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Edited by
Faith Wigzell

Russian Writers on Russian Writers

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Faith Wigzell**



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But this is what Shestov's article is: the antithesis in a dialectic of which we are presumed to know the thesis. We are perfectly entitled to try to define a superior synthesis ourselves. Shestov's antagonism towards Hegel notwithstanding. But not, if we accept the rules of dialectic, to smooth the opposition over or avert our gaze.

Gumilev's Reviews of Viacheslav Ivanov's *Cor Ardens*: Criticism as a Tool in the Polemics of Literary Succession

Pamela Davidson

The title of this volume, *Russian Writers on Russian Writers*, suggests an interesting question. Is there a generally valid distinction to be drawn between the literary criticism of writers and that of critics, and, if so, what are the main factors which inform this difference?

The critic's judgement is usually rooted in the current climate of literary opinion and often tends towards a conservative approach; it may well be linked to a particular critical method, sometimes imposed upon the writer under consideration. In the Russian tradition, for example, criticism has frequently been dominated by ideological or social concerns.

The well-spring of a writer's response to another writer is somewhat different. It is to be found in the dynamics of the writer's own creative process and development. The act of criticism may be a form of self-definition, a way of underlining a creative affinity, emphasising a difference or marking a new point of departure.

When one is dealing with relations between contemporaries, there is a further important area of difference. The critic delivers his verdict upon a writer who does not usually respond directly or openly. By contrast, the writer who comments on another writer is potentially engaging in a two-way dialogue – of which criticism may only form a small part.

Finally, while the critic may not aspire to be a writer, the writer-critic competes with his fellow-writer on a professional level – their critical exchange is much more likely to be coloured by elements of personal rivalry or even hostility. This tendency can be exacerbated in cases where there is a substantial age difference between two contemporary writers, and criticism may become a tool in the hands of younger writers seeking to take over from the older generation.

These distinctive features peculiar to a writer's criticism are all very much in evidence in Gumilev's reviews of Viacheslav Ivanov's collection of verse, *Cor Ardens*, published in two parts in 1911 and 1912. Although Gumilev has often been described as a dispassionate literary critic, a close reading of his reviews reveals that they were far from being objective pieces of literary criticism;¹ rather they constituted a form of preliminary and covert literary manifesto and served as an important tool in his struggle to sort out his own complex and somewhat confused relationship to his Symbolist heritage and to establish an independent literary platform.

I

Before looking at the texts themselves, a brief outline of Gumilev's relationship with Ivanov will help to set them in context.

The first point concerns the younger poet's almost pathological craving for a teacher figure, accompanied by a strongly ambitious urge towards complete mastery of his craft and independence. This tendency comes across strongly in his early letters to Briusov, the first poet to fulfil this role in his life.² Around 1909, however, Gumilev's allegiance seems to have shifted at least in part to Ivanov. This change may to some extent have resulted from his growing sense of crisis over two aspects of his poetry – his knowledge of versification and what he terms 'ideological content' ('ideinost'), the sophistication of his ideas and of their expression in his verse.³

1. In his introduction to N. S. Gumilev, *Pis'ma o russkoi poezii*, compiled and edited by G. M. Fridlender and R. D. Timenchik, Moscow, 1990, Fridlender argues that Gumilev's criticism was not affected by differences of opinion or literary groupings, and that he paid full tribute to Ivanov despite their polemical disagreements over questions of aesthetics. He concludes that 'Gumilev stremitsia byt' v svoikh otsenках maksimal'no bespristrasnyim' (p. 23). The present chapter seeks to show precisely the opposite – how strongly Gumilev's assessment of Ivanov as a poet was affected by the desire to escape the dominant influence of his personality and ideas.

2. See in particular Gumilev's letters to Briusov of 24 March 1907, 15 August 1907, 6 April 1908, 15 June 1908 in N. S. Gumilev, *Neizdannye stikhi i pis'ma*, Paris, 1980, pp. 13, 19, 44, 48. Gumilev constantly addresses Briusov as *maître*, *uchitel'* or *pokrovitel'*, begs him to continue guiding him, and reminds him that the development of his talent lies entirely in his hands.

3. It is interesting to note that as early as 1906 Gumilev was making a special study of Ivanov's verse, following Briusov's advice, in order to improve his understanding of certain aspects of versification. See Gumilev's letter to Briusov of 30 October [1906] in Nikolai Gumilev, *Neizdannoe i neisobrannoe*, compiled and edited with commentaries by Michael Basker and Sheelagh Duffin Graham, Paris, 1986, p. 96. The worry over his lack of knowledge of the technical aspects of versification persists throughout his early letters to Briusov. See his letter of 24 March 1907 for example. 'Odnou menia muchuet i sil'no – eto moe nesovershenstvo v tekhnike stikha' (Gumilev, *Neizdannye stikhi*, p. 13).

