Music and Literature in Silver Age Russia:
**Mikhail Kuzmin and Alexander Scriabin**

by

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To my grandfather, who instilled in me a deep love of classical music.

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Sections of two of these chapters appeared in presentations, and in the course of the discussions that followed I received especially valuable feedback from Lada Panova and Alexander Zholkovsky at the University of Southern California.   At

Preface

This dissertation will be an interdisciplinary study focusing on two sets of

works: Mikhail Kuzmin's poetic cycle *Alexandrian Songs*, the accompanying musical

settings, and the novel *Wings*, which prominently features one of the songs; and

Alexander Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy* and the 5th Piano Sonata, which includes a

stanza of the poem as its epigraph. In both cases, the artists' attempts to merge music

and literature into a type of syncretic project led to the creation of poems that were, in

the Russian context, unprecedented in their free use of meter and rhythm. In order to

understand these artists' compositional strategies, this dissertation will take these

works apart to reveal their formal qualities, chart the relationships between deep

structures across media boundaries, then situate that analysis against the context of the

works' composition.

Though the relationship of music and literature was a focal point in early 20th

century Russian art, there have been few studies to address both, in large part because

of the difficulty of translating concepts from one medium to the other. Theorists like

Roman Jakobson and Boris Gasparov have written on the musical qualities of some

literature, and Boris Kats has written on the translation of musical forms into literary

forms, but serious study of relationships between music and literature remains rare.

As a way of narrowing down a potentially large topic, this dissertation will focus

primarily on the two works of poetry, since the challenges of echoing or

supplementing music led both artists to experiment with poetic form, meter, and rhythm in ways that had no precedent in Russian literature. Both works are rich with still unexplored questions:

In *The Poem of Ecstasy*, what deep structural elements led the composer to consider it synonymous with his Fourth Symphony? How does he translate ideas of rhythm and meter into a medium that approaches both concepts in a markedly different way? Is there a relationship between the philosophical syncretism in the subject matter and the particular way Scriabin attempts to combine the arts? Do the original context and function of the lines from *Ecstasy* used as the Fifth Sonata's epigraph lead to a reading of the sonata that requires knowledge of the poem?

In *The Alexandrian Songs*, how does Kuzmin design lines that are both "free", and yet lend themselves to rhythmic melodies? How does Kuzmin see the symmetries, the patterns, and the overall structure? Furthermore, if Kuzmin has a particular set of strategies for writing free verse that easily accommodates music, do the poems he did not set to music bear the same qualities, or do the twelve he selected for song setting differ from the rest in the way they were composed? Does Kuzmin's position outside the cultural *zeitgeist* find expression in the works' unconventional form?

These are some of the questions that this dissertation will address. Though the works involved are greatly different, a similar methodology governs the analysis in both cases. This dissertation will strive

1. To "take stock" of the materials by analyzing each poem's constituent parts, including rhythm and meter, phonology, syntax, etc.;

2. To interpret these findings against the background of the music that

accompanied/inspired them; to reach a better understanding of the relationship

between the words and the music; and to ascertain the aesthetic strategy that

the works share in common; and

3. To interpret these findings against the background of the works'

composition as well as their social, political, and intellectual environment.

Representatives of the two extremes of the Silver Age, the apocalyptic

fantasies of Scriabin and the lyrical detachment of Kuzmin offer a parallax view of

Russia's most complex and artistically rich period. Both sets of texts were written

during 1905, and while neither mentions the revolution by name, both are informed by

related strains in the art world which arose in this turbulent period: Kuzmin by a

disaffected attitude towards established social norms, and Scriabin by an apocalyptic

mysticism. In fact Kuzmin's novel, the world's first with an explicitly and

unapologetically homosexual theme, was only publishable because of the sudden

relaxation of censorship standards during the 1905 revolution, while Scriabin's music

was used by prominent poets as the model for the revolutionary spirit. Both artists

were eventually banned under the Soviet regime, and as a result, both artists are

understudied.

As a way of contributing to the growing amount of scholarship on these two

artists, the dissertation will focus on the way these sets of works articulate notions

about syncretism during the Silver Age. This will not only bring back into focus

neglected works from the early modernist period, but also seek to establish a

methodology for future studies of works that combine music and literature.

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Abstract

My dissertation explores the relationships between poetry and music in the works of two early-twentieth century Russian artists, the poet Mikhail Kuzmin (1872-1936) and the composer Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915). The development of musical thought in Russian literature, in particular the heritage of German philosophy and French Symbolist poetry, led to a privileging of music as the supreme art in the early 20th century. However, very few writers at the time had a background in the technical aspects of music. Two contemporary conservatory-trained artists worked in both music and poetry, and their attempts to merge music and literature into a type of syncretic project led to the creation of poems that were, in the Russian context, unprecedented in their use of new meters and free verse. Scriabin's poetic *Poem of Ecstasy* reveals an ur-structure that provides insight into the compositional framework of his related 5th Sonata. Meanwhile Kuzmin's songs take on new meaning when the clashes between poetic form and musical form are explored. Though greatly dissimilar in philosophy and approach, both artists found ways to incorporate their musical training into the writing of poetry in a way that both reflects and challenges the expectations of musico-poetics during the Silver Age.

Chapter I

The Many Meanings of "Music"

"In the beginning, there was music," wrote Alexander Blok in a 1919 diary entry[1], although, in a paradox not atypical for this period, Blok was the writer of his generation both least interested in music and considered to have the best ear for it.[2]

Blok's statement about music was not unique among his peers. Russia in the early twentieth century saw one of its most fertile periods of artistic creation, and with the arrival of the Symbolist movement from abroad, philosophers, writers, and critics alike elevated music to the supreme position in their hierarchies of art. At the same time, the actual musical scene in Russia was undergoing a relatively infertile period, a trough between the crests of the Romantics on one side, and the Modernists to come on the other. As a result, the actual interplay between the two media was far less than might be expected, given the reams of critical and theoretical work devoted to them.

Somehow, the few attempts to explore the deeper relationships between the two media managed to avoid attracting much attention. Mikhail Kuzmin, a conservatory-trained composer who published his first works of poetry and prose in 1905, worked in both media with some proficiency, yet his groundbreaking free-verse songs collected under the title *Alexandrian Songs* (*Александрийские песни*) earned him his first

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[1] "Вначале была музыка", Blok, *Dnevnik*, 21 March 1919

[2] See for example Sophie Bonneau's discussion in *L'univers poètique d'Alexandre Blok*, p. 43

publication, some positive criticism, and not much else. Meanwhile, the period's artistic idol Alexander Scriabin tried to transform Symbolist-era philosophy and the complex rhythms of his music into poetic form, but received no positive feedback outside his most ardent admirers.

Both cases were missed opportunities. Kuzmin had freed Russian verse from its syllabotonic heritage, allowing the language to explore intonational patterns and giving it access to *vers libre*. Scriabin had shown that philosophical content could be expressed in formal qualities like rhythm and meter, allowing both a greater flexibility in their relationship to overall structure. In the works of both artists, the key to accessing these innovations was music.

How could the work of composers interested in poetry go undervalued, given the strong emphasis on music during this period? For one thing, the very notion of "music" in the Symbolist era meant many things to many different people. For that reason, the first chapter of this dissertation will explore the relevant history of musical thought in poetry and philosophy, with attention to the particular strains of influence and divergence of opinion.

Among the difficulties in discussing the development of theories of music in literature is the overlapping use of different meanings of "music". At times an author may have more than one in mind, but as these meanings involve different phenomena altogether, the extent to which they are freely interchanged has further muddled an already difficult topic. Roughly speaking, the most common uses of the word "music" can be grouped into three categories:

1. Music as an artistic medium, or music proper. Though in some ways the most basic understanding of music – the organization of sounds in such as way as to elicit an artistic response – this use of the word "music" was often the last one on the minds of poets and philosophers. No greater evidence of this need be noted than the relative lack of examples in many of the works which will be discussed: music is often invoked, but without reference to any particular pieces of music.

2. Music as a metaphor for the euphonic qualities of poetry, or "musicality". Since many of the artists under discussion are poets, it should be no surprise that their notion of music is really one of sound-quality in a poem; where auditory properties of poetry may or may not overlap with music proper is rarely discussed, though the focus on lyric poetry implies that poets treat "musicality" predominantly as a consonant, melodic phenomenon. In short, "music" here refers to poetry that flows smoothly and "sounds good."

3. Music as an abstract form of understanding, a harmonizing of elements that transcends any specific genre. This notion of music stretches as far back as Plato, and was most significantly resurrected by Schopenhauer: a capital-M Music that refers not to any concrete musical product, but to a way of thinking about the world.

The confusion of meanings also comes from an extensive and often inexact overlap of terminology from the two media. Seeking to avoid this in his work *The Substance of Verse* (*Материя стиха*), Efim Etkind begins his chapter on music and poetry with an overview of overlapping terminology, including both terms that have

drifted from poetry to music (phrases, syntax, iambic form, etc.) and those that have followed the reverse path (dissonance, melody, cadence, etc.).[3]

A full survey of all the influences of music on Symbolist poetics is far beyond the scope of this chapter, even of this dissertation. Instead, this chapter will touch upon those poets, philosophers, and composers whose influence was particularly strong in turn-of-the-century Russia in order to explain why the heritage of the Silver Age led to a simultaneous idealization and dismissal of music by the leading poets and philosophers.

Even this narrow focus requires an examination of a span of over a hundred years in multiple countries and languages. Two major currents intersected in the 19th century, bringing both a philosophical and an aesthetic edge to the theories that resulted. The first came from Germany, with Schopenhauer, Wagner, and Nietzsche dominating the discourse among second generation Russian Symbolists. The second came from France, where the poetry of Poe (appreciated more in France and in translation than in his home country), Baudelaire, and Verlaine provided the philosophical backbone with a new aesthetic – Symbolism – to develop the relationship between music and art.

The German Heritage of Symbolism

The author who provided Symbolist theories of music with their most fundamental philosophical backbone was Arthur Schopenhauer, whose *World as Will*

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[3] Etkind, p. 368

placed music not only as the supreme art, but as one that transcends even the label

"art". According to Schopenhauer, the material world is a reflection of the Will, and

the rest of the arts – poetry, sculpture, painting – are themselves products of that

material world. Music, on the other hand, is a direct reflection of the Will, which

places it in a unique category:

> Music also… is entirely independent of the phenomenal world, ignores it
> altogether, could to a certain extent exist if there was no world at all, which
> cannot be said of the other arts. Music is as *direct* an objectification and copy
> of the whole *will* as the world itself, nay, even as the *Ideas*, whose multiplied
> manifestation constitutes the world of individual things. Music is thus by no
> means like the other arts, the copy of the Ideas, but the *copy of the will itself*,
> whose objectivity the Ideas are.[4]

One may wonder how music could exist without the world, but this is a natural

extension of Schopenhauer's belief that, just as the will exists independently of and

creates the world of phenomena, so the reflection of will (music) must exist

independently of and create the world of phenomena. In essence, everything *is* music,

although Schopenhauer's vision of music lies clearly in the realm of the capital-M

abstract form. In what will become a typical approach to writing about music,

Schopenhauer provides no examples or references to the actual medium.

For future poets, the danger of a too-close adherence to Schopenhauer's view of

art lay in his weak justification for poetry's place in that hierarchy of the arts – this

tension between the elevation of music and the simultaneous justification of poetry will

appear again and again. Schopenhauer becomes especially problematic because his

hierarchy clearly places poetry as an inferior art; in fact, he writes negatively of opera

that seeks to bring music into the same realm as either the words or the action: "[I]f

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[4] Schopenhauer, v.I, p. 333

music is too closely united to the words, and tries to form itself according to the events, it is striving to speak a language which is not its own."[5] In a rare example taken from the real world, Schopenhauer lauds Rossini for being the composer who most consistently avoids this temptation, precisely because – in Schopenhauer's mind – the words in Rossini's opera are of secondary importance to the music.[6]

Even writers and composers who had not read Schopenhauer were aware of his privileging of music among the arts, a hierarchization that functioned as philosophical backbone to much of aesthetic philosophy that followed.   As Lydia Goehr notes, the German's renown was so great that his name was common enough talk even by composers like Rimsky-Korsakov and Prokofiev, "[who] were able to converse about and even to quote Schopenhauer with a kind of ease that typifies 'cocktail party knowledge' – a kind of knowledge for which serious engagement with the philosopher's writings is not required."[7]

Of added importance for the Symbolists were Schopenhauer's ideas about the organization of the world according to musical terms, specifically those of four-part harmony. Using this division of voices, he developed a metaphorical scheme for understanding the organization of the physical universe:

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[5] Ibid., p. 338

[6] Schopenhauer's rare uses of examples merit a study in themselves. He disdains any music that relies on imitative sound effects (Haydn's *Creation* and *The Seasons* come under his censure) and he derives a set of concrete emotional expectations for different musical phenomena: what to expect of an *Andante*, of a minor key, etc. At his boldest, Schopenhauer attempts to link culture at-large to the expected emotional effects of its music: "With northern nations, whose life is subject to hard conditions, especially with the Russians, the minor prevails, even in church music. Allegro in the minor is very common in French music, and is characteristic of it; it is as if one danced while one's shoe pinched." Schopenhauer, v.III, p. 244

[7] Goehr, p. 214

Table 1.1 - Schopenhauer's hierarchy of musical voices[8]

"Melody" (Soprano)	The intellectual life and effort of man
Alto	The world of plants and beasts
Tenor	Manifold phenomenal things
Bass	Unorganized nature

The influence of Schopenhauer on the thought of Russian Symbolists, even if one ignores the extent to which they quote him as an authority on matters of philosophy, can be felt in various hierarchies and schemes that those artists develop; that is, Schopenhauer's contribution is not only one of substance but also of methodology. Bely's hierarchy of the arts, which he included in a letter to Alexander Blok[9], references and modifies Schopenhauer's hierarchy, while Scriabin's notebooks are full of these one-to-one schemes attempting to develop the relationships between art, philosophy, and the world of phenomena.

However, Schopenhauer's influence pales alongside that of one of his compatriots and contemporaries: no figure stands more central to the aesthetics of the late Romantic and Modernist periods than Richard Wagner. In his book *Opera and Music*, Wagner attempted to create a synthetic theory of the arts. His notion of *gesamtkunstwerk*, the "total" art that combines drama, music, and visual art into Opera, helped give an aesthetic justification, rather than a strictly philosophical justification, for future attempts at fusing the arts.

More importantly, Wagner gave his theories a concrete expression, even in the arena of language. In contrast to Schopenhauer, Wagner sought to rescue the other arts

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[8] Schopenhauer, v.I, p. 334

[9] See Figure 1.2 below

from the dominance of music in opera, which in his mind had led to a dramatic stasis due to composers' failing to use compelling material. Wagner extended this criticism not just to the quality of the plots, but also to the writing, developing ways to integrate language more organically into his work. His theory of tone speech attempted to separate the meaning of words from the aesthetic qualities of their sounds, arguing for a greater focus on the latter as a path both to musicality and to true meaning:

> The primal organ-of-utterance of the inner man, however, is *Tone Speech*… and this we can call before us at any moment, – as far as its substance goes, – by removing from our Word-speech its dumb articulations and leaving nothing but the open sounds. In these vowels, if we think of them as stripped of their consonants, and picture to ourselves the manifold and vivid play of inner feelings, with all their range of joy and sorrow, as given-out in them alone, we shall obtain an image of man's first emotional language; a language in which the stirred and high-strung Feeling could certainly express itself through nothing but a joinery of ringing tones, which altogether of itself must take the form of Melody.[10]

Significantly Wagner downplays the role of semantics in language, focusing instead on the emotive quality of certain sounds. A word's expressivity rather than its denotation conveys a primal "meaning", which places speech on the same level as music provided its expressive content is foregrounded. In addition, the influence of Wagner's focus on the vowels as pure expression of inner emotions can be felt in Symbolist attempts to link vowel sounds concretely with moods and timbres, from René Ghil's famous treatise to Bely's essays.

Wagner's influence was felt throughout Europe: one of his strongest champions was Charles Baudelaire, assuring a Wagnerian strain even in the French Symbolist movement. Unlike the other influences discussed in this chapter, Wagner had actually visited Russia, giving concerts in St. Petersburg in the early 1860s. However, with the

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[10] Wagner, *OD*, p. 225

exception of his friend and champion Serov, the reception was cool and his influence on the local music scene downplayed.[11] In some respects this was due to the robust nationalistic project among native composers, which in turn created a backlash against the strong Germanic tradition in European art music. In Russia, Wagner's primary champions would be poets and philosophers, not composers.

For Russian Symbolists, Wagner is doubly important as the only of these German influences to combine his theories with a markedly Christian ideology. In *Opera and Drama* Wagner celebrates his art as the reflection of his religious convictions, combining them with Classical tradition in the form of the god of music: "Let us therefore erect the altar of the future, in Life as in the living Art, to the two sublimest teachers of mankind: – Jesus, who suffered for all men; and Apollo, who raised them to their joyous dignity!"[12] In a later essay, Wagner would expand his convictions to include Eastern religions, a point not insignificant for the only major Wagnerite composer in Russia, Alexander Scriabin: "The two sublimest of religions, Brahmanism with its offshoot Buddhism, and Christianity, teach alienation from the world and its passions, thus steering straight against the flow of the world-tide without being able in truth to stem it."[13] Scriabin's later philosophy included Blavatsky-inspired flirtation with Brahmanism and mysticism, although hardly a trace of Christianity exists in his writings.

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[11] Rimsky-Korsakov in particular had stinging words for Wagner's debut in Russia. See below, "Music in the Silver Age"

[12] Wagner, *OD* v. 1, p. 65

[13] Wagner, "Religion and Art", p. 225

Despite his enormous influence as a composer and the attractiveness of his

Christian strain, Wagner's work had some shortcomings for a theoretician of music.

His strengths as a composer and theorist were not reflected in a particularly strong

body of writing, especially since *Opera and Drama* was so thickly interwoven with

off-topic, anti-Semitic screeds. Significantly, many Symbolists invoked Wagner's

name without quoting from Wagner[14], while the actual words of his compatriots

enjoyed more exposure. Fortunately for the development of Symbolism, a more

compelling shape to Wagner's theories came later, through the early works of his

sometimes-friend Freidrich Nietzsche.

Though later disavowed by the author as an early, weak work, Nietzsche's *The*

Birth of Tragedy was nonetheless instrumental in transmitting Wagner's theories in a

more engaging, literate way. Where Wagner had spoken of the Christian power of

death and transfiguration, Nietzsche expanded the theme of death into a whole history

of ancient art, recasting the struggle between rational and irrational as twin currents in

ancient Greek culture: the calm Apollonian and wild Dionysian.

Nietzsche associates music with the latter, implicitly opposing music to rational

clarity. Fortunately for future poets, he also rescues and elevates lyric poetry, "the

imitative fulguration of music in images and concepts". He recognizes the difficulty of

transferring the ineffable to mere words, and asks "as what does music *appear* in the

mirror of images and concepts?"[15] For Nietzsche, the answer is not an issue of

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[14] Although this may have been due, to some extent, to the lack of translated works by Wagner until 1906. Most people were familiar with Wagner through either his music or Nietzsche's writings. (see *Symbolism and After*, p16)

[15] Nietzsche, *BT*, p. 55

aesthetics, but of philosophy: the poet views Dionysian music through the lens of Apollonian contemplation.

Seeking an authority from the world of poetry, Nietzsche quotes Schiller: "With me the perception has at first no clear and definite object; this is formed later. A certain musical mood comes first, and the poetical idea only follows later."[16] But this transference or translation of musical mood (whatever that might mean) into a poetical idea requires a new approach to aesthetics: Symbolism is necessary because "*language, as the organ and symbol of phenomena, can never by any means disclose the innermost heart of music; language, in its attempt to imitate it, can only be in superficial contact with music.*"[17] Here again is the fundamental problem Schopenhauer raised, reformulated for a new generation: music expresses pure mood but lacks the ability to transmit concrete content, while language can only approximate the purity of musical expression.

Later in his life Nietzsche disavowed Wagner, although in doing so he unintentionally pointed to some of Wagner's most important accomplishments:

> Wagner was not a musician by instinct. He showed this by abandoning all lawfulness and, more precisely, all style in music in order to turn it into what he required, theatrical rhetoric, a means of expression, of underscoring gestures, of suggestion, of the psychologically picturesque. Here we may consider Wagner an inventor and innovator of the first rank – *he has increased music's capacity for language to the point of making it immeasurable*: he is the Victor Hugo of music as language.[18]

What Nietzsche here considers a failing was a necessary development towards the breakdown of traditional harmony, an expansion of the language that made possible

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[16] Ibid., p. 49

[17] Ibid., pp. 55-6

[18] Nietzsche, "The Case of Wagner", p. 629

the innovations of Debussy, Scriabin, and Stravinsky. However this particular side of

Wagner's art had little impact on the writers and philosophers who had little access to

the technical achievements of Wagnerian harmony.

Meanwhile, Nietzsche's own adoption in Russia was complicated by his anti-

Christian stances. His primary champion, the philosopher-poet Dmitri Merezhovsky,

had a long and constantly shifting relationship to Nietzsche's works that ranged from

repulsion to elevation as an ideal, although never without Merezhovsky's strongly

religious bent. As Bernice Rosenthal stresses in "Nietzsche in Russia: the case of

Merezhovsky", "Russian symbolism derived from many sources … But Nietzsche was

most important. His philosophy gave Russian symbolism its fighting edge; it enabled

his admirers to fuse a medley of attitudes into a militant creed."[19] That Nietzsche

places Music as the representation of Dionysian art helps explain its elevated, if not

idealized, status among Russian symbolists.

The French Heritage of Symbolism

The French influence on Russian Symbolism did not exist independently of the

German – in fact, it was itself under the pronounced influence of Wagner that French

Symbolism developed – but it added a different dimension to the development of

musico-poetics that justifies its discussion as a discrete line of influence. If the

Germans provided the philosophical and religious frameworks for the discussion of

music in the Russian Silver Age, then the French provided the key elements that

allowed for the development of an artistic product in Russia: an aesthetic called

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[19] Rosenthal, p. 431

"Symbolism" and a heritage of poetic works that gave practical, concrete examples of how music could influence the production of poetry. Even when imitation and discussion of Schopenhauer, Wagner, and Nietzsche were at their peak, and the Parnassianism of the French school was most hotly rejected, two observations about art most commonly repeated by Russian Symbolists came from Baudelaire and Verlaine.

However, the roots of French symbolist poetry stretch back to non-native sources, as well. Most importantly, the poetry and criticism of Edgar Allen Poe met with mixed reactions in his home country, but were enthusiastically adopted and propagated by Baudelaire, and through him reached future generations of Symbolist poets.

Poe's great breadth as a writer assured him a broader audience than any of the other writers discussed in this chapter. "The Philosophy of Composition" appeared in 1878 with an introduction by S. A. Andreevsky, and the first translation of his collected works appeared in Russia in 1885. Bal'mont and Briusov both translated his works, and a September 1897 article in *Russian Herald*, "The Progenitor of Symbolism Edgar Poe" ("Родоначальник символизма Эдгар По"), established the connection of Poe to the Symbolist movement. [20]

For the Symbolists, Poe was a member of their literary movement despite belonging to an earlier generation. Even a non-Symbolist like Kuzmin noted, in his diary, "I'm reading Poe, convinced of his commonality with Wilde and the French Romantics. But he both anticipates them and is beyond them."[21]

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[20] Grossman, *Poe*, p. 79

[21] "Читаю По, убеждаясь в его общности с Уайлдом и с французскими романтиками. Но он предвосхищает и позднейшее." Kuzmin, *Dnevnik*, p. 386

Poe's influence on the musical sensibilities of the Symbolists involves, to differing degrees depending on the poet in question, four sets of phenomena: an aesthetics centered around ambiguity, a notion of art as spiritually transcendent (whether in line with Truth or not), a superficial musicality in verse based on sound texture, and an analytical approach to constructing and dissecting art. The first of these, ambiguity, Poe associated explicitly with music in his theoretical writings:

> I *know* that indefinitiveness is an element of the true music – I mean of the true musical expression. Give to it any undue decision – imbue it with any very determinate tone – and you deprive it at once of its ethereal, its ideal, its intrinsic and essential character. You dissolve the atmosphere of the mystic upon which it floats. You exhaust it of its breath of fäery.[22]

Poe continues the tradition of writers on musicality by failing to provide any examples, least of all an explanation of what an indeterminate tone might be. On the other hand, this language makes for a convenient fit with Schopenhauer's philosophy, although Poe's formulation is more abstract.

This quality of "indefinitiveness" Poe sought to encourage in poetry, as well – although the direct connection to a poetic aesthetic focuses on ambiguity of meaning rather than any purely artistic methods. In Poe's formulation, ambiguity of meaning in poetry is the most direct link between writing and music, since both encourage a different, "spiritual" appreciation of art. In his analysis of Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott", Poe elevates this spiritual appreciation above other forms of artistic creation:

> If the author did not deliberately propose to himself a suggestive indefinitiveness of meaning with the view of bringing about a definitiveness of vague and therefore of spiritual *effect* – this, at least, arose from the silent

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[22] Poe, Marginalia, p. 1045

analytical promptings of that poetic genius which, in its supreme development, embodies all orders of intellectual capacity.[23]

In this sense Poe solves the problem posed by Schopenhauer: the word can achieve something like the expressivity of music by blurring its connection to concrete meaning and allowing its appreciation on less direct terms. Here is one of the key moments in the development of Symbolism: a justification for the detachment of the word from its semantic meaning.

Poe also establishes a specific link between poetry and music on the level of technique. In his essay "The Poetic Principle", he not only defines rhythm as the essence of poetry, but in a statement more in line with French than Russian Symbolism (and somewhat at odds with his other statements about the spiritual nature of the artistic experience), he excludes beauty from the realm of truth altogether:

> I would define, in brief, the Poetry of words as *The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty*. Its sole arbiter is Taste. With the Intellect or with the Conscience it has only collateral relations. Unless incidentally, it has no concern whatever either with Duty or with Truth.[24]

Poe's contribution differs from that of any of the Germans discussed in that he provides practical examples of how to achieve the effects he discusses, at least in the realm of poetry. On one level, this leads Poe to verse experiments like "The Bells", in which repetition at all levels – sound, word, phrase – allegedly creates a certain melodiousness in the lines. Onomatopoeia, like imitative music, carries the dual function of both representation and illustration; in this way the poetry of Poe could reconcile the Wagnerian split between meaning and expressivity. In this respect, Poe's

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[23] Ibid., p. 1045

[24] Poe, "The Poetic Principle", p. 1027

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primary follower among Russians was Konstantin Bal'mont, who foregrounded the expressive quality of words to a much greater degree than his contemporaries.

For future writers who wanted to translate the abstract theories of Schopenhauer or Nietzsche into actual poetic output, Poe provided one of the first models, even though his analytical approach to creating poems (as in his description of writing *The Raven* in "The Philosophy of Composition") lay far from the techniques of most of the poets he influenced. As Baudelaire later wrote of Poe, "Chance and the incomprehensible were his two great enemies. We should not forget that his genius, as ardent and as agile as it was, was passionately excited by analysis, combinations, and calculations."[25] In this particular area, Poe's primary poetic descendents are René Ghil and Andrei Bely.

Though the mysterious personality of Poe was equally responsible for his popularity abroad, strictly speaking this side of Poe was as much a construction of Baudelaire as actual biography. Baudelaire was fascinated by the celebration of the grotesque that he found in Poe's work, and was stupefied that such a celebration could exist alongside a rigorous, analytical approach to art. That Baudelaire was less interested in music than later Symbolists is perhaps a reflection of this, as well. Though Baudelaire's development of synesthesia as a poetic trope would become the cornerstone for Symbolist poetics, his focus lay with the visual arts above all. This lent his poetry a more concrete tone, and Poe's "breath of fäery" becomes rendered in specific, descriptive terms. Peter Wetherill notes, in his book on the two poets, "If

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[25] "Le hasard et l'incompréhensible étaient ses deux grands ennemis… Il faille ne pas oublier que son génie, si ardent et si agile qu'il fût, était passionnément épris d'analyse, de combinaisons et de calculs." Baudelaire, p.153

Poe's power of abstraction is undoubtedly superior to Baudelaire's, his aesthetic

competence is less sure. Baudelaire has a sense of plasticity and color that Poe did not

at all possess to the same degree."[26]

Despite all this, Baudelaire's work is more *musical* in the sense of poetic

fluidity than Poe's, although Baudelaire's lip service to the muse of music was less

important than his famous formulation in "Correspondances": "le forêt de symboles".

In the poem, Baudelaire juxtaposes different sensory phenomena to create a sense of

synesthesia, describing

> …scents, fresh as the flesh of babies,
> Sweet like an oboe, green like the prairies.[27]

While Baudelaire's formulations are usually not music-specific and he does not

elevate music in the same way as Schopenhauer or Nietzsche, the development of an

aesthetic that suggests different media *can* be combined marks his major contribution

to the development of a musico-poetic system. Baudelaire, unlike many of his

followers, treats synesthesia as an inexact, idiosyncratic phenomenon.

Furthermore, Baudelaire was responsible for bringing the Wagnerian element

into French Symbolism. In 1860, he even wrote to Wagner after attending a concert of

his music, later dedicating his only critical article on music to Wagner in 1861.

Wagner's "total art" theories merged well with the synesthetic tradition begun by

Baudelaire, and the combination of exceptional poems with exceptional music lay only

a generation away.

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[26] "Si le pouvoir d'abstraction de Poe est sans conteste supérieur à celui de Baudelaire, sa compétence esthétique est moins étendue. Baudelaire a un sense de la plastique et de la couleur que Poe ne possède pas du tout au même degré." Wetherill, p. 53

[27]   …des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,
       Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies

If Baudelaire was the vessel through which Poe arrived in Europe, Poe was the vessel through which Baudelaire arrived in Russia. The first translated works by the French poet were his essay on Poe's work and introduction to Poe's life, appearing in 1852 in the journal *Pantheon*.[28] For this reason, the otherwise Anglophile Bal'mont allows Baudelaire a place in his list of influences.[29]

Future generations of French Symbolists, poets like Arthur Rimbaud, Stéphane Mallarmé, and the Belgian-born Maurice Maeterlinck, were not as influential for the development of a musical aesthetic in poetry as the self-proclaimed leader of the *poètes maudits*, Paul Verlaine. Any discussion of Verlaine's impact on Russian Symbolists begins necessarily with the opening line of his poem "Art poètique" – "De la musique avant toute chose" – which became a credo for Symbolist poets, used by poets from Bal'mont to Ivanov, and almost always out of context. The first two stanzas of Verlaine's poem/treatise describe music as a quality of poetic indistinctness rather than, in Schopenhaueresque terms, an elevation of the medium of music before other forms of art:

> De la musique avant toute chose,
> Et pour cela préfère l'Impair
> Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air,
> Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou qui pose.
>
> Il faut aussi que tu n'ailles point
> Choisir tes mots sans quelque méprise
> Rien de plus cher que la chanson grise
> Où l'Indécis au Précis se joint.

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[28] Grossman, *Poe* p. 64

[29] Ibid., p. 73

Blok refers to Verlaine as "unconscious" ("бессознательный")[30], underscoring the fact that Verlaine's concept of music is here unconnected with the medium of music itself or with a particular quality of poetry, but with an abstract notion, suggesting unconscious meanings through vague, indistinct imagery and language. Here we see echoes both of Poe's indefinitiveness and of Wagner's tone-speech.

However, Verlaine's reputation and perceived authority on matters musico-poetical also rest a great deal on the musicality of his verse, here the exploitation of auditory elements of the poem: assonance, alliteration, etc. Though Verlaine argues in "Art poétique" that formal elements such as rhyme are of secondary importance to vagaries of theme and meaning, his poetry nonetheless contains a heightened use of euphonic elements, most famously in poems like "Chanson de l'automne", with its repetition of the vowel O against a background of liquid consonants. Here the influence of Poe is strongly felt, and these qualities of both poets reappear most strongly in the poetry and theories of Konstantin Bal'mont.

Though this would be enough to secure Verlaine's reputation in Symbolist poetics, Daniel Grojnowski shows that the structural and generic conceits of Verlaine's poetry play an important role as well. In his article "De la chanson avant toute chose", Grojnowski argues that Verlaine's central place in discussions of musico-poetics has something to do with the poet's approach towards modernist aesthetics: "In its different metamorphoses, 'modernity' devotes itself to all sorts of models and enjoys intermingling them. It operates by voluntary hybridization. Writers and artists search

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[30] Blok, *Perepiska* p. 4

the cultural margins for the ferment of revival."[31] The unique ability of Verlaine to transcend these media boundaries and create "hybridizations" comes not from an abstract appreciation of music by the poet, but from the use of popular song forms, which separates him from the influences so far discussed.

The result was a poetic strategy that included sonority in its design, but also incorporated the structural marks of the song genres Verlaine used: a studied repetition not only of verse refrains, but of phrases, words, and individual sounds.[32] This helps explain why, though Verlaine's poetry had a marked influence on other poets, he is also among the most popular poets chosen by composers for song settings. In total, there exist over fifteen hundred settings of Verlaine's poems, many of which were contemporaneous to the Symbolist movement.[33] Indeed, while the Russian Symbolist movement was beginning to develop and process poetry and music from the West, the influential French composer Claude Debussy was setting nearly two dozen of Verlaine's poems to music.

The elevation of Verlaine's aesthetic credo did not prevent Russian Symbolists from openly deploring his lack of higher purpose. In an unpublished article written in 1894, Valery Briusov, the Russian poet most influenced by Verlaine's poetry, nonetheless laments Verlaine's lack of moral principle.[34] *L'art pour l'art*, the catchphrase of Parnassian decadence in *fin du siècle* France, had no place in the

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[31] "Dans ses différents avatars, la «modernité» consacre toutes sortes de modèles et elle se plaît à les entremêler. Elle opère volontiers par hybridations. Écrivains et artistes cherchent dans les marges culturelles les ferments d'un renouveau." Grojnowski, p. 155

[32] Ibid., p. 158

[33] White, p. 98

[34] Grossman, *Briusov*, p. 49

mystico-religious world of the Russian Symbolists.   But Verlaine's success at developing a poetry with the seeming expressivity of pure music meant that his influence among Russian Symbolists was unavoidable.

