

# Plant, Metaphor, God: Thinking Mythically in Viacheslav Ivanov's Essays

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In a lecture on the poet given many times in the 1920s in Vitebsk and in Leningrad, Mikhail Bakhtin remarked that the “flesh” of the word is not properly felt in Viacheslav Ivanov's poetry. Ivanov's tendency toward “logical thought,” claimed Bakhtin, suffocates the poetic word's individuality, and indeed the very scent of its body. For these reasons, he concludes, one cannot really consider Ivanov an “intimate” poet.<sup>1</sup> Bakhtin's lukewarm appraisal of Ivanov's poetics has become a commonplace in the poet's reception by his contemporaries and critics alike. From a fellow poet's bemused remark that “for all his depth of understanding, he wrote bad poems” to a critic's comment that Ivanov was “risen from Trediakovsky's grave, writing poetry with a mop,” the difficult, unappealing, and downright unpoetic nature of his verse is now, paradoxically, a central feature of the cultural myth of one of Russian modernism's founding poets.<sup>2</sup> However, Ivanov's verse bears a significant advantage: it has drawn those readers who are, in a certain sense, disciples of his, in that they believe in his precept that poetry can accomplish intellectual work—that it can think.

The goal of this article is to illuminate the poetic-cognitive effects of Ivanov's expository engagement with a specific set of mythical material, specifically Demeter and Dionysus. To do so, I focus on those poems and essays where his deployment of these mythic personages as metaphors in the service of explaining the task of poetry is most profound. The essays are “The Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles” (1905), “Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism” (1908), and “The Testaments of Symbolism” (1910). I frame my discussion of his essays with examples of these mythic images in verse: one early (“Beauty,” 1902)

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<sup>1</sup>M. M. Bakhtin, “Viacheslav Ivanov,” in *Viacheslav Ivanov: Pro et contra. Lichnost' i tvorchestvo Viacheslava Ivanova v otsenke russkikh i zarubezhnykh myslitelei i issledovatelei. Antologiya*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 2016), 2:12.

<sup>2</sup>The first speaker is Akhmatova, from Lidiia Chukovskaia, “Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatove,” and the second is Petr Iakubovich, both quoted in *Pro et contra* 2:8, 12.

and one later (“With the rays of his arrows Eros pierced me,” 1907). As we move through the corpus chronologically, we note a progression in terms of the images employed. What starts with Dionysus (and—per Ivanov’s pantheon—his alter-ego Christ) and Demeter as embodied character-presences in the texts slowly morphs into their presence in avatar form: vine and grain.

Sensing the cognitive and conceptual of Ivanov’s poetics—though in a review that angered the poet greatly—Nikolai Gumilev ventured that Ivanov’s relation to language and verse was closer to that of a philologist than a poet: he did not see them as ends in themselves, but rather as a means to convey the idea concealed within.<sup>3</sup> It was the intense *thinking* inherent in these ideas that shaped the language of Ivanov’s verse and gave it distinction.<sup>4</sup> All the resources available to Ivanov the poet were marshalled in the service of the poetically based expression of thought.

#### “LIGHTNINGLIKE FISSURES OF THE IMAGINATION”

Myth was one such resource. Indeed, not only in his verse but also, overwhelmingly, in his essays, Ivanov turns to ancient Greek myth in order to accomplish that cognitive and conceptual work, and frequently by means of traditionally *poetic* device. In this case, form supports and continues the work of content: Ivanov’s essays, which are urgent, erudite blends of Symbolist manifesto, lyric theory, mythopoesis, cultural criticism, and ancient history, are often dedicated to illuminating the work of poetry on the mind and the task of the poet. To this end, his engagement with mythic metaphor, his use of patterned sound and image, and his temporal play with repetition and rhythmic rupture collaborate to make his case more clearly, more quickly, and on a level of thought separate from the logical faculties we usually animate to apprehend written argument.<sup>5</sup>

Thinkers from different schools of thought have tackled the effects of poetry on the mind variously. Reuven Tsur, an influential scholar in the field of cognitive poetics, calls what I have just referred to as a “separate level of thought” the “precategorical” (that is, pre-linguistic) realm of cognition, observing that, because of speech’s “focus” on speech categories, “language is particularly ill-suited to convey unique emotional experiences, unique sensations, mystic insights, and the like,” and concludes that a speaker’s recourse to metaphoric image and rhythm might significantly enhance their attempts to communicate such experience.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, for Tsur, “the sound patterns of poetry in general, and rhyme in particular, typically exploit this precategorical acoustic information.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup>N. S. Gumilev, “Viacheslav Ivanov, Cor ardens, Chast’ pervaiia,” in *Pro et contra* 1:275–76.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>5</sup>For this way of conceiving of the intellectual work poetry might do, I am indebted to a specific phrase from Simon Jarvis, who, in an analysis of Viktor Zhirmunsky’s description of Pushkin, remarked that (per Zhirmunsky) Pushkin’s rhymes “both sound and think.” See Jarvis, “Why Rhyme Pleases,” *Thinking Verse*. 1 (2011): 22.

<sup>6</sup>Reuven Tsur, *Playing by Ear and by Tip of the Tongue: Precategorical Information in Poetry* (Amsterdam, 2012), 3.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 120. In *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* (New York, 2002), Peter Stockton makes a similar argument, situating the work of thinking poetically firmly in the mind and—crucially—the *body* of the reader, thus understanding poetry not as a locus of thought but rather as thought’s ingrained linguistic form. In the words of this leading scholar in the field, “Most simply, we think in the forms that we do and we say things in the

From quite a different angle, Boris Maslov and Richard Martin, two scholars from an emergent wave of scholarship reconsidering historical context's relation to poetic form, have also recently written about poetic metaphor as a kind of pre-logical conceptual technology, one which surfaced along with the invention of the lyric poem and which signified a mythic (pre-philosophical) mode of perception, conception, and expression. As Maslov puts it, in order to understand the role performed by metaphor in ancient poetry and thought,

we must remember that, before the rise of philosophy, the task of *conceiving of* the world was pursued, first and foremost, within the medium of poetry. Abstract concepts were not rigorously defined, interrelated by logic, or organized into a philosophical system; instead, they were construed as actors and cast (“hypostasized”) into what we would call personifications. The setting in which these concepts interacted was provided by “myth”—yet that was myth before the rise of philosophically inflected theology. In other words, it was not a mythological doctrine but a malleable medium of thought, which was subject to innovation and change that were *conceptual* in their nature and effects.<sup>8</sup>

Although the cognitive school's focus is on logical or conceptual priority (wherein “pre-categorical” signifies a realm of the brain, not a stage of human development) and the historical poetics focus is on historical priority (“before the rise of philosophy”), both otherwise quite disparate fields of poetry-study agree that metaphor and other conceptual strategies commonly deployed by poetry are best understood in terms of priority, firstness, or before-ness. The effects of poetry on the mind, in other words, take place *before differentiation*, whether that differentiation takes place at the level of the speech category or (as the classicist Martin puts it) occurs when science comes along to dissect the metaphor with a scalpel.<sup>9</sup>

In *The World as Will and Representation*, a work that exerted great influence on Ivanov, Schopenhauer also observes that the thoughts effected by poetry are achieved “prior to” those arrived at by the faculties of judgment and reason:

Rhythm and rhyme are quite peculiar aids to poetry. I can give no other explanation of their incredibly powerful effect than that our faculties of perception have received from time, to which they are essentially bound, some quality on account of which we inwardly follow, and, as it were, consent to each regularly recurring sound. In this way rhythm and rhyme are partly a means of holding our attention, because we willingly follow the poem read,

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ways that we do because we are all roughly human-sized containers of air and liquid with our main receptors at the top of our bodies” (p. 4). More lyrically, Nikki Skillman has recently written about poetry as a faculty of thought in twentieth-century American poetry, finding in the material workings of the brain itself a fecund source of metaphorical material for her poets, as lyric encounter “evolves into a mediation on the emergence of consciousness from the interaction of inanimate parts—on the origins of mind in matter.” See Skillman, *The Lyric in the Age of the Brain* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 2.

