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**Pamela Davidson**

**VYACHESLAV IVANOV AND C.M. BOWRA:  
A CORRESPONDENCE FROM TWO CORNERS ON HUMANISM**

*In memoriam*

Dimitrii Vyacheslavovich Ivanov (1912-2003)

Sergei Sergeevich Averintsev (1937-2004)

Дорогой друг мой, мы пребываем в одной культурной среде, как обитаем в одной комнате, где есть у каждого свой угол, но широкое окно одно, и одна дверь.

[My dear friend, we inhabit one cultural world, just as we live in one room, where there is a corner for each person but one wide window and one door.]

V.I. Ivanov to M.O. Gershenzon, June 1920

(from *A Correspondence from Two Corners*)

He was a great man, of a kind very uncommon at any time and especially now. He really represented a great tradition and kept it alive by his great candour and sincerity and passion. I am very proud to have known him.

C.M. Bowra to D.V. Ivanov, August 1949

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Photograph of V.I. Ivanov in Rome (courtesy of Rome Archive of Ivanov).

Photograph of C.M. Bowra in Oxford (courtesy of the *Oxford Mail*).

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## **Transcription and Transliteration**

In transcribing the MS texts of letters and other materials for this publication I have generally avoided making any changes to the spelling or punctuation of the originals. Oblique brackets have been used to signal omissions, additions (such as expanded contractions) and dates absent in the original but established from other sources. In transliteration I have followed the conventions of Birmingham Slavonic Monographs.

## Abbreviations

L. Leningrad

M. Moscow

RAI Rimskii arkhiva Ivanova (Rome archive of Ivanov)

SPb. St. Petersburg

WCA Wadham College, Oxford, archive



## INTRODUCTION

Vyacheslav Ivanov (1866-1949), the poet, classical scholar and leading theoretician of religious Symbolism, is rightly regarded as one of the most cultured and erudite 'Russian Europeans' of the Silver Age. And yet, although he had an impressive command of a wide range of languages and cultures, his links with England were not as well developed as they were, for example, with France, Germany, or Italy. To some extent this difference can be explained by biographical factors. Ivanov spent only one extended period of time living in England, amounting to some eight months between October 1899 and May 1900. At first he stayed in London, renting a flat near the British Museum with his second wife, Lidiya Zinov'eva-Annibal, her three children from her first marriage and their two young daughters, including the newborn Elenushka. This was not an easy period in the couple's lives. Lidiya had only recently obtained a divorce and been able to marry Ivanov; she was now anxious to conceal the whereabouts of her children from her first husband. In November Elenushka suddenly fell ill and died at the age of just over ten weeks; she was buried at a cemetery in Norwood. Although Ivanov continued his work on ancient Greek religion in the library of the British Museum and wrote some remarkable poetry during his stay with Lidiya at Tintagel, Cornwall in April and May 1900, he did not establish any significant links with contemporary English cultural circles. In fact, the only English person who seems to have made a substantial impression on him was Mr J.L. Paton, the kindly headmaster of University College School, who lent him an uncensored English translation of Tolstoi's *Resurrection*.<sup>1</sup>

Ivanov's relative lack of involvement with English culture was not, however, just

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<sup>1</sup> Lidiya Zinov'eva-Annibal's eldest son attended Mr Paton's school. For a general account of this period in Ivanov's life, based on archival documents, see Grigorii Kruzikov, "My – dvukh tenei skorbyashchaya

a matter of biographical circumstance. Apart from two essays on Byron (1906 and 1916) and one on Shakespeare (1916), his critical writings contain rather few references to English literature. This may well have been linked to the greater ‘resistance’ of English writers (with the notable exceptions of Milton and Byron) to interpretation or assimilation within the distinctive brand of religious and philosophical literary criticism practised by Ivanov as an integral part of his Symbolist aesthetics.

It is therefore particularly intriguing to find Ivanov developing an unexpected friendship towards the very end of his life with a remarkable Englishman from Oxford, the classical scholar and literary critic, Cecil Maurice Bowra (1898-1971). In 1943, prior to their first contact, Bowra published his pioneering *Book of Modern Russian Verse*, including his own translations of three poems by Ivanov. Following the suggestion of Sergei Konovalov, Professor of Russian at Oxford, Ivanov sent Bowra some offprints in 1946, accompanied by a poetic address in Latin distichs; this initial contact prompted their subsequent correspondence and led to two meetings in Rome in 1947 and 1948. The legacy of the relationship was substantial: as well as bringing examples of Ivanov's early verse to an English audience, Bowra also wrote a foreword to the English translation of Ivanov's highly influential study of Dostoevskii (1952) and was instrumental in facilitating the publication by the Clarendon Press of the poet's magnificent late collection of verse, *Svet Vechernii* (*Vespertine Light*, 1962), to which he contributed a fairly extensive introduction.

The interest of this relationship, however, goes well beyond the considerable role that Bowra played in disseminating knowledge of Ivanov's works in the West. As we shall see, their correspondence reflects the dialogue of two highly original minds, seeking to affirm from their different perspectives the continuing relevance of the

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cheta”: Londonskii epizod 1899 goda po pis'mam Vyach. Ivanova i Lidii Zinov'evoi-Annibal’, in his

classical tradition of humanism to contemporary literature and, ultimately, to the values of the modern age in the aftermath of two traumatic world wars. This study traces the development of the relationship and analyses its deeper significance within this context. It falls into five chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 introduce Ivanov and Bowra, focusing on their distinct approaches to the classical tradition of humanism and its relevance to contemporary culture. Chapter 3 investigates Bowra's translations of Ivanov's verse, undertaken before the beginning of their correspondence. Chapter 4 provides a historical and analytical account of their relationship, which probes beyond the surface points of contact to uncover significant underlying differences of outlook. Chapter 5 publishes the documentary evidence of the relationship that survives in the two correspondents' archives in Rome and in Oxford: Ivanov's opening address to Bowra in Latin distichs, and the ten letters that they exchanged between 1946 and 1948, written in Latin, English and French, including an original poem in Greek, composed by Ivanov for Bowra.

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*Nostal'giya obeliskov: Literaturnye mechtaniya* (M.: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2001), 344-80.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Ivanov and the 'Good Humanistic Tradition'

The good humanistic tradition demands of me an answer in Latin to your elegant latin message; but I prefer to amuse you with innocent solecisms of my virgin english prose.

V.I. Ivanov to C.M. Bowra, October 1946

When Ivanov wrote his first letter to Bowra on 1 October 1946, he began by invoking the 'good humanistic tradition'. His choice of this phrase was clearly designed to evoke their common allegiance to a rich humanist tradition, stretching back to classical antiquity and informing Christian culture through to the present. At the time Ivanov was well known in Russian émigré and European circles as a leading proponent of Christian humanism, and this was the perspective from which he initiated and developed his dialogue with Bowra. It is important to remember, however, that he reached this position as a result of a long and complex process, made up of several different strands, woven together over many years. The fact that he had travelled this path enabled him to perceive with particular lucidity the religious limitations of Bowra's approach to humanism and led him to seek ways of influencing the younger scholar to move closer to his own position. In order to facilitate a fuller understanding of the dynamics of the relationship, this opening chapter will therefore provide an overview and analysis of the main stages of Ivanov's evolution from his early 'pagan humanism' towards his later Christian view of the 'good humanistic

tradition'.<sup>1</sup>

Although Ivanov began writing poetry in his childhood and continued throughout his years at school and university, this relatively private side of his life did not become a part of his public persona until the late 1890s and early 1900s, when he first began to publish his verse. Before his return to Russia in 1905 he spent nearly twenty years from 1886 to 1904 travelling around Europe (with spells in Berlin, Paris, Rome, London, Athens, Switzerland, and France), devoting himself to the scholarly investigation of classical antiquity. After two years of studying history at the Faculty of History and Philology of Moscow University (1884-86), he set off for Germany, armed with letters of recommendation and the blessings of his Moscow professors. He spent nine semesters in Berlin (1886-91), studying under Otto Hirschfeld (1843-1922) and Theodor Mommsen (1817-1903); as well as attending a wide variety of lectures and seminars on ancient Greek and Roman history, philosophy and literature, he also prepared the first draft of his dissertation on the system of taxation and collection of revenues in ancient Rome.<sup>2</sup> Although he eventually completed this dissertation and even published it in Latin in Moscow in 1910,<sup>3</sup> he failed to attend the final oral examination of defence with Mommsen and consequently never received a University degree from Berlin.

The experience of living and studying in the Northern 'Athens on the Spree' clearly had a profound impact on Ivanov, which went far beyond the official academic purpose of his stay. His time in Berlin coincided with a peak period in the German

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<sup>1</sup> In his letter to Charles Du Bos' (1930), Ivanov refers to the period of his life when his faith began to reassert itself 'sur les débris de mon humanisme païen'; 'Lettre à Charles Du Bos', in Vyacheslav Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. D.V. Ivanov and O. Deschartes, 4 vols. (Brussels: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1971-87), III, 418-32 (424).

<sup>2</sup> Ivanov's correspondence with Hirschfeld and the list of lectures he attended is published in Michael Wachtel, 'Vyacheslav Ivanov – student Berlinskogo universiteta', *Cahiers du monde russe*, 35, January-June 1994, 353-76.

<sup>3</sup> *De societatibus vectigalium publicorum populi romani* (SPb.: Tipografiya M.A. Aleksandrova, 1910).

revival of classical antiquity. Throughout the nineteenth century German scholars carried out ambitious archaeological expeditions to various corners of the ancient world and regularly transported trunkfuls of remains back to Berlin; after painstaking reconstruction these relics were then put on display to the public in the city's newly built neo-classical museums. As part of his course of studies, Ivanov inspected all the Greek and Roman antiquities collected in these secular temples with one of his University professors, Ernst Curtius (1814-96).<sup>4</sup> It would be difficult to imagine a setting that could have presented him with a more tangible representation of the desire to revive classical antiquity in the modern world. The complex relationship that he observed between the passionate cult of antiquity and the rise of German nationalism affected the formation of his own vision of the Russian national idea, likewise based on a renaissance of the classical past. It is no coincidence, therefore, that one of his earliest statements on the special character of the Russian people, 'Russkie i evrei' (The Russians and the Jews, 1888-89), was composed during his student years in Berlin.<sup>5</sup>

Ivanov was also aware of a darker side to the link between classical studies and German nationalism. The troubled relationship between nationalism and anti-Semitism had caused serious rifts between University academics, including two of his teachers, Theodor Mommsen and Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-96). In his 'Avtobiograficheskoe pis'mo' (Autobiographical Letter, 1917) Ivanov recalled his disgust with the 'self-satisfied and yet still unsated nationalism' of Germans at that time, as well as his reservations over Mommsen's enthusiastic cult of statehood and Treitschke's 'extreme chauvinism'; although he did not sympathise with these attitudes,

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<sup>4</sup> Ivanov, 'Avtobiograficheskoe pis'mo', in his *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, 17; Wachtel, 'Vyacheslav Ivanov – student Berlinskogo universiteta', 364.

<sup>5</sup> Konstantin Lappo-Danilevskii, 'Nabrosok Vyach. Ivanova "Evrei i russkie"', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 21, 1996, 191-3.

he overlooked them because of his high regard for the great talent of both scholars.<sup>6</sup> After Mommsen's death in 1903 Ivanov reviewed a Russian tribute to his memory for the Symbolist periodical *Vesy*; significantly, he concluded his essay on a personal note, noting Mommsen's parallel life as a lyric poet and drawing attention to his frequently expressed 'melancholy presentiment of the coming barbarity': 'этому гуманисту казалось порой, что начатая его поколением культурная работа не найдет продолжателей, что поднятые памятники древности снова будут подавлены долгою ночью...' [at times it seemed to this humanist that there would not be anyone left to continue the cultural work begun by his generation, that the rediscovered monuments of the ancient past would once more be engulfed by a long night...].<sup>7</sup>

Ivanov returned to Mommsen's warning words to his students once more in his autobiographical letter of 1917 – citing them on this occasion, we may presume, with a much sharper sense of their prophetic import and urgent significance for the present.<sup>8</sup> In Mommsen he clearly found for himself a model of the scholar-poet, a fellow humanist who viewed the study and revival of classical antiquity as a vital task threatened by the dark forces of barbarity. What sort of defence could the next generation of humanists and classical scholars mount against this threat? How was Ivanov to respond to his teacher's warning injunction? As we shall see, both Ivanov and Bowra developed their own distinct responses to this challenge over a number of years, particularly in the wake of the first world war and the later tragic events of twentieth-century history.

Ivanov's eventual answer to Mommsen's warning was to create a new synthesis of his classical scholarship and Christian faith. The path that led him to espouse this

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<sup>6</sup> Ivanov, 'Avtobiograficheskoe pis'mo', II, 18. For a discussion of the background to these issues, see Lappo-Danilevskii, 'Nabrosok Vyach. Ivanova "Evrei i russkie"', 182-90.

<sup>7</sup> Vyacheslav Ivanov, 'O Mommzene: Yu. Kulakovskii, Pamyati Mommzена. Kiev 1901', *Vesy*, 11, 1904, 48 (1901 is a misprint for 1904, the date of Kulakovskii's obituary).

<sup>8</sup> Ivanov, 'Avtobiograficheskoe pis'mo', II, 17.

form of Christian humanism was a gradual and indirect one: at first he simply sought to uncover the religious element latent in classical antiquity and to suggest some of its affinities with early Christianity. In his retrospective account of his student years, he represented this new departure as a fated outcome, stressing that his extended period of studying Roman history in Berlin had delayed him from pursuing his true vocation and love, the ‘study of the Hellenic soul’. It was only when he eventually got to Athens and switched to philology and the cult of Dionysus that he was able to realise his true calling and explore the religious significance of Hellenism.<sup>9</sup> His study of Dionysus was initially dictated by a pressing inner need to ‘overcome Nietzsche in the sphere of questions of religious awareness’.<sup>10</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* acted as a powerful springboard from which he launched his own alternative reading of the cult of Dionysus as the religion of a sacrificial, suffering god, sharing many features with Christianity. This interpretation eventually led to the creation of a new syncretic version of the Russian idea, in which the mystic teachings of Christian thinkers such as Fedor Dostoevskii, Aleksei Khomyakov and Vladimir Solov’ev were grafted onto the fertile soil of classical antiquity, viewed through the prism of Dionysus in its tragic, cathartic aspect. In this way, strange as it may seem, the Dionysian strain in Hellenism was presented as an alternative ‘Old Testament’ for Russians, as the key source destined to bring about a renewal of their religious awareness and self-definition.

From this time onwards, Ivanov’s explicit agenda was therefore to bring about a revival of the Dionysian dimension of classical antiquity and to integrate it as fully as possible into contemporary Russian culture. To achieve this goal he drew on all his manifold talents as a charismatic role model, teacher, translator, poet, dramatist, literary critic and scholar. First and foremost, we should note the importance of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., II, 16-17.



‘zhiznetvorchestvo’ (creation of life) as a means of resuscitating the spirit of classical antiquity in life itself. As Ivanov commented in later years to his student at Baku University, Moisei Al’tman: ‘Я, <...> быть может, как никто из моих современников, живу в мифе – вот в чем моя сила, вот в чем я человек нового, начинающегося периода.’ [I, <...> perhaps, more than any of my contemporaries, live in myth – this is where my strength lies, this is where I am a man of the new era that is now beginning.]<sup>11</sup> He excelled at mythologizing his own life and at drawing his close friends and wider circle of followers into this process. At the famous Wednesday gatherings at the Tower in St. Petersburg he and his wife deliberately created an atmosphere reminiscent of Platonic symposia.<sup>12</sup> A similar erosion of the boundaries between life and art was achieved in many of the literary societies and circles in which he subsequently took an active part. In these public forums as well as in the more intimate circles of his private life, he created a life-style to match his ideals; he also used his autobiographical writings, correspondence and verse to project a particular ‘reading’ of the text of his own life. Striking examples of such forms of self-mythologizing ‘zhiznetvorchestvo’ include his diary entries and verse on the introduction of a third person (Sergei Gorodetskii, then Margarita Sabashnikova) into the sacrificial cult of Eros at the Tower, or his reading of Lidiya’s death and his subsequent marriage to her daughter Vera in the light of the Dionysian cycle of suffering, death and rebirth.

Ivanov’s role as a lecturer and teacher enabled him to extend his inner circle into the more public domain and won him many more adherents. In 1903, for example, he gave a course of lectures on Dionysus in Paris and introduced a large audience of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., II, 21.

<sup>11</sup> M.S. Al’tman, *Razgovory s Vyacheslavom Ivanovym*, ed. V.A. Dymshits and K.Yu. Lappo-Danilevskii (SPb.: INAPRESS, 1995), 61.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed discussion of Ivanov’s symposia, see Andrei Shishkin, ‘Simposion na peterburgskoi bashne v 1905-1906 gg.’, in D.S. Likhachev (ed.), *Russkie piry* (SPb.: Al’manakh “Kanun”, 1998), 273-352.

Russians, including Bryusov, to his ideas on the religion of the suffering god. When he took over from the deceased poet Innokentii Annenskii as Professor of Greek Literature at Raev's courses for women (1910-12), or later, when he was appointed Professor of Classical Philology and Poetics at the newly founded University of Baku (1920-24), he continued to spread his ideas on the revival of classical antiquity and to widen his circle of dedicated disciples.

Ivanov saw translation and poetry as two closely related forms of creativity and used both as a powerful tool for the assimilation of classical antiquity into Russian literature. In his translations from ancient Greek verse and tragedy (Pindar, Bacchylides, Alcaeus, Sappho, Aeschylus) he always strove to dissolve the boundaries between the worlds of ancient Greece and modern Russia by 'russifying' the Greek originals and by 'Hellenizing' the Russian language. In his preface of 1899 to his first published translation from Greek (Pindar's first ode) he explicitly defended the practice of introducing 'church and old folk elements' into his Russian version.<sup>13</sup> At the end of his second book of lyric verse he included his translation of Bacchylides's dithyramb 'Theseus' together with an extensive note on the musical principles underlying his method of translation in order to render the Dionysian character of the original.<sup>14</sup>

In his original poetry Ivanov made extensive use of ancient Greek themes and experimented with the Russian language and its verse forms to facilitate this revival. His first collection *Kormchie Zvezdy* (Pilot Stars, 1903) included several sections on ancient Greek themes ('To Dionysus', 'The Hesperides', 'Thalassia', 'The Oreades'), juxtaposed with sections on Russian, Italian, French and Latin subjects. Greek themes and verse forms continued to permeate his subsequent collections, *Prozrachnost'*

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<sup>13</sup> Ivanov, Vyacheslav, tr., 'Pervaya pifiiskaya oda Pindara', *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniya*, 324, July-August 1899, 49.

<sup>14</sup> 'Primechanie o difirambe', in Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, 816-18.

(*Transparency*, 1904), *Eros* (1907), *Cor Ardens* (The Burning Heart, 1911-12), and *Nezhnaya taina* (The Tender Mystery, 1912).

It is symptomatic of Ivanov's general agenda that he deliberately concluded *Nezhnaya taina* with a cycle of poems composed in Greek and Latin, entitled 'Humaniorum studiorum cultoribus' (To the cultivators of humanist studies) and including two poems addressed to his fellow classicists, Mikhail Rostovtsev and Faddei Zelinskii.<sup>15</sup> In his preface to the collection, he issued a bold statement, defending himself against the possible charge of 'schoolish pedantism' for choosing to compose this cycle in ancient tongues: 'Пристрастие любителя оправдывается его верою в будущность нашего гуманизма. Автор думает, что античное предание насущно нужно России и Славянству, - ибо стихийно им родственно, - и смело предполагает в числе своих читателей "humaniorum studiorum cultures".' [The predilection of an amateur is justified by his faith in the future of our humanism. The author believes that the classical tradition is vitally necessary to Russia and the Slavonic world – for it is elementally close to them – and boldly presumes that his readers include 'cultivators of humanist studies'.].<sup>16</sup> By addressing his fellow classicists and readers in ancient Greek and Latin, Ivanov effectively drew them into his inner circle and made them participate 'interactively' in his faith in the future of humanism, based on the revival of classical antiquity in Russia. As we shall see, he later used the same technique in his poetic addresses to Bowra, composed in Latin and Greek.

As part of his grand design to bring about the transition from symbol to myth, from 'lesser' to 'great art', Ivanov also wrote two verse tragedies, modelled on ancient Greek dithyrambic drama, 'Tantal' (Tantalus, 1905) and *Prometei* (Prometheus, 1919). Although never performed in public as intended, their publication testifies to the extent

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<sup>15</sup> Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, III, 59-60.

of his remarkable determination to revive ancient Dionysian forms in Russian literature.

To clarify the principles behind his verse and tragedies and to set the agenda for contemporary culture, Ivanov published many critical essays in the leading periodicals of his day. These studies were widely read and extremely influential; many of them were later collected in his three volumes of essays, published in 1909, 1916 and 1917. He also wrote up his scholarly investigations, sometimes for a specialist audience, but more often in a relatively popular, accessible form. His Paris lectures on Dionysus, for example, formed the basis of the series of essays on the religion of the suffering god that he published with the help of Bryusov and Merezhkovskii in *Novyi put'* (1904) and *Voprosy zhizni* (1905). At the outset of this series, he explained that he had undertaken the study of the cult of Dionysus in order to clarify contemporary religious and philosophical searchings; the final goal of his investigations is reached in the penultimate section of his last article, 'Dionysus and Hellenism – Dionysus and Christianity'. The introduction to Homer's epic verse that he wrote for a new edition of the poet's verse in Russian translation published in 1912 is one more example among many of his skill at presenting his vision of classical antiquity to a contemporary audience.

In all these various ways, through his life-style, lectures, teaching, translations, poetry, tragedies, critical articles and scholarly investigations, Ivanov pursued his agenda of reviving classical antiquity with remarkable dedication. Although he was very successful in his efforts to assimilate the legacy of this tradition into contemporary Russian culture, he did not yet achieve its full integration into a Christian form of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., III, 7.

humanism; as we shall see below, the last phase of this complex process was not initiated until after the Revolution and only completed in emigration.

During the 1900s and 1910s, Ivanov's views attracted many followers but remained rather controversial. Why was it necessary for a true believer in Christ to invoke the mask of Dionysus? This was the question posed by Dimitrii Merezhkovskii in a provocative article questioning the relationship between aestheticism and mysticism, 'Za ili protiv?' (For or Against?, 1904), published in *Novyi put'* alongside one of Ivanov's essays on the cult of Dionysus.<sup>17</sup> At the root of this question lay a deeper one, relating to the religious significance of classical antiquity for Christianity. Why was it necessary to present Hellenism as an alternative 'Old Testament' for Russia? When Ivanov's second collection of essays, *Borozdy i mezhi* (Furrows and Boundaries, 1916) appeared, it attracted some rather critical reviews from a number of leading philosophers and religious thinkers. In his comments on the collection Nikolai Berdyaev accused Ivanov of substituting philology for ontology and of replacing the realities of religion and philosophy with aesthetic and cultural constructs.<sup>18</sup> Lev Shestov, in an ironically entitled article 'Vyacheslav Velikolepnyi' (Vyacheslav the Magnificent, 1916), was even harsher, finding that Ivanov's thought, for all its ornate beauty, suffered from an inherent lack of reality and exhibited classic symptoms of a culture of decadence and decline.<sup>19</sup>

Such reservations did not, however, detract from the enthusiastic and largely uncritical reception that Ivanov's ideas met with among creative artists, writers and poets. It would be impossible, for example, to imagine Aleksandr Blok's Dionysian

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<sup>17</sup> D. M<erezhkovskii>, 'Za ili protiv?', *Novyi put'*, 9, September 1904, 268-72.

<sup>18</sup> Nikolai Berdyaev, 'Ocharovaniya otrazhennykh kul'tur', *Birzhevye vedomosti*, no.15833, 30 September 1916, morning issue, 2-3.

<sup>19</sup> L. Shestov, 'Vyacheslav Velikolepnyi: K kharakteristike russkogo upadochnichestva', *Russkaya mysl'*, no.10, October 1916, 80-110 (second pagination).

verse or Andrei Belyi's novel *Peterburg* (Petersburg) without taking this influence into account.<sup>20</sup> Ivanov's views also found wide support among his fellow classicists. His most ardent advocate in this respect was the above-mentioned Faddei Zelinskii (1859-1944), a prominent classicist of Polish origin, who first met Ivanov at one of his lectures in 1905 and kept up a close relationship with him throughout their years in Russia and later in emigration. In the same year as Berdyaev and Shestov published their critical essays about Ivanov, Zelinskii wrote an article which offered nothing but positive support for the poet's contribution to the revival of classical antiquity in Russia. He began by quoting a passage from an earlier essay of 1899, in which he had advocated the ideal of a 'fusion between the Greek and the Slavonic spirit', based on Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*. At the time he had known nothing of Ivanov's existence, but when *Kormchie Zvezdy* appeared a few years later in 1903, he attributed 'prophetic' significance to his earlier words and welcomed the poet's work as the fulfilment of his ideal.<sup>21</sup>

Zelinskii was the editor of Nietzsche's works in Russian translation and shared Ivanov's enthusiasm for applying Nietzsche's ideas on the revival of the Dionysian spirit to Russia in a religious context. In his comments on *Kormchie Zvezdy* he identified Dionysus as Ivanov's main pilot star and explained his particular way of developing Nietzsche's thought. He gave an enthusiastic appraisal of the Greek motifs in Ivanov's verse and tragedy 'Tantalus', drawing attention to his achievements in reviving ancient Greek forms of versification and to the value of his Symbolist style as the most natural and appropriate form of expression for this 'prophet of Dionysus'. He also highlighted

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<sup>20</sup> On Blok's debt to Ivanov's view of Dionysus, see Pamela Davidson, 'Dionysus and the Demon: Ivanov and Blok on Art as Luciferian', in Sergei Averintsev and Rozemari Tsigler [Rosemarie Ziegler] (eds.), *Vyacheslav Ivanov i ego vremya: Materialy VII Mezhdunarodnogo simpoziuma, Vena 1998* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2002), 175-95. Belyi first read *Peterburg* at the Tower, Ivanov suggested its title to him, and later wrote an influential essay on its Dionysian qualities in 1916.

his transformation of the Russian language through the creation of neologisms, often based on Greek, combined with national Church Slavonic and old Russian folk terms; in his view, Ivanov derived the special strength of his poetic language from his deep knowledge of Dionysian dithyrambic hymns and Aeschylus's tragedies.<sup>22</sup>

In his conclusion Zelinskii returned once more to his earlier article of 1899, reiterating the need for 'the realisation of a third, Slavonic renaissance' of classical antiquity, to follow the first two revivals that had taken place at the time of the Renaissance and later in Germany. He hailed Ivanov as 'one of the heralds of this renaissance', uniquely equipped to carry out this task as a poet and scholar of classical antiquity, whose translations reflected a wonderful synthesis of the poet and philologist.<sup>23</sup> He not only 'read' Ivanov's works entirely in terms of the ideal of a classical revival, he also mapped out his future for him according to this agenda, urging him to follow his calling and to translate Aeschylus into Russian (some years later Ivanov completed this task, leaving Zelinskii to produce verse translations of all of Sophocles's tragedies).

