

MAXIMILIAN VOLOSHIN BETWEEN SPIRIT AND MATTER

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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This thesis considers in tandem the verbal and visual production of the Russian modernist poet and artist Maximilian Voloshin (1877-1932), whose work, I argue, was polarized between the spiritual and the material realms. This tension between spirit and matter is manifested in his poetry, prose, and visual works, as well as in his life-creation practices (*zhiznetvorchestvo*). I contend that Voloshin understood his creative task as being to display the true essence of things by purifying ideas or symbols of their material “layers”, thereby recognizing the otherworldly in physical objects. One of Voloshin’s most crucial concepts is the “Apollonian dream”. He understood this as a source of the transcendental that coexists alongside the tangibility and concreteness of his poems and landscapes and his emphasis on form. This spirit-matter dyad is reflective of the profoundly eclectic nature of Voloshin’s creative corpus which emerged at the intersection of Naturalism, Symbolism, and Acmeism.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION. MAXIMILIAN VOLOSHIN AND HIS MILIEU

Maximilian Voloshin's work was banned in the USSR beginning in 1934, as his death coincided with the rise of Stalinism and state-sanctioned literature. Voloshin was considered to be a representative of an elitist culture hostile to Stalinist cultural politics. Only during Khrushchev's Thaw (from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s), a period marked by relaxation of censorship, were memories of Voloshin partially revived, resulting in the subsequent reintroduction of his name to literary studies in the mid-1980s. Previous research analyzed Voloshin's Crimean poetic cycles (Bunina 2005, Liusyi 2003) and post-revolutionary poems (Landa 2015). His poetic work has been approached from an anthropological point of view (Walker 2005); Voloshin has been portrayed as an occultist (Pinaev, 2014, Kuz'min 1999); and a Symbolist (Lavrov 1995), as well as a figure within feminist studies due to his role of a mentor to such poets as Marina Tsvetaeva, Adelaida Gertsyk, Cherubina de Gabriak (Landa 2013, Walker 2005). A transmedial framework in the analysis of his oeuvre is employed by Cynthia Marsh (1982) and Natalia Zlydneva (2013).

In my thesis, I explore the notions of the spiritual and the material, at the intersection of which, according to Voloshin, true creativity emerges. I trace the tension between spirit and matter in Voloshin's poetry, prose, and visual works, as well as in his life-creation practices (*zhiznetvorchestvo*). I contend that Voloshin understood his creative task as being to display the true essence of things by purifying ideas or symbols of their material "layers", thereby recognizing the otherworldly in physical objects. Voloshin's creative work can be described as abstract and concrete at the same time. He underlined the importance of real impressions which are synthesized in the poetic or

visual work. Alongside Voloshin's naturalism, one of the most crucial concepts in his creative work was the "Apollonian dream, a source of the transcendental. The materiality of his work manifested itself not only in his imagery but also in the tangibility of the forms he employed: Voloshin is one of the few authors of crowns of sonnets in Russian poetry, as well as of poems written in Galliambic verse, a very rare classic meter. This spirit-matter dyad is reflective of the profoundly eclectic nature of Voloshin's creative corpus which emerged at the intersection of Naturalism, Impressionism, Mysticism, Symbolism, Neoclassicism, Formalism, and Acmeism.

My thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter 1, "Introduction. Maximilian Voloshin and His Milieu", analyzes the emergence of the "Kimmerian myth" on the basis of the Petersburg myth and Voloshin's life-creation strategies. Chapter 2, "The Apollonian Dream in Voloshin's Poetic Works", focuses on Voloshin's contributions to the literary journal *Apollo* and his theoretical views on art and poetry as expressed in articles published in Petersburg reviews. I illustrate his theories of art through an analysis of his crown of sonnets, "Corona Astralis". Chapter 3, "Intermediality, Materiality, Poetics", analyzes Voloshin's artworks with special attention to the material side of his painting and to the representation of the physical and transcendental world in them.

Maximilian Alexandrovich Kirienko-Voloshin was born in 1877 in Kiev into a family of "mid-level professionals" (Walker 2005, 24). He spent his early childhood in the Russian south (Taganrog and Sevastopol') and in Moscow. Voloshin's first poetic and critical publications date back to the time of his studies at the department of jurisprudence at Moscow State University (1897-1900). From 1900 to 1905, he traveled around Central Asia and Western Europe (France, Greece, Italy, Spain, and Germany).

He studied painting at Elizaveta's Kruglikova's<sup>1</sup> studio in Paris, where he fell under the influence of fin-de-siècle European culture. It was at that time that he developed an interest in "orientalism" and mystic and occult studies (he was close to such prominent figures as Annie Besant, Rudolf Steiner, and Anna Mintslova). Voloshin was greatly impacted by French art: impressionism, neo-impressionism (he published articles about Gauguin, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec, Renoir, Maurice Denis etc.) and European Symbolism poetry: he translated Verhaeren, Henri de Régnier, Paul Claudel.

During his visits to Russia, he became close with Russian Symbolist circles (Valerii Briusov, Andrei Bely, Viacheslav Ivanov, Sergei Gorodetskii, Mikhail Kuzmin, Adelaida Gertsyk, Aleksei Remizov, and Fedor Sologub) and the "Mir Iskusstva" ("World of Art") artistic movement. He started his collaboration with the journals *Apollon (Apollo)* and *Zolotoe runo (Golden Fleece)*, where he published his theoretical essays, critical reviews of theater and art exhibitions, and his poetry and prose.

Maximilian Voloshin's creative production is usually associated with Koktebel' – a town in south-eastern Crimea situated on the Black Sea - where he resided since 1911, and with the Crimea more broadly. Despite the relatively short time he spent in the capital, Petersburg and the Petersburg's myth had a great impact on Voloshin's life and work thus making him a contributor to the Petersburg text. Voloshin visited Petersburg in January 1903, December 1904, and resided there from October 1906 to March 1907. Moreover, the impressions he received in the Symbolist milieu in Petersburg, I argue, later would inform his Crimean or "Kimmerian" myth. He recalled his first impressions of the city in his review of Alexander Ivanov's Petersburg tale "Stereoscope" (1909):

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<sup>1</sup> Elizaveta Kruglikova (1865-1941) was Russian-Soviet painter, etcher, silhouettist and monotypist. In 1895-1914 she lived in Paris where taught art.

Petersburg is a fantastic and ghostly city. We have known this for a long time. But what is its ghostly and fantastic nature, which strikes the eyes even of those who do not think about Peter, or about Pushkin, or Dostoevsky? The root of this feeling lies in some elusive, purely impressionistic street evocations... When I saw Petersburg for the first time in my life - it was in winter, I was painting, and came from Paris - I was struck by the deathly grayness of its general tone. Undoubtedly, Petersburg resembles a photograph. From this purely visual impression - a natural transition to the idea of ghostly, fantastic. Photography captures the ghostly and fantastic world. Ghostly - colorless, monochromatic, flat-tone ... The photograph retains some ghostly, but material trail of the past. In new photography, the horror is not striking, but the older the picture, the more its fantasticness appears, based on the mechanicalness with which a moment of a past life is recorded. Old photographs reveal the world only relatively similar to the human world, but at the same time deeply hostile to its living essence. In it, the most terrible things for a person are his doubles which are at the same time corpses, because the depicted has already died (Voloshin 2008, 248-249).

Traditionally, Voloshin connects the image of Petersburg to the names of Peter the Great, Pushkin, and Dostoevsky. However, he contrasts his Parisian impressions where he studied painting with the monochrome colors of Petersburg. He compares the city to a photograph, which for Voloshin is a rather negative evaluation, or at least not fully compatible with his own worldview. The photograph, according to Voloshin, is a mere double of life, hostile and deadly. Therefore, Voloshin refers to Gogolian and Dostoevskian descriptions of Petersburg as fantastic and ghostly in nature.

However, in 1906 in his letter to Margarita Sabashnikova, his young wife, he expresses his admiration for Petersburg poets (Kuz'min and Gorodetskii<sup>2</sup>) and considers Petersburg to be a better place for his professional development:

I felt the mustiness and falsity of Moscow and the Moscow poets. We must live in Petersburg. In Petersburg ... .. Do you hear, Amorya [Sabashnikova]? I will return to Moscow in a week, and we will go to Petersburg together. Only here I can work (Voloshin 2015, 114).

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<sup>2</sup> Mikhail Alekseevich Kuzmin and Sergei Gorodetskii were Russian poets and prominent contributors to the Silver Age of Russian Poetry, associated with Symbolism and Post-Symbolism.

In the fall of 1906, Voloshin and Sabashnikova rented an apartment on Tavricheskaia Street, underneath the apartment of Viacheslav Ivanov and his wife Lidiia Zinov'eva-Annibal. In January 1907, Voloshin and his wife moved into their apartment. It was located on the mansard floor, known under the name "Bashnia" (Tower). Vyacheslav Ivanov was a poet, a philosopher, and one of the main ideologists of Russian Symbolism, who held literary gatherings every Wednesday from 1905 until 1909. They attracted Russian elites to give talks and discuss poetry and philosophy. According to Sergei Makovskii, almost all young Russian poetry "went through" Ivanov's Tower (Shruba 2004, 62). Voloshin's impressions of life in Saint Petersburg at the time were as follows:

Life in Petersburg is terribly interesting, but also tiresome with its intensity and the fact that an evening ends at 3 or 4 a.m. Amorya was completely exhausted from continuous delight. I was so absorbed at this time by external impressions that I could almost do nothing. We are delighted with the beauty of Petersburg. I never suspected that it was so beautiful, slender and stern (Voloshin 2010, Letter to Kirienko-Voloshina, 251).

Vyacheslav Ivanov and Zinovieva-Annibal (also a Symbolist poet) saw the *ménage à trois* as a prototype for the new community of humankind, and Sabashnikova became a candidate for inclusion in such a triad: "They had a strange idea: when two have merged together as they do, both can love the third ... Such love is the beginning of a new human community, even a church in which Eros is incarnated in flesh and blood" (Voloshina-Sabashnikova 1993, 161). Attempts of Ivanov and Zinovieva-Annibal to include Sabashnikova in this act of *zhiznetvorchestvo* or life creation led to the alienation of Voloshin. Already in June 1907, three months after parting with Sabashnikova and

leaving for Koktebel, Voloshin would admit: “Petersburg became disgusting” (Kupchenko 2002, 185), “I think of Petersburg life with horror” (Ibid.). A little later, he would call the atmosphere of the city “feverish and vicious” (Ibid., 186), and the visitors to the “Tower” – “circle of people specializing in psychological and sexual experiments” (Ibid., 187).

Nevertheless, in a letter to Vyacheslav Ivanov dated August 15, 1907, the poet offers him the path of peace and redemption:

I am waiting for you and Lidia in Koktebel. We must all live together here on the land where poets should live, where there is a real sun, a real naked land, and a real Odysseus Sea. Everything that was obscure and vague between me and you, I ascribe neither to you nor myself but to Petersburg. Here I found my ancient clarity, and everything that exists between us seems simple and joyful to me ... Only in Petersburg, with its fake people and fake life, could I get so confused before. On this land, I want to meet with you to forever curse all the dark ghosts from Petersburg life (Voloshin 2010, Letter to Vyacheslav Ivanov, 319).

Voloshin ascribes misunderstandings and confusion in their relationship to their life in Petersburg with its “fake people” and “fake life”. He employs the metaphor of “ghosts of Petersburg life” and contrasts it with the image of the land more suitable for poets. At the same time, Voloshin wrote cycle of poems exalting the Crimea, developing a “Crimean text” largely in opposition to the Petersburg text.

In 1907, Voloshin writes the poem “Krov’” (Blood) (“V moei krovi slepoi dvoinik...”, “In my blood there is a blind double ...”) as a response to Ivanov’s poem “Dvoinik” (“Double”). As Svetlana Bunina points out, the “omniscient” Viacheslav Ivanov, a true Petersburg intellectual, became for Voloshin the spirit of the artificially created city (Bunina 2005, 55). In his poems “Dvoinoi lik Ianusa” (“The Double Face of

Janus” (1908) and “O da, mne dushno v tvoikh setiakh” (“Oh yes, I am suffocating in your nets” (1909) written not long after his attempts to reconcile with Ivanov, he develops the theme of doubles: both poems are structured around antitheses and contrasts. He calls Ivanov “Janus” (a god with two faces), “both a friend and an enemy”.

