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The Background of the Metaphor "Russia as Unattainable Beloved" in modern Russian Literature

1.

During a public reading of his poems, the Russian poet Aleksandr Blok was interrupted by a request to recite some poems specifically concerning Russia. His answer was that "this is all about Russia"^I (Babenchikov 1923: 12). Especially after 1907, Russia and its future play a key role in Blok's poetics. He called Russia "my theme"^{II}, and claimed "to this theme I consciously and irrevocably dedicate my life"^{III} (Blok 1908a: 265). In his representation of Russia, he often reverts to marital imagery. A famous example in this context is the exclamation "My Russia! My Wife!"^{IV} in the poem cycle *На поле Куликовом* (*On the Snipe Field*). But Russia is personified by a bride-to-be or a beloved woman in several of Blok's other works as well. My paper is dedicated to the function of this particular metaphor in Blok's oeuvre and to its roots in Russian literature and culture.¹

The image of Russia as the beloved is elaborated by Blok most extensively in his collection of poems *Родина* (*Native Land*) (1907-1916) – particularly in *Река раскинулась. Течет, грустит лениво...* (*The river widely streams. It flows and grieves lazily*), *Россия* (*Russia*), *Осенний день* (*Autumn Day*), *Новая Америка* (*New America*) – and in the play *Песня судьбы* (*Song of Fate*). Here, we can invariably discern a metaphoric love intrigue between a feminized Russia and the hero or the poet. In these works, the female figure functions as a metaphor for Russia. To be more precise, she symbolizes what Blok conceived of as the authentic, "spontaneous"^V, "free"^{VI} Rus' (cf. Dolgoplov 1984: 74, 110; Pravdina 1984: 21), the Russia of the endless steppes and of the ordinary people, from which the hero or poet feels isolated. Thus Faina, the heroine in *Песня судьбы*, is compared to a Russia that is "invariable in her very essence"^{VII} (Blok 1908b: 134); she is called a gypsy woman, her song is interpreted as a "free Russian song"^{VIII} (Blok 1908b: 135) through which she introduces the intellectual elite to part of the "people's soul"^{IX} (Blok 1908b: 134). The hero or poet who is confronted with this female figure is depicted as her potential but ineffectual bridegroom. He is a representative of the intelligentsia, the Russian intellectual and artistic elite. From the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, the traditionally Western-oriented intelligentsia was haunted by a growing sense of isolation from Russia and a failing sense of duty towards the ordinary people, the 'narod'. By the beginning of the twentieth century, this sense of isolation and failure dominated its self-view. In Blok's work, this feeling is reflected by the inability of the hero to become amorously involved with his metaphorical "Russia-beloved", who functions as a representative of the 'narod', as we have seen above. In *Новая Америка*, for instance, the poet is not able to see the face of the "bride Russia"; instead he sees only a "terrible spaciousness [...] An incomprehensible endless expanse"^X (Blok 1913: 268). Likewise, Germann in *Песня судьбы* does not recognize Faina's face as that of his

¹ Throughout this article, the term 'metaphor' is used rather than 'allegory', since the use of the image that we refer to is restricted to elements *within* literary texts; however, these texts *as a whole* should not be interpreted as symbolic representations of Russia as a beloved (cf. "Metapher und Symbol sind Binnenelemente literarischer Texte, die Allegorie dagegen ist auch eine Gattungsform", Kurz 1997: 5).

bride.² When she urges him to fulfill his role as her bridegroom-to-be, he is not able to react (cf. Blok 1908b: 149-150).

This tragic clash between hero and heroine repeatedly leads to a situation in which a third figure enters the scene: the other or rival. In such a situation, the metaphorical Russia-beloved, whom the hero or poet is incapable of conquering, is captivated by the other, "false" bridegroom. The figure of the false bridegroom occurs, for instance, in Russia, where the poet meekly allows Russia to give her "gypsy beauty to any sorcerer you want"^{X1} (Blok 1908c: 254), and to be enchanted and deceived by that sorcerer; and in *Песня судьбы*, as the figure of Faina's Old Companion, from whom she hopes to be freed by Germann. But the figure of the false bridegroom occurs even more distinctly in *Возмездие (Retribution)*. In this poem, the procurator of the Holy Synod, Pobedonoscev, is pictured as a sorcerer who has cast a spell on Russia by looking her in the eyes with his magic glance. Since then the "красавица" ("beauty") Russia is in his power and in a deep sleep (cf. Blok 1910-1921: 328).³ Both in the case of Pobedonoscev and the Old Companion, the rival is associated with the official authorities that the hero is opposed to as intelligent.