At this point, neither Zelinskii nor Ivanov specified exactly how this projected revival of classical antiquity would fit in with Christianity. Ivanov eventually achieved a fuller integration of classical antiquity into a Christian form of humanism, but this process was a gradual one, involving two further stages. At first, like many intellectuals of the time, responding to the traumatic events of the first world war, Revolution and civil war, he embarked on a full re-examination of the value and purpose of culture in relation to Russia's self-definition as a nation. Later, in the quieter and more settled

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<sup>21</sup> F.F. Zelinskii, 'Vyacheslav Ivanov', in S.A. Vengerov (ed.), *Russkaya literatura XX veka (1890-1910)* (M.: Izdanie T-va 'Mir', 1916), III, viii, 101-13 (102-3).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 109-10.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 113.

years of emigration, he elaborated more detailed responses to these issues within a broader European context.

The first stage is well represented by two key works that Ivanov wrote in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution. In his essay on the crisis of humanism, 'Kruchi' (Steep Slopes, 1919), he noted that a fundamental change in the perception of space and time had taken place, resulting in the historical upheaval of war and Revolution. After surveying the development of humanism in classical antiquity, Christianity and the recent 'Scythian' period, he came to the conclusion that humanism, when defined in purely human terms, deserved to die and was indeed dying. Looking towards the future, he called for a new relationship between the individual and the whole of humanity, understood as a living, spiritual entity, through which individual sin could be redeemed.<sup>24</sup>

If the humanist culture of the past had not always achieved the correct balance between the individual and the divine dimension, what was to be its role in the future? Was it a cumbersome burden to be jettisoned, or a powerful source of future regeneration? In July 1920 Ivanov and his friend the literary critic and philosopher Mikhail Gershenzon found themselves sharing a room in a sanatorium near Moscow and debated this question with considerable passion in an exchange of twelve letters, written from their 'opposite corners'. Gershenzon's longing to rediscover a primeval freshness of spirit, unclouded by the accretions of centuries of culture, led him to advocate a 'tabula rasa' approach to the past. Ivanov countered this by defending the value of culture as a sacred 'thesaurus', a unique repository of national memory, comparable in its spiritual potential to the sacred 'ladder of Jacob'.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Vyacheslav Ivanov, 'Kruchi', in his *Sobranie sochinenii*, III, 365-83 (369, 372, 382).

<sup>25</sup> Vyacheslav Ivanov, 'Perepiska iz dvukh uglov', in his *Sobranie sochinenii*, III, 383-415 (412).



The publication of these letters in Petersburg in 1921 and in Moscow and Berlin in 1922 under the title *Perepiska iz dvukh uglov* (A Correspondence from Two Corners) preserved the spontaneity and authenticity of the original exchange while extending it into the public domain (a similar effect was achieved by Gogol' when he published his *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*). Like the earlier essay 'Kruchi', the correspondence set up the parameters of the debate in a lively, provocative manner without offering any single solution to the many questions it raised. This open-ended quality was undoubtedly part of the reason for its huge appeal and influence in post-war Europe. In 1926 the letters were published in a German translation in Martin Buber's journal *Die Kreatur*, followed by book versions in 1946 and 1948. In 1930 a French translation by H el ene Iswolsky and Charles Du Bos appeared in *Vigile*, accompanied by Ivanov's letter to Charles Du Bos, reproduced in a book edition of 1931 with an introduction by Gabriel Marcel. 1932 saw the publication of an Italian translation, revised by Ivanov and introduced by Ol'ga Deschartes (the pseudonym of his companion Ol'ga Shor). Translations into Spanish (1933), Hebrew (1943), Dutch (1945), and English (1947, 1948, and 1966) followed in rapid succession.<sup>26</sup>

It is interesting to note that the English translation of 1966 appeared in an anthology introduced by Isaiah Berlin, who accompanied Bowra on his first visit to Ivanov in Rome in 1947, as we shall see in Chapter 4. In his comments on the correspondence (described as 'the swan song of the old intelligentsia') he characterised Ivanov as 'a greatly gifted, civilized, and influential symbolist poet, [...] who speaks as a "Hellene" and an heir of Byzantium', and emphasised his search for 'a synthesis of

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<sup>26</sup> For details see Pamela Davidson, *Viacheslav Ivanov: A Reference Guide* (New York: G.K Hall, 1996), xxxviii-xlii.

pagan classicism and Christianity, of Dionysus and Christ, through which the individual, if not the masses, can be transformed and saved.’<sup>27</sup>

Almost all these new editions gave rise to further ‘correspondences’ between Ivanov and the European intellectuals who discovered his work, responded to it with interest, and were often instrumental in arranging its translation or publication. In his exchanges about the correspondence with Martin Buber, Ernst Robert Curtius, Charles Du Bos, and Alessandro Pellegrini, Ivanov developed more detailed answers to the questions posed in the original work and elaborated his understanding of Christian humanism.<sup>28</sup> For example, in his letter of 1930 to Charles Du Bos he explained that the reaffirmation of his Christian faith was his radical response to the question posed to all consciences by the Revolution, ‘Est-on avec nous ou avec Dieu?’, leading him to join the Catholic church in 1926.<sup>29</sup> When Alessandro Pellegrini read the correspondence, he asked Ivanov to define his current view of humanism since its completion; Ivanov responded in his letter on ‘Docta pietas’ (1934) with a much fuller explanation of his understanding of the relationship between humanism and Christianity. Whereas in ‘Kruchi’ he had written of the death of humanism, here he sang the praises of ‘l’umanesimo basato sulla fede in Dio’ (‘humanism, based on faith in God’), arguing that any humanism that deprives man of his spiritual dimension is not true humanism.<sup>30</sup>

In parallel to these theoretical explanations of his new position, Ivanov advanced Dostoevskii as a compelling practical example of his ideal synthesis of classical antiquity and Christian humanism. He reworked his earlier essays on the writer and supervised their translation into German for a book published in 1932; this German

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<sup>27</sup> Isaiah Berlin, ‘Introduction’, in Marc Raeff (ed.), *Russian Intellectual History: An Anthology* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1966), 3-11 (11).

<sup>28</sup> For Ivanov’s correspondence with Buber and Curtius see Michael Wachtel (ed.), *Vjačeslav Ivanov. Dichtung und Briefwechsel aus dem deutschsprachigen Nachlass* (Mainz: Liber Verlag, 1995), 29-76.

<sup>29</sup> Ivanov, ‘Lettre à Charles Du Bos’, III, 424.

edition then formed the basis of the later English translation, published in 1952 with a preface by Bowra. By arguing that Dostoevskii's novels are based on the cathartic principles of Greek tragedy, Ivanov provided an effective means of integrating the religious dimension of classical antiquity into a Christian context with particular relevance to the spiritual path of Russia.

The European editions of Ivanov's correspondence with Gershenzon and his study of Dostoevskii are among his best known works in the West and were extremely influential in spreading his ideas. For an insight into the inner shift and spiritual reorientation that led him to espouse this new form of Christian humanism, we should turn to his less public, more intimate writings. Soon after his conversion to Catholicism in 1926, he wrote a remarkable poem, 'Palinodiya' (Palinode, 1927), in which he posed an unusual question:

Ужели я тебя, Эллада, разлюбил?

Have I really, Hellas, stopped loving you?

In response to this doubt the poet offers a recantation of his previous 'pagan humanism' and describes the inner process that caused him to withdraw from the 'intoxicating sound of subterranean flutes' and to flee the 'ornate temple of demons' for the 'wild honey of silence' in the foothills of the Thebaid. As Ol'ga Deschartes pointed out, this did not lead to a longterm rejection of ancient Greece: the palinode expresses the inner withdrawal and short period of renunciation that were the necessary precondition to the poet's rediscovery of humanism in a Christian spirit as a form of 'docta pietas'.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Venceslao Ivanov, 'Lettera ad Alessandro Pellegrini sopra la "Docta pietas"', in Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, III, 434-48 (438).

<sup>31</sup> For the text of the poem and Deschartes's note see Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, III, 533, 860. For a detailed analysis see Pamela Davidson, 'Hellenism, Culture and Christianity: The Case of Vyacheslav Ivanov and His "Palinode" of 1927', in Peter I. Barta, David H.J. Larmour and Paul Allen Miller (eds.), *Russian Literature and the Classics* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), 83-116.

Zelinskii remained the classical scholar who could best understand and comment on Ivanov's path from pagan to Christian humanism. After the Revolution he settled in Warsaw, met up with Ivanov a few times in Italy, and kept up a busy correspondence with him; forty-two of his letters to Ivanov, written between 1924 and 1940, have survived and were recently published with an interesting introductory article by Elena Takho-Godi. As he observed in a letter to Ivanov of 1933, the main thrust of his scholarly work during this period was to prove his thesis 'that the religion of classical antiquity is the true Old Testament of our Christianity'.<sup>32</sup> In this context he continued to extol Ivanov's achievements as a pioneer of the Slavonic renaissance of classical antiquity. Parts of his original essay of 1916 were recycled in 1926 in his Polish and Italian reviews of Ivanov's study *Dionis i pradionisiistvo* (Dionysus and Pre-Dionysianism, 1923), and again in 1933 and 1934 in further essays on Ivanov, also published in Polish and Italian.<sup>33</sup> These articles played an important role in extending the Slavonic ideal of a classical revival into a wider European context. Despite some of the errors they contained, Ivanov clearly welcomed the continuing support of such a dedicated kindred spirit in emigration. On New Year's Day in 1933 he wrote a second poem to Zelinskii, entitled 'Drugu gumanistu' (To a Humanist Friend), ending with the following stanza:

Друг, наши две судьбы недаром

Связует видимая нить:

Мой дар с твоим широкосветлым даром

Изволилось богам соединить,

Дабы в юнейшем племени заветом

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<sup>32</sup> Elena Takho-Godi, "'Dve sud'by nedarom svyazuet vidimaya nit'" (Pis'ma F.F. Zelinskogo k Vyach. Ivanovu), in Daniela Rizzi and Andrej Shishkin (eds.), *Archivio italo-russo II* (Salerno: Europa Orientalis: 2002), 181-276 (239).

Жил Диониса новый свет...  
Через Альпы, льды сарматские с поэтом  
Перекликается поэт.  
[Friend, our two fates are not in vain  
Linked by a visible thread:  
My talent with your far-reaching lucent talent  
The gods saw fit to join,  
In order that in the youngest tribe as a testament  
The new light of Dionysus should live...  
Across the Alps and Sarmatian ices a poet  
Exchanges calls with another poet.]<sup>34</sup>

Ivanov addressed Zelinskii as a friend, humanist, and fellow poet, in much the same way as he later addressed Bowra in his letters and Latin and Greek poems. Zelinskii was a cognate spirit from the same background, who shared his understanding of the religious significance of the Dionysian revival; in the case of Bowra, however, Ivanov was initiating a dialogue with a stranger, whom he hoped to win round to his position. It was entirely fitting, therefore, that he decided to include his late poem to Zelinskii as well as his 'Palinode' of 1927 in *Svet Vechernii*, the publication of which was made possible by Bowra, another 'humanist friend'.

Ivanov's correspondence with Bowra was divided from his earlier exchanges of the 1920s and 1930s with Buber, Curtius, Du Bos, Pellegrini, and Zelinskii by the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy and the second world war. Between the wars, Ivanov was seen as a Russian European, a survivor of the Revolution and émigré fugitive from an

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<sup>33</sup> For bibliographical details and Russian translations of these essays, see *ibid.*, 186-7, 257-76.

atheist regime, received into a community of religious intellectuals in Europe; after the watershed of the second world war, his teaching on the need to preserve the humanist tradition in a Christian spirit transcended its original Russian context and became even more relevant to Europe as a whole. Although Ivanov was now an old man in his eighties, he once again turned to poetry and correspondence as a means of stitching together the tattered fabric of world humanism. In his late cycle ‘Rimskii dnevnik 1944-go goda’ (Roman Diary of 1944), published in *Svet Vechernii*, several poems revisit the relationship of humanism to Christianity from the vantage point of war. His dialogue with Bowra stands out as a salient example of his return to these themes during the last few twilight years of his long life as a dedicated humanist.

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<sup>34</sup> Ivanov, *Svet Vechernii*, 50 and 192-3 (note); reprinted in Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, III, 530-31 and 837-8 (note). For further background to the poem, see Zelinskii’s letter to Ivanov of 5 April 1933 and the notes in Takho-Godi, “Dve sud’by nedarom svyazuet vidimaya nit’”, 238-40.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Bowra as a Classical Scholar and Literary Critic

Vous êtes justement poète, sans y songer peut-être, incessamment, inconsciemment, lorsque vous composez vos strophes grecques et que vous vous adonnez à des recherches austères, à des analyses critiques, en causant avec des amis aussi bien qu'en vous inspirant (tel un ὑποφῆτης de Delphes) pour interpréter des inspirés.

V.I. Ivanov to C.M. Bowra, December 1947

In the following outline of Bowra's background, personality and scholarly achievements we shall focus on those aspects that were of particular significance in defining his relationship with Ivanov.<sup>1</sup> Bowra was born in 1898 at Kiukiang on the Yangtse and spent the first five years of his life in China, where his father, Cecil Arthur Verner Bowra, worked for the Chinese Customs Service, as had his father before him. He was brought up in a lively international community, in which the Russians outnumbered all other Europeans and Americans and made a lasting impression on him through their extravagant life-style.<sup>2</sup> Although he left China in 1903 and received all his formal education in England, he returned to China twice in 1909 and in 1916 to visit his parents. It seems likely that his later attraction to foreign cultures was fostered by this early contact with an exotic alien environment.

In 1910 at the age of twelve Bowra was sent to Cheltenham College, a rather

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<sup>1</sup> Useful sources on Bowra's life and personality include John Sparrow, 'Bowra, Sir (Cecil) Maurice', in Lord Blake and C.S. Nicholls (eds.), *The Dictionary of National Biography. 1971-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 76-7; C.M. Bowra, *Memories: 1898-1939* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966); The Times, 'A Brilliant Oxford Figure', Isaiah Berlin, 'Memorial Address in St Mary's', Hugh Lloyd-Jones, 'British Academy Memoir', in Hugh Lloyd-Jones (ed.), *Maurice Bowra: A Celebration* (London: Duckworth, 1974), 9-38.

conventional boarding-school with a strong reputation for preparing boys for military careers and drilling them in the classics.<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, given the unusual breadth of his earlier experiences, Bowra did not fit in; he was cramped by the school's irksome restrictions and 'felt abandoned by God and man'.<sup>4</sup> Despite these personal difficulties, he received a thorough grounding in Greek and Latin and won the top scholarship to read classics at New College, Oxford in 1915.<sup>5</sup>

Before Bowra could begin his studies at Oxford, an important episode occurred, which had a considerable bearing on his later interest in Ivanov. In the summer of 1916, while waiting to be called up to the army, he visited his parents in China; on his way back to England via Siberia he stopped over in Petrograd, where he remained for nearly a month until the end of September.<sup>6</sup> He stayed with a well-connected English Russophile, Robert Wilton, in a flat on Pochtamtskaya facing the square before St Isaac's Cathedral. Wilton was a friend of the painter Il'ya Repin, and also knew Kornei Chukovskii, who had spent a few years in London from 1903 to 1904, learning and writing about English literature. Bowra became good friends with Chukovskii and later remained in touch with him through to the 1960s. Although he was disappointed not to meet Chukovskii's famous friend, the 'genius' Mayakovskii, he made many other interesting acquaintances. He greatly enjoyed visiting the Hermitage and exploring the world of painting; he also attended the ballet and the theatre and was particularly overwhelmed by hearing Shalyapin sing. This discovery of the arts took place in the

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<sup>2</sup> Bowra, *Memories*, 2-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 24, 30.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 36, 42.

<sup>6</sup> On Bowra's stay in Petrograd, see *ibid.*, 60-69. Bowra's box of papers in the archive of Wadham College, Oxford contains his passport (no. 254269) with various visas and stamps relating to this visit: 'Travelling to Peking, China via Norway, Sweden and Russia and the Trans-Siberian Railway, Foreign Office, 7 Mar. 1916'; a visa issued by the Russian Consul dated 15/28 April 1916; a stamp fixing the date of Bowra's first arrival in Russia on 1 May 1916; a stamp indicating that he presented his passport for registration (as a student) in Petrograd on 8 September 1916.



company of a Russian friend's sister, to whom he formed a close attachment. In his late *Memories* he offers the following appraisal of this exhilarating time of his life: 'While Russia was sinking into some primeval chaos, Petrograd offered in its theatres what must have been the highest level of the applied arts in the history of man. <...> To enjoy such spectacles in the most delightful company possible was so enthralling that I have never regained its delight.'<sup>7</sup> Coming from a man as cultured as Bowra towards the end of his life, these are high superlatives indeed. Although Ivanov was by this time no longer residing at his famous tower in St. Petersburg, Bowra, at the impressionable age of eighteen, had stepped into his cultural milieu and absorbed its impact. Isaiah Berlin is therefore undoubtedly right to date Bowra's 'life-long interest in Russian poetry' to this visit.<sup>8</sup>

Bowra's memories of his time in Petrograd were later overlaid by the dramatic stories that he heard from an English friend of his father's, Nicholas Gibbes, who lived in Russia before the Revolution and ended his life in Oxford as a Russian Orthodox archimandrite. Gibbes served as tutor to the Tsar's children from 1910, knew Rasputin well, and remained with the family up until the time of their murder in Ekaterinburg after the Revolution.<sup>9</sup> His account of his experiences lent a broader historical dimension to Bowra's own recollections. It is clear that the month that Bowra spent absorbing a sense of 'menacing drama' in the 'superbly inhuman'<sup>10</sup> city of Petrograd on the eve of Revolution amounted to much more than a passing diversion: it was instrumental in forming his lasting commitment to the value and continuity of cultural tradition in the face of historical change and the threat of barbarism – a deep-rooted commitment borne

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<sup>7</sup> Bowra, *Memories*, 68.

<sup>8</sup> Berlin, 'Memorial Address in St Mary's', 19; see also Sparrow, 'Bowra, Sir (Cecil) Maurice', 76: 'That visit sowed the seed of an interest in Russia which flowered later in his studies of the Russian language and Russian literature.'

<sup>9</sup> Bowra, *Memories*, 65-7.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 67, 62.

of personal experience that was also shared by Ivanov.

This awareness was translated into action during the war, aptly characterised by Cyril Connolly as Bowra's 'initiation into life'.<sup>11</sup> Bowra was still eighteen when he was called up at the beginning of 1917 and not yet twenty-one when he was demobilized in February 1919.<sup>12</sup> These were highly impressionable years: as he later recalled in *Memories*, life in the army made him realise the necessity of maintaining some sort of 'inner life'.<sup>13</sup> When the front was quiet, he read the classics (Homer, Virgil, Tacitus), French literature (Anatole France) and modern English poetry (Hardy, Yeats and Eliot) – a poignant image of the 'inner life' mounting its cultural defences against the ravages of war.

We can see, therefore, that even before he began his studies at Oxford, Bowra was already in possession of three abiding elements of his future development: a love of the exotic and foreign, a thorough grounding in the classics, and the seeds of his love of Russian culture. These ingredients combined together to sustain his passion for exploring other cultures, formed the basis of his academic career, and prompted his later attraction to Ivanov.

In April 1919 Bowra went up to New College, Oxford to study 'Greats', a challenging combination of Greek and Latin literature, philosophy and ancient history. His natural wit and talent for conversation led him to become the leader of a brilliant group of students.<sup>14</sup> Although his tutor in philosophy, H.W.B. Joseph, intimidated him and, in Isaiah Berlin's opinion, 'undermined his faith in his own intellectual capacity',<sup>15</sup> he was greatly inspired by the classes of Gilbert Murray, the Regius Professor of Greek,

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<sup>11</sup> Cyril Connolly, 'Hedonist and Stoic', in Lloyd-Jones (ed.), *Maurice Bowra: A Celebration*, 44.

<sup>12</sup> Bowra, *Memories*, 71, 88, 93.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>14</sup> The Times, 'A Brilliant Oxford Figure', 10.

<sup>15</sup> Berlin, 'Memorial Address in St Mary's', 17.

who initiated him into the art of translating English prose and verse into Greek.<sup>16</sup> As we shall see below, Murray's impact was long-lasting and can be traced in Bowra's later exchanges on the art of translation with Ivanov.

In 1922, immediately upon graduation Bowra was elected to a tutorial fellowship in classics at Wadham College; this was followed by his appointment in October 1931 as University Lecturer in Greek history.<sup>17</sup> From now until his death in 1971, he devoted his formidable energies to all aspects of his academic position at Oxford: to his research, students, colleagues, College and University. His distinguished career was marked by a series of professional triumphs. Although he was disappointed not to be elected to the Regius Professorship of Greek when Gilbert Murray retired in 1936, consolation followed swiftly when he was elected Warden of Wadham College in 1938 at the remarkably early age of forty. He was such a popular Warden that his appointment was extended after he reached seventy, the usual age of retirement.<sup>18</sup> From 1946 to 1951, he occupied the prestigious Oxford Chair of Poetry; in 1951 he was knighted; from 1951 to 1954 he was Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University and from 1958 to 1962 President of the British Academy. He was also a Delegate of the Clarendon Press (a position which enabled him to facilitate the publication of Ivanov's late collection of verse *Svet Vechernii*).

For all his remarkable administrative talents, Bowra did not allow his academic interests to become eroded by these public appointments. He maintained an impressive output of scholarly publications, amounting to nearly thirty books over some forty years. His publications fall into two principal categories: studies, editions and translations of classical literature, for which his education had groomed him, and critical investigations

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<sup>16</sup> Bowra, *Memories*, 109-10.

<sup>17</sup> Bowra's papers, WCA, contain his contract for this appointment, dated 30 October 1931.

<sup>18</sup> Lloyd-Jones, 'British Academy Memoir', 35.

of modern European literature, which grew out of his broader cultural interests. His first book in the field of classical studies was his translation into free verse of Pindar's *Pythian Odes* (1928); this was followed by *The Oxford Book of Greek Verse* (1930), edited with Gilbert Murray and others, an edition of Pindar's verse *Pindari Carmina* (1935) and *The Oxford Book of Greek Verse in Translation* (1938). His studies of classical authors include *Tradition and Design in the Iliad* (1930), *Greek Lyric Poetry* (1936), *Early Greek Elegists* (1938), *Sophoclean Tragedy* (1944) and *Pindar* (1964) – a prolific range of publications sustained all the way through to the last years of his life.

Throughout the 1930s, Bowra also continued to develop his parallel interest in modern European literature. He produced a number of essays and translations for the periodical press. In 1932, for example, he published an essay on Blok, including his translations of the poet's verse.<sup>19</sup> To check these translations he enlisted the help of a remarkable Russian-speaking undergraduate, Isaiah Berlin, who subsequently became a life-long friend and accompanied him on his first visit to Ivanov in 1947.<sup>20</sup> His fascination with Russian poetry led to the compilation of *A Book of Russian Verse* (1943), for which he prepared his first three translations of Ivanov. His first published book of criticism on modern European literature was his well-known study of post-Symbolist poetry *The Heritage of Symbolism* (1943), consisting of five chapters on Valéry, Rilke, Stefan George, Blok and Yeats, based on earlier essays written for personal enjoyment during the 1930s.<sup>21</sup> In *From Virgil to Milton* (1945) he studied the literary epic in the works of Virgil, Tasso, Camões and Milton. These last two books

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<sup>19</sup> C.M. Bowra, 'The Position of Alexander Blok', in *Criticism*, xi, 44, April 1932, 422-38, cited in Michael Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (London: Vintage, 2000), 310.

<sup>20</sup> For an amusing account of Isaiah Berlin's first meeting with Bowra in 1931 and of their disagreement over a point of ornithological translation, see Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life*, 51.

<sup>21</sup> See the preface, dated 23 October 1942, in C.M. Bowra, *The Heritage of Symbolism* (London: Macmillan, 1943), v. For an account of Yeats's reaction to the chapter on his verse, first written in 1934, see Bowra, *Memories*, 240-41.

made possible his election to the Oxford Chair of Poetry in 1946.<sup>22</sup> As we shall see below, Bowra sent all three books to Ivanov, who responded with interesting comments on each. In 1948 he published *A Second Book of Russian Verse*, including two new translations of Ivanov. In *The Creative Experiment* (1948) he continued to pursue his interest in Russian poetry, comprising studies of Mayakovskii and Pasternak alongside Cavafy, Apollinaire, Eliot, Lorca and Alberti. In *The Romantic Imagination* (1950) he published his lectures on the English Romantic poets, delivered during his second stay at Harvard in 1948-49. His next work, *Heroic Poetry* (1952), dedicated to Isaiah Berlin, provided an ambitious anatomy of heroic poetry, based on the comparative study of ancient and modern heroic verse, including Slavonic works. In *Inspiration and Poetry* (1955) he analysed the treatment of inspiration in the verse of a wide range of poets, including Horace, Dante, Milton, Hölderlin, Pushkin, Lermontov and Thomas Hardy.

