

The Legend of Kitezh in Russian Literature

by Lisa Woodson

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This dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

David M. Bethea, Professor, Slavic Languages and Literature

Andrew Reynolds, Associate Professor, Slavic Languages and Literature

Irina D. Shevelenko, Associate Professor, Slavic Languages and Literature

Alexander Dolinin, Professor, Slavic Languages and Literature

Francine Hirsch, Associate Professor, History

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Abstract

This study focuses on the legend of Kitezh and its varied incarnations in Russian literature. The legend, which describes an ideal city that disappeared during a time of war, rose from obscurity to wide recognition in less than a century. It then appeared in the works of many leading Russian writers of the twentieth century. This dissertation studies the way three groups of writers appropriated the legend, using Kitezh as a touchstone that allows for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of their philosophical and artistic purposes.

The introductory chapter surveys existing research and sets out a semiotic framework for understanding the legend both in world culture and in the Russian context in which it developed, where Old Believers conceived the legend as an escape to a pre-Petrine Russia. It also discusses the legend as a piece of folklore and highlights the changes that occur when a legend enters mainstream literature. The next three chapters examine three incarnations of the legend at transitional points in its development. Chapter 2 focuses on how writers of the nineteenth century, in particular Pavel Melnikov (pseudonym Andrei Pechersky), first brought Old Believers to the Russian press and used the legend to illustrate the escapist worldview of people they considered ignorant religious fanatics. Chapter 3 examines how the Symbolists Zinaida Gippius and Dmitry Merezhkovsky transformed the dominant interpretation of the Kitezh legend at the turn of the century. Frustrated with institutional Church and State institutions, the Symbolists sought alternatives in the practices of religious dissenters, and made the dissenters' ideal city—Kitezh—an apocalyptic symbol of the future they idealized for Russia. Chapter 4 covers the post-Revolutionary years, when writers again reinterpreted Kitezh, this time as a symbol of the idealized *past* that had been lost after the Revolution. Writers with a particularly “exilic” mentality,

such as émigré writers (Bunin and others), or people who saw themselves as “cultural exiles,” such as Anna Akhmatova, used Kitezh as an identity marker, drawing a distinction between themselves and the Soviet culture around them. The conclusion surveys the appearance of Kitezh in post-Soviet culture.

Chapter 1

The Kitezh Legend

In Russia, in the people's soul there is a kind of endless searching, a searching for the invisible city of Kitezh, an unseen home.

– Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Soul of Russia*¹

In 1992, two Russian participants of a joint Soviet-American environmental conference appealed to what they called “ancient Russian legend” to clarify cross-cultural differences that had become apparent at the conference. The Americans were perplexed that the Soviets devoted so much of their energy to a network of small nature reserves, while apparently disregarding the widespread environmental crisis outside of these nature reserves. In an article reflecting on the conference, the Russian scholars offered the following explanation for their priorities:

It seems to us that the issue of specially protected natural territories has been suddenly disclosed as a peculiar manifestation, as a kind of allegory, of the ancient Russian theme of “The City of Kitezh....” According to the ancient Russian legend, when the country had become the Kingdom of Evil and Falsehood embracing both State and Church authorities, the Kingdom of Good and Righteousness – The City of Kitezh – sank to the bottom of a lake. Hence the Russian idea of “The City of Kitezh” is the idea of withdrawal from surrounding vicious life, the idea of wandering elsewhere in search of this “ideal City.”²

1 Nikolai Berdyaev, *Sud'ba Rossii* (Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1990), 20.

2 Vyacheslav Gertovich and Anton Struchkov, “Epilogue: Russian Reflections,” *Journal of the History of Biology*

The Russian scholars further note that the idea of Kitezh “was particularly influential during difficult periods in Russian history,” and that it is no coincidence that the nature reserves developed rapidly in the 1920s and 1930s in opposition to Soviet policy to use nature to build communism. In founding and defending these nature reserves while ignoring the environmental devastation around them, according to the authors of the article, Russian environmentalists were protecting Kitezh. Their actions were more philosophical than scientific.³

This story illustrates the pervasiveness and importance of the Legend of Kitezh in Russian culture. Despite being virtually unknown outside of Russia, the legend achieved great popularity in the early twentieth century, establishing a permanent place for itself in Russian cultural consciousness.

In its most basic form, the legend tells the story of an ideal city, Kitezh, that is hidden from the outside world. According to the legend, Kitezh was an ancient Russian city that disappeared when attacked by invading Mongol armies in the thirteenth century. In some versions of the legend, the city went underground or sank to the bottom of Lake Svetloyar, in the Nizhny Novgorod region; in others, it simply became invisible, standing to this day on the shores of the lake. Kitezh is said to be a city of the righteous, and that for this reason God saved it from the infidel armies and will keep it hidden until the Second Coming of Christ. Nonetheless, occasionally people from the outside world have contact with Kitezh, especially if they are righteous or devout enough. They may glimpse the reflection of the city in the waters of the lake, or may hear its bells pealing from beneath the waves. In some versions of the legend, Kitezh rises up from beneath the lake on an island, only to disappear again. A shepherd may accidentally

25, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 488-89.

3 Gertovich and Struchkov, 489-91.

wander into Kitezh, but be forced to leave because he is unworthy of being there. If he attempts to bring bread back from Kitezh, it will turn to mold as soon as he leaves the city. Merchants may encounter monks seeking bread, and understand that the monks came from Kitezh only when they mysteriously disappear. Every now and then, when a righteous person inexplicably disappears, it is said that he was granted entrance into Kitezh. Supernatural and extraordinary phenomena are observed at the lake, and the water, flora and fauna at the lake are said to have miraculous properties.

These stories developed in tandem with devotional practices at Lake Svetloyar, in which pilgrims would come to the lake in hopes of glimpsing the holy city or hearing its bells. People would circle the lake a requisite number of times, sometimes on their hands and knees. Certain natural features, such as trees or hills, were believed to have particular significance and were the objects of special devotion. St. John's Eve, June 23 (July 7 in the new calendar), was a particularly important time in the devotional life of the lake and legend, when the largest gatherings of pilgrims would descend on the lake for prayer and religious debates.

The legend underwent a meteoric rise in popularity over the span of just a few decades, rising from complete obscurity in the mid-nineteenth century to broad recognition in the early twentieth century. Moreover, the legend became something more than a legend: it became an active symbol in Russian consciousness, appropriated by writers, artists, composers, and philosophers across the political spectrum. Within the first half of the twentieth century, Kitezh would be found in the travelogues and memoirs of Gippius and Prishvin, the novels of Gorky and Sologub, the political-philosophical writings of Merezhkovsky, Durylin, and Berdyaev, a short story by Zamyatin, the poetry of Gorodetsky, Voloshin, Khlebnikov, Kliuev, Esenin, Tsvetaeva, and Akhmatova, and the literary criticism of Bunin, to name a few prominent

examples. As the diagram below shows, Kitezh not only rose dramatically in importance, but attained a popularity that rivaled the globally recognized myth of Atlantis.

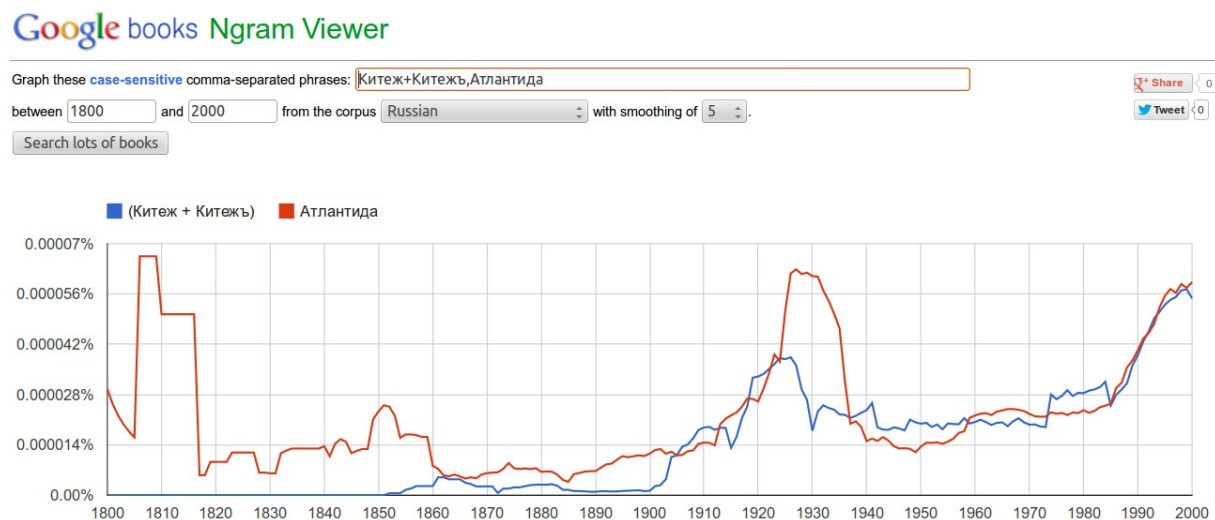


Chart of the frequency with which Kitezh (blue) and Atlantis (red) appear in the Google's corpus of Russian-language books from 1800-2000. Created with Google Ngram viewer (books.google.com/ngram).

Exactly why the Kitezh legend would rise in prominence so dramatically is not immediately apparent, as other similar legends did not achieve the same level of popularity. For example, the legend of Belovodye ('Whitewaters') developed at the same time and in the same specific subculture as the Kitezh legend. Both legends describe ideal sacred places that are hidden, and therefore protected, from the profane world around them, and suggest an escape from the profane world into this paradise-on-earth. Both legends were also “discovered” at the same time, in the middle of the nineteenth century, and appeared in print with equal frequency during the initial decades following their discovery. Around the turn of the twentieth century, however, Kitezh experienced a boom in popularity while Belovodye did not, as the chart below shows.

Google books Ngram Viewer

Graph these **case-sensitive** comma-separated phrases: between and from the corpus with smoothing of .

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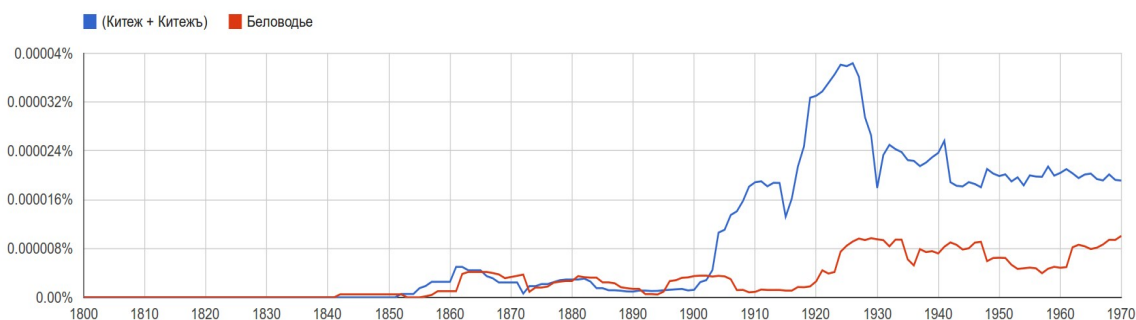


Chart of the frequency with which Kitezh (blue) and Belovodye (red) appear in Google's corpus of Russian-language books from 1800-1970. Created with Google Ngram viewer (books.google.com/ngram).

What exactly made the Kitezh legend so special? What accounted for its popularity and incorporation into broader Russian cultural consciousness? The aim of this dissertation is to elucidate these questions by tracing major developments in the literary appropriation of the Kitezh legend. By examining the way three groups of authors employed the legend at different times, I show a progression in the life of the legend in Russian culture as it moved from folklore to high literature. At the same time, understanding the history behind the Kitezh legend and its appropriation allows us to understand better these authors and their works.

Previous Research

Despite the prominence of the legend in Russian literature and culture, there is not a single English-language work that addresses even the legend itself in depth, to say nothing of its appropriation and evolution in literature. Even materials on the subject in Russian are few: there

is only one monograph on the topic of Kitezh in Russian culture, an extensive doctoral dissertation by Irina Karlsohn, 2009.⁴ Karlsohn traces the intelligentsia's fascination with the legend from 1843, when the first publication of the Kitezh legend was printed, until 1940. She analyzes trends in the intelligentsia's relationship to and interpretation of the legend, and also presents what amounts to an annotated catalog of the majority of important literary works that feature the Kitezh legend. Because of the broad scope of Karlsohn's study, however, she provides little detailed analysis of many seminal Kitezh works (the major exceptions being her fascinating analyses of Rimsky-Korsakov's Kitezh opera, Andrey Bely's "interior" Kitezh, and Kitezh in the poetry of Nikolai Kliuev).

In addition to Karlsohn's work, several scholarly articles address various aspects of the transformations of the legend in literature. Svetlana Sheshunova has done the most groundbreaking work in a series of articles in which she provides an overview of the uses of the Kitezh legend by grouping works that employ the legend into three categories.⁵ In the first are writers such as Vladimir Korolenko, who have a "materialist worldview" and see belief in Kitezh as an emblem of the "ossification" of rural culture; in Korolenko's stories, Kitezh is a "ghost of the past that clouds the present and hinders the discovery of a path to the future." The second includes Symbolists and other authors close to the Symbolists. These writers saw belief in Kitezh as a piece of "true national [*narodnaia*] faith, the foundation of a coming 'Russian spirituality.'"

4 Irina Karlson [Irina Karlsohn], *Poiski Rusi nevidimoi: Kitezhskaia legenda v russkoi kul'ture. 1843-1940* (Gothenberg: University of Gothenburg, 2011).

5 S. V. Sheshunova, "Grad Kitezh v russkoi literature: transformatsii obraza," *Studia Rossica Posnaniensia* 31 (2003): 65-71; "Legenda o Grade Kitezhe v kontekste simvolizm i postsimvolizma" in *Postsimvolizm kak iavlennie kul'tury*, vyp. 4. *Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii*. Moscow, RGGU, 5-7 March 2003 (Moscow, 2003), 57-63; "Grad Kitezh v russkoi literature: paradoksy i tendentsii," *Izvestiia RAN: Seriia Literatury i iazyka* 64, no. 4 (Aug. 2005): 12-23; "Grad Kitezh v khudozhestvennoi literature i problema bifurkatsii russkoi kul'tury" (published online at the internet project Postsimvolizm.ru in 2007: http://postsymbolism.ru/joomla/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=54&Itemid=28)

In the final category, Sheshunova places authors such as Esenin and Bunin, who lie on opposite sides of the political spectrum but both use Kitezh as a metaphor for historical Russia.⁶ Other important efforts to trace the Kitezh legend in literature include Elena Biasci Motasova's extensive article on the subject and Irina Zakharijeva's chapter in her book on twentieth-century Russian literature.⁷

In addition to these broad works on the Kitezh legend in Russian literature, several scholars have addressed the legend in the works of individual authors or groups of authors. Noteworthy studies in this category include N. G. Koptelova's survey of the Kitezh legend among Symbolist writers; Mikhail Pashchenko's articles on Rimsky-Korsakov, Esenin, and Akhmatova; K. M. Azadovskii's work on Nikolai Kliuev and Anna Akhmatova; Olga Rubinchik's articles on Anna Akhmatova; R. A. Solokova's work on Prishvin and Esenin; Kudrin and Kudriashov's article on Melnikov-Pechersky and Korolenko, Igor Sukhikh's article on Platonov, and L. V. Evdokimova's chapter on Kitezh in her book on Sologub's mythopoetics.⁸

6 Sheshunova, "Grad Kitezh v russkoi literature," 16-17, 19.

7 Elena Biasci Motasova, "Drevnerusskaia legenda o nevidimom grade Kitezhe (Istoriia, uspekhi, bibliografiia)," *Slavica tergestina* 2 (1994): 161-196; Irina Zakharijeva, "Kontsepty simvolicheskogo megaobraza russkoi literatury XX veka (Grad Kitezh)," in Irina Zakharijeva, *Russkie poety XX veka: Aspekty formirovaniia kanona v russkoi literature XX veka* (Sofia: Heron Press, 2008), 225-31.

8 N. G. Koptelova, "Obraz Grada Kitezha v literature pervoi chetverti XX veka," *Vestnik KGU im. N. A. Nekrasova*, no. 1 (2003): 73-79; M. Pashchenko, "Kitezh, ili russkii 'Parsifal': genezis simvola," *Voprosy literatury*, no. 2 (2008): 145-182; Mikhail Pashchenko, "Problema 'Kitezhskego teksta' i 'Inonii' Esenina," *Voprosy literatury*, No. 2 (2011): 9-58; K. M. Azadovskii, "Menia nazval 'Kitezhanok': Anna Akhmatova i Nikolai Kliuev," *Literaturnoe obozrenie* no. 5 (1989), 66-70; O. E. Rubinchik, "Tam za ostrovom, tam za sadom..." Tema Kitezh u Anny Akhmatovoi," in *Anna Akhmatova: Epokha, sud'ba, tvorcestvo*, vyp. 3 (Simferopol': Krymskii arkhiv, 2005), 46-65; R. A. Sokolova, "Tema Grada Kitezha v tvorcestve M. Prishvina i S. Esenina," *Maloizvestnye stranitsy i novye kontseptsii istorii russkoi literatury XX veka: Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii*, Vol. 2 (Moscow: Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2003), 49-53; Iu. A. Kudrin and I. V. Kudriashov, "Kitezhskaia legenda, v interpretatsii V. G. Korolenko ('V pustynnykh mestakh') i P. I. Mel'nikov-Pecherskogo ('V lesakh')," in *Korolenskivskie chteniia. Tezisy dokladov nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii, 15-16 oktiabria 1996 g* (Glazov: Glazovskii gosudarstvennyi pedagogicheskii institut, 1996), 6-9; Igor' Sukhikh, "Russkie stranniki v poiskakh Kitezha (1926-1929. 'Chevengur' A. Platonova)," *Zvezda*, No. 8 (1999): 222-235; L. V. Evdokimova, "Kontseptsiiia 'zemnogo raia' v romane. Sologubovskaia interpretatsiia legendy o grade Kitezhe," in *Mifopoeticheskaiia traditsiia v tvorcestve Sologuba* (Astrakhan: izdatel'stvo astrakhanskogo pedagogicheskogo universiteta, 1998), 109-148.

While the Kitezh legend across the scope of Russian literature has yet to be fully explored, many scholars have provided valuable contributions to the topic through their studies of the legend itself and the semiotic net it encompasses. Pavel Melnikov's ethnographic work on Old Believers and their legends is the most valuable nineteenth-century source on the Kitezh legend.⁹ In the twentieth century, Vasily Komarovich's thorough 1936 study of written and oral examples of the legend remains the most seminal work on the original legend, though more recent folklorists, most notably Vladimir Basilov, Nina Savushkina, and Alla Kulagina, have contributed new information to the subject.¹⁰ In her chapter on Kitezh in the works of Bely and Tsvetaeva, Dagmar Burkhart places the legend in the context of world mythology in her comparative study of myths of sunken cities, pointing out the uniqueness of Kitezh as the *only* city sent underwater on account of the righteousness—not the sins—of its inhabitants.¹¹ Gornova and Krinichnaia begin to bridge the gap between folklore and literature with their respective studies of the signature images of the Kitezh legend (city, water, bells, etc.) in the context of the sacred and profane; Shestakov has examined the eschatological theme in the Kitezh legend.¹² Finally, Ksana Blank has recently contributed new information about the appeal of the Kitezh myth for eighteenth-century Old Believers, proposing that they (or at least their Symbolist

9 See Chapter 2.

10 V. L. Komarovich, *Kitezhskaia legenda: opyt izucheniia mestnykh legend* (Moscow-Leningrad, Izdatel'stvo Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1936), photomechanical reprint in *Monuments of Early Russian Literature* (Berkeley: Berkeley Slavic Specialties, 1982). See below for a discussion of the major contributions of Komarovich and other folklorists.

11 Dagmar Burkhart, "Der mythos von der versunkenen stadt," in *Das XX. Jahrhundert; Slavische Literaturen in Dialog mit dem Mythos*, ed. Angela Richter (Hamburg: Kovac, 1998), 85-104.

12 G. V. Gornova, "Urbanisticheskaia metafora 'grad-Kitezh,'" in *Ratsional'noe i irratsional'noe v russkoi filosofii i kul'ture: proshloe i sovremennost: materialy vs Rossiiskoi nauchnoi zaochnoi konferentsii* (Barnaul: Barnaul'skii gos. ped. Universitet, 2003), 52-56; N. A. Krinichnaia, "Nevidimyi grad Kitezh: sakral'noe i mirskoe v strukture siuzheta," in *Russkaia istoricheskaia filologiya: problemy i perspektivy. Doklady Vserossiiskoi nauchnoi konferentsii pamiati N. A. Meshcherskogo. Petrozavodsk, 18-20 oktiabria 2000* (Petrozavodsk: Periodika, 2001), 293-302; Viacheslav Pavlovich Shestakov, "Eschatologicheskie motivy v legende o grade Kitezhe," in *Eschatologiya i utopiia: ocherki russkoi filosofii i kul'tury* (Moscow: Vlado, 1995), 6-32.

admirers) imagined the city of Kitezh as an opposition to St. Petersburg and the New Jerusalem monastery, two attempts by Peter the “Antichrist” to create a utopian city on earth.¹³ K. V. Chistov, A. I. Klibanov, Boris Egorov, Leonid Heller and Michel Niqueux have all addressed the Kitezh legend in their studies of popular utopianism.¹⁴

The Kitezh Legend in Global Context

The Kitezh legend is essentially a piece of folklore that occupied a special place in Russian culture as it rose to prominence and began appearing in non-folkloric media. As a legend, it is related to many legends and other folkloric stories that appear throughout the world, many of which have been used, like the Kitezh legend, in literature, art, and music.

Folklorists have yet to reach a consensus on how to define legends. Related to both myths and tales, legends take place in the living past (as opposed to the distant past of myth) and continue into the present. They are stories that are *supposed* to be true, but which are inevitably subject to skepticism. Linda Dégh explains that “the built-in anticipation of contradiction is the main identifier of the legend, setting it apart from other folklore genres.” They are intimately connected to the beliefs of the community, and, unlike other folklore genres, are comparatively immune to ossification, continuing to develop with the community. They may be “local,” associated with a particular geographic element, such as a lake, road, or house, or may be

13 Ksana Blank, “The Invisible City of Kitezh As an Alternative 'New Jerusalem,'" in *New Jerusalems. The Translation of Sacred Spaces in Christian Culture. Materials from the International Symposium* (Moscow: Indrik, 2006), 169-171; Ksana Blank, “Ierotopiia sokrovennogo grada: nevidimyi Kitezh, nikonovskii Novyi Ierusalim i petrovskii Paradiz,” in *Novye Ierusalimy*, pod. red. Alekseia Lidova (Moscow: Indrik, 2009), 837-49).

14 K. V. Chistov, *Russkaia narodnaia utopia (genezis i funktsii sotsial'no-utopicheskikh legend)* (St. Petersburg: Rossiiskaia akadmiia nauk, Muzei antropologii i etnografii im. Petra Velikogo (Kunstkamera), Dmitrii Bulanin, 2003); A. I. Klibanov, *Narodnaia sotsial'naia utopiia v Rossii. Period feodalizma* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo “Nauka,” 1977); B. F. Egorov, *Rossiiskie utopii: Istoricheskii putevoditel'* (St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 2007); Leonid Geller and Mishel' Nike [Leonid Heller and Michel Niqueux], *Utopiia v Rosssii*, trans. I. V. Bulatkovskii (St. Petersburg, Giperion, 2003).

“migratory,” traveling great distances and adapting to local conditions.¹⁵

Legends have been described as “formless” because they require no specific literary features. In contrast to the tale, in which the storyteller's art is a main feature, legends are centered on conveying a core message, a “kernel” or “nucleus.” Legends may thus be told in the most elaborately constructed narratives or the most naïve, short utterances. Many variants describing elements of one basic plot comprise a single legend. In some cases, a variant may focus on a tangential part of the plot; but taken together, these tangential variants support the basic plot or “core message” of the legend. Linda Dégh explains:

Legend must be seen as a plot unit regardless of the formal cohesiveness of its variants.... The plot is sometimes clearly articulated, but more often it is quite blurred by stressing one of its parts and dropping the rest.... In other words, identifying a legend as a narrative unit...requires us to bring together all components of its manifest forms – from the shortest statement (the one that can be considered as a narrative only by its inclusion of crucial elements of the story), to the longest, polished oral and printed versions. All forms of the legend need to be assembled and pieced together to see the extent of the type and its ramifications in the context of other narratives and folklore in general.¹⁶

The Kitezh legend exhibits all of these characteristics. Scholars have identified it as a localized manifestation of migratory legends of sunken cities and disappearing castles. Its “nucleus” is the existence of a hidden city at Lake Svetloyar. It is found both in highly literary written forms from the eighteenth century, and in current-day oral reports of supernatural or extraordinary occurrences at Lake Svetloyar. Stories about Kitezh reflect the beliefs and values of the local community, and because they purport to be true (“They say...” or “My grandmother saw...”) are often met with skepticism, especially by people outside of the local community.

In content, the Kitezh legend overlaps with three types of legends and myths in world

15 Linda Dégh, *Legend and Belief: Dialectics of a Folklore Genre* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 2, 81, 52.

16 Dégh, 102.

culture—the earthly paradise, the sunken city, and the invisible monastery—though ultimately it has a place all its own. As a utopian legend, Kitezh shares semantic space with legends of Lost Edens, attempts to describe and reclaim paradise. Such stories often take the form of Lost Civilization legends, as people imagine hidden societies that are idyllically undisturbed by modern progress.

The Buddhist legend of Shambhala, for example, the inspiration for Shangri-La, describes an ideal kingdom located somewhere in the mountains of Asia.¹⁷ According to the legend, Shambhala is hidden in the mountains, accessible only to those with the proper moral and spiritual approach:

A great ring of snow mountains glistening with ice completely surrounds Shambhala and keeps out all those not fit to enter.... One can cross the snow mountains only by flying over them, but lamas point out that this must be done through spiritual powers—whoever tries to go by airplane or any other material means will meet destruction on the other side.

Like Kitezh, it is a land blessed by the righteousness of its inhabitants, who live in perpetual peace, devoting themselves to spiritual pursuits. Should the kingdom ever come under attack, its inhabitants have the power to become invisible. In fact, “if an ordinary person should happen to stumble on the kingdom, he would see only an empty valley surrounded by desolate mountains. Instead of a country of golden pagodas and flowering trees, he would find a barren landscape swept by great clouds of dust and snow.”¹⁸ Similarly, the Kitezh legend holds that only those worthy will see or enter Kitezh: according to the eighteenth-century Kitezh *Letopisets*, or chronicle, a person who wishes to find Kitezh must commit himself to endure hunger and even death during the search. Anyone who fails to live up to this standard will not see the invisible

17 Shangri-La is a name invented by James Hilton in his 1933 book *Lost Horizon*, about an ideal kingdom hidden in the Himalayas. The popularity of Hilton's book (including a 1937 film of the same name) turned “Shangri-La” into the inspiration for its own mythology, much of which is directly related to Shambhala.

18 Edwin Bernbaum, *The Way to Shambhala: A Search for the Mythical Kingdom Beyond the Himalayas* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001; originally published Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1980), 6-11, 38.

city, but rather a “forest and an empty place.”¹⁹

Such legends are particularly common in the “New World,” as the utopian ideology that began in the Renaissance influenced European settlement in the Americas. Legends of El Dorado and the Fountain of Youth appropriate the same mythology of a hidden paradise. The colonization of the Americas and the western spread of the American frontier were similarly steeped in the utopian view of the “earthly paradise”; in these cases, however, the story was not a legend of lost civilization to be found, but rather a mythology of a utopian society to be built. While popular imagination created legends and mythologies on a community or societal level, the same ideology was manifest in numerous literary works: books such as Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun* (1602), and Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627) reflected hopes of finding or constructing an ideal society.

Religious myths and legends add an extra dimension to legends of hidden paradises. The recapturing of an Edenic world and an end to sin and suffering holds a special place in the religious imagination. The legend of Shambhala, for example, is a Buddhist legend about a land in which attaining Nirvana is a near certainty. In Christian theology, the New Jerusalem, the ideal city promised in the Apocalypse, is the goal of history. This eschatological desire to regain a lost paradise is found in multiple stories of temporary visits to paradise in Christian writings of the Middle Ages and later. Many medieval religious legends in Russia and Europe involved temporary visits to paradise lands or heaven itself. In several stories, devout monks were shown glimpses into heaven. Other legends depicted paradise lands that supposedly existed directly on earth. The twelfth-century “Tale of the Indian Kingdom,” for example, tells of a magical land, complete with giants and fantasy animals, in which the good Tsar Ioann rules the kingdom with

19 “Legenda o grade Kitezhe,” in L. A. Dmitrieva and D. S. Likhachev, eds., *Pamiatniki literatury drevnei Rusi. XIII vek* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1981), 222-25.

12 patriarchs, 12 metropolitans, 300 popes and 300 princes.²⁰ In the New World, the Mormon story of Zion recalls the Kitezh legend. The story is a version of the Biblical story of Enoch, whose righteousness was so outstanding that he did not die; rather, God “took” him.²¹ In the *Pearl of Great Price*, Enoch is the leader of the righteous city Zion, which was taken up into heaven together with Enoch.²² All of these religious stories emphasize the idea of not only a prosperous land, but of a world free from sin, in which the religious ideal of the faith community is realized on earth.

A second category of myth and legend that overlaps with Kitezh is the sunken city. Atlantis in the ancient world and Ys (also called Ker-Ys, Ker-Is, Keris) in medieval France may be the most recognized examples on account of the prominent literary and musical works they inspired (Plato's dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias* and Debussy's “La Cathédral Engloutie,” respectively), but legends of sunken cities are quite common in world culture. The Stith Thompson Motiv-Index of Folk Literature records stories of floods and sunken cities from all parts of the world.²³ James Doan counts at least 14 legendary sunken cities in Brittany and Wales alone; in his expansive study of German sunken city legends, Warren Maurer analyzes over 200 German legends, which he considers a representative sampling rather than an exhaustive collection.²⁴ Several Russian and Soviet scholars have shown the prevalence of sunken city

20 For an overview of paradise legends popular in medieval Russia, see Egorov, 20-24.

21 Genesis 5:21-24.

22 Moses 7:20-21. I am grateful to my colleague Nicholas Rampton for first introducing me to this story and its significance in Mormon culture.

23 See entires A1010-A1029, “Deluge” and “Escape from Deluge,” and F940, “Extraordinary Underground (Underwater) Disappearance.” S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of folk-literature: a classification of narrative elements in folktales, ballads, myths, fables, medieval romances, exempla, fabliaux, jest-books, and local legends*, revised and enlarged edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1955-1958). Available online via the Ruthenia database: <http://www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/thompson/>.

24 James Doan, “The Legend of the Sunken City in Welsh and Breton Tradition,” *Folklore* 92, no. 1 (1981), 81-82; Warren R. Maurer, “German Sunken City Legends,” *Fabula* 17, no. 1 (1976), 190.

legends in Russia and the Caucasus.²⁵ Individual tropes from sunken city legends, such as people hearing church bells pealing from beneath the water, are also widespread.²⁶ Many scholars believe that the flood stories may have a real-life antecedent, such as the destruction of a coastal town during a storm. In time, these real-life events became migratory legends rooted to specific locations all over the world.²⁷

The underlying cause of the flood is an important aspect of the semiotic web of the sunken city legends. Following the semiotic lines of Noah's flood in the Bible and the Epic of Gilgamesh, in virtually every instance, the sinking of a city is interpreted as punishment, often divine, for the moral failure of the city's inhabitants.²⁸ The Kitezh legend stands out as a striking aberration in this pattern, as Kitezh supposedly lies at the bottom of Svetloyar as a form of divine salvation.²⁹

The Kitezh legend also overlaps with legends of invisible, or disappearing-reappearing castles and monasteries. Arthurian legend contains several references to such castles, beginning with the grail castle itself, as described by Chrétien de Troyes in the 12th century. In Chrétien's

25 L. A. Blinkova, R. G. Borod'ko, I. I. Odintsova, and N. I. Savushkina, "Kitezhskaia legenda i neskazochnaia proza Zavolzh'ia," *Sovetskaia etnografiia* No. 4 (1973): 113-122; see also H. F. Sumtsov, "Skazaniia o provalivshikhsia gorodakh" in *Sbornik Khar'kovskogo istoriko-filologicheskogo obshchestva* (1896), 297-305.

26 Maurer cites bells pealing underwater as the most frequently mentioned apparition related to German sunken cities; it is not infrequent that the underwater bells become the most important motif in the story. See Maurer, 201-202. Similarly, folklorist D. L. Ashliman has compiled seven different stories of underwater bells from England on his online folklore database, *Folktexts: A Library of Folktales, Folklore, Fairy Tales, and Mythology* (<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/folktexts.html>). See "Sunken Bells: Legends of Type 7070" at <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type7070.html>.

27 See, for example, James Doan's explanation for the widespread stories of floods in Brittany and the British Isles: "When one compares these tales [from Wales and Brittany] with similar ones from Ireland and Cornwall...one must conclude that this is either a very old tale-type which was distributed throughout the entire Celtic world, or else a legendary account of an actual event which happened more recently, and was later disseminated to other Celtic areas and subsequently localized," Doan, 81; see also Maurer, 206.

28 Maurer, 189-214; Doan, 77-83; Blinkova et al., 115-16.

29 Blinkova et al. note that the motif of Kitezh being "saved" by drowning or falling into the earth is found only oral folklore near the lake. In the oral folklore of areas farther removed from the lake, the standard "drowning as divine punishment for sin" motif is applied to Kitezh just as it is to other lakes and cities. Blinkova et al., 115.

Perceval, the Story of the Grail, which draws on widespread folklore, the hero Perceval meets the Fisher King, who takes him to his castle, which subsequently disappears.³⁰ Further developments of the Perceval tale and the grail legends as a whole emphasized the motif of the invisible castle. In Perceval's continued quest for the grail, he encounters more invisible castles. Similarly, in the story of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, when Sir Gawain prays for shelter on Christmas Eve, the (hitherto invisible) castle of the Green Knight materializes out of thin air.

These stories of invisible castles are related to stories of invisible monasteries, which were particularly prominent in Russia and the Trans-Volga region where Lake Svetloyar is located. According to local legend, an invisible monastery lies at or under Lake Nestiar, another lake in the Nizny Novgorod region. Until the mid-twentieth century, folklorists studying the Kitezha legend at Lake Svetloyar generally encountered oral stories of a hidden monastery rather than a hidden city.³¹ In the Tver region of Russia, tales of “Mlevsky” monasteries were common. These monasteries supposedly once existed dug into the ground near the village of Mleva, but subsequently disappeared completely into the ground. The monks and nuns continue their service there to this day, but for outsiders, reaching the monasteries is extremely difficult. On major church holidays, however, underground bells can be heard rising from the Mlevsky monasteries.³²

30 The importance of folklore, including elements from Celtic and Persian folklore, in the development and spread of the grail legends has been widely studied. Emma Jung and Marie Louise von Franz specifically suggest a Breton fairy tale as the possible origin of Crétien's story. In the fairy tale, a youth named Peronik seeks a magical spear and goblet in the enchanted castle of Ker Glas, which disappears after Peronik finds the magical items. Emma Jung and Marie Louise von Franz, *The Grail Legend*, trans. Andrea Dykes, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 10-20; 35-36.

31 N. I. Savushkina, “Legenda o grade Kitezhe v starykh i novykh zapisiakh,” *Russkii fol'klor* 13 (1972): 74. See also “Zagadka nevidimogo grada,” *Literaturnaia gazeta* 9 August 1968 (No. 32), 11; V. N. Basilov, “O proiskhozhdenii kul'ta nevidimogo grada Kitezha (monastyria) u ozera Svetloiar,” *Voprosy istorii religii i Ateizma: Sbornik Statei* 12 (Moscow: Nauka, 1964): 152.

32 P. I. Mel'nikov (Andrei Pecherskii), “Ocherki popovshchiny” in *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*. T. 7. (Moscow: Pravda, 1976), 217.

These three families of legends—the earthly paradise, the sunken city, and the invisible castle or monastery—are all significant for the Kitezh legend in folklore and in its subsequent development in Russian literature. The semiotic fields associated with each type of legend are at play in the Kitezh legend and in its appropriations in Russian literature. For example, it is no coincidence that authors with a distinctly religious viewpoint inevitably chose the version of the Kitezh legend in which Kitezh became invisible instead of the version in which Kitezh sank underwater. The works of these religious authors are steeped in a Biblical worldview in which water symbolizes chaos and death, while the invisible is the locus of faith, in which divine activity may be perceived if not visibly seen.³³ On the other hand, writers without a specific religious agenda are more likely to appropriate the version of the legend in which Kitezh is underwater or underground, a Russian treasure hidden in the Russian soil.

The Kitezh Legend in Russian Context

The supposed location of Kitezh, Lake Svetloyar, is an unassuming, oval-shaped lake about 40 miles northeast of Nizhny Novgorod, in the Kerzhenets River region. It is not particularly remarkable in any feature, save its depth: despite its modest size (410 m by 315 m), it is the deepest lake (36 m) in the Nizhny Novgorod area. Because of the cultural and ecological significance of the lake, in 1965 Svetloyar was placed under official environmental protection as

33 Floodwater as death and chaos in the Bible can be found in the creation myth, in which God separates land from the waters and pronounces it “good”; in Noah's flood; in the Exodus escape from Egypt via the Red Sea as on dry land (and the subsequent drowning of the Egyptian pursuers); in crossing the Jordan River as dry land; in Jonah being swallowed and vomited by a great fish; in Jesus calming the waters and walking on the waters; and in the sacrament of baptism as a symbolism of death (in the water) and rebirth (out of the water). New Testament authors who adhere to a semi-platonic dualism regularly draw the distinction between the visible world as temporal and bound to decay versus the invisible world as eternal. The author of Hebrews writes that faith is “the conviction of things not seen,” and that people of faith *see* “Him who is unseen” (Hebrews 11:1, 27). Similarly, Paul writes to the Corinthians: “We look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

a regional park (памятник природы). In 2002, the park was included in a network of parks and nature preserves that together formed a UNESCO biosphere reserve called Nijegorodskoe Zavolje (Нижегородское заволжье).³⁴

Whether or not an actual city of Kitezh (or “Great Kitezh,” Большой Китеж) ever existed remains unknown. The location of a related city, “Little Kitezh,” (Малый Китеж), has been identified in a part of the modern city of Gorodets, on the Volga River near Nizhny Novgorod. Komarovich has suggested that “Kitezh” is a variant name for “Kideksha” (Кидекша), a town near Suzdal that suffered multiple attacks during the Mongol invasions; why Kideksha would change location, from Suzdal to Svetloyar, however, is a matter of conjecture.³⁵ Regardless, many scholars believe that the Kitezh legend is a variation of a migratory legend that, for some reason, became fixed to the location of Lake Svetloyar, turning this migratory legend into a local legend. The prevalence of the invisible monastery as a migratory legend in the region may be confirmed by other local legends, which hold that invisible churches or monasteries exist at the nearby Nestiar and Ozerskoe lakes, about 25 miles from Svetloyar.³⁶

As some legends of sunken cities are based on actual cities that were probably destroyed by natural disasters, researchers have speculated that a Kitezh may once have existed but been

34 Entsiklopediia Nizhnego Novgoroda, Svetloiar (<http://www.nnov.org/Светлояр>); Biosfernyi rezervat “Nizhegorodskoe zavolzh’e”, Gosudarstvennyi zapovednik “Kerzhenskii” (<http://www.kerzhenskiy.ru/content/biosfernyi-rezervat-nizhegorodskoe-zavolzhe>); UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserves Directory, Nijegorodskoe Zavolje (<http://www.unesco.org/mabdb/br/brdir/directory/biores.asp?code=RUS+28&mode=all>).

35 Komarovich, 111-153.

36 Vladimir Korolenko records the following story in his travelogue of the Kerzhenets region, *V pustynnykh mestakh*: “There is a legend that once upon a time a church with an icon of Varlaam of Khutyn moved from the steep bank of Vasilrusk [a small town on the Sura River in the Nizhny Novgorod Region] and secretly speeding over the forest, became invisible above the lake [Nestiar] and stands there to this day. From the lake sometimes the peal of bells can be heard, as from Svetloyar,” (Есть поверье, что некогда из Васильсурска церковь с иконой Варлаама Хутынского двинулась с крутого берега и, пронесясь над лесами, невидимо стала над озером и стоит до сих пор, и из озера слышен бывает звон, как из Светлояра). V. G. Korolenko, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii. T. 5.* (St. Petersburg: Marks, 1914), 313. See also Blinkova et al., 115-117.

abandoned, or suffered geological catastrophe, collapsing into a sinkhole that filled with water and became Lake Svetloyar. A multifaceted expedition to Lake Svetloyar organized by *Literaturnaia gazeta* in 1968 initially put these theories to rest, as the expedition—which in addition to historians and folklorists included archaeologists, limnologists and scuba-divers—found no evidence of human settlement at or under Lake Svetloyar. Local residents who continued to believe in Kitezh, however, explained that the hidden city had repelled the scuba-divers.³⁷ More recently, however, in October 2011, the discovery near the lake of fragments of pottery, knives, jewelry and a millstone dating to the fourteenth or early fifteenth century have lead researchers to believe that a settlement did exist on Lake Svetloyar that may have served as the prototype for the legendary Kitezh. The site is still undergoing excavation.³⁸

Regardless of the actual origins of Kitezh the city, Kitezh the legend in the form generally recognized today dates to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century and a particular religious community called Old Believers. Old Believers (староверы), also called Old Ritualists (старообрядцы), or simply “schismatics,” (раскольники), arose as a result of the Schism that took place in the Orthodox Church in mid-seventeenth century. At that time, a series of clerical reforms under the guidance of Patriarch Nikon—particularly when later coupled with the vast cultural reforms of Peter the Great—caused deep distress among many Russian Orthodox, who subsequently broke with the state-sponsored Orthodox Church.³⁹ The Old Believers initially

37 N. I. Savushkina, “Kompleksnaia ekspeditsia na Svetloiare,” *Russkii fol'klor* 12 (1971): 270-71; A. V. Kulagina and V. A. Kovpik, “Legendy, predaniia, rasskazy ob ozere Svetloiar i ego okrestnostiakh,” in *Aktual'nye problemy polevoi fol'kloristiki*, ed. A. A. Ivanova, vol. 3 (Moscow: Izd-vo moskovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2004): 220, 222-23.

