in memoriam
Vladimir Markov
(1920–2013)

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Acknowledgments

One must be thankful for the growing richness of scholarship that has recently been directed to the life and work of Georgy Vladimirovich Ivanov. Our task as his translators, editors, and interpreters has been greatly enhanced by contemporary scholarship, including but not limited to the analyses and research by Andrey Arieff, Nikolay Bogomolov, Anna Lisa Crone (1946–2009), Jennifer Jean Day (1973–2009), Justin Doherty, Sergey Fedyakin, Roman Gul' (1896–1986), Vadim Kreyd, Alexei Lalo, Francesca Lazzarin, Nikolai Melnikov, Georgy Moseshvili (1955–2008), Kirill Pomerantsev (1906–1991), Andrei Ranchin, Peter Rossbacher (1928–2007), Svetlana Semenova, and Tatjana Senn. Michael A. Green, Professor Emeritus (Program in Russian, University of California, Irvine) assiduously read the first draft of *Petersburg Winters*. We are thankful for his many helpful and precise suggestions. Valuable assistance came from Kirill Tolpygo, Slavic and East European Studies Librarian at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

One scholar, teacher, mentor, and dearly departed friend we must single out for special praise for his fundamental contribution to the study of Georgy Ivanov. It is Vladimir Markov (Vladimir Fedorovich Markov, 1920–2013, Professor Emeritus with the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures of the University of California, Los Angeles). Not only did he establish a personal contact with the notoriously difficult and cantankerous Ivanov, but in a serious of groundbreaking publications Markov laid the foundation for an impartial conceptual understanding of this poet and writer's significance for Russian letters and culture. In addition to that Markov should be credited with establishing the subfield of Ivanov studies. He accomplished all this at a time when only a few people were persuaded that Ivanov merited such attention; it should be noted that his contribution to Ivanov studies comprises a mere fraction of his wide-ranging achievement.

Jerome Katsell and Stanislav Shvabrin gratefully dedicate this volume to the memory of Vladimir Markov.

A number of years ago Jerome Katsell and Oksana Willis, with advice and encouragement from Stanislav Shvabrin, set out to redress the dearth of Georgy Ivanov's prose in English. *Petersburg Winters* was translated first in draft. Of its total eighteen chapters, Oksana Willis did first drafts of eight of the first sixteen; Jerome Katsell did likewise, and on his own Chapters XVII and XVIII, which Ivanov added for the final 1952 edition. The initial notes for *Petersburg Winters*, which have now been superseded, were formulated by Katsell and Willis. Unfortunately, Oksana Willis was unable to continue her work on this project. The first draft of and the notes to *Disintegration of the Atom* were the sole work of Jerome Katsell. Stanislav Shvabrin joined the project in 2014. Since that time the initial drafts have been thoroughly revised, and a new introduction written, while the notes have been culled and expanded where needed.

While we are most grateful for all the assistance directly or indirectly proffered by the scholars enumerated here and others, final responsibility for the text remains of course with the translators, editors, and annotators.

On Transliteration, Sources, and Annotation

We have chosen to use a two-tier system of transliteration of Russian names and toponyms. The "service" sections of this volume, such as this preamble, the introduction, and the notes, adhere to a simplified US Library of Congress transliteration system that matches each Russian (Cyrillic) character with its customary English (Latin) counterpart, yet avoids diacritical signs. In the texts of our translations of *Disintegration of the Atom* and *Petersburg Winters*, we have opted for still greater simplicity with the aim of meeting the needs of English speakers who may wish to sound out or pronounce Russian names they encounter in this book. To that end, we signal the presence of the "y" sound found at the beginning of such English words as "young" and "yonder" when it appears before and between Russian vowels: hence the surnames that could be and have been rendered in English as "Esenin," "Evreinov," and "Chebotarevskaia" have invariably been spelled as "Yesenin," "Yevreinov," and "Chebotarevskaya." In those cases where the presence of the accented "o" sound would be obscured by the deceptive correspondence between visually identical Cyrillic and Latin characters, we have used the "yo" combination, hence the spelling of "Fyodor" (not "Fedor") for the first name and "Gumilyov" (not "Gumilev") for the surname.

