

Michael Basker  
The Trauma of Exile: An Extended Analysis of  
Khodasevich's 'Sorrentinskie Fotografii'

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What exile from himself can flee  
Byron<sup>1</sup>

It is widely accepted that the deaths in August 1921 of Aleksandr Blok and Nikolai Gumilev, the one ill for months and denied until too late the necessary papers to leave Russia for treatment, the other executed for complicity in the so-called Tagantsev conspiracy, marked a practical and symbolic turning point in the relations between Russian writers and thinkers and the new regime. In the not untypical assessment of Vladislav Khodasevich's long-term partner in exile, Nina Berberova:

...that August was a boundary line. An age had begun with the 'Ode on the Taking of Khotin' (1739) and had ended with August 1921: all that came after (for still a few years) was only the continuation of this August: the departure of Remizov and Bely abroad, the departure of Gorky, the mass exile of the intelligentsia in the summer of 1922, the beginning of planned repressions, the destruction of two generations — I am speaking of a two-hundred year period of Russian literature. I am not saying that it had all ended, but that an age of it had.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From 'To Inez', song inserted between stanzas lxxiv and lxxxv of Canto 1 of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. To avoid undue encumbrance of the extensive critical apparatus, works of nineteenth and twentieth-century poetry by authors other than Khodasevich will generally be identified by title or first line, and cited without reference to the standard academic editions from which they have been taken. Quotations from literary prose are referenced in the usual way.

<sup>2</sup> Nina Berberova, *The Italics are Mine*, tr. Philippe Radley, London and Harlow: Longmans, 1969, p. 128. The reference to Lomonosov's ode evidently in-

Khodasevich himself had shared a platform with Blok during the Pushkin commemorations of February 1921 which were virtually Blok's last appearance before a Petrograd public, and he was the last person to speak with Gumilev before his arrest — from the House of Arts on the Moika where both had been allocated accommodation.<sup>3</sup> Understandably enough, therefore, for Khodasevich, too, the double fatalities of August 1921 prompted the first serious thoughts of leaving Russia.<sup>4</sup> He finally did so in June 1922, on a temporary visa, in the company of Berberova: coincidentally the addressee of Gumilev's last attested poem, and a fortuitous visitor to Blok's flat as the first office of the dead was read over his open coffin.<sup>5</sup> Neither of them would return to Russia. Before his departure, Khodasevich had made arrangements for publication of his fourth book of verse, *Tiazhelaia lira*, which duly appeared with the Soviet State Publishing House at the end of 1922. His fifth and final collection, *Evropeiskaia noch'*, was not published separately during his lifetime, but comprised the third part of his Parisian *Sobranie stikhov* of 1927. For most of the next twelve years, until his death in Paris in 1939, he produced copious journalistic, literary-critical and literary prose, but only a tiny handful of new poems of note.

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volves a backward glance at lines from Khodasevich's very last poem: '*No pervyi zvuk Khotinskoi ody / Nam pervym krikom zhizni stal'* (Vladislav Khodasevich, *Stikhotvoreniia*, Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1989, p. 302).

<sup>3</sup> See Khodasevich's memoir 'Gumilev i Blok' in his *Nekropol'*: Vladislav Khodasevich, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 4 vols, Moscow: Soglasie, 1996–97 (hereafter *SS-Moscow*), vol. 4, pp. 84–85, 92–93. On later poetry readings by Blok, in Petrograd in March–April 1921 and Moscow in May, see *ibid.*, pp. 89–90; Avril Pyman, *The Life of Aleksandr Blok*, vol. 2, *The Release of Harmony: 1908–1921*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980, pp. 372–74.

<sup>4</sup> See Anna Chulkova-Khodasevich, 'Vospominaniia o Vladislave Khodaseviche', *Russica-81: Literaturnyi sbornik*, New York: Russica, 1982, p. 288. Khodasevich, who was packing for the summer when he conversed with Gumilev on the night of 2–3 August, left next morning for Bel'skoe ust'e. He learned of Blok's death in a letter from Belyi (to whom he had written *en route* on 4 August: see *SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, pp. 431, 646); of Gumilev's, according to Chulkova-Khodasevich, on his return to Petrograd in early September.

<sup>5</sup> Berberova, *Italics*, pp. 121–24, 125–27. Gumilev's poem was '*Ia sam nad soboi nasmeialsia'*.

*Sorrentinskie fotografii* (hereafter SF), a poem of 182 lines, completed in February 1926, is much the longest of the émigré compositions of *Evropeiskaia noch'*, and Khodasevich's longest piece of original verse. It has been very highly regarded by the leading scholarly authorities. John Malmstad, in the introduction to a prestigious Russian edition, describes it as the 'poetic culmination' of Khodasevich's final collection.<sup>6</sup> For David Bethea, in what remains the major study of Khodasevich to date, this 'very difficult work, integrating various surfaces on a large scale', is the masterpiece of an artist 'who understood implicitly the poignant border-crossings, physical, metaphysical, and historico-literary, confronting his generation'.<sup>7</sup> The more far-reaching claim that, Tsvetaeva notwithstanding, this is perhaps therefore the most significant single poem of the Russian emigration of the 1920s, and rivals in quality and complexity anything written in Russian during that decade, might seem more difficult to accept. Yet SF, as Bethea has established, is the poem of an ironist. The ironic mode, in Northrop Frye's pithy characterisation, entails 'saying as little and meaning as much as possible';<sup>8</sup> and SF demonstrates this in abundance. The poem conceals its own profundity, and does not easily surrender its meanings. The present study seeks to reveal something of both, by attempting the sustained close reading which, doubtless due to reticence of presentation as well as exceptional length, the poem has hitherto been denied.

The narrative structure of SF seems at first sight more ingenious than it is complex or obscure. After a brief opening stanza on the process of recollection, modified and re-iterated in conclusion, the text falls into three main sections of three, three and two stanzas (totalling 60, 64 and 42 lines respectively).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Dzh. Malmstad, 'Poeziia Vladislava Khodasevicha', in Vladislav Khodasevich, *Stikhotvoreniia*, St Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2001 (hereafter *Stikhotvoreniia-2001*), p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> David M. Bethea, *Khodasevich: His Life and Art*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983, pp. 302, 314, 350.

<sup>8</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957), London: Penguin, 1990, p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> Thus in the 1927 *Sobranie stikhov*, and thence the American edition of John Malmstad and Robert Hughes (V. F. Khodasevich, *Sobranie sochinenii*: vol. 1,

Stanza 2 introduces the motif of double-exposed photographs — the apparent referent of the poem’s title — which become an effective analogue for the operation of memory and imagination. The superimposition of images captures the speaker’s attention as conventional photographs do not; and in the two stanzas that follow, perception of the here and now of the Italian countryside is comparably ‘double-exposed’ against the persistently recollected images of an unsightly Moscow house and a floor-polisher’s modest funeral. The middle narrative episode of stanzas 5-7 concentrates on a single time and place, to describe a Good Friday religious procession and subsequent church service in Sorrento. The motif of double-exposure is then reintroduced in the two penultimate stanzas, where the shifting scenery during a motorbike ride around hairpin bends opposite Naples becomes intertwined with visual reminiscences of Russia’s ‘second capital’. The angel which surmounts the spire of St Petersburg’s Peter and Paul Fortress is seen hauntingly inverted, ‘toppled’ upon the waters of the Italian bay.

### Critical Approaches

SF has rightly been held up by critics as, first and foremost, a powerful evocation of the debilitating disorientation of exile. In the succinct formulation of E. J. Brown, who takes the ‘Sorrento photograph effect’ as a fundamental paradigm for a general discussion of émigré literature, Khodasevich builds his poem around ‘a striking metaphor for the divided and confused consciousness of the exile, whose mixed images of home and abroad have the effect of defamiliarizing — of making strange in

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*Stikhotvorenniia*; vol. 2, *Stat’i i retsenzii (1905–1926)*, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1983–90 (hereafter *SS-Ardis*), vol. 1, pp. 156–60). The first publication (*Blagonamerennyi*, 2, 1926, pp. 15–20) contained an additional break after ‘*V dalekikh pleshchet vodopadakh*’, in what subsequently became the unbroken sixth stanza; *Stikhotvorenniia* has a less plausible-seeming break in the same stanza, after ‘*Ogniami zheltymi gorit*’. It should be emphasised, however, that the stanzaic divisions are a structural convenience: they help to segment analysis, but have no appreciable semantic bearing on the reading advanced below.

Shklovsky's sense — both the experience of exile life and memories of home'.<sup>10</sup> What Edward Said has described as the 'contrapuntal vision' of exile thus finds here an outstandingly effective embodiment, lucid, poignant and readily accessible.<sup>11</sup>

Bethea, in particular, has sought to develop such analysis further, in an article devoted specially to SF and incorporated without substantial change into his book on Khodasevich.<sup>12</sup> In the context of his overarching interpretation of Khodasevich as a modernist ironist, his elegant and highly perceptive commentary addresses both theme and technique: the interplay between the 'artificial world of artistic patterning and the world of historical inevitability', and what he terms the speaker's manipulation of 'the knobs on the viewfinder, bring[ing] one surface into focus while removing the other surface to the background'. Frank Göbler has provided another section-by-section exposition, with greater emphasis on religious elements and the uncertain distinction between Truth and illusion, and some useful asides on connections with earlier poems by Khodasevich.<sup>13</sup> Others, too, have argued that Khodasevich's poetry of *Evropeiskaia noch'* is thematically and emotionally consistent with pre-emigration works, particularly of the previous, 'Petersburg' collection, *Tiazhelaia lira*.<sup>14</sup> The point is well made with reference to SF by A. Kirilcuk,

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<sup>10</sup> Edward J. Brown, 'The Exile Experience', in *The Third Wave: Russian Literature in Emigration*, ed. Olga Matich with Michael Heim, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1984, p. 53. Similar views are echoed elsewhere; curiously, however, there is no mention of SF in the one monograph specifically relating to Khodasevich and emigration: Inna Broude, *Ot Khodasevicha do Nabokova: nostal'gicheskaia tema v poezii pervoi russkoi emigratsii*, Tenafly NJ: Hermitage, 1990.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', in *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile*, ed. Marc Robinson, San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1994, p. 148.

<sup>12</sup> 'Sorrento Photographs: Khodasevich's Memory Speaks', *Slavic Review*, 39, 1 (1980), pp. 56–69; *Khodasevich*, pp. 296–316.

<sup>13</sup> Frank Göbler, *Vladislav F. Chodasevič: Dualität und Distanz als Grundzüge seiner Lyrik*, Munich: Otto Sagner, 1988, pp. 126–36.

<sup>14</sup> See in particular M. Kreps, 'Evropeiskaia noch' (Poeticheskoe mirooshchushchenie Vladislava Khodasevicha)', *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 27 (1993), pp. 121–47 (pp. 122, 125).

in a subtle analysis of the closing image of the angel to which we shall return below.<sup>15</sup>

More recently, studies devoted specifically to SF have adopted theoretically based, ekphrastic approaches, to discern in Khodasevich's verse innovatively modernist analogues to photographic and filmic techniques. Michael Jakob thus segments the entire text into a series of 'iconic' and 'filmic' sequences, finding analogues to the 'surface effect of photography' and the 'spatiality' of film even in such detail as the distribution of assonance. Another ekphrastic reading, by Jason Brooks, draws on the film theory of Vsevolod Pudovkin to describe the 'transference of filmic style to the poetic text', distinguishing a use of photographic collage and a series of 'cinematic' jump cuts, tracking shots, and, above all, instances of dialectical montage, through which Khodasevich 'recreates the experience of memory's jumping to and fro'. M. Nafpaktitis has instead taken 'the photograph as such' as 'dominant in the work', ranging from consideration of advances in popular photography and camera technology to Rodchenko's photomontage, to contend that 'Khodasevich's conception of photographs and photography shape the structure of the *poema*', lending it 'a sense of physical presence, immediacy and wholeness that can only be „borrowed“ from photography'.<sup>16</sup>

In each of these dedicated studies of SF there is, however, a perhaps inevitable predominance of structural description over semantic interpretation. This might obviously be related to the inherent characteristics of a poem with a strongly explicit visual

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<sup>15</sup> Alexandra Kirilcuk, 'The Estranging Mirror: The Poetics of Reflection in the Late Poetry of Vladislav Khodasevich', *Russian Review*, 61 (2002), pp. 388–90.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Jakob, 'Der Dichter in Seitenwagen des Films: Photographie und Film in lyrischen Text von Wladislaw Chodassewitsch' „Sorrentinskie fotografii“', *Ars Semiotica*, 14 (1991), pp. 99–121; Jason Brooks, '„Directing“ the Reader: Khodasevich's „Sorrento Photographs“ and Montage', *The Comparatist: Journal of the Southern Comparative Literature Association*, 28 (2004), pp. 39-51; Margarita Nafpaktitis, 'Multiple Exposures of the Photographic Motif in Vladislav Khodasevich's „Sorrentinskie fotografii“', *Slavic and East European Journal*, 52:3 (2008), pp. 389–413.

element, in which a series of narrative episodes is presented without detailed authorial commentary. The effect — and consequent interpretative challenge — of the persona's narration may be contextualised with reference to the 'photographic' declaration at the opening of another piece of overtly autobiographical ex-patriate literature of the inter-war period, Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*:

I am a camera with its shutter open, *recording, not thinking*. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed... [*emphasis mine* — M B].<sup>17</sup>

From this perspective, critical 'development' of the modernist's elusively objectified, 'unthinking' recording is both legitimate and essential. Yet an ekphrastic pursuit of the manner of showing, that registers, say, 'the filmmaker's „despotic“ control over the spectator', or the 'willingness to be captivated by the photographer's unexpected results',<sup>18</sup> perhaps runs the risk of transferring the 'not thinking' from authorial persona to reader. It must also be set against Khodasevich's own forcefully stated scepticism as to the artistic value of photography and, especially, cinema. Khodasevich portrayed his father's career as photographer as an abandonment of art; and dismissed as 'defective' any work of art limited to mere reproduction 'of memoir, landscape or everyday material'.<sup>19</sup> As to cinema, in the year he completed SF he wrote scathingly that 'it is neither art nor anti-art. It simply bears no relationship to art'. Like sport, Khodasevich maintained, cinema is a form of 'primitive spectacle'. And it be-

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<sup>17</sup> Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939), London: Minerva, 1989, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Brooks, '„Directing“ the Reader', p. 39; Nafpaktitis, 'Multiple Exposures', p. 404.

<sup>19</sup> See the poem *Daktili* in *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 189, and 'K stoletiu „Pana Ta-deusha“', in Vladislav Khodasevich, *Izbrannaia proza*, New York: Russica, 1982, p. 62.

comes 'anti-art' 'from the moment it begins to be treated as a new motive force of art'.<sup>20</sup>

Khodasevich's hypothetical resistance to such interpretations does not invalidate critical analyses of the poet's visual techniques — even where conclusions point explicitly to the superiority of the visual arts over the poetic text.<sup>21</sup> It does, however, suggest the importance of a critical endeavour also to penetrate beneath the multiple visual 'surfaces' that his poem presents (including that of the overtly autobiographical poetic persona), and to do so in the light of the more positive notions of poetic art which motivate his declared antipathy to modern non-verbal forms. A valuable starting point in this respect is the speech published as 'Koleblemyi trenochnik', which Khodasevich gave on the occasion of the commemorative Pushkin events of February 1921 already referred to above.<sup>22</sup>

He began his address with a generalisation:

В каждом художественном произведении находим ряд заданий, поставленных себе автором. Задания эти бывают различного порядка: философского, психологического, описательного и т. д. <...> Часто в процессе творчества одна такая задача оказывается разрешенной полнее, чем другие...

Pushkin, however, maintained an exceptional even-handedness (*ravnovesie*) in his approach to such 'tasks'. As Khodasevich argued with reference to *Mednyi vsadnik*, this was especially true of the *poemy*, remarkable both for the quantity of their 'parallel

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<sup>20</sup> 'O kinematografe' (1926), *SS-Ardis*, vol. 2, pp. 420–21.

<sup>21</sup> E. g. that visual techniques permit the poet to overcome 'the linearity and focus on one image at a time that is often associated with verbal texts' (Nafpaktitis, 'Multiple Exposures', p. 398), or that poetry, 'in a generic sense', may be incapable of keeping pace with film (Brooks, '„Directing“ the Reader', p. 50).

<sup>22</sup> For further details and analysis of the proceedings, which were spread over a couple of weeks, see Robert P. Hughes, 'Pushkin in Petrograd, February 1921', in *Cultural Mythologies of Russian Modernism: From the Golden Age to the Silver Age*, ed. B. Gasparov, R. P. Hughes and O. Matich, Berkeley: University of California, 1992, pp. 204–13.



tasks' and for the skill of their resolution. Their sheer multiplicity necessitates a range of interpretative angles, and lends to Pushkin's work a corresponding 'series of parallel meanings'. The result is an exceptional polyvalency, typical of all great art:

Пушкин показывает предмет с целого множества точек зрения. Вещам своего мечтаемого мира он придает такую же полноту бытия, такую же выпуклость, многомерность, и многоцветность, какой обладают предметы мира реально-го. Поэтому, к каждому из его созданий приложим целый ряд критериев, как он приложим к вещам, окружающим нас.

<...> Исключительная многотемность Пушкина влечет за собой такую же исключительную многозначимость его произведений. И если творения всех великих художников, заключая в себе ряды смыслов, вызывают соответственные ряды толкований, то творения Пушкина принадлежат к числу наиболее соблазнительных в этом отношении.<sup>23</sup>

Despite Khodasevich's use in SF of the distinctly non-modernist, free-rhymed iambic tetrameter, typical of Pushkin's *poemy*, and an abiding fascination with Pushkin that found expression in some 150 journalistic and literary-critical articles,<sup>24</sup> his own closest approximation to a *poema* is not in any meaningful sense 'Pushkinian': indeed, its very distance from Pushkin becomes thematised, in depiction of a more modern world divorced from that fullness of being — *polnota bytiia* — to which 'Koleblemyi trenozhnik' refers. Yet Khodasevich's friend Iurii Terapiano suggested in the year of the poem's publication that SF exemplified the creation of a new poetic form, of 'dually-co-existing parallelism' (*dvoistvenno-sosushchestvuiushchego paralelizma*), offering 'the simultaneous illumination of an object in many facets and the plastic depth of a seemingly four-dimensional perspective'.<sup>25</sup> To put it differently, it might be claimed that the poem comes spec-

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<sup>23</sup> V. F. Khodasevich, 'Koleblemyi trenozhnik', in his *Stat'i o russkoi poezii*, Petersburg 1922; repr. Letchworth: Prideaux, 1971, pp. 107–108, 110–11.

<sup>24</sup> In the absence of a comprehensive bibliography of Khodasevich, the figure is taken from the editorial commentaries to *SS-Moscow*, vol. 3, p. 560.

tacularly close to replicating the ‘multiplicity of tasks’ that Khodasevich finds in Pushkin, and that it displays in consequence the exceptional multiplicity of meanings (*riady smyslov*) that he attributes to great art.

The essentially linear, stanza by stanza reading that follows seeks to demonstrate this proposition through concentration on verbal rather than visual or ekphrastic aspects, aiming less at the descriptive than the interpretative in relation to a poem that, in the very withholding of overt interpretative clues, is more than usually demanding of interpretation. In the terms of ‘Koleblemyi trenochnik’, the ‘tasks’ of SF are ‘philosophical and psychological’ as well as descriptive. Besides evoking — in, as we shall see, a quite literal, clinically precise sense — the trauma of exile for which the speaker, if not the poet, serves as trope, it constitutes an extended valediction to the age that ended, according to Berberova, in August 1921, and to the demise of which Khodasevich turned in the concluding section of his same Pushkin speech. It brings into sharp focus the process and purpose of poetic creativity, and poses questions as to the nature and integrity of the modern self, and the relationship of self and world. Beyond the distillation of émigré experience for which it is generally recognised, it offers a more fundamental exploration of the meaning — or otherwise — of all experience, repeatedly tottering ambivalently on the knife-edge between rich significance and deceptive chimera or senseless absurdity.

### Biographical Context

Khodasevich (1886–1939) frequently maintained in his critical writings that ‘the autobiography of the poet is the basis of all poetic creation’.<sup>25</sup> SF, for all its reticence, is as clearly founded in personal experience as anything Khodasevich wrote (*‘Vse tak i*

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<sup>25</sup> Iu. Terapiano, ‘Dva nachala v sovremennoi russkoi poezii’, *Novyi dom*, 1926, 1, pp. 31, 28.

<sup>26</sup> ‘O chtenii Pushkina (K 125-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia)’, *Sovremennye zapiski*, 1924, 20; repr. *Klassika otechestvennoi slovesnosti v literaturnoi kritiki russkoi emigratsii 1920–1930-kh godov*, Saransk: Mordovskii universitet, 2009, p. 176.

*bylo, kak rasskazano'*, he noted in Berberova's copy),<sup>27</sup> and some further, albeit brief biographical contextualisation is a necessary prelude to textual analysis.

Khodasevich's background might seem to have prepared him long in advance for the deracinated existence of an expatriate. His father, who had trained as an artist at the Imperial Academy, but, as intimated above, became a successful photographer and photographic retailer, was the son of a dispossessed Polish (Lithuanian) nobleman. His mother was born to the prominent Jewish historian and polemicist Ia.A. Brafman, who had converted first to Protestantism then to Catholicism; but she was brought up, after her parents' separation, by a prominent family of Lithuanian-Polish Catholics. Later, in the heart of Moscow, she assiduously sought to inculcate in her young son her un-Russian, Roman Catholic religion and Polish nationality. Khodasevich himself, the youngest by eleven years in a family of six children, and so sickly in childhood that he was pronounced 'not for this world' (*ne-zhilet*), afterwards asserted accordingly that he had imbibed his Russian language and culture not from his mother, but from his wet-nurse.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, long before 1922, he sometimes gave private voice to a sense of ethnic as well as familial alienation. In Venice with E.V. Muratova in 1911, he was fond of repeating: 'I'm a little Jew (*zhidenok*), though my mother's a Catholic and my father a Pole'; similar sentiments recur — for instance, in a letter to his closest friend S.V. Kissin (Muni): '...I'm a Pole, I'm a Yid, I've neither kith nor kin'.<sup>29</sup> Even Khodasevich's literary position appeared to have been characterised by a sense of marginality and non-belonging. Born, by his own observation, too late not only for family and siblings but

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<sup>27</sup> *SS-Ardis*, vol. 1, p. 367.

<sup>28</sup> On Khodasevich's forebears see Bethea, *Khodasevich*, pp. 4–9; on his childhood see the autobiographical sketch 'Mladenchestvo' in *SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, pp. 190–209, and the poems *Daktily* and '*Ne mater'iu, no tul'skoiu krest'iankoj*' (*Stikhotvoreniia*, pp. 188–89, 128–29).

<sup>29</sup> Khodasevich, *SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, p. 611; Samuil Kissin (Muni), *Legkoe bremia: Stikhi i proza. Perepsika s V. F. Khodasevichem*, Moscow: Avgust, 1999, p. 253 (letter of 9 August 1915).

also for full-fledged Symbolism, this exact coeval of Gumilev detested Futurism, and stayed largely aloof from Acmeism and other post-Symbolist groupings: 'Tsvetaeva and I, ... when we left Symbolism, attached ourselves to nothing and no-one, remaining forever solitary, „wild“ (*dikie*)'.<sup>30</sup> The recurrent impression of an inherent apartness, potentially akin to the exile experience, naturally found reflection also in poetry in which *izgnanitsa* functions as a synonym for the soul.<sup>31</sup>

As the unmistakably Pushkinian overtone of the relationship to the nurse indicates, it is nevertheless important to recognise that a strong element of mythologising self-presentation also obtains here. Ethnic disorientation should thus be offset against a Russian patriotism that forms the broader background of the already-quoted letter to Muni, or led Berberova to her immediate and abiding impression that this 'stepson of Russia', who 'had in him not a drop of Russian blood', was somehow more Russian than his contemporaries: the very personification of the 'Russian renaissance of the first quarter of the century', with which he was inextricably bound.<sup>32</sup> There is clear evidence of Khodasevich's fond attachment to family members.<sup>33</sup> Despite the isolation his memoirs tend to suggest, in the early part of his career he was closely, even centrally involved in literary circles of his own

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<sup>30</sup> 'Mladenchestvo', *SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, p. 190.

<sup>31</sup> See *Elegiia* (1921; *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 146). For a stimulating exploration of spiritual exile in the later poetry, see Jane Miller, 'Xodasevič's Gnostic Exile', *Slavic and East European Journal*, 28:2 (1984), pp. 223–33; on the 'alienation of the human „self“ from its own soul' specifically in *Elegiia* and contemporaneous poems, see also D. M. Magomedova, 'Simvol „dushi“ v „Tiazheloi lire“ V. Khodasevicha', *Filologicheskie nauki*, 1990, 6, pp. 17–22 (p. 22). More generally on Khodasevich's concept of soul, see the section 'Mifologema dushi' in Iu.D. Levin, 'Zametki o poezii Vl. Khodasevicha', *Wiener Slavistischer Almanach*, 17 (1986), pp. 43–129 (pp. 73–81).

<sup>32</sup> Berberova, *Italics*, pp. 134, 227. The phrase 'stepson of Russia' is Khodasevich's ('*Rossii — pasynok — a Pol'she — / Ne znaiu sam, kto Pol'she ia! No vosem' tomikov, ne bol'she, — / I v nikh vsia rodina moia*': *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 295. The 'eight small volumes' are the edition of Pushkin he took into exile.)

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, N. Berberova's telling editorial corrective in Chulkova-Khodasevich, 'Vospominaniia', p. 296.

choosing.<sup>34</sup> And though he distanced himself from Russian Symbolism, by 1921 he willingly recollected that for him, personally, Symbolism had once been ‘a way of thinking, feeling, and — most of all — living’.<sup>35</sup> He would continue to acknowledge its impact in terms of an initiate’s ineradicable belonging, and others’ alienation:

У символизма был *genius loci*, дыхание которого разливалось широко. Тот, кто дышал этим воздухом символизма, навсегда уже чем-то отмечен, какими-то особыми признаками <...> И «люди символизма» и его окрестностей умеют узнавать друг друга. В них что-то есть общее <...> Они — свои, «поневоле братья» — перед лицом своих современников-чужаков.<sup>36</sup>

It should be noted, too, that intricate ties of kinship as well as friendship did indeed bear testimony to Khodasevich’s intimate, strikingly familial involvement in the literary sphere. Suffice it to recall that, as a schoolfriend of Briusov’s younger brother, Aleksandr Iakovlevich, Khodasevich was from his teens a frequent visitor to the Briusov household; that Muni married Lidiia Iakovlevna, the youngest of the Briusov sisters; and that Khodasevich’s second wife, the sister of Georgii Chulkov, had been the common-law wife of Aleksandr Briusov (with whom friendly relations were maintained) until she left him for Khodasevich. The latter was at that same period also the privileged younger confidant of Briusov’s (formerly Belyi’s and, briefly, Bal’mont’s) mistress, Nina Petrovskaiia (with whom, as with Gumilev in 1921, he even happened for a while to live in the same building). What

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, N. A. Bogomolov, ‘Vladislav Khodasevich v moskovskom i petrogradskom literaturnom krugu’, in his *Russkaia literatura pervoi treti XX veka. Portrety. Problemy. Razyskaniia*, Tomsk: Vodolei, 1999, pp. 343–58; A. V. Lavrov, ‘„Santimental’nye stikhi” Vladislava Khodasevicha i Andreia Belogo’, in his *Andrei Belyi: razyskaniia i etiudy*, Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2007, pp. 130–42.

<sup>35</sup> From Khodasevich’s preface to a planned re-edition of his first book of verse, *Molodost’ (Stikhotvoreniia)*, p. 362.

<sup>36</sup> ‘O simvolizme’ (1928), in Khodasevich, *Izbrannaia proza*, p. 125.

stanza 1 of SF refers to as 'nodes of correspondence' (*uzly sootvetstviu*) of this type could readily be extended.

At the end of 1920, having lived for thirty-four years in Moscow, Khodasevich moved in desperate circumstances to Petrograd. In N. A. Bogomolov's view, he already conceived of the 'northern capital' as a 'potential second homeland' (*rodina*),<sup>37</sup> and he enjoyed considerable literary acclaim and authority during his brief period there. Khodasevich found the city itself 'indescribably majestic and beautiful in its wasteland silence' (*pustynnaia tishina*), and a decade after SF, he still recalled with proud nostalgia 'the combination of inner freedom with the austere tragicality of life around' he had then experienced. Much as with Symbolism, he felt that 'those to whom befell the mournful happiness of living in Petrograd' at that time shared an identity and awareness that 'links them together for ever, indissolubly'.<sup>38</sup>

In common with such other prominent writers as Andrei Belyi or Aleksei Tolstoi, Khodasevich left the USSR in 1922 with every intention of eventually returning, and he felt strong revulsion for the extreme anti-Bolshevism he encountered in émigré circles. Indicative of his sympathies is his rapprochement with Maksim Gor'kii (another major literary figure with whom family rather than professional ties had first brought him together, through the daughter of his eldest brother, the artist and sculptor Valentina Khodasevich). Their slightly improbable association flourished both in literary collaboration on the journal *Beseda*, and in regular personal contact over a period of some three years, when Khodasevich was frequently Gor'kii's neighbour or lodger during their respective peregrinations through Germany, Czechoslovakia, then Italy.<sup>39</sup>

From October 1924 to April 1925, Khodasevich and Berberova stayed, at Gor'kii's invitation, at villas rented by him in Sor-

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<sup>37</sup> 'Khodasevich v moskovskom i petrogradskom literaturnom krugu', p. 354.

<sup>38</sup> V. Khodasevich [Review of N. Chukovskii, *Slava*], *Vozrozhdenie*, 15 August 1935.

<sup>39</sup> For a convenient overview see N. Berberova, 'Tri goda zhizni Gor'kogo (1922–1925)', *Mosty*, 8 (1961), pp. 265–72.

rento: first at *Villa Massa*, and, from 16 November, *Il Sorito*. The latter, which Khodasevich had helped to find, provided the main backdrop for SF. *Il Sorito* was about 2 kilometres outside the town, high on the cape, in the direction of Capri, with the ferry close by (stanza 2) and views all around the bay, past the village of Castellammare to Vesuvius, Naples and the small island of Procida directly opposite (stanzas 8-9). Khodasevich began his poem there on 5 March 1925. The editors of his collected works suggest that it was informed by transmuted recollections of the sounds of fireworks and a religious procession he had witnessed there at Christmas, as well as of occasional forays in the motorcycle sidecar of Gor'kii's son Maksim, who happened also to be a keen amateur photographer (and, incidentally, an avid cinema-goer).<sup>40</sup> As we shall see, however, the central stanzas more obviously reflect specific details of Sorrento's distinctive Easter processions, which Khodasevich must have observed at first hand during Catholic Holy Week, on 9-10 April 1925. The draft begun in March was in any case abandoned after a mere 17 lines. The poem was more substantially written and completed almost a year later — in February 1926, in the Parisian suburb of Chaville, where Khodasevich had gravitated after leaving Gor'kii and Sorrento, both for good, on 18 April.<sup>41</sup>

Khodasevich's parting from Gor'kii had been planned from at least late March, and was amicably good-natured: Gor'kii pressed on him \$100 to help him through the first weeks in Paris, and there was an impromptu farewell photograph by Maksim.<sup>42</sup> His departure was nevertheless symptomatic of an ideological divergence that must have become increasingly apparent during

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<sup>40</sup> See Khodasevich's letter to M. O. Gershenzon, completed 1 January 1925, in *SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, p. 482, and the introductory commentary to his correspondence, *ibid.*, pp. 597–98; for Khodasevich's own descriptions of *Il Sorito* and Gor'kii's son, see his memoir of Gor'kii, *ibid.*, pp. 160–62.

<sup>41</sup> For the timetable of composition, see *SS-Ardis*, vol. 1, p. 367, and Khodasevich's letters to D. A. Shakhovskoi of 19 and 27 February and 1 March 1926 (D. Shakhovskoi (Arkhiepiskop Ioann), *Biografiia iunosti*, Paris, 1987, pp. 187–90).

<sup>42</sup> See O. Ronen, 'Berberova (1901–2001)', *Zvezda*, 2001, 7

(<http://magazines.russ.ru/zvezda/2001/7/ronen.html> — accessed 8 December 2009).

fruitless negotiations for Soviet distribution of *Beseda*, and would come to a head that summer on the ostensible pretext of an article by Khodasevich on the Belfast shipyards (see below). Khodasevich was prone to articulate these political differences in Gor'ky-esque terms of truth and lie. He felt that Gor'kii, whose entire career 'was imbued with a sentimental love for all forms of lie and an obstinate, methodical dislike of truth', stubbornly deduced himself as to the good intentions of the Soviet government and the likely conditions of a prospective return.<sup>43</sup> Khodasevich, habitually insistent on the uncompromising truth of his own statements,<sup>44</sup> rejected the comforting lie, and by the time he left Sorrento had consciously accepted that for him at least, despite his yearnings, there could be no compromise, no way home.<sup>45</sup> Any lingering doubt would have been dispelled that autumn, in Khodasevich's privately stated disquiet over the so-called *vozv-rashchenchestvo* campaign and, in print, by a polemic noteworthy in relation to the reading of stanzas 2 and 3 of SF advanced below for involving the memory of Gumilev. In September 1925, Khodasevich attacked Il'ia Erenburg's latest novel, *Rvach*, for its scurrilous misappropriation of the 'murdered' Gumilev's surname for the odious owner of a Poltava sugar refinery: in Khodasevich's opinion, a shameful endeavour to curry favour with the Bolshevik authorities, that placed Erenburg and his work beyond the pale of literary criticism. The Soviet press concluded in response

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<sup>43</sup> For Khodasevich's assessment of Gor'kii, see his memoir in *Nekropol'* (*SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, esp. pp. 163–67), and particularly its later, 'second part': *ibid.*, pp. 349–75 (esp. pp. 370–73). The quotation is from p. 166, where there is explicit reference to *Na dne*. On *Beseda*, see also 'Iz perepiski Viach. Ivanova s Maksimom Gor'kim: K istorii zhurnala *Beseda*', Publikatsiia N. Kotreleva, *Europa Orientalis*, 14 (1995), pp. 183–208; and the several references in Khodasevich's correspondence of 1924–25 (*SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, pp. 476–88).

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, his later, polemically motivated *profession de foi*: '*Sposobnost' pisat' pravdu vo mne, slava Bogu, eshche ne atrofirovana. Ia pishu tol'ko to, chto soglasno s moeiu sovest'iu, i ne rodilsia eshche tot redaktor, kotoryi sumeet menia zastavit' pisat' inache*' ('Eshche o pisatel'skoi svobode', *Vozrozhdenie*, 2 August 1934).

<sup>45</sup> Berberova, *Italics*, pp. 217–18.



that Khodasevich must have 'obviously determined never again to set foot on the territory of the USSR'.<sup>46</sup>

The protracted composition of SF thus spanned a period of bitter realisation that temporary emigration had irrevocably become the permanent exile Khodasevich had feared. This personal crisis, leading on arrival in Paris to a near-suicidal despair,<sup>47</sup> seems to have been linked, moreover, to a period of poetic barrenness. The desultory initial progress on SF reflected a deep-rooted 'crisis of form' — the roots of which, Khodasevich cryptically acknowledged in January 1925, 'of course run deeper' — that thwarted virtually all efforts to write new poetry either in Sorrento or for several months to come.<sup>48</sup> The struggle and responsibility of writing, as well as the fate of the writer and the powerlessness to direct one's own lot, were understandably crucial considerations underlying the long poem he went on to complete the following year.

### Stanza 1

SF opens with a categorical, abstract-philosophical reflection on the 'capricious and unamenable' workings of memory. The cognitive function is elucidated through a strikingly concrete visual simile, which likens the living, organic ramifications of mental recall to the knots and intricately interwoven branches of an olive tree. The poem thus begins, it should be noted, not with superimposed photographs, not with visual perceptions *per se*,

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<sup>46</sup> On *vozhreshchenchestvo* see Khodasevich's 'K istorii vozhreshchenchestva' and the editorial commentaries thereto, *SS-Ann Arbor*, vol. 2, pp. 430–33, 550–52. This 1926 article, left unpublished during Khodasevich's lifetime, describes his reactions of September 1925 on p. 431. On *Rvach*, see 'Vmesto retsenzii', *ibid.*, p. 376, and the responses and counter-responses, *ibid.*, pp. 533–36.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Bereberova, *Italics*, p. 223.

<sup>48</sup> Letter to V. I. Ivanov of 21 January 1925: *SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, p. 483 (see also his letter to Gershenzon of three weeks earlier: *ibid.*, p. 481). The three short *Sorrentinskie zametki* (*Stikhovoreniia*, pp. 251–53: 8 quatrains in total) were the only poems completed in Sorrento, one of them within 10 days of arrival; the vitriolic second *Ballada*, dated June-17 August 1925 (*ibid.*, 177–78), became the first major poem for almost a year.

but with the 'indissoluble nodes of correspondence' that inform mental processes:

Вспоминанье прихотливо  
И непослушливо. Оно —  
Как узловатая олива:  
Никак, ничем не стеснено.  
Свои причудливые ветви  
Узлами диких соответствий  
Нерасторжимо заплетет —  
И так живет, и так растет.

A valuable gloss on this intriguing evocation of the faculty of recollection is provided by the deceptively casual opening paragraphs of an article on the harsh fate of Russian poets, published by Khodasevich under the title 'Tsitaty' within a few months of SF in 1926:

Подумайте: как часто, вспомнив мелочь какую-нибудь из прошлого, вы по смежности вспоминаете и другие такие же, а потом еще и еще, все дальше, все больше, пустяк возвращает к важному, важное к пустяку — и внезапно вся жизнь проступает отчетливо, представляя не кучей бирюлок-случайностей, но цепью, роковой и неумолимой связью причин и следствий...

Вспоминание безмолвно предо мной  
Свой длинный развивает свиток.

Можно читать его «с отвращением» или с гордостью, мечтать о том, чтобы «начать жить сначала» — или радостно сознавать, что жизнь прожита именно так, как должно. Но все равно: в ходе воспоминаний уясняется вам смысл — если не жизни вообще, то во всяком случае смысл вашей жизни. (Ну, и жизни вообще, если хорошенько подумать.)<sup>49</sup>

Khodasevich's quotation here of a famous poem by Pushkin comes as no surprise; and the obvious inference is that

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<sup>49</sup> *SS-Ardis*, vol. 2, p. 422.

his own recent poem on memory, itself seeming to fluctuate between the trifling (*pustiaki*: goats and picnics, for instance) and the significant (Easter procession; upturned angel), might yield up a similar 'clarification of meaning': of the individual life, which perhaps stands in turn for life in general. Yet however much Khodasevich's constant reversions to Pushkin's era suggest he might have wished otherwise, his universe is, as already noted, no longer that of Pushkin; and against the contextual background of 'Tsitaty', the divergence between the two poets' outwardly similar tropes for the process of recollection proves highly revealing.