38 Dmitrii Karabel'nikov, “Otkopali Kitezh? Na beregu unikal'nogo ozera Svetloiar naideno srednevekovoe poselenie,” *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, no. 5662 (20 December 2011); Irina Belova, “Nizhegorodskie arkeologi otyskali grad Kitezh,” *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (26 July 2012).

39 For a more nuanced overview of the causes and immediate effects of the schism, see Michael Cherniavsky, “Old Believers and the New Religion,” *Slavic Review* 25, no. 1 (March 1966): 1-39; and G. B. Michels, *At War with the Church: Religious Dissent in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

suffered intense persecution from tsarist armies, leading many to flee and form autonomous religious communities in remote parts of Russia, including the sparsely populated Kerzhenets region. They became convinced that Peter the Great was the Antichrist, and believed they were living in the End Times. They awaited the Apocalypse and, in rare cases, developed suicidal obsessions and committed mass-suicide.⁴⁰ In other cases, Old Believers set up isolated, self-governed communities until these communities were destroyed or subjugated by Tsarist armies.⁴¹

This apocalyptic, semi-suicidal worldview accounts for many Old Believer legends that developed in the eighteenth century, among which the Kitezh legend is far from unique. As opposed to the Christian doctrine espoused by Church Fathers such as Augustine, which holds that the world and history are the locus of divine redemption, and that therefore Christians should participate in it, many Old Believer groups sought to flee the world of the Antichrist. The legends that developed and spread among Old Believers, accordingly, idealized an escape from Tsarist rule. This worldview may be found in the popularity of both “pretender” legends—in which a person would gain popular support as the “true” tsar, in opposition to the monarchy in St. Petersburg—and in legends of distant and hidden paradise lands. The popular utopian legends that developed and spread at this time did not arise solely as a result of the Schism, but rather, in the words of Heller and Niqueux, “the Schism gave a push [толчок] to popular utopianism.”⁴² Another important factor was the eastward migration and settlement of peasants in Siberia in the eighteenth century, which facilitated tales of mysterious free lands of opportunity far away from

40 Citing the research of A. Gerasimov, Leonid Heller claims 20,000 Old Believers died in mass-immolations between 1672 and 1691. Michael Cherniavsky claims schism-related suicides numbered in the tens of thousands. Geller and Nike, 31; Cherniavsky, 21.

41 See Egorov, 30-40.

42 Geller and Nike, 30.

European Russia.⁴³

One of the most radical branches of religious dissenters that emerged from the Schism, the *beguny*, or 'wanderers' (бегуны, странники), preached a rejection of the world so extreme that they refused the basic elements of settlement, including family, taxes, and permanent housing. Some scholars do not even consider the *beguny* a religious movement, characterizing them rather as popular utopians or as fraudulent runaways. Chistov, for examples, describes their unorganized movement as “anarchical utopianism with a religious coloring”; Melnikov dismisses *beguny* as wanderers who used the guise of religiosity to veil their darker motivations.⁴⁴ Many twentieth-century scholars consider the *beguny* to be the originators of the multiple utopian legends of paradises in “distant lands” that were so popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries among Old Believers. One of the basic sayings of the *beguny*, “We have no present city, but seek the coming city” (града настоящего не имимы, а грядущего взыскуем), became the basis for a real-life search for a utopia on earth.⁴⁵ Wandering from settlement to settlement, these *beguny* told fantastic tales of distant or hidden lands where people were free from the Tsar's—the Antichrist's—reign, and continued to practice Orthodoxy as their grandparents and great-grandparents had, before Nikon's reforms. In time, these legends gained popularity among the more conservative Old Believer communities, essentially becoming Old Believer legends and eventually bleeding into the greater Russian population.

One of the most prevalent Old Believer legends, Belovodye (Беловодье, 'Whitewaters'),

43 A. I. Klibanov, 221-22; Chistov, *Russkaia narodnaia utopia*, 276-77.

44 Chistov, *Russkaia narodnaia utopia*, 281; P. I. Mel'nikov (Andrei Pecherskii), “Pis'ma o raskole,” in *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh* (Moscow: “Pravda,” 1963), 6:213.

45 Chistov, *Russkaia narodnaia utopia*, 286. The *beguny* saying is based on Hebrews 13:14: “For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (не имамы бо zde пребывающаго града, но грядущаго взыскуемъ).

told of a land somewhere past the Siberian mountains, perhaps in China or beyond, in which people lived and practiced Orthodox Christianity in accordance with pre-Petrine traditions. Belovodye was said to be situated on 70 islands that were rich with grapes and rice, as well as gold, silver, and precious stones.⁴⁶ Special 'guidebooks' (путешественники) claiming to lead the way to Belovodye began circulating among the peasant population—especially among *beguny* and Old Believer communities—and many people journeyed east in search of Belovodye. Rumors about Belovodye were strong enough that in 1807 the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs contracted a civilian to follow up and report on any Russian communities living there that were not paying taxes.⁴⁷ Other similar legends, such as the City or Land of Ignatius (Город Игната, Земля Игната), the Oronskoe Kingdom (Оронское царство), Syria or Assyria, or the Nut Land (Ореховая земля) likewise promised the good life somewhere far away. Chistov counts a total of ten to twelve such legends in Russia between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴⁸

The Origins of the Kitezh Legend and its Ongoing Development

Despite the importance of the Old Believer worldview for the Kitezh legend and other similar legends, some scholars have sought the roots of the legend in pre-Christian, pagan culture. The first major scholar of Old Believer culture and legend, Pavel Melnikov (better known under his literary pseudonym Andrei Pechersky), claimed that the Kitezh legend, and the devotional cult that surrounded it, were essentially pagan elements that had been whitewashed

46 Chistov, *Russkaia narodnaia utopia*, 292-95.

47 The civilian, a resident of Tomsk named Bobylev, reportedly accepted 150 rubles for this task and was never seen or heard from again. Chistov, *Russkaia narodnaia utopia*, 279.

48 Chistov, *Russkaia narodnaia utopia*, 332-56, 357; Egorov, 40-47.

with a Christian story to make them acceptable. In his view, the gatherings at Lake Svetloyar, especially the largest midsummer gatherings, originated in pre-Christian pagan rites celebrating the sun god Yarilo. Unable to constrain the pagan traditions, Church officials invented a Christian story—the Kitezh legend—that contaminated and eventually overcame the pagan motivations for devotional practices at Lake Svetloyar. This process accounted for the odd combination of pagan and Orthodox ritual widely observed at the lake in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (hanging icons on trees and praying before them, performing genuflections to the hills or the lake, considering the water and trees sacred, etc.).⁴⁹

Melnikov's view was widely accepted for nearly a century until 1964, when ethnographer Vladimir Basilov challenged the notion that the Svetloyar cult was an outgrowth of regional pagan practices. Basilov argued that the legend of the invisible monastery—later city—could not have dated to before the late seventeenth century, since its ideology so clearly reflected the world-renouncing views of the *beguny*. The earliest written text associating the invisible Kitezh with Lake Svetloyar, the *Kitezh Letopisets* (Книга, глаголемая летописец), was compiled in the eighteenth century, and is actually a rather clumsy attempt to add the legend of the invisible city onto an older text about Kitezh and its destruction by Khan Batu (in the older text, Kitezh was destroyed, not saved through invisibility). The earliest mention of devotional practices at Lake Svetloyar comes in 1837 in the form of a denunciation a local resident made to Orthodox officials regarding relatively small unsanctioned religious activities at the lake. The response of the Orthodox officials to the denunciation is telling: they did not believe the denunciation and apparently had no knowledge of the Svetloyar cult. Basilov argues that a long-existing cult based in pagan ritual could not have escaped the notice of Orthodox officials for over a century. To the

49 See, for example, Komarovich, 7-10; “Rabota svetloiarskoi ekspeditsii (po sledam Mel'nikova, Korolenko, i Prishvina),” *Sovetskaia etnografiia* 1-2 (1931):172-73; Basilov, 152-53.

contrary, the tradition of devotional practices at the lake must have arisen later, probably in the late eighteenth century in connection with the development of the legend.⁵⁰ Later folklorists have generally agreed with Basilov's explanation for the origins of the legend, though some continue to see a pre-existing lake cult (or general pagan reverence for water) as a factor in the determination for Lake Svetloyar as the location of Kitezh.⁵¹

Two eighteenth century texts, the oldest existing records of the Kitezh legend, offer the best glimpse into the early years of the legend. They were also pivotal for the development of the Kitezh legend and especially its entry into mainstream Russian literature in the nineteenth century. The first of these, the “Epistle to a father from a son in a hidden monastery, in order that he not be mourned and that someone who hid from the world not be counted as dead” (“Послание к отцу от сына из онаго сокровеннаго монастыря, дабы о нем сокрушения не имели и в мертвы не вменяли скрывавшагося из мира”) is dated June 20, 1702.⁵² The “Epistle” comprises a short text in which a son explains to his parents that though he has disappeared, he is not dead, but is living in a hidden monastery, flourishing there with holy fathers. In this monastery, the visible and invisible are reversed, such that the immaterial prayers of the holy fathers are visible, like pillars of fire, while the physical monastery itself is invisible. According to the “Epistle,” God loves the holy fathers so much that he “has covered them invisibly with his palm” (покры их невидимо дланию своею), thereby hiding them from the

50 Basilov, 158-162. Basilov does not discuss the possibility that the Old Believer Church—not the institutional Orthodox Church—might have had prior knowledge of pagan rituals and attempted to counter them with a Christian narrative of the lake, leading to the development and spread of the Kitezh legend, as Melnikov assumed. However, the fact that the Kerzhenets region was barely inhabited before the Schism, and was settled primarily by Old Believers at the same time the Kitezh legend was developing, makes it all the more unlikely that pagan rites were ever widely practiced at the lake. It seems far more plausible, as Basilov suggests, that the mass gatherings and pilgrimages to the lake arose as a result of the spread of the Kitezh legend.

51 See Savushkina, “Kompleksnaia ekspeditsii na Svetloiare,” 270-71; Blinkova, et al., 113-14.

52 The complete text of the *Epistle* was first published in the 1860s by Pavel Melnikov in his “Study of the Popovshchina” (“Очерки поповщина”). See Mel'nikov, “Ocherki popovshchina,” 218-19.

sinful world. The son reminds his parents of the coming Last Judgment and implores them to value eternal life in heaven above life on earth, entreating them to seek heavenly treasure instead of earthly riches that are subject to decay and destruction. The son concludes the letter by asking his parents to bow to his wife for him.

Though the name Kitezh is never specifically mentioned in the letter, scholars nonetheless consider the “Epistle” an important manifestation of the Kitezh legend. Folklorists working at Lake Svetloyar have found oral accounts expanding the “Epistle”: one day, the son and his mother were walking and the ground opened up before them, revealing a staircase that led into the earth. The son followed the staircase, but the mother, thinking of her husband, hesitated and the ground closed up in front of her. The parents searched the shoreline for their son, until one day the earth opened up again for just long enough for the son to tell the parents that he was still alive and that they should stop searching for him.⁵³ This version of the Kitezh legend, which predates any mention of Kitezh as a hidden city, suggests that originally the legend described not an invisible city, but an invisible monastery. Only later, when permanently fixed to the name “Kitezh,” would the legend become a tale of a hidden city.

The most complete written version of the Kitezh legend is found in the *Kitezh Letopisets*, a text formally called the “Book called the *letopisets* [chronicle], written in 6646 on the fifth day of September” (Книга, глаголемая летописец, написана в год 6646 сентября в 5 день).⁵⁴ The leading scholar of the *Letopisets*, Vasily Komarovich, has shown that the text is a compilation of four separate parts, in which the first and fourth are independent wholes sewn together by the second and third parts. While various parts of the manuscript claim to be written in 1237 and

53 Basilov, 151.

54 The complete text of the Kitezh *Letopisets* has been published in side-by-side Old Slavic and modern Russian translation by N. V. Ponyrko as “Legenda o grade Kitezhe,” in L. A. Dmitrieva and D. S. Likhachev, eds., *Pamiatniki literatury drevnei Rusi. XIII vek*, 210-227.

1251, Komarovich dates the compilation and most of the writing of the *Letopisets* to between 1702 and 1790.⁵⁵ Komarovich and subsequent scholars agree that the compiler-author or authors of the *Letopisets* were *beguny*, probably associated with a monastery in the Trans-Volga region.⁵⁶

The first, “historical” part of the *Letopisets* begins with the genealogy of Prince Georgy Vsevolodovich, who founded Kitezh in 1165 on the shores of Lake Svetloyar by building three churches there. Then in 1239, when Batu attacked Rus’ “for our sins,” Georgy Vsevolodovich met him in battle at Little Kitezh, after which the Prince secretly went to Great Kitezh. When Batu did not find Georgy Vsevolodovich in Little Kitezh, he tortured one of the local residents until he showed him the path to Lake Svetloyar and Great Kitezh. Batu attacked the city and killed Georgy Vsevolodovich on February 4th. The section concludes with the abandonment of both Kitezhes: “And after that destruction these cities were abandoned, both Little Kitezh, which stands on the banks of the Volga, and Great Kitezh, which is on the shore of Lake Svetloyar” (И после того разорения запустели города те, Малый Китеж, что на берегу Волги стоит, и Большой, что на берегу озера Светлояра). This first section has also been found as an independent manuscript called the “Chronicle of the Killing of the Blessed Prince Georgy Vsevolodovich” (Летописец о убиении благоверного князя Георгия Всеволодовича).⁵⁷ Some conservative estimates date this “Chronicle of the Killing” to the 17th century, while other scholars believe it may have textual roots as far back as the thirteenth century.⁵⁸ The compiler of

55 Komarovich, 37.

56 Komarovich, 38-41. See also Basilov, 167, and K. Chistov, “V poiskakh izbavleniia,” *Nauka i religiia* 4 (1968): 58.

57 Komarovich, 29.

58 While allowing that some portion of the text may have originated prior to the 17th century, Komarovich dates the “Chronicle of the Killing” to between 1609 and 1613. He further points out that Georgy Vsevolodovich was not canonized until 1645, and thus the “Chronicle of the Killing” must have been significantly edited after this date. See Komarovich, 61, 87. Ponyrko, Dmitriev, and Likhachev, on the other hand, include the entire *Kitezh Letopisets* in their compendium of Russian literature from the thirteenth century.

the *Letopisets* used this older, independent manuscript as an introduction and grounding for his telling of the Kitez h legend itself.

The middle two parts—significantly shorter than the first and last—somewhat clumsily tie the first part to the last. The second, or “apologetic” part of the text, begins with the statement that Great Kitez h will be invisible until the Second Coming of Christ. According to the text, Kitez h is only one of many hidden monasteries and holy dwellings, to which the saints in ages past testified. The third, or “small historical” part of the text describes the fallout of the Kitez h battle, including Batu's subsequent killing of both Mikhail Chernigovsky and Mercury Smolensky in battle.

The fourth section, subtitled “Story and Admonition about the Hidden City of Kitez h” (Повесть и взыскание о граде сокровенном Китеже), explains how a person living today might find Kitez h. It is dated 6759 (1251) and bears many similarities to the “Epistle.” The text is full of references to the Apocalypse and the “End Times,” and emphasizes the importance of fleeing the world. He who seeks Kitez h must be zealous for his task, must weep, leave behind his family, and swear to die of hunger before departing from his path. If he does these things faithfully, God will help him and show him the way to Kitez h. Should a person begin to have doubts about Kitez h, however, God will close the path to the city, and in place of the city, the unfaithful doubter will see a mirage of “forest or an empty place” (лесом или пустым местом).⁵⁹ He will be doubly punished—both in this life and the next—for his abuse of such a miracle. Like the monastery found in the “Epistle,” Kitez h is invisible because it is hidden by the hand of God: “the Lord covered that city with his palm” (покры господь той град дланию своею). The text further explains that Kitez h became invisible through the prayers of the hidden

⁵⁹ “Legenda o grade Kitezhe,” 224-225.

faithful, who do not suffer on account of the Beast-Antichrist who reigns in Russia. It again mentions the existence of many invisible monasteries and hideaways, and, echoing the final words of the Apocalypse, curses anyone who adds to or changes the text in any way.⁶⁰

These two documents, the “Epistle” and the *Letopisets*, present fixed versions of a fluid legend that continues to develop to this day in oral folklore. They also played important roles in both the development of oral folklore and the trajectory of the Kitezh legend as it entered broader Russian literature. Considering the relationship between folklore and literature, the Russian Formalists Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrev made a number of observations that help explain the dynamics at work in the interaction between literary Kitezh texts and the ongoing folkloric tradition. Literature, they explained, was a creation that came into existence when conceived and written down by the author; folklore, on the other hand, was the creation of a community that existed from the moment it was accepted by that community, regardless of when, or if, it was ever written down. Nonetheless, literature could influence folklore, as the community selected elements of a literary text and incorporated them into their own folklore. Moreover, individual creativity—such as that required to write down the eighteenth-century Kitezh legends—was not necessarily at odds with the collective creativity of the greater community, but rather could be an expression of it.⁶¹ While both eighteenth-century Kitezh texts show the individual creativity of their writer/compiler, in a larger sense, they reveal the collective creativity of the community (*beguny*) that developed the legend.

60 See the last chapter of the Book of Revelation: “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18-19).

61 Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrev, “On the Boundary between Studies of Folklore and Literature,” Herbert Eagle, trans., in L. Matejka and K. Pomorska, eds., *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views* (Cambridge, MA. 1976), 91–93. Originally published as “K problematike razmezhevaniia folkloristiki i literaturovedeniia,” *Lud slowianski* 2 (1934): 229–33.

The dynamics Jakobson and Bogatyrev describe were further at work in the Kitezh legend as the eighteenth-century texts influenced the legend's later development. Nineteenth-century accounts from eyewitnesses of devotional practices at Lake Svetloyar regularly describe scenes of people reading the eighteenth-century texts aloud to a crowd of listeners. At this point, the eighteenth-century texts no longer reflected the ongoing experience of the community, but rather represented a moment in the legend's past, existing more as "literature" than living "folklore." This trend was all the more true in the twentieth century, in which the eighteenth-century texts continued to be influential. Collecting oral versions of the legend in 1925 at Lake Svetloyar, Komarovich noted that literate people were more likely to tell a version of the legend as found in the *Letopisets*, whereas illiterate people would tell a different version.⁶² Folklorists identified specific details found only in oral legends: the name of the traitor, Grishka Kuter'ma, who showed Batu the path to Great Kitezh; Kitezh as underground or underwater (as opposed to invisible).⁶³ Details such as these helped folklorists understand the interaction between the eighteenth-century texts and the continuing oral life of the legend. One of the most interesting discoveries made by Nina Savushkina, one of the leading twentieth-century scholars on the Kitezh legend, was an increasing standardization in the narrative of the "historical" part of the Kitezh legend over time that showed the influence of the *Kitezh Letopisets*. On the basis of multiple expeditions and hundreds of collected stories, Savushkina concluded that the *Letopisets* had been a vital part of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century development of oral legend on Kitezh.⁶⁴

62 Komarovich, 22.

63 V. P. Shestakov and K. V. Shokhin, "Skazanie o nevidimom grade Kitezhe," *Vestnik istorii mirovoi kul'tury* 5 (1960): 81; Savushkina, "Legenda o grade Kitezhe v starykh i novykh zapisiakh," 65

64 Savushkina, "Legenda o grade Kitezhe v starykh i novykh zapisiakh," 69-70, 74.

At the same time, the legend developed new emphases by the mid- to late-twentieth century that were completely alien to the eighteenth-century texts but reflected the experience of the community that kept the legend alive. Savushkina noted, for example, that after the 1968 *Literaturnaia gazeta* expedition, stories about how Kitezh had repelled the scuba divers began to appear in oral folklore at the lake.⁶⁵ As a whole, twentieth-century folklorists noted a decline in stories about Kitezh as hidden city and an increase in stories about Svetloyar as miraculous lake. Local residents would recall their grandparents telling stories about Kitezh, but were themselves more familiar with the wondrous qualities of the lake: it was connected through a hidden channel to Lake Baikal; marvelous, unknown-to-science fish lived in it; its waters and the grasses around it had healing properties. Folklorists also reported a decline in the religiosity of the stories, perhaps in part as a result of anti-religion brigades that worked in the area and the general atheist ethos of the Soviet Union. In the mid-twentieth century, it was no longer only the devout who saw or heard Kitezh, but rather those who chanced to be in the right place at the right time. The religious or utopian coloring of Kitezh stories gave way to patriotic themes.⁶⁶ Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, folklorists have noted a rise in religious pilgrimages to the lake, which draws not only the Orthodox and Old Believers, but also new age groups, neopagans, and Hare Krishnas. Though the Orthodox Church does not consider Lake Svetloyar a sacred site, a chapel nearby nonetheless incorporates the lake into its church calendar, leading processions around the lake on religious festival days.⁶⁷

These twentieth-century developments in the Kitezh legend in oral folklore from

65 Savushkina, "Kompleksnaia ekspeditsia na Svetloiare," *Russkii fol'klor* 12 (1971): 270-71.

66 Savushkina, "Legenda o grade Kitezhe v starykh i novykh zapisiakh," 74-76; Basilov, 164-67; For an excellent demonstration of contemporary oral folklore from Svetloyar, see Kulagina and Kovpik, 218-248.

67 A. V. Kulagina, "Neskazochnaia proza ob ozere Svetloiar: k voprosu o dinamike fol'klornoj traditsii," *Aktual'nye problemy polevoi fol'kloristiki*. Vol. 3 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo moskogskogo universiteta, 2004), 69.

Svetloyar went virtually unnoticed by anyone outside the sphere of folklore studies. The Kitezh legend that entered mainstream Russian literature was a combination of the eighteenth-century texts and nineteenth-century observations. In accordance with folklorists' assertion that legends develop in pace with the community that maintains them, the Kitezh legend underwent a bifurcation at the time it was picked up by the Russian intelligentsia in the mid-nineteenth century. On one side, the local community near Lake Svetloyar continued to bring innovations—from giant fish to scuba divers—to the legend. On the other side, the intelligentsia, far removed from the lake itself, appropriated the legend for itself in ever-changing ways.

Once adopted by the intelligentsia, the Kitezh legend ceased to be a legend in the technical sense of the word. Under Jakobson and Bogatyrev's definitions of “literature” and “folklore,” the novels and poems that employed Kitezh were clearly the artistic creations of individuals, not communities: they were literature, not folklore. When authors incorporated Kitezh into their works, they did not tell their stories as “true” only to have them met with suspicion (a defining principle of legends as a genre). Rather, the generic conventions in which the authors wrote largely dictated the reception of the legend and how it was used, be that as cautionary tale or metaphor. Nonetheless, the Kitezh legend continued to develop together with the community that held it. Each group of writers that appropriated Kitezh changed the emphases and interpretation of the legend while maintaining its identifying features, thereby expanding Kitezh's semiotic field with each new literary creation.

This dissertation tells the story of the life of the Kitezh legend in the intelligentsia's hands. The next three chapters each focus on three seminal stages in the legend's development, together with the authors who were most important for this development: 1) the introduction of the legend to broader Russian culture in the mid-nineteenth century (Pavel Melnikov / Andrei

Pechersky), 2) the first major transformation of the legend, by the Symbolists (Zinaida Gippius and Dmitry Merezhkovsky) at the turn of the twentieth century, and 3) the post-Revolutionary adaptation of the legend to identify the experience of exile (émigré writers and Anna Akhmatova). The conclusion surveys post-Soviet uses of the Kitezh legend to review the legend's journey over the course of 150 years. We see Kitezh transform from a dangerous obsession of religious fanatics in the mid-1800s, to a metaphor for the future renewal of Russia at the turn of the century, to a symbol of a lost home in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. At each stage, Kitezh acts as a philosophical touchstone for the authors who employ it, revealing their key beliefs as they recast a previous iteration of the legend for their own artistic and philosophical purposes.

Chapter 2

Russia Meets Kitezh:

Nineteenth-century Adaptations of the Kitezh Legend

The virgin forests of the Kerzhenets, the Kerzhenets heroes and the Kerzhenets cloisters—all of these, thanks to the literary sketches of P. I. Melnikov are already known to every literate Russian.¹

- V. I. Nemirovich-Danchenko, *Along the Volga*

In 1843, readers of Pogodin's conservative periodical *The Muscovite* (Москвитянин) were treated to, among other things, several poems by a young Afanasy Fet, book reviews by Stepan Shevyrev, and a curious ethnographic article about people who believed a city had miraculously disappeared underground when Tatars attacked Rus in the thirteenth century.² The article, entitled “Kitizh [sic] on Lake Svetloyar,” was the first mention of the Kitezh legend in the Russian press. In the next half century it would be followed by several ethnographic reports, travelogues, fictional works, and poems that all told essentially the same story, bringing the Kitezh legend to the broader Russian public not as an isolated story, but as one intimately connected to the people who believed in it, Old Believers.

1 Vasilii Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko, *Po Volge (Ocherki i vpechatleniia letnei poezdki)* (St. Petersburg: Izdanie knigoprodavtsa I. L. Tuzova, 1877), 58.

2 Meledin, “Kitizh na svetloiarom ozere,” *Moskvitianin* 12, no. 6 (1843): 507-511.

The presentation of the Kitezh legend in these publications was very different from its presentation among Old Believers. In Old Believer circles, the Kitezh *Letopitsets* and similar written and oral texts were treated as devotional works that conveyed the history of actual events—Batu's invasion and the subsequent disappearance of Kitezh. In the nineteenth-century press, this devotional text became an ethnographic one, presumed not to depict historical events, but rather the desires and culture of an exotic and superstitious people.

The Kitezh legend came to Russian culture in the nineteenth century as a result of two intersecting trends: an interest in folklore that fostered the publication of rural folk songs, rituals, and legends, and a change in policy towards Old Believers and other “schismatics” that brought them out of secrecy. At the nexus of these trends was Pavel Melnikov, an unhappy history teacher who became the nation's foremost scholar of the schism and, under the pseudonym Andrei Pechersky, a popular writer.

The spread of the Kitezh legend in the nineteenth century is paradoxical: on one hand, the very fact of any publication about Old Believers and their culture marked a dramatic change from the dark secrecy and repression that had surrounded religious dissenters earlier in the century. On the other hand, Melnikov and other authors who began changing public opinion about Old Believers could not regard the Kitezh legend with the same esteem they had for ordinary Old Believer life. Melnikov and other writers spent time in the Kerzhenets region, and after observing the practices of religious devotion relating to Kitezh at Lake Svetloyar, these writers were troubled by what they saw as dangerous superstition and world-denying fanaticism. Accordingly, they made the Kitezh legend emblematic of the darker sides of Old Belief. Their works, in particular those by Melnikov-Pechersky, established the contours of the legend for the Russian reading public as an obsession of fanatics with a poor grip on reality and an escapist

desire to renounce the world. It was this interpretation of the legend that would stand until a new generation of writers reappropriated the legend at the turn of the twentieth century.

The Kitezh legend might never have captured the attention of the Russian public had it not been for a wave of interest in folklore that swept over Russia in the nineteenth century. All across Europe, romantic interest in folklore fueled a search for finding “native” national culture among the folk. This was the era of the first publications of *Grimms' Fairy Tales* (1812) and the *Kalevala* (1835), a time when folk culture was understood to be somehow integral to national identity. Vasily Zhukovsky, an avid translator, brought the traditions of German Romanticism to Russia, including a focus on folklore and its importance for national literature. The writers who laid the foundations of Russian literature in the nineteenth century readily appealed to folklore when composing their works: Pushkin's *Ruslan and Liudmila*, Gogol's *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*, and Lermontov's *Song of the Merchant Kalashnikov* all represent early attempts to infuse Russian literature with folk motifs. In the 1830s, all-important discussions of “nationality” (народность) included folklore, and the accompanying push to collect folklore culminated in the publication of folklore anthologies by Afanasiev, Kireevsky, and Dal. All of the major journals across the political spectrum, from the conservative *Muscovite* to the liberal *Contemporary* and *Fatherland Notes* devoted space to publishing folklore.³ In these publications, the ethnographic sketch (этнографический очерк) became a common genre for discussing traditional Russian holidays, rituals, and beliefs, as well as the texts (songs, etc.) associated with them. In these

3 Linda Ivanits, “Folklore in the Debates of the Westernizers and Slavophiles,” *Folklorica* 16 (2011): 88.

sketches, the Russian peasant was idealized as the “bearer of true Russian foundations and ancient customs,” and folkloric material was interpreted in a similar vein.⁴

This drive to collect and publish folklore had a direct bearing on the Kitezh legend. When the Kitezh legend first began appearing in the Russian press, it was in the form of folklore or ethnography that had been collected in the Nizhny Novgorod region near Lake Svetloyar. Of the dozen or so publications containing the Kitezh legends between 1840 and 1890, roughly half are ethnographic or folklore studies.⁵ Several other publications of the Kitezh legends occur in genres that readily blended in folklore or ethnography, such as histories, travelogues, and ethnographic novels and short stories.⁶ In many ways, these ethnographically oriented studies of the Kitezh legends are typical of other ethnographic sketches that appeared throughout the Russian press, presenting information about the folk traditions of a rural culture and offering a “text”—the Kitezh legend (in manuscript or transcribed oral form)—as a feature piece of “authentic” folklore. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Kitezh legend was presented as an embedded text, a tale inserted into an ethnographic article, fictional work, or travelogue. By the twentieth century, the Kitezh legend was known well enough that a writer could reference the entire legend with the word “Kitezh” or even “invisible city.” But until the very end of the nineteenth century, writers needed to tell the legend in any work in which it was mentioned. In some cases, this embedded text was literally a reproduction of the eighteenth-century Old

4 R. V. Iezuitova, “Literatura vtoroi poloviny 1820-x – 1830-x godov i fol'klor,” in *Russkaia literatura i fol'klor (pervaia polovina XIX v.)*, Akademiia nauk SSSR. Institut russkoi literatury (Pushkinskii dom) (Leningrad, 1976), 87-91.

5 These include an ethnographic sketch (in *Moskvitianin*, 1843), two book-length ethnographic studies (*Zapovlozhskaia chast' Makarovskogo uezda nizhegorodskoi gubernii*, 1857; *Nizhegorodskii letopisets*, 1886), two folklore articles (in *Pesni, sobrannye Kireevskim*, 1862; and *Istoricheskii vestnik*, 1880).

6 These include a history book (in *Russkii vestnik*, 1862-1867), a short story (in *Sovremennik*, 1860), an ethnographic novel (in *Russkii vestnik*, 1871-1874), and two travelogues (*Po Volge*, 1877; in *Russkie vedomosti*, 1890).

Believer manuscripts; in others, a summary of the manuscripts or of an oral version or versions of the legend served as the embedded text.⁷

In all of these instances, the literary frame surrounding the embedded legend was as important to the overall story (be it article or novel) as the legend itself, for it was this frame that differentiated nineteenth-century printings of the legend from Old Believer tellings of the legend. When the Kitezh legend began to appear in the Russian press, it became what Gary Saul Morson calls a “boundary work,” in which “it is uncertain which of two mutually exclusive sets of conventions governs a work.” Because of this uncertainty, the work can be interpreted in opposing ways according to which hermeneutic procedures are used to “decode” it.⁸ Old Believers reading the Kitezh *Letopisets* at Lake Svetoyar assumed one set of conventions and therefore used corresponding hermeneutic procedures to “decode” the legend as a devotional text that conveyed historical and spiritual truth; readers from the broader Russian population who encountered the legend in a journal assumed a different set of conventions and, accordingly, interpreted the legend as a piece of folklore that belonged to superstitious people. The actual text of the legend was no different in these two forms: the difference was in the presentation of the legend in each context, for this presentation dictated the conventions each reader or listener would use to decode the legend.

John Frow's analysis of the relationship between a literary frame and its interior text offers a fruitful view into the dynamics at work in this process. Frow describes the literary frame not merely as a fence enclosing a text, but rather as an entity that “mediates” between the

7 The Kitezh *Letopisets* was first published in 1862 in an appendix to *Pesni, sobrannye Kireevskim*. The “Epistle to a father from a son in a hidden monastery” was published the same year by Melnikov in his *Ocherki popovshchiny*, a series of articles that appeared in *Russkii vestnik*. Both will be discussed below.

8 Gary Saul Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's Diary of a Writer and the Traditions of Literary Utopia*, University of Texas Press Slavic Series, No. 4 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981): 48-49.

aesthetic object and the space around it, simultaneously operating in two directions. On the one hand, the frame exerts a structural influence inward on the embedded text, for example, by delineating its edges; on the other hand, the frame exerts influence outward by establishing the genre conventions of the embedded text and setting parameters for its interpretation. Frow understands a frame broadly, encompassing the covers of a book, its title pages, dedications, and publishing house, all of which delimit an artistic text and establish expectations for the reader. Interior frames also often exist within a larger literary work, introducing a “play within a play,” or, in the case of nineteenth-century Russian fiction, the Kitezh legend embedded within a fictional tale.⁹

The frame in which nineteenth-century authors presented the Kitezh legend established expectations for how to classify and understand the legend. While in Old Believer circles, the Kitezh *Letopisets* had been “framed” as a piece of devotional literature relating historical fact, the nineteenth-century framing of the legend identified it as an ahistorical Old Believer legend. Moreover, these frames went beyond merely establishing genre expectations to actually loading the Kitezh legend with associations and judgments that would affect the reader's interpretation of the legend. Despite the fact that they appear in literary genres that cross the spectrum of non-fiction and fiction from ethnographic sketch to poem to novel, the frames constructed around the Kitezh legend are remarkably consistent in the way they mediate the legend for the reader. As a whole, they created a picture that warned the nineteenth-century reader that the Kitezh legend was a seductive fiction that lured fanatical schismatics to bad ends.

The framing of the 1843 account of Kitezh devotional practices in Pogodin's *Muscovite* is prototypical for retellings of the legend in the nineteenth-century Russian press. The tone of the

9 John Frow, “The Literary Frame,” in *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames*, edited by Brian Richardson (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 336-337.

article is different from many ethnographic sketches of the nineteenth century. Though the author, identified only as “Semyonov citizen Meledin,”¹⁰ finds the legend itself somewhat charming, he does not idealize the practitioners of Kitezhd devotion at Lake Svetloyar the way many ethnographers do their rural subjects. Rather, he is dubious of what he believes are superstitions whose ignorant adherents are easy victims for charlatans. Meledin's account is typical of the presentation of the Kitezhd legend in nineteenth-century sources, many of which share four basic features: 1) an extended description of the legend; 2) explicit association of the legend with “schismatics” or Old Believers; 3) focus on the devotional practices the legend inspires; and 4) the implication that ignorance, and often ignorant fanaticism and corruption accompany the legend. This fourth point may appear in discussion of the legend as a non-historical story describing imaginary events and/or through discussion of moral problems that arise in conjunction with devotion to the legend.

Meledin opens his account with a description of the unremarkable physical appearance of Lake Svetloyar and then compares the legend he is about to tell with tales about the buried treasures of Nightingale the Robber, Stenka Razin, and the Polish *Pany*. This list of villains, which varies from the historical Stenka Razin to the imaginary Nightingale the Robber, offers a broad space for situating Kitezhd. Meledin's subsequent comment, that the local population is

10 Stepan Prokhorovich Meledin (1786-1865) was a notable book collector and trader involved in the establishment of the first public library in Nizhny Novgorod. The surname Meledin in the Semyonov region was commonly associated with Old Believer circles, making it likely that Meledin himself was an Old Believer. The purposeful distance Meledin creates between himself and Old Believers who practice Kitezhd devotion may be an attempt to pass his work through the censors or to protect himself from criminal charges. After the publication of his article, when Meledin began more serious research on the Kitezhd legend, he was denounced by a local priest. A court summoned Meledin for questioning and released him after finding him innocent of following and promoting the Kitezhd cult; during the questioning, Meledin used his *Muscovite* article to prove that he was no friend—just an observer—of the Kitezhd cult. Iu. G. Galai, “Avtor pervoi publikatsii o grade Kitezhe na Svetloiaraskoom ozere S. P. Meledin,” in *Grad Kitezhd, ozero Svetloiar v russkoi kul'ture. Slovo nizhegorodskikh issledovatelei: Materialy literaturno-istoricheskikh chtenii* (Nizhnii Novgorod: Gosudarstvennyi ordena Pocheta muzei A. M. Gor'kogo, 1995), 38-44.

“religious” (набожный) and therefore more interested in treasure that does not decay, draws a distinction between people who believe in this legend and those who believe in the popular Russian legends listed above.

Following this introduction, the article devotes about a page to the story of the construction and disappearance of Kitezh, essentially summarizing the story found in the Kitezh *Letopisets*. Another page is devoted to oral stories about Kitezh, such as the righteous hearing the pealing of bells from Kitezh, or a shepherd who accidentally stumbled into Kitezh. The final two pages of the article are dedicated to devotional practices relating to Kitezh, including pilgrimages and gatherings at the lake. Throughout the article, Meledin distances himself from those who believe in Kitezh, casting doubt on the veracity of their belief and repeating phrases such as “they say” and “supposedly.” He makes it clear that the “they” are Old Believers, and that when Orthodox Christians come to the lake, it is only for the sake of curiosity: “earlier it was only Old Believers who went there; but today many Orthodox gather there too, in all likelihood out of curiosity” (прежде приходили туда одни старообрядцы; но ныне много собирается и православных, вероятно по любопытству).¹¹ Meledin's assertion of the different motives of the Old Believers and the Orthodox underscores his purposeful separation of the two and suspicion of the former. Meledin concludes his article with the hope that acquaintance with the Old Believers' way of life in the Semyonov region “may present much material for history, characterization, and humor” (может доставить много материалов для истории, характеристики и юмористики). This final relegation of the Old Believers' beliefs and devotional practices to the realms of history and humor further separates Meledin from the Old Believers and their living belief in the Kitezh legend.

¹¹ Meledin, 510.

Meledin regards the Old Believers and their practices dubiously, offering several examples of the potential for harm involved in belief in Kitezh. He warns that the legend propagates fanatical devotion, since it promises that people will receive rewards in measure with the zeal with which they forsake the world; Meledin recounts that some people actually die of starvation and exposure trying to enter Kitezh by standing motionlessly on the shores of the lake. He is particularly critical of hermits (пустынники) who dig holes and live for an extended period at the lake, surviving off the pilgrims who visit and bring the hermits food and supplies. The hermits serve as teachers for the pilgrims, telling them stories about Kitezh and giving the pilgrims instructions for how to increase their chances of glimpsing Kitezh or hearing the Kitezh bells. Meledin labels the hermits' stories “superstitious tales” (суетверные рассказы) and hints that the hermits are mere charlatans living off the gullibility of the ignorant and superstitious pilgrims. According to Meledin, the hermits tell their miraculous stories as calculated oral performances: “these hermits with grandiloquent verbosity lay out entire novellas of the miraculous as eyewitnesses” (эти пустынники с велеречивым многоглаголением складывают целые повести чудесного, как самовидцы). When the hermits instruct people to lay their ears to the ground, according to Meledin, “they assure [their listeners] that he who has more zeal for this holy place (and who also brings more supplies for them) will hear more of the miraculous” (уверяют между тем, что тот больше услышит чудесного, кто больше имеет усердия к этой святыне, [и кто также больше приносит им запасов]).¹² Meledin's cynical description of the hermits suggests the legend offers the opportunity for con men to prey upon the naïve faith of ignorant schismatics, a motif that is prominent in Kitezh texts of the nineteenth century.¹³

12 Meledin 511.

13 Notably, when Meledin's account was reprinted in Kireevsky's collection of songs in 1862, when greater

This first publication of the Kitezh legend shares many features with publications of the legend that would occur later in the century in multiple genres. Although the depiction of the legend and its adherents became more positive with time, many of the writers who feature the Kitezh legend are hesitant to embrace it the way they do other folkloric matters. For those authors like Meledin who are explicitly critical of devotion to Kitezh, the major problem from their perspective is that belief in an illusion leads people to do destructive things, or allows unscrupulous people to take advantage of the naïve faith of others. Writing in 1857, N. S. Tolstoy draws attention to the fact that the “superstitious folk” who believe in the legend spend large sums of money on copies of the Kitezh *Letopisets*; he also complains that devotion to the Kitezh legend is a major cause of illness, because many who believe in the healing properties of the lake get sick after spending cold autumn nights on its shores.¹⁴ The “Grisha” plotlines of Melnikov's short story of the same name and Apollon Maikov's narrative poem “The Pilgrim” feature impressionable young men who commit robbery in hopes of reaching Kitezh. In his 1890 travelogue *In Deserted Places*, Vladimir Korolenko recounts the story of an alleged murder by drowning in Lake Svetloyar that local residents believed was a saint being taken into Kitezh.¹⁵

Even those publications that do not discuss or are uncritical of devotional practices depict the legend as one associated with ignorant Old Believers. The first complete publication of the Kitezh *Letopisets*, in an 1862 appendix to *Songs collected by Kireevsky*, frames the manuscript in part with the story of a devout stationmaster who suddenly tries to prove the historicity of the

openness was already beginning to change the reputations of Old Believers, the editors of the collection omitted all of Meledin's words that painted the legend's adherents in such a negative light, leaving what the editors considered a more objective explanation of the legend and devotional practices surrounding it.

