

On the New Significance of Ancient Tragedy:
Translation and Reception of Greek Drama in the Russian Silver Age

by
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Chapter One
Goats After Shakespeare: A Survey of Tragedy in Russia

Когда же нам говорят теперь, что сцена есть священнодействие, актер—жрец, а созерцание драмы приобщает нас таинству, то слова “священнодействие”, “жрец”, “таинство” понимаем мы в неопределенном, многосмысленном, почти бессмысленном смысле этих слов. Что такое священнодействие? Есть ли это акт религиозного действия? Но какого? Перед кем это священнодействие? И какому богу должны мы молиться? Приглашают ли нас вернуться к тем примитивным религиозным формам, из которых развилась драма, или нет, все это остается покрытым мраком неизвестности. Если да, подавайте нам козла для заклания! Но что мы будем делать с козлом после

Шекспира?
Андрей Белый, 1907

When we hear these days that theatre is ritual, the actor a priest and that by contemplating drama we are participating in holy mystery, we understand the words “ritual,” priest,” “mystery” in a vague, ambiguous, almost meaningless way. What is “ritual”? Is it some kind of religious act? But of what kind? Before whom is this ritual to be enacted? And to what god are we supposed to pray? Whether or not we are being invited to return to those forms of religion out of which the drama developed remains veiled in mystery. If we are to do so, then give us a goat for immolation! But what are we to do with a goat after Shakespeare?

Andrei Bely, 1907

Reconciliation is never the aim of tragedy, Vyacheslav Ivanov argued in 1912.¹ Tragic dramas depict two equal forces which, finding themselves in irreconcilable conflict, move first against each other and then, inevitably, toward death. Death is the end of the Bacchic ritual at the root of tragedy, blood spilt from the slit neck of an ox or goat in honor of Dionysus, the many-faced god of dubious origin; Dionysus, the animating force behind the resurrection of tragedy in the minds of certain Russian poets of the fin-de-siecle. Dionysus is not alone on the tragic stage: alongside his heated, rhythmic choruses is the dialogue, which, according to Friedrich Nietzsche’s 1872 study *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, is governed by Apollo. Neatly organized Apollonian stichomythia imposes structure, Ivanov wrote, on the genre, taming the “ecstasy”² of the Dionysian chorus. While the conclusions of tragic dramas often leave their

¹ Ivanov 2018, 198. All translations from Russian are my own unless otherwise noted.

² Ivanov 2018, 200

protagonists in a state of abjection, the audience was not meant to join them in this feeling. Instead, the despondent state of tragic characters was meant to inspire cultic communality among the audience members, reminding them of the universality of their experiences on earth and the consequences of bad behavior. Tragedy provided a forum for discussions of life and mortality that was also wrapped up in religious ritual and worship of the liberating masked god Dionysus. It is no wonder that writers and artists associated with Russian Symbolism turned to tragedy in the violent, unstable, rapidly changing landscape of Russia, and for the purposes of this dissertation, primarily Petersburg, at the turn of the century. The tragic drama is at once high art and folktale, the work of divine geniuses and the bread of the people. It is tragic irony that the poets who painstakingly translated tragic dramas and other literatures from Ancient Greek, and who wrote extensive polemics on the future of theater in Russia and tragedy's potential as a unifying force, were members of a relatively small, esoteric, volatile movement, quite literally enclosed in a "tower" debating minor differences of their aesthetic sensibilities while their country was disintegrating and their countrymen were rallying for revolution. The work they produced, however, was enormously influential for the next century of literary production. Vyacheslav Ivanov's legendary *bashnya* salons in his apartment on the Tavrichesky Sad began in 1905, the same year and several kilometers away from Dvortsovaya Ploshad', where members of the Imperial Guard fired into a crowd of striking workers. Several hundred were killed on *Krovavoye voskresenye*, sending Russian society into years of chaos that would culminate in the dissolution of imperial reign followed by the Bolshevik Revolution. Symbolism and the movement that emerged in opposition to its mystical anarchism, Acmeism, declined in popularity as nationalist fervor gained traction after 1910, and were still not sufficiently aligned with growing revolutionary unrest as 1917 approached. The luminaries of Symbolism and Acmeism were not able to shapeshift

their movements into something that could exist in early Bolshevik society, as movements such as Futurism did. Individual artists and poets who had been associated with Symbolism or Acmeism (or both) continued working in these evolving cultural spaces, doing what was necessary to survive, whether that meant conceding to Soviet cultural aims, “writing into the desk” for decades at a time, or immigrating to Paris, Berlin, or Rome with their memories of the Russia they left behind and the Russia they had hoped to create.

The ancient origins of tragedy as a religious ritual that evolved into performance are murky, but tragedy in the form we recognize today came into prominence in Athens in the fifth century BCE, and as a genre it has continued to evolve and generate thought for millennia. This dissertation will examine tragedy as it existed in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Russia, and as it was invoked by writers associated with or against (in the case of Acmeism) Symbolism. Classical influence permeated countless areas of culture and artistic production during this period, so the constraint of this dissertation will be working primarily with texts and theory produced by writers who were trained in Ancient Greek and Latin to the extent that they were able to competently and oftentimes wonderfully translate tragic works themselves into Russian: Vyacheslav Ivanov, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, and Innokenty Annensky. These translation and reception projects were scaffolded by sparkling theoretical writing on the future of Russian theater and the use of tragedy in modernity by these three writers and many of their compatriots, including Andrei Bely, Aleksandr Blok, Valery Bryusov, Nikolai Gumiliev, Osip Mandelstam, and Vsevolod Meyerhold.

My three subjects were not the only translators to embark on the task of bringing Attic tragedies into Russian. The Brockhaus-Efron Encyclopedia entries on Euripides, Sophocles, and Aeschylus list a number of translators of each playwright undertaken in the nineteenth century,

primarily done by scholars translating for academic purposes. In this category are Aleksei Merzlyakov (1778–1832) and Pyotr Dmitrievich Shestakov (1826–1889) who each translated several works by Euripides, including the *Hippolytus* and *Medea*. Concurrently with the advent of Russian Symbolism, the classical philologists N. Kotelov, V. I. Vodovozov, and V. Alekseyev published translations of collections and sections from tragedy in the 1880s. Alekseyev's translations were in prose. Vladimir Zubkov, a classical philologist at Moscow University, translated *The Women of Trachis* by Sophocles in 1880. The encyclopedia entries for Sophocles and Euripides were written by Fyodor Gerasimovich Mishchenko (1848–1906), a professor of classics at Kazan University, who himself translated Sophocles' Theban plays in 1872. The entry on Aeschylus was written by Tadeusz Zielinski, the Polish-born classicist whose lectures calling for a "Slavonic Renaissance" were popular in Petersburg in the fin-de-siecle, and who worked extensively with Ivanov and Annensky. His work and influence will be discussed at length in chapters two and three. Among the translators of Aeschylus, Zielinski mentions the poet Apollon Maikov (1821–1897), the Polish classicist Ignatyi Kossovich (1808–1878), and the classical philologist Vladimir Appel'rot (1865–1897). These pedagogical translations are not the subject of this dissertation: I am interested in tragedy as it intersects with modernist poetry and the aesthetic manifestos of Ivanov, Merezhkovsky, and Annensky, who all endeavored to make tragedy part of the Russian zeitgeist, envisioned for it a higher purpose, and strove to transport the ancient plays as far outside the academy as they could manage (which, to be honest, was sometimes not very far).

The theatrical world of Petersburg was alight with the work of visionary dramatists, and Symbolists knew the stage would be a key site for the enactment of their incendiary aesthetic philosophies, which were heavily drawn from the nineteenth-century studies on tragedy by Richard

Wagner and Friedrich Nietzsche. Wagner and Nietzsche wrote treatises on the resurrection of tragedy for its aesthetic efficacy and for its capacity to foster communal, national feeling. Ivanov reiterated these ideas in 1906.

Theaters of choral tragedies, comedies, and mysteries must become the hearths of the nation's creative or prophetic self-determination. The problem of fusing the actors and spectators into a single orgiastic body will only be resolved when, with the vital and creative mediation of the chorus, the drama becomes not a spectacle offered from outside, but the inner work of the national *community* that has chosen this particular *orchestra* as its focus.³

Alongside the influence of Wagner and Nietzsche, the other dominating framework shaping these projects was a renewed interest among the intelligentsia in Russian Orthodoxy. The translation of Greek tragedy and related reception projects often used literary and linguistic parallels with Russian Orthodox Christianity to create a version of antiquity these writers (Ivanov and Merezhkovsky in particular) believed to be suited for this period of modernity. This follows in a tradition dating to the Roman Empire in which structures and plots from tragedy were mingled with Christian myth by monks and theologians who were educated in Greek and saw how useful the tragic genre could be to disseminate Christian ideas. In the case of the early Russian modernists, these translation choices were made not anticipating the imminent Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet rejection of organized religion. As liturgical texts were erased from the Russian educational system and religious worship went underground culturally, the mingling of Greek and Christian language and myth wrought by Symbolist poets became increasingly archaic and alienating to its readers in the Soviet Union. The result is that these translations, which were meant to reinvigorate interest in tragedy and align with Russianness, are recognizable as products of the narrow period of time before the revolution, its language hewn to the aesthetic notions of a practically extinguished (and in the Soviet Union suppressed) literary movement. Despite this, these

³ Ivanov, 110

translations remain among the most widely read and well-regarded translations of tragedy available for Russophone readers. The aim of this dissertation is to determine how the unique cultural forces of this period shaped the separate but interweaving projects of Ivanov, Merezhkovsky, and Annensky to reintroduce and transform Greek tragedy in the decades leading up to the revolution. I argue that each translator, within the same three decades (1890–1920), established a unique manifesto for tragic reception that responds to the same combination of cultural forces. This introductory chapter will discuss the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century receptions and translations of Greek tragedy in Russia that predated Symbolism, and introduce the theoretical debates that competed to offer a modern interpretation of the ancient form. These polemics centered around Nietzsche’s study on the Dionysian and Apollonian dichotomy in tragic structure, which provided a rich framework through which Russian Symbolists developed and expanded their own theories for the application of antiquity to the art and literature of modernity.

Tragedies in Athens were performed during a festival called the Dionysia, honoring the eponymous god with three tetralogies of dramatic plays, scheduled alongside animal sacrifices and religious rituals. The word “drama” is derived from the Greek verb *δράω*, “to do,” and “drama” means “deed” or “act.” The word for rite or ritual is *δρῶμενον* (*dromenon*), derived from the same verb, and translates literally to “the thing done” or “action.” Jane Ellen Harrison, an early-twentieth-century classicist who, like Zielinski in Russia at practically the same time, was known throughout England for her engaging, informative lectures on classical history and culture. She published the seminal study *Ancient Art and Ritual* in 1914, in which she illuminates the linked ancestry between art and religious ritual (a concept that scholars including Ivanov had been arguing in Germany and Russia for decades). Harrison argues that “these two divergent developments have a common root, and that neither can be understood without the other. [...] It is at the outset of and

the same impulse that sends a man to church and to the theatre.”⁴ The church and the theater both revolve around collectivity and shared experience, and a collective sharing emotional tension transforms a “simple reaction into a rite.”⁵ While the Dionysia preserved religious ritual and made it a central moment of the festival, the creation of the drama can be seen as a reaction to the decrease in a ritualistic approach to religion as people moved from tribal systems to cities like Athens. The desire to replicate the sensation of ritual collectivity by recreating its material circumstances, i.e. communal singing, dancing, and sacrifice, is where the mimesis (imitation) comes in, which is what we now understand as art.

The ancient ritual that is believed to have evolved into tragic performance began with the dithyramb, a hymn sung to honor Dionysus. No complete dithyrambs have survived into modernity. The earliest mention of the dithyramb in poetry comes from the seventh-century BCE iambic poet Archilochus of Paris, who wrote “I know how to lead the fair song of Lord Dionysus, the dithyramb, when my wits are fused with wine.”⁶ Two centuries later, in the fifth century BCE, a fragment left by Aeschylus notes that “the dithyramb of mixed voice should accompany the revels of Dionysus.”⁷ Between these centuries, the use of dithyramb in religious worship spread through regions such as Delphi, Naxos, and Thebes, and lengthened from several lines of poetry to longer sets of verse led by a chorus. The “chorus dithyramb” finally reached “full literary development in connection with the Dionysiac festivals at Athens,” according to Arthur Pickard-Cambridge.⁸ While other regions expanded upon dithyrambic ritual in unique ways, the tragedy, sung and danced by actors wearing masks, was “exclusively Athenian.”⁹ The stem of the term

⁴ Harrison, 9-10

⁵ Harrison, 36

⁶ Pickard-Cambridge, 1

⁷ Pickard-Cambridge, 2

⁸ Pickard-Cambridge, 31

⁹ Pickard-Cambridge, 52

“tragedy,” τραγωδία, is τράγος, which means goat. What this implies is the subject of centuries of scholarship and debate, which boil down to the following: that this may be a reference to the chorus who were in the guise of goat-like satyrs, that these chorus members may have been wearing goat-skins for ritual reasons, that the goat was a prize for the winning tragedian, or that the goat would be sacrificed as part of the performance.¹⁰ This is the goat whose continued relevance Andrei Bely questioned in the epigraph to this chapter. Early tragedy consisted only of choral verses; the actor Thespis is credited for introducing the solo actor into the performance. This was expanded in the work of Aeschylus.¹¹

Fragments of tragedies exist from a number of playwrights who were frequently victorious in the Dionysia, but Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides are the only fifth-century tragedians with dramas that have survived to the present day, (mostly) complete. The plays we have are tantalizingly few compared with the prolific output of the ancient dramatists: Sophocles is said to have written over one hundred plays, with only seven surviving, alongside seven of Aeschylus’ ninety dramas, and nineteen of Euripides’ ninety-two. Analysis of these surviving plays reveals that they share complex thematic and metrical structures, demonstrating patterns that give modern scholars relatively clear ideas about what tragedy was meant to relay to ancient audiences, and how it functioned as part of Athenian society. All the extant tragedies were performed publicly and depicted an event or series of events that could be understood and reckoned with by all members of society, represented within the drama by the chorus members, who were meant to stand in for “ordinary people,” using well-known semihistorical myth to provide characters and setting. Tragedies depict the limits of human power, intersecting desires of men and forces more powerful than men, all leading to an overwhelming question: what is the meaning of life? Why are

¹⁰ Pickard-Cambridge, 113

¹¹ Pickard-Cambridge, 121

we here, alive, somehow both mired in an inescapable *moira* (fate) and seemingly endowed with the ability to make choices? Tragedy in the fifth century predates the lives and teachings of Plato and Aristotle, but served a similar purpose as a mode of rhetorically working out crises of mortality and the consequences of harm caused to others, against the greater cosmic context of religion, war, and other powers beyond our control. The dominion of Socratic thought, which Nietzsche despised for being overly rational, also created a gulf between these kinds of existential questions in art and their representation in sacrificial ritual. The ritual is meant to satiate a more primitive desire to see the dead resurrected, and the subsequent belief that the one resurrected is divine. This particular type of ritual is found in Egyptian as well as Greek and later Christian religious rites. Harrison writes, “In ritual, the thing desired, i.e. resurrection, is acted, in art it is represented.”¹²

The neoclassical revival of tragedy in the eighteenth century, exemplified in the plays of Jean Racine, did not have any interest in reviving the genre as a religious sacrificial rite, but viewed tragedy in the style in which neoclassicists preferred to imagine the ancient world: cold, perfect marble, with tragedies subjected to this framework of completeness and discipline. In *Greek Tragedy and the Modern World*, Leo Aylen argues that tragedy cannot exist in the modern era as it did in antiquity because of the difference in function: to entertain rather than to represent in a religious context. Aylen writes, “The temptation to avoid unsettling the audience is too strong.”¹³ Neoclassical tragedies were written with the intention of supporting political and social norms, and the dominance of reason over passion, while the morals and conclusions of the tragedies of Athens can be obscure and perplexing, meant to mirror the painful, morally complicated nature of being alive and interacting with the world.

¹² Harrison, 8

¹³ Aylen, 342

The Russian Symbolists were a collective of poets in Russia around the turn of the twentieth century among whom some, for a multiplicity of reasons, had a vested interest in reviving tragedy as it existed during the Dionysia. This movement emerged in the 1890s and is often divided into two stages which are associated with two groups of poets, although in reality there was frequent overlap between the two groups, and the divide came down to a differing theoretical and philosophical outlook that was developed by the “younger” group around the turn of the century, under the stewardship of Vladimir Solovyov. The first, “older” wave of Symbolists, which counted among them Valery Bryusov, Konstantin Balmont, Dmitri Merezhkovsky, Zinaida Gippius, and Fyodor Sologub, were more directly inspired by French Symbolism, while the second wave, which included Andrei Bely, Aleksandr Blok, and Vyacheslav Ivanov, had interests more closely related to German Romanticism. For Symbolists, art was not only an end in itself but a spiritual, mystical experience intertwined into their artistic production and quotidian life. Symbolist theory and aesthetics were greatly inspired by the philosophical writings of Solovyov, who mingled Hellenistic and early Christian tradition in his work, writing about the idea that man has the potential to reach an ideal, divine state which he should always be striving to reach. Solovyov’s writing was influential to key figures in the Symbolist movement, including Merezhkovsky, Blok, and Bely, but none more so than Ivanov. Ivanov is central to discussions of Symbolist aesthetics in general and especially those concerning elements of Hellenism because he wrote at length what would become the theoretical framework for Russian Symbolism, and was a brilliantly erudite scholar of classical languages and literature. His poetry is based in the Symbolist idea of higher reality, not in the sense of metaphor, but in its possibilities for public function and prophecy. Ivanov looked back at the poets of antiquity for examples of this kind of exalted poetry. His devotion in classical antiquity goes much further: he often wrote poems in classical meters, with

vocabulary and names from Greek, with allusions to Greek and Roman mythology, to say nothing of his propensity to wear a toga and lead friends in ancient rituals, which sometimes involved light bloodletting. Ivanov's interest in reviving antiquity is rooted in his fascination with Dionysus, spawning from his discovery of Nietzsche in the 1890s, and would write myriad poems as well as multiple studies on the god and his mystic followers in antiquity, and would emulate Dionysus and his followers in his own life, including in his relationship with his wife, whom he married in a Dionysian ritual and called his "maenad" after the female followers of Dionysus in myth.

Community among the Symbolists and their friends blossomed at Ivanov's Wednesday night salons at the Tower, where he hosted many of the most brilliant writers and artists of the moment, including Bryusov, Bely, and Blok, who were all part of a group they called the Argonauts, in reference to Jason's crew of hero-sailors in the *Argonautika* by Apollonius of Rhodes. Interest in classical antiquity pervaded the works of nearly every Symbolist, and can be seen in a vast array of poems, dramas, articles, novels, and translations. Osip Mandelstam encountered Ivanov at the Tower, and impressed the elder poet with his knowledge of Ancient Greek language and literature, although Mandelstam would not ally with Ivanov's theories of poetry and rather joined with the Acmeists poets who were drawn to the antique but rejected Symbolist mysticism. Mandelstam and Nikolai Gumiliev built Acmeism around the ideas of Innokenty Annensky, a poet and philologist whose work was appreciated exponentially more after his untimely death at age fifty-four in 1909. This collective founded the journal *Apollon* in 1909, making explicit their alliance with Apollo, god of poetic order and the word, against the Symbolist fascination with chaotic Dionysus. The popularity of the aesthetics of the ancient world in the fin-de-siecle went beyond Symbolism and Acmeism, entering mainstream popular culture in music: the composer Sergei Taneyev wrote and staged an operatic adaptation of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* in

1895. The scale of this resurgence of interest in the antique allowed Tadeusz Zielinski, the brilliant Polish-born classical philologist, who gave a series of popular lectures on philosophy and literature of antiquity, to summon into this era of Russian culture a “Slavonic Renaissance,” a Russian version of the European rediscovery of the ideas and art of the ancients four centuries prior. The fact that this Slavonic Renaissance was occurring so many centuries after its predecessor meant that the Russians were simultaneously receiving the art and literature of classical antiquity and the Italian Renaissance, as well as the philosophical works of the Enlightenment, and finally, German Romanticism, a movement that profoundly influenced Russian writers throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Symbolists can rarely be described accurately as a monolith, but one characteristic widely shared was incredibly deep and varied erudition in literature, arts, religion, and philosophy. They were acutely aware of the history of Russian literature and more specifically, the evolving nature of classical reception in Russia, so prior to further discussion of tragedy in Russian literature and subsequently in Symbolism, it is necessary to give an overview of the stages of classical reception in Russia, and discuss how this process differed from the trajectories of reception in the West.

A Survey of Classical Reception up to 1890

In this survey, I will be focusing on cultural mythologies around classical literature, particularly the mythologies built around a connection between Ancient Greece and Russia, and on experiments with translation and versification, as these concepts will recur and be central to my discussions of Silver Age reception. The deepest roots of classical reception in Russia are in medieval Christianity. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, theological academies taught Greek and Old Church Slavonic to read the holy gospels. In 1632, Peter Mohyla, a Ukrainian priest

who had received a Jesuit education in Poland, founded a school in Kyiv where for the first time Latin was added to the curriculum alongside Greek and Slavonic for the first time.¹⁴ Another Jesuit practice added to Orthodox education was the Latin school drama, a religious theater of morality and mystery plays depicting biblical plots and the lives of saints, which students performed in Latin.¹⁵ Jesuit Latin dramas were also allowed to use stories from Greek and Roman mythology in allegorical representations. Students at the Kievan Mohyla Academy were assigned Horace and Aristotle, and read about the dramatic genres of tragedy and comedy in textbooks by the Jesuit German classicist Jacob Spanmüller, who went by the name Pontanus. The classical reception that followed in the eighteenth century, heavily influenced by French neoclassicism, was in some ways a rupture from this arcane, medieval, liturgical language study, but in other ways could not have existed without it: the Russian neoclassicists were frequently educated in academies that followed the curricula established by the schools under the Orthodox Church. Nonreligious literature and arts were officially forbidden by the church, so it is unlikely that students in these academies would have had contact with the tragedians or with Homer firsthand, but it would be in these cultural realms that the legacy of this period would prevail into modernity. The languages, religious texts, teachings, and visual aesthetics of the pre-Enlightenment era would be highly influential and inspiration to artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and were extremely important to the Symbolists in particular.

In Russia, as in many empires in various epochs, antiquity has been referenced at the beginning of ambitious reigns or eras in order to project an authority and natural right to power. Peter I drew inspiration from Rome and decorated his court with Roman iconography, and Catherine II saw utility in representing Russia as the natural heir to the Byzantine Empire, in the

¹⁴ Karlinsky, 9

¹⁵ Karlinsky, 10

name of expanding her own empire southward. Interpolation of classical antiquity into Russian literary culture was one of the many tendrils of Westernization in Russia that originated in the reign of Peter I, and only intensified under Catherine II. The literary legacy of the eighteenth century can be described as it being a time of experimentation and expansion of reference and influence. The first step for any germinating literary culture in the West (or near the West...) for the past millennium has been to look back at Ancient Greek and Roman texts, genres, and forms for inspiration and rooting in the greater historical tradition. The eighteenth century is often unfairly remembered as a time when imitation and mimicry of European forms was the only cultural product, but it was due to these sometimes halting steps forward that nineteenth-century Romantic poets were able to accelerate into a gallop toward their own national literature.

When eighteenth-century Russian poets and scholars began to integrate reference to antiquity into their work, their reception of classical heritage was primarily mediated through its contact with European culture.¹⁶ Writers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries engaged with antiquity most often through the framework of neoclassicism, accessing Greek and Roman literature through translations into French or German. Viktor Zhivov argues in *Language and Culture in Eighteenth Century Russia* that the cultivation of classical aesthetics at this particular moment in Russian history was not only in the interest of participating in great Western cultural tradition, it was also a rejection of the Middle Ages.

In the framework of the contrast between the Classical Age and the barbarian Middle Ages that formed in sixteenth and seventeenth-century cultural consciousness, the values of Greece and Rome were endowed with all positive values, while the Middle Ages were declared a time in which good taste was corrupted. [...] Rejecting the Middle Ages inferred a focus on antiquity. In this way the interest in the classics was not an organic part of the Classicist program but a consequence of the collateral battle that was being waged with previous cultural epochs.¹⁷

¹⁶ Torlone, 590

¹⁷ Zhivov, 250

Zhivov does not attribute this urge to distance the present from the not-so-distant medieval past solely to the Russians, mentioning a screed written by the French historian Charles Rollin in which he laments the inability of French to express the subtleties of Latin and Greek, indicating a belief in the natural superiority of these ancient languages in their ability to convey complex ideas, which could not be matched by modern languages or by languages and literary artifacts of the medieval period. The poet Vasily Trediakovsky spent thirty years translating Rollin's nine-volume *Histoire Ancienne* (Ancient History) and fifteen-volume *Histoire Romaine* (Roman History) from French into Russian, which he published in full by 1766. These volumes, according to the Formalist literary critic Lev Pumpyansky, quickly became "encyclopedias of knowledge for several generations of Russian intelligentsia."¹⁸ Pumpyansky adds that Rollin's perspective on the superiority of ancient culture "molded [Trediakovsky's] literary views."¹⁹ However, Trediakovsky was interested in older forms of Slavonic language and excavated remaining literature for its connections to Ancient Greek, writing in 1766, "Nature gave it all the abundance and sweetness of the Hellenic tongue, and all the importance and gravity of Latin. Why should we voluntarily subject ourselves to French poverty and narrowness when we have the myriad richness and breadth of Slavenorossiiskii?"²⁰

Trediakovsky is incredibly important to Russian literature owing to the fact that in 1735 he introduced the metrical foot, borrowed from Greek and Latin, into Russian poetry, which made the regular alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables the main rhythmic principle of Russian verse. This was the precursor of the syllabotonic verse that is still dominant in Russian poetry. Prior to the eighteenth century, all medieval literature was in prose. Michael Wachtel, in *The*

¹⁸ Pumpyansky, 215

¹⁹ Zhivov, 252

²⁰ Zhivov, 254

Development of Russian Verse: Meter and its Meanings, writes that the Russian language is immediately stymied by the fact that Ancient Greek and Latin prosody rely on the length of vowels, a concept nonexistent in Russian, and also did not use rhyme, a main tenet of poetry in modern languages.²¹ Trediakovsky set a precedent of choosing to imitate the ancient meters regardless of vowel quantity, altering ancient versification by using stressed and unstressed syllables instead of the long and short vowels. Wachtel indicates that this may have been influenced by the tendency of German poetics to follow this pattern as well.

In 1766, Trediakovsky published an epic poem called *Telemakhida* (*Телемахиды*), an adaptation of François Fénelon's novel *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (The Adventures of Telemachus). Trediakovsky ambitiously set his poem in dactylo-trochaic hexameter, a variation of the dactylic hexameter in which the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid* were composed, a meter that had never been used in Russian verse. In his introduction to this poem, Trediakovsky notes that French translations of epic poetry tend to use rhymed alexandrines (lines of verse made up of six iambic feet) to convey the heroic sound of the dactylic hexameter in Latin and Ancient Greek, and, further, that the French language is not capable of recreating the "metrical richness" of the original language, whereas Russian is perfectly suited to do so. Trediakovsky writes,

Что ж до нашего языка, то он столько ж благолепно воскриляется дактилем, сколько и сам еллинский и римский; и так же преизящно употребляет пренесение речей с места на другое, не пригвождаясь к одному определенному, как и оный еллинский с латинским: природа ему даровала все изобилие и сладость языка того еллинского, а всю важность и сановность латинского.²²

As for our language, it is as decorously extolled by dactyl as the Hellenic and Roman languages themselves; and it uses the same most elegant transference of speech from place to another, not nailing it to one specific one, as the Hellenic language with Latin: nature

²¹ Wachtel, 172

²² Trediakovskii, 522

has given it all the abundance and sweetness of that Hellenic language, and all the importance and dignity of the Latin.

The *Telemakhida* was not received well by Trediakovsky's contemporaries, and was even the subject of mockery from none other than Catherine II herself, who recommended it as a cure for insomnia.²³ According to D. S. Mirsky, as soon as Trediakovsky's *Telemakhida* appeared, it "became a byword for all that is pedantic and ugly."²⁴ The *Telemakhida* is the subject of an extensive rehabilitation in Lev Pumpyansky's posthumous *History of Russian Literature* (*История русской литературы*, 1941), in which Pumpyansky argues that Trediakovsky deserves credit not only for pioneering the use of dactylo-trochaic hexameter in Russian, the meter that both Nikolai Gnedich would use in his translation of the *Iliad* (1826) and Vasily Zhukovsky would use for his *Odyssey* (1849), but also for decades of endeavoring to move Russian poetry forward.

Similarly interested in ancient languages, history, and versification, Trediakovsky's fellow scholarly poet, and sometime rival, Mikhail Lomonosov, is remembered for introducing linguistic reforms into Russian. Lomonosov took Trediakovsky's text *New and Brief Methods for Composing Russian Verse* (*Новый и краткий способ к сложению российских стихов*) with him to Germany, where he further studied syllabotonic poetry and after that wrote his own "Epistle on the Rules of Russian Versification" ("Письмо о правилах российского стихотворства"). He disagreed with Trediakovsky's claim that the ideal length of a line of Russian poetry was eleven or thirteen syllables, but proposed that lines of verse have both bisyllabic and trisyllabic meters and mix verse feet within a line. Lomonosov also designated "high," "middle," and "low" styles of diction, with tragedy, alongside the solemn ode and the epic, in the "high" category. High styles

²³ Scherr, 127

²⁴ Mirsky, 42

of diction were populated with more words and phrases from the ecclesiastical languages, Church Slavonic and Latin, and low styles used common colloquial diction. Lomonosov concurs with Trediakovsky that Greek had a transformative effect on the language of the medieval and pre-medieval Slavic people, as he explains in his “Foreword on the Use of Church Books”:

In ancient times, when the Slavonic people did not know how to depict its thoughts in writing, thoughts which were then very limited due to ignorance about many things and actions that were known [only] to educated peoples, its language was also not abundant in many phrases and expressions of the intellect, of the kind we read today. This richness was acquired first and foremost together with the Greek Christian law, when church books were translated into Slavonic for glorifying God. The outstanding beauty, abundance, importance and power of the Hellenic word is very highly esteemed; lovers of the verbal arts amply attest to this.²⁵

By holding Old Church Slavonic right beside Ancient Greek, compressing centuries of linguistic morphology in Greek between the classical language of Plato and the Byzantine Greek of the “Apostles to the Slavs,” Kirill and Methodius, who translated the Gospels into Old Church Slavonic in 863 AD, Lomonosov and Trediakovsky endow Russian with the credibility to be the foundation of a great literary and linguistic tradition. Their interpolation of vocabulary from Church Slavonic in “high” styles of literature was meant to evoke the etymological connection with Greek, a way of denying that adoption of classical ideals in Russian literature was solely a mimetic replication of French and German trends. This is precisely the mythmaking that will recur consistently in the history of Russian classical reception: regardless of whether this linguistic genealogy would stand up to analysis, the messaging is that rather than being behind France, Germany, and England, and their several centuries’ head start in artistic advancement, Russian literature is the inheritor of the ancient world.

²⁵ Zhivov, 253

Classical theater was introduced to Russian audiences by Alexander Sumarokov: his drama *Khorev* (*Хорев*), performed for the first time in 1747, is considered the first tragedy in Russian literature, centered around the eponymous East Slavic mythological hero. Mirsky writes:

It was no doubt that the good acting made the reputation of Sumarokov, as the literary value of his plays is small. His tragedies are a stultification of the classical method; their Alexandrine couplets are exceedingly harsh; their characters are marionettes. His comedies are adaptations of French plays, with a feeble sprinkling of Russian traits. Their dialogue is a stilted prose that had never been spoken by anyone and reeked of translation.²⁶

Sumarokov's tragedies are emblematic of the type of neoclassical pastiches of French literature from which later Russian classicists strove to distinguish themselves. These dramas will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter. The period in which Trediakovsky, Lomonosov, and Sumarokov were writing (1740–1770) is important to this dissertation because of the key developments in versification, experiments in genres such as the tragedy and the ode, and translations from French and Latin that would be fruitfully developed by later Romantic poets. It is notable that while, again, it was common for educated poets like those mentioned above to know Latin well enough to translate and investigate its structures, an orientation toward Greek in particular as a mode of reception and revival can be linked to Catherine II's "Greek Plan" to forge a direct line from the Russian Empire to antiquity.

The Greek Plan (Греческий проект) envisioned the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire between Russia and the Hapsburgs Empire. The aim of this plan was for Russia to "liberate" Constantinople by expelling the Turkish population and "reestablish" the Byzantine Empire, which would be ruled by her intentionally named grandson Konstantin, who was born in the midst of these plans in 1779. Grand Duke Konstantin Pavlovich's destiny was so thoroughly planned out

²⁶ Mirsky, 54

by his empress grandmother that she made sure he was cared for by a Greek nurse at birth.²⁷ The Greek Plan also entailed extensive renaming of cities in Novorossiia (modern day Ukraine) with Greek-sounding names: for example, the port city Kherson (formerly Bilchowiez) was so named in 1778 after the ancient Greek colony Cherson (Χερσών), and Sebastopol (formerly Aqyar) after the ancient port settlement Sebastopolis (Σεβαστούπολις). Catherine visited these cities on her infamous journey along the Crimean peninsula in 1787, during which she was inspecting land recently conquered in Russian wars against the Ottomans. This trip is the source of the expression “Potemkin village,” as Catherine’s experience of the Black Sea territories was moderated by Grigorii Potemkin and the facades of flourishing villages he constructed to falsely represent the region. Needless to say, the reclaiming of Byzantium in any literal sense never came to pass, as Catherine’s co-conspirators, the Habsburgs, were soon preoccupied with the French Revolution and the following Napoleonic wars.

The lasting effects of this attempt to expand the Russian Empire can be found in the cultural sphere. Catherine II’s interest in perpetuating the idea that Russia was related organically to Ancient Greece through their Slavic ancestor and Byzantium led to the addition of Ancient Greek and Latin to the education system by the end of the eighteenth century. Prior to this, classical languages were primarily offered at specialized academies. For example, Lomonosov and Trediakovsky had been educated at the Slavonic-Greek-Latin Academy in Moscow, and received Kievan-style Latin classes from Ukrainian-born teachers.²⁸ In 1818, Sergei Uvarov, an important figure in the history of Russian Classics, sought to ensure that Greek and Latin were permanent fixtures in Russian education. Uvarov began as a head of the Petersburg educational district, but ascended to the role of Minister of Education in 1833 and held this role until 1849. He served as

²⁷ Wes, 47

²⁸ Wirtschafter, 5

the president of the Academy of Sciences for thirty-seven years, from 1818 until his death. According to Cynthia H. Whittaker, Uvarov's biographer, Uvarov felt strongly that for Russia to develop into the world empire he hoped it would become in the nineteenth century, there was a fervent need for a classical education that was not simply an imitation of European precedent, but a new, distinctly Russian classical education.²⁹ To keep with French neoclassicism, a movement already regarded as out of vogue with burgeoning Russian Romantics, would be to continue imitating a movement that was an imitation of Renaissance revivals of Latin forms, which to Greek purists was even at this ancient point a pale imitation of the original Greek culture. For Russian literature to be shaped by neoclassicism, Uvarov wrote, would "look like an infant carrying all signs of senility or withered youth."³⁰ He describes this kind of education in a proposal for the founding of an Academy Asiaque sent to Minister of Education Andrei Razumovsky in 1810.

Russia has a great advantage over the rest of Europe. It can take Greek literature as the basis for its own national literature and in this way found an entirely new school. It need not be guided by German letters or French esprit or our ponderous Latin scholarship. The profound study of Greek and its literature will open up an inexhaustible source of new ideas and fertile images. It will give shape to history, philosophy, and poetry in the purest forms, forms which come closest to the true models. Precisely the Greek language, for that matter, is in itself already closely tied to the religion of the Russians and to Slavonic language and literature, which seems to have been modeled on Greek. Russia's earliest writers particularly studied the historians and the geographers of the ancient Greeks. No doubt there are fine Greek manuscripts of Strabo for instance, to be found in Russia. And Byzantine history is important for the Russians for more than one reason. But here they need their own scholars, who bring a classical Greek literature to the study of the Byzantines and are prepared to devote the best part of their lives to them.³¹

Uvarov is referencing an idea also espoused by the German classical scholar Christian Gottlob Heynes. Heynes made this comment in 1768, the same year Catherine II sponsored the Orlov

²⁹ Whittaker, 5

³⁰ Whittaker, 26

³¹ Wes, 115-116

Revolt as part of her Greek Plan, and he encapsulates the cultural and linguistic mythology Catherine hoped would spread. Uvarov suffixes his proposal: “Unfortunately, the only thing still lacking is that this plan still has to be carried out.”³² The following year, Uvarov introduced a gymnasium plan that halved the number of hours of German and French language lessons, and made Latin and Greek mandatory. Marinus A. Wes in *Classics in Russia: 1700–1855* argues that without Uvarov singlehandedly proposing and then pushing his plan through various bureaucratic educational committees, revival of Greek and Latin would have stayed solely in the upper echelons of the education system and rarefied literary circles, in the lycée attended by Pushkin rather than the Moscow gymnasium attended sixty years later by Vyacheslav Ivanov, the son of a civil servant. Wes calculates that by 1849, there were between five thousand and six thousand young students who reached the highest levels of Greek classes and had language proficiency comparable to students in the French and German universities in which prior generations of Russians had traveled to study. It was this access to classical languages at school, as well as the preponderance of ancient literature in translation that became accessible at the same time, that lay the groundwork for the reception achievements of Silver Age writers this dissertation will discuss. Beyond his work in education policy, Uvarov studied Greek for fifteen years with the classical scholar Friedrich Gräfe as his tutor, and with the Romantic poet Igor Batyushkov he published a translation of a volume of Greek epigrams in 1820. Batyushkov would glowingly praise Uvarov as seeming “Athens born.”³³ It was in fact Uvarov who persuaded Gnedich to retain the hexameters of Greek in his translation of the *Iliad*, discouraging him from using the “boring and dry” Alexandrines of French translations.³⁴ Gnedich’s translation of the *Iliad*, published in 1829, was received warmly by

³² Wes, 116

³³ Whittaker, 27

³⁴ Whittaker, 28

critics, and it is still the canonized version of the *Iliad* most commonly read in Russian. In his introduction to the text, Gnedich emphasized the lexical similarities between Russian and Greek that allowed him to follow the text closely, citing a recent study by Constantine Oikonomos, a Greek Orthodox priest who had fled Greece during the War of Independence and lived in Russia. The study, titled “Study of the Similarities in the Slavonic Russian and Greek Languages,” (“О ближайшем родстве славяно-российского языка с эллинским”), was published in Greek and in Russian translation by the Imperial Russian Academy in 1828. Gnedich writes,

The beauty of the original moulded into the translation by itself because the Slavonic language, with its free word order, similar to that of Russian, easily follows the movement of the phrases and the forms of Greek ideas. This was strengthened by the magical affinity of these two languages which had been proved so well by Father Constantine Ekonomid in his *Study of the Similarities in the Slavonic Russian and Greek Languages*, St. Petersburg, 1828. In my understanding of translation merit I adhered to Homer and, following the intelligent saying that one has to translate customs similarly to language, I did not omit nor did I change anything. Great writers have such forceful expressions that can convey, better than a whole book, an understanding of a character who speaks to them or of a nation which uses them. Changing these expressions into Russian, I tried not to make Homer’s thoughts sound Russian, and what is even more important, not to embellish the original.³⁵

The critic Vissarion Belinsky said Gnedich’s *Iliad* “preserved the aroma” of the original Greek.³⁶

Pushkin in 1832 dedicated a poem to Gnedich in which he compared Gnedich and his *Iliad* to Moses bringing his tablets from Mount Sinai: “С Гомером долго ты беседовал один, / Тебя мы долго ожидали, / И светел ты сошел с таинственных вершин / И вынес нам свои скрижали.”

Allow me one more example of praise in poem form to celebrate Gnedich’s achievement, a six line poem by Anton Delvig:

Н.И. Гнедичу
Муза вчера мне, певец, принесла закожитную новость:
В темный недавно Айдеc тень славянина пришла;
Там, окруженная сонмом теней любопытных, пропела
(Слушал и древний Омер) песнь Илиады твоей.

³⁵ Baer, 65-66

³⁶ Belinskii 1976, 453

Старец наш к персям вожатого-юноши сладко приникнув,
Вскрикнул: «Вот слава моя, вот чего веки я ждал!»

To N. I. Gnedich

Singer! The muse just brought me some news from the realm of the shadows:
Down in Hades so dark, recently entered a Slav;
There in a circle of curious shadows this Slav then recited
Iliad's Russianized song; Homer was listening too –
Nestling up to the newcomer's bosom our old man, rejoicing, cried loudly:
“Waiting of epochs is past! This is true glory for me!”³⁷

Wachtel points out that the description of Homer waiting impatiently in the underworld for millennia for a Russian translation of the *Iliad* was meant to be affectionately hyperbolic, but it still points to a general knowledge of the idea that Russia stands as an heir to Ancient Greece.³⁸ This is all to go back to the idea that while Sergei Uvarov, as a minister, friend, and mentor, does not often receive laurels-in-verse like the poets he encouraged, much of nineteenth-century Hellenism is the direct result of his efforts to revitalize classical study.

The Russian educational system of the nineteenth century was positively Byzantine in the number of reforms and re-reforms that took place under the auspices of political and social change, and the level of prominence in curricula held by Ancient Greek changed frequently, even with advocates like Uvarov at the head of the education ministry, and must be covered with some omissions for the purposes of this chapter. Another supporter of the inclusion of classical languages in Russian schools was Dmitry Tolstoy, who led a series of reforms on the college system in 1871. After these reforms, study of Ancient Greek and Latin became compulsory subjects. While Latin had been required before, Greek had never been compulsory until this point. Catriona Kelly writes,

³⁷ Wachtel, 182

³⁸ Wachtel, 182

From 1871 until 1918, an unwilling population of Russian schoolchildren was forced through an intensive course in the classics. The syllabus was frequently modified, but its basic character did not change. There was a seven, later eight, year programme, and classical languages occupied an enormous number of teaching hours: they were taught for more than sixteen hours of a thirty hour teaching week. After 1871, various reforms (particularly in 1890 and 1902) shortened the number of hours given to the classics; and in 1902 compulsory Greek was abolished, though it remained a requirement for university matriculation.³⁹

This is precisely the period during which the vast majority of future Russian modernists were being educated: Annensky was born in 1855, Merezhkovsky in 1865, and Ivanov in 1866. Kelly continues that it is reasonable to assume the majority of students educated in these decades were exposed to Latin and likely Greek, but the depth and breadth of this education varied greatly. One reason for this was a lack of teachers sufficiently trained in classical languages. The life of a harried, isolated classics teacher was the premise for Chekhov's short story "Человек в футляре" ("The Man in a Case"), published in 1898.

To return to the concept of a literary inheritance of the classics: the idea of a genealogical connection between Hellas and the Russian Empire persisted in the literature of the nineteenth century, although by the Russian Romantic period the influences and ideas around antiquity had outgrown those of the eighteenth century. This is not to say Romantic poets rejected the prior century's achievements in the classics. Pushkin cited Lomonosov's discovery of Greek heritage in Russian linguistic structures, making Russian a language still in touch with its ancestor, as opposed to the newer, synthetic Romance languages like French. By the nineteenth century, Hellenic Romanticism arrived in Russia via several routes, including the popularity of the English Romantic poets, chief among them Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley, both accomplished translators of Ancient Greek and Latin. The reception of classical texts, art, and sculpture in the Romantic framework was distinct from the neoclassicism of the prior century in part because by the early

³⁹ Kelly, 19

nineteenth century Greece was not the impossibly distant land it had been. Archeological missions had revealed the contemporary state of many of the treasures of antiquity: they were in crumbling, though often still glorious, ruins. Friedrich Schlegel defined Romantic literature in his *Athenaeum Fragments* in terms of the self-mirroring and open-endedness he saw in ancient fragments. According to French neoclassicism, antiquity had produced complete, perfect works to be replicated by modern authors; meanwhile, the Romantics were drawn to the fragment, precisely that which was imperfect and represented the mysterious past.

In her lecture “Cultural Memory and Survival,” Pamela Davidson discusses the distinct way antiquity was woven into Russian culture and arts: whereas in western European literary traditions, Christianity was built quite literally on top of already existing pagan artifacts, and Christian mythologies were grafted onto familiar pagan legends and celebrations, in Russia it was the opposite, and consequently Russia views antiquity through the prism of religion.⁴⁰ Russian thinkers including Dostoevsky, Vladimir Solovyov, the Slavophile writers Ivan Kireevskii and Alexei Khomiakov⁴¹, and, most centrally to this dissertation, Dmitri Merezhkovsky and Vyacheslav Ivanov, wrote compelling arguments linking ancient ritual and literature with not merely Christianity, but a distinctly Russian, medieval Christianity. The invented relationship between Ancient Greece and Russia which is invoked to summon the image of a mystical connection between the ancient empire and the modern empire is an example of a recurring problem in the reception of the antique in Russia: it is perpetually contaminated by other dominating frameworks which steer interpretation as well as translation. The exploration of these

⁴⁰ Davidson, 3

⁴¹ Khomiakov wrote extensively about his understanding of *sobornost'*, a concept that also drove Ivanov's work. I will expand on this term and Khomiakov's writing about it in my second chapter.

frameworks and how they apply specifically to Silver Age receptions of antiquity is a central task of this dissertation.

Just as Russian Romanticism was a reaction against Enlightenment ideas of rationalism, Symbolism arrived on the heels of realism in Russian literature. The exact dates of Symbolism as a movement vary from scholar to scholar, but some date the beginning of Symbolism as 1881, the year Fyodor Dostoevsky died. The novels of Dostoevsky, Ivan Turgenev, and Lev Tolstoy, the titans of realism, depict social issues and various sides of political debates on topics including education reform, agriculture, religion in modern life, and the rights of the peasantry. The Russian Symbolists returned to the ideas of the Romantics, as James West puts it, in that “the whole world is a constantly self-perfecting work of art, and human art is but a reflection of that process.”⁴² The prominence of religious ideas in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky offered fertile ground for engagement for readers of the type of religious philosophy that was brought into the zeitgeist by the works of Nietzsche, which had made its way to Russia by the 1880s. Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* as a text and the subsequent Symbolist responses by Ivanov, Merezhkovsky, Bely, among others, will be discussed in the next chapter. I turn now to early receptions of tragedy in Russian literature.

Tragedy in Russian Drama and Poetics

Turning to the genre of tragedy and its history as a genre in Russian literature, discussion will be limited to writers and plays that resurfaced in the writing of the early twentieth century, or which were crucial to understanding the form. Tragedies were a very popular form among eighteenth and nineteenth-century writers, and many of the great poets, including Derzhavin, wrote tragedies that are nevertheless not relevant to the trajectory of tragedy as it led toward Symbolism.

⁴² West, 2

The brightest, most interesting moments are those in which Russian playwrights either successfully pulled off a change to the stolid French formula or felt the desire to reach back themselves for an authentic relationship to the forms as they were in antiquity. The history of Greek tragedy as it intersects with Russian drama and literature is about as old as the latter categories all together. Adaptations of French neoclassical tragedy were among the very first dramas to be performed on Russian stages during the reign of Peter I, who saw the establishment of public theaters as an element of Westernizing social culture. Russian playwrights of the eighteenth century wrote tragedies and comedies that both resembled and differed from the European models to which they had been exposed. Playwrights including Sumarokov began moving the boundaries that separated the two types of drama, one noticeable adaptation to the genre being the adding of comic endings to tragic dramas. Elise Wirtschafter in *The Play of Ideas in Russian Enlightenment Theater* suggests that theaters may have chosen to elide tragic endings in favor of happier ones to avoid endorsing a tragic, unethical, non-Enlightenment perspective on social and political events. Wirtschafter writes, “Too much realism and too many hopeless outcomes would have demoralized the audience and undermined the social utility of theater.”⁴³ This is an interesting starting place for tragedy in the context of this dissertation: the Symbolist revivals of tragedy were also invested in the social utility in theater, but Symbolist writers would be horrified by the idea of lopping off or altering the tragic ending, the key moment of the ancient Dionysian ritual. From a Symbolist classical perspective, the entire function of the tragedy is to depict that crushing ending, leading to an experience of ritualized grief and subsequent sacrifice. In fact, these tragedies were studied extensively by Symbolist writers, which will be discussed momentarily.

⁴³ Wirtschafter, 32

To return to the eighteenth century: Russian tragedies followed the neoclassical standard of dramas centered around personages of note: royalty, courtiers, and characters from history or mythology. Plays concerning everyday folk were categorized under dramas, ranked lower in Lomonosov's tiers. One of the first notable original Russian tragedies was Sumarokov's *Khorev*, briefly mentioned earlier, published in 1747 and performed in 1750. *Khorev* ends with the suicide of the titular character from Slavic myth, keeping with genre conventions. Sumarokov inches away from these conventions in his next tragedy, an adaptation and reworking of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which ends with the happy union of a nonsuicidal Ophelia and Hamlet. Trediakovsky wrote several tragedies set in Ancient Greece, characteristically hewn to the classical model in form, but he, like Sumarokov, blesses his central characters with union and personal happiness at the end of his plays. Wirschafter also connects these contrived endings with an Enlightenment-era social interest in personal happiness and personal fulfillment, again, a concept diametrically opposed to Symbolist hopes for theater to represent a universal oneness, a collectivity of desires. Most tragedies of this period revived Slavic myth and figures from the histories of Rus': one popular example was Sumarokov's *Dmitry the Pretender* (*Димитрий Самозванец*), depicting the story of the false Dmitry, the tyrant who rose to the throne through rebellion claiming he was the assassinated son of Ivan the Terrible.

According to Simon Karlinsky in *Russian Drama from its Beginnings to the Age of Pushkin*, the reason these tragedies fell out of vogue once their era had passed, and are rarely if ever staged in the present, is that while Russian neoclassicists carefully replicated their French models in form, that did not extend to beauty in composition. Karlinsky writes,

What is conspicuously missing is the poetry, the human depth, and the psychological subtlety that Corneille and Racine brought to the structure that Sumarokov so adroitly borrowed. Another sorely lacking dimension is the elegance and suppleness of the language of the French originals, which Sumarokov [...] was simply not able to match. Although

adequate for the 1750s, Sumarokov's style was very soon overtaken by the rapid linguistic evolution of his century and became antiquated within a few decades.⁴⁴

That lacking dimension began to materialize in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Neoclassical tragedy as a genre continued to be popular, and plays had evolved linguistically and poetically, but had changed little in structure and form around the turn of the century. One novel achievement was a reception of Greek tragedy written in 1800 by Vasily Narezhny titled *A Night of Blood, or the Final Fall of the House of Cadmus* (*Кровавая ночь, или Конечное падение дома Кадымова*), in which Narezhny broke from the form perfected by the likes of Sumarokov and wrote in unrhymed iambic pentameter and trimeter (instead of hexameter). Narezhny's play combines the plotlines of two ancient tragedies: Aeschylus's *Seven Against Thebes* and Sophocles's *Antigone*, each of which are concerned with the aftermath of the fall of the house of Oedipus and the deaths of his children. Narezhny, trained in classical languages, was interested in returning to the origins of the genre that had been worked nearly to exhaustion by decades of neoclassical playwrights. His tragedy is based on his study of the ancient plays in the original Greek, and included the strophic choruses characteristic especially of Aeschylus. This was an interesting early experiment both in the context of classical reception of tragedy and also in the career of Narezhny, who is primarily remembered for his satirical Russian novels and for being an early voice in realism.

Two more receptions of Greek tragedy followed Narezhny's pattern. Expressing familiarity with the original tragedies and an interest in reviving the more ancient form, these plays are nonetheless largely original creations that use plots and themes from antiquity. The authors of these tragedies, however, are early Romantics. The first, Pavel Katenin's *Andromache*

⁴⁴ Karlinsky, 68

(*Андромаха*), which depicted Andromache, Hector's widow, in the aftermath of his death at the hands of Achilles, was called the "best Russian tragedy" by Pushkin.⁴⁵ Katenin also translated extensively from Greek and Latin among other languages. The second, *The Argives* (*Аргияне*) by Wilhelm Küchelbecker, a Romantic poet and a Decemberist, was written between 1822 and 1825 and was composed in verses made up of unrhymed iambs.⁴⁶ *The Argives* was published only in excerpts, and was never staged. Formalist critic Yuri Tynyanov wrote about *The Argives* a century later, describing it as the result of Küchelbecker's studies of antiquity (Tynyanov states that at the time of writing, Küchelbecker was reading Sophocles and Aeschylus in the original) and on the mystery, moralite Christian play.⁴⁷ This confluence of inspiration will be revived in Symbolist dramas. Tynyanov points out that Küchelbecker's use of ancient setting and plot was in the interest also of generating a vehicle for writing about his political views, stating, "Antique material was a conventional semantic coloring for political and artistic speech of that time." ("Античный материал был условной семантической окраской тогдашней политической и художественной речи.") Küchelbecker completed *The Argives* in 1825, the same year he participated in the Decemberist uprising in Petersburg. Tynyanov notes that there were two editions of *The Argives*, with the first, complete version left in the possession of Zhukovsky, and a second, censored version, which was the version published. Also in 1825, Küchelbecker sent his friend Vladimir Odoevsky, another Romantic writer, a letter including a translation of the prologue to Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*. This prologue, also called the Watchman's Speech, is a remarkable example of the Aeschylean choral ode, one of the most musical and metrically complex sections

⁴⁵ Terras, 280

⁴⁶ Wachtel, 179

⁴⁷ Tynyanov, 49

in the notoriously challenging play. Unfortunately, this translation has been lost. I will examine Ivanov's translation of the Watchman's Speech in my third chapter.