The lines from Pushkin's *Vospominanie* imply in the 'unfurling' before the 'reader' the construction and presentation of a single, coherent linear narrative (*dlinnyi svitok*). SF, however construed, appears instead to provide a series of fragmented narratives (or narrative fragments); and the opening promise of a multiplicity of interlacing nodes, of 'wild correspondences' intersecting, perhaps randomly, across temporal and narrative discontinuities, indicates that 'fateful and inexorable linkages of cause and effect' will here prove at best considerably more challenging to discern. Any sudden illumination, synthetically unifying disconnected trinkets (*biriulki-sluchainosti*) to disclose overarching 'meaning', is liable in consequence to be profoundly elusive.

It is symptomatic of this that even — in the terms of Khodasevich's essay — to distinguish the 'trifling' from the 'significant' is repeatedly, often intractably problematic. The olive tree of line 3 provides a simple foretaste of what is to come. In Russian poetry the olive tree is an obvious exoticism, with implicit connotations of antique mythology and biblical tradition;<sup>50</sup> yet for Khodasevich in his *Il Sorito* exile, the olive was ubiquitously familiar, its branches the prosaic source of the damp firewood that supplied insufficient heat through a cold winter.<sup>51</sup> How then

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<sup>50</sup> Cf., for example, Viacheslav Ivanov's use of the olive in such contexts in two early poems: *Dem Weltverbesserer* and 'Magnificat' *Botichelli* (V. I. Ivanov, *Stikhotvoreniia. Poemy. Tragedii*, St Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1995, bk. 1, pp. 193, 131).

<sup>51</sup> Khodasevich, *Nekropol'*, in *SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, p. 160.

should it be interpreted here? Bethea not unreasonably refers to the olive as ‘a symbol of life and peace ... strangely out of place in the deadly landscape of *European Night*’;<sup>52</sup> but it is difficult to see how this meaning is activated in the text of SF. Some 60 lines later, with the speaker walking in a ‘garden of olives’ (*v olivkovom sadu*), other symbolic connotations may after all seem to be implied. Yet this passage is now so remote from the opening that any inter-connection (‘wild’ correspondence?) appears tenuous. The self-presentation is overtly ironic (cf.: ‘*za smutnym shestviem idu ... spotykaias*’), and any interpretation that may be advanced seems dependent on a series of subtexts (see below). It remains fundamentally uncertain whether the olive introduced in the first stanza is numinously charged with profound though not readily perceptible *smysl*, or ‘accidental trinket’ — a banal referent without intrinsic meaning, constituting a chance reflection of the speaker’s immediate surroundings.

Other, more weighty evaluative uncertainties, of a type alien to Pushkin, also persistently characterise SF. In *Vospominanie*, ‘reading’ of recollection’s extended ‘scroll’ evokes the strong emotional and moral responses — disgust and bitterness; non-erasure of ‘sad lines’, despite all — which bring the poem to a powerful conclusion:

И с отвращением читая жизнь мою,  
Я трепещу и проклиная,  
И горько жалуясь, и горько слезы лью,  
Но строк печальных не смываю.

A fully conscious acknowledgement of emotional pain and ethical responsibility is, as it were, fundamental here to *processing* the recollection: the evaluative interpretative act through which the lyric self confronts memory is self-evidently vital to the poem’s construction of meaning, and pivotal to the reader’s interpretative assessment. Khodasevich, perhaps with a view to the grander scheme of things, may be right in asserting in ‘Tsitaty’ that the content of the affective response to recollection is a matter of in-

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<sup>52</sup> Bethea, *Khodasevich*, p. 305

difference (*vse ravno*); but without *some* such response (a simple matter of cause leading to commensurate effect), ‘illuminating’ crystallisation of meaning will scarcely follow. In SF, however, the process of observation — the description of vision, the content of recollection — may be obsessively, compulsively intense (*‘ot mechty ne otrvoiaias’, ‘kak ni otvozhu ia vzora’,* etc.), yet consequent affective evaluation is almost invariably not explicit. As with the funeral of Savel’ev in stanza 4, the persona generally gives the appearance of ‘recording without thinking’. We must return below to consideration of how far this overt reticence might be taken as a conscious strategy of the modernist, who withholds what is available in order to direct the under-informed reader beneath the visible surface; how far it might also, or alternatively, be interpreted more literally as a real, coruscating failure in responsiveness. Nothing is withheld because there is nothing to communicate, for in the dispassionate alienation of exile, emotional and moral bearings have been atrophied; all that remains are the ‘faint amusement and indifference’ which a clinical psychologist might view as characteristic of psychic impairment.<sup>53</sup>

Not surprisingly, beneath this difference in overt degree of emotional and ethical engagement, comparison of *Vospominanie* with the opening paragraph of SF also therefore reveals fundamentally divergent models of personality. In Pushkin, the reliability of recollection is taken for granted. Memory is compliantly subservient to a coherently identifiable self (hence: *‘bezmolvno peredo mnoi ... razvivaet svitok’*); and the latter is confident in its evaluative ‘reading’ of the data presented. Khodasevich’s declarative opening presents an emphatic contrast: memory is ‘whimsical’ — unpredictable, if not by definition unreliable — and ‘disobedient’: explicitly non-compliant to the control of an overarching self. It lives an organic life of its own (*‘I tak zhivet, i tak rastet’*).

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Oliver Sachs, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, Basingstoke and Oxford: Picador, 1986, p. 26.

In place of a comfortably traditional, unitary sense of self, Khodasevich thus presents a radical inner dissociation. The conscious self does not control one of the major cognitive faculties, and its restricted function as the passive receptor of a 'life apart' is indicated linguistically. Unlike in Pushkin, there is no first person pronoun in this first stanza. The lyric voice is palpable, but it is detached in its observation of inner process, almost disembodiedly impersonal. Nor does the pattern significantly alter in what follows. Remarkably for a poem so thoroughly focused on subjective personal experience, the first first-person possessive adjective does not occur until line 19. The first first-person pronoun and verb occur only in line 27, and, at that, in a concessive clause enclosed in parentheses:

(Хоть я и не люблю козляток).

The concluding *pointe* of the longer second stanza does relate to the self, but it is grammatically estranged — with 'life' the delayed, third-person subject of 'personal' experience, and the first person again relegated to a possessive adjective:

В себе виденья затая,  
Так протекает жизнь моя.

Repeatedly throughout the poem, the sense of self will be comparably attenuated, literally not pronounced: exiled, one might say, to the periphery of being.<sup>54</sup>

An important corollary of this observation is that if memory is the record of experience, yet the process of memory is impenetrably 'alien', then self and experience of reality are equally liable to significant dissociation. (To pursue the previous analogy, self is at an 'exilic' remove from both internal process and external world.) Further unsettling implications arise from this, concerning the limitation of self-awareness and self-know-

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<sup>54</sup> There is an obvious correlation to the thematically declarative opening of another of the best-known poems of *Evropeiskaia noch'*, *Pered zerkalom*: 'Ia, ia, ia. Chto za dikoe slovo! Neuzheli von tot — eto ia?' (*Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 174).

ledge, and the function and nature of the (conscious) self. It might be inferred from the model presented in stanza 1 that, beyond the mere passive reception of impressions (recollections), the conscious self also performs the function of construction of meaning (interpretation). This is readily apparent in the impressive, thought-provoking generalisation from which the stanza proceeds. Yet if memory, as raw material for interpretative construction of meaning, is wholly outside conscious, causal control (*'nikak, nichem ne stesнено'*), then it is unclear how far the mnemonic contents which are logically the *cause* as well as basis of conscious interpretation are themselves ordered or possessed of meaning. Indeed, how *can* 'inexorable linkages' ('Tsityaty') reliably be made between apparently random data, and across fundamental mental dissociation? Is experience (discontinuous, randomly re-ordered), let alone the reality on which it is based, endowed with inherent meaning; or is 'meaning' — perceived identification of the nodes of interconnection — merely the subjective construct of a strictly delimited consciousness? Plainly the emphasis on 'disobedience', 'whim' and the 'fantastical' (*prichudlivye vetvi*), used to evoke the structure of mind in this opening stanza, inclines to the notion of a fundamentally senseless, random or chaotic universum. Yet in the passage quoted above from the essay 'Tsityaty', Khodasevich implies an alternative process, whereby meaning, like recollection, might arise independently, spontaneously, and immanently intact, before a (once more) passively receptive conscious self: *'внезапно вся жизнь проступает отчетливо ... уясняется вам смысла'*. Conclusions are premature; for the epistemological and, ultimately, ontological considerations (or uncertainties) that proceed from this carefully wrought first stanza will continue to be addressed throughout the poem, from a shifting series of points of view and, it might be said, in relation to a series of potentially 'meaningful' semiotic systems (e. g. art, myth, religion, history, perhaps language, as well as the past of personal memory).

Though less familiar in poetry than prose fiction, the portrayal of a split within the self has many precedents in Russian literature. Khodasevich's variant nevertheless differs markedly

from, say, a Dostoevskian or Blok-like dichotomy, that mirrors conflicting impulses to good and evil, 'God' and 'the Devil'; as also from a Pechorinesque condition of duality between 'two people' within, one of whom 'lives in the full sense of the word' while the other 'rationalises and judges'. It is both less ideologised and more modern — comparable, perhaps, to Belyi's modelling of mind and self in *Peterburg* — and in these respects shows some striking affinities with recent psychological and neuro-scientific approaches to memory and the nature of consciousness. (The gnarled, interlacing branches of the olive tree — shorn of the literary-mythological accretions referred to above — might seem a presciently well-chosen simile for the ineluctable 'hard-wiring' of linkages between myriad sets of neurons: the 'patterns of connectivity between cells in various parts of the brain',<sup>55</sup> which underlie modern models of memory and consciousness.) For neuroscience, too, the role of the conscious mind is in important respects narrowly circumscribed. Causal power and intentionality are located in the unconscious brain, and there is ready acceptance of the notion that — like Khodasevich's recollections — percepts 'just happen: they pop into consciousness automatically and involuntarily'.<sup>56</sup> Following the work of Benjamin Libet in the 1980s, the very awareness of conscious volition (in respect of straightforward decisions to act) has been held to be illusory; thus the passivity of Khodasevich's conscious persona, too, might seem intuitively well-grounded. It is also axiomatic to modern science that the perceived world is indeed constructed by the brain, and this postulate extends beyond what was suggested above, to incorporate the possibility that 'the self is as much a construction of the brain as is the world with which it interacts'.<sup>57</sup> Any continuous narrative structuring of consciousness is thus rejected. How conscious experience arises out of the

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<sup>55</sup> Jeffrey Gray, *Consciousness: Creeping up on the Hard Problem*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 59.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91. Gray's major study, and particularly chapters 2 ('The Illusory Narrative of Consciousness') and 8 ('Creeping up on the Hard Problem'), are the source for the remainder of this paragraph.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25; on Libet's experiments see pp. 22–23.



function of the brain is another matter, however; and precisely the interaction between consciousness and physical (rather than perceived) world constitutes a major conundrum. Current theory holds that the only direct contact is by way of ‘unconscious sensorimotor action systems’, but hitherto provides no viable account of causal powers to relate cognitive consciousness with physical world. From a very different angle, it comes up short against that same gap of interaction between self and world that is at the troubling core of Khodasevich’s poetic account of exilic experience.

For neuropsychology, however, the problem is one of ‘normal’ human consciousness. We have already suggested that for Khodasevich (as for the literary predecessors just mentioned), dichotomous mental structure carries with it implications of psychological dysfunction. In fact, an occasional switching and persistent blurring between ‘normal’ and ‘pathological’ will provide another of the abiding uncertainties of SF.

## Syntax and Sound

Despite its emphasis on limitation of cognitive control, the first stanza is of course articulated in carefully crafted poetic form. The main formal characteristics are retained throughout, and it is another measure of a work of outstanding significance that they are semanticised to an exceptional degree. Elements of poetic syntax and sound orchestration will be addressed here, before turning to some of the consequences of Khodasevich’s adoption of conventionally rhymed iambic tetrameter.

The opening line, consisting of just two words — five-syllable abstract noun plus three-syllable short adjective, stressed symmetrically on syllables 4 and 8 of the iambic tetrameter — is formally consistent with either a self-contained philosophical aphorism, or the weighty prelude to a more elaborate meditative pronouncement of categorical import. Either way, its balanced rhythmic-syntactical structure underpins meaning with the assurance and rhetorical authority of the classical poetic tradition.

Arguably, however, its declarative force is slightly diminished by the coordinating conjunction and second, pentasyllabic adjective which extend the statement into line 2:

Воспоминанье прихотливо  
И непослушливо.

The second adjective somewhat obscurely reinforces the sense of the first but, at first sight, offers little fresh information or obvious elucidation. It also brings the sentence it continues to an abrupt and premature-seeming conclusion, barely consistent with the gravitas of the opening: two syllables short of the end of line 2, with an intonational tailing off underscored by the falling cadence of a dactylic word- (and sentence-) ending (*I neposlùshlivo*). The initial rhetorical flow is further weakened by the sentence-break, which ends line 2 on the first word of a new sentence. In contrast to the semantically weighty noun *vospominan'e* which introduced sentence one, this is, moreover, a mere neuter personal pronoun, suspended at line-end with unnaturally emphatic stress on its second syllable (*Onò*). Nor is the awkwardness relieved across the enjambement: the construction '*Ono kak*' which straddles lines 2—3 is slightly inelegant, distinctly unpoetic.

Comparable prosaic lapses — specifically, one might say, minor (col)lapses of rhetoric — will prove a recurrent feature of SF. These may be lexical as well as syntactic: the distant repetition of *uzlovataia* — — *uzlami* in lines 3 and 6, for example, seems less egregious than '*Zabudet snimkam .../ I snimet'* in successive lines at the start of stanza 2, or the repetition of *grob* in successive lines of stanza 4 ('*Na polotentsakh grob ... V grobu Savel'ev'*), or '*letit ... poletom*' at the start of stanza 8; but on a level probably just beneath conscious perception, an effect of slight clumsiness is conveyed in each of these and several other similar cases. In addition to a liberal sprinkling of prosaicisms, admittedly more insistent from the start of stanza 2 (*I tak... rotozei, I tut zhe, tak sdelal*, etc., etc.), the tendency to 'awkward' placement of weak parts of speech in strong position (e.g. at line end) also recurs. The undue load is typically cast into relief by inversion and/or enjambement

(‘*Segodnia v oblakah ona*’; ‘*Pred nim/ Smeshalis’ liudi, vody, dym...*’; cf. also the extreme accumulation of prepositions in the repeated line ‘*A v nikh, skvoz’ nikh i mezhdu nikh*’). There is, too, further, apparently anti-climactic tailing off of clauses and sentences. Sometimes, as between lines 2–3, this depends on bathetic deflation of the intonational suspense created by enjambement (‘*potertyi, polosatyi // Pidzhak*’; ‘*I Ol’ga, prachka, za perila / Khvataias’ krepkoii rukoi // Vykhodit’*’ — where, moreover, the verb repeats ‘*Vykhodi*’ of three lines previously). Sometimes, as between lines 1-2, there is the continuation, almost as an afterthought, of a sentence that might already have been deemed syntactically and intonationally complete (‘*Pred nim / Smeshalis’ liudi, vody, dym // — — Na negati-ve pomutnelom’*’). Comparable in effect to such manipulation of lexical and syntactic structure is the use of banal (e.g. *luna/ona*) or semantically bathetic or inappropriate rhyme: *agavy/pliugavyi, glubokom/polubokom; osteriia/Mariia* (where the name is that of the Mother of God). The subject matter may be serious, but the disturbing tinge of ‘faint amusement’ repeatedly encroaches.

Such devices, it should be stated, are broadly typical of the Khodasevich of *Evropeiskaia noch*.<sup>58</sup> Stylistic angularities might easily be related here to the disequilibrating intrusion of modernity (camera, steamship, picnic, motorbike) into the universe of the poem, and the disruption of conventional poetic discourse taken to reflect the stance of the modernist ironist. But in a poem in which lack of conscious control is thematised from the outset, the stumbling awkwardnesses of syntax, flatness of construction, and falling cadences to which attention has been drawn might also be taken to suggest that, like recollection, poetic material, too, is ‘disobedient’ to the lyric self. This in turn might be construed as a concomitant failure to sustain the literary norm of a previous era to which, as we shall see more fully below, over-

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<sup>58</sup> See, e. g., Georgii Vasiutochkin, ‘Etiudy o poetike Khodasevicha’, *Vestnik russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniia*, 152 (1987), pp. 136–143 (section 2: ‘Intonatsiia budushchego v lirike Khodasevicha’); S. Fomin, ‘S razdvoennogo ostriia: poeticheskii dissonans v tvorchestve V. F. Khodasevicha’, *Voprosy literatury*, 1997, 4, pp. 32–44. On rhyme, see also Miller, ‘Xodasevič’s Gnostic Exile’, p. 228.

arching form, scope, other elements of diction unmistakably point, but which now evades the (exilic) artistic grasp.

In another area of poetic technique, that of sound-patterning, Khodasevich might seem, by contrast, to aim resolutely beyond the practices of the past. Briusov, shortly before his recent, untimely death, had cogently re-affirmed for Khodasevich's generation the intricate manipulation of vowels and consonants within every line that underlay the 'particular, inimitable musicality of Pushkin's verse'.<sup>59</sup> In some sections at least of SF, Khodasevich operates on the more stridently modernist principle of phonic repetitions constructed around entire syllables (or morphemes). Elements of this practice have been observed in a different context by Jakob at the start of stanza 2.<sup>60</sup> Bethea, for his part, offers a semanticised account of the sound sequences of lines 4–8 of the first stanza, where, as he puts it: 'Khodasevich manages to tangle the branches [„vetvi“] in the knots of correspondences [„sootvetstvii“] and the living [„zhivet“] and growing [„rastet“] in the inextricable [„nerastorzhimó“] weaving'.<sup>61</sup> Yet Khodasevich's elaborate patterning begins even before this, so that *prikhotlivo* in line 1 contains within it the final (albeit unstressed) syllable of *neposlushlivo* in line 2, and both adjectives phonetically anticipate (or suggest) the subject of the second sentence, *oliva*. Secondary alliterations are more unobtrusively interwoven: echoes of *vo-spominan'e* in *neposlushlivo*, for example, or of *uzlovataia* in *oliva*. An exhaustive analysis of the poem's densely repetitive sound-structure — by Khodasevich's own admission, his 'favourite verses' in respect of sound<sup>62</sup> — would thus be a daunting task.

Of particular interest in the present context, however, is the potential correspondence of such paronomastic linkages to a process of auditory mnemonic priming, whereby the presence of one phonetic form predisposes to the selection of another, contiguous one. In this respect, the phonetic-semantic development of these

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<sup>59</sup> V. Ia. Briusov, 'Zvukopis' Pushkina' (1923), in his *Sobranie sochinenii*, 7 vols, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1973–75, vol. 7, p. 127.

<sup>60</sup> Jakob, 'Der Dichter in Seitenwagen des Films', pp. 111–12.

<sup>61</sup> Bethea, *Khodasevich*, p. 305.

<sup>62</sup> *Stikhotovoreniia*, p. 401.

first lines seems metadescriptive of, precisely, the ‘whimsical’ functioning of memory, laid bare in ‘disobedient’ leaps of acoustic association that offer a more plausibly realistic representation of mnemonic process than the narratologically ordered, smoothly unfolding scroll of Pushkin’s *Vospominanie*. (Plainly, too, there is an inescapable parallelism between the mnemonic process, and the creative process through which it is conveyed and which it implicitly informs: among its ‘multiplicity of tasks’, SF is thus also both conventionally metapoetic and more broadly, ‘meta-creatively’ reflective of the mechanisms of poetic genesis.) But this, ultimately, is to call into question the nature and meaning of the meaning that is generated. If an autonomously functioning auditory memory underlies the development of the first lines (*prikhotlivo > oliva...*), so that sound may be held somehow to precede and whimsically predetermine sense, the relationship of the consequent utterance not so much to the perceived world constructed by the brain, as to external physical reality, is cast into considerable uncertainty.

The latter distinction is significant, for it allows Khodasevich the essayist and literary theorist (not unreasonably) to privilege the perceived world, describing the created poem as ‘a transfiguration of the real world in which the poet lives in the same way as all other mortals’.<sup>63</sup> The argument proceeds ostensibly from the inseparability of form and content, which paronomasia might be taken pre-eminently to exemplify, and on which Khodasevich would continue to insist throughout his career. Sometimes, as in the essay on Pushkin’s 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary from which the last quotation is taken, it is articulated through a more elaborate description of the finished poem as a product of the three-stage process of ‘inspiration’, ‘sweet sounds’ and ‘prayer’, adumbrated in the conclusion to Pushkin’s *Poet i tolpa* (...Мы рождены для вдохновенья, /Для звуков сладких и молитв). Here especially, however, it is apparent that ‘sweet sounds’ are in truth considered hierarchically subordinate and secondary to the semanticised work of ‘inspiration’, defined by Khodasevich as a

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<sup>63</sup> ‘O chtenii Pushkina (K 125-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia)’, p. 175.

two-fold 'capacity of the soul to assimilate impressions (*vpechatleniia*)', and to subject them to '„explanation“, that is philosophical interpretation' (*ob''iasnenie, to est' filosofskoe osmyslivanie*). Sounds ('words'; figuratively, poetic form) are sifted through and selected with intense effort, in (obedient) support of a pre-existent sense to which they prove ideally adequate, before the completed, transfigurative work, 'created by the poet from what is accumulated in his soul', is returned outward in 'prayerful' gesture to God's world:

Слова сортируются, выбираются, пригоняются к местам, шлифуются в отделении фонетики, а иногда и зазубриваются грубым распилом <...> Ничто здесь не пропадает, все впечатления и понятия поэта идут в дело. Светлое и темное, чистое и грязное, прекрасное и безобразное — все находит себе место.

Even in the essayist's rose-tinted evocation of a well-ordered Pushkinian creative model (based on a well-integrated self!), it is acknowledged that the three 'moments' may in practice prove mysteriously synchronic, with significant overlap;<sup>64</sup> but the theorist's position, with its implication of sounds' purposive manipulation, may nevertheless sit uncomfortably with the intriguing intimation of a less controlled, less hierarchically stable process in the poetic text of SF.

An extreme but conveniently expressive contrary perception of poetic paronomasia is offered by the literary theorist Paul de Man. Instead privileging external over perceived reality, de Man draws on some of the same concepts in uncompromising rejection of all semblance of perfectly contrived 'convergence of sound and meaning' as 'a seductive temptation to mystified minds':

a mere *effect* which language can perfectly well achieve, but which bears no substantial relationship, by analogy or by onto-

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 173–75; the quotation is from p. 175. For a reiteration of similar premises a decade later, see V. Khodasevich, 'O forme i sodержanii', *Vozrozhdenie*, 15 June 1933.

logically grounded imitation, to anything beyond that particular effect. It is a rhetorical <...> function of language, an identifiable trope <...> that operates on the level of the signifier and contains no responsible pronouncement on the nature of the world — despite its powerful potential to create an opposite illusion. This gives the language considerable freedom from referential restraint, but it makes it epistemologically highly suspect and volatile, since its use can no longer be said to be determined by considerations of truth and falsehood, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, or pleasure and pain.<sup>65</sup>

At least *in potentio*, the language of the poem's opening thus returns us to the ethical indeterminacy discerned in relation to Pushkin's *Vospominanie*. Nor is it necessary to suggest that Khodasevich might have espoused the positions of literary deconstructionism, to detect beneath the elaborate sound play of his opening declaration of memory's autonomy, the symptom and spectral acknowledgement of that estranged loss of grip on reality which is the baneful condition of the exilic self. Paradoxically, the very success of the technique may be a token of the persona's predicament.

### Literary 'Reminiscences'<sup>66</sup>

In the preceding discussion we have encountered potential distinctions between normal and dysfunctional psychologies, and between ordinary ('human') and specifically creative experience. This latter, which is a leitmotif of Khodasevich's critical writings, recurs in 'Tsitaty', where the introductory remarks on the nature of memory are followed by claims for the intensified capability of the writer, who lives 'not only his own life':

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<sup>65</sup> Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986, p. 10.

<sup>66</sup> The Russian *reministsentsiia*, usually rendered as allusion or echo, is intended here. The more direct equivalent has been repeatedly adopted in the following analysis, for its obvious connection with the process of memory.

Рассеянные по странам и временам, мы [писатели] имеем и некую сверх-личную биографию. События чужих жизней мы иногда вспоминаем, как события нашей собственной. История литературы есть *история нашего рода*; в известном, условном смысле — история каждого из нас.<sup>67</sup>

In SF, this collective-artistic aspect of the complex faculty of memory is thoroughly reflected in the intertextual exploitation of poetic precedent, another of the ‘multiplicity’ of artistic tasks which lend the poem its exceptional richness. The form and rhythms of the iambic tetrameter are particularly effective in this, functioning as a mnemonic device: a verbal-literary variant of the double-exposed negative, in which the poetic text is superimposed, consciously or otherwise, on the memory of previous verse. As Irena and Omri Ronen have suggested, Khodasevich’s procedure is also analogous to the medieval palimpsest, which they consider with reference to sources in Baudelaire and Viacheslav Ivanov.<sup>68</sup> Strangely, however, the abundant intertextual detail of Khodasevich’s poem has previously been very little described.

We have already intimated above that Pushkin’s *Vospominanie* is a significant pre-text for SF. Several commentators have remarked in more general terms on the Pushkinian ‘feel’ of the poem — and it should be added that for Khodasevich’s contemporaries, from Blok and Ivanov to Maiakovskii, the iambic tetrameter was firmly associated precisely with Pushkin’s poetic heritage.<sup>69</sup> Some critics relate SF in particular to *Mednyi vsadnik*, although here again, specific intertextual connections do not appear to have been identified.<sup>70</sup> In fact, unobtrusive, often barely

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<sup>67</sup> *SS-Ardis*, vol. 2, p. 422.

<sup>68</sup> Irena Ronen, Omri Ronen, ‘Iz goroda Enn: Palimpsest’, *Zvezda*, 2008, 11 (<http://magazines.russ.ru/zvezda/2008/11/ro15.html> ; accessed 10 December 2009).

<sup>69</sup> See Z. G. Mints, ‘Funktsiia reminstentsii v poetike Al. Bloka’, in her *Poetika Aleksandra Blok*, St Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 1999, p. 371.

<sup>70</sup> Thus, most notably, David Bethea: ‘...this ironic *poema* has its headwaters — more remote than direct comparison can justify — in Pushkin and *The Bronze Horseman* ... we can only suspect that Pushkin was an abiding presence in the modern poet’s mind’ (‘*Sorrento Photographs*’, p. 57). Nafpaktitis



tangible Pushkinian reminiscences are ‘indissolubly interwoven’ (line 7) throughout the fabric of the poem. These certainly include the use of such canonically clichéd, ‘eternal’ rhyming pairs as [*iasnye*] *cherty/mechty* in description of the Easter procession (stanza 6), or *rozov/morozov* in the penultimate, Petersburg stanza.<sup>71</sup> The backward glance at Pushkin is corroborated by Khodasevich’s critical investigation of the ‘history’ of recurrent rhymes in Pushkin (e. g. *sladost’/mladost’*), in which he both maintained that ‘to use a discredited rhyme is embarrassing’, and charted a ‘rhyming of recollections’ (*rifmovka vospominanii*), arising from the separate psychological associations of hackneyed rhyme-pairs.<sup>72</sup>

Perhaps more interesting are lines which indeed appear as ghostly re-draftings: contextual re-adaptations of a Pushkinian original still recollected through them. So, for example, we might just discern an unsettling hint at the shadowy presence of perhaps the most famous one-line landmark in Russian verse:

Адмиралтейская игла

behind the ‘majestic’ Italian landmark rendered as:

Амальфитанский перевал.

The Amalfi Pass is at this point in the poem (stanza 3) explicitly ‘double-exposed’ behind the superimposed visual recollection of the cloudy Moscow river. But the inexorable hold of the past is itself doubled. At a level perhaps below conscious perception, through verbal structure rather than visual impression, Petersburg, too, intrudes its dimly recollected presence: by the rhyth-

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has recently re-endorsed Bethea’s observation (‘Multiple Exposures’, p. 403).

<sup>71</sup> Cf. the epithets *milye cherty*, *nebesnye cherty*, in the rhyming combinations of Pushkin’s mnemonic lyric ‘*la pomniu chudnoe mgnoven’e*’. The *rozy/morozy* rhyme, offered up to the expectant reader in *Onegin*, IV.xlii (‘...*treshchat morozy, / ... / (Chitate! zhdet uzh rifmy rozy...)*’) recurs in the Introductory paean to St Petersburg in *Mednyi vsadnik* (‘[*Liubliu... / Nedvizhnyi vozdukh i moroz / ... / Devich’i litsa iarche roz’*]). The term ‘*vechnaia rifma*’ is from *Onegin*, VI.xliv.

<sup>72</sup> See ‘*Istoriia rifm*’ (1923), *SS-Moscow*, vol. 3, pp. 443–47.

mic identity of a two-stress tetrameter, consisting of polysyllabic toponymic adjective in 'A – skii' + short, final-stress concrete noun (*lá – ál*). In a similar way, the subsequent view of Naples (stanza 8), with the emergent daylight caught on the windowpanes of houses on the shoreline:

... ОГОНЬ СТЕКЛЯННЫЙ  
БЕРЕГОВЫХ ЕГО ДОМОВ

seems inescapably bound in auditory poetic memory to the embankment of the Neva, as it is rendered at the beginning of Pushkin's celebration of 'love for Peter's creation':

[Люблю...]  
Береговой его гранит.

SF diverges lexically by a matter of just three syllables from Pushkin's rhythmically and structurally identical line, from the same paragraph of the 'Introduction' to *Mednyi vsadnik* evoked by the *rozov/morozov* rhyme. And it is impossible, too, not to catch in the 'magical' motorbike ride round zig-zag bends that is the prelude to this spectacle of Naples bay:

Он [залив] все волшебней, все живее.  
Когда несемся мы правее,  
Бегут налево берега,  
Мы повернем — и величаво  
Их позлащенная дуга  
Начнет разворачиваться вправо

a modernised echo of the endless ('*dnem i noch'iu'*) circumambulations of the learned cat from the Prologue to *Ruslan i Liudmila*:

Идет направо — песнь заводит,  
Налево — сказку говорит.  
Там чудеса...

Khodasevich's 'gilded arc' (*pozlashchennaia duga*) clinches the similarity, with distant undertones of the golden chain that binds the cat to its sea-shore oak. A further 'wild' correspondence conceivably links acoustically the contiguous, semantically disparate, disyllabic nouns: *zlataia tsep' na dube // pozlashchennaia duga...*

It is fitting, therefore, that another near-subliminal reminiscence of a Pushkinian precedent might be detected also in the opening stanza of SF, where the concluding couplet:

Нерасторжимо заплетет —  
И так живет и так растет

surely bears the imprint of the final couplet of a stanza from *Onegin*:

То стан совет, то разовьет,  
И быстрой ножкой ножку бьет.

In this case — appropriately enough, at the end of a stanza that appears to offer a practical exemplification of the mnemonic process of paronomastic association — the echo seems to be purely structural: rhythmic-syntactic and acoustic, rather than lexical-semantic. Yet on this level the resemblance is strong. Both couplets include three third person singular verbs rhyming in -(')ët; both combine present tense with idiomatic use of the perfective future to convey habitual action; in both, end-rhyme is supplemented by an internal rhyme at the mid-point (stressed second ictus) word-break of a line divided symmetrically by a repeated conjunction or adverb in /t/ (*To ... to ... // I tak ... i tak...*). Others of the phonetic components identified by Bethea as interwoven into Khodasevich's lines (*ras- t- zh — k-*) reproduce a significant part of Pushkin's dominant sound pattern. On this purely structural level there is, nevertheless, a notable difference. In Pushkin's couplet, it is the first line of the pair that is divided into two equal clauses of four syllables each, so that the single eight-syllable clause of the second line brings the couplet and stanza to an emphatic closure. The disposition of clauses in Khodasevich inverts

this pattern, leading by comparison to a relative dissipation of momentum, increased provisionality and even awkwardness of intonation at stanza-end: perhaps, then, a further, low-key variant on the failure any longer to sustain the intonational cadences and vigour of the (Pushkinian) tradition.

This in turn may seem consistent with the semantic resonance of the structural parallel. Pushkin's lines famously evoke the performance of Istomina, in a passage from *Onegin* (I.xx) set in the broader context of his own nostalgia for the 'magical land' (I.xviii) of theatre and ballet, recollected by implication from the present distance of southern exile ('*Moi bogini! chto vy? gde vy? / ... / Uvizhu vnov' li vashi khori? / Uzriu li russkoi Terpsikhory / Dushoi ispolnennyi nalet?*'; I.xix).<sup>73</sup> For Khodasevich, the ballet was a passionate first love. Childhood 'balletomania' was, in his own estimation, the definitive formative influence in his life, through which he came 'to art in general and to poetry in particular'.<sup>74</sup> The ballet would evidently always remain for him an instinctively natural figure for verbal art.<sup>75</sup> Thus, whereas the last couplet of stanza 1 of SF explicitly describes the organic growth and independent development of an autonomous memory, the *form* of the utterance conveys a deeply submerged, and quite different secondary meaning. The shadowy lyric speaker, alienated from his own psychic processes, is doubly, trebly exiled — perhaps not so much identified with the exiled Pushkin, as estranged from the Pushkinian era, from a cherished personal past,

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<sup>73</sup> In Robert Hughes' view, Khodasevich had already previously alluded to the Istomina stanza of *Onegin* (I.xx) in *Zhizel'*, the last poem he wrote before leaving Russia ('Khodasevich: Irony and Dislocation: A Poet in Exile', in Simon Karlinsky and Alfred Appel Jr, eds, *The Bitter Air of Exile: Russian Writers in the West, 1922–1972*, Berkeley: California University Press, 1977, p. 57). N. A. Bogomolov, however, discerns a different set of intertexts in *Zhizel'*, in Tiutchev, Fofanov and Baratynskii (*Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 388).

<sup>74</sup> 'Mladenchestvo', *SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, pp. 196–97.

<sup>75</sup> So, for example, in his letter to Golenishchev-Kutuzov of 7 August 1935: '*Pozhaluista, peredaite Trauber, chto napisannoe mnoiu o nei kak-to slovesno ne vytyant-sevalos', t. e. vyshlo gorazdo sushe, chem mne khotelos*' ('V. F. Khodasevich i I. N. Golenishchev-Kutuzov. Perepiska', Publikatsiia Dzhona Malmstada, *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 23 (1997), p. 239).



## Russian Symbolism and Intertextual Principle

For all the centrality of Pushkin to Khodasevich's art and thought, SF contains another important intertextual layer relating to (and reflecting on) Russian Symbolism and Khodasevich's Silver Age contemporaries. Naturally, this has further direct bearing on the pre-exile personal and creative past touched on in the immediately preceding discussion. Two quite different intertexts, from Viacheslav Ivanov and Solov'ev, have in fact already been discerned in stanza 1 by leading modern scholars.

Irena and Omri Ronen, in an article stemming from a paper on '„Memory“ and „Recollection“ in Viacheslav Ivanov and Vladislav Khodasevich', have perceived in the first and last stanzas of SF 'numerous reminiscences of Ivanov's unfinished *Derev'ia*'. This 'Introduction to a *poema*' had appeared in the journal *Zapiski mechtatelei*,<sup>78</sup> the six issues of which (1919–1922) became something of a swan-song of Russian Symbolism. Much in the last three was given over to materials in memory of Aleksandr Blok; issue 4 tacitly marked Gumilev's execution, with Akhmatova's harrowing lyric, '*Strakh, vo t'me perebiraia veshchi*'; Khodasevich himself published in issue 5, which also carried Andrei Belyi's high praise of his poetry in '*Rembrandtova pravda v poezii nashikh dnei*'. Whilst this alone would have given Khodasevich good reason to remember Ivanov's 'unfinished' poem (nowhere republished), he had also recently re-established personal contact with Ivanov, whom he narrowly missed in Rome *en route* for Sorrento

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tion with a rare feel for language, often takes his verses 'beyond the limits of ordinary understanding': '*stikhi Mandel'shtama nachinaiut volnovat' kakimi-to temnymi tainami, zakliuchenymi, veroiatno, v kornevoi prirode im sochetaemykh slov...*' (V. F. Khodasevich, Review of O. Mandel'shtam, *Tristia* (1922): *SS-Ardis*, vol. 2, p. 340). The statement begs close comparison to Khodasevich's own procedures. The probability of a 'commemorative' Gumilev layer behind Mandel'shtam's lines just quoted (see Grigorii Amelin, Valentina Moderer, *Pis'ma o russkoi poezii*, Moscow: Znak, 2009, p. 205) signals another point of convergence, of a different order (on Gumilev in SF, see below). Although there appears to be no direct intertextual connection between SF and *Nashedshii podkovu*, a comparison of the deep-level themes and adumbration of creative method in these two masterpieces could prove exceptionally illuminating.

<sup>78</sup> № 2–3, 1921, pp. 136–38.

in 1924, and whom he and Berberova met there in spring 1925. In the interim, both Khodasevich and Gor'kii had corresponded with Ivanov in connection with *Beseda*, and Ivanov and Khodasevich had exchanged views on emigration. Ivanov ruminated on means to extend his stay in Europe; Khodasevich, complaining also of the 'crisis of form' alluded to above, lamented in terms pertinent to the doubling of SF that: 'Russia has been rent in two, and each half is rotting (*gniet*) in its own way'.<sup>79</sup>

Ivanov's *Derev'ia* begins with a characteristically impassioned apostrophe to memory ('*Ты, Pamiat', Muz rodivshaia, svia-ta, — / Bessmertiiia zalog, venets soznan'ia, / Netlenogo v istlevshem krasota!*'), but soon shifts to the press of 'recollections' (capitalised *Vospominan'ia*), striving to re-birth from the 'cellar of the soul'. Their *sotto voce* 'bright choir' is capable of revealing a divine purpose and, in the third stanza, it 'weaves' likenesses (of 'souls, alive only in Memory') as branching trees over the journeying self:

... Обличия дремотный ткет напев  
Ветвившихся над путником дерев.

The Symbolist theoretician of memory *par excellence* thus anticipates the biological metaphor of recollections as branching tree.