14 N. S. Tolstoy, *Zavolzhskaiia chast' makar'evskogo uezda nizhegorodskoi gubernii* (Moscow: Universitetskaia tipografii, 1857), 156-157.

15 V. G. Korolenko, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii. T. 5.* (St. Petersburg: Marks, 1914), 248-251.

Kitezkh legend by saying that it wouldn't have been recorded in books had it not been true. But the story closes with a scholarly analysis of the *Letopisets*—the “book” the stationmaster cites as authoritative—and the claim that the *Letopisets* “obviously” contains “not history, but folk legend; its late origin is revealed...through the Old Believer additions on the end about the antichrist.”¹⁶ Some works point out contradictions between the Kitezkh *Letopisets* and medieval chronicles.¹⁷ One such work says that the compilers of the *Letopisets* were “obviously poorly acquainted with historical facts,” and implies that these authors claimed to be bearing witness to the “teaching of the holy fathers” to make up for the fact that they were inventing a story and calling it history.¹⁸ Such descriptions frame the legend as a fiction that could only be believed by ignorant people.

As a whole, when the legend was contained in ethnographic reports from the Nizhny Novgorod region, the very nature of the genre expectations of the ethnographic report depicted Kitezkh as something exotic. Further details within the frame delineated Kitezkh as a legend, that is, a piece of folklore, belonging to a distinct community—“schismatics” or “Old Believers.” Therefore the dominant assumptions about this community would automatically be brought to bear on the content of the legend. Framing the Kitezkh legend in this way, as a legend that only ignorant, perhaps fanatical, Old Believers would accept as historical fact, probably has two points of origin. The first, already mentioned, is the unease outside observers felt upon seeing devotion that led to undesirable, perhaps even dangerous, outcomes. The second, to be discussed

16 “Prilozhenie k 4-mu vypusku pesen, sobrannykh Kireevskim,” *Pesni, sobrannye Kireevskim, izdanye Obshchevom liubitelei rossiiskoi slovesnosti. Vypusk 4* (Moscow: Tipografiia A. Semena, 1862), 122, 132 (CXXII, CXXXII).

17 According to the *Letopisets*, Prince Georgii Vsevolodovich was killed in battle with Batu at Kitezkh on February 4, 1243. According to medieval chronicles, he died on March 4, 1238, in the Battle of the River Sit.

18 A. S. Gatsiskii, *Nizhegorodskii letopisets* (Nizhny Novgorod: Tipografiia gubernskogo pravleniia, 1886), 9. Melnikov's *In the Forests*, to be discussed below, points out the same inaccuracy.

below, is the inherent prejudice Russian culture leveled against Old Believers and other “schismatics” until the turn of the twentieth century.

The burgeoning interest in Russian folklore cannot by itself explain the appearance and spread of the the Kitezh legend. The second major factor in the discovery of the Kitezh legend in the nineteenth century was the changing relationship of the Russian public towards religious dissenters. These religious dissenters, who had been a dark secret of Russian culture for much of the nineteenth century, became widely known and better understood as a result of changing government policy. At the same time, a loosening of censorship restrictions under Alexander II allowed several authors who were familiar with religious dissenter communities to write about religious dissenters in ways that were more nuanced and true to life than earlier stereotypical depictions.

Since the time of the schism, official policy towards Old Believers and other sectarians had been more or less consistently hostile.¹⁹ No differentiation was made between Old Believers and non-Old Believer sects, much less between different concords (согласия) of Old Believers, such that all religious dissenters were lumped together into the same category under the title “schismatics” (раскольники).²⁰ Laws regarding religious dissent in the first half of the nineteenth century included a general mandate forbidding any actions against the Orthodox Church, including converting out of the Orthodox Church; they also prohibited the construction

19 The major exception to this trend occurred during and following the reigns of Peter III and Catherine the Great, who granted—at least on paper—religious freedom to many religious minorities in the Russian Empire, allowed religious dissenters who had fled Russia to return unharmed, and reduced the persecution of religious dissenters. The second half of Alexander I's reign and all of Nicholas I's reign were marked by a return to official repression of religious dissenters. See O. P. Ershova, *Staroobriadchestvo i vlast'* (Moscow: Unikum-Tsentr, 1999), 134-136; Irina Paert, *Old Believers, Religious Dissent and Gender in Russia, 1760-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 184.

20 The category “schismatic” was briefly removed from Russian government discussions during the reign of Catherine, but subsequently reappeared in the early nineteenth century. For information on the origins and worldview of Old Believers, see the discussion in the previous chapter.

or repair of Old Believer churches and forbade Old Believer priests from traveling (and thereby spreading their faith). Local police were required to maintain records of all “schismatics” in their districts.²¹ When Nicholas I came to power in 1825, he instituted even harsher repressions of religious dissenters.

Government policy reflected the belief that religious dissent represented a danger to the stability of the State and should therefore be eradicated. The schism and schismatic teaching were referred to as a “disease” (болезнь) or “canker” (язва) that had “infected” (заразила) Russia, and from which she therefore needed to be healed.²² When differentiation between various sects and concords was eventually recognized in the mid-nineteenth century, it was according to how “harmful” to society they were: “very harmful” (вреднейшие), “harmful” (вредные), and “less harmful” (менее вредные).²³ However, very little was actually known about the religious dissenters themselves, especially in broader Russian society.

Religious dissenters are notably absent from Russian literature until the second half of the nineteenth century, and when they do appear in the first half of the century, they are villains whose religious practice remains obscure.²⁴ For example, in his writings about the Pugachev

21 Ershova, 121-122, 133.

22 This metaphor was popular throughout the nineteenth century and is still employed by some Orthodox Church officials today. For a discussion of its use in late nineteenth-century Russia, see Daniel Beer, “The Medicalization of Religious Deviance in the Russian Orthodox Church (1880-1905),” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 3 (2004): 451-482.

23 Paert, 191-192. See also Alexander Etkind's fascinating discussion of Ivan Liprandi's work in the Ministry of Internal Affairs on the “Committee for Schismatics, Castrates, and Other Especially Dangerous Sects” in Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 155-58.

24 In her study of the depiction of Old Believers in Russian literature, Viktoria Pleyer notes that Old Believers appear in one of Kantemir's satires, and that in early (i.e. eighteenth-century) Russian literature “a fleeting reference [to Old Believers] may be found here and there,” but that these references are “not noteworthy or coherent with each other.” Pleyer also dates the main entrance of Old Believers into Russian literature to the second half of the nineteenth century. Viktoria Pleyer, *Das russische Altgläubigentum: Geschichte, Darstellung in der Literatur* (Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1961), 75. In Kantemir's fourth satire, “On the Danger of Satirical Works,” a critic, probably an Old Believer, reads the entire 1581 edition of the Bible to compose arguments

rebellion, Alexander Pushkin repeatedly names its leader Emelian Pugachev a “schismatic” (раскольник), but produces few details as to the religious or cultural practices of the schismatic communities. Reporting that Pugachev “crossed himself according to the schismatic practice” is enough to establish Pugachev as a member of a religious community outside of Orthodoxy.²⁵ But Pushkin does not attempt to define which group of “schismatics” Pugachev belonged to, and what such an identity implied. Like his contemporaries, Pushkin is apparently unaware of the significant differences—social, political, and theological—that existed between different types of religious dissenters.

Even Alexander Radishchev, who wrote his *Journey from Petersburg to Moscow* during a time when religious dissenters were (officially) no longer persecuted, understands little of “schismatics”: he complains of their ignorance and condemns the Russian government for forbidding schismatic practice, since he believes forbidding a practice makes it more tempting. In other words, Radishchev would agree with the characterization of the schism as a “disease,” but not with the method used to “cure” it. Like Pushkin, Radishchev understands religious dissenters only through stereotypical external signs of religious practice, such as claiming Saturday or Wednesday as the sabbath (and therefore working on Sunday) or crossing oneself with two fingers. Presuming religious dissent is limited to meaningless external expressions, Radishchev polemicizes against the kind of ignorance by which people “get lost...in three fingers.”²⁶ Ironically, Radishchev was rather ignorant of the very people he considered ignorant,

against Kantemir and his muse. Kantemir's 9th satire, “On the Condition of the World,” is largely devoted to superstitious people such as Old Believers, whom he depicts as ignorant and hypocritical.

25 Alexander Pushkin, “A History of Pugachev,” in *Alexander Pushkin: Complete Prose Fiction*, translated by Paul Debreczeny, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 398. Debreczeny suggests that Pugachev was actually not a schismatic, but rather that he used a fake passport to pretend to be an Old Believer from Poland. See p. 534n13.

26 A. N. Radishchev, *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo Khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1961), 8, 106.

a condition typical of broader Russian society at the time. It would take over a century for people to reconsider the long-held assumptions that the schism was essentially either a religious debate over ritual or social protest over Westernization. Only recently have scholars begun uncovering the varied and sometimes sophisticated theology and spirituality of different groups of dissenters.²⁷

Under Nicholas I, the agency responsible for managing the schism was a secret committee within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and even the people in this committee had virtually no contact with religious dissenters and knew very little about their way of life or day-to-day activities.²⁸ The only information available about religious dissenters was statistical data on their numbers in various regions, and even these data were questionable because they did not make a clear distinction between those who practiced their beliefs openly and those who had something of a double life, practicing Orthodoxy openly and Old Belief in secret. What was clear by the mid-nineteenth century, however, was that all of the government's attempts to suppress Old Belief had utterly failed—perhaps even backfired—as the schism continued to spread throughout the empire.²⁹ In the last years of Nicholas's reign, the government adopted a new policy of actually sending government officials to areas “infected” (зараженные) with the

27 Paert, 4-6, 231. See also Paert, 21-58; G. B. Michels, *At War with the Church: Religious Dissent in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); and Boris A. Uspensky, “The schism and cultural conflict in the seventeenth century,” in S. K. Batalden (ed.), *Seeking God: The Recovery of Religious Identity in Orthodox Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia* (De Kalb IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993), 106-33.

28 An illuminating survey of the work and people of the Ministry may be found in Etkind, *Internal Colonization*, 150-69.

29 In the Nizhny Novgorod region, for example, Old Believers constituted a majority in the northern forested part of the province and in areas of the southeast. Despite government shutdowns of monasteries that decreased the total number of monasteries in the Semyonov district from 54 (population 2000) in 1900 to just 8 (population 200) half a century later, a mid-nineteenth century census estimated that 15 percent of the of the entire province were Old Believers. Catherine Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province: Economy, Society, and Civilization in Nineteenth-Century Nizhnii Novgorod* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 184, 201-204.

schism. This change in policy would prove particularly important for Pavel Melnikov, who was among the first government officials in charge of policy on religious dissenters to spend time in schismatic communities.

Over the span of the second half of the nineteenth century the veil of secrecy surrounding Old Believers fell as ethnographers and government officials began spending time among Old Believers, learning their ways of life, beliefs, and legends, and publishing their findings in public. Alexander II's reforms, which included loosening censorship on previously restricted topics, allowed debate on religious dissenters and thorough depictions of their communities comparatively free from the ideological constraints of Government-Church policy. People like Pavel Melnikov began publishing articles about the schism based on their face-to-face evaluations of religious dissenters. While Melnikov brought a great deal of insight and new information to discussions of Old Believers, initially he continued to see Old Belief more or less in the traditional way, as a religiously motivated phenomenon. Meanwhile, a new interpretation of Old Believers, led by A. P. Shchapov, imagined religious dissent not as a religious issue, but as a political one.³⁰ This interpretation, most common among populists, envisioned Old Believers rebelling against Peter the Great's cultural reforms and the imperial government in general, not against minor points of church doctrine. Still others, most notably Nikolai Leskov, held that the truth was to be found somewhere in between the views of Melnikov and Shchapov:

I suggest, I'm actually certain, that a time will soon come when it will be possible to prove to Mr. Melnikov and to Mr. Shchapov, that each of them is *partly* right..., that between their two extreme opinions there is a another middle opinion that is, perhaps, the closest to...the truth.

Я полагаю, я даже уверен, что придет, и скоро придет время, когда можно будет доказать и г. Мельникову, и г. Щапову, что каждый из них *частию* прав,... что между двумя их крайними мнениями есть еще одно среднее, может быть, самое

30 Etkind, *Internal Colonization*, 198-213.

близкое к...истине.³¹

These active debates on policy towards Old Believers in the Russian press foreshadowed the emergence of fiction about Old Believers and schismatics a few years later. Pavel Melnikov, writing under the pseudonym Andrei Pechersky, was the first writer to publish stories and novels that took place in Old Believer communities, in which most of the characters were Old Believers, and which offered a nuanced view into the diverse life of these religious and social communities. He was soon followed by Nikolai Leskov, Dmitry Mamin (Sibiryak), and Vladimir Korolenko, all of whom considered Old Believer or schismatic communities a worthy topic not only of discussion, but of literary art.

Pavel Melnikov / Andrei Pechersky

The simultaneous trends of ethnographic interest highlighting Russian folk culture and changing government policy towards religious dissenters achieved a nexus in the person of Pavel Melnikov, the individual most responsible for educating the Russian public about religious dissenters and also bringing the Kitez legend to popular attention. Born in Nizhny Novgorod in 1818, Melnikov became acquainted with religious dissenters through book collectors in the region and trips along the Volga. He also inherited an estate called Kazantsevo, in the Semyonov region, which was populated entirely by Old Believers. These Old Believers left a positive impression on Melnikov with their quiet, diligent way of life, and avoidance of alcoholism. One of the Old Believers on the estate, the well-respected village elder Ivan Petrov, was a long-term friend of Melnikov, who recounted he “would spend entire evenings with him, talking about the

31 Nikolai Leskov, “S liud'mi drevlego blagochestiia (Pervoe pis'mo k redaktoru “Biblioteki dlia Ch<teniiia>”. In *Polnoe sobraniiie sochinenii. T. 3. Sochineniia 1862-1864* (Moscow: Terra-Terra, 1996), 484.

schism.”³²

At the same time, Melnikov was encouraged to pursue his curiosity about regional history and culture by friends who were interested in Russian ethnography, including Pogodin, Dal, Kraevsky, and Minister of Education Sergey Uvarov. In 1847, the governor of the Nizhny Novgorod *gubernia* assigned Melnikov a task investigating “special” (i.e. schism-related) matters. Melnikov noted that it was here that he first “began studying the *narod* face to face, having studied them hitherto in an office with books and papers.”³³ Within three years he was transferred to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, where he continued his work on the schism “face to face” for the next sixteen years. Much of this work involved simply gathering information about the schism, but Melnikov was also involved in trying to suppress the schism. During his years in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, he converted two monasteries to *edinoverie*, closed other monasteries, and seized the beloved icon of the Mother of God of Kazan, which was believed to protect Old Believers as long as it remained in place.³⁴

Over time his views on the schism changed, however. Early in his career, he assumed the opinions of many who came before him who had little to no direct encounters with religious dissenters: he believed Old Believers and other schismatics were dangerous, potentially treacherous, and should be prevented from spreading their faith and developing their communities. His 1854 “Report on the Contemporary State of the Schism” argued that the schism “made use of the shortcomings” (воспользовался недостатками) of the Russian people, making these shortcomings matters of conviction and dogma.³⁵ Melnikov's 1857 “Note on the

32 Usov, 87-88.

33 P. I. Mel'nikov (Andrei Pecherskii), *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh* (Moscow: Izd-vo Pravda, 1963), 6:320.

34 Usov, 129-130, 139.

35 P. I. Mel'nikov, “Otchet o sovremennom sostoianii raskola v Nizhegorodskoi gubernii, sostavlennyi sostoiashchim pri Min. Vnutr. Del Kollezhskim Sovetnikom Mel'nikovym,” in *Sbornik v pamiat' P. I.*

Russian Schism,” written for the tsar's brother Konstantin, warned that five million Old Believers who followed the Belokrinitsky (“Austrian”) hierarchy might be loyal to Austria if war ever broke out between Austria and Russia. He claimed that in general Old Believers loved Russia, and that a change in allegiance to a foreign government had occurred only because of persecution.³⁶ Later, however, he grew increasingly convinced that Old Believers presented no threat whatsoever to the Russian nation, either militarily or socially, and that they deserved the same rights as Orthodox Russians because there was no reason to deny them these rights:

Schismatics did not and do not represent any danger to the state and the public good: their 200-year persecution and limited civil rights were therefore completely unnecessary and even harmful, and schismatics fully deserve to make full use of all civil rights... I myself used to look at the schism as other authors do; but having studied it for more than a day, I came to the conviction that schismatics absolutely do not possess those elements whose imagined existence was the cause for 200 years of them being subject to persecution or limits in civil rights.

Раскольники не заключали и не заключают в себе ничего опасного для государства и общественного благоустройства: двухсотлетнее преследование их и ограничение в гражданских правах поэтому было совершенно излишне и даже вредно, и раскольники вполне заслуживают того, чтобы пользоваться всеми гражданскими правами... Я сам прежде смотрел на раскол так же, как и другие авторы; но занимаясь изучением его не со вчерашнего дня, пришел к убеждению, что раскольники вовсе не заключают в себе тех элементов, за мнимое присутствие которых они два века подвергались то преследованиям, то ограничениям гражданских прав.³⁷

He continued to believe that the schism was caused and perpetuated by ignorance, but he saw no threat posed by Old Believers as a group. His criticism, once balanced between the potentially treacherous Old Believers and the corrupt Orthodox clergy who set a poor moral example of the

Mel'nikova (Andreia Pecherskogo). Deistviia Nizhegorodskoi Gubernskoi Uchenoi Arkhivnoi Komisii. Tom IX, Chast' II (Nizhnii-Novgorod: Tipo-Lit. T-va I. M. Mashistova, 1910), 257.

36 P. I. Mel'nikov, “Zapiska o Russkom raskole, sostavlennaia Mel'nikovym dlia V. K. Konstantina Nikolaevicha po porucheniiu Lanskogo,” (1857). A pdf copy of this document is available at the following website: http://samstar-biblio.ucoz.ru/publ/mel'nikov_p_i_zapiska_o_russkom_raskole_1857_g/144-1-0-1825

37 Pavel Usov, “Pavel Ivanovich Mel'nikov, ego zhizn' i literaurnaia deiatel'nost',” in P. I. Mel'nikov (Andrei Pecherskii), *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (St. Petersburg: M. O. Vol'f, 1897), 1:201. Quotation from a comment Melnikov published in *Severnaia pchela*, 1862, as a follow-up to his “Letters on the Schism.”

national faith, now turned increasingly against the Church and Government approach towards managing the schism.³⁸

Melnikov never went so far as to condone the schism or its adherents, but he came to see them primarily as harmless members of Russian society whose ignorance was hardly greater than that of the Russian people as a whole. His own efforts with religious dissenters focused on conversion through education. Melnikov came to believe that the best way to convince Old Believers to rejoin the Orthodox Church was to prove the rightness of this course of action on the basis of the Old Believers' own books and teachings. He also insisted that the schism itself would disappear if education and enlightenment penetrated the “lowest layers of society.”³⁹ This “progress through education” approach was also the one Melnikov recommended for larger Russian society. He held that keeping the Russian public in ignorance about the schism, that insisting the schism be a matter of secrecy, was insulting to Russia and to the Russian church, since the schism could not pose a tangible threat to either one. Rather, by holding the schism in secret, the Russian government had perpetuated myths about religious dissenters that had led to their unfair treatment, even persecution. Ultimately Melnikov advocated for a policy of “toleration” (терпимость) but not “protection” (покровительство) of the schism.⁴⁰ He believed

38 Little is known to what, if any, extent Melnikov-Pechersky's personal religious views influenced his views on the schism. While his writings demonstrate thorough knowledge and affection for many elements of Christian teaching, Melnikov-Pechersky was apparently rather indifferent to displays of religious piety for much of his life. His son Andrei relates the following story when he tells a family friend of his father's death: “Vasilev...started to raise his hand to cross himself, but only waved his hand, saying, 'After all, the deceased and I were alien to religious prejudices.' Vasilev was indeed 'alien to prejudices'...but my father, although not at all too religious and even considered by many to be an atheist (not completely justly), toward the end of his life, not long before the full loss of his reasonable consciousness, partly devoted himself to the opposite extreme.” A. P. Mel'nikov, “Iz vospominanii o P. I. Mel'nikove,” *Sbornik*, 65-66.

39 Usov, 222.

40 In using the term “toleration,” Melnikov was appealing to an existing tradition of policy towards non-Orthodox faiths. Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky explain:

non-Orthodox clergy should be “allowed” (допущено) but not “sanctioned” (разрешено), and their public status should not be religious (e.g. “clergy”) but secular (“merchants,” “peasants,” etc.). Police and government should not interfere in the everyday religious affairs of Old Believers, but only in incidents that disrupted the well-being of society.⁴¹

Melnikov's focus on tolerating religious dissenters *unless they disrupt the well-being of society* explains one of his pet points, that not all “schismatics” are the same and should not be treated as such. In his “Third Letter on the Schism,” published in the *Northern Bee* in 1862, Melnikov questioned the policy of considering the schism an “illness,” and further argued that current policy on the schism was bound to fail:

They call the schism a moral illness of the Russian people. I won't expand on whether such a comparison is true or untrue. But let's suppose it's true. What would happen if, for example, medicine were to mix all of the illnesses of the human organism under one name, for example, *unhealth*, if it assigned all the various illnesses the same properties and, on that basis, started treating them with one undifferentiated remedy?...*The doctors* of the schism, since the second half of the seventeenth century, looking at all the divergent dissent of the Russian people from one point of view, not noticing the substantial difference between them, naturally had to fall into mistakes that couldn't bring benefit.

...

An adherent of the *popovshchina*, that is, of the concord that is closest to Orthodoxy, and

The Russian term *veroterpimost'* ('religious toleration' or 'religious tolerance') was defined vaguely and ambiguously in tsarist Russia. Though it did have the connotation of a moral virtue, it rarely implied absolute freedom of worship or 'freedom of conscience' (*svoboda sovesti*) and was not based on any notion of civil or human rights. Freedom of conscience as such did emerge as both a demand and a topic of official discussion around 1905....

Russian statesmen in the nineteenth century frequently used the word *veroterpimost'* to describe their policies. Yet the only common denominator in all such instances was the absence of a policy of forced conversion.... One's religion was not a matter of choice or preference.... The church might have missionaries proselytizing to discredit a 'tolerated' religion and encourage conversion.

See “Introduction,” in *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, edited by Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 7.

41 Usov, 222-226.

a *sopelkovsky begun*, who is not a sectarian at all, but merely someone who, under the guise of religiosity, breaks all ties to social and family life, who raises itinerancy to the level of dogma and eternally lives in illusions and hallucinations; a *khlyst* and a *skopets* who mutilates himself and others – all of this was implied under one name: *schismatics*, and all the various sectarians were looked at in the same way.

Называют раскол нравственной болезнью русского народа. Не буду распространяться о том, верно или неверно такое уподобление. Но предположим, что оно верно. Что вышло бы, например, из медицины, если бы она все болезни человеческого организма смешала под общим названием, хоть напримерь, *нездоровья*, всем разнообразным болезням приписала одни и те же свойства и на этом основании стала врачевать их одним безразличным средством?...*Врачи* раскола, с половины xvii века, смотря на все разномыслия русского народа с одной точки зрения, не замечая между ними существенного различия, естественно должны были впадать в такие ошибки, которые не могли принести пользы.

...

Придерживающийся так называемой поповщины, т. е. самого близкого к православию толка, и бегун сопелковский, вовсе не сектатор, но лишь, под личиной религиозности, разрывающий все связи общественного и семейного быта, возводящий бродяжество на степень догмата и вечно живущий в иллюзиях и галлюцинациях, хлыст и уродующийся и других скопец, – все это разумелось под одним именем: *раскольники*, и на всех столь разнородных сектаторов смотрели одинаково.⁴²

Melnikov further claims that while there was some awareness of differences within the schism, these differences were taken to be superficial expressions of piety, and no consideration was given either to their origins or to their deeper views. The ignorance about the true nature of religious dissent resulted in unfair treatment. For example, the peaceful, industrious members of the *popovshchina* were subject to horrible persecutions during the time of Peter the Great, while under Catherine's more “enlightened” rule, dangerous *skoptsy* and *beguny* were given the same rights as the *popovshchina*.

Melnikov undertook several attempts to classify the Old Believers and sects in a way he found fruitful, but always felt his classifications somehow lacking. His major efforts to define the

42 P. I. Mel'nikov, “Pis'ma o raskole,” in *Sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Izd-vo Pravda, 1963), 6: 212-213.

“spirit” of the sect or concord divided the *popovshchina* from the *bespopovshchina* (Old Believers who recognized no clergy) but held both these subcategories under the general heading “Old Believers,” or “schismatics,” which he further distinguished from “heretics.” According to Melnikov, heretical sects such as *khlysty* and *skoptsy* had nothing to do with the historical schism and were fundamentally un-Russian, derived from either Europe or Byzantium. These were the “dark sects” which people had rightly feared for so long; these sects were future-oriented, believing in the future victory of their sect. In contrast to them, the Old Believers, and particularly the *popovshchina*, were wholly Russian, but oriented to the lost past, seeing no future victory. For Melnikov, they were not so much dangerous as irrelevant: he described them as “Lot's wife, who turned to look backward and turned to stone” (Это Лотова жена, обернувшаяся назад и оставшаяся неподвижной).⁴³

The outlook on the schism that Melnikov presented in his polemical and educational works bears a strong resemblance to the view he presents in his fiction under the name Andrei Pechersky. But in fiction Melnikov-Pechersky drew further on a moral voice absent from his non-fiction. In all of his fiction, he addresses the human condition, fate, and morality—all of which he had observed were equal forces among the Orthodox and the non-Orthodox. Beginning in the late 1850s, Pechersky penned the first published stories devoted to Old Believers that appeared in the Russian press.⁴⁴ One of these stories, “Grisha. From Schismatic Life” (“Гриша. Из раскольничьего быта”) first appeared in the *Contemporary* in 1860. A number of the themes of Melnikov's non-fiction occupy “Grisha,” as the author seems to be using the opportunity to present a picture of the diversity of the schism and comment on it. Coincidentally, it is also the

43 Mel'nikov, “Pis'ma,” 6: 249-250.

44 A decade earlier, Melnikov's friend Ulybyshev had written a drama entirely devoted to Old Believers, but it was not published until 1877.

first fictional work by any author to feature the Kitezh legend, and would become influential in the reception of the Kitezh legend in the Russian public.

“Grisha” is a parable-like story about the inexplicable decline of the Gustianikov family, which goes to seed after the untimely death of its matriarch Evpraksia Mikhailovna. Evpraksia Mikhailovna is a kind-hearted widow who “did much secret good and in secret gave away much to charity” (много потаенного добра творила она, много раздала тайной милостыне).⁴⁵

Among other things, she offers shelter to traveling monks and other pilgrims of all sorts, and takes in a zealous orphan, Grisha, to help her care for them. Inspired by stories of pious hermits, Grisha dreams of finding people who are truly devout, of finding the “true faith.” He teeters on the edge of reality, suspecting that the village girls who arouse his passions are demons sent to tempt him. He becomes increasingly disillusioned with the pilgrims he meets, almost all of whom bicker amongst themselves, complain about the doctrines of others, and do not conduct themselves in a manner that Grisha thinks befits the higher calling of a monk. Some are not even true monks, but con men who take advantage of Evpraksia Mikhailovna's hospitality and policy of believing that “all people are God's persons” (Все люди – Божие человеки). In response, Grisha becomes proud of his own ascetic feats, and looks down on anyone—especially those who follow Nikonian Orthodoxy—who cannot match his standards.

On the brink of despair, Grisha prays that God will bring him a person who will show him the true faith. As if in response to this prayer, shortly thereafter a saintly hermit named Dosifey appears at the door, explaining that he had lived in the forest devoting himself to solitude and prayer for 40 years, until government officials burned down his cell (presumably acting on the orders of someone like Pavel Melnikov). But he forgives these officials, claiming

45 P. I. Mel'nikov (Andrei Pecherskii), *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh. T. 1* (Moscow: Pravda, 1976), 286.

they are merely performing the “will of him who sent them.” Grisha is fascinated by Dosifey's integrity and asceticism, and is convinced he has finally found someone who can teach him the true faith. However, when Grisha asks Dosifey for guidance, he learns that Dosifey believes that all Christian faiths are more or less the same, and that though Dosifey himself is an Old Believer, he holds others in equal esteem and finds their differences superficial. Shocked by Dosifey's “heresy,” Grisha runs away into the arms of one of the village girls, who seduces him.

Grisha now believes his soul is lost until a final pilgrim, a *begun* named Ardalion, convinces him that he must become obedient to Ardalion, be baptized into the true faith, and do battle with the Antichrist—anyone who doesn't follow the true faith. Though Grisha finds Ardalion's intolerance appealing, he is hesitant to accept the vows of obedience Ardalion requires until Ardalion entices him with stories of three magically hidden virtuous places: elders hiding in the mountains, Kitez, and a church at Lake Nestiar. While Kitez stands in the central spot of these three hidden places, all three are closely related to the Kitez legend, as Lake Nestiar is a legend very similar to the Kitez legend, and Ardalion quotes extensively from the “Epistle to a Father from a Son in a Hidden Monastery” in his description of the elders in the mountains.

Ardalion promises that Kitez is a blissful place for holy people:

In that city live blessed people, venerable hermits... There is life without sorrow; life without complaint, unceasing day, the pleasures of heaven... And any man, should he humble his soul with obedience, shall find the path to that wondrous city and shall taste of the blessed life of the earthly angels who abide there.

Живут в том граде люди блаженные, пустынные жители преподобные... Тамо жизнь беспечальная; жизнь без воздыхания, день немерцаемый, утечи райския... И всяк человек, иже смирил душу свою послушанием, уведает путь в чудный град тот и вкусит от блаженныя жизни живущих тамо земных ангелов.⁴⁶

The stories of Kitez and similar places prove the turning point of the story. Unable to overcome

⁴⁶ Mel'nikov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 1:318-19.

the temptation to see these holy places and the righteous people who dwell in them, Grisha agrees to follow Ardalion, who baptizes him and commands him to rob Evpraksia Mikhailovna and run away. Evpraksia dies within three days of the robbery, and the family inexplicably slides into ruin. Kitez and related legends are thus the true motivation for Grisha's crime.

“Grisha” had a mixed reception. *The St. Petersburg Messenger* praised the story for its portrayal of “typical” schismatics and suggested the story would be beneficial for a volume of public reading (народное чтение). Those with more sympathies towards religious dissenters were less generous. Nikolai Leskov, who was offended at the tone of the story, called it “hideous, hideous in relation to art and a monster in relation to truth” (безобразие, безобразие в отношении художественном и урод по отношению к правде). Herzen, living in London and publishing the journal *Obshchee veche* for religious dissenters in hopes of luring them to his cause, wrote privately in a letter: “Well tell me, what meanness is this, to berate schismatics and make them hideously funny? What tact!” (Ну, скажите, что же это за мерзость - ругать раскольников и делать уродливо смешными? Экой такт!). Overall, the story was understood as a parable of how religious zealotry leads to dangerous fanaticism.⁴⁷ When Melnikov's good friend Apollon Maikov retold part of the story in his 1867 dramatic poem “The Pilgrim” (“Странник”), he included only the final episodes, between Ardalion and Grisha, focusing attention on the connection between zeal and fanaticism rather than the whole of Pechersky's story.⁴⁸

47 On the reception of “Grisha” in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Viktor Bochenkov, “Grisha' P. I. Mel'nikova (Andreia Pecherskogo). K probleme interpretatsii povedeniia geroev,” *Nachalo* 7 (2008): 55-66 and L. A. Anninskii, *Tri eretika* (Moscow: Kniga, 1998), 179-80.

48 Very little attention has been given to the connection between these texts beyond mentions of their shared plot. The most thorough discussion of the two works is L. V. Alekseeva's article, which points out that “Grisha” is modeled as an inverted *zhitie*, in which the hero succumbs to spiritual temptations rather than overcoming them, while “The Pilgrim” is a psychological drama in the tradition of nineteenth-century Russian literature in general and Dostoevsky in particular. L. V. Alekseev, “Povest' P. I. Mel'nikova-Pecherskogo 'Grisha' i poema A.

When taken in its entirety, however, “Grisha” is a much more complex story that depicts Old Believers in a much more positive light than critics have generally recognized. The title character's search for the true religion juxtaposes two “hidden goods”: Kitezkh and the other imaginary hidden virtuous lands of Ardalion's stories, and the real hidden virtue of Evpraksia Mikhailovna. Secret acts of charity and good, a favorite concept of Pechersky's that appears in of his several works, refer to Christ's teachings on charity from the Sermon on the Mount: “When you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you” (У тебя же, когда *творишь* милостыню, пусть левая рука твоя не знает, что делает правая, чтобы *милостыня* твоя была *втайне*; и Отец твой, видящий тайное, воздаст тебе явно).⁴⁹ The narrator's description of Evpraksia Mikhailovna's secret charity clearly references these verses: “She did much secret good, in secret gave away much to charity” (много потаенного добра *творила* она, много раздала *тайной милостыне*).⁵⁰ This “secret good” is also the key to understanding the mystery which begins and ends the story, the inexplicable decline of the family after Evpraksia Mikhailovna's death. By alluding to Christ's sermon, the narrator also reveals the source of Evpraksia Mikhailovna's success: the divine reward for secret good. Evpraksia Mikhailovna's secret virtue died with her, and with it the divine reward her family received for it.

The irony demonstrated by this juxtaposition of the imaginary secret virtuous places

N. Maikova 'Strannik': сопоставительный анализ,” in *Zhizn' provintsii kak fenomen dukhovnosti: Sbornik statei po materialam Vserossiiskoi nauchnoi konferentsii*, pod red. N. M. Fortunatova, 39-44 (Nizhny Novgorod, 2008), available online: <http://lib.znate.ru/docs/index-22142.html>.

49 Matthew 6:3-4, NASB and Russian Synodal Version, emphasis mine.

50 P. I. Mel'nikov (Andrei Pecherskii), *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh* (Moscow: Pravda, 1976), 1: 286, emphasis mine. Henceforth *Sobranie sochinenii*.

(Kitez, etc.) and the real secret virtue of Evpraksia Mikhailovna is that the hidden virtue Grisha sought was living right next to him the whole time, but he was too bigoted to be able to recognize it, being seduced instead by imaginary tales. Ardalion convinced him that destroying Evpraksia Mikhailovna was the first step towards finding any of the many loci of hidden virtue, when in fact all he did was destroy a real locus of hidden virtue in a quest for an imaginary one. Rather than finding hidden virtue, he destroys it. This action creates a parallel between Grisha and the government police who destroy Dosifey's cell. Both are explicitly described as “performing the will of him who sent him,” both pursue a course of violence on account of religious bigotry, and both destroy virtue.

Virtue, on the other hand, is associated with the philosophy of Evpraksia Mikhailovna and Dosifey, who preach religious tolerance and forgiveness of enemies. Evpraksia Mikhailovna accepts all without question, repeating her mantra that “all people are God's persons” (Все люди – Божие человеки). Similarly, in his conversation with Grisha about the “true faith,” Dosifey reveals his belief that the doctrinal differences that divide Christians are irrelevant:

“And yet you say that the Nikonite is the same kind of person as we who have been baptized with the old-style baptism? You probably also believe that we may have fellowship with them in food and drink?

“We may, Grishenka... In fact, we must.

“Have you lost your senses?”

“We must. Know that arguments about faith are sins before the Lord. All of us are brothers, we all preach the same Christ. Do you really not remember that the Lord, when he was walking on earth, ate with tax collectors and pagans, not shunning anyone? Then how dare we? Are we holier than he?”

“But they're *shchepotniki* [derogatory term for Nikonites], they pray with three fingers.”

“And how many fingers did the Lord tell the Samaritan woman to pray with? Have you read that God is to be worshiped in spirit and in truth?.. And whether you use two or three fingers...that's the very last concern.”

- А говоришь, что никонианин такой же человек, как и мы, старым крещеньем крещенные? По-твоему, пожалуй, и в пище и в питии общение с ними можно иметь?

- Можно, Гришенька... Мало того что можно, – должно.
- Да ты в своем ли уме?
- Должно. Знай, что споры о вере – грехи перед господом. Все мы братья, все единого Христа исповедуем. Не помнишь, разве, что господь, по земле ходивши, и с мытарями ел и с язычникам—никто не гнушался? Как же мы-то дерзнем?... Святее, что ли, мы его?
- Да ведь они щепотники, в три перста молятся.
- А сколькими перстами повелел господь самаряныне молиться?.. Читал ли ты, что богу надобно кланяться духом и истиной? А два ли, три ли перста сложишь... это уж самое последнее дело.⁵¹

Dosifey uses this argument as justification for forgiving one's enemies, including the Nikonite officials who burned down his cell.

In contrast, Grisha and Ardalion preach religious bigotry and violence towards anyone outside one's own faith. The narrator recounts that in his quest for the “true faith,” Grisha disapproves of Evpraksia Mikhailovna's acceptance of Nikonites:

And Grisha's heart became consumed with spite against everyone whom he considered servants of the Antichrist. He caressed in his soul the rule of schismatic zealots: “with tobacco-users, with *shchepotniki* and people who shave, and with any shaved mug—do not pray, do not be friends, do not argue.” And he became convinced that “injuring a Nikonite was no great sin.” And his hand would not have hesitated to do harm to a churchgoer. Evpraksia Mikhailovna didn't have even a shadow of that kind of intolerance, and many times she scolded Grisha for the spiteful words that would sometimes pour out of him, but the scoldings of his landlady didn't move him. He would listen to her speeches in gloomy silence, but his soul would ache: “so, she's so nice and charitable, but she has given herself over to sinful vanity: she has gone completely to the ways of the world.”

И распаялось злобой Гришино сердце на всех, кого считал он антихриста слугами. Лелеял он в душе своей правило раскольничьих ревнителей: “с табашником, со щепотником и бритоусами и со всяким скобленным рылом—не молись, не дружись, не бранись.” И дошел до убеждения, что “никонианина пришибить – семь пятниц молока не хлебать”. И не дрогнула б рука него, если б зло сотворить кому из церковников... Евпраксия Михайловна и тени не имела такой нетерпимости, не раз журила она Гришу за вырывавшиеся у него подчас злобные словеса, но журьба доброй хозяйки его не трогала. Мрачно молчит, слушая речи ее, и душой болеет: “вот, дескать, и добро, и милостива, а вдалась же в суету греховную: совсем обмиршилась.”⁵²

51 *Sobranie sochinenii* 1: 308.

52 *Sobranie sochinenii* 1:302.

When Ardalion appears, he feeds Grisha's nascent bigotry and violence, arguing that “Everyone who is not of our faith is the Antichrist” (Все, что не нашей веры – антихрист).⁵³ This includes not just Nikonites, but most Old Believers, whom Ardalion considers “wolves in sheep's clothing,” who claim to follow the Old Faith, but nonetheless bear the mark of the Antichrist. Ardalion tells Grisha repeatedly that the call of the Christian is to “do battle with the Antichrist” (твори брань с антихристом), and under his definition, this means causing harm to all who are not of his faith, including Evpraksia Mikhailovna.

With this juxtaposition of characters, the story does not hold up one group (Orthodox, *popovshchina*, *beguny*, etc.) as virtuous—though it is perhaps notable that the two most virtuous characters are both Old Believers—but rather presents religious tolerance as virtue. This aspect of the story stands in contrast to Melnikov's statements in his *Letters on the Schism*, in which he supported religious *toleration* (as opposed to *tolerance*) but gave a preferential position to Russian Orthodoxy. But the purposeful parallel in “Grisha” between Ardalion and the tsarist official who ordered the destruction of Dosifey's cell—both are the “senders” in the phrase “do the will of him who sent you”—further suggests criticism of tsarist policy that is at best implicit in Melnikov's *Letters* and other non-fiction works.

But in other ways, “Grisha” fulfills the values stated in Melnikov's *Letters*, such as educating the Russian population about the diversity of the schism. By including characters from several different concords and sects and explaining their arguments with each other, Melnikov-Pechersky shows that “schismatic life” comprises many different groups that argue over different points. Ardalion explains that the collective term “Old Believers” includes both the *popovshchina* and multiple concords of *bespopovshchina*, and he separates himself from all of

53 *Sobranie sochinenii* 1:321.

them:

“They are all called Old Believers (старообрядцами) – both those that are called the *popovshchina* (and their faith is variegated), and those called *pomortsy*, *fedoseevtsy*, *filippovtsy* – but they are all of one origin, the viper of hell.”

– Все старообрядцами нарицаются—и те, что зовутся поповщиной, а вера их пестра, и те, что поморцами прозваны, федосеевцами, филипповцами – но все они одинаго порожденья, геенской ехидны.⁵⁴

Melnikov-Pechersky develops the differences between these groups by allowing Grisha to overhear their arguments:

“[Grisha] more than once heard Old Believer schismatics arguing with each other about the new Austrian hierarchy; many times he heard the *pomortsy* disparage the *popovshchina* for their priests, the *fedoseevtsy* the *pomortsy* for marriage, the *filippovtsy* the *fedoseevtsy* for doing genuflections wrong, and the *sopelkovsky beguny* cursed all who lived in their own home. And they all called each other heretics, all brought criticism on others' doctrine, all praised only their own faith.

Не раз слышал, как поповщинские раскольники спорили меж себя насчет нового австрийского священства; много раз слышал, как поморцы хулят поповщину за попов, федосеевцы поморцев за браки, филипоовцы федосеевцев за то, что не по уставу кладут поклоны, а бегуны сопельковские всех проклинают, кто в своем доме живет. И все-то друг друга обзывают еретиками, все хвалят одну свою веру.⁵⁵

These arguments reveal the basic distinctions in dogma that separate different concords, educating the reader about the issues of importance to each and underscoring the lack of unity in what was still called “the schism.”