<sup>8</sup>Boris Maslov, *Pindar and the Emergence of Literature* (Cambridge, England, 2015), 119.

<sup>9</sup>Richard Martin, “Against Ornament: O. M. Freidenberg’s Concept of Metaphor in Ancient and Modern Contexts,” in *Persistent Forms: Explorations in Historical Poetics*, ed. Ilya Kliger et al. (New York, 2015), 274–313.

and partly they produce in us a blind consent to what is read prior to any judgment, and this gives the poem a certain emphatic power of convincing independent of all reasons.<sup>10</sup>

In a fragment on the workings of lyric poetry written in 1908, Ivanov commented that the lyric is distinguished from the other classical genres in that the “chord of the moment” is proper to it and to no other genre. The lyric is constituted by transitions from one mental image to another: they are “lightninglike fissures of the imagination.”<sup>11</sup>

It was Ivanov's conviction that this quick, sensory mode of thinking, which occurs “prior to any judgment,” as Schopenhauer puts it, was a process with its roots in ancient myth: a mode of representation wherein the means of thinking and speaking are united. Following an idea that originated with Herder and had significant influence on the Russian and German intellectual and scholarly traditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Ivanov believed that divinity had once inhered, mystically, within words—that when poets and priests had uttered words like “mixing bowl” and “cave” they signified not only mixing bowl and cave but also, simultaneously, divine concepts like “soul” and “birth,” concepts which lived inside the image of those cooking implements and geographical features and were not separable from them. And he believed that through the effects of Symbolist poetry that divinity could be expressed again.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, just as one may apprehend the divinity in a religious icon immediately upon apprehending its image, so too do the principles of poetry—patterned sound and image—work with “priority” upon the listener, claiming and modeling a certain immediacy of the experience of perception, thought, and time.

There is something of the divine in this mental experience, and while modeling poetic thought on the level of the individual image, sound, and word, Ivanov also lets a vast mythic drama—nearly a storyline, nearly a whole new myth unto itself—play out in the poetic moments of these essays. Throughout Ivanov's essays, the vehicle for this concept of poetry as a tool of thought is the “two great gods of earth,” in Edith Hamilton's immortal words: a repeated metaphoric cluster of pastures, fields, soil, the things that grow on them in nature and in cultivation, and the agents and instruments of that cultivation.<sup>13</sup> Thus the reader apprehends Ivanov's claim—his hope for the inherent togetherness of things—on the syntactic level of the prose argument, on the sensory level of the experience of poetry, and on the ritual level of the myth of two specific Greek gods: Demeter and Dionysus. At these moments the language itself is charged with the full complexity of thought, just as

<sup>10</sup>Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York, 1966), bk. 1:243–44 (emphasis added). Ivanov was explicitly interested in Schopenhauer's theory of “bezvol'noe sozertsanie” as he glossed the above in his 1914 essay on Novalis. See V. I. Ivanov, “O Novalise,” in his *Sobranie sochinenii* 4 vols. (Brussels, 1971–84), 4:264.

<sup>11</sup>Ivanov, “O lirike,” *Sobranie sochinenii* 3:119–20.

<sup>12</sup>I am paraphrasing from Ivanov, “Zavety simovlizma,” *Sobranie sochinenii* 2:593. Herder's ideas on myth are elaborated in the enormously influential “Fragment of an Essay on Mythology,” written during the 1780s, in which he became the first thinker of the modern era to discuss myth as a fundamentally conceptual framework—a framework that modeled and represented thought. Herder's essay can be found in Marcia Bunge, ed. and trans., *Against Pure Reason: Writings on Religion, Language, and History* (Eugene, 1993), 80.

<sup>13</sup>“The Two Great Gods of Earth” is the title given to the subchapter on Dionysus and Demeter in Edith Hamilton's now-classic compendium for schoolchildren, *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes* (Boston, 1942).

language is specially charged during ritual or ceremony. They are moments of mythic speech, and for Ivanov, to speak mythically is, in a sense, to *think*—to accomplish the thought of the myth.

As in Claude Lévi-Strauss's seminal definition, myth's conceptual power comes from its ability to transcend time, to absorb and explain more than one historical moment at once.<sup>14</sup> "Ivanov's thinking was ultimately metahistorical," observed one scholar. "In this framework time is a very relative value. The cultural process or phenomenon is not conceived in terms of creation or destruction, but memory and oblivion."<sup>15</sup> Ivanov's profound relationship to the mythical is best understood in the same terms as his conception of poetry: simultaneity, the internal togetherness of different temporalities.

Ivanov's understanding of myth had its roots in the works of such German thinkers as Herder, Goethe, and Novalis, and scholars have tended to distinguish him in terms of degree, rather than kind.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Michael Wachtel maintains that Ivanov "went further" than the Jena Romantics, understanding myth as more than a "not strictly rational way of cognizing reality": "essentially true, not a merely psychological phenomenon. ... Not the creation of an individual, but the conviction of a community."<sup>17</sup> In an article arguing that the Symbolists were primarily engaged in *neomythological* (or *mythopoetic*) work, rather than a stylization of mythic works or an orientation to them of the kind we find in Romanticism, Zara Mints cites Ivanov's adage "from symbol to myth," heralding him as an architect of a more essentially *creative* attitude toward myth.<sup>18</sup> Robert Bird, following a "ritual/narrative" dichotomy of the sort proposed by Roland Greene and upheld by contemporary lyric theorists, argues that "myth" comprises the narrative elements of Ivanov's poetic output and thought.<sup>19</sup> Taking a more critical tone, Tomas Venclova has remarked that Ivanov's capacity to engage with myth was "masked" by his scholarship; his philological concerns eclipsing the kernels of anarchic revelation that one finds in other modernist poets.<sup>20</sup>

What these scholarly perspectives have in common is their conception of myth as creative material for Ivanov, either used radically and fully, as in Wachtel, Mints, and Bird's views, or not realizing its potential, as in Venclova's. In Ivanov's intellectual oeuvre, one

<sup>14</sup>On the one hand, a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place in time: before the world was created, or during its first stages—anyway, long ago. But what gives the myth an operative value is that the specific pattern described is everlasting; it explains the present and the past as well as the future" (Lévi-Strauss, Claude. "The Structural Study of Myth," *Journal of American Folklore* 68 [October–December 1955]: 430).