Concern over the *ideinost'* of his verse becomes a prevalent theme from the summer of 1908. On 14 July 1908, for example, Gumilev wrote to Briusov expressing the worry that the philosophical development of the themes of his work may be childish. On 20 August

Ivanov was ideally equipped to guide him in both these fields – versification and *ideinost'*. Gumilev's first visit to the older poet's celebrated salon at the tower took place in November 1908.⁴ At first his attitude to Ivanov was tempered with irony – he refers to him as the 'Queen of Sheba', for example, in a letter to Briusov of 26 February 1909.⁵ But later in the same year he informs Briusov that it is only now, after attending Ivanov's lectures on poetry, that he is beginning to understand what verse is all about.⁶

In August and September 1909 the two poets met with particular frequency, and Ivanov exerted a considerable ideological influence on Gumilev around this time, initiating him into his ideas on the theurgic role of art, mysticism and theosophy.⁷ The extent of their closeness at

1908 he wrote again that his views on art had undergone a complete change ('perelom vo vzgliade na tvorcestvo'). He is aware of the inadequacy of the thought content of his verse ('v moikh obrazakh net ideinogo osnovaniia') and resolves to remain silent until he matures. See Gumilev, *Neizdannye stikhi*, pp. 51–3.

4. In his letter to Briusov of 30 November 1908 Gumilev mentioned the meeting, but was quick to reassure Briusov that the latter's role as his teacher remained unchallenged ('Viacheslav Ivanovich vchera mne skazal mnogo novogo i interesnogo, no uchitel' moi Vy i mne ne nado drugogo'). See Gumilev, *Neizdannye stikhi*, p. 56. The hasty reassurance would seem to suggest that Gumilev was already wavering in his loyalties. According to Akhmatova, Briusov tried to prevent Gumilev from meeting Ivanov, wishing to retain him under his own influence (Lidiia Chukovskaia, *Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatovoi*, vol. 1, 1938–1941, Paris, 1976, p. 46).

5. The phrase was originally Briusov's, as Gumilev notes in his letter; he is anxious to reassure Briusov that he has not fallen prey to the 'Dionysian heresy'. See Gumilev, *Neizdannye stikhi*, p. 60.

6. 'I mne kazhetsia, chto tol'ko teper' ia nachinaiu ponimat', chto takoe stikh'; undated letter, *ibid.*, p. 61. Ivanov's lectures for young poets on the theory of verse were held at the Poetic Academy at the tower in 1909. Further evidence of Gumilev's appreciation of Ivanov's poetic technique around this time can be found in a letter to M. Kuzmin of early May 1909: 'Viacheslav Ivanovich chital svoi "Venok smetov" – udviciel'no khorosh', (Gumilev, *Neizdannye stikhi*, p. 120).

7. See Gumilev's six letters (1909–12) to Viacheslav Ivanov in Gumilev, *Neizdannoe*, pp. 122–5 and the detailed accompanying notes on pp. 253–61. Four of these letters and one additional letter from Gumilev to Vera Shvarsalon were also published with extensive notes in R. D. Timenchik, 'Neizvestnyye pis'ma N. S. Gumileva', *Izvestia Akademii nauk SSSR, Seriya literaturny i iazyka*, vol. 46, 1987, no. 1, pp. 62–9.

Ivanov's diary of 1909 gives details of his frequent meetings with Gumilev in the course of August and September 1909. See Viacheslav Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, edited by D. V. Ivanov and O. Deschamps, 4 vols (to date), Brussels, 1971–87, vol. 2, 1974, pp. 782–4, 791, 795–6, 799. Although the diary contains no specific references to discussions of mystical matters, this was the period of Ivanov's maximum absorption in theosophy and occultism, following the death of his second wife, Lidiia Zinov'eva-Ammibal, in October 1907 and the growth of his nascent feelings for her daughter, Vera Shvarsalon, soon to become his third wife.

In this context one can understand Gumilev's reference to theosophy in his letter to Ivanov from Africa of 5 January 1910: 'Pereidite, pozhaluista, Vere Konstantinovne, chto ia vse vremia pomniu o teosoffii'. Timenchik notes that Gumilev, Kuzmin and Vera Shvarsalon were considering a plan for a theosophical society in November 1909 ('Timenchik, "Neizvestnyye pis'ma", p. 63).

this point can further be gauged from the fact that Ivanov very nearly accompanied Gumilev on his trip to Africa in November 1909.⁸

While Gumilev could absorb Ivanov's lessons on poetry on a technical level without relinquishing his independence, his relationship to Ivanov as a 'thinker' was more complex. Here one senses that Gumilev was both very susceptible to Ivanov's influence – particularly in view of his own self-confessed weakness in this area – and also, as a result, extremely anxious to assert his independence.

This tension underlies Gumilev's reaction to the review which Ivanov wrote of his third collection, *Pearls*, published in *Apollon* in April 1910.⁹ Ivanov wrote that Gumilev had now reached the end of his romantic, dreamy phase, marked by the influence of his teacher, Briusov, and was ready to embark on a new independent stage of poetic development, 'when the true experience of his soul, acquired through suffering and love, would tear apart the veils ('razorvet zavesy') still shrouding the essential reality of the world from the poet's gaze ('pered vzorom poeta') – the implication was that Gumilev should shed his youthful romanticism and come to adopt a more Ivanovian type of poetics, characterised by a combination of real experience and belief in a higher transcendent reality, rather than by the subjective world of fantasy and dreams. With typical astuteness Ivanov had divined Gumilev's weak spot – his immaturity and excessive dependence on a teacher figure – and was trying to exploit this weakness in order to bring the younger poet more closely within the sphere of his own influence. Gumilev strongly resented the prescriptive tone of this review and appealed to Briusov for guidance in helping him to resist its message.¹⁰

When Gumilev came to write his review of the first part of *Cor Ardens* in the following year, he had a slightly clearer but still rather vague idea of his poetic aims, now defined in a further letter to Briusov

8. On 3 January 1910 Ivanov wrote to Briusov: 'Chut'-chut' bylo ne uckhal's Gumilevym v Afriku ... no byl bolen, otseplen delami i – beden, ochen' 'beden den' gami.' See *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 89, Moscow, 1976, pp. 523–4.