Moreover, the main characters all have specific religious affiliations that broaden the brief descriptions of the groupings. Evpraksia Mikhailovna and Grisha (until his baptism by Ardalion) are typical members of the *popovshchina*:

He was a schismatic, from the “recorded” schismatics, that is from the original forefathers, his great grandfathers paid double taxes, wore the required dress with the yellow marking, paid off their beards with a tariff. That was fine with Evpraksia Mikhailovna: she herself and her children followed “the old ways.” Only *they weren't*

54 *Sobranie sochinenii* 1:313.

55 *Sobranie sochinenii* 1: 303.

from some evil sect, but a part of those who employed fugitive priests—in other words, a part of the Rogozhskoe cemetery community.

А был он из раскольников, из “записных”--из самых, значит, коренных – деда, прадеды его двойной оклад платили, указное платье с желтым козырем носили, браду свою пошлиной откупали. Это было с руки Евпраксии Михайловне: и сама она с детками “по древнему благочестию” прибывала. Только *были они не злой какой-то секты*, а по беглому священству—по Рогожскому, значит, кладбищу.⁵⁶

By explaining the historical treatment of Old Believers and the association of the *popovshchina* with the Moscow Rogozhskoe community, and especially by separating the *popovshchina* from “evil sects,” Melnikov-Pechersky illustrates that some of the best-known and most populous elements of the schism are very different from the evil sects. Since Dosifey is a hermit, the religious community to which he belongs is harder to define, but when pressed he admits he adheres “to the books of Joseph [of Volotsk] and [Metropolitan] Filaret,”⁵⁷ both of whom were pre-Nikonian defenders of a strong institutional church. This affiliation makes it likely that Dosifey is also of the *popovshchina* rather than a sect or a more extreme concord of *bespopovshchina*. Ardalion, in contrast, is clearly a *begun*. He believes marriage is a greater sin than occasional sex, refuses to carry a passport or other documents with the “stamp of the Antichrist” (though as a hypocrite, he has no trouble handling money), and preaches that salvation is to be found in a life of wandering:

“He who seeks salvation must leave everything – his father and mother and relatives and friends – renouncing everything, and run into the desert. One should not live under one roof – no matter if it's yours or someone else's – run away and wander over earth, until the Lord calls you. *Having your own shelter is an unpardonable sin*, you won't escape from it through any prayers, you won't smooth it over through any genuflections, you won't cleanse yourself of it through any deed of spiritual salvation. Be like a bird of heaven – then all the universe will be yours! Run away and do battle with the Antichrist!”

- Кто спасение ищет, все должен оставить – и отца, и мать, и родных, и друзей, ото всего отршись и бегать в пустыню. Не следует жить под одной кровлей – твоя ли

56 *Sobranie sochinenii* 1: 287-288, emphasis mine.

57 *Sobranie sochinenii* 1:308.

она, чужая ль, все равно—беги и странствуй по земле, дондеже воззовет тя Господь. *Свой кров иметь – грех незамолимый*, никакими молитвами его не избудешь, никакими поклонами его не загладишь, никаким делом душевного спасения от него себя не очистишь. Буди, яко птица небесная,--тогда вся вселенная будет твоя!.. Беги и брань твори со антихристом!...⁵⁸

This characterization matches Melnikov's definition of a *begun* from his *Letters on the Schism*, quoted above:

a *sopelkovsky begun*...is not a sectarian at all, but merely someone who, under the guise of religiosity, breaks all ties to social and family life, who raises itinerancy to the level of dogma and eternally lives in illusions and hallucinations.

бегун сопелковский, вовсе не сектатор, но лишь, под личиной религиозности, разрывающий все связи общественного и семейного быта, возводящий бродяжество на степень догмата и вечно живущий в иллюзиях и галлюцинациях.⁵⁹

The “illusions and hallucinations” in which Ardalion lives are the stories of hidden virtuous places, including Kitezh.

While Melnikov-Pechersky's association of Kitezh with the *beguny* in “Grisha” corroborates the opinions of twentieth-century scholars on the origins of the Kitezh legend, it contradicts his own non-fiction presentation of the Kitezh legend. In his book *A Historical Study of the Popovshchina*, published serially in the *Russian Messenger* in the 1860s, Melnikov describes the Kitezh legend as one the *popovshchina* contrived in their desire to find a source of priests untainted by church reforms. The lack of a structure for ordaining new Old Believer priests was a fundamental problem for the *popovshchina*, since all of the bishops with authority to ordain belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church. In general, to cope with this problem the *popovshchina* employed “renegade priests” (беглые попы), who had initially been ordained in the Russian Orthodox Church, but had broken with or “fled” the church and adopted Old Belief instead. Nonetheless, the desire for a more stable source of

58 *Sobranie sochinenii* 1:314, emphasis mine.

59 Mel'nikov, “Pis'ma o raskole,” 6:213.

priests remained and, according to Melnikov, contributed to the development of legends of distant righteous lands. Melnikov includes the Kitezh legend with legends of Belovodye, the Oponskoe Kingdom, Lake Nestiar, and hidden monasteries, and prints the text of the “Epistle to a Father from a Son in a Hidden Monastery” as a similar example of desire for hidden sources of priests. Melnikov calls the Kitezh legend a “folk fantasy” (народная фантазия) and explains that the more practical *popovshchina* ultimately abandoned the idea of a magically hidden source of priests, instead searching for Orthodox bishops outside of Russia who would ordain Old Believers.⁶⁰ Melnikov also briefly mentions the Kitezh legend in his 1854 “Report on the Current State of the Schism,” in which he notes that both “schismatics and non-schismatics” gather at Lake Svetloyar, but claims that devotion to the lake is a “folk fantasy” appropriated by schismatics and turned into the Kitezh legend as found in the *Letopisets*.⁶¹

Since Melnikov was a supporter of toleration towards the *popovshchina* but not *beguny*, who he believed brought harm to society, it is notable that in his first fiction work he attributed the Kitezh legend and several other Old Believer legends with the “illusions and hallucinations” of the *beguny*. In fact, Melnikov included several interpretations of the Kitezh legend in different works, associating it alternately with the *beguny*, the *popovshchina*, and

60 *Sobranie sochnienii* 7:217-219. The multi-decade searches for Orthodox bishops outside of Russia to ordain Old Believer priests ultimately resulted in the formation of the Belokrinitsa or “Austrian” hierarchy in 1846 in Bukovina in the Austrian Empire (present-day western Ukraine), when a Greek bishop named Amvrosy (1791-1863) agreed to lead a diocese at an Old Believer monastery. The appearance of the Belokrinitsa hierarchy was very controversial among the *popovshchina*, leading to heated debates. In large part due to the support of the influential Muscovite “Rogozhskoe” Old Believers, the Belokrinitsa hierarchy became a dominant element among the *popovshchina*. Roy Robson, *Old Believers in Modern Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), 31; Leonid Heretz, *Russia on the Eve of Modernity: Popular Religion and Traditional Culture Under the Last Tsars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 63-35. Igumen Manuil (Chibisov), *Belokrinitskaia ierarkhiia: spory vokrug voprosa o ee kanonichnosti v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XIX-nachale XX vv* (Kostroma: Kostromskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2008).

61 Mel'nikov, “Otchet,” 191-92.

pre-Christian pagans. The common thread between them lies in Melnikov's view that the legend is a fantasy that holds little appeal for sober-minded people. Melnikov's understanding of morality is pragmatic, focused on the good or bad people do rather than the esoteric sides of what they (claim to) believe. In his fictional works in particular, Melnikov-Pechersky draws on the Sermon on the Mount, in which Christ preaches a living faith in opposition to the ossified trappings of religious practice. One of Melnikov-Pechersky's key ideas stems from Christ's teachings that a person's actions reveal his or her true spiritual alignment:

“Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.”⁶²

Melnikov-Pechersky's positive characters, such as Evpraksia Mikhailovna in “Grisha,” are good because they do good. Accordingly, since Melnikov-Pechersky considers Kitezha a fantasy, its good is not real, but rather is a lure or an excuse for those who lack the moral fortitude to do real good in the real world.

A bridge between the depiction of Kitezha in “Grisha” and the *Historical Study* can be found in Melnikov-Pechersky's magnum opus, his thousand-page novel *In the Forests*. Written in the years after Melnikov retired from government service, *In the Forests* and its sequel, *On the Hills*, offered Melnikov the space to depict the full breadth of Old Believer and sectarian culture he had observed first-hand, including the Kitezha legend. *In the Forests* is set in an Old Believer community in the late 1840s, as the *popovshchina* consider what to do about the new Belokrinitsa hierarchy and the imminent closure of local cloisters. This “Fiddler on the Roof” of Old Believer culture focuses on the patriarch of the Chapurin family, Patap Maksimych, and the

62 Matthew 7:15-20, New American Standard translation.

loves of his teenage daughters. *On the Hills* follows a minor character from *In the Forests*, Dunya Smolokurina, on her search for spiritual truth, which leads her into and out of a *Khlyst* sect. Throughout the novels, Pechersky enriches the story with frequent digressions on traditions, songs, legends, history, and mythology. Some of these are from Afanasiev's works, but many are presumably Melnikov's own observations.⁶³ The novels were very popular, reaching a wide audience through their publication in the *Russian Messenger* alongside works by Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. *In the Forests* was published serially from 1871 to 1874; *On the Hills* was published between 1875 and 1881.

Melnikov's two novels allowed him to describe what he saw as the two fundamental and opposing stances of the Old Believers and the other sects. In his *Letters on the Schism*, Melnikov explained that “heretics” such as the *Khlytsey* and *Skoptsy* had nothing in common with the schism, and that it was “only our ignorance that placed them in one group with the schismatics” (Только одно невежество наше ставит их в одну группу с раскольниками).⁶⁴ These “dark sects” were future-oriented, and were fundamentally *un-Russian*, deriving their origins from Byzantium or the Protestant West. In contrast, the *popovschina* were thoroughly Russian, but fixated on the past. Melnikov saw their lives not as a religious protest against the Orthodox Church (to which they were theologically extremely close) nor a political protest against the Russian Empire (which they were very much a part of), but rather a worship of the past. He claimed they were characterized by

an unlimited, elevated-to-the-level-of-dogma respect for old things, for legend, and especially for external religious rituals; the desire make all the conditions of civil, social, and family life subject to this legend; social immobility of life, the rejection of any

63 On Pechersky's borrowings from Afanasiev, see Georgii Vinogradov, “Opyt vyiasneniia fol'klornykh istochnikov romana Mel'nikova-Pecherskogo 'V lesakh,’” in *Sovetskii fol'klor. Sbornik statei i materialov 2-3* (1935) (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1936), 341-368.

64 Mel'nikov, “Pis'ma o raskole,” 6:242.

progress, coldness towards everything new, and especially foreign; and finally a deep, unshakable faith in the holiness and infallibility of any external ritual, any legend that carried the stamp of pre-Nikonian old times and old nationality.

безграничное, возведенное на степень догмата, уважение к старине, к преданию, а особенно к внешним религиозным обрядам, стремление подчинить этому преданию все условия гражданского, общественного и семейного быта, неподвижность жизни общественной, отвержение всякого прогресса, холодность ко всему новому, а в особенности к иноземному, и наконец глубокая, ничем непоколебимая вера в святость и непогрешимость всякого внешнего обряда, всякого предания, которые носят на себе печать дониконовской старины и старой народности.⁶⁵

Like “Lot's wife,” their worship of the past made them irrelevant for the present and the future.⁶⁶

This nostalgic, irrelevant, dying world is the world of *In the Forests*.

In the Forests is also the work in which Melnikov-Pechersky described the Kitezh legend in greatest depth, and which many credit with bringing the Kitezh legend to popular consciousness. Kitezh operates on several levels in the novel. On one level, it is emblematic of the *popovshchina* as keepers of Old Russian culture. On another, it highlights the extraordinarily ordinary lives of the *popovshchina* and their very ordinary moral failings. Finally, it symbolizes the corruption of church leaders and the hopelessness of Old Belief. As in “Grisha,” so in *In the Forests* the Kitezh legend serves as a kind of plumb line that tests the moral character of the people in the novel. Against the backdrop of this idealistic legend, the characters reveal their true beliefs; and once again, for Melnikov, “good” is not demonstrated by belief in imaginary hidden lands of virtue, but rather in the day-to-day practice of virtue.

The first use of the Kitezh legend in the novel emphasizes the backward-looking stance of Old Belief. The novel opens with an extended description of the Kitezh legend based on the story found in the *Letopisets*, followed by a brief oral legend about a reflection of the city appearing on

65 Mel'nikov, “Pis'ma o raskole,” 6:246.

66 Mel'nikov, “Pis'ma o raskole,” 6:249-250.

the surface of the lake. Melnikov highlights that Kitezh preserves a true, traditional, primordial Russia, uncorrupted by Mongol rule:

From olden times Rus' settled along the forests and bogs of the Trans-Volga headwaters... Novgorodians in the ancient days of Riurik settled there. Legends about Batu's invasion are still fresh there. They will show you “Batu's path” and the location of the invisible city of Kitezh on Lake Svetloyar. That city is still intact...the city is intact, but invisible. Sinful people cannot see glorious Kitezh. It was hidden miraculously, by God's will, when the infidel tsar Batu, having destroyed the Suzdalian Rus, went to fight the Kitezhian Rus... The Lord did not allow infidel sacrilege in a Christian holy place.

В заволжском Верховье Русь исстари уселась по лесам и болотам... Новгородцы в давние Рюриковы времена там поселились. Преданья о батыевом разгроме там свежи. Укажут и “тропу Батыеву” и место невидимого града Китежа на озере Светлом Яре. Цел тот град до сих пор...цел град, но невидим. Не видать грешным людям славного Китежа. Скрылся он чудесно, божьим повеленьем, когда безбожный царь Батый, разорив Русь Суздальскую, пошел воевать Русь Китежскую... Не допустил Господь басурманского поруганья над святыней христианскою.⁶⁷

On the following page, Melnikov-Pechersky creates a parallel description of the entire Trans-Volga headwater region as he transitions from talking about Kitezh to talking about the land where people believe the Kitezh legend:

That's what they say beyond the Volga. Old Rus' is there, original, traditional. From the time that the Russian land was conceived, no foreign brethren have been there. There Rus' from olden times has stood in purity; as it was at the time of our forefathers, so has it been preserved to this day. It is a good land, although it looks angrily at outsiders.

Так говорят за Волгой. Старая там Русь, исконная, кондовая. С той поры как зачиналась земля Русская, там чуждых насельников не было. Там Русь сысстари на чистоте стоит, – какова была при прадедах, такова хранится до наших дней. Добрая сторона, хоть и смотрит сердито на чужанина.⁶⁸

Melnikov-Pechersky's focus on a land preserved from outsiders—a trope not found in the *Letopisets*—and repetition of “from olden times” (исстари, сысстари) create a parallel between Kitezh and the geographic region in which *In the Forests* is set. Both are lands that preserve an

67 P. I. Mel'nikov (Andrei Pecherskii), *V lesakh. Roman v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow: Astrel', 2010), 1:5.

68 Mel'nikov, *V lesakh*, 1:6.

ancient Russia untouched by outside influence. In the thousand pages that follow this introduction, Melnikov-Pechersky offers a glimpse into that world, like the reflection of Kitezh that is said to appear on the surface of Lake Svetloyar on a quiet summer evening. It was likely this romantic picture of “Old Russia” that accounted for the novel's popularity at the time and inspired the artist Nesterov to paint a series based on *In the Forests* and *On the Hills*. As Jane Costlow explains:

For late nineteenth-century artists, writers, and composers, Mel'nikov's epic evoked a rich, intact culture that seemed still to exist within the depths of these remote but Russian forests; it suggested a world in which time stood still, a world permeated by legend and tale, a world in which the very language people spoke was rich with the syncretic agrarian symbolism of conservative Orthodoxy and still more ancient, pagan practice.⁶⁹

As nostalgic as the novel is, however, the world of the Old Believers in *In the Forests* is far from ideal. Melnikov-Pechersky depicts a people who suffer from the same human failings as ordinary Orthodox Russians.⁷⁰ They are afflicted by greed, lust, power, and ignorance as much as any other human society; likewise, they also demonstrate love, compassion, generosity, and ingenuity. The novel subverts stereotypes of Old Believers as ignorant fanatics and as political dissenters and prevents any idealization of Old Believer culture by offering a broad view of the diversity of Old Believer life. In doing so, Melnikov fulfills his own advice in his *Letters on the Schism* to make the truth about the schism known to prevent rumors and ignorance. The picture

69 Jane Costlow, *Heart-Pine Russia: Walking and Writing the Nineteenth-Century Forest* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013), 54.

70 Veronica Shapovalov even interprets the Kitezh legend in the novel as emblematic of the characters' failures to achieve their ideals: “For the characters of Mel'nikov-Pecherskii's novels *In the Woods* and *On the Hills*, the unattainable Absolute is always associated with the invisible Grad Kitezh and its reflection in the lake: at best the characters can see only the reflection of the invisible city.... Grad Kitezh is a symbol of the unattainable Absolute that the characters in the novel strive to achieve. All of them seek it in their own way: both Dunia...and the peasant Gerasim Chubalov search for truth; Mother Manefa and the other nuns are looking for the best way to deal with the closing of the Old Believer monasteries; Aleksei is trying to rise to the top ranks of society, etc.” Veronica Shapovalov, *P. I. Mel'nikov-Pecherskii in the History of the Russian Novel*, PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1988, 103, 159.

of Old Believer life Melnikov-Pechersky presents in the novel is realistic, covering some of the most important aspects of Old Believer existence, including the role of monasteries, the challenges of marrying when priests are hard to find, and the place of tradition.

An extended section on a pilgrimage to Lake Svetloyar for a large gathering (presumably St. John's Eve) demonstrates Melnikov-Pechersky's realistic approach to depicting the life of Old Believers and acts as a microcosm of the novel as a whole. In Parts III and IV of the novel, an entourage from the monastery, including Chapurin's younger daughter Parasha and the emissary from Moscow, Vladimir Borisych, head to Lake Svetloyar “to pray at Kitezh.” The episode allows Melnikov-Pechersky space to share legends about Kitezh and devotional practices he has (presumably) observed. It also provides the opportunity for commentary on both. The organization of the episode and the commentary surrounding it make Melnikov-Pechersky's framing of the legend much like other nineteenth-century retellings of the Kitezh legend.

The first depictions of Kitezh tales and devotional practices come through the eyes of Vasily Borisych as he walks around Lake Svetloyar observing different groups gathered there. Even though Vasily Borisych is an Old Believer and hardly a sympathetic character, his observations do offer the perspective of an educated person, not unlike Melnikov-Pechersky's readers or the author himself, encountering the Kitezh *Letopisets* and devotional practices for the first time. While Vasily Borisych observes some straightforward retellings of the legend, several encounters raise his—and the readers'—suspicions.

Vasily Borisych first comes upon an old man reading the *Letopisets* to a group gathered around him, in much the same way Meledin described. The negative tone of the encounter is set by the narrator, who describes the man reading “in a melancholy, nasal voice” (УНЫЛЫМ, ГНУСЛИВЫМ ГОЛОСОМ). The reading is from the section of the *Letopisets* about Prince Georgy,

and Vasily Borisych immediately takes umbrage at the inconsistencies between the *Letopisets* and other chronicles. “What a whole lot of nonsense they've said!” (Вот чепухи-то наговорили!) he mutters, and the more he listens, the more frustrated he becomes: “Vasily Borisych lost his patience. The great doctrinarian was annoyed at listening to the fables that ignorant writers had spun in the Kitezh 'Letopisets.’” (Не стерпелось Василью Борисычу. Досадно стало великому начетчику слушать басни, что неизвестные писатели наплели в Китежском “Летописце”). When he confronts the man reading the *Letopisets*, asking how Georgy could have been killed at Kitezh when the chronicles say he was killed at the River Sit a month later, the man ignores him, the old women mutter in scorn, and a young man named Vasya Pyzhov threatens and nearly attacks him for his insolence.⁷¹

A few minutes later, another character who is sympathetic to Vasily Borisych's doubts about the *Letopisets* warns him not to raise any questions at the lake among “zealots” (ревнителi) because doing so is too dangerous. He also reveals that Vasya Pyzhov, a typical “zealot,” used to be a coachman, but became a zealot when he took to drinking. Following the religious gatherings at Svetloyar, he collects a mob of fellow “zealots” and soldiers' wives to play music and drink for days. During this drunken revelry, the same Pyzhov who seemed so pious defames saints: “And the same Vaska Pyzhov, walking around drunk, will begin calling out invisible saints with bad words... There are many like him.” (И тот же Васька Пыжов, ходя пьяный...станет невидимых святых нехорошими словами окликать... Много таких).⁷² The episode with Pyzhov and the *Letopisets* emphasizes the ignorance and moral bankruptcy of “zealots” who appear to believe unwaveringly in the *Letopisets* but whose behavior betrays their lack of integrity.

71 Mel'nikov, *V lesakh* 2:298-299.

72 Mel'nikov, *V lesakh* 2:319.

After Vasily Borisych listens to another man reading the section of the *Letopisets* about finding Kitezkh, he comes upon a group discussing a man named Perfil Grigorich who actually attempted to find Kitezkh by following the general instructions in the *Letopisets*: vow to reach Kitezkh; fast; do not tell your family where you are going; be prepared to die of hunger or other dangers; do not waver from your path. However, he gets specific directions from Father Mikhail, the corrupt abbot recently discovered counterfeiting money with the con man Yakim Stukolov. Hunger and the elements could not keep Perfil Grigorich from pressing on towards his destination, but when he encountered a bear, he ran away and lost the path to Kitezkh. On his return trip, when he told Father Mikhail what happened, the abbot explained that the bear was the gatekeeper to Kitezkh in disguise. Had Perfil Grigorich blessed the bear rather than running from it, he would have been granted entrance into Kitezkh. This episode again calls devotion to Kitezkh into question. All those gathered believe the story about Perfil Grigorich and the bear despite recent news about Father Mikhail's corruption, which some believe and others consider slander.⁷³ The reader, however, knowing the appealing lies Father Mikhail told other characters in the novel, is now hesitant to trust anything Father Mikhail says, and wonders if there is more to the story of Father Mikhail and Perfil Grigorich than the naïve believers see. While from the story Perfil Grigorich seems like an honest and devout old man, the reader wonders if he is actually one of Father Mikhail's seemingly devout accomplices; or perhaps Perfil Grigorich is just another victim of one of Father Mikhail's cons.

Vasily Borisych's remaining encounters are somewhat more benign than his first ones, offering Melnikov-Pechersky the opportunity to retell the story from Meledin's account of the shepherd who wandered into Kitezkh and an adaptation of the "Epistle from to a Father from a

73 Mel'nikov, *V lesakh* 2:305-306.

Son in a Hidden Monastery.” Melnikov-Pechersky frames the latter as a letter written by a pious man who wished to devote his life to God instead of married life. However, his parents insisted that he marry, so he obeyed them until the day after his wedding, when he disappeared. Some time later, he sent the “Letter” from Kitezh, where he was finally able to devote his life to spiritual pursuits. At the end of this story, Vasily Borisych talks with a man who claims to be a monk, but who has no monastery, who, like Ardalion in “Grisha,” “wander[s], having no current city, seeking the coming city” (странствуе[т], града настоящего не имея, грядущего взыская). He is apparently a *begun*, although he demonstrates none of the bile or intolerance of Ardalion; he merely begs for candles and incense from the other pilgrims. Later, however, others warn Vasily Borisych that the monk is not a monk at all, but a well-known, escaped convict exiled three separate times for false papers, perhaps counterfeit money (“фальшивы бумажки”). Vasily Borisych's final encounter is with an old man, apparently one of the “hermits” from Meledin's account, who directs pilgrims to lie on the shore with their ears to the earth but not to give in to sleep, promising them that if they are earnest enough, they will glimpse Kitezh.

The overall impression of these framings of the Kitezh legends suggests that people who believe in Kitezh are zealous but ignorant Old Believers who are easy prey for con men. Even in cases where there is no obvious fraud, the reader may have doubts about the sanity and ethics of those who believe a bear is a disguised gatekeeper, or that a man who abandoned his bride is a model to be emulated. In particular, the emphasis on false documents—the counterfeit money that Father Mikhail produces and the false papers the *begun* was exiled for—suggests a culture of false documents among Old Believers, many of whom are particularly bookish. The *Letopisets* itself, the primary document of the Kitezh legend, is factually inaccurate, according to Vasily Borisych, filled with “fables that ignorant writers spun.” Meanwhile, Perfil Grigorich is

described as spending “all his time bent over books” (Все, бывало, над книгами сидит, все над книгами...).⁷⁴ The narrator gives special attention to the fact that the man who left his new wife to find Kitezhh became literate at age seven and read spiritual books.⁷⁵ In his 1854 “Report on the Current Condition of the Schism,” Melnikov singled out blind devotion to printed material as a particular fault of schismatics, and he repeatedly argued that using the Old Believers' own books was the most effective means to challenging their dogmatic views.

While Vasily Borisych's wanderings around Lake Svetloyar provide an ample picture of the faces of belief in the Kitezhh legend, perhaps the most striking aspect of the pilgrimage chapter is the fact that almost all of the main characters *do not* believe in the Kitezhh legend and are merely going through the motions of pilgrimage. Religious fanatics represent a tiny minority of the characters in *In the Forests*, most of whom are pragmatic and focused on ordinary life. Of all of the main characters, only Dunya Smolokurina is touched in any way by the Kitezhh legend. As Veronica Shapovalov points out, the introduction of Dunya (the heroine of *On the Hills*) occurs at Lake Svetloyar, when she is described as being moved to tears by hearing the Kitezhh legend. Dunya is a religious seeker like Grisha, and after her brief appearance at the end of *In the Forests*, she will undertake a spiritual journey through Old Belief and the *Khlyst* sect in *On the Hills*. It is thus “from Grad Kitezhh [that] she will start her search for the ultimate truth.”⁷⁶ Though Dunya is more virtuous than Grisha, and therefore escapes the clutches of those who try to manipulate her with religious fictions, it is nonetheless significant that responsiveness to the Kitezhh legend predicts the susceptibility of both these characters to religious charlatans.

The other main characters on the pilgrimage are comparably indifferent to the Kitezhh

74 Mel'nikov, *V lesakh* 2:304.

75 Mel'nikov, *V lesakh*, 2:308.

76 Shapovalov, 165.

legend, and to the extent they practice devotion to Kitezh, it is only out of habit. Throughout the section on the Svetloyar pilgrimage, they are depicted as being the opposite of the earnest, devout, world-forgetting Kitezh-seekers praised in the Kitezh legends. Chapurin's younger daughter Parasha uses the pilgrimage as an opportunity for romantic rendez-vous with Vasily Borisych. Chapurin's niece Flenushka begins orchestrating an elopement between Parasha and Vasily Borisych. The nun Mother Arkadia meets with potential sponsors of the monastery and is very proud of herself for securing a visit from a wealthy patron. Vasily Borisych begins the pilgrimage focused on Parasha, but becomes obsessed with Dunya as soon as he lays eyes on her, and is petrified by Flenushka's warnings that she will marry him off to Parasha. The juxtaposition of Vasily Borisych with the man who abandoned his bride to find Kitezh only emphasizes the difference between the two men: despite his high position in the Old Believer church, Vasily Borisych has no interest in actual religious matters, and wants to avoid a wedding only because he is a ladies' man. All of these characters are so focused on their worldly affairs that they have no interest in renouncing the world in search of Kitezh. Though they lie down on the shores of the lake that night, none of them hears or glimpses Kitezh:

The Lord did not bring the Komarov monastery girls to hear the sweet pealing of the Kitezh bells, God did not bring them to see the city that was invisible to them in the bosom of the lake.... Because, according to Mother Arkadia's words, the Komarov monastery girls were not worthy of embracing grace, vanities had overcome them, idle, insubordinate thoughts had swayed their thoughts.

Не привел господь комаровским келейницам слушать малинового звона колоколов китежских, не привел бог в лоне озера увидеть им невидимый град.... Оттого, по словам матери Аркадии, не удостоились комаровские келейницы приять благодати, что суета обуяла их, праздные, многомятежные мысли умы всколебали.⁷⁷

As they return to the monastery, Mother Arkadia tries to talk with Vasily Borisych about the Kitezh *Letopisets*, but he is preoccupied with trying to avoid eloping with Parasha. The

⁷⁷ Mel'nikov, *V lesakh* 2:323.

pilgrimage chapter closes with Arkadia daydreaming about the rich food the wealthy patron will bring when he arrives:

Having nothing better to do, Arkadia cast her mind about thinking about how much caviar, how much sturgeon Marko Danilych would have to send to the monastery... And she thought about the sturgeon spinal cords, and the beluga belly meat. Mother Arkadia thought about everything over again along the road.

Из нечего делать раскидывала Аркадия умом-разумом—сколько бы икры, сколько осетрины надо бы было прислать в обитель Марку Данилычу... И про вязгу думала, и про белужью тёшку, и про все передумала дорогой мать Аркадия.⁷⁸

By concluding the Kitezh pilgrimage chapter with these humorous and very terrestrial thoughts from Mother Arkadia, Melnikov-Pechersky cements the impression that most of the people involved, however spiritual they are supposed to be, are actually far more concerned with the practical considerations of life than an esoteric search for a spiritual city.

Melnikov-Pechersky's overall assessment of the legend in the novel is that it is a fiction invented by clergy to cope with pagan rituals they were powerless to combat. In the first chapter of part IV of the novel, in a bookend to complement the opening pages of the novel that describe the Kitezh legend, Melnikov-Pechersky unmask the legend he initially presented, explaining its origin and the devotional practices surrounding it. The story begins with the pagan myth of the love between the sun god, Yarilo, and the Moist Mother Earth. The eternally young and radiant sun god, also the god of love, gazed down at the Moist Mother Earth and awakened her, and the fruit of their love appeared all over the earth in form of vegetation and lakes, birds, animals, and people. In the fall, Yarilo abandons the Moist Mother Earth and their children, and the Earth mourns all winter long. However, Yarilo leaves the gift of fire to his favorite son, human beings, explaining that he himself is contained in it. For this reason, in midsummers, it is customary to

78 Mel'nikov, *V lesakh* 2:325.

burn “Kupala” (another name for Yarilo) bonfires.⁷⁹ Melnikov-Pechersky describes various joyful midsummers rituals, which have since died out and are remembered only in church readings about St. John's Eve and warnings about the “Hellenistic charms” (еллинские прелести) of the gatherings of “shameless talk” (бесстыдный говор), “demonic singing and dancing” (бесовские песни и плясания), and “unholy deeds” (богомерзкие дела).⁸⁰ One of the locations where great gatherings occurred was particularly notable—a lake that was named for Radiant Yarilo (Светлый Яр) himself – *Svetly Yar* or Svetloyar. An ancient city, perhaps the Kidish saved by Ilya Muromets, or glorious Podidysh, where bogatyrs dined with princes, once stood on its banks, but today, the pagans claimed, Kitezh was visible only to the righteous.

The hedonistic gatherings at Lake Svetloyar troubled the monastic communities, so the monks and nuns devised an ingenious strategy to combat them: they usurped them. The mechanism Melnikov-Pechersky describes is an example of Lotman and Uspensky's model for cultural change.⁸¹ Lotman and Uspensky argue that in the face of broad cultural change, such as a transition from paganism to Christianity, the “deep structure” of the culture is preserved, while its elements are renamed or reevaluated. They explain:

The pagan gods had two possible fates: either they were identified with demons and so occupied a negative but entirely legitimate position in the new religious system; or they were united with the Christian saints who replaced them functionally... In exactly the same way too places where there had been pagan temples might have one of two fates: they might continue in the function as holy places but with the heathen deity replaced by a Christian saint...or on the other hand the nature of the deity might be preserved, but the function would be totally reversed, the place becoming “evil,” the habitation of demons.⁸²

79 Mel'nikov, *V lesakh*, 2: 287-290.

80 Mel'nikov, *V lesakh*, 2: 294.

81 Lotman and Uspensky limit their discussion to the Russian context, though their model is applicable to many areas besides Russia. The usurping and renaming of pagan symbols during an era of Christianization that results in a kind of “double faith” is by no means unique to Russian culture. See Stella Rock, *Popular Religion in Russia: “Double Belief” and the Making of an Academic Myth* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007).

82 Ju. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspenskij, *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, ed. Ann Shukman (Ann Arbor: The

Recent scholarship has questioned the veracity of Lotman and Uspensky's model, suggesting that instead of relating a historical process, it describes the fruits of a nineteenth-century view that the “folk” were “unspoiled by modern, enlightened ideas” and therefore “preserved pure and unchanging cultural and religious traditions rooted in the primitive, pre-Christian past.” Stella Rock further explains that in the nineteenth century, “this perception of the peasantry...as bearers of an essentially static national culture led to the belief that pre-Christian religion could be reconstructed by the study of peasant belief and culture, and an obsession with identifying 'pagan survivals' within peasant religiosity.”⁸³

Melnikov-Pechersky's writing on the origins of the Kitezh legend display this obsession with finding “pagan survivals” in peasant religiosity. In Melnikov-Pechersky's theory—which accords with Lotman and Uspensky's model—church officials reappropriated the pagan Svetloyar cult, reassigning pagan elements Christian names:

And they declared Svetloyar and the hills above it “sacred places”... Here, they said, stood the invisible city of God's saints, the city Great Kitezh... But we, sinful people, cannot see its beauty, because the place is made filthy by demonic deeds... And the devout elders and holy mothers began to appear on days devoted to the old festivities with books, with crosses, with icons... They started reading the Psalter and singing canons, they compiled the Kitezh *Letopisets* and started reading it to the people who came to celebrate the Yarilo holidays. And at those monastic gatherings a different kind of fire smoldered—on the eve of Agrafena Kupalnitsa they started hanging lanterns on oaks, placing wax candles, hanging icons on branches... Worshipers of the god Yarilo and the champions of the monastic fathers sometimes entered into hand-to-hand fighting, and then at the lake there were deadly fights, great shedding of blood... But the monks and nuns did not lose heart, and with every year their champions were greater in number, while those for Yarilo were fewer... And in time the noisy festivities of happy Yar gave way to the silent gatherings for worship of the invisible city.

И огласили Светлый Яр и холмы над ним “святыми местами”... Тут, сказали они, стоит невидимый град божих святых, град Великий Китеж... Но не можем мы, грешные зреть красоты его, понеже сквернится место делами бесовскими... И стали

University of Michigan, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, 1984), 7-8.

83 Rock, 88.

боголюбивые старцы и пречестные матери во дни, старым празднествам уреченные, являться на Светлый Яр с книгами, с крестами, с иконами... Стали на берегах озера читать псалтырь и петь каноны, составили Китежский “Летописец” и стали читать его народу, приходившему справлять Ярилины праздники. И на тех келейных сходбищах иные огни затеплились – в ночь на день Аграфены Купальницы стали подвешивать к дубам лампы, лепить восковые свечи, по сучьям иконы развешивать... Поклонники бога Ярилы с поборниками келейных отцов, матерей иногда вступали в рукопашную, и тогда у озера бывали бои смертыне, кровопролитье великое... Но старцы и старицы не унывали, с каждым годом их поборников становилось больше, Ярилиных меньше... И по времени шумные празднества веселого Яра уступили место молчаливым сходбищам на поклонение невидимому граду.⁸⁴

This explanation of the Kitezh legend, Melnikov-Pechersky's final and most thorough (and his third in as many works), proved the most enduring, perhaps because of the appeal of the “pagan survivals” it posited. For nearly a hundred years after the publication of *In the Forests*, scholars of the legend and laypeople alike believed that the Kitezh legend originated in pagan Kupala rites.⁸⁵ Following the chapter on the origins of Kitezh legend, Melnikov-Pechersky describes the contemporary “silent gatherings” discussed above, juxtaposing the boisterous pagan rite with the solemn Christian practice.

Melnikov-Pechersky's pitting of the pagans against the monastics around the Kitezh legend leads some to read the chapter as an example of Melnikov-Pechersky's larger project of pitting vital, pagan, “Russian” Rus against morbid, clerical, “Byzantine” Russia, but this view is short-sighted.⁸⁶ While critics are correct to point out that Melnikov-Pechersky does contrast the two throughout the book, he does not side with one against the other. Rather, he shows the prevalence and failings of each. Melnikov-Pechersky's condemnation of Old Believer religiosity

84 Mel'nikov, *V lesakh* 2:295-296.

85 In 1964, Basilov first questioned Melnikov's conclusion, and since then scholarly opinion has sided against Melnikov. See the previous chapter and B. N. Basilov, “O proiskhozhdenii kul'ta nevidimogo grada Kitezha (monastyria) u ozera Svetloyar,” *Voprosy istorii religii i ateizma* 12 (1964): 150-169.

86 Vinogradov, 348.

occurs only when strict adherence to dogma leads to moral failings. As Shapovalov explains, this occurs primarily in cases of fanaticism, not in the ordinary practice of families like the Chapurins: “fanaticism is the main aspect of the Schism that alienates Melnikov-Pecherskii. In the world of the Old Believers, fanaticism leads to inhumanity, cruelty, and, ultimately, the rejection of Christian dogma.”⁸⁷ For example, arguably the harshest criticism in the novel is for an Old Believer family who disowned and abandoned their young son after he was forcibly removed from them and sent to a “Petrine” school where they believed he would become a heretic:

There is nothing more dear in the world to a Russian person than parental love, nothing more beautiful than family harmony... Where did such cruelty, which is so common among Old Believers, come from? It was transferred from alien lands, brought into Rus' by alien teachers. Heartless Byzantines, the stern composers of monastic regulations, breathing with the spite of the assailants of the heresy of ancient days, with the dead letters of their writings they brought to our kind country the putrid spirit of hatred.

Русскому человеку нет ничего на свете дороже любви родительской, нет ничего краше семейного лада... Откуда ж взялась такая жестокость, столь обычная между старообрядцами?... Из чужих краев она принесена, чуждыми учителями на Русь навеяна... Бессердечные византийцы, суровые слагатели отшельнических уставов, дышащие злобой обличители еретичества древних лет, мертвящими буквами своих писаний навеяли на нашу добрую страну тлетворный дух ненависти.⁸⁸

A similar religious bigotry sets in motion events that lead to the death of Chapurin's elder daughter, Nastasya, and the novel polemicizes against nuns who live in cloisters fraught with corruption, who argue over whether or not Christian law allows them to extend charity to non-Old Believers. In contrast, despite his many faults, Chapurin is a sympathetic character because of his religious tolerance, generosity, and unwavering love for his daughters.

As in “Grisha,” in *In the Forests* Melnikov-Pechersky draws a distinct line between religious tolerance and intolerance, demonstrating the virtue of former over the latter. Quoting

⁸⁷ Shapovalov, 195.

⁸⁸ Mel'nikov, *V lesakh*, 1:287-288.

the same “rule” the title character followed in “Grisha,” Pechersky describes Patap Maksimych as an Old Believer, but not an isolationist zealot:

Patap Maksimych and his family held to the old ways, were schismatics, but had never been ossified fanatics. They did not hold to the rule: “With a person who shaves, with a tobacco-user, with a *shchepotnik*, and with any shaved mug—do not pray, do not come together, do not be friends, do not argue.” And Patap Maksimych really was a schismatic more because beyond the Volga, for ages, that had been the tradition, and he didn't have to be estranged from people.

Патап Максимыч с семьей старинки придерживался, раскольничал, но закоснелым изувером никогда не бывал. Не держался правила: "С бритоусом, с табашником, щепотником и со всяким скобленным рылом не молись, не водись, не дружись, не бранись". И раскольничал-то Патап Максимыч потому больше, что за Волгой издавна такой обычай велся, от людей отставать ему не приходилось.⁸⁹

While being a schismatic is good for business, Patap Maksimych's religious tolerance leads him to befriend Orthodox people, including regularly donating money to an Orthodox priest, despite the fact that these actions are bad for business. When discussing faith with Yakim Stukolov, Chapurin argues that what makes a person good is not what he believes, but what he does:

“Amidst [Orthodox] churchgoers there are often good people, while among Old Believers there are those who on the outside look like a blessed man, but on the inside “Why doth he rage?”⁹⁰...A good person is always good, whatever faith he believes in.”

“И между церковниками зачастую попадают хорошие люди, зато и меж староверами такие есть, что снаружи-то блажен муж, а внутри «вскую шаташася»... Хороший человек всегда хорош, в какую веру он ни веровал.”⁹¹

Chapurin is essentially echoing the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount on how to distinguish true faith from false: “you will know them by their fruits.” His intuitive understanding of this fundamental truth drives his religious tolerance and makes him a positive character in the novel despite his faults.

89 Mel'nikov, *V lesakh*, 1: 10.

90 A reference to Psalm 2:1: “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?” (**Вскую шаташася языцы, и людие поучишася тщетным?**) (King James Version, Slavonic Bible). The psalm warns the heathen nations that their actions against the Lord are in vain.

91 Mel'nikov, *V lesakh*, 1:242.

In contrast, Chapurin's ideological opponent Stukolov, a zealous itinerant, holds that having the proper faith—including avoiding those of other faiths—is what matters: “The proper faith shields everything...but fellowship with the heretic leads to eternal death” (Правая вера все покрывает...а общение с еретиком в вечную гибель ведет).⁹² Stukolov, however, is hardly trustworthy: he is the primary co-conspirator of Father Mikhail, who made counterfeit money. Melnikov-Pechersky's commentary throughout the novel and his juxtaposition of moral, tolerant characters and immoral, intolerant characters underscores his belief that Old Belief is not objectively bad, but that fanatical devotion to it is.