Thus a recurring amorous triangle can be reconstructed in Blok's work, in which the heroine (representing the genuine Russia of the ordinary people) is imagined as a potential bride for both the hero, representing the intelligentsia and its weaknesses, and his rival, representing state authority. As a rule, the hero is incapable of fulfilling his role as bridegroom, and his rival dominates Russia.

2.

Such a plot was not unique at the time. Both poets and philosophers in the Silver Age viewed the relationship between the intelligentsia and Russia or the ordinary Russian people in terms of a marriage. In poetry, images of Russia as a bride can be found in Sologub's poem *Россия (Russia)*, in Voloshin's *Святая Русь (Holy Rus')*, and in Bal'mont's poems *Страна, которая молчит (The Silent Country)* and *Я (I)*. Several other examples could be added.⁴

² Thus Germann says, referring to Faina: "I do not remember her face" ["Не помню ее лица"] (Blok 1908b: 147); "So you are my bride? Open your face to me [...] I do not remember you." ["Так ты – невеста моя? Открой лицо [...] я не помню тебя."] (Blok 1908b: 164). The motif of the invisible or covered face as a sign of the unattainability of the heroine as the metaphorical "Russia-beloved" for the hero is repeated throughout the play and in several of the poems in *Родина* as well (cf. Blok 1908c: 254-255, 268-270).

³ "Pobedonoscev [...] outlined Russia with a glorious circle, Looking her in the eyes With the glass gaze of a sorcerer; To the sound of the clever fairy-tale murmur It is not difficult for the beauty to fall asleep, And she grew cloudy, Having overslept her hopes, thoughts, passions..." ["Победоносцев [...] дивным кругом очертил Россию, заглянув ей в очи Стеклянным взором колдуна; Под умный говор сказки чудной Уснуть красавице не трудно, И затуманилась она, Заспав надежды, думы, страсти..."]

⁴ Cf. "You are still a bride" ["еще невеста ты"] (Sologub 1915: 397); "have they raised you to be a bride...? [...] You homeless, street-walker, light-headed, God's fool in Christ, Rus'" ["тебя невестою растили...? [...] Ты - бездомная, гулящая, хмельная, Во Христе юродивая Русь!"] (Voloshin 1917: 92-3); "The silent Country is all in white, Like a bride, clothed in a gown" ["Страна, которая молчит, вся в белом-белом, Как новобрачная, одетая в покров"] (Bal'mont 1913: 398); "I am ready to accept anything for only one [...] My wife! Russia!" ["за одну я всё принять готов [...] Жена моя! Россия!"] (Bal'mont, 1924: 452). Other examples include Zinaida Gippius, who speaks of the earth in her poem *Земле (To the Earth)* as the Earth-Bride (Gippius 1905: 158); Andrej Belyj calls Russia a bride and a "Woman clothed with the sun" ["Облеченная солнцем Жена"] in the poem *Христос Воскресе (Christ has Risen)* Belyj 1918: 441, 444).

More specifically, the plot in which a feminine Russia is confronted by male forces as rivals for her love regularly occurs in Silver Age poetry. Thus in his essay *Луг зеленый* (*The Green Meadow*), Andrej Belyj conceives of Russia as a Sleeping Beauty whom he compares to Katerina in Gogol's story *Страшная месть* (*Terrible Vengeance*), who "needs to decide consciously to whom she will give her soul: to her beloved husband, the cosack Danil, who fights against foreign invasion to preserve the native fragrance of the green meadow for his beauty, or to the sorcerer from the foreign land"^{XII} (Belyj 1905: 329).

A similar symbolic plot can be found in Sologub's poem "*На меня ползли туманы...*" (*Mists Crawled Unto Me*), and Voloshin's poems *Россия* (*Russia*), *Святая Русь* and *Русь глухонемая* (*Deaf-and-Dumb Rus*).⁵ Philosophers of the Silver Age also had recourse to this specific plot. Thus, Vasilij Rozanov imputes Russia's inclination to fully give herself to foreign forces to the fact that she behaves like a "woman, always looking for a bridegroom, a leader and a husband"^{XIII} (Rozanov 1911: 329). Nikolaj Berdjaev asserts that Russia is a predominantly female nation which "always poses as a bride, feels like a woman in front of the colossus of the state"^{XIV} (Berdjaev 1914: 352) and which "slavishly submitted itself to the West"^{XV} (Berdjaev 1915: 15) in search of a masculine counterpart. According to him, such male stimulus should not be sought outside Russia but within. Berdjaev conceives of the relationship between the people or the Russian "soil" and the intelligentsia as the true marriage that Russia should enter into. Thus, in his review of Dostoevsky's novel *Бесы* (*The Possessed*), he interprets the powerlessness of Stavrogin before the Crippled as:

"the powerlessness of metaphysical squiredom before the Russian soil, the soil that is the eternally female principle, eagerly awaiting the bridegroom [...] Stavrogin is incapable of marrying, incapable of uniting with a woman, of fertilizing the soil"^{XVI} (Berdjaev 1916: 108)

In Vjacheslav Ivanov's review of the novel, the tragic relationship between the Crippled and Stavrogin is explained in similar terms.⁶ The two forces that the metaphysical "Russia-bride" is confronted with in these texts are invariably an evil, demonic one and a good one, which could possibly liberate the enchanted or captured heroine – Russia – from the power of the evil force. Zara Minc has proposed in this context that "one of the most widespread "myths" of Symbolism [is] the symbolized folkloric plot of 'de-enchantment' and liberation of the Sleeping Beauty,

⁵ In Voloshin's poem *Россия*, for instance, Russia is imagined as a female slave who is tied and beaten by her evil master ("having tied you by the legs, The master swipes Your gentle eyes" ["связав по ногам, Наотмашь хозяин хлещет Тебя по кротким глазам"]) (Voloshin 1915: 85); in *Святая Русь* the poet accuses Russia of having refused to be a bride-Carevna for the "sons of overseas princes" (Voloshin 1917: 92), and of being somebody who "gave herself to a robber and a thief" ["отдалась разбойнику и вору"], (Voloshin 1917: 93) as a result of which Russia is now "profaned, and poverty-stricken, and a slave of the last slave" ["поруганной, и нищей, и раба последнего раба"] (Voloshin 1917: 93); cf. also *Русь Глухонемая* "you are possessed by a spirit, deaf-and-dumb Rus! A demon [...] Throws you into fire and water [...] And here we appeal: "Come to us!" And the chosen one, far from the battles, Hammers the sword of his prayers with fastings And he will soon say: "Demon, leave!" ["духом одержима Ты, Русь глухонемая! Бес [...] Тебя кидает в огонь и воду [...] И вот взываем мы: "Прииди!" А избранный вдали от битв Кует постами меч молитв И скоро скажет: - "Бес изыди!"]" (Voloshin 1918: 96).

⁶ Cf.: "[Dostoevsky] as it were saw before his eyes, how the masculine principle in the mysterious depth of folk life can isolate itself from Christ and how its feminine principle, the Russian Soul-Earth sighs and pines for its promised bridegroom, hero in Christ and god-carrier, finally making up his mind" (I thank Dr. Sander Brouwer for his translation) ["Он [Достоевский] как бы воочию увидел, как может замыкаться от Христа мужское начало собственного народного бытия и как женское его начало, Душа-Земля русская, стонет и томится ожиданием окончательных решений суженого жениха своего, героя Христова и богоносца"] (Ivanov 1914: 510)

captivated by evil forces"^{XVII} (Minc 1988: 229). In this plot, the Sleeping Beauty represented either Life itself, the "Soul of the World", or Russia, and her potential liberator stood for the artist. As a rule, he is not able to cope with his task. The Sleeping Beauty remains unattainable to him: she is left in the hands of the evil forces which are associated with either the state or Western domination. Western domination should be understood here in the first place as the European orientation of the Russian state since Peter the Great. Since the early nineteenth century, this orientation had been criticized in retrospect by the intelligentsia as a forced import of Western rational mentality into Russian non-rational, "spontaneous" culture. In the Silver Age, it was explicitly interpreted in gender terms, as we have seen above.