9. *Apollon*, no. 7 (April), 1910, pp. 38–41, second pagination. The same issue contained Gumilev's much more flattering assessment of Ivanov's verse in his essay 'Zhizn' stikha', discussed below. It is significant that Gumilev had originally asked Briusov to review *Pearls* (dedicated to him, as his teacher), but Briusov declined the invitation (for their exchange of letters, see Gumilev, *Netzdannnye stikhi*, pp. 64–5 and *Netzdannnoe*, p. 136).

10. Gumilev wrote to Briusov about this review shortly before his wedding to Akhmatova, which took place on 25 April 1910. His extreme indignation can be sensed from the fact that he devotes most of his letter to the review, after only a brief opening reference to his impending marriage. He is aware that Ivanov is trying to channel his poetic development in a particular direction, and resists this, but indecisively ('teper' ia ves'tustrennik k inomy, novomy. Kakoe budet eto novoe, mne poka ne iasno, no mne kazhetsia, chto eto ne tot put', po kotoromu menia posylaet Viacheslav Ivanov'). See Gumilev, *Netzdannnye stikhi*, pp. 65–6.

as the attempt to widen and 'render concrete' ('konkretizirovat') the range of his images.¹¹ The desire to break free from Ivanov's pervasive influence, coupled with uncertainty as to exactly how to achieve this, seems to have informed the rather ambivalent attitude to the poet which can be sensed in his writing of this period. In June 1911, for example, he wrote to Ivanov, asking him in an excessively deferential manner to approve the publication in *Apollon* of certain poems enclosed with the letter as a proof that he has not yet disowned his 'always doubtful but always devoted pupil'.¹²

II

A similar ambivalence is reflected in Gumilev's two reviews of *Cor Ardens*. The general tone of the first review appears to be fairly positive, with just a few reservations.¹³ However, a closer reading reveals evidence that Gumilev is already preparing the ground for the much fuller rejection of Ivanov which takes place in the review of the second part of *Cor Ardens* published a year later.

The first review adopts a dual approach to Ivanov's collection, interestingly enough corresponding to the two main areas of the poet's influence on Gumilev: his use of poetic form and ideas. On the one hand Gumilev makes a series of apparently objective and fairly positive observations about the technical side of Ivanov's poetry and his use of language. In each case, however, he then proceeds to relate these observations about poetic form to some aspect of the poet's ideas, and in so doing endows them with a negative value.

Gumilev starts by raising a question, effectively concerned with the relationship of poetry to ideas and with the status of religious or philosophical poetry – are writers who deal with personal mystic experience to be regarded as poets? He cites the examples of Confucius, Mohammed, Socrates and Nietzsche – significantly, all better known as religious thinkers or philosophers than as poets. If these writers can be regarded as poets, so, he concludes, may Ivanov.

Through this rhetorical opening Gumilev scores a number of points. Ivanov's status as a poet is not only implicitly queried, it is also relegat-

11. See *ibid.*, pp. 67–8.

12. 'Etim vy dokazhete, chto Vy ... eshe ne otrekalis' ot vsego somnevaiushchegosia, no vsego predannogo vam uchenika.' See Timenchik, 'Neizvestnye pis'ma i Timenchik's accompanying note (pp. 64, 67). The same letter is partly quoted and given an interesting interpretation by Timenchik in 'Zametki ob akmeizme III', *Russian literature*, no. 9, 1981, p. 175.

13. Review of *Cor Ardens: Chast' pervaiia, Apollon*, no. 7, 1911, pp. 75–6. This review and the second one were both reprinted in N. S. Gumilev, *Pis'ma o ruskoi poezii*, Petrograd, 1923, pp. 117–20 and 147–9, and in the recent annotated edition, Gumilev, *Pis'ma*, pp. 124–5 and 147–8.

ed to a special category which, according to the examples given, is not normally associated with poetry, and is alien to the Russian tradition.

Gumilev then continues to underline the abyss which separates Ivanov from those whom he defines as the poets of 'lines and colours'. Ivanov's verse is characterised by the image of the sky reflected in a lake ('nebo, otrazhennoe v ozere'), while the poetry of the others is described as a lake reflecting the sky ('ozero, otrazhaiushchee v sebe nebo'). Already these two images imply a certain unspoken scale of values – the sky reflected in a lake hints at compression and artificial reduction, whereas the lake reflecting the sky suggests wider vision and extra dimension.

To the second category, to the poets of lines and colours, belong Pushkin and Briusov, Lermontov¹⁴ and Blok. By assigning Ivanov to the first category, Gumilev effectively removes him from this mainstream tradition, making him a poet of the other world, divorced from this world.

