

GENDER AND RUSSIAN LITERATURE

New perspectives

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY

ROSALIND MARSH

*Professor of Russian Studies and Director of
the Centre of Women's Studies,
University of Bath*



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Notes on contributors

Eva Buchwald studied at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies of the University of London, where she obtained a doctorate in 1990 for her dissertation entitled 'Ideals of Womanhood in the Prose and Drama of Finland and Russia, 1894–1914'. Since then she has lived in Finland, where she teaches courses on Finnish and Russian literature at the University of Helsinki. She is also currently employed as a literary manager by the National Theatre of Finland.

Pamela Davidson is a Lecturer in Russian at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies of the University of London. After taking her first degree at the University of Cambridge and doing postgraduate research at St Antony's College, Oxford, she held a Junior Research Fellowship at The Queen's College, Oxford, and lectureships at the Universities of Birmingham and Surrey. She is the author of *The Poetic Imagination of Viacheslav Ivanov* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and *Viacheslav Ivanov: a Reference Guide to Literature* (New York: G. K. Hall Reference, 1996), and the editor of an anthology of poems dedicated to Anna Akhmatova, *Posviashchaetsia Akhmatovoi* (Tenafly, NJ: Hermitage Publishers, 1991). She has published articles on a number of twentieth-century Russian authors, including Ivanov, Akhmatova, Gumilev and Bulgakov, and has also written on Russian food and translated nineteenth-century opera libretti and modern poetry.

Ol'ga Demidova is a Reader (Dotsent) of Herzen University in St Petersburg. She graduated from an institute of foreign

- Elena Koltonovskaia and other Silver Age critics, which contemporary western feminists would find highly debatable.
- 27 Mirè's courtship was conducted by correspondence. Hamsun's novel *Pan* was apparently A. Mirè's favourite book, and the character of Glan is noteworthy for his almost boundless power over women.
- 28 Ed: Mariia Mikhailova provides a fuller account of A. Mirè's strange and tragic life in Ledkovsky, Rosenthal and Zirin, *Dictionary of Russian Women Writers*, pp. 427–30.
- 29 G. Chulkov, 'Shurochka i Venia', in *Liudi v tumane* (Moscow, 1916).
- 30 Entry in Viacheslav Ivanov's diary, in V. Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II (Brussels: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1971–87), p. 20.
- 31 *Ezhegodnik rukopisnogo otdela Pushkinskogo Doma na 1980 god* (Leningrad, 1984), p. 183.
- 32 L. Zinov'eva-Annibal, *Tridtsat' tri uroda* (St Petersburg, 1907); translated by Samuel D. Gioran, in *The Silver Age of Russian Culture: an Anthology* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1975).
- 33 The name of the famous literary salon hosted from 1905 by Lidiia Zinov'eva-Annibal and Viacheslav Ivanov, where the intellectual and artistic élite of Petersburg gathered on Wednesdays to discuss the latest literary, artistic, occult and philosophical trends. See also Davidson below, p. 161.
- 34 Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, p. 774.
- 35 A. Mirè, 'Dve iz mnogikh', in A. Mirè, *Zhizn'* (Nizhnii Novgorod). The italics are mine (M. M.).
- 36 A. Mirè, 'Belyi kliuch', *Novyi zhurnal dlia vsekh*, 23 (1910).
- 37 S. Gorodetskii, 'Ogon' za reshetkoi', *Zolotoe runo*, 3–4 (1908), p. 97.

*Lidiia Zinov'eva-Annibal's The Singing Ass: a
woman's view of men and Eros*

Pamela Davidson

Many of the most interesting women of the early twentieth century were and still are all too often perceived as the 'wives' or adjuncts of their famous literary spouses. One could cite several examples: Voloshin's wife, the artist Margarita Sabashnikova, Nadezhda Chulkova, or Liubov' Blok, the actress, are not so much remembered for their own achievements as for the roles they played in their husbands' lives. Lidiia Zinov'eva-Annibal (1866–1907) falls into a somewhat different category, in that she both was the wife of the well-known writer, Viacheslav Ivanov, and also nurtured literary ambitions of her own. In this sense the closest parallel to her example is the literary marriage of Gippius and Merezhkovskii. However, whereas the work of Gippius has received a fair amount of critical attention, that of Zinov'eva-Annibal is hardly ever considered in its own right outside the context of her husband's work.¹

Zinov'eva-Annibal originally trained as an opera singer, but gradually joined Ivanov in moving towards literary pursuits some years after their first meeting in Italy in 1893. She wrote a number of strikingly original, if not always entirely successful works. Between 1904 and 1907, the year of her abrupt, premature death, she published two plays, *Kol'tsa* (*Rings*, 1904) and *Pevuchii osel* (*The Singing Ass*, 1907); a work of prose, *Tridtsat' tri uroda* (*Thirty-Three Abominations*, 1907) which achieved some notoriety for its treatment of lesbian love; and a collection of semi-autobiographical short stories, *Tragicheskii zverinets* (*The Tragic Menagerie*, 1907), as well as several essays of literary criticism and a few prose poems. A further collection of short

stories was published posthumously in 1918 under the title *Net!* (*No!*), and an early novel, 'Plamenniki' ('Torches'), still remains unpublished.

In seeking to establish her own voice as a writer, she had to define her position with regard to a number of strong, pervasive influences. One of these was endemic to the age, and derived from the mystical view of women and of their role in love and art which was widely held at the time. The second related to her own specific circumstances: the fact that she was married to Ivanov, a powerful personality and the chief ideologue of the religious Symbolist movement which was instrumental in promoting this particular view of women.

This essay will argue that her literary development can best be understood as a response to these pressures, gradually shifting from initial acceptance to later strategies of ironic subversion leading towards the discovery of her own independent voice. In order to demonstrate this, we shall first consider the way in which the image and self-image of women and of Zinov'eva-Annibal in particular were shaped by some of the main ideological tenets of the period; then we shall look at her writing in relation to these influences, focusing on one specific late work of 1907, the satirical drama *The Singing Ass*, seen within its biographical context.

THE SYMBOLIST IMAGE OF WOMEN AND ZINOV' EVA- ANNIBAL'S RESPONSE

Mention must first be made of two principal ideas which were in fashionable currency at the turn of the century, particularly amongst Ivanov and his entourage. The following outline is deliberately simplified and schematic in order to highlight those features of Symbolist attitudes which – in distorted form – were the target of Zinov'eva-Annibal's satire.

The first of these ideas was derived from Vladimir Solov'ev's influential essay, 'Smysl liubvi' ('The Meaning of Love'), published in 1892–4 and regarded by the Symbolists as the most important statement on love since Plato. This treatise advances a justification of human, sexual love in terms of its mystical

dimension. Through sexual union with woman, man transcends his narrow individuality and comes closer to the mystical essence of the material world, referred to by Solov'ev as the 'eternal feminine' (*vechnaia zhenstvennost'*) and linked to the figure of Sophia or Wisdom.²

In theory, this view of love was applicable to either sex. Women could attain closer union with Sophia through union with men, just as men could aspire to the eternal feminine through contact with women. In practice, however, the ideology tended to place man as the subject and initiator of love, and woman as the object and medium of male aspirations, rather than the other way around. This was due to a variety of reasons. The language of the treatise, written by a man, implied a male perspective on love. Sophia, although not a woman, was closely related to the principle of the eternal feminine; she was often symbolically depicted as a female saint in the Russian iconographic tradition, and her cult was also associated with that of the Virgin Mary. Furthermore, most of Solov'ev's disciples who claimed to put his theory into practice were men, and to varying degrees tended to link their beloved woman with Sophia.

The second main idea, central to Ivanov's philosophy of love and aesthetics, derives from Nietzsche and relates to the cult of the Dionysian principle in life and art. Dionysus was a male God whose worship was best performed through sacrificial rites carried out by his female devotees, the Maenads. This practice tended to emphasize the ecstatic and sacrificial aspects of women as worshippers, an association which was reinforced by the tradition of female models of sacrificial love of Christ.