Whenever supported by precedents in English usage, in the body of our translated texts Russian first names and surnames of foreign origin retain their English or Western spelling (hence "Alexander," not "Aleksandr"; "Hippius," not "Gippius"; and "Wilhelm," not "Vilgelm"). We depart from this practice in those instances where the author deliberately chooses to employ patronymics along with first names: it is for this reason that the reader will find "Alexander Blok" and "Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok" for the poet and "Alexandra" and "Aleksandra Fyodorovna" for the empress, for example. Along with those of many first names and surnames ("Dmitry,"

and not "Dmitrii," "Gorodetsky," and not "Gorodetskii"), the different grammatical endings of Russian toponyms have all been standardized to look identical regardless of the gender of the nouns they modify in the original: hence "Vasilyevsky" and not "Vasil'evskii," "Shpalerny" and not "Shpalernaia." It is useful to recall that much like alphabets, all transliteration systems are mere approximations of the sounds and sound combinations they correspond to in actual speech, and as such they are subject to various spelling conventions and may not altogether eschew occasional incongruities and inconsistencies.

After falling into obscurity, Georgy Ivanov's literary legacy was rediscovered and reevaluated, first in the West and subsequently in the Soviet Union and Russia. His poetry, prose, and critical writings have been republished multiple times, and annotated scholarly editions have long superseded small-run original publications and their reprints. Our translations of *Disintegration of the Atom* and *Petersburg Winters* are based on the versions of these texts established in the three-volume annotated collection of Ivanov's writings compiled by Evgenii Vitkovskii and Vadim Kreyd (see Georgii Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh* [Moscow: Soglasie, 1994]). Whereas Ivanov did not revise the text of *Disintegration of the Atom* after its publication in 1938, he amended that of *Petersburg Winters* when he republished the memoir in 1952 in such a way that it differed considerably from its initial publication of 1928. Among the most important emendations are the removal of the poem-epigraph from Ivanov's friend-foe Georgy Adamovich, deletion of a number of sections pertaining to Anna Akhmatova (Chapter VI) and the poet and novelist Aleksei Skaldin (Chapter VIII), along with the addition of Chapters XVII and XVIII. Certain fugitive fragments published by Ivanov under the "Petersburg Winters" heading in various émigré outlets were not included in either version of the memoir when it was published as a book in 1928 and 1952 and have not been incorporated in our version of the text. Ivanov's references to "DPs," or "displaced persons" (here citizens of the Soviet Union who found themselves in the American, British, and French-controlled sections of Western Europe in the aftermath of World War II, as was the destiny of this book's dedicatee Vladimir Markov) in Chapter XVIII expand the narrative span of the book from the early 1900s

to the 1940s and 1950s. The order in which *Disintegration of the Atom* and *Petersburg Winters* appear here reflects that of the publication of their finalized versions.

Following the lead of our *On the Border of Snow and Melt: Selected Poems of Georgy Ivanov* (Santa Monica: Perceval Press, 2011), the English translations of *Disintegration of the Atom* and *Petersburg Winters* seek to introduce the Anglophone reader to the most significant parts of Ivanov's legacy as a prose writer and memoirist. As translators and annotators of *Disintegration of the Atom*, we have been singularly fortunate to draw on the experience of our predecessors Peter Rossbacher and Alexei Lalo. More expansive and interpretative in their nature and scope, our notes to *Disintegration of the Atom* combine our research with the achievements of our predecessors, while those to *Petersburg Winters* lean heavily on the annotations compiled by Georgy Moseshvili for the aforementioned three-volume collection of Ivanov's writing as well as those by Nikolai Bogomolov (see Georgii Ivanov, *Stikhotvoreniia. Tretii Rim. Peterburgskie zimy* [Moscow: Kniga, 1989]). Our much sparser notes to *Petersburg Winters*, therefore, cannot rival those found in these two editions. We identify the sources of Ivanov's quotations and misquotations, but leave the majority of his references to historical events and characters uncommented, since more often than not interested readers may easily find such background information readily available online or in the editions we have used.