This distinction is illustrated by two contrasting pairs of examples. Lermontov's Demon comes down to earth to kiss Tamara, whereas the hero of Ivanov's long poem 'The Dream of Melampus' retires into an abyss of abstractions. A Pushkin landscape is contrasted with one by Ivanov: the first is concrete, the second very abstract.¹⁵

The point may appear to have been 'proven' in this way, and undoubtedly there is, as in every persuasive distortion, more than a grain of truth in it. However, the examples have been selected from a very varied body of poetry to prove one particular point. Gumilev has chosen one of the most abstruse poems of *Cor Ardens*, 'The Dream of Melampus' (so obscure that Ivanov was compelled to provide notes for it, fearful that his readers would otherwise miss the point), and one of his most abstract, unrealistic landscapes. He could equally well have

14. For evidence of Gumilev's strong personal identification with Lermontov's fate and poetry, see Irina Odoevseva, *Na beregakh Nevy*, Washington, 1967, pp. 160–73. The statement that Gumilev named Lermontov as his favourite poet (*Lermontovskaia ensiklopediia*, Moscow, 1981, p. 123, repeated by Fridlander in Gumilev, *Pis'ma*, p. 6) refers to this source, but derives from a faulty attribution of words spoken by Odoevseva to Gumilev.

15. Gumilev's choice of poems is quite deliberate. From Pushkin's 'Otryvki iz puteshestviia Onegina' he chooses the stanza beginning 'Inye nuzhny mne kartiny', which portrays a humble, simple Russian landscape, purposefully evoked to contrast with the preceding highly romantic description of the Crimean landscape (full of phrases which one might well encounter in Ivanov's poetry such as 'brega Tavriidy', 'pri svete utrennei Kipriidy', 'v bleske brachnom', 'na nebe sinesim i prozrachnom'). Gumilev's example from Ivanov, the first verse of 'Sirena', is in fact not a 'landscape' poem at all, but a poem about the forces of memory and fate, conjured up through the evocation of a dream-like and unrealistic setting (the poem comes from 'Eros', the third book of *Cor Ardens*: *Chast' pervaiia*, reprinted in Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, p. 367).

selected one of Ivanov's less symbolic, more naturalistic landscapes,¹⁶ or an example of his heavily erotic mystic verse, or one of his more playful philosophical poems – any one of which could have been cited in support of a quite different argument.

The review then continues with a series of comments on three aspects of Ivanov's poetic craft, his use of images, language and verse. In each case what starts out as simple description or even praise rapidly becomes tinged with reservation and subtly turns the reader's mind in another direction. A close look reveals the way in which Gumilev's positive evaluation of Ivanov's poetic technique is constantly overshadowed by his desire to escape the influence of his ideas.

To describe Ivanov's images, Gumilev chooses the key term of 'illuminosity' ('prizrachnost'). Here he is quite deliberately playing on Ivanov's own terminology. Ivanov placed great stock on the concept of 'transparency' ('prozrachnost'), by which he intended the power of the artistic image to serve as a pure and transparent reflection of the transcendent world. The artist should be endowed with penetrating or transparent vision – he has the ability 'to see through', 'to perceive' ('prozret'), his visions are *prozreniia* ('insights', 'perceptions') – and his art, the medium of expression, should be correspondingly *prozrachnyi* ('transparent') to allow his vision to shine through.¹⁷

Prozrachnost' (Transparency) was the title of Ivanov's second collection of verse, and Gumilev was very much aware of the full resonance of the term. When he gave Ivanov a copy of his second collection of verse, *Romantic flowers* (1908), he inscribed it with the following dedication 'To Viacheslav Ivanov as a token of deep respect for his insights' ('prozreniia').¹⁸ In his third collection, *Pearls* (1910), he chose as an epigraph to one section two lines of a poem from Ivanov's

16. Although Ivanov's landscapes are always imbued with an awareness of the higher reality which they reflect, they are often – in his best poems – densely textured and richly evocative of natural beauty in a manner somewhat reminiscent of the English religious poet Gerald Manley Hopkins. From the first part of *Cor Ardens* one could cite as examples the poems 'Zagor'e', 'Nevedomoe', 'Ulov', 'Vesenniaia otpepel', 'Liven', or 'Osen' (Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, pp. 278, 280–1, 310–11).

17. For a fuller discussion of the concept of transparency see Pamela Davidson, *The Poetic Imagination of Vyacheslav Ivanov: A Russian Symbolist's Perception of Dante*, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 165–7.

18. This copy of *Romantic Flowers* is held in the Lenin Library, Moscow (GBL). See the note to the reprint of Gumilev's review of *Tender Mystery* in A. V. Lavrov and R. D. Timenchik, "'Ne pokorialis' magii imen': N. Gumilev – kritik. Novye stranitsy", *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 7, 1987, p. 108.

Transparency which allude to the same concept: '— Chto tvoï znak? — "Prozren'e glaza./ Dal'nost' slukha, okrylen'e nog'" ('— What is your sign? — "In sight of the eye./Long-range hearing, winged feet"').¹⁹

Transparency, in Ivanov's view, did not involve a lessening of the reality of an object — on the contrary, it allowed it to retain its own natural appearance, while at the same time enabling it to be 'transparent', to reveal a vision of its inner spiritual essence or deeper reality.

Gumilev, in his review, has made one small but highly significant change. By changing *prozrachnost'* into *prizrachnost'*; by the semantic shift of one prefix, he has transmuted Ivanov's transparency into its very opposite, into something shadowy, illusory and possibly deluding — thus undermining the ontological foundation of Ivanov's poetics.

This transformation is achieved by degrees. The first time Gumilev uses the term *prizrachnost'* in his review, he simply establishes it as the main characteristic of Ivanov's images, and contrasts it with the 'life-like' ('zhiznennyi') imagery of poets of the mainstream tradition (thus implying a certain lack of life in Ivanov's imagery).