According to these two views of love, women were regarded either as passive objects to be loved as a means to a higher end, or as creatures capable of reaching or inducing Dionysiac transports of ecstasy – or sometimes even as both. In either case, their role in the experience of love was defined by men and in terms of male aspirations as a means to an end. This approach was also extended by the Symbolists into the realm of art and creativity. Following the Solov'evian model, the task of the artist is to 'bring Sophia down to earth' by creating beautiful forms in which to incarnate her essence.

The male-orientated view of love was carried over to art: the artist was usually regarded as male, and the woman as the inspiration or subject-matter of his art, leading him on to closer union with the eternal feminine. According to the Dionysian ideal, the sacrificial ecstatic character of woman can serve as a medium of inspiration, providing an essential preliminary stage of dark and sacred chaos through which man must pass to create Apollonian form.

This combination of ideas created a potentially problematic climate of opinion for women at the heart of the Symbolist circle who aspired to be creative figures in their own right. Critics at the time were well aware of these difficulties. In 1908 the anti-idealist Marxist critic Bazarov contributed an article to the anthology *Literaturnyi raspad* (*Literary Collapse*) in which he attacked Berdiaev's metaphysics of love and sex and its implications for women and creativity. Berdiaev's view of sex and love, like Ivanov's, was derived from Plato and Solov'ev. In the following extract Bazarov paraphrases and quotes from Berdiaev's definition of the distinction between the sexes:

Истинное назначение женской половины человеческой индивидуальности состоит вовсе не в том, чтобы что-нибудь творить, создавать, воплощать в жизнь. Творчество — удел мужчины. Женщине предопределено быть не творцом, а прекрасным творением, не художником, а «произведением искусства, примером творчества Божьего, силой, вдохновляющей творчество мужественное».

(The true calling of the female half of human individuality has nothing at all to do with creating, originating, embodying something in life. Creativity is the lot of man. Woman is predestined to be not a creator, but a beautiful creation, not an artist, but a 'work of art, an example of divine creativity, of the force which inspires male creativity'.)

On this, Bazarov comments as follows:

Хотя г. Бердяев и старается уверить своих читателей, что назначение их в качестве вдохновительниц творчества ничуть не ниже назначения мужчин-творцов, я не думаю, что метафизика его могла иметь значительный успех среди женских половин человечества. Даже дамы, всецело поглощенные «проблемой пола» — а таких в настоящее время

очень не мало — будут по всей вероятности несколько шокированы той слишком уже примитивной ролью, которую отводит им в жизни религиозно-эротический идеал вечной женственности.³

(Although Mr Berdiaev does try to convince his female readers that their calling as inspirers of creativity is no less worthy than the calling of male creators, I do not think that his metaphysics can have had much success among the female halves of humanity. Even those ladies who are entirely engrossed in 'the sex question' — and in our time there are more than a few such ladies — will in all probability be somewhat shocked by the excessively primitive role which the religious erotic ideal of the eternal feminine assigns to them in life.)

This point should be borne in mind when considering the works of women writers of the period, and, in particular, when we come to look at Zinov'eva-Annibal's satirical play, published in the same year as Berdiaev's essay.

Undeterred by critics like Bazarov, men of the Symbolist persuasion went ahead and invested their womenfolk with these ideals. Female responses varied from an enthusiastic embracing of the ideal to bitter rejection. At one extreme is the case of Anna Schmidt, a spinster from Nizhnii Novgorod, who presented herself to an astonished Vladimir Solov'ev and later to his Symbolist disciples, announcing that she was none other than Sophia incarnate. The role was played less willingly and with increasing reluctance over the years by Blok's wife, Liubov' Dmitrievna. In her youth she was inscribed into the Solov'evian ideal, both in love and in art. Set up on a pedestal as a passive object of worship, her image was linked to that of the Beautiful Lady (*Prekrasnaia Dama*) and the eternal feminine, and valued as a source of poetic inspiration. It was only many years later that she was able to write frankly about the pain which this caused her at the time. Her memoirs are a remarkable document, a woman's attempt to demythologize the history of her relationship with her husband as reflected in his poetry and canonized by subsequent generations of mainly male critics.⁴

What of Zinov'eva-Annibal? What sort of an image did Ivanov form of her, and how did she respond to this? She was

cast by her husband in both the Solov'evian and the Dionysiac moulds, as an ecstasy-inducing medium, leading towards spiritual renewal and poetic self-discovery.⁵ Most of the poetry which Ivanov wrote about her both before and after her death presents her in this light.

Many memoirists and critics, whether consciously or not, echo this approach. For example, Pavel Florenskii, the religious philosopher, stressed the Solov'evian aspect. In his vast treatise of 1914, he interpreted one of Ivanov's poems on Lidiia as evidence of the poet's personal experience of Sophia.⁶ Berdiaev tended to emphasize the Dionysian side of Ivanov's wife, presenting her in the light of his theory of women and creativity. In his description of Ivanov's salon, he portrays her as an elemental Dionysiac nature, an incarnation of 'talented femininity' (*darovitaia zhenstvennost'*), that is to say speaking little, presenting no grand ideas, and yet being the very soul of the company, inspiring *others* to be creative.⁷ The male memoirists clearly could not imagine Zinov'eva-Annibal in any other way than in the light of the image which Ivanov had created for her. Modest Gofman's memoirs are typical in this respect; after describing the way Lidiia used to lie around at home in a loosely flapping Greek tunic, he adds a characteristic comment: «И я иначе ее — Диотиму Вячеслава Иванова, перед которой он благоговел, — и не представляю себе.»⁸ ('And I simply cannot not imagine her — Viacheslav Ivanov's revered Diotima — in any other way.')

This was the 'canonical' image created by Ivanov and male memoirists. What of the women's view, however? Here it is interesting to note that the picture painted by female memoirists differs significantly. They do not take Ivanov's theoretical pronouncements as their starting-point, but rather their own personal observations of her as a woman and writer. Zinaida Gippius was in a good position to appreciate the pressures of being a woman writer married to a leading Symbolist. In a review article with the inauspicious title of 'The communal grave' ('Bratskaia mogila') written for *Vesy* in 1907, she condemned the current fashion for erotic or even pornographic literature, characterized in her opinion by a mania for 'laying

bare' (*zagolnie*) and 'uncovering' (*obnazhenie*). She took the view that Zinov'eva-Annibal was a basically simple, 'innocent' woman who wrote her notorious but talentless work *Thirty-Three Abominations* in slavish imitation of this current fashion. According to Gippius, she was in fact capable of a much more talented, sincere type of writing as exemplified by the 'womanly warm' (*zhenski-teplye*) sections from her collection of autobiographical stories, *The Tragic Menagerie*.⁹ The use of the word 'womanly' is significant here, implying that sincerity and innocence go with femaleness, and that the fashion for erotic decadence is more in line with the imitation of male models (the rest of the review was mainly devoted to works by Andreev and Kuz'min). As we shall see below, this point was also relevant to the portrayal of men and Eros in *The Singing Ass*.

Nadezhda Chulkova was a close friend of Zinov'eva-Annibal, and one of the few people to be present at her death-bed (summoned by a telegram from Ivanov). In her memoirs, she also takes the view that Zinov'eva-Annibal wrote decadent works in the spirit of Ivanov under his influence, but was herself a much simpler and deeper person, capable of a far better style of prose, as shown by *The Tragic Menagerie*.¹⁰

Another female memoirist, Ariadna Tyrkova-Vil'iams, follows a similar approach. In her opinion Zinov'eva-Annibal's love and blind adulation of her husband led her to imitate him in everything, even in her writing.

