

# VIACHESLAV IVANOV'S "ALPINE HORN" AS A MANIFESTO OF RUSSIAN SYMBOLISM<sup>1</sup>

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Viacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov (1866–1949) has been called “the most ‘orthodox’ of the creators and followers of symbolist aesthetic theory, so to say, the most symbolist of the symbolists” (Averintsev 6), “the theorist *par excellence* of the Russian symbolist movement,” and someone “alone in producing a sufficiently coherent aesthetic for it to be possible to distinguish clearly the legacy of the father of Russian symbolism [Vladimir Soloviev]” (West 201 and 106, resp.). Victor Terras and others have noted that Ivanov’s first collection of poetry, *Kormchie zvezdy* (*Lodestars*, 1903), is a rich mirror of Ivanov’s “structured philosophy” (Terras 211) of symbolist art. In this article I would like to draw attention to one poem in *Kormchie zvezdy* that, though it has received little attention, has been characterized as “programmatically [*programmnoe*]” (Averintsev 39) and allegoric (Terras 215), and, it seems to me, distills in concentrated form much of that philosophy. Moreover, the poem is particularly useful for presenting the complex, erudite thought of Russian Symbolism’s most important theoretician in a convenient, accessible way.<sup>2</sup> While the manifesto as a well-defined genre related to literature was not to surface for nearly another decade in the context of Italian and Russian Futurism, Ivanov’s poem “Alpine Horn [*Al’piiskii rog*]” can be looked at both as a statement of principles and as an illustration of those principles in action, not unlike the typical manifesto. Of course, many articles and poems by Ivanov and other symbolists are statements of principles of one kind or another, and Wanner (155, 159) has even applied the term “manifesto” to two of Ivanov’s translations of Baudelaire, so the use of the term in the present case is not meant to imply that the “Alpine Horn” is unique in this regard.<sup>3</sup>

	Agent	Instrument	Statement	Response
Level 1	shepherd	horn [ <i>rog</i> ]	song	echo
Level 2	choir of spirits	unearthly instruments	speech of the heavens	thought
Level 3	poet-author	words	statement A (lines 13-15)	statement B (lines 17-19)
Level 4	(statement A)	genius	song of earth	another song in hearts
Level 5	(statement B)	Nature=Symbol	sounding	God [ <i>Bog</i> ]

This schema is laid out to follow the sequence of levels as presented in the poem, though it is more symmetrical in its appearance than the corresponding elements are in the text itself. The poem begins with a concrete situation: a shepherd blows an alpine horn in the mountains, producing a resonant echo (Level 1). In a pattern of statement and response, each response in turn generates a new statement on a higher level of abstraction or generality. Thus the first response (the echo) produces or is interpreted as a fairly standard simile. Since, by the laws of acoustics, the echo of the original horn note would return purified of many of its overtones, it can be compared to the purified sound of a spiritual chorus playing spiritual instruments. On Level 3, the poet, again in the concrete situation of Level 1, reflects on the significance of the first part of the poem and produces a statement (A) that draws out the symbolic meaning of what he has just experienced. This in turn is echoed, as in Level 2, by an answering voice with statement B, which gives the poet's words yet a higher and more general meaning. Strictly speaking, Levels 4 and 5 are contained within Level 3, but each of the two quoted statements also contains within itself the same paradigm of statement and response. However, on Levels 4 and 5 the agent is not specified and is perhaps conflated with the instrument.

The schema also highlights several peculiarities of the imagery in the poem. First, on Level 4 the term "genius" is applied as a simile to the horn itself, rather than, as might be expected, to the shepherd. The musician-artist is seen as functioning as one with his instrument in the poem; the instrument is the voice of the artist. By constructing the simile as he does, Ivanov says in effect that genius is more a channel for the song than the originator of it. In this connection, Ivanov considers genius to be not the capacity to create a new reality, but the capacity rather to see reality as it truly

spirits on Level 2, and these spirits serve as both echo and agent, so perhaps the same is true of the “answering voice.” Implicitly here the breath of an unspecified musician causes Nature to “sound,” thus eliciting a Divine echo and theurgically causing God to appear. In a certain sense, liturgical rituals are intended to do the same thing. However, in keeping with the symbolist concept of theurgy, Ivanov shifts agency from the priest to the artist.<sup>11</sup>

This level of the poem also relates to Ivanov’s theory of “realistic symbolism” later elaborated in his essay “Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism” (“Dve stikhii v sovremennom simvolizme”) [1908]. He contrasts it with “idealistic symbolism”:

For realistic symbolism, the symbol is the goal of artistic discovery: each thing, inasmuch as it is a concealed reality, is already a symbol; the more deep and the less analyzable in its final content it is, the more direct and close is the communion between this thing and absolute reality. For idealistic symbolism the symbol, being only a means of artistic depiction, is no more than a signal that is supposed to establish communication between individual consciousnesses. In realistic symbolism, the symbol is of course also a beginning point linking separate consciousnesses, but their ecumenical [*sobornoe*] unity is achieved by a common mystical contemplation of the objective essence that is one for all. (SS 2: 552)

The poem expresses this effort to reach “realistic symbolism” in which humanity is united in its vision of Nature as a symbolic embodiment of the Divine.<sup>12</sup>

Alternately, one could interpret the concluding statement in the poem as indicating that God and Nature vibrate in consonance with each other. The last line seems to suggest this view and to consecrate those who can perceive the musical consonance of Nature and God. An additional peculiarity is that this answering statement apparently does not come from God directly, but from some other, unnamed source “from beyond the mountains” (perhaps Sophia as the channel of divine wisdom?). Of course, since Nature includes the mountains themselves, this echo-response must logically come from beyond them.

It is also important to note that one level of meaning in the poem does not replace the preceding one, but is added to it. In other words, all five levels remain operative at the same time in a grand symbolic simultaneity from the lowest individual level of the shepherd and his horn to the highest in which all Nature is a symbol of the divine. This is implicitly in keeping with Ivanov’s dictum “a realibus ad realiora,” since the “more real” does not replace or deny the “real,” but rather is an extension or intensification of it. The following passage from “Mysli o simvolizme” [1912] (SS 2: 611–12) is especially relevant to the poem:

It is more characteristic of symbolism to depict the earthly, than the heavenly: for this what is important is not the force of the sound, but the strength of the response [*otzvuka*]. A realibus ad realiora. Per realia ad realiora. Genuine symbolism does not tear itself away from the

*simvol*],”<sup>16</sup> Ivanov makes it clear that *prekhodiashchee*=*priroda* and *podobie*=*simvol*.<sup>17</sup> Implicit in this reference is an important element of Ivanov’s worldview that is otherwise missing in the poem, namely “The Eternal Feminine,” which is presented in the concluding lines of *Faust*: “Das Ewig-Weibliche / Zieht uns hinan.” This reference links the poem to the Sophiology of Vladimir Soloviev.<sup>18</sup>

Among other intertexts to the poem are Pushkin’s poem “Ekho” [1831], Tiutchev’s poem “Silentium” [1830], Lermontov’s poem “Angel” [1831], and the Psalms and the Sermon on the Mount. In the Pushkin poem an echo attends all sounds and immediately responds (“*Na vsiakii zvuk / Svoi otklik v vozdukhe pustom / Rodish’ ty vdrug*”) [For every sound / Your response in empty air / You suddenly produce]. But this eager response does not receive a reply (“*Tebe zh net otzyva. . .*” [To you though there is no response]), nor does the poet receive one (“*Takov / I ty, poet!*”) [Such / Are you, poet!]). The poet responds to his world, but he receives no reaction from his audience in return. Ivanov’s poem has been seen as a corrective to this pessimistic view.<sup>19</sup> Among other Pushkin poems that deal with the special role of the divinely inspired poet and his mission to transfer his inspiration to his audience one can mention “The Prophet” [*Prorok*, 1826], “Poet” [1827], and “The Poet and the Crowd” [*Poet i tolpa*, 1828].

The link to the Tiutchev poem is the word *neizrechenno* (unutterably) in line 9, and its inevitable association with Tiutchev’s famous line “*Mysl’ izrechennaia est’ lozh*” (An uttered thought is a lie).<sup>20</sup> Tiutchev’s point is that our deepest thoughts cannot be expressed adequately in speech and therefore should best be left unspoken. The last stanza of the poem in literal translation reads:

Know how to live only in yourself –  
There is a whole world in your soul  
Of mysteriously magical thoughts;  
External noise will muffle them,  
Daytime rays will drive them away, –  
Attend to their singing – and be silent! . .

The poet’s attending to his innermost song is not unlike the dialogue in Ivanov’s poem, where the poet’s quoted statement (lines 13–15) is also thought, not spoken, and receives a response that, while literally described as coming from an external source, could well be coming from within the poet’s own soul. In many other Tiutchev poems, the poet is also receptive to the message of the cosmos, but, in contrast to Ivanov, this situation often occurs at night and the message is usually of chaos and storminess, but also of harmony, as in the poem “*Pevuchest’ est’ v morskikh volnakh*” (There is songfulness in the waves of the sea [1865]):

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent  
 Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité  
 Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,  
 Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se repondent.

(Nature is a temple where living pillars/Sometimes let confused words come forth;/Man passes here through a forest of symbols/Which observe him with familiar looks.//Like long echoes which are mixed in the distance/With a shadowy and deep unity/Vast as the night and the light./Perfumes, colors and sounds respond to each other.)