"…Struck by all the horrors of human disillusionment…" Miseries and Splendors of Georgy Ivanov's "Citational" Prose

Among Russia's outstanding lyric poets Georgy Ivanov (1894–1958) remains, and will always be, an uneasy presence. The series of miniatures he composed halfway through and toward the end of his life as he confronted penury, mortality, and oblivion have secured him a place not merely alongside his fellow émigrés Vladislav Khodasevich and Marina Tsvetaeva, but in the all-Russian pantheon that includes the likes of Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelstam, and Boris Pasternak. In such books of verse as *Roses* ("Rozy," 1931), and especially *Embarkation for the Island of Cythera* ("Otplytie na ostrov Tsiteru," 1937), *A Portrait Without Likeness* ("Portret bez skhodstva," 1950), *Poems* ("Stikhi," 1958), and *Posthumous Diary* ("Posmertnyi dnevnik," 1958) his growing mastery at distilling despair into austere, indelible idiom stops readers in their tracks, but not—superficially, at least—because they find Ivanov's poems to be life-affirming triumphs of creativity over adversity or chaos. On the contrary, if there should ever be a contest for the thorny wreath of the most morose of Russian lyricists, he would stand a good chance of becoming its laureate. Yet the economy of his form, and his directness in communicating his bitter truths never fail to command attention and reflection, as Ivanov takes it upon himself to draw a line under the imperial period of Russian history (see poems opening with "Nice—there is no Tsar" and "Small enamel cross in his lapel"), when he makes his hero toy with the idea of suicide only to shrink from this prospect in fright ("A bluish cold [A chill at my temple]"), or when he chooses to cast a reproachful parting glance at some of Russia's most enduring myths and aspirations, after holding them up to the disgrace

of their fulfillment ("The passage is free at Thermopylae," "Russia is happiness, Russia is light").[1]

One of the most nonchalant of his contemporaries, Ivanov fluttered across the motley but rigidly demarcated landscape of pre-1917 Russian literature with its "strong poets," groups, schools, and movements as it suited him at any given moment. After his departure from Soviet Petrograd to Berlin in 1922, he expended significant effort reinventing himself as a living link between the postrevolutionary dusk of the "Silver Age" of Russian poetry and the younger generation of exiles struggling to make sense of their separation from their homeland. An erstwhile Ego-Futurist and member of the neo-Acmeist "Guild of Poets" (and one-time ardent World War I-era patriot behind the front lines), already at the outset of his career Ivanov chose to treat literature as a game with few hard-and-fast rules apart from those governing the craft of versification. Combined with his weakness for intrigue and manipulation, Ivanov's literary partisanship eventually earned him the reputation of a scurrilous critic as he persisted in waging protracted, public, and ultimately pointless wars with his "rival poet" Khodasevich and Khodasevich's younger protégé and ally Vladimir Sirin (Nabokov). Even though in the circle of the prerevolutionary luminaries Zinaida Hippius and Dmitry Merezhkovsky Ivanov was proclaimed "the first poet of exile"—and despite the influence he enjoyed and shared with his on-and-off friend Georgy Adamovich among the literati aligned with the magazine *Numbers* ("Chisla," 1930–1934)—Ivanov gradually succeeded in alienating all but a few of his closest friends and most forgiving of admirers, withdrawing, as he did, to the company of his second wife, poet, novelist, and memoirist Irina Odoyevtseva (Iraida Heinike, 1895–1990). Predictably enough, what at one point must have seemed a thrilling game of literary vitriol and self-advancement proved impossible to win without incurring significant losses; toward

1 The best edition of Ivanov's poetry is Georgii Ivanov, *Stikhotvoreniia* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo DNK-Progress Pleiada, 2010), ed. Andrei Ar'ev. A representative selection of his mature and late verse can be found in *On the Border of Snow and Melt: Selected Poems of Georgy Ivanov*, introduction by Stanislav Shvabrin; trans. and ed. Jerome Katsell and Stanislav Shvabrin (Santa Monica: Perceval Press, 2011).

the end of his life it fell to Ivanov to document their corrosive effects on the gambler's soul:

> They tell me: "You've won the game!"
> It's all the same. I'm not playing anymore.
> All right, as a poet I will not die,
> Yet as a man I am dying.
>
> ("A Portrait Without Likeness")

It was in that negativity, however, where Ivanov found an equivalent of a guiding light, a way of asserting himself in the face of defeat—and along with it he evolved a sense of poetic irony that helped him cling to some of his dignity:

> I've turned despair into a game—
> What's to sigh and cry about anyway?
> And isn't it amusing, that I'll die
> No later than next week?
>
> I'll die—although I could live on
> Ten or perhaps even twenty years.
> No one took pity. No one helped, either.
> And now it's time to slip away.
>
> ("I've turned despair into a game")