Она была им околдована ... Себя она беспощадно коверкала. Заразившись окружавшей ее поэтоманией, она тоже стала писательницей, хотя способностей к этому у нее было мало. Следуя общему духу Башни, отчасти и моде, она в писаньях своих старалась быть порочной ... Если ее муж жрец, она будет жрицей. Если он бог Дионис, она будет Менадой. На самом деле она была мать четырех детей и, вопреки всем своим стараньям, оставалась милой, добродушной русской барыней.¹¹

(She was bewitched by him ... She distorted herself mercilessly. Infected by the poetomania which surrounded her, she also became a writer, despite the fact that she had little talent in this direction. Following the general spirit of the Tower,¹² and partly also fashion, she tried in her writings to be depraved ... If her husband was a

priest, she would be a priestess. If he was the god Dionysus, she would be a Maenad. In actual fact she was the mother of four children and, despite all her efforts, remained a nice, kind-hearted Russian lady.)

One can therefore discern a certain clash of views: a canonical male view of Zinov'eva-Annibal as an erotic Dionysiac Maenad with touches of Sophia, and a directly opposed female view of her as a simple, 'nice Russian lady' whose susceptibility to her husband's influence had a generally detrimental effect on her writing. The difficulty of reaching any final judgement on this matter lies in the inherent ambiguity of Zinov'eva-Annibal's own attitude to her husband's influence. At times she took on the role wholeheartedly, but at other times she adopted a more rebellious stance and seemed to wish to escape the image imposed upon her (this could, however, be construed as an extension of her role, as further evidence of her elemental Dionysiac nature).

This delicate balance between independence and influence was additionally complicated by the fact that Ivanov played a vital role in setting up his wife's literary career. He arranged through Briusov for her first works to be published by Skorpion and in the journal *Vesy*; later on, most of her main works were printed by his own publishing-house Ory. Their reviews and works regularly appeared side by side in the same journals and anthologies, reinforcing the impression of a close literary partnership. Even more pervasive than this type of technical assistance was the fact that Ivanov provided a theoretical framework within which his wife wrote and which he applied to her works. Her early play, *Rings*, incorporated into its text poems drawn from Ivanov's collection *Kormchie zvezdy* (*Pilot stars*), and was prefaced by an introduction by him entitled 'Novye maski' ('New Masks') which set the play firmly within his understanding of the theatre as a form of Dionysiac revival.¹³

Around 1906, however, this early type of dependence began to give way to a change of tone. This can be traced through the next two works which Zinov'eva-Annibal wrote – *Thirty-Three Abominations* and *The Tragic Menagerie*.¹⁴ There is no space to dwell on these here, but it is worth making just one point: the choice of themes – lesbian love in the first

work and autobiographical childhood reminiscences in the second – may well have been motivated by the desire to escape into a more autonomous female world, isolated from the sphere of male influence. In both works men are relegated to very much of a background role.¹⁵

THE SINGING ASS

The opening part of this essay has considered the Solov'evian and Dionysian ideas which shaped the Symbolist image of woman, their application to the case of Zinov'eva-Annibal and her ambiguous response to this image. It now remains to examine *The Singing Ass* in the light of these issues. This play is of particular interest when considering Zinov'eva-Annibal's development; it is one of her latest works, written hurriedly in the spring of 1907 and partly published in May, just a few months before her death. It returns to the drama form used three years earlier in *Rings*, but on this occasion the relationship to Ivanov's ideas is one of ironic satire and subversion rather than of supportive echo.

The play is not well known, and has received next to no critical attention.¹⁶ And yet it is a fascinating document for at least two reasons. It provides an amusing and lively picture of the goings-on at the *bashnia* in 1906 (Ivanov's home and salon, known as the 'Tower', was in itself a microcosm of St Petersburg literary life). It is also remarkable as a rather daring piece of feminist rewriting of Shakespeare, adapted to satirize the Russian Symbolist canon.¹⁷

Biographical background

The polemic purpose of the play cannot be appreciated without a brief recapitulation of the main biographical events on which it is explicitly based.¹⁸ The year 1906 at the *bashnia* was dominated by seemingly endless late-night discussions of the nature of Eros. Behind the public front of these debates, another more private and intimate one was also taking place within Ivanov's marriage. Both spouses were intensely

preoccupied by the question of the ideal relationship between love (in its twin physical and spiritual dimensions) and marriage. According to the Solov'evian and Dionysian ideals discussed above, an individual's spiritual well-being depended on achieving self-transcendence through the love of another person. For a marriage to succeed, it was therefore essential for this mystic dimension to be preserved. And yet, as Vera, the heroine of *Thirty-Three Abominations* never tires of reiterating, the two greatest enemies of love are habit and fidelity. How, therefore, was one to maintain the ideal of Eros – love with a mystic dimension – in marriage?

A theoretical discussion of this question was provided by Ivanov in his essay of 1908, 'O dostoinstve zhenshchin' ('On the Dignity of Women').¹⁹ Here he promotes the periodic separation of the sexes as a means of enabling each to fulfil its true spiritual potential by escaping the dulling routine of a closed marriage. This provided some sort of conceptual underpinning for experiments with homosexual love, and indeed, one finds that reflections on this theme become increasingly prevalent in Ivanov's diary of 1906, linked to a growing sense of loneliness and desire to prove that he is 'alive'. Around this time he was attending the meetings of the Hafiz circle, a mainly male group with homosexual overtones, described quite vividly by Kuz'min in his diary.²⁰ Parallel women-only meetings organized by Zinov'eva-Annibal were attended by Liubov' Blok, Nadezhda Chulkova and Margarita Sabashnikova.²¹

These issues were hotly debated by Ivanov and his wife in an atmosphere of some tension, and before the beginning of the summer of 1906 they reached a decision to introduce a third person into their marriage. This resolution led to two successive experiments. The first was with Sergei Gorodetskii and took place during Lidiia's absence in Switzerland from mid-June to mid-August 1906. Needful of a break, Lidiia left St Petersburg to spend the summer with her children, knowing before her departure that Ivanov was going to embark on an affair during her absence and apparently approving the choice of Gorodetskii for this purpose. Throughout her absence, Ivanov wrote her regular letters, chronicling the progression of his affair. He

wanted to see Gorodetskii as a mask of Dionysus, but, ironically, complained that Gorodetskii did not want him to love him because he was a man. The affair received its literary embodiment in the poems of Ivanov's third collection, *Eros*, published in January 1907 and remarkable for their intensity of feeling. The second experiment involved Margarita Sabashnikova. She and her husband Voloshin had moved into the Tower in October 1906 and at some point from the end of 1906 and through the spring and summer of 1907, with Voloshin's consent and approval, she became enmeshed in an affair with Ivanov.²²

Both experiments, while embarked on in good faith, evidently caused a certain amount of pain to Zinov'eva-Annibal and in the long term turned out to be failures.²³ *The Singing Ass* stands midway between the two episodes; it was written between March and April 1907²⁴ at a time when the second affair was in progress, and looks back from this standpoint at the first affair, quite possibly as a retrospective attempt to exorcize its memory through satirical parody.

The first act was printed in the anthology *Tsvetnik Or* (*The Flower-Bed of the Horae*), published by Ory in May 1907. Many of the works included in the anthology were by intimates of the *bashnia* and reflected events of the previous year. Zinov'eva-Annibal's contribution differed substantially from the other contributions through its satirical tone and humorous approach.²⁵ Three further acts of *The Singing Ass* survive in manuscript versions in Moscow and Rome. In 1993 the Moscow archive version of the three remaining acts was published in the journal *Teatr*.²⁶ The present discussion will, however, confine itself to the first act of the play which, through publication, acquired the status of a public statement and became a part of the literary culture of its time.

Relation to Shakespeare's original

Significantly, rather than composing an original work, Zinov'eva-Annibal chose to write a variation on an existing play, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This is made

plain on the opening page; the title *The Singing Ass* (a reference to Bottom with his ass's head) is followed by a subtitle «Вариации на тему из Шекспирова 'Сна в летнюю ночь'» ('Variations on a theme from Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream"').

