" (435). We should recall that had Zhivago resolved to describe post-revolutionary Moscow in the language of Blok, Verhaeren and Whitman. Had he succeeded in doing this, Zhivago's poems might well have been very similar to Bely's later writings, in which (in Pasternak's view of 1952) he desperately tried to pour his old wine into new bottles. However, Yuriy himself soon perished and no such poems were later found in his papers (a fact emphasized by the narrator).

Zhivago's death after a heart attack in a street-car in August 1929 has been interpreted and re-interpreted by many scholars. The timing of his death is usually attributed to the wave of political and cultural repressions that began around this time marking the end of independent art and literature in Russia. This, however, does not explain Pasternak's choice of the month and of the streetcar setting. Although there is no conclusive evidence, it is worthwhile recalling that on August 13, 1926 Andrey Bely was severely struck by a street-car while crossing the road. Bely who had always felt that August was his unlucky month, was extremely shaken both

291 This period is discussed in detail in Barnes, Boris Pasternak. A Literary Biography. Vol. 2, Chapters 1 and 2.
emotionally and physically and attributed his miraculous escape to his instinctive leap in order to avoid the wheels of the vehicle. Bely was, in fact, notoriously preoccupied with the nature of the subconscious and used to analyze such situations in great detail recounting them to members of his inner circle. It is quite likely that Pasternak heard about this episode either from Bely himself or from his wife Klavdiya Bugaeva who meticulously recorded those events in her memoirs.292 Thus, had Bely died in 1926, he would have not written those later novels and memoirs which were particularly criticized by Pasternak when writing Doctor Zhivago.

Thus, in curtailing Zhivago's life Pasternak asserted his freedom of a narrator and author, which in real life is controlled by Fate.293 In this connection it is useful to recall Pasternak's letter to Mark Grigor'evich Vatagin written on December 15, 1955, a few days after Doctor Zhivago was completed. In this letter Pasternak talks about the mysterious divine force whose function it is to "restrict" the otherwise destructive freedom of the artist.

292 All information about this accident comes from K. N. Bugaeva, "Iz knigi 'Vospominaniya o Belom'," Vospominaniya of Andree Belom, ed. V. M. Piskunov (Moscow: Republika, 1995) 404-7.

293 I believe in a considerable gap (that was consciously observed and maintained) between Pasternak and his character. Cf. the perceptive observation of Zinaida Pasternak: "[. . .] для меня доктор Живаго, в отличие от Бори, был отнюдь не героическим типом. Боря был значительно выше своего героя, в Живаго же он показал среднего интеллигента без особых запросов, и его конец является закономерным для такой личности." Boris Pasternak, Vtoroe rozhdenie. Pis'ma k Z.N. Pasternak; Z. N. Pasternak, Vospominaniya, ed. N. Pasternak and M. Feinberg (Moscow: GRIT Dom-muzey Pasternaka, 1993) 359. The placing of Zhivago's coffin on his writing desk is another sign pointing to the lifelessness of his last project.
In the Epilogue the reader learns about the fate of Zhivago's legacy. First of all, there is Yuriy's and Lara's daughter Tanya. However, she is not so much a real person, as a living reference to Blok's *Retribution* [*Vozmezdie*] (1910-1921). In his introduction to the poem Blok revealed a plan to conclude the three-part work with an epilogue that would feature the illegitimate son of his "superfluous" but sacrifice-prone character. This son was to grow up totally unaware of his aristocratic father and would be brought up by a simple Polish peasant woman. We know nothing about the future of this child, but it seems fairly predictable: even while he is still being breast-fed by his mother, he sings a revolutionary song: "And I will go towards the soldiers. . . And I will throw myself upon their bayonets. . . And for you, my freedom, I will mount the black

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This wonderful child, according to Blok, was pre-destined to eventually fulfill some kind of Messianic role.

The crass contrast between the characters and fates of father and child also seems reflected in Pasternak's novel. Indeed, Zhivago's daughter Tanya appears as the result of a transfer of Blok's planned epilogue into the reality of the Stalinist 1940s. The consequence of this crude transfer naturally offends the feelings of Zhivago's close friends Gordon and Dudorov. In their eyes, the semi-illiterate Tanya Bezocheredova bears little resemblance to their lofty friend and his muse. Not surprisingly, neither Gordon nor Dudorov express any interest in Tanya's future and instead happily reassure one another that it was Evgraf's duty to look after her. The sight of Tanya and her horrible story provoke Gordon to reflect on the projection of Blok's legacy into the Soviet period. He says:

—Ты понял, кто это, эта бельевщица Таня?
—О, конечно.
—Евграф о ней позаботится—Потом немного помолчав прибавил—Так было уже несколько раз в истории. Задуманное идеально, возвышенно, — грубо, овеществлялось. Так Греция стала Римом, так русское просвещение стало русской революцией. Возьми ты это Блоковское «Мы дети страшных лет России», и сразу увидишь различие эпох. Когда Блок говорил это, это надо было понимать в переносном смысле, фигурально. И дети были не дети, а сыны,
Since Tanya forms a biological sequel to Yuriy's life, which we can actually follow into the 1940s, her presence in the final prose chapter of the novel seems like a warning of what might have been Yuriy's poetic fate had he lived to become a Soviet poet laureate.

The prosaic part of the novel, however, does not quite end with Tanya Bezocheredova, but with Gordon and Dudorov deeply immersed in a re-reading of Yuriy's poetry in the 1950s. After this the final Chapter 17 is comprised exclusively of Yuriy's poetry. Although it was not possible to preserve all of his verse, what remains of it his friends "almost know by heart" (463). Zhivago's poems that "survive" the state of flux are those written, of course, by Pasternak himself. This is not to state the obvious. Pasternak unselfishly bestows on his character, who was active in the late 1910-s and 1920-s, the poems that he himself wrote between 1944 and 1955.296 No wonder that they survived so well and did not lose their appeal for Gordon and Dudorov thirty years later.

296 In the late 1940s, Pasternak made a particular effort to stress that he had been writing and putting some of his poems aside for his character, Yuriy Zhivago, also a poet. See Ol'ga Ivinskaya, Gody s Borisom Pasternakom. V plenu vremeni (Moscow: Libris, 1992) 212. These poems became commonly known either as Zhivago's poems or as "poems from the novel."
Thus, by the mid-1940s and for a number of reasons, Pasternak finally found the time ripe for his "revisionist" masterpiece. Moreover, far from engaging in open battles with his predecessors' and contemporaries' legacy, he preferred to confine the scope of his work to "translating" that heritage. Finding certain "flaws" in the writings of Blok and others, he set out to rectify them (i.e. the perceived obsoleteness and incomprehensibility of their texts), thus redeeming their writings in the eyes of his own contemporaries. By skillfully "recycling" Blok's poetry within his novel, Pasternak thus proved himself to be the real heir to his legacy. By contrast, as we remember, this privilege was granted by official Soviet criticism to Mayakovsky alone.298

297 One should not underestimate Pasternak's own appreciation of the innovatory nature of his project. When in the early and mid-forties Pasternak devoted much of his creative efforts to translation, he insisted that his translations (mainly of Shakespeare) should be considered as original works in their own right, "Работу [his translation of Hamlet] нужно судить как русское оригинальное драматическое произведение, потому что, помимо точности, равнодушия с подлинников и прочего, в ней больше всего той намеренной свободы, без которой не бывает приближения к большим вещам [. . .] Переводы мыслимы потому что в идеале и они должны быть художественными произведениями и, при общности текста, становиться вровень с оригиналами своей собственной неповторимостью. Переводы мыслимы потому, что до нас веками переводили друг друга целые литературы, и переводы — не способ ознакомления с отдельными произведениями, а средство векового общения культур и народов" (Boris Pasternak, "O Shekspire," SS, vol.4, 386, 394).
Pasternak's position vis-à-vis his literary progenitors was far from that of being their meek student, however. As we have demonstrated, Blok's poems and artistic biography as well as other texts of the Silver Age are not only "incorporated" into the prose texture of Doctor Zhivago, but are further distilled in its final poetic chapter.299 Interestingly, there are 25 poems in Zhivago's cycle, one for each year that had elapsed from Blok's death to 1946 when Pasternak first started writing his anniversary article.

298 If Antipov-Strel'nikov was indeed modeled after Mayakovsky (as many scholars maintain), then his lack of real talent and originality (which is consistently emphasized both by Zhivago and the narrator) was Pasternak's way of settling accounts with his rival and avenging Blok's heritage.