The Ronens comment in terms of similarity and difference:

Как у Иванова, размышления о воспоминании вызы-  
вают в поэтическом воображении Ходасевича облик  
дерева, но дерево, олива, у него символическое сравне-  
ние для самого воспоминания, а не символический  
атрибут предмета воспоминаний, служащий у Ивано-

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<sup>79</sup> On the visits to Rome, see 'Chetyre pis'ma V. I. Ivanova k V. F. Khodasevichu', Publikatsiia N. N. Berberovoi, *Novyi zhurnal*, 62 (1960), pp. 284–89 (pp. 284, 288); and V. F. Khodasevich, *Kamer-fur'erskii zhurnal*, Moscow: Ellis Lak, 2002, pp. 67–68. For the correspondence, see 'Chetyre pis'ma Ivanova k Khodasevichu'; *SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, pp. 483–84; and 'Iz perepiski Viach. Ivanova s Maksimom Gor'kim', pp. 183–208. The last quotation, from a letter by Khodasevich which appears not to have survived, is reconstructed by N. Kotrelev from Ivanov's diary (*ibid.*, p. 206).

ва поводырем и верной сенью, «обителю духовного семейства».

И образность, и идеи Иванова претерпели у Ходасевича изменения, свойственные характерному для третьей волны символизма трезвенному и стоическому недоверию лирического субъекта к «вещей правде» здешнего, прижизненного видения предвечных идей...<sup>80</sup>

More detailed textual analysis of SF is not the Ronens' purpose, but their indication of divergence from a point of contact is highly suggestive. It is reinforced by further resonances between the two poets, and merits further exploration. (The Ronens indicate a substantial 'return allusion' to SF in one of the poems of Ivanov's *Rimskii dnevnik*; the earlier *Gli Spiriti del Viso* provides a pertinent metaphor of vegetative life, 'interwoven' as experience into memory.)<sup>81</sup> We should note concurrently that Khodasevich's 'wild correspondences' (*dikie sootvetstviia*), woven by recollection's branches, inevitably evoke in the context of *Derev'ia* that notion of 'correspondences' which Ivanov — citing in full Baudelaire's famous poem, with its suggestively arboreal '*forêt de symboles*' — had defined in a seminal article as 'the fundamental teaching and *profession de foi*' of the Symbolist school.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Irina Ronen, Omri Ronen, 'Iz goroda Enn: Palimpsest'.

<sup>81</sup> See Ivanov, *Stikhotvoreniia. Poemy. Tragedii*, bk. 2, p. 171; bk. 1, p. 192. The 1944 Roman poem '*Tak, vsia na polose podvizhnoi / Otpechatlelas' zhizn' moia*' maintains a Khodasevich-like intonation throughout its 12 lines, and concludes with the arresting image of a '*zagrobnyi kinematograf*'. The lyric from *Prozrachnost'* (1904) records how the 'spirits of the eyes' register memory: '*S kusta ne kazhdyi tsvet / Oni vpletut v venki svoikh izbranii; / I sorvannyi s ikh pamiatiiu rannei / Spletaetsia*'.

<sup>82</sup> V. I. Ivanov, 'Dve stikhii v sovremennom simvolizme', in his *Po zvezdam*, St. Petersburg: Ory, 1909, pp. 265—66. Ivanov's rather tendentious prose translation of Baudelaire's poem (*Sootvetstviia* in the Russian version) begins: '*Priroda — khram. Iz ego zhiivykh stolpov vyryvaiutsia poroi smutnye slova. V etom khrame chelovek prokhodit chrez les simvolov; oni provozhaiut ego rodnymi, znaiushchimi vzgliadami*' [emphasis mine]. Perhaps not coincidentally, the arboreal metaphor resurfaced in connection with *Zapiski Mechtatelei*, where an extended reprise became the basis for Bely's lengthy programmatic introduction to the first issue: '*... my, „Mechtатели” — les; ... Stvol v nas lichnost' ... roshchi-*



Ivanov in *Derev'ia* proceeds from a fundamental distinction between branching recollections (*Vospominan'ia*) and overarching, 'sacred' Memory (*Pamiat'*), the 'crown of consciousness', with its source in 'Pre-Eternal' Memory (*Pamiat' Predvechnaia*, 'the soul's recollection of contemplation of divine Ideas', emanating in turn from Mnemosine, goddess of memory, mother of the muses, the guiding force of Spirit and human culture).<sup>83</sup> The detail of his vision is less important here than that Khodasevich offers nothing of the sort. His 'disobedient' mnemonic process, randomly 'unconstrained by anything', including a 'ruling' consciousness (*venets soznan'ia*), in other words carries an additional, potentially disorienting significance as a departure from the vertically ordered, hierarchical Symbolist model that is brought intertextually into account. And of course the 'wild' correspondences, thrown up at contingently intersecting nodes, seem equally remote from Ivanov's meaning-laden indices of 'the communion of higher and lower worlds' — correspondences revelatory to the initiate of a hidden design, the 'sacramental ... kinships and consonances in that which, to our atrophied ignorance, seems discretely separate, discordant, accidentally proximate and lifelessly mute'.<sup>84</sup> The underlying point, one assumes, lies not in a belated re-opening of the polemic with Symbolism conducted by Acmeists and Futurists in the 1910s, but in Khodasevich's reconsideration of his own, pre-War Symbolist past, continued later in the same year as SF in his memoir of Muni:

Действительность, расплываясь в сознании, становилась сквозной. Мы жили в реальном мире — и в то же время в каком-то особом туманном и сложном его отражении <...> Каждая вещь, каждый шаг, каждый жест как бы отражался условно, проектировался в иной плоскости <...> Явления становились видениями.

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*tsa — tselostnost'*; .. *no ona — rastet snizu, estestvenno medlenno, vyzrevaia v godakh...*, etc..

<sup>83</sup> Cf. the first section of Ivanov's essay 'Drevnii uzhas' (*Po zvezdam*, pp. 393 — 96). Referred to also by the Ronens, the essay provides invaluable commentary to *Derev'ia*.

<sup>84</sup> 'Dve stikhii v sovremennom simvolizme', pp. 268, 266.

Каждое событие, сверх своего явного смысла, еще обрело второй, который надобно было расшифровать. Он нелегко нам давался, но мы знали, что именно он и есть настоящий.

Таким образом, жили мы в двух мирах. Но, не умея раскрыть законы, по которым совершаются события во втором, представляющемся нам более реальным, нежели просто реальный, — мы только томились в темных и смутных предчувствиях <...> В «лесу символов» мы терялись, на «качелях соответствий» нас укачивало.<sup>85</sup>

The break with a fevered environment which would bring Muni to suicide was thus in itself no cause for regret; but the divorce from Russian Symbolism — its mode of perception and rich patterns of signification, in a world over-charged with meaning — will continue to haunt the exiled persona of SF with a sense of loss.

From a quite different point of view, the issue of the randomness of recollection also arises in relation to what Iu.D. Levin notes in passing as, in all probability, a 'purely accidental' coincidence between the first lines of Vladimir Solov'ev's *Panmongolizm*

Панмонголизм. Хоть имя дико,  
Но мне ласкает слух оно,  
Как бы предвестием великой  
Судьбины Божией полно

and the first lines of both the first and (here quoted) last stanzas of SF:

Воспоминанье прихотливо.  
Как сновиденье — оно  
Как будто вещей правдой живо,  
Но так же дико и темно.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Nekropol'* (SS-Moscow, vol. 4, pp. 69, 70). First published in *Poslednie novosti*, 30 September 1926.

<sup>86</sup> Levin, 'Zametki o poezii Vl. Khodasevicha', pp. 61—62.

An allusion to Solov'ev's poem in 1926 might bring connotations of the collapse of an apostate Russia into destructive chaos, entirely consonant with the vision of the angel fallen from the Peter and Paul Fortress in Khodasevich's penultimate stanza (see below). Thus the opening and closing stanzas of SF might be held to contain, respectively, a muted anticipation and final echo of this crucial thematic juncture. And although Solov'ev was remote from Khodasevich's usual citational sphere, Khodasevich would have been recently reminded of these lines, recontextualised with specific reference to the Bolshevik Revolution: Blok had adopted the stanza from *Panmongolizm* as epigraph to his *Skify*.<sup>87</sup> Doubt nevertheless remains, as to whether this relatively flimsy contextual background, and a textual 'correspondence' that amounts merely to the recurrence of the adjective *dikii* (with differing referents), the neuter pronoun *ono* in rhyming position in line 2 of a quatrain of iambic tetrameter, and the skeletal structure of conjectural simile + instrumental (*Kak by predvestiem... Kak budto ...pravdoi*), are truly sufficient to sustain such weight of historiosophical explication. Is the perceived allusion 'real' (and how can that be determined)? Or is any 'meaning' that might be attributed a merely illusory interpretative construct, a chimera, founded on nothingness?

To a greater or lesser degree, the same consideration applies to every one of the intertextual reminiscences considered during the course of this study. In contrast to the poetic discourse of many contemporaries, that of Khodasevich's self-alienated persona contains very few obvious markers of the citational presence of an 'alien' word.<sup>88</sup> As Bogomolov puts it, in Khodasevich's poetry from *Putem zerna* onwards 'the „material" signs of tradi-

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<sup>87</sup> Although Blok's epigraph — in which *nam* came to be substituted for *mne* in line 2 — did not appear in the first publications of *Skify* in 1918, by the following year it was already a subject of critical debate (e. g. by Voloshin): see A. A. Blok, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 20 vols, Moscow: Nauka, 1997—, vol. 5, pp. 461—62, 477.

<sup>88</sup> For an articulation of general principles in this regard, see, e. g., Mints, 'Funktsiia reminstsentsii v poetike Al. Bloka', esp. pp. 361—67.

tion, which allow us to judge its presence or absence, plunge into the depths of the verse, become less apparent'. Reminiscences are concealed, and the possibility of identification with a single indubitable source diminishes, even though we may also encounter 'an increase in polygenetic quotation, „montage" of meaning, arising from the intersection of various quotations, „cryptograms" in the citation of poet-predecessors'.<sup>89</sup> In SF, moreover, the reticent persona eschews articulation of anything akin, say, to the 'joy of recognition', that is made thematically explicit in Mandel'shtam's manipulation of the 'warp and weft' of intertextual referents.<sup>90</sup> A nagging element of epistemological uncertainty consequently attaches to each occurrence.

In the problematic case of *Panmongolizm*, the possibilities are perhaps as follows. The perceived correspondence may — as Levin conjectures — be regarded as a matter of pure chance, to which, therefore, no 'meaning' should be ascribed (as far as that is possible, and unless there is meaning in randomness). If, however, the correspondence is not entirely fortuitous, but located somewhere on the spectrum from subconscious reflex to full-fledged intentionality, then we return once more to the intractable difficulty of distinguishing the 'trifling' from the 'significant'. At one extreme, in keeping with the overt theme of stanza 1, intertextual resonance could be attributed to the autonomously functioning, undirected 'whimsicality' of memory — with the corollary that memory is in this aspect 'indissolubly' (line 7) embedded in language: linguistic memory — specifically, subconscious recollection and reproduction of the words and patterns of previous poetic discourse — both defines and constrains thought (and ultimately therefore identity), shaping utterances independently of the (illusory?) will of the much cir-

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<sup>89</sup> N. A. Bogomolov, 'Zhizn' i poeziia Vladislava Khodasevicha', in *Stikhotovoreniia*, pp. 5–48 (p. 29); 'Retseptsiiia poezii pushkinskoi epokhi v lirike VI. Khodasevicha', in his *Russkaia literatura pervoi treti XX veka*, pp. 365, 373.

<sup>90</sup> The reference is to Mandel'shtam's 1918 poem *Tristia*; for a cogent exposition of its thematisation of intertextuality, see Steven Broyde, 'Osip Mandel'stam's „Tristia"', in D. S. Worth, ed., *Russian Poetics, Proceedings of the International Colloquium at UCLA, September 22–26 1975*, Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1983, pp. 74–88.

cumscribed conscious 'self'. From this point of view (and at the risk of quoting out of context a study that persuasively demonstrates how Blok integrates disparate intertextual material to create his own, unique, existential and literary polyphony), we might apply to Khodasevich A. V. Lavrov's argument in relation to Blok: that 'the reminiscences and associations discovered in his works are not, as a rule, programmatic but spontaneous, and arise not in order to reinforce his poetic intuitions, not to add to them, but as one of the underlying, *a priori* forms of their elaboration'.<sup>91</sup> Their presence can readily be explained, even as a compositional principle, without the apparent need to attribute significant *meaning*. Yet intentionality, as we have suggested above in relation to Khodasevich's modern model of the self, is an attribute of the unconscious mind. Thus, to maintain that the correspondences thrown up 'spontaneously' by mnemonic function are entirely devoid of semantic accretions is to subscribe once more to a radical notion of an inherently meaningless universum, and is probably to assert the unverifiable. The way to interpretative construction of (perceived) meaning is consequently open; and that being the case, there is no obviously determinable limit. (Bogomolov, indeed, would argue specifically of the later Khodasevich that the depth of the 'citational subtext' allows him to expand 'semantic (*smyslovoe*) richness almost to infinity, continually incorporating more and more fresh texts'.)<sup>92</sup> Trifling and significant become ultimately indistinguishable.

The example of *Panmongolizm* — and possibly of other texts already discussed here — may nevertheless seem intuitively to commend an approach, perhaps in the spirit of Lavrov's reflection on Blok, that stops short of the need for far-reaching interpretation of each and every reminiscence. In the context of SF, there is the possibility that some, at least, of the many intertextual resonances are 'real', but that their 'meaning' is primarily extrinsic rather than intrinsic. Meaning is located, in other words,

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<sup>91</sup> A. V. Lavrov, '„Solov'inyi sad" A. Bloka. Literaturnye reministsentsii i paralleli', in his *Etudy o Bloke*, St Petersburg: Ivan Limbakha, 2000, p. 253.

<sup>92</sup> 'Retseptsiia poezii pushkinskoi epokhi v lirike Vl. Khodasevicha', p. 366—67.

primarily in process rather than content, so that the cumulative products of disobedient mnemonic function comprise the remnants of a past tradition, now fading (like sentence ends and rhetorical devices) from the grasp of a diminishing, exiled self. In that case, we are dealing with something akin to what T. S. Eliot describes, at the conclusion to another poetic masterpiece of the early 1920s, as 'These fragments I have shored against my ruins'.<sup>93</sup> But here again there is room for equivocation. Are the remembered fragments (such as the snatch of Solov'ev) truly defence against ruin, a means of shoring up the self, offering something resembling Mandel'shtamian 'teleological warmth' in a cold world?<sup>94</sup> Or are they instead the symptom of ruin, a mark of obsessive inability to free the exiled mind of a now unredeemable past? As ever in SF, the possibilities are multiple and open-ended.

These considerations with regard to intertextual material cannot of course be pursued afresh in relation to each separate instance below. They will nevertheless remain relevant throughout, and will be returned to explicitly at several points. But whilst the nature of Khodasevich's citational practice is of obvious interest in its own right, it is, as already noted, the extent to which the method mirrors and embodies the concepts of world, self and the predicament of exile that lends particular depth and distinction to SF. The intertextual method, with its attendant uncertainties, profoundly reflects the condition of Khodasevich's poetic universe.

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<sup>93</sup> The quotation is from the final stanza of Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922; line 430). The 'fragments' refer most directly to the formidably impenetrable, multi-lingual intertextual mosaic (cf. Bogomolov's '„montage" of meaning', at n. 89 above) — preceded by snatches of nursery rhyme marking the collapse, not of Khodasevich's Petersburg angel, but of another emblematic capital-city landmark ('London bridge is falling down falling down falling down') — through which the poem finally disintegrates toward closure. Despite Eliot's more ostentatiously experimental modernism, the themes and procedures of SF would bear detailed comparison also to this major poetic analysis and metapoetic embodiment of traumatised post-world-war Europe.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Osip Mandel'shtam, 'O prirode slova', in his *Sochineniia*, 2 vols, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990, vol. 2, p. 182.

## Stanza 2

The second stanza, with its lengthy description of the photographic double exposure, has received much fuller attention from previous critics than the first, which tends to have been treated, mistakenly, as little more than a framing device. Here stanza 2 is regarded as a continuation and fresh variation upon the principles and preoccupations already crucially established in stanza 1. For these reasons, it can be treated with relative brevity.

The circumstances of compilation as well as the subject matter of the double-exposed photograph are recorded in considerable detail, in playful language that is 'simple, and more or less conversational'.<sup>95</sup> After the categorical abstraction of the more difficult eight lines that precede, this lends the passage an immediate attraction as the vivid representation of concrete reality, of physical rather than mental space. Yet though the photograph — like memories — may have a life of its own (*'I tak zhivet, i tak rastet...'*), it is essential to emphasise that it is presented here not as autonomously valuable 'thing in itself', but, in its own turn, as a double-exposed metaphor. The photograph is not — as has recently been suggested — a reliable 'corrective' to the vagaries of memory,<sup>96</sup> but an analogue simultaneously both for the unpredictably fallible workings of memory, and for the psychical condition of the exile.

The parallel between the photograph and the intrusion of recollection into consciousness is not difficult to discern. The double exposure is a mechanical process, a whimsical, chance occurrence, outside the conscious control of a photographer who, by definition, lacks concentrated mental focus (*fotograf-rotozei*: the term itself is redolent of the phonic-mnemonic priming discussed earlier).<sup>97</sup> The slightly comic, slightly inept photographer

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<sup>95</sup> Bethea, *Khodasevich*, p. 305. The drafts of this stanza also described photographic technicalities of acid and chemical developer (*SS-Ardis*, vol. 1, p. 440; subsequent references to the poem's drafts are to this edition).

<sup>96</sup> Nafpaktitis, 'Multiple Exposures', p. 398.

<sup>97</sup> Nafpaktitis argues the particular semantic significance of Khodasevich's 'prominent use of the phonetic unit —oto—', supposedly connecting *fotografiia* and the distancing (*ot*) of exile in 'almost' every section of the poem (*ibid.*,

might also readily be seen as standing for the disempowered, marginalised self. The underlying psychical orientation of the photograph-as-metaphor is confirmed, moreover, by the closing lines of the stanza, already quoted above:

В себе виденья затая,  
Так протекает жизнь моя.

Whether or not the shift from botched photograph to ‘visions’ (*viden’ia*) should be interpreted as ironic (both immediate context or the irony of the striking observation ‘*iavleniia stanovilis’ videniiami*’, already quoted from the memoir of Muni of that same year, would suggest that it should, but the basis for an alternative reading is advanced below), the perceived world is emphatically a property of the mind, not of the external reality from which it is distanced.<sup>98</sup>

As for the persona in exile, the immediate experience that can be recorded as a single-exposure photograph — a steamship on the bay, friends, goat, the luxury of a winter picnic in the Italian countryside — lacks intrinsic interest. Whatever the magnificence of the setting, ‘ordinary’, unmediated responses are dulled.<sup>99</sup> Only the chance collocation of unrelated impressions (photographic plates, *otpechatki*) holds attention; and it is consistent

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pp. 396–97). Irrespective of considerations of the semantic (in)determinacy of auditory memory and literary paronomasia, Khodasevich’s dense phonetic patterning nevertheless makes the priveliging of a single phoneme seem problematically arbitrary.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Gray, *Consciousness*, p. 60: ‘...let us dispense with the biggest illusion of all: that the perceived world is external to our brains (while... accepting that there is some real world or other that *is* external to our brains)’.

<sup>99</sup> A ‘normal’ reaction to the same landscape, fictionally ascribed some twenty-five years earlier to the foreign eye of a non-exiled, modernist hero, illustrates by contrast the extent of SF’s dulled unreceptivity. For André Gide’s ‘Immoraliste’: ‘The road from Ravello to Sorrento is so magnificent that that morning I did not care to see anything more beautiful on earth. The roughness of the sun-warmed rocks, the rich, limpid air, the smells made me feel so alive; so satisfying was it that my only feeling was one of light happiness. Memories and regrets, hopes and desires, past and future all fell silent...’ (A. Gide, *The Immoralist* (1902), trans. D. Watson, London: Penguin, 2000, p. 50).



with our previous analysis that even the double-exposed image evokes a merely aesthetic response, conveyed through an impersonal (quasi-passive) construction, without first-person agency:

*Мне полюбился отпечаток  
Двух совместившихся миров.*

At most, there is also that tinge of 'faint amusement' referred to above. As the next two stanzas increasingly confirm, this reception of the trivial photographic curiosity is more broadly symptomatic of a mental state that precludes concentration on the immediate present alone, for it is always involuntarily shot through with the disobediently intrusive recollection of elsewhere. The uncontrolled whimsicality of memory becomes confirmed as a debilitating affliction.

Though the persona apparently fails at this stage, in contrast to the Pushkinian creator of *Poet i tolpa*, to proceed from 'assimilation of impressions' (and cognates of *vpechatlenie* — *zapechatleet*, *otpechatok* — are notable in this stanza) to evaluative 'philosophical interpretation', the disoriented, unguided reader is bound to consider whether any illumination of meaning remains to be discovered in the chance juxtapositions that are described. There is, in fact, much that predisposes toward interpretative analysis. Bethea notes Khodasevich's blurring of 'various levels of reality — the world of things, of animals, of people'.<sup>100</sup> The steamship (intrusion of Futurist 'modernity'!?) is suggestively anthropomorphised, '*s kosmoiui dymnoiui na lbu*'; the cliffs, likewise, are 'giants' (*ispoliny*); whilst the mingling of pluralised 'waters' with people and smoke might suggest some mythical, elemental confluence of water and air with human experience. Then there is the diminutivised small goat, inverted, butting Vesuvius 'with its horns': a suggestively Solzhenitsian encounter of the 'trifling' with the 'significant' — unless, perhaps, in this world of blurring identity, the creature that butts the 'giants' might conceivably activate traditional, infernal symbolism, its demonic connotations subconsciously 'primed' by a coincidence of

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<sup>100</sup> Bethea, *Khodasevich*, p. 305.

grapheme (*'Cherty'* vs. *'Cherti'*). And yet, while material from which to construct meaning exists here in abundance, it would be difficult indeed — much more so than in the case of the secondary (perceived) world of language and literary reminiscence — to argue that significant meaning is *inherent* in this stanza's random convergences of physical realia: that any 'sense' that is derived is not illusory interpretative artifice, but affords genuine insight into the nature of being. Despite the conversational lightness of tone, the confrontation with existential meaninglessness (*besmyslitsa*) is therefore acute. The photographic 'wild correspondences' may evoke mild passing interest, but it might be concluded that there is nothing behind their mere semblance of meaning. The unresponsiveness of the persona is to that extent vindicated. What remains is only what the superimposition reveals: objects and people undifferentiated in their spectral insubstantiality (*'legkim telom / Poluprozrachno zaslonial...'*), grotesquely suspended, vaguely comic, not quite alive. Meaning and plenitude are absent, in this world and the other.

Although the 'two worlds' that are combined here (*sov-mestivshiesia miry*) are indubitably a manifestation of flat, exilic horizontality, not neo-Platonic, Symbolist verticality (*dvoemirie*), the very reference to their conflation might nevertheless be seen as pointing once more to an implicit loss of the Symbolist vision of the pre-Revolutionary, pre-exilic era. Other literary allusions paradoxically add a similar dimension of meaning to this stanza on meaning's loss. Thus, in the first place, the expression of dislike for 'Italian picnics':

Хоть я и не люблю козляток  
(Ни итальянских пикников)

though a more elegant anticipation of the unbearably tawdry, mechanical Sundays of Khodasevich's *Bednye rifmy* (October 1926):

В воскресенье на чахлую траву  
Ехать в поезде, плед разложить,

И опять задремать, и забаву  
Каждый раз в этом все находить<sup>101</sup>

is perhaps also a semi-humorous indication of decline from the intimate symposium of creative friends imagined by Evgenii Baratynskii in the poem that memorably begins:

Я не люблю хвастливые обеды.<sup>102</sup>

More substantially, the opening lines of the stanza perhaps also conceal the first of a series of intertwined allusions (polygenetic montage?) that together constitute a requiem for Blok and Gumilev, the two major Petrograd poets who died in August 1921. The dative construction and syntactic inversion that lend a 'poetic' twist to description of the prosaic, mismanaged accountancy of the amateur photographer:

Порой фотограф-ротозей  
Забудет снимкам счет и пленкам...

might constitute a distant, vestigial echo of the more grandiose accountancy practised by the most consummate of artists in the final stanza of Blok's *Ravenna*:

Лишь по ночам, склонясь к долинам,  
Ведя векам грядущим счет,  
Тень Данта с профилем орлиным  
О Новой Жизни мне поет.

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<sup>101</sup> *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 176. A tangible echo in these lines of the self-satisfied *chinovnik*, 'guliaia v lodke v voskresen'e' at the end of Pushkin's *Mednyi vsadnik*, seems previously to have gone unnoted.

<sup>102</sup> *Obedy* (1839). For other reminiscences from Baratynskii, about whom Khodasevich 'wrote almost nothing', although he 'felt the influence of his creative experience to a very high degree' (N. A. Bogomolov, 'Kategoriia „podzemnyi klassik“ v russkoi kul'ture XX veka', in his *Russkaia literatura pervoi treti XX veka*, p. 217), see Bogomolov, 'Retseptsiiia poezii pushkinskoi epokhi v lirike Vl. Khodasevicha', pp. 360, 362, 363, 367, 378; and the notes to *Iskushenie, Buria, V zasedanii, Stansy, Lida*, in *Stikhotvoreniia*, pp. 386, 389, 391. These latter stem in part from the valuable observations in Levin, 'Zametki o poezii Vl. Khodasevicha', pp. 50–52, 56, 61, 62, 77.

An adverbial construction using *poroi* in Blok's preceding stanza:

Лишь в пристальном и тихом взоре  
Равеннских девушек, порой...

strengthens the correspondence to SF; and shadowy invocations of Dante will occur again in Khodasevich's poem on Italian exile. The construction in the second line of Khodasevich's stanza (dative noun + *schet* + *i* + dative noun) has a more exact counterpart, however, in Gumilev's poem on another Italian city, Pisa, which forms a more immediate link in this intertextual chain:

Ах, и мукам счет и усладам  
Не веками ведут — годами!  
<...>  
Все проходит, как тень, но время  
Остается, как прежде, мстящим,  
И бывшее, темное бремя  
Продолжает жить в настоящем.

Interspersed between further Dantean references, to Count Ugolino, Guelfs and Ghibellines, Gumilev's lines were one of the more prominent nodes in a protracted two-way poetic dialogue between his and Blok's respective Italian cycles.<sup>103</sup> Khodasevich's photographic context seems equally divorced from the weighty intellectual deliberations of both these poems of some fifteen years previously, on the eternity of art, the transience of time and the burden of historical memory (contrast '*Zabudet snimkam schet*'). Exile is implicitly the more bitter for this impoverishment of preoccupation and implied loss of intellectual vigour.<sup>104</sup> It is

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<sup>103</sup> On the polemic with Blok, see my commentaries in N. S. Gumilev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 10 vols, Moscow: Voskresen'e, 1998—, vol. 2, pp. 277—78; commentaries to other Italian poems in the same volume; and S. Shvartsband, 'Kolchan: Chetvertaia kniga Gumileva', in *Nikolaj Gumilev, 1886—1996*, ed. S. D. Graham, Berkeley: Berkeley Slavic Specialties, 1987, pp. 295—97.

<sup>104</sup> Blok's poem dates from 1909, Gumilev's from 1912. Cf. Khodasevich's opinion, expressed for instance to Gor'kii in 1924, that Russian poetry lost its intellectual force from around 1910—11 (*SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, p. 477; see also *ibid.*,

painful, too, in an abiding awareness of human and creative losses that have acquired emblematic significance. Hence, beneath deceptive inconsequentiality, the stanza simultaneously recalls two personal acquaintances and outstanding poets who, as Khodasevich remarked in *Nekropol'*, for all their diametrical differences 'often appear together in my memory ... In their very demise, and in the shock that it evoked in Petersburg, there was something that connected them'.<sup>105</sup> The person closest to Khodasevich in these years related the connection, as we have seen, more unequivocally to the end of an epoch. We have already indicated some of the personal repercussions for survivors.

Finally in relation to stanza 2, this literary context also suggests the possibility of a high-literal, non-ironic reading of the *viden'ia* of the final lines, which may be related not merely to poorly assimilated 'photographic' impressions. Thus, the first of these two lines:

В себе виденья затая,  
Так протекает жизнь моя

might also now recall the formulation of artistic mission in the last section of the 'Prologue' to Blok's *Vozmezdie*:

Дай мне неспешно и нежливо  
Поведать пред Лицом Твоим  
О том, что мы в себе таим,  
О том, что в здешнем мире живо...

For Khodasevich, this would entail a shift from diminished persona to poet, able, in his Pushkinian terms, not merely to absorb and store what is 'seen', but to 'explain' and transfiguratively reprocess external impressions, through 'sweet sounds' to eventual 'prayerful gesture' (significantly, Blok's *Litso Tvoe* is plainly a hypostasis of the quasi-divine Eternal Feminine: '*Ты, porazivshaiia Dennitsu...*'). The theme of the poet's duty will be developed,

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pp. 678–79).

<sup>105</sup> *SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, p. 80. An earlier variant again dates from 1926.

primarily at the subtextual level, through successive stanzas. But at this stage, if the allusion is acknowledged, it remains an open question whether it should be interpreted as statement of intent — as it were, to resist life's inexorable ebb (*protekaet*), perhaps repossessing the organically living memory in the process — or as (paradoxical) recognition, consistent with the surrounding context, of inability any longer to fulfil the poetic role.

### Stanza 3

The short third stanza reverts from photograph to mind, to demonstrate a particular sense in which memory has a 'disobedient' life — and will — of its own. Recollection intrudes persistently, unbidden, upon present experience: the memory of Moscow (principally; but see above) shows through as spectral double-exposure against immediate perception of the Amalfi coast. The Russian image is unprepossessingly squalid, yet its 'pitiful shade' is not to be suppressed. The negative image is obsessively insistent, permeating consciousness to preclude concentrated existence in the exotic beauty (*'skaly i agavy'*) of a new life. The ground of Italy is, by the end of the thirteen-line stanza, stony and barren.

This is straightforward enough; but a literary layer, shifting primarily, but by no means solely, between the voices of Gumilev, Pushkin and that of Khodasevich himself, once again lends an additional dimension of complexity. Thus, in the first place, the structure of Khodasevich's first line appears double-exposed against what may be termed the shadowy structural template of another poem by Gumilev. Khodasevich's

Я вижу скалы и агавы

presents a close lexical-structural parallel and exact rhythmical equivalent to the first line of the third stanza of Gumilev's *Priroda*, extending even to a comparable sequence of three consecutive

vowels (*i-i-a*; cf. *y-i-a*) across the conjunction that links the noun-variables:

Я вижу тени и обличья,  
Я вижу, гневом обуян,  
Лишь скудное многоразличья  
Творцом просыпанных семян.

Curiously, Khodasevich's formulation is notably more concrete and precise than that of the Acmeist; Gumilev's surprisingly rhetorical and abstract, in one of the most Symbolist poems of his penultimate major collection, *Koster* (1918). *Priroda* elaborates the Khodasevich-like theme of the spirit's alienation from the external, physical world ('*Tak vot i vsia ona, priroda, / Kotoroi dukh ne priznaet...*'), and impatience for epiphanic-apocalyptic revelation of the world's concealed essence. The adjective (*skudnoe*) used by Gumilev to convey the exiled spirit's perception of the flatness of the natural world looks back, of course, to Tiutchev ('*Eti bednye selen'ia, / Eta skudnaia priroda...*'), but like the metaphor of seed-sowing latent in Khodasevich's surname (see below), it is remarkably consonant also with Khodasevich's mature verse.<sup>106</sup>

Khodasevich's cliffs and agaves, for all their physicality, nevertheless become the background 'against and through which' memories of Russia are relentlessly projected. The second line of the stanza:

А в них, сквозь них и между них —

conveys through its awkwardly unpoetic conglomeration of three prepositions and same repeated pronoun at three stressed ic-

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<sup>106</sup> Cf. the masterly analysis of the pivotal significance of *skudost'* to Khodasevich's first *Ballada* ('*Sizhu, osveshchaemyi sverkh'u*'; 1921) in Bethea, *Khodasevich*, pp. 243–45. Other relevant texts by Khodasevich include his *Sny*, where body addresses alienated soul: '*Den' izo dnia, v mig probuzhden'ia trudnyi, / Pripominaiu ia tvoi veshchii son, / Smotriu v okno i vizhu seryi, skudnyi / Moi nebosklon...*' (1917; *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 102); '*Mechta moia! Iz Vifl'emskoi dali*' ('*Vse bylo tam ubogo, skudno, prosto*', with reference to the pre-Nativity universe: 1920–22; *ibid.*, p. 291); more distantly, *Golubok*, and (with an eye to the title of Gumilev's collection) the earlier *Nochi* ('*Kochevii skudnykh deti zlye, / My ruki greem u kostra*') (*ibid.*, pp. 282, 58).

tuses, the remorseless press of inescapable recollection. *Skvoz'*, as S. Fomin has noted, is 'one of the main words in Khodasevich's poetic economy', allowing him to unite the disparate and dissonant in single images.<sup>107</sup> In the 1926 memoir of Muni quoted above, it also encapsulated the disintegration of vision that characterised the Symbolist epigone's quasi-exilic grip on the world (*'Действительность, расплываясь в сознании, становилась сквозной...'*), whilst the striking accumulation of prepositions had another, more unlikely analogue in Khodasevich's prose, in the sketch on the Belfast shipyards he published within just a few weeks of leaving Sorrento, in May 1925:

Лес труб ... то сплошных, то сквозных ... За ними и между ними — подъемные краны...

Лодки ... лежат на боку, на спине, килем вверх. Люди стучат, стругают, шпаклюют в них, на них и под ними.<sup>108</sup>

The article elicited a reproach from Gor'kii, in defence of the Soviet work ethic, which effectively brought the two writers' relationship to an end that summer. Their final letters to each other leave no doubt that the irritation caused reflected the fundamental divergence over Soviet politics already referred to, but the rift was indeed ideological, not personal, and Khodasevich viewed it 'with regret' (*s gorech'iu*).<sup>109</sup> It seems entirely possible that a distant echo of the still painful episode informed the present passage's confrontation with exile.

The recollected image of 'home' that obtrudes so insistently upon the Italian landscape is not merely aesthetically unattractive but, at least as it is re-envisioned in this third stanza, one of precarious insecurity:

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<sup>107</sup> Fomin, 'S razdvoennogo ostriia', p. 38.

<sup>108</sup> *SS-Ardis*, vol. 3, pp. 44, 45.

<sup>109</sup> For the letters of summer 1925 see 'Pis'ma Maksima Gor'kogo k V. F. Khodasevichu (1922—1925)', *Novyi zhurnal*, 31 (1952), pp. 203—205; *SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, pp. 487—89 and (in Khodasevich's paraphrase) pp. 370—73. His expression of regret is on p. 371.



Домишко низкий и плюгавый,  
Обитель прачек и портных...  
...Как бы сползая с косогора  
Над мутною Москвой-рекой.

Although choice of epithet and impressionistic *'kak by'* instil an element of subjectivism, the description is nevertheless fundamentally dispassionate. The text itself offers not the slightest indication of the personal connection or affective relationship between exiled poet-persona and the household of 'washer-women and tailors' to which he might naturally be assumed not to belong. The inner *meaning* of the recollection — trifling or significant, as the case may be — is in other words typically withheld. Instead, the use of archaic-poetic *obitel'*, between the colloquialism *plugavyi*, and the alliterative listing of humble inhabitants, creates an ironic distancing which seems merely to preclude both nostalgia and compassionate identity with the 'washer-women and tailors'. There is, rather, a hint of the distanced, supercilious disdain that characterises presentation of the petty bourgeois world of Western Europe in much of *Evropeiskaia noch'*.<sup>110</sup>

That *such* a memory should prove bindingly compulsive, despite all efforts at resistance:

...как ни отвожу я взора,  
Он все маячит предо мной

is again symptomatic of the spiritual affliction of exile: irrational, incommensurate yearning is balanced against deadening of response. Beyond the text, however, there is, after all, confirmation of a direct connection between Khodasevich and the dwelling that is so unappealingly evoked. As N. A. Bogomolov has indicated,<sup>111</sup> the description is unmistakably of Khodasevich's own

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<sup>110</sup> Symptomatically, the drafts of SF contained a longer and more grotesque sociological listing, consistent with other poems of the collection: *'...Mnogosemeinikh schetovodov ... Zaik, beremennykh, urodov, / I prestarelykh balerin'* (SS-Ardis, vol. 1, p. 441).

<sup>111</sup> *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 401.

last Moscow address, high over the embankment of the Moscow river on 7-oi Rostovskii pereulok. He had first occupied a flat there (no. 11, flat 24) in November 1915, when he informed Boris Sadovskoi of his new address by reference to the acoustically suggestive district and parallel major thoroughfare of Pliushchikha.<sup>112</sup> (Might there be another instance of onomastic priming in the selection of adjective for this stanza: *pliushchikha* > *pliugavyi*?). With the following stanza in mind, it should also be noted that, by the winter of 1919–20, Khodasevich was forced into a single room at basement level:

Зиму 1919—1920 провели ужасно. В полуподваланном этаже нетопленного дома, в одной комнате, нагреваемой при помощи окна, пробитого — в кухню, а не в Европу...<sup>113</sup>

The personal basis for the haunting recollection thus becomes clear; but the absence on the part of the exiled persona of explicit emotive engagement, ‘„explanation” or philosophical interpretation’, is arguably made thereby all the more lamentable.

There is also, however, a further intertextual dimension to this dwelling. We have suggested above that the stylistic precedent of *Mednyi vsadnik* underlies the visual conflation of Moscow with the Amalfi Pass in the following lines of the stanza. Khodasevich’s ironic reference to his basement window is scarcely needed to propose also that the ‘*domishko nizkii i pliugavyi*’, sliding ominously toward the waters of the river, cannot fail to bring to mind the ‘*domishko vetkhii*’ that is the vulnerable dwelling, not of *prachki* but of Parasha, washed away by the Neva in *Mednyi vsadnik*. A further leap of association might cast the exiled persona as passive, Evgenii-like victim of historical forces.<sup>114</sup> And there is, perhaps, yet

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<sup>112</sup> *Pis'ma V. F. Khodasevicha B. A. Sadovskomu*, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1983, p. 30. Cf. also the poem 2-go noiabria: ‘...vyshe, vyshe, / Nad tikhoiu Pliushchikhoi, nad rekoii’ (*Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 111).

[http://www.imwerden.info/pdf/khodasevich\\_pisma\\_sadovskomu\\_1983.pdf](http://www.imwerden.info/pdf/khodasevich_pisma_sadovskomu_1983.pdf)

<sup>113</sup> ‘O sebe’, *SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, p. 188.

