



SHAPES OF APOCALYPSE

ARTS AND PHILOSOPHY IN SLAVIC THOUGHT

Edited by
Andrea OPPO

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PART THREE
MUSIC
AND VISUAL ARTS

Polina Dimova

THE APOCALYPTIC DISPERSION
OF LIGHT INTO POETRY AND MUSIC

Aleksandr Skrjabin in the Russian Religious Imagination

Who can say: conquered or conqueror
Of him, whom—falling silent in the graveyard of miracles—
The abode of the Muses mourns with the whispering of its laurels?¹

The spring Sun shone above, as the funeral songs blended with the joyful paschal hymns in a peculiarly meaningful fashion ... And suddenly the coffin with the “burned Icarus” or Lucifer resting in it seemed solemnly jubilant; [Skrjabin’s] life was a grandiose myth, as if a legend of the utmost human daring and the punishment incurred. This man wanted to set the world on fire, but ended up burning himself because of a trifle ... He was happy and shone all his life. Like a radiant moth, he flew toward the fire in his ecstatic thirst unaware of it himself.

The funeral took place the next day ... Everything seemed to happen on its own account. Submerged in flowers, the coffin floated over the crowd, and the funeral procession curiously enough seemed again strangely joyful; the pace was brisk, not somber, and it often seemed to me that the crowd would any minute dash into a flight with the coffin in its hands.²

¹ Vjačeslav Ivanov, “Pamjati Skrjabina,” in “Vzgljad Skrjabina na iskusstvo,” *Sobranie sočinenij (SS), Collected Works*, Red. D. Ivanov i O. Deschartes. Vved. i primech. O. Deschartes, Vols. 1-4. (Bruxelles: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1971), Vol. 3, 189. Translated by Michael Wachtel as “In Memory of Skriabin,” in “The ‘Responsive Poetics’ of Vjačeslav Ivanov,” *Russian Literature* XLIV (1998): 309-310.

² Leonid Sabaneev, *Vospominanija o Skrjabine* (Moscow: Muzsektor Gosizdata, 1925), 311. My translation. All subsequent translations are my own unless otherwise specified.

A sense of mourning, foreboding, and bewilderment haunted the Russian intellectual world bereft of Aleksandr Skrjabin upon his untimely death on 14/27 April 1915. The Russian virtuoso pianist and composer of Wagnerian aspirations had been superstitiously pleased to have been born on Christmas (25 December/6 January 1871), and had [furthermore] died during Easter time. He had fashioned his life as that of a Messiah, and his death was interpreted in mystical terms as a miracle in its own right. In his reminiscences, Leonid Sabaneev, one of Skrjabin's closest friends, could not resist reading the mystical significance of Skrjabin's death. The funereal atmosphere oscillates between lament and joy, music and light, and death and resurrection. The spring Sun rejoices, suffusing the funeral with divine light. The paschal hymns resonate with exultation, as if they celebrated the advent, departure, and resurrection of the new prophet of light. Skrjabin's death is construed as the burning of a radiant moth (*lučezarnyj motylěk*) in the apocalyptic fire meant to ignite the world with his later music and thought. For his ecstatic luminous yearning, Skrjabin earns his due punishment, just as the hubris of the light-seeking Icarus and Lucifer leads to their fall from the light. The hand of a miraculous, fairy-tale, divine agent orchestrates the memorial service, which seems to happen without human intervention, "on its own account": "vsë delalos'... samo saboju." The funeral procession accelerates its pace, ready to soar up in a Skrjabinian flight (*vzlët*).³ Sabaneev's description of the funeral encapsulates the mythopoetic significance of the composer's life, death, and work as defined by apocalyptic music and light. The mythologized artist pursued light and transfiguration throughout his creative life.

This essay examines the complex construction of the figure and work of Aleksandr Skrjabin in Russian religious philosophy. Recent scholarship on the subject has been devoted exclusively to a search for parallels and for possible influences of Russian religious thought and Western philosophy and mysticism on Skrjabin's artistic output. The overarching concepts of the Russian religious renaissance and Symbolist theory, heralded by the Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovëv, such as theurgy (divine action), collectivity,

³ On the motif of flight in Skrjabin's music, see Susanna Garcia, "Scriabin's Symbolist Plot Archetype in the Late Piano Sonatas," *19th-Century Music* 23.3 (Spring 2000): 284-285.

oneness, and ecstasy, have shaped the research on the composer's art and thought.⁴ In contrast, the present essay traces the posthumous refashioning of Skrjabin's persona and music by Russian religious thinkers, as they construed the most culturally resonant aspects of Skrjabin's life and work. After an overview of various Russian religious interpretations of Skrjabin's death and appraisal of his evocations of sonic light, this article will focus on the concepts of light, poetry, and music in the verse of the Symbolist poet and religious philosopher Vjačeslav Ivanov, who was both a formative influence on and an interpreter of Skrjabin's work.⁵ Skrjabin and Ivanov collaborated during the composer's final years and conspired to stage the apocalyptic *Mysterium*. Savoring the manifestations of divine light synaesthetically dispersed in Skrjabin's poetry and music, Ivanov retrospectively inscribed the artist in his own aesthetic theology and cast him as an Orphic figure, interweaving the composer's synaesthetic music with his own Symbolist poetics of light.

1. Skrjabin and Russian Religious Philosophy

Aleksandr Skrjabin had enchanted Russian artists, intellectuals, and religious thinkers alike. His multifaceted persona conflated subtle pianistic virtuosity with Wagnerian ambitions of an aesthetic transformation of the world that surpassed those of Wagner himself. His impeccably groomed

⁴ On the parallels between the thought of Skrjabin and that of the Russian religious philosophers (from Solov'ëv to Berdjaev), see Natal'ja Andreeva, "Skrjabin. Estetiko-filosofskij kontekst chudožestvennykh novacii Skrjabina," in *Učenyje zapiski*, Vypusk 5 (Moscow: Memorial'nyj muzej A. N. Skrjabina, 2005), 44-60. On ecstasy and occultism in Skrjabin, see Marina N. Lobanova, "'Ekstaz' i 'bezumie': Osobennosti dionisijskogo mirovosprijatija A. N. Skrjabina," *Voprosy filosofii* 3 (March, 2007): 159-170. For a discussion of Skrjabin's music in connection with the Symbolist idea of the Eternal Feminine in his late piano sonatas, see Susanna Garcia, "Scriabin's Symbolist Plot Archetype in the Late Piano Sonatas," op. cit., 273-300. For an integrated approach to Skrjabin's music, the Silver-Age cultural context, and Symbolist theory, see Richard Taruskin's invaluable and insightful study "Scriabin and the Superhuman: A Millennial Essay," in *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1997), 307-359.

⁵ In his cultural and musical analysis, Taruskin chooses to rely on Vjačeslav Ivanov as a faithful interpreter of Skrjabin's work rather than critically examine Ivanov's writings on Skrjabin as an act of myth-creation (cf. Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, op. cit., 319-320).

dandyism and his fragile and easily excitable disposition were eclipsed by a penchant for mysticism and otherworldliness: "I am God./ I am no one."⁶ A decadent artist, a symbolist composer, a solipsistic thinker, and a self-deifying mystic enamored with theosophy, Skrjabin had accelerated the intensity of apocalyptic anticipation in the early 1910s with his work *The Preparatory Act* (*Predvaritel'noe dejstvo*) to the ultimate religious-aesthetic *Mysterium* (*Misterija*), which was intended to obliterate the world.⁷ These grandiose projects were meant to prepare humanity for the final transfiguration of the world and ultimately realize it, but both were left incomplete. Fervently pursuing his megalomaniac aspirations, Skrjabin conspired to stage this final religious total artwork in India, where composer, musicians, dancers, and audience would all join in to bring about the Apocalypse. Skrjabin's dream of mankind's last mystical celebratory feast of music, poetry, lights, colors, dance, sculpture and architecture was cut short and stolen from us with his demise. His death left the Russian religious thinkers and Symbolist artists baffled in the aftermath.