Here must certainly lie one of the secrets of Ivanov's lasting success with modern audiences—or a good deal of it. Unconcerned with—or simply ignorant of—some of the least savory aspects of his literary and extraliterary stance and conduct, his newfound readers sense that under its chillingly crystalline surface Ivanovian despair may actually be hiding a hopeful, affirmative charge. Fittingly, the exegetes of that nihilism of his have forwarded a useful designation of this puzzling, counterintuitive phenomenon. With the aid of a concept adapted from theology, the empathetic students of Ivanov's mature poetry draw our attention to what they designate its "apophaticism": his seemingly illogical ability to derive

strength to create from a sense of abandonment and impending doom that should surely have rendered futile any such impulse if Ivanov's poetry truly were as barren of hope as it might appear to a superficial observer.[2] In its essence it is akin to a staunch believer's capacity for affirming God's existence through the negation of everything a supreme deity is not and cannot be, and a theodicean strategy based on this procedure. Thus Ivanov's epitaphs to a Russia that will never rise from its postrevolutionary, post-Civil War ashes seem to have the unexpected and perhaps unintended effect of breathing new life into the very same cultural myths they appear to be demolishing. Despite the prevailing tenor of his mature verse, Ivanov proves to be a "nihilist" who succeeds in becoming "a light-bearer" of a deeply divided culture, in Vladimir Markov's far-reaching formulation.[3]

Attractive and convincing as these hypotheses may appear, first and foremost they concern Ivanov's verse, not prose, and certainly not his legacy as critic and memoirist. But then his most audacious and consequential foray into the realm of artistic prose, *Disintegration of the Atom* (1938), cannot be defined and described in terms customarily reserved for analyses of prose works, be they traditional or unconventional. What is indisputable, however, is the fact that *Disintegration of the Atom*, the graphic nature of its content notwithstanding, represents not only one of the most contentious, but also one of the most elusive texts in the Russian literary canon, and deliberately so. In this compact work Ivanov demonstrated his ability to expand the boundaries of a domain his supporters and detractors agreed on treating as his own—that of a terse versified lyric utterance—to

2 Andrey Arieff points out that the earliest substantiation of Ivanovian "apophaticism" was formulated by his younger contemporary, fellow émigré poet, and acquaintance Kirill Pomerantsev (see Andrei Ar'ev, *Zhizn' Georgiia Ivanova. Dokumental'noe povestvovanie* [St. Petersburg: Zvezda, 2009], p. 120).

3 Markov's accessible essay "Georgy Ivanov: Nihilist as Light-Bearer" is both a perfect snapshot of the state of affairs prior to its subject's posthumous rediscovery and reevaluation but also an incisive and thought-provoking comparative analysis of Ivanov's legacy as poet and thinker (see *Bitter Air of Exile: Russian Writers in the West, 1922–1972*, ed. Simon Karlinsky and Alfred Appel, Jr. [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973], pp. 139–163). It is followed by a selection of Ivanov's poems in Ron Loewinsohn's and Theodore Weiss's versions as well as Brant Basset's translation of an excerpt from the closing chapter of *Petersburg Winters*.

leitmotif-rich first-person prose narrative. At the time of its publication its subject matter provoked resistance not encountered by any other work by Ivanov, a resistance that took the form of an indignant, offended silence.[4]

While literary connoisseurs value Ivanov primarily as a poet, his prose fiction and memoir writing enjoy a considerable popularity. His first experiments with the short story date back to 1914, the installments of his novel *Third Rome* ("Tretii Rim") were serialized in 1929 and 1931, and in 1933 he published a series of fragments united under the title of *The Book of the Last Reign* ("Kniga o poslednem tsarstvovanii"), a fictionalized study of the twilight of the Russian Empire. Ivanov the memoirist, author of a range of autobiographical sketches published in émigré literary outlets under the heading of *Chinese Shadows* ("Kitaiskie teni," 1924–1930, collected posthumously) and *Petersburg Winters* ("Peterburgskie zimy," finalized separate edition 1952), has been enjoying a steady popularity as a highly subjective, and highly amusing, chronicler of Russia's literary and artistic scene before, during, and after the turmoil associated with the outbreak of World War I, the Revolution of 1917, the Civil War, and the eventual solidification of the Soviet totalitarian regime.

It is this aspect of Ivanov's controversial but indubitably significant literary legacy that the present translation of *Disintegration of the Atom* and *Petersburg Winters* seeks to bring to the attention of the Anglophone reading audience.