Both strands of publications reflect Bowra's constant endeavour to 'revive for the modern world the inner life of the Greeks' and of other cultures, whether through scholarly editions, translations or more popular works.<sup>23</sup> Although his output was prolific, his textual scholarship has been criticised,<sup>24</sup> and his writing has been described as 'flat, pedestrian, lucid, well-ordered, but, at times, conventional'.<sup>25</sup> Most memoirists agree that Bowra's written work did not live up to the charismatic brilliance and wit which revealed themselves in his personal letters, private verse, and above all in his conversation. As Isaiah Berlin wrote, 'those who know him solely through his published works can have no inkling of his genius'.<sup>26</sup> It is certainly clear from Ivanov's correspondence with Bowra that their two meetings in 1947 and 1948 played a more

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<sup>22</sup> Lloyd-Jones, 'British Academy Memoir', 31.

<sup>23</sup> Bowra, *Memories*, 257.

<sup>24</sup> Lloyd-Jones, 'British Academy Memoir', 28.

<sup>25</sup> Berlin, 'Memorial Address in St Mary's', 18.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

important role in the development of their friendship than all the publications they exchanged.

Although Bowra was in many ways a typical Oxford figure and is often cast as such, it is important to remember that he far exceeded the usual boundaries of the conventional academic role. He has been characterised as a ‘deeply romantic’ ‘poet manque’, as an ‘open rebel’ and as a ‘a major liberating influence’.<sup>27</sup> As John Finley, a friend and fellow classicist from Harvard, put it in his tribute: ‘Though he became a fine flower of the English education and admired its niceties, he was not in imagination essentially formed, much less confined, by these.’<sup>28</sup>

We can see, therefore, that at the time of his first encounter with Ivanov, Bowra was already an extremely distinguished figure: an accomplished classical scholar and literary critic, with an impressive range of publications (twelve books by the age of forty-seven in 1945), an established authority on classical and modern poetry, recognized through his appointment to the Oxford Chair of Poetry in 1946, and a prominent and influential figure in academic life at Oxford University. In all these three areas of accomplishment he had a great deal to offer Ivanov. In terms of academic and literary interests, the two men had much in common. They had both been trained as classical scholars and shared a passion for ancient Greece, which they expressed in their scholarly work and translations of ancient Greek poetry. In some areas their work overlapped very closely; it is remarkable, for example, that their first publications in this field were translations of Pindar's odes (Ivanov's version of Pindar's first Pythian ode appeared in 1899, Bowra's *Pythian Odes* were published in 1928). We know from Bowra's letter to Ivanov of 19 September 1948, written on the eve of his departure for

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<sup>27</sup> Connolly, ‘Hedonist and Stoic’, Lloyd-Jones, ‘British Academy Memoir’, Berlin, ‘Memorial Address in St Mary’s’, 45-6, 35, 18, respectively.

<sup>28</sup> John H. Finley Jr, ‘Maurice in America: I’, in Lloyd-Jones (ed.), *Maurice Bowra: A Celebration*, 113.

the United States, that he discussed Pindar with Ivanov during their second meeting in August 1948 and received welcome encouragement from him over his forthcoming Pindar studies.<sup>29</sup> They also both translated the poetry of Alcaeus; indeed, Bowra even possessed a copy of the rare 1914 edition of Ivanov's translations from Alcaeus and Sappho.<sup>30</sup>

Their tastes in modern poetry overlapped in several areas. Bowra's fascination with Symbolism and its legacy naturally brought him closer to the sphere of Ivanov's interests. This is reflected in the contents of *The Heritage of Symbolism*, which includes chapters on three poets who had a great deal in common with Ivanov: Blok, Yeats, and Stefan George. Blok was Ivanov's close friend and fellow Symbolist, and Yeats shared Ivanov's fascination with the poetic uses of myth (this was presumably why Gumilev saw fit to describe Yeats as an 'English Vyacheslav' to Akhmatova before setting off to meet him in 1917).<sup>31</sup> Stefan George promoted a mystical, hieratic view of poetry not unlike Ivanov's brand of religious Symbolism; he was also regarded as 'the Master' by his devoted disciples, in the same way as Ivanov was cast in the role of 'Uchitel' (Teacher) by his followers in Russia. Ivanov was an ardent admirer of George's verse and was frequently compared to him by his contemporaries and later readers, both Russian and German; the German poet Johannes Von Guenther, who attended the literary gatherings at the Tower and translated Ivanov's verse into German, did much

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<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 5, letter 11.

<sup>30</sup> *Alkei i Safo: Sobranie pesen i liricheskikh otryvkov v perevode razmerami podlinnikov Vyach. Ivanova so vstupitel'nom ocherkom ego-zhe* (M.: Izdanie M. i S. Sabashnikovyx, 1914). A copy of this book is held in Wadham College library, marked with a sticker 'Ex libris Maurice Bowra'; it is listed B1942 from the list of roughly 2500 books owned by Bowra that were taken into the College library after his death in 1971. As Ivanov's correspondence with Bowra contains no mention of this book, and as it is unlikely that he would have had a spare copy to send to Bowra from Rome, we can assume that Bowra acquired the book through other channels.

<sup>31</sup> N.S. Gumilev, Letter to A.A. Akhmatova of <June 1917>, in M.S. Lesman (ed.), *Knigi i ruskopisi v sobranii M.S. Lesmana: Annotirovannyi katalog. Publikatsii* (M.: Kniga, 1989), 370.

to promote this analogy.<sup>32</sup> Bowra knew George's poetry very well and once glimpsed him in Heidelberg. He was a close friend of a member of George's circle, the German-Jewish historian Ernst Kantorowicz, who came to Oxford as a refugee in 1934 (when Isaiah Berlin introduced him to Bowra) and then moved to America. Through Kantorowicz, Bowra met Ernst Morwitz, the central surviving member of the George circle, in Berlin in 1934, as well as other disciples of the Master.<sup>33</sup> It is very likely that his close acquaintance with George's writings and followers influenced his later perception of Ivanov. Given these various areas of close overlap, it comes as no surprise to find that Ivanov read the copy of *The Heritage of Symbolism* sent to him by Bowra in 1947 with great interest and responded in detail on several points related to the origins and character of Symbolism.<sup>34</sup>

Underlying these shared academic and literary concerns, there was a further, somewhat elusive but, in the final analysis, highly significant dimension, which goes a long way towards explaining the dynamics of this unusual relationship. Ivanov and Bowra both shared a similar temperament, characterised by an unusual combination of scholarly erudition with a highly romantic (and at times subversive) poetic disposition. Ivanov was quick to recognize this duality in Bowra; in the draft of a letter to him written soon after their first meeting, he commented on his discovery of the poet behind the mask of the scholar: 'Je crois avoir découvert la clé de l'énigme: vous êtes poète. Poète lorsque vous êtes philologue, poète dans vos explorations et dans vos essais – et surtout quand vous avez affaire à d'autres poètes pour les transposer en anglais.'<sup>35</sup>

Ivanov, whose scholarship and translations were always informed by his poetic

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<sup>32</sup> See Michael Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition: Goethe, Novalis, and the Poetics of Vyacheslav Ivanov* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 16-17.

<sup>33</sup> See Bowra, *Memories*, 286-91, 294. Bowra's papers, WCA, contain an interesting collection of Kantorowicz's letters to him from America.

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter 5, letter 9.

<sup>35</sup> Draft of letter 9 in Chapter 5, note 73.



intuitions, was able to recognize in Bowra characteristics that he himself possessed to a high degree.

In one respect only Bowra and Ivanov were poles apart. As a highly effective administrator, Bowra had the practical know-how and influence that Ivanov, living in emigration in Italy, manifestly lacked. And yet, it was precisely this area of difference, taken in conjunction with their common intellectual interests and literary tastes, that provided the relationship with its practical *raison d'être*; Bowra's talents and energies as a man of action enabled him to gain an *entrée* into Ivanov's life and to play a crucial role in the late stages of his literary endeavours.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Bowra's Translations of Ivanov

Vous êtes confident de ma Muse, dont vous avez porté en Angleterre les premiers échos. <...> Vos traductions de lyriques russes sont autant précises que musicales, et je suis fier de trouver parmi elles mes rimes transposées très heureusement par vous.

V.I. Ivanov to C.M. Bowra, December 1947

Bowra's first encounter with Ivanov was as a reader and translator of his verse.

According to his earliest letter to Ivanov, written on 1 September 1946, he discovered the poet's books in the London Library in 1941 and was immediately captivated by them, especially by *Cor Ardens*, admiring the fine artistry, wisdom, and great talent that 'burns' throughout them.<sup>1</sup> He added that he had attempted to render three of Ivanov's poems into English but remained uncertain about the results. Surprisingly, however, he entirely omitted to mention that these three translations had in fact already been published three years earlier in his *Book of Russian Verse*.

Bowra's anthology grew out of his great personal enthusiasm for Russian poetry, kindled during his visit to Petrograd in 1916 and developed throughout the 1930s. Its publication in 1943 was evidently also linked to the general move to develop Anglo-Russian cultural relations during the war-time alliance. Numerous English translations of Russian poetry were included, for example, in *Britanskii soyuznik* (The British Ally), the popular weekly paper produced in Russian by the British Embassy in

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 2 in Chapter 5.

Moscow during the war years.<sup>2</sup> The anthology compiled by Bowra was substantial and varied; it included over one hundred-and-fifty poems, starting with Pushkin's 'The Prophet' and closing with Mayakovskii's 'Our March'. Of the twenty-seven poets represented, fourteen were chosen from the twentieth century: Annenskii, Sologub, Ivanov, Bal'mont, Bryusov, Blok, Khodasevich, Gumilev, Akhmatova, Mandel'shtam, Pasternak, Esenin, Kazin, and Mayakovskii. These poets were all represented by one to five poems, apart from Blok who received a more generous allocation of seventeen poems. About half the translations, particularly from the later poets, were Bowra's own work; as he commented in the preface: 'it was not my first intention to add many pieces of my own, but I seemed forced to do so by a desire to make the book really representative.'<sup>3</sup>

From today's perspective, it is difficult to appreciate the originality and full impact of Bowra's collection when it was first published. At a time when the criteria for evaluating the literary standing of Russian writers were becoming increasingly confused and distorted by political considerations, a publication appearing in the West could play a vital role in establishing reputations and giving writers a sense that their voices were still heard and valued. As evidence of the powerful impact of Bowra's anthology, it is worth citing the reactions of a well-known contemporary Russian poet. In November 1945, when Boris Pasternak first came across the book and found among its pages Bowra's translation of Mandel'shtam's 'Tristia', followed by one of

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<sup>2</sup> The classicist N.N. Kazanskii recalled having a teacher in the 1940s, who lovingly preserved a whole series of issues of this paper; private communication to the author, St. Petersburg, 2002. When Bowra's friend Isaiah Berlin arrived in Moscow on 8 September 1945, he attended a dinner hosted by the British Embassy in celebration of the third anniversary of *Britanskii soyuznik*; among the guests were J.B. Priestley, Lina Prokof'ev, Aleksandr Tairov, Sergei Eisenstein, and Kornei Chukovskii (whom Bowra had met in Petrograd in 1916). See Isaiah Berlin, 'Meetings with Russian Writers in 1945 and 1956', in his *Personal Impressions*, ed. Henry Hardy, with an introduction by Noel Annan (London: The Hogarth Press, 1980), 163-6, and Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life*, 135-6.

<sup>3</sup> C.M. Bowra (ed.), *A Book of Russian Verse*, tr. into English by various hands (London: Macmillan, 1943), v.

his own poems, he was immediately prompted to write to the poet's widow:

Вы, наверное, ищите повода, послужившего толчком к такому  
неурочному письму? Вот он: в русской антологии издательства  
Macmillan and Co° под редакцией Оксфордск.<ого> проф.<ессора>  
древн.<ей> греч.<еской> литературы <...> С.М. Bowra напечатаны Tristia  
Ос.<ипа> Эмильевича. В слезах переписываю Вам первую строфу (по-  
моему, хорошо; перевел этот самый Боура).

[You are probably searching for the reason that has served to trigger such an  
untimely letter? Here it is: Osip Emil'evich's 'Tristia' have appeared in a  
Russian anthology published by Macmillan and Co., edited by the Oxford  
professor of ancient Greek literature <...> C.M. Bowra. In tears I copy out for  
you the first stanza (in my opinion it's good; it was translated by the same  
Bowra).] <sup>4</sup>

Pasternak's tears were presumably tears of joy, in recognition of  
Mandel'shtam's 'survival' in the pages of this anthology after his disappearance from  
the pages of official Soviet literary history in 1938. In this context the first stanza of  
Mandel'shtam's tragically prescient poem of 1918 must have had a special resonance  
for both Pasternak and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam: in Bowra's translation, transcribed  
in the letter, it opens with the line 'I've studied all the lore of separation' and closes  
'And women's weeping joined the Muse's songs.'

In the following month, in a letter written in December 1945 to his sisters in  
Oxford, Pasternak described Bowra's translations as 'astonishing' and explained at  
some length how such small pockets of recognition created a 'крошечный уголок'

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<sup>4</sup> Letter to N.Ya. Mandel'shtam of <November 1945>, in Boris Pasternak, *Sobranie sochinenii v pyati tomakh*, ed. E.V. Pasternak and K.M. Polivanov, 5 vols. (M.: Khudozhestvennaya literature, 1992), V, 435.

(tiny little corner): 'это <...> точки чудодейственного какого-то, необъяснимого моего соприкосновенья с судьбою и временем, это мистерия или роман, который мог бы дать много пищи для суеверья' [they are <...> points of some sort of miracle-working, inexplicable encounter of mine with fate and time, they are a mystery or a novel, which could give much food for superstition]. Living in the 'sober, cold Soviet era', he had 'never imagined that all this could still be possible'.<sup>5</sup>

Pasternak was even moved to write direct to his translator. In an unpublished letter to Bowra of 25 December 1945 he expressed his joy and gratitude over the response brought to him by fate:

Dear, dear Mr Bowra,

I lack words and knowledge even for an ordinary English letter. How should I find means to represent my admiration and gratitude to you! When I read in your beautiful "Heritage of Symbolism" your admirable lines about Rilke and Blok, when afterwards I saw your deep, exact and melodious translations of the Twelve, I dreamed. Would this man (this Bowra) ever hear of me, could I some day attract his high attention, and, perhaps, deserve his recognition! And, on a sudden, these wonderful, incomparable translations!!

If once I knew that the fate will give me such sort of response, the anticipation of it would restrain me from many excesses, from which no power of tradition or of contemporaneity could withhold me, as I was young.<sup>6</sup>

If Bowra's translations could elicit such strong reactions from a poet as well-known as Pasternak, it is not difficult to imagine the response of other less well-known

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<sup>5</sup> Letter to Zh.L. and L.L. Pasternak of <December 1945>, in Pasternak, *Sobranie sochinenii*, V, 443. Four years later Pasternak developed similar feelings in a letter of 7 August 1949 to his cousin Ol'ga Freidenberg; see Pasternak, *Sobranie sochinenii*, V, 478.

<sup>6</sup> WCA, Bowra's papers. Manuscript, purple ink, one sheet; no envelope. Pasternak's reference to Bowra's 'translations' (in the plural) must include the translations of his work that Bowra also published in *Horizon*, since his anthology only contains one poem by Pasternak in his translation ('In the breeze, on a bough...').

poets. For Ivanov, whose following and reputation in emigration were based more on his philosophical and literary essays than on his poetry, the discovery that his early verse was read and translated in England must have come as a very welcome surprise. It was in fact somewhat astonishing that Bowra should have included three poems by this largely forgotten poet in his anthology. What prompted his choice? Was it really just the result of a chance discovery while browsing along the Russian literature shelves of the London Library, as his letter to Ivanov would seem to suggest? Or had his attention already been drawn to Ivanov by other sources? He might well have come across the thought-provoking discussion of Ivanov's verse in D.S. Mirsky's pioneering study, *Contemporary Russian Literature: 1881-1925* (published in 1926, this was the first account of Ivanov's work to appear in English in a book).<sup>7</sup> He is even more likely to have read about Ivanov in Vladimir Pozner's *Panorama de la littérature russe contemporaine* (1929), as he owned a copy of this book; Pozner's account emphasizes Ivanov's background as a scholar of classical antiquity, the dry, academic side of his poetic universe, and his bookish use of Greek mythology.<sup>8</sup> Bowra's personal library, preserved in Wadham College, also contains a beautifully bound copy of *Russkii Parnass* (Russian Parnassus), an anthology of Russian verse published in Leipzig around 1920, including eleven poems by Ivanov; the last of these poems, 'Put' v Emmaus' (The Road to Emmaus), is marked by hand with a dash in the table of contents and was chosen by Bowra for translation and inclusion in his book of Russian verse.<sup>9</sup>

Bowra may also have sampled Ivanov's poetry in English translation from some

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<sup>7</sup> D.S. Mirsky, *Contemporary Russian Literature: 1881-1925* (New York: Knopf, 1926), 205-9, 353-4. Mirsky also published a few earlier articles on Ivanov in *The London Mercury* in the 1920s. For a chronological account of criticism of Ivanov, see Davidson, *Viacheslav Ivanov: A Reference Guide*.

<sup>8</sup> Vladimir Pozner, *Panorama de la littérature russe contemporaine* (Paris: Editions KRA, 1929), 184-9. The copy in Wadham College library from Bowra's library, numbered B2928, was purchased in Oxford from B.H. Blackwell.

of the existing anthologies of Russian verse, such as those compiled by P. Selver, B. Deutsch and A. Yarmolinsky, and C.F. Coxwell, published between 1919 and 1929.<sup>10</sup> Ivanov was most fully represented in the popular anthology compiled by Deutsch and Yarmolinsky, first published in 1923 and reprinted in several further editions. It is interesting to note that four of the nine poems by Ivanov included in this collection were also subsequently translated by Bowra for his two anthologies; considering that Bowra only translated a total of five poems by Ivanov, this is a surprising degree of coincidence, suggesting the possibility of direct influence.

In addition to these published sources, Bowra's attention may well have been drawn to Ivanov's verse by a personal contact. At the end of his preface to *A Book of Russian Verse*, dated June 1943, he thanked 'above all' Professor Sergei Konovalov, 'who has lent me books otherwise unobtainable and devoted much of his valuable time to removing my grosser mistakes and helping me from his great knowledge.'<sup>11</sup> Konovalov's role may have included recommending particular poets (such as Ivanov) for inclusion in the anthology. Although this is only a conjecture, it fits with the fact that Konovalov later put Ivanov in touch with Bowra; as we shall see in Chapter 4, in 1945 he advised Ivanov to make direct contact with Bowra, recommending him as an influential and well-disposed person who might be able to facilitate the publication of the poet's late verse.

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<sup>9</sup> Aleksandr and David Elyasberg, (eds.), *Russkii Parnass* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, <1920>), 222-9. Bowra's copy, bound in Oxford, is now in Wadham College library, numbered B1954, with a sticker 'Ex libris Maurice Bowra'.

<sup>10</sup> For a selection of translations of poems by Ivanov available in earlier anthologies, see 'The Maenad', in P. Selver (tr.), *Anthology of Modern Slavonic Literature in Prose and Verse* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1919), 197-8; 'The Catch', 'Autumn', 'Fountain', 'The Seeking of Self', 'Complaint', 'Narcissus: A Pompeian Bronze', 'Funeral', 'The Holy Rose', 'Nomads of Beauty', in Babette Deutsch and Avrahm Yarmolinsky (eds. and trs.), *Modern Russian Poetry: An Anthology* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, <1923>), 98-108; 'Far Distances', 'Autumn', 'Repining', 'The Dawn of Love', in C. Fillingham Coxwell (tr.), *Russian Poems*, with an introduction by Prince Mirsky (London: The C.W. Daniel Company, 1929), 198-9. Surprisingly, Ivanov's verse was not included in Maurice Baring (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Russian Verse*, with notes by D.S. Mirsky (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924).

<sup>11</sup> Bowra (ed.), *A Book of Russian Verse*, v.

Of the five poems by Ivanov translated by Bowra, three appeared in his first *Book of Russian Verse* (1943) and two in *A Second Book of Russian Verse* (1948). The first poem was taken from Ivanov's second collection, *Prozrachnost'* (1904), while the remaining four all came from part one of his fourth collection, *Cor Ardens* (1911). This limited range of sources may be explained by the fact that these were the only volumes of Ivanov's poetry held in the London Library, where Bowra first came across his verse; he did not acquire these books for his own library until 1946.<sup>12</sup>

From these two collections Bowra picked out a range of poems, distinguished by the simplicity of their tone rather than by the complex use of classical themes (a dominant feature of both volumes, which one might have expected Bowra as a fellow classicist to highlight). For his first anthology, he chose 'Kochevniki Krasoty' (translated as 'Beauty's Nomads'), a well-known programmatic poem addressed to artists, portrayed as the untamed nomads of the wild steppes. Next came 'Ropot' (translated as 'Complaint'), a short poem of intense metaphysical anguish, describing the unsatisfied longings and solitude of the soul. The third and closing poem, 'Put' v Emmaus' (translated as 'The Road to Emmaus'), deals with the triumph of spiritual life over death through the prism of the apostles' meeting with the resurrected Jesus on their way to Emmaus.<sup>13</sup>

The first anthology was clearly extremely successful, for it was reprinted

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<sup>12</sup> See letter 4 in Chapter 5. After Bowra's death in 1971, members of the College were invited to help themselves to a few items from his extensive collection of books, before it was absorbed into the library of Wadham College. In this way Timothy Binyon, a fellow of the College and specialist in Russian Symbolism, acquired Bowra's copies of Ivanov's *Prozrachnost'* (1904), *Cor Ardens I, II* (1911-12), and also of *Mladenchestvo* (1918), *Prometei* (1919), and *Chelovek* (1939). None of these books bear any marks or inscriptions from Ivanov to Bowra. The edition of *Prometei* has the inscription 'Aleksei Narskii. Moskva. 6.III.42', which suggests that this book (as well as the others) may have been acquired secondhand, possibly by Isaiah Berlin, who received extensive book-shopping lists from Bowra when he travelled to Russia (private communications of T.J. Binyon to the author, July and August 2002). Other books by Ivanov from Bowra's library (with and without inscriptions) passed into Wadham College library.

<sup>13</sup> For the translations, see Bowra (ed.), *A Book of Russian Verse*, 86-8. For the original texts, see Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, I, 778, and II, 370, 264.



(unchanged) in 1947 and then followed by *A Second Book of Russian Verse* (1948). In this completely new sequel Bowra included a similar number of poems (one-hundred and sixty) but almost doubled the number of poets (from twenty-seven to forty-nine), adding several new authors from the pre-Pushkin and most recent periods. Ivanov was represented by two further poems from the same sections of *Cor Ardens* as before. The first poem, 'Ulov' (translated as 'Now the golden leaves have been beggared...'), combines great lyrical beauty with profound religious feeling; it likens an autumnal wood, stripped of its leaves, to a stone cathedral, and presents the poet's song in this context as a hymn to nature, which can only give partial witness to the presence of the divine on earth. The second poem, 'Simposion III. Pokhorony' (translated as 'Funerals'), offers a more detached philosophical meditation on the relation between the funeral of the soul's unrequited love and the resurrecting power of Eros.<sup>14</sup>

Ivanov's poetry is renowned for its complexity, and one might well marvel at Bowra's enterprise in undertaking these translations, particularly given his limited knowledge of Russian. In the preface to *The Heritage of Symbolism*, dated October 1942, he confessed quite candidly: 'I can make no pretence to have a good knowledge of Russian <...> and I may well have made mistakes.'<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in the introduction to *A Book of Russian Verse*, he noted: 'I have no claims to be a Russian scholar.'<sup>16</sup> In both his anthologies of Russian poetry he made a point of underlining the considerable help he had received from various quarters. In the preface to the first book, he thanks Professor V. De S. Pinto, John Betjeman ('in the intricacies of English composition') and S. Konovalov. In the preface to the second book the names change: 'My own

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<sup>14</sup> For the translations, see C.M. Bowra (ed.), *A Second Book of Russian Verse*, tr. into English by various hands (London: Macmillan, 1948), 58. According to Bowra's preface, some of the translations included in this anthology were first published in the journals *Horizon*, *Orion*, and *Mandrake*. For the original texts from *Cor Ardens*, Part 1, Books 1 and 3, see Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, 280-1, 375-6.

<sup>15</sup> Bowra, *The Heritage of Symbolism*, v.

<sup>16</sup> Bowra (ed.), *A Book of Russian Verse*, v.

versions would be worse than they are but for kind help from Mr. I. Berlin and Dr. S. Rachmilevitsch.<sup>17</sup> Bowra clearly had some Russian, but the manner of its acquisition and its precise level remain something of a mystery. Did he pick up the language during the few months he spent in Petersburg in 1916? Did he perhaps take lessons later in Oxford or attempt to teach himself? He does not write about this in his *Memories*, nor do the published memoirs of his contemporaries cast any light on the subject.<sup>18</sup> My own attempts to find out from witnesses how good his Russian was have yielded two results, suggesting that his ability to memorise literary texts far exceeded his grasp of the living language. Isaiah Berlin, describing to me the occasion when he accompanied Bowra on his first visit to Ivanov in Rome in 1947, recalled that Bowra conversed with Ivanov in French, as his spoken Russian was very poor.<sup>19</sup> Timothy Binyon, a former Fellow of Wadham College and Tutor in Russian, informed me that in later years Bowra could quote Russian poetry from memory at great length, though in rather a strange accent, and remembered Bowra reciting to him occasionally in the College common-room after dinner (possibly a long passage from Lermontov's 'Mtsyri').<sup>20</sup>

How, therefore, did Bowra approach the task of translating Ivanov? His general method as a translator was strongly influenced by the classes given by Murray on translation from Greek that he had attended as an undergraduate in Oxford; as Isaiah Berlin perceptively commented, Bowra 'virtually alone in England happily (and successfully) parsed the obscurest lines of modern Russian poets as he did the verse of

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<sup>17</sup> Bowra (ed.), *A Book of Russian Verse*, v; Bowra (ed.), *A Second Book of Russian Verse*, v.

<sup>18</sup> Apart from Ivanov's daughter, who comments in her memoirs that Bowra 'knew Russian well'. Lidiya Ivanova, *Vospominaniya. Kniga ob ottse*, ed. John Malmstad (Paris: Atheneum, 1990), 293.

