

**JOURNALS DEVOTED TO RUSSIAN
AND EAST EUROPEAN CULTURE:**

CANADIAN-AMERICAN SLAVIC STUDIES

CLASSICAL RUSSIA

THE DOSTOEVSKY JOURNAL

EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

EXPERIMENT/ЭКСПЕРИМЕНТ:
A JOURNAL OF RUSSIAN CULTURE

NICHE/НИША: A BILINGUAL JOURNAL OF THE
CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE

THE PUSHKIN JOURNAL

ROMANTIC RUSSIA

RUSSIAN HISTORY

THE SILVER AGE OF RUSSIAN
LITERATURE AND CULTURE 1881-1921

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

THE SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET REVIEW
(formerly SOVIET UNION/UNION SOVIETIQUE)

**ΣΥΜΠΟΣΙΟΝ/SYMPOSION:
A JOURNAL OF RUSSIAN THOUGHT**

CHARLES SCHLACKS, JR., PUBLISHER,
Center for Multiethnic and Transnational Studies,
University of Southern California
344 Grace Ford Salvatori Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90089-1694, USA.

28
ΣΥΜΠΟΣΙΟΝ



SYMPOSION

A Journal of Russian Thought
Vol. 1
1996

ΣΥΜΠΟΣΙΟΝ/SYMPOSION A Journal of Russian Thought

TABLE OF CONTENTS

From the Editors	1
THE BANQUET	
<i>Symposium and Russian Filosofia</i> Mikhail Epstein	3
On the Literary History of the Russian Symposium Andrei Shishkin (translated by Robert Bird)	7
THE FUTURE OF RUSSIAN PHILOSOPHY	
The Consolation of Philosophy Today Alexei Chernyakov	19
The Phoenix of Philosophy: On the Meaning and Significance of Contemporary Russian Thought Mikhail Epstein	35
THE RUSSIAN LOGOS	
Poetic Dominion in the Work of Andrei Belyi Igor Vishnevetsky	75
PUBLICATIONS AND DOCUMENTS	
<i>In partibus infidelium: Sergius Bulgakov and the YMCA (1906-1940)</i> Robert Bird	93
From <i>The Dialectics of Myth</i> Aleksei Losev (translated by Vladimir Marchenkov)	122
REVIEWS	
Nikolai Leskov. <i>Schism in High Society: Lord Radstock and His Followers.</i> Translated by James Muckle (I. Christina Weinberg)	141
<i>Russian Thought after Communism: The Recovery of a Philosophical Heritage.</i> Edited by James P. Scanlan (Victor Terras)	144

Philip Boobbyer. <i>S. L. Frank: The Life and Work of a Russian Philosopher 1877-1950</i> (Boris Jakim)	146
V. Senatov. <i>Filosofii istorii starobriadchestva;</i>	
Jonathan Sutton. <i>Traditions in New Freedom: Christianity and Higher Education in Russia and Ukraine Today</i> (Nicolai Petro)	148
Iver B. Neumann. <i>Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations</i> (Nicolai Petro)	150
S. L. Frank. <i>Man's Soul: An Introductory Essay in Philosophical Psychology.</i> Translated by Boris Jakim. Foreword by Philip J. Swoboda (Robert Slesinski)	152
Vladimir Solovyov. <i>The White Lily.</i> Translated, edited, with an introduction by Boris Jakim (Aleksy Gibson)	153

COVER: Drawing of Nikolai Fedorov, Vladimir Solov'ev and Lev Tolstoi (clockwise from left) by Leonid Pasternak.

FRONTISPIECE: "The Philosophers" (1917) by Mikhail Nesterov, showing Pavel Florenskii and Sergei Bulgakov at Sergiev Posad.