The intellectual heritage of the intelligentsia itself, however, was also mainly of Western origin. Since the eighteenth century, Russian intellectuals had adopted ideas from Western thought and tried to transpose them to their own culture. At first, they were regarded as "Kulturträger" who would enrich Russian culture with their Western ideas (cf. Markovich 1995: 83-84). But by the beginning of the nineteenth century, it became obvious that the 'europeanized' Russian intelligentsia had not met with any response to their Western ideas among the Russian people. All their strivings to proclaim their message to these people had failed. As a result, the intelligentsia began to concentrate on their sense of isolation and of failing duty towards their own country and people. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, this feeling was reflected in Russian literature by the literary character of the "Russian European", a hero who unites Russian and Western culture in himself and experiences this double cultural consciousness as problematic. This led to a schizophrenic self-view in which foreign influences were divided into good and bad influences. The bad influences were associated with the Tsar, who was conceived of as a sort of angry Father figure. The intelligentsia interpreted their own foreign heritage as "a good influence", and its role towards the state as that of honest but worsted sons. In this context, Oleg Popov's model of Russian culture as a specific variant of Freud's interpretation of the Oedipus myth comes to mind. In Popov's model, the state allegedly functions as the father, "Mother-moist-Earth" or the Russian 'narod' as mother, and the Russian man as a weak version of the Greek Oedipus: in the end, he loses the battle for his mother (the Russian soil and its people) whom he desires sexually (cf. Popov 2001: 591-599). Indeed, from the nineteenth century onwards, we often encounter plots in Russian literature where a son is a rival for the love of a woman with his father, or a young hero challenges the older husband of his beloved.⁷ Against this light, the symbolic plot of the hero's fight with evil Western forces in order to free Russia can also be understood as an inner battle of the intellectual between his Russian roots and his Western disposition. Such an inner battle was also conceptualized in gender terms in the Silver Age. Thus, to Berdjaev, the intelligentsia failed in their struggle to save Russia because, being Russian, its members were naturally feminine and passive: "the Russian intelligentsia, in fact, has always been feminine: capable of heroic deeds, of giving away its life, but it has never been capable of manly activity"^{XVIII} (Berdjaev 1916: 416-417).

⁷ The first situation occurs, for instance, in Turgenev's story *Первая любовь* (*First Love*) and in Dostoevskij's *Братья Карамазовы* (*The Brothers Karamazov*); the situation in which a younger hero is confronted by the older husband or fiancée of his beloved can be found in several nineteenth-century Russian novels. Some famous examples include *Евгений Онегин*, *Анна Каренина* (*Anna Karenina*) and, in the twentieth century, Bunin's story *Ворон* (*The Raven*) and Pasternak's *Доктор Живаго* (*Doctor Zhivago*).

3.

Thus, not only Blok but several poets and philosophers of the Silver Age repeatedly turned to this amorous triangle to describe the relations between Russia, the intelligentsia and the state or the West. In itself, the tendency to formulate the characteristics of a certain culture in gender terms is a universal one. Countries and cities are often personified as women. In this context we can think of the Greek Pallas Athena, the French Marianne, or the English Britannia. In Russia, the land was traditionally associated with the mother figure of "Mother-moist-Earth" (cf. Billington 1970: 20, Hubbs 1988: xiii). The unique character that these gender associations acquired in the Russian Silver Age, however, can be attributed to the influence of sophiological philosophy. For the sophiologists, the principle of the "eternally feminine" Sophia was embodied in the Russian mentality more than in any other national consciousness. New in their ideas is the understanding of Russia not as a female principle in general but as a bride-to-be. The founder of Russian sophiology, Vladimir Solovjov, depicted the Russian idea as a female person, imprisoned by evil powers, who needed to be freed: "Et comment pourrait-elle se manifester, la pauvre idée russe, enfermée dans une prison étroite, privée d'air et de lumière et gardée par des eunuques méchants et jaloux?" (Solovjov 1888: 64). The marriageable status of the Russian idea in this passage is reinforced by the image of the Eunuchs, which are not simply evil but also "jealous", i.e. of potential male suitors. In the future, Solovjov foresaw a change in this situation through the relationship between Russia and the West. In his *Чтения о Богочеловечестве* (*Lectures on Godmanhood*), he conceived of this relationship in terms of a marriage between the female Sophia and the male ratio.⁸ According to Boris Groys, "the West" in this context should be understood as the Russian 'westernized' intelligentsia (cf. Groys 1995: 42), and the union between Russia and the West as an "innere mystische Ehe in der Seele des russischen Intelligenzlers zwischen seiner westlichen Kultur und seinem russischen Unbewußten, die ihm die lang ersehnte Ganzheit, die Androgynität, oder in solowjowschen Termini die 'All-Einheit' verleiht" (Groys 1995: 43).

