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“A Fullness of Living Forces”: Viacheslav Ivanov’s Poetics of Theurgy

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Slavic Languages and Literatures

by

Jeffrey T. Riggs

2018

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“A Fullness of Living Forces”: Viacheslav Ivanov’s Poetics of Theurgy

by

Jeffrey T. Riggs

Doctor of Philosophy in Slavic Languages and Literatures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Ronald W. Vroon, Chair

Developing poetry into a form of theurgy (“divine work,” from the Greek *θεουργία*) is perhaps the most heraldically proclaimed yet scantily defined preoccupation of the Russian Symbolist poet Viacheslav Ivanov (1866-1949). The Symbolist movement’s philosophical progenitor, Vladimir Solov’ev (1853-1900), sounded the clarion call for theurgic art in his treatise *Crisis of Western Philosophy* (1874), however the concept of theurgy dates to late antiquity, when the Neoplatonist philosophers Iamblichus (c. 245–c. 325 CE) and Proclus (412–485 CE) posited theurgic ritual as superior to theological discourse. While it has been established that Ivanov followed Solov’evian paradigms in creating theurgic art, the Neoplatonic context of Ivanov’s engagement with theurgy has remained hitherto unexplored in Slavist scholarship.

This dissertation argues for Neoplatonic theurgy as an active constituent in Ivanov’s poetics and theory of the symbol. Being an accomplished classical historian and philologist as

well as a poet and theoretician, Ivanov incorporated both Solov'evian and Neoplatonic theurgic ideas into his highly allusive, richly symbolic, and archaically stylized poetry. Neoplatonism supplied Ivanov with a notion of the symbol as a conduit of divine mysteries, a mythopoetic device, and a functional element of ritual practice. With the aid of theurgically charged symbols, Ivanov sought to construe Dionysus and the Orphic mystery rites associated with him as predecessors to Christ and the Christian sacraments.

Ivanov's theurgic project is particularly exemplified by "Suspiria," a poetic cycle which draws symbolic parallels between Orphic and Christian rituals. The epigraph to "Psyche," a poem contained in the cycle, features a quotation from the Orphic gold tablets (ancient leaves of gold foil bearing hexametrical post-mortem instructions for initiates into Dionysian mystery cults), which Ivanov discusses in theurgic terms in his philological treatise *Dionysus and Predionysianism*. Cross-referencing Ivanov's philological and poetic works reveals that his research on ancient theurgy provided material that he re-deployed as theurgic symbols in his poetry. The "Suspiria" cycle's streamlining of Orphic mystery rites with Christian sacraments is not merely a representation of a historical lineage, but an enactment of theurgic ritual through symbolic poetry.

The dissertation of Jeffrey T. Riggs is approved.

David L. Blank

Gail D. Lenhoff

Ronald W. Vroon, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2018

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JEFFREY T. RIGGS

Education

University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

Ph.D. Slavic Languages and Literatures (expected June 2018)

Dissertation: "A Fullness of Living Forces": Viacheslav Ivanov's Poetics of Theurgy

Chair: Ronald Vroon

Committee: David Blank, Gail Lenhoff

Ph.D. Musicology (expected October 2018)

Dissertation: Rimsky-Korsakov the Antiquarian: Visions and Reconfigurations of the Slavic Past in the Opera *Sadko*

Chair: Mitchell Morris

Committee: Robert Fink, Raymond Knapp, Ronald Vroon

New College of Florida (Honors College of Florida)

B.A. (with Honors), Russian Language and Literature, 2006

Publication

Riggs, Jeffrey. "Greco-Slavonic Liturgies in Viacheslav Ivanov's 'Suspiria' Cycle," in *"On Behalf of All and For All": The Place of Liturgy in Russian Art and Culture*. Edited by Sean Griffin, Jeffrey Riggs, and Ronald Vroon. UCLA Slavic Studies, New Series: Slavica (forthcoming).

Invited Conferences

"*Bogodēistvie* and *Teurgiia* in Viacheslav Ivanov's 'Suspiria' Cycle." Presented at the Annual Conference of the American Association for the Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages (AATSEEL), February, 2018.

"Nietzschean Inflections in Dmitrii Merezhkovsky's *novoe religioznoe soznanie*." Presented at the Annual Conference of the American Association for the Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages (AATSEEL), January, 2012.

"Obscuring the Lyric Self: Viacheslav Ivanov and the Poetic Problem of Individuation." Presented at the Annual Conference of the American Association for the Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages (AATSEEL), January, 2011.

"The Musical Divine: Dmitrii Kastal'skii, Early Music, and Russian Metaphysical Symbolism." Presented at the Annual Conference of the American Association for the Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages (AATSEEL), December, 2009.

"Native Subtexts: Russian Liturgical Music in Viacheslav Ivanov's *Kormchie zvezdy*." Presented at the University of Helsinki's "Russianness" Conference, December, 2009.

“The Center and Periphery of the Symbolist Poetic Text: Viacheslav Ivanov and Valerii Briusov’s ‘Tvorchestvo.’” Presented at the University of California, Berkeley at the California Slavic Colloquium, April, 2009.

UCLA Conferences

“The Problem of Musical Representation in Aleksandr Skriabin’s Third Symphony, ‘The Divine Poem’ (op. 43).” Presented at UCLA’s conference “Scriabin among the Symbolists: A Centennial Symposium,” March, 2015 (co-organized by me, Ryan Rowen, and Mitchell Morris).

“Greco-Slavonic Liturgies in Viacheslav Ivanov’s ‘Suspiria’ Cycle.” Presented at UCLA’s conference “‘On Behalf of All and For All’: The Place of Liturgy in Russian Art and Culture,” October, 2012 (co-organized by me, Sean Griffin, and Ronald Vroon).

Research Interests

Neoplatonic theurgy in Russian Symbolism
Hellenic strains in early twentieth-century Russian poetry
Interdisciplinary approaches to the study of poetry and music
Folkloric sensibilities in nineteenth-century Russian opera

Courses Taught at UCLA as an Instructor of Record

The History of Electronic Dance Music	2016
Writing about Music	2015
Old-Time and Bluegrass Performance Ensemble	2014-2015
The Beatles	2014

Courses Taught at UCLA as a Teaching Assistant, Associate, and Fellow

Courses in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures

Great Russian Novels	2017
Introduction to Russian Civilization	2016
Christianities East and West	2014
The Nineteenth-Century Russian Novel in Translation	2010
Beginning Russian Language	2009-2010

Courses in the Department of Musicology

The History of Rock ‘n’ Roll	2016
Contemporary Jewish and Israeli Music	2016
Film and Music	2015
Music in Los Angeles	2013
The Blues	2013
Writing about Music	2013

Introduction –
Bad Poet or Good Theurgist?

1. The “Bad Poet”

I recall an informal conversation with a senior colleague several years ago, before I started working on my dissertation, that has been formative in the development of my work. I had begun doing research on Neoplatonist philosophy, and had discovered what I thought to be some astounding parallels with Russian Symbolism that had gone unnoticed in the scholarship on the Symbolist movement. Over a watery cup of campus store coffee, I excitedly hashed out my plans for delving into the notion of theurgy in Russian Symbolism further than prior scholars had attempted. What was needed, I contended, was a thorough investigation of the significance of the Neoplatonist theurgists to Ivanov and the other classically inclined Symbolists. Upon exhaustively sketching the trajectory of my proposed work – which would first review the centrality of the symbol to theurgic Neoplatonism, then uncover the earlier and previously undetected theurgic strain in Russian culture introduced through the Church Slavonic translations of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus, and, finally, apply this philosophically, theologically and historically broadened framework for theurgy to Ivanov’s early poetry and theory of the symbol – he emitted a guffaw. Then came the succinct reply: “But you know Ivanov is a *bad poet*, right? Why do you need to do all of that background work on a poet who’s not really worth reading in the first place?” I was left aghast. I rushed to Ivanov’s defense, citing the intricate referentiality and palimpsestic intertextuality of his poems, his neologistic inventiveness, the bold programmaticity of his theory, his encyclopaedic knowledge of the classical tradition. All of this, however, only seemed to reinforce the scorn that my colleague had conveyed by drawing

out the two syllables in *bad poet*. At the time, I did not realize that I was contending not only with his opinion of Ivanov's poetry, but with a longstanding tradition of the poet's reception that dismisses him for precisely the reasons that I had mustered in his defense.

If one is to do a serious investigation of Ivanov's notion of theurgy, which involves thorough background work on Neoplatonist theurgy and Hellenic ritual practice, one also has to contend with the impression of Ivanov as a "bad poet." Elucidating the topic of theurgy in Ivanov's corpus involves tackling head-on the difficult aspects of his style – his convoluted syntax, his Slavonicizing lexicon, his relentlessly arcane references – that many have found unpleasant. This task will be attempted in the ensuing pages – not only in an effort at convincing his detractors to take him seriously, but, in an exegetical vein, in an effort at elucidating the obscure aspects of his poetry, and, most importantly, at understanding its difficulty as one of its core devices.

While the difficulty of Ivanov's verse has elicited criticism since his debut volume, *Kormchie zvezdy*, in 1903, "Critics (have) failed to relate the formal difficulty of his poetry either to his subject matter or to his poetics."¹ It is in fact when the level of difficulty is treated as a formal device that theurgy turns from a wishful proclamation of Ivanov's theoretical essays into an active element of his poetics. While Ivanov propounds the necessity for theurgic art in his theoretical essays, his guidelines for how poetry in general constitutes theurgy, and how *his* poetry specifically operates on theurgic premises, remain a matter for conjecture. These questions have remained unanswered precisely because a cross-referencing of Neoplatonist theurgic thought with Ivanov's theurgy has not been attempted until the present work. This

¹ Pamela Davidson, "The Legacy of Difficulty in the Russian Poetic Tradition: Contemporary Critical Responses to Ivanov's 'Cor Ardens'." *Cahiers du Monde russe*, vol. 35, no. 1/2, (Jan.-Jun., 1994), p. 252.

endeavor reveals extensive parallels between the two, and even offers a new way of reading the difficult aspects of Ivanov's poetics: as theurgic devices. Doing the background work on theurgy supplies convincing explanations for why *not* understanding Ivanov at first glance is a deliberate and carefully wrought feature of his poetics.

Ivanov's heraldic yet equivocal pronouncements on theurgic art have led many scholars to chalk his preoccupation with theurgy up to *fin-de-siècle* anxiety, mysticism, or infatuation with the occult.² Though, on the one hand, theurgy clearly fits this rubric, on the other hand, this explanation does not draw a complete picture in the case of Ivanov, who understood theurgy in philological, philosophical, and historical terms, and attempted to make theurgy into a poetic device. It is somewhat ironic that while Ivanov is consistently accused of academic dryness or philological pedantry, he did not make the connections between his own theurgic aims and theurgy in late antiquity explicit. His philological treatise *Dionis i pradionisiistvo (Dionysus and Predionysianism)* demonstrates that he was well aware of the Neoplatonist sources for theurgy, however his theoretical essays paint theurgy in a more wistful and, indeed, mystical light. It is when Ivanov's philological, theoretical, and poetic endeavors are considered concurrently and coextensively that the full breadth of theurgic significance is revealed in his work.

Ivanov fashioned numerous intellectual identities for himself throughout his life (1866-1949): classical philologist, poet, theoretician, translator, *leser* dramatist, and, finally, prose writer. Ivanov started out as a classical historian studying Roman history under Theodor Mommsen in Berlin before discovering the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and devoting himself to

² See in particular Maria Carlson, "Fashionable Occultism: Spiritualism, Theosophy, Freemasonry, and Hermeticism in Fin-de-Siècle Russia," in Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 135-152.

writing poetry.³ Scholars have customarily considered his poetry, translations, drama, and theoretical essays to be in some way interrelated. Vladimir Markov notes that “Ivanov habitually conceived his best ideas first poetically and later formulated them in his essays, lectures, speeches, prefaces, and letters.”⁴ Ivanov’s work as a historian and philologist, however, is generally viewed as an outlier to his creative efforts. For many of his critics, his philological background is perceived as being at odds with his poetry, as exemplified by Zara Martirosova Torlone’s appraisal that “...the humanistic school system of eighteenth- and especially nineteenth-century Russia produced a number of classical scholars who were also good poets (Annensky and Ivanov) and poets who were also classical scholars (Fet and Briusov).”⁵ Here, in contrast to Fet and Briusov, who are poets foremost and *then* scholars, Annensky and Ivanov are scholars who are “also” poets. Ivanov’s scholarly identity is construed as inorganically tied, even undesirably appended, to his work as a poet. Furthermore, his classical scholarship is seen as somehow primary to, or dominating over, his poetry. This characterization has often led to the impression that Ivanov’s poetry is detrimentally impacted by his early scholarly work. As Pamela Davidson states, “Ivanov was frequently dubbed a scholar masquerading as a poet but unable to shed his academic bookishness.”⁶ The relationship between Ivanov’s philology and

³ Ivanov’s first dissertation, which was written in Latin, was on agrarian taxation in the late Roman empire, and remained undefended and unpublished in his lifetime. He wrote a second dissertation, which he defended at the University of Baku in 1923, entitled *Dionis i pradiionisiistvo*.

⁴ Vladimir Markov, Review of *Sobranie sochinenii, vol. 3 by Viacheslav Ivanov, D.V. Ivanov, O. Deshart*, in *Slavic Review*, vol. 40, No. 3, (Fall, 1981), p. 464.

⁵ Zara Martirosova Torlone, *Russia and the Classics: Poetry’s Foreign Muse* (London: Duckworth, 2009), p. 10.

⁶ Davidson, “The Legacy of Difficulty in the Russian Poetic Tradition,” p. 252.

poetry is usually viewed in terms of prefiguration: the philology came before the poetry, which explains why the poetry is so dense and unreadable. Though Ivanov is commonly dubbed a philological poet, his philological works are understood as being distinct from his poetic output.

A different picture begins to take shape, however, when Ivanov's philological and creative efforts are viewed as parts of an integral whole. If the philology and the poetry are considered to be organically combined, Ivanov's philological work on Dionysian religion becomes an indispensable hermeneutic tool in approaching his poetry, as will be demonstrated in chapter 4. Markov's astute remarks on the interpretive value of Ivanov's essayistic and belletristic output on his poetry apply equally to his scholarship. As Ol'ga Deschartes comments in her introduction to Ivanov's collected works, "ego filosofskie stat'i i nauchnye issledovan'ia vseгда – teoreticheskaia transkriptsiiia ego stikhov, ikh interpretatsiia, vsestoronnii k nim kommentarii."⁷ An understanding of Ivanov's philology as integrally related to his poetry is still in its developmental phases.⁸ When the dismissive tone is removed from the categorization of his poetry as "philological," the implication becomes that there is more lying beneath the surface than can be apprehended at first glance. Construing the relationship between the philology and the poetry as mutually informed and coextensive rather than as "primary" and "secondary" offers a new set of insights into Ivanov's creative process.

Delving into the philological aspect of Ivanov's poetry requires some explanation, and must be attempted cautiously. On the one hand, the endeavor to explain Ivanov's polysemic

⁷ Ol'ga Deschartes, "Vvedenie," in Viacheslav Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. I, (Brussels: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1971), pp. 115-116. ("...his philosophical articles and scholarly studies are always a theoretical transcription of his poems, an interpretation of and detailed commentary on them.") Translations from the Russian are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁸ The inaugural study on this theme is Filip Vestbruk, *Dionis i dionisiiskaia tragediia: Viacheslav Ivanov: filologicheskie i filosofskie idei o dionisiistve* (München: Sagner, 2009).

symbolic language can be perceived as succumbing to his cleverly designed and recursively constructed trap. Playing Ivanov at his game begs for a justification of the effort, since it is one that few readers are prepared to make. It may seem somewhat like accepting Ivanov at face value, like falling for the riddles that he deploys as philological diversion tactics. On the other hand, however, this impression would carry more than a tinge of irony, considering the systematicity, exactitude, and sheer erudition of his referentiation. What the effort reveals is that the remarkable intertextuality of Ivanov's poetry does not disclose itself on the basis of cursory readings. As Avril Pyman remarks, "Reading his poetry is rather like mounting the slippery marble slabs to the Parthenon."⁹ The subtextual layers of each poem are not meant to be discerned without concerted effort and additional research. Indeed, its aura of difficulty was an intended effect on Ivanov's part, one which gave his critics good reason to call his poetry "philological." This difficulty was not merely self-serving, or designed to mock his readers, however; it was designed to reward intense scrutiny and dedicated inquiry. While there is a kind of byzantine complexity at the surface level of Ivanov's poetry, there is a resounding consistency of thematics and purpose upon closer inspection. Ivanov may lead readers far afield, and not shy from exposing their ignorance, but his symbolics prove to be interconnected. Mandel'stam described Ivanov's symbolic system as having an "astronomical circularity."¹⁰ To borrow a musical metaphor, the tension that is created by its difficulty is always accompanied by a sense of resolution if one hears him out.

⁹ Avril Pyman, *A History of Russian Symbolism* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press), p. 188.

¹⁰ Quoted from Sergei Averintsev, "The Poetry of Viacheslav Ivanov," in *Viacheslav Ivanov: Poet, Critic and Philosopher*, ed. Robert Louis Jackson and Lowry Nelson, Jr. (Columbus: Slavica Publishers, Inc., 1986), p. 28.

2. “Something deeply scholastic waft(s) from Mr. Ivanov’s book”

The reception of Ivanov’s verse has been remarkably polarized since his appearance on the Russian literary scene in the first decade of the twentieth century. Whether critics, fellow poets, and scholars dismiss or welcome the difficulty of Ivanov’s verse, it is precisely its level of difficulty that almost always occupies the foreground of the discussion. Mikhail Bakhtin sums this up succinctly in stating that “Osnovnoi osobennost’iu Viach. Ivanova iavliaetsia bol’shaia zatrudnennost’.”¹¹ In many instances, the reaction to the difficulty trends toward the negative.¹²

Petr Krasnov’s review of *Kormchie zvezdy* exemplifies a typical response:

...мертвечиной, бессодержательностью, пустою словесною забавою, чем-то глубоко школьным (схоластическим) веет от книги г. Иванова. Это не вдохновение, а скорее упражнение в разных размерах и родах лирической поэзии на академические темы. Его остроты педантичны; форма всегда умышленно и неумышленно неоригинальна, и вся книга носит характер чего-то совершенно ненужного, безжизненного.¹³

¹¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, “Viacheslav Ivanov,” in *Viacheslav Ivanov: Pro et contra: lichnost’ i tvorchestvo Viacheslava Ivanova v otsenke russkikh i zarubezhnykh myslitelei i issledovatelei: antologiya*, vol. 2, ed. by D.K. Bogatyrev; compiled by K.G. Isupov, A.B. Shishkin (St. Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo russkoi khristianskoi gumanitarnoi akademii, 2016), p. 11. (“The foundational feature of Viacheslav Ivanov is great difficulty.”)

¹² Negative reactions are not found across the board, however. Ivanov’s erudition is almost uniformly revered, if not necessarily welcomed in the format of lyric poetry. When his verse is positively evaluated, it is often as a continuation of the classical tradition in Russian poetry. Vladimir Ern heralded Ivanov as being at the forefront of a “Vozrozhdenie v pravoslavnoi Rossii” (“Renaissance in Orthodox Russia”). Vladimir Ern, “O velikolepii i skeptitsizme (k kharakteristike adogmatizma),” in *Viacheslav Ivanov: Pro et contra*, vol. 1, p. 384. The Russian classicist Faddei Zelinskii published an essay on Ivanov, which was particularly laudatory of Ivanov’s introduction of Greek meters into Russian poetry, in 1933 entitled “Poet slavianskogo vozrozhdeniia Viacheslav Ivanov” (“Viacheslav Ivanov: A Poet of the Slavic Renaissance”). Faddei Zelinskii, “Poet slavianskogo vozrozhdeniia Viacheslava Ivanova,” in *Viacheslav Ivanov: Pro et contra*, vol. 1, pp. 535-541.

¹³ Petr Krasnov, “Retsenziia na knigu: Viach. Ivanov. *Kormchie zvezdy: Kniga liriki*,” in *Viacheslav Ivanov: Pro et contra*, vol. 1, p. 44. (“...carrion, vacuity, empty verbal play, and something deeply scholastic waft from Mr. Ivanov’s book. This is not inspiration, but more like

Krasnov's appraisal offers merely one example of how Ivanov's highly allusive thematics and formal complexity were frequently perceived as a form of scholastic pedantry instead of pure lyric poetry. The most common impression that Ivanov's poetry seems to leave among reviewers is one of dry impersonality. Krasnov even goes a step further in accusing Ivanov of a lack of inspiration that results in his poetry being "unoriginal." This sentiment is echoed by Bakhtin: "Ni odnoi novoi formy (Ivanov) ne sozdal. Vsia ego poeziia est' genial'naia restavratsiia vseh sushchestvuiushchikh do nego form."¹⁴ The allusiveness of Ivanov's verse is often viewed as having a citational quality, which, in many critics' estimation, is a detriment to its originality.

Poets contemporaneous with Ivanov likewise exhibited ambivalent reactions to the difficulty of his poetry. Fellow Symbolist Andrei Belyi described Ivanov's early poetry as a "laboratoriia filologicheskikh opytov," a phrase associating his verse with the sterility of scientific experimentation.¹⁵ In one of his letters to Ivanov, Osip Mandel'shtam took a more reverential stance: "Vy – samyi neponiatnyi, samyi temnyi, v obydenom slovopotreblenii, poet nashego vremeni – imenno ottogo, chto kak nikto verny svoei stikhii – soznatel'no poruchiv

exercises in various meters and types of lyric poetry on academic themes. His witticisms are pedantic; the form is always intentionally and unintentionally unoriginal, and the whole book has the character of something absolutely unnecessary and lifeless.")

¹⁴ Bakhtin, "Viacheslav Ivanov," in *Viacheslav Ivanov: Pro et contra*, vol. 2, p. 11. ("Not one new form did Ivanov create. All of his poetry is an ingenious restoration of all the forms which existed before him.")

¹⁵ Quoted from the commentary to A. Blok, "Retsenziia na knigu: Viacheslav Ivanov. *Prozrachnost': Vtoraia kniga liriki*," in *Viacheslav Ivanov: Pro et contra*, vol. 1, p. 753. ("a laboratory of philological experiments")

sebia ei.”¹⁶ While acknowledging the difficulty of Ivanov’s verse in no uncertain terms (“samyi neponiatnyi, samyi temnyi”), Mandel’stam places it in a more charitable light by explaining it as being “true to (Ivanov’s) element.” Mandel’stam’s sentiment conveys an insight that goes against what many critics perceived as an element of impersonality in Ivanov’s verse. Ivanov, after all, was a trained classical philologist, and many of his erudite references held a personal significance to him if not for his readers. What Belyi viewed as a “laboratory of philological experiments” was in fact an assemblage of “pilot stars,” which, for Ivanov at least, were vested with a significance beyond that of learned puzzles or sterile trials. When one looks past the erudition of Ivanov’s symbolism, one can glimpse whole constellations of meaning – akin to Baudelairean *correspondances* – which point to an array of cultural and intellectual traditions, while remaining grounded in the poet’s lived experience. More to the point, Ivanov was situating his personal voice and lyrical sensibilities within the classical tradition in his poetry, interpreting his own life through the symbols and poetic forms that spoke directly to him.

The reception of Ivanov’s poetry was in an important sense prefigured by the readerly expectations for Russian lyric poetry at the beginning of the twentieth century – namely, that it be comprehensible, that it convey personal intimacy, and that it follow the stylistic guidelines established in the early nineteenth century. Pamela Davidson explains that

Poetry is generally deemed to be difficult when there is a gap between the poet’s practice and the expectations or knowledge of the reader. Since expectations are largely conditioned by habit, and knowledge is developed through familiarity, it is evident that difficulty in poetry is a relative concept subject to shifting perceptions as the generations

¹⁶ Quoted from Sergei Averintsev, “Sistemnost’ simbolov v poezii Viacheslava Ivanova,” in *Viacheslav Ivanov: Pro et contra*, vol. 2, p. 27. (“You are the most unintelligible poet of our time, the most obscure, in the ordinary use of the word – precisely because you, like no one else, are true to your element – having consciously entrusted yourself to it.” Translation by Suzanne Fusso in Robert Louis Jackson and Lowry Nelson, Jr., ed., *Viacheslav Ivanov: Poet, Critic, Philosopher*, p. 26.)

succeed each other and poetic practice evolves... With hindsight, difficulty as a category can often be seen to have played a pioneering and innovative role...¹⁷

Certain aspects of Ivanov's poetry, such as his penchant for neologisms, mark the path to ensuing Russian Modernist movements such as Futurism. Other aspects, such as his cultivation of a high style replete with Slavonicisms, point back to the eighteenth century. The difficulty, in other words, was both innovatory and "atavistic" (a common epithet leveled against Symbolist poetry in general). It bridged a gap to the experiments with language that would come to define *zaumnaia poeziia* (trans-sense poetry) in the early 1910s, while simultaneously harking back to a pre-Pushkinian, arcane high style developed in the eighteenth century. His poetry's defiance of ready classification was clearly one of the causes of Ivanov's critics' consternation.

His classicizing tendency led a number of Ivanov's early readers to dub him a modern-day Vasilii Tred'iakovskii. Remarking on his references to pre-Christian Slavic deities (a mainstay of the Russian Baroque), Pyman states that "By the end of the nineteenth century, the Russian ear was no longer accustomed to such references except in historical ballads of the type written by Aleksei Tolstoy or in comic verse."¹⁸ Ridicule was not an uncommon reaction to the aura of profundity that Ivanov attempted to create. Aleksandr Izmailov composed two poems parodying Ivanov's high style – the second of which compares him to Tred'iakovskii, Derzhavin and Kiukhel'beker.¹⁹ Nikolai Asheshov called Ivanov the "Tred'iakovski(i) nashikh dnei."²⁰ While the comparison with Tred'iakovskii is intended pejoratively, it gets at a key feature of

¹⁷ Davidson, "The Legacy of Difficulty in the Russian Poetic Tradition," p. 250.

¹⁸ Pyman, *A History of Russian Symbolism*, p. 188.

¹⁹ Davidson, "The Legacy of Difficulty in the Russian Poetic Tradition," p. 264.

²⁰ Quoted from the commentary to N. Segal-Rudnik, "Dionisiistvo kak priem," in *Viacheslav Ivanov: Pro et contra*, vol. 2, p. 792. ("The Tred'iakovskii of our times.")

Ivanov's style – namely, its departure from the paradigm set for Russian lyric verse in the early nineteenth century. Features of Ivanov's poetry such as its abundant Slavonicisms, Grecian syntax, and classical references all hark back to a mode of Russian poetic expression which had gone mute for over a century. As Sergei Averintsev points out, “Viacheslav Ivanov khotel kak by pereigrat' istoricheskuiu pobedy ‘Arzamas’ nad slavianshchinoi ‘Besedy liubitelei russkogo slova’ i cherez golovu Pushkina vernut'sia k dopushkinskim istokam russkoi poezii.”²¹ Though by the early twentieth century, the Pushkinian middle style of Russian lyric poetry had become the status quo, Ivanov's cultivation of a high style was not without precedent, and indeed represented a continuation of stylistic strains prevalent in eighteenth-century Russian poetry.

The impression of Ivanov's verse as overly pedantic or academically dry persists even in present-day scholarship. As James West notes, “occasional detractors have accused (Ivanov) of an abstruseness bordering on hermeticism.”²² The scholarly criticism of Ivanov's style tends to highlight the same difficult features that commanded the attention of his initial critics. A telling example, albeit rather extreme even within the detractor camp, follows below:

Ivanov, as most of his articles show, came to the purely intellectual conviction that the Dionysian experience of pan-unity is necessary to artistic creativity, but because of internal fears he did not adhere to his own conclusions in lyrics, drying up his soul and disconnecting it from bodily perception of the world. His soul lay like a mummy within the sarcophagus of the Self, in an empty room inside the pyramid of his cosmological and historical views. These demonized feelings turned into lemurs from *Faust* which are

²¹ Sergei Averintsev, “Vstupitel'naia stat'ia,” in *Viacheslav Ivanov. Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, ed. and compiled by R.E. Pomirchego (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1976), p. 35. (“Viacheslav Ivanov wanted to, as it were, replay the historical victory of ‘Arzamas’ over the Slavonicizing of the ‘Society for the Lovers of the Russian Word,’ and through the head of Pushkin to return to the pre-Pushkinian sources of Russian poetry.”)

²² James West, “Ty esi,” in Fausto Malcovati, ed., *Cultura e memoria: Atti del terzo Simposio Internazionale dedicato a Vjacheslav Ivanov* (Florence: La Nuova Italia), p. 231.

commanded by the other-Mephistopheles..., crowding around the open sarcophagus shouting: “Who built...such a bad house?!”²³

This appraisal recapitulates much of the rhetoric of scholastic hollowness and lack of vitality which typified the early reception of Ivanov’s verse. While the perception of Ivanov’s difficulty is perhaps more explicable coming from fellow poets and consternated reviewers, it comes not without a dose of irony from contemporary scholars. Why, after all, would scholars revile a scholarly poet for being extremely learned? Does Ivanov not present a wealth of complexity for scholars to disentangle and interpret? Ivanov’s verse, like that of many Modernists, begs for a scholarly apparatus to facilitate its difficulty and elucidate its obscurity. If scholars pale at the task, then the labeling of his poetry as difficult ends the discussion rather than sparking lively debate about the nature of the complexity. It is when complexity is deemed too difficult that inquiry ceases, and dismissal begins. What is worse, it turns the characterization of “difficult poet” into “bad poet.”

3. “The symbols themselves, by themselves”

A closer investigation of Neoplatonist theurgy presents ready-made explanations for many of the elements of Ivanov’s poetry which commonly elicit criticism. As the Greek philosophical tradition entered late antiquity, a subset of Platonist philosophers began to advocate theurgy, a form of ritual practice, over theology, or discursive thought. The distinction between theurgy and theology is built into the semantic structure of the terms in the Greek: *theourgia* combines the roots *theos* (“god,” “divine”) and *ergon* (“work,” “act,” “deed”), whereas

²³ Uri Daigin, “Magical-Theurgical Language Theories of the Russian Symbolists,” in Daniel Abrams and Avraham Elquayam, ed., *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*, vol. 14 (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2006), p. 144.

theologia combines *theos* and *logos* (“word,” “reasoning,” “discourse”). Theurgy may therefore be translated as “divine work” – a rendering which emphasizes the sense of ritual action that it carried in Neoplatonism. While theology is discursive and philosophical, theurgy is based on the ritual implementation of esoteric symbols. Theurgy’s primary advocates, Iamblichus (c. 245-325) and Proclus (412-486), describe theurgy as complementary to theology, in that theurgy is thought to take up where theology leaves off. The purpose of engaging in theurgy (and theology) is for the soul to attain *henosis*, or unity, with the One – the highest being in the Neoplatonic cosmological hierarchy.

Theurgy was based on ritual practices involving the use of *symbola*, or symbols. The *Chaldean Oracles*, a collection of archaically stylized Greek hexameter verses dating to the second century CE (which has survived only in fragments from quotations by later authors), served as a theurgic sourcebook for Iamblichus and Proclus. The *Oracles* sketched the cosmology within which theurgy was thought to function as well as containing divination guides and classifications of symbols. Neoplatonic theurgists regarded poetic verses (much like the arcane hexameters of the *Oracles*), divine names, music, Plato’s dialogues, and material objects as symbols. The procedures for theurgic rituals and the symbols which were used in their performance are unknown, as they were most likely passed on exclusively to initiates and transmitted orally to ensure secrecy. The piecemeal remnants of the *Oracles* unfortunately do not offer a clear indication of the specifics of theurgic practice.

In a passage from his treatise *On the Mysteries*,²⁴ Iamblichus asserts the centrality of symbol and ritual to theurgic practice, stating that “...it is the accomplishment of acts not to be

²⁴ This title is a translation of Marsilio Ficino’s Latin edition of the text, *De mysteriis*, which appeared in 1497. Iamblichus’ original Greek title translates to “Response of the Teacher

divulged and beyond all conception, and the power of the unutterable symbols, understood solely by the gods, which establishes theurgic union.”²⁵ In contrast to theology, which is based on intellection, theurgy is grounded in “the power of the unutterable symbols.” The symbols, furthermore, are “understood solely by the gods,” their full significance remaining undisclosed to the theurgist. The symbols are not completely understood by their interpreters and practitioners, nor are they presumed to be. They instead present a form of signification that exceeds our epistemological capabilities, and is directed toward the upper echelons of the Neoplatonist cosmological hierarchy. Theurgy, therefore, foregrounds an element of mystery due to the ineffability of the symbols and ritual actions involved in its practice.

In theurgic thought, the admission that the symbols are inscrutable is accompanied by the assumption that they figure within a complex and graded cosmological hierarchy. The organizational principle of Neoplatonist cosmology is likeness, or, as Anne Sheppard summarizes, “Everything in everything according to its nature.”²⁶ The symbols, in other words, bear likenesses that are unrecognizable to us, however their signification is registered in higher realms of the cosmos. Proclus asserts in a treatise on theurgy entitled “On the Hieratic Art According to the Greeks” that symbols operate according to the Neoplatonic principle of sympathy: “...the priests, drawing from the sympathy in all phenomena to one another and to the unseen powers, and having understood that all things are in all things, constructed the hieratic

Abamon to Porphyry’s Letter to Anebo and Solutions to the Puzzles in it.” In Anglophone scholarship, the text is primarily known as *On the Mysteries*.

²⁵ Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, II, 11, 96.13-97.2 Parthey. Translation quoted from Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, translated with an introduction by Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), p. 115.

²⁶ Anne Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays of Proclus’ Commentary on the Republic* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), p. 164.

science.”²⁷ Theurgic symbols “participate” in different levels of being, and can therefore be used hieratically to elicit the attention of particular divinities.

Rather than having an aesthetic or discursive purpose, symbols in theurgy are purely functional. Indeed they are *the* functional element in theurgy, as Iamblichus explains:

For even when we are not engaged in intellection, the symbols themselves, by themselves, perform their appropriate work, and the ineffable power of the gods, to whom these symbols relate, itself recognises the proper images of itself, not through being aroused by our thought.²⁸

In Iamblichean and Proclean theurgy, symbols have their own discrete ontology, and their signification exists outside of human consciousness. The theurgist merely recognizes their instrumentality, and uses them in a ritual setting. It is in this sense of pure functionality and instrumentality that symbols may be regarded as the *devices* of theurgy. While the use of symbols in an artistic setting customarily falls under an aesthetic or interpretive rubric, in theurgic thought, symbols carry an element of ritual functionality that operates apart from aesthetic or hermeneutic contemplation in order to effect *henosis* of the theurgist’s soul with the One.

The apophatic element of theurgic thought, i.e. the acceptance of what *cannot* be known about the symbols, was adapted to Christian theology by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (c.

²⁷ Proclus, “On the Hieratic Art According to the Greeks” (*Peri tēs kath’ Hellēnas hieratikēs technēs*) in J. Bidez et al, ed. *Catalogue des manuscrits alchimiques grecs* (Brussels: Maurice Lamertin, 1928), p. 148. Translations from “On the Hieratic Art According to the Greeks” are mine with reference to Thomas Taylor’s translation of Ficino’s Latin version contained in Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, ed. by Stephan Ronan with the translations of the lost works of Proclus “On the Sacred Art” and “On the Signs of Divine Possession” by Thomas Taylor and Alexander Wilder (Hastings, E. Sussex: Chthonios Books, 1989). A gracious thanks to David Blank for proofreading and offering suggestions on the translations.

²⁸ Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, II, 11, 97.4-7 Parthey. Translation by Clarke, Dillon, and Hershbell in Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, p. 115.

fifth-sixth century). Drawing from Proclus, Pseudo-Dionysius presents a hierarchically structured cosmos within which the sacraments “participate” in a manner akin to theurgic symbols. Pseudo-Dionysius’ theology is predicated on the notion that the full significance of the symbols and ritual actions involved in the sacraments remains occluded to both their celebrant and recipient. Frequent reference is made to theurgy in the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus, particularly in discussions of the Eucharist. In a passage from his Letter IX, Pseudo-Dionysius refers to the Eucharist as a “theurgic mystery.”²⁹ The concept of symbol and ritual developed in Neoplatonist theurgy thus in turn constitutes a foundational element of Pseudo-Dionysian apophatic theology.

Pseudo-Dionysian theology played a pivotal role at two junctures in Russian cultural history: the hesychast controversy and the second South Slavic influence on Russian literature in the fourteenth century, and the schism of the Russian Orthodox Church in the seventeenth century. The first translation of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus into Church Slavonic dates to the late fourteenth century, and was completed by a church elder named Isaiia under the instruction of the Serbian metropolitan Theodosius. Isaiia’s translation rendered the Greek *theourgia* as a calque in Church Slavonic: *bogoděistvie*.³⁰ The combination of the roots *bog* (“god,” “divine”) and *děistvie* (“action,” “activity”) encompasses the sense of “divine work” that *theourgia* denotes in the Greek. *Teurgiia* – the Russian nominal form used most commonly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – is, by contrast, a loan word from the Greek. Thus two terms exist for

²⁹ Hermann Goltz, G.M. Prokhorov, ed., *Das Corpus des Dionysios Areiopagites in der Slavischen Übersetzung von Starec Isaija (14. Jahrhundert)*, vol. 2 (Weihert: Friburgi Brisgoviae, 2011), pp. 667.

³⁰ On the transliteration of *bogoděistvie*, see notes 3 and 83 in chapter 2. The “ě” stands in for “iat” as indicated by the Library of Congress transliteration system for Old Church Slavonic.

theurgy in Russian culture, which date to different periods and have specific usages.³¹ The inaugural discussions of this dual theurgic terminology occur in this dissertation.

Since the coinage *bogoděistvie* was created to accommodate the theurgic terminology of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus, and it is most frequently associated with the sacraments in Pseudo-Dionysian theology, theurgy was originally introduced to Russian culture under the aegis of official Orthodoxy. In other words, its element of mystery, in contrast to the occult implications that theurgy carried in Neoplatonism, applied to the consecration of the elements of the Eucharist, and to the remission of sin through baptism. Its language of symbol and ritual was readily streamlined with the pre-existing sacramental theology of the Church, which envisioned the full significance of these practices as occluded in the first place. *Bogoděistvie* in turn came to signify the ineffability of the Church's ritual practices as instruments of divine grace. The term *tainstvo* in Church Slavonic is understood and can be translated as both "mystery" and "sacrament." Thus theurgy's apophatic regard for symbols and ritual actions suited a sacrament practice that was already preferentially enshrouded in mystery.

Teurgiiia, by contrast, entered Russian intellectual discourse in the nineteenth century. The Russian religious philosopher Nikolai Fedorov (1829-1903) discussed theurgy as a means of bringing about a "divine technocracy" on earth. Vladimir Solov'ev (1853-1900), whose ideas were tremendously influential to the Symbolists, understood theurgy as effecting a merging of

³¹ Chapter 2 will address the proliferation and impact of the Church Slavonic translation of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus and the term *bogoděistvie* on Russian culture specifically. The Greek borrowing *teurgiiia* is the more common term for theurgy in Russia due to the wide readership for poets of the "Silver Age" such as Ivanov, Andrei Bely, and Aleksandr Blok, who made theurgy into one of the foremost artistic concerns of the Russian *fin de siècle*. Owing to the fact that the readership for Church Slavonic texts is limited mostly to ecclesiastical circles, the calque *bogoděistvie* has not entered into the Russian lexicon. *Bogoděistvie* instead has a specialized theological usage relating to the sacraments of the Church, which will be discussed in chapter 2.

divine and human realms through artistic creation, coining the term *svobodnaia teurgii* (“free theurgy”) to denote this process. His sense of “divine work” was a work of art that was both directly inspired by the divine, and that supplied a representation of the divine in human cognitive forms. The theurgic artist, for him, acted as divinely inspired creator who participated in the process of incarnation by transmitting objects of aesthetic and religious significance from the noumenal to the phenomenal world. Solov’ev was a scholar of Neoplatonism, Gnosticism and early Christianity, and was clearly familiar with the concept of theurgy in later Greek philosophy. His concept of theurgy was as both an occult and divinely sanctified procedure. It was Solov’ev’s version of theurgy that had the widest impact on Symbolist aesthetics and religious thought.

Teurgii for the Symbolists came to signify hidden, occult powers that could be harnessed through artistic means. Ivanov often quotes Solov’ev in connection with theurgy in his theoretical essays. Ivanov, however, also demonstrates his familiarity with the Neoplatonic sources for theurgy in his discussions of Iamblichus and Proclus (as well as Porphyry) in his philological treatise *Dionis i pradiionisiiistvo*. Ivanov’s interest in theurgy was thus derived both from Solov’ev, who had discovered theurgy from the original sources, *and* from his own reading of ancient theurgic texts. While Solov’ev provided the impetus for theurgic thought at the Russian *fin de siècle*, Ivanov grounded Solov’ev’s “free theurgy” in a theoretical apparatus that he himself developed from ancient theurgic theory. Solov’ev provided the clarion call to apply theurgic principles to artistic creation, and Ivanov answered – in a manner entirely in keeping with his philological training – by consulting the primary texts before he fleshed out Solov’ev’s theory in poetic form.

It would hardly be a groundbreaking or novel claim to state that theurgy has played a significant role in Russian culture and the arts. It is somewhat *de rigueur* for scholarship on the Symbolist movement to acknowledge the relevance of theurgy to the cultural climate at the *fin de siècle* in Russia. The notion that theurgy has a longer and more complicated history in Russia, is, however, entirely new and unexplored. Scholars have conventionally dated theurgy's impact on Russian culture to the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, while the pre-modern history of theurgy in Russia has gone undetected in Slavist scholarship. This wider historical and conceptual scope for theurgy turns out to be indispensable for understanding the form that theurgy takes in the Symbolist movement.

Perhaps even more importantly, the significance of ancient theurgy to the Symbolists has thus far eluded scholarly consideration. While it has been firmly established that it was Solov'ev's exhortation to create theurgic art that the Symbolists heeded, an investigation of Neoplatonic theurgy offers interpretational insight into the shape that Symbolist theurgic art took. Solov'ev's discussions of theurgy, after all, seem to be designed more to inspire potential theurgic artists than to inform them of how to instantiate theurgy in art. The Symbolists would require additional conceptual models and theoretical underpinnings in order to complete the task. What Neoplatonic theurgy offered in particular was the notion of the symbol as mysterious and dark to its depths, but also as an active presence that supplied a connection with higher, dimly apprehended ontological planes. The symbol's characteristic of both concealing and disclosing levels of reality, of both signifying and actualizing heightened states of consciousness and of elevating the soul, figured as one of the defining characteristics of Russian Symbolist theurgy. Without an understanding of its Neoplatonic context, Symbolist theurgic art – particularly in the case of Ivanov – indeed appears to be an obscurantist, “atavistic” endeavor. However with an

understanding of the Greek theurgic texts, this obscurantism becomes a functional mechanism—an aspect of the symbol’s instrumentality to the theurgic enterprise.

4. Ivanov the Antiquarian

At this juncture, a number of parallels may begin to be drawn between theurgic Neoplatonism and Ivanov’s instantiation of a theurgic poetics. This set of associations is preliminary, however, and will be more fully developed in the ensuing chapters. Ivanov’s archaizing lexicon may in an important sense be regarded as theurgically derived. Linguistic and stylistic archaism, as mentioned in connection with theurgy’s primary text, the *Chaldean Oracles*, has strong theurgic associations. In *On the Mysteries*, Iamblichus – writing in the guise of an Egyptian priest named Abamon – disparages the Greeks for translating ancient divine names, which he declares to have particular theurgic efficacy, from the Egyptian. Ivanov’s predilection for using Slavonicisms – one of the main sources of the difficulty in reading him – gives his poetry an elevated, pseudo-liturgical aura. Ivanov’s Slavonicized lexicon reads as obscure yet comprehensible to the Russian ear, while firmly associating it with sacred texts composed in Old Church Slavonic.³² The approximation of sacrality conveyed by Ivanov’s diction “was regarded (by him) as a deliberate method for initiating the reader into the secrets of

³² Davidson provides an elucidating comment on the liturgical quality of Ivanov’s lexicon in “The Legacy of Difficulty in the Russian Poetic Tradition,” p. 251: “Whereas the original Hebrew language of the Bible and Psalms is a remarkably simple and transparent medium, in translation it has undergone a process of ‘obscuration’ – particularly in the case of its Church Slavonic and Russian versions. This has led to a much greater nationally inherited tradition of the sense of the ‘difficulty’ of a sacred text – a consciousness which has in turn had an important philological bearing on Russian poetry.”

mystical experience.”³³ Considering the importance of archaic language to theurgy,³⁴ this “deliberate method” that Davidson speaks of could involve theurgy. Ivanov’s “cult of obscurity and veiled speech” demonstrates clear resemblances to Neoplatonist theurgy’s emphasis on linguistic occlusion and recondite referentiation.³⁵

Neoplatonist theurgy emphasizes form over content. The theurgist does not need to understand the meaning of the symbols, but must administer them in the correct way. Taking this into account, Bakhtin’s comments that “Ni odnoi novoi formy (Ivanov) ne sozdal” and “Vsia poeziia (Ivanova) est’ genial’naia restavratsiia vsekh sushchestvuiushchikh do nego form” begin to sound like theurgic criteria.³⁶ While Bakhtin inflects this as a comment on Ivanov’s unoriginality, it serves as an entirely accurate descriptor of his theurgic poetics. Adherence to prescribed ritual and linguistic forms, or “unoriginality,” was of course key to how theurgy was

³³ Ibid., p. 252.

³⁴ Iamblichus emphasizes preserving divine names in their archaic form, however his and other theurgic treatises (with the exception of the *Chaldean Oracles*, which were attributed to the “earliest Greek poet,” Orpheus, and which correspondingly were stylized archaically) were composed in contemporary forms such as the epistle, and do not make abundant use of archaizing language. The claim that archaic language was central to ancient theurgy is based on Iamblichus’ discussion of divine names and the *Chaldean Oracles*. Archaism figures into theurgy in additional ways as well, e.g. the notion that theurgic ritual must retain its most ancient form in order to be effective, Proclus’ contention that theurgic rituals imitate the originary acts of the gods in creating the cosmos, and Iamblichus’ impersonation of an Egyptian priest, giving his claims an aura of pre-Greek authority.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Bakhtin, “Viacheslav Ivanov,” in *Viacheslav Ivanov: Pro et contra*, vol. 2, p. 11. (“Not one new form did Ivanov create. All of his poetry is an ingenious restoration of all the forms which existed before him.”)

thought to work in Neoplatonism.³⁷ Ivanov's resuscitation of poetic and symbolic forms can be regarded as an enhancement to his verse's theurgic potential.