Vladislav Ozerov effectively moved the genre of tragedy into the new century with his 1804 play *Oedipus in Athens*, which was exceedingly popular among audiences in Petersburg and Moscow. The play was adapted not directly from Sophocles but from *Oedipe à Colone*, a 1785 opera by Italian composer Antonio Sacchini. Ozerov's tragedy allowed more movement and feeling than the stiff plays of the prior century. Karlinsky writes, "Ozerov offered a view of Greek mythical characters with which audiences could become involved emotionally in an intimate way not possible with the tragedies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."⁴⁸ Ozerov visited myths from antiquity again in 1809 with *Polyxena* (*Поликсена*), regarded as the best tragedy of his career. Mirsky considered it "the best Russian tragedy on the French classical model" and "genuinely evocative of the atmosphere of the *Iliad*."⁴⁹ It is notable that while he was familiar with French receptions, Ozerov chose to avoid looking at the original tragedies in which Polyxena, a daughter of the Trojan king Priam and his wife, Hecuba, sister to Paris and Hector, is a primary character, *Hecuba* and *The Trojan Women* by Euripides.⁵⁰ Ozerov's tragedies signaled new life in the genre, and were influential to writers of the Silver Age in the next century, including Osip Mandelstam, who concludes a 1914 poem with the lines "И для меня явление Озерова / Последний луч трагической зари." ("And for me the appearance of Ozerov / Was the last ray of the tragic dawn.")

As Russian drama continued to advance and evolve from western European formulas and toward a new, national drama, it drew away from the genre of tragedy. Pushkin wrote *Boris*

⁴⁸ Karlinsky, 197

⁴⁹ Mirsky, 68

⁵⁰ Karlinsky, 201

Godunov in 1825, a Romantic tragedy composed in verse that shows influence from Shakespeare in its structure and from the historian Nikolai Karamzin in its premise. Pushkin also wrote four short Romantic dramas in 1830, which are commonly grouped together as the “Little Tragedies” (“Маленькие трагедии”), and which are similar to the English monodrama. While tragedies for the next several decades continued to be written and performed, the dominant genre was comedy, in which Alexander Griboedov and Nikolai Gogol wrote their masterpieces. In 1840, Vissarion Belinsky wrote that no Russian plays were worth preserving other than those of Griboedov, Pushkin, and Gogol, and that all that came before should be gotten rid of, including all the eighteenth-century plays, which he calls “pseudoclassical.” For the purposes of this project, it is not necessary to cover the terrain of realism in Russian literature. It was, of course, like every other period, rife with fascinating classical reception, particularly in regard to the classical epic: in 1841, Belinsky called the novel “the epic of our time” (“Эпопея нашего времени есть *роман*”).⁵¹ The debt of Gogol to Homer is evident in *Dead Souls*, his “epic poem in verse,” and Tolstoy places Homer next to the Gospels and other biblical literature as “the best, the highest art” in *What Is Art?*⁵² This attraction to Homer and epic tradition is a natural progression for the literary culture, which had fully discarded the French packaging of ancient literature, while Russia was creating its own grand style of epic literature. In the theater, Alexander Ostrovsky became the leading dramatist, and was highly popular for decades from the 1850s to the 1880s. Ostrovsky was celebrated for his representation of realism on the stage, so let us resume around the year of his death, 1886, when Symbolism began to challenge the dominance of realism in literary and artistic culture. Symbolism and Naturalism were the predominant directions being taken in the theater at the end of the nineteenth century. Naturalism in theater, the depiction of everyday speech and

⁵¹ Belinskii 1948, 38

⁵² Tolstoy, 81

events, constructed to evoke conversations and relationships from life, was aesthetically and theoretically opposed to the highly stylized and metrically structured tragedies of the Ancient Greeks and Romans at the source of Symbolist inspiration. Symbolists took exception to the idea that naturalistic theater, which artificially recreated social and private settings on stage and mimicked colloquial dialogue patterns, was more evocative and true to life than the Symbolist desire to depict poetic internality and spirituality.

Symbolist aesthetic divisions were complicated even from the beginning of their assemblage, so Harold B. Segel, in his volume *Twentieth Century Russian Drama: From Gorky to the Present*, differentiates between factions of Symbolist theater as symbolism proper, neo-romanticism, and theatricalism.⁵³ These categories are flexible and allow for the constant overlap of ideas and participants, but indicate the differences in motivation that allowed for the several decades of polemical literature the Symbolists left behind. The first category are the Symbolists most connected to French Symbolism, Wagner and his idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (a total work of art on the stage, encompassing music, poetry, set design), and Maeterlinck's theories of the drama. In fact, many of the plays under this category were translations or rough imitations of plays by Maeterlinck. The second, the neo-romantics, were the dramatists most interested in a revival of Greek tragedy in stagings true to how they imagined the ritual performances of fifth-century Athens, and medieval folkloric settings, reminiscent of the Russian Romantic preoccupation with E. T. A. Hoffmann. While the Maeterlinckian Symbolist dramas were mainly written in prose, the neo-romantics wrote primarily in verse. The third group, which Segel calls "theatricalists," for their focus on directly rejecting realism and naturalism, revived the element of ancient theater that to this day makes it the most alien and disconcerting to a modern audience: the mask. Segel writes,

⁵³ Segel, 50

To those seeking to end the hegemony of the theater of external reality the first order of business was to expose as fully as possible the illusionary nature of the theatrical art—to show audiences that theater *was* art and hence illusion and then to persuade them that its primary purpose in deed was not merely the object representation of a single reality of the senses. This they did by reviving the mask and mime of ancient theater, by fusing within the same theatrical work dramatic dialogue, song, and dance, by introducing again the figures and improvisations of the Italian commedia dell'arte, by so stylizing gesture that the actor became reduced to a marionettelike character, by involving the audience either by the character as character, or by the actor as actor.⁵⁴

This vision in theater was not restricted to the Symbolist movement, and it had considerable impact on other stars of the theater, such as the director and theater theorist Vsevolod Meyerhold, whose acting technique biomechanics is also focused on highly trained gesture that is a constant reminder of the presence of the stage and the audience. The plays that Symbolists began writing and staging in the 1890s and into the 1900s fall into the categories of drama, tragedy, and mystery play. Mystery plays, similar to the Latin school plays performed at Peter Mohyla Academy in the seventeenth century, were originally portrayals of stories from the Bible that were, like the tragedies at the Dionysia, performed in cycles over several days at festivals in medieval Europe. The format and theming was adopted by Romantic writers such as Lord Byron, who wrote his dramas *Cain* and *Heaven and Earth* with the subtitle *A Mystery*. In 1907, Symbolist theater director and playwright Nikolai Evreinov founded the Ancient Theater (Старинный театр) in Petersburg, with an ambitious plan to revive and showcase Ancient Greek and Roman tragedy, medieval mystery plays, and Renaissance theater, staged to resemble their original historical stagings as closely as possible. This theater closed after only two seasons, but during those seasons staged medieval mystery and morality plays originating in Germany and France, and Spanish Renaissance theater from Cervantes and Calderon. The planned third season was to focus on Italian folk theater.

⁵⁴ Segel, 56-7

Anton Chekhov premiered his final play, *The Cherry Orchard*, at the Moscow Art Theater in 1904. The Symbolist poet Andrei Bely wrote an essay in response to the production, published the same year in the journal *Vesy* (*Весы*). Bely examines the play as a representation of “realistic symbolism”: which “conveys the beyond in terms of the reality that surrounds us.”⁵⁵ Bely is addressing the idea that Naturalism, the movement in theater articulated in 1880 by Émile Zola and frequently used to describe the plays of Chekhov and the direction of Konstantin Stanislavsky, is not necessarily diametrically opposed to Symbolism in theater, but represents the same experiences sans the element of mysticism. What is Symbolism without mysticism? To Bely, it is a way of expressing universality and negotiating with reality, but stripped of its religion. Bely writes, “Chekhov, while remaining a realist, [in *The Cherry Orchard*] parts the folds of life and what from a distance had seemed to be shadowy folds are revealed to be an outlet to eternity.” One might say creating in art the “outlet to eternity” is precisely the task of Symbolist revival of classical tragedy, but Bely was critical of his compatriots’ desire to resurrect the religious element of theater, described in his 1908 essay “Against Reviving the Greek Theatre.” In Bely’s view, there was a reason tragedy had moved away from religion as it advanced as an artistic genre, and regardless of any pseudo-mythological connection to those ancients, the Symbolists were inheritors of a type of drama that was “emancipated from religion.” Bely writes,

The European theatre developed and fixed the forms in which emancipation resulted. When we hear these days that theatre is ritual, the actor a priest and that by contemplating drama we are participating in holy mystery, we understand the words “ritual,” priest,” “mystery” in a vague, ambiguous, almost meaningless way. What is “ritual”? Is it some kind of religious act? But of what kind? Before whom is this ritual to be enacted? And to what god are we supposed to pray?⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Green, 126

⁵⁶ Green, 131-2

In this essay, Bely includes a footnote in which he insists he is excluding the philosophical writing on tragedy of his friend Vyacheslav Ivanov in this polemic, and is rather criticizing acolytes of Ivanov who do not write with the knowledge and nuance of Ivanov; however, it is difficult to read this essay and not see it as impatient repudiation of the seeds of mystic cult Ivanov was deliberately sowing among the Petersburg intelligentsia in favor of what Bely describes as the “modest dignity” of nineteenth-century traditional drama.

Bely was not the only poet put off by the decadence, vagueness, and smoky-roomed mysticism of Symbolism. In 1912, Mikhail Kuzmin, a poet who had published in the Symbolist journal *Vesy*, wrote an article called “On Beautiful Clarity” (“О прекрасной ясности”) for the newly founded journal *Apollon*. In this article, he questions the “incomprehensible, dark cosmic attire” (“непонятный, темный космический уборъ”) of the writing of the Symbolists, and calls for clarity: “I beg you, be logical—forgive me this cry of the heart!—logical in the concept, in the construction of the work, in the syntax...” (“умоляю, будьте логичны – да простится мнѣ этотъ крикъ сердца! – логичны въ замыслѣ, въ постройкѣ произведенія, въ синтаксисѣ...”.) This would be the rallying point of the Acmeists. The name comes from the Greek *akmē*, which refers to the “best age of man.” Sergei Gorodetsky, who beside Gumilev and Mandelstam was one of the primary theoreticians of the Acmeists, gave the movement the alternate name “Adamism” because he described it as an effort to define the world anew. Acmeists venerated “the word,” *logos*, as the universal aesthetic medium, and published in *Apollon*, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, in alignment with Apollo in the Nietzschean dichotomy. If Symbolism could be described as neo-romantic, the Acmeists were neo-neoclassicist. Acmeism embraced the late Annensky’s theoretical writing and his polemics with Ivanov, with whom Annensky often disagreed on the nature and function of Greek tragedy.

These discussions, declarations, and disagreements will be the subject of my second chapter. As this dissertation endeavors to explore eclectic forces that appear in the reception of classical tragedy at this period in history, this introductory chapter has attempted to demonstrate the incredibly wide range of influences that steered classical reception from the very genesis of the written Russian language, even before the development of its literary tradition, to the beginning of the twentieth century. The following chapter will examine in closer detail the theoretical texts of central importance to this generation of writers specifically in the realm of reception and interpretation of ancient tragedy, beginning with Wagner, Nietzsche, and Maeterlinck. Accompanying these theoretical frameworks will be discussion of polemics on Symbolism and Symbolist theater by Merezhkovsky, Bryusov, Bely, and Ivanov, in conversation with the anti-Symbolist theoretical writing of Annensky and Gumilev. A question I am interested in answering revolves around what precisely tragedy represented to these writers: why revive an ancient form that had been intentionally drained of its religious resonances and which had evolved into a secular genre that was itself out of vogue? Nietzsche was widely read across Europe and Russia at this time, but not every literary culture preoccupied with Nietzsche experienced a mystic, cultish effort from a collective of the most brilliant members of intelligentsia to commune with Dionysus, writing screeds on resurrecting the staging of ancient rituals that historically would have preceded the slaughter of oxen and goats. Tragedy encompasses the personal and the public—crises facing the city-state alongside chaos in the family, such as in *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone*, *Agamemnon*, and *The Trojan Women*. Many, though not all, tragedies feature divine interference from one or more from the pantheon of Greek gods and goddesses, who seek to protect their favorites or punish the hubristic among mortals. The place of human responsibility is thus more unsteady, and this is a fertile area where frameworks from other modes of interpretation can be brought in. Tragedies

depicted well-known mythic heroes from epic and lyrical poetry experiencing crises of personal and social values that were meant to reflect contemporary reality through a prism of heightened drama and myth. Especially for the modern viewer, tragedy asks a lot of its audience: to accept on the stage, or on an imagined stage, a world which is, as Jacques Vernant puts it, “wide enough for the oppositions between legal and political thought on the one and the mythical and heroic traditions” and “narrow enough for the conflict in values still to be a painful one and for the clash to continue to take place.”⁵⁷ Insofar as these Russian writers were inspired by and responded to Nietzsche, via their tragic affiliations (i.e. Ivanov and Aeschylus, Annensky and Euripides) they enact his perspective that Aeschylean and Sophoclean tragedy is a largely distinct genre from the works of Euripides. In their independent bodies of work, which interweave classical influences with modern ideas through dramas, translations, novels, poems, and sundry articles, Merezhkovsky, Ivanov, and Annensky each develop a distinct approach to their definition of tragedy and their vision for what tragedy will represent on the prerevolutionary Russian stage.

My third chapter turns to the tragedies that were written and sometimes staged by Silver Age poets, which include translations from Ancient Greek of all three of the ancient tragedians: Ivanov felt a particular kinship to Aeschylus, and certainly resembled the ancient father of tragedy in his arcane, cryptic, complexly wrought verse. Ivanov translated all of Aeschylus, beginning with the three plays of the *Oresteia*, (the *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*), which he had been contracted to finish and publish in 1911 by Mikhail Sabashnikov’s publishing press. Annensky devoted years to the task of translating the entire extant corpus of Euripides. Dmitri Merezhkovsky tried his hand at translating selected works from all three, and his translations of Euripides’ *Hippolytus* and Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone* were staged

⁵⁷ Vernant, 4

at the Alexandrinsky Theater in Petersburg. I will examine these translations, along with exploration of Symbolist and Acmeist translation methodology and each author's personal commentaries on these works. This chapter also discusses the formal aspects of tragedy as well as the experiments and innovations in language and meter found in these translations.

Lastly, my fourth chapter will focus on dramatic receptions of tragedy in the works of Annensky and Ivanov. Annensky and Ivanov took up the form to construct original plays set in the ancient world, adhering to certain genre conventions but often leaving idiosyncratic stamps of authorial stylization, while Merezhkovsky wrote receptions primarily in novel form. These include Annensky's plays *Melanippe the Wise* (1901), *King Ixion* (1902), and *Laodamia* (1906), which all take as a starting point fragments from lost plays of Euripides, and *Thamyris Kitharodos* (1906), which was inspired by Sophocles. The plot of *Laodamia* is drawn from a fragment of a Euripidean tragedy called *Protesilaus*, which also inspired receptions from Fyodor Sologub (*The Gift of the Wise Bees*, *Дар мудрых пчёл*) and Valery Bryusov (*The Deceased Protesilaus*, *Протесилай умерший*). Ivanov wrote two tragedies of a planned trilogy (as all tragedies at the Dionysia were in a cycle of three), titled *Tantalus* (1904) and *Prometheus* (1915). My conclusion will consider the legacies of these translations and receptions in the corpus of twentieth-century Russian literature. A vast array of works from antiquity were translated by Soviet translators, and these translators, working in the 1940s up to the 1960s, note the peculiarity to their ears of, for example, Ivanovian Church Slavonic interpolated into Greek tragedy. Other translations, such as Merezhkovsky's *Antigone*, are often still the most recommended versions by contemporary Russian classicists. The "Slavonic Renaissance" announced by Zielinski and his circle was alternately buoyed and daunted by the revolutionary activity of their time, and then found itself representing precisely the Western, bourgeois culture that the Bolshevik cultural administrators

were most wary of, lopping off the head of the movement, and Ivanov and Merezhkovsky, the surviving tragedians, soon fled to Europe. Annensky, Ivanov, and Merezhkovsky were not only translators, they were evangelists for tragedy, for the beauty of the ancient work and for the enduring power of the form. This dissertation is inspired by their energy and erudition.

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Chapter Two

Religious, National, and Universal: Theories of Tragedy in Symbolism

“Yes, my friends, believe with me in the Dionysian life and in the rebirth of tragedy. The age of the Socratic man is over: garland yourselves with ivy, take the thyrsus in your hands, and show no surprise when the tiger and the panther lie down fawning at your feet. Only dare to be tragic men: for you are to be redeemed. You are to lead the Dionysian procession from India to Greece! Prepare yourselves for a hard struggle, but believe in the miracle of your god!”⁵⁸

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*

Tragedy is distinct from all other genres of art by virtue of the dialogue it demands from its audience. The audience sees itself onstage in the tragic chorus, and sees it mirroring their shock, fear, apprehension, the reactions an average body of people would feel witnessing the unspooling of the tragic hero's life and the unraveling of his self-perception. The tragic drama has been revived and reinvented across civilizations and empires as artists respond to the desire of their communities to be taught how to contend with their fate and mortality. Modern audiences still express wonder at the empathy these millennia-old tragedies evoke: the bravery of Antigone and her commitment to what she knows to be right in the face of wartime cruelty, for example, feels fresh in the context of any contemporary war zone and its victims. Antigone is firm in her conviction, but the chorus pleads with her to change her mind and not risk her life. She ignores them. Her insecure uncle Creon, newly king, debates with the chorus, unsure if the punishment he has given his niece is too extreme. The chorus reassures him that as king he cannot go wrong, but later shakes its collective head in resignation when Creon meets his own unhappy fate: he will go to Hades after Antigone, as will Creon's son, Haemon, and wife, Eurydice. As audience members and more recently as readers of tragedy, we are made malleable by our heroes and villains, alternately pitying and hating them, rooting for their redemption or their damnation. The chorus is our voice, never omniscient,

⁵⁸ Nietzsche, 110.

never magical, but able to offer broader context, and reference older myths, when mortals acted like gods, and gods acted like mortals, and both paid the price.

Early-twentieth-century modernizations of tragedy and the various approaches to making tragedy relevant to Russians in terms of their nationality and religion are rooted in nineteenth-century writing on tragedy primarily from Germany, but also from France and Belgium. This chapter will discuss the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of Symbolist projects to revive tragedy, which are often sprung out of readings of Richard Wagner, whose essays were just as influential as his operas, and of Friedrich Nietzsche, with particular attention to *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, the philosopher's expansive response to Wagner's ideas. In 1907, Ivanov wrote about the debt of Russian Symbolism to "the mystagogue Richard Wagner" who "sowed seeds deep into the European consciousness, seeds that have already sprung up on one part of the field as the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, this 'prime mover' of the modern soul."⁵⁹ Symbolist tragedy also bears the influence of other fin-de-siecle projects to repurpose the structures and themes of tragedy, such as those of Maurice Maeterlinck and Hugo von Hofmannsthal. This chapter will first analyze these thinkers and their ideas in the Russian context, and specifically in the cultural moment of the fin-de-siecle, where they were met with one of the other dominant influences driving Symbolism: the return of factions of the intelligentsia to Russian Orthodoxy in untraditional, mystical, philosophical approaches.

Receptions of tragedy in modernity have often sought to widen the gap between the audience and the hero by keeping the ancient dramatic structure largely intact, save for the removal of the presence of the chorus. It is possible to see remnants of the chorus in certain plays, often shrunken to one character, like Horatio in *Hamlet*, who comments on the action. The

⁵⁹ Ivanov 2001, 115

Shakespearean tragedy has more genetic material in common with the literary than the religious; the same can be said of the French neoclassical tragedy, exemplified by Jean Racine. In an essay on the need for a tragic revival, Ivanov summarizes these two prominent receptions of tragedy and their divergence from ancient forms: “In the age of Shakespeare, everything was calculated to reproduce ‘character.’ And was not French theater of the seventeenth century the apogee of the stage’s closeness to the plastic arts?”⁶⁰ These dramas were performed quite differently as well: verses in ancient tragic performance were sung or rhythmically recited, more similar to a performance of a ballad than modern theatrical acting, with little differentiation between the characters. In fact, modern theatrical acting is indebted to the school of naturalism in Russian theater, a movement concurrent and in conversation with Symbolism. Nietzsche locates the turning point in tragedy as occurring much earlier than with the changes in form innovated by Shakespeare and other early modern to modern playwrights; already in the works of Euripides Nietzsche saw the characterization of heroes expanding and the voices of the chorus contracting.

Ivanov was invested in the revival of tragedy from its roots in the dithyramb and in other religious rites, and perceived these moments in the form’s evolution, when its scope narrowed from the universal to the individual, to be digressions from the true purpose of tragedy. His idea for a revival of tragedy was for theatrical performances to resurrect the ancient ritualistic, pagan worship function that Ivanov felt was the key to the sensation of universality, *sobornost’*, that he hoped would alight in communion-starved members of the Russian public. The concept of *sobornost’* is central to Symbolist interpretations of tragedy, and it was crucial to Ivanov in particular. The word is a neologism that has roots in Greek, according to Artur Mrówczyński-Van Allen.

⁶⁰ Ivanov 2001, 102

In Russian, the Slavic sobor is, in principle, a synonym for the Greek word *súnodos*, *synodos*. Although the Slavic noun *sobor* basically means “assembly,” or even “council” or “cathedral,” within the Slavophile school of thought the semantic evolution of the term *sobornost’* has resulted in a vastly different meaning.⁶¹

This term was integrated into the context of Slavophilic thought by Alexei Khomiakov (1804-1860), a theologian and theoretician of Slavophilism. Khomiakov believed in the truth and superiority of the Orthodox Church over Catholicism, and wrote that there was only one true church, and it was “called Orthodox, Eastern, or Graeco-Russian.”⁶² Michael Wachtel defines *sobornost’* as “the freedom achieved by a community of believers in ecclesiastical life; it was seen as a basic condition for cognitive and ontological integrity.”⁶³ Only under Orthodoxy and through *sobornost’* could Russians join in the spirit of Christian unity and reject the individualism that was infesting the West. The term was adopted by theological philosophers such as Vladimir Solovyov, Sergei Trubetskoy, and Nikolai Berdiaev around the turn of the twentieth century. In their work, *sobornost’* came to represent universality, a collectivism that could be achieved through religious and social communality. To Ivanov, *sobornost’* was achieved in its most perfect iteration in Ancient Greece, a civilization he claimed “did not know individualism in our sense.”⁶⁴ Specifically, it could be found in the music of the tragic chorus. Ivanov writes,

The question of the chorus is inextricably linked to the question of myth and to the affirmation of the principles of Realistic Symbolism. The chorus is in and of itself already a symbol, a sensible signification of the concord and unanimity of *sobornost’*, the visible evidence of a real connection that brings isolated consciousnesses together into a living unity.⁶⁵

Ivanov’s deep knowledge of the workings of ancient theater informs his ambitions for recovering the triumphs of antiquity in the modern era. In his essay “Presentiments and Portents”

⁶¹ Mrówczyński-Van Allen, 21

⁶² Lanvin, 43

⁶³ Ivanov 2001, 245

⁶⁴ Ivanov 2001, 18

⁶⁵ Ivanov 2001, 33

(“Предчувствия и предвестия”), published in 1906 in the journal *Zolotoe Runo*, he explains these ancient origins.

In the Dionysian orgies, the most ancient cradle of the theater, each participant had a twofold goal: to participate in the orgiastic action (*sumbakcheuien*) and in the orgiastic cleansing (*katharizesthai*), to sanctify and be sanctified, to attract the divine presence and receive the gift of grace—an active, theurgical goal (*hierourgein*) and an emotional, passive goal (*paschein*).⁶⁶

Sobornost' cannot be separated from its ecclesiastical Russian origins, so the synthesis of Orthodoxy with myth and ritual from Hellenism became central to Ivanov's Symbolism. Ivanov imbued his translations of Aeschylus with language from Old Church Slavonic to evoke the archaic, religious, discordant sounds of Aeschylean verse, and to make them sound lofty and familiar to Russians who grew up in the Orthodox church. Dmitry Merezhkovsky also sought to revive tragedy by putting it into a more overtly Christian context, using his translations and scholarly writing on tragedies to engage in dialectical interpretations of Greek tragedy in which Christian, and therefore Russian, moral and philosophical dilemmas merged with Hellenic religion, and were worked out in the absence of (and perhaps in anticipation of) biblical teachings. He did not, however, agree with Ivanov that revival of ancient theater should attempt to replicate the tragedies as they were performed in Athens, writing in 1899 that “A complete imitation of the ancient production is unattainable, and unnecessary.” (“Полное подражание древней постановке недостижимо, да и не нужно.”)⁶⁷ While his Christianity, like Ivanov's, was heavily influenced by mysticism and an interest in finding the common ground between Hellenic religion and Orthodoxy, his beliefs were generally rooted in an intellectual interest in religion rather than the possibilities of universality in art and its public function that motivated Ivanov. Merezhkovsky managed to put more performances of tragedies on the Russian stage than Ivanov did, including

⁶⁶ Ivanov 2001, 104

⁶⁷ Merezhkovsky 2007, 303

stagings of his own translations of the *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus* of Sophocles and the *Hippolytus* of Euripides. His revivals enthusiastically incorporated language and imagery from Christianity, and Merezhkovsky urged his audiences to see the similarities between Ancient Greek and Russian literature.

If Ivanov and Merezhkovsky can be seen as pagan priests performing tragic rites, Innokenty Annensky was Socrates, working for most of his life in secondary schools, first as a teacher and then as an administrator, quietly producing a prodigious amount of poetry and translation, including a complete set of every extant play by Euripides accompanied by thorough introductory essays. Like Socrates, his devoted former students dedicated themselves to preserving his legacy and demonstrating the influence of his teaching on their own work: in Annensky's case, I am referring to Nikolai Gumilev and Nikolai Punin, whose movement Acmeism is founded on Annenskian principles. Alongside his poetic accomplishments, Annensky wrote manifestos for pedagogical reforms, diligently advocating for his students to be exposed to foreign languages, literatures, music, and poetry, which he felt were not represented properly in the curricula of the schools in which he worked, which included the Nikolaevskaya Gymnasia in Tsarskoe Selo, where he taught the young Gumilev and Punin.⁶⁸ Annensky taught Greek and Latin for decades, with the ambition of making the ancient world as much of a part of their imaginations as it was a part of his. An 1892 proposal for foreign language instruction by Annensky emphasizes the importance of students studying a language until they are able to comprehend its unique poetic sounds and structures, and can recognize not only the meaning but the "harmonious combination of words."⁶⁹ Vsevolod Setchkarev points out that this motto for school language instruction mirrors the aesthetic philosophy that can be observed in Annensky's own translation and poetic projects, the

⁶⁸ Setchkarev, 25

⁶⁹ Setchkarev, 25

same adherence to discipline, structure, beauty, and the Word that would inspire Acmeist thought nearly two decades later.⁷⁰ Like Ivanov, Annensky valued his role as an educator, and was known to deliver lengthy, eloquent, popular lectures to his students and as an invited speaker at Petersburg social clubs. Descriptions of these visits were left by Tadeusz Zielinski, professor and classicist-in-chief of fin-de-siecle St. Petersburg, who wrote approvingly of Annensky's lectures and his "slightly velvety" voice; Zielinski would take on the project of editing and publishing Annensky's Euripidean translations after the latter's untimely death.⁷¹ Annensky died suddenly of heart failure in November 1909, a year when his ideas were generating admiration and thought as they never had before, the same year and same day he had been finally granted permission to retire from his administrative role at the school in Tsarskoe Selo. Only in the year prior he had begun socializing in earnest with Petersburg literary society, and had the opportunity to interact in person with the other subjects of this dissertation. His former student Gumilev had introduced him to his fellow poets and admirers of antiquity, including Maximilian Voloshin, Sergei Makovsky, and Ivanov.⁷²

Annensky and Ivanov, despite differences in their perspectives on the use of antiquity in modernity, admired each other's scholarly achievements and dedication to classical philology. The two wrote poems dedicated to each other: Annensky's two-part poem "Мифотворцу – на башню" (written in June and July 1909) references his visits to Ivanov's Wednesday salons at his apartment, the Tower. Ivanov seems to have responded in a poem dated September 1909 titled "Ultimum Vale," "Final Goodbye" in Latin, a sadly prescient title. The poem speaks to a sensation of recognition of shared knowledge between the two classicist poets:

— Молчи! Я есмь; и есть — иной.
Он пел; узнал я гимн заветный,
Сам — безглагольный, безответный

⁷⁰ Setchkarev, 25

⁷¹ Setchkarev, 34

⁷² Kelly, 70

Таясь во храмине земной.

Ivanov contributed to *Apollon*'s issue honoring Annensky after his death, writing an article on Annensky's translations of Euripides. This article will be discussed in chapter three, which contends specifically with each translation project. Annensky was not as impressed by Merezhkovsky, whose mysticism he detested, and whose translations he found wanting. Annensky published unfavorable reviews of both Merezhkovsky's translations of *Hippolytus* and of the pastoral novel *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus. In both reviews, Annensky suggests that Merezhkovsky's handling of Greek is imprecise, and that he suspects Merezhkovsky relied on other translations for help, such as the French translation of Paul-Louis Courier.⁷³ To close this circle of communication: Ivanov and Merezhkovsky also knew each other well. Merezhkovsky and Gippius were frequent visitors to the Tower, and as émigrés decades later they visited each other when Merezhkovsky and Gippius lived in Paris and Ivanov lived in Rome. All three men were also able to travel outside of Russia to visit the sites of the classical world that had animated their imaginations. Merezhkovsky visited Italy and Greece as a young man in 1892, and the trip spurred his translation ambitions; Annensky visited Italy in 1890, though he never made it to Greece. Ivanov's intellectual gifts as a student granted him the opportunity to study in Berlin under Theodor Mommsen, and he lived across Germany, Italy, Greece, England, and Switzerland as a young man, returning to Russia after nearly two decades away in 1905.

While poetry is generally considered the primary medium of the Symbolists, experiments with drama and debates over drama's purpose within Symbolism go back to the beginning of the movement. Merezhkovsky and Nikolai Minsky wrote mystery plays in the 1890s, a genre of Christian drama that shares structures and motivations with ancient tragedy: both were intended to

⁷³ Setchkarev, 52

use familiar characters, myths, and parables to convey reminders and lessons to the general populace, and be a space for public communion. During the first decade of the twentieth century, debates over the future of theater came to a boil, with impassioned treatises on the potential of theater to embody Symbolist ideas in their purest forms. These ongoing, ever expanding arguments amongst the capricious Symbolists were taking place in the context of growing social unrest: striking workers, propulsive allies, and escalating revolutionary fervor. The agitation around the theater, a popular and more broadly accessible artistic medium, was oriented around its potential social purpose, giving Symbolists among other factions of artists the opportunity to envision a better future facilitated by art. The zenith of tragedy in Athens occurred amidst the Persian and Peloponnesian wars; many of the tragedies, such as Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, Euripides' *Herakles*, and Sophocles' *Ajax*, contend with the mental toll of war and widespread violence on soldiers and their families. In 1906, Symbolists were among those suffering from what Avril Pyman calls "post-revolutionary nervous exhaustion."⁷⁴ In a lecture given in 1902, which I examine near the end of this chapter, Annensky suggests that tragedy is designed and uniquely suited for this tumultuous atmosphere.

Revivals and reinterpretation of ancient tragedy were popular in French Symbolism and in the culture of the theater in general, as various schools of drama pushed back against realism, or else looked back to Ancient Greece and Rome for organic inspiration. Maurice Maeterlinck was a member of the school of French Symbolism whose dramas and other writing were popular across Russian theaters beginning in the 1890s, when Chekhov became interested in his work and suggested to Stanislavsky to stage Maeterlinck's work at the Moscow Art Theater. Maeterlinck's collection of mystical essays *The Treasure of the Humble*, published in 1900, quickly became

⁷⁴ Pyman, 295

popular among the Russian intelligentsia. His plays, which included *Intruder*, *The Blind One*, and *Pelleas et Melisandre*, dramatized the individual's confrontation with death and the mystery of existence and what lay beyond. His play *The Blue Bird* was so popular that it sustained the Moscow Art Theater for several seasons.⁷⁵ Maeterlinck was also inspired by the German Romantics, a point of overlap with the Russian Symbolists. Like Wagner, he was interested in folklore and the fairy tale as sources of inspiration, which, like pagan religion and ancient mythology, provided an alternative from Christian spirituality for the working out of philosophical and social questions for cultures that were increasingly alienated from traditional religious practice. His essay "The Tragical in Daily Life," from *The Treasure of the Humble*, looks past religious mysticism in tragedy, and instead seeks to uncover how tragedy reveals the strangeness of our own phenomenological world through the beauty of its words. He writes,

Certain it is that, in the ordinary drama, the indispensable dialogue by no means corresponds to reality; and it is just those words that are spoken by the side of the rigid, apparent truth, that constitute the mysterious beauty of the most beautiful tragedies, inasmuch as these are words that conform to a deeper truth, and one that lies incomparably nearer to the invisible soul by which the poem is upheld.⁷⁶

The "finest tragedies" from antiquity that Maeterlinck finds to embody this beauty are those of Aeschylus and Sophocles: plays such as *Antigone* and *The Eumenides*, which have simple, straightforward plot concepts that blossom through dialogue. Maeterlinck finds this poetry in tragic dialogue in, for example, Ibsen's *The Master Builder* (1892).

Significant works of Symbolist drama at this moment include Aleksandr Blok's *The Puppet Show* (*Балаганчик*) and Merezhkovsky's historical drama *Paul I* (*Павел I*), both written in 1906. *The Puppet Show*, which employs characters from Italian commedia dell'arte, was directed in three separate productions by Vsevolod Meyerhold, who himself played a lead role,

⁷⁵ Maeterlinck, 12

⁷⁶ Maeterlinck, 300

Pierrot, in the first production in 1907. The play was staged in a theater operated by the beloved actress Vera Kommissarzhevskaya, who was invested in fostering creativity in the Petersburg theater community. At one gathering hosted by Kommissarzhevskaya, a chorus of actresses performed Dionysian dithyrambs written by Ivanov. Pyman writes that these verses, ingeniously metered to match their ancient predecessors, were to “echo in the minds of all who heard them that night as the underlying, ecstatic beat of the next few years.”⁷⁷ Meyerhold, who was mentored by Stanislavsky, would go on to play key roles not only on the Symbolist stage but in Futurist theater, and in the 1930s became a card-carrying communist party member and attempted to function within the Soviet theater world before being arrested and killed in 1940. He played the role of Tiresias, the blind prophet who warns Creon not to leave his nephew Polynices unburied, in an 1899 production of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, in Merezhkovsky’s translation. Meyerhold, possibly under the mentorship of Ivanov, enthusiastically espoused Symbolist ideas about the transformation of theater, writing in 1904,

But thanks to such dramatists as Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Verhaeren and Wagner, the theatre is moving back towards its dynamic origins. We are discovering the precepts of antiquity. Just as the sacred ritual of Greek tragedy was a form of Dionysian catharsis, so today we demand of the artist that he heal and purify us.⁷⁸

Blok’s *The Puppet Show* was the rare Symbolist success with the public. In his biography of Meyerhold, the émigré violinist Yurii Elagin described his own attendance at one of the performances of the 1907 staging:

Реакция зрительного зала на первом представлении «Балаганчика» была необыкновенно бурной. Разразился настоящий театральный скандал. Свист, шум, крики, стук, казалось, были готовы перейти врукопашную... Часть публики ревела от ярости и возмущения. Другая часть аплодировала бешено, орала изо всех сил: «Браво Блок – Мейерхольд!», стараясь перекрыть исступлённые вопли противной стороны. Был момент, когда, казалось, возмущённые хлынут на сцену, готовые

⁷⁷ Pyman, 292

⁷⁸ Bartlett, 97

разорвать на части и Блока, и Мейерхольда, разнести на куски и сцену, и декорации, и весь театр.

The reaction of the audience hall at the first performance of “Balaganchik” was unusually stormy. An actual theatrical scandal broke out. Whistling, noise, shouting, knocking, it seemed, were ready to go hand-to-hand...One part of the audience roared with rage and indignation. Another part applauded furiously, shouting with all their might: “Bravo Blok – Meyerhold!” trying to shout down the frantic cries of the opposing side. There was a moment when it seemed that the indignant ones would rush onto the stage, ready to tear Blok and Meyerhold to pieces, to smash to pieces the stage, the scenery, and the entire theater.⁷⁹

Blok’s play was not a reception of tragedy, but this is not far from the reaction an Attic tragedy would elicit from its audiences during the Dionysia in fifth century Athens BCE: a Greek dictionary writer of the second century wrote (apocryphally) that audience members of Aeschylus’s *The Eumenides* were so shocked by the tragedy that women were “frightened into miscarriage.”⁸⁰ Indeed, this is along the precise lines of the reaction Ivanov imagined being inspired by Symbolist tragedy reception. Blok wrote in 1908, in light of his success with *The Puppet Show*, that Russian theater must move toward becoming a “new theatre of action and passion,”⁸¹ built by dramatists who eschewed the idea that theater is meant only to entertain and depict petty-bourgeois city life. He was delighted by his theatrical success with *The Puppet Show*, and found himself reinvigorated artistically, writing in his diary about his shift from poetry to plays: “I have been dissatisfied with my poems since the spring [...] But perhaps this new, fresh cycle will come soon and Aleksandr Blok—to Dionysus!”⁸² Blok’s vision of the changes necessary for Russian theater was shaped by his practical experience as a playwright and avid viewer of theater in St. Petersburg, and his reasonable belief that for theater to thrive it needed to be looking for how audiences reacted to the works of, for example, Maurice Maeterlinck (whom Blok

⁷⁹ Elagin, 156

⁸⁰ Henderson, 139

⁸¹ Green, 39

⁸² Pyman, 293

dismisses for Maeterlinck's claim that he aimed to "build a theater 'of peace and beauty without tears'" —what, to a Symbolist, is the point of that?⁸³) and Ibsen (whose plays Blok alleges to have seen his countrymen yawning through), and to respond directly to the needs of the audience.

While Ivanov and Blok both agreed that drama was, as Blok put it, "the highest manifestation of art,"⁸⁴ Blok's plan for theater was not in alignment with that of Ivanov, his friend and fellow second-wave Symbolist. Both saw theater as an energetic force that could be harnessed and for the audience to feel involved in the drama. In 1906, Ivanov articulated his ideas for theater in the journal *Zolotoe Runo*: "Enough playacting—we need action! The spectator must become an actor—a participant in the ritual act. The crowd of spectators must unite in a choric body like the mystic community of the 'orgies' and 'mysteries' of old."⁸⁵ Already by the fourth century CE, Ivanov had determined, aesthetics had taken over the domain of artistic creation, supplanting religious symbolics.⁸⁶ This devaluation of the holy mystery represented the supremacy of "phenomena of aesthetic individualism and experimentalism" and movement toward the "artificial" over the "natural," and naturally Greco-Roman society progressed artificially. The Renaissance revived classical antiquity via an "idealistic understanding" of it; the "Slavonic Renaissance" proselytized by Ivanov (among others, mostly notably Zielinski, who gave a series of popular lectures on the art and literature of antiquity and its relevance to modern education) aimed to revive ancient culture the right way: by returning to those religious symbolics the ancients and early moderns had abandoned (to their detriment). Ivanov's foundation for a Slavonic Renaissance are summarized beautifully by Nikolai, elder brother to Mikhail Bakhtin, who in emigration became a classical philologist at the University of Birmingham, England. Bakhtin

⁸³ Green, 38

⁸⁴ Green, 37

⁸⁵ Green, 111

⁸⁶ Ivanov 2001, 17-18

interacted with Ivanov as a young student in Petersburg as Ivanov was establishing himself as a public intellectual after his decades living abroad in Europe.

[Ivanov] believed Russia had fully inherited the Hellenic tradition through the orthodox Church, whose liturgy, for instance, was the only living survival of Greek Tragedy. Alone among peoples the Russian had not lost the archaic directness of an Aryan tongue in its prime – like Ancient Greek. Consequently a Russian poet betrayed his mission if he wanted to express only his isolated self and addressed only a few refined elite. He must recover in himself those fundamental symbols and archetypes which ruled his soul as they ruled also the soul of his people, although the people might not be conscious of them. But once they were revealed the people could not fail to recognise in them their own forgotten heritage. Thus the people and the poet would meet again, and they would meet on the ground of a common art – religious, national and universal.⁸⁷

For Ivanov, the art of the ancient world could not be disentangled from the religious function of its origin, making the ancient poet a priest, and poetic language a holy tongue. This religion was Dionysian, which Ivanov defines as “a mystical religion” in which “the soul of mysticism is the divinization of man, whether through the grace-bearing approach of the Divinity to the human soul, which results in their complete fusion, or through an inner insight into the true and eternal essence of the ‘I’ into the ‘Itself’ in the ‘I’” (Ivanov is not known for his clarity and concision).⁸⁸ He wrote two expansive studies on Dionysus, *The Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God* (Эллинской религии страдающего бога) in 1904 and *Dionysus and Predionysianism* (Дионис и прадиионисийство) in 1923. The tragedies he hoped to revive would be a pseudo-Mass to Dionysus, with plots akin to homilies, and the music and connection between the performers providing the sensation of *sobornost*, universality among gathered performers and audience. It is in pursuit of the embodiment of this concept, *sobornost*, that Ivanov orients his arguments on the necessity of reviving tragedy. Ivanov was popularly regarded as a scholar among poets, and a poet among scholars, who derailed his trajectory to an assured professorship by neglecting to participate

⁸⁷ Bachtin, 41

⁸⁸ Ivanov 2001, 185

in an oral defense of his dissertation in Berlin, after completing and submitting it, in the interest of writing poetry, traveling around Europe, and living a life centered around art and love. Ivanov's scholarship, poetry, personal life, and plans for a tragic-Slavonic renaissance are all intertwined and are inseparable from his enduring devotion to Dionysus, and what the god represented religiously, culturally, and philosophically. Discussion of Symbolist thought, especially within the realm of theater, will often reference Dionysus and a passion for the Dionysian, and the fixation on this particular member of the pantheon of Hellenic gods loomed large in the philosophical thought of the late nineteenth century. The mystical figure of Dionysus represented to members of the Russian intelligentsia the maelstrom created by changing societal norms, the resurgence of religiosity, and a shifting of aesthetics away from realism and toward, to paraphrase a motto cited by Ivanov, the "more real."⁸⁹

Locating the root of Russian Symbolist interest in the multifaceted suffering god haunting their poetry and scholarship must begin first with the critical essays of Richard Wagner, who set the ideals of the Dionysian in motion, and then secondly with Friedrich Nietzsche, who took inspiration from Wagner and their mutual musical hero Ludwig von Beethoven in writing *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*. Ivanov calls Nietzsche the Aaron to Wagner's Moses, the one able to amplify and convey to broader audiences the revelations of the prophet. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, in her introduction to a volume of essays titled *Nietzsche in Russia*, explains the appeal of Nietzsche to the Russian intellectuals of the late nineteenth century by describing him as "a philosopher for rebels."⁹⁰ According to Rosenthal, *The Birth of Tragedy* was often the first work by Nietzsche encountered by Russians of the late nineteenth century. She continues, "Russian intellectuals discovered [Nietzsche] in a time, the 1890s, when they were seeking a new

⁸⁹ In Latin: "*A realibus ad realiora*" ("from the real to the more real")

⁹⁰ Rosenthal, 3.

vision of man and the world.”⁹¹ Ivanov’s assertion that aesthetics had become more important in art than reverence for its religious roots is based in his reading of *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which Nietzsche argues that the balance between the Dionysian and Apollonian forces as they were represented in art kept ancient Greek people from existential despair, but that these forces were quelled by the rational philosophies of Socrates and Plato, and the influence of rationality has reigned into modernity. Important members of this school of thought circulated around the arts journal *Mir Iskusstva* (*The World of Art*), which was founded by Nietzschean devotees Alexandre Benois and Sergei Diaghilev. The journal featured translations of the philosopher’s treatises, extensive critical responses to Nietzschean and Wagnerian thought by writers including Merezhkovsky and Lev Shestov, and Rosenthal points out that the logo of *Mir Iskusstva* (pictured below) is itself a Nietzschean image: “[the logo] conveys Benois’ belief that the world of art is above all earthly things, above the stars, reigning there proud, mysterious, and lonely, like an eagle.” *Mir Iskusstva* also published a eulogy for the philosopher in the year of his death, 1900.⁹²



Diaghilev, Serge, and Alexandre Benois. *Mir iskusstva*. [s.n.], 1900.

⁹¹ Rosenthal, 39.

⁹² Rosenthal, 12.

The draw to ancient tragedy that many artists and sophists felt as the nineteenth century came to a close did not begin or end with Wagner or Nietzsche, but it is necessary to delve into their work for the purposes of this dissertation, and to linger on the nuances between the Dionysian and the Apollonian, a brilliant framework for dividing the artistic from the abject. While it is clear in Nietzsche's text that the Apollonian and Dionysian are each necessary in balance to allow the tragic structure to function, these terms entered the lexicon of modernist artists, allowing poets and philosophers to signify allegiance either to the mystery and wildness of the Suffering God or to the Word and the clarity of Apollo. This framework is also useful in illuminating the theoretical backgrounds of the translation and reception projects of Ivanov, Merezhkovsky, and Annensky: two Dionysian thinkers accompanied by a principled Apollonian. What follows is first a discussion of several critical essays by Wagner and of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, a text that expansively acknowledges its debt to Wagner as well as to Arthur Schopenhauer. This will be followed by an exploration of the theory and polemics on tragedy written by Symbolists, especially the multiple treatises written by Ivanov, which respond to these German writers and parse Dionysian ideas, dissecting aesthetic and religious interpretations of the dramatic form in attempts to emerge with the argument for a Greek tragedy that serves the Russian moment.

Richard Wagner and the "total work of art"

The tremendous influence of Richard Wagner on Russian culture began with the popularity of his music, which resulted in Wagner, in need of money and an ego boost, visiting St. Petersburg and Moscow in 1863 to conduct a series of concerts. Wagner was pleased by his warm welcome in Russia, writing to a friend, "I have made an unexpectedly thrilling impression on the Russian

public.”⁹³ There was a resurgence of interest in Wagner during the fin-de-siecle, two decades after the composer's death in 1883, driven by interest in his aesthetic forms and rejection of positivism, and for the Russian Symbolists, his writing was just as important as the music. Nikolai II's German-born wife, Alexandra, chose Prince S. M. Volkonsky to direct the imperial theaters in 1899, and among his first productions was Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* and all four parts of his *Ring* cycle at the Mariinsky Theater.⁹⁴ Rosamund Bartlett, author of *Wagner and Russia*, writes that Russia was “particularly sympathetic and susceptible to Wagnerian ideas,” continuing, “certainly no other culture seems to have taken the composer's writings on art to heart as they did in Russia.”⁹⁵ The Russian Symbolists followed the French Symbolists in putting Wagner at the forefront of aesthetic inspiration: Raymond Furness writes that in 1885, the poet Mallarmé thought that Symbolist poetry should “emulate [Wagnerian] musical patterns.”⁹⁶ In 1899, *Mir Iskusstva* began publishing articles on Wagner's artistry and aesthetic philosophy, which Bartlett locates as the beginning of “Russian Wagnerism.”⁹⁷ This strain of Wagnerism spread across artistic mediums from the *Mir Iskusstva* impresarios Benois and Diaghilev, to the painters Mikhail Vrubel and Wassily Kandinsky, and poets Andrei Bely, Blok, and Ivanov, among many others. Benois argued that the Ballet Russe was “one of the most consistent and complete expressions of the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the idea for which our circle was ready to give its soul.”⁹⁸ The synthesis of the arts achieved by a ballet, which was the favorite type of performance of the imperial court, can be seen as a prototypical version of what the subjects of this dissertation imagined for their revivals of tragedy, with its rich font of artistic inspiration, its draw to artists of all mediums, and its

⁹³ Bartlett, 27

⁹⁴ Weber, 205

⁹⁵ Bartlett, 6

⁹⁶ Millington, 396

⁹⁷ Bartlett, 67

⁹⁸ Weber, 203

widespread popularity in Russia and abroad. As a form of entertainment enjoyed primarily by the upper classes, ballet was funded extensively, but it lacked the social function and ability to motivate a sensation of *sobornost* that Symbolists built into their hopes for tragedy, engaging with Wagner's ideas on the aesthetic level without delving into the call for revolution and mystic utopia that was tied up in tragedy.

Appetite for Wagnerian productions was immense, and the imperial theaters in Moscow and St. Petersburg were performing all the above operas, as well as *Die Walkerie*, to sold-out audiences.⁹⁹ The theater critic Sergey Durylin wrote that Russian desire for "religious, myth-based art" was at the root of this phenomenon.¹⁰⁰ Bartlett expands upon this idea:

Wagner brought tragic drama to the operatic stage and combined it with symphonic music, the result of which was an emotional expressiveness that had an explosive effect on receptive listeners. He had created a fairy-tale world of myth which these writers could both escape into, and identify with, as allegorical of the world in which they themselves lived. These writers were Aleksandr Blok, Vyacheslav Ivanov and Andrei Bely, the second-generation Russian Symbolists, for whom art was the "key to the world of absolutes," and music above all a "redemptive revelation."¹⁰¹

There are three essays by Wagner, written in quick succession beginning in 1849, in which he articulates his vision for an "art-work of the future," drawn heavily from his understanding of ancient Greek theater and ancient authors, and it is the premises of these essays in particular that are cited and expanded upon by Russian Symbolists half a century later. Wagner had read through the complete works of Aeschylus for the first time in 1847, the year he was finishing his second draft of *Lohengrin*, an opera with a plot drawn from German medieval romance, into which Wagner interwove structural influence from Greek tragedy. Wagner was intrigued by the history of German reception of antiquity, especially the interaction of the medieval and the ancient. He

⁹⁹ Bartlett, 70

¹⁰⁰ Bartlett, 111

¹⁰¹ Bartlett, 69

continued to be preoccupied with Greek literature for the rest of his life, remarking to his wife Cosima in 1880 that the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus was the “most perfect thing in every way, religion, philosophic, poetic, artistic.”¹⁰² He read the trilogy of plays in the 1832 German translation by Johann Gustav Droysen, and noted in particular how Droysen’s accompanying commentaries on each play conveyed the mechanics and mysteries of ancient performance. Wagner wrote in his memoir that his “ideas about the significance of drama, and especially of the theatre itself, were significantly moulded” by his reading of Droysen’s *Oresteia* translation and commentaries.¹⁰³ In the four years that followed his first encounter with Aeschylus among other Greek authors in 1847, he wrote “Art and Revolution,” “The Art-Work of the Future,” and “Opera and Drama,” in which he works out his theory that the future of the arts would require a revival of classical tragedy in Germany. Wolfgang Schadewaldt writes, “Confirmation of [Wagner’s] own ideas by relating them to, and deriving them from, the Greeks almost becomes a way of thinking for him.”¹⁰⁴ The influence of Greek tragic structure is reflected in the *Ring*, Wagner’s operatic cycle, which like tragedies competing in the Dionysia festival in Athens is a tetralogy intended to be performed over the course of several days.¹⁰⁵

The dynamic between Apollo and Dionysus that would be the genesis for *The Birth of Tragedy* is first mentioned by Wagner in his 1849 article “Art and Revolution” (“Die Kunst und die Revolution”). Wagner writes that Apollo is the “fulfiller of the will of Zeus upon the Grecian earth”; he is described as “the springtime of the Greeks,” characterized by “energetic earnestness,” and being “beautiful but strong.”¹⁰⁶ Wagner imagines the young Aeschylus leaving home, as he

¹⁰² Borchmeyer, 77

¹⁰³ Borchmeyer, 77

¹⁰⁴ Wagner 1992, 229

¹⁰⁵ Wagner 1992, 235

¹⁰⁶ Wagner 1973, vol 1, 32

did to fight in the Persian Wars against Xerxes I in 490 BCE, and being initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries, the famously secretive cult of Demeter and Persephone, before being inspired by Apollo and Dionysus to bring forth “the highest conceivable form of art—the DRAMA.”¹⁰⁷ Tragedy was at its zenith during Aeschylus’s prime, but after the fifth century, the drama and Athens as an empire would never be quite as powerful. Athenian dominance was succeeded by the rise of the Romans, an empire Wagner characterizes as being much more brutal and less encouraging of the artistic creations of its citizenry. The Athenian in the age of tragedy could make complex, celebratory art that reflected Wagner’s perception of life and its value, but this age was followed by a turn to philosophy. Wagner writes, “And, at the bitter end, every impulse of Art stood still before Philosophy, who read with gloomy mien her homilies upon the fleeting stay of human strength and beauty. To *Philosophy*, and not to Art, belong the two thousand years which, since the decadence of Grecian Tragedy, have passed till our own day.”¹⁰⁸ Greek tragedy was replaced by Roman spectacle in the amphitheater, with lions and elephants reminding gladiators of their mortality instead of metered warnings sung and danced by poets. According to Wagner, as quality of life declined and men were subjugated by the imperial military control of the Romans, their creation and practice of art fell out of alignment with their needs: rather than Greek art, which reflected harmony between men and nature, Romans needed Christianity.¹⁰⁹

The uneasy marriage of Christianity and tragedy ordained by Ivanov and Merezhkovsky (via separate methodologies) is founded upon the idea that Christian liturgy and its surrounding literature is built upon the same desire to experience the divine that is at the heart of tragedy as a religious rite, and that a kinship exists between the two systems that would be recognizable and

¹⁰⁷ Wagner 1973, vol 1, 33

¹⁰⁸ Wagner 1973, vol 1, 35

¹⁰⁹ Wagner 1973, vol 1, 37

therefore accessible to Russian audiences. In the article that lends this dissertation its name, “On the New Significance of Ancient Tragedy,” (“О новом значении древней трагедии”) published in 1904, Merezhkovsky argues for the presence of “Christians before Christianity” in tragedy, specifically in the titular character in Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, which was staged at the Alexandrinsky Theater in Merezhkovsky’s translation. This article will be discussed further later in this chapter. Ivanov believed that Russian Orthodox worship and ritual represented an evolved but still extant form of Hellenic tragedy. Wagner’s view is that Christianity and Greek tragedy are products of distinctly different sets of conditions for men living under empire, with Christianity replacing tragedy in the Roman context to meet the needs of a spiritually—and literally—impoverished population, whose existence was the “antithesis of Art.”

