

GNOSTIC MOTIVES AND IMAGES AND THEIR INTERPRETATION IN VLADIMIR SOLOVYOV'S POETRY

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ABSTRACT

The necessity to study Vladimir Solovyov's poetry in the context of his philosophical and aesthetic views remains the actual problem because it is lyric poetry that gives artistic realization to his theoretical ideas and views. The purpose of this paper is to reveal the relationship of the dominant in the works of Vl. Solovyov image of Sophia with other similar images in the world's philosophical and aesthetic thought. Gnosticism is one of the most important doctrines which attracted Solovyov's attention. Gnostic motives and images can be easily found in some of his poems and plays. Comparative historical method and comparative contrastive method used in the research with the reference to the motive and figurative structure of poems help to reveal images and symbols connected with the philosophic and aesthetic conception of the ideal which is realized through the idea of "absolute unity" (or sobornost) in the image of Sophia determining the artistic mentality of Vl. Solovyov. The materials of this paper may be interesting and useful for those who are interested in Russian literature and philosophy of the beginning of the 20th century.

Keywords: poetry, author's language, Gnosticism, ophite, Sophia, symbol

INTRODUCTION

The image of Sophia is considered to be dominant in the philosophy, aesthetics and lyric poetry of Vl. Solovyov. It is connected with aesthetic views of the poet as an expression of beauty and plays, according to his theory, the crucial role in the process of "fight" with chaos, in the divine creation and in creative activity.

Sophiology takes a considerable part of Solovyov's philosophy. He is regarded to be the founder of the doctrine of Sophiology, which has a centuries-old history [Bychkov, 1999], [Kozyrev, 1992], [Khoruzhiy, 2001]. The conception of Divine Wisdom or the Eternal Feminine, or Sophia became Vl. Solovyov's signal contribution both to Russian philosophy and Russian symbolism. This conception attracted the attention of foreign researches to his works at different times [Cioran, 2006], Sophian intuitions are present in his early works, and later they transformed into the complicated artistic and philosophical conception, which "crowned his philosophy of "absolute utility" and embodied his religious longing for the ideal Universal Church of the perfect human society" [Buchkov, 2005, p. 333]. Sophiology and the philosophy of "absolute utility" of Vl. Solovyov were based on ancient teachings and doctrines, and "the most significant of them was Gnosticism" [Prihod'ko]. Gnosticism is supposed to be a heterodoxy separated from the Christianity although some researches insist on the fact that the religion of Gnostics was formed earlier as a result of interaction between elements of Greek philosophy, particularly Platonism and Pythagoreanism, Egyptian religious and mythological conceptions, mythology and philosophy of Iran, Syrian influences, and the mystical side of Judaism, and was the basis for Christian doctrine. At present Gnosticism is viewed as an independent collection of ancient religions which influenced Christianity and were influenced by it, genetically and typologically connected with many phenomena of world culture.

One of the aspects of Gnosticism, which Vl. Solovyov was interested in, was the myth created by Basilidian Gnostics about Sophia-Aeon – a feminine figure, analogous to the human soul but also simultaneously one of the feminine aspects of God (after falling out from the Pleroma Sophia is referred to as the World Soul). Egyptian Isis, Babylonian Ishtar, the Woman Clothed in the Sun from the "Book of Revelation", Platon's

World Soul from “Timaeus” – all these images from myths and religions were interpreted by Gnostics and projected on Sophia, who is characterized with dual nature embodying the divine and terrestrial origin. Solovyov knew much about those matters. He studied ancient religions in England and Egypt not only as a researcher but as an adherent of those mystical doctrines.

The difference in Solovyov’s approach to Sophia was revealed by Losev who claimed that ophites’ ideas about Sophia were restricted and bound [Losev, 1992, 264]. The image of Sophia created by Solovyov and expressing the idea of “absolute utility” is close to the philosophy of Plotin, who uses the concept of “wisdom” (sophia), and mentioned in his works “sophian eidos” is understood as “embodied in reality an ideal image”.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The works of leading home [Losev, 1992], [Prihod’ko, 2000] and foreign [Yonas, 1998] researches examining Gnosticism and its influence on V.I. Solovyov’s system become the methodological base of the article. Analyzing lyric poetry we are guided by the works devoted to the analysis of poetic texts, as well as symbolic texts, written by V.M. Zhyrmunsky [Zhyrmunsky, 2000], Y.M. Lotman [Lotman, 2000], Z.G. Mints [Mints, 2003, pp. 273-313], A. Khanzen-Leve [Khanzen-Leve, 2003].

The works of V.V. Buchkov [Buchkov, 2005] and Y.B. Borev [Borev, 2002] representing investigations in the sphere of aesthetics and Sophiology [Khamidullin, 2015] are also important for the given article.

Comparative historical method allows of referring to and interpreting the content of the notion “sophia” in Gnosticism.

Comparative contrastive method gives the opportunity to compare the meaningful in poetic texts of Vladimir Solovyov symbolic image of Sophia with other possible similar images presented in the world culture and literature.