The most significant connection between Neoplatonist theurgy and Ivanov's poetics is the role of symbols. Ivanov's poetry is replete with intricate networks of symbols that are interlocking, multivalent and cross-referential. The density of symbols contained sometimes within merely a single poem can require a staggering amount of research to unpack. Sergei Averintsev describes Ivanov's poetry as a "closed system," referring to the compound referentiality and interrelatedness of his symbolics.³⁸ The full scope of this system, however, rarely discloses itself on the basis of one or two readings, and sometimes remains obscure even after concerted efforts at discerning it. Ivanov indeed did attempt to mystify and confound his readers – and largely succeeded. Neoplatonist theurgy's regard for the symbol as ineffable and mysterious, however, offers insight into this feature of Ivanov's poetry.

Given the paradigm for symbols in Neoplatonist theurgy – according to which they are not meant to be fully grasped, but instead to be, in a sense, "deployed" – the complexity of his symbolics could be considered a theurgic aspect of his poetics. Clearly Ivanov did not assume that his readers would be familiar with all of his references, or that his symbolics would convey the same meaning to a general readership as to a professional philologist. His use of the symbol is as a philological artifact, which is discernible in part but mysterious at its core. In one of his most programmatic theoretical essays, "Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism," where he establishes a set of criteria for what constitutes Symbolist art, Ivanov describes the symbol as a

³⁷ See note 34.

³⁸ Sergei Averintsev, "The Poetry of Viacheslav Ivanov," in Robert Louis Jackson and Lowry Nelson, Jr., ed., *Viacheslav Ivanov: Poet, Critic and Philosopher*, p. 28.

“gieroglif tainstvennyi, ibo mnogoznachashchii, mnogosmyslennyi.”³⁹ His notion of the symbol as a “hieroglyph” implies that its meaning is occluded but nonetheless substantial. The symbol thus contains an array of significations, many of which, however, remain undisclosed to the reader. Ivanov positions himself as an archaeologist of symbols as much as a creative artist, recovering antiquities and placing them on display in his poetry. He may be understood as a kind of poetic antiquarian, restoring and preserving symbolic forms while also testing their theurgic efficacy. His poems are part philological excavations and part imaginative creations, part re-instantiations of pre-existing meanings and part re-envisionings of those meanings through the prism of his lyric persona. Ivanov is engaging in both philological discovery and theurgic re-deployment of his findings. If the “philological” label is understood less as scholastic pedantry and more as a theurgic endeavor, then new terms are set for reading and interpreting his verse.

5. The Good Theurgist

Under this rubric, the element of the unknown or indiscernible in Ivanov’s poetry turns from an aesthetic shortcoming to a theurgic device. If his symbolics are understood in theurgic terms, then the density of his verse is not to be taken as aesthetically motivated. When the philological quality of Ivanov’s symbolics is understood theurgically, the aura of mystery takes precedence over aesthetic edification. The reader’s full apprehension of the symbolic system of a given poem in turn plays a lesser part than its presumed theurgic effect. Ivanov envisioned the symbol as exceeding the reader’s understanding, and – in a clear borrowing from Neoplatonist

³⁹ Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 537. (“a mysterious hieroglyph, for it is polysemic, multivalent.”)

cosmology – as “prorezyva(iushchii) vse plany bytiia i vse sfery soznaniia i znamenu(iuschii) v kazhdom plane inye sushchnosti, ispolnia(iushchii) v kazhdoi sfere inoe naznachenie.”⁴⁰ From this description, the symbol bears significance beyond human consciousness, and, furthermore, within dimly apprehended or unknown spheres of being. Ivanov’s foregrounding of the unknown and the mysterious in his theory of the symbol relates demonstrably to Neoplatonist theurgy’s notion that the symbol “participates” within a hierarchalized cosmos. Recalling the distinction between theology and theurgy, the symbol in Ivanov’s rendering turns from a discursive object into an active element of his poetics designed to resound on multiple ontological planes.

If understood from a theurgic standpoint, Ivanov’s symbolism looks less like dry scholasticism and more like a form of ritually inflected religious practice. Theurgy begins to fit even more within the Symbolists’ preoccupation with ritual practice when its Neoplatonist origins are brought to light.⁴¹ Against the backdrop of late imperial Russia’s anxiety for spiritual and cultural renewal, the functional aspect of theurgy is brought into high relief. In this context, Ivanov’s poetry appears designated more for theurgic agency than aesthetic edification. Symbolic art, Ivanov avers, has a primarily religious purpose: “...(iskusstvo) pozvoliaet osoznat’ sviaz’ i smysl sushchestvuiushchego ne tol’ko v sfere zemnogo empiricheskogo soznaniia no i v sferakh inykh. Tak, istinnoe simvolicheskoe iskusstvo prikasaetsia k oblasti religii...”⁴² Within

⁴⁰ Ibid. (“cutting through all planes of being and all spheres of consciousness, and signifying in each plane a different essence, fulfilling in each sphere a different purpose.”)

⁴¹ On Ivanov’s interest in the renewal of ancient ritual practices, see Robert Bird, “Lyric, Ritual, Symbol” in *The Russian Prospero: The Creative Universe of Viacheslav Ivanov* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), pp. 47-86.

⁴² Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 538. (“...[art] allows us to perceive the connection and the meaning of what exists not only in the sphere of corporeal empirical consciousness but also

the cultural climate of the *fin de siècle*, the apophatic element of not knowing how the symbols work or what sort of change they may bring about takes precedence over understanding their content. As Iamblichus insists, it is “the symbols themselves, by themselves” that produce a theurgic effect. Poetry in turn takes on a degree of ritual instrumentality that supersedes aesthetic criteria. It becomes an object of mystical reflection and religious contemplation rather than aesthetic appreciation and discursive interpretation.

In recent years, Russian scholars of the Symbolist movement have developed the concept of a “theurgic aesthetic” (*teurgicheskaia estetika*) to refer to the complex of religious-philosophical loftiness, arcane language, and cross-cultural topoi that one encounters frequently in Symbolist literature.⁴³ This “theurgic aesthetic” is characteristically traced to Solov’ev and his coinage of the phrase “free theurgy” (*svobodnaia teurgiia*) to describe art as participating in what he called “all-unity” (*vseedinstvo*), a processual merging of divine and human realms. Given theurgy’s emphasis on religious functionality and ritualism as outlined above, however, this terminology seems only partially descriptive, and even somewhat misleading. Theurgy, after all, is not an aesthetic, but an *ergon*, a practice. Associating theurgy purely with aesthetics gives the impression that it belongs to an aesthetic tradition, or that it is only understandable as an artistic phenomenon. In fact, it would be more appropriate to re-situate the modifier and the noun in this phase and call what the Symbolists were doing “aesthetic theurgy.” Clearly aesthetics loomed

in other spheres. Thus true symbolic art touches upon the domain of religion...”) It is precisely this association between art and religion that caused a rift within the Symbolist movement in 1910, with one camp, led by Valerii Briusov, advocating their utter separation, while another camp, led by Ivanov, argued for their mutuality of purpose.

⁴³ See V.V. Bychkov, *Russkaia teurgicheskaia estetika* (Moscow: Lodomir, 2007); O.V. Pchelina, “Teurgicheskaia estetika D.S. Merezhkovskogo: temy i variatsii,” in *Uchenye zapiski Orlovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, No. 2 (52), 2013; Z.R. Zhukotskaia, *Svobodnaia teurgiia: kul’turfilosofiiia russkogo simvolizma* (Moscow: RGGU, 2003).

large for the Russian Symbolists, but poetry for many of them had a higher calling. The theurgic Symbolists had a religious agenda that instrumentalized and programmatized aesthetics. Calling theurgy an aesthetic relegates its study exclusively to literary history, however theurgy is also a facet of Russian philosophy and religious thought. Theurgy to the Symbolists was both *teurgiia* and *bogoděistvie*, occult yet orthodox, mysterious yet sanctified.

In the following chapters, I attempt to present Ivanov's theurgy as an extension of its Neoplatonist origins as well as its more proximate Solov'evian influence. Chapter 1 provides a background on the aspects of Neoplatonist theurgy that apply directly to understanding Russian Symbolism generally, and Ivanov's poetry and theory of the symbol in particular. Chapter 2 examines the pre-modern concept of theurgy in Russian culture by looking at several passages of the Church Slavonic translation of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus. It sketches a historical trajectory of the significance of theurgy to Russian Orthodox theology, highlighting the hesychast controversy of the fourteenth century and the Church schism of the seventeenth century. Chapter 3 unpacks the set of associations regarding theurgy that Ivanov constructs in his early theoretical essays. Chapter 4 attempts to discover theurgic devices within Ivanov's poetics, focusing specifically on the "Suspiria" cycle of his debut volume, *Kormchie zvezdy*. This chapter discusses Ivanov's streamlining of Orphic myth and Dionysian symbolism with Christianity in the cycle in terms of the *teurgiia* and *bogoděistvie* dualism. The conclusion poses the question of how Ivanov's conversion to Eastern Rite Catholicism in 1926 impacted his stance on theurgy.

Chapter 1 –

“The Symbols Themselves, by Themselves”:

Neoplatonic Paradigms for Ivanov’s Theurgy

1. Introduction

As a trained classical philologist, Viacheslav Ivanov’s knowledge of the Neoplatonic theurgic sources was firsthand (his citations of Iamblichus and Proclus in his philological treatise *Dionis i pradiionisiistvo* [*Dionysus and Predionysianism*] are discussed in detail in chapter 3). What Ivanov appears to have extracted from these sources for his creative endeavors is primarily a set of theurgic premises for conceptualizing the symbol. As the foremost theoretician of the Russian Symbolist movement, theurgy plays no small role in the enactment of the artistic program that he outlines in his essays. Ivanov makes frequent reference to the Platonic cosmology that figured prominently for the Neoplatonic theurgists, and he consistently issues theurgically inflected proclamations about the mysterious power of the symbol within this hierarchical cosmos. Ivanov’s (along with other Symbolists’) dedication to renewing ancient ritual practices likewise must be regarded as having a theurgic mien. The somewhat blurred distinction between philosophy and religion that characterizes late-antique theurgy receives an extensive reworking in Ivanov’s theories, which attempt to integrate philology, philosophy and poetry within a single religious system.

For Ivanov, the symbol possesses an inherent capacity for spiritual, historical, and cultural development as an artistic device. Its effectiveness, furthermore, lies outside of the artist’s grasp; the symbol for him plays an indeterminable role in precipitating spiritual and cultural revitalization. Drawing from Kantian and Schopenhauerian epistemology, Ivanov

formulates the symbol as a representation of the noumenal realm in the phenomenal realm—a bridge to the ineffable in cognizable forms. In order for the symbol to articulate the inarticulable, and form the formless, it must be conveyed in a language of suggestion, allusion, and approximation. To this end, Ivanov relies on a mode of poetic expression that consistently utilizes lexical and morphological archaisms, which are drawn primarily from Old Church Slavonic, the liturgical language of the Russian Orthodox Church. In deploying theurgic symbols, Ivanov aims to resuscitate a forgotten link between Dionysus and Christ, and to instill what he calls a *novoe religioznoe soznanie* (“new religious consciousness”) in the modern era. Thus sacramental theurgy, both in its Neoplatonist and Christian versions, plays a figurative role in his combined artistic and religious program. Ivanov envisions the symbol as theurgically regenerating and reconfiguring ancient myths, which serve in turn to restore and revivify ancient religious sensibilities amid *fin-de-siècle* eschatological anxieties and materialist leanings.

This chapter provides a background on the aspects of late-antique theurgy that are particularly germane for assessing Ivanov’s instantiation of theurgy. It will begin by sketching the Chaldean background from which the later Neoplatonists drew theurgic ideas. It will then discuss the Neoplatonic cosmological framework within which theurgy was thought to function, paying particular attention to the concept of *sympatheia*. Given that the main point of correspondence between Neoplatonic and Russian Symbolist theurgic ideas is the central role of the symbol, the remainder of the chapter will outline the various classifications of symbols involved in theurgy. It will conclude by touching upon the transferral of theurgic ideas from Neoplatonism to Christianity in the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

Since the purpose here is not to provide a history of theurgy, but instead to lay the conceptual ground for Ivanov’s involvement with theurgic ideas, Neoplatonist texts will be cited

within a thematic rubric indicated by the section heading rather than in chronological order. This is intended to keep the focus on what Ivanov drew from these sources, rather than on providing a comprehensive synopsis of theurgic thought. The history of theurgic Neoplatonism has been covered amply elsewhere.¹ The topics selected for discussion in this chapter supply the context for Ivanov's incorporation of theurgic elements into his theory of the symbol and his poetics, which will be discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

1.1. The Chaldean Background

The noun *theourgia* first described the practices of Julian “the Theurgist” and his father Julian “the Chaldean,” who were “magicians” and “philosophers” in Rome in the late second century CE.² The Julians were associated with mysterious rites, texts and wonderworking events. According to one account, the younger Julian conjured a rainstorm to ward off barbarian attack and replenish the Roman camp's water during Marcus Aurelius' campaign against the Marcomans.³ Julian “the Theurgist” is the putative author of the *Chaldean Oracles*, a collection of hexameter poems composed in stylistically archaized Greek. The Neoplatonist philosophers Iamblichus and Proclus treated the *Oracles* as authoritative texts second only to Plato's own

¹ See, for example, Carine van Liefferinge, *La Théurgie Des Oracles Chaldaïques à Proclus* (Liège: Centre International d'Études de la Religion Grecque Antique, 1999); see also Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism* (Stockfield: Acumen, 2008); R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (London: Duckworth, 1972).

² E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), p. 55; Hans Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire* (Le Caire: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1956), pp. 461-467; Ruth Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation, Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), p. 1; R.M. Van den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 67-70.

³ Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, p. 56; Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation, Commentary*, p. 2.

writings.⁴ According to the Neoplatonist account, the *Oracles* were “handed down by the gods” (*theoparadota*).⁵ They were “received,” in a theurgic process of calling and receiving, from the soul of Plato with the elder Julian acting as an entranced medium.⁶

For their introduction of Chaldean deities into the Platonic metaphysical system, the *Oracles* are often understood as a consolidation of Platonic philosophy with certain ritual and theogonic aspects of Chaldean religion.⁷ The oracular capabilities of the Julians and the authorship of the *Oracles* accorded them authoritative status among the Neoplatonists, who referred to the *Oracles* as *ta hiera logia* (the sacred oracles) or *ta logia* (the oracles).⁸ Extensive commentaries for the *Oracles* were composed by Iamblichus and Proclus. It is likely that the *Chaldean Oracles*, which themselves exist piecemeal in quotations by later authors, constitute only a fraction of the writings and teachings of the Julians that would have been available to the Neoplatonist philosophers.⁹

Much of the *Oracles*’ source material for theurgy that was available to the Neoplatonists in the Imperial era is now unavailable to scholars. While the fragments of the *Chaldean Oracles*

⁴ For a discussion of the relationship of oracular wisdom to philosophy in theurgic Neoplatonism, see chapter one of Crystal Addey, *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 1-42.

⁵ Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation, Commentary*, p. 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷ On the Platonic/Chaldean metaphysical system of the *Oracles*, see chapters six and seven of Hans Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire* (Le Caire: L’Institute Francaise D’Archologie Oriental, 1956), pp. 311-442.

⁸ John F. Finamore and Sarah Iles Johnston, “The Chaldean Oracles” in *Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, vol. 1, ed. by Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014), p. 161.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

give insight into the metaphysical system that supported theurgic practice, the content of theurgic rituals is undocumented. Some scholars have presumed that the missing *Oracles*, or other lost texts of the Julians, contained theurgic prescriptions.¹⁰ It is probable that theurgic rituals were passed down orally to inductees to ensure secrecy and to prevent misuse.¹¹ The transmission of ritual formulae orally is consistent with the Hermetic tradition, which figures strongly in Iamblichus' concept of theurgy.¹² Iamblichus and Proclus discuss the purpose and capabilities of theurgy at length, but never the details of its practice or instructions for its implementation.

What is clear from the fragments of the *Oracles* is that theurgy was thought to function within a Platonic cosmology. Theurgy combines aspects of both philosophy and religion into a single system. It is, as we will see, envisioned as taking up where philosophy leaves off. The modern scholar of theurgy must keep in mind that it operates with both religious and philosophical underlying assumptions, and that the parameters of “the philosophical” and “the religious” for Iamblichus and Proclus differ categorically from modern ones. Importantly, for the theurgic Neoplatonists, philosophy and religion are parts of a singular goal: *henosis*, or unity with the One—the highest being in the Neoplatonic cosmological hierarchy. Proclus, the Athenian theurgist and leader of Plato's Academy from 437-485 CE, is usually considered a

¹⁰ Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation, Commentary*, pp. 1-2.

¹¹ See Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*, pp. 227-258.

¹² See Brian Copenhaver, ed. *Hermetica: the Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1995), pp. xvi-xxxvi; and chapter seven, “Hermetism and Theurgy,” in Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1986), pp. 142-154.

systematizer of Platonism and the late-antique pantheon.¹³ Proclus' systematizing of Platonism and Greek religion exemplifies a sense of singularity or unity of purpose to philosophy and religion. Theurgy deals with philosophical and religious questions, sometimes simultaneously. It integrates philosophic knowledge with religious belief into a single system with a designated role for each.

The accounts of the younger and elder Julian, and their theurgic capabilities, provide an important series of associations with theurgy that begin to define it as both a concept and practice. Their thaumatological successes derive from their knowledge and enactment of particular rituals, which are performed in order to bring about an intervention of the divine in the material, human realm. They are described as calling for and receiving knowledge through mediumistic trance and divine inspiration. This knowledge is then transmitted in the form of poetic verses composed in an archaic style. The object of this knowledge, in other words, surpasses discursive or conceptual understanding, which are attainable through theoretical philosophy.

1.2. *Ergon* and *logos*

One of the most important discussions of theurgy in late antiquity comes from Iamblichus' *De mysteriis* (composed 280-305 CE).¹⁴ The Latin title, by which the work is now known, was added by Marsilio Ficino in his fifteenth-century translation. Iamblichus' original

¹³ See Carlos Steel, "Proclus" in *Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, vol. 1, ed. by Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014), p. 630. See also van Liefferinge, *La Théurgie Des Oracles Chaldaïques à Proclus*, p. 272.

¹⁴ Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell, "Introduction," in Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, edited, translated and notes by Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), p. xxvii.

title for the work was “The Reply of the Master Abamon to the Letter of Porphyry to Anebo, and the Solutions to the Questions it Contains.” Iamblichus’ text is a response to his former teacher and fellow Neoplatonist Porphyry, whose “Epistle to Anebo,” though ostensibly addressed to an Egyptian priest, is likely directed at his former pupil.¹⁵ Porphyry’s epistle, which exists only in fragments, voices skepticism toward the efficacy of arcane rites. Clarke, Dillon, and Hershbell state in the introduction to the *De mysteriis* that “the letter was in some way aimed at Iamblichus and, more specifically, at what Porphyry saw as his ex-pupil’s interest in the occult, typified in the Hellenic mind by certain Egyptian (or pseudo-Egyptian) magical practices.”¹⁶ Porphyry, for whom theology took precedence, regarded theurgy as having limited value. Iamblichus addresses Porphyry’s critique of theurgy in the guise of a senior Egyptian priest, “Abamon.” The association between theurgy and earlier, Egyptian magical practices for the Neoplatonists was of crucial significance, whether they were defending or opposed to theurgy. Iamblichus’ response to Porphyry as “Abamon” lends an enhanced sense of authority to the more ancient tradition. Thus even in late antiquity, theurgy was envisioned as an ancient tradition which predated the Greeks. For “Abamon,” the antiquity of theurgic rites and their connection to Egyptian practices are markers of their legitimacy and occult potential.

In order to go beyond the parameters of theoretical philosophy, the theurgist must employ some form of ritual action, or *ergon*. The noun *theourgia* is made up of the Greek roots *theos* (god) and *ergon* (deed). The theurgic Neoplatonists distinguished *theourgia* from *theologia* (theology), which contains the roots *theos* and *logos* (reason, discourse). In the following

¹⁵ Ibid., p. xxviii.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. xxix.

passage from Iamblichus' *De mysteriis*, the Syrian Neoplatonist suggests that ritual activity, or *theourgia*, takes up where reasoned discourse, or *theologia*, leaves off:

Granting, then, that ignorance and deception are faulty and impious, it does not follow on this that the offerings made to the gods and divine works are invalid, it is not pure thought that unites theurgists to the gods. Indeed what, then, would hinder those who are theoretical philosophers from enjoying a theurgic union with the gods? But the situation is not so: it is the accomplishment of acts not to be divulged and beyond all conception, and the power of the unutterable symbols, understood solely by the gods, which establishes theurgic union. Hence, we do not bring about these things by intellection alone; for this their efficacy would be intellectual, and dependent upon us.¹⁷

It is not “pure thought” (*ennoia*), but “divine works” (*theia erga*) which are the basis for theurgy. If pure thought were what established theurgic union, then its “efficacy would be...dependent upon us.” Theurgic union is not established by “intellection alone,” but instead by some form of *ergon*. As Iamblichus stipulates, *theia erga* are required to unite the soul of the theurgist with the divine.¹⁸ These acts, moreover, are “not to be divulged,” suggesting that theurgic proceedings were kept in secrecy. Iamblichus draws numerous distinctions here: between thought and action, the knowable and unknowable, unity and disunity, and the human and the divine. Theurgy supplements theology by conducting ritual proceedings that are outside of the scope of theological discourse. Theologians can interact with the divine on a certain level, but

¹⁷ Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, II, 11, 96.14-19 Parthey. Translation by Clarke, Dillon, and Hershbell in Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, p. 115. Further citations of the *De mysteriis* will follow Parthey's edition of the Greek text (Iamblichus, *Jamblichi De Mysteriis Liber*, ed. by Gustavus Parthey [Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1965]), and will include the page number of the Clarke, Dillon, and Hershbell translation.

¹⁸ In Iamblichus' view, theurgy has to supplement theology because of a condition of the soul. Plotinus and Porphyry posited that a part of the soul remains undescended within the cosmological hierarchy, i.e. part of the soul exists in a state of perpetual contemplation of and unity with divinity. Iamblichus, in contrast, states that the soul incurs damage as it descends through the hierarchy at birth, and loses contact with the divine realm. The damaged soul necessitates theurgy to reestablish full unification with the divine. On the descent of the soul in incarnation, see Iamblichus, *De anima*, 6-7, 30, 365-366.1-27 Finamore and Dillon; see also *De mysteriis*, I, 5, 15.10-13; 21. On the necessity of theurgy to restore the soul's contact with divinity, see *De mysteriis*, I, 11, 40.7-9; 51.

clearly not to the extent of the theurgists (“Indeed what, then, would hinder those who are theoretical philosophers from enjoying a theurgic union with the gods?”). Theurgy attempts to take knowledge beyond the confines of the discursive—mystical experience of the divine becomes the object of knowledge.

Theurgic acts are “beyond all conception” due to their use of *symbola*,¹⁹ or symbols, which elicit the response of divinities at various stages in the cosmological hierarchy.

For even when we are not engaged in intellection, *the symbols themselves, by themselves, perform their appropriate work, and the ineffable power of the gods, to whom these symbols relate, itself recognises the proper images of itself, not through being aroused by our thought.*²⁰ (emphasis added)

According to Iamblichus, the efficacy of the *symbola* is understood solely by the gods. The theurgist is aware that they are effective, but not why they elicit divine attention. The rituals themselves are thought to be modeled after the originary creative acts of the gods in fabricating

¹⁹ Hereafter the use of *symbola* in Greek transliteration will refer specifically to symbols associated with theurgy. Neoplatonist theurgic texts commonly employ three terms designated for theurgic symbols: *symbola*, *synthēmata*, and, with lesser frequency, *sēmeia*. These may be translated as “symbols,” “tokens,” and “signs” respectively. Each of them refers to material objects or verbal forms that were considered instrumental in theurgic practice. Gregory Shaw points out that the use of *symbola* and *synthēmata* is interchangeable in the *Chaldean Oracles* (see Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* [University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press], p. 162). He explains that *symbola* and *synthēmata* “functioned in a manner similar to Plato’s Forms in that both revealed the divine order” (ibid., p. 164). Being analogous to the Forms, *symbola* and *synthēmata* were involved in both cosmogony and anagogy to the theurgists. While there are some nuances to the meaning of these terms in theurgic texts (Proclus, for instance, stresses the particular anagogic power of *synthēmata* in “On the Hieratic Art According to the Greeks,” discussed below), I will refer most often to *symbola* in this chapter. I will switch to *synthēmata* in discussing cited passages that rely upon that term instead of *symbola*, however they are essentially synonymous in their theurgic implication. Insofar as Ivanov does not specifically discuss *synthēmata*, and his interest is in the theurgic potential of symbols generally, the default will be to use *symbola* to denote theurgic symbols, since it is a cognate in both English and Russian (*simvoly*).

²⁰ Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, II, 11, 97.4-7; 115.

the cosmos.²¹ The *symbola*, which are dispersed in nature, maintain a connection with the divine realm according to the Platonic principle of *sympatheia*, or “sympathy.” Symbols in turn are instrumental in the theurgic process as a link between divine and material reality. An important aspect of theurgic *ergon*, therefore, is the deployment of *symbola* in a ritual setting.

2. Theurgic *symbola*

What constituted theurgic *symbola*, however, and what sort of cosmological structure were they thought to function within? What might the theurgist accomplish by deploying the *symbola*? Before examining material and verbal *symbola*, we first have to sketch the Neoplatonist ontological structure within which they were thought to operate. As mentioned above, *symbola* function by the Platonic principle of *sympatheia* within the cosmological hierarchy. They figure into an intricate ontological hierarchy linking divinity and matter. The centrality of the *symbola* to theurgic Neoplatonism deserves particular attention in view of its significance for understanding Russian Symbolist theory and poetry.

2.1. Neoplatonic *sympatheia*

Theurgists placed the symbol’s cosmic receptivity within a framework of *sympatheia*. Drawing from the description of the cosmos as a unified organism with sympathetic ties between the divine and human realms in Plato’s *Timaeus* (30 B-C; 37 C-D),²² as well as the Stoic doctrine

²¹ See Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*, pp. 117-226. See also Liefferinge, *La Théurgie Des Oracles Chaldaïques à Proclus*, p. 25.

²² The *Timaeus* is one of the most important and frequently cited dialogues among Neoplatonists. Proclus describes the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides* as “hymns”: see R.M. Van den Berg, *Proclus’*

of *sympatheia*,²³ the Neoplatonists envisioned being as multi-tiered, gradated, and bound by likeness.²⁴ Neoplatonist writers added multitudinous levels within Plato's tripartite cosmological structure of Intellect, World Soul, and Matter.²⁵ A basic assumption in Neoplatonism is that each level of the ontological hierarchy is always co-present with higher and lower levels. These levels are connected through *sympatheia*. While the Neoplatonic hierarchy is often envisioned on a vertical axis extending from matter at the bottom to the One at the highest level, it presents reality as a simultaneity of these levels. Pauliina Remes states that Neoplatonists "assume that the complexity of thought must mirror the complexity of being."²⁶ Neoplatonism explains being in terms of variegation of higher (divine) and lower (material) ontological levels, which are always simultaneously present, though not necessarily sensibly apparent. Anne Sheppard offers a helpful explanation of these dual axes of Neoplatonic ontology in a discussion of Proclus' theurgy:

Thinking of it [the Neoplatonic levels of being] diagrammatically, we may say that the world was conceived as organized into both horizontal and vertical lines. The heliotrope, on the low level of plant life, is a *symbolon* of the sun which is in the same *seira*, the same "vertical line," but on a higher level of being, a higher "horizontal line." The sun in turn is a *symbolon* of higher realities in the same *seira* such as the god Apollo, and

Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 23-25. On the extended commentaries on the *Timaeus*, see Remes, *Neoplatonism*, p. 18.

²³ For a discussion of the Neoplatonists' use of the Stoic concept of *sympatheia*, see Katerina Ierodiakonou, "The Greek Concept of *Sympatheia* and Its Byzantine Appropriation in Michael Psellos," in *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium*, ed. by Paul Magdalino and Maria Mavroudi (Geneva: La Pomme d'or, 2006), pp. 100-104.

²⁴ See, for instance, Plotinus' discussion of likeness as the operative principle behind *sympatheia* in *Enneades*, vols. 1-2, ed. by Paul Henry and Hans-Rudolf Schwyzer, 3, 3, 6, 24-38; 4, 5, 1, 34-38 (Oxonii: E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1964-1982).

²⁵ For discussions of the Neoplatonic additions to Plato's cosmology, see Remes, *Neoplatonism*, pp. 7-9. See also Van den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary*, pp. 35-65.

²⁶ Remes, *Neoplatonism*, p. 7.

ultimately, as in Plato *Rep.* VI, of the transcendent Good which is the Neoplatonic One. The belief that such “vertical line” relationships hold between the natural world and the intelligible world is equally essential both to theurgy and to Proclus’ metaphysics.²⁷

This simultaneity of vertical and horizontal levels of being is summarized in the Neoplatonist principle: “Everything in everything but according to its nature.”²⁸ In theurgic Neoplatonism, the higher levels of the hierarchy are only accessible through theurgy.

In the cosmogony of the *Chaldean Oracles*, the Paternal Intellect (the first emanation from the One, or second level of the ontological hierarchy, which is allotted the task of creation) “sows” the *symbola* throughout the cosmos.²⁹ Theurgic cosmogony attributes a divine origin to the *symbola* of theurgic ritual. Matter emanates from the divine, albeit indirectly through intermediary stages, and thus provides an obscured representation of divinity in symbolic form. An underlying assumption here is that if *symbola* generate *sympatheia*, creation maintains a connection with its creator. *Symbola* are not exclusively material objects, however—a point that will be discussed below. The *symbola* “participate” in higher levels of the ontological hierarchy through *sympatheia*. Participation refers to the *symbola*’s activation of sympathetic ties between the levels of reality. It is the sympathetic resonances between these proposed ontological levels that allow for the *symbola* to participate in the upper reaches of the hierarchy. *Symbola*, if used in a ritual setting, activate chains of participation above the material realm, and present a form of signification that is inscrutable to the theurgist, but is decipherable by divinities in the cosmological hierarchy. The concepts of participation and *sympatheia*, which are central to

²⁷ Anne Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays of Proclus’ Commentary on the Republic* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), p. 152.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 164.

²⁹ Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, pp. 90-91. The fragment of the *Oracles* is quoted by Proclus, *In Crat.*, 20.31-21.2.

theurgic Neoplatonism, are relatable to the French and Russian symbolist notion of symbolic *correspondances* and *sootvetstviia* (correspondences).

2.2. Material *symbola*

The *symbola*, moreover, are thought to have a distinct existence outside of subjective consciousness. The theurgist does not create the *symbola*—these are of obscure divine origin; the *symbola*, however, can be manipulated by the theurgist. Certain *symbola* correspond to particular divinities or levels within the cosmological hierarchy, and can be used for particular theurgic ends. Proclus' essay "On the Hieratic Art According to the Greeks" (*Peri tēs kath' Hellenas hieratikēs technēs*) discusses natural sympathies as a source of occult power. This brief work is an important source for understanding *sympatheia* and the use of material *synthēmata*³⁰ for ritual and divination purposes. It likewise refers to the telestic entrancement of statues as a theurgic technique.³¹ Proclus refers to the discernment of these natural sympathies as "hieratic science," another term for theurgy:

...the priests, drawing from the sympathy in all phenomena to one another and to the unseen powers, and having understood that all things are in all things, constructed the hieratic science.³²

³⁰ See note 19 on the similarity of *symbola* and *synthēmata*. Proclus' "On the Hieratic Art According to the Greeks" refers to theurgic symbols of a material nature as *synthēmata*.

³¹ See Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, pp. 55-72. See also Addey, "Manifesting the Gods: Oracles as *Symbola*" in *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism*, pp. 283-290.

³² Proclus, "On the Hieratic Art According to the Greeks" (*Peri tēs kath' Hellenas hieratikēs technēs*) in J. Bidez et al, ed. *Catalogue des manuscrits alchimiques grecs* (Brussels: Maurice Lamertin, 1928), p. 148.5-7. Translations from "On the Hieratic Art According to the Greeks" are mine with reference to Thomas Taylor's translation of Ficino's Latin version contained in Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, ed. by Stephan Ronan with the translations of the lost works of Proclus "On the Sacred Art" and "On the Signs of Divine Possession" by Thomas Taylor and Alexander Wilder (Hastings, E. Sussex: Chthonios Books, 1989). A gracious thanks to David Blank for proofreading and offering suggestions on the translations.

This “hieratic science” consists in the discovery of natural sympathies and the “turning” (*peristrophē*) of matter toward a divine state.

Hence, from what they saw, the authorities of the sacred art, mixing some things together and appropriately removing others, invented the service to the higher powers... They often made commingled images and incenses, mixing divided tokens into one and making by art the sort of thing that the divine contains according to its essence, insofar as it unites the plural powers, each of which division obscured, while mixture returned it to the form of its model.³³

Proclus ascertains that material objects possess an element of divinity in isolation, but, when combined in a certain way, can “lead back to the form of its model.” The mention of “form” and “model” indicates the Platonic framework within which Proclus envisions the material *synthēmata* as operating. The “mixing (of) some things together and appropriately removing others” enhances the theurgic capability of *synthēmata* by restoring matter to a closer imitation of its original, divine form. Through the theurgist’s intervention, the inert divine properties of *synthēmata* become activated and generate *sympatheia*. Proclus’ notion of the symbol here is also explicable according to the literal sense that *symbolon* denotes in the Greek: a “combination” or “juncture,” in this case of the divine and the material. Each natural object contains a celestial as well as a material nature which the hierophant enlists for theurgic purposes:

But really on the earth there are to be seen suns and moons in a terrestrial manner, in the heavens (there are to be seen) all the plants, stones and animals in a celestial manner alive in a spiritual way. Having perceived these things, and bringing some heavenly things toward some (terrestrial) things and others toward others, the wise men of long ago summoned divine powers into the mortal place, having attracted them through likeness.³⁴

³³ Ibid., pp. 150.24-26; 150.30-151.1-5.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 148.19-23.

The reference to “summon(ing) divine powers into the mortal place” offers a visual image of the cosmological hierarchy within which the *synthēmata* figured. The theurgist “(brings) heavenly things toward (terrestrial) things” through imitation, or “likeness.” In their imitation of matter in its divine state, the *synthēmata* exhibit an accentuated quality of divinity. Proclus’ notion of the mimetic nature of symbolic representation is strikingly reminiscent of Viacheslav Ivanov’s theory of the symbol, which is similarly grounded in a mimetic principle. Ivanov formulates the symbol as a vantage point “from the real to the more real” (*a realibus ad realiora*), i.e. from the material/phenomenal realm to the divine/noumenal realm.

2.3. Verbal *symbola*

Dodds and Van den Berg note that the use of material and verbal symbols is not particular to theurgy, but is found throughout Greco-Egyptian magical rituals.³⁵ Much like material objects, which can be combined as *symbola* in a process of theurgic return to a divine state, verbal utterances can likewise be construed as *symbola*. While *symbola* were thought to be “sown,” in Proclus’ phrase,³⁶ throughout nature and to consist of natural objects such as plants, animals, minerals and so forth, an especially significant role is ascribed to verbal utterances in theurgic practice. Poetry, music, divine names and glossolalia likewise constituted theurgic *symbola*. In the same way that the symbolic potential of material objects can be awakened through the theurgist’s manipulation, verbal utterances can also constitute theurgic activity.

³⁵ Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, p. 57; Van den Berg, *Proclus’ Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary*, p. 70.

³⁶ Proclus, *In Crat.*, 71, 30.29-31.6 Pasquali. “Therefore, the qualities of the substance of the loftier things which are sown into subsequent things are ineffable and unknowable signs (*synthēmata*), and their active and mobile aspect surpasses all intellection.” Translation by Brian Duveck, quoted from Richard Sorabji, *Philosophy of the Commentators, 200-500 AD: A Sourcebook*, vol. 1 (London: Duckworth, 2004), p. 388.

Proclus' commentary on the *Cratylus* mentions the theurgic value of glossolalia as *symbola*: “(The symbols) are uniform in the superior orders but multiform in the inferior. Imitating these symbols, theurgy too produces them through vocalized, though inarticulate, expressions (*ekphonēseis adiarthrōtai*).”³⁷ The theurgist verbalizes *symbola* in glossolalic utterances, though never quite understands what they mean, or why they are effective. Thus incomprehensible vocalizations are likenesses of a divine realm which is too obscure for our perception or understanding. The theurgist re-connects material or verbal entities to their original, and therefore more unified and divine state.

Like material symbols, verbal symbols function by imitation of divine reality. There is both divine and human agency in the creation of the symbols. The Intellect casts the symbols throughout the cosmos, but the theurgist reconstitutes them for ritual purposes. Theurgic poetry must then imitate divine reality if it is to be a theurgically active *symbolon*. The poet-theurgist's task becomes to transform verbal utterances into *symbola* to elicit divine attention and reception. The question then turns to which verbal forms were considered theurgically active, how they imitate or reconstitute divine reality, and what exactly this divine reality was that they were thought to imitate.

2.3.1. Divine Names and *nomina barbara*

It is a *symbolon*'s antiquity that acts as a measure of its theurgic viability. Theurgic verbal forms, *qua symbola*, must therefore be archaisms. It should be recalled here that the *Chaldean Oracles* were composed in archaically stylized Greek hexameters. Iamblichus assigns particular theurgic value to divine names untranslated from the Egyptian:

³⁷ Proclus, *In Crat.*, 71, 31.24-27 Pasquali. Translation by Brian Duvick in Sorabji, *Philosophy of the Commentators*, vol. 1, p. 388.

For, since the gods have shown that the entire dialect of the sacred peoples such as the Assyrians and the Egyptians is appropriate for religious ceremonies, for this reason we must understand that our communication with the gods should be in an appropriate tongue. Also, such a mode of speech is the first and the most ancient. But most importantly, since those who learned the very first names of the gods merged them with their own familiar tongue and delivered them to us, . . . forever we preserve here the unshakeable law of tradition.³⁸

For Iamblichus, the “mode of speech (that) is the first and the most ancient” has theurgic primacy. He defends the theurgic value of the “meaningless names” (*asēma onomata*) contained in the Greek and Demotic magical papyri against Porphyry’s critique.³⁹ The operative principle is the older the name, the closer it is to the original form in which it was made known by the gods. If untranslated, the name retains “divine similitude”: “The symbolic character of divine similitude, which is intellectual and divine, has to be assumed in the names.”⁴⁰ The *Chaldean Oracles* likewise state a direct caution against translating divine names: “Do not change the *nomina barbara*.”⁴¹ The operative principle here is that the god being entreated for theurgic purposes is more likely to recognize and respond to its proper name.

Divine names, therefore, function theurgically if their semantic content is derived from their original lexical, phonological, and morphological forms. The theurgic capability of the name correlates to the antiquity of the linguistic form. If the lexical, phonological and morphological forms of the name are preserved unchanged, this enhances the theurgic receptivity of the name. Translating divine names, on the other hand, detracts from their theurgic value.

³⁸ Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, VII, 4, 256.4-12; 297-299.

³⁹ Clarke, Dillon, and Hershbell, “Introduction,” in *ibid.*, p. xliii. See also Fowden, “Hermetism and Theurgy,” in *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*, pp. 142-154.

⁴⁰ Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, VII, 4, 255.7-9; 297.

⁴¹ Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation, Commentary*, p. 107. Fragment quoted in Psellus, *P.G.*, 122, 1132 c 1-3.

For the names do not exactly preserve the same meaning when they are translated; rather, there are certain idioms in every nation that are impossible to express in the language of another. Moreover, even if it were possible to translate them, this would not preserve their same power.⁴²

Objecting to Porphyry's notion that "all that matters is that the conception remains the same, whatever the kind of words used," Iamblichus contends that the form of the word supercedes its content.⁴³ What is essential for theurgic purposes is archaic language, i.e. utterances akin to the original linguistic forms handed down by the gods. Iamblichus suggests that in order for a god to play an active role in the theurgic process, it must be contacted using its correct name.

Prayers, like names, must also be preserved in an archaic form to have theurgic value: "And it is necessary that the prayers of the ancients, like sacred places of sanctuary, are preserved ever the same and in the same manner, with nothing of alternative origin either removed from or added to them."⁴⁴ The necessity of archaic verbal forms to conduct theurgy poses a problem, however, to "Abamon," the Egyptian priest writing in late antiquity after the Alexandrian conquests.

For this is the reason [the necessity of archaic prayers and names—J.R.] why all these things in place at the present time have lost their power, both the names and the prayers: because they are endlessly altered according to the inventiveness and illegality of the Hellenes. For the Hellenes are experimental by nature, and eagerly propelled in all directions...; and they preserve nothing which they have received from anyone else, but even this they promptly abandon and *change it all according to their unreliable linguistic innovation*.⁴⁵ (emphasis added)

For "Abamon," the theurgic names and prayers, which are of the utmost antiquity, have lost their power due to translation by the "experimental" Greeks. Theurgic language becomes in a sense

⁴² Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, VII, 5, 257.8-11; 299. Translation lightly emended.

⁴³ Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, VII, 5, p. 298, 257.1-2; 299.

⁴⁴ Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, VII, 5, 258.13-14-259.1; 301.

⁴⁵ Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, VII, 5, 259.1-10; 301.

deactivated by “linguistic innovation.” For Iamblichus (as “Abamon”), if the name or prayer is translated or altered phonologically or morphologically, it loses its effectiveness for theurgy. Though perhaps its semantic content becomes more recognizable to us, the name or prayer risks being unrecognizable to the divinities to which it is addressed in the first place.

In other words, the theurgist’s understanding of the semantic meaning of theurgic prayers and names is not essential in the theurgic process. As Iamblichus resolutely states, the *symbola* are understood “solely by the gods.”⁴⁶ Incomprehensibility, or vague comprehensibility, thus enhances the theurgic status of divine names and prayers, or formalized language more generally, as *symbola*. To the gods, the names

are all significant, not according to an effable mode, nor in such a way that is significant and indicative to the imaginations of human beings, but united to the gods either intellectually or rather ineffably, and in a manner superior and more simple than in accordance with intellect.⁴⁷

The meaning of the *symbola* exists independently of human understanding. The *symbola* themselves are “united to the gods” in a way that exceeds our cognition; the theurgist merely recognizes that they have significance. The value of language as a *symbolon*, moreover, is tied to the antiquity of its lexical, phonological, and morphological forms.

While archaism is one measure of linguistic *symbola*, imitation comprises another aspect of language as a *symbolon*. In a certain light, this could be posed as a contradiction. Linguistic *symbola* are dependent on archaism for their theurgic viability, though they also function as imitations of divine reality. Iamblichus addresses the aspect of imitation in discerning and creating the *symbola*. The Egyptians

⁴⁶ Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, II, 11, 97.1; 115.

⁴⁷ Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, VII, 4, 255.1-5; 297.

imitating the nature of the universe and demiurgic power of the gods, display certain images of mystical, arcane and invisible intellections by means of symbols, just as nature copies the unseen principles in visible forms through some mode of symbolism, and the creative activity of the gods indicates the truth of the forms in visible signs.⁴⁸

The creation of symbols imitates the “creative activity of the gods.” The *symbola* can contain “divine similitude,” i.e. likeness to divine creative principles. Archaism can thus be subsumed under the category of imitation, since the linguistic *symbola* are imitations of the creative work of the Demiurge.

2.3.2. Theurgic prayers and hymns

Linguistic *symbola* could occur in the form of prayers, hymns and myths. Iamblichus states categorically in a discussion of prayer and sacrifice that “no sacred act (*hieratikon ergon*) can take place without the supplication contained in prayer.”⁴⁹ Iamblichus’ use of the term *ergon* here includes theurgy, the claim being that prayer is essential to perform a “sacred act” such as theurgy. The question arises as to what sorts of prayers are theurgic, and how they work as theurgy. Proclus’ commentary on the *Timaeus* offers an explanation for how prayers may be considered theurgically active:

And prayer contributes enormously to this *epistrophē* by means of the ineffable symbols of the gods, which the Father of the souls has sown into them. It attracts the beneficence of the gods towards itself and it unifies those who pray to those to whom they pray, it links the intellect of the gods to the words of those who pray, it moves the will of those who contain all goods in a perfect way to bestow them without envy, it creates the persuasion of the divine, and it establishes all that we have in the gods.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, VII, 1, 249.11; 250.1-5; 291. Translation lightly emended.

⁴⁹ Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, V, 26, 238.11-12; 277.

⁵⁰ Proclus, *In Tim.*, I, 211.1 Diehl. Translation reproduced from Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus*, vol. 2, translated with an introduction and notes by David T. Runia and Michael Share (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), p. 47.

For Proclus, prayer facilitates the theurgic goal of *epistrophē*, or return. Proclus places this *epistrophē* within a tripartite structure of causation: “every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and reverts upon it (*epistrephēi*).”⁵¹ The prayers are an attempt to persuade the divine in order to bring about the *epistrophē* of the soul of the theurgist. What enables this return, or ascent within the divine hierarchy, is the *symbola* which are contained in prayer. Prayer makes contact with the divine through the *symbola* as they return to their original cause, i.e. “the Father.”

In R.M. Van den Berg’s description, the symbol for Proclus

is something immaterial which marks someone or something as the product of a cause. These causes, which are the gods of Proclus’ metaphysical system, are situated at the various levels of reality and even seem to include the One itself. It is due to such symbols that we are able to return to the causes of which we bear the symbols.⁵²

Prayers and other linguistic *symbola* therefore help accomplish theurgic *epistrophē*. The *symbola* vary according to the gods that are thought to be their cause, and the levels of reality the theurgist attempts to access. The *symbola* are directed at divinities thought to reside at various levels of the hierarchy. Proclus posits that the Demiurge imputes two symbols in every object (including human souls): one that remains in the divine realm with its original cause, and one that returns to its original cause.⁵³ Proclus’ commentary on the *Timaeus* states that

All things, therefore, both remain in and revert to the gods, receiving this ability from them and obtaining in their very being twin tokens (*ditta synthēmata*), the one in order to remain there, the other so that what proceeds forth can return. And it is possible to observe these not only in souls, but also in the lifeless beings that follow them. For what else is it that produces the sympathy that they have towards the diverse powers than the

⁵¹ Proclus, *Stoicheiōsis theologikē*, D, 35.9-10 Dodds. Translation quoted from Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, translation, introduction, and commentary by E.R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933), p. 39.

⁵² Van den Berg, *Proclus’ Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary*, p. 79.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

fact that they have obtained symbols from nature, which causes them to correspond to the various classes of the gods?⁵⁴

The symbols are the source of the sympathy which connects nature and humanity to the gods.

The twofold nature of the *symbola* allows for theurgic *epistrophē* of the soul of the theurgist.

Van den Berg argues that Proclus' hymns may be considered examples of theurgic practice.⁵⁵ The hymns, much like the *Chaldean Oracles*, are composed in archaically stylized Greek hexameters. The fact that the hymns are directed at various Chaldean deities suggests a theurgic context, but Van den Berg is the first scholar to discuss them as theurgic poetry. The hymns, of which there are seven extant, are addressed to low ranking gods in the divine hierarchy such as the anagogic gods and leader-gods. Though addressed to lower gods, the hymns are designed to permit the theurgist access to Nous, or Intellect. They function, he argues, to persuade lower divinities in the hierarchy to accompany the theurgist to the higher realm of the Intellect.⁵⁶ In both Iamblichus and Proclus, certain theurgic rituals are directed at lesser divinities who facilitate the soul's ascent to upper reaches of the hierarchy. Iamblichus likewise describes theurgy as compelling lower divinities to usher the soul to greater stages of illumination. For Iamblichus, some theurgic rituals distract lesser *daimones* who prevent the theurgist's further ascent to Nous and the One.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Proclus, *In Tim.*, 1, 210.11-19 Diehl. Translation (lightly emended) by David T. Runia and Michael Share in Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus*, vol. 2, p. 46.