For Art is pleasure in itself, in existence, in community; but the condition of that period, at the close of the Roman mastery of the world, was self-contempt, disgust with existence, horror of community. Thus *Art* could never be the true expression of this condition: its only possible expression was *Christianity*. Christianity adjusts the ills of an honourless, useless, and sorrowful existence of mankind on earth, by the miraculous love of God; who had not—as the noble Greek supposed—created man for a happy and self-conscious life upon this earth, but had here imprisoned him in a loathsome dungeon: so as, in reward for the self-contempt that poisoned him therein, to prepare him for a posthumous state of endless comfort and inactive ecstasy. [...] The free Greek, who set himself upon the pinnacle of Nature, could precreate Art from very joy in manhood: the Christian, who impartially cast aside both Nature and himself, could only sacrifice to his God on the altar of renunciation; he durst not bring his actions for his work as offering, but believed that he must seek His favour by abstinence from all self-prompted venture.¹¹⁰

Wagner does not believe this fulfillment of doctrine is what Christianity’s suffering god intended for his flock, but that it is the Church that did away with Christ’s teachings of universal love, and that this version of Christianity has continued into the modern era. This idea is familiar, of course, to readers of Russian literature, as a similar idea plays out in “The Grand Inquisitor,” a section of Dostoevsky’s novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. Further, Wagner notes that art in the modern era

¹¹⁰ Wagner 1973, vol 1, 37-38

exists to be sold and is primarily available only to the upper classes. For these reasons, modern art, especially modern theater, would be unrecognizable to the fifth-century Athenian. The purpose of modern theater is for the “rest, distraction, and amusement” of a prince “after a heavy dinner,” or a banker after a “fatiguing financial operation.”¹¹¹ The only path to restoring tragedy from its component parts to its full potential is a “Revolution of Mankind.”¹¹²

Wagner’s vision of a post-revolutionary (the revolution itself he leaves to our imagination) theater is one that again serves a social purpose and is stripped of class affiliation. It would be supported by the state, with no financial incentive driving its success. Tickets would be free, and artists well paid by the state and their community, although Wagner’s imagined audience would soon realize the senselessness of selling or paying for art, valuing instead “human fellowship.” Rather than returning to pre-Christian Athens, theater after the revolution would incorporate Christ’s teachings into Greek mythological drama. Wagner concludes:

Thus would *Jesus* have shown us that we all alike are men and brothers; while *Apollo* would have stamped this mighty bond of brotherhood with the seal of strength and beauty, and led mankind from doubt of its own worth to consciousness of its highest godlike might. Let us therefore erect the altar of the future, in Life as in the living Art, to the two sublimest teachers of mankind:—*Jesus, who suffered for all men; and Apollo, who raised them to their joyous dignity!*¹¹³

Nietzsche would replace the suffering Christ with Dionysus, a clever trade between gods who are often mistaken for each other in early Christian and pagan mythos, especially when Wagner’s Jesus and Apollo seem to be contributing to tragedy in similar ways. Nietzsche sees the same pattern of death and rebirth in the Dionysian that Wagner sees in the story of Christ, and makes this the essence of his theory of tragedy, the Apollonian being of secondary importance. Nietzsche will also depart from Wagner’s perception of public life and artistic creation in ancient Greece as

¹¹¹ Wagner 1973, vol 1, 44

¹¹² Wagner 1973, vol 1, 53

¹¹³ Wagner 1973, vol 1, 65

being defined by its beauty and harmony, a Romantic idea exemplified in Winckelmann that is at odds with Nietzsche's vision of the effects of Dionysian forces.

Wagner's next article, also published in 1849, develops a central element of his aesthetic theory: his concept of the "total work of art," the Gesamtkunstwerk. In "The Art-Work of the Future" ("Das Kunstwerk Der Zukunft"), Wagner surveys a variety of artistic genres, including the individual elements of tragedy (dance, song, and poetry) as well as music, architecture, sculpture, and painting, among others, in order to determine their function and importance for the more sophisticated art of the future, ultimately finding drama to be "the highest artistic aim."¹¹⁴ Wagner calls the simultaneous and spontaneous enactment of dance, song, and poetry in tragic performance to be the "three primeval sisters" who were the "trinitarian utterance of human Art," "the truest and most high-born Muses of artistic man."¹¹⁵ While each of these forms can exist individually, only their unity can transcend "art" as a bounded category and become a representation of freedom and the universal. Of the three categories, Wagner finds music, specifically the symphonies of Beethoven, to be the only art form able to reach the universal alone, without union with forms such as dance or poetry. To this end, Wagner identifies Beethoven as the most important modern artist, "a second Prometheus who fashioned men of clay [...] Beethoven had sought to fashion them of *tone*."¹¹⁶ Nietzsche will continue this discussion of Beethoven as the preeminent artist able to conjure the Dionysian in a Socratic, Apollonian world. Wagner also gives credit to Shakespeare for his use of poetry in drama, calling him "the mightiest Poet of all time"; nonetheless, the art of his period was still "incomplete" without dance and song, making

¹¹⁴ Wagner 1973, vol 1, 184

¹¹⁵ Wagner 1973, vol 1, 95

¹¹⁶ Wagner 1973, vol 1, 125

Shakespeare the “*Thespis of the Tragedy of the Future*.”¹¹⁷ Wagner finds his own form of art, the opera, to be a mostly satisfactory reunion of the primeval sisters, but that it does not fully revive the perfect balance of the ancient drama.¹¹⁸

Tragedy, like a symphony, is most powerful in its live performance, and this power is granted by the audience, or as Wagner calls them the Folk, everyday citizens of varying social classes and backgrounds who are united in their captivation. The existence of this balance between citizens, balance between the personal, political, and religious, allowed for the cultivation of tragedy in the context of fifth-century Athens, but this moment was only temporary. Wagner writes, “Tragedy flourished for just so long as it was inspired by the spirit of the Folk, and as this spirit was a veritably popular, *i.e.* a *communal* one. When the national brotherhood of Folk was shivered into fragments, when the common bond of Religion and primeval Customs was pierced and severed by the sophist needles of the egotistic spirit of Athenian self-dissection,—then the Folk’s art-work also ceased [...] With Arisophanian laughter, the Folk relinquished to these learned insects the refuse of its meal, threw Art upon one side for two millennia, and fashioned of its innermost necessity the history of the world.”¹¹⁹ A modern renewal of the tragic drama that was explicitly for communal rather than individual good would be updated to include the only (to Wagner) triumph that mankind had managed in those two thousand years: the classical orchestra. Wagner is referencing the ancient use of the term orchestra—ὀρχήστρα—which refers to the ground-level space in the center of a Greek amphitheater in which the tragic chorus were traditionally located during performances. The term is derived from the verb ὀρχεῖσθαι, “to dance,” therefore, “the dancing place.” This is also the space where an altar devoted to Dionysus, called a

¹¹⁷ Wagner 1973, vol 1, 141; Thespis was a poet of sixth-century Athens who wrote more primitive forms of dithyramb and tragedy before the time of Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides.

¹¹⁸ Wagner 1973, vol 1, 152

¹¹⁹ Wagner 1973, vol 1, 136

thymele (θυμέλη), was visible during the drama. This type of orchestra, male performers chanting the verses that Nietzsche would identify as the Dionysian presence, would be replaced in the Wagnerian tragedy by members of a classical orchestra, playing music that offered the same dialogic function, and conveyed the same conciliatory, frightened, or grief-stricken tone that the ancient chorus was responsible for.

Wagner's longest treatise on art, "Opera and Drama" ("Oper und Drama") was published in 1851, and further builds on the ideas in "Art and Revolution" and "The Art-Work of the Future." The first section of "Opera and Drama" is a critique of Wagner's peers in the contemporary opera sphere; the second turns to the variations of interactions between music and poetry in the modern drama. Wagner's description of the "twofold origin" of modern drama—the Romance, a genre "natural, and peculiar to our historic evolution," and the Greek Drama, which is "alien, and grafted on our evolution by reflection"—would echo in Ivanov's "Presentiments and Portents," in which he locates the foundational ideas of Symbolism between Romanticism and "prophecy," which he defines as "not necessarily an accurate foresight of the future, but always a certain creative energy, anticipating and conceiving the future," a concept grounded in ancient tragedy.¹²⁰ Wagner credits the widespread acceptance of Aristotelian tragic poetics through the dramatic scenarios of Shakespeare and Racine for the decline in drama and related performance genres. "Between these two extremes," he writes, "between the *Shakespearian* and the *Racinian* Drama, did *Modern Drama* grow into its unnatural mongrel shape."¹²¹

Wagner is far from the first composer to see opera as the modern equivalent of Greek tragedy. Already in Monteverdi's operas in the seventeenth century are tragic structures and themes from mythology visible, most notably in his operas *L'Orfeo* (1607), *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in*

¹²⁰ Ivanov 2001, 96

¹²¹ Wagner 1973, vol 2, 134

patria (1639), and *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (1642). Over a century later, an opera of Gluck again drew on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice; another, *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1779), on the tragedy of the same name by Euripides. Among German classical scholars and enthusiasts there were also other attempts to update and revive tragedy, for example, Goethe's play *Iphigenia in Tauris* (*Iphigenie auf Tauris*), which was also a reception of Euripides, and Schiller's tragedy *The Bride of Messina* (*Die Braut von Messina*), which included a chorus, departing from the neoclassical or Shakespearean tragic model in favor of the classical structure. Wagner finds these two German tragic receptions to be a superficial engagement with antiquity, an "imitation of Greek form" for "a purely artistic purpose."¹²² In Wagner's view, this type of reception fails to recognize that the form of the ancient Greek drama is structured to convey man's understanding of the phenomenal world and his own sets of choices—what Wagner calls Actions—within it. He writes, "To allow this Action, in its weightiest significance, to proceed in a manner fully vindicated by the idea of its transactors—*this* was the task of the Tragic-poet; to bring to understanding the Necessity of the action, by and in the demonstrated truth of the idea."¹²³ Wagner's concept of tragedy as *Gesamtkunstwerk*, then expanded and made his own by Nietzsche, is the most directly related to the theories of the tragic that would emerge in early-twentieth-century Russian Symbolism. Simon Goldhill writes, "Tragedy, for the nineteenth century in particular, became a structuring principle of the self-understanding of modernity. [...] If tragedy was an aesthetic battleground in the argument between the ancients and moderns in the eighteenth century, for the nineteenth century it became an integral element in the profoundest thinking about history and the suffering of humankind."¹²⁴ For the Symbolists, tragedy from the Wagnerian understanding was a

¹²² Wagner 1973, vol 2, 146

¹²³ Wagner 1973, vol 2, 156

¹²⁴ Goldhill, 140

way of imagining a future in which art could be a public forum and healing balm for their fractured society.

Wagnerism among the Symbolists

Symbolist attraction to Wagner's music and thought is intertwined with their abiding love for German literature, folklore, and philosophy. Bartlett calls Wagner a "priestly intermediary" between German Romanticism and French Symbolism, the most dominant sources of inspiration for Russian Symbolism.¹²⁵ Practically every Symbolist was among the audiences that flooded imperial productions of Wagnerian operas at the turn of the century. The ubiquity of Wagner in Russian theatrical culture coincided with ongoing debates among the Symbolists on the future of the theater, which lasted for years, and can be traced through the preponderance of polemical articles on Wagner and the theater in each of the Symbolist journals from this period, beginning with *Mir Iskusstva*, which ran from 1898 to 1904, and followed by *Vesy (Libra or The Scales)*, which was edited by Valery Bryusov and ran from 1904 to 1909. *Mir Iskusstva* published translated selections from Henri Lichtenberger's study on Wagner in 1899, which, according to Bartlett, was the first time a journal not primarily preoccupied with music had published on Wagner in Russia.¹²⁶ In 1900, *Mir Iskusstva* published the music critic A. M. Koptaiev's translation of Nietzsche's essay "Wagner in Bayreuth."¹²⁷ Poet Emil Medtner pitched Bryusov on publishing in *Vesy* Medtner's Russian translation of Wagner's "The Art-Work of the Future," but expressed to a friend disappointment that Bryusov found the translated article to be too long to print in full in the journal.¹²⁸ Correspondence between Ivanov and Bryusov from 1904 shows Ivanov disapproving

¹²⁵ Bartlett, 70

¹²⁶ Bartlett, 67

¹²⁷ Weber, 204

¹²⁸ Bartlett, 153

of the lack of Wagneriana in the pages under Bryusov's editorship. Ivanov wrote: "The Wagner question should be constantly discussed in *Libra*. It is an open question and has crucial meaning for all art, not just for music."¹²⁹ It should not be surprising, then, that in this same year Ivanov published two articles in *Vesy*, titled "Nietzsche and Dionysus" and "Athena's Spear" ("Kop'e Afiny") on the significance of Nietzsche and Wagner to the Symbolist movement. *Vesy* was challenged by *Zolotoe Runo* (*The Golden Fleece*) in 1906. The self-described "Argonauts" associated with *Zolotoe Runo* included Andrei Bely, Aleksandr Blok, Medtner, and the poet Lev Kobylinsky (who published under his pseudonym, Ellis).

Vesy, run by a first-generation Symbolist in Bryusov, represented Symbolism as an artistic movement and a school of literary production, while the second-generation Symbolists of *Zolotoe Runo* were more invested in Symbolism in the Ivanovian sense: as a "worldview," a way of living, which encompassed literary publication but expanded outward to the everyday.¹³⁰ Pyman describes *Zolotoe Runo* as a Gesamtkunstwerk itself, carefully curated to fuse mediums: poetry was formatted with original illustrations, and artists were commissioned to create portraits of Symbolist writers and composers.¹³¹ A subsequent journal, *Trudy i dni* (*Works and Days*), also edited by Medtner, was founded in 1912, and featured a section on Wagner in each issue.¹³² In 1913, as Symbolism was losing steam in favor of Acmeism, the latter movement's journal *Apollon* grew in scope and readership. Of course, it is immediately noticeable that with the exception of the *Mir Iskusstva*, each of these journals' names are drawn from antiquity. Wagner is frequently evoked in these journals as he, as Bartlett writes, was "one of the first artists to attempt to convey

¹²⁹ Wachtel, 102

¹³⁰ Bartlett, 170

¹³¹ Pyman, 286

¹³² Bartlett, 111

ideas through consciously symbolical means” as well as “a promoter of a people’s theatre which would unite actor and public.”¹³³

The ethos of *Apollon* emerged from efforts to diverge from the prevailing influence of Ivanov, and to create a distance between Ivanov’s cult of Dionysus and the set of classically inclined poets who abhorred mysticism. Ivanov, for his part, was happy to speak and preside over any gathering of poets and intellectuals, including *Apollon*, but his mentorship of Nikolai Gumilev and Osip Mandelstam led to their disavowal of the Ivanovian approach to poetics and antiquity. The set of aesthetic ideals they favored was inspired by the writing of Innokenty Annensky, himself an admirer of Wagner. Annensky wrote a poem in 1906 mentioning Wagner’s *Parsifal*, which had been performed for the first time in St. Petersburg that year.

О нет, не стан, пусть он так нежно-зыбок,
Я из твоих соблазнов затаю
Не влажный блеск малиновых улыбок —
Страдания холодную змею.

Так иногда в банально-пестрой зале,
Где вальс звенит, волнуя и моля,
Зову мечтой я звуки Парсифаля,
И Тень, и Смерть над маской короля...

Оставь меня. Мне ложе стелет Скука.
Зачем мне рай, которым грезят все?
А если грязь и низость — только мука
По где-то там сияющей красе?

Oh, no, not your waist, though it be so
Tender and lively, will I save from your
Temptations, not the moist shine of crimson
Smiles, the cold serpent of suffering.

Thus at times in the banal, motley hall, where
The waltz rings out, disturbing and beseeching,

¹³³ Bartlett, 96

I summon up in reverie the sounds of Parsifal
And the shadow, and Death over the king's mask...

Leave me... Boredom makes my bed. What do I
Need that paradise for, of which all dream? And
If dirt and baseness are only tormented longing
For the beauty that is shining somewhere there...¹³⁴

Among the three primary subjects of this dissertation, Annensky was arguably the most enthusiastic about Wagner, inclusive of his operas and his critical essays. "I remain a Wagnerian. I always have been," he wrote in a letter to a friend in 1907. *Apollon* and Acmeist theory will be discussed further later in this chapter.

The two articles by Ivanov mentioned above scratch the surface of his extensive writing on Wagner and his significance to the Symbolist movement. Despite this recognition of Wagner as a key influence on Symbolism, Michael Wachtel writes that Ivanov did not personally care for Wagner's music, and felt that his ideas for the theater demonstrate a lack of understanding of the ancient practices. Wagner was, to Ivanov, not a "pure Dionysian," despite Wagner being among "the first of the artists to speak in his theoretical essays about Dionysus."¹³⁵ Ivanov's "Presentiments and Portents" argues that there is a widespread desire in Russia for theater, and that ancient theater holds the key to the type of dynamic drama that will fulfill them, as exemplified abroad by the energetic theater of Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Verhaeren, and Wagner. Ivanov writes,

If modern theater is once again to be dynamic, let it be so in full. Following the example of the ancients, who used ecstatic music and the exciting rhythms of dance as a treatment for frenzy, we seek musical intensification of the affect as a means capable of producing a healing resolution. [...] We want to gather in order to create, to "act," in a collective [*sobornyi*] manner, and not to contemplate: "zu schaffen, nicht zu schauen [to create and not to watch]."¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Annenskii 1982, trans. Morrison, 28

¹³⁵ Wachtel, 102

¹³⁶ Ivanov 2001, 104

Wachtel's commentary on this essay notes that this phrase was originally even more explicit in its reference to Wagner: in an earlier draft it was followed by "as Wagner already recognized and demanded," an allusion to a line from Wagner's opera *Siegfried*.¹³⁷ Ivanov gives Wagner (and Nietzsche) credit for calling for a synthesis of the arts that would "gather into its focus the nation's entire spiritual self-determination"¹³⁸ but disagrees with Wagner's replacement of a singing chorus with the music of the orchestra: "Wagner the hierophant does not give the community a choral voice and word. Why? The community has a right to this voice because it is supposed to be not a crowd of spectators but a gathering of orgiasts."¹³⁹ Ivanov's staging would do away with Wagner's clever replacement of the *orkhestra* with a modern orchestra, ensuring that the chorus is central to the performance. The chorus, he writes, "gives form to movement (processions, theories) and acts with the massive grandiosity and collective [*sobornyi*] authority of the community it represents."¹⁴⁰

Symbolist tragic reception deviates from Wagnerian and Nietzschean tragedy with regards to Christianity and interplay between Christian and Greek mythos. Throughout his writing on tragedy, Wagner repeatedly differentiates between tragedy as a creation of the Greeks and all art emerging from a Christian mythos, beginning with the Romans and even Roman reception of tragedy. A Greek drama is occupied with man's negotiating between several vectors of his reality, from his mortality, to his religion, to the natural world, while the Christian hero is interested in "preparation for Death." Wagner writes, "In Greek drama the movement waxes from the beginning, with constantly accelerated speed, to the mighty storm of the catastrophe; whereas the genuine, unmixed Christian drama must perforce begin with the storm of life, to weaken down its

¹³⁷ Ivanov 2001, 267

¹³⁸ Ivanov 2001, 98

¹³⁹ Ivanov 2001, 106

¹⁴⁰ Ivanov 2001, 108

movement to the final swoon of dying out.”¹⁴¹ The idea that Greek drama and Christian literature are governed by different mythological and psychological approaches is antithetical to Ivanov’s and Merezhkovsky’s thought in particular among the Symbolists. Both writers were adamant that a singularity existed between the two traditions, and that their interweaving and shared mythologies is why Greek literature resonates with the Russian reader.

In “Presentiments and Portents,” Ivanov heralds Wagner and Nietzsche as “our [Russian] elder brethren among the barbarians.” Ivanov continued:

Wagner called for a fusion of artistic energies in a synthetic art that would gather into its focus the nation’s entire spiritual self-determination. Nietzsche appeared with the message of a new, integral soul for which (so opposed is it to the soul of the “theoretical man,” the son of the critical era!) the will is already knowledge, knowledge (in the sense of affirmation) is already life, and life is already faithfulness to the earth. Independently of Nietzsche, Ibsen willed us, the “dead,” to “arise”: he rose up against beauty that had broken down into arts and into separate self-contained and isolated artistic creations, prophesying that all beauty would become life, and all life—beauty.¹⁴²

In 1920, when Ivanov was valiantly participating in Narkompros programming, he gave a lecture titled “On Wagner” before a performance of *Die Walkure* at the Bolshoi Theater, in which his perspective on Wagner is essentially unchanged from his Symbolist manifestos. Now in the Soviet context, Wagner, perhaps more so than ever, represented a path forward for theater and music for their new society.¹⁴³

Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche presents a premise for thinking about Greek tragedy that was drastically different from the contemporary way of thinking about ancient literature, building upon the ideas of Wagner enumerated above, while also establishing an innovative,

¹⁴¹ Wagner 1973, vol 2, 160

¹⁴² Ivanov 2001, 89

¹⁴³ Wachtel, 379

exciting methodology for resurrecting tragedy and using it as a framework for understanding life as well as art.¹⁴⁴ Rather than conceiving of the ancient dramas as examples of the serene, prescient, somewhat naive artistic sensibility of antiquity, Nietzsche presents tragedy as a way ancients tried to understand the fragile balance humans face between chaos and rationality.

When we ask which remedy enabled the Greeks in their period of greatness, at the time of the extraordinary strength of their Dionysian and political drives, to avoid exhausting themselves either in ecstatic brooding or in a consuming pursuit of global power and prestige, and to achieve rather that glorious mixture resembling a noble wine, which both inflames and induces contemplation on the part of the drinker, then we must remember the tremendous power of *tragedy* which stimulates, purifies, and discharges the whole life of the people; whose highest value we only sense when it draws near us, as in the case of the Greeks, as the epitome of all prophylactic healing powers, as the mediator which holds sway over the strongest and in themselves most disastrous characteristics of the people.¹⁴⁵ Nietzsche articulates how citizens of the powerful and expanding Athens would fear or desire the mysteries most necessary for communal cathartic release, arguing against the image his academic contemporaries had of Athens in the fifth century BCE as a metropolis that in which its inhabitants managed to be both at the height of political and intellectual achievement and also the embodiment of antique serenity. Unlike any other genre or form, tragedy, Nietzsche argues, was created to evoke these unwieldy, conflicting emotions: the rumblings of danger and fear beneath the structure of quotidian life. It is this relationship with art, borne through the music of tragedy, that he argued must be revived, for the sublime redemption of German society. This idea, reoriented to imagine a Russian artistic unity centered around music, that reverberated through the Russian intelligentsia, and represented a very real course of action for the subjects of this dissertation.

The Birth of Tragedy distinguishes between these sensations summoned by watching or otherwise participating in tragedy by aligning them with the two gods associated with music: Apollo, who is often depicted in ancient statuary holding a lyre, rules over music that is orderly

¹⁴⁴ Nietzsche, 4.

¹⁴⁵ Nietzsche, 112

and tame, while Dionysian music, as befits the god of wine and debauchery, is overwhelming, noisy, and sensual; Apollo rules over the realm of dreams, that space where humans can imagine the world of the gods and receive divine inspiration for their own artistic creation, while Dionysus is the lord of intoxication, signaling a loss of control, the desire for abundance, and being subsumed into pleasure. Nietzsche explains Apollo's strict boundaries by way of Arthur Schopenhauer's concept of *principium individuationis* (principle of individuation), a term used by Schopenhauer in *The World as Will and Representation* (1818) to describe the fact that time and space exist independently and thus prove the existence of multiplicity. *Principium individuationis* allows man to feel secure boundaries in an ultimately boundaryless world; Schopenhauer writes: "Just as a captain sits in a boat, trusting the weak little vessel as the boundless sea raises up and casts down howling cliffs of waves, so the human individual sits calmly in a world full of sorrow, supported by and trusting the *principium individuationis*, which is how the individual cognizes things as appearance."¹⁴⁶ Nietzsche cites this passage in *The Birth of Tragedy* as the "most sublime expression" of Apollo, and that Apollo "might even be described as the magnificent divine image of the *principium individuationis*, through whose gestures and looks all the pleasure and wisdom and beauty of 'appearance' speak to us." Schopenhauer goes on to describe the sensation of "indelible dread" humans feel when the principle is confronted with an event that causes them to doubt their trust in appearances, such as the impression that the dead have returned to life, or that the past or future is encroaching on the experience of the present. This gives people "a tremendous fright because they are thrown into sudden confusion over the forms of cognition of appearances, which is the only thing keeping their own individuality separate from the rest of the world."¹⁴⁷ Nietzsche adds to this dread or fright the "blissful rapture" that can also result from the breakdown

¹⁴⁶ Schopenhauer, 379.

¹⁴⁷ Schopenhauer, 380.

in cognition of the phenomenal world, an introduction to the sensations of the Dionysian and his pathways to intoxication: “Either under the influence of the narcotic drink of which all original men and peoples sing in hymns, or in the approach of spring which forcefully and pleasurably courses through the whole of nature, those Dionysian impulses awaken, which in their heightened forms cause the subjective to dwindle to complete self-oblivion.”¹⁴⁸

As far as these philosophical terms may be applied to an individual, the Apollonian approach is focused on that individual and the laws and limits one sets for oneself, influenced by the “ethical deity” Apollo, who “demands of his disciples moderation and in order to maintain it, self-knowledge.”¹⁴⁹ This is the approach that Nietzsche sees attempting to rule aesthetics beginning with the Greeks and their pursuit of outward beauty and inward calm through art and philosophy. The repression of the Dionysian, the seedy underbelly of society where all the fun is had, only makes it more tempting, so in any Apollonian context the Dionysian celebration will ring in an “ever more seductive and spellbinding way through this artificially dammed-up world built on appearance and moderation, how in these spells the whole excess of nature in pain, pleasure, and knowledge resounded to the point of a piercing scream.”¹⁵⁰ Nietzsche illustrates the battle between the Apollonian and the Dionysian in Hellenic history, leading to its culmination in a “secret marriage” between the two: Attic tragedy. Having proven that the Apollonian and Dionysian drives infiltrate human personalities and the collective personalities of various epochs of civilization, Nietzsche moves to discussion of these drives as they animate genres of art.

While Nietzsche categorizes lyric poetry and the epic as products of the Apollonian drive, as they imitate and model in smooth, dreamlike, ordered imagery the suffering and ecstasy of

¹⁴⁸ Nietzsche, 22.

¹⁴⁹ Nietzsche, 31.

¹⁵⁰ Nietzsche, 32.

human feeling, the Dionysian drive is rooted in music, which does not require images or even words to summon emotion and evoke pain and longing. Another instance of the meeting of the Apollonian and Dionysian drives in art is the folk song, which Nietzsche credits the seventh century BCE poet Archilochus for introducing into literature. Nietzsche calls the folk song the *perpetuum vestigium* (perpetual footprint) of the joining of the Apollonian and Dionysian: “the folk song represents for us in the very first instance a musical mirror of the world, an original melody, which now seeks a parallel phenomenon in dream and expresses this in poetry.”¹⁵¹ In his description of the nature of the folk song, Nietzsche discusses the merging of poetry and music in folk music that is a precursor to their “secret marriage” in tragedy: “Here we find sketched out for us the only possible relationship between poetry and music, word and sound: the word, the image, the concept seeks an expression analogous to music and now feels the force of music in itself. In this sense we may distinguish between two main currents in the history of the language of the Greek people, according to whether language imitates the world of phenomena and images or the world of music.”¹⁵²

At this point, Nietzsche moves closer to the key idea of tragedy that would make it central to Symbolist artistic conception: that Greek tragedy emerged out of the tragic chorus, and infuses Apollonian reality with emotions and motive from the Dionysian.

We must understand Greek tragedy as the Dionysian chorus which again and again discharges itself in an Apollonian world of images. So those chorus parts that are interwoven through tragedy are to a certain extent the material womb of the whole so-called dialogue, that is, of the whole world of the stage, of the real drama.¹⁵³

Nietzsche mentions the popular idea that all protagonists in tragedy are depictions of Dionysus wearing a tragic mask, suffering in all ways imaginable in the guises of well-known semihistorical

¹⁵¹ Nietzsche, 39.

¹⁵² Nietzsche, 40.

¹⁵³ Nietzsche, 50-51.

characters from Homer and Hesiod. While the dramas of Aeschylus and Sophocles perpetuate this sensation of watching the suffering god enact the tragic fates of Oedipus and Prometheus (whose eponymous dramas he discusses at length), Nietzsche accuses Euripides of contributing to tragedy's demise by "bringing the spectator on stage," referring to the colloquial, natural register of Euripidean speech.

Through [Euripides], the man of everyday life pushed his way from the auditorium to the stage; now the mirror, in which previously only the great and bold traits came to expression, showed that embarrassing fidelity which reproduces the botched lines of nature. [...] For from now on there was no longer any secret as to how and with which aphorisms daily life could be represented on stage. The mediocrity of the citizen, upon which Euripides built his political hopes, now got a chance to speak, while previously in tragedy it had been rather the demigod and in comedy the drunken satyr or the half-man who had determined the character of language.¹⁵⁴

While characters in Aeschylus and Sophocles, in their dialogue but especially in the lines of the chorus, often speak in obscure, stilted, mystical phrases, intentionally distant from natural speech, Euripides bridges this gap, and even the gods in his dramas speak naturally and express emotions that could be described as relatable. Take, for example, these lines from the choruses of two Greek tragedies: the first from *The Eumenides* by Aeschylus and the second from the *Alcestis* by Euripides, both in translation from the same volume by Richmond Lattimore.

The Eumenides

Chorus	Home, home, o high, o aspiring Daughters of Night, aged children, in blithe processional. Bless them, all here, with silence.
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In the primeval dark of earth-hollows
held in high veneration with rights sacrificial
bless them, all people, with silence.

Alcestis

Chorus	Your luck had been
--------	--------------------

¹⁵⁴ Nietzsche, 64.

good, so you were inexperienced when
grief came. Still you saved
your own life and substance.
Your wife is dead, your love forsaken.
What is new in this? Before
now death has parted
many from their wives.¹⁵⁵

The difference in register is clear, and the chorus shrinks in importance between Aeschylus and Euripides from a mystical collective to a crowd of bystanders. Nietzsche proposes that the natural speech and relatability of gods and demigods found in Euripidean drama influenced the reputation of Greek literature as being one of “serenity,” rather than being characterized by the mysteries, punishments, and chaos depicted in the works of Aeschylus and Sophocles. This perspective was roundly rejected and made Nietzsche a controversial figure when *The Birth of Tragedy* was published as it went against the widely accepted belief that came with neoclassical and Enlightenment-era thinking that the ancient Greeks were a simpler, happier, more balanced people, not the people seeking answers to complex, painful, mystical questions such as Nietzsche depicts. The surviving tragedies that are most true to their original function, Nietzsche argues, are those of Aeschylus, and that even in the plays of Sophocles one can see the “displacement of the chorus” that would eventually lead to the “annihilation of the chorus,” which Nietzsche locates in the plays of Euripides and of the playwrights of New Comedy.¹⁵⁶ The crisis of the decentering of the chorus takes Nietzsche’s text from the time of Euripides to Nietzsche’s contemporary moment in German philology, in which he argues the chorus and its role as the presence of Dionysus is urgently needed. Nietzsche argues that Aeschylean tragedy is designed to leave the spectators (individually and as a collective) feeling disconcerted by the interactions of the tragic hero and the chorus, requiring us to remind ourselves that this sensation is “the origin and essence of Greek tragedy, as

¹⁵⁵ Lattimore, 41, 301.

¹⁵⁶ Nietzsche, 77.

the expression of two interwoven artistic drives, the *Apollonian and the Dionysian*.”¹⁵⁷ Euripidean tragedy, on the other hand, aims “to excise that original and all-powerful Dionysian element from tragedy and to rebuild tragedy purely on the basis of an un-Dionysian art, morality and world-view.”¹⁵⁸

According to Nietzsche, Euripides changes the orientation of tragic drama toward the emerging genre of New Comedy, reigned by Aristophanes, and what Nietzsche terms “aesthetic Socratism,” aligned with the Socratic ideas that “in order to be beautiful, everything must be intelligible” and that “Knowledge is virtue.”¹⁵⁹ Euripides smoothed out the unwieldy, jagged edges of Sophoclean-Aeschylean drama, in which narrative came second to pathos, and created plot-driven, naturalistic tragedies that still give the impression of modernity after millennia. The chorus has fewer lines in Euripidean drama, and its verses help move plot forward through dialogues with protagonists rather than the invocations of ancient conflicts and abstract warnings in earlier dramas. The concept of plot versus pathos will recur when discussing the Russian Symbolist receptions of tragedy, which were largely found to be unstageable, as opposed to other forms of reception, such as the novel or poetry, which found widespread popularity. Euripidean tragedy portrays characters, even those swathed in heroic myth, as individuals, who are able to learn and grow and are rewarded with earthly pleasures; Aeschylean characters are bound to their mythical archetype, and act with god-like distance and strangeness, emitting the glow of universal knowledge and, by the end of the play, universal redemption by Dionysus.

Nietzsche accuses Socrates of being the opponent of Dionysus for his influence on his contemporary Euripides, whose presence causes the suffering god to retreat, and Socratic tragedy

¹⁵⁷ Nietzsche, 68

¹⁵⁸ Nietzsche, 68.

¹⁵⁹ Nietzsche, 70.

ruled thenceforth, up until Nietzsche's present, Germany in the 1870s.¹⁶⁰ Book 10 of Plato's *Republic* depicts Socrates critiquing Homer and the tragic poets for being "imitators of the highest degree," capable only of shallow replication of emotion that pales in comparison to experiencing reality. Nietzsche recounts the anecdote that Plato burned his own poetry as a young man in order to become a dutiful pupil of Socrates.¹⁶¹ Nietzsche sees the philosophical and intellectual history of the past two millennia as spiraling out from Socrates' influence, and that the optimism of Socratic knowledge seeking in the modern era is "hurtling inexorably toward its limits."¹⁶² At this limit, man, optimism extinguished, looking into an "impenetrable darkness," may encounter what Nietzsche calls "tragic knowledge," and look back toward art and particularly tragedy as a balm, i.e. in the same function of Aeschylean tragedy before Euripidean alterations to the genre. The tenets of tragedy—the music and the speech—were separated to enhance the verisimilitude of Euripidean, "rational" tragedy (a term Nietzsche would find oxymoronic). The music is the key to tragedy's power. Here Nietzsche explicates how the music inherent to both Dionysus and Apollo function together to evoke the tragic in concert.

Dionysian art usually exercises two types of influence on the Apollonian capacity for art: music stimulates the *allegorical contemplation* of Dionysian universality, and music allows the emergence of the allegorical image in its *most significant form*. From these facts, intelligible in themselves and accessible to any more perceptive observer, I deduce the capacity of music to give birth to *myth*, which is the most significant example, and precisely the *tragic* myth: the myth which speaks of Dionysian knowledge in allegories. With respect to the phenomenon of the lyric poet, I have shown how in the lyric poet music struggles to reveal its essence in Apollonian images: if we now imagine that music in its most heightened form must also seek to reach its greatest transformation into images, then we must consider it capable of finding symbolic expression for its real Dionysian wisdom; and where else should we look for this expression if not in tragedy and above all in the concept of the *tragic*?¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Nietzsche, 73.

¹⁶¹ Nietzsche, 77.

¹⁶² Nietzsche, 84.

¹⁶³ Nietzsche, 89-90.

Without the music, the Dionysian allegories referenced above lose a crucial element of their transportative power. It follows that the Euripidean style of tragedy suffused with Socratic reasoning would be less dependent on music, and that this style of tragedy in its existence to modernity would become independent from original attempts to evoke the suffering wine god. Music is also a link we have today to ancient culture: it may not sound the same, but the communal enjoyment of harmonious instruments is a joyful human experience. German music, per Nietzsche, is an artistic achievement borne out of “the Dionysian ground of the German spirit.”¹⁶⁴ Nietzsche identifies Kant and Schopenhauer as modern philosophers who have diverged from the rational-theoretical trajectory established by Socrates. The works of Bach, Beethoven, and Wagner in particular have made music the “sole unadulterated, pure, and purifying fire-spirit” in the midst of all German culture.

Finally, nearing the end of his treatise, Nietzsche addresses the aesthetic transformation that will result in viewers of the revived musical tragedy. The intended audience includes the “critic,” whose entire artistic and scholarly perspective is informed by art that is “artificial and no more than thinly coated with the appearance of life”; even this critic will himself be revived as an “aesthetic listener.”¹⁶⁵ The “aesthetic listener” is one willing to put aside notions of reason and rationality to open himself up to the “miracle” happening on the stage and in so doing, demonstrate himself capable of comprehending myth, the “compressed world-image,” which requires acceptance of this miracle and the rejection of the Socratic annihilation of myth.¹⁶⁶ Evidence that Germany is capable of this rebirth is found in German folk music and dance, Reformation-era choral music, and the compositions of Beethoven and Wagner. While Wagner’s concept of the

¹⁶⁴ Nietzsche, 106.

¹⁶⁵ Nietzsche, 120.

¹⁶⁶ Nietzsche, 122.

Gesamtkunstwerk emphasizes the balance between the elements of music, dance, and poetry, Nietzsche makes it clear that music, the orchestra Wagner imagines in the chorus's place, is the foundation and center of the performance, the "spirit of music." This art is meant to reach listeners and participants on an intuitive level. Nietzsche's enthusiasm and optimism for a renaissance of tragedy is infectious, a fitting end to a sweeping entreaty to return to a pre-Socratic artistic mode. This return will herald the salvation of culture and an enlightenment for the people, which, after all, we must take as being directly the inheritance of Greek art.

Russian readers of *The Birth of Tragedy*

The Russian response to Nietzsche's body of work was immense and paved the way for cultural development both in line with and in opposition to Nietzsche's rejection of rationalism and positivism. The Symbolists applied the Dionysian principle to their artistic production and their ambition to collectively revive and recreate myth (*mifotvorchesto*). I will restrict my discussion around responses to the text and ideas of *The Birth of Tragedy* as Nietzsche's manifesto of his aesthetic thought rather than his wider oeuvre, although many Russian intellectuals were responding to the ideas of Nietzsche's greater body of thought. Nietzsche's works were technically banned under censorship laws in Russia until 1898, but had been rising in popularity among intellectual circles for at least a decade prior.¹⁶⁷ Merezhkovsky and Ivanov both encountered Nietzsche in the German while traveling in Europe in the 1880s and early 1890s.¹⁶⁸ In 1896, the literary critic Akim Volynsky-Flekser, editor of the literary journal *Severnyi Vestnik*, wrote an article on *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which he breaks down and critiques its main ideas. While he agrees with Nietzsche's conception of art and its connection to metaphysics, Volynsky points out

¹⁶⁷ Grillaert, 20

¹⁶⁸ Grillaert, 22-23

that central ideas in Nietzsche's work are not themselves novel, and were drawn directly from Schopenhauer.

Но и в этом анализе Ницше, при всем великолепии литературных выражений, нет настоящей оригинальности, потому что Ницше делает прямые ссылки на Шопенгауэра, говорит его словами, цитирует его фразы, даже приводит из его сочинения целые страницы. В этом вопросе Ницше, как и Вагнер (в своей брошюре "Beethoven", Leipzig, 1870), прямо шли по следам шопенгауэровской критики, не улучшая и не дополняя ее никакими самобытными рассуждениями и замечаниями. На очень немногих страницах, в обеих частях своего основного сочинения, Шопенгауэр объяснил природу музыки, ее высокий трагический характер, с удивительным совершенством. Ее идеальное отношение к миру явлений он описал такими фразами, какие были доступны только Шопенгауэру, -- с каким-то суровым вдохновением, в котором как бы отразился староклассический бог Дионис. Каждое замечание его метко, точно, относится к существу предмета и незаметно раздвигает перед читателем широкие духовные перспективы.¹⁶⁹

But even in this analysis of Nietzsche, with all the splendor of literary expressions, there is no real originality, because Nietzsche makes direct references to Schopenhauer, speaks in his words, quotes his phrases, even cites whole pages from his work. In this matter, Nietzsche, like Wagner (in his brochure "Beethoven" Leipzig, 1870), followed directly in the footsteps of Schopenhauer's criticism, without improving or supplementing it with any original reasoning or comments. In very few pages, in both parts of his main work, Schopenhauer explained the nature of music, its high tragic character, with amazing perfection. Its ideal relationship to the world of phenomena he described in phrases that were accessible only to Schopenhauer—with a kind of severe inspiration, in which the old classical god Dionysus was reflected. Each of his remarks is apt, precise, relates to the essence of the subject and imperceptibly expands broad spiritual perspectives for the reader.

Volynsky also noticed how this earlier work stands in contradiction to the philosopher's later work *Antichrist*, in which Nietzsche makes no mention of this Dionysian principle he so fervently espouses in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Still, Volynsky finds the framework of the Apollonian and Dionysian to be fertile ground for the abundant interest in Hellenism already growing in Russian culture.

¹⁶⁹ Burlaka, 203

Among the Symbolists, interest in Nietzsche's ideas was complicated by his rejection of Christianity. A central theoretician for the Symbolists, Vladimir Solovyov, critiqued Nietzsche's resistance to putting his hopes for the revival of art and beauty into an explicitly Christian context. Solovyov wrote in *Mir Iskusstva's* first issue in 1899 that he considered the "bad sides" of Nietzscheanism to include

Презрение к слабому и больному человечеству, языческий взгляд на силу и красоту, присвоение себе *заранее* какого-то исключительного сверхчеловеческого значения - во-первых, себе единолично, а затем себе коллективно, как избранному меньшинству "лучших", т. е. более сильных, более одаренных, властительных, или "господских", натур, которым все позволено, так как их воля есть верховный закон для прочих, -- вот очевидное заблуждение ницшеанства.

Contempt for weak and sick humanity, a pagan view of strength and beauty, the attribution to oneself *in advance* of some kind of exceptional superhuman significance — first, to oneself individually, and then to oneself collectively, as a chosen minority of "better," i.e. stronger, more gifted, powerful, or "masterly" natures, for whom everything is permitted, since their will is the supreme law for others.¹⁷⁰

Solovyov is writing in response to a comment by Vasily Preobrashensky, a philosophy scholar invested in popularizing Nietzsche's works, who had noted in a review of a translation of the philosopher in the *Moscow Journal of Philosophy* that "to his own misfortune, Nietzsche seems to be becoming a fashionable writer in Russia; at least, there is a noticeable demand for him" ("к некоторому несчастью для себя, Ницше делается, кажется, модным писателем в России; по крайней мере, на него есть заметный спрос"). In his reminiscences on Ivanov written in 1933, Zielinski mentions anecdotally that Ivanov's wife, the playwright Lidia Zinovieva-Annibal, showed Ivanov's poetry to Solovyov without the former's knowledge, and that while Solovyov was impressed by Ivanov's lyric, he was perturbed by the younger poet's interest in Nietzscheanism. Despite Solovyov's strong influence on the thought trajectories of second-wave Symbolists, including Blok, Ivanov, and Bely, ideas from Nietzsche would continue to percolate

¹⁷⁰ Solovyov, 221

in Symbolist writing. Polemics on Nietzsche's ideas abounded in studies and articles by writers across affiliations, including the philosophers Lev Lopatin, Nikolai Grot, and Petr Asafev, and the Populist theoretician Nikolai Mikhailovsky.

Zielinski calls Nietzsche Ivanov's "second mentor," his first being the German classical philologist Theodor Mommsen, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1902 largely for his work *Römische Geschichte* (*Roman History*). Mommsen was the primary reader on Ivanov's dissertation and would have been his examiner in his oral defense, had Ivanov followed through with the defense. Zielinski sees Nietzsche and Ivanov as aligned in their vision of the Dionysian as being "beautiful and voluptuous, so inclining the soul to dreaminess and bliss," unlike the "demonic" Dionysian that the Socrates-poisoned Euripides depicts in his *Bacchae*. Zielinski acknowledges that Ivanov's thought soon diverged from Nietzsche's, writing,

Потому что Ницше для Иванова был скорее примером, чем образцом. Соединение смерти и возрождения в лице Диониса (знаю, что такое толкование плоско и убого, но более глубокого пока не нахожу) сильнее впечатлило Иванова, чем идея Диониса как выразителя всеобщей Воли, -- идея, которую глубоко и правильно, воспитанный на философии Шопенгауэра, также открыл и воссоздал Ницше.¹⁷¹

Nietzsche was more of a model than a role model for Ivanov. The union of death and rebirth in the person of Dionysus (I know this interpretation is shallow and pathetic, but I haven't yet found a more profound one) impressed Ivanov more than the idea of Dionysus as the spokesman of the universal Will—an idea that Nietzsche, profoundly and correctly educated in the philosophy of Schopenhauer, had also discovered and recreated.

Zielinski's perspective on Ivanov's Nietzscheanism is reflected in an essay Ivanov wrote in 1904 titled "Nietzsche and Dionysus." Ivanov figures Nietzsche as a hero out of myth, doomed to insanity in life but venerated as a demigod for his gifts to mankind, namely having "returned Dionysus to the world" as his "mission and prophetic madness."¹⁷² Ivanov had, like Nietzsche, studied classical philology and history at German universities, where the most learned and

¹⁷¹ Isupov, 538

¹⁷² Ivanov 2001, 178

impressive classicists were rigorously trained; also like Nietzsche, despite immense academic success, Ivanov never managed to officially finish his doctoral degree, although this did not prevent either from being employed as an instructor at the university level while pursuing other types of writing. Ivanov also commends Nietzsche for illuminating the centrality of music to the Dionysian, writing,

Nietzsche was an orgiast of musical raptures: this was his second soul. Not long before his death, Socrates dreamed that a divine voice was exhorting him to take up music: the philosopher Nietzsche fulfilled this wondrous testament. He was to become a participant in the Wagnerian throng dedicated to the worship of the Muses and Dionysus. He was to assimilate musically what Wagner had perceived in the legacy of Beethoven: his prophetic mantle and his Promethean, fire-bearing, hollow thyrsus—in other words, his heroic and tragic pathos. It was necessary that Dionysus be revealed in music (the mute art of deaf Beethoven, the greatest proclaimer of the orgiastic mysteries of the spirit) before he could be revealed in the word or in the “ecstasy and frenzy” of Dostoevsky, that great mystagogue of the future Zarathustra.¹⁷³

The gulf between Ivanov and Nietzsche comes from the latter’s rejection of the Dionysian as a religious mode, a mode that Ivanov took extremely seriously, writing in his characteristically evocative style that Nietzsche “recoiled before the religious mystery of his purely aesthetic raptures.”¹⁷⁴ While Nietzsche saw the Dionysian principle as a function of art that may be applied as a framework to life, to Ivanov, the Dionysian is “first and foremost a religious principle,” and the reason it is present in the theater is the same reason it is present in temples devoted to Dionysus: it is where devotees gather. Ivanov points out that the ancient term “Dionysus’s craftsmen” (“οἱ περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον τεχνῖται”) referred to actors as well as priests, and that they served the same purpose: “a truly Dionysian understanding of the world requires that in our consciousness our mask be the countenance of the many-faced god himself and that our playacting at his cosmic altar be a holy rite and sacrificial worship.”¹⁷⁵ Ivanov casts Nietzsche’s descent into insanity as a punishment

¹⁷³ Ivanov 2001, 179-80

¹⁷⁴ Ivanov 2001, 182

¹⁷⁵ Ivanov 2001, 187

out of Aeschylus, for “recklessly glanc[ing] at the mysterious idol”¹⁷⁶ without any kind of proper offering. It is within the cycle of Dionysian worship, however, to self-immolate and become like Dionysus by succumbing, as the god did, and as Ivanov argues Nietzsche did, to his unrelenting suffering. Ivanov concludes, “Prophet and foe of Dionysus in his passions and torments, in his guilt and his death, Nietzsche displays the tragic features of the god whom the Hellenes believed to have experienced universal martyrdom repeatedly beneath the heroic masks of mortals.”¹⁷⁷

Ivanov viewed Socrates and his role in bringing about the age of rationalism differently than Nietzsche. In “The Poet and the Crowd,” published in *Vesy* in 1904, Ivanov imagines the ancient philosopher in terms of what he owed to his public as a teacher.

Если бы Сократ предупредил всю жизнь тайный голос, повелевший ему—слишком поздно!—заниматься музыкой,—он стал бы впрямь и вполне «сподвижником лебедей в священстве Аполлона», как означает он в Платановом «Федоне» свое божественное посланничество,—и чаша с ядом народной мести не была бы им выпита. Ища осмыслить смутно презренную измену его стихии народной, духу музыки и духу мифа,—сограждане обвинили его в упразднении старых и введении новых божеств: они говорили на своем языке, который уже не был языком Сократа, и не находили в слове средства осознать и исчерпать всю великую, трагическую и творческую вину пророка, который был топором, подсекшим мифородные корни эллинской души. Он именно бессилён был ввести новые богопочитания; он не был подобен древнему Эпимениду. Если бы мифотворческая сила Греции не иссякла в Сократе, если бы она ещё дышала в нём, как она снова дышит в Платоне, срок эллинского цветения был бы продлен—и, быть может, лучом более стало бы в спектре человеческого духа.¹⁷⁸

If Socrates had spent his entire life forestalling the secret voice that commanded him—too late!—to study music, he would have truly and fully become “a companion of the swans in the priesthood of Apollo,” as he signifies his divine mission in Plato's *Phaedo*—and the cup of poisoned popular vengeance would not have been drunk. Seeking to comprehend the vaguely contemptible betrayal of his elemental folk, the spirit of music, and the spirit of myth, his fellow citizens accused him of abolishing old and introducing new deities: they spoke their own language, which was no longer the language of Socrates, and found no means in words to comprehend and exhaust the entire great, tragic, and creative guilt of the prophet, who was the axe that severed the mythological roots of the Hellenic soul. He was precisely powerless to introduce new worship; He was not like the ancient Epimenides.

¹⁷⁶ Ivanov 2001, 188

¹⁷⁷ Ivanov 2001, 188

¹⁷⁸ Ivanov 2018, 710

If the myth-making power of Greece had not dried up in Socrates, if it had still breathed in him, as it breathes again in Plato, the period of Hellenic flowering would have been prolonged—and perhaps it would have become a greater ray in the spectrum of the human spirit.

It is interesting that Ivanov projects onto Socrates a longing for music and myth that the philosopher pushed down in order to fulfill his agenda of rationalism. This is a prototypical Ivanovian scenario, linking the end of the golden age of Athenian tragedy with the failure of Socrates to imbue sufficient myth and music into his teaching. This excerpt further demonstrates the complexity of Ivanov's reception of Nietzsche's thought: while the two thinkers often traversed down parallel lines of inquiry, they rarely arrived at the same conclusion.

Another German classicist influential to Russian Symbolists was Erwin Rohde and his 1894 study *Psyche; the Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks*. This work also explores Dionysian ecstasy, beginning with Rohde's concept of the soul and how it was understood in various periods of Greek antiquity, beginning in the times of Homer. The ideas of Rohde can especially be seen in the popular lectures and series of essays of Zielinski, including his book *Ancient Greek Religion* (1918). *Psyche* is important for Russian Symbolist theories on Dionysus primarily because of the geographical element that it introduced, which was central to Ivanov in particular, but resonates throughout Russian receptions of antiquity. Rohde explains that the idea of the divine, immortal soul originated in Thrace, the mythological birthplace of Dionysus, and home to his cult. Rohde equates the experience of ecstatic Dionysian worship with their knowledge of the immortality of their soul. This cult of Dionysus spread from Thrace (modern day Bulgaria and Macedonia) to mainland Greece. The Thracian roots of Dionysian cult are explored in depth in Ivanov's *The Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God*. Katherine Lahti argues that the geographical connection between South Slavic lands and Dionysus allowed Russians to see their ancestors as the original worshippers of Dionysus, even before his cult made its way to Athens:

“It might not be too much of a stretch to say the Russians during the Silver Age believed Dionysus to have been Russian.”¹⁷⁹ Lahti quotes Ivanov:

The great non-Hellenic elemental force, barbarism, lives a separate life alongside the world of the Hellenic elemental force. Both worlds relate to each other, as the realm of form and the realm of content, as formal structure and birth-giving chaos, as Apollo and Dionysus—the Thracian god from beyond the Balkans who was remade, displayed in a plastic form, and subdued, rendered harmless by the Hellenes, but all the while in his very essence remaining our, barbarian, our, Slavic, god.¹⁸⁰

As the Russians felt half-included, half-excluded from the cultural practice and industry of the West, they felt kinship with a god half formed from the Hellenic god of wine and revelry and half from the Thracian god of ecstasy and chaos. This idea of a Slavic folk connection between the Russian modernists and Dionysian tragedy will be discussed in more depth in my fourth chapter.

Tragedy on the stage and page in the fin-de-siecle

Dmitry Merezhkovsky also grappled with Nietzsche’s rejection of religion. Rosenthal cites a trip to Italy and Greece in 1891 as the period Merezhkovsky fully turned to Nietzscheanism. Ideas from *The Birth of Tragedy* can be seen in Merezhkovsky’s reflection upon visiting the Parthenon in Athens.