Skrjabin's fate inevitably became the subject of philosophical interpretations, and questions proliferated. What would happen with the Mystery to which Skrjabin had devoted his life's work? Was Skrjabin "conquered" by death or was he its "conqueror," as his close friend and adviser Vjačeslav Ivanov asks in his poetic tombeau "In Memory of Skrjabin"?⁸ Was his death a miracle in its essence? Was Skrjabin's demise a numerological anticipation of a future Mystery to come? According to Father Pavel Florenskij, Skrjabin's *Mysterium* did not fail with the composer's death, but would in fact be realized thirty-three years after

⁶ "Ja Bog./ Ja ničto." Various formulations and modifications of this dialectical statement are interspersed throughout Skrjabin's notebooks. See Aleksandr Skrjabin, "Zapisi A. N. Skrjabina," *Russkie Propilei*, vol. 6, edited by Michail Geršenzon (Moscow: Izd. M. i S. Sabašnikovych, 1919), 140-144 and 154.

⁷ In the following pages, I will use *The Mysterium* as a general umbrella term when discussing Skrjabin's life-long vision of the Apocalypse, whereas I will refer more specifically to *The Preparatory Act* when examining the work of his last years, especially the verse he wrote for his final incomplete opus. My reference to one opus will also implicate the other.

⁸ Vjačeslav Ivanov, "In Memory of Sκριabin," in Michael Wachtel, "The 'Responsive Poetics' of Vjačeslav Ivanov," op. cit., 309-310.

that death, that is, a Christ's life span away from Skrjabin's demise.⁹ Leonid Sabaneev remembered Florenskij's mystical calculation, and, in 1948, exactly thirty-three years after Skrjabin's death, he was reminded of it when he heard about Florenskij's death in a concentration camp in Siberia. The otherwise skeptical music theorist Sabaneev concluded: "The Mystery had been consummated—not for Skrjabin but for Florenskij himself."¹⁰ Laden with mythopoetic significance, Skrjabin's death continued to perpetuate its prophetic momentum well into the twentieth century, and in fact Florenskij was executed as early as 1937 in Solovki, whereas official Soviet accounts insisted on 1943 as the year of his death. At the other end of the spectrum, skeptics maintained that Skrjabin's death was a failure of the transfiguration of reality. The impossibility of comprehending the mystical significance of Skrjabin's life and death, or of settling on an interpretation of his passing away, troubled the Russian intellectual mind.

The complex and often contradictory reactions of Russian religious thinkers to Skrjabin's fate encapsulate the seductive overlaps and dramatic divergences between his intuitions in *The Mysterium* and the Russian philosophical understanding of the Apocalypse. At the *fin de siècle*, the Russian Symbolists actively sought ways to transfigure reality with their philosophical and artistic projects. Their goal was to transcend individuality and achieve collectivity and all-unity, or the reintegration of the material world with the spiritual world, as the Russian religious philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev (1853-1900) would have it. The fusion of the human senses, the arts, and human beings would take place in a utopian religious, erotic, and aesthetic act. This heady, ecstatic blend of the Symbolist mystical unison underlay Skrjabin's conception of *The Mysterium*.

Skrjabin's evolving thoughts on his apocalyptic project are preserved in his posthumously published notebooks, which also contain the complete poetic text of *The Preparatory Act*. His notes reveal engagement with German Idealist philosophy and disclose Fichte's special influence on the composer. Though highly derivative, Skrjabin's utterly subjectivist reflections testify to the theoretical basis of his mystical and religious

⁹ Leonid Sabaneeff, "Pavel Florensky—Priest, Scientist, and Mystic," *Russian Review*, 20.4 (October 1961): 314-315.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 315.

thought that informed his vision of *The Preparatory Act* to *The Mysterium*. The eclecticism and self-aggrandizing—indeed, self-deifying—tendencies of Skrjabin's ideas provoked the diametrically split responses of the Russian religious thinkers. Skrjabin became an embattled figure promising divine light and transfiguration to such thinkers as Vjačeslav Ivanov, while tempting the religious mind of others with dark light, or what Aleksej Losev and Father Georges Florovskij condemned as Satanism. Still, albeit shocked by the satanic overtones of his oeuvre, the Russian religious philosophers all agreed on the depth and significance of Skrjabin's mystical experience, as manifested in his music, ideas, and sudden portentous death.¹¹

In his philosophical treatise "Skrjabin's Worldview" (*Mirovozzrenie Skrjabina*), written between 1919 and 1921, Aleksej Losev¹² (1893-1988) sets out to expound on Skrjabin's mystical and musical vision. The essay torturously enacts the controversial reception of Skrjabin in the mind of a single Russian philosopher. In his text, Losev subliminally soars to the peaks of adoration while simultaneously checking himself and casting his hero into the abysses of condemnation. The philosopher initially affirms the undeniable depth of Skrjabin's mystical experience and the enthralling power of his music, but then disapprovingly ponders the composer's philosophical inadequacy in capturing its complexity.¹³ As Losev

¹¹ Ivanov was a staunch supporter of Skrjabin's art, as we shall see in the second half of this chapter when I discuss his essay "Skrjabin's View on Art," while Florenskij was interested in his concept of *The Mysterium*, despite having some reservations regarding Skrjabin's synthesis of the arts and ambition to go beyond the limits of music in his art. See Vjačeslav Ivanov, "Vzgljad Skrjabina na iskusstvo," op. cit., 172-189. On the connections Florenskij drew between Skrjabin's ideas of *The Mysterium* and his own idea of "The Orthodox Rite as a Synthesis of the Arts," see Nicoletta Misler, "The Religious Ritual as Social Event," *Event Arts and Art Events*, ed. Stephen C. Foster (Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1988), 159-174 and Pavel Florenskij, "Chramovoe dejstvo, kak sintez isskustv," *Makovec* 1.1 (Moscow: Mlechnyj put', 1922): 28-32. On Florenskij's views of Skrjabin, see also Leonid Sabaneeff, "Pavel Florenskij," op. cit., 315 and nn23-24 in *Vjačeslav Ivanov: Archivnye materialy i issledovanija* (Moscow: Russkie slovari, 1999), 105-106. On the other hand, Losev and Florovskij emphasized the satanic impulses behind Skrjabin's music. See Aleksej F. Losev "Mirovozzrenie Skrjabina," in *Strast' k dialektike* (Moscow: Soveckij pisatel', 1990), 256-301; and Georges Florovsky, "On the Eve," in *Ways of Russian Theology, Collected Works*, vols. 5-6, ed. Richard S. Haugh, trans. Robert L. Nichols (Belmont, MA: Nordland Pub. Co., 1979), 270-271.

¹² Aleksej F. Losev, "Mirovozzrenie Skrjabina," op. cit., 256-301.

¹³ While the young Aleksej Losev was enchanted with Skrjabin's music, Losev's reservations

articulates the stages of the world process evolving toward *The Mysterium*, he fluctuates between a lacerating analysis of Skrjabin's trivial and naïve relativistic thought, and sheer awe at the profundity and richness of the composer's mystical experience. While delineating the final ecstatic stage of *The Mysterium*, as recorded in the text to *The Preparatory Act*, Losev pinpoints the erotic sensuousness of lights, colors, moans, and music that evoke the transfiguration of reality in Skrjabin's imagination. The philosopher questions the composer's vision of the Apocalypse by drawing attention to its demonic implications, which could have arisen only from a pagan worldview. Yet, Skrjabin's spellbinding music, coupled with his sinful Satanism, elicits an almost pagan veneration in Losev himself, as he repeatedly calls Skrjabin a genius, although presumably a demonic one. Losev's essay is thus punctuated with vehement criticism and reluctant admiration for the tragically courageous composer, whose music the philosopher would always love.¹⁴ Unable to cope with his own profoundly ambivalent reactions to Skrjabin and his music, Losev ultimately condemns the self-deifying theurgic artist as a Satanist.

From the beginning of the essay, Losev vacillates between dialectical binaries, trying to delimit Skrjabin as an artist, mystic, and thinker.¹⁵ In

towards it grew after the composer's death and the 1917 revolution. See Losev's notes on Skrjabin from 27 May 1914, and compare his unrestrained enthusiasm ("Scriabin's Second Symphony enchanted me with its incredible complexity") with the growing suspicion towards the composer in Losev's 1919-1921 essay. Aleksej Losev, *Ja soslan v XX vek*, ed. A. A. Tacho-Godi (Moscow: Vremja, 2002), 429.