In his essay "Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism," Ivanov too identifies the Baudelaire poem as "recognized by the pioneers of recent symbolism as the fundamental doctrine and as though a confessional statement of faith for the new poetic school" (SS 2: 547), and he allies Baudelaire with his program of "realistic symbolism" in which the symbol is not merely a signal of a higher reality, but "a revelation of what the artist sees as reality in the crystal of lower reality" (557). In other words, the artist does not change or distort the perception of the object, but rather: "Being purely perceptive in relation to his object, the artist-realist sets as his task the undiluted reception of the object into his soul and the conveyance of it to another soul" (540). In this regard, Ivanov finds Baudelaire, in the conclusion of "Correspondances," too focused on subjective perception and lacking in the crystalline communication of the mysterious essence of the object (550). As Wanner (145) notes, "Although Ivanov did not extend his condemnation of French symbolism to Baudelaire, whom he respected and translated into Russian, his attitude toward the latter was nevertheless ambiguous and not free of a certain deep-seated mistrust," primarily because of Baudelaire's focus on the sensual aspects of nature in the latter part of the poem.<sup>26</sup> It is perhaps for this reason that Ivanov chose not to include "Correspondances" among those he translated.<sup>27</sup> In his discussion of Ivanov and "Correspondances," Wanner also introduces the notion of "the dichotomy between 'vertical' and 'horizontal' correspondences, which has become a commonplace of French literary criticism" (147). In the Baudelaire poem, the vertical correspondences are those in the early lines of the poem (which Ivanov approved of), while the sensual associations are "horizontal" (and condemned by Ivanov). In this regard, the correspondences in "Alpine Horn" can all be seen as vertical.

Since the Ivanov poem focuses on sonic symbolism, one is somewhat surprised to note that it is basically unrhymed, i.e., blank verse, a relatively infrequent form in Russian versification, though with an important tradition in nineteenth-century Russia, predominantly in Russian verse drama. Perhaps because of its association with the dramatic monologue, blank

(ecumenism) and symbolism as a religion has to be read into the final line of the poem. But since Ivanov's essays began to appear only in 1904, "Alpine Horn," for all its brevity, can be given the status of Ivanov's earliest signal statement of a symbolist orientation.

Evidence for its signal status is provided by Mikhail Kuzmin, who, in articulating a reaction against symbolist doctrines in 1912, singles out "Alpine Horn" for the following comment "not without sarcasm":

And characteristic is the poem from *Kormchie zvezdy*, where perhaps the tourist is captivated also by the echo, forgetting about the horn, but from the viewpoint of music and art what is important is only *those sounds* which the horn emits, while the touching impressions of the natural echo are not appropriate for consideration.<sup>33</sup>

As Kac and Timenchik, the authors of the book where Kuzmin is quoted, note:

With the italics Kuzmin was decisively separating the real musical sounds, the sounds of nature and their symbolist interpretation as echoes of the cosmic elements. And the point here is not that Kuzmin had studied at the Conservatory, but that he was polemicalizing with the symbolist worldview, juxtaposing to a picture of the world "wrapped in a colored fog" a different picture, one illuminated by "excellent clarity." (Kac and Timenchik 86)

In other words, "Alpine Horn" was seen as a reference point in Russian symbolism to be reacted against by the newer generation of post-symbolists.

## NOTES

- 1 This article is dedicated to Vladimir Fedorovich Markov, whose presentation of "*Al'piiskii rog*" as the initial poem in the Ivanov section in Markov and Sparks (1967:130) first drew my attention to the poem. I would also like to express my gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers of the article for SEEJ and posthumously to the journal's editor Stephen L. Baehr for their many valuable suggestions on how to improve this study.
- 2 A similar approach is taken by Venclova in regard to another Ivanov poem, though with a somewhat different focus. There, in passing, he also refers to "Alpine Horn": "Language turns out to be an echo, *otgul* ("reverberation") of other remote worlds, of another suprapersonal horizon of meanings; this theme is among those most fundamental to Ivanov (cf. e.g. the well-known poem 'The Alpine Horn' [*Al'piiskij rog*] of 1902)." (Jackson and Nelson 119–20)
- 3 Notably, S. Dzhimbinov includes both essays by Merezhkovsky, Balmont, Briusov, Bely and Ivanov, and poems by Soloviev and Briusov in his anthology *Literaturnye manifesty ot simvolizma do nashikh dnei* (2000). "Alpine Horn" is included as the epigraph to "Mysli o simvolizme." However, the earliest symbolist poem-manifesto included is Soloviev's "Milyi drug, il' ty ne vidish'" (1892), which in its three quatrains argues that the visible, the audible and the palpable, respectively, are only reflections of the other world.
- 4 Cited using the text and punctuation of its first publication in Ivanov 1903: 178–79), but with modernized orthography; also Ivanov 1974 [hereafter: SS] 1: 606, where, however, there is an erroneous period at the end of line 14. The space between lines 12 and 13 is as in the first publication, where it serves nicely to divide the poem into two parts according