Far removed from the deliberate ambiguities of Verlaine's verse, among the most seminal works to come out of the French experience was René Ghil's frequently revised *Traité du verbe*, which sought to develop a scientific system for synesthetic relationships. Ghil had been reading scientific works on the shape of soundwaves formed by instruments of different timbres; using that information, he attempted to create an encompassing theory to account for the effect of a poem's vowels and rhythms. Such an attempt to impose an absolute system onto a phenomenon as idiosyncratic as synesthesia was bound to fail, but Ghil's work also suffered from a certain difficulty of expression. In bracketed annotations to one of Ghil's explanations, Louis Marvick attempts to make sense of Ghil's tortured prose:

> All the ideas are there, and there before him [i.e. the poet], in the vast and amorphous horizon, the naked mass of Word-instruments: and the Composer composes, just as the poet is a musician of words. This Instrument or this characteristic marriage of Instruments [i.e. the poet? the mass of Word-instruments?] will designate the Theme or the grand leitmotif of the poem's thought. These [i.e. the words? the Word-instruments?], in their plan, of diverse and strictly measured RHYTHMS, will sound the secondary leitmotifs.[35]

Although the specifics of Ghil's arguments are often difficult to follow, his approach was somewhat more radical than that of any of his predecessors: while Schopenhauer could make metaphorical links between musical and non-musical terms,

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[35] "Toutes les idées sont là, et là devant lui [i.e. le poète], dans l'horizon vaste et amorphe, la masse nuée des Mots-instruments: et le Compositeur compose, car ce poète est un musicien de mots. Cet Instrument ou ce mariage caractéristique d'Instruments [i.e. le poète? la masse des Mots-instruments?] designera le Thème ou grand leit-motiv de la pensée du poème. Ceux-ci [i.e. les mots? les Mots-instruments?], à leur plan, de RHYTHMES divers et strictement mesurés, sonneront les leit-motiv secondaires." Quoted and commented on by Marvick, p. 296

Ghil was attempting a direct overlay of musical and poetic aesthetics: the poet *is* the composer, the vowel *is* the tone. His work aimed to categorize scientifically the kinds of impulses other poets recognized instinctively, and to give them concrete expression.

In his recent article on Ghil's theories, Marvick notes the relationship between Ghil's subsequent attempts to categorize synesthetic phenomena and the 18th century *Affektenlehre*, or "doctrine of affections", which dominated philosophy of music during the Enlightenment.[36] Ghil had substituted for the "rational" philosophy of *Affektenlehre* the science of acoustics, although neither system came close to constructing a coherent methodology.

Whatever the result of *Traité du verbe*, René Ghil was a known quantity in early twentieth century Russia: three essays by Ghil appeared in *Scales* (in translation), affording him a direct audience of Symbolist poets.[37] These included a discussion of Mallarmé in 1908. Poets such as Bely, who attempted an equally rigorous approach to constructing sound-fabrics in their works, owed more in methodology to Ghil's treatise than to the popular but largely personal expression of sound-color in Arthur Rimbaud's "Voyelles".

Native Developments

Seeking a native antecedent to the Symbolist movement, turn-of-the-century theorists turned to the otherwise neglected poetry of Afanasy Fet. Much as Nietzsche

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[36] Marvick, p. 303

[37] Steinberg, p. 252

turned to Romantic roots in Schiller to provide a poetic heritage for his theories, Russians' turn to Fet (and, to some extent, to Tiutchev) stood as an acknowledgment of Symbolism's roots in the Romantic spirit.

Fet himself was sensitive to the relationship between music and poetry, as evidenced in his essays:

> The words "poetry is the language of the gods" are not empty hyperbole, but convey a clear understanding of the essence of the matter. Poetry and music are not only related but also indivisible. All the eternal works of poetry from the prophets to Goethe and Pushkin inclusive are – in essence – musical works – songs. All these geniuses of deep clairvoyance approach the truth not through science, not through analysis, but through beauty, through harmony. Harmony is likewise truth. Wherever harmony is disrupted, reality is also disrupted, and with it truth.[38]

The popular notion of Fet as a musical poet stems from the heightened lyrical quality of his verse, not to mention Fet's own use of music as a major thematic element in his lyric poetry, with titles such as "To a singer" ("Певице"), "To Chopin" ("Шопену"), and the collection *Melodies* (*Мелодии*). This interpretation of Fet's musicality appears also in critical analyses of his works: Lydia Lotman, for example, argues that Fet's poetry is rooted in a foregrounding of euphonic and melodic patterns, possibly due to Fet's childhood spent immersed in Russian vocal music.[39]

Lotman points to a more ambiguous formulation from Fet's contemporary, the composer Tchaikovsky, who wrote

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[38] "Слова *поэзия язык богов* - не пустая гипербола, а выражает ясноепонимание сущности дела. Поэзия и музыка не только родственны, но нераздельны. Все вековечные поэтические произведения от пророков до Гете и Пушкина включительно - в сущности - музыкальные произведения - песни. Все эти гении глубокого ясновидения подступали к истине не со стороны науки, не со стороны анализа, а со стороны красоты, со стороны гармонии. Гармония также истина. Там, где разрушается гармония - разрушается и бытие, а с ним и его истина." Fet, p. 303

[39] Lotman, L. p. 125

Often Fet reminds me of Beethoven, but never of Pushkin, Goethe, or Byron, or Musset. Like Beethoven he has been given the power to affect those strings of our soul which are inaccessible to artists, no matter how talented, who are limited to words. He is not simply a poet, but more of a poet-musician, since he avoids those themes which lend themselves easily to verbal expression.[40]

Tchaikovsky does not go on to explain how a particular *theme* can be not only non-verbal but also inherently musical, but it is significant that he shifts the focus away from the euphonic qualities of Fet's verse towards a more intangible notion of music.

Taking this a step further in his *The Imagination of Spring: the Poetry of Afanasy Fet*, Gustafson argues that the key essence of music in Fet may not be musicality at all; his analysis of the above quotation helps explain Fet's influence on the second generation of Symbolists a little more clearly:

This opposition between scientific, analytical, or sometimes mathematical truth and the truth of beauty, music, or harmony, recurs throughout Fet's writings on art. The musical metaphor, however, is both telling and confusing. Most critics believe that Fet was speaking about the formal qualities of verse, about rhythm and rhymes, about vowel harmony and sound orchestration. His verse abounds in such musical effects. But Fet is speaking about *truth*. He is saying, I believe, that poetry communicates as does music: its truth is not an idea or accepted value, but a personal experience into which the listener is drawn.[41]

In other words, Fet stands as a precursor to Symbolist notions of musical poetry not only in the heightened attention to euphonic qualities in verse, but also because of the union of music with a notion of something higher, or Music as an abstract quality that communicates truth.

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[40] "часто Фет напоминает мне Бетховена, но никогда Пушкина, Гёте, или Байрона, или Мюссе. Подобно Бетховену, ему дана власть затрагивать такие струны нашей души, которые недоступны художникам, хотя бы и сильным, но ограниченным пределами слова. Это не просто поэт, а скорее поэт-музыкант, как бы избегающий даже таких тем, которые легко поддаются выражению словом." Tchaikovsky, p. 514, 24 aug, 1888. Cited both in Gustavson (p. 194) and Klenin (p. 73, n.31)

[41] Gustafson, p. 168

The notion of Fet as an essentially musical poet received one of its major

champions in Vladimir Soloviev and, by virtue of Soloviev's central importance to the

second generation of Symbolist poets, assured Fet's reputation for would-be musical

poets of the early twentieth century.

In his article on the poetry of Fet and Polonsky, Soloviev opens with a line that

could easily be the epigraph for those future poets, had Verlaine's famous formulation

not taken that role: "After music, lyrical poetry presents the most direct revelation to

the human soul."[42] Here Soloviev engages in a Schopenhaueresque sleight-of-hand,

using the medium of music to talk about the ideal Music, but in order to elevate lyrical

poetry as a possible channel for that ideal.

Among Fet's poems that Soloviev chooses for analysis is "Quasi una fantasia",

a short lyric whose title references the Beethoven sonata more popularly known as

"Moonlight". "Quasi una fantasia" would provide Scriabin both with thematic material

used in his *Poem of Ecstasy* and a unique approach to metrical freedom, though given

the dominance of Soloviev's writings during this period, Scriabin might have come to

the poem initially through Soloviev's article rather than through the initial source.

In his analysis of "Quasi una fantasia", Soloviev continues with his mix of

musical notions: "These kinds of poems are located on the border between poetry and

music, and sometimes directly evoke musical impressions."[43]   Soloviev acknowledges

here the difference between the two media, but how a particular work exists on the

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[42] "Лирическая поэзия после музыки представляет самое прямое откровение человеческой душе." Soloviev, "O liricheskoi poezii" p. 208

[43] "Такие стихотворения также находятся на границе между поэзией и музыкой, а иногда и прямо вызваны музыкальными впечатлениями." Ibid., p. 218

borders between them is left undeveloped unless the meaning has shifted to "musicality". Fet's poem references Beethoven, but otherwise its relationship to music appears to belong to the poem's euphonic qualities.

Soloviev also joined Merezhovsky in bringing Nietzsche – "a talented writer (who unfortunately turned out to be mentally ill)"[44] – into the world of Russian philosophy and aesthetics. Though Soloviev did not share Nietzsche's religious leanings, he also did not seem to share Wagner's anti-Semitism, noting the extent to which Jewish culture had excelled at music.[45]

Setting the tenor for future Russians' writing on the heritage of Symbolism, Soloviev rejected the developments in the French movement, insofar as they lacked the necessary *moral* dimension for art: "art is not for art's sake, but for the realization of that fullness of life which it necessarily embraces in itself."[46] This rejection of the French based on accusations of Parnassianism – or at least on lack of higher substance – became a common current among Russian thinkers. Even Scriabin will reject Debussy on the grounds of the latter's "passive sensuality".[47]

This rejection of the French, though never a full break due to their enormous accomplishments in founding the Symbolist aesthetic, reached its apex in an 1897 lecture by Semon Vengerov, in which he which argued that Symbolism was

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[44] "талантливый писатель (к сожалению, оказавшийся душевнобольным)." Soloviev, "Pervyi shag", p. 553

[45] Soloviev, "Lectures on Divine Humanity", p. 153

[46] "искусство не для искусства, а для осуществления той полноты жизни, которая необходимо включает в себе." Soloviev, "Pervyi shag", p. 552

[47] see Maes, p. 214

dangerously altering the traditional path of Russian literature, away from its search for truth.[48]

The Symbolist Poets of Russia

In her work outlining the French influence on the development of Russian Symbolism, Georgette Donchin argues that a fundamental tension existed between the emotive French and the analytical Germans: she set the wild decadence of the *poètes maudits* against Max Nordau's *Entartung* (*Degeneration*), which purported to prove that "[the tendencies of the fashions in art and literature] have their source in the degeneracy of their authors, and that the enthusiasm of their admirers is for manifestations of more or less pronounced moral insanity, imbecility, and dementia."[49]

However, Donchin's binary is a bit disingenuous: for one thing, the French symbolist movement owed as much to the Germans as to their own culture, thanks especially to Schopenhauer, Wagner, and Nietzsche. Meanwhile, Nietzsche was no more the stereotypically rigorous German than the René Ghil was the stereotypically emotive Frenchman.

Still, a binary did exist in Russian perception of the French and German heritage, as evidenced by the cultural rift between the decidedly pro-French *World of Art* and *Scales* versus the strongly pro-German *argonauts*, among others. However, the real difference between the French and German heritage for Russian symbolists lay in the philosophical/religious side of the debate: as far as the Russians were concerned,

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[48] Donchin, p. viii

[49] ibid, pp. 15-16

the French were decadents and Parnassians while the Germans brought philosophical credibility and a higher purpose to the Symbolist project – even Nietzsche, whose lack of Christianity should have otherwise kept him outside, projected an air of authority because of his position as a major world philosopher.

Given this winding and diverse genealogy, by the time the notion of the "musical" as formulated by French and German thinkers began gaining currency in Russia, the term was already hopelessly stretched. Without even mentioning the various shades of meaning acquired through German philosophers, Grossman summarizes the lack of uniformity among French poets:

> Musicality in poetry of course did not mean the same thing to all: for Mallarmé it meant giving a poem the structure of a musical composition, while for Baudelaire individual words had the value of musical notes. For Verlaine it meant combining words so that their recurrent sounds create an effect on the hearer like music.[50]

For the Symbolist poets, this complex intermingling of theories of music was enough to guarantee a diversity of opinion on matters theoretical. However, other sets of disagreements helped diversify this opinion even more:

1. Moral/Aesthetic: was the dominance of music in the arts a merely aesthetic quality or a moral one, as well? Did art exist for its own sake, or to elevate the audience to a higher moral – if not mystical – plane?

2. Modern/Classical: was the development of music in line with symbolist goals better served by a return to the classical rigor of pre-Romantic composers, or in the experimentation of the avant garde movements?

3. Native/Foreign: were the theories surrounding music's role somehow linked to a notion of Russianness, or did they transcend national boundaries?

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[50] Grossman, *Briusov*, p. 50

Despite – or maybe because of – these complexities, music lay at the center of turn-of-the-century *zeitgeist* in Russia. The short-lived *Russian Symbolists* labeled its sections according to musical terminology ("Notes", "Scales", etc.), even if the content did not reflect any justification for the names.[51] *World of Art* published song scores and articles on music theory, and *Scales* helped spread the works of French Symbolists, both poetic and theoretical. Articles in *Golden Fleece* carried names like "Music as one of the highest mystical experiences" (June, 1907).[52]

The attitude towards music, musicality, and Music was equally idiosyncratic for each of the period's major Symbolist poets:

Bal'mont, the poet most influenced by Poe, defends poetry as the expression of inner music, but also tries to establish a concrete methodology for using vowels and consonants, unlocking their inner magic. His essay "Poetry as Sorcery" bears the trace of Ghilesque categorization, but instead of the pseudo-scientific approach of Ghil, Bal'mont links the sounds with associated words to unlock the power of particular vowel sounds:

> У - музыка шумов, и У - всклик ужаса. Звук грузный, как туча и гуд медных труб. Часто У - грубое, по веществу своему: *Стук, бунт, тупо, круто, рупор*. В глухом лесу плутает - А у. Слух ловит уханье филина. Упругое У, многострунное. Гул на морском берегу.[53]

Bal'mont attributes this notion of vowel inner-essence to Poe and Wagner, though it reaches its fullest pre-Symbolist expression in the poetry of Fet: "Буря на

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[51] Richardson, p. 40

[52] "Музыка, как одно из высших мистических переживании" Ibid, p. 77

[53] Bal'mont, p. 11 , p. 11. This quote loses the effect in translation, since it relies on the repetition of the "U" sound in the words Bal'mont chooses to illustrate his thesis.

небе вечернем"[54], for example. In that sense Bal'mont is moving away from vowel texture as an essentially "musical" phenomenon and towards an iconicism of vowel sound that stretches beyond surface onomatopoeia. However, Bal'mont does not translate this inner-essence to any higher, world-changing experience.

In contrast to Bal'mont, Briusov was the Symbolist era's strongest link to the heritage of the French, especially to Verlaine. In 1893 he published translations of Verlaine's poetry and wrote, the next year, an unpublished essay on the French poet.[55] Though familiar with the works of Mallarmé and Ghil, Briusov does not incorporate theories of music or musicality much into his work.

The second generation of Symbolist poets yielded a more pronounced set of philosophies, especially on issues of music in poetry. In a letter to Andrei Bely, Blok noted in a much quoted – perhaps too much quoted – line, "I don't understand a single thing about music, being naturally deprived of any sign of a musical ear. So I cannot speak about music as about art, in any sense."[56] Most analysts read this as a statement of Blok's shortcomings on issues of music, a fair assessment since Blok certainly writes less about music than his contemporaries.[57] However, the context of that line and the general topic of the letter hint that Blok's statement is a bit disingenuous: this is the first ever of Blok's letters to Bely (their correspondence eventually spanned over

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[54] "Storm on the evening sky", a poem that creates a powerful euphonic effect through vowel choice and repetition.

[55] Grossman, *Briusov*, p. 49

[56] "Я до отчаяния ничего не понимаю в музыке, от природы лишон всякого признака музыкального слуха, так что не могу говорить о музыке, как искусстве, ни с какой стороны." Blok, *Perepiska* 1/3/1903, p. 3

[57] This line is cited as evidence of Blok's lack of a musical ear by Steinberg, Bonneau, etc.

250 letters), and it concerns itself with a criticism of Bely's article "Forms of Art" ("Формы искусства"), which had recently appeared in *World of Art*.[58] Blok's line about his musical inadequacies comes after a glowing overall review of Bely's article and segues into a set of questions asking Bely to clarify some aspects of his musical theory, pointing out what seem to Blok to be contradictions. Read in context, Blok's formulation seems more an act of deference to a perceived expert than a neutral and otherwise unmotivated statement of artistic ability.

In the continuation of the line that began this chapter, Blok outlines briefly his view of music sitting at the center not only of the creative universe, but of the actual universe, as well: "In the beginning was music. Music is the substance of the world. The world grows in elastic rhythms… The growth of the world is culture. Culture is musical rhythm."[59]

Blok's formulation is closest of all to Schopenhauer's, who wrote in *World as Will*, "We might, therefore, just as well call the world embodied music as embodied will."[60] For Blok, however, this embodiment is not just metaphysical but cultural as well; without music, the evolution of Humanism cannot have taken place: "Music was the cement that built the culture of humanism. When the cement was no more, humanistic culture returned to human civilization."[61]

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[58] *Мир искусства*, 1902, No. 12, pp. 343-61

[59] "Вначале была музыка. Музыка есть сущность мира. Мир растет в упругих ритмах... Рост мира есть культура. Культура есть музыкальный ритм." Blok, *Dnevnik*, p. 360

[60] Schopenhauer, p. 340

[61] "Музыка была цементом, который создавал культуру гуманизма; когда цемента не стало, гуманистическая культура превратилась в гуманную цивилизацию." Blok, *Dnevnik* p. 358

A theorist whose focus on music extended far further than Blok's, Viacheslav

Ivanov conceived of symbolist poetry as a three-pronged activity: painting, music, and

knowledge, but linked with the ability to move the listener as well. Though he, too,

rejected French symbolism for its lack of spiritual elevation, he joined other Russian

symbolists in their recognition of Baudelaire as the grandfather of the movement,

asking "From what grew this forest of symbols, which stare at us with native, leading

eyes (as Baudelaire said)?"[62]

For nearly all matters musical, Ivanov takes cues from Nietzsche's *Birth of*

Tragedy, elevating the German philosopher as the central thinker in his conception of

music:

> Nietzsche was the orgiast of musical rapture: it was his second soul. Not long
> before his death Socrates dreamed that a divine voice admonished him to study
> music: Nietzsche the philosopher fulfilled that marvelous calling. He needed to
> become a member of the Wagnerian crowd, dedicating himself to the service of
> the Muse and Dionysus, and to develop an understanding of Wagner as the
> inheritor of Beethoven, of his prophetic grace, of his Promethean fire-bearing
> hollow thyrsus: his heroic and tragic pathos. He needed Dionysus to reveal
> himself in music, in that mute art of the deaf Beethoven, the greatest harbinger
> of the orgiastic secrets of the soul, before doing so in the word, before the
> "rapture and ecstasy.[63]

Significantly, Ivanov uses this passage both to assert music's dominance and to

justify the right of literature to exist on the same level: music comes first, but literature

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[62] "Откуда вырос этот лес символов, глядящих на нас родным ведущим глазами (как сказал
Бодлэр)?" Ivanov, "Poet i chern'" p. 712

[63] "Ницше был оргиастом музыкальных упоений: это была его другая душа. Незадолго до смерти
Сократу снилось, будто божественный голос увещевал его заниматься музыкой: Ницше-философ
исполнил дивный завет. Должно было ему стать участником Вагнерова сонма, посвященного
служению Муз и Диониса, и музыкально усвоить воспринятое Вагнером наследие Бетховена, его
пророческую милость, его Прометеев огненосный полый тирс: его героический и трагический
пафос. Должно было, чтобы Дионис раньше, чем в слове, раньше, чем в "восторге и исступлении"
великого мистагога будущего Заратустры-Достоевского, - открылся в музыке, немом искусстве
глухого Бетховена, величайшего провозвестника оргийных таинств духа." Ivanov, "Nitsshche i
Dionis", pp. 179-80

after it still has the power to reveal what lay at the heart of the mysteries. Its greatest expression in literature has come not from the French or German, but from Russian writers like Dostoevsky. Likewise, in another article Ivanov praises Tiutchev's work for expressing "certain secrets of the great and unspeakable music of the soul."[64]

Ivanov's vision of music is united firmly with the notion of Music - less as a genre, and more as "unconscious exercise in time and numeration."[65] However, again referencing Nietzsche, Ivanov links this supra-generic system with a more concrete set of meanings: death, resurrection, orgiastic abandon, and tragedy. At most music is a "liquid architecture" with the ability to challenge and inspire the other arts.[66]

Though Blok achieved what his critics call true musicality in his verse, and though Ivanov developed a strong theoretical/religious approach to justifying the role of music in literature, neither writer dominated (and continues to dominate) the topic as much as their contemporary, Andrey Bely.

In some ways Bely was uniquely situated to write both on music and on poetry. Besides being one of the most prolific theorists of the Symbolist movement, he also had a rudimentary knowledge of music theory. Bely could play the piano, and maintained friendships both with the Medtners and the composer Taneev. Furthermore, he had made his literary debut with the *Symphonies*, elaborately

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[64] "некие тайные великой и несказанной музыки духа." Ivanov, "Poet i chern'", p. 712

[65] "бессознательным упражнением в счету и счислении." Ibid., p. 713

[66] See Bird, p. 169

constructed works of rhythmic prose, but whose form bore little resemblance to a musical symphony.[67]

Bely outlines his vision of music ca. 1903 in a letter responding to Blok's questions about his article, "Forms of Art". First, Bely gives two possible schematics for understanding the relationship of music to other forms of art. The first is a re-drawing of Schopenhauer's design, which places the arts in a linear relationship, with music taking the pride of place at the far right of the line. The second comes from a suggestion by Blok that all the arts participate in music, placing music in essence outside of the rest and placing the other arts on equal footing:
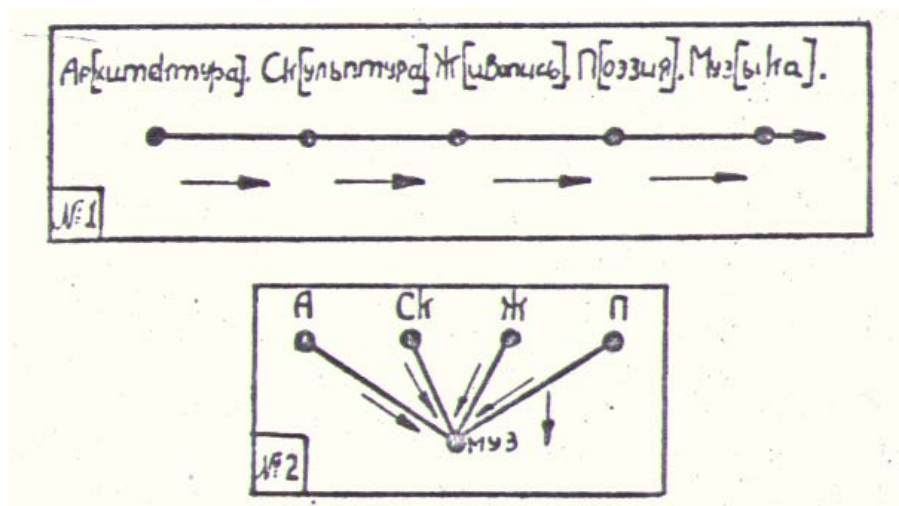
Figure 1.1 - Bely's summary of other theories [68]

Bely's own design combines the two, maintaining the primacy of music as the supreme art while continuing to place poetry above the other arts. In this chart, music is divided between music proper, found on the extreme right of the hierarchy, and the concept of Music, in which all the arts share some quality:

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[67] See Tielkes, who agrees with Bely's assessment that only the fourth "symphony" bears a strong trace of musical form.

[68] Bely, *Perepiska*, p. 16
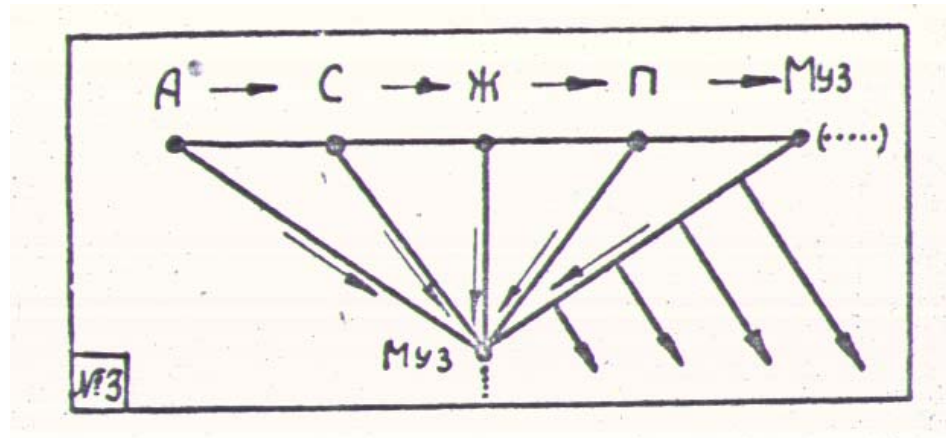
Figure 1.2 - Bely's theory of music and art [69]

This shows that Bely had made the crucial distinction between two of the meanings of "music" that opened this chapter: the art form and the philosophical notion. This distinction is important for Bely's own aesthetics, because he could reasonably argue that his poetry then reflected the essence of music even if he had little experience with the art form itself.

Typical of the dominance which Bely has enjoyed in critical circles is this gaffe in Ada Steinberg's otherwise excellent *Word and Music in the Novels of Andrei Bely*: "Bely's schooling in musical theory, *which distinguished him from other contemporary writers*, and also Wagner's epoch-making experiment, drew him to the idea of the indissoluble bond between music and poetry."[70] Steinberg goes to great lengths to defend Bely's knowledge of music theory against Čiževsky's criticisms, but it is telling that neither here nor anywhere in her overview of composers and writers does Steinberg mention Mikhail Kuzmin, a conservatory-trained musician and composer who enjoyed equal dexterity in both music and poetry as early as 1906, at the same

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[69] Ibid, p. 16

[70] Steinberg, p. 41. Emphasis mine.

time Bely was writing his *Symphonies*. This oversight speaks less to any critical shortcomings in Steinberg's work than to the Bely-centric nature of musico-poetic criticism.

Music in Silver Age Russia

While the development of poetry in Russia began a particularly vibrant stage near the end of the 19th century, the development of music had reached its first major apex a generation before, with the building of the two conservatories, the international successes of P. I. Tchaikovsky, and the work of a community of nationalistic composers who helped sculpt a notion of inherently "Russian" music.

This circle of composers who developed around the tutelage of Miliy Balakirev set the development of a national music as their *raison d'être*. Although this sort of project was not unique to Russia, it also predisposed them towards a certain hostility to the very German Wagner. Rimsky-Korsakov himself writes about his lack of interest in Wagner's theories – although writing from the safe distance of 1906, he also takes time to credit himself with developing many of the same theories independently, and more skillfully – until he heard Wagner give concerts in St. Petersburg. Even then, the only major influence he notes involves Wagner's style of orchestration.[71]

A contrarian opinion was voiced by the composer and critic Alexander Serov, who wrote positively about Wagner's music and appearance in Russia. As this put Serov at odds not only with those composers but also with the very influential

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[71] Rimsky-Korsakov, p. 204, 251

nationalist critic Vladimir Stasov, the vocally Wagnerite element of Russian musical culture was effectively marginalized.[72]

By the time the symbolist movements were making inroads into Russia, the former clout of the Balakirev circle was giving way to that of a new circle around the publisher Mitrofan Beliaiev, partially because of Beliaiev's active financial support of young composers, and partially because members of the old circle were either dead or – in the cases of Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin – drifting into Beliaiev's sphere. Included in the new circle were Borodin (until his early death), Glazunov, Liadov, Dutsch, Felix, Blumenfeld, and Rimsky-Korsakov. Eventually this list would also include Sokolov, Antipov, and the "warped, posing and self-opinionated A. N. Skryabin."[73]

Rimsky-Korsakov would later wield a disproportionate amount of influence on the music of the Beliaiev circle composers, but Beliaiev nonetheless offered an alternative venue for the next generation of artists. Beginning in the 1880s, he held his famous "Fridays", gatherings in which music by these new composers could be debuted informally in a sort of musical salon. Though their opposition to the conservative and nationalistic Balakirev circle led Rimsky-Korsakov to label them "progressive", Francis Maes argues that they were in fact another form of conservativism: academic rather than nationalistic.[74] Experimentation was limited to Rimsky-Korsakovian touches, like octatonic scales, even while Claude Debussy was radically re-envisioning music in Western Europe.

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[72] Maes, p. 40

[73] Rimsky-Korsakov, p. 319

[74] Maes, p. 192

Viewed as a whole, the composers in early twentieth century Russia did not present a particularly "modern" front. Rachmaninoff and Medtner lay on the more conservative end of the scale, working predominantly in a Romantic idiom. At the other end, Prokofiev and Stravinsky, later associated with the avant garde side of Russian modernism, had not yet begun their most important works. This left any number of otherwise minor composers somewhere in the middle.

These alignments help explain why, though their contemporaries in poetry were elevating music as the supreme art, very few composers in turn-of-the-century Russia had any real connection with the Symbolist movement. In the end, only a few pieces of Symbolist writing were even approached by contemporary composers: a smattering of songs set to poems by Bal'mont, Bely, and Briusov, and a choral symphony on Bal'mont's translation of Poe's "The Bells".[75] Only one major composer can truly be said to be "Symbolist" in his own right: Alexander Scriabin. Scriabin would later enjoy the strong support of Viacheslav Ivanov and occasional mentions by other Symbolists, but again this was an exception.

Far from lamenting this gap between new currents in poetry and music – a gap all the more incomprehensible because of poetry's elevation of music – certain writers actually supported it. The music critic Emile Medtner, a cousin of the composer Nikolai Medtner and a friend of Andrei Bely, wrote strongly against new currents in his article "Modernism and Music". Emile Medtner used his publications to attack Reger and Strauss, among others.[76] Furthermore, both Medtners enjoyed the support of

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[75] ibid., p. 203

[76] Richardson, p. 80

Bely, and by virtue of his position as the musical authority among Symbolist poets, a certain status in the modernist polemics taking place in the journals.

Why would Bely throw his support behind a composer now relegated to such minor status? Ultimately, Medtner's position in contemporary Russian music was determined less by what he was than by what he was not. As Leonid Sabaneev noted, "The most original thing about [Medtner] is that he was almost the only one among his musical contemporaries who did not adopt the slogans of the revolution in music, did not destroy any traditions, and did not seek any new horizons (although he found them in the end)."[77] However, Sabaneev elsewhere noted that Medtner was also "a true master of composition", about whom people frequently whispered the word "genius."[78]

This relative conservativism was a more comfortable fit for the musical sensibilities of poets like Bely, whose conception of ideal music was Romantic rather than Modernist. Richardson notes that Bely's elevation of Medtner was more than just an expression of friendship, but intimately linked to Bely's view of art:

> Belyi attempted to unite Medtner with his greatest contemporaries in literature (Briusov and Merezhkovsky) and art (Vrubel), whom Belyi considered the true innovators within modern Russian artistic life. Discussing Medtner as a "tragedian" in music, Belyi then praised him as the only Russian composer who affirmed rather than denied life. After again examining Medtner in the context of Russian artistic life, Belyi concluded that Goethe's lyrics, put to Medtner's music, formed one of the few manifestations of true culture.[79]

The friendship with the Medtners was strained after Bely published, in April 1907, an anti-Wagner polemical article in *Scales*, "Against Music" ("Против

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[77] Sabaneiev, "Medtner" p. 78

[78] Sabaneev, *MRC* p. 135

[79] Richardson, p. 65

музыки"). Steinberg argues that the article, which was written at the beginning of Bely's self-imposed exile from St. Petersburg, cannot be taken seriously in light of Bely's otherwise lifelong interest in music.[80]

In opposition to anti-modernist music critics, Viacheslav Karatygin used his column in *Golden Fleece* to support and promote Alexander Scriabin, criticize composers like Rachmaninoff and otherwise Tchaikovskian influences in contemporary music, and present a strongly modernist edge to the publication.[81] These articles helped push Scriabin to central position among contemporary composers, and therefore further away from the sympathies of Andrei Bely.

The Overlooked

In *The Influence of French Symbolism on Russian Poetry*, Donchin argues that the elevation of music was not mere rhetorical posturing from poets, but it made possible the verse experimentation that began in the latter half of the 19th century: "[the evolution towards tonic verse] corresponded to an acutely felt need – the modern ear was attuned to music, and modern sensibility demanded a more fluid and musical mode of expression."[82]

Still, experimentation in free verse was rare and controversial, though Walt Whitman had achieved international fame for his use of it in *Leaves of Grass*. It had appeared recently in France, but even the foremost experimenter of the French

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[80] Steinberg, p. 41

[81] Richardson, p. 76

[82] Donchin, p. 171

symbolist movement, Verlaine, satisfied himself with a limited *vers libéré* rather than outright free verse.

In Russia, perhaps because of the relatively late development of its literary meters, free verse and metrical experimentation had an even more difficult time. Even Walt Whitman was crammed into metrical structures by his primary translator, Bal'mont. Some attempts at experimentation did take place, albeit rarely. Briusov, closer to the French tradition than any of his fellow Symbolists, wrote a few short pieces attempting to exploit its use.

This is not to say that the Symbolist period lacked a strong experimental side, but experiments in metrics were largely limited to issues of accentual rhythm, especially incorporation of *dol'niki* – an otherwise duple meter that allows for a variable number of unstressed syllables (0-2) between stresses – and tonic verse. This highlights why the experiments of Scriabin and Kuzmin, though relatively benign from a 21st century point of view, signaled a radical departure from the work of their colleagues. However, it was not the *nature* of the experiments that prevented their wider appreciation.

What Kuzmin lacked, and the primary reason for his marginalization during the Symbolist period, was a philosophico-religious current in his works. Though the *Alexandrian Songs* were praised by Briusov and *Wings* had been a *succès de scandale*, neither of these works, nor the full collection of poems in *Seti*, expressed anything in line with a theosophic worldview. Furthermore, Kuzmin had made no friends among Symbolists with the publication of his 1909 article "On Beautiful Clarity", which argued for a prose of concrete, specific imagery instead of Verlainesque ambiguity.