Shakespeare's play is a comedy of love, acted out between three different sets of characters (aristocrats, craftsmen and fairies), all of whom have one thing in common: the problems of love and its relationship to marriage. Theseus and Hippolyta are about to be wed and the planned marriage of Hermia and Lysander is under threat. The craftsmen face the problem of representing in art the tragedy of passionate yet unfulfilled love told in the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. Oberon and Titania are in a state of marital discord, and, through the juices of the magic flower procured by Puck, the fairy world represents the supernatural power which sets the forces of love in motion.

A Midsummer Night's Dream was almost certainly written as a wedding entertainment,²⁷ and its basic theme, the relationship of love to marriage, was, as we have seen, one which very much preoccupied Ivanov and Zinov'eva-Annibal at this time. In addition to the appeal of its subject-matter, the magical atmosphere of the play, together with its explicit theatricality (the play within a play prepared by the actors) made it an ideal source for the depiction of literary life at the *bashnia*, often described as a little theatre in itself.²⁸ The fact that Shakespeare's play is also well known in Russian under a title which carries a suggestive reference to Ivanov, *Son v Ivanovu noch'* or *Son v Ivanovskuiu noch'*, may also have been instrumental in this choice.²⁹

Although *The Singing Ass* is a very free adaptation of Shakespeare (the title already indicates a substantial shift of emphasis in the play's centre of gravity), it relies on its original source and assumes a knowledge of it at all times. This device serves to add an extra implied layer of meaning to the work. The educated readership at which the play was aimed would inevitably focus its attention on the variations referred to in the subtitle: the areas in which the original plot was changed would stand out as the most significant.

What, then, were the principal changes made in the first act of the play? In terms of cuts, Zinov'eva-Annibal has made use of only part of Shakespeare's original and decreased the overall number of characters quite substantially. The actors have all been retained, but with new names and professions. Whereas Shakespeare's company have wonderfully homely names and down-to-earth occupations (Quince is a carpenter, Snug a joiner, Bottom a weaver, Flute a bellows-mender, Snout a tinker and Starveling a tailor), the members of Zinov'eva-Annibal's company carry fancy Greek-style names and have occupations to match.

Ligei is the chief poet of the group, and the author of the play to be performed. He corresponds to Bottom who effectively directs the play in Shakespeare's original, although Quince is its nominal director. Like Bottom he is turned into an ass; in Zinov'eva-Annibal's version this appears as an allegory of his true animal nature being revealed, reminding one of Shakespeare's description of Bottom as 'the shallowest thick-skin of that barren sort' (III. ii. 13). Other characters from the actors' group include Medon, described as a 'philosopher hymnosophist' (*filosof-gimnosofist*) and Baratron, a 'demagogue orator' (*demagog-orator*). The humbler professions are represented by Erast, a sculptor (*vaiatel'*), Leonid, a soldier, and Mormoliks, a 'master puncher' (*kulachnykh del master*). Unlike Shakespeare's engaging and unpretentious simpletons, Zinov'eva-Annibal's crew are represented as a loutish lot, who, despite their intellectual pretensions, spend most of their time conspiring to drag Hermia and Helena off into the bushes and arguing over who will have first go at them. From the last group, Oberon and Puck are present, but, Titania, significantly, is absent throughout the first act, having been advised by a female fairy acting on the instructions of Puck to visit her daughter Fida in order to escape her husband's bad temper.³⁰

In terms of action, Zinov'eva-Annibal's play is much reduced in scope. The published first act of the play corresponds to the first scene of Shakespeare's Act II, and to the first and third scenes of his Act III, heavily adapted. There are several alterations, of which the major one is undoubtedly a mischievous

piece of feminist rewriting of Shakespeare. Whereas in the original, Puck is the loyal servant of Oberon, always ready to do his bidding, in *The Singing Ass* he is fed up with his master's impossible requests and resolves to outwit him. This is made clear early on in the play when Puck refers to his master's 'insatiable spirit', feeding on illusions, and to the 'bitter poison' of his 'vain wishes'.³¹ In Shakespeare's *Dream* Oberon asks Puck for the magic flower and applies its juices to Titania, causing her to fall in love with Bottom. In Zinov'eva-Annibal's version Puck denies having the flower and later sprinkles its juice on to his master's eyes while he is asleep, causing him, rather than Titania, to fall in love with the poet and playwright Ligei, dressed as an ass. In other words the magic forces governing love are no longer controlled by men, and Oberon falls victim to the plight originally assigned to Titania.

Relation to life

All these changes and variations were evidently designed to bring the plot of Shakespeare's original more closely in line with events as they were played out at the *bashnia* in 1906. These parallels were all perfectly obvious to initiated readers at the time. On 22 May 1907 Briusov wrote to Gippius drawing her attention to the play and commenting on its reflection of recent events: «А видели ли вы *Цветник Ор?* ... Г-жа Лидия Зиновьева и т.д. в драме, 'варьированной на тему из Шекспира' (так и сказано!), под прозрачными псевдонимами пересказывает недавние перипетии из жизни 'средового' кружка». ³² ('And have you seen *The Flower-Bed of the Horae?* ... Mme Lidiia Zinov'eva etc. in a drama based on "variations on a theme from Shakespeare" (so it says!), using transparent pseudonyms relates recent peripeteia from the life of the "Wednesday" circle.') It is clear from the language of the play that Oberon is Ivanov, and that the absent Titania visiting her daughter is Lidiia away in Switzerland for the summer, staying with her children. Oberon falling in love with a man disguised as an ass is a transparent allusion to the affair between Ivanov and Gorodetskii which took place during Lidiia's absence. His

effusive and rhetorical professions of love to Ligei, the ass, parody Ivanov's attempts to invest love with mystical significance; they are couched in language which directly mimics the poetry addressed by Ivanov to Gorodetskii in *Eros*.³³

The following extract describes Oberon's first glimpse of Ligei in his new asinine guise. The characteristic Ivanovian images of passion as a burning fire and of the beloved as a divine creature or god are here addressed to an ass, traditionally regarded as an image of stupidity or lust; thus the language of mystical eros is devalued and reduced to a meaningless caricature.³⁴

ОБЕРОН

Горит пожар любви без утоленья,
Желаньем необъятным я палим . . .

*Лигей выбегает из-за кустов, на копытах,
с ослиным хвостом под короткой
туникой, в ослиной голове и с флейтой в
руках . . .*

ОБЕРОН

В экстатическом созерцании.

Прекрасный, кто ты? Дивного, как звать?
Ты человек? иль бог? Мое желанье,
Хватавшее весь мир, ты полонил.³⁵

(**ОBERON**

The fire of love burns unquenched,
I am consumed by unbounded desire . . .

*Ligei runs out from behind the bushes on hooves,
with an ass's tail under a short tunic, wearing an
ass's head and with a flute in his hands . . .*

OBERON

In ecstatic contemplation

Beauty, who are you? Marvel, what is your name?
Are you man? or god? My desire
Which embraced the whole world has been captured by you.)

A later passage ridicules Ivanov's determined attempts to overcome Gorodetskii's resistance to his advances, based on the belief that Eros would lead them together to new mystical heights.

ОБЕРОН

Цыпь, шут! Не зубоскалить зря! Молчи!
Эрот, приди, и сердце научи
Еще неведомым, сладчайшим ласкам.

ЛИГЕЙ

Ио! Ио! ... Нет!

ОБЕРОН

Что косных уст мне тайна изрекла?
Меня любя, ты станешь полубогом.
Два сильных вырощу тебе крыла.³⁶

(OBERON

Hush, fool! Don't bare your teeth for nothing! Be quiet!
Eros, come, and teach the heart
Caresses still unknown and sweetest.

LIGEI

Hee haw! Hee haw! ... No!

OBERON

What has the riddle of dull lips uttered to me?
By loving me you will become a demi-god.
I will grow you two strong wings.)