¹⁴ Losev's second wife, Aza Tacho-Godi remembers his love for Skrjabin's music. A. A. Takho-Godi, "Aleksei Fedorovich Losev," *Soviet Studies in Philosophy* 28.2 (Fall 1989): 39. Quoted in Bernice G. Rosenthal, "Losev's Development of Themes from Nietzsche's 'The Birth of Tragedy,'" *Studies in East European Thought* 56.2/3 (June 2004): 207n5.

¹⁵ Losev identifies three abstract concepts underlying Skrjabin's mystical experience: *anarchical individualism*, *mystical universalism*, and *erotic historicism*. In his dialectical method, the philosopher goes on to synthesize these philosophical abstractions into the composer's life-long vision of *The Mysterium*. As a Messianic artist, Skrjabin extends his individualistic psyche over the cosmic world (universalism) and strives toward its end (historicism). Losev suggests that, in a mystical-philosophical gesture of utter solipsism, Skrjabin's theurgic self encompasses all preceding and future stages of the world process leading toward the eroticized vision of the Apocalypse (in a Christian sense), which, for that matter [or "furthermore"], Ivanov, Solov'ëv, and Skrjabin shared. See Aleksej Losev, "Mirovozzrenie Skrjabina," op. cit., 256-270. Interestingly, Skrjabin likely formulated his early ideas of the transfiguration of the

his extreme solipsism, according to Losev, Skrjabin's "I" encompasses the cosmos, conflating the individual and the universal. His paganism and Christian apocalyptic thought intersect in the realm of the demonic. His heroic daring and tragic courage are informed by excruciating aristocratic refinement, as well as by petty bourgeois sensibility. Even Skrjabin's demonic genius manifests itself as paltry, not titanic. Ultimately, *The Mysterium* dialectically embodies both the attainments of European culture and its negation. We could use Losev's dialectical method to explain the fluctuations in this reading of the composer.¹⁶ Losev suggests that Skrjabin's genius lies precisely in this marriage of thesis and antithesis in his art, thought, and persona, and so the artist fulfils the synthesis of the flowering and collapse of Western civilization. However, towards the end of the essay, unassimilated abstract constructions such as "pagan-Christian-solipsistic atheism" disrupt the text and defy Losev's neatly dialectical method.¹⁷ Losev's dizzying dialectics appears to be psychologically rooted in his inability to grasp Skrjabin's deeply unsettling music and put it into orderly categories:

While listening to Skrjabin, you would want to throw yourself into some abyss, jump out of yourself, and do deeds unheard-of and horrendous. You'd want to destroy, beat up, kill, and be yourself torn to pieces ... All drowns in erotic Madness and Rapture.¹⁸

Losev's pagan experience of Skrjabin's music is overwhelmingly decadent, or, shall we say, Dionysian. Losev's constant slippage into pagan worship is

world independently of his predecessors, perhaps partly based on his philosophical discussions with Prince Sergej N. Trubeckoj, who was a student of Solov'ev's. On Skrjabin and Trubeckoj, see Marina N. Lobanova, "'Ekstaz' i 'bezumie,'" op. cit., 161. In any event, the idea of an aesthetic and erotic transfiguration of reality was in the air during the Russian Silver Age.

¹⁶ From his early work on Skrjabin to his Marxist-Leninist dialectics, Losev strove for the centripetal integration of ideas into an organic whole. His thought draws together a multiplicity of ideas to produce not abstract concepts but one living organism, an organic concept, which, according to Losev, crystallizes into the vision of *The Mysterium* in Skrjabin's thought. On Losev's dialectical method, see Caryl Emerson, "On the Generation that Squandered its Philosophers (Losev, Bakhtin, and Classical Thought as Equipment for Living)," *Studies in East European Thought* 56 (2004): 97, 102-108.

¹⁷ See Aleksej F. Losev, "Mirovozzrenie Skrjabina," op. cit., 295.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 292.

annihilated in one final gesture when he conclusively settles his accounts with Skrjabin. In a zealous flourish, he proclaims that, for a Christian, it is sinful to listen to Skrjabin's music, as it corrupts the soul and awakens erotic shudders and bodily delights. In a rhetorical tour de force, Losev declares anathema on the composer, who dialectically epitomizes the highest achievements, as well as the downfall, of Western civilization: "You don't pray for Satanists; you anathematize them."¹⁹

With the benefit of hindsight, Father Georges Florovskij (1893-1979) astutely sums up the two conceptual poles that inform Skrjabin's reception in the Russian religious mind. Florovskij, like Losev, emphasizes the composer's indisputable, highly charged "mystical experience" (*mističnyj opyt*) and immediately establishes its counterpart in the composer's Satanism.²⁰ He describes Skrjabin's mystical experience as a vision without a God—problematic, ambiguous, and seductive—forever tempting the Russian religious philosophers to reflect on Skrjabin's music and fate. Florovskij thus claims that the demonic reigns supreme in Skrjabin's music. In his satanic pursuit of Apocalyptic destruction and the end of history, the composer finds his own death. Thus, Skrjabin's mystical experience united the Russian Orthodox philosophers and the philosophically inclined Symbolists in their interpretations of his persona and oeuvre, while religion, philosophy and aesthetics pulled them apart.

The most important juncture of this stark religious divide concerning Skrjabin's art and thought emerges in the varying interpretations of his musical, poetic, and visual constructions of light and fire. In the Russian philosophical mind, Skrjabin's images and concepts of fiery illumination received a dramatically split reception, which alternated between divine (uncreated) light and false demonic light (the fire of hell).²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., 301.

²⁰ Georges Florovsky, "On the Eve," op. cit., 270. See also the original in Prot. Georgij Florovskij, "Nakanune," in *Puti russkogo bogoslovija* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1981), 486-487.

²¹ In Eastern Orthodoxy, the opposition between divine uncreated light and created Satanic light can be traced back to Gregory Palamas's doctrine of uncreated energies. They emanate from God's essence and can be perceived by the saintly, pure ascetic, who can be penetrated by divine light and undergo the process of theosis or deification. According to Palamas, Christ's disciples experienced God's light or uncreated energies on Mount Tabor at the Transfiguration. Often in monastic tradition, however, ascetics are tempted by demons manifesting themselves

In his late period (1909-1915), Skrjabin's music acquired enigmatic dissonant translucency, mystical subtlety and scintillating texture, which delineated the process of rarefaction and dematerialization towards the transfiguration of reality. This would be a transfiguration of matter into light by apocalyptic fire. Skrjabin sought to capture his favorite mystical images of light and fire in his music through shimmering trills and tremolos; in his lighting design for his synaesthetic symphony *Prometheus: A Poem of Fire*, musically notated in the score for a keyboard of colorful lights (*Luce*); and in his philosophical diary and his verse for *The Preparatory Act to The Mysterium*.²² Skrjabin's works iridescently glitter with expression marks conveying the luminous quality of his music: *lumineux and flamboyant, étincelant, flot lumineux, fulgurant*; "luminous and dazzling," "sparkling," "luminous wave," "flashing like a lightning."²³ Nonetheless, the profound ambiguity of Skrjabin's sonic world lies precisely in his musical images of light that emerge both as mystically divine in their radiant sound vibrations (in ecstatic trills and tremolos) and as demonic in the underlying dissonance of Skrjabin's mystic world defined by the most jarring musical

in the guise of dazzling radiance. Yet this false light of hell would test a monk's humility, and the demons would inflict punishment on the unenlightened for their pride. I would like to thank Viktor M. Zhivov for providing me with insightful leads during a conversation that took place in Berkeley, CA, in May 2011, on the topic of light in Eastern Orthodox theology and bringing to my attention monastic examples of the experience of false, demonic light.