Underneath the aesthetic criticism is a philosophical one: the Symbolist world theories are themselves muddled and ambiguous. In "The Testaments of Symbolism", Ivanov responded indirectly to Kuzmin:

> "Parnassianism" would have a full right to exist if only it did not distort all too often the natural characteristics of poetry, especially lyrical poetry. It is too inclined to forget that lyric poetry is by its nature far from a depictive art, such as the plastic arts and painting. Rather, like music, it is an art of motion, active rather than contemplative, and, in the final analysis, lyric poetry creates life not icons.[83]

Though Blok would disagree on this negative assessment of the visual arts, and lecturing Kuzmin on music seems unwise coming from a non-musician, Ivanov's criticism aims predominantly at the perceived lack of spiritual elevation at the core not only of Kuzmin's art, but of the French tradition in general. Because the *Alexandrian Songs* did not elevate the human spirit towards some theosophic goal, their achievement in uniting music and poetry with the double benefit of freeing Russian poetics from syllabatonic meter went largely unnoticed.[84]

Bely's dislike of Kuzmin, however, is more palpable. In his memoir *Between Two Revolutions* (*Между двух революций*), Bely noted Kuzmin's attendance at one of Ivanov's evenings: "M. Kuzmin, having already gasped out his Wings, began to lisp poems, rolling his eyes coquettishly; at the time I didn't like him at all."[85] Though

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[83] "«Парнассизм» имел бы, впрочем, полное право на существование, если бы не извращал — слишком часто — природных свойств поэзии, в особенности, лирической: слишком склонен он забывать, что лирика, по природе своей, — вовсе не изобразительное художество, как пластика и живопись, но — подобно музыке — искусство двигательное, — не созерцательное, а действенное, — и, в конечном счете, не иконотворчество, а жизнетворчество.", Ivanov, "Zavety simvolizma" p. 600. Trs. with a note on the relevance to Kuzmin by Robert Bird, p. 252 n.68

[84] Whether Ivanov's dismissal of Kuzmin is somehow connected to their very public private life is another question. Kuzmin had been both a houseguest and roommate in the Ivanov household, and their relationship began to fracture near the end of the first decade of the 1900s.

[85] "М. Кузмин, уже ахнувший «Крыльями», стал шепелявить стихи, кокетливо опускал глаза; мне тогда не понравился." Bely*, MDR*, p. 95

Kuzmin and Bely shared very little in common in matters of artistic theory, more likely than not Bely's dislike of Kuzmin stemmed from the latter's choice of subject matter. In a dismissive note in the same autobiography, Bely sarcastically rejected the sexual openness of Russian literature at the time: "those are their 'accomplishments' – a lesbian tale by Zinovieva-Annibal and the pederastic verse of Kuzmin."[86]

On the other hand, even Bely did not deny Kuzmin's skill as a musical performer. In *Beginning of the Century* (*Начало века*) he recalled another evening in which Kuzmin performed songs at the piano: "M. A. Kuz'min [sic] was at the piano: he sang his verses to musical accompaniment written for them, in a hoarse, cracked voice, and it came off wonderfully."[87]

It took the allegedly un-musical Blok to appreciate Kuzmin's work as a composer, hiring him to write the incidental music for his "The Puppet Booth" ("Балаганчик"). Nevertheless, Blok's and Kuzmin's conceptions of poetry were too distant for Blok to take his admiration of Kuzmin too far – he writes appreciatively of Kuzmin's poetry, but without the intense analytical approach that Bely would use to dissect other people's poems.

On the other hand, Scriabin should not have met with such resistance, at least on the surface. Boris Gasparov has argued that the Silver Age marked the first time in Russian history when the dominant cultural figure was musical rather than literary[88],

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[86] "вот «плоды» – лесбиянская повесть Зиновьевой-Аннивал и педерастические стихи Кузмина." Ibid., p. 197

[87] "М. А. Кузьмин [sic] – за рояль: петь стихи свои, аккомпанируя музыкой, им сочиняемой, - хриплым, надтреснутым голосом, а выходило чудесно." Bely, *NV*, p. 323

[88] "There was one major exception to this trend: Scriabin. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the cult of Scriabin reached truly messianic proportions, comparable to the cults of Pushkin and Tolstoy." B. Gasparov, pp. vii-viii

but Scriabin's own philosophical and literary output received little attention outside a close circle of family (Boris Schloezer, for example) and admirers.

On the surface, this is easy enough to explain: Scriabin's philosophical writings, which were not published during his lifetime, were scattershot diary entries that never cohered into a stable system. His first completed literary work, *The Poem of Ecstasy* (*Поэма экстаза*), was pulled from publication after its negative reviews at the premier of the Fourth Symphony, although Bowers notes that Scriabin continued to read it at public gatherings.[89] His second large-scale poem, *Prefatory Act* (*Предварительное действие*), was substantially re-written with the aid of Viacheslav Ivanov[90]. In all, Scriabin's literary career was not a success.

Still, there are structural elements in Scriabin's poems that should have attracted the attention of writers eager to merge a sense of music into poetry, especially since Scriabin's sense of music – as a medium – was far more developed than that of any of the writers. *The Poem of Ecstasy* never verges into free verse, but its rapidly shifting rhythmic patterns, especially towards the end of the poem, and its music-savvy structural elements merit a much closer reading than it has received.

Of Symbolist writers, only Viacheslav Ivanov considered himself a close friend of Scriabin, inviting the composer to the Tower to participate in Russia's most famous salon, although perhaps fittingly for his philosophy of death and resurrection, Ivanov's interest in Scriabin becomes much stronger after the composer's early and unexpected departure. Ivanov believed that Scriabin was the consummate Symbolist artist, one

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[89] Bowers, p. 110

[90] Volume 6 of *Russkie propilei* (pp. 201-247) contains both Scriabin's original draft and the version Ivanov helped prepare.

who was seeking out true dithyrambs in his poetry.[91] On the other hand, considering the crop of composers working in contemporary Russia, Ivanov did not have many people to choose from.

This largely conservative element in Russian music helps explain Bely's lack of interest in and occasional dislike of Scriabin. For a "dominant artistic figure", Scriabin almost never appears either in Bely's theoretical writings or even in his memoirs. With Medtner's song settings as the ideal art in Bely's mind, this is no great surprise: Scriabin was on the avant garde wing of Russian music.

However, the inability of Symbolist poets to reconcile themselves with the works of Scriabin may have a more basic explanation: though Scriabin's musical output was large and his philosophy sympathetic with that of second generation Symbolist poets, Scriabin failed to work in any of the genres most associated with those poets' theories: he wrote only long poems, not a single lyric poem; he wrote no operas, although an incomplete and abandoned libretto predates *The Poem of Ecstasy*; and he wrote no song settings of poetry – or no songs whatsoever except for the wordless "Romance".   Scriabin's full vocal output consisted of that "Romance", the Schilleresque choral finale of his first symphony ("Hymn to Art"), and the wordless chorus of *Prometheus*.

Most of the Symbolist poets discussed in this chapter were familiar with these works, but despite a strong interest in music and its possibilities in the realm of poetry, they did not draw a great deal from Kuzmin's or Scriabin's experiments. Though music was elevated as the supreme art of the Silver age, the specific needs of its

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[91] Ivanov, "Vzgliad Skriabina", p. 187

leading poets guaranteed that the actual incorporation and recognition of musical elements in poetry was stunted.

This dissertation will explore what the theorists of the Symbolist period missed: the direct influence of music – the medium – on the poetic production of two marginalized writers who had the benefit of knowing music proper. In both cases a close look at the accompanying music brings us insight back to the poetry that inspired it.

Chapter II

Methodological Concerns

The first chapter of this dissertation discussed the intellectual history that led to the privileging of music among the arts in Russia of the early 20th century.   The chapter's focus lay on various artists' prescriptive theories, or a philosophy of how music *should* be considered in the creation of art, at least as an abstract ideal. However, as this dissertation considers two works that involve both arts in a concrete way, a discussion of methodology is in order.

Two major questions have to be addressed: 1) Before analysis even begins, how should the relationship between music and poetry be discussed?, and 2) Once some form of relationship is determined, what is the best route to analyzing and interpreting the result? Though the questions are closely related and the answers largely dependent on the specific texts under discussion, in the broader sense these questions have shaped the development of musico-literary poetics both in Russian and abroad. This development is difficult to trace because, as an isolated topic within two much larger fields, study of what Jean-Pierre Barricelli has labeled *melopoiesis* has not developed independently of the two constitutive fields. [92] As a result, an attempt to draw a constellation of ideas within musico-literary study relies on very few stars against an enormous background.

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[92] The term *melopoiesis* was used in ancient Greece to describe musical poetry, and Ezra Pound later revived the term to discuss poetry that was "musical".

Nevertheless, this niche field has had a few key champions, and a brief discussion of their ideas will help clarify the two questions asked in the previous paragraph.

Assessing the Relationship

One of the most fundamental questions in this scattered field concerns how to approach the relationship at all: different pieces of art may invite different analytical approaches, but hybrid or inter-media relationships can extensively complicate matters.

In his work *Music, Art, and Metaphysics: Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics*, philosopher of aesthetics Jerrold Levinson attempted to clarify the scattered topic by exploring three general ways the arts can interrelate: juxtaposition, synthesis, and transformation. Per Levinson's definitions, most songs would qualify as juxapositional hybrids, since they "consist of elements imaginable in isolation from the others to which they are joined and which, so isolated, would count as bona fide (if peculiar) instances of the arts entering into the hybrid."[93] In other words, the text of the song can live independently as words on the page, while the music to a song can also live independently of the lyrics. On the other hand, Wagnerian opera would qualify as a synthesis, since the theatrical and musical elements are dependent on each other for actualization.[94]

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[93] Levinson, p. 31 Levinson continues, "This is not at all to deny that in such hybrids the whole is often (aesthetically) 'more than' the sum of its parts, but only to point out the recognizable allegiance the parts still owe to their artistic origins."

[94] I'm not sure I agree with or entirely understand this part of his argument. It seems to work from the point of view of theatre: the drama in Wagner cannot be separated from the music, since it is through

The hybrid with the highest level of complexity is the transformation, in which "some *essential* or *defining* feature of one or both arts is challenged, modified, or withdrawn." Synthetic and transformational hybrids are nonetheless distinct from mere influence of one art form on another, because they remain "wholly and unequivocally" one art form, "with all standard features intact."[95]

Levinson's work is useful in helping to categorize the larger areas in which two arts can interact, though he keeps his work largely abstract. On the more concrete level, the most comprehensive discussion of the different levels of influence comes from Boris Kats's *Musical Keys to Russian Poetry* (*Музыкальные ключи к русской поэзии*), which concerns itself only with literature that has been in some way influenced by music. In the introduction, Kats acknowledges that the vague expression "music and poetry" can mean a large variety of things, so he delineates two areas (and sub-areas) that his analysis will concern. The first major area concerns thematic links with music:

> 1. Elucidation of meaning of those poetic texts which:
> a) are thematically linked with music;
> b) contain non-evident (and possibly unrealized by the author) associations with musical works, events in the history of music, or with the musical experience of the poet, whether from perception as a listener or personal musicianship;
> c) are consciously encoded by the author in a way that the reader who does not have specific information about music cannot be in a position to interpret them.

As Kats acknowledges, not all thematic links are apparent and/or conscious. As an example of this he charts the commonality of one of *Don Giovanni*'s arias with Pushkin's retelling of the story in *The Stone Guest*. Whether Pushkin would have

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singing that the drama takes place. On the other hand, musical recordings of Wagner's operas – that is, music without the theatre – are fairly commonplace.

[95] Levinson, p. 33

made conscious use of the aria in the play is debatable, but Kats makes a compelling

argument that it nonetheless makes itself felt.

Kats then shifts from the thematic to the formal implications of music's

influence on poetry:

> 2. Establishment of similarity/dissimilarity between specifically musical and
> specifically poetic means of compositional organization in those poetic texts
> which:
> a) contain (possibly unbeknownst to the author) elements of construction more
> typical for musical composition than for poetic;
> b) are consciously built by the author according to similarity to one or another
> type of musical composition.[96]

Unlike the large-scale distinctions in Levinson's work, Kats's categories are not

necessarily exclusive and can often operate simultaneously. His focus is narrower in

the sense that he does not discuss different forms of hybrid arts, but within the narrow

field of music-influenced literature Kats is more concerned with the full impact that

music can have, rather than a more narrowly-circumscribed understanding of

"influence". This has important implications for *how* one approaches the study of the

two, since different imprints of influence (e.g. thematic, or structural) suggest different

analytical approaches.

Kats's major contribution here is the distinction between different *levels* of

thematic and formal influences, each of which have important implications for

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[96] "1. Уяснение смысла тех поэтических текстов, которые:
а) связаны с музыкой тематически;
б) содержат неявные (и, возможно, не осознававшиеся даже автором) ассоциации с
музыкальными произведениями, событиями истории музыки либо с музыкальным опытом поэта,
будь то слушательское восприятие или собственное музицирование;
в) сознательно зашифрованы автором таким образом, что читатель, не владеющий определенной
информацией о музыкальном искусстве, не в состоянии их расшифровать.
2. Установление сходства/несходства между специфически музыкальными и специфически
поэтическими способами композиционной организации в тех поэтических текстов, которые:
а) содержат (возможно, помимо воли автора) конструктивные элементы, более типичные для
музыкальной композиции, чем для поэтической;
б) сознательно построены автором по подобию того или иного типа музыкальной композиции."
Kats, p. 5

analysis. Most striking is his assertion that certain elements of musical influence may be unrecognized even by the author, a contentious claim as the level of musical specificity in a particular text increases. Kats uses the example of Nabokov, who famously denied having much interest in or knowledge about the technical aspects of music, but whose works Kats argues nonetheless display certain elements of musical form.

Knowing the artist's particular level of expertise in both arts can also affect the direction of analysis, which becomes a concern in Mark Scroggins' *Louis Zukofsky and the Poetry of Knowledge*. In the section on musical influence, Scroggins begins by distinguishing between three ways that poetry becomes "musical", two of which overlap with the distinctions in the first chapter of this dissertation: 1. "foregrounding of aural values of words", or Pound's idea of *melopoieia*; 2. rhetoric of music and song – that is, constant reference *to* music; and 3. music as a formal model for poetry.[97] Though Scroggins does address this explicitly, the third of these qualities is itself divided between poetry organized according to the same formal rules as music and poetry taking inspiration from musical form. This distinction separates those works whose authors are familiar enough with musical form to attempt more literal transpositions, and those like Zukofsky, in whose work "the relationship of music and writing can be most fruitfully regarded not as an airtight analogy but as a kind of experimental premise."[98] This distinction is crucial because it directs the type of analysis that can be safely be done on the text.

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[97] Scroggins, 176-7

[98] Scroggins, p. 195, citing Karen Lawrence (*The Odyssey of style in Joyce's Ulysses*). Joyce actually *did* have formal musical training, but Lawrence argues that the fugal sections of *Ulysses* are more

Both Kats and Scroggins deal with literature that has been in some way shaped by music. An equally troublesome area of study that falls within the same general field is *song*, which contains both a literary and musical text. Should songs be treated as musical illustrations of literary texts, or as simultaneous interaction of two art forms? Does one inherently dominate the other by nature of the relationship?

On issues related to music and poetry, the foremost Russian scholar in the first half of the twentieth century was Boris Asaf'ev. In 1930 Asaf'ev edited a collection of essays on the Russian song appropriately called *The Russian Song* (*Русский романс*), with articles discussing the relationships of text to music in 19th century works from Glinka to Rimsky-Korsakov. Asaf'ev outlines the methodological issues in his introduction to the essays, noting especially that the dominance of either word or music in song should not be decided as part of a preexisting analytical bias, but is dependent on the individual piece at hand: "This *a priori* thesis about what 'should be' brings nothing to the relationship of our understanding of the song as a real object, something concretely there, and not as something that 'should be'."[99] For Asaf'ev the key to understanding the song is the notion of "intonation": not in the typical sense of the word, but as an expression of the song's articulation in the full context of its composition and performance. The song as an object is not just aesthetic, but also historical and sociological.

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inspired by than modeled after musical fugues. Scroggins considers Lawrence's formulation as an apt description of Zukofsky's methodology, although the same can be said for any number of music-inspired (rather than music-trained) poets.

[99] "Этот априорный тезис *долженствования* ничего не дает в отношении понимания романса, как реально существующей, конкретной данности, а не того, чем он должен быть." Asaf'ev, p. 5

Though Asaf'ev's warning about a too-hasty discussion of dominance is an important one, other scholars have nonetheless sought to discuss this relationship as it works to create meaning. For example, in her book on *Art Song*, (1992) Barbara Meister writes,

> In an art song the poetic text predates the music. Since the composer has an unlimited choice of texts, it seems axiomatic that something about the specific poem chosen must have inspired the composer to attempt to convey its meaning in musical terms. This would seem to indicate that the text should be of primary importance to the finished product, and many characteristics of art song indicate that it is.[100]

Meister is not arguing for a privileging of either music or literature in the aesthetic sense, but in the generation of meaning. The composer has chosen the text, therefore the analyst can reasonably look to the text when attempting to discuss the creation of meaning in the music, as well. This relationship is uneven by nature: only rarely does a poet choose an existing musical work to write lyrics to. Consequently Meister can analyze Debussy's *Chansons de Bilitis* from the perspective of Louÿs' poems rather than the reverse. However, an important distinction should be made: meaning in the songs derives not from Louÿs but from Debussy's reading of Louÿs. This suggests that Meister's formula could be improved by considering the song text as a translation of a poetic text rather than on its original terms.

Along these lines Lawrence Kramer, who is perhaps the most prolific of scholars working on musico-literary poetics, defines the relationship between music and poetry in song as combative rather than cooperative. Because the composer is working with a particular interpretation of a poem, the text is robbed of its multivalent aspects by a musical setting which attempts to force it into a single – or a least a more

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[100] Meister, pp. xvi-xvii

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limited – level of interpretation. "The relationship between poetry and music in song is implicitly agonic, the song becoming a 'new creation' only because it is a decreation. The music appropriates the poem by contending with it, phonetically, dramatically and semantically, and the contest is what most drives and shapes the song."[101] A similar sentiment was articulated a few decades prior by semiotician George Steiner, who considered the song setting "an act of interpretive restatement in which the verbal sign system is critically illuminated…or misconstrued by a non-verbal sign system with its own highly formal syntax… [The song is] a construct in which the original and its 'translation' coexist in active simultaneity."[102]

These are helpful approaches because they relieve the researcher from the burden of having to find a definitive "meaning" in an artistic creation that is fundamentally about simultaneous or translated meanings. Though the text comes with a certain set of meanings, the composer can choose to set the words in a more directly illustrative form or to ironize them with a sharply contrasting mood. For this reason, the combative or translational model of dealing with songs reinforces Asaf'ev's assertion that the relationship between word and music has to be assessed on an individual basis.

These distinctions have important implications for analysis. For example, if Meister is correct that meaning in a song generates specifically from the text, does analysis of the work require someone more comfortable with literary analysis than musical? Works that involve both arts as equal partners are difficult enough, but even

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[101] Kramer, p. 127

[102] Steiner, p. 419

when the relationship is uneven, what kind of attention to the minor partner is required
in order to make safe assertions about their relationship?

In a rare book-length treatment of these issues of analysis, the 1988 collection
of essays *Melopoiesis,* Barricelli argues that equal dexterity is required if analysts are
to avoid the trap of making poor or indefensible connections between the arts. As an
example of poor connections, Barricelli notes that reference to repetition is often used
to justify the musical nature of texts: "Granted, repetition is a central musical necessity
and recall is a central device, but both repetition and recall unify all artistic expression,
from architecture and painting to music and literature."[103] Without a formal, analytical
approach to how repetition functions in both music and literature, such critical gestures
lead nowhere:

> The dire critical limitation we should be aware of here is the dilettante's
> comparison which relies on inference rather than analysis. Analogy is
> important in the cognitive and comparative process, but analogy fashioned
> inferentially and not analytically is rootless and constitutes a grievous
> methodological error, since neither discipline gains anything in the process.[104]

Perhaps in reaction to mid- to late-twentieth century developments in literary
criticism, Barricelli specifically refers to his notion of *melopoiesis* as "a stolidly
multidisciplined, *formal* construct."[105] Earlier, David Hillery had made the same point
more forcefully, arguing in his study of French Symbolist musico-poetics, "Merely to
juxtapose poem and music is inadequate; drawing analogical parallels is also
inadequate since musical developments, even in song, can normally be explained in

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[103] Barricelli, p. 6

[104] Ibid., p. 4

[105] Ibid., p. 10

terms that owe nothing to poetry."[106] This is an important observation, since most

scholars agree that music cannot transmit concrete meaning: meaning is usually

derived from extramusical prompts, like the work's title, lyrics, programme, etc.

Fortunately, at least one major concern will *not* play a role in this dissertation:

the question of dominance between competing artists in hybrid works. For example,

studies of Debussy's settings of Louÿs' poems face the problem of how, if at all, to

address Louÿs' work: in essence, the songs are translations that represent more

Debussy's idea of the poems than Louÿs'. However, the two works discussed in this

dissertation – Mikhail Kuzmin's *Alexandrian Songs* and Alexander Scriabin's *Poem of

Ecstasy* – lie partially outside this usual complication: these two authors were

responsible for both the literary and musical elements of their works, collapsing the

sometimes contradictory readings of meaning that can complicate interpretations.   On

the other hand, this presupposes a unity of purpose and application when none may

exist, as we shall see with Kuzmin's song settings and their relationship to the texts.

So how should one address the relationship of music to poetry within these

pieces? A key observation appears in Louis Marvick's *Waking the Face that No One

Is: A Study in the Musical Context of Symbolist Poetics*. In his work on French and

Russian Symbolists, Marvick addresses the methodological challenges of dealing with

Scriabin's poem and concludes, "If we take seriously Scriabin's claim that the poem

'express[es] what will be one and the same as music', we must regard the poem and the

music as being *equally secondary* expressions of some idea conceived prior to both, an

idea worked out in every detail proper to itself before word or note was written."[107] As

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[106] Hillery, p. 10
[107] Marvick, p. 32

the sole author of both works, Scriabin does not invite the same interpretive complications that arise in the study of works that are hybrids due to the involvement of multiple artists. Furthermore, Scriabin invites the association of music and poetry towards a common goal, bringing interpretation out of the realm of speculation and onto firmer ground: rather than a composer interpreting a poem into music, Scriabin was interpreting a philosophy into both poetry and music.

Likewise, Kuzmin's work suggests treatment of both word and music as part of a single project, rather than with particular focus on one of the two media. However Kuzmin has prepared an extra challenge: though the temptation to view the song settings as authoritative reflections on the texts might arise due to their common authorship, Kuzmin's settings seem to conflict with or reject the otherwise apparent meaning in the poems.   This raises a new interpretive issue: how does one assess a song in which the same author seems to be pulling the audience in different directions?

Different Routes to Analysis

The second major question in this chapter concerns the *how* of analysis: once the relationship between music and literature has been explored, how does one go about subjecting this relationship to critical analysis? What are the particular pitfalls involved in possible approaches?

For much of the history of this area of study, the predominant critical approach to music and literature has been to read them both as texts that reinforce each other in some way; that is, the analysis has focused on interpretative analogy. A typical

example comes from Wilfrid Mellers, whose work *Harmonious Meeting* sought to explain the relationship between words and music in Handel's oratorios. Recognizing an emotional shift between two sections of text, Mellers looks for a comparable shift in the accompaniment: "On the words 'Lay not our sins to our charge' there is the slightest rise in emotional temperature as the music modulates sharpwards to the dominant; then the immediate reflattening of the seventh that comes, in the treble, on the word 'forgive' is like balm."[108]

Mellers' discussion focuses on these kinds of interpretive links, which leaves it open to the types of criticisms outlined in the first half of this chapter: it lacks a consistent methodological approach, and it relies on explanations of musical phenomena that are easily explainable independently of the interpreted meaning. For example, unclear in the above example is whether the reflattening of the seventh is consistently tied to a "balm"-like effect, both within the piece and in Handel's overall oeuvre.

Even this criticism is not so simple, since the demands of rigor in formalist analysis are not necessarily representative of an artist's conception of his/her work. Just as the above discussion of music in poetry has to contend with poets who lacked a precise understanding of the actual mechanics of music (see the discussion on Zukofsky below, for an example), an interpretative analysis of music's effect in transmitting textual meaning has to contend with composers who do not necessarily tie musical gestures in such absolute ways: Handel very well could have intended his reflattened seventh to this effect without doing so elsewhere in the piece. Without a note from the composer outlining his intentions, both interpretative and formal analysis

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[108] Mellers, p. 21

have considerable difficulty making a strong case about the relationship between individual elements in the two arts.

Of course, to some extent this will always be a problem of analyzing music for concrete meaning. With rare exception – Eero Tarasti's *Signs of Music: A Guide to Musical Semiotics* argues that music does, in fact, signify – most scholars concur that concrete meaning in music depends on extramusical phenomena.   No matter how suggestive a particular piece of music may be, its interpretation is usually driven by its title, by its context, by statements of the composer, etc. A significant rebuttal comes from Schopenhauer, who noted in *World as Will* that in many cases song lyrics could be effectively swapped without damaging the mood or expressive content of the song. If this is so, it calls into question the expected dominance of the literary text in song settings.

One possible alternative is to shift the discussion away from meaning in formal structures and into other areas, especially thematic. For example, in a recent collection of essays, *The Idea of Music in Victorian Fiction*, editors Sophie Fuller and Nicky Losseff explore the way representation of music impacts fiction, leading to a variety of approaches including "composer reception; representations of instrumental practice; aspects of gender, race, sexuality, and class; musical taste; musical style as wordless communicant; issues surrounding nationalism and national identity."[109] What is missing here is an attempt to bridge the aesthetics of music with the aesthetics of literature; music is instead treated as a predominantly thematic concern that prompts predominantly thematic analysis. That type of discussion does have its necessary place (especially in discussions of how the influence of one art on the other can help transmit

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[109] Fuller and Losseff, p. xiv

meaning), though it neglects the type of fundamental impact one can have on the other in the very creation of an artistic piece.

At the other end of the critical spectrum lies formal analysis, which in many respects began with the experiments of René Ghil and Andrei Bely. In his essay "Lyric and Experiment" ("Лирика и Эксперимент," 1909), Bely asserts that aesthetics can be studied as an exact science, so long as it entails the rejection of "obligatory valuation. Its objective is the inference of principles as the ties between empirical hypotheses of aesthetic investigations. What's more, its hypotheses are induced from empirical laws."[110] Bely seeks to analyze poetry via a "comparative anatomy" (*сравнительная анатомия*)[111], taking some of his cues from the composer Taneev, who attempted to rationalize the metrical patterns of *byliny* according to musical intervals.[112]

Much as in literary studies, the formal approach has dominated Russian scholarship in musico-literary studies. Efim Etkind expanded Bely's inquiry into musical form, discussing the way large-scale musical structures (ternary form, rondo) insinuate themselves into poetic form.

Kats has pushed this type of analysis to its extreme, locating such complex forms as sonata and fugue in both poetry and prose. Kats has been careful, however, to recognize the limits of this kind of inquiry, rejecting the over-determination of links between musical and literary phenomena; in the case of sonata form, he recognizes that

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[110] "общеобязательных оценок; ее задача – выведение принципов как связи эмпирических гипотез эстетических исследований; гипотезы ее опять-таки – индукция из эмпирических законов." Bely, p. 179

[111] Bely, p. 186

[112] see Bely, p. 198 Bely claims to have gotten these ideas in discussions with Taneev.

"verbal art does not and cannot have anything similar to tonality."[113] This seems

problematic, considering that tonality is the driving force behind sonata form, but Kats

reframes the discussion to the *effects* that tonality has on the structural progression of

parts in the sonata, and then looks to the literature for a similar set of effects. In his

analysis of Pushkin's "To the sea" ("К морю") and two short stories by Nabokov, he

singles out verbal aspect as the stand-in for musical tonality: that is, verbal aspect has

nothing in common with musical tonality except in its function in the work's structure.

The formal approach has also had its champions outside Russia. David Hillery,

in *Music and Poetry in France from Baudelaire to Mallarmé* (1980) makes the good

point that the Symbolists were *not* unique in their philosophically-shaky worship of

music; Romantic novelists had done for Beethoven what Symbolist poets were doing

for Wagner, but music had a more pronounced effect on *form* for the Symbolists.

> When a poet claims that his conception of music was the direct cause of a
> certain development in his poetic practice and when he chooses to use musical
> terminology to describe that development, then two essential points need
> clarifying. First, the musical conception the poet says he is copying or
> transferring should be adequately defined and, more important, should be
> shown to be operative within the generic context of poetry; second, the
> development in poetic technique needs to be shown explicitly to be the direct
> result of the poet's conception of music rather than a development explicable in
> terms of poetic evolution (with musical embellishments), even though the
> change came about as the result of a musical stimulus. Without either of these
> points being made clear it is really somewhat idle to talk of musical poetry
> except in a loose and impressionistic manner.[114]

Hillery's desire for analytic rigor somewhat belies the fact that poets sometimes

used music as a "necessary fiction" [115] for the development of their poetry, a fiction

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[113] "ничего похожего на тональность в словесном искусстве нет и быть не может." Kats, p. 29

[114] Hillery, p. 11

[115] Scroggins' term for Zukofsky's musical poetics; p. 184

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that can nonetheless be explored even if the poetic results do not reflect their musical stimuli accurately.

An example appears in Scroggins' study of Zukofsky, although the results are both encouraging for addressing an understudied area and disappointing for the reasons Hillery outlines. In addressing Zukofsky's "fugal" works, Scroggins notes, "the fugal form of [Zukofsky's poem] '*A*' – whatever it might be – is not an aural structure or sound patterning. It is a 'counterpointing' of linguistic, thematic, and conceptual units rather than a counterpointing of particular sounds or rhymes."[116] This creates something of an analytical problem: not knowing Zukofsky's conception of the fugue (since Zukofsky did not know the specifics of musical structure), Scroggins interprets the text according to fugal terms that he himself places onto the material.

How does one address this kind of analytical hurdle? An analysis according to the strict definition of "fugue" runs the risk of reaching an obvious conclusion: that Zukofsky's form may bear fugue-like elements, but ultimately fails to mimic a real fugue. On the other hand, a looser search for fugue-like elements runs the equally problematic course of searching for formal likenesses that may or may not have anything to do with Zukofsky's structural strategy. If nothing else, this kind of challenge helps explain why so few scholars are willing to work on musico-literary poetics.

Though structure has been the primary area of inquiry for formalist analysis, other areas have also lent themselves equally well to it. Andrei Bely located the relationship in rhythm and meter, and his inquiries in that direction led to his discovery

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[116] Scroggins, p. 194

of distinct stress patterns for different Russian poets. Bely noted that, when actualized word stresses were mapped over potential stresses in a typical metrical pattern, "better" poets tended to have a more complex and varied pattern of unrealized stresses.

One of the most successful formal studies, albeit limited in its potential for expansion into other areas, is Judith Aikin's monograph *A Language for German Opera*. Aikin analyzes early opera libretti to argue that the development of the German literary language was influenced heavily by the need for a suitable German for opera aria and recitative. The demands of opera – dramatic intensity, rhythmic flexibility – shaped the developing poetic language, even when that language began to function independently of its musical context.[117] What Aikin succeeds in doing is linking changes in poetic language concretely to music, although she is working with a larger time scale and a pivotal point in the development of the language, two phenomena that most of these other studies lack. Still, the recognition that music can impact the development of the poetic language will have some important resonance in this dissertation.

Another approach towards analyzing the formal qualities of music-inspired poetry is to attempt a more literal definition of what poets sometimes refer to as "melody".   At least two attempts are noteworthy, although neither is unproblematic:

In "'The Ailing Spirit is Assuaged by Song': On the Constructive Role of Vocalism in Russian Verse"[118], the poet Olga Sedakova and Valerii Kotov argue that

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[117] Aikin, p. 308 "In developing a poetic language and poetic forms suitable for aria and recitative, the librettists likewise contributed to the development of German as a literary language capable of great lyrical beauty and emotional intensity, and to the creation of flexible literary forms that could convey musicality even without demanding a musical setting."

vowels can be assigned relative pitch classes, and these can be visually mapped in time against alternating stresses: "Our conception entails an approach to *sound* in verse as the bearer of distinct pitch, and to sound structure (not 'repetition', but all aspects of sound distribution) as the distinct *organization* of pitch, 'melody'. Thus poetry contains, in transposed form, both basic characteristics of music: rhythm and organized pitch."[119]

The justification of such a study lies in the way sound structure is often relegated to decorative function alone. If music really is a strong influence on some poetry, and if music *is* sound structure, then sound structure should play a larger role in the construction of poetry influenced by music. Critiquing previous studies of sound, the authors note,

> In all instances… the focus is on the decorative rather than the constructive function of sound: poems can occur with 'sound play' – and without it. The function of sound texture in verse is thereby likened to that of figures and tropes, i.e. non-obligatory, facultative elements, rather than to that of grammar, without which even the most austere of poetic texts cannot be constructed.[120]

Though this seems an obvious observation, actual analysis of sound structure as a fundamental (not merely decorative) structural element is rare. Roman Jakobson had recognized it as such in his essay, "Musicology and Linguistics", but apart from noting the exciting potential of such studies, he did not pursue them.[121]

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[118] published in translation by Michael Basker in the Autumn 1996 (v. 21) edition of *Essays in Poetics*. Originally "Болящий дух врачует песнопенье: о конструктивной роли вокализма в русском стихе" Язык: системаи подсистемы. К 70-летию М. В. Панова. М. , 1990.