⁵⁵ Van den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary*, pp. 86-112.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-65.

⁵⁷ See Emma C. Clarke, *Iamblichus' De Mysteriis: A Manifesto of the Miraculous* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 72-75.

Van den Berg situates his claim about the theurgic nature of the hymns within Anne Sheppard's classification of three types of theurgy in Proclus.⁵⁸ He argues that the hymns may be classified as Sheppard's second type of theurgy, in which the theurgist ascends to the level of the Intellect.⁵⁹ The first type of theurgy is associated with white magic, and the third and highest is unification with the One. Van den Berg draws a parallel between the second type of theurgy and the hymns on the basis that they both involve the anagogic and leader-gods as a stage of *epistrophē* to Nous. Sheppard connects ritual tenuously with the second type of theurgy, doubting whether anything more than purificatory rites would be involved, but as Van den Berg suggests Proclus may have composed the hymns for ritual purposes.

2.3.3. Myths as *symbola*

Proclus argues in his commentary on the *Republic* that the interpretation of poetry and myth can be a *symbolon*. Sheppard suggests that the interpretation of poetry and myth is tied to theurgy.⁶⁰ Proclus' term for this type of reading is *symbolikoteron*, or symbolic. In view of Plato's (disparaging) term for allegory, *hyponoia* ("under-sense"), and the common late-antique usage of *allegoria*, Proclus' description of interpreting poetry and myth as symbolic seems theurgically significant. Proclus critiques Plato's view that poetry has limited representational

⁵⁸ Anne Sheppard, "Proclus' Attitude to Theurgy," *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, vol. 32, no. 1 (1982), pp. 212-224.

⁵⁹ Van den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary*, p. 79.

⁶⁰ Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays of Proclus' Commentary on the Republic*, pp. 145-162.

value.⁶¹ He classifies poems into three groups: inspired, didactic, and imitative.⁶² Inspired poetry, in Proclus' view *contra* Plato, can imitate divine reality. Inspired poetry "installs the soul in the causes of being, making by some sort of ineffable unification the one that is being filled (i.e. with divine goods) identical to the one that is filling."⁶³ The operative principle here, much like for *sympatheia* and the *symbola*, is likeness. Inspired poetry represents something identical to the source of the representation. The symbolic representation that inspired poetry can produce is of a different order for Proclus from the mimesis of natural objects.

The myths have theurgic properties as *symbola*, not only in their interpretation, but in their own right to Proclus. The myths themselves are *symbola*:

...to a small number of people who have woken up to understanding, myths reveal the sympathy which they have towards reality, and the theurgical rites themselves guarantee that their power is connatural to the gods. For the gods themselves rejoice at hearing such symbols and they are persuaded willingly by those who call upon them and they show what is peculiar to them through these signs because they are appropriate to them and especially familiar.⁶⁴

According to Proclus' theory of the symbol, the gods cast the *symbola* into nature. The *symbola*, as well as the gods themselves, can inspire poetic symbols, as Proclus' category of inspired poetry indicates. Granting that *symbola* represent more to the gods than our understanding allows, the recitation of inspired poetry and myths may draw divine attention in a theurgic setting. The theurgic rites independently establish a connection between the myths and the gods.

⁶¹ Plato argued that poetry stood at a third stage of removal from reality as a representation of nature, which is itself a representation of the Forms.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 162-202.

⁶³ Proclus, *In Remp.*, I, 178.12ff Kroll. Translation quoted from Van den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary*, p. 116.

⁶⁴ Proclus, *In Remp.*, I, 83.15-84, 2 Kroll. Translation quoted from Van den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary*, p. 94.

The gods are sympathetic to the myths as *symbola*. Myths, Proclus observes, are additionally useful for instruction in divine matters:

The initiations show that the myths even influence the masses. For these too, using myths as vehicles, in which to embody the ineffable truth concerning the gods, establish for the souls a sympathy with the ongoing ritual in a divine way that is incomprehensible to us. The result is that some of the initiates, filled with divine terror, are astounded, whereas others are affected in a positive way by the holy symbols and, in a state of ecstasy, are completely established in the gods and inspired by them. Evidently, I would say, the classes of beings superior to us which follow the gods awake in us, by means of our love for such signs, the sympathy with the gods which is brought about by means of them.⁶⁵

The myths convey an “ineffable truth” that is “incomprehensible to us” though which brings us into theurgic contact with the gods. Divine inspiration can produce terror or ecstasy. In contrast to Plato, Proclus suggests that myths are useful didactic tools, though only for initiates.

Sheppard notes that the lexicon that Proclus uses to describe symbolic interpretation and representation derives from the mystery religions.⁶⁶ Proclus also ascribes theurgic significance to certain Homeric myths and verses.⁶⁷

In view of Proclus’ correlation between myth and theurgy, it is significant that his hymn to Athena narrates the myth of Dionysus. The hymns recount myths of various deities, though Proclus’ hymnic rendering of the theogony of Dionysus is particularly important for our purposes in understanding Viacheslav Ivanov’s theurgy.

you, who saved the heart, as yet unchopped,
Of lord Bacchus in the vault of heaven, when he was once divided up
by the hands of the Titans, and brought it to his father,
in order that, through the ineffable wishes of his begetter,

⁶⁵ Proclus, *In Remp.*, II, 108.17-27 Kroll. Translation quoted from Van den Berg, *Proclus’ Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary*, p. 95.

⁶⁶ Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays of Proclus’ Commentary on the Republic*, p. 145.

⁶⁷ See Derek Collins “The Magic of Homeric Verses”, *Classical Philology*, vol. 103, no. 3 (July 2008), p. 230. See also Olivia Kuisma, *Proclus’ Defense of Homer* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1996).

a new Dionysus would grow again from Semele around the cosmos;⁶⁸

The narrative of Dionysus' dismemberment by the Titans, his heart's preservation by Athena, and his rebirth adumbrates the Orphic myth of Dionysus. Proclus adheres to one version of the myth in which Zeus places the heart in a broth eaten by Semele, who becomes pregnant and gives birth to Dionysus. The story of Dionysus would have perhaps been one of the myths that called for a symbolic interpretation for theurgic purposes. Van den Berg, following Pepin, discusses an interpretation of the myth dating to antiquity that he classifies as a "spiritual exegesis":

The emotions and irrational powers (the Titans) that come with living in a body distract the attention of the soul from the metaphysical realm, characterized by unity, towards the realm of matter, characterized by plurality, thus scattering the particular soul (the body of Dionysus). However, our intellect (the heart) remains intact. The right use of intellect may, with the help of Athena, enable the *epistrophē* of our soul towards the world of unity away from the world of matter.⁶⁹

Van den Berg does not specifically mention the myth of Dionysus within the hymn as a potential theurgic *symbolon*. The exegesis, however, emphasizes the same goal as theurgy—*epistrophē* toward a realm of greater unity away from one of greater plurality. Given Proclus' claim that symbolic interpretation of myths serves to unite the soul with the gods,⁷⁰ the myth of Dionysus may be associated here with theurgy. The myth of Dionysus, itself a kind of *symbolon* to Proclus, perhaps bolsters Athena's receptivity to the hymn. The hymns, *symbola* in their own right, include symbolic myths, which undergo another stage of theurgic activation through interpretation.

⁶⁸ Proclus, Hymn 7.11-15. Translation quoted from Van den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary*, p. 277.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 289. Proclus discusses this interpretation of the myth in *In Alc.*, p. 43, 24ff Segonds.

⁷⁰ See Proclus, *In Remp.*, 171, 177.15-23 Kroll.

3. Sacramental Theurgy in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite

Since, as chapter three discusses, Viacheslav Ivanov envisions theurgy as resuscitating a tie between Dionysus and Christ, the topic of theurgy in Christianity must also be addressed. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, a saint in eastern and western Christian churches, wrote treatises such as the *Celestial Hierarchy*, *Mystic Theology* and the *Divine Names*, the mere titles of which suggest Platonic leanings. Pseudo-Dionysius' works were composed in Greek by a pseudonymous theologian in the fifth or sixth century who attributed the works to the biblical figure, Dionysius the Areopagite.⁷¹ His theology demonstrates an immense debt to Neoplatonist thought and Proclus especially. This section will look at aspects of Pseudo-Dionysius' theology which resonate with theurgic Neoplatonist ideas.

3.1. Apophatic theology

Pseudo-Dionysius is among the first theorizers of apophatic, or negative, theology in the Christian tradition. This approach to knowing and interacting with the divine attempts to delimit what one cannot understand about divine operations. It posits God as ineffable and unknowable, and comprehensible only in negative terms (i.e. not limited, not created, etc.). Pseudo-Dionysius envisions the ineffable God as presiding at the summit of a hierarchy of divine and material being. Similar to the Neoplatonist's One, Pseudo-Dionysius' God is cloaked in mystery. Pseudo-Dionysius' hierarchy has two main subcategories, the celestial and the ecclesiastical, which mirror each other in earthly and divine realms. The celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies, much as in Neoplatonism, are gradated according to unity and plurality, with the higher stages

⁷¹ See Acts 17:34.

representing greater unity and simplicity. Procession through the divine hierarchy, which Pseudo-Dionysius calls “illumination,” occurs as a result of the correct performance of ritual acts and their corresponding reception by divine entities within the hierarchy. Wear and Dillon explain that this procession in Pseudo-Dionysius is sourced from Proclus:

Dionysius’ God engages in the Platonist tri-fold motion of remaining, procession and reversion, whereby a self-constituted entity processes downward in a cycle of creation, radiates itself to form a multitude, while simultaneously drawing this multitude back to itself in a process of reversion. This diffusion and its reversion, however, do not affect the source of the multitude, which remains unified in a singular state of ‘remaining’ (*monē*). Dionysius describes this process of creation through procession using Proclus’ language of ‘bubbling over.’⁷²

Pseudo-Dionysius, similarly to Proclus, sees creation as a “bubbling over” or emanation of the divine. The procession through the hierarchy according to Pseudo-Dionysius, much as in Proclus, is a return, or *epistrophē* to the soul’s divine origin. As in theurgic Neoplatonism, this return is accomplished through the enactment of rituals involving *symbola*. In apophatic theology the effectiveness of ritual acts, which are based on symbols, is not entirely understood by their performer.⁷³ The symbols serve both to conceal and disclose the nature of God. Since, in Pseudo-Dionysius’ apophatic framework, God remains unknowable save through the mediation of symbols, theurgic *epistrophē* serves an epistemological as well as a salvific purpose.⁷⁴

⁷² Sarah Klitenic Wear and John Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition: Despoiling the Hellenes* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 51.

⁷³ For a further discussion of theurgy, apophatic theology, and Pseudo-Dionysius, see John Milbank, “Sophiology and Theurgy: the New Theological Horizon” in *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World through the Word*, ed. by Adriab Pabst and Christoph Schneider (Marnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 43-52.

⁷⁴ The introductory chapters of the *Celestial Hierarchy* divide symbols into “similar” and “dissimilar” categories. Those that are “similar” closely approximate what they symbolize, whereas those that are “dissimilar” function by antipodal correspondence. The idea behind

3.2. *Symbola* in Pseudo-Dionysius

These rituals and sacramental procedures function according to the receptivity of the divine to *symbola*.

We use appropriate symbols [*symbola*] for the things of God. With these analogies [*analogiai*] we are raised upward towards the truth of the mind's vision, a truth which is simple and one. We leave behind us all our own notions of the divine. We call a halt to the activities of our minds and to the extent that is proper, we approach the ray which transcends being. Here, in a manner no words can describe, pre-existed the goals of all knowledge and it is of a kind that neither intelligence nor speech can lay hold of, nor can it at all be contemplated, since it surpasses everything and is wholly beyond our capacity to know it. Transcendently, it contains within itself the boundaries of every natural knowledge and energy. At the same time, it is established by an unlimited power beyond all celestial minds. And if all knowledge is that which is limited to the realm of the existent, then whatever transcends being must also transcend knowledge.⁷⁵

The *symbola* enable us to “leave behind us all our own notions of the divine” since they represent something more to God than to us. The way the *symbola* work is beyond all human intelligibility, but we understand this functionality to be “established by an unlimited power beyond all celestial minds.” The *symbola* mediate “every natural knowledge and energy.” The *symbola*, as in Proclus, originate from the divine and are cast into natural objects and souls upon

“dissimilar” symbols relates to the apophatic emphasis in Pseudo-Dionysius’ theology, since symbols that are dissimilar to God indicate what is contrary to his nature. See Eric Perl, “Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite,” in *Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, vol. 2, pp. 785-6.

⁷⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita Scr. Eccl., Theol., *De divinis nominibus* (2798: 004) “Corpus Dionysiacum i: Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita. *De divinis nominibus*,” ed. B.R. Suchla (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990); *Patristische Texte und Studien* 33.115.6-18. Translation quoted from Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*, p. 85.

creation. As in theurgic Neoplatonism, Dionysian *symbola* consist of things such as material entities, poetry, divine names, glossolalic utterances, and scriptural interpretation.⁷⁶

Pseudo-Dionysius ascribes theurgic activity to divine names in the scriptures. Since the divine names are given at the time of creation, as Wear and Dillon describe, they “refer to particular *ousiai*; the name is an illumination of the divine.”⁷⁷ They act as *symbola* which sympathetically correspond to divine beings within the celestial hierarchy. These names are activated through scriptural interpretation and recitation:

This is the kind of theurgic enlightenment into which we have been initiated by the hidden tradition of our inspired teachers, a tradition at one with scripture. We now grasp these things in the best way we can, and as they come to us, wrapped in the sacred veils of that love towards humanity with which scripture and hierarchical traditions cover the truths of the mind with the things derived from the realm of the senses.⁷⁸

As Hans-Joachim Schultz discusses, Pseudo-Dionysius’ view is that the symbol both contains and discloses divine reality.⁷⁹ It has a dual nature of rendering the divine in perceptible, cognizable forms, while also pointing to something essential other than the form itself. In the instance of divine names from scripture, the name both contains and discloses the *ousia* that it signifies. It can thus be used to call forth the divine in an exegetical or liturgical context. Wear and Dillon state that “Primarily, Dionysius refers to passages and even to particular words in scripture as symbols that signify a higher reality...The word itself performs a generative function

⁷⁶ See Eric Perl, “Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite,” in *Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, vol. 2, pp. 785-6. See also Wear and Dillon, “Scriptural Interpretation [*Theoria*] as Onomastic Theurgy” and “*Hierourgia* and *Theourgia* in Sacramental Activity,” in *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*, pp. 85-98.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁷⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Div. Nom.* 113.12-114.7. Translation quoted from Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*, p. 91.

⁷⁹ Hans-Joachim Schultz, *The Byzantine Liturgy: Symbolic Structure and Faith Expression* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1980), pp. 25-26.

unleashed at the divine level, but still potent when it functions as human language.”⁸⁰ This notion of symbolic containing and disclosing figures in Pseudo-Dionysius’ view of language and liturgical poetry. Language can symbolically represent the divine, and the divine can be manifest in language:

And what could anyone say about sacred tokens [*synthēmata*] that attempt to render the form of God by putting forward and multiplying the visible shapes of things hidden, the divisions of things one and undivided, and shapes and many forms of things shapeless and formless? With regard to these, if anyone is able fittingly to see and distinguish their inner meaning, he will discover that they are all mystic things, of a divine form, and filled with much theological light.⁸¹

The “sacred tokens” possess an “inner meaning” which carries “mystic” significance. Like Proclus’ association between theurgy and the symbolic interpretation of myths, Pseudo-Dionysius stresses the interpretation of symbols in scripture as a means of establishing contact with the divine.

For Pseudo-Dionysius, linguistic and material *symbola* contribute to ritual and sacramental activities that elicit a response from God. Pseudo-Dionysius’ emphasis on ritual demonstrates a clear association with theurgic *ergon*. Sacraments such as the eucharist or baptism must be enacted ritually using the proper *symbola*; the means by which they instantiate divinity is not entirely clear, nor is it for us to know. Pseudo-Dionysius associates the parables of Jesus with theurgic mysteries: “...we see the all-holy angels bringing forth divine things mystically by means of enigmas, and Jesus himself speaking about God in parables, handing

⁸⁰ Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*, p. 86.

⁸¹ Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Ep.* 9.1. Translation (lightly emended) quoted from Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*, p. 87.

down the theurgic (*theourga*) mysteries by means of the symbolic (*typikos*) furnishing of a table.”⁸² Pseudo-Dionysius also discusses Jesus’ works as examples of *theia erga*, or theurgy.⁸³

4. Conclusion

Viacheslav Ivanov’s attempt to integrate theurgy into his theory of the symbol and his poetics contains demonstrable parallels with the theurgic thought of Iamblichus, Proclus, and Pseudo-Dionysius. This chapter’s emphasis on the different types of symbols involved in Neoplatonist and Pseudo-Dionysian theurgy is designed to contextualize the discussion of Ivanov’s theoretical essays and poetry in chapters 3 and 4. Notions such as the theurgic symbol’s ineffability, its resonance within a Platonic cosmological model, its emphasis on archaic form over content, its combination of religious and philosophical premises, its centrality to ritual practice, and its relationship to myth all figure prominently for Ivanov. As will be shown, Ivanov invests particular theurgic significance in symbols and myths related to the god Dionysus, whom he envisions as a predecessor to Christ. Given Ivanov’s adumbration of a typology between Dionysus and Christ on the basis of their similar narratives of suffering, death and rebirth, this chapter touches upon the transferral of theurgy from the Neoplatonist to the Christian tradition. As chapters 3 and 4 discuss, Ivanov considered theurgic symbols to be instrumental in retracing the path from antiquity to Christianity, and in instantiating a revitalized religious sensibility in the modern era. Chapter 2 turns to the Church Slavonic translations of the Dionysian corpus and the topic of theurgy in the pre-modern era in Russia.

⁸² Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Ep.* 9.1, PG 3, 1105D-1108A. Translation by David G. Robinson; quoted from Sorabji, *Philosophy of the Commentators, 200-500 AD: A Sourcebook*, vol. 1, p. 390.

⁸³ See Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*, pp. 99-116.

Chapter 2 –

Bogodēistvie and *Teurgii*: Pre-Symbolist Theurgy in Russia

1.1. Introduction

The first chapter discussed the Neoplatonist sources for theurgy as well as Iamblichus and Proclus' notions of the theurgic symbol. Drawing from Neoplatonism, the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius formulate a sacramental theology founded on the mediation of divinity through symbols.¹ The Serbian monk Isaiia's fourteenth-century translation of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus into Church Slavonic was pivotal in the development of Russian theology.² Theurgy thus initially enters Russian culture as *bogodēistvie*³ through Isaiia's translations of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus. As a Church Father and a saint venerated by both Western and Eastern Churches, Pseudo-Dionysius introduces theurgy to Russian culture as the biblical figure "Dionysius the Areopagite," i.e. under the aegis of official Orthodoxy, and not as "occult" knowledge. Pseudo-Dionysian theurgy in turn contributed to the theology of the sacraments in the Russian Orthodox Church beginning in the fourteenth century.⁴

¹ For a discussion of symbols and their sacramental significance in Pseudo-Dionysius' theology, see Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), pp. 117-125.

² V.G. Egorkin, *Nasledie antichnoi filosofii v vostochnoslavianskoi dukhovnosti Srednevekov'ia: XI-pervaia tret' XVII vv.* (Biisk: NITS BiGPI, 1995), p. 63.

³ The Church Slavonic text that appears in this chapter will follow the transliteration system for Old Church Slavonic recommended by the Library of Congress. While Isaiia's translation of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus represents a later recension of Old Church Slavonic, which will be called Church Slavonic in this chapter (see footnote 6), the transliteration system for Old Church Slavonic is also applicable to the later recension.

⁴ See John Milbank, "Sophiology and Theurgy: the New Theological Horizon" in *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World through the Word*,

To phrase the main concern of this chapter using an evolutionary metaphor, what are the conditions in Russian culture that allow theurgy to develop? Russia's inheritance of the Greco-Byzantine Rite acts as an important point of departure in conceptualizing theurgy in Russian culture. Given theurgy's ties to both Platonism and Greek mystery religion, its transferral to Christianity, and later to Russian culture, occurs not without some modification to the term's initial meaning and use. The defining aspects of theurgy, however, persist in the Russian context, such as its emphasis on the ineffability of the *symbola* and its reliance on the correct, inalterable performance of theurgic rituals. As Iamblichus insists, the notion that "the symbols themselves, by themselves" are the agents of theurgic ritual (and not the hierophant) remains the cornerstone of theurgy in Russian Orthodoxy. It is not directly through Neoplatonism, but through the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus that theurgy initially enters Russian culture in the fourteenth century. Neoplatonic sources, notably Iamblichus and Proclus, begin to shape Russian theurgic thought in the second half of the nineteenth century. By that time, however, Pseudo-Dionysian theurgy had underlied the Russian Church's theology of the sacraments for some five centuries.⁵ Russian Symbolism's receptivity to theurgic ideas should therefore be

ed. by Adriab Pabst and Christoph Schneider (Marnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 43-52. See also John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), pp. 201-205.

⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius' theurgic stance toward the sacraments had also figured in the Byzantine sacramental theology which Russia inherited earlier, in the tenth century. It is in the fourteenth century through Isaiia's translation of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus, however, that theurgic terminology such as *bogoděistvie* enters the Russian theological lexicon. G.P. Fedotov remarks that "Через Дионисия вся традиция поздней неоплатонической теургической мистики Ямвлиха и Прокла влилась в мистическую религиозность древнехристианской Церкви, углубив уже существовавший и без того мощный поток обрядности." In *Russkaia religioznost'*, part 1, vol. 10 (Moscow: Martis, 2001), p. 38. ("Through Dionysius the entire tradition of the late Neoplatonist theurgic mysticism of Iamblichus and Proclus infused the mystical religiosity of the early Christian church, having intensified what was already a powerful stream of ritualism.") The translation of Pseudo-Dionysian corpus had a similar effect of

placed in a wider historical view that antedates the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Approaching theurgy in Russian culture involves taking into account Pseudo-Dionysian *bogodēistvie* as well as Neoplatonist *teurgiia*. Russian religious symbolism – both in the Church and in the modernist literary movement – contains undertones of Greek theurgic ideas. This chapter will examine the history of theurgic ideas in Russia beginning with the Serbian monk Isaiia’s fourteenth-century translations of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus into Church Slavonic.⁶ It will then discuss Pseudo-Dionysian *bogodēistvie* and Neoplatonist *teurgiia* as envisioned by more immediate predecessors to Ivanov and the Symbolists such as Vladimir Solov’ev and Nikolai Fedorov.

1.2. Apophatic Theology and Paul’s Oration on the “Unknown God”

The pseudonymous author of the fifth or sixth century who wrote as Dionysius the Areopagite assumed the name of a biblical figure whom Paul is described as converting in the Acts of the Apostles.⁷ Recalling the theurgic potential of names in Pseudo-Dionysian theology from chapter 1, the significance of this gesture deserves note. Numerous points of theurgic

“intensify(ing) the powerful stream of ritualism that had pre-existed without it” upon its introduction into the Russian context. Thus the contention here is not that the translation of the corpus somehow altered Russian theology, but that it expanded its lexicon.

⁶ Natal’ia Nikolaeva describes the language of the translation of *On the Divine Names* as “древнеславянский, точнее – средний древнеславянский, общий литературный язык южных и восточных славян.” (“Church Slavonic, though more precisely middle Church Slavonic, the common literary language of South and East Slavs.”): Nikolaeva, *Traktat Dionisiia Areopagita O bozhestvennykh imenakh v drevneslaianskom perevode* (Frankfurt am Main; Berlin; Bern; Bruxelles; New York; Oxford; Vienna: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 10-11.

⁷ Acts 17:34. As discussed in chapter 1, the identity of Pseudo-Dionysius remains a matter for dispute, though Nutsbidze’s suggestion of the Georgian bishop Peter the Iberian has gained some consensus. See Shalva Nutsbidze, *Petr Iver i antichnoe filosofskoe nasledie: Problemy Areopagitiki* (Tbilisi: Izdatel’stvo SSP Gruzii “Literatura i iskusstvo,” 1963).

significance in fact can be drawn from looking at the account of the Areopagite's conversion. Acts describes Paul's missionary activity in Athens, where he preaches to those gathered at the Areopagus, a hill where the Athenian legal council would congregate. The site of Dionysius' conversion is symbolic of the Greek legal and philosophical tradition in Athens preceding the introduction of Christianity. Much as the pseudonymous author who took Dionysius' name adapts concepts from the Platonist tradition – such as theurgy – to Christianity, Dionysius' conversion at the Areopagus signifies a seamless transition from Greek philosophy to Christian theology. Paul observes an inscription on an altar reading “to an unknown god,” and endeavors to convince the Greeks that the “unknown god” is in reality Christ. Thus, in what could be called a cataphatic theological gesture of describing an unknown god, Paul converts a figure whose name would be used six centuries later to introduce apophatic theology to the Christian tradition.

The author's framing of apophatic theology as “Dionysius the Areopagite's” response to Paul's discourse on an “unknown god” emphasizes a sense of fluidity or succession from Greek philosophy and polytheism to Christianity. The corpus' attribution to “Dionysius the Areopagite” serves to reinforce the likeness between Athenian and Christian religiosity that Paul adumbrates. In Acts, Paul appeals to the Athenians gathered on the Areopagus (who “spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas”)⁸ by emphasizing continuity rather than fissure between the tradition of Greek philosophy, law, and religion and Christianity. He quotes the Stoic Aratus (“We are his offspring”) as a prelude to condemning idolatry. The multiple references to idolatry in the passage containing Pseudo-Dionysius' *nom de plume* also have theurgic resonance. As discussed in the first chapter, theurgy is thought to have been performed with the aid of telestic objects such as statues or images of gods. While

⁸ Acts 17:21.

statues and other public objects of devotion were a mainstay of Hellenic culture, the significance of symbols and images within the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus brings this feature of the biblical passage into high relief. Pseudo-Dionysius' theology, with its Neoplatonic emphasis on "the symbols themselves, by themselves," as well as its elaborate angelic and ecclesiastical hierarchies, attempts to "Christianize" certain features of Greek religion that Paul decries, such as idol worship and polytheism. Considering that theurgy is semantically and conceptually rooted in *erga* ("acts" or "works"), Dionysius the Areopagite's appearance in the book of Acts also plays into the theurgic thematics of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus.

The theme of the "unknown god" was one that preoccupied Viacheslav Ivanov, who wrote a poem entitled "Nevedomomu bogu" ("To an Unknown God," 1902), and made reference to the phrase and the biblical passage with some regularity in his essays and correspondence.⁹ The biblical passage encapsulates an important *tvorcheskii zamysel*, or creative impulse, behind Ivanov's work—to trace symbolic continuities between the Greco-pagan and Christian worlds. The concept of ineffability and "unknown gods" is central to Russian Symbolism, with its Kantian-Schopenhauerian epistemology of noumenal and phenomenal worlds.¹⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, as already examined in the first chapter, developed a theology from a point of departure of the ineffability of God. With God knowable in only negative terms, liturgical and scriptural symbols serve an epistemological purpose. Pseudo-Dionysius' view of the symbol, as

⁹ See Viacheslav Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1 (Brussels: Foyer Chrétien, 1972), pp. 540-2; in vol. 2, p. 556.

¹⁰ See Kåre Johan Mjør. "Philosophy, Modernity National Identity: The Quest for a Russian Philosophy at the Turn of the Twentieth Century" *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (October 2014), pp. 622-652.

discussed in the first chapter, draws from Proclus' notion that the full significance of the theurgic *symbola* remains occluded to the theurgist.

Divinity in Pseudo-Dionysius is metaphorized as illumination, which descends through gradated celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies. Divine illumination is accordingly presented to us in symbolic form, i.e. in the church's liturgical worship, in divine names, and in images. As Pseudo-Dionysius states, divine illumination "takes place in a purely spiritual manner in the sphere of the angelic world," but then is "repeated in the Church in symbols, sacraments and images, that is in half-spiritual, half-visible forms which at once copy and conceal the spiritual process occurring in the higher sphere."¹¹ For Pseudo-Dionysius, the unknowability of God is mediated by the Church's liturgical symbolics and ritual practice. The ineffability of the divine creates a condition under which theurgy, in either a polytheistic or monotheistic setting, may be considered effective.¹² If God is thought to be unknowable, the full significance of the theurgic *symbola* also lies beyond the theurgist's grasp. Since, as Pseudo-Dionysius suggests, the symbols conceal divine reality as much as they disclose it, they retain an element of mystery that is similarly accorded to the upper echelons of the ontological hierarchy.

The pseudonymity of "Dionysius the Areopagite" compounds the emphasis on unknowability in his theology. Doubt as to the Areopagite's authorship has existed since the corpus' discovery in Constantinople in 533, when the Ephesian bishop Hypatius first called it

¹¹ Quoted from Hans Joachim Schultz, *Byzantine Liturgy: Symbolic Structure and Faith Expression* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1980), pp. 25-26.

¹² As discussed in chapter 1, *henosis* or "unity" with the divine – the object of theurgic practice – was often metaphorized by the Neoplatonists as illumination. The theurgist's ascent to the divine realm was thought to take place with the aid of rays of light. Pseudo-Dionysius' description of symbols as vehicles for divine illumination clearly draws upon the imagery of Neoplatonic theurgy.

into question.¹³ The arguments disproving Dionysius the Areopagite's authorship are not necessary to reproduce here; it suffices to mention for our purposes that Pseudo-Dionysius' references to Proclus date the composition of the texts to the fifth century or later. The corpus was composed in support of the monophysite position in the Church, which was refuted at the Chalcedonian council of 451.¹⁴ The seventh-century commentary on the corpus by Maximus the Confessor cemented the status of Dionysius the Areopagite as a Church Father, and ensured its canonicity in Eastern Christianity.¹⁵

2.1. The Pseudo-Dionysian Corpus in Russia

The corpus, along with Maximus the Confessor's commentary, was translated into Church Slavonic by the elder Isaiia in 1371 at the request of the Serbian metropolitan Theodosius.¹⁶ Isaiia's translations circulated widely in Russia beginning in the fifteenth century.¹⁷ The canonicity of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus in the Russian Church is suggested by the inclusion of Isaiia's translation in the sixteenth-century anthology of church documents the *Velikie Minei Chet'i* (*The Great Menaion Reader*). Gelian Prokhorov notes four extant copies of

¹³ G.M. Prokhorov, *Pamiatniki perevodnoi i russkoi literatury XIV-XV vekov* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1987), p. 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ See the introduction to Prokhorov's translation, G.M. Prokhorov, ed. and trans. *Dionisii Areopagit. Sochineniia. Tolkovaniia Maksim Ispovednika* (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2002), pp. 2-24. See also G.M. Prokhorov, "Korpus sochinenii s imenem Dionisiia Areopagita v drevnerusskoi literature: Problemy i zadachy izucheniia," *TODRL*, vol. 31 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1976), pp. 356-7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 531.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 532-534.

Isaia's translation dating to the fifteenth century, eleven to the sixteenth century, twenty three to the seventeenth century, six to the eighteenth century, and three to the nineteenth century.¹⁸ In 1675, the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus was again translated from the Greek by a monk, Evfimii, of the Chudov monastery, though this translation remains unpublished. Translations of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and the *Celestial Hierarchy* were completed in Moscow in 1787.¹⁹ Until Prokhorov's translations at the end of the twentieth century, the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus existed only piecemeal in modern Russian. Prokhorov, in fact, published the first Russian translation of *On the Divine Names*.²⁰ A Russian translation of the *Mystical Theology* appeared as *Misticheskoe bogoslovie* in the journal *Khristianskoe chtenie* in 1825.²¹ Segments of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus were published throughout the nineteenth century with some regularity in Russian thick journals.²²

The Pseudo-Dionysian corpus' initial translation into Church Slavonic in the fourteenth century at the request of the Serbian metropolitan Theodosius was directed at a Russian reading audience.²³ The translation accordingly may be assessed as a document of the second South

¹⁸ Prokhorov, "Korpus sochinenii s imenem Dionisiia Areopagita v drevnerusskoi literature: Problemy i zadachy izucheniia," p. 354.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *O bozhestvennykh imenakh; O misticheskom bogoslovii*, trans. by G.M. Prokhorov (St. Petersburg: "Glagol," 1994).

²¹ G.M Prokhorov, "Korpus sochinenii s imenem Dionisiia Areopagita v drevnerusskoi literature: Problemy i zadachy izucheniia," p. 354.

²² Ibid.

²³ Nikolaeva, citing N.I. Tolstoi, "K voprosu o drevneslavianskom iazyke kak obshchem literaturnom iazyke iuzhnykh i vostochnykh slavian," in *Istorii i struktura slavianskikh literaturnykh iazykov* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), pp. 34-52, states that "перевод Исаяи предназначался в первую очередь для русского читателя той эпохи." ("Isaia's translation

Slavic influence on Russian literature.²⁴ Isaiia's introduction to the corpus notes the translation's need "in the vilest of evil times," referring to the Ottoman invasion of the Balkans and the impending fall of the Byzantine empire in the following century.²⁵ The Pseudo-Dionysian corpus appears at a watershed moment in Russian cultural history, as Prokhorov discusses:

Кризисная эпоха "византийского гуманизма," "христианского гуманизма," "перевозрождения" и одновременно "православного возрождения" окрашена сильнейшим влиянием сочинений Дионисия Ареопагита; и именно в это время возникает потребность в переводе их на славянский язык и они получают доступ к новой громадной читательской аудитории.²⁶

The appearance of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus coincides with events in Russian cultural history such as the fourteenth-century monastic revival, the debates over hesychasm within the Church, the disintegration of the "Mongol Yoke," the decline of the Byzantine empire, and Moscow's inheritance of Constantinople's former symbolic status as the "new Rome."²⁷ V.G. Egor'kin

was primarily intended for a Russian reader of the given epoch.") In *Traktat Dionisiia Areopagita O bozhestvennykh imenakh v drevneslavianskom perevode*, pp. 10-11.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Prokhorov, *Pamiatniki perevodnoi i russkoi literatury XIV-XV vekov*, p. 5.

²⁶ G.M Prokhorov, "Korpus sochinenii s imenem Dionisiia Areopagita v drevnerusskoi literature: Problemy i zadachy izucheniia," p. 356. ("The crisis epoch of "Byzantine Humanism," "Christian Humanism," the "Renaissance" and the simultaneous "Orthodox Renaissance" is colored by the significant influence of the compositions of Dionysius the Areopagite. It is precisely at that historical moment that a demand arises for a translation of the texts into a Slavic language, and it is then that they gain access to an enormous new readership.") All translations from the Russian are mine unless otherwise noted.

²⁷ The appearance of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus in Russia also roughly coincides with the translation of Byzantine texts of a less canonical variety. Uri Daigin notes that "Written prayer-spell textbooks and divinatory texts translated from Byzantine manuscripts did not appear in Russia until the late fifteenth century. The latter contain some forms of calendars, primitive astrology, thunder divination etc." In "Magical-Theurgical Language Theories," in *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*, ed. by Daniel Abrams and Evraham Elqayam, vol. 14 (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2006), p. 120.

argues that the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus, with its emphasis on hierarchies of various orders, contributed to the ideological and political centralization of Russia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.²⁸ Isaiia's translations became frequently cited materials in the controversy over hesychasm (a term derived from the Greek *hesychia*, or "stillness") in the Russian Orthodox Church in the fourteenth century.²⁹ The corpus thus enters Russian culture at a time in which Orthodox theology was undergoing a "renaissance" precisely due to the translation of Greek texts, the works of Pseudo-Dionysius prominently among them.³⁰

Prokhorov argues that the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus receives particular attention during times of crisis or controversy in the Russian Church.³¹ As noted above, twenty three (extant) copies of Isaiia's translation were made during the seventeenth-century schism in the Church. The Pseudo-Dionysian corpus' significance in historical eras of renewal or crisis, such as the monastic revival or the schism, gives insight into its reception in the Russian context. Pseudo-Dionysian theology, which is grounded in the unknowability of God and the mystical power of liturgical symbols, can, in one sense, be readily deployed in the service of traditionalism within the Church. As one of Paul's first converts, Dionysius the Areopagite – a name linking the past and future of Greek intellectual and religious history – invokes an authority of traditionalism

²⁸ Egorkin, *Nasledie antichnoi filosofii v vostochnoslavianskoi dukhovnosti Srednevekov'ia: XI-pervaia tret' XVII vv.*, p. 29.

²⁹ See Nikolaeva, *Traktat Dionisiia Areopagita O bozhestvennykh imenakh v drevneslaianskom perevode*, p. 10. See also Prokhorov, "Korpus sochinenii s imenem Dionisiia Areopagita v drevnerusskoi literature: Problemy i zadachy izucheniia," p. 356.

³⁰ V.V. Kolesov, "Idei grecheskoi filosofii v otechesvennoi dukhovnoi kul'ture XIV-XVIII vv." in V.M. Nichik et al., ed. *Otechestvennaia filosofskaia mysl' v XI-XVII vv. i grecheskaia kul'tura* (Kiev: Nauka, 1991), p. 211.

³¹ Prokhorov, "Korpus sochinenii s imenem Dionisiia Areopagita v drevnerusskoi literature: Problemy i zadachy izucheniia," pp. 354-356.

harking back to pre-Christian times. With Pseudo-Dionysius' emphasis on the *unknowability* of God, and the *inexplicable* power of symbols, apophaticism can be construed to reinforce old ways being called into question. If God is presumed to be unknowable, as Pseudo-Dionysian theology posits, then the traditions which Christ and the Church have established, such as the Eucharist and the Divine Liturgy, act as the surest means of retaining contact with him.

In another sense, however, the significance of Pseudo-Dionysian theology in the fourteenth century, with its Neoplatonist leanings, fits a renaissance rubric of rediscovering Greek antiquity in support of new ideas (such as hesychasm):

Перевод трактата был произведен во время активного влияния со стороны Византии на славянскую общественную мысль, так что зарождение и стремительное развитие такого характерного для этой эпохи движения, как исихазм, можно рассматривать одновременно как фон для работы инокa Исаии и как практическое воплощение теоретических идей, заложенных в трактате Дионисия.³²

Hesychasm is a fourteenth-century elaboration upon Pseudo-Dionysian theology, and a cornerstone of the “Orthodox Renaissance.” Palamas’ theology of “essence and energies” is grounded in Pseudo-Dionysian apophaticism—God’s essence is unknowable, while his energies signify his essences. For Palamas *trans* Pseudo-Dionysius, God’s energies are symbols—they both contain and disclose his essence. The doctrine of God’s unknowability in hesychasm renders symbolism the “exclusive means of knowing,” as V.G. Egorin argues:

Исихазм редуцировал и тем самым объединил и античный философский материал...и богословскую систему Ареопагита, абсолютизовав, во-первых,

³² Nikolaeva, *Traktat Dionisiia Areopagita O bozhestvennykh imenakh v drevneslaianskom perevode*, p. 16. (“The translation of (*On the Divine Names*) was produced at a time of active Byzantine influence on Slavic social thought. The genesis and rapid development of such a characteristic movement of the era as hesychasm can be considered both as a backdrop for Isaiia’s work and a practical embodiment of the theoretical ideas contained in the Dionysian corpus.”)

мистический символизм как исключительное средство познания, и, во-вторых, апофазу как основную тенденцию в гносеологии.³³

Theurgic ideas thus underlie the “Orthodox Renaissance” and the Orthodox Church’s theology of hesychastic prayer.

Much as the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus’ “mystical symbolism” invoked an authority spanning to Greek antiquity in Russian culture of the fourteenth century, to Iamblichus and Proclus, theurgy represented a doctrine that vastly antedated them. The translation of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus contributes to the theology of “mystical symbolism” regarding the sacraments in the Russian Orthodox Church. Maximus the Confessor’s commentary further elaborated upon this sacramental symbolism, as John Meyendorff states: “Maximus the Confessor...systematically applies the terms ‘symbol’ or ‘image’ to the Eucharistic liturgy in general and to the elements of bread and wine in particular.”³⁴ The notion of symbolism in Russian culture accordingly has been shaped by Pseudo-Dionysius’ theory of the symbol since the fourteenth century. The theurgic strain in Russian culture thus develops initially in the Church upon the translation of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus into Church Slavonic. The Russian Church’s “mystical symbolism” operates under theurgic assumptions of the unknowability of the divine and the epistemological indispensability of symbol and ritual. The liturgical practice of the Orthodox Church must be understood in view of theurgy’s emphasis on the correct performance of ritual actions such as reciting prayers and divine names.

³³ Egorkin, *Nasledie antichnoi filosofii v vostochnoslavianskoi dukhovnosti Srednevekov’ia: XI-pervaia tret’ XVII vv.*, pp. 33-4. (“Hesychasm reduced and by the same token united material from ancient philosophy...and the theological system of the Areopagite, having absolutized, in the first instance, mystical symbolism as the exclusive means of knowing and, in the second instance, apophaticism as the foundational premise of epistemology.”)

³⁴ Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, p. 203.

Egorkin suggests that the translation of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus led to a significant terminological shift in Russian theology.³⁵ The Areopagite's texts “dali vostochnoslavianskoi dukhovnosti obilie raznoobraznykh filosofskikh terminov, voskhodiashchikh k poniatiino-terminologicheskomu apparatu grecheskogo ‘liubomudriia.’”³⁶ In addition to an expanded philosophical lexicon, Nikolaeva argues that terminology associated with the Greek mystery religions was adapted to Russian theology, observing that root repetition in *On the Divine Names* is informed by Neoplatonist ideas about language.³⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius uses terms containing the Greek root *theourg-* some 47 times in the corpus.³⁸ Isaiia renders the root *theourg-* as a calque in Church Slavonic, *bogoděistv-*. Nikolaeva notes that Isaiia's translation makes abundant use of calques for rendering philosophical terms from the Greek.³⁹ The nominal forms *theourgos* (theurgist) and *theourgia* (theurgy), as well as the adjectival form *theourgikon* (theurgic) appear as *bogoděiatel'*, *bogoděistvie*, and *bogoděistv'nyi* in Isaiia's Church Slavonic version.⁴⁰

³⁵ Egorkin, *Nasledie antichnoi filosofii v vostochnoslavianskoi dukhovnosti Srednevekov'ia: XI-pervaia tret' XVII vv.*, p. 63.

³⁶ Ibid. (The corpus “gave East-Slavic religiosity a wealth of philosophical terms relating to the conceptual-terminological apparatus of the Greek tradition.”)

³⁷ Nikolaeva, *Traktat Dionisiia Areopagita O bozhestvennykh imenakh v drevneslaianskom perevode*, p. 26.

³⁸ I.P. Kurdybailo and D.S. Kurdybailo, “O teurgii i ontologii imeni v Areopagiticheskom korpuse” *Vestnik Leningradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta im. A.S. Pushkina* (vol. 2, no. 4 [2015]), p. 227.

³⁹ Nikolaeva, *Traktat Dionisiia Areopagita O bozhestvennykh imenakh v drevneslaianskom perevode*, pp. 22-24.

⁴⁰ Kurdybailo and Kurdybailo, “O teurgii i ontologii imeni v Areopagiticheskom korpuse,” pp. 226-232.

Bogoděistvie, or theurgy, is among the terms which enters the Russian philosophical and theological lexicon through the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus.

In a passage from Letter IX, Pseudo-Dionysius draws a clear distinction between theology and theurgy. Isaiia's version is quoted below:⁴¹

inako zhe, i se razoumĕti podbaĭet', sougoubno bŷti bogoslov'ts'' prĕdaniĕ. ōbo oubo neizrechenno i tain'stv'no. ōbo zhe, ĭavlienno i poznaiemo. i ōbo oubo ōbraznoiĕ i slouzh'b'nsko. ōbo zhe, liuboprĕmoudr'stv'noiĕ i oukazatelnoiĕ. i s'leteno ĭes rechenomou nerechennoiĕ. i ōbo oubo ouvĕraĭet' i svezouĭet' glagoliemŷkh' istinou. ōbo zhe dĕĭet', i outvr'zhdaĭet' k' bogou, neouchennŷimi ouchenmi. i oubo ni zhe sviatĕishĭikh tainst'v'' v' slouzheniĭakh, izhe nashego, ili zakon'nago prĕdaniĭa sviashthenoouchiteliĕ, bogopodbniĭkh ne nepotrĕbovashe ōbraz''. n' i vsesviashtenniĕ aggelyĕ gadanmi bozhestvnaĭa taino proizvodeshteĭe zrim'. i samogo ĭsusa v' prit'chakh' bogosloveshta. i bogodĕistv'naĭa tainstva prĕdaiushtaa ōbraznŷim' trapezosaniĕm.⁴²

However, as it behooves us to understand, theological tradition is of two varieties. One is ineffable and mysterious. The other is revealed and knowable. One is symbolic and dealing with Church service, the other is philosophical and demonstrable. The ineffable is bound to the spoken. One confirms and connects the truth that can be articulated. The other acts, and strives to God by means of unteachable teachings. And, in fact, in the services of the holiest sacraments, neither the holy instructors of our tradition nor those of the tradition of the Law did not leave unused the symbols appropriate to God.⁴³ Indeed we see the blessed angels producing divine mysteries by means of riddles. Jesus himself preaches in parables. And he passes on the theurgic mysteries with a symbolic table setting.⁴⁴

⁴¹ The purpose of quoting this passage in the Church Slavonic (part of it has already been discussed in chapter 1) is to highlight certain lexical items and concepts which enter Russian theology through Isaiia's translation. The recapitulation of some of the aspects of Pseudo-Dionysian theology already examined in chapter 1 is designed to show how Isaiia's terminological rendering introduced them into the Russian context. The overarching sense is that theurgic terminology was readily adaptable to pre-existing Russian theological terms and concepts.

⁴² Hermann Goltz, G.M. Prokhorov et al., ed., *Das Corpus des Dionysios Areiopagites in der Slavischen Übersetzung von Starec Isaija (14. Jahrhundert)*, vol. 2 (Weihert: Friburgi Brigoviae, 2011), pp. 666-667.

⁴³ A gracious thanks to Sabine and Dieter Fahl for their help with the translation of this sentence.

⁴⁴ All translations from the Church Slavonic are mine unless otherwise noted. My purpose in translating the Church Slavonic rather than using a prior translation from the Greek is to bring out the nuances of meaning that are conveyed by Isaiia's rendering of the text. The translation of

Isaia renders Pseudo-Dionysius' suggestion that "theological tradition is of two varieties" (*sougoubno býti bogoslov'ís" přédaniie*) by using the construction *ōbo oubο...ōbo zhe* throughout the passage to illustrate the distinction between the two types of theology. The overall sense of the passage, i.e. contrasting two types of theological tradition, is conveyed by this linguistic construction. One is "philosophical and demonstrable" and the other is "symbolic and dealing with Church service." Fitting theology's basis in *logos* and theurgy's in *ergon*, one "connects the truth" while the other "acts" (*děiet'*). Pseudo-Dionysius' distinction is clearly based on Neoplatonist *theologia* and *theourgia*. The passage's contrasting of *logos* and *ergon* is further emphasized by Isaia's root repetition structures, as Nikolaeva mentions, such as *rechennomou-nerechennoie* or "ineffable...spoken," and *neouchennyimi ouchenmi* or "unteachable teachings." The root repetition with negation here creates an antinomic sense of theology and theurgy. The antinomy of the ineffable and the knowable corresponds to ritual and theology, or action and thought, which are distinct but not contradictory.

