

VALERII BRIUSOV'S *ZEMLIA*: AN OCCULT CRITIQUE OF SYMBOLIST APOCALYPTIC THEURGY

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Introduction

This essay explores the relevance of one of Valerii Briusov's little-studied works, the doomsday tragedy (as he originally designated its genre), *Zemlia* (*Earth*, 1905), to contemporary Symbolist debates about apocalyptic theurgy.¹ "Theurgy," or the idea that art could or should re-create phenomenal reality into a more aesthetic and mystical one, was originally associated with the poet and religious thinker, Vladimir Solov'ev. It had special influence on the poetics of Andrei Belyi and Viacheslav Ivanov, each of whom had developed his own theory about the purpose of theurgic art. For Belyi, like Solov'ev before him, theurgy was not just a poetics that had elements of prophecy, but the very purpose of art. Blurring the boundary between art and religion, i.e., the revelatory and prophetic religion of Christian apocalypticism and the aesthetics of Symbolist poetry, theurgy, in his view, should approach the very limits of art. Although Briusov was a self-professed Decadent and "first generation" Symbolist, the theurgically inclined members of the "second" generation of Symbolists (the *Mladosimvolisty*) believed that he sympathized with such apocalyptic prophecy: many of Briusov's coevals saw

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1. All translations from Russian primary and secondary sources are my own. Scholarship on *Zemlia* has concentrated on the play's literary borrowings from Western proto-science fiction works (see Dolgopolov; Suvin, 144). Comparisons of *Zemlia* to apocalyptic science fiction rely on plot-based similarities to English (Vinnik 56) and French (Dolgopolov 75) works. Another line of interpretation reads *Zemlia* as political allegory. Seeing it as neither Symbolist (58) nor as "decadent individualism" (59), Vinnik claims that the play is a "drama-warning" (*drama-preduprezhdenie*) (56), which cautions against the threat to the "beauty" of human labor by bourgeois progressivism (60). Similarly, for Strashkova, *Zemlia* manifests "Briusov's conception of Life, Death and Fate" in the context of the 1905 Revolution (139).

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him as no exception to the “theurgical” trend, and, therefore, considered *Zemlia* a kind of mystery play. My reading of the drama argues that Briusov in fact intended to critique their theurgic belief system. In particular, Briusov took aim at Belyi’s brand of theurgy, as well as the younger poet’s refusal to acknowledge Bal’mont as a “providential poet” (Belyi, “V zashchitu” 42). Briusov portrayed his most famous quarrel with Belyi (involving their shared mistress Nina Petrovskaia) in the novel *Ognennyi angel* (*The Fiery Angel*, published in *Vesy*, 1907–1908); this novel dealt with later, more personal conflicts, but also continued aesthetic and religious disagreements already found in his play *Zemlia*. Indeed, an image of the titular “fiery angel” appears at the play’s conclusion.² Having explained how the play critiques and even parodies Belyi’s beliefs, I show how the drama refers to theosophical and occult speculations about the lost continent of Atlantis and the Aztec and Mayan descendants who inherited the Atlantean legacy. In his drama, Briusov is not disavowing the intersection of art and religion, but he does propose an occult narrative in place of a Christian one. The references to Atlantis and the Aztecs transcend Belyi’s Christian poetic prophesies and demonstrate a universal apocalyptic narrative based on the theosophist historicizing of Christianity as just one among many cosmologies and eschatologies. *Zemlia* presents the end of history and culture, thereby redirecting the focus of the apocalyptic theme to the earthly contributions of art and culture and away from redemption in the next life. More than a simple critique of Belyi, *Zemlia* shares fellow poet Konstantin Bal’mont’s belief in Atlantis as the birthplace of art, privileging the Aztecs and Maya over Egyptians and other ancient cultures. In doing so, Briusov’s drama also invalidates Belyi’s broader dismissal of Bal’mont, who, as *Zemlia* indicates, is as “providential” as Solov’ev.

***Zemlia*, Symbolism, and Theosophy**

The Symbolist “maître” of new verse forms and decadent themes in poetry, Briusov is also known as a crusader for the autonomy of art amid the prevalence of religious, social, and political tendencies in literary movements of the time (from the *Mladoslavisty* to the Socialists). The fact that *Zemlia*³

2. The fictionalization of this love triangle with Belyi and Nina Petrovskaia in *Ognennyi angel* offers the possibly most famous example of *zhiznetvorchestvo* (life-creation) in the Silver Age. For a commentary on the fate of its heroine, Nina-Renata, see Vl. Khodasevich’s “Konets Renaty” (“The End of Renata,” 1924), in his memoirs, *Nekropol’* (*Necropolis*).

3. Briusov dated *Zemlia* on its title page to “the clear autumn of 1890” (*Zemlia* 149). In his juvenile diary, there is early mention of a *poema* called *Zemlia*, which took an epic rather than dramatic form (Strashkova 42). Later, in the posthumously published *Iz moei zhizni* (*From My Life*, 1927), Briusov recalled a *poema*, entitled “*Zemlia*,” for which he planned to adopt the meter of Lermontov’s *Mtsyri* (*The Novice*, 1840): “The story was written in the first person, from the point of view of a spirit who was in love with the planet Earth, and who even loved it when it was still but a molten mass” (*Iz moei zhizni* 75). This later comment indicates the occult character of the play, which, as I show, was preserved in the drama.

concludes with the end of the world reveals, however, that Briusov's relationship to religious themes in Russian Symbolism is more complex than his defense of art's autonomy (*l'art pour l'art*) would seem to imply. Let us now turn to the plot of the play.

Zemlia presents the story of Nevatl', an intrepid hero who travels to the borders of his futuristic city (its size is not indicated in stage directions) and returns to his people with a plan to rescue it from the decline that has become increasingly manifest. In this future Earth, the populace lives in a vast megapolis covered by a massive roof which blocks out natural sunlight and air.⁴ Nevatl''s plan is to open this roof and restore humanity's reliance on the sun, thereby also reinstating a form of pagan sun-worship.⁵ Supporters of Nevatl' join in a collective effort to open the roof, but the result is disastrous. As the roof opens one of the citizens, perceiving the sun, cries out, invoking the seven trumpets of the Book of Revelation, "It's a fiery angel (*ognennyi angel*), trumpeting a golden trumpet" (Briusov, *Zemlia* 196).⁶ Finally, as the crowd suffocates, unable to breathe natural air and tolerate natural light, the sun rises from behind the just opened cupola of the city and the final stage direction reads: "And slowly, slowly all of the quieted room is transformed into a cemetery of motionless, disfigured bodies, over which the depths of the heavens shine from the gaping cupola and, like an angel with a golden trumpet [*slovno angel s zolotoi truboi*], is the blinding sun" (*ibid.*).⁷