299 The organization of Zhivago's cycle follows the poetic development of Blok. Among Blok's early poetry there are several poems that were in one way or another inspired by an amateur performance of Shakespeare's Hamlet (August, 1898), in which he played the leading role and his future wife, L. D. Mendeleeva, played the part of Ophelia ("Kogda tolpa vokrug kumiram rukopleshchet"; "Poka spokoynoyu stopoyu"). Zhivago's poem "Skazka" brings to mind an excerpt from Blok's outline (1911) of Part I of Retribution in which he described a typical family of Russian intellectuals: "Вся суть в том, что прелесть этой семьи так заметна, потому что все тогдашние прекрасные передовые русские люди носили в себе мир — при всеобщем сне. То были герои еще (дракон, спящая царевна). То, что кажется «наивным» теперь, тогда не было наивно, но было сораспятием. Профессор лучших времен Петербургского университета был тем самым общественным деятелем, он берег Россию." Blok, Sobranie sochineniy, vol. 3, 463. [Blok's emphasis]. The so-called "Christian" cycle of Zhivago's poetry can be paralleled with Blok's intention in 1918 to write a contemporary play about Jesus Christ which was never finished (see Aleksandr Blok, Dnevnik [Moscow: Sovetskaya Rossiya, 1988] 259-260) and with the concluding portion of The Twelve [Dvenadtsat'].
CHAPTER FOUR: THE APOCALYPSE REVISITED
(VIKTOR EROFEEV'S RUSSIAN BEAUTY)

Our last example of how the legacy of the Silver Age was assimilated in the works of later writers comes from Russian alternative prose, the literary trend that originated in the late 1960s and gained its recognition in the late 1980s and 1990s. As we showed in Chapter I, its various representatives (such as Bitov and Sokolov)—although still preoccupied with turn-of-the-century culture in their writings—nevertheless, treated its legacy as part and parcel of the literary process in Russia, rather than as shaky foundations on which to exercise one's ethical principles and moral
duty. Thus, as we shall see, their approach to cultural heritage is by far more revisionist than that of Nabokov and Pasternak. In fact, they have called for a revision of Nabokov's and Pasternak's own legacies.

Speaking about the cultural and literary sources of the so-called Russian alternative prose, Viktor Erofeev (b. 1947) acknowledges that it "has learnt from a strange mixture of teachers."\textsuperscript{300} The incomplete list of sources includes Marquis de Sade, Decadents, Surrealists, mystics, pop-art and Nabokov.\textsuperscript{301} For Erofeev--a renowned mouthpiece of alternative prose and one of Russia's leading literary critics--"learning" results from very careful study, almost X-ray examination and scrutiny. His collected works (1994-1996) include scholarly articles on Rozanov, Shestov, Dostoevsky, Nabokov, Sologub, Bely and Chekhov among others. Nor does Erofeev lose sight of Western and American cultural traditions. The list of the non-Russian cultural figures that have attracted his attention over the last twenty years is equally impressive. Apart from this, he wrote introductory articles to the selected works of Shestov, Rozanov, Nabokov and \textit{The Penguin Book of New Russian Writing}.

Erofeev's apparent narrow focus on representatives of the Silver Age and its immediate successors, like Nabokov, cannot be


\textsuperscript{301} Ibid.
fortuitous. Brezhnev's Russia of the 1970s and early 1980s (when alternative prose was in a state of gestation) followed up by a period of democratic reforms and cultural revitalization in the late 1980s and early 1990s, has a lot in common with a similar period of stagnation that Russia underwent in the 1880s, and which gave way to a cultural renaissance. Whether a believer in "eternal recurrence" or not, Erofeev draws explicit parallels between Russia's newly born prose and its Silver-haired ancestors.302 His celebrated articles "A Funeral Feast for Soviet Literature" ["Pominki po sovetskoy literature"] (1989) and "Russia's Fleur du Mal" ["Russkie tsvety zla"] (1993), in which he gives a retrospective view of Russian literary tradition and provides a theoretical background for the emergence of alternative prose, sound very much like the apology for Decadence and Symbolism, voiced by Merezhkovsky a century earlier in his famous discourse "On the Reasons for the Decline and New Trends in Contemporary Russian Literature" [O prichinakh upadka i o novykh techeniyakh sovremennoy russkoy literatury"] (1893).

Erofeev proves himself to be a quick learner. Like his beloved Vasiliy Rozanov he "pricks up his ears" [ВСЛУШИВАЕТСЯ] and "peers tirelessly" [ВСМЯТРИВАЕТСЯ] at the most ordinary things.303 The results


303 See Viktor Erofeev, introduction ("Raznотsvetnaya mozaika rozanovskoy mysli"), Nesovmestimyye kontrasty bytiya by V. V. Rozanov (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1990) 6-36. In it, Erofeev admits to
of such scrutiny well surpass those of Rozanov. Where Rozanov, for example, sees only a phallus ("The pine-tree, silver fir, spruce tree, particularly, particularly the cone of the spruce tree, 'the sight of a tree,' the sky dome--everything is phallus-like."),304 Erofeev's narrator observes "with the meticulousness of a naturalist [that the cone of] the regal spruce tree [looks more like] a little brown sausage of dog's shit."305

Like Nabokov, Erofeev often astonishes his readers with his interchangeable Ich and Er-narrators (his novel The Last Judgment [Strashnyy sud] (1995) which provides allusions to Nabokov's The Gift and Despair, is particularly noteworthy in this respect). From Nabokov, via Gogol', Erofeev's narrator inherits a sensitive nose which not only allows him to detect "a sharp stink from a male mouth" [резк[ая] вонь из мужского рта]306 and "the discreet scent of a poor aging woman" [прощла, ... облав скромным запахом бедной стареющей

being a proud owner of Rozanov's own copy of The Apocalypse of Our Time [Apokalipsis nashego vremeni] (1918) which he obtained in his youth in exchange for the rare lifetime edition of Pushkin's Boris Godunov. His joy was doubled when he later on found out that the lifetime edition of Boris Godunov was one of the books that Rozanov really valued in his own library. Oleg Dark was the first to point to Erofeev's affinity with Rozanov, but refrained from exploring this theme to any considerable extent (see Oleg Dark, "Chernovoe pis'mo," Strelec 1 [1992]: 183).


but also a variety of smells that are exuded from male and female genitalia. If Nabokovian characters produce a farting noise mostly with their lips ["Ардалион пукнул губами"], Erofeev's characters not only do it less delicately and discreetly but considerably more often.

For an epigraph to a story about a man admiring graffiti in the male washroom, Erofeev shamelessly pulls a line--"leaning against a door-post" [прислонясь к дверному косыку]—out of Pasternak's poem "Hamlet." Moreover, he manages to outscore even the seemingly unsurpassable Chekhov. Erofeev's characters religiously eat the notorious watermelon not only after that (i.e. a sado-masochistic gang-rape orchestrated by the protagonist for the "benefit" of his sweetheart of ten years), but also before that (i.e. a sacrificial rape in Russian Beauty).

Alternative prose is omnivorous, it swallows and quickly digests both refined and unrefined food. The results of this digestion

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310 "[...] арбуз сохраним на потом [...] ну, а теперь давай есть арбуз" (Erofeev, SS, vol. 3, 136, 235) [Erofeev's emphasis].

311 "Стали арбуз есть, но что-то не елось [...]" (Erofeev, SS, vol. 1, 197).
are more shocking than aesthetically pleasing. After many years of enforced abstinence and strict diet, the alternative prose writers are particularly fond of chewing on sacred cows, be they objects of national pride or subjects of reverence. The new Russian literature in Erofeev’s words:

has called everything into question: love, children, faith, the Church, culture, beauty, nobility of character, motherhood, and even the wisdom of the common people, thereby destroying those Populist illusions in which the intelligentsia kept believing through all the years of Soviet power. [...] [Alternative prose] is a joint reaction to the wild Russian reality and the excessive moralism of Russian culture.312

When Erofeev’s first novel, Russian Beauty [Russkaya krasavitsa] (1980-82), was published in 1990 simultaneously in Russian and French, it brought him instant fame and was immediately acclaimed by literary reviewers for its combination of eroticism with audacious and inventive wordplay. Now the morbid story of a beautiful courtesan whose fate has been identified by many with that of "Mother Russia" (raped, abused and attractive) is translated into twenty-six languages. Although the bulk of scholarly articles on Erofeev are still to come, Oleg Dark and Robert Porter in their illuminating works traced the various ascribed and unascribed literary allusions and quotations that one encounters in Russian

312 Erofeev, "Russia’s Fleurs du Mal" xvi.
As their studies show, Erofeev slaughtered not one, but many sacred cows in his novel.

However, apart from fragments of various literary texts, it is possible to uncover something much more pervasive—what Linda Hutcheon calls "the target text"—which is addressed and appropriated by Erofeev in Russian Beauty. This "target text," I believe, is the Book of Revelation, more specifically its re-interpretation within the cultural context of the Russian Silver Age.