<sup>114</sup> The allusion is noted in Göbler, *Chodasevič*, p. 130; on Evgenii, see also Bethea, *Khodasevich*, p. 307.

another 'correspondence' here, to the recent Italian present rather than the literary past. Khodasevich recalls at some length in *Nekropol'* how he accompanied Gor'kii's son, Maksim, to view a villa, positioned in precarious insecurity over water far below, that Gor'kii was planning to rent in preference to *Il Sorito*:

Вилла оказалась стоящей на крошечном выступе скал; под южным ее фасадом находился обрыв сажен в пятьдесят — прямо в море. <...> Вилла, на которой предстояло нам поселиться, еще за семь месяцев до того стояла на западной окраине маленького поселка, который очередным обвалом был буквально раздавлен и снесен в море. <...> Вилла каким-то чудом уцелела, так что теперь и восточный ее фасад тоже смотрел в пропасть...<sup>115</sup>

Khodasevich's objections to renting prevailed; but by curious coincidence, dwellings both 'here' and 'there' may have seemed equally insecure. Life is perilously uncertain, while impressions of Moscow blur into those of Petersburg and Italy in a continuation of the spectral insubstantiality of exilic identity noted in the previous stanza. Meanwhile, the image of the unprotective, unenticing home gains additional poignancy against the background of Khodasevich's pre-revolutionary literary-critical appreciation of the unclouded domesticity of Derzhavin ('*On voistinu i gluboko liubil zemliu i — na etoi zemle — blagopoluchnyi i krepkii dom svoi'*'), and of a persistent theme of his own earlier verse, from the volume entitled *Schastlivyi domik* to what Jane Miller identifies as 'the luminous, sanctified domesticity of *Putem zerna'*'.<sup>116</sup>

The stanza closes with a five-line unit that re-states the contrast between the mean Moscow home that remains a haunting presence, and the magnificence of Italy:

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<sup>115</sup> *SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, pp. 159–60.

<sup>116</sup> Khodasevich, 'Derzhavin' (1916), in his *Stat'i o russkoi poezii*, p. 51 (contrast 'earth' to the present imagery of 'water'); Miller, 'Khodasevič's Gnostic Exile', p. 228. The distance from *Schastlivyi domik* is also noted by Göbler, *Khodasevič*, p. 131.

И на зеленый, величавый  
Амальфитанский перевал  
Он жалкой тенью набежал,  
Стопою нищенскою стал  
На пласт окаменелой лавы.

There is, however, a notable secondary contrast here between the ‘majestic verdure’ of the Pass — and more distantly, perhaps, the ‘growing’ tree of the poem’s opening — and the ‘stony lava’ underfoot with which the description of landscape now ends. And although, typically, it is not the perceiving self but the shade of the inanimate house that ‘stands’ on the lava — the ‘layers’ of which might connote the layering of memory as well as of time — its personification and animacy (*on ... nabezhal*) contain a probable allusion to the displaced poet, and this returns us to the thematic considerations of the end of stanza 2.

The essential prompt to a densely ‘polygenetic’ cluster of association is the phrase ‘*stopoiu nishchenskoiu*’ (the inversion and disyllabic instrumental endings alert to the poeticism). Khodasevich himself had played on the double meaning of *stopa* in the concluding lines of the *Ballada* that brought his previous collection, *Tiazhelaia lira*, to a dramatic close. In that poem, the walls of the poet’s stifling, electrically-lit apartment suddenly dissolve away, as he receives a ‘heavy lyre’ from ‘someone’s’ hands and — as Bethea puts it — ‘sees and hears both the physical footsteps and metrical feet of Orpheus’:<sup>117</sup> if not upon petrified larva, then upon (*na* + accusative) another stony, cliff-top landscape:

На гладкие черные скалы  
Стопы опирает Орфей.

The image from *Ballada* echoes the ambiguous use of *stopa* that had heralded this final transformation three stanzas earlier, in specific connection with a poetic descent into subterranean flame (*podzemnoe plamia*):

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<sup>117</sup> Bethea, *Khodasevich*, p. 247.

Я сам над собой вырастаю  
Над мертвым встаю бытием,  
Стопами в подземное пламя...

The latter phrase is, undoubtedly, a borrowing-cum-citation from Briusov's famous injunction to the poet in his programmatic *Poetu* (1907):

...Как Данту, подземное пламя  
Должно тебе щеки обжечь,<sup>118</sup>

whilst the stanza's first line brings to mind, and perhaps engages polemically with, Gumilev's 'last' poem, to Berberova: '*Ia sam nad soboi nasmeialsia...*'.<sup>119</sup>

Against this background, the '*stopoiu nishchenskoiu*' of SF's third stanza might in turn recollect the measured, infernal poetic descent, '*stopoi nespeshnoi*', that concludes another of the Italian poems of Gumilev (the stanza's opening allusion to whom is subtly underscored by retention to the final line of the initial rhyme: *agavy — plugavyi — velichavyi — lavy*). Gumilev's *Florentsiia* ends:

...А между них, потупя взгляд,  
Изгнанник бедный Алигьери  
Стопой неспешной сходит в Ад.

In Khodasevich as in Gumilev, use in line-initial position of the mild syntactic inversion of instrumental singular *stopoi* + adjective to evoke the descent of the poetic hero into the underworld can be traced back to Batiushkov's exquisite poem about the homeless (semi-exiled) wanderer Odysseus:

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<sup>118</sup> Although the allusion to Briusov appears not to have been previously remarked, Bogomolov detects in *Ballada* a parallel to another Briusov poem, *Unynie* ('*Budu pet' moi gimn nevedomyi, / Skaly dvizha, kak Orfei*'; see Khodasevich, *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 395).

<sup>119</sup> See note 5 above.

Средь ужасов земли и ужасов морей  
Блуждая, бедствуя, искал своей Итаки  
Богобоязненный страдалец Одиссей;  
Стопой бестрепетной сходил Аида в мраки...

Gumilev's *nespeshnoi* is perhaps vestigially echoed in adverbial form in the *nespeshno* of Khodasevich's next stanza; and we might incidentally recollect that the concept of measured pace also informed Blok's formulation of the poetic task in lines quoted in relation to stanza 2 ('*Dai mne nespeshno i nelzhivo...*'). Within this broad context, it seems not unlikely that Khodasevich's *ten'* ('*on zhalkoi ten'iu nabezhal'*) at some level recalls the '*ten'* Dante' from Blok's *Ravenna*, implicated in the Gumilev-Blok associations of the previous stanza. Certainly Khodasevich's choice of epithet, *nishchenskii*, further reinforces the implicit orientation toward the myth of the poet (cf. *izgnannik bednyi, bedstvuia*, in the examples just quoted) — and possibly thereby suggests an underlying connection, after all, between poet and lowly denizens of the '*domishko nizkii*' which is the overt grammatical subject of this stanza's last sentence. As Irena Ronen writes in her perceptive analysis of Khodasevich's next *Ballada*, from *Evropeiskaia noch'*:

Поэт нищ, по-своему, не как Лазарь, а как Христос,  
как лирик Блока.<sup>120</sup>

At a point where the apparently unrelievedly cheerless narrative of SF makes explicit reference to layering (*plast ...lavy*), there is thus a strong but submerged nexus of association to the theme of the poet and his arduous path. For now this remains in the poem's own subliminal underworld (cellar, *polupodval...*) of

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<sup>120</sup> I. Ronen, 'O vtoroi „Ballade“ Vladislava Khodasevicha', *Weiner Slawistischer Almanach*, 15 (1985), p. 164. Significantly, the poem contains an important allusion to the first *Ballada* (see *Stikhotovoreniia*, p. 402), and Ronen identifies intertextual connections with both Blok and Gumilev. Among the many references to Khodasevich's real, biographical impoverishment, his wry letter to Shakovskoi of 27 February 1926 relates directly to his work on SF: '*...So svoei storony proshu — poshlite mne gonorar s takoi zhe nezamdelitelnost'iu. Vsego vyshlo 182 stikhov, t. e. 546 frankov. Posledniuiu nedel'iu ia splosh' prosidel nad etoi veshch'iu — i sovershenno obnishchal*' (Shakhovskoi, *Biografiia iunosti*, pp. 188—89).

distant recollection, but it will be developed in a still tentative resumption of the metapoetic theme at the end of the following stanza.

#### Stanza 4

The fourth stanza begins, with another slight awkwardness, quite literally where the previous one left off: the first line (*'Raskryta dver' v polupodval'*) rhymes only backward, with the penultimate triplet of stanza 3. This implicitly links the ensuing subject matter and scene very firmly to the Moscow memory that precedes.

The 'descent' presaged at the end of stanza 3 is not into any identifiable nether world, but attenuated, perhaps bathetically, to the 'half-basement' to which Khodasevich had himself gravitated after the Revolution. The focus has now shifted, however, from depersonalised contemplation of the persona's 'life' at the end of stanza 2, to contemplation of an alien death; and death and its challenge to 'explanation or philosophical interpretation' provide this stanza's underlying thematic and referential core. The basement is the point of departure for the funeral of the floor-polisher Savel'ev, borne out in his coffin in a sequence that might indeed be regarded as cinematic, rather than statically photographic. Narration is primarily in the present tense (the first past-tense verb, *'zagolosila'*, occurs only 13 lines in), and it gains further immediacy through interjection of a single line of colloquial direct speech (*„Nu, Ol'ga, polno, vykhodi"*).<sup>121</sup> In other respects, however, the episode is defamiliarised. In particular, there is, as usual, no direct expression of affective involvement, with no intrusion of the narrative first person until completion of the scene at stanza's end, and again no indication of the precise relationship of lyric observer to participants (who is he to them or they to him?). The

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<sup>121</sup> Bethea's attribution of this line directly to 'the gentle, nearly avuncular prodding' of the poet-speaker (*Khodasevich*, p. 308) appears unmotivated, but illustrates the interpretative difficulties posed at every level of Khodasevich's narration.

ready assumption is that the recollection is of distant neighbours, even persons unknown and observed by chance (it is, after all, another reflection of memory's 'whimsicality' that vividness of recollection is not dependent upon emotional content). Yet if the coffin indeed emerges from the basement Khodasevich had himself temporarily inhabited, there is also the unstated but intriguing possibility of double-exposed identification with Savel'ev, in a vision-reminiscence that projects the persona's own death. Typically, a substantial element of unresolved uncertainty remains.

Whatever may be deduced, expression of emotion is played down from the outset. The potential solemnity of '*v sokrushenii glubokom*' in the stanza's second line is deflated through an emphatically enriched, comical, adjacent rhyme with *polubokom*, evidently symptomatic of the 'faint amusement' of indifference noted earlier:

Раскрыта дверь в полуподвал,  
И в сокрушении глубоком  
Четыре прачки, полубоком,  
Выносят...

The adverb *polubokom* also picks up on the sense of attenuation inherent in the preceding *polupodval*, whilst the collective subject, *chetyre prachki*, delayed by inversion, collectively, undignifiedly turned 'half-sideways', likewise contributes to withholding attribution of profound individual grief.

The narrative proceeds through a structurally repetitive accumulation of locative and nominative nouns, juxtaposed without verbal links:

На полотенцах гроб дощатый,  
В гробу — Савельев, полотер.  
На нем потертый, полосатый  
Пиджак. Икона на груди  
Под бородою рыжеватой.



The sequentiality of recorded ‘impressions’, as if contingently (‘whimsically’) determined rather than sifted by consciousness in ‘obedience’ to any overarching understanding, conveys immediacy, but leaves the description evaluatively undifferentiated. Through the familiar failure to discriminate between ‘trifling’ and ‘significant’, towels, coffin, corpse, jacket, icon, beard, are all consigned in this mechanistic enumeration to the same inexpressive level of trivial inanimate objects. Consistently with the evocation of ‘washer-women and tailors’ in stanza 3 (and far remote from the sympathy for ‘little people’ (*malen'kie li-udi*) of democratic tradition), mourners and deceased are also diminished, distanced and de-personified by recurrent reference to their social station (*‘chetyre prachki’* > *‘Savel'ev, poloter’* > *‘i Ol'ga, prachka, ... vykhodit’*).<sup>122</sup> Another ‘awkward’ repetition, already noted above, also characterises the emergence of Ol’ga: presumably, but not certainly, the deceased’s wife. Ol’ga is told, with unpoetical directness, that she has grieved or tarried enough (*pòlno*: further stifling of emotion); and to meagre, denotative repetition of both name and verb she duly — mechanically — makes her appearance up the stairs:

«Ну, Ольга, полно. Выходи».  
И Ольга ...  
Выходит. И заголосила.

Even the folk-ritualistic element — the towels on which the coffin is carried, Ol’ga’s wail, the keening that accompanies the coffin through the gates — contribute to automatise and de-individualise the participants’ responses.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> For the suggestion of an alternative view, see, however, Bethea, *Khodasevich*, p. 307.

<sup>123</sup> Towels were widely used in funeral rituals, for bearing the coffin out from the home and lowering it into the grave; in some instances they were used to tie the gates after the coffin had been carried through, so that ‘death should not return’ (N. A. Ivanitskii, *Materialy po etnografii Vologodskoi gubernii: Sbornik svedenii dlia izucheniia byta krest'ianskogo naseleniia Rossii*, Moscow: Imperatorskoe ob-o liubutelei estestvoznaniia, antropologii i etnografii pri Moskovskom universitete, 1890, p. 116). Here the rural folk tradition survives — presumably,

There is, however, an unexpected hint of alteration in emphasis, as the funeral sequence — the ‘dream’ (*mechta*) from which the lyric persona is unable to ‘tear himself’ — finally merges (*‘skvoz’ koliuchie agavy’*) into double-exposed projection with the Italian landscape, invisible and almost forgotten since the start of stanza 3, that nevertheless constitutes present reality:

И полотера лоб курчавый  
В лазурном воздухе плывет.

The continuing identification of the deceased by profession rather than name, and the quasi-absurdist detachment and reification not even of head, but of ‘curly forehead’, are in keeping with all that has preceded. Yet there is also upward trajectory — from *polupodval*, up the stairs and through the gates, to Italian air (further latent symbolism of earth and air?). This is accentuated by a choice of adjective that is quintessentially emblematic of mystical Symbolism. Primarily through the example of Blok and Belyi, who readily acknowledged their source in Vladimir Solov’ev (*‘V lazuri Ch’ego-to lucheznogo vzora prebyvaet teurg’*, wrote Blok, as the prelude to a quotation from his ‘teacher’s’ verse in *‘O sovremennom sostoianii russkogo simvolizma’*), the ‘azure’ had become the common currency of Symbolist poetic discourse.<sup>124</sup> Solov’ev’s seminal poetic text in this regard was his *Tri svidaniia* (including, for instance: *‘...Lazur’ krugom, lazur’ v dushe moei. // Pronizana lazur’iu zolotistoi ... Stoiala ty s ulybkoiu luchistoi...’*); and both the significance of his symbolic palette, and the central

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like the era, for little longer — in an immediately pre- or post-revolutionary urban setting.

<sup>124</sup> Aleksandr Blok, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 8 vols, Moscow-Leningrad: GIKhL, 1960–63, vol. 5, p. 427. An apposite illustration of the contemporary vogue for the azure is an eight-line lyric by Khodasevich’s inseparable companion of his early Symbolist phase, Muni: Как бы прозрачнее и чище / Лазурь над головой твоей. / А сердце — тихое кладбище / Былых надежд, былых страстей. // И беспечально, безнадежно, / Как светлый месяц в лоне вод, / В душе простившей, безмятежной, / Воспоминание встает (1910; Muni, *Legkoe bremsia*, p. 75). See also Khodasevich’s use of *lazur’* in connection with the soul in his own *K Psikhee (Stikhotvoreniia)*, p. 130).

thrust of his verse, are indicated by the first two lines of this long poem:

Заранее над смертью торжествуя  
И цепь времен любовью одолев...

In SF too, then, the unexpected intrusion of the azure upon the vision of Savel'ev's corpse seems to invite speculation as to whether there may not be some overarching higher meaning, some teleological purpose, that might afford 'philosophical explanation' of death's absurdity, and redeem a life and world that appear unensouled and flat. Is there, after all, a glimmer of hope, of meaning that will permit 'triumph' over apparent senselessness?

The suggestion is not explicitly articulated, and the hint seems rapidly submerged, as the funeral procession itself becomes, like the Moscow River before it, a 'clouded' vision (*smutnoe shestvoie*: cf. *mutnaia reka*). To find 'meaning' in 'azure' may, as ever, be interpretative chimera, and the danger of extrapolating *any* significance from the random superimposition of disparate entities — in this case, floorpolisher and azure air — has already been demonstrated in stanza 2. Yet as the persona re-appears at the stanza's conclusion, in the first use of the first-person pronoun since the first line of stanza 3 (35 lines ago), it is perhaps still reasonable to suppose that his rapt attention is at some level held by the elusive azure, as well as by the stronger, familiar, inexorable grip of the past:

И от мечты не отрываясь,  
Я сам в оливковом саду  
За смутным шествием иду,  
О чуждый камень спотыкаясь.

Outwardly, there is no change. The persona 'stumbles' on, isolated in a severe and alien environment, perhaps no less than Ol'ga before him in a will-less condition of semi-trance. The 'olive garden' might, as we noted earlier, be thought to contain a barely tractable implication of charismatic self-sacrificial duty to

come,<sup>125</sup> but a surface reading has little more to reveal. Once again, however, the intertextual context will offer amplification of what is at stake. The referents are fewer but more protracted than in previous stanzas, and are plunged, in Bogomolov's phrase, into the depths of the verse.

In the first place, the description of Savel'ev's funeral finds another significant precedent in Blok, and specifically his *Vozmezdie*: this time, however, in the third chapter, which was the last on which Blok worked. It was first published just before the poet's death, in the same issue of *Zapiski mechtatelei* as Ivanov's *Derev'ia*,<sup>126</sup> and affords less a conventional source of intertextual reminiscence than a template (or negative) upon which Khodasevich's stanza is 'exposed'.

Blok's theme is the death and burial not of a distant neighbour but of the estranged father, to assist at which the third-person lyric hero — as overtly autobiographical as Khodasevich's persona — has travelled to Warsaw. Narrative presentation throughout this episode is remarkably consonant with that adopted by Khodasevich, with lengthy, closely observed but dispassionate enumeration used for the location of corpse in coffin, defamiliarising fragmentation into parts of body and items of clothing, and subsequent depiction of the ceremony. There is, too, comparably shabby, subdued colouration (cf. Khodasevich's *portyri* and the attenuative *ryzhevaty*<sup>127</sup>), punctuated, in Blok also, by a single-line of banal, platitudinous dialogue:

И в комнате, чужой и тесной,  
Мертвец, собравшийся на смотр,

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<sup>125</sup> It should of course be borne in mind that *maslichnyi*, not *olivkovyi*, is the usual Russian epithet in relation to Gethsemane. Any association is accordingly more muted than the English alone might suggest.

<sup>126</sup> *Zapiski mechtatelei*, 2—3 (1921), pp. 96—112; prose foreword and poetic text are reproduced in Blok, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, vol. 5, pp. 48—62. Quotations below are from the journal edition.

<sup>127</sup> In the context of the 'little man' theme, the adjective might conceivably bring to mind the distinctly undemocratic description of Akakii Akakievich in the first paragraph of Gogol's *Shinel'*: '*neskol'ko riabovat, neskol'lo ryzhevot, neskol'ko dazhe na vid podslepovat...*'.

Спокойный, желтый, бессловесный..  
«Он славно отдохнет теперь»  
<.> Лик желтый, туфли, узость плеч...

Anatomising description resumes with a passage prefaced by anaphoric repetition of the preposition *skvoz'*, commented above in relation to SF. It is notable, too, for a colloquial adverbial phrase (*ne ochen' strogo*), used with a mildly comic effect that anticipates Khodasevich's *polubokom*, to subvert solemnity and withhold emotion:

Сквозь скуку панихид, обедней,  
Сквозь пошлость жизни без конца...  
Отец лежал не очень строго:  
Торчал измятый клок волос;  
Все шире с тайною тревогой  
Вскрывался глаз, сгибался нос;  
Улыбка жалкая скривила  
Неплотно сжатые уста...

There is also de-individualisation of proceedings: including, in the lines cited next, through use of third-person impersonal verbs, designation by social status, substitution of part of body for person, and of eloquently deadening 'lead' for human agent as grammatical subject at the sealing of the coffin:

Над гробом говорили речи;  
Цветками дама убрала  
Его приподнятые плечи;  
Потом на ребре гроба лег  
Свинец полоскою бесспорной  
(Чтоб он, воскреснув, встать не мог).  
Потом, с печалью непритворной,  
От паперти казенной прочь  
Тащили гроб, давя друг друга.

More generally in these lines, action is made strange through segmentation into component parts, reported sequentially in a

mechanistic-seeming series of short, coordinated clauses. The effect is underscored by an anaphoric *potom* which has its equivalent in Khodasevich's more insistent repetition of the unobtrusive conjunction *i* (*I ... vykhodit, ... i zagolosila, ... i tronulis', ... i skvoz', ... i polotera lob...*). Blok's adverbial phrase '*s pechal'iu neprivoornoj*' is comparable, in its ironic contextualisation, to Khodasevich's '*v sokrushenii glubokom*'; above all, his jarringly casual colloquialism *proch*' anticipates Khodasevich's concluding use of *doloi* for an essentially identical action:

И тронулись под женский вой  
Неспешно со двора долой.

Although SF does not directly quote the iambic tetrameters of Blok's *Vozmezdie*, Khodasevich's more compressed, laconic rendition of the funeral of Savel'ev shows such a sustained resemblance to his predecessor, that it might best be accounted for not merely as continuing memorial tribute, but in relation to the underlying experience of the detached, disoriented persona. Blok's hero arrives in the foreign city with an expectation of miracle or mystical illumination, expressed in terms that resonate suggestively with the dispiritingly 'stony' landscape across which Khodasevich's persona finally stumbles:

Он хочет в камне видеть хлеб,  
Бессмертья знак — на смертном ложе.

Yet in Blok, too, there is no miracle. No sign is given, and the sense is of experience and significance missed: '*I myslit syn: 'Gde prazdnik Smerti?*' The hero is transfigured; but in keeping with the tenor of the narrator's retrospective description, the result is the familiar, negative one of inner emptiness, atrophy of emotional and intellectual response, and seemingly endless, aimless, debilitating wandering in what has become the quasi-exilic space of the foreign city:

... бесцельно и тоскливо,  
Едва похоронив отца,

Ты бродишь, бродишь без конца,  
<...>  
Уже ни чувств, ни мыслей нет,  
В пустых зеницах нет сиянья,  
Как будто сердце от скитанья  
Состарилось на десять лет...

The imagery of stone is also taken up, to characterise a heart now petrified:

И сердце *каменное глухо*,  
Без сожаленья и без слуха.

And yet, at the end of the chapter's penultimate section, as this hero, too, wanders outside a 'garden' (in fact, a Warsaw park: '*beskonechnaia ograda / Saksonskogo, dolzhno byt', sada'*'), a sudden change is finally presaged. The closing promise, generalised beyond the experience of the hero, is of the possibility of an epiphanic moment of intuitive understanding:

Постигнешь слухом жизнь иную,  
Которой днем ты не постиг...  
...Всё вспыхнет в сердце благодарном,  
Ты всё благословишь тогда ...  
А мир — прекрасен, как всегда.

The essential beauty and blessed meaning of the world may yet be revealed.

Khodasevich's orientation toward *Vozmezdie* in the funeral sequence of stanza 4 might, then, finally be interpreted positively, as (somehow) reinforcing the muted intimation of a liberating understanding in Savel'ev's ascension to the 'azure air'. But there is a more powerful contrary consideration. *Vozmezdie* broke off at the end of chapter 3, because Blok had felt himself unable to continue. He declared in the Foreword that accompanied publication in *Zapiski mechtatelei* that, by 1919, he felt 'neither the need nor the wish' to complete a poem 'full of revolutionary presentiments'. Khodasevich, in a commemorative article of 1931 which

borrowed its title, 'Ni sny, ni iav"', from a posthumous publication of Blok's in the next issue of *Zapiski mechtatelei*, picked up on the imagery of hearing in the lines just quoted, to link the cessation of work on *Vozmezdnie* unequivocally and emblematically with Blok's more general loss of poetic inspiration:

Наступление «глухоты» можно датировать прекащением работы над «Возмездием» (*emphasis mine* — МВ).<sup>128</sup>

The modelling of Savel'ev's funeral after the template of *Vozmezdnie* may thus be at least provisionally connected with the demise of Blok's poetic gift — and hence of the poet himself — made redundant in the new, Revolutionary era. In an empirical, biographical sense, moreover, the hope expressed at the conclusion of the third chapter of Blok's long, uncompleted *poema* was manifestly not realised. The consequent implication for SF (and for the poet of SF) might seem to be that any faint promise of meaning arising out of flatness is dashed. The hope of renewal for the exiled 'devastated soul' (*opustoshennaia dusha*, to borrow from the long concluding sentence of *Vozmezdnie*) is misplaced and deluded.

The existential importance of the issues underlying the understated episode of the floorpolisher's funeral is clarified by two more of Khodasevich's essays: on Pompeii, which he visited from *Il Sorito*, significantly enough, on Roman Catholic Easter Monday, just a few days before he left Sorrento in April 1925;<sup>129</sup> and on another Silver Age poet, Innokentii Annenskii, in whose memory he spoke at the Petrograd House of Arts on 14 December 1921. The speech, published in 1922, was of sufficiently lasting relevance to Khodasevich for him to reissue it as late as March 1935 — slightly curtailed, toned down in expression, but with the major-

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<sup>128</sup> *SS-Moscow*, vol. 2, p. 218. Blok's dream-like prose sketch, in which the soul, parted from the body, is consigned to the torment of contemporary Russia, appeared prominently in the issue dedicated to his memory: *Zapiski mechtatelei*, 4 (1921), pp. 12–15.

<sup>129</sup> Khodasevich dates his visit, without allusion to Easter, as 13 April 1925; he left Sorrento on 18 April (*Kamer-fur'erskii zhurnal*, p. 67).



ity of the text intact, and no fundamental alteration in theme or structure.<sup>130</sup> It revealed, in Iu.D. Levin's view, that 'Khodasevich suffered from the same sicknesses as Annenskii, and tried agonisingly to overcome them'.<sup>131</sup>

Khodasevich's indubitably partial reading of Annenskii<sup>132</sup> is of a man and poet obsessed by death. Annenskii 'knew and remembered death' at all times:

смерть — основной, самый стойкий мотив его поэзии, упорно повторяющийся в неприкрытом виде и более или менее уловимый всегда, всюду, как острый и терпкий запах циана, веющий над его стихами.

Yet his 'cry of intolerable and interminable horror' (*krik ob uzhasе, nesterpimom i bezyskhodnom*) went largely unrecognised, beneath the reticent formal exterior presented alike by the structure of his verse and the uniform of the Ministry of Education.

Annenskii's oppressive consciousness of death was bound up, in Khodasevich's analysis, with an almost equal fear of life: each of them 'unknown' and 'incomprehensible', and in the epistemological uncertainty they engender, apparently redolent only of a prosaic meaninglessness. The assessment indeed comes close to the mood and preoccupations of Khodasevich himself — who by 1925 had embarked on the memoirs he would eventually publish under the title of *Nekropol'*, and whose last three poetry collections contained, besides SF, no less than seven other depictions of bodies in coffins.<sup>133</sup> His description of the 'almost invariable' context in which such sentiments are embodied in

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<sup>130</sup> For the two texts see, respectively: *SS-Ardis*, vol. 2, pp. 318–33; Khodasevich, *Izbrannaia proza*, pp. 129–41. Quotations below are from the longer, 1922 text.

<sup>131</sup> Levin, 'Zametki o poezii Vl. Khodasevicha', p. 57. Levin discerns several reminiscences from Annenskii in Khodasevich's lyrics in support of his observation (*ibid.*, pp. 57–58).

<sup>132</sup> A recent Annenskii-centred analysis unequivocally concludes that Khodasevich's account is 'simplified and generalised in accordance with the moralising imperatives of the critic' (V.A. Cherkasov, '„Vinograd sozreval...“: I. Annenskii v otsenke V. Khodasevicha', *Russkaia literatura*, 2004, 3, p. 188).

Annenskii's verse reads accordingly like another potential blueprint for the funeral episode of SF (truly, then, 'double-exposed' against two intertextual negatives):

Собственно говоря, смерть пугает его почти тем же, чем жизнь: неизвестностью, непонятностью <...>. И — безобразием, мещанскою прозаичностью. Мысль о ней почти всегда сопряжена для Анненского с представлениями о грубой, мишурной, убого-помпезной обрядности панихиды или погребения, с этим «маскарадом печалей», лишний раз подчеркивающим безжалостную, равнодушную безучастность всего живого, остающегося здесь, к мертвецу, уходящему «туда».

Notably, too, Annenskii's presentation of funeral ritual is characteristically conveyed by itemising accumulation of the tawdry *realia* of death:

...изломанные цветы, венки, траур, ленты, свечи, гроба, коптящие фонари, клячи, дроги, цилиндры, га-лоши, гробовщики — постоянные спутники смерти у Анненского.

Their pointless superfluity (*nenuzhnost'*) betokens the senselessness (*bessmyslitsa*) of life, which the fear of death, for Annenskii as for Tolstoi's Ivan Il'ich, has rendered 'deadening, unresponsive to everything, mendacious, shabby and spectral' (*mertvenna, glukha ko vsemu*, — the lexeme by which Blok's final silence was described above — *polna lzhi, poshlosti i prizrachnosti*). It is, then, both tempting and reasonable to see Khodasevich's presentation of Savel'ev's funeral, with the paraphernalia of coffin, icon, towels, jacket, as just such an Annenskian 'masquerade of sorrows' (cf. '*v sokrushenii glubokom*'): an embodiment of the same petty-

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<sup>133</sup> See 'O, esli b v etot chas zhelannogo pokoia', *Smolenskii rynek, Zoloto, 'Ne mater'iu, no tul'skoiu krest'iankoi'*, *Okna vo dvor, Dzhon Bottom, Pokhorony (Stikhotvoreniia*, pp. 102, 105, 109, 118—19, 175—76, 178—85, 189); cf. also the draft of *Slezy Rakhili* (ibid., p. 374), and the description of a coffin being made — at the autobiographically resonant locus of a basement on 7-oi Rostovskii pereulok — in *2-go noiabria* (ibid., p. 111)

bourgeois prosaicism, benighted pomposity and pitilessly indifferent detachment (*'Nu, Ol'ga, polno'*; the greater detachment of the observing persona), ultimately revealing of a profound loss or absence of meaning. The coarse physical reality accentuates both the incomprehensibility of death, and a disjuncture between living and dead, life and death, so absolute that life itself is deprived of meaning. The exilic condition is universalised as one of mute separation from death.

An 'Annenskian' reading of Savel'ev's funeral is of course by no means incompatible with a simultaneous orientation toward Blok. It exemplifies once more that polyvalent 'multiplicity of tasks' which, in his analysis of Pushkin, Khodasevich related to the fundamental propensity to show an object — or presumably a scene — 'from a whole multitude of points of view'. In this case, the technique might aptly be described by Terapiano's 'dually co-existing parallelism'.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, the particular relevance of the 'masquerade of death' is further elucidated by Khodasevich's essay on Pompeii. The vocabulary and imagery he used to record his first-hand impressions of a historical site more terrible than any cemetery (*'na kladbishche — primirennost', zdes' tol'ko uzhas'*) coincide, to a remarkable degree throughout, with his profoundly personal critical appraisal of Annenskii. The following passage refers directly to the mask, the fundamental attribute of the masquerade, in relating the overarching theme of death to the worldly professions that figure so prominently in stanza 4 of SF (as also, incidentally, in Khodasevich's critical-biographical attention to Annenskii's standing and death as government official):

Когда человек умирает в болезни, в изношенности  
своего тела, спадает случайное, временное, как заботы,  
хлопоты или всяческие черты его профессии. Спадает  
маска — обнажается лицо. Умирает не сапожник, не  
врач, не актер, а человек, раб Божий. <...> Есть момент  
очищения в <...> этих смертях. В Помпее не было его.  
Как жили, так и умирали: не «человеками», а булочни-

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<sup>134</sup> See notes 23 and 25 above.

ками, сапожниками, проститутками, актерами. Так и «перешли за предел» — в грязных земных личинах...<sup>135</sup>

In the poem Khodasevich completed a few months later, however, it seems that the mask (if such it really is) never quite does 'fall away', to 'bare the face' of the 'man' beneath. Savel'ev, even in his coffin after death, is not 'servant of God', but 'floor-polisher' mourned by washer-women, and the narrative insistence on profession is so unremitting that his very clothing appears contaminated by paronomastic association (*poloter* > *potertyi*, *polosatyi pidzhak*). The glimpse of the 'curly forehead' in the azure air might hint, beguilingly, belatedly, at a final relaxation of the mask; but the perception remains that of *polotera lob kurcahvyi*. One explanation, of course, may be that the jaded, de-personalising negativity of depiction is throughout not a true reflection of the inner lives of the 'human beings' (servants of God) who are observed, but a function and symptom of the narrator's ailing, subjective perception and whimsical recollection. It is the poem's persona, in his condition of emotionally stifled exilic detachment, who is unable to see through 'the shabby earthly guise'. But an alternative explanation is that the 'moment of purification' denied to the Pompeians before death is no longer to be had: people again 'die as they have lived', as 'bakers, cobblers, prostitutes...'. They are outside the remit of divine sanction, for a new Pompeian cataclysm has been visited not just upon Savel'ev, but on Russia, and perhaps the era. The condition is again generalised toward the universal.

The competence of the persona comes further into consideration in the few lines that round off this funeral episode and stanza:

Я сам в оливковом саду  
За смутным шествием иду,  
О чуждый камень спотыкаясь.

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<sup>135</sup> 'Pompeiskii uzhas', *Poslednie novosti*, 10 May 1925; repr. as V. F. Khodasevich, 'Pompeia', *Chast' rechi*, 1983, 4—5, p. 32. The phrase 'pereshli za predel' is a quotation from Briusov's poem *Pompeianka*.

The intertextual range now broadens, principally in the direction of Khodasevich's own poetic texts; but the preceding, protracted evocation of both Blok and Annenskii remains an underlying basis for interpretation.<sup>136</sup> In particular, as suggested above, the metapoetic theme of previous stanzas is taken up here. Blok, once more, provides one apparent signal of this, with the first-person action of stumbling with misted vision across stony cliff-top ground reminiscent not of *Vozmezdie*, but of the closing, 'homeless' section of *Solov'inyi sad*:

Или я заблудился в тумане?  
Или кто-нибудь шутит со мной?  
Нет, я помню *камней* очертанье,  
Тощий куст и скалу над водой...

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<sup>136</sup> It is possible that a deeply submerged subtext of this section of SF is Blok's reminiscence in the opening paragraph of 'Rytsar' monakh' (1911) of his only encounter with Vladimir Solov'ev, at the funeral of a relative in 1900. The living Solov'ev — 'as yet unfathomed and doubling before us', in the words with which the essay concludes — seems a 'wild' (*dikii*), incongruously other-worldly being, whose very presence (and sudden disappearance) imparts a momentary spectrality to the solid reality of the funeral cortège: '*shestvie etogo cheloveka kazalos' dikim sredi kuchki obyknovennykh liudei, trusivshikh za kolesnitsei. Cherez neskol'ko minut ia podniat glaza: cheloveka uzhe ne bylo; on ischez kak-to nezametno — i shestvie prevratilos' v obyknovennuiu pokhoronnnuiu protsessiiu*' (Blok, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, p. 446). It is worth adding that Blok's abiding impression of this 'strange vision' was of the 'bottomless blueness' of Solov'ev's gaze (*bezdonnaia sineva*; cf. the azure and radiance referred to at note 124 above); whilst the following paragraph, in which he goes on to describe reports of a reading by Solov'ev of *Panmongolizm* (see above), is introduced by a reflection on Solov'ev's fame ('*V to vremia okolo Solov'eva shumela uzhe nastoiashchaia slava, ne tol'ko russkaia, no i evropeiskaia*'). This might be taken as a hitherto unremarked polemical rejoinder to the concluding sentiment of Gumilev's ideologically important assessment of Annenskii, published just a few months previously in *Apollon* (№ 8, 1910): '*I teper' vremia skazat', chto ne tol'ko Rossiia, no i vsia Evropa poteriala odnogo iz bol'shikh poetov...*'. Thus Blok's essay, which examines Solov'ev's legacy in relation to death and the eternal (and, like Khodasevich on Annenskii, takes Tolstoi as a seminal yardstick), is already implicitly juxtaposed against the counter-example of Annenskii, whom Khodasevich would examine in his essay of a decade later in a much darker, more negative treatment of the same metaphysical themes. (I am grateful to Ruth Coates for directing me to Blok's essay.)

Где же дом? — И скользкой ногою  
Спотыкаюсь о брошенный лом...

Blok's lines mark the re-emergence of his persona from the enchantment of the nightingale garden to a recognition of the call of duty, and thus to comfortless resumption of a harshly demanding spiritual-creative path in a now defamiliarised landscape. (The garden, as A. V. Lavrov argues, perhaps simultaneously symbolised 'the world of the bright ideal, lost, but unshaken in its spiritual foundations, and the world of „decadent” isolation and outcast'.<sup>137</sup> Like the topography of Blok's closing section, both meanings seem pertinent to SF.) Given Khodasevich's grammatically emphatic reintroduction of the first person (*Ia sam*) after long delay, the 'stone' might also in this context — and perhaps against the background of the paternal theme of *Vozmezdie* — recall Khodasevich's own early formulation in *Vozvrashchenie Orfeia* (1910) of a painful, reluctant return to poetic duty, in circumstances the debilitated poet feels in advance to be fruitless:

Отец, отец! Ужель опять, как прежде,  
Пленять зверей, да камни чаровать?  
Иль песнью новою, без мысли о надежде,  
Детей и дев к печали приучать?

Пустой души пустых очарований  
Не победит ни зверь, ни человек.

Among more recent poems, the '*chuzhdyi kamen*' of SF resonates also with the stone of exile in *Evropeiskaia noch*: with the poem '*Vse kamennoe. V kamennyi prolet...*' and, notably, with the '*chuzhoi granit*' at the conclusion of the contemporaneous *Pod zemlei* (both September 1923):

И трость моя в чужой гранит  
Неумолкаемо стучит.

As Bethea has shown, the 'alien granite' is part of a complex metaphor for the difficulty of poetic creation and 'the tragic barrenness of Russian poetry in emigration', the poet feeling that 'he

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<sup>137</sup> Lavrov, '„Solov'inyi sad" A. Bloka', p. 249.

has been struck down by an angry Lord because his work has become seeds on a foreign pavement'. Its full impact depends in no small measure on a series of contextual inversions of the title poem of *Putem zerna* (1917):<sup>138</sup>

Проходит сеятель по ровным бороздам.  
Отец его и дед по тем же шли путям.

Сверкает золотом в руке его зерно,  
Но в землю черную оно упасть должно.

