



# By the waters of the Tiber: Viacheslav Ivanov, Aleksandr Grechaninov and Russian culture in interwar Europe

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## Abstract

In Russia, the impact of the end of World War I was subsumed under the far greater impact of the October Revolution, which led to a bifurcation of Russian culture into Soviet and émigré branches. This article examines a hybrid literary and musical work from the interwar period: Viacheslav Ivanov's nine *Roman Sonnets* (*Rimskie sonety*, 1924) and the musical settings that the composer Aleksandr Grechaninov made of five of these as his *Sonetti Romani* in 1939. Here, both poet and composer seek to convey the experience of finding oneself in one of Europe's most evocative historical and cultural locations. At the same time, their evocation of Rome forges a powerful historical narrative of the city's prior inhabitants. Accordingly, Rome emerges as an intertextual palimpsest of literary and artistic references, which together create a powerful sense of cultural continuity to offset the loss of the artist's original homeland.

## Keywords

Aleksandr Grechaninov, Viacheslav Ivanov, music, Rome, Russia Abroad

For Russia, the First World War ended not with the declaration of the Armistice on 11 November 1918, but on 3 March 1918, when Vladimir Lenin signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the Central Powers (Chernev, 2017; Gattrell, 2014). From a Russian perspective, the defining historical events of the period were the February Revolution of 1917, when the Romanov dynasty was replaced by the Provisional Government, and then the October Revolution, when the Bolsheviks seized power for themselves. Soviet Russia was subsequently plunged into a violent civil war lasting until 1922, and the country that emerged embarked on a radical programme of social, economic and cultural transformation. Those who were unwilling to accept Bolshevik rule went into either

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voluntary emigration or enforced exile, establishing centres of Russian culture in cities as diverse as Berlin, Harbin, New York, Paris, Prague and Sofia (Schlögel, 1994). Over time, these communities became a diaspora, reinforced by subsequent waves of emigration. The impact of this bifurcation of Russian culture has been comprehensively mapped with respect to literature (Livak, 2003; Raeff, 1990; Rubins, 2015, 2021; Slobin, 2013; Struve, 1956). More recently, the musical life of 'Russia Abroad' has been the object of considerable scholarly attention (Dufour, 2006; Giroud, 2015; Korabelnikova, 2008; Móricz, 2020; Móricz and Morrison, 2014; Taruskin, 2016b; Vishnevetskii, 2005).

This article situates itself at the intersection of these two worlds and presents a case study of Viacheslav Ivanov's nine *Rimskie sonety* (*Roman Sonnets*, 1924), five of which were set to music by Aleksandr Grechaninov in 1939 under the title *Sonetti Romani*. Song represents a particularly interesting genre through which to examine how writers and musicians dealt with expatriation. On the one hand, notions of music as a kind of 'universal language' have tended to encourage the belief that it requires no explicit form of translation or mediation. As Marc Raeff argues: 'Music, as a language that knows no national barriers, was easily absorbed by and integrated into the host environments' (1990: 99). On the other hand, through their choice of language, émigré composers could either signal a commitment to the literary culture of their host environment, or express an ongoing relationship with the country they had left behind. Both Igor Stravinskii and Artur Lur'e (also transliterated as Arthur Lourié) evinced a particular interest in the poetry of their newly adopted homelands, first France, then the United States (Bullock, 2019; Taruskin, 2016a). By contrast, the more conservative Nikolai Metner (also Medtner) remained loyal to the canon of Russian and German romantic poetry which he had favoured before his emigration to the West, thereby creating a deliberate sense of continuity with the literary and musical culture of the past which the October Revolution had sundered (Boyd, 1965). Lur'e, too, found himself increasingly drawn to Russian poetry as a way of coping with the isolation imposed by exile (Móricz, 2008; Salkowski, 2019). Others, such as Sergei Rakhmaninov, gave up composing songs entirely, as if separation from the homeland rendered lyric impossible as a form of creative expression (Sylvester, 2014).

But what of those composers who sought to voice the experience of exile by setting to music words by poets who themselves had also gone into emigration? How might words and music interact to express the increasing feeling that 'Russia Abroad' was no longer a temporary state, but a permanent condition? Here, Grechaninov's *Sonetti Romani* stand out for their explicit attempt to imagine how the condition of exile might be conveyed through song. As their title suggests, these songs use words and music to capture and convey the experience of finding oneself in one of Europe's most evocative historical and cultural locations. Ivanov's poetry certainly encapsulates something of the immediacy of day-to-day life in the city. At the same time, its vivid evocation of Rome's sights and spaces forges a powerful historical narrative of the city's prior inhabitants. Accordingly, Rome emerges as an intertextual palimpsest of literary and artistic references, which together create a powerful sense of cultural continuity to offset the loss of the artist's original homeland. Moreover, Rome's religious significance affords a form of belonging that explicitly transcends the nation as a source of identity. This was certainly the case for Ivanov when he wrote the original poems in late 1924, immediately after his

emigration from the Soviet Union. By 1939, however, Grechaninov was on the verge of a second emigration, this time to the United States. Thus, Ivanov's gesture of greeting to his new home is translated into the composer's act of farewell to a Europe on the threshold of another catastrophe.