It should also be noted that transparency is a visual concept and in its Russian etymology (through-seeing) is closely related to clairvoyance. For Ivanov, this unity in transparency distinguishes a symbol from an allegory (“[A symbol] is even a kind of monad, and thereby differs from the complex and divisible structure of an allegory, fable or simile. Allegory is paraphrase [*inoskazanie*]; a symbol is index [*ukazanie*]. Allegory is logically limited and internally immobile; a symbol has a soul and internal development. It lives and regenerates.” “Poet i chern” [1904] (SS 1: 713). On symbol and allegory in Ivanov see Holthusen, 46–48. While Terras (see above) has characterized “Alpine Horn” as an allegory, my argument is that it succeeds in becoming a symbol.

- 14 See “Dve stikhii v sovremennom simbolizme” [1908], SS 2: 536–61, esp. 552–54.
- 15 Schopenhauer, Vol. I section 52; Paul Verlaine, “Art poétique,” *Jadis et Naguère* [1884], which, by the way, has also been characterized as “a manifesto for the Symbolists” (Verlaine 1948: 222). The first line of the Verlaine poem, “De la musique avant toute chose,” became a Symbolist slogan and was frequently quoted by Ivanov and other Russian Symbolists. As an example from Ivanov: “The main benefit of decadence, as an art of the intimate, in the realm of poetry was the simple, and at the same time extremely complicated and subtle matter of recent poets distinguishing poetry from ‘literature’ (recalling Verlaine’s ‘de la musique avant toute chose . . .’) and joining it again as an equal member and sister to the round-dance of the arts: music, painting, sculpture, dance” [1908] (SS 3: 75). For connections between Schopenhauer and *Kormchie zvezdy* see Terras 211–18.
- 16 Ivanov, “Gete na rubezhe dvukh stoletii” (SS 4: 137). Ivanov gives no clue as to the source of the Schelling quotation and I have not been able to locate it.
- 17 SS 4: 137. Ivanov in “Dve stikhii v sovremennom simbolizme” [1908] had translated the line as “Vse prekhodiashchee — tol’ko simvol” (SS 2: 549). Ellis (Lev Kobylinsky) had translated Goethe’s line as “Vse prekhodiashchee lish’ simvol” and linked the line to Schopenhauer and Fet (1910: 15). Ellis added the following elaboration: “A phenomenon has a meaning not *an sich*, but, like *Gleichnis*, merely as a reflection [*otblesk*] of another, mysteriously hidden, perfect world, merely as a point of departure. Consequently, the meditatively seeking spirit must unavoidably leave the boundaries of the empirically given, having stepped across the borders of sense experience [*opyt chuvstvenno-oshchushchaemogo*]” (16). Goethe’s lines were also quoted by Andrei Bely: “Goethe’s slogan ‘vse prekhodiashchee est’ tol’ko podobie’ found its justification in symbolism” (1910, 9). On Goethe in Russian Symbolism see Zhirmunsky (1982, Ch. 7) and Wachtel 1994.
- 18 See Ivanov’s essay “Religioznoe delo Vladimira Solov’eva” [1910] (SS 3: 306) for a specific connection; also “Gete na rubezhe dvukh stoletii” (SS 4: 156). A brief discussion of the concluding lines of *Faust* can be found in Soloviev’s 1890 essay “Obshchii smysl iskusstva” (4: 89). In fact, this Soloviev essay contains a number of other passages that are relevant to the Ivanov poem. Also, as Pamela Davidson notes (285), Soloviev himself used the phrase “Das Ewig-Weibliche” as the title of a poem of 1898 (Soloviev 12: 71–73).
- 19 R. E. Pomirchii, notes to Ivanov 1976, 458.
- 20 Ivanov begins “Zavety simbolizma” [1910] (SS 2: 589) with precisely this line and later develops it as one of the traits of symbolist art as follows: it is “— a trait characteristic particularly of symbolic art also in instances of so-called ‘unconscious’ creation which does not interpret the metaphysical connection of what is depicted, — the special intuition and energy of the word, which is directly sensed by the poet as a secret writing of the inexpressible [*tainopis’ neizrechnogo*] and absorbs into its sound many echoes which responded it is not known from where and as if these were echoes [*otzvuki*] of native subterranean springs” (597–98). He also refers to the poem in “Poet i chern” [1904] (SS 1: 712).

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