<sup>19</sup> Personal communication to the author from Isaiah Berlin, All Souls College, Oxford, 26 November 1980.

<sup>20</sup> Personal communication to the author from T.J. Binyon, July and August 2002. Most sadly, Timothy Binyon died unexpectedly on 8 October 2004. According to his obituary, Bowra 'bid' for him to become a Fellow of Wadham in 1968 and was his chief mentor when he began teaching at the College (Paul Levy, *The Independent*, 13 October 2004).

Pindar or Alcaeus.’<sup>21</sup> In his brief foreword to Sir Cecil Kisch's bilingual anthology of nineteenth-century Russian poetry, published in 1947, Bowra offered a simple and clear definition of his approach to the art of translation: ‘There are many ways of translating poetry, and one of the most interesting ways is that which keeps as closely as possible to the meaning and the metre of the original text. This method allows us to see what the poet really said and into what form he cast his thoughts.’ It is clear from his comments that he placed a high value on ‘great accuracy’ in conveying both the meaning and the form of the original poems, and was sensitive to the difficulty of rendering ‘the ease and simplicity of Russian poetry’ in English.<sup>22</sup> In *A Book of Russian Verse* his stated aim was ‘to give a representative selection of short Russian poems in translations as faithful and as readable as can be found’ with versions that follow ‘not only the sense but the metres of the originals’.<sup>23</sup>

To see how well Bowra succeeded in meeting these goals, we shall consider two of his translations from Ivanov’s verse. The first example, ‘Complaint’, was singled out by Ivanov as his favourite translation when he eventually received a copy of Bowra's first anthology in 1947, four years after its first publication.<sup>24</sup>

#### Complaint

Thy soul, unhearing and unspeaking,  
In its dark forest droops to sleep,  
Where droves of dark desires are breaking  
And through the tangled brushwood sweep.

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<sup>21</sup> Berlin, ‘Memorial Address in St Mary’s’, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Cecil Kisch, tr., *The Waggon of Life and Other Lyrics by Russian Poets of the Nineteenth Century*, with a foreword by Dr C.M. Bowra (London: Cresset Press, 1947), xi.

<sup>23</sup> Bowra (ed.), *A Book of Russian Verse*, v.

<sup>24</sup> See draft of letter 9 in Chapter 5, note 73.

To guide thee where the stars are keeping  
My home, I made a flame burn bright;  
In empty brake, in forest sleeping,  
I sowed the torch's seed of light.

I shine, I cry to pathless spaces;  
In silence the numb thickets brood.  
Neither with men nor God thy place is,  
Soul, hidden in thy solitude.<sup>25</sup>

#### Ропот

Твоя душа глухонемая  
В дремучие поникла сны,  
Где бродят, заросли ломая,  
Желаний темных табуны.

Принес я светоч неистомный  
В мой звездный дом тебя манить,  
В глуши пустынной, в пуще дремной  
Смолистый сев похоронить.

Свечу, кричу на бездорожья;  
А вокруг немеет, зов глуша,  
Не по-людски и не по-божьи

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<sup>25</sup> Bowra (ed.), *A Book of Russian Verse*, 87.

## Уединенная душа.<sup>26</sup>

A close comparison of the translation with the original reveals that Bowra was remarkably successful; although the second quatrain differs in some respects from the original, as a whole his translation captures the spirit of Ivanov's poem, while preserving its iambic metre and alternating feminine-masculine rhymes. In this way, through the prism of another language and another culture, Bowra provided a faithful echo of Ivanov's poignant cry on the loneliness of the soul, some thirty-five years after its first publication.

The second example, 'The Road to Emmaus', has been chosen because this poem was evidently a particular favourite of Bowra's. We have already noted that it was marked by him in his copy of the anthology *Russkii Parnass*; more significantly, perhaps, it is the only work by Ivanov to be included in a bound collection of typed poems, assembled by Bowra towards the end of his life and recently discovered in Wadham College.<sup>27</sup>

### The Road to Emmaus

Now has the third day's red sail come

To haven on its westering way;

In the soul – Golgotha, the tomb,

Dispute, and riot, and dismay.

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<sup>26</sup> Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, 370.

<sup>27</sup> In 2004 two bound books of poems collected by Bowra were discovered by Cliff Davies in the library of Wadham College, Oxford, and added to Bowra's papers. The first manuscript book (undated), bound in black leather with gold edges, contains a wide range of poems in different languages (Greek, Latin, English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Russian), written out by Bowra in black ink. Russian poets include A. Tolstoi, Pushkin, Lermontov, Fet, Tyutchev, Akhmatova, and Blok; the first two Russian poems are copied out in transliterated Russian; later poems are copied out in Cyrillic (first in the old, then in the new orthography, with some minor errors). The latest date of a poet's death recorded in this book is 1939. The second typescript book (undated), bound in a Bromptons Instantaneous Binder, contains a similar range of poems in different languages; Ivanov's 'Put' v Emmaus' (typed with a few minor errors) appears alongside works by other Russian poets, bound in alphabetical order (Annenskii, Bal'mont, Gumilev, Esenin, Ivanov, Kazin, Lermontov, Mandel'shtam, Mayakovskii, Pasternak, Pushkin, A. Tolstoi,

And craftily, the cruel night  
Stands everywhere on sentinel,  
And though the warming sun is bright,  
It has not strength the dark to quell.

Death, the inexorable, gapes;  
The heart is stifled in the grave...  
Somewhere are white and shining shapes,  
Gold on the gloom, wrath on the wave!

And frenzied women, pale with tears,  
Proclaim good tidings – but of what?  
From crushing and denying fears  
The lulling mist lets nothing out.

Someone, a stranger, on the road,  
Stopping to speak to us, proclaims  
A sacrificed and a dead God...  
And the heart breathes again, and flames.<sup>28</sup>

Путь в Эммаус

День третий рдяные ветрила

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and Khlebnikov). The latest recorded date in this book is 1960. This second book is evidently a later, more systematically arranged compilation of some of Bowra's favourite poems.

<sup>28</sup> Bowra (ed.), *A Book of Russian Verse*, 87-8.

К закатным пристаням понес...

В душе – Голгофа и могила,

И спор, и смута, и вопрос...

И, беспощадная, коварно

Везде стоит на страже Ночь, -

А Солнце тонет лучезарно,

Ее не в силах превозмочь...

И неизбежное зияет,

И сердце душит узкий гроб...

И где-то белое сияет,

Над мраком зол, над морем злоб!

И женщин белых восклицанья

В бреду благовестят – про что?...

Но с помаваньем отрицанья,

Качая мглой, встает Ничто...

И Кто-то, странный, по дороге

К нам пристаёт и говорит

О жертвенном, о мертвом Боге...

И сердце – дышит и горит...<sup>29</sup>

Ivanov's poem was first published in 1906 and then included in *Cor Ardens* as

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<sup>29</sup> Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, 264.

the opening poem of the cycle ‘Solntse Emmausa’ (The Sun of Emmaus). It is written from the point of view of the two apostles who encountered the resurrected Jesus on the third day after his crucifixion but did not at first recognize him (Luke 24). The biblical narrative is used as a springboard for a meditation on the central role of faith in bringing about the transition from darkness to light, from death to eternal life. The poem culminates in the image of the burning heart, symbolising the transforming power of faith, derived from the biblical verse that serves as one of the sources of the title *Cor Ardens* (Luke 24.32).<sup>30</sup>

Although Ivanov expressed his enthusiasm for all three translations in his letter to Bowra, he did not single out this poem for special mention, possibly because of a number of distortions in the translation. The most significant error is the translation of ‘nad mrakom zol’ (over the gloom of evils) as ‘gold on the gloom’, evidently based on the confusion of the genitive plural of ‘zlo’ (evil) with the root of ‘zoloto’ (gold). One could also quibble over various other points. The replacement of ‘vopros’ (question) by ‘dismay’ at the end of the first stanza somewhat obscures the allusion to the leading question posed in the biblical narrative (‘Why seek ye the living among the dead?’ Luke 24.5). In the second stanza, the line ‘And though the warming sun is bright’ lacks the darker connotations of ‘A Solntse tonet lucezarno’ (And the Sun sinks radiantly). The addition of ‘death’ before ‘the inexorable’ narrows the open-ended dimension of the opening line of the third stanza. Lines 15-16, ‘From crushing and denying fears / The lulling mist lets nothing out’ sound poetic but are unclear and too far removed from the allusion in the original poem to the apostles’ dismissal of the women’s words as idle tales and refusal to believe their report of the resurrection (Luke 24.9-11). Despite these differences of emphasis, however, Bowra’s translation has much to commend it and

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<sup>30</sup> On the image of the burning heart see Pamela Davidson, *The Poetic Imagination of Vyacheslav Ivanov*:



succeeds in conveying the power and mystery of the original, while preserving its iambic metre and alternate rhyming scheme.

One final point should be noted. In his anthology Bowra chose to highlight the importance of this poem by placing it last; he reversed the order in which the last two poems appear in *Cor Ardens*, thereby creating the effect of a triptych, moving from amoral aestheticism ('Beauty's Nomads') through existential doubt and spiritual searching ('Complaint') to a final Christian resolution ('The Road to Emmaus'). It is significant that Bowra gave particular prominence to the final stage of this progression through his arrangement of the poems, culminating in a strong expression of Christian belief, particularly since the role of faith and the relationship of art to religion were precisely the areas in which his views differed most substantially from Ivanov's. His translations of Ivanov opened up a dialogue between two different minds, formed by the legacy of a common cultural tradition rooted in classical antiquity. As we shall see in the next chapters, this dialogue then developed into a full-scale correspondence, in which the relationship of this tradition to Christian values became a key issue for debate.

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*A Russian Symbolist's Perception of Dante* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 198.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Relationship and Meetings of Ivanov and Bowra

Je vis jusqu'à ce jour sous le charme de cette inoubliable conversation avec vous à vive voix qui m'a rendu votre image de poète-humaniste, présente déjà à mon esprit, encore plus aimable.

V.I. Ivanov to C.M. Bowra, December 1947

#### The role of Konovalov

Sergei Konovalov (1899-1982) not only helped Bowra with his first anthology of Russian verse, as noted in the previous chapter; he also played a crucial role in initiating and nurturing Ivanov's subsequent correspondence and relationship with Bowra and in publishing Ivanov's book on Dostoevskii and late collection of verse. His contribution deserves special emphasis because it has been underplayed and even largely ignored in the brief accounts of Ivanov's links with Bowra given by his biographer Ol'ga Deschartes and his two children in their memoirs. Although Deschartes mentioned in her original notes to *Svet Vechernii* that Konovalov had written to Ivanov in 1946, suggesting a new edition of his late verse, she made no reference to his role in her later account of the publication of this book at the end of her long introduction to Ivanov's collected works.<sup>1</sup> The reader is left with the misleading impression that two Oxford professors, Bowra and Isaiah Berlin, decided out of the blue to publish Ivanov's late verse in England and unexpectedly swooped down on the aging poet in Rome to collect the manuscript. A similar picture is conveyed by the memoirs of Ivanov's children, Lidiya and

Dimitrii, who also omit all reference to Konovalov's role in their recollections of this episode.<sup>2</sup>

And yet, as we shall see, without Konovalov the relationship of Ivanov and Bowra would never have come into existence. Konovalov was in an excellent position to act as a mediator between the two men. Like Ivanov, he was a Russian émigré, living in the West. He came to England to study after leaving Russia at the age of seventeen during the Revolution with his family (his father, A.I. Konovalov, was a prominent businessman and politician, closely associated with Aleksandr Kerenskii during the Provisional Government).<sup>3</sup> As Bowra's almost exact contemporary, he overlapped with him for many years at Oxford. In 1919, just as Bowra started to read 'Greats' at Wadham College, Konovalov embarked on the study of economics at Exeter College. If they did not meet each other while undergraduates, their paths would almost certainly have crossed during the 1930s or later. From 1929 to 1945 Konovalov held a lectureship at Oxford jointly with a part-time professorship at the University of Birmingham; in 1945 he became Professor of Russian at Oxford and remained in this post until his retirement in 1967.

Konovalov was not a specialist in literature; after completing his undergraduate and postgraduate studies in the field of economics, he went on to become a specialist in Anglo-Russian diplomatic relations in the seventeenth century.<sup>4</sup> Like most Russian émigrés of the

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<sup>1</sup> See Vyacheslav Ivanov, *Svet Vechernii: Poems*, with an introduction by Sir Maurice Bowra and commentary by O. Deschartes, ed. Dimitri Ivanov (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 179 (reproduced in Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, III, 819-20); O. Deshart, 'Vvedenie', in Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, I, 227.

<sup>2</sup> Ivanova, *Vospominaniya*, 293; Raphaël Aubert and Urs Gfeller (eds.), *D'Ivanov à Neuvecelle: Entretiens avec Jean Neuvecelle*, preface by Georges Nivat (Montricher: Les Éditions Noir sur Blanc, 1996), 165.

<sup>3</sup> A.I. Konovalov owned a large textiles enterprise founded in 1812; he was elected to the State Duma and served twice as Minister of Trade and Industry.

<sup>4</sup> At Oxford Konovalov took the Diploma in Economics and Political Science in 1921, and received the degree of B.Litt. in 1927 for a thesis on monetary reconstruction in Czechoslovakia. For an outline of Konovalov's career, see I.P. Foote, Obituary of Professor S.A. Konovalov, BUAS newsletter <1982>, 2-3. I am very grateful to Paul Foote for supplying me with a copy of this valuable source and for sharing with me his interesting recollections of

period, however, he had a strong desire to promote his native culture in the West, and this led him to play an active role in developing his literary contacts and arranging publications (for example, he founded and edited the Blackwell's Russian Texts series and the journal *Oxford Slavonic Papers*). His interest in Ivanov may well have been kindled by the enthusiasm of a fellow émigré and colleague at the University of Birmingham. Nikolai Bakhtin (1896-1950) was a classicist and a favourite former student of Ivanov's old friend and colleague, Faddei Zelinskii, who taught him and his younger brother (the well-known literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin) in St. Petersburg before the Revolution.<sup>5</sup> After leaving Russia in 1918 and serving for a few years as a soldier in the Foreign Legion, Bakhtin settled in Paris. Konovalov was not alone in regarding him as one of the most brilliant men of the Russian emigration. When he met up with him in Paris in the spring of 1928, he invited him on the basis of his reputation to come and study in Birmingham for a few months. Bakhtin subsequently received a diploma from the School of Oriental Languages in Paris and completed a Ph.D. thesis on ancient Thessaly at Cambridge.<sup>6</sup> In 1935 he took up his first academic appointment as Assistant Lecturer in classics at University College, Southampton; he then moved to the University of Birmingham, where he held a lectureship in classics from 1938, followed by a lectureship in linguistics from 1945 until his untimely death in 1950. His posthumously published lecture on the Symbolist movement in Russia contains a remarkable tribute to Ivanov, based in part on personal recollection: 'V. Ivanov was not only a great poet, but a great philosopher and Greek scholar as well, and above

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Konovalov's style of academic life. In his inaugural lecture of 1946, Konovalov recorded his debt of gratitude to Professor Paul Vinogradoff for starting him off on his undergraduate days at Exeter College in 1919 and to Professor Nevill Forbes for encouraging him to pursue an academic career. See S. Konovalov, *Oxford and Russia: An Inaugural Lecture delivered before the University of Oxford on 26 November 1946* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), 4.

<sup>5</sup> On the relationship of the two brothers see O.E. Osovskii, "'Neslyshnyi dialog': Biograficheskie i nauchnye sozvuchiya v sud'bah Nikolaya i Mikhaila Bakhtinykh", in K.G. Isupov (ed.), *M. Bakhtin i filosofskaya kul'tura XX veka (Problemy bakhtinologii): Sbornik nauchnykh statei* (SPb.: Obrazovanie, 1991), 43-51.

<sup>6</sup> Noted in Nicholas Bakhtin, *Introduction to the Study of Modern Greek* (Cambridge, 1935), 30.

all a great personality <...> in contact with whom none could escape the overwhelming feeling of some superhuman and quasi-divine presence. <...> And for myself, the evening when Ivanov read us his translation of the *Oresteia* remains the most intense and decisive experience of my life.’<sup>7</sup> Konovalov, whose post at Birmingham overlapped with Bakhtin’s appointment from 1938 to 1945, may well have known Bakhtin’s lecture or heard him speak about Ivanov; his colleague’s enthusiasm would certainly have affected his own view of the poet.

The intricate web of connections linking Konovalov with Bakhtin, Bowra and Ivanov is reflected from the outset of Konovalov’s correspondence with Ivanov. When he first wrote to Ivanov in December 1945, after suggesting several ideas for the publication of the poet’s works, he mentioned both Bowra and Bakhtin as among Ivanov’s ‘admirers and friends’ in England who would be willing to help him in any way possible. He gave the following brief account of Bowra’s credentials: ‘Dr. C.M. Bowra, Warden of Wadham College, Oxford, занимающийся переводами стихов с русского, автор книги “The Heritage of Symbolism” (Macmillan, 1944) и один из leading classical scholars в Англии’ [Dr. C.M. Bowra, Warden of Wadham College, Oxford, translates poems from Russian, the author of the book “The Heritage of Symbolism” (Macmillan, 1944) and one of the leading classical scholars in England].<sup>8</sup> In his next letter of March 1946 Konovalov described his efforts to advance the project that was clearly closest to Ivanov’s heart (the publication of his late verse), including his plan to act ‘through the Oxf.<ord> Professor of Poetry’<sup>9</sup> (Bowra’s election to the Oxford Chair of Poetry in 1946 put him in a strong position to promote the publication of poetry). On 18 May Konovalov informed

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<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Bakhtin, ‘The Symbolist Movement in Russia’, in his *Lectures and Essays* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1963), 41. This selection from the unpublished writings of Bakhtin was prepared by A.E. Duncan-Jones with the help of Francesca M. Wilson, who wrote the greater part of the biographical introduction. Bakhtin’s undated lecture on the Symbolist movement was evidently delivered in 1934, judging from his description of a gathering of the ‘Union of the Third Renaissance’ (a group of Greek scholars, philosophers, poets) in the flat of Professor Zelinskii in Petersburg during the October Revolution ‘seventeen years ago’ (43).

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Konovalov to Ivanov of 7 December 1945, RAI, *opis*’ 3, 111.

Ivanov of Bakhtin's plan to include seven of his poems in a selection of lyrics he was preparing under the title 'Vtoraya volna simvolizma' (The Second Wave of Symbolism). He noted that one of Ivanov's poems had to be cited from memory, as his books were very scarce in England; in response Ivanov sent him a note and a signed copy of his poem to forward to Bakhtin.<sup>10</sup> In the same letter Konovalov also sent Ivanov an encouraging report on Bowra's role in facilitating the publication of his poems in Russian:

Я имею твердую поддержку Оксф.<ордского> Professor of Poetry – Dr. С.М. Bowra, Warden of Wadham College, classical scholar. Его последние книги (к сожалению здесь их не достать) 'The Heritage of Symbolism' (Valéry, Rilke, St. Georg<e>, A. Blok, Yeats), 1944 и 'Book of Russian Verse' (антология 30 поэтов в переводах). Bowra мне сказал, что мы можем рассчитывать на субсидию (которую он берется собрать по подписке – и во всяком случае сам подпишет и к.<ак> ниб.<удь> осилит это дело) – во всяком случае на одну книгу (м.<ожет> б.<ыть> удалось бы издать и две – сейчас невозможно определить расходы по печатанию). [I have the firm support of the Oxf.<ord> Professor of Poetry – Dr. С.М. Bowra, Warden of Wadham College, classical scholar. His latest books (unfortunately you can't get hold of them here) are 'The Heritage of Symbolism' (Valéry, Rilke, St. Georg<e>, A. Blok, Yeats), 1944 and 'Book of Russian Verse' (an anthology of 30 poets in translations). Bowra told me that we can count on a subsidy (which he undertakes to collect by subscription – and he will in any case underwrite it himself and somehow manage this task) – certainly for one book (it might even be possible to publish two –

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<sup>9</sup> Letter from Konovalov to Ivanov of 21 March 1946, RAI, *opis*' 3, 111.

<sup>10</sup> Letters from Konovalov to Ivanov of 18 May 1946, from Ivanov to Konovalov of 24 June 1946, and from Konovalov to Ivanov of 12 August 1946, RAI, *opis*' 3, 111, 112.

right now it's impossible to determine the publishing costs).]<sup>11</sup>

In a postscript Konovalov urged Ivanov to make direct contact with Bowra by sending him an offprint with an inscription. In this way he initiated their correspondence and laid the foundations of an enduring relationship and fruitful exchange of ideas.

### **Ivanov's distichs to Bowra**

Ivanov was quick to act on Konovalov's instructions and fulfilled them with characteristic flair and inspiration. He not only despatched to Bowra some offprints of his most interesting recent articles in German, published in the 1930s in *Hochland* and *Corona*, but also added a brilliant and original poetic address to Bowra, composed in Latin distichs. Although it has unfortunately not proven possible to locate the poem and the offprints among Bowra's papers in Wadham College, a draft and final version of the distichs survive in Ivanov's Rome archive and the articles are identified in Ivanov's letter to Konovalov of 24 June 1946:

Глубоко трогает меня участие проф. Bowra к моей музе и я бесконечно ему признателен; чтобы ознаменовать хоть чем-нибудь эту признательность, посылаю ему, как гуманисту, а к тому же и германисту и слависту, мои немецкие статьи: “Гуманизм и религия”, “Существо античной трагедии”, “Гоголь и Аристофан”, “Слово о полку Игореве” и мои немецкие переводы стихов Боратынского и Тютчева на смерть Гете (из *Corona*) с сопроводительными латинскими стишками.

[I am deeply touched by the interest of Prof. Bowra in my muse and I am infinitely grateful to him; to mark my gratitude at least in some way, I am sending him, as a humanist as well as a Germanist and Slavist, my German articles: ‘Humanism and Religion’, ‘The Essence of Ancient Tragedy’, ‘Gogol' and Aristophanes’, ‘The Lay of

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<sup>11</sup> Letter from Konovalov to Ivanov of 18 May 1946, RAI, *opis'* 3, 111.

Igor's Campaign' and my German translations of poems by Boratynskii and Tyutchev on Goethe's death (from *Corona*) with accompanying Latin verses.]<sup>12</sup>

Ivanov's choice of articles was cleverly designed to touch upon all the key areas in which his interests overlapped with those of Bowra: classical antiquity and scholarship, Russian literature, translations of poetry. In his reply Konovalov commented approvingly on how 'very useful' it was for Ivanov to establish his own direct link with such an energetic and influential figure.<sup>13</sup>

The draft and final version of the distichs that survive in Ivanov's Rome archive are reproduced below at the beginning of Ivanov's correspondence with Bowra, published in Chapter 5 of this study. Several aspects of this remarkable poetic address invite comment. The first and most obvious question concerns the choice of form. Why did Ivanov decide to address Bowra in distichs? Couplets written in distichs, originally comprising a line of dactylic hexameter followed by a line of dactylic pentameter; were popular in ancient Greek and Latin literature and extensively developed in European and Russian literature.<sup>14</sup> As Michael Wachtel has noted, 'in the Russian tradition, Vyacheslav Ivanov's work displays the most intensive and extensive exploration of the creative potential of the distich.'<sup>15</sup> His first collection of verse contains an entire section entitled 'Distichs', ranging from short couplets to extended addresses

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<sup>12</sup> Letter from Ivanov to Konovalov of 24 June 1946, RAI, *opis*' 3, 112 (several manuscript and typescript drafts of this letter survive; the last typescript draft has been cited, incorporating Ivanov's handwritten corrections). The articles listed are Wjatscheslaw Iwanow, 'Humanismus und Religion: Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Nachlass von Wilamowitz', *Hochland*, XXXI, 10 (July 1934), 307-30; Wjatscheslaw Iwanow, 'Der Sinn der antiken Tragödie', *Hochland*, XXXIV, 3 (December 1936/37), 232-43; Wjatscheslaw Iwanow, 'Gogol und Aristophanes', *Corona*, Year III, 5 (June 1933), 611-22; Wjatscheslaw Iwanow, 'Vom Igorlied', *Corona*, Year VII, 6, 1937, 661-9; Wjatscheslaw Iwanow, 'Zwei russische Gedichte auf den Tod Goethes', *Corona*, Year IV, 6 (August 1934), 697-703. The first and last two items were written by Ivanov in German; the second and third items were reworked German versions of earlier essays previously published in Russian.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from Konovalov to Ivanov of 29 August 1946, RAI, *opis*' 3, 111.

<sup>14</sup> For background on the complex assimilation of the classical elegiac distich (unrhymed) into early twentieth-century Russian verse, see M.L. Gasparov, *Russkii stikh nachala XX veka v kommentariyakh* (M.: Fortuna Limited, 2001), 141-2.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Wachtel, *The Development of Russian Verse: Meter and its Meanings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 194-5.



covering several pages;<sup>16</sup> distichs also figure prominently throughout his later collections. As a form generally associated with the development of a complete thought, the distich was well suited to Ivanov's fondness for the epigrammatic style in poetry.<sup>17</sup> He would often choose distichs for the expression of a particularly powerful experience, encapsulating a moment of religious revelation or prophetic insight. For example, the epigraph to *Cor Ardens*, dedicated to the memory of Lidiya Zinov'eva-Annibal, takes the form of a distich in Russian.<sup>18</sup> In the same year as he composed his distichs to Bowra, he published an extract from his letter of 1939 to Karl Muth entitled 'Ein Echo', describing a mystic experience that had occurred some thirty years earlier and his attempt to capture this private revelation in the 'golden ring' of a Latin distich.<sup>19</sup>

In the case of his address to Bowra, Ivanov's choice of the distich served several purposes. It underlined their affinity as fellow classicists and set their relationship within the framework of a well developed literary tradition rooted in classical antiquity. The choice of Latin rather than Greek emphasised the importance of Latin as the mediating culture through which the legacy of Greek antiquity passed into the European tradition of humanism; it was the language in which humanists such as Erasmus wrote when corresponding with their peers. Furthermore, because of its inherent duality of form (based on the couplet), the distich was uniquely suited to the theme of Ivanov's address, which deals with several sets of dualities: the relationship between two people (Ivanov and Bowra, author and addressee), the dialogue between two cultures (native and foreign), the presence of two forms in the act of poetic

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<sup>16</sup> Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, I, 635-42. In the opening distich from this cycle, 'Veste detracta' (the Latin title is followed by a distich in Russian), Ivanov announced his preference for the 'naked' distich, not clothed in rhyme (the true classical form of the distich).