²² Biographers of Skrjabin (cf. Leonid Sabaneev, *Vospominaniia o Skrjabine*, op. cit.; and Faubion Bowers, *Scriabin: A Biography*, 2 Vols. [Mineola, NY: Dover, 1996]) discuss images of light in his music. Garcia links the motive of light to the erotic theme (see Susanna Garcia, "Scriabin's Symbolist Plot Archetype in the Late Piano Sonatas," op. cit., 283-284). Finally, in a recent study, I focused on the mystical-scientific discourse underlying Skrjabin's and the Russian Symbolists' concepts and tropes of light. See Polina Dimova, "The Poet of Fire: Aleksandr Skrjabin's Synaesthetic Symphony 'Prometheus' and the Russian Symbolist Poetics of Light," BPS Working Paper Series (Berkeley, CA: UC Berkeley, Summer 2009), 1-54. Available at www.escholarship.org/uc/item/25b624gd. Last accessed in January 2013.

²³ On expression markings in Skrjabin, see Hugh MacDonald, "Words and Music by A. Skryabin," *The Musical Times*, 113/1547 (January 1972): 22-25. MacDonald recognizes Skrjabin's expression markings as the only meaningful synthesis of words and music in Skrjabin's works. They suggest "a mood, a prevailing atmosphere, an interpretative hint" (*Ibid.*, 23). They can be hortatory (addressed towards the performer) or programmatic and descriptive. MacDonald emphasizes the importance of single words and phrases, rather than grandiose narratives or poetic works, in conveying the evocative quality of the music.

interval: the tritone, which has carried infernal connotations since the Middle Ages. The dissonant tritone splits the pure consonance of the octave in two symmetrical halves and does not allow for the mutability of the human world. Yet its symmetry delineates the erotic and demonic trajectory towards death in Skrjabin's music.

Indeed, the composer gave Russian thinkers ample reason to doubt the divinity of his music and see it as informed by satanic light. The ambiguity runs through the textual dimension of the music itself. Skrjabin's Piano Sonata No. 7, op. 64 and Piano Sonata No. 9, op. 68 are called, respectively, "White Mass" and "Black Mass." Skrjabin's piano piece *Vers la flamme: poème* ("Toward the Flame: A Poem"), op. 72 starts out in inert terrestrial darkness, imbued with the creeping dark flames of tritone dissonances. Only gradually does the piece unfold to declare its upward celestial strivings. The expression marking *éclatant, lumineux* ("brilliant, luminous") transports us into a continual shimmering ascent of fast tremolos and trills. The effulgent music grasps for higher and higher piano ranges and transcends the sonic realm into the divine luminosity of inaudible heights at the closure. Finally, Skrjabin's two "Dances for Piano," op. 73, *Guirlandes* ("Garlands") and *Flammes sombres* ("Dark Flames"), similarly embody the divine and demonic ambiguity encoded in Skrjabin's musical images of light. Written a year before his death, the two dances are the only musical remnants explicitly marked as fragments of *The Preparatory Act to The Mysteries*. They occupy the diametrically opposed realms of demonic fire or untrue light and the joyous crystalline glittering of refracted sunlight in the garlands.

Nevertheless, Father Georges Florovskij chooses to neglect the divine white light of Skrjabin's music, which Skrjabin calls for at the end of his *Prometheus*: "Sun. I want the Sun at the end!" Instead, he rhetorically construes the composer's Ninth Sonata "Black Mass," along with his *Poème satanique*, op. 36 and *Flammes sombres*, as Skrjabin's *Ninth Symphony*.²⁴ Florovskij thus defines the satanic and the demonic light as the apotheosis of Skrjabin's music, denouncing it as the antithesis of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*.

²⁴ Georges Florovsky, "On the Eve," op. cit., 270.

Within a philosophical framework, Losev poetically examines Skrjabin's satanic shattering and illumination of European Idealistic thought. He sees demonic light in this destructive act:

But, oh, God! What did Skrjabin do with German Idealism!... With his anarchical individualistic mysticism, he shattered it into pieces, madly expanding, deepening and exalting each piece, then shooting all of them in motley fireworks. Playing with each other in a multi-colored fountain, they engaged in a peculiar satanic game of cosmic shudders.²⁵

Skrjabin explodes German Idealist thought into a multiplicity of demonic colors and crashing noises. The burning flames of Skrjabin's ideas synaesthetically disperse in the spectacular shapes, colors, and sounds of the fireworks and illuminate the satanic landscape of his music and thought. The fireworks recall Skrjabin's ideas of music with lights for his symphony *Prometheus. A Poem of Fire* and his aesthetically contrapuntal *Mysterium* of music, verse, dance, and art. In their figurative synaesthetic beauty, Skrjabin's fireworks of music and ideas lure the cosmos into a satanic game.

Losev further locates Skrjabin's Satanism in the composer's ecstatic and erotic imagery of light in the poetic text for *The Preparatory Act*. He argues that, for Skrjabin, "the achievement of ecstasy is the utmost tension of lustful sensuality and penetration by light" and then, in a critical leap, neatly ties fragments of Skrjabin's orgiastic verse full of divine light to the satanic *danse macabre* that follows in Skrjabin's text.²⁶ In Losev's analysis, Skrjabin's "ray of light" loses its pure divine connotations; it is eroticized and reduced to the artist's "I," to Skrjabin as a self-deifying solipsist who identifies with the Sun: ["Shaft of light, white light"].../ "Delicate, it scattered/ In lights and peals/ The abysses resounded/ With sensual moans..."²⁷ In his text, Losev leaves out the ray of light as the referent for

²⁵ Aleksej Losev, "Mirovozzrenie Skrjabina," op. cit., 298.

²⁶ Ibid., 284 and 285. Losev quotes from Aleksandr Skrjabin, "Predvaritel'noe dejstvo," *Russkie Propilei*, op. cit., 218-219 and then from 220-221 ("Song—Dance of the Fallen"; *Pesnja—Pljaska padšich*).

²⁷ Ibid., 285. Quoted in Losev from Aleksandr Skrjabin, "Predvaritel'noe dejstvo," *Russkie Propilei*, op. cit., 218.

the above quote and insinuates “the moan” in its place. However, it is the shaft of light that disperses into colors and sounds and then produces a divine “rainbow,” not a hellish firework. Losev places the emphasis on the sensual moans of the ecstatic being and reads them as satanic, neglecting the creative and transformative potential of divine sunlight. I will return to these poetic images in the second half of this chapter and reinterpret their significance for Skrjabin’s art and thought in conjunction with Vjačeslav Ivanov’s synaesthetic figuration of divine light.

Losev’s and Florovskij’s contradiction-ridden reactions to Skrjabin’s thought, music and ideas of light may make us wonder about Vjačeslav Ivanov’s staunch support and unflagging approbation of Skrjabin’s music and conception of *The Mysterium*. Florovskij’s more sober, skeptical, and critically detached depiction of Ivanov’s views on art can provide us with a clue to a better understanding of the artistic affinities between Skrjabin and Ivanov. Florovskij describes Vjačeslav Ivanov as all-absorbed in antiquity and in art.²⁸ According to Florovskij, “the danger of Symbolism” lies precisely in the transformation of religion into art, and he sees Ivanov’s schemes as aesthetic rather than religious. Florovskij maintains that Ivanov’s main dream is of collectivity, *sobornost’*, but the poet-philosopher approaches this cornerstone idea of Christianity, and of Russian religious philosophy, through the cult of Dionysus as the suffering God. For Ivanov, Christianity manifests itself in the guise of Dionysian experience, in the orgiastic, the Bacchantic, and the ecstatic; he captures it in dithyrambic verse, which Skrjabin tried to emulate when working on *The Preparatory Act*.

In similar terms, Losev construes Skrjabin as a pagan; his aesthetic and mystical thought is based both on the eternity of the Greek cosmos, where God, world, and flesh are identical, and in Christian historicity, where the world process relentlessly moves toward the end of time. Skrjabin rejects circular time and the eternal return of Antiquity, but makes Christian Apocalyptic history central to his thought. Like Ivanov in Florovskij’s view, Losev’s Skrjabin is a pagan and an aesthete, who conflates Christianity and Antiquity in his aesthetic theology.²⁹ For this reason, Ivanov’s and

²⁸ See Georges Florovsky, “On the Eve,” op. cit., 239-240; and Prot. Georgij Florovskij, “Nakanune,” op. cit., 458.