RESULTS

So-called “object” symbols in the poetic texts of V.I. Solovyov are proved to be very meaningful and expressive. Quite often used symbolic images of a flower, a star, and pearl have a centuries-old tradition of use both in western and eastern cultures. Their content depends to a large extent on existing tradition of usage and philosophical and aesthetic views of the author. On the one hand, some researches notice that these symbolic images in the poems of Solovyov are “fixed”, “undeveloped”, “a constant metaphoric cliché” approximating to the “traditional religious symbols” [Zhyrmunsky, 2001, pp. 184-185]. On the other hand, Solovyov gives to ready and traditional forms different interpretation and sense, new content adopting them to his philosophical and aesthetic conception.

An early poem called “Ophites’ song” (1875) can be regarded as an example of original reconsideration of common symbolic images. The name of the poem, the image of a serpent, and the epithet “ancient” characterizing it (“Tie up our dove with new rings of an ancient serpent” - interlinear translation) refer to the ancient study of Gnostics. As it is known, ophites held sacred an image of the serpent which, in their opinion, was taken by a super being of Divine Wisdom or by a heavenly aeon to convey the first knowledge to people. And according to Iriney in this case the serpent is Sophia [Losev, 1992, p. 262].

The ideas of Gnostics, including ophites, about the serpent date back to the Egyptian pictures of a coiled up serpent which symbolized eternity and the Universe as well as the cycle of death and regeneration. The ouroboros of ophites which represents a serpent eating its own tail is also the symbol of immortality and innovation, unity of opposites and integration [Yonas, 1988, p. 123].

This theory begs the question of what does the serpent mean in the poem of V.I. Solovyov? There is a significant parallel with mentioned in the poem “fire of Prometheus” granting the knowledge to people (“Should she be afraid of the fire of Prometheus” - interlinear translation) and the image of the serpent which has “fiery rings”. Thereby the serpent in Solovyov’s interpretation is the bearer and grantor of knowledge and can be identified with Sophia. But at the same time the serpent personifies chaos in mythological comprehension of this notion. A coiled up serpent, which encircled the chaos and bounded it, was perceived as “prima materia”. According to Solovyov chaos is “the deepest essence of the world soul and the base for

the Universe” [Solovyov, 1994, 366]. The presence of chaotic, irrational origin “gives to different natural appearances freedom and strength which are essential for life and beauty” [Solovyov, 1994, 366]. It explains the appeal in the last strophe of the poem to sing of a violent thunderstorm (“Sing heavily of a violent thunderstorm, // In the violent thunderstorm we find peace...” - interlinear translation) A thunderstorm is an example of uncontrollable elemental forces, a representation of chaotic in nature, and as Solovyov remarked, majestic beauty of summer thunderstorms depends on “moving chaos and excited intensity of elemental forces contending for final triumph with pure world order” [Solovyov, 1994, p. 222]. The serpent and its fiery rings, fire of Prometheus, a violent thunderstorm can be regarded as symbols of the base necessary for further transformation.

Pearl represented in the poem also has a Gnostic tradition of interpretation. It refers to Gnostic “The Hymn of the Pearl”, which was found in apocryphal The Acts of Thomas, a Gnostic composition preserved with minor orthodox revision. “The Hymn of the Pearl” is the name given by modern translators. In the Acts it is called as “The Song of the Apostle Jude Thomas in the Land of India”. Commonly interpreted as Gnostic, the hymn views human beings as spirits lost in a world of matter and forgotten about their true origin. The pearl thus is the soul thrown by the super being into the form (or the body).

The treatment of a soul as “pearl” is used “to remind it of its origin, to underline its importance” [Yonas, 1988, 123]. This interpretation finds its reflection in the lines of analyzing poem. Besides, the pearl in the poem is connected with the image of the dove. Khanzen-Lyove notices, that “a winged soul is traditionally represented as a dove” [Khanzen-Leve, 2003, 521]. The dove (and so the soul) in the poem of VI. Solovyov embodies the feminine origin. The encircled by the serpent the image of the dove can be also treated as the unity of Christianity (the dove as the emblem of the Holy Spirit) with pagan wisdom (according to ancient philosophy a serpent can be regarded as a true principle of wisdom, and its rings – the symbol of movement and cosmic energy) [Arefyeva, 2011, 218].

In the poem of Solovyov the symbolic images of pearl, dove and a white lily have some common general sense. They are associated with the soul having a divine origin. The white lily is especially meaningful in the symbolic context. The play “The White Lily” written by Solovyov is devoted to search and finding of the White Lily symbolizing the eternal feminine (das ewig-weibliche). The three-act play was begun in 1878 and completed in 1880 in Pystun’ka. The poem “Ophites’ song”, the monologue representing cabbalistic doctrine about Sophia are also placed in the play by Solovyov. The image of a white lily is presented in the text called by Solovyov “The Prayer for the Revelation of the Great Mystery” (“Let roses and lilies unite in the valley of Sharon”) and in his medium note (“The White Lily will blossom out in March”) composed in 1875-1876 during Solovyov’s travel to England and Egypt. I. Rodnyanskaya writes about literary and philosophical origin of the symbol of a white lily the following: “The symbol was partly borrowed from the Song of Songs (“a lily of valleys”); it’s also a traditional flower of Madonna, the emblem of absolute purity; partly it is a result of mystical Gnostic propensities” [Rodnyanskaya, 2002, 96]. In the first version of the play red roses grew on the grave of Mortemir and white lilies on the grave of the White Lily.