These general parallelisms are even extended down to small details. From Ivanov's letter to Lidiia in Switzerland we learn of his intense desire for her approval from afar of his affair with Gorodetskii: «Жажду твоей близости как жизнетворной силы ... Твое последнее слово необходимо мне, как творению слово Творца: 'хорошо', как утверждающая сила мирового Художника» ('I long for your closeness as a life-giving force ... I need your final word, just as the created world needs the word of the Creator: "good", as the sanctioning force of the universal Artist.')

³⁷ This rather egocentric wish is parodied towards the end of the first act of *The Singing Ass*:

ОБЕРОН

Но где Титания?

ПОК

У милой Фиды.

ОБЕРОН

Хочу, чтобы любила нас царица.

ПОК

Желаешь вздора, — не слепа она.³⁸

(OBERON

But where is Titania?

ПУК

At dear Fida's.

OBERON

I want the queen to love us.

ПУК

Your wish is foolish -- she's not blind.)

Satirical intent

The Singing Ass was described by Zinov'eva-Annibal as a 'satirical drama'.³⁹ It is clear from the above comments that the main butt of her satire was the false pretensions surrounding the mystical cult of Eros, and in particular the tendency to substitute literary or metaphysical constructs for the reality of human experience. She questions the emphasis which the Solov'evian and Dionysian views of love placed on the attainment of self-transcendence through the ecstatic love of another being. The automatic assumption that physical love will always carry a mystical dimension is shown to be an illusion or pretence. Oberon's love for an ass demonstrates that the chosen object of love may be woefully at odds with the emotions invested in it, and the lecherous behaviour of the actors reveals the unvarnished cruder reality which underlay much of the philosophizing about mystical eros. Madness prevails, but in the form of human stupidity rather than of Dionysiac frenzy. The absence of Titania in the first act suggests that these features are characteristic of male rather than female attitudes to love.

How far did this satire in fact go? Mild satire can, after all, be an accepted part of any canon or tradition, only serving to bolster it within accepted limits. Blok's *Balaganchik* (*Puppet Booth*), first published and performed in 1906, not long before *The Singing Ass* was written, is a case in point; while outwardly satirizing the ideal of the Beautiful Lady (*Prekrasnaia Dama*), it in

fact went some way towards reinforcing this tradition. The term 'mystical scepticism' which Chulkov used to characterize this work could perhaps also be applied to *The Singing Ass*, poised uncertainly between faith and irony.⁴⁰

Ultimately, the problem of determining the limits of the satirical intent of *The Singing Ass* is bound up with the difficulty of evaluating the real extent of Zinov'eva-Annibal's emancipation from Ivanov's influence at this stage of her life. The biographical evidence presents a contradictory picture. On the one hand she appears to be playing a supportive role, echoing her husband's views. She begged him not to choose anyone other than Gorodetskii for his first experiment,⁴¹ and later wrote to Mintslova with an ecstatic description of the mystical revelations brought about by his affair with Sabashnikova, duplicating his turn of phrase in every sentence.⁴² And yet on the other hand, in a letter to Ivanov from Switzerland, she complained about his alienation from her and confessed to a feeling of envy;⁴³ when she returned to St Petersburg she evidently found Gorodetskii's presence distasteful. Later, during her husband's involvement with Sabashnikova, she confided to Chulkova that she found his coldness and insensitivity upsetting.⁴⁴ Voloshin's diary of the period reveals that she initially disliked Sabashnikova, and was quite desperate in March 1907 to get away from the mounting tension at home and to leave for Zagor'e.⁴⁵

Zinov'eva-Annibal was clearly torn between conflicting needs and aspirations. This is confirmed by the revealing analysis of her character noted by Ivanov in his diary on 12 June 1906. After recording a recent day of emotional scenes between them, he comments on her insistence that she is not jealous but envious of him:

завидует же она всему и, больше всего, мужчине во мне, ее глубоко оскорбляет гордость мужской самовлюбленности, абстрактный нарциссизм моей чувственности ... Она горда и честолюбива, знает себя и все еще не нашла, величается и отчаивается. Замыкается и уединяется в мире своих идей и эмоций. Отчаянно борется за окончательную внутреннюю

эмансипацию от моего идейного влияния. Сжигает то, чему поклонялась.⁴⁶

(she envies everything and most of all the man in me, she is deeply offended by the pride of male vanity, by the abstract narcissism of my sensuality . . . She is proud and ambitious, knows herself and has still not found herself, glories in herself and despairs. Closes herself off and withdraws into the world of her own ideas and emotions. Struggles desperately for a final inner emancipation from my ideological influence. Burns what she used to worship.)

This characterization pinpoints a number of crucial details, highly relevant to an understanding of *The Singing Ass*: Zinov'eva-Annibal's struggle with her husband's influence, her difficulty in resisting it without an alternative ideology, and her resentment of aspects of his attitude to sensual love, regarded by her as typically male. These features explain why she turned to satire (the ideal genre for undermining without having to present a positive alternative) and targeted it particularly at male behaviour. Through her writing and the exercise of irony, Zinov'eva-Annibal was evidently able to achieve a greater measure of detachment from the circumstances of her life than the contradictions of her temperament normally allowed her. Although *The Singing Ass* was written for Ivanov's anthology and with his active encouragement, it is nevertheless a surprisingly sharp attack on various facets of life at the *bashnia*, and certainly a far cry from the unquestioning parroting of *Rings*.

The extract cited above is also illuminating with regard to the ultimate target of Zinov'eva-Annibal's satire in *The Singing Ass*. She may well have written the play to provide an outlet for the wounded feelings of bitterness and envy which the Gorodetskii episode had aroused, and which were revived by recent developments in the affair with Sabashnikova at the time of writing the play. On a deeper level, however, it is possible that Zinov'eva-Annibal, who was a great advocate of passion and physical beauty, was getting at something more fundamental – at what she sensed was the essential *literariness* of Ivanov's approach, the abstract nature of his feelings and his lack of real passion or commitment. Her satirical portrayal of his feelings

for Gorodetskii may have been a vehicle for a more general attack on his ability to relate to real people and emotions.

It is well known that the Symbolist ideal of incorporating abstract ideas into life often resulted in the transformation of life into a literary artefact, rather than in its desired intensification. In his memoirs Dobuzhinskii not only describes life at the Tower as a 'theatre', but, more devastatingly, suggests that Ivanov was a somewhat indifferent spectator of the performance.⁴⁷ Ivanov himself periodically expressed the fear that he was 'dead',⁴⁸ and this accusation was also levelled at him in various forms by others.⁴⁹ If this suggestion has any foundation, it would go some way towards explaining Zinov'eva-Annibal's choice of Shakespeare's play as a source, given its atmosphere of magic and artificiality, and the extreme literariness of its construction, comprising a play within a play. The device of metatheatre traditionally suggests a view of the world as a stage or of life as a dream. Shakespeare's humorous portrayal of the craftsmen actors savaging Ovid's tragic tale of the noble love of Pyramus and Thisbe was held up as a mirror image to the actors of the *bashnia* acting out the Dionysiac mystery of Eros.

The satirical thrust of *The Singing Ass* is sharpened by the fact that the play, while taking up many of the standard features of Symbolist drama (written in verse form, replete with intertextual, literary and mythological allusions, symbolic figures and references to the cult of Eros), uses these to a very different end: to point out the dangers of dogmatic assertions about the link between this world and transcendent reality, thereby challenging the central claim of Ivanov's mysticism and aesthetics, *a realibus ad realiora*. In this way Zinov'eva-Annibal has neatly countered the claims which Ivanov had made for her play *Rings* three years earlier, hailing it as a precursor of the new Symbolist drama of the future which would transform life through art.