²⁹ Incidentally, Ivanov was Losev’s favorite poet and in no manner deserves to be called a Satanist.

Skrjabin's theurgic aesthetics allowed them to join forces in collaborating on Skrjabin's *Preparatory Act*. Ivanov's Christian paganism or Dionysian Christianity thus informs his casting of Skrjabin as an Orphic Messiah, as we shall see. For Ivanov, the Orphic Skrjabin is a hypostasis of Dionysus as the suffering God, an idea that attracts further Christ-like associations in a typically Symbolist crossover of Christian apocalyptic thought and Greek cosmology.

2. Ivanov's Orphic Skrjabin

In his 1915 commemorative essay upon Skrjabin's death, "Skrjabin's View on Art," Vjačeslav Ivanov creates the myth of Skrjabin as Orpheus relying on the composer's messianic beliefs that he would compose the eschatological *Mysterium*, which would "synthesize all the arts, load all senses in a hypno[tic], [multimedia] extravaganza of sound, sight, smell, feel, dance, décor, orchestra, piano, singers, light, sculptures, colors, visions."³⁰ Ivanov posits that, in its pagan aesthetics, like Orpheus's music, Skrjabin's work conflates all the arts, and his music creates and orders a new world: "Music for Skrjabin, as for the mythic Orpheus, was a fundamental principle, building and setting the world into motion. Music flourishes in words and conjure up images..."³¹ Skrjabin's music abounds in words, images, and sounds. As an Orphic poet-musician, Skrjabin brings together the Apollonian and the Dionysian principles, the visual and the musical. Skrjabin's untimely death parallels Orpheus's descent to the underworld and his violent dismemberment at the savage hands of the raging Maenads: a dismemberment that would regenerate the world. Ivanov imagines the composer demanding the immediate renewal of the world. Yet Fate decrees otherwise: "Fate answered [to Skrjabin]: 'you should die and resurrect yourself alone.' I revere this death," says Ivanov, "remembering that the seed will not come back to life without dying first."³² Thus, in Ivanov's original interpretation, Skrjabin's death regenerates the artist and the world, by sowing the seeds of Orpheus's dismembered body.

³⁰ Faubion Bowers, *Scriabin: A Biography*, op. cit., 185.

³¹ Vjačeslav Ivanov, "Vzgljad Skrjabina na iskusstvo," *SS*, Vol. 3, 175.

³² *Ibid.*, 181.

In actuality, Skrjabin died of a blood infection, and Ivanov never explicitly mentions the dismemberment of the Orphic Skrjabin. Nonetheless, Ivanov's poetic and theoretical practices construe Skrjabin's art as mystically dismembered. In Ivanov's work, the dispersion of light with its corollary proliferation of the arts and the senses metaphorically parallels the scattered body of Orpheus. In his early poetry collection *Transparency* (*Prozračnost'*, 1904), Ivanov conflates light and synaesthesia with the artist figure of Orpheus, and thus prepares Skrjabin's inscription in his Orphic mythology. Early on, Ivanov had fashioned an Orphic figure whose model Skrjabin would poetically emulate in the 1910s and mystically fulfill with his vision of *The Mysterium* and with his death, as commemorated in the poet's essays and poems about the composer.

Ivanov's essay "Skrjabin's View on Art" concludes with a poem dedicated to Skrjabin as a hypostasis of Orpheus:

Памяти Скрябина (1915)

Осиротела Музыка. И с ней
Поэзия, сестра, осиротела.
Потух цветок волшебный у предела
Их смежных царств, и пала ночь темней

На взморие, где новозданных дней
Всплывал ковчег таинственный. Истлела
От тонких молний духа риза тела,
Отдав огонь Источнику огней.

Исторг ли Рок, орлицей зоркой рея,
У дерзкого святыню Прометея?
Иль персть опламенил язык небес?

Кто скажет: побежден иль победитель,
По ком, — немея кладбищем чудес —
Шептаньем лавров плачет муз обитель?

In Memory of Skrjabin

Music has been orphaned. And
Her sister Poetry was orphaned with her.
The magical blossom has died at the border
Of their adjoining kingdoms, and night has fallen darker

On the shore, where the mysterious ark of newly-created days
 Has surfaced. The raiment of the body has smoldered
 From the refined lightning-bolts of the spirit,
 Having given up its fire to the Source of fires.

Did Fate, hovering like a keen-eyed eagle, tear away
 The sacred object from daring Prometheus?
 Or did the language of the heavens set the earth afire?

Who can say: conquered or conqueror
 Of him, whom—falling silent in the graveyard of miracles—
 The abode of the Muses mourns with the whispering of its laurels.³³

In Ivanov's sonnet "In Memory of Skrjabin," both music and poetry mourn for the Orphic artist as a musician-poet after heaven's lighting-bolt has purged and transformed his body into universal fire. Transformation by fire and light enhance the poetic and musical dimension of the Orphic composer, transporting him into the realm of light. This is the realm of the sun god Apollo, Orpheus's father, whose whispering laurels honor the artist at the closure of the poem. Furthermore, Ivanov likens Skrjabin to the light-giving Prometheus, alluding to the composer's own symphonic hero. *Prometheus: A Poem of Fire* prepared Skrjabin's *Mysterium* in its otherworldly ethereal harmonies, as well as in its synaesthetic aspirations to conflate music with light and color.

The sestet of the sonnet poses a rhetorical question about the significance of Skrjabin's death: was Skrjabin conqueror or conquered? Was his "sacred object," his messianic mission, snatched away from him, or did his death purge the whole world by setting it on fire? Skrjabin's victory manifests itself in the posterior positioning of his triumph, at the end of the first tercet and at the end of line 12, as well as in the synaesthetic allusions in the poem to music, poetry, and language as fire (literally, "the tongue of fire").³⁴ Skrjabin is the "conqueror" who purifies the earth by setting it afire.

³³ Vjačeslav Ivanov, "Pamjati Skrjabina," in "Vzgljad Skrjabina na iskusstvo," *SS*, Vol. 3, 189. Translated by Michael Wachtel in "The 'Responsive Poetics' of Vjačeslav Ivanov," *op. cit.*, 309-310.

³⁴ In the handwritten addendum to his essay, Ivanov describes the opening half of the antinomic statements as ironic. Cf. Vjačeslav Ivanov, "Vzgljad Skrjabina na iskusstvo," in *Skrjabin* (Moscow: IRIS-PRESS, 1996), IX, 36-37.

According to Ivanov, Skrjabin reveres all the arts as “instrumental forces, weaving a multicolored cover for the child—the miracle that had to be born in the choral all-unity of *The Mysterium* and become the soul of the new, better age...”³⁵ Ivanov’s metaphor of the multiplicity of the arts as a motley, multicolored veil for the spiritual miracle suggests the prismatic figuration of mystical transfiguration in Ivanov’s thought. Similarly, the spectrum of colors, which here stand for the various arts, can converge in the white light of “the collectively united consciousness, as in a convex lens, gathering light.”³⁶ White light represents both transcendence and death, as enacted in Ivanov’s myth of Skrjabin’s Orphic death. Thus, the typically Symbolist dispersed synaesthetic and inter-artistic light anticipates its apocalyptic transfiguration into synthetic white light.

The prismatic quality of Ivanov’s aesthetics of colorful dispersion of light can be traced back to Vladimir Solov’ev’s religious thought. Solov’ev proposes that, on its way to all-unity (reintegration of matter and spirit), matter is transfigured by illumination (*preobraženie*), and spiritual light becomes incarnated in matter (*voploščenie*).³⁷ Solov’ev exemplifies his aesthetic principle with the evolution of the crystalline structure of the carbon element. For him, dark coal transfigures into the refractive and light-dispersing diamond in the chemical interpenetration of light and matter.