The abovementioned writers were influenced by this notion of an amorous triangle between the female "sophiologic" Russia, the westernised Russian intelligentsia and an intervening third force. The extent to which the influence of Solovjov in particular reached is proven by a remark

⁸ In the eleventh and twelfth lecture, Solovjov opposes the Eastern and the Western Church as the embodiment of the divine versus the human principle, and claims that the new "godmanhood" should be born from their union. The East is in this context considered to be represented by Russia in particular; it is referred to as "Byzantium and the people that have accepted Byzantine culture headed by Russia" ["Византия и воспринявшие византийскую культуру народы с Россией во главе"] (Solovjov 1881: 167). Thus, the "godmanhood" was to be born from a union between Russia and the West. Such a union, Solovjov asserts, has a mystical meaning, which he explains in gender terms as a fertilization of the divine by the human principle: "the impregnation of the divine mother (the church) by the active human principle should articulate the deification of manhood." ["оплодотворение божественной матери (церкви) действующим началом человеческим должно произвести свободное обожествление человечества."] (Solovjov 1881: 169). In the history of Christianity, according to Solovjov, this marriage bond or fertilization can be formulated in terms of an impregnation of the divine element or of Sophia by the human ratio: "in the process of Christianity the basis, or substance, is nature, or the divine element (the Word, that has become flesh, or the body of Christ, Sophia), the active and forming principle is the human intellect, and their result is Godman" ["в процессе христианства основою, или материей, является натура, или стихия божественная (Слово, ставшее плотью, или тело Христово, София), действующим и образующим началом является разум человеческий, а результатом является человеко-бог"] (Solovjov 1881: 169)

by Andrej Bely, who claimed that "in 1901 we lived in the atmosphere of his poetry, as the theurgic completion of his teaching on Sophia-Wisdom"^{XIX} (Belyj 1922: 209).

4.

At first sight, the tendency to conceive of the relations between the land, the intellectual elite and the state as an amorous triangle between a female beloved and her two male rivals seems to be confined to Russian literature of the early twentieth century. However, its outlines were already present in the nineteenth century in the form of a recurring plot pattern, as Jurij Lotman asserts (cf. Lotman 1993). According to Lotman, nineteenth century literature presents remythization: it reduces the apparently infinite range of possible plots to a number of invariant archaic plot schemes that are stored in the cultural memory. Every concrete plot is an individual realization of such an archaic scheme. The archaic plot schemes form a relatively small, closed group, which he visualises as a kind of "play area" within which the plots of a certain historical period, whether or not realised, can move. He calls this "play area" a product of the time and culture in which it originates, the "сюжетное пространство" (Lotman 1993: 95) or "plot space". As an example of such a time and culture-bound plot space, Lotman describes a recurring plot model in the Russian nineteenth-century novel, in which a hero fails both in his attempt to establish an amorous relationship with the heroine and to find his place within Russian society. This hero, a figure of almost mythological stature who is "destined to transform the world, can be the executor of one of two roles: he can be a 'undoer' or a 'saviour'"^{XX} (Lotman 1993: 98). According to Lotman, in this plot model Russia is ascribed the function of the feminine character that can be "undone" or "saved" by the hero.

This scheme first occurs in Pushkin's *Евгений Онегин* (*Eugene Onegin*), and its outlines can also be reconstructed in, for instance, Griboedov's *Горе от ума* (*Woe from Wit*), Gogol's *Мертвые души* (*Dead Souls*), and Gercen's *Кто виноват?* (*Who is to Blame?*). In the second half of the nineteenth century, according to Lotman, the hero in the scheme loses his mythological aura: the "undoer"- "saviour" antithesis in his character loses its demonic or sacred traits. However, the hero is still portrayed as a character with great potential both in his relationship to Russia or Russian society and to the heroine, but who fails to exploit that potential in the end. This "demythologized" version of the plot model can be found in several of Turgenev's novels and stories, and, for instance, in Goncharov's *Обломов* (*Oblokov*) and *Обрыв* (*The Precipice*).

As a rule, the hero in the recurring plot in question represents the Russian intellectual elite. His position in society is marked as one of high status – he is for instance a rich dandy, of noble origin, a landowner, well-educated – but opposed to official state authority. Although he is invariably portrayed as a highly gifted, delicate person, he does not manage to find himself a place in society or to use his talents to make himself useful to Russia; nor does he succeed in becoming amorously involved with the heroine. An important role in this context is played by the above-mentioned concept of the "Russian European": as a result of his Western orientation and ideas, the hero feels alienated from Russian society and the Russian people.