Zinov'eva-Annibal's abrupt death in October 1907 makes it impossible to know exactly what direction her writing would have evolved in, had she lived longer. However, *The Singing Ass* provides compelling evidence that she was beginning to detach herself from her surroundings and to emancipate herself from her husband's influence. It marks an important stage in the

development of her writing, considered as a response to some of the ideological pressures characteristic of the Symbolist ambience at the turn of the century.

NOTES

- 1 For a brief bibliography of works by Zinov'eva-Annibal and of early articles and reviews of her work, see K. D. Muratova, ed., *Istoriia russkoi literatury kontsa XIX-nachala XX veka: Bibliograficheskii ukazatel'* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1963), pp. 242-3. The fullest account of Zinov'eva-Annibal's literary achievement is by T. L. Nikol'skaia, 'Tvorcheskii put' L. D. Zinov'evoi-Annibal', in *Al. Blok i revoliutsiia 1905 goda: Blokovskii sbornik VIII* (Tartu, 1988), pp. 123-37. The first detailed encyclopaedia article on Zinov'eva-Annibal (by O. B. Kushlina) appeared in P. A. Nikolaev, ed., *Russkie pisateli 1800-1917. Biograficheskii slovar'*, II (Moscow, 1992), pp. 342-4. After work on this paper was completed, several English-language publications appeared with sections on Zinov'eva-Annibal. See Catriona Kelly, *A History of Russian Women's Writing 1820-1992* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 157-60; Charlotte Rosenthal's essay on women's prose in the Silver Age in Toby W. Clyman and Diana Greene, eds., *Women Writers in Russian Literature*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), pp. 162-3; the entry on Zinov'eva-Annibal by Kristi A. Groberg in Marina Ledkovsky, Charlotte Rosenthal and Mary Zirin, eds., *Dictionary of Russian Women Writers*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), pp. 752-4. In recent years a few of Zinov'eva-Annibal's stories have been reprinted in the Russian periodical press by Mariia Mikhailova.
- 2 For a fuller discussion of these ideas, see Pamela Davidson, *The Poetic Imagination of Vyacheslav Ivanov: a Russian Symbolist's Perception of Dante* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 53-62.
- 3 V. Bazarov, 'Lichnost' i liubov' v svete "novogo religioznogo soznaniia"', in *Literaturnyi raspad: Kriticheskii sbornik* (St Petersburg, 1908), pp. 231-2. Bazarov is criticizing Berdiaev's essay 'Metafizika pola i liubvi', published in *Pereval*, 5 (1907), pp. 7-16, 6 (1907), pp. 24-36 and as a chapter in Berdiaev's second book, *Novoe russkoe soznanie i obshchestvennost'* (St Petersburg, 1907).
- 4 L. D. Blok, 'I byl' i nebylitsy o Bloke i o sebe', in V. Orlov, ed., *Aleksandr Blok v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, I (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1980), pp. 134-87. Evidence of Zinov'eva-

- Annibal's sense of 'earth-born' kinship with Liubov' Blok is provided by the inscription which she wrote for her on a copy of *Tragicheskii zverinets*: 'Sestre po Materi Demetre Liubovi Demetrievne ot Lidii Demetrevny' ('For Liubov' Demetrevna, my sister by Mother Demeter, from Lidiia Demetrevna'). See K. P. Lukirskaia, ed., *Biblioteka A. A. Bloka. Opisanie*, 1 (Leningrad: BAN, 1984), p. 285.
- 5 See Ivanov's description of Zinov'eva-Annibal's role in his life in his autobiographical letter of 1917, quoted in his *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by D. V. Ivanov and O. Deschartes (Brussels: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1971-87), II, p. 20.
 - 6 Pavel Florenskii, *Stolp i utverzhenie istiny: Opyt pravoslavnoi feoditsej v dvenadsati pis'makh* (Moscow, 1914), pp. 570, 801. The poem under discussion is 'Pokrov' from the 'Povecherie' section of the first book of *Cor Ardens*.
 - 7 Nikolai Berdiaev, "'Ivanovskie sredy'", in S. A. Vengerov, ed., *Russkaia literatura XX veka: 1890-1917*, III, Book 8 (Moscow, 1916), p. 98. Reprinted in Lidiia Ivanova, *Vospominaniia: Kniga ob otse*, ed. by John Malmstad (Paris, 1990), pp. 320-1. A similar view was conveyed by Belyi: in his obituary of Zinov'eva-Annibal, *Pravda zhivaia*, 1 (26 October 1907), he describes her role as that of an inspirer in Ivanov's literary circle, rather than as that of a theoretician or writer in her own right.
 - 8 Modest Gofman, 'Peterburgskie vospominaniia', *Novyi zhurnal*, 43 (1955), p. 123. Gofman was a regular visitor at the Tower in 1906 and 1907; he became the secretary of Ivanov's publishing-house Ory which printed Ivanov's *Eros*, Zinov'eva-Annibal's works *Tridtsat' tri uroda* and *Tragicheskii zverinets*, and the anthology *Tsvetnik Or* which included 'Pevuchii osel' amongst its contributions.
 - 9 Anton Krainyi [Zinaida Gippius], 'Bratskaia mogila', *Vesy*, 7 (July 1907), p. 61.
 - 10 N. G. Chulkova, "'Ty - pamiat' smolknushhego slova ...': Iz vospominanii o Georgii Chulkove', *Vestnik russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniia*, 157 (1989), p. 130.
 - 11 Ariadna Tyrkova-Vil'iams, 'Teni minuvshhego: Vokrug bashni', *Vozrozhdenie*, 41 (May 1955), pp. 80-1. See also the same author's earlier portrayal of Zinov'eva-Annibal at the *bashnia* as an actress, dressed up for a masquerade, whose natural character showed through this artificial mask as soon as she began to speak; Ariadna Tyrkova, 'Pamiati Al. Bloka: Beglye vstrechi', *Rul'*, 256 (1921), p. 4.
 - 12 See p. 149, and p. 154, n. 33 above.

- 13 Ivanov's essay 'Novye maski' was published as the introduction to Lidia Zinov'eva-Annibal, *Kol'tsa: Drama v 3-kh deistviakh* (Moscow, 1904), pp. iii-xiv, and also separately in *Vesy*, 7 (1904), 1-10.
- 14 The first work was written in the summer of 1906 and published in March 1907. The second one was published in May 1907. See Nikol'skaia, 'Tvorcheskii put', pp. 129-30.
- 15 Sergei Gorodetskii traces this tendency back to *Kol'tsa*; see his comment following his discussion of *Kol'tsa*, *Tridtsat' tri uroda* and *Tragicheskii zverinets* in his obituary article on Zinov'eva-Annibal, 'Ogon' za reshetkoi', *Zolotoe runo*, 3-4 (1908), p. 97: 'Vo vsekhn trekh knigakh muzhskoe pochti neulovimo . . . Stikhiia avtora zhenskoe' ('In all three books the masculine is almost imperceptible . . . The author's element is the feminine').
- 16 Surprisingly, contemporary reviewers of *Tsvetnik Or*, while discussing other contributions to the anthology, generally omitted all reference to 'Pevuchii osel'. Blok considered the anthology in his review of literary publications for 1907, but failed to mention the play (despite the fact that further on in the same essay he praised *Tragicheskii zverinets* extensively). See A. Blok, 'Literaturnye itogi 1907 goda', in Aleksandr Blok, *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by V. N. Orlov, v (Moscow and Leningrad, 1962), pp. 223, 226. Belyi's review of the anthology described it as a collection of aromatic flowers engulfed in nettles and also passed over Zinov'eva-Annibal's contribution in silence, presumably relegating it to the nettles; see Andrei Belyi, Review of *Tsvetnik Or: Koshnitsa pervaiia*, *Vesy*, 6 (June 1907), 66-9. The obituaries of Zinov'eva-Annibal which appeared in 1907-8 only occasionally mentioned the play in passing; Sergei Gorodetskii's obituary article refers to 'Pevuchii osel' in a footnote ('Ogon' za reshetkoi', pp. 95-8). Sergei Auslander's obituary ('Iz Peterburga', *Zolotoe runo*, 10 (1907), pp. 76-7) likewise makes only passing mention of the play. A. Amfiteatrov was one of the few critics to comment on the play, albeit briefly, in the context of his general drive against writers he described as 'khudozhniki russkoi pornografii' ('artists of Russian pornography'). After some discussion of Kuz'min's 'Komediia o Evdokii iz Geliopolia', published in the same anthology, he condemned Zinov'eva-Annibal's play (without mentioning its author or title) as a travesty of Shakespeare, referring to it as 'sploshnoi lepet besstydnichaiushchei impotentsii' ('an unbroken babble of shameless impotence'); see A. Amfiteatrov, *Protiu techeniia* (St Petersburg, 1908) pp. 146-7.