Vjačeslav Ivanov adopts Solov’ev’s idea of the transfiguration of dark coal into illuminated diamond in his cycle *Kingdom of Transparency* (*Carstvo Prozračnosti*). Precious stones inhabit Ivanov’s kingdom of transparency: the diamond, the ruby, the emerald, the sapphire, and the amethyst.³⁸ As in Solov’ev’s notion of spirit as light, Ivanov’s gemstones

³⁵ Vjačeslav Ivanov, “Vzgljad Skrjabina na iskusstvo,” *SS*, Vol. 3, 188.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ For a discussion of Solov’ev’s main aesthetic categories in the essay “Beauty in Nature” (1889) and his mystical realism as a synthesis of scientific and religious views on reality, as well as for an evaluation of his influence on the Russian Symbolist poets (seen in their utopian craving to transfigure reality through art and their use of the metaphor of the incarnation of spirit into matter), see Irina Paperno, “The Meaning of Art: Symbolist Theories,” in *Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Symbolism*, ed. Irina Paperno and Joan Grossman, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994), 13-23.

³⁸ Precious stones and ornate jewelry are a favorite decadent image evoking artifice. Interestingly,

mediate between divinity and humanity by refracting glaring white light and producing iridescent crimson red, green, blue, and violet beams. Thus, the invisible and incomprehensible divine light descends toward humanity in the whole spectrum of colors and lights. Transparent gems enable this vertical communication between matter and spirit.

But what does spiritual and material “transparency” mean for Vjačeslav Ivanov? In her introduction to Ivanov’s *Collected Works*, Olga Shor-Deschartes, who was Ivanov’s closest companion in his later years, his literary executor, and first biographer, offers a lapidary, tantalizing summary:

Vjačeslav Ivanov sets out to examine the nature of that spiritual medium where the incarnations of mystical reality take place. The nature of this medium is oppositional: on the one hand, the medium must be transparent so as not to impede the passing of the sunbeam, which would be halted, darkened, or made invisible by the non-transparent medium; yet, the medium should not be absolutely transparent, as it needs to refract the ray of light—otherwise, *Res* will not be seen, as it is invisible in its essence.³⁹

Rigid, dark, impenetrable matter thwarts illumination, and only the transparent yet refractive spiritual medium of the gem can render the mystical reality of light knowable to mankind. The refraction and dispersion of white light in the transparent medium translates divinity in polychromous human terms. Man can know white light or God only in the multiplicity of colors, and, by extension, in the multiplicity of the senses and the arts, as Ivanov’s essay on Skrjabin and Skrjabin’s synaesthetic work attest.

given my concern with light and, further below, electricity, the magazine *L’Illustration* presented a drawing of a ballerina, poised in dance, girdled and crowned with electric jewels. The illustration clearly articulates the relationship between light, art, and technology in the visual culture of the time. See “Electric Jewels,” *L’Illustration* (1881), reproduced in Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Angela Davis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 72. While decadent imagery associated electricity and jewels with the artificial world, the Russian Symbolists saw them as a part of nature.

³⁹ Vjačeslav Ivanov, *SS*, Vol. 1, 63.

The refractive transparency of the gemstone medium was thought to be enabled by what *fin-de-siècle* culture believed to be luminiferous ether (*efir*), or what Solov'ëv called *insubstantial substance* (*veščestvo neveščestvennoe*.)⁴⁰ The inner ether that objects accommodate makes them transparent or opaque, permeable or refractive. In Russia around the early 1900s, the transparency of matter was explained in the following way: light sets ether into vibration, and rigid matter either absorbs or reflects light, unless the vibrating particles of ether can squeeze through the matter's crevices.⁴¹ In that event, they would enter the object and set in motion the inner ether that fills it. Thus, the inner ether transmits and disperses vibrating light. I suggest that, for Ivanov, transparency enacts this transmission by luminiferous ether and the interpenetration of matter and light in the ethereal medium of the gemstone:⁴²

40 Vladimir S. Solov'ëv, "Smysl ljubvi," in *Sočinenija v dvuch tomach*, ed. Aleksej Losev, Vol. 2 (Moscow: "Mysl'," 1988), 542.

41 See the entry on "Light," *Svet*, by V. Lebedinskij in Brockhaus and Efron, *Enciklopedičeskij Slovar'*, Vol. XXIX, 1900, 238. I summarize the wave theory of light according to Huygens, as expounded by Brockhaus encyclopedia. It is important to note that the encyclopedic entry does not cast doubt on the notion of ether (luminiferous ether) even when the new electromagnetic theory of light is formulated in the nineteenth century. Now ether has obtained electrical and magnetic characteristics that are as yet unknown, but can be studied with greater precision. The electrical and magnetic dimensions of a transparent medium or, rather, the ether of this transparent medium, can determine the speed of light. According to the article, this shows us most saliently the interpenetration (*vzaimnoe proniknovenie*) of electricity and light as two spheres of natural phenomena (Ibid., 246). In this sense, I want to underscore again the scientific and conceptual permeability of light, electricity, the transparent medium, and ether in the mind of the *fin-de-siècle* Russian intellectual.

42 The notion of transparency as a refractive medium can easily find a counterpart in the *fin-de-siècle* decorative arts and material culture. European *style moderne* and Art Nouveau interior designers focused on the expressive, poetic, and refractive qualities of glass. Tiffany lampshades and windows created a kaleidoscope of lights reminiscent of Gothic stained glass windows: "Iridescent glass flux, shimmering in all colors of the rainbow and creating most delicate nuances, develops a wavy, irregular surface when the substance is compressed before it cools" (quoted in Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*, op. cit., 182). In their gorgeous color and irregularities, Tiffany lampshades "compensated for the monotony of electric light" (Ibid.). Windows acted as a "colored filter," poeticized the room, and "[broke] up the dazzling, formless mass of light from the window" (Ibid., 183). In Moscow, the architect Fëdor Sechtel' employed *style moderne* for the Stepan Rjabušinskij house, begun in 1900. In his colorful treatment of glass, his work bears resemblance to Tiffany's: in the two-story stained glass windows, as well as in the Tiffany-style electric lamp. On Moscow architecture at the turn of

Царство Прозрачности (1904)

Алмаз

Когда, сердца пронзив, Прозрачность
 Исполнит солнцем темных нас,
 Мы возблестим, как угля мрачность,
 Преображенная в алмаз.

Взыграв игрою встреч небесных,
 Ответный крик твоих лучей,
 О Свет, мы будем в гранях тесных:
 Ты сам — и цель твоих мечей!

Всепроницаемой святыней
 Луча божественное Да,
 Стань в сердце жертвенном твердыней,
 Солнцедробящая звезда!

The Kingdom of Transparency

Diamond

When, having pierced the hearts, Transparency
 Fills us in the dark with sun,
 We'll shine upward, as the coal's darkness,
 Transfigured in the diamond.

Excited by the play of celestial encounters,
 We will be within the narrow limits,
 O Light, the respondent cry of your beams:
 You yourself—and the target of your swords.

By the all-penetrating sacredness
 Of the ray's divine 'Yes,'
 Become a stronghold in the sacrificial heart,
 Sun-shattering star!⁴³

the century, see William Brumfield, "The Decorative Arts in Russian Architecture: 1900-1907," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 5 (Summer 1987): 12-27. On the artistic and poetic uses of glass by Émile Gallé and Louis Comfort Tiffany, see Ljudmila Kazakova, "Steklo E. Gallé i L.K. Tiffany kak chudožestvennyj fenomen," in *Evropejskij simvolizm*, ed. Igor' Svetlov (St. Petersburg: Aletejja, 2006), 316-331. The Russian symbolists' interest in the refractive medium's permeability, in its metaphorical transparency, and in its spiritual ability to disperse light certainly bears resemblance to Art Nouveau glass design with its focus on the prismatic qualities of glass.

⁴³ Vjačeslav Ivanov, "Almaz," *SS*, Vol. 1, 754.

Ivanov's "Diamond" illuminates the confined, dark, material lyric "We" with celestial light by the power of ethereal transparency. Physical and spiritual light merge in the metaphor of the human heart. The heart is transformed into a figurative diamond, embracing and dispersing light. Transparency as the interpenetration of matter and light structures the poem. The interlocking rhymes, alternating between feminine and masculine, as well as the interplay of images of light and darkness, set into motion the process of permeation. While in the first two quatrains semantically opposite words are coupled in rhymes—transparency and darkness, the unenlightened "We" and the diamond, celestial and narrow, beams and swords—by the final quatrain of the poem, all rhyming words carry positive connotations: sacredness, Yes, stronghold, and star.