<sup>17</sup> See S.S. Averintsev, 'Gnomicheskoe nachalo v poetike Vyach. Ivanova', *Studia Slavica*, 41, 1996, 3-12 (on Ivanov's use of distichs, 5).

<sup>18</sup> Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, 225.

creation (the creative impulse and the created form) and in the process of translation (which echoes the two forms of the original text in a new 'twin' version). Pushkin had already made the distich famous in this last way by using it for his two addresses on Gnedich's celebrated translation of Homer's *Iliad* (one address exudes respect, while the other is full of biting sarcasm).<sup>20</sup> Ivanov is echoing this precedent in the adoption of the same form for his address to Bowra, a skilful translator of the classics as well as of Ivanov's own verse.

Already, in the very title of his poem, Ivanov addresses Bowra as the 'Oxford high-priest of the art of poetry' (he knew from Konovalov that Bowra was the Oxford Professor of Poetry). Later, in the first couplet, this address is echoed by the apostrophe to Bowra as a 'learned poet'. Here he is deliberately going far beyond Konovalov's rather dry account of Bowra's external achievements as a prominent scholar, academic and translator, and elevating him to the highest rank of poet; according to Ivanov's understanding and own experience, the activities of scholarship and translation are rooted in the poetic impulse, represented as an act of religious theurgy.

In the first couplet Bowra is addressed as a learned poet who lends his tongue to foreign Muses who would otherwise remain 'mute' and have no voice in other cultures. Although this could be construed as a broad reference to Bowra's role as an interpreter of other cultures (through a variety of means, such as scholarship, literary criticism, translation, or the publication of editions of verse), it seems much more likely that it is a specific reference to Bowra's role as a translator of foreign poets. This reading fits well with the second couplet, in which Ivanov offers a remarkably condensed poetic summary of his understanding of the creative process as applied

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<sup>19</sup> Wjatscheslaw Iwanow, 'Ein Echo: Aus einem Brief an Karl Muth', *Mesa*, 2, 1946, 21-2; reprinted in Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, III, 647.

<sup>20</sup> Aleksandr Pushkin, 'Na perevod Iliady' (1830) and 'K perevodu Iliady' (1830), in A.S. Pushkin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. D.D. Blagoi and others, 10 vols. (M.: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1974), II, 254, 266.

to the task of translation. A key to the complex ideas underlying this couplet can be found in his late essay, 'Mysli o poezii' (Thoughts on Poetry), begun in 1938 and revised in 1943, just a few years before the composition of the distichs.<sup>21</sup> In his discussion of poetry Ivanov distinguishes between two aspects of artistic form: 'forma formans', the invisible creative form or energy that exists in potential and gives rise to a work of art, and 'forma formata', the visible created form of the work of art once it has come into being. 'Forma formans' is compared to the 'living soul' that sleeps within the marble, and poetry is defined as 'the communication of creative form through the medium of created form.' This understanding of the dual nature of form means that the translator has a demanding task; not one of 'mechanical mimesis' of the outer form of the original, but one which requires a new 'organic cristallisation of creative form.'<sup>22</sup>

These concepts underly the second couplet of the poem: the achievement of Bowra, the 'learned poet', has been to hear the 'silent voice' ('vox surda') and the 'voice's echo' ('vocis imago') singing in turn; the 'silent voice' evidently represents the invisible creative energy or 'forma formans', while its clearer echo represents the material created form in which this energy becomes embodied. The translator hears both voices and reflects the dual forms of the original in his twin work.<sup>23</sup>

Ivanov concludes his address in the third couplet with a reference to himself and the material he is sending Bowra, incorporating the traditional topos of self-effacing modesty.

Unlike Bowra, who has succeeded in translating foreign poets into his native tongue as an act of

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<sup>21</sup> Similar ideas were reiterated by Ivanov in his Italian essay 'Forma formans e forma formata' (1947), written in 1946 in the same year as he wrote the distichs to Bowra. Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, III, 674-82.

<sup>22</sup> Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, III, 667-8, 670. See the discussion of Ivanov's application of these principles to his versions of Novalis in Michael Wachtel, 'K probleme perevoda podlinnika u Vyacheslava Ivanova', *Studia Slavica* 41, 1996, 45-53.

<sup>23</sup> In an earlier sonnet, 'Perevodchiku' (To the Translator) from *Prozrachnost'* (1904), Ivanov uses the term 'mask' for what he later describes as 'forma formata', and enjoins the translator, described as a 'ptitselov' (bird-catcher) who carries his catch off to a 'chuzhezemnyi plen' (foreign captivity), to respond to a mask with a new mask: 'S

re-creation undertaken on the highest level, Ivanov has only translated the ‘gold’ of his native poets into ‘bronze’ for foreign readers. This echo of the famous exchange of ‘gold for bronze’ armour described by Homer in the *Iliad* (6, 236) evidently refers to one of the offprints that Ivanov sent to Bowra, containing his German translations of two poems by Boratynskii and Tyutchev on the death of Goethe, followed by a short essay. Ivanov describes these translations, undertaken in a foreign tongue, as gold transmuted into bronze. It seems most likely that he inscribed the final version of his distichs to Bowra on this offprint. This hypothesis fits well with the fact that Ivanov referred to his accompanying Latin verses immediately after mentioning this particular offprint in his letter to Konovalov, quoted at the beginning of this section. The phrase cited in brackets after the title ‘Distichs’ - ‘commentariolo subscripta’ (appended to a short essay) – would accordingly refer to the contents of this offprint (the ‘short essay’), alluded to in the condensed message of the inscription. The addition of distichs to the offprint was an entirely appropriate echo of the Roman use of the epigram as a short personal message or dedication, often written to accompany gifts.

Ivanov’s poetic address reveals his remarkable intuitive ability to grasp the essence of a person. Unlike Konovalov, he chose to highlight the ‘learned poet’ in Bowra and to establish their relationship on this basis. His emphasis on Bowra as a fellow poet with a special talent for mediating between different cultures went far beyond the purpose indicated by Konovalov and elicited a response well attuned to his opening address. When Bowra replied on 1 September 1946, he wrote in Latin, echoing Ivanov’s choice of language for the correspondence of two humanists. It is clear from his letter that Ivanov’s witty and elegant Latin verses made a strong impression on him. He made no comment on the offprints, but picked up on the ‘poet to poet’

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Proteem bud' Protei, vtor' kazhdoi maske maskoi!' [With Proteus be a Proteus, echo each mask with a mask!].  
Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, I, 788-9.

connection advanced by Ivanov and pursued the subject of publishing an edition of Ivanov's late verse in England.<sup>24</sup> In this way Bowra took up the lead advanced by Ivanov and established their correspondence on the basis of his response to Ivanov as a poet, expressed in the past through his translations of Ivanov and projected into the future in his plans for a new collection of Ivanov's verse.

### **Literary exchanges**

At the same time as his first letter, Bowra also sent Ivanov his recent book, *From Virgil to Milton* (1945), a study of the literary epic in four of its chief examples (Virgil, Camões, Tasso and Milton).<sup>25</sup> Ivanov was most impressed; in a letter to Konovalov he described it as a 'brilliant work'.<sup>26</sup> Bowra's study was of particular interest to him for two reasons. In general, like many of his contemporaries, he was fascinated by the relation of Russian literature to the classical heritage and by the role of the literary epic in this context. In addition, on a more personal level, he was currently engaged in writing the fourth book of a medieval-style epic narrative, 'Povest' o tsareviche Svetomire' (The Tale of Tsarevich Svetomir), a highly unusual and original project begun in 1928 and still unfinished at the time of his death in 1949.<sup>27</sup> The arrival of Bowra's book was particularly timely in this respect and resonated with his own attempt to create a Russian epic narrative for the modern age. When he wrote to thank Bowra for his gift on 1 October 1946, he relinquished Latin in favour of English in order to

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<sup>24</sup> Letter 2 in Chapter 5.

<sup>25</sup> This copy survives in Ivanov's library in Rome, RAI; it carries an undated inscription 'To V. Ivanov from C.M. Bowra'.

<sup>26</sup> After recommending to Konovalov that the planned edition of his work on Dostoevskii should be about the same size as Bowra's *From Virgil to Milton*, Ivanov added: 'Etu blestyashchuyu rabotu on lyubezno prislal mne s latinskim pis'mom, na kotoroe ya otvetil angliiskim, chtoby pozabavit' ego, kak pishu emu, "moimi soletsizmami".' [He kindly sent me this brilliant work with a Latin letter, to which I replied in English so as to amuse him, as I wrote to him, 'with my solecisms']. Ivanov, Letter to Konovalov of 20 October 1946, draft manuscript, RAI, *opis'* 3, 112.

demonstrate his ability to appreciate the style and conception of the book and commented:

‘Your researches have for me just now a particular interest, for I am hastening to complete a long narrative in mediaeval style, somewhat similar perhaps, as intention, to Milton's *Arthuriad*, – a miraculous vita of a mighty tzar and his holy son, told by a pious monk in the language of the ancient russian chronicles and legends.’<sup>28</sup> The analogy that Ivanov drew between his project and Milton's *Arthuriad* was almost certainly suggested to him by reading Bowra's account of Milton's unfulfilled plan to write ‘an *Arthuriad*, an epic which, while it took King Arthur for its central figure, would through the traditional devices of prophecy and the like treat of the great events of English history from its mythical dawn to his own times.’<sup>29</sup> Ivanov's awareness of this parallel, as well as the broader inspiration afforded by Bowra's book, may well have influenced the further development of his own work in the epic genre.

Ivanov's first letter to Bowra reveals his consummate skill at building elegant bridges between himself and others: as we have seen, he links Bowra's scholarly work to his own experiment with epic narrative, and Bowra's versions of Virgil to his translations of Ivanov's verse. The association he makes between his study of Greek religion in the British Museum reading-room in 1899 and Bowra's first discovery of *Cor Ardens*, although based on an unwitting confusion of the London Library with the British Museum, reflects a clear wish to establish their connection as fellow members of the same tradition, united through time and space under the protective dome of the reading-room, where Vladimir Solov'ev once enjoyed his second vision of Sophia, the divine spirit of Wisdom. From his opening mention of ‘the good humanistic tradition’ to his concluding reference to ‘my great joy to have won, as poet, in

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<sup>27</sup> ‘Povest’ o tsareviche Svetomire’ was first published in Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, I, 255-512; on the history of its composition, see introduction and notes, I, 221-4 and 856.

<sup>28</sup> Letter 3 in Chapter 5.

you, poet, so much sympathy, comprehension and help', Ivanov presents his correspondence with Bowra as the dialogue of two poets belonging to a common humanist tradition; this reinforces the message of his earlier poetic address to Bowra in Latin distichs and sets up a creative framework for future exchanges and cooperation.

In his next letter of 3 November 1946 Bowra reported that he had now acquired copies of Ivanov's two collections, *Prozrachnost'* (1904) and *Cor Ardens* (1911-12) from 'a friend in Moscow.'<sup>30</sup> This kind individual may well have been Kornei Chukovskii. As noted in Chapter 1, Bowra had met him during his 1916 visit to Petrograd; many years later he was able to renew contact with him through Isaiah Berlin, who was in Moscow working for the Foreign Office from 8 September 1945 until his return to Oxford in April 1946.<sup>31</sup> On 25 October 1945 Bowra sent Berlin some of his versions from Blok with a request to pass them on to Chukovskii with his warmest regards. He also suggested to Berlin that *All Souls* might give Chukovskii 'a job for his declining years' ('he would add a lot to our gaiety') and promised 'to talk to that stuffed Sumner about it.'<sup>32</sup> During this period Bowra regularly sent Berlin extensive shopping-lists of books to buy for him in Moscow; on 5 November, for example, he despatched 'a statement of needs' for books, including 'works by any member of the lost generation, Esenin, Mandelstam, Annensky, Gumilev, Bal'mont, Bryusov, Gorodetsky, Sologub, Ivanov. This is what I really like – this is my date, and I find it almost impossible to get. <...> No expense to be spared.' At the end of the same letter he added: 'I sent off two books for Borya <Pasternak> and Kornei <Chukovskii>, if you think it suitable to present them. It might make them feel less isolated. I

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<sup>29</sup> C.M. Bowra, *From Virgil to Milton* (London: Macmillan, 1945), 194. Ivanov's interest in the legend of King Arthur may date back to the time he spent at Tintagel in Cornwall in the late 1890s.

<sup>30</sup> Letter 4 in Chapter 5.

<sup>31</sup> Berlin met Chukovskii soon after his arrival in Moscow and took a great liking to him. See Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life*, 135, 170.

shall be interested to hear reactions.’<sup>33</sup> When Berlin moved back to Oxford, Chukovskii may well have taken over the role of Bowra's chief book-buyer in Moscow and procured for him the volumes of Ivanov's verse.

### **Bowra's 'Hellenic' versions of Coleridge and Swinburne**

Together with his letter of November 1946 Bowra enclosed an eccentric offering, designed to appeal to his new correspondent: reprints of his own Greek versions of two poems by Coleridge and Swinburne ('Kubla Khan' and 'When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces...'), first published in the Oxford journal *Greece and Rome* in 1934 and 1935.<sup>34</sup> Since Ivanov had initiated his first contact with Bowra by sending him an offprint of his translations of two Russian poets into German, it was entirely fitting for Bowra to respond by sending him his Greek versions of two English poets. In his letter he alludes obliquely to this symmetry by describing his Greek versions as 'χάλκεα χρυσείων' (bronze for gold). This elegant inversion of 'χρύσεια χαλκείων' (gold for bronze), the phrase used by Homer to describe the famous exchange of gold for bronze armour between Glaucus and Diomedes (*Iliad* 6, 236), echoed Ivanov's earlier reference to his own transformation of golden songs into dull bronze ('aurea

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<sup>32</sup> Letter from Bowra to Berlin of 25 October <1945>; copy deposited with Bowra's papers, WCA. Sumner was the Warden of All Souls. Nothing came of Bowra's plan to bring Chukovskii to All Souls, but he and Berlin were both involved in the award to Chukovskii of honorary degrees from Oxford University in 1957 and 1962.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Bowra to Berlin of 5 November <1945>; copy deposited with Bowra's papers, WCA. The first item on Bowra's shopping-list of books was collections or studies of *byliny*, evidently intended for his current work on *Heroic Poetry*, published in 1952 with a dedication to Isaiah Berlin, possibly in recognition of Berlin's heroic exploits acquiring books for him in Moscow. Bowra's gift to Pasternak prompted a letter of thanks; see Pasternak's letter to Bowra of 25 December 1945, WCA, Bowra's papers, cited in Chapter 3.

<sup>34</sup> The English originals and Greek versions of Coleridge's 'In Xanadu did Kubla Khan...' and of Swinburne's 'When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces...' were published in *Greece and Rome*, III, 9, May 1934, 178-81 and V,13, October 1935, 53-6, respectively. The Greek texts are described as 'versions' and signed by C.M. Bowra. Bowra sent Ivanov reprints of these versions. Ivanov's library, RAI, holds a reprint from *Greece and Rome*, vol. v, no.13, October 1935, with the English original of Swinburne's poem and Bowra's Greek version; his archive also contains four printed sheets with the text of Bowra's Greek version of Coleridge's poem. In both cases the Greek versions are the same as in the original journal publication, but are reprinted on unnumbered pages in a different



mutans carmina in aes raucum’) in the Latin distichs that he had sent to Bowra together with his German translations of Russian verse.

Bowra's Greek versions were a by-product of his earlier years in Oxford. In November 1923 he joined an informal club of seven members, who met at tea once a fortnight in term to discuss their Greek and Latin compositions in prose and verse;<sup>35</sup> for one of these gatherings, as Bowra subsequently recalled in his memoirs, he ‘audaciously turned Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* into a Greek chorus.’<sup>36</sup> This experiment, together with several Greek and Latin versions of English poets composed by other members of the group, subsequently appeared in print in the journal *Greece and Rome*, founded in 1931; the best versions were later revised and collected in the anthology *Some Oxford Compositions*, published in 1949.<sup>37</sup> The exercise evidently represented an attempt to recreate the spirit of ancient classical culture in Oxford, while exploring how far the differences between English and Greek or Latin could be overcome through the act of translation.

Why did Bowra choose these two particular poems for this exercise? And what prompted him to send his Greek versions to Ivanov many years later? In the case of Coleridge's ‘Kubla Khan: Or, A Vision in a Dream. A Fragment’ (1797, first published in 1816), the experiment was of particular interest to both writers. According to Coleridge's own note on its genesis, published as an introduction to the fragment although written much later in 1816, the poem came to him while he slept under the effect of an anodyne prescribed for an indisposition.

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Greek font, identical to the one used when the versions were later republished in 1949 in an anthology of Oxford compositions.

<sup>35</sup> See T.F. Higham's preface to J.G. Barrington-Ward, J. Bell, C.M. Bowra, A.N. Bryan-Brown, J.D. Denniston, T.F. Higham and M. Platnauer, *Some Oxford Compositions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), v.

<sup>36</sup> Bowra, *Memories*, 255.

<sup>37</sup> For a full listing of the versions published in the journal, see *Greece and Rome: Index to the first series. Volumes I-XXII* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 20-22. Bowra contributed a wide range of pieces to the 1949 anthology, including his Greek versions of Coleridge and Swinburne (Barrington-Ward, *Some Oxford Compositions*, 252-6, 292-8). See letter 11 in Chapter 5 for his plan to send this anthology to Ivanov.

Before falling asleep, he had been reading the description in *Purchas's Pilgrimage* of Kubla Khan's command for the creation of a great palace and garden; in his sleep he saw a succession of images, prompted by this passage, accompanied by their effortless expression in some two to three hundred lines of verse. On awakening he immediately wrote down the lines preserved in the fragment. At this point an unfortunate interruption by 'a person on business from Porlock' dispelled the rest of the vision. The fragment that survives opens with an extended description of the stately pleasure-dome and its gardens by the sacred river Alph, leading on to the mysteries of the 'deep romantic chasm' and its 'mighty fountain'. It then shifts to first person narration: after evoking his vision of a 'damsel with a dulcimer' playing music and singing, the poet expresses his own wish to revive within him 'her symphony and song' in order to 'build that dome in air' 'with music loud and long'.<sup>38</sup>

The subject of this poem and the account of its origins were of great interest to Bowra, who was deeply fascinated by the nature of poetic inspiration and its connection with vision or prophecy and frequently cited the poem in this context.<sup>39</sup> The fragment would also have had a particular resonance for Ivanov, who openly cultivated the image of the poet-prophet, recorded several instances of 'automatic' writing in his sleep or during a vision, and frequently offered prose 'explanations' of his own prophetic verse in his diary, correspondence and essays. His library included a copy of Coleridge's poems.<sup>40</sup>

Swinburne made extensive use of classical Greek forms and subjects in his verse and drama and enjoyed a rather risqué reputation as a provocative aesthete and rebel against

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<sup>38</sup> Coleridge, *The Complete Poems*, ed. William Keach (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1997), 249-52.

<sup>39</sup> Bowra cites the poem twice in *The Heritage of Symbolism*, 29, 219. In *The Romantic Imagination* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 11-12, he reads it as 'the central experience of all creation in its Dionysiac delight and its enraptured ordering of many elements into an entrancing pattern'. In *Inspiration and Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1955), 8-9, he defines the subject of the poem as creative inspiration itself.

<sup>40</sup> 'Poems of Coleridge' is included in a list compiled by Ivanov of books from his library (RAI); see item 551 in G.V. Obatnin, 'Materialy k opisaniyu biblioteki Vyach. Ivanova', *Europa Orientalis*, 21/2, 2002, 291.

conventional morality. These aspects of his work appealed to Bowra and were naturally conducive to the re-creation of his work in the Greek idiom. The text he chose for this purpose, 'When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces....', is the well-known first chorus from Swinburne's verse drama in classical Greek form, *Atalanta in Calydon: A Tragedy* (1865); it celebrates Artemis, the goddess of the moon and of hunting, and presents the coming of spring in a Dionysiac light, culminating in the description of a sensuous Maenad, pursued by Pan and Bacchus. Bowra's Greek version was of special relevance to Ivanov, who had devoted a large part of his scholarship to the study of the Hellenic cult of Dionysus and frequently invoked spring as a time of Dionysiac renewal in his own verse.<sup>41</sup> He was also familiar with the works of Swinburne, described by him in his article of 1936 on Symbolism as a representative of decadent aestheticism.<sup>42</sup>

For his Greek versions of both poems, Bowra chose the form of the dithyrambic chorus. In ancient Greece this form first arose in connection with the worship of Dionysus and was then extended to cover a much wider range of subjects from Greek mythology; in later European literature any kind of rather 'wild' song or chant with a 'possessed' quality came to be regarded as dithyrambic, irrespective of its precise form (examples from English literature can be found in Blake's prophecies and in poems by Shelley or Swinburne). Bowra's choice of this form with its Dionysian associations was well suited to the thematic content and 'possessed' tone of both poems. He turned Coleridge's poem into a dithyrambic chorus of ninety lines (almost twice its original length), broken up into a series of strophes and anti-strophes, and expanded Swinburne's chorus from seven into eight strophes.

At the end of his covering letter to Ivanov Bowra made a poignant comment about his

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<sup>41</sup> See, for example, 'Trizna Dionisa', in Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, I, 571-2.

Greek versions: ‘I am not sure that they are really Hellenic – I wish they were.’<sup>43</sup> He knew that Ivanov would be a discerning judge of this question - the copy of *Prozrachnost*’ that he had just received from Moscow included the poet’s translation of Bacchylides’s dithyramb ‘Theseus’, followed by extensive comments on the musical principles underlying the transposition of its Dionysian qualities from Greek into Russian. As a poet who had devoted a large part of his creative energies to reviving Greek poetic forms in Russian through original verse, drama and translations, Ivanov understood exactly what Bowra was trying to achieve and what he meant by his closing comment in the letter. He copied it out twice: first on a folded sheet accompanying Bowra's Greek version of Coleridge, followed by two significant words “Ἑλληνίδ” ἔμπναι’ (breathes the ‘Greek’), and then again at the beginning of his letter of reply, written on 9 December 1946. After quoting Bowra’s words, he opened his letter with a six-line original poem, composed by him in Greek iambic trimeters to allay his correspondent’s worries about the ‘Hellenic’ qualities of his versions. Like the earlier Latin distichs, this poem also takes the form of a flattering address to Bowra; Ivanov reassured him that he must indeed be inspired by the Greek Muse, for without such inspiration it would be impossible for anyone, however wise, to render lines of the Northern lyre into Greek.<sup>44</sup>

In the next part of his letter, after expressing his admiration for Bowra’s command of the Greek poetic language, Ivanov went on to address his concern in considerable detail. In the case of the Greek version of Swinburne, he found it ‘more transparent, more serene, more Greek’ than the original, apart from four lines, deemed to be ‘rather biblical’. In the case of Coleridge’s fragment, after a careful comparison of the Greek version with the original text, he praised

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<sup>42</sup> V. I. <Ivanov>, ‘Simbolismo’, in *Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani), 1936, XXXI, 795.

<sup>43</sup> Letter 4 in Chapter 5.

<sup>44</sup> Letter 5 in Chapter 5; for further discussion of the Greek poem, see Chapter 5, note 35.

Bowra's interpretation and admired 'the splendid dithyrambic raiment', but was obliged to recognize that Coleridge's 'queer and confused poem' resisted attempts to make it Hellenic: 'The instructive experiment shows that some emanations of romanticism are absolutely reluctant to the spirit and style of Greek poetry.'

At the end of his letter Ivanov skilfully returned to the subject of his own poetry and plans for publication by dropping a gentle hint to Bowra to get in touch with Konovalov, who had failed to respond to his last missive. He followed up this hint ten days later by sending Bowra for Christmas two inscribed copies of his own works: his long and complex melopoeia, *Chelovek* (Man), printed in Paris in 1939 by Dom knigi, the émigré publishing-house run by M.S. Kaplan,<sup>45</sup> and the Italian translation of this work, recently published in Milan in 1946. Both gifts were evidently chosen to serve as a timely reminder of his continuing activity as a poet, still published and translated in Europe. Ivanov had been closely involved in preparing the Italian version of his poem, as he made clear in his inscription to Bowra:

All' illustre umanista e poeta C.M. Bowra questa versione fatta a cura dell'autore, quale commento dell' opera originale e formulazione definitiva di taluni suoi concetti, manda in segno d'animo grato e d'ammirazione Venceslao Ivanov / Roma, 19 Dicembre, '46.  
[To the illustrious humanist and poet C.M. Bowra this translation, supervised by the author, as a commentary on the original work and a definitive formulation of some of its concepts, is sent as a token of gratitude and admiration by Venceslao Ivanov / Rome, 19 December 1946'.]<sup>46</sup>

This inscription served to reinforce his links with Bowra, a humanist and poet, also involved in

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<sup>45</sup> A copy of Vyacheslav Ivanov, *Chelovek* (Paris: Dom knigi, 1939) with Ivanov's inscription in brown ink ('To C.M. Bowra / from V.I. / Rome / X-mas 1946') is preserved in the library of Wadham College, Oxford.

furthering intercultural dialogue through translation.

Bowra responded promptly on 30 December 1946, thanking Ivanov for his letter and for the two books, ‘which arrived punctually on Christmas morning.’ To his correspondent’s ‘penetrating remarks’ about translation into Greek he added some thoughtful reflections on the way in which the act of translation reveals fundamental differences between cultures that cannot be surmounted. As examples he cited the impossibility of rendering Hebrew ideas in English (the challenge faced by the authors of the King James version of the Bible), or of transposing the metaphors and movement of thought of Shakespeare’s dramatic speeches into Greek iambs (an exercise that he had undertaken himself).<sup>47</sup> He also informed Ivanov that he was sending him a copy of his recent book, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (1945), describing it as ‘rather too pedantic and philological in the worst sense’ but noting in its defence that it was written ‘as an anodyne in the worst years of the war’.<sup>48</sup> Like Ivanov, Bowra was only too well aware of the need to reaffirm the value and continuing relevance of the classical and humanist traditions at a time of widespread cultural crisis in war-torn Europe. Finally, picking up Ivanov’s closing hint, he promised to contact Konovalov and mentioned that he had spoken to Kaplan in Paris about the possibility of publishing Ivanov’s latest collection of verse (as noted above, Ivanov had recently sent Bowra a copy of *Chelovek*, published by Kaplan).