A rose is the most complicated symbol of all flowers having a long cultural tradition of usage. It symbolizes heavenly perfection, terrestrial passion, time and eternity, life and death. As a flower of goddesses it means love, life, creation, fertility and beauty. In Christianity since the time of Saint Ambrose a red rose became a symbol of blood which was shed by crucified Christ. So a red rose and its thorns were understood as the symbol of the Passion of Christ, the symbol of martyrdom, the symbol of suffering Christ.

Red roses in the play can be interpreted as a symbol of earthly love of Mortemir and his self-sacrificingness, and a white lily symbolizes the heavens, search and finding of the ideal.

A theurgic idea of “God-manhood” put forward by Solovyov goes back to hermeneutic and Gnostic ideas of the synthesis of terrestrial and heavenly and Sophia is “the embodiment of the principle of connection, the archetype of unity or desire of the world soul, mater material, for unity” [Khanzen-Leve, 2003, 221].

The ideas represented by symbolic images in the poetic texts find their further development in theoretical works of VI. Solovyov. For example, the explanation of the cosmic process as the result of falling of the World Soul (Gnostic Sophia) and its transformation into the active force of the chaos with further belief in

escaping and returning to the heavenly “fiancé” was corrected and represented by Solovyov in his “La Russie et l'Eglise universelle”.

DISCUSSIONS

VI. Solovyov's poetry was an object of study mainly in the aspect of its influence on symbolism in Russian literature [Sukhodub, 2012], [Maksimov, 2013], [Muryanov, 1999]. These works determine basic constants of philosophy; analyze symbolic images and their influence on poetry of Russian modernism. The works of V.V. Kravchenko [Kravchenko, 2006] and A.M. Karpeev [Karpeev, 2007] are of interest for our research in terms of analyze of polysemantic, multi-aspect, and symbolic image of Sophia and the origin of Solovyov's sophiology. For interpretation and analysis of the mythic images the works of R.F. Bekmetov [Bekmetov, 2007], L.R. Sakayeva and T.K. Ivanova [Sakayeve, Ivanova, 2016] were helpful.

The influence of Gnosticism on poetry of VI. Solovyov was retraced in the articles of V. Kudryashov (Kudryashov), N.G. Arefyeva [Arefyeva, 2011] and A.R. Zabolotskaya [Zabolotskaya, 2007] by example of the poem “The Song of Ophites”. P. Kudryashov points out the connection of the poem with romantic tradition in Russian literature. The problems brought up in the poem are analyzed by N.G. Arefyeva. Mythopoeic images in the interpretation of VI. Solovyov are highlighted in the research of A.R. Zabolotskaya.

CONCLUSION

VI. Solovyov's poetry is an independent part of his system. Notions and ideas, which have further development in philosophical and aesthetical works, find their artistic expression in his poetry. Some common phenomena of world culture and literature embodied in symbolic images are reconsidered by Solovyov. He supplements their contest, gives them specific poetic form. Meanwhile, poetry of V. Solovyov remains symbolic and attracts the attention of symbolists with its capacity to express inexpressible through object images.

Gnosticism was one of the doctrines which influenced on motives and images of the poetic texts of VI. Solovyov. Gnostic views and images were reconsidered by Solovyov in compliance with his conception of “absolute unity” (vseedinstvo) and in the framework of his Sophioplgy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The article will be interesting and useful for specialists and students studying Russian literature and philosophy of the beginning of the 20th century.

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Vladimir Solovyov envisioned universal unity as a spiritual living being, an embodiment of the eternally feminine origin; its other images are the Soul of the World, Sofia, and the Maiden of Iridescent Gate. Solovyov's poetry, inseparable from his philosophical thought is imbued with symbols of this sort. Vladimir Solovyov died on July 31, 1900 and was laid to rest next to his father's grave in the Novodevichy Cemetery, Moscow. Tags: Vladimir Solovyov Russian Philosophers Russian Poets Symbolism. Comment on our site. Vladimir Solovyov, AKA Vladimir Sergeyevitch Soloviev, (1853-1900), one of the greatest philosophers of the nineteenth century, was the founder of a tradition of Russian spirituality that brought together philosophy, mysticism, and theology with a powerful social message. A close friend of Dostoevsky, a Platonist, and a gnostic visionary, Solovyov was a prophet, having been granted three visions of Sophia, Divine Wisdom. He was also a poet and a profoundly Christian metaphysicist. His most important works include Lectures on Divine Humanity, The Justification of the Good, and War, Progress, and the Future. View Vladimir Soloviev Research Papers on Academia.edu for free. The nature, motives and consequences of both types of loves will be examined and then compared. Finally, an attempt will be made to see whether what a believer experiences in his or her love for God, is similar to what any human being can experience through romantic love. Save to Library.