Similarly, the pagan roots of Russian culture, though full of vitality and joy, are not objectively good. As much tragedy in the novel stems from blind devotion to the “Russian Dionysis” Yarilo, god of love, as from blind devotion to religious ritual, or greed. For example, Yarilo is explicitly mentioned in virtually every amorous episode of the novel, responsible for the passionate loves of Nastasya and Aleksei, Aleksei and Marya Gavrilovna, and all of skirt-chaser Vasily Borisych's adventures. Yet all of these loves end tragically, as the lovers realize their beloved is not the person they once thought. Chapurin's elder daughter Nastasya recognizes that Aleksei, whom she once thought a “falcon,” is actually a cowardly “duck”; he leaves her for a wealthy widow, and she dies from the humiliation of her affair. The same wealthy widow, Marya Gavrilovna, briefly enamored of Aleksei because he reminds her of her dead fiancé, spends her nights in tears within a week of marrying him. Aleksei, overcome with love for Nastasya, quickly cools towards her when he meets Marya Gavrilovna; while still engaged to Marya Gavrilovna, he begins to desire younger women. Likewise Yarilo prompts Vasily Borisych from one amorous escapade to another. After his conquest of Ustinia, Vasily Borisych

92 Mel'nikov, *V lesakh*, 1:242.

leaves her distraught when he takes interest in Chapurin's younger daughter Parasha. And even as his wedding to Parasha is being planned, Vasily Borisych has already forgotten Parasha and is enamored with Dunya Smolokurova. In the novel, Yarilo is a vital life force that drives people to acts of passion, but not to moral love. As Shapovalov explains:

Passion makes all these characters forget everything in the world; they readily sacrifice their inmost treasures and values for the sake of a temporary feeling. But they never find happiness and fulfillment: they have to suffer the consequences of their momentary enchantments for a long time. They fully abandon themselves to the power of the pagan god, forgetting all of the Christian commandments.⁹³

Shapovalov points out that the most positive character in the novel is the “sorceress” or “healer” (знахарка) Yegorikha, who employs both pagan and Christian tradition for good. Like Evpraksia Mikhailovna in “Grisha,” she practices hidden charity: “In secret she gives away much charity, she does much secret good,” (много тайной милостыни раздает она, много творит добра потаенного).⁹⁴ In her knowledge of herbs and hexes, she keeps alive pagan traditions, but she fuses them with Christian prayers and practice, literally taking the best of both worlds while succumbing to the vices of neither.⁹⁵

As a whole, the pilgrimage at Svetloyar and the extended description of the pagan origins of the legend amplify the themes of the entire novel, which depicts the day-to-day lives of ordinary Old Believers. The religious side of the Kitezh legend exemplifies the worst aspects of Old Belief: it is a lie invented by clerics that leads zealous and ignorant believers to harm, causing them to be easy victims of fraud. However, despite the legend's stature, it is of little

93 Shapovalov, 157.

94 Mel'nikov, *V lesakh*, 195.

95 Jane Costlow draws a distinction between “witches” (ведьмы) and “healers” (знахарки) in Russian peasant culture. The former enlisted the powers of unclean spirits, while the latter derived their powers from God or the saints and used them only for good (Costlow, 74). Shapovalov astutely identifies Yegorikha as a prototype for Dmitry Merezhkovsky's practitioners of “true religion,” who combine pagan and Christian practice. This topic will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter. See Shapovalov, 149-152, 202-204.

practical consequence to the Old Believers in the novel, since few are so zealous and ignorant. Rather, most ordinary Old Believers are still prey to the elemental forces worshiped in the pagan religion the Kitezh legend usurped. Rather than fusing the best of pagan and Christian traditions, as Yegorikha does in her practice, the Kitezh legend pits the darker sides of each against the other. The promise that only the righteous may see Kitezh proves hollow, since the only righteous person at Lake Svetloyar is Dunya Smolokurina, and she still has much to learn.

Thus Melnikov confirms the image of Kitezh made popular in the nineteenth century, albeit with his own emphases. For Melnikov, as for most nineteenth-century authors, Kitezh is emblematic of the worst aspects of Old Belief: superstition, dogmatic bookishness, worship of the past, zealotry, religious chauvinism, naiveté and fraud. Melnikov's realistic portrait of Old Believer life in the novel is sympathetic not because most of the characters believe in Kitezh, but rather *because they do not*. The ordinary lives of the Old Believers display, most of all, their core commonality with Orthodox Russians and humanity in general. They are not religious fanatics carried away by a legend of a hidden, virtuous place. They are human beings with human failings living in the disappearing world of Old Russia.

In the Forests cemented the picture of the Kitezh legend that had been formed through earlier nineteenth-century works by Melnikov-Pechersky and other authors. By the end of the nineteenth century, what had been a frame enclosing the Kitezh legend became a fixed part of the picture itself. The elements that always accompanied retellings of the Kitezh legend that were crucial to the interpretation of the legend—the Old Believers who believed in it, the fanatical

devotional practices, and the tendency towards ignorance and corruption—became a fixed part of the legend itself. In order to establish a new interpretation of the legend, the next group of authors who appropriated the legend would need to take special measures to paint over the legend's nineteenth century frame.

Nonetheless, two elements of Melnikov-Pechersky's *In the Forests* that were already innovations on the existing Kitezh legend would long outlast the nineteenth-century interpretation of the legend. The first was Melnikov-Pechersky's purposeful construction of a novelistic world that rested on pagan myth and Christian legend. His emphasis on the value of combining the best of both would prove hugely influential for the Symbolists, the next group who picked up the Kitezh legend. But while Melnikov-Pechersky depicted the Kitezh legend as combining the worst elements of both—clerical dishonesty masking pagan hedonism—Dmitry Merezhkovsky would see Kitezh as a perfect combination of both, a folk religion as natural and healthy as Egorikha's healing activities.

Even more influential were the first pages of *In the Forests*, in which Melnikov-Pechersky made Kitezh a metaphor for Old Russia. Melnikov-Pechersky's humanizing of Old Believers made them seem less like fanatics that represented a danger to the present, and more like ordinary Russians who lived in the past, revealing a glimpse of a lost Russia. Thanks to the novel, the image of Kitezh became tied to a quaint picture of life hidden deep in the forest, untouched by modern Russia. Twentieth-century authors who appropriated the Kitezh legend inevitably drew on the idea that Kitezh and those who believed in it were somehow in touch with a secret, Old Russia that had been lost to most of the world. In time, Kitezh would become a symbol of this lost Russia.

Chapter 3

Seeking the Seekers:

The Early Symbolist Transformation of the Kitezh Legend

With us the religious spirit appeared only among the schismatic sects.

- Belinsky's Letter to Gogol

The dramatic changes that accompanied the turn of the twentieth century in Russia were inevitably reflected in the uses of the Kitezh legend in Russian literature. The interpretation of the Kitezh legend established so monolithically in the nineteenth century quickly gave way to a multitude of varied interpretations in literary works that were equally diverse. The long-standing traditions of realism in literature reached their apex with Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Chekhov, and at the end of the nineteenth century, the first generation of Russian Symbolist writers (also called Decadents) challenged the priorities and methods of literature. Within decades, numerous new literary movements would arise, fueled by the creative energies of the new century. At this juncture, the qualitative changes in the uses of the Kitezh legend were accompanied by a quantitative change: the number of publications referencing Kitezh grew exponentially, and Kitezh came to the forefront of Russian cultural consciousness. While Kitezh appeared in the literary works of only three major authors in the nineteenth century—Melnikov-Pechersky, Maikov, and Korolenko—within the first three decades of the twentieth century the legend would

appear the poetry of Maximilian Voloshin, Sergey Gorodetsky, Nikolai Kliuev, Velimir Khlebnikov, Sergey Esenin and Marina Tsvetaeva. It would be found in the prose fiction of Maksim Gorky, Evgeny Zamyatin, Andrei Platonov, and Konstantin Fedin; in the philosophical essays of Dmitry Merezhkovsky and Nikolai Berdyaev, and in the literary criticism of Ivan Bunin. And it would become the subject of operatic works by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Sergey Vasilenko and visual art by Victor Vasnetsov, Konstantin Gorbатов, and Nikolai Rerikh.

Scholars have noted the dramatic turn in the fate of the legend in the early twentieth century, correctly associating it with the Symbolists, who saw in the legend a kernel of true Russian spirituality that held the promise for a spiritual renaissance in Russian culture.¹ The Symbolists also developed the contrast presumably originally drawn by the Old Believers themselves between Petersburg, Peter the Great's (false) "Paradise," and Kitezh, the (true) "Russian New Jerusalem."² While no individual authors were solely responsible for the changes in interpretation of the Kitezh legend, the Symbolist writers Zinaida Gippius and her husband Dmitry Merezhkovsky played the most vital role in the legend's transformation at this time. They were the first writers to develop the nascent religious-philosophical interest in Old Believers that appeared in the late nineteenth century, the first Symbolists to employ the Kitezh legend in their works, and the first to present a wholly different interpretation of the legend that would subsequently be adopted by numerous Symbolist and quasi-Symbolist writers. While they shared a general interest in religious dissidence with many intellectuals of their time, they went a step further by adopting the legend, redrawing its contours, and recasting it as a central image in their

¹ S. V. Sheshunova, "Grad Kitezh v russkoi literature: paradoksy i tendentsii," *Izvestiia RAN. Seriya literatury i iazyka* 64:6 (2005), 15-17; N. G. Koptelova, "Obraz grada Kitezha v literature pervoi chetverti XX veka," *Vestnik Kostromskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta* T. 1, 2003, 73.

² Ksana Blank, "Ierotopiia sokrovennogo grada: nevidimy Kitezh, nikonovskii Novyi Ierusalim i petrovskii Paradiz," in *Novyet Ierusalimy: ierotopiia i ikonografiia sakral'nykh prostranstv* (Moscow: Indrik, 2009), 843-844).

philosophical system.

The story of Gippius and Merezhkovsky's interpretation of the Kitezh legend lies at the intersection of Russian culture's changing relationship with religious dissenters and Gippius and Merezhkovsky's own developing religious-philosophical vision. In Gippius and Merezhkovsky's formulations, the religious dissenter became an embodiment of the ideal religious seeker—the same kind of religious seeker the Merezhkovskys saw in themselves—whose true home is Kitezh, a stand-in for the New Jerusalem. Their interpretation of the legend proved so flexible and fruitful that they applied it when discussing metaphysical, social, and political philosophy in both fiction and non-fiction. Merezhkovsky laid out the basic philosophical contours of his Kitezh his 1904 novel *Peter and Alexis*; concurrently Gippius developed the same ideology, though in a social direction, in her 1904 travelogue “The Bright Lake (A Diary).” Three years later, a newly politically galvanized Merezhkovsky adapted his wife's social interpretation of the legend to his political-religious theory in his 1907 philosophical essay “Revolution and Religion.”

Changing Ideas

The Symbolist transformation of the Kitezh legend in the early twentieth century is essentially a religious-philosophical one rooted in Gippius and Merezhkovsky's association with religious dissenters. They were not alone in their interest in religious dissenters: one of the major trends of intellectual life at the end of the nineteenth century was a dissatisfaction with the institutional Orthodox Church that led to a search for alternative models of faith and philosophies of religion. The noted critic Vissarion Belinsky may have been the first to point to

sectarians as bearers of a true “religious spirit” in opposition to the institutional Orthodox Church in his 1847 letter castigating Gogol for supporting serfdom and other injustices in Russia on religious grounds.³ But while Belinsky's comment was little more than a passing observation, later intellectuals began to treat sectarianism as a serious alternative or corrective to institutional Orthodoxy and the socio-political order it supported.

By the turn of the twentieth century public opinion and official Russian policy towards Old Believers and other sects had softened. The increased exposure religious dissenters gained from people such as Pavel Melnikov and Nikolai Leskov led to more awareness and sympathy towards Old Believers in broader Russian society. For the first time, Old Believers were no longer seen as a dangerous cancer on society, a temporary evil that needed to be extinguished, but as a phenomenon of Russian culture with a right to its own existence.⁴ To be sure there were still plenty of people, in particular representatives or defenders of the Orthodox Church, who continued to see Old Believers as an “ignorant mass” clinging superstitiously to the external aspects of religious ritual. But there were also new evaluations of religious dissenters. By the late 1800s, many even imagined religious dissenters as less of a religious force than a political one: populists and marxists saw Old Believers essentially as peasants who were opposed to the government, who therefore could be turned to the cause of revolution.⁵ This politicization of Old Believers led in turn to political argument from the Orthodox Church, which warned that in protecting religious dissenters, the government was protecting “insurgents” and “revolutionaries,” or that ordinary, God-fearing Old Believers were being led astray by “nihilists,

³ Vissarion Belinsky, *Selected Philosophical Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956), 539-540.

⁴ O. P. Ershova, *Starobriadchestvo i vlast'*. Moscow: “Unikum-Tsentr,” 1999), 137.

⁵ William J. Comer, *The Russian Religious Dissenters and the Literary Culture of the Symbolist Generation*, PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1992, 29-37; Ershova, 31-50.

Darwinists, Tolstoyans and socialists.”⁶ Overall, public opinion held that Old Believers constituted a significant portion of the Russian population—by some estimates, as much as ten percent⁷—and should not be persecuted on account of their religious beliefs.

The turning point in official policy came in February 1903 with a government manifesto that asserted the primacy of the Orthodox Church in Russia, but, for the first time, declared that other confessions also had the right to free practice of their religion.⁸ Two years later, an edict in April 1905 on religious tolerance issued by Tsar Nicholas II brought an official end to persecution of most Old Believers. It also made official a more nuanced understanding of the schism, replacing the catchall term “schismatics” (раскольники) with a tripartite division into “Old Believer concords” (старообрядские согласия), “sectarianism” (сектантство), and “followers of fanatical teaching” (последователи изуверных учений), the last of which were still legally subject to persecution.⁹ Six months later, the October Manifesto offered broad guarantees of freedom of conscience for all religious groups. However, as with the earlier laws that called for harassment and destruction of Old Believers and their property, the 1905 edicts were only effective to the extent that they were enforced, and local realities did not necessarily reflect official policy.¹⁰ Even so, this year marks the beginning of Old Believers having the right

⁶ Ershova, 39-51, 92-93.

⁷ Manon de Courten, *History, Sophia and the Russian Nation. A Reassessment of Vladimir Solov'ev's Views on History and his Social Commitment*. European University Studies, Series III: History and Allied Studies. Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New York (Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, 2004), 311.

⁸ Ershova, 176, 188.

⁹ Ershova, 180-181; “Imennoi vysochaishii ukaz, dannyi senatu, 'Ob ukreplenii nachal veroterpimosti', 17 apreliia 1905,” in *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii: Sobr. 3-e. T. XXV: 1905* (St. Petersburg, 1908), 237-38. Available online from Russian Wikisource: [ru.wikisource.org/wiki/Указ_Об_Укреплении_Начал_Веротерпимости_\(1905\)](http://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/Указ_Об_Укреплении_Начал_Веротерпимости_(1905)).

¹⁰ Roy R. Robson, *Old Believers in Modern Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), 18. As Robert Crummey notes, the history of Old Belief during the period of 1855-1917 is poorly studied in comparison to other periods, and therefore in particular need of further research. Robert O. Crummey, *Old Believers in a Changing World* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 236n38.

to open speech in public and in print.

By the late nineteenth century, Old Believers had attracted the attention of public intellectuals as Vladimir Soloviev, Vasily Rozanov, and Nikolai Berdyaev, and had become a significant topic in the Russian press. One of the more influential interpretations of Old Believers for Gippius and Merezhkovsky may have been Vladimir Soloviev's. Despite Gippius's claims that she and her husband had little contact with Vladimir Soloviev and were not strongly influenced by him even though sympathetic towards his views, there can be little doubt of the importance of Soloviev's body of thought in Merezhkovsky and Gippius's developing philosophies of the divine, the relationship between the sexes, and the goal of humanity.¹¹ The key principles of Soloviev's philosophies, based in the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the dual divine-human nature of Christ, were fundamental for both Merezhkovsky and Gippius. Soloviev's fascination with Holy Sophia (Divine Wisdom) as both the mediator between the divine and human and the perfect "world soul" would similarly be featured in Merezhkovsky and Gippius's philosophical conceptions as a whole, and in their Kitezkh retellings in particular. Soloviev saw Old Believers as a critical element of Russian religious culture, a group with flaws that nonetheless had a vital role to play in the religious drama that he saw unfolding in the world.¹² While critical of the Old Believers' isolationism and refusal to consider reunification with the Orthodox Church, Soloviev upheld the importance of religious freedom and was sympathetic to the Old Believers' religiosity, considering it indicative of the religiosity of the Russian people as a whole. In his "Short Tale of the Antichrist," Soloviev gives a special place to Old Believers, who reunite with the Orthodox but are less susceptible to being deceived by the

¹¹ Aleksei Kholikov, *Dmitrii Merezhkovskii: iz zhizni do emigratsii: 1865-1919* (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2010), 73.

¹² For a thorough account of Soloviev's evolving and somewhat ambivalent relationship towards Old Belief see de Courten, 305-350.

Antichrist than the Orthodox.¹³ Thus for Soloviev, the Old Believers were excellent representatives of the Russian religious spirit whose fatal (and temporary) flaw was an unwillingness to make progress towards a global religious unity. Merezhkovsky and Gippius would adopt a similar attitude towards religious dissenters, except that they would recast continued opposition to the Orthodox Church as movement away from the dead carcass of institutional religion towards a living future religion. In other words, in contrast to Soloviev's vision of Old Believers returning to Orthodoxy and thereby participating in the Universal Church (which included total reunification of Eastern and Western Christian confessions), Merezhkovsky and Gippius would envision Orthodox believers reuniting with religious dissenters, who were leading the way towards the true Universal Church.

One of the major differences between Soloviev's generation and the turn-of-the century intelligentsia was a change from talking only *about* sectarians to talking *with* sectarians. This was the first generation in Russian history for which sectarians were suddenly more *interesting* than obscure or frightening. Ronald Vroon notes that amidst a wide variety of “competing eschatologies” in turn-of-the-century Russia, sectarian views held a unique appeal to the intelligentsia because they were based in a historically rooted, living community that comprised a significant portion of the general population.¹⁴ As noted above, this interest in sectarians was not limited to those concerned with their religious offerings: across the board, various elements of the intelligentsia—from Tolstoyans to populists—saw in sectarians new potential to help them

¹³ Only “half of the former Old Believers” join the Antichrist, compared with “more than half” of the Orthodox clergy, monks, and laypeople. Vladimir Solovyov, *War, Progress, and the End of History. Three Conversations, Including a Short Story of the Anti-Christ*, Trans. Alexander Bakshy, Intro. Czesław Miłosz, Afterward Stephan A. Hoeller (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1990), 182.

¹⁴ Ronald Vroon, “The Old Belief and Sectarianism as Cultural Models in the Silver Age,” *Christianity and the Eastern Slavs*, Vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 174.

attain their goals, be those goals an authentic way of life or a political revolution.¹⁵ Sectarianism was so important to this generation that many members of the intelligentsia not only incorporated it into their thinking, but made a point of interacting directly with sectarians themselves, from pilgrimages to interviews to an all out rejection of contemporary culture and formation of dissident religious communities.¹⁶

Merezhkovsky and Gippius were among many who spent time directly with religious dissenters, trying to understand the secrets these people held that had been lost to the rest of Russia. It was likely this direct contact with religious dissenters that guided Merezhkovsky and Gippius to a new evaluation of the sectarians and with it, a new interpretation of the Kitezh legend. Despite the fact that their interest in Old Believers dates to the late nineteenth century, the couple did not employ the Kitezh legend in any of their works until after meeting with sectarians at Lake Svetloyar in the summer of 1902. The ostensible reason for the trip was Merezhkovsky's research for his novel *Peter and Alexis*, part of which was devoted to Old Believers and other sectarians. But these meetings with religious dissenters had consequences for the couple far beyond one novel. Recalling this trip forty years later, Gippius called it “one of the most interesting of a multitude of trips” she and Merezhkovsky made throughout their lives, hardly empty words from a couple who also traveled extensively throughout Europe and Turkey.¹⁷ It was apparently these meetings that changed their evaluation of religious sectarians from the curiosity and moderate sympathy typical of the intelligentsia to a far deeper

¹⁵ For an overview of the appeal of sectarians to different elements of the intelligentsia, see chapter 3 of William J. Comer's PhD dissertation, *The Russian Religious Dissenters and the Literary Culture of the Symbolist Generation*. Comer explains that the main difference between the attitudes towards sectarians expressed by Symbolist generation and prior generations is that the Symbolist generation believed that sectarians were a “positive force” that “had the potential to offer something new to the intelligentsia” (Comer, 131).

¹⁶ Vroon, 172-174.

¹⁷ Zinaida Gippius, *Dmitri Merezhkovskii in Sobranie Sochinenii T. 6, Zhivye Litsa. Vospominaniia. Stikhotvoreniia* (Moscow: Russkaia Kniga, 2002), 279.

identification with the religious dissenters as like-minded religious “seekers” whose legendary city, Kitezh, became an emblem of hope and unity for Gippius and Merezhkovsky.

While the culture of turn-of-the-century Russia gave Merezhkovsky and Gippius plenty of opportunity to employ religious dissenters in their religious, social, political, and philosophical programs, it was the couple's own religious-philosophical searching that led them to their unique appropriation of sectarianism. Dmitry Merezhkovsky had not always been a religious man, and the “path” or “search” that he undertook from religious curiosity to conviction is a major feature of his mature religious-philosophical beliefs and interpretation of the Kitezh legend. At the time of their marriage, according to Gippius, Merezhkovsky was a typically non-religious representative of the secular intelligentsia, fascinated on an intellectual level with many different religions, but utterly uninterested in religious practice. His early poetry, even when it addressed religious characters or themes, ultimately displayed his fleeting interest in Populism more than religious devotion. Merezhkovsky's earliest work devoted to religious sectarians was an 1887 narrative poem loosely based on the autobiography of Avvakum. The picture of Avvakum that emerges from Merezhkovsky's poem is of a compassionate, temperate, forgiving man suffering at the hands of the government, not the colorful religious zealot depicted in the autobiography.¹⁸ With the exception of the generally positive tone of the poem and its respect for Christian virtue, it shares little with Merezhkovsky's mature interpretation of Old Believers.

According to Gippius, it was not until Merezhkovsky began work on his *Christ-Antichrist* trilogy that he began a move towards Christianity. And it was really only when he was working on the final book of the trilogy, *Peter and Alexis*, that he developed a robustly Christian

¹⁸ The difference between Merezhkovsky's poem about Avvakum and the actual autobiography of Avvakum, noted by many critics, have led to various interpretations. Vroon claims that Merezhkovsky sees Avvakum as a radical reformer rather than a defender of the faith, and uses him to preach “a kind of neo-Protestant universalism” that appealed to Merezhkovsky (Vroon, 182-183). Bedford, on the other hand, suggests that Merezhkovsky's Avvakum poem and other poems about religious figures originated in stories from Merezhkovsky's nanny. See Harold C. Bedford, *The Seeker: D.S. Merezhkovskiy* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1975), 5.

philosophy.¹⁹ Concurrent with Merezhkovsky's work on *Peter and Alexis*, he founded and participated in Religious-Philosophical Meetings intended to bring people from different religious backgrounds, from secular journalists to Orthodox clergy, together in one room to discuss questions about life and Christianity. The proceedings of these meetings, as well as additional literary pieces, were published in the Merezhkovskys' new journal, *The New Path* (*Новый путь*). This period of active questioning of traditional Christian dogma was vital for Merezhkovsky to define his own religious beliefs and philosophy. And it was ultimately this mature religious philosophy that Merezhkovsky would illustrate with the Kitezh legend.

A primary problem for Merezhkovsky at the end of the nineteenth century was what he saw as the eternal opposition of two equal truths: paganism and Christianity. Influenced by Nietzsche, Merezhkovsky thought of Christianity as a religion opposed to the delights of the physical world—to beauty, aesthetics, sex, and the classical culture that celebrated them—which he called alternately “earthly truth” or “earthly love.”²⁰ Merezhkovsky felt torn between his love of aesthetics, sensuality, and the general physical world, which he identified with pagan culture (and the “prince of this world,” or “Antichrist”), and his respect for ethics and spirituality, which he identified with Christian culture (“Christ”). In his autobiographical narrative poem from the 1890s, *Ancient Octaves* (*Старинные октавы*) he writes of this tension:

Why have you given us two souls, Lord?

¹⁹ Zinaida Gippius, *Dmitrii Merezhkovskii*, 222-223, 239, 252-253.

²⁰ Merezhkovsky, like many members of the Russian intelligentsia, began reading Nietzsche in 1890 and reached the peak of this infatuation with Nietzsche in the middle of that decade. See Nel Grillaert, *What the God-seekers found in Nietzsche: The Reception of Nietzsche's Übermensch by the Philosophers of the Russian Religious Renaissance*, Studies in Slavic Literature and Poetics, Volume L., ed. J.J. Van Baak, R. Grübel, A.G.F. Van Holk, W.G. Weststeijn (Rodopi: Amsterdam-New York, 2008), 145-156. The problem of Christian morbidity, anti-hedonism, and preoccupation with the afterlife was a general concern of many discussions of the Religious-Philosophical Meetings as members of the intelligentsia questioned church representatives about Christianity's traditional opposition to “the truth on earth.” See Olga Matich, *Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia's Fin-de-siècle* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 212-235, and Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *Dmitri Sergeevich Merezhkovsky and the Silver Age: The Development of a Revolutionary Mentality* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 134-138.

Hating each other and suffering,
 In vain spirit and flesh fight in people,
 Heavenly love, earthly love:
 One cannot overcome the other.
 The Angel of heaven fights with the Ruler of Darkness:
 And to which of them I will give primacy,
 Who will conquer me – I myself do not know.

Зачем ты дал нам две души, Господь?
 Друг друга ненавидя и страдая,
 Напрасно в людях спорят дух и плоть,
 Любовь небесная, любовь земная:
 Одна другой не может побороть.
 С Владыкой Тьмы враждует Ангел рая:
 Кому из них я первенство отдам,
 Кто победит меня, — не знаю сам.

This same tension can be found in the first two books of the Christ-Antichrist trilogy that accompanied the beginnings of Merezhkovsky's spiritual searchings. These books tell the story of the moral insufficiency of paganism compared to the superior spirituality of Christianity (*Julian the Apostate*) and the insufficiency of Christianity with its suspicion of the physical world (*Leonardo da Vinci*).

Gippius reports that she never accepted Merezhkovsky's division of truth into opposing dualities, and that she and Merezhkovsky “had especially heated arguments and fights” about the subject during these years. Perhaps these arguments helped guide Merezhkovsky to his new position on religion and history.²¹ Whatever the cause, by the time Merezhkovsky was working on the final book of the trilogy, *Peter and Alexis*, he had reached a different conclusion about the relationship between heavenly and earthly truths:

When I began the trilogy *Christ and Antichrist*, it seemed to me that two truths existed—

²¹ Zinaida Gippius, “Avtobiograficheskaia zametka,” *Russkaia literatura XX veka (1890-1910). T. 1.* Pod red. S. A. Vengerova, (Moskva: Izdania T-va “Mir”, 1972), 176. Gippius's secretary Zlobin credits Gippius with planting seeds in Merezhkovsky of what would become his major ideas, including both the “duality” of heavenly and earthly truths and a “trinitarian structure of the world.” According to Zlobin, Gippius was the more dynamic thinker of the couple, who would implant her ideas in Merezhkovsky and wait impatiently for him to accept them as his own. Vladimir Zlobin, *Zinaida Gippius: A Difficult Soul*, ed. Simon Karlinsky (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 44-46.

Christianity, the truth of heaven, and paganism, the truth of the earth—and that the absolute religious truth lay in the future union of these two truths. But as I was finishing it, I already knew that the union of Christ and Antichrist was a blasphemous lie; I knew that both truths—of heaven and earth—had already been united in Jesus Christ...that in Him alone is not only the perfect, but also the eternally self-perfecting, the eternally growing, truth, and that there will be no other than He. But I now also know that I had to follow this lie to its end, in order to see the truth.²²

Merezhkovsky's reflection is important not just for the conclusion he reached, but for his emphasis on the journey it took to get there. The motif of the religious seeker who must “follow [a] lie to its end, in order to see the truth” became a fundamental value for Merezhkovsky. As William J. Comer notes, it was precisely the value of the search—not a destination per se—that led Merezhkovsky and Gippius to name their journal *The New Path* (*Новый путь*).²³ The mentality of a seeker was principal to Merezhkovsky's conception of the “new religious consciousness”—in Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal's words, “not a religion but a search for one”—that would make people open to the full truth of religious realities for a coming era.²⁴

Merezhkovsky's new conviction that Christ already held the fullness of both “truths” he had once considered irreconcilable forced him to reconsider his views on Christianity. The conclusion he arrived at was one not unlike the one reached by Nietzsche and even Belinsky: that the Church had departed from the truth of Christ.²⁵ Merezhkovsky's new understanding of Christ and Christianity required a reformulation of his conception of history, which he outlined in his treatise on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky and revealed in the final pages of *Peter and Alexis*. In this new formulation, which Zlobin calls “the most important idea of his life,” it was not *Christianity* that devalued the physical, but *historical Christianity*, a temporary stage in human history that

²² Dmitrii Sergeevich Merezhkovskii, Author's introduction, *Khristos i antikhrisť. Trilogiia. Tom I. Smert' bogov (Iulian Otstupnik)* (Moscow: Kniga, 1989), vi. Quoted and translated in Bedford, 91.

²³ Comer, 174.

²⁴ Rosenthal, 86.

²⁵ On the connection between Merezhkovsky's view and Nietzsche's see Grillaert, 149-150.

followed paganism and Judaism.²⁶ True Christianity, a *future* Christian era, would unite the best of paganism and historical Christianity that were already united in Christ.²⁷

To explain his conception of this new era, Merezhkovsky turned to the metaphor of electricity (borrowing Gippius's poem of the same name) created by opposing charges that makes lightning that connects heaven and earth. According to Merezhkovsky, the world is built of opposites, which, when brought together, create the equivalent of “light” on various levels of existence from the atomic to the moral to the historical to the mystical. He reveals that the struggle he had named “Christ-Antichrist” was only between the *seeming* Christ and the *seeming* Antichrist, the so-called pagan and the so-called Christian (which he now considers “Buddhist”). The connection between these “poles” of history and mysticism will result in the “light” of a new religion, the light of the *true* Christ:

Light, which seems so dull and everyday, unmysterious, is in fact so full of mystery, so joyful and presageful, the light of the last separation and connection, of lightning, connecting heaven and earth – the light of Electricity. Yes, even in phenomena of elementary nature, in the mechanics of inanimate matter, there is attraction and opposition of atoms, centripetal and centrifugal forces of moving suns, positive and negative poles of electricity; higher, in organic development (“evolution”), there is the separation and union of vertebrate parts (“differentiation,” “integration”) the opposition of the sexes, of these animal poles; even higher – in supraphysical, metaphysical, moral phenomena, there is good and evil, love for others, love for self; in phenomena of world history there is so-called “pagan” and so-called “Christian”—more accurately, “Buddhist”—culture, the ultimate affirmation and ultimate negation of the individual personality, its last “yes” and last “no”; and finally, in the highest, mystical realm, there is the struggle between the *seeming* “Christ” and *seeming* “Antichrist” [(italics mine; subsequent italics Merezhkovsky)], the Godman and the Mangod: here are the ascending steps of this cosmic division, struggle and agreement of two halves, two poles, two sexes of the world – the Two, which will be One, which are One in the mystery of the Trinity (“*I and the Father are One,*” the Son, Father, and Spirit – Three One); these are the steps of cosmic *polarity*, which, more or less, was always open to the religious consciousness of humanity, but which with final clarity is now opening only to our contemporary, or,

²⁶ Zlobin, 44.

²⁷ “Historical Christianity” as Merezhkovsky envisions it actually resembles Manichean heresy more than Orthodox Christian doctrine. Manicheans had a dualistic worldview separated along the lines of good/spiritual and evil/material, and that good was temporarily “imprisoned” in the material. They rejected both the Old Testament and the Incarnation because of the goodness of the physical world that each implied.

more precisely, future religious consciousness. We now more than ever anticipate that –

The ends will touch,
 “Yes” and “no” will awake,
 and “yes” and “no” will merge.
 And their death will be Light.

It is namely the light of our new religion, the light of the final connection – the spark which lights up only between “ends,” between the poles of the final separation; – the light about which was said that He “*shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not encompassed Him.*” (John 1:5)

Свет, кажущийся столь унылым и будничным, нетаинственным, на самом деле столь полный тайны, столь радостный и предзнаменующий, свет последнего раздвоения и соединения, молнии, соединившей небо и землю, -- свет Электричества. Да, еще там, в явлениях доживотной природы, в механике неодушевленной материи, -- притяжение и отталкивание атомов, центростремительная и центробежная сила движущихся солнц, положительный и отрицательный полюс электричества; выше -- в развитии органическом ("эволюции"), разделение и объединение сочлененных частей ("дифференциация", "интеграция"), противоположность полов -- этих животных полюсов; еще выше -- в явлениях сверхфизических, метафизических, нравственных -- добро и зло, любовь к другим, любовь к себе; явлениях всемирной истории -- так называемая "языческая" и так называемая "христианская", вернее -- "буддийская" культура, крайнее утверждение и крайнее отрицание обособленной личности, ее последнее "да" и последнее "нет"; наконец, в самой высшей, мистической области -- борьба *кажущегося* "Христа" и *кажущегося* "Антихриста" [(italics mine; subsequent italics Merezhkovsky)], Богочеловека и Человекобога: вот восходящие ступени этого космического раздвоения, борьбы и согласия двух половин, двух полюсов, двух полов мира -- Двух, которые будут Одно, которые суть Одно в тайне Троиинства ("Я и Отец Одно", Сын, Отец, Дух -- Три Одно); вот ступени космической *полярности*, которая, более или менее, всегда была открыта религиозному сознанию человечества, но с окончательною ясностью открывается только нашему современному, или, точнее, будущему религиозному сознанию. Мы теперь более, чем когда-либо, предчувствуем, что --

Концы соприкоснутся,
 Проснутся "да" и "нет",
 И "да" и "нет" сольются.
 И смерть их будет Свет --

именно свет нашей религии, свет последнего соединения -- искра, которая вспыхивает только между "концами", между полюсами последнего раздвоения; --свет, о котором сказано, что Он "во тьме светит, и тьма не объяла Его" (Иоанна, I, 5).²⁸

²⁸ D. S. Merezhkovskii, *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevsky* (Moscow: Nauka, 2000), 359.

The bearers of a new religious consciousness understand and are motivated by the joining of the “poles” of existence. When the poles of the “final” separation—the “seeming” Christ and the “seeming” Antichrist—join, they create the future religion of the true Christ. Referring to this true Christ and true Christianity, Merezhkovsky closes his Christ-Antichrist trilogy without any of the struggle or ambiguity that characterized the first two novels of the trilogy: “Hosanna! Christ will defeat the Antichrist.”²⁹

Merezhkovsky's conviction that “paganism” and “buddhism” or “historical Christianity” were united in Christ and would be united in a future Christian era required him to devise a new conception of history divided into religious eras. This conception was undoubtedly related to his friend Rozanov's division of religions: Rozanov saw Old Testament Jewish religion as a religion of joy that celebrated life and procreation without the preoccupation of an afterlife, whereas the New Testament and the Christianity that followed it was a religion of sorrow and death that shunned procreation and the sexuality that attended it because it was focused solely on the afterlife. Rozanov even considered any tendencies within Christianity towards joy, hedonism, or a celebration of life on earth (such as a celebration of romantic marriage) to be fundamentally *unchristian*, the religion of God the Father rather than God the Son:

It is the earth, the beginning of the earthly, the foundation of existence, just as eternal as the grave; that is, it is, if you will, a second religion or, probably, *still* a religion, just *not a Christian one*. It is the religion of the Paternal Hypostasis, world parenthood.... One religion is to enter *here*, to fall to earth; another religion is to exit *from here*, to rise to heaven.

Это – земля, начало земного, устой бытия, столь же вековечный, как и гроб; т. е. Это, если угодно, вторая религия или, пожалуй, *еще* религия, но только *не христианская*. Религия Отчей Ипостаси, мирового родительства... Религия – *сюда* войти, ниспасть на землю; и религия – *отсюда* выйти, вознестись на небо.³⁰

²⁹ Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, *Khristos i antikhrisť. Trilogiia. Tom 4. Antikhrisť (Petr i Aleksei)*, reprint of 1914 edition, vols 5-6 (Moscow: “Kniga,” 1990), 6: 288. Henceforth *Petr i Aleksei*.

Like Merezhkovsky, Rozanov envisions the Apocalypse, with its sensual depictions of trees, fruits, and clothing, as the historical event to resolve this dichotomy: “Here is the true path of the historical ship, and some reconciliation of our sorrows and joys” (Вот истинный путь исторического корабля, и некоторое примирение наших скорбей и радостей).³¹

Though not identical to Rozanov's, Merezhkovsky's formulation includes a similar distinction between the religion of God the Father and the religion of God the Son and the reconciliation of these in the Apocalypse. Merezhkovsky saw history comprising three ages corresponding to the three hypostases of God. The Old Testament era represented the age of God the Father, the religion of God in the world; the New Testament ushered in the age of God the Son, the religion of God in a man. And now a new, Third Testament could be expected—the age of God the Spirit, the religion of God in humanity, which would fuse divine and human.³² Merezhkovsky lays out this formulation at the end of *Peter and Alexis*, as Merezhkovsky's hero Tikhon (a version of Merezhkovsky himself) quite literally “sees the light” in his vision of St. John the Evangelist, the “Son of Thunder”:

There was the ancient church of Peter, the standing Stone; there will be the new church of John, the flying Thunder. The thunder will strike the stone, and [from it] will flow living water. The first testament is the Old Testament – the Kingdom of the Father, the second testament is the New Testament – the Kingdom of the Son, and the third testament is the Final Testament – the Kingdom of the Spirit.

Была древняя церковь Петра, Камня стоящего, будет новая церковь Иоанна, Грома летящего. Ударит в камень гром, и потечет вода живая. Первый завет Ветхий – Царство Отца, второй завет Новый – Царство Сына, третий завет Последний – Царство Духа.³³

³⁰ V. V. Rozanov, “Sluchai v derevne,” in *V temnykh religioznykh luchakh. Sbranie sochinenii pod obshchei redaktsii A. N. Nikoliukina* (Moscow: Respublika,” 1994), 154. First published in *Mir iskusstva*, 1900.

³¹ Rozanov, “Sluchai v derevne,” 155.

³² V. Zen'kovskii, “Merezhkovskii, ego idei,” in *D. S. Merezhkovskii: Pro et kontra: lichnost' i tvorchestvo Dmitriia Merezhkovskogo v otsenke sovremennikov: antologiya* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkogo-khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta, 2001), 429-430.

³³ Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleksei*, 6:284.

This vision rejuvenates Tikhon and transforms him into an apocalyptic evangelist of the Final Testament.

The importance of the Apocalypse for Merezhkovsky as a result of his “conversion” should not be downplayed, because it was only an anticipated future era that could broadly resolve the tension between the earthly and the divine for Merezhkovsky. As Rosenthal explains, Merezhkovsky's turn to apocalyptic thought was a recourse for his failure to synthesize the poles of existence in the present:

As Merezhkovsky's attempt to reconcile Paganism and Christianity fell short of his goals, his apocalypticism came to the fore. Endless discussions and study of the Gospels and the religions of the Ancient Near East were not leading to the new dogma he sought. Psychologically unable to accept ambiguity, he relied increasingly on the Apocalypse itself..... Christ would step in where human powers have failed.³⁴

Moreover, Merezhkovsky's division of history into three periods is in itself an echo of one of the most apocalyptic theologies in history: the 12th-century Italian mystic Joachim of Fiore similarly divided history into three ages of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, therein laying the foundation for the modern apocalyptic anticipation that was flourishing in turn-of-the century Russia.³⁵

Prescribing a course of history in which two flawed ages would be followed by a glorious age that solved the problems of both of its predecessors created an apocalyptic desire to enter that

³⁴ Rosenthal, 127.

³⁵ David Bethea explains that until Joachim, prevailing opinion held to Augustinian doctrine that the millennial reign of Christ was already in place; after Joachim, those looking for a better future, particularly “the popular, sectarian consciousness, which could not help from noticing the disparity between the historical and ideal churches,” had a marvelous explanation for the problems of the present and appealing goal for the future. Moreover, when Joachim prophesied apocalyptic events for the thirteenth century, he set a blueprint for others to follow, leading to a pattern of apocalyptic anticipation: “Joachim's placement of this third age of the Holy Spirit *within* history was enormously influential for the development of apocalyptic thought in the West. It surfaces, *mutatis mutandis*, in the programs of Müntzer, Campanella, Lessing, in the Third State of Auguste Comte, in Marx's Higher Stage of Communism, in Teilhard's Noösphere, as well as in countless nationalisms, from Savonarola's Florence to Hitler's Third Reich. Even Columbus' discovery of a new world in 1492 (the year the old world was scheduled to end in Russia) is largely a product of this tradition. And in the Russian context it can be seen in modern guise in the tripartite periodization of history advanced by such thinkers as Vladimir Solovyov and Dmitry Merezhkovsky.” David Bethea, *The Shape of the Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 11-12.

third age as soon as possible.