Thus, we can see that up until the time of their first meeting Ivanov and Bowra had established a solid basis for their relationship through their exchange of letters and publications: as poets, as translators, as classical scholars, they had much to share and saw themselves as

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<sup>46</sup> The inscribed copy of Venceslao Ivanov, *L’Uomo*, with a preface and tr. in verse by Rinaldo Küfferle (Milan: Fratelli Bocca, 1946) is preserved in the library of Wadham College, Oxford. I am grateful for this translation to David Forgacs, Department of Italian, University College London.

<sup>47</sup> Letter 6 in Chapter 5; see note 48 to this letter for details of Bowra’s Greek versions of Shakespeare.

<sup>48</sup> C.M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945). A copy of this book (reprinted with corrections from the first edition of 1944) survives in Ivanov’s library in Rome; it contains a printed slip ‘With the Author’s Compliments’, but no inscription.

members of a common humanist tradition, threatened by revolution and war. As we shall observe below, important differences in their approaches to this tradition surfaced in their correspondence after their two meetings.

### **Ivanov's first meeting with Bowra and Isaiah Berlin**

Bowra visited Ivanov twice in Rome, first in September 1947, and then again in August 1948. On both occasions they met in Ivanov's home at no.25 Via Leon Battista Alberti, appropriately named after the great fifteenth-century humanist of the Italian Renaissance. The meetings added a warm 'human' dimension to the humanist tradition linking both writers, as can be seen from Bowra's reference to the 'charmingly human welcome' that Ivanov gave him on his first visit.<sup>49</sup> Ivanov summed up his feelings about this first meeting in a letter to Konovalov:

Излишне говорить как рад я был неожиданной личной встрече и простой, непринужденной увлекательной беседе с гуманистом-поэтом, с которым уже через письма и книги установилось у меня живое и разностороннее умственное общение.

[It is unnecessary to say how happy I was at the unexpected personal meeting and simple, unconstrained, absorbing conversation with the humanist-poet with whom I had already through the exchange of letters and books established a living and multifaceted intellectual communion.]<sup>50</sup>

Bowra later emphasised the importance of both meetings by opening his introduction to *Svet Vechernii* with a vivid account of the deep impression that his host made on him in Rome. After evoking Ivanov's 'full mastery of his faculties', 'most noble and striking personality' and

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<sup>49</sup> Letter 8 in Chapter 5.

<sup>50</sup> Letter from Ivanov to Konovalov of 8 December 1947, typescript, RAI, *opis'* 3, 112.

‘charming, unaffected courtesy’, he went on to describe his deep love of Greek poetry, the range and depth of his conversation, always advancing ‘from the particular text to the general issue’ and presenting his views ‘in crisp, imaginative, memorable phrases’. He rounded off his portrait by stressing Ivanov’s combination of ‘generous, exact learning’ and ‘powerful intellect’ with ‘the vision of a poet’: ‘he was a poet who was indeed a consummate scholar but used his scholarship to deepen and enrich his poetry.’<sup>51</sup>

On his first visit Bowra was accompanied by Isaiah Berlin (1909-97), who was also in Italy for the summer and had been staying with him in Amalfi. In November 1980 Berlin kindly shared with me his recollections of this meeting.<sup>52</sup> In his characteristic self-deprecating manner, he described himself as just ‘tagging along’ with Bowra. He was, however, undoubtedly curious to meet the legendary poet of the Petersburg Tower. As a child, he had spent four years from 1916 to 1920 living in Petrograd at the time of the Revolution. On his two return visits to Leningrad in November 1945 and January 1946 he met Akhmatova and heard her views on Ivanov.<sup>53</sup> She told him that Ivanov was the most civilised and cultured person of that generation, but that she did not care for his poetry.<sup>54</sup> She also recited to him her still unfinished ‘Poema bez geroya’ (Poem without a Hero), which conjures up Ivanov’s entourage in pre-Revolutionary Petersburg through a carnival procession of masked figures.<sup>55</sup> Berlin most likely recounted the

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<sup>51</sup> Bowra, ‘Introduction’, in Ivanov, *Svet Vechernii*, xiii.

<sup>52</sup> Meeting with Isaiah Berlin, All Souls College, Oxford, 26 November 1980; my notes on Berlin’s comments were made at the time. No mention is made of Berlin’s visit to Ivanov in Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life*.

<sup>53</sup> For an account of the meetings with Akhmatova, see Berlin, ‘Meetings with Russian Writers in 1945 and 1956’, 189-210; see also Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life*, 148-69.

<sup>54</sup> Personal communication from Isaiah Berlin, All Souls College, Oxford, 26 November 1980. Compare Berlin’s published recollection of these conversations: ‘Vyacheslav Ivanov was infinitely distinguished and civilised, a man of unerring taste and judgement, of the finest imaginable critical faculty, but his poetry was to her chilly and unsympathetic.’ Berlin, ‘Meetings with Russian Writers in 1945 and 1956’, 198. For a more extensive record of Akhmatova’s view of Ivanov, prior to her meeting with Berlin, see Lidiya Chukovskaya, *Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatovoi*, vol.1, 1938-1941 (Paris: YMCA-PRESS, 1976), 46, 68-9, 120, 156-7, 166.

<sup>55</sup> See Berlin, ‘Meetings with Russian Writers in 1945 and 1956’, 193-4. In Akhmatova’s later notes (1959-62) for a projected ballet libretto of ‘Poema bez geroya’ Ivanov is cast as Faust.



details of his meetings with Akhmatova to Bowra, including her views on Ivanov, before they visited the poet in Rome.

When Berlin first saw Ivanov in Rome, he was struck by his white fluffy hair and ‘very Catholic’ appearance; he also noted his remarkable mental alertness at the age of eighty-one. Ivanov evidently adjusted his conversation to suit his distinguished academic visitors from Oxford; he told them that he still regarded himself as a pupil of Theodor Mommsen, whose seminar on ancient Roman history he had attended in Berlin in the late 1880s, and described his own teaching during his brief spell as Professor of Classical Philology and Poetics at Baku University. Opinions about the work of Bal’mont, Merezhkovskii, Blok, Akhmatova and Pasternak were also discussed. Berlin recalled that Bowra probably conversed with Ivanov in French, since his spoken Russian was very poor.<sup>56</sup> As Bowra was partial to long monologues and did not much like to be interrupted, Berlin eventually left the floor to his friend and retreated to the kitchen, where he chatted with Ivanov’s companion, Ol’ga Shor, and his two children, Lidiya, a composer and musician, then aged fifty-one, and Dimitrii, a teacher and journalist, aged thirty-five.

At the time of their visit, Ivanov was greatly excited about the recent discovery in Rome of a Mithraic temple, displaying an eclectic mix of pagan and Christian imagery.<sup>57</sup> The worship of the Persian god Mithras, identified with the sun, was introduced in ancient Rome and attracted a large following alongside Christianity until it was officially banned in the fourth century. Ivanov’s interest in the spread of Mithraic religion in ancient Rome arose in Berlin, when his fellow student, the Belgian scholar Franz Cumont, shared the results of his first

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<sup>56</sup> This recollection is supported by the fact that Ivanov wrote his next letter to Bowra in French (letter 9 in Chapter 5).

<sup>57</sup> Rome contains many such sites. The church of San Clemente, for example, near the Coliseum, is built over a small Mithraic temple, containing an altar with a classical bas-relief depicting the ritual slaying of a bull by Mithras.

investigations into this subject at Mommsen's seminar.<sup>58</sup> At the time of his encounter with Bowra, he saw the newly discovered temple as a living symbol and tangible proof of his fundamental belief in the organic connection between pagan antiquity and early Christianity, based on the central experience of sacrifice. Berlin recalled that Ivanov despatched him and Bowra to visit the temple, possibly under the guidance of Ol'ga Shor.

The significance of Bowra's and Berlin's visit to Ivanov was later mythologised by Akhmatova. In much the same way as she represented Berlin as a guest from the future, whose meetings with her in Leningrad in 1946 had changed the course of twentieth-century history, she cited his visit with Bowra to Ivanov in Rome as 'proof' of a strong renaissance of Western interest in Petersburg literary life of the 1910s: 'В Оксфорде настоящий культ Вячеслава Иванова («Свет вечерний» и статьи). Сэры Bowra и Berlin ездили к нему на поклон (между нами говоря, это было зрелище для богов!?)' [In Oxford there is a real cult of Vyacheslav Ivanov (*Svet Vechernii* and articles). Sirs Bowra and Berlin travelled to bow down before him (speaking in confidence, this was a spectacle for the gods!?).<sup>59</sup> By contrast, in his own account of the visit, Berlin underplayed the significance of the meeting and belittled his own role. He did not reveal to me that he had promised Ivanov that he would check the philosophical terms in Semen Frank's translation of Ivanov's essay 'Anima', currently under preparation for a collection of Russian religious philosophical writing edited by Frank.<sup>60</sup> Nor did he even mention that he had been entrusted with the key task of transporting the typescript

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<sup>58</sup> Ivanov, 'Avtobiograficheskoe pis'mo', II, 17.

<sup>59</sup> Anna Akhmatova, 'Iz prozaicheskikh zametok', published by Roman Timenchik, *Rodnik*, 5 (29), 1989, 23. When *Svet Vechernii* was published, Konovalov sent a copy to Kornei Chukovskii, whose daughter, Lidiya Chukovskaya, showed it to her close friend Akhmatova.

<sup>60</sup> See Ivanov's letter to Konovalov of 8 December 1947, typescript, RAI, *opis'* 3, 112. The volume planned with Harvill Press at the instigation of Konovalov was to be in English; after a disagreement with the publisher, this plan was dropped. A Russian translation by Semen Frank of Ivanov's essay 'Anima' (1935), originally published in German, eventually appeared in S.L. and V.S. Frank (eds.), *Iz istorii russkoi filosofskoi mysli kontsa XIX i nachala XX veka: Antologiya* (Washington, DC and New York: Inter-Language Literary Associates, 1965), 183-93.

of *Svet Vechernii* back to Oxford, thus ensuring its later publication<sup>61</sup> – in fact, strangely enough, he appeared to have lost all recollection of the plan to publish this book, instigated by Konovalov. When I reminded him of this during our meeting, he commented that it was ‘perfectly possible’, but wondered who might have put Konovalov up to it, as he was a ‘very boring man’ and could not possibly have had such an interesting idea on his own.<sup>62</sup> At the time, however, and for some years afterwards, Berlin was genuinely interested in the project and did much to expedite it; in the spring of 1949, for example, he wrote to Bowra from Harvard, triumphantly announcing that he had found a sponsor (‘the admirable Burdon Muller’), prepared to put up £50 to subsidise the publication of *Svet Vechernii*.<sup>63</sup> After Ivanov’s death, Berlin and his wife visited his children and Ol’ga Shor in Rome; Dimitrii Ivanov also visited Berlin in Oxford and was in touch with him about publicity for *Svet Vechernii* when it was finally published.<sup>64</sup> Finally, as noted in Chapter 1, Berlin had occasion to write briefly about Ivanov for his introduction to the anthology of 1966 that included a new English translation of *Perepiska iz dvukh uglov*.

Ivanov’s first meeting with Bowra in Rome played a crucial role, strengthening the close relationship that they had already built up through their exchange of letters, translations, poems and publications. He expressed this quite beautifully in a letter he wrote to Bowra a few months after their meeting: ‘vous êtes confidant de ma Muse, dont vous avez porté en Angleterre les premiers échos, – et je vis jusqu’à ce jour sous le charme de cette inoubliable conversation avec vous à vive voix qui m’a rendu votre image de poète-humaniste, présente déjà à mon esprit,

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<sup>61</sup> For evidence of Berlin’s role, see letter 9 in Chapter 5.

<sup>62</sup> Berlin’s rather low opinion of Konovalov is reflected in the letters he wrote in 1945 to Christopher Hill and Bowra soon after Konovalov was elected to the Chair of Russian in Oxford; see Isaiah Berlin, *Flourishing Letters 1928-1946*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Chatto and Windus, 2004), 564, 577.

<sup>63</sup> I. Berlin, Letter to C.M. Bowra of <spring 1949>; copy of one page from this letter deposited with Bowra’s papers, WCA.

encore plus aimable.’<sup>65</sup> As we shall see in the next section, however, his concept of the ‘poet-humanist’ differed quite substantially from Bowra’s approach to this role.

### **‘True’ Symbolism and the relation of ‘the good humanistic tradition’ to Christianity**

When Bowra got back to Oxford he wrote to Ivanov on 3 October 1947, promising to get down to work on his collection of verse as soon as Berlin returned with the text.<sup>66</sup> He also sent him his recently reprinted *Book of Russian Verse* (1947), inscribed ‘To Vyacheslav Ivanov in admiration and friendship from C.M. Bowra / Oxford 3 October 1947’ and *The Heritage of Symbolism* (1947), inscribed ‘To Vyacheslav Ivanov, truest of Symbolists / from C.M. Bowra’.<sup>67</sup> As a result Ivanov was able to acquaint himself, evidently for the first time, with Bowra’s translations of his three poems and with his writing on the Symbolist poets, including Blok. In his letter of thanks, penned in French on 20 December 1947, he painted a flattering portrait of Bowra, highlighting once more the poet in him, as he had in his earlier Latin distichs. He went on to praise Bowra’s translations for their fidelity to form as well as meaning, singling out ‘Complaint’ as his favourite. At the same time he took the opportunity to distance himself from Bowra’s association of his earlier poem ‘Nomads of Beauty’ with the message of amoral, destructive nihilism conveyed in Bryusov’s ‘The Coming Huns’ (both works were translated by Bowra for his anthology and linked by him in the preface and notes).<sup>68</sup>

Ivanov’s passing observation about ‘Nomads of Beauty’ was in fact part and parcel of a much deeper difference of opinion that comes to the fore in the closing part of his letter. After reading his copy of *The Heritage of Symbolism*, inscribed to him as the ‘truest of Symbolists’,

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<sup>64</sup> Personal communication from Isaiah Berlin, All Souls College, Oxford, 26 November 1980.

<sup>65</sup> Letter 9 in Chapter 5.

<sup>66</sup> Letter 8 in Chapter 5.

<sup>67</sup> Copies of both books with Bowra’s inscriptions survive in Ivanov’s library in Rome.

he was clearly anxious to define in his own terms the essence of ‘true’ Symbolism. In his study Bowra placed considerable emphasis on the role of the French Symbolists in defining the movement’s direction and legacy. He described Mallarmé as ‘the conclusion and crown of the Symbolist Movement’ and referred to the later Symbolists as ‘the true inheritors of Mallarmé’. By comparing Blok’s understanding of the transcendental, prophetic properties of art to Mallarmé’s belief in poetry as music, incantation and magic, he also implied that the French line of influence extended to the Russian Symbolists.<sup>69</sup> Ivanov was keen to counter any suggestion that the religious goals of the Russian Symbolists could be identified with the aesthetic aims of the French Symbolists. He opposed Bowra’s blanket definition of Symbolism as a ‘mystical form of Aestheticism’ ‘not in any strict sense Christian’,<sup>70</sup> and referred him to his article of 1936 on Symbolism, which drew a firm distinction between aesthetic and ‘realist’ (religious) forms of symbolism; in his view French Symbolism, as an aesthetic phenomenon, did not exert much influence on the religious dimension of the movement, represented by the Russian Symbolists.<sup>71</sup>

The argument here was clearly not just about the essence of ‘true’ Symbolism. It went much deeper, and ultimately concerned the fundamental nature of culture itself. Was the great humanist tradition to which Ivanov and Bowra both subscribed intrinsically religious in its origins and significance, or not? For Ivanov, as he made clear in his letters to Charles Du Bos (1930) and Alessandro Pellegrini (1934), humanism represented the fulfilment of the wisdom of classical antiquity through its assimilation into the Christian faith; as a result it carried deep religious and ontological significance. Although Bowra was consistently attracted to the areas in

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<sup>68</sup> See Chapter 5, letter 9 and note 66.

<sup>69</sup> See Bowra, *The Heritage of Symbolism*, 1, 15, 164, 220.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>71</sup> See Chapter 5, letter 9 and note 70.

which art approaches the sphere of religious feeling through its association with inspiration and prophecy, his view of the relationship between humanism and Christianity remained rather fluid and undefined. Isaiah Berlin found that Bowra's attitude to religion was 'complicated and obscure: he had a feeling for religious experience; he had no sympathy for positivist or materialist creeds.'<sup>72</sup> To many of his contemporaries he appeared 'disturbingly frank and non-conformist'; he was generally seen as 'a free-thinker, an epicure and an uninhibited advocate of pleasure'.<sup>73</sup> Hugh Lloyd-Jones called him 'an open rebel' and noted: 'He had a kind of religion, like that of the early Greeks, but he did not believe in Christianity.'<sup>74</sup> In a similar vein Noel Annan observed that he 'led the vanguard of the Immoral Front' before the war and that 'dogmatic Christianity was beyond him. But so was rationalist interpretation of being. <...> As a classical scholar he drew his religion <...> from ancient Greece and Rome.'<sup>75</sup>

Bowra's strong belief in the need to develop the 'inner life' through literature did not extend to embracing religion as a value in itself. In a letter to Cyril Connolly about his reaction to reading T.S. Eliot he made a revealing comment on this very issue: 'Eliot hit me very hard inside, but I resisted it, <...> I resisted the Christian part. But now I see that he was on the whole right, and that the Christian part is in fact hardly Christian at all, but really a plea for the inner life.'<sup>76</sup> Bowra clearly preferred to treat Christian elements in art as manifestations of an undefined 'inner life'. Ivanov was sensitive to this area of resistance in Bowra's response to the religious dimension of literature and tried to shift him in the direction of a more explicitly Christian approach to the humanist tradition. Apart from his possible interest in Bowra's own spiritual welfare, he was also doubtlessly concerned about

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<sup>72</sup> Berlin, 'Memorial Address in St Mary's', 21.

<sup>73</sup> *The Times*, 'A Brilliant Oxford Figure', 14.

<sup>74</sup> Lloyd-Jones, 'British Academy Memoir', 35.

<sup>75</sup> Noel Annan, 'A Man I Loved', in Lloyd-Jones (ed.), *Maurice Bowra: A Celebration*, 55, 84.

the way in which his generation of religious Symbolists might be (mis)represented by Bowra in the light of his own views. In his letters he used flattery as a means of persuasion: by addressing Bowra as a member of an élite community of inspired poet-scholars, he evidently hoped to bring him more closely into the orbit of his own understanding of the Christian significance of humanism.

The dialogue between Ivanov and Bowra about the Christian significance of the ‘good humanistic tradition’ continued well after Ivanov’s death. Traces of their differences of opinion can be found in Bowra’s introduction to *Svet Vechernii*. The following passage, for example, reflects their disagreement over the meaning of ‘Nomads of Beauty’ and the essence of true Symbolism:

As a comparatively young man, he had in his poem *Kochevniki krasoty* proclaimed that artists are anarchists free to do what they will and are almost destined to destroy. In later life he did not disown this poem but he was careful to explain that he no longer believed all that it said – a conclusion which he could hardly avoid after Bryusov had used it as a text for his *Gryadushchie Gunny*, in which he proclaimed the thrill of destruction as an end in itself.<sup>77</sup>

This passage contains clear echoes of Ivanov’s comments in his letter to Bowra of 20 December 1947, and yet the echoes are not entirely faithful to the original voice. Ivanov did not state that he no longer believed all that the poem said; he simply tried to correct what he felt was Bowra’s misunderstanding of the poem.

Although Bowra took most of the biographical material used in his introduction from the article on Ivanov by Ol’ga Deschartes, published in 1954 alongside examples of Ivanov’s

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<sup>76</sup> Connolly, ‘Hedonist and Stoic’, 47.

<sup>77</sup> Bowra, ‘Introduction’, in Ivanov, *Svet Vechernii*, xxi.

verse in *Oxford Slavonic Papers*,<sup>78</sup> he did not follow her religious and philosophical line of interpretation in his assessment of the poet's work. He continued to emphasise the significance of Ivanov as a mystic poet and did not devote much attention to the Christian dimension of his work. This provoked a reaction from Dimitrii Ivanov, the guardian of his father's legacy and reputation. In January 1959, after receiving the proofs of *Svet Vechernii* from Clarendon Press, he wrote to Bowra to thank him for his support and introduction:

I have read it with great joy and deep gratitude. Perusing your essay I remembered your first visits to our house and the pleasure of my father in meeting you. And I admired the art with which you have recreated those moments through an intuition coming from the heart, and an extraordinary literary ability. May I thank you for the Introduction and, once more, for the vital assistance you have given to the book?

After these warm opening words he went on to introduce a 'few suggestions'. Most of these were factual corrections, but the last and most substantial point concerned the very same issue of principle that set his father's approach to humanism apart from Bowra's:

Page XVI: It would perhaps be helpful to add for the uninitiated reader a short paragraph, lending a little more precision to my father's spiritual position: After your description of his religious views, finishing with the words: 'He felt that his religion ... to the whole world', I would add, continuing your analysis of his 'vision of existence' something on these lines: This vision of existence was, as he said, 'christocentric', and he used to quote St Justin declaring *ὅσα παρα πᾶσι καλῶς εἶρηται, ἡμῶν χριστιανῶν*

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<sup>78</sup> O. Deschartes, 'Vyacheslav Ivanov', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, 5, 1954, 41-55. Bowra made much more limited use of O. Deschartes's second article, 'Etre et Mémoire selon Vyatcheslav Ivanov: Commentaires au bas de quelques poésies du recueil *Svet vechernii*', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, 7, 1957, 83-98. *Oxford Slavonic Papers* was founded by Konovalov; the first volume appeared in 1950 with an article by Bowra on Pushkin, followed by contributions from W.J. Entwistle, Boris Unbegaun, Dmitri Obolensky, Konovalov and John Simmons.



ἔστιν.<sup>79</sup> This Christian version of ‘nihil humani a me alienum puto’<sup>80</sup> stems like the invitation of all to the marriage of the Son, from a feeling of universal community in the Word, and from a wish that not one iota of eternal spiritual inheritance be lost to mankind, conscious of being the sons of God. (This is all, ‘incirca, what my father writes in his letter on ‘Docta Pietas’; this essay has been published by Suhrkamp Verlag in a small book ‘Das Alte Wahre’ p.175. I sent it to you when it came out, some years ago, I hope it has reached you).<sup>81</sup>

Bowra did not heed Dimitrii Ivanov’s firm (though delicately expressed) suggestion to add this material to his text; although he incorporated all the factual corrections into the final version of his introduction, he omitted this paragraph. The difference of opinion was too substantial to be glossed over by the addition of a new paragraph, and continues to divide scholars of Ivanov’s legacy to this day.

### **Last meeting and exchanges**

In late August 1948 Bowra visited Rome once more and met with Ivanov for the second and last time. Significantly, on this occasion their conversation centred on their current projects exploring the roots of the humanist tradition in Greek antiquity. Bowra was due to spend the

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<sup>79</sup> ‘Everything which has been well expressed by anyone belongs to us Christians.’ This statement, taken from Justin, *Second Apology*, 13, is often cited as a source to support the view that Christianity should embrace the truths to be found in secular thought and other religions. The accent which should be on the final letter of ‘παρά’ has been omitted in the letter.

<sup>80</sup> ‘I consider nothing alien to me.’ This famous quotation comes from a comedy of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC Latin dramatist Terence, *Heauton Timorumenos* (The Self-Tormentor), Act 1, i, 25 (line 77 of the play). The original text reads ‘Homo sum: humani nil a me alienum puto’ [I am a human being: I consider nothing human alien to me].

<sup>81</sup> Letter from D.V. Ivanov to Bowra of 24 January 1959. Typescript, carbon copy, two sheets, RAI, Bowra folder. The originals of Dimitrii Ivanov’s letters to Bowra have not been located among Bowra’s papers in WCA. Dimitrii Ivanov is closely paraphrasing and quoting from a passage from Ivanov’s letter of 1934 to A. Pellegrini on ‘Docta Pietas’ (Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, 440). A German translation of this essay was included in Wjatscheslaw Iwanow, *Das Alte Wahre: Essays*, with an afterword by Victor Wittkowski (Berlin and Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, <1955>), 163-83. Although Dimitrii Ivanov evidently sent this book to Bowra, it has not survived in Wadham College library.

next academic year at Harvard, where he hoped to pursue his Pindar studies. Ivanov, who shared a strong interest in Pindar, offered him encouragement and advice on this topic. He also told Bowra about his own work on a new German version of his earlier study of the religion of Dionysus, a long-standing passionate interest to which he returned towards the end of his life. When Bowra returned to Oxford, he wrote to Ivanov on 19 September 1948, promising to send him details of recent books on Dionysus in English and to resume enquiries about plans for the publication of his other works.<sup>82</sup>

During the following year Bowra continued his efforts on Ivanov's behalf; he corresponded with Isaiah Berlin in Harvard about attempts to raise money for the publication of *Svet Vechernii*,<sup>83</sup> and later voiced his worries that Ivanov might now be too old to take in the encouraging news about the publication of his book.<sup>84</sup> Sadly, Ivanov did not live to hear this good news; he died on 16 July 1949 at the age of eighty-three, just under a year after his last meeting with Bowra. When Bowra learned of his death, he wrote a warm letter to Dimitrii Ivanov:

I saw the news of your father's death in the "Manchester Guardian", which had quite a good notice of him. I fear it must be a great blow to you and your sister and that you will miss him greatly. He was a great man, of a kind very uncommon at any time and especially now. He really represented a great tradition and kept it alive by his great candour and sincerity and passion. I am very proud to have known him. I cherish my memories of him and often think of his kindnesses to me.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> See Chapter 5, letter 11 and note 83.

<sup>83</sup> Letter from Berlin to Bowra of <spring 1949>. Copy of one page from this letter deposited with Bowra's papers, WCA.