And so in the Parthenon, as I recalled our own dull, tiresome existence, I thought: We no longer have the art of constructing *in harmony with Nature*. For twenty long centuries past we have departed from her and rejected her. [...] We boast of our knowledge, and we lose the human form; we remain as barbarians in the midst of indecent, melancholy luxury, amid the grand, inventive spirit of contemporary science; we have grown wild in our distorted, monstrous cities, these fortresses of stone and iron, piled up to repel the forces of Nature’s elements...Here in the Acropolis alone does one learn to comprehend the significance of the spirit of a mighty and peaceful nation. All that we laboriously divide with tedium and strife, all that leads us to impossible contradictions, the sky, the earth, nature and mankind, evil and good, all these were united for the ancients in one great harmony. The creation of an artist’s hands was the loftiest action, the action of a hero, the

¹⁷⁹ Lahti, 21

¹⁸⁰ Lahti, 21

highest pinnacle of beauty. This is the double revelation emanating from a single principle—single in the single soul of man.¹⁸¹

Merezhkovsky is echoing Nietzsche's claim that creation of art in harmony with the two elements that otherwise may battle each other leads to the highest achievement of man. He also repeats Nietzschean criticism of the unbalanced nature of contemporary society, science, and art.

By the end of the decade, Merezhkovsky's Nietzscheanism had been modified to facilitate his return to Christianity: he and his wife, the important Symbolist poet Zinaida Gippius reconciled their draw to Christianity with their Nietzschean beliefs by turning to a new kind of Christ that allowed them to reject asceticism and create instead a new Christian sensuality, a novel conception of Christianity that combined with their interests in mysticism and sexuality. These ideas shaped Merezhkovsky's work translating classical tragedy. In 1899, *Antigone* by Sophocles in Merezhkovsky's translation was staged at the Alexandrinsky Theater in St. Petersburg. This production was directed by the Alexandrinsky fixture Yuri Ozarovsky, set to music by the Anglo-Russian composer Baroness Elisabeth von Overbeck, and featured costumes and sets by the future Ballet Russe designer Leon Bakst. All three returned for a production of *Hippolytus* three years later. Merezhkovsky had completed the translation in 1892, during the height of his Nietzscheanism, but by this time he was already skeptical of the tragic scheme the philosopher had created. In an article he wrote for *Mir Iskusstva* after the premiere of *Antigone* titled "Трагедия целомудрия и сладострастия" ("A Tragedy of Chastity and Sensuality"), Merezhkovsky comments on the production, the audience response, and of the contents of the drama itself. It appears that while his translation was used for the production, Merezhkovsky was not involved in its staging. He expresses cautious optimism on the fact that the play was well attended. The level of popular interest in attending a production of a Greek tragedy as he writes, "speaks of a barely

¹⁸¹ Merezhkovsky, *Acropolis* 26-27.

emerging, vague desire to understand something, previously completely unnecessary, to turn their gaze in a direction where previously no one had looked.” (“Оно говорит о едва нарождающемся, смутном желании что-то понять, прежде совсем ненужное, обратить взоры в ту сторону, куда прежде вовсе не смотрели.”) He is critical of the “operatic” choruses, which suggests that Ozarovsky may have been inspired by Wagner’s suggestions for staging tragedy:

Значение хоров, в которых заключена вся мудрость и поэзия трагедии, ослаблено, потому что их превратили в "оперные" хоры. Публике, впрочем, это понравилось: вероятно, без оперы она бы скучала от однообразной простоты великих слов и не столь охотно посещала бы представления.¹⁸²

The significance of the choruses, which contain all the wisdom and poetry of the tragedy, is diminished, because they have been transformed into “operatic” choruses. The audience, however, enjoyed this: it is likely that without the opera, they would have been bored by the monotonous simplicity of the great words and would not have attended the performances so readily.

Merezhkovsky calls the music a “concession” to the “infantile” audience, stating that it “conceal[s] the stern and merciless prophecies of the ancient Greek under sentimental and tender Semitic melodies of Mendelssohn” (“скрывая под семитическими сентиментально-нежными мелодиями Мендельсона² суровые и беспощадные пророчества древнего эллина”). It is possible to read this merely as a disregard for von Overbeck’s compositions, which were seemingly similar to the music of Mendelssohn, or else as a rejection of the Wagnerian and Nietzschean vision of tragic performance being elevated by the accompaniment of orchestral music. The latter seems more likely, as it seems Merezhkovsky perceived the music to be a distraction from the “stern and merciless prophecies of Ancient Greek,” rather than a necessary element of the tragic synthesis of poetry, song, and dance. In this, Merezhkovsky is in alignment with Hofmannsthal, his contemporary, who was interested in a revival of classical tragedy as a Wagnerian

¹⁸² Merezhkovsky, 304

Gesamtkunstwerk, but found that music could overpower the language and dance happening concurrently.¹⁸³

Merezhkovsky is also critical of the choice of *Antigone*, which he guesses was chosen for its adaptability to “the point of view of a shallow, generally accessible, pseudo-Christian sensibility” (“понять со стороны неглубокой, общедоступной, мнимохристианской чувствительности”). Instead of Sophocles, Merezhkovsky suggests that a drama by Euripides would be more appropriate for Russian audiences. Merezhkovsky pushes back against the Nietzschean dismissal of Euripides, arguing instead that within *Hippolytus* the Apollonian-Dionysian balance described in *The Birth of Tragedy* is achieved more perfectly than within other tragedies by Sophocles or Aeschylus.

Еврипид в сравнении с Эсхилом и Софоклом казался некогда трагиком упадка. Его находили слишком утонченным, изысканным, лишенным той громовой силы, которая есть у его предшественников, упрекали за то, что он отошел от правды жизни и допускал чудесное в своих трагедиях. Но так ли это?

Действительно, боги развязывают у него узлы человеческих страстей сверхъестественным вмешательством; он обнажает два вечные начала—“я” и “не-я,” Аполлона и Диониса, – до последней, почти безобразной наготы; он знает борьбу между ними и уже символизирует ее в “Ипполите” борьбой двух богинь—Афродиты и Артемиды. Может быть, у него уже слишком много сознания, что лишает его стихийной, первобытной мощи Эсхила и совершенной гармонии Софокла; но именно это мощное и тонкое сознание и преобладание его над стихийностью, глубокая прозрачность символов, разлад, ослабляющий и углубляющий его, и приближают к нему нас, людей с душами, едва пробудившимися к сознанию, еще такими же раздвоенными, как душа Еврипида. Так же, как он, мы поняли, что трагедия мировой жизни заключается в окружающей, в проникающей нас великой борьбе двух великих начал; так же, как он, увидели, что говорить о ней можно только символами, и, как он, слишком острым и тонким сознанием еще не сумели найти последней гармонии, последнего соединения.¹⁸⁴

Compared to Aeschylus and Sophocles, Euripides was once regarded as a tragedian of decline. He was deemed overly refined and sophisticated—lacking the thunderous power possessed by his predecessors—and was reproached for deviating from the truth of life and for admitting the miraculous into his tragedies. But is this truly the case?

¹⁸³ Fleischer, 99

¹⁸⁴ Merezhkovsky 2007, 299

Indeed, in his works, the gods untie the knots of human passions through supernatural intervention; he lays bare two eternal principles—the "Self" and the "Non-Self," Apollo and Dionysus—to a point of ultimate, almost grotesque nakedness; he recognizes the struggle between them and, in *Hippolytus*, already symbolizes it through the conflict of two goddesses: Aphrodite and Artemis. Perhaps he possesses an excess of self-consciousness—a quality that deprives him of the elemental, primal power of Aeschylus and the perfect harmony of Sophocles; yet it is precisely this potent and subtle consciousness—and its predominance over the elemental forces—along with the profound transparency of his symbols and the inner discord that simultaneously weakens and deepens him, that draw us closer to him: we, whose souls have but recently awakened to consciousness and remain as divided as the soul of Euripides. Like him, we have come to understand that the tragedy of cosmic existence lies in the great struggle between two mighty principles—a struggle that surrounds us and permeates our very being; like him, we have realized that this struggle can be articulated only through symbols; and, like him—endowed with a consciousness too acute and subtle—we have not yet succeeded in attaining that ultimate harmony, that final reconciliation.

The Russian public was not yet ready for *Antigone*, Merezhkovsky believed, but they would be more sympathetic to the “tender, virginal Hippolytus.” It would appear the production of *Hippolytus* was already being planned in 1899, although it would not premiere until 1902, with Merezhkovsky’s support and participation, which can be observed in an introductory speech he gave before the first performance. This staging is a key example of how the introduction of mystical Christianity into a Nietzschean schema in the context of revival of classical tragedy created an original form of tragic reception that is uniquely Russian.

The speech Merezhkovsky gave before *Hippolytus*, which would be published in the next issue of *Novoe Vremya* with the title “On the New Significance of Ancient Tragedy” (“О новом значении древней трагедии”), primed the audience to combine the tragedy they were about to see with ideas from Christianity and Russian literature. Ozarovsky staged the play like a religious rite, complete with smoking altars on stage. Performers recited their lines in chants and danced choreography meant to resemble the way tragedies were staged in the ancient world. In this speech, Merezhkovsky makes the case for Hippolytus, a pious prince who rejected carnal love and thus incurred the wrath of Aphrodite, as a prototype for Christian thought located centuries before the

life of Christ. The speech reads a bit cynically in light of his 1899 comment on the “shallow, generally accessible, pseudo-Christian sensibility” of the Russian audience, but over the course of research for this project, and especially with regard to Dmitri Sergeevich, I have come to the conclusion that the Symbolist poet was a man of many moods, most of them bad, and that writing about his ideas must leave space for contradiction. This speech, in front of the Alexandrinsky audience, potentially the largest group he had ever spoken in front of, is an argument for the relevance of tragedy and for the singularity Merezhkovsky fervently believed existed between Ancient Greece and modern Russia. In the following excerpt, he closes the gap between the two worlds:

Первое представление "Ипполита" в Афинах в театре Диониса в четвертый год LXXXVII Олимпиады, год смерти Перикла, от первого в Европе возобновления этой трагедии, именно здесь, в сегодняшний вечер на Александрийской сцене, отделяют 2331 год и какие бездны истории, какие громады мировых событий! Ведь все христианство легло между этими двумя представлениями, тогдашним афинским и сегодняшним петербургским. А между тем -- такова сила религиозной мысли -- трагедия эта более живая, более современная, новая, отвечающая на самые жгучие злобы дня, на самые тайные томления и недоумения нашего духа, чем великое множество пьес, которые написаны вчера и сегодня, ибо вечное всегда новее, чем сегодняшнее.¹⁸⁵

The first performances of *Hippolytus* in Athens at the Theatre of Dionysus in the fourth year of the 87th Olympiad [428 BCE], the year of Pericles' death, and its first revival, right here, tonight on the Alexandrinsky stage, are separated by 2331 years and what abysses of history, what enormous world events! For all of Christianity lies between these two performances, the Athenian one of that time and the Petersburg one of today. And yet—such is the power of religious thought—this tragedy is more alive, more modern, newer, and responds to the most burning evils of the day, to the most secret languor and perplexity of our spirit, more than a great many plays that were written yesterday and today, for the eternal is always newer than the present.

This claim on the eternal power of ancient tragedy is, like his revelation about the Parthenon, borrows heavily from Nietzsche. It builds on Merezhkovsky's claim that *Hippolytus* is the most Nietzschean tragedy, despite its author. Merezhkovsky uses the Nietzschean argument that tragedy

¹⁸⁵ Merezhkovsky 2014, 470-471

uniquely responds to the human need for art to process the struggles of mortality, but applies it to a tragedy he simultaneously praises for the very qualities Nietzsche criticized in Euripides: that it feels fresh and modern. Perhaps Nietzsche would respond that *Hippolytus* feels fresh and modern because it makes use of straightforward, naturalistic dialogue and Socratic rationality: Hippolytus is punished by Aphrodite for his refusal to honor her. It is not quite so easy to articulate why Oedipus or Prometheus suffer. The quality of eternality that Merezhkovsky finds in the *Hippolytus* lies in what he identifies as the central question of the tragedy: what is the nature of love, as a phenomenon of the human and divine world.

In the opening of the play, two statues are described guarding the gates of the palace where most of the action will occur: a statue of Aphrodite, goddess of romantic love and sex, the stand-in for Dionysus, facing a statue of Artemis, the goddess of the hunt and chastity, the Apollonian. When handsome young prince Hippolytus comes on stage, he garlands only the statue of Artemis and pays it homage, neglecting the statue of Aphrodite. Aphrodite is exactly the wrong goddess to be paying this type of disrespect, and Hippolytus's death at the end of the play, strangled by the reins of his own horses, is her revenge. Merezhkovsky's speech spends a lot of time with the character of Hippolytus, even though his stepmother and foil, Phaedra, gets just as much if not more time on stage. Merezhkovsky animates Hippolytus into a character he thinks will be familiar to the audience by transforming him into a mirror of Jesus Christ.

Ипполит—ученик Орфея. Мы знаем, что первые христиане в римских катакомбах изображали под видом Орфея Христа. Ипполит отрекается от мирских сует, от власти; живет вдали от шума и толпы, в кругу “немногих избранных друзей,” почти отшельником, в тишине, в уединении, преданный чтению, молитве, труду и созерцанию. Он—постник: “довольствуется растительною пищею, бескровною.” Святой, отшельник, постник, девственник, жених небесной Девы и, наконец, мученик целомудрия, прощающий и любящий врага своего, убийцу—разве это не почти совершенный образ христианина до христианства?¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Merezhkovsky 2014, 468-469

Hippolytus is a student of Orpheus. We know that the first Christians in the Roman catacombs depicted Christ under the guise of Orpheus. Hippolytus renounces worldly vanities, from power; lives far from the noise and the crowd, in the circle of “a few chosen friends,” almost a hermit, in silence, in solitude, devoted to reading, prayer, work and contemplation. He fasts: “he is satisfied with vegetarian food, bloodless.” [...] A saint, a hermit, a faster, a virgin, the bridegroom of the heavenly Virgin, and, finally, a martyr of chastity, who forgives and loves his enemy, the murderer—is this not an almost perfect image of a Christian before Christianity?

It is interesting that Merezhkovsky idealizes this Hippolytus of Euripides, a character who expresses his hubris at length, who possesses a hatred for women and their sexuality not quite in line with Christlike love or Christ’s choice of companions. In Euripides’ rendering, Hippolytus is naive and arrogant. After being gently rebuked by a tutor for his hubris in not honoring Aphrodite, he retorts: “No god who uses the night to work her wonders finds favour with me.”¹⁸⁷ (In Merezhkovsky’s translation: “Поверь, служить не буду я богам, / Которых чтут во мраке ночи, тайно!”) Merezhkovsky’s reading would also align Aphrodite, who is recognized within the play as responsible for the cycles of reproduction and birth and thus must be worshiped accordingly, with Satan, luring the chaste into temptation. So much for the phenomenon of divine love. Demonization of Aphrodite in a Christian context is in line with receptions of the goddess from late antiquity through the medieval period.

Merezhkovsky’s rehabilitation of Hippolytus relates to his greater argument, which is that Greek literature and Russian literature are connected. He continues in this speech to compare the plot of *Hippolytus* with the novels of Dostoevsky, which are also concerned with the opposition of evil, pagan love, and merciful Christian love. It is worth noting that when he gave this speech in 1902, he had for the past several years been publishing installments of his famous and extensive critical monograph “Tolstoy and Dostoevsky” in *Mir Iskusstva*, in which he sorts through the lives and literary output of the two authors and how they address what Merezhkovsky sees as the

¹⁸⁷ Euripides and Hall, 42

struggle between the two principles within Russian literature: the Divine and the Human, or rather how Tolstoy and Dostoevsky present Christian ideas in their work. Merezhkovsky ultimately aligns Tolstoy with the “human” impulse and Dostoevsky with the divine. This thinking lines up with the parallel Merezhkovsky draws in this speech between the chaste Alyosha of *The Brothers Karamazov* and Hippolytus, even using Dostoevsky’s phrase for describing Alyosha, “frantic modesty” (исступлённая стыдливость), to describe Hippolytus.

With Hippolytus’s death Merezhkovsky makes him a martyr for Artemis, a medieval knight suffering for the Holy Virgin. This is a medieval “lives of the saints” play, and is not how Greek tragedy works. Hippolytus suffers in Euripides’s play, fleeing his father Theseus’s household in disgrace after being falsely accused of raping his stepmother Phaedra, but he never reaches a place of divinity, even after he forgives his father. The region between human and divine in ancient tragedy can never be traversed by mortal men, as the Olympian gods never tire of reminding victims like Hippolytus and Phaedra. Merezhkovsky’s reading arguably avoids much of the point of *Hippolytus*. Hippolytus is not sainted after his death; his death is a reminder of Aphrodite’s power. This speech in front of the audience at the Alexandrinky, however, is not literary criticism, it is Merezhkovsky’s pitch to Russian audiences that classical literature was not only compelling and sympathetic but intrinsically connected to Russian culture and nature.

The performance of *Hippolytus* in 1902 was memorably described by Vasily Rozanov in the next issue of *Mir Iskusstva* as “somnambulistic.” Rozanov also notes that Merezhkovsky’s voice could not be heard from the stage, and only phrases and aphorisms reached the Alexandrinsky audience. He also disputes Merezhkovsky’s characterization of Hippolytus as an innocent:

Нам кажется, Д.С. Мережковский преувеличивает, приписывая Ипполиту такую virginitas naturalis [природная девственность (лат.)]: из трагедии Эврипида видно, что

скорее Ипполит проходит только девственность *возраста*, несколько застоявшуюся, задлившуюся в нем. Охотник, среди товарищей, в лугах, в лесах, он "исступленно стыдлив", как все мы бываем испуганно стыдливы в 13 -- 14 лет. Скорее всего *пора* его, думается, -- предлюбовная.¹⁸⁸

It seems to us that D.S. Merezhkovsky exaggerates, attributing such a *virginitas naturalis* [natural virginity (Lat.)] to Hippolytus: from the tragedy of Euripides it is clear that Hippolytus rather goes through only the virginity of age, somewhat stagnant, lingering in him. A hunter, among his comrades, in the meadows, in the forests, he is "frantically modest," as we all are frantically bashful at 13-14 years old. Most likely, his time, I think, is pre-love.

Merezhkovsky's vision for tragedy to come alive again did come across to viewers at the Alexandrinsky Theater in October 1902: Rozanov reports seeing a tearful teenager lamenting that so much of life had fallen since antiquity, and sat next to a theologian who breathlessly exclaimed "So *that's* where our liturgical entrances and exits and exclamations and gestures are taken from!" This production of *Hippolytus* was followed by *Oedipus at Colonus* in 1904, indicating that there was a receptive audience coming back for Merezhkovskian tragedy.

The poet as teacher

As has been mentioned, Ivanov diverged from Nietzsche in the latter's rejection of tragedy's religious function, but Ivanov aligned with Nietzsche on the idea that tragedy can be a site of communal learning outside the education system. Ivanov's focus on the instructive power of tragedy is not novel, but it is unique in the context of this period of Russian reception of antiquity, and is an area where he and Annensky, both lifelong educators, converge. "In the era of popular, 'great' art, the poet is a teacher. He teaches through music and myth," Ivanov wrote in 1904.¹⁸⁹ In an essay on Leon Bakst's painting *Terror Antiquus*, Ivanov paraphrases a dialogue from Plato's *Timaeus*, in which the statesman and traveler Solon is reminded by an Egyptian high

¹⁸⁸ Rozanov, 248

¹⁸⁹ Ivanov 2018, 710

priest that the Hellenes were children in comparison to the Egyptians: “‘You are still young of age, o Hellenes, and verily there is not an elder among you,’ the high priest taught. When asked ‘why?’ he answered: ‘because you do not have any tradition or instruction about ancient times, you are eternally young in soul.’”¹⁹⁰ This scene from *Timaeus* is also referenced by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*, during a description of how even the unsophisticated early musical compositions of the Greeks (in comparison with Nietzsche’s admiration for Wagner and Beethoven) in accompaniment to tragedy were able to evoke the Dionysian: “The Greeks are, as the Egyptian priests say, the eternal children, even in tragic art they remain mere children unaware of the sublime plaything which has emerged in their hands and which those same hands—smash to bits.”¹⁹¹ It is easy to replace the Hellenes with late-nineteenth-century Russians in this dialogue. The beneficiaries of rapid developments in the realms of education and industry, young intellectual Russians of the fin-de-siecle did not have the near millennia of recorded history that their peers in western Europe laid claim to. The implications of this dearth of knowledge were greater than lack of written record or cultural achievements: to Ivanov, the danger of having a citizenry ignorant of the cycles of history and the greater forces that have controlled the developments and destructions of human civilizations was for it to be all the easier for their newfound wealth of resources and information to be wiped out again. The agitation under the surface of a supposedly educated and advancing society is due to an instinctive “ancient terror” of this perpetually imminent annihilation. In this particular essay, Ivanov argues that the solution to this problem is a return to the Christian idea of self-affirmation and the Christian concept of the World Soul, concluding with the idea that comprehending the mystery of the difference between the sexes via holy marriage,

¹⁹⁰ Ivanov 2001, 147

¹⁹¹ Nietzsche, 92

but elsewhere he follows Zielinski in arguing that understanding ancient culture was imperative for the continuation of civilization.

The history of tragedy as an instructive text is long, and generally aligned with the Apollonian drive and the Socratic turn of tragedy under Euripides. It is speculated that a reason many of Euripides' plays have made it into modernity is that they were often used as textbooks to teach Greek to students centuries after his death.¹⁹² His Greek is, as Nietzsche reminds us, clear and conversational, and overall comprehensible to intermediate students, unlike the idiosyncratic, complex language of Sophocles and Aeschylus, and perhaps it is correlative that many of their plays are considered lost to time (although we always hold out hope). For French neoclassicism, Euripides was sometimes not Socratic enough: Jean Racine, playwright of *Phèdre* and *Andromaque*, both adapted from works by Euripides, was compelled by the moralistic second wife of King Louis XIV, Madame de Maintenon, to switch his source material from the sensual dramas of the Greeks to the fables of the Old Testament after she observed the scintillating effect Euripidean receptions had on students.

Annensky hoped to instill in students the power of Euripidean performance. In 1896, for example, secondary students at Gymnasia No. 8 in Petersburg performed Euripides' *Rhesus*, a lesser appreciated latter work of the tragedian, in Annensky's translation.¹⁹³ For all his translation efforts, very few productions of his Euripidean tragedies would be performed in Annensky's lifetime. This does not appear to have bothered him. Annensky's diligent years translating all nineteen Euripidean tragedies were years he spent at the head of a classroom, and his body of work can be seen as a gift to his students, whom he hoped would fall just as deeply in love with Ancient Greece as he had. It was precisely the order, recognizable humanity, and colloquial language of

¹⁹² Hardwick, 105

¹⁹³ Setchkarev, 27

Euripidean tragedy which put Nietzsche off, that made Euripides so vital to Annensky as a teacher and as a poet. In comparison to Ivanov and Merezhkovsky, whose sordid interpersonal affairs are well documented, Annensky is more of a cipher. While all three men benefited from the familial wealth of the families they married into, Annensky relied heavily on his salary as a teacher, and worked until his death in 1909. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, his public foray into the literary culture of the period was limited to approximately a year before his death, as he was courted by the founding members of Acmeism, but his body of published work goes back several decades, consisting of scholarly articles and reviews in the journals *Филологическое обозрение*, *Журнал министерства народного просвещения*, and *Библиограф*. The rights to his collected translations of Euripides were acquired by the publisher Mikhail Sabashnikov, who planned to posthumously publish the tragedies alongside the complete works of Aeschylus (for which Ivanov was contracted) and Sophocles (in Zielinski's rendering). Sabashnikov hoped with this project to publish the first complete set of Greek tragedy in Russian, but the plan was derailed first by Ivanov's tardiness in providing his translations, and then by the maelstrom in culture following the Bolshevik Revolution. This endeavor will be discussed further in chapter three.

Annensky's interest in French Symbolism began in the 1880s, but he was immediately alienated from its Russian variation. He eschewed the mystical philosophies of the likes of Solovyov and Merezhkovsky and preferred Parnassianism. His continued proximity to the early, French-inspired Symbolism eventually became the reason "post-Symbolist" poets gravitated toward him. Boris Eikhenbaum writes,

It was not for nothing that the acmeists put forward as their principal teacher Innokentij Annenskij, who more than others preserved inviolable the features of early symbolism, then still called modernism or decadence. Preserved here was the aesthetic position with which the movement itself began and from which it later deviated when it became involved in the religious and philosophical substantiation of its artistic tendencies. Extremes meet—the line of a circle ends in a return to the starting point. By underscoring their connection

with Annenskij the acmeists were designating themselves the completers of the large circle known in general as modernism.¹⁹⁴

Annensky admired the French neoclassical tradition, and believed it to be the best model for modern applications of antiquity. His depth of knowledge on French Hellenism is demonstrated in the introductions written for each of his translations of tragedy, which reference the Parnassian poets Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, Catulle Mendès, and Joséphin Péladan. He was disturbed by the popularity of Nietzsche and the noticeable influence of his philosophy on the artistic and critical work of contemporary *littérateurs*, writing that “Nietzsche is coming and threatens tomorrow to become a religion—a religion of masters.”¹⁹⁵ Interestingly, he, like Ivanov and Merezhkovsky, agrees that there is something in Nietzschean Dionysianism that is natural and inherent to Russians, although Annensky sees this as a negative quality: “Nietzsche called himself a pupil of Dionysus the philosopher. Note: a *pupil*. This desire to acquire Dionysian principle is peculiar to the Slavs. It rushes into both revolution and pornography and produces martyrs and Sanins.”¹⁹⁶ Annensky hoped that the Nietzsche fever raging among the Russian intelligentsia would be quelled by a wave of attention to Aristotle.

A rigorously intellectual treatment of the moral themes in Aristotle can create in the interests of the Russian reader a useful counterweight to the influence of the Nietzschean pathos. Specifically, reading Aristotle is useful especially to the Russians, whose very temperament rules their life more by emotions and fantasies than by calculation and reasonableness, and who are disposed toward mysticism even by their literary traditions.¹⁹⁷

Annensky’s perspectives on the use of tragedy in modernity were articulated in a public lecture given at a salon of the Circle of Artistic Literature and Music Lovers (Кружка любителей художественного чтения и музыки) in 1902. In this lecture, he moves through the qualities and

¹⁹⁴ Ljunggren, 10

¹⁹⁵ Ljunggren, 25

¹⁹⁶ Ljunggren, 25. Reference to Mikhail Artsybashev’s 1907 novel *Sanin*.

¹⁹⁷ Ljunggren, 26

characteristics that distinguish the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides from each other, acknowledging, as Nietzsche does, the stark contrast between the language of Aeschylus and that of Euripides, but instead of connecting this difference to the religious or ecstatic function of the play, Annensky ascribes this difference to the historical and personal context of each tragedian. While Nietzsche designates the dramas of Aeschylus as representative of the true, original, ritual function of tragedy and therefore Aeschylus to be tragedy's most important and effective practitioner, and attributes the colloquial register and rationalism found in Euripidean verse to the later tragedian's adjacence to Socratic thought, Annensky suggests that the "lofty, otherworldly" language and preoccupation with ethical fatalism of Aeschylus was drawn from his experiences as a veteran of the Persian Wars, as well as his being an initiate into mystical religious cult, and simply a member of an earlier generation of tragic playwrights, the greater oeuvre of which is lost to time, and that these factors contributed to his distinctive poetic voice. It follows that Euripides's poetic voice was a natural evolution from Aeschylus, whose work he emulated and extrapolated upon, as well as the conditions of his own life. Sophocles and Euripides were born a generation or so after Aeschylus, and all three lived markedly different lives from each other. Neither Sophocles nor Euripides fought in any wars, and Sophocles achieved success as a tragedian early in life, defeating Aeschylus himself in the Dionysia when he was around thirty years old (Aeschylus was likely around sixty). Annensky writes that Sophocles "experienced all the joys life could offer a Greek." Euripides, on the other hand, like Annensky, was reluctant to be a public figure, preferring to keep to his library or else to the company of other intellectuals.

Sophocles and Euripides appear to Annensky to signify two paths in their work: Sophocles, the master of the psychological portrait, whose plots unfold with intricate precision, demonstrating the inevitability of fate, belongs to the past, because "the past is always more harmonious and

poetic than the present with its instability, a heap of trifles, and a motley mixture of ends and beginnings” (“прошедшее всегда стройней и поэтичнее, чем настоящее с его неустойчивостью, грудой мелочей и пестрой смесью концов и начал.”) Euripides, by contrast, Annensky sees as the tragedian of the future:

Еврипид, в силу особенностей своей природы, наоборот, делался поэтом будущего. Люди вроде Меланиппы, проповедовавшей философию Анаксагора как основу нравственных воззрений, или Амфиона, умевшего остаться в жизни чистым созерцателем, или, наконец, люди душевного разлада, как Орест—все это были контуры из "мира гипотез", мира будущего. Ни миф, ни гражданская община V века не уделяли им никакой роли.¹⁹⁸

Euripides, by virtue of his very nature, became—quite to the contrary—a poet of the future. Figures such as Melanippe, who championed the philosophy of Anaxagoras as the foundation of moral outlook; or Amphion, who managed to remain a pure contemplative amidst the currents of life; or, finally, those souls in a state of inner discord—such as Orestes—all these were contours drawn from the "world of hypotheses," a world of the future. Neither myth nor the civic community of the fifth century assigned them any role whatsoever.

Annensky repeats the adage that Sophocles depicts humans as they should be, while Euripides shows them as they are. This perspective also pushes back on the Nietzschean view of Euripidean tragedy, which, again, he describes as being overly rational and logical, with humans facing the consequences of their actions with far less divine intervention than in Aeschylus. His invocation of Melanippe, a tragic heroine whose behavior is linked to the moral philosophy of Anaxagoras, illuminates why he chose her as the subject of one of his own tragic receptions, which is discussed in depth in my fourth chapter. For Annensky, Euripidean tragedy reflects the disharmony of reality and the beauty and nuances that exist even in everyday speech.

Главное достоинство речи Еврипида заключалось в том, что этот поэт заставлял своих героев говорить обыденными словами, а слушателям казалось, что это тот же язык, которым говорят и они, но, вслушиваясь и вдумываясь в музыкальные строки трагедий, афиняне обретали в них такое богатство оттенков и такую тонкость в разграничениях, которых не могла бы передать обыденная речь. [...] Речь Софокла унаследовала ее синтетичность, стиль Еврипида развил и разработал богатые залежи

¹⁹⁸ Annenskii 2000, 25

мысли, которые таились в вещем слове старого сфинкса. Мне кажется, что в языке Еврипид разрешил задачу союза между глубоким одушевлением страсти и ясной гибкой мыслью. Его поэтическая речь открыла свободную арену для бесконечного развития языка человеческих чувств, когда они проходят через призму анализирующего ума.¹⁹⁹

The principal merit of Euripides' speech lay in the fact that the poet compelled his characters to speak in everyday terms; to his listeners, it seemed to be the very same language they themselves spoke. Yet, as they listened intently and reflected upon the musical lines of his tragedies, the Athenians discovered within them a richness of nuance and a subtlety of distinction that ordinary speech could never convey. [...] Sophocles' speech inherited this quality of synthesis; Euripides' style, meanwhile, developed and mined the rich veins of thought that lay concealed within the prophetic utterances of the ancient Sphinx. It seems to me that, through his use of language, Euripides resolved the challenge of uniting the profound animation of passion with clear, flexible thought. His poetic speech opened up a boundless arena for the infinite evolution of the language of human emotion—specifically as that emotion passes through the prism of an analytical mind.

In order to evoke the experience of reading Euripides' Greek, Annensky suggests reading Pushkin's 1828 poem "Anchar" alongside Lermontov's "Valerik," the poet's account of his experience fighting in the Battle of Valerik River in 1840.

Annensky points out that while tragedy as a genre evolved out of religious practice, its scale, popularity, and possibilities as a public forum also made it an extension of state power and contemporary politics. This is an idea that is extensively studied and written about by classicists to this day.²⁰⁰ He writes,

Но думать, чтобы театр был неизменным спутником религии, значило бы не понимать ни того, ни другого. Театр, возникший под прикрытием шутки и обмана сатиров, очень рано, несмотря на пылавший жертвенник Диониса, достиг той свободы, для которой религии потребовалось едва ли не две тысячи лет. Никто не вменял Эсхилу в преступление упреки Зевса в тирании, и Еврипиду надо было заходить уже слишком далеко в откровенности своих религиозных сомнений, чтоб подвергаться нападкам. Античный театр вообще не любил только большой откровенности, и если Еврипиду ставили в упрек его *Меланиппу* или *Гекубу*, то лишь за то, что эти женщины говорили, будто они не знают, что такое Зевс. Между тем, ироническое замечание диоскуров насчет Аполлона, "об уме которого они не смеют судить, потому что он их начальник, проходило безнаказанным. Прикрытость,

¹⁹⁹ Annenskii 2000, 35

²⁰⁰ See: *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?: Athenian Drama in its Social Context*, edited by Froma Zeitlin

мистификация, ирония -- вот те формы критики, которые были освящены традицией сцены и ее происхождением из культа божественного обманщика.²⁰¹

Yet to imagine that the theater was an inseparable companion to religion would be to misunderstand both. The theater—having emerged under the guise of the jests and deceptions of the satyrs—very early on, and despite the blazing altar of Dionysus, attained a degree of freedom that religion would take nearly two thousand years to achieve. No one deemed it a crime when Aeschylus reproached Zeus for tyranny; indeed, Euripides had to go to extreme lengths in the candor of his religious doubts before he faced any attacks. In general, the ancient theater took offense only at excessive frankness; if Euripides was reproached for his *Melanippe* or *Hecuba*, it was solely because these women declared that they did not know who—or what—Zeus was. Meanwhile, an ironic remark by the Dioscuri regarding Apollo—to the effect that they dared not pass judgment on his intellect, as he was their superior—went entirely unpunished. Obliqueness, mystification, and irony: these were the forms of criticism sanctioned by the traditions of the stage and by its very origins in the cult of the divine trickster.

Annensky disliked the Symbolist conception of the ancient world as a mystical, pagan site of Dionysian frenzy. Like Merezhkovsky, he felt a unity with Ancient Greece that he wished to convey to the Russian public, but Annensky's sense of unity was derived from his conviction that ancient literature, and tragedy in particular, was a way to experience beauty, "musical beauty" that "constituted the ideal of ancient tragedy." Beauty is the key word for all of Annensky's projects and is at the center of his literary aesthetics. *Apollon* was founded on his evocations of the "beautiful clarity" of Apollonian ethics.²⁰² Annensky concludes this lecture by directly addressing the question of what tragedy has to offer to modern audiences and readers. This lecture was given the same year, 1902, as Merezhkovsky's staging of Euripides' *Hippolytus*. Annensky had given Merezhkovsky's translation of the play a scathing review in the classical philology journal *Filologicheskoe obozrenie* when it was published in 1893, and his opinion did not improve upon hearing of this staging; in fact, Annensky wrote to his friend and fellow classicist Victor Ernstedt that he hoped to interfere with production, as he did not think *Hippolytus* (in Merezhkovsky's

²⁰¹ Annenskii 2000, 39

²⁰² Ljunggren, 18

rendering) was “fit for modern theater.”²⁰³ His answer to the question of tragedy’s modern meaning can therefore be seen perhaps as a veiled comment on Merezhkovsky’s revival:

Но что же привлекательного в античной трагедии сохраняется для поэта до сих пор? Во-первых, в мифах есть простор для самого широкого идеализма. В них есть и силуэты тех героических поднимающих душу образов и ситуаций, и те благородно-мажорные ноты, которых не хватает современным темам, и которых мы так справедливо ждем от театра. А что лучше: насиловать ли действительность, оставаясь в ее рамках, или на минуту оживить веру в те сказки, которые составляли некогда душу великого народа?

Затем, нельзя закрывать глаз и на то обстоятельство, что античная трагедия давно уже понемногу овладевает желаниями современного зрителя, но что люди точно боятся высказать эти желания. Все мы хотим на сцене прежде всего красоты, но не статурной и не декоративной, а красоты как таинственной силы, которая освобождает нас от тумана и паутин жизни и дает возможность на минуту прозреть несозерцаемое, словом, красоты музыкальной, а эта-то именно красота и составляла идеал античной трагедии, именно она своими блесками и сделала драму эллинов великой и бессмертной.

Я думаю, наконец, что, сообразно цели, и некоторые приемы античной сцены ждут своей очереди на нашей. Речь идет, конечно, не об открытых театрах, масках или котурнах, а об музыке и балете, т. е. о широком развитии лиризма и мимики, которые были так долго и так несправедливо разобщены с трагедией, этой универсальной формой творчества, поскольку оно является вечным поиском тайны красоты.²⁰⁴

But what is it about ancient tragedy that still holds such appeal for the poet today? First, myths offer ample scope for the broadest idealism. Within them lie the silhouettes of those heroic, soul-uplifting images and situations—as well as those noble, major-key notes—that are so conspicuously absent from modern themes, yet which we so rightly expect from the theater. And which is the better course: to violate reality while remaining confined within its bounds, or to briefly rekindle faith in those tales that once constituted the very soul of a great people?

Furthermore, one cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that ancient tragedy has long been gradually capturing the desires of the modern spectator—even if people seem afraid to give voice to those desires. Above all else, we all seek beauty on the stage—not a static or merely decorative beauty, but beauty as a mysterious force that liberates us from the mists and cobwebs of everyday life, granting us the chance—however fleeting—to glimpse the unseeable; in short, a musical beauty. And it is precisely this beauty that constituted the ideal of ancient tragedy; it is precisely this quality, with its shimmering brilliance, that rendered the drama of the Hellenes both great and immortal.

Finally, I believe that—in keeping with this ultimate aim—certain techniques of the ancient stage are now awaiting their turn to be revived upon our own. I speak, of course, not of open-air theaters, masks, or cothurni, but rather of music and ballet—that is to say,

²⁰³ Annenskii 2007, 295

²⁰⁴ Annenskii 2000, 38

the expansive development of lyricism and mime. For too long—and most unjustly—these elements have been severed from tragedy: that universal form of creative expression which, at its very core, represents the eternal quest for the mystery of beauty.

Annensky's calls for the beauty and harmony of the language to be the center of modern understanding of tragedy is not antithetical to Symbolism, but it resists the conventions and clichés that often entrapped Symbolist thinking and writing. This perspective shows the influence of French Symbolist thinkers, especially Maeterlinck, who wrote

Indeed, it is not in the actions but in the words that are found the beauty and greatness of tragedies that are truly beautiful and great; and this not solely in the words that accompany and explain the action, for there must perforce be another dialogue besides the one which is superficially necessary.²⁰⁵

Annensky avoids the apocalyptic mysticism of the Symbolists, but he is interested in going slightly beyond the veil to experience the enduring mystery that ancient tragedy is able to provide. His work with tragedy revolved around finding a precise idiom for rendering the ancient texts in Russian. As he describes in the passage above, he is able to subvert the darker imagery of tragedy and emphasize its redemptive and life-affirming qualities, and this, to Annensky, is what makes the tragedies immortal, not their ability to provide a map into the abyss.

This chapter has aimed to introduce the frameworks for interpreting tragedy that were most influential to the subjects of this dissertation. The following chapter will discuss the translations of Greek tragedy produced by Ivanov, Merezhkovsky, and Annensky, with a closer look at their methodological approaches to translation and features of their translations including meter and alterations to the original text.

²⁰⁵ Maeterlinck, 235

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Chapter Three

Too Vivid a Classical Flower?: Tragedy in Translation

Russia's history of literary translation is as old as its literature, and translation has remained tightly intertwined with literary creation. A vast number of the great Russian poets across the past three centuries have at least dabbled in translation, and many have seriously applied themselves to expanding access for Russian readers to world literature: luminaries including Mikhail Lomonosov, Vasily Trediakovsky, Nikolai Gnedich, Vasily Zhukovsky, Konstantin Batiushkov, Afanasy Fet, Fyodor Tyutchev, Konstantin Balmont, Valery Bryusov, Osip Mandelstam, Samuil Marshak, and Boris Pasternak translated works from German, French, English, Spanish, Italian, Latin, and Greek (and more) into Russian while also composing their own original verses. The creation and circulation of a secular literature began in the imperial courts of eighteenth-century Russia, and many translations were translations of translations; this is especially true of classical texts. This practice lasted into the nineteenth century: it is well known that Vasily Zhukovsky's translation of the *Odyssey* was undertaken without knowledge of Ancient Greek, but with the assistance of a German classical philologist who bridged the gap between the languages and provided textual support and commentary in German. Zhukovsky's translation of Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" was a catalyst for Russian Romanticism; Vladimir Solovyov wrote in 1900 that this poem "can be considered the beginning of truly *human* poetry in Russia after the relative rhetorical triumphs of the Derzhavin period."²⁰⁶ Zhukovsky's third critical contribution to the burgeoning world of translation into Russian is his rendering of Gottfried August Bürger's gothic ballad "Lenore": Zhukovsky's version, retitled "Liudmila," is also relocated from medieval Germany to medieval Russia and became an early text in the creation of

²⁰⁶ Baer, 1

a national literary tradition in Russian Romanticism. These three works by Zhukovsky, who is among the most important translators of Russian literature, correspond to key components of the modernist translation project at the beginning of the following century: a sense of Russianness infused into the translated text to reconstitute it for a Russian audience, and experimentation with the construction of a medieval national mythos as a palimpsest over centuries of Western reception of classical antiquity. Vissarion Belinsky, discussing the translations of Zhukovsky, called Greece the “universal workshop” (всемирная мастерская) through which Russian poets had to pass in order to learn about poetry.²⁰⁷

The first chapter of this dissertation discusses the education and translation culture of Orthodox monasteries beginning in Kievan Rus’: the oldest Greek-Slavonic dictionaries date to the eleventh century.²⁰⁸ Brian James Baer and Susanna Witt write that translation was the “main semiotic mechanism at work in the transfer of Christian culture from Byzantium to the Eastern Slavs,” a process that led to the development of a Russian vernacular from Greek that was “functionally defined, leaving the sacred or spiritual sphere (and hence most of the literature) the domain of [Greek] while [Russian] was used primarily in administrative, commercial, legal, and everyday writing.”²⁰⁹ While across western Europe Christian liturgy was read in Latin, in Russia it was translated into Old Church Slavonic, making the sound of this medieval language familiar to people from all levels of society. Outside of the religious context, Greek was never as widespread as Latin in post-Renaissance Europe, although Kenneth Haynes writes that fluency in French “distinguished the gentry” in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russia in the way that Latin did across much of Europe.²¹⁰ Abram Tertz (Andrei Sinyavsky) quotes a “contemporary of

²⁰⁷ Belinsky, 224

²⁰⁸ Friedberg, 26

²⁰⁹ Baer and Witt, 7

²¹⁰ Haynes, 29

Pushkin” saying “We philosophize in German, joke in French, and use Russian only for praying to God and scolding our servants.”²¹¹ While Greek was included in the curricula of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century schools and academies across Europe, Haynes speculates that it was “only in the mid-nineteenth century in England and Germany that the level of literacy in Greek was high enough for interests of large segments of literate classes to be crystallized around it.”²¹² I have discussed how by the end of the nineteenth century, the expansion of schools in Russia and developments in educational and cultural policies gave a far greater number of students access to Greek and Latin than was possible at the beginning of the century. At this point, styles of Russian translation had generally corresponded to the three dominant literary movements: neoclassicism, Romanticism, and realism. This chapter is concerned with the development of a modernist strain of translation practice, and how modernist ideas are expressed through translations of Greek tragedy. My subjects, Ivanov, Merezhkovsky, and Annensky, all embarked upon verse translations of tragedy, and their devotion to poetry, especially Russian poetry, is evident in their tragic verse. In fact, across the modernist translation in Russia, there is a noticeable adherence to metrical, verse translation. Despite the high volume of writing by the Symbolist theoreticians, there is no manifesto or treatise establishing a direction in Symbolist translation. Instead, perspectives on approaches and methodologies of translation in Symbolism and other Russian modernist movements are found in the polemical articles published in the periodicals discussed in chapter two: primarily *Mir Iskusstva*, *Apollon*, *Vesy*, *Novyi Put’*, and *Zolotoe Runo*.

Dmitry Merezhkovsky began his translations of Greek tragedy in 1892, after returning from a voyage with Zinaida Gippius to Italy and Greece. The following year, he published “On the Causes of the Decline and New Trends in Contemporary Russian Literature” (“О причинах

²¹¹ Siniavskii, 154

²¹² Haynes, 11

упадка и о новых течениях современной русской литературы”), a critically important lecture in the trajectory of Russian Symbolism, in the journal *The Northern Herald* (*Северный Вестник*), in which he argues that Russian literature up to that point lacked coherence and unity, functioning more as a chain of unrelated authors and movements cresting into public consciousness rather than an expanding body of national literature. While the necessary elements for a new movement were already observable in the work of Russian Romantic and realist writers, it fell to the emerging generation of modernist writers and their collective efforts to take up the task of creating art with a sense of unity.

Несмотря на скуку, бездействие, порчу языка, газетно-журнальную анархию, отсутствие крупных талантов и непонятный застой, мы переживаем один из важнейших моментов в историческом развитии русской литературы. Это -- подземное, полусознательное и, как в начале всякая творческая сила, невидимое течение. Тайные побегі новой жизни, новой поэзии слабо и непобедимо пробиваются на свет Божий, пока на поверхности достигает последних пределов торжество литературной пошлости и варварства.

Мы видели, что русские писатели предшествующего поколения с небывалою гениальною силою выразили, несмотря на внешний реализм бытового романа, неутолимую мистическую потребность XIX века. И в широких философских обобщениях, в символах Гончарова, и в художественной чувствительности, и импрессионизме, в жажде фантастического и чудесного у разочарованного, ни во что не верующего скептика Тургенева, и главным образом в глубокой психологии Достоевского, в неутомимом искании новой правды, новой веры Льва Толстого -- всюду чувствуется возрождение вечного идеального искусства, только на время омраченного в России утилитарно-народническим педантизмом критики, на Западе грубым материализмом экспериментального романа. Современное поколение молодых русских писателей пытается продолжать это движение.

Перед нами—огромная, так сказать, переходная и подготовительная работа. *Мы должны вступить из периода поэзии творческого, непосредственного и стихийного в период критический, сознательный и культурный.* Это два мира, между которыми целая бездна. Современное поколение имело несчастье родиться между этими двумя мирами, перед этой бездной. Вот чем объясняется его слабость, болезненная тревога, жадное искание новых идеалов и какая-то роковая бесплодность всех усилий. Лучшая молодость и свежесть таланта уходит не на живое творчество, а на внутреннюю ломку и борьбу с прошлым, на переход через бездну *к тому краю, к тому берегу*, к пределам свободного божественного идеализма. Сколько людей погибает в этом переходе или окончательно теряет силы.²¹³

²¹³ Merezhkovsky, 501-502

Despite the boredom, the inertia, the corruption of language, the anarchy of the press, the dearth of major talents, and an inexplicable stagnation, we are living through one of the most pivotal moments in the historical evolution of Russian literature. It is an underground, semi-conscious, and—as is the case with every creative force in its inception—invisible current. The secret shoots of a new life and a new poetry are breaking through into the light of day—feebly, yet irresistibly—even as, on the surface, the triumph of literary vulgarity and barbarism reaches its absolute limits.

We have seen how Russian writers of the preceding generation—with an unprecedented, genius-level power—gave voice to the insatiable mystical yearning of the nineteenth century, notwithstanding the external realism of the domestic novel. Whether in the broad philosophical generalizations and symbols of Goncharov; in the artistic sensibility, impressionism, and thirst for the fantastic and the miraculous found in the disillusioned, utterly skeptical Turgenev; or—above all—in the profound psychology of Dostoevsky and the tireless quest for a new truth and a new faith undertaken by Leo Tolstoy: everywhere, one senses the resurgence of an eternal, ideal art—an art that, in Russia, had been only temporarily obscured by the utilitarian-populist pedantry of literary criticism, and in the West, by the crude materialism of the experimental novel. The contemporary generation of young Russian writers is striving to carry this movement forward.

Before us lies a monumental task—one that is, so to speak, transitional and preparatory in nature. We must cross the threshold from an era of poetry that was creative, spontaneous, and elemental, into an era that is critical, conscious, and cultured. These are two distinct worlds, separated by a veritable abyss. The contemporary generation has had the misfortune of being born between these two worlds, standing right at the edge of this abyss. This is what accounts for its weakness, its feverish anxiety, its voracious quest for new ideals, and a certain fateful futility that seems to attend all its endeavors. The very best of youth and the freshness of talent are expended not on living creativity, but on inner upheaval and a struggle with the past—on crossing the abyss to the other side, to the far shore, to the frontiers of free, divine idealism. How many perish in this passage, or lose their strength once and for all!

In this lecture, Merezhkovsky uses the hypothetical translation of Greek tragedy as an example of what was wrong with Russian publishing and readership at that transitional moment.

А русский читатель в самом деле — сила темная, стихийная, неожиданно прихотливая. Редактор чувствует под собой эту зыбкую некультурную почву и не доверяет ей. Как у всех ценителей с трусливым банальным вкусом, поработанным толпе, заветный идеал его — внешняя литературная *благопристойность*. Пусть холодно, как лед, но зато строжайший этикет соблюден, пусть мертво, но зато в каждом буржуазно-аристократическом салоне Петербурга можно смело читать вслух. До какого педантизма иногда доходит эта забота о внешней корректности при внутреннем безвкусице, видно из следующего характерного анекдота, невероятного и, однако, вполне достоверного.

Писатель отдает в редакцию серьезного журнала перевод одной греческой трагедии. После внимательного чтения редактор объявляет:

– Печатать невозможно.

– Почему же?

– Вот видите ли... Трагедия Эсхила -- это, так сказать, *слишком яркий классический цветок на тусклом поле современной русской беллетристики*.

– Но тем лучше, что яркий...

– Я ведь сказал -- *слишком яркий классический* цветок – перевод с греческого.

– Что же из того, что с греческого?

– Помилуйте, мы в общественной хронике все время боремся против классической системы воспитания, и вдруг целая трагедия Эсхила.

В сущности – рыночная система гонораров, капиталисты-издатели, бескорыстные, но лишенные художественного чутья редакторы – все это силы только внешние, и, как ни пагубно их влияние на литературу, оно не может сравниться с действием внутренних разрушительных сил, из которых едва не главная – критика.²¹⁴

And the Russian reader is, indeed, a dark, elemental force—unpredictably capricious. The editor senses this shifting, uncultured ground beneath his feet and places no trust in it. Like all connoisseurs possessed of a timid, banal taste—a taste enslaved to the crowd—his cherished ideal is external literary propriety. Let it be cold as ice, so long as the strictest etiquette is observed; let it be dead, so long as one can safely read it aloud in any bourgeois-aristocratic salon in St. Petersburg. The extent of the pedantry to which this concern for external correctness—coupled with internal tastelessness—sometimes reaches is evident in the following characteristic anecdote: improbable, yet entirely authentic.

A writer submits a translation of a Greek tragedy to the editorial office of a serious literary journal. After a careful reading, the editor declares:

“It is impossible to publish this.”

“But why?”

“Well, you see... An Aeschylean tragedy is—so to speak—too vivid a classical flower blooming in the drab field of contemporary Russian fiction.”

“But surely, the more vivid, the better...”

“I did say: *too* vivid a classical flower—and a translation from the Greek, at that.”

“And what difference does it make that it’s from the Greek?”

“Good heavens! In our ‘Social Chronicle’ section, we are constantly campaigning against the classical system of education—and then, all of a sudden, we go and publish an entire tragedy by Aeschylus!”

In essence—the market-driven system of fees, the capitalist publishers, the editors (however selfless, yet utterly devoid of artistic sensibility)—all these are merely external forces; and, however pernicious their influence on literature may be, it cannot compare with the impact of those destructive forces that operate from within—foremost among which stands literary criticism.

²¹⁴ Merezhkovsky, 443-444

This “improbable yet entirely authentic” anecdote happened to coincide with Merezhkovsky’s own period of translating Greek tragedy. Between 1890 and 1896, Merezhkovsky published translations of Euripides (*Hippolytus*, *Medea*), Sophocles (*Antigone*, *Oedipus at Colonus*), and Aeschylus (*Prometheus Bound*) in the journals *The European Herald* (*Вестник Европы*) and *The Herald of Foreign Literature* (*Вестник иностранной литературы*). The Romantic period had already demonstrated how powerful literary translation was as a tool in cultural change and growth, not only in the arts but in the wider political and social world. The centering of translation in the creation of modernist aesthetics demonstrates an understanding on the part of the translators of how these projects could shape the next phases of Russian literature.