However, his perception of Petersburg remains complex. In his 1915 poem “Petersburg” written as a protest to Petersburg’s renaming as Petrograd, Voloshin references Pushkin: “Waters chained in granite”, construction with “I love...» (“Liubliu tebia, Petra tvorenie” – “I love you, Peter’s creation), “prophetic” (veshchii), which later is echoed by the imagery of the horse and the snake, which, in turn, is a reference to *Pesn’ o veschem Olege* (*The Song of the Wise Oleg*). The image of the snake serves as possibly a bad omen for Peter, and a sign of the duplicitous nature of Petersburg: Voloshin creates a contrast of “riot” (bunt) and “order”, “nonsense” and “fate” in the next stanza. Voloshin fuses Peter and Oleg, supporting the theme of “fate” in his poem. However, in the last stanza with the image of the Admiralty needle, Voloshin asserts the triumph of Petersburg over its obscure destiny. Peter is called a “demiurge”; Voloshin seems to reference Peter’s role as carpenter and builder (cf. Pushkin’s “na trone vechnyi byl rabotnik”). The poem is written as a monologue of Joseph de Maistre, author of “Soirees de St. Petersburg”, addressed to an unknown interlocutor. According to Vladimir Toporov, this book was one of the most important for the “historiosophic” understanding of Petersburg, which is why it is not surprising that Voloshin references it (Toporov 2003, 50). In his letter, Voloshin states: “De Maistre is a genius writer, and from the Russians he can be equated with Vladimir Soloviev and Leont’ev, although he is

completely different” (Voloshin 2004, 702). De Maistre, floating on the Neva in a boat, admired its transparent waters embraced by the granite embankments.

In his 1917 poem "Petrograd" Voloshin describes the demonic dance, spawned by the “emptiness of the sovereign will,” namely, Peter’s decision to build a city in a flooded and marshy area. The place is described as a “unsteady deception of the swamps” (zybkii morok bolot), inhabited by “spirits of abomination and fornication”, “demons” and “nezhit” – dark and deadly forces. “Morok” does not have a precise translation into English. In Russian, it is an equivalent of the word “mrak” (darkness), but in this form it means something stupefying, darkening the mind. It is supported by the images of “people embraced by madness” (narod bezumiem ob’iatyi), “senseless miracles” (bessmyslennye chuda). The motif of madness as well as of doubling (“they mumble and double” (merechat i dvoitsia)) is one of the characteristics of the Petersburg text as employed by Pushkin, Gogol’, Dostoevsky, and Andrei Bely. Therefore, Voloshin employs the traditional Petersburg text imagery, but he gives it an unexpected resolution. At the end of the poem, he introduces the figure of the “builder of an internal city” (stroitel’ vnutrennego grada), who is not put out of countenance by the demons, which enter the herd of swine, causing them to run down a hill to the abyss. This line is a reference to the Biblical legend of Jesus exorcising demons from a man (famously used in the epigraph to Dostoevsky’s *Besy* (*Demons*)); this reference is supported by the elevated word “grad” (city), usually found in religious or classicist poetry. Voloshin foresees a victory over the dark forces dominating the city. It seems that the figure of the builder can be understood in multiple ways, one of which is to interpret this person as Peter the Great himself, mentioned earlier in the poem, and possibly compared to an “evil

shaman”, who opens the doors for the demons to later clear the space of them. Another interpretation is to understand it as a contrast of the real city and the inner or invisible city. This conception was important for theosophy, which had a significant influence on Voloshin’s early work. According to this idea, the best features of the invisible city are meant to appear. A similar image of the “invisible city” is used in Voloshin’s 1910 poem “Stupni goriat... V pyli dorog dusha” (The feet are burning ... In the dust of the roads of the soul ...), which was published in *Theosophy Review*.

Petersburg and Peter the Great are the central themes of Voloshin’s 1924 poem “Rossiia” (Russia). In this poem, he tracks the history of Russia from the foundation of Saint Petersburg to the rise of the Bolshevik Government. In this poem, Voloshin presents a drastically negative interpretation of Peter’s politics:

Я нёс в себе — багровый, как гнойник,  
Горячечный и триумфальный город,  
Построенный на трупах, на костях  
«Всея Руси» — во мраке финских топей,  
Со шпилями церквей и кораблей,  
С застенками подводных казематов,  
С водой стоячей, вправленной в гранит,  
С дворцами цвета пламени и мяса,  
С белесоватым мороком ночей,  
С алтарным камнем финских чернобогов,  
Растоптанным копытами коня,  
И с озарённым лаврами и гневом  
Безумным ликом медного Петра.

I carried in me - crimson as an abscess<sup>3</sup>,  
A hot and triumphant city  
Built on corpses, on bones  
"All Russia" - in the darkness of the Finnish swamps,  
With the spiers of churches and ships  
With the dungeons of underwater casemates,  
With standing water set in granite,  
With palaces the color of flame and meat,  
With a whitish haze of nights

---

<sup>3</sup> The translations are mine unless indicated otherwise.

With the altar stone of the Finnish chernobogs,  
Trampled by the hooves of a horse,  
The mad face of bronze Peter  
Illuminated with laurels and anger.

The city is described as built on dead bodies and bones, in the darkness of Finnish swamps, and is comprised of still water set in granite. Saint Petersburg's features are usually understood as positive, but in this poem they are interpreted as ambiguous or openly negative: "whitish deception of the nights", the water is "still", meaning there is no improvement. The Winter Palace colors are the colors of "flame" and "meat"; this color and emphasis on flesh and physicality are echoed in the first line – "crimson as an abscess". In the early twentieth century the palace was painted not light blue or turquoise, but red (hence, the association with flesh or meat). The theme of violence is expressed through the images of "underwater prisons" and "Peter's face lights up with anger". The Bronze Horseman monument is called the "altar of the Finnish chernobogs (black gods)", downtrodden by Peter's horse. Peter's face is referred to as "lik", which is a saintly image, as opposed to "litso" (face). Peter appears to be the wrong god, mistakenly placed on the pedestal. He is described as a sinful tsar, who is born in sin and is spreading sinfulness around his subordinates. Voloshin refers to Peter's "All-Joking, All-Drunken Synod of Fools and Jesters", seeing in it almost a demonic force:

Царь, в чине протодьякона, ведёт  
По Петербургу машкерную одурь.

The tsar, in the rank of protodeacon, leads  
In Petersburg marching stupor.

Among Peter's sins Voloshin lists the murder of Maria Hamilton and the torture of the emperor's own son. The construction of Saint Petersburg is compared to the clearing of the forest, and avenues are compared to the "scary forest glades". Peter is called "lumberman" (*drovosek*) as opposed to "carpenter": it emphasizes a destructive relationship to trees rather than a creative relationship with wood. In the years after Peter's death, Voloshin sees the consequences of his rule in the set of cruel, sinful, and uneducated emperors, with the political system giving rise to the broken fates of Russian *raznochintsy*<sup>4</sup> and intelligentsia:

He threw a net of the Table of Ranks into Russian society, and his catch created the *raznochintsy*. Of these, mixing with the livelier elements of the nobility, a century after the death of the Transformer, the Russian intelligentsia crystallized (Voloshin 2008, "Rossiai Raspiataia", 462);

Russian degeneration is the intelligentsia. It must be swept away by the wave of the people along with the government. It is alien to the spirit of the people, infected with the European barbarity of forms, and has no place in national renewal (Voloshin 2010, Letter to A. Petrova, 207).

In the *raznochinets* Voloshin saw an individuum deprived of family ties, deadened by state departments, and a future rebel (Danton and Robespierre were leaders of the French Revolution):

Оторванный от родовых корней,  
Отстоянный в архивах канцелярий —  
Ручной Дантон, домашний Робеспьер, —  
Бесценный клад для революций сверху.

Torn from ancestral roots  
Stood in the archives of the office -  
Handmade Danton, homemade Robespierre, -  
An invaluable treasure for revolutions from above.

---

<sup>4</sup> A newly emerged social class, people of various lower ranks (as opposed to the members of the nobility; an official term first introduced in the late 17th century.)

The intelligentsia is portrayed as naïve, weak, and clumsy; such features as “beautiful-hearted, honest, soft” can be comprehended here as ironic as Voloshin interpreted the intelligentsia as the face and the product of the autocracy:

От их корней пошёл интеллигент.  
Его мы помним слабым и гонимым,  
В измятой шляпе, в сношенном пальто,  
Сутулым, бледным, с рваною бородкой,  
Страдающей улыбкой и в пенсне,  
Прекраснодушным, честным, мягкотелым,  
Отгиснутым, как точный негатив,  
По профилю самодержавья...

An intellectual came from their roots.  
We remember him weak and persecuted,  
In a crumpled hat, in a worn-out coat,  
Stooped, pale, with a torn beard,  
Suffering smile and pince-nez  
Beautiful-hearted, honest, soft-bodied,  
Imprinted like an accurate negative  
Along the profile of autocracy...

Voloshin will show the ontological unity of the Russian revolution and autocracy and critically analyze the type of intellectual (the homunculus raised by Peter):

Гомункула, возвращённого Петром  
Из плесени в реторте Петербурга.

Homunculus raised by Peter  
From the mold in the retort of Petersburg.

Marianna Landa argues that in this poem and in “Grazhdanskaia voina” (“The Civil War”, 1919), Voloshin emphasizes the paradoxical character of the Russian Revolution and the unfortunate role of the intelligentsia in it:

In his lectures he addressed the tragedy and paradox of Russia's artistic, liberal and socialist intelligentsia who had prepared and brought to fruition the democratic February Revolution, only to have their ultraradical faction, the Bolsheviks, destroy all their accomplishments. The latter turned the country back to an even more oppressive dictatorship in the name of the "oppressed classes (Landa 2015, 89).

In his poem "Russia" Voloshin proclaims Peter 'the first Bolshevik', and there is no page in the history of Russia as insane and dark for him. At the end of the poem, Voloshin, however, asserts the strength which he sees in the Russians: everyone who was boiled in this melting pot is a human next to any European. He links the idea of Russianness to the spirit of anarchy and explosion, comparing it to an uncultured field:

У нас в душе некошенные степи.  
Вся наша непашь буйно заросла  
Разрыв-травой, быльём да своевоьем.

...

В анархии всё творчество России:  
Европа шла культурою огня,  
А мы в себе несём культуру взрыва.

We have unmown steppes in our souls.  
All our unplowed land is violently overgrown  
With wild grass, with past and with willfulness.

...

All the creativity of Russia is in anarchy:  
Europe was a culture of fire,  
And we carry the nature of explosion in ourselves.

After Voloshin settled down in Koktebel', he started to create his "Crimean text".

Situated on the Black Sea coast, Crimean nature resembles the Mediterranean landscape and the place itself experienced the influence of Ancient Greek, Roman, and Muslim cultures, and was a place of imperial conquest and Romantic literary journeys (Pushkin, Lermontov, Griboedov). It can be considered Russia's own "Orient". For Voloshin, these

historical and cultural connotations played an important role, thus he often evoked them in his poetry: “Gradually, Koktebel becomes for Voloshin a symbolic image of the universe, in which all the many different ‘liki zemli’, traces of its history and culture are accumulated, and ‘Kimmeria’s sad region’ emerges as a universal paradigm of the human being, showing all the unity of diversity and absorbing all the diversity of unity” (Lavrov 1995, 39). Voloshin reintroduced the term “Kimmeria”, saturating it with historical and cultural connotations. The Kimmerians were the most ancient people of the Crimea, the first true nomads in the region. There are conflicting points of view as to where the Kimmerians came from, what language they spoke and what happened to them after the collision with the Scythians. Now the eastern part of the Crimean Peninsula from Sudak to Kerch’ is called Kimmeria, and it is largely thanks to Voloshin. In his poems and paintings, he contrasted it to Taurida - the southern coast of the Crimea (Tauric Chersonesos). Kimmeria first appeared already in Homer's *Odyssey* as the city, which was situated at the entrance to Hades (on the shores of the Ocean in the extreme east). Under the influence of this text, in aspects of ancient tradition, Kimmeria became a part of the kingdom of the dead.