<sup>15</sup>Vasily Rudich, "Vyacheslav Ivanov and Classical Antiquity," in *Vyacheslav Ivanov: Poet, Critic and Philosopher*, ed. Robert Louis Jackson and Lowry Nelson, Jr. (New Haven, 1986).

<sup>16</sup>It is not a coincidence that Ivanov's favorite poets are primarily those known for their ideas and worldviews—those famous, in other words, for philosophizing through poetry. On Ivanov's intellectual debts to the German Romantic tradition and its mystical, interactive, comprehensive worldview, as played out specifically in his poetry, see Michael Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition: Goethe, Novalis, and the Poetics of Vyacheslav Ivanov* (Madison, 1994).

<sup>17</sup>Vyacheslav Ivanov, *Selected Essays*, trans. Robert Bird, ed. Michael Wachtel (Evanston, 2001), xii.

<sup>18</sup>Zara Mints, "O nekotorykh 'neomifologicheskikh' tekstakh v tvorchesvte russkikh simvolistov," *Blok i russkii simvolizm: Izbrannye trudy v 3 kn*, bk. 3, *Poetika russkogo simvolizma* (St. Petersburg, 2004), 59–96.

<sup>19</sup>Robert Bird, "Lyric Ritual and Narrative Myth in Russian Modernism: The Case of Vyacheslav Ivanov," *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture* 36 (Spring/Summer 2003): 81–106.

<sup>20</sup>Tomas Venclova, "On Russian Mythological Tragedy: Vyacheslav Ivanov and Marina Cvetaeva," in *Myth in Literature* 5, ed. A. Kodjak et al. (Columbus, 1986), 89–109.

can see this sort of relation to myth at work perhaps most profoundly and influentially in his writings on Dionysus and Friedrich Nietzsche. In a famous 1904 essay, "Nietzsche and Dionysus," Ivanov casts the mythologies of the German philosopher and the Greek god in each other's terms, writing Nietzsche's biography into a trajectory of Dionysian ecstasy and sacrifice, cult and divinity. He opens with the established Greek myth of the Thessalonian military leader Eurypylus, who received the cult image of Dionysus as a Trojan war trophy and who, like Nietzsche (so Ivanov), consequently became steeped in holy madness. Inaugurating a myth about the German thinker that would stay in the Russian poetic and cultural consciousness for over a century, Ivanov concludes: "Nietzsche gave Dionysus back to the world: therein lay his calling and his prophetic madness."<sup>21</sup>

What we could call the "myth as creative material" angle on Ivanov's relation to myth, then, is a crucial one for understanding his work. But in addition to creative fodder and cult idol, Dionysus was also, for Ivanov, a *mode of thinking*: not merely malleable material for ideation and text production, but a structure of thought and experience which Ivanov himself did not write so much as access. In the essay "The Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God," written contemporaneously with "Nietzsche and Dionysus," Ivanov elaborates what would be his most influential theory of the Dionysian: a conception of pagan cult worship inflected with Christian mysticism. Ivanov argues that ecstasy—transcendence of the individual—is the most ancient and deepest phenomenon of religious experience; that suffering and sacrifice are required for it. This essay, which provides a kind of theoretical backdrop to the cult narrative developed in "Nietzsche and Dionysus," presents the story of Dionysus, crucially, as the *means* of mystical transcendence rather than the substance of it. "The element of Dionysus is only a state," professed Ivanov in "Hellenic Religion," describing the possibility of encountering the god as the possibility of collective self-discovery and transformation, rather than as material for narrative. The myths of Dionysus's appearances, he continues, are only an attempt to give those appearances and encounters an etiological explanation.<sup>22</sup> In this understanding, the stories about the god are secondary to the god as a mode.

This more capacious consideration of Dionysus as a mode of thought and experience will prove fruitful when engaging with his cameos in Ivanov's essays. Omry Ronen has remarked that for Ivanov and the early Symbolists, "Dionysus was the principle autometadescriptive sign ... the symbol of the symbol."<sup>23</sup> In this vein, Nina Segal-Rudnik has recently argued that since Ivanov was first and foremost invested in poetic language—and brought that to his work on questions of theology and philosophy—we are justified in understanding his engagement with the Dionysian as a "device."<sup>24</sup> Much like metaphor itself, the presence of the god in Ivanov's essays is best conceived of at once as a portal to divine poetic expression—the image resolving in the more abstract concept, or the vehicle pointing to the distant tenor—and the name of that very expression, the divinity achieved by poetic utterance.

<sup>21</sup>Ivanov, "Nitsche i Dionis," *Sobranie sochinenii* 1:717.

<sup>22</sup>Ivanov, "Ellinskaia religiia stradaiushchego boga: Opyt religiozno-istoricheskoi kharakteristiki," *Sobranie sochinenii* 3:39.

<sup>23</sup>Omry Ronen, "A Functional Technique of Myth Transformation in Twentieth Century Russian Lyrical Poetry," in: *Myth in Literature* 5, 110–23.

<sup>24</sup>Nina Segal-Rudnik, "Dionisiistvo kak priem," in *Pro et contra* 2:145.

In his study *Greek Mythology and Poetics*, classicist Gregory Nagy adopts specific terminology from Roman Jakobson and the Prague Linguistic Circle to illuminate the relation of poetic language to myth in ancient Greek culture. Nagy comments that, for the ancient Greeks,

the language of ritual and myth is marked, whereas “everyday” language is unmarked. The Greek language gives us an example of these semantics: *múō* means “I have my eyes closed” or “I have my mouth closed” in everyday situations, but “I see in a special way” or “I say in a special way” in ritual. Hence *mústēs* is “one who is initiated” and *mustērion* is “that into which one is initiated, mystery (Latin *mysterium*).” Hence also *múthos*, “myth”: this word, it has been argued, is a derivative of *múō* and had at an earlier stage meant “special” as opposed to “everyday” speech.<sup>25</sup>

This passage could almost have been written by Ivanov. Its “content,” or logical aim, is to demonstrate that mythic poetry uses the same words as everyday speech but in a “special” way. At the end Nagy reveals that the very words he has used to make his argument are complicit in the phenomenon he describes. The reader is left quite persuaded, but not entirely sure of how the persuasion took place, since the final sentence in the passage worked more quickly on the intellectual consciousness than the others had. It works, I would argue, poetically. The poetic principle at play here is based in a specific kind of repetition which suddenly shortens the reader’s experience of linear time—the time it usually takes to apprehend a written argument. Like rhyme, which achieves its effect by dovetailing a remembered sound and a new piece of semantic information, the last sentence in this paragraph dovetails a remembered word and a new semantic position for it to occupy. The word *myth*, which had previously been presented as mere setting or scaffolding—as “unmarked,” indeed, in Jakobson’s schema—is re-presented anew, now as the object of inquiry, the most marked position. That the word also *means* the intellectual maneuver we have just experienced (everyday speech becoming special speech) is left for us to marvel at, and to believe.

As we shall see, when poetry is presented as a faculty of thought in Ivanov’s essays, this same basic pattern is employed. The genre seems prosaic and logical, linear even; the subject matter is “how poetic language and thought work, have worked, or ought to work”; a poetic principle is activated in the prose; the point is made through some combination of linear argument and extra-semantic cognitive experience; the name of that combination and its performance is revealed to be “myth.” If there is something tricky or that seems like sleight of hand in the pattern I have just outlined, I submit that that is because poetic principles at work in prose catch us intellectually unawares.