### Ivanov's *Rimskie Sonety*

Born in Moscow in 1866, Ivanov was a scholar, poet and leading theoretician of the Russian symbolist movement. After studies in history and philosophy in Moscow, he moved to Berlin in 1886 to read for a doctorate under the classicists Otto Hirschfeld and Theodor Mommsen. He paid his first trip to Rome in 1892 and remained in Western Europe until 1905, travelling extensively and producing his first two volumes of poetry. It was, though, his return to Russia that established his literary reputation. Alongside further volumes of poetry, he published essays and translations, and his St Petersburg salon became a meeting point for many members of the city's cultural elite between 1905 and 1912. Ivanov did not leave Russia immediately after the October Revolution, but by 1920 he had begun to explore the possibility of doing so. Initial attempts met with failure, and in November 1920, he was appointed to the chair in classical philology at Baku University. Only in 1924 did he finally receive permission to leave Soviet Russia on official business, having promised that he would not publish in émigré journals (Davidson, 2021: 103). He headed first to Rome, before taking up a teaching position in Pavia in 1926. He returned to Rome in 1935, dying there in 1949.

Ivanov's writings – both his poetry and his scholarship – are characterized by an eclectic and syncretic vision of world culture (Bird, 2006), which draws on his erudite command of sources as diverse as the German romantics and Friedrich Nietzsche (Wachtel, 1994), the poetry of Dante (Davidson, 1989) and the classical tradition (Murašov, 1999; Vestbruk, 2009). More than any other figure of the so-called 'Silver Age' (as the renaissance of Russian culture around the turn of the twentieth century is often known), Ivanov promoted an idealized form of cosmopolitan cultural practice that was inflected by a religious form of humanism transcending any particular sense of national identity. When he left Soviet Russia, therefore, he was not exchanging it for 'Russia Abroad'. As Ivanov had already spent so much of his life in Western Europe before the Revolution and felt himself such a part of its intellectual fabric, Rome represented for him a homecoming, not an emigration or even a state of exile.

Appropriately, then, the first of his *Rimskie sonety* sees Rome as a spiritual homeland:

Привѣтствую какъ сводь родного дома,  
Тебя, скитаний пристань, вѣчный Римъ. (Ivanov, 1936 [1924]: 178)

[I greet you, like the vault of my native home,  
Eternal Rome, refuge after many wanderings.]<sup>1</sup>

In the eighth and penultimate sonnet, Ivanov refers to the popular tradition of throwing a coin into the waters of the Trevi Fountain, according to which the traveller would eventually return to Rome:

О, сколько разъ, бѣглець невольный Рима,  
 Съ молитвой о возвратѣ въ часъ потребный  
 Я за плечо бросаль въ тебя монеты!  
 Сверхались договорные обѣты:  
 Счастливаго, какъ днесъ, фонтанъ волшебный,  
 Ты возвращаль святынямъ пилигрима. (Ivanov, 1936: 182)

[O, how many times, a fugitive from Rome against my will,  
 Praying that I might return at the proper hour,  
 Have I thrown coins over my shoulders into your waters!  
 Each time, vows once sworn would come to pass:  
 Like today, o enchanted fountain, you would bring back  
 The fortunate pilgrim to these holy places.]

This was not an uncommon sentiment for many displaced Russians, for whom emigration entailed a return to worlds already familiar from their pre-revolutionary lives. In theory, at least, the first generation of émigrés could re-establish prior intellectual and artistic affinities with their host cultures.

The process of the cycle's composition and publication reveals significant features of Ivanov's life outside Russia. The sonnets were composed in November and December 1924 and initially bore the title *Ave Roma* (Ivanov, 2011: 79). Ivanov hoped to publish the cycle in the Berlin-based journal, *Beseda (Colloquy)*, edited by Maksim Gor'kii and Vladislav Khodasevich and designed to host work by both Soviet and émigré writers (Ivanov, 2011: 81). This plan fell through, however, and for the next decade or so, individual sonnets appeared piecemeal in various venues. Italian verse translations of two of the sonnets were published in September 1930, and four of the sonnets and the final sestet of a fifth were cited in the original Russian in an article on Ivanov's lyric poetry by Il'ia Golenishchev-Kutuzov in 1930. In 1933, Ivanov published his own Italian prose versions of two of the sonnets, and the next year one was published in a German version by Dorothea Hiller von Gaertringen (Davidson, 2012: 146, 147, 153, 155). The complete cycle finally appeared in 1936 in the Paris-based émigré journal, *Sovremennye zapiski* (also known by its French name, *Annales contemporaines*), thus constituting Ivanov's formal repudiation of his promise not to publish in such venues.