Zemlia's ending is apocalyptic, but its angel and trumpet only superficially recall the Christian apocalypticism of canonical works of the Symbolist period: Vladimir Solov'ev's *Kratkaia povest' ob Antikhriste* (*Brief Tale about the Antichrist*, first published in 1900), Andrei Belyi's novel about an apocalyptic cult, *Serebrianyi golub'* (*The Silver Dove*, first published in Briusov's journal, *Vesy*, in 1909), and Aleksandr Blok's *Dvenadtsat'* (*The Twelve*,

4. This situation is comparable to that in his novella, "Respublika iuzhnogo kresta" ("Republic of the Southern Cross," 1907) in which a mechanized roof protects the city from a harsh climate ("Respublika" 26). Certain elements of the play also point to the influence of Camille Flammarion's *Fin du monde* (*End of the World*, 1893). I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for calling my attention to E. M. Forster's story "The Machine Stops" (1909), in which a machine that regulates all aspects of a future city's living conditions tragically malfunctions. For a discussion of Russian Symbolist texts that may claim *Zemlia* and its sources as an influence, see Gerould 85–91.

5. Briusov considered *Ogon'* (*Fire*) for his play's title (Strashkova 138). This alternative title captures the sacrificial relationship of the city's inhabitants toward the sun.

6. The arrival of the fiery angel evokes Briusov's satire of Belyi's theurgic Symbolist stance in the novel of the same name. Incidentally, Johannes von Guenther, *Zemlia*'s German translator, gave the play the title *Erduntergang*, which ironically evokes the German for "sunset" (*Sonnenuntergang*). The word *Untergang* means not only "descent," but also "decline."

7. This disturbing *nemaia stsena* (silent scene) is reminiscent of two other final scenes in Russian theater: Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* and Gogol's *Revizor* (*The Inspector General*).

1918). This tradition, dominated by the image of the “Zhena oblechennaia v Solntse” (“Woman Clothed in the Sun”), relies primarily on gnostic and apocalyptic Christian texts. This figure from Revelation 12: 1, one of the manifestations of the famous “Prekrasnaia Dama” (“Beautiful Lady”) of Blok’s poetry, appears as an occult spirit in *Zemlia* and forms a part of Briusov’s critique of his peers’ apocalypticism. As Avril Pyman notes in her chapter on Russian Symbolist apocalypticism, Briusov

remained unconvinced of the imminence of a Christian Apocalypse. He sought stimulation rather in the occult studies of Agrippa of Nettesheim (a sixteenth-century German scholar with a taste for necromancy), and found scary predictions of the onset, at the beginning of the twentieth-century, of the penultimate age of the world, the terrible, “adamantine” era of Ophiel [a planetary spirit, LC]. (232)

Though *Zemlia* refers at certain points to the language and mythology of the Christian world, the conclusion of the play should predominantly be read in the context of theosophist concepts of history that purported to explain the destruction of not only the mythical lost continent of Atlantis, but also successive dynasties and empires like the Aztecs, whom the theosophists considered cultural and even biological descendants of the Atlanteans. Briusov’s study of Atlantis and Mesoamerica and its importance to his composition of *Zemlia* has not gone unnoticed in scholarship, but it has not yet been the subject of in-depth investigation.⁸

Prominent theosophists held that Mayan culture preserved the ancient heritage of the destroyed civilization of Atlantis. Briusov’s play assumes this dynastic history of the Maya, which theosophists believed continued the heritage of Atlantis into the distant future. Like the primitive Eloi in H. G. Wells’s *Time Machine*, the future humanity in *Zemlia* first comes across as purely atavistic; however, Briusov illustrates both the decline of Mayan culture according to theosophist prophetic historiography as much as he affirms the survival of a noble Atlantean cultural heritage within it. In addition to its theosophical significance, the Mayan theme provides an alternative vision of universal catastrophe on Earth by implicitly critiquing the predominant Christian orientation of Symbolist eschatology as a universal catastrophe followed by a New Jerusalem. Briusov thus disputes the hegemony of the Christian apocalyptic narrative, which according to his theosophist reading of history did not give a complete picture of spiritual and cultural development *beyond* Earth. In this way Briusov’s drama supersedes the Christian

8. P. N. Berkov interpreted the Atlantis theme in the play as the preliminary and still unrefined “mystical-Symbolist [...] conception” of what would later be developed into a “strictly documented system, resting on the sober conclusions of incontrovertible archeological science at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century” in Briusov’s Atlantis lectures (32).

orientation of Symbolist apocalyptic theurgy, conforming in a way to its conventions, but resisting complete identification with its aims.⁹

The characters of *Zemlia* live in a future in which the culture and religion of their ancestors miraculously survived the Spanish Conquest and Roman-Catholic conversion, but their obviously dying civilization (women in the play have ceased to have children) reflects the degenerative effects of “Atlantean Karma,” a notion discussed in H. P. Blavatsky’s classic theosophical text, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) (741). According to Blavatsky, Karma, a universal force comparable to fateful necessity (Ananke) in Greek tragedy, is responsible for the gradual decline of certain races. This association of Karma with fate—“Karmic necessity” (780)—does not mitigate the explicit racism of Blavatsky’s statements about the destinies of certain peoples. She claims that “it is inaccurate to maintain that the extinction of a lower race is *invariably* due to cruelties or abuses perpetrated by colonists,” for “it is a most suggestive fact—to those concrete thinkers who demand a *physical* proof of Karma—that the lowest races of men are now rapidly dying out; a phenomenon largely due to an extraordinary sterility setting in among women, from the time that they were first approached by the Europeans” (780; emphasis in original). Unlike Blavatsky’s concept of “lower races,” Atlantean language, and culture among the characters descended from Mayan-Aztec ancestors in the futuristic city of Briusov’s play, show neither a postcolonial vision of the future, nor a racist playing out of theosophist Karma, but rather a belief in the eternity of art beyond its earthly origins. Before offering an interpretation of *Zemlia* as a critique of Christian apocalypse, its contemporary reception, as well as the text’s dialogue with Belyi, should be examined.

Contexts

If not for the accolades of prominent contemporaries, it would be easy to overlook *Zemlia* in Briusov’s *Collected Works*. Vsevolod Meierkhol’d, for example, placed Briusov in the company of the most celebrated playwrights of the times. Stressing the innovative aspects of the play, he wrote: “Van Lerberghe and Maeterlinck are in advance of their theater. Ibsen, Verhaeren’s *Les Aubes* [*The Dawn*], Briusov’s *Earth*, Viacheslav Ivanov’s *Tantalus*—and where are the theaters that could stage them?” (150). Asking this question, Meierkhol’d is no doubt thinking of *Earth*’s futuristic setting and the characters’ strange names, which distanced the action from contemporary life (reminiscent of effects in Maeterlinck’s drama). The architectural complexity of the stage-directions’ *mise-en-scène* would have provided challenges even for Meierkhol’d’s avant-garde studio.