Without doubt, one of the most prominent sources in Russian literature, the Book of Revelation acquired the status of an all-permeating artistic structure during the quarter of a century prior to the Bolshevik revolution. Many a Russian intellectual welcomed the vision of Apocalypse, while striving to usher in its more tangible version, the socialist revolution. The preceding dark period of reaction and all encompassing lethargy provided fertile soil for


314 This term is introduced by Linda Hutcheon in her A Theory of Parody (New York/London: Routledge, 1991).

315 "There are,' as the philosopher Nikolay Berdyaev once wrote, 'two dominant myths which can become dynamic in the life of a people—the myth about origins and the myth about the end. For Russians it has been the second myth, the eschatological, that has dominated." David M. Bethea, The Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989) xiii.
nursing and nurturing ideas about the ways of fostering the spiritual rebirth of mankind. During the following period of cultural vitality intellectuals got weary of waiting for the event however; change had to be instantaneous—as in the Apocalypse. The Apocalyptic theme played an important role in the writings of such diverse people as Vladimir Solov'ev, Berdyaev, Fedorov, Merezhkovsky, Shestov, Bely, Blok—to name but a few—till it reached its culmination in Rozanov's *The Apocalypse of Our Time* that was written parallel to the unraveling of post-Revolutionary events, which, in Rozanov's words, turned the mock-apocalypse of intellectual scenarios—as used to be the case—into "events, truly apocalyptic in nature."  

The origin of Erofeev's apocalyptic moods at the time of writing *Russian Beauty* can be found in his personal life. The early 1980s were a tough and disappointing period for Erofeev: his joint venture—literary miscellany *Metropolis* (the cradle of alternative prose)—was closed by Soviet officials and Erofeev's membership in the Writers' Union was suspended for an indefinite period. Many of his friends were sacked, some chose to leave the country. *Russian Beauty*, which was written immediately after the fiasco, provides numerous allusions to these events. For example, Ira's parting with the beloved Ksyusha, who is not allowed to re-enter Russia, is reminiscent of Erofeev's parting with his close friend, the writer Vasiliy Aksenov, who left Russia shortly after the

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316 For a comprehensive summary of their ideas see Bethea 28-61.

fiasco with *Metropol* in 1980. Ira's persecution by the authorities after her arranging for the publication of her pictures in *Playboy* parodies a similar campaign against the contributors to *Metropol* who prudently sent extra copies of their magazine to the American publisher. According to Erofeev, there were even rumors spread by the authorities that he and Aksenov (like the fictional Ira and Ksyusha) were having a homosexual relationship, using their partnership in *Metropol* as a disguise. The support of six fictional American beauties for Ira parallels the actual support of American writers (Updike, Vonnegut, Albee, Miller and Styron) for the contributors to *Metropol*.318

Erofeev and his friends were forced to go through various trials and tribulations. The behavior of fellow writers who went out of their way to demonstrate their loyalty to the existing regime was particularly shocking and disappointing. As Erofeev remarked later, Russian *alternative prose* was purged by the Soviet establishment. This, according to Erofeev, was reminiscent of the Silver Age culture being aborted by the establishment some sixty years earlier.319 It would seem therefore that, like his Silver Age ancestors, Erofeev had every reason to "bring" the Apocalypse to his country for the edification of its citizens. Fortunately for Russian literature, this did not happen. Erofeev chose not to become another

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prophet. Instead, with the help of an "unreliable" skaz narrator, he embarked on re-visiting messianic and eschatological writings of his predecessors and as a result drew out his own, late-twentieth-century version of the Apocalypse.

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Russian Beauty is recounted by an Ich-narrator, Irina (Ira) Tarakanova, who, having learned about her unnatural (miraculous) pregnancy, sets out to present an account of the events that led to it. Ira is an object of many a man's sexual desires, which in most cases she is willing to satisfy. Two years prior to the time of her writing she meets a distinguished writer, Vladimir Sergeevich, who is considerably older than she is and rapidly falls in love with him. At the outset of their relationship they strike a deal that in exchange for her services he will eventually marry her. This, however, never happens, since Vladimir Sergeevich dies in Ira's presence as a result of their sexual intercourse. Ira is left to answer various embarrassing questions from the media and Soviet authorities, not to mention the hatred of Vladimir's widow and the betrayal of her friends and colleagues. Heartbroken, Ira decides to save the nation by sacrificing herself on the grounds of the historically famous battlefield, presumably, Kulikovo. However instead of turning into a martyr, she is visited by the ghost of her late lover and conceives a child from him. Disturbed and frightened,
Ira lives in seclusion and resolves to write about what has happened to her.

While settling down to write the account of the last two years of her life, Ira is concerned that she lacks the necessary skills of a good writer:

Написать, конечно, я могу, но невольное беспокойство вызывает у меня то, что я не знаю как, то есть к литературе не имею никакого отношения. Было бы куда лучше, если бы мою историю взялся описать, например, Шолохов. (6)320

She contemplates Mikhail Sholokhov as the author of her story because she imagines that the most prominent socialist realist writer's input would add authenticity to her account. Her fears about not knowing how to set about writing a truthful account of her life turn out to be totally justified. She is indeed a most unreliable skaz-narrator,321 who either constantly makes

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320 All Russian quotations from Russian Beauty are from Viktor Erofeev, Russkaya krasavitsa, SS, vol. 1. References to this edition are given in parenthesis.

321 "In the skaz the narrating act itself is made unreliable. The narrator gives up his function of objective truth-value assignments and engages in a free, non-binding narrative game. Speaking figuratively, we can say that the skaz narrator does not take himself seriously; he is free to make contradictory statements or to undermine his statements by irony. The basic law of authentication--the descriptions introduced by the narrator are eo ipso authentic--is invalid in the skaz narrative. In other words, the skaz narrator is one possible solution of the task of depriving the narrator of his authority." Lubomir Dolezel, "Narrative Worlds," Sound, Sign and Meaning, ed. L. Matejka (Ann Arbor: Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Michigan, 1976) 550.
contradictory statements\textsuperscript{322} or admits to having been under the influence of excessive amounts of alcohol while writing the larger portion of the narrative.

Unlike typical postmodern narrators, who are often engaged in confusing the reader, the question of verisimilitude is extremely important to Ira: on the one hand she is longing for a scientific explanation of her supernatural experiences, and on the other she fears ending up in a mad-house as the result of her writing. Thus, having discarded Sholokhov as a helper, Ira proceeds with her revelation which she models, "unwittingly," on the text that is, eo ipso, authentic, namely the Bible.

Like The Gospel according to St. Luke, Ira's story starts with the Annunciation.\textsuperscript{323} Not unlike the angel Gabriel, the cunning gynecologist Stanislav Albertovich tells Ira about her extraordinary pregnancy and declares it to be a miracle. She conceived her child if not from the Holy Ghost then still from the ghost of her late lover. However the fact that the fetus suddenly starts to rot and that by the end of the story Ira commits suicide two thirds through her pregnancy provides allusions to the Book of Revelation.\textsuperscript{324} The idea

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\textsuperscript{322} Cf. Ira's three different versions of her second marriage.

\textsuperscript{323} Like St. Luke, Ira arranges her narrative in the form of a letter which is addressed to her friend Ksyusha (St. Luke was writing his Gospel to "the most excellent Theophilus") and divides it into 24 Chapters.

\textsuperscript{324} On the structure of the Apocalyptic narratives, particularly in Russian literature, see Bethea.
that part of the New Testament and the Book of Revelation were written by the same person, in the Silver Age context was particularly emphasized by Lev Shestov (1866-1938), a philosopher whose works are intimately familiar to Erofeev. In "Speculation and the Apocalypse" ["Umozrenie i Apokalipsis"] Shestov suggests that St. John, the author of the fourth Gospel, was "punished" for his exaggerated Hellenic belief in Logos ("In the beginning was the Word") by being made the author of the Apocalypse:

И, если тот, кто писал четвертое Евангелие, не был автором Апокалипсиса, то волей судьбы стал им. Судьба властно потребовала, чтоб тот, кто говорил о поклонении в духе и истрине, кто возвестил миру, что в начале было слово, т. е. кто первый из христиан задумал слить "Эллинскую песню песней" со словом Божием Израиля, был обречен апокалиптическими громами будить омертвевшие, быть может, мертвые души людей.  

In Russian Beauty there is literally one person who—paradoxically—in order to avoid punishment, narrates both texts simultaneously. Erofeev superimposes the Book of Revelation upon the Gospels and presents an intricate collage of the two. As a result we have an expected immaculate conception, but the mother turns out to be the "grandmother of Russian abortion" as Ira is often cursed by others; and the fetus starts to rot in the early stages of

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her pregnancy. The child instead of an expected Savior turns, in Ira's own words, into "a monster [...] like Hitler or some such monsters [...]". 

3.

Erofeev's version of the Apocalypse, apart from being informed by the works of Russian intellectuals, such as the philosopher Shestov (which will be discussed in section 4), rests on the multiple semantics of the word "конец" [the end] and its derivatives. The word "конец," which is used in Apocalyptic writings to mean the End of the world [конец света], has, however, several connotations. Apart from the general meaning of an ending, and more specifically "death" and "the End of the world," in colloquial Russian the word "конец" is often used to denote "phallus." By analogy, the verbs from the same root (кончать, кончить) mean not only "to end something" or "to kill someone," but also "to reach sexual orgasm." Due to such complex semantics, the phallus is shown to perform a great variety of functions.