On the heels of Merezhkovsky's change from a dualistic to a trinitarian view of life came the trip that would influence his and Gippius's philosophy for decades to come. In summer of 1902, he and Gippius went to the Kerzhenets region to meet with “schismatics” in preparation for his novel *Peter and Alexis*. Rozanov claims this event caused a sea-change in Merezhkovsky, transforming him from a western-leaning global citizen who was never quite at home in Russia to a man so fixated on the Russian people that none other mattered to him. According to Rozanov, Merezhkovsky found a common language with these rural schismatics by talking about the Apocalypse and returned to Petersburg ecstatic about having seen what he believed was the future of humanity:

It is impossible to convey all the enthusiasm with which he spoke about both this region, and its people: ... “Why bother with the West? Everything there has already lost faith: Russia – here is the new land of our faith! Petersburg, with its positivism and social questions is a belch from the West: but the true Russia, these peasant women and men at the Kerzhenets, with their *legends*, these pine forests, where you are riding along and suddenly see a little icon on a tree, like an ancient nymph in the Hellenic forests: *this Russia is the world of the future, new, resurrected Christ, the reconciliation of the nymphs and the winged John [the Baptist], Hellenism and Christianity, Christ and Dionysus*. Nietzsche was wrong when he separated and juxtaposed them: their union is possible! Western people looked past the true, whole, complete Christ, adopting only half of Him, the dark, ascetic half, but not seeing the side of Him that was white, resurrecting, orgiastic, Dionysian.”

Невозможно передать всего энтузиазма, с которым он рассказывал и о крае этом, и о людях: “Что Запад – там уже все изверилось: Россия – вот новая страна веры! Петербург, с его позитивизмом и общественными вопросами – это отрывок Запада: но коренная Россия, но эти бабы и мужики на Керженце, с их *легендами*, эти сосновые леса, где едешь-едешь и вдруг видишь иконку на дереве, как древнюю нимфу в лесах Эллады: *эта Россия есть мир будущего, нового, воскресшего Христа, примирения нимф и окрыленного Иоанна, эллинизма и христианства, Христа и Диониса*. Ницше был не прав, их разделяя и противопоставляя: возможно их объединение! Западные народы просмотрели Христа истинного, цельного, полного, усвоив в Нем только одну половину, аскетически-темную, но не увидев в Нем же стороны белой, воскресающей, оргийной, Дионисовой.”³⁶

³⁶ Vasilii Vasil'evich Rozanov, “Sredi inoiazychnykh (D. S. Merezhkovskii),” in *Sobranie sochinenii. O pisatel'stve i pisateliakh*, pod obshch. red. A. N. Nikoliukina (Moscow: Respublika, 1995), 147. Emphasis mine.

Rozanov's paraphrase of Merezhkovsky may be exaggerated: nothing that Gippius or Merezhkovsky himself wrote depicts the Kerzhenets trip as such an obvious resolution to the problem of the “truth of earth” and “truth of heaven.” Nonetheless, two points from Rozanov's story are noteworthy. The first is that Merezhkovsky returned from the Kerzhenets a new man, a man suddenly excited about the Russian people because he believed that among them he had glimpsed the holistic religion that would define the future. The second is that Merezhkovsky had a particular esteem for the *legends* of the Kerzhenets schismatics, which he considered a valuable part of this new world culture. Merezhkovsky's esteem for these legends—the most celebrated of which is the Kitezh legend—would lead him and Gippius to create the first positive interpretation of the Kitezh legend in Russian literature.

Peter and Alexis

The vast changes of perspective Merezhkovsky underwent at the turn of the century, including his impressions from his trip to the Kerzhenets region, led to new priorities in the final novel of his *Christ-Antichrist* trilogy.³⁷ The first was a clear distinction between “historical

³⁷ The general criticism of Merezhkovsky's novels that they are too ideologically driven, leading to mechanical characters who lack human spontaneity and instead move, to use Lundberg's phrase, “along railroad tracks” becomes more complicated in *Peter and Alexis*, in which the ideology that drove the previous novels is itself in a state of development. While many critics agree that *Peter and Alexis* is a weaker novel than its predecessors, they differ sharply in their reasons and subsequent evaluations of the philosophical emphases of the novel. A. S. Dolinin says that while the first two books of the trilogy were too ideologically driven, “in *Peter and Alexis*, Merezhkovsky descended even farther from the heights of artistic creation...by several steps. Here there are not even those spontaneous bright eruptions that were found in the previous parts [of the trilogy]; here everything is measured ahead of time, calculated, one thing matched to another, as if he consulted about everything...in some kind of 'master script.'” Bedford, on the other hand, diagnoses the weakness of the novel as a rupture in the philosophical structure that supported a trilogy that relied on philosophy more than artistry, leading to a novel that is “far more confused and mixed up” than its predecessors. Avril Pyman points to Merezhkovsky's philosophical changes as the source of “a feeling of anticlimax” in the last volume, “as though the author had set a puzzle and then become inexpressibly bored with his own attempts to solve it and...had 'changed the question.’” E. Lundberg, *Merezhkovskii i ego novoe khrisianstvo* (St. Petersburg: Tip. G. A. Shumakher I V. D. Brukera, 1914), 36; A. Dolinin, “D. Merezhkovskii,” in Vengerov, S. A., ed., *Russkaia literatura XX v. T. I* (Moscow: Izdanie t-va “Mir,” 1914), 322; Bedford, 80; Avril Pyman, *A History of Russian Symbolism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 130.

Christianity” and “Christianity” and a vehement rejection of the former. The second, related to the first, was an apocalyptic mood that anticipated the coming age of true Christianity. The third and perhaps most important priority was to make the hero, Tikhon, a religious seeker akin to Merezhkovsky himself, a bearer of a “new religious consciousness,” whose unremitting search for a perfect fusion of divine and earthly truths would drive the book to its apocalyptic end. Notably, Kitezkh plays a role in realizing each of these new priorities in this novel, the first work in which Merezhkovsky mentions the Kitezkh legend. In this way, Merezhkovsky unmistakably binds Kitezkh to his new religious philosophy. *Peter and Alexis* was published in *New Path* in 1904-1905, and it may be seen as a kind of transitional piece between the prevailing nineteenth-century attitudes towards Old Believers and the Kitezkh legend and the full Kitezkh mythology that Gippius was already developing, and which Merezhkovsky would soon adopt.

Tikhon's vision of the three stages of history at the end of the novel explains the failures of the Christian movements he encounters—and becomes disillusioned with—throughout the book. These include the (Nikonian) Orthodox Church, aligned with the State and bearing the mark of the “Antichrist” Peter; the Old Believers who practice self-immolation at the bidding of their corrupt leaders; and the hedonistic sectarian practitioners of the “white death” (who actually resemble Bacchanalian pagans more than Christians). The depiction of the Old Believers in the novel is particularly important because they are the source of the Kitezkh legend and contribute to a complex and, on the surface, contradictory image. Merezhkovsky considers the suicidal Old Believers the most extreme example of the world-denying tendency of historical Christianity; but at the same time, he protects the image of Kitezkh in the novel as a good apocalyptic symbol.

Like the villains of nineteenth-century Kitezkh works, the corrupt Old Believer leaders in *Peter and Alexis* feed and prey on others' preoccupation with the spiritual, convincing them that

attaining heaven justifies whatever means they take to get there. This extreme preference for the spiritual over the physical—Merezhkovsky's fundamental criticism of historical Christianity—leads to many abuses, and ultimately a rejection of life itself. While some Old Believers debate the wisdom of using suicide to avoid capture and forced conversion, the corrupt Old Believer leaders have already persuaded many that self-immolation is the best way to save their souls from the “prison” of their bodies. Ordinary people begin convincing each other that life is just a waste of time, since death is the goal of life anyway; that parents do well to murder their own children and thereby send them to heaven; that death by fire will cleanse sins that would require a decade of penance by fasting and prayer. The planned suicide becomes a justification for actions the Old Believers would generally consider sin. As a young nun seduces Tikhon, she whispers to him: “everything is allowed, the fire will cleanse all” (все можно, все очистит огонь).³⁸ This depiction of Old Believers ready to sacrifice morality in the present for the sake of paradise reinforces stereotypes of the dark side of Old Belief from the “Grisha” plotlines of the nineteenth century.

The Old Believers in *Peter and Alexis* likewise reinforce the stereotype that Old Believers are overly concerned with trivial matters of dogma. In the novel the disproportionate weight the Old Believers give to spiritual concerns leads to heated doctrinal debates that turn brother against brother “over any trifle.”³⁹ One of the more reasonable Old Believers warns the others their endless debates have made them worse than the Nikonian persecutors they are fleeing:

Is not the devil warring among us and incensing us with fratricidal rebellion? And no one is searching for living water to extinguish the satanic flame, but everyone is searching for pitch and chaff and dry sticks to feed the bitter conflagration. Eh, fathers, I have not heard such fraternal hatred even among the Nikonians.

³⁸ Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleksei*, 6: 151, 155, 170-171, 175.

³⁹ Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleksei*, 6: 166.

Не диавол ли воюет в нас и распяет мятежем братоубийственным? И никто не ищет воды живой, дабы пламень сатанинский угасить, но всяк ищет смолы, изгребия и тростия сухого на распаление горшее. Ей, отцы, не слыхал я и в никонианах такого братоненавидения.⁴⁰

As Comer points out, there is a direct link between the Old Believers' spiritual debates and their suicidal obsession:

In the monk's questions Merezhkovskii invites a comparison to be drawn between the inflammatory debate over dogma and the practice of self-immolation. The argument, which their fanaticism fosters, is described by Merezhkovskii as verbal self-immolation, since he uses the same vocabulary (raspaliaet, plamen', raspalenie) and realia (smola, izgrebiia and trostie) that reappear later in the description of the self-immolation.⁴¹

In their readiness for both physical and metaphorical self-immolation, the Old Believers reveal their disdain for the earth and the people and life that populate it. To the Old Believers, the only thing of consequence is the spiritual, particularly the afterlife, and they are willing to sacrifice anything in the world for it.

The final evil of the Old Believers is the murderous corruption of their leaders. After the elders Cornelius and Kiriukha convince their followers that they must all burn themselves rather than be captured by Tsarist police, they lock themselves and their followers in a structure booby-trapped to ignite in the case of attempted rescue or escape. When these traps fail, Kiriukha ignites the structure himself. But as their followers burn to death—even while attempting to escape—Kiriukha and Cornelius escape through an underground passage into the forest, dragging the unconscious Tikhon with them. The narrator comments that “nearly all the preachers of self-immolation behaved this way: they burned others, but saved themselves and their closest disciples to preach to new audiences.” The collective picture of corrupt, petty, volatile, life-hating Old Believers in the novel leaves little doubt that the Old Believers cannot be

⁴⁰ Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleksei*, 6: 164.

⁴¹ Comer, 185.

true followers of Christ.⁴²

The striking difference between Merezhkovsky's attitude towards the religious dissenters in *Peter and Alexis* and those he met during his trip to the Kerzhenets requires some explanation. Why would Merezhkovsky turn the schismatics with whom he was so enamored into one of the darkest villains of the novel? The simple answer to this question is that even though both groups may be lumped into the category “schismatics,” Merezhkovsky regarded them as fundamentally different. In order to understand Merezhkovsky's choice of the Old Believers to demonstrate the life-renouncing qualities of historical Christianity it is helpful to consider Rozanov's writings on religious fanaticism from the early twentieth century. Despite the general trend of growing respect towards Old Believers around the turn of the century, several incidents reinforced the earlier stereotypes of Old Believers as dangerous religious fanatics, such as a rash of mass suicides by immurement and vivisepture during the census of 1897. These and other religiously motivated suicides caught Rozanov's attention, and he began collecting newspaper stories and other records of what he called the “dark rays” (темные лучи) of Christianity and attempted to publish them, with commentary, in the early 1900s.⁴³ Only a portion of the incidents he recorded were directly tied to Old Belief or sectarianism, but Rozanov considered them all of the same religious vein, a demonstration of rarefied Christian culture. Rozanov claimed that the distinction society attempted to make between regular Orthodox Christians and “fanatical schismatics” was inherently false, since the schismatics' faith had been considered “schismatic” for only about 200 years—prior to that time, it was “normal.” Rozanov even rejected the concept of “fanaticism,” claiming fanaticism was “merely very strong faith,” the taking of a given faith to its logical

⁴² Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleksei*, 6: 194-96.

⁴³ A number of these stories were published individually in *Mir iskusstva*, *Novyi put'*, and *Novoe vremia* between 1900 and 1904; they and others were collected and published in *Temnyi lik* in 1911. However, the stories most damaging to the Orthodox Church, such as those involving Orthodox priests raping children, were censored and were only published in the late twentieth century.

conclusions: “Basically, whatever a *faith* is like, so will be its 'fanaticism,' white or black, positive or negative” (Вообще какова *вера*—таков и “фанатизм” ее, белый или черный, плюсовый или минусный). Moreover, this test of a religion by its fanatics was one that Orthodoxy failed. Orthodoxy's fanatics betrayed the religion's inherent desire to destroy life:

The strange “fanaticism” of Orthodoxy periodically leads people, for example, not to polygamy, but to the destruction even of their own individual existence, to the destruction in general of *the living*, through self-immolation, self-drowning, and self-suffocation.

Странный “фанатизм” Православия то там, то здесь приводит людей, напр., не к многоженству, а вот к истреблению и своего единоличного существования, к истреблению вообще *живого*, через самосожжение, самоутопление, самодушение.⁴⁴

A similar understanding of religious “fanatics” and their incidents of suicide and violence underpins Merezhkovsky's inclusion of the self-immolating Old Believers in *Peter and Alexis*. Their faith is essentially no different than contemporary Orthodoxy, but their willingness to follow the underlying anti-life philosophy of their religion to its extreme ends allows Merezhkovsky to demonstrate vividly the evils of historical Christianity. Tikhon's thoughts as he leaves the Old Believers reveal the fundamental equivalence of the Orthodox Church and the Old Believers: “He understood that the old church was no better than the new, and decided to return to the world in order to search for the true church until he found it” (он понял, что церковь старая не лучше новой, и решил вернуться в мир, чтоб искать истинной церкви, пока не найдет).⁴⁵ Calling the Old Believers the “old church” emphasizes their place as part of the flawed historical Christianity. The difference between the sectarians of *Peter and Alexis* and the sectarians Merezhkovsky met in 1902 and later employed in his philosophical writings is that the former are fanatical practitioners of historical Christianity, whereas the latter are sober seekers of the Coming Kingdom.

⁴⁴ Rozanov, “Kupol khrama,” in *V temnykh religioznykh luchakh*, 190.

⁴⁵ Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleksei*, 6: 196.

Given the change that the trip to the Kerezhenets made in Merezhkovsky's life and thought, it is plausible that his view of religious dissenters also changed dramatically as a result of a direct encounter with them. The rough outlines of his thought process would be thus: intending to show the worst side of historical Christianity during the time of Peter the Great, Merezhkovsky chose the Old Believers because of their history of mass suicide, the ultimate form of world-denial.⁴⁶ Having chosen the Old Believers, Merezhkovsky did considerable archival research on Old Believers and self-immolation, but also decided to take a trip to the Kerzhenets region to do background research.⁴⁷ This trip stunned Merezhkovsky, for he found a perfect synthesis of flesh and spirit in the schismatics' rural religion. This revelation notwithstanding, he continued to use “fanatical” Old Believers in his novel to demonstrate the flaws of historical Christianity.

At the same time, Merezhkovsky incorporated something of his experiences among the schismatics in the Kerzhenets region in the storyline of Tikhon, which becomes so important that actually overshadows the main father-son storyline of Peter and Alexis by the end of the novel. Though from an Old Believer family, Tikhon is distinct from the other Old Believers in the novel because he does not succumb to their vices: he is repeatedly resistant to the idea of self-immolation, he recognizes the religious debates for the bestial fights they are, and he is disgusted by the deception of Cornelius and Kiriukha. Tikhon is the predecessor of the schismatics Merezhkovsky met in 1902, a religious dissenter who possesses the “new religious consciousness” necessary to synthesize flesh and spirit, and to see the future of humanity in the

⁴⁶ Comer, 185.

⁴⁷ E. M. Iukhimenko proves convincingly on the basis of manifold textological evidence the many seventeenth-century documents that Merezhkovsky used to develop his varied Old Believer characters and their conversations. See E. M. Iukhimenko, “Staroobriadcheskie istochniki romana D. S. Merezhkovskogo 'Petr i Aleksei,’” *De visu*, 3/4 (1994): 47-59. Gippius, Rozanov, and Merezhkovsky himself repeatedly name research for *Peter and Alexis* as the reason for the trip.

Third Testament. And it is through the character of Tikhon that Merezhkovsky turns the legend of Kitezh, which he found such a vital part of the Old Believers' holistic, future-minded Christianity, into a positive symbol.

Tikhon is an ideal religious seeker. As a young child, Tikhon is often overwhelmed by an apocalyptic desire:

a strange feeling, unlike anything else, unbearably eerie but at the same time sweet, always new, always familiar. In this feeling were awe and surprise, and memory, as if from another world, but most of all: curiosity, a desire that sooner rather than later that which was supposed to take place would take place.

странное чувство, ни на что не похожее, нестерпимо жуткое и вместе с тем сладкое, всегда новое, всегда знакомое. В чувстве этом был страх и удивление, и воспоминание, точно из какого-то иного мира, но больше всего—любопытство, желание, чтобы скорее случилось то, что должно случиться.⁴⁸

He often imagines scenes from the Apocalypse in his mind, and suggestions of the End of the World sometimes trigger epileptic fits in him. Even when Tikhon's Western education forces him to admit he no longer believes many of the religious teachings of his youth, he still feels an affinity for the Old Believers because of their shared “sense of the end” (чувство конца).⁴⁹

The difference between Tikhon and the other Old Believers—the reason he is immune to being carried away by their world-renouncing fanaticism—is his instinctual ability to synthesize flesh and spirit, to find the divine in the human, the pagan in the Christian. Tikhon's worldview when he is among the Old Believers recalls Merezhkovsky's delight (as reported by Rozanov) at seeing a Christian icon on trees “like an ancient nymph in the Hellenic forests” when he was visiting the Kerzhenets region. One beautiful, fragrant summer day, the plenitude and harmony of nature together with the grave of a saint suddenly arrest Tikhon, and as heaven and earth meld into one, he has a vision of the Divine Sophia, the mysterious entity Soloviev identified as

⁴⁸ Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleksei*, 5: 70.

⁴⁹ Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleksei*, 5: 81.

having the power to mediate between heaven and earth:⁵⁰

A summer midday, the scent of fir trees, in which the freshness of apples was mixed with incense, a forest glade, sun, bees buzzing over clover, lungwort, and pink campion; in the field an ancient, half-rotted cross, probably marking the grave of a saintly hermit... He knelt, moved aside the high grasses, fell to the ground and kissed it, and wept, and prayed:

Wondrous Queen Mother of God,
Earth, Earth, Moist Mother!

And, gazing at the sky, he affirmed:

From heaven the All-Hymned Mother will descend,
Our Lady the Ruler Mother of God!

And the earth and the sky were one. In the heavenly face, like the sun, the Face of the Woman, firey-eyed, firey-winged, holy Sophia, the Wisdom of God, he saw an earthly face, which he both wanted to recognize and feared recognizing.

летний полдень, запах елей, в котором свежесть яблок смешана с ладаном, лесная прогалина, солнце, пчелы над кашкой, медуницей и розовой липкой дремой; среди поляны ветхий полусгнивший голубец-крест, должно быть, над могилою святого отшельника.... Он стал на колени, раздвинул высокие травы, припал к земле и целовал, и плакал, и молился:

Чудная Царица Богородица,
Земля, земля, Мати сырая!

И, глядя на небо, твердил:

С небес сойдет Мати Всепетая,
Госпожа Владычица Богородица!

И земля, и небо были одно. В лике небесном, подобном солнцу, Лике Жены огнезрочной, огнекрылой, святой Софии, Премудрости Божьей, он видел лик земной, который хотел и боялся узнать.⁵¹

Heading into the woods towards a round lake, he sees his beloved, the young novice Sophia,

⁵⁰ Kornblatt explains that Sophia “is not merely a person but a relationship, the principle or energy or potential that can conjoin. She does not exist in either a sacred or a natural world, but mediates dynamically between the two.... Like an icon, Sophia brings heaven to earth and in the interaction of the opposites creates a new whole: a poetic, often joyful, light-infused creation.” Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, *Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov* (Cornell University Press, 2009), 94.

⁵¹ Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleksei*, 6: 152.

appearing “just like a mermaid” with flowers in her unbraided hair, dangling her naked feet in the water while singing an ancient pagan song about the sun and the moist earth. Her eyes appear intoxicated. He recognizes in this pagan, water-nymph Sophia the same face of the Divine Sophia he has just encountered. Tikhon's ability to fuse the “truths” of heaven and earth, from fusing the pagan Moist Mother Earth with the Mother of God (the Queen of Heaven) to fusing the Holy Wisdom of God with a Dionysian water-nymph reveals his “new religious consciousness.” Though Tikhon later worries that his ecstatic prayers linking heaven and earth were blasphemous, he cannot overcome them, and ultimately his ability to see divinity in earth will protect him from the Old Believers' fanaticism.⁵²

A similar scene occurs when Tikhon runs away from an increasingly heated discussion about self-immolation, the dreaded “red death.” He runs deep into the forest and again finds himself face-down in the ground praying to the Moist Mother Earth and the Mother of God:

He lay face-down on the ground, buried into the grass and again, as at the Round Lake, kissed the earth, prayed to the earth, as if he knew that only the earth could save him from the fiery delirium of the red death:

Wondrous Mother of God,
Earth, Earth, Moist Mother!

Он лег ничеком на землю, зарылся в траву и опять, как тогда, у Круглого озера, целовал землю, молился земле, как будто знал, тчо только земля может спасти его от огненного бреда красной смерти:

Чудная Царица Богородица,
Земля, земля, Мати сырая!

And once again, he meets Sophia. This time the human Sophia finds him, but he sees her in the imagery of gold and azure associated with Holy Sophia. He looked up at her “from below, such that the face of the girl...was clearly defined against the golden azure of the sky, like a holy face

⁵² Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleksei*, 6: 152-153.

against the gold of an icon” (глядя на нее снизу, так что лицо девушки... выделялось четко на золотистой лазури неба, как лик святой на золоте иконы).⁵³

While the human Sophia does eventually convince Tikhon to commit suicide by self-immolation, she changes her mind at the last moment and persuades the Old Believer leaders to take Tikhon with them when they escape the flames through their secret passage. After his rescue from the flames, Tikhon is restored by the same moist mother earth he identifies with the Mother of God:

The moisture of the earth soothed the pain of the burns, and it seemed to him that the earth had heard his prayer, had saved him from the fiery heaven of the red death, and that he was once again coming out of the womb of the earth, like a child being born, a dead man resurrecting. And he embraced and kissed it, as if it were alive, and wept and prayed:

Wondrous Queen Mother of God,
Earth, Earth, Moist Mother!

Сырость земли утоляла боль ожогов, и ему казалось, что земля услышала мольбу его, спасла от огненного неба красной смерти, и что снова выходит он из чрева земли, как младенец рождающийся, мертвец воскресающий. И он обнимал, целовал ее, как живую, и плакал, и молился:

Чудная Царица Богородица,
Земля, земля, Мати сырая!⁵⁴

Tikhon's ecstatic prayers equating earth and heaven, pagan and Christian, always accompanied by the salvific presence of Sophia, testify to the importance of fusing these supposed antipodes. The pursuit of one to the exclusion of the other—as the Old Believers pursue what they presume to be divine truth—is actually diabolical, a worldview relegated to the past. Tikhon, with his instinctive desire and ability to synthesize earth and heaven, especially with help from Sophia, is a model of the coming age of true Christianity.

⁵³ Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Alekisei*, 6: 174.

⁵⁴ Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleksei*, 6: 195-196.

Merezhkovsky likewise separates Tikhon from the other Old Believers by making him an honest seeker. Like Merezhkovsky himself, Tikhon is naturally curious, interested in science, foreign lands, and driven to spiritual searching by his dissatisfaction with the world around him. When presented with the choice to stay in St. Petersburg or join the Old Believers in the forest, Tikhon chooses the latter, “to become...a wanderer, one of the hidden runaways 'who have no current city, who are seeking the coming city,'...to go with Elder Cornelius to invisible Kitezh” (сделаться...бродягою, одним из утаенных, беглых людей, “настоящего града не имеющих, грядущего взыскующих”...со старцем Корнелием—в невидимый Китеж-град).⁵⁵ When he discovers the fraud of Cornelius and becomes disillusioned with the Old Believers, he decides to return to civilization “in order to search for the true church until he finds it” (чтоб искать истинной церкви, пока не найдет).⁵⁶ This search leads him first to the hedonistic and murderous cult of the “White Death,” and then to the stale, lifeless Orthodox Church. Unwilling to compromise his ideals to live in either of these, he dons an icon of Holy Sophia and sets out wandering again with a member of the *beguny* who is searching for the mythic Belovodye. He lives for a while with two hermits and then begins wandering alone until he has exhausted all the alternatives on earth, including literally getting lost and going in a giant circle on the island of Valaam. Only then, despondent over the fact that he has “nowhere left to go” (идти некуда), does Tikhon suddenly have the apocalyptic vision of John that unveils the Third Testament and the New Jerusalem.⁵⁷ Tikhon's unrelenting search stands in stark contrast to the Old Believers, who identify themselves as “pilgrims...who have no current city, who are seeking the future

⁵⁵ Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleksei*, 5: 82.

⁵⁶ Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleksei*, 6: 196.

⁵⁷ Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleksei*, 6: 283.

city,” but do very little active seeking.⁵⁸ Tikhon's journey through all the religious options of his day, motivated by his conviction to seek authentic religion instead of accepting the status quo, resembles Merezhkovsky's own spiritual pilgrimage as found in his participation in the Religious-Philosophical Meetings and acknowledgment that his “path” required “following a lie to its end” in order to discover the truth.

Just as Merezhkovsky separates the religious seeker Tikhon from the Old Believers who practice the worst of historical Christianity, Merezhkovsky also separates the Kitezh legend from the fanaticism it was associated with in the nineteenth century. For Merezhkovsky, Kitezh and similar sectarian legends are not the domain of world-renouncing fanatics, but of Third Testament-seekers like Tikhon. While Tikhon must have first learned of the Kitezh legend from the Old Believers, every mention of it in the book occurs entirely in his own imagination, which is not corrupt or—a key difference from the unwitting villains of the nineteenth-century “Grisha” plotlines—susceptible to corruption. In Melnikov-Pechersky and Maikov's “Grisha” tales, a corrupt pilgrim convinces the zealous but hitherto honest Grisha that he must commit a heinous robbery in order to reach Kitezh, and Grisha compromises his morals—and accidentally kills his benefactresses—in the selfish hope of reaching Kitezh. In contrast, when Tikhon learns of the deception during the mass-suicide, he loses faith in the existence of Kitezh. Thus while Kitezh is associated with corrupt Old Believers, it plays no part as a lure to crime (or, as in Korolenko's stories, a cover-up for crime).

When Kitezh or similar legends do occur in *Peter and Alexis*, they are always in the positive context of uniting the material world with the spiritual. For example, Tikhon's vision of the Divine Sophia takes place at “Round Lake” (Круглое озеро). Whether or not the Round

⁵⁸ Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleskei*, 6: 154-155.

Lake is actually supposed to be Svetloyar, the supposed location of Kitez, is uncertain.⁵⁹ But if it is not meant to be Svetloyar itself, the Round Lake is certainly intended to be a Svetloyar-like lake, one of a number of legendary lakes in the Kerzhenets region. The narrator describes the Round Lake as “small, round, like a bowl, surrounded by steep banks overgrown with fir forest that reflected in the water, as in a mirror, like full green walls.” While such a description could probably describe many lakes in the Kerzhenets region, Svetloyar was also noted in contemporary literature as a small, bowl-like lake with steep banks and strong reflective properties. Moreover, the narrator notes that the pagan song Sophia sings was the same one sung “among *kupal'nye* fires on St. John's Eve.”⁶⁰ In *In the Forests*, Pechersky described the gatherings on St. John's Eve at Lake Svetloyar—the same gatherings Merezhkovsky and Gippius attended in 1902—as remnants of pagan *Kupala* rites celebrated on the same day. Because Melnikov's interpretation of the origin of the gatherings at Svetloyar on St. John's Eve went unchallenged until the mid-twentieth century, there is no reason to believe Merezhkovsky doubted it.⁶¹ But if for Melnikov, the Kitez cult was a troublesome Christian whitewashing of pagan rites, for Merezhkovsky, it is an emblem of the new religious consciousness. Tikhon has his Sophianic vision at a Svetloyar-like lake precisely because Merezhkovsky sees the legend as a beautiful example of the fusion of Christian and pagan that is native to the rural religion of the schismatics he so respects. In Merezhkovsky's Kitez mythology, Kitez becomes a Sophianic

⁵⁹ In nineteenth and twentieth century sources, including Gippius's travelogue, Svetloyar is repeatedly described as oval-shaped and surrounded by oak or deciduous forest. The Round Lake, in contrast, in “round” and is surrounded by coniferous forest. Tikhon's geographical location is ambiguous, but it is likely the site of the future Sharpan Monastery, about 20 miles to the west of Lake Svetloyar. The narrator explains the location of Tikhon and the Old Believers by recounting a legend almost identical to the story of the founding of the Sharpan monastery in the Vetluga Region as recounted by Melnikov in *V Lesakh* (an icon of the Mother of God from the Solovetsky Monastery led monks to the site on which the faithful were to live).

⁶⁰ Merezhkovskii, *Petri i Aleksei*, 6: 152.

⁶¹ For more on Melnikov's views of the connection between the Kupala rites and the Kitez legend, see chapters 1 and 2.

force in the unification of heaven and earth that marks the Third Testament Age.

This Kitezh mythology is evident from Tikhon's earliest thoughts about Kitezh. The exposition of the legend near the beginning of the book lays the foundations for a Kitezh that cannot but appeal to Tikhon and his new religious consciousness: this Kitezh fuses the earthly and heavenly, is apocalyptic, and must be searched for. Tikhon understands Kitezh as “truly the kingdom on earth” (поистине царство земное) where there reign “peace and quiet and eternal gladness,” a sylvan wonderland where “holy fathers blossomed” and their prayers became “visible, like pillars of fire”; in other words, a combination of the joyful, physical truth of earth and the holy, spiritual truth of heaven. It is protected from the Antichrist by remaining invisible “until the end of the age.” Arriving at Kitezh is no easy task, requiring one to travel “through thickets and wilderness” along a “narrow path surrounded by all kinds of wonders and terrors.”⁶² Accordingly, Tikhon will spend his life searching for this ideal, unwilling to settle for anything less.

Much of this depiction of Kitezh is taken almost word-for-word from the “Epistle to a father from a son in a hidden monastery” and the Kitezh *Letopisets*. As in many other parts of the novel, Merezhkovsky made use of existing seventeenth and eighteenth-century sources to provide authentic language and ideas to his characters. However, as much as Merezhkovsky's text resembles the “Epistle,” there are important differences that Merezhkovsky introduces to bend the legend to his ideals. The “Epistle” focuses only on spiritual delights and emphasizes the lack of physical delight: “Truly, my parents, the kingdom on earth. With peace, and quiet, and gladness, joy that is spiritual, *but not corporeal*” (Поистине, родители мои, царство земное. И покой, и тишина, и веселье, и радость духовная, *а не телесная*), (emphasis mine).⁶³

⁶² Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleksei*, 5: 69-70.

⁶³ Mel'nikov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii P. I. Mel'nikova (Andreia Pecherskogo)*, T. 7 (St. Petersburg: Izdanie T-fa

Merezhkovsky truncates this quotation: “There is the true kingdom on earth, in peace, quiet and eternal gladness” (поистине царство земное: и покой, и тишина, и веселие вечное). By omitting the phrase “joy that is spiritual, but not corporeal,” Merezhkovsky opens the possibility of physical joys in Kitezh, and does not undermine the otherwise earthly and physical descriptions of Kitezh in the rest of the passage. Similarly, the section of Merezhkovsky's Kitezh exposition about searching for Kitezh, though it follows a section taken nearly word-for-word from the Kitezh *Letopisets*, is also original, an extension on the spiritual “searching” found in the *Letopisets*. Observing the differences between the eighteenth-century texts and Merezhkovsky's first exposition of the Kitezh legend reveals the importance of both physicality and searching in Merezhkovsky's version of the legend.

Tikhon builds on this exposition of Kitezh through his imagination. As a youth, Tikhon learns an equal regard for the spiritual and physical from his mentor Pastor Gliuk, who is convinced that science and faith are not incompatible, but actually necessary to each other. But where Gliuk struggles to harmonize science and faith, Tikhon instinctively and spontaneously synthesizes the spiritual and the physical. Tikhon is drawn early in life to both Western science and philosophy and Old Russian spirituality, which play equally on his curiosity and imagination. The representative mythical cities of each field, the Glassy City (Стекольный град)⁶⁴ or Glassy Kingdom (Стекольное царство) and Kitezh are equally appealing and mysterious: “his long-time curiosity attracted him to other lands, to the 'Glassy Kingdom,' which was nearly as mysterious to him as the invisible Kitezh” (давнее любопытство влекло его в другие края, в “царство Стекольное”, почти столько же для него таинственное, как невидимый Китеж-град). Each reminds him of the other, and he listens to “stories of the

A. F. Marks, 1909), 26-27.

⁶⁴ “Glassy city” (*Stekol'ny grad*) was a name for Stockholm (*Stokgol'm*).

wonders of science with the same kind of curiosity as the conversations of the three elders about the invisible Kitezh” (слушал эти сказания о чудесах науки с таким же любопытством, как беседы трех стариков о невидимом Китеж-граде). When he studies science in a “kingdom of books” and overhears the pealing of evening church bells, he imagines he is deep in the forest hearing the pealing of the Kitezh bells.⁶⁵

Moreover, for Tikhon Kitezh plays a special role in the Apocalypse. When he imagines the Second Coming, he pictures it as a unification of the spirituality of the Old Believers and the science of his Western teachers:

He would fancy images: now a monstrous Snake, winding itself around Moscow, now the seven-headed Beast, upon which sat the whore with her cup of abominations, now the armies of angels chasing the demons and crushing them with fiery arrows such that rivers of blood poured over the sky, and now the radiant Zion, the *invisible City*, descending from the heaven to earth in praise of the coming Lord.

Чудились ему то исполинский Змий, обвившийся вокруг Москвы, то семиглавый Зверь, на котором сидит блудница с чашею мерзостей, то воинства ангелов, которые гонят бесов, разя их огненными стрелами, так что реки крови льются по небу, то лучезарный Сион, *невидимый Град*, сходящий с неба на землю во славе грядущего Господа.⁶⁶

The images he sees in his imagination are all more or less found in the Apocalypse, save one: nowhere in the Bible is the New Jerusalem described as *invisible*.⁶⁷ The phrase “invisible city” (*nevidimyi grad*), with the Church Slavonic *grad* instead of modern Russian *gorod* is a reference instead to Kitezh, a city which captures the hero's imagination in his early childhood. Later he has a similar vision: troubled by the Old Believers' plans for self-immolation, Tikhon dreams of a

⁶⁵ Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleksei*, 80, 74, 76.

⁶⁶ Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleksei*, 71, emphasis mine.

⁶⁷ The two major descriptions of the appearance of the New Jerusalem in the Bible, both found at the end of the book of Revelation, are “as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” and a specific description of dimensions and building materials: “The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as *glass*. The foundations of the city were decorated with every kind of precious stone.... The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as *transparent glass*” (Rev. 21:2, 18-21, emphasis mine). The repeated mention of the New Jerusalem as being pure as glass resonates with the “Glassy City” of Western Science that Tikhon conflates with Kitezh.

New Jerusalem that he identifies with both Kitezh and the Glassy City:

He dreamed that he was flying over some fairy-tale city, perhaps Kitezh, or the New Jerusalem, perhaps the Glassy City, like “pure glass and crystal jasper”; and mathematics was the music in this shining City.

Ему приснилось, будто бы он летит над каким-то сказочным городом, не то над Китежем-градом, или Новым Иерусалимом, не то Стекольным, подобным “стклу чисту и камени иаспису кристалловидну”; и математика—музыка была в этом сияющем Граде.⁶⁸

In the novel, Kitezh—and its double, the “Glassy City” of Western science—are stand-ins for the New Jerusalem and both represent Tikhon's longing for the Second Coming and the Third Testament.

By placing Kitezh safely in the imagination of an ideal character and transforming the city into a stand-in for the New Jerusalem, Merezhkovsky enables the image to play a crucial and positive role in the philosophical message of the novel. Kitezh is as different from its nineteenth-century incarnations as Tikhon is from the self-immolating Old Believers. Whereas nineteenth-century fiction features Kitezh as a beacon for fanatics seeking to escape the physical world for a spiritual one, Merezhkovsky transforms the image into one that brings the spiritual and physical together, resolving his dualistic worldview through an apocalyptic one. For Merezhkovsky, seekers of Kitezh are not backward-looking fanatics, but future-looking bearers of a new religious consciousness and prophets of the coming Kingdom.

Seeking the “Seekers”

While these changes mark a significant departure of the Kitezh legend from its path in nineteenth-century literature, the single greatest change in the use of the Kitezh legend in

⁶⁸ Merezhkovskii, *Petr i Aleksei*, 6: 185.

Russian literature at this time came from the pen of Zinaida Gippius in her travelogue “The Bright Lake. A Diary” (“Светлое озеро. Дневник”), published first in 1904 (in the same issues of *New Path* in which the first installments of *Peter and Alexis* appeared) and subsequently in her 1906 collection of short stories *The Crimson Sword* (*Алый меч*). The travelogue describes the month-long journey undertaken by Gippius and Merezhkovsky to Lake Svetloyar in the summer of 1902, when they went to talk to the religious dissenters who gathered at the lake.

The similarities and differences between Merezhkovsky's application of the the Kitez legend in *Peter and Alexis* and Gippius's in “The Bright Lake” underscore the priorities of the two members of this husband-wife pair. For both, the Kitez legend became an instrumental symbol for their vision of the essential trinitarian structure of the world, an outgrowth of the Slavophiles' concept of *sobornost'* and Soloviev's religious philosophy. But while Merezhkovsky was interested in a grand organizational scheme for the relationship between morals and aesthetics in the history of the world, Gippius was concerned with relationships between people and the communal nature of salvation. Her experiments with intimate human relationships, from celibate marriage to same-sex epistolary romances to ménage à trois, testify to her attempts to work out in life a trinitarian social philosophy; around the turn of the century, she became increasingly interested in communal salvation on a global scale.⁶⁹ Her literary output is similarly focused on the relationship between individuals and between individual and community, an attempt to read social relationships through the lens of Christian doctrines of the Trinity and dual natures of Christ, allowing for complete unity while preserving individuality. Accordingly, her application of the Kitez legend is primarily *social*. While Merezhkovsky appealed to the Kitez legend in his attempt to unify earthly and heavenly “truths” in an apocalyptic ideal, Gippius used it to unify disparate social groups in an equally apocalyptic ideal.

⁶⁹ Matich, 162-211.

Though scholars routinely mention the travelogue as evidence of the Merezhkovskys' interest in religious dissidence, they forgo any detailed analysis of it. However, the travelogue is actually a carefully constructed literary work that reveals a great deal about Gippius's social and religious philosophy, and lays an excellent framework for understanding her husband's later religious-political-philosophical works. In the travelogue, Gippius meticulously undermines the prevailing nineteenth-century depictions of the Kitezh legend—and those who believe in it—as backward and corrupt. In so doing, she calls into question the methods and conclusions of people, particularly the populist writer Vladimir Korolenko, who depicted Kitezh negatively while purporting a populist message of “salvation” for the people. At the same time, she redefines the contours of the legend, changing its focus to a message much more appealing than the depictions of religious fanatics from the nineteenth century.

At the time, Vladimir Korolenko's writings from the 1890s—the travelogue *In Deserted Places* (*В пустынных местах*) and the short story “The Playful River” (“Река играет”)—were the most recent works to address the Kitezh legend in any depth.⁷⁰ Exiled for political reasons to the Nizhny Novgorod region of Russia, Korolenko consciously followed in the steps of Melnikov-Pechersky to see for himself the Old Believer communities the older writer had brought to the public. As a populist writer, Korolenko's main concern in his multiple visits to the Svetloyar region was “to watch, listen, and catch the living stream of folk poetry among the colorful glittering and noise” (смотреть, слушать и ловить живую струю народной поэзии среди пестрого мелькания и шума).⁷¹ While in general Korolenko finds the folk world of the Nizhny Novgorod region vibrant and engaging, Svetloyar is an exception, and he is frustrated

⁷⁰ Korolenko also wrote a related short story fragment “He is gone” (“Ушел,”) in 1902, but it was not published until 1923, after the writer's death.

⁷¹ V. Korolenko, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (St. Petersburg: Marks, 1914), 5:243.

with the ignorance and passionate superstition he finds there. His interpretation of Kitezh is in line with Melnikov-Pechersky and other nineteenth-century writers: in Korolenko's works, Kitezh is a relic of the past, and those who believe in it are trapped in a backward-facing world. On occasion, this belief can have dire, even criminal, consequences, but for the most part, it is simply a marker of a fading world that has no place in Russia's future.

Gippius is clearly conscious of the reputation Kitezh has gained thanks to Korolenko and others and goes out of her way to clear new territory for her interpretation. She explains on the first page of her travelogue that the version of the Kitezh legend most people know is not the “real” one:

This legend is well known. But many think that “The City of Kitezh,” like Atlantis, was hidden beneath the waves of the Sacred Lake. The schismatics' belief is not such. The city...was hidden only from people's eyes...The churches turned into hills.

Предание это известно. Но многие думают, что «град Китеж», как Атлантида, скрылся под волнами Святого Озера. Поверье раскольников не таково. Город...скрылся только от глаз людских...Церкви превратились в холмы.