Voloshin continued the tradition of the Crimean text, which he inherited from the Romantic tradition, but reinvented it, moving away from exclusively Romantic interpretations of the Crimea. Russian “Tavrída” – the old name of the Crimea - took on the features of a beautiful country of exile, an imaginary and desired earthly paradise. Russian poetry of the 18th and 19th centuries produced topoi associated with the land of the “midday sun” (Pushkin) with its lush nature. The non-civilized and picturesque Crimea or Tavrída appeared in contrast to northern metropolitan Saint Petersburg.

Voloshin, in his turn, reinvented this myth, which by the 20th century had already turned into an abstraction. Not as a romantic, but as a modernist poet, Voloshin chose Koktebel' to be his land of exile after the tragic separation from his wife, Margarita Sabashnikova, and his break with Vyacheslav Ivanov and his circle. His Kimmerian myth appeared as a continuation of the Tavrida myth, but his Crimea is a land of suffering and lonely wandering. The Kimmerian myth was crystallized in his poetic cycles *Kimmeriiskie sumerki* (*Kimmerian Twilights*) and *Kimmeriiskaia vesna* (*Kimmerian Spring*). They are filled with the motifs of rocky, dry, and pristine land, not touched by civilization. It is a land of suffering and lonely wandering, which serve as a source of true creativity. Nikolai Antsiferov argued that Maximilian Voloshin discovered Koktebel' and conveyed it in his work as a "foggy Kimmeria of the night land". He described the Crimea not as a sunny south, but as the "harsh outskirts of the world" (Antsiferov 1928, 111-112). In his poetic cycles, Voloshin taps into the proximity of Kimmeria to the depths of Hades, comparing himself to Orpheus or Odysseus descending into the realm of the dead.

Voloshin turned abstract "southern" topoi into a "Kimmerian" myth that was tangible and fully materialized. This statement speaks to the fact that in Koktebel' Voloshin started working as a painter, creating thousands of watercolors. Alexander Liusyi sees in it the reinvention of the Crimean (Kimmerian) myth and text: "...the essence of the aesthetic redemption of the Tavrida myth by the Kimmerian lies in the non-organic (geological and mineralogical) graft made by Voloshin to verse and poetry in general (Liusyi 2003, 167). Voloshin's Kimmerian myth is based on various historical, cultural, and symbolic connotations associated with this land. Since this territory was

populated by different peoples, it contained traces of multiple cultures, which make their way into Voloshin's poetry.

Another unique aspect of Voloshin's heritage in relation to his life in Saint Petersburg was his Crimean boarding house, which was in operation since 1911. With the construction of the railroad from Moscow, Crimea started to attract educated elites for summer vacations. Every summer Voloshin hosted many representatives of Russian culture. His visitors formed a community which called itself the "Obormoty" and were engaged in role-playing, shows, games, and creative production. I contend that it offers a very prominent example of the practice of life creation, where text comes out of its borders thereby transforming the life around. As Barbara Walker points out, even after the death of Voloshin, when the original "Obormoty" group partially vanished, the stories of their creative production had found their way into oral discourse and memoir literature, turning Voloshin into a legend: "The emergent insider mythology of the Voloshin circle shows the gossipy discourse of the Russian intelligentsia at its most compelling and creative, as it contributed to the forging of a communal identity" (Walker 2005, 116). The Koktebel' house partially ensured Voloshin's survival after the Revolution and the Civil War. The widespread Soviet requisition of domestic space made his property vulnerable. The solution was to turn his house into a "free house of rest for writers, artists, [scholars], and also a literary-painting studio" (Walker 2005, 153). This "Artistic Colony" or "House of Rest" successfully existed until the end of the 1920s, serving as a source of income for Voloshin and allowing him to keep his house intact.

I believe that these *zhiznetvorchestvo* practices were inherited by Voloshin from Ivanov's "Tower", thus extending them beyond the Symbolist milieu and epoch, as well

as spatially beyond the birthplace of the Petersburg myth to the Russian Orient. The degree of fusion of art and real life and its impact on Soviet art, however, differentiates Russian Symbolism from the larger context of European Symbolism. The conception of “life creation” – “life treated as a text” (Paperno 1994, 2) - implied that art had to go beyond itself and be embodied in a new type of person to further transform the world:

The principle of fusing art and life as practiced by Russian Symbolists is generally known as *zhiznetvorchestvo*. The words itself is untranslatable. In Russian, it leaves room for multiple interpretations: *tvorchestvo* refers to artistic creation; when combined with the word *zhizn'* (“life”), it suggests both the creation of life and a synthesis of the two elements – creation and life (Ibid.).

In the context of *zhiznetvorchestvo*, Voloshin’s role as mentor for young poets is worth mentioning here. Voloshin received his poetic training at Viacheslav Ivanov’s Tower, seeing himself as a mentee to Ivanov. Later he would adopt the role of mentor to young talent himself but exclusively for the women, Margarita Sabashnikova, Adelaida Gertsyk, Elizaveta Dmitrieva (Cherubina de Gabriak), and Marina Tsvetaeva. Barbara Walker interprets this as his rebellion against the existing reputational and publishing practice which affected female poets and artists: “Through his new mentorship activities, he was in a sense rising up against that system, although it was an awkward and partial revolution.” (Walker 2005, 66).

Due to Voloshin’s mystification, the name of Elizaveta Dmitrieva or Cherubina de Gabriak remains more famous for the literary scandal surrounding this figure than for her poetry. Her physical appearance did not respond to the powerful contemporary stereotype of beauty associated with the female poetic soul. Voloshin invented a new personality for her under the name of Cherubina de Gabriak. According to the legend, Cherubina was a beautiful young girl of French-Polish descent who lived in an

oppressive Catholic household. She had reddish-bronze curls, her skin was very pale, but she had bright lips with downward corners. Her poems arrived at *Apollo*, a Symbolist review where Voloshin collaborated, in an elegant envelope complemented by dry flowers (types of flowers that were never repeated, perhaps, serving as a secret message for someone aware of their symbolic meaning). This elaborate presentation of de Gabriak's poems produced an exaggerated image of femininity that predisposed male readers to her works. The mystery surrounding de Gabriak created quite a stir among the Russian poets of the day, and a number of *Apollo* contributors fell in love with her, including its editor in chief, Sergei Makovskii. Her poems were an instant success, as they catered to Symbolist aesthetic taste, creating extensive debate about her work and her identity. In November of 1909, it was finally revealed that Cherubina de Gabriak was a fake persona. Makovskii described his meeting with the real woman in his memoir:

The door opened <...> [and] into the room came, limping heavily, a short, fairly stout dark-haired woman with a large head, an inordinately prominent forehead, and with a sort of truly frightening mouth from which fanglike teeth protruded. She was exceptionally ugly. <...> The wonderful dream suddenly vanished forever; coming into its own was merciless, monstrous, shameful reality (Makovskii 1955, 351).

Dmitrieva was described as a "plain" woman, but she possessed wit and charm, which are absent from Makovskii vengeful description, whose pride most likely was wounded.

After that, Dmitrieva quickly disappeared from the Petersburg literary scene and abandoned poetry for some time. Even though this mystification could not be maintained for a long time, it made "a vivid and mocking public exposure of the narrow masculine

spirit that dominated modernist publishing circles” (Walker 2005, 82). Thus, Voloshin succeeded in challenging the Symbolist hierarchies by supporting female writers.

Voloshin’s years in Saint-Petersburg and his impressions of the city evolved in his work from classical admiration of its “strictness” and beauty to disdain and contempt. Voloshin started to associate the name of Peter with Bolshevism, seeing in him a falsely praised tyrant. According to Voloshin, Peter’s reforms defined the fate of Russia, giving birth to the emergence of the intelligentsia and *raznochintsy*, in whom he saw a degeneration of Russian family lines. Voloshin’s personal drama involving Vyacheslav Ivanov made his Crimean exile not an abstract Romantic journey but an intimate and groundbreaking experience. He reinvented the Crimea for the Russian reader, creating his own “Kimmerian text” in opposition to the Petersburg text. Voloshin’s unique form of *zhiznetvorchestvo* (his “Obormoty” circle) continued the line of Vyacheslav Ivanov’s Tower but in a different way: their production was emphatically humoristic and devoid of Ivanov’s serious mystical quest. Appearing on the Russian literary stage at the decline of Symbolism, Voloshin inherited the fruits of Symbolist experiments with language and poetic form, as well as their interest in the otherworldly and in blurring of the boundaries of life and art. His *zhiznetvorchestvo* can be considered a material embodiment of Symbolism, in which text essentially becomes life and the transcendental merges with the real.

## CHAPTER II: THE APOLLONIAN DREAM IN VOLOSHIN'S POETIC WORKS

Voloshin's short collaboration with *Apollo*, the literary journal, played an important role in his creative evolution. In *Apollo*, Voloshin received an opportunity to formulate his aesthetic ideas and to participate in the debates around new tendencies in art, both Symbolist and Post-Symbolist. *Apollo*, founded by literary critic Sergei Makovskii, was one of the most important modernist institutions in existence from 1909 to 1917. Even though *Apollo* inherited its participants, form, and structure from the journal "Mir Iskusstva" (*The World of Art*), *Apollo*'s theoretical platform was much further from Symbolism: it promoted neoclassical tendencies, formalism, eventually developing a program for a new literary movement – Acmeism.

The title of the journal, *Apollo*, derives from Friedrich Nietzsche's classic dichotomy of the Dionysian and Apollonian in the Greek art expressed in his essay "The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music". The essence of Greek culture was understood by Nietzsche as a dialectic of the dark, irrational mystical, and ecstatic of the Dionysian and the harmony and enlightened spirituality of the Apollonian. The creators of *Apollo* proclaimed their aspiration to "deeply conscious and harmonious creativity", lying beyond "the painful disintegration of the spirit and pseudo innovativeness" (*Apollo* 1909, 3-4). In the preamble, Innokentii Annenskii, one of the main literary critics of the time, underlined the journal's departure from "God-seeking" and mysticism and emphasized the importance of craftsmanship: "This *Apollo* has no priests and will have no sanctuary", but rather "workshops, where everyone who wants and knows how to

work for Apollo may freely enter” (Ibid.). Apollonian participants emphasized clarity and attention to form, as opposed to decadent darkness and chaotic origins:

The principle of the journal is the strictest selection of texts. The main task can be expressed in two words - striving for the Apollonian source of creativity, as opposed to the emotional disintegration of the spirit and pseudo innovativeness, which has sinned the art of the last decade. Consequently, we are looking for - a strict, harmonious, life art and are fighting with everything that can be called - a vague effect, a pretentious posture, a mannerism of bad taste (Lavrov 2010, 26).

Makovskii however, invited Vyacheslav Ivanov, a representative of an opposing “decadent” group, for collaboration in *Apollo*; his conception of theurgical art was quite impactful even among *Apollo*’s contributors. Ivanov’s influence did not last long: Nikolai Gumilev’s poem “Kapitany” (“Captains”, 1909) outlined a new aesthetics of the “earthly”, “simple” and concrete opposing Symbolism’s sublime spirituality and mystical quest. Voloshin’s participation in *Apollo* was somewhat controversial, even though his aesthetic beliefs seemed to be aligned with Makovskii’s. Sergei Gorodetskii in his article on the “formalists” pointed out Voloshin’s attention to the formal side of the poetic work:

His [Makovskii's] meeting with Maximilian Voloshin seems to be a historical event. This author of the most orgiastic hymns ... always concealed in himself the most refined grain of formalism ... Love for stones ..., porphyries, emeralds and all sorts of others, the ability to petrify the most intimate experience, the fastest movement, heavily shining beauty - these are the main features of Voloshin’s formalism (Zolotoe Runo 1909, 55—56).