Translators and translation theorists often categorize types of translations based on their attempted proximity to the original text. John Dryden, England’s first poet laureate, in the preface to his translation of Ovid’s *Epistulae Heroidum* (*Letters of Heroines*) in 1680, organized the types of translation into three approaches: the literal translation or “metaphrase,” the looser paraphrase, which hews to the original with slightly more room for authorial deviation, and the imitation, which is governed most substantially by the translator’s aesthetic mission.²¹⁵ The famous translation competition between Trediakovsky, Lomonosov, and Sumarokov in 1752 was to create a paraphrastic translation of Psalm 143. Translator-poets often brought characteristics of foreign verse into their own work: in Symbolism, this can be seen in the Ancient Greek meters introduced by Ivanov into his original poetry, and in the use of the *dol’nik*, a meter associated with folk poetry, by Aleksandr Blok in his translations of Heinrich Heine.²¹⁶ On the subject of cultural transmission through literary translation, the translation theorist Laurence Venuti writes

In contributing to the canonicity of a foreign text, the translation leaves neither that text nor the receiving situation unaltered. The foreign text undergoes a radical transformation

²¹⁵ Friedberg, 74

²¹⁶ Friedberg, 195

in which it comes to support a range of meanings and values that may have little or nothing to do with those it supported in the foreign culture. And the linguistic choices, literary traditions and effects, and cultural values that comprise the translator's interpretation may reinforce or revise the understanding and evaluation of the foreign text that currently prevail in the receiving situation, consolidating readerships or forming new ones in the process.²¹⁷

Venuti goes on to describe the semiotic transformations that the translator negotiates, and what they uncover about the translator's ambition for the project: it is revealing to the reader to notice which "discursive structure[s]" of the original text the translator focused on recreating, such as the meter, the text's "point of view or the conceptual density of its terms, its representation of human agency or its pattern of figurative language."²¹⁸

Approaches to translation in Russian modernism adhered closely to the uniting ideas of the translator's literary affiliation. Leon Burnett and Emily Lygo argue that the preeminence of translation as a literary occupation in the Silver Age is connected to the overarching "aesthetic theories of transformation and transcendence" in Symbolism, traceable back to Russian Symbolism's parent movement in France, and particularly in Baudelaire's concept of *correspondences*. Burnett and Lygo write, "Translation as a symbolic activity could thus be regarded as a kind of metamorphosis of the body of the text or even a reincarnation of the spirit of the original impulse that gave rise to it."²¹⁹ Valery Bryusov and Konstantin Balmont, Symbolists like Merezhkovsky of the first wave, were both prolific translators, and their poetic translations are central in their bodies of work alongside their own original verse. Acmeist translation theory pivots away from the Symbolist desire to transfigure oneself through poetry: Gumiliev's "nine commandments" for poetic translation return to Dryden's call for adherence to "1) the number of lines, 2) the meter and measure, 3) the alternation of rhyme, 4) the nature of the *enjambement*, 5)

²¹⁷ Lianeri, 30

²¹⁸ Lianeri, 34

²¹⁹ Burnett and Lygo, 19

the nature of the rhyme, 6) the nature of the vocabulary, 7) the type of similes, 8) special devices, 9) changes in tone.”²²⁰ This perspective was already present, however, in first wave Symbolist translation: Bryusov’s unfinished translation of Virgil’s *Aeneid* was as literal a translation as the poet could manage, as he attempted to stay so close to the Latin that he eventually gave up. Mikhail Gasparov wrote about this project in 1971, and connects Bryusov’s dogged determination to render a thoroughly literal translation to his departure from early Symbolist aesthetics of experimentation and toward the overarching modernist trend of literalism.²²¹ The literalist approach, as practiced and experimented upon by Bryusov, Gumilev, and others, would be highly influential upon Soviet translators, who fell with great seriousness on the task of bringing classics of world literature into the socialist library. Osip Mandelstam found this style of translation tedious and stifling to creativity, writing in 1929 about Soviet publishing practices and nascent socialist realist forces in literature: “The translation itself is treated as if one were pouring grain from one sack into another.”²²²

“Translation is a mode,” Walter Benjamin writes in his famous essay “The Task of the Translator.”

To comprehend it as a mode one must go back to the original, for that contains the law governing its translation: its translatability. The question of whether a work will be translatable has a dual meaning. Either: will an adequate translator ever be found among the totality of its readers? Or, more pertinently: Does its nature lend itself to translation, and, therefore, in view of the significance of the mode, call for it?²²³

From this perspective, Greek tragedy is not the most “translatable” genre of texts because so much information is lost from its original context. Scholars believe tragedies were sung and danced, which Wagner imagined as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but we will never recover these elements of tragic

²²⁰ Burnett and Lygo, 20

²²¹ Gasparov 1995, 108-9

²²² Burnett and Lygo, 22

²²³ Benjamin, 60

performance, stifling the ability of the translator to render an “accurate” translation in another language. However, translations of Greek tragedy into other languages are also among the first literary translations in recorded history, an indication of how many generations of translators have found it meaningful to bring tragedy from Greek into other languages and contexts. The tradition of ensuring that the most educated members of a civilization were proficient in Greek began in Rome: Roman poets brought the hexameter into Latin, so Virgil’s *Aeneid* follows the meter of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* precisely. While adequate translators have existed for millennia, the distance between ancient literature and the moment of the translator requires a relentless drive of innovation on the part of the translator in order to bridge it. The texts preserve in amber a way of communicating rooted in a time and place that will never be wholly accessible to the translator. Many have pointed out that “faithful translation” is an oxymoron.

To keep to the era of modernism: in 1913, the classicist Jane Ellen Harrison wrote about the difficulty of creating a translation that produces the same tangible effect on audiences.

Suppose that these choral songs have been put into English that in any way represents the beauty of the Greek; then certainly there will be some among the spectators who get a thrill from the chorus quite unknown to any modern stage effect, a feeling of emotion heightened yet restrained, a sense of entering into higher places, filled with a larger and a purer air—a sense of beauty born clean out of conflict and disaster.²²⁴

Her contemporary and acquaintance Virginia Woolf appears to have taken this sentiment to heart. “It is useless, then, to read Greek in translations,” Woolf wrote in 1923. “Translators can offer us a vague equivalent; their language is necessarily full of echoes and associations.”²²⁵ By way of example, Woolf provides Percy Shelley’s translation of a line from Plato’s *Symposium*: “πᾶς γοῦν ποιητής γίγνεται οὗ ἂν Ἔρως ἄψηται,” which Shelley renders as “for everyone, even if before he were ever so undisciplined, becomes a poet as soon as he is touched by love.” Woolf finds this

²²⁴ Harrison, 122

²²⁵ Woolf, 56

translation, in which Shelley needed twenty-one words to Plato's thirteen, to nevertheless be "spare" and bereft of the life present in the original Greek.²²⁶ This attitude toward translation can ensnare the amateur classical philologist. Maurice Friedberg, author of the seminal *Literary Translation in Russia: A Cultural History*, responds to this idea with a reminder that translation is an art form rather than a science.

The fact of the matter is that literary translation is but one kind of interpretation of the text, and as such it is necessarily subjective, even if the rendition from one language to another is as rigorously literalist as the grammar and usage of the target language will allow. Precisely for this reason, a translation is not viewed as "sacred"—even if the original text is so regarded.²²⁷

Friedberg continues that translations have granted immortality to the texts from antiquity, which have long outlived their languages.²²⁸ Vissarion Belinsky, the preeminent critical voice of the first half of the nineteenth century in Russia, similarly argued that translation need not be flawless to be of value to literary culture:

If the only way to introduce Shakespeare to the public is by disfiguring his texts, well, then, have no qualms. Go right ahead, distort the text, as long as you achieve your goal, as long as the two or three or even a single Shakespearean play—however disfigured [iskazhenie] by you—have instilled in the public respect for Shakespeare. As long as they have paved the way for better, fuller, and more faithful renditions of the same play, you have accomplished a noble task. Your mutilation or initiation are a thousand times worthier of respect than the most faithful and accurate rendition, if the latter, its merits notwithstanding, hurts the advancement of Shakespeare's fame instead of spreading that fame.²²⁹

Woolf concedes that despite the inaccuracy of the language, it is still worth reading classical tragedy and epic for the shocking familiarity of the emotions and plots. Translation of classical drama for the plot alone, however, was not the prevailing approach for modernist engagement with

²²⁶ Woolf, 56

²²⁷ Friedberg, 15

²²⁸ Friedberg, 17

²²⁹ Friedberg, 134

antiquity: for these translators, finding ways to dress Greek words and phrases in the clothes of their spoken languages was the center of their achievement.

Translation of Homeric verse is an especially strange task, as it is the translation of a tradition and performance rather than of an author. Classical scholarship has long accepted the theory researched and popularized by Milman Parry that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the products of an untold number of bards over years (possibly centuries) of oral-formulaic composition. Whether a man in the Iron Age named Homer had anything to do with their creation is beside the point; Virgil, on the other hand, a well-documented historical figure who studied Greek literature in order to write receptions, has more in common with Shakespeare and Goethe than he does with a historical Homer. It is unique to the Russian canon of translated classical literature that the 1829 translation of the *Iliad* by Nikolai Gnedich and 1849 translation of the *Odyssey* by Zhukovsky are still the most widely read and beloved renderings of Homer; in English, preference is split between the work of Robert Fagles, Robert Fitzgerald, and Richmond Lattimore, among others; more recently the scholars Emily Wilson and Daniel Mendelsohn have contributed popular and methodologically diverse translations of Homer to the Anglophone canon.

The Greek tragedians, who all lived within a century of each other in and around fifth-century BCE Athens, are also relatively well-documented historical figures, to the extent that scholars can use what is recorded of their lives to make inferences into their artistic choices. For example, Aeschylus's experience as a veteran of the Persian and Pelopenessian wars may have informed his depiction of the aftereffects of war, and his involvement with the cult of the Eleusinian mysteries sheds light on his references to mystical religion and obscure worship practices. The tragedians were also, as J. Michael Walton writes, distinct and innovative writers in

their lifetimes, complicating, as Benjamin suggested, our ability “[t]o comprehend” their work “as a mode:”

The Athenian playwrights each wrote in a highly distinctive manner, constantly foraging, breaking new ground, making new discoveries about what the power of the theatre could and might be. One of the factors that makes Greek tragedy and comedy difficult to translate is that these dramatists were, in their own day, the *avant-garde*. Aeschylus used coinages which are not found anywhere else in surviving Greek literature. Sophocles incorporated emotional contrasts which have physical equivalents. Euripides used a mixture of colloquial and forensic language that brings mythical issues to the level of everyday experience. [...] The medium of these Greek playwrights was a different world, a new art form in a changing society. So, one of the priorities for any translator of Greek plays should be, but too seldom has been, to have a firm grasp of the playwright’s distinctive features, as well as of the social, cultural, and theatrical conditions for which each of them was writing, that their equivalences are rooted solidly in the past before being transmitted into the present.²³⁰

It is clear to me that in the context of the Russian modernist translations of tragedy that occupy this dissertation, each translator felt himself to be sufficiently knowledgeable about the tragedian he was rendering, occasionally to the point of overidentifying with the subject, and felt that it was possible for his translation of Greek tragedy to become the definitive translation, and further that it was his duty to liberate these texts from their places on the mantelpiece of western European culture, and give them a new, Russian context. The translations by Annensky, Ivanov, and Merezhkovsky that occupy this dissertation are still among the most prominent translations read in Russian, alongside a handful of Soviet and even fewer post-Soviet translations.

A further conundrum that Walton sees plaguing translators of Greek tragedy is the urge for translators to soften the edges of the dramas, out of fear that their audiences would find “unadulterated Greek tragedy” to be “obscure and alien.”²³¹ Each of my subjects made alterations in the text that may not necessarily have been meant to soften the drama, but certainly were intended to make it more accessible and recognizable to Russian audiences, to varying effect. I

²³⁰ McDonald and Walton, 5

²³¹ McDonald and Walton, 6

will discuss how Ivanov worked to recreate the obscurity of his translations of Aeschylus and also attempted to add Slavicisms into the verse, while also striving to make the plays accessible to a Russian audience. Annensky was determined to create translations that preserved the beauty and clarity of the Greek verse, an objective that corresponded well with his choice to render Euripides, the most colloquial of tragedians, into Russian, although his translations stray often quite far from the original text. Merezhkovsky and Annensky were both influenced by French Symbolism and ideas from French poetry are present in their translation. I will be demonstrating how this manifests in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, which both Annensky and Merezhkovsky translated into Russian within several years of each other. The French writer and Latinist Jacques Perret argued that the differing importance of genre between antiquity and modernity affects the translation: if Virgil had been writing in the seventeenth century, he would not be writing epic, therefore a translation should be read for its canonical importance and not necessarily for what they can communicate to the present day.²³² I believe that if the Russian modernist translators of tragedy were offered this premise, they would argue that if Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides lived in early-twentieth-century Russia, they would still be writing tragedy.

Translation of Greek tragedy in modernism

Western Europe has been negotiating its relationship with the assigned value of classical literatures since the Renaissance, but while Renaissance artists and writers engaged with antiquity in terms of its renewal and rediscovered timelessness, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thought on antiquity began to contend with the idea that all canonized “classical” literature was worthy of being brought into modernity, and to problematize the concept of the “eternal” in reception of

²³² Friedberg, 94

ancient literature. This development required a new categorization for reception of ancient literature, and Alexandra Lianeri and Vanda Zajko define this category as the “relative classic”: a “work whose perfection had to be appraised by standards pertaining to its age, rather than universal ones.”²³³ If the texts of classical antiquity face reevaluation and renegotiation in each new period of cultural and intellectual progression, this makes the act of translation the key site for translators to make their argument for the continued relevance of the text they are bringing into their language, whether it be the first or hundredth time it has been translated into a modern language. Conversations on antiquity in European history are built on either interrogating or insisting upon the enduring mythology that the political systems and philosophical frameworks of modern Europe are its direct inheritance from Rome, which itself had inherited and refined its systems from Greece. In his 1944 lecture “What Is a Classic?,” T. S. Eliot calls the work of the Roman poet Virgil “the universal classic,” as he “symbolises so much in the history of Europe, and represents such central European values.”²³⁴ Eliot asserts that a properly “classic” work of literature is obvious to the context in which it is reintroduced due to a quality of “maturity”: “that if we are properly mature, as well as educated persons, we can recognise maturity in a civilisation and in a literature, as we do in the other human beings whom we encounter.”²³⁵ Frank Kermode responds to Eliot’s definition of a “classic” as being proportional to its perceivable “maturity” by pointing out that Eliot is using “the expansive logic of empire” to bestow universal relevance on Virgil.²³⁶ Virgil, Kermode continues, wrote political and prophetic poetry on Rome as an imperial power, and the stately power of Rome would appear universal to Eliot, perched between the British and American empires and in the midst of the Second World War. Eliot makes it clear in his lecture

²³³ Lianeri, 11

²³⁴ Eliot, 10, 7

²³⁵ Eliot, 10

²³⁶ Lianeri, 13

that he is speaking as an enthusiast of classical literature and not as a scholar, and as a result he is neglecting the scholarly work that has allowed for his enthusiasm: the work of the translator.

Lianeri and Zajko write,

The “mature” state of language and culture, purportedly achieved by the metropolitan centre and confirmed through its expansion, requires a process that is more than mere reiteration and transfer. Texts that become classics move into the periphery through the act of translation. Yet, this act, far from asserting the finality of the classic, raises questions about who does the moving, what forms of gain and loss are involved in the process, and how translating communities actively contribute to this becoming.²³⁷

This chapter is concerned with this act of moving a work of classical literature, a “relative classic,” into the language and context of another empire, during the “Slavonic Renaissance,” when the Russian intelligentsia was especially interested in renegotiating their relationship with ancient literature. I will examine how Ivanov, Annensky, and Merezhkovsky each approached translation as a literary mode, investigating questions of accuracy, reference, aesthetic choice, intent, and reach, before turning directly to their translations. More than simply attempts to render the tragedies in Russian to fill a gap in literature available to Russophone readers, these translations of Greek drama were responses to greater conversations on national mythology, religion, poetry, and continuity in the Russian body of literary accomplishments.

The historical context of the early twentieth century, the period in which modernism was germinating in Russia as well as throughout Europe, is critically important to the process. In the introduction to *The Classics in Modernist Translation*, edited by Miranda Hickman and Lynn Kozak, Hickman points out that “the pioneering cultural works of modernist literature was pivotally shaped by translations of, responses to, and reinventions of literary and cultural material from classical antiquity.”²³⁸ Hickman’s volume addresses modernist receptions in the anglophone

²³⁷ Lianeri, 14

²³⁸ Hickman, 1

context from poets including Ezra Pound, H.D., and W. B. Yeats, but this is unquestionably true for the Russian modernists as well. The modernist attraction to translation is articulated by Steven G. Yao:

Translation represented for the Modernists much more than either just a minor mode of literary production or an exercise of apprenticeship, though for some writers it continued to fulfill such a traditional function. Rather, it constituted an integral part of the Modernist program of cultural renewal, a crucially important mode of writing distinct from, yet fundamentally interconnected with, the more traditionally esteemed modes of poetry and prose fiction.²³⁹

Yao argues that modernist writers used translation as a site for working out problems such as the instability of world political systems, the unreliability of authorities including religion in the face of these international and domestic conflicts, and the perception among artists that the old forms of artistic production were not satisfactory for their efforts to depict their circumstances. The result is a “need to develop new formal and representational possibilities more in tune with the demands of the expressly modern world.”²⁴⁰ Innovative approaches to translation proved to be a fertile ground for interactions with diverse cultures, ancient and modern, and for shrugging off the Enlightenment-era norms for rendering art through the frameworks of rationalism and positivism.

Translation of drama as opposed to poetry, epic, or philosophic dialogue also poses its own unique set of challenges. While tragedy has been collected in volumes and published to be read for millennia, the translator of tragedy approaches the text with the knowledge that it is meant to be performed before an audience. J. Michael Walton memorably writes, “While most translation involves a bond between source as mother and target as child, theatre translation serves as midwife between the playwright’s pregnancy and a living, breathing performance baby.”²⁴¹ Writers with

²³⁹ Yao, 6

²⁴⁰ Yao, 7

²⁴¹ Hardwick and Stray, 222

“strong beliefs,” Walton continues, “make the worst translators.”²⁴² This is an unavoidable dimension of Russian modernist engagement with tragedy: it is never from a “neutral” perspective, only ever as an existential project by a poet with his own distinctive voice and agenda. After the Bolshevik Revolution, the occupation of translator began to take on an entirely new context: translation, especially of obscure, apolitical texts, was a source of income for writers who were not able to publish their own work under Soviet censorship and surveillance. In comparison, the two decades of the Silver Age when writers could choose from a global pantheon of artists to emulate and bring to Russian audiences burn even brighter and seem more ephemeral. Still, generations of Soviet translators studied and emulated the translations of the Silver Age, so these eras are not as different as they seem.

A comprehensive discussion of the complexities of rendering Attic tragic meters in Russian is warranted, but my oversimplified summary of the most critical concepts will have to suffice. A critically important voice on the subject of the translation of classical texts into Russian is that of Mikhail Gasparov, a brilliant theorist of Russian versification, and translator himself of texts from Ancient Greece and Rome. In an article on Gasparov’s translation theory, Barry P. Scherr makes a brief comment that opened my thinking about modern approaches to translating classical texts.

Yet, despite Gasparov's intensive work as a translator and for all that he explored in depth numerous topics connected with verse structure, he typically avoided theoretical constructs in this, as in his other writing. When he was at work on his numerous translations of works from Greek and Latin, he saw translation less as a theoretically interesting problem in its own right than as simply inherent to a classicist's basic endeavor, one aspect of delving into and understanding a work as thoroughly as possible. In fact, he talks of translating from ancient and medieval literature while traveling, as a way of occupying his time when he could not do other work.²⁴³

²⁴² Hardwick and Stray, 230

²⁴³ Scherr, 235-6

This insight into Gasparov's interpolation of intellectual activity into his personal routine, and the suggestion that this is a philological mode more attuned to classicists than scholars of any other field, has revealed a gulf in my thought on the translation of texts from ancient languages as opposed to modern languages. Translating Greek and Latin is the only remaining form of linguistic immersion possible for students and scholars, so all forms of translation into modern languages are pathways for the translator to get close to the life of the dead language. To recenter the translator as the main beneficiary of translation (whether from Greek or Latin or any language) is to dwell on the process, or perhaps the odyssey, as much as the finished product. I find that this mode of translation can be observed in all three of my subjects, who embarked upon translation projects with their own personal edification at the fore. While all three writers translated multiple genres, their common attraction to translation of tragedy seems to me particularly illuminatory. It must have been frustrating on a certain level to be interested in Attic tragedy, because of Nietzsche or Schopenhauer or Wagner or Hegel (etc.), and not have access to the texts in their native language (despite as I well know their depth of fluency in other languages, and the presence of certain pedagogical prose translations that predated their projects). Before these translations could become part of an endeavor to revive communal experience of art and inspire interest in the continued relevance of ancient myth, they were attempts on the parts of Merezhkovsky, Ivanov, and Annensky to understand tragedy on a linguistic level.

One of Gasparov's most important works is *A History of European Versification* (*Очерк истории европейского стиха*, 1989), a comparative study of verse traditions and evolutions beginning in antiquity and stretching into modernity and across Europe (and Russia). In this text, Gasparov discusses the structure and development of choral lyric poetry, which is often (but not only) found in tragedy.

Choral lyric poetry—the solemn songs of Pindar or the songs of the chorus that are inserted into Attic tragedy—were written in much more complex stanzas [than Aeolic Syllabo-Metrical Verse]: they were very long, and composed of such complex measures that it was only in the nineteenth century that scholars sorted out their rhythmical structure. In addition, we find here also the use of purely metrical, isosyllabic substitutions of two short syllables for one long. How these things sounded in reality is difficult to imagine without the music.²⁴⁴

Gasparov goes on to mention that the structure of the choral ode, in which a strophe is followed by a corresponding antistrophe and then an epode, is found not only in classical tragedy but also in folk song and ritual dances across cultures and millennia.²⁴⁵ Concerning the possibility of rendering these choral odes into other languages, Gasparov simply states that

Exact tonic imitations of the rhythms of classical choral lyrics are encountered comparatively rarely, because they are so complicated. Usually, in translations the rhythm of the original is somewhat simplified, and the syntax is modified so as to coincide more closely with the rhythm.²⁴⁶

Exact imitations in modern languages are complicated (across meters) because of the fact that Greek and Latin prosody is built upon systems of long and short syllables. In Russian, syllable length is replaced by stress or accented syllables. My first chapter discussed how the history of Russian versification is shaped by the influence of Greek and Latin poetics across the centuries, but Vyacheslav Ivanov is recognized for, as Michael Wachtel writes, a “more authentic Russian realization of Greek prosody.”²⁴⁷ The meter most commonly used in tragedy is the iambic trimeter, a meter that Scherr notes is not commonly used by Russian poets, but can be found in “lighter genres such as songs, romances, love poems, and other short lyrics” beginning in the eighteenth century.²⁴⁸ Ivanov maintains iambic trimeter through his translations of Aeschylus, but Annensky and Merezhkovsky both turn to iambic pentameter, a far more popular meter for Russian poets

²⁴⁴ Gasparov 1996, 62

²⁴⁵ Gasparov 1996, 63

²⁴⁶ Gasparov 1996, 63

²⁴⁷ Wachtel, 195

²⁴⁸ Scherr 1986, 65

beginning in the nineteenth century. This is the meter in which Pushkin composed *Boris Godunov* and the *Little Tragedies*.

I will now turn to discussion and analysis of the translation projects of my dissertation subjects, in light of these theories of translation.

A Russian Aeschylus

The story of Ivanov's decade-long project to translate the entire extant body of work by Aeschylus and the trajectory of these works to publication is nearly a tragedy itself: the manuscript was almost finished for years as Ivanov bought himself more time, it was almost destroyed in a fire in Moscow in October 1917, and it was almost published multiple times by various publishers: Ivanov tried to find a publisher for the complete set of translations until the very end of his life. It was only published in its entirety after his death, even though from its inception he was careful to retain the rights to publish this set of translations in his own collected works. Ivanov knew even before beginning the project that it would be a key part of his legacy and identity as a scholar and poet. His work with Aeschylus extends from his conviction that tragedy is the embodiment of the Dionysian, and subsequently Nietzsche's identification of Aeschylus as the most Dionysian tragedian. Beyond that, Aeschylus also represented a form of leverage Ivanov was able to wield as protection in a rapidly changing world and a reminder of his extreme erudition. In a sea of Silver Age poets, painters, musicians, and philosophers all deeply immersed in classical antiquity, there was no one more knowledgeable about the ancient world or more of a fervent advocate for its continued relevance than Vyacheslav Ivanov (except potentially Zielinski, Ivanov's frequent collaborator). I think of Ivanov as a Russian Aeschylus, referring to the complicated process that accompanied the first complete translation of the ancient playwright's extant works into Russian,

and also a way to understand how Ivanov thought about himself. He considered himself, not without reason, to be the prophetic father figure of a sea change in artistic culture. The classical philologist Nikolai Bachtin recalled a night during which Ivanov read aloud from his translation of the *Oresteia* as “the most intense and decisive experience of [his] life.”²⁴⁹ Evgeny Anichkov had a similar experience, writing: “This immensity, encompassing all poetry, the poetry of all periods of Symbolism, was so vividly revealed before my eyes when Vyacheslav Ivanov once read his heartfelt translation of Aeschylus's Agamemnon in the Apollon editorial office.”²⁵⁰

Ivanov was drawn to figures he saw as parallels to himself in other eras: he felt a similar pull to Dante and Petrarch, Novalis, and Goethe, all underwritten by the thread of the Dionysian. He was interested in scholarly poets, who were curious about the philosophical and religious underpinnings of the cultures and civilizations, poets who were teachers and priests, passing mystical knowledge to audiences of students. Aeschylean tragedy is concerned with order and disorder. Morality for Aeschylus is an understanding of the limits of the powers organizing the world, and not doing things that make these powers recoil against you: understanding the limits of your *moira* (fate). His plots span generations; he has a god’s perspective. His greatest characters are both patient and furious. Aeschylean choral odes consist of strophes and antistrophes in a balancing act with matching rhythmic patterns; his meters are complex and his choruses are intentionally opaque and ominous. English translators have given up on the idea of rendering these meters into English verse, often choosing blank verse with rhyming couplets. “It is virtually impossible to translate Aeschylus,” writes Anne Lebeck. “Hence the translator must give some explanation of intent, define his aim, and apologize for inevitable inadequacies.”²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Bachtin, 41

²⁵⁰ Aeschylus 1989, 513

²⁵¹ Lebeck, 4

Ivanov reproduced all of Aeschylus's meters in Russian, innovating the application of Greek meter into Russian prosody: the iambic trimeter, also called the tragic trimeter, is the most common, but there are also more bedeviling meters, such as the trochaic tetrameter catalectic and dactylo-epitrite, which are often used in Aeschylean choral odes. Aeschylus was invested in poetry of mysteries: he had been initiated in the Eleusinian Mysteries, the famously secretive cult of Demeter and Persephone. Ivanov was a religious philosopher, interested in the divine panegyric of the tragedy. The *Agamemnon* in particular is suited to Ivanov's interests in the Dionysian and the connection between Greek tragedy and the occult and the Eleusinian mysteries. It is representative of all that is enticing and perplexing about Aeschylean tragedy in terms of its characterization, choral odes, references to mythology, and use of archaic language, and I have chosen to use examples from this tragedy to discuss the nature of Ivanov's translation.

A letter from Vsevolod Meyerhold to Ivanov in 1908 is the first time the idea of an Ivanov set of Aeschylean translations is mentioned in print.²⁵² Ivanov had been interested in following Merezhkovsky in staging a translation of a Greek tragedy at the Alexandrinsky Theater, as Merezhkovsky had done with the *Antigone*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Hippolytus*. Their correspondence indicates that Ivanov had originally suggested a staging of *Oedipus Rex* in his translation, but Meyerhold informed him that the Imperial Theatres Directorate had a contract with Merezhkovsky to stage it. No production of *Oedipus Rex* ensued, and Ivanov never published any translations of Sophocles. Meyerhold suggested that their production could begin in February of the next year, but no contract followed; incidentally, a year was not nearly enough time for a translation of all three plays at Ivanov's standard rate of production. 1908 was also only a year after the death of his wife, the writer Lydia Zinoviev-Annibal.

²⁵² Aeschylus 1989, 497

The plan to translate the *Oresteia* reemerged a few years later. Ivanov signed a contract on April 6, 1911, with the publisher Mikhail Sabashnikov in Moscow to translate all seven of Aeschylus's extant tragedies into Russian. Like many projects the ambitious Ivanov was entangled in, this did not go according to plan. The Russian translations of Aeschylus were part of a project envisioned by Sabashnikov to publish the first complete edition of Greek tragedies in Russian. Sabashnikov had already enlisted Taddeus Zielinski to translate the works of Sophocles and had acquired the rights to Annensky's translations of the works of Euripides. Zielinski had recommended Ivanov to Sabashnikov as the only appropriate translator of Aeschylus, but Sabashnikov had been hesitant. Their interpersonal relations may have been strained: among other reasons, Ivanov had tried to seduce the publisher's sister, Margarita Sabashnikova, several years earlier. Sabashnikov later wrote:

Вячеслава Иванова я знал как кунктатора, нерешительного и мнительного человека и опасался предоставить ему такую большую работу, как перевод всего Эсхила: возьмется, свяжет нас и не сделает, говорил я. Я бы предпочел отвести ему что-нибудь менее громоздкое. Но Ф. Ф. Зелинский уговорил меня остановиться на Вячеславе Иванове как на единственном в своем роде кандидате, обещая, со своей стороны, всячески побуждать его не затягивать работу.²⁵³

I knew Vyacheslav Ivanov as a cunctator (procrastinator), an indecisive and suspicious man, and I was wary of giving him such a large task as translating all of Aeschylus: he'd take it on, tie us up, and then not do it, I said. I would have preferred to assign him something less cumbersome. But F. F. Zielinski persuaded me to settle on Vyacheslav Ivanov as a unique candidate, promising, for his part, to do everything he could to encourage him not to drag out the work.

This is, unfortunately, exactly what happened. Ivanov procrastinated, despite Zielinski's encouragement. Zielinski remained convinced that Ivanov was the only person capable of translating Aeschylus. In 1918, Zielinski planned an anthology of Greek poetry and prose and wrote to Ivanov asking for his translations of Cassandra's scene in the *Agamemnon*: "I can't leave

²⁵³ Aeschylus 1989, 500

my listeners without Aeschylus... without *your* Aeschylus, for it's impossible to read anyone else when you have yours.”²⁵⁴ Ivanov had been willing to sign Sabashnikov’s contract only if his own conditions were met:

Кроме того, хотелось оговорить одну не оговоренную, но мною подразумеваемую подробность, а это уже делало написание письма скучным, потому что как бы сложно-деловым. Разумею вот какую подробность: необходимо в условии упомянуть, что я сохраняю право перепечатки своих переводов в собрании своих сочинений. Ибо, ежели перевод будет удовлетворять меня как художественная работа (а удовлетворять он, по существу задачи, *должен* — или не должен существовать вовсе), то он так же органически приобретает место в моей поэзии, как например, «Одиссея» в поэзии Жуковского.²⁵⁵

I wanted to stipulate one detail, unstated but implied by me, and this already made writing the letter boring, because it was, so to speak, too complicated and businesslike. I mean this detail: it is necessary to mention in the conditions that I retain the right to reprint my translations in collected editions of my works. For if the translation satisfies me as a work of art (and, by the very nature of the task, it *must satisfy it*— or it must not exist at all), then it will organically acquire a place in my poetry, just as, for example, the *Odyssey* does in the poetry of Zhukovsky.

Ivanov was engaged to hand over his translation of Aeschylus’s trilogy of plays known as the *Oresteia*—consisting of the plays *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*—in roughly a year, May 1912. Despite many delays caused by a variety of Ivanovian reasons, he did manage to leave behind complete translations of all seven of Aeschylus’s tragedies. Ivanov finished the *Oresteia* approximately four years after this deadline, in 1916, according to the preface he wrote for the Soviet publication of the trilogy that he had proposed, which was also never published. Interestingly, Ivanov twice used Aeschylus as an escape route. He left Russia in 1912, likely to avoid social repercussions for the fact that he had just married his stepdaughter, Vera, who was soon pregnant, in the name of beginning his Aeschylean translations. Ivanov turned over the completed *Oresteia* to Sabashnikov in the early fall of 1917, and, as mentioned, the manuscripts

²⁵⁴ Aeschylus 1989, 514

²⁵⁵ Aeschylus 1989, 502

were nearly destroyed in a fire in Moscow in October, but according to Ivanov, Sabashnikov chose to save these manuscripts over his other personal possessions, so they survived. In 1920, Ivanov had finished the *Oresteia* and was working on *The Persians* and *The Seven Against Thebes*, but now had Bolshevik authorities to contend with in getting his work published.

Ivanov had the ear of Anatoly Lunacharsky, the first Commissar of Enlightenment, who was similarly invested in the importance of world literature and the necessity of it being readily available for Russian readers. Sabashnikov signed over rights to the translations to the publishing house under Narkompros. Lunacharsky had been a visitor at Ivanov's iconic Wednesday salons at the Tower fifteen years prior, and now Ivanov gamely served in Lunacharsky's Narkompros as an editor of literature and philology at the State Publishing House and in theater organizations, and in turn attempted to wangle out of Lunacharsky permission to leave Bolshevik Russia and return to Europe. One reason he gave for the necessity to return to Europe and the libraries of Western universities was to finish his Aeschylean translations.²⁵⁶ Vera was ailing and Ivanov and his family were clearly not suited for life under the Bolsheviks. This application, which was approved by Lunacharsky, was denied by Lenin. Vera died soon after, in 1920, and Vyacheslav moved with his children to Baku. As a philology professor at the newly founded State University of Baku, he lectured extensively on tragedy and used his translations of Aeschylus to teach students Greek and classical meters. He was aware that he could use this rare level of classical philological fluency as a currency, and that he would be taken seriously when invoking this project.

When Ivanov was able to permanently immigrate to Europe, he knew the chances of publishing his translations of Aeschylus were nonexistent outside the Soviet Union. In 1937 he offered his translations of Aeschylus along with Novalis to a Russian publisher in Paris, but here

²⁵⁶ Wachtel 2025, 386

they also languished. Ivanov hoped his translations of Aeschylus would inspire recognition in his audiences of the unity he believed existed between ancient Greece and Russia, writing

Если бы работа была удачна, в самом деле, и притом (в данном случае это необходимо) в лучшем смысле доступна для широких кругов, я был бы внутренне счастлив; в противном случае — несчастлив. Эсхил — мечтаю я — должен быть общенародным достоянием; он будет истинно греческим по духу, если он будет и истинно русским (не интеллигентским, не западническим — т. е. разглядываемым через призму западной интерпретации, но уже, понятно, и не «стасовским»). Есть сфера общности между эллинской и национальной *живой* стариной, которую мне хочется открыть и воплотить в этих переводах.

If the work were truly successful, and (in this case, this is necessary) accessible in the best sense to a wide circle, I would be inwardly happy; otherwise, unhappy. Aeschylus—I dream—should be a national treasure; he will be truly Greek in spirit if he is also truly Russian (not intellectual, not Westernized—that is, viewed through the prism of Western interpretation, but, of course, not “Stasov-esque”²⁵⁷ either). There is a commonality between the Hellenic and national *living* traditions, which I want to discover and embody in these translations.²⁵⁸

Ivanov aimed to render the foreboding, archaic language of Aeschylus by incorporating words from Old Church Slavonic and the lofty language of eighteenth-century poetry. The use of Church Slavonic to recreate the impression of high style in Ancient Greek is referenced in 1829 in Gnedich’s introduction to his translation of the *Iliad*, in which he clarifies that Homer’s language does not need this type of linguistic intervention in order to render it in a style of Russian that is true to the original. Ivanov left behind little writing on his approach to translation and his reasoning behind certain translation choices. One exception is his introduction to a 1899 translation of Pindar’s *Pythian Odes*, which are structurally similar to Aeschylean choral odes. In these translations, Ivanov also relies on vocabulary from Old Church Slavonic, and he addresses this decision briefly, stating, “The ecclesiastical and archaic popular elements admitted into the language of the translation seemed to us to accord with the tone and dialect of the original.”

²⁵⁷ Vladimir Stasov was a 19th century writer and critic who wrote about the need for Russian art to be liberated from Western influence.

²⁵⁸ Aeschylus 1989, 508

(“Элементы церковные и старонародные, допущенные в язык перевода, казались нам согласными с тоном и диалектом подлинника.”)²⁵⁹ This still leaves many questions about how to interpret the use of these elements in the specific circumstances in which they are employed.

There are several ways to approach Ivanov’s use of terms from Old Church Slavonic in his translations. Liia Ermakova observes these terms are sometimes interpolated into the verse without being tied to any equivalent Aeschylean term, but rather serve to synthesize and locate common practice between Attic Greek and Christian literature, the same Dionysian project that also occupied Merezhkovsky. In this way, Ivanov makes a case for the connection between Ancient Greece and Russia on religious, literary, and linguistic levels. An example of this is Ivanov’s use of the adjective страстной and the noun страстотерпец, which are both rooted in Orthodox liturgical contexts. Ermakova points out that these terms frequently recur in Ivanov’s scholarly writing on Dionysus: his two studies *The Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God* and *Dionysianism and Predionysianism* each employ страстотерпец to describe the suffering of Dionysus. Ermakova writes,

Иванов сознательно вводит христианские по своим коннотациям понятия в дискурс о дионисийской религии, что со всей очевидностью следует из тех пассажей в «Дионисе и прадиионисийстве», где он сравнивает «языческие страстные мистерии» с христианской мистериальной идеей страстей Христовых и культом мучеников, которым «церковь, при завоевании ею языческого мира, искала заменить стародавние формы культа языческих предков». «Понятие “страстей”, — утверждает Иванов, — прямо перешло из эллинской религии в христианство, во всей полноте своего содержания, как мистического и обрядового термина».²⁶⁰

Ivanov consciously introduces concepts with Christian connotations into the discourse on Dionysian religion—a fact that is patently evident from those passages in *Dionysus and Pre-Dionysianism* where he compares the “pagan mysteries of suffering” with the Christian mystery-idea of the Passion of Christ and the cult of martyrs, with which “the Church, in the course of its conquest of the pagan world, sought to replace the ancient forms of the cult of pagan ancestors.” “The concept of ‘suffering’ [passions],” Ivanov asserts, “passed

²⁵⁹ Ivanov 1899, 49

²⁶⁰ Ermakova, 224

directly from Hellenic religion into Christianity, in the full richness of its content, as both a mystical and a ritual term.”

Ermakova identifies an instance in *The Eumenides* when Athena calls Orestes Μολεῖσθαι-страстотерпец, when there is no term in the line being translated (σεμνὸς προσίκτωρ ἐν τρόποις Ἰξίονος) in alignment with that meaning.²⁶¹ By attributing this epithet to Orestes, Ivanov classifies him among the suffering, Dionysian heroes of tragedy, while also imbuing him with Christlike passions.

To examine this phenomenon in Ivanov’s translation further, I will turn to several examples that I find illuminating from the translation of Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon*, the first play in the *Oresteia*, in which the king of Argos and great warrior Agamemnon returns home after a decade battling in Troy, accompanied by the Trojan princess Cassandra, whom he has taken as a prize of war, to find that his wife, Clytemnestra has been scheming to take her revenge on him with the help of her lover, Aegisthos. I will begin by taking a closer look at the prologue. The play begins with a thirty-nine-line choral ode composed in iambic trimeter, which Ivanov retains in his translation. The ode is spoken by a watchman who has been assigned the heretofore tedious task of waiting to see Agamemnon’s imminent return signaled by flaming beacons. He has been waiting a year, lying “doglike” on the palace roof, for any sign of his erstwhile ruler. His reaction to seeing the flaming beacon changes from joy to trepidation over eleven lines, setting up our expectation for this triumphant return to turn into bloody violence. Eduard Fraenkel’s commentary on the Greek text notes that the tenor of the speech intensifies as it progresses: “Drop by drop, one by one, ideas and images form in his weary head, and as they come he gives them utterance, advancing

²⁶¹ Ermakova, 224

to clearer and more forceful expression of his experience.”²⁶² The commentary by David Raeburn and Oliver Thomas describes the first lines of the tragedy as being “in the language of prayer”:

θεοὺς μὲν αἰτῶ τῶνδ’ ἀπαλλαγὴν πόνων
φρουρᾶς ἐτείας μῆκος, ἦν κοιμώμενος
στέγαις Ἀτρειδῶν ἄγκαθεν, κυνὸς δίκην,
ἄστρον κάτοιδα νυκτέρων ὁμήγυριν,
καὶ τοὺς φέροντας χεῖμα καὶ θέρος βροτοῖς
λαμπροὺς δυνάστας, ἐμπρέποντας αἰθέρι
ἀστέρας, ὅταν φθίνωσιν, ἀντολὰς τε τῶν.

Before turning to my analysis of Ivanov’s translation, I quote from Richmond Lattimore’s translation, in order to make clarifications regarding the original Greek.

I ask the gods some respite from the weariness
of this watchtime measured by years I lie awake
elbowed upon the Atreidae’s roof dogwise to mark
the grand processions of all the stars of night
burdened with winter and again with heat for men,
dynasties in their shining blazoned on the air,
these stars, upon their wane and when the rest arise.²⁶³

The first word of the tragedy is θεοὺς, “gods” in the accusative case. Raeburn and Thomas point out that the following phrase, τῶνδ’ ἀπαλλαγὴν πόνων, “release from these toils” or “respite from the weariness” as Lattimore translates, is associated with the Eleusinian Mysteries and their promise of “a happy afterlife,”²⁶⁴ and this phrase is repeated again in line 20 of this speech, and again in *The Eumenides* in a line spoken by Apollo to Orestes. The watchman “gains his release through the appearance of torchlight”: the Mysteries speak of a procession led by the Furies into the afterlife.²⁶⁵ Another reference to the Eleusinian Mysteries can be found in lines 36-37, when the watchman changes course after saying he welcomes Agamemnon home.

γένοιτο δ’ οὖν μολόντος εὐφιλῇ χέρα
ἄνακτος οἴκων τῇδε βαστάσαι χερί.

²⁶² Fraenkel, 90

²⁶³ Aeschylus 1959, 39

²⁶⁴ Raeburn and Thomas, 65-66

²⁶⁵ Raeburn and Thomas, xli

τὰ δ' ἄλλα σιγῶ: βοῦς ἐπὶ γλώσση μέγας
Βέβηκεν:

May it only happen. May my king come home, and I
Take it up within this hand the hand I love. The rest
I leave to silence; for an ox stands huge upon
My tongue.²⁶⁶

Raeburn and Thomas explain that the phrase “an ox stands huge upon my tongue” is a “proverbial expression ‘keeping mum’; the image of a key on the tongue is also found, associated with the secrecy of the Eleusinian mysteries.”²⁶⁷ The watchman’s speech concludes by firming up his resolution to only unlock his words only for those already in the know: “οἶκος δ’ αὐτός, εἰ φθογγὴν λάβοι, / σαφέστατ’ ἂν λέξειεν: ὥς ἐκὼν ἐγὼ / μαθοῦσιν αὐδῶ καὶ μαθοῦσι λήθομαι.” According to the commentary, “The initiated will understand his hints about the house’s secrets; he is careful the uninitiated will not.”²⁶⁸ This is a work in which words are carefully calibrated, and that the watchman is afraid even to speak aloud the topic on his mind reveals the word’s power. “The play’s compulsive dynamic lies in the accumulation of ominous words,” Raeburn writes, “which should be perceived as a *form* of action, with power to influence what happens.”²⁶⁹

This “language of prayer” and reference to secret ritual is present in Ivanov’s translation. As is possible in Greek and Russian and is (practically) impossible in English, Ivanov’s *Agamemnon* begins with the word “gods” as the direct object.

Богов молю, да кончатся труды сии
Ночных дозоров! Долгий год, Атридов пес,
Лежу на вышке, опершись на локоть, —
И ведом стал мне круговратных звезд собор,
Несущих зной и холод, узнаю владык,
Воздушных венценосцев.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ Aeschylus 1959, 40

²⁶⁷ Raeburn and Thomas, 71

²⁶⁸ Raeburn and Thomas, 71

²⁶⁹ Raeburn and Thomas, I

²⁷⁰ Aeschylus 1989, 76

While the language of the watchman in Greek is reserved, hesitant to share too much information about the implications of Agamemnon's return, Ivanov's watchman makes his thoughts perfectly clear, and speaks in a colloquial register. The vocabulary is often rooted in Old Church Slavonic, adding a lofty tone to certain phrases. I will skip to the verse beginning at line 26.

26. Ἀγαμέμνωνος γυναικὶ σημαίνω τορῶς
εὐνῆς ἐπαντείλασαν ὡς τάχος δόμοις
ὀλολυγμὸν εὐφημοῦντα τῇδε λαμπάδι
ἐπορθιάζειν, εἴπερ Ἰλίου πόλις
30. ἐάλωκεν, ὡς ὁ φρυκτὸς ἀγγέλλων πρέπει:
αὐτὸς τ' ἔγωγε φροῖμιον χορεύσομαι.
τὰ δεσποτῶν γὰρ εὖ πεσόντα θήσομαι
τρὶς ἐξ βαλούσης τῆσδέ μοι φρυκτωρίας.

34. γένοιτο δ' οὖν μολόντος εὐφιλῇ χέρα
ἄνακτος οἴκων τῇδε βαστάσαι χερί.
τὰ δ' ἄλλα σιγῶ: βοῦς ἐπὶ γλώσσει μέγας
βέβηκεν: οἶκος δ' αὐτός, εἰ φθογγὴν λάβοι,
σαφέστατ' ἂν λέξειεν: ὡς ἐκὼν ἐγὼ
μαθοῦσιν αὐδῶ κοῦ μαθοῦσι λήθομαι.

Ivanov's translation:

26. Супруга Агамемнона — услышала ль?
Бегу поведать знаменье. Через миг она,
Воспрянув с ложа, радостный подымет клик,
Встречая ликованием вождеченный луч,
30. Заголосит: «Победа! Рухнул вражий кремль!...»
Ей славу петь, а мне плясать предславию!
За царский дом я трижды по шести очков
Здесь выиграл на вышке — ставку полную!
34. Когда бы только цел и здрав вернулся сам!
Цареву руку милую сожму ль в своей?
О прочем ни полслова! Поговорка есть:
Стал бык огромный на язык — не сдвинешь. Все
Сказали б эти стены, будь у стен язык...
Кто знает — понял; невдомек намек другим.²⁷¹

²⁷¹ Aeschylus 1989, 77

Ivanov changes the tone of the speech in an effort to elucidate Aeschylus's words. I will not belabor each change he makes in his translation of the original text, but I will note changes that appear particularly interesting, and speculate on possible reasons for Ivanov's choices. The word *супруга*, for example, a formal term for spouse, stands out as a translation of *γυναικα*, wife, a word that seems to me perfectly aligned to *жена* as terms derived or equivalent to the word for "woman." Ivanov often gives preference in these translations to words derived from Old Church Slavonic, but in this case *супруга* and *жена* are both originally found in the archaic language. The term *супруга*—spouse—does create distance between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, signaling to the reader that the watchman knows Clytemnestra is wife in name only to Agamemnon. In the same line, the watchman asks *услышала ль?* Has she heard? This is a bizarre question, as it is his responsibility to convey this information to her. In Greek, the watchman addresses Clytemnestra in the dative: *Ἀγαμέμνονος γυναικὶ σημαίνω τοῦῶς*, "to the wife of Agamemnon I cry out piercingly."

Ivanov translates line 30 "Заголосит: 'Победа! Рухнул вражий кремль!...'" The word "victory" does not appear in Aeschylus, but the watchman instead wonders if the city of Ilium has been conquered (*ἐάλωκεν*). Ivanov's line has more archaic language, and most notably, the word *кремль*, while Aeschylus simply calls the Ilium *πόλις*, city. The use of the word *кремль*, kremlin, is unmistakably intended to merge Russian and Greek traditions, to build a landscape of the ancient world in the minds of his Russophone audience that resembled the visible remnants of the medieval Russian empire. Similarly, in line 34, Ivanov translates *χέρα ἄνακτος οἴκων*, the hand of master of the house, as *Цареву руку [милую сожму]*, the tsar's hand. Twice more in this verse he adds the modifier *царский* when the corresponding Greek phrase refers to a house (*οἶκος* or *δόμος*) with no such adjective: first in line 19—*Неладно в царском доме!*—and second in lines 32–33—*За*

царский дом я трижды по шести очков / Здесь выиграл на вышке. Phrasing such as “Цареву руку милую сожму ль в своей?” also carries an association with the language of folklore or fairy tale. Repeated use of words with the root *слав-* convey images of Church Slavonic and the language of liturgical worship, notably in line 31: Ей славу петь, а мне плясать предславие! To sing the glory, славу петь, is ecclesiastical language often used in the context of glorifying God. The verb *плясать* refers often to folk dance, a *narodnyi* dance in which someone of the watchman’s social class would participate. This verb also recalls the group ritual of singing and dancing that Ivanov emphasizes in his scholarship to be the key to understanding the function of the chorus. Ivanov has changed the register of the Watchman’s Speech, marking a significant change in a highly important passage. The opening scene of the *Agamemnon* sets the tone for the entire trilogy of plays, and would potentially be a reader’s first exposure to the language of Aeschylus (in translation). This translation releases the tension and reservation of the watchman in Greek, and his Russian aligns him with the literature and folklore of Russia pre-Westernization and pre-industrialization.

Further along in the tragedy, Clytemnestra is also given liturgical language in an unexpected context. Agamemnon has made his triumphant return to Argos, accompanied by Cassandra, a silent captive. They are greeted by Clytemnestra and her maids, who are carrying purple tapestries for Agamemnon to tread upon as she beckons them inside the palace, where she promises celebratory sacrifices. Ivanov uses the language of biblical sacrifice in these lines from Clytemnestra in 1056–57:

Κλυταιμίστρα	τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἐστίας μεσομφάλου
	ἔστηκεν ἤδη μῆλα πρὸς σφαγὰς πάρος ²⁷²
Clytemnestra	At the central altarstone
	the flocks are standing, ready for the sacrifice ²⁷³

²⁷² Aeschylus 1989, 104

²⁷³ Aeschylus 1959, 75

The Athenians of the fifth century were very familiar with all kinds of animal sacrifice (the festival during which the *Agamemnon* was first performed was likely accompanied by the sacrifice of a bull), and sheep were among the most frequent and therefore unremarkable animals to be sacrificed. Clytemnestra refers to μῆλα, adult sheep, and we understand her double meaning and her intended human victims. Ivanov translates the word as “lamb” instead of “sheep.”

Клитемнестра Уж агнцы ждут
 Заклания у жертвенника среднего
 Палат царевых.²⁷⁴

Ivanov uses the Church Slavonic word for lamb, агнец, which is used in phrases like “агнец Божий” (“the lamb of God”), and is distinct from the conversational words in Russian for lamb (ягнёнок/ягня). The Slavonic term of course itself derived from antiquity: *agnus* is lamb in Latin, a primary source of ecclesiastical language. The word for sacrifice or slaughter employed by Ivanov, заклание, is also an archaic, literary term. The implications for these translation choices are enthralling. Firstly, Isaiah 53:7 describes Christ and his humility in the face of his crucifixion as brought as a “lamb to slaughter.”²⁷⁵ In Old Church Slavonic, the phrase appears as “агнецъ предъ стригушимъ.” Does Ivanov see either Cassandra or Agamemnon as a Christlike figure? It would certainly not be Agamemnon, whose crime preceding this tragedy is a link to another interesting implication for his being a “lamb led to slaughter”: Clytemnestra is moved to murder her husband as revenge for his decision to sacrifice their daughter, Iphigenia, in exchange for the strong winds needed to sail their fleet to Troy, putting him in similar territory to Abraham, who was commanded by God to sacrifice his son Isaac. Isaac is saved at the last moment by God, who

²⁷⁴ Ivanov 2018, 105

²⁷⁵ The original Greek of Isaiah 53:7 has πρόβατον, “sheep,” leading this translation in a circle. For the purposes of Ivanov’s intention to populate his translation of Aeschylus with words from OCS, the OCS terminology takes precedence over the original text.

swaps him for a ram.²⁷⁶ Perhaps Ivanov is exploring the possibilities of the divine command in ancient literature, or how the crime of sacrificing a child in the way an animal is sacrificed is treated across ancient cultures.

One final scene from later in the *Agamemnon* that I find to exhibit Ivanov's approach to translating Aeschylus is the dialogue between Cassandra, the kidnapped princess doomed with prophetic sight, and the chorus, which follows Clytemnestra's fatal invitation inside. This is a part of the play that Aristotle in his *Poetics* dubbed the *kommos*: a back-and-forth interplay between the chorus and an actor that heightens the drama and makes the stakes clear. These are Cassandra's first lines spoken in the play, although she has been silently standing by Agamemnon as he is ominously greeted by Clytemnestra. Once Agamemnon and Clytemnestra leave the stage (Cassandra having silently rejected Clytemnestra's invitation to enter the palace), Cassandra's prophecy begins spilling out in threnodic song, predicting Agamemnon's murder and her own. The members of the chorus are reluctant to listen to Cassandra's words and respond disbelievingly to her prophecies, which aligns the audience with the doomed princess and against the chorus, which is the audience's representative onstage.

1107. Κασάνδρα

ἰὼ τάλαινα, τόδε γὰρ τελεῖς,
τὸν ὁμοδέμνιον πόσιν
λουτροῖσι φαιδρύνασα—πῶς φράσω τέλος;
τάχος γὰρ τόδ' ἔσται: προτείνει δὲ χεὶρ ἐκ
χερὸς ὀρέγματα.

Χορός

οὐπω ξυνῆκα: νῦν γὰρ ἐξ αἰνιγμάτων
ἐπαργέμοισι θεσφάτοις ἀμηχανῶ.

1114. Κασάνδρα

ἔ ἔ, παπαῖ παπαῖ, τί τόδε φαίνεται;

²⁷⁶ *Iphigenia in Tauris*, a tragedy by Euripides, imagines that Iphigenia was swapped for a deer by Artemis during her father's sacrifice, and has survived into adulthood as a priestess for Artemis in Tauris, or modern-day Crimea, another representation of Scythian territory in the tragic mythos.

ἦ δίκτυόν τί γ' Ἴδου;
ἀλλ' ἄρκυς ἡ ξύνευνος, ἡ ξυναιτία
φόνου. στάσις δ' ἀκόρετος γένει
κατολολυξάτω θύματος λευσίμου.