On the second occasion the term *prizrachnyi* is used to argue that Ivanov's images are so full and bright that they prevent the reader from grasping the overall sense of the verse and induce a feeling of frustration. By the time Gumilev came to write his review of the second part of *Cor Ardens* a year later, the term had undergone a further 'negative' transformation and turned into a 'deceptive illusion' ('obmanchivyi prizrak'), as we shall see below.

It should be added that the accusation of lifelessness which Gumilev levelled at Ivanov's poetry in 1911 is in sharp contrast with his assessment in the previous year of the poet's verse as a prime example of 'living' poetry.²⁰ Gumilev was most probably mounting a counter-attack in defence against Ivanov's earlier comment in his review of *Pearls* that the younger poet's verse was lifeless because of its dreamy romanticism

19. The lines are taken from the final verse of Ivanov's poem 'Prishlets' from *Transparency* (reprinted in Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 753). The question 'Chto tvoï znak?' is addressed to Dionysus, who replies by describing his attributes in the last quatrain of the poem, quoted from above. In the first edition of *Pearls* (Moscow, 1910), Ivanov's lines were appended to the section entitled 'Zhemchug rozovyi' and were immediately followed by the poem 'Rytisar' s' isep'iu' (1908), in which a knight describes the renewal of his spirit of adventure. Gumilev's positioning of the epigraph from Ivanov thus has the effect of linking the spirit of adventure expressed in his poem to Ivanov's Dionysian intuitions. In the later 1918 edition of *Pearls* Gumilev did away with the division into sections and, significantly, removed the epigraph from Ivanov.

20. In this essay, Gumilev specifically made the point that the 'life-like' quality of a poem does not depend on its relation to real life, but on its intrinsic quality. He singled out Ivanov's poem 'Gel'iady' from *Transparency* as one of only four examples of what he terms "'zhivye" stikhotvoreniia': in this sense. See 'Zhizn' stikha', *Apollon*, 1910, no. 7 (April), pp. 9–11, first pagination.

and lack of relation to the transcendent mystic dimension.²¹ Gumilev was now attempting to turn the tables on his teacher by claiming precisely the opposite, that the transcendent dimension in poetry — and in Ivanov's verse in particular — renders it lifeless.²²

As far as language is concerned, here also there is a move towards negative characterisation, again as a result of reading the poetry in terms of the ideas which it is seen to reflect. In earlier essays Gumilev had praised the richness and inventiveness of Ivanov's language.²³ These same qualities are now a matter of debate. It turns out that Ivanov is more of a philologist in his approach to language than a poet. Gumilev asserts that for Ivanov all words are equal, and that his use of them is eclectic and shows no respect for their origins and individual weight: 'for him [words], just like images, are only the clothing of ideas'.

Ivanov was undoubtedly a superb philologist, fluent in several languages, and well aware of the historical weight of words. His verbal inventiveness was a great source of inspiration to poets fairly far removed from him in other respects — as in the case of Khlebnikov, for example.²⁴ The claim that he disregards the age or origins of words seems to miss the point of what the poet is trying to achieve through his eclectic use of language, deliberately cultivated as a means of synthesising opposites and of conveying the sense of culture as living memory.

21. See, for example, the following features singled out by Ivanov in his characterisation of *Pearls*: 'oisuitstvie bystroty, neposredstvennosti, zhivoi podvizhnosti, zhivoi reaktivnosti na mnogoobrazie zhivoi zhizni'. Ivanov's review ended with the prognosis that if Gumilev were to break through the veils shrouding his gaze from a vision of the 'subchahia real'nost' mira'... 'togda vperve budet on prinadlezhat zhizni' (ibid., p. 41).

22. Gumilev chooses to ignore the fact that *Cor Ardens* is unique in Russian poetry for its intimate connection with the poet's life: Ivanov himself referred to his wish to 'napisat' svoju zhizn' in connection with his book (diary entry for 27 Aug. 1909, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, p. 796). At the end of his first review of *Cor Ardens* Gumilev promises to write about this aspect of the book in his next review ('O samom glavnom v poezii Viacheslava Ivanova, o toi zolotoi lestnitse, po kotoroi on vedet ocharovannogo chitatelia, o soderzhanii, ia budu govorit', kogda vyidet vtoroi tom *Cor Ardens'a*): the intention was never carried out, however.

23. He commented specifically on the depth and beauty of Ivanov's adjectives and on the principle of 'sploshnaia revoliutsiia' in his poetic art. See Gumilev, *Pis'ma*, pp. 105, 110.

24. For an account of Khlebnikov's early debt to Ivanov, see Aleksandr Parnis, 'Novoe iz Khlebnikova', *Daugava*, no. 7, 1986, pp. 106–7.

However, Gumilev does not, at this stage, take this too far – he recognises (as do Briusov and Kuzmin in their reviews of the same book)²⁵ that Ivanov's language is always closely tied to the expression of an exact thought and is astonishingly varied and unique in this respect.

On the question of verse, Gumilev acknowledges that Ivanov is an accomplished master of poetic form. But here again, he somehow manages to turn this to Ivanov's disadvantage – apparently, versification is only a 'means' for Ivanov, not an intrinsic source of joy or inspiration: 'for him [verse] is not a helper, not a source of pure joy, but also only a means'.