According to Inna Koretskaia, Voloshin is usually considered among Annenskii’s disciples, based on the similarity of the themes developed in their poetry: antiquity, French symbolism, theoretical approaches to the essence of the poetic word. Gorodetskii emphasizes the proximity of Voloshin and Makovskii in terms of the “Apollonian”

aesthetic setting, which he calls “formalism”; but at the same time Gorodetskii describes Voloshin’s poetry as primarily “orgiastic” or Dionysian. Vyacheslav Ivanov, his mentor and close friend, contributed to this view as well. As a consequence, Voloshin’s position in *Apollo* was somewhat shaky: “Among the collaborators of *Apollo*, he remained a stranger in his entire mentality, in his self-consciousness and in the universalism of artistic and conceptional preferences” (Makovskii 1955, 314). The episode with Cherubina de Gabriak caused more distancing from Voloshin, who, however, remained their correspondent until the closure of the journal. Alexander Lavrov argues that “under the skillfully chosen ‘Apollonian’ guise of an aesthete, he showed signs of a different quality - a writer-theurgist, an esotericist, a religion seeker” (Lavrov 2010, 370), which contradicted the principal policy of the journal.

One of the most crucial texts for understanding Voloshin’s philosophy is his 1911 essay “Apollon i mysh” (“Apollo and the Mouse”) where he engages with the figure of Apollo Smintheus – the Mouse Apollo or Apollo, Lord of the Mice. This name is derived either from the town of Sminthe in Troas, or from the Greek word *sminthos* – a similar-sounding ‘mouse’, which, as an animal that sees in the dark, served as a symbol of prophecy and the all-seeing god. In his essay, designated for publication in *Apollo*, Voloshin refers to Nietzsche’s conception of the Apollonian dream as the creative state of the artist. Voloshin shows that there exists a very subtle boundary between the two worlds: that of the beautiful Apollonian dream and of the earthly and mundane. To get immersed in the dream is to die in the real world; to deny the dream and “believe” in the physical world is to lose artistic inspiration and divinity:

The world of Apollo is a beautiful dream of life; life is beautiful only because we perceive it as our dream; and at the same time, we have no right to forget

that this is only a dream, under the fear that the dream does not turn into the crude reality. Thus, the soul, initiated into the mysteries of the Apollonian dream, stands on the edge between two abysses: on the one hand, there is a danger of believing that this is not a dream, on the other, there is a danger of waking up from sleep. To wake up from life is death, to believe in the reality of life is to lose your divinity (Voloshin 1984, 98).

The artist, therefore, needs to find a balance between the two states, and this will ensure artistic success and the authenticity of the creative process. According to Voloshin, the mouse represents the idea of chaos and madness, which inspires terror in the artist; it is an embodiment of the fleeting moment as opposed to the eternity of the Apollonian dream. Perceived as a threat by the artist, it nevertheless establishes a connection with the physical world: “In the fast-fleeing movement of the small gray animal, the Greeks saw a semblance of a prophetic, evasive, and elusive moment, a thin crack that always threatens to disrupt the Apollonian dream, which at the same time can only be realized by it” (Ibid., 101).

Through the metaphor of the mouse, Voloshin proposes a connection to Apollonian creativity understood as the state of an eternal dream interrupted by the presence of reality. The poet must exist in between the two spaces; he must feel the moment and to transform it into immortality through art. Voloshin thus positions the idea of creativity between the spiritual and the material, where both Apollo and the mouse are a metaphor for the creator existing between two realms. It is reflected in Voloshin’s method of painting consisted of “documenting” the moment, letting it to be absorbed by the unconscious, turning it into the Apollonian dream and then recreating it in an artwork. It is noteworthy that in “Apollo and the Mouse” Voloshin compares the time between the mountain and the mouse to the crack between the past and the present:

Time is eternity, a tense and ever-moving sphere of inner intuitive feelings, which to our logical consciousness seems to be a huge mountain of darkness and chaos, shaken to the ground. And from the crack an infinitely small moment is born - a mouse. A mountain gives birth to a mouse, just as eternity gives birth to a moment. Every moment is an elusive rift between the past and the future. Every moment rings in a crystal Apollonian dream, like a crack in a crystal vessel. (Ibid.)

The mountains and hills of Crimea were among the most prominent themes in Voloshin's artwork. A pristine landscape, with very few details, however, dark, or light lines representing rock strata and rifts are typically present. The mountain, therefore, is the embodiment of time, and the crack is the present moment.



Fig.1. Maximilian Voloshin. *Clouds*. Watercolor on paper. 1929

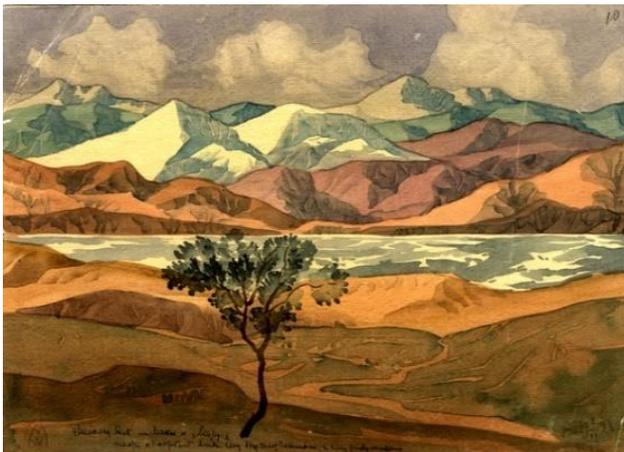


Fig.2. Maximilian Voloshin. *Koktebel' Landscape*. Watercolor on paper. 1928

In his essay “Horomedon” (1909), Voloshin develops the idea of Apollo as the God of time and argues that the Word is the essence of things. The Word remains hidden in dark matter, appealing to the poet and waiting to be freed by him:

Before it began to exist as a will, as a form, as a face, it used to be a word, and there is nothing around us that would not conceal the Word inside itself, hidden in a dark substance: sound, smell, and color - all external perceptions - only burns of a fiery, captive word with the masks of the world, which from the depths of the dungeon gives its voice to the poet and expects from him his name, his liberation. (Voloshin 2007, 301).

In his letter to Annenskii, Voloshin sided with his understanding of a poetic word expressed in his article “O sovremennom lirisme” (“On Contemporary Lyricism”): “What you say about the word meets my deepest thoughts <...> The word is the original essence of all things. ‘In the beginning was the Word’ — I take it literally”. (Annenskii 2009, 291).

Voloshin establishes a unique approach to things, which are essentially ideas and concepts – or symbols of the Apollonian dream, trapped in the physical reality. By naming things, the poet calls to the true essence of them, estranging them and awakening their inner truth. The poet turns physical objects into words:

Such is the influence of poetry on the world of external things, completely overgrown with flesh: it awakens in them vague memories of themselves, it removes the spell of inertia, it erodes the stubborn thicknesses of matter, and, back to the development of the world in which the word becomes flesh, it again turns into a word what has already become a body (Voloshin 2007, 303).

Explaining his search for words hidden in things, Voloshin cites the words of Ivanov about how Michelangelo's sculptures are idols ("kumiry") sleeping in the captivity of marble.<sup>5</sup>

Alexander Lavrov, while analyzing Voloshin's drafts, tried to explain his creative method – Voloshin started with distinct poetic themes, a quite detailed poetic "program" with imagery necessary for the development of the theme. The next step was to transform this preparatory material into a poem. The higher his program was, the more deployed and elaborate was his preliminary explication (Lavrov 1995, 15). Voloshin repeatedly underlined that for him there is no radical difference between prose and poetry: he polished his prose to a degree so that it would become poetry. Lavrov argues that in a poem for Voloshin there is a primary idea-imagery structure, which can be transformed into a poem but can also unfold in prose texts. Voloshin conceived his programmatic poem "Podmaster'e" (*Apprentice*, 1917) as a prose introduction to his poetic cycle *Iverni*, and later it evolved into a blank verse poem. It reflects Voloshin's views on the essence of the poetic word, even though it was written ten years after "Horomedon". In *Apprentice*, Voloshin employs masonic symbolism, with which he was very familiar due to his theosophical studies. He tracks the path of a poet from an "apprentice" of "verbal sacred craftsmanship" to a "master". The titular 'apprentice' is a smithy, a "stone cutter", working with words to find their hidden value. This corresponds with the masonic conception of an apprentice who was given tools symbolizing work with stone:

Ты будешь подмастерьем

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<sup>5</sup> Voloshin cites Vyach. Ivanov's article "Sporady" (*Vesy*, 1908 №8): "This angry madman assured in rhymes that idols slumber in the marble captivity of inert boulders, expecting a liberating chisel from the artist".

Словесного, святого ремесла,  
Ты будешь кузнецом  
Упорных слов,  
Вкус, запах, цвет и меру выплавляя  
Их скрытой сущности, –  
Ты будешь  
Ковалем и горнилом,  
Чеканщиком монет, гранильщиком камней.

You will be an apprentice of  
Verbal, holy craft,  
You will be a blacksmith of  
Persistent words  
Taste, smell, color and measure melting of  
Their hidden essence, -  
You will be  
A forge and a crucible,  
A minter of coins, engraver of stones.

The next step after mastering the tools is self-restraint and introspection, turning to the depths of one's soul, and from this depth there will come the word, bearing "vse trepety i vse siianiia zhizni" ("all the thrill and all the radiance of life"). Voloshin's poetry can be seen as difficult to understand due to its logical and synthetic character, which is complicated by its deliberate structure. His word has a quasi-physical dimension like a rock, which consists of layers of strata.

Так, высвобождаясь  
От власти малого, забывшего «я»,  
Увидишь ты, что все явления –  
Знаки,  
По которым ты вспоминаешь самого себя,  
И волокно за волокном собираешь  
Ткань духа своего, разодранного миром.

So, releasing  
From the power of a small, forgetful "I",  
You will see that all phenomena are  
Signs,  
By which you remember yourself  
And you gather fiber by fiber  
The fabric of your spirit, torn apart by the world.

His position appears to be a purely Symbolist one: in the center of the object lies an idea, only accessible to the poet. Freeing himself from the grip of the ego, a poet will see that all phenomena of the world are signs or ideas. Voloshin claims that a poet is not the son of the Earth but a wanderer across the Universe; that is to say, a poet does not belong to the physical world but is meant to exist in the otherworld, by naming things and freeing them from the power of the matter:

Когда же ты поймешь,  
....  
Что всюду – и в тварях и вещах – томится  
Божественное Слово,  
Их к бытию призвавшее,  
Что ты – освободитель божественных имен,  
Пришедший изназвать  
Всех духов – узников, увязших в веществе...

When you come to understand  
....  
That everywhere - and in creatures and things - languishes  
The Divine Word,  
Calling them to being,  
That you are the liberator of divine names  
Who came to call  
All spirits - prisoners, trapped in the substance...

Discussing his creative process in “Horomedon”, Voloshin employs the metaphor of a flower. He purifies the words of acquired “book” meanings, he returns to the intrinsic value and quality of the word (“examines the structure of the stem and flower pattern”), and weaves them together in perfect harmony, not only outer aspect, but also inner “so that the completeness of the circle would be based on the internal correspondence of the words from which it is woven”. Voloshin calls his final poetic creation a “venok” (“wreath”): “So from many words I weave a single wreath, find one name, pure and unspoken, and carry it into the world in order to find out which things will respond to it”.

His superiority in working with the formal side of the poem, especially compositional, singled him out among the other representatives of the Symbolist milieu. Valerii Briusov, for example, claimed that no one but Voloshin could write a proper sonnet in Russian. Other researchers, too, commented on the formal precision and the sense of solidity, almost palpable in his poems. His mystical lines are encapsulated in heavy and strict forms:

By that meticulous and careful finishing, which is characteristic of each of Voloshin's poems, for the sophistication and accuracy of his engraved images, he can be called a jeweler of verse... The elusive vibrations of the soul, the subtlest mystical experiences are enclosed by the poet in the clear, steel facets of verse (Gollerbakh 1920).