BVA/DIVISION OF THE AMERICAS

1996 SPECIAL OFFERS

Church History, Theology and Russian Studies

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF GEORGES FLOROVSKY:

- Volume 5: *Ways of Russian Theology. Part 1* (sale price = \$10.99)
- Volume 6: *Ways of Russian Theology. Part 2* (sale price = \$10.99)
- Volume 7: *The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century* (sale price = \$10.99)

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF GEORGE P. FEDOTOV (in English):

- Volume 1: *St. Filipp: Metropolitan of Moscow—Encounter with Ivan the Terrible* (sale price = \$10.99)
- Volume 2: *A Treasury of Russian Spirituality* (sale price = \$10.99)
- Volume 4: *The Russian Religious Mind. II: The Middle Ages* (sale price = \$7.99)
- Volume 5: *Peter Abelard: The Personality, Self-Consciousness and Thought of a Martyr of Enlightenment* (sale price = \$7.99)

SERGEI BULGAKOV. *Karl Marx as a Religious Type* (sale price = \$11.99)

GEORGE M. YOUNG. *Nikolai F. Fedorov: An Introduction* (sale price = \$11.99)

MARTHA BOHACHEVSKY-CHOMIAK. *Sergei N. Trubetskoi: An Intellectual among the Intelligentsia in Prerevolutionary Russia* (sale price = \$11.99)

PAUL CALL. *Vasily I. Kelsiev: An Encounter between the Russian Revolutionaries and the Old Believers* (sale price = \$11.99)

GEORGE VERNADSKY. *Russian Historiography: A History* (sale price = \$11.99)

Add 10 percent (15 percent overseas) to these prices for postage and handling

BVA/DIVISION OF THE AMERICAS

Suite 220
454 Moody Street
Waltham
Mass. 02154

roughly analogous to the difference between a scholarly symposium and a platonic *symposion*: the participants in the latter not only correctly discuss abstract ideas but 'totally' give themselves over to them, with all their body, soul and mind.⁵

Filosofia is that philosophy that has not detached itself from total thinking, has not become a narrow specialty studying the conditions and possibilities of knowledge; instead, it tries to preserve the scale and shape of total wisdom, combining in various ways elements of criticism and fantasy, science and poetry, analysis and synthesis, historicism and utopia. *Filosofia* can and should learn from philosophy how to become more exact at distinguishing these elements – but not in order to sacrifice one of them; rather in order better to promote their unity in a non-totalitarian totality.

The distinction between philosophy and *filosofia* applies not only along but across national traditions. In England, where the tradition of philosophy has held almost complete sway, some *filosofers* – such as G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis – have nevertheless appeared. As one goes deeper into the continent, *filosofia* begins to occupy a larger and larger place; in France there is Bataille, Bachelard, and Baudrillard; in Germany, Nietzsche and Heidegger. By the time we reach Russia the *filosofers* thoroughly dominate, although it does have its philosophers as well – neo-Kantians, Positivists, Phenomenologists, Structuralists . . .

The calling of this journal is to become a crossroads, a meeting place of *filosofia* and *philosophy*, as much within Russian culture itself as in Russia's cultural intercourse with the West. It is crucial to discover those new points of postmodern consciousness where the intellectual traditions and perspectives of Russia and the West come together. We must think jointly, bearing one another's burdens in resolving those problems for which no single tradition can offer an adequate framework.

Emory University

February 29, 1996

5. See, on this score, the observation of Pavel Florenskii: "Philosophy, as an academic discipline, never took root in Russia, just as it did not exist in the ancient world. Our philosophers have striven not so much to be *intelligent* as *wise*, not so much to be *thinkers* as *sages*. . . . An ethical striving, a religious consciousness, an activity not only of the brain but of all the organs of the spirit; in a word, it is only life outside the study that seems to us of ultimate seriousness and completely worthy" (*Sochineniia* v 4 tt., t. 1 [Moscow: Mysl', 1994], p. 207).

ANDREI SHISHKIN (Rome, Italy)

ON THE LITERARY HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN SYMPOSION*

The symposion belongs to the same intersection of intellectual and existential life as the feast-day or holiday, rooted in human nature itself, in the human desire for immortality, and in human nostalgia for divine life. The symposion brings man to partake of eternity and strives to overcome death by means of the ritual repetition of archetypal actions. The symposion is one of the most prominent and significant cultural institutions of Ancient Greek high culture; an extremely large quantity of surviving written and material witnesses (e.g., vase-painting) is tied to the symposion.¹

The symposial model was reproduced in later epochs of Greek and Latin antiquity, bringing it into contact with various forms of ancient literary activity. The variety of symposia attested in various genres and various centuries is thus a testament to the model's vitality and significance, rather than an obstacle to its precise definition. Indeed, the model of the ancient symposion was reproduced in the Middle and Modern Ages, right up to Modernism and Post-Modernism. This is true also of Russian literature, which from the eighteenth to the twentieth century has relied heavily on the symposial model. The goal of the present essay is to trace the diachronic literary history of the Russian symposion through several important episodes, showing the widespread interest in this model and the originality of its Russian interpretation.