The general trend of this review is therefore a curious blend of the positive and the negative. Ivanov's uniqueness as a poet of mystic experience is underlined, but this is then turned against him as a way of removing him from the mainstream Russian tradition. His originality and mastery of his craft are recognised on one level, but at the same time the relationship between the poet and his craft is somehow seen to be at fault. In each case Ivanov's considerable technical achievements as a poet are undermined by an implied attack on his ideas, often presented in a subtly distorted form.

III

The year that elapsed between the writing of the first review and the second one was a decisive one in post-Symbolist poetics and in Gumilev's attempts to establish his own independent literary platform. A series of articles in *Trudy i dni* were devoted to this debate, and Gumilev's second review, published in the sixth issue of *Apollon*, can be read as a challenge to Ivanov's attempts to reestablish the supremacy of Symbolism.²⁶

25. See Valerii Briusov, 'Novyye sborniki stikhov', *Russkaya mysl'*; no. 7, 1911, pp. 20–4, and Mikhail Kuzmin, 'Cor Ardens Viacheslava Ivanova', *Trudy i dni*, no. 1, 1912, p. 50). For a comparative study of contemporary responses to *Cor Ardens* (reviews by Briusov, Kuzmin, Chulkov, Khodasevich, Gumilev and Gorodetskii) in relation to the issue of Ivanov's difficulty as a poet, see Pamela Davidson, 'The Legacy of Difficulty in the Russian Poetic Tradition: Contemporary Critical Responses to Ivanov's *Cor Ardens*', *Cahiers du Monde russe* 35 (1–2, 1994, pp. 249–67).

26. The second part of *Cor Ardens* appeared after some delay in April 1912; Gumilev's review followed in *Apollon*, no. 6, 1912, pp. 52–3.

Earlier in the same year, the first issue of *Trudy i dni* had opened with the seminal essays by Ivanov ('Mysl' o simvolizme') and Belyi ('O simvolizme'), claiming the continuing supremacy of Symbolism (*Trudy i dni*, no. 1, 1912, pp. 3–24). The same issue also included Kuzmin's positive review of the first part of *Cor Ardens*, thus presenting Ivanov's collection within the framework of the journal's pro-Symbolist programme.

A discussion of the talks on which Ivanov's and Belyi's essays were based took place at the third meeting of the Society of Lovers of the Artistic Word in St Petersburg on 18

Many of the traits which were identified by Gumilev in his first review as simply characteristic of Ivanov's poetry are taken up in the second review and developed in a more explicitly negative manner.

For example, towards the end of the first review Gumilev wrote that Ivanov's 'intense mode of thought' ('napriazhennoe myshlenie') creates an astonishingly varied language. Early in the second review, the same intellectuality has become 'monotonous intensity' ('odnoobraznaia napriazhennost'), giving a purely intellectual pleasure, and ruling out the 'unexpected joy' of poetic discovery.

Furthermore, the link between Ivanov's intellectual thought and complex language, still recognised and respected in the first review, is now broken. Ivanov's language is here qualified as archaic and barbarian, his syntax is seen as 'painstakingly obscuring the general sense' – obscuring rather than revealing meaning.

Most significantly, however, as noted above, the line of thought already introduced in the first review through the transmutation of *prozrachnyi* into *prizrachnyi*, of transparency into illusoriness, is given a further and much more negative development in the second review. Gumilev asserts that for Ivanov all earthly realities, ideas and names are nothing but a 'deceptive illusion' ('obmanchivyi prizrak') and shadows.

Here he is making an unspoken transition from the recognition of the reality of the spiritual world to the implication that the material, physical world therefore has no reality. Although Ivanov used terms like transparency and even *Moya* (illusion), he did not regard the phenomena of this world as illusory in themselves, only as such if one failed to see what lay beyond them. The poem which Gumilev alludes to in his review as an illustration of Ivanov's illusory symbolism, 'Ad rosam', is in fact devoted to a discussion of the need to rediscover the lost link between the spiritual world and earthly reality, and favours a sort of creative, dynamic symbolism of transformation, not one of negation or

February 1912 and was reported in the following issue of the journal in an article by N. V. Nedobrovo, 'Obschestvo revnitetel' khudozhestvennogo slova v Peterburge', *Trudy i dni*, no. 2, 1912, pp. 26–7). Nedobrovo recorded the negative reactions of Gumilev and Gorodetskii, who had declared at the meeting their refutation of the principles of Symbolism and withdrawal from the Symbolist camp.

For helpful reviews of this debate, see the notes introducing Gumilev's letters to Ivanov in Gumilev, *Neizdannoe*, pp. 253–6 and Timenchik, 'Neizvestnye pis'ma', pp. 66–7.

Ivanov of his poetic lineage by setting him apart from the Pushkin and Lermontov line of poets; in the second review, he takes this further and denies him his future or poetic posterity.

After a passing bow in the direction of Ivanov as 'an important and original individual', he maintains that to follow him would be a perilous, risky adventure, spelling death: 'for others, not possessing his characteristics, to follow him would mean embarking on a risky, very likely even fatal adventure'. It is rather as if Gumilev is hurrying his reader past a section in the garden of Russian poetry reserved for exotic curiosities from abroad, something worthy of passing comment, but essentially foreign and not designed to flourish on Russian soil. Ivanov, in his view, illustrates one extreme of the Slav soul, and perhaps has a certain curiosity value as such – but cannot represent a path forward for the future.²⁹

The review concludes with the following words: 'He is dear to us as an example of one of the extremes to be found within the Slav soul. But, in defence of the integrity of the Russian idea, we must, while loving this extreme, firmly say "no" to it, and remember that it is not by chance that the heart of Russia is simple Moscow and not magnificent Samarkand.'