The clash between the hero and the society he lives in is reinforced by the appearance of a second suitor or antagonist, who is associated with the state and state authority. The characters of hero and antagonist are diametrically opposed in their actions on both social and amorous levels. Thus, the antagonist succeeds where his rival fails, both in becoming amorously involved with the heroine and in finding a useful place in society. In certain cases he is referred to not by name but merely by title, which emphasizes his function as a socially successful figure – here we could

think of general N. in *Евгений Онегин* or prince N. in Turgenev's *Дневник лишнего человека* (*Diary of a Superfluous Man*). At the same time, the hero is portrayed as the heroine's true love; although the second suitor may be her official or socially accepted beloved, he is not the one to whom her heart belongs. Thus, Tat'jana admits to Onegin "I love you [...] But I have been given to another"^{XXI} (Pushkin 1830: 188). Vera in Turgenev's story *Фауст* (*Faust*) has also been given to another, but is in love with the hero. In addition, Liza in Turgenev's *Дворянское гнездо* (*Nest of the Gentry*) is supposed to marry Panshin but she does not want to; the same goes for the heroines and their second suitors in the novel *Накануне* (*On the Eve*) and the story *Весенние воды* (*Spring Torrents*) by the same author.

In the association of the heroine in this model with Russia, we should understand Russia – just as later in the Silver Age – specifically as the genuine, traditional Russia or the Russian people. The parallel between the hero's relationship to this "genuine" Russia and to the heroine is especially strong in Turgenev's *Дворянское гнездо* and *Ася* (*Asja*), where the moment that he begins to fall in love with the heroine takes place when he is musing on the beauty of Russia and his thoughts automatically turn to the heroine. In several of the above-mentioned works, the heroine is associated with Russia on a more explicit level as well. In particular, Tat'jana and Turgenev's heroines Asja as well as Liza and Elena (the heroine in *Накануне*) are distinctly depicted as Russian heroines. They are portrayed as women who feel close to the ordinary Russian people and take the fate of those people to heart. Tat'jana is called "Russian by heart"^{XXII} (Pushkin 1830: 98); Liza and Asja are described in similar terms.

Several ingredients of this recurring plot pattern – the association of the heroine with Russia, of the hero with the problems of the intelligentsia, his rival with state authority – can easily be recognized as similar to those in the literary works of the Silver Age that we have discussed above. Obviously, in the context of the nineteenth century, these ingredients do not function as elements of a metaphoric plot with fixed symbols. But at the plot level they already contain the outlines and interdependent relations of the metaphor "Russia as an unattainable beloved as we see it in the Silver Age.

5.

After the Silver Age, the metaphor has remained upright in Russian literature down to the present day. It practically disappeared during the Soviet period, when the way in which Russia was portrayed in literature was to a large extent coloured by the demands of Socialist Realism. According to this art ideology, the conditions of the Soviet system led to a situation where the intellectuals and the people inevitably formed a successful union in which social and cultural differences disappeared. The idea of a problematic relationship between the intellectual elite and Russia (or the Russian people) was not in compliance with that picture of reality, and could therefore not be freely expressed in literature. However, beginning with the period of the Thaw, the metaphoric love triangle centred around Russia has resurfaced. It appears in several novels which can be considered classics of Soviet and Postsoviet literature. A relatively early example is the relationship between Pasternak's Doctor Zhivago and Lara and Komarovskij. In postmodernism, the situation was turned inside out: the metaphor "Russia as an unattainable beloved" and its literary representations has become an object that is consciously played with. Here, we can think of the attitude of Venichka in *Москва – Петушки* (*Moscow to the End of the Line*) towards the girl who is waiting for him in Petushki and his antipathy towards the state, or the wish of Viktor Erofeev's *Русская красавица* (*Russian Beauty*) to save Russia and awaken it

from its "enchantment" through her sexual union with a demonic force. From Russian literature of the 1990s, several examples can be added from the works of Vladimir Sorokin and Viktor Pelevin. Thus, in Sorokin's *Тридцатая любовь Марины* (*Marina's Thirtieth Love*), the heroine's daydreams of a future saviour of Russia coincide with her search for a man who can give her both true love and sexual satisfaction, something that her intellectual friends are incapable of. In Pelevin's *Чаноев и Пустота* (*Chapraev and Pustota*), a marriage between soapstar Maria and Arnold Schwarzenegger is interpreted as an alchemical marriage between Russia and the West. In *Generation 'П'* (*Generation 'P'*), Russia is envisaged as a naked sleeping beauty who is raped by a black man with demonic qualities. Several other examples could be added.⁹

Central to these modern and postmodern versions of the metaphorical "Russia-beloved" is the borderline between the exalted and the profane. The unattainable beloved with whom Russia is identified is portrayed here on the one hand as sexually promiscuous or depraved, and on the other as an exalted, highly religious figure. This line can be traced back to Dostoevsky's heroines and first coincides with the image of a feminized Russia in the works of Blok discussed here. In *Новая Америка*, for instance, the poet calls Russia a "fatal, dear country", under whose coloured Moscow shawl he discerns "not a senile, pious face", but "whispering, silent speeches, your glowing cheeks..."^{XXIII} (Blok 1913: 268). In *Песня судьбы*, Faina is referred to as the exalted dream which turned into a gypsy woman (cf. Blok 1908b: 129). It would be interesting to investigate how this aspect of the metaphor developed over the course of the twentieth century. However, we will not go into that here.