4 In his *Russian Literature in Exile: An Experiment in a Historic Survey of Literature Abroad*, Gleb Struve refers to an alleged "conspiracy of silence" that prevented *Disintegration of the Atom* from being reviewed on the pages of the most influential intellectual journals of the emigration (see his *Russkaia literatura v izgnanii: opyt istoricheskogo obzora zarubezhnoi literatury* [New York, Izdatel'stvo imeni Chekhova, 1956], pp. 316–317). For a survey of contemporary reactions to *Disintegration of the Atom*, see Ar'ev, *Zhizn' Georgiia Ivanova*, pp. 247–254.

Disintegration of the Atom

> If I did not believe in life, if I were to lose faith in the woman I love, if I were to lose faith in the order of things, even if I were to become convinced, on the contrary, that everything is disorderly, damned, and perhaps devilish chaos, if I were struck even by all the horrors of human disillusionment—still I would want to live, and as long as I have bent to this cup, I will not tear myself from it until I've drunk it all! However, by the age of thirty, I will probably drop the cup, even if I haven't emptied it, and walk away.
>
> —Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

Like certain other literary works from the first half of the twentieth century, *Disintegration of the Atom* was composed to shock; unlike the vast majority of such works, it has retained a good deal of its shocking charge until today. This same shocking—or repellent, as it may be alternatively termed—quality, however, accounts for only a fraction of the lasting relevance of this compact prose narrative. Once a contestant for the title of "the Russian Oscar Wilde," Ivanov probably would not mind being proclaimed "the Russian Henry Miller" based on the superficial similarity of their subject matter and the unconventionally blunt—for his time—manner of its presentation,[5] but calling him that would only obscure the fact that in *Disintegration of the Atom* he pursues objectives at once more ambitious and specific. Before these are discussed even briefly, however, it would be useful to take a closer look at the genre nature of this narrative piece.

5 In 1955 Ivanov readily acknowledged a certain kinship between Henry Miller and *Disintegration of the Atom*—although the author of *Tropic of Cancer* was unknown to him at the time he wrote his narrative (see Ar'ev, *Zhizn' Georgiia Ivanova*, p. 415). For Alexei Lalo, the surfeit of mostly arid and even repellent sexual references in *Disintegration of the Atom* "appears to be a pioneering attempt at developing [a] new, modern, vocabulary for carnal and corporeal desires in terms recognizable to a contemporary Russian audience" (see his "Exploring the Impetus of Russia's Silver Age: Representations of Sexuality and Eroticism in Aleksandr Kuprin, Ivan Bunin, and Georgii Ivanov," *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*, no. 31 [2010], http://sites.utoronto.ca/tsq/31/lalo31.shtml).

Held together by its nameless protagonist, this agglomeration of themes and leitmotifs, along with all its stylistic lapses (take the incongruent "heartless face," for example), quickly proves to be the result of a well-considered and focused effort, an expertly "literary" work that merely masquerades itself as the cri de coeur of a heartbroken man driven to distraction by his beloved's departure. Compelling as Ivanov's depiction of heartache and rejection may be (few would argue that his protagonist's selfish complaints and misogynistic rants do not amount to a starkly accurate portrayal of the chaotic inner world of a possessive jilted lover on the verge of suicide), soon enough one realizes that Ivanov prompts his reader to take *Disintegration of the Atom* not only literally but also figuratively. One way of defining its genre would be by calling it a parable communicating and illustrating a point that most certainly seemed too delicate to Ivanov to be delivered in direct speech and in his own voice—at that time, at least: as he rushes toward his individual "journey to the end of the night," his Célinian antihero reveals himself to be a modern everyman abandoned not by a tender if perhaps faithless lover, but by God and his faith in that God. The energy released by the force of this same realization, it should be noted, is a spirit that moves most of Ivanov's mature and late poems where he confronts his despair without resorting to the literary ruse of a fictional narrative. By this token *Disintegration of the Atom*, with its unambiguous identification of the traitorous lover with Psyche, a late classical allegory of the human soul in search of a lost union with God, emerges as a periphrastic depiction of the plight of people robbed of their illusions by cataclysms as monumental in their proportion as they were senseless in their cruelty. On this level of abstraction, the fact that Ivanov's antihero happens to be a Russian émigré pinned to the specific backdrop of his Franco-German displacement in a clearly defined historical moment between the two world wars is a detail of lesser importance: this is, for want of a better word, the universal significance of *Disintegration of the Atom*. As such, this work is notable at best, but hardly groundbreaking, much less original or remarkable, notwithstanding the accolades showered upon it by Ivanov's supporters, the mystically inclined Hippius, Merezhkovsky, and those in their orbit. To grasp the true significance of *Disintegration of the Atom* we have no choice but to delve into its

peculiarly local, which is to say Russian, set—or garbage pail, as Ivanov would have it—of "accursed" questions. It is at this juncture where a more precise definition of the genre of this coarse metaphysical parable becomes an absolute necessity.