[119] Sedakova and Kotov, p. 94

[120] Sedakova and Kotov, 94

[121] Jakobson, p. 457

Sedakova and Kotov distinguish their focus on vowel quality from Andrei Bely's by breaking apart the poem into a "line-by-line segmentation into inter-comparable units", which in the examples chosen is synonymous with poetic lines. After analyzing poems by Blok, Fet, Brodsky, Khlebnikov, and Baratynsky, the authors come to the conclusion that certain poets display a recognizable "type" of melodic line in their poems which is even more distinctive than their rhythmic patterns (as Bely had argued). Their analysis gets problematic, however, when they try to discuss the links between their melodic analysis and its relationship to meaning in the poem:

> It is also possible to observe a certain typology of melodic principles held in common by different poets (thus poems of a hieratically solemn, emotionally charged, 'existential' nature, such as Tiutchev's already quoted О вещая душа моя!, Pushkin's Пророк, and so on, work with a full melodic range, fluctuating sharply between и and у). We might assume that a definite semantic attaches to particular 'intervals', independent of context: so, for example, the sequence и – е is connected with maximum relief, with cathartic emotion.[122]

This sort of interpretive analysis suffers from major drawbacks, in part due to the lack of a large sample of analyzed works. Without a more detailed explanation, the conclusions seem to contradict somewhat the previous assertion that poets (not semantics) carry a recognizable melodic signature. The authors do not provide a more detailed explanation of how one signature differs from the other, and whether, for example, there is a greater difference between 1. cathartic emotion in Pushkin and cathartic emotion in Tiutchev or 2. between cathartic emotion in Pushkin and an emotionally reserved Pushkin.

This becomes even more problematic when the authors begin casting critical judgment according to the terms of their new definition of melodics:

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[122] Sedakova and Kotov. p. 100

It is interesting to discover that certain poets are utterly deaf to the 'melodics' of verse – including, for example, the acknowledged virtuoso of versification, Valerii Briusov (who was evidently receptive only to consonants). In a certain sense, pitch contour is a poetic litmus test.[123]

This assertion is strange, since the authors themselves have defined this litmus test, then judged poets according to it – doubly strange since they reject Briusov's otherwise secure reputation in light of it. If nothing else, this is a good example of how an overly-determined formalistic analysis can lie at odds with reader perception, and thus be of questionable worth in terms of its contribution to understanding a particular work of art. Nevertheless, the notion of mapping vowel pitches to develop a theory of vocalic melody is an interesting one, and it deserves some exploration.

A second example of literalizing the semi-metaphor of "melody" in verse, G. Burns Cooper's work in *Mysterious Music: Rhythm and Free Verse* consists of mapping intonation rather than vowel pitch, graphing the auditory frequency of spoken performance intonation by a selection of twentieth century poets. Cooper argues that spoken performances highlight structures not immediately evident in the text, while recognizing that "Each authorial reading, even if it is flawed, is a strong clue about (but not an absolute reproduction of) authorial intention(s), just as every conversational utterance is a strong clue about its speaker's intended meaning(s)."[124]

Cooper's assertion about the value of spoken performances in elucidating hidden structure is a defensible one[125], but he does not successfully reconcile the idiosyncrasies of performance with innate qualities of the text: that is, he never

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[123] Ibid.. p. 101

[124] Cooper, p. 117

[125] Ibid., p. 187 "Oral performances reveal things about poetic structure – phrasing, range, parallelism – that printed texts do not."

convincingly argues that the melodic qualities of a performance can necessarily be attributed to the text itself. Because Cooper does not suggest a methodology for studying intonation in poems as they appear on the printed page, this makes it difficult to extend his style of analysis any further.

Like Sedakova and Kotov, Cooper also has trouble linking his findings with anything beyond the work's formal qualities, although he occasionally makes timid assertions in that direction. For example, his analysis of T. S. Eliot's performance of *Four Quartets* concludes, "Eliot, in his reading of *Four Quartets*, certainly seems to be hearing a guiding melody. His stylized performance sometimes sounds as though he is between speaking and chanting – a style likely influenced by the traditional method of chanting texts in the Church of England."[126] Here, Cooper is one step away from linking this notion of style to the meaning and content of the text, though he never takes that final step.

What is common to both these analyses, apart from their difficulties in bridging deep structure with interpretative meaning, is that they attempt a reading of poetic "music" that is no longer dependent on – and possibly even influenced by – music itself. Though Cooper argues that his use of "musical" is not metaphorical but direct[127], he is really discussing musicality, since reference to the actual art form of music is rare and digressive. Nevertheless, since the poets Cooper, Sedakova and Kotov discuss certainly looked to music as an inspiration/model/ideal for at least some

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[126] Ibid., p. 128

[127] Cooper, p. 116: "[The] 'music of poetry' often has to be taken as an analogical or metaphorical concept, and pretty much every phenomenon we've looked at so far could be treated as a part of it. For at least one aspect of these putatively 'musical' qualities, though, the comparison to music is not metaphorical at all, but direct. That aspect is intonation."

of their poetic output, these inquiries into musicality do have their place in the overall discussion.

Each of the approaches outlined above will play a role in this dissertation, but none of them will represent a dominant strategy. Lawrence Kramer has given a sophisticated explanation of why a sensible analysis cannot rely on any of these independently:

> Meanings are always retrospective; they can only be conveyed *after* we have learned to expect them. The real question is how fully and concretely a work meets our expectations of it. In musical terms, I would suggest, such fullness and concreteness are best grasped *dynamically, in the interplay of deep structure, foreground expression, and field of affiliation.*[128]

Kramer's formulation seems obvious in some respects, but this recognition that formal analysis can involve a nexus of interlocking fields rather than a strictly-focused inquiry is helpful, especially when no one field of analysis offers a complete picture of the way two arts can interact in hybrid pieces. This will be the dominant approach to analysis in this dissertation, with specific approaches suggested and defined by the pieces themselves.

Therefore each of the following chapters will begin with a brief outline of the works under discussion, with special attention to how their defining features suggest certain analytical approaches. Both Scriabin's mystical programme and Kuzmin's combination of archaism with subtly queer subtext help give entry into the ways the artists used hybridization to express their ideas both in the foreground and in the deeper structural level. The interplay of these different elements, against the background of Symbolist-era polemics about music, offer new insight into the way modernist

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[128] Kramer, p. 16 Emphasis mine.

aesthetics could be used to literalize post-Romantic notions of music as the supreme

art.

Chapter III

Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy*

In 1904 Scriabin launched his second European tour, partially because of the debt he had begun accruing since the death of his publisher and most consistent champion, Mitrofan Beliaiev. The composer had been receiving a small pension from one of his former students, Margarita Morozova, but his inconsistent publication had caused financial problems for his family. He also used the tour as an excuse to attend the second session of the International Congress in Philosophy in Geneva, where he developed a love of German philosophy, not to mention a copy of Madame Blavatsky's *La Clef de la Théosophie*, a work which would help define his future mysticism.

His musical output, already heavy in heady subtexts, began to incorporate these new influences: his two-movement Piano Sonata 4 op 30 came with a free-verse poem in French describing the evolution of the soul. The music follows an evolutionary curve: the backgrounds behind the first movement's lyrical theme grow increasingly complex, and the melody then returns as the climax of the second movement's *presto*.

The plans for *Ecstasy* followed immediately. In his 1904 notebook, he wrote of an "Orgiastic Poem" in four movements, with each movement divided into stages of mystical/evolutionary development.[129] The detailed but incomplete plan contained references to philosophical concepts that disappeared by the time he completed the

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[129] See Appendix A

work, most importantly the notion of a "man-God" ("человек-Бог"). This idea of the artist-as-God otherwise filled Scriabin's notebooks until *Ecstasy*: "The man-God is the bearer of universal consciousness," he wrote near the end of the notebook.[130] Earlier in the same notebook, he made the connection more concrete and personal – "Я Бог!"[131] – but as the theme developed he detached himself from explicit identification with the Nietzschean man-God.

As Scriabin's interest in Godliness eventually waned, he erased the man-God completely, ultimately condensing the plan for the "Orgiastic Poem" into a single-movement work, the Symphony 4 ("Poem of Ecstasy"). In his letters, Scriabin is alternately worried that the philosophical subtext will be unclear without a program, and worried that an explicit program will disrupt appreciation of the symphony's philosophical subtext; but in 1906, he put aside his music composition to focus his energies on poetry. His brother-in-law, Boris Schloezer, recalls that Scriabin recognized his shortcomings as a writer and divorced himself from musical composition in order to focus on the craft of poetry:

> What worries me most is the text. In music I feel like a sovereign; there I am content: I do what I want. But I have to master verse technique completely. I cannot allow the text to be less than the music; I don't want people to look at my verse as the work of a composer determined to write the text to his own music. [132]

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[130] "Человек-Бог является носителем универсального сознания", in "The Blue Notebook," published in *Russkie propilei*, p. 189

[131] Ibid., 142

[132] "Единственное, что меня беспокоит, это текст. В музыке я чувствую себя владыкой; тут я спокоен: сделаю, что хочу. Но мне нужно вполне овладеть техникой стиха. Я не могу допустить, чтобы текст был ниже музыки, я не хочу, чтобы на стихи мои смотрели, как на произведение музыканта, решившегося сам написать текст к своей музыке." quoted in Schloezer, p. 113

The result of Scriabin's focused poetic work was the 369 line *Poem of Ecstasy*, which he printed at his own expense to be handed out during the premiere performance of the Fourth Symphony.[133]

Ecstasy recounts the journey of the spirit from a static, leisurely existence to self-realization through challenge. In the opening lines of the poem, the spirit flies about aimlessly and lazily, which Scriabin reflects in plodding trochaic tetrameter. Suddenly this free play is interrupted by "disturbing rhythms / of dark presentment" ("Предчувствия мрачного / Ритмы тревожные") which the spirit eventually recognizes as a real threat. The spirit conquers, but finds itself bored with its return to unfulfilling stasis, and begins to realize that it craves the battle.

With each battle, victory, and return to stasis, the spirit attains a higher and more self-aware status: in this model of competition leading to still higher levels of rest, Scriabin's debt to Hegelian dialectics is most pronounced. By the midway point of the poem, Scriabin begins reflecting the growing self-awareness by inserting first-person pronouns into the language. By the poem's final third, the text has become a direct monologue of the spirit, speaking in a mix of meters and themes in which the previous dialectic has all but disintegrated. Here the spirit affirms itself as life-giver, constantly seeking challenges in order to evolve. The final line of the poem stands as complete affirmation of the self: "I am!" ("Я есмь!") Scriabin's adoption of the archaic verb lends this final line a Biblical sheen.[134]

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[133] Appendix B contains the full text of *The Poem of Ecstasy*

[134] Scriabin's interest in the notion of man-God suggests he chose "Я есмь" for its Biblical undertones, however the phrase also appears in Russian translations of Fichte, whom Scriabin read closely (see the final section of this chapter).

Shortly after completing the poem, Scriabin experienced a fit of rapid composition, churning out the Fifth Sonata in a little over a week. This "спутник" piece[135], connected to the two Ecstasies by an epigraph from the poem, further condenses the philosophical heft of his Fourth Symphony into a solo piano work of some twelve minutes.

Though the symphony would be a moderate success during Scriabin's lifetime (it received second place for the 1908 Glinka prize) and the Sonata would eventually become the most performed piece in the Scriabin repertoire, *The Poem of Ecstasy* has been subjected to derision by critics from the moment Scriabin handed it out. Only recently have scholars begun to analyze the text, although most continue to ignore it altogether or dismiss it as unworthy of study. Hugh Macdonald noted, "one *Poem of Ecstasy* is a masterpiece of light and color; the other may be safely ignored."[136] Levaya notes that the poem has some structure, specifically a "refrain" ("Дух играющий, / Духъ желающий, / Дух, мечтою все создающий / Отдается блаженство любви")[137]; unfortunately, this is an inaccurate description both of the poem and of the function of those particular lines. Boris Focht's article on the poem treats it almost exclusively from a philosophical angle, although he correctly identifies the poem's most important structural conceit – an interaction between duple and triple

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[135] Levaya, p. 99

[136] MacDonald, p. 53 However, MacDonald then goes on to try to draw specific links between musical sections and lines of verse. His reading is sensitive enough to note that the poem contains an "inverted recapitulation": "a passage where the spirit is found discomfited and is revived by 'joyful rhythms'." (MacDonald, p. 49) See table 1 below for more.

[137] Levaya, p. 99

meters.[138] Ralph Matlaw devotes considerably more substantial analysis to the poem

as an aesthetic object but misinterprets the poem's metrical structure, calling the entire

poem predominantly choriambic[139]; nevertheless he provides some important insights

as to the triple meter's predominant rhythms.

Although the poem is typically relegated to footnotes in studies of Scriabin,

there is much to be gained from serious analysis of the poem's artistic qualities, not the

least of which is better insight into Scriabin as an artist. The poem not only contains

structures isomorphic to those in the musical works, but its experimental use of meter

and rhythm show a poet more sophisticated and rigorous than the dilettante of

reputation.

Given that the majority of scholarship surrounding the poem has focused on its

philosophical content, is this attempt to focus on form and aesthetics wrongheaded?

After all, the content of Scriabin's diaries lends weight to the theory that his works

have a primarily philosophical thrust and should be analyzed accordingly.

However, despite his own insistence otherwise philosophical consistency is

rarely the overriding concern in Scriabin's art. On one hand, in the coda of his 6th

sonata Scriabin includes a tone beyond the range of the piano rather than bend the

structural pattern he has created. Discussing the oddity of including an imaginary tone

in the sonata, analyst Cheung Wailing concludes, "Scriabin's retention of *d″″* does

suggest that he rates structural integrity, which exists in this case only in the abstract,

above aural effect."[140] On the other hand, the structural expectations of the 5th sonata

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[138] Focht, p. 218

[139] Matlaw, p. 16. See also footnote 140

are undercut by an incomplete repetition of the primary theme when it appears in the recapitulation. Here, Scriabin sacrifices structural unity for dramatic effect, since a full repetition of the primary theme at this point in the sonata might sound excessive.

In both cases, the lack of complete overlap between artistic content and philosophical content is clear, and sacrificing a study of the one for the other gives an incomplete understanding of his works, though this has not stopped some analysts from criticizing Scriabin's adherence to aesthetic strategies at the expense of a clear philosophical unity.[141] Clearly, some negotiation between the two is needed.

Before proceeding with this analysis, one should remember that Scriabin was high on rhetoric but low on consistency; any time his own words are used as evidence for a particular interpretation, that interpretation will have to be defended on stronger grounds than the artist's occasional and contradictory commentary. Especially important for this analysis, as Matlaw notes, is that "Scriabin did not work on music and text simultaneously and that he changed his mind about the relationship and relative importance of text and music."[142] Though there is an explicit connection between the poetic *Ecstasy*, the 4th symphony (also *The Poem of Ecstasy*), and the 5th piano sonata, these relationships are neither absolute nor perfect: they overlap in many respects but deviate just as easily. A side-by-side study of words and music has much to offer, especially when revealing structural isomorphs that form the backbone of Scriabin's artistic method. In fact, when describing the composer's later works,

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[140] Cheung, 208

[141] Typical of this are Hull's notes on the 5th sonata, in which the author is astonished at Scriabin's adherence to sonata form in the face of his philosophical program. (Hull, p. 139 *n*.1)

[142] Matlaw, p. 20

Schloezer suggests that this is how Scriabin actually worked – developing an

overarching concept that belonged to neither medium, and only then translating it to

those media:

> We know that Scriabin worked first on the words and only then, having
> finished his work, wanted to move onto music, in order to establish all the
> details of performance, but it seems to me that this route I've described only
> *seemed* as such, and that in reality Scriabin on the contrary went from the whole
> to the part, from the Prefatory Action, which he has already seen as a complete
> act, to its musical and poetic elements.[143]

If this is so, then Scriabin's poetry should reveal deeply imbedded structures that can

be mapped more or less onto the music.

Large-Scale Structure in the Poem

The *Poem of Ecstasy* runs for 369 lines without graphic structural divisions –

that is, there are no spaces to indicate stanza breaks. Nevertheless the poem displays

some kind of structure and is not just a free-form work; thus the first step towards

dealing with the poem is to divide it into its structural units. Without the graphic

separations, we must use other means of determining what the poem's structural

divisions actually are. Two strategies stand out prominently: an analysis of the poem's

meters and a division of the poem into thematic sections. The meters and themes

overlap significantly at the beginning, but as the poem's structure grows more and

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[143] "Однако, мы знаем, что Скрябин работал сначала над словом и только, закончив эту работу, хотел перейти к музыке, чтобы затем установить все подробности исполнения самого акта но мне кажется, что этот видимый, описанный мною здесь путь был лишь кажущийся и что в действительности Скрябина, напротив, шел от целого к частному, от Предварительного Действа, узренного им, как цельный синтетический акт, к его музыкальным и поэтическим элементом." Schloezer, p. 119

more complicated, the two must be kept separate in order to see how Scriabin manipulates his materials.

On one hand, Scriabin uses shifts in meter to indicate some key structural divisions. These shifts, at least in the beginning, form unambiguous borders between two types of episodes, creating what Focht calls a "rhythmic dialectic."[144] In the earliest sections of the poem, Scriabin alternates between sections in trochaic tetrameter and a more ambiguous two-foot tri-syllabic rhythm.

The trochaic sections are usually self-contained; that is, they are typically bordered by the same lines and thus easy to delineate. The single word "Дух" begins most of these sections, and the line "Он готов уж впасть в забвенье" closes all but the final repetition. In the course of the poem, isolated lines and short passages in trochees or iambs surface as reminders of the trochaic meter without establishing themselves as discrete sections.

The sections in triple meter are more difficult to deal with. Early in the poem, they are contained between the trochaic episodes, but as the poem continues, they grow increasingly longer and begin to incorporate different rhythms and thematic material. This inability to pinpoint even a base meter arises because of Scriabin's flexible use of the anacrusis and inconsistently hypercatalectic endings:

<div align="center">

Но чем омрачен	x x́ x x x́
Этот радостный миг?	x x x́ x x x́
Именно тем,	x́ x x x́
Что он цели достиг.	x x x́ x x x́

(lines 136-139)

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[144] Focht, p. 218

Here the variable anacrusis prevents us from naming a distinct meter for the section; the only indication that they belong together metrically is what Matlaw calls a "choriambic" (¯ ˘ ˘ ¯) rhythm, although the term choriambic is inexact in syllabotonic poetry.[145] These tri-syllabic sections are perhaps more accurately labeled dactylic with variable anacrusis, since a dactylic rhythm predominates and roughly 80% of lines contain a zero anacrusis.[146] This approach to writing in an ambiguous tri-syllabic meter is highly uncommon in Russian literature but not unknown. According to Gasparov, "Verses with variable anacrusis are exceedingly few in number and become only sometimes noticeable in the 1830s (when Lermontov's "Rusalka" was written) and in the 20th century."[147]

By the end of the poem, the different meters are overlapping and interchanging so frequently as to make discrete division into metrical sections impossible.[148]

Leaving aside meter, if we divide the poem by thematic sections, we notice roughly two types: static and dynamic. The "static" sections are so-called not because of actual stasis in the descriptions – Scriabin uses words like "flying," "playing," and

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[145] Matlaw, p. 16 Furthermore, Matlaw overstates the matter when he calls the whole poem "primarily choriambic with a variety of anapestic and trochaic patterns and single bisyllabic or trisyllabic words." Matlaw's recognition that this rhythm is a key to the poem is an important one, but he takes no notice of the significant blocks of trochees, though they dominate the first third of the poem. Likewise, his later comment – "The rhythms shift as quickly as the scenes and just as arbitrarily" – is demonstrably incorrect.

[146] Further evidence for this reading can be found in an observation by G. Burns Cooper in his *Mysterious Music: Rhythm and Free Verse*: "Musical theorists and perceptual psychologists tend to see all metrical units as head first, as in musical measures: strong-weak or strong-weak-weak." (p. 37) Given that every musical measure begins with a downbeat, it is not difficult to imagine that Scriabin conceives of any tri-syllabic rhythm as inherently dactylic, regardless of the anacrusis.

[147] "Стихи с переменной анакрузой очень малочисленны и становятся сколько-нибудь заметны лишь в 1830-х годах (когда была написана и лермонтовская Русалка) и в XX в." M. Gasparov, p. 70

[148] See Appendix C for a full mapping of the poem's thematic and rhythmic sections.

"creating" – but because the action lacks any conflict, the spirit is engaged in free play, flying "to the heights of negation" ("на высоты отрицанья"). Furthermore, the variation within repetitions of the static sections is minimal, from the precise repetition of some passages to minor shifts in word choice in others.

By contrast, the "dynamic" sections introduce a nameless conflict that challenges the spirit and brings on a struggle. Though the theme of conflict appears consistently in these sections, the word choice and phrase structures are more independent, no longer relying on common phrase structures as links between repetitions. Words and phrases reappear, but in different arrangements and combinations.

At the beginning of the poem, these two types of divisions are easy to distinguish, as they overlap almost exactly. Though the ability to pinpoint meter eventually breaks down, Scriabin continues to use key words as motifs; their appearance and reappearances provide signal markers for certain episodes.

Running through all these metrical shifts and thematic developments is Scriabin's philosophical program, which was still taking shape during this period of his creative output. Understanding the philosophical subtext poses a few challenges – even though Focht devotes his essay to a section-by-section analysis of the poem's philosophical program[149] – because Scriabin was not always honest about his sources. "He had only to read a page of Blavatsky and under her flag claim the cargo as his

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[149] cf. Focht's article on the philosophical content of the poem, although Focht's analysis is as frustratingly vague as Scriabin's own writing.

own," complained one acquaintance.[150] Scriabin advised one young student to "absorb

Kant as quickly as possible and then acquaint yourself a little with Fichte, Shelling, and

Hegel, even if only as a part of the history of philosophy," although his knowledge of

Kant seems second-hand at best, and his own philosophical system bears a closer

resemblance to those of Fichte and Hegel.[151] Further complicating matters, Scriabin

attended the second session of the International Congress of Philosophy, Geneva, in

Sept. 1904, and began reading Blavatsky's *La Clef de la Théosophie* just before

beginning his work on *The Poem of Ecstasy*. The resulting musings in his notebooks

read like a pastiche of Schopenhauer and Blavatsky, with lingering traces of Nietzsche,

not to mention of Nietzsche's love-hate relationship with Wagner and his theories of

art.

With this in mind, we can begin taking apart each section of Scriabin's poem,

using structural elements of his Fifth Sonata to explain and understand the sometimes

confusing structural patterns in the poetic work.[152]

Compositional Blocks

As noted above, Scriabin organized the poem in blocks, discrete sections that,

rather than develop organically, are recombined and reorganized like bricks. The same

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[150] Bowers, p. 188

[151] Bowers notes that Scriabin's knowledge of Kant seems to have been drawn predominantly from Kuno Fischer's book on Kant and the "New Philosophy." ibid., p. 47, see also *Skriabin* (ed. Tompakova) for Scriabin's notations in Fischer.

[152] The Fifth Sonata, rather than the Fourth Symphony, represents the real break with Scriabin's more conventional musical past: Taruskin notes that it is "Scriabin's first piece to cast off conventional trappings of tonal closure." (Taruskin, p. 346)

organizational strategy holds true in much of Scriabin's musical output. In his analysis

of the 6th sonata, Cheung Wailing writes,

> At a time when organic unity is hailed and contrapuntal techniques feverishly
> revived, oddly enough, Scriabin preoccupies himself with a variegated mix of
> "precomposed" blocks. In composing a work which exploits pure octatonicism
> to such an extent, the development of thematic material becomes severely
> restricted and a cut in the flexibility with which the composer may manipulate
> the musical material to meet his expressive ends seems inevitable. The very
> heavy reliance on repetition is none the less much in line with Scriabin's earlier
> style; the richness of surface events abides with a severe limitation of material.
> Like a kaleidoscope of sounds, there is a constant shift of patterning, though the
> basic material remains unchanged, evoking a sense of fundamental stasis.[153]

This analysis, while accurate in content, is also misleading in the context of Russian

classical music. Unlike their German counterparts whose belief in development was

the dominant aesthetic in Western classical music, Russian composers gravitated

towards a particular type of variation – "changing backgrounds variation", in which an

unchanging melody is presented against different harmonies, rhythms, or arrangements

– as the most culturally marked structural form in the growing national music.   In this

form of composition, the content is divided into discrete blocks, each of which contains

its own background material: for example, the melody in his Fourth Sonata never

changes its shape, but the arrangements below it become increasingly complex. In

moments like this, Scriabin's use of pre-composed blocks is marked as a distinctly

Russian form of composition.

On the other hand, Scriabin was also the first Russian composer to make

extensive use of the piano sonata, a significant departure from the cultural norm and a

nod to the Western tradition.   Sonata-allegro form in Russia had appeared most

prominently in Tchaikovsky's symphonies (another composer with strong ties to the

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[153] Cheung, p. 228

West) but almost never in his piano works; some of the few sonatas written in Russia were the work of Anton Rubenstein, a non-Russian by birth.   In some respects he was a latecomer to the form: the sonata was already out of style in Europe by the time Scriabin made it a primary vehicle of his musical expression. Even more oddly, none of Scriabin's more obvious musical influences wrote many piano sonatas – Chopin wrote only two, Wagner zero.

While the inclination to reduce Russian art to Slavophil, Western-oriented, or a deliberate merging of the two is not uncommon in studies of Russian music, here a claim of merging may be justified according to Scriabin's philosophical leanings, themselves an equally deliberate merging of German and pseudo-Eastern philosophies under the banner of Russian mysticism. Scriabin treats the sonata form less as a vehicle for development of motifs (as it appears in the German tradition) than as a convenient ordering pattern for blocks of music whose arrangements fulfills his extra-musical program: the A│BA' structure supplies a means for themes to appear and reappear in modified form[154] – this combined with the contrast between primary and secondary themes provides a potentially convenient metaphor for evolution through dialectic. On the other hand, the changing backgrounds variation form is not a natural fit for the sonata form, giving Scriabin's sonatas a structural tension that make understanding their suggested philosophical "content" even more challenging.

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[154] It is difficult to describe concisely the issues related to sonata form as practiced by composers of Scriabin's generation, so for the purposes of this dissertation I have adopted **A│BA'** as the simplest way of conveying both the expectations of a "typical" sonata structure and its historical roots. **A** represents the exposition (or "home", whether signified by key area or some other quality), **B** the development (a departure from **A**), and **A'** the recapitulation (the anticipated return to the beginning, but with notable variation). This allows the sonata to be read either as a journey through key areas or as a dialectic between themes. Qualities of both are present in Scriabin's sonatas.

These considerations of his treatment of form in music make the poem's structure all the more striking – it seems an attempt, despite Scriabin's adamant belief that his music and poetry were independent of each other, to write a long poem whose form would call to mind the ordering of sectional blocks in the Russian classical musical tradition. In fact, the poem's structure more closely resembles Scriabin's late period sonatas (especially 9 and 10), which focus their energies more directly on a constant alternation between the primary and secondary themes and less on a strict sonata relationship. "Scriabin probably conceived the poem in a form approximating the sonata-allegro in music," Matlaw writes. "Indeed, the statement of themes, transitions, restatements, and development betray their dependence on musical form and do not satisfactorily perform their literary counterpart."[155] However, as in Scriabin's sonatas, the tense relationship between the approximated sonata form and the compositional blocks akin to changing backgrounds variation form give the poem a complexity that cannot be reduced so easily. With these complex echoes of musical form, the poem has no complement in Russian literature, with the possible exception of Bely's *Symphonies*.[156]

For example, while recognizing the existence of compositional blocks is an important step in unraveling Scriabin's artistic strategies, a too-strict adherence to this method of analysis has led to what Jason Stell calls a "taxonomy" in Scriabin

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[155] Matlaw, p. 15. While Matlaw is correct in noting that Scriabin's music-like arrangement of poetic units reads unsuccessfully as poetry, his claim of 'sonata-allegro' form does not seem to be borne out by the actual poem.

[156] Bely's *Symphonies* consisted of numbered lines of prose, with repetitions that recall motivic development in music (or at least an impression thereof). Whether Bely's organizational strategies represent anything more than a superficial nod to repetition in musical form has been the subject of much debate. However, the *Symphonies* have no musical counterpart against which to analyze his textual strategies.

studies.[157] Stell argues that this particular style of analysis, which seeks to break apart

Scriabin's harmonic blocks – the uniqueness of which is usually seen as his primary

contribution to music – takes focus away from the unfolding of the music *in time*.

Analysis of the poem faces similar pitfalls, however the relationship between the

vertical and horizontal cannot be mapped exactly onto both art forms. As Jakobson

notes,

> Both visual and auditory perception obviously occur in space and time, but the
> spatial dimension takes priority for visual signs and the temporal one for
> auditory signs. A complex visual sign involves a series of simultaneous
> constituents, while a complex auditory sign consists, as a rule, of serial
> successive constituents. Chords, polyphony, and orchestration are
> manifestations of simultaneity in music, while the dominant role is assumed by
> the sequence.[158]

Simultaneity is not a quality of the written word, thus an attempt to argue for

isomorphism between the poem and music has to operate at a level of deeper structure,

focusing on the arrangement of constituent parts and the relationships that these

arrangements create.

Section A, and the poetics of evolution

The opening lines of Scriabin's poem sets up one of the more stable episodes

that he develops throughout the work. Certain thematic concerns have carried over

from the original "Orgiastic Poem", including the inspiring spirit ("окрыляющий

дух"), the desire to create ("желание творить"), and the flight to the height of

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[157] Stell, p. 6

[158] Jakobson, "Visual and Auditory Signs," p. 489

negation ("взлёт на высоту отрицания"). More importantly, the opening lines

establish a pattern of line endings that will appear multiple times in the poem:

A$_1$	Дух,		
	Жаждой жизнь окрыленный,	a	
	Увлекается в полет	B	
	На высоты отрицанья,	c	
	Там в лучах его мечты	D	
	Возникает мир волшебный	e	
	Дивных образов и чувств.	F	
A$_2$	Дух играющий,	g	(dact.)
	Дух желающий,	g	(dact.)
	Дух, мечтою все создающий,	h	
	Отдается блаженство любви.	i	
A$_3$	Средь возникнувших творений	j	
	Он томленьем пребывает,	k	
	Высотою вдохновений	j	
	Их к расцвету призывает.	k	
	И полетом опьяненный	j	
	Он готов уж впасть в забвенье.	j	

(lines 1-17)[159]

Initially (A$_1$), the lines alternate between masculine and feminine endings, but

after a brief episode (A$_2$) involving a mix of trochees with some trisyllabic rhythms, the

trochaic tetrameter returns (A$_3$), though now the endings have polarized to feminine

and remain so until interrupted by the B section.[160]

A$_2$ represents one of the most marked metrical deviations in the poem, because

it is highlighted by an embedded position between chunks of unambiguously trochaic

tetrameters.   Here, with the most-quoted lines of the poem ("Дух играющий, / Дух

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[159] Appendix D contains a full scan of these lines.

[160] As always, there are inconsistencies; however, Scriabin uses feminine endings in all but 2 of the 25 lines (92% usage) that constitute close repetitions of section A$_3$. I do not include the so-called Soul's monologue, beginning at line 227; though it repeats thematic material from A$_3$, the use of first-person monologue, accompanied by rapid metrical shifts, require us to read it as a discrete section.   Discussion of this section will be addressed later.

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желающий"), another element appears: rhyme. Scriabin begins with a grammatical

rhyme by means of two adjectival participles with identical stress patterns

("играющий" and "желающий") then tricks the reader in the third line with a surprise

равноударная рифма – a misleading sight-rhyme derived here from a participle whose

grammatical ending is the same, but whose stress falls on the third syllable instead of

the second ("создающий").[161] He heightens the effect by positioning all the participles

at the end of their respective lines, reinforcing the visual parallelism that he undermines

metrically.   This change insinuates itself on the next section: when the trochaic

tetrameter returns in A_3, the newly-feminine endings rhyme, albeit grammatically (the

rhymes again depend on shared grammatical suffixes, or homeoteleuton, a technique

largely out of fashion in Russian verse). However, while rhymes appear sporadically

throughout the poem, consistent rhyming occurs in no other sections, marking A_3 as a

special episode.

To reiterate this structure:

Table 3.1 - Structure of the poem's A section

section	meter	endings	rhyme
A_1	4 f. trochees	alternating f/M	none
A_2	2 x 2 f. trochees	dactylic	grammatical
	2 x 3 f. anapests	f/M	sight
A_3	4 f. trochees	feminine	grammatical

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[161] According to Mikhail Gasparov, sight rhymes based on stress changes occur in folk poetry when contrasting masculine and dactylic endings, occasionally in syllabic poetry between any endings, and almost never in syllabotonic poetry outside of occasional experiments (Ivanov, Briusov, etc.) (*ОИРС*, p. 247)

Were this an isolated occurrence, it could be a chance pattern not unlikely in a poem of this length; however, this basic structure is reiterated in all the A sections' appearances.

But the difficulty of reading further into such a pattern is that no pronounced thematic shift occurs to support the structural changes. That is, if A_2 or A_3 introduced new material of any sort, it would justify reading A_2 as the initiator of change, which is then expressed structurally in A_3. An interpretive roadblock emerges, although here Scriabin's musical output can offer some clues.

A comparable pattern (in musical terminology, an A│BA' structure) appears multiple times in Scriabin's 5th Sonata. As in the A section of the poem, the sonata's secondary theme exists in a *meno vivo* ("less lively") languor contrasted against the vivacious primary theme. This theme appears three times in the sonata: twice in a traditional exposition-recapitulation relationship – the recapitulated theme is transposed up a fourth, but without further modification – and once in modified form in the development.

Like the poem's A section, the sonata's secondary theme is structured according to a subtle A│BA' format – subtle, because the variation in A' is nearly unnoticeable. In the opening A section, the initial phrase is repeated twice, with a nearly identical ending; the only difference is in the tenor melody, with the G octave replacing the F:

Figure 3.1 - Sonata 5, measures 120-121; 124-125

Of special importance is the C flat root, which provides these measures with a complete whole-tone scale: C flat – F – E flat – A – G – D flat (the D natural functions only as a neighboring tone). Significantly, Scriabin constructs the scale via tritones in the bass: C flat – F, followed by E flat – A.[162]

After this restatement, the secondary theme goes into a brief contrasting episode that introduces an element conspicuously missing in the first section: a perfect fifth:

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[162] The significance of the tritone in Scriabin's harmonic system will be developed in the following section.

Figure 3.2 - measures 129-134
Circles indicate the stabilizing fifth in the bass

The E-flat – B-flat in the bass gives the secondary theme its first taste of tonal stability, but only for two measures.[163] Though the melody reappears in two transpositions – both times down a fourth – the underlying harmonies no longer contain that stable fifth.