The mediation of *symbola* supplants a clear understanding of God:

i oubο ni zhe sviatěishīikh tainst'v" v' slouzheniīakh, izhe nashego, ili zakon'nago přédaniia sviashtennoouchiteliie, bogopodbniīkh ne nepotrēbovashe ōbraz".⁴⁵

And, in fact, in the services of the holiest sacraments, the holy instructors – neither of our nor of the tradition of the Law – did not leave unused the symbols appropriate to God.

Pseudo-Dionysius' reference to the law (*zakon'nago přédaniia*) should not be mentioned without recalling the author's assumed identity, a representative of the Greek legal tradition. Isaia's

the Greek which I consulted was Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Complete Works*, translated by Colm Luibheid; foreword, notes, and translation collaboration by Paul Rorem; preface by Rene Roques; introductions by Jaroslav Pelikan, Jean Leclercq, and Karlfried Froehlich (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 666.

translation, based on a *ni...ili* or neither/nor construction, encapsulates the apophaticism of Pseudo-Dionysius' legalistic assertion. The sense of this is that symbols are central to the efficacy of the sacraments as well as the preservation of tradition. Given the unknowability of God, liturgically activated *symbola* assume a crucial epistemological role. Isaiia translates *symbolon* as *ōbraz*", which alludes simultaneously to another Platonic concept, the Forms. This translation likewise has a theurgically significant inflection, considering theurgy's emphasis on preserving symbolic forms over an understanding of their content. The notion of the sacraments that is transmitted to the Russian tradition through Pseudo-Dionysius thus underscores their symbolic form. The Platonic archetypes of the sacramental *symbola* are Christ's *theia erga* or "divine works," such as the above-mentioned "table setting," or Eucharist.⁴⁶

Pseudo-Dionysius' references to the sacraments draw from the duality of theological and theurgic thought. The second, theurgic branch of theology articulates some of the key assumptions behind the sacramental practice of the Russian Church. At the end of the passage, Pseudo-Dionysius refers to the central sacrament of the liturgical service, the Eucharist, as one of the "theurgic mysteries" (*bogoděistv'naïa tainstva*). In Church Slavonic (and Russian), *tainstvo* means both "sacrament" and "mystery." In other words, another possible translation of *bogoděistv'naïa tainstva* is "theurgic sacraments." The sacraments here are described both as being "not without need of symbols" and as symbols themselves ("Jesus...passes on the theurgic mysteries with a symbolic table setting"). Symbols, that is, function in the practice of the

⁴⁶ One of the senses in which theurgy is used in the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus is literal—as the acts or works of Christ (*theia erga*), including the miracles performed by him. Pseudo-Dionysius' description of the Eucharist as a *theon ergon* or "divine work" fits this rubric for theurgy. See Sarah Klitenic Wear and John Dillon, "Hierourgia and Theourgia in Sacramental Activity," in *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 99-116. See also Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis*, p. 14.

sacraments, and the sacraments themselves constitute symbols as well. Recalling chapter one, theurgy does not purport to explain what the *symbola* mean, but stresses their correct usage in a ritual setting. Christ's offering of the Eucharist is envisioned by Pseudo-Dionysius as a theurgic *symbolon*, a mystery beyond our comprehension. Moreover, Christ's words to "do this in remembrance of me" create a template for the symbolic re-enactment of the ritual in liturgical worship. The liturgy's *anamnesis*, i.e. the ritual re-creation of the events of Christ's "table setting," constitutes a "theurgic mystery."

The introduction of the term *bogoděistvie* to describe the sacrament of the Eucharist served as a terminological addendum to a practice that had already existed for centuries. Therefore the contention here is not that theurgy represented an innovation in Russian theology, but that it added a quality of obfuscation to a sacramental practice that was already regarded as a mystery. Pseudo-Dionysius' description of the Eucharist as theurgic complements the apophatic quality of the pre-existing term for the sacraments in Church Slavonic, *tainstva* or "mysteries." Thus Isaiia's rendering of "theurgic sacraments" as *bogoděistv'naïa tainstva* is perhaps more accurately understood as "divinely enacted mysteries." This translation enhances the sense of mystery that the sacraments already represented in the Russian tradition. The modifier *bogoděistv'naïa*, in other words, further occludes the meaning of *tainstva*. The description of the mysteries as "divinely enacted" places them entirely outside of the realm of discursive logic. This notion of the sacraments is of course entirely in keeping with theurgy's *modus operandi*, which is to take up where theological reasoning leaves off. The phrase *bogoděistv'naïa tainstva* represents a quintessential merging of Neoplatonist and Russian Orthodox ideas of the divine.

Pseudo-Dionysius mentioning of "theurgic mysteries" elicited a comment from Maximus the Confessor, reproduced below in Isaiia's translation:

Bogoděistv'naia glagoliet', ili iazhe boga nakonchavaiushtaia prichestvouiushtago im', ili iazhe ot boga s'děistvovannaia.⁴⁷

“Theurgic” means both that which is deemed by God as suitable to him, and that which has been enacted by God.

Paul Rorem argues that Pseudo-Dionysius changes the Neoplatonist usage of the noun *theourgia* from an objective genitive referring to the “work of God” to a subjective genitive referring to God’s own work.⁴⁸ Examples of both usages appear in the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus. Maximus the Confessor here points to this dual sense of Pseudo-Dionysian theurgy—it results from what imitates or has a likeness to divinity, such as the sacraments, as well as the “acts of God,” or *theia erga*. As discussed in the first chapter, Pseudo-Dionysius refers to the miracles performed by Christ as *theia erga*. *On the Divine Names* discusses Christ’s incarnation as a type of theurgy.⁴⁹ As Rorem suggests, Pseudo-Dionysius’ assertion that “theurgy is the consummation of theology” may be understood in the sense of works fulfilling the word, i.e. the events of the New Testament fulfill the predictions of the Old.⁵⁰ *Ergon* actualizes or enacts the *logos* in Pseudo-Dionysius, as Maximus the Confessor explains here.⁵¹ Another possible translation of *ot boga s'děistvovannaia* is “created by God.” “Enacted” reproduces the theurgic emphasis on

⁴⁷ Goltz and Prokhorov et al., ed., *Das Corpus des Dionysios Areiopagites in der Slavischen Übersetzung von Starec Isaija (14. Jahrhundert)*, vol. 2, p. 667.

⁴⁸ Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis*, p. 14.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of the incarnation as theurgy, see Graciela Ritacco, “Theurgy: Unity and Plurality in *The Divine Names*” in Filip Ivanovic, ed., *Dionysius the Areopagite between Orthodoxy and Heresy* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge, 2011), pp. 76-77.

⁵⁰ Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis*, pp. 14-15.

⁵¹ The notion of the ritual actions of church service as a physical enactment of the *logos* is the topic of Maximus the Confessor’s treatise “On the Mystagogy of the Church.” See Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, translation and notes by George C. Berthold, introduction by Jaroslav Pelikan (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).

ergon, but it is important to note the polysemy of *s'děistvovannaia* in the Church Slavonic. The calque *bogoděistvie*, like *theourgia* in the Greek, can suggest both “work with a likeness to God” as well as a “work of God” in the Church Slavonic. This dual sense of theurgy which Maximus the Confessor underscores, both “works of God” (including works having a *likeness* to God) and “God’s actions,” is conveyed by the Church Slavonic term *bogoděistvie*.

In his commentary to *On the Divine Names*, Maximus the Confessor notes that “theurgic lights are a doctrine of the ancients” (*bogoděistvniie svētŭ, oucheniia starŭkh' iavlĭaet*).⁵² This suggests that he, like Pseudo-Dionysius, understood theurgy as belonging to a prior tradition. In his introduction to the corpus, Maximus the Confessor discusses resemblances between the philosophy of Proclus and the theology of Dionysius the Areopagite, however he dismisses the fact that Proclus lived some four centuries later than the biblical figure Dionysius the Areopagite as a falsification of Dionysius’ authorship of the corpus.⁵³ Maximus does not attribute Pseudo-Dionysius’ notion of theurgy to Proclus because, in his view, Proclus’ writings postdated the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus.⁵⁴ In the passage on which Maximus the Confessor comments, Pseudo-Dionysius posits that theurgy is a “hidden tradition” supported by the scriptures:

⁵² Goltz and Prokhorov et al., ed., *Das Corpus des Dionysios Areiopagites in der Slavischen Übersetzung von Starec Isaija (14. Jahrhundert)*, vol. 2, p. 174.

⁵³ Prokhorov, “Korpus sochinenii s imenem Dionisiia Areopagita v drevnerusskoi literature: Problemy i zadachy izucheniia,” p. 359.

⁵⁴ Maximus interpreted the resemblances between the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus and Proclus’ philosophy as evidence of Pseudo-Dionysius’ influence on Proclus. See M.N. Gromov; V.V. Mil’kov, “Neoplatonicheskaia traditsiia v drevnerusskoi mysli,” in *Ideinye techeniia drevnerusskoi mysli* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo russkogo khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta, 2001), p. 229.

ī ielikȳīe inȳīe bogoděistv'niīe svěťy, slovesem' posledovatel'ie iēzhe bozhestvnȳikh nashikh nastavnik' s'kr'vennoie předaniie.⁵⁵

These are the sorts of theurgic lights, which follow scripture, that are a hidden tradition of our sacred teachers.

Isaia's active participial construction in the Church Slavonic, *bogoděistv'niīe svěťy, slovesem' posledovatel'ie*, or “theurgic lights, which follow scripture” emphasizes a sense of continuation of theurgy in scripture. The passage makes use of terms drawing from the mystery religions, such as initiation and “hidden tradition,” which are associated with the “theurgic lights” here. The further implication is that this “hidden tradition” continues in Pseudo-Dionysian theology. Citing the antiquity of the “theurgic lights” lends authority to the divine names, which, as Pseudo-Dionysius argues, are inalterable *symbola*. Recalling chapter one, the antiquity of the theurgic *symbola* points to their divine origin, as well as the need to preserve their original form. In Neoplatonist theurgy, divine names have theurgic efficacy as *symbola* in an untranslated, unmodified linguistic form. For Pseudo-Dionysius, the liturgical recitation of the divine names from Christian scripture is a type of theurgy. Both Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor envision the divine receptivity to names as deriving from a prior, “hidden” theurgic tradition.

2.2. The Commemoration of Dionysius the Areopagite in Russian Liturgical Texts

As mentioned earlier, Dionysius the Areopagite is a saint in the Orthodox tradition. A look at the commemorative service recited yearly on his feast day, October 3rd, reveals several significant points of theurgic resonance. The text of the service includes a troparion and

⁵⁵ Goltz and Prokhorov et al., ed., *Das Corpus des Dionysios Areiopagites in der Slavischen Übersetzung von Starec Isaija (14. Jahrhundert)*, vol. 2, p. 174.

kontakion which emphasize Dionysius' grasp of "ineffable mysteries." The kontakion is reproduced and translated below:

Nebesnaę vrata proshed" dūkhom", iakō ouchenik", do tretīęgō nebesa dostigshagō apostola, dīonysīe, neizrechennŷkh" obogatilse esi vsekim" razūmom", i ōzaril" esi vo tmě nevedēnīę sēdęshtŷę. tēmzhe zovem": radūiseę, ōtche vsemīrnŷi.⁵⁶

As a disciple of the apostle caught up to the third heaven, / you spiritually entered the gate of heaven, Dionysius. / You were enriched with understanding of ineffable mysteries, / and enlightened those who sat in the darkness of ignorance. / Therefore we cry to you: Rejoice, universal Father!⁵⁷

The kontakion makes reference to Pseudo-Dionysius' adumbration of hierarchies for divinity and the Church (in *The Celestial Hierarchy* and *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*). Heaven here is presented as a gradated structure much as in Pseudo-Dionysian theology. As a convert of Paul, who is "caught up to the third heaven," Dionysius has likewise ascended the hierarchy and "entered the gate of heaven." There, he was "enriched with an understanding of ineffable mysteries"—a reference to the apophatic premise of his theology. The narrative elements of the kontakion resemble Neoplatonist depictions of theurgic *henosis* (unity), according to which the theurgist is elevated within the cosmological hierarchy and attains a status of oneness with the divine. The aspects of Pseudo-Dionysian theology that are highlighted in the kontakion thus have notable theurgic subtexts.

The troparion similarly portrays Dionysius as imbibing "ineffable mysteries from a chosen Vessel":

Blagosti naūchivseę, i trezvęseę vo vsekh" blagoiū sovęstīiū sveštenolępnō ōbolksę, pocherpl" esi ōt sosūda izbrannagō neizrechennaę, i vērū sobliūd", ravnoe techenīe

⁵⁶ "3 oktiabria: Sviatogo sviashchennomuchenika Dionisiia Areopagita," pravoslavie.ru: <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/docs/oct03-ffb59d.pdf> (accessed Aug. 3, 2016), p. 8.

⁵⁷ "Hieromartyr Dionysius the Areopagite the Bishop of Athens – Troparion & Kontakion," oca.org: <https://oca.org/saints/troparia/2017/10/03/102843-hieromartyr-dionysius-the-areopagite-the-bishop-of-athens> (accessed Oct. 4, 2017).

sovershil” esi, svęstennomūcheniche dīonýsīe: moli khrista boga, spastiseŕ dūsham” nashým”.⁵⁸

Having learned goodness and maintaining continence in all things, / you were arrayed with a good conscience as befits a priest. / From the chosen Vessel you drew ineffable mysteries; / you kept the faith, and finished a course equal to His. / Bishop martyr Dionysius, entreat Christ God that our souls may be saved.⁵⁹

Thus in both the kontakion and the troparion Pseudo-Dionysius is associated with “ineffable mysteries.”⁶⁰ In the troparion, these mysteries emanate from a “chosen Vessel”—a clear reference to the Eucharistic chalice. The phrase encapsulates a twofold meaning hinging on the polysemy of the term *tainstvo* as both “sacrament” and “mystery”: the Eucharist is the source of the ineffable mysteries, and the sacrament itself is a mystery. The troparion recalls the passage from Letter IX quoted above. The Eucharist in the troparion functions as a theurgic *symbolon*, in that the sacrament – the full significance of which remains occluded – discloses another mystery which is deemed ineffable.

The distinction between theurgy and theology, which Pseudo-Dionysius stresses, makes its way into the materials devoted to his yearly liturgical commemoration. In the service read on his day of commemoration, Dionysius the Areopagite is repeatedly associated with the term

⁵⁸ “3 oktiabria: Sviatogo sviashchennomuchenika Dionisiia Areopagita,” pravoslavie.ru: <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/docs/oct03-ffb59d.pdf> (accessed Oct. 5, 2017), p. 3.

⁵⁹ “Hieromartyr Dionysius the Areopagite the Bishop of Athens – Troparion & Kontakion,” oca.org: <https://oca.org/saints/troparia/2017/10/03/102843-hieromartyr-dionysius-the-areopagite-the-bishop-of-athens> (accessed Oct. 5, 2017).

⁶⁰ *Tainstva* are not explicitly mentioned here or in the kontakion, however the absence of the noun following the plural adjective *neizrechennaę* merely enhances the ineffability of the *tainstva*. The substantive adjective *neizrechennaę* can be literally rendered as “things ineffable,” i.e. mysteries.

neizrechennyi, or ineffable.⁶¹ He is referred to in the service as a *bogodētel'*, a neologism in Church Slavonic which is translatable as “divine worker,” or, perhaps, “theurgist.”⁶² As a *bogodētel'* in the Russian Church, Dionysius is remembered as delineating “ineffable mysteries” from what can be known, and as formulating a symbolics of liturgical worship. The theurgic elements of Pseudo-Dionysius’ thought, in other words, were transferred to Russian culture not only through the translation of the corpus, but also through the liturgical materials celebrated in his name.

2.3. Theurgic Undercurrents of the Schism

In addition to its translation and proliferation in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Russia, the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus came to the forefront of theological debates during the schism in the Russian Church in the seventeenth century. As mentioned above, twenty three out of the forty seven extant manuscript copies of Isaiia’s translation date to the seventeenth century. Thus nearly half of the existing copies of the corpus were made in the period of the most intense strife in the history of the Russian Church. Sheer numbers in this case attest to Prokhorov’s notion that the corpus receives particular attention amid theological controversies within the Church.⁶³ Pseudo-Dionysian theology, with its theurgic emphasis on the inalterability of symbol and ritual,

⁶¹ “3 oktiabria: Sviatogo sviashchennomuchenika Dionisiia Areopagita,” pravoslavie.ru: <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/docs/oct03-ffb59d.pdf> (accessed Aug. 3, 2016).

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶³ Prokhorov, “Korpus sochinenii s imenem Dionisiia Areopagita v drevnerusskoi literature: Problemy i zadachy izucheniia,” pp. 354-356.

posed a heightened relevance in the conflict over the Nikonian reforms to the Russian service books and ritual practices which precipitated the schism.⁶⁴

The schism occasioned an updated (though unpublished) translation of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus in 1675 by Evfimii, a monk of the Chudov monastery.⁶⁵ The date of Evfimii's translation is telling; he – a student of one of the foremost advocates of the reform, Epifanii Slavnetskii – completed it after the reforms had been instituted and the Old Believers anathemized.⁶⁶ The impetus to reconsider Isaiia's translation of the corpus could be seen as an extension of the reformers' attempt to "correct" the Slavonic service texts according to the Greek.⁶⁷ Evfimii's re-translation of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus, which was a part of Epifanii

⁶⁴ The history of the reforms initiated by the Russian patriarch Nikon will remain peripheral to this section, since the primary goal here is to outline the theurgic thinking underlying the schism and to discuss the relevance of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus to the schism's core concerns. The history of the reforms has been covered amply elsewhere. See Paul Meyendorff, "The Events of the Reform," in *Russia, Ritual & Reform: The Liturgical Reforms of Nikon in the 17th Century* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), pp. 37-81; Pierre Pascal, "L'église russe après le temps des troubles: Aspirations à la réforme," in *Avvakum et les débuts du raskol: La crise religieuse au XVII^e siècle en Russie* (Paris: Librairie ancienne honoré champion, 1938), pp. 1-73; S.A. Zenkovskii, "Raskol," in *Russkoe staroobriadchestvo: Dukhovnye dvizheniia semnadsatogo veka* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1970), pp. 258-374.

⁶⁵ Prokhorov, "Korpus sochinenii s imenem Dionisiia Areopagita v drevnerusskoi literature: Problemy i zadachy izucheniia," p. 354.

⁶⁶ The reforms were introduced by a series of councils of the Russian Church from 1654-1667. The adherents to the former liturgical books, or "Old Believers," were condemned as heretics at the 1667 council. See Meyendorff, *Russia, Ritual & Reform: The Liturgical Reforms of Nikon in the 17th Century*, pp. 42-80. See also Zenkovskii, *Russkoe staroobriadchestvo: Dukhovnye dvizheniia semnadsatogo veka*, pp. 258-321.

⁶⁷ While the reform's ostensible aim was to make the Russian practice of the liturgy accord with older Greek practices established before the introduction of Orthodoxy into Russia, in effect the reform brought Russian practice into line with contemporary Greek practice. The Greek *Euchologion* that was used by the reformers as the template for their corrections to the Church Slavonic *Sluzhebnik* was published in Venice in 1602 (see Zenkovskii, *Russkoe staroobriadchestvo: Dukhovnye dvizheniia semnadsatogo veka*, p. 224). As a result, certain aspects of Russian practice in fact pre-dated the Greek practices that were in use circa the

Slavinetskii's larger project of re-translating the works of the Church Fathers, occurred in the reform's spirit of re-establishing Russian Orthodoxy firmly within its original Greek substrate.

reforms, however the reformers regarded these as Russian innovations. Zenkovskii provides an illuminating explanation of the divergences: “В годы принятия христианства Русью, в Византии господствовало два близких друг другу, но все же несколько различных между собою устава: – на востоке Византии наиболее распространенным был так называемый устав Иерусалимский, составленный св. Саввой Освященным, а на западе, – наоборот, преобладал так называемый Студийский или Константинопольский устав. По принятию Россией христианства, греки принесли туда Студийский или Константинопольский устав, который и стал основой русского устава, в то время, как в Византии, в двенадцатом и тринадцатом веке, преобладающим стал устав св. Саввы (Иерусалимский). В конце четырнадцатого и начале пятнадцатого века, митрополиты московские, – Фотии и Киприан, – первый из них – грек, а второй – болгарин греческой школы, стали вводить в России устав св. Саввы – Иерусалимский, заменяя им Студийский устав, но они не успели довести свою реформу до конца. Поэтому в русском уставе осталось много древних, более архаических ранневизантийских черт из Студийского устава, чем в уставах, которыми пользовались греки четырнадцатого и пятнадцатого века. Так как после 1439 года в России больше не было греческих митрополитов, то русская церковь так и сохранила до середины семнадцатого века этот переходной устав, в котором более архаические элементы устава Студийского отличали его от во всем нового греческого Иерусалимского устава. Но, к сожалению, история перемены уставов, и в греческой церкви и в русской, была забыта, и греки, забывшие Студийский устав, считали старые черты русского устава русскими нововведениями.” In *Russkoe staroobriadchestvo: Dukhovnye dvizheniia semnadtsatogo veka*, p. 174. (“At the time of Russia's acceptance of Christianity, in Byzantium there were two predominant ordos, which were similar to one another although slightly different. In the east of Byzantium the so-called Jerusalem ordo, compiled by Sabbas the Sanctified, was more widespread; in contrast, in the west, the so-called Studite or Constantinopolitan ordo prevailed. Upon Russia's acceptance of Christianity, the Greeks brought the Studite or Constantinopolitan ordo there, which became the foundation of the Russian ordo at the same time that, in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Byzantium, the Jerusalem ordo became prevalent. At the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century, Moscow metropolitans Photius and Cyprian – the first of whom was a Greek, and the second was a Bulgarian of the Greek school – started introducing the Jerusalem ordo into Russia, replacing the Studite ordo; however, they did not succeed in seeing the reforms through to the end. Therefore many ancient features remained in the Russian ordo that were more archaic and early-Byzantine than in the ordos used by the Greeks in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Since after 1439 there were no more Greek metropolitans in Russia, until the middle of the seventeenth century the Russian Church preserved this transitional ordo. The more archaic elements of the Studite ordo distinguished it from the entirely new Greek Jerusalem ordo. Unfortunately, the history of the change in ordos was forgotten both in the Greek and the Russian Church, and the Greeks, forgetting the Studite ordo, considered the old features of the Russian ordo to be Russian innovations.”)

Much as in the hesychast controversy of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in the seventeenth century, the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus was construed by both the reformers and the group who rejected the reforms (who subsequently came to be known as the *starovery* or Old Believers) as supporting their respective positions. The Pseudo-Dionysian corpus spoke to both the reformers' and the Old Believers' motive of preserving the fundamental beliefs and practices of the Church. For both sides in the schism, the problem with the service texts centered on their modification: for the reformers, the modifications to the Church Slavonic service books and rituals had been introduced over the centuries by inaccuracies in translation and copying, and thus necessitated correction according to the Greek service texts; for the Old Believers, the modifications to the Church Slavonic service texts, which had been in use for centuries, were introduced by the reformers, and constituted a form of heresy.⁶⁸ Thus the crucial issue in both sides of the debate was maintaining the service books according to prior versions in order to avoid distortions in liturgical practice and, concomitantly, the faith. The epistemological reliance on symbol and ritual in Pseudo-Dionysian theology presupposes that the symbols and rituals contained in the liturgical texts have a single, definite form.⁶⁹ Thus whether the

⁶⁸ The pre- and post-reform versions of the *Sluzhebnik* are reproduced and discussed in Meyendorff, *Russia, Ritual & Reform: The Liturgical Reforms of Nikon in the 17th Century*, pp. 133-214.

⁶⁹ “Русские приняли все церковные обряды и чины от греков в готовом виде и были убеждены, что они – церковные обряды и чины обязаны своим происхождением или самому Христу, или апостолам, или целым соборам – Вселенским или Поместным, или хотя бы отдельным позднейшим лицам, но обязательно святым, находящимся под непосредственным воздействием Божией Силы. Церковные чины и обряды, как имеющие Божественное происхождение, сразу явились обязательно в строго определенной форме, которая повсюду, поэтому, должна быть одна и та же, и, как Божественного происхождения, не допускает в себе никаких изменений и поэтому не может быть в Православной Церкви не единообразна.” N.F. Kapterev, *Patriarkh Nikon i tsar' Aleksei Mikhailovich* (Moscow: Izd-vo Spaso-Preobrazhenskogo Valaamskogo monastyrja, 1996), pp. 190-191. (“Russians accepted all church rituals and rites from the Greeks in their completed

modifications in the liturgy were thought to stem from prior translations, as in the case of the reformers, or to occur by changing the pre-established norms, as in the case of the Old Believers, the inflection remains on the issue of modification. Pseudo-Dionysian theology spoke to both sides' sense of traditionalism, in that – in lieu of knowing God in positive terms – it emphasizes preserving those beliefs and practices which are thought to emanate directly from the divine in their original and singularly epistemologically verifiable form.

The core issue of the schism thus plays into the theurgic aspects of Pseudo-Dionysian theology. The notion that symbol and ritual are inalterable lest they lose their efficacy as points of contact between humanity and the divine bears a theurgic stipulation. The theurgic concept that the full significance of liturgical symbols and practices always remains occluded, and that therefore they must not be modified, is central to the schism. As M. O. Shakhov explains,

... в православном мировоззрении церковные таинства есть прежде всего акты встречи, соприкосновения двух миров – земного и трансцендентного, Божественного. В этом особый, специфический символизм таинств, предопределяющий неразрывную онтологическую связь между их духовным содержанием и внешней формой, которая представляет явление трансцендентной сущности в человеческом мире.⁷⁰

form and were convinced that these rituals and rites owed their origin either to Christ himself, or to the apostles, or to whole councils – ecumenical or local – or at least to particular later figures, albeit obligatorily holy, who were placed beneath the direct influence of Divine Power. Church rites and rituals, as having a divine origin, at once appeared obligatorily in a strictly defined form, which everywhere, therefore, must be one in the same, and – being of divine origin – does not permit any changes and therefore cannot lack uniformity in the Orthodox Church.”)

⁷⁰ M.O. Shakhov, *Staroobriadcheskoe mirovozzrenie: Religiozno-filosofskie osnovy i sotsial'naia pozitsiia* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo RAGS, 2001), p. 108. (“...in the Orthodox worldview the Church sacraments are primarily acts of encounter, a contiguity of two worlds – the earthly and the transcendental or divine. This constitutes the particular, specific symbolism of the sacraments, which predetermines the indissoluble ontological connection between their spiritual content and external form. Their form presents a manifestation of transcendental essence in the humanly realm.”)

From the Old Believers' standpoint, the alteration of the "external form" of the service texts resulted *ipso facto* in an alteration of their "spiritual content." Any change, even if of a grammatical nature, amounted to a distortion in meaning. To the Old Believers, modifying textual form carried ontological implications:

Онтологической основой неприятия реформы старообрядцами была их убежденность в том, что произведенные искажения затрагивают не только внешние формы, но и идеальную сущность Православной Церкви, приводя тем самым к отступлению от истинной веры.⁷¹

The Nikonian reforms were motivated by a similar type of theurgic literalism. For the reformers, however, the distortions in spiritual content in the Church Slavonic service texts were caused by inexact renderings of the Greek. As a result, their corrections attempted a literal reproduction of Greek grammatical and syntactical structures, often at the expense of readability in the Church Slavonic: "Reformatory stremilis' k maksimal'no bukvat'nomu, po ikh mneniiu, kopirovaniu grecheskogo teksta, ne uchityvaia razlichii v grammatike dvukh iazykov."⁷² The reformers as well as the Old Believers thus regarded the spiritual content of the service texts as inhering in the texts themselves. The Urtext for the reformers was the Greek; for the Old Believers, it was the Church Slavonic. In each case, any changes in textual form – even of a grammatical nature – amounted to deviations in spiritual content.⁷³ This stance is reminiscent of the Neoplatonist and

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 105. ("The ontological basis of the Old Believers' unacceptance of the reform was their conviction that the resultant distortions affected not only the external forms, but also the ideational essence of the Orthodox Church, leading correspondingly to a divergence from the true faith.")

⁷² Ibid., p. 90. ("The reformers strove for a maximally literal, in their opinion, copying of the Greek text, irrespective of differences in the grammar of the two languages.")

⁷³ The principle of textual form corresponding in a one-to-one relationship with spiritual content became especially evident when the reformers changed the spelling of Jesus' name in liturgical texts from *Isus* to *Iisus*, inciting vehement opposition from the Old Believers.

Pseudo-Dionysian notion of symbols as discrete ontological entities; their signification is inherent in their form and is understood as being independent of their perceiver. Thus in order to retain their signification the symbols must not be altered in any way.⁷⁴ The theurgic proscription of change in Pseudo-Dionysian theology acts as a ready-made defense of traditionalism within the Church – a stance which both the reformers and the Old Believers sought to defend.

2.4. Pseudo-Dionysian Theology in Avvakum's *Zhitie*

The Archpriest Avvakum, in the introduction to his *Zhitie protopopa Avvakuma, im samim napisannoe* (*The Life of the Archpriest Avvakum Written by Himself*), refers to the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus in defending several positions that would come to define the Old Belief. One of these relates to the modification which the reformers introduced into the Creed of Nicea-Constantinople. The exclusion of the word *istinnyi* (“true”) from the phrase *istinnyi Gospod'* (“true God”), a reference to the Holy Spirit in section 8 of the Creed, was a major point of contention for Avvakum and the Old Believers. In the pre-schism text, the Greek substantive adjective κύριος (“supreme”) was rendered with its implied noun as a modifier-plus-noun phrase: *istinnyi Gospod'*. M. O. Shakhov contends that the pre-schism version of the text included the noun along with the modifier in order to accentuate that the Holy Spirit is of an equal status

⁷⁴ The Old Believers' apprehension at altering textual symbols extended to other ritual actions as well. One of the most contentious issues of the schism was the reformers' modification of the sign of the cross. In the pre-schismatic Church the sign of the cross was made with the first two fingers and the thumb, however the reformers introduced a three-fingered sign of the cross in 1653. The theurgic proscription of change is thus not restricted to textual considerations, as in this case it takes on a performative dimension related to the physical enactment of the sign of the cross. See Meyendorff, *Russia, Ritual & Reform: The Liturgical Reforms of Nikon in the 17th Century*, pp. 39-42; 59-63. See also Zenkovskii, *Russkoe staroobriadchestvo: Dukhovnye dvizheniia semnadtsatogo veka*, pp. 207-210.

along with the Father and the Son in the trinity.⁷⁵ It is ironic that as a result of the reformers' preference for literal translation of the Greek, the substantive adjective was rendered as a noun *Gospod'*, and the modifier *istinnyi* was dropped altogether. Avvakum cites Pseudo-Dionysius in defending the prior version:

Мы же речем: потеряли новолюбцы существо Божие испадениемъ от истиннаго Господа Святаго и Животворящаго Духа. По Дионисию, коли ужь истинны испали, тутъ и Сущаго отверглись. Богъ же от существа своего испасти не может, и еже не быти – нѣсть того в нем, присносущен истинный Богъ наш. Лучше бы им в Символѣ вѣры не глаголати «Господа», виновнаго имени, а нежели «истиннаго» отсѣкати, в немже существо Божие содержится. Мы же, правовѣрнии, обоя имена исповѣдуем и в Духа Святаго, Господа истиннаго и животворящаго, свѣта нашего, вѣруем, со Отцем и с Сыномъ поклоняемаго, за негоже стражемъ и умираемъ, помощию его владычню.⁷⁶

Avvakum's objection to the removal of *istinnyi* is that the epithet itself “contains the essence of God.” His notion that the textual form of the epithet is, as it were, consubstantial with its signification has clear theurgic implications. Avvakum appeals to Pseudo-Dionysius to support his contention that the removal of *istinnyi* constitutes a “falling away from the truth,” which results in a “repudiation of the Existent One.” Avvakum's resistance to the modification of the

⁷⁵ Shakhov, *Staroobriadcheskoe mirovozzrenie: Religiozno-filosofskie osnovy i sotsial'naia pozitsiia*, p. 90.

⁷⁶ Protopop Avvakum, *Zhitie Protopopa Avvakuma im samim napisannoe*, vol. 1, edited with an introduction and commentary by N.V. Ponyrko (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo “Pushkinskii dom,” 2016), p. 36. (“And we say this: the novelty lovers have lost the essence of God by falling away from the true Lord, the holy and life-giving Spirit. According to Dionysius, as soon as they fall away from the Truth, they at once repudiate the Existent One. But God cannot fall away from his own essence, and that which cannot be is not him: omnipresent is our true God. It would be better for them in the Creed not to say ‘Lord,’ a consequent name, than to cut out ‘the true,’ for in it is contained the essence of God. But we, the true believers, confess both names; we believe ‘in the Holy Spirit, the true Lord and our life-giving Light,’ who is worshiped together with the Father and the Son, for whom we suffer and die with his lordly help.”) Translation by Kenneth N. Brostrom with modifications by J.R. In Archpriest Avvakum, *The Life Written By Himself*, translations, annotations, commentary and a historical introduction by Kenneth N. Brostrom (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1979), pp. 37-38.

Creed implies the theurgic presumption that any change in a divinely inspired text is a change of an ontological nature. For Avvakum, the signifier *istinnyi Gospod'* is constitutive of what it signifies, and thus the removal of *istinnyi* amounts to a separation of the signifier from its signification. Citing Pseudo-Dionysius' *On the Divine Names* earlier in the passage, Avvakum is drawing here from Pseudo-Dionysius' notion of the inviolability of epithets for the divine.

Avvakum references Pseudo-Dionysius in discussing another key point of doctrinal contention for the Old Believers – the addition of one “alleluia” to the Cherubic Hymn. The reformers added one “alleluia” to the two already present in the hymn on the principles that 1) it accorded with contemporary Greek practice, and 2) the three “alleluias” represented the three figures of the trinity.⁷⁷ The pre-schism hymn included two “alleluias” followed by *slava Tebe, Bozhe* (“glory to thee, O God”). The Old Believers' defense of the prior version stipulated that *slava Tebe, Bozhe*, a translation of the Hebrew word “alleluia” into Church Slavonic, constituted the third “alleluia” representing all three members of the trinity. Thus, from the Old Believers' standpoint, the reform's introduction of an additional “alleluia” actually amounted to a quadrupling of the recitation of “alleluia.” The quadrupled version represented a deviation from trinitarian doctrine, and therefore was condemned as heresy by the Old Believers.

Avvakum refers to Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory of Nyssa and Basil the Great in support of the triple “alleluia”:

Он же Дионисий пишет о небесныхъ силахъ, возвѣщая, како хвалу приносятъ Богу раздѣляя девять чинов на три троицы. Престоли, херувими и серафими, освящение от Бога приемля, сице восклицаютъ: «Благословена слава от мѣста Господня!» И чрезъ ихъ преходитъ освящение на вторую троицу, еже есть господства, начала, власти. Сия троица, славослвѣя Бога, восклицаютъ: «Аллилуия, аллилуия, аллилуия!» По алфавиту, «аль» – Отцу, «иль» – Сыну, «уия» – Духу

⁷⁷ See Meyendorff, *Russia, Ritual & Reform: The Liturgical Reforms of Nikon in the 17th Century*, pp. 128-129. See also Shakhov, *Staroobriadcheskoe mirovozzrenie: Religiozno-filosofskie osnovy i sotsial'naia pozitsiia*, p. 93.

Святому. Григорий Низский толкует: «Аллилуия – хвала Богу». А Василий Великий пишет: «Аллилуия – ангельская рѣчь, человѣчески рещи – слава тѣбѣ, Боже». До Василия пояху во церкви ангельския рѣчи: «Аллилуия, аллилуия, аллилуия!» Егда же бысть Василий, и повелѣ пѣти двѣ ангелькия рѣчи, а третьюю – человѣческую, сице: «Аллилуия, аллилуия, слава Тебѣ, Боже!». У святых согласно, у Дионисия и у Василия: трижды воспѣвающе, со ангелы славим Бога, а не четырежи по римской бляди. Мерско Богу четверичное воспѣвание сицевое: «Аллилуия, аллилуия, аллилуия, слава тебѣ, Боже». Да будет проклят сице поюще, с Никоном и с костелом римским!⁷⁸

With the passage containing the “alleluias” occurring in the Cherubic Hymn, Avvakum appeals to Pseudo-Dionysius’ authority on the angelic hierarchy (as outlined in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*). Citing Pseudo-Dionysius, Avvakum points out that the triple “alleluia” is sung in imitation of the way that the second trinity of angels praises the three members of the trinity. His emphasis throughout the passage is on tripartite structures – of angels, “alleluias,” and, of course, the triune God. Avvakum’s explanation of the two “alleluias” plus *slava Tebe, Bozhe* as the correct form of liturgical praise refers to Basil the Great, who distinguishes “alleluia” as “angelic speech” and *slava Tebe, Bozhe* as “human speech.” In sum, the two “alleluias” followed by

⁷⁸ Avvakum, *Zhitie*, vol. 1, p. 38. (“That same Dionysius also writes about the heavenly powers, proclaiming how they bear praise unto God, their nine orders dividing into three trinities. The Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim receive sanctification from God and cry out in this manner: ‘Blessed be the glory from the place of the Lord!’ And through them sanctification passes to the second trinity, which is of the Principalities, Virtues, and Dominions. This trinity, glorifying God, cries out: ‘Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!’ According to the Alphabet, ‘All’ is for the Father, ‘el’ is for the Son, and ‘uia’ is for the Holy Spirit. Gregory of Nyssa interprets Alleluia as praise to God, but Basil the Great writes, “‘Alleluia’ is the speech of angels, and spoken as men do it means “Glory be to thee, O God”” Before St. Basil, the words of the angels were chanted in church: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia! But when Basil was alive he decreed chanting twice in the words of angels and once in those of men, in this manner: Alleluia, Alleluia, glory be to thee, O God! It was agreed by the saints, by Dionysius and by Basil: in threefold laudation we glorify God with the angels, but not in fourfold, like the whore of Rome; repulsive to God is a fourfold laudation of this sort, ‘Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, glory be to thee, O God!’ Let him who chants in this way be damned with Nikon and the Roman cauldron!”) Translation by Kenneth N. Brostrom with modifications by J.R. In Avvakum, *The Life Written By Himself*, p. 39-40.

slava Tebe, Bozhe, according to Basil, equal three “alleluias” commensurate with the three members of the trinity. Avvakum condemns the quadrupled “alleluia” as a Roman heresy.

With Avvakum’s continual reference to tripartite structures, the resounding theme of the passage is that the textual form of the Cherubic Hymn must imitate the ontological form of the angelic hierarchy, which correspondingly imitates the ontological form of the triune God.

Avvakum demonstrates this principle down to the three syllables of “alleluia.” As in his defense of the pre-reform version of the Creed, Avvakum invokes Pseudo-Dionysian theology here to posit that the textual form of the liturgy reflects the ontology of God. The trio of “alleluias” in the Cherubic Hymn is both constitutive of and inseparable from a doctrinal stance. The deviation from the established textual form of three “alleluias,” for Avvakum, represents a distortion of trinitarian theology. His contention that the textual signifier maintains an ontological connection with its signification reveals his theurgic regard for liturgical symbols.⁷⁹ As a symbol both praising and invoking the trinity, the “alleluias,” for Avvakum, have to retain their tripartite structure.

⁷⁹ Furthermore, the theurgic stance that the recitor of the ritual text has only a passive agency, and that the active agent is the symbols contained therein, is found in the Old Belief: “В православно-старообрядческом понимании не человек, создавший совокупность внешних форм крещения или евхаристии, «заставляет» Бога ниспослать благодать в купель или чашу, но сама трансцендентная сущность является началом, предопределяющим внешние формы символа, своего соприкосновения с материальными миром, орудием воспроизведения которых служит человек.” M.O. Shakhov, *Filosofskie aspekty staroveriia* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii dom “Tretii Rim,” 1998), p. 79. (“In the Orthodox Old-Believer understanding it is not the person creating the set of external forms of the baptism or the Eucharist who ‘forces’ God to bequeath grace into the baptismal font or the chalice; its transcendental essence itself is the principle which predetermines the external forms of the symbol, its contiguity with the material realm. The person serves as an instrument of the reproduction of the external forms.”)

3.1. *Bogoděistvie* and *teurgii*

The concept of “mystical symbolism” that enters Russian culture through Pseudo-Dionysius’ theology in certain senses prefigures the poetic and religious-philosophical disposition of Russian Symbolism. Apophatic theology instrumentalizes texts, rituals, and symbols as a means of contacting and understanding divinity. The unknowability of the divine sets a condition under which symbols function epistemologically as well as aesthetically. The notion that symbolism both bridges and separates divine and material realms begins to resemble the epistemological and cosmological constructs of Russian Symbolism. The Kantian-Schopenhauerian epistemology of noumenal and phenomenal worlds which figures so prominently in Symbolism relies on apophasis in conceptualizing the noumenal realm. The ineffability of the noumenal realm relegates its artistic depiction to symbolic representation. Symbolic representations in turn take on the theurgic properties of *symbola*. Pseudo-Dionysian apophaticism informs our reading of Ivanov’s statements such as:

Символ только истинный символ, когда он неисчерпаем и беспределен в своем значении, когда он изрекает на своем сокровенном (иератическом и магическом) языке намека и внушения нечто неизглаголемое, неадекватное внешнему слову. Он многолик, многосмыслен и всегда темен в последней глубине.⁸⁰

Ivanov formulates the symbol in apophatic terms (“ineffable,” “inadequate”) to illustrate its “hidden language of allusion and suggestion.” Moreover, the symbol is “dark to its last depths.” The symbol speaks a “hidden language” that is both “hieratic and magical,” a description which begins to sound particularly theurgic.

⁸⁰ Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 713. (“The symbol is only a true symbol when it is inexhaustible and limitless in its meaning, when it effuses a certain something ineffable in its hidden (hieratic and magical) language of allusion and suggestion, a certain something inadequate to the superficial word. It is multifarious, polysemic and always dark to its last depths.”)

3.2. Solov'ev's Concept of Theurgic Art

Though the term *bogodēistvie* dates to the fourteenth century, *teurgiia* is a development of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian culture. *Teurgiia*, a loan word from Greek in the Russian, carries its own set of meanings distinct from its Church Slavonic counterpart. While *bogodēistvie* is associated with the Russian theological lexicon, *teurgiia* develops within the “religious turn” of Russian Symbolism of the late 1890s-early 1900s. Vladimir Solov'ev's notion of *svobodnaia teurgiia* or “free theurgy” segues directly to later Symbolist theurgic thought, and figures especially prominently for Ivanov. *Teurgiia* points to both Vladimir Solov'ev's centrality to Symbolism, as well as Symbolism's classicizing and ritualizing tendencies. *Teurgiia* retains its Neoplatonist associations with theurgy, which resounds with the broader Symbolist interests in late antiquity, spiritualism, and the occult.⁸¹

Bogodēistvie and *teurgiia* both reserve a ritual reverence for *tainstva*, or “sacraments,” “mysteries.” Whereas *bogodēistvie* describes the sacramental rituals of the Church (*tainstva*), *teurgiia* connotes an occult sense of “the mysteries” (*tainstva*). Both senses of theurgy, i.e. the sacramental ritualism of *bogodēistvie*, and the occult mysteriology of *teurgiia*, are formative to Symbolism and Ivanov's thought and poetry. Symbolist theurgy fully embraces the polysemy of *tainstvo* with its Orthodox, mysteriological, and occult associations. Ivanov presaged Aleksandr

⁸¹ On the Symbolist preoccupation with the occult, see Maria Carlson, “Fashionable Occultism: Spiritualism, Theosophy, Freemasonry, and Hermeticism in Fin-de-Siècle Russia” in Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997), pp. 135-154.

Skriabin's plans by calling for Symbolist art to enact a *Misteriia* in "Wagner and the Dionysian Rite" (*Vagner i Dionisovo deistvo*).⁸²

The dual sense of *bogodēistvie*⁸³ and *teurgiia* is foundational to Solov'ev's theurgy, who refers to both terms:

Новая религия есть активное богодействие (теургия), т.е. совместное действие Божества и Человечества для пересоздания его последнего из плотского или природного в духовное и божественное.⁸⁴

Solov'ev here describes theurgy as a process of humanity's transfiguration into divinity. He encapsulates the theurgic sense of *ergon* in defining it as a "collective act of the divine and humanity." One of his core ideas, that of "divine humanity" or *bogochelovechestvo*, resembles the Eastern Orthodox notion of *theosis*, or "deification." *Theosis*, as discussed prior, developed in the fourteenth century in connection with the theology of hesychastic prayer, which is grounded in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius. Solov'ev's concept of *bogochelovechestvo*, like *theosis*, has resonances both with theurgy and the Eastern Orthodox theology of transfiguration. Solov'ev's simultaneous use of *bogodēistvie* and *teurgiia* situates his understanding of theurgy within the context of the Church as well as outside of it. As A.P. Kozyrev demonstrates, his

⁸² Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, pp. 84-85.

⁸³ Insofar as Solov'ev and Fedorov's usage of *bogodēistvie* and *bogodēistvo* is derived from Church Slavonic, these terms will likewise appear in this section in Church Slavonic transliteration with "ě" standing in for the "iat'." This transliteration likewise reflects how the terms appeared in the Russian orthography of Fedorov and Solov'ev's day (i.e. before the reforms of 1918), when the Russian spelling of *bogodēistvie* and *bogodēistvo* would have been identical to the Church Slavonic. My quotations from Fedorov and Solov'ev's texts, however, will appear in modern Russian orthography, since they are taken from recent editions.

⁸⁴ Quoted from Z.R. Zhukotskaia, *Svobodnaia teurgiia: kul'turfilosofia russkogo simvolizma* (Moscow: RGGU, 2003), p. 5. ("The new religion is an active theurgy, in other words a collective act of the Divine and Humanity toward the regeneration of the latter from the material or corporeal into the spiritual and divine.")

familiarity with writings of the Church Fathers as well as the Gnostics and Neoplatonists was equally extensive.⁸⁵ The “new religion” to which he refers, and which would be actively pursued by the Symbolists under the banner of a “new religious consciousness” (*novoe religioznoe soznanie*), ascribes theurgic significance to artistic creation. The “new religion” envisioned by Solov’ev unifies the ecclesiastical and Neoplatonist senses of *bogodēistvie* and *teurgiiia*.