1107. Cassandra

So cruel then, that you can do this thing?
The husband of your own bed
to bathe bright with water—how shall I speak the end?
This thing shall be done with speed. The hand gropes
now, and the other
hand follows in turn.

Chorus

No, I am lost. After the darkness of her speak
I go bewildered in a mist of prophecies.

1114. Cassandra

No, no, see there! What is that thing that shows?
Is it some net of death?
Or is the trap the woman there, the murderess?
Let now the slakeless fury in the race
rear up to howl aloud over this monstrous death.

These lines are not of a fixed meter, but this section is characterized by an abundance of dochmiacs, a meter that is used in tragedy to convey expressions of agitation and distress. These can especially be found in Cassandra's speech, heightening her pain. The choral verses are also composed in dochmiacs and choriambes. This is a part of the tragedy that is meant to sound more musical, and it is easy to imagine foreboding, rhythmic group dance as the chorus tries to interpret and refute Cassandra's prophecies. Ivanov's translation, which in other sections discussed above and throughout the rest of the tragedy is adhering to the same meter as the original, does not attempt to exactly match the meter here. Instead, he recreates the effect of these meters by interrupting lines with frequent exclamations and short, fragmented sentences. This is especially true in Cassandra's verses. The responses of the chorus are smoother and closer to regular iambic verse, although they also reflect their own distress at Cassandra's words.

1107. Кассандра

Содеять что — хочешь, проклятая?
Того, с кем ты спала, зачем —
Его встречая — в баню повела?.. Зачем?
Что дале — не вижу. Спешат. В чью-то руку
Что-то сует рука...

Предводитель хора

Еще не разумею. Словно бельмами,
Вещание загадками мне застит свет.

1114. Кассандра

А!.. а!.. Увы! увy! Что я увидела?
Аида сеть! Секира!
Топор двуострый! С ним она, с убийцею,
Давно спала... Демон семьи, Раздор,
Жадный, ликуй! Вдыхай крови дым. Грех свершен.²⁷⁷

Cassandra's prophetic abilities were given to her by Apollo, who also cursed her to never be believed when she speaks her visions. Beginning in 1107, Cassandra is receiving and reacting to the prophetic vision that will be revealed as Clytemnestra murdering Agamemnon. Cassandra, seeing Clytemnestra through the veil of prophecy, addresses her and asks her how she could kill τὸν ὁμοδέμνιον πόσιν, her husband and bedfellow, λουτροῖσι φαιδρύνασα, having cleansed him with a bath. Ivanov translates this line as Того, с кем ты спала, the one with whom you slept, в баню повела, and led into the banya. Again, like kremlin, this is a word that paints a specifically Slavic scene. There is no banya or bathhouse in the original, only a bath. It is also surprisingly colloquial to call Agamemnon the one with whom Clytemnestra slept instead of one of the two words for spouse used in the Greek. Naming the relationship between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra through their extinguished sexual relationship also reminds us that Cassandra is the forced concubine of Agamemnon, a victim of his violence like Clytemnestra's sacrificed daughter, Iphigenia, and his current, unwilling bedfellow. Cassandra calls out in the agonized cries of Greek

²⁷⁷ Aeschylus 1989, 106

tragedy ἔ ἔ, παπαῖ παπαῖ, e e papai papai, which English-language translators often unconvincingly render along the lines of “alas!” Ivanov’s Cassandra calls out увы, which is at least an iamb like papai, and nicely anticipates sonically her next phrase, “Что я увидела?”

Several lines later in Ivanov’s translation, Cassandra addresses Clytemnestra again as Демон семьи, demon of the family. The phrase that would correspond with this translation in the original is ἄρκυς, hunter’s net, as Cassandra is referring to the queen as the snare or net that will entrap her husband. This is quite different from “demon.” Demon is also a complex word to use in this context, as a homonym with δαίμων, “daimon,” which means god or goddess or divine being, and does not only refer to an evil entity, only a great one. Socrates called his guiding inner voice *daimon* or *daimonian*, and this was a positive presence in his life. Ivanov certainly knew all this. It may be a bridge too far to interpret this as a gesture at representing the ambiguity in Clytemnestra’s character and motivation, which can be understood through the Hegelian understanding of tragedy: she is righteously angry at Agamemnon for slaughtering her daughter. Unlike in the *Antigone*, in which Creon and Antigone each have a version of justice on their side, Agamemnon and Clytemnestra are each convinced they are justified in their decision to murder.

The next line is completely different from the Greek: Жадный, ликуй! Вдыхай крови дым. Грех свершен. “Greedy one, rejoice! Inhale the fumes of blood. The sin is done.” “Greedy one” aligns with the Greek ἀκόρετος, insatiable, but the rest of the line, especially the invocation of грех, sin, a return to distinctly Christian terminology. There is no “sin” in the Greek, nor is sin in Greek literature the same as sin in Christianity, which is rooted in the “original sin” committed by Adam and Eve. In Greek there is the term ἁμαρτία, hamartia, which means mistake or error and can refer to guilt. The sin is also not done at this point: Cassandra is speaking in prophetic perfect tense, which is how prophets in the Bible speak. The concept of the prophet and the power of the

unexpected person endowed with prophetic abilities is present across religions and religious literature. Endowing Cassandra, a Trojan (Eastern) princess with doomed foreknowledge of the fall of a Greek royal house which she expresses in the voice of a Christian prophet, certainly seems to me to fit into Ivanov's project of connecting ancient sites of tragedy with Slavic history and religion. I will expand on this tendency in my fourth chapter, as it corresponds with Ivanov's tragic dramas *Prometheus* and *Tantalus*.

Translations of the *Hippolytus* by Annensky and Merezhkovsky

After an introduction to the factors at play in Annensky's and Merezhkovsky's translation projects, I will examine a passage from the *Hippolytus*, a tragedy translated and written about extensively by both Annensky and Merezhkovsky, Euripides' *Hippolytus*, and compare how the text is rendered in Russian by each translator.

Until 1906, Innokenty Annensky published his poetry under the pseudonym *Huk. To*— a reference to the *Odyssey* that beautifully reproduces in Russian the double meaning of the name in Ancient Greek. In Book 9 of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is preparing to stab out the eye of the cyclops Polyphemos with a flaming staff, and as he creeps toward the giant creature he speaks in “honeyed” tones to him: “Cyclops, you’ve been asking me for my famous name and now / I shall tell you— and then you’ll give me the guest-gift you’ve promised me. / No-One is my name. No-One is what people call me, / My mother and my father and all my comrades, too.”²⁷⁸ After being stabbed, Polyphemos stumbles out of his cave, calling out to his neighbors, “Friends, *No-One* is killing me—by trickery, not force!”²⁷⁹ The word for “no one” in Greek that is used in both of these cases is “outis” (“οὐτις”). However, his neighboring cyclops use a different word for “no one” when

²⁷⁸ Mendelsohn, 208

²⁷⁹ Mendelsohn, 209

they call back to him in exasperation: “If no one is doing you harm while you sit there all by yourself / Well, there’s no way to fend off a malady that comes from mighty Zeus.”²⁸⁰ Instead of “outis,” the other cyclops say “*mē tis*” (“μή τις”), which also means “no one” or “not any man.” In addition, however, to this meaning, it is a homophone for the word *mētis* (“μητις”) which means “cunning intelligence.” As he is stumbling around, blinded, Polyphemos hears his fellow cyclops telling him that it was cunning intelligence that has injured him. This double meaning has proven impossible for English translators to reproduce. It is a moment of ingenuity and arrogance from Odysseus, a prank that will further complicate his journey home as he has angered Poseidon (Polyphemos’s father).

Annensky is a clever linguist, like Odysseus, but his reputation as an educator, poet, critic, and translator shows that he was a man of humility, erudition, and patience, with the calm authority of a schoolteacher. Annensky’s reference to this moment is as Homeric as it is Gogolian: he assumes an identity (within the obvious pseudonym) recognizably Russian while also eschewing recognition, disguising himself as никто, while also boldly aligning himself with Odysseus. Annensky published semi-anonymously, as a nobody, throughout the 1890s, building a tidy collection of scholarly articles and reviews as he spent his days teaching at Nikolaevskaya Gymnasia in Tsarskoe Selo. This pseudonym may also be seen as sadly prescient, as he was little recognized for his contributions to Russian modernism in his lifetime. After Annensky’s death, Voloshin wrote about how it took years for him to understand in full all of Annensky’s contributions to Russian literature, having encountered his criticism, poetry, French and Greek translations, and more separately, and thought of them as belonging to different entities named Nikolai, Ivan, and Innokenty.

²⁸⁰ Mendelsohn, 209

Но можно ли было догадаться о том, что этот окружной инспектор и директор гимназии, этот поэт-модернист, этот критик, заинтересованный ритмами Бальмонта, этот знаток французской литературы, к которому [Никола́й] Михайловский обращался за сведениями, этот переводчик Эврипида - все одно и то же лицо?

Для меня здесь было около десятка различных лиц, друг с другом не схожих ни своими интересами, ни возрастом, ни характером деятельности, ни общественным положением. Они слились только в тот мартовский день 1909 года, когда я в первый раз вошел в кабинет Иннокентия Федоровича и увидел гипсовые бюсты Гомера и Эврипида.²⁸¹

But could one possibly have guessed that this district inspector and gymnasium director—this modernist poet, this critic fascinated by the rhythms of Balmont, this connoisseur of French literature to whom [Nikolai] Mikhailovsky turned for information, this translator of Euripides—were all one and the same person?

To me, they appeared as nearly a dozen distinct individuals, bearing no resemblance to one another in their interests, their age, the nature of their work, or their social standing. They coalesced into a single figure only on that March day in 1909, when I first entered Innokenty Fyodorovich's study and beheld the plaster busts of Homer and Euripides.

Voloshin had met Annensky only in the year before the latter's death, 1908, a bright year full of new poetic and artistic acquaintances for the long-cloistered Annensky.

Annensky's experience with Ancient Greek began in secondary school, but became his focus during university. While he was not as prodigiously accomplished as Ivanov at that age, Catriona Kelly's research shows that he was qualified to begin a career as a professor at the university level. This did not come to pass, however, as the Annensky family was not able to continue supporting him financially through doctoral coursework, and so Innokenty began work as a tutor for a wealthy family; he married the widow at the head of that family in 1879. He began teaching Russian and classical philology at the gymnasium level soon thereafter, which would be his primary occupation for the rest of his life. Kelly writes, "As Annensky's career progressed, he became increasingly disillusioned, and began to believe that the only value of his job was that it offered him a means of propagating interest in classical literature."²⁸² The idea to translate the

²⁸¹ Voloshin, 524

²⁸² Kelly, 64

works of Euripides, along with introductory articles and commentary, came to Annensky in 1891, during the two years in which he taught at the Pavel Galagan College in Kyiv. In his introduction to a volume on Annensky's translations of Euripides, Mikhail Gasparov paints a compassionate portrait of a man whose literary preoccupations shaped his reality.

“Язык трибуна с сердцем лани” – писал Анненский в стихотворной надписи к своему портрету. Вряд ли кто из читателей услышит в его стихах и статьях “язык трибуна”. Но Анненский знал, о чем говорил. Он был сверстник Надсона, Гаршина и Короленко, брат своего брата народника, воспитанный в самой публицистической эпохе русской культуры. Собственными усилиями, скрытыми от глаз современников, он сделал из себя того образцового человека *fin de siècle*, каким мы его знаем. Внутренний ориентир у него имелся, “сердце лани”, полное страха перед жизнью, не выдуманно: он был смолоту больной, всегда под угрозой разрыва сердца, неврастеник с осязательными галлюцинациями. Но внутреннего ориентира недостаточно: “языком сердца говорить” не так просто, как казалось романтикам, этот язык тоже нужно сперва выучить. Нужен был ориентир внешний. Таким ориентиром для него стали французские “парнасцы и проклятые” — и Еврипид.

В обращении к французам он был не одинок. Другой его сверстник, П. Якубович-Мельшин, тоже переводил Бодлера, тоже от потребности сердца и теми же приемами, что и Анненский. В мировоззрении Анненского мрачный агностицизм Леконта де Лиля опирался на старый атеизм Писарева. На модное сверхчеловечество Ницше у него уже не хватило силы; он устал от самовыковывания, от той пропасти между Надсоном и Малларме, которую ему пришлось преодолеть одним шагом. Но себя он выковал -- и новый поэтический язык тоже.²⁸³

“The tongue of a tribune with the heart of a fawn”—so wrote Annensky in a verse inscription accompanying his portrait. Few readers, if any, would discern the “tongue of a tribune” in his poetry and essays. Yet Annensky knew whereof he spoke. He was a contemporary of Nadson, Garshin, and Korolenko—the brother of a Narodnik, raised in the most journalistic era of Russian culture. Through his own efforts—efforts hidden from the eyes of his contemporaries—he forged himself into that quintessential *fin de siècle* figure we know today. He possessed an inner compass; the “heart of a fawn”—brimming with a fear of life—was no mere invention: he had been sickly since youth, constantly under the threat of cardiac arrest, a neurasthenic plagued by tactile hallucinations. Yet an inner compass alone is insufficient; to “speak the language of the heart” is not as simple as the Romantics imagined—that language, too, must first be learned. An external compass was required. That compass he found in the French “Parnassians and the *poètes maudits*”—and in Euripides.

In turning to the French, he was not alone. Another contemporary of his, P. Yakubovich-Melshin, also translated Baudelaire—likewise out of a heartfelt need, and employing the very same techniques as Annensky. In Annensky's worldview, the somber agnosticism of Leconte de Lisle found its foundation in the old-guard atheism of Pisarev.

²⁸³ Annenskii 2007, 7-8

He no longer possessed the strength to embrace Nietzsche's fashionable concept of the *Übermensch*; he had grown weary of the ceaseless self-forging—wearied of that chasm between Nadson and Mallarmé which he had been compelled to bridge in a single stride. Yet he had indeed forged himself—and, in the process, a new poetic language as well.

Gasparov's suggestion that Annensky's embrace of French Parnassians over realism or the German Romantics was the result of his lifelong physical and emotional fragility is compelling, but not fully convincing. Annensky's predilection for both French Parnassians and Euripides are united by his attention to clarity and beauty in lyrical verse. Despite his physical ailments, Annensky spent decades in a demanding career, declaiming to generations of students the importance of learning the languages of ancients until they could recognize their beauty. Outside of teaching hours, Annensky continued to strive to instill interest and excitement about classical literature in his students, which coincided with his translation endeavors. In 1893, he staged a student production of Euripides' *Rhesus*, using his own translation. *Rhesus* is a lesser-known tragedy that takes place during the Trojan War and imagines the events of Book 10 of the *Iliad*, when Odysseus sneaks into the Trojan camps. Kelly points out that despite Annensky's reputation as a highly trained classicist, his publications on the area were largely for popular consumption or for educational use, and he made little original scholarly contributions to the field.²⁸⁴ His Greek was also imperfect: Zielinski admitted to amending Annensky's translations before he considered them fit to publish.²⁸⁵

Annensky's translations were known and well regarded during his lifetime, although the majority of his work remained unpublished for years to decades after his death. His first volume of poetry, *Tikhie Pesni*, was published in 1900, after over a decade of publishing translations and scholarship. Other than Greek, he translated primarily from French, focusing on the Symbolist

²⁸⁴ Kelly, 65

²⁸⁵ Zielinski 1908, 374

poetry of Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Mallarmé. Annensky translated poetry by the Parnassian poet Lesconte de Lisle, a classicist who had himself translated Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, Homer, Hesiod, and Horace into French. Gasparov suggests that de Lisle's prose translations of Euripides may have been an aid for Annensky's translations of Euripides, adding that "no one has investigated this yet."²⁸⁶ (I shall not rectify this gap in Annensky studies: I have no French.) Annensky began his project of translating all nineteen of Euripides' extant plays in 1890, and had only recently finished the last translation, of the *Medea*, in the year of his death, 1909. Of a planned three-volume series of the *Teatr Evripida*, only one volume was published during his lifetime. This volume, published in 1906, contained his translations and comments on the *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *Ion*, *Cyclops*, and *Herakles*. After Annensky's death, the project was taken up by Zielinski, who worked with Sabashnikov to acquire the rights to the publication of the collected tragedies. Between Annensky's death and his departure for Poland, Zielinski edited his translations of the tragedies and added his own critical commentary to publish alongside Annensky's introductions to each play. Sabashnikov and Zielinski published four volumes of Annensky's Euripidean translations but this project was left unfinished when Zielinski left Bolshevik Russia for Poland in 1922.²⁸⁷

In his approach to translation, Kelly asserts that Annensky is more in line with the Symbolists than not. "The main effect of the Symbolists' contact with the ancient world," Kelly writes,

was to make them timid and defensive about translating Greek and Latin literature. They wrote introductions to their classical translations, which they had not felt it necessary to do with their translations from French, and made ostentatious reference to their own erudition, as if to justify their handling of forbidden material. [...] The semi-academic character of Annensky's translations is typically Symbolist. His translations of French and German poetry were done privately, and he appears not to have thought of publication at first. But

²⁸⁶ Annenskii 2007, 8

²⁸⁷ Kelly, 135

his translations of classical poetry were specifically for publication, and most were published shortly after they were written. The Symbolists' attitude to classical poetry was more faint-hearted than to contemporary poetry. They argued here for the very technique of *bukval'nyi perevod* [literal translation] they had attacked elsewhere. Annensky was the sternest advocate of this.²⁸⁸

While Annensky sternly advocated for literal translation, his own translations, as I shall demonstrate, were far from literal. Gasparov, writing fifteen years after Kelly, also differentiates between Annensky's approaches to translating French and Greek verse.

В работе над этим новым языком у него было два ряда упражнений – более легкие и более трудные. Более легкими были переводы из французских поэтов: здесь нужно было преодолевать сопротивление материала в себе, изламывать привычный надсоновский (в лучшем случае фетовский) язык по чужим образцам. Более трудными были переводы из Еврипида: здесь нужно было преодолевать сопротивление материала перед собой, переделывать по тем же новейшим западным образцам язык античной трагедии, еще гораздо менее податливый. (Каким подспорьем для Анненского при этом был леконтовский прозаический перевод Еврипида, тогда знаменитый, а теперь забытый, -- этого пока еще никто не исследовал.) Французов Анненский переводил на имеющийся русский язык, преображая его; Еврипида он переводил на новый, преображенный русский язык, без опоры на традицию, как первопроходец.²⁸⁹

In working on this new language, he undertook two distinct sets of exercises—one easier, the other more difficult. The easier exercises involved translating from French poets: here, he had to overcome the resistance of the material *within himself*—to wrench his habitual, Nadson-esque (or, at best, Fet-esque) idiom into conformity with foreign models. The more difficult exercises involved translating from Euripides: here, he had to overcome the resistance of the material before him—to refashion the language of ancient tragedy (an idiom far less pliable still) according to those very same, cutting-edge Western models. (To what extent Leconte de Lisle's prose translation of Euripides—then celebrated, though now forgotten—served as an aid to Annensky in this endeavor remains a subject no one has yet explored.) Annensky translated the French poets into the existing Russian language, thereby transfiguring it; he translated Euripides, however, into a *new*—already transfigured—Russian language, forging ahead like a pioneer, without any reliance on tradition.

In 1899, theater scholar and classicist Boris Varneke read Annensky's translation of *Iphigenia in Aulis*, which had been published in 1898 in the *Journal of the Ministry of Public*

²⁸⁸ Kelly, 155-156

²⁸⁹ Annenskii 2007, 8

Education (Журнале Министерства народного просвещения). Varneke shared it with Yury Ozarovsky, who had directed Merezhkovsky's *Antigone* earlier that year and was looking for another project in which the storied theater actress Vera Kommissarzhevskaya would be interested in starring. *Iphigenia in Aulis* depicts Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia, in order to receive winds to sail with his army to Troy, and his deception of Iphigenia and his wife, Clytemnestra, a crime for which he will be repaid in the events of the *Agamemnon*. According to Varneke's memoirs, Annensky was delighted by the idea of his translation being staged, and Ozarovsky agreed to direct the tragedy and brought it to Kommissarzhevskaya, who was cast as Iphigenia. In an interesting turn, Kommissarzhevskaya dropped out of the production short before its run and was replaced by Ozarovsky's wife; Varneke speculates that her decision to leave the production was "perhaps influenced by the intrigues of Merezhkovsky and Madame Gippius" ("едва ли не под влиянием интриг Мережковского и м-ме Гиппиус").²⁹⁰ This is an intriguing supposition, a bit of Petersburg gossip that I wish was further documented. It is not difficult to imagine that there would be tension between Annensky and Merezhkovsky after Annensky's negative reviews of Merezhkovsky's translations of tragedy and of *Daphnis and Chloe*, but I have not encountered any other sources on this smaller staging of *Iphigenia in Aulis* beyond Varneke's recollection that would corroborate this reason for Kommissarzhevskaya's absence. She was replaced by Ozarovsky's wife, the actress Daria Musina-Pushkina, and the performance took place in March 1900 at Pavlova Hall (зал Павловой) on Troitsky Street in Petersburg. On Annensky's participation in the production, Varneke writes,

Не ближе, чем Котляревский [Petersburg literature scholar and husband of the actress playing Clytemnestra], стоял к театру и сам переводчик Иннокентий Федорович, на первой же читке заявивший, что он очень давно не бывал в театре. [...] он оказался очень несговорчивым автором, с бою отстаивавшим неприкосновенность каждого эпитета. Поэтому все необходимые замены и купюры приходилось делать у него за

²⁹⁰ Skatov, 73

спиной, преподнеся их ему в виде сюрприза уже на самом спектакле и всякими хитростями не пуская его на последнюю репетицию. Но уже тогда, в разгар работ над постановкой его перевода, я убедился, как глубоко и тонко знал он и своего любимца Эврипида, и вообще греческую поэзию.²⁹¹

Innokenty Fyodorovich—the translator—stood no closer to the theater than Kotlyarevsky [Petersburg literature scholar and husband of the actress playing Clytemnestra]; indeed, at the very first reading, he declared that he had not set foot in a theater for a very long time. [...] He proved to be a most intractable author, fiercely defending the inviolability of every single epithet. Consequently, all necessary substitutions and cuts had to be made behind his back—presented to him as a surprise only at the actual performance—while various stratagems were employed to keep him away from the final dress rehearsal. Yet even then, in the midst of working on the production of his translation, I became convinced of just how deeply and subtly he understood both his beloved Euripides and Greek poetry in general.

This performance of *Iphigenia in Aulis* is a rare instance of Annensky's work, either original drama or translation, being staged during his lifetime. Varneke notes that in 1901, Annensky dedicated his next published drama, *Melanippa-filosof*, to him in gratitude for initiating the performance of *Iphigenia in Aulis*. In his obituary for Annensky, Varneke again mentions that for all his devotion to tragedy in terms of its translation and accessibility to students and aesthetes, he was not particularly interested in the modern theater.

Dmitry Merezhkovsky's translations of Greek tragedy are characterized by his persistent adherence to his claim that the tragedies performed in fifth-century BCE Athens could only be understood in Russia within a Christian framework. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal divides Merezhkovsky's prolific career into three stages, drawn from the prevailing forces influencing his output during that period. The first Rosenthal calls his "aesthetic stage," beginning in his university years and lasting until 1899; the second, from 1899 to 1905, is his "religious search"; and the third, beginning in 1905 in the wake of the revolution and lasting essentially for the rest of his life, is his "theocratic stage."²⁹² His translations of tragedy all took place during this first stage, as a young

²⁹¹ Skatov, 72

²⁹² Rosenthal, 11

man heavily influenced by Nietzschean philosophy and his exaltation of “aesthetic creativity and solitary greatness,” motivated by an irresistible attraction to Hellenic antiquity. He was also not very many years out from secondary school and university, years in which he intensively studied Ancient Greek. His first known translation of tragedy is an excerpt from Euripides’ *Electra*, which was published with his first poetry collection in 1888 under the title *The Death of Clytemnestra* (*Смерть Клитемнестры*). The translation, which is around one hundred lines and matches up roughly to *Electra* 1165—1200, is dated to 1885, when Merezhkovsky was only twenty.

Merezhkovsky’s first complete attempt at a tragic translation was Aeschylus’s *Prometheus Bound* in 1891. It is likely that his interest in this drama stems from its importance to Nietzsche, as well as its presence in Romantic literature, including its English translations by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1833; revised in 1850) and by Percy Bysshe Shelley, whose reception *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) is a sequel to Aeschylus’s drama (which is the only remaining play of what scholars believe was a trilogy in the style of the *Oresteia*). In 1891 he visited Europe with Gippius for the first time: they traveled through Poland and Austria and made their way through Italy and then around Greece and Turkey by sea. Merezhkovsky was especially inspired by his trip to Athens and the Parthenon.²⁹³ While not impressed with Crete or with Athens in general, he described his experience visiting the Acropolis as “a sensation such that I will not forget to my dying day.”²⁹⁴ In a passage recalling the ideals of ancient harmony espoused by Johann Winckelmann, Merezhkovsky wrote that he found the beauty of the Acropolis to be in the harmony of the architecture and the natural environment.

Here man has added nothing of his own to Nature. The beauty of the Parthenon and of the Propylaea is but a continuation of the beauty of the sea, the sky, and the stern, sharp outlines of Hymettus and Pentelicon. [...] Here is the fullest harmony between the works of Nature and those of the hands of men, a harmony that never since has been repeated; the great

²⁹³ Bedford, 42

²⁹⁴ Merezhkovsky 1909, 18

reunion of these two principles that are eternally opposed, the works of men and the works of the gods.²⁹⁵

The influence of Nietzsche and *The Birth of Tragedy* is clear in this passage; it is also parallel to his argument in “On the Reasons for the Decline and New Trends in Russian Literature” on the necessity of learning from the old forms and from them creating a new, Russian version. The idea of singularity between the Russian (and himself in particular) and the Ancient Greeks can also be found in this essay:

As in every great unique contingency of our existence, it seemed to me that I had seen all this before, somewhere and at some time long, long ago, and had not experienced it in books alone. I looked and remembered. It was all so intimate, so familiar to me. I felt that thus it was inevitable, that otherwise it could not be; and in this feeling was deep joy.²⁹⁶

Merezhkovsky concludes this reflection with religious devotion: back at his desk in Petersburg, he looks upon pieces of the Parthenon filched from the site “with the superstitious love of a pious pilgrim gazing upon some holy relic that he has brought back from a distant land.”²⁹⁷ *The Acropolis* would be published in his first volume of literary criticism, *The Eternal Companions* (1896).

The *Prometheus Bound* was the only work of Aeschylus that Merezhkovsky attempted to translate; the rest were split between Euripides and Sophocles’s Theban plays. Merezhkovsky translated the *Hippolytus*, *Medea*, *Oedipus Tyrannos*, *Antigone*, and *Oedipus at Colonus* between 1892 and 95. I can only speculate why he chose these dramas and not others; *The Bacchae* is notably absent despite the Dionysian interests of the translator. Kelly suggests dramas such as the *Hippolytus* and *Medea* were chosen for their enduring popularity and thus the familiarity of the wider public with their plotlines.²⁹⁸ The *Hippolytus* and *Antigone* also are led by characters whose obsessions with honor, virginity, and proper adherence to ritual could be interpreted through

²⁹⁵ Merezhkovsky 1909, 24

²⁹⁶ Merezhkovsky 1909, 19

²⁹⁷ Merezhkovsky 1909, 28

²⁹⁸ Kelly, 157

Christian thought. In my second chapter, I quoted Merezhkovsky's disappointment that Russian audiences had not responded to the *Antigone* appropriately, and his conclusion that while they were not prepared for the complexity of Antigone's character, they would find more of value in the eponymous hero of the *Hippolytus*. While I have not been able to uncover any corroborating sources, I speculate that Merezhkovsky chose to translate the *Antigone* because of its importance to the theories on tragedy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. In Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, he discusses the *Antigone* in terms of the dialectic enacted between Creon and Antigone, who each represent compelling arguments for their own understandings of justice: For Creon, justice must be found in the law of the city, and for Antigone, it is within the law of family. These two sides of the conflict can each be understood and found legitimate, and set up questions of ethical order and of human law as opposed to divine law. Hegel was also interested in reading through tragedy to address aspects of Christianity, much like Merezhkovsky would later. Merezhkovsky wrote a short play in 1917 called *The Romantics* (*Романтики*), in which a father chastises his son over his preoccupation with Hegel and German Romanticism.

Outside of tragedy, Merezhkovsky also translated *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus during this period, a pastoral novel thought to have been written in the second century AD, during a period known as the second sophistic. In an essay from *The Eternal Companions* on *Daphnis and Chloe*, Merezhkovsky argues that authorial choices in *Daphnis and Chloe* make it clear the novel is to be read as an act of nostalgic literary conjuring, as a Hellenistic fantasy influenced by the early Christian aesthetics of late antiquity. Merezhkovsky writes that this novel was created by someone similar to himself:

оно написано не эллином, а эллинистом, т.е. человеком, для которого Эллада -- веселие, полнота и прелесть языческой жизни, языческого духа являются уже не

действительностью, а призраком; не настоящим, а более или менее далеким прошлым; не тем, что есть, а тем, что было и должно быть.²⁹⁹

not by a Hellene, but by a *Hellenist*, those men for whom Hellas is the joy, entirety, and pleasure of pagan life. This pagan spirit is no longer a reality, but a phantom; not the present, but the more or less distant past; not what is, but what was and should be.

Merezhkovsky goes on to articulate precisely the alignment he perceives between Longus, his audience, Merezhkovsky himself, and Russian literary society:

Но для нас, людей XIX века, ожидающих в сумерках нового, еще неведомого солнца, предчувствующих, что *Великий Пан*, умерший пятнадцать веков тому назад, скоро должен воскреснуть, тихая грусть поэмы Лонгуса делает ее особенно близкой, понятной и пленительной.

Они – эти странные, одинокие и утонченные эстетики, риторы, софисты, гностики IV века – люди глубоко-раздвоенные, люди прошлого и будущего, только не настоящего. Дерзновенные в мыслях, робкие в действиях, они стоят на рубеже старого и нового. Они – люди Упадка и вместе с тем Возрождения; в одно и то же время гибнущие, доводящие утонченность дряхлого мира до болезни, до безумия – и возрождающиеся, предрекающие знаменьями и образами то, чего нельзя *еще* сказать словами.³⁰⁰

But for us, people of the nineteenth century, [...] the quiet sadness of Longus's poem makes it especially close, understandable and captivating. They are these strange, solitary and refined aestheticians, rhetoricians, sophists, gnostics of the fourth century—people deeply divided, people of the past and the future, but not of the present. Daring in thought, timid in action, they stand on the borderline of the old and the new. They are people of Decline and at the same time of Renaissance; at the same time perishing, bringing the refinement of the decrepit world to illness, to madness—and reviving, predicting with signs and images what cannot *yet* be said in words.

The first readers of *Daphnis and Chloe* were living through conditions that would repeat at the end of the nineteenth century, and were reacting to their circumstances by creating art that responded to their reality and contextualized their experience within the greater body of work of their literary tradition. Merezhkovsky plainly identifies with Longus, whom he imagines as a city-dwelling Roman in apocalyptic times, at once inspired by Hellenic culture and burgeoning Christian theology. It is easy to project onto Longus like this, because nothing is known of his life or

²⁹⁹ Merezhkovsky, 16

³⁰⁰ Merezhkovsky, 17

circumstances, and Longus may not even be his name. It is through this persona, a Longus-type “on the borderline of the old and the new,” that Merezhkovsky’s receptions of tragedy can be understood. Merezhkovsky framed his attempts to revive tragedy as though he were a citizen of late antiquity, in a declining empire, seeking reconciliation between Christianity and pagan religion. Another way of saying this is that he perceives Longus as a Russian Symbolist. He also finds Euripides to represent Symbolist interests, in his efforts in tragedy to reconcile man’s desire to find religious meaning while also finding pleasure in sexuality.

Merezhkovsky’s perspectives on the intersections between Hellenic religion, the tragic genre, and Orthodox Christianity shifted between years and with different audiences in mind. In “On the New Significance of Ancient Tragedy,” he represents Hippolytus as a Christlike figure who martyrs himself for Artemis, choosing the goddess of virginity over Aphrodite, the goddess of sexuality and “sin.” He represents the conflict in *Hippolytus* differently in his essay on *Antigone*, “The Tragedy of Chastity and Sensuality” (“Трагедия целомудрия и сладострастия”). This essay was written after *Antigone* was staged in 1899, and three years before *Hippolytus* would be staged in 1902. During this period, Merezhkovsky experiences what Rosenthal sees as a shift from his “aesthetic” stage into his “religious search,” which “grew out of the inability of aesthetic individualism to provide firm values needed for a satisfying life style.” Rosenthal continues:

It was an attempt to find a more definite faith which would guide and inspire both life and art. Art and religion were to be united in a new synthesis based on an interpretation of Christianity which included paganism. On the larger scene, this was the period of the discovery of Vladimir Solov’ev, of Dostoevsky as a religious writer (previously he had been regarded primarily as a social critic, of the revival of Kantian ethical idealism, and of a general interest in religious questions.³⁰¹

It was during this second phase that Merezhkovsky’s translations of tragedies were staged at the Alexandrinsky Theater (*Antigone* in 1899, *Hippolytus* in 1902, and *Oedipus at Colonus* in 1904),

³⁰¹ Rosenthal, 11

and Merezhkovsky approaches these performances of his work from the prior decade with a notably changed, often contradictory perspective on the value of the tragedies and their meaning to modern Russian audiences. He plumbs the tragedies not for their representations of the Apollonian and Dionysian, but instead for evidence of, as he calls them in 1902, “Christians before Christianity.”

During his search for, as Rosenthal puts it, “a new religious consciousness,”³⁰² the influence of Hegel on Merezhkovsky’s thinking becomes increasingly apparent. Merezhkovsky references the Hegelian dialectic in a speech that he gave at the eighteenth meeting of the Religious-Philosophical Society, a discussion group he had founded alongside Gippius, Dmitry Filosofov, and Vasily Rozanov, among others, intended to foster discussions between members of the clergy and the intelligentsia on topics of religious and philosophical importance; Rosenthal notes the conversations often ended up revolving around romantic and sexual love.³⁰³ In this speech, Merezhkovsky discusses the iterations in his life and thought of the Holy Trinity, which ranged from highly blasphemous to slightly less blasphemous. In his personal life, he and Gippius were involved romantically (or perhaps some other relation stranger and more dialectical) with Filosofov, and had vowed to operate as an inseparable triad.³⁰⁴ Merezhkovsky saw trinities across material and spiritual areas of his life, which he interpreted through Hegelian “threefold thinking”:

Мы знаем, что закон триадности заключается не в одном христианстве. Еще ранее христианства различные религии и философские системы подходили к этому закону — неизбежного, тройственного мышления о всем существующем. Думаю, это можно найти еще у греков. У Платона ясно высказана триадность, тройственность нашего мышления. Замечательно, что новые философы также вернулись к этому. Самый глубокий метафизик, Гегель, пришел к такой триадности, тройственному мышлению. Иначе нельзя ни о чем думать, как Троицей, так сказать — троясь. Что это значит? А вот мы перейдем к предмету. Без Троицы и В. В. Розанов не победит, не найдет настоящей основы для своих религиозных упований. Он должен принять

³⁰² Rosenthal, 87

³⁰³ Rosenthal, 98

³⁰⁴ Rosenthal, 98

одновременно и во всей полноте все три Ипостаси, все три великих Принципа (тезис, антитезис и синтез), ибо жизнь проходит по этому троичному закону: положение, противоположение и сочетание. Только так все движется.³⁰⁵

We know that the law of the triad is not limited to Christianity. Even before Christianity, various religions and philosophical systems approached this law—the inevitable, threefold thinking about everything that exists. I think this can be found even in the Greeks. Plato clearly expressed the triad, the triplicity of our thinking. It is remarkable that new philosophers have also returned to this. The most profound metaphysician, Hegel, arrived at such a triad, a threefold thinking. Otherwise, it is impossible to think about anything except as a Trinity, so to speak—in triplicate... He [Rozanov] must accept simultaneously and in their entirety all three Hypostases, all three great Principles (thesis, antithesis, and synthesis), for life proceeds according to this threefold law: position, opposition, and combination. Only in this way does everything move.

Merezhkovsky is intertwining the Christian concept of the Hypostases (the three distinct persons of the Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) and the three stages of the Hegelian dialect, which he names above. This triad can be seen in his discussion of the *Hippolytus* in the 1899 essay “The Tragedy of Chastity and Sensuality,” in the dynamics between Aphrodite, Artemis, and Hippolytus.

In this essay, Merezhkovsky represents Aphrodite and Artemis in the *Hippolytus* as equal forces engaged in power struggles that each lay claim to a reasonable argument, following a Hegelian dialectical pattern, while in “On the New Significance of Ancient Tragedy,” written three years later, he depicts them through a Nietzschean framework as chaotic lust and divine chastity personified, with chastity prevailing.

Афродита—сила, сладострастие и красота—идет против Артемиды, целомудренной, строгой, нежной и такой же сильной и прекрасной. Обе они равно прекрасны – и потому равно правы. Вечная борьба их не оканчивается и никогда не окончится в трагедии мира поражением одной, победой другой, и эта борьба не нарушает их олимпийской тишины и ясности, совершаясь *только* внизу, на земле, в сердцах человеческих. [...] Борьба продолжается в бесконечность, и поле битвы все то же – сердце человека. Еврипид понимает, что эта борьба богов есть истинная жизнь людей, что она – биение их сердца, движение крови, усилие и победа мысли. Мир -- две чаши весов, вечно колеблющихся, две разные и равные чаши, с одной трепетной

³⁰⁵ Polovinkina, 392-393

стрелкой сверху. И только две, соединенные и далекие, они могут существовать, обреченные на ничтожество, одна без другой.³⁰⁶

Aphrodite—power, sensuality, and beauty—stands opposed to Artemis: chaste, austere, tender, yet equally strong and beautiful. Both are equally beautiful—and therefore equally right. Their eternal struggle does not end, nor will it ever end within the tragedy of the world through the defeat of one and the victory of the other; moreover, this struggle does not disturb their Olympian stillness and clarity, taking place solely down below, on earth, within the hearts of men. [...] The struggle continues into infinity, and the battlefield remains ever the same: the human heart. Euripides understands that this struggle of the gods constitutes the true life of humanity—that it is the beating of their hearts, the coursing of their blood, the striving and triumph of thought. The world is a pair of scales, forever wavering—two distinct yet equal pans, surmounted by a single, trembling pointer. And only as two—interlinked yet distant—can they exist; for, one without the other, they are doomed to utter nothingness.

This reading leads Merezhkovsky to a variation of his reading of the early Christianity present in this play. It is also a distinctly Hegelian reading, as Merezhkovsky does not ascribe goodness or evil to either side of his set of scales; Artemis and Aphrodite are “equally strong and beautiful.” According to this reading, Euripides’ representation of endless conflict between warring gods was meant to convey to mortal men the need to refuse participation in this cycle of violence, which can be sustained only by immortal energy. For mortal men, a solution to this conflict was in submission and humility:

Еврипид как будто за много веков прозревал неведомое, новое учение и носил его в душе своей. Это смутно чувствовали люди старой русской Церкви, тихие и глубокие, более нас близкие к тайне жизни, потому что они в эту тайну хотели проникнуть, тогда как средний человек (под корой сонной нехристианской и неязыческой пошлости) к ней равнодушен. Наши древние иконописцы изображали языческих мудрецов, поэтов и сивилл, предвещавших Мессию. И в Вяжицком монастыре, в храме святого Николая (1462) под Спасителем, сидящим на престоле, изображен *"Трагик Эврипидий"* со свитком: *"Аз чаю неприкосновенному родитися от Девы и воскресити мертвыя и паки судити им."*³⁰⁷

It was as if Euripides, centuries before, had glimpsed an unknown, new teaching and carried it within his soul. This was dimly sensed by the people of the old Russian Church, quiet and profound, closer than we are to the mystery of life, for they desired to penetrate this mystery, while the average person (under the crust of a sleepy, non-Christian and non-

³⁰⁶ Merezhkovsky, 299-302

³⁰⁷ Merezhkovsky, 302

pagan vulgarity) was indifferent to it. Our ancient icon painters depicted pagan sages, poets, and sibyls who foretold the Messiah. And in the Vyazhishchsky Monastery, in the Church of St. Nicholas (1462), beneath the Savior seated on the throne, is depicted the "Tragician Euripides" with a scroll: *"I hope the inviolable will be born of the Virgin, and will raise the dead and judge them again."*

This surprising anecdote appears to be true: an iconostasis at the St. Nicholas Convent of the Vyazhishchsky Monastery outside Velikii Novgorod features a number of philosophers and artists from antiquity, including Plato, Hermias, and Euripides, bearing short quotations such as the one Merezhkovsky quotes, which of course is not from any of Euripides' tragedies, but is rather rooted in medieval Orthodox negotiation with ancient drama, which will be addressed at greater length in my fourth chapter.

In the same essay, Merezhkovsky suggests that the specifics of the translation and its modern performances matter less than the overarching unity that exists between the ancient literature and contemporary audiences, which allows them to connect with the "soul of the great poet."

Все мелочное, временное уходит с временем, остается лишь вечное, и ясною должна быть только цепь, соединяющая наши помыслы и желания с душой великого поэта и пророка.³⁰⁸

All that is petty and transient fades with the passage of time; only the eternal remains, and the sole link that must shine forth clearly is the chain connecting our thoughts and desires to the soul of the great poet and prophet.

I have discussed at length Merezhkovsky's later writing on the *Hippolytus*, the essay "On the New Significance of Ancient Tragedy," in the previous chapter, as I find it to illuminate Merezhkovsky's vision for what a revival of tragedy could mean in Russian culture. I also mentioned that Annensky reviewed Merezhkovsky's translation unfavorably, and I have no evidence that Merezhkovsky read Annensky's translation, which was published several years after

³⁰⁸ Merezhkovsky, 303

his. Annensky also wrote an essay on the importance of the *Hippolytus*, which was published alongside his translation is his first volume of *The Theater of Euripides (Teamp Eepynuda)* in 1906. This essay reveals an entirely different reading of the tragedy than that of Merezhkovsky. Merezhkovsky does not discuss the characterization of Phaedra, having chosen Hippolytus to represent as a Christlike figure. Annensky focuses much of his article on the experience and words of Phaedra, in whom he finds the soul of Euripides himself. Annensky compares *Hippolytus* to *The Bacchae*, observing that both tragedies center around religious extremism and demonstrate how “the god-fighter is punished” (“карается богоборец”³⁰⁹); like Merezhkovsky, Annensky sees something Christian in Hippolytus’s solemn piety and devotion to Artemis that is not found in the ecstatic religiosity of the maenads in *The Bacchae*. Unlike Merezhkovsky, Annensky moves on quickly from Hippolytus to Phaedra, whom he describes alongside her nurse, who serves as her interlocutor in this tragedy, as “the conscious and unconscious sides of the female soul” (“сознательную и бессознательную сторону женской души”).³¹⁰ As Goethe gave his own characteristics and traits to his Faust, so Euripides, Annensky writes, imbues Phaedra with shades of his own personality.

В Федре не раз слышится отзвук личной жизни самого поэта, его исканий и болезненного душевного разлада. Когда, например, царица (ст. 375-380) говорит, что она уже давно проводит бессонные ночи над вопросом о причине порчи человеческой жизни, и когда потом, точно полемизируя с Сократом, она утверждает, что знать доброе (τα κρηστα) еще не значит его творить, то из-под розовой маски женщины на нас глядит задумчивый образ Еврипида, столь чуждого сердцем всему, в чем нет трепета идеальной мысли; но нам назойливо вспоминается и тот трагичнейший из поэтов мира, который с болью сознавал все бессилие философского ума над несчастьями и язвами жизни. [...] Но вдумайтесь в содержание бреда Федры, вы и здесь различите за ней поэта, который одухотворяет страдающий образ своей героини болью собственных, часто безнадежных попыток воплотить мечту и говорить голосом чужого сердца.³¹¹

³⁰⁹ Annenskii 1979, 383

³¹⁰ Annenskii 1979, 385

³¹¹ Annenskii 1979, 386

In *Phaedra*, one repeatedly catches echoes of the poet's own life—of his questing spirit and his painful inner discord. When, for instance, the queen (lines 375–380) declares that she has long spent sleepless nights pondering the causes of the corruption of human life—and when, subsequently (as if in direct polemic with Socrates), she asserts that to know what is good (τα κρηστα) is by no means the same as to do it—then, from behind the rosy mask of the woman, there gazes out at us the pensive figure of Euripides: a soul utterly estranged from anything devoid of the vibrant pulse of ideal thought. Yet, at the same time, we are insistently reminded of that most tragic of the world's poets—he who, with aching awareness, recognized the utter impotence of the philosophical intellect in the face of life's misfortunes and afflictions. [...] Yet if you delve into the substance of *Phaedra's* delirium, here too you will discern behind her the poet—one who imbues the suffering figure of his heroine with the anguish of his own, often hopeless attempts to give form to a dream and to speak with the voice of another's heart.

Annensky's sympathies, and he clearly believes Euripides' sympathies, lie with *Phaedra* over *Hippolytus*, whom, through his reading, the playwright has inscribed with the intellectual and philosophical powers of Socrates and his descendants in modern thinkers and poets. These were thoughts and emotions that were already being modernized in antiquity by Euripides, the most modern of tragedians. The same Socratic rationalism that Nietzsche saw as the bane of modern artistic creation Annensky perceives to be *Phaedra's* only method of battling inner torment.

Нравственная ответственность действующих лиц трагедии есть, в сущности, только художественная фикция. Она -- не более, как отблеск нравственных требований читателей. Как живопись говорит красками, так трагедия говорит обидами и страданиями, и если вы художественно пережили трагедию Федры, то не можете не согласиться со мною, что казнь Ипполита, в сущности, есть лишь возмездие за ту клевету, которою он преждевременно оскорбил Федру и с ней целую половину человеческого рода.

Итак, может ли наше нравственное чувство осудить месть Федры, если оно требует ее последствий?³¹²

The moral responsibility of the characters in a tragedy is, in essence, merely an artistic fiction. It is nothing more than a reflection of the moral demands of the readers. Just as painting speaks through colors, so tragedy speaks through affronts and suffering; and if you have experienced the tragedy of *Phaedra* on an artistic level, you cannot fail to agree with me that the execution of *Hippolytus* is, in substance, merely retribution for the slander with which he prematurely offended *Phaedra*—and, through her, fully half of the human race.

Thus, can our moral sense condemn *Phaedra's* vengeance if it is that very sense which demands its consequences?

³¹² Annenskii 1979, 394

Annensky's perspective on Phaedra's innocence and the inevitability of Hippolytus's punishment is profoundly modern and anticipates feminist readings. He also expresses impatience with Merezhkovsky's Christian interpretation, writing, "I would still not dare to limit Euripides' conceptions to this sentimental premonition of Christianity." ("я бы все же не решился ограничить концепции Еврипида этим сентиментальным предчувствием христианства.")³¹³ *Hippolytus* does, however, contain premonitions of many modern works of literature: Annensky cites formal similarities in the text of the tragedy to works by Goethe, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, and Jules de Goncourt.

To analyze and compare the translation approaches of Annensky and Merezhkovsky to Euripides' *Hippolytus*, I turn to a monologue by Phaedra. This monologue is the first time in the tragedy that she speaks at length, and she is addressing the chorus, which is made up of women from Troezen, her husband Theseus's subjects. This is the same monologue Annensky references in the quotation above in which Phaedra is pondering the meaning of goodness. At this point in her speech, Phaedra has concluded that her passion for Hippolytus, which was given to her by Aphrodite (Cypris) against her will, makes life unbearable, and Phaedra has resolved to commit suicide. Her language is clear and eloquent: her horror is organized into poetry. From their writing about poetry and tragedy, it is clear that Merezhkovsky and Annensky value different aspects of Euripidean drama. Merezhkovsky is interested in the unity between antiquity and modernity, which he characterizes as a "chain" connecting the ancient poets to modern readers. I provide first the Greek, then an English translation by Gilbert and Sarah Lawall, followed by the respective translations of Annensky and Merezhkovsky of this passage.

³¹³ Annenskii 1979, 396

Φαίδρα

391. λέξω δὲ καὶ σοὶ τῆς ἐμῆς γνώμης ὁδόν.
ἐπεὶ μ' ἔρωσ' ἔτρωσεν, ἐσκόπουν ὅπως
κάλλιστ' ἐνέγκαιμ' αὐτόν. ἡρξάμην μὲν οὖν
ἐκ τοῦδε, σιγᾶν τήνδε καὶ κρύπτειν νόσον.
γλώσση γὰρ οὐδὲν πιστόν, ἥ θυραῖα μὲν
φρονήματ' ἀνδρῶν νουθετεῖν ἐπίσταται,
αὐτὴ δ' ὑφ' αὐτῆς πλεῖστα κέκτεται κακά.
τὸ δεύτερον δὲ τὴν ἄνοιαν εὖ φέρειν
τῷ σωφρονεῖν νικῶσα προυνουησάμην.
τρίτον δ', ἐπειδὴ τοισίδ' οὐκ ἐξήνυτον
Κύπριν κρατῆσαι, κατθανεῖν ἔδοξέ μοι,
Κράτιστον—οὐδεὶς ἀντερεῖ— βουλευμάτων.
ἐμοὶ γὰρ εἴη μήτε λανθάνειν καλὰ
μήτ' αἰσχρὰ δρώση μάρτυρας πολλοὺς ἔχειν.

Phaedra (trans. Gilbert and Sarah Lawall)

I will tell you the path my thoughts have taken.
When love first wounded me, I looked to see how
I might best bear it. I began by
keeping silence about my illness and hiding it.
For the tongue is not to be trusted; it knows
how to advise the thoughts of other men,
but when it speaks for itself it gets only trouble.
Second, I planned to bear my senseless passion properly
by overcoming it with virtuous restraint.
And third, since I did not succeed in conquering
Cypris by these means, I resolved to die—
the best of all plans, as no one will deny.
May it be my luck not to go unnoticed if I do good deeds,
and not to have many witnesses if I do shameful ones.³¹⁴

Annensky's translation:

Но я хочу с тобою проследить
Решенья ход... Когда Эрота жало
Я в сердце ощутила, как его
Переносить, я стала думать честно...
И начала с того, чтоб затаить
Его как можно глубже. Проку мало
Для нас в речах. Пусть иногда язык
Поможет нам другого образумить,
Но раны нет больней, чем от него.
(Пауза.)
Я думала потом, что пыл безумный
Осилью добродетелью...

³¹⁴ Euripides, 43

И вот,
Когда ни тайна, ни борьба к победе
Не привели меня -
(тихо)
осталась смерть
И это лучший выход. Нет, не надо
Мне возражать. Для славы мы хотим
Свидетелей... для горя только тайны...³¹⁵

Merezhkovsky's translation:

И вот каким путем я шла, внимайте:
Когда в груди моей зажглась любовь,
Чтоб легче страсть перенести, пыталась
Я, от людей сокрыв ее, молчать:
Кто языку вверяет тайны сердца,
Другим вредит и самому себе.
Преодолеть я разумом хотела
Любовь мою. Но тщетно. И теперь
Я умереть решила, и не может
Последнего исхода у меня
Отнять никто! Деяний благородных
Я не таю, но не хочу иметь
Свидетелей постыдного.³¹⁶

I have chosen this passage as I find that it demonstrates the translation approach that each translator adheres to for the length of the tragedy. Both are composed in iambic pentameter, a familiar meter for readers of Russian poetics, while the Greek is in iambic trimeter, the tragic meter that Ivanov retained in his translations. Merezhkovsky's translation is significantly closer in literal translation and in register to the original. It seems to me like Merezhkovsky is restraining his Symbolist poetics in order to deliver an accurate translation that is both pleasant to read and conveys as similar a set of images to the original as possible. Annensky's translation is far less literal, but he touches on compelling phrases in his own style. For example, the phrase in line 395, γλώσση γὰρ οὐδὲν πιστόν (the tongue is not to be trusted), a line that speaks to Phaedra's estrangement from her physical body and its desires. In Merezhkovsky's translation, this line shifted to "Кто языку

³¹⁵ Annenskii 1959, 345

³¹⁶ Merezhkovsky 2014, 362

вверяет тайны сердца, / Другим вредит и самому себе,” but retains the unusual image of the tongue. Phaedra’s ominous stoicism in this moment is not found in Annensky’s translation. Annensky’s language is loftier than the language of Euripides, and the lyricism is aligned with his own poetic voice. While the meter is the same as Merezhkovsky’s, Annensky’s lines are more fragmentary; this is not how Euripides sounds in these lines. In his essay on *Hippolytus* Annensky stresses Phaedra’s philosophical rationality, and this monologue in the original Greek is a profound example of this aspect of her character; however, the voice he gives her is that of, as Kelly writes, “an introverted modern neurotic.”³¹⁷ It is an innovation in Annensky’s translation to integrate original stage directions into the text, a hint of modern theatrical influence, particularly that of naturalism. In the above monologue, Annensky inserts a pause between lines, and instructs Phaedra to drop the volume of her voice mid-line when she announces her intention to kill herself, heightening the neuroticism Kelly identifies in the language. Annensky’s Phaedra also engages more deeply with the chorus, waving off their potential efforts to stop her from killing herself: “Нет, не надо / Мне возражать.” Merezhkovsky does not heighten the drama of this monologue, and this is not where the drama exists in the original tragedy. Merezhkovsky’s translation of this monologue and of the play in general is marked by its clarity and adhesion to the original text.