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326 All English quotations from Russian Beauty are from Viktor Erofeev, Russian Beauty, trans. Andrew Reynolds (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1994) 85. References to this edition are given in parenthesis. When both Russian and English versions are used, the page number in the parenthesis corresponds to the page in the English edition, while the second corresponds to that in the Russian edition.

functions in *Russian Beauty*.\textsuperscript{328} Thus, Vladimir Sergeevich gets out of a scandalous situation with the help of his phallus, so to speak:

Тогда, посмеиваясь, Владимир Сергеевич рассказал продолжение истории с апельсинами, как он все потушил, помочившись в этот костер, и все уладилось [...](92)

Many of the pornographic scenes in Ira's narrative evolve from its intimate links with the Book of Revelation. In regard to Vladimir Sergeevich's orgiastic death the words to come [кончать] and to die [кончиться] are bound by the cause and effect relationship:

[... a кончал у меня, как миленький. [...]. Я сама, говорю, поседела, жуткое дело: на глазах кончился, если не сказать того хуже. (64) [emphasis added]

А он смотрит на меня нелюбящим взором и ничего не отвечает, никак последних слов не произносит, после того, как кончил, а кончил, как юноша — властно и горячо, да только надорвался и все в нем окончательно выпнуло, и смотрю — глаза мутнеют, как у воробушка, который, знаете ли, подыхает. (100) [emphasis added]

Moreover, as we find out, the approaching "end of a great people" [конец великого народа] (i.e. the Russians) can be easily averted if only

\textsuperscript{328} Words with a wide range of connotations are favored and used to good effect by Erofeev's contemporaries, Komar and Melamid, in their paintings. For example, their five panels "Eggs, Coitus and Cicero" (1984-1985) are based on different meanings of the word "egg" or "eggs" [яйцо, яйца] in Russian and give rise to various equations.
Ira offers her services to "Russia's greatest foe" (219/177). Thus, when Ira agrees to save the nation, her death should come as the result of her being impaled on the phallus of the "voluptuous" rapist (presumably, the Devil).

[...] груди мои он сжал мертвой хваткой, норовит с корнем вырвать [...] а потом руки ноги оторвать и обрубок на конце натянуть, как марионетку [...] (207) [emphasis added]

Ira offers her body as an arena for the unraveling of the apocalyptic events. She hopes that the ultimate destruction [конец света] will take place not throughout the whole of the Soviet Union but only inside her own body:

[...] а не будет ли это, Ирина Владимировна, с вашей стороны, терроризмом? не повредит ли экологии?—Нет, говорю, ничему не повредит, и крови людской не прольется.—А что же прольется?—Известно что: воюющее, как гной семя главного врага России, плотоядного демона, узурпатора и самодержца. А как прольется, он немедленно сникнет, сожжётся, ослабееет, и тогда сила справедливости восторжествует, закончится вековечное колдовство [...] (176)

Ira's Christ-like gesture fails to save the world, however. She returns home absolutely exhausted and falls sick. The fact, that such a truly Christian idea as that of improving the world by means of voluntary sacrifice and martyrdom is shown to be barren in Russian Beauty, might be viewed as Erofeev's allusion to the so called crisis of traditional Christianity, which occurred in Russia at the turn-of-
the-century and was reflected in many works of this period. Their authors sought new and more radical solutions to the improvement of mankind, involving (apart from the social changes) drastic changes in human anatomy and physiology (such as castration, enforced sexual abstinence, desired androgyny, resurrection of the dead, vegetarianism and many other). Rozanov's *The Apocalypse of Our Time* is particularly noteworthy in this respect. In this work Rozanov speaks overtly about the impotence of Christianity and interprets the Book of Revelation as an appeal to (and the only means to) reshape a dying tradition ("Apokalipsis требует, зовет и велит новую религию. Вот его суть").

Therefore, it is only to be expected, that instead of the semen of "Russia's great foe," Ira's body receives the new revelation. This happens when she returns from the battlefield and is visited by the ghost of her lover, who forces her into love-making. That night Vladimir Sergeevich not only seduces her but requests her to start writing a new revelation in order to save the "emasculated" culture:

Говорил, что культура повсюду выхолостилась, что только новое откровение способно будет ее оживить. (238) [emphasis added]

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Ira's encounter with Vladimir Sergeevich has all the necessary ingredients of an apocalyptic plot, for "Apocalypse' is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality [. . .]."  

Then, why is the prostitute shown by Erofeev to be worthy of a revelation? The idea that a prostitute--or any woman with abnormal sexual desires--should be endowed with Religious zeal more than anybody else most likely echoes some of the statements in Rozanov's People of the Moon Light [Lyudi lunnogo sveta] (1912). In this work, Rozanov recounts the story of a woman who "poisoned" the life of her husband, children and even grandchildren by her inability to control her sexual desire. Apart from her remarkable sexual appetite, this woman lead an exemplary life: she was a hard worker, extremely patient and benevolent, and in every other way a decent human being, a true Christian. Rozanov does not conceal his admiration for women of this kind. This and many other analogous situations allow him to conclude that women of this type often combine the most

331 Collins quoted in Bethea 7.

332 Bethea 8.

333 In fact, Nikolay Fedorov out of all women most highly praised Mary Magdalene and expected fallen women (after they have given up their profession) to contribute greatly to the fulfillment of the "Common Task." See Irene Masing-Delic, Abolishing Death (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992) 96.
powerful sexual desires with religious ardor and devote their lives to various heroic deeds. Such women are truly remarkable: their state of delirium is informed either by erotic or religious visions and even if they use foul language, it is steeped in religious mysticism. Such conclusions allow Rozanov once again to revel in his favorite speculations that sex and "the really true religion" originate from the same root.  

Ira's sexual intercourse with Vladimir Sergeevich (which Ira experiences in a state of delirium because of her sickness) is, in fact, modeled after Chapter X in the Book of Revelation in which St. John the Divine describes how he "ate" the book:

9. И пошел я к Ангелу и сказал ему: дай мне книжку. Он сказал мне: возьми и съешь ее; она будет горька во чреве твоем, но в устах твоих будет сладка, как мед.
10. И взял я книжку из рук Ангела и съел ее; она в устах моих была сладка, как мед; когда же съел ее, то горько стало во чреве моем.
11. И сказал он мне: тебе надлежит опять пророчествовать о народах и племенах и языках и царях многих.

It will be recalled that when Vladimir Sergeevich makes love to Ira, she is consumed with a pleasure such as she never experienced before:

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Soon this sweet taste of love-making gives way to "the unmistakable aftertaste, the earliest herald of alarm [. . .] [accompanied by] a nagging pain down below" which tells Ira that she is pregnant (3). The above mentioned intertextual parallels suggest that like St. John, Ira also carries the book in her belly. The fact that a sexual organ can function as a writing instrument is observed by Ira when she compares the phallus of one of her lovers to "a sharpened pencil" [член заострен, как оцинченный карандаш] (336/269).

By bringing the Book of Revelation and Soviet socialist reality of Moscow in 1980 together, Erofeev daringly explores previously untrodden paths and creates a new version of the Apocalypse. In this revelation, a renowned prostitute is expected to save the nation, while the phallus is mythologized and plays a crucial role in Erofeev's eschatology. Erofeev's Apocalypse, however, is not an act of intellectual sacrilege. In some ways it is an Apocalypse with a human face, so to speak. As is often the case in real life, Erofeev's characters quietly go through with their personal Apocalypses

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(drugs, alcohol, death, sexual abuse, etc.), events that usually escape the eyes of a witness.

In his narrowing of the sphere of Apocalyptic events Erofeev might have followed in part the lead of artists of the Silver Age. For them private life and art (the public sphere) merged to such an extent that they became virtually indistinguishable. Thus, when in 1929 Bely searched for the cause of his pervasively apocalyptic moods, he found it in his very personal experiences: for most of his childhood he had been torn apart between his incompatible and constantly arguing parents.

Первые впечатления бытия: рубеж между отцом и матерью; рубеж между мной и ими; и—кризис квартиры, вне которой мне в мире не было еще мира; так апокалиптической мистикой конца я был переполнен до всякого «Апокалипсиса»; она—эмпирика поданной мне жизни; впоследствии, уже семилетним, наслушавшись рассказов горничной о «светопредставлении», я всю душой откликнулся на «судную трубу»; я только и ждал: «вострубит» отец спором, воскликнет мать нервами; и—конец, конец всему! Критику, рассуждающему об «эсхатологических» моментах в моем творчестве, я подаю простую, наилюбимейшую тему: как ему невдомек, что тема конца—имманентна моему развитию; она навеяна темой другого конца: конца одной из профессорских квартирек, типичной все же, ибо в ней—конец быта, конец века.

336 In Erofeev's The Last Judgment the long expected and prophesied Great Flood often materializes into the overflowing bathtub.

Characteristically, Bely sought solutions to his private problems in the world-consuming holocaust that he welcomed in his writings.