<...> Так и душа моя идет путем зерна:  
Сойдя во мрак, умрет и оживет она.

И ты, моя страна, и ты, ее народ,  
Умрешь и оживешь, пройдя сквозь этот год...

This symbolically resonant precursor-poem, with its pun on the poet's own surname in its first line (*khodit' + seiat'*),<sup>139</sup> is also brought directly into the referential sphere at the close of stanza 4 of SF: not least, through the prominent self-identification of '*ia sam'*' in close conjunction with the 'walking' emphatically encoded in both noun and verb of the near-tautological '*za ... shestviiem idu'*'. Its Biblically inspired articulation of a myth of creative (and national) death and rebirth perhaps, after all, activates the connotation of impending self-immolatory sacrifice implicit in the setting of the 'garden of olives'. It more clearly links back, through Khodasevich's likewise paternally oriented poem on 'poor' Orpheus (*Vozvrashchenie Orfeia* begins with words strikingly anticipatory of the exiled persona of SF: '*O pozhaleite bednogo Orfeia! / Kak skuchno pet' na ploskom beregu!''), to the Dantean-Odyssean-Orphic mythopoetic contexts of descent into an underworld evoked, through further semantic play on the 'measured pace' of the walker, in the cluster of association around '*stopoiu nishchenskoiu'*' at the end of stanza 3.*

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<sup>138</sup> Bethea, *Khodasevich*, pp. 292–94.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

There is, nevertheless, an obvious and important distinction between SF and Khodasevich's own earlier poem. In *Putem zerna*, the sower poet, walking the furrows of ancestral tradition, was on rich 'black earth'; now he is stumbling (compare also the *trost'* to which the persona must have recourse, to aid his progress and tap the Berlin pavements in *Pod zemlei!*), and the ground is stony. The relevant Biblical text is no longer that of the seed that falls into the earth, dies and brings forth much fruit,<sup>140</sup> but Jesus' exegesis in respect of the seed that falls on stone:

А посеянное на каменистых местах означает того,  
кто слышит слово и тотчас с радостью принимает его;  
Но не имеет в себе корня и непостоянен...<sup>141</sup>

In one sense, the distinction is merely another poignant measure of the debilitating decline that is the result of exile: from a state of being and of creative activity that, in 1917, was possessed at least of purposeful conviction in the face of tribulation, to the present 'rootless' self, 'inconstant' even in the whimsical uncontrol of its own mental processes. Within the portentous intertextual contexts built up across the closing lines of this and previous stanzas, however, the disjuncture is plainly not just between past and present selves, but between the high avocation of poet — or perhaps of charismatic poet-prophet, described in 'Tsitaty' as quintessential to Russian letters<sup>142</sup> — and the ordinary man: the drifting, damaged, diminished persona of SF, scarcely likely to charm the stones or reap fertile seed. Nor is this a static opposition. The cumulative weight of intertextual reminiscences contains a strong imperative to (re-)assumption of poetic duty. This brings back into more urgent focus the uncertain creative capacity of the per-

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<sup>140</sup> As Göbler points out (*Chodasevič*, p. 83) the Biblical source is in 1 Corinthians 14: 36 ff., as well as the more familiar John 12: 24. Corinthians gives extended exegesis in terms of *spiritual* resurrection ('*Seetsia telo dushevnoe, vosstaet telo dukhovnoe*'; verse 44).

<sup>141</sup> Matthew 13: 20—21; cf. Mark 4: 5—6, 16—17.

<sup>142</sup> *SS-Ardis*, vol 2, p. 428. Further on the poet-prophet, see discussion of stanza 10 below.



sona in exile, implicit of course from the outset, and brought into consideration at the end of stanza 2 through allusion to the 'visions within' in *Vozmezdie*. In the stumbling gait at stanza's end, there is a clear onus to regain direction — or at least to test the possibility of so doing.

Inevitably, a submerged injunction in mid-poem to resumption of poetic activity is liable to appear paradoxical or even absurdly tautological. What is at stake, however, is the ability to produce poetry of true (Orphic-prophetic) significance. The nature of the intention, and its urgency at the conclusion of this particular episode, may now be understood more clearly in the context of Khodasevich's analysis of Annenskii. The latter, so Khodasevich states, knew full well that the 'lyric impulses' of his verse, his 'feelings and thoughts', were insufficient to conquer death. Yet like Tolstoi's Ivan Il'ich, Annenskii failed to recognise also that 'to make sense of death it is necessary to make sense of life':

Осмыслить же свою жизнь значит найти для нее некое высшее мерило, и высший подвиг, нежели простое накопление «мыслей и чувств» (у Ивана Ильича) и нежели эстетическое любование ими (у поэта Анненского). Больше того, для осмысления жизни, своей жизни в частности, эта частная, личная жизнь должна быть не только пересмотрена, а и подчинена такому высшему императиву. Маленькое «я» надо сжечь, чтобы из пепла встало иное, очищенное и расширенное.

The price of failure in this endeavour (*podvig*) of comprehension is the empty, senseless, mind-numbing flickering of the cinematograph:

Без этого осмысления вся лирическая отзывчивость, тонкость, сложность Анненского — пустое, бессмысленное, дурманящее мелькание синематографа, кошмар, мираж, чепуха...<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> *SS-Ardis*, vol 2, pp. 329—30.

In creative terms, it is to remain in the perceptual and psychical condition hitherto exemplified in SF, from random double-exposures to the 'cinematic' sequence of stanza 4.

For all the difference in rhetoric, the task is not fundamentally different from that articulated through the tripartite formula of 'inspiration, sweet sounds and prayers' of Khodasevich's anniversary essay on Pushkin's *Poet i tolpa*. But there is at this point a much more forceful, existentially acute acknowledgement of the need to pass beyond the passive recording of impressions that has been the overt norm in SF (and which may be equated to Annenskii's purely 'aesthetic appreciation'), to an '„explanation" or philosophical interpretation' that is informed by a 'prayerful' sense of overarching, higher principle (*vysshee merilo*): of 'Him with whose creation one compares one's own', however the poet might choose to call Him.<sup>144</sup> (More could not be asked even of the Dantean-Orphic ideal; while the ethical distance from Pushkin noted in the discussion of the first lines of SF becomes particularly telling.) The difficulty in this is all too obvious: to diagnose the requirement is straightforward enough; but to 'find ... some higher measure' where one is lacking, to re-inspect the life in order to 'subordinate it to some higher imperative' and thereby redeem the petty, ailing self, is easier said than done. For Annenskii (as also for Tolstoi's Ivan Il'ich), it was Khodasevich's estimation that nothing short of a miracle was needed:

Расширение «я» могло произойти лишь чудом, которого они не знали и в которое не верили.<sup>145</sup>

For Annenskii-as-poet (whatever the frame of mind of Annenskii the man, as he went anxiously to his death at the Tsarskoe Selo Station), the miracle never came. Blok, who set out in *Vozmezdie* to describe in prayerful attitude accumulated internal impressions ('*to, chto my v sebe taim'*), perhaps seemed to succeed with the epiphanic conclusion of his longest poem:

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<sup>144</sup> 'O chtenii Pushkina (K 125-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia)', p. 175.

<sup>145</sup> *SS-Ardis*, vol. 2, p. 330. See also the discussion of stanza 6 below.

Постигнешь слухом жизнь иную,  
<...>  
А мир — прекрасен, как всегда.

But the moment was conditional and transient, at odds with the underlying reality of Blok's own circumstances to which Khodasevich drew attention in his later commentary. The auditory epiphany of *Vozmezdie* might in that respect be summarised in the words of the parable:

...кто слышит слово и тотчас с радостью принимает его;  
Но не имеет в себе корня и непостоянен...

For the miracle-starved persona, stumbling across alien stone in stanza 4 of SF, the chances of success therefore seem almost impossibly remote. Ironically, indeed, the very condition of exile from wholeness and purpose that precipitates the need for a guiding imperative may inherently preclude its discovery (the self is already too divided and disoriented); and, as ever, there is the possibility that there is nothing to be discovered behind the meaningless masque of earthly existence. Together with the potential for vicious circularity of failure in one who is 'rootless and inconstant', precisely the quest for a 'higher imperative' will nevertheless serve to structure the following stanzas of SF; whilst the gap between text and subtext, *маленькое «я»* and poet-ideal, will continue to define and compound the divided psychical plight of the exile.

### Stanzas 5–7

These three stanzas shift to another and more elaborate, public funereal procession, to depict a Good Friday event in Sorrento, culminating in a cathedral Church at dawn. There is no overt superimposition of memories of Russia. Stanza 5 sets the scene, with the arrival of the persona and his companion by motorbike into the slumbering town, and description of the ap-

proaching procession. Stanza 6 concentrates on the statue of Mary, represented as the procession's focal point. Stanza 7 delineates a quasi-epiphanic moment in the Cathedral. Khodasevich's drafts contained a good deal of additional, incidental description, and some of the overt narrative linkages have been pared down. Characteristically, for example, several variants of a quatrain describing Mary's statue being carried from the darkness of the streets, through the Church doors, to the '*zlatoi koster*' inside, were rejected in favour of the laconic phrase '*Uzh Ona v sobore*' at the start of stanza 7. Continuity of exposition is thereby deliberately diminished. The three stanzas nevertheless constitute a clear and coherent single sequence. In contrast to those which precede, they appear closely linked not by the whimsicality of internal, mnemonic associative leap (as between stanzas 3 and 4), but by unfolding narration of an external event.

Good Friday has traditionally been marked in Sorrento by two separate processions, dating back to at least the 1500s and, in present form, to the eighteenth century. The first is that of Our Lady of Sorrows or the 'Visitation of the Sepulchres'. This procession begins in the early hours of Good Friday morning, between 3-4 am, and concludes at first light, visiting many of the town's churches in representation of the Madonna's search for her Son, taken prisoner and condemned to death. The second, the 'Procession of the Dead Christ', commemorating Mary's discovery of her Son on the Cross, takes place at around 8 in the evening, and culminates in a nocturnal Liturgy 'with the wood of the Cross'. The first, in which the penitent-participants are dressed in hooded white robes, is known also as 'La Processione Bianca'; the second, in which the hooded robes are black, as 'La Processione Nera'. Both include a large male choir and band, with many of several hundred participants carrying incense or lighted torches; in both, in addition to crucifixes, other participants carry, one by one, representations of the so-called 'mysteries' and 'martyrs' of Christ's suffering, including each of the objects enumerated in Khodasevich's fifth stanza: whip, purple robe, crown of thorns, nails, hammer and ladder. Both processions incorporate a full-size statue of Mary, on an ornate pedestal wrought in gold, with

candles and white roses at her feet, carried aloft on wooden poles on the shoulders of participants. In the ‘Processione Bianca’ she is robed in dark red and blue, with a vertical, stellate halo; in the ‘Processione Nera’, the Lady of Sorrows (*Madonna Addolorata*) wears a black robe with white trimmings, and a golden crown. Both of these polished ‘waxen statues’ stand upright, with head tilted slightly backward, hands pressed together in supplicatory gesture, a handkerchief clasped between them.<sup>146</sup>

The time of day, from quiet of night through to dawn, suggests that Khodasevich’s stanzas are constructed around closely observed representation of the ‘Processione Bianca’ which took place on 10 April 1925. This is apparently confirmed by reference in the substantial cancelled drafts of this section both to the juncture between Holy Thursday and Good Friday (e. g.: ‘*I noch’ nastala. Tikhii, sonnyi / [Konets Strastnogo Chetverga]’*), and to figures in white robes (‘*Dva belykh prizraka mel’knuli... Dva kapiushona mne vzglianuli*’; ‘*...v bezlikikh kapiushonakh, / Poparno, v belykh balakhonakh*’).<sup>147</sup> Yet the simile which compares to a ‘black sail’ a banner heralding the procession’s approach (‘*Kak chernyi parus, mezh domami*’) seems to relate instead to the ‘Processione Nera’: the banners and insignia carried in the preceding procession are predominantly blue, and specifically not black. The same applies to the (potentially punning) description of the crowd as ‘*cherneia*’ (*chernet*’ and the adjective *chernyi* are also variously deployed in the drafts, which, it should be emphasised, leave no doubt that the reference is to the ‘black crowd of heads’ — *chernaiia tolpa golov* — of participants in the procession, not of unhooded spectators).<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, the ‘*nedosiagaemyi venets*’ might seem a

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<sup>146</sup> For details of the processions, numerous photographs, and video materials from recent years, see the extensive website at <http://www.processioni.com/index.asp> (accessed 22 November 2009). Note that representations of the Sorrento processions should be distinguished from those at Piano di Sorrento and elsewhere on the Sorrentine peninsula.

<sup>147</sup> *SS-Ardis*, vol. 1, pp. 447 (cf. also pp. 446, 448), 451, 453.

<sup>148</sup> Other draft variants of line 2 of stanza 6 (‘*Tolpa kolyshetsia, cherneia*’) included an unequivocal description of the procession’s approach: ‘*I blizitsia [kolyshetsia] tolpa golov <...> / V tesnime sdvintuykh domov*’; to be compared with: ‘*[I chernaia] tolpa golov, / [Kolyshetsia] / Kak stado sbitoe cherneia*’, etc. (*ibid.*, p. 454).

more apt description of the crown that adorns the head of the 'black' Mary than of the pointed halo fixed behind the head of the figure in the 'Processione Bianca'. It seems likely, in other words, that for all their basis in precise observation of the first, early morning procession, Khodasevich's stanzas provide a composite description (and constitute thereby another approximation to the mnemonic double exposure), into which elements of the second, evening procession are also incorporated. In view of a potential for direct parallelism to the burial of Savel'ev, with its associated considerations of death and its dominion, it is therefore notable, too, that Khodasevich nevertheless refrains from any reference to the effigy that importantly precedes Mary in the 'Processione Nera': a representation of the dead Christ, laid out contortedly in his coffin, naked and bearded. Christ remains absent throughout.

Khodasevich's version of the Good Friday procession readily lends itself to the search for the 'higher imperative' found to be wanting in the preceding stanza and section. The present stanzas relate, however, not to religion alone but to three overlapping and closely intertwined modes of significance — religious, ritual-mythic, and (Russian) Symbolist — traced through and offset against a subversive intrusion of modernity, and a familiar impulse to sceptical estrangement. Evaluation is further complicated by Khodasevich's position in relation to Roman Catholicism. The Italian public procession is essentially 'alien' (and it is notable that a week later, on the evening of his arrival from Sorrento on 18 April, Khodasevich attended the Russian Church in Rome for celebration of Orthodox Easter).<sup>149</sup> But Catholicism, at least in its private manifestation, was also one component of the poet's own, culturally and confessionally complex childhood; and it is perhaps no accident that, in one possible interpretation, these stanzas accomplish an apparent shift from exiled alienation toward acceptance, from an outsider's to an insider's point of view.

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<sup>149</sup> Cf. *Kamerfur'erskii zhurnal*, p. 67. Orthodox Easter Day was 19 April 1925.

Equivocation remains necessary, however: for between the cliffs and agaves of stanzas 3-4 and the streets of Sorrento in stanzas 5-7 there is no expansion of the diminished, fundamentally passive persona. On the contrary, the first-person singular is entirely absent from these stanzas, and affective reaction is as difficult to gauge as ever. Following the ruminations on poetic duty at the end of stanza 4, there is a brief flurry of consciously directed activity at the opening of stanza 5, where the persona and companion(s) arrive as noisily intrusive outsiders into the quiet town:

Мы шумно ворвались туда...

But cessation of this aggressively self-assertive encroachment is immediate. Its curtailment is conveyed metadescriptively, by an enjambement that brings the sentence up short after a second verb, three syllables into the next line:

И стали.

The remaining 24 lines of the stanza accordingly comprise a 'static' record of seemingly dispassionate observation, its passivity corroborated by a slightly cumbersome subjunctive construction, implying that the procession itself relieves the collective observers of interpretative effort:

И чтобы видеть мы могли  
Воочию всю ту седмицу...

In stanza 6, a shift in mid-stanza from description to rhetorical question (*'Ne otogo l' k Ee podnozh'iu...'*) indicates an slight increase in personal engagement, further perceptible in the apparently semi-comic exclamation that brings the stanza to an end:

Он улыбается Марии.  
Мария! Улыбнись ему!

This, however, is the limit of the persona's affective involvement, and indications of personal responsiveness are disconcertingly

absent from stanza 7. At the potentially culminating moment of 'understanding' (*osmyslenie*) of this Easter sequence, description is at its most inscrutably de-personalised. The interpretative consequences must be unravelled below.

### Stanza 5

The fifth stanza begins, not directly with the visitors to Sorrento, but with the motorcycle that brings them there. Again, that is, human agency is attenuated. The abrupt shift from the preceding lines, where the speaker could only stumble on foot across the quasi-biblical, stony landscape, is accentuated by cacophonous, near-onomatopoeic alliteration. Another expressive use of enjambement and subsequent mid-line syntactic break also contributes to convey the motorcycle's jarring dynamism:

Мотоциклетка стрекотнула  
И сорвалась.

Its impact is visual as well as auditory (*'Zatrepetal / Prozhektor po ustupam skal'*), and the rudeness of this echoing intrusion of modernity is underscored by another, cognate verb of violent motion (*'i vorvalis''*). The discordance is emphasised in contrast both to the slumbering town:

Сорренто спит в сырых громадах

and to the splash of distant waterfalls that are heard once the motorcycle comes to a halt:

...вода  
В далеких плещет водопадах.

The use of *gromady* for the edifices that characterise the town at sleep might constitute a distant reminiscence of the Introduction to *Mednyi vsadnik*:



И ясны стящие громады  
Пустынных улиц.

Sorrentine ‘dampness’ would in that case offer an unprepossessing counterpart to Petersburgian ‘clarity’. It is conceivable, too, that the waterfalls contain a fainter reverberation of another Pushkinian locus — the splashing waterfalls of Tsarskoe Selo: the echoing space that the motorcyclists invade is, as we shall see, on some level poetic.<sup>150</sup> More immediately, however, there are discernible echoes of the ambience and texts of Blok’s Italian poems. The use of *spat’* in conjunction with the name of an Italian town recalls the memorable first stanza of *Ravenna*, which initiates Blok’s theme of contrast between grandiloquent past, eternity, and sordidly transient present:

...Ты, как младенец, спишь, Равенна,  
У сонной вечности в руках.

And Khodasevich’s obtrusive motorcycle headlamp, thrown into relief in line-initial position by mild syntactic inversion (*‘Zatrepetal / Prozhektor’*), resonates with the use of the same, unpoetically modern noun — to similar effect, albeit with different referent — in the scene-setting opening lines of one of the Florentine poems:

Окна ложные на небе черном  
И прожектор на древнем дворце.<sup>151</sup>

Blok’s contempt for the triviality of the modern world is at its most scathing in the *Florentsiia* sequence (where, incidentally, his invective extended to bicycles, though not — in 1909 — to motor-cycles: *‘Zveniat v pyli velosipedy / Tam, gde sviatoi monakh*

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<sup>150</sup> Cf. *Vospominaniia v Tsarskom Sele*: ‘S kholmov kremmistrykh vodopady / Stekaiut bisernoi rekoj / Tam v tikhom ozere pleskaiutsia naiady...’ etc.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. also Khodasevich’s emphatically negative use of this noun in *Zvezdy*, the final poem of *Evropeiskaia noch’*: ‘Otkrylis’ temnye predely / I vot — skvoz’ dym tabachnykh tuch — / Prozhektora zelenyi luch’ (autumn 1925; *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 185).

*sozhzhen'*). But whereas Blok's overt concern is with the opposition of culture and history to 'civilisation', Khodasevich juxtaposes the modern civilisation of which his persona is here the bearer (more accurately, the passively borne) against still older, mythic-ritualistic patterns:

В Страстную Пятницу всегда  
На глаз приметно мир пустеет,  
Айдесский, древний ветер веет,  
И ущербляется луна.

These densely alliterated lines foreground not the uniqueness of the Passion, but annual, cyclical repetition (*vsegda*). Cyclicity of time is also implicit in the waning of the Paschal moon, and, incidentally, in the allusion to Holy Week as *ta sedmitsa* later in the stanza. The visible 'emptying of the world' takes place against the imposing cosmic-elemental background of water (the splashing waterfalls), 'ancient wind', the waning of the literally 'damaged' (*ushcherb*) moon, and the darkness evoked in the stanza's opening. The striking adjective *Aidesskii* has precedents in Pushkin and (in nominal form) in Baratynskii, where it is used in semi-facetious reference to the Classical underworld;<sup>152</sup> but here the relatively rare archaism seems to intensify the aura of mythical solemnity attendant upon a world implicitly abandoned by the dead or dying God, and, in its unmistakable eclecticism, to extend the 'ancient' ritual pattern beyond the specifically Catholic-Christian.<sup>153</sup> The emphasis of Khodasevich's lines appears to rest on a broad and primitive mythical convergence of sympathetic natural and perhaps chthonic forces.

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<sup>152</sup> Thus '*Klianus' tebe aidesskim bogom: / On [skelet] budet družhby mne zalogom...*', in anticipation of a mock descent into the underworld in Pushkin's 1827 *Poslanie Del'vigu*; '*u vrat Aidesa*' in Baratynskii's *Eliziiskie polia*. Cf. also Khodasevich's 1917 *U moria (Stikhotvoreniia, p. 106)*.

<sup>153</sup> Equally, despite the 'Hellish ... wind', there is no obvious association here with the Crucified Christ's Descent into Hell or (Catholic) 'Harrowing of Hell' (in either case, emphatically *Ad*, not *Aides*), which tradition ascribes to the following day, Easter Saturday.

The persona's perception, encompassing hearing and sight, seemingly tinged with awe, is of a low-point of emptiness and darkness. Inevitably, though, the strong indications of periodicity connote potential antitheses: ritually recurrent sequences of waning and waxing, emptiness and plenitude, darkness and light, death and life. From this point of view (to state the obvious), there can be — over the long term, at least — no finality of despair, no nadir without compensatory hope. Yet identification of such sequences is manifestly not equivalent to discovery of the 'higher imperative' that Khodasevich refers to in his essay on Annenskii. As the myth-critic and literary comparatist Northrop Frye maintained, in an incisive observation that seems thoroughly pertinent to the context of Khodasevich's lines:

Ritual, by itself, cannot account for itself: it is pre-logical, pre-verbal, and in a sense pre-human. Its attachment to the calendar seems to link human life to the biological dependence on the natural cycle which plants, and to some extent animals, still have.<sup>154</sup>

Attunement to ritual moment or overarching cyclical pattern is not the same as philosophical *osmyslenie*.

It may also be the case that the pattern as such is more significant here than the point reached or direction taken. Pattern *per se* is antithetical to 'whimsical' randomness. It suggests an order, rather than absurdity, behind existence; and at least therefore a relational ground for construction of meaning. This is in contrast to the resistance of potentially elemental thematic material to persuasive structuring in stanza 2; whilst the intuited link of the fragmented self (with its alienated, organic memory) to the natural, biological world, means that the exilic isolation of the individual is not absolute. The attraction of ritual patterning for the sophisticated, disoriented modernist is in this respect entirely comprehensible, and may in itself perhaps partake of cyclicity. Frye, once again — who would derive all genres of literature

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<sup>154</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957), London: Penguin, 1990, p. 106.

from myth — discerns in European literature a broad literary-historical sequence of five fictional modes, from myth to romance to high mimetic to low mimetic to ironic. But as the latter, predominant from the turn of the twentieth century (and well exemplified by Khodasevich), ‘descends’ from its ‘low mimetic’ beginnings, in realism and dispassionate observation, toward the senselessly random and incongruous, so also ‘it moves steadily towards myth, and dim outlines of sacrificial rituals and dying gods begin to reappear in it. Our five modes evidently go round in a circle’.<sup>155</sup> Frye cites the examples of Kafka and Joyce. One might easily add the Eliot of *The Waste Land*, and many others. Khodasevich is again in illustrious company, in charting a cyclical experience that is redolent of a broader mythical pattern by no means specific to the Russian exile.

In contradistinction to the masterpieces of these major European contemporaries, the mythical worldview is nevertheless not structurally pivotal to SF, but rather one more, fleetingly considered component in the unremitting sequence of Khodasevich’s ‘multiplicity of tasks’. Its shortcomings are not just ontological (inadequate ‘philosophical explanation’ of external impressions), but epistemological. In SF, the mythical perception is explicitly and precisely just that: a manifestation not of the real world, but of the perceived (*‘na glaz primetno...’*) world that is a construct of the brain.<sup>156</sup> The structural pivot of Khodasevich’s extended lyric thus remains the imperfect self modelled in the opening stanza, literally riven by uncertainties of perception as well as reminiscence. These will continue to affect the quest for a ‘higher imperative’ — as also the related aspiration to reconstruction of that self (another function of perception) in the mythic-heroic mode persistently alluded to in the poem’s subtexts.

On the surface level, the numinous moment of mythical attunement is thus immediately attenuated in the lines that follow:

Сегодня в облаках она [луна].  
Тускнеют улицы сырые.

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 42. For the initial definition of fictional modes, see pp. 33–34.

<sup>156</sup> See notes 57, 98 above.

The cyclical perception is obfuscated in present time, by both clouds and the lustrelessness of damp streets (*tusknet'* perhaps recalls the indistinctness of vision evoked in previous stanzas by *mutnyi* and its cognates). The first of the two lines quoted is notably banal in its prosaicism, undermining the sublime with an awkward, verbless inversion to contrive the previously-mentioned rhyming couplet *luna / ona*. But perhaps its contrastive *segodnia* also more broadly comprises the present-day of the motorcycle: the mechanised and the ritualistic-organic are implicitly juxtaposed. It is difficult to regard them as other than mutually exclusive, the one representing a mode of thinking disruptively subversive of the other; but unlike in Blok's Italian verses, in the absence of overarching imperative, SF offers no indication of stable evaluative preference.

The whimsical shift from mythic-ritualistic to everyday (or present day) is completed by the chance figure of the tousled, somnolent (*poluspit* — an echo of the 'half-tones' of stanza 4) owner of a hostelry, incongruously, almost sacrilegiously still lit at this hour of morning, and on this particular day:

Одна ночная остерия  
 Огнями желтыми горит.  
 Ее взлохмаченный хозяин  
 Облокотившись, полуспит.

Any impropriety (if no more than that) in the lighted inn is plainly inadvertent: the owner exhibits an 'all too human', undemonstratively unreflective indifference to grander themes and considerations. He seems at this point a marginal, even extraneous figure, and the persona's narrative record moves on without comment.

The gradual approach of the distant procession, marked consecutively by (once more) externally ordered perception of singing, candlelight, and black banner, brings a further shift in thematic as well as narrative focus. The large black flag of mourning, paraded ship-like between the houses:

Как черный парус меж домами  
Большое знамя пронесли

seems initially to accentuate the generically ritualistic aspect of funereal celebration. To that extent, there is a kinship to the potent cyclical symbol of death and remembrance in a 1917 poem by another of Khodasevich's neighbours in the Petrograd House of Arts, Osip Mandel'shtam's '*Eshche daleko asfodelei*':

Туда душа моя стремится,  
За мыс туманный Меганом,  
И черный парус возвратится  
Оттуда после похорон!

As Khodasevich's procession draws close, however, it is related unequivocally and solely to the specific details of Christ's Passion — although the Catholic-religious mode does not at this point acquire the substantive weight of the mythic-ritual earlier in the stanza. In what might be thought of as a reversal of Symbolist signification, whereby earthly *realia* are the conduit to higher meaning, here, as it were, the higher truth is translated back into a literal parade of *realia*. The 'mysteries and martyrs' are enumerated, atomised, made strange in their fragmentation from the whole, and deprived of spiritual depth in their *ersatz* tangibility:

И чтобы видеть мы могли  
Воочию всю ту седмицу,  
Пронесят плеть, и багряницу  
Терновый скорченный веноч,  
Гвоздей заржавленных пучок,  
И лестницу, и молоток.

In effect, this alienated perception brings the stanza's lengthy sequence to a close through a different form of repetition: a fresh variant on the 'masquerade of sorrows', manifest, as Khodasevich phrased it in his essay on Annenskii, in the 'грубая, мишурная, убого-помпезная обрядность панихиды или

погребения' that seemed also to inform the spirit of Savel'ev's more humble funeral procession in stanza 4. Here the prosaic recurrence of the verb *pronesti*, already used just four lines previously, mirrors something of the mechanical nature of the display; whilst the masculine rhyming triplet brings the stanza to an end in considerable bathos, in another itemising accumulation of the realia of death. The crown of thorns — semantically, *venets* would be more appropriate than *venok* — is made to rhyme with the incongruous-seeming collective noun *puchok* (*gvozdei puchok* — nevertheless an accurate description of the single fused object paraded in Sorrento) and the diminutive form *molotok*. The stanza finally descends, via an adjective in the penultimate line that is jarring in its unseemly realism (*zarzhavlennyi*), to conclude with what appear in isolation, undignified by adjectival qualification, the most banal of domestic objects. There may be a return here to 'faint amusement and indifference'; but for the once again detached observer, significant meaning is dissipated. The enigma of death finds no triumphant resolution.

The parallelism to stanza 4 (further manifest in draft, where Ol'ga was at one point named Mar'ia)<sup>157</sup> may also, on a deeper level, impart one final semantic twist. If, once more, there is no transcendence at the end, then the flat, dark, empty world, with its instruments of torture, eerie lighting, and hellish wind, is, in a sense, the Hell to which the poet-persona of the preceding stanza's subtext must descend, in his search for the higher imperatives of meaning and miracle. The quest has already passed in this stanza from fleeting hope back to fruitlessness. But there are further stages to come, further circles to be described.

## Stanza 6

Whereas stanza 5 addressed ritual and religion, stanza 6 turns its attention to religion and Symbolism, as the subject-matter narrows to the single image of the Madonna. In other re-

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<sup>157</sup> *SS-Ardis*, vol. 1, p. 444.

spects, its development follows a similar pattern to stanza 5. Its brief course passes once more through promise to disappointment, but thence to a final ambivalence. Beneath the sequential structuring afforded by events in the real, external world (the continuity of which, as we have noted, is somewhat disrupted by narrative laconicism and lacunae), the stanza more fundamentally charts a series of shifts in the perceived world that is the construct of the brain. Moreover, these shifts in mental perception appear whimsically 'disobedient' in the same way as recollections: popping into consciousness ready-formed; above all, undirected by an overarching consistency of logical self or ideological principle (the absent higher imperative). To that extent, the stanza's development mirrors the structure of the self, and points back once more (beneath the initial impression of sequential recording of external detached observation) to the modern neuroscientific postulate that there can be no continuous narrative structuring of consciousness.

The stanza begins with an antithetical conjunction that is liable to cause mild confusion:

Но пенье ближе и слышнее.

It is perhaps not immediately obvious that the discontinuity which this indicates is on the level of perception, rather than external narrative. In fact, the singing still 'grows closer' because the preceding lines described only the first part of the long procession: this stanza depicts the eventual appearance upon the 'crooked street' of the large statue, borne on the shoulders of the swaying crowd of hooded participants (see above), that brings up the rear. But in contrast to the bathos that concludes stanza 5, the first eight or nine lines of stanza 6 appear to build, through a radical perceptual shift, toward a crescendo of genuine apotheosis. By a suspension of disbelief that could be regarded as the opposite of the predominant technique of estrangement, the statue — which is here never referred to as such — becomes closely identified with the Virgin Mary it represents (*lish' Ona*). It is raised above the crowd, and its positive reception is construc-



ted through cumulative emphasis of its elevation. This is partly physical: not only is the statue carried on high; its posture is ‘tall and erect’, it is dignified, perhaps symbolically sanctified, by a ‘ring of lights’ that contrasts the darkness; and it is luxuriantly (*utopaia*) adorned with the resplendent attributes of silk and roses. Its elevation is also ethical-spiritual. The face emanates abstract virtue, the more-than-human permanence of which is conveyed by a negative adjective (*nedvizhnaia blagost’*). A second such adjective (*nedosiagaemyi*) lifts beyond the scope of earthly senses the crown (or halo?) that decorates the Madonna’s head. Her movement — the statue ‘glides’ (*plyvet*), whereas the sail-like banner of stanza 5 was ‘carried’<sup>158</sup> — likewise implies ethereal transcendence of the purely human sphere:

Толпа колышется, чернея,  
А над толпою лишь Она,  
Кольцом огней озарена,  
В шелках и розах утопая,  
С недвижной благодатью в лице,  
В недостижимом венце,  
Плывет, высокая, прямая,  
Ладонь к ладони прижимая...

As Bethea has suggested, there is in this ‘distant and unapproachable’ Virgin something ‘perhaps reminiscent of Blok’s Beautiful Lady and his feminine Jesus’.<sup>159</sup> Although, here too, there is no direct citation, the typological resemblance is clearly signalled from the first occurrence of Khodasevich’s capitalised *Ona* (mysteriously ineffable, unidentified by name for another 18 lines). Bethea, in referring to the ‘feminine Jesus’, might well have had in mind not only, or not so much, the Christ of *Dvenadtsat’* — likewise ‘negatively’ qualified (*nevidim, nevredim*), likewise elevated above the streets (*nezhnoi postup’iu nado’iuzhnoi*) — as the resonance of the fourth of the lines just quoted with Blok’s first line, and poem:

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<sup>158</sup> *Plyvet* was also used, however, of ‘*polotera lob kurchavyi*’ in the azure air of stanza 4. The same issue of redemptive belief is still at stake.

<sup>159</sup> Bethea, *Khodasevich*, p. 310.

Вот Он — Христос — в цепях и розах.

More generally, lights in the darkness, candles, roses (*rozovye teni, tsvetok vesny*, etc.), are ubiquitous in characterising the devotional contexts of Blok's Lady.<sup>160</sup> They extend beyond *Stikhi o Prekrasnoi Dame*, to recur, for example, in the drama *Neznakomka*: here the 'Poet' does, for once, name his feminine ideal — *Imenem dal'nim / Imenem nezhashchim slukh: / „Mariia”* — and writes in her honour:

И от иконы в белых розах  
Медлительно сошла Она.<sup>161</sup>

The broad correspondence of Khodasevich's description to such material is to a degree, of course, inevitable. A further evocation by Ellis, a secondary figure with strong Catholic proclivities, of canonical attributes of Mary that overlap with the description in SF, more obviously demonstrates the inherent proximity of Symbolist and Roman Catholic cults of the feminine:

...и в сердце грешном нет иной любви,  
Чем Девы лик безгрешный и пречистый  
Ее убор из роз, венец лучистый.

Мольбы и славословия в честь Розы ...  
Columna ignis, stella, sancta rosa.<sup>162</sup>

Within the contexts already established in Khodasevich's poem, however, there seems no doubt that the terms of description he selects for the Italian religious image resonate specifically with Russian Symbolism. Even the exceptional shift of the poem to the

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<sup>160</sup> It is indicative that Z.G. Mints lists 31 occurrences in the *Prekasnaia Dama* cycle of *ogon'* and cognates, 10 of *svecha*, and 13 of *roza* and cognates ("Chastotnyi slovar' „Stikhov o Prekrasnoi Dame" Al. Bloka i nekotorye zamechaniia po strukture tsikla", in Mints, *Poetika Aleksandra Bloka*, pp. 640, 645, 644).

<sup>161</sup> The words are those of the Poet in the third act (*Tret'e videnie*) of Blok's play.

<sup>162</sup> *Mariia* (*Argo*, 1914): Ellis, *Stikhotvoreniia*, Tomsk: Vodolei, 2000, pp. 173, 177.

vertical plane at this stage seems in the light of our earlier discussion to reinforce the Symbolist as well as Christian-religious frame of reference.

Yet from either point of view, with the introduction in the following two lines of two diminutive nouns, qualified by 'positive' adjectives denoting material substance, the spell is broken:

И держит ручкой восковой  
Для слез платочек кружевной.

Once again, with a jolt of naturalistic observation, the humdrum banality of the everyday substance and everyday object (the 'lace' of the handkerchief perhaps another trapping of the *mishurnaia ... obriadnost'* that Khodasevich discerned in his commentary on Annenskii) defamiliarise into bathos the preceding cumulative impression. The details effect a shift — possibly, one might say, from imaginatively transfigured world to external physical reality; more persuasively and consistently, in the terms of the present analysis, from a perception conducive to belief to one of scepticism — to recall that this is not a figure of enigmatic immateriality, like Blok's Christ or Beautiful Lady, and not, after all, the Queen of Heaven, but a lifeless, earthly-artistic representation. In Symbolist terms, one might think of the disenchantment of realisation that the 'unfamiliar' (*neznakomaia*) female figure of the 'antithesis' is mere beautiful doll, neither living nor dead (and occasionally, it might be noted, framed in lace);<sup>163</sup> perhaps, too, of the bitter and disturbing indignity of the specifically 'waxen' breast and waxen figure of Blok's Cleopatra (*Kleopatra*, 1907), exposed to the common gaze in the modern-day 'panopticon' ('„Kadite mne. Tsvety rassyp'te. / Ia v nezapamiatnykh vekakh / Byla tsaritsei v Egipte / Teper' — ia vosk. Ia tlen. Ia prakh"'). At any rate,

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<sup>163</sup> See 'O sovremennom sostoianii russkogo simvolizma' (Blok, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, p. 430). The imagery of lace — admittedly of snow/scarf, not handkerchief — memorably occurs in lines from *Nechaiannaia Radost'* which Blok quotes in his essay to illustrate the creation of the *krasavitsa kukla, ... zemnoe chudo*: '... Vot litso vznikaet is kruzhev, / Vznikaet iz kruzhev litso. / Vot plyout ee v'uzhnye trel...' (ibid.).

the vertical perception of the processional figure does not reach high enough.

The detachedly ironic observation does not stand as conclusive, however; and if the profound ambivalence of previous sections was generated primarily through the subtext, here uncertainty is at once compounded by a further discontinuity of viewpoint. The couplet just quoted, with its rhyming adjectives, is immediately followed by a two-line sentence, introduced by a further antithetical 'no', that appears to re-assert something of the abiding, transcendent value of the Madonna figure:

Но жалкою людскою дрожью  
Не дрогнут ясные черты.

At the same time, the Pushkinian connotations of '*iasnye cherty*' (with associations already noted above, to a poem such as '*Ia pomniu chudnoe mgnoven'e*') might represent another shift of focus, to a purely aesthetic rather than spiritual mode of veneration; and the effigy's apparent imperviousness to human frailty is also tinged with ambivalence. It is implicitly presented as an unclouded (cf. '*iasnye cherty*') superiority to the pitifully mortal. Yet in the poem's persona, detachment ('detachment from self and from things and from persons', to quote once more Khodasevich's most illustrious English-language contemporary) is not virtue, but affliction or deficiency. Perhaps, then, here too, there is also an implicit failure in responsiveness. The statue of the Mother of God is merely waxen statue: a simulacrum, betokening not imminent divine intercession or any guiding divinity, but the meaningless vacuity of absolute, lifeless indifference.<sup>164</sup>

Unexpectedly in the context of previous stanzas, even at this juncture the narrative does not pass on, but further elabor-

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<sup>164</sup> Cf.: 'There are three conditions that often look alike, / Yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgerow: / Attachment to self and to things and to persons, detachment / From self and from things and from persons; and, growing between them, indifference, / Which resembles the others as death resembles life' (T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*, iii).

ates these contrarities in untypically internalised, subjective form:

Не оттого ль к Ее подножью  
Летят молитвы и мечты,  
Любви кощунственные розы  
И от великой полноты —  
Сладчайшие людские слезы?