One of the most important poetic cycles in Voloshin's work is "Corona Astralis" (1909), which is part of his first poetic collection *Stikhotvoreniia 1900-1910 (Poems)* and "Iverni", 1918. It is one of the first known crowns of sonnets composed in Russia. The crown of sonnets is a cycle of fourteen sonnets forming together the fifteenth sonnet by means of repeated lines. The cycle was created under the influence of the occult and theosophical studies. In Europe, Voloshin met with Annie Besant, the head of the Theosophical Society, and Rudolf Steiner, the head of the German branch of the Theosophical Society and was his disciple through the 1910s. Besides Steiner, Voloshin was influenced by Anna Mintslova, a Russian theosophist who was influential in Symbolist circles and one of the participants of Vyacheslav Ivanov's literary soirees at his famous Tower. Voloshin's fascination with theosophy and anthroposophy played an important part in his intellectual and creative quest; however, he did not aspire to reproduce their philosophy in his poetry as it was presented to him. He used theosophical imagery, blending it with Antique, Christian and other religious systems, thus

demonstrating his universalism or eclecticism, which was not approved of by the *Apollo* editorial board. “Corona Astralis” expresses an esoteric secret available only to the select few initiated to theosophical perceptions of the world, but at the same time it can be read as reflecting certain cultural and personal associations. As far as “Corona Astralis” is a synthesis of religion, science and philosophy, the mix of rational knowledge and esoteric revelations, it would be ill-judged to try to find a single angle to approach this unique work of art. One should have everything and nothing in mind while interpreting this crown of sonnets, where each word is immersed in a complex associative-esoteric field. Boris Leman called this cycle a “medieval style encyclopedia of a monk.... where there are myths, and natural sciences, and art, and all pervaded by one mystical note” (Voloshin 2003, 475). “Corona Astralis” is also a love poem, dedicated to Elizaveta Dmitrieva (Cherubina de Gabriak), who replied to this work with her own crown of sonnets “Zolotaia vetv” (The Golden Bough, 1909).

The title is given in Latin, and there are several ways of translating it into Russian: “star crown” and “astral crown”. Evgenii Kuz’min explained the origin of the “astral” in theosophy: it goes back to Paracelsus, who was interested in astrology and believed that planets have an influence on humans; in addition to that, in the astral plane people’s emotions are embodied as fantastic creatures. As a result, creatures formed under such a double influence, affect the person who gave birth to them, and also, they have their own impact on other people and the universe (Kuz’min 1999, 278-288). Therefore, the “astral” in relation to Voloshin’s poem can be translated through the transcendental and emotional sphere, which aligns with the concept of the symbolist love poem. Emmanuil Mendelevich argues that, according to Medieval kabbalistic mysticism,

Sephirot “corona” signified the whole plan of the Universe in its temporal and spatial infinity (Mendelevich 2001, 79-80). I suggest that “corona” as a synonym to “wreath” can be interpreted as a collection of carefully chosen words, woven together in search of a perfect poetic structure, according to Voloshin’s metaphor from “Horomedon”. There have been several attempts to analyze the poem: Sergei Pinaev, Evgenii Kuzmin, and Emmanuil Mendelevich studied the mystical and mythological content of the poem, providing an extensive commentary, as “Corona Astralis” requires considerable erudition from the reader. In contrast, Marianna Landa focuses on the personal dimension of the cycle, considering “Corona Astralis” in tandem with Cherubina de Gabriak’s poetic response (Landa 2013).

Even though mystical and cultural references are crucial for an understanding of the poem, I believe that Voloshin wrote the poem for an educated general readership and did not expect of them any theosophical education. The esoteric images can be deciphered but they fail to provide a key to the crown. I argue that the cycle’s main trope is a Symbolist antithesis of the daily life and the world of symbols or ideas in an Apollonian aesthetic setting. When Voloshin wrote: “For my attitude to the world, see ‘Corona Astralis’” (Voloshin 1995, 358), I believe, he was referring to his position as a poet (and an artist) associated with the Symbolism. According to Voloshin, the vocation of the Symbolist poet involves rigorous self-restraint, rejection of the ego, and readiness to encounter suffering. He considered the poet to be a wanderer and an outcast, gifted with the memory of the whole existence of the world.

The poem belongs to the collection *Altari v pustyne* (“Altars in the Desert”), the main goal of which Voloshin described as “comprehend the true character of the

Hellenistic Apollo”. I argue that the dominant images in the poem are the Apollonian dream and the wanderer, who is destined to dwell in the physical world with his knowledge of the true “astral” reality. He starts the poem by ascribing more reality to dreams than to earthly existence: “Earth cannot quench the ferment of our dreams” (Iav’ nashikh snov zemlia ne istrebit). The poet has the power to see Apollonian dreams and “remember names” (sacred names of the things) but is blinded by the light of day. The Earth appears to be a «land of exile» or a dark cellar, probably a reference to Plato’s allegory of the cave, central to the Symbolist worldview:

Тому, кто зря, но светом дня ослеп,  
Тому, кто жив и брошен в тёмный склеп,  
Кому земля – священный край изгнания,  
Кто видит сны и помнит имена...

Some, though seeing, are blinded by the light of day<sup>6</sup>;  
Some live, yet are forgotten in dark prisons;  
For some the earth’s a sacred land of exile.  
Some dream, yet all the while remember names.

One of the recurring syntactic constructions in the cycle is concession: despite emotional and physical trials and the intensity of the earthly existence, the poet refuses to oblivate the other world.

И пусть кругом грохочут глухо громы,  
Пусть веет вихрь сомнений и обид, -  
Явь наших снов земля не истребит!

Let thunder dully threaten all our schemes;  
Let regret and ill assail us on all sides;  
Earth cannot quench the ferment of our dreams!

---

<sup>6</sup> Here and elsewhere, I adhere to the English translation of “Corona Astralis” by Graham Harrison with some minor adjustments.

The poet's spirit, suffocated by the bodies, is compared to the statue of the Laocoön entangled by two sea serpents.



Fig. 3. Laocoön and his sons, also known as the Laocoön Group. Marble, copy after a Hellenistic original from ca. 200 BC. Found in the Baths of Trajan, 1506.

Having been insulted by Laocoön who consummated his marriage in front of the statue of Apollo, Apollo himself sent the beasts. I believe that Voloshin refers to the theme of the human love (one of the semantic themes of “Corona Astralis”), which appears to be lesser than the upper world of ideas:

Но пусть огонь и жалит и язвит  
Певучий дух, задушенный телами, -  
Лаокоон, опутанный узлами  
Горячих змей, напрягся... и молчит.

И никогда ни счастье этой боли,  
Ни гордость уз, ни радости неволи,  
Ни наш экстаз безвыходной тюрьмы  
Не отдадим за все забвенья Леты!

But even if the fire torment and sear  
His singing spirit, choked by serpents' coils,  
Laocoön, trapped in their dire embrace,

Strains every sinew... and holds his peace.

Nor shall we give up this blissful pain,  
This fetter'd pride, these joys of sheer necessity,  
Nor the hopeless prison cell's hard ecstasy.

In "Skeleton of Art", Voloshin uses the example of Laocoön to illustrate that most of the expressive power of the figure is concentrated in the torso: "Laocoön 's inverted stomach says more than a sentimentally exaggerated head" (Voloshin 2007,9). It is noteworthy that, in "Corona Astralis", Laocoön "holds his peace" (molchit), manifesting stoicism amid suffering. Voloshin was likely familiar with the famous essay by Gotthold Lessing "Laocoön, or the Limitations of Poetry" (1766). Lessing argues that Laocoön does not cry out due to unbearable pain, but only emits a sigh, but instead of psychological proof of the latter he gives an aesthetic one. Lessing believes that in Greek art the portrayal of suffering was allowed only in part. In connection with Laocoön, the artist's main goal was to depict the highest beauty associated with bodily suffering, but, due to the incompatibility of this type of suffering with the beauty, the sculptor was faced with the task of expressing something that, in terms of its properties, moderates the distortion of beauty. So, according to Lessing, instead of Laocoon's cry, the artist depicted a groan. For Voloshin, I believe, this image is the embodiment of a transcendental idea trapped in a physical body and of the earthly sufferings which a poet must endure.

In "Corona Astralis", the image of the wanderer cannot be reduced to one mythical parallel. It brings together a number of mythological figures, such as Jesus, the Wandering Jew, Icarus, and Aeneas, all of which are prominent in the poem. The image first appears in the "zero" sonnet:

Ах, не крещен в глубоких водах Леты  
Наш горький дух, и память нас томит.  
В нас тлеет боль внежизненных обид –  
Изгнанники, скитальцы и поэты!

Our bitter soul's not bathed, alas! In Lethe's  
Deep oblivion. We're wearied by regrets  
And feel the smoldering aches of alien woe,  
Banished exiles, wanderers and poets!

The Wanderer is characterized by the Universe's primordial memory which retains the pain of the outcast. "Bitterness, regrets, aches and woe" are the punishments of the wanderer who offended God. The "unsteady comets" (in Russian this adjective can be also read as "unfaithful") cannot follow the "proven orbit" in order to find their own way in the "sacred earth of exile". Voloshin puts together "sacred" and "exile", turning eternal wandering into a blessing of sorts. He creates an opposition between the divine world and the earth: poets are tragic who "though seeing, are blinded by the light of day" ("zriach, no svetom dnia oslep"). They are capable of clairvoyance and of seeing a higher truth, but this ability is compromised by their mundane existence. The next line, "...alive, yet in dark prisons are forgotten" ("...kto zhiv i broshen v tiomnyi sklep") compares real life to life in captivity. According to Voloshin, an exile, a wanderer, and a poet are all of the same nature, endowed with the gift of supersensible perception. For the poet, earthly love is not attainable due to its non-divine, human nature, which is deciduous as are all personal feelings:

Тому в любви не радость встреч дана,  
А темные восторги расставанья!

All these find in love no union of bliss  
But only parting's dismal ecstasies!

The wandering itself appears to bring suffering, since every step, each moment reminds him of “other worlds” (“inykh mirov v sebe napominaniia”), which he is unable to reach. The signs of the heavenly world can be remarked on by him but cannot be interpreted, as due to his long wandering, he has lost the ability to understand the secret language:

В душе встают неясные мерцанья,  
Как будто он на камнях древних плит  
Хотел прочесть священный алфавит  
И позабыл понятий начертанья.

He has intimations as yet unclear,  
As if predestined he were to pore  
O'er sacred alphabets on ancient stones,  
Unlearning our inherited conceptual lore.

The poet catches glimpses of the otherworld or “unclear intimations” (neiasnye mertsaniia), he is “himself a god, yet himself mistaken” (sebia zabyvshyi bog), which brings up the Romantic and Symbolist concepts of the poetic gift as given from above. He “tracks telling patterns everywhere” (sledit v veschakh znakomye uzory), seeing in the materiality of the world reminders of their divine origin. In his lecture “Puti Erosa [Mysli i kommentarii k Platonovy ‘Piru’]” (“Ways of Eros [Thoughts and Commentaries on Platonov 'Feast'”) Voloshin claims that the source of creativity is “to be like gods crucified in matter” (Voloshin 1999, 19).

The eleventh sonnet features the Wandering Jew figure, cursed and destined to eternal wandering:

Он тот, кому погибель не дана,  
Кто, встретив смерть, в смущеньи клонит взоры,  
Кто видит сны и помнит имена.

His like, whom Fate resolves to spare,

Meet death, confused, and bow their heads;  
They dream, yet all the while remember names.