For Solov’ev, theurgy primarily describes creative activity which carries a religious or *Zeitgeist*-altering significance. Solov’ev envisions theurgic activity as simultaneously artistic and religious, a notion that was especially impactful for Ivanov. This is the sense Solov’ev’s coinage *svobodnaia teurgiiia*, or “free theurgy”—artistic creation becomes a theurgic act. The *svobodnaia* or “free” aspect refers to theurgy’s generation by aesthetic creations. Within this framework, theurgic art is “theurgic” by dint of its likeness or *mimesis* of the divine. Viacheslav Ivanov’s citations of Solov’ev regarding theurgy give a sense of *svobodnaia teurgiiia* in the Symbolist rendering. Ivanov repeatedly paraphrases the following from Solov’ev’s *Rechi o Dostoevskom* in support of the Symbolist “theurgic task,” or *teurgicheskaia zadacha*:

Художники и поэты опять должны стать жрецами и пророками, но уже в другом, но еще более важном и возвышенном смысле: не только религиозная идея будет владеть ими, но они сами будут владеть ею и сознательно управлять ее земными воплощениями.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ See A.P. Kozyrev, *Solov’ev i gnostiki* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Savin S.A., 2007), pp. 130-176.

⁸⁶ Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, pp. 557-8. (“Solovyov spoke in this sense in his speeches on Dostoevsky: ‘artists and poets must once again become high priests and prophets, but now in another, even more important and sublime sense: not only will they be possessed by the religious idea but they themselves will possess it and consciously govern its earthly incarnations.’”) From Viacheslav Ivanov, *Selected Essays*, trans., ed., and notes by Robert Bird with an introduction by Michael Wachtel (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2001), p. 32. The term *zhrets* (“high priest”) denotes a pagan priest. Ivanov’s lexical choice suggests that in this passage he is conceptualizing art in terms of *teurgiiia* rather than *bogodēistvie*.

There are echoes of the antinomy of theurgy and theology in Solov'ev's notion that the artist-theurgist represents divinity in "earthly incarnations." Theurgic *ergon* is given a sense of primacy over *logos* in both Solov'ev and Ivanov. The "religious idea," here perhaps the *logos*, does not merely inform the artist-theurgist's activity, theurgic *ergon* creates divinity and the "religious idea" in linguistic and material forms. This sense of a gradual merging of divine and human realms through theurgic-artistic activity encapsulates Solov'ev's concept of "divine humanity" or *bogochelovechestvo*. The artist-theurgist works toward the transfiguration of humanity through the representation of divine beauty. Solov'ev's aesthetics center on the theurgic potential of artistic beauty as the representation of the divine.⁸⁷ In the spirit of Solov'ev's urge to artists and poets to "become priests and prophets," theurgy becomes for Ivanov a "task":

Вл. Соловьев ставит высшею задачей искусства задачу теургическую. Под теургическою задачей художника он разумеет преображающее мир выявление сверхприродной реальности и высвобождение истинной красоты из-под грубых покровов вещества.⁸⁸

Ivanov's formulation of the artistic-theurgic task here is presented in distinctly Platonic terms as a "emancipation of true beauty from the crude shackles of matter." The theurgic task for Ivanov is, as in Solov'ev, presented in Eastern Orthodox terms of transfiguration (*preobrazhaiushchee mir vyjavlenie*). Ivanov's notion here is that artistic beauty, in an unknowable fashion as a theurgic *tainstvo*, transfigures the world.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ V.V. Bychkov, *Russkaia teurgicheskaja estetika* (Moscow: Lodomir, 2007), pp. 58-94.

⁸⁸ Ibid. ("Vladimir Solovyov posits the theurgical task as the highest task of art. By the theurgical task of the artist, he means a world-transfiguring revelation of supernatural reality and the emancipation of true beauty out from beneath the crude shackles of matter.")

⁸⁹ Ivanov here encapsulates Solov'ev's interpretation of Dostoevsky's "beauty will save the world" (*krasota spaset mir*).

Given their theurgic potency, symbols in art take on the characteristics of the Neoplatonist *symbola* to Ivanov (as will be discussed further in chapters three and four). In keeping with his description of theurgy as a “collective action of the divine and humanity,” for Solov’ev the artist engages in theurgy as a type of sacramental activity. Artistic creation has the theurgic potential to alter or reshape the divine or “noumenal” realm, and thus becomes a form of ritualism to Ivanov and the Symbolists, as Robert Bird discusses: “Ivanov and the other symbolists came to view lyric poetry as intervening in the rituals (whether religious or social) that stood at the heart of their volatile religious situation.”⁹⁰ For Ivanov, the artist, as “priest and prophet,” creates *symbola* as theurgic sacraments for collective administration. The Symbolist artist-theurgist, as in Neoplatonist theurgy, remains unaware of the full historical or spiritual significance of the *symbola*. Ivanov understands theurgic art as impacting historical or cosmic circumstances in an indeterminate yet fundamental way.

3.3. Fedorov’s Theurgy as *bogoděistvo*

It is probable that Solov’ev was familiar with *bogoděistvie* and *teurgiia* from Russian philosopher and cosmologist Nikolai Fedorov as well as from their original sources. Fedorov contrasts *bogoděistvie* and *teurgiia* as well as theology and theurgy in the following passage from *Filosofiiia obshchego dela*:

Богословие вознеслось до солнца, но осталось лишь богоговорением, словом, а не делом Божиим; только богодействие (но не мистическая теургия), только превращение самого себя в орудия дела Божия обратит все солнца, все небесные миры в Царство Божее, в рай.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Robert Bird, *The Russian Prospero: The Creative World of Viacheslav Ivanov* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), p. 123.

⁹¹ N.F. Fedorov, *Filosofiiia obshchego dela (sbornik)* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Eksmo, 2008), p. 14. (“Theology has risen to the sun, but has remained merely discourse on the divine—words, but

The passage clearly distinguishes between theology and theurgy on the basis of *logos* and *ergon*. Theology, while having “risen to the sun,” is “merely discourse.”⁹² Theurgy takes up where theology leaves off with “divine action.” Fedorov’s description of theurgy as a “transformation of oneself into an instrument of divine action” anticipates the theurgic role in Solov’evian *bogochelovechestvo*. Fedorov’s description here likewise resembles Solov’ev’s notion of theurgy as incarnating divinity in artistic forms. Paralleling Solov’ev and Ivanov, theurgy is presented in terms of transfiguration, or a “transformation of oneself” (*prevrashchenie samikh sebia*). Significantly, Fedorov uses the compound word *bogodēistvo* rather than *bogodēistvie*. *Deistvo* in Russian denotes a religious rite. Whereas *deistvie* indicates a more general sense of “act” or “action,” *deistvo* has a ritual inflection. Thus Fedorov’s *bogodēistvo* points directly to the sense of sacramental ritualism associated with Pseudo-Dionysius’ theurgy in the Eastern Church. Fedorov, however, contrasts *bogodēistvo* to *teurgiia*, regarding the latter pejoratively as “mystical.” Whereas Solov’ev and Ivanov unify the meanings of *bogodēistvie* and *teurgiia*, Fedorov dismisses occult *teurgiia* in favor of the Orthodox sacramentalism of *bogodēistvo*. Theurgy is presented by Fedorov more in terms of the Eastern Orthodox notion of *theosis*, a processual merging of human and divine acts.

not divine action. Only theurgy (but not the mystical sort), only a transformation of oneself into an instrument of God’s action will turn all suns, all heavenly realms into the Kingdom of God, into paradise.”)

⁹² Fedorov’s solar metaphor is not incidental in this passage. As discussed in chapter one, solar imagery is consistently associated with theurgy in Neoplatonism and in Pseudo-Dionysius.

4. Conclusion

The Solov'evian and Symbolist idea of theurgic art relies upon a dual sense of *bogoděistvie* and *teurgii*. Engaged in *bogoděistvie* and *teurgii* alike, the theurgic artist harnesses both benevolent and occult powers in the task of artistic creation. As “high priest and prophet,” the theurgic artist administers symbolic art as a kind of sacrament with an indeterminable *Zeitgeist*-altering affect. Symbolist theurgy aims not only to elevate the theurgist's soul (as in Neoplatonism), but also to influence the course of historical events. Robert Bird states that “Symbolism formulated its theoretical pretensions at a time when Russia was making a transition from an uneasy, borrowed *modernity* to an even more uneasy *modernism*.”⁹³ The Symbolists viewed their historical situation as being in serious flux, and art as both reflecting and affecting their cultural and social circumstances. Ivanov's emphasis on ritual, and the philological recovery of theurgic *symbola* (as will be discussed in the next chapter), has both a traditionalist and non-traditionalist element: theurgy acts as a kind of traditionalism, as it necessitates the correct ritual use of symbols in an unmodified form; the artistic use of theurgy to Ivanov, however, is to reshape the “religious consciousness,” which, in turn, redirects history.⁹⁴ Like in Neoplatonist theurgy, where the full significance of the *symbola* remains hidden from the theurgist, in Russian Symbolism, the theurgic artist cannot precisely determine the effect of symbolic art on history. Symbolist art to Ivanov (and Merezhkovsky)

⁹³ Bird, *The Russian Prospero: The Creative World of Viacheslav Ivanov*, p. 123.

⁹⁴ The Symbolist notion of theurgic art as reshaping history has distinct Hegelian overtones. Ivanov's idea that theurgy restructures the “religious consciousness” with concomitant implications for human history at large is reminiscent of Hegel's view of the progression of history as consciousness coming to know itself. For a discussion of the role of the symbol in the historical process for both Hegel and Ivanov, see S.G. Sycheva, “G. Gegel' i V.I. Ivanov: Vysshaia tsel' iskusstva,” *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo politekhnicheskogo universiteta*, vol. 5, no. 120 (2012), pp. 236-241.

could both embody and recreate the religious climate of late antiquity, thereby perhaps reinstating it in current times.

E.R. Dodds refers to theurgy's emphasis on symbol and ritual over knowledge as symptomatic of the decline of the ancient world.⁹⁵ From this standpoint, theurgy becomes a desperate effort to cling to, in Pseudo-Dionysius' terms, "hidden traditions." (Iamblichus, of course, admonishes the Greeks for translating the divine names and thereby corrupting *symbola*.) The parallels between the decline of the late Roman empire and late-imperial Russia did not escape the Symbolists. Merezhkovsky's novel *Smert' bogov* (*The Death of the Gods*), which portrays Iamblichus as a curmudgeonly mystic, details the *bogoiskatel'stvo* ("god seeking") of the Roman emperor Julian from Christianity to paganism. Julian, recalling chapter 1, re-converted to the "old gods" through the teachings of Iamblichean theurgy. In the spirit of *fin-de-siècle* anxiety and Solov'ev's eschatology of the Anti-Christ, the Symbolists anticipated an epochal cultural shift akin to the decline of paganism and rise of Christianity. The creation and philological resuscitation of theurgic *symbola* in poetry becomes a *religioznoe delo* ("religious affair") for the Symbolists. Much like in late antiquity, theurgy for the Symbolists acted as a means of preservation, a retention of the *symbola* in a period of cultural upheaval.

⁹⁵ E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951; repr., Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 246-250; 287-288.

Chapter 3 –

Ivanov's Religious Philology and the Theurgy of Dionysian and Christian *Strast'*

1. Introduction

As a classical historian and philologist, Ivanov's reading of the Greek theurgic sources was in the original language. Ivanov received training in Greek and Latin beginning in his *gymnazium* years. Roman history became Ivanov's first academic specialization as a student in Berlin under Theodor Mommsen. Ivanov states in his "Autobiographical Letter" that despite his decision to study history (which, he suggests, was in keeping with the civically-minded 1880s in Russia), his lifelong interest was in Greek philology.¹ His dissertation on agrarian taxation in northern Italy during the decline of the Roman empire would remain undefended, however, in consequence of his travels through Europe with Lydia Zinoveva-Annibal and his newfound calling as a poet. His discovery of the writings of Nietzsche coincided with his abandonment of his studies in Berlin, his rejection of civic and positivist viewpoints, and the renewal of his interest in Greek philology.²

Ivanov continued his research into the ancient world for the rest of his life after turning to poetry. In 1905, he published a series of lectures that he had delivered two years prior at the Russian Academy of Social Sciences in Paris as *Ellinskaia religiia stradaiushchego boga* (*The Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God*). Printed versions of the lectures first appeared in installments in *Novyi put'* (*The New Path*) between 1904 and 1905, and then in *Voprosy zhizni*

¹ Viacheslav Ivanov, "Avtobiograficheskoe pis'mo" in *Po zvezdam. Borozdy i mezhi* (Moscow: Astrel', 2007), p. 17.

² Pamela Davidson, *Viacheslav Ivanov and C.M. Bowra: A Correspondence from Two Corners on Humanism*, Birmingham Slavic Monographs No. 36 (Birmingham: Birmingham UP, 2006), pp. 8-9.

(*Life's Questions*) in 1905. Ivanov's publication of his philological research in Symbolist literary journals lends a certain likeness of purpose to his creative and philological endeavors. In 1924, while at the University of Baku, he completed a dissertation entitled *Dionis i pradionisiistvo (Dionysus and Predionysianism)*—the result of over 30 years of research on the Dionysian cult and its predecessors. His education provided him with a specialist's knowledge of the myth, history, and literature of antiquity, which often served as sources for his poetry and theoretical essays.

Ivanov's particular focus, both as an academic and as a belletrist, was on the cult of Dionysus. His philological approach to the history of religion is much indebted to Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*. His philological works demonstrate important parallels to his poetic and theoretical output, and may even shed interpretive light on certain aspects of his creative work. The question of how Ivanov's philology shaped his poetry and theoretical essays has entered the discussion in recent scholarship,³ and will be pursued further in this chapter.

Ivanov ascribed tremendous importance to the similar narratives of suffering, death, and rebirth associated with Dionysus and Christ. His syncretizing thought operated within a framework of Christian teleology in which prior deities, while symbolically prefiguring Christ in important ways, marked an incremental path toward Christ as the *telos* of history and divine revelation. For Ivanov and other Symbolists of his generation, theurgy – with its notion of the symbol as an ontologically viable, if not totally comprehensible, link to noumenal reality – provided a way of revisiting stages in the development of religious consciousness that led to

³ See E.A. Takho-Godi, M.Iu. Edel'shtein, ed., *Antichnost' i russkaia kul'tura Serebrianaogo veka: k 85-letiiu A.A. Takho-Godi* (Moscow: Volodei Publishers, 2008). See also Filip Vestbruk, *Dionis i dionisiiskaia tragediia: Viacheslav Ivanov, filologicheskie i filosofskie idei o dionisiistve* (Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner, 2009).

Christianity. Much as for Iamblichus and Proclus, who envisioned theurgic ritual as a reenactment of the initial creative acts of the gods, for Ivanov, the implementation of theurgy could serve to reconstruct an alternate path to Christ proceeding through the Greek mystery cults. Ivanov derives his theurgic sources through philological and literary study of ancient mystery cult practice. The philological and artistic reconstruction of theurgic symbols (and their role in Symbolist mythopoesis) could then revitalize ritual practices – Christian or otherwise – and create a *novoe religioznoe soznanie* (“new religious consciousness”) in the coming epoch.

2.1. “Publicistic” Philology

The association between theurgy and philology is not restricted to Ivanov’s scholarly work; in fact, it is perhaps more fully fleshed out in his poetry and theoretical essays. While Ivanov cites Iamblichus and Proclus in *Dionis i pradionisiistvo*, he does not generally provide citations to theurgic sources in his theoretical essays. This is perhaps explicable in one sense according to their publication venue. The majority of his essays were published initially in thick journals as non-scholarly, “publicistic” writings—a genre which did not require a strict citation etiquette. The Symbolists generally used the thick journals, with their relatively wide readership throughout Russia, as a venue for public discourse through which they could develop their artistic and philosophical projects. Ivanov’s exhortations to construct theurgic art, which take on a highly programmatic and emphatic tone in his thick-journal essays, did not necessitate an appeal to the full breadth of theurgic thought and practice. It should also be mentioned here that theurgy had a strong “occult” association in the nineteenth century, with its most proximate historical adherents being the Martinists. Small wonder, then, that Ivanov, much like the other Symbolists, associates theurgy primarily with Solov’ev, and not the Neoplatonists, in his

theoretical essays. This association can be read both as a gesture toward the legitimation of the artistic-theurgic enterprise, and as an appeal to the presumed familiarity of his readership with Solov'ev and his notion of *svobodnaia teurgiia* ("free theurgy"). Ivanov seems both to play on the "occult" cache of theurgy in his essays while also withholding the full extent of the "occult" sources that deal with theurgy, of which he was nonetheless well aware.

Ivanov sparingly points to philological sources in his theoretical essays, though in an important passage from "Dve stikhii v sovremennom simvolizme" ("Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism"), he formulates a discussion of theurgy around the ideas of the philologist Georg Friedrich Creuzer (1771-1858). Creuzer was a professor of classical philology at Heidelberg and published a four-volume work entitled *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen* between 1810 and 1812. The work proposes that religious belief originated in the remotest antiquity around a set of symbols, which were subsequently spread throughout numerous civilizations of the ancient world. Creuzer posited that demotic myths in turn arose as narratives facilitating the interpretation of the symbols.⁴ One of Creuzer's key examples for the cross-cultural transmission of the symbols was the image of the slaughtered steer, representing Dionysus-Osiris, which can be found on artifacts from both Greece and Egypt.⁵ The cycle of suffering, death, and rebirth that structures the mysteriological account of Dionysus, for Creuzer, in turn structures the narrative of Christ's life in the Gospels.

"Dve stikhii v sovremennom simvolizme," similarly to Creuzer's *Symbolik*, argues for myth as the interpretation of a symbolic system: "V kazhdoi tochke persecheniia simvola, kak luchu niskhodiashchego, so sferoiu soznaniia on iavliaetsia znameniem, smysl kotorogo obrazno

⁴ Georg Friedrich Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen*, 2nd edition, vol. 1 (Leipzig and Damstadt: Heyer and Leske, 1819-1821), p. 96.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:333; 4:120-135.

i polno raskryvaetsia v sootvetstvuiushchem mire.”⁶ Fashioning the artistic work out of symbols, for Ivanov, entails the creation of new myths, or *mifotvorchestvo*, which in turn establishes a religious purpose to the work of symbolic art. In a passage immediately preceding the one on Creuzer, Ivanov defends himself against anticipated criticism for laying the entire Symbolist artistic enterprise at the altar of myth creation, stating “Ibo mif, o kotorom my govorem, ne est’ isustvennoe sozdanie neproizvol’nogo tvorchestva, kak priniato v nastoiashchee vremia uspokoенno dumat’.”⁷ The myths, instead, are based upon symbols, which, as Creuzer suggests, contain a tie to remote antiquity as the prototypes of religious consciousness. They thus are something more than what Ivanov terms “Idealistic Symbolism,” in which arbitrary signification replaces the theurgic *symbola*⁸ that he believes to be operative behind “Realistic Symbolism.”⁹ The philologist or historian such as Creuzer or Ivanov must work *backward* to the theurgic *symbola* through the textual and narrative formulae of myth in order to reconstruct the proto-symbolic system. In Ivanov’s case, the purpose of returning to the *symbola* is to utilize their theurgic potential in the creation of new myths through symbolic art. These myths are not “iskusstvennyi” (“artificial”), for Ivanov; their basis upon the *symbola* gives them a kind of

⁶ Viacheslav Ivanov, “Dve stikhii v sovremennom simvolizme” in *Po zvezdam. Borozdy i mezhi*, p. 179. (“At each point where the symbol, like a descending ray of light, intersects with the sphere of consciousness, it [the symbol] is a sign, the meaning of which is figuratively and fully unpacked in the corresponding myth.”) All translations from the Russian are mine.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 202. (“The [type of] myth that we’re speaking about is not an artificial product of nonspontaneous creativity, as it is placidly accepted to think currently.”)

⁸ Hereafter *symbola* in Greek transliteration, as in chapter 1, will refer to theurgic symbols.

⁹ Ivanov designates “Idealistic Symbolism” as non-theurgic in the sense that it lacks “realistic” (*realisticheskii*) symbols, i.e. ones that are not derived through *mimesis*. It instead consists of “impressionistic” and “psychological” symbols.

theurgic viability much as Proclus asserts in his commentary on the fifth and sixth books of the *Republic* (as discussed in chapter 1).

2.2. Theurgists in an “Organization of Mystical Communities”

Ivanov enlists Creuzer’s support for his proposal that religious life in the ancient world began with an “organizatsiia misticheskikh soiuзов” (“organization of mystical communities”),¹⁰ which developed and transmitted a form of esoteric, theurgic knowledge based on symbols.

...науке придется вспомнить несколько истин, ясно представлявшихся исследователям мифа и символа, хотя бы в эпоху Крейцера. Древность в целом непонятна без допущения великой, международной и древнейшей по своим корням и начаткам организации мистических союзов...¹¹

Creuzer’s philology, which advances something similar to the idea of a “large, international organization of mystical communities,”¹² had come up against sharp criticism in the 1810s and 1820s in Germany, and he had fallen out of favor in philological scholarship long before Ivanov’s time. Ivanov here proposes a controversial scholarly point of view in a “publicistic” essay and enlists the support of a discredited philologist to bolster his claims. It is important that he mentions Creuzer in a passage dealing with theurgy as a form of esotericism. Creuzer maintained that this “organization of mystical communities” was transmitted cross-culturally and across time through symbols, the interpretation of which took the form of esoteric knowledge. It

¹⁰ The translation of *soiuzy* as “communities” emphasizes Ivanov’s reference here to groups of people rather than more abstract “unions.” Further in the passage Ivanov uses the term *obshchiny* interchangeably with *soiuzy*.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 203. (“...current scholarship must recall a few truths which presented themselves clearly to the researchers of myth and the symbol in the epoch of Creuzer. The ancient world cannot be understood without the admission of a large, international organization of mystical communities that is of the utmost antiquity according to its roots and origins...”)

¹² Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie*, 2:302.

is this esoteric knowledge, or myth, that Ivanov believes possesses theurgic actuality and can be reconstituted in symbolic art. Creuzer steps in to reinforce a religious proposition that began life as a philological doctrine. Ivanov exhorts the thick-journal readership, not philological scholars, toward a reevaluation of Creuzer for religious ends.

2.3. Religious Philosophy, Religious Philology

With William “Oriental” Jones’ discovery of resemblances between Sanskrit and European languages in the 1780s, the notion of an ancient “organization of mystical communities” could be regarded in one sense as an extrapolation of the idea of Indo-European. Jones’ discovery was a main impetus behind the development of the philological discipline in the nineteenth century. The proposal that modern European languages had commonalities with ancient Sanskrit implicated religion as well. If linguistic resemblances can be traced to a common proto-language, and can be understood systematically, then the same assumption could explain religious syncretism. The Indian or Caucasian origin of European mythology was a commonly accepted notion in the early nineteenth century, as George Williamson discusses in *The Longing for Myth in Germany*:

The fascination with oriental religion was stimulated further by translations of the Persian Zend-Avesta and the Hindu Upanishads by Abraham Anquetil-Duperron. Many scholars saw these texts as the oldest records of religious belief in the ancient world, predating Homer and even the Hebrew Bible. By the first decade of the nineteenth century, Joseph Goerres, Friedrich Schlegel, Johann Arnold Kanne, and Joseph Hammer von Purgstall had published works tracing the origin of ancient religion and mythology to India or the Caucasus.¹³

Thus Ivanov’s proposal of an “organization of mystical communities” in connection with Creuzer confirms his awareness of a set of ideas in German philology which broadened the

¹³ George S. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2004), p. 129.

framework for investigating the origins of European languages and religions beyond ancient Greece. It also demonstrates that he readily applies his philological studies to religious questions.

While we would commonly think of Ivanov and other Silver Age authors as engaging in a kind of post-Solov'evian religious philosophy in their theoretical essays, a closer definition of what Ivanov is doing here would be religious *philology*. His purpose in placing Dionysus and Christ in a symbolic, typological relationship is religious, though the argument is couched in philological terms. Ivanov needs to propose a kind of proto-organization of worshippers centered on symbol and myth in order to advance key aspects of his religious-philological program. The historical process that, for Ivanov, will culminate in the appearance of Christ can be retraced to a common origin in the “organization of mystical communities.” These groups, as Ivanov argues, were the original keepers and disseminators of the theurgic *symbola*. He describes them as the “khranitel(i) preemstvennogo znaniia i pererozhdaishchikh cheloveka tainstv.”¹⁴ Ivanov's use of the term *tainstvo*, which means “sacrament” in addition to “mystery,” suggests that he sees the theurgic *symbola* as predecessors to the Christian sacraments. While various cultures and religions have differing interpretations of the *symbola*, i.e. varying myths and origin stories, the *symbola* and their theurgic potential act as the constant in the history of religious life. In this passage, Ivanov presents the theurgically active *symbola* as enabling ritual contact with the divine throughout history. If religious life from its earliest phases was organized ritually around a set of theurgic *symbola*, then, much like the assumption behind Indo-European, the different myths attached to the *symbola* should be treated inclusively as part of a single system. The history of religion then begins with an “organization of mystical communities” and

¹⁴ Viacheslav Ivanov, “Dve stikhii” in *Po zvezdam. Borozdy i mezhi*, p. 203. (“keepers of successive knowledge and of the mysteries which regenerate humanity.”)

proceeds all the way to the appearance of Christ with an active link provided by the theurgic *symbola*. Religious life can then be historicized according to the transmission of the *symbola*.

2.4. Theurgy and “Esoteric Knowledge”

Ivanov claims that “Ne tol’ko v znamenitykh misteriiakh, kakovy elevsinskie ili samofrakiiskie, my vstrechaem sledy etoi organizatsii, no i v bol’shinstve zhrecheskikh obshchin, vyrosshikh pod sen’iu proslavlennykh khramov.”¹⁵ As in Creuzer, the esoteric knowledge of interpreting myth and ritual accompanies the passage of the *symbola*. Ivanov’s reference to the continuation of the original mystical societies occurring in the “shade of renowned temples” suggests that esoteric knowledge – which is purveyed by theurgists – is a constant in the history of religion. Ivanov presents esoteric knowledge in a sense as the wellspring from which religious life has been renewed throughout the centuries.

It is through esotericism and theurgy that the Christian Apostles maintain a connection with the original “mystical communities”: “Ucheniki filosofov soedinialis’ v obshchestva...uchenichestvo uzhe bylo esoterizmom, idet li rech’ o Egipte ili Indii, o drevnikh pifagoreitsakh ili neoplatonikakh, ili, nakonets, o Esseiah i obshchine apostol’skoi.”¹⁶ Christianity is likewise obliquely filed into the category of esotericism in this passage. Ivanov’s lineage of esotericism importantly begins with Egypt and India, highlights the Neoplatonists and Pythagoreans, and culminates with the Apostles. The uniting factor is that each of the religious

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 203. (“We find traces of this organization not only in the well-known mysteries such as the Eleusinian or the Samothracian, but also in the majority of priestly societies growing up in the shade of renowned temples.”)

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 203. (“The disciples of the philosophers formed societies...; their studies were esoteric, whether we’re speaking about Egypt or India, about the ancient Pythagoreans or the Neoplatonists, or, finally, about the Essenes or the apostolic community.”)

societies is made up of theurgists: “Eti teurgi i, kak govorili podchas elliny, “teologi,” byli organizatorami religii s nezapamiatnykh vremen.”¹⁷ Ivanov envisions theurgy as both primary to and formative of religious life; the theurgists become the historical keepers and disseminators of religious knowledge. Theurgy is a form of esotericism since, as Iamblichus asserts, the nature of theurgic knowledge and the efficacy of the symbols is not fully understood by the theurgist. To Ivanov, the individual instantiations of theurgic thought and practice are placed within an enormous historical and cultural framework that leads back to the “organization of mystical communities.”

Significantly, Ivanov broaches the theurgy-theology subject in this passage, though attributes it broadly to the “Hellenes,” or ancient Greeks. As we will see, Ivanov cites Iamblichus in *Dionis i pradionisiistvo*, though here prefers an unspecific attribution which nonetheless evokes religious and philosophical authority. The point here, made to the thick-journal readership, is that the existence of theurgists predates classical culture, Egyptian and Indian civilization, and harks back instead to “time immemorial,” i.e. to a pre-documented and pre-literate past. Ivanov mentions the Neoplatonists here merely as practitioners of a more ancient tradition of theurgy. While, as discussed in chapter 1, the use of the term theurgy can be dated to late antiquity, theurgic Neoplatonists such as Iamblichus and Proclus attributed theurgic practice to what they – writing in the fourth century – envisioned to be the remotest antiquity. Iamblichus’ reply to Porphyry’s critique of theurgy is, as discussed in chapter 1, in the guise of an Egyptian priest named Abamon, who rails against the Greeks’ tendency toward syncretism for its dilution of the ancient theurgic traditions. Proclus, in his commentary on the *Republic*, specifies certain Homeric hymns as possessing theurgic capability. Ivanov here indicates his

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 203. (“These theurgists, or ‘theologians’ as the Hellenes sometimes called them, were the organizers of religious life from time immemorial.”)

familiarity with Neoplatonist theurgy, and also subscribes to the notion of its practice in distant antiquity.

2.5. The Symbolists and Theurgic “Esoteric Societies”

In “Two Elements,” Ivanov exhorts the Symbolists to be the latest in the tradition of theurgists engaging in myth creation. The reconstruction of the *symbola* is a thoroughly philological enterprise, though the creation of new myths to transmit the *symbola* is an aesthetic and artistic one in the spirit of Solov’evian “free theurgy”: “Esli vozmozhno govorit’, kak Vl. Solov’ev, o poetakh i khudozhnikakh budushchego kak teurgakh, vozmozhno govorit i o mifotvorchestve, iskhodiashchem ot nikh ili cherez nikh.”¹⁸ Ivanov’s depiction of the Symbolist project here is to rediscover the ancient *symbola* according to philological and linguistic inquiry, and then reconstitute them in art as new myths. He imagines the Symbolists as the latest in the succession of “esoteric societies” presumably leading back to the “organization of mystical communities.” In order for the Symbolists to function as theurgists, “Neobkhodimo dlia etogo, soglasno Vl. Solov’evu, chtoby prezhde vsego religioznaia ideia vladela imi, kak nekogda ona vladela drevnimi uchiteliami ritma i stroia bozhestvennogo.”¹⁹ The poet or artist’s attunement to the frequency of a “religious idea” which likewise motivated the “ancient teachers of rhythm and the divine order” results in the ability to actualize this idea in “earthly manifestations.” If motivated by the “religious idea,” the artist as theurgist should then “*eiu vlade(t’) i soznatel’no*

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 203. (“If it is possible to speak, as Vladimir Solov’ev did, about poets and artists of the future as theurgists, it is also possible to speak of mythopoesis deriving from them or through them.”)

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 203. (“It is necessary, in accordance with Solov’ev, that they be driven by a religious idea like that which drove the ancient teachers of rhythm and the divine order.”)

upravlia(t') ee zemnymi voploshcheniiami" (emphasis added).²⁰ Ivanov quotes from Solov'ev's speech at Dostoevsky's funeral to frame the idea of the Symbolist-theurgists as the bearers of this "religious idea" that can be actualized in artistic creation. At the end of a passage that begins with Ivanov's discussion of Creuzer and the "organization of mystical communities," Solov'ev tellingly makes an appearance in justification of art as theurgy. Though he is clearly aware of the Neoplatonist theurgic context, Ivanov's emphasis is on the Solov'evian concept of art as "free theurgy." The theurgic enterprise here is directed at the Symbolists; Ivanov, following Solov'ev, exhorts them to actualize a religious agenda through theurgic mythopoesis.

The myths, which themselves carry a kind of potency due to their interpolation of the *symbola*, are created according to Ivanov by theurgists in "esoteric societies":

В эсотерических общинах, напริม., в Элевсине, творились мифы, чуждые мифам народным — как они творились в академии Платона и школах платоников, — творились мифы и в храмах; и поскольку они становились достоянием непосвященных и открывались толпе, они назывались не мифами, а священными повестями (ἱεροὶ λόγοι), и только в устах толпы и с ее прикрасами или искажениями, во всенародном своем облике, оказывались мифами в полноте этого понятия. Ибо миф, в полном смысле, безусловно всенароден.²¹

Ivanov's oblique reference to "other Platonist schools" here certainly includes the Neoplatonists. In a gesture toward nineteenth-century nationalist discourse, Ivanov is interested here in theurgic mythopoesis as a source for a kind of Russian national *mythos*. The Symbolists act as the new

²⁰ Ibid., p. 203. ("command *it* and consciously direct *it* through earthly manifestations.")

²¹ Ibid., p. 203. ("In esoteric societies, for example in Eleusis, myths were created that were foreign to folk myths – as they were created in Plato's Academy and in other Platonist schools. Myths were created in temples; and insofar as they became the possession of the uninitiated and were disclosed to the public, they were called not myths, but sacred stories, and only in the ears of the crowd and with its adornments or distortions, in its national [*vsenarodnyi*] form, did they turn out to be myths in the fullness of that concept. For myth, in its full sense, is unquestionably national.")

“esoteric society” which preserves the *symbola* and develops aesthetic means for their transmission to the public as myths.

In both Creuzer and Ivanov, the notion of a symbolic system which has been disseminated cross-culturally accommodates myth as a national expression of that system. Ivanov, in religious-philological fashion, affiliates the system with the theurgic *symbola*, and proposes a kind of theurgic potentiality to the myths associated with them. Through a process of “adornment and distortion” in popular consciousness, these myths take on a national character. Ivanov proposes that national myths are “refracted through a theurgic milieu”:

...если мы не можем вместе с Крейцером не учитывать народного поэтического и религиозного творчества в происхождении мифов, тем не менее вынуждены будем рано или поздно признать, что значительная по числу и, быть может, важнейшая по религиозному содержанию часть их преломилась чрез теургическую среду, другая же часть была привита теургами к молодым росткам народного верования или обряда.²²

Thus Ivanov’s portrayal is of theurgists as a healthy symptom of the nation’s religious life. The theurgic *symbola* are kept within presumably elite “esoteric societies” (as in Creuzer), but, in their transmission to the public as myths, they can in turn serve as a source for folk creativity. “Folk belief and ritual” in fact have a tie to the theurgic milieu, and, Ivanov exhorts, should be considered a significant source for national and religious identity. Ivanov frames his discussion here in the nineteenth-century nationalist discourse that dates back to Herder and his notion of language as the signal bearer of national identity. Again in religious-philological fashion, Ivanov localizes folk belief and ritual, moreover, as a source for theurgic influence. The analysis of folk belief and ritual then acts as a means of reconstituting the theurgically active *symbola* through

²² Ibid., p. 203. (“...if we cannot, following Creuzer, fail to consider folk poetic and religious creativity in the origin of myths, nonetheless we will be forced to acknowledge sooner or later that a significant number of them, and perhaps the most important with respect to their religious content, were refracted through a theurgic milieu; another part was grafted by the theurgists onto the young offshoots of folk belief or ritual.”)

comparative philological study. Individual national and cultural histories, presumably each with their own local “theurgic milieu,” provide a window into the deeper structures of the theurgic *symbola* at play.

2.6. Theurgic Mimesis and “Folk Poetic Creativity”

Ivanov suggests that in the artistic imitation of “folk poetic creativity,” itself an expression of “folk belief and ritual,” the theurgic torch can be passed along. Theurgy, after all, emphasizes practice over theory, and implementation over theorization. His proposal of “folk poetic creativity” as a theurgic source implies a philological search for the presumably active theurgic forms, though it also implies artistic imitation of those forms. In Iamblichus, the ritual significance of the symbolic forms is not always fully grasped by the theurgist—the efficacy of the *symbola*, however, has much to do with their deployment in a ritual setting. If understood in these terms, Ivanov is implying that formal imitation of “folk poetic creativity” has theurgic potential. The poet-theurgist need not be entirely aware of why a particular linguistic or poetic form is theurgically active; one merely needs to use or *practice* it. Imitation, or *mimesis*, is the primary impetus behind “Realistic Symbolism,” as Ivanov assesses at length in prior sections of “Two Elements.” Theurgic art, and especially poetry, thus has a particular preoccupation with *forms* which have been uncovered philologically, and which are thought to contain dormant theurgic properties.

The pure imitation of theurgic forms can, theoretically, yield a theurgic result according to Iamblichus and Proclus. From Ivanov the religious philologist’s standpoint, the uncovering of theurgic linguistic forms can occur through looking at “folk poetic creativity,” i.e. a largely undocumented group of poetic forms which have been preserved orally. As a Symbolist poet,

Ivanov can then document and imitate these forms in order to activate their presumed theurgic capability. As forms which originated in oral recitation and song, one theurgically functional aspect of folk verse must be its sonic characteristics. The sound of the poetic form can only be conveyed through recitation, which in this case acts as a kind of ritual implementation of the form as a *symbolon*. The folk oral form, which, to quote an earlier passage, has been “refracted through a theurgical milieu,” preserves sounds from “time immemorial.” The form, if preserved as such and imitated in a successful way, acts as a theurgic *symbolon* with corresponding implications for recitation in a ritual setting. Ivanov’s imitation of various oral and musical forms in poems such as “Pesn’ razluki” and “Tebe blagodarim” could thus be regarded as theurgic, a topic which will be assessed in detail in chapter 4. In Ivanov’s view, the sound of the poem, i.e. its linguistic, rhythmic, and metrical forms actualized in recitation, can reveal “an unheard mystery about eternal gods”:

Возможно в иных случаях (как в мифе о Загрее) проследить, как священная повесть, сообщенная после долгого хранения в тайне народу, мало-по-малу занимает во всеобщем религиозно-мифологическом мирозерцании равное место с исконными мифами, несмотря на самые противоречия и новшества, которые заключало в себе разоблачение неслыханной тайны о вечных богах.²³

Ivanov in a sense represents an opposing view to Iamblichus on the matter of the “contradictions and adornments” to theurgic myth and practice which occur in what he calls the “public religious-mythological consciousness.” Iamblichus, as discussed in chapter 1, disparages the Greeks for syncretizing their divinities and ritual practices with those of their acquired territories (and invaders). Ivanov here seems to suggest that the “contradictions and adornments” which

²³ Ibid., p. 203. (“It is possible in certain cases [as in the myth of Zagreus] to investigate how the sacred story, communicated to the people following an extended preservation in obscurity, little by little occupies an equal place in the public religious-mythological consciousness with age-old myths. [This occurs] despite contradictions and adornments, which disclose an unheard mystery about eternal gods.”)

accompany the oral transmission of myths or “sacred stories” represents a discoverable mystery, one which presumably may be approached and understood through philological means.

Moreover, in contrast to Iamblichus, here it is the very “contradictions and adornments” for Ivanov which constitute the theurgic actuality of the myth. Following a period of dormancy, or “an extended preservation in obscurity,” Ivanov suggests that theurgic forms can be accessed philologically and reimplemented poetically.

Ivanov’s passage portrays the religious philologist as uncovering the latent theurgic potential of certain linguistic and poetic forms. Their orality ties in with their “mystery,” i.e. their theurgic status, while acting as their means of transmission through generations. As in Neoplatonist theurgy, the recitation of incantatory formulae and *nomina barbara* becomes a way of eliciting the attention of receptive divinities; orality ensures the secrecy of the linguistic *symbola* among only the inducted few. Sound, in this passage and elsewhere in Ivanov, is treated as a means of theurgic activation. The sound of rhythmicized language, i.e. the oral rendition of poetic form, is understood in a functional sense. Through the oral transmission of myths or “sacred stories,” “unheard mysteries about eternal gods” can bring about a theurgic effect.

Situating his theurgic thought in a Greek context, Ivanov provides a bracketed translation of the phrase “sviashchennye istorii,” or “sacred stories,” in Greek (*hieroi logoi*). The mysteries that oral poetry can reveal likewise date from polytheistic times (“vechnye bogi,” or “eternal gods”). Ivanov’s example of the theurgic “sacred story” here centers on one of the incarnations of Dionysus: the myth of Zagreus, the son of Zeus dismembered by the Titans and resurrected thanks to Athena’s preserving of his heart. Both Creuzer²⁴ and Ivanov pinpoint Zagreus,

²⁴ Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie*, 2:333; 4:120-135.

signified by the symbol of the sacrificial bull, as one of the early instantiations of Dionysus in their philological works. Ivanov uses Zagreus here to exemplify how the philological study of myth can disclose the theurgic undercurrent that the myths themselves potentially contain. “Folk poetic creativity,” which passes through a “theurgical milieu,” is treated as a linguistic and religious tie to Greek antiquity and earlier.

3.1. Russian and “Divine Hellenic Speech”

As in Iamblichus and Proclus, for whom many of the most important *symbola* were linguistic, for Ivanov, language is a locus of theurgic activity. In the 1918 essay “Nash iazyk” (“Our Language”), Ivanov uses the historical and linguistic tie between Greek and Church Slavic to posit a theurgic relationship between the languages:

Церковно-славянская речь стала под перстами боговдохновенных ваятелей души славянской, свв. Кирилла и Мефодия, живым слепком «божественной эллинской речи,” образ и подобие которой внедрили в свое изваяние приснопамятные Просветители. Воистину теургическим представляется их непостижимое дело...²⁵

Ivanov’s essay was written in response to the orthographical and linguistic reforms to the Russian language undertaken by the post-revolutionary regime, and takes on a preservationist tone. Ivanov notes one defense of the reform by N.P. Sakulin, who claims that it represents a “secularization” of the Russian language in accordance with new civic ideals.²⁶ In contrast, Ivanov wants to demonstrate Russian’s tie to Greek through Church Slavic, and its resultant theurgic viability.

²⁵ Viacheslav Ivanov, “Nash Iazyk” in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4 (Brussels: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1986), p. 676. (“In the hands of the divinely-inspired sculptors of the Slavic spirit, Saints Cyril and Methodius, Church Slavic speech became a living mold of “divine Hellenic speech,” with whose image and likeness the ever-memorable Enlighteners imbued their casting. Their inimitable deed is in truth theurgic...”)

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 680.

The sculpting metaphor that Ivanov uses in the above quote is in keeping with its emphasis on the “theurgic deed.” As discussed in chapter 1, one of the theurgic techniques frequently referenced in Neoplatonism is statue animation or entrancement. The theurgist would perform a series of rituals intended to compel a particular divinity to descend into the statue. The animated statue would then speak to the theurgist in the form of oracles.²⁷ Ivanov’s reference to Cyril and Methodius as “sculptors”, and his “casting” imagery, create a metaphor of the Russian language as the theurgic statue which becomes animated by Greek. The image of a “living mold” portrays Russian as a kind of linguistic raw matter which is enlivened by theurgically enabled Greek.

Ivanov begins the essay by using theurgic terminology, which here he attributes to Wilhelm von Humboldt, to define language: “Iazyk, po glubokomyslennomu vozzreniiu Vil’gel’ma Gumbol’dta, est’ odnovremenno delo i deistvennaia sila (ἔργον ἢ ἐνέργεια).”²⁸ Ivanov uses the Greek terms *ergon* and *energeia*, both of which have strong theurgic associations, as defining attributes of language. As an “act and an active force,” the Russian language stands as a “zhivoi slepok” (“living trace”) of Greek, which it preserves in “image and likeness.” Ivanov’s reading of animacy (*zhivoi, energia*) in language has important theurgic overtones. The Greek *ergon* associates language with action. As discussed in chapter 1, theurgy’s emphasis on *ergon* over *logos*, on action over discourse, constitutes its primary distinction from theology. Ivanov’s categorization of language as *ergon* conveys a sense that it is theurgically enabled. One may read Ivanov’s association of *ergon* with language, however, to

²⁷ E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951; repr., Berkeley and Los Angeles: UC Press, 1971), pp. 283-314.

²⁸ Ivanov, “Nash Iazyk” in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, p. 675. (“Language, according to Humboldt’s profound observation, is at once an act and an active force [ἔργον and ἐνέργεια].”)

be somewhat contradictory. Language, after all, could be more closely associated with *logos* and theological discourse. Ivanov's implication instead is that language possesses a ritual viability as *ergon*. For the Neoplatonic theurgists, language assisted in creating forms of contact with the divine that superseded cognitive understanding and eluded linguistic description. Ivanov's classification of language as *ergon* situates it firmly within a theurgical, rather than theological, framework.

Russian's relationship to Church Slavic, the liturgical language of the Russian Orthodox Church, holds significance from a theurgic perspective. Ivanov presents Russian's connection to Church Slavic, and thereby Greek, as a measure of its sacrality and theurgic animacy. Russian is exceptional among modern languages for Ivanov in terms of its formal resemblance to Greek.

Вследствие раннего усвоения многочисленных влияний и отложений церковно-славянской речи, наш язык является ныне единственным из новых языков по глубине впечатления в его самостоятельной и беспримесной пламенной стихии — духа, образа, строя словес эллинских, эллинской “грамоты.”²⁹

By association with the “divinity” of Greek, Church Slavic, and thereby Russian, becomes theurgically viable.

St. Cyril and Methodius' translation of the Greek Septuagint and New Testament for missionary purposes made use of Greek orthography, lexicon and syntax, and provided the foundational documents of Church Slavic. Ivanov calls their translation a “theurgic deed” (*teurgicheskoe delo*). The notion here is that in translating from Greek to what became Church Slavic, Cyril and Methodius likewise inscribed Greek religious and literary traditions into the new sacred language. Church Slavic's linguistic descentance from Greek indicates to Ivanov a

²⁹ Ibid., p. 676. (“As a consequence of its early assimilation of numerous influences and residues from Church Slavic speech, our language is currently alone among modern languages in its depth of independent and pure elemental fire, of its spirit, form, and its Hellenic word order—its Hellenic ‘literacy.’”)

measure of its sacrality. Acting as theurgists in this “deed,” Cyril and Methodius need not have been fully aware of the extent of their translation of Greek and prior traditions into Church Slavic. What they accomplished, as Ivanov later suggests, was a transferral of the *symbola* to another language and culture with divine assistance. Church Slavic thus inherits pre-Christian mysteriological, mythological, and theurgic traditions which extend back to remote antiquity and lead to Christian revelation.

Через него невидимо сопричастны мы самой древности: не за пределами и внеположна нашему народному гению, но внутренне соприродна ему мысль и красота эллинские; уже не варвары мы, поскольку владеем собственным словом и в нем преемством православного предания, оно же для нас — предание эллинства.³⁰

Russian, via Church Slavic, thus inherits not only Greek orthographical, syntactic, and lexical features, but also Greek’s “divinity,” i.e. its historically-developed liturgical, theological, and theurgic applications. “Iazyk, stiazhavshii stol’ blagodatnyi udel pri samom rozhdanii, byl vtorichno oblagodatstvovan v svoem mladenchestve tainstvennym kreshcheniem v zhitovoriashchikh struiakh iazyka tserkovno-slavianskogo.”³¹ Ivanov uses terminology associated with the *symbola* to describe this transferral; Church Slavic acts as a “living mold” of Greek. His use of a baptismal metaphor to illustrate the succession likewise implies the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the “theurgic deed.” In Neoplatonic theurgy, a “theurgic deed” tries to elicit, or is assisted by, the intercessory presence of a divinity. Recalling chapter 1, theurgic ritual and language are often discussed in terms of animacy—thus Ivanov emphasizes

³⁰ Ibid., p. 676. (“Through [our language] we are invisibly copresent with antiquity itself. Hellenic thought and beauty are not closed-off to or incompatible with our folk genius; they are rather of an internally similar nature to it. One couldn’t consider us barbarians, insofar as we have our own discourse [*sobstvennoe slovo*] and within it the succession of Orthodox tradition, which for us is the tradition of Hellenism.”)