Vladislav Khodasevich, the only contemporary critic who did not dismiss *Disintegration of the Atom* without examining it closely (or chose not to rise to its challenge publicly, as did so many),[6] was the first to point out that it was "an assiduously thought-through, carefully weighed" literary work, that "the contents of the trash can" that Ivanov empties on his pages have been "selected, arranged, and depicted with commendable artistic skill." The same critic (by no means impartial given the long history of the Ivanov-Khodasevich confrontation) was evenhanded enough to point out that many of its "declamatory devices"—its numerous repetitions, refrains, anaphoras, and other rhetorical techniques—effectively render *Disintegration of the Atom* "a [lyric] poem in prose."[7] To put it somewhat differently, the matter that is disintegrating on the pages of this narrative is poetry itself—along with the myth of its soothing, consolatory, and inspirational power. The urgency and portent of this realization for Ivanov and his fellow displaced compatriots who, after all, constituted his immediate "target audience" cannot be overestimated.

6 Vladimir Nabokov's dismissal of *Disintegration of the Atom* is highly symptomatic in this respect: "… this little brochure with its dilettantish seeking after God and banal description of *pissoirs* (capable of embarrassing only inexperienced readers) is simply very bad … Georgy Ivanov … , exceptional poet … , should have never, ever 'toyed' with prose" (see Vladimir Nabokov, *Sobranie sochinenii russkogo perioda v piati tomakh* [St. Petersburg, 1999], vol. 5, p. 593). The Nabokov-Ivanov feud became a significant event of Russian émigré letters. Directly or indirectly involving other major literary figures (especially Adamovich, Khodasevich, and Ivanov's wife Odoyevtseva), it left an indelible mark on the work of both parties. Adamovich's and Ivanov's extraliterary conduct inspired Nabokov's story "Lips to Lips" (c. 1931); Ivanov invested considerable energy in trying to become something of a scourge to Nabokov. This feud is the subject of a secondary literature of its own; for thoughtful investigations of the lasting effect of *Disintegration of the Atom* on Nabokov, see Andrei Ar'ev, "Visson: Georgii Ivanov and Vladimir Sirin. Stikhosfera" (*Zvezda*, no. 2 [2006], pp. 201–202) and especially Andrei Babikov, "'Dar' za chertoi stranitsy" (*Zvezda* [2015], pp. 154–155).

7 See Vladislav Khodasevich, "Raspad atoma," in his *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh* (Moscow: Soglasie, 1996), vol. 2, pp. 414–418.

A carefully wrought "lyric poem in prose," *Disintegration of the Atom* is the perfect, if perhaps radical, realization of the specifications formulated by Ivanov's one-time émigré ally Georgy Adamovich, the critic and theoretician at the head of a short-lived, yet quite consequential literary school universally remembered today as the "Parisian note." While Ivanov never claimed to be a participant in that school (one simple reason for his not doing so may well have been his age—the majority of writers who rallied around *Numbers*, its "bastion," belonged to a younger generation and never had much of a chance to gain a foothold in prerevolutionary culture), his proximity to and direct participation in Adamovich's gravitational pull placed him close to the wellspring of its uniting ethos. Confronted with the necessity to make sense of the loss of their homeland and its culture to a savage tyranny, the adherents to that ethos took it upon themselves to become the closing chapter in the history of a different, all-but-extinct Russian culture. The poetry of the "Parisian note," therefore, became the poetry of last, bitter truths. To express them with a fitting efficacy, the school promulgated a special aesthetics and poetics, that of a short versified utterance stripped of everything inessential, peripheral, or "self-indulgent," such as metaphors, elaborate imagery, and pursuit of beauty and harmony for their own sake ("We will not be asked: / 'Did you sin?' / We will be asked: / 'Did you love?' / Without raising our head, / We will say quietly: / 'We did love. / Love we did. With all our might . . ."—so wrote one of the best partakers of that "Parisian" ethos Anatoly Steiger, 1907–1944). Unambiguously—and perhaps understandably—tragic in its outlook, the prevalent emotional strain of the "Parisian note" compelled its participants to regard with suspicion the chief achievement of prerevolutionary—prelapsarian, in terms of émigré cultural eschatology—Russia, the creative legacy of Alexander Pushkin. His exuberance, positively Renaissance inability to dwell on the tragic aspect of the human predicament alone, his celebration of the body, his irreverence and rationalism, the "Parisians" felt and argued, held in itself a promise of a future harmonious Russia that before their very eyes proved to be patently mendacious. It is here where we begin to develop an understanding of the antiliterary (consider his references to Dostoevsky, Goethe, Gogol,