In Russian Beauty, on the contrary, Apocalyptic events are restricted to the human body and manifest themselves through its function and malfunction, such as drinking, bingeing, excessive sexual desires, death, unwanted pregnancy, and even flatulence. In the opening portion of the book Ira dismisses contemporary writers on the grounds that they are "always rather agitated, they fuss, and they come very quickly" (суетятся и очень быстро кончают) (14/17). The Russian text allows this to be interpreted both as that they reach their orgasm too soon or that—to one's disappointment—they stop telling their story half-way through. In her account Ira does not spare any details. She creates her version of a private, intimate Apocalypse in which the size of her toes and the smell of her groin prophesy the approaching of the End. It is—borrowing the title of Erofeev's short story—a truly "Pocket Apocalypse" ["Karmannyy apokalipsis"]. In Ira's case the Word is literally made flesh, and


this flesh immediately starts to rot and the smell of this rotten flesh replaces Ira's famous smell of bergamot.

4.

In order to understand what went wrong with Ira's child, we should look at its parents. The father of Ira's baby is an eminent writer who is wooed by the authorities. And he is not the only one. Prominent men of letters (dead and alive), striving underground writers and official Soviet journalists abound in Russian Beauty. The problems of what to write and how to write are at the core of the motivations and ambitions of many characters.

Prior to his death Vladimir Sergeevich compares himself to Fedor Tyutchev (a renowned poet and a precursor of the Russian Symbolists [1803-73]) and declares to Ira his decision to devote himself solely to the writing of an autobiographical novel. In his novel he was going to portray the aging colonel who, after learning about the infidelities of his young lover, shoots her:

[...] только гибнет бедовая санитарка, он ее сам пристреливает из дымящегося нагана [...]. он стоит над ней, расставив ноги, с дымящимся наганом, невдалеке догоерает товарный состав, а по небу летят легкокрылые истребители: помесь Тютчева с вихрастым полковником [...].

The fact that the novel was going to be written "against the background of earth-shattering events" (116), together with his
predilection for burning trains and fighter planes, indicates that Vladimir Sergeevich was thinking about writing his own version of the Apocalypse. The pun of Vladimir Sergeevich's identifying himself (and his character) with Tyutchev does not only lie in the obvious parallels between his affair with Ira and Tyutchev's relationship with Elena Denis'eva. The fact that the colonel actually murders his lover seems to be a crude realization of Tyutchev's famous line "Oh, how murderously we love" [О, как убийственно мы любим], which was meant to be taken metaphorically.

As will become clear from the following discussion, Ira's relationship with Vladimir Sergeevich is informed not only by biographic material (like Tyutchev's relationship with Denis'eva), but in fact by more general discourses—pertinent to the apocalyptic moods that pervaded late Imperial Russia—on subjects such as love, sex, death and resurrection. To start with, Vladimir Sergeevich's appeal to write a new revelation and Ira's subsequent pregnancy parodies the cherished dream of Nikolay Berdyaev (1874-1948) about the "immanent" Apocalypse and the third revelation that was going to save the world. It is noteworthy that Berdyaev expected this new revelation to come not from Heaven but from within a human being of his own free will:

Предполагает творческую активность человека, его собственное откровение. [...] Откровение третьего Завета нельзя ждать сверху [...] Лишь в собственной глубине и
Ira’s lover is also spiritually indebted to yet another thinker whose first name and patronymic—Vladimir Sergeevich—are identical with his own. This is Vladimir Sergeevich Solov’ev (1853-1900), one of the most influential late nineteenth-century Russian philosophers. The Solov’evian connection throws light on Vladimir Sergeevich’s sudden death. In his seminal work “The Meaning of Love” [“Smysl lyubvi”] (1892-4) Solov’ev condemns promiscuity as well as any type of relationship between men and women that might result in procreation, being in favor of pure (unconsummated) love. This might explain both Vladimir Sergeevich’s inability for a long time to consummate his relationship with Ira and his sudden death immediately after making love to her. Like many of his fin de siècle predecessors did, or wished to do, Vladimir Sergeevich dies by the hand of his lover, screaming and "roll[ing] around at [her] feet" while she whips him with his leather belt (118). His countenance is compared to that of a dying sparrow ("his eyes are growing muddy, like a sparrow’s" [121]), which can be read as a reference to Solov’ev’s name derived from a bird (the nightingale).341


341 This detail was suggested to me by Joseph Schallert.
Solov'ev's connection with a Socialist realist writer like Vladimir Sergeevich (he is proud to be in the same picture as Stalin) is not far fetched. Like the proponents of Socialist Realism, Solov'ev saw the main function of art as creating ideal human beings. As Irene Masing-Delic puts it in her summary of Solov'ev's "The General Meaning of Art" [Obshchiy smysl iskusstva"] (1890):

If that objective is out of reach now, art can at least be prophetic, presenting "each and every object and phenomenon in the perspective of its final state," which is the state of indestructible beauty. True art demonstrates what will be and, in doing so, creates aesthetic models that will eventually be realized.342

The fact that Vladimir Sergeevich (aging and slow decaying) is duly emphasized) dies while Ira—the epitome of beauty and the follower of Jesus Christ—is left to live conforms with Solov'ev's concept of beauty, or to be more precise, his concept of proper versus improper "arrangement." For Solov'ev death is a manifestation of man's imperfection, imperfection, however, can be erased by man's emulation of Jesus Christ.343 Solov'ev maintained, that everything which is well put together, like a work of art, is endowed with eternity, while things that are poorly put together (flesh) cease to exist.344 Ira's unfading beauty, her bisexuality together with her

342 Masing-Delic, Abolishing Death 113-4. [Solov'ev's emphasis]

343 Discussed in Masing-Delic 106.

344 Discussed in Masing-Delic 108-9.
patronymic--Vladimirovna--might be seen as a distorted reflection on Solov'ev's vision of perfect human beings of the future, whom he expected to be androgynous.

A man who shunned women in real life, Solov'ev received subsequent recognition in artistic and literary circles for his cult of the eternal Feminine, which was expected to save the world. The mysterious eternal Feminine was more of an abstract philosophical category than anything connected with actual women. Nevertheless, Solov'ev's ideas inspired many of his followers (Blok and Bely among them) to search for possible incarnations of the eternal Feminine among their female contemporaries. As Blok's poem "The Stranger" ["Neznakomka"] (1906) attests, the boundary between a prostitute and the national savior eventually became blurred to a considerable extent. Thus, Ira (an avid reader of Blok's poetry345 and the "unearthly bride" [небесная невеста] of Vladimir Sergeevich [119/99]) might be seen as a Soviet incarnation of the Solov'evian-cum-Blokian feminine ideal. Moreover, by the end of his life Solov'ev identified his eternal Feminine with the "woman clothed in the sun" [Жена, облечённая солнцем] an image which comes from the Book of Revelation.346 According to Solov'ev this woman (not unlike

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345 "Отвечая: никуда не пропала, жизнь влуху в одиночестве, с княжкой, полюбила я Блоха... — Кого? — Ну, Блоха! Поэта. На память выучила стихи." (91)

Erofeev's Ira) was expected to "reveal the truth [and] give birth to the word [. . .] in the end the Eternal beauty [was going to] be fertile, and from her [was going to] emerge the world's salvation."347

Another thinker whose works informed Ira's relationship with her lover, is Nikolay Fedorov (1829-1903). Fedorov did not rely on the Apocalypse alone in bringing universal salvation closer, and supplemented it with his Philosophy of the Common Task [Filosofiya obshchego dela] (1906/1913) which propagated the all-inclusive resurrection of the dead "fathers." The words "resurrection" and "raising from the dead" abound in Russian Beauty.348 Here, however, they are used by Ira as euphemisms for erection. Thus, she refers to the long-term process of arousing Vladimir Sergeevich as the resurrection of the Biblical Lazarus (Lazarus here stands for the phallus):

Ксюша спрашивает: воскресила ли я его Лазаря? Ну, хвалиться не стану, воскресила, хотя положение было пиковое, надежд не подавал никаких [. . .] (64)

Ira's choice of words is not accidental. As is often the case with Erofeev, what looks to be only a risqué episode on the surface, has,

347 Solov'ev as quoted in Matich 28. It will be recalled that prior to her meeting with Vladimir Sergeevich, Ira was declared barren by a number of gynecologists, thus her pregnancy comes as a total shock both to her and to her doctor.

348 One sees, for example, a miraculously resurrected General Vlasov who is brought back to life—presumably at the common will of a Fedorovian-like "kollektiv"—to bear witness at Ira's mock-trial.
in fact, a complex multilayered structure beneath.\textsuperscript{349} For, according to Fedorov, the resurrection of Lazarus was the most important deed performed by Christ. "Restoring him to life, Christ proved an ordinary mortal to be resurrected even in an advanced state of decay and demonstrated the capacity of the human body for reversing the process of disintegration."\textsuperscript{350}

Like a true Fedorovian, Ira combines the process of resurrection with moral improvement.\textsuperscript{351}

\begin{quote}
В ногах валяется, трясется, ты моя богиня и так далее, а я его по спине! по спине!—и не больно ему доверять сама, бывало склоняла его к дикому крику. Накричи, уговаривала, выблой ты из себя все свое величие, и Лазарь ожivet, и тот ожид, и теперь, смотрю потихоньку оживает и мутная капелька дрожит у засранца. Я, истощу кричит, тебя предаю, я недостоин, но сделай прощальную милость—дай тебя облизать от ногтей до волос, языком моим скверным и лживым [...] ну, думаю, я тебя доведу! врешь, не выкуришься! И давай его црапать, молотить, стегать, лупить—пока он лежит, весь пущовый, задыхается и шепчет: в последний раз, прости, Ира! (98) [emphasis added]
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{349} This can be best illustrated by the dust jackets of Erofeev’s books. The dust jacket of his third volume of collected works shows a blatantly naked couple from Lucien Freud’s "And the Bridegroom" (1993). When one removes the jacket, surprisingly one sees three singing angels from Gérard David’s "Nativity" (1510-23).