³¹ Ibid., p. 675. (“[Our] language, benefitting from such a blessed fate at its inception, was dually blessed in its youth by a sacramental Baptism in the life-giving waters of the Church Slavic language.”)

the perpetuation of a “live” Greek tradition in Church Slavic through a “theurgic deed” on the part of St. Cyril and Methodius. Later in the passage, in a phrase to be dealt with separately, Ivanov describes both languages as possessing a “fullness of living forces.”

His stance on the enhanced “theurgicity” of Church Slavic provides insight into his plentiful use of archaisms and Slavonicisms in his poetry. Ivanov presents lexical archaisms as theurgic *symbola*: the untranslated, unchanged, uncorrupted *form itself* becomes the theurgic vehicle. For Ivanov, there is a direct correlation between archaism and theurgic animacy in language. In Iamblichus and Proclus, the efficacy of the *symbola* is generated by their archaism, both in the sense of their imitation of the original creative acts of the gods, and in their passage through historical time in an unmodified form. Ivanov regards lexical archaism in Russian as possessing enhanced divinity due to its association with Church Slavic and Greek. This “divinity” is in one sense attributable to Church Slavic’s status as a liturgical language in the Russian Orthodox Church. In another sense, he is clearly taking the Greek polytheistic religions into account as well. Archaic linguistic forms seem to be treated as theurgically active precisely by dint of their archaism. This notion will be developed more fully in the following chapter in connection with the “Suspiria” cycle.

3.2. Language and a “Fullness of Living Forces”

In what Ivanov envisions to be a kind of sacramental exchange,³² the Russian language takes on a “fullness of living forces” due to its affiliation with Greek:

Воистину теургическим представляется их непостижимое дело, ибо видим на нем, как сама стихия славянского слова самопроизвольно и любовно раскрывалась навстречу оплодотворяющему ее наитию, свободно поддавалась налагаемым на нее

³² The opening paragraphs of the essay are reliant on sacramental imagery. Ivanov refers to marriage (*schastlivyi i blagoslovennyi brak*) and the Eucharist (*soprishastnik*).

высшим и духовнейшим формам, отклоняя некоторые из них, как себе чуждые, и порождая взамен из себя самой требуемые соответствия, не утрачивая ни своей лексической чистоты, ни самородных особенностей своего изначального склада, но обретая в счастливом и благословенном браке с эллинским словом свое внутреннее свершение и полноту жизненных сил...³³

Ivanov's reading of these "living forces" in language makes Russian into a kind of theurgic *symbolon*—a suitable means for theurgic activity. Part of Cyril and Methodius' theurgic "deed" to Ivanov seems to be their preservation of Greek's "fullness of living forces," i.e. its theurgic capability.

In Ivanov's reading, the "fullness of living forces" contained in language is enabled in part by its relationship to Greek, and in part by its generation of the "requisite correspondences out of itself." The animacy of language, its "divinity," hinges on the "correspondences" which it either creates or symbolizes. On the one hand, the term "correspondences," with its strong Baudelairean associations, would not be out of place in any Symbolist's essay on language. Here, however, its implication of language as a kind of channel for cosmic correspondences suggests that Ivanov is thinking in terms of Platonic *sympatheia*. The correspondences which it generates here are "requisite," implying that a fixed ontological structure be in place, within which language participates. They are "requisite" in order for the language to acquire a "fullness of living forces," thus for liturgical or theurgic applications. Earlier in the passage, Ivanov suggests that the Russian language "participates" (*soprīchast[en]*) in antiquity, again using a Platonic term associated with *sympatheia*. As discussed in chapter 1, the theurgic *symbola* in the

³³ Ibid., p. 676. ("[Cyril and Methodius'] deed is in truth theurgic. We observe in it how the very element of the Slavic word spontaneously and graciously welcomed the inspiration which engendered it, how it willingly yielded to the elevated and highly spiritual forms imposed onto it. By rejecting some of them [forms] as foreign, and generating instead the requisite correspondences out of itself, it preserves its lexical purity, or the particularities of its primordial constitution. The Slavic word acquires its inner fulfillment and a fullness of living forces in a fortunate and blessed union with Hellenic discourse.")

Iamblichean and Proclean renderings function within a hierarchical and gradated ontology, in which they generate sympathetic correspondences among various levels of reality both divine and material. In the theurgist's view, certain material objects or linguistic formulae can participate in the more abstractly known levels of the hierarchy. Theurgic ritual operates within the Platonic system of sympathetic correspondences. In Ivanov's essay, Russian participates in antiquity, and thereby in a spiritually replete and theurgically oriented milieu, through Greek.

The notion that theurgic activity in language is generated, in part, "out of itself" is in keeping with Ivanov's prior discussion of the theurgic elements of "folk poetic creativity" in "Two Elements." In the essay, Ivanov states that folk poetic creativity is the product of a theurgic milieu (*teurgicheskaia sreda*). The imitation of oral folk poetry, in the sense of its metrical, rhythmical and linguistic structures, thus carries a theurgic implication. Theurgic efficacy, as Iamblichus contends, is the result of formal imitation rather than the theurgist's own cognitive awareness. The theurgist does not have to understand fully why the *symbola* work, but must use or present them in the correct way. Ivanov's rendering of Greek meters in Russian (as in "Pesn' razkluki," discussed in chapter 4), and his imitation of seventeenth-century "spiritual verses" (*dukhovnye stikhi*) may thus have theurgic underpinnings. In a similar vein, his use of Slavonicisms and liturgical language falls into a theurgic perspective. Writing poetry in Russian *itself* becomes a theurgic act for Ivanov.

4. Dionysian and Christian *strast'*

Ivanov's philological and creative work are remarkable alike for their preoccupation with Dionysus and the history of Dionysian worship. Robert Bird suggests that, beginning in the 1890s, Ivanov even engaged in a kind of *imitatio Dionysi*, attempting to follow Dionysus in life

as well as literature.³⁴ Ivanov's interest in Dionysus and Dionysian cult worship affected his personal devotion as well as his literary efforts. It acts as a continual point of reference throughout his work, one of his surest "pilot stars." This is not to say that Ivanov's philological and creative sights were set on the revival of Dionysian cult practice as an end in itself. He was primarily interested in tracing, as Pamela Davidson discusses, other historical and spiritual paths to Christ, or "alternate Old Testaments," through the mystery cults of late antiquity.

His study of Dionysus was initially dictated by a pressing inner need to "overcome Nietzsche in the sphere of questions of religious awareness"... The Dionysian strain in Hellenism was presented as an alternative 'Old Testament' for Russians, as the key source destined to bring about a renewal of their religious awareness and self-definition. From this time onwards, Ivanov's explicit agenda was therefore to bring about a revival of the Dionysian dimension of classical antiquity and to integrate it as fully as possible into contemporary Russian culture.³⁵

The association of Dionysus with *strast'* – with a narrative of suffering, death, and resurrection – represents an important precursor to Christ's passion for Ivanov. In *The Poetic Imagination of Viacheslav Ivanov*, Davidson states that the centrality of Dionysus in Ivanov's life "did not detract from his view of Christ and the Church as part of a radically new revelation, ... nor did it reduce the two religions to identical manifestations of equal spiritual value."³⁶

Ivanov's dissertation for the University of Baku, *Dionis i pradionisiistvo*, surveys the historical precursors to the narratives and worship practices associated with Dionysus. An especially important section, in which Ivanov references Iamblichus and Proclus in connection

³⁴ Robert Bird, *The Russian Prospero: The Creative World of Viacheslav Ivanov* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), p. 8.

³⁵ Pamela Davidson, *Viacheslav Ivanov and C.M. Bowra: A Correspondence from Two Corners on Humanism*, Birmingham Slavic Monographs No. 36 (Birmingham: Birmingham UP, 2006), p. 9.

³⁶ Pamela Davidson, *The Poetic Imagination of Viacheslav Ivanov: A Russian Symbolist's Perception of Dante* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1989), p. 33.

with theurgy, is entitled “Dionis orficheski” (“The Orphic Dionysus”). Ivanov views the proliferation of myths associated with Dionysus in late antiquity as based on earlier, often cross-cultural referents. His emphasis in his discussion of the Orphic myths of Dionysus is on the parallels between Neoplatonist and older (primarily Egyptian) sources, as the title of his subheading suggests: “Prelomlenie orficheskogo ucheniia o Dionise v umozreniakh neoplatonikov i drevnost’ ego osnovnykh polozhenii” (“The Interpretation of Orphic Teaching on Dionysus by the Neoplatonists and the Antiquity of its Foundational Principles”).

In a passage from “The Orphic Dionysus,” Ivanov points to antecedents for the Dionysian cultic practice of the dismemberment of the dead.

Нам представляется, прежде всего, очевидным, что в основу этой доктрины (о расчленении Диониса) было заложено египетское мистическое предание. Ибо хотя разъятие тела и обезглавление играет огромную роль в прадионисийском островном (первоначально критском) и в разных местных Дионисовых культах, при чем о заимствовании обряда из Египта не может быть речи, тем не менее эта древнейшая жертвенная литургия нигде не возвышается до теологемы, и мистико-умозрительное, теологическое, оккультное истолкование наличной обрядности, какое мы находим у орфиков, имеет явно отдельное от культа происхождение. Мы видим, что возбуждившее споры и разнотолкуемое свидетельство Геродота об орфиках столь же ясно, сколь точно: “общины, называющия себя орфическими и вакхическими, на самом деле египетския.” Орфики учились у египтян, и чрез их посредство религия Осириса наложила свою печать на аттический государственный культ Диониса...”³⁷

³⁷ Viacheslav Ivanov, *Dionis i pradionisiistvo* (St. Petersburg: Alteiia, 1994), pp. 182-183. (“To us it appears above all obvious that Egyptian mystical tradition lies at the foundation of this doctrine [of the dismemberment of Dionysus]. For although cutting up the body and decapitation play a massive role in proto-Dionysian insular [primarily Cretian] cults as well as other local Dionysian cults, in this case we cannot speak of a borrowing of ritual from Egypt. This nevertheless most ancient sacrificial liturgic is nowhere else elevated to the level of a theologem, and the mystical-speculative, theological, occult interpretation of ritual practice, which we find among the Orphics, has a clearly separate origin from the cult. We see that Herodotus’ variously interpreted testimony about the Orphics, which has incited scholarly debates, is as clear as it is accurate: ‘...communities calling themselves Orphic and Bacchic are in actuality Egyptian.’ The Orphics studied the Egyptians, and through their mediation the religion of Osiris made its mark on the Attic state cult of Dionysus.”)

Throughout this section, Ivanov references the findings of the philologist Richard August Reizenstein on the Hermetic sources depicting similar practices of ritual dismemberment of the dead. Ivanov postulates that the Orphic practice of decapitating the dead (which emulates the dismemberment of Dionysus) resembles Egyptian traditions related to the cult of Osiris. The Osirian cult acts as a historical antecedent to Dionysian cultic practice, and for Ivanov “the Egyptian mystical tradition lies at the foundation of (the doctrine of Dionysus’ dismemberment).”

Ivanov cites a passage from Herodotus here that has sparked debate for centuries about the origination of Greek mystery rites.³⁸ The quote from Herodotus on the Greeks’ borrowing of Egyptian cult worship was one of the cornerstones of Creuzer’s argument for his proposed symbolic system.³⁹ Creuzer had, of course, posited that the cross-cultural evidence for the cult of Dionysus-Zagreus argued in favor of the transmission of an esoteric symbolic system from early antiquity. Ivanov quotes Herodotus with a similar emphasis on the Dionysian cult predating the Greeks. The recurrence of the suffering, dismemberment, and resurrection narrative in Egyptian Osirian cults and Greek Dionysian cults, for Ivanov, has additional implications for Dionysus’ relation to Christ.

Ivanov includes a footnote after the passage about the Neoplatonic “occult interpretation of ritual practice” having a separate origin from the Dionysian cult. While references to the dismemberment of the dead may be traced to Hermetic texts, Ivanov proposes that a more extensive ritual practice (*obriadnost’*) was developed later by the Neoplatonists. His footnote draws an example from Proclus:

³⁸ Herodotus, *Histories*, II 50-52.

³⁹ Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie*, 1:xvii-xix.

Отсечение головы у покойника, которому в египетском предании придается столь важное значение, помнят и эллинские „ѳеурги,” т. е., в конечном счете, орфики, по свидетельству неоплатоника Прокла (in Plat. theol. IV, 9, p. 193: *tôn theürgôn thaptein to sôma keleuontôn plên tês kephalês*, срв. Maass, Orpheus, S. 176, A-3.). Орфическая молитва за усопших о даровании им воды прохладной, текущей из озера Памяти, сочетается в позднюю эпоху с культом Осириса, как видим, не в силу безразличного синкретизма, а на основании стародавней традиции.⁴⁰

Ivanov indicates that the Neoplatonists developed a set of ritual practices in late antiquity that have a “clearly separate origin from the (Dionysian) cult.” His example suggests that Proclus identified the syncretism between the particular Orphic prayer and the older, Egyptian tradition. To Ivanov, Proclus was not merely systematizing Greek and Egyptian beliefs, but drawing a parallel between “long-held traditions.” Systematizing and classification, as discussed in chapter 1, are terms generally associated with Proclus’ philosophy. Ivanov presents Proclus both as a representative of the Neoplatonic “occult interpretation of ritual practice,” or theurgy, and as subscribing to more ancient traditions.

Ivanov here regards theurgy as an Neoplatonist development that can be typologized with older practices. This stands in contrast to his notion from “Two Elements” of the theurgists as a constant in religious life from “time immemorial.” Here, in his philological dissertation, he specifies theurgy to be of Neoplatonic origin in late antiquity, though which nonetheless demonstrates similarities with older traditions. In the thick-journal essay, he emphasizes the antiquity of theurgic tradition and mentions the Neoplatonists in a kind of chain of theurgic succession (“...[philosophical and theurgic] instruction was esoteric, whether we’re speaking

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 183. (“The severing of the head of the deceased, to which tremendous significance is given in Egyptian tradition, is remembered by the Greek [*ellinskie*] “theurgists,” that is, Orphics, according to the Neoplatonist Proclus (in Plat. theol. IV, 9, p. 193: *tôn theürgôn thaptein to sôma keleuontôn plên tês kephalês* [“Theurgists instruct that the body should be buried without the head” – my translation], cf. Maass, Orpheus, S. 176, A-3.). The Orphic prayer on behalf of the deceased regarding their gift of cool water flowing from the lake of Memory gets combined in a later period with the cult of Osiris. [This combination occurs] as we see not owing to undifferentiated syncretism, but on the basis of long-held tradition.”)

about Egypt or India, about the ancient Pythagoreans or the Neoplatonists, or, finally, about the Essenes or the Apostles.”). In a religious-philological gesture, “Two Elements” proposes that theurgists can be traced back to an “organization of mystical communities” and up to the Apostles. Writing as a specialist in the Dionysian cult, however, Ivanov regards theurgy as a late-antique phenomenon that drew upon prior Egyptian and Hermetic traditions.

In what seems contradictory at first glance, Ivanov uses the adjective “theological” to describe the Neoplatonist interpretation of theurgic ritual practice. He likewise places theurgists in quotations as if to slightly ironize them. The fact that Ivanov mentions theurgy in a footnote rather than in the body of the text, where he refers to it as an “occult interpretation of ritual practice,” also seems significant. As discussed in chapter 1, theurgy’s occult association limited serious scholarly consideration of it before the mid-twentieth century. It was its ritual aspect in particular that was viewed as antithetical and inferior to its opponent—“pure” philosophy, or Neoplatonic theology. Thus Ivanov’s series of adjectives (“mystical-speculative, theological, occult”) to describe the ritual practice of late antiquity is not out of the ordinary. However, the mention of theurgy, even in the footnote in ironizing quotations, is relatively adventurous in this format.

Ivanov is deferring to academic respectability but also advancing a speculative hypothesis about an occult doctrine. He moreover suggests, drawing from Proclus’ description, that the late-antique Dionysian cult’s practice of decapitating the dead may have been part of a theurgic ritual. It is especially significant that Ivanov associates theurgic ritual with Dionysian cult practice in his historical-philological work. As discussed in chapter 1, the content of theurgic rituals remains unknown and was probably undocumented. Ivanov proposes that the older ritual took on a theurgic aspect in Dionysian cults of late antiquity—an unprovable claim

that is intriguing nonetheless, since it affiliates theurgy with Dionysian worship. More specifically, he draws a connection between theurgy and rituals imitating the suffering, death, and rebirth of a deity. The symbol of the suffering god is central both to Ivanov's philological and artistic work. The concept of *strast'* connects Dionysus not only to Christ, but to earlier deities within his symbolic system.

Later in "The Orphic Dionysus," Ivanov frames a discussion of Christianity's indebtedness to the mystery cults around *strast'*. The concept of divine suffering, he notes, is somewhat contradictory in view of Greek rationalism: "Prikhodilos' razlichit' dva roda bogov: neprekhodiashchikh i neizmennykh, 'apaticheskikh' – s odnoi storony, podverzhennykh stradaniiu i izmeneniiu – *empatheis* – s drugoi."⁴¹ Ivanov first attributes this distinction to the fourth-century BCE Greek mythographer Euhemerus, and then, significantly, to Iamblichus.

Но не один Эвemer прибежал к такому различению... Евсевий сохранил нам письмо неоплатоника Порфирия к некоему египетскому жрецу Анебо: здесь мы находим и то же деление на апатических *theoi* и патетических *daimones*, и недоумения, отсюда проистекающая. Порфирию отвечает учитель Анебо — Абаммон, под маскою которого скрывается, повидимому, Иамблих: он разрешает сомнения Порфирия указанием на то, что божественная природа сама по себе всегда и безусловно свободна от аффектов, но некоторые боги осуществляют собою само начало паюса и служат его живыми двигателями...⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 205. ("It became necessary to distinguish between two types of gods: ineffable and unchangeable, 'apathetic', on the one hand, and those susceptible to suffering and change – *empatheis* – on the other.")

⁴² Ibid., pp. 205-206. ("It was not only Euhemerus who arrived at this distinction... Eusebius preserved the Neoplatonist Porphyry's letter to a certain Egyptian priest Anebo. Here we find the very same division into apathetic *theoi* and empathic *daimones*, as well as the conundrum that arises out of it. It is evidently Iamblichus who is hiding behind the guise of Anebo's teacher, Abammon, replying to Porphyry. He resolves Porphyry's doubts by indicating that, due to its nature, divinity is perpetually and unconditionally free from persuasion, but some gods actualize the principle of pathos themselves and carry it out with animate forces.")

Ivanov does not reference theurgy specifically in this passage, but sets up the notion of empathic divinities, or *daimones*, which is central to how theurgy works for Iamblichus. His mention of “animate forces” (*zhivye dvigateli*), however, almost certainly refers to theurgy. Ivanov sketches Iamblichus’ philosophy succinctly and correctly: the gods are not bound by theurgic ritual, but will occasionally respond to it out of empathy, i.e. in accordance with Platonic *sympatheia*. Moreover it is in some gods’ nature, particularly those lower in the hierarchy such as the *daimones*, to succumb to persuasion or to intercede on behalf of the theurgist.

Ivanov claims that Christian *strast’* arrives in an unmediated form from Greek religion.

Понятие “страстей” прямо перешло из эллинской религии в христианство, во всей полноте своего содержания, как мистического и обрядового термина. Не случайны византийские попытки приспособить формы Эврипидовой трагедии к религиозно-поэтическому кругу христианских представлений о божественных страстях: само заглавие мистерии “Христос Страдающий” (*Christos paschôn*) обличает взгляд на античную драму, как на поэтический канон родственного христианству в принципе “страстного действия.”⁴³

Further on, he connects Greek heroic narratives and the feats of Christian martyrs on the basis of *strast’*. It is in the following passage, however, where he makes his most resounding case for the mysteriological basis of Christian *strast’*:

Литургии на гробах мучеников — прямое продолжение героического культа с его подобием евхаристических обрядов. Уверовавшему эллину, воспитанному на страстных мистериях, христианство естественно должно было явиться только реализацией родных прообразов, предчувствий и предвестий, — зрением лицом к лицу того, что прежде было постигаемо гадательно и видимо как сквозь тусклое стекло.⁴⁴ Воспитательной задачей церкви, естественно, прежде всего, оказалась

⁴³ Ibid., p. 207. (“The concept of *strast’* passed directly from Greek religion into Christianity in all fullness of its content as a mystical and ritual term. The Byzantine attempts to adapt the forms of Euripidean tragedy to the religious-poetic sphere of Christian notions about divine passions are not accidental. The very title of the mystery play “Suffering Christ” indicates that they viewed ancient drama as a poetic canon related to Christianity in the sense of the “passion rite.”)

⁴⁴ I Cor. 13, 12: 12: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” Ivanov appears to be quoting here from the Synodal translation of the Bible in Russian, not Old Church Slavonic: “Теперь мы видим

задача — бороться с представлением, что новая вера только вид однородных мистерий,— внушить убеждение, что церковные таинства — мистерии окончательные и единственно спасительные...⁴⁵

If Ivanov associates Dionysus and Christ through *strast'*, and evisions theurgic significance to the passion narrative and its ritual reenactment, then theurgy is evidently a possibility within a Christian framework for Ivanov as well.

Ivanov's earlier reference to theurgy in connection with the Orphic prayer for the deceased provides a link between his philological and poetic work. He quotes this prayer as the subheading to his poem "Psikheia" in the "Suspiria" cycle of *Kormchie zvezdy*. The fact that Ivanov discusses Proclus and theurgy in connection with this prayer in *Dionis i pradionisiistvo*, and that the prayer occurs in a poetic cycle with other important theurgic and liturgical symbolics, suggests that Ivanov may have envisioned "Suspiria" as having theurgic resonances. It is to this cycle, and to the subject of the poetics of theurgy, that we will turn in the next chapter.

как бы сквозь тусклое стекло, гадательно, тогда же лицом к лицу; теперь знаю я отчасти, а тогда познаю, подобно как я познан."

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 207. ("Liturgies at the graves of martyrs are a direct continuation of the Hellenic heroic cult and its rituals similar to the Eucharist. To the faithful Hellene who had been brought up on the passion mysteries, Christianity must have appeared only as a realization of domestic [native] prototypes, presentiments and portents, as a face-to-face vision of that which formerly seemed attainable only by conjecture and visible as if through a glass, darkly. The foremost educational task of the church was to battle with the notion that the new faith was only a version of other similar mysteries, to instill a conviction that the church's sacraments are the decisive ones, the only ones that will bring salvation.")

Chapter 4 –

Ivanov the Orphic: Initiatory and Sacramental Theurgy in the Poetic Cycle “Suspiria”

1. Neoplatonic *symbola* and Dionysian symbolism

This chapter turns to the topic of theurgy in Ivanov’s poetry. While his theoretical essays consistently argue for art as a form of theurgy, Ivanov does not specify guidelines for how poetry in particular might fit a theurgic rubric. Given the density of references in Ivanov’s poetry, theurgic elements may be discerned within the internal logic of symbolic *correspondances* built into the individual poem, on the micro-level, and, on the macro-level, into the cycle, the verse collection, and Ivanov’s *oeuvre* as a whole. The attempt at pinpointing theurgic loci within Ivanov’s network of symbols is significantly aided by cross-referencing his philological and poetic work. By considering his philology and poetry in tandem, and even as parts of one project, the analysis of Ivanov’s poetics of theurgy begins to coalesce around a single theme – the myth of Dionysus.

In creating theurgic poetry, Ivanov is putting a combination of Neoplatonist and Solov’evian theories into practice. Establishing his criteria for the theory in turn gives insight into how he turned it into poetic praxis. The Neoplatonists Iamblichus and Proclus conceptualize theurgy as a ritual implementation of *symbola*. Theurgic art, for Solov’ev, brings about *vseedinstvo*: a merging of the realms of the divine and the human. Ivanov’s championing of the Symbolist movement in Russian poetry, and Neoplatonism’s emphasis on theurgic *symbola*, suggest an interpretive strategy that designates a theurgic role for symbols. Following Proclus,

Ivanov avers a connection between the symbol and myth.¹ Incorporating Solov'ev's idea of theurgic art, he urges that Symbolist poetry be regarded as a type of mythopoesis (*mifotvorchestvo*).² Much as his philological work primarily investigates Dionysian myth and ritual, as N.G. Aref'eva states, "Mozhno skazat', chto vse tvorchestvo Viach. Ivanova...podchineno edinoi tseli – sozdanie Mifa o Dionise."³ The "astronomical circularity," in Mandel'shtam's words, of Ivanov's symbolic system thus revolves on a singular axis.⁴ The analysis of theurgically active *symbola* in Ivanov's poetry begins and ends with Dionysian symbolism. In inserting Dionysian symbols in his poetry, Ivanov attempts to create a reconstituted myth of Dionysus, which, he imagines, will theurgically generate a "new religious consciousness" for the twentieth century.

The previous chapter concluded by discussing a passage from *Dionis i pradiionisiistvo* (*Dionysus and Predionysianism*), in which Ivanov speculates that a ritual of decapitating the

¹ Ivanov describes the symbol as the "plot' mifa" ("the flesh of myth"). Viacheslav Ivanov, "Dve stikhii v sovremennom simvolizme," in *Po zvezdam. Borozdy i mezhy* (Moscow: Astel', 2007), p. 211. Chapter 3 highlighted several passages from Ivanov's essays in which he expands upon the relationship of symbol and myth. Proclus discusses the theurgic significance of symbol and myth in his commentary on Plato's *Republic*. See chapter 4, "Allegory, Symbols and Mysteries," in Anne D. R. Sheppard, *Studies on the Fifth and Sixth Essays of Proclus' Commentary on the Republic* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), pp. 145-161.

² See in particular "Vagner i dionisovo deistvo" in Ivanov, *Po zvezdam. Borozdy i mezhy*, pp. 67-69.

³ N.G. Aref'eva, *Drevnegrecheskie mifopoeticheskie traditsii v literature russkogo moderna (Vladimir Solov'ev, Viacheslav Ivanov)* (Astrakhan': Izdatel'skii dom "Astrakhan'skii universitet," 2007), p. 119. ("One could say that Viacheslav Ivanov's entire creative output...is dedicated to a single purpose – the creation of a myth of Dionysus.") All translations from the Russian are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Quoted from Sergei Averintsev, "The Poetry of Viacheslav Ivanov," in *Viacheslav Ivanov: Poet, Critic and Philosopher*, ed. Robert Louis Jackson and Lowry Nelson, Jr. (Columbus: Slavica Publishers, Inc., 1986), p. 28.

dead practiced by late-antique followers of Orpheus may have constituted a theurgic ritual.

Ivanov asserts that though this practice dated to earlier Dionysian cults, the Orphic Neoplatonists supplied its “mistiko-umozritel’noe, teologicheskoe, okkul’noe istolkovanie nalichnoi obriadnosti,” i.e. its relation to theurgy.⁵ In a footnote to the passage, he quotes from Proclus’ *Platonic Theology* to clarify his distinction between earlier and later Orphism: “theürgôn thaptein to sôma keluontôn plên tês kephalês” (“Theurgists instruct that the body should be buried without the head”).⁶ He then posits that the Orphic theurgists associated this practice with prior, Egyptian traditions related to the worship of Osiris (like the myth of Dionysus, the myth of Osiris involves the god’s dismemberment and reconstitution). Ivanov bolsters this interpretation by referencing Herodotus’ claim that Orphic and Bacchic burial customs are “na samom dele egipetskie.”⁷

It is significant that Ivanov unambivalently associates Orphism with theurgy: “...ellinskie ‘teurgi,’ t.e. v konechnom schete, orfiki.”⁸ His contention that the Orphic Neoplatonists saw a parallel of their theurgic practice in Osirian myth is notably consistent with Iamblichus’ insistence on the Egyptian origins of theurgy. Ivanov reinforces his connection of Orphic and Osirian rituals by paraphrasing an Orphic verse for the deceased: “Orficheskaia molitva za usopshikh o darovanii im vody prokhladnoi, tekushchei iz ozera Pamiati, sochetaetsia v pozdnuui epokhu s kul’tom Osirisa, kak vidim, ne v silu bezrazlichnogo sinkretizma, a na osnovanii

⁵ Viacheslav Ivanov, *Dionis i pradionisiistvo* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo “Aleteiia,” 1994), p. 183. (“the mystical-speculative, theological, occult interpretation of ritual practice”) Herodotus, *Histories*, II 50-52.

⁶ Ibid. The Greek appears in transliteration in Ivanov’s text. My translation.

⁷ Ibid. (“in reality Egyptian.”)

⁸ Ibid. (“Greek ‘theurgists,’ that is, in the final analysis, Orphics.”)

starodavnei traditsii.”⁹ Ivanov is referring here to a verse found in the “Orphic” gold tablets.¹⁰

These small gold leaves, which were found in exhumed grave sites in numerous cities of the ancient world, contain instructions for the deceased on gaining admittance to the afterlife.

Considering Ivanov’s linking of Orphism with theurgy, his assumption is that the verse, like the decapitation ritual, had a theurgic application for the later Orphics. The verse, like the ritual, fits his “mystical-speculative, theological, occult” – or theurgic – paradigm for the Orphic Neoplatonists.

⁹ Ibid. (“The Orphic prayer on behalf of the deceased regarding their administering of cool water flowing from the lake of Memory becomes associated in a later period with the cult of Osiris, as we see, not due to undifferentiated syncretism, but on the basis of long-held tradition.”)

¹⁰ “Orphic” appears in quotations here because scholarly opinion has varied regarding the tablets’ relationship to Orphism since they began to be discovered in the nineteenth century. Orphic religion itself is a nebulous and much-debated category, with hypotheses ranging from Orphism as a coherent belief system practiced widely in the Hellenophone ancient world to a scholarly construct. Ivanov’s attribution of the prayer as Orphic represents the most influential hypothesis on the tablets in the nineteenth century (and in the present day). His association of the prayer with Osiris might have been derived from Erwin Rohde, whom he cites frequently in *Dionis i pradiionisiistvo* (though not in the above-mentioned passage). Rohde offers a similar thesis in *Psyche*, stating: “‘May Osiris give you the cold water’ is a common prayer expressed in a formula that is of frequent and significant occurrence in late [Greek] epitaphs.” Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks*. Translated by W.A. Hillis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd.; New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, Inc., 1925), p. 543. Rohde contends that “It appears that the legend of the fountain of Mnemosyne and its cold water was independently developed by the Greeks and then associated subsequently with the analogous Egyptian idea or brought into harmony with it.” Ibid., p. 576. Like Rohde, Ivanov sees the prayer as originating in early Orphic-Dionysian cults and becoming associated with Osiris only “in a later period,” i.e. in late antiquity. On the topic of the later interpolation of the Osirian prayer, Thomas M. Dousa points out that “...it is worth recalling that in Roman times, an echo of [Egyptian post-mortem spells] is found in a formula written in Greek that occurs on grave stelae from Egypt, Alexandria, Carthage, and Italy, and reads ‘May Osiris give you refreshing water.’ ... Despite the chronological gulf of half a millennium that separates the Greek version of this Osirian formula from the gold plates, the verbal and thematic parallels between the ‘cool water’ of Osiris and that of the spring of Memory are striking and suggestive, for, in both cases, ‘cool water’ is a *sine qua non* for post-mortem well-being.” Thomas M. Dousa, “Common Motifs in the ‘Orphic’ B Tablets and Egyptian Funerary Texts: Continuity or Convergence?” in Radcliffe G. Edmonds, ed., *The “Orphic” Gold Tablets and Greek Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 160-161.

2. Initiatory theurgy in the “Psikheia” epigraph

The verse provides an important connection between Ivanov’s philological and poetic works. Ivanov quotes it as the epigraph to “Psikheia,” a poem contained in the “Suspiria” cycle in Ivanov’s debut verse collection, *Kormchie zvezdy* (1903). Considering his association of the verse with theurgy in *Dionis i pradionisiistvo*, the epigraph signals that “Psikheia” may constitute a theurgic locus in his poetry. The epigraph exemplifies Ivanov’s “religious philology” as discussed in chapter 3: philological discoveries reveal *symbola* which can in turn be used for theurgic purposes in poetry. If the Orphic verse had a theurgic application for late-antique mystery cults, then, within Ivanov’s religious-philological paradigm, it could potentially have a theurgic application in Symbolist poetry as well.

In the six poems of the “Suspiria” cycle, “Psikheia” is placed third in the sequence. If the two poems which bookend the subset of six “Suspiria” poems, “Pesn’ razluki” and “Gost’,” are added, then “Psikheia” occurs fourth out of the eight poems. “Psikheia” thus divides the cycle in two much like the poem itself is divided in two as a diptych. The division occurs on two levels: the micro-level of the “Suspiria” subset, and the macro-level, which includes the introductory and concluding poems of the cycle.¹¹ “Psikheia” is clearly placed at a pivotal point, with its theurgic epigraph, and its theme of the self-immolation of the soul factoring into the broader thematic scheme of the cycle. According to Ivanov’s correspondence with Lidiia Zinov’eva-Annibal from the winter of 1902, “Suspiria” was the final cycle he wrote for *Kormchie zvezdy* (it

¹¹ The “Suspiria” subset is a kind of cycle within a cycle. The six poems are numbered, and have an identical metrical scheme, in which iambic pentameter lines alternate with iambic dimeter in quatrains. The other two poems, “Pesn’ razluki” and “Gost’,” which begin and conclude the cycle, exhibit contrasting meters.

likewise concludes the volume).¹² “Psikheia” was the last poem composed for the cycle, and for the verse collection. In a draft of “Suspiria” appended to his letter from March 31-April 1, 1902 (new style), Ivanov includes only the title of “Psikheia,” but not the text.¹³ This demonstrates that the poem was written once the broader thematic, narrative, and metrical structures of the cycle were already established. Its placement suggests a kind of transitional moment, where the lyric self’s separation and death anticipates its reunification and rebirth, which occurs in “Gost’.” Much in the way that the epigraph of “Psikheia” encompasses a liminal state between life and death, the poem is placed at the crux of the cycle to reflect the lyric self’s transition from death to spiritual renewal within the narrative.

Not only “Psikheia,” but the “Suspiria” cycle as a whole has Orphic resonances. Ivanov includes a verse attributed to Orpheus as the epigraph to the cycle: Δάκρυα μὲν σέθεν ἐστὶ πολυτλήμιον γένος ἀνδρῶν (“Your tears are the much-suffering human race”).¹⁴ The quote is taken from Proclus’ commentary on the *Iliad*. Ivanov probably also has in mind a line from Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*: “From the smile of this Dionysus sprang the Olympian gods, from his tears sprang man.”¹⁵ The epigraph is likely related to theurgy for Ivanov merely as a quote

¹² Viacheslav Ivanov and Lidiia Zinov’eva-Annibal, *Perepiska*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2009), p. 414.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 416. In the draft, “Psikheia” is placed fifth out of the six poems. This manuscript is one of the two drafts of the cycle which are contained in the Ivanov archive at the Russian National Library (see Viacheslav Ivanov, *Stikhotvoreniia, poemy, tragediia*, vol. 2, introductory essay by A.E. Barzakh, edited with commentary by R.E. Pomirchego [St. Petersburg: Gumanitarnoe agentstvo “Akademicheskii proekt,” 1995], pp. 283-284.)

¹⁴ Viacheslav Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1 (Brussels: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1971), p. 695. My translation.

¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, translated by Clifton P. Fadiman (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1995), pp. 34-35.

from Proclus. Provided Ivanov's association of Orphism with theurgy in *Dionis i pradiónisiistvo*, it is doubly likely that he regarded the phrase – and, concomitantly, the cycle – as in some sense theurgic. Ivanov's placement of Orpheus as the presidor over the cycle adds a theurgic aura to what transpires in the narrative.

The text of the epigraph to "Psikheia" reads:

Γῆς παῖς εἰμι καὶ οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος, —
δίψη δ' εἰμι καὶ ἀπόλλυμαι, ἀλλὰ δότ' αἶψα
ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ προρέον τῆς Μνημοσύνης ἀπὸ λίμνης.¹⁶

I am the child of Earth and starry Heaven;
I am parched with thirst and I perish; but give me quickly
refreshing water flowing forth from the lake of Memory.¹⁷

The epigraph is an excerpt from an Orphic gold tablet discovered in Petelia in 1836. The Petelia tablet, which dates to the fourth century BCE, was the first of the Orphic gold leaves to be found. Similar tablets with Orphic-related inscriptions were unearthed in archeological excavations in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries: five at Thurii in 1879, four at Eleutherna in 1893,

¹⁶ The epigraph omits one line of the verse from the original text of the Petelia tablet. The full text appears below:

Γῆς παῖς εἰμι καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος,
αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ γένος οὐράνιον· τόδε δ' ἴστε αὐτοί.
δίψη δ' εἰμι αἶψα καὶ ἀπόλλυμαι, ἀλλὰ δότ' αἶψα
ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ προρέον τῆς Μνημοσύνης ἀπὸ λίμνης.

(This is the text of the verses as they appear in Edmonds III, ed., *The "Orphic" Gold Tablets and Greek Religion*, p. 22. The original text on the tablet is in all capital letters and appears without punctuation or word boundaries; thus the discrepancies in the capitalization and punctuation of Ivanov and Edmonds' reproductions are insignificant.) It is curious that Ivanov chooses not to reproduce the second line: αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ γένος οὐράνιον· τόδε δ' ἴστε αὐτοί. ("But my race is heavenly; and this you know yourselves.") He likewise omits αἶψα in line three. The omissions are perhaps attributable to Ivanov quoting the verses from memory.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 22. Translation by Radcliffe G. Edmonds III.

and one at Rome in 1903.¹⁸ Of the four discovered at Eleutherna in 1893, three tablets contain nearly identical verse formulae to the epigraph of “Psikheia.” Ivanov was clearly familiar with the Thurii and Eleutherna tablets as well as the Petelia tablet, judging from a passage in *Dionis i pradionisiistvo*, in which he refers to “zolot(ye) plastink(i), kotorye klalis’ s pokoinikom v grob v orficheskikh obshchinakh Petelii i drugikh mest iuzhnoi Italii, a takzhe Krita.”¹⁹ It is possible that Ivanov studied the Petelia tablet firsthand during his visit to the British Museum in 1899, where it has been kept since 1843.

The epigraph represents an illuminating nexus of philology and poetry. Ivanov’s philological studies in Berlin in the 1880s and early 1890s coincided with the first period of heightened scholarly interest in the tablets.²⁰ The discovery of the Eleutherna tablets roughly dates to Ivanov’s composition of the “Suspiria” cycle, which was written in Athens in the winter of 1902. Cecil Smith and Domineco Comparetti were the first of many scholars to relate the contents of the tablets to Orphic mysteries in their article “The Petelia Gold Tablet,” published in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* in 1882. Ivanov’s attribution of the “Psikheia” epigraph to Orpheus represents the prevailing scholarly view on the tablets in nineteenth-century philology. His frequent references to the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* in his correspondence with Lidia

¹⁸ See table 2.1 in *ibid.*, p. 40. Tablets continued to be discovered throughout the twentieth century (and into the twenty first), which of course postdate Ivanov’s composition of “Suspiria.”

¹⁹ Ivanov, *Dionis i pradionisiistvo*, p. 170. (“gold plates, which were placed in the grave of the deceased in the Orphic communities of Petelia and other locations in southern Italy, as well as Crete.”)

²⁰ For a background on the scholarship on the tablets, see Radcliffe G. Edmonds III, “Who Are You? A Brief History of the Scholarship,” in *The “Orphic” Gold Tablets and Greek Religion*, pp. 3-14. See also Fritz Graf, “A History of Scholarship on the Tablets,” in Fritz Graf and Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets*, Second Edition (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 50-65.

Zinov'eva-Annibal and I.M. Grevs suggest that he had almost certainly read Smith and Comparetti's article. He would have also been familiar with the tablets through Erwin Rohde's *Psyche* (1894) and Jane Ellen Harrison's *Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens* (1894) and *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903), all of which he cites abundantly in *Dionis i pradionisiistvo*. Ivanov also references Ernst Maass' *Untersuchungen zur Griechischen Römischen altchristlichen Jenseitsdichtung und Religion* (1895), which attempts to link Orphic myths with Christianity. This association of Orphic myth with Christianity is represented in the "Suspiria" cycle. In the poetic sequence, Ivanov presents Orphic-Dionysian rites, such as the "Psikheia" epigraph, as symbolic preludes to the Christian sacraments. The cycle creates a parallelism between Orphic and Christian mysteries by placing the rites of both traditions in succession.²¹ By re-instantiating these rites in poetry, Ivanov seems to suggest that they are equally viable as theurgic devices.

With few exceptions,²² the scholarship on the gold tablets since the nineteenth century has interpreted them in the context of the Orphic myth of Dionysus.²³ Ivanov discusses the

²¹ Ivanov's project of merging the Orphic myth of Dionysus with Christianity is one of the resounding themes of his early *oeuvre* and thus is not confined to the "Suspiria" cycle. For a discussion of Ivanov's Orphic-themed dithyrambs, see Lena Silard, "'Orfei rasterzannyi' i nasledie Orfizma," in *Germetizm i germenektika* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Ivana Limbakha, 2002), pp. 54-101.

²² Günther Zuntz, following Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's hypothesis in *Der Glaube der Hellenen* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1931/1932), attributes the content of the tablets to Pythagorean teachings rather than Orphic mysteries in *Persephone: Three Essays on Religion and Thought in Magna Graecia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

²³ The Neoplatonic philosopher Olympiodorus provides the most complete version of the Orphic myth of Dionysus in his commentary on Plato's *Phaedo*. In the poems attributed to Orpheus, the myth appears in the *Eudemian Theogony*, a work which is also preserved in quoted fragments by Neoplatonic authors. Other earlier authors such as Pindar and Plato present variations on Olympiodorus' account. Reproduced below is Sarah Iles Johnston's summary of Olympiodorus' version (in italics) along with details interpolated from other sources (in plain text): "*Dionysus*

Dionysian symbolism of the Petelia tablet in *Dionis i pradiónisiistvo*. In addition to a translation of the tablet,²⁴ Ivanov provides an interpretation of the deceased's drinking from the lake of

was the child of Zeus and Zeus' daughter Persephone. Dionysus succeeded Zeus; Zeus himself placed the child on his throne and declared him the new king of the cosmos. The Titans, jealous of Dionysus' new power and perhaps encouraged by Hera, used various toys, and a mirror, to lure Dionysus away from his guardians, the Curetes, and dismembered him. They cooked his flesh and ate it. Zeus, being angry at this, killed the Titans, and from their remains, humanity arose. Because humanity arose from material that was predominantly Titanic in nature, each human is born with the stain of the Titans' crime, but a remnant of Dionysus leavens the mixture. Each human must expiate the Titans' crime by performing rituals in honor of Dionysus and Persephone, who still suffers from the 'ancient grief' of losing her child; by doing so, humans can win better afterlives. Meanwhile Dionysus was in some manner revived or reborn." Johnston and Graf, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife*, p. 67. The Earthy/Heavenly dualism of the Petelia tablet's "I am the child of Earth and starry Heaven" verse reflects humanity's dual nature due to its emergence from the ashes of the Titans who had killed and consumed Dionysus. Humanity's "Earthly" aspect derives from the Titans, whereas its "Heavenly" aspect is inherited from the remnants of the consumed Dionysus. Bernabé and Cristóbal's commentary on the tablets notes that the story of Dionysus' dismemberment at the hands of the Titans was "the central myth of Orphism." Alberto Bernabé and Ana Isabel Jiménez San Cristóbal, *Instructions for the Netherworld: The Orphic Gold Tablets* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), p. 41. Dionysus' death and rebirth constitutes the Orphic doctrine of ancestral sin, according to which "The Titans' being struck by lightning is placed in relation with human nature, the idea being that we have something of Dionysus within us, namely the part that had been ingested by the Titans. This is our positive, divine part, which desires to reintegrate itself with its originary nature. On the other hand, we have within us the remains of the Titans themselves. This is our sinful, proud, and wicked part, from which we must liberate ourselves... With time, and by means both of initiation into the knowledge of what enables it to save itself and of a life of purity and the observance of ritual taboos, the soul is able to purify itself of its crime and liberate itself from the eternal cycle of reincarnations, to achieve a state of beatitude in Hades." Ibid.

²⁴ Ivanov's translation is reproduced below:

Странствуя в долах Аида, по левую сторону встретишь
Быстрый родник и стоящий над ним кипарис белолистный:
Мимо держи ты свой путь, и к ручью берегись приближаться.
Ключ обрящешь иной: из озера Памяти плещут
Влаги студеной струи. Пред источником – грозные стражи.
Им ты скажи: «Вы – чада Земли и звездного Неба;
Я же – небесное семя, и вѣдом род мой самим вам.
Но изсыхаю от жажды, и гибну. Дайте ж испить мне
Вод прохладных, текущих из озера Памяти!» Стражи,
Слову послушны, допустят тебя до холодной криницы:
Струй напьешься живых, и воцарствуешь в сонме героев.

Memory as a restoration of the soul's primordial unity with Dionysus: "Predstavlenie o prokhladnykh vodakh Pamiati...protivopolagaet miru zemnogo razdeleniia potustorononii mir bozhestvennogo edinstva: razdelenie – zabvenie, vossoedinenie – vospominanie."²⁵ In Ivanov's reading, the tablet refers to the Orphic doctrine of ancestral sin, according to which humanity retains both a sense of Titanic individualism and an element of Dionysus' divinity.²⁶ Humanity's "nizshaia priroda – 'titanicheskaia,' khaoticheski bogoborstvuiushchaia" is overcome only in death, when "tsel'nost' ego dukhovnogo lika, Dionisa v nem, deistviem 'apolloniiskoi monady' spasena (systasis) za porogom smerti, gde tekut zhivye vody iz 'ozera Pamiati' (Mnêmosynês apo limnês), vosstanovliaiushchie soznanie zabytogo edinstva."²⁷ Ivanov reads the purpose of

Ivanov, *Dionis i pradiioniistvo*, p. 169. There is one significant discrepancy between the translation and the original text of the tablet. Ivanov translates Γῆς παῖς εἰμι καὶ οὐρανοῦ ἄστερόεντος ("I am the child of Earth and starry Heaven") as "Вы – чада Земли и звездного Неба" ("You are children of Earth and starry Heaven"). In other words, in Ivanov's version, the verse is addressed to the guardians of the lake of Memory ("You") instead of referring to the deceased initiate ("I"). The discrepancy appears simply to be a mistake, attributable to the fact that Ivanov was reproducing the tablet from memory, as he did not have access to referential materials while writing in exile in Baku.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 170. ("The notion of the cool waters of memory...contrasts the realm of earthly division with the otherworldly realm of divine unity: division is forgetting, reunification is remembrance.")