9. Avril Pyman has described Briusov’s subtle means of critiquing other Symbolists in a similar vein: “It is not surprising that, during the early years of the ‘battle for Symbolism’, Briusov tended at times to use the language and even perhaps to think in the terms of their [the Symbolists’] circle, particularly when making general statements intended for a wider public” (232).

As for the drama itself, Briusov's contemporaries failed to grasp its critique of prevailing Symbolist ideas, so closely did it masquerade as the kind of play that could be expected from a leading Symbolist contemporary playwright.¹⁰ Viacheslav Ivanov, for example, seemed particularly interested in both the ideological ramifications and ambiguous genre of *Zemlia*, especially since they seemed to be in line with his own attraction to drama as religious-philosophical inquiry. In a letter to Briusov, Ivanov expressed his hopes of seeing his stylized ancient tragedy, *Tantalus*, printed alongside *Zemlia* (and it was), possibly as a gesture of literary alliance. In a letter to Briusov, Ivanov wrote: "I will wait for your drama impatiently. When the opportunity presents itself, write more definitively what *Earth's* genre is. A mystery in verse? A philosophical drama?—*Tantalus* is getting written [...] I would treasure seeing it printed together with your drama..." (Shcherbina 25 Dec. 1903/7 Jan. 1904, 444). Ivanov might have been on to something when he speculated about *Zemlia's* genre, but his guesses—"a mystery in verse? A philosophical drama?"—may also be read as personal hopes for the ultimate significance of Briusov's work for the religious preoccupations of "younger," more *theurgically* inclined Symbolists like himself (even though *Tantalus*, strictly speaking, was hardly a purely Christian drama).

For contextualizing the play, Briusov's brief but well-known response to Andrei Belyi's interpretation of it is important; it was published in *Vesy* in May of 1905, under the title of "V zashchitu ot odnoi pokhvaly" ("In Defense against Praise Received"). It places his drama in an ongoing Symbolist polemic.¹¹ In this open letter, Briusov criticized Belyi's apocalyptic theurgy as stated in the essay "Apokalipsis v russkoi poezii" ("Apocalypse in Russian Poetry," 1905). Briusov expressed concern that Belyi's view of poetry as religious prophecy relegated "beauty," or aesthetics, to a secondary category. This exchange between the two poets on the pages of *Vesy* appeared in the two months before the publication of *Zemlia*, probably while Briusov was still writing the drama. In the letter, he compared Belyi's argument—that poetry was good if it engaged with religious prophecy—with those literary crit-

10. Fr. Sergei Bulgakov and Ellis (Lev Kobylinskii), the first a religious thinker from the idealist cohort at the journal *Novyi put'*, the second a writer and avid promoter of Symbolism, were struck by the universality of *Zemlia* as a philosophical drama, as Ivanov had hoped. In their view, *Zemlia* joined the ranks of world classics that staged the history of humanity as an ongoing tragedy. Ellis wrote in 1907 that *Zemlia* was "a tragedy of all humankind," comparing it to Dante's *Inferno* and Charles Baudelaire's meditations on infinity (76). For the theologian Bulgakov, *Zemlia* demonstrated the author's "dark fantasy of the fate of future humanity" in which the forces of rebellion against life clash with the equally frightful "collective suicide of humanity, freed from its illusions" (305).

11. Belyi's response was printed in the next issue of the journal as "V zashchitu ot odnogo narekaniia" ("In Defense against One Reproach" 40–42). Also in this issue was Belyi's review of the almanac *Severnnye tsvety*, in which he praised Ivanov's *Tantalus* before a brief, yet positive review of *Zemlia* ("Review of *Severnnye tsvety*" 69–70). He did not remark on the polemical elements of the drama, possibly reading it as a theurgic drama like most of his contemporaries.

ics of the 1860s who were similarly guided by ideological ends, even if political ones in their case:

You evaluate poets according to how they relate to the “Woman, clothed in the sun.” Critics of the 1860s evaluated poets by their relationship to the progressive ideas of their times. They threw Fet out of their scheme of things [*skhema*]; you throw out Bal'mont. Really, there is not a big difference. Both methods are in agreement. (“V zashchitu ot odnoi pokhvaly” 38)

To this challenge, Briusov added, “No, I decidedly refuse the honor of being in the number of the six [leading poets] if for this honor one must *forget* Kol'tsov, Baratynskii, Bal'mont. I prefer to be excluded from the representatives of contemporary poetry, together with Bal'mont, than to be included among them with Blok alone” (38; emphasis in the original). Belyi had masked criticism of Bal'mont's decadent aestheticism as praise, writing elsewhere, “Bal'mont is the last Russian giant of pure poetry—a representative of aestheticism that has spilled over into theosophy” (“K. D. Bal'mont” 10).¹² Though Belyi a few years later would incorporate theosophical ideas into his own work, at the time of this comment he obviously felt differently.¹³ Despite Belyi's hesitant praise of Briusov in “Apokalipsis,” Briusov most likely read the rebukes ostensibly aimed at Bal'mont as a not so covert attack on himself. Belyi reportedly saw both poets as spiritually unsound, allegedly telling Vasilii Rozanov “about the Beast exiting the abyss in the guise of Bal'mont and Valerii Briusov” (qtd Lavrov 35).

It was not only the content of Briusov's response to Belyi, but also the art design of his open letter that makes *Zemlia* relevant to their literary quarrel. Just above the title of Briusov's letter is an illustration by Nikolai Feofilaktov showing a famous symbol of the Apocalypse, important for Russian Symbolists: a half-moon surrounded by twelve stars.



From Briusov's article, “V zashchitu ot odnoi pokhvaly” (“In Defense against Praise Received”) in *Vesy*, No. 5, 1905 (37)

12. For his part, Bal'mont charged Belyi with poetic insincerity in letters to Briusov. In one, he wrote with ambivalence, “The only person who could carry the name Poet is Andrei Belyi. But he lies to himself. Speaking crudely, he's some kind of prostitute of Poetry” (Trifonov 5 Sept. 1905, 187).

13. For a discussion of the theosophical ideas and Christian eschatology in his novel *Serebrianyi golub'*, see Carlson, “The Silver Dove.”



From *Zemlia, Severnye tsvety. Assiriiskie*, 1905 (187)

This image appears in Revelation 12:1 (RSV): “And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet.” But the beautiful woman is missing from this illustration: Is She coming or absent as the first rays of dawn stretch over the horizon? An identical framing illustration appears over the fifth and final act of *Zemlia*,¹⁴ which ends with a similarly foreboding dawn. Given the subject matter of Briusov’s letter to Belyi, the illustration seems to have been carefully chosen for its casting doubt on the certainty of Her arrival.