Among more recent critics Temira Pachmuss includes a brief reference to Amfiteatrov's comment in her outline of Zinov'eva-

- Annibal's work, but mistakenly attributes it to the wrong play, *Kol'tsa*; see Temira Pachmuss, ed. and trans., *Women Writers in Russian Modernism: An Anthology* (Urbana, ILL: University of Illinois Press, 1978), p. 195. Nikol'skaia devotes a paragraph to the play, contrasting its light humour with the more ponderous *Kol'tsa* ("Tvorcheskii put", p. 147). Nikolai Bogomolov's recent publication of the full text of the play is prefaced by his introductory article, 'Na grani byta i bytiia', *Teatr*, 5 (May 1993), 159-91. Further comments on the play in relation to meetings of the Hafiz circle are also included in N. A. Bogomolov, 'Peterburgskie gafizity', in Viach. Vs. Ivanov, V. N. Toporov and T. V. Tsiv'ian, eds., *Serebrianyi vek v Rossii: Izbrannye stranitsy* (Moscow: Radiks, 1993), pp. 167-210.
- 17 Meierkhol'd praised the play both as a piece of drama, and for its revival of Shakespeare. In a letter of 17 July 1907 to the actress Vera Komissarzhevskaja he recommended it for staging, mentioning that although only the first act had been published, Zinov'eva-Annibal had read the full work to him; see V. E. Meierkhol'd, *Perepiska: 1896-1939* (Moscow, 1976), pp. 103, 373. In a later article dated 1911, 'Russkie dramaturgi (Opyt klassifikatsii, s prilozheniem skhemy razvitiia russkoi dramy)', he lists 'Pevuchii osel' among works of the 'New Theatre' (favourably contrasted with the theatre of the 'decadents') which attempt to revive aspects of an earlier genuinely theatrical epoch; Zinov'eva-Annibal's play is cited as a revival of the manner of Shakespearean comedies. See Vs. Meierkhol'd, *O teatre* (St Petersburg, 1913), p. 115.
- 18 For a fuller view of this period in Ivanov's life, see his diary for 1906 in V. Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, pp. 744-54, Ol'ga Deschartes's commentary on the diary (II, pp. 75f-64) and her introduction to Ivanov's works (I, pp. 96-106). Aspects of the relationship between Ivanov's ideas and his life are also discussed in Davidson, *The Poetic Imagination of Vyacheslav Ivanov*, pp. 110-20.
- 19 First published in the newspaper *Slovo*, 650 (1908), p. 3; 652 (1908), p. 4; then in Viacheslav Ivanov, *Po zvezdam: Stat'i i aforizmy* (St Petersburg, 1909), pp. 377-92.
- 20 See the description of these evenings in Kuz'min's diary published with an introduction and notes in George Cheron, 'The diary of Mixail Kuzmin, 1905-1906', *Wiener Slavistischer Almanach*, 17 (1986), pp. 391-438.
- 21 See Chulkova, "'Ty - pamiat' smolknivshego slova ...'", pp. 132-3.
- 22 A detailed account of the affair from March 1907 can be found in

Voloshin's diary entries for 1907; see M. Voloshin, 'Istoriia moei dushi', in Maksimilian Voloshin, *Avtobiograficheskaia proza. Dnevnik*, compiled and edited by Z. D. Davydov and V. P. Kupchenko (Moscow: Kniga, 1991), pp. 261–84.

- 23 Despite Zinov'eva-Annibal's official 'approval' of the two affairs, there is evidence which suggests that they involved her in a considerable amount of suffering. In her memoirs Lidiia Ivanova notes her mother's unusual sadness during her stay with her children in Switzerland at the time of Ivanov's affair with Gorodetskii: 'na etot raz chuvstvovalos' chto-to inoe, chto-to ochen' pechal'noe, kakoi-to solnechnyi zakat. Mama byla grustnaia, otiazhelevshaia ...' ('this time something different could be sensed, something very sad, some sort of sunset. Mother was sad, burdened ...'). (Ivanova, *Kniga ob ottse*, p. 23). Zinov'eva-Annibal recorded in her diary on 21 August 1906 her feeling of displeasure at Gorodetskii's presence when she returned from Switzerland and was met by Ivanov at the station (Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, p. 755). Chulkova also recalls Zinov'eva-Annibal's complaints and suffering at the time of Ivanov's affair with Sabashnikova (Chulkova, "'Ty – pamiat' smolknushego slova ...'", p. 134).
- 24 On 24 March 1907, Zinov'eva-Annibal wrote to her daughter Vera that the decision to publish the anthology had just been taken: 'I Viacheslav ochen' khochet, chtoby poshla moia satiricheskaia drama, kotoruiu teper' pishu v stikhakh i ne znaiu sekundy otdykha' ('And Viacheslav very much wants to include my satirical drama which I am writing now in verse without a second's rest'). See *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, 92, *Aleksandr Blok: Novye materialy i issledovaniia*, III (Moscow: Nauka, 1982), p. 274. This suggests that the first act of the play was written between March and April 1907, as *Tsvetnik Or* was printed in May 1907. For evidence that the rest of the play was completed by mid-July 1907 at the latest, see Meierkhol'd's letter, quoted above in note 17.
- 25 'Pevuchii osel'. *Tsvetnik Or: Koshnitsa pervaiia* (St Petersburg: Ory, 1907). pp. 121–69. On the opening pages of the anthology the play is listed as 'Komediia Lidii Zinov'evoi Annibal'. On p. 121 of the anthology a fuller description is given: L. Zinov'eva-Annibal, 'Pevuchii osel. Trilogii pervaiia chast': "Altsvet". Variatsii na temu iz Shekspirova "Sna v letniuiu noch'". Although the play is described here as a trilogy, four acts were in fact written. Other contributions included Maksimilian Voloshin, 'Kimmeriiskie sumerki', Sergei Gorodetskii, 'Alyi kitezh', M. Sabashnikova, 'Lesnaia svirel', and Viacheslav Ivanov's cycle of seventeen sonnets, 'Zolotye zavesy', commemorating his affair with Sabash-

nikova. The arrangement of these items is significant; 'Pevuchii osel' immediately precedes the poems by Gorodetskii, and the last two items by Sabashnikova and Ivanov were published next to each other at the conclusion of the anthology.