6.

From the above we can conclude, firstly, that the metaphoric construction in which Russia is depicted as an unattainable beloved is firmly rooted in Russian literature in the twentieth century and, secondly, that it can already be reconstructed as a typically Russian plot model in the nineteenth century Russian novel. Its roots, however, go back much further and are not confined to a Russian context. Thus, already in the plot of the so-called Russian wonder tale, the origins of which are generally traced back to Kievan Rus', the male hero's social and amorous strivings are modelled in parallel: in the end, his marriage to the princess is paired with his obtainment of half of the kingdom. A similar parallel can be discerned in Western fairytales. Its modern Western variant is the French novel of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in which the hero's position in society is raised through his romance with a girl from a higher social class. The most famous examples of this type of hero are Rousseau's St. Preux in *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse* and Stendhal's Julien Sorel in *Le Rouge et le Noir*. The link between the social and amorous strivings of the hero in Rousseau's novel also exists in his wish to free the heroine through education. This idea would influence the Russian radical intelligentsia in the 1860s, whose members ascribed great social importance to educating their wives. In Chernyshevskij's

⁹ Variants of the metaphor - often through the prism of "Moscow as unattainable beloved", in which Moscow functions as the symbol of everything genuinely Russian - can also be found in Platonov's novel *Счастливая Москва* (*Happy Moscow*, 1936) and, in postmodern literature, in Mikhail Epshtejn's essay *Русская Красавица* (*Russian Beauty*, 1977-88), the poem cycle *Моя Россия* (*My Russia*, 1990-1994) by Dmitrij Prigov, Pavel Peppershtejn's story *Яйцо* (*The Egg*, 1983-1997), Pelevin's novel *Жизнь Насекомых* (*The Life of Insects*, 1998), Viktor Erofeev's *Энциклопедия русской души* (*Encyclopedia of the Russian Soul*, 1999), Sorokin's essay *Эрос Москвы* (*The Eros of Moscow*, 2000), several poems of Timur Kibirov (f.i. *Russian Song* (*Русская Песня*), 1989, and the cycle *Upon Reading the Anthology "Россия-Russia"* (*По прочтении альманаха "Россия-Russia"*), 2000), and Ol'ga Mukhina's play *Ю* (*Yu*, 1996), which was staged lately - autumn 2002 - at the MKhAT theatre in Moscow.

diaries and letters, for instance, his love for his wife is repeatedly paired to his wish to give her lessons in the "encyclopaedia of civilization"^{XIV} (Bogdanovich 1929: 124). According to Irina Paperno, we can interpret this wish on the part of a radical to free his beloved through education as a projection of the longing to "teach" and liberate humanity (cf. Paperno 1996: 80). Again, the social and amorous aspects are intermingled in this concept.

Close to this wish to liberate through education is another concept that the intelligentsia eagerly picked up from Western thought and which influenced their vision of the Russian people as their bride: the veneration of the people in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century European Romanticism. In Romanticism, with its heightened interest in individual national cultures, the ordinary people were worshipped as bearers of a national essence or authenticity. The tendency to exalt the own people was particularly strong in German Romanticism, and before, in the ideas of Herder. The Russian intelligentsia inherited this cult of worship for the people and tried to project it onto the Russian 'narod'. Another background for the marital imagery is the ancient image of the marriage between the ruler and his land, which we encounter both in Russia and in the West. In his study of the mediaeval political metaphor, E. Kantorowicz quotes several writers and stately figures from Antiquity down to seventeenth-century England who speak of the land and its ruler in terms of a bride and her husband (cf. Kantorowicz 1957: 212-227). In an article by Sander Brouwer, the presence of this metaphor in Russian literature and politics since the fifteenth century is discussed and illustrated by a number of titles in which it appears (cf. Brouwer 2001: 6-8). Connected with this is the image of the conquest of the city as either a marriage or as the rape of the city in question. This concept has Biblical roots – Babylon is depicted as a whore and Jerusalem as bride, for example. In Russia, the myth of the city as a virgin to be taken or married played a role in the depiction of the conquest of Vladimir in the 12th century *Повесть временных лет* (*Tale of Bygone Years*) and the *Слово о полку Игореве* (*The Igor Tale*) (cf. on this for instance Pljukhanova 1995: 190-203). Consequently, the roots of the association of the land with a beloved are not exclusively Russian. The concepts that influenced its final contours are to a great extent of Western origin. Its "ingredients" are for the greater part universal. Nevertheless, the metaphor of the land as an unattainable beloved as it functions in the work of Blok and his contemporaries may be considered a pre-eminently Russian image. The same is true for the nineteenth-century plot model in which the failing relationships hero-heroine and hero-Russia are paralleled. This "Russification" of a concept with universal ingredients is the result of context change: the process by which elements which are transferred from one culture to another inevitably acquire a different function in their new cultural environment. According to Boris Uspenskij, such a process has been characteristic of the formation of Russian culture throughout its history (cf. Uspenskij 2002: 397).