<sup>84</sup> Letter from Bowra to Berlin of 1 August <1949>. Copy deposited with Bowra's papers, WCA. When Bowra wrote this letter he was in Harvard and had not yet heard the news of Ivanov's death on 16 July 1949.

<sup>85</sup> Letter from Bowra to D.V. Ivanov of 24 August <1949>, RAI, Bowra folder. Typescript, one sheet, on printed stationery of The Warden's Lodgings, Wadham College, Oxford; no envelope.

These are not just empty truisms. In a few deft words Bowra pinpointed the essence of his high regard for Ivanov: he recognized that Ivanov was ‘a great man, of a kind very uncommon at any time’ and linked his stature to the ‘great tradition’ that he ‘really represented’ and ‘kept alive’. After Ivanov’s death, Bowra made sure that his last contributions to this great tradition were not lost to posterity. Thanks to his continued efforts with Konovalov, an English translation of Ivanov’s work on Dostoevskii appeared in 1952 with a foreword by Bowra; a selection of his late verse and two substantial articles on his work were published in *Oxford Slavonic Papers* in 1954 and 1957; last but not least, *Svet Vechernii*, the greatest dream and hope of the poet’s late years, eventually saw the light of day in 1962, prefaced by Bowra’s introduction. In this way Bowra also revealed himself as a ‘very uncommon’ sort of man and did much through these tangible outcomes to keep alive the ‘good humanistic tradition’ that sustained and defined his remarkable relationship with Ivanov.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Letters of Ivanov and Bowra (1946-48)

Ad C.M. Bowra, artis poëticae antistitem Oxoniensem

[To C. M. Bowra, Oxford high-priest of the art of poetry]

V.I. Ivanov to C.M. Bowra, June 1946

Praestantissime poeta!

[Most excellent poet!]

C.M. Bowra to V.I. Ivanov, September 1946

This chapter publishes for the first time the full text of the correspondence of Ivanov and Bowra, consisting of eleven items (one poem and ten letters), exchanged between June 1946 and September 1948. Ivanov addressed one poem to Bowra in Latin and wrote three letters to him (two in English, one in French); his second letter includes a further poem addressed to Bowra, composed in Greek. Bowra responded with seven letters (one in Latin, six in English), all of which survive in Ivanov's archive in Rome (RAI). The situation with regard to the preservation of Ivanov's side of the correspondence is rather more complex. Cliff Davies, the keeper of the archive of Wadham College, Oxford (WCA), has described Bowra as a 'nightmare for archivists', since he threw out most of his papers and did not file what he kept in any systematic fashion. Until very recently Ivanov's contribution to the correspondence could only be reconstructed on the basis of draft copies of two of his letters to Bowra, held in the Rome archive. In July 2004, after several years of fruitless searching, all three of Ivanov's letters to

Bowra were discovered in Wadham College library, buried in a box of miscellaneous offprints. Although Ivanov's Latin poem has not yet been found in Oxford, a final copy of it survives in Rome, and it is therefore now possible to publish the full text of this fascinating correspondence.

After Ivanov's death, Bowra continued to communicate with his son, Dimitrii Ivanov, mainly in relation to the publication of *Svet Vechernii*. The Rome archive holds a further nine letters, written between 1949 and 1963 (six from Bowra to Dimitrii Ivanov, three from Dimitrii Ivanov to Bowra, all in English). The same folder also includes two letters exchanged in 1950 by Dimitrii Ivanov and Marjorie Villiers of Harvill Press, concerning the publication of Ivanov's book on Dostoevskii. These letters have not been included in the present publication, as they lie outside its scope.

## Ivanov - Bowra

June 1946<sup>1</sup>

Ad C.M. Bowra,

artis poëticae antistitem Oxoniensem,

Disticha

(commentariolo subscripta)

Convivis mutis epuli, Musis peregrinis,

ore loqui suades, docte poeta, tuo.

Ecce alterna canunt vox surda et vocis imago

clarior, et formam reddit opus geminum.

Ast ego nostrates interpretor, aurea mutans

carmina in aes raucum, genti alienigenae.

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<sup>1</sup> RAI, Folder II. Manuscript, ink and pencil, one sheet. Repeated attempts to locate Ivanov's distichs and the accompanying offprints of his articles among Bowra's papers, WCA, have unfortunately not met with success. The poem is not among the contents of the Bowra box, nor has it been possible to find it or the offprints among the several boxes of offprints (contents uncatalogued) transferred from Bowra's library after his death to the College library and archive. The text reproduced here is the second of the two versions that survive in RAI; although it appears to be a final version, it may differ from the text that Ivanov sent to Bowra. The recto contains the first four lines of the dedication and heading (written in ink), followed by the first draft of the distichs (written in ink, crossed out in pencil) and the signature V.I. (not crossed out). The verso contains the second draft (written in pencil); this only contains the six lines of the distichs, and does not repeat the dedication, heading and signature, which appear on the recto and are not crossed out. This publication reproduces the dedication, heading and signature from the recto and the second version of the distichs from the verso; it differs slightly in layout and punctuation from the published text of both versions, which appeared as the last item in a collection of unpublished poems by Ivanov in Daniela Rizzi and Andrej Shishkin (eds.), *Archivio italo-russo III: Vjačeslav Ivanov - Testi inediti* (Salerno: Europa Orientalis: 2001), 43.

The date of the distichs (June 1946) can be reconstructed from Konovalov's correspondence with Ivanov. On 18 May 1946 Konovalov suggested to Ivanov that he should get in touch with Bowra and send him an offprint with an inscription (RAI, *opis'* 3, 111); on <24 June 1946> Ivanov informed Konovalov that he was sending Bowra some offprints with accompanying verses in Latin (RAI, *opis'* 3, 112, undated typescript and manuscript drafts of letter; letter dated from Konovalov's reply of 12 August 1946, RAI, *opis'* 3, 111). On 1 September 1946 Bowra wrote to Ivanov to thank him for the distichs and offprints (letter 2). For a detailed discussion of the background to the poem and its contents, see the section on Ivanov's distichs in Chapter 4.

[To C. M. Bowra,

Oxford high-priest of the art of poetry,

Distichs

(appended to a short essay)

You, learned poet, persuade to speak in your tongue

The mute guests at the banquet, the foreign Muses.

Behold, the silent voice and the voice's clearer echo sing in turn,

and the twofold work renders the form.

I for my part translate our country's poets for a foreign people,

changing golden songs into harsh bronze.

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<sup>2</sup> The first draft (crossed out on the recto) reads as follows:

Mutis in vestro thiaso Musis peregrinis  
ore loqui suades, docte poeta, tuo.  
Ecce melos recinit tacitarum vocis imago,  
molliter et formam reddit opus geminum.  
Ast ego nostrates interpretor, aurea mutans  
carmina in aes raucum, genti alienigenae.  
[You, learned poet, persuade to speak in your tongue  
the silent foreign Muses in your company.  
Behold, the voice's echo gives back the song of the silent ones,  
and the twofold work smoothly renders the form.  
I for my part translate our country's poets for a foreign people,  
changing golden songs into harsh bronze.]

<sup>3</sup> I am most grateful to Gerard O'Daly, Department of Greek and Latin, University College London, for his translations of the two versions of Ivanov's distichs and illuminating comments.

**Bowra - Ivanov**

**1 September 1946<sup>4</sup>**

Kal.<endae> Sept.<embris><sup>5</sup>

Praestantissime poeta!

Quomodo verba inveniam quibus dicam quanto gaudio acceperim tuos tres libellulos<sup>6</sup> et versus lepidos et elegantes Latina lingua scriptos?<sup>7</sup> Utinam et mihi Musa adforet quae ita me ingenio adflaret ut dignas gratias referre possem! Iuvat me magnopere audire te vigere et adhuc carmina scribere. Etiam spero et in hac terra carmina tua nota editum iri.<sup>8</sup> De hac re cum bibliopolo Blackwellio<sup>9</sup> sum collocutus et conatus sum ei demonstrare quantum honorem sibi sit asciturus si librum a maximo poeta scriptum ediderit. Sed deest carta, desunt operarii,<sup>10</sup> deest Russicae linguae, Russicarum litterarum scientia. Est tamen perseverandum.<sup>11</sup> Utinam omnia

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<sup>4</sup> RAI, Bowra folder. Typescript, one sheet, on printed stationery of The Warden, Wadham College, Oxford. Envelope addressed to Prof. V. Ivanov, 5 Via Leon Battista Alberti (S. Saba), Roma, Italy. Registered post, postmarked Oxford, 2 September 1946. Ivanov occupied a flat at no.5 Via Leon Battista Alberti; the house was subsequently renumbered no.25.

<sup>5</sup> The Calends of September, the first day of the month in the Roman calendar.

<sup>6</sup> 'Libellolos' (literally 'pamphlets') refer to the offprints that Ivanov sent to Bowra at the suggestion of Konovalov, accompanied by the distichs. In his letter to Konovalov of <24 June 1946> Ivanov listed five offprints that he was sending to Bowra. The fact that Bowra only thanked him for three offprints could be an error on his part, or may suggest that Ivanov ended up reducing the number of offprints from five to three. See the section on Ivanov's distichs in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, letter 1, note 1.

<sup>7</sup> Bowra is referring to the Latin distichs addressed to him by Ivanov. 'Lepidos' can mean 'witty' as well as 'delightful'.

<sup>8</sup> Bowra knew of Ivanov's wish to publish his Russian verse in England from Sergei Konovalov, who put Ivanov in touch with Bowra in December 1945 and subsequently involved Bowra in this project.

<sup>9</sup> 'Bibliopolo' literally means 'bookseller'; in ancient Greece and Rome booksellers were often the equivalent of publishers. On 18 May 1946 Konovalov wrote to Ivanov that he would go to Clarendon Press and to B.H. Blackwell, Oxford, during the next week to discuss the publication of Ivanov's verse; on 12 August 1946 he told Ivanov that he had written that day to Bowra about *Svet Vechernii*, asking him to continue and complete negotiations with B.H. Blackwell in Oxford. On 29 August 1946 Konovalov informed Ivanov that Bowra had told him that he had now written to Blackwell (RAI, *opis*' 3, 111).

<sup>10</sup> 'Operarii' has been taken to refer to printers etc. Konovalov lists a similar catalogue of obstacles in his letter to Ivanov of 29 August 1946 (RAI, *opis*' 3, 111).

<sup>11</sup> Ivanov quoted this phrase back to Bowra in his reply (letter 3).



prosperere vigeant!<sup>12</sup>

Iam ante quinque annos inveni tuos libros in Bibliotheca Londiniana, et non possum dicere quanto gaudeam eis, praecipue illo quod 'Cor Ardens' vocatur.<sup>13</sup> Admiror subtilitatem, sapientiam, concinnitatem, immo ingenium quod ubique ardet.<sup>14</sup> Conatus sum tria carmina Anglica lingua repraesentare, sed non mihi persuasi me quod erat desiderandum fecisse.<sup>15</sup>

Saluto te et omnia bona opto et ominor,

C.M. Bowra

[The Calends of September

Most excellent poet!

How can I find the words to express with what great delight I received your three offprints and your delightful and elegant Latin verses! How I wish that the Muse might also visit me, and inspire me with the skill to be able to thank you as you deserve! It gives me great pleasure to learn that you are flourishing and still writing poetry. I hope, too, that your new poems will be published in this country. I have spoken about this to the publisher Blackwell, and I have tried to make him see what great esteem he should enjoy, were he to publish a book written by so eminent a poet. But paper is scarce, there is a labour shortage, there is a lack of knowledge of the Russian language and of Russian literature. Nevertheless, we must persevere. Let us hope that everything will turn out well!

Five years ago I came across your books in the London Library, and I cannot tell you

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<sup>12</sup> Bowra's perseverance and hopes were justified in the end, but it took another sixteen years until *Svet Vechernii* was finally published in 1962.

<sup>13</sup> This dates Bowra's initial reading of Ivanov's poetry to 1941, when he was collecting materials for his first anthology of Russian verse in translation. The London Library on St James's Square holds copies of Ivanov's *Prozrachnost'* (1904) and *Cor Ardens* (1911-12), the two collections from which Bowra chose poems for translation and inclusion in his anthology.

<sup>14</sup> 'Ardet' (burns) is an elegant play on 'ardens' (burning) from the title of Ivanov's book *Cor Ardens* (The Burning Heart).

how much I enjoy them, especially the one entitled 'Cor Ardens'. I admire their fine artistry, their wisdom, their charm, and above all the great talent that burns throughout. I have attempted to render three poems into English, but have not convinced myself that I have done what was needed.

I send you greetings and best wishes,

C.M. Bowra]<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Bowra's first translations of three poems by Ivanov appeared in Bowra (ed.), *A Book of Russian Verse*, 86-8. For details of the translations, see Chapter 3.

<sup>16</sup> I am extremely grateful to Gerard O'Daly for kindly preparing this translation of Bowra's letter and for his helpful comments.

Ivanov – Bowra

1 October 1946<sup>17</sup>

Rome, 1st October 1946.

via Leon Battista Alberti, 5 (S. Saba)

Dear Sir,

The good humanistic tradition demands of me an answer in Latin to your elegant latin message; but I prefer to amuse you with innocent solecisms of my virgin english prose.<sup>18</sup> I may give you in this way a proof of being somehow enabled to appreciate the “lucent language” and the architectonic harmony of your beautiful book, whose artistic refinement and sensibility I admire not less than its doctrine, penetration and originality of conception.<sup>19</sup>

Your researches have for me just now a particular interest, for I am hastening to complete a long narrative in mediaeval style, somewhat similar perhaps, as intention, to Milton's *Arthuriad*, - a miraculous *vita* of a mighty tzar and his holy son, told by a pious monk in the language of the ancient russian chronicles and legends.<sup>20</sup>

I thank you very, very much for both your precious book and your kind letter, which tells me how you discovered my *Cor Ardens* under the cupola of the famous Reading-room where I

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<sup>17</sup> WCA, Bowra's papers. Typescript, one sheet; final sentence (from 'Reiterating') and signature in manuscript, black ink; no envelope. Two earlier versions of this letter survive in RAI: a manuscript draft, pencil, one sheet, dated 1 October 1946, and a typescript copy, without the final sentence added in manuscript. The most significant difference in the manuscript draft is cited below in note 26.

<sup>18</sup> This phrase is echoed in Ivanov's draft letter to Konovalov of 20 October 1946 (RAI, *opis*' 3, 112), cited in Chapter 4, note 26.

<sup>19</sup> Bowra sent Ivanov his recent book, *From Virgil to Milton*, inscribed 'To V. Ivanov from C.M. Bowra' (copy preserved in Ivanov's library in Rome). He evidently sent the book at the same time as his first letter of 1 September 1946, although he makes no reference to the gift in his letter.

<sup>20</sup> Ivanov is referring to his late work 'Povest' o tsareviche Svetomire'. For further details see Chapter 4, note 27. Bowra describes Milton's unfulfilled plan to write an *Arthuriad* in *From Virgil to Milton*, 194-5.

studied once for a short time Greek religion.<sup>21</sup> Your Virgilian versions make me extremely regret the hypercriticism that hampered your begun translation of what you had chosen among my lyrics.<sup>22</sup>

I am profoundly grateful to you for the generous effort to promote an edition of my rhymes. *Utinam fata sinant!*<sup>23</sup> Your strong encouragement (“*est tamen perseverandum*”)<sup>24</sup> moves me to my very heart. But I am quite conscious of the fact that the expensive publication (though the author renounces all his rights) can by no means meet a ready sale. URSS<sup>25</sup> forbids wholly the non-conformist literature. However, these obstacles do not in the least diminish my great joy to have won, as poet, in you, poet, so much sympathy, comprehension and help.<sup>26</sup>

Reiterating the expression of my deepest gratitude

Yours faithfully

V. Ivanov

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<sup>21</sup> Ivanov worked on the ancient Greek religion of Dionysus in the British Museum reading-room during his stay in England from October 1899 to May 1900. He confuses the British Museum reading-room with the London Library, mentioned by Bowra in his previous letter.

<sup>22</sup> In the preface to *From Virgil to Milton*, v, Bowra notes that the translations of Virgil are his own. Ivanov's high regard for these 'Virgilian versions' leads him to regret that Bowra's self-critical comments on his translations of Ivanov's verse (expressed in his first letter to Ivanov) evidently caused him to abandon further attempts.

<sup>23</sup> 'May the fates allow <it>!'

<sup>24</sup> 'Nevertheless, we must persevere.' Ivanov is quoting a phrase from Bowra's previous letter to him in Latin (letter 2).

<sup>25</sup> Italian for USSR.

<sup>26</sup> This last section of the letter was phrased somewhat differently in the manuscript draft, held in RAI: 'But I find quite reasonable the refusal of the editor to undertake an expensive publication (though the author renounces all his rights) for the sake of a few strangers and scholars, since the government of URSS forbids the intrusion into the country of non-conformist literature. However this not unexpected disappointment does not in the least diminish my great joy to have won, as poet, in you, as poet, so much sympathy and comprehension.'

Bowra – Ivanov

3 November 1946<sup>27</sup>

Nov. 3

Praestantissime poeta,<sup>28</sup>

I am most indebted to you for your charming letter, and, happily, since I heard from you, a friend in Moscow has sent me “Cor Ardens” and “Прозрачност<ь>”.<sup>29</sup> Alas, I wish I could send you more than *χάλκεα χρυσείων*<sup>30</sup> – but such as they are, I send versions with Greek from Coleridge and Swinburne.<sup>31</sup> I am not sure that they are really Hellenic - I wish they were.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> RAI, Bowra folder. Manuscript, ink, one sheet, on printed stationery of The Warden, Wadham College, Oxford; no envelope. The year of the letter is dated by Ivanov’s reply (letter 5).

<sup>28</sup> ‘Most excellent poet’.

<sup>29</sup> *Prozrachnost*’ (1904) and *Cor Ardens* (1911-12) were Ivanov’s second and fourth collections of verse. Bowra wrote the title *Prozrachnost*’ in Cyrillic, but omitted the soft sign. The ‘friend in Moscow’ who sent Bowra the books is likely to have been Kornei Chukovskii, with whom Isaiah Berlin made contact on Bowra’s behalf during his stay in Moscow in 1945-6; for further details, see the section on Ivanov’s first meeting with Bowra in Chapter 4.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Bronze for gold’. A reference to the famous exchange of gold for bronze armour, described in Book 6 of *The Iliad*. When Glaucus and Diomedes encounter each other, fighting on opposite sides during a battle between the Trojans and the Greeks, they discover that they are bound by old family ties of friendship. Diomedes proposes that they avoid each other in combat and suggests an exchange of armour as a sign of friendship; Glaucus foolishly exchanges his gold armour for the bronze armour of Diomedes. The Homeric line (*Iliad* 6, 236) reads ‘*χρῦσα χαλκείων*’ (gold for bronze). Bowra’s elegant reversal of Homer’s phrase enables him to defer modestly to his correspondent, whose collections of verse he has just received. I am most grateful to Chris Carey, Department of Greek and Latin, University College London, for drawing my attention to this allusion. Bowra’s choice of phrase also echoes Ivanov’s earlier reference to his own transformation of golden songs into dull bronze in his Latin distichs to Bowra (letter 1); for further details, see Chapter 4.

<sup>31</sup> The English originals and Greek versions of Coleridge’s fragment ‘Kubla Khan...’ (1797) and of Swinburne’s chorus ‘When the hounds of spring are on winter’s traces...’ (from his verse drama *Atalanta in Calydon: A Tragedy*, 1865) were first published in *Greece and Rome*, III, 9, May 1934, 178-81 and V, 13, October 1935, 53-6, respectively. The Greek texts are described as ‘versions’ and signed by C.M. Bowra; at the end of his version of Coleridge Bowra cites as parallels sections from the tragedies of Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris* and *Hercules Furens*. Bowra sent Ivanov reprints of these versions. Ivanov’s library, RAI, contains an undated reprint from *Greece and Rome*, V, 13, October 1935, with the English original of Swinburne’s chorus and Bowra’s Greek version; his archive also contains three pages with the printed text of Bowra’s Greek version of Coleridge’s poem, filed together with this letter in RAI. In both cases the Greek versions are the same as in the original journal publication, but are reprinted on unnumbered pages in a different Greek font. Bowra later included his versions of Coleridge and Swinburne in an anthology of compositions in Latin and Greek, published in Oxford in 1949; see Chapter 5, letter 11, note 82.

<sup>32</sup> Ivanov quoted this sentence back to Bowra at the beginning of his reply (letter 5).

Yours sincerely,

C.M Bowra

Ivanov – Bowra

9 December 1946<sup>33</sup>Rome, Dec. 9<sup>th</sup>, '46

- “I am not sure that they (the versions) are really Hellenic. I wish they were”.<sup>34</sup>

- Πολλῶν ἐδῶν δέσποινα Μοῦσ' ἐν Ελλάδι

αὐλοῖσιν ἔμπνῃ σοῖσιν οἰκεῖαν χάριν,

ἠ΄ εὖνις ὦν, φράδμων περ, ἐρμηνεὺς ἔπῶν

Ἄρκτου λύρας, Βορρᾶ συγήθεις ἀλμυρῶ

Χώρας τ' ὀμίγλη καὶ νέφους φαντάσμασιν

ἐλληνίδας πῶς ἂν ποιήσαι; Χαιρέτω.

[The Muse, mistress of many sites in Greece,

Breathes into your pipes with her own grace,

Bereft of which, wise though he be, how could an interpreter of lines

Of the Northern lyre, make those accustomed to the briny North wind

And the country's mist and phantasms of cloud

Into Greek? Let it be.]<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> WCA, Bowra's papers. Manuscript, ink, one sheet (torn); no envelope. No draft versions of this letter survive in RAI.

<sup>34</sup> Ivanov opens his letter by quoting the closing sentence of Bowra's previous letter to him (letter 4), also copied out by him on a separate sheet (see note 35 below). His letter and Greek poem directly address the concern that Bowra expressed in this sentence.

<sup>35</sup> I am extremely grateful to Chris Carey for his translation and helpful comments. Ivanov's poem is an original composition in iambic trimeters (a few lines are metrically flawed, due to lack of caesura). The poem's core message evidently grew out of two Greek words “Ἐλληνίδ” ἔμπνῃ (breathes the Greek); as Ἐλληνίδ (the Greek) is in the feminine accusative form, it may refer to the Greek Muse or spirit. These two words, which were later taken up in lines 2 and 6 of the poem, were first written down by Ivanov on a folded sheet, accompanying the three printed pages of Bowra's Greek version of Coleridge's poem, immediately after the closing sentence of Bowra's previous

Dear Warden,

Many, many thanks for the duple<sup>36</sup> joy given me by two “things of beauty”.<sup>37</sup> In your Greek versions I am admiring abundance, expressiveness, colours, plasticity of the poetical language you command with sovereign power. Most happily you have built your odic strophes both harmonizing with the musical movement you would render as harmonious. Your Swinburne seems to me – and this is your merit! – clearer and sunnier, more measured in his outbursts, more definite in outlines, more transparent, more serene, more Greek (I except the lines 33-36, which are rather biblical).

As to Coleridge's fragment, the version (I have compared it with the original) is a master-piece of interpretation; but even the splendid dithyrambic raiment is unable to make the queer and confused poem Hellenic. The instructive experiment shows that some emanations of romanticism are absolutely reluctant to the spirit and style of Greek poetry. Of course, you have well done giving back his right name to the oriental hero of a legend that is obviously a minoan

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letter ('I am not sure that they are really Hellenic - I wish they were'), also copied out by him on the same sheet (RAI, Bowra folder). With these two words and their development in his poem, Ivanov is responding reassuringly to Bowra's doubt over the Hellenic qualities of his versions, suggesting that Bowra must have been inspired by the Greek Muse in order to render into Greek two English poets (the 'Northern Lyre'), formed by such a different cultural climate. It is somewhat puzzling that Ivanov has put the adjective 'ἑλληνίδας' (Greek) in the final line in the feminine form of the accusative plural; one would expect the masculine form if he had in mind the Hellenization of a north European *people*. He may have been struggling to fit the words to the metre (iambic trimeter), or have intended the adjective 'Greek' to qualify an implied feminine noun such as 'Muse' or 'spirit', as in the phrase discussed above, "Ἑλληνίδ" ἔμπναι' (breathes the Greek).

<sup>36</sup> 'Double'.

<sup>37</sup> Ivanov's phrase 'two "things of beauty"' echoes the opening line of Keats's 'Endymion: A Poetic Romance' (1817): 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.' Ivanov is thanking Bowra for his two Greek versions of Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' and Swinburne's 'When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces...', sent to him with letter 4.



survival.<sup>38</sup>

I am glad that you have got now my “Translucidity” too.<sup>39</sup> On the next occasion I will write in Russian.<sup>40</sup> Long since I have no news from Prof. Konovalov, no answer came even <to><sup>41</sup> business-questions; I wonder not without apprehension whether all's right with him.<sup>42</sup>

My best wishes for the coming Holidays and the New Year!

Yours truly

V. Ivanov

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<sup>38</sup> In line 1 of his Greek version Bowra replaced Coleridge’s Kubla Khan (the Mongol ruler and founder of the Yuan dynasty in China in the thirteenth century) with Minos, a Cnossian king of Crete (έν Κνωσῶ βασιλεὺς Μίνως) famed for his magnificent palace and maze.

<sup>39</sup> Bowra mentioned that he had acquired a copy of *Prozrachnost'* in letter 4.

<sup>40</sup> Ivanov did not keep this threat; his next (and last) letter was in French.

<sup>41</sup> This word has been inserted, as the manuscript is torn at this point.

<sup>42</sup> Konovalov had last written to Ivanov over three months ago on 29 August 1946 (RAI, *opis'* 3, 111); he then fell silent for four months. Ivanov wrote to Konovalov on 20 October 1946 and again on 9 December 1946 (a draft of the first letter is in RAI, *opis'* 3, 112; the second letter does not survive in RAI, but is referred to by Konovalov in his next letter). On 22 December 1946 Konovalov wrote to Ivanov, apologising for having fallen behind with his affairs during a hard semester and resuming discussion of several projects for the publication of Ivanov’s works (RAI, *opis'* 3, 111).