IV

At the beginning of this essay, I raised a question about the nature of the difference between the criticism of writers and of critics. Gumilev's reviews of Ivanov have provided a telling example of the form that this difference can take, and illustrate the intimate link between a writer's creative development and his criticism.

The fact that Gumilev was not able to assimilate the legacy of Ivanov more smoothly and had recourse to a certain measure of distortion in his reviews is an indication of just how susceptible he was to the powerful influence of Ivanov at this stage of his literary development. His reviews reflect the fluctuations and inconsistencies caused by his conflicting urges towards discipleship and independence.

29. Later Khodasevich was to take a similar view of Ivanov's legacy to future generations. Comparing *Cor Ardens* to San Marco he wrote: 'tvorchestvo Viacheslava Ivanova neizbezhno voidet v istoriiu, no esli i vyzovet nativnye podrazhaniiia, to ne budet imet' prodolzhatel'ei' (Vladislav Khodasevich, 'Russkaia poez'ia: Obzor', in *Ali strana: Kniga perviia*, Moscow, 1914, p. 197).

The tone of Gorodetskii's review of *Cor Ardens* was considerably more restrained. However, in a sentence which was later deleted from the printed version, he made a similar point: he wrote that the book reflected 'nachalo, apogei i ukton togoo poeticheskogo mirosozertsaniia, kotoroe stroit na poehve simvolizma Viach. Ivanov'. See Roman Timenchik, 'Zametki na poliaakh: No. 1', *Giperborei*, no. 1, 1912, facsimile reprint, Leningrad, 1990, [p. 33].

denial.²⁷ Gumilev's underlying polemical intentions are given away in this section of the review by his use of the word 'symbols' – he is trying to discredit Symbolism by implying that it is based on a view of the material world as illusory.²⁸

These specific attacks on Ivanov are inserted into a rather poorly constructed overall argument. Gumilev first sets up a fairly stereotyped image of the Slav soul, composed of conflicting Eastern and Western elements. After promoting the idea of organic synthesis as superior to either of these elements, he argues that Ivanov represents the Eastern extreme.

Gumilev may here have been alluding to Ivanov's interest in theosophy and occultism, which he had witnessed in 1909, or to his experiments in *Cor Ardens* with Eastern verse forms such as the *ghazal*; however, his claim that Ivanov represents a purely Eastern extreme seems quite unjustified in the light of the poet's far greater familiarity and affinity with classical antiquity, medieval Christian Europe and German romanticism.

The final stage of Gumilev's argument is to assert that an extreme is a dead end – and yet surely the course of poetic development has shown again and again that what may appear to be an extreme or dead end can be an unexpected source of renewal or inspiration for the next generation?

Why, therefore, the emphasis on this rather shaky argument (at the expense, one might add, of any serious discussion of the poetry itself)? It appears to stem from the desire, already implicit in the first review, to define Ivanov in such a way that he falls outside the mainstream of the Russian poetic tradition. In the first review, Gumilev had deprived

27. 'Ad Rosam' is the opening poem of the fifth and final book of *Cor Ardens*, 'Rosarium' (Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, pp. 449–50). For a fuller discussion of its meaning, see Davidson, *The Poetic Imagination*, pp. 208–18. It is interesting to note that another less partisan contemporary reviewer of the second part of *Cor Ardens* singled out the same poem for discussion in his review but described it as typical of Ivanov's poetics of transformation of the earthly. See Pavel Medvedev, Review of *Cor Ardens: Chast' vtoraiia*, *Noviiaia studiiia*, no. 13, 1912, pp. 4–5.

28. A later article by Chul'kov refutes these contentions. He spotted the way in which the Acmeists used the word *prizrachnyi* to imply – incorrectly in his view – that the Symbolists made the world unreal. 'Chto kasaetsia akmeisticheskoi kritiki simvolizma, to ona svoditsia k odnomu sushchestvennomu upreku. Simvolizm obesseniil etot vnesnii mir, sledal ego prizrachnym i stalo byt', – zakliuchait akmeisty, – pustym'. He argues that the tendency towards 'illusionism' exists as a heresy within Symbolism, but that in true Symbolism 'zemlia real' na i zhiva'. Significantly, he takes the example of the rose to prove his point: 'Roza, kotoruiu budto-by tak grubo rastoptali simvolisty, vovse ne pogibla. Naprotiv, v glazakh simvolizma, ona stala bezumno blagoukhannoe i chudesnee ... lish' v simvolizme my nakhodim glubokuuu liubov' k ploti, k zemle, k cheloveku'. See Georgii Chul'kov, 'Opravdanie simvolizma', in his *Nashi spumiki: 1912–1922*, Moscow, 1922, pp. 112–13.