Important posthumous publications (Deschartes, 1954: 76–80; Ivanov, 1962: 106–10; Ivanov, 1971–87: III, 578–82; Ivanov, 2011) have employed the reformed Russian script that was introduced after the October Revolution, yet throughout his life, Ivanov remained loyal to the pre-revolutionary orthography (which was retained in many émigré publications too, including *Sovremennye zapiski*). In a volume of essays on the Revolution that appeared in 1918, he spoke out against the spelling reforms, arguing that they were a betrayal of the profound cultural and historical roots of the Russian language:

Языкъ нашъ запечатлѣвается въ благолѣпныхъ письменахъ: измышляютъ новое, на видъ упрощенное, на дѣлѣ же болѣе затруднительное, – ибо менѣе отчетливое, какъ стертая монета, – правописание, которымъ нарушается преемственно сложившаяся соразмѣрность и законченность его начертательныхъ формъ, отражающая вѣрнымъ зеркаломъ его морфологическое строение. (Ivanov, 1918: 138)

[Our language is imprinted in the majesty of its characters: a new orthography is being devised, ostensibly simplified, yet actually more cumbersome – since it is less clear, like a worn coin – and this orthography destroys the continuous history of the commensurability and perfection of our language’s graphic forms, which reflect like a faithful mirror its morphological structure.]

Given the importance of language when it comes to Ivanov’s emphasis on the importance of continuity, community and cultural memory, the original orthography of the *Rimskie sonety* has been retained in this article. At the same time, the initial appearance of several of the sonnets in translation is evidence of Ivanov’s adherence to a shared vision of pan-European culture that could potentially efface national and linguistic borders. As a distinguished translator himself, at home in several European languages, Ivanov would surely have appreciated the fact that a number of the sonnets appeared first in languages other than Russian. Moreover, Hiller von Gaertringen was a trusted friend and colleague (she was married to the son of the classicist, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, with whom he had also studied in Berlin), and her translation attests to the ways in which Ivanov’s humanism was rooted in the cultivation of close personal relationships.

Yet for all their imbrication in the long history of European letters and scholarly learning, the *Rimskie sonety* can also be read as a work that betrays the emotional impact of exile. This particular interpretation of the cycle unfolds along three interrelated axes. First, the city figures as a recognizable locale, whose sites stir vivid and immediate aesthetic responses in the poet-*flâneur*. The contemporaneity of the poet’s impressions is juxtaposed with the cycle’s second axis, which is both historical and mythological in nature; the cityscape stimulates thoughts of Rome’s past glory, as well as broader meditations on the rise and fall of peoples, nations and empires. Finally, a third way of reading the poems emerges from their frequent allusions to the artists and writers whose legacy Ivanov discerns in the city and which form the foundation for a reading of the cycle in terms of its own metatextuality.

The order of the nine sonnets as finalized by Ivanov in 1936 traces a very specific route through the city.<sup>2</sup> In the first poem, ‘Regina Viarum’, the poet enters the city via the Appian Way. In the three sonnets that follow, he contemplates the Quirinale (‘Monte Cavallo’), passes by the fountain at the end of one of Rome’s principal aqueducts (‘L’Acqua Felice’), finally emerging at the bottom of the Spanish Steps (‘La Barcaccia’). From there, he makes his way back towards the Quirinale, stopping to admire Bernini’s fountain in Piazza Barberini (‘Il Tritone’), before heading to Piazza Mattei in the Sant’Angelo quarter (‘La Fontana delle Tartarughe’). In ‘Valle Giulia’, he finds himself in the Borghese gardens, before heading towards the Trevi Fountain (‘Aqua Virgo’). In the final sonnet (‘Monte Pincio’), the poet surveys the city at sunset, casting his eyes towards the dome of St Peter’s in the distance. As Judith E. Kalb argues, the poems not only recall everyday details of Ivanov’s life in the city (he lived on the Via delle Quattro Fontane, not far from ‘Il Tritone’), but also ‘convey the impression of an elite Baedeker guidebook’ (2008: 132). Throughout the cycle, his pleasure is evident, as in the final sestet of the fourth sonnet (‘La Barcaccia’):

Люблю домовъ оранжевый загаръ  
 И людныя межъ старыхъ стѣнъ тѣснины  
 И шорохъ пальмъ на ней въ полдневный жаръ;  
 А ночью темной вздохи каватины  
 И подѣ аккорды бархатныхъ гитаръ  
 Бродячей стрекотанье мандолины. (Ivanov, 1936: 180)

[I love the houses' sunburnt ochre glow  
 And the crush of people between the old walls  
 And the rustle of the palms in the midday heat;  
 And the sighs of a cavatina in the dark of night  
 And the chirrup of a roving mandolin,  
 Accompanied by chords of velvet guitars.]

The reference here to Rome's other inhabitants is rather out of keeping with the rest of the cycle, where the emphasis is on the poet's solitary communion with the city's fountains and other architectural features. By means of detailed ekphrastic renderings, Ivanov evokes both tangible objects and his reaction to them. In 'La Fontana delle Tartarughe', for instance, he gives a meticulous description of Taddeo Landini's mannerist fountain (1585), before devoting the final tercet to his own reflections:

И въ этой нѣгѣ лѣни и приволій  
 Твоихъ ловлю я праздничныхъ утѣхъ,  
 Твоихъ, Лоренцо, эхо меланхолій. (Ivanov, 1936: 181)

[And in this languid mood of laziness and ease  
 I catch the echo of your leisurely delights,  
 The echo of your melancholy thoughts, Lorenzo.]