Perhaps, Voloshin associated the Wandering Jew figure with Judas Iskariot, and, in so doing, he offered his unique interpretation of this image. Voloshin claims that in the Christian world there exist two types of Judases. The first one, Judas the Traitor of the Gospels, betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. He is the symbol of filth, crime, and unfaithfulness in Orthodox Christianity. The second one is the Judas of the first Christian heretics, the strongest and the most dedicated apprentice of Jesus. Only the best of the Apostles can enact the sin of betrayal in order to make Jesus's sacrifice and resurrection possible. This second Judas serves as an example of incredible purity and sanity, of willingly and consciously accepting the most shameful crime and the hate of all people. In order for his sacrifice to be full, it should ultimately be marked as the worst sin in the Gospels (Voloshin 1988). Judas, the Wandering Jew or the fallen angel in Voloshin's interpretation, are associated with matter, the physical world, and is a necessary condition for the existence of the divine. One's suffering makes one into a saint, or maybe even a new God who possesses the ability to name and thereby recreate the world. All the sonnets rehearse the same motif of exile and wandering, which can be interpreted on many different levels and measured against various sign systems, from Christianity to the occult.

Voloshin puts forth quite a unique interpretation of the Wandering Jew myth in his 1902 poem, "Ya – vechnyi zhid... Mne liudi brat'ia" ("I am the Eternal Jew. People are brothers to me..."). Traditionally, the Wandering Jew is associated with loneliness, despair, exile, and eternal suffering. Voloshin directly claims to be a Wandering Jew himself, but the overall tone of the poem strikes one as optimistic and reassuring. He

asserts his closeness to all people (“People are brothers to me”), and to everything that is alive. In keeping with the spirit-matter dyad, he is a heavenly, as well as an earthly and mundane figure: “The sky and the earth are close to me” (“Mne blizki nebo i zemliia”). Voloshin uses the oxymoron – “blessed curse” (“bogoslovennoie proklat’e”) – pointing to the fact that his “curse” is, in fact, a blessing in disguise allowing for the opportunity to explore the vast and beautiful land. Curiously, the motif of a “path” or “road”, commonly found in this type of “wandering” poem is substituted with the notion of a field (“blessed fields”). I would argue that, unlike the anticipated road, the field here creates an impression of vastness, diversity, and variety. In Voloshin, the world “field” itself appears to be full of mysteries and wonders, and the “Wandering Jew” in the poem is eager to explore them. However, mystery turns out to be not the usual gloomy and complicated enigma, but rather something entirely opposite to that – a “fairy tale”. The material world is full of sublime sense and abundant with evanescent, non-material objects: “sunbeams, and songs, and flowers” (“luchi, i pesni, i tsvety”). Having experienced the land in its vastness, the wanderer will be ready to reach the limit, the extreme of the physical world: “There – beyond the edge (“Tuda – za gran”). The wanderer then claims his strong inclination towards the symbolic side of the world: “In the fields I only like colors, and in people – delusions of dreams” (“V poliakh liubliu ia tol’ko kraski, a v liudiakh tol’ko bred mechty”). The world is a “sea before the dawn” (“mir kak more pred zarioiu”), changing its color, full of gauziness and mystery. The next line - “I am walking in the bosom of the waters” (“Ia idu po lonu vod”) – has a reference to the biblical plot about Jesus walking on the water. Therefore, the Wandering Jew turns into a Christ-like figure towards the end of the poem. For Voloshin, it seems that early on

in the poem, the word “wandering” is equal to divine existence. Therefore, the earth and the heavens are aligned. The last lines in the poem provide the supporting evidence: “And beneath me and above me trembles the starry sky” (“I podo mnoi i nado mnoiu trepeschet zviozdnyi nebosvod...”). The sky, the upper world, is everywhere for a person with an ear for the symbolic significance of things.

The same idea of wandering is expressed in a poem from 1903, “Skvoz’ set’ almaznuiu zazelenel vostok” (Through a Diamond Net the East Shines Green). The poet aspires to travel all around the world in order to “recreate everything again” (snova voplotit’):

Всё видеть, всё понять, всё знать, всё пережить,  
Все формы, все цвета вобрать в себя глазам.

To see everything, to understand everything, to know everything, to experience everything  
All forms, all colors to take in with your eyes.

This again makes the wanderer have a kind of divine power with the potency to reinvent the world, which is clearly something that a symbolist poet would ascribe to himself.

In the fourteenth sonnet of “Corona Astralis” the motif of wandering reaches its culmination. Its last line is the repetition of the first line of the crown of sonnets, closing the circle. The poet asserts his loneliness, surrounded by darkness and hostility:

Со всех сторон из мглы глядят на нас  
Зрачки чужих, всегда враждебных глаз,  
Ни светом звезд, ни солнцем не согреты,

In the gloom on all sides alien gazes  
Meet us; everywhere are hostile eyes.  
No star gives light, no sun gives us its warmth.

At the center of the last sonnet is the love theme, returning the reader back to the opening sonnet. The poet asserts the impossibility of earthly love: “We cannot strut in dark-blue lunar linen” (Nam ne stupat’ po lunnym sinim l’dam). For Voloshin, the moon signified physical love, which is a prominent concept in his second crown of sonnets, “Lunaria” (1913). The poet chooses the Apollonian dream over human love, establishing therefore that creativity and the naming objects is incompatible with earthly feelings:

От милых рук бежим к обманным снам,  
Не видим лиц и верим именам,  
Томясь в путях напрасного скитанья.

We flee kind hands to follow dreamers’ lodes.  
We see no face, it’s names that we believe;  
Weary wanderers on unrewarding roads.

Similar thoughts were expressed in Voloshin’s commentaries to Plato’s “Feast”. Voloshin distinguishes between Eros and the sex (“pol”): Eros is a “evolution”, divine, and spiritual, while gender is “involution,” material, carnal, and sensual:

The sex is the closure of the spirit in matter, extinction, obscuration ... The falling away from God occurs not in the area of sex, but in the area of Eros, and only with Eros can a person return to God ... Here is the mysterious closeness of love and death. The fiery stream of Eros has poured into the element of sex, which must bring the floor to complete exhaustion, must spend, crush, and opacify the physical body to the very end, to be resurrected in the spirit (Voloshin 1999, 21).

The divine nature of the human is trapped in his physical body, which has to be worn out, destroyed in order for the divine to be resurrected. The ascent to God is associated with the rejection of physical love and self-restraint. For Voloshin, the essence of the creativity is a constant tension between material existence and the sacred spirit;

true creativity, the manifestation of the spirit, is possible only through asceticism. In

“Corona Astralis” Voloshin proclaims the renunciation of physical pleasure:

Кто не пошел искать земной улады  
Ни в плясках жриц, ни в оргиях Менад,  
Кто в чашу нег не выжал виноград,

Those who never sought delights terrestrial  
In priestesses’ dance nor Maenads’ orgies,  
Nor crushed the vine into the voluptuous cup;

Кто в страсти ждал не сладкого забвенья,  
Кто в ласках тел не ведал утоленья,  
Кто не испил смертельного вина.

Renouncing passion’s sweet forgetfulness;  
Nor in caresses do they slake their thirst  
Nor do they down draughts of the deadly wine.

The theme of wandering in the poem is expressed on a different level through celestial bodies: traveling comets, the moon, the sun, and the stars. It seems that the planets are located on their own level in the world: they are the largest physical bodies, and thus the most material things in the world, but also the least material as they seem to be endowed with their own will, at times hostile and at times favorable for people. Voloshin creates his own cosmology with these constantly moving or “wandering” celestial bodies:

Алмазный бег вселенные стремят:  
Системы звезд, туманности, планеты,

От Альфы пса до Веги и от Беты  
Медведицы до трепетных Плеяд –  
Они простор небесный бороздят,  
Творя во тьме свершенья и обеты.

...and universes course the diamond paths.  
Constellations, mists and planets all,

From Sirius to Vega and from Beta  
Of the Bear to flickering Pleiades,  
They plough across the heavenly void,  
Bringing all things to being in darkness.

For Voloshin, the Universe consists of multiple co-existing layers: nature (earth, mountains, water, animals, insects), cultural landscape (roads, fields, paths), outer space (moon, sun, planets, comets, stars) and the spiritual realm (dreams, memory, imagination). In Voloshin's cosmology, the poet can move freely between these different levels of reality: he can access the heavenly bodies and the underground, as well as different times and spaces.

Voloshin's aesthetic ideas were crystalized during his work as *Apollo's* correspondent. In dialogue with other literary critics, Voloshin formulated his position as an "Apollonian" artist, for whom the world consists of ideas (or sacred words) enclosed in matter; the main vocation of the poet is to reach the transcendental realm in the three-dimensional world. "Corona Astralis", written around the time Voloshin was most active in *Apollo*, serves as a perfect illustration of the following statement: the poet is destined to eternal wandering in the physical world, but gifted with the ability to see Apollonian dreams as the connection with the otherworldly. Without the physical, however, creativity cannot exist as it is born at the intersection of the material and the spiritual.

### CHAPTER III: MAXIMILIAN VOLOSHIN'S INTERMEDIALITY, MATERIALITY, AND POETICS

As a critic, Voloshin served as an ambassador of French post-impressionists and neoimpressionist art, introducing it in his reviews which he began writing in 1900 as well as in a number of theoretical essays. Theoretically, Voloshin was close to the *World of Art* movement. They proclaimed new artistic principles, renounced academism and searched for inspiration in old Russian history, creating the alliance of literature and the arts, best represented in Diaghilev's journal *World of Art*. Although primarily devoted to art, this review (1898-1904) accepted contributions from Symbolist poets and philosophers. Their work served as a basis for the international success of the *Ballets Russes*, performed between 1909 and 1929 throughout Europe and on tours to North and South America. *Ballets Russes* represented a fusion of arts, a collaboration among young choreographers, composers, designers, and dancers.

In the 1904 essay "Skelet Iskusstva" (The Skeleton of Art) Voloshin raised the questions of crisis in European art and its new tendencies. According to Voloshin, the Renaissance was an artificial stage based on theoretical research and a scholarly approach to painting and not on the empirical experience. When Renaissance traditions and academic principles were abandoned, new European painting returned to Pre-Raphaelite art to receive empirical experience and represent it rather than to operate on abstractions. Voloshin emphasizes the importance of Japanese art, which for him demonstrates much more freedom and proximity to Nature.

In addition to that, Voloshin reviewed exhibitions of the Russian avant-garde art in his essays "Bubnovyi valet" (Jack of Diamonds), 1911 and "Oslinyi khvost" (Donkey's

Tail), 1912. Even though the principles of primitivism and futurism are not directly reflected in Voloshin's poetry and artwork, this impulse was still critical for him, affecting his work with mediums.

Once Voloshin moved to the Crimea, its landscapes became the main theme of both his poetic and visual production. He produced two or three watercolors each day throughout the 1920s. His method was not to paint in the open air but reproduce and synthesize in his studio the memories and impressions he gained on his daily walks: "I paint watercolors regularly, two or three every morning, so that they form a kind of artistic diary where all the themes of my solitary walks are recorded and woven together" (Voloshin 1976, 45). The fact that he painted by memory had a special significance for him, it was part of his art creation philosophy:

Creative work is an ability to govern your unconscious. Observation, documentation – naturalism – are the foundations of all art. A document should not only be found and experienced, but it should also be forgotten. In other words, it should become part of an artist to a degree when it is no longer a part of his conscience. Because oblivion is not a loss, but a final assimilation (Voloshin 2007, "Itogi Impressionizma", 22).

By "document" Voloshin understood empirical impressions of reality, which, according to him, were the basis for impressionist artworks. However, he suggests taking the impressions further, making them part of the unconscious. Therefore, Voloshin contradicts Russian Symbolists' idea of rejecting naturalism, claiming naturalism to be the foundation of an artwork.

Voloshin represented the same subject, the type of landscape around Koktebel, in two art forms and with similar methods. The most concrete testimony to Voloshin's understanding of the link between his poetry and his painting is found in the fact that he

added lines of poetry to his paintings. In this way, the painting and poetry exist side by side. Considering the use of artistic background in the Symbolist theater, Kurt Taroff points out the non-analogous connection to their subject-matter:

In this, the symbolists offer something very new in their conception of the role of scenery on stage. Here, we have for the first time an art of scenic representation in which the things represented do not necessarily accord directly to the diegetic world of the play...And in forcing the audience to contemplate two artistic works both separately and as one, the symbolists exploit the tendency of the human mind to form a narrative out of disparate elements when presented together (Taroff 2016, 224).