In a note on the history of Acmeism Akhmatova wrote that as a boy Gumilev had believed in Symbolism rather as one might believe in God, and that his subsequent disillusionment had affected his attitude towards Ivanov. In an autobiographical fragment of great interest she goes so far as to attribute the beginning of Gumilev's break with Ivanov specifically to his review of the first part of *Cor Ardens*, recognizing that it had contained elements which had unnerved Ivanov.³⁰

The difficulty which Gumilev experienced in disengaging himself from Ivanov's influence was partly due to his own relative immaturity at the time, but was also further compounded by certain aspects of Ivanov's own character. According to the portrait which Berdiaev draws in his memoirs, Ivanov's unique role as a teacher of poetry derived from his considerable talent for friendship and from the exceptional attentiveness which he displayed towards younger poets; however, these qualities went hand in hand with a rather despotic nature and desire for influence over others.³¹

This seems to be confirmed by a very perceptive comment made by Blok in a diary entry for April 1912 about the state of mind which informed Gumilev's response to Ivanov. He wrote that although Gumilev's anti-Symbolist pronouncement 'a word should signify only that which it signifies' might appear stupid if taken literally, it is quite understandable from a psychological point of view 'as a rebellion

30. 'Vsego nuzhnee poniat' kharakter Gumileva i samoe glavnoe v etom kharaktere: mal'chikom on poveril v simbolizm, kak ljudi veriat v Boga. Eto byla sviatynia neprikosnovennaia, no po mere priblizheniia k simbolistam, v chastnosti, k "Bashne" (V. Ivanov), vera ego drognula, emu stalo kazat'sia, chto v nem porugano chto-to' (Akhmatova's note, 'K istorii akmeizma' in her 'Aviobiograficheskaia proza' edited by R. D. Timenchik, *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 5, 1989, p. 7). The second (untitled) fragment includes the following statement: 'Akmeizm voznik v kontse 1911 gloda]. V desiatom godu Gumilev byl esche pravovernym simbolistom. Razryv s "bashnei" nachalsia, po-vidimomu, s pechatnogo otzyva Gjumileva o *Cor Ardens* na stranitsakh *Apollona*. I... V. Ivanov emu chego-to etoi reitsenzii nikogda ne prostil' ('Iz dnevnikovykh zapisei', edited by V. A. Chernykh, *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 5, 1989, p. 11).

31. 'Dar družby u nego byl sviazan s despotizmom, s zhuzhdoi obladaniia dushami ... No v kontse kontsov ljudi ot nego ukhodili.' See Nikolai Berdiaev, *Samopoznanie: Opyt filosofskoi avtobiografii*, 2nd edn, Paris, 1983, p. 178.

32. The diary entry for 17 April 1912 appears in Aleksandr Blok, *Sobranie sochinenii*, edited by V. N. Orlov, 8 vols, 1960-3, Moscow-Leningrad, vol. 7, 1963, p. 140. It was written the day after Blok's letter to Andrei Belyi of 16 April 1912 (printed in vol. 8, pp. 386-8), which criticised the first issue of *Trudy i dni* and attacked Ivanov's despotism and covert polemics with Gumilev. This issue of *Trudy i dni* contained Ivanov's essay, 'Myslio simbolizma', with its celebrated declaration 'ia ne simbolist, esli slova moi ravny sebe, esli oni — ne ekho innykh zvukov' (*Trudy i dni*, no. 1, 1912, p. 6).

33. The age-difference was undoubtedly a very important factor in Gumilev's case. One can contrast his response to Ivanov with that of the older Briusov, who, despite an open polemical disagreement with Ivanov over the nature of art, was still able to write two very positive reviews of *Cor Ardens*.

against Viach. Ivanov and even as the desire to break free from his authority and despotism'.³²

This statement contains the key to the ambiguities and distortions of Gumilev's reviews — born of the conflicting pressures of Ivanov's pervasive and somewhat despotic influence, exerted over a younger poet whose intense desire for independence was not yet matched by a sufficiently strong sense of direction.³³

By the time Gumilev came to review Ivanov's next collection, he had overcome some of these earlier unresolved conflicts.³⁴ His short review of *Tender Mystery*, published in *Apollon* in 1913, praises the simplicity and clarity of Ivanov's new collection and describes it as the work of a great poet at the peak of his powers. Although Gumilev concludes his review by reiterating the profound distance between Ivanov's path and Acmeism ('between Viacheslav Ivanov and Acmeism there is an abyss which no talent can fill'), his awareness of this difference no longer prevents him from recognising the older poet's gifts, as it previously had.³⁵

Gumilev's reviews of *Cor Ardens* are not only key documents for understanding the gradual stages of the emergence of Acmeism from the symbolist chrysalis; they also reveal the many ways in which a writer's criticism can contribute to his own literary development — as a means of self-definition, as an indirect form of literary manifesto, or as a tool in the polemics of literary succession.³⁶

34. In 1913 he published his prose manifesto 'Nasledie simbolizma i akmeizm' (*Apollon*, no. 1, 1913); this was followed later in the same year by the programmatically Acmeist drama 'Akteon' (*Giperboi*, no. 7, 1913), written as a further endeavour to overcome Ivanov and Symbolist attitudes (see the perceptive analysis by Michael Basker, 'Gumilyov's "Akteon": A Forgotten Manifesto of Acmeism', *Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 63, 1985, pp. 498-517).

35. *Apollon*, 1913, no. 3, pp. 74-5. Gumilev's other review of *Tender Mystery*, published in *Giperboi*, no. 4, 1913, p. 27, was even more positive in its praise and untinted by any form of negative comment.

36. The author would like to thank the British Academy and the Leverhulme Trust, whose generous support of research for a complete annotated bibliography of critical works about Ivanov has facilitated work on this essay.