²⁶ Most scholars refer to Dionysus' dismemberment by the Titans as Orphic "original sin," however the term "ancestral sin" will be used in this chapter for several reasons. Since both coinages are projecting Christian doctrines of sin onto Orphic myth, and both terms have specific usages within different Christian traditions, it is most appropriate here to use the terminology associated with the Eastern Orthodox concept of sin with which Ivanov was attempting to synchronize the Orphic myth. Furthermore, "ancestral" more accurately conveys the sense that the Titans' sin was a singular event that could be expiated by undertaking Orpheus' prescribed rites, which is closer to Eastern Orthodoxy's view of the fall and its sacramental practice for remitting ancestral sin. Ivanov's idea that the Orphic myth of Dionysus acted as a predecessor to the Christian doctrine of sin involves (theurgic) ritual as a means of atonement.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 169. ("base, 'titanic' nature, chaotically opposing the divine;" "the wholeness of its spiritual being, in which Dionysus inheres, is saved by an act of the 'Apollonian monad' beyond

the “I am the child of Earth and starry Heaven” verse for Orphic initiates as both a recollection of humanity’s dual nature, and a restoration of the soul’s forgotten unity with Dionysus. Ivanov thus conceives of the verse in terms of *henosis* (*vossoedinenie*), the object of theurgic ritual. He uses theurgic language in ascribing the tablet “an undoubtedly magical significance,” calling it a “naputstvennyi zavet, imevshii nesomnenno magicheskoe znachenie zagrobnogo propuska.”²⁸

The passage establishes three points that are germane for assessing the epigraph of “Psikheia”: 1) Ivanov saw the verses as related to the Orphic myth of Dionysus, 2) he interpreted the verses as having “an undoubtedly magical significance,” and 3) he viewed the purpose of the verses as *henosis* with Dionysus.

Reviewing briefly the contents of the Petelia tablet and where the “magical” verse appears within them reveals important points of comparison with the text of “Psikheia.”²⁹ As

the threshold of death, where living waters from ‘the lake of Memory’ flow, which restore its awareness of its forgotten unity.”)

²⁸ Ibid. (“parting token, having an undoubtedly magical significance of admittance to the afterlife.”)

²⁹ The full text of the tablet is:

You will find in the halls of Hades a spring on the left,
and standing by it, a glowing white cypress tree;
Do not approach this spring at all.
You will find another, from the lake of Memory
refreshing water flowing forth. But guardians are nearby.
Say: “I am the child of Earth and starry Heaven;
But my race is heavenly; and this you know yourselves.
I am parched with thirst and I perish; but give me quickly
refreshing water flowing forth from the lake of Memory.”
And then they will give you to drink from the divine spring,
And then you will celebrate? [rites? with the other] heroes.
This [is the ? ... of Memory, when you are about] to die ..
?write this?
.....].?? shadow covering around

mentioned above, the tablet contains instructions for the deceased for admittance to the afterlife. It adumbrates a “geography” of the underworld, and how the deceased is to navigate it.³⁰ After death, the soul finds itself at the entrance to Hades. (S)he is urged to bypass the first spring with a glowing cypress tree located next to it, and to request a drink – using the verses from the epigraph – from two guardians presiding over the lake of Memory. After drinking the water, the deceased will then be guided by the guardians onto the correct path to Elysium. Other tablets, such as the one discovered at Hipponion, present a clearer picture of the last stage of the Petelia tablet’s narrative. In the Hipponion tablet, the deceased is led onto the path to Elysium with other initiates (*mystēs*) and followers of Bacchus (*bacchoi*) upon reciting the verses.³¹ According to the Pelinna tablets, the deceased has to tell Persephone (Dionysus’ mother, the queen of the underworld) that “Dionysus himself delivered me.”³²

The final line appears in the right margin of the tablet. The translation is by Ratcliffe G. Edmonds III in Edmonds, ed., *The “Orphic” Gold Tablets and Greek Religion*, p. 22.

³⁰ For a discussion of the notion of post-mortem geographies in the tablets and their relation to other religious traditions, see Sarah Iles Johnston’s “The Eschatology Behind the Tablets,” in Graf and Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife*, pp. 96-98.

³¹ Following the “I am the child of Earth and starry Heaven” verses, the Hipponion tablet reads:

And then [the guardians] will speak to the underworld ruler,
and then they will give you to drink from the lake of Memory,
and you too, having drunk, will go along the sacred road that the
other famed initiates and bacchics travel.

Translated by Ratcliffe G. Edmonds III in Edmonds, ed., *The “Orphic” Gold Tablets and Greek Religion*, p. 30. Some scholars have postulated that the discrepancies in the texts point to an Orphic initiatory or funerary Urtext from which the tablets are derived. An attempt has been made to reconstruct this text by Christoph Riedweg in “Initiation – death – underworld: Narrative and ritual in the gold leaves,” in *ibid.*, pp. 248-251.

³² Graf and Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife*, p. 145.

The speaker of the tablet, who utters the instructions to the deceased, may be interpreted as Orpheus himself, as Fritz Graf explains:

...in most tablets...it is the voice of an omniscient and somewhat didactic guide who addresses the soul on its way through the Underworld; he describes the critical points and tells it what to do, what to avoid and what to say. But he also acts as a master of ceremonies who utters acclamations, praising the soul at crucial stages, and he promises future bliss. One can understand this, and has regularly done so in the past, as the voice of Orpheus, the poet who has seen it all and is addressing the initiate to let her participate in his knowledge: this turns the texts into snippets from a *katabasis* poem.³³

Orpheus, the heraldic poet and musician who travels to the underworld and returns, who commands nature with song, and whose head continues to sing following his decapitation, symbolizes both poetic mastery over the natural order, and a triumph over death. In many accounts, Orpheus journeys to Hades in an ill-fated attempt to rescue his wife, Eurydice. This would explain his familiarity with underworld geography, his acquaintance with the presiding figures such as the guardians, and his knowledge of the key phrases that would grant the soul access to more desirable realms. Orpheus is also considered the inventor of Dionysian mystery rites.³⁴ In Diodorus of Sicily's account, Orpheus inherited a firsthand knowledge of the Dionysian mysteries as the successor to the Thracian seat of power, which was established by Dionysus himself.³⁵ Diodorus claims that "Orpheus' different [Thracian] nature had first driven him to poetry and music; and it was he who first brought initiations and mystery cults to the Greeks."³⁶ Orpheus' initiatory toolkit consisted of poetry (he is attributed to be the inventor of the hexameter, the meter used in the tablets) and music (his performances were attended by birds

³³ Ibid., p. 139.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 173-174.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 142.

³⁶ Quoted from *ibid.*, p. 172.

and animals, and even rocks and trees moved closer when he sang). The tablet texts contain Orpheus' instructions for deceased initiates into Dionysian mysteries.

The hexametrical "I am the child of Earth and starry Heaven" verse thus would have been learned as an initiatory rite. It is attested on a significant number of the tablets, suggesting its importance for Orphic eschatological thought. The prosody of the verses could be interpreted as a mnemonic device for the initiates.³⁷ Given the reference to Mnemosyne in the tablets, the act of remembering and reciting the verses plays a crucial role. The inscriptions on gold foil³⁸ thus function as permanent reminders of the "passwords" (*symbola*) that Bacchic initiates were taught in the course of their initiation.³⁹ Simply knowing and reciting the *symbola* constituted admission to the sought-after realms of the afterlife, as Bernabé and Cristóbal discuss:

In the leaves, emphasis on knowledge is attested by Mnemosyne's presence as the presiding deity, by the insistence on truth, by the questions of the guardians, whose mission is to prevent those who do not know the answers from having access to the place of blessing, and by the passwords (*symbola*) that they and Persephone must be told as a proof that one knows the truth.⁴⁰

³⁷ Bernabé and Cristóbal, *Instructions for the Netherworld: The Orphic Gold Tablets*, p. 15. Graf and Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife*, p. 94.

³⁸ The use of gold may be seen to reflect the permanence of the *symbola* inscribed into it. Bernabé and Cristóbal (in *Instructions for the Netherworld: The Orphic Gold Tablets*, p. 2) comment that "The use of gold no doubt corresponds to the search for a material intended to be noble and long-lasting, useful for avoiding malign influences and a symbol of the durability of the life that the deceased hoped for."

³⁹ Ibid., p. 36; Bernabé and Cristóbal in Edmonds, ed., *The "Orphic" Gold Tablets and Greek Religion*, p. 79.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 75.

Ivanov's epigraph is thus one of such *symbola*.⁴¹ The Bacchic initiate would have been instructed to recite the verses of the epigraph immediately preceding (or perhaps following) death.⁴² The fact that the verb forms of the "I am the child of Earth and starry Heaven" verses are present-tense, in contrast to the future-tense and imperative verbs of Orpheus' instructions to the initiate, suggests a performative context for the verses. Uttering the verses acts as a "proof" of initiation, as Sarah Iles Johnston explains: "Declaring that it is 'a child of Earth and starry Sky,' then, is another way for the soul to establish that it has been initiated and thereby has

⁴¹ It is also possible that the tablets themselves were considered *symbola* along with the verses inscribed upon them. This could explain why the tablets were placed in initiates' graves: not just as a reminder of the critical verses to recite in the afterlife, but as a kind of token of admission. On a tablet dating to the 2nd or 3rd century CE discovered in Rome in 1903, the text reads "But accept this gift of Memory, sung of among mortals." The tablet itself perhaps acts here as the "gift of Memory." Sarah Iles Johnston argues that "the request that the divinities 'accept' this gift of Memory (the tablet) suggests that the tablet may also have been understood as a *symbolon* in the physical sense – that is, like the clay, bone, or wax tokens that sometimes were used to prove a person's identity in the world of the living, the tablet proves, by its very existence, that the soul who possesses it is an initiate." Graf and Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife*, p. 124.

⁴² Opinions vary on whether the verses were intended to be recited by the initiate before death or by the soul after death. Bernabé and Cristóbal translate the final lines of the Petelia tablet, which are nearly indecipherable due to damage to the gold foil, as:

This is the wo[rk of Mnemosy]ne. [When a hero is on the point of] dying,
[let him] recall and get this grav[ed on gold,
lest] the murk cover [him] and lead [him] down in dread.

Given the post-mortem scenario that the tablets adumbrate, other scholars have posited that the verses were intended to be recited by the soul after death (Dirk Obbink states that "it is... possible to see the putative performance of deeds and speech prescribed by the texts as messages and speech acts projected into the nether world and the next life, the performance of which is to be thought of as continuing or taking place in the next life." In "Poetry and performance in the Orphic gold leaves," in Edmonds, ed., *The "Orphic" Gold Tablets and Greek Religion*, p. 305. Bernabé and Cristóbal (in *Instructions for the Netherworld: The Orphic Gold Tablets*, pp. 19-20, 47) argue that the present-tense verbs suggest that the verses are to be recited by the initiate preceding death, however this interpretation seems to follow from their reconstruction of the indecipherable concluding lines of the tablet. For the purposes of this discussion, either a pre- or post-mortem scenario could apply to "Psikheia."

earned a special relationship with the gods.”⁴³ The emphasis on recitation links the verses to a ritual setting, and reveals an important connection to theurgy, which (as discussed in chapter 1) also emphasizes the oral recitation of versified *symbola*.

It represents a significant common thread with theurgy that the tablets contain formulae understood by initiates as *symbola*. Several of the tablets even include the word *symbola*. Like theurgic *symbola*, the recitation of the tablet verses was thought to elicit a kind of automatic response from the guardians and targeted divinities. Dirk Obbink suggests that “as objects bearing inscribed utterances, (the tablets) are supposed to *do* something, i.e. be ritually effective.”⁴⁴ The verse formulae were thought to have an instrumentality, much like the *symbola* of theurgic ritual. The initiate must merely quote the formulae from memory in order to fulfill their purpose. As in Neoplatonist theurgy, (s)he does not necessarily have to understand why the *symbola* are effective or how they work.

If mere knowledge of the verses applied in an otherworldly setting to Bacchic initiates, then, from Ivanov’s perspective, the verses might generate a similar theurgic effect as a poetic epigraph. That the verses were found in exhumed graves and inscribed on gold foil could only enhance their theurgic appeal. The tablets are about as esoteric as can be, having no intended readership other than the deceased. As Hans Dieter Betz points out, “The testimonials were not meant for a future reader, but were put into the graves of the initiated *mystai* as secret memoranda. This makes them *esoteric* inscriptions, in other words, different from the *exoteric*

⁴³ Graf and Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife*, p. 116.

⁴⁴ Dirk Obbink in Edmonds, ed., *The “Orphic” Gold Tablets and Greek Religion*, p. 302.

grave inscriptions aimed at the passing visitor (although they show revealing similarities).”⁴⁵

The theurgic viability of a symbolic text buried with a Bacchic initiate, from Ivanov’s standpoint, seems almost undeniable.

3. Separation and theurgic reunification

Why did Ivanov include the verses in “Psikheia” specifically? The poem narrates two scenes from the myth of Psyche and Eros, a story which, at a glance, has little to do with Orpheus, Dionysus, or the mortality topos of the epigraph. Ivanov takes the thematic material for the poem from two sources, one of which he identifies in an explanatory endnote to the title:

Образы Психеи, прикованной к безлистному дереву, и Психеи-Мотылька, сжигаемого Эросом на пламени факела, в присутствии Немезиды и Надежды, причем все трое из сострадания отвращают лица от зрелища казни, — внушены древними пластическими изображениями (см. Collignon, Psyché).⁴⁶

The structure of the poem – a diptych – reflects the two scenes which Ivanov draws from Greek sculpture. Ever the philologist, Ivanov identifies Maxime Collignon’s *Essai sur les monuments Grecs et Romains relatifs au mythe de Psyché* (1877) as his source for the sculpture depictions.

The first section of the poem recounts the scenario of Psyche as a prisoner bound to a leafless tree:

И узница под ним, слепой темницей
Окружена;

⁴⁵ Hans Dieter Betz, “‘A child of Earth am I and of starry Heaven’: Concerning the anthropology of the Orphic gold tablets,” in *ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴⁶ Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 861. (“The images of Psyche chained to a leafless tree, and Psyche as a moth immolating in the flame of Eros’ torch in the presence of Nemesis and Hope – along with all three turning their faces away from the execution scene out of sympathy – are inspired by ancient sculpture depictions.”)

И сонм людей, идущих вереницей
Через двери сна.⁴⁷

In the second section, Ivanov portrays her as a moth sacrificing herself in an act of self-immolation:

Пожар смолы воздвигнутой десницей
Он (Eros) колыхал;
И мотылек — все отвратили лица —
Вблизи порхал...⁴⁸

The questions arise as to how the epigraph relates to the narrated scenes, and whether it connects the two parts of the diptych in some way. The second of Ivanov's sources for the Psyche narrative, Apuleius' novel *The Metamorphoses*, offers insight into the first question. A closer look at the role of the speaker in the scenario will address the second question.

Ivanov's depiction of Psyche draws substantially from Apuleius' novel. The epigraph invites a cross-referencing of the text of the Petelia tablet and Apuleius' account of Psyche. In the novel, Psyche descends to the underworld at the behest of Aphrodite. Psyche initially elects to throw herself from a tower to enter the realm of the dead; however, a disembodied voice from the tower warns her that, by perishing, she will not be able to return to fulfill Aphrodite's request. She is then given instructions on how to descend to the underworld while retaining her life. The voice advises her to proceed to the river of Styx, where she will meet a guardsman, Charon, who will demand a gold token in order for her to cross.⁴⁹ The scene bears oblique

⁴⁷ Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 700. ("A captive beneath [the leafless tree] is surrounded / By a blind prison; / A crowd of people walking in procession / through the door of sleep.") All translations of Ivanov's poetry are mine.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 701. ("He fanned a tar flame / With an extended hand; / A moth – everyone averted their eyes – / Fluttered up close...")

⁴⁹ Apuleius, *The Golden Ass, or A Book of Changes*, translated by Joel C. Relihan (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2007), p. 124.

resemblance to the post-mortem scenario of the Petelia tablet.⁵⁰ The instructions on descending to the underworld are narrated in both cases in the second person “you.” In the tablet, the deceased is to refuse to drink from the first spring that (s)he sees, and to proceed to a second source of water, where (s)he will meet two guardians (in the novel’s case, one guardian).⁵¹

⁵⁰ Some of the parallelisms that can be drawn between the gold tablets and Apuleius’ novel are not specific to these texts; they are instead attributable to commonplaces of underworld depiction in pre-Christian times. The implication here is not that Apuleius was familiar with the gold tablets, but that Ivanov merges Apuleius’ rendition of Psyche with the text of the Petelia tablet through the epigraph. The thematic resemblances between “Suspiria” and *The Metamorphoses* are not restricted to “Psikheia.” In the poem “Pietà,” Ivanov invokes the Egyptian goddess Isis, who likewise appears in the novel:

Вселенская Изида, вождь алканий,
Любовь! тебя
Да познаём в путях твоих исканий,
С тобой скорбя,

(“Universal Isis, ruler of yearning, / Love! / May we discover you in the paths of your searching / Grieving along with you,”)

The third line’s mentioning of “the paths of your searching,” while referring to the cycle’s theme of separation, could likewise refer to the plight of the hero Lucius, who appeals to Isis to transform him back into human form from a donkey. Lucius is initially turned into a donkey by dabbling in magic – another comparison between the cycle and the novel in relation to theurgy. The line also refers to Isis’ attempt to reconstitute Osiris following his dismemberment. M. Tsimborska-Leboda discusses additional connections between Apuleius’ novel and “Suspiria” in the article “‘Nad palimpsestom ellinskikh sloves’: Psikheia i Eros v poezii Viach. Ivanova. Mif o dushe,” in *Antichnost’ i kul’tura serebriannogo veka*, ed. by E.A. Takho-Godi (Moscow: Nauka, 2010), pp. 186-187.

⁵¹ On the presence of guardians in the underworld, Sarah Iles Johnston mentions that “Guards and guard-like figures are encountered frequently in ancient Mediterranean eschatological texts and in related documents such as ascent and *katabasis* texts (texts in which a living individual temporarily visits the Heavens or the Underworld). Usually, these guards are located at the entrance to a desirable part of the afterlife; sometimes they stand at the entrance to Heaven or the Underworld as a whole, in which case failure to get past them means that the soul will wander forever between the realms of life and death. The guards may be gods, *daemones*, angels, or monstrous creatures such as Cerberus. (We are given no information about what the guards in our tablets are, or even look like; they may be any or none of these things.) Typically, such guards challenge the traveler to do something before allowing him or her to enjoy whatever benefits they are protecting.” Graf and Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife*, p. 112.

Instead of reciting verses, Psyche is instructed to offer a gold token to the guardsman in the novel.⁵² It should be recalled that the Orphic tablets were inscribed on gold foil. In the novel, Psyche must offer the gold coin to Charon on the condition that he take it from her mouth. It deserves note that several of the Orphic gold tablets were discovered in the mouths of the deceased.⁵³ The principle connection between the Orphic tablets and Apuleius' account of Psyche, however, is the topos of descending to the underworld. Apuleius' narrative also recalls the myth of Orpheus, who, similar to Psyche, descends to Hades, though to retrieve his beloved, Euridyce.

Ivanov's attribution of the epigraph to Orpheus presents a parallel with Psyche on the basis of their similar underworld journeys. Since, in the Petelia tablet, the verses apply to the soul's well-being in the afterlife, the epigraph suggests a pre- or post-mortem scenario in the poem. Psyche, metaphorized in the second part of the diptych as a moth, perishes in the flame fanned by Eros:

«Испей! истай!..» И что влекло — пахнуло.
Как два крыла,

⁵² Regarding the images of water and the gold token in the underworld, Sarah Iles Johnston points out that "Rivers that must be crossed are in fact one of the most common features of Underworld geographies; by at least the classical period, popular Greek belief developed the idea that coins buried with the dead would insure that Charon, the infernal ferryman, would transport the soul into the Underworld." *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁵³ Although the position of the Petelia tablet within the exhumed grave was not recorded, one of the five tablets discovered at Thurii in 1879 was placed near the cranium, possibly in the mouth of the deceased. Ivanov might have taken note of the similarity between the placement of the gold foil (the location within the grave was mentioned in Smith and Comparetti's article) and Apuleius' account of Psyche. Several other tablets discovered in the twentieth century, and thus after Ivanov's composition of the poem, were likewise located in the mouth or near the head of the deceased. See table 2.2-2.7 in Edmonds, ed., *The "Orphic" Gold Tablets and Greek Religion*, pp. 41-48.

Душа в груди забилась... и вдохнула...
И — умерла!..⁵⁴

It should be mentioned here that Psyche means “soul” in Greek. Ivanov’s Psyche refers both to the mythical figure, and to the soul: the mention of *dusha* in the penultimate line could refer to the soul of the eponymous heroine.⁵⁵ Therefore, on the one hand, the theurgic symbolism of the epigraph could be directed at Psyche’s “psyche.” In this reading, the epigraph relates to Psyche’s self-immolation.

On the other hand, Ivanov’s reference to *dusha* could suggest a different reading. The fact that a possessive modifier is not needed in the phrase *dusha v grudi* in Russian poses an intriguing ambiguity. It is not clear that *dusha* refers to Psyche; it instead seems likely that this refers to the soul of the lyric self narrating the scene. It is the inner state of the dreaming lyric self that occupies the foreground of the two scenarios of the diptych. The mythical narratives, in this reading, function as projections of the lyric self’s consciousness – a view suggested by the retelling of the myth in a dream sequence. What unites the two scenes of the diptych would thus be the mediation of the lyric “I.” In both sections, the speaker is portrayed initially as an onlooker who identifies with, and, subsequently, *becomes* one of the characters in the mythical scenario. The mythical narrative acts as a process of self-realization, through which the lyric “I” gradually finds itself affecting the unfolding events. The speaker witnesses the scene of Psyche’s self-immolation, and perishes in turn.

⁵⁴ Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 701. (“‘Drink! Melt away!’ What was drawn in smelled. / Like two wings, / The soul pounded in my chest... and took a breath... / And died!”)

⁵⁵ A significant number of the tablets, including the Petelia tablet, were discovered in the graves of women (see Obbink in Edmonds, ed., *The “Orphic” Gold Tablets and Greek Religion*, p. 298.) Ivanov’s use of the Petelia tablet for the epigraph is consistent with Psyche’s gender.

In the first section, this process begins with the lyric self's empathy toward Psyche, who is portrayed as a prisoner bound to a leafless tree. He is unable to differentiate Psyche from his mother, his wife, his sister, or his daughter:

Была ль мне мать, жена ль она, сестра ли,
Была ли дочь, —
Ах! было мне не вспомнить — и печали
Не превозмочь!⁵⁶

The lyric self's projection of important female figures of his life onto Psyche initiates the personalization of the mythical narrative. He wants to free her, but has no agency within the scene at first and cannot speak:

Так сладостно была мне и так больно
Она близка.

Я спросить горел — о чем?.. Немела
Пред Роком речь...⁵⁷

The speaker's observations are prismatic, refracting from the physical setting, to Psyche and the passers-by, and finally to his own thoughts within the dream. As the narrative focuses in on the lyric self's inner state, he perceives himself to be in an ineffectual position. In his state of inertia, he calls out to the passers-by walking in procession to assist Psyche:

И каждого я звал из шедших мимо:
«Не ты ли, брат,
Ту изведешь, что здесь в цепях томима,
Из горьких врат?»⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 700. (“Was she to me a mother, wife, sister, / Was she a daughter? / Oh! It was not for me to recall, and the sadness / It was not for me to overcome!”)

⁵⁷ Ibid. (“She was so sweetly and so painfully / Close to me. // I burned to ask – about what? Speech / Failed me before Fate...”)

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 701. (“I called out to each one passing before me: / ‘Will it be you, brother, / Who leads her, who here is languishing in chains, / From the bitter gates?’”)

He subsequently identifies with the passers-by, and realizes that he is one of them:

И с лестью «брат» я говорил притворной:
Зане был я,
Кто мимо шел — и чей был взор укорный
Мой судия.⁵⁹

This section could be described as a *mise-en-abîme*. The prismatic refraction has resulted in a mirror reflection. The lyric self watching the scene as an impartial observer in turn becomes his own judge. The passers-by disappear, and the lyric self and Psyche are alone:

И все прошли...⁶⁰

He rushes to Psyche's aid, but she does not recognize him:

И я к жене: «Твой друг, твой отчужденный,
Забытый — я!..»
Мне чуждый взор, мне взор непробужденный
Был судия...⁶¹

Psyche's unrecognizing, "unawakened" stare is a reflection of the lyric self's own isolation and disorientation within the dream state. Initially the passive viewer of the narrative events, the lyric self becomes its own "judge." This judgment, however, is passed by Psyche, who in actuality is a projection of his own inner state, i.e. his "psyche."

As in the first section, in the second section of the diptych, the dreaming lyric self at first stands at a remove from the sequence of events, but later finds himself situated within the narrative. In the first stanza, he cannot clearly make out the figures in the scene:

И снилось мне: вдруг свет взыграл великий —
И я рыдал...

⁵⁹ Ibid. ("I was saying 'brother' with false flattery / For it was I / Who walked by, and whose reproachful look / Was my judge.")

⁶⁰ Ibid. ("Everyone had gone...")

⁶¹ Ibid. ("I approached the woman: 'I am your friend, your estranged, / forgotten one!' / To me her strange stare, to me her unawakened stare / was a judge...")

Кто были три, что отвратили лики, —
Я угадал.⁶²

He “guesses” that there are three who avert their faces from the light. These are the figures of Eros, Nemesis, and Hope, which Ivanov mentions in the endnote:

Тебя назвал мой ужас, Немезида!
Надежда, ты
Стояла с ним, чьего, как солнце, вида,
Чьей красоты

Мой темный дух, его лучей молящий,
Снести не мог:
То Эрос был, — алтарь любви палящей,
И жрец, и бог.⁶³

Psyche, as a moth, flutters toward Eros’ flame:

Пожар смолы воздвигнутой десницей
Он колыхал;
И мотылек — все отвратили лица —
Вблизи порхал...⁶⁴

In contrast to the first stanza, in this instance, the lyric self is included among those who turn away from the light: “everyone turned their heads” – in other words, Nemesis, Hope and himself. The lyric self thus gradually finds himself situated within the narrative. As in the first section of the diptych, the lyric self’s identifying with Psyche transforms him *in medias res* from a bystander to the focal point of the narrative:

⁶² Ibid. (“I dreamt: suddenly a great light sprung up / And I wept... / I guessed there were three / Who averted their faces.”)

⁶³ Ibid. (“My horror summoned you, Nemesis! / Hope, you / Stood with him, whose look, like the sun, / Whose beauty // My dark spirit, longing for its rays, / Could not bear: / It was Eros, both priest and god – / An altar of burning love.”)

⁶⁴ Ibid. (“He fanned a tar flame / With an extended hand; / A moth – everyone averted their eyes – / Fluttered up close...”)

Так сладко зреть мне было казнь, — так больно!..⁶⁵

The lyric self perishes in reaction to seeing the moth “in the fingers of the divine” in the penultimate stanza:

Уж он в перстах божественных... Привольно
Ему гореть!..⁶⁶

The inclusion of the adverb *uzh* suggests that the moth has already succumbed to the flames. In the concluding stanza, it is the lyric self that is “attracted” to the fire, and engulfed by it:

«Испей! истай!..» И что влекло — пахнуло.
Как два крыла,
Душа в груди забилась... и вдохнула...
И — умерла!..⁶⁷

The phrase *dusha v grudi zabilas'* is somewhat unconventional; one would expect the heart to have begun beating furiously, not the soul. However, the phrase is explicable in that the fluttering of the soul is compared to that of the moth's wings. It is unclear who utters the lines “Ispei! istai!”: it could be Eros, Nemesis, Hope or the lyric self. Presumably it is Eros, however, this lack of referentiality contributes to the the speaker's transferrance from narrator to narrated occurring in the concluding stanza. As if from a post-mortem vantage point, the lyric self recounts his own death in the dream. He has transitioned from the subject to the object of the narration. The transition is also illustrated by the speaker's reference, in the third stanza, to:

Мой темный дух, его лучей молящий,⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 701. (“For me it was so sweet to see the execution, so painful!”)

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 701. (“Already it is in the fingers of the divine... Freely / It is for it to burn!”)

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 702. (““Drink! Melt away!’ What was drawn in smelled. / Like two wings, / The soul pounded in my chest... and took a breath... / And died!”)

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 701. (“My dark spirit longing for [the sun's] rays”)

The “dark spirit,” which “longs for (the sun’s) rays” is later consumed in flames. The lyric self’s longing for a seemingly metaphorical illumination is consummated in an actual conflagration.

The dream state creates illusory dualisms in the poem between self and other, myth and reality, and life and death. The use of a dream state as a vehicle for self-realizations of a spiritual nature is a recurrent device in Ivanov’s poetry.⁶⁹ One of the overarching framing devices of the “Suspiria” cycle is the transition from night to day, and from dreaming to waking states. The sequence of the “Suspiria” poems begins at night with “Noch’,” then shifts to the dream in “Psikheia,” and concludes with a spiritual “awakening” as the sun rises in “Gost’.”⁷⁰ Aref’eva

⁶⁹ Another example is “Nevedomomu bogu,” which contains several significant parallels to “Psikheia.” The first two stanzas are reproduced below:

Я видел в ночи звездноокой с колоннами вечными храм;
И бога искал, одинокий, — и бога не видел я там.
Но змеи стожалые жили под пеплом живым алтаря,
И звезды заочно служили, над кровлей отверстой горя.

И пал на помосте святыни, и сон я внезапный вкусил...
И недра отзвучной пустыни прилив мириад огласил:
И гулы растущие хоров, как звон, отдавали столпы;
Из зарева мрачных притворов со стоном врывались толпы.

(“I saw a cathedral with eternal columns in the starry-eyed night; / Lonely, I searched for god, but I did not see god there. / Hundred-fanged snakes lived beneath the living ashes of the altar, / And, out of view, the stars performed a service, burning above the open roof. // I fell upon the platform of the sanctuary, and I tasted a sudden dream... / A rush of myriads broached the bowels of the echoing desert: / The pillars gave way to the increasing roar of choirs, like a knell; / Crowds broke through with a howl from the glow of the gloomy narthexes.”)

Ibid., pp. 540-541. Several comparisons to the dream imagery of “Psikheia” can be deduced, such as the starry night, the “eternal columns” of the cathedral (similar to the valley encircled by cliffs), the theme of *bogoiskatel'stvo* in isolation, and the crowd of impartial observers.

⁷⁰ An important subtext of the narrative framing from night to day is Tiutchev’s poem “Den’ i noch’,” the first stanza of which reads:

deduces that dream settings are indicative of “*dushevnyi razlad i dukhovnyi poisk*” in Ivanov’s thematics.⁷¹ Following Nietzsche, Ivanov conceptualizes the dream state as an imagerial, Apollonian realm that discloses unforeseen, Dionysian truths.⁷² In “*Psikheia*,” the Apollonian dream brings about a Dionysian scenario of death by sacrifice. In his discussion of the Petelia tablet in *Dionis i pradionisiistvo*, Ivanov paraphrases a passage from Pausanias’ *Description of Greece*, which clearly serves as a subtext of the dream state in “*Psikheia*”: “*Iz dvukh istochnikov – Zabvenie i Pamiati – p’et i ‘niskhodiashchii’ v peshcheru Trofoniia za orakulom dionisiiskogo geroia, proritsaiushchego palomniku, pogruzhennomu v son, v podzemnom*

На мир таинственный духов,
Над этой бездной безымянной,
Покров наброшен златотканый
Высокой волею богов.
День – сей блистательный покров –
День, земнородных оживленье,
Души болящей исцеленье,
Друг человеков и богов!

(“Onto the mysterious world of spirits, / Over this nameless abyss, / A gold-embroidered cover is thrown / By the lofty will of the gods. / The day is this brilliant cover. / Day, the revitalization of the earth-dwelling, / The cure for the sickly soul, / A friend of men and gods!”)

Much like in “*Suspiria*,” night is portrayed as the realm of “mysterious spirits,” and the onset of day as a “cure for the sickly soul.” Another framing device of the “*Suspiria*” cycle borrowed from Tiutchev is the lyric self’s ascent from the valley in “*Psikheia*” to the mountain top in “*Gost’*.” Ivanov seems to be thinking of Tiutchev poems such as “*Snezhnye gory*” in his association of the valley with earthly existence and the mountain heights with spiritual clarity.

⁷¹ Aref’eva, *Drevnegrecheskie mifopoeticheskie traditsii v literature russkogo moderna*, p. 174. (“disunity of the soul and the search for the spiritual”)

⁷² See Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, pp. 1-3, 10-11.

sklepe.”⁷³ The scenario of descending into the cave of Trophonius while asleep parallels the lyric self’s dream state and the underworld topos of the epigraph.

Given the processual situating of the lyric self within the mythical narrative, the compound referentiality of the epigraph becomes clear. The “I” of the epigraph alludes to Orpheus and Psyche, but also to the speaker of the poem, thus drawing a connection between the three. The Orphic verses pertain to the lyric self’s own transition to post-mortem life. The fact that the moth’s wings (*kryla*) are placed in rhyming position with dying (*umerla*) suggests that, in death, the soul is in some sense being transported. The rhyme of *goret’* with *vstret’* in the penultimate stanza precludes the mortality scene of the concluding stanza: perishing in the flames is construed as an introduction to the afterlife.⁷⁴ The lyric self *trans* Psyche undergoes a “trial by fire,” though the Orphic verses assure his safe passage to the next life. The theme of mortality in “Psikheia,” and in the “Suspiria” cycle more broadly, contains an autobiographical element: the

⁷³ Ivanov, *Dionis i pradionisiistvo*, p. 170. (“The ‘descender’ into the cave of Trophonius for an oracle from a Dionysian hero, who prophesizes to the pilgrim esconced in a dream, also drinks from two sources – Forgetting and Memory – in the underground crypt.”)

⁷⁴ Here Goethe becomes another subtextual presence in the poem. Michael Wachtel (in *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition: Goethe, Novalis, and the Poetics of Vyacheslav Ivanov* [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994], p. 102) points out that the line “Metnis’—i vstret’” resembles Goethe’s “Stirb und werde!” (“Die and become!”), with its similar implications of death as a prelude to the afterlife. Ivanov provides a condensed explanation of the symbolism of “Psikheia” in a discussion of Goethe’s poem “Selige Sehnsucht”: “Итак, живое тем запечатлеват свою жизнь, что ищет выхода в новую жизнь из полноты своей жизненности; переход — смерть; огонь — Бог; бабочка — душа; смерть — брак человека с Богом. Еще древние изображали Психею в виде бабочки, летящей в пламя факела, который держит Эрос.” (*Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, p. 140.) (“Thus, the living imprints its life by seeking an exit to a new life from the fullness of its vitality; the transition is death; the butterfly is the soul; death is the marriage of man with God. The ancients already depicted Psyche in the form of a butterfly, flying into the flame of a torch held by Eros.” Wachtel’s translation.)

cycle was composed while Ivanov was recovering from a bout with typhus in 1902.⁷⁵ The theurgic applicability of the epigraph extends beyond Ivanov's lyric persona to the poet himself.

Additional resemblances can be deduced between the poem and the tablet text. Psyche and the lyric self's death by fire in the concluding stanzas is counterposed with the image of water in the epigraph. The eponymous heroine's name in Russian (Психея) closely resembles the spelling of the Greek noun ψυχρα (singular ψυχρῶν), meaning places for cooling water. The title of the poem thus alludes not only to Psyche, but also to the source of her admission to the afterlife as described in the tablet. In both the tablet and the poem, water is ascribed salvific significance as a symbol of post-mortem life. In the tablet, the initiate recites the verses, and is granted a drink of water; in the poem, the lyric self is instructed to drink before perishing in flames. M. Tsimborska-Leboda notes that "simvolika vody v epigrafe...(otsyliaet) k *rite de passage* i k pogrebal'noi simvolike, t.e. v tselom k initsiatsionno-misterial'nomu stsenariiu."⁷⁶ The opposition of fire and water is presented as an antinomy: the initiate must be burned by the fire in order to be quenched by the water of eternal life. The purificatory symbol of fire precludes the salvific symbol of water.

The instructions "Ispei! istai!" allude to the water in the epigraph. As in the Petelia tablet, these instructions in the poem appear in imperative verb forms. The imperatives are likewise in the singular, denoting one addressee. The command to "Drink!" recalls the initiate's drinking from the lake of Memory. The exhortation to "Melt away!.." suggests that, in taking a

⁷⁵ See Deschartes' introduction to Ivanov's collected works in *ibid.*, pp. 42-44.

⁷⁶ M. Tsimborska-Leboda in Takho-Godi, ed., *Antichnost' i kul'tura serebriannogo veka*, p. 187. ("The symbolics of water in the epigraph...relate to a *rite de passage* and to the burial symbolics, that is, in sum to the scenario of initiation into a mystery.")

drink, the victim will die and descend to the afterlife. Additional images relatable to the tablet text appear in the first stanza of the poem:

Мне снилися: утесами задвинут,
Темничный дол;
И ночь небес; и — вёснами покинут —
Безлистный ствол;⁷⁷

The setting of “night in the heavens” recalls the “starry Heavens” line from the epigraph. In addition, the image of the “leafless tree” recalls the cypress tree standing at the first spring. The description of the tree as “abandoned by the springs” offers an intriguing contrast to the tablet text, which positions the tree by a replete water source. It is as if the setting of the poem, with its “prison-like valley encircled by cliffs” is, like the tablet, to be understood as the underworld. (The first line of the Petelia tablet finds the deceased “in the halls of Hades.”) The crowds of people walking in procession mentioned in the second stanza of the poem reinforce the infernal image.⁷⁸ The lyric self’s recognition of himself as one of the passers-by recalls the scenario from the Eleutherna tablets, in which the initiate joins other initiates and Bacchics on the path to Elysium.

⁷⁷ Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 700. (“I dreamt: a valley like a prison / Enclosed by cliffs; / Night in the heavens, and a leafless trunk / Abandoned by the springs;”)

⁷⁸ N.G. Aref'eva (in *Drevnegrecheskie mifopoeticheskie traditsii v literature russkogo moderna*, p. 179) points out that the scene presented in the first stanza of the poem resembles Apuleius’ depiction of Psyche as being imprisoned in a valley surrounded by cliffs and unaided by passers-by: “У римского писателя Психея была оставлена на утесе по божье воле, и никто из жителей города, сопровождавших несчастную, не пытался освободить Психею от ‘погребальной свадьбы’.” (“In the version of the Roman writer, Psyche was left on a cliff by the will of god, and none of the inhabitants of the city who accompanied her attempted to liberate Psyche from her ‘burial wedding’.”) This substantiates the impression that Ivanov is combining the imagery of the tablets and Apuleius’ novel in the poem, as discussed above.

Ivanov's prismatic construction of his lyric identity was noted by fellow Symbolist poet Valerii Briusov. In Briusov's review of *Kormchie zvezdy*, he comments on Ivanov's use of mythical subjects to contextualize his lyric voice:

Хотя автор подзаглавил ее «книга лирики», однако не надо понимать этого в узком смысле – книги, где собраны признания о личных, субъективных переживаниях поэта. У автора есть та стыдливость, которая побуждает все личное укрывать под объективными, внешними образами. Почти нигде он не говорит от своего лица, предпочитая или надевать различные маски, или искать аналогии своим переживаниям в традиционных образах древних сказаний или исторических событий.⁷⁹

What Briusov attributed to “shyness” could also be read as a structural tactic. In framing his lyric voice within myths of the ancient world, Ivanov seems to want to understand them as part of lived experience. “Psikheia” presents the lyric self as fragmented, split into two much as the poem is structured as a diptych. Rather than Ivanov “not speaking in the first person,” as Briusov complains, he instead structures his lyric voice as a dualism of self and mythical other. The lyric self in turn undertakes a kind of dialectical synthesis of subject and object, past and present, and dreaming and waking. It in turn subsumes its mythical projection as constitutive of its integral self. Instead of figuring as an “objective, external image” of the lyric self, in “Psikheia,” Psyche becomes a symbol of the lyric self's subjective, inner experience. The symbol acts as a mediator of the lyric self's inner state, a vehicle for its self-realization. By adorning “masks,” the lyric self both creates and synthesizes its duality.

⁷⁹ Valerii Briusov, *Sobranie sochinenii v 7-mi tomakh*, vol. 6 (Moscow: “Khudozhestvennaia literatura,” 1975), p. 296. (“Although the author subtitled the volume ‘a book of lyrics,’ one must not understand this in the narrow sense as a book in which declarations about the personal, subjective experiences of the poet are collected. The author has a shyness that encourages him to hide everything personal beneath objective, external forms. Almost nowhere does he speak in the first person, preferring either to adorn various masks or search for analogues of his experiences in traditional forms of ancient legends or historical events.”)

Ivanov devotes an essay entitled “Ty esi” to the theme of the soul divided against itself. The essay in many ways serves as an interpretive guide to the “Suspiria” cycle. Ivanov posits that this condition of the divided soul precedes religious renewal in the modern age:

Какой-то невидимый плуг, в наступившие сроки, разрыхлил современную душу — не в смысле изнеможения ее внутренних сил, но в смысле разложения того плотного, непроницаемого, нерасчлененного сгустка жизненной энергии, который называл себя «я» и «цельною личностью»... Это разрыхленное поле личного сознания составляет первое условие для всхода новых ростков религиозного мировосприятия и творчества.⁸⁰

Detecting the presence of the divine other, or “thou,” within one’s “I” resolves the soul’s divided state: “No to, chto est’ religiia voistinu, rodilos’ iz ‘ty,’ kotoroe chelovek skazal v sebe tomu, kogo oshchutil vnutri sebia sushchim, bud’ to vremennyi gost’ ili prebyvaiushchii vladyka.”⁸¹ Ivanov’s extended metaphor for the soul’s search for spiritual communion in its divided state is, as in “Suspiria,” Psyche’s seeking after Eros. As in the cycle, the divine object of Psyche’s search assumes different forms in the essay: Eros, Dionysus, Osiris, and Christ. The cause of soul’s division and separation from the divine is its ancestral sin:

...и только грехопадение, только титаническое растерзание единого сыновнего Лица положило непроходимую для сознания границу между ноуменально непостижимым макрокосмом и внутренне распавшимся в себе микрокосмом, которого благодатное воссоединение в Духе стало для человеческого индивидуума

⁸⁰ Ivanov, *Po zvezdam. Borozdy i mezhy*, p. 290. (“In current times, some sort of unseen plow has furrowed the modern soul – not in the sense of an exhaustion of its internal strength, but in the sense of a disintegration of that dense, impervious, undifferentiated mass of vital energy, which called itself “I” and the “integral personality”... This furrowed field of self-consciousness is the first requirement for sprouting new seedlings of a religious worldview and creativity.”)

⁸¹ Ibid. Ivanov’s description of spiritual self-realization as a “temporary guest” contains a telling parallel in “Suspiria,” which concludes with a poem entitled “Gost” (“The Guest”). (“However, true religion was born from ‘thou,’ which man said within himself to the one whom he sensed existed within himself, either as a temporary guest or a resident master.”)

единственно возможным в чудесные и жертвенные мгновения правого религиозного восторга.⁸²

Ivanov's etiology of the soul's division once again exemplifies his merging of Orphic myth with Christianity through the concept of ancestral sin. The soul's microcosmic condition of "internal disintegrat(ion)" and its separation from the "noumenally ineffable macrocosm" was occasioned by the "titanic dismemberment of the singular personage of the son." Using theurgic terminology, Ivanov describes the resolution of this state as *vossoedinenie*, or *henosis* with divinity. As will be demonstrated in the next section, this *henosis* continues to be brought about through theurgy. Borrowing from both Orphic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, Ivanov suggests that the pre-lapsarian state of the soul is restored through the performance of rites.

4. From Orphic *teurgiia* to sacramental *bogoděistvie*

The predominant theme of the cycle – that of the soul's separation from itself – is introduced in the poems which precede "Psikheia": "Noch" and "Vremia."⁸³ These poems inaugurate the narrative elements that factor into the cycle as a whole, such as the progression from night to day, from a dreaming to a waking state, from the valley to the mountain top, and from death to rebirth. The epigraph of "Vremia," which comes from Vladimir Solov'ev's poem "Bednyi drug! istomil tebia put' . . .," prepares the mortality topos of "Psikheia":

⁸² Ibid., p. 294. ("...only the fall, only the titanic dismemberment of the singular personage of the son placed the barrier impassible to consciousness between the noumenally ineffable macrocosm and the internally disintegrated microcosm, [whose reunification in the spirit, realized through Grace, has made] which gracious unity in the Spirit has made the singularly possible state for the human individuum in miraculous and sacrificial instants of correct religious exultation.")

⁸³ The theme of separation contains an personal point of reference for Ivanov, as he wrote the cycle while he was in Athens, and Zinov'eva-Annibal was caring for her children in Geneva.

Смерть и Время царят на земле:
Ты владыками их не зови!⁸⁴

The theme of the duality of the soul is presented in the first stanza of “Vremia”:

И в оный миг над золотой долиной
Плыла луна...
Душа скорбит, — с собой самой, единой,
Разлучена!⁸⁵

This stanza likewise portrays a nighttime setting in a valley, which recurs in “Psikheia.” Here the “unified” soul has been “separated from itself.” In the concluding stanza of the poem, the lyric self encounters its “double”:⁸⁶

И, разлучен, единой молит встречи
Единый лик...
И шепчет вслед непонятые речи
Души двойник.⁸⁷

The next occurrence of the word *dusha* in the cycle is in the final stanza of “Psikheia.” The soul has thus entered its divided state as the dream state of “Psikheia” commences.

The “soul’s double” that Ivanov refers to in “Vremia” seem to be the mythical characters within which he inserts his lyric persona. Psyche thus becomes one of the doubles of the lyric self. The scene in “Psikheia,” in which the lyric self speaks to Psyche, but she does not recognize or understand him, could be compared to the double “whisper(ing) incomprehensible

⁸⁴ Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 698. (“Death and Time rule on earth: / You should not call them lords!”)

⁸⁵ Ibid. (“At that moment, the moon drifted / Above the golden valley... / The soul mourns – it is separated / From its singular self!”)

⁸⁶ The image of the double has an extensive history in nineteenth-century Romantic literature. Ivanov is certainly drawing upon Dostoevsky’s novella “The Double,” E.T.A. Hoffmann’s “Der Sandmann,” and probably Heine’s poem “Still ist die Nacht, es ruhen die Gassen...”

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 699. (“Separated, the singular persona prays / For a single encounter... / Afterward the soul’s double whispers / incomprehensible sayings.”)

sayings” in “Vremia.” The speaker calls her an “estranged, forgotten friend,” to which she reacts with a “strange, unawakened stare.” Psyche’s response incites a moment of self-awareness for the lyric subject; the blank stare is his “judge.” Ivanov’s use of Psyche as a mythical double contains an element of self-referentiality, or mirroring: the Psyche narrative in fact reflects his “psyche,” i.e. the inner state of the lyric persona. The gradual merging of the lyric self with Psyche both resolves and compounds its duality, as, in this case, it results in an additional dualism of spiritual life and death.