Even the chronological progression we note within the essays contains a mythic argument. The earlier essays present the gods as gods: thus, for instance, Dionysus and Demeter make literal appearances in “The Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles.” The later essays present them in their earthly avatars: “The Testaments of Symbolism” employs intricate analogies featuring vines, ears of grain, and the soil of their marriage. This

<sup>25</sup>Gregory Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca, 1990), viii.

progression is variously interpretable. It may, from the perspective of cognitive poetics, function as a drawn-out example of the development and refinement of the precategorical realm of thought, as an abstract image is required to take on the burden of increasingly complex signification. Alternatively, from the vantage point of the nineteenth-century school of myth studies and philology to which Ivanov was indebted, it may be said to trace the conceptual trajectory that the ancients themselves underwent: from myth to pure metaphor.<sup>26</sup>

### “THE SYMBOLICS OF AESTHETIC PRINCIPLES”

The 1905 essay “The Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles” is devoted to a careful consideration of individual dynamic poetic principles: Ivanov unfolds the colors, physical setting, sex, Greek gods, poetic images, poetic moods, and themes inherently symbolically associated with each of three “principles” (*nachala*). Ivanov’s use of the word *nachalo* is telling: it well exemplifies his commitment to the originary. This interest in origins is not only temporary—in that he believes in circularity and return—but also structural: he discusses the poetic origins underlying the mechanisms of thought and expression.<sup>27</sup> The essay codifies these origins and correlates them into unified principles available to poetic thought.

In his explication of the poetics of “descent” (*niskhozhenie*), the colors pink and emerald, the goddesses Aphrodite and Demeter, the feminine sex, the earth, the themes of grace, beauty, assent, and return, and the images of rings, wreaths, and rainbows are all unfolded from a single poetic principle: the divine movement *downward*. This principle, in turn, is the antithesis of the sublime motion *upward*: “Ascent is rupture and separation; descent is the return and good tidings of victory. The one is ‘glory in the highest’; the other is ‘peace on earth.’ Ascent is a ‘No’ to the Earth; descent is ‘the meek ray of a mysterious Yes.’”<sup>28</sup> As is common in his prose works, the final few words come from Ivanov’s own poetic oeuvre, and later in the essay he offers more of the poem to illustrate the image of Aphrodite’s smile:

Я ношу кольцо,	I wear a ring
И мое лицо –	And my face
Кроткий луч таинственного Да. <sup>29</sup>	Is a meek ray of the mysterious Yes.

The lines come from a poem called “Beauty,” which features an enamored traveler in dialogue with a mysterious beauty—perhaps better understood as Beauty incarnate: a “daughter of the earth or the heavens” (*doch' li ty zemli/ il' nebes*). The lines quoted in the essay belong to the female speaker, and end the poem. The circularity of the ring (and the “o” sound of *kol'tso, moë, litso*), the mysterious Yes not uttered but inherent within the speaker’s

<sup>26</sup>I am paraphrasing from Aleksandr Potebnja’s *Mysl' i iazyk* (1862). The phrase “pure metaphor” (*chistaia metafora*) I take from Eleazar Meletinsky’s gloss on Potebnja in his canonical *Poetika mifa* (Moscow, 1976), 123.

<sup>27</sup>Both words are calques of the Greek *archa*, as in Aristotle’s “first principles.”

<sup>28</sup>Ivanov, *Selected Essays*, 8. For the original see Ivanov, “Simvoliki esteticheskikh nachal,” *Sobranie sochinenii* 1:826. Subsequent citations to various Ivanov essays will at times show both the Bird and Wachtel translation, followed by a reference to the Russian-language version.

<sup>29</sup>Ivanov, “Simvoliki,” 827.



countenance, are the themes and motifs that constitute the “feminine” principle discussed in Ivanov’s essay. The unsaid Yes of the speaker’s face, an example of mythically meaningful speech both expressed and apprehended by non-logical means, signifies consent as such, not only between the poem’s speakers.

Here is the poem in its entirety.

Красота	Beauty
<i>Владимиру Сергеевичу Соловьеву</i>	To Vladimir Sergeevich Solovyov
Περί τ’αμφί τε κάλλος ἄητο. <i>Нутн. Нотер.</i>	<i>Beauty spread around her.</i> <i>Homeric hymn</i>
Вижу вас, божественные дали, Умбрских гор синеющий кристалл! Ах! там сон мой боги оправдали: Въяве там он путнику предстал ... «Дочь ли ты земли Иль небес, – внемли: Твой я! Вечно мне твой лик блистал».	I see you, divine expanses, Of Umbrian mountains the crystal shining blue! Ah! there the gods justified my dream: There in reality it appeared to a traveler ... “Whether you are daughter of earth Or heavens, – hark: I am yours! Your face has been shining to me eternally.”
– «Тайна мне самой и тайна миру, Я, в моей обители земной, Се, гряду по светлому эфиру: Путник, зреть отныне будешь мной! Кто мой лик узрел, Тот навек прозрел – Дольний мир навек пред ним иной.	“I am mystery to myself and mystery to the world, I, in my earthly dwelling, Lo, I approach along the light ether: Traveler, hence you will see by me! Who has seen my face Has seen the light eternally – The world below is eternally different before him.
«Радостно по цветоносной Гее Я иду, не ведая – куда. Я служу с улыбкой Адрастее, Благосклонно – девственно – чужда. Я ношу кольцо, И мое лицо – Кроткий луч таинственного Да». <sup>30</sup>	Joyfully along flower-bearing Gaia I go, not knowing where. I serveAdrastea with a smile, Am propitiously – virginally – other. I wear a ring, And my face Is a meek ray of the mysterious Yes.

The line immediately before the lines cited in Ivanov’s essay frames them tellingly: “I am, virginally, *other*,” declares the earthly incarnation of beauty; “I wear a ring./ And my face/ Is a meek ray of the mysterious Yes.” She must be other so that she may be rejoined; she must be virginal so that her Yes will always signify anew. For just as the principle of sublime ascent represents a “No” to the earth, this poem is about the principle of earthly consent. It is about the promise of marriage (*ia noshu kol'tso*) and about consummation. It is about being together again—the traveler traverses the earth; the beauty is of it—and the eternity of that return to unity, the circularity of time. Remarkably, the poem describes a

<sup>30</sup>For the poem in its entirety see Ivanov, “Simvoliki esteticheskikh nachal,” *Sobranie Sochinenii* 1:517.

kind of movement, a dynamic, a change, a consummation—not only a togetherness but a *coming-togetherness*—yet the dynamic is eternal (some version of *vechno* or *navek* is repeated three times throughout the poem). The poem's dialogic structure participates in this experience: a literary device known for its capacity to represent and model tension, here the dialogue resolves in allegory, something more akin to the lovers' holy duet in the Song of Songs than the philosophical debates hosted by Socrates. The speakers in the poem participate allegorically in Ivanov's myth of the symbolist word itself: the union of things meaning and things meant.