The allusion here is to the Florentine statesman and patron, Lorenzo de' Medici (Landini began his career in Florence, before moving to Rome). Rome emerges both as a living, breathing site of contemporary life, and as a repository of historical references and aesthetic stimuli.

Ivanov's removal to Rome also incited reflections about the country he had left behind, and in the very first sonnet the October Revolution is likened to the destruction of Troy:

Мы Трою предковъ пламени даримъ;  
 Дробятся оси колесницъ межъ грома  
 И фурій мірового ипподрома:  
 Ты, царь путей, глядишь, какъ мы горимъ. (Ivanov, 1936: 178)

[We consign the Troy of our ancestors to flame;  
 The axles of the chariots splinter amidst the din  
 And fury of the world's hippodrome:]

You, king of all roads, watch on as we burn.]

Ivanov sees the death of pre-revolutionary Russia in apocalyptic terms, comparing it to the sack of Troy. Yet Ivanov's capacious historical vision allows him to see Troy's destruction – and, implicitly, that of Russia itself – as but a single event in a longer process of renewal and rebirth:

И ты пылалъ — и восставалъ изъ пепла,  
И памятливая голубизна  
Твоихъ небесъ глубокихъ не ослѣпла.  
И помнить въ ласкѣ золотого сна,  
Твой вратарь кипарисъ, какъ Троя крѣпла,  
Когда лежала Троя сожжена. (Ivanov, 1936: 178)

[And as you burned, so you rose up from the ashes,  
And the retentive blue  
Of your blue skies never grew blind.  
And embraced by golden sleep,  
The cypress, your custodian, recalls how Troy grew strong,  
Even as Troy lay in burning ruins.]

In the next sonnet, Ivanov refers to Castor and Pollux (also known as the Dioscuri), who were not only linked to the history of Troy (their sister was Helen), but were the object of a major Roman cult. The statue to the Dioscuri which stands in the Piazza del Quirinale watches over Rome (just as the constellation of Gemini watches down from the heavens):

И въ немъ остались до скончины міра.  
И юношей огромныхъ два кумира  
Не сдвинулись тысячелѣтъя съ мѣсть.  
И тамъ стоять, гдѣ стали изначала –  
Шести холмамъ, синѣющимъ окрестъ,  
Свѣтитъ звѣздой съ вершины Квиринала. (Ivanov, 1936: 179)

[There they remained until the end of the world.  
And the two idols of these massive youths  
Never moved from their places for millennia.  
And they stand there still, where once they used to stand –  
To shine like a star from the height of the Quirinale  
Over the six hills surrounded in blue haze.]

Elsewhere, oblique references to Virgil's *Aeneid* allude to the mythical continuity linking Troy and Rome, yet Ivanov situates the triumphant narrative of Aeneas's destiny within a broader understanding of the contingencies of the historical process and of the rise and fall

of empires (Kalb, 2008: 31). In the first sonnet, he had described how Rome ‘пылал – и восставал из пепла’ (‘as you burned, so you rose up from the ashes’). Here, he employs verbs in the imperfective aspect, which expresses incomplete, durative or frequentative action (Klimoff, 1986: 127–8). Hence, the previous translation of this phrase might also be rendered as ‘as you would burn, so each time you would rise up from the ashes’. From the vantage point of 1924, history is seen as a series of repetitions, rather than finite destinies – even, perhaps especially, the October Revolution (Ivanov is silent about the fact that Italy had been a Fascist state since 1922, although his daughter’s memoirs do record her impressions of the political climate of the period (Ivanova, 1990: 130, 132, 136)).

If, in the *Rimskie sonety*, history emerges as fragile and mutable, what grants the city its permanence is the religious spirit, as manifested in art. It is striking that Ivanov’s emphasis is on the architectural legacy of the popes, rather than the ancient Romans. Throughout the cycle, Ivanov’s evocative descriptions of fountains, statues and buildings are often wreathed in references to their creators. ‘Il Tritone’, for instance, is characterized by an extended intertextual dialogue between Ivanov and his precursors, as well as between the literary and visual modes of representing the city:

Бернини, — снова нашъ, — твоей игрой  
 Я веселюсь, отъ Четырехъ Фонтановъ  
 Бредя на Пинчю памятной горой,  
 Гдѣ въ келью Гоголя входилъ Ивановъ,  
 Гдѣ Пиранези огненной иглой  
 Пѣль Рима грусть и зодчество Титановъ. (Ivanov, 1936: 180–1)

[Bernini – ours anew – I revel  
 In your play, as I wander from Quattro Fontane  
 Towards the Pincio by way of that memorable hill,  
 Where Ivanov used to visit Gogol’ in his cell,  
 Where Piranesi, with his fiery needle,  
 Sang the sadness of Rome and the architecture of Titans.]