* The current work is part of an ongoing project "Russian Feasts" involving scholars from St. Petersburg and Rome whose goal is to publish a collective monograph on the history of the symposial model in Russian literature.

1. On the symposion, see: Oswyn Murray, "The Greek Symposion in History," *Times Literary Supplement* 6.XI.1981; *Poesia e simposio nella Grecia Antica. Guida storica e critica*, A cura di M. Vetta (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1983); F. Lisserrague, *The Aesthetics of the Greek Banquet: Images of Wine and Ritual*, trans. Andrew Szegedy-Maszak (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990); *Symptica: A Symposium on the Symposion*, ed. Oswyn Murray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); *In Vino Veritas*, ed. Oswyn Murray and Manuela Tecusan (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995); *Dining in a Classical Context*, ed. William J. Slater (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1991); Joachim Latacz, "Die Funktion des Symposions für die entstehende griechische Literatur," in *Erschliessung der Antike* (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1994), pp. 357-95.

I. *The Symposion in Ancient Greece*

The purpose of table talk is forgotten,
and Dionysus is in disrespect.

Plutarch, *Table Talk* 615A

The symposion for the ancient Greeks was a particular kind of after-dinner gathering, where time was given over to wine and mutual converse concerning politics or the philosophy of love, to the improvisation and admiration of poetry, or, in later times, to philosophical conversations.²

The symposion was separate from the usual time and space, held in a special room, called an *adron* — 'a room for men.' The occasions were most various: Xenophon tells of a symposion marking the victory of the boy Autolicus in a gymnastic competition, Plato — of one celebrating Agathon's victory in the *agon* of tragic poets. One came to a symposion without invitation: Socrates brings the uninvited Aristodemus to Agathon's feast (*Symposion* 174C). Only men participated, although female musicians or dancers — *heterae* — were admitted for entertainment; noble women stayed away. The number of participants ranged from the number of Muses to that of the Graces, although some large rooms seated up to thirty guests. Beginning after dusk, the symposion could last until morning.

After the meal, the participants were brought vessels with water for washing and wreaths of myrtle or vine, dedicated to Dionysus. The cleansing and wearing of wreaths was a ritual act in preparation for the following acts of sacred initiation. A cup of undiluted wine was handed clockwise around the circle; each man took a gulp and, pronouncing the words *agathou daimonos*, offered a libation to the gods. Then three libations were performed with diluted wine: the first bowl was offered to the 'heavenly gods,' then in honor of 'heroes,' and then to 'Savior Zeus,' followed by a general paean, a kind of prayer. The sacred or magical meaning of the libations could be to remove a taboo on the wine, allowing the drinkers to enter the 'divine' or perceive the truth: *in vino veritas*, a saying coined by the poet Alcaeus in the sixth century BC. Philochorus, the early Hellenic philosopher wrote that, "the drinkers of wine reveal not only their own inner being, but anything they like, without observing any limitation of speech."

2. M. Vetta, "Il simposio: la monodia e il giambo," in *Lo spazio letterario della Grecia Antica. V. I. La produzione e la circolazione del testo* (Roma: Salerno editrice, 1994), p. 177.

Indeed, as the symposial language indicated, wine was not only the gift of the gods, but god himself: Bacchus, Bromius or Dionysus. Therefore it was not only the participants of the feast who were crowned with wreaths, but also the mixing bowls through which the god appeared. A red-figure vase of Ambosius (ca. 500 BC) shows satires engaging in sexual intercourse with amphorae; thus the ancients would say that "Aphrodite is never without Dionysus."