It is noteworthy that, in his response, Briusov sought not only to critique Belyi’s ideological evaluation of 19th-century and contemporary poetry; he also took the opportunity to defend Bal’mont. The latter was traveling in Mexico at the time of Briusov’s letter and his three-part travel diary *V stranakh solntsa* (*In the Lands of the Sun*, 1905) was appearing in *Vesy*. Given Belyi’s neglect of the path-breaking poet (see Markov), it is not surprising that in *Zemlia*, which recasts the apocalyptic themes that Belyi lauded in recent poetry in an ironic vein, Bal’mont’s persona, poetry, and his own syncretic interest in non-Western cultures of the world play an important role. With *Zemlia*, Briusov both conceded to and critiqued other poets of apocalyptic theurgy, especially Belyi, with whom he publicly disagreed about the purpose of art.

***Zemlia* as Polemical Allegory**

The polemic with Belyi found its way into the action and characters of *Zemlia*. Other than the heroic and well-meaning, but perhaps naïve, Nevatli, there are three characters to whom it is more difficult to assign morally positive or negative roles, but whose ideological positions are clear and consistent: Teopikski, the teacher of Nevatli, the death-worshipping Teotli, and the epicurean Katontli. Long before Nevatli’s search for a solution to his civiliza-

14. This illustration did not appear when *Zemlia* was republished in *Zemnaia os'* in 1907.

tion's decline, the city has been terrorized by a mysterious Order of Liberators, led by Teotl'. This organization carries out routine murders in order to impose their occult agenda on the rest of the populace. Headquartered in an underground chamber in a secret location of the city, the Order seeks, as Teotl' proclaims, to "become the destroyers. Our Order is merely the will of Nature, merely the hand of Fate!" (Briusov, *Zemlia* 161). This thirst for death is directly contrasted with Nevatl's life-affirming vision of a fecund Earth, thriving once again under a deified sun.

It comes as a surprise to the reader that archenemies Nevatl' and Teotl' were both students of Teopikski (mainly referred to in the text as *Mudrets* (Sage)). His message about the decline of civilization resounds like a mysterious prophecy: "We, the keepers of the holy fire, which has been bequeathed by happier generations, are faithful to a single duty: to prevent humanity from collapse. We recent ones have preserved its decline [*zakat*] as others, who came first, worshipped its radiant ascent" (153). Referencing the rising and setting of the sun, Teopikski walks a fine line between Nevatl's hope for the renaissance of a vital culture and Teotl's fatalism: the latter argues that, since it is too late to rejuvenate the Earth, one must accept the extinction of humanity.

Teopikski's philosophy is not only acquiescence to decline, however; he also claims that humanity's purpose can only be realized in *other* worlds: "as it was before, so it has always been on earth; we are in body—beasts, we are in spirit—celestial beings. We are too close to the steps of spirits [*besplotnykh*], but we have no paths to their world" (169). With this reasoning, he wistfully slips into the recognizable Symbolist credo, "in earthly symbols we must reach the unearthly" (*ibid.*). In this manner, Briusov initially links Teopikski with ideas to which not many Symbolists would have objected, but later this character's apocalyptic mysticism reaches suicidal proportions. Prophesying the continuation of the human spirit outside material limitations, he envisions collective suicide as the answer to a spiritual rebirth in an incorporeal future.

Nevatl' at first fails to convince Teopikski of his plan until he raises the possibility of opening the roof of the city. Recalling the lectures he once listened to about the construction of the City, Nevatl' especially remembers the retractable roof (172). Teopikski, who knows what will happen if the roof is opened, is gripped by a sudden mysterious ecstasy at the thought of humanity's instant extermination, crying, "Fate is sending this to mankind—to be an executioner! ["*Sud'ba posylaet cheloveku eto—byt' palachom!*"] Show humility to Fate, old man, and lift the sacrificial knife over your brother!" (173). Teopikski's reaction puzzles Nevatl' ("I don't understand you, teacher..."), who does not realize that by receiving the eerie endorsement of the *Mudrets* he is about to become the one to bring about the fatal outcome of Earth's destruction.

Fearing that Nevatl' might succeed in his plans, Teotl', who has been in

charge of the killings in the city, is badly in need of reassurance from his dark “Beautiful Lady”—an occult analogue of the Symbolist sun-clad muse. She is “the spirit of the last sorceress”; paying him a visit, she explains how she alone guards the secrets of a once powerful connection between humanity and the spirit world: “The souls of deceased people, purified in the crucible of ordeals, have ascended to the higher spheres and ever fewer spirits have remained near this planet” (176). She informs Teotl' that his “dark thirst for Death” is only the first stage of his soul's long journey: “What is not completed here will be finished by other beings in other worlds” (177). Her prophecy recalls Teopikski's earlier words to Nevatl': “Let every planet reveal its face [*lik*] in the universe” (169). She thus shares the key concept of Teopikski's philosophy—that having reached its final development, humanity can have only a non-fleshly—astral—form of existence. Indeed, the reader learns that Teopikski is merely carrying out the wishes of *his* teacher, Nel'tilitstli (a character who is only mentioned and who never appears), revealing that the death-worshipping ideology of Teotl' serves a larger cosmic design. Teopikski exclaims: “Oh, wise Nel'tilitstli, my teacher! I fulfilled the commandment that was entrusted by you. I humbly accepted your staff of guidance. I led people along the way intended by fate until my ultimate purpose was revealed to me” (188).

Intermediate scenes feature Nevatl' rejecting his lover for his newfound cause, as well as the decadent governing officials of the city acceding to popular support of Nevatl's plan. Teotl' seeks out a former schoolmate of his, the learned citizen Katontli, and learns of Teopikski's assent to Nevatl's plan. Katontli reveals the truth to Teotl', but only to wash his hands of the affair. He has just finished his account of the last days of the Earth and wishes to devote his last moments to earthly pleasures. Teotl' is of course delighted to find out that opening the roof will lead to sudden collective death. As Katontli explains, “Our Teacher wanted humanity to know a proud death, instead of shameful decrepitude. He wanted for its end to be beautiful. He did not want degeneration to carry out the execution [*kazn'*] of the people, but for them themselves to be their own voluntary executioners” (191).¹⁵ Teotl's reply is one of joyful relief and reveals the previously unexplained resemblance between his own beliefs and his former teacher's: “He! He wanted that? A sickly old man, buried in books? A prophet of deceitful teachings? The living keeper of old words about kindness and light! How could these mysteries enter into his desiccated soul? How did his neutered [*oskoplennaia*] thought contain all the greatness of my truth?” (191). The “evil” Teotl' thus emerges as the *true* student of Teopikski. Overjoyed by the nearness of death, Teotl' does not explore the source of Teopikski's teachings. It remains possible, however, that Teopikski has always