\textsuperscript{350} Masing-Delic, Abolishing Death 85.

\textsuperscript{351} Fedorov foresaw resurrection as a process that should be always accompanied by the moral improvement of the resurrected (even crooks, murderers, etc., were expected to be transformed beyond recognition).
Ira follows Fedorov's teaching reasonably closely\textsuperscript{352} except for one point. According to Fedorov, "[o]ne component of the human body that will not be needed after the abolition of death, and so will not be reconstructed at the time of resurrecting, is the sexual-reproductive system."\textsuperscript{353}

Vladimir Sergeevich's nickname--Leonardik--which stands for "Leonardo da Vinci, formerly an Italian artist" (323) as Ira refers to him in her final letter, endows his personality with the traits of an outstanding Renaissance man. As we mentioned in Chapter III, in Russian culture the image of da Vinci was formed under the influence of a powerful portrait of da Vinci, created by Dmitriy Merezhkovsky in 1901 in his novel \textit{Leonardo da Vinci}. From Leonardo, Leonardik takes his creative power and moral indifferetism. Merezhkovsky's Leonardo is equally friendly with worthy and unworthy people. With the same enthusiasm he devises projects and prepares blueprints for a new environmentally clean two-story city (which will be based on a totalitarian regime and a sharp division between privileged and underprivileged people), on the brothel, on the flying machine and on the gigantic canal. He interrupts his painting of the head of Mary, the mother of Christ, in

\textsuperscript{352} It is repeatedly stated that Vladimir Sergeevich belongs to the generation of the \textit{fathers}, he was a bosom friend of the \textit{father} of Ira's best friend. It is no accident that one of Ira's friends is Yura Fedorov (some sort of hybrid between Yuriy Zhivago and Nikolay Fedorov). Fedorov accompanies Ira to the battlefield and volunteers to write a new Testament about her deeds.

\textsuperscript{353} Masing-Delic, \textit{Abolishing Death} 96.
order to draw a sketch of two crudely deformed persons. Vladimir Sergeevich's cherished dream of having sex with Siamese twins can be traced to Leonardo's insatiable passion for new experiences and experiments. Although there is no evidence of Leonardo's sexual involvement with women, his disciple believes that his master would definitely have had intercourse at least once, if only out of sheer curiosity.

Leonardo's treatment of Mona Lisa—the love of his life—is equally instructive. Instead of addressing problems of a real woman who happens to be in love with him, Leonardo chooses to immortalize her in his painting. The real living woman is interesting to him only as an object for his art. Day after day he slowly transfers her features to the canvas. The portrait acquires immortality, while the real woman dies.\textsuperscript{354} Leonardo's treatment of Mona Lisa serves as a model for Leonardik to follow when he resolves to part with Ira and immortalize her in his future writings, "Well, okay, have it your way, we'll never see each other again, but I will portray you and will suffer as if you had died" (117). Only Erofeev's Leonardik is "all too human." He begs Ira for a final lovemaking and his ailing heart fails him.

It is possible to squeeze out yet another association from Leonardo-Leonardik. Leonardo's preference for operating from his dacha, his wife Zinaida who persecutes her young rival, even preventing her from taking an "active" part in his funeral--all of these point to Vladimir's other main prototype, namely Boris Leonidovich Pasternak, whose fondness for his country house in Peredelkino and his affair with Ol'ga Ivinskaya became legendary. The fabula of his last completed work, the novel Doctor Zhivago--a love story in "time of trouble"--is not so different from that of Vladimir Sergeevich's unwritten masterpiece.

Such a nickname--Leonardik--also brings to mind the literary activity of Vladimir's immediate contemporary, namely Leonid Brezhnev, who at the end of his life shared his war and postwar experiences in a series of books, such as The Little Land [Malaya zemlya] (1975), Virgin Soil [Tselina] (1977) and Rebirth [Vozrozhdenie] (1978). In these books Brezhnev presented an eyewitness account of the crucial events in the life of the Soviet people that can be read apocalyptically. It was also common knowledge

355 Russian Beauty evokes the title of Pasternak's unfinished play, The Blind Beauty [Slepaya krasavitsa], which tells the story of a blind pregnant housemaid in mid-nineteenth century Russia (Porter 150).


357 Cf. the opening lines of Vozrozhdenie: "Трава уже успела прорасти сквозь железо и шебень, издеваюсь доносился вой одичавших собак, а вокруг были одни развалины да висели на ветях обгоревших
that Brezhnev's books were ghost-written. "Возрождение" in Russian means both "rebirth" and "Renaissance." This is why Ira insists on calling her lover a "Renaissance artist" [художник Возрождения]: he is a peculiar cross-breed between an artist who inherited the cultural vitality of the Silver Age and a corrupt communist, between a philosopher who admires the Renaissance and an author of mediocre books.

Boris Leonidovich Pasternak-cum-Leonardo da Vinci-cum-Leonid Brezhnev... Erofeev's introduction of the unreliable skaz-narrator (who is "uneducated," always conveniently drunk and confused) makes possible and justifies the existence of such cultural cross-breeds in the fictional world of Russian Beauty. Ira's joke on the eve of her mock-sacrifice can serve as an illustration of its basic principles:

[...] это как, знаете, говорю, Василий Иванович, хотел скрестить арбуз с тараканами? Ну, вот. Чтобы, говорю, как его разрезешь, все косточки сами по себе, как тараканы, разбежались... (197)

The joke is especially poignant if one remembers that Ira's last name is Tarakanova ("of the cockroaches"). Erofeev's syncretism probably has its roots in a similarly syncretic approach of some Silver Age artists and philosophers, particularly in that of Vyacheslav Ivanov (1866-1949). On his return to Russia from abroad деревьев черные вороньи гнезда. Подобное пришлось мне видеть после гражданской войны, но тогда пугало мертвое молчание заводов, теперь же они и вовсе были повержены в прах." Leonid Brezhnev, Vozrozhdenie (Moscow: Politizdat, 1978) 3.
in 1904, Ivanov quickly succeeded in bringing together cultural figures of various stripes by syncretizing virtually incompatible aesthetic and philosophical concepts and notions in his essays, talks and poetic works. As Andrey Bely recalled in 1922:

Спаявая декадентов, неореалистов, символистов и идеалистов в одно стадо и тем подготовляя «александрийский», синкретический период символизма, он давал материал для статейных популяризаций непопуляризумого […] он стоит как углубитель и обоснователь идеологических лозунгов декаденства и лолекаденства, строя мост к символизму через многих и давая материал «несимволистам» считать себя «символистами»; становилось нечто вроде знака равенства между театром и храмом, мистерией и новой драмой, Христом и Дионисом, Богоматерью и всякой рождающей женщиной, Девою и менадой, любовью и эротизмом, Платоном и греческой любовью, теургией и философией, Влад. Соловьевым и Розановым, греческой орхестрой и парламентом, русской первобытной общиной и Новым Иерусалимом, левым народничеством и славянофильством и т. д.358

Thus, like Vyacheslav Ivanov, or a no less famous Vasiliy Ivanovich, Erofeev constructs his characters as if playing that children's game, in which one takes the head of one animal, puts it on a body of a different animal, then adds feet of yet another animal and so on.

Such peculiar cross breeding allows Erofeev to put his "silver-rich" amalgam (Tyutchev-Merezhkovsky-Solov’ev-Berdyaev-Fedorov-Pasternak) within a certain time frame. Not only did Vladimir

358 Andrey Bely, "Vospominaniya ob Aleksandre Aleksandroviche Bloke," Aleksandr Blok v vospominaniyakh sovremennikov v dvukh tomakh 265-6.
Sergeevich absorb the features of cultural figures of the Silver Age, he is also a peculiar cross-breed between Vladimir Nabokov and Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin. In his first utterance Vladimir Sergeevich identifies himself with Pushkin, by emphasizing that they both love winter. Like Pushkin in relation to Anna Petrovna Kern (a woman of not impeccable morals) he keeps calling Ira "the genius of pure beauty" (101) and beseeches her to grant his wildest wishes just like Pushkin's "golden fish" does for an "old fisherman" (46-48).