The symposion was in some ways the acme of life, antinomically opposed to death, which itself was a common theme of symposial poetry. In Plutarch's "Feast of the Seven Wise Men," Thales of Miletus says:

The skeleton which the Egyptians brought into their feasts and exposed to the view of their guests, with this advice, that they should not in their merriment forget they would shortly be themselves such as that was — though it was a sight not so acceptable (as may be supposed), — had yet this convenience and use, to incite the spectators not to luxury and drunkenness, but to mutual love and friendship, persuading them not to protract a life in itself short and uncertain by a tedious course of wickedness.³

In Petronius' late and parodic (with respect to both Roman society and the ancient model) "Trimalchio's Feast," a slave drags a silver skeleton into the midst of a luxurious feast; thrown onto the table, its pliable form adopts various poses, causing the host to declaim poor verses of his own composition:

Let us do what we can,
This life's but a span,
Exposed to Trouble and Sorrow;
Then drink my good Friends,
E're our Merriment ends,
For we may be dead by Tomorrow.⁴

The banality of this image speaks of the vitality of the tradition of death as a guest at an ancient feast.

3. Plutarch, *Miscellanies and Essays*, ed. William W. Goodwin, v. 2 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1889), p. 7.

4. Petronius, *Satyricon* (London: n.p., 1899), p. 34.

II. The Platonic Symposion

With the passage of time, the real social institution of the symposion began to give way to its literary status. Particular symposial images, situations and symbols arose and formed the constant repertoire of symposial poetry. At the beginning of the fourth century BC, there arose even an independent literary genre of symposion. The Platonic symposion, having arisen in the context of the 'Socratic dialogue' widespread in the Athenian philosophical school in the fourth century BC, must be seen as one of the models of this genre. Only the 'Socratic dialogue' could give concrete form to the *universitas membrorum* postulated by the Athenian school: truth is revealed only in a conversation of two or more interlocutors, and is not discovered by the individual alone. The epistemological orientation of the 'Socratic dialogue' corresponded to the orientation of the symposion as a gathering of equals.

It might, therefore, seem surprising that the theme of death is absent from Plato's *Symposion*, not counting the mention of the epidemic of plague in Athens, which the priestess Diotima managed to postpone for ten years. Yet, in the first place, Diotima's speech, as retold by Socrates, dwells on the theme of immortality, the overcoming of death through love (207A). Secondly, the theme of death is implicitly present in the Dionysian context of the feast, since Dionysus, according to his main underlying myth (Hesiod, *Theogonis* 940-42), was twice-born, having passed through death. Plato's dialogue takes place the day after the Great Dionysia, which had included the competition of tragedians won by Agathon. Almost all the participants of the *Symposion* are somehow tied to the god Dionysus, including the tragic poet Agathon and the comedian Aristophanes, for "all that he does," according to Socrates, "is tied to Dionysus and Aphrodite" (177E). Both Eryximachus and Diotima (whose name W. H. D. Rouse proposed to translate as "the prophetess Fearlord of Prophetville") are tied to the Dionysian element, and Alcibiades, according to one recent scholar, appears at Agathon's feast as "the epiphany of the god coming to earth in his correct iconographical form: crowned with *taenia* and with a thick wreath of ivy and violet."⁵ Most of all, however, the Dionysian element is reflected by Socrates himself, whom Alcibiades compares to Silenus, Dionysus' companion, and to Marsyas, Apollo's opponent (215B).

5. D. Sider, "Plato's Symposium as a Dionysian Festival," *Quaderni urbinati di cultura classica* NS 4 (1980), pg. 55. Cf. G. Krüger, *Einsicht und Leidenschaft: das Wesen des platonischen Denkens* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1939), pp. 86-92.

Plato's *Symposion* exerted a strong influence on both the composition and thematics of subsequent symposial literature, especially in antiquity. This influence is complicated by the wide range of feasts described in literature, from funerals to religious mysteries and the Christian agape; any comparison of Plato's symposion and the Last Supper, for example, must yield to philosophical and philological caution.⁶ Several works refer to Plato's model quite explicitly, for example St. Methodius of Patara's "Feast of Ten Virgins, or On Virginity" (late third century AD). The Russian philosopher and original interpreter of Plato, Vladimir Ern, noted that "St. Methodius of Patara, in his wonderful dialogue on Christian eroticism . . . followed the *Phaedrus*, although the general composition (a series of speeches) is an imitation of Plato's *Symposion*."⁷ Indeed, although the poetics and composition might derive from *Symposion*, the theme might refer to another Socratic dialogue, one devoted to a 'dialogue on the threshold' of death.