This (obliquely) personalised flight of speculation might possibly be taken as a gesture toward the analytical ‘„explanation” or philosophical interpretation’ of impressionistic observation generally lacking in the main body of the poem. (If so, it might also confirm the necessity of emotional engagement to such explanation.) Yet the negative frame of the rhetorical question brings an inherent equivocation, and the deliberation on the source and object of devotion that it introduces remains densely paradoxical. In one respect, the lines offer a sceptical reflection on the gullibility and folly of the human crowd, naively misjudging and self-indulgent (cf. ‘*sladchaishie slezy*’) in its cloying, trivialised, blasphemously misplaced devotions to the waxen statue. This assessment would be consistent with the spirit of a satirical remark in a recent letter of Khodasevich’s to Gor’kii, that religion is ‘not opium but a stimulant for the people’ (*kak raz ne opium, a doping*).<sup>165</sup> Perhaps not without the faint amusement frequently characteristic of the detached narrative stance, this popular display of the acceptance of a ‘higher imperative’ might be dismissed, in Gorkyesque terms, as a comforting lie. Yet the tentative uncertainty of Khodasevich’s only interrogative until the poem’s final lines, the Pushkin-tinged recourse to the most conventional of rhymes (*mechty/polnoty; rozy/slezy*) and most clichéd of metaphors (*rozy liubvi*),<sup>166</sup> even the distant paronomastic coincidence (or acoustic-semantic priming?) of *liubvi-liudskie* — perhaps also convey a critical relaxation, an indulgence and corresponding compassion that exceed anything displayed in relation to Ol’ga and

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<sup>165</sup> Letter of 14 September 1924: *SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, p. 479.

<sup>166</sup> See notes notes 71 and 72 above.

Savel'ev. Especially striking is the unexpected reference to the *'velikaia polnota'* that finds outlet in the people's sentimental effusion. Doubtless an element of ironic condescension is present; but we might think also of the 'fullness of being' that Khodasevich attributed to Pushkin in 'Koleblemyi trenochnik' in 1921, whilst 'fullness' of love, faith, or spontaneous expression of feeling, are hitherto so alien to the manifestly ailing persona who formulates the half-incredulous question of these lines that, whatever their cause (object), the effect cannot easily be dismissed as worthless. This might in turn recall Khodasevich's discussion of the quest for 'understanding' in the essay on Annenskii, elaborated through an extended comparison and contrast between Tolstoi's 'ordinary' fictional hero, Ivan Il'ich,<sup>167</sup> who experienced 'sudden miracle' at the last, and Annenskii, the exceptional poet, who apparently did not. The 'terrible warning' (*groznoe predosterezhenie*) with which the essay concluded — *'chto inogda cheloveku daetsia to, chego ne dano poetu'* — seems hauntingly pertinent to the bemused isolation of the Russian poet-outsider at this point in SF.<sup>168</sup>

As so often, intertextual background suggests an additional dimension to the persona's interpretative hesitancy. A main point of reference in this case is not literary but devotional: the Marian prayers of Catholicism, and in particular, perhaps, the prayer *Salve, Regina*. An approximate Russian translation of the Latin text will demonstrate the correspondences in imagery and vocabulary of sweetness, tears, love and joy:

Радуйся, [Святая] Царица, Мать Милосердия,  
 Наша жизнь, наша сладость и наша надежда, радуйся.  
 К Тебе мы взываем,  
 изгнанные дети Евы,  
 к тебе мы направляем свои вздохи, стоны и плачи

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<sup>167</sup> Cf.: *Ivan Il'ich ne obrazchik nikchemnogo, glupogo i poshlogo cheloveka. Tak ne nado sudit' o nem. On — chelovek, prosto chelovek, kak vse my liudi, — on obyknovennyi'* (SS-Ardis, vol. 2, p. 332).

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 333. The occurrence of *mechty* in this passage of SF nevertheless also maintains a link between ordinary 'men' and the poet at the close of stanza 4 (*'ot mechty ne otrывaiais'*). As ever, disjuncture is internal as well as external.

в этой юдоли слез.  
И потому обрати к нам, Наша Заступница,  
свои глаза милосердия,  
и после этого нашего изгнания,  
покажи нам благословенный плод чрева Твоего, Иисуса.  
О, милостивая, о, любящая, о, сладкая Дева Мария!<sup>169</sup>

Khodasevich — who in 1918 had incorporated four lines of Latin religious text directly into his eight-line poem *V kostele*<sup>170</sup> — must once have known this common rosary prayer by heart, and been familiar from his Moscow childhood with the (maternally instilled) cultic ambience it represents.<sup>171</sup> It may be difficult here to tell whether or not the echo of its terms in SF is parodic; and like the cyclicity of the previous stanza, neither the Mother of God's promise of comfort and hope, nor even the assurance of a higher, teleological pattern of redemption in the life to come (*post exilium*; cf. the fundamental Marian prayer: '*ora pro nobis peccatoribus hunc et in hora mortis nostrae*') amount to a 'philosophical explanation' (*osmyslenie*) of being. The Mother has the potential to assuage and to redeem the faithful (through intercession with the Son who, as we have noted, is significantly absent from the explicit discourse of SF); to alleviate, but not to elucidate, the present, Fallen-exilic condition. The intellectual and emotional ambivalence of the stanza's unusually lingering reflection on the present scene might nevertheless now be related to successive layers of a personal past. These extend back through Symbolism, and perhaps the

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<sup>169</sup> The Latin text reads: '*Salve, Regina, Mater misericordiae, / vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve. / ad te clamamus / exsules filii Hevae, / ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes / in hac lacrimarum valle. / Eia, ergo, advocata nostra, illos tuos / misericordes oculos ad nos converte; / et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui, / nobis post hoc exsilium ostende. / O clemens, O pia, O dulcis Virgo Maria.*'

<sup>170</sup> *SS-Ardis*, vol. 2, p. 455. The source texts should be identified as the first two lines of the Introit of the Requiem for the Dead ('*Requiem aeternam dona ei(s), Domine, et lux perpetua luceat ei(s)*'), and Christ's promise of resurrection and life taken from the routinely combined John 11: 25 and 6: 54.

<sup>171</sup> His earliest, domestic prayers were in Polish (see 'K stoletiu „Pana Tadusha”', *Izbrannaia proza*, p. 59), but it is precisely imagery and ambience, not language, that is at issue here.

'fullness' of the literary-cultural era that Khodasevich evoked through Pushkin at the end of stanza 1, to the early, intimate-devotional elements of childhood. Even beneath the single-focussed Sorrentine episode, that is, the irrepressible whimsicalities of memory bring double-exposed awareness of a personal exile that is temporal as well as spatial. There is divorce from an irretrievable past (to which, in the present context, we might speculatively ascribe a childish integrity of faith and even security of maternal comfort), as well as detachment from a present in which, according to the faith that *Salve, Regina* represents, exile is the fundamental condition of all human existence. But in his particular vale of tears, the Russian exile is also exiled from the community of exiled children of Eve — whose naïve and possibly self-deluding belief might appear more psychically valuable, even enviable, than ethically or doctrinally reprehensible.

The last four lines of the stanza return to the individual case of the sleepy owner of the hostelry, who comes out onto his threshold to watch the procession. The persona is now unmistakably at a double distance, watching the previously indifferent observer observing the scene. But the inn-keeper smiles, and another surprising narratorial intervention, deceptively complex in tone and implication, brings the stanza to a curious close that touches further on the issue of faith:

Он улыбается Марии.  
Мария! Улыбнись ему!

In one respect, the exclamation constitutes a movement of human sympathy of persona for spectator — perhaps of 'poet' for 'man'. The emotional gesture may be regarded as positive, though it is once again whimsically inconsistent with the misanthropically undemocratic treatment of the Moscow funeral. At the same time, the exclamation is also a wry absurdity which, as Bethea puts it, describes 'the gap between man and divinity in comic terms'.<sup>172</sup> In contrast to what obtains on the human level, there can of course be no smile, no gesture of benevolent connec-

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<sup>172</sup> Bethea, *Khodasevich*, p. 310.



tion between divinity (or waxen statue!) and ordinary mortal. The possibility that the latter's unreflected smile may be naively misguided projection into the emptiness of the meaningless universum therefore ineluctably recurs. Yet in another sense, the innkeeper no longer needs the smile of response: he has moved from detachment to engagement, from the previous, passively somnolent indifference of the outsider to the emotional engagement and believing acceptance of the insider. From this perspective, it is the observing persona who is truly in need of the visible token of divinity — the miraculous impossibility that cannot come.<sup>173</sup>

As may be anticipated, these concluding lines of the stanza also offer a secondary layer of meaning. Whereas the motif of Mary's (Mariia's) smile, made emphatic through repetition of both proper noun and verb, seems strangely incongruous in the literal and religious context, the smile bestowed by the Lady is of recurrent significance in the imagery of mystical Symbolism with which the stanza also engages. The textual incongruity may thus serve here as a distinct signal, rare in Khodasevich's later verse, of an alternative, quasi-citational intertextual dimension.<sup>174</sup>

The motif of the smile was already prominently emblematic, as we have seen, in Solov'ev's *Tri svidaniia* ('...*Pronizana lazur'iu zolotistoi ... Stoiala ty s ulybkoiu luchistoi...*'). Blok indicated its importance, in rather abstract terms, in the continuation of the passage from '*O sovremennom sostoianii russkogo simvolizma*' also already quoted above in relation to the azure:

В лазури Чьего-то лучезарного взора пребывает те-  
ург; этот взор, как меч, пронзает все миры: <...> — и  
сквозь все миры доходит к нему вначале — лишь сия-  
нием Чьей-то безмятежной улыбки.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Cf. once more Khodasevich's judgement of Annenskii and Ivan Il'ich, quoted at n. 145 above: '*Rasshirenii „ia” moglo proizoiti lish' chudom, kotorogo oni ne znali, i v kotoroe ne verili*'.

<sup>174</sup> See notes 88 and 89 above.

<sup>175</sup> Blok, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, p. 427.

Naturally, there are cognate examples in Blok's own early verse. In *'My preklonilis' u zaveta'*, for instance, the memory of the Woman's smile, *'v luchakh bozhestvennogo sveta'*, conditions the prayerful wait for the Lady's appearance, greeted with certainty in the poem's annular conclusion:

На праздник мой спустился Кто-то  
С улыбкой ласковой Жены.

The smile is also directly linked with anticipation of the Beautiful Lady in *'Vkhozhu ia v temnye khramy'* and elsewhere:<sup>176</sup>

О, я привык к этим ризам  
Величавой Вечной Жены!  
Высоко бегут по карнизам  
Улыбки, сказки и сны.

Of particular relevance in the present context, however, is Blok's later re-articulation of the same motif in explicit conjunction with the name of Mariia, in the drafts toward a continuation of Chapter 3 of *Vozmezdie*. Although drafts are generally of no intertextual consequence, these haunting fragments of a larger text that was of express interest to Khodasevich and the citational sphere of SF had been posthumously published — in the fifth issue of (once more) *Zapiski mechtatelei* that also contained five poems by Khodasevich. They were accompanied by an editorial note and authorial date (January—July 1921) which established them as the very last verses Blok wrote, and they have the unmistakable air of a poetic testament: 'the *mea culpa* of all great spirits', in the memorable formulation of Avril Pyman.<sup>177</sup>

The promise of life and hope in the final lines of *Vozmezdie's* third chapter, cited in discussion of stanza 4 of SF above, seems,

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<sup>176</sup> Indicatively, Mints registers nine occurrences of *ulybka* in the canonical text of *Stikhi o Prekrasnoi Dame* ('Chastotnyi slovar' „Stikhov o Prekrasnoi Dame“', p.649). For a further occurrence, transitional toward the lines from *Vozmezdie* cited below, see poem 7 of *Zakliatie ognem i mrakom*: *'Po ulitsam metel' metet / Svivaetsia, shataetsia, / Mne kto-to ruku podaet / I kto-to ulybaetsia'*.

<sup>177</sup> Pyman, *The Life of Aleksandr Blok*, vol. 2, p. 369.

after all, to be rejected in Blok's skeletal continuation. The hero now freezes as he stands in the snowstorm outside the railings of the Warsaw garden. With obvious overtones of *Mednyi vsadnik*, he appears to be ridden down by a imperious Polish nobleman (*gordelivyi pan*), whose horse rears its hooves over his doomed head;<sup>178</sup> but out of the snow cloud beneath and around it there emerges the vision of a young girl (*'Iz snezhnoi tuchi burevoi / Vstaet viden'e devy iunoi'*). Her name is Mariia. She opens her arms with a smile, and the hero dies in her embrace. The relevant sequence read as follows, in the form in which it was known to Khodasevich.<sup>179</sup>

Простая девушка пред ним.  
Как называть тебя? — Мария.  
Откуда родом ты? — С Карпат.

— Мне жить надоело. — Я тебя не оставлю. Ты умрешь со мной. Ты одинок? — Да, одинок. — Я зарую тебя там, где никто не узнает, и поставлю крест, а весной над тобой расцветет клевер.

... Она с улыбкой открывает  
Ему объятия свои.  
И все, что было, отступает  
И исчезает (в забыты).

И он умирает в ее объятиях. Все неясные порывы, не воплощенные мысли, воля к подвигу, не совершенно-му, растворяется на груди этой женщины.

... Мария, нежная Мария,  
Мне пусто, мне постыло жить!

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<sup>178</sup> For some detailed reflections on *Mednyi vsadnik* and the Warsaw section of *Vozmezdie*, see A.L. Ospovat, R.D. Timenchik, „*Pechal'nu povest' sokhranit'...*“, Moscow: Kniga, 1985, pp. 200—205.

<sup>179</sup> *Zapiski mechtatelei*, 5 (1922), p. 15. Blok's short manuscript pages are slightly rearranged, in more plausible order, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, vol. 5, pp. 72—73, where the last lines here quoted become the final lines of all. In *Zapiski mechtatelei*, they were followed by a further 11 incomplete lines.

Я не свершил того ...  
Того, что должен был свершить.  
. . . . .  
Мария, нежная Мария,  
Мне жизнь постыла и пуста!

Blok's hero thus meets his death, isolated (*odinok*) in a strange land, with an exilic perception of the flat emptiness of life. Death appears as the only escape in a life that has nothing more to offer, and he dies with his duty unfulfilled. There is no resolution of quest, and oblivion is the best that can be wished for. As to the Carpathian Mariia on whose breast all aspiration dissolves away as she ministers to the final moments, hers is accordingly no longer the radiant smile of the Symbolist thesis, nor the mark of a final, triumphant realisation of synthesis: she is ordinary as Ivan Il'ich, a 'simple girl'. Her emergence as 'vision', from beneath the bridle of the Pan's horse (*'iz pod udil konia vspenennykh'*) and from the classically obfuscating topos of the snowstorm, nevertheless marks her as a creature of imagination, of at best uncertain ontological status. Even the source of simple human comfort and compassion is at least primarily a construction of the perceived world, not of external reality.

Within the context of SF, a reminiscence of the smile of *this* Mariia in the final lines of stanza 6 would function, firstly, as another fond posthumous tribute to Blok — now, perhaps, as bereft human rather than poet — and another farewell to the era he represented. It would bear the serious implication, too, of regret at the failure and demise of mystical Symbolism, with the central imagery of which this stanza has engaged, and with which Khodasevich had formerly been closely identified. But particularly significant is the connection with a poetic duty left undone: for in SF, we have argued, the injunction to pursue the arduous poetic mission was adumbrated through allusion to *Vozmezdie* in stanza 2 (*'nespeshno i nelzhivo povedat' / O tom, chto my v sebe taim'*), then elaborated in the subtext of stanza 4 through complex dialogue with the published sections of Blok's Chapter 3. By that point in SF, it entailed nothing less than to identify a 'higher im-

perative', in order to 'make sense' of life and the horror of death. The continuation of Blok's text that appears to be invoked here — the more memorable for its fleeting echo of Mazepa's '*Mariia, bed-naia Mariia*' from the third canto of Pushkin's *Poltava*<sup>180</sup> — suggests that the poetic quest is in vain. The refined metaphysical constructs of Symbolism, like the popular religious devotion of the Sorrentine people with which they are intertwined at the positive start of the stanza, promise much, but may be hollow consolations — perceptual delusions, behind which there lurks what is defined in the conclusion of the essay on Annenskii as the alternative to unrealisable cathartic purification: 'the meaningless affectation of life and the meaningless stench of death'. If the endeavour of the poet, to discover meaning and assert control (over self, memory, art, world, fate?), is implicitly refuted, perhaps the best that can be wished for are compassionate gestures of solace, directed toward 'man' rather than poet in this vale of tears. But as the 'smiles' of the two Mariias show, Blok's and the inn-keeper's, even those may be delusion: comforting variants on the creative lie.

Thus, once more, the stanza's conclusion builds to a considerable complexity, with tension between the literal-surface and subtextual meanings. The exclamation to Mariia, semi-humorous, comically indulgent on one level, is deeply poignant on another, suggestive of loss, both personal and cultural, of human isolation, and the prospective failure of poetry and poetic duty in a world devoid of overarching meaning.

## Stanza 7

As noted above, the drafts of what have become the seventh stanza originally continued the narration of the Good Friday procession as a smooth progression, from the dark streets into the cathedral at the coming of dawn. Khodasevich rejected this

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<sup>180</sup> See Blok, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, vol. 5, p. 450.

sequential representation in favour of a brief marker of discontinuity:

Но мимо: уж Она в соборе...

The procession has 'passed'; but the adverb is more emphatically the signal also of a fresh shift of perception. Once again, the mental reversal reflects not the measured, cognitive direction of a conscious self, but 'obedience' to an essential randomness of external impressions, cognate with the whimsicality of memories that pop into consciousness unbidden and ready-formed. With the stanza's initial *mimo*, the preceding scepticism and underlying despondency nevertheless appear to be brushed away, to permit a renewed approach to the 'higher imperative', or miracle of faith.<sup>181</sup> The short, eight-line stanza that follows (stanza 1 is the same length, others considerably longer) is the most single-focused in the poem and, by no means coincidentally, outwardly the most positive. Indeed, John Malmstad finds here an 'unexpected feeling of bliss', that he singles out as a striking achievement of the late Khodasevich.<sup>182</sup>

Although the stanza is set in the cathedral, at what might be presumed the first moment of Paschal joy,<sup>183</sup> its subject-matter remains more broadly spiritual than specifically Christian-religious. Just as there was no mention of Christ's effigy in the 'Processione Nera', so now there is no explicit reference to resurrec-

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<sup>181</sup> The sober taking-stock implicit in *mimo* in this instance has nothing of the expansive Romantic flourish that is strongly marked in several Russian-modernist poetic uses of the adverbial form: compare, for instance, the Italian-Marian context of Blok's '*Devushka iz Spoleto*': '*Mimo, vse mimo — ty vetrom gonima — / Solntsem palima — Mariia! Pozvol' / Vzoru — prozret' nad toboi kheruvima, — / Serdtsu — izvedat' sladchaishuiu bol'!*'.

<sup>182</sup> Malmstad, 'Poeziia Vladislava Khodasevicha', p. 28.

<sup>183</sup> The question of 'which procession' is again theoretically at issue in this. Strictly speaking, the 'Processione Bianca', terminating at dawn on Good Friday morning, precedes the Crucifixion rather than (as is here strongly implied) anticipates the Resurrection. Again, Khodasevich perhaps resorts to poetic licence in amalgamating time and events; a further double exposure, of Orthodox Easter joy upon the darker mood of Catholicism, might be more intangibly suspected beneath.

tion and redemption — that victory over death which, from stanza 4, has persisted as a major, unspoken preoccupation. It is the Lady (*Ona*) who is present in the first line, again capitalised, but again unnamed, perhaps therefore with renewed overtones of mystical Symbolism. There are also strong elements of the aesthetic-sensual and even of the pantheistic — not least in the apparently triumphant transition from the nadir of ‘hellish’ darkness in stanza 5 to a zenith of vertically soaring light that encompasses the natural scene outside (mountain, morning star), and promises to realise the cyclical pattern adumbrated in the first Sorrentine stanza.

The scene within the cathedral begins in luxuriant light and sound. The Lady is seen against fructifying rays of light that contrast the earlier darkness, to a resonating choir that may be set against the earlier *glukhoe penie* of the sombre, funereal procession.<sup>184</sup>

В снопах огней, в гремящем хоре.

The crowd has thinned, perhaps suggesting a more refined, less populist experience than the adoration of the statue on the streets. This is consistent, too, with the pale-blue light that flutters overhead:

Над поредевшюю толпой  
Порхает отсвет голубой.

Like the azure in stanza 4, the choice of colour may evoke the rarified perceptions of mystical Symbolism more readily than Catholicism. The same could be said of the noun *otsvet*, which might be taken to connote reflection of some higher realm: a meaning-laden index of what Viacheslav Ivanov termed ‘the commu-

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<sup>184</sup> On the traditional musical accompaniment to the Good Friday processions, based around the *Miserere*, funeral marches and cantatas, see [http://www.processioni.com/musiche\\_settimana\\_santa.asp](http://www.processioni.com/musiche_settimana_santa.asp) (accessed 10 January 2010).

nion of higher and lower worlds'.<sup>185</sup> There is a suggestion, perhaps, of celestial mystery, taking shape and about to be revealed. In the dawning light, the faces of the worshippers also emerge more clearly:

Яснее проступают лица,  
Как бы напудрены зарей.

The draft description had the faces resplendently 'silvered' (*Oserebrennye zarei*'), rather than merely 'powdered'. The participle now used brings possible overtones of pallor, vanity or the mask (*masque*), but the movement away from previous 'faceless' crowd to emergent individuality is nonetheless strong. Its significance might be measured against the persistent de-individualisation and de-personification which, in stanza 4, were projected in relation to Savel'ev's funeral as the experiential norm. The growing clarity of the faces might also presage the onset of that moment denied at times of Pompeian cataclysm, when the 'servant of God' emerges from beneath the shabby earthly guise: the mask will fall away and the face is revealed (*Spadaet maska — obnazhaetsia litso*').<sup>186</sup>

This promise of personal healing and essential wholeness, of impending enlightenment and even transfiguration — perhaps, indeed, the component products of a sense of bliss — is ostensibly continued through the following two lines, that bring the stanza to an abrupt conclusion:

Над островерхою горой  
Переливается Денница...

The very shape of the vertically rising mountain peak (in a line anaphorically introduced by the second *nad* in five lines) might

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<sup>185</sup> See note 84 above. *Otsvet* was particularly favoured by Ivanov, but the seminal significance of 'reflection' for Symbolist verse was already articulated in Solov'ev's 1892 reworking of Tiutchev's *Nakanune godovshchiny 4 avgusta 1864 g.*: 'Milyi drug, il' ty ne vidish'? / Chto vse vidimoe nami — / Tol'ko otblesk, tol'ko teni / Ot nezrimumo o chami?'

<sup>186</sup> See the quotation at note 135 above.



be interpreted as a symbol of hope and faith, for in the same essay on Pompeii Khodasevich dwelt in quasi-Acmeist terms on the spiritual value of the soaring Christian spire (*ostrie*) as antidote to the unrelieved flatness and monotony of (exilic?) earthly existence:

Здесь воочию познаешь простую истину гимназических учебников о христианстве, принесшем в мир готическое острие — взлет ввысь. <...> Тут веришь и видишь, как велика, вероятно, была в некоторых тогдашних душах тоска по Спасителю ...<sup>187</sup>

And yet, despite its crescendo of anticipation, the stanza perhaps never quite reaches a true, epiphanic climax. With the appearance of the Morning Star, it breaks unexpectedly off, the suspension points eloquent testimony to an egregious omission: the description tantalises with the promise of transcendence, of a 'higher imperative' seemingly within reach, but nothing is definitively recorded. It may be possible, as Malmstad's reading implies, to imagine an ensuing revelation, a miracle of faith too deep for words; but in the context of all that precedes and follows, it seems more plausible to suppose a failure in realisation, even — in a stanza introduced by the phrase '*No mimo*' — of headlong flight from the scene at the point of potential culmination (the motorcyclist, incidentally, apparently gets away in time to witness sunrise over Naples in stanza 8). Certainly, the blissful spiritual-religious moment passes, with little more lasting effect than any other; and after a further break in continuity, the inconclusive narrative will resume.

In one respect, the apparently premature interruption of the cathedral sequence might be attributed to 'disobedient' mental association with the noun *Dennitsa* upon which the stanza breaks off. Khodasevich's American editors relate the noun to the Virgin Mary, amongst whose sobriquets is *Stella Matutina*, and the dawn it connotes to the Paschal redemption of mankind,

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<sup>187</sup> '*Pompeia*', p. 34. The essayist polemically disguises the Acmeistic note in disparaging reference to 'textbook truths', but the parallel seems unmistakable.

whilst also noting that *Dennitsa* was ‘one of the names of Lucifer (and was often used in this sense by the Symbolists)’. David Bethea ventures further, referring to Berberova’s suggestion to him that *Dennitsa* ‘may belong to a symbolic system combining the Virgin Mary and Lucifer’.<sup>188</sup> There is, indeed, a distinct periodisation in Russian poetic usage of *Dennitsa*. As herald of dawn, it was a commonplace of the Pushkin era, typically in combination with the adjective *zlataiia*.<sup>189</sup> Notable too, as in Lenskii’s eve-of-duel elegy in *Onegin* (VI.xxii; a reworking of Pushkin’s own youthful ‘*Grob iunoshi*’), was a rhyming concordance with *grobniitsa* (though *tsaritsa*, *bagrianiitsa*, *resniitsa* are also recurrent, in Lermontov, Iazykov, Tumanskii and others). Although there is little evidence of the primarily Catholic Marian connotation, these contexts are uniformly positive, often celebratory. By Khodasevich’s time, in contrast, the connection with Lucifer, originally stemming from Isaiah 14: 12, had become the norm. Thus the young, Symbolist Gumilev could open his ‘*Potomki Kaina*’ with the declaration:

Он не солгал нам, дух печально-строгий,  
Принявший имя утренней звезды...

whilst Voloshin could make routine allusion to the dual identity of the Morning Star (albeit in association with Venus rather than Mary) in his tongue-in-cheek ‘*Goroskop Cherubiny de Gabriak*’:

зеленая вечерняя звезда пастухов — Венера, которая  
в утренней своей ипостаси именуется Люцифером.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> *SS-Ardis*, vol. 1, p. 368; Bethea, *Khodasevich*, p. 311, note.

<sup>189</sup> Malmstad (*Stikhotvoreniia-2001*, p. 245) quotes the example of Pushkin’s early, Ossianic *Kol’na*, on which Khodasevich remarked in his *Poeticheskoe khoziastvo Pushkina*: ‘*Dennitsa krasnaia vyvodit / Zlatoe utro v nebesa*’; for several of numerous other occurrences, see, for instance, Baratynskii’s ‘*Kogda vzoidet dennitsa zolotaia*’, Batiushkov’s *Prividenie* and *Moi penaty*, or the lines from Gnedich’s *Rybaki* quoted in Pushkin’s notes to Chapter 1 of *Onegin*.

<sup>190</sup> *Apollon*, 1909, 2; Maksimilian Voloshin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, Moscow: Ellis Lak, 2000—, vol. 6, bk. 1, p. 260.

But, once more, it is not necessary to look beyond Blok's *Vozmezdie* for a prominent occurrence of *Dennitsa* in an unequivocally Luciferian sense.<sup>191</sup>

Ты, поразившая Денницу,  
Благослови на здешний путь!  
Позволь хоть малую страницу  
Из книги жизни повернуть.  
Дай мне неспешно и нежливо  
Поведать пред Лицом Твоим  
О том, что мы в себе таим,  
О том, что в здешнем мире живо...

The lines introduce the closing section of the 'Prologue' to *Vozmezdie* — and it will be recognised that the reference to the Morning Star leads directly into the dedicatory formulation of poetic mission, already discussed in intertextual connection with stanza 2 of SF. Khodasevich's recourse to *Dennitsa* at the close of stanza 7 is in no obvious sense a citation of this evocation of the ideological antagonism between Lucifer and Blok's unnamed, victorious Feminine Ideal; but, equally, it can scarcely be read in the spirit of the Pushkin era, as innocently uncontaminated by reminiscence of a sombre antithesis that is unsettlingly subversive of the surface description. The poeticism that overtly marks onward ascent toward celebratory climax brings with it disruptive accretions that consciousness cannot entirely suppress.

The minor but unsettling note of ambivalence that is thus created, lexically and through curtailment of narrative, at the end of stanza 7, is of itself open to differing interpretations. It might be taken as an ontologically justified incursion of doubt, hence a salutary antidote to the deceptive 'stimulant' of the cathedral setting (*'ne opium, a doping...'*): the aesthetic perception of religious ceremonial, sound, light and splendid natural scene has tempted

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<sup>191</sup> There are other occurrences of *dennitsa* in Blok, including the sombrely funereal 1904 lyric '*Zhdu ia smerti bliz dennitsy*', where the noun is used without obvious symbolic overtone, or the conclusion of *Petr* (also 1904), where a latent demonic connotation may be detected (*'On budet gorod svoi berech', / I, zaalev pered dennitsej, / V ruke prostertoi vspykhnet mech / Nad zatikhaiushchei stolitsej*).

to construction of an apparently significant experience (perhaps, indeed, of seeming 'bliss') behind which there is no substance, and doubt is a sobering re-intimation of the meaninglessness of an empty universe. Alternatively, or additionally — if ambivalent hesitation is not to be attributed, from a traditional religious perspective for which there is scant evidence in SF, to the seductive insinuations of Lucifer, the 'bearer of light' turned 'father of lies' — the interruption of the stanza's smooth development may be a product of the excessive cultural baggage (with its burden of disobedient reminiscence)<sup>192</sup> or underlying psychic condition of the refined but ailing modern persona. Ontologically, of course, no mere poem can offer final certainty — and SF at this point veers abruptly away from presentation of higher imperative. But the rhetorical and mental pattern of elaboration and subversion of an increasingly positive apprehension is already familiar from representation of the Virgin's statue in the first lines of stanza 6; and that, in turn, is one manifestation of the more persistent, 'whimsical' reversals of point of view that typify the Sorrentine stanzas. The inconclusive conclusion of stanza 7 demonstrates once more that Khodasevich's persona is no more equipped than the hero of Blok's *Vozmezdie* to profit definitively from epiphanic illumination ('... *slyshit slovo i totchas s radost'iu prinimaet ego; No ne imeet v sebe kornia i nepostoianen...*'). What might appear in context as religious doubt is thus a particular realisation of a more fundamental characteristic of the poem's modernist self,<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Cf. Khodasevich's description in 'Koleblemyi trenozhnik' of the compelling lexical aspect of cultural memory, as both a burden and a privilege, lost, however, to the post-revolutionary generation: '*Inye slova, s kotorymi sviazana dragotsenneishaia traditsiia i kotorye vvodish' v svoi stikh s opaskoi, ne znaia, imeesh' li vnutrennee pravo na nikh — takoi osobyi, sakramental'nyi smysl imeiut oni dlia nas — okazyvaiutsia poprostu blednymi pered sudom molodogo stikhotvoortsa, i ne podozrevaiushchego, chtò eshche znachat eti slova sverkh togo, chtò znachat oni dlia vsekh po slovariu Dalia. Poroi tselye riady zavetneishikh myslei i chuvstvo okazyvaiutsia neiz'iasnimymi ...*' ('Koleblemyi trenozhnik', p. 116).

<sup>193</sup> Cf. T. S. Eliot's withering evocation of persistent whimsical inconstancies of viewpoint as modernist affliction: '*... time yet for a hundred indecisions, / And for a hundred visions and revisions, / Before the taking of toast and tea. // ... In a minute there is time / For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse*' (*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*).

whose exilic condition, as we have repeatedly seen, precludes 'obediently' single-focussed concentration of mind and purpose.

Once again, however, the 'pathology' of Khodasevich's persona extends further. Although the ambivalence of *Dennitsa* and the narrative gap that follows might be taken to convey incipient doubt, there is no question here of any Karamazov-like battle between doubt and faith, with conflicting impulses warring within the self — for the self, as usual, is effectively absent. Indicatively, there is, as noted above, no grammatical first-person form at any point in this stanza. This may be less striking than in previous sections, for cathedral, light, dawn, inherently seem sufficiently positively marked to orient the reader; but here too, in essence, there is observation without affective engagement. (There may indeed be active *disengagement* beyond the stanza's end.) The absence of an identifiable, controlling self (or consciousness) might seem symptomatically correlated to the absence of any firm ideological or doctrinal core: the description flits, after all, from Mother of God, to choir, to congregation, to mountain peak, with a logic that again seems contingently, externally guided, merely by trajectory of observation. Beyond that, however, if there is no focus of self, then there can be no effective expansion of self (and the neuroscientific view of self as illusory construct might seem admirably exemplified). The broadening of a diminished, marginalised being, such as Khodasevich anticipated only through miracle in the essay on Annenskii, is indeed a practical impossibility. Epiphanic transfiguration or transcendence are equally implausible, for there is no ground for transformation, no core to transcend. For *this* persona, failure seems inevitable.

The by now familiar contrastive tension between subtext and surface text is thus maintained to dispiriting effect in stanza 7. Overtly the most positive, literally uplifting stanza of the poem implicitly discloses the hopeless irredeemability of the psychological plight of the exiled persona. If the preceding stanza pointed subtextually to the unrealisability of the *poetic* task, the implication here is of a comparable impasse in human terms, for 'man' rather than 'poet'. And it is scarcely surprising that the uni-

verse that the persona typically projects, mirrors the self-image of absence, of flat, unresponsive emptiness.

### Stanza 8

Khodasevich's first approach to drafting stanza 8 began with the one-word sentence '*Domoi*'. This would have served to emphasise a symmetrical linkage between the motorcycle ride that he proceeds to describe, and the visit to Sorrento in the previous three stanzas. The motorcycle which arrived noisily into darkness in stanza 5 now departs into light, to return whence it came with a sense of ease, energy and relief that seems, after all, to develop out of (or contrast with?!) the positive, surface experience of stanza 7. Thus explicitly connected with the Sorrentine sections, the stanza might also have appeared as a transitional link, as well as unmediated journey, between the two narrative peaks of stanzas 7 and 9: the ostensibly positive moment inside the cathedral, and the negative vision of the St Petersburg angel reflected on Naples bay.

With omission of the link-word '*Domoi*', narrative continuity is typically weakened, and with it any impression of a unity of consciousness. Although elements of symmetry are unobtrusively retained (like stanza 5, for instance, this stanza now begins with '*Mototsikletka*'), any direct sequential or causal relation with what precedes is obscured, and it is no longer so unequivocally certain even that description resumes from the same location, and on the same day, as in the preceding lines. The insertion into the finished poem of a graphic section-break further emphasises that stanza 8 is not part of a continuum. It is, however, closely paired with, and in some sense a prelude to, stanza 9, in much the same way as stanza 3 was paired with stanza 4.

The stanza begins in striking, contrastive transition from the timeless ritual of the religious service to the modernity of the motorcycle, and from the upward soar of perspective within the cathedral (*nad...*) to the downward progress of the bike 'beneath'

the cliff (*pod skaloi*).<sup>194</sup> Once again, moreover — albeit perhaps primarily from continuing absence of affective, judgemental involvement, rather than an improbable ideological sympathy for the age of the machine, amateur camera and cinematograph — the modern is not overtly portrayed as vulgarly inferior. On the contrary, the motorcycle's 'flight' (*'letit izvoilistym poletom'*) might seem to re-articulate with more vigorous intensity the 'fluttering' (*porkhaet*) of the pale-blue reflection within the church; whilst gold replaces blue as the dominant colour, in evocation of a ride around the hairpin bends above the bay that appears not merely exhilarating, but increasingly magical (*'vse volshebnei, vse zhivoe'*). Nothing has altered, however, in the marginalised passivity of the persona, whose first-person presence is registered only once in the stanza, and only in an oblique case (*'Zaliv prostornei predomnoi'*). As in stanza 5, there is also one occurrence of an undifferentiated first-person-plural subject in reference to the motorcycle's course (*'My povernem...'*); but this, too, signals no increase of the individual persona's 'ruling power',<sup>195</sup> and the grammatical subject of the first sentence is the mechanical conveyance, *mototsikletka*, in which he is driven. (Biographically, we should recall, Khodasevich rode in the sidecar of Gor'kii's son.) Yet in this instance, precisely an absence of control — the fact, as it were, that the self is not in the driving seat — enables a surrender to the exuberant rhythm of physical motion and aestheticising observation. This may be no substitute for a 'higher imperative', but it might nevertheless seem, if anything, more psychically invigorating than the previous religious-spiritual experience. Scrutiny of

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<sup>194</sup> At first sight, the adverbial *pod skaloi*, which complements *mototsikletka* to complete the first line, might be taken as another 'retrospective' rhyme, spanning a stanza-break in the same way as the first line of stanza 4, in pointing backward to the penultimate *zarej/goroi* pairing of stanza 7. The impression is 'corrected' only in the fourth line of the new stanza, which offers an enclosing rhyme on *mnoi*, to re-align a potentially stuttering focus and carry momentum forward.

<sup>195</sup> The term is borrowed from Plato's famous evocation in *Phaedrus* (246) of a more venerable means of transport: the chariot, with winged charioteer driving a pair of horses as allegory for the human soul. In this modern variant, the charioteer, 'the ruling power in us men', has gone missing.

religious mystery has given way to the 'magical', sensual-aesthetic enchantment of sight and speed, and for once, the perceived world does not seem either empty or flat. Like the Amalfi Pass in stanza 3, the gilded shoreline is described as majestic (*velichavyi*). Vesuvius, rising above both fog and the obfuscation of popular renown, is imposingly solemn and grand (*torzhestvennyi, velikii*). Furthermore, perhaps contrary to expectation, the impetus of this increasingly positive mood seems relatively sustained — at least co-terminously with the motorcycle's motion. It is undiminished and undiluted to the very end of the stanza. The final image is of Naples arising from the vapours over the sea in a resplendent burst of light:

Встает Неаполь из паров,  
И заиграл огонь стеклянный  
Береговых его домов.