The Nabokovian theme\textsuperscript{359} intervenes when Vladimir Sergeevich declares his deeply Russian love for winter and adds that "[i]n winter we turn the tennis court into a skating rink" (40). From Nabokovian characters (Humbert Humbert, in particular) Vladimir Sergeevich inherits his passion for playing tennis and love for little girls.\textsuperscript{360} As Ira remarks about him playing tennis with Ksyusha when she was still in her early teens: "I know that once, on the tennis court, the power behind her serve made you suddenly realize that she had grown up, and you missed the ball, causing her papa a certain embarrassment, despite your friendship [...]" (89).\textsuperscript{361} When Ira

\textsuperscript{359} The outline of Erofeev's novel—an attractive Russian woman, marrying a considerably older man and her subsequent death as a result of her pregnancy—brings to mind Nabokov's short story "Krasavitsa" which is translated into the English as "Russian Beauty."

\textsuperscript{360} He starts eyeing the Siamese twins when they are only nine years old.

\textsuperscript{361} The last name of Vladimir Sergeevich's best friend and Ksyusha's father is Mochul'sky. As a matter of fact, the literary historian Konstantin Mochul'sky was one of the first to recognize Nabokov's talent in 1926 in his laudatory article on Mary [Mashen'ka].
analyzes her behavior in Vladimir Sergeevich's presence, she confesses that she "always felt like a shy schoolgirl with stumpy pigtails" (100). Ira's "refusal" to accept a car as a present from her lover brings to mind Lolita's unwillingness to take Humbert's car during their last encounter. In Ira's situation the car is most likely the product of Ira's imagination--"and I didn't need a car, and even if he had given me one, I would have smashed it right up, like an egg! I didn't want a car, I wanted happiness" (94)--but the fact that she thinks along these lines is very revealing. Ira's patronymic--Vladimirovna--suggests an incestuous relationship between her and her lover.362

Erofeev does not bring Pushkin and Nabokov together (almost "опрятней модного паркета сверкает" теннисный корт "льдом одет") only to produce laughter. Their joint appearance is only natural. If the


362 Ira's own father, whose name is naturally Vladimir is reported to have forced Ira into an incestuous relationship while she was about twelve years old; at the time of the narrative he falls sick and to everybody's surprise insists on calling his wife "Vera" (the name of Nabokov's wife) instead of using her actual name. Erofeev who wrote scholarly articles on Nabokov appears to have a peculiar attitude to his predecessor. Thus, the writer Sisin (the protagonist of Erofeev's The Last Judgment) is nearly killed in Geneva by "Nabokov's relative" as a result of her seeing something offensive in Sisin's writings. Such a peculiar reaction on the part of "Nabokov's relatives" is only to be expected, since by altering one consonant in the last name of his protagonist, Erofeev turned Nabokov's pretentious nom de plume, Sirin, into some kind of an obscenity--Sisin.
Russian Silver Age traced proudly its provenance back to Pushkin, then in Nabokov it had its legitimate heir, or—in Zinaida Shakhovskaya's words--its last representative. Nabokov more than anyone felt this bond and completed the circle by diligently working on his "definitive" translation of, and commentary to, Pushkin's Eugene Onegin.

As we have demonstrated, Vladimir Sergeevich has not one, but a number of conceivable prototypes. Since he has no surname and it is repeatedly pointed out that he is very old and that the studying of his books became compulsory in secondary school (Ira even says, "I had known of you since childhood" [87]), it is possible to identify him not only with one particular person or persons, but with the whole literary tradition, mainly that of the Silver Age. Vladimir Sergeevich's identification with the Renaissance artist is not fortuitous. As we remember, from the late 1930s onward the Silver Age has been often described as the period of religious, artistic and spiritual Renaissance. Thus, when Vladimir Sergeevich's child unexpectedly starts to rot inside Ira, it can be interpreted as a sign of the putrefaction of that specific literary tradition.


364 Zinaida Shakhovskaya, V poiskakh Nabokova. Otrazheniya (Moscow: Kniga, 1991) 44.

365 See section 4 of Chapter I.
Such a peculiar sensation as that of harboring the body of a rotting literature in one's womb was experienced previously, although by a man. Vasiliy Rozanov wrote in *Fallen Leaves* [*Opavshie list'ya*] (1913):

> [. . .] иногда кажется мне, что во мне происходит разложение литературы, самого существует. И, может быть, это есть мое мировое "emploi". [. . .] Явно во мне есть какое-то завершение литературы; литературности; ее существа,—как потребности отразить и выразить [. . .] И вот с этой точки зрения я кончая и кончил. И у меня мелькает странное чувство, что я последний писатель, с которым литература вообще прекратится, кроме хлама, который тоже прекратится скоро. [. . .] Это мое частое чувство. И как тяжело с ним жить.366

Erofeev transforms Rozanov's figure of speech into gruesome reality.367 Ira's insides really decompose and the smell of decaying flesh is felt not only by Ira herself, but also by her lovers and her gynecologist.

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366 Rozanov, *Opavshie list'ya, Izbrannoe* 220-1. [Rozanov's emphasis]

The moment Ira discovers the rotten smell which tells her she is pregnant, she tries to unburden herself by throwing herself into writing what she dreams will be a "truthful" account of her life. It is not so easy for her to tell her own story however. The underlying structure of her narrative mirrors the pattern of her submissive sexual behavior. Her narrative is as open and vulnerable to the intrusion of other narratives as is her body to all who want to satisfy their sexual needs. This is why Ira's narrative lacks cohesiveness; we can see how one diegetic texture permeates and grows within and through another. Alien pieces and fragments form xenolithic agglomerations within her diegesis.

This can be illustrated by the story of her mother in Chapter 14 which is embedded in Ira's own story. The mother—who is compared to a steam-engine—"bursts into [Ira's] life without any warning" (182), and enters her daughter's private territory through every possible aperture: both through the door and through the peephole. Her intrusion takes Ira by surprise. The mother throws herself into her skaz-narrative—a compulsory insertion from the life of "little people"—in the middle of Ira's own story and then leaves the narrative without trace. This "bursting in without any warning" brings back to mind Ira's intercourse with the musician Dato, who also liked attacking Ira from behind and taking her by surprise. The narrative intruders are no different from the sexual ones.

Ira's inability to pour out her story ("it's quite a burden to carry around") [носить в себе тоже, надо сказать, громоздко и
obrəmenitel'no] (13/15), is linked semantically with her unwanted pregnancy [береженность]. Thus, the threadbare metaphor of comparing the work of an artist with his/her child (or to the state of being "pregnant" with art) is turned upside down in Erofeev's novel. Ira's "child," on the contrary, constantly interferes with her writing and threatens her with possible catastrophe:

[.. .] и минит, минит меня эта писанина, расписалась, дуреха, и сама как будто снова по полю бегу, такой же озноб и жар, и дитя роковое в утробы воет, из утробы вызывает не писать, угрожает выкидышем, а не сказать—тоже нельзя, да мне и так все равно пропадать, такая уж моя планида [...] (206)

Ira's unnatural and unwanted pregnancy, therefore, might be perceived as one text/tradition permeating and growing inside another text/tradition.

In the last chapter the level of textual chaos reaches its apogee. Ira seemingly finds it harder and harder to preserve her own voice. As pointed out by Robert Porter, her eloquent speech about the possibility of erecting a monument to her genitalia heavily relies on Akhmatova's poem "Requiem" ["Rekviem"] (1935-40):

И тогда я подумала: поставьте ей памятник, и народ обрадуется [...] не ставьте его посреди многолюдной площади [...] не ставьте визави Василия Блаженного, ибо негоже Василию лицеезреть ее каждодневно, а также на Манежной, как новогоднюю елку,—не ставьте! [...] ей милее смушенный памятник, накрытый шалью или шинелью, не помню, гденибудь во дворике [...] (261-3)368

368 Porter 150. Cf. "A если когда-нибудь в этой стране \ Возводят задумают памятник мне, \ Согласься на это даю торжество, \
Ira's revengeful thoughts which suddenly give way to humility:

[...] полежу, помечтаю [...] мой лягушонок, он отомстит за меня—чтобы вы приседали от тяжести и умирали в тоске, пусть! [...] но все-таки я не вредная, нет, и меня одолели сомнения да ладно, я не элопамятная, живите, пусть все умрут в свой черед [...] (261)

bring to mind Rozanov's:

Я мог бы наполнить багровыми клубами дьма мир... Но не хочу. И сгорело бы все... Но не хочу. Пусть моя могилка будет тиха и в «сторонке».369

To restore the cohesiveness of her narrative (and of the fictional world) Ira has to purge her child by going through her self-inflicted Apocalypse ("I'm not a destroyer, not a monster, not a troublemaker. I don't need anything from you at all [...] I am not going to go through with the birth of my son [отменяю рождение сына]" [324-5/261-2]). In Russian Beauty the long prophesied Apocalypse is precipitated, occurs, and is restricted to the level of "writing." The narrator simply asserts her freedom to put an end to her narrative,

369 Rozanov, Opavshie list'ya 222.
"Beat it! I composed you in order to compose myself, but when I discompose you I shall dissolve myself as a person [. . .]" [Убирайтесь! Я вас сочинила, чтобы сочинить себя, но рассочинив вас, я самораспускаюсь как персона [. . .] ] (342/273). There is no threat that this ghastly finale may turn into a "world" tragedy (or spill over to the "real" world). In accordance with Ira's wishes, it is restricted to her body, for she hangs herself two thirds through her pregnancy before "they'll make it in time." The "author,"370 the only witness and survivor of this novelistic Apocalypse, steps forward and says "Good to see you!"