These two translations represent the two prevailing sides of Symbolist translation, although the two translators are not on the side I would have predicted before reading this translation. Kelly has already pointed out that “Merezhkovsky and Annensky’s Symbolist readings of *Hippolytus* do not seem to have affected their translations.”³¹⁸ Annensky’s extensive writing about tragedy and particularly Euripidean tragedy stresses accuracy: his review of a translation of tragedy by

³¹⁷ Kelly, 166

³¹⁸ Kelly, 161

Merezhkovsky scolds him for minor errors in his understanding of the text.³¹⁹ Despite this, his translation takes artistic liberties that I interpret as being founded in Annensky's deep-seated belief that his poetics and thought were aligned with that of Euripides, allowing him to speak in Euripides' voice in Russian. This is representative of the Symbolist and modernist Merezhkovsky's translation, in my estimation, is aligned with the tendency of Symbolist translators to be conservative and careful in their translations to adhere closely to the original material, primarily out of a sense of respect toward the author of the text and an academic drive to show deep understanding of the text in its original language. The nuances of the translation of the *Hippolytus* into Russian by these two classicist-modernists is worthy of further study, which would pay more attention on the level of the word throughout the play, and address more deeply the gulf between each writer's literary perspective toward the subject matter and his rendering of it in Russian; I hope to embark on this project in the future.

Merezhkovsky's lifelong and sometimes contradictory project to find a modern religion between the pagan and the Christian was effectively summarized by Ivanov in 1949, the final year of Ivanov's life; Merezhkovsky had died in 1941.

Проповедуя веру и находя в то же время, что старая вера бездейственна, Мережковский, очевидно, борется за веру новую и действенную; новое откровение должно, очевидно, воплотиться в новом действии. Но если именно действия и не оказывается ни на практике, ни в самой доктрине, вся новизна которой в том, что старому действию навязывается чужеродный ему мотив, -- не обяывают ли нас основоположения самого вероучителя к выводу, что его откровение -- не откровение и вера его -- только жажда веры? Но Мережковский непрестанно исповедует свою веру. "And Brutus is an honourable man" Я свидетельствую, что не имею ни тени сомнения в правдивости этого исповедания. В чем же тут дело? В чем существо этой загадки, мучительной, как я сказал, для людей, любящих Мережковского? Не следует ли предположить, что в самом акте веры совершилась у него (быть может, бессознательно) какая-то роковая подмена или измена? Быть может, сам он не стал бы отрицать, что какой-то внутренний уклон воли, какое-то глубокое нарушение было им допущено как единственный представившийся ему путь следования Христу. Служение через грех, послушание через ослушание -- так нужно было бы

³¹⁹ Kelly, 156

означить это антиномическое событие его внутреннего опыта. Я не буду говорить о такой установке религиозного сознания, религиозной совести по существу; но ясно одно, -- что такого рода антиномические решения могут притязать на оправдание лишь в том случае, когда они непосредственно осуществляются в трагическом действии; обращаясь в принципиальный призыв, они представляются искажением и подменой. Религиозный императив должен быть категорическим, а не антиномическим по форме; трагедию (сущность которой есть антиномическое действие) можно переживать, но запрещено проповедовать.³²⁰

While preaching faith—yet simultaneously finding that the old faith is ineffectual—Merezhkovsky is evidently striving for a new and active faith; this new revelation must, clearly, find its embodiment in new action. But if precisely this action proves to be absent—both in practice and within the doctrine itself (the entire novelty of which consists merely in grafting a motive alien to it onto an old form of action)—do not the very premises laid down by the teacher of this faith compel us to conclude that his revelation is no true revelation, and his faith merely a thirst for faith? Yet Merezhkovsky ceaselessly professes his faith. “And Brutus is an honourable man.” I bear witness that I harbor not the slightest shadow of doubt regarding the sincerity of this profession. What, then, is the matter here? What constitutes the essence of this enigma—so agonizing, as I have said, for those who love Merezhkovsky? Must we not surmise that, within the very act of faith itself, some fatal substitution or betrayal took place within him—perhaps unconsciously? Perhaps he himself would not deny that some inner deflection of the will—some profound transgression—was admitted by him as the sole path toward following Christ that presented itself to him. Service through sin, obedience through disobedience—such is how one would have to characterize this antinomian event within the landscape of his inner experience. I shall not here address the intrinsic nature of such a stance regarding religious consciousness or religious conscience; yet one thing is clear: such antinomian resolutions can lay claim to justification only when they are realized directly through tragic action; when transmuted into a principled appeal, they appear instead as a distortion and a substitution. The religious imperative must be categorical in form, not antinomian; Tragedy (the essence of which is antinomian action) may be experienced, but it is forbidden to preach it.

Ivanov wrote these observations some years after Merezhkovsky's death, perhaps anticipating his own end and the afterlife of a man whose life was wrapped around tragedy. By the time of his death, Merezhkovsky, living in exile in Paris, had done irreparable damage to his legacy by voicing his support for Benito Mussolini in 1937 and Adolf Hitler in 1939. The specter of this moral betrayal is present in Ivanov's postmortem assessment of Merezhkovsky's character and purpose. It is generous for Ivanov to interpret the ideological dialectic that animated Merezhkovsky's life

³²⁰ Ivanov 1994, 77-78

between Hellenic mysticism and Christianity, an area most familiar to Ivanov, within the framework of tragedy and its “antinomian action.” It is tempting to follow this thread and cast Merezhkovsky as a tragic hero, exiled from his homeland and drawn toward a death cult, although Ivanov too was in this position, and he suffered professional repercussions living in Italy under Mussolini by refusing to join the Fascist party. I am left pondering these final words, which aptly blend Christian and Hellenic premises one last time: tragedy may be experienced (lived through? survived?) but cannot be preached.

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Chapter Four

The Moral Choir: Receptions of Tragedy in Drama

“Где нам до французов?—В нас еще слишком много степи, скифской любви к простору. Только на скифскую душу наслои́лась тоже давняя византийская буколика с ее вертоградami, пастырями, богородицыными слезками и золочеными заставками. И это, вероятно, самый глубокий культурный слой нашей души.”³²¹
Иннокентий Анненский, 1909

“How could we ever measure up to the French? There is still far too much of the steppe within us—that Scythian love for open spaces. Yet, layered atop this Scythian soul lies an ancient Byzantine bucolic tradition as well—with its walled gardens, shepherds, ‘Tears of the Mother of God,’ and gilded ornamental headpieces. And this, in all likelihood, constitutes the deepest cultural stratum of our soul.”
Innokenty Annensky, 1909

“Perhaps Russia never needed self-consciousness as much as now,” Vasily Rozanov wrote in 1904. “Who are we? What are we in the world? Why do we exist? Is there a little star [*zvezdochka*] burning in our soul? One involuntarily wants to ask about this when a sort of fog is rising around the existence of Russia, blocking our horizon from all sides.”³²² These urgent questions on identity were published in *Novyi Put’*, the journal founded by Merezhkovsky and Gippius to operate alongside their newly formed Religious-Philosophical Society, where they hoped to seat poets by Orthodox clergymen in order to find common ground between their artistic interests in mysticism and Christian doctrine. This line of existential inquiry was precisely what the citizens of fifth-century BCE Athens turned to tragedy to answer. John J. Winkler posits that the “notional learners of [tragedy’s] lessons (*paideia*) about the trials of manhood” were “the young men of the city,” who were also possibly the performers in the tragic chorus.³²³ Imagining

³²¹ Annensky 1979, 335

³²² Shevelenko, 101

³²³ Zeitlin, 21

tragic performance as a venue for young members of society to witness and, in a way, practice suffering communally opens a window into how ancient Athenians looked for answers to Rozanov's questions. In turn-of-the-century Russia, anxiety around identity and community, on individual and national scales, was heightened by the revolution in 1905 and defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. Modernist writers looked to artistic traditions across empires and civilizations to answer these questions, and it is the aim of this dissertation to follow the paths that led them to the Attic tragedy and the creation of a Russian idiom of tragedy. While the previous chapter examined translations of the ancient tragedies of Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles into Russian, which overwhelmingly aspired to faithfully recreate the effects of the dramas in the original, this chapter will discuss receptions of tragedy, which in this context refers to the dramas composed in Russian using tragic structure, motifs, and myths. The settings of these projects span periods of antiquity, and incorporate eclectic elements from Romanticism, neoclassicism, and modernist innovations in literature and theater. I will be primarily discussing the dramas of Vyacheslav Ivanov (*Tantalus*, *Prometheus*) and Innokenty Annensky (*Melanippe the Wise*, *King Ixion*, *Laodamia*, and *Thamyris the Citharode*). Following this, I will move to a survey of adjacent projects in modernist theater, poetry, and prose that rely on one or another of the aforementioned elements of tragedy. This includes Dmitry Merezhkovsky's *Christ/Antichrist* trilogy of novels and his experiments with the drama, although these do not fit as neatly into the tragic schema of the Annensky and Ivanov receptions. All of these projects are sites of literary negotiation and experimentation with the possibilities of the tragic, and it is the aim of this chapter to take from these receptions an idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk that Hellenist modernists envisioned. These are literary products borne out of the theory of tragedy discussed in my first chapter and the deep familiarity with the original Greek dramas examined in my second chapter. Presently, I will examine how these writers

reshaped tragedy to make it fit the cultural moment by using tools such as language and myth from Russian Orthodox liturgy, primitivism, and the style and poetics of French Symbolism. Modernist receptions of tragedy replaced the Athenian *polis* with evocations of *narodnost'*, the creation of a Russian national idea, drawn from mytho-historical understanding of the Russian empire's distant (or not so distant) past. These were Russian tragedies composed for a new century: expressions of national character that were, as they always had been up to this point in Russia, made manifest in the form of literature.

Rozanov wraps up his article in *Novyi Put'* by connecting these existential questions to redemption through art, a solution to isolation and despair that originated in the ancient world: “*All Russians come together in their respect for the Russian word, art, poetry and in general for the Russian spirit in its fundamental characteristics, which have existed for millennia and spread everywhere.*” In an article for *Apollon* in 1909 titled “Archaism in Russian Painting (Roerich, Bogaevsky and Bakst)” (“Архаизмъ въ русской живописи (Рерихъ, Богаевскій и Бакстъ)”), Maximilian Voloshin discusses a similar urge to look backward and find something recognizably Russian: “The dream of the archaic is the last and most cherished dream of the art of our time, which looked into all historical epochs with such inquisitiveness, searching within them for what was rare, heady, and secretly similar to it...Like a multifaceted mirror, artists and poets spun world history, in order to see in each facet a fragment of their own particular face.”³²⁴ In these articles, Rozanov and Voloshin are not only engaging with primitivism, or “native antiquity,”³²⁵ in the form of Slavic folklore, dance, music, and painting, but drawing from Greco-Roman antiquity, for its literature as well as its ruins and artifacts. The nineteenth century had seen archaeological miracles

³²⁴ Kunichika, 15

³²⁵ This term (наша родная старина or our native antiquity) is developed and extensively defined by Michael Kunichika in his book “Our Native Antiquity: Archeology and Aesthetics in the Culture of Russian Modernism.”

in Greece and Turkey, making the world of Homer and Hesiod tangible. The presence of Cretan pottery and Bronze Age Mediterranean jewels in the center of the Russian cultural world allowed boundaries to blur, between ancient and modern, between Russian and Greek. These receptions are the literary representative of such blurred boundaries.

First, it will be useful to discuss the scholarly approaches to reception and classical reception in particular that have provided frames of reference for understanding new tragedies of modernism. Hans Robert Jauss, whose theories on literary reception have greatly shaped contemporary scholarship on the subject, proposed in his article “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory” (1970) opening up the study of literature up to include the experience of its readers, and applying philological importance to study of how the passage of time affects understanding and the projected significance of a text or author. Jauss followed the school of Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose study *Truth and Method* (1960) argues that “interpretation always takes place within history, and is subject to the contingencies of its historical moment.”³²⁶ Responding to Lukacs and Bakhtin, who designate readers as perceiving subjects within the social order who may rise to the occasion of engagement with literary text, but not as participants in the literary project on the level of the author or the political and social conditions of the original date of publication, Jauss suggests through a series of seven theses it is indeed the experience of the reader that gives a text continued meaning, creating a “triangle of author, work, and public.”³²⁷ Jauss uses the term “horizon of expectation” (“*Erwartungshorizont*”) to explain how literary analysis of a text may facilitate the reactions of both its first readers and its readers of a different time period:

The way in which a literary work, at the historical moment of its appearance, satisfies, surpasses, disappoints, or refutes the expectations of its first audience obviously provides a criterion for the determination of its aesthetic value. The distance between the horizon of expectations of the work, between the familiarity of previous aesthetic experience and the

³²⁶ Kallendorf, 301

³²⁷ Jauss, 19

“horizontal change” demanded by the reception of a new work, determines the artistic character of a literary work, according to an aesthetics of reception.³²⁸

The character of a literary work can be received along this horizon in two ways. If there is not a sufficient gap between the text and its receiving audience, the text may be read as “entertainment art,” or “*Unterhaltungskunst*” (kitsch or poshlost’), popular but forgettable and low-style, recognizable for its adherence to the “ruling standard of taste.”³²⁹ If the text was originally designed to be alienating or surprising to its first audience, however, but has since entered into a “classical” canon of literature, it may be more challenging to read the text as it was originally received, and to access the first horizon along which the art was received. Jauss uses the example of Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, published in 1857, the year before Ernest Feydeau’s novel *Fanny*: while the latter novel was fantastically successful in the year it was published, it is the former that has since earned a place in the canon of French literature. Jauss posits that this is the result of Flaubert’s innovative use of “impersonal narration,” a tenet of realism, while Feydeau’s novel, with its reliance on a passé “flowery style” and storytelling cliché, has led to its disappearance from conversations on the mid-nineteenth-century French novel.³³⁰ Working toward a “reconstruction of the horizon of experience” is a useful but challenging tool for analysis of ancient literature, to bridge the two-millennia gap between the creation of the texts and the present, and also to push back against the ever dominant neoclassical paradigm, a vision of the ancient world still firmly rooted in the Western imaginary. The neoclassical approach to classical reception originated in Johann Winckelmann’s eighteenth-century writing about antiquity, in which he situates the reception of ancient literature and art within his perception that the ancient world was ruled by unity and harmony, an idea visually represented by a perfectly preserved bust carved from

³²⁸ Jauss, 25

³²⁹ Jauss, 25

³³⁰ Jauss, 27-28

milky white marble. This picture of antiquity was disrupted by the emergence of the Romantic tradition out of the *Athenaeum* of the Schlegel brothers, who overrode the image of the marble bust with that of a crumbling ruin, an invitation for our imaginations to conjure a lost world that remains only in fragments. This change in the horizon of expectation allowed Romantic poets to inhabit genres from antiquity, such as the elegy and the ode, anew.

It is obvious that classical texts were not “classical” at their moment of origin, and the texts of interest to this dissertation, Attic tragedies, were innovative receptions themselves, reappropriations of Homeric myth for citizens of a city-state at the zenith of its power. Characters and plots from Homer were universally known among Athenians and could be endlessly reimagined and expanded in tragedies to be performed at the Dionysia. The events of Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*, the downfall of the house of Atreides, for example, were written by numerous other tragedians but have been lost to time. The tragedies questioned and renegotiated what it meant to be Athenian as much as they interrogated morality, familial responsibilities, and the power of their rulers. The Dionysia was a political project: while it was hosted by the city to honor Dionysus, the vast majority of attendees were (as far as scholarship can tell) male, active in voting and other city activities, and were Athenian citizens, meaning no foreigners from other regions or city-states (or at least very few) were ever witness to these performances.³³¹ Josiah Ober and Barry Strauss write,

The concerns of Attic dramatists were, of course, not merely political: they encompassed the broadest and most profound of human subjects, among them the erotic, the divine, kinship, family authority, and the relation of nature to culture. It is, nevertheless, characteristic of Attic drama that these suprapolitical concerns are often dramatized precisely through political action and political speeches.³³²

Taking tragedy out of Athens already strips them of a central tenet of their meaning, and leaves a void that receptive audiences in the future are called to fill either with a reimagining of the ancient

³³¹ Zeitlin, 5

³³² Zeitlin, 239-40

world or with a unique setting oriented toward the modern ambitions of the text. This chapter will use the Jaussian model, in short, the use of texts as “communicative phenomena,”³³³ which may convey any number of meanings to the reader, to examine how the horizon of expectation morphed again in the early twentieth century, when the Symbolists, who may be referred as neo-Romantic, began to reinterpret ancient literature against the backdrop of social unrest across Russia and looming revolution. Jauss writes,

A literary past can return only when a new reception draws it back into the present, whether an altered aesthetic attitude willfully reaches back to reappropriate the past, or an unexpected light falls back on forgotten literature from the new moment of literary evolution, allowing something to be found that one previously could not have sought in it.³³⁴

I argue that both of these conditions are met in the context of Russian modernist reception of antiquity: one important element of literary evolution that made this moment of reception possible was the newfound access of more students to classical texts in the original Greek and Latin as the number of students in Russian schools and universities grew exponentially through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. This created an opportunity for a new class of writers to reckon with ancient words without a German or French intermediary, in conjunction with the “altered aesthetic attitude” that was rippling through artistic culture as it turned away from realism and positivism. The literary landscape that Merezhkovsky identified as unstable in 1893 provided fertile ground for eclectic renewal of canonized texts.

In his seventh and final thesis, Jauss addresses the social function of literary reception: the experience of the reader as an interpreter of literature is inextricable from “the horizon of expectation of his lived praxis” and has “an effect on his social behavior.”³³⁵

³³³ Grillaert, 11

³³⁴ Jauss, 35

³³⁵ Jauss, 39

The relationship between literature and reader can actualize itself in the sensorial realm as an incitement to aesthetic perception as well as in the ethical realm as a summons to moral reflection. The new literary work is received and judged against the background of other works of art as well as against the background of the everyday experience of life. Its social function in the ethical realm is to be grasped according to an aesthetics of reception in the same modalities of question and answer, problem and solution, under which it enters into the horizon of its historical influence.³³⁶

Tragedy, perhaps more than any other genre of literature, originated to fulfill a social function, and, as has been examined in my first and second chapters, it is the gulf that widened between this original function and its modern reception, in the form of the neoclassical tragedy, that Wagner, Nietzsche, and, in Russia, a handful of eccentric and scholarly modernists envisioned bridging. During the Renaissance, the horizon of expectation for tragedy was governed by the preeminence of Aristotle's *Poetics*, in which he asserts that plot is the most important element of tragedy: "Tragedy is an imitation [*mimēsis*] of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude [...] through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation [*catharsis*] of these emotions."³³⁷ To neoclassical receivers of tragedy, it was rather the depiction of redemption and justified retribution that animated tragedy. In the preface to *Phedre*, Racine emphasized his commitment to using tragedy as a way to administer lessons on moral order: "I have written no play in which virtue has been more celebrated than in this one. The smallest faults are here severely punished; the mere idea of a crime is looked upon with as much horror as the crime itself."³³⁸ Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* returns to the moment of catharsis, to emotional turmoil and relief, as it could be brought on by bearing witness to the Apollonian and Dionysian drives in the dialogue and choruses of the tragedy. Ivanov dismisses the Aristotelian lens on tragedy, writing in "Freedom and the Tragic Life" that Aristotle would rather read tragedy than see it performed, implying that the

³³⁶ Jauss, 41-42

³³⁷ Aristotle, 343

³³⁸ Racine, v

philosopher failed to understand the Bacchic ritual at the heart of the drama.³³⁹ The horizon of expectation for tragedy as a genre and social tool has continued to morph in the present: contemporary scholarship considers tragedy in the context of decolonizing the classics and viewing ancient literature through the frameworks of race and gender.

While Jauss's theories on reception are applicable across philological fields, they were taken up quickly by classicists who were interested in creating scholarship that could invigorate their field and bring it into conversation with other modern literary disciplines. The term "reception" is relatively novel, and the same idea of the study of classical influences through history has also been referred to as the *Nachleben* (afterlife) of the texts, or is simply encompassed into the "classical tradition." "Reception studies" as an alternative way of thinking about this area of study offers a discursive critical framework for interpreting academic inquiry into the ancient world, a historiographic approach instead of historical. Charles Martindale observes that a "dialogic model" between classical and modern literary studies "provides mutual illumination of each other."³⁴⁰ Simon Goldhill suggests that there are

at least three types of reception study in classics. The first takes a work of the ancient world — the *Aeneid*, say or the *Antigone* — and sees how it has been adapted by later artists. It derives its logic and its focus through a linear genealogy — a sequence of works descended from an original text, interrelating with each other. The second type takes a post-Classical author and sees how this particular artist works with a classical paradigm — Dante's antiquity, Wagner's Greeks. It derives its logic and focus in the vision of a single artist, reading antiquity. The third type takes a more general cultural model and explores how classical antiquity has provided models and inspiration in a time in history or in a genre or an artistic movement: the Victorians and ancient Greece; modernism and the classical body. In this case, there is potentially a more diffuse focus and potentially a wider set of cultural questions. The specific problem for contemporary reception studies is how these three models fit together.³⁴¹

³³⁹ Ivanov 1952, 12

³⁴⁰ Martindale, 177

³⁴¹ Goldhill <https://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2009/2009.09.58/>

It is clear that the engagement of Russian modernists with antiquity touches on each of these types of reception; Ivanov, Annensky, and Merezhkovsky were engaging with antiquity through serious scholarship of their own period, which differentiates their receptions further from other Russian modernists who approached antiquity solely from an aesthetic perspective. Of course, Symbolists and Acmeists were participating in dialectics that had already stretched over the nineteenth century, beginning with Schopenhauer and Hegel, to Wagner, Nietzsche, and Rohde, and were self-consciously building their own intellectual tradition. One of the most famous instances of classical reception in the twentieth century would come decades after the modernist project in Russia had been convoluted and tamped down by authoritarian government: Bertolt Brecht's staging of *Antigone*, in 1948, reacted explicitly to the violence of fascist government, and is adapted from the German translation by the Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin. In this way, Brecht's *Antigone* shares a common ancestor with the Russian Symbolists, who were deeply indebted to German Romanticism, a framework equally as important as Hellenism to modernist reception projects.

Another way of approaching these receptions, this time in regard to genre, is posited in *Distance Manipulation: The Russian Modernist Search for a New Drama* by Joanna Kot. Kot examines the concept of "distance" in theater, which she defines in this context as "the position of the work vis-à-vis the recipient."³⁴² Distance in the theater is a tool for the playwright, director, and actors to negotiate the level of emotional identification the audience may expect to experience during the performance. The majority of the dramas that will be examined in this chapter were not performed in the playwright's lifetime (or since, as far as I have been able to discover), so my discussion of "distance manipulation" will be restricted to a reading of the authorial intention,

³⁴² Kot, 2

determined by adherence to and deviation from the structures, forms, and themes of the genre the work is receiving. Kot identifies a tension between distancing techniques, which lead to an estrangement between the performance and the audience in line with what Brecht called “techniques of alienation,” and the audience’s ability to recognize and identify with what they are seeing, leading to “shifting distance,” which Kot argues to be “the distinguishing feature of twentieth-century literature and, more important, drama.”³⁴³ A reception of a tragic drama is a natural fit into this dynamic of emotional shift, as it navigates between a defamiliarizing setting and highly stylized narrative structure, and the enduring stories of human emotion and experience. My analysis of these reception projects reaches for the presence of these cues for distance manipulation, and whether they operate in accord with an intention to exist in alignment with contemporary theater or an intention to faithfully replicate the estranging norms of ancient drama. Like Jauss, Kot emphasizes the necessity of considering the recipient in the classical reception project, and defines several forms in which the recipient may be imagined: “(1) the virtual recipient,” understood as the reader or viewer whom “the author encodes into his text, expecting that this recipient can rely on the same codes that the author himself is using,” followed by “(2) the contemporary recipient of the second half of the twentieth century” (this refers to Kot’s inclusion of herself in the reception project, which I extend to include myself and my own experience as recipient in the first half of the twenty-first century), and “(3) the modernist recipient of the turn of the century.”³⁴⁴

A recurring problem for my dissertation subjects when it comes to these dramatic receptions was the question of how to merge their own scholarly and poetic identities into the highly structured models created by their ancient inspiration. These negotiations between ancient

³⁴³ Kot, 4

³⁴⁴ Kot, 11

form and modern language can be seen shifting between dramatic works as years went on. This question of authorial identity as it concerns the creation of tragedy is not new. Modern scholars question whether it is possible to ascribe “authorship” to the Athenian playwrights in our modern understanding of the term. Oddone Longo writes that it would be “a mistake to view the dramatic author” as a “discrete individual”:

His access to the theatrical area does not come about as a matter of personal right but in the context of a collective trial, within the bounds of group (namely, that of competing poets), a group which acquires some degree of de facto homogeneity in virtue of its members’ mutual conditioning or the positive constraints of the context itself (one only reached the stage through a competition, and in observance of the rules of the genre.

In other words: the concepts of artistic autonomy, of creative spontaneity, of the author’s personality, so dear to bourgeois esthetics, must be radically reframed, when speaking of Greek theater, by considerations of the complex institutional and social conditions within which the processes of literary production in fact took place.³⁴⁵

This contributes to the atmosphere of communality, at the cost of a loss of artistic identity, and is an element of classical reception that is at odds with the modern construction of literary identities. Symbolist theater projects sought to address this element of ancient creative practice by extending collaboration, which can be seen beautifully enacted in many arenas, from the publication of literary journals that were full of articles, poems, photographs, and illustrations by artists of various affiliation, under the editorship of visionary thinkers, to the staging of plays, operas, and ballets against the backdrop of sets painted by important artists.

This ethos of collaboration is certainly not unique to this movement or period of time; rather, I am interested in examining how modern and ancient methods of fostering communality in the creative act intersect with each other, and if the creative act in the modernist setting, especially as it was concerned with reviving antiquity, could ever shed its preoccupation with authorial identity. This series of questions will manifest as an investigation of how much authorial

³⁴⁵ Zeitlin, 15

identity can be found in these reception projects: writerly trademarks, or references to other authors or works. Ivanov wrote extensively about theater as a pathway to *sobornost'*, but could he separate himself from the tragic dramas he wrote, in the name of the *polis*? On the scope of the dramatist, Ober and Strauss write,

The Athenian tragic playwright was in no narrow literary compartment: his subject was the life of the *polis*. If the characters were mythical, if the setting was usually out of Athens, if the dramatic date was ancient, nevertheless the rhetoric of politics in tragedy is largely the rhetoric of contemporary democratic Athens. Both tragic poets and political orators could see themselves as teachers: both aimed at the improvement of the citizen, both communicated through rhetoric.³⁴⁶

It would be too simplistic to replace Athens as the *polis* in question with the city of St. Petersburg, where all three of my subjects spent the majority of their time while living in Russia. Their community consisted of their own intellectual class, a citizenry engaged in the artistic life of their city: attending the theater, reading *Mir Iskusstva* and *Apollon*, buying books published by Mikhail Sabashnikov's press. Their receptions update the content of tragedy to the problems and rhetoric of their contemporary Russia.

I turn now to a discussion of the intertextuality between Greek tragedy and medieval Christian literature, to demonstrate that Symbolist use of an aesthetic framework built on the overlap between these sources is a natural response to living within a religious tradition that has its foundations in genres, forms, and myths of ancient Greece and Rome.

Tragedy in the development of Christian literature

Christian literature has been in conversation with Greek and Roman drama from its origins: the Christian and the pagan aesthetic traditions overlapped and intertwined through the Roman empire, and on to Byzantium and, of course, the Renaissance. Their reunion in the reception

³⁴⁶ Zeitlin, 248

projects of Russian modernism was a natural development for a deeply erudite culture looking for inspiration in ancient mysticism and myth. I have sought to illuminate elsewhere in this project how revival of tragedy in Russian modernism was often mediated through the aesthetics of Slavic medieval religious literature, often through language (notable in the Aeschylean translations of Ivanov), as well as through reference to liturgical ritual and philological analysis (as seen in the staging of Merezhkovsky's *Hippolytus* and article "On the New Significance of Ancient Tragedy"). John Parker discusses the concept that the classical tragedy floundered during the medieval period, which Renaissance-era scholars of antiquity claimed to be a result of a decline in literacy and increase in religious authority. This idea was also referenced by Nietzsche, who saw Christian teachings as meager, moralizing medicine for a population in need of the pathos and dynamism of the tragic chorus. Parker argues instead that

ancient tragedy can be said to disappear in the Middle Ages only because the Middle Ages so thoroughly absorbed, to the point of worship, its aesthetic for glorifying pain. Of all the pagan materials and customs spoliated or otherwise repurposed by the iconoclasm of the early church (its transformation of despised theater masks, for example, into the Trinity's personae), tragedy was an especially alluring genre insofar as it promised audiences the sublime satisfaction of watching a semi-divine protagonist come to horrific grief.³⁴⁷

In fact, tragedy was never rejected by Christian theology, despite its "pagan" content. Early Christian communities included Greek poetry, prose, and theater in their school curricula. Their acceptance of Hellenistic, Hellenic, and Roman literature into their educational programming can be interpreted as an interest in the same educational and cultural value systems as their non-Christian counterparts: these texts taught grammar, rhetoric, logic, debate, and the mythos that animated most cultural life outside their religion. This exposure to texts including tragedy continued for centuries, despite an edict from Emperor Julian (Julian the Apostate, remembered for converting from Christianity back to Roman religion) in 362 AD banning Christians from

³⁴⁷ Parker, 81

teaching pagan literature.³⁴⁸ Despite this ban, Christian students still studied alongside their Roman counterparts in schools. Basil of Caesarea, a fourth-century Roman Christian bishop and theological writer, quoted from Euripides' *Hippolytus* and *Rhesus* in his writing, but tragedy comes up far less than Hesiod, Homer, or Socrates in his body of work.³⁴⁹ His brother, the theologian and later consecrated Eastern Orthodox saint Gregory of Nyssa, mentioned anecdotally in his memoirs that their mother forbade their sister, Makina, from reading tragedy and comedy specifically, for their lurid depiction of sexual relationships and violence, particularly suicide.³⁵⁰

Carol Symes suggests that the forces that have made tragedy an unstable genre for reception and interpretation in modernity were already in place in late antiquity, including, for example, as it concerns the canon of remaining tragedies that we have today, which are the work of centuries of scholars reconstructing the texts and comparing manuscripts passed down from antiquity through the medieval period.³⁵¹ The tragic drama has the possibility of being understood both as a text and as a performance, and whether or not it could be best understood as one or the other was a source of passionate debate among the modernists; a millennium earlier, the same topic was contentious for scholars of the late Roman empire, as tragedy shifted from a medium transmitted orally to one that could be written down and compared against other transmissions. In late antiquity, Symes writes, Christian theologians and bishops “were trying to forge a new religious identity that could compete with older Hellenic ideals blended with contemporary Hellenistic cosmopolitanism.” At the same time, their peers were “trying to create an alternative pedagogy that built on—without being engulfed by—ancient models.”³⁵² These religious thinkers

³⁴⁸ Hardwick and Stray, 107

³⁴⁹ Hardwick and Stray, 111

³⁵⁰ Hardwick and Stray, 113

³⁵¹ Hardwick and Stray, 153

³⁵² Hardwick and Stray, 159

wished to carve out a theological and artistic niche for themselves in Roman life, but did not wish to excise the greater pagan culture from their world; I consider the classical reception projects of the Russian modernists to represent an inversion of this balance. Ancient texts including tragedy were also highly valued for their instructive possibilities, both in the moral circumstances presented, more simply, as tools for studying high Greek style, as well as and opposed to the simple, *koine* Greek of the New Testament.³⁵³ Medieval advancements in the transmission of Attic drama on the page included the incorporation of lowerclass letters and diacritics in the ninth century, and the centuries that followed saw the unfolding of rigorous scholarly compendia, including commentaries, pronunciation guides, and collections of plays with introductions which, Symes writes, were “all designed to help the student come to grips with texts that were simultaneously familiar and strange.”³⁵⁴

In the first and second centuries AD, Latin overtook Greek as the “vehicle of conversion and instruction,”³⁵⁵ and dramas by the Roman playwright Terence were among the most commonly read and performed into the early Middle Ages. The scholarship of Byzantine monk Michael Psellos led to a renewal of interest in Greek literature, including tragedy, between the tenth and eleventh centuries, creating a generative atmosphere for reception projects in contexts such as monasteries and imperial courts. One such reception is the *Christos Paschon*, a Christian Byzantine drama from c. eleventh-twelfth centuries, which is, according to Sandro Sticca, “the only authentic dramatic expression of the Byzantine religious theater.”³⁵⁶ For centuries the work was attributed to the theologian Gregory of Nazianzos, but modern scholarship challenges the veracity of this claim, as the text has been dated to the twelfth century, and Gregory lived in the

³⁵³ Hardwick and Stray, 162

³⁵⁴ Hardwick and Stray, 166

³⁵⁵ Hardwick and Stray, 166

³⁵⁶ Sticca, 26

fourth century.³⁵⁷ *Christos Paschon* is a cento, a tragedy composed from adaptations of verses written primarily by Euripides (specifically the *Hecuba*, *Orestes*, *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *Troades*, *Rhesus*, and *Bacchae*), but also by Aeschylus and Sophocles. Sticca writes that the *Christos Paschon* is the “only extant attempt to put together in dramatic form the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ.”³⁵⁸ Scholarship since the eighteenth century has noted the clear alignment in this text of Christian liturgical rites with tragic choral odes. By the nineteenth century, the development of the medieval religious drama out of the Greco-Roman tragic genre was incorporated into histories of the modern drama by E. du Meril and Charles Magnin.³⁵⁹ Sticca observes that “in both worlds, the Greek and the Christian, the tragic intuition focuses on a final assertion of a divine order within the universe to which man must conform.”³⁶⁰ The *Christos Paschon* ends with an angel meeting Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary at Christ’s tomb, where the angel reassures them that Christ is risen, and the women exult. Sticca writes that this moment exemplifies the meeting of the classical and Christian: “The Christian experience here is very close to that of the classic Greek audience when, at the end of the tragic presentation, it found again its pristine soul unencumbered by sin and affliction.”³⁶¹ Symes notes that one of the earliest manuscripts of the drama had the subtitle “‘according to Euripides’ (κατ’ Εὐριπίδην), wording that ranks this favorite tragic poet among the evangelists of the gospels.”³⁶² A similar moment in modernist reception of antiquity is Hofmannsthal’s *Elektra*, which the author described on its title page as “freely after Sophocles.”³⁶³ Both dramas use the ancient text primarily as inspiration for a

³⁵⁷ Mullett, web

³⁵⁸ Sticca, 13

³⁵⁹ Sticca, 15

³⁶⁰ Sticca, 14

³⁶¹ Sticca 40

³⁶² Hardwick and Stray, 176

³⁶³ Kallendorf, 108

new interpretation of the form and lyric style that suited the contemporary moment, a type of reception that differs from that of Annensky and Ivanov.

During the same period of time (the tenth and eleventh centuries), Byzantine Orthodoxy was spreading through central and eastern Europe, bringing with it complex systems of reception and repurposing of classical literature. One more compelling example of Christian reception of tragedy is the work of Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim, a tenth-century canoness of the Saxon Imperial Abbey who wrote hagiographic dramas in medieval Latin that were adapted from Greco-Roman tragedy, specifically works by Terence. Hrotsvitha wrote in a preface to a volume of her dramas that she employed “permissible and even desirable imitation and aemulation of pagan learning [...] for the purpose of Christian instruction.”³⁶⁴ She continued, “Many Catholics can be found—and we cannot fully exculpate ourselves of this crime—who for the eloquence of cultivated language prefer the vanity of pagan books to the usefulness of sacred scripture.”³⁶⁵ Her dramas, which were early versions of the saint or mystery plays, included the conversions and persecution of early Christians by Roman generals and Julian the Apostate (*Gallicanus*), the martyrdom of holy virgins under Diocletian (*Dulcitus*, *Sapientia*), and a retelling of St. Abraham’s (an Orthodox and Syriac saint of the fourth century) rescue of his niece Mary from prostitution and into the arms of the Lord (*Abraham*). Sticca writes that Hrotsvitha likely turned to the collection of Greek hagiographic writing called the *Vitae Patrum* for inspiration, a volume that “had a profound liturgical character for it was meant to involve in its totality the entire community in a spiritual comparticipation similar to the mystical *catharsis* experienced by the early Christian community.”³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ Hrotsvitha, 1

³⁶⁵ Parker, 93

³⁶⁶ Hrotsvitha, 2

Hrotsvitha's dramas are written as "imitatio" of Terence, who wrote plays most directly influenced by the Attic comedies by Menander and Apollodorus of Carystus, who wrote in the fourth century BCE. Her intention was to use the structure and lyric verse developed by the Athenian and later Roman playwrights to create Christian dramas that would satiate the need for theater she sensed in her religious, literary community. Parker points out that a key difference between medieval tragic receptions and their Attic ancestors is that the medieval drama depicts a martyr's journey to eternal life in Christ through their sacrifice, proving their devotion through their willingness to die, while heroes in ancient Greek tragedy face death as an end.³⁶⁷ Parker writes, "The foundation of all hagiographical writing concerned with saints who die by violence is that Christian redemption must be purchased with pain, and the pain, for that reason, frequently erupts into bliss: 'the more bitterly I am tortured,' says Irena [a character from the drama *Gallicanus*], 'the more gloriously am I exalted.'"³⁶⁸ The exaltation of these martyrs and saints is its own type of catharsis, but is unique to Christian receptions, differing from the catharsis through the communal experiencing of despair and subsequent release that Nietzsche identifies. Leo Aylen writes,

There is a body of historical material which would serve a Christian writer in almost exactly the same way as the Greek myths served the Greek tragedians. We have very much the same attitude to the history of the Middle Ages as the fifth-century Athenians had to the period of their myths. We look back from a sophisticated, rational, urban, and democratic culture to a primitive, irrational, rural culture governed by kings. We look back from a time when everyone goes to law, on a time of moral articulateness and directness, when gods walked the earth. We interpret life analytically, and look back on a time when it was interpreted through ritual.³⁶⁹

A similarity between the Attic tragedy and the medieval Christian tragic reception is the idea that theater could be a theological and political pillar in a community that taught as much as it could

³⁶⁷ Parker, 95-96

³⁶⁸ Parker 95

³⁶⁹ Aylen, 194

be considered to have entertained. This urge to revive tragic forms with the interpolation of Christian liturgy, out of at once an irresistible draw to ancient drama and out of an avowed mission to better one's literary public, would be reborn in Russian modernism.

Discussion of Renaissance reception of tragedy is not necessary for the focus of this dissertation, and the first chapter examined Slavic medieval interactions with classical literature, which, as far as I could discover, did not include texts that were borne of direct contact with Greco-Roman tragedy. These medieval receptions are closely related to the reception projects of Ivanov and Merezhkovsky, who drew upon Russian medieval aesthetics and religion in distinct ways. Martha M. F. Kelly calls the urge of Russian modernist poets to merge Orthodox traditions with their own poetry the “sophianic task,” and defines it as an “impulse to unite: earthly and heavenly, human and divine, flesh and spirit, secular and sacred.”³⁷⁰ While the “sophianic task” is explicitly a response to the philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov and his search for the Divine Sophia, Kelly points out that each Symbolist went about this task in his (or her) own way.

The philosopher Lev Lopatin called Solovyov the “first truly original Russian philosopher, just as Pushkin was the first Russian national poet.”³⁷¹ At the risk of oversimplifying their parallel influence on Russian Symbolism, one could say that like Nietzsche, Solovyov rejected the prevailing movement of positivism in nineteenth-century philosophical discourse, but while Nietzsche sought to move away from established traditions of Christianity, Solovyov inaugurated a return for intellectuals to Russian Orthodox via mysticism. Solovyov initiated a mode of collaborative thought between early Christian theology, itself intertwined with pagan theosophy, and Russian Orthodoxy, enumerated in his theory of *bogochelovechestvo*, God-manhood, his concept of the divine meeting the human, and in his writing on the Divine Sophia, a mystical

³⁷⁰ Kelly 2016, 15

³⁷¹ Grillaert, 81

presence whom he encountered through his visions and represented through poetry and philosophy. Solovyov modeled for the Symbolists the mingling of Orthodox theological thought and modernist poetry and art. Kelly points out, however, what I find to be an important element of modernist reengagement with Orthodoxy: that while modernists (especially Symbolists) interacted with the work of Solovyov and often responded to his ideas in their own art, they were also responding to a “larger impulse in their epoch that Solovyov’s work represents.”³⁷² This impulse manifests differently across various writers’ artistic output, but I will focus on how it appears in the work of Annensky, Ivanov, and Merezhkovsky.

Russian literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was preoccupied by the life of the *narod*—the peasants whose way of life appeared to the upper classes as to have remained static for centuries at a time, and who represented the true “Russian soul.” This can be seen in Nikolai Karamzin’s *Poor Liza* (*Бедная Лиза*) in 1792, throughout Tolstoy’s oeuvre but especially in the chapters devoted to Konstantin Levin in *Anna Karenina*, and in the art produced by the artists of the Abramtsevo Colony. This is not to say there is not an abundance of humanist and realist literature on the experience of the serf and peasant classes, particularly in the writing of Ivan Turgenev and Anton Chekhov. This line of thought is especially associated with the Slavophile movement of the nineteenth century. The experience of the *narod* is inextricable from their religion, leading artistic journeys to rediscover or reconnect with “Russianness” directly to the liturgical language and medieval aesthetics of Russian Orthodoxy, itself seemingly unchanged since before the Westernizing efforts begun by Peter the Great in the seventeenth century. For religious-philosophic thinkers including Solovyov, Merezhkovsky, and Ivanov, among many of their peers, the aesthetics of *narod* could be brought together with select strains of Western art and

³⁷² Kelly 2016, 15

philosophy to create a genre that represented both their difference and distance from the West and their deep knowledge and adoration for the Western canon of art going back to antiquity. This attitude is also entrenched in mistrust of urbanization and industrialization, and these anxieties would only grow as the nineteenth century ended and the twentieth began. In short, modernists under the wing of Solovyov found themselves in the same position as their counterparts in the Roman empire and medieval period, wary of progress and the ills of urban life, and following in their footsteps, they consciously built a new horizon of expectation to receive the ancient texts through their Russianness. This mode of reception was imbued with Orthodoxy as it could be used as a stand-in for “traditional Russianness,” while earlier generations of writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had received antiquity *in spite of* their Russianness. This reception could be seen as shallow, of course, and primarily occupied with the medieval aesthetics of the church and its rituals, and with a rosy perception of life in the countryside. Russian modernist reception, as Kelly emphasizes, “endowed art and beauty with a role more essential than in (at least modern) Western Christianity.”³⁷³

Many of these ideas about the experience of the Russian peasant overlap with the aims of the modernists in reviving tragedy: the peasants of the *narod* appeared to Slavophiles to be endowed with the quality of *sobornost*’ that was sought by Ivanov in his reception projects. Dmitry Pisarev wrote that “the Russian peasant is perhaps still not able to raise himself to a conception of his own personality, to rise to national egoism and respect for his own personality.”³⁷⁴ The concept of preserving the universality of peasant thought and experience in Slavophilism is in opposition to the ambitions of the Westernizers, who equate progress with the development of individualistic personality. Slavophiles saw the Orthodox Church as a site for the “surrender of personal identity,”

³⁷³ Kelly 2016, 22

³⁷⁴ Kelly and Shepherd, 15

as Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd write.³⁷⁵ Konstantin Aksakov connected the religious unity of the peasant and the concept of the Greek choir in 1851, and he planned to write a drama that had a chorus, which he described as “an element of Greek drama to which alone could Russian drama bear any similarity. The choir is the principle of Russian life.”³⁷⁶ Aksakov borrowed the image of the Greek chorus and associated it with folk music and dance, and references the “khorovod,” a group folk dance based in ritual that can be found in the cultures of many Slavs, during which the dancers are able to “[merge] their separate identities into the *narod*.”³⁷⁷

Five decades later, in 1904, Ivanov published an essay in *Vesy* titled “The Poet and the Crowd” (“Поэт и чернь”)³⁷⁸, in which he imagines a mob of peasants waiting to hear the prophetic word of the Poet. Art has suffered, he argues, with the rise of individualism and the subsequent isolation of the Artist-Poet from his public. Ivanov mentions Lermontov and Tyutchev as poets whose art suffered as a result of their solitude. The reunion of the poet and the crowd would be the accomplishment of Symbolism:

Истинный символизм должен примирить Поэта и Чернь в большом, всенародном искусстве. Минует срок отъединения. Мы идем тропой символа к мифу. Большое искусство— искусство мифотворческое. Из символа вырастет искони существовавший в возможности миф, это образное раскрытие имманентной истины духовного самоутверждения народного и вселенского. Разве христианская душа нашего народа, проникновенно и мифически названного богоносцем, не узнает себя в мифотворческих стихах Тютчева? [...] Только народный миф творит народную песню и храмовую фреску, хоровые действия трагедии и мистерии. Мифу принадлежит господство над миром. Художник, разрешитель уз, новый демиург, наследник творящей матери, склонит послушный мир под свое легкое иго. Ибо миф — постулат мирского сознания, и мифа требовала от Поэта не знавшая сама, чего она хочет, Чернь. Важного, верного, необходимого алкала она: только вымысл мифический — произвольный вымысел и вернейший «тьмы низких истин». К

³⁷⁵ Kelly and Shepherd, 22

³⁷⁶ Christoff, 127

³⁷⁷ Christoff, 354

³⁷⁸ This title is a reference to Pushkin's poem “Поэт и толпа” (1828).

символу же миф относится, как дуб к желудю. И «ключи тайн», вверенные художнику, — прежде всего ключи от заповедных тайников души народной.³⁷⁹

True Symbolism must reconcile the Poet and the Crowd in a great, national art. The time of separation is over. We are following the path of symbol to myth. Great art is a myth-making art. From symbol will emerge the myth, which has always existed as a possibility, this figurative revelation of the immanent truth of spiritual self-affirmation, national and universal. Does not the Christian soul of our people, so penetratingly and mythically called God-bearer, recognize itself in Tyutchev's myth-making verses? [...] Only folk myth creates folk songs and temple frescoes, the choral performances of tragedy and mystery. Myth holds dominion over the world. The artist, the liberator of bonds, the new demiurge, the heir of the creative mother, will bend the obedient world to his easy yoke. For myth is the postulate of secular consciousness, and myth was demanded of the Poet by the crowd, which did not know what it wanted. It craved something important, true, and necessary: only mythical fiction—an involuntary fiction and the truest of the “darkness of base truths.” Myth relates to symbol as an oak relates to an acorn. And the “keys to secrets” entrusted to the artist are, first and foremost, the keys to the sacred recesses of the people's [*narod's*] soul.

Performance of tragedy is the apotheosis of the great, national art. Ivanov is imagining in its capacity to restore *sobornost'*. Returning to an artistic culture in which the identities of the artist and audience merged would be true to the Slavic national idea of communality, what Aksakov called a “moral choir,”³⁸⁰ as well as true to their even more ancient ancestors. Ivanov also argued that “Greco-Roman antiquity did not know individualism in our sense.”³⁸¹ Ivanov even staged the *khorovod* among his friends and acolytes in Petersburg.

On May 2, 1905 in Petersburg N. M. Minsky's apartment, the people gathered there undertook to conduct a “rite” [*deistvo*] as proposed by Ivanov. They did a “rhythmic circle dance” [*ritmicheskii khorovod*], and they performed symbolic sacrifices. They pricked someone with a pin and drank his blood, which had been squeezed out into some wine, calling this a “collective communion” [*soprichastie*].³⁸²

While I do not believe this ritual was what Aksakov had in mind in 1851, the cross-pollination between the nineteenth-century intellectual polemics of the Slavophiles and interest among

³⁷⁹ Ivanov 2018, 714

³⁸⁰ Kelly and Shepherd, 22

³⁸¹ Ivanov, 18

³⁸² Lahti, 151

Russian modernists in seeking a renewed understanding of the preindustrialized world through art corresponds with a greater pattern developing in cultures around the world at this time. Many versions of modernism formed during this period share a common strain of finding inspiration in “primitivism.” David Richards writes,

To seek to renew an exhausted culture with a primitive alternative is a motive as ancient as culture itself; what makes modernist primitivism different from its predecessors is the greatly increased variety and accessibility of primitive models that nineteenth- and twentieth-century global empires made available.³⁸³

In Russia, primitivism thrived in the realms of painting and poetry. The painter Natalia Gonacharova was influenced by Scythianism and Slavic folk tradition, through which she could reinvent abstraction in painting. To the Ancient Greeks, who prized proximity to “civilized” society, Scythians were considered barbaric and primitive. The tension that forms between movements or generations of artists engaged in evolving waves of progress and then a return to tradition is nothing new. There is proverb from fifth-century BCE Athens that is recounted by Plutarch in his “Symposiacs”: “When Phrynichus and Aeschylus developed tragedy to include mythological plots and disasters, it was said ‘What has this to do with Dionysus?’” This led spectators to joke that the tragedies, which were no longer entirely based around venerating the wine god, were “Nothing to do with Dionysus.”³⁸⁴ The receptions of tragedy that were borne out of the maelstrom of change and influence in Russian fin-de-siecle culture may be described as “Too much to do with Dionysus.”

Annensky was perplexed by the Slavic-nationalist mysticism taken to heart by his fellow poets and scholars. In a 1909 essay for *Apollon* titled “On Contemporary Lyricism” (“O

³⁸³ Richards, 65

³⁸⁴ Pickard-Cambridge, 124

современном лиризме”), Annensky surveyed the field of modernist poets publishing in Russia, discussing the work and personae of Vyacheslav Ivanov, Valery Bryusov, Aleksandr Blok, Fyodor Sologub, Maximilian Voloshin, Sergei Makovsky, Andrei Bely, Viktor Gofman, Mikhail Kuzmin, Sergei Rafalovich, Boris Sadovsko, Ivan Rukavishnikov, Aleksandr Kondratiev, Sergei Solovyov, and Nikolai Gumiliev. Annensky concludes that only Konstantin Balmont, Bryusov, Ivanov, and Sologub possess “fully established types of lyricism,”³⁸⁵ notices that much of modernist poetry concerns urban life, and registers the influence of French poetry and that “[o]ccasionally, attempts at Slavic-Byzantine stylization arise, a bizarre return to antiquity.”³⁸⁶ (“Изредка возникают попытки и славяно-византийской стилизации, причудливый возврат к старине.”) The descriptor “Byzantine” functions as a pejorative throughout this essay, as Annensky tartly notes that the words “decadence” and “Byzantine” are synonymous to the French. In the context of modernist applications of antiquity, this appears to me to be a rejection of a strain of the “native antiquity” path to classical literature that many of these poets were traversing, which connected Russia to Ancient Greece through the Byzantine Empire and Orthodox Christianity. In particular, this type of creative exercise was encouraged by Ivanov, and while Annensky does acknowledge the depth of Ivanov’s aesthetic world and his literary skill, he is critical of Ivanov’s reappropriation of classical language and myth in his poetry, which he describes as teaching Greek to the Hyperborean (a reference to the mythical land in the far north from Ancient Greek myth) maenad. Annensky analyzes a poem published by Ivanov in the literary magazine *Ostrov* titled “Trial by Fire” (“Суд огня”), which draws from the myth of the Thessalian king Eurypylus, who fought on the side of the Achaeans in Troy. Ivanov’s poem receives a myth told by Pausanias, a Greek traveler and writer of the second century AD, of the downfall of Eurypylus, after he opened a

³⁸⁵ Annenskii 1979, 382

³⁸⁶ Annenskii 1979, 382

cursed chest in which he found an icon of Dionysus and subsequently went mad. Annensky questions Ivanov's use of a relatively unknown figure and story from myth without any additional context.

Отчего бы поэту, в самом деле, не давать к своим высокоценным пьесам комментария, как делал в свое время, например Леопарди? И разве они уж так завидны, этот полусознательный восторг и робкие похвалы из среды лиц, не успевших заглянуть в Брокгауз-Ефрона, и пожимания плечами со стороны других, вовсе и не намеренных “ради каких-нибудь стишков” туда заглядывать?

Но педантизм Вячеслава Иванова мешает понимать его поэзию—что “понимать”? дышать ею—не одним отсутствием комментария. Дело в том, что наш поэт не создает, как Стефан Малларме, особого синтаксиса. [...] Его суровые речения сцеплены крепко,— местами они кажутся даже скованными.³⁸⁷

Why shouldn't a poet, indeed, provide commentary on his highly valuable plays, as Leopardi, for example, once did? And are they really so enviable, this half-conscious admiration and timid praise from those who haven't had a chance to visit Brockhaus-Efron, and the shrugs from others who have no intention of visiting "for the sake of some verses"?

But Vyacheslav Ivanov's pedantry hinders one from understanding his poetry—“to understand” what? To breathe it in—not merely through the absence of commentary. The fact is that our poet, unlike Stéphane Mallarmé, does not create a unique syntax. [...] His stern utterances are tightly knit—in places they even seem constrained.

Annensky even quotes a newspaper parody of Ivanovian verse, which ends with the line “We haven't read Aeschylus — what are we to do?” “Мы не читали Эсхила—что же делать!”³⁸⁸ (This review was written before Ivanov embarked on his translations of Aeschylus.) This is an interesting perspective from Annensky that further illustrates how crucial the role of the educator was in his promotion of classical reception. Annensky not only employed lesser-known myths himself in his receptions, he was particularly interested in figures from Thessalian myth, such as Eurypylus: these projects will be discussed later in this chapter. These receptions, however, were prefaced with Brockhaus-Efron-style articles with historical and literary context.

³⁸⁷ Annenskii 1979, 332

³⁸⁸ Annenskii 1979, 332

I find these two perspectives delineated in essay form from Ivanov and Annensky to be fitting prologue to my discussion of each of their receptions of classical tragedy.