Moreover, according to Gippius, the believers who come to Kitezh are not seeking an escape from the world—they just want to be worthy enough to see the *reflection* of Kitezh on the surface of lake Svetloyar: “And not the city itself, but only a *reflection* of the city that stands on the shore is visible to 'worthy people' in the quiet waters of Svetloyar” (“И не город, а лишь *отражение* города, стоящего на берегу, видят «достойные» в тихих водах Светлояра”).⁷² This was, of course, only one of many versions of the legend at the time, and folklore studies show Gippius is wrong in her assertion that this version is more authentic than others.⁷³ Gippius's choice of this legend is more strategic than her explanation suggests: by claiming the primacy of

⁷² Zinaida Gippius, “Svetloe ozero,” *Sobranie sochinenii. T. 3 Alyi mech. Povesti. Rasskazy. Stikhotvoreniia* (M: Russkaia kniga, 2001), 312-313, emphasis mine.

⁷³ N. I. Savushkina, “Legenda o grade Kitezhe v starykh i novykh zapisiakh,” *Russkii fol'klor* XIII (1972): 58-76. For a more complete discussion of the different folkloric versions of the legend, see Chapter 1.

this “reflection” version of the legend, Gippius simultaneously prepares her audience for her version of a Kitezkh miracle that occurs later in the story, and also undermines the authority of previous authors who cited other versions of the legend in their negative depictions of the Kitezkh legend and those who believe in it.⁷⁴

Within a few pages of the travelogue, it becomes clear that Gippius's primary opponent is Vladimir Korolenko, whose travelogue and fiction from the 1890s about the Svetloyar region had solidified the image of Kitezkh of a relic of the past associated with people too naïve to be part of Russia's future.⁷⁵ To convey his sense of Kitezkh, and those who believe in it, as belonging to the past, Korolenko frequently describes them as dead, or dying, or sleeping. The whole Kerzhenets region is filled with “primeval [lit. 'slumbering'] forests” (дремучие леса). It is cold and empty—Korolenko regularly applies the epithets “cold” (холодное), “deserted” (пустынное) and “empty” (пустое) to depict a world devoid of life. Even his steamboat sails along the river “like a sleepy fish” (точно сонная рыба).⁷⁶ In his works, people who believe in Kitezkh are somnolent, giving in to a kind of dreamworld instead of facing the real world: “Sleepy, in the languor between two worlds...they give themselves over to the lullaby-rocking of the shores and the inaudible distant pealing... And they freeze for a while, seeing and hearing nothing that surrounds them” (Усталые, в истоме между двумя мирами...они отдаются баюкающему колыханию берегов и невнятному дальнему звону... И порой замирают,

⁷⁴ On the establishment of a predominantly negative image of Kitezkh in the nineteenth century in the works of Mel'nikov-Pechersky, Maikov, and Korolenko, see Chapter 2 of the present study.

⁷⁵ Gippius's attack on Korolenko apparently did not go unnoticed by contemporary readers. Responding to criticism of her travelogue in a later issue of *New Path*, Gippius claims that the critics were unanimously opposed to her criticism of populist writers in general, and especially Korolenko in particular. See Zinaida Gippius, “Soglasnym kritikam,” *Sobranie sochinenii. T. 7, My i oni. Literaturnyi dnevnik. Publitsistika 1899-1916 gg* (Moscow: Russkaia kniga, 2003), 107-8.

⁷⁶ Korolenko, 5:225.

ничего уже не видя и не слыша из окружающего).⁷⁷ Similarly, the story “The Playful River” (“Река играет”) begins with the word “Having woken up,” (“Проснувшись”), upon which the narrator begins to recall the unpleasantness of being at Svetloyar the previous night. Listening in on the overly scholastic debates of those gathered at the lake reminds him of being in a tomb and hearing prayers read for a thought that has fallen asleep forever:

I took away heavy, joyless impressions from the shores of the Sacred Lake [Svetloyar], from the city that is invisible, but passionately sought by the people. It was as if I spent that entire sleepless night in a stifling tomb, in the faint light of a dying lamp, listening to someone on the other side of a wall reading requiem prayers in a cadenced voice over a people's thought that had fallen asleep forever”

Тяжелые, нерадостные впечатления уносил я от берегов Святого озера, от невидимого, но страстно взыскуемого народом града. Точно в душном склепе, при тусклом свете угасающей лампадки, провел я всю эту бессонную ночь, прислушиваясь, как где-то за стеной кто-то читает мерным голосом заупокойные молитвы над заснувшей навеки народной мыслью).⁷⁸

And when he left Svetloyar, he too was in the clutches of its morbid somnolence. Only being far away enlivens him and returns him to the real world: “[I] went to the river and immediately fell onto the sand, as if dead, from fatigue and the austere impressions I took from the lake. [Now], having remembered that I was now far from them, I vigorously shook off the remnants of somnolence” ([я] вышел к реке и тотчас же свалился на песок, точно мертвый, от усталости и вынесенных с озера суровых впечатлений. [Теперь] вспомнив, что я уже далеко от них, я бодро отряхнулся от остатков дремоты). When he describes potential doubts people might have about Kitezh, he calls them an 'awakened doubt' (“проснувшиеся сомнение”).⁷⁹

In one of the most important episodes from his travelogue, Korolenko describes a conversation with a fisherman about the disappearance of a man widely regarded as a saint by

⁷⁷ Korolenko, 5:243.

⁷⁸ Korolenko, 3:145

⁷⁹ Korolenko, 3:163.

the local people. It was said that the man could hear the Kitezh bells and had made arrangements with the residents of Kitezh to be taken to their hidden city. One day he was nowhere to be found, and the only clue to his whereabouts was the following story: late one night, a woman chasing a lost cow happened to see a boat with three figures row out into the middle of the lake. Then there was some splashing and shouting, and she became frightened and ran away. Locals believed it was monks from Kitezh taking the old saint to his well-earned paradise; but officials from the city called it murder, and even arrested two youths. The story puts a wall between the narrator and the old fisherman: “He fell silent, and it was as if the intangible shadow of estrangement ran between us. I was also a city-dweller, and with a shudder of indignation saw a dark and barbaric crime where he saw a deeply touching, holy mystery. And he felt that” (Он смолк, и между нами пробежала как будто неуловимая тень отчуждения. Я был тоже городской и с дрожью негодования видел мрачное и грубое преступление там, где для него была умиляющая святая тайна. И он это чувствовал).⁸⁰ Throughout the travelogue, Korolenko finds himself unable to share the experiences of the Kitezh faithful, estranged from the somnolent lives of people who live in the past.

Gippius chooses the same qualities Korolenko did to function as aesthetic and moral categories in her travelogue, but she applies them in such a way as to undermine his conclusions. In Gippius's travelogue, it is Petersburg, not Svetloyar, that is empty and lifeless, whereas her Svetloyar is full of people vivaciously engaged in the crucial questions of life. Gippius opens her travelogue by describing Petersburg in exactly the same terms that Korolenko described Svetloyar: “In Petersburg it was overcast, dusty, cold, and empty. Peterburgers had gone every which way, mostly abroad. You can pass through all of Europe in a sleeper car” (“В Петербурге было пасмурно, пыльно, холодно и пусто. Петербуржцы разъехались кто куда, больше за

⁸⁰ Korolenko, 5:248-251.

границу. Всю Европу можно проехать в Sleeping'е").⁸¹ By using the English "Sleeping" for "sleeper car," Gippius emphasizes the somnolence of the Europeanized Petersburg elite. Meanwhile, when she and Merezhkovsky arrive at Svetloyar, they find crowds of people, none of whom give any thought to sleep. Even after their night at the lake, when the Merezhkovskys return to the village where they are staying, they find they cannot sleep. In contrast to Korolenko's nostalgic tone, Gippius's story has an almost razor-edged realism, humor, and not a hint of romanticism. Where Korolenko repeatedly found "slumbering," Gippius sees vivacious engagement with life; where Korolenko found "deserted lands," Gippius finds swarms of people. Where Korolenko pronounced the culture of the schismatics dying out, Gippius finally finds people who are truly alive. And where Korolenko found that faith was a wall that separated him from the people at Svetloyar, Gippius discovers that faith is what brings them together.

The substance of Gippius's story is of finding a point of connection with people of a very different background—the long-sought unification of intelligentsia and *narod* (the masses)—that holds the promise of Russia's future. Observing the scene at Svetloyar, Gippius claims that while numerous Korolenkos and Gorkys and populist-socialists have given significant thought and energy to Russia's disparate social classes, they have gone about it in the wrong way, and that is why a solution has eluded them:

It's as if this is not the same earth on which Petersburg stands, with its newspaper interests, liberals, bureaucrats, dachas, elections, lady-philanthropists, countless editions of Maxim Gorkys, with burning worries over the frivolous singer Vialtseva, with all its cockroach-afflictions and foul-smelling, dull delights. Aren't so-called "cultured" people muddying themselves in a low pit that is already sagging under their weight? And isn't it here, on these hills, that a seed (only a seed) lies from which true culture *could* grow? Thousands of people came here from distant places, on foot, only for the opportunity to talk "about faith." It's serious to them, it's important to them, maybe the most important thing in the world... And there are so many of them – and they all have one question: how does one believe in God? ...All are united by one thing: how should one believe? Where is truth? How should one pray? Decide this, and then everything else will be clear. This is

⁸¹ Gippius, "Svetloe ozero," 313.

the source. The most important thing.

Как будто не та земля, на которой стоит Питербург с его газетными интересами, либералами, чиновниками, дачами, выборами, дамами-благотворительницами, бесчисленными изданиями Максимов Горьких, жгучими волнениями по поводу кафешантанной певицы Вяльцевой, со всеми его тараканьими огорчениями и зловонно-тупыми веселостями. Не копошатся ли так называемые «культурные» люди в низкой яме, которая все оседает под их тяжестью, – и не здесь ли, на этих холмах, лежит зерно (только зерно), – откуда *может* вырасти истинная культура? Сюда пришли тысячи народа, из дальних мест, пешком, – только для того, чтобы говорить «о вере». Это для них серьезное, это для них важное, – может быть, самое важное в жизни... И так их много – и для всех один вопрос: как верить в Бога?...все соединены одним: как надо верить? Где правда? Как молиться? Решить это, а там уже все будет ясно. Это – исток. Самое главное.⁸²

Later in the travelogue, she criticizes Korolenko and others supposedly concerned with the fate of the *narod* and indicts them for having the wrong approach, basing their efforts on pity rather than love:

We remembered the “members of the intelligentsia” who went “to their lesser brothers,” who were occupied with dressing “like them,” eating “like them,” chopping wood “like them,” and believing that this was the path to “fusion...” They think about “the belly” and are attracted not by *love*, but *pity*.

Нам вспомнились «интеллигенты», идущие «к меньшим братьям», занятые тем, чтобы одеться «как они», есть «как они», рубить дрова «как они», и верящие, что это путь к «слиянию»...Думают они о «брюхе» народа и влечет их не *любовь*, а *жалость*.⁸³

In the Merezhkovskys' conception of progress, meeting material needs without addressing spiritual ones is meaningless, and ultimately detrimental. While Gippius's religious beliefs were certainly outside the pale of traditional Orthodoxy, her belief in love as the vehicle of salvation was one she shared with both Dostoevsky and Soloviev. Gippius explains that instead of focusing only on material concerns, such as feeding hungry peasants, for “true ‘fusion’” (истинное “слияние”) to occur, people must find the “one point” at which all of living humanity

⁸² Gippius, “Svetloe ozero,” 329-330.

⁸³ Gippius, “Svetloe ozero,” 332, italics original.

can meet: “that one point in which all living people can touch up against each other, without separation... And this one point is everything. It is alive” (“та единая точка, в которой возможно соприкосновение всех живых людей, без различия... И эта одна точка – все. Жива она”). Borrowing a metaphor from her poem “Electricity,” Gippius continues: “Thus an *entire* dark room is illuminated when the end of a thin strand of wire touches up against another narrow end” (“Так освещается *вся* темная комната, когда конец тонкой проволоки прикасается к другому узкому концу”).⁸⁴ Without this connection through the one living point, unity and communication are impossible.

The living point, accordingly, is religious faith. Much of the travelogue is devoted to conversations Gippius and Merezhkovsky have with sectarians who have come to the lake on St. John's Eve to discuss religious questions.⁸⁵ Because Gippius and Merezhkovsky believe they have essentially the same religious concerns as the schismatics, they interpret their encounter as finding a common language with them—in particular, with a sect that calls themselves “seekers” (ищущие), a clear correspondence to the hero “seeker” Tikhon of Merezhkovsky's *Peter and Alexis*—and they claim to discover that they have more in common with these semi-literate sectarians than they do with their so-called peers in Petersburg.⁸⁶

They are joyful, they understand from half a word our awkward, metaphysical, bookish

⁸⁴ Gippius, “Svetloe ozero,” 332. In Gippius's poem, two separate ends of wire become fused as they touch and an electrical current passes through them.

⁸⁵ The importance of religious discussions at Lake Svetloyar should not be overlooked. Irina Karlsruhn notes that while religious debates were not part of the earliest depictions of the Kitezh legend in Russian literature, they became an “inseparable part” of the legend by the turn of the century (recall Korolenko's frustration with “scholastic fights” in his story “The River Plays”). On the basis of local ethnographic sketches from the 1870s, Karlsruhn suggests that sectarians became active participants in the “Kitezh disputes.” Irina Karlsruhn, *Poiski Rusi nevidimoi: Kitezhskaia legenda v russkoi kul'ture, 1843-1940* (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2011), 145-146.

⁸⁶ Alexander Etkind astutely notes that Merezhkovsky and Gippius were no different than proponents of other strains of religious populism, who all exaggerated the similarity of their own views with those of the *narod*. Aleksander Etkind, *Khlyst: Sekty, literatura i revoliutsiia* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2013), 185-87.

language, they help us, they translate it into their own, simple language. Everything that we had thought about, written about, published about – they had thought about in their own home, in the forest, and maybe more deeply and seriously than we had. But it's easier for them, they are many, they are together; while we are few and live amidst a crowd that greets any thought about God with a dirty smirk, suspicion of abnormality or...even dishonesty.

Радуются, понимают с полуслова наш неумелый, метафизический, книжный язык, помогают нам, переводят на свой, простой. Обо всем, о чем мы думали, читали, печатались, – думали и они у себя, в лесу, и, может быть, глубже и серьезнее, чем мы. Но им легче, их много, они вместе, — а мы, немногие, живем среди толпы, которая встречает всякую мысль о Боге грязной усмешкой, подозрением в ненормальности или ...даже нечестности.⁸⁷

Gippius's choice of words to describe how “cultured” people view her and others who want to speak seriously about God is a direct response to the established nineteenth century image of those who believe in Kitez, who were depicted in literature as naïve, fanatical, mentally unstable, or criminal/corrupt. With this description of her own treatment at the hands of prevailing public opinion, she aligns herself and others who want to talk seriously about religion with those who believe in Kitez: the public believes such people are abnormal, but Gippius depicts them as down-to-earth and smart. While Korolenko found their debates petty because of over-scholasticism, Gippius emphasizes the beauty of the schismatics' natural, simple language compared with her own “bookish” language. Moreover, as Comer points out, there is a distinct resonance between Gippius's description of the mutual understanding she has with sectarians and Merezhkovsky's description of how the western-educated Tikhon (very much a stand-in for a nineteenth-century representative of the intelligentsia) finds a common language with the uneducated Old Believers in *Peter and Alexis*. Comer cites the following passage from Merezhkovsky's novel:

Tikhon had not studied in vain. Much of what these people believed he no longer believed; he thought differently, but felt the same as they did. The main thing—the feeling of the end—they had in common. Those things which he had never spoken about

⁸⁷ Gippius, “Svetloe ozero,” 331.

with anyone, which no educated people could have understood, these things they understood—these things were their life.

Тихон учился не даром. Многому, чему верили эти люди, он уже не верил; думал иначе, но чувствовал так же, как они. Самое главное — чувство конца — у них было общее с ним. То, о чем он никогда ни с кем не говорил, чего никто из ученых людей и не понял бы, они понимали — этим только и жили.⁸⁸

The striking similarity of language between these passages, which show the religious dissenters understanding thoughts that Tikhon and the Merezhkovskys could not share with their educated Petersburg colleagues, suggests that Merezhkovsky used his own experience as a model for Tikhon's encounters with Old Believers.⁸⁹

This ability of the two groups to understand each other despite their external differences builds to the climax of Gippius's story, her version of the Kitezh miracle. A discussion of the coming Kingdom of God, the central theme of the Merezhkovskys' philosophical system, leads directly into the miracle:

It seemed that in just a little time we would hear, all at once, like a single person, the quiet pealing of the churches of the holy city gliding over the water. We would see in the solid mirror of the lake instead of black hills, the reflection of gold cupolas, a barely perceptible motion there where the light of the candles fell on the water.

Казалось, еще немного – и услышим мы – все сразу, как один человек, – тихие звоны храмов святого града, скользящие по воде. Увидим в плотном зеркале озера вместо черных холмов – отражение золотых глав, чуть уловимое мерцание там, где на воды падает свет от свечей.

For Gippius, the truth reflected in Svetloyar is indeed an apocalyptic utopia, a vision of that which exists, and will become visible to all at the Second Coming of Christ. But her Kitezh is not a lost city that disappeared in the thirteenth century during the Mongol invasions, but a metaphor for a force that simultaneously unites disparate elements even as it reveals the ideal of a united

⁸⁸ Comer, 182-183.

⁸⁹ While it might seem likely that the Merezhkovskys are exaggerating their connection to the *narod*, their story is corroborated by Mikhail Prishvin, who was surprised at the extent to which the Merezhkovskys and the sectarians found a common language. See Comer, 116-117.

humanity.⁹⁰ It is the truth of being able to see one's own perfect reflection in the face of another, no matter how different the two might seem on the outside. Immediately following her comment that their vision of Kitezkh is imminent, Gippius explains the closeness she feels to the people around her:

These people who talked with us, who were farthest from us—were the closest. We sat together on one earth, separate in everything: in customs, in legends, in history, in clothing, in language, in life—and no one noticed the difference anymore. We had one essence, one thing that was important for us and for them. *It turned out to be* one thing, because after all we didn't accommodate ourselves to suit them, nor they to us.....

Они, люди, говорившие с нами, самые далекие нам – были самые близкие. Мы сидели вместе, на одной земле, различные во всем: в обычаях, в преданиях, в истории, в одежде, в языке, в жизни, – и уже никто не замечал различия; у нас была одна сущность, одно важное для нас и для них. *Оказалось* одно, – потому что ведь ни мы не приравнивались к ним, ни они к нам.....⁹¹

This ability to see oneself in the face of another, the moment of fusion for intelligentsia and *narod* is likewise the hope for uniting all of Russia and ushering in the long-awaited Third Testament. This unity of disparate peoples in the same religious consciousness offers a vision of a New Jerusalem, a new unified Russia, a new unified world.

It is not by chance that Gippius has chosen the version of the Kitezkh legend in which Kitezkh is *reflected* in Lake Svetloyar. Mirrors and reflections form a persistent core image in Gippius's artistic-philosophical system and can be found in her poetry, prose, and personal correspondence. Gippius's specific explanation of the “reflection” version of the legend and later mention of Lake Svetloyar's mirror-like quality (she calls it a “watery mirror” [водяное

⁹⁰ The parallels between Gippius's Kitezkh reflection and Soloviev's Sophia are hard to ignore. As Merezhkovsky infused his story of the “Round Lake” and Tikhon's prayers to the Mother Earth/Mother of God with Sophianic imagery, so Gippius too accompanies her story of joyful (re)union with imagery of gold cupolas on a (presumably) blue lake. Gippius's picture of a perfect humanity to be revealed in the future matches one of Soloviev's understandings of Sophia as the “divine body of God,” which is the same as “ideal humanity.” See Kornblatt, 93.

⁹¹ Gippius, “Svetloe ozero,” 332.

зеркало]),⁹² are typical devices Gippius uses to metaphorize her conception of spiritual realities made evident through reflections rather than direct sight. This image, like the rest of her fiction and poetry, is often ambivalent, but inevitably enables the otherwise invisible to become visible. Her short story *Mirrors (Зеркала)*, printed in her second book of stories of the same title (published 1898), suggests that people act as mirrors that allow the perception of metaphysical realities invisible to the naked eye. In a conversation between the main character and his sister, Vera ('Faith'), Vera explains that people are mirrors that reflect an invisible spiritual reality:

“What mirror?”

“Yours, mine, any... Imagine a very long row of mirrors: they're all different, crooked, slanted, clear, dark, small, big... And they're all facing in one direction. And across from them is a Spirit. I don't know what kind – just a great Spirit. And it is reflected in these mirrors. Every mirror, as it is able, reflects it. Then suddenly the moment of life is ended, a mirror goes dark, gets broken, and the Spirit isn't reflected. We say—the Spirit disappeared. That's not true: it's there! It's just that we don't see it, because it isn't being reflected. Mirrors come in all sorts, concave, convex...but there is just one Spirit.

– Какое зеркало?

– Твое, мое, всякое... Вот, представь себе: длинный-предлинный ряд зеркал: все разные, кривые, косые, ясные, мутные, маленькие, большие... И все в одну сторону обращены. А напротив – Дух. Не знаю какой — только великий Дух. И он в этих зеркалах отражается. Каждое зеркало, как умеет, его отражает. Потом раз-два, момент жизни кончен, зеркало затуманилось, разбилось, и Дух не отражается. Мы говорим—исчез. Неправда: есть! Только мы не видим, потому что не отражается. Зеркала разные бывают, вогнутые, выгнутые... а Дух один.⁹³

Similarly, in her poem “Mirrors,” written nearly a quarter century later, in 1922, Gippius imagines a fusion of the heavenly and the earthly by means of mirrors that reflect each in the other:

Have you never seen it?
In the garden or the park – I don't know,
Everywhere mirrors were flashing.
Down below, in the field, on the edge,

⁹² Gippius, “Svetloe ozero,” 324

⁹³ Zinaida Gippius, “Zerkala,” *Sobranie sochinenii. T. 2. Sumerki dukha: Roman. Povesti. Rasskazy. Stikhotvoreniia* (M: Russkaia kniga, 2001), 42-43. First appeared in *Severny vestnik*, 1896, No. 11.

On the top, on the birch, on the fir.
 Where soft squirrels were jumping,
 Where mossy branches were bending, –
 Everywhere mirrors were shining.
 And in the upper one – grasses were swaying,
 While in the lower one – a cloud was running...
 But each one was deceptive,
 Earth or heaven was not enough for it, –
 They repeated each other,
 They reflected each other...
 And in each the blushing of dawn
 Fused with the greening of vegetation;
 And in the mirror moment
 The earthly and heavenly were equal.

А вы никогда не видали?
 В саду или в парке — не знаю,
 Везде зеркала сверкали.
 Внизу, на поляне, с краю,
 Вверху, на березе, на ели.
 Где прыгали мягкие белки,
 Где гнулись мохнатые ветки, –
 Везде зеркала блестели.
 И в верхнем — качались травы,
 А в нижнем — туча бежала...
 Но каждое было лукаво,
 Земли иль небес ему мало, –
 Друг друга они повторяли,
 Друг друга они отражали...
 И в каждом — зари розовень
 Сливалось с зеленостью травной;
 И были в зеркальном мгновеньи,
 Земное и горнее — равны.⁹⁴

In Gippius's poem, the desire of each mirror—the subjects of everyday life around us—for more than its isolated self leads to their union as the heavens descend to earth and the earth rises to heaven when the mirrors reflect each other. And while the lyric persona is certainly ambivalent about these reflections—perhaps because they imply a lack of individuality that she found essential—the mirrors nonetheless bring together heaven and earth.

⁹⁴ Gippius, *Sobranie Sochinenii. T. 6. Zhivye litsa: Vospominaniia. Stikhotvoreniia* (Moscow: Russkaia kniga, 2002), 446.

Gippius also used the image of mirrors to imagine relationships between people—that love can allow one to see himself or herself through the other. Olga Matich quotes and explains a passage from correspondence between Gippius and her secretary Vladimir Zlobin:

“Your love sometimes makes you crystal clear to my view.... You must become transparent to yourself, but to accomplish that don't look into yourself but into me....At yourself—through me.’ The message is that two could become one in a refracting and reflecting mirror by making their bodies transparent to each other. Instead of uniting in the sex act, they could become one body by serving as each other's mirrors.”⁹⁵

In the same way, in Gippius's travelogue, the common search for truth and God leads the people gathered at Svetloyar to see themselves reflected in others, and thus to be united despite their differences.

Gippius and Merezhkovsky return to Petersburg to find it in the same morbid state they left it, but say they find it strange because they themselves had changed as a result of their trip. A minor detail of their journey to and from Svetloyar emphasizes this point: on the way there, the Merezhkovskys stay at the hotel “Petersburg, in the lower part of the city” and on the way back, in the same city, they stay at the hotel “Russia...high up in the Kremlin.”⁹⁶ They have come out of the “low pit” (низкая яма) Gippius claimed the so-called cultured people of Petersburg were sinking in and have been elevated (literally) to the status of citizens of a noble Russia.

The travelogue is not just a travel story of enlightenment, however. True to the Kitezh subtext on which it relies, the travelogue is also an apocalyptic text. Gippius returns to Petersburg with a reawakened apocalyptic consciousness. References to the Apocalypse and the Second Coming can be found throughout the travelogue. Wherever they go, the Merezhkovskys attempt to engage their interlocutors in conversations about the Apocalypse. Moreover, a sense of urgency for the end of the age permeates the second half of the text: in the first half of the

⁹⁵ Matich, 207-8.

⁹⁶ Gippius, “Svetloe ozero,” 314, 347.

story, Gippius never mentions an “end” or “ending,” but she repeats the terms frequently throughout the second half.⁹⁷ The travelogue begins and ends with references to or quotations from the last chapter of the Book of Revelation. The final sentence of the travelogue, a direct quotation of the last chapter of the Book of Revelation (“The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'”) invites the readers to spread the message they have just heard, as the continuation of the verse Gippius quotes is as follows: “And let the one who *hears* say, 'Come!' Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.” These words in turn propel the reader back to the beginning of travelogue, in which Gippius cryptically comments that she wanted nothing added or taken away from her text. At the beginning of the travelogue, without the Apocalyptic context revealed throughout the work, her words seems like a reference to a censor; illuminated by the entirety of the travelogue, however, they are clearly a reference to the last chapter of the Book of Revelation. The verse in Revelation 22 immediately following the quotation about the Spirit and the Bride provides exactly this warning:

“I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life *and from the holy city, which are written in this book.*”⁹⁸

Gippius has written an apocalyptic treatise, and her holy city is Kitezh, which she glimpsed in the faces of other believers.

Gippius's great innovation on the Kitezh legend was transforming it into a metaphor, by which she made it a key component of the philosophical message of her travelogue. Whereas Korolenko's stories had portrayed dewey-eyed dreamers who thought they could see Kitezh, and therefore became dead to the actual, visible world, and even Merezhkovsky's *Peter and Alexis*

⁹⁷ “It ended...Then everything really conclusively was concluded” (Кончилось... Затем уже все окончательно окончилось); “the times are being fulfilled” (исполняются сроки); “here ends,” (тут кончается), Gippius, “Svetloe ozero,” 349, 358.

⁹⁸ Emphasis mine. Revelation 22:17-18, New American Standard Translation.

portrayed Kitezkh as a legend vaguely associated with dangerous and corrupt sectarians, Gippius's metaphorization of the Kitezkh legend allows her believers to remain lucid and engaged in real life. They are not seeking escape from the world of the Antichrist and they will not be suspected of insanity for claiming to see a physical city reflected in the lake: instead they see their own image reflected in the faces of others who seem very different, the image of the restored unity of humanity. This “miracle” in turn opens a window to Gippius's deepest religious and social desires, for the unity of Russia and the coming of the Third Testament. By placing the Kitezkh legend as a positive image at the heart of a work discussing matters of utmost seriousness to her, Gippius made a radical break with previous tradition. No longer would Kitezkh be bound to dark villains on the losing end of moral lessons. The door was open to more positive and imaginative uses of the Kitezkh legend.

Religious Revolutionaries

It would not take long for Gippius's use of the legend to affect others, including her husband. A very similar use of the Kitezkh legend appears in Merezhkovsky's essay “Revolution and Religion,” published first in French in 1907, and then in Russian in Merezhkovsky's 1908 compendium *Not Peace but a Sword* (*He мир, но меч*). Undoubtedly the Merezhkovskys' personal conversations at the time included their trip to Svetloyar, and it is no surprise to find the same interpretation of events in the works of both husband and wife. Though Merezhkovsky never published anything resembling a travelogue, he did include a detailed chapter on his meetings with schismatics at Svetloyar during their June 1902 pilgrimage as a crucial transition in “Revolution and Religion.” The similarities to Gippius’s travelogue are striking, both in the

description of events and in the use of the Kitezh legend as a capstone metaphor for the unity of disparate peoples. The essay as a whole explains his vision of the Decadent movement leading the way out of the political and religious establishment, into a new era, the Third Testament.

The essay focuses on the question: “Does the Russian Revolution have a religious meaning?”⁹⁹ Following the abortive 1905 Revolution, the previously apolitical Merezhkovsky became convinced of the necessity and inevitability of real revolution in Russia. He incorporated this new political turn into his existing religious ideology of the Third Testament, believing that the revolutionary events in Russia were tightly wound up in religious questions. While his previous belief that the material “truth of earth” needed to be sanctified through fusion with the spiritual “truth of heaven” had applied predominantly to private realms of aesthetics, sex, and personhood, he now extended the “truth of earth” to include the social concerns of the masses (by which he meant peasants—Merezhkovsky never mentioned the plight of the workers¹⁰⁰). But it was not enough to respond to the “truth of earth” alone as the atheistic socialists and secular intelligentsia did—revolution in Russia needed to embrace a religious component as a complement to its political motivations, liberating the soul as well as the body.¹⁰¹ Like the religious philosophers of the *Landmarks* collection, Merezhkovsky diagnosed the failure of the 1905 Revolution as a lack of recognition that the “enemy” was not just political, but religious.¹⁰²

In the essay, after noting that the seventeenth-century schismatics were the first Russian

⁹⁹ D. S. Merezhkovskii, “Revoliutsiia i religiia,” in *Ne mir, no mech: K budushchei kritike khristianstva* (Moskva: AST, 2000), 34.

¹⁰⁰ Rosenthal, 209-210.

¹⁰¹ On this topic see also Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal's discussion of Merezhkovsky's conception of and call for a “religious revolution.” Rosenthal, 163-195.

¹⁰² Dmitrii Sergeevich Merezhkovskii, Author's introduction, *Khristos i antikhris. Trilogiia. T. I. Smert' Bogov (Iulian Otstupnik)*, reprint of 1914 edition (Moscow: “Kniga,” 1989), vii.

revolutionaries,¹⁰³ Merezhkovsky begins an extended discussion of how various forms of Caesaropapism—or for that matter any harmful form of religious or political autocracy—practiced in both the West and Russia constitute a “false theocracy” in opposition to the future kingdom of God, and therefore belong to the rule of the Antichrist. In the course of this argument, Merezhkovsky explains how various movements or creative religious thinkers, such as the Old Believers, Decembrists, Chaadaev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Soloviev, or Rozanov, have in some way fought against the false theocracy instituted by Peter the Great and supported by the institutional Orthodox Church.¹⁰⁴

Towards the end of the essay, as Merezhkovsky moves increasingly closer to the present and his own life, and especially the work of the Religious-Philosophical Meetings, he reaches the Decadent movement (декаденты). Merezhkovsky explains that by refusing to take sides in the political debates of the day, conservatives versus liberals, the Decadents descended into an isolating underground only to find “a gap [просвет]...in the stone masses of positivism that opened up towards a new heaven.” He claims that “the Russian Decadents became the first self-generating mystics [самозародившиеся мистики] in educated Russian society, the first generation of Russian people who, outside of any church tradition, searched for a secret [взыскавшее тайны].” He does admit, however, that whether this secret is “Divine or diabolic... will be resolved upon exiting the decadent underground...into a new religious consciousness.”¹⁰⁵

Shortly after beginning his discussion of the decadent movement and its promises,

¹⁰³ Merezhkovsky almost certainly adopted this idea from Afanasy Shchapov, whom Alexander Etkind calls “the founding father of the great myth of the Russian schism.” Etkind, *Khlyst*, 181.

¹⁰⁴ See also Margarita Pavlova's article on the context of Merezhkovsky's essay and Alexander Etkind's insightful discussion of Merezhkovsky's religious-revolutionary philosophy. Margarita Pavlova, “Mucheniki velikogo religioznogo protsessa,” in D. Merezhkovskii, Z. Gippius, and D. Filosofov, *Tsar i revoliutsiia* [Paris, 1907], First Russian edition (Moscow: OGI, 1999), 7-54; Etkind *Khlyst*, 184-187.

¹⁰⁵ Merezhkovskii., “Revoliutsiia,” 75.

Merezhkovsky turns directly to the Kitez legend. Merezhkovsky devotes the entire 14th chapter of the work to his trip with Gippius to Svetloyar.¹⁰⁶ He describes St. John's Eve at Svetloyar as a time when “thousands of ‘those who hunger and thirst for truth’ [алчущих и жаждущих правды]¹⁰⁷ come together on foot from hundreds of versts away in order to talk about faith.” He defines Kitez as a place where, according to legend, “saints live, and will continue to live without dying, until the second coming.” Those whom God deems worthy are able to see the city reflected in the water and hear the peal of its bells. Merezhkovsky's introduction to this trip and depiction of the legend are important for their attention to the themes that will arise later in this chapter and in the remainder of the essay. The key ideas Merezhkovsky associates with the Kitez legend are the concept of the “seeker” who longs for the truth and will travel great distances in hopes simply of talking about faith with sympathetic souls (note that in the passage from the Beatitudes that Merezhkovsky quotes, Jesus promises that these people *will be sated*), the looming importance of the second coming, and the concept of being selected, or deemed worthy, by God.

Merezhkovsky describes the night at Svetloyar with distinct Decadent coloring, a subtle difference from Gippius's description of the event. He describes sitting on matted grass in the “suffocating dark of a June night,” surrounded by a mass of humanity, that altogether reeks of the foul smells of body odor and forest decay: “we...sat on the trampled grass, surrounded by a dense, stuffy, crowding mass of peasant men and women. It smelled of skin, pitch, wax, human sweat and forest moisture” (“мы...сидели на утопанной траве, окруженные тесною, душною, напиряющей толпою баб и мужиков. Пахло кожей, дегтем, воском, человеческим

¹⁰⁶ Merezhkovskii., “Revoliutsiia,” 80-81.

¹⁰⁷ A quotation from the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for truth, for they will be sated” (Блаженны алчущие и жаждущие правды, ибо они насытятся). Matthew 5:6, Russian Synodal Version.

потом и лесною сыростью”). As if verifying his claim from a few chapters earlier that Decadence was a dark underground that would lead to the new heaven, Merezhkovsky finds the “decadent” atmosphere around Svetloyar the perfect location for a discussion of the Apocalypse: “We talked about the end of the world, the second coming, the Antichrist, and the coming church of John [the Evangelist].” Merezhkovsky continues to the center of his story, an interpretation of this night as a taste of the coming Kingdom of God:

“The prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled: the lion will lie down with the lamb,” someone whispered into my ear... “You yourselves are not lions, but your part is with the lions, and when the lions are joined with the lambs, then the kingdom of God will come.... So, kind sir, why not stay and live with us!”

— Исполняется пророчество Исаии: лев ляжет рядом с ягненком, — шепнул мне кто-то на ухо... — Вы-то не львы, да часть ваша львиная, а как львиное с агнчим совокупится, то придет царство Божье... А что, барин милый, оставайтесь-ка жить с нами!¹⁰⁸

For Merezhkovsky—and apparently for the sectarians he describes—the fact that members of the Petersburg intelligentsia can find a common language with religious dissenters, predator with prey, as it were, is tantamount to the end of the age of historical Christianity, with all of its divisions, power struggles, and political machinations. He is witnessing the beginning of his desired Third Testament.

Like Gippius, Merezhkovsky also feels joy at the understanding between peasant and intelligentsia, and for both of them it is precisely the accomplishment of this unity, which none of the populist “to the people” movements could achieve, that forms the vital center of their Kitezh stories. Merezhkovsky writes of the experience as the end of a long isolation:

For the first time in our lives we felt that our most personal, secret, lonely thoughts could be made universal, shared by the nation. Not just an average Russian intellectual, a devotee of Maksim Gorky, but also Russian Europeans, like Maksim Kovalevsky or Miliukov, would not understand anything in these thoughts; but simple peasant men and women understood.

¹⁰⁸ Merezhkovskii, “Revoliutsiia,” 80.

Первый раз в жизни мы чувствовали, как самые личные, тайные, одинокие мысли наши могли бы сделаться всеобщими, всенародными. Не только средний русский интеллигент, поклонник Максима Горького, но и такие русские европейцы, как Максим Ковалевский или Милюков, ничего не поняли бы в этих мыслях; а простые мужики и бабы понимали.

While Gippius only hinted at the political ramifications of a religious unity between *narod* and intelligentsia, Merezhkovsky marks the revolutionary potential of the peasants' faith. Borrowing the name of the populist revolutionary movement "Land and Freedom" ("Земля и Воля"), Merezhkovsky explains the secular populists' mistaken understanding of the peasants' worldview and value system:

Everything that we brought to them from the depths of world culture, from Aeschylus to Leonardo, from Plato to Nietzsche, was the most essential for them not only in an ideal, but in a real-life sense – essential for basic needs, for "land and freedom," since "complete freedom" over "all the earth" is for the people "a new heaven above a new earth." From two opposing ends of the world we arrived at the same place.

Все, с чем шли мы к ним из глубины всемирной культуры, от Эсхила до Леонардо, от Платона до Ницше, было для них самое нужное не только в идеальном, но и в жизненном смысле, – нужное для первой нужды, для «земли и воли», ибо «вся воля» над «всею землею» есть для народа «новое небо над новою землею». С двух противоположных концов мира мы пришли к одному и тому же.¹⁰⁹

Merezhkovsky claims that true revolutionary power is to be found not in secular land reform programs, but in a combined religious-political revolution that will bring about the Third Testament with its promised new heaven and new earth.

Using a metaphor from his wife's 1904 poem "Glass" ("Стекло"),¹¹⁰ Merezhkovsky describes a barrier between the intelligentsia and the people that could not be breached by the populists or any other movement that went to the people:

With what endless and hopeless effort entire generations of Russian intellectuals wanted

¹⁰⁹ Merezhkovskii, "Revoliutsiia," 80-81.

¹¹⁰ In Gippius's poem, people are bound together by a secret, but separated by a wall of dark glass. Invoking the power of love, the lyric heroine begs for a hammer, and concludes with the promise that God will "will give us the strength to break the glass."

to connect to the people, “went to the people,” but some kind of glass wall separated them from each other, and like flies, they kept hitting up against this glass.

С каким бесконечным и безнадежным усилием целые поколения русских интеллигентов хотели соединиться с народом, «шли в народ», но какая-то стеклянная стена отделяла их от него, и они бились, как мухи, об это стекло.¹¹¹

According to Merezhkovsky, however, for Merezhkovsky and Gippius no glass wall exists despite their class differences because they share the soul disposition of religious seekers:

We had no reason to go to the people: they came to us, to our world; they were us ourselves, in our first religious element; we were them in their final religious consciousness. Neither we without them nor they without us will manage to do anything. We are just like them, pitiful children without a mother, lost sheep without a shepherd, the same homeless wanderers, “having no current city, seeking the coming city.”

Нам незачем было идти к народу: он сам шел к нам, к нашему; он был сами мы, в нашей первой религиозной стихии; мы были он, в его последнем религиозном сознании. Ни он без нас...ни мы без него ничего не сделаем. Мы—такие же, как он, жалкие дети без матери, заблудшие овцы без пастыря, такие же бездомные странники, «настоящего града не имеющие, грядущего града взыскующие».¹¹²

The crucial distinction between Merezhkovsky and the “Maksim Gorky” intelligentsia is the difference between the latter's “God-building” versus the former's “God-seeking.” The common ground Merezhkovsky finds with the sectarians is the disposition of a homeless wanderer “searching for the coming city.” This phrase, generally associated with *beguny*, is used by Merezhkovsky three times in the essay and three times in *Peter and Alexis*, usually as a self-identification for Old Believers. It is a reference to the New Testament book of Hebrews, in which the anonymous author draws an extended parallel between the followers of Christ and the Old Testament story of the Israelites in the desert, preparing to enter the promised land. In the passage from which Merezhkovsky takes his signature phrase, the author of Hebrews describes spiritual devotion as a kind of pilgrimage outside of the establishment:

¹¹¹ Merezhkovskii, “Revoliutsii,” 81.

¹¹² Merezhkovskii, “Revoliutsii,” 81.

The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.¹¹³

Merezhkovsky identifies this life “outside the camp” with his involvement in the decadent movement, which he sees as a search for God. For this reason, he claims the decadent movement is the key to the future: “decadence, which seems a frightening 'underground,' a deaf dead-end, is in actuality the beginning of a new community, a narrow, underground passage into a dark starry night of the nation-wide, universal element” (“Декадентство, которое кажется...страшным «подпольем», глухим тупиком, есть на самом деле начало новой общественности, узкий, подземный ход в темное звездное небо всенародной, вселенской стихии”).¹¹⁴ In closing the story of his travels to Svetloyar, he reminds the reader of the Kitez story, and explains that he promised these “seekers” (“ищущие”) that he would keep looking for the answers they both sought.