One of the most interesting examples of Plato's influence on modern literature was first noted by the post-Bakhtinian literary scholar E. G. Rabinovich in 1972, in her work "Pushkin and Plato's *Symposion*." Analyzing both Plato and Xenophon's *Symposion*, Rabinovich notes that "ethical problems are discussed at both symposia in direct connection to the opposition of body and spirit, the irrational and the rational." She sees a similar split on the formal level: "Each *Symposion* is divided into two parts, each refuting the other. This conflict is not resolved at all in the end, so that a denouement, in the usual sense, is absent."⁸ E. G. Rabinovich sees Pushkin's "Feast at the Time of a Plague" as having an analogous contradictory, polyphonic structure.

Indeed, such different writers as Karl Jaspers and Mikhail Bakhtin have concurred on the view that some works of modern European prose stem from Plato's particular artistic oeuvre. Jaspers compared Plato to Dostoevsky and Balzac: each presents widely differing views without revealing prejudice or judging between them, allowing everyone to live outside of the categories of good and evil, although within the illumination of good

6. See an example of such a comparison in George Steiner, "Due Cene," *Micromega*, no. 3 (1996), pp. 97-125. The figure of Christ at the Last Supper prevents it from being seen as a gathering of equals, and thus as a symposion *in sensu strictu*.

7. V. F. Ern, "Verkhovnoe postizhenie Platona," *Sochineniia* (Moscow: Pravda, 1991), p. 485, n. 1. See also M. Margheritis, "L'influenza di Platone sul pensiero e sull'arte di S. Metodij," in *Studi dedicati alla memoria di Paolo Ubaldo, Pubblicazioni della università cattolica del sacro cuore*, 19 (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1937), pp. 401-12.

8. E. G. Rabinovich, "Pir' Platona i 'Pir vo vremia chumy' Pushkina," *Antichnost' i sovremennost'* (Moscow: Nauka, 1972), p. 463.

and evil.⁹ Bakhtin, for his part, isolated five distinct features of the Socratic dialogue, allowing one to see it as a major trend in the development of European prose, leading to Dostoevskii.¹⁰ If one views the literary tradition of the symposion from its beginning, it is quite clear that the polyphonic nature of Dostoevskii's novels is ultimately based in Plato's acceptance of a plurality of worlds and in the conversational epistemology of the Ancient Greek symposia preceding Plato himself.

III. Pushkin and the Symposion

The second decade of the nineteenth century saw the beginning of a new epoch in Russian literary culture. This 'Golden Age' was initiated by the group Arzamas, a circle of like-minded writers united by common ideas and interests, and by a youthful distrust for authorities; its members included Konstantin Batiushkov, Vasilii Zhukovskii, Pavel Viazemskii, A. Turgenev, Denis Davydov and Aleksandr Pushkin. This circle created its own rituals, which institutionalized ways of judging literary works of both members and literary opponents. Indeed, their ritualized life became literature.

The symposion soon became an almost obligatory element of Arzamas life and work. An interesting example is Viazemskii's "Letter to a Publisher about the Poet Bobrov" (1810), in which the author and his friends decide to celebrate this 'wild' poet with a symposion: three cups were drunk up in honor of Bobrov, each accompanied by the recital of the poet's verse in "a voice interrupted by sobs." This parody of a symposion continued with further libations.

Another example of the symposion's thematic roots in Arzamas poetry is Pushkin's poetic epistle to Krivtsov (1817), a free-thinker and atheist. Pushkin relates a conversation with his friend about death, which the poet sees as a symbolic feast consisting of traditional images: the friends are crowned with Aphrodite's wreath, the final cup of wine follows the circle of friends as the bright instant of death approaches. At the end, women friends collect the ashes of the feasters in the cups, underlining the cups' role as vessel of life and death.

9. K. Jaspers, "Plato," *The Great Philosophers*, vol. 1 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), pp. 109-74.

10. M. Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 3rd ed. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1972), pp. 184-89. In previous editions of his book Bakhtin had held the opposite view on Dostoevsky; see his *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979), pp. 186, 394.