But then, another surprise: despite an otherwise exact restatement of the first section, the perfect fifth from the contrasting episode has migrated into the bass harmony, so subtly as to be almost unnoticeable. Furthermore, in the final measures, the root note has changed to accommodate the pattern: now, the C-flat has descended a half-tone to that B-flat, whose fifth relationship with the F above disrupts the otherwise whole-tone effect of the harmonies:

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[163] Scriabin had previously used this root anchor to a dominant harmony in the "Poème Satanique". See MacDonald, p. 40

Figure 3.3 - measures 136-137

Though the difference of a single half-tone is barely noticeable in the larger picture of the sonata, there is now a perfect fifth between B flat and F, which gives these measures a harmonic stability lacking in the original statement, however ambiguous this new harmony may be.[164]   Nonetheless, the restatement of the secondary theme has incorporated a new element from the transition that subtly changes its structure.

In the secondary theme's final appearance, the pattern is the same, though the whole process has been shifted up a fourth in keeping with the recapitulation's changes in key.[165] As expected, the bass note moves downward a half step in the A' section from F flat to E flat, changing the scale from whole tone to E flat minor or major.

In an overlay of the compositional pattern with the poem's A section, the following deep structural pattern emerges:

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[164] If we read the D natural as a passing tone, we now have B flat – D flat – E flat – F – G – A, or the ascending side of a B flat minor melodic scale, minus the second degree (C natural). If we read the D flat as an anticipatory tone that resolves to D natural, we end up with B flat – D – E flat – F – G – A, or a B major scale also minus the second degree. Scriabin doesn't give us enough context to choose between these interpretations, creating an effect that mirrors the overlap between major and minor harmonies in the primary theme.

[165] The manipulation of the secondary theme in the sonata's development section will be addressed later.

Table 3.2 - Comparison of the poetic and musical structures

	Poem	Sonata	General Pattern
A	Initial statement: 4 foot trochees, alternating endings, no rhyme	Initial statement: Secondary theme, underlying whole tone scale	Initial statement
B	Brief contrasting episode: - seems to begin like the preceding section (trochee beginning on "Дух") - departs rhythmically as the line develops - incorporates a new effect into the poem: grammatical rhymes - loses the new effect at the end of the episode	Brief contrasting episode: - seems to begin like the preceding section (similar structure, transposed up a fourth) - departs harmonically as the episode develops - incorporates a new effect into the section: root-fifth relationship - loses the new effect at the end of the episode	Brief contrasting episode: - opening that promises fidelity to the original statement - unexpected departure - new effect - loss of new effect with the development of the episode
A'	Return of original statement, modified: 4 foot trochees, feminine endings, grammatical rhymes	Return of original statement, modified: Secondary theme, root fifth relationship	Return of original statement, modified: Incorporation of effect from the contrasting episode

Though these patterns are roughly isomorphic, the poetic variant proves to be more complicated than the musical, because while A stays the same in each subsequent appearance, the other sections will evolve significantly.

Within the middle section, three changes occur which complicate matters further. The first change is subtle, and requires the section to repeat before it becomes noticeable. As noted in the broad outline of the poem's structure, Scriabin marks A_1 by giving it a word-for-word repetition at each of its four appearances. When A_2 begins,

the poem promises that the repetition will continue without deviation, and "Дух играющий" repeats, as expected. But the participle in the second line changes with each cycle: "Дух ласкающий" (32), "Дух страдающий" (63), "Дух порхающий" (221). By the third line, Scriabin changes all but the initial "дух." A pattern of slow evolution appears: the first line remains unchanged, the second line changes only its participle, the third line changes all but the initial word, and the fourth line looks completely different with each cycle. This pattern prepares the more significant deviations of subsequent sections.

The second important change involves that dactylic ending – the first example of a trisyllabic foot in a poem that will eventually be dominated by these rhythms.[166] Within the A_2 section, these trisyllabic feet increase in number until they claim the entire line:

<pre>
Дух играющий,   X́ X X́ X X
Дух желающий,   X́ X X́ X X
Дух, мечтою все создающий, X́ X X́ X X́ X X X́ X
Отдается блаженство любви. X X X́ X X́ X X́ X X́
</pre>

One trisyllabic foot appears in each of the first two lines (the dactylic ending), two in the third, and three – the complete line – in the fourth and final.   But the poem, not yet ready for a full transformation, settles back into a comfortable trochaic tetrameter in A_3.

Looking forward to future repetitions of this section, further clues towards Scriabin's strategy become apparent. With each of the poem's restatements of A_2, the

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[166] The appearance of a dactylic ending in what otherwise appears to be a trochaic line had become commonplace in Russian poetry. M. Gasparov notes that the dactylic endings in Blok's iambic "the Unknown" "уже никого не удивляют." (p. 209)

third line – transitional insofar as it bridges the hypermetrical trochees with the fourth line's dactyls – undergoes its own evolution as well, and this development closely mirrors the pattern of the overall A₂ section. The invasive trisyllabic rhythm exerts more and more dominance until the line breaks apart completely, fully transformed into the familiar two-foot rhythm otherwise associated with the B sections. The pattern of slow evolution mirrors that of the evolving word choice:

10. Дух, мечтою все создающий   Х́ Х Х́ Х Х́ Х Х Х́ Х
33. Дух, надеждою радость зовущий   Х́ Х Х́ Х Х Х́ Х Х Х́ Х
64. Дух, сомнением скорбь создающий   Х́ Х Х́ Х Х Х́ Х Х Х́ Х

222. Вечным стремленьем   Х́ Х Х Х́ Х
       Экстаз создающий   Х Х́ Х Х Х́ Х

By contrast, the musical variants are much more static. Still, why would Scriabin include such a minor change, hardly noticeable during performance? What does he gain by doing so?

For one thing, the establishment of a root-fifth relationship in the bass confirms a general process throughout the sonata: the transition from V to I in the bass line in each repetition of the A│BA' process. This dominant-tonic motion is not only a phenomenon in the secondary theme, but it clues us into the whole sonata's structural conceit – this motion dominates the sonata at both the micro and macro levels:

- Within both the primary and secondary themes, the distance from A to A' is a fourth:
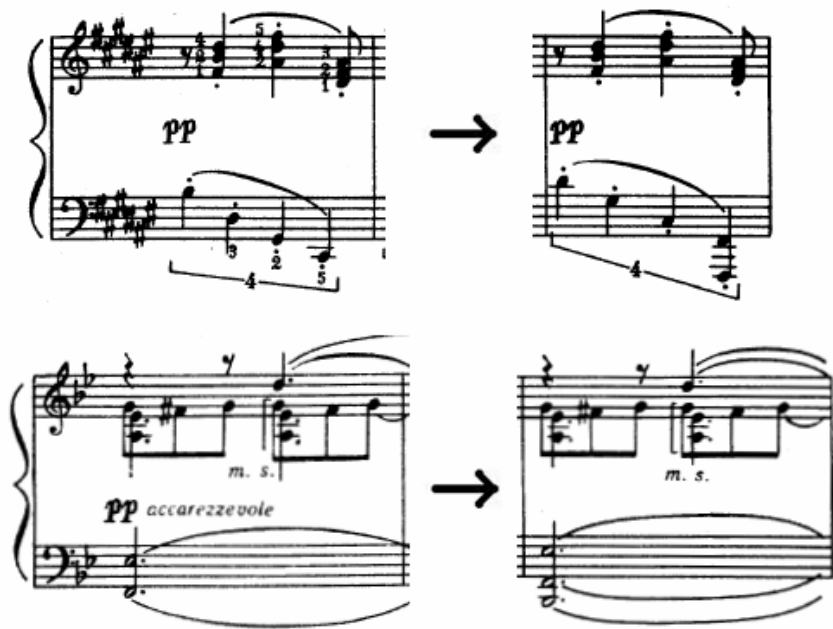
Figure 3.4 - shift from A to A′
Primary theme: C# → F#
Secondary theme: F → Bb

- In the large-scale compositional strategy, the distance between the exposition and the recapitulation is also a fourth, which gives structural cohesion to a recapitulation that otherwise deviates from the sonata form by not returning the primary theme to its original key:
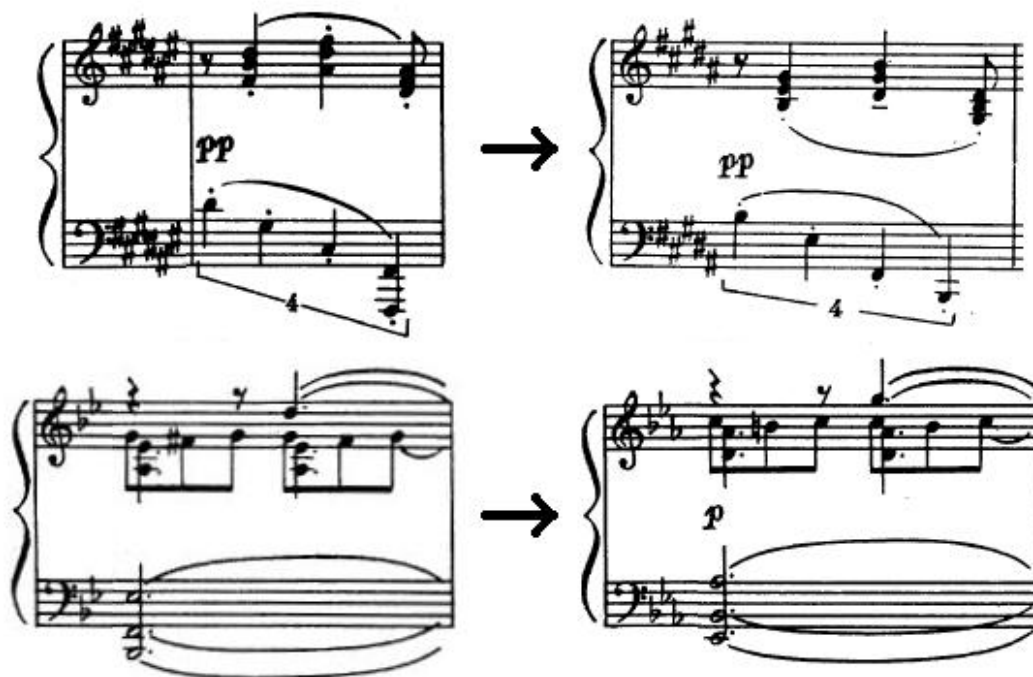
Figure 3.5 - shift from Exposition to Recapitulation
Primary theme, F# → B,
Secondary theme, Bb → Eb

The overall sonata then reveals itself to be not just a large A│BA' form (which could describe any true sonata-allegro), but one in which the shift between A and A', whether on the small or large scale, is the same in every case: V-I.[167] Represented graphically, the move occurs both in the horizontal and in the vertical:

Table 3.3 - Root movement in the Sonata

	Primary: A A'	Secondary: A A'
Exposition:	C# F#	F Bb
Recapitulation:	B	Bb Eb

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[167] Compare Scriabin's baffling claim: "I will play the 5th Sonata uninterrupted in one movement, though it has masses of tempo changes. These cannot be listed on a billboard advertisement as movements. Why not just put 'solo' and then the details can be given on the program?" (Bowers, p.181) Strange a description as that may seem for a relatively straightforward sonata form, one could argue that the Fourth Sonata is really a one-movement work, as well, with the ostensible first movement as a long introduction.

In addition, as if echoing the sonata's harmonic plan, Scriabin fills his melodies with these upward-a-forrth jumps: The primary theme is transposed up a fourth in each of its occurrences in A and A'. From the A section in the exposition:
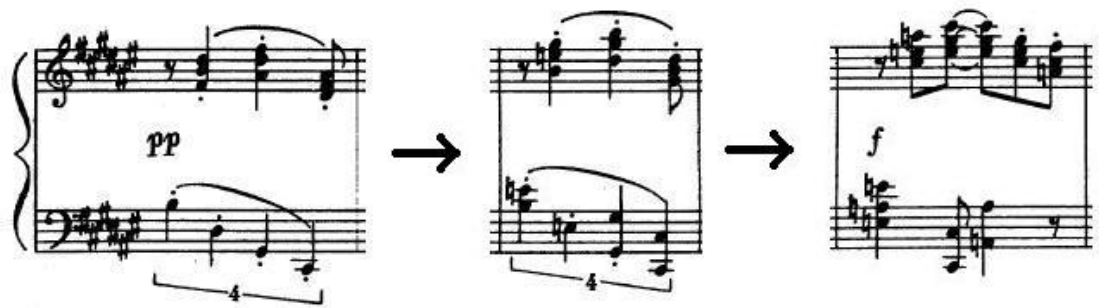
Figure 3.6 - Transpositions of the Primary Theme
F# → B → E

Likewise, in the secondary theme, all restatements of the main motif in the B section move by a subdominant relationship.

If nothing else, this can help us understand Scriabin's overall harmonic strategy in the sonata. Most analysts have argued that Scriabin composed the sonata in the key of F#, however the actual patterning of the sonata shows that the work does not, in fact, gravitate towards a single key.[168]

In the most recent analysis of the sonata's harmonic structure, Stell argues that Scriabin's plan follows a linear and constantly ascending bass line – although this forces his analysis to use the A' sections exclusively. Noting the sonata's overall structure, Stell writes,

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[168] Baker and Stell both argue that the sonata is constructed according to a cyclical *Urlinie* – an underlying "fundamental line" that stems from Schenkerian analysis, which focuses on the "background" of a musical work – that could continue indefinitely (Baker, p. 188). MacDonald alone notes the teleological effect of the sonata's key changes: "Eb, towards which the closing pages gravitate, is the nearest to a magnetic centre." (MacDonald, p. 53)

Because of the perfect-fourth relation between the first theme in the exposition and in the recapitulation, one might recall other sonatas with "subdominant" recapitulations (e.g., Mozart's C-major Sonata, K. 545/i). However, in Skryabin's recapitulation the subdominant area is not functional as in Classical or Romantic syntax. Traditional tonal goals based on root motion by perfect fifth, and their use in articulating structure, play a secondary role in Skryabin's linear technique.[169]

While this may hold true for Scriabin's later sonatas, Stell has to ignore the motion by fifths within the exposition and recapitulation in order to make this claim. In fact, this motion is the structural conceit on which Scriabin organizes the whole sonata – the logic becomes clearer if, instead of interpreting the recapitulation as the subdominant, we consider the exposition the dominant (secondary theme in the key of Bb) finally resolving into tonic in the secondary theme's recapitulation (in the key of Eb). Significantly, the sonata's introductory theme follows a similar course from F# to its final appearance in the climax in Eb, marked *estatico*.[170]

Like the imaginary note in the 6th sonata, that miniscule downward step in the bass carries not only the sonata's structural weight but, insofar as it points to a teleological work rather than a traditional home key, the sonata's philosophical weight as well.[171] The rhetorical heft in a typical A│BA' structure lies in the similarity of A to A', allowing the listener to feel a sense of satisfaction at the return of a familiar theme, key area, or other quality. While Scriabin does bring the music back to earlier iterations, he nonetheless emphasizes the variation in A' over its similarities: the

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[169] Stell, pp. 27-28

[170] I do not include mm. 1-12 as an introductory theme, although some scholars do. In all its other appearances, the musical material of these measures functions as "an ersatz cadence", to use Taruskin's formulation (Taruskin, p. 346)

[171] Taruskin argues that this teleological form in Scriabin's works is their major weakness, since his very harmonic system already expressed the path to sublime transcendence: "his evolving musical means and aesthetic aims had rendered such a rhetoric of hyperbole superfluous." Taruskin, p. 344

rhetorical weight of the music lies on where it is going rather than where it has been. In essence Scriabin had found a way to communicate the evolutionary dialectic of his poem using purely harmonic means.

Line 18, and the poetics of stasis

At first glance, the brief and innocuous line 18 seems to function as little more than a breather between larger sections of the poem's development. Like a silent film intertitle, "but suddenly" ("но внезапно") promises a shift in narrative and tone, but seems to carry little poetic function itself. However, as Jakobson noted in his article "Grammatical Parallelism and its Russian Facet,"

> Orphan lines in poetry of pervasive parallels are a contradiction in terms, since whatever the status of a line, all its structure and functions are indissolubly interlaced with the near and distant verbal environment, and the task of linguistic analysis is to disclose the levels of this coaction. When seen from the inside of the parallelistic system, the supposed orphanhood, like any other componential status, turns into a network of multifarious compelling affinities.[172]

True to form, this brief line gives us our first major interpretative paradox, due to Scriabin's exploiting of poetic meter.

Because Russian metric poetry is often syllabotonic, allowing for the possibility of unstressed icti in duple meters, the meter of a particular line can be determined only by its context, that is, by the lines that border it. But at line 18, after the first full statement of the A section, Scriabin undermines our ability to determine the meter by

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[172] Jakobson, p. 179

couching a metrically ambiguous line between two sections of differing meters.

Taking the line out of context, we read

но внезапно…

$\overset{\smile\smile}{X} \; X \; \acute{X} \; X$ - two foot trochee with first ictus unrealized

$X \; X \; \acute{X} \; X$ - one foot anapest with feminine ending

The problem with scansion once we return to the context of Scriabin's poem is that both interpretations are equally correct.[173] Scriabin precedes line 18 with a large section in trochaic tetrameter (lines 12-17) and follows with a section in tri-syllabic rhythms (lines 19-23), therefore context provides no clear solution. This metrical ambiguity serves a number of important functions:

First, the short line "но внезапно" marks the poem's first thematic break. Until line 17, the poem has dealt with the spirit in a state of lethargic bliss ("мечтою все создающий"), an image underscored by the rhythmic regularity of the trochaic tetrameter. "но внезапно…" begins a new phase, in which rumbling unease in triple meters ("ритмы тревожные") disturbs the calm.

Second, Scriabin's short line calls attention to the rhythmic break itself by serving as a pivot point: because these lines are read/heard in time, we as readers/listeners expect the line to be trochaic based on the preceding section, but with

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[173] Barry Scherr has discussed the difficulty of determining meter when faced with a possible trochaic dimeter (emphasis mine):

"Even more limited is the trochaic dimeter, which, because the ictuses fall on the odd syllables, is a syllable shorter than the already short iambic dimeter. Again, only two possible rhythmic variants exist, but unlike iambic dimeter, where the fully stressed line is more common, the trochaic is affected by the tendency in Russian poetry to avoid heavy stressing of the first ictus when it coincides with the first syllable of the line. The line therefore often begins with two unstressed syllables, **making it difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the trochaic dimeter from the anapestic monometer**. Both have constant stress on the third syllable of the line and occasional stress on the first." Scherr, p.111

the first ictus unrealized, the result *sounds* like an anapestic line, in effect preparing the

reader aurally for the tri-syllabic rhythm that follows:

<div style="text-align:center">

Он готов уж впасть в забвенье.　　Ẍ X X́ X X́ X X́ X

Но внезапно　　　　　　　　　　Ẍ X X́ X

Предчувствия мрачного…　　　　x X́ X X X X́ X X

</div>

<div style="text-align:center">

(lines 17-19)

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　　　　As it turns out, the use of a duel-interpretation figure as a pivot point is one of

the markers of Scriabin's harmonic system, as well. In his search to develop beyond

conventional notions of tonality, Scriabin began privileging one particular interval, the

tritone, whose unique properties color the composer's middle and late work.

　　　　Prior to the 20th century, the tritone was often considered too unstable an

interval (its pejorative nickname was *diabolus in musica*), and its use was most

commonly limited to diminished 7th chords. Scriabin referenced the "diabolic" nature

of the interval in the titles of his works: the complex relationship of tritones in the 9th

sonata, for example, underscores the sonata's alternate title, "The Black Mass."[174] In

fact, Scriabin's use of the tritone's inversion property is further evidence that his

musical development might have led to atonality decades before Schoenberg. As *Grove*

notes, "In 12-note music, the fact that the inversion of the tritone at the interval of an

octave yields another tritone (no other interval except the octave has this property) has

proved fundamentally significant, both in theory and in practice."[175]

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[174] Similarly, the "Poème satanique", op. 36, whose melodic rhythms reappear in the 4th Symphony (cf. m. 20)

[175] William Drabkin: 'Tritone', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 2 October 2005), <http://www.grovemusic.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu>

Beginning in his middle period, Scriabin exploits the tritone's ability to serve two functions simultaneously. While the harmonic function of any interval is dependent on its context, the tritone shares with the octave a unique property of equivalence: a tritone remains a tritone in any inversion, and it is furthermore enharmonic with a tritone whose root lies a tritone away:

Figure 3.7 - tritone equivalence
tritone F-B, first inversion B-F, enharmonic tritone B-E#

Scriabin exploits this quality of the tritone in order to explore the relationship between harmonically distant chords. In his later work especially, he would undermine the traditional harmonic system by building new relationships off the tritone, forcing the listener into unexpected harmonic territory.

This technique already begins appearing in Scriabin's middle period. For example, the opening measures from his "Poème languide," (Op. 53, No. 3) published the same year as the *Poem of Ecstasy*, contain a back-and-forth pivot off the same tritone: here, the enharmonic tritones A#/Bb – E allows the bass harmony to pivot between C major 7th and F# major 7th:

Figure 3.8 - Opening measures of the "Poème languide", op. 30 no. 3.
The circles indicate enharmonic tritones Bb/A# and E.
The red line shows the root pivoting from C natural to F sharp and back.

This yields two chords distantly related in conventional harmony but whose relationship is central to Scriabin's developing harmonic system.[176] Of special note is the way the F# major 7th chord, which Scriabin arpeggiates in contrast to the C major 7th block chords, unfolds in time: the arpeggio begins with the very tritone that serves as the pivot, seeming to promise the listener a repeat of the initial harmony, but as the arpeggio completes, the bass notes progress into unexpected territory, and the familiar tritone is revealed to have a different harmonic function altogether. Like the pivoting procedure in Scriabin's poem, the expected harmonic function gives way to a second, but equally applicable interpretation.[177]

This type of pivot movement occurs both in the 5th sonata and the symphonic *Poem of Ecstasy*. In the sonata, it is especially striking that the tritone pivot appears in the transitional section between the primary and secondary theme, much as the poem's rhythmic pivot is used to transition between the poem's two meters:

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[176] see Dernova, *Garmonia Skriabina*

[177] Using enharmonic tones or intervals in a pivot function is neither new nor unique to Scriabin, but constructing a dominant system of harmonic progression out of this function is a significant marker of his style.
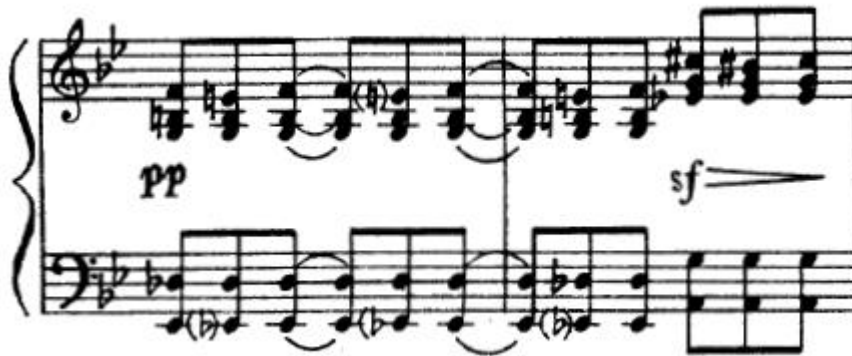
Figure 3.9 - measures 106-107
Here the bass line moves from Eb to A, via the tritone Db/C#-G

In his earlier-quoted words on the "taxonomy" in Scriabin studies, Stell also mentions a possible solution that might resonate here: "These two dichotomies, technical–cultural and vertical–linear, are more than just headings under which I might organize previous scholarship. They are the thesis and antithesis that will give rise to future studies."[178] Here the vertical function, the particular harmonic interval at the center of Scriabin's pivoting, is defined – and changed – by horizontal movement; the progression defines and redefines the name and function of that interval: could this merging of vertical and horizontal be the key to unlocking Scriabin's compositional strategies in the way that Stell envisions?

But first, a qualification: this comparison between the poetic figure and the musical is not absolute. In the poem Scriabin uses the pivot function to transition between larger sections; in this respect, its usage more closely resembles a transition section in a sonata, albeit a brief one. In the music, the pivot is a central feature of Scriabin's developing harmonic system, since he uses the distant chord in a dominant

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[178] Stell, p. 6

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function. Nevertheless, in both cases we can see the notion of pivoting off structures that permit dual interpretations, an unsurprising approach for a composer with an interest in 19th century German philosophy. In fact, there are Hegelian (and Fichtian) underpinnings to Scriabin's own writings of the time.[179] As Scriabin approached his middle period, he was developing a stronger background in German dialectic philosophy. In a passage Scriabin underlined from Kuno Fischer's work on Kant (*History of the New Philosophy: Immanuel Kant and his Work*), we read

> When opposite extremes <u>like A and not-A</u> can exist in one and the same subject only in a series, and not in one in the same time, it is clear that only time is a condition for status, likewise for a change of status.[180]

This focus on time, especially on the role of dialectics in time, runs throughout Scriabin's work, again unsurprising for an artist working in the time-dominated field of music. In her essay on Scriabin's middle period, "The Formula of Ecstasy", Levaya interprets the 4th symphony and 5th sonata as progressive attempts to express the "dissolution of time and space," metaphorically in the former and more directly in the latter.[181] Levaya reads the works' spiral structures as the edifice on which this disappearance rests, despite misreading the poem's actual structure.[182]

However, Scriabin's attention to Fischer gives us new insight into the function of these pivot mechanisms and their relationship to time. In the manner of a Hegelian

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[179] cf. Bowers, II. 47, although Bowers notes that Scriabin seemed more interested in Kant at the time.

[180] "Когда противоположные определения <u>как А и не А</u> могут находиться в одном и то же субъекте, только последовательно, а не в одно и то же время, то ясно, что только время является условием как состояний, так и смены состояний". Fischer, part 4, II, 3. Scriabin's underline.

[181] "исчезновение времени и пространства", Levaya, p. 99

[182] Levaya reads the first two lines of the section I label A_2 as a refrain that marks the spiral structure. In fact, A_1's literal repetitions, unlike A_2's constant reformulations, hold a stronger claim to that position, although the method of Scriabin's development makes the concept of "refrain" somewhat arbitrary.   see Levaya, p. 98

dialectic, they are structures that, despite the desire to separate into opposite interpretations, contain both an expected interpretation and its antithetical opposite. They are synthetic structures, but their synthetic properties dissolve in the face of time and progression: A becomes not-A in the passage from one section to another, though for a brief moment their shared properties coexist. That brief moment exists in a kind of stasis, the destruction of time envisioned by Levaya as Scriabin's necessary ingredient in the formula of ecstasy.[183]

This existence of line 18 "outside" of time bears a particular irony, since the actual subject of the words is itself the passage of time: "but suddenly…" ("но внезапно…")

Scriabin may have gotten the idea of metrical ambiguity from Afanasy Fet, whose poetry he mentions in his letters. Fet had written short poems using this meter throughout, where the consistently unstressed first ictus blurs the distinction between the trochees and a possible anapestic monometer. The title of one these poems from 1889 references the first movement of Beethoven's 14th piano Sonata ("Quasi una fantasia"), and Scriabin's vocabulary is not too distant from some of Fet's formulations, particularly in the second and third stanzas:

Неизбежно,
Страстно, нежно
Уповать,
Без усилий
С плеском крылий
Залетать –

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[183] This also supports Taruskin's claim that Scriabin's emergent harmonic system creates a "timeless" quality: "Until one of the root notes leaves the trintone treadmill and proceeds along the circle of fifths (or, in a pinch, by a semitone), the eventual destination of the tritone is in doubt, and one can even forget that the tritone *has* a destination. A quality of hovering, of time-forgetful statis, altered consciousness, or trance, can be induced." Taruskin, p. 331

В мир стремлений,
Преклонений
И молитв;
Радость чуя,
Не хочу я,
Ваших битв.

Of course, Fet's use of the trochaic dimeter is far more extensive than anything
Scriabin does, but Scriabin was familiar with Fet's poetry and would have recognized
the musical reference in the title.   Likewise, the thematic material – dreams, flights,
battles, longings – bears a strong connection to the concerns of the *Poem of Ecstasy*.

To emphasize the growing sense of self in the poem, Scriabin introduces the
first person pronoun as part of a combinatory scheme that prepares this introduction of
self in the first three iterations of A_3. Midway through each version of A_3, Scriabin
uses a close repetition with one variable – "их к [X] призывает" – with a different
value for X in each stanza: 1. расцвет ("blossoming"), 2. экстаз ("ecstasy"), and 3.
смерть ("death"). At line 185, during an episode in iambs, Scriabin shifts suddenly
into triple rhythm and combines all three values of X into a single couplet, although
reversing "death" into "life" and adding a significant fourth element:

О мой мир, моя жизнь,
Мой расцвет, мой экстаз!

The self, in the first use of any first-person pronoun in the poem, is finally
introduced at almost the exact midpoint of the text, and all four are enveloped into the
totality of the spirit's world ("мир").   Scriabin's close combining of all four elements
at the moment of overlap between multiple threads suggests that he conceives of
ecstasy as a process of self-actualization. As each cycle of the poem completes, the

small discrepancies in repetition accumulate until they reach this moment of breakthrough.

The most likely musical counterpart for this kind of combinatory scheme would likely be some form of counterpoint or close interaction of melodic motifs. While Scriabin uses both in the 5th Sonata, neither seems especially tied to an ecstatic or self-actualizing function: for example, the primary and transitional themes overlap in the first half of the development section, and the secondary and coda themes appear in alternating measures in the second half, but no such overlap or alternation occurs in the sonata's climax (marked "estatico"). However, a more direct relationship seems to exist in Scriabin's later work. The 9th Sonata builds to its climax by layering melodies directly on top each other, creating intensity through dense juxtaposition.

This also appears to be the organizing principle of the poem's finale, a monologue by the spirit itself. Following the progressive breakdown of discrete metrical sections, the spirit's monologue nearly disposes with organization entirely, even alternating between individual lines in duple and triple rhythms. However, even at its most seemingly chaotic, Scriabin never dispenses with traditional meter entirely: the individual lines remain recognizable reminders of previous sections in trochaic tetrameter or dactyls. Scriabin seems unwilling to take his notion of poetic chaos beyond certain boundaries.

In the end, the poem represents a complex transitional moment in Scriabin's development as an artist. The surface philosophy remains, as even his contemporaries noted, half-boiled, but in the process of wrestling with its formal implications in poetry, Scriabin both reflected the concerns of his music and pointed forward to his

future work. As we have seen, the opening lines reveal significant deep structural elements that find important parallels in the music. More importantly, these deep structures have implications for Scriabin's philosophical system, allowing his theories of synthesis through dialectic to appear in his works both at the rhetorical level (the actual subject matter of his poem) and at the metaphorical level (the interactions of meter, juxtapositions of melodies, etc.)

As the poem continues and the metrical regularity breaks down, Scriabin will use the interaction of thematic materials to illustrate a theory of synthesis through dialectic against the background of relative metrical chaos. While the poem shares many of its structural conceits with the other pieces of Scriabin's middle period, in a way it also looks forward to the more complex structures of his late work, which is less bound to the formal trappings of the sonata.

As such the poem should be considered a key work of Scriabin's middle period, allowing him to break free from his earlier classical moorings and to explore the more sophisticated channels that marked his later career.

Chapter IV

Kuzmin's *Alexandrian Songs*

Kuzmin's reputation as a writer has so eclipsed his work as a composer that his music remains, with rare exception, unstudied. This is especially problematic since in some of his works Kuzmin composed the words and music concurrently, which suggests that a detailed study of their relationship might offer insight that a more narrowly-conceived study cannot.

In his earliest writings Kuzmin had expressed an equal interest in both music and poetry. After a self-imposed exile (ostensibly in the Russia of Old Believers) brought on by his suicidal departure from the conservatory, Kuzmin's literary debut arrived via the publication of a small collection of verse and songs in the so-called "Green Collection of poems and prose" ("Зеленый сборник стихов и прозы"), published and distributed privately by the Verkhovsky family.[184] A major breakthrough came when Kuzmin met future friend Walter Nouvel, a musician who introduced him to the Evenings of Contemporary Music. The Evenings were a *salon* whose members included luminaries like Diaghilev, and which featured live performances of new works by local composers. His association with the Evenings of Contemporary Music and its circle of artists gave him the platform to explore his talents in both literature and music.

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[184] Bogomolov, p. 66

The major result of this was the interlocked *troika* of *Wings* (*Крылья*), a novel whose infamy derived from its unapologetic homosexual theme, the *Alexandrian Songs* (*Александрийские песни*), a collection of thirty poems focusing on life in ancient Alexandria, and another *Alexandrian Songs*, two cycles of song settings based on texts from the poetry collections. The scandalous topic of the novel (also hinted at in the poetic cycle) contributed in large part to the unavailability of Kuzmin's works in the Soviet era.

For a short while, however, Kuzmin enjoyed success both from his infamy and from positive critical reception of his poems. He began to interact regularly with other Silver Age poets, gave performances of his music in tandem with readings of his poetry, and contribute to journals like *Scales* and *Apollo*. The critical backlash that came later was in part due to Kuzmin's reputation, but also in part due to the difficulty of locating Kuzmin within any of the dominant poetic movements. Kuzmin's verse bears certain affinities with Symbolism and Acmeism without landing comfortably in either: this places Kuzmin outside the usually convenient frameworks for understanding the Russian cultural scene in the early years of the 20th century.

Thanks to a recent resurgence of interest in Kuzmin, the novel and poems have received renewed attention. The music has had less success, in part because it had less of an impact on his contemporaries, and in part because the music is far less available than his literary texts. This lack of attention is especially problematic in studies of the *Alexandrian Songs*, because Kuzmin had worked on the music and poems in close cooperation. Whether the music bears important implications for the poetry has yet to be answered. This chapter will attempt to address some of these issues.

Background and Influences

The most important antecedent to the literary *Alexandrian Songs* was the *Chansons de Bilitis*, a collection of scandalous poems by French author Pierre Loüys. Loüys had written *Bilitis* from the point of view of an ancient courtesan who takes both male and female lovers, a conceit shocking enough to turn the collection into a major *succès de scandale* not only in France, but throughout Europe.

Kuzmin first came in contact with the literary *Bilitis* through his friend and frequent epistolary partner Georgy Chicherin, the future Soviet diplomat. Chicherin had sent Kuzmin a copy of Loüys' disreputable work in 1897, although nearly a decade passed before Kuzmin began writing his *Bilitis*-inspired songs. In a letter dated April 19, 1905, Kuzmin notes the existence of seven poems for the planned cycle, three of which he has set to music. Only one of those three found inclusion in the eventually completed song cycle. Furthermore, the letters show that both words and music were composed roughly in tandem, rather than Kuzmin's completing the cycle before choosing individual poems to set.