15. For more on this idea of “voluntary execution” in Briusov, see his essay, “Strast'” (“Passion”).

guarded the same secrets as Teotl', imparted to him by Nel'tilitstli. If this is true, then Teopikski had been secretly preparing his students for their own execution, only waiting for the right moment to realize his plans. Teopikski's last words provide a clue as to what his true motivations have been. Supervising the opening of the roof, he is the first to die, having uttered his *Nunc dimitis* (in Russian, *Nyne otpushchaiushi*). These are the words of Simeon in Luke 2:29, to whom the Holy Ghost told that his death would come with the birth of the Messiah. This quotation would seem ironic given Teopikski's role in condoning world-wide death, and not the resurrection of his people, at least not the Christian resurrection; however, it is possible that Briusov appropriated the Christian phrase to triumphantly proclaim the *Mudrets*'s decidedly un-Christian occult piety. Teopikski's final words announce *his* vision of salvation in other worlds, once Earth has been abandoned. As the sun rises over the assembled, panic ensues, and Teotl' delivers a final prayer:

I see your gigantic countenance, O Death. It looks intently at me. O what bliss that I am seeing your triumph. Here you are exalting your omnipotent hand over us. Strike [your hand] down! The sin of separation has been atoned for. The soul rejoices, having a presentiment of the last moment. Sun, sun! Your rays will not burn through this darkness that I am rushing into! (196)

The battle between the sun-worshippers and the death-worshippers has led to this finale in Act 5.

An allegorical reading permits an exploration of the drama's relationship to the debate between Briusov and Belyi over apocalyptic theurgy (intersecting with Bal'mont's poetic legacy in the process). Nevatl' has elements of both Bal'mont's (culturally syncretic) and Belyi's (Christian) personal mythologies, gravitating as they did to sun symbolism (evidenced in their poetic collections *Budem kak solntse* (*We'll be Like the Sun*, 1903) and *Zoloto v lazuri* (*Gold in Azure*, 1904), respectively.¹⁶ Teotl' and the Order are most obviously a reference to the mystical trend in Russian Symbolism, which even Blok—an adept—parodies in *Balaganchik* (*The Fairground Booth*, 1906). Who, then, is the character closest to Briusov's voice in this debate? It turns out to be the other student of Teopikski, the scholar Katontli. He even hints at Briusov's poetic mantra, which always privileged art's service to finding the eternal in the moment (*mi*, *mgnovenie*), when he addresses Teotl' in Act 5: "However you take my news, leave me to spend my final moments [*mi*] as I wish to. In this fateful hour, fulfill my request as I have fulfilled yours"

16. Briusov even quotes Bal'mont's poem, "Kak ispanets" ("Like a Spaniard," 1899), in *Zemlia*. Dolgoplov has also noted this citation (76). Approaching the implementation of Nevatl's plan, a character speculates about the sun's nature, claiming: "One ancient poet has this verse—'The sun, red like blood'" ("U odnogo drevnego poeta est' stikh—'Solntse, krasnoe kak krov'") (Briusov, *Zemlia* 193). This verse alludes to Bal'mont, whose poetry is shown to survive the cataclysm of universal death. The image of the *krasnoe solntse* is repeatedly found in Bal'mont's *Liturgiia krasoty* (*Liturgy of Beauty*, 1905) in the poem "Solntse—krasnoe": "The sun is red, my native people said to me / And my heart sings to me about the free, red Sun" (27).

(192). But, when the world ends, the most spiritually insightful character is Teotl', whose sorceress-muse shows a viable afterlife, privileging occult knowledge over Nevatl's honorable, but naïve, hope for the dawn of the sun-Christ.

***Zemlia*, Atlantis, and Universal Apocalypse**

Adding another dimension to the allegory of *Zemlia* are traces of Briusov's lifelong fascination with Atlantis, which appear as references to the Aztecs in his play. This connection requires some explanation. According to theosophists, Atlanteans were the ancestors of the Toltecs, who were the ancient forbears of the Maya, ancestors of the Aztecs. There is ample evidence that Briusov had been studying the Maya in earnest before he wrote *Zemlia*. For example, in his substantial later lectures on the lost continent, "Uchiteli uchitelei" ("The Teachers of Teachers," 1917), Briusov claimed to have taken a course on the Maya at the Collège de France in 1902 and that he had "made use of his own notes for the present work" (368). These notes, if they existed, were also likely used for *Zemlia*.¹⁷

Briusov's fellow poet and close friend Bal'mont shared his interest in Atlantis and the Maya.¹⁸ Indeed, Briusov's *first* contact with Mesoamerican culture can be traced to his friendship with Bal'mont,¹⁹ who was the dedicatee of Briusov's 1895 unfinished *poema*, *Atlantida* (Vasil'ev and Shcherbakov 482).²⁰

17. Briusov's published correspondence during 1902 shows that he was not then in Paris; he had been there in the spring of 1903. Records available in the *Annuaire du Collège de France* (*Directory of the Collège de France*) for the year 1903 indicate that a course entitled "Antiquités Américaines" ("American Antiquities") was being offered, and it is likely that these are the lectures that Briusov remembers. Taught by Mesoamericanist Léon Lejeal, this course dealt with Mayan art, history, and religion, all of which could have influenced *Zemlia*. Whether or not Briusov was present at Lejeal's lectures, the available documentation suggests that it was possible for him to have attended at least a few of them. Besides, he could have read the introductory lecture, which was already published in 1903. Among the topics covered were "Archéologie mexicaine (Le Calendrier et la vie religieuse des Aztèques)" ("Mexican Archaeology (The Calendar and Religious Life of the Aztecs)") and "Découvertes archéologiques récentes dans la Zapotèque et le Yucatan" ("Recent archeological discoveries in the Zapotec and Yucatan regions") (Lejeal 23).

18. Bal'mont's investigations into Mesoamerican myth were on prominent display in Symbolist periodicals in 1905. Earlier that year, a single issue of the journal *Iskusstvo* was devoted to Bal'mont's Mexican writings, which were supplemented with photographs of Mayan ruins. On Bal'mont's travels in Mexico, see Bidney. In preparation for this trip, Bal'mont wrote to Briusov in November of 1904 asking him to "please obtain for me a book about the Maya [...]" (Trifonov 26 Nov. 1904, 158).

19. Briusov's wife recalled conversations in 1897 between the two poets, which ended when Bal'mont went abroad. Thereafter, "Valerii Iakovlevich ordered from France, Germany, and England a great number of scientific-historical books, all concerning Atlantis, the Etruscans, the Aegeans, and *even the Maya*" (qtd Vasil'ev and Shcherbakov 483; my emphasis).

20. Atlantis appears in another early work, "Gora zvezdy" ("Star Mountain," 1885–1899), a novella about an isolated desert civilization.