By 1825,¹¹ Pushkin had become directly acquainted with Plato's model of the symposion through the *Sophists at Dinner* (*Deipnosophistai*, ca. 192 AD), the multi-volume work of Athenaeus. Athenaeus preserved for us many ancient traditions, as he incorporated in his work various ancient writings; thus, as at Ancient Greek symposia, songs by Anacreon and Sappho are performed. Pushkin's reading of *Sophists at Dinner* resulted in six free translations of Ancient Greek poets, whose selection seems to have been guided by Pushkin's interest in the symposial model, with which all the poems are connected. Two poems, under the title "Imitations of the Ancients" (*Podrazhaniia drevnim*), were published in 1834 with citations of the sources, Xenophanes (570-480 BC) and 'from Athenaeus.' The former is one of the first descriptions of a symposion in Greek literature; the second is an epitaph for a musician who "sweetly praised Bacchus and the Muses." The other "Imitations of the Ancients," which were published only posthumously, are also related to the symposial model.

In fact, Pushkin here is following a certain thematic clue. While he removes the poetic texts from the general frame of the literary feast, he chooses poems that form a quite original composition: a precise and detailed description of a symposion, followed by witty praise for Dionysus and the rules of the symposion. When he read the translation of Xenophanes in 1832 at a reunion of his Lyceum classmates, who had been inspired by Arzamas, Pushkin was indicating both the immediate occasion for his poem (the atmosphere of the symposion) and the age-old tradition the alumni were continuing.

Pushkin's use of the symposial model is also evident in "Feast at the Time of Plague" (1830), one of the "Little Tragedies," which can indeed be compared to Plato's *Symposion*, as E. G. Rabinovich proposed to do in the aforementioned article. The action is thus divided into two parts: before and after the priest's arrival, which corresponds to the arrival of Alcibiades in Plato's work. The two parts negate each other, Walsingham's speech being opposed to the priest's, just as Socrates is opposed by Alcibiades. As a result, Pushkin preserves Plato's polyphonicity: "each . . . is faced by the possibility that his antagonist is correct. The priest blesses Walsingham, 'May the Lord save you! Forgive me, son,' while the Chairman, amidst the feast, 'remains, absorbed in deep contemplation,'"¹²

11. Cf. R. Burgi, "Pushkin and the Deipnosophists," *Harvard Slavic Studies*, 2 (1954), 268-69.

12. Cf. Iu. Lotman, "Iz razmyshlenii nad tvorcheskoi evoliutsiei Pushkina (1830)," in *Izbrannye stat'i*, t. 2 (Tallinn: Aleksandra, 1992), p. 478. It is worth noting that the work by

But "Feast at the Time of Plague" can also be projected onto the Platonic model of the symposion. Viacheslav Ivanov was the first to propose such a reading. In his 1919 paper at a Pushkin seminar, Ivanov spoke of the Dionysian character of Pushkin's 'little tragedy,' and of its "features of the primeval feast ritual."¹³ Since Ivanov's text is not extant, it is difficult to account for all of his arguments, but following his usual method one might discern the following parallels between Pushkin's tragedy and the ancient feast ritual. First of all, the speakers at the feast command equal authority and liberty, all under the guidance of the chairman-symposiarch. The image of the women, Mary and Louise, is also consistent with the *hetaerae*, the only women allowed at the ancient symposion. The feast opens with a speech dedicated to the memory of a departed interlocutor, in the genre of the epitaph, and both of the songs that follow are devoted to the same theme.

Each participant is seeking his or her attitude towards, and decision regarding, death, and each structures his or her behavior accordingly. The "young man" knows that art and artistic mastery will outlast death ("his grandiloquent tongue did not fall silent"), but the dead are also alive when their friends recall them at a feast, partaking of Bacchus' drink ("I propose to drink in his memory with the merry clink of glasses, with exclamation, as if he were still alive"). These lines reveal a subtle but significant semantic shift with respect to Wilson's text, which Pushkin used as a model: "Let us drink unto his memory / with acclamation and a merry peal / Such as in life he loved."