Predictably, however, this surface reading is not the full story. In the first place, although we might reasonably attach *value* to the physical experience, it remains altogether more difficult to attach meaning. The problematic uncertainty lies once more with the randomness of uncontrolled motion, hence of the sights that are revealed at 'each new bend' (*s kazhdym novym povorotom*): symptomatically, their very 'vividness' (*vse volshebnei, vse zhivoe*) echoes the autonomous functioning — or disobedient whimsicality — of 'living' memory (*I tak zhivet...*). Perhaps more emphatically than in stanza 2, for example, it is tempting to discern a pantheistic conjunction of the elements, in the combination of the water and earth of the gilded margins of the bay that are the main focus of observation, with the fire and air of the stanza's second sentence —

Горя зарей и ветром вея —

and the fire on glass at stanza's end. But it would be difficult to attribute any greater 'meaning' to this than to the chance coincidence of water, air (smoke) and people in the poem's opening photographic gambit. Similarly, it is difficult to read any definitive



significance into an apparent transition — consistent also with the temporal progression of the Sorrentine stanzas — from the indistinctness that is a leitmotif of stanzas 2-4 (*mut'* and cognates; from blurred negative, to Moscow river and 'hazy' (*smutnoe*) funeral procession) to the dazzling, apparently triumphant emergence of Neapolitan day from miasmal maritime 'vapours' and the 'fog' twice mentioned as enveloping Procida and Vesuvius. (Clarity, one might say, is only temporary and seeming, as the motorcycle wends its way 'beneath' a cliff, such as the Orphic poet might traditionally have trodden or surmounted.) And although it might plausibly be argued that the verb *vstaet* rounds off the stanza with an implication of resurrection to new life that develops a positive thematic impulse latent in the final Sorrentine stanza,<sup>196</sup> it could equally be maintained that the religious light that illuminated the cathedral (*snopy ognei*) is now eclipsed and outdone, by the blaze of fire (*'zaigral ogon'*) that is the culmination of a headlong rush away from the Sorrentine scene. 'Resurrection' is from that point of view an awakening into immanent physical exuberance, liberating from the oppression of spiritual doubt and loss of faith.

These all-too-familiar interpretative convolutions of speculative supposition and reversal invite a perhaps not too fanciful comparison to the repeated twists to right and left around the hairpin bends of the road.<sup>197</sup> And just as the uncertainties and ambivalences of the interpretative process frequently stem from a flimsiness of ontological underpinnings, so the superficially enticing process of travel perhaps discloses only a hollow truism:

Когда несемся мы правее,  
 Бегут *налево* берега,  
 Мы повернем — и <...>  
 дуга  
 Начнет разворачиваться *вправо*.

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<sup>196</sup> Cf. the brief observations on 'new life' in this stanza in Göbler, *Chodasevič*, p. 135.

<sup>197</sup> Similarly, Alexandra Kirilcuk has discerned an analogy between these hairpin bends and 'the twists of the olive tree's branches' in stanza 1 ('The Estranging Mirror', p. 386).

Certainly, this last glimpse in SF of the persona in (zig-zag) motion — in which it is not difficult to see an analogue to the persistent perceptual shifts of the preceding, Sorrentine section — is a far cry from the purposeful pursuit of a ‘poetic path’ to which the earlier ‘stumbling’ had implicitly pointed. And if, as suggested above, pursuit of poetic and personal mission is recognised to be unattainable (or unsustainable) chimera, then perhaps entrapment in an endless round of fruitless repetition is all that remains. The many partial symmetries with the theme and structure of earlier stanzas, already apparent in stanza 8, and increasingly prominent as the poem reaches its end in stanzas 9 and 10, will gradually reinforce the ‘hairpin’ impression of the enclosure (rather than mere closure) of a vicious circle, of semantic and existential impasse.

One such element of unproductive recrudescence is to be found in the familiar pattern and associated concerns of the stanza’s intertextual procedures. As noted earlier, stanza 8 contains some unusually prominent reminiscences from Pushkin’s *Ruslan i Liudmila* and *Mednyi vsadnik*. Even in the exuberance of a spectacular Italian dawn, that is, the exile’s vision is not entirely single-focussed. The Russian past has not been wholly relinquished — importantly, there is in that sense no advance on previous experience — and the transition to the overt double-exposure of stanza 9 is already latent. It is perhaps also possible to detect in the allusive correlations between Pushkin and motorcycle ride an element of trivialisation of the poetic heritage. This would seem consistent with Khodasevich’s apprehension in ‘Koleblemyi trenochnik’ of an impending eclipse in the significance of Pushkin, who had already become inaccessible to many contemporaries:

Чувство Пушкина приходится им переводить на язык своих ощущений, притупленных раздражающими драками кинематографа.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> ‘Koleblemyi trenochnik’, p. 115.

Equally, however, the reminiscences might instead be taken as evidence of an exceptional intimacy with Pushkin, and of Pushkin's particular range and adaptability, his ability to speak to all occasions of life. But if, to return to our discussion of intertextuality in stanza 1, the Pushkinian verbal patterns are thus an inherent, *a priori* form for spontaneous elaboration of the persona's intuitions, it seems more than ever apparent that such 'thinking through Pushkin' brings no practical benefit. There is no satisfaction of recognition, no evident pleasure in connection with a living tradition (again, Mandel'shtam's work provides the obvious yardstick for comparison). On the contrary, the perhaps involuntary manifestations of cultural identity seem merely to hinder unmediated acceptance of the present moment, in and for itself. These intertextual reflexes are indeed, then, in terms of that earlier discussion, shored-up fragments of 'ruin', symptomatic of the inability to free the mind of an irretrievable past. Even Pushkin, his tripod 'shaken' as Khodasevich predicted in 1921, is no source of higher imperative. He is perhaps treated with the indifferent tinge of faint amusement that extends to so much else, betokening an imminent eclipse of self, as well as of historical and cultural era.

This gloomy observation seems consonant, moreover, with the implications of the curious description of Vesuvius, to which we must finally turn in discussion of this stanza:

Везувий к северу дымит.  
Запятнан площадною славой,  
Он все торжествен и велик  
В своей хламиде темно-ржавой,  
Сто раз прожженной и дырявой.

Like much else at this stage in SF, the depiction of Vesuvius picks up on a fleeting earlier reference, when the volcano appeared amid the photograph collection of stanza 2. We might also wonder, in retrospect, whether Vesuvius was not the 'pointed' mountain-summit glimpsed through the cathedral window in stanza 7: as we shall see, this uncertain identification would add another,

dark counter-implication behind the ostensible brightness and hope of description at that point in the poem. The modern-day trivialisation hinted at in the combination of Pushkin with Good-Friday(?) motorcycle ride — and before that, perhaps, in the popular reception of the waxen statue of the Mother of God — is now made explicit in reference to the famous and much-visited volcano. Berberova provides amplification of what may have been involved in her deprecation of the ‘lighted staircase’ that led to its crater,<sup>199</sup> while the distaste for tourism, fleetingly indicated also in Khodasevich’s ‘*Pompeia*’, resonates distantly, too, with the poem’s opening description of Capri, the ferry, and the Italian picnic. Yet Vesuvius — perhaps more persuasively than Pushkin, if not also the *Madonna Addolorata* — preserves its majesty despite the belittling temporal misconstructions that result from popular renown:

Он все торжествен и велик

As to what is retained through human incursions, the quasi-anthropomorphic description of the volcano’s rust-dark, ragged mantle, initially seems neither appealing nor imposing by comparison to the golden arc of the sun-tinged bay. Imperiousness is nevertheless symbolically implicit (albeit in distinctly non-populist terms). The volcano’s precise colour (*temno-rzhavyi*), in combination with the uncharacteristically fanciful approximation to an antique garment, might be taken to activate a sense comparable to that of the ‘Roman rust’ (*rimskaia rzhavchina*) depicted by Mandel’shtam in his ‘*S veselym rzhaniem pasutsia tabuny*’ (1915):

С веселым ржанием пасутся табуны,  
И римской ржавчиной окрасилась долина...

Victor Terras elucidates with reference to Mandel’shtam: ‘The metaphor is ... a great finesse: „Roman rust” (*ferrugo*) is literally the colour of the *clavus* of the Roman *praetexta*, and of imperial purple, and metaphorically the decay of ancient civilization in its

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<sup>199</sup> Berberova, *Italics*, p. 191.

late, Roman period (as opposed to the gold of its „classical spring” ...).<sup>200</sup> More obviously, Khodasevich’s garment ‘burnt through a hundred times’ makes reference to the volcano’s periodic eruptions, whilst the smoke it emits is a visual token of its continuing, latent menace. (Vesuvius, it should be noted, was considerably more active in Khodasevich’s day than at present. It had erupted in 1906, killing more than 100 people; a ‘prolonged period of permanent activity’ began in 1913 and ended only in 1944, with ‘voluminous lava flows and vigorous explosions that left a 300-metre-deep crater at the summit’; there were major interim lava flows close in time to SF, in 1926 and 1929. There has been no comparable activity in more recent times.)<sup>201</sup> In addition, as Bethea has observed, Khodasevich’s description of the volcano’s colouration and smoke is almost identical to his record in the article on Pompeii:

Везувий высится слева, коричнево-ржавый. Вершина его в парах.<sup>202</sup>

There, it will be recalled, on a site more terrible than any cemetery, the visible legacy of the most famous of Vesuvius’s many eruptions was viewed by Khodasevich as testimony to a cataclysmic destructive force, capable of visiting death, without possibility of purification or divine atonement, on a populace that perishes not as ‘servants of God’, but in the ‘shabby earthly guise’ in which they lived (‘bakers, cobblers, prostitutes...’).<sup>203</sup> Behind the exhilarating scene of a contemporary golden spring captured in stanza 8, in other words, there still lurks the same threat of merciless, meaningless annihilation that, on a personal level, so tormented both Annenskii (*‘smert’ pugaet ego ... neizvest-*

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<sup>200</sup> Victor Terras, ‘Classical Motives in the Poetry of Osip Mandel’štam’, *Slavic and East European Journal*, 10, 3 (1966), p. 256.

<sup>201</sup> Data from the ‘Smithsonian Global Volcanism Program’ (<http://www.volcano.si.edu/world/volcano.cfm?vnum=0101-02=&volpage=erupt>), and [http://www.vesuvioinrete.it/e\\_storia.htm](http://www.vesuvioinrete.it/e_storia.htm) (both accessed 18 January 2010).

<sup>202</sup> ‘Pompeia’, p. 29; cf. Bethea, *Khodasevich*, p. 298.

<sup>203</sup> See above, n. 135.

*nost'iu, neponiatnost'iu...*’) and the observing persona incapable of ‘tearing himself’ from recollection of Savel’ev’s funeral.

This fresh contrast between surface and subtext, enticing visible scene and hidden volcanic menace, is strikingly redolent also of the discrepancy between ‘perceived world’ that is the construct of the brain, and the immanent, external reality of the physical world (with which the body engages through its sensorimotor action systems). Khodasevich himself, incidentally, pointed implicitly toward a comparable disjuncture in his own reflections on the environs of Pompeii:

...пепел Везувия здесь вьелся во все. Поклонники сладенькой «красоты» находят ее здесь. Но она им только мерещится. Вся поэзия здешних мест — в их трагической скудости (my emphasis — MB).<sup>204</sup>

The real world upon and against which mental perceptions are formed is on this evidence bleak and comfortless indeed: threatening and chaotic, lacking any inherently discernible ‘sense’. Like the periodic flooding of the Neva, ever capable of sweeping away man’s aspirations to home, shelter and security,<sup>205</sup> to which the stanza’s closing Pushkinian intertext invites comparison, the destructiveness of Vesuvius does not exhibit an ordered cyclicity. It is certain only that eruptions will recur; but their timing is unknown and betrays no perceptible pattern. Like death — which, to reverse the polarities of the essay on Annenskii, must be explained in order to explain life — the volcano’s destructive force is ineluctable, but random and whimsically unpredictable. The passive self is powerless before its sombre majesty and — on all the evidence of SF — powerless to offer adequate ‘explanation or philosophical interpretation’ of the sense-eluding, if not senseless external reality it seems here to represent.

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<sup>204</sup> ‘*Pompeia*’, p. 29.

<sup>205</sup> For detailed analysis of these themes in *Mednyi vsadnik*, see my introductory essay in A. S. Pushkin, *The Bronze Horseman*, London: Bristol Classical Press, 2000, pp. xxvi-xxx.

In the shadow of Vesuvius, even the 'fire' reflected on Neapolitan windowpanes with which the stanza and its journey conclude, inspiringly elevating at first sight, becomes an unsettling reminder of the volcanic potential. Surrender to physical sensation is no antidote to mental and ontological exigencies. The fear which beset Annenskii is unresolved: the external reality of loss and death, for which exile might serve as a trope, is not to be circumvented.

### Stanza 9

Stanza 9 appears predominantly static rather than dynamic, photographic rather than cinematic, with an emphasis on vision rather than motion. It is natural (though not essential) to suppose a narrative continuity across the preceding stanzaic gap. This might plausibly be reconstructed to suggest that, under the hypnotic rhythm of the motorcycle ride, vivid external impressions and physical sensations have given way to disobedient memory and imaginative reverie. Perhaps primed by the intertextual promptings of the previous episode, it is the Petersburg angel that surmounts the narrow, octagonal spire of the cathedral of the Peter and Paul Fortress that now whimsically presents itself to the mind's eye (*'ia vizhu...'*). It is then pictured inverted upon the greenish waves in front of Castellammare,<sup>206</sup> as it had formerly been observed emerging from a misty Petersburg morning, reflected, head first, in the waters of the Neva. The penultimate stanza of the poem — the last before the concluding, annular recapitulation of stanza 10 — thus returns in dramatically visual terms to the double-exposure that is sustained on a verbal, (sub-)textual level throughout, as the abiding, inalienable affliction of exile. As successive commentators have noted, the object of recollection in this case, described

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<sup>206</sup> Strictly speaking, the waters are of the Bay of Naples, not, as has been suggested, the Gulf of Castellammare (Betha, *Khodasevich*, p. 314). This is Castellammare di Stabia; the Gulf of Castellammare (Castellammare del Golfo, town and bay) is in Sicily.

explicitly as emblematic guardian of tsarist Russia — ‘*ogromnyi strazh Rossii tsarskoj*’ — also brings to the individual theme a broader social, cultural and ‘historical-national dimension’.<sup>207</sup> Its fallen posture clearly represents ‘the collective tragedy of the fall of Imperial Russia’.<sup>208</sup>

The first five-and-a-half lines of the stanza:

Я вижу светлые просторы,  
Плывут сады, поляны, горы,  
А в них, сквозь них и между них —  
Опять как на неверном снимке,  
Весь в очертаниях сквозных,  
Как был тогда ...

reproduce in extensive detail the language and situational paradigms of stanzas 2 and 3. The first and third lines are a direct quotation of the opening verb and striking prepositional conglomeration from the first two lines of stanza 3:

Я вижу скалы и агавы,  
А в них, сквозь них и между них...

The alteration is only in the interpolated array of natural, topographical features, and these are a matter of comparative indifference, because all, as before, become spectrally transparent: the force of the preposition *skvoz*’, commented on in analysis of stanza 3, is intensified by use of the adjective *skvoznoi* two lines later (‘*v ochertaniiakh skvoznykh*’), whilst the verb *plyt*’, which had earlier rendered the double-exposed vision of Savel’ev’s forehead in the azure sky, likewise conveys a perceived world that is deprived of firm, fixed, material contour. The fourth line of the stanza looks back instead to the initial photographic metaphor of stanza 2. The choice of adjective (*nevernyi*) ensures that the theme of the double-exposed photograph as erroneous, poorly executed anomaly is also re-introduced, and it brings additional overtones

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<sup>207</sup> Göbler, *Chodasevič*, p. 134.

<sup>208</sup> Kirilcuk, ‘The Estranging Mirror’, p. 386.



of uncertainty and even lack of faith that are entirely apposite to the persona and dilemma of SF. In all, the multiple repetitions and re-articulations, implicit in the *Opiat'* of the stanza's fourth line, cumulatively confirm the impression of an endless round of undifferentiatedly similar experiences. These are comparable in their circumvolutions to the random intertwinings of recollection by which they are informed, but without obvious sign of organic growth: there is no significant development, no advance and no escape.

If the exilic present is in that fundamental sense unchanging, the past, too, seems inevitably frozen in memory:

Как был тогда в студеной дымке,  
В ноябрьской утренней заре...

It is also of course long gone, dissipated insubstantially, like the freezing 'smoke' that had combined in the recollected scene with the ominous, funereal-seeming flocks of birds of ill-omen over the motionless angel:

Золотокрылый ангел розов  
И неподвижен — а над ним  
Вороньи стаи, дым морозов,  
*Давно рассеявшийся дым.*

It is unlikely that this November dawn carries any direct association with the Bolshevik revolution, transposed into the calendar of the new era. Other considerations apart, Khodasevich had been in Moscow in October 1917, and had recorded intimately private experiences of his native city, emerging from the 'October' upheaval 'seven days and seven nights' later, in the poem notably entitled '*2-ogo noiabria*': '*Sem' dnei i sem' nochei Moskva metalas' / V ogne, v bredu...*'. Moscow — and specifically, as in *2-ogo noiabria*, 7-oi Rostovskii pereulok — is also the setting of '*Muzyka*' (1920), the last in the series of blank verse narratives to which *2-ogo noiabria* also belongs. Here, however, there is a striking anticipation of the present lines from SF, in the 'pinkness' — albeit compounded with 'silver', not 'gold' — and 'steam' of a

frosty morning, which are the prelude to introduction of another, highly idiosyncratic 'angelic' theme:

Сребро-розов  
Морозный пар. Столпы его восходят  
Из-за домов под самый купол неба,  
Как будто крылья ангелов гигантских.

Just as the spectre of Petersburg had seemed to show through (*skvoz'*) evocations of Moscow in earlier stanzas of SF, so now, perhaps, the memory of Petersburg/Petrograd in this penultimate stanza is double-exposed upon vestigial reminiscence of the (to Khodasevich) more familiar Moscow.<sup>209</sup> Such shadowy superimposition of the two capitals may be particularly apposite to the public, emblematically national reverberations of the stanza, with its angelic city-symbol. We must return shortly to its more private implications.

Commenting from a different angle on the dissipated smoke that had hung above the statue, Bethea suggests that the image of the Peter and Paul angel is in itself something of a surprise:

The smoke of a once vital tradition, a tradition we might expect Khodasevich to associate with Falconet's magisterial statue and Pushkin's *poema*, has dispersed forever. But Khodasevich turns from the Russia epitomized by the equestrian figure of the tsar-conqueror. Pushkin selected the Bronze Horseman as symbol of imperial Russia at the zenith of its power; Khodasevich now selects the angel holding the cross as symbol of Russia in eclipse.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> An anticipatory intertextual convergence of place might be discerned also in the use of *metat'sia* in the first line of the 'Muscovite' '2-ogo noiabria', just quoted: cf. Pushkin's 'Petrograd' November in the first lines of Part I of *Mednyi vsadnik*: 'Nad omrachennym Petrogradom / Dyshal noiabr' osennim khladom /.../ Neva *metalas'*, kak bol'noi...'. And, of course, the paronomastic sequence 'Srebro-rozov / Moroznyi' in the Muscovite lines from *Muzyka* has its archetypal source of poetic origin in Pushkin's paean to Peter's city in the Introduction to *Mednyi vsadnik*, discussed in connection with SF earlier in this study.

<sup>210</sup> Khodasevich, p. 312.

As we have repeatedly seen above, however, Pushkin's narrative poem — as distinct from the symbolic Horseman of its title — is a recurrent subtextual presence at several points in SF. It is never far away; and the *rozov/morozov* rhyme in the lines just quoted follows on from the more overt allusion to *Mednyi vsadnik* in stanza 8, to extend the process of reminiscence into stanza 9. Conceivably, therefore, the stanza's closing image of the angel reflected in the Neva:

Зловещий, огненный и мрачный

— strikingly discordant with the motionless (*nepodvizhen*), golden-winged figure, roseate in the dawn sky, with which the descriptive sequence begins — might after all constitute something of a shadowy double (and typically submerged citation) of Pushkin's still motionless Horseman, as he is 'recognised' by Evgenii:

... Кто неподвижно возвышался  
Во мраке медною главой <...>  
Ужасен он в окрестной мгле! <...>  
Какая сила в нем сокрыта!  
А в сем коне какой огонь!

The same adjectival string — *zloveshchii, ognennyi, mrachnyi* — also, however, seems appropriate to, and directly evocative of, the volcano of the previous stanza, with which the 'smoke' (*rasseiavshiisia dym morozov*) suggests another link in the chain of mnemonic association: all the more so in that the two aspects of the angel — golden and roseate; menacing, fiery and gloomy — might seem to arise out of, and be superimposed 'as on an uncertain photograph' upon, the preceding stanza's contrastive visual impressions of gold-tinged, rosy Italian dawn (cf. *rumiany luch pronik*), and 'rust-dark' Vesuvius. Perhaps, then, these 'wild correspondences' of memory — otherwise parallels of intra- and intertextual connection — construct a

nexus of significance which brings two symbols of Russia's pre-Revolutionary imperial power, horseman spectrally delineated behind angel, together with Terras's rust-tinged decay of once golden civilisation(s), and the broader certainty of inevitable decline and fall: of annihilation emblematised by fire or water, volcano or flood, that is a fundamental condition of external reality.<sup>211</sup>

Khodasevich's particular choice for this final sequence, of fortress angel rather than Pushkinian-equestrian tsar, might well have involved an element of fastidious avoidance of the most clichetically familiar, consistent with the propensity noted by Bogomolov, to submerge overt citation and other '„material" signs of tradition' in 'the depths of the verse'.<sup>212</sup> It also eschews some of the overtones of aggressive imperialism, autocratic power, and oppression of the private individual latent in Pushkin's narrative, but of little relevance to the post-1917 poet in exile. More simply, it maintains the sense of 'documentary exactitude' that Khodasevich valued in Pushkin's most famous nar-

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<sup>211</sup> The volcanic Vesuvian-Pompeian analogy to post-1917 Petrograd that arises contingently from the Italian background of SF would subsequently occur to others: on comparisons of the 'capital' to a devastated Pompeii, and the damage inflicted on the city by the 'revolutionary Vesuvius', see Roman Timenchik and Vladimir Khazan, 'Na zemle byla odna stolitsa', in *Peterburg v poezii russkoi emigratsii (pervaia i vtoraiia volna)*, St Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2006, p. 38. (Timenchik and Khazan's splendid, voluminous anthology excludes poems by Khodasevich, as also G. Ivanov and Nabokov, on the grounds that each is represented by an individual volume of the 'Biblioteka poeta' series.) Another image of the cathedral angel ('Angel / Na shpile krepostnom') — in this instance, able to see prophetically into the distance — elaborated in a surrounding context of intertextual reminiscences from *Mednyi vsadnik*, but without overt reference to Falconet's monument, notably occurs in stanza iv of the Introduction to Chapter 2 of Blok's *Vozmezdie*.

<sup>212</sup> See note 89 above. Though the ubiquity of poetic refractions of the Bronze Horseman scarcely requires illustration, it is indicative that the topographical index in Timenchik and Khazan's anthology lists overt reference to the monument by 54 first and second wave émigré poets, or roughly one in three of those represented. On a series of pre-1917 Silver Age examples, see part 2 of Ospovat and Timenchik, *„Pechal'nu povest' sokhranit'..."*, esp. pp. 172 — 215.

rative.<sup>213</sup> Khodasevich's angel is closer to the water than Falconet's monument, hence appropriately situated to permit the observation of a reflected image — presented, as ever, independently of the persona's will (cf. '*Takim iavilsia predο mnoi*') — that is thoroughly consonant with SF's overt fascination with visual surfaces. Naturally, however, the angel also brings important connotations of its own. Bethea recalls the grim, 'star-crossed' identity of the fortress and cathedral over which it presides, for two centuries both a prison and the royal burial vault of the Romanovs.<sup>214</sup> Clearly, this latter consideration lends special weight to Khodasevich's designation of the angel as '*strazh Rossii tsarskoi*', and maintains the preoccupation with mortality and burial persistent throughout this poem by the author of *Nekropol'*. Inevitably, in the broader thematic context of SF, the angel must also signal something not merely of the political, historical and social order, but of Russia's religious and spiritual tradition: perhaps, given the poem's previous uses of the trope of vertical elevation, Symbolist as well as Orthodox;<sup>215</sup> in any case, now under external threat of serious eclipse, if not already as indisputably consigned to the past as the Romanov tsars in their coffins. It is doubtless pertinent in this connection that the Cathedral which the angel surmounts had been closed as a place of worship in 1919, and was one of the first parts of the Peter and Paul Fortress to become a museum in 1924.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> See '*Koleblemyi trenochnik*', p. 109. Cf. Khodasevich's perhaps not entirely persuasive comment on Berberova's edition of SF: '*Vse tak i bylo, kak rasskazano*' (*Stikhotovoreniia*, p. 401).

<sup>214</sup> Khodasevich, p. 312.

<sup>215</sup> Given the convergence of Symbolist with Roman Catholic imagery, noted above in relation to the Lady of stanza 6, it might be added that, as my colleague Dr Ruth Coates has pointed out to me, this particular, feminised angel, like the spire that it surmounts, more closely reflects a Catholic than traditionally Orthodox aesthetic. For a thorough contextualisation of this further potential twist of complexity in relation to the Petersburg monument, see the seminal essay by Iu.M Lotman and B. A. Uspenskii, 'Echoes of the Notion of „Moscow as the Third Rome” in Peter the Great's Ideology' (*Khudozhestvennyi iazyk srednevekov'ia*, Moscow, 1982; repr. and trans. e. g. in their *Semiotics of Russian Culture*, Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Contributions, 1984, pp. 53–67).

Given this broad range of possible associations, Khodasevich's recollected perception — or imaginative invention — of the image of the *toppled* angel renders with condensed symbolic force a view implicit throughout SF, and previously articulated in the poet's 1921 speech on Pushkin:

Прежняя Россия, а тем самым Россия пушкинская, сразу и резко отодвинулась от нас на неизмеримо большее пространство, чем отодвинулась бы за тот же период при эволюционном ходе событий. Петровский и Петербургский период русской истории кончился; что бы ни предстояло — старое не вернется. Возврат немислим ни исторически, ни психологически.<sup>217</sup>

This irreversible distancing — which Khodasevich already described in spatial terms, as well as with reference to temporal epoch — seems nothing if not an experience of exile before emigration, evoked as a national, rather than individual phenomenon. The 'double' inversion of the angelic 'guardian of tsarist Russia', in the waters of the Neva, in the greenish waves of the Bay of Naples, now re-articulates this same separation from the Pushkinian-Petrine-Petersburgian era<sup>218</sup> through a visual image of demise, consistent with the poem's repeated encounters with death over which there appears to be no triumph. It reminds us, too, that, if not yet all children of Eve, or even all Khodasevich's erstwhile compatriots, then those of his generation and Symbolist culture, irrespective of place, are collectively consigned to the deprivation of exile. And though return is impossible — the psychological condition of the period that has ended cannot be re-

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<sup>216</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, the angel itself nevertheless remained in place throughout the Soviet era, although a project to replace it with a ruby star did come under consideration a decade after the completion of SF, in the late 1930s.

<sup>217</sup> 'Koleblemyi trenochnik', p. 113.

<sup>218</sup> Cf. the observation of Timenchik and Khazan: '*... obraz Peterburga, fakticheskogo tsentra natsional'no-kul'turnogo kosmosa, kak nikakogo drugogo rossiiskogo goroda, neotdelim ot russkoi literatury. On v takoi zhe mere tvorenie Petra, kak i Pushkina*' ('Na zemle byla odna stolitsa', pp. 16–17).

captured — the debilitating sense of loss which is confirmation of this, remains in lasting evidence.

The exilic resonance of this ninth stanza is neatly reinforced by the very choice of statue and reflection. Just as the *ostro-verkhaia gora* of the cathedral sequence in stanza 7 ‘prepares us for the poem’s climactic image, the angel atop the *vos’migrannoe ostri’e*’, so, as Bethea has noted, the ‘fall’ of Russia’s guardian angel is anticipated by the implication in the same stanza of Lucifer as Morning Star.<sup>219</sup> Lucifer as fallen angel is, of course, the archetype of all sorrowing exiles, irrevocably expelled from the irretrievable spiritual homeland (*‘Pechal’nyi Demon, dukh izgnan’ia...’*, etc.). The collective-national, if not the universal, nature of the experience is again implicit in this; and it might be added that the ‘public’ transformational dynamic of Khodasevich’s powerfully emblematic angel-become-demon consummately exemplifies the predominant aspect of the contemporary, collective Petersburg text: the city becomes the more or less overt symbol of a paradise lost, and its familiar topographical features regularly undergo an inversion of semantic value to dramatise the effect of mythical/Biblical expulsion. (*‘Paradiz moi obratilsia v Ad’*, as Vadim Gardner’s animate version of the Bronze Horseman laments upon the ‘centennial’, 1924 recurrence of Pushkin’s flood.) Yet Khodasevich, for all his subsequent recollection of the privileged ‘mournful happiness’ of his own existence in Petrograd — ‘indescribably majestic and beautiful in its wasteland silence’, a lasting component of his collective identity — nevertheless offers in the text of SF, for reasons to which we shall shortly turn, none of the explicit idealisation of the ‘pre-lapsarian’ city to which his erstwhile compatriots were unquestionably prone.<sup>220</sup>

At the same time, the textual correlation between *Dennitsa* and fallen angel suggests a re-enactment of the thwarted spiritual questing of the Sorrentine stanzas: once again, in the toppled an-

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<sup>219</sup> Khodasevich, p. 311 note.

<sup>220</sup> Cf. Timenchik and Khazan, ‘Na zemle byla odna stolitsa’, pp. 15, 27–28, 42. For Gardner’s ‘*Navodnenie 1924 g.*’, written in Finland in 1928, see *ibid.*, p. 28, and *Peterburg v poezii russkoi emigratsii*, pp. 198–99; for Khodasevich’s recollection of Petrograd, see note 38 above.

gel there can be no enduring higher imperative; again, despite the unmentioned cross in the angel's arms, no hope of resurrection ('*Vozvrat nemyslim...*'). This in turn directs us to the private symbolic system which remains prominent among the multiplicity of Khodasevich's poetic tasks. Both angel and demon are frequently recurrent motifs in Khodasevich's verse (*Lida*, of 1921, includes an '*Angel Paden'ia*'): both, indeed, have attracted unusually extensive critical attention, which requires no general recapitulation here.<sup>221</sup> Exceptionally, however, Alexandra Kirilcuk has accorded the fallen angel of SF a substantial place in her consideration, arguing persuasively that the image generates 'a metapoetic meaning through its association with the angels (and demons) of poetic inspiration that appear throughout *Tiazhelaia lira* and, in debased form, in *Evropeiskaia noch*'. Whereas angels for Khodasevich habitually 'announce the approach of poetic inspiration and, like the soul, sometimes hover on the margins of earthly and spiritual reality', here the other-worldly element is become thoroughly earthbound, assuming visible (if not entirely tangible) form and spatial contour:

the angel appears defeated and powerless in its earthly incarnation: its silent, unmoving, upended state suggests that the angel, like the poet, is now a helpless prisoner in the phenomenal world.

There is none of the fructifying, inspirational transfiguration of the earthly that typically results from the downward incursion of the heavenly in *Tiazhelaia lira*; and if the double-exposed photograph provides a metaphor 'to express the painful split between the two worlds of home and abroad that all exiles share', so, according to Kirilcuk, the image of the angel in stanza 9:

takes on a poignant, intensely personal resonance as an emblem of the poet's other, perhaps even more painful ex-

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<sup>221</sup> See, for example, Kreps, '*Evropeiskaia noch*', pp. 134-39, 142 and *passim*; Levin, '*Zametki o poezii Vl. Khodasevicha*', pp. 71-72, 78, 82-85; Miller, '*Xodasevič's Gnostic Exile*', pp. 224-29.



ile from his 'transcendent home': that of the other world  
that his poetry once gave him access to.<sup>222</sup>

The poet-persona, in other words, is trapped in matter like his angel-double — and we should perhaps recall once more that it is prison and tomb that lie beneath the cathedral spire. Once again, the poetic mission has literally fallen flat.

It is further symptomatic of this that whereas, in another memorable image from *Evropeiskaia noch'*, the very process of falling brings a momentary perceptual relief from the oppression of unrelieved flatness, so as to make even the lot of the suicide seem enviable to the observer:

Счастлив, кто падает вниз головой:  
Мир для него хоть на миг — да иной,<sup>223</sup>

in stanza 9 of SF there is no observation of process, only the stasis of already completed action:

Огромный страж...  
Вниз опрокинут головой.  
Так отражался он...

Reflection, too — in mirrors, windows, polished table-top, puddle — is repeatedly employed in Khodasevich's presentation of the angel's fallen, demonic (or quasi-demonised) counterpart in other poems of the period. This is a diminished figure, shorn of his traditional, grand-tragic aura of rebellion. He is sunk into the daily grind (*prostoe zhit'e-byt'e*), to share the mask-like 'shabby earthly guise' (eczema on the forehead in place of the mark of Cain, etc.), failings and familiar limitations of the contemporary, exilic earthly persona from whom he is ultimately indistinguishable, to the extent that, in Miller's observation, 'the only awareness he possesses is a vague uneasiness, the only epiphany an unidentified and mute despair'.<sup>224</sup> The tropes of reflection function in such contexts to signal both doubling of identity,

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<sup>222</sup> Kirilcuk, 'The Estranging Mirror', pp. 387—89.

<sup>223</sup> *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 164.

and an entrapment in endless, repetitive surfaces, the force of which was encapsulated by Khodasevich in addressing the sense of terror before the 'senseless play-acting of life and the senseless stench of death' at the end of his essay on Annenskii:

Ужас, приоткрывающий перспективу — опять-таки в ужас.  
Два зеркала, отражающие пустоту друг друга.<sup>225</sup>

The double reflection of the fallen angel of stanza 9, deprived of transcendent verticality, inherently inert, thus carries a substantial weight of contextual association, to convey also the private predicament from which there seems no hope of escape.

In sum, the composite image of Petersburg angel and its demonic inversion in the Italian bay is not merely another 'disobedient' recollection of the pre-exilic past, but also in itself a double metaphor, standing (or failing to stand!) both for the Petrine-Petersburgian era of Russian culture, and less obviously, for the nearly-absent poet-persona. But the latter, too, not least through identification with the monument, seems to acquire a double signification in the play of reflections that informs the broadened context of this penultimate stanza. He remains the isolated self, lacking integrated individual presence, dissociated in his very mode of perception from the fixed bearings of firm internal or external value; but his experience is now also implicitly representative of the exilic lot of compatriot-contemporaries, temporally, and in some cases spatially, divorced from a historical era that is irrevocably ended. We might perhaps think back here to Berberova's suggestion of a precise dating of August 1921, and her perception of Khodasevich as the quintessential personification of the 'Russian renaissance of the first quarter of the century'; as also to Khodasevich's own deliberation in 'Tsitaty' on the

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<sup>224</sup> 'Khodasevič's Gnostic Exile', p. 229. The quotation is from Miller's illuminating discussion of the cycle *U moria* (ibid., pp. 228—29), the source of the image of an eczemic Cain and reflection of the 'daily grind': 'Sidit v tabachnykh magazinakh, / Pogriaz v prostom zhit'e-byt'e, / I otrazhaetsia v vitrinakh / Shirokopolyim kanot'e' (Stikhotvoreniia, pp. 158—59).

<sup>225</sup> *SS-Ardis*, vol. 2, p. 333.

individual life that suddenly appears on reflection to stand for life in general.

### The Traumatized Persona

Although the rhetorical framework of stanza 9 is perhaps more overtly dependent on mytho-poetic association than at any other point in SF, it is nevertheless grounded, as ever, in explicit reference to psychological processes of memory and perception. Before passing to analysis of the final stanza, it will therefore be useful to reconsider afresh the by now thoroughly familiar affliction of the persona from the 'historical and psychological' perspective alluded to in Khodasevich's Pushkin speech. In both private and representative-national hypostases, it can be summarised at this stage as exhibiting a broad range of psychological symptoms classically characteristic of a traumatized personality.

In its clinical-psychological sense, trauma might conveniently be understood as 'an overwhelming experience or set of experiences that destabilize an individual's sense of self and ... place in the world'.<sup>226</sup> The traumatized ego is in consequence diminished, 'shrunken', and finds itself 'caught in an external environment that has been transformed into a hostile place, at least as the individual perceives it'.<sup>227</sup> Manifest symptoms vary very considerably, but will typically include obsessive, intrusive memories, in which the subject lives as vividly as in 'reality'; a sense of helpless passivity; and a 'symptomatic numbing, such as emotional anesthesia or loss of interest in activities previously

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<sup>226</sup> This 'working definition' is proposed by Lisa Cardyn, 'The Construction of Female Sexual Trauma in Turn-of-the-Century American Medicine', in Mark S. Micale and Paul Lerner, *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870–1930*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 177, note.

<sup>227</sup> Abram Kardiner, *The Traumatic Neuroses of War* (1941), quoted in Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 90.

found pleasurable':<sup>228</sup> in other words, a restricted range of affective response to the surrounding world, where 'faint amusement and indifference' may be all that remain. These indications are very clearly and persistently present in the persona depicted in SF.

The intrusive memories characteristic of trauma bear further, specific comparison to the double exposures of Khodasevich's poem, as 'fragments of past experience that are irrelevant to the present, [but] continue to intrude on and influence behaviour, consciousness, moods, affects and perceptions'.<sup>229</sup> Such memories were termed 'fixed ideas' by the pioneering investigator of medico-psychological trauma, Pierre Janet, who ascribed to a 'dissociation of consciousness' their power to impair and overwhelm the mind's capacity for synthesis (compare in SF the persona's thwarted 'Pushkinian' pursuit of assimilated impressions toward synthetic '„explanation", that is philosophical interpretation'). For Janet, that is to say, writing in 1925, the fixed ideas betrayed by traumatic memories 'belong to a mental system that is not subject to conscious will'. They are isolated (dissociated) from the control of the limited personal consciousness (compare Khodasevich's autonomy of recollection: '*I tak zhivet, i tak rastet*'), and their domination of the mind may result in a partial or complete automatism (cf. '*I ot mechty ne otryvaias' ... Za smutnym shestviem idu, ... spotykaias*').<sup>230</sup> It is not surprising, in consequence, that 'traumatized, dissociative people tend to be stuck, to not be able to go on with their lives':<sup>231</sup> the pull of the past becomes an impasse that prevents effective engagement in the present. In engendering depressive states, trauma also tends particularly to

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<sup>228</sup> Young, *The Harmony of Illusions*, p. 107; sourced from the US *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 1980.