Not long after the publication of *Zemlia*, Briusov published two of Bal'mont's pieces in *Vesy* in 1905—the already mentioned *V stranakh solntsa* and *Poeziia stikhii* (*Poetry of the Elements*)—both treating the Mayan theme.²¹ William Richardson notes that “For Balmont, speculating on the mysteries of the past became an obsession, one stimulated by [...] his infatuation with Theosophy, sun worship, paganism, and in the case of the Maya of Yucatán, with the vague belief that their civilization was all that remained of submerged Atlantis” (78).²² Bal'mont wrote grandly of the lost continent: “[W]ithout Atlantis it is impossible to understand and explain the enormous types of phenomena from the sphere of cosmogonic ideas and works of sculpture, painting, and the art of construction” (*V stranakh solntsa*-3 20).²³ Like Bal'mont, Briusov understood Atlantis as a key to the mysterious source of all art, and for this reason he devoted much of his later research on the subject to a historical and quasi-scientific study of the Mesoamerican descendants of the Atlanteans.

In his essay “Uchiteli uchitelei,” Briusov wrote of the slow degeneracy of Atlantean culture through the time of the Maya and their descendants: “The culture of the Aztecs was only a shade of Mayan culture, which, for its part, must have been insignificant compared to the culture of the Atlanteans, the ‘teachers’ of the Maya” (408). For him, the Aztecs were a dying civilization like the Roman Empire, both of which had been crushed by the rise of Christianity. By highlighting the decline of the descendants of the *Aztecs* in *Zemlia*, Briusov may have hoped to create a historical parallel between the decline of the Romans and that of the Maya as a way of overcoming the dominance of the Christian historical narrative, as well as its centuries-long ideological superiority. The titles of the leadership elite in the play's doomed society obviously refer to the Roman Empire. Among them are *konsul* and *liktor*, titles once used for Roman politicians and administrators. As Judith Kalb notes in her book *Russia's Rome*, “Briusov's fourth-century Rome is a world of dying, Western, pagan imperialism vanquished by Eastern, Christian religion” (77). This interpretation of Briusov's Roman theme confirms my conclusions on the Mesoamerican theme, also the seat of a dying empire, as a subversion of the Christian narrative of apocalypse.

The choice of a pre-Christian (Atlantean) historical narrative diffuses the essential teleology of Christian belief. Briusov's critique of theurgy is just a different form of it; he argues that the end of the world has not been prophesied according to Revelation, but has an older and richer source, which still remains to be acknowledged as the origin of all art and culture: the culture of

21. In *V stranakh solntsa*, Bal'mont located the usually northern mythical Thule in Mesoamerica. He considered the large statues of Toltec warriors at the archeological site of Tula examples of Atlantean figures.

22. On Bal'mont, Egypt, and Atlantis, see Panova, *Russkii Egipet*.

23. In *Gornye vershiny* (*Mountain Heights*, 1904), Bal'mont compared the Spanish “discovery” of the New World with the destruction of Atlantis (14).

Atlantis. The most obvious way that the Atlantean heritage of the Aztecs appears in *Zemlia* is in the characters' names, which are not coincidentally borrowed from Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs.²⁴ Why Briusov chose this language is discussed in one of *Zemlia*'s most probable sources, William Scott-Elliot's *Story of Atlantis* (1896). Scott-Elliot characterized Toltec as the closest approximation of the now lost Atlantean language: "All through the ages, however, the Toltec language fairly maintained its purity, and the same tongue that was spoken in Atlantis in the days of its splendor was used, with but slight alterations, thousands of years later in Mexico and Peru" (45). For his part, Briusov deliberately obscured the origin of the names, claiming to have taken them from "one ancient American dialect" (Lazarev, qtd Molodiakov 344), without indicating a source, insisting that "All things have *their meaning* in this language" ("[V]se imeiut v etom iazyke *svoi smysl*"; emphasis in original).²⁵ It is possible that Briusov wished to use the obscure Nahuatl references as a special code for Bal'mont, whose study of the Maya may have allowed him to identify and decipher the names. Fellow Symbolist Maksimilian Voloshin seems to have been somewhat aware of the Mayan associations of the play's *dramatis personae*, but perhaps, out of respect for their mysterious quality, he referred more to their sonorous effect than to their meaning. He wrote, "Finding possible names for the last people on earth was a very difficult task and he settled it cleverly and logically, taking the most ancient names that have reached us: the names of the Mayan tribe. These names resound beautifully, with gravitas, and naturally in *Zemlia*, imparting to everything the particular archaism of the future" (386). They are organized in the table below, with the French definitions that Briusov might have discovered in the standard reference work of his time (see Siméon):

Worth special note is the name of Teopikski's teacher, Nel'tilitstli, which in Nahuatl means "truth." This name refers to the "truth" of the secret occult knowledge into which Teotl' and Teopikski are initiated. The name Teotl' is translated as "god," carrying a slight phonetic echo of the Greek "θεός" (possibly why the Spanish gravitated to this translation).²⁶ According to Pohl and

24. Briusov explicitly references the *nagua* (Nahua) in the later work "Uchiteli uchitelei." "We know that the Aztecs and later the Zapotecs—more specifically, the Nahua tribes, to whom also belonged the tribe that founded the subsequent Aztec kingdom—invaded Mexico from the North approximately in the middle of 900 A.D., that is, in the epoch of medieval Europe" (367).

25. Gudrun Langer has discovered the anagrammatic nature of the names of three characters—Atla, Intla, and Tlan—all of which are letters in the word "Atlantis" (64), but did not investigate their meaning. She also notes an accepted belief in the nineteenth century that descendants of the people of Atlantis were from a "red race" (*rote Rasse*) whose origins presumably were in the Americas. I would add to Langer's observation that this theory of "root races" had special currency among theosophists. She does not refer to Briusov's theosophical sources, and recognizes the names only as "Indian," not specifically Nahuatl.

26. "The word *teo* may be used to qualify almost anything mysterious, powerful, or beyond ordinary experience [...] Nor was its application restricted to good or ethical things, for malign phenomena might also be designated by *teo*" (Townsend 120).

Table 1. Transliterations and translations of Mayan terms.