Tolstoy), antipoetic, anti-Pushkinian pathos of *Disintegration of the Atom*, its attempt to demonstrate that the promise of harmony embodied in Pushkin's euphonious verse is little more than a distraction from the inevitable onslaught of what Ivanov's protagonist calls "universal hideousness." In this sense, *Disintegration of the Atom* is an impassioned soliloquy, a bitter reproach thrown in the face of a lost illusion, of a hope and inspiration abandoned forever:

> A lost man walks the streets of an alien town. Like a high tide, the void gradually begins to engulf him. He does not resist it. As he goes away, he mutters to himself: "Pushkinian Russia, why did you deceive us? Pushkinian Russia, why did you betray us?"

Expansive, harmonious poetry in general, and richly nuanced love poetry in particular, was Pushkin's natural idiom. The heartbroken protagonist of *Disintegration of the Atom* realizes to his dismay that the sound of water rumbling in a Parisian *pissoir* is identical to that described by Pushkin in a poem formulating a lover's peaceful resignation in the face of a lost love. Pushkin's poetic equanimity, that cherished gem of Russian cultural heritage, proves of no use to the protagonist dealing with the fallout from his realization that the material rudely tramples the spiritual. The romantic drama at the center of *Disintegration of the Atom* is, of course, a crooked-mirror reflection of the reaction that a personal calamity of similar nature effects in the heart of the Pushkinian protagonist. There is no better way of appreciating this polemical aspect of Ivanov's "lyric poem in prose" than considering it in juxtaposition with that same short poem by Pushkin, the distorted opening line of which provides *Disintegration of the Atom* with the most salient of its refrains. What follows is a literal—not literary—unrhymed English rendition of the Russian original:

> Evening mist lies upon the hills of Georgia,
> The Aragva rumbles before me …
> I am sad and at my ease; my sorrow is radiant;
> My sorrow is filled with you,
> With you, you alone … My despondency

Is tormented, disturbed by nothing,
And my heart once more burns and loves—because
Not to love, it cannot.

(1829)

His inability to love and to forgive—and to find in the love poetry of a bygone era a refuge from the inevitable—Ivanov's protagonist blames on his times. Modern man is no longer conditioned to appreciate harmony in art, as art itself has run out of ways to refresh and vivify itself. It is this unsettling suspicion—he calls it "a hunch"—that he is imparting to the world:

> The hunch that art, creativity in the generally accepted sense, is nothing other than the hunt for ever-newer banalities. The hunch that the harmony to which art aspires is nothing other than some sort of supreme banality.

Ivanov's protagonist insists on misquoting the opening line of Pushkin's poem: "evening mist lay upon the hills of Georgia." Hardly noticeable in English, the change in the tense of the verb from present to past creates the most inharmonious aural tautology (cf. "legla … mgla" and the original "lezhit … mgla). Modern scholar Justin Doherty credits Ivanov with a masterful use of this aural oxymoron as a trope: "The use of the past tense may … be read as an attempt by Ivanov to underscore the historical separation of his narrative from Pushkin's text: what in 1829 is represented by Pushkin in the process of happening has become an irreversible fact, had passed into historical time, by 1937."[8] Vladislav Khodasevich, in his response to *Disintegration of the Atom*, saw here an attempt on Ivanov's part to distance himself from his narrator, since as a poet himself he could not have been deaf to this travesty of Pushkinian music. The question as to what the intended effect of this misquotation might have been remains open, what becomes clear from a closer acquaintance with Ivanov's prose is that in it he developed an entire poetics of misquotation. There is every

8 See Justin Doherty, "The Pushkin Contexts of Georgii Ivanov's *Disintegration of the Atom*," in *Two Hundred Years of Pushkin*, ed. Joe Andrew and Robert Reid (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), vol. 1, p. 126.