While in the other poems, the reader is implicitly required to supply the names of the artists and architects associated with the city, here their identities are revealed. Bernini is, of course, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, the sculptor and architect most famous for his baroque refashioning of Rome in the seventeenth century (he had been tacitly addressed in the previous sonnet, ‘La Barcaccia’, designed by Bernini and his father, Pietro). The other Italian artist is Giovanni Piranesi, most famous for his eighteenth-century etchings of Rome, which had conveyed the spirit of the city to those unable to visit in person. These Italian figures are paired with Russian doubles. Ivanov is the poet’s namesake, the nineteenth-century painter, Aleksandr Ivanov, who had lived in the city between 1837 and 1857, where he created his most famous work, a vast canvas entitled *Iavlenie Khrista narodu* (*The Appearance of Christ to the People*). He was frequently attended by the writer, Nikolai Gogol’, who himself lived in Rome between 1836 and 1848, and who wrote appreciatively of what he saw as Ivanov’s spiritual masterpiece (Davidson, 2013). In this sonnet, as in the cycle as a whole, Ivanov’s affection for Rome is motivated by his sense that the city represents a very particular fusion of

Italian and Russian cultural narratives. His removal to the city in 1924 not only marks a personal homecoming to a city he knew well, but also evokes a prior series of transnational artistic encounters.

In this regard, the sonnet proves to be the ideal form with which to celebrate the city, while also contemplating the nature of literal and linguistic displacement. In the *Rimskie sonety*, Ivanov employs the Petrarchan sonnet, with its division into an octet and a sestet. Yet Ivanov's topic is not the classically Petrarchan theme of love (at least in its human form), but the evocation of both a city and its layered history. The intertextual reference here is, in fact, to Joachim Du Bellay's sequence, *Les Antiquités de Rome* (1558) (Rebhorn, 1980), which had created 'an image of a city, both as a literal entity and as a metonym for empire' (Katz, 1979: 12). Just as Du Bellay assimilated the Petrarchan sonnet into French, so too does Ivanov actualize the semantic potential of the form to explore similar themes in the twentieth century, this time through the Russian language. Yet Ivanov did not simply 'domesticize' this European form into his native language; his handling of it is imbued with an inherent multilingualism that reveals its origins in the act of translation itself. The *Rimskie sonety* make extensive use of macaronic rhyme, putting Roman names and toponyms into dialogue with items of Russian vocabulary (Klimoff, 1986: 126). Throughout, Ivanov makes full use of the flexibility of Russian word order to evoke a kind of syntax that feels decidedly Latinate. In Ivanov's short sequence, the sonnet comes to represent a mobile, transnational literary form, ideally suited for conveying his deeply held humanistic beliefs about the continuities of European culture across time and space.

### Grechaninov and the *Sonetti Romani*

Born in Moscow in 1864 (just two years before Ivanov), Grechaninov studied first at the Moscow Conservatory, before transferring to the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1890. He returned to Moscow in 1896, where he remained until after the October Revolution. Feeling increasingly ill at ease in Soviet Russia, he settled in Paris in 1925. Between the wars, he made a number of trips to the United States, relocating there permanently in 1939. He died in New York in 1956. Best known for his pieces for children, orchestral works, scores for the stage and choral music, Grechaninov also left behind a substantial body of songs (Pastukhov, 1952; Pluzhnikov, 1988: 110–39).

Ivanov knew Grechaninov personally and admired his music. The admiration was mutual; in 1915, for instance, Grechaninov set three of Ivanov's poems to music as his triptych, *U krinitsy (By the Well)*, op. 73, and included two of Ivanov's original poems, as well as a translation of Byron, in his *Shest' romansov (Six Romances)*, op. 74 (1916) (Dmitriev, 2013). The first three stanzas of a poem dedicated by Ivanov to Grechaninov in 1919 evoke the creative affinity between composer and poet, as well as a shared sense of Russian identity:

Твоя душа, вся звон и строй  
 Моей душе сродни,  
 И дни, когда ты пел со мной, —  
 тмеченные дни.  
 Напевный лад, что ты с мечтой

Моею обручал,  
 Кропил меня живой росой  
 И колосом венчал.  
 В твоих угодиях роса  
 И колос наливной;  
 В твоих напевах голоса  
 Земли моей родной. (Ivanov, 1971–87: IV, 83)

[Your soul, all sound and shapeliness,  
 Is akin to my soul,  
 And the days when you sang with me  
 Are days of note.  
 The melodious mode, which you  
 Wedded to my dream,  
 Aspersed me with living dew  
 And crowned me with a sheaf of wheat.  
 In your pastures are dew  
 And plump wheat;  
 In your melodies are the voices  
 Of my native land.]

Here, images of nature suggest that Grechaninov's music is somehow organically tied not just to the nation, but to the land itself. Formally, his use of alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter lend this poem a rustic, folkloric quality.