[...] итак, пора, а то они успеют. Я карабкаюсь к потолку по мыльной табуретке, которая служила мне для стирки белья, и мыло затвердело, я лезу вверх, и входит Леонардик—Жанна, говорит он,—на этот раз вы выбираете такой способ?—Да, отвечаю я.— Ну, что же, это вполне по-хамски.— Да, мой повелитель,—соглашаюсь я.— Да, мой неземной жених.— Поцелуемся? И мы целуемся. Помиримся? И мы миримся. Жизнь труда. Я делаю шаг к нему. Бросаюсь в объятия. Крепче! Обними меня крепче, милый! Войди, войди в меня, коханый!.. Ой, как хорошо!.. [...] Дай мне сладко кончить!371 Ты меня задушил.

370 The fact that the novel opens with the description of Ira's gynecologist literally sliding along her genitalia—the medical check up is deliberately presented as a difficult trip of an explorer of new territories—points to the presence of an extradiegetic narrator who positioned himself inside Ira's body. It is possible to speak about an extradiegetic narrator because Ira cannot see the insides of her own body.

371 This can mean to die, to reach orgasm or to stop writing. Cf. "И вот с этой точки зрения я кончаю и кончили. И у меня мелькает странное чувство, что я последний писатель, с которым литература вообще
Erofeev's version of the Apocalypse, although being literally pregnant with the literary tradition of the Silver Age, is nevertheless different from the works of his numerous predecessors. He breaks away from the tradition by deliberately

прекратится [...]" Rozanov, Opavshie list'ya, Izbrannoe 221. [emphasis added]

372 Such an ending—with Ira, hustling to prepare food and drinks in case the guests should come to celebrate her wedding—is reminiscent of a certain passage from Bely's Silver Dove [Serebryanyy golub'] (1910), the novel steeped in the Apocalyptic moods of the 1900s. This passage shows Matrena (who, like Ira, is a femme fatale and an alleged witch) laying the table for anybody who might pay a visit to her man and master Kudeyarov: "[...] уже стол ему накрыла босоногая Матрена [...] уже белая скатерть с каймой из красных петухов [...] с хлебом, яйцами на столе; и уже дымит самовар: пора чайничать; но с кем же чайничать, как не с гостем, а гость все нет [...] А вот и гость." Andrey Bely, Serebryanyy golub', Sochineniya v dvukh tomakh, vol. 1 (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1990) 397-8.

CONCLUSIONS

Erofeev's version of the Apocalypse, although being literally pregnant with the literary tradition of the Silver Age, is nevertheless different from the works of his numerous predecessors. He breaks away from the tradition by deliberately
dislocating the Apocalyptic events. He did not have much to do. He simply brings to the point of absurdity the preoccupation of the Silver Age artists with the internal, private sphere, their obsession with both sex and religion, and their general tendency towards syncretism. In Russian Beauty, events of a cosmic order, such as universal salvation or world-consuming holocaust, take place not within the whole universe, but within the microcosm of one body (we might add, the body of the book). Without doubt the sensation of such a transitory, carefully controlled Apocalypse contributes greatly to the pleasure of Russian Beauty, for as Roland Barthes put it: "[t]he pleasure of the text is like that untenable, impossible, purely novelistic instant so relished by Sade's libertine when he manages to be hanged and then cut the rope at the very moment of his orgasm, his bliss."373

Does this actually mean that the Silver Age holds no attraction for Erofeev? On the contrary. His recent literary essays show that he is as preoccupied as ever with the works of his predecessors (after all, Ira was really in love with Vladimir Sergeevich). However, it was precisely because of this love, and almost irresistible, attraction, that Erofeev felt the need to ridicule their ideas and thus to purge himself of their influence. Otherwise (as the novel suggests) his "incestuous" relationship with his forefathers would have given birth to a monstrous or simply stillborn child. The Apocalyptic theme is not fortuitous in Erofeev's first novel, it is

brought in to underscore the scale of the battle between the old and new traditions.

Erofeev's situation is typical of many representatives of alternative prose. On the one hand, to legitimatize their subversive and often overtly offensive writings within the Russian cultural tradition, they had to show that they in fact took their roots from one of the most vital periods in cultural history; on the other, in order to acquire or preserve their own voice they had to distinguish themselves radically from their forefathers. In any case, "[s]trong writers do not choose their prime precursors: they are chosen by them, but they have the wit to transform the forerunners into composite and therefore partly imaginary beings."374

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CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I examined the phenomenon of literary influence and the transmission of literary tradition with particular application to the cultural heritage of the Russian Silver Age and its refractions in later writings. Although "every generation retranslates the classics, out of a vital compulsion for immediacy and precise echo,"375 not every generation is quite so obsessed with concern for the literary past as is the case with many recent Russian writers.

As we have seen, perceptions of the period 1890-1917 and its legacy have been neither uniform nor constant. This period went through various stages of being rejected, then re-evaluated and upgraded to the status of the Silver Age in Russian literature and culture; subsequently it received belated, though wide, recognition for its tremendous contribution to the evolution of Russian culture. Now it is, apparently, undergoing further revision and re-evaluation.

The perceived contribution of the Silver Age to political developments in twentieth-century Russia is particularly crucial and depends on whether one sees the Silver Age as paving the road to the 1917 revolution, the subsequent totalitarian regime and its consequences, or as having been brutally interrupted by them. Contrary to general belief, these different perceptions of the Silver Age are confined neither to Russia (Soviet Union), nor to the Russian diaspora. Even nowadays the Silver Age is still perceived as a kind of pariah, as an enigmatic "other" in Russian cultural tradition, attracting either unreserved sympathy or unqualified contempt.

As has been demonstrated, the inclusion of the legacy of the Silver Age into Soviet and post-Soviet culture has been a gradual and complicated process. However, despite a lasting and widespread assumption that the Bolshevik revolution and subsequent political and cultural developments brutally interrupted the normal course of literary evolution and thus consigned the Silver Age heritage to oblivion, the present study suggests otherwise in regard to the effects of rupture. In fact, the abysmal rift between pre- and post-revolutionary cultures appears to have been beneficial in creating an entire cultural apparatus (or even institution) that has been seriously engaged in the re-production of the Silver Age's legacy for a contemporary audience, thus securing its vitality during later periods. This re-presentation has included numerous memoirs, biographical materials, popular and scholarly articles, dissemination of literary and artistic works, conferences and symposia, literary jubilees and various fictional works whose
authors have addressed the issues at stake during the Silver Age. Certainly, its legacy has been both overtly rejected (viz. the cases of Terapiano, Otsup and Khodasevich, and various representatives of the Soviet establishment) and vehemently ridiculed (e.g. Viktor Erofeev and other alternative prose writers). Paradoxically, even these negative statements attest to their authors' dependence on their cultural past, serving to re-instate its significance. As Thomas Green put it:

By perpetuating the past, by reproducing ritualistically its external features, we are actually exposing its pastness, pointing to its anachronism, putting it from us. By ostensibly ridiculing the past, by exposing its inconsequence and parodying its rhetoric, we may be revealing how we depend on it, how necessary it is to us, how little free of it we are, how we really stem from it." 376

The larger part of this dissertation is devoted to a discussion of various strategies that Nabokov, Pasternak and Erofeev employed while assimilating the legacy of the Silver Age into their writings. This assimilation includes "heuristic imitation" and transposition (Nabokov), "translation" (Pasternak), and overt parody (Erofeev). As we have seen, each of the chosen approaches was dictated not only by the inclinations of each particular writer and the facts of their personal lives, but also by varying attitudes to the Silver Age that were current at the specific times when Nabokov, Pasternak and Erofeev embarked on writing their novels.

By uniting Nabokov, Pasternak and Viktor Erofeev under the umbrella of this study, we are nevertheless not directly ascribing any of them to the Silver Age "tradition." One cannot but agree with Joseph Brodsky that "[l]ike every living creature, a writer is a universe unto himself, only more so" and that "[t]o talk about his pedigree, trying to fit him into this or that tradition of literature is, essentially, to move in a direction exactly opposite to the one in which he himself was moving."\textsuperscript{377} But however unique, no artist is a totally closed, self-sufficient system. In London people drink water that has previously passed through the bodies of eight other people. However unpleasant the thought of these eight might be, we have yet to hear of anybody who has decided to break this chain by collecting, purifying and re-using his or her own water! By bringing Nabokov, Pasternak and Erofeev together I intended to show only that in one way or another they all ran the legacy of the Silver Age through their writings, a process equally beneficial to both the user and the source. In fact, this has been one of the ways of keeping the original source clean and alive.

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