Transparency, all-penetration, and transpiercing carry the semantic and acoustic charge of the poem: *prozračnost'* (1), *pronziv* (1), and *vsepronicaemyj* (9). Etymologically, the Latin prefix "pro-" signifies "forward" movement and unifies the key words phonetically. The voiced forceful fricative "z," also in the final consonant of *almaz*, the diamond as adamant, seems to pierce the texture of the poem with the release of air through a narrow opening between the tongue and the teeth. Similarly, the affricative "c" as a semi-soft consonant in "all-penetrating" (9) relates to "z" in its alveolar position, but is softened as if to suggest the ever-growing permeability and transparency of the human heart. The ray of light has pierced our hearts and illuminates them in a metaphorical process similar to the transfiguration of coal into diamond. In fact, light acts upon both the diamond and the heart, as they become iridescent or radiant.

The celestial encounters and the interplay of matter and spirit in the heart posit the interaction between man and light as a process of perpetual creation of light in man. Indeed, the Russian instrumental case, or, literally, "creative" case, *tvoritel'nyj padež*, pervades "Diamond." Transparency fills us "with sun" in line 1; we communicate with and respond to the light rays "by the play of celestial encounters." Finally, the poetic speaker exhorts "the sun-shattering star" to become a stronghold in the heart *by means of* the "all-penetrating sacredness" of the light ray's "Yes" in the last quatrain. This creative interaction of pervasion and impregnation by light molds the complicated intertwinement of the heart and the diamond, as they merge. The metaphorical heart-diamond becomes a stronghold (*tverdynej*) that breaks the sun into particles and disperses light, "sun-shattering star"

(*solncedrobjaščaja zvezda*) (11-12). In this sense, the poem closes with the dispersion and not the union of light, with the spectrum of colors and not with white light.

Ivanov underscores the violence in the process of interpenetration, or piercing. Our hearts are sacrificed to the penetrating sunbeams. The piercing of the hearts by the light-bearing transparency and the “swords” of its rays brings about the illumination of humans. Additionally, the sun itself is shattered by matter, embodied in the star of our heart as a diamond. In this way, Ivanov’s poem “Diamond” also reveals the violence involved in the scattering of light, as well as in the interpenetration of matter and light. This sacrificial piercing and shattering of both the human heart and the sun evokes Ivanov’s understanding of Orpheus as a divinity who is offered sacrifices and is the sacrifice itself.⁴⁴ Also, *The Kingdom of Transparency* recalls Orpheus’s poetry collection *Lithika*, which contains magical songs on gemstones whose beams are healing.⁴⁵ Perhaps Orpheus is figured in the cycle as both using gemstones and being pierced by their beams, as the receiver of sacrifices and the sacrifice itself. Thus, the sacrificial dispersion of light in “Diamond” draws a parallel between the dismemberment of Orpheus and spiritual ascent and purification. Interestingly, after Orpheus’s sundering in Ivanov’s dithyramb “Orpheus Dismembered” (*Orfej rasterzannyj*, 1904), also from *Transparency*, Orpheus rises as a red sun. This is reminiscent not only of the sun cult of Orpheus, but also of the process of *solificatio*, the alchemical separation of the (Orphic) head from the body.⁴⁶ The chorus of Maenads sings:

⁴⁴ Ivanov’s *Kingdom of Transparency* draws on Orpheus’s *Lithika*, which contains a collection of magical songs devoted to gemstones, the rays of which Orpheus used to heal or to enter the cosmic space. See Lena Szilard, “Orfej rasterzannyj’ i nasledie orfizma,” in Vjačeslav Ivanov, *Arhivnye materialy i issledovanija*, op. cit., 214. See note 11.

⁴⁵ For more information on the historical sources for the figure of Orpheus, on his gift as a healer, and on his *Lithika*, see Nikola Gigov, *Gela: Orfevo cvete* (Sofia: Medicina i fizkultura, 1988), 3-45. Gigov translates Orpheus’s name as “magnetic light,” a meaning that powerfully resonates with our discussion of light and electromagnetic phenomena at the *fin de siècle*.

⁴⁶ Lena Szilard, “Orfej rasterzannyj’ i nasledie orfizma,” op. cit., 232.

Он младенец. Вот он в зеркало взглянул: В ясном зеркале за морем лик его, делясь, блеснул! Мы подкрались, улучили полноты верховной миг, Бога с богом разлучили, растерзали вечный лик,

И гармоний возмущенных вопиет из крови стон: Вновь из волн поработанных красным солнцем встанет он. Строя семя, искра бога сердце будет вновь томить.

The infant, lo, he looked into the mirror: in the clear mirror, beyond the sea, his countenance, divided, flashed! We snuck up, seized the sublime moment of plenitude, separated God from the god, tore to pieces the eternal image,

Out of the blood, a wail full of indignant harmonies rose up: He will rise again as a red sun out of the enslaved waves. Ordering the seeds, the divine spark will again let the heart suffer.⁴⁷

Here, Ivanov renders the dismemberment of Orpheus in visual terms, reinforcing the relationship between Orpheus, light, and the sun. Early on in the dithyramb, Orpheus explicitly juxtaposes the ray of light and the divine countenance: “where there is a beam, there is an image/face” (*gde luč, tam lik*). The figurative mirror reflects and separates the embodied face of the god by transforming it into an image. The Russian *lik* encapsulates the meanings of both face and image, and the verse fluctuates between the visual, light-giving image and the embodied Orpheus. The reflected face further “flashes” in the mirror, *blesnul*. By the end of the verse, the corporeality of Orpheus materializes with the separation of the god from the god and the dismemberment of the eternal face. Finally, after Orpheus rises in blood as a red sun, the divine spark, or, shall we say, the divine particle or seed, is sown in the human heart. This metaphor anticipates Skrjabin’s Orphic seed that cannot live without first dying.

To sum up, the dispersion of light is figured as Orphic sacrificial dismemberment; the dispersed light represents the scattered Orphic or divine body. Finally, Ivanov’s figuring of Orphic dispersion of light is synaesthetic. His *Gli spiriti del viso*, also in *Transparency*, reveals the scattered body of the suffering god in nature:

⁴⁷ Vjačeslav Ivanov, “Orfej rasterzannyj,” *SS*, Vol. 1, 804.

Gli spiriti del viso (1904)

Есть духи глаз. С куста не каждый цвет
 Они вплетут в венки своих избраний;
 И сорванный с их памятью ранней
 Сплетаётся. И суд их: *Да* иль *Нет*.

Хоть преломлен в их зрящих чашах свет,
 Но чист кристалл эфиросных граней.
 Они — глядят: молчанье — их завет.
 Но в глубях дали грезят даль пространней.

Они — как горный вкруг души туман.
 В их снах правдив явления обман.
 И мне вестят их арфы у порога,

Что радостен в росах и солнце луг;
 Что звездный свод — созвучье всех разлук;
 Что мир — обличье страждущего Бога.⁴⁸

There are spirits of the eyes. They will not weave every flower
 From the bush into the garlands of their selection;
 And the plucked flower with their early memory
 Intertwines. And their judgment is *Yes* or *No*.

Although the light is refracted in their seeing flower cups,
 Yet the crystal of their ether-bearing facets is pure.
 They look: silence is their bidding.
 But in the depths of the distance they dream of a vaster distance.

They are like a mountain mist around the soul.
 In their dreams the deception of phenomena is true.
 And their harps tell me at the threshold,

That the meadow is joyful under dew and sun;
 That the starry vault is the accord of all separation;
 That the world is the outer appearance of a suffering God.

The first line of *Gli spiriti del viso*, or “Spirits of the Eyes” enacts an enriched synaesthetic translation of *spiriti*. It evokes both (*dUchi*) as spirits and

⁴⁸ Vjačeslav Ivanov, “*Gli spiriti del viso*,” *SS*, Vol. 1, 785. Translated by Pamela Davidson, in *The Poetic Imagination of Vyacheslav Ivanov: A Russian Symbolist’s Perception of Dante* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 167-168.

perfume (*duchI*) in Russian. This secondary meaning of the enriched translation is reinforced by the flower metaphor that informs the rest of the poem on the level of vision, fragrance, and also of music in the flowers' melodious harps.