Nahuatl word	Russian transliteration	(in French transliteration)	French trans.	English trans.
Тлакатель	tlacatl		Homme, noble, seigneur; doux, humain, chaste, etc.	Man, noble, lord; sweet, humane, chaste, etc.
Теопикски	teopixqui		Prêtre, religieux	Priest, religious
Неватль	nehuatl		Je, moi	I, me
Теотль	teotl		Dieu, déesse.	God, deity
Тлацотли	tlaçotli		Précieux, cher, qui a de la valeur, estimable	Precious, dear, one who has valor, estimable
Окнома	oc noma		Jusqu'à présent	So far
Матсеватли	maceualli		Vassal, homme du peuple, paysan, sujet	Vassal, man of the people, peasant, subject
Куалли	qualli		on, bonne; litt. comestible	Good, lit. edible
Атла	atl		Eau, urine, sinciput, tête, cervelle, guerre	Water, urine, crown (of the skull), head, war
Тлан	tlan		postp. Avec, près de, auprès, dans, dessous, entre, à	With, close to, near, in, below, between, at
Интла	intla		conj. Si	If
Интланель	intlanel		conj. Bien que, supposé que	Even though, supposing that
Нельтилицтли	neltiliztli		Vérité, certitude	Truth, certitude
Катонтли	—		Undetermined	—

Lyons, “Spanish sources often translate *teotl* as ‘god,’ but its actual meaning corresponds more closely with the Polynesian concept of *mana*, a numinous impersonal power diffused throughout the universe” (34). The names of major characters seem to have been chosen with greater care; the names of others were possibly chosen for their sound.²⁷

27. A probable resource for learning about Nahuatl is John Thomas Short’s *North Americans of Antiquity* (1880), also cited in Scott-Elliot’s *Story of Atlantis*, which Briusov consulted later for his lectures, as well (Vasil’ev and Shcherbakov 483).

It is now possible to return to a close reading of the scene of the sorceress's visitation, in which the connection to Atlantis is made explicit. The priests who once preserved the secrets of their forbears, she explains, have finally died out: "The knowledge of the priests [*magi*] has perished. No one yet has known how to read the ancient books that were written in the language of the Atlanteans" (*Zemlia* 177). She apparently had learned how to read these texts from her mother, but, having been an outcast during her years on Earth, she failed to pass on this ancient knowledge and took it to her grave. Now, before ascending to the higher spheres, the sorceress shares a final prophecy with Teotl': "Four times, according to the number of the four continents, the Earth's races have changed. In each one of them, seven times the scepter of spiritual power has passed from the hands of one tribe into the hands of others" ("sem' raz skipetr dukhovnogo derzhavstva perekhodil iz ruk odnogo plemeni v ruki drugikh") (*ibid.*).²⁸

Each of these dynasties was responsible for "revealing a new face of truth, accessible to the human mind" ("iavit' novogo lika istiny, dostupnoi umu cheloveka") (*ibid.*). The four faces of truth revealed throughout human history suggest the four-sided pyramid, a structure at the foundation of many Mesoamerican cultures.²⁹ The sorceress explains that "all levels have been passed; all faces have been revealed" ("vse stupeni proideny; vse liki iavlenny") (177). Therefore, when Teotl' looks into the "face of Death"—"I see your gigantic countenance" ("Vizhu tvoi ispolinskii lik")—the next *face* of truth (*lik istiny*; my emphasis) is revealed. Teotl' employs the same word (*lik*) as the sorceress in his declarations. Bearing in mind the significance of the "four faces" permits the interpretation of the play's final scene as the culmination of human knowledge on Earth in the completion of the pyramid's fifth point, the apex of the geometric shape and thus, the end of the world. Briusov's insistence on the number symbolism of the pyramid in "Uchiteli uchitelei" makes the deliberateness of the "fives" in *Zemlia* probable (364).³⁰ In addition, Scott-Elliot's *Story of Atlantis*, whose text indicates how many

28. Later, when more receptive to theosophical belief, Belyi referred to the very same historical evolution—as well as to the existence of a universal apocalyptic narrative of which Christianity is but one example—in his later pseudonymous essay "Sem' planetnykh dukhov" ("Seven planetary spirits," 1909).

29. Commonalities between ancient Egyptian and Mayan architecture were proof to theosophists of a shared cultural past in Atlantis.

30. The relevant passage is: "In Egypt, Etruria, as well as in Mexico, on the quadrangular base rise four triangles with their points turned to the sky (this is a symbol of the soul's eternal striving upward from the earthly). Both here and there is the stone incarnation of primordial numbers [*pervichnykh chisel*]: 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12... These numbers are the external expression of an entire worldview and are likely closely connected to astrological religious ideas, the conclusion of many centuries of observations on the starry sky." By "primordial numbers," Briusov is referring to an occult belief that certain numbers dictated the structure and development of the universe. As an example, see Blavatsky I: 2: 320–23.

generations are required for each “root race,” confirms the sorceress’s vision of history in the play:

For of the seven sub-races required to complete the history of a great Root Race, five only have so far come into existence. Our own Teutonic or 5th sub-race has already developed many nations, but has not yet run its course, while the 6th and 7th sub-races, who will be developed on the continents of North and South America, will have thousands of years of history to give to the world. (2)

This passage would seem to further explain the sorceress’s detailed account of the scepter, changing hands a total of seven times. One finds an identical historical narrative in Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine*: “Occult philosophy teaches that even now, under our very eyes, the new Race and Races are preparing to be formed, and that it is in *America* that the transformation will take place, and has already silently commenced” (II: 2: 444, my emphasis). The future civilization in *Zemlia* is this very same seventh sub-race following the most recent “Fifth Age.” The sorceress reminds the mortal Teotl’ of the insignificance of all human action, as if to further affirm the power of her prophecy: “Not by your will and against the will of your enemies, but according to the decrees of Fate [*zhrebiiu Roka*] have the hours of Death come” (*Zemlia* 177).

Finally, to complete the syncretic, universal vision of Apocalypse presented in *Zemlia*, Briusov seems to have based some of the sorceress’s prophecy on the myth of the Five Suns, an Aztec cosmological myth.³¹ Bal’mont recorded this myth at the ruins at Xochicalco at the Temple of the Feathered Serpent (i.e., Quetzalcoatl): “The legend tells of the four great epochs of the world, connected to the four universal destructions, which preceded our earthly life and the founding of the famous Thule [...] The four universal scourges and creators are: the heavenly Fire (Sun and Lightning), the earthly Fire (Volcano), Air (Hurricane), Water (Flood)” (*V stranakh solntsa-2* 21).³² The myth tells of four sibling gods who were born of the first sun and defeated each other in turn to become kings of the universe, whose throne is in the Sun. Each of these four defeats coincided with a scourge that resulted in humanity’s extermination. After the fourth catastrophe (a flood) reduced the earth to

31. For an overview of the legend, see Phillips 158–63. I’m grateful to Ilya Vinitzky for suggesting this myth as a possible source for the play. Scott-Elliot mentions an important Mayan text, the *Popol Vuh*, where this legend appears (14–15). Bal’mont later devoted an entire volume to his Mexican travels, entitled *Zmeinye tsvety* (*Serpent Flowers*, 1910), which included portions from the *Popol Vuh* (according to its standardized spelling). Bal’mont’s translation of this text is entitled “Chelovecheskaia povest’ Kvichei-Maiev,” which he mentioned in a letter to Briusov (Trifonov 12 Sept. 1905, 170). A detailed version of this cosmology was published in *Iskusstvo* as “Kosmogoniia Maiev: Otryvki iz Sviashchennoi knigi ‘Popol Vuh’” (28–41). Once published in *Zmeinye tsvety*, its title was given as *Kosmogoniia Maiev. Iz Sviashchennoi Knigi Popol’-Vu*. “Povest’ ‘Kvichei-maiev’” was also published in *Zolotoe runo* in 1906.