The two central songs, those of Mary and Walsingham, and the Priest's speech form a counterpoise to this half-pagan stoicism. Mary's song is about the inexorable force of death and about love in heaven; Walsingham's "hymn in honor of the plague" is a heroic challenge thrown to death in the hope of some kind of immortality. The Priest's speech concerns how impious acts on Earth would prevent the union of lovers' souls in heaven. These very different answers to the question of death show how Pushkin preserves the 'polyphonic' form of the symposion. Pushkin's own answer to the question of death embraces both the Priest's Christian answer and the romantic one of Walsingham. This dialogism and respect for the depth of the protagonists' various answers

John Wilson that served as a source for Pushkin's 'little tragedy' does not contain such a mutual admission of truth; the final words of Wilson's work are: "The Priest walks mournfully away."

13. Unknown author, "O pervom semestre 'Pushkinskogo seminarii' pod rukovodstvom Viach. Ivanova," typescript in the Rome archive of Viacheslav Ivanov.

distinguishes Pushkin's text from Wilson's more monological and didactic fragment "The City of the Plague" (1816).

In conclusion, one might also note the presence of the symposial model in Pushkin's unfinished "Tale from Roman Life" (1833-35), in which Petronius chooses suicide over trial by Nero, and spends his final evenings feasting with friends. This is a traditional pre-death feast, with the performance of poetry and stories. Iurii Lotman proposed a reconstruction of Pushkin's plan, by which this symposion would be united with two others, Pushkin's "Egyptian Nights" and an unwritten feast with the "strict voice of a Christian preacher" telling of the Last Supper.¹⁴ The three symposia would thus present a picture of the conflict and death of three cultures, three world civilizations. Such a 'decline of civilization' was also the occasion for the Russian symposia of the 'Silver Age.'

IV. Symposia at Viacheslav Ivanov's 'Tower'

When, in the fateful days of 1905, Viacheslav Ivanov and his wife, Lidiia Zinov'eva-Annibal, left hospitable Geneva to establish themselves at a Petersburg apartment known as the 'Tower,' where they soon began to host the local cultural elite at the famous 'Wednesdays,' they were burdened by forebodings of the coming catastrophe. One of Ivanov's poems presents the Bronze Horseman riding the streets of the imperial capital, with the sound of his hooves striking the granite streets muffled by the corpses which line the thoroughfares of the city. Indeed, Vladimir Piast, in his review of Ivanov's 1907 collection *Eros*, noted that the book reminded him of Plato's *Symposion* and Boccaccio's *Decameron*, since the latter's tales occurred at a time when "Florence was devastated by plague."¹⁵ While Ivanov's symposia have begun to be seen as a significant phenomenon of Symbolist literary culture, it is important to keep in mind that other, more sinister events were to come. The meetings at Ivanov's 'Tower' were structured on the model of the Socratic 'symposion.' They were open to the most varied participants, who were free to come without formal invitation. A meeting was considered successful if it had been marked by a lively exchange of opinions and disagreement. Memoirists note a conscious following of the Platonic

14. Iu. Lotman, "Opyt rekonstruktsii pushkinskogo siuzheta ob Iusise," in *Izbrannye stat'i*, t. 2, pp. 452-62, esp. pp. 459, 461.

15. V. Piast, *Kniga o russkikh poetakh poslednego desiatiletia. Kriticheskie ocherki*, ed. Modest Gofman (St. Petersburg and Moscow: Izdanie t-va M. O. Vol'f, 1909), p. 272.

model, beginning with the smallest details of arrangement.¹⁶ The evening began late and continued until morning. Wine was obligatory. The hostess, Zinov'eva-Annibal, received the nickname Diotima, the name of the priestess whose speech about Eros was retold by Socrates. The constant chairman of the symposia was the philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev, who later confessed: "To tell the truth, I considered myself a pretty bad chairman and always was surprised that I was so highly valued as a chairman. I was always too active, too often I became embroiled in arguments, defending some ideas and attacking others; I was unable to be 'objective'."¹⁷ One might say that Berdiaev thought contradiction more valuable than agreement, since it gave an impulse for creativity; needless to say, this subjectivity suited the other participants.

The chairman's constant antagonist was Viacheslav Ivanov, who, in a sonnet addressed to the young Khlebnikov, called himself a 'co-questioner' and 'co-seeker' (*sovoprosnik, sogliadai*). The anaphoric 'co-' underlines the equal position of the interlocutors in their search for existential and spiritual truth. One is reminded of Socrates, who called himself the 'midwife' of others' ideas (*Theaetetus* 150a-151).