Innokenty Annensky's closet dramas

Annensky wrote four original dramas, which were all receptions of Greek tragedy, between 1900 and 1906. The first three are tragedies: *Melanippa-filosof* was published in 1900, followed by *Tsar Ixion* in 1902; *Laodamia* was written in 1902 but was published in 1906 in the journal *Severnaya rech'*. The final play, called *Famira-kifared*, was written in 1906, but with a different subtitle than the prior three: this was a "Bacchic drama," which to Annensky meant it was not quite as neoclassical as the prior tragedies, but showed more decadent aesthetic influence. Annensky had published little outside of pedagogical scholarship before 1900, despite having been translating extensively from French and Greek and writing original poetry throughout the 1890s. These receptions intertwine with the translations of Euripides that Annensky was immersed in at the same time. Like his translations, the dramas are composed in unrhymed iambic pentameter. In terms of tragic structure, Annensky continues to adhere to Euripidean style by using the choral sections not for religious solemnity and mystical language but for interaction with the tragic hero or heroine that deepen and complicate the choices presented in the plot. Like the chorus in Euripidean tragedies such as the *Medea*, the chorus expresses moral outrage at the actions of the hero. While Ivanov's tragedy revolves around the chorus, the heart of Annensky's tragedies is in his characterization. In the preface to *Tsar Ixion*, Annensky writes that these dramas were designed to "utilize classical models, despite the modernization of the myth's psychological development."³⁸⁹

³⁸⁹ Annenskii 1959, 349

This intention is immediately evident when reading his receptions, beginning with his choice of protagonists. Torlone writes,

All Annenskii's tragic protagonists are united by common characteristics: they are all young and wholesome beings driven by and loyal to their callings, who carry in themselves a creative spirit that clashes with the base matter of life, and for a fleeting moment they each subjugate that matter and become triumphant.³⁹⁰

Famira-kifared would become his best-known drama when it was published in 1913 and staged in 1916 at the Kamernyy Teatr in Moscow. Despite the fact that his first three tragic receptions were never staged, and it does not appear Annensky took any measures to try and stage them even in his classroom, his dramas all include extensive stage directions and descriptions of elaborate sets drawn from his research on ancient performance.

These receptions are built around fragments from incomplete Euripidean drama. Interestingly, Annensky appears to have been drawn to myths centered around figures from the Greek region Thessaly. During this period, Annensky was also translating the *Alcestis*, a Euripidean tragedy set in Thessaly, which he published in 1901. In the Mycenaean period of the Bronze Age (1750 to 1050 BCE), Thessaly was known as Aeolia, and the Aeolians were one of the four tribes of Greeks (alongside the Achaeans, Ionians, and Dorians—classifications familiar to readers of the *Iliad*). Their mythical ancestor was Aeolus, one of the seven sons of Hellen (the forefather of all Hellenes). In Euripides' *Melanippe* fragments, she is the daughter of Aeolus, although this relationship does not exist in other sources of myth. In ancient literature, Thessaly is often characterized as a region associated with witchcraft and the occult.³⁹¹ It is also the mythological homeland of the heroes Achilles and Jason. Maria Mili's study of religion in Hellenistic Thessaly finds the topos of Thessalian land—populated with mountains, valleys, and

³⁹⁰ Torlone, 84

³⁹¹ Mili, 154

coastlines—and the fertility of the land in particular to also be part of its distinguishing characteristics.³⁹² While Athens and Sparta prided themselves on their powerful militaries, the various cities and settlements that populated Thessaly were united in their shared pride in agricultural abundance. It follows, therefore, that both Dionysus and Demeter were widely worshipped, as deities ruling the fertility of the earth. Mili finds that local worship of Dionysus had an “old Thessalian pedigree”: artifacts dated to the fifth century BCE describe him as “Dionysus Karpios,” derived from *karpos*, meaning fruit.³⁹³ A form of ritual dance from Thessaly is called “karpaia,” possibly in reference to Dionysus Karpios.³⁹⁴ Other emblems of Thessalian life were horses (Thessaly is considered the mythical homeland of the centaur) and corn, which, like Dionysus and Demeter, also points toward pride in the fertility of the land and its inhabitants.³⁹⁵ Mili also identifies uniquely strong cults of Heracles and Hestia in various Thessalian regions.³⁹⁶

Melanippe, Ixion, and Laodamia are figures from myth who recur throughout antiquity in the works of Ovid, Lucian, Catullus, and Virgil, but are not the subject of any (extant) dramas by Aeschylus or Sophocles. Accounts of the parentage and fates of these figures differ, but Annensky’s plots and characterizations are largely based on scholarly reconstruction of Euripides’ vision, which he determined through examination of the remaining lines, reference to the dramas in antiquity in literature, and with the help of ancient and modern classical scholarship. Much of extant Greek tragedy revolves around figures and settings related to the Trojan War (Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*; Sophocles’ *Elektra*, *Philoctetes*, and *Ajax*; Euripides’ *Helen*, *Andromache*, *Orestes*, *The Trojan Women*, *Hecuba*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and *Iphigenia in Aulis*) or the house of Oedipus in

³⁹² Mili, 116

³⁹³ Mili, 115

³⁹⁴ Mili, 115

³⁹⁵ Mili, 122

³⁹⁶ Mili, 135

Thebes (Aeschylus's *Seven Against Thebes*; Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*). It is significant that Annensky chooses to receive dramas that are somewhat removed from these universes of myth (with the exception of Laodamia, who is the grieving widow of the first warrior to be killed in Troy, Protesilaus). Ixion and Melanippe are part of the body of myth that predates any "historical" past such as the Trojan War, similar to the setting of Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*. Euripides' Melanippe is the daughter of Aeolus and thus the great-granddaughter of Prometheus, the subject of Ivanov's second tragic reception. Annensky spends nearly half of his *Antichnaya Tragediia* lecture vividly imagining the first performance of *Prometheus Bound* at the Dionysia, and quotes extensively from dialogue between Prometheus and Hermes. His purpose, he explains, is "to illustrate, through at least one example, what ancient tragedy was and what the ancient Greeks understood by the word tragic." ("Мне надо было только хотя бы на одном примере показать моим слушателям, что такое античная трагедия и что понимали древние эллины под именем трагического.")³⁹⁷ In his dramas, Annensky returns to this time and place, to a mysterious, primitive era of Greek civilization, during which mortals were not bound by common understanding of laws and behaviors that are implicit in tragedies built around the Trojan War. Annensky recognizes that this atmosphere is inherently Aeschylean, so he grounds his receptions in a more recognizable "reality" by drawing from Euripidean fragments, creating his ideal tragic space between the two playwrights. By making this space Thessaly, Annensky links his dramas to early Greek myth and distances it from military violence and the contemporary politics of the kings Agamemnon and Oedipus. Instead, Thessaly represents Annensky's non-Symbolist vision of the Dionysian. In a Thessalian context, Dionysus can be linked at once to fruitful harvest, ritual dance, and local occult practice, which are all

³⁹⁷ Annenskii 1959, 203

characteristic of the Russian countryside and traditional culture in the imagination of Slavophilism, or as I believe to be more accurate in Annensky's case, the broad interest of modernists in primitive cultures.

Melanippa-philosof is inspired by *Μελανίππη ἡ Σοφὴ* (*Melanippe the Wise*), a tragedy written by Euripides c. 420 BCE. Melanippe gives birth to twins fathered by Poseidon, whom she conceals from her father, Aeolus. This tragedy is usually discussed as part of a pair alongside *Melanippe the Captive*, and a total of 170 lines remain out of both plays. In the preface to his reception, Annensky introduces not only the myth and the lost play, but his approach to writing neoclassical drama (forgive the length of the quotation, I find it all to be relevant).

В десятых годах V века до Р. Х., в Афинах, знаменитый трагический писатель Еврипид, уже стариком, поставил на сцену пьесу, которая носила то же название, что и помещаемая ниже, — “Меланиппа-философ”. Эта пьеса не дошла до нас. Об ней сохранились только довольно редкие отзывы, да из нее цитировали 13–16 строк. По счастью, миф, точнее основа драматического сюжета, хотя и не вполне, сохранилась у одного историка античной эры (I века до Р. Х.), Дионисия Галикарнасского, и у византийца XII века нашей эры, Григория Коринфского. Автор воспользовался этим мифом, а равно и всем, что осталось от легенды о Меланиппе и Эолидах. Но этого оказалось слишком мало даже для контура, и автору пришлось быть не только драматургом, но и мифургом. Ни расписные вазы, ни саркофаги не помогали ему при этом. Схемы он взял античные. Это было не случайно, и уже во всяком случае не потому, чтобы автор взял на себя неблагодарную задачу подделываться под Еврипида. По его глубокому убеждению, античный миф органически связан с тою формой, в которой он изображался на сцене афинскими трагиками V века. Шекспировские формы драмы существуют для более сложных фабул. *Ограниченность времени* (в этой трагедии около 18 часов), которую, если хотите, можно назвать *единством времени*, имела для автора весьма существенное значение. Он представлял себе трагедию не в комнате, а под чистым небом; а различные ее стадии - в связи с положением солнца на горизонте или за горизонтом. Начинается трагедия в исходе ночи; в жаркий полдень завязывается ее страшный узел. Трогательный закат связан с апофеосой и т. д. *Единство места* вызывалось желанием автора сохранить в трагедии хор. Но хор новой “Меланиппы” совсем не тот, что был в античной трагедии. Он индивидуализован, составляя гармоническое дополнение к героине трагедии. Но если мы в современной драме так часто невольно хотим музыки, то не вполне ли естественным оказывается желание автора трагедии ввести лирический музы-кальный элемент в качестве определенной части в состав своего произведения? Содержание хоровых партий по большей части мифическое, но оно понятно без особых объяснений. Читатель поймет также, что в некоторые

моменты, для того чтобы ослабить излишнее напряжение нервов и освободить душу для новых впечатлений, чтобы, так сказать, *ободрить* ее, автору приходилось прибегать в хорах к простоте и спокойствию почти эпическим. Таков переход к третьему действию. Для трактования античного сюжета в распоряжении автора было два способа или метода: *условно-археологический*, более легкий, и *мифический*, который показался ему заманчивее. Этот метод, допускающий анахронизмы и фантастическое, позволил автору глубже затронуть вопросы психологии и этики и более, как ему казалось, слить мир античный с современной душою.³⁹⁸

In the 480s B.C., in Athens, the renowned tragic playwright Euripides—already an old man—staged a play bearing the very same title as the work presented here: “Melanippe the Philosopher.” This play has not survived to our day. Of it, only rather sparse references remain, along with citations of some thirteen to sixteen lines. Fortunately, the myth—or, more precisely, the basis of the dramatic plot—has been preserved (albeit incompletely) in the writings of an ancient historian (1st century B.C.), Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and a 12th-century Byzantine scholar, Gregory of Corinth. The author drew upon this myth, as well as upon every other surviving fragment of the legend concerning Melanippe and the Aeolids. Yet this proved insufficient even to outline the basic contours of the story; consequently, the author was compelled to act not merely as a playwright, but as a myth-maker as well. Neither painted vases nor sarcophagi offered him any aid in this endeavor. He adopted ancient dramatic structures. This choice was not accidental—and certainly not the result of the author undertaking the thankless task of merely mimicking Euripides. It was his profound conviction that the ancient myth is organically bound to the specific dramatic form in which it was presented on the Athenian stage by the tragedians of the 5th century B.C. Shakespearean dramatic forms, in his view, are suited to plots of greater complexity. The strict limitation of time—spanning, in this tragedy, approximately eighteen hours (a constraint one might, if so inclined, term the “unity of time”)—held profound significance for the author. He envisioned the tragedy unfolding not within the confines of a room, but beneath the open sky; he conceived its various stages as inextricably linked to the position of the sun—whether above or below the horizon. The tragedy commences at the waning of the night; at the scorching hour of noon, its terrible knot is tied. The poignant sunset is linked to the apotheosis, and so forth. The unity of place was dictated by the author’s desire to retain the chorus within the tragedy. Yet the chorus of the new *Melanippe* is by no means the same as that found in ancient tragedy; it is individualized, serving as a harmonious complement to the tragedy’s heroine. But if, in modern drama, we so often instinctively crave music, is it not entirely natural for the author of a tragedy to wish to introduce a lyrical, musical element as an integral component of his work? The content of the choral passages is, for the most part, mythical, yet it remains intelligible without the need for extensive explanation. The reader will also appreciate that, at certain junctures—in order to alleviate excessive nervous tension, to open the soul to fresh impressions, and, as it were, to offer it solace—the author found it necessary to imbue the choral passages with a simplicity and serenity that bordered on the epic. Such is the transition leading into the third act. In his treatment of this ancient subject, the author had two approaches—or methods—at his disposal: the conventional-archaeological method, which was the easier of the two, and the mythical method, which struck him as the more

³⁹⁸ Annenskii 1959, 289-90

compelling option. This latter method—which admits of anachronisms and elements of the fantastic—enabled the author to delve more deeply into questions of psychology and ethics, and, as it seemed to him, to achieve a more profound fusion of the ancient world with the modern soul.

Annensky (referring to himself in the third person) points readers directly toward the key ideas animating his idiom for Russian modernist tragedy. He acknowledges that he is writing in a pastiche specifically of Euripides, that his tragic style is meant to formally evoke Attic tragedy and not modern innovations made by the likes of Shakespeare, and that the element of lyricism in his language is especially present in his Euripidean choruses. As I have discussed in other chapters, the chorus is often the first structure from the ancient tragedy to be left out of modern receptions. The language Annensky notes that the myth from which this tragedy's plot is drawn was passed through the (now lost) Attic receptions to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a historian who lived during the Augustan period and specialized in Attic rhetoric, to the Byzantine Greek scholar Gregory of Corinth a millennium later, and now to a Russian modernist-classicist another eight hundred years later. Annensky traces the reception of myth through scholars and teachers, evidence of his conviction that the survival of these texts and languages is dependent on their strong presence in educational institutions. This is also undeniably an argument for the genealogy between classical Greece and modern Russia mediated through medieval Orthodox Christianity, a religious ancestry that in this context is also bound up in education: religious institutions were a constant sanctuary for education through the millennia. Educational institutions, which by Annensky's era had deviated from the monastic schools that carried classical education from early Byzantium to early modern Russia, not only trained future generations in these subjects, but they provided support for figures such as Annensky and innumerable other teacher-poet-translators whose lives were animated by literature of antiquity. It is also interesting that Annensky twice emphasizes his method of receiving tragedy through myth (a Parnassian approach) rather than through archeology,

the Schliemann and Dörpfeld mode of classical reception, which is intertwined with the German school of classical philology in which Ivanov was educated and the mainstream, popular understanding of antiquity through artifact exhibition happening in Russia at the turn of the century.

Ixion is a villain of Greek mythology, notable for being considered the first kin slayer, for killing his father-in-law, and one of the most hubristic men of myth, for trying to seduce Hera after being invited to Mount Olympus by Zeus. For these crimes, he was banished to Tartarus for eternal punishment. Ixion is discussed by Pindar in his Second Pythian Ode, and Aeschylus and Sophocles each wrote tragedies for him as well, which are lost. In the preface to this drama, Annensky notes that Ixion, unlike Orestes or Prometheus, “belonged entirely to the ancient world.”

В заключение не лишним будет упомянуть, что миф об Иксионе в отличие от мифа Ореста или Промефея всецело принадлежал античному миру. По крайней мере, автору настоящей трагедии не удалось найти в новых литературах обработки мифа о “сверхчеловеке” эллинского мира.³⁹⁹

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the myth of Ixion—unlike those of Orestes or Prometheus—belonged entirely to the ancient world. At the very least, the author of the present tragedy has been unable to discover, within modern literature, any adaptations of the myth of this “superman” of the Hellenic world.

It is not coincidental that Annensky has chosen to use the Nietzschean term *сверхчеловек*, *Übermensch*, to describe an overtly villainous tragic hero, the first murderer in Greek mythology. It may also be Annensky’s concession into the immense popularity of Nietzsche in the Russian zeitgeist to engage with his ideas in Annensky’s own original work. It is an accurate reading of the character, however. Ixion is pardoned by Zeus for his first crime, and then quickly commits one even more arrogant and ill-fated. At the end of the tragedy, Hermes announces that Ixion will

³⁹⁹ Annenskii 1959, 349

suffer eternal punishment, which is the fate of both of Ivanov's tragic heroes, Tantalus and Prometheus.

Laodamia is the wife of Protesilaus, who was among the first Greeks to be killed in the Trojan War. Notably, the lost drama of Euripides is called *Protesilaus*, and Annensky changes the focus to Laodamia, as Seneca received Euripides' *Hippolytus* as *Phaedra*. Annensky cites recent research on the reconstruction of this lost tragedy by German classicists Maximilian Mayer and Wilhelm Heinrich Roscher.⁴⁰⁰ Annensky was not the only writer to revive and reinterpret the myth of Laodamia during this period. In 1899, Polish playwright Stanisław Wyspiański published a tragedy called *Protesilaus and Laodamia*, which Annensky names in the preface to his drama as the only other modern reception of Laodamia of which he was aware; he also mentions Wyspiański's play in a review of a volume of Zielinski's popular lecture series "Из жизни идей." This volume features a lecture titled "Античная Ленора" ("The Antique Lenore"), in which Zielinski discusses a connection between Laodamia in ancient literature and the Lenore motif in Romanticism. He finds multiple parallels in versions of the story of Laodamia and the heroine of Bürger's ballad "Lenore," who waits years for her lover to return from the Seven Years' War and when she becomes angry with God for keeping him away from her, receives a visit from Death in the form of her lost William. This is a key text for Russian Romanticism, as it was received by Vasily Zhukovsky and renamed "Liudmila" in 1808. First, Zielinski describes the "ghost motif"; one theory for Euripides' plot is that it depicted Laodamia, having learned that Protesilaus has died in the Trojan War, begging the gods to restore him to life and bring him back from the underworld. It is clear how this aligns with Bürger's plot. This also parallels the *Alcestis*, in which the titular princess chooses to give up her life in place of her husband, Admetus, a ruler of a province in

⁴⁰⁰ Annenskii 1959, 414

Thessaly, whom the Furies have summoned to Hades. Alcestis is rescued and brought back home by Herakles, but the Alcestis who returns, veiled, from Hades appears to be quite different from the woman who had left.

Zielinski traces this myth from the lost tragedy to modernity through the writing of Servius the Grammarian, a fourth-century commentator on Virgil. In Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas descends into the underworld, and Laodamia is among the shades he encounters. Zielinski cites Servius's comment:

Развязку первого мотива дает нам древний комментатор Виргилия Сервий; комментируя то место своего автора, где тот в числе прочих теней преисподней упоминает и Лаодамию («Энеида»), он поясняет: «Лаодамия была женой Протесилая; получив известие, что ее муж погиб первым в Троянской войне, она возымела желание увидеть его призрак; когда ей это было дозволено, она уже не могла оторваться от него и погибла в его объятиях».

The resolution of the first motif is provided by Servius, an ancient commentator on Virgil; in his commentary on the passage [in the *Aeneid*] where the author—amidst the other shades of the Underworld—mentions Laodamia, he explains: “Laodamia was the wife of Protesilaus; upon receiving news that her husband had been the first to perish in the Trojan War, she conceived a desire to behold his phantom; once this was granted to her, she could no longer tear herself away from him and died within his embrace.”⁴⁰¹

Zielinski credits Virgil, and Servius's indication that Virgil representation of Laodamia would be well known among readers, for this myth's passage through the medieval period into folk legend that reemerged in contexts such as Bürger's “Lenore.” Zielinski writes,

Лаодамия не умерла; вечную молодость обрела она в огненной купели; вечной сказкой пережила она гибель своего народа. Она живет и среди нас, под различными именами — Леноры, Людмилы, Светланы. Все это — та же Лаодамия, та же сказка про жениха, возвращающегося из могилы к нежно любящей невесте, сказка про любовь, поборовшую смерть.

Laodamia did not die; she attained eternal youth in a fiery font; she outlived the demise of her people as an eternal tale. She lives on among us still, under various names—Lenore, Lyudmila, Svetlana. All these are but the same Laodamia, the same tale of a bridegroom

⁴⁰¹ Zielinski 1908, 208

returning from the grave to his tenderly loving bride—a tale of love that conquered death.⁴⁰²

Another potential avenue for reconstructing Euripides' tragedy, Zielinski writes, is via the “statue motif,” and this is the plot Annensky chooses for his reception.⁴⁰³ In this telling, a grief-stricken Laodamia constructs an effigy of her dead husband (named Iolaus by Annensky, essentially lopping the proto- off of Protesilaus) out of natural materials, which she begins to ecstatically worship, and the effigy becomes an idol to Dionysus. A servant catches sight of Laodamia embracing the effigy, and tells Laodamia's father, Acastus. When Acastus finds her in a Bacchic frenzy, he orders the idol to be burned in a pyre; Laodamia, who in her trance is suspended between life and death, chooses to follow the idol into the flames. This myth is centered in anxiety not only about grief and ensuing madness, but uncontrolled sexuality, which are all the domain of Dionysus, and a fertile ground for Nietzschean reception. Annensky eschews association with the Nietzscheans in the cultural sphere of decadence, but within Euripides' body of work he is attracted to the Dionysian all the same, and like Ivanov and Merezhkovsky he recognizes the Russian in Dionysus's wildness. Annensky also calls Laodamia the “Thessalian Lenore,” acknowledging the reception history of this myth.⁴⁰⁴

Annensky's last drama, *Famira-kifared*, which he called a “Bacchic drama” rather than a tragedy, cannot be categorized with the prior three, and appears to be practically a parody of the deeply serious Dionysian incantation created by Ivanov. It is at once an exploration of Euripidean territory (it was, after all, Euripides who wrote *The Bacchae* and engaged deeply with the myth and ritual of Dionysus) and a deviation from his usual set of interests, as the plot is based on that of a lost tragedy of Sophocles. While the three earlier tragedies are all set around Thessaly, *Famira-*

⁴⁰² Zielinski 1993, 203

⁴⁰³ Zielinski also posits that Euripides combined the “ghost” and “statue” motifs in his lost *Protesilaus*.

⁴⁰⁴ Annenskii 1959, 443

kifared is set in Thrace, the birthplace of the Dionysian cult, and a site that was extensively researched by Rohde in *Psyche*, which is mentioned in my second chapter. The adherence to classical structure is less strict, and Annensky continues to give his characters distinctly modern voices, but he makes adjustments to suit the Dionysian focus by expanding his use of the chorus. The chorus is made up of maenads, the female followers of Dionysus. The plot follows a Thracian kithara player named Famira, whose mother is a nymph, Argiope. Famira's hubris leads him to challenge the Muses to a contest, which he of course loses and pays for with his eyes and his musical ability. Catriona Kelly argues that this drama is closer to the satyr play that would follow tragedies at the Dionysia than it is to neoclassical or modernist tragedy.⁴⁰⁵ Katherine Lahti summarizes it as an "Apollonian poet stranded in a Thracian Dionysian world, which may be how Annensky saw himself."⁴⁰⁶

Ivanov's Übermensch

Ivanov went the furthest into working to re-create classical lyric in his own poetry. Like Merezhkovsky, Ivanov saw a connection between the spirits of the Hellenes and Russians, but while Merezhkovsky rooted this connection in Christianity, Ivanov understood it to be shared on a deeper level through an ability of Slavonic people to have access to Dionysian experience, and he tried to share this impression in his poetry and drama. In the preface to his volume of poems *Нежная тайна* (*The Tender Mystery*), published in 1912, he gives this reason for his dedications in Latin to several of the poems:

Да не усмотрят школьного педантизма в том, что последние из этих лепт выбиты древним чеканом. Пристрастие любителя оправдывается его верою в будущность

⁴⁰⁵ Kelly 1985, 82

⁴⁰⁶ Lahti, 173

нашего гуманизма. Автор думает, что античное предание насущно нужно России и Славянству, — ибо стихийно им родственно.⁴⁰⁷

Let no one perceive mere academic pedantry in the fact that the last of these contributions have been struck with an ancient die. The enthusiast's partiality is justified by his faith in the future of our humanism—for the author believes that the classical tradition is vitally necessary to Russia and the Slavic world, being, by its very nature, akin to them.

Ivanov wrote two dramas in the style of classical tragedy, *Tantalus* in 1905 and *Prometheus* in 1918. These were two parts of an intended trilogy, but the third play, *Niobe*, was left unfinished. As Annensky wrote his dramas with a Euripidean foundation, Ivanov began with Aeschylean tragedy, and the mythological Tantalus and Prometheus are part of the larger-than-life, “prehistory” of myth that Annensky was also inspired by. However, unlike Annensky, who looked deeply into Thessalian mythology to reconstruct fragments on typically Euripidean subject matter, i.e., the madness and unraveling of the lives of mortals as a result of their own choices, Ivanov chose Nietzschean supermen: subjects who pushed back against the boundaries set by the gods and incurred their wrath. In one of his lectures on tragedy as a professor of classics in Baku in the early 1920s, Ivanov told his students that “The tragedies of Aeschylus are all based on personal freedom: crime is the free act of a free personality.”⁴⁰⁸ These dramas allow Ivanov to interrogate the freedom of these figures, who each commit a crime against the gods. Both of his subjects are connected to Aeschylus: Prometheus is the subject of Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* and Tantalus is the progenitor of the House of Atreus, the lineage that ends with the events of the *Oresteia*. The drama is set on Mount Sipylus, the mythical birthplace and kingdom of Tantalus. Mount Sipylus is located in modern-day Turkey, across the Aegean Sea from Greece, and therefore part of the East that also encompasses the Thracians and Scythians.

⁴⁰⁷ Aeschylus, 509

⁴⁰⁸ Jackson, 93

There is mythological overlap with Annensky's tragedies: Ixion, a failed superman, is a character in Ivanov's *Tantalus* who shares in the hero's hubris. Another similarity with Annensky's style of reception is that Ivanov's characterization of Tantalus is drawn from various depictions of him across myth.⁴⁰⁹ Catriona Kelly writes that in the reception projects of both Annensky and Ivanov, they "made no concessions to their audience."⁴¹⁰ They chose arcane subject matter and showed their dedication to proving their deep knowledge of tragic structure, plot, and motif at the expense of making their dramas recognizable to their audiences. *Tantalus* was published in 1905, the year Ivanov moved back to Russia after several decades living abroad in Europe, so this project predates the translations of Aeschylus discussed in the previous chapter while *Prometheus* was published after his translations were completed in 1919. Zara Torlone argues that while *Tantalus* adheres strictly to tragic structure, *Prometheus* should be regarded "as a dramatic poem like Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* or the second part of Goethe's *Faust* rather than a neoclassical drama."⁴¹¹ The use of highly archaic and lofty language and meter are in the same register as his translations, demonstrating a throughline for his idiom of tragic language in Russian and his role as a "Russian Aeschylus." Dialogue in both dramas is composed in iambic trimeter, the same "tragic meter" as his translations of Aeschylus, and the choruses feature both dactylic and trochaic meters. The chorus also speaks at length and at least in *Tantalus* speaks more than any other one character, which is quite Aeschylean. While Ivanov is more attentive than Annensky to re-creating Greek meters, he also introduces rhyme into his tragedies, which was not a feature of ancient literature.

⁴⁰⁹ Kot, 110

⁴¹⁰ Kelly 1989, 252

⁴¹¹ Torlone 2009, 77

Ivanov's plot is drawn from a confluence of stories told by Pindar, Euripides, and Homer: King Tantalus is the son of Zeus and a mortal woman, and the opening scene depicts his mythological insatiety and existential dread at his half-mortality.

Довольно! Вечно ль я — лишь чадо милости,
лишь сын царевой ласки, лишь — Обилья сын?
Иным, чем сам он. Танта́ла родил Кронид,
и неподобен человек жильцам небес.
Он одарил, — но где дары? Они — я сам.
Один в себе, несу я мир божественно.
Но тесен мир моим алканиям. Богов
молить об утоленьи, девы? Но не всё ль
они сказали, что сказать велела им
святая Правда и Судьба извечная? —
Не всё ль сказали этим миром солнечным,
что я уведал и, познав, запечатлел
своим согласьем, в оный миг, когда
разверзлось это око и мой дух воззрел?
Нет, девы! Из себя — себя творить, собой
обогащать и умножать себя, воззвать
из недр своих себя иного — волю я.

Even from this opening monologue, many of Ivanov's Symbolist literary motifs are prominent. There are words easily connected to Orthodoxy: чадо милости or "child of mercy" using an Old Church Slavonic term for child, reference to святая Правда и Судьба извечная, "holy Truth and eternal Fate." The final lines speak like Nietzsche's Zarathustra: Из себя — себя творить, собой / обогащать и умножать себя, воззвать / из недр своих себя иного — волю я! "To create myself from myself— / to enrich and multiply my being through myself, / to summon forth from my own depths a different self—that is my will!" Tantalus is addressed by the chorus as Человекобог, "man-god," a clear connection to Solovyov's *bogochelovechestvo*. Tantalus's greed is enacted in a trick he plays on the gods, whom he tempts using his son, Pelops. Tantalus steals immortality from the gods in the form of ambrosiac nectar, which he gives to Sisyphus and Ixion. The boundless Dionysian qualities of Tantalus in this tragedy center around Tantalus's desire to

become immortal and escape from the cycle of death and rebirth that characterize Dionysus's trajectory as the Suffering God who dies and is reborn. Tantalus stresses his Titan grandfather—"Тантала родил Кронид"—over his father Zeus. Later in the play, as Tantalus is preparing to sacrifice Pelops, his verses become more choral and euphoric.

Дар неба — небу!... Платит Тантал. Мзда — он сам.
За все дары собою платит. Чем он был
поднесь, — покрыто. Искуplen отныне я.
Себя, иного, я раждаю. Встань, выиграй,
из солнца — солнце!... Ты же, сын моей любви,
ты, кто — я сам, каким я был, — вернись в свой лимб!

This stanza evokes the passion that Ivanov ascribes to Tantalus in his essay "On the Crisis in Humanism": "The crisis in the art of the word is the widowhood of the poet who has lost the Psyche who once was alive in the word, who has lost the inner form of the word; it is a yearning for its renewal, vivification, transfiguration; it is the hunger of Tantalus in the fertile verbal garden, which is how the shifting and deceptive phantom of abundant language appears to us."⁴¹² Dionysus, as Zielinski wrote in 1918, "brings to believers the news of the immortality of their souls."⁴¹³

The presence of the Divine Feminine, or the Divine Sophia in Solovyov's terms, is represented by Tantalus's goddess wife, Adrasteia, who appears enigmatically only at the very end of the tragedy. Ivanov cites both Tantalus and Prometheus in his essay "Ancient Terror," which is occupied with the idea of women as the "restorers" of religion and their freedom from enslavement bringing out a freedom of orgiastic energy and divine harmony: "Niobe continues to affirm the pride of her father Tantalus. The Okeanides are Prometheus's faithful companions in his passion and ultimate execution."⁴¹⁴ As mentioned earlier, Ivanov left behind an unfinished tragedy called

⁴¹² Ivanov 2001, 166

⁴¹³ Lahti, 20

⁴¹⁴ Ivanov 2001, 159

Niobe, named for Tantalus's daughter and which appears to have been planned to depict her fervent defense of her father.⁴¹⁵ Ivanov dedicated this drama to his wife, Lidia Zinovieva-Annibal, whom he often called a "maenad," with the inscription "To you, bacchante, unified with me in the cult of Bacchus and the Muses, a beautiful gift of two thyrsi, and to the god Bacchic prayers."⁴¹⁶

The Dionysian qualities of Prometheus are even more immediately apparent, and Prometheus, and specifically the image of Promethean fire, had long been an image in Symbolist art. Solovyov's 1890 poem "Ex Oriente Lux" contains the lines "Но не напрасно Прометей / Небесный дар Элладу дан." ("And not in vain was Hellas granted / The heavenly gift of Prometheus."⁴¹⁷) Alexander Scriabin's symphony *Prometheus: Poem of Fire* was performed for the first time in Moscow in 1911. Prometheus is also linked to Scythians, having been chained to a mountain in the Caucasus for his eternal punishment. In his essay "On the Limits of Art," Ivanov writes that "This earth, mixed with the dust of the Titans who had consumed the pre-worldly infant Dionysus, still contained the living flame of the dismembered god."⁴¹⁸ He references this point of myth in *Prometheus*.

Сама в перстах моих слагалась глина
В обличья стройные моих детей,
Когда сошел я в пахнущие гарью
Удолия, где прах титанов тлел,
Младенца Диониса растерзавших
И в плоть свою приявших плоть его.
Еще незримый теплился огонь
Божественным причастьем Геи темной
В пласту земном, покрывшем кости сильных,
Убитых местью Зевсова орла.
Моих перстов ждала живая персть,
Чтоб разрешить богоподобных плен
И свету дня вернуть огонь Младенца.
Я был творцом их, если тот творец,

⁴¹⁵ Ivanov 2001, 292

⁴¹⁶ Lahti, 129

⁴¹⁷ Ivanov 2001, 193

⁴¹⁸ Ivanov 2001, 83

Чье имя меж богов — Освободитель.

These lines are spoken by Prometheus, and the violence done to the infant Dionysus and his cannibalization at the hands of Prometheus's fellow Titans is reborn as a creation myth, and Prometheus shares credit for his gift to mankind with Dionysus. Torlone observes that "Ivanov's focus, unlike that of Aeschylus, was not on the punishment and subsequent release of Prometheus by Heracles but on Prometheus, the benefactor of an ungrateful mankind, who was martyred for his selfless gifts."⁴¹⁹

These tragedies are Ivanov's only works composed in the genre so sacred to him and so central to his Symbolist theoretical writing. Are these dramatic receptions representative of what Ivanov intended for the revival of tragedy? The best way to locate what Ivanov is interested in signaling is by looking to the chorus, the most important part of tragedy to Ivanov as a living representation of *sobornost'*. Kelly writes,

The chorus, identified in theory as a universal phenomenon, on the one hand as a congregation, on the other as a dramatic device which varies the action in the manner of Shakespearian minor characters, is in Ivanov a construct for an imagined and unattainable social consensus subordinate to the wishes of the gods and the human demi-god, in Annenskij a metaphor for the cloddish sensibilities of the middle rank. Add to this the almost total unfamiliarity of the chorus to a Russian audience (Ozerov's *Fingal* uses it, but this is an exception), and it is not surprising that these dramas, intended as the beginning of a new dramatic tradition, in fact remained isolated experiments. Rather than attracting a new appreciative audience to the classics, these dramas on the whole found a niche as the diversions of erudite readers, such as Zelinskij, who were already familiar with the classic tradition.⁴²⁰

I return now to the framework created by Joanna Kot referenced earlier in this chapter, which measures the level of estrangement experienced between a dramatic performance and its audience and how that estrangement is wielded by the playwright to shape the audience's emotional distance from the events onstage. As Kelly observes, the chorus, which is meant to represent *sobornost'*

⁴¹⁹ Torlone, 79

⁴²⁰ Kelly 1989, 252

and join with the audience to enact a unified experience of catharsis, is in practice an inherently estranging concept to a Russian audience. In Annensky's essay "On Contemporary Lyricism," quoted earlier in this chapter, he accuses Ivanov of placing too much distance between himself and his reader and chastises him for not including more educational background for the uninitiated. Valery Bryusov recognized the synthesis between the Greek and Russian experience that Ivanov aimed to evoke, but found that he fell short on both ends:

Будь трагедия русского поэта поставлена в Афинском театре IV в. перед современниками Эсхила, они, вероятно, мало что поняли бы в ней, сочли бы ее кощунственной и автора освистали бы. С другой стороны, человеку XX века должно сделать прямо героическое усилие над своим сознанием, чтобы принять все условности, предлагаемые поэтом.⁴²¹

Had the Russian poet's tragedy been staged in the Athenian theater of the 4th century before Aeschylus's contemporaries, they likely would have understood little of it, considered it blasphemous, and booed the author. On the other hand, a person of the 20th century must make a truly heroic effort to adapt their consciousness to all the conventions proposed by the poet.

Annensky's tragedies, on the other hand, strive to reach the audience through their lyrical yet colloquial language and lighter subject material. While Ivanov's tragedies emphasize the strangeness of the tragic form and the mystical distance of his characters from humankind, Annensky's seek to shrink the gap and further modernize the form of the most modern tragedian. His decision to update Euripidean language and plots both in his translations and dramatic receptions is built on his deep understanding and respect for Euripides' reputation in antiquity as the tragedian of humanity and not divinity. Finally, Kot's framework for distance manipulation also considers the recipient, the reader or viewer encoded into the text. Annensky's encoded reader is a student, reading under his tutelage. Annensky aims for students to approach texts to enjoy the beauty of the language and to feel kinship with the characters represented in the myth. Conversely,

⁴²¹ Bryusov, 569

the encoded reader of Ivanovian drama is an extension of the chorus: a member of the audience who is drawn into the ritual and feels himself to be a part of the action onstage. This is the reader I believe each writer was imagining in his audience; Kot's premise extends to contemporary recipient. It is likely that contemporary recipients would feel similarly toward both projects, the gulf between them having lessened in the last century, due to their use of archaic, ornate language and reference obscure myth, despite the fact that Ivanov's dramas were meant to be defamiliarizing, and Annensky's were not.

Reception of tragedy outside of the dramatic genre

Merezhkovsky did not integrate classical reception into his original work by writing tragic dramas using ancient structures and characters. His most significant contributions to classical reception were his trilogy of historical novels, *Christ and Antichrist*, which he began researching on his 1891 trip to Europe. The trilogy consists of *The Death of the Gods. Julian the Apostate* (*Смерть богов. Юлиан Отступник*) (1895), *The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci* (*Воскресшие боги. Леонардо да Винчи*) (1900), and *Peter and Alexei* (*Пётр и Алексей*) (1904). These novels are Merezhkovsky's best-known works of fiction in Russian and in translation, and *The Death of the Gods* is considered the first Symbolist novel. These novels construct a religious and historical genealogy between ancient Rome, Renaissance Italy, and the "Third Rome," imperial Russia, situating himself and his milieu, in fin-de-siecle Petersburg, as the inheritors of this recurring dynamic. Each novel addresses a period of conflict between Christianity and paganism. The novels span a period of great intellectual development and change for Merezhkovsky, as he grew out of a youthful preoccupation with Nietzscheanism to a more obsessive and mystical entanglement with Christianity. By the end of this literary project, he wrote,

When I began the trilogy *Christ and Antichrist*, it seemed to me two truths existed—Christianity, the truth of heaven, and paganism, the truth of the earth—and that the absolute religious truth lay in the future union of these two truths. But as I was finishing it, I already knew that the union of Christ and Antichrist was a blasphemous lie; I knew both truths—of heaven and earth—had already been united in Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, the one who professes ecumenical Christianity; that in Him alone is not only the perfect, but also the eternally self-perfecting, the eternally growing, truth, and that there will be no other than He. But now I also know that I had to follow this lie to its end, in order to see the truth. *From divarication to synthesis*; such is my path.⁴²²

Merezhkovsky had been among the first in his generation of writers to demonstrate the influence of Nietzsche on his thought, and even in his turn toward Christianity around 1900 his new mode of religiosity is clearly organized around Nietzsche's critique of Christianity.

Merezhkovsky's new religious-philosophical occupations after the turn of the century were also sprung out of his original Nietzscheanism. He was interested in promoting what he called "historical Christianity," a neo-Christian project integrating his interests in the sensual body and the occult into a form of Christianity that was inclusive of ideas from Hellenic religion, which Merezhkovsky believed to be organically related to early Christianity. This project to create cultic, sensual Christians among the literary communities of Petersburg and then Paris inspired much of his writing for the next several decades. Nietzsche's continuing influence can also be seen in the three subjects of his novels, each a classic example of the *Übermensch*: the Roman emperor Julian, Leonardo da Vinci, and Peter the Great. While he put great effort into researching their historical context, Merezhkovsky's novels are not biographical, but rather take each protagonist as a means for exploring crises of individualism and the search for truth through religion, dominion, and creation. While they are occupied with ideas and dynamics from tragedy (the displays of hubris by Julian and the betrayal and murder of Alexei by his father, Peter the Great are obviously suited for tragedy), they are not the genre of reception of tragedy that is most pertinent to this dissertation.

⁴²² Bedford, 91

These novels do, however, most effectively illuminate the greater message that Merezhkovsky hoped to disseminate through his body of work, which may also be attributed to his revivals of Greek tragedy through translation and performance: that Christianity and Hellenic religion are both vital sources of the divine for humanity from antiquity to the present, and that a synthesis of the two would result in the most fulfilling, transcendental mode. His protagonists embark on a struggle between their desires for each set of divinities; this enduring fascination with the Christ-Dionysus dichotomy would eventually result in Merezhkovsky's most unusual and obscure books, written in emigration in the 1920s, *The Birth of the Gods* and *The Secrets of the West* among them.

This dissertation has focused on three writers out of many more who used myth and genres from antiquity in their art, but I will conclude with a brief survey of other receptions specifically of tragedy or the tragic ancestor, the dithyramb. Katherine Lahti's *The Russian Revival of the Dithyramb: A Modernist Use of Antiquity* follows several generations of poets who were inspired by the dithyramb, the ancient hymn to Dionysus that is understood to be the foundation of tragedy. Fyodor Sologub wrote what Lahti calls "neo-dithyrambs," including a cycle called "Hymns of the Suffering Dionysus ("Гимны страдающего Диониса"), which was published in Merezhkovsky's journal *Noyvi Put'* in 1904. Annensky's *Laodamia* served as inspiration for Sologub's play *The Gift of the Wise Bees* (*Дар мудрых пчел*), a five-act tragedy published in 1907. Sologub also receives *Protesilaus* through the "statue motif": the name of the play refers to the effigy of Protesilaus crafted for Laodamia from beeswax. In 1911, Valery Bryusov wrote his own reception of the Laodamia myth, called *Protesilaus the Dead* (*Протесилай умерший*). Bryusov and Balmont also wrote dithyrambs that directly reference Dionysian symbols and concepts.⁴²³

⁴²³ Lahti, 174-175

The movements that grew out of and succeeded Symbolism, Acmeism and Futurism, continued to revive and renew elements of the tragic drama for increasingly avant-garde projects. Vladimir Mayakovsky's first drama was titled *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy* (1913), and featured his experimental reworkings of the dithyramb. Marina Tsvetaeva, whose father was the classical philologist and art historian Ivan Tsvetaev, wrote two tragedies of a planned trilogy called *Theseus* while living in emigration in Paris in 1927 and 1928. They were titled *Ariadne* and *Phaedra*, and were meant to be followed by a play titled *Helen*. Tsvetaeva had observed that these three women had all suffered as a result of Theseus's presence or interference in their lives. Torlone writes, "While Ivanov and Annensky tried to rethink Greek tragedy in modern terms, each following their chosen Greek model, Tsvetaeva was doing the same in personal terms applicable to the rest of her poetics at the time."⁴²⁴ Konstantin Vaginov's novel *Goat Song* (*Козлиная песнь*), published in 1928, reflects the intellectual culture that evolved after my dissertation subjects had left the Petersburg scene. While these receptions engaged with the myth and the form of tragedy to varying extents, they were not undertaken with the intention to use tragedy for greater social, religious, or educational purposes like the projects of Ivanov, Annensky, and Merezhkovsky. The fact that these receptions followed the translations and receptions discussed in this dissertation, however, are an indication that the voices of my subjects were effective in their ambition to open up the genre of Greek tragedy to Russian readers and future generations of writers.

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⁴²⁴ Tsvetaeva, xiii

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Conclusion

Πάθει μάθος: Learn Through Suffering

Within a period of three decades, beginning in 1890, three translators approached the task of bringing Greek tragedy into Russian in their own highly individual styles. These collections of translations are still widely read and admired today. Russian literature is struck through with varying stripes of classical influences from its very incarnation in the eighteenth century to the present day, but for readers of the genre of tragedy, there is not a vast array of translations to choose from in the Russian language. Coming from the Anglophone sphere, in which there are many choices for translations of tragedy by scholars and poets going back several centuries, it was quite surprising to realize the durability of the Russian modernist translations of tragedy that occupy this dissertation, which initially appeared to me to be too eccentric to be part of the canon. These translations by Vyacheslav Ivanov, Innokenty Annensky, and Dmitri Merezhkovsky are the work of scholarly poets with monumental aesthetic and philosophical ambitions for their work. The three writers also wrote extensively about each other, which allowed me to delve into an extraordinary intertext between not only their translations, but also their dramas, essays, reviews, memoirs, and personal letters.

Each of these writers came from similar economic circumstances and were educated in Greek and Latin because they happened to be born during a period of time in the second half of the nineteenth century when imperial education policy had decided that classical philology would be a requisite element of the secondary schooling system. The exposure to these languages and to classical literature in their youth began a lifelong preoccupation with antiquity and the possibilities of receiving Greek and Latin texts into their cultural context. This drive was accompanied by the popularity of Richard Wagner's operas and his theoretical writing in Russia, and subsequently the

work of Friedrich Nietzsche. Wagner's concept of the Gesamtkunstwerk was cited as inspiration for a variety of Russian cultural achievements, including the arts and literature journal *Mir Iskusstva* and the Ballets Russe, which were both in large part the work of Sergei Diaghilev and Alexandre Benois. *Mir Iskusstva* and the journals that followed, which include *Zolotoe Runo*, *Novyi Put'*, *Vesy*, and *Apollon*, provided a necessary space for artists and critics to share their work and to engage in years of polemics on their cultural world. Merezhkovsky, Ivanov, and Annensky all published in these journals, and the scholarship they left in those pages was critical for this dissertation.

The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music, Nietzsche's study of the Dionysian and Apollonian drives and the function of tragedy to instruct mankind how to live in balance between these drives, was also a crucial element of the modernist project to revive tragedy. My subjects had complicated relationships with Nietzsche: Ivanov and Merezhkovsky were infatuated with his philosophy in their youths, but as they developed their aesthetic and religious perspectives, they each drew away from Nietzscheanism. Ivanov and Merezhkovsky took from their Nietzschean years an enduring fascination with Dionysus and the ecstatic, frenzied, ritualized worship of his cult, which they endeavored to reintroduce into modernity. Ivanov and Merezhkovsky both sought to find a synthesis between Hellenic religious ritual and Russian Orthodox mysticism, but their perspectives and projects in this area were very different. Merezhkovsky's turn away from Nietzsche coincided in an increased interest in the Hegelian dialectic, which he applied to these concurrent obsessions, seeking a reconciliation between Christianity and Hellenism. His solution was partly to argue for the existence of Christian thought in ancient literature, which he found in the hero of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, whom he thought of as a "Christian before Christianity." Sometimes Merezhkovsky's efforts to make tragedy seem Christian are baffling and seem to

misunderstand or at the very least misrepresent the tragedy, such as when he finds Hippolytus to be Christlike because of his piety and tendency to fast. I attribute this sentiment to a misplaced urge to make tragedy accessible to his audience when it is apparent that his audience would have been able to connect to the text even without overt Christian overtones.

Ivanov agreed with Nietzsche that tragedy originated in a desire for religious communion in man, but diverged from Nietzsche as soon as Nietzsche classifies tragedy as an aesthetic project in modernity and not a religious one. Ivanov believed that Russia had inherited the Hellenic tradition in the sense that it was merged and folded into the Russian Orthodox Church through Byzantium and the medieval period when liturgy made its way from Greek into Slavonic languages. He hoped that the meeting of ancient literature and religion would lead to a return to religious art. This religious art would be able to unite people in universal, communal experiences of faith, what he thought of as *sobornost'*. *Sobornost'*, a central concept to Slavophilism, connects Ivanov's classical reception to Slavic nationalism. Ivanov's quest for unity through the confluence of these concepts is expressed by his favorite slogan: *a realibus ad realiora*: from the real to the more real. *Sobornost'* in its truest form could be found in the tragic chorus, Ivanov wrote: "Theaters of choral tragedies, comedies, and mysteria must become the hearths of the nation's creative or prophetic self-determination."

Annensky recognized why Nietzsche and Dionysianism would be appealing to Russians and in particular Russians of his milieu, but wished for his people to redirect their attention to the philosophy of Socrates and Aristotle. Annensky's decades of work on Euripides are indication enough of his perspective on Nietzsche, who found Euripidean tragedy to fall short of Aeschylean and Sophoclean tragedy and to serve rationalism rather than the communal affirmation of life's suffering. In his lecture *Ancient Tragedy* in 1902, Annensky dismissed the Dionysus-centric

approach: “Obliqueness, mystification, and irony: these were the forms of criticism sanctioned by the traditions of the stage and by its very origins in the cult of the divine trickster.” Instead, Annensky hoped to demonstrate “the heroic, soul-uplifting images and situations” in tragedy and to transport his students and readers of tragedy into a world of beauty and clarity. These priorities would be adopted by the Acmeists, for whom Annensky’s influence would be central, although the movement’s genesis coincided unfortunately with Annensky’s untimely death in 1909.

In their translations, each writer chose a style through which he could express Symbolist, modernist ideas. Ivanov hoped to create a translation of Aeschylus that was attuned to the Russian soul, writing “Aeschylus—I dream—should be a national treasure; he will be truly Greek in spirit if he is also truly Russian.” To achieve this, Ivanov translated Aeschylus using archaic, lofty language that would be at home in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century poetry, interwoven with words from folklore and from Old Church Slavonic liturgy. He also painstakingly recreated the complex meters from Aeschylus in Russian, innovating for his fellow Symbolists and for all of Russian poetry this dexterous use of classical meter. His attention to meter is crucial to his overall project of translating tragedy, as he hoped to revive the original style of performance, meaning his translation could be put to music and sung as it may have been sung in antiquity, and danced in a group choral dance that, in Ivanov’s imagination, had been inherited by Russians in the form of the *khorovod*, a ritual dance of Slavic peasants. In my analysis of several passages from Ivanov’s translation of the *Agamemnon*, I discussed unique translation choices that tie the Attic Greek to myth from Judeo-Christianity and intertwine Christian concepts, such as the sacrifice of the lamb of god and original sin, with ritual sacrifice and *hamartia* in Greek literature.

Merezhkovsky and Annensky took two paths of modernist translation. Merezhkovsky chose to translate as closely as possible to the original. His possible dependence on French

translations is suggested in an unfavorable review by Annensky, and is worthy of further study. However, his translations are pleasant to read, and show careful attention to register and imagery in the tragedy. Annensky's translations are imbued with the energy of French Symbolism, which can be seen in his attention to emotion and sentimentalist imagery in the verse. His bombastic translations can sometimes obscure the "beauty and clarity" that he prizes so highly in tragedy. Annensky often uses many more words than Euripides does to convey the same meaning, while Merezhkovsky is more restrained. Both diligently translate choral structures and stichomythia, and Annensky adds distinctly modern and thoughtful stage directions, which aid the reader as well in understanding the actions in the tragic plot. The decision to add these clarifying directions is related to Annensky's demand that translators add sufficient context to educate their readers on what is being shown on the page. Without this context, Annensky fears the depth and beauty of the literature will be lost on readers. In his essay "On Contemporary Lyricism," Annensky reprimands Ivanov for failing to provide sufficient background when he references obscure myth.

Lastly, I discussed tragic dramas written by Ivanov and Annensky that draw deeply from the aesthetics and mythology of their chosen tragedian: Aeschylus for Ivanov, Euripides for Annensky. Ivanov's dramas, *Tantalus* and *Prometheus*, take their protagonists from Aeschylean contexts and place them in distinctly Slavic circumstances. Tantalus, the progenitor of the House of Atreus, and Prometheus, who "created mankind" by giving them the gift of fire, are both tied to geographical locations that are home to Thracians and Scythians, the mythical forebears of the Slavic people. Annensky also expresses interest in exploring an ancient topos through his dramas: all three of his tragedies take place in Thessaly, and I explored possibilities for his preoccupation with this region and its myth. I concluded that Thessalian tragedy represented to Annensky a version of Dionysianism that was based in his historical and mythological context, free from

Nietzscheanism and instead linked to primitivism. Annensky's final drama, a "Bacchic drama" called *Famira-kifared*, is set in Thrace, the birthplace of Dionysian cult according to the highly popular work of Erwin Rohde. Annensky's dramas uses fragments from lost Euripidean tragedies as his starting place, a literary device that also connects him to Romanticism and the fragment as a poetic exercise. I briefly surveyed other reception projects that were based in tragedy, and hope in the future to expand this survey into an examination of the continuation of tragic theory, translation, and reception in Russian modernism as the Silver Age ended and the Soviet period began. This dissertation focused on the translation and reception projects of Vyacheslav Ivanov, Dmitri Merezhkovsky, and Innokenty Annensky because of their knowledge of Ancient Greek and their decades-long ambitions to share with Russians the texts and myths that moved them in the ancient language. I have argued that each translator makes his own unique case for tragedy being not only relevant in modernity but also necessary medicine for what was ailing the Russian people during this period, a time of tumult that would soon lead to revolution and the end of the imperial regime. Tragedy is a genre that can express the sensation of living through apocalyptic events, and even when these events end in death, there is the possibility that your story could be healing to the world and bring people together. Tragedy has been received over and over again over the past two thousand five hundred (approximately) years because of its miraculous ability to speak to people across incredibly different horizons of experience. It proved to be a particularly meaningful genre in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in times of constant war, rapid social change, and evolving conceptions of national identity. In the apocalyptic doom of the fin-de-siecle, the Russian Symbolists illuminated their lives by merging life with art, and imagining that the truth created by their art could liberate them.

Near the beginning of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, the chorus sings that Zeus allows humans to learn through *pathos*, which can mean suffering, but it can also mean experience. Ivanov translates *pathos* as боль, pain: Zeus teaches us through pain. Pain is not the instructive medium that he, Merezhkovsky, and Annensky left behind in their translations and receptions: despite all of their theorizing on the importance of tragedy in the world canon and the potential power of tragedy to unite and heal the world, these three writers embarked on these projects because they hoped to bring joy to readers and give them access to works of art that had brought deep meaning into their lives. These translations and dramas are poetry, composed by scholar-poets, who were devoted to Russian poetry as much as they were to ancient tragedy. These texts, especially the translations, are still read and beloved because of the beauty of the verse. Zeus may compel his subjects to learn through suffering, but the Greek tragedies of the Russian Silver Age allow us to learn through poetry.