The poem is cited, per Ivanov, for its imagistic evocation of Aphrodite's smile of consent.<sup>31</sup> It bears an epigraph from the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, and indeed seems primarily to feature a female earth divinity. The association—even identification—of Aphrodite and Demeter is particularly remarkable in this section of the essay "The Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles." Or—perhaps precisely not remarkable, since in Ivanov's description they seem intuitively to belong together and to mean each other, in an abundance of earthliness and natural feminine sensuality. But the "intuitive" structure of Ivanov's associating these two specific goddesses is a deeply mythical one, and deserves some consideration.

The association of sex and eros with fertility and agriculture was a basic principle of ideological organization in Indo-European ritual and social practice. Indo-European ritual and culture, the ancestral genitor of ancient Greek myth and poetic production, is commonly understood to have been organized into three "functions": one category of ritual was dedicated to the sovereign and the sacral, another to warfare, and a third to fertility, sex, agriculture, and animal husbandry.<sup>32</sup> It has been suggested that these lines of organization find their way into Greek myth in the story known as the Judgment of Paris, that beauty contest between Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite at which Paris of Troy served as judge, and the consequences of which launched the events of the *Iliad*. As the myth goes, each goddess offered Paris a bribe, hoping to be named the most beautiful. Hera offered to make Paris sovereign ruler of all Europe and Asia; Athena offered him great military wisdom and skill in warfare; and Aphrodite offered him the love of the most beautiful woman in the world, then Helen of Sparta.

Nagy argues that the goddesses' offerings to Paris map on to the discrete categories of Indo-European ritual: Hera's offer represents the sovereign and sacral; Athena's, warfare; and Aphrodite's, fertility, sex, and agriculture. In the fabula of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the Judgment of Paris is the point of departure for the Trojan War and its aftermath and thus represents, as Nagy puts it, Greek "epic's reckoning with its own genesis."<sup>33</sup> I would continue

<sup>31</sup>In this vein, Wachtel has discussed Aphrodite's smile—in this essay, in this poem, and throughout Ivanov's corpus—as a signifier of "visionary experience" (*Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition*, 51). Taking the "vision" trope further, N. Kotrelev has identified seeing as *the* gateway to divine knowledge in this poem. Reading the traveler as an avatar for the biological poet, he claims: "he sees the world through her." See Kotrelev, "Videt" i "vedat" u Viacheslava Ivanova," in *Pro et contra* 2:262.

<sup>32</sup>The term "function" belongs to Georges Dumézil, whose seminal work in comparative mythology *Mythe et épopée. I. L'idéologie des trois fonctions dans les épopées des peuples indo-européens* (Paris, 1968), was the first to propose this tripartite ideological breakdown. Following him and considering in particular the consequences of his work for Greek myth's capacity to self-theorize is Nagy's *Greek Mythology and Poetics*.

<sup>33</sup>Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics*, 16.

this line of argument and suggest that Paris's opting for Helen can be read, in historical-mythic terms, as Greek myth's capacity to self-theorize in eroticized agricultural metaphor. The intertwining agrarian metaphors Ivanov employs repeatedly to depict—and indeed to *model*—mythic thought and expression may be understood, then, as the descendants of the Judgment of Paris. They conjure the gods of the epic era; they intend to re-effect a total synthesis of crop, deity, and the poetic trope that binds them.

At the end of “The Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles,” Ivanov discusses the third aesthetic principle: the frenzied Dionysian plunge to the underworld.<sup>34</sup> At first presented as a synthesis reaching beyond the scope of the first two principles, it becomes clear that this principle has a special, erotically charged, relationship with the Aphroditic/Demetrian cluster, offering our first scene in Ivanov's myth of the gods of harvest and the vine: “Dionysus is the god of moisture (*vlazhnyi bog*), fertilizing and enlivening (*zhivotvoriashchii*) the earth with ambrosial intoxication.”<sup>35</sup> This drunken, mystical rite seems to resemble cultivation itself—the god does, after all, irrigate the soil. But Ivanov doesn't quite cast the god in the image of the cultivating man, wielding agricultural technology over the submissive earth. Rather, his decision to ascribe the attributes of cultivation to the vine-god, and to portray them in such erotic terms, can be read as a vote of confidence in the symbiotic crops' relative autonomy from human hands. Left to their own devices, the gods—which are the earth and its plants—will ready themselves to make myth grow.

One could locate something of the proto-ecocritical in this particular structure of thought. In a foray into the relationship between plants and human philosophy, ecocritical theorist Michael Marder has recently observed that, because they *may* reproduce asexually, “sexuality is a luxurious appendage of plant life.”<sup>36</sup> In a section on viticulture and eroticism in particular, he asks:

What does the humanly enforced asexual reproduction hold in store for plants and, above all, for Hegel's favorite grapes? Predictably enough, a future in which we [humans] continue to impose abstinence on plants is grim; it is a future of greatly diminished diversity and a nearly identical genetic makeup in three-quarters of the world's grape varieties.<sup>37</sup>

As if predicting Marder's call for humans to let grapevines express their “sexuality” freely, Ivanov portrays the sprouting of mythic expression as a sexual communion between divine plants cultivating each other. Like the traveler and the beauty in “Beauty,” they simultaneously belong to each other and are strange to each other, and constantly renew that relational cycle.

The interpretive maneuver I am proposing here—an ecocritical reading of Ivanov's plant metaphors—requires a different conception of the relation of wine to grape than the one I imagine Marder has in mind. He takes Hegel to task for not letting the vine attain “being-for-self”; he condemns the wine industry for exploiting the vine; forced asexual reproduction is his case in point. But to conceive of the vine mythically is to understand

<sup>34</sup>Ivanov, “Simvoliki,” 829.

<sup>35</sup>Ivanov, *Selected Essays*, 8; Ivanov, “Simvoliki,” 826.

<sup>36</sup>Michael Marder, *The Philosopher's Plant: An Intellectual Herbarium* (New York, 2014), 166.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 168.

wine—perhaps intoxication as such—as a principle that inheres in the grape. It isn't a commodity for the taking; it is proper to the grape. It is divine and the name of it is Dionysus. Thus when Ivanov writes of Dionysus's "fertilizing and enlivening the earth with ambrosial intoxication," he is describing a plant-on-plant dynamic, as it were. Dionysus becomes the subject and the object of viticulture at once.

#### "TWO ELEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY SYMBOLISM"

In "Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism," a 1908 essay devoted to disentangling the "idealistic" from the "realistic" strands of symbolist thought and art, Ivanov turns again to agrarian metaphors while giving a mythologized intellectual history. "Two Elements" is in part a manifesto, in this case advocating poetic composition in a literary mode he calls "realistic symbolism"; in part a work of comparative historiography, in this case tracing the trajectory of symbolist thought from antiquity through modernity; and in very large part a work of ambitious mythopoesis, seizing upon subtle patterns across cultures and histories to forge a great new meta-myth about the task of the symbolist poetic word. As with "The Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles," one can read this essay, too, as a work of mystical lyric theory, employing poetic thinking to make—and model—the argument for myth.

The essay's basic device is a compare-and-contrast between the trends of "idealism" and "realism" in symbolist literary art. As in "Symbolics," Ivanov correlates each trend to a sex and one of art's roles; idealism, he claims, is masculine and transformative; realism, feminine and signifying. Over the course of the essay, Ivanov makes it clear that he much prefers realism and even despairs somewhat over the reign of the idealist tendency, decrying it for promoting rampant "individualism" and forsaking the natural (*prirodnoe*).