Kuzmin worked rapidly, sending Chicherin new installments every couple of weeks; on his part, Chicherin was immediately receptive to the merits of Kuzmin's poems. The letters between them is not only insightful for Kuzmin's notes about dates of composition, but also because Kuzmin openly discusses his artistic taste during the period he was working on the songs. In a much earlier letter, Kuzmin's specific criticisms of Loüys' poems provide some insight as to Kuzmin's own approach when composing his version of antiquity:

I'm very grateful to you for Bilitis, but I'm extremely annoyed by it and to some extent even indignant. There's not a drop of ancient spirit in any of it – it's all boulevards, *café-chantant* or worse. And it's even more unworthy that antiquity is used senselessly as a cover for similar pornography. What kind of 7th century is this? Over there you have some smile of a golden morning, and everything's likewise clean and sunny, nudity is the result of naïveté; here's half-nakedness on the sofas of separate pleasure rooms. "Hymn to Astarte" is very good, but it's so close to the antiques and to the proclamations of Flaubert and Leconte de Lille that it suffers by comparison. More than anything I loved the bathing children, and the camels passing by, and then the portrait of winter, when he looks at the pale sky through a piece of ice.[185] That is subtle and poetic; but a lot of things, gracious and dear in themselves, he soils and forever spoils.[186]

In this critique certain important concerns of Kuzmin's poetics appear, especially his privileging of concrete visual images as representative of good poetry. Already in 1897 Kuzmin is discussing very specific imagery as examples of what he "likes best of all" in Loüys' collection. In a similar vein Kuzmin would choose as the first piece of his song cycle "Evening dusk", a poem which consists almost entirely of a list of unconnected visual images.

The "bathing children" that Kuzmin cites approvingly in *Bilitis* would appear in his own "Sun, sun"; likewise the image of men or women bathing appears throughout

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[185] Kuzmin is referencing three poems from *Bilitis*: "Hymn to Astarte" is one; the bathing children and passing camels appear in I.XVII ("Les petits enfants"); and the farmer staring through the shard of ice appears in I. XLVI ("Le tombeau des naiades").

[186] "За Bilitis я тебе очень благодарен, но ею крайне раздосадован и даже до некоторые степени возмущен. Во всем этом – ни капельки древнего духа, везде бульвар, кафе-шантан или еще хуже; и тем недостойней, что античность треплется для прикрытия подобной порнографии. Ну какой это VI-ой век! Там какая-то улыбка золотого утра, так все чисто и солнечно, нагота вследствие наивности; здесь же полуобнаженность на диванах отд<ельных> кабинетов для возбуждения. Гимн Астарте очень хорош, но он так похож на автентичные и на воззвания Флобера и Леконт де Лилля <*так!*>, что несколько теряет. Мне больше всего нравятся купающиеся дети, и проходящие верблюды, и затем картина зимы, когда он смотрит сквозь куски льду на бледное небо, - это тонко и поэтично; многие вещи, сами по себе грациозные и милые, он пачкает и портит безвозвратно." Letter to Chicerin, quoted in *Dnevnik 1905-1907*, p. 451 n.27. Kuzmin's distaste cannot be blamed on poor translation: a Russian version of *Bilitis* did not appear until ten years later (by A. A. Kondratev), possibly due to renewed interest after Kuzmin's successes with the *Alexandrian Songs*.

the *Alexandrian Songs* as a major visual motif.[187] The "passing camels" do not appear

anywhere in the poems, which play less explicitly to exoticism than do Loüys' poems.

Meanwhile the shard of ice, a wintry motif that has no place within Kuzmin's largely

summer-oriented Alexandria, found their most famous home in the third of Debussy's

song settings.

In addition, Kuzmin's critique of the pornographic element in Loüys' verse

helps contextualize the almost coy sexuality in Kuzmin's cycle, which distances itself

from overt physicality with an almost stoic reserve.   In Kuzmin's Alexandria the

rejection of physicality becomes itself the source of pleasure, since graphic depictions

of sex would be "the greatest of sins, tastelessness", as Andrew Field noted of

Kuzmin's aesthetics in "Notes on a Decadent's Prose".[188] Though *The Alexandrian*

Poems sometimes invite comparisons to "The Song of Songs", their sexual imagery is

nowhere near as explicit. Kuzmin limits his lovers to furtive kisses and stolen glances,

and his favorite synechdocic evocation of the object of desire is "eyes" rather than a

more typically erotic part of the body.[189]

Finally, Kuzmin's disavowal of inappropriately anachronistic style, which he

witheringly dismisses as "café-chantant" in Loüys' poems, helps contextualize the

mood and attention to daily minutiae in Kuzmin's cycle.   This negative judgment deals

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[187] This motif appears directly in "Evening twilight", "When I leave the house in morning", and "Three times I saw him"

[188] Kuzmin certainly dabbled in obscene poetry à la Barkov, but not in any of his published collections. Even *Wings* was scandalous because of its theme, not because of any explicitly sexual content.

[189] Kuzmin focuses on the eyes of the loved one in nearly a dozen of the poems, allowing the "серые глаза"(with no indication of the owner's gender) to float between the male and female narrators. See Panova, p. 369 This visual motif is also important in *Wings*, where it is used to describe not only the narrator, but also the narrator's chief competition for Strup's attention (a young bathroom attendant) and a beautiful woman he meets in Italy.

both with *Bilitis'* poor evocation of Egypt, which Kuzmin himself had visited just before reading Louys, and with the tawdry quality of Loüys' attempts at exoticism. For factual information Kuzmin's Alexandria was no more historically accurate than that of *Bilitis*, but as Panova notes it is a successful synthesis of what he had read, seen with his own eyes, and experienced.[190]

This "what he had read" involves a rich and not always expected set of sources. Kuzmin is notoriously reticent about discussing specific influences in his own art, but a few stray comments remain. In a diary entry dated December 27, 1934, Kuzmin lists as key influences on *The Alexandrian Songs* the historical novels of German Egyptologist Georg Ebers, even more so than authentic ancients like Aeschylus or Theocritus.[191] Nina Volkenau, who spoke directly with Kuzmin about the poems, asserted that Kuzmin also drew inspiration from translations of ancient Egyptian texts into English.[192] More recently, Bogomolov and Panova have discovered influences from more local sources, such as Pushkin and Leskov.[193] The consensus of contemporary scholars is that Loüys' influence on the poems was minimal and superficial: Kuzmin in fact pulled from an enormous pool of resources.[194]

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[190] Ibid. p. 328

[191] Diary, 27/XII/1934. Malmstad and Bogomolov note that Ebers' works were received by critics as *Professorenromanen* (see MB, 99)

[192] Ibid.

[193] Panova in particular devotes a large section of *Русский Египет* to the diverse origins of Kuzmin's eclectic antiquity.

[194] While this is certainly true, the complete disavowal of Loüys' influence seems tied more to the poor, tawdry quality of his verse rather than the lack of Loüys-like qualities. Kuzmin might have been playing the savvy self-promoter in appealing to Loüys' very popular work, but key strains from Loüys' poems are present throughout *The Alexandrian Songs*.

In fact much of Kuzmin's early work reflects a strong pull towards an eclectic portrait of antiquity, present not only in the poetic cycle and the novel *Wings*, but also in his early attempts at theatre and musical comedy. The first pieces in *The Alexandrian Songs* were pulled from the latter, as Kuzmin explored the possibilities of different media.

For all that, Kuzmin asserts in his letters to Chicherin that *The Alexandrian Songs* were primarily inspired by *Bilitis*, and he appends to the poem "There were four of them that month" ("Их было четверо в этот месяц") the description "in imitation of P. Loüys" ("подражание П. Луису"). Though the poem occupies a roughly middle position in the poetic cycle, Kuzmin assigned the song version of "There were four" prominent position as the cycle's finale. Kuzmin's "imitation", which consists of a brief introduction followed by four stanzas, departs from the stricter form of Loüys' *Bilitis*, whose poems-in-prose are invariably in four short stanza/paragraphs (the introduction pushes Kuzmin's to five). However the theme and overall structural pattern were taken directly from Loüys' "Chanson".

The musical heritage of *The Alexandrian Songs* is harder to trace, in part because Kuzmin is even less explicit about his musical influences than his literary ones. Critiques by his contemporaries are no more helpful, although sometimes colorful: Chicerin refers to the song settings admiringly as "Kuzmin *le plus pur*", while the journal *Nashaya zhizn'* reviewing their debut performance allegedly called them "the works of an utter degenerate."[195] If Kuzmin's diary is to be believed, members of

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[195] Chicheren, letter to Kuzmin May 16, 1906. Review from *Nashaya zhizn'* described by Kuzmin in his diary ("совершенно произведениями дегенерата"), November 30, 1905. See also MB p.101

the Evenings of Contemporary Music considered them "somewhat virtuosic,"[196]

although "virtuoso" here can only mean stylistically rather than technically, since none

of the pieces require a great deal of virtuosic skill to perform.

Despite his usual reticence, Kuzmin obliquely discusses his own music in a

scene from *Wings*, written while he was still composing the song cycle. When the hero

Vanya enters his future lover Stroop's apartment for the first time, he hears an

unknown male voice singing to piano accompaniment in the next room. Kuzmin here

provides the full text of "Evening twilight" ("Вечерний сумрак"), followed by a brief

description of the music: "And the piano enveloped the yearning voice in deep chords,

as in a thick fog."[197] Whatever the musical qualities of the song (we assume Kuzmin is

referring to his own setting, which was written concurrently with the novel), the

language Kuzmin uses to describe it involves a typically Symbolist simile: sound as a

thick fog. The most likely reference to this type of musical "effect" is Debussy, one of

the few contemporary composers whose work Kuzmin enjoyed: fog is a frequent if

overemphasized motif in his music.[198]

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[196] From Kuzmin's diary, October 6, 1905.

[197] Kuzmin, *Kryl'ia*, p. 217. "И фортепьяно низкими аккордами, как густым туманом, окутало томительные фразы голоса." This description is problematic for the song lyrics that precede it; this will be addressed in more detail later.

[198] Were Debussy's settings of *Bilitis* an influence on Kuzmin's? So far I have not been able to find a satisfactory answer to this question, and even the painstakingly thorough Malmstad and Bogomolov gloss over the issue. Kuzmin was certainly familiar with songs by Debussy, although the first concrete reference to "Trois chansons de *Bilitis*" comes only in 1907; Debussy had already written some sixty songs before approaching *Bilitis* in 1897, choosing three songs ("La flute de Pan", "La reve", and "Le tombeau des naiades") as songs for piano accompaniment, as well as six non-vocal "mood" pieces for chamber ensemble (later in piano reduction) collected under the title "Epigraphs antiques".   Until 1907 Kuzmin does not refer to any Debussy songs by name.

Kuzmin's musical diet, like his literary diet, was enormous and varied. As a student at the conservatory he had studied under both Rimsky-Korsakov and Liadov. His tastes changed little: throughout his diaries and letters of any given period, the two composers who occupy the highest place in his discussions of music are Mozart and Debussy. Of Russian composers he holds Mussorgsky in higher esteem than others, and in fact Kuzmin's song settings resemble his more than those of Mozart or Debussy. He also respects his former teacher Rimsky-Korsakov, but Tchaikovsky and the Germans are frequent targets of scorn. In a pair of letters listing his many likes and dislikes, Kuzmin asserts,

> I do not like Beethoven, Wagner, and especially Schumann.[199]
> I like old French and Italian music, Mozart, Bizet, Delibes, and the newest French (Debussy, Ravel, Ladmirault, Chausson); I used to love Berlioz, I prefer vocal and ballet music; I prefer intimate music, but not quartets.[200]

Like and dislike is not necessarily a clear guide to ascertaining influence: for example, dislike of Beethoven was a motivating influence on any number of late 19th century composers (Scriabin included, who nonetheless borrows a great deal from Beethoven). However, Kuzmin's dislike of Wagner is especially noteworthy, since Wagner-fever dominated discussions of art in early 20th century Russia. Nor was Kuzmin entirely immune to the influence of the German opera composer: the second part of *Wings* opens with a discussion of Wagnerian opera, judging most of Wagner's work harshly, but with some exception. Using the characters of *Wings* as his mouthpiece, Kuzmin asserts the superiority of *Tannhauser* due in part to its classical

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[199] "Я не люблю Бетховена, Вагнера и особенно Шумана." Letter to Ruslov, 28/15 Nov, 1907; see Bogomolov, pp. 203; and MB 139-40

[200] "Люблю старую французскую и итальянскую музыку, Mozart'a, Bizet, Delibes'a, и новейших французов (Debussy, Ravel, Ladmirault, Chausson); прежде любил Berlioz'a, люблю музыку больше вокально и балетную; больше люблю интимную музыку, но не квартеты." Letter to Ruslov, 8-9 Dec, 1907, ibid. See also Bogomolov, p. 210

subject, while rejecting the otherwise ascetic bent of Wagner's plots: "Asceticism is, in essence, the most unnatural phenomenon, and the chastity of some animals is the purest nonsense."[201]

Kuzmin's assertion that he prefers the "old French and Italian" to the more emotionally transparent music of the Romantics or the more dominant musical ethos of the Germans helps situate his alignments among contemporary artists, his dislike of Scriabin, his strong affinity for Debussy, and the relatively dry and transparent quality of his own musical settings.

These settings are interesting for their debt to Mussorgsky, both in a harmonic logic that is often self-contained and idiosyncratic, in a certain patchwork quality that regards each measure as an individual unit rather than organically linking to those measures surrounding it, and also in the construction of melody according to principles of speech rhythm and especially speech intonation.[202] This latter quality was a pronounced feature of Mussorgsky's late period song settings.[203] Even more so than in Mussorgsky, Kuzmin's music is without a trace of anything "folkish", especially without the melismatic lines associated with "authentic" *protyazhnaya* singing: Kuzmin was more Western-leaning in his musical tastes than any of his contemporaries, rejecting the Slavophilia of his conservatory teachers.

There are some nods to religious music, especially with the old believer traditions of *znamenny* chant: in Kuzmin's songs these appear as unisons or octaves

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[201] "Аскетизм - это, в сущности, наиболее противоестественное явление, и целомудрие некоторых животных - чистейший вымысел." *Kryl'ias*, pp. 82-3

[202] In Kuzmin's music this is a quality somewhat limited to the *Alexandrian Songs*. The melodic lines in the settings of *Chimes of Love*, for example, follow more regular musical rhythms not reflective of speech patterns; the shape of the melodies are likewise not reflective of speech intonations.

[203] Taruskin, p.123

with the piano accompaniment, as well as occasional modal qualities (although a more historically accurate parallel to chant would involve the lack of a leading tone rather than the construction of a full mode). While this may seem strange in light of Kuzmin's apparent lack of interest in other issues popular with nationalists, Kuzmin nonetheless had a pronounced interest in Old Believers that he did not extend to folk culture.[204]

As for classical influences, the Russian tradition of changing backgrounds variation, in which a melody is held without variation over a shifting accompaniment, has some echoes but is never adopted as an overall organizing principle in Kuzmin's work. His construction of a musical Alexandria is, like his poetic Alexandria, refreshingly free from the clichés of exoticism: with rare exception, he avoids the temptation to use augmented seconds, a temptation freely indulged by his conservatory instructor Rimsky-Korsakov. Likewise, the occasional modal qualities are unforced and unobtrusive. It is perhaps surprising that there is none of Debussy in the *Alexandrian Songs* despite Kuzmin's great love of the composer, and despite their mutual debt to Mussorgsky.

Kuzmin's musical style is thus as diverse and eclectic a compendium of sources as his literary background. The resultant music, which often sounds jarring due to abrupt shifts and unexpected harmonic progressions, mirrors the sometimes strange progressions in the poems.

In all, Kuzmin chose twelve of the thirty-two published *Alexandrian Songs* for musical setting. The following list indicates the title of each work, as well as its placement within the poetic cycle (section and number).

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[204] An early photograph of Kuzmin shows him in full beard, dressed in traditional Old Believer garb.

Book I	1. Вечерний сумрак (I.3)
	2. Сладко умереть (IV.4)
	3. Что ж делать (IV.2)
	4. Я спрашивал (IV.1)
	5. Если б я был (II.7)
	6. Солнце, солнце (IV.5)
Book 2:	1. Когда мне говорят "Александрия" (I.2)
	2. Когда утром выхожу из дома (II.5)
	3. Ты – как у гадателя отрок (II.2)
	4. Когда я тебя первый раз встретил (II.1)
	5. Нас было четыре сестры (III.1)
	6. Их было четверо в этот месяц (III.5)[205]

The first book of songs relies heavily on section four of the poetic cycle, "Wisdom" ("Мудрость"). Book two involves predominantly sections two, "Love" ("Любовь"), and three, "She ("Она"). Oddly there are no settings from the section entitled "Canopic songs" ("Канопские песенки"), this despite their more regular rhythms and conventional rhymes. This suggests that Kuzmin approached both poetry and music as an active engagement with irregularity and asymmetry.

The choice of wisdom, arguably the least lyrical major theme of the *Alexandrian Songs*, as the dominant subject of the first book perhaps explains the often spare settings that Kuzmin composed for these songs, as well as his detached attitude towards the themes of love and desire. Because there is clear overlap between the musical style and the choice of poems, does the musical accompaniment to *The Alexandrian Songs* invite us to reread Kuzmin's poetry through a different lens?

The possibility of such a reading of Kuzmin's music-influenced poetry was asserted already by early critics of Kuzmin, including Gumilev in his essay "The Life of Verse" ("Жизнь стиха"). Commenting on the fluid verse of Kuzmin's *Chimes of Love* (*Куранты Любви*), Gumilev suggested,

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[205] See Appendix E for full texts of each of these poems

At the same time [as the verses], the author wrote music to them as well, and this gave them the stamp of some sort of special exaltation and elegance which is only accessible to pure sounds. The verse flows like a jet of thick, fragrant, and sweet honey, and you believe that this alone is the natural form of human speech.[206]

Whether the flexibility required for musical settings lent Kuzmin's verse these "pure sounds", much less the qualities of a natural speech, will be part of our study. The rest will concern the relationship of formal expectations in the verse and song, and whether Kuzmin's negotiations between the two yield a more pregnant text than initially appears.

Poetic and Musical Organization

Generally speaking, the organizational logic of much of the *Alexandrian Songs* is linked to stanzas rather than to the length of written verse or melodic line. In much of the cycle Kuzmin allows the lines within the stanzas to vary in length, and the melodic settings of those lines likewise resist regular, repetitive patterns. This suggests at the very least that Kuzmin did not compose poems according to predetermined musical forms, nor did he try to cram his uneven verse lines into even measures. In some respects this runs counter to Gumilev's suggestion that the music prompted a more fluid verse line, unless the *idea* of music lent itself to a looser and more fluid approach by Kuzmin. The formal links between song and poem, however, yield no

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[206] "Одновременно [со стихами] автором писалась к ним и музыка, и это положило на них отпечаток какого-то особого торжества и нарядности, доступной только чистым звукам. Стих льется, как струя густого, душистого и сладкого меда, веришь, что только он – естественная форма человеческой речи." Gumilev, "Zhizn' stikha", p. 58. Interestingly, in his review of Kuzmin's *Seti* (where the *Alexandrian Songs* were republished) two years before, Gumilev had opened by calling Kuzmin "a poet of love, that is, a poet and not a singer. " ("поэт любви, именно поэт, а не певец"). "M. Kuzmin. Seti. 1908", p.14

direct evidence of the influence of music on the written word: if anything, the reverse is true.

For example, in the most loosely structured poems, the song settings gain some cohesion through repetition of motifs while the melodic phrases vary wildly in length. In "Sun, sun" ("Солнце, солнце"), a free-verse poem that Kuzmin divides loosely into three "stanzas" marked in the settings by their opening figure and melodic fragment, the stanza lengths stay within reasonable proximity of each other (12, 13, and 12 measures respectively), but the vocal phrases vary from in length from 1.5 measures to 5 measures.

More unstable still are the three stanzas of "Sweet it is to die" ("Сладко умереть")[207]:

Table 4.1 - Divisions of "Сладко умереть"

	lines of poetry	musical measures	melodic phrases
stanza 1	9	17	8
stanza 2	9	16	7
stanza 3	19	32	16

The literary text gains structural cohesion through its opening words, which repeat verbatim in the first two stanzas: "Sweet it is to die…" The prolonged opening of the third stanza, "But it is even sweeter, even wiser…", previsions the likewise prolonged third stanza, whose subject is a lyrical and slow farewell to life in contrast to the brief and efficiently described deaths of the first two stanzas.

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[207] Kuzmin does not divide these stanzas with extra spacing, but each coincides with a single sentence.

In the music Kuzmin maintains the structural repetition through time signature, opening each stanza in a 3/4 meter that yields to 2/4 after the incantory opening is completed. The first two stanzas repeat this opening identically in both the melody and the accompaniment, but the third stanza departs significantly: rather than with the opening hint of d minor, the third stanza begins in D major; rather than echoing the gradually descending melodic fragment from the first two openings, the third opening's melody gradually moves upwards. The effect of skewed repetition is less pronounced than in the poem, but with the gain of a greater change of mood.

Likewise the closing fragment of each stanza finds a mirrored effect in the musical setting. While the first two stanzas end with a farewell from the narrator's cohort according to the formulaic "farewell hero/father" ("прощай герой/отец"), the final stanza ends in peaceful solitude (with the otherwise key word "farewell" appearing in the negative midway through the stanza: "hearing no farewells" ["не слыша никаких прощаний"]). In the song setting, the first two farewells are set to a authentic cadence created by a C# major to F# major progression. The third stanza's closing is much less sure: the final three chords are all incomplete, relying on tones in previous measures to suggest their quality: an F#-C# fifth without a third (an A appears in the previous stanza, suggesting a complete f# minor triad) leads to a B-D without a fifth, cadencing on a E-B without a third. Whether this indeterminate quality of the closing successfully echoes the calm ease of the poem's ending is a question best left to the individual listener: however its significant difference from the harmonically sure cadences of the previous stanzas certainly emphasizes its contrast within the context of this song.

Far less coherent is the chaos of "What can be done" ("Что ж делать"), whose time signature varies wildly before settling into a 6/8 in the second half.   Kuzmin changes the time signature ten times in the first half of the song, sometimes alternating after only a single measure, as well as changing the key signature midway through. Fragments in the melody or accompaniment reappear in the course of the song, but without a strong sense of linkage or overall scheme. In a sense Kuzmin translated the unpredictability of free verse into this song setting, although without the semantic unity that the poem's words provide the music seems to drift without a clear sense of direction.

Because the melodies are often at the service of the lyrics, a closer look at the melodies themselves offers insight into the poems' intonational patterns. A striking example of this is "Evening dusk", a rare poem in the cycle for its use of accentual verse.[208] The lines are of variable length, but each contains exactly four accented syllables. Despite such a regular duple accentual pattern, Kuzmin nonetheless chooses to squeeze his verse lines into a triple meter (3/4) in the song setting, splitting the four stresses equally between two measures.   This leaves two beats in the poetry to be set against three beats in the music.

In the song setting Kuzmin detaches the first two lines of the poem as a brief introduction: the mixed meter (3/4 alternates with 2/4) plus a harmonic indeterminateness combine to create a sense of vagueness appropriate to the scene description: "Evening dusk over the warm sea / Lighthouse fires on the darkening sky".[209]

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[208] Specifically four-beat accentual verse. Panova, p. 357
[209] "Вечерний сумрак над теплым морем, / Огни маяков на потемневшем небе"

Then the body of the song begins. For the bulk of the setting, Kuzmin divides each poetic line into two measures, and each measure into a regular rhythmic pattern: all syllables coming before the second stressed syllable are relegated to the first beat, the second stressed syllable gets an entire beat (or more) to itself, and whatever is left falls into the final beat. The resulting effect is of a drawn-out, emphasized second stress regardless of the line length. Compare the shortest and longest lines ("храма Юноны" and "продавцы фиалок, гра[нат]") in terms of their location against the measures' beats:

Table 4.2 - Syllable apportioning in "Вечерний сумрак"

First beat	Second beat	Third beat
хра-ма Ю-	-но-	-ны
про-дав-цы фи-	-а-	-лок, гра-

This pattern becomes especially foregrounded in the lines with a more cluttered first beat, allowing the solo stressed syllable in the second beat a more striking contrast. Kuzmin allows twelve measures for the repetition of this rhythmic pattern. However, even the more ambiguous introductory measures reflect a similar conceit: though divided differently, the second and fourth stressed syllable of each line is assigned a longer value and more dominant stress than the surrounding syllables. (e.g. Ве-чер-ний | су- | -мрак над / теп-лым | мо- | -рем)

Does this kind of rhythm belong strictly to the musical setting, or does it add something to our understanding of the text itself? If the latter, does it add something to the text that is not intrinsic in the words alone, or does it refocus our attention on a quality of the text that might otherwise escape notice?

In both cases the latter: Kuzmin's rhythmic strategy in the song setting is a reflection of the textual strategy already present but not necessarily immediately noticeable. Though the poem appears as four-beat accentual verse, the added emphasis on the second and fourth stresses echoes the dominant semantic value of those words. If we divide the four stressed words from each poetic line according to deemphasized and emphasized stresses, we get

Table 4.3 - Division of material by stress position

de-emphasized (stresses 1 and 3):	emphasized (stresses 2 and 4):
вечерний, теплым огни, потемневшим запах, при свежее, долгих прогулки, весеннего крики, купающихся священные, храма продавцы, гранат	сумрак, морем маяков, небе вербены, пира утро, бдений аллеях, сада смех, женщин павлины, Юноны фиалок, лимонов

The stressed column consists entirely of nouns. The list of words de-stressed by their lesser emphasis in the song text includes a mix of nouns and other parts of speech, and among the nouns are often the less evocative pairs of noun combinations (for example, in "запах вербены" Kuzmin emphasizes the verbena over the more neutral word "scent"). Therefore the melodic line closely recreates what would be the proper intonational stress pattern of a semantic-sensitive reading of the poem. Kuzmin's setting is not only receptive to the words' meanings, but draws out and emphasizes their placement in the text.

The concluding lines of the poem deviate somewhat from the pattern, stretched into seven *molto meno mosso* measures. But they also contain a mystery that may support the notion that Kuzmin worked on both word and music in tandem rather than

at an interval: a small change in the song setting drastically alters the difference of mood between the poem and the song. In both *Seti* and the song's appearance in *Wings*, the narrator brings the list of imagery to a close with a triumphantly expressed hypothetical: "doves are cooing, the sun is shining, if/when I see you again, my native city!"[210] As Panova has noted, this ending encapsulates Kuzmin's poetics of surprise: the narrator has in fact *not* been witnessing in real time the described cityscape, a realization underscored by the unexpected shift in verb tense.[211]

The song however disturbs the triumphantalism of the poem by breaking up the line and transforming the final phrase into a question: "doves are cooing, the sun is shining. *When* will I see you again, my native city?"[212] Instead of an assertion that the narrator will see his native city again, the song ends with on a note of uncertain nostalgia. The musical setting illustrates the uncertainty rather than the triumph: in one of the song's cycles most astute musical moments, Kuzmin not only sets the final words against an unexpected harmonic leap downwards (a full tritone – the furthest distance harmonically possible between two chord roots), but he lands the final stress on a flattened seventh, lending the last vocal measure the kind of "blue" yearning associated with African American music in the United States.

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[210] "…воркуют голубы, светит солнце, когда увижу тебя родимый город!"

[211] For example, see Panova, p. 357

[212] "…воркуют голубы, светит солнце! Когда ж увижу тебя родимый город?"

Figure 4.1 - conclusion of "Вечерний сумрак" (mm 25-32)

This makes the song's appearance in *Wings*, and the narrator's description of it, somewhat confusing. Only in these final measures does Kuzmin use the kind of "deep chords" that the narrator describes, and while they may not evoke a "a thick fog" à la Debussy, they are certainly in the service of the more uncertain variant rather than the triumphant one. In effect Kuzmin used one version of the poem in the text of *Wings*, but described the musical setting to the other version.

While this could have been a simple error of typography, the two variants remain in all editions of the novel and poetic cycle. The effect in the novel is especially striking because of the disjuncture between the transcribed words and the description of the song's effect, even more so because they occur at a key moment in the hero's development: the confused young Vanya hears the song during his first visit to the home of his future lover, Stroop. In essence, the trajectory from triumphant transcription and muted description reverses the trajectory of the novel, which passes from the uncertainty of Vanya's childhood to the exhilaration of his acceptance and maturity, symbolized by his final decision to become Stroop's lover.

Formal Tensions

So far this discussion of the interaction between musical and poetic form has operated under the assumption that the two are placed in a cooperative relationship. However Kuzmin recognizes that a rift exists between the two media; in fact he approaches the media boundaries of *The Alexandrian* Songs with something of a self-conscious wink: the opening lines of the literary text begin with an invocation of music ("Like a mother's song..."). Meanwhile as the opening piece of the musical cycle he chose the poem that most relies on visual imagery ("Evening dusk…"), while the opening piece to the second half of the song cycle invokes the power of the word ("When they say to me 'Alexandria'…"). As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the section of poems labeled "Canopic songs" yields no songs at all.

Likewise Kuzmin occasionally uses his song settings to poke fun at imitative music, usually the most direct linkage between word and sound. For example, when the narrator of "When they say to me 'Alexandria'" evokes the sound of flutes, the piano accompaniment inexplicably begins to imitate drums: [213]

Figure 4.2 - "Когда мне говорят 'Александрия'" mm 9-11

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[213]"and I hear the sounds of distant flutes" ("и слышу звуки далеких флейт")

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Rather than take advantage of the words' invocation of sound, Kuzmin sometimes sets out to break the linkage entirely.

In his use of motifs that appear in more than one poem/song, the text and music operate with complete independence: literary motifs find no consistent musical setting, while musical motifs carry no noticeable semantic value. For example, the words "[grey] eyes" ("[серые] глаза") represent a dominant motif which stretches over a dozen times through the poetic cycle, as well as a major image in the novel *Wings*. As a genderless synecdoche representing the narrator's object of desire, they participate in the ambiguity that marks Kuzmin's verse with a certain sexual fluidity.[214] Despite their prevalence in the texts, these eyes appear only three times in the songs, and each time differently: the first in "Evening dusk" as a wavering melody, the second in "When I saw you the first time" ("Когда я первый раз встретил") in a melody ascending stepwise, and the third in "There were four of them that month" as a melody descending stepwise. The semantic unity has been undercut by the phrases' dissimilar musical settings:

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[214] See Panova's discussion, p. 369

Figure 4.3 - two settings of "глаза"
"Когда мне говорят'Александрия'" mm 35-36 and
"Когда я тебя первый раз встретил" mm 16-17

Likewise, musical fragments that repeat across song boundaries are not bound by any thematic consistency, even though they lend themselves to a feeling of stylistic consistency in the cycle. One such figure is a descending triplet made up of one eighth note, one dotted eighth, and one sixteenth – in each case the first note descends stepwise to the second, followed by a downward leap to the third. Its uniqueness is underscored by the fact that this rhythmic pattern appears nowhere else in the cycle except with the same melodic shape.[215] In "Sweet it is to die" it accompanies the words "завтра за[был бы]" in a phrase noting that the narrator would forget the object of his desire tomorrow. In "What can be done" it appears against "[дру]гому ве[ликому]" and again in the following "[лю]бовь и всю [нежность]". In "I asked sages far and wide" ("Я спрашивал мудрецов вселенной") it supports "[дру]гие для [смерти]", the response of the sages to the question of life's meaning.

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[215] By "rhythmic pattern", I include all appearances of the figure in which the first note coincides with the downbeat.
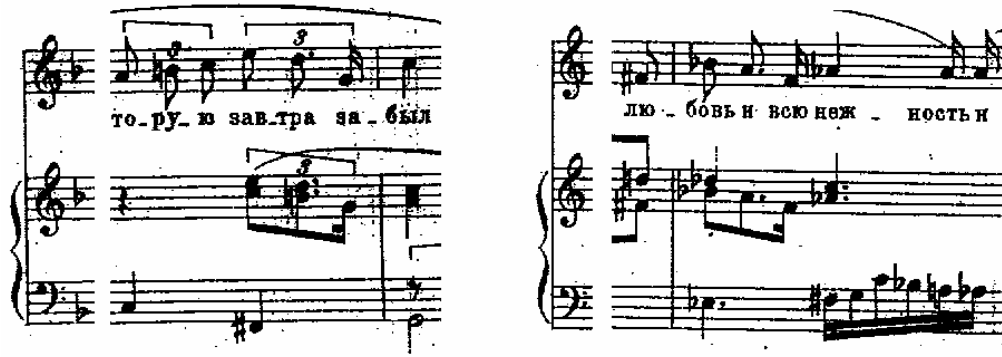
Figure 4.4 - two examples of the descending triplet figure
"Сладко умереть" mm 42-43 and "Что ж делать" mm 31-32

The repetition of the figure in different songs lends itself to a feeling of stylistic coherence in Kuzmin's music, even though it is not linked concretely to any consistent meaning: in the realm of motifs, the text and music are operating independently of one another.

The significance of this independence is that it undercuts the primacy of the written word: while certain aspects of the settings suggest that Kuzmin subordinated the music to the text, this disjunction between types of motivic repetition suggests greater tension between the two arts.

The tension between literary form and musical form is most strongly felt in "If I were" ("Если б я был"), a five-stanza poem built on structural repetition, but whose variations differ in location according to the art form.[216] Because variations can act as signifiers of meaning, the differing locations of these variations result in two works whose impact is dramatically different.

The literary text of the poem follows a standard pattern in each of its five stanzas: the narrator begins with a hypothetical conditional statement ("If I were [an

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[216] Appendix C contains the full text of the poem.

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ancient general]") [217], then develops that hypothetical into a vision of a future that situates him in some superfluous state ("I would become [more glorious] than everyone in Egypt")[218].

However, not all the stanzas carry equal weight. Unlike in the first four hypothetical situations, the narrator finds true happiness in the fifth ("I would become *happier* than everyone in Egypt"), which is paradoxically the most miserable of the possible situations. Rather than a Pharaoh or a god, the narrator envisions becoming the "least slave" ("рабом последним") of his beloved, but finds superlative happiness in the mere glimpse of a thread of her (his?) sandals.