Ivanov's sentiments would surely have been shared by Grechaninov, who saw his own music as a spontaneous and uncomplicated expression of an essential Russianness. Even in emigration, he emphasized the role played by music in sustaining a spirit of nationalism:

Некоторые русские писатели за границей жалуется, что, будучи оторванными от родной почвы, они не могут творить. У меня этого не было. Наоборот. Я много здесь работал, и в сочинениях моих, написанных здесь, как будто ещё более чувствуется моя русская природа, чем в прежних, написанных дома. Здесь издали я ещё острее чувствую всё русское и ощущаю глубже свою любовь и привязанность к родине. (Grechaninov, 1951: 139)

[Some Russian writers abroad complain that they cannot continue their creative work away from their native soil. I never experienced this difficulty. Quite the contrary: I have worked productively abroad, and my compositions of this period are imbued with the Russian spirit to an even greater degree than the music I wrote in Russia. Here, from afar, I feel more intimately all things Russian, and my love and attachment to my native land grows ever deeper.] (Grechaninov, 1952: 150, translation modified)

Other figures from within the emigration concurred with this view, not least Nicolas Slonimsky, the translator of the American edition of the composer's memoirs:

In the second half of the twentieth century, Gretchaninoff is the last living link with the traditional music of Great Russia. During his thirty years of emigration, in Paris and in New York, he has remained a Russian in his heart, and a Russian in his music. He says himself that his feeling for the Russian folkways is even more pronounced, more intense, in his self-exile from Russia than it was when he was a Russian composer in Russia. Like the historical patriots who carried a handful of native earth with them into foreign lands, Gretchaninoff preserves a spiritual parcel of Russia wherever he makes his residence. (Slonimsky, 1952: 1)

Like many émigrés, Grechaninov saw his task as the preservation of traditional Russian culture, both from the influence of the host culture (first France, then the United States), and from the ideological impact of Soviet politics. Yet this account overlooks the diverse range of sources that characterized Grechaninov's output, especially in the first decades of the twentieth century. In 1909, for instance, he set five of Charles Baudelaire's poems from *Les Fleurs du mal* to music (Abbott, 2017: 114–31), and his opera based on Maurice Maeterlinck's *Sœur Béatrice* (1908–10) ran into problems with ecclesiastical censorship when it was briefly staged in 1912. His catholic literary tests extended further too, as in his five *Pesni Gafiza* (*Songs of Hafiz*) of 1916 (Bullock, 2021: 52–3, 59). His musical language – sometimes dismissed as derivative or even epigonic – might more generously be interpreted as a highly characteristic instance of the syncretism and cosmopolitanism of the Russian Silver Age, and hence an ideal foil for Ivanov's equally receptive literary muse.

The extent of Grechaninov's interactions with Ivanov in the 1920s and 1930s remains unclear. The poet's daughter, Lidiia – a trained musician and composer, who had studied with Ottorino Respighi in Rome (Ivanova, 1990: 142–8) – visited Paris in the summer of 1927, and her letters to her father paint a vivid account of life in the city, with a particular emphasis on the musical affairs of the Russian emigration (Shishkin, 2020). She played some of Grechaninov's songs to friends (2020: 181), but it is unknown whether she met the composer or not. It is known, however, that Grechaninov visited the Ivanov family in Rome in the winter of 1938. By February 1939, Grechaninov had set two of the *Rimskie sonety* to music (Grechaninov, 2017: II, 204–5), and Lidiia performed them for her father, who was delighted by them. By March, Grechaninov had set three more to music (Grechaninov, 2017: II, 205–6), although the score is actually datelined 'Paris, 1940'. According to *The Times* (Anon., 1940), the five songs – performed by Tat'iana Makushina – were broadcast by the BBC Home Service on 14 February 1940. The score – in which the words are given in both the pre-revolutionary Russian orthography and equimetrical English singing translation – was not published until after the Second World War (Grechaninov, 1949 [1939]).<sup>3</sup>

Grechaninov's songs certainly gave Ivanov's poems an afterlife in music, conveying them to audiences very different from the émigré readership of *Sovremennye zapiski*. Yet the selection and order of the poems he chose to set to music represent a rather different narrative to the one proposed in the cycle's first publication in 1936. Grechaninov suppressed the first three of Ivanov's sonnets entirely ('Regina Viarum', 'Monte Cavallo' and 'L'Acqua Felice'), as well as the seventh ('Valle Giulia'). The remaining five are then ordered as follows:

1. 'Piazza di Spagna' (IV, 'La Barcaccia', in Ivanov)
2. 'Fontana della Tartaruga' (VI, 'La Fontana delle Tartarughe', in Ivanov)

3. 'Triton' (V, 'Il Tritone', in Ivanov)
4. 'Il Tramontare del Sole al Pincio' (IX, 'Monte Pincio', in Ivanov)
5. 'Fontana Trevi' (VIII, 'Acqua Virgo', in Ivanov)

Grechaninov's decision to omit the first two of Ivanov's sonnets means that his cycle dispenses with much of the reflective historicism of Ivanov's original. In choosing to open the cycle with 'Piazza di Spagna' instead, Grechaninov responds more directly to the immediacy of Ivanov's evocation of modern-day Rome, and by replacing Ivanov's original title – 'La Barcaccia' – with the more familiar name of the square itself, he evokes a more touristic, less obviously philological vision of the Italian capital. The appeal of this poem also surely rests on its explicit allusions to music in its final tercet ('And the sighs of a cavatina in the dark of night / And the chirrup of a roving mandolin, / Accompanied by chords of velvet guitars'). The importance of sound runs through the next two sonnets. In 'La Fontana delle Tartarughe', the poet seems to catch an echo of the past, which in turn justifies Grechaninov's musical adaptation of Ivanov's verse. And in 'Triton', Grechaninov seizes on the idea of sound, translating it into his own musical response to Ivanov's poem:

Двустворку на хвостах клубок дельфиний  
 Разверстой вынесь; в ней растеть Тритонь,  
 Трубить въ улиту; но не зычный тонь,  
 Струя лучомъ пронзаеть воздухъ синий. (Ivanov, 1936: 180)

[On their tails, a tangle of dolphins bears aloft  
 A gaping mollusc shell; upon it arises Triton,  
 Blowing into a giant snail; no strident tone,  
 It penetrates the blue air, radiating light.]

Throughout, the impact of Ivanov's already sonorous verse is heightened by the fluency of Grechaninov's musical language, whose trills, arpeggios and broken chords course and gush as effortlessly as water itself.

In each of these cases, Grechaninov responds to something latent in Ivanov's poetry, while adapting it for his own creative purposes. However, he made one very significant departure from the original structure of the *Rimskie sonety*. As published in *Sovremennye zapiski* in 1936, Ivanov had closed his cycle with 'Monte Pincio'. Here, the poet abandons the approach taken in the preceding sonnets, which had concentrated on detailed evocations of the city's sights. Now Ivanov ascends the hill by the Borghese Gardens, from where he gazes across the city towards the dome of St Peter's:

Зеркальному подобна морю слава  
 Огнистаго небеснаго расплава,  
 Гдѣ таетъ дискъ и тонеть исполинъ.  
 Ослѣпшими перстами лучъ ощупаль  
 Верхъ пинии, и глазъ потухъ. Одинъ,  
 На золотѣ кружится синий Куполь. (Ivanov, 1936: 183)

[The glory of the molten fiery heavens  
 Is like the shining surface of the sea,  
 Where the sun's disc melts and the giant sinks.  
 With blind fingers, the dying ray  
 Reached out to sense the pine tops, and vision grew dim. Alone,  
 The blue Dome stands out against the gold.]

The poem offers an apocalyptic vision of the city at the close of day, echoing the cycle's emphasis elsewhere on the rise and fall of empires. It is also a prophetic image: two years later, in 1926, Ivanov would convert to Eastern Rite Catholicism, and this evocation of the Vatican can be read as another of the cycle's instances of homecoming. Here, the city gives rise to an explicitly religious epiphany, in which Christianity takes on the mantle of Rome's valency as a symbol of the supposed universality of European identity.

Ivanov's conclusion is a powerful and moving one, deftly fusing the mythic and the personal into a single moment of religious insight. And there are affinities with some of Grechaninov's other compositions of the second half of the 1930s too. In pre-revolutionary Russia, he had written works for use during the liturgy of the Orthodox Church. In emigration, however, he turned his attention to the Catholic rite, producing his *Missa Oecumenica* in 1935 and *Missa Festiva* in 1936 (Yasser, 1942). As Grechaninov was writing the *Sonetti Romani*, he was also composing his mass for women's or children's voices and organ, and he enclosed a copy of this work with the score of the sonnets that he sent to Ivanov in March 1939 (Grechaninov, 2017: II, 205). Just as Grechaninov's masses form the backdrop to the composition of the *Sonetti Romani*, so too do his ecclesiastic compositions constitute an important point of contact with Ivanov's own conversion to Catholicism, which never entailed a renunciation of his interest in Russian Orthodoxy, forming instead part of his longstanding commitment to a transnational form of European humanism (Wang, 2016).

In a letter to Lidiia Ivanova, Grechaninov confessed that his setting of 'Monte Pincio' was 'мое любимое дитя' ('my favourite child') (2017: II, 206). Yet Grechaninov chose not to conclude his cycle with this sonnet, with its meditation on the close of day and premonition of Ivanov's religious conversion. Rather, the composer placed his setting of this sonnet in fourth position, concluding instead with Ivanov's joyous depiction of the Trevi Fountain (again replacing the poet's original title – 'Acqua Virgo' – with something more familiar to the general listener). Ending *fortissimo* in the radiant key of B major, this latter song certainly makes for an ebullient and dramatic end to the cycle in performance.<sup>4</sup> It may also have a personal narrative of its own. For Grechaninov, Rome represents not so much a homecoming, as it had done for Ivanov in 1924, but a moment of new departure. The practice of tossing coins into the fountain, which had brought Ivanov back to a city where he had spent so much time before his eventual emigration from Soviet Russia, here becomes a hopeful gesture of a composer facing a second exile, this time from a Europe on the verge of the Second World War.