The third of the essay's nine sections is dedicated primarily to the ancient and medieval literary arts. Here Ivanov again invokes divine imagery to demonstrate the power and process of poetic thought, this time through metaphors of the harvest:

Greco-Roman antiquity did not know individualism in our sense. It only had a foretaste of the goodness of the grains and the poisons of the chaff (*blagost' tekh zlakov i iady tekh plevel*) that could only sprout on a historical soil that had been plowed by Christianity. For Christianity revealed the mystery of the face-image (*lik*) and affirmed the personality (*lichnost'*) once and for all.<sup>38</sup>

Here the soil is the historical consciousness of a whole epoch, the cultivating agent is Christianity, and the forms of knowledge it produces are both positively and negatively valued. The good grain ears may be said to correspond to the happy revelation of the mystery of the *lik*, which indeed is symbolist poetry's task; whereas the poisonous weeds are likely responsible for decisively championing *lichnost'* and cultivating individualism.

The finer pattern of argument rests on a virtuosic combination of expressive modes: it relies simultaneously on linear argument, unfolding sentence by sentence, and on poetic device, which achieves its effects more quickly. Here, first a curious kind of knowledge is

<sup>38</sup>Ivanov, *Selected Essays*, 18 (translation modified); Ivanov, "Dve stikhii v sovremennom simvolizme," *Sobranie sochinenii* 2:542.

introduced (*individualizma v nashem smysle greko-rimskaia drevnost' ne znala*); then a sense-perception verb is employed to describe knowing, with a claim on double temporality (*ona lish' predvkushala*); finally the mythic metaphors of grain and chaff are marshalled to evoke the phenomenon of mythical thinking “taking root” in a given cultural climate. What is more, these metaphors are accompanied by an even more “poetic” device: dactylic meter (*blágost' tekh zlákov i iády tekh plével*). The sentence is nearly a Gesamtkunstwerk in itself, uniting not art forms but modes of apprehension: it plays on the aural, visual, and gustatory modes of apprehending and producing knowledge.

The metaphors’ mythic promises resolve with an erotic twist: Demeter shows up, newly, embodied in the ears of grain and weeds sprouting on cultivated soil. And the god of the vine, so bodily present in the agrarian scene offered in “Symbolics,” appears here in a different form. Dionysus is evoked by the specter of Christ in the scene, the *lik* and the *lichnost'*, the masculine force of knowledge that “ploughs” the fertile earth, recalling their cultivation-relation in the earlier essay. From the union of mythic parents is born a mythic knowledge.

Later in the same essay, in a kind of echo, the agrarian metaphors come back intensely. Ivanov lapses into a familiar vatic mode, dropping the premise of mytho-historiography and exhorting absolutely.

Myth can only grow from out of the symbol, understood as reality, like an ear of grain from a seed (*kak kolos iz zerna*). For myth is the objective truth about the existing. Myth is the purest form of poetry that signifies. Thus, Plato claims that in the harmony of the anti-individualist world he desires, the task of the poet, “if he wants to be a poet, is to create myths.” Is myth still possible? Where is the creative religious soil on which it might blossom?<sup>39</sup>

This return to the dynamic images of grain and earth confirms their role as bearers of mythic knowledge on the soil of cultural consciousness. We witness an effective poetic device in action: the move from simile (*kak kolos iz zerna*) to straight metaphor (*Gde tvorcheskaia religioznaia pochva, na kotoroi on mog by rastsvest'?*), which presents the second round of figurative language as reality. As though the yearned-for creative religious soil existed in *our* plane. But we know where it is: it must be on the other side of the simile, with the grain and the seed. Only by thinking according to poetic principles, in other words, is it possible to “find” the frame of mind that would let myth take root.

### “THE TESTAMENTS OF SYMBOLISM”

Much like “Two Elements” and “Symbolics,” Ivanov’s 1910 essay “The Testaments of Symbolism” puts forth part mythic historiography, part modern poetic program. Its stated goal is an explication of the task of the Symbolist poet: to make the mysteries of poetic language known to all, just as the ancient poets of ritual did. The essay has a dual claim on time: its author invokes the trans-historical, ever-present mystical power of the poetic word,

<sup>39</sup>Ivanov, *Selected Essays*, 29 (translation modified); Ivanov, “Dve stikhii,” 554.

while also calling on his contemporaries with a sense of urgency, exhorting them to take up the mantle of the ancients and write *now*.

The essay is not only a narrative manifesto, however: like “Two Elements,” it also offers a lengthy, philologically inclined, mystical linguistic theory, with its roots in German idealism and Greek myth. Immediately after presenting a sweeping mythologized history of the modern loss of access to poetic mystery, Ivanov calls upon the contemporary poets of Symbolism to recover it. He describes two kinds of speech available to them, championing the second as their special prerogative:

Symbolism forebodes that hypothetically conceivable, fully religious epoch of language, when it will embrace two separate forms of speech: speech about empirical things and relations, and speech about objects and relations of an order revealed only in inward experience, that is, the hieratic speech of prophesying. The former speech (the only one we are presently accustomed to) will be logical speech, a speech having analytic judgment as its fundamental inner form. The latter kind of speech is currently entangled with the former in an incidental fashion, just as holy golden mistletoe encircles the congenial oaks of poetry but strangles the gardens of science with parasitic growths (*obvivaishchaia sviashchennoiu zolotoi omeloi druzhnye s neiu duby poezii i glushashchaia paraziticheskim proizrastaniem rassadniki nauki*); on pastures of inspired contemplation such speech rises as lush ears of native grain, but it is like foreign chaff on fields turned by the plows of exact thought (*podnimaishchiasia tuchnymi kolos'iami prodnogo zlaka na pazhitiakh vdokhnovenного sozertsaniia i chuzhdymi plevelami na pole, vspakhannom plugami tochnogo myshleniia*); this latter is mythological speech. The main form of mythological speech will be “myth,” understood as a synthetic judgment with a conceptsymbol [*sic*] as its subject, and a verb for its predicate: for myth is the dynamic aspect (*modus*) of the symbol, viewed as movement and mover, as action and active force.<sup>40</sup>

The passage is only two sentences long (three in English translation), but it is convoluted enough that it merits some unpacking. In the second sentence, where Ivanov describes the kind of poetic/mythical language that ought, under Symbolism, to reign, he mobilizes four discrete metaphoric scenarios: the holy golden vines winding around the oaks of poetry who are friendly to it; the parasitic upgrowth suffocating the hotbeds of science; the lush ears of native grain rising on pastures of inspired contemplation; and the foreign weeds on the field worked by ploughs of exact thought. The vines and the ears of grain represent mythological speech, and the friendly oaks of poetry and pastures of inspired contemplation represent a poetically-inclined intellectual-cultural landscape where such speech might flourish. Conversely, the parasitic upgrowth and foreign weeds represent the same mythological speech, doomed to strangle or perish on the hotbeds of science and the fields ploughed by exact thought, which represent a logically-inclined intellectual-cultural landscape. Unlike the plants in “Two Elements,” which grew on the same patch of land and represented a simultaneity of good and bad, these plants are offered as competing, separate visions of how speech might work.

<sup>40</sup>Ivanov, *Selected Essays*, 41 (translation modified); Ivanov, “Zavety simvolizma,” 594–95.