Why does this stanza necessarily carry the poem's meaning? There are two formal aspects of the poem that encourage this reading: the stanza's placement at the end of the poem, and the use of an unexpected variation that sets it apart from the rest of the stanzas. In each of the first four situations, the superlative state follows naturally from a hypothetical positive: wisdom, power, or wealth leads to greatest wisdom, greatest power, or greatest wealth. In the final stanza, the opening hypothetical is semantically negative rather than positive, but it nonetheless leads to greatest happiness; the stanza is marked by irony. The combination of the formal and semantic qualities of this stanza places extra emphasis on the variation and its role.[219]

Kuzmin mirrors the stanza's irony in the musical setting. While (most of) the other stanzas travel from an *allegretto* hypothetical to a triumphant *allegro* finish, the

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[217] "Если б я был [древним полководцем]"

[218] "стал бы [славнее] всех живущих в Египте"

[219] As Panova has noted, the variation in the final stanza does follow naturally from a steadily descending progression: the perceived future in each stanza is lower on the social hierarchy than that of the preceding stanza (p. 367). However, the hypothetical *quality* that begins the first four stanzas is always positive, while the final is negative until its potential is revealed in its resolution.

final stanza begins at a slow andante, underscoring the misery of slavery. The *andante*

stretches throughout the stanza, and the *ritardando* "и стал бы" prepares the listener

for a likewise slow and melancholic coda. However, after a brief pause for breath, the

music unexpectedly returns to the triumphant *allegro*, asserting that this is indeed the

happiest of possible situations. Kuzmin has no need to overemphasize the joy of the

final stanza's coda: it is note-for-note identical to the previous ones, but its now

contrasting tone carries the ironic effect of the lyrics.

Figure 4.5 - "Если б я был": codas
Comparison of stanzas 1 (mm 13-16) and 5 (mm 58-61)

While this seems an appropriate enough setting to emphasize the poem's

trajectory and underscore the textual meaning, Kuzmin does something truly baffling

elsewhere: his setting of the *third* stanza deviates far more dramatically than the final

stanza. While most of the song is in A minor, the third stanza is in Ab major; while the others lead to a triumphant *allegro* coda, the third stanza begins and ends in a calm *andantino*. The resulting effect is that the middle stanza stands out far more starkly than the final stanza, effectively undercutting the poem's trajectory.[220] If, as we discussed above, the final stanza's claim to meaning derives partially from its marked deviation, then the more pronounced deviation of the third stanza in the musical variant challenges the final stanza's claims to meaning.

There are a few ways of reading this. One is aesthetic and poses no challenge to the textual reading of the poem: a variation in the third appearance prevents a repetitiveness which might seem tasteless. However, this is often not the case in Kuzmin's *Alexandrian Songs* settings, especially in places where repetition serves some important thematic purpose. For example, in "There were four of them that month" the final line of each of its five stanzas is set identically in order to underscore the identical rejection of each of the narrator's potential suitors. The actual object of the narrator's desire receives a similar setting, with only a Picardy third on the final cadence to highlight his "favor" with the singer.

Further evidence that repetition does not bother Kuzmin is found in the musical opening to "If I were", in which a steadily descending figure is repeated four times before the fifth stanza deviates entirely, a perhaps small-scale rendering of the literary poem's structure. Therefore an argument based on bending the otherwise rigid form of the poem to the dictates of a musical taste seems here unwarranted. The coda to third stanza remains especially problematic: even presupposing a composer unwilling

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[220] Herb Eagle has pointed out that the third stanza already carries significant variation from the poem's overarching pattern in both intonational complexity and theme. Significantly, both the third and fifth stanzas deal with love, a quality absent from the other three. (personal correspondence)

to begin each stanza in the same key, the Ab major coda in the third stanza of "If I were" poses significant questions, especially with an eye towards the identical settings of all five coda sections in "There were four of them that month".[221]
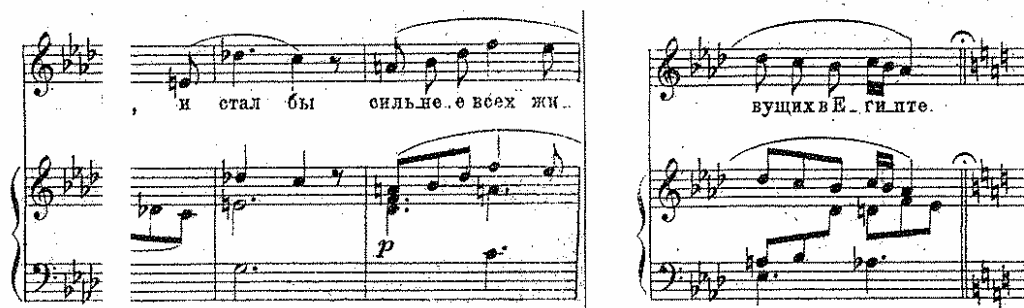
Figure 4.6 - "Если б я был", coda to stanza 3 (mm 34-37)

Another reading is that the song variant is calling the listener's attention to something differently than the text; in effect, the music is eliciting a different reading of the poem than the text alone. For this a closer reading of the text of the third stanza is necessary:

"If I were a second Antinous," begins the narrator in a stanza devoted to beauty as a form of power. Antinous was the lover of Hadrian, a shepherd boy whom the Emperor "acquired" on a campaign in Turkey, and who became his close companion. When Antinous drowned unexpectedly, Hadrian was so overcome with grief that he declared Antinous divine, erecting temples to him for a sect that long outlived the emperor himself. Antinous, the symbol of male beauty and a classical referent for same-sex attraction, is an important figure in Kuzmin's early artistic production. This tendency to view Antinous explicitly as a marker of same-sex

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[221] There are also minor differences in the piano accompaniment during the fourth stanza's coda. Because it is otherwise identical in key, tempo, and general rhythmic profile, its differences are not significant enough to create a marked effect.

attraction is so strong that the cycle's first English translator, Michael Green, made the connection direct: he rendered "я бы *всех* сводил с ума красотою" as "I would drive *all men* crazy with my beauty".[222]

Kuzmin had a strong identification with Antinous: after the publication of these works, Kuzmin began taking part in the Hafiz circle ("Друзья Гафиза", or "гафизиты")[223], a group of artists who emulated classical culture and practiced openly homosexual behavior while taking nicknames from antiquity. Kuzmin's pseudonym with the group was Antinous. For those who knew Kuzmin, this foregrounding of Antinous in the song would have evoked an immediate connection with the author. While such a blatant conflation of the author with the symbol of ultimate beauty might strike the reader as narcissistic, Denisoff has noted that narcissism is a strong component in the way Kuzmin's homosexual characters construct their identity as homosexuals.[224] In *Wings*, for example, Vanya frequently examines his physical beauty in front of a mirror, and must eventually accept and come to terms with his own beauty in order also to come to terms with his sexual desires. Thus the early audiences of the *Alexandrian Songs*, which Kuzmin performed with readings of *Wings*, would have heard a song in which the fictional narrator was positioning himself hypothetically with the real-life author.

Further evidence of Kuzmin's use of music to highlight authorial connections not immediate inherent in the text is found in his setting to "There were four of them

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[222] Green, p. 339

[223] Bogomolov, "Peterburgskie gafizisty" pp. 67-98

[224] Denisoff, p. 254. Denisoff also cites Irena Paperno's discussion in *Studies in the Life and Works of Mixail Kuzmin*.

that month", a five stanza poem describing the (female) narrator's rejection of potential

suitors and love for a man uninterested in her. The stanzas are unequal in length, with

the shorter first stanza acting as an introduction, and the final deviating from the

pattern to describe the object of her desire. Despite an identical coda that runs through

all five stanzas, the third stanza (that of the second failed suitor) deviates from the rest

in its tempo. While the rest of the song is set *con moto*, the section describing the

second suitor begins with an *andantino* opening that further reduces to a *meno mosso*

in the fifth measure.   This places the second failed suitor in a more dramatically

marked position than even the object of the narrator's desire.

This stanza in question describes a poet, who dedicates to the narrator "thirty

elegies, famous even as far as Rome" ("тридцать элегий известных даже до Риме").

While the narrator has no reason to identify with this poet, whom she rejects for not

being the one she loves, the author himself draws undue attention to the poet's stanza,

perhaps in a sense of camaraderie. Otherwise the strange foregrounding of this stanza

makes little musical sense.

Even without these direct authorial connections, which might not have been

known by listeners or readers not within Kuzmin's immediate circle, the naming of

Antinous in "If I were" is especially important when considered against the network of

associations in the texts. Antinous appears throughout *Wings* as the key symbolic

figure, even though he often lurks in the background of the text, alluded to without

being named directly.[225] Most importantly near the novel's climax, the canon Mori

reads the history of Antinous to Vanya, and in their discussion Antinous becomes a

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[225] For example, the image of a "drowned man" appears twice in the story, the first time under the
suggestion of drowning oneself because of beauty. Kuzmin reverses the Antinous myth by having the
drowned boy in Part 2 of the novel appear as a loathsome, decayed corpse.

symbol fusing the notion of male beauty, immortality of the form Beauty (in the

Platonic sense), the amoral nature of same-sex feelings, and the resolution and

reconciliation of these ideas with religious belief.

Antinous appears only one other time in the poetic text of *The Alexandrian*

Songs, although as an unnamed figure: the narrator of "Three times I saw him" ("Три

раза я его видел") describes the death of Antinous and his subsequent elevation to

godhood without naming him explicitly. As the narrator witnesses the drowned

Antinous' body being recovered from the river, the poem returns to its key erotic

synecdoche, the final evocation of "eyes" in Kuzmin's cycle:

> The body fished out from the water
> lay on the sand,
> and that same unearthly face,
> the face of a sorcerer,
> stared with eyes unclosed.[226]

"Three times I saw him" is also the most directly homoerotic of the poems in

the cycle, since it marks the only time that the narrator and the object of desire are both

male. In the end, possibly due to its length, "Three times I saw him" was not among

the poems chosen for musical setting. Therefore the reference to Antinous in "If I

were" is the closest that any of the songs comes to a direct statement of the homoerotic

theme made more explicitly in *Wings*.

The particular setting of the Antinous stanza reinforces this reading. Despite

beginning with the same melodic line, each stanza of the song is distinguished by a

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[226] Вытащенное из воды тело
лежало на песке,
и то же неземное лицо,
лицо колдуна,
глядело незакрытыми глазами.

unique figure in the accompaniment, a nod to the tradition of changing-backgrounds variation. The first stanza begins over a tremolo figure, the second with leaping thirds, and the fourth against an echoed melody doubled in octaves. The Antinous stanza unfolds over a rolling triplet arpeggio; although Kuzmin often complicates the relationship between word and imitative music, it is not difficult to hear this accompaniment in tandem with his description of Antinous in "Three times I saw him":

> suddenly I heard the sound of strumming,…
> he was sitting alone,
> running his slender fingers over the strings of a lyre [227]

This interpretation of the musical figure may be idiosyncratic, but it is undeniable that the privileging of Antinous in the text not only calls to mind the complex network of associations that stretches through the novel and poetic cycle, but also contradicts the general trajectory of this specific poem. The listener is caught between two different works with two different messages, a sort of Bakhtinian polyphony in which multiple authors rather than characters compete on equal ground, although here the multiple authors – poet and composer – are in fact the same person.

This uncomfortable juxtaposition of the works also plays an important role in the novel *Wings*, with the intrusion of the *Alexandrian Songs* at a key moment in the main character's development. The turning point of the novel occurs when its young protagonist Vanya visits the apartment of his future lover Stroop for the first time. There he will find a witty, intelligent *salon* community whose views on classical culture, beauty, and same-sex love will eventually help Vanya fashion his self-identity

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[227]   вдруг я услышал звуки струн,...
он сидел один,
перебирая тонкими пальцами струны лиры

as a young homosexual. But the first hint of Vanya's new life comes at the moment he steps into the apartment and hears an unknown male voice singing in another room. Intrigued, Vanya steps into the adjoining room to hear the song, which Kuzmin transcribes in its entirety: "Evening dusk" from the *Alexandrian Songs*.

The significance of the doorway to Stroop's as an important developmental threshold for Vanya, as well as the key intrusion of the songs at that moment, has not been lost on commentators. In his study of colonial tropes in Kuzmin from the perspective of queer sexuality, Denis Denisoff notes,

> Within the liminal space signified by 'the piano's sonorous chords veil[ing] the voice's yearning phrases as in a mist', the multiplicity of identities offered in the orientalist *Alexandrian Songs* penetrate the hero's consciousness. He then crosses the threshold into the bachelor's drawing room, choosing an identity that, while culturally constructed, offers the best fit for what he feels are his innate sensual desires.[228]

Denisoff here implies that the insertion of one song from the cycle is enough to trigger the novel's readers into accepting the whole of the *Alexandrian Songs* into the discourse. Because the earliest appearances of all three works – the novel, the poems, and the songs – involved public readings and performances within drawing-room circles, this contention is well warranted.

In effect, Kuzmin's use of word and music involves less a grand plan for unity à la Wagner's *gesamtkunstwerk*, and more an interlocking network of motifs and allusions that resist full unification. This resistance perhaps further distanced Kuzmin from the aesthetic plans of the dominant cultural landscape around him, in which a Wagner-centered discourse promised a synthetic unity with the goal of mystical

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[228] Denisoff, p. 257

transfiguration.[229]   However, Wagnerian synthesis was not the only possible venue for modernist discourse in early 20th century poetry: Nietzsche had long since described the opposite pull in modernism – decentralization and atomization – as "decadent".[230] The eclectic, fragmentary nature of Kuzmin's poetic universe represented a strong strain of this atomization in Russian literature that found expression in works as diverse as Rozanov's anti-autobiographies and the disjoint prose of Bely's *Symphonies*.

This in some sense rescues the music, as well. The fragmentary nature of the poetic cycle finds appropriate expression in a musical strategy as eclectic as Kuzmin's: the jarring effect of changing meters and key signatures serves as a musical expression of eclecticism.   Kuzmin's lack of experience as a composer might explain his inability to follow through on this eclecticism in a fully satisfying way (compare Debussy's preludes "The Interrupted Serenade" or "Minstrels"), but the results are nonetheless striking. This is further foregrounded by the relative conservativism of his later music. *Chimes of Love*, a narrative song-cycle that eschews eclecticism in favor of a unified, albeit abstract, world, finds its musical expression in an almost Mozartian style of strict simplicity.

Whatever the case, in the *Alexandrian Songs* Kuzmin had created a unique poetic space for his synthetic antiquity, whose poetry ultimately elevated it in esteem above either the novel or accompanying music. This elevation, which reflects the superior quality of the verse over the prose or musical accompaniments, nonetheless

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[229] Such a plan appears in the closing pages of *Wings*, although not without a hint of satire: the speaker has already been described by the author as something of a sub-par artist, and his grand ideas for aesthetic-philosophical-sexual synthesis feel bombastic against the muted coming-of-age drama of the narrator.

[230] Nietzsche, "The Case of Wagner", p. 187

robs the cycle of the rich interplay of themes around which the three works were

constructed. As a result the music has fallen into undeserved obscurity.

Conclusion

"In the beginning, there was music," wrote Alexander Blok, as the poets and philosophers of Russia's Silver Age sought to integrate this worldview into their poetic projects without recourse to music itself. Meanwhile the composers of the age seemed to develop less absolute opinions about their medium, which was in part responsible for their downplayed importance in literary circles.

To some extent the disjoint between Silver Age interest and music and the production of actual music (and music-related work) by contemporary artists lay in the difference between a philosophical ideal of music and the reality of music as an art. While the idea of music as a transcendent phenomenon had a lot of appeal for mystical and metaphysical theorists, much less appealing was the experience of breaking down a rhythmic pattern or exploiting the relationships between a sonata's constituent parts. Aside from Andrei Bely's rudimentary efforts, the majority of writers were content to leave music at arm's length, building from a long tradition of German and French philosophy and art.

The gap between the stated expectations of Silver Age poets and the reality of their relationship to music is well-illustrated by Ivanov's claim about Scriabin: "Music for him, as for the mythical Orpheus, was a first principle that moves and organizes the

world."[231] This is certainly Ivanov's view of music, albeit the philosophical Music rather than the art form. While it is possible that Scriabin himself felt this way (he is notoriously inconsistent in his writing), the evidence seems to suggest otherwise: Scriabin's first principle is a purely philosophical one, with the music and poetry merely manifestations of a larger, more fundamental and abstract idea.

Speaking with the benefit of some distance, Sabaneev was perhaps more correct in noting that Scriabin's music was so dependent on its context that the decreasing interest in his music was understandable: "Perhaps his music is alien to modernity for the very reason that when severed from his philosophy, it is incomprehensible and incomplete, while his philosophy suffers from too manifest faults."[232] The composer once seen as the cornerstone of Russian music tumbled out of favor shortly after his death, leaving no serious disciples and a waning interest in his music.

With even more distance than Sabaneev, we can see the steady return of interest in Scriabin's music, thanks to ears that have come to accept even more radical exploration than the composer would have dreamed.   That his harmonic system had begun to incorporate full twelve-tone chords shortly before his death suggests that Scriabin was on the verge of breaking through to true atonality, a notion attractive to listeners already long accustomed to Stravinsky and Schonberg.   Scriabin's harmonic system and scale derivation still provide major challenges to the analyst, but groundbreaking work by scholars like Varvara Dernova and James Baker have helped clear some of the surrounding fog. Taruskin's analysis of Scriabin's music through the

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[231] "Музыка для него, как для мифического Орфея, была первоначалом, движущим и строящим мир." Ivanov, p. 175

[232] Sabaneev, p. 53

lens of his philosophy has also helped lend credibility to a composer long considered a delusional megalomaniac.

Because the poem is considerably less accomplished as a work of art, the possibility of a resurgence of interest in Scriabin's literary experiments remains less likely. However his writings have shown to be more informative than they initially seem, in part due to Scriabin's attempts to encode his philosophy under the surface of the text. In this dissertation we have seen how Scriabin uses similar organizational principles both media. The appearance of structural isomorphs supports Marvick's assertion that Scriabin's aesthetic strategy was independent of any specific medium.

In addition, the more transparent organizational structure of the poem has proven fertile ground for this kind of inquiry. Because Scriabin was transforming an abstract principle into a medium in which he was less comfortable as an artist, the awkward and occasionally patchwork quality of the result gives the analyst the opportunity to work with Scriabin's developing philosophy at a more immediate level. Though the philosophy itself may not provide much of interest, it has important implications for the understanding of his music. As this dissertation has shown, the overarching departure-return structure that the sonata encodes even *within* the primary and secondary themes is more directly communicated in the poem than in the music, where his sophistication as a composer allows him to mask the more superficial stitches.

This perhaps opens a window for more serious consideration of Scriabin's writings, or at least of the formal qualities embedded within them. *The Poem of Ecstasy*, as we have seen, may suffer from a superficial poverty of expression, but represents an interest test case for Scriabin's developing ideas. Likewise, future study of the two

versions of the *Prefatory Act* promises insights into Scriabin's final and most musically complex works.

Kuzmin as well is enjoying a resurgence of interest in his work, in part because of the increased availability of texts once difficult to find, and in part because of a growing interest in queer studies that situates him in a unique historical position: openly gay at the turn of the century. Very few other writers fit into this company, and even fewer whose works are still regarded highly for their quality of their art. In addition the dismissive attitude towards Parnassianism, towards that aspect of Kuzmin's verse once derided as minor, is no longer as pervasive as it was during the Silver Age.

Though some of his contemporaries had no patience with the supposed frivolity of his work, his admirers pointed to the disarming ease of his verse as his major asset. However, what we have seen with Kuzmin's music complicates the expectation that his work as a composer lend a freedom and fluidity to his verse: close analysis suggests that the music was clearly subordinate on the words. This is not to say that a certain musical sense, or a certain expectation of musicality, did not play a role in Kuzmin's developing poetic style; but evidence of direct impact of compositional philosophy on the poetry is likely not forthcoming. If anything the reverse is true.

This is somewhat less the case with the later *Chimes of Love*, whose more traditional strophic forms and repetitions create a certain set of expectations for the poetry meant to accompany it. Here Gumilev may be correct in his sense that the music inspires a fluidity evident in the poems, since the music brings the words into a much tighter and more controlled structure.

However the looseness of the *Alexandrian Songs* suggests that Kuzmin entered into that project as an iconoclast targeting verse forms first, with or without the accompaniment of music. The music follows suit, mimicking the length and shape of the verse lines while showing a disregard for conservative song form and occasional lapses in strictly musical logic.   The most important relationship between word and music becomes a semantic one, with the accompaniment accentuating and occasionally subverting the expectations of the lyrics. As this dissertation has shown, Kuzmin developed a complicated set of relationships between the poems and their musical settings, but the poems remain at the center.

This subordination of music to word, in addition to the already spare and "frivolous" quality of the music, in part explains the resistance of other Silver Age poets to recognition of Kuzmin's contributions.   Though Kuzmin exploits the relationships between the art forms in interesting and occasionally sophisticated ways, his work lacks the fashionable metaphysics of his contemporaries'. Furthermore, the scandalous nature of the material provided an easy distraction from discussions about form and structure.

Kuzmin's musical output, while slim and mostly difficult to find, nonetheless promises a wealth of study: his early works are littered with songs, dances, and incidental music that has received very little notice outside the occasional article. The *Alexandrian Songs* alone contain a great deal more to be discovered, as do the pieces in the narrative cycle *Chimes of Love*. As the interest and availability of resources increase, so does the likelihood of a complete reassessment of Kuzmin as a composer.

The problems of musico-poetics only complicate our ability to situate these two artists against the backdrop of Silver Age art and Symbolist poetics. Music represented a common thread, but their particular approaches to music pushed Kuzmin to the margins while elevating Scriabin to celebrity. On the other hand, Scriabin was ill-equipped to meet the heavy philosophical demands of this central place, while Kuzmin achieved successes as a poet despite his ill fit with prevailing philosophical winds. In the final assessment, the artists both represent and complicate our understanding of music and poetry in the Silver Age.

Though this dissertation has dealt with a formal approach to the works of Scriabin and Kuzmin that cross media boundaries, many other approaches remain. The expansion of both literary and musical theory into new territories promises an even *more* rapid expansion of the possibilities for discourse that spans both arts. In this vein, what Kofi Agawu calls the "selectively pluralistic" aspect of new musicology offers a challenge to primarily formal analysis (such as this dissertation) but with the promise of new and different types of perspectives.[233] With luck studies like this one will inspire new interest in these neglected works of Russia's Silver Age, and with that new interest a new crop of critical approaches.

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[233] Agawu, p. 300

Appendices

Scriabin's plan for the "Poème Orgiaque"

This outline was the embryo for the *Poem of Ecstasy*, reprinted as it appears in *Russkie propilei*, v. 6, pp. 183-184.   Translation mine.

Poème Orgiaque.

I.

1) тема — сладость мечты, окрыляющей духъ, желанье творить томленье, жажда неизвѣданнаго.
2) валётъ на высоту дѣятельнаго отрицанія, твор[чество?]
3) элементы подавленности вслѣдствіе сомнѣнія
4) усиліе воли побѣждающей
5) человѣкъ *Богъ*
6) *успокоеніе въ дѣятельности*

II.

1) духъ отдается любимымъ мечтамъ
2)
3) отчаяніе врывается внезапно и подавляетъ духъ
4) рождается протестъ
5) борьба
6) освобожденіе въ любви и въ сознаніи единства
7) освободительныя стремленія расцвѣтаютъ
8) человѣкъ Богъ

III.

1)
2)
3)
4)
5) соединеніе чувства протеста съ сладостью мечты
6) послѣдняя фаза борьбы снова освобождаетъ въ любви

IIII.

1) Человѣкъ Богъ. Сознаніе безцѣльности и свободная игра; опьяненіе свободой; сознаніе единства
2) сознаніе относительности явленій,
3) что прежде подавляло, теперь лишь возбуждаетъ къ дѣятельности.

Orgiastic Poem

I.

1) theme – the sweetness of a dream, winged spirit, desire to create, languor, thirst for the unknown.
2) flight to the height of active negation, creat[ive work?]
3) elements of depression due to doubt
4) the strength of victorious will
5) man *God*
6) *tranquility in action*

II.

1) the spirit surrenders itself to beloved dreams
2)
3) despair suddenly bursts in and overwhelms the spirit
4) protest arises
5) struggle
6) liberation in love and in the realization of unity
7) liberating yearnings blossom
8) man God

III.

1)
2)
3)
4)
5) combining the feeling of protest with the sweetness of the dream
6) the last phase of the battle again liberating in love

IV.

1) Man God. Realization of aimlessness and free play; intoxication of freedom; realization of unity
2) realization of the relativity of phenomena
3) what earlier overwhelmed, now only provokes to action

The Poem of Ecstasy. Full text.

This edition of *The Poem of Ecstasy* comes from *Russkie propilei*, v. 6, pp 192-201. The translation is Faubion Bowers' and appears in *Scriabin: A Biography of the Russian Composer*, v. 2, pp. 131-135. I have made minor formatting changes to accommodate spacing and visual presentation.

Духъ,	Spirit,
Жаждой жизни окрыленный,	Wingèd with a thirst for life,
Увлекается въ полетъ	Is drawn into flight
На высоты отрицанья.	On the summits of negation.
Тамъ въ лучахъ его мечты	There, under the rays of its dream,
Возникаетъ міръ волшебный	Emerges a magical world
Дивныхъ образовъ и чувствъ.	Of heavenly forms and feelings
Духъ играющій,	Spirit playing,
Духъ желающій,	Spirit desiring,
Духъ, мечтою все создающій,	Spirit creating all with a dream
Отдается блаженству любви.	Surrenders to the bliss of love.
Средь возникнувшихъ твореній	Mid the risen creations
Онъ томленьемъ пребываетъ,	It dwells in languor,
Высотою вдохновеній	From the height of inspiration
Ихъ къ расцвѣту призываетъ.	Calls them to flower,
И полетомъ опьяненный	And drunken with soaring
Онъ готовъ ужъ впасть въ забвенье,	It is ready to sink into oblivion.
Но внезапно...	But suddenly…
Предчувствія мрачнаго	Trembling presentiments
Ритмы тревожные	Of dark rhythm
Въ міръ очарованный	Break rudely into
Грубо врываются,	This enchanted world,
Но лишь на мигъ.	But only for an instant.
Легкимъ усиліемъ	With light increase
Воли божественной	Of divine will
Онъ изгоняетъ	It dispels
Призраки страшные.	Frightening phantoms.
И лишь достигъ	And it attained
Желанной побѣды	Only desirèd victory
Онъ надъ собой,	Over itself.

Духъ играющій,
Духъ ласкающій,
Духъ, надеждою радость зовущій,
Отдается блаженству любви.
Межъ цвѣтовъ своихъ твореній
Онъ лобзаньемъ пребываетъ,
Цѣлымъ міромъ возбужденій
Ихъ къ экстазу призываетъ.
Опьяняясь ихъ дыханьемъ,
Ослѣпляясь красотой,
Онъ несется, онъ рѣзвится,
Онъ танцуетъ, онъ кружится;
Цѣлой гаммой ощущеній
Онъ истерзанъ, истомленъ.
Онъ готовъ ужъ впасть въ забвенье,
    Но снова...
Изъ нѣдръ таинственныхъ
Духа смятеннаго
Грозной волной
Бурно вздымается
Ужасовъ дикихъ
Толпа безобразная;
Все поглотить
Она угрожаетъ.
    Духъ,
Жаждой жизни окрыленный,
Увлекается въ полетъ
На высоты отрицанья.
Тамъ въ лучахъ его мечты
Возникаетъ міръ волшебный
Дивныхъ образовъ и чувствъ.
    Духъ играющій,
    Духъ страдающій,
Духъ, сомнѣніемъ скорбь создающій,
Отдается мученью любви.
Межъ цвѣтовъ своихъ твореній
Онъ терзаньемъ пребываетъ,
Цѣлымъ міромъ потрясеній

Spirit playing,
Spirit caressing,
Spirit calling hope of joy
Surrenders to the bliss of love.
Mid the flowers of its creation,
It lingers with a kiss
Over a whole world of titillation
Summons it to ecstasy.
Intoxicating it with breaths
Dazzling it with beauty
It is transported, it tittups,
Dances and whirls;
With a whole range of sensations
It is tormented, wearied.
Ready to sink into oblivion
    But again…
From mysterious wombs
The spirit confusèd
A formless host
Of savage terrors
Rises stormily
In menacing waves;
It threatens all to submerge.
    Spirit,
Wingèd with a thirst for life,
Is drawn into flight
On the summits of negation.
There, under the rays of its dream
Emerges a magical world
Of heavenly forms and feelings.
    Spirit playing,
    Spirit suffering,
Spirit creating grief by doubt
Succumbs to love's torment.
Mid the flowers of its creations
It lingers in torment,
    With whole earth shakings.

Онъ ихъ къ смерти призываетъ.
Страхомъ трепетнымъ объятый,
Онъ готовъ ужъ впасть въ забвенье,
    Но внезапно...
Предчувствія свѣтлаго
Ритмы веселые
Въ немъ зарождаются.
Сладостный мигъ!
Лучами надежды
Вновь озаренный
Къ жизни стремленіемъ
Онъ загорается.
Чудно постигъ
Онъ силу божественной
    Воли своей.
Въ темныя бездны
Взоромъ сжигающимъ
Онъ проникаетъ,
Исполненный гнѣва
И возмущенья
Дерзкій вызовъ онъ бросаетъ,—
Загорается борьба.
Зіяютъ разверстыя
Пасти чудовищъ,
Грозно сверкаютъ
Страстныя молніи
Воли божественной,
    Всепобѣждающей;
Отблески яркіе
Свѣтомъ волшебнымъ
    Міръ озаряютъ.
Забывая о цѣли любимой,
Духъ отдается борьбѣ съ опьяненьемъ.
Онъ весь упоенье,
Весь наслажденье
Этой игрой
Свободной, божественной,
Этой любовью-борьбой.

Calls them to death.
Seized with fear,
It is ready to sink into oblivion
    But then…
Bright presentiments
Of shining rhythms
Awake within it.
Sweet moment!
With rays of hope
Radiant again
It burns for life.
And marvelously attained
Is the power
    Of divine will.
It pierces
The dark abysses
With glowing glances,
It shouts with rage
And fury…
The battle blazes.
Yawning caverns
Of monster mouths
Flash menacingly
Passionate lightning streaks
Of divine will,
    All-conquering;
Radiant reflections
Of magical light
    Illumine the world.
Spirit, forgetting the belovèd goal,
Drunkenly yields to the struggle.
All enraptured,
Fully delighted
With free
Godlike play
The struggle of love.

Въ дивномъ величіи	In the divine loftiness
Чистой безцѣльности	Of pure aimlessness,
И въ сочетаніи	In combining
Противустремленій	Opposing desires
Въ единомъ сознаніи,	In single awareness,
Въ единой любви	One love.
Духъ познаетъ	Spirit learns
Природу божественной	Its divine essence.
Своей сущности.	It knows that
Онъ понимаетъ,	Which desired struggle;
Что хочетъ борьбы.	It desired only
Онъ захотѣлъ—	And events
И событія	Assembled round
Въ стройномъ порядкѣ	This wish
Окружили	In harmonious order
Этотъ порывъ.	Capricious emotion.
Играетъ, мѣняется	Spirit,
Чувство капризное,	Playing, changing
И вселенная	Vibrates the universe
Съ нимъ вибрируетъ,	Explaining
Его объясняя,	Affirming.
Его утверждая..	Desirous of victories
Онъ хочетъ побѣды,	It was victorious,
Онъ побѣдилъ,	It is triumphant!
Онъ торжествуетъ!	And to its belovèd realm,
И можетъ онъ радостный	Joyous, it can return now.
Въ міръ свой излюбленный	But what darkens
Тотчасъ вернуться.	The glorious moment?
Но чѣмъ омраченъ	ALAS!
Этотъ радостный мигъ?	IT HAS ATTAINED ITS PURPOSE.
Именно тѣмъ,	It longs for past struggle.
Что онъ цѣли достигъ.	Instantly it feels
Онъ сожалѣетъ	Boredom, melancholy, and emptiness.
О прошлой борьбѣ;	But with thirst of life
И на мгновеніе	
Чувствуетъ онъ	
Скуку, уныніе и пустоту.	
Но жаждою жизни	

Вновь окрыленный
Увлекается въ полетъ.
На высоты отрицанья.
Тамъ въ лучахъ его мечты
Возникаетъ міръ волшебный
Дивныхъ образовъ и чувствъ.
И ничѣмъ не возмущаемый
Можетъ вѣчно отдаваться
Онъ излюбленнымъ мечтамъ.
Но о чемъ же, чѣмъ, о духъ мятежный,
Опять нарушенъ твой покой?
Не ритмы тревожные
Тебя омрачаютъ,
Не призраки страшные
Тебѣ угрожаютъ,
То ядъ разлагающій
    Однообразія,
Червь пресыщенія
Чувство съѣдаетъ.
И крикомъ больнымъ
Огласилась вселенная:
    Иного!
    Новаго!
Наслажденьемъ утомленный,
Наслажденьемъ, но не жизнью,
Духъ уносится въ полетъ
Въ область скорби и страданья.
И въ свободномъ возвращеніи
Въ міръ мечтаній и тревогъ
Онъ чудесно постигаетъ
Смыслъ тайны бездны зла.
Снова раскрылися черныя пасти,
Снова зіяютъ, грозятъ поглотить,
Снова борьба и усиліе воли,
Желаніе все побѣдить.
Снова побѣда, опять опьяненіе,
    И упоенье,
    И пресыщенье.

Again it is wingèd
Is drawn into flight
On the summits of negation.
Three, under the rays of its dream
emerges a magical world
Of heavenly forms and feelings.
And tormented by nothing
It can eternally
Surrender to
Favorèd dreaming
But why, O rebellious Spirit,
Again is Thy rest perturbèd?
No disturbing rhythm
Overshadows Thee,
No dreadful phantoms
Haunt.
Only monotony's
Infecting poison,
The maggot of satiety
Devours feeling
With sickly cry
The universe resounds:
    Something else!
    The new!
Wearied of pleasure
Worn with pleasure
But not with life,
Spirit lifts into flight
To the kingdoms of grief and suffering.
And in its free return
To the world of dream and of excitement
It comprehended miraculously
The idea of evil's
Mysterious abysses.
Again the dark caverns
Gape open
Again the mouths threaten to swallow
Again battle,
The girding of will
The wish to conquer all.
Again victory, again intoxication,
    And rapture
    And satiety.