In order to perceive two or more artforms together, the spectator was forced to use his creative imagination, collaborating with the author on creation of the dream-like world. I believe that Voloshin does the same with his watercolors: his landscape is very concrete, but at the same time abstract, inviting the viewer to contemplate it and be immersed in his subconscious, taking an active part in unfolding the meaning of the landscape and its correlation with the poetic title. His collection of poetry lists two hundred and thirty poetic titles to watercolors. According to Nikolai Barsamov, Voloshin was composing poetry and working on the watercolors at the same time, with poetry dominating this process: “Sometimes it seems to me that Voloshin simultaneously with the creation of his watercolors was composing lines of poetry, and they engulfed a major part of his attention” (Barsamov 1970, 78-79). I would argue, however, that Voloshin’s work had a principle transmedial nature, when painting and poetry interacted in a complex way. In his early article “The Skeleton of Art”, he states that between visual perception and incarnation the artist does not have the intermediary of the word. According to Voloshin, an idea expressed in a painting cannot be translated into words, and if it can be, it means that this work contains extraneous literary elements. Therefore, he understood the link

between his poetry and artwork as more subtle; they complement each other but can be considered and accessed independently. The confirmation of it can be found in his 1917 letter:

Imagine that you are walking from early morning until late at night along the paths, immersed in your thoughts and contemplation, and sometimes a verse or stanza appears in you: it does not quite correspond to what you are looking at, but it relates to the general mood of the landscape... Their combination is not parallel, but irrational ... It seems to me that this is one of the possibilities of combining a word with a picture. I am very against parallelism in art ... We must look for a symphonic, not unison combination (Voloshin 2017, Letter to Obolenskaia).

One of his watercolors is titled *The Brown Backs of the Hills above the Mirror-like Swell of the Bay*. According to Cynthia Marsh, this poetic line contains one metaphor, 'backs', and one simile, 'mirror-like', both of which images are carried over into the painting:

The hills are colored chocolate brown with outcrops of rock in other varying shades of brown and are rounded and curved like the back of some huge beast. The sea reflects the brown of the hills and the blue of the sky in correct sequence of perspective as they would appear in a mirror. In this combination of painting and poetry, the verbal images are presented in visual form (Marsh 1984, 88).

Voloshin invites the viewer to collaborate with him in the creative process by imagining the back of a beast and noticing the resemblance of the water to the mirror.

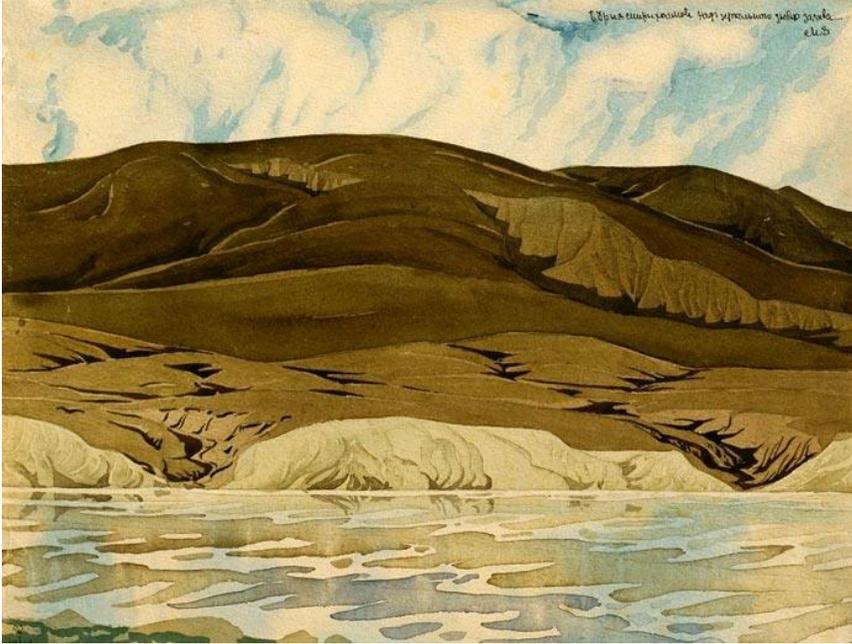


Fig.4. Maximilian Voloshin. *The Brown Backs of the Hills above the Mirror-like Swell of the Bay*. Watercolor on paper. 1928

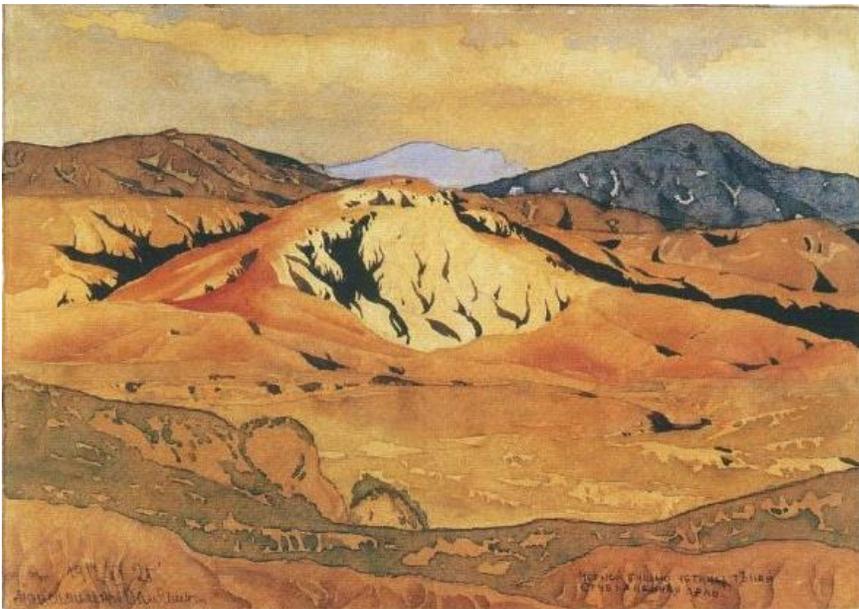


Fig. 5. Maximilian Voloshin. *With the Blank Ink of Distinct Shadows is the Minted Distance*. Watercolor on paper. 1925.

Another example is his 1925 watercolor entitled *With the Blank Ink of Distinct Shadows is the Minted Distance*. In Russian, these lines have alliteration, so the sound of these lines itself creates a poetic effect: “Chernoi tush’iu chetkikh tenei // Otchekanennaia dal’”— the repetition of the *ch* and *t* sounds correlate thus creating an impression of a crisp and articulate image, which corresponds to the meaning of the word “distinct” (chetkii). The metaphor of black ink (chernaia tush’) also has the connotation of “distinct and crisp”. Voloshin employs the oxymorons “distinct shadows” and well as “minted distance”, juxtaposing pronounced borders (distinct and minted) with “distance” and “shadow” which do not have them by definition. In his watercolor we can see the dark mountains in the background with distinct outlines, black lines signifying mountain layers and shadows, and a much vaguer and less distinct foreground. Therefore, the poetic title and the image correspond in a symphonious way suggesting different interpretations; it seems that the watercolor invites the viewer to look for the embodiment of poetic figures. According to Alexander Benois, “this is not a Crimea that any photographic apparatus can capture, but ... some kind of idealized, synthetic Crimea”. Voloshin’s Koktebel’ while “maintaining the typical, also holds the completely encapsulated surreal. These are not the beautiful projections of reality, but rather of dreams” (Benois 1968, 234).

Concepts and images in these visual works resonate with the thoughts and images contained in his verses. The form of the crown of sonnets itself implies constant repetition; thematically, each sonnet introduces a new aspect of the same topic. Creating his watercolors, Voloshin employed a similar method: he painted the same view multiple times in different light and weather conditions. The whole corpus of his artwork consisted

of constant recirculation of the same motifs: mountains, water, sky, and a thin tree. Zlydneva calls it “varying of a single motif based on the rhythmical development of the whole” which activates the viewer's meditative and introspective state (Zlydneva 2008, 129).

In the author’s landscapes, there is typically no trace of a person, but one can feel the gaze of a lonely observer who knows how to convey through lines and colors his sense of a deserted and pristine landscape. There is a feeling of eternity in them, the idea that it has been so and will always remain so as there are no signs of a civilized landscape or human presence. The poet envisions the earth almost as cosmic infinity which he seeks to capture in watercolors. It corresponds with the imagery in “Corona Astralis”. The dominant strains that run through the poem are anthroposophical clairvoyance, contacts with the supernatural realm, astral worlds, and the idea of the Universe encapsulated in the human soul. In his sonnets, the poet is a wanderer, walking in a deserted land:

Ах, не крещен в глубоких водах Леты  
Наш горький дух, и память нас томит.  
В нас тлеет боль внежизненных обид –  
Изгнанники, скитальцы и поэты!

Our bitter soul’s not bathed, alas! In Lethe’s  
Deep oblivion. We’re wearied by regrets  
And feel the smoldering aches of alien woe,  
Banished exiles, wanderers and poets!

In the watercolors the wanderer is present outside of the painting; as they imply active creative collaboration of the viewer, everyone becomes such a wanderer.

Voloshin approached his work – both poetic and visual – with an almost scientific method. He had a vast knowledge of geology, geography, botany, astronomy, and

archeology. In his memoirs, Mindlin recalls that geologists who commissioned a set of paintings from Voloshin found them to be more precise than photographs:

But each [painting] with extraordinary poetic accuracy conveyed the general character of the landscape - even the structure of the soil! It was... a conventionally generalized landscape imbued with maximum poetic expressiveness. Voloshin spoke with pride about the order of geologists. In their scientific interest in his watercolors, he saw confirmation of his long-standing belief in art as the most accurate and definite measure of things (Mindlin 1979, 28).

A scientific, scholarly approach to art is reflected in his sonnets from “Corona Astralis”:

О, пыль миров! О, рой священных пчел!  
Я исследил, измерил, взвесил, счел,  
Дал имена, составил карты, сметы...

O dust of worlds! O swarm of consecrated bees!  
I've studied, measured, weighed, accounted,  
allotted names, drawn maps and calculated...

Voloshin's artwork is concrete and abstract at the same time; and it is intriguing to look at the material side of his work. In his diaries, Voloshin complained about the lack of materials – cheap paper and a limited amount of paint; but at the same time, he turned it into his advantage:

Bad watercolor paper also gave me many opportunities... It is a struggle with the material and the constant overcoming of it... In general, in artistic self-discipline, any self-restraint is useful: lack of paint, the poor quality of paper, any defect in the material that makes the painter look for new workarounds and makes him preserve in painting only that which cannot be dispensed with (Voloshin 1976, 45).

The same idea is expressed in his earlier article “Individualism in Art”, where he discussed the artificial character of oil paint, and manufactured paint in general, contrasting it with “rough” material, ground by the hand of an artist, which itself guides an artist in his act of creation:

...Oil paint ...poisoned contemporary art. Speaking about oil paint, I only mean factory manufactured paint, because oil paint ground by an artist or his apprentices...was a totally different element. In rough material there is its unconscious creativity... Rough material will lead an artist's hand at the moment of weakness. Oil paint deprived an artist of a great element of unconscious creativity (Voloshin 2007, "Individualizm v Iskusstve", 70).

As recent restoration work confirmed, many pigments were made by Voloshin out of mountain minerals and soil (Markina 2019); therefore, his landscape work received a fascinating material dimension, where the artist does not only take his inspiration from nature, but also quite literally creates a continuation of it. In his seminal 1909 article "Horomedon" Voloshin argues that the artist is not a demiurge, but a "mentor" to the material, breathing in human life with his suffering:

Plastic art creates its work in the very heart of matter, continuously transforming it and enlightening it with life and the flame of slain moments.

Painter, sculptor, architect - you are not a creator; you are only the educator of the substance; you teach balance, the human structure and civic consciousness to stone and metal, color and line, you teach them desires, you initiate them into the mysteries of passion and poison the silence of their consciousness with the poison of feelings and suffering. (Voloshin 2007, 300).