- 26 A manuscript version of Acts II–IV is held in the Manuscripts Section of Rossiiskaia Gosudarstvennaia Biblioteka, fond 109, kart. 41, ed. khr.19–21. This version, together with the text of Act I printed in *Tsvetnik Or*, is published with an introduction by Nikolai Bogomolov in *Teatr*, 5 (May 1993), 159–91. Ivanov's archive in Rome contains the proofs of Act I, marked with corrections in the hand of Ivanov. It also contains the final typescript of Acts II, III and IV, with corrections (possibly in the hand of Zinov'eva-Annibal), representing the definitive text of the play (Box 8, containing 26, 20 and 14 large format sheets, corresponding respectively to Acts II–IV). This information has kindly been provided by Andrei Shishkin, who is currently preparing a full descriptive catalogue of Ivanov's Rome archive. For evidence of Ivanov's unrealized plan (1918–1921) to publish the entire play under the imprint of Alianskii's publishing-house Alkonost, see G. V. Obatnin, 'Viach. I. Ivanov. Predislovie k povesti L. D. Zinov'evoi-Annibal "Tridtsat' tri uroda"', *De Visu*, 9 (10) (1993), p. 25.
- 27 For a discussion of this point, see the introduction to the Arden edition of W. Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. by Harold F. Brooks (London: Methuen, 1979), pp. liii–lviii.
- 28 See, for example, M. Dobuzhinskii, 'Vstrechi s pisateliami i poctami', *Novyi zhurnal*, 11 (1945), p. 284. M. Dobuzhinskii designed symbolic covers for *Tsvetnik Or*, *Tridtsat' tri uroda*, *Tragicheskii zverinets* and Ivanov's *Po zvezdam*.
- 29 The title 'Son v Ivanovu noch' derives from the link between Midsummer Day (24 June) and the feast of St John the Baptist ('Ivan Kupala'), known as 'Ivanov den' and widely celebrated in traditional Russian folklore on 24 June. Midsummer Night was termed 'Ivanova noch' or 'noch' na Ivana Kupalu' and was regarded as a time when lunacy was supposed to be prevalent. For a list of Russian translations and adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (which omits reference to 'Pevuchii osel'), see *Shekspir: Bibliografiia russkikh perevodov i kriticheskoi literatury na russkom iazyke, 1748–1962* (Moscow, 1964), p. 615 and listed entries. Several versions of Shakespeare's play appeared during the 1880s, 1890s and 1900s; one of the most popular translations, by N. M. Satin (1851), was reissued in 1902 in the Brokgauz and Efron edition of Shakespeare with a preface by F. D. Batiushkov.

Apart from translations, there were also a few other free adaptations of Shakespeare's play which predated 'Pevuchii osel', including one by Kiukhel'beker and another by Vel'tman (1844).

- 30 For this purpose the play starts with an additional scene between Puck and a female fairy, 'Serdtsse-rozy' (Rose-heart). In the remaining acts of the play, Titania returns and plays a prominent role.
- 31 *Tsvetnik Or*, pp. 126-7.
- 32 *Literaturnoe nasledstvo: Valerii Briusov*, 85 (Moscow, 1976), p. 696.
- 33 See, for example, the poems 'Vyzyvanie Vakkha', 'Zodchii', 'Khudozhnik' and 'Pozhar' in Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, pp. 368-9, 380-1. As well as echoing Ivanov's poetry in this way, 'Pevuchii osel' also incorporates two poems by him directly into its text (on pp. 123 and 131, ascribed to Ivanov in a note on p. 169).
- 34 In this context it is worth recalling that in Apuleius' *Golden Ass* (one of the sources for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), the ass typifies lust, and Lucius' transformation into an ass is seen as a just punishment for his carnal sins and for meddling with the supernatural. See Lucius Apuleius, *The Transformations of Lucius, otherwise known as The Golden Ass*, translated by Robert Graves (London: Penguin, 1954) and the introductory comments by Robert Graves on pp. 12-13.
- 35 *Tsvetnik Or*, pp. 160-1.
- 36 *Ibid.*, pp. 164-5.
- 37 From letter of 11 August 1906, quoted in Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, p. 758.
- 38 *Tsvetnik Or*, p. 168. Other details parodied include the numerous references to the phases of the moon (a recurrent feature of Shakespeare's play and of Ivanov's own references to his affair with Gorodetskii) and the description of Oberon dozing all day in his bower (an allusion to Ivanov, who used to sleep for most of the morning in the *bashnia*).
- 39 See note 24 above.
- 40 'Balaganchik' was published in April 1906, in the first issue of the miscellany *Fakely*, which also carried contributions by Zinov'eva-Annibal and Ivanov. The opening performance, produced by Meierkhol'd, was held on 30 December 1906. Chulkov's comments on the play were published a few days earlier. See the notes on the play in Blok, *Sobranie sochinenii*, IV (Moscow and Leningrad, 1961), pp. 567-8. A similar strain of 'mystical scepticism' was reflected in Blok's projected play 'Dionis Giperbo-reiskii', drafted on 29 December 1906 on the eve of the premiere

of 'Balaganchik', evidently written with Ivanov in mind and intended as a humorous pastiche of the concept of mystical ascent. See Aleksandr Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki 1901-1920*, ed. by V. N. Orlov (Moscow, 1965), pp. 87-91. Further evidence of the close link between Blok and Zinov'eva-Annibal is provided by the story 'Golova Meduzy' in which Zinov'eva-Annibal portrays Blok as Neznakomov, drawing on his poem of 1906, 'Neznakomka'. For an analysis see A. V. Lavrov, 'Marginalii k Blokovskim tekstam', in Iu. K. Gerasimov, N. Iu. Griakalova and A. V. Lavrov, eds., *Aleksandr Blok. Issledovaniia i materialy* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1991), pp. 182-8. 'Golova Meduzy' can be compared to 'Pevuchii osel' in its self-conscious use of literary sources to achieve a stylized portrait of contemporary figures in the artistic world.

- 41 See the extract from Zinov'eva-Annibal's letter to Ivanov, dated 4 August 1906, quoted in N. A. Bogomolov, 'Epizod v peterburgskoi kul'turnoi zhizni 1906-1907 gg.', in *Al. Blok i revoliutsiia 1905 goda: Blokovskii sbornik VIII* (Tartu: Tartuskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1988), p. 100. The same article includes a note on 'Pevuchii osel' on p. 110.
- 42 'Bolee istinnogo i bolee nastoiashchego v dukhe braka *troistvennogo* ia ne mogu sebe predstavit', potomu chto poslednii nash svet i posledniaia nasha volia tozhdestvenny i ediny' ('I cannot imagine a *triple* marriage more true or genuine in spirit because our last light and our last wish are identical and one'). See letter of 2 March 1907, quoted in N. A. Bogomolov, "'My - dva grozoi zazhzhennye stvola": Erotika v russkoi poezii — ot simbolistov do oberiutov', *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 11 (1991), p. 60.
- 43 Noted by Ivanov in his diary, Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, p. 753.
- 44 For sources, see note 23 above.
- 45 The last entry before the diary is resumed in September 1907 is dated 11 March 1907 and concludes with the following words: "'Ia za kazhdyi novyi den' boius'", - govorit Lidiia. U vsekh takoe zhe chuvstvo. Vse stremiatsia raz"ckhat'sia, otdokhnut', uspokoit'sia ot etoi nechelovecheskoi napriazhennoi atmosfery poslednikh dnei' ("I'm fearful of each new day", says Lidiia. Everyone has just the same feeling. Everyone wants to get away from each other, to have a rest, to calm down from the inhuman tense atmosphere of these last days'). See Voloshin, *Autobiograficheskaia proza*, p. 266. Lidiia's initial dislike of Sabashnikova is noted in the first entry for 1907, dated 1 March (p. 261).
- 46 Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, pp. 747-8.
- 47 'K etomy "teatru" my ... otnosilis' ochen' ne vs'er'ez, no s

liubopytstvom. Ochevidno ko vsemu po-filosofski ravnodushno otnosilsia i sam khoziain' ('We regarded this "theatre" . . . with very little seriousness but with curiosity. Evidently the host himself regarded everything with philosophical indifference'). See Dobuzhinskii, 'Vstrechi s pisateliami i poetami', p. 284.

- 48 'A vprochem -- ne mertv li ia sam?' ('But come to think of it, am I not dead myself?'). Diary entry of 1 June 1906, Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, p. 744.
- 49 Berdiaev, for example, accused him of living his life at one remove, in a sphere of purely 'philological existence' (*filologicheskoe bytie*); Nikolai Berdiaev, 'Ocharovaniia otrazhennykh kul'tur', *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 15833 (30 September 1915), pp. 2-3.