<sup>229</sup> Elizabeth F. Howell, *The Dissociative Mind*, Hillsdale NJ: Analytic Press, 2005, p. 55.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 58–59; O. Van der Hart and B. Friedman, 'A Reader's Guide To Pierre Janet: A Neglected Intellectual Heritage' <http://www.traumapages.com/a/vdhart-89.php> (accessed 3 January 2010). Janet's first work appeared in 1889, but he continued publishing into the 1940s. His two-volume *Psychological Healing* appeared contemporaneously with SF, in 1925.

<sup>231</sup> Howell, *The Dissociative Mind*, p. 60.

preclude such 'effective action and resolution' as brings 'feelings of triumph and joy': it interrupts 'the possibility of a competent completion that would yield a sense of triumph, and this interruption contributes to a loss of will'.<sup>232</sup> The failed epiphany (if such it is) in the Sorrento cathedral of stanza 7 might plausibly be read in this light.

If the persona of SF, more or less thoroughly and consistently throughout, thus exhibits the symptoms of a post-traumatic pathology, there arises an obvious and, on the face of it, relatively simple question as to the source of trauma. Khodasevich, as we have seen, uses the eruption of Vesuvius to stand for the calamity of death without opportunity of cathartic 'purification'. Like Pushkin's Petersburg flood in the shadowy subtextual background of the poem, this sudden, violent, randomly unpredictable event, which is beyond the capacity of human control and denies its victims any chance of directing their own fate, seems an aptly persuasive analogue for any other, large-scale traumatogenic occurrence, up to and including Russian Revolution, and Civil War: the here unspoken mechanism by which the angel is toppled, the Petersburg period of culture abruptly curtailed. Objectively, however, there is an element of anachronism in the Vesuvian model. Although the concept of psychological trauma, as the overwhelming experience that destabilizes the sense of self and world, might in retrospect readily be applied also to Pushkin's Evgenii (another example of Pushkin's enduring contemporaneity!), it emerged explicitly only in connection with the advent of industrial, technological modernity: from the nineteenth-century railway accidents with which the phenomenon was first widely connected, to the shells and mechanised slaughter of World War I.<sup>233</sup> In the summation of one recent authority in the cultural-historical field: 'Trauma — as concept, theory, and experience — requires not just „new“ events but an

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>233</sup> Khodasevich himself spoke in 1921 of the 'psychic infection' — *psikhi-cheskaia zaraza* — which a generation of young men had brought back from protracted exposure to killing and death in the trenches and their aftermath ('Koleblemyi trenochnik', p. 115).

altered sensibility, a change in the consciousness of change, which now becomes threatening, incomprehensible, and unmasterable'. It is a product of the profound, anxiety-provoking cultural, social and political transformations of modernity:<sup>234</sup> of Khodasevich's age of the motorcycle and steamship, pocket camera and cinematograph.

It follows from this 'shift in sensibility', moreover, that trauma is a matter of subjective experience, belonging to the perceived world that has repeatedly been juxtaposed in our analysis of SF to the external, physical world: 'trauma turns out to be not an event per se but rather the *experiencing* or *remembering* of an event in the mind of an individual or the life of a community'.<sup>235</sup> It also became increasingly recognised that, as a condition bound with the process (or dysfunction) of memory, post-traumatic disorders might often be attributed to a complex of external circumstances rather than a tangible single occurrence.<sup>236</sup> Although it would certainly be mistaken to identify with Khodasevich himself the persona of SF — who might now be regarded as a literary case-study in psychic disorder, on a par with Sologub's clinically persuasive depiction of paranoia in *Melkii bes*, or Maiakovskii's rendition of manic depression in *Fleita-pozvonochnik* and *Oblako v shtanakh* — it is worth pausing to recollect the series of deprivations and losses that overtook an author avowedly insecure from the outset as to origins, health, and place in the world (*'ne*

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<sup>234</sup> Mark S. Micale, 'Jean-Martin Charcot and *les névroses traumatiques*: From Medicine to Culture in French Trauma Theory of the Late Nineteenth Century', in Micale and Lerner, eds, *Traumatic Pasts*, pp. 139, 137; Micale's acute analysis of Second Empire and early Third Republic France contains much that is applicable to Russia of the period. On the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century emergence of traumatic neurosis as a distinct psychiatric category, see also Micale and Lerner's Introductory chapter to the same volume ('Trauma, Psychiatry, and History: A Conceptual and Historiographical Introduction': *ibid.*, pp. 1-26), and Part I ('The Origins of Traumatic Memory') of Young, *The Harmony of Illusions*.

<sup>235</sup> Micale and Lerner, 'Trauma, Psychiatry, and History', p. 20. See also Wolfgang Schäffner, 'Event, Series, Trauma: The Probabilistic Revolution of the Mind in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', in Micale and Lerner, eds, *Traumatic Pasts*, p. 84.

<sup>236</sup> Bruna Bianchi, 'Psychiatrists, Soldiers and Officers in Italy during the Great War', *ibid.*, p. 229.

*zhilets...*'), and who insisted, moreover, on the autobiographical basis of all serious poetry (*'vse tak i bylo, kak rasskazano...'*). As we have already noted, in the period following the initial experience of revolution commemorated in *2-go noiabria* (where *Tsygany* and *Motsart i Sal'ieri* fail for the first time to satisfy), these included a precarious winter in the single, unheated room of a Moscow basement; the shocking, premature deaths of literary colleagues, in a depopulated Petersburg that flourished in its decay like a corpse that grows more attractive (*khoro-sheet*) in its coffin;<sup>237</sup> the tribulations and upheaval of departure from Russia; nomadic existence abroad; and the final and irrevocable acceptance that 'return' really is impossible — this latter, already symbolically foretold in the Pushkin speech, more or less directly connected with departure from Sorrento and the associated rift with Gor'kii. The traumatogenic turning point of August 1921 is not, of course, the whole story; and it may be reasonable to trace the aetiology to a period before any external upheaval: to the peculiar, Symbolist experience of a spectral reality, lived out on two separate planes, that Khodasevich described in the memoir of Muni and elsewhere (*'deistvoitel'nost', raspyliaias' v soznanii, stanovilas' skvoznoi...'*). Symbolism had left its indelible imprint, and its cultural ambience had much to answer for.<sup>238</sup>

It is, however, the persona of SF who in stanza 9 becomes implicitly representative of 'the life of a community': a generation — or nation — for whom the traumatised condition is endemic. This in turn takes us back to the difficult distinction between 'normal' and 'pathological', touched on in discussion of stanza 1. Perhaps, indeed, the inference now to be drawn is that the psychic impairment of trauma is the 'normal' condition of modern humanity. Intriguingly, Janet's pathological 'dissociation

<sup>237</sup> See 'Dom iskusstv', in Khodasevich, *Izbrannaia proza*, p. 325.

<sup>238</sup> See the quotation from 'Muni' at note 85 above, and the analysis of Symbolist culture that runs through 'Konets Renaty' and other essays of Khodasevich's *Nekropol'*. From a slightly different viewpoint, cf. also Bethea's comparison of SF to Akhmatova's *Poema bez geroia* as a retrospective apportionment of 'personal and collective responsibility', in which the excesses of 'Decadence and Symbolism' were now 'bringing the volcanic ash of retribution on everyone's head' (Khodasevich, p. 301).

of consciousness' has much in common with the gap of interaction between conscious mind and unconscious brain that is taken as the norm in recent neuroscience; and if, as Allan Young has argued, 'the discovery of traumatic memory' severely curtailed the scope of 'two core attributes of the Western self, free will and self-knowledge — the capacity to reflect upon and to put into action one's desires, preferences and intentions',<sup>239</sup> we have seen, too, that this radical revision of once stable assumptions is normalised as general principle in the most recent neuropsychological modelling of mind and self. The 'normalisation of pathology' is a topic clearly beyond the scope of this study; but the model of memory and personality that Khodasevich adumbrates with apparent generalising force in his opening stanza, and amplifies and exemplifies with unflinching, quasi-forensic acuity in the poem that follows, has in this respect a symptomatic resonance far beyond the narrow specificity of his own Italian exile. Perhaps there is something of the pathological in the most 'normal' of present-day psyches; we are all indeed the exiled children of Eve.

The concepts just outlined naturally retain their pertinence for the finale of stanza 9. Although the stanza's Petersburgian imagery engenders far-reaching speculation in directions consistent with Khodasevich's multiplicity of tasks ('philosophical, psychological, descriptive, etc.'), it closes with a characteristic gesture of disengagement from recollection of 'the guardian of Tsarist Russia' — *strazh Rossii tsarskoi* — and at least partial disavowal on the part of the persona:

Таким явился предо мной —  
Ошибка пленки неудачной.

This literally self-dismissive statement is also doubly retrospective. It returns us to the comparison to an uncertain photograph (*nevernyi snimok*) in the first lines of the stanza, which in turn recapitulated elements of stanzas 2 and 3. It points backward, in

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<sup>239</sup> Young, *The Harmony of Illusions*, p. 4.



addition, to the autonomy of mental processes from the control of the marginalised conscious self established in stanzas 1 and 2, and specifically recollects the mishandled films ('*Zabudet snimkam schet i plenkam*') that result in the double-exposures of stanza 2. Now, however, the personal agency of the *fotograf-rotozei* is absent. As the slightly tautological combination of *oshibka* with a slightly clumsy, slightly inappropriate epithet (*neudachnaia [plenka]*) serves tacitly to remind us, there has been no significant evolution over the course of the poem. Once again, the reiterative circularity instead seems strongly denotative of mental impasse (*bezvykhodnost'*). Nor, evidently, is this any longer merely a matter of the persona's failure adequately to synthesise accumulated impressions: impressions *per se* are not to be trusted. The memory of the angel is not only subjectively perceived ('*takim iavilsia predomnoi'*), but subjectively construed. It is chimerical, objectively absent, and has intruded with disobedient whimsicality, 'in, through and between' present surroundings. Implicitly, then, there is no more justification for attribution of meaning to the randomised superimposition of angel inverted upon the bay, than to the earlier image of the baby goat inverted upon Vesuvius. There is no certain ground from which to proceed; to that extent, all interpretative endeavour is hazardous, potentially misguided if not downright futile (*oshibka neudachnaia...*).

It goes almost without saying that such 'loss of ontological security', and an inability to reconcile intrusive images and thoughts with the 'cognitive schemas' that might make it possible 'to impose a sense of order and meaning on the world', are themselves typically symptomatic of post-traumatic pathology.<sup>240</sup> Whether they are nothing more than deficiencies in the perceived world on the part of a traumatised exilic subject, or on the contrary, an objectively justified, 'normalised' response to an external reality that is typified by arbitrary traumatogenic occurrences, remains unresolved. Less obviously, it might be added that, for psychotherapists from Janet onward, a fundamental therapeutic treatment for traumatic disorders is in confrontation with

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

memories through the construction of narrative. To the persona of stanza 9, such confrontation is unrewarding. The final line rejects the value of the perception, and the possibility of 'cure', of restoration of psychic health, seems hopelessly remote. The stanza ends on a depressive, self-deprecating decrescendo, subversive of any imposition of 'order and meaning'.

Stanza 10 will summarise, but the expectation of resolution is naturally slight.

### Stanza 10

The final stanza begins with a continuation of the process of recapitulation that is already well in train. Formal features are again significantly semanticised. Whereas the penultimate stanza had reiterated, quite explicitly, elements of stanzas 2 and 3, and the previous, eighth stanza, had less overtly alluded to subtextual elements of stanza 4, this last stanza begins with a prominent echo of the first. With a syntactic adjustment to which we shall return shortly, its opening line repeats the memorable first line of stanza 1: '*Vospominan'e prikhotlivo*'. Still, however, this carefully articulated, seemingly purposive framing:

1 {2+3 (4 [Sorrento sequence]) 8) 9} 10

does not bring the poem to the elegant resolution that might accordingly be anticipated: symmetries are suggested but not sustained, creating an impression of imbalance and incompleteness, if not of further mirror-like entrapment. The potential annular recapitulation of the poem's opening, intimated in the stanza's first line, is thus only fragmentarily developed in the few lines that follow (recurrence of *ono* in rhyming position at the end of line 2; recurrence of *kak* as comparative conjunction; recurrence of the lexemes *diko*, *zhivo*). The patterning is then dropped, and it is notable that the stanza is not symmetrically equivalent in length to the first, being two lines longer than the densely formulated opening.

The stanza's ten lines comprise two distinct semantic units of five lines each. Not surprisingly, these prove to convey disparate, even mutually contradictory attitudes, whilst their rhetorical structure is indicative of a continuing, unresolved provisionality. The first unit consists of a single-line first sentence, and a four-line second sentence that tails off into suspension points. It is expressively, though not syntactically incomplete. The second part of the stanza consists of a single sentence, extending over the last five lines, that takes the form of a rhetorical question — the more noteworthy as only the second question in the entire poem. The poem's ending thus appears formally inconclusive: as far from any perfect resolution as the partial indications of potential symmetry.

Initially, the re-assertion of memory's whimsicality nevertheless brings to the stanza's first line the apparent force not of an abstract proposition that remains to be tested, but of an incontrovertible truth, borne out by concrete example through the entirety of the preceding text. Its declarative impact is accordingly not attenuated, as in stanza 1, by extension through a coordinating conjunction into a second line: a full stop at line's end lends uncompromising finality to a comfortless observation of the accidental and uncontrolled, presented as generalised norm. An early draft of the second line amplified this sense of unfathomable randomness:

Бог знает, чем оно живет.<sup>241</sup>

In the final version, as in stanza 1, elaboration of the opening definition of recollection is instead effected by means of a simile introduced by *kak*. Again as in stanza 1, moreover, an element of syntactic indeterminacy is now introduced, tending after all to erode the force of the opening. The second line, like the first, might naturally be perceived as a complete sentence — particularly in that re-recognition of stanza 1's (and Solov'ev's?) stressed *ono*, prominently placed at line end, is liable to retard attention as a seeming fixed point:

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<sup>241</sup> *SS-Ardis*, vol. 1, p. 466.

Как сновидение — оно

But closure is repeatedly thwarted, on a variety of levels, and the sentence that begins with one *kak* continues through a second, conjunctive *kak* at the start of the next line:

Как сновидение — оно

Как будто вещей правдой живо...

Inevitably, it would seem, a minor effort of syntactic recoding is required of the reader. The characteristic faint clumsiness (not least in the inelegant repetition of *kak*), the slight, stumbling awkwardness in handling of the disobedient poetic material, have, as it were, still not been overcome. Analytic exigency continues to outweigh rhetorical assurance, and the unobtrusive encumbrance of poetic syntax and poetic form will provide a tacit, semantically significant undercurrent to the metapoetic theme which resumes prominence in this final stanza.

The first stage of the simile, comparing memory to dream, is less arrestingly original than the poem's opening comparison of abstract mental process to the tangibly concrete branches of the olive tree. It is nevertheless somewhat unexpected: though the oneiric power of memory was suggested in stanza 4 ('*ot mechty ne otryoaias'*), dream — and specifically *son* (*snovidenie*), rather than *mechta* — has not been significant in the preceding stanzas. Plainly, the comparison re-accentuates the 'whimsicality of recollection', as an autonomous mental function, dissociated from the control of consciousness; and the adjective *zhivo* makes fresh allusion to its organic separateness ('*i tak zhivet'*'; compare also the draft: '*Bog znaet, chem ono zhivet'*'). It is as alien, impenetrable and uniddable as dream. At this late stage of the poem, the comparison to dream might also seem persuasively to characterise the undirected, obsessive intrusiveness of double-exposed, pre-exilic memories, in which the traumatised subject tends to live 'as vividly as in reality'.

None of this, however, prepares for the powerful and surprising suggestion of line 3 — albeit soon to be cancelled — that

whimsical recollections, like dream, are imbued with the vigour of 'prophetic truth'. A possible inference from this near-oxymoronic combination of memory and prescience is that 'true' being — perhaps something akin to the Pushkinian 'fullness of being' discussed previously — is located in the pre-exilic past to which memory gives access. Nor is this necessarily a vindication of passive retrospectivity, liable to leave the subject 'stuck, not able to go on with life'; for the choice of epithet might also point to a creative context, consistent with preceding metapoetic preoccupations. 'Prophecy', according to the author of 'Tsitaty', was the natural province of the Russian poet:

Ни одна литература <...> не была так пророчественна,  
как русская. Если не каждый русский писатель пророк  
в полном смысле слова <...>, то нечто от пророка есть в  
каждом, живет по наследству...<sup>242</sup>

Despite a lexical shift, from *veshchii* to *prorochestvennyi*, it is not unreasonable to assume that memories, like the prescient dreams to which they are equated, might thus form a productive and fruitful basis for archetypally prophetic verse (the Orphic-oracular 'true' poetry referred to in discussion of the closing lines of stanza 4?). Further speculation is redundant, however: for with typical inconstancy, the two lines that follow at once subvert the positive value of memory-dream, transferring emphasis in the process from weighty epithet and noun (*veshchaia pravda*) to the at first barely perceptible qualifier (*kak budto*) by which they are preceded:

*Как будто* вещей правдой живо,  
Но так же дико и темно  
И так же, вероятно, лживо...

In a familiar pattern of expositional hesitancy, one qualification follows another, and positive value is dissipated.

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<sup>242</sup> *SS-Ardis*, vol. 2, p. 428.

Reference to the ‘probable’ falsehood of memories in one respect introduces an entirely fresh consideration. The notion that the memories which enter disobediently into consciousness may in themselves prove inaccurate, false or misleading has not previously been explicitly at issue. It is, however, in obvious accord with the epistemological and ontological uncertainty that has afflicted the persona and coloured the narrative from the outset. In the context of all that has gone before, recollections must also be deemed ‘false’ in the more specific sense most recently elaborated through the metaphors of ‘*nevernyi snimok*’ and ‘*oshibka plenki neudachnoi*’ in stanza 9: memories — and particularly those memories that intersect and double with present experience — can seem numinously ‘truthful’, pregnant with quasi-oracular significance, but they are random in their absence of conscious direction, an at best flimsy, perception-bound, potentially illusory basis for the construction of meaning (or, it might be added, the production of verse). The adjectives *diko* and *temno* reinforce this implication. The former points back to the ‘*dikie sootvetstviia*’ of the poem’s opening; together, they re-emphasise the semantic obscurity and inherent dubiety that attach to interpretative decoding of the pattern woven by recollections’ branches — thrown up, as it were, from ‘dark’, subconscious roots, perhaps suggestively denotative only of ‘false’ linkages.<sup>243</sup> The echo (reminiscence) of ‘*dikie sootvetstviia*’ might also recollect the literary procedures of Symbolism, and thus allude — paradoxically — to earlier uncertainty as to the substantiality and veracity of textual allusion, amplifying in a new key the metapoetic theme of these lines. The underlying inference is that poetry based on the promptings of undirected recollection (and it may be difficult to conceive of poetry that is not), intuitive correspondences, or the self-referential ‘secondary’ modelling system of literary precedent, is liable to mislead and deceive, presenting the mere semblance of oracular authority.

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<sup>243</sup> Again the drafts are revealing: cf.: ‘[*Poroiu kazhetsia, chto*] v nem / Podspudnym svetitsia ognem / Dushi [tainsvennoe] [nesoznannoe] znanie. / No snov razgadyvat’ ne stoit’ (SS-*Ardis*, vol. 1, p. 466; emphasis mine)

In some circumstances, this realisation might conceivably be equated with a positive affirmation of creative freedom. Here, it seems of particular, negative moment in the light of Khodasevich's uncompromising insistence on truth: exemplified in practice, as we have observed, in his dealings with Gor'kii, and repeatedly articulated in his critical writings — even, as in the first paragraph of the memoir of Andrei Belyi in *Nekropol'*, in contradistinction to the authority of Pushkin:

Истина не может быть низкой, потому что нет ничего выше истины. Пушкинскому «возвышающему обману» хочется противопоставить нас возвышающую правду...<sup>244</sup>

Although in the uncertain world of SF there is no certainty even of falsehood, no final rejection of the prescient perceptivity of internal, mental process ('*I tak zhe, veroiatno, lzhivo*'), the lines in question are emphatically remote from the offer of 'enriching truth'. Instead, the antithetical force of *lzhivo* is accentuated by its placement in prominent rhyming position, at sentence as well as line-end; and the rhyme itself, with preceding *zhivo*, appears to confirm the aesthetic-creative impasse. Unless, of course, the connection is deemed 'false', it offers a contrastive reminiscence and inversion — with the telling omission of a negative prefix — of the rhyme *nelzhivo/zhivo* from the statement of poetic intent in the 'Prologue' to Blok's *Vozmezdie*, more than once quoted above as an important point of intertextual reference:

Дай мне неспешно и *нелживо*  
Поведать пред Лицом Твоим  
О том, что мы в себе таим,  
О том, что в здешнем мире *живо*...

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<sup>244</sup> *SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, p. 42. The reference is to Pushkin's *Geroi*, where the 'Poet's' cavalier rejection of 'the light of truth' is of course also the source for the concept of *nizkaia istina* refuted here by Khodasevich (cf.: '*Da budet prokliat pravdy svet / ... / T'my nizkikh istin mne dorozhe / Nas vozvyshaiushchii obman*').

Precisely such an unhurriedly deliberative and unequivocally truthful account of both inner experience — the ‘visions within’, to return to stanza 2 — and the ‘vivacity’ (!) of the external world, remains, to the last, impossible in the exilic condition that defines Khodasevich’s persona. At this concluding stage, the contrast may be taken to indicate not merely a re-affirmation of failure in ‘poetic mission’, but also a loss of faith in the very possibility of poetic art.

Naturally, Khodasevich was well aware of the inescapable paradox in producing poetry that despairs of the possibility of poetry. His analysis a decade later, in the course of his polemic with Adamovich, seems pertinent to his own practice in SF:

...никакое творчество, даже посвященное изображению предельного отчаяния, — с предельным отчаянием несовместимо. Поэт, не обретающий душевной опоры в самом творчестве, в какие бы тона отчаяния оно ни было окрашено, — никогда ничего замечательного не создаст. Обратное: возможность создать нечто из самого своего отчаяния, из распада своего — уже есть гарантия против того последнего отчаяния и распада, при котором, конечно, естественнее всего ничего не писать.<sup>245</sup>

In SF, it might be assumed, it is the disoriented persona, lacking conviction in the veracity of the grounding from which poetry must proceed, who corresponds to the despairing ‘poet’ figure of this second sentence. His failure to find ‘spiritual support in creativity’ is consistent with — perhaps consequent upon — preceding confrontations with deprivation, death and religious faith; and in the by now seemingly irredeemable absence of a higher imperative such as moves Blok’s creative persona (*‘pred Litsom Tvoim...’*; even service to truth is now discounted in SF), it is impossible to synthesise impressions to convincing ‘philosophical explanation’, let alone offer up the completed work in prayerful gesture. Khodasevich as poet, by contrast, is able to make con-

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<sup>245</sup> V. F. Khodasevich, ‘Novye stikhi’, *Vozrozhdenie*, 28 March 1935.



summate poetry of his persona's poetic despair: his personal nadir has not been reached. It must be added, however, that for much of SF the boundary between what is conventionally referred to in this analysis as the persona, and the author who insisted on the autobiographical basis of poetry, is (in truth!) another tantalising uncertainty, evidently fluctuating, and often slender. In Khodasevich's own admission: '*Vse tak i bylo, kak rasskazano...*'. It would be idle to speculate how far Khodasevich's personal despair approached the terminal extreme (*predel*) of a persona with whom there can be no complete identity; but there is evidence that the denigration of poetry's possibilities — unlike in the famous example of Tiutchev's *Silentium* — was no mere literary conceit. Biographically, SF was completed very close to the effective end of Khodasevich's poetic career, and it affords a potentially exceptional, intimate insight into the complex psychological causes of this loss of creative will. In the years that followed, his extensive literary output would be dominated by criticism, literary scholarship and biography, and the prose memoirs, including *Nekropol'*, on which he had embarked contemporaneously with SF. These, it must be supposed, should be attributed to a different function of memory — it is tempting to suggest, *pamiat'* rather than *vospominan'e*: not the impressionistic, creative-imaginative reception of random percepts, which, in the terms of the essay on *Poet i tolpa*, poetic inspiration must intuitively reconcile with the paronomastic promptings of 'sweet sounds'; but the subjection of accumulated, rigorously sifted experiential data to the analytical '„explanation", that is philosophical interpretation' which Khodasevich regarded as just one stage of the more multifaceted poetic process.<sup>246</sup> At the price of abandoning poetry, this would entitle him to claim continuing adherence to truth: polemically, in statements such as that already noted above:

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<sup>246</sup> Cf. Khodasevich's characteristic treatment in *Nekropol'* of Belyi's protracted drunken confessions to him: '*Ia imi pochti ne pol'zuius' v dannoi stat'e, potomu chto v takie minuty Belyi smeshival pravdu s vooobrazheniem*' (*SS-Moscow*, vol. 4, p. 62). The memoirist's understandable preference is for data verifiable as far as possible by reference to external (non-perceptual) reality.

Способность писать правду во мне, слава Богу, еще не атрофирована;<sup>247</sup>

more substantively, in aspiring toward the 'elevating ideal' adumbrated in the memoir on Belyi. As memoirist, it established him almost presciently as a foremost exponent of a genre that arguably came to outweigh the importance of poetry in mid-century Russian letters.<sup>248</sup>

As to the persona of SF, for whom there is no 'spiritual support' (*dushevnaia opora*) in the last refuge of an art that cannot be trusted, and who is deprived thereby of its therapeutic potential, he appears by this point hopelessly entangled in unending, unresolved uncertainties, estranged from his own unconscious being, as well as from an irretrievable past, and memories that bring no solace. He is 'rootless and inconstant', without significant involvement (artistic or otherwise) in present existence, and without solid faith in any overarching value. This is, however, a curiously muted expression of profound despair, for the unemotional reticence of presentation which is a symptom of the traumatised condition, complicates realisation of the depth of the predicament, to the extent that SF has routinely been taken by readers as a sunny exception to the prevalent dark mood of *Evropeiskaia noch'*.

Nor, of course, is this the final word. The stanza and poem have five more lines to run, and these at first sight offer a characteristic final reversal: an apparent lightening of mood, which may, as ever, nevertheless belie a more sombre underlying meaning:

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<sup>247</sup> 'Eshche o pisatel'skoi svobode' (see note 44 above). This particularly sally against Zinaida Gippius perhaps also contains a tongue-in-cheek intonational reminiscence of the Countess's impatient observation at the start of Chapter 3 of *Pikovaia Dama*: compare '*Slava Bogu, ia ne kartavliu i iz uma eshche ne vyzhila!*'.

<sup>248</sup> Paradoxically, Khodasevich's creative orientation toward analytic factography nevertheless also led him eventually to a deliberate 'falsehood' more extreme than anything in the poetry: the hoax literary biography *Zhizn' Vasiliia Travnikova* (1936).

Среди каких утрат, забот,  
 И после скольких эпитафий,  
 Теперь, воздушная, всплывет  
 И что закроет в свой черед  
 Тень соррентинских фотографий?

The first two of these lines concisely encapsulate the predominant experiences of exile: losses, anxiety and death — the latter reflected in SF's unobtrusive but persistent 'epitaphs', to fellow-poets (Blok, Annenskii, Gumilev, Muni) as well as to the larger epoch, which are one facet of the broader preoccupation. Contrary to expectation, the three final lines, which turn for the first time to the future, then seem to offer a cautious hope. With an implication of fruitful cyclicity rather than sterile, repetitive sameness, there is an expectation that the unpredictable course of whimsical recollection will naturally continue. The Sorrentine present will become the past, and return in the form of disobedient memories, to be superimposed on subsequent experience of an unknown future: perhaps yielding up after all — as might be assumed both from the seemingly positive epithet (*vozdushnaia*), and from iteration, also for the first time, of the poem's title in its closing words — material for further poetic creation. Perhaps, indeed, not all is lost: the logic of cyclicity touched on in the central stanzas involves ascent from the nadir; there will be gain as well as 'losses and anxieties'.

The basis for sceptical counter-interpretation is both linguistic and psychological. The noun *ten'* — *ten' tenei* in some versions of the drafts, made emphatic also by the demand of distinguishing it as subject of the relatively elaborate final syntactic inversion — seems to carry inevitable connotations of insubstantiality, incorporeal spectrality or even death. If the shade of Solov'ev's *Panmongolizm* is indeed to be heard behind this stanza, then one might think also of the quintessentially Symbolist notion of the transparency of all earthly things, articulated in other lines from Solov'ev already noted above: '*Milyi drug, il' ty ne vidish'? / Chto vse vidimoe nami — / Tol'ko otblesk, tol'ko teni / Ot nezrimgo ochami?'*. More tangibly and incontrovertibly, the photo-

graphic analogy evokes the horizontal, rather than vertical 'combination of two worlds' (*'dvukh sovmestivshikhsia mirov'*) familiar from the faintly amusing but troublingly insubstantial pictures of stanza 2, and the insistent concern with the possibility of uncertain and mistaken images that persists through later stanzas. The mnemonic-photographic shadow is now accorded an ethereal *vozdushnost'*, that might seem an energising contrast to the trajectory that cast the golden-winged angel downward from air to earth and water in stanza 9. Yet we might wonder in context whether such surprising and slightly incongruous elevation — the adjective makes a curious, perhaps disembodiedly abstract combination with *ten'* — is not akin to the *'vozvyshaiushchii ob-man'* of art referred to in discussion of the preceding lines. There is, at any rate, no logical basis to consider that the superimposed (cf. *'chtó zakroet v svoi chered'*) shades of new impressions will prove more reliably meaning-laden or intrinsically valuable than those encountered previously. They, too, will 'probably' prove 'false', vacuous beneath seeming but misleading significance; and the deceptive promise of this ending is in truth of repetitive entrapment *ad infinitum*.

Arguably, moreover, the closing promise of a recurrent pattern of future recollection is also more fundamentally flawed. The double-exposed memories described by the persona in the course of SF are of the Russian past, and the obsessive preoccupation with that earlier world, unappealing as it may often be, is a defining symptom of his condition. Exiled, 'Sorrentine' recollections simply cannot have the same hold over the traumatised psyche; and it is a consequence of the uncontrolled whimsicality that defines recollections that they follow no simple, linear sequence of succession. Logically, psychologically, 'later' memories of the flat, unensouled Italian present will not begin to recur in turn in the same intrusive way. They will not supplant the deleterious grip of the irretrievable past. And though this sceptical reading is considerably more negative than any view of the poem's ending advanced by previous critics, it is worth recalling once more the biographical fact that any 'flimsily airy' memories of Sorrentine experience that may have welled in subsequent

years into Khodasevich's own consciousness no longer moved him to poetic expression.

In more than one respect, the tentative hope of the poem's final lines must therefore be deemed a falsehood: a mere self-deception on the part of the persona. The poem's final irony is thus that Khodasevich's persona comes to embrace and propound the ignominy of a 'comforting lie'. This in turn subtly but powerfully substantiates the paradoxical view, underscored by continuing hesitant awkwardnesses of poetic syntax, that art cannot be held to articulate enduring truth. Like preceding stanzas, these last ten lines, too, exhibit a submerged meaning at odds with the surface text. From an attitude of continuing passivity and alienation from inner mental process<sup>249</sup> as much as external world, its final implication is that meaning and value are indeed depressingly, perhaps irretrievably lost.

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There is no doubt that David Bethea was correct in describing SF as 'a very difficult work', that 'integrates various surfaces on a large scale'. It is tempting to add that it also displays stereoscopic depth beneath. Khodasevich's longest poem, which had been in gestation for almost a full year by its completion in late February 1926, is an accomplishment of exceptional scope and considerable originality.

In the terms of the important Pushkin speech of 1921, Khodasevich carries out a 'multiplicity' of 'tasks of differing orders: philosophical, psychological, descriptive, etc.', to treat his subject 'from a whole series of points of view'.<sup>250</sup> Previous commentators have devoted their attention primarily to the visual manipulation of descriptive effects, as evocation of the contrapuntal émigré experience or as experimentation in ekphrastic modern-

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<sup>249</sup> A further articulation of the drafts included the line '*Bog vest', kogda, zachem vsplyvet'* to project the future incursion of memory into consciousness (*SS-Ardis*, vol. 1, p. 468). In the final version, the persona's passive un-control of causatively obscure mental process is unchanged, but typically more muted.

<sup>250</sup> See the quotations referenced at note 23 above.

ism; the present study has instead concentrated largely on the poem's 'psychological', textual (structural-poetic, intertextual) and, to a lesser extent, conceptual-philosophical aspects. These contribute, most obviously, to an outstandingly forceful, comprehensively detailed insight into the mental condition of the exile, projected in direct, first-person terms through the experience of an ailing persona, deprived of fullness of being as well as stable 'home'. Yet this seemingly idiosyncratic, particularised individual (whose predicament, incidentally, is interpreted as considerably bleaker than in previous readings), burdened with intimately personal memories, is also to be regarded as importantly representative: of a cultural milieu (in loose terms, that of the 'Russian Symbolism' with which Khodasevich grew up), a generation, and perhaps a nation. An intriguing implication of this is that the exilic condition spans the geographical divide between 'here' and 'there': the definitive dissociation becomes temporal (from the pre-August-1921, Pushkinian-Petrine era) rather than spatial. This far-reaching realisation can be linked to the modern affliction of psychological trauma and the concept of the random, uncontrolled traumatogenic event (or series of events). Generation and nation have been traumatised by recent large-scale upheavals, of which the Symbolist mindset was conceivable harbinger. (There is of course an at least partial pan-European analogy in the upheaval of World War I.) The enduring consequences extend beyond the poem to historical record; but from a literary point of view, this makes SF remarkably innovative. Trauma figures significantly in European fiction from *Mme Bovary* onwards. Khodasevich breaks new ground in Russian verse in making poetry of the extensive symptomatology of the psychological condition.

The poem's substantive psychological preoccupations also inform its searching reflection on the creative process. Metapoetic and creative themes are of course broadly embedded in Russian poetry, particularly of the Silver Age; but Khodasevich again enters relatively uncharted territory. He deals with the deficiencies of verse and the obstacles to conventionally smooth, 'Pushkinian' (or even Blok-like) creativity, and turns, radically, to the

failure of poetry and the poetic mission, rather than the (finally) triumphant fulfilment of the oracular-charismatic act that is characteristic of the Silver-Age tradition. SF is more distinctively insightful and uncompromising in this than Khodasevich's own essays on creativity, some of which are quoted above. More strikingly still, SF also advances a thoroughly modern, scientifically persuasive model of the mind — and specifically of the function of memory and the limitations of consciousness, free will and the severely circumscribed autonomous self. Psychologically, this intersects intriguingly with the depiction of the exilic psyche which it serves to elaborate, to suggest the exilic condition as existential 'norm', broadly symptomatic of the modern(ist) human condition. In literary terms, this is again challengingly original. A telling indication of Khodasevich's pioneering boldness is the contrast between his unsettling treatment of the unreliable whimsicality of memory, and the hieratic solemnity with which memory is accorded absolute value in the work of a Symbolist such as Ivanov, or treated as the redemptive vindication of (supra-personal) identity and immortality in the Acmeist verse of Mandel'shtam and Akhmatova.

Khodasevich's multiplicity of tasks in SF more broadly entails, as he observed of Pushkin, an 'exceptional polyvalency of theme' (*iskliuchitel'naia mnogotemnost'*; we might also recall Terapiano's 'dually coexisting parallelism' and 'seemingly four-dimensional perspective'). This is clearly manifest in the disoriented persona's unstable quest for fixity in relation to not only poetry and art, but also, for instance, myth, history, and religion — overshadowed by the abiding consciousness of loss and ineluctable death, and the perilously random hostility of the external world. In consequence, the poem elaborates less a single coherent message than a series of parallel (and largely provisional or ambivalent) observations. Indeed, the absence of a single overarching meaning — the failure, in effect, to articulate a higher imperative — is a fundamental component of the predicament that SF embodies and addresses. This absence of message — or perhaps, rather, the engagement with meaninglessness, and the persistent interruption and subversion of the 'themes' that are advanced — is of course a major aspect of the poem's diffi-

culty. Again, moreover, there is an instructive comparison to be drawn between Khodasevich's comfortless articulation of the psychological and philosophical impasse of the external exile, and the work of the major 'internal émigrés', Mandel'shtam and Akhmatova, whose focussed, oppositional separateness from the dark, immediately threatening political world entailed not just a purposeful exploitation of personal and cultural memory, but a strong, even quasi-religious sense of ethical value. Khodasevich, 'attached ... to nothing and no-one' in his post-Symbolist apartness, indeed seems somehow more 'wild' (*dikii*) than these exact contemporaries who drew their poetics from Gumilev. Curiously, however, this perhaps also places him closer to the mainstream of European modernism (of, say, the pre-Catholic Eliot) than to its distinctively Russian counterpart.

Finally, it is pertinent to reflect a little further on the poem's difficulty. Unlike the work of several major Russian contemporaries (Mandel'shtam, once more, is a prominent example), SF does not advertise its complexity. The initial appearance is not of a near-impenetrably encrypted surface that urgently demands decoding: instead, the poem offers a lengthy but readily identifiable narrative, which can be read at face value, as a loosely if somewhat enigmatically related series of post-emigration experiences. Brown's 'Sorrento photograph effect' is immediately accessible. The seeming objectivity (or faint amusement?) with which the scenes are presented is also, however, a product of the emotional atrophy and lack of effective engagement which are symptoms of the persona's condition. In this respect, the poem demands and rewards an unusually intensive rigour of intellectual scrutiny of the outwardly coherent, superficially authoritative narrative position. The reticence of presentation also extends to the intertextual dimension, which, as Bogomolov contends is typical of the late Khodasevich, offers very little in the way of 'material sign', but is plunged into the 'depths of the verse'. The inevitable consequence is a provisionality of interpretation unusual even for this particularly intangible critical domain. But there may be conviction in cumulative recurrence; and the corollary is indeed of a 'semantic riches almost to infinity' — albeit that in the



poem's broader thematic-philosophical context, that in itself is profoundly paradoxical.

Perhaps like Khodasevich's work in general, SF is unlikely ever to attain the broad appeal of some of the best poems of his most famous contemporaries. Its disadvantage in this respect is that it projects a largely unrewarding, uncontrollable, traumatised world, in a manner which is at once emotionally reserved and intellectually exacting. A reticence of presentation that is incompatible, say, with the stirring articulation of political-oppositional commitment, or of some hyperbolised cry of existential despair, also conspires against spontaneously unconditional identification with the poem's representatively damaged persona. At the same time, its formidable, at first scarcely perceptible textual density makes exceptional intellectual and cultural demands of any potential reader. But though this is no recipe for mass consumption, the poem is surely deserving both of more prominent critical recognition than it has hitherto been accorded, and of serious and continuing scholarly attention. It is the masterpiece of a major, often underrated Russian poet, and one of the foremost poetic achievements of a Europeanised Russian modernism.