This particular metaphoric cluster of images that Ivanov uses to discuss the intellectual work with which poetry is tasked and to which it is suited is not only “about” poetry: it is *itself* a performance of the double-knowledge of which poetry is capable—and, indeed, to which it is bound. The vehicles of poetic thought in the passage above—the ears of grain and the vine—represent, in one sense, simply “the kind of poetic speech that Ivanov likes.” This is the sense in which the reader of the essay is meant to logically understand Ivanov’s argument, aided through the (suffocating!) stacked relative clauses and the lengthy verbal participles by the clarity of the images they hold. In another, greater sense, those vehicles are also Demeter and Dionysus, gods of the harvest and of wine. The extended metaphor series is the story of their work and—as in the other instances throughout his essays—their relation to each other. Their myth unfolds and refolds, as it were, as Ivanov uses their attributes and earthly forms as metaphors for poetic knowledge.

The conceptual performance here is not totally different from the usual signifying acrobatics of a good lyric poem, though the stakes, perhaps, are higher; the tenors more numerous. One must grasp, at once, the objects on the page (grain, vine) and their apparent referent (positively valued poetic speech in a friendly intellectual environment), and sense their mythic persons (Demeter, Dionysus) dancing behind the scenes. The major difference is that the metaphor is not in a poem; it is in a rather programmatic essay about what poetry must do, and it is using the tools of poetic knowledge to establish its argument.

As we have seen, this constellation of images allows Ivanov some freedom with regard to the agency and purposiveness of poetic knowledge-cultivation: sometimes the field of knowledge represents a single human mind, sometimes it is the collective consciousness of a generation, an epoch, or indeed human culture writ large.<sup>41</sup> It also allows him to speak of the intellectual work that poetry does simultaneously in terms of *longue-durée* intellectual history and individual human consciousness. One of the features of poetic thought, evidently, is its ability to jump between, correlate, and unite a great variety of scales and patterns of temporal experience. Like myth in Lévi-Strauss’s conception—at once a series of real historical events and also a narrative with eternal explanatory power—Ivanov’s poetic thought is tasked with signifying doubly, a “synthetic judgment,” wherein things are meant rationally and mythically at once.<sup>42</sup> It is the creative principles of poetry—metaphor, patterned sound, repeated image and motif; also poetry’s simultaneous claims on ritual and the immediate present—which make possible such a conceptual simultaneity, such a synthesis of judgment.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup>The tension between Ivanov’s faith in crowds of people (cast in his work as a Dionysian throng) and the prophet-savior, between his belief in a collective, continuous culture and revolutionary sacrifice, have been discussed in Robert Bird, “Concepts of the Person in the Symbolist Philosophy of Viacheslav Ivanov,” *Studies in East European Thought* 61 (August 2009): 89–96; and Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition*, esp. 217–24.

<sup>42</sup>The terms “analytic judgment” and “synthetic judgment,” together with the syntactic language of “subject” and “predicate” are, clearly, Kantian. Per Kant, synthetic judgments do not contain their predicates within their subject concepts: thus, in Ivanov’s schema, myth is dynamic, formed of a “conceptsymbol” plus a verb. Analytic judgments, by comparison, are static, with diminished opportunity to affect the world around them.

<sup>43</sup>For recent and convincing work on poetry’s dual temporalities (à la myth), see especially Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 294, where he discusses lyric’s special, even hyperbolic, claim on the repeatable present, which he calls the “iterable *now*.”

## CODA: POETIC PRACTICE

A year after “Testaments of Symbolism,” Ivanov published the first half of his poetry collection *Cor ardens*, the book that earned him the epithet “philologist” in Gumilev’s review. One of the poems in the collection where Ivanov’s “synthetic” poetics of togetherness is particularly apparent is the sonnet “With the rays of his arrows Eros pierced me.” The poem also offers a slightly different vision of agricultural metaphor in the realm of Dionysian passion. As “Beauty” depicted a Demetrian landscape inflected with her Aphroditic counterpart, so “With the rays of his arrows” depicts a Dionysian world shot through with Erotic fertility.

<p>Лучами стрел Эрот меня пронзил, Влача на казнь, как связня Севастьяна; И, расточа горячий сноп колчана, С другим снопом примчаться угрозил.</p> <p>Так вещий сон мой жребий отразил В зеркальности неaljivого обмана ... И стал я весь – одна живая рана; И каждый луч мне в сердце водрузил</p> <p>Росток огня и корнем врос тягучим; И я расцвел – золотоцвет мечей – Одним из солнц; и багрецом текучим</p> <p>К ногам стекла волна моих ключей ... Ты погребла в пурпурном море тело, И роза дня в струистой урне тлела.<sup>44</sup></p>	<p>With the rays of his arrows Eros pierced me, Dragging me to execution like the captive Sebastian; And, scattering the burning sheaf of his quiver, Threatened to come bearing down with another sheaf.</p> <p>Thus a prophetic dream reflected my lot In the mirrorness of an unfalse deceit ... And I became all over – one living wound; And each ray erected in my heart</p> <p>A sprout of flame and grew into prolix root And I blossomed – chrysanthemum of swords – As one of the suns. And in a crimson flow</p> <p>To my feet the wave of my springs flowed hard ... You entombed my body in the purple sea And the rose of day in wavelike urn decayed.</p>
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The poem combines elements from epic and lyrical models of representation. Perhaps it makes an argument for the epistemological transition from one to the next; perhaps it argues for their synthesis.<sup>45</sup> The past tense—rare for a short lyric poem—brings us into an epic realm, forsaking the lyric present, but the first-person pronoun and the sonnet form reestablish lyricity. The scope and scale of the poem alternates between personal hyperbole (*I stal ia ves' – odna zhivaia rana; I ia rastsvet – zolototsvet mechei*) and trans-historical epic modes (*Tak veshchii son moi zhrebii otrazil/ V zerkal'nosti nelzhivogo obmana*; the leaps from Eros to St. Sebastian, the parable-like quality of the rising and setting sun).

<sup>44</sup>Ivanov, “Luchami strel Erot menia pronzil,” in his “Cor Ardens. Kniga Vtoraja,” *Sobranie Sochinenii* 2:383.

<sup>45</sup>Working with a similar German philosophical framework as Ivanov himself, the contemporary classicist Maslov has, following Herder and others, argued that the historical transition from the epic to the lyric modes of thought and expression is marked by the “separation” of image from concept in poetic metaphor: in epic, ideas come wholesale with their visual images and one experiences knowledge of them together; in lyric, images are presented as signifying, and we must locate and identify the signified concept ourselves (*Pindar and the Emergence of Literature*, esp. chap. 2; and Maslov, “From [Theogonic] Mythos to [Poetic] Logos: Reading Pindar’s Genealogical Metaphors after Freidenberg,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 12 [January 2012]: 49–77).