**Bowra – Ivanov**

**30 December 1946<sup>43</sup>**

December 30th

Dear Professor Ivanov,

Thank you very much indeed both for your letter and for the two books which arrived punctually on Christmas morning.<sup>44</sup> I am extremely grateful to you for the pleasure which you have given me both by your letter and the books. In the first I much appreciated your penetrating remarks about translation into Greek, and I find myself in complete agreement. One of the risks and delights of this recondite art is seeing how far the English ideas will go into Greek. There is nearly always a point where they will not – and then one goes blindly ahead, rather as the translators of the Bible must have done in the seventeenth century, when they knew that the Hebrew ideas were not English but insisted on trying their best with them.<sup>45</sup> Indeed one of the many lessons that translation offers one of the best<sup>46</sup> is the way in which it stresses the difference between one language and another, differences which really cannot be surmounted by any ingenuity because they reflect differences, as you say, of climate and of all that climate

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<sup>43</sup> RAI, Bowra folder. Typescript, one sheet, on printed stationery of The Warden, Wadham College, Oxford. Envelope addressed to Professor V. Ivanov, 5 Via Leon Battista Alberti (S. Saba), Roma, Italy. Postmarked Oxford, 30 December 1946; Rome, 4 January 1947.

<sup>44</sup> Ivanov sent Bowra his long and complex poem, *Chelovek* and its recent translation into Italian. Both copies survive in the library of Wadham College and contain personal inscriptions to Bowra in Ivanov's handwriting. Since the pages of *Chelovek* remain uncut, it appears that Bowra did not read this work. For details of the inscriptions, see Chapter 4, notes 45 and 46.

<sup>45</sup> A reference to the Authorized Version of the Bible (1611) prepared for King James.

<sup>46</sup> No punctuation in the original; Bowra's typewriter may have lacked brackets.

implies.<sup>47</sup> How hard it is, for instance, to put any speech of Shakespeare into Greek iambs, though he wrote for the stage and in a line not absolutely unlike the Greek.<sup>48</sup> But the metaphors, the movement of the thought, the quality of the emotions, the whole background are different. Still one goes on trying and enjoys the endless problems which the job presents.

I am sending you my book on Sophocles.<sup>49</sup> On looking at it again I find it rather too pedantic and philological in the worst sense. But I wrote it as an anodyne in the worst years of the war, and I am sure that you will make allowances for this.

I will see Konovalov and find out what has happened to him. In Paris I saw Kaplan and talked to him about publishing your book.<sup>50</sup> I hope he will do so, and I think he is willing and can get the paper. But I have heard no more. But you may rest assured that we will do something somehow.

With all good wishes for the New Year and very many thanks,

yours sincerely

C M Bowra

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<sup>47</sup> An allusion to Ivanov's reference to the English climate ('the briny North wind / And the country's mist and phantasms of cloud') in his Greek poem responding to Bowra's Greek versions of Coleridge and Swinburne at the beginning of letter 5.

<sup>48</sup> This sort of exercise was regularly undertaken by Bowra, one of the seven members of the Oxford informal club for the practice of Latin and Greek composition in prose and verse, formed in November 1923. Bowra later published his Greek versions of three excerpts from Shakespeare's plays in an anthology of compositions produced by members of the group; see Barrington-Ward, *Some Oxford Compositions*, 262-5 274-5. Bowra planned to send Ivanov a copy of this anthology when it was published; see letter 11. Shakespeare wrote his dramas in iambic pentameters. Greek iambs are based on quantity (the alternation of long and short syllables), not stress; the line is a trimeter, in which one metron, consisting of two feet, is repeated three times.

<sup>49</sup> C.M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945). A copy of this book (reprinted with corrections from the first edition of 1944) survives in Ivanov's library in Rome; it contains a printed slip 'With the Author's Compliments', but no inscription.

<sup>50</sup> M.S. Kaplan (1893-1979) was the owner of the Paris émigré publishing-house, Dom knigi (Maison du livre étranger), which published Ivanov's poem *Chelovek* in 1939 as the ninth item in its series 'Russkie poety.' On 22 December 1946 (eight days before Bowra wrote this letter) Konovalov had already informed Ivanov that the Oxford publisher Blackwell had not agreed to printing Ivanov's book of verse, despite Bowra's approach, but was prepared to take on its distribution; this had only become clear at the beginning of November, at which point Konovalov had immediately written to Kaplan in Paris, asking him to send an estimate for 4,200 lines. Bowra happened to be in Paris at this time and spurred Kaplan on. Kaplan agreed (a subsidy of \$150 was offered) and offered two different

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page sizes, but Konovalov still wished to have another attempt at publication in England (RAI, *opis'* 3, 111). *Svet Vechernii* was eventually published in Oxford at the Clarendon Press in 1962.

**Bowra – Ivanov**

**19 September 1947<sup>51</sup>**

Hotel S. Caterina<sup>52</sup>

Amalfi

19 Sept.

Dear Professor Ivanov,

With my friend Is<a>iah Berlin I hope to be in Rome next week, staying at the Hotel Eden,<sup>53</sup> and if you are free at any time, we should be most honoured and delighted if we might visit you at some time. Of course you must not allow us to trouble you, but if you feel it is possible, we should greatly appreciate the honour.

Yours sincerely,

C.M. Bowra

We expect to arrive on the evening of Monday 22.

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<sup>51</sup> RAI, Bowra folder. Manuscript, ink, one sheet. Envelope addressed to Signore Prof. W. Ivanov, 5 Via Gian Battista Alberti (S. Saba), Roma. Express post, postmarked Amalfi, 22 September 1947. Bowra has mistakenly written Gian instead of Leon (Battista Alberti) in the address.

<sup>52</sup> Santa Caterina is a small hotel just outside Amalfi, perched on the cliff and set in its own gardens, overlooking the sea.

<sup>53</sup> Founded in 1889, the Hotel Eden is situated on Via Ludovisi between Via Veneto and the Spanish Steps.

**Bowra – Ivanov**

**3 October 1947<sup>54</sup>**

October 3rd<sup>55</sup>

Dear Professor Ivanov,

I cannot settle down to my usual routine here without sending you a word of gratitude for the charmingly human welcome which you gave me in Rome. It was more than delightful to see you and to feel at perfect and happy ease with you, to talk of the things that most matter and to find you so approachable and hospitable. Thank you too for the fine bottle of wine which your son brought to me and which I am treasuring for some special occasion.<sup>56</sup>

I am sending you herewith two books of mine which I think you have not got.<sup>57</sup> Both were written in the war and may show signs of it, but I hope will interest you.<sup>58</sup>

When Berlin returns here with your poems, we will get to work at once and report progress.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> RAI, Bowra folder. Typescript, one sheet, on printed stationery of The Warden, Wadham College, Oxford; no envelope.

<sup>55</sup> The year '1947' has been added by Ivanov in pencil.

<sup>56</sup> Ivanov's son, Dimitrii Ivanov (1912-2003), was aged thirty-five at the time of Bowra's visit; he worked as a teacher and also as a journalist under the pseudonym of Jean Neuvécelle.

<sup>57</sup> During his visit to Rome Bowra must have noticed that Ivanov did not have copies of his two works most closely connected with the poet: *A Book of Russian Verse* (including his translations of three poems by Ivanov) and *The Heritage of Symbolism* (including a chapter on Blok). Both books, first published in 1943, had recently been reprinted in 1947. On his return to Oxford, Bowra sent Ivanov inscribed copies of these new editions, now located in Ivanov's library in Rome. For details of the inscriptions, see the section on 'True' Symbolism in Chapter 4. For Ivanov's response to both gifts, see letter 9. In a letter of 8 December 1947 to Konovalov Ivanov describes the two books sent to him by Bowra (RAI, *opis'* 3, 112).

<sup>58</sup> Bowra's letter contains an uncorrected error; by mistake he typed 'but I hope you will interest you.'

<sup>59</sup> Berlin transported the manuscript of *Svet Vechernii* from Rome to Oxford. He was charged with this task as he stayed on in Italy for longer than Bowra and could therefore wait until the manuscript was ready. Olga Bickley, a lecturer in Italian from Oxford and close friend of Konovalov, had previously written to Ivanov from Genoa, suggesting that she could convey the manuscript back to Oxford, but this plan was dropped when Bowra and Berlin announced their intention to visit Ivanov in Rome; see Ivanov's letter of 8 December 1947 to Konovalov (RAI,

With all good wishes to your family and yourself,

yours sincerely

C.M. Bowra

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*opis'* 3, 112). When the manuscript of *Svet Vechernii* arrived in Oxford, work continued on plans for its publication, eventually brought to fruition in 1962. Before the book was ready, Konovalov also published some poems from it in *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, the journal that he founded in 1950 and edited until 1967; see 'Forty-one Sonnets by Vyacheslav Ivanov', with an introduction by O. Deschartes, *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, 5, 1954, 56-80, and 'Poems', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, 7, 1957, 64-82.

Ivanov – Bowra

20 December 1947<sup>60</sup>

Rome, le 20 Décembre 1947

Monsieur et cher Ami,

M'est il permis de vous nommer ainsi à double titre: vous êtes confident de ma Muse, dont vous avez porté en Angleterre les premiers échos,<sup>61</sup> – et je vis jusqu'à ce jour sous le charme de cette inoubliable conversation avec vous à vive voix qui m'a rendu votre image de poète-humaniste, présente déjà à mon esprit, encore plus aimable. Et le secret de ce charme que je subis si délicieusement, je crois l'avoir deviné: c'est que vous êtes justement poète, sans y songer peut-être, incessamment, inconsciemment, lorsque vous composez vos strophes grecques<sup>62</sup> et que vous vous adonnez à des recherches austères, à des analyses critiques, en causant avec des amis aussi bien qu'en vous inspirant (tel un *ὑποφήτης* de Delphes)<sup>63</sup> pour interpréter des inspirés. Il semble qu'il vous soit difficile de ne pas chanter avec ceux qui chantent, de ne pas partager les enthousiasmes et même les folies des poètes que vous avez à juger. Le langage des symbolistes étrangers vous est plus transparent, plus familier qu'à leurs

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<sup>60</sup> WCA, Bowra's papers. Manuscript, ink, one sheet (torn); no envelope. Two draft versions of this letter survive in RAI: a manuscript draft, pencil, in Dimitrii Ivanov's handwriting, undated, one sheet (a much condensed version of the final letter, reproduced below in note 73), and a typescript, red ink, dated 1 December 1947 (text exactly as in the final manuscript version, but with several typing and spelling errors not found in Ivanov's final version; this typescript may be a preliminary version of the final letter, dictated to O. Shor, or a copy of the final version, typed by her for Ivanov's records).

<sup>61</sup> Ivanov is referring to Bowra's English translations of his verse, first published in 1943 (in his Latin distichs to Bowra, he also describes translations as 'echoes'); he is mistaken, however, in referring to Bowra's translations as the *first* echoes of his Muse in England, since translations of Ivanov's verse started appearing in England as early as 1919; see Chapter 3, note 10.

<sup>62</sup> Evidently a reference to Bowra's Greek versions of Coleridge and Swinburne.

<sup>63</sup> 'A priest who declaims an oracle'.



compatriotes non-initiés.<sup>64</sup> Vos traductions de lyriques russes sont autant précises que musicales, et je suis fier de trouver parmi elles mes rimes transposées très heureusement par vous.<sup>65</sup> À propos, ne prenez pas trop au sérieux ma boutade contre le conformisme bourgeois (Les Nomades), assez inoffensive et nullement “nihiliste”;<sup>66</sup> en tout cas, je suis bien loin de saluer “the coming Huns”, destinés selon Brussov à démolir la culture et qui s'appliquent effectivement à démolir mon oeuvre.<sup>67</sup> Vos beaux livres (The Russian Verses, The Heritage of Symbolism) que vous avez eu la grande bonté de m'envoyer me sont précieux, et je vous remercie chaleureusement de ce don accompagné d'un charmant billet de souvenir amical.<sup>68</sup> En matière de symbolisme nos vues diffèrent quelque peu; j'ai esquissé ma conception dans L'Enciclopedia Italiana (Treccani) s.v. Simbolismo. À la poésie stérile et “méonique” (μη ὄν)<sup>69</sup> de Mallarmé j'attache moins d'importance que vous; elle n'a réellement exercé une influence que sur Valéry et qu'à travers Valéry.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Ivanov is probably referring to Bowra's treatment of Symbolist poets in *The Heritage of Symbolism*, but he may also have in mind Bowra's English translations of Russian Symbolist verse.

<sup>65</sup> In his practice as a translator Bowra strove to reproduce the meaning and the metre of the original as closely as possible; see Chapter 3. This was also the approach followed by Ivanov, who praises Bowra's translations of his three poems, published in Bowra (ed.), *A Book of Russian Verse*, 86-8.

<sup>66</sup> Ivanov is referring to his poem 'Kochevniki Krasoty', from which Bryusov quoted a line as the epigraph to his poem 'Gryadushchie gunny' (1904-5). Bowra translated both poems by Ivanov and Bryusov for *A Book of Russian Verse*; in his introduction to the anthology he linked the 'kind of nihilism in Ivanov's *Beauty's Nomads*' with the 'sinister' 'prophecy of destruction' in Bryusov's poem, presenting both as manifestations of a kind of mysticism which is 'not necessarily Christian'; Bowra (ed.), *A Book of Russian Verse*, xviii. Ivanov is clearly anxious to put Bowra right on this score, and to avoid the confusion of his address to artists as untamed nomads with Bryusov's destructive brand of nihilism.

<sup>67</sup> Ivanov seems to associate Bryusov's 'coming Huns' with the barbarian Soviet officials responsible for the destruction of Russian culture. For an account of the suppression and distortion of Ivanov's literary work in Soviet Russia, see Davidson, *Viacheslav Ivanov: A Reference Guide*, xxii-xxvi.

<sup>68</sup> See letter 8.

<sup>69</sup> Ivanov has coined a new French word 'méonique', based on the Greek 'μη ὄν' (not being, non-existent), in order to convey his view of Mallarmé's poetry as sterile and devoid of ontological reality. He first used the term 'Meon' as the title of a poem dedicated to N.M. Minskii, who promoted a bizarre philosophy of 'meonism' in *Pri svete sovesti* (In the Light of Conscience, 1890). Ivanov's 'Meon' was first published in 1905 and later included under the title 'Semper morior, semper resurgo' in *Cor Ardens* (Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, 267-8). For examples of his later use of the terms 'meonizm' and 'meonicheskii' in a philosophical and religious context, see his essays on V. Solov'ev (1911) and F. Dostoevskii (1917) in his *Sobranie sochinenii*, III, 303, IV, 470.

<sup>70</sup> V. I. [V. Ivanov], 'Simbolismo', 793-4. For a discussion of Ivanov's approach to Mallarmé in the broader context of Russian culture, see Roman Dubrovkin, *Stefan Mallarme i Rossiya* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998).

Veillez bien transmettre mes amitiés et mille remerciements<sup>71</sup> au Prof. Berlin, qui s'est si généreusement chargé du fardeau de mon manuscrit,<sup>72</sup> et agréez vous-même, cher Maître et Ami, de ma part et de la part de ma famille, avec l'expression de notre admiration, our best wishes of merry Xmas and a happy New-Year.

Votre très dévoué et profondément reconnaissant

Venceslas Ivanov<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Usually spelled 'remerciements'.

<sup>72</sup> See letter 8, note 59.

<sup>73</sup> The first manuscript draft in RAI contains several interesting variants of the final version:

Monsieur et cher Ami,

je garde bien vivant le souvenir de votre visite qui vous a rendu, présent déjà à mon esprit, plus concret et plus réel. Je crois avoir découvert la clé de l'énigme: vous êtes poète. Poète lorsque vous êtes philologue, poète dans vos explorations et dans vos essais - et surtout quand vous avez affaire à d'autres poètes pour les transposer en anglais.

Merci de m'avoir envoyé les deux livres que j'ai lus avec joie. Il nous faudrait parler ensemble des origines et de l'essence véritable du symbolisme - car je crois que nous ne serions pas toujours d'accord.

Je vous suis reconnaissant des trois poèmes que vous avez pris la peine de choisir dans mon oeuvre. J'aime bien ces traductions - surtout celle du deuxième poème.

Tout le monde ici vous envoie son souvenir amical. Veuillez transmettre le mien à S.A. Konovalov, à prof. Berlin et le remercier encore d'avoir bien voulu se charger du fardeau de mon manuscrit. J'espère qu'il est arrivé sain et sauf au port!

Revenez bientôt me voir à Rome et croyez, cher Monsieur et Ami, à mes sentiments reconnaissants et amicaux

**Bowra – Ivanov**

**<18> August 1948<sup>74</sup>**

August 22nd<sup>75</sup>

Dear Professor Ivanov,

I hope to come to Rome next Sunday, August 22nd, and to be staying there for a week. I should very much like to see you if it is possible. A message to the Eden Hotel<sup>76</sup> will find me. I hope very much that you will be there, as I greatly look forward to continuing our talk.

yours very sincerely

C M Bowra

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<sup>74</sup> RAI, Bowra folder. Typescript, one sheet, on printed stationery of The Warden, Wadham College, Oxford. Envelope addressed to Professor V. Ivanov, Via Gian Battista Alberti 5 (S. Saba), Rome, Italy. Postmarked Oxford, <18?> August 1948; Rome, 20 August 1948. Bowra has once more mistakenly written Gian instead of Leon (Battista Alberti) in the address.

<sup>75</sup> Bowra evidently confused the date of his intended arrival in Rome with the date of his letter, clearly written a few days earlier (see details of postmarks above).

<sup>76</sup> See letter 7, note 53.

Bowra – Ivanov

19 September 1948<sup>77</sup>

September 19th

Dear Professor Ivanov,

I was extremely sorry not to see you again in Rome, but I was only there for a few hours, and in these I had a great deal to do.<sup>78</sup> I hope it will not be long before I see you again. I greatly enjoyed your delightful hospitality and the gracious friendliness which I met in your household. It was extremely kind of you to be so good to me.

I leave for the United States on Friday, and hope that I shall have some time there to pursue my Pindar studies.<sup>79</sup> I am greatly encouraged by what you said to me and have continued to think about Pindar and to read what I can about him. Much of the Wissenschaft<sup>80</sup> on him is very poor, and it is surprising how much better the old scholars are than the new, not merely on textual questions but in the whole interpretation of his poetry.

I will make contact with the Harvard Press as soon as possible and stir them up about

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<sup>77</sup> RAI, Bowra folder. Typescript, one sheet, on printed stationery of The Warden's Lodgings, Wadham College, Oxford. Envelope addressed to Professor V. Ivanov, Via Gian Battista Alberti 5 (S. Saba), Rome, Italy. Postmarked Oxford, 19 September 1948; Rome, 22 September 1948. Bowra has once more mistakenly written Gian instead of Leon (Battista Alberti) in the address.

<sup>78</sup> Bowra had evidently visited Ivanov during his week in Rome from 22 to 29 August 1948, but was unable to visit him again when passing through Rome for a few hours at a later date, probably on his way back to England.

<sup>79</sup> Bowra first visited Harvard in the autumn term of 1936; he returned again for a few months in the college year 1948-9 as Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry to deliver a series of lectures on the English Romantic poets, later published in *The Romantic Imagination* (1950). Ivanov and Bowra both shared a life-time interest in Pindar. Ivanov's earliest publication was a version of Pindar's first Pythian ode (1899), while Bowra published translations of Pindar's Pythian odes in 1928, an edition of his verse in 1935, and a study of his work, *Pindar*, in 1964. Bowra's edition and study of Pindar have recently been republished and are widely considered by many scholars in the field to be among his finest work.

<sup>80</sup> 'Science'; here 'scholarship'.

your book.<sup>81</sup> I have also written to Konovalov to find out what, if anything, he has done.

Some of my colleagues here are producing a book of translations from English into Greek and Latin, and several of my own pieces will be in it. Some are rather dull, being exercises for students, but I hope that some of the verse-pieces will interest you. I will send you a copy when it comes out. It should be ready some time next year.<sup>82</sup>

I much look forward to the appearance of your 'Dionysos' and will try to find some of the recent books in English on the subject, though I fear that they may all be out of print.<sup>83</sup>

With my warmest regards both to yourself and your family and "the Flamingo",<sup>84</sup>

yours very sincerely

C M Bowra

P.S. My address in America will be Eliot House, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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<sup>81</sup> Bowra evidently wrote 'Harvard' Press by mistake (as he was on his way to Harvard) but actually meant Harvill Press, with whom Ivanov had signed a contract for his book on Dostoevskii at the instigation of Konovalov.

<sup>82</sup> Barrington-Ward, *Some Oxford Compositions* (1949). The introduction to this anthology was written by T.F. Higham, with whom Bowra had edited the *Oxford Book of Greek Verse* (1930) and the *Oxford Book of Greek Verse in Translation* (1938, 1944). Bowra contributed a wide range of pieces to the 1949 anthology, including his Greek versions of Coleridge and Swinburne (252-6, 292-8). Ivanov's library in Rome does not include a copy of the anthology; Bowra evidently did not send it after learning of Ivanov's death.

<sup>83</sup> After the publication of *Dionis i pradionisiistvo* (1923) Ivanov continued to work on the cult of Dionysos in Italy; during the 1930s and 1940s he was involved in editing and revising a German translation of this work, originally prepared for Benno Schwab in Basel. Two chapters of this translation were published in incomplete form after his death: Wjatscheslaw I. Iwanow, 'Der Orphische Dionysus', *Castrum Peregrini*, 48, 1961, 7-32, and 'Pathos. Katharsis. Tragödie', *Castrum Peregrini*, 168-169, 1985, 96-129. The full revised German version is currently being prepared for publication by Michael Wachtel and Christian Wildberg of Princeton University.

<sup>84</sup> The family nickname for Ivanov's devoted companion and helper, Ol'ga Shor.

## CONCLUSION

The correspondence and meetings of Ivanov and Bowra enabled them to form a close relationship, based on their shared commitment to the perpetuation of a common humanist tradition, reaching back to its roots in Greek antiquity. They both excelled at translating the legacy of the past into the language of the present and at promoting dialogue between different strands of modern European culture. And yet, as Bowra commented to Ivanov, the act of translation between cultures also reveals many ‘differences <...> of climate’ that cannot be surmounted.<sup>1</sup> This observation can equally well be applied to his dialogue with Ivanov, in which each participant ‘translated’ the ideas of the other into his own cultural tradition. The exchange uncovers deep-seated differences in their attitudes to the religious significance of ‘the good humanistic tradition’. In correspondents such as Faddei Zelinskii, Ernst Robert Curtius, Charles Du Bos or Alessandro Pellegrini, Ivanov found fellow humanists in his own religious understanding of this term. In Bowra, by contrast, he encountered a different breed of humanist, less given to metaphysical speculation about the religious origins and purpose of culture, but uniquely qualified to play a practical role in ensuring its survival and continued influence in the modern world.

However paradoxical it may seem, it was precisely this more worldly, practical side of Bowra’s nature that allowed something approaching a miracle to take place: the publication and dissemination of some remarkable works by the ‘truest of Symbolists’ in England, initiated during the darkest years of the second world war. In this respect, Bowra’s role in granting Ivanov’s legacy a new lease of life turned out to be substantial. His two anthologies of Russian verse put Ivanov on the map for English-speaking readers of Russian literature.

His subsequent support for the publication of *Svet Vechernii* demonstrated that Ivanov's poetry was valued in the West as well as in Russia; the appearance of this book also provided tangible proof that religious Symbolism was still alive and relevant to the modern world. Ivanov's pioneering work on Dostoevskii, which anticipated the new criticism of Bakhtin in its concern with the form of Dostoevskii's novels and their roots in tragedy and myth, has been described as 'perhaps the finest example of the ontologically and metaphysically-oriented school of Dostoevsky criticism'.<sup>2</sup> By contributing a foreword to the English translation of this book, Bowra helped to spread the influence of Ivanov's ideas among an even wider audience than his poetry could reach.

A further important consequence of Bowra's contribution to Ivanov's legacy should also be noted. The fact that he arranged the publication of Ivanov's works in England had a crucial bearing on their reception and subsequent influence in Russia. Whereas works by Russian writers published by émigré publishing houses were withdrawn from public circulation and placed in the 'spetskhran' reserve collections of major libraries, inaccessible to the general reader, Ivanov's works published in Oxford and London remained on open access. One of the most distinguished Russian interpreters of Ivanov's legacy for his generation and for today's readers, the late Sergei Averintsev, made this very point: in his last published essay on Ivanov, he recalled how important a personal experience it was for him and for some of his contemporaries to be able to read *Svet Vechernii* in the Lenin library of Moscow during the early 1960s.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 6 in Chapter 5.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Louis Jackson, Introduction to Vyacheslav I. Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life: A Study in Dostoevsky*, with a new introduction by Robert Louis Jackson, foreword by Sir Maurice Bowra, tr. Norman Cameron, ed. S. Konovalov (Wolfeboro, New Hampshire: Longwood Academic, 1989), vii.

<sup>3</sup> Sergei Averintsev, 'Vyacheslav Ivanov – segodnyashnimi glazami', in Sergei Averintsev and Rozemari Tsigler [Rosemarie Ziegler] (eds.), *Vyacheslav Ivanov i ego vremya: Materialy VII Mezhdunarodnogo simpoziuma, Vena 1998* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2002), 12.

Bowra's energy and generosity in promoting the work of this Russian Symbolist is amply repaid today in Russia, where his works on classical antiquity and literature are still read, remembered, and highly valued. When I gave a paper on Bowra and Ivanov at a recent conference held in St. Petersburg at Pushkinskii Dom, Academy of Sciences, I was astonished at the strength of enthusiasm exhibited by several members of the audience; the comments of various classicists and literary scholars revealed a close knowledge of Bowra's works on Greek and Russian literature and deep regard for their relevance to the present as well as to the past. In this climate of opinion it is perhaps not surprising that Bowra's substantial study *Heroic Poetry* (1952), now largely forgotten in England, was translated into Russian and published in Moscow with a long introductory essay to great acclaim just a few years ago.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Sesil Moris Boura, *Geroicheskaya poeziya*, tr. with an introductory essay by N.P. Grintser and I.V. Ershova (M.: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2002).



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