Context change is what has happened to the universal images in nineteenth-century Russia mentioned above, when the Western ideas that the intelligentsia had appropriated proved not to touch ground in their own culture. In this respect, Boris Uspenskij speaks of the tragic paradox of the Russian intelligentsia as a clash between messenger and recipient: "the intelligentsia represents Western culture, but the recipient of that culture ought to be the Russian people"^{XXV} (Uspenskij 2002: 396). We have seen that part of the intelligentsia's cult of worship of the people was the wish to free them from the allegedly evil foreign Tsarist influence that they were under, a wish that the 'narod' itself met with indifference and disapproval. At the same time, however, the intelligentsia itself represented foreign culture in Russia, which led to a problematic self-view in which their Western disposition and Russian roots clashed. In the context of this problematic self-view and the dissociated relationship of the intelligentsia to both the Russian

state and the people, the Russian variant of the ancient image of the land as bride arose. This variant is characterized by its problematic, tragic aspect. Whereas the hero in the wonder tale indeed conquered part of the kingdom and married the princess, and whereas the ruler as mystical husband indeed married his land, the hero in nineteenth and twentieth-century Russian literature fails on both social and amorous levels. The hero in the Russian novel from the 1830s onwards was haunted by the figure of his successful rival, who triumphed over him both socially and amorously. His bride-to-be becomes an unattainable bride. It is this "russified" problematic character constellation that turns into the metaphor which explicitly refers to the relationship Russia-intelligentsia-state in the Silver Age, and in particular Blok's poetics, and which would remain throughout Russian twentieth-century literature. Therefore, the metaphor "Russia as unattainable beloved" can justly be called one of the "cultural myths" of modern Russian literature.

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- I "Это всё о России"
II "моя тема"
III "этой теме я сознательно и бесповоротно посвящаю жизнь"
IV "Русь моя! Жена моя!"
V "стихийная"
VI "вольная"
VII "неизменная в самом существе своем"
VIII "вольная русская песня"
IX "народная душа"
X "страшный простор, [...] Непонятная ширь без конца"
XI "какому хочешь чародею [...] разбойную красу"
XII "должна сознательно решить, кому она отдаст свою душу: любимому ли мужу, казаку Даниле, борющемуся с иноплеменным нашествием, чтоб сохранить для своей красавицы родной аромат зеленого дуга, или колдуну из страны иноземной".
XIII "женщина, вечно ищущая жениха, главу и мужа"
XIV "всё невестится, чувствует себя женщиной перед колоссом государственности"
XV "рабски подчинялась Западу"
XVI "Бессилие ноуменального барства перед русской землёй, землёй – вечной женственностью, ожидающей своего жениха [...] Ставрогин неспособен к браку, бессилён соединиться, не может оплодотворить землю".
XVII "одном из самых распространенных символистских "мифов" – в символизированном фольклорном сюжете "расколдовывания" и освобождения Спящей Царевны, заколдованной силами зла"
XVIII "русская интеллигенция, в сущности, всегда была женственна: способная на героические подвиги, на отдавание жизни, но никогда не была способна на мужественную активность."
XIX "в 1901 году мы жили атмосферой его поэзии, как теургическим завершением его учения о Софии-Премудрости."
XX "[Герой,] призванный преобразить мир, может быть исполнителем одной из двух ролей: он может быть "погубителем" или "спасителем"
XXI "Я вас люблю [...] Но я другому отдана"
XXII "русская душою"
XXIII "роковая, родная страна"; "не старческий лик, и не постный"; "шопотливые, тихие речи, заплывшие щеки твои..."
XIV "энциклопедию цивилизации"
XXV "интеллигенция представляет западную культуру, однако реципиентом этой культуры должен быть русский народ"