Этимъ ритмомъ учащеннымъ
Бейся жизни пульсъ сильнѣй!
О мой міръ, моя жизнь,
Мой расцвѣтъ, мой экстазъ!
Ваше каждое мгновенье
Создаю я отрицаньемъ
Раньше пережитыхъ формъ.
 Я вѣчное
 Отрицаніе.
 Еще,
 Всегда еще!
 Болѣе сильнаго,
 Болѣе нѣжнаго,
 Новыхъ терзаній,
 Новыхъ блаженствъ.
Наслаждаясь этимъ танцемъ,
Задыхаясь въ этомъ вихрѣ,
Забывая о цѣляхъ любимыхъ стремленій,
Духъ отдается игрѣ опьяненій.
На крыльяхъ могучихъ
 Новыхъ исканій
Въ область Экстаза
Онъ быстро несется.
Въ этой смѣнѣ непрестанной,
Въ этомъ полетѣ безцѣльномъ, божественномъ
 Духъ себя познаетъ
 Могуществомъ воли
 Единой, свободной,
 Всегда созидающей,
 Все излучающей,
 Все оживляющей,
 Дивно играющей
 Множествомъ формъ.
 Онъ себя познаетъ
 Трепетомъ жизни,
 Хотѣньемъ расцвѣта,
 Любовью-борьбой.
 Духъ играющій,

  Spirit playing

With this rhythm increasing and frequent
Beats the pulse of stronger life!
O my world, my life,
My blossoming, my ecstasy!
Your moments each by each
I create by negation
Of earlier experience.
 I am forever
 Negation
 Again and
 Ever again!
 More powerful
 Tenderer
 New torture,
 Fresh beatitude.
Delighting in this dance,
Choking in its vortex.
Unmindful of goals
Belovèd aspirations
Spirit surrenders to playful drunkenness.
On powerful wings
 It speeds
Into realms of new discovery
Of Ecstasy.
In this endless change,
In this purposeless, godlike flight
 Spirit comprehends itself
 By the might of will,
 Alone, free
 Ever-creating.
 All-illumining
 All-lifegiving
 Divine play
 In the multiplicity of forms:
 It knows itself
 As the palpitation of life,
 The wish to burgeon
 In the struggle of love.

Духъ порхающій,
Вѣчнымъ стремленьемъ
Экстазъ создающій,
Отдаться блаженству любви.
Межъ цвѣтовъ своихъ твореній
Онъ свободой пребываетъ.
„Я къ жизни призываю васъ,
Скрытыя стремленья!
Вы, утонувшія
Въ темныхъ глубинахъ
Духа творящаго,
Вы боязливые
Жизни зародыши,
Вамъ дерзновенье
Я приношу!
Отнынѣ свободны вы!
Раздѣляйтесь, расцвѣтайте,
Возставайте другъ на друга,
Возноситесь на высоты,
Чтобы въ сладостномъ блаженствѣ
Вамъ познать себя единствомъ,
Уничтожиться во мнѣ!
Возставайте другъ на друга,
Возставайте на меня,
Отрицайте и любите!
Возстаньте на меня, народы и стихіи,
Поднимайтесь ужасы,
Старайтесь меня уничтожить,
Разверстыя пасти драконовъ;
Змѣи, обвѣйте, душите и жальте!
Когда все поднимется
Противъ меня,
Тогда я начну
Свою
Игру.
О міръ ожидающій,
Міръ истомленный!
Ты жаждешь быть созданнымъ,

Spirit fluttering
By its enduring longing
Creating Ecstasy
Gives itself up to Love's thrill
Mid the flowers of its creations
It lives in freedom.
"I summon you to life,
Hidden longings!
You, sunken
In the somber depths
Of creative spirit,
You timid embryos
Of life,
To you bring I
Daring!
Henceforth, you are free!
Fragment and flower
Each separately
Rise up one against another
Flee to the summits
That in sweetest bliss
You may know your oneness
Annihilated within me!
Rise up one against another,
Strike against me,
Negate yet love!
Turn against me, all peoples and elements,
Horrors lift up your heads,
Try to destroy me,
Caverns of dragons' mouths
Serpents twist around me
Constrict me and bite me!
When all is risen
Against me,
Then I begin
My
Play.
O waiting world,
Weary world!
You art thirsting to be created

Ты ищешь творца.
До меня долетѣлъ
Нѣжно сладостный стонъ
    Призыва.
    Я прихожу.
Я уже пребываю въ тебѣ,
О мой міръ!
Таинственной прелестью
Чувствъ неизвѣданныхъ,
Сонмомъ мечтаній и грезъ,
Огнемъ вдохновенья,
Исканіемъ Истины,
Желаньемъ запретнымъ
Свободы божественной.
О міръ мой возлюбленный,
    Я прихожу.
Твоя мечта обо мнѣ—
Это я нарождающійся.
Я уже являю себя
Въ присутствіи тайномъ
    Едва уловимаго
    Дыханья свободы.
    Существо твое
    Охватила уже
    Легкая,
    Какъ призракъ мечты,
    Волна
Моего существованія.
Ты уже содрогнулся.
Я—свобода тобою любимая,
Ты мой возлюбленный міръ!
    Я прихожу
    Тебя ослѣпить
    Великолѣпіемъ
    Сновъ очарованныхъ;
    Я приношу тебѣ
    Прелесть волшебную
    Жгучей любви

You seek the creator.
Your tenderly sweet sigh,
    Calling
Has been wafted to me.
    I will come.
O world of mine!
With mysterious delights
Of unknown feelings,
With multitudes of dreams and vision,
With inspiration's flame
With seeking of Truth,
With the forbidden wish
Of divine freedom.
O my belovèd world,
    I shall come.
Your dream of me
Is being born
It is I.
Already I am manifest
In mysterious presence
    A barely perceptible
    Breath of freedom.
    Lightly,
    A wisp of dream
    The wave
Of my being
Has already seized you.
You are quivering already
I am your belovèd freedom,
Thou art my belovèd world!
    I will come
    To dazzle you
    With the marvel
    Of enchantment repeated;
    I will bring you
    The magical thrill
    Of scorching love

И ласкъ неизвѣданныхъ,	And unimagined caresses.
Отдавайся довѣрчиво мнѣ!	Surrender to me in all faith!
Я настигну тебя океаномъ блаженствъ	I will drown you in oceans of bliss
Влюбленнымъ, манящимъ, ласкающимъ,	And belovèd kisses
То тяжелой волной набѣгающимъ,	And great heaving waves
То лишь въ отдаленьи играющимъ,	But in our remoteness playing
И цѣлующимъ тебя	Only the spray
Лишь разбрызгами.	Envelops you
А ты будешь безумно хотѣть	And you will insanely desire
Иного	Something else!
Новаго!	The new!
И тогда дождемъ цвѣточнымъ	And then in torrents of flowers
Буду падать на тебя,	I will lie upon you
Цѣлой гаммой ароматовъ	With all aromas and scents
Буду нѣжить и томить,	I will bask languidly
Игрой благоуханій	In this play of fragrance
То нѣжныхъ, то острыхъ,	Now tender, now sharp
Игрой прикосновеній,	In the play of touches,
То легкихъ, то бьющихъ.	Now soft, now harsh
И замирая	And sinking into passion
Ты будешь страстно	You will
Шептать:	Whisper:
Еще,	Again and
Всегда еще!	Ever again!
Тогда я ринусь на тебя	Then I will plunge
Толпой чудовищъ страшныхъ	With a horde of fearsome monsters
Съ дикимъ ужасомъ терзаній,	With savage torment and terror
Я наползу кишащимъ стадомъ змѣй	I will crawl upon you with verminous
И буду жалить и душить!	nests of snakes
А ты будешь хотѣть	And will bite and choke you!
Все безумнѣй, сильнѣй.	And you will want me
Я тогда упаду на тебя	More madly, more passionately.
Дождемъ дивныхъ солнцъ.	Then I will lie upon you
И зажгу васъ молніями	Under rays of celestial suns
Моей страсти,	And you will burn with the fires
Священные	Of my emotion
Огни желаній	The holy
Самыхъ сладостныхъ,	Flames of desire
	For the sweetest,

Самыхъ запретныхъ,
Самыхъ таинственныхъ.
И ты весь—одна волна
Свободы и блаженства.
Создавъ тебя множество,
И поднявъ васъ,
Легіоны чувствъ,
О чистыя стремленья,
Я создаю тебя,
Сложное единое,
Всѣхъ васъ охватившее
Чувство блаженства.
Я мигъ, излучающій вѣчность,
Я утвержденіе.
Я Экстазъ."
Пожаромъ всеобщимъ
Объята вселенная.
Духъ на вершинѣ бытья.
И чувствуетъ онъ
Силы божественной,
Воли свободной
Приливъ безконечный.
Онъ весь дерзновеніе.
Что угрожало—
Теперь возбужденье,
Что ужасало—
Теперь наслажденье,
И стали укусы пантеръ и геенъ
Лишь новою лаской,
Новымъ терзаньемъ,
А жало змѣи
Лишь лобзаньемъ сжигающимъ.
И огласилась вселенная
Радостнымъ крикомъ
Я есмь!

The most forbidden,
Most mysterious.
And all of you is a single wave
Of liberty and joy.
Multiplicity has created you.
Legions of feelings
Have elevated you
O pure desires,
I create you,
This complex unity
This feeling of bliss
Seizing you completely.
I am the instant illumining eternity
I the affirmation.
I am Ecstasy."
The universe
Is embraced by enveloping flames
Spirit at its summit of being
Feels
Endless tides
Of divine power
Of free will
Emboldened
That which menaced
Is now titillation
That which frightened
Is now pleasure.
And the bite of panther or hyena
Is a new caress
Another
And the serpent's sting
Is but a burning kiss.
And the universe resounds
With joyful cry
I am!

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Appendix C

Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy* by section

Thematic breaks	Line	Section	Metrical breaks
"static"	1-7	A_1	Trochaic tetrameter, alternating masculine and feminine endings
	8-11	A_2	2 trochees with dactylic ending followed by 2 3-foot anapests
	12-17	A_3	Trochaic tetrameter, all feminine endings
"dynamic"	18-23	B_1	Dactylic, variable anacrusis
	24-30	B_2	Dactylic, variable anacrusis
"static," changes in specific word choice without changes in structure or theme	31-34	A_2	Exact repetition
Changes in specific word choice without changes in structure or theme; extension of number of lines, some entirely new, some variants of original lines, but concluding with the same line	35-45	A_3	Exact repetition of metrical scheme, extended by 5 lines
"dynamic," but entirely different word choice	46-54	B_1	Dactylic, variable anacrusis
"static," exact repetition	55-61	A_1	Exact repetition
Changes in specific word choice without changes in structure or theme	62-65	A_2	Exact repetition
Changes in specific word choice without changes in structure or theme	66-71	A_3	Exact repetition
"dynamic," same phrase structure as B_1, but same thematic material as B_2; open-ended section, no clear end marker	72-???	$B_?$	Dactylic, variable anacrusis
"static," near-exact repetition	144-150	A_1	First two lines changed from trochaic tetrameter to choriambs (continuation of metrical pattern from preceding section); otherwise exact repetition

	151-220		Initial continuation of meter from preceding section, then alternating meters throughout
First use of second person	(154)		
First use of first person	(185)		Two lines of choriambs imbedded in a larger section of iambs
Preparation for next section, signaled by word choice and phrase structure	208-219	(A_2)	All choriambs, predominantly dactylic endings
Changes in specific word choice without changes in structure or theme	220-224	A_2	Exact repetition
Changes in specific word choice; the next section, while marked separate, begins with a continuation of this section's themes	225-???	A_3	Exact repetition of opening phrases
First person monologue of "the soul"; interaction of all previously used themes	227-349	$A_{3...?}$	Use of all previous meters
Final line; Я есмь!	369		One foot iamb

Full scansion of the A section of Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy*

Дух,	X́
Жаждой жизнь окрыленный,	X́ x X́ x X̆ x X́ x
Увлекается в полет	X̆ x X́ x X́ x X́
На высоты отрицанья,	X̆ x X́ x X̆ x X x
Там в лучах его мечты	X̆ x X́ x X̆ x X́
Возникает мир волшебный	X̆ x X́ x X́ x X́ x
Дивных образов и чувств.	X́ x X́ x X̆ x X
Дух играющий,	X́ x X́ x x
Дух желающий,	X́ x X́ x x
Дух, мечтою все создающий,	X́ x X́ x X́ x x X́ x
Отдается блаженству любви.	x x X́ x X́ x X́ x x X́
Средь возникнувших творений	X̆ x X́ x X̆ x X́ x
Он томленьем пребывает,	X̆ x X́ x X̆ x X x
Высотою вдохновений	X̆ x X́ x X̆ x X x
Их к расцвету призывает.	X̆ x X́ x X̆ x X́ x
И полетом опьяненный	X̆ x X́ x X́ x X́ x
Он готов уж впасть в забвенье	X̆ x X́ x X́ x X x
Но внезапно	X̆ x X́ x

Full texts of those *Alexandrian Songs* set to music

Numbers in parentheses indicate the poem's placement in the poetic cycle. All translations mine. On occasion the text of the song differs slightly from the text of the poem. In some cases these are clear typos; in others the meaning is shifted slightly. The variations are listed in the footnotes.

Book I

1. Вечерний сумрак (I.3)

Вечерний сумрак над теплым морем,	Evening dusk over the warm sea
огни маяков на потемневшем небе,	lighthouse fires against the darkening sky,
запах вербены при конце пира,	the scent of verbena at the end of the feast,
свежее утро после долгих бдений,	the fresh morning after long vigils,
прогулка в аллеях весеннего сада,	a walk in the alleys of a spring garden,
крики и смех купающихся женщин,	shouts and laughter of bathing women,
священные павлины у храма Юноны,	sacred peacocks at the temple of Juno,
продавцы фиалок, гранат и лимонов,	vendors of violets, pomegranates, and lemons,
воркуют голуби, светит солнце,	doves are cooking, the sun is shining
когда увижу тебя, родимый город![234]	when I will see you again, my native city!

2. Сладко умереть (IV.4)

Сладко умереть	Sweet it is to die
на поле битвы	on the field of battle
при свисте стрел и копий,	under the whistle of arrows and spears,
когда звучит труба	when the trumpet sounds
и солнце светит,	and the sun shines
в полдень,	at noon
умирая для славы отчизны	dying for the glory of the fatherland
и слыша вокруг:	and hearing all around:
«Прощай, герой!»	"Farewell, hero!"
Сладко умереть	Sweet it is to die
маститым старцем	as a venerable old man
в том же доме,	in the very same house,
на той же кровати,	on the very same bed,
где родились и умерли деды,	where your grandparents were born and died,
окруженным детьми,	surrounded by your children
ставшими уже мужами,	who have already become men,
и слыша вокруг:	and hearing all around:

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[234] In the song setting, Kuzmin slightly modifies the last two lines:

воркуют голуби, светит солнце.	doves are cooking, the sun is shining!
Когда увижу тебя, родимый город?	When I will see you again, my native city?

«Прощай, отец!»
Но еще слаще,
еще мудрее,
истративши все именье,
продавши последнюю мельницу
для той,
которую завтра забыл бы,
вернувшись
после веселой прогулки
в уже проданный дом,
поужинать
и, прочитав рассказ Апулея
в сто первый раз,
в теплой душистой ванне,
не слыша никаких прощаний,
открыть себе жилы;
и чтоб в длинное окно у потолка[235]
пахло левкоями,
светила заря,
и вдалеке были слышны флейты.

"Farewell, father!"
But it is still sweeter,
still wiser,
having spent up all your estate,
having sold your last mill,
for her,
whom you would forget tomorrow,
having returned
after a joyful stroll
to your already-sold home,
to dine
and, reading Apuleius
for the hundredth time,
in a warm, fragrant bath,
hearing no farewells at all,
to open your veins;
that, through the long window near the ceiling
would be the scent of stock,
that the dusk would glow,
and that flutes would be heard from the distance.

3. Что ж делать (IV.2)

Что ж делать,
что багрянец вечерних облаков
на зеленоватом небе,
когда слева уж виден месяц
и космато-огромная звезда,
предвестница ночи —
быстро бледнеет,
тает
совсем на глазах? [236]
Что путь по широкой дороге
между деревьев мимо мельниц,
бывших когда-то моими,
но промененных на запястья тебе,
где мы едем с тобой,
кончается там за поворотом
хотя б и приветливым
домом
совсем сейчас?
Что мои стихи,
дорогие мне,

What can be done,
if the crimson of evening clouds
against the greenish sky,
when the moon is already seen to the left
and the large, shaggy star
the harbinger of night —
quickly grows pale,
melts
right before one's eyes?
If the path along a narrow road
between trees, past the mills
which were once mine
but now are your bracelets,
where we travel together,
ends there past the bend
even though a friendly
home
is just beyond?
If my verses
as dear to me

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[235] The song lyric reads, "и чтоб в узкое окно у потолка" ("and that, through the narrow window near the ceiling")

[236] Song lyrics:

предвестница утра —
быстро бледнеют,
тают
совсем на глазах? [236]

the harbinger of morning —
would quickly grow pale,
would melt
right before one's eyes?

так же как Каллимаку
и всякому другому великому,
куда я влагаю любовь и всю нежность,
и легкие от богов мысли,
отрада утр моих,
когда небо ясно
и в окна пахнет жасмином,
завтра
забудутся, как и все?
Что перестану я видеть
твое лицо,
слышать твой голос?
Что выпьется вино,
улетучатся ароматы
и сами дорогие ткани
истлеют
через столетья?
Разве меньше я стану любить
эти милые хрупкие вещи
за их тленность?

as Callimachus
and each of the greats,
where I invest all my love and tenderness
and thoughts, light from the gods,
the comfort of my mornings,
when the sky is clear
and the smell of jasmine through the window,
tomorrow
would be forgotten, as everything will?
If I would cease to see
your face,
to hear your voice?
If the wine was drained
and the smells evaporated
and the expensive fabrics
decayed
over the course of a century?
Would I really begin to love
these dear, fragile things less
because they are subject to decay?

4. Я спрашивал (IV.1)

Я спрашивал мудрецов вселенной:
«Зачем солнце греет?
зачем ветер дует?
зачем люди родятся?»

I asked the wise men of the world:
Why does the sun give warmth?
why does the wind blow?
why are people born?”

Отвечали мудрецы вселенной:
— Солнце греет затем,
чтоб созревал хлеб для пищи
и чтобы люди от заразы мёрли.
Ветер дует затем,
чтоб приводить корабли к пристани дальней
и чтоб песком засыпать караваны.
Люди родятся затем,
чтоб расстаться с милою жизнью
и чтоб от них родились другие для смерти.

The wise men of the world replied:
“The sun gives warmth
for grain to grow for food
and for people to die of disease.
The wind blows
to carry boats to distant docks,
and to bury caravans in sand.
People are born
to part with their dear lives
and to give birth to more people to die.”

«Почему ж боги так все создали?»
— Потому же,
почему в тебя вложили желанье
задавать праздные вопросы.

“Why did the gods create it thus?”
“Because,
in order for you to have the desire
to ask useless questions.”

5. Если б я был (II.7)

Если б я был древним полководцем,
покорил бы я Эфиопию и Персов,
свергнул бы я фараона,
построил бы себе пирамиду
выше Хеопса,

If I were an ancient general,
I would subdue Ethiopia and Persia
I would topple the Pharaoh,
I would build myself a pyramid
Higher than Cheops’

и стал бы	And I would become
славнее всех живущих в Египте.	More glorious than anyone in Egypt.
Если б я был ловким вором,	If I were a nimble thief,
обокрал бы я гробницу Менкаура,	I would raid the tomb of Menkaura,
продал бы камни александрийским	I would sell the precious stones to
евреям,	the Alexandrian Jews,
накупил бы земель и мельниц,	I would buy up land and windmills,
и стал бы	And I would become
богаче всех живущих в Египте.	Richer than anyone in Egypt.
Если б я был вторым Антиноем,	If I were a second Antinous,
утопившимся в священном Ниле -	He who drowned in the sacred Nile -
я бы всех сводил с ума красотою,	I would drive everyone mad with my beauty,
при жизни мне были б	They would erect temples to me
воздвигнуты храмы,	during my lifetime,
и стал бы	And I would become
сильнее всех живущих в Египте.	More powerful than anyone in Egypt.
Если б я был мудрецом великим,	If I were a great sage,
прожил бы я все свои деньги,	I would go through all of my money,
отказался бы от мест и занятий,	I would renounce all posts and professions
сторожил бы чужие огороды -	I would watch over others' gardens,
и стал бы	And I would become
свободней всех живущих в Египте.	Freer than anyone in Egypt.
Если б я был твоим рабом последним,	If I were the least of your slaves,
сидел бы я в подземельи	I would sit in the dungeon
и видел бы раз в год или два года	And once a year or every two years,
золотой узор твоих сандалий,	I would see the golden tracery of your sandals
когда ты случайно мимо темниц	When you accidentally walk past
проходишь,	the prison,
и стал бы	And I would become
счастливей всех живущих в Египте.	Happier than anyone in Egypt.

6. Солнце, солнце (IV.5)

Солнце, солнце,	Sun, sun
божественный Ра-Гелиос,	divine Ra-Helios,
тобою веселятся	you gladden
сердца царей и героев,	the hearts of kings and heroes,
тебе ржут священные кони,	to you the sacred horses neigh,
тебе поют гимны в Гелиополе;	to you they sing hymns at Heliopolis;
когда ты светишь,[237]	when you shine,
ящерицы выползают на камни	lizards crawl out onto the stones
и мальчики идут со смехом	and children go with laughter
купаться к Нилу.	to bathe in the Nile.
Солнце, солнце,	Sun, sun
я — бледный писец,	I am a pale writer,
библиотечный затворник,	a library recluse,
но я люблю тебя, солнце, не меньше,	but I love you, sun, no less
чем загорелый моряк,[238]	than a sunburnt sailor,

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[237] The slightly-modified song lyric here makes more immediate sense, considering the lines that follow: "когда ты греешь" ("when you are giving warmth")

пахнущий рыбой и соленой водою,
и не меньше,
чем его привычное сердце
ликует
при царственном твоем восходе
из океана,
мое трепещет,
когда твой пыльный, но пламенный луч[239]
скользнет
сквозь узкое окно у потолка
на исписанный лист
и мою тонкую желтоватую руку,
выводящую киноварью
первую букву гимна тебе,
о Ра-Гелиос солнце!

who smells of fish and saltwater;
and no less
than his habitual heart
rejoices
at your royal rising
from the ocean,
does my heart tremble
when your dusty but fiery ray
slides
through the narrow window near the ceiling
onto a page covered with writing,
and onto my thin, yellowish hand
which is tracing with cinnabar
the first letter of a hymn to you,
O Ra-Helios sun!

Book II

1. Когда мне говорят "Александрия" (I.2)

Когда мне говорят: «Александрия»,
я вижу белые стены дома,
небольшой сад с грядкой левкоев,
бледное солнце осеннего вечера
и слышу звуки далеких флейт.

When they say to me: "Alexandria",
I see the white walls of a home,
a small garden with a bunch of stock,
the pallid sun of a fall afternoon,
and I hear the sound of distant flutes.

Когда мне говорят: «Александрия»,
я вижу звезды над стихающим городом,
пьяных матросов в темных кварталах,
танцовщицу, пляшущую «осу»,
и слышу звук тамбурина и крики ссоры.

When they say to me: "Alexandria",
I see stars above the calm city,
drunken sailors in unlit quarters
a dancer, dancing the "wasp",
and I hear the sound of tambourines and shouts
     of fighting.

Когда мне говорят: «Александрия»,
я вижу бледно-багровый закат над
          зеленым морем,
мохнатые мигающие звезды
и светлые серые глаза под густыми бровями,
которые я вижу и тогда,
когда не говорят мне: «Александрия!»

When they say to me: "Alexandria",
I see the pale-crimson sunset over
          the green sea,
the shaggy, twinkling stars
and bright grey eyes under thick brows
which I see even
when they don't say to me: "Alexandria!"

2. Когда утром выхожу из дома (II.5)

Когда утром выхожу из дома,
я думаю, глядя на солнце:
«Как оно на тебя похоже,

When I leave my home in the morning,
I think, looking at the sun:
"How it is like you,

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[238] In what must clearly be a typesetter's error, the song lyric reads "чем загорелый монах" ("than a
sunburnt monk")

[239] Another likely error: the song lyric reads "когда твой пышный, но пламенный луч" ("when your
magnificent, but fiery ray"). The "but" renders the phrase somewhat meaningless.

когда ты купаешься в речке
или смотришь на дальние огороды!»[240]
И когда смотрю я в полдень жаркий
на то же жгучее солнце,
я думаю про тебя, моя радость:
«Как оно на тебя похоже,
когда ты едешь по улице людной!»
И при взгляде на нежные закаты
ты же мне на память приходишь,
когда, побледнев от ласк, ты засыпаешь
и закрываешь потемневшие веки.

when you are bathing in the stream
or gazing over distant vegetable gardens!"
And at the hot noon, when I gaze
on that burning sun,
I think of you, my joy:
"How it is like you,
when you travel down the crowded streets!"
And on seeing the tender sunset
it is you who comes back to my memory,
when, pale from caresses, you fall asleep
and you close your darkening eyelids.

3. Ты – как у гадателя отрок (II.2)

Ты — как у гадателя отрок:
все в моем сердце читаешь,
все мои отгадываешь мысли,
все мои думы знаешь,
но знанье твое тут не велико
и не много слов тут и нужно,
тут не надо ни зеркала, ни жаровни:
в моем сердце, мыслях и думах
все одно звучит разными голосами:
«люблю тебя, люблю тебя навеки!»

You are like a prophet's apprentice:
you read everything in my heart,
you guess all of my ideas,
you know all of my thoughts
but your knowledge is not so much,
and not many words are needed,
nor are mirrors or torches needed:
in my heart, my ideas and my thoughts
everything cries together in different tongues:
"I love you, I love you eternally!"

4. Когда я тебя первый раз встретил (II.1)

Когда я тебя в первый раз встретил,
не помнит бедная память:
утром ли то было, днем ли,
вечером, или позднею ночью.
Только помню бледноватые щеки,
серые глаза под темными бровями
и синий ворот у смуглой шеи,
и кажется мне, что я видел это
          в раннем детстве,
хотя и старше тебя я многим.

The first time I met you,
my poor memory does not recall:
maybe it was morning, maybe daytime,
afternoon, or late at night.
I only recall the pale cheeks,
the grey eyes under dark brows,
the blue collar around a swarthy neck
and it seems to me that I saw this
                    from my earliest childhood,
even though I am much older than you.

5. Нас было четыре сестры (III.1)

Нас было четыре сестры, четыре сестры
          нас было,
все мы четыре любили, но все имели
          разные «потому что»:
одна любила, потому что так отец с матерью
          ей велели,
другая любила, потому что богат был ее
          любовник,

We were four sisters, and four sisters
                    were we,
all four of us loved, but all of us had
                    our different reasons:
the first loved because father and mother
                    told her to,
the second loved because her lover
                    was rich,

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[240] The song lyric provides "дынные огороды" ("melon gardens") instead.

третья любила, потому что он был
        знаменитый художник,
а я любила, потому что полюбила.

Нас было четыре сестры, четыре сестры
        нас было,
все мы четыре желали, но у всех были
        разные желанья:
одна желала воспитывать детей и варить кашу,
другая желала надевать каждый день
        новые платья,
третья желала, чтоб все о ней говорили,
а я желала любить и быть любимой.

Нас было четыре сестры, четыре сестры
        нас было,
все мы четыре разлюбили, но все имели
        разные причины:
одна разлюбила, потому что муж ее,
        умер,
другая разлюбила, потому что друг ее
        разорился,
третья разлюбила, потому что художник ее
        бросил,
а я разлюбила, потому что разлюбила.

Нас было четыре сестры, четыре сестры
        нас было,
а может быть, нас было не четыре, а пять?

the third loved because he was
        a famous artist,
and I loved, because I fell in love.

We were four sisters, and four sisters
        were we,
all three of us desired, but all of us had
        different desires:
The first desired to rear children and cook porridge,
the second desired to wear a different outfit
        every day,
the third desired that everyone talk about her,
and I desired to love and to be loved.

We were four sisters, and four sisters
        were we,
we all fell out of love, but all of us had
        our different reasons:
the first fell out of love because her husband
        died,
the second fell out of love because her lover
        lost everything,
the third fell out of love because the artist
        abandoned her,
and I fell out of love because I fell out of love.

We were four sisters, and four sisters
        were we,
or perhaps we were not four, but five?

6. Их было четверо в этот месяц (III.5)

Подражание П. Луису

Их было четверо в этот месяц,
но лишь один был тот, кого я любила.

Первый совсем для меня разорился,
посылал каждый час новые подарки
и продал последнюю мельницу, чтоб
        купить мне запястья,
которые звякали, когда я плясала,—
        закололся,
но он не был тот, кого я любила.

Второй написал в мою честь тридцать элегий,
известных даже до Рима, где говорилось,
что мои щеки — как утренние зори,
а косы — как полог ночи,
но он не был тот, кого я любила.

Третий, ах третий был так прекрасен,
что родная сестра его удушилась косою
из страха в него влюбиться,

Imitation of P. Loüys

There were four of them that month,
but only one was the one that I loved.

The first ruined himself for me,
he sent me new gifts every hour
and sold his last miss in order
        to buy me bracelets,
which clinked when I danced,—
        he stabbed himself,
but he was not the one that I loved.

The second wrote thirty elegies in my honor,
famous even as far as Rome, where it was said
that my cheeks were like the daybreak
and my hair like the curtains of night,
but he was not the one that I loved.

The third, ah, the third was so beautiful
that his sister strangled herself with her braid
from the fear of falling in love with him,

он стоял день и ночь у моего порога,
умоляя, чтоб я сказала: «Приди», но я молчала,
потому что он не был тот, кого я любила.

Ты же не был богат, не говорил про зори
       и ночи,
не был красив,
и когда на празднике Адониса я бросила тебе
       гвоздику,
посмотрел равнодушно своими светлыми
       глазами,
но ты был тот, кого я любила.

he stood day and night at my threshold
begging for me to say "Enter", but I was silent,
because he was not the one that I loved.

You were not rich, you did not talk of daybreak
       and night,
you were not beautiful,
and when I threw you a carnation at the festival
       of Adonis,
you looked at me indifferently with your bright
       eyes,
but you were the one that I loved.

Appendix F

Full text of "Three times I saw him"

Три раза я его видел лицом к лицу.	Three times I saw him face to face.
В первый раз шел я по саду,	The first time I was walking through the garden
посланный за обедом товарищам,	sent to get food for my comrades,
и, чтобы сократить дорогу,	and in order to shorten the trip,
путь мимо окон дворцового крыла избрал я,	I chose a path past the window of a courtyard
вдруг я услышал звуки струн,	suddenly I heard the sound of strumming,
и как я был высокого роста,	and as I am tall,
без труда увидел в широкое окно	I saw him without difficulty through the broad
его:	window:
он сидел печально один,	he was sitting alone, sadly
перебирая тонкими пальцами,	running his slender fingers over the strings
струны лиры	of a lyre
а белая собака	and a white dog
лежала у ног не ворча,	lay silently at his feet,
и только плеск водомета	and only the splash of a fountain
мешался с музыкой.	mingled with the music.
Почувствовав мой взгляд,	Feeling my gaze
он опустил лиру	he put down the lyre
и поднял опущенное лицо.	and raised his lowered face.
Волшебством показалась мне его красота	His beauty seemed like sorcery to me
и его молчанье в пустом покое	and his silence in the empty room
полднем!	like noontime!
И, крестясь, я побежал в страхе	And crossing myself, I ran in fear
прочь от окна...	away from the window…
Потом я был на карауле в Лохие	Then I was on sentry in Lochias
и стоял в переходе,	and I stood in the passageway
ведущем к комнате царского астролога.	leading to the chamber of the king's astrologer.
Луна бросала светлый квадрат на пол,	The moon cast a bright square on the floor,
и медные украшения моей обуви,	and the copper decorations of my shoes,
когда я проходил светлым местом,	whenever I crossed that bright spot,
блестели.	gleamed.
Услышав шум шагов,	Hearing the noise of footsteps,
я остановился.	I stood still.
Из внутренних покоев,	From the inner rooms
имея впереди раба с факелом,	and with a slave carrying a torch in front,
вышли три человека	three people came out
и он между ними.	and he among them.
Он был бледен,	He was pale,
но мне казалось,	but it seemed to me
что комната осветилась	that the room was illuminated
не факелом, а его ликом.	not by the torch, but by his face.
Проходя, он взглянул на меня	Passing by, he glanced at me
и, сказав: «Я тебя видел где-то, приятель»,	and saying, "I've seen you somewhere, friend,"
удалился в помещенье астролога.	he withdrew to the astrologer's lodgings.
Уже его белая одежда давно исчезла	His white clothes had long disappeared
и свет от факела, пропал,	and the light from the torch was gone,
а я все стоял, не двигаясь и	but I stood all the same, neither moving
не дыша,	nor breathing
и когда, легши в казарме,	and when, lying in the barracks
я почувствовал,	I felt

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что спящий рядом Марций
трогает мою руку обычным движением,
я притворился спящим.
Потом еще раз вечером мы встретились.
Недалеко от походных палаток Кесаря
мы купались,
когда услышали крики.
Прибежав, мы увидели, что уже поздно.
Вытащенное из воды тело
лежало на песке,
и то же неземное лицо,
лицо колдуна,
глядело незакрытыми глазами.
Император издали спешил,
пораженный горестной вестью,
а я стоял, ничего не видя
и не слыша, как слезы,
забытые с детства,
текли по щекам.
Всю ночь я шептал молитвы,
бредил родною Азией,
       Никомидией,
и голоса ангелов пели:
«Осанна!
Новый бог
дан людям!»

Martius, who was lying nearby
touch my hand with the usual motion,
I pretended to be asleep.
Then we met once more in the evening.
Not far from the Emperor's field tents
we were bathing,
when we heard shouts.
Running, we saw it was already too late.
The body fished out from the water
lay on the sand,
and that same unearthly face,
the face of a sorcerer
stared with eyes unclosed.
The emperor was hurrying from afar,
staggering from the sorrowful news,
but I stood, seeing nothing
and hearing nothing, as tears,
forgotten since childhood,
ran down my cheeks.
All night I whispered prayers
talking deliriously about my native Asia
       my Nicomedia,
and voices of angels sang:
"Hosanna!
A new god
has been given to men!"

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