## Volta

By any account, Ivanov's poetry can seem dense, complex and challenging. It is rich in literary and mythological allusions, its vocabulary can be archaic and recondite, and its handling of syntax is clearly influenced by classical models. Yet, like many Russian symbolists, Ivanov was equally drawn to the idea of music, whether as a metaphor for the ineffable and the metaphysical, as a way of investing everyday language with heightened artistic form, or as an art form of powerful emotional immediacy (Dudek, 2018). Viewed in the light of such ideas, Grechaninov's songs represent less a response to the content of Ivanov's poetry, than an extension of its means. Grechaninov brings out less the scholarly force of Ivanov's meditations on history and the fate of nations than the immediacy of the poet's responses to the sights and sounds of the Eternal City. Rome provides sustenance for the mind, just as it stimulates the poet's sensory perception, and it is to the latter that Grechaninov's music most obviously attends.

In 'L'Acqua Felice', for instance, Ivanov explicitly evokes the sound of water:

То плещеть звонко въ кладязь саркофага;  
 То бьеть въ лазурь столбомъ и вдаль, дробима,  
 Прохладу зыблетъ; то, неукротима,  
 Потоки рушить съ мраморнаго прага.  
 Ея журчаньемъ узкій переулокъ  
 Волшебнo оживлень; и хороводы  
 Окрестъ нея ведутъ морскіе боги[.] (Ivanov, 1936: 179)

[Now, it plashes noisily into the sarcophagus's well;  
 Now, in a single column, it strikes the azure sky, before scattering far off  
 And ruffling the cool air; and now, untamed,  
 Sets streams running from the marble threshold.  
 Its babbling brings the narrow lane  
 Magically to life; and around it, sea gods  
 Go about their round dances.]

Elsewhere, as in 'Valle Giulia', Ivanov's persistent interest in sight – a consequence of his use of ekphrasis – is accompanied by an equally intense appeal to sound:

Взирають такъ, съ улыбкою печальной,  
 Блаженные на насъ, какъ на платанъ  
 Увядшій солнце. Плещеть звонъ хрустальный:  
 Струя къ лучу стремить зыбучій станъ.  
 И въ глади опрокинуты зеркальной  
 Асклепій, клень, и небо, и фонтанъ. (Ivanov, 1936: 182)

[The blessed gaze upon us, smiling sadly,  
 Just as the sun gazes upon a wilted plane tree.  
 Crystalline sound splashes:  
 The rippling form strives upwards, surging towards the light.

And on the mirrored surface are overturned  
Asclepius, maple, sky and fountain.]

At such moments, Ivanov's sonnets appeal directly to the senses, and his frequent use of alliteration and assonance takes on a sensuous quality that is well captured in Grechaninov's fluent and expressive musical settings.

In an early review of the first publication of Ivanov's sonnets, Khodasevich praised the cycle precisely because it embodied the vivid emotional truthfulness that he identified as one of Ivanov's greatest gifts, and which served as a counterweight to his scholarly learning:

Вячеслава Иванова, как поэта, нельзя ни понять, ни оценить, не почувствовав органической слитности мысли и чувства в его творчестве. Самая эрудиция этого человека, совершенно поразительного объемом и глубиной познаний, служит для него источником не только умозрений, но и живых, реальных переживаний. (Khodasevich, 1936: 9)

[One can neither understand nor appreciate Viacheslav Ivanov as a poet without feeling the organic fusion of thought and feeling in his works. This very erudition of this man, quite remarkable for the breadth and depth of his knowledge, provides him with a source not just of thoughts, but also of living, real feelings.]

We are, as it were, closer to the sensuous realm of Goethe's *Römische Elegien* (*Roman Elegies*, 1795) than to the finely wrought intellectualism of Rilke's Roman 'Dingedichte' (Vilain, 2019). Listening to Grechaninov's music, then, we can allow history and posterity to fall away, even if only for a moment, and imagine ourselves instead as witnesses both to Ivanov's daily life in Rome in late 1924, as well as to Grechaninov's impressions of the city in the winter of 1938, forgetting the ruptures brought about by the First World War and the October Revolution, as well as the atmosphere of menace that presaged the Second World War. Emigration and exile can certainly be profoundly disruptive, even traumatic experiences, yet Ivanov's *Rimskie sonety* and Grechaninov's *Sonetti Romani* attest to the moving ingenuity of human creativity in the face of history's violent deprivations, as well as to ways in which art can operate outside the categories of the nation to create new narratives of continuity and belonging.

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### Notes

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
- 2 When the cycle was first published, Ivanov suppressed the titles given to the individual sonnets, replacing them with Roman numerals; for ease of reference – and because of the

importance of particular locations to an understanding of the cycle – these titles have been retained here.

- 3 Although the score bears a copyright date of 1949, Grechaninov's correspondence suggests that the *Sonetti Romani* did not in fact appear in print until 1951 (2017: II, 349 and 405).
- 4 Although Grechaninov is unlikely to have known it, Ivanov's original manuscript draft of the *Rimskie sonety* had placed 'Monte Pincio' in second position, meaning that the cycle concluded with 'Aqua Virgo'. It was only later that 'Monte Pincio' was moved to the end of the cycle, where its prophetic, philosophical tone speaks more clearly. The manuscript is held in the Viacheslav Ivanov archive in Rome and is reproduced at: [www.v-ivanov.it/archiv/op1-k05-p01-06.htm](http://www.v-ivanov.it/archiv/op1-k05-p01-06.htm).

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