32. A photograph of the Xochicalco pyramid appears in Bal’mont’s publication in *Iskusstvo* (11).

ruin (a possible connection to the oceanic submergence of Atlantis), the god Quetzalcoatl is said to have created with his own blood the age of the fifth sun, the one in which the Aztecs and Briusov's characters lived. When the sorceress warns Teotl', "You will see the last moments of the human race. You will see the convulsion of the dying earth," she refers to earthquakes that the Aztecs believed would conclude the fifth age (*Zemlia* 177).

The Atlantean subtext of *Zemlia* reveals another ironic twist in Briusov's treatment of the sorceress, who emerges as the prophetess of universal apocalypse. For Belyi, who expressed concern that Briusov's muse bore too close a resemblance to the Whore of Babylon, "She" had to appear in a particular way: "The incarnated image of the Woman must become the focus of the mystery, incarnating in herself the all-uniting principle of humanity [...] The chaos, incarnated in the poetry of Briusov, must become the body of the Woman, shining in the heavens" ("Apokalipsis...", *Vesy*, no. 4, 1905, 24). A few months before the publication of *Zemlia*, the younger poet anticipated, "From Briusov's point of view, Her most real unity [would turn] out to be an incorporeal vision."³³ The dark "Beautiful Lady" of *Zemlia* speaks quite directly to Belyi's comments about the elder poet's shortcomings as a theurgist. Though it is not Belyi's or Blok's enigmatically smiling "She," Briusov conjures up his own version of the Beautiful Lady, a powerful sorceress who alone voices the "true" occult prophesies of *Zemlia*. Disputing the always passive appearance of *their* Beautiful Lady, Briusov attacked the most sacred symbol of the Symbolist cult of apocalypticism. Moreover, he eschews the stakes of Belyi's apocalyptic theurgy, adopting instead a theosophist (and universalist) eschatology for his occult speculations on the origins of culture and the end of the earth—one which, however, envisions a continuation of some new form of culture in the astral realm.

Conclusion

At the end of *Zemlia*, it is not the Day of Judgment or the redemptive eternal life of Christian Apocalypse that is envisioned, but the speculative survival of an Atlantean cultural heritage in "astral spheres." Nevatl's teacher Teopikski, which this paper has shown is a secret believer in the occult cosmology that appears in the sorceress's prophesy, states similarly: "We are too close to the steps of the spirits, but we have no paths to their world" (169). Voicing concepts rooted in the theosophical literature of Briusov's time, the sorceress maintains that *Zemlia*'s humanity has entered its final phase: "What is not completed here will be finished by other beings in other worlds" (*Zemlia* 177). By incorporating the mythological and linguistic traces of Atlantis

33. In a review of the drama's publication in *Zemnaia os'*, Georgii Chulkov singled out the "irreligious *Zemlia*" as a heartless portrayal of human suffering, accusing Briusov of transforming the muse-like *Neznakomka* into a "fake corpse" (*butaforskii mertvets*) (64).

into the plot of *Zemlia* Briusov upholds the survival of culture and ancient knowledge in the face of Christian apocalypse, which decouples material culture and creativity from the spiritual transformation of the end days. Language, ancient art, and cultural practices survive in *Zemlia* because of their primordial origins in Atlantis, understood as the key to unlocking the mysteries of human culture and its authentic spiritual essence. In this way, he offers his own kind of theurgy, aimed at communing with a lost, but shared, cultural past. As a work of art, *Zemlia* testifies to Briusov's (and Bal'mont's) faith in the occult origins of art, a faith which both poets believed could be proven through both scientific and non-rational means. By incorporating Bal'mont's research on the Maya into *Zemlia*, Briusov shows a fictional world whose cosmology "proves" the eschatological and occult prophecies of the Atlanteans. Indeed, Briusov finds Bal'mont's insights profoundly providential and he defends his friend's work and its underlying mythology as (fictionally) realized truth. Challenged by the contemporary pessimistic zeitgeist, Briusov's occult play conjures up a vision of human history with an unexpectedly life-affirming message about the eternity of art against the background of impending revolution and fears of cultural decline.

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Тезисы

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«Земля» Валерия Брюсова: Оккультная полемика с апокалиптически-символистской теургией

В предлагаемой статье драма Валерия Брюсова «Земля» (1905), достаточно малоизвестная на данный момент, рассматривается в контексте символистской полемики автора с Андреем Белым о предпосылках апокалиптической теургии. Понятие теургии у символистов предполагало, что искусство способно создавать или изменять феноменальную реальность, а у некоторых символистов «теургия» явно вызывала ассоциации с пророчеством. Незадолго до публикации «Земли» Брюсов прилюдно оспорил взгляды Белого на искусство как поэтическое пророчество, при этом отстаивая работу таких поэтов, как Бальмонт, о которых Белый отзывался пренебрежительно из-за их эстетизма. Эта полемика проявляется и в «Земле» — в таких ключевых элементах драмы как действие, окружающая обстановка и качества героев. Брюсов использовал теософические идеи об утраченном континенте Атлантида для критики позиции Белого. Как Брюсов, так и Константин Бальмонт увлекались идеей Атлантиды и считали ее отправной точкой для искусства и культуры. Теософы утверждали, что культура Атлантиды была сохранена в ацтекской цивилизации; именно по этой причине персонажи Брюсова названы именами из ацтекского наречия «науатли». К этим отсылкам на культуру ацтеков Брюсов добавил элементы теософических историй Атлантиды, а также мифа ацтеков, предлагая свою версию эсхатологии, конкурирующую с христианским описанием апокалипсиса, типичным для Белого. В «Земле» Брюсов представляет эсхатологическую модель, предшествующую христианству, подводя все истории мира под единый основополагающий сюжет. Так он исправляет апокалиптические предсказания Белого о «Жене, облечённой в солнце», исполняя, хотя и в драматической реальности, оккультное пророчество

о конце света. Нам представляется, что «Земля» не построена на теургии Белого, а является редким примером *окультной* теургии. Брюсов также защищает своего друга и энтузиаста теургии Бальмонта, который во время публикации «Земли» путешествовал по Мексике в поисках таинственных связей с цивилизацией Атлантиды. В заключение следует отметить, что взгляды Брюсова на апокалипсис укоренены в «Земле». В этой драме тяготение к тайне мирового культурного и исторического наследия побеждает страх перед потусторонним судом — ощущение, широко распространённое в апокалиптических произведениях символистов.