The most striking strategy the poem employs to combine epic and lyric, however, is that it performs its own reading. Any time a visual symbol is offered in the poem (Eros's arrows, blood, fire), the reader is prevented from thinking of what it might "mean," since Ivanov immediately supplies an array of accompanying "meanings" (divine penetration, wine and intoxication, the circularity of the sun's rising and falling). Reading the poem, one does not *venture* that these images and concepts are linked by the bond of signification; one *experiences* that they all mutually inhere at once.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, this sonnet offers the most radical intimacy of Demetrian and Dionysian imagery we have seen, braiding the two together so tightly that they are figured not as two gods consummating their romance or two plants intertwining as they grow, but instead as *one* androgynous body, penetrating and penetrated at once, fertilizing and sprouting at once.<sup>47</sup> The Dionysian arrows become a Demetrian sheaf of wheat (*rastocha goriuchii snop kolchana*); Dionysian flame bears a Demetrian root and blossom (*I kazhdyi luch mne v serdse vodruzil// Rostok ognia kornem vros tiaguchim;/ I ia rastsvet – zolototsvet mechei*). In keeping with Ivanov's notions that a symbolist poem ought to bring two principles together (the inner and outer worlds, the active and passive modes of comprehension), so this poem brings the masculine and feminine principles together into one body.<sup>48</sup>

In a recent comprehensive essay about metaphor called "Against Ornament," Richard Martin discusses the history of people conceiving of metaphor as an adornment or dressing—something fancy and unnecessary gracing an otherwise straightforward communication.<sup>49</sup> This conception, which, as Martin explains, goes at least back to Cicero's generation of rhetoricians, found great popularity in the Enlightenment, and remained the popular intellectual conception of metaphor up through the emergence of cognitive linguistics as a

<sup>46</sup>This phenomenon seems to have frustrated readers, scholars, and critics who would like to do the intellectual work of interpretation—of seeing X and discovering it means Y. In a reading of this poem, for instance, Boris Gasparov has observed that "there is something almost didactic in the persistence with which Ivanov's poetic subject points toward the symbolic reverberations of every phenomenon that comes his way." His comment on the poem's "didactic" quality suggests to me an interpretive frustration with the poem's inability or unwillingness to participate in a pattern of concealing and revealing latent meaning; frustration with its commitment to mythic immanence. Ivanov's poetics is one of simultaneity; concepts are less *meant* by each other than *given* together at once. See Gasparov, "Poetry of the Silver Age," in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*, ed. Evgeny Dobrenko and Marina Balina (Cambridge, England, 2011), 6.

<sup>47</sup>Earlier, in "Two Elements," Ivanov discusses Sergei Gorodetskii's poem "Iar," which prominently features grain and vine imagery suffused with mythic eroticism. "Реальное мистическое событие – в данном случае брак Деметры и Диониса, – событие, свершившееся в высшем плане бытия, сохранилось в памяти хлебных колосьев ..." ("Dve stikhii," 556). "With the rays of his arrows" continues in this vein and furthers it, rendering the two divine lover-crops as one entangled body.

<sup>48</sup>The image of the androgynous body, and the combination of sun and earth imagery here strongly recalls Aristophanes' mythopoetic speech in Plato's *Symposium*, where he posits the origin of love: people were once attached to each other in pairs, and there were three sexes—the children of the earth (double women, so to speak), the children of the sun (double men), and the children of the moon (half man, half woman); we humans got cut in two through divine rage and now we suffer desire. This is the same moment in the *Symposium* where the word *symbolon* (whence "symbol," "Symbolism") is defined. In Ancient Greek it meant a token of one's debt or word; the physical form this token took was half of a knucklebone which would always symbolize the other half and thus the ideal whole (promise kept, debt paid). "Each one of us is but the *symbolon* of a human being," says Aristophanes, "sliced in half like a flatfish, two instead of one—and each pursues a never-ending search for the *symbolon* of himself." See W. R. M. Lamb, ed., *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 191d.

<sup>49</sup>Martin, "Against Ornament."

discipline.<sup>50</sup> As suggested by his title, it is Martin's aim in the essay to conceive of metaphor in different terms: not as dress, not something "external" at all, but as an integral element of certain patterns and structures of thought.

Drawing on an intellectual history that Ivanov would have recognized and claimed, based in pre-Platonic Greek poetic practice and German idealist philosophies of language, Martin lands triumphantly upon a formulation coined by Soviet philologist Olga Freidenberg, describing the way the trope worked for the ancient Greeks.<sup>51</sup> In Freidenberg's vision, metaphor is not clothing; it is an integral semantic whole, where image (perhaps "vehicle" or signifier, or, in Ivanov's words, "symbol") and concept (perhaps "tenor" or signified) are naturally fused, and only come apart when scholarly science dissects them.<sup>52</sup> The possibility of this integral unity, as Freidenberg has it, is the conceptual legacy myth leaves to lyric poetry. The poetic trope is in fact an ancient technology of thought.

Freidenberg's insistence on the ancient unity between image and concept recalls Ivanov's hope for the same. The mythological speech described in "The Testaments of Symbolism" with recourse to the pastures, vines, and grain, resolves in synthesis, after all, "with a conceptsymbol (*poniatiesimvol*) as its subject."<sup>53</sup> In this light it is necessary to understand that Ivanov does not "choose" in the ordinary sense to allegorize his arguments for poetic knowledge with crops or gods. It is rather that the possibility of poetic thought inheres in the soil and the vine, inheres in divine communion, just as gods may be said to have inhered fully once in grain and wine. This is Ivanov's final conceptual sleight of hand: in reading him closely one feels one's mind participating in the thought processes he models. To follow the argument is to become, briefly, a believer in the myth.

Or perhaps, as history teaches us, not so briefly. Broadly speaking, Ivanov's project constitutes a lyrical inquiry into the premises of lyric itself—that is, into the structures of thought that made and make it possible, and which it in turn makes possible now. Understood in these terms, this project had enormous influence on both Russian modernism's self-perception—as a movement conceivably based in ancient classical thought—as well as for the future of the Russian lyric throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first—as a genre capable of doing a certain kind of thinking or philosophizing. Like Dionysus (at once the agent and object, remember, of viticulture), lyric poetry itself is herein understood at once as a matter to be investigated *and* the most appropriate means to do the investigating.

<sup>50</sup>Probably the most well-known of his discipline, cognitive linguist George Lakoff famously declared that human life is essentially structured by unconscious use of metaphor in cognition in the now-classic *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, 1980).

<sup>51</sup>Martin extensively discusses Pindar, whose early lyric poetry serves as a laboratory for mythic notions of metaphor usage. His philosophers include Johann Gottfried Herder, one of the first modern thinkers to formulate a mythic epistemological framework; Ernst Cassirer, who understood metaphor as the simplest mythic form; Hermann Usener, who argued that all myth is generated from image; and Aleksandr Potebnja, who inherited German idealist philosophies of language and forged one based more centrally in the [poetic] word than in the image. With regard to Freidenberg, who was deeply indebted to these traditions, as well as their structuralist and symbolist philosophical outgrowths, we might consider Iurii Murashov's radical and convincing argument that the Russian structuralist theory of myth, though it claims to be universal, in fact has its roots primarily in *Ivanov's own work* with dionysianism. See Murashov, "Dionisiistvo simvolizma i strukturalisticheskaia teoriia mifa: Viacheslav Ivanov i Iurii Lotman / Zara Mints," *Pro et contra* 2:122–31.

<sup>52</sup>Ol'ga Fridenberg, *Mif i literatura drevnosti* (1954; reprint ed. Moscow, 1988), 230.

<sup>53</sup>Ivanov, "Zavety simvolizma."