The plastic arts merge human life order and passions with their "quietness", allowing them to overcome time. The notion of time becomes essential for Voloshin's conception and division of the arts. In "Horomedon", Voloshin offers his interpretation of Apollo as primarily a god of destiny and time, associated with the Parcae. In 1909 he wrote to Annenskii: "...It occurred to me ... the connection of one of the least definable faces of Apollo, the leader of time, with Parcae, who also so strangely repeat the idea of the past, present and future" (Voloshin 1976, 251). Art, therefore, deals directly with fleeting

moments and eternity; as shown in the quote above, the plastic arts allow one to reflect on the transience of human life in the eternity of the material. According to Voloshin, music “possesses” the past, the plastic arts “possess” the present, and poetry the future. In the early poem “Delos” (1909), Voloshin calls Apollo “the leader of the moment (“Vozhd’ mgnovenii”):

Гневный Лучник! Вождь мгновений!  
Предводитель мойр и муз!

Angry Archer! Leader of the Moments!  
The leader of moirai and muses!

Angry Archer! Leader of the Moments!  
The leader of the moirs and muses!

Delos is an island in the Aegean Sea, the motherland of Apollo according to the Greek mythology. Voloshin pictures Delos as dry and rocky land, burned with the gaze of Medusa Gorgon:

Оком мертвенным Горгоны  
Обожженная земля:  
Гор зубчатые короны,  
Бухт зазубренных края.

By the eye of the deathly Gorgon  
Burnt earth:  
Horus jagged crowns,  
The coves are jagged edges.

Voloshin underlines the connection between Apollo and the deserted island of Delos and the Crimean landscape:

Сам из всех святынь Эллады  
Ты своей избрал страной  
Каменистые Циклады,  
Дэлос знойный и сухой.

From all the shrines of Hellas

You have chosen as your country  
Stony Cyclades,  
Sultry and dry Delos.

Himself from all the shrines of Hellas  
You have chosen your country  
Stony Cyclades,  
Delos is sultry and dry.

This poem can be considered a polemic with the Romantic view of the landscape, especially the Crimean landscape. In 1904, Voloshin wrote in his diary: “The desert makes poets, the sea does not. The sea, with its mists, creates rhetoric, like Victor Hugo. The desert is the thought in all its simplicity”. The theme of the stony ground as a symbol of the new Apollonian art as opposed to the emotional art of the preceding Dionysian epoch, is developed in Voloshin’s article “Archaism in Russian Painting” (1909) which appeared in the first issue of *Apollo* as a manifesto of the new tendencies in art. Voloshin emphasizes the “archeological” approach to painting of Léon Bakst, Nicholas Roerich, and Konstantin Bogaevskii. According to Voloshin, archeological excavations at the end of the nineteenth century changed the perception of Antiquity, which became more tangible and material:

This happens to someone who dreamed in a dream and, waking up, grieves about the dream that has flown away, but suddenly feels in his clenched hand a flower or object brought with him from the dream world. And then with all his flesh, requiring tactile evidence, begins to believe in the earthly reality of what before was only an elusive touch of the spirit. And when we woke up from the solemn sleep of the Iliad, holding in our hands a necklace that hugged the neck of Helena the Greek, then the whole face of the ancient world is changed for us! Figures that have already become conventional signs have become real again. (Voloshin 2007, “Archaism v Zhivopisi”, 114).

In Voloshin’s visual art, mountains and the ground often become the central themes.

Analyzing the first published watercolors by Voloshin, Cynthia Marsh states: “... they all have hills which are made up of rocks and a thin covering of soil and scant vegetation.

The overall impression is of a stark land- and sea-scape which is broken by gently rolling hills or sharp, jagged outcrops of rock, with here and there the glint of the sea.” (Marsh 1982, 17). Layers of dry soil turning into mountains represents the work of time, which is in turn overseen by Apollo, the patron of art. Voloshin’s conception of layers of ground resembles Goethe’s, who was one of the most important influences for Voloshin; as shown by Vladimir Kupchenko, his critical essays and personal documents contain numerous references to Goethe (Kupchenko 1997). One of Voloshin’s book of poetry is called “Gody stranstvii” (“Journeyman Years”) after Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years, or the Renunciants*. Wilhelm’s journey starts with a description of the mountain range as time compressed into space. The force of time is destructive but preserved as space it becomes an eternal symbol (Lagutina 2000, 207).

Oh, yes,” rejoined Wilhelm, “it would surprise me if the spirit who centuries ago worked so powerfully amid this mountain desert and attracted towards itself such a huge mass of buildings, possessions and rights, and thereby diffused manifold culture in the neighborhood, - it would surprise me if it did not still display its vital energy even out of these ruins upon a living human being (Goethe’s Works, 1885).

According to Inna Lagutina, this idea was introduced in the second part of *Faust*, where Goethe considered art the second nature. Granite, for Goethe, is a precursor to all artistic form: it constantly changes under the work of time yet preserves its core. For Voloshin, the Crimean hills reflect Goethe’s multilayered symbol: they are the oldest form of nature, containing remnants of human cultures. Voloshin was one of the main specialists in the history of Koktebel’ at the time, and, therefore, the thread connecting Antiquity to the present day is perceptible in his work. Natalia Zlydneva argues that the concreteness of Voloshin’s geological modeling makes his landscapes challenge the authority of

nature; and that Voloshin destroys the traditional opposition of nature and culture (Zlydneva 2008, 131).

Apart from landscapes, Voloshin created other innovative art forms, one of which were his painted stones:

Once Max went for a walk... and found a flat stone with a drawing created by nature itself, a pattern that strongly resembled the head of the Virgin. I liked this stone...and he began to paint the same images of the Virgin, in the same bluish-golden tones, with barely outlined lines, forcing [the viewer] to peer inward, to look for her face and to invigorate with imagination what in contours and paints was given in a hint (Voloshina 2003, 92).



Fig. 6. Maximilian Voloshin. *The Virgin and the Child*.  
No date. Stone, oil. 11\*7,8 cm



Fig. 7. Maximilian Voloshin. *The Virgin and the Child*.  
No date. Stone, oil. 8,9\*8,2 cm

The creation of this artform was prompted by the natural shape of a stone, guided by natural material, aimed at presenting a spiritual image, or idea. Voloshin transforms a material *condition* into a poetic materiality that is an intrinsic part of Symbolist aesthetic as shown by Reinhold Heller. Heller stressed that Symbolist art is characterized by a changed view of surface and medium and the material presence of the artwork as object: “...the accentuation of unorthodox or orthodox mediums perceptibly used in an unorthodox fashion... function[s] to deny the presentation of art as an extension of visible nature” (Heller 1985, 151). Heller also emphasizes the paradox in Symbolist art: the emphasis on the materiality of their work coexisted with the depiction of the abstract world of Ideas: “Rather than a disjunction of the material and the Ideal, Symbolist art posits the presence of the one in the other and a dialogue in which the two participate” (Ibid, 152). In the case of Voloshin, materiality and the use of an unorthodox medium (stones) play an opposing role by underlying the principal closeness of artwork and nature. Zlydneva argues that, for Voloshin, stone represented this perfect blend of nature and culture:

The connection of the stone with the main precepts of culture in its historical development is attributed to the physical property of the mineral as a natural material - its tectonicity, strength, ability to resist the destructive power of time. The stone itself personifies time in ancient them architectural structures, receiving understanding not only as traditional building material, but also metaphorically as temporalization of space (Zlydneva 2016, 142).

The stone was an important image in Symbolists and Post-Symbolist poetics. In his poetry, he is very precise about the types of rock and minerals: he names basalt, copper, mercury, bile, mica, slate, marble, granite, as well as precious stones: turquoise,

onyx, amethyst, emerald. Therefore, in Voloshin's creative work the stone emerges from the two sources simultaneously: the cultural and the natural.

In terms of his work with various mediums (and the merging of text and plastic art), Voloshin seemed to undergo an evolution towards Acmeism<sup>7</sup> with its emphasis on materiality and the concrete nature of the depicted world, in which each object is equal to itself. The Acmeists attacked the Symbolist idea of the mystical essence of poetry and refused to regard life as a "forest of symbols": "They [Symbolists] put a seal on all words, all images, designating them exclusively for liturgical use. This had very uncomfortable results: you can't get by or get up or sit down. It is impossible to light a fire because it might signify something that would make you unhappy" (Monas 1975, 520). They tried to eliminate Symbolism's vagueness and encouraged fellow artists to seek beauty in the natural and physical world around them and reflect the realness of the subject.

Voloshin the Symbolist claimed that realism and naturalism lay at the basis of any artwork (Voloshin 2007, "Itogi Impressionisma", 22), thus making a statement, which was paradoxical for a Symbolist. Symbolists advocated against naturalism and realism in art, and this very movement emerged in attempts to overcome it. Voloshin, however, saw materiality and naturalism as the key elements of his artwork, while remaining largely a Symbolist in his approach.

## CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

My thesis is in an attempt at exploring the intermedial nature of Voloshin's creativity and his engagement with the literary and artistic tendencies during the decline of Symbolism and the emergence of new literary and artistic movements. Voloshin's most famous achievements – the reinvention of the “Russian Orient” and the creation of the Kimmerian myth, – were in a way fruits of his life in Saint Petersburg and his engagement with Vyacheslav Ivanov. Voloshin would turn to Petersburg imagery even in his post-Revolutionary poems; his Kimmerian myth was conceived in opposition to the Petersburg myth. Along with these developments, his *zhiznetvorchestvo* practices are also indebted to the atmosphere in Ivanov's Tower. Articles, such as “Horomedon” and “Apollo and the Mouse”, which were published in *Apollo*, shed light on Voloshin's theoretical approach to his art and poetic work.

To illustrate Voloshin's aesthetic innovations as a Symbolist, I examined his crown of sonnets “Corona Astralis”. This poem testifies to his craftsmanship and his special attention to form, which is characteristic of his visual work as well. Furthermore, it expresses Voloshin's conception of the word as a center of the universe, which is trapped in the physical materiality of objects. The task of the poet is to purify the essence of the word of its materiality and to reestablish its connection with the transcendental. This approach is deeply Symbolist at its core containing the idea of the Apollonian dream as a connection of the artist to the otherworldly. Alexander Benois compared Voloshin's watercolors to “dreams”; the painter constantly replays the same motifs, thereby creating an effect, which strikes one as being almost spell-like, where the link to the spiritual

world is attained through gauzy colors. His watercolors emphasize the meditative state of mind and make the observer turn her gaze inward toward herself. Both “Corona Astralis” and the watercolors feature the motif of lonely wandering – humans never appear in his watercolors – but the land is covered with narrow paths and mountain cracks. The vastness, symbolic abundance, and incomprehensibility of the land all invite the viewer’s eyes to wander across the lands on the canvas.

The intermedial nature of Voloshin’s creativity is reflected in the titles he gave to his artworks, which consisted of poetic lines. They cannot be seen as direct descriptions of the paintings, but rather as “associations” that create an “irrational” connection. The viewer, therefore, contemplates two artistic works at once and while trying to find the links between them, participates in the creative process. Similar to Voloshin’s deliberately “difficult” poetic forms, which sometimes obstruct one’s perception, his artworks engage with the formal dimension as well, thus emphasizing the medium (hence the interest in non-traditional mediums, such as stones). Mountains, hills, rocks are a recurring motif in both Voloshin’s visual and poetic works. They are an embodiment of time – that is, the inner history of humanity in its full complexity of spiritual pursuits.

Voloshin’s work, therefore, is polarized between the spiritual and the material realms, which do not contradict each other (as was usually held by the Symbolists who deprecated naturalism and realism). Voloshin’s naturalism conceals a deeply Symbolist conception of the materiality of art. Marina Tsvetaeva described Voloshin’s work as “dense, weighty, almost creativity of matter itself” (Tsvetaeva 1988, 167). I believe, therefore, that the presence of matter and the special aspect of “tangibility” in Voloshin’s poetic and visual work brings him closer to the Acmeist movement with its emphasis on

clarity and concrete things. I ultimately envision Voloshin's creativity as profoundly modernist, not constrained by any single theory or approach, but one that emerges at the intersection of various media, as well as of the material and the spiritual realms.

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