“Pietà” likewise depicts the speaker in a scenario related to mortality. As in “Psikheia,” in “Pietà,” the lyric self projects a mythic double that acts as a prism through which it sees its inner state. In this case, however, it is Dionysus’s dismemberment that incites the speaker’s empathy and concomitant self-recognition. The penultimate stanza of the poem situates the lyric self within the Orphic myth of Dionysus:

И я, тень сна, Титанов буйных племя,
Их пепл живой,—
Несу в груди божественное семя, —
Я, Матерь, твой!⁸⁸

The speaker’s affiliation with both the Titans and divinity is another metaphor for its dual nature. The lyric “I” here identifies himself as the “living dust” of the Titans. The stanza refers to the Orphic creation myth, according to which (as discussed above) humanity sprung from the ashes of the Titans following their punishment by Zeus for killing Dionysus. The lyric self’s statement that he “(carries) a divine seed in (his) chest” refers to the remnants of Dionysus among the ashes from which humanity grew. In the concluding stanza of the poem, an unnamed god – presumably Dionysus – is tortured and killed:

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 702. (“I, a shadow of a dream, am of the clan of unruly Titans, / Their living dust. / I carry a divine seed in my chest; / I, Mother, am yours!”)

Услышь (— и здесь Его свершились муки,
И умер Он! —)
Мой страстный вопль разрыва и разлуки,
Мой смертный стон!⁸⁹

Similar to “Psikheia,” the stanza depicts a *mise-en-abîme*. The suffering and death of Dionysus elicits the speaker’s own “deathly groan.” The lyric self’s cry of separation reflects Dionysus’ dismemberment, just as the death of its soul reflected Psyche’s self-immolation. The lyric self’s separation from itself parallels the dismemberment of Dionysus at the hands of the Titans. The occurrence of *mise-en-abîme* here recalls the Titans’ use of a mirror to lure Dionysus away from his guardians, the Curetes, in the Orphic myth.⁹⁰ The mirroring of the lyric self and Dionysus results in them both uttering a “deathly groan.”

In an endnote, Ivanov provides an explanation of the poem’s symbolism:

По орфическому мифу, люди возникли из праха Титанов, испепеленных Зевсом за растерзание и пожрание Диониса. «Темная» — один из эпитетов Изида. — Изида ищет тела Озириса, разорванного на части, как был растерзан и Дионис, и отождествленного Греками с их Дионисом. — Как изображения Изида с Горосом на руках напоминают художественный тип Мадонны с Младенцем, так тип «Pietà» намечен древними в изображениях Эос и Кефалоса, и Ниобеи (Stark, Niobe 203, Taf. V).⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibid. (“Hear [here He was tortured, / And died] / My fervent scream of rupture and separation, / My deathly groan!”)

⁹⁰ See M.L. West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 141-143. See also Graf and Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife*, pp. 152-153.

⁹¹ Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 861. (“According to Orphic myth, humans arose from the dust of the Titans, who were incinerated by Zeus for their dismemberment and consumption of Dionysus. “The dark one” is one of Isis’ epithets. Isis searches for the body of Osiris, who was torn to pieces just as Dionysus was, and who was identified with Dionysus by the Greeks. Just as the depiction of Isis with Horus in her hands recalls the artistic type of Madonna with the Infant, so the type “Pietà” is alluded to by the ancients in the depictions of Eos and Cephalus, and Niobe.”)

The passage connects the Orphic myth of Dionysus' dismemberment, Isis' reconstitution of Osiris, and Mary's compassion for the crucified Christ (as depicted in Michelangelo's sculpture "Pietà").⁹² The unnamed suffering and perishing divinity in the final stanza could be Osiris, Dionysus, or Christ (just as the "Mother" referenced above could be Isis or Mary). As discussed in chapter 3, Ivanov delivered a lecture series entitled *Ellinskaia religiia stradaiushchego boga* (*The Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God*), in which he compared Dionysus and Christ on the basis of their suffering, death and rebirth. The lectures were devised shortly after the composition of the "Suspiria" cycle. In "Pietà," the merging of the lyric self with a mythic double results in a concomitant merging of the narratives of Osiris, Dionysus and Christ. Like in the endnote to "Psikheia," Ivanov provides a philological explanation for what, in the poem, is depicted as a spiritual undertaking.

The penultimate stanza of "Pietà" bears a significant resemblance to the epigraph of "Psikheia," in that both represent the Orphic creation myth.⁹³ Echoes of the dream state in

⁹² This is not the only reference to Michelangelo in the cycle. The epigraph of "Noch'," the first poem of the "Suspiria" subset, is a quote from his inscription to the sculpture *Notte* (*Night*): "Non mi destar!" ("Do not awaken me!"). This precludes the dream state in "Psikheia."

⁹³ Ivanov (in *Po zvezdam. Borozdy i mezhy*, pp. 292-293) links Psyche with the Orphic notion of ancestral sin, and in turn with Orthodox Christian ancestral sin in "Ty esi": "Психея повторит в своем переживании миф о Еве и Змии и послужит орудием мрачного самоутверждения личности, замкнувшейся в своих пределах и удалившейся от начала вселенского, — в каковом удалении и отъединении мы усматриваем содержание метафизического грехопадения, темной «вины своевольных предков», о снятии которой молились орфики, разумея под нею предвечный разрыв Диониса Титанами — это мифическое отображение «начала индивидуации» (principii individuationis)." ("In her experience, Psyche will repeat the myth of Eve and the snake, and will serve as an instrument of the bleak affirmation of selfhood in her isolation within her own bounds and her departure from a universal principle. In this departure and disunity we see the content of metaphysical ancestral sin, of the dark 'fault of headstrong forebears.' The Orphics prayed for the elimination of this sin, understanding it as the primordial break of Dionysus with the Titans. This is the mythic representation of the principle of individuation.") Ivanov (in *Perepiska*, vol. 2, p. 233) likewise discusses Orphic ancestral sin in Christian terms in his letter to Zinov'eva-Annibal from Feb. 10, 1902: "Орфики верили в

“Psikheia” appear in the speaker’s description of himself as a “shadow of a dream,” a quote from Pindar’s *Pythian* 8. As in the formula “I am the child of Earth and starry Heaven,” here the lyric self identifies himself as one of the “clan of rebellious Titans” and as “(carrying) a divine seed.” The reference to the Earth parallels the Titanic ashes, just as the starry Heavens parallel the lyric self’s assertion of its divinity. The involvement of the Orphic myth of Dionysus in both poems suggests their relation to theurgy for Ivanov. As in the tablets, the lyric subject’s self-identificatory phrase could serve as a *symbolon*: a kind of password that permits access to another realm.⁹⁴ By reciting the myth, the lyric self identifies himself as an initiate into Dionysian mysteries, much as the Orphic verses of the tablets would have been memorized only by a *mystēs*. Reciting the verses, as in the initiatory rites of the Dionysian mystery cults, results in the lyric self becoming “a Bacchus,” i.e. an incarnation of Dionysus.⁹⁵ The theurgic effect of

первородный грех: люди родились из пепла Титанов, сожженных молнией Зевса за растерзание Диониса. Они молились и совершали искупительные жертвы за грехи προγόνων ἄθεμίστων («беззаконных предков»). Мы теперь как умны стали, что не верим в «проклятия старинных преступлений.» (“The Orphics believed in ancestral sin: humans were born from the ashes of the Titans, who were incinerated by Zeus’ lightning for the dismemberment of Dionysus. They prayed and performed redemptive sacrifices for the sins of their lawless forebears. Nowadays, we have become so wise that we do not believe in the ‘damnation of ancient crimes.’”) As mentioned prior, scholars such as Maass, Rohde and Harrison, whose works Ivanov consulted while composing “*Suspiria*,” noted the resemblances between Orphic and Christian notions of ancestral sin. In the poems following “*Pietà*,” the Orphic-Dionysian symbols give way to Christian ones in “*Zhertva*” and “*Tebe blagodarim*.”

⁹⁴ “The concept of knowledge... is inherent to the nature of Orphic *teletai*, which are oriented to the acquisition of an eschatological wisdom which allows the initiates (and not only them) to know the nature of the soul, her situation in the world, and how to be freed from the mortal condition.” Bernabé and Cristóbal in Edmonds, ed. *The “Orphic” Gold Tablets and Greek Religion*, pp. 74-75. The lyric subject’s self-identificatory statement seems to serve a similar purpose here, that of recalling the circumstances of its creation in anticipation of its empathic death with Dionysus in the following stanza.

⁹⁵ See Barbara Kowalzig and Peter Wilson, ed., *Dithyramb in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 61.

recalling the Orphic myth consists in the lyric persona's *henosis* with Dionysus, and, in turn, with Osiris and Christ.

The recounting of the Orphic myth, and the lyric self's suffering in tandem with Dionysus, resolves the tension of separation that dominates much of the cycle. As a result of becoming "a Bacchus," the lyric "I" has achieved a theurgic resolution through *henosis*. In the concluding poems of the "Suspiria" subset, the focus shifts from the lyric "I" to "two wills" (in "Zhertva") and to "we" (in "Tebe blagodarim"). In "Zhertva," the lyric voice becomes "two wills" which emit "one groan":

Когда двух вошь возносят окрыленья
Единый стон,
И снится двум, в юдоли Разделенья,
Единый сон, —⁹⁶

The dream, which transpires in the "valley of Separation" similar to "Psikheia," becomes "a single dream." This opening stanza of "Zhertva" incorporates four key symbols from "Psikheia" and "Pietà": inspiration, or "wingedness" (*okrylen'ia*), a groan (*ston*), dreaming (*snitsia, son*), and the "valley of Separation" (*iudol' Razdelen'ia*). The theme of mortality reappears in the following stanza, though in this instance it is "two souls" which emit "one scream" in the event of death:

Двум алчущим — над звездами Разлуки —
Единый лик, —
Коль из двух душ исторгся смертной муки
Единый крик:⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 703. ("When the inspiration of two wills emits / A single groan, / And the two dream in the valley of separation / A single dream.")

⁹⁷ Ibid. ("For the two yearning above the stars of Separation / A single entity. / If a single scream of deathly torture is emitted / From two souls:")

“Zhertva” merges the themes and symbols of the preceding poems as an extension of the cycle’s broader merging of Osirian, Dionysian and Christian symbolics. In the following stanzas, the Dionysian themes of suffering, death and rebirth take on a Christian overtone:

Се, Он воскрес! — в их жертвенные слезы
Глядит заря...
Се, в мирт одет и в утренние розы
Гроб алтаря...

И пригвожден (о, чудо снисхожденья!)
На крест небес,
Умерший в *них* (о, солнце возрожденья!) —
Он в *них* воскрес!..⁹⁸

As the personal pronoun “I” turns into “two wills,” the imagery of Dionysian rites assumes the form of Christian sacraments – in this case, marriage (in “Tebe blagodarim,” the Eucharist):

О, Кана душ! О, в гробе разлученья —
Слиянье двух!
Но к алтарям горящим отреченья
Зовет вас Дух!⁹⁹

Recalling that “Suspiria” was composed while Ivanov and Zinov’eva-Annibal were apart for several months, the theme of separation takes on an autobiographical dimension. The lyric self’s overcoming of isolation, which in “Psikheia” and “Pietà” was facilitated by mythic doubles such as Psyche and Dionysus, is metaphorized here as a marriage in Christ, as Robert Bird explains:

...appearing after Christ’s resurrection, the Spirit calls the two human spirits to renounce their selfhood at the altar to Love, which is depicted as both prison and liberation...The

⁹⁸ Ibid. (“Behold, He is risen! The dawn gleams / In their sacrificial tears... / Behold, the grave of the altar is clad in Myrtle / and morning roses...” // Nailed [o miracle of condescension!] / On the cross of the heavens, / Dying in *them* [o sun of resurrection!], / He is risen in *them*!”)

⁹⁹ Ibid. (“O Cana of souls! O, the merging of the two / In the grave of separation! / The Spirit calls you to the burning altars / Of disavowal!”)

separation of the lovers is akin to death on the cross, but there is a resurrection: a heavenly Cana of Galilee presided over by the Bridegroom Himself.”¹⁰⁰

The Orthodox Church’s proscription of Ivanov’s marriage to Lidiia Zinov’eva-Annibal following the failure of his first marriage is an important subtext to the poem. The reference to the “burning altars of disavowal” reflects the forbidden nature of the conjugal union taking place. “Zhertva” portrays a ritual that could not occur in actuality.

“Zhertva” could be read as a theurgic rite of marriage in lieu of an officially sanctioned marriage in the Church. A ritual inflection is conveyed merely by its title (“The Sacrifice”). The poem, in this reading, becomes the consecration of the couple’s bond, much in the way that ritual actions and verses would be performed to sanctify their formal union in the Church. The poem’s marital and resurrectional symbolism thus serves a theurgic purpose in the absence of ecclesial ritual. Ivanov depicts Christ’s resurrection as occurring in the souls of the couple (*On v nikh voskres!..*), as if the poetic instantiation of the sacrament of marriage has generated a theurgic response. There is a theurgic sense to Ivanov’s deeming the marriage to have “all the might of a divine gift”:

На подвиг вам божественного дара
Вся мощь дана.¹⁰¹

Christ stands in as the celebrant who presides over the marriage. His appearance here recalls Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s description of theurgic *ergon* in a literal sense as the actions of Christ. The theurgy of “Zhertva” leans more toward Pseudo-Dionysius’ sacramental *bogoděistvie* than the Orphic *teurgiia* of “Psikheia” and “Pietà.” As in “Psikheia” and “Pietà,” a

¹⁰⁰ Robert Bird, *The Russian Prospero: The Creative World of Viacheslav Ivanov* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), p. 65.

¹⁰¹ Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 703. (“All the might of a divine gift is granted / To you for your feat.”)

kind of *henosis* of the lyric persona(e) with divinity transpires, though, in this case, with Christ. Again theurgic *symbola* effect the union, though here in the form of Christian sacrament.

The sacramental theurgy continues in “Тебе благодарим.” The poem’s title is taken from an Orthodox liturgical hymn. Within the sequence of the liturgy, the hymn is sung during the epiclesis, when the consecration of bread and wine into the Eucharistic elements occurs. Similar to “Psikheia,” “Тебе благодарим” portrays a liminal moment, though, here, the liminality regards the infusion of matter with spirit in the Eucharist rather than the transition from life to death.

The Eucharistic theme appears in the first stanza:

Бог страждущий, чьей страстной Чаши жаждем,
По Ком горим!
Зане в Тебе, зане с Тобою страждем, —
Благодарим!¹⁰²

The symbol of fire from “Psikheia” recurs here, though in a figurative sense. Here the lyric subjects “burn” for the “impassioned grail” of the Eucharist. The lyric “I” has been replaced by the plural personal pronoun “we” following the conjugal union of “Zhertva”:

Зане Тебя, по Ком в разлуке страждем,
Разлукой зрим, —
Бог жаждущих, чьей страстной Чаши жаждем, —
Благодарим!¹⁰³

As in “Zhertva,” the sacrament produces the theurgic effect of *henosis* with divinity. Just as the theurgic verses of the “Psikheia” epigraph would have been learned only by Bacchic initiates, the Eucharist is reserved only for “Christian initiates.” The Eucharist here acts as the *symbolon* through which the lyric subjects encounter divinity. In “Тебе благодарим,” the unification is

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 704. (“The suffering god, whose impassioned Grail we thirst for, / Whom we burn for! / For in You, for with You we suffer. / We give thanks to You!”)

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 705. (“For it is you, for whom we suffer in separation, / Whom we behold. / God of the thirsting, whose impassioned Grail we thirst for, / We give thanks to You!”)

both literal and figurative, material and spiritual, in that the Eucharistic elements are physically consumed. The sacramental theurgy of “Tebe blagodarim” resembles Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s notion of the Eucharist as a “theurgic mystery.”

Ivanov’s abundant Slavonicisms contribute to the liturgical atmosphere of the poem. Recalling chapter 1, linguistic archaisms are replete in the theurgic primary text, the *Chaldean Oracles*. Iamblichus links linguistic archaism with theurgy in contending that only untranslated divine names retain their theurgic viability. Though Slavonicisms are a recurrent feature of Ivanov’s poetics, given the sacramental theme of “Tebe blagodarim,” they may be read as a theurgic device which complements the poem’s Eucharistic symbolism. Ivanov’s Slavonicized lexicon conjures a sense of mystery which accompanies the consecration of the Eucharistic elements.

Music acts as another of the theurgic devices of “Tebe blagodarim.” Ivanov’s letter to Zinov’eva-Annibal from December 15-17, 1901 (new style) reads:

“За обедней, при словах ‘Тебе благодарим,’ был поражен мыслью, что христианство – религия благодарности по преимуществу. Христос часто благодарит Отца. Евхаристия – благодарность... Ницше говорит, что религия Греков была избытком благодарного чувства: так ли это?... У древних дифирамб – уже благодарность страдающему богу...”¹⁰⁴

Ivanov’s comparison of the Eucharist and dithyramb in the letter, which roughly dates to his composition of “Suspiria,” has a notable parallel in the cycle. The opening poem, “Pesn’ razluki,” is modeled after Greek choral dithyrambs in its tripartite structure of strophe,

¹⁰⁴ Ivanov and Zinov’eva-Annibal, *Perepiska*, vol. 2, p. 20. (“During the liturgy, at the words ‘We give thanks to thee,’ I was struck by the thought that Christianity is primarily a religion of gratitude. Christ frequently thanks the Father. The Eucharist is gratitude... Nietzsche says that the religion of the Greeks was a profusion of gracious sentiment: is this so?... For the ancients the dithyramb was already the gratitude for the suffering god...”)

antistrophe, and epode.¹⁰⁵ Its ecstatic utterances, addressed to a Muse (perhaps Zinov'eva-Annibal), are punctuated by numerous references to Dionysus. The tone of "Tebe blagodarim" – a poem which contains four exclamation points – exhibits a similar dithyrambic fervor. The dithyrambic structure of "Pesn' razluki," and the quotation of the Orthodox hymn in "Tebe blagodarim," suggests a comparison based on their shared musical theme. As discussed in chapter 1, the Neoplatonists considered music to have theurgic properties. Ivanov seems to fashion "Tebe blagodarim" as a kind of "Christian dithyramb." Its musical setting, combined with its Slavonicized lexicon, contribute to the theurgic event of the Eucharistic consecration.

5. Ivanov the Orphic

The cycle's recalling of Orphic and Christian rites in tandem suggests their interchangeability as theurgic devices to Ivanov. Just as he connects Dionysus to Christ in succession as suffering deities, Ivanov presents the rites associated with them as similarly interconnected. In his letter to Zinov'eva-Annibal from February 27, 1902 (new style), Ivanov refers to a "starinnoe protivorechie: garmoniia dionisicheskogo orfizma i khristianstva s odnoi storony, istoricheskaiia vrazhda mezhdru khristianstvom i dionisicheskoi stikhiei – s drugoi."¹⁰⁶ "Suspiria" depicts the "harmony" between Orphism and Christianity as a succession of theurgically viable rites. While Orphism and Christianity may signify "historical animosity" in a diachronic setting, Ivanov presents their ritual traditions as theurgically applicable in a

¹⁰⁵ See M.L. Gasparov, *A History of European Versification*, translated by G.S. Smith and Marina Tarlinskaja, edited by G.S. Smith with Leofranc Holford-Strevens (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 62-63.

¹⁰⁶ Ivanov and Zinov'eva-Annibal, *Perepiska*, vol. 2, p. 309. ("an ancient contradiction: the harmony of Dionysian Orphism and Christianity on the one hand, and the historical animosity between Christianity and Dionysian nature on the other.")

synchronic setting. As in Iamblichus' phrase, it is "the symbols themselves, by themselves" which are the instruments of theurgic unification for Ivanov.

As he states in *Dionis i pradionisiistvo*, Ivanov considered theurgists to be "in the final analysis, Orphics." Since "Suspiria" was written under the aegis of Orpheus (recalling the epigraph to the cycle), then perhaps Ivanov could be counted among the Orphics practicing theurgy. The synthesis between Orphism and Christianity that he proposes entails a new mystery, the rites of which are communicated through symbolic poetry much like the hexameters of the tablet texts. "Suspiria" may be read as not only citing theurgic rites in a philological manner, but as initiating new ones. Ivanov's hieratic poetic voice in a sense takes after Orpheus as an inventor of mystery rites for the Greeks. "Suspiria" documents Ivanov's lyric persona's own initiation into the Orphic mysteries, and in turn could be intended as a theurgic initiation itself for its readers. In the same way that Ivanov's lyric self projects mythical doubles in "Psikheia" and "Pietà," Ivanov acts as both Orpheus, the teller of the tale, and the Orphic initiate, who repeats the symbolic language of the mysteries. Initiation into the mysteries is, after all, a practice which is learned, and which involves a mastery of language.¹⁰⁷ Ivanov takes Orpheus' project in developing Dionysian mystery rites one step further by connecting them with the Christian sacraments. The result is a theurgic amalgam of Orphic *teurgia* and Pseudo-Dionysian *bogoděistvie*.

¹⁰⁷ "Orpheus...introduced mystery cults into Greece, having learned initiations from the Dactyls; performing initiation into mystery cults, then, is a craft that can be learned and that relies, among other things, on powerful words and songs." Graf and Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife*, p. 173.

Conclusion –

Theurgy Outside the “Decorated Temple of Demons”

The topic of theurgy preoccupied Ivanov primarily during the height of the Symbolist era, from about 1903-1910. Scarcely a thick journal publication penned by Ivanov from this period lacks a mention of theurgy. As chapter 3 demonstrated, one of Ivanov’s most programmatic essays, “Dve stikhii v sovremennom simvolizme” (“Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism,” 1907), heralded theurgy as no less than the chief objective of Symbolist art. Theurgy was also a hotly debated topic in his correspondence with fellow writers. In Ivanov scholarship, the theurgic theme is most commonly associated with his early work (and this dissertation is no exception). If one were to pinpoint the high time for theurgy in the Russian arts, one would certainly single out the period of the *fin de siècle*, with its boiling cauldron of eschatological musings, spiritual yearnings, and occult fascinations.

Ivanov, however, lived until 1949, and continued to write prolifically (in intervals) after the wave of theurgic interest had reached its crest around the turn of the twentieth century. While Ivanov’s theurgic enthusiasm seems to have been somewhat curbed following the death of his second wife, Lidiia Zinov’eva-Annibal, in 1907, and the so-called “crisis of Symbolism” in 1910, which split the Symbolists into two camps according to their stance on the role of religion in art, the theurgic theme never entirely disappeared from Ivanov’s thought and writing. One could even posit that Ivanov’s creative friendship with the composer Aleksandr Skriabin from 1912-1915 represented a renaissance, perhaps even the apex, of his dedication to the theurgic potential of art. Skriabin had in a sense attempted to bring Ivanov’s theurgic ideas to their ultimate fruition in his unfinished *Misteriia (Mysterium)*, a piece that was to embody a

culmination of the “synthesis of the arts,” and was envisioned as precipitating the end of time. Ivanov eagerly collaborated with Skriabin on the poetic text for the *Predvaritel'noe deistvo* (*Preliminary Act*), which was designed to prepare the world theurgically for the onset of the apocalypse brought on by the *Misteriia*.

Ivanov’s predilection for music, and his attempt to write poetry according to various musical principles, remained a consistent feature of his creative endeavors throughout his life. His association of music with Dionysus and, concomitantly, theurgy received many treatments in his later work in addition to his better known earlier work. The topic of theurgy in his later poetry, however, is one that has received relatively little attention in Ivanov scholarship. Given the firm connection between Dionysian thematics and theurgy for Ivanov, as discussed in chapter 4, it is reasonable to assume that wherever Dionysus – in his many guises – appears in his poetry, something theurgic is in the offing. With the parallelism between Dionysus, Orpheus and Christ that Ivanov went to great lengths to establish in his philological, poetic and theoretical works, Christian topoi and symbols must likewise be regarded as having a theurgic implication. Ivanov’s consistent use of Dionysian symbolics to, in a sense, re-pave the theurgic path from the Hellenic world to Christianity occurs in the spirit of revitalization and rediscovery, as Robert Bird notes:

...постоянным подтекстом дионисийских сочинении Иванова является необходимость как-то обновить христианство новым и непосредственным опытом безусловного, даже если этот новый опыт послужит лишь подтверждению и повторению пройденного развития христианской догматики.¹

¹ Robert Bird, “Viacheslav Ivanov za rubezhom,” in *Kul'tura russkoi diaspory: Samorefleksii i samoidentifikatsiia*, ed. by A. Danilevskii and S. Dotsenko (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 1997), p. 79. (“...a perennial subtext of Ivanov’s Dionysian compositions is the necessity to, as it were, renew Christianity by the new and unmediated experience of the absolute, even if that new experience serves merely as a confirmation and repetition of the traversed development of Christian dogmatics.”)

Ivanov's construal of Greek culture as a prefiguration to Christianity, though not without its critics, nor without a sense of ambivalence on the part of the poet himself about the true nature of his religious devotion, acts as a constant throughout the vicissitudes of his life.

Following the upheavals of the revolution and the ensuing civil war, Ivanov emigrated first to Baku in 1921, and then to Rome in 1924. With an air of solemnity, he declared to his friends in anticipation of his emigration to Rome, as Ol'ga Deschartes reports, "Ia edu v Rim umirat'."² Upon his arrival in Rome, Ivanov experienced a surge of creative energy, composing the *Rimskie sonnety* (*Roman Sonnets*) in short order in 1924 and 1925. In 1926, he converted to Roman Catholicism, though retained the Eastern Rite, declaring subsequently that he "vpervye pochuvstvoval sebia pravoslavnym v polnom smysle etogo slova."³ Following his conversion, Ivanov's poetic voice fell largely silent. He composed only 17 poems from 1926 until 1944, when he set himself to writing the *Rimskii dnevnik 1944 g.* (*Roman Diary of 1944*).

Given the apparent connection between Ivanov's shifting of religious affiliations and his poetic inspiration, how did his conversion affect his stance on theurgy? In one sense, theurgy in Ivanov's creative work is intimately conjoined with the *Zeitgeist* of late imperial Russia, with its apocalyptic forebodings and desperate search for spiritual regeneration. Theurgy, as touched upon in chapter 2, was undertaken by Ivanov and other Symbolists precisely as a means of

² Viacheslav Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1 (Brussels: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1971), p. 173. ("I am going to Rome to die.")

³ Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, p. 429. ("for the first time felt Orthodox in the full sense of the word.") The details of Ivanov's conversion have been covered amply elsewhere, and are not necessary to recapitulate here. See in particular Andrei Shishkin, "Viacheslav Ivanov i Italiia," in *Archivio italo-russo*, ed. by Daniela Rizzi and Andrei Shishkin (Trent: Editrice Università degli Studi di Trento, Dipartimento di Scienze Filologiche e Storiche, 1997), pp. 503-62. For Ivanov's own account of the conversion, see his "Pis'mo k Diu Bosu," in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3 (Brussels: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1979), pp. 423-429.

altering a course of historical events that appeared to be on an ineluctable path of destruction. Much as theurgy was devised in late antiquity as a way of preserving the ancient world from the rise of Christianity, theurgy offered a solution for what Ivanov called the “novyi ‘aleksandriiskii period’ istorii,” in which the old world was quickly dissolving into the uncertain new.⁴

In another sense, however, theurgy, given its ties to Ivanov’s perpetual themes of Dionysian myth and Christianity, is not confined to the poet’s pre-emigration output. From this perspective, theurgy simply enters a new paradigm upon Ivanov’s conversion, one which was characterized by his somewhat reluctant diminution of the influence of Dionysus and pre-Christian culture on his religious views and his poetry. Ivanov construed his abandonment of Russia’s universalist mission of *sobornost’*, which had assumed an atheistic form in the Bolshevik revolution, and his ensuing acceptance of Roman universalism embodied by the Catholic Church as a choice of Christ over Dionysus, of order and peace over chaos and destruction. He envisioned this choice not as an either-or opposition, but as an antinomy of truths that are simultaneously present yet irreconcilable. The inflection, however, fell on Christ in Ivanov’s Roman period, when he attempted to demonstrate his commitment to Christianity, perhaps as much to himself as to others, by distancing himself from Russia and Dionysianism. In his “Pis’mo k Diu Bosu,” Ivanov formulates his gravitation toward Rome and Christ, and away from Russia and Dionysus, as a decision to “stat’ za ili protiv Togo, Kto est’ edinstvennyi ob”ekt nenavisti apostolov Nenavisti.”⁵ The result of his redistribution of allegiances, however, was poetic silence for nearly 20 years. Just as Dionysus was inextricably tied to Christ for

⁴ Viacheslav Ivanov, *Po zvezdam. Borozdy i mezhi* (Moscow: Astrel’, 2007), p. 173. (“new ‘Alexandrian period’ of history”)

⁵ Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, p. 425. (“be for or against He, Who is the Apostles of Hate’s only object of hate.”)

Ivanov, the creation of theurgic art was intimately associated with establishing Dionysus as a predecessor to Christ. Once Christ decisively occupied the foreground of Ivanov's religious consciousness, theurgy, along with Dionysus, became somewhat peripheral and ancillary.

Not long after his conversion, Ivanov wrote a poem entitled "Palinodiia" (1927), one of only 17 that he would write until 1944.

И твой гиметский мед ужель меня пресытил?
Из рощи миртовой кто твой кумир похитил?
Иль в вещем ужасе я сам его разбил?
Ужели я тебя, Эллада, разлюбил?
Но, духом обнищав, твоей не знал я ласки,
И жутки стали мне души недвижимой маски,
И тел надменных свет, и дум Эвклидов строй.
Когда ж, подземных флейт разымчивой игрой
В урочный час ожив, личины полой очи
Мятежную тоской неукротимой Ночи,
Как встарь, исполнились — я слышал с неба зов:
«Покинь, служитель, храм украшенный бесов».
И я бежал, и ем в предгорьях Фиваиды
Молчанья дикий мед и жесткие акриды.⁶

The mere title invites a reading of the poem as a recantation of previously stated beliefs or practices. Pamela Davidson notes that the genre of the palinode was "taken up in a religious

⁶ Has your Hymettian honey really sated me?
Who stole your idol from the myrtle grove?
Or did I smash it myself in vatic horror?
Could it really be that I have stopped loving you, Hellas?
But, having become poor in spirit, I no longer knew your caresses,
And the masks of your inert soul filled me with terror,
Like the light of haughty bodies and the harmony of Euclidean thoughts.
But when, arising at the proper time
With the intoxicating play of flutes, the eyes of a hollow mask
Were filled, as of old, with the rebellious longing
Of indomitable Night – I heard a call from heaven:
"Abandon, o priest, the decorated temple of demons."
And I fled, and now I eat in the foothills of Thebaid
The wild honey and rough locusts of silence.
(Translation [lightly emended] by Robert Bird, *The Russian Prospero: The Creative World of Viacheslav Ivanov* [Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006], pp. 36-37.)

sense by the early Church fathers to signal their revocation of previously espoused pagan cultural values...and occurs in liturgical usage as a more general expression of repentance from sin.”⁷ Indeed the thematics and imagery of “Palinodiia,” which involve the poet’s withdrawal from a “khram ukrashennyi besov” (“decorated temple of demons”) to the Egyptian desert, and his consumption of “Molchani’ia dikii med i zhestkie akridy” (“The wild honey and rough locusts of silence”), suggest the poem as a pivotal turn from Dionysianism to Christianity in Ivanov’s creative and religious life. The mention of “Molchan’ie” (“silence”) in the concluding line acts as a prelude to the extended period of poetic silence that ensued. The poem’s repentant stance is further informed by Ivanov’s declaration of St. Augustine’s *City of God* to be his “favorite book” in 1928.⁸ Much as Augustine assails the pagan world and affirms his allegiance to Christianity in this work, “Palinodiia” acts as a statement of Ivanov’s unequivocal devotion to Christ over Dionysus.

“Palinodiia” adumbrates a familiar nexus of Orphic, Dionysian and Christian symbolics that is frequently encountered in Ivanov’s poetry. Given the relationship of this symbolic network to theurgy for him, as discussed in chapter 4, one may surmise a theurgic subtext to the poem. Numerous elements of “Palinodiia” can indeed be interpreted within a theurgic framework. The mention of “kumir” (“idol”) in line 2 recalls the theurgic tactic of entrancing telestic objects such as statues in order to communicate prophecies. In this case, however, the idol has gone missing, stolen, perhaps, from the myrtle grove, or smashed by the lyric subject

⁷ Pamela Davidson, “Hellenism, Culture and Christianity: The Case of Vyacheslav Ivanov and his ‘Palinode’ of 1927,” in *Russian Literature and the Classics*, ed. by Peter I. Barta, David H. J. Larmour and Paul Allen Miller (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1996), p. 92.

⁸ Alexis Klimoff, “Two Examples of Philosophical Revisionism in Viacheslav Ivanov’s ‘Roman Diary of 1944’,” in *Cultura e Memoria: Atti del terzo Simposio Internazionale dedicato a Viacheslav Ivanov* (Florence: “La Nuova Italia,” 1988), p. 164.

himself in a moment of terror. The association of myrtle with the idol suggests a connection with Dionysus, who presents Persephone with a myrtle branch in order to gain access to the underworld and rescue his mother, Semele. In line 6, the Dionysian symbolics continue with the image of masks, which are associated with Dionysian theatrical performances. Here the masks, however, cover a “nedvizhnaia dusha” (“inert soul”), indicating a lack of vital content behind their form. The images of the mask and the smashed idol, rather than denoting Dionysus’ presence in the poem, instead seem to suggest his conspicuous absence. It is as if the material devices of theurgy here have failed to achieve their desired effect.

The image of “tel nadmennykh svet” (“the light of haughty bodies”) in line 7 likewise suggests a sense of form absent of content. Pamela Davidson, following Golenishchev-Kutuzov, reads this line as referring to Lucifer, whose name means “light-bearing.”⁹ Another interpretation could place the image in the context of Plato’s allegory of the cave, according to which the captive subject views reality as a succession of shadows projected onto the cave wall by firelight. According to this reading, the lyric subject, like Plato’s cave dweller, is unable to perceive the animate presences behind the images that appear before him. Reality presents itself instead as a series of shadowy representations of an actuality that remains hidden from view. The idol, the hollow mask, and the shadowy figures sketch an Apollonian world of forms that has lost its Dionysian content.

In the first 4 lines of the poem, the lyric subject seems to be in disbelief at the absence of his former source of inspiration. Each line is a question that he appears to be asking himself regarding the loss of his love for “Ellada” (“Hellas”). Lines 1 and 4 are punctuated by the adverb “uzhel” (“really,” “can it be...”), reinforcing his sense of bafflement. The first line

⁹ Davidson, “Hellenism, Culture and Christianity,” p. 96.

begins with “i” (“and”), suggesting that the poem opens *in medias res* of the lyric voice’s strained contemplation. Hellas is apostrophized in the first two lines (“tvoi” [“your”]), and only appears in nominal form in line 4 (“Ellada”). This suggests a sense of intimacy, as if the lyric subject is speaking about someone or something beloved. It likewise builds a degree of suspense as to what the object of his affection is until it is revealed in line 4. The speaker’s apostrophizing of Hellas accentuates the feeling of despondency conveyed by the self-inquiry of the first four lines.

Line 5 signals a thematic departure by beginning with “No” (“But”). Here it is as if the speaker is beginning to formulate an explanation – or a rebuttal – for the questions he has issued. He exclaims that the Dionysian “dushi nedvizhnoi maski” (“masks of your inert soul”) have become terrifying to him (“zhutki stali mne”). His description is prefaced by a past participial phrase, “dukhom obnishchav” (“having become poor in spirit”), that is positioned following “No” (“But”) as an explanatory note on his condition. The phrase is an allusion to the first Beatitude: “Blazheni nishchii dukhom”, iako tekh” est’ tsarstvie nebesnoe” (“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”). Thus the implication is that the lyric subject, having become poor in spirit, no longer sees the value in what had formerly enriched him. He has ceased to feel the “laska” (“caress”) of Hellas; the “tel nadmennykh svet” (“light of haughty bodies”) and the “dum Evklidov stroi” (“harmony of Euclidean thoughts”) now appear empty and lifeless to him. With his new sense of spiritual humility (i.e. following the conversion), what had previously fulfilled him has turned out to be void of meaning.

The next four lines of the poem, however, paint a different picture. In lines 8-11, the Dionysian masks have come to life “kak vstar” (“as of old”), and he is again enticed by the alluring music of “podzemnye fleiti” (“subterranean flutes”). His Dionysian reawakening is

curtailed – in mid-line – by a voice from heaven which instructs him to “‘Pokin’, sluzhitel’, khram ukrashennyi besov’” (“‘Abandon, o priest, the decorated temple of demons’”). He then flees to Thebaid, and, like John the Baptist, subsists in the desert on “dikii med i zhestkie akridy” (“wild honey and rough locusts”). The mention of “med” (“honey”) brings the poem full-circle back to the beginning, when the lyric subject questions whether he has truly been sated by the “gimetskii med” (“Hymettian honey”) of Hellas. Whereas at the opening of the poem he is unsure if he has gotten his fill, at its close, he eats for needed replenishment. At its first mention, the honey symbolizes the saccharine temptations of Hellas, however in the final line, it symbolizes the lyric subject’s resignation of the pre-Christian world. In the penultimate line, the verb tense changes in mid-line from the past to the present: “I ia bezhal, i em...” (“And I fled, and now I eat...”). All of the narration has occurred up to this point in the past tense; the narrative voice then shifts to the present tense and brings the poem to an abrupt end. The speaker is left in a state of ongoing asceticism.

The retractive sentiment of “Palinodiia,” however, is not unequivocal. Several aspects of the poem form an impression that the lyric subject’s ascetic withdrawal is compulsory and reluctant rather than voluntary and willing. His eremitic condition seems to be undesirable but necessary to him; he, after all, embarks for the desert by heavenly injunction just as his revisitation by Dionysus occurs. The state of disbelief in the first half of the poem is relayed more in a tone of exasperation at Dionysus’ absence than one of peaceful resignation. The questions in the first four lines seem to anticipate negated responses, i.e. the Hymettian honey has *not* in fact sated him, the idol has *not* really been stolen *or* broken, and he has *not* fallen definitively out of love with Hellas. There is also a degree of ambiguity as to the locale of the poet’s retreat at the end of the poem; Thebes, on the one hand, evidently points to the Egyptian

desert associated with the early Christian ascetics, but, on the other hand, Thebes could also refer to the city in Crete which, according to Orphic myth, is the birthplace of Dionysus. Thus the speaker's withdrawal to Thebaid can be read in two senses – as secluding himself from Dionysian temptations, or as inviting future encounters with Dionysus.

The poem is written in iambic hexameters, which are associated with the elegiac genre in Russian poetry.¹⁰ Its formal properties thus seem to complement the tone of lament at the absence of Dionysus that suffuses the poem. The hexameters also exude Grecian influence. Orpheus, after all, is the attributed inventor of the hexameter (albeit the dactylic hexameter), and the creator of the Dionysian mystery rites. The iambic hexameter lines contain mid-line caesuras splitting the metrical feet into three and three, which give the poem a highly wrought, classical feel. The poem is, upon closer inspection, suffused with symmetry, an impression stemming not only from the caesura, but also from the thematic turn exactly halfway through the poem, as well as the line referring to “dum Evklidov stroi” (“the harmony of Euclidean thoughts”). The poem's symmetrical, “Euclidean” structure, in other words, is indebted to Greek rationalism.

The symmetry extends to the poem's phonetic structure, which, particularly in the first half, is distinguished by an unusual preponderance of the vowel “i” at the beginning and end of the lines. The first three lines begin with “I” (“And”), “Iz” (“From”), and “Ii” (“Either”), respectively. The fourth line begins with “Uzheli” (“Really”), which ends with “i.” Lines 6 and 7 likewise begin with “I” (“And”). In addition, each of the first four lines of the poem end with masculine rhymes with the stress on “i”: “presytil” (“sated”), “pokhital” (“stole”), “razbil” (“broke”) and “razliubil” (“fallen out of love”). Lines 5 and 6 end with feminine rhymes in

¹⁰ See Mikhail Gasparov, *Ocherk istorii russkogo stikha* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo “Nauka,” 1984), p. 111 and pp. 228-229.

which the unstressed second vowel is “i”: “laski” (“caresses”) and “maski” (“masks”). Lines 7-10 also end with feminine rhymes where the second, unstressed vowel is “i” (though in lines 7 and 8 the “i” is in the form of a consonant: “stroj” [“harmony”] and “igroi” [“game”]). The closing two lines of the poem end with feminine rhymes with a stressed “i”: “Fivaidy” (“Thebaid”) and “akridy” (“locusts”). The extraordinary assonance of line 6 is, not surprisingly, based on “i”: “I zhutki stali mne dushi nedvizhnoi maski” (“And the masks of your inert soul filled me with terror”). The frequent appearance of “i” at the beginning and end of the lines seems to allude to “Dionis” (“Dionysus”), which is spelled with “i” as both its first and last vowels. Thus at the moment when the lyric subject is in his deepest doubts over the presence of Dionysus, the god appears to be lurking just beneath the surface. The speaker’s rejection of Dionysus is replete with Dionysian subtextual presences; the reference to “podzemnye fleiti” (“subterranean flutes”) perhaps most directly alludes to this liminal realm within the poem. While the narrative of the poem seems to lead the lyric subject away from the temptations of pre-Christian civilization, the form situates him firmly within a Greek substrate.

The memoirs of the museum curator B.V. Shaposhnikov’s conversations with Ivanov from this period offer a telling insight into the blended Dionysian and Christian symbolism of the poem. According to Shaposhnikov,

Основной смысл (этого стихотворения) заключался в том, что Вячеслав Иванов считает современное эллинизма возможным только в формах христианства, так как вне этих форм греческий мир есть «храм украшенный бесов»; эллинский дух перешел христианству и в нем получил дальнейшее развитие.¹¹

¹¹ B.V. Shaposhnikov, “Ogon’ sviatilishcha Apollona,” *Nashe nasledie*, no. 119, 2016, <http://www.nasledie-rus.ru/podshivka/11911.php> (accessed Feb. 17, 2018). (“The fundamental meaning [of this poem] consists in the fact that Viacheslav Ivanov considers contemporary Hellenism possible only in the form of Christianity, since outside of this form the Greek world is a ‘decorated temple of demons.’ The Hellenic spirit shifted to Christianity and received its subsequent development in it.”)

Ivanov's explanation provides a template for Christian spirituality that accommodates Hellenism as its forerunner. As in the poem, Ivanov positions Hellenism as prefiguring Christianity, though gives Christianity pride of place. Without Christianity as its successor, "grecheskii mir est' 'khram ukrashennyi besov'" ("the Greek world is a 'decorated temple of demons'"). Christianity is understood here as a continuation of the "ellinskii dukh" ("Greek spirit") that had been cultivated before the appearance of Christ. Ivanov's emphasis on Christianity as the current form that Hellenism has taken recalls the analogous situation in "Palinodiia," where the speaker's rejection of Dionysus in favor of Christ is firmly entrenched in forms and symbols of the classical world.

"Palinodiia" has been interpreted variously as a renunciation of Ivanov's devotion to Dionysus and Greek culture, and as an anticipation of Dionysus' cyclical return.¹² The merged Orphic, Dionysian and Christian symbolics of the poem do not permit a reading that is free of ambiguity or contingency.¹³ The ambivalence of the poem is probably indicative of Ivanov's own stance on the matter. Ivanov, after all, was one of the foremost scholars of Dionysian

¹² See in particular Davidson, "Hellenism, Culture and Christianity," pp. 83-116 for a reading of the poem as a rejection of Dionysus. Bird in "Viacheslav Ivanov za rubezhom," pp. 69-86 interprets the poem as Ivanov's hope for a Dionysian reawakening.

¹³ According to Shaposhnikov's memoir, Ivanov was hesitant at first to publish the poem: "Вячеслав Иванов заявил, что это слишком обязывающее стихотворение, и, написав его, он еще не уверен, может ли нести за него полную ответственность, как это необходимо должен каждый поэт за свои высказывания." Shaposhnikov, "Ogon' sviatilishcha Apollona," (accessed Feb. 17, 2018). ("Viacheslav Ivanov stated that the poem was too binding, and, upon writing it, that he was uncertain whether he could take full responsibility for it, as each poet necessarily must for their statements.") This suggests that Ivanov himself saw the poem as a recantation. Furthermore, he was not eager to make this statement public, perhaps sensing that it would be perceived in terms of closure with his prior work. In a typescript collection of Ivanov's poems located in the Shaposhnikov archive dated 1939, "Palinodiia" appears last, likewise denoting a sense of finality that parallels the poem's thematics.

religion in the past century, and thus his self-willed abandonment of Dionysus could not have occurred without a sense of uncertainty or regret. “Palinodiia” documents Ivanov’s struggle to reconcile worldly wisdom and humility in Christ – a dilemma not unlike the Cappodocian Fathers who had been educated in the Greek philosophical tradition. Much like the Desert Fathers, Ivanov’s solution was to retreat to the Thebaid for prolonged silence and contemplation. While he evidently felt compelled to heed the “s neba zov” (“call from heaven”), his answer was accompanied by a sense of internal conflict that rendered his poetic voice mute for many years.

Upon his conversion, the amalgam of Dionysus, art, and theurgy clearly became tinged with resignation. His turn away from theurgic art appears reluctant, yet self-imposed. Pamela Davidson notes that Ivanov’s

...spiritual development as a Christian was clearly inextricably linked to his creative development as an artist...He is advocating (in “Palinodiia”) the need to strive for a new balance between spiritual purity and artistic expression, to reach art through the spiritual rather than the spiritual through art, as the theurgic symbolists had once set out to do.¹⁴

The poem indicates a shift from the artistic to the spiritual in Ivanov’s sense of theurgic possibility. He has dispensed with art as the point of departure toward theurgic ends, and, “dukhom obnishchav” (“having become poor in spirit”), has been humbled. The culmination of Ivanov’s search for Dionysus through theurgic art turned out to be Christ, much as his construal of Dionysian religion was as a predecessor to Christianity. It appears that his need for theurgy dwindled as his search for the spiritual reached a stage of resolution.

Whereas in his early life poetry acted as a kind of theurgic refuge in which he enlisted his philological education to accumulate theurgically active symbols, Ivanov’s conversion could indicate a shift toward a reliance on the pre-established rituals and dogmas of the Church.

¹⁴ Davidson, “Hellenism, Culture and Christianity,” p. 103.

Instead of the celebrant performing theurgic rites through poetry, he becomes the initiand for whom the rites are performed by the priesthood. In turn, his poetic voice is silenced; he has no need of attempting theurgy through art because he has placed his confidence in the theurgic viability of the rites of the Church. His sense of mystery associated with theurgic symbols yields to the scholastically defined concept of how the sacraments work in Catholicism.

Correspondingly, engaging in theurgy through poetry becomes superfluous as well as a source of conflict about his true spiritual allegiance. In emigrating to Rome and converting to Catholicism, Ivanov has in a sense fulfilled his Dionysian mission; he has arrived in the eternal city and has little need for theurgy as a means of attaining spiritual and creative self-definition.

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