The flowers as spirits and fragrance refract light with their cups of petals, literally, "glasses." The flowers thus function as mediators of the divine, as they disperse light into Orphic colors and sounds, similarly to Ivanov's precious stones. These cups seem made of pure crystal that would transmit rather than distort the divine. For a moment, the faint scent of perfume, (*duchI*) resurfaces in the permeable and refractive ether of the blossoms' delicate edges, (*efronosnye grani*). These "ether-bearing facets" are reminiscent of the facets of Ivanov's diamonds. They delineate the permeable border between the human spirits and God and define the territory of ethereal and crystal interpenetration as synaesthetic refraction. Sight and scent are completed with the sounds of the lyre that herald the epiphanies of the eye-flowers. All separation vanishes in "harmony" (*sozvučie*), figuring sound again. Thus, the synaesthetic spirits-eyes-perfumes are able to envision the suffering God scattered in nature. Nature is the suffering Orpheus, and the dispersion of light is the manifestation of the dismembered God.⁴⁹

Vjačeslav Ivanov's poem "Rainbows" (*Radugi*) also performs the scattering of the divine body in the material world through the synaesthetic dispersion of light not only into the whole spectrum of colors, but also into sounds, perfumes, and flavors. Through the spiritual process of refraction, the divine (the Orphic) manifests itself. The mediating rainbows in the poem are both visible, "seven-colored/ ethereal arcs" (...*semicvetnye/ arki efirnye*), and audible, "harmonious spectrums" (*spektry sozvučnye*) and "murmurs of lyres" (*rokoty lirnye*).⁵⁰ Thus, rainbows mediate between God and man, and their synaesthetic light allows mankind to experience the divine; they

⁴⁹ The last line of the sonnet is usually interpreted as referring to the suffering Dionysus. However, as Szilard observes, for Ivanov, Orpheus is a hypostasis of Dionysus. Orpheus also conflates both the Apollonian and the Dionysian principles. See Lena Szilard, "'Orfej rasterzannyj' i nasledie orfizma," op cit., 223. See also the quotation from Ivanov's "Orfej" (*Ibid.*, 217).

⁵⁰ Vjačeslav Ivanov, "Radugi," *SS*, Vol. 1, 750-752.

illuminate matter.⁵¹ We saw Solov'ev's and Ivanov's diamond similarly mediate between the human and the divine, and Solov'ev's essay "Beauty in Nature" figures the diamond as a "solidified rainbow" (*okamenevšaja raduga*) or transfigured matter.⁵² Through a false etymology, the rainbow (*raduga*) semantically resonates with the verb "rejoice" (*radovat'sja, radujus'*) with all its divine connotations of jubilant transfiguration and resurrection.

Interestingly, Ivanov's rainbows emerge not simply as manifestations of light, light beams, and the Sun in the human world of transparency. They also retain a complex relationship to synaesthetic fire. They are "fire-sounding" and "fire-visible" (*ognezvučnye* and *ognezračnye*) and create synaesthetic clusters anticipating Skrjabin's *Prometheus*. The thunderbolt (*molnija*), which accompanies rain and precedes the rainbow, explains Ivanov's insistence on fire imagery in a poem about rainbows. However, unlike Losev's fireworks whose synaesthetic explosions are a token of the demonic, Ivanov's rumbling thunders and flashes of lightning reveal the divine. In its descent toward humanity, Vjačeslav Ivanov's divine radiance refracts into the whole gamut of colors and sounds.⁵³ This pantheistic polychromous and polyphonic dispersion of light illuminates man and can transfigure the world. It resembles the Eastern Orthodox uncreated light or divine energies with their promise of deification. Yet, Losev's and Ivanov's contrasting views on synaesthetic light caution us about the divide between uncreated divine light and false Satanic light that Skrjabin straddles in the Russian religious imagination.

If we now briefly return to Skrjabin's verses from *The Preparatory Act*, which he wrote under Ivanov's guidance and which Losev criticized for their erotic and, consequently, demonic potential, we immediately notice Skrjabin's appropriation of Ivanov's Orphic poetics of light dispersion:

51 On Goethe's influence on Ivanov's conception of the rainbow as mediating between humanity and divinity, see Michael Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition: Goethe, Novalis, and the Poetics of Viacheslav Ivanov* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 86-88.

52 Vladimir Solov'ev, "Krasota v prirode," op. cit., 358.

53 For a discussion of Ivanov's understanding of ascent (*voschozdenie*) and descent (*nischozdenie*) as aesthetic and theurgic principles, see Victor Terras, "The Aesthetic Categories of *Ascent* and *Descent* in the Poetry of Vjačeslav Ivanov," *Russian Poetics*, ed. Thomas Eekman and Dean S. Worth (Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1983), 393-408.

Это луч, белый луч
 В нас распался, певуч
 Своей негой луч
 Своей лаской—могуч.

Хрупкий, он рассыпался
 Светами и звонами
 Бездны огласились
 Сладостными стонами

Заиграли радуги
 Расцвелились сны...

Искрятся алмазами...

Боги в отражениях
 Сны свои дробят...

Shaft of light, white light
 Dispersed in us, singing,
 With its blissful delights,
 With its caress, the great ray reigns.

Delicate, it scattered
 In lights and peals
 The abysses resounded
 With sensual moans

The rainbows danced,
 Colorful dreams blossomed...

Scintillating with the diamonds...

Gods, in the reflections,
 Splinter their dreams...⁵⁴

The ray of white light disintegrates into colors and sounds (*raspalsja, rassypalsja*). The sparkling diamonds and the play of the rainbows reflect the synaesthetic nature of the unfinished *Preparatory Act* for Skrjabin's *Mysterium*. Furthermore, the gods also participate in this process of dispersion and fragmentation as "in the reflections,/ they splinter their

⁵⁴ Aleksandr Skrjabin, "Predvaritel'noe dejstvo," in *Russkie Propilei*, op. cit., 218-219.

dreams”—or is this perhaps a splintering of their bodies, a metaphorical dismemberment through reflections and dreams? Like these gods, Skrjabin was the theurgic artist for Ivanov, presiding over the Mystical ritual of the synaesthetic transfiguration of reality and offering his body and art as a sacrifice.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that Aleksandr Skrjabin was critically torn to pieces in the Russian religious imagination for his double vision of light in his poetry and music, at once synaesthetically divine and demonic, ecstatic and erotic. The Russian religious thinkers Aleksej Losev and Georges Florovskij denounced him as a Satanist, while Vjačeslav Ivanov exalted him as an Orphic Messiah. In his collaboration with Ivanov on the verse for *The Preparatory Act to The Mysterium*, Skrjabin inscribed himself in Ivanov’s poetics of Orphic dispersion of light into poetry and music. The poetry for *The Act* lent the composer an appropriately Symbolist textual dimension, while his synaesthetic symphony *Prometheus* had already configured light as composed of sounds and colors. In a way, Skrjabin prepared his own poetic *tombeau* (literally, tombstone), which Ivanov then carefully wove into a multicolored, musical narrative. Thus, the poet created the Orphic myth of Skrjabin as a theurge and a human sacrifice in an act of life creation, or, shall we say, of death creation.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ For a discussion of Ivanov’s poetic and mythic rethinking or emplotting of his life in the cases of his second wife, Lidija Zinov’eva-Annibal, and her daughter, Ivanov’s third wife Vera, see Robert Bird, “Introduction: From Biography to Text,” in *The Russian Prospero* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2006), 21–26. The sonnet “Ljubov” (1899) from the early “Pilot Stars” (“My—dva groznoj zažžennye stvola”) epitomizes Ivanov’s tendency to mythologize life in retrospect, for it served as the basis for his “Garland of Sonnets,” “Venok sonetov” (1909) that appeared after Lidija’s death in 1907. Thus, Lidija’s death seems to be prefigured in the early sonnet. As Bird puts it: “The result is an almost Talmudic explication of the original poem” (Ibid., 22).