Many discussions at the 'Wednesdays' were devoted to Eros, and this philosophizing about love was far from abstract, rather immediate and vital. This dramatic and even tragic Eros became incarnate in the artistic works created by the participants. Ivanov himself recorded aspects of his erotic relations with Zinov'eva-Annibal, Sergei Gorodetskii and Margarita Sabashnikova in the poems of the book *Eros*, which were read at the 'Wednesdays.' These meetings were also the first airings of Berdiaev's "Metaphysics of Sex and Love" (1907) and Maksimilian Voloshin's "The Ways of Eros," which precipitated the latter's break with his wife, Margarita Sabashnikova.

It is very important to trace the effect of the symposial model of the 'Tower' on the literary culture of Russian modernism. One example of this is provided by Velimir Khlebnikov's two Futurist 'feasts.' In 1908-09, Khlebnikov was very close to Viacheslav Ivanov and his circle, making several visits a week during that autumn and winter. It was precisely at the 'Tower' that Khlebnikov was recognized as a genius and given his literary name Velimir, which soon completely overshadowed his given

16. See N. Berdiaev, "Ivanovskie sredy," in *Russkaia literatura XX veka* Bk. 8 (1916), ed. S. A. Vengerov, pp. 97-98; N. Chulkova, "Ty — pamiat' smolknushhego slova," *Vestnik RKhD*, No. 157 (1989), p. 132.

17. N. Berdiaev, *Samopoznanie. Sbranie sochinenii* t. 1 (Paris: YMCA Press, 1989), p. 177.

name Viktor.¹⁸ In a 1909 poem, which N. Khardzhiev has called a "protocol description of a 'Wednesday' at Viacheslav Ivanov's apartment,"¹⁹ Khlebnikov tells of how he read his own poems, and how they were discussed by Ivanov and Mikhail Kuz'min; he gives futuristic portraits of Valerii Briusov, Gumilev, Ivanov speaking of Dionysus, Kuzmin, and of himself. The clock strikes two and the guest take their places at table to discuss "humanity and faith." At this moment the main mysterious event of the symposion occurs: the Mother of God descends from an icon in the corner and stands behind the backs of the feasters. In the final scene of the poem, the Mother of God leaves the symposion for a far-away square in order to grieve. This episode might reflect Khlebnikov's final rejection of the Symbolists' searchings and his approaching break with them.

Khlebnikov's other feast is the play "The Mistake of Death" (1915). In a tavern twelve "merry corpses-bodies" drink from skulls under the chairmanship of "Lady Death." They spin around, taking each other by the hand, one singing a song in praise of death, and then Lady Death reads a speech. The feast begins, but soon the Thirteenth Guest appears and throws down a challenge to Lady Death. He is able to outfool her, and instead of the cup of life, she drinks up the cup of death and dies. As she dies, the twelve corpses return to life, and the final scene is 'the merry feast of the emancipated.' It is remarkable that the Futurist feast of the utterly non-Christian poet Khlebnikov follows both the composition and the imagery of the ancient symposion, including its central problem: the challenge issued to death.

In conclusion, it is fitting to recall that history is the establishment of epochal works on the gradual solving of death and on its future overcoming. It was with such intent that Russian literary culture of the beginning of the twentieth century turned to the symposion as a question of art and life. Ivanov's 'Tower' tried to reproduce the model of the banquet of equals as a social and cultural institution, not just as a literary topos. But this life-creating utopia, like those of the Petersburg and Moscow Futurists who to a certain degree inherited some Symbolist ideas, were not fated to reach fruition. After the Russian revolution, as Evgenii Zamiatin noted, Russia "moved from the old, polyphonic universe into a new, monophonic one."

Translated by Robert Bird

18. See A. Shishkin: "Velimir Khlebnikov na 'Bashne' Viach. Ivanova," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 17 (1996), 145-47; "Velimir: ob imeni Khlebnikova," *Europa Orientalis*, 15, no. 2 (1996).

19. Commentary to V. Khlebnikov, *Neizdannye proizvedeniia* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1940), p. 418.