The final chapters of Merezhkovsky’s essay chronicle the Religious-Philosophical Meetings, which brought together around one table people of the most varied perspectives:

Old acquaintances of the host, employees of *Moscow News* and *The Citizen*, the most extreme reactionaries and just as extreme (if not political, then philosophical and religious) revolutionaries—professors of the spiritual academy, synod bureaucrats, priests, monks—and true “people from the underground,” antichrist-decadents. These two sides struck up apocalyptic discussions, as if stolen right out of *The Possessed* or *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Старые знакомые хозяина, сотрудники *Московских Ведомостей* и *Гражданина*, самые крайние реакционеры и столь же крайние, если не политические, то философские и религиозные революционеры—профессора духовной академии, синодальные чиновники, священники, монахи—и настоящие «люди из подполья», антихристы-декаденты. Между этими двумя сторонами завязывались

¹¹³ Hebrews 13:11-14, New American Standard Bible. Merezhkovsky's phrase is a paraphrase of the Old Slavonic translation of the final verse: “не имамы бо zde пребывающаго града, но грядущаго взыскуемъ.”

¹¹⁴ Merezhkovskii, “Revoliutsiia,” 81.

апокалиптические беседы, как будто выхваченные прямо из «Бесов» или «Братьев Карамазовых».¹¹⁵

Merezhkovsky explains that these were the first meetings of their kind between the established Christian church and representatives of secular society. It was the first time “since monasticism had separated the church from the world” that serious questions had been directed at the Church—the kind of questions posed by “seekers”:

the question of spirit and flesh, of religious personality; the question of marriage and virginity, of religious gender; the question of the church and the monarchy, of religious community; – all the same questions that were posed by the Russian seekers of the Kingdom of God, from the flagellants to the decadents, from Novikov to VI[adimir] Soloviev.

вопрос о духе и плоти, о религиозной личности; вопрос о браке и девстве, о религиозном поле; вопрос о церкви и царстве, о религиозной общественности; -- все те вопросы, которые возникли у русских искателей Града Божьего—от хлыстов до декадентов, от Новикова до Вл. Соловьева.¹¹⁶

Merezhkovsky remarks that this conglomeration of varied people with their questions represented “at the highest level of society a reflection [отражение] of what happened at Lake Svetloyar, in the depths of the *narod* [в глубине народа].”¹¹⁷ The use of the word “reflection” is particularly significant, because Merezhkovsky, like Gippius, relates the version of the Kitezh legend that reports that those worthy (in this case, Merezhkovsky himself) can see the *reflection* of the city of Kitezh in Lake Svetloyar. Merezhkovsky reports the atmosphere was such that a miracle could have occurred: “A fiery atmosphere was being born, in which everything seemed possible: at any moment a miracle would occur, the glaciers separating us would melt, crumble, and connection would occur—children would find their mother” (“Рождалась та огненная атмосфера, в которой кажется все возможным: вот-вот совершится чудо, разделяющие

¹¹⁵ Merezhkovskii, “Revoliutsiia,” 82.

¹¹⁶ Merezhkovskii, “Revoliutsiia,” 83.

¹¹⁷ Merezhkovskii, “Revoliutsiia,” 82.

льды растают, рушатся, и произойдет соединение—дети найдут свою мать”).¹¹⁸

However fruitful these meetings were initially, Merezhkovsky says they ultimately ended in failure, because the glass wall that separated the representatives of the established church (i.e., non-seekers) and the “underground” (i.e., seekers) proved impenetrable: “You can't bend, you can only break the glass; you can't limit, you can only destroy autocracy” (“Нельзя погнуть, можно только разбить стекло; нельзя ограничить, можно только уничтожить самодержавие”).¹¹⁹ In her study of the two-year life of the Religious-Philosophical Meetings, Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal suggests that the two sides (clergy and intelligentsia) had come to meetings with fundamentally different premises and goals. The clergy had set out on a mission to win back the intelligentsia to acceptance of standard church dogma and authority; the intelligentsia had expected the clergy to be “a partner and fellow seeker, not a teacher.” Once each side realized the intentions of the other, fruitful dialogue became impossible.¹²⁰

At the time the Religious-Philosophical Meetings were closed by Pobedonostev (April 1903), Merezhkovsky was still concerned only with religious questions, not political reform. However, by the time he wrote “Revolution and Religion,” the 1905 Revolution had radically changed his perspective, and Merezhkovsky wrote about the failure of the Religious-Philosophical Meetings as the last chance for reconciliation between the intelligentsia and a combined autocratic political-religious establishment. Continuing the parallel between the autocracy of the State and the Church establishment with which he began the essay, Merezhkovsky claims that both have outrun their times: the new religious consciousness has outgrown the confines of historical Christianity just as the Russian revolutionary movement is

¹¹⁸ Merezhkovskii, “Revoliutsiia,” 83.

¹¹⁹ Merezhkovskii, “Revoliutsiia,” 86.

¹²⁰ Rosenthal, 139.

bringing an end to political autocracy in Russia. Merezhkovsky concludes his essay with the promise that the “martyrs” of the religious and revolutionary movements in Russia are the “chosen ones”—the seekers—that will eventually bring the world into its next phase of history, the unity of the Third Testament.¹²¹

The chosen ones are already present in both the Russian *narod* and in Russian society—it is all those “who have no present city, who are seeking the new city,” all the martyrs of the revolutionary and religious movement in Russia. When these movements merge into one, then Russia will come out of the Orthodox church and the autocratic kingdom into the universal church of the One High Priest and into the Universal Kingdom of the One Tsar—Christ.

Избранные есть уже и теперь как в русском народе, так и в русском обществе—это все «настоящего града не имеющие, грядущего Града взыскующие», все мученики революционного и религиозного движения в России. Когда эти движения сольются в одно, тогда Россия выйдет из православной церкви и самодержавного царства во вселенскую церковь Единого Первосвященника и во вселенское царство Единого Царя—Христа.¹²²

Thus in Merezhkovsky's explanation of his new religious and political philosophy, which he developed largely during the writing of *Christ-Antichrist* and then following the Revolution of 1905, it is the seekers—those “without a current city and searching for the coming city”—that have seen through the lies of political autocracy and historical institutional religion and have been “chosen” by God to lead humanity into the next level of being, unified in the universal Church kingdom, which has no earthly ruler. While it was the *beguny* who originally adopted the identity of wanderers who were seeking the coming city, and who actively promoted Kitezsh as that city, Merezhkovsky extends this identity to religious dissenters in general and all who share the disposition of a seeker. He makes Kitezsh their “coming city,” forming it into a key metaphor to explain his vision of the miraculous unity he anticipates: those who gather on the shores of

¹²¹ Merezhkovsky's version of the unification of society at the end of the world shows the difference between his and Soloviev's view of the institutional church. While Soloviev saw the best leaders of the three branches of Christianity and their followers joining together at Apocalypse, Merezhkovsky envisions religious revolutionaries leading the way *out* of the Orthodox Church into a universal kingdom.

¹²² Merezhkovskii., “Revoliutsiia,” 116-117.

Lake Svetloyar are the chosen seekers, who come from various religious and class backgrounds, but whose shared dissatisfaction with institutional religion allows them to be unified. These true citizens of Kitezh offer both a picture of the coming Third Testament and the means of bringing it to life.

Gippius and Merezhkovsky did not start with a fully-formed Kitezh myth that fit their purposes: they developed their own Kitezh myth. And that development was not instantaneous—it occurred over the space of a few years, beginning with the Merezhkovskys' trip to Svetloyar in 1902 and reaching fulfillment around 1907, when Dmitry Merezhkovsky made it a metaphor that served as a robust capstone to his newly developed religious-political philosophy. In *Peter and Alexis*, Merezhkovsky took advantage of the existing Apocalyptic coloring of the legend (a trait it had carried since its origins with eighteenth-century Old Believers) to make Kitezh Tikhon's preoccupation as he searched for the coming Kingdom of God. Drawing on the existing assumption that the Kitezh legend blended Christian and pagan practice, Merezhkovsky celebrated it as an example of the fusion of divine and earthly truths, a demonstration of the Divine Sophia as an entity that joins together disparate parts. By making Kitezh a stand-in for the New Jerusalem in Tikhon's imagination, Merezhkovsky attempted to cleanse the legend from its earlier negative connotations, instead allowing it a privileged position as an emblem of the coming Third Testament. Gippius similarly understood Kitezh as an emblem of the coming Kingdom of God, but she took the legend even further, metaphorizing it to serve as a sign of one of her most precious desires—the fusion of separate beings and peoples, in this case, the

intelligentsia and the *narod*. And in Merezhkovsky's final innovation on the legend, he employed it as the capstone of his religious and political philosophy: Kitezh was a vision of the Third Testament, granted to the chosen seekers, when the disparate elements of humanity would be joined together to move out of an age of monolithic, institutional church and state and into a new era of brotherhood and love with Christ as its only king. Apropos of the symbolist project to use symbols to unveil the deeper meaning of the world, Merezhkovsky and Gippius understood and applied Kitezh as a critical symbol that revealed their interpretation of the true structure of the universe.

Gippius and Merezhkovsky's appropriation of the Kitezh legend had broad influence. Whereas up to this point, Kitezh had been used only to describe a literal belief, the couple's metaphorization of the legend opened it up to more figurative uses. Kitezh would take on ever more varied forms in the coming decades. Several younger Symbolist writers, including Blok and Bely, developed infatuations with Kitezh based on the Merezhkovskys' creative understanding and recasting of the legend. Blok would beg Gippius for stories of Kitezh, believing “there was nothing better in the world than Kitezhes”¹²³; Bely would set out to write his own trilogy about sectarians, Petersburg, and the resolution of their differences in the third novel (never written), *The Invisible City* (Невидимый град).¹²⁴ In the hands of younger Symbolists and those associated with them—Prishvin, Durylin, Voloshin, Gorodetsky—the Kitezh legend grew in further directions, but in the same essential vein that Merezhkovsky and Gippius carved:

¹²³ Koptelova brings the following citation from correspondence between the two: “Please, write me something about Kitezh, because there is little in this world better than Kitezhes,” (Пожалуйста, напиши мне...что-нибудь о Китеже, потому что мало, что на свете лучше Китежей), N. G. Koptelova, “Образ града Китежа в литературе первой четверти XX века,” *Vesnik kostromskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta im. N. A. Nekraskogo* No. 1 (2003): 74.

¹²⁴ See Irina Karlsohn's chapter on Bely's thinking through the Kitezh subject as he planned and changed plans for the novel. Irina Karlsohn, *V posikakh nevidimoi Rusi: Kitezhskaia legenda v russkoi kul'ture, 1840-1940* (Gothenberg: University of Gothenberg, 2011).

Kitezh was no longer an outdated obsession, but an ideal city, a goal of Russian culture. It was this Kitezh that featured prominently in the works of many who envisioned the social and political changes sweeping Russia would lead directly to a better world, a Kitezh. It was only when the 1917 Revolution failed to bring about such changes that a new chapter in the life of the Kitezh legend would commence.

Chapter 4

A Lost Home:

Kitezh after the Revolution

In Petersburg we will come together again

- Osip Mandelstam

The simplest way to encapsulate the changes the Kitezh legend underwent in the first half of the twentieth century may be to compare two paintings of Kitezh by Konstantin Gorbatov, the first painted in 1913 while Gorbatov was living in Russia, the second in 1933 when the artist had emigrated to Europe.¹ The first picture, from 1913, is titled “The Invisible City” (Невидимый град). It depicts a medieval Russian city on a large wooden ship floating on shimmering water. The picture is sunny, and the boat and city are reflected in the ripples of the water. The second painting, from 1933, is titled “The Sunken City” (Потонувший город). It is a far mellower

1 Konstantin Gorbatov (1876-1945) was a painter who emigrated to Europe in the early 1920s. After emigrating, he lived primarily in Germany, although he traveled widely until the Second World War, when he was forbidden from leaving Germany on account of his Soviet citizenship. He died in Berlin in 1945. A follower of the “*peredvizhniki*” artists, Gorbatov is known in particular for paintings of traditional rural Russian landscapes and old Russian cities; he also painted many scenes from his travels before and after emigrating. For further information, see Andrei Kusakin, “Vozvrashchenie Konstantina Gorbatova,” *Nashe nasledie* No. 49 (1999):103-109; *Konstantin Gorbatov: K 125-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia: Vystavka proizvedenii zhivopisi iz sobraniia istoriko-arikhitekturnogo i khudozhestvennogo muzeia “Novyi Ierusalim” i iz chastnykh kolleksii* (Moscow: Novyi Ermitazh-1, 2001).

painting, depicting a medieval Russian city in a nostalgic, blueish haze. In the foreground, a girl in a *sarafan* gazes at the city from a grove of autumnal birch trees.² These contrasting pictures of Kitezh encapsulate the changes in the Kitezh legend that accompanied the Revolution and its aftermath: Kitezh went from being a reflection of a hopeful vision of a future Russia to a memory of a lost home, sunken into the past.

In the twentieth century, an explosion of new styles of writing accompanied an explosion of interpretations of the Kitezh legend. As Konstantin Azadovsky explains, the popularity of the Kitezh legend—and the many works that employed it—is natural given that the Kitezh legend was developing along the same lines as popular consciousness:

The success of the novels of Melnikov-Pechersky, the operas of Rimsky-Korsakov, the poems of Kliuev and Voloshin can be explained not only by their artistic worth—they are directly connected to the direction of Russian public thought: from the populism of the 1860s-1870s to the religious populism of the beginning of the 20th century; from the revolutionary wave of the first half of the 1900s to god-seeking and god-building...from the furious discussions around the problems of “*narod* and intelligentsia” that sharpened during the period “between two revolutions,” to the full rethinking of the concept of “*narod*” after the victory of Bolshevism. The growing interest in Kitezh upon this background seems entirely natural.”³

The variety with which writers adapted the Kitezh legend to these changing popular currents shows the legend's flexibility. While maintaining its identifying features, the Kitezh legend underwent full symbolic transformations.

2 Ludmila Denisova notes that after emigration, many of Gorbatov's paintings of Russian cities resemble Kitezh: “the depiction [of Russian scenes] on his paintings lost its former solidity, materiality, and acquired a kind of ephemerality, recalling his depiction of the imaginary city of Kitezh that sank underwater.” *Konstantin Gorbatov*, 4.

3 Konstantin Azadovskii, “Toska i tomlenie po sviatoi Rusi (Rets. na kn.: Karlson I. Poiski Rusi nevidimoi: Kitezhskaia legenda v russkoi kul'ture. 1843-1940. Goteborg, 2011),” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* No. 119 (2013). Available online: <http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2013/119/a31-pr.html>.



Konstantin Gorbatov, "The Invisible City," 1913



Konstantin Gorbatov, "The Sunken City," 1933.

In her study of the Kitezh legend, Irina Karlsruhn shows that the Revolution is a major turning point in the life of the legend. Karlsruhn focuses on two points: 1) the version of the legend employed, and 2) its interpretation. Prior to the Revolution, writers essentially followed the Symbolist interpretation of the legend pioneered by Merezhkovsky and Gippius discussed in the previous chapter.⁴ For these writers—Prishvin, Blok, Bely, Durylin, Ashukin—Kitezh was a symbol of a future, ideal Russia, even where these writers (notably Prishvin) saw the failure of this symbol. All of these writers appealed to the same version of the legend championed by Gippius and Merezhkovsky: that Kitezh stood invisible on the shores of Lake Svetloyar and occasionally became visible to those with the faith and vision to imagine a more perfect Church and a more perfect world. Following the Revolution, the most popular version of the legend became the one in which Kitezh sank to the bottom of Lake Svetloyar. Barely noted before 1917, this underwater version of the legend became so dominant that it was the only one mentioned in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia entry for “Legend of Kitezh” (Легенда о граде Китеже) half a century later.⁵

At the same time, as Karlsruhn elegantly shows, post-Revolutionary *poets* in particular reinterpreted the legend around contemporary events. When the Revolution failed to bring about the hoped-for transfiguration of Russia, the symbol of that transfiguration—Kitezh—needed to be reassigned a new meaning. In the works of Kliuev, Esenin, Voloshin, Rozhdestvensky and others, Kitezh became a symbol of a Russia that was lost in the Revolution. In other words, instead of being a vision of Russia's ideal future, it became an idealized memory of Russia's past.

4 Karlsruhn focuses particularly on Rimsky-Korsakov's 1907 opera, “The Tale of the Invisible City of Kitezh and of the Maiden Fevronia” instead of works by Merezhkovsky and Gippius. See also N. G. Koptelova, “Образ града Китежа в литературе первой четверти XX века,” *Vestnik Kostromskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta im. N. A. Nekrasova: Periodicheskii nauchno-metodicheskii zhurnal* No. 1 (2003), 73-79.

5 *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia* (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1969-1978). Available online at <http://bse.sci-lib.com/>.

In the works of many poets, Kitezh became a symbol not of hope, but of loss. Mapping current events onto the contours of Russian history, they compared the Revolution to the chaos of the Mongol invasions, reimagining Kitezh as the world of pre-Revolutionary culture, just as the Old Believers imagined it a world of pre-Mongol and (more importantly) pre-Petrine culture. But while the Old Believers imagined Kitezh as an unequivocal good hidden from an evil world, many post-Revolutionary poets were more ambivalent about it, and a few even welcomed the disappearance of Kitezh and the old order that it represented.⁶ The layering of Russian history, equating Kitezh and the Kievan Rus' that disappeared during the Mongol invasions with pre-Revolutionary Russia was so common, in fact, that it became something of a cliché. When, in 1920, the poet Marina Tsvetaeva gathered her poems composed in the year 1916—that is, the last year before the Revolution—her plan was to publish them under the name “The City of Kitezh” (Китеж-град). Irina Shevelenko suggests that this title was meant to convey that her poems contained a picture of a world on the brink of disappearance, and which could now be found only in these poems; Shevelenko further states that Tsvetaeva's ultimate decision to use the title “Mileposts. Volume I” (“Версты. Выпуск I”) instead of “Kitezh” may have been due to the triviality of the term Kitezh as a metaphor for Russia in 1916.⁷

6 Consider, for example, Sergey Esenin's 1918 poem *Otherland (Inoniia)*, in which he celebrates the construction of a new god and a new city, Otherland, and the liberation of humanity from the false gods of the past, represented by Kitezh:

I curse the breath of Kitezh / And all the hollows of its roads. / On a bottomless stretch I
want / For us to erect a palace for ourselves. / With my tongue I will lick up on icons / The faces of
martyrs and saints. / I promise you the city of Otherland, / Where the Divinity of the living lives!

Проклинаю я дыхание Китежа / И все лошины его дорог. / Я хочу, чтоб на бездонном
вытяже / Мы воздвигли себе чертог. / Языком вылижу на иконах я / Лики мучеников и святых.
/ Обещаю вам град Инонию, / Где живет Божество живых!

S. A. Esenin, *Inoniia* (“*Ne ustrashusia gibeli*”), in *Polnoe sobranie sochnienii v 7 t.* (Moscow: Nauka: Golos, 1997-2002) T. 2, *Stikhotvoreniia (Malen'kie poemy)* (1997), 61-68.

7 Irina Shevelenko, *Literaturnyi put' Tsvetaevoi: Ideologiya-poetika-identichnost': avtora v kontekste epokhi* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2002), 107. The overuse of the metaphor of Kitezh as pre-

To understand the full extent of the transformation of the Kitezh legend in the twentieth century, however, we must examine other factors. For example, the association of the legend with Old Believers, so crucial in Russian literature up to this point, became obsolete: while some writers maintained this association (most notably Kliuev and Akhmatova), most writers ignored the historical connection between Old Believers and Kitezh in favor of considering Kitezh an all-Russian myth. Another factor was a change in the communal nature of the legend. While Merezhkovsky and Gippius envisioned Kitezh as a symbol of communal salvation, many later twentieth-century writers conceived of it as an individual refuge, what Dagmar Burkhart describes as a “place of inner emigration, an other, counter-world to the existing world.”⁸ From the quasi-religious writing of symbolist Fyodor Sologub to the proletarian satire of Andrei Platonov, depictions of Kitezh turned inevitably inward, juxtaposed against the failed utopias of the Soviet Union. This combination of factors became particularly poignant in the émigré appropriation of Kitezh, as an exilic mentality led many to imagine themselves as citizens of Kitezh, removed from the life they knew by the Revolution much as they imagined the Tatar invasions had cut off the life of Russian principalities, allowing only a remnant to remain, hidden and irrelevant, in Kitezh. The most profound and creative expression of this exilic Kitezh identity comes, however, not from the émigré community, but from the poet Anna Akhmatova, who used the legend to construct an identity for herself as a poet-prophet living in the Soviet Union.

Revolutionary Russia did not prevent Tsvetaeva from turning to Kitezh in other works, however, leading her to some of the most inventive uses of the Kitezh legend in Russian literature. See her memoir “Safe Passage” (“Вольный проезд”) and her short poem “Pedal” (“Педадь”). Some believe that her narrative poem *The Ratcatcher* (*Крысолов*) also alludes to Kitezh. For a discussion of Kitezh in these works, see Karlsohn, 326-333; also Marie-Luise Bott, “Studien zu Marina Cvetaevas Poem ‘Krysolov’: Rattenfänger- und Kitež-Sage,” in *Marina Cvetaeva: Studien und Materialien* (Wiener slawistischer Almanach; Sonderband 3) Wien, 1981: 87-112; and Dagmar Burkhart, “Der Mythos von der versunkenen Stadt,” in *Das XX. Jahrhundert; Slavische Literaturen im Dialog mit dem Mythos*, ed. Angela Richter (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac, 1999), 93-99.

8 Burkhart, 102.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Kitezh gradually lost the connection to Old Believers that had served as its defining motive from the time it became public in the 1840s. One of the major forces in this release of the legend from its Old Believer context may have been Rimsky-Korsakov's 1907 opera, "The Tale of the Invisible City of Kitezh and of the Maiden Fevronia" ("Сказание о невидимом граде Китеже и о девице Февронии"), which fused the story of the Tatar attack on Kitezh from the Kitezh *Letopisets* with the medieval "Tale of Peter and Fevronia of Murom" ("Повесть о Петре и Февронии Муромских"). While the opera demonstrates and further develops the Kitezh-as-New-Jerusalem thinking of the symbolist generation, it depicts the story without obvious reference to Old Believers or other sectarians. Moreover, it places the legend on the same level as the treasured medieval Russian story of Peter and Fevronia, and falls within the tradition of writing operas about Russian folklore and history. It was not an opera about the exotic beliefs of sectarians, but rather one about Russian folklore, in which no distinction was made between Old Believer legend and Russian legend in general. In other words, the Kitezh Rimsky-Korsakov depicted wasn't merely *not sectarian*; it was a part of all of Russia's common heritage.⁹

A second influence separating the Kitezh legend from its Old Believer context may have been popular novels by Maksim Gorky. Gorky was from the Nizhny Novgorod region, and

9 For more on Rimsky-Korsakov's opera (especially on the libretto, co-written with Vladimir Bel'sky) and its influence on Russian culture, see Irina Karlsruhn's dissertation, *Poiski Rusi nevidimoi*, especially her excellent chapter "Umozreniie v zvukhakh': Skazanie o nevidimom grade Kitezhe i deviце Fevronii," 43-73; also Simon Alexander Morrison's chapter "Rimsky-Korsakov and Religious Syncretism," in his book *Russian Opera and the Symbolist Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 115-183; and Mikhail Pashchenko's article "Kitezh', ili russkii 'Parsifal': Genezis Simvola," *Voprosy literatury* No. 2 (2008): 145-182.

claimed in his autobiographical novel *In the World* (*В людях*, 1916) to have heard the Kitezh legend from his grandmother.¹⁰ In several works—*Foma Gordeev* (1899), *Childhood* (*Детство*, 1913-14), and *In the World*—he refers to the legend more or less as a childhood fairy tale. In this fairy tale, righteous people live in a city under water; no mention is made of the Old Believers who conceived of it. Rather, Gorky makes Kitezh seem a regular Russian fairy tale, and in his novels Kitezh shares space with tales of Baba Yaga and Vasilisa the Beautiful. Gorky's novels may also be the first and most important literary source of the version of the legend in which Kitezh is underwater: prior to Gorky, no other mainstream Russian writer had employed the underwater version of the legend.

A disassociation of the legend from Old Believers can be seen in most works that reference Kitezh in the second decade of the twentieth century and beyond. For example, in Pasternak's 1914 poem “Spring” (“Весна”), Kitezh is a symbol of rejuvenation, but has no sectarian or even specifically religious connotations. The author describes Moscow flooded with melting snow and ice, but understands a promise of life and poetic inspiration emerging from it. To those who fail to see this hope, the author offers the following admonition near the end of the poem:

Look around and you will see
 Before dawn, all day, everywhere,
 Moscow stands with its head, like Kitezh,
 In sky-blue water.

Оглянись и ты увидишь
 До зари, весь день, везде,
 С головой Москва, как Китеж,-
 В светло-голубой воде.¹¹

10 M. Gor'kii, *Sobranie sochinenii. T. 9. Proizvedeniia 1913-1923* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1962), 218-19.

11 Boris Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami v odinnadtsati tomakh*, T. 1, *Stikhotvoreniia I poemy, 1912-1931* (Moscow: Slovo, 2003), 90-92. The poem was first published as the triptych “Spring” only in

The author likens the image of Moscow emerging from the spring flooding to Kitezh emerging from Lake Svetloyar, highlighting the sound similarities of “Svetloyar” and “sky-blue water” (*svetlo-goluboi vode*, in the prepositional). The rhyming of “you will see” (*uvidish'*) with “Kitezh” underscores the promise from the Kitezh legend that only those who are worthy—in this case, those imbued with a special vision—will be able to see Kitezh and the hopeful promise it offers; the others will see only sludge and meltwater (“Can it be that only mud is visible to you...?” [Разве только грязь видна вам...?]).¹² Nowhere in the poem, however, is there any suggestion of an explicitly religious context to this Kitezh, or to being able to see it. For Pasternak, Kitezh is an image of hope, renewal, and poetic inspiration, a metaphor for the special vision accessible to the poet, but not the center of a complex religious-philosophical program that draws on religious dissenters.

Perhaps even more telling, in many examples of the Kitezh legend that do frame Kitezh as a utopian vision for the future, this utopian vision is not a religious one of the kind imagined by Gippius and Merezhkovsky and their followers. In 1917, A. N. Tolstoy wrote a short story, “The Traveler's Tale” (“Рассказ проезжего человека”), addressing the chaos of contemporary Russian life. In it, a group of people are disillusioned by the violence of war and the failures of the Revolution to solve Russia's problems—until they hear the story told by the eponymous “man passing through.” The man recounts a hopeful story about illiterate soldiers on the front gathering together to discuss worldwide justice; the sheer fact of this impromptu gathering and the noble ambitions of the soldiers gives the traveler hope that Russia can and will overcome its

1929; in 1917 the three poems appeared individually in *Poverkh Bar'ero*v. The stanza quoted above appears in the third part of the triptych, “Can it be that only mud is visible to you?” (“Разве только грязь видна вам?”).

12 Rima Salys suggests that the poet is addressing none other than Pushkin, who remarked on his dislike of spring and its accompaniments—boredom, stench, mud, illness—in his poem “Autumn” (Осень). See Pasternak, 444; and Rima Salys, “Izmeritel'naia edinica russkoj žizni': Puškin in the works of Boris Pasternak,” *Russian Literature* 19, no. 4 (May 1986): 352-353.

difficulties. He chastens the group for their lack of faith and likens the future Russia to Kitezh emerging from Svetloyar:

I wanted to tell all of this because I saw a lack of faith in you; and if you do have it, nonetheless you don't want what is happening, what is approaching. We aren't going to have order or peace now. A new Russia is being born, invisible, united, and white, like Kitezh rising from the lakebed... And factories, plants, asphalt streets – that will come later, on its own, but right now it's not important...

Я хотел все это рассказать к тому, что увидел у вас мало веры, а если и есть она, то хотите вы не того, что настает, близится. Не будет у нас сейчас ни порядка, ни покоя. Рождается новая Россия, невидимая, единая и белая, как Китеж выходит с озерного дна... А фабрики, заводы, асфальтовые улицы – это потом придет, само собой, сейчас это не важно...¹³

The traveler's story in turn gives hope to the disillusioned, renewing their love for their country and their faith in its future. Tolstoy's story essentially replicates the utopian vision of Merezhkovsky's religious revolution *without* the religion. The hopeful image of Russia as Kitezh rising from Svetloyar is an image of the New Jerusalem, but it is a secular, Marxist utopia, with no overt reference to the Old Believers who invented the legend.

A second change in the post-Symbolist Kitezh legend is a movement from collective salvation, as envisioned by Gippius and Merezhkovsky, to individual refuge. Unlike the first change, the release of the legend from its association with religious dissenters, which began early in the twentieth century, the turn from a collective to an individual Kitezh took place primarily after the Revolution. This interpretation of Kitezh is found in works across the political and artistic spectrum, from Sologub to Platonov to émigré writers, and comes to its pinnacle in the “exilic” works of Anna Akhmatova.

The effect of the Revolution—in particular the failure of the Revolution to bring about desired changes in Russia—on the intellectual and artistic output of the intelligentsia should not

13 A. N. Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, T. 4 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1984), 671.

be underestimated. The apocalyptic-millennial hopes that accompanied the lead-up to the Revolution gave way to a profound disappointment and a search for ideals outside the political sphere. The change in worldview and creative work wrought by the failures of the Bolshevik Revolution is similar to a change that occurred following the French Revolution. In his work on the effect of the French Revolution on Romanticism, M. H. Abrams suggests that apocalyptic religious ideals informed the spirit of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but that disillusionment with the fruits of the French Revolution led to a more personal, as opposed to political, thrust in the works of Romantic poets, who continued to see themselves as poet-prophets. Abrams writes:

We need to grasp the special nature of the hope evoked by the Revolution which...was sudden, universal, and absolute, in order to understand how cataclysmic was the collapse of that hope in the mid-1790's and later.... For Wordsworth and his contemporaries...the millenium didn't come. The millennial pattern of thinking, however, persisted, with this difference: the external means was replaced by an internal means for transforming the world.... Faith in an apocalypse by revolution...now gave way to faith in an apocalypse by imagination or cognition. In the ruling two-term frame of Romantic thought, the mind of man confronts the old heaven and earth and possesses within itself the power, if it will but recognize and avail itself of the power, to transform them into a new heaven and new earth, by means of a total revolution of consciousness. This, as we know, is the high Romantic argument, and it is no accident it took shape during the age of revolutions. The great Romantic works were not written at the height of revolutionary hope but out of the experience of partial or total disenchantment with the revolutionary promise.¹⁴

A strikingly similar pattern can be seen in post-Revolutionary Russian literature, particularly in Kitezh works. Whereas in Kitezh literature from the early twentieth century, Kitezh was a symbol for the transformation of Russian society as a whole, bound up with revolutionary hopes for the country, in post-Revolutionary works, Kitezh became a metaphor for individual and internal salvation.

¹⁴ M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1971), 329-335.

A Personal Vision

The symbolist poet and prose-writer Fyodor Sologub provides a fascinating “transitional form” between the Kitezh writings of his contemporaries, Gippius and Merezhkovsky, and later post-Revolutionary writers. Sologub's Kitezh works appeared more than a decade after Gippius and Merezhkovsky's, and show a distinct change from the hopeful timbre of the couple's religious-revolutionary expectations.¹⁵ Kitezh is a central image in three works by Sologub: two poems, both composed in 1920, and a novel, *The Snake Charmer* (*Заклинательница змей*), published in 1921. For Sologub, Kitezh as an image does not carry the same global eschatological hopes that it does for Gippius and Merezhkovsky. It is still a symbol of transfiguration, but it offers individual, rather than collective, salvation, and it has no connection to Old Believers or other religious sectarians. Kitezh as an individual refuge is most evident in *The Snake Charmer*, in which individual characters open to spiritually transforming experience have visions of Kitezh.

Sologub's two Kitezh poems, both written in July 1920, offer a basis for understanding his appropriation of the legend at this time in his life. In one of the poems, “Through the barely visible fog” (“Сквозь туман едва заметный”), Kitezh is a spiritual shadow for the Old Russian city of Kostroma:

Through the barely visible fog
Quietly shimmers Kostroma,
Just like Kitezh, the sacred city -
Churches, towers, palaces.

15 A similar change is evident in the evolution of Andrei Bely's Kitezh, which changed so drastically between 1910 and 1920 that it never appeared in print. Bely's most famous novel, *Petersburg*, was originally intended as the second piece in a trilogy. The first piece, *The Silver Dove* (*Серебряный голубь*), appeared in 1910 and was devoted to an invented sect of religious dissenters. *Petersburg* (pub. 1913) was to be followed by a novel titled *The Invisible City* (*Невидимый град*), a clear reference to Kitezh. In the course of work on the final novel, he changed the title to *My Life* (*Моя жизнь*), which he ultimately never wrote. For more on the story behind the novel, see Karlsohn's chapter “Excursis I: The Builder of the Inner City – Andrei Bely” (“Эккурсе I: 'Строитель внутреннего града'--Андрей Белый”), in Karlsohn, 183-206.

Kostroma is memories,
 Historical dreams,
 Legendary tales,
 The voice of ancient Russian times,

A corner of gray-haired existence,
 Of new factories and merchants.
 Where there was hidden so much
 Pure power and prophetic dreaming.

In the golden crowns of the cathedrals,
 Kostroma, bright, white,
 In the days of agreement and conflict
 Lived storied Russian life.

But from this glorious, storied life
 What has she preserved?
 Like Yaroslavna in Putivl
 Is a faithful wife waiting?

Сквозь туман едва заметный
 Тихо блещет Кострома,
 Словно Китеж, град заветный,-
 Храмы, башни, терема.

Кострома - воспоминанья,
 Исторические сны,
 Легендарные сказанья,
 Голос русской старины,

Уголок седого быта,
 Новых фабрик и купцов.
 Где так много было скрыто
 Чистых сил и вещей снов.

В золотых венцах соборов,
 Кострома, светла, бела,
 В дни согласий и раздоров
 Былью русскою жила.

Но от этой были славной
 Сохранила что она?
 Как в Путивле Ярославна,

Ждет ли верная жена?¹⁶

Like many Kitezh poems of this era, Sologub's poem envisions Kitezh as a representative of historical Russia disappearing, or perhaps already disappeared, in the wake of post-Revolutionary life. But, as Karlsohn points out, Sologub's poem points simultaneously to past and to future with its final questions: what has Kostroma preserved from its glorious past in the present? Is a faithful wife waiting the future return of her hero-husband?¹⁷ Kostroma stands in transitionally as a gateway to the “sacred city,” Kitezh, in which Russia's storied past is preserved untainted by the progress of time; does Kostroma also preserve some of this ancient Russian essence? Is there a possibility of return?

Sologub's second Kitezh poem, “Beneath the light haze of the fog” (“Под легкою мглою тумана”), deals with the subject of time in a more overtly metaphysical way.

Beneath the light haze of the fog
Now transforms into one-upon-a-time.
There is no sweeter deception
Than this fairytale of sunset.

People of the daylight, look and see
How the golden domes
And the mysterious city of Kitezh
Are shimmering in the radiance of eternal glory.

Loss is sorrowful for the heart,
It does not want to be patient,
But that which once upon a time
Rose up in a faithful outburst did not die.

Aim for the hazy distance,
Don't believe that time cannot be returned, –
In the anguish of creative sorrow
The past does not pass by.

In the uncountable residences of God

16 F. Sologub, *Sobranie stikhotvorenii* T. 7 (St. Petersburg: Nav'i Chary, 2002), 280, 605.

17 Karlsohn, 313-14.

Space and time are immeasurable.
 Don't say there are many treasures there, —
 There everything is faithfully kept.

Под лёгкою мглою тумана
 Теперь обращается в когда-то.
 Сладостней нет обмана,
 Чем эта сказка заката.

Люди дневные, глядите ж,
 Как мерцают золотые главы,
 И таинственный город Китеж
 В сиянии вечной славы.

Горестна для сердца утрата,
 Не хочет оно быть терпеливым,
 Но не умерло то, что когда-то
 Верным воздвиглось порывом.

Стремитесь во мглистые дали,
 Не верьте, что время необратимо, —
 В томленьях творческой печали
 Минувшее не проходит мимо.

В неисчислимых обителях Бога
 Пространство и время безмерно.
 Не говорите, что сокровищ там много, —
 Там всё сохранилось верно.¹⁸

Using a distinction between the day as “false” and night as “real” that Sologub employed throughout his works, the poet calls on the “people of the daylight”—that is, those trapped in the temporal illusions of the visible, day-to-day world—to look around and see Kitez, which is hiding in plain view.¹⁹ For Sologub, Kitez is connected to eternity, to the promise that in the mysterious divine economy, that which appears lost is not ever truly lost, for eternity is not

18 F. Sologub, *Sobranie stikhotvorenii* T. 8, ch. 1 (St. Petersburg, Nav'i chary, 2003), 216-17, 373-74.

19 On Sologub's division of night and day and its similarity to Tiutchev's appropriation of the same symbolic fields, see George Kalbouss, “Sologub and Myth,” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 27, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 449. For Tiutchev's appropriation of “dark” and “light” in his poetic world, see B. Ia. Bukhstab, “Tiutchev,” in *Istoriia russkoi literatury: v 10 tomakh. T. 7, Literatura 1940-kh godov* (Moscow, Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo AN SSSR, 1955), 700-706.

subject to time or space. Creative activity, such as art, offers access to this eternal world, a leitmotif of Sologub's oeuvre. As a sacred city immune to time, Kitezh is a gateway to eternity, a vision awaiting those with the artistic and/or spiritual disposition to see it, Sologub's variation on the Old Believers' idea that only the righteous could see Kitezh. Perhaps for this reason, Sologub invariably describes Kitezh veiled in fog or haze—a trope which does not appear in Kitezh literature before the twentieth century—as if it lies just beyond the edge of the tangible, visible world.²⁰ It is a special artistic rendition of that sphere of reality which George Kalbous describes as “the legend being created” (Sologub's “творимая легенда”), a place

where the visions of the eternal world become transfigured into recognizable “earthly” images and vice-versa, where temporal images are transformed into their eternal potential. It is on this level that the essential questions regarding art are discussed, namely, the artist-poet's sacred task to bridge the gap between the two worlds and transform reality.²¹

Looking at Sologub's other Kitezh poem (“Through the barely visible fog”) through the lens of “Beneath the light haze of the fog” reveals a deeper layer in the poem. The real-world, temporal city of Kostroma has the potential to be transformed into its eternal counterpart, Kitezh. But few people have the vision to see this potential, and whether or not it will be realized remains a mystery.

Kitezh also plays an important role in Sologub's final novel, *The Snake Charmer*, which he started writing well before the Revolution, but did not publish until 1921.²² The novel, set in

20 Karlsohn asserts that Sologub may well have connected fog with Kitezh because of Rimsky-Korsakov's opera, in which Kitezh is enveloped in fog as it becomes invisible. Karlsohn, 86, 314.

21 Kalbous, 444.

22 On the basis of Sologub's correspondence, L. V. Evdokimova suggests that Sologub had written a significant portion of the novel by 1911, but ceased work on it between 1913 and 1918, when he was more occupied with drama. See L. V. Evdokimova, *Mifopoeticheskaia traditsiia v tvorchestve Sologuba* (Astrakhan: izdatel'stvo astrakhanskogo pedagogicheskogo universiteta, 1998), 109. Given that Sologub's interest in Kitezh first definitively appears in 1920 (when his Kitezh poems were written), it seems likely that the Kitezh elements of *The Snake Charmer* date to after 1918 rather than before 1913. Alternatively, if the Kitezh elements of the novel date to the earlier period, perhaps returning to work on the novel after 1918 inspired Sologub to write the Kitezh

the invented Volga town of Sonokhta a few years before the Revolution, describes a factory owner, Gorelov, and the relationships between Gorelov and his family and the factory workers. While the factory workers agitate for better working conditions, one of the workers, the beautiful Vera, enchants Gorelov, eventually convincing him to transfer ownership of the factory to the workers. However, the fate of the factory remains uncertain after Gorelov dies of a heart attack and Vera, to whom he has just deeded the factory, is murdered by her jealous fiancé.

The novel was poorly received, especially outside the Soviet Union, and has been virtually ignored by scholars since its publication. Many believe that it was co-written or primarily written by Sologub's wife, Anastasia Chebotarevskaia, and that it is his (or her) weakest work. The poet Vladislav Khodasevich called it “completely unbearable”; literary historian Prince Mirsky devoted less than a sentence to the novel, summing it up with the phrase “decidedly weak.” Later western scholars have generally followed this pattern, calling it “artistically shoddy” or simply ignoring it. The Soviet formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky is a rare exception, insightfully judging *The Snake Charmer* not as a standard novel but as a utopian project: “The novel, like an airplane, leaves the earth and turns into a utopia. Of course, Fyodor Sologub had no intention of writing an ordinary novel. More likely he wanted to create a fairy tale out of the burning and heavy elements of life” (Роман, как аэроплан, отделяется от земли и превращается в утопию. Конечно, Федор Сологуб и не хотел написать бытовой роман, он хотел скорей из элементов жизни, жгучих и тяжелых, создать сказку).²³

poems in 1920.

23 Vladislav Khodasevich, “Iz peterburgskikh vospominanii <Sologub>,” in Fedor Sologub, *Sobranie sochinenii. T. 6. Rasskazy, Roman, Stat'i, esse, zametki, Vospominaniia sovremennikov* (Moscow: MPK “Intelvak”; GNPК “Vakuummashpribor,” 2002), 499; D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 442; Murl G. Barker, “Reality and Escape: Sologub's 'The Wall and the Shadows,’” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 16, No. 4 (Winter 1972): 420; Viktor Shklovskii, *Gamburgskii schet: Stat'i-vospominaniia-esse (1914-1933)* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990), 142.

Without praising the novel above its due, it is worth noting that even the weakest novel of an accomplished author may not be without merit, and that various factors may have prejudiced Sologub's first readers against *The Snake Charmer*. Though Sologub was extremely devoted to his wife, she was not well-liked by many of his friends, who believed that she was a negative influence on him; accordingly, they may have been biased against a work they believed she wrote or co-wrote simply due to her (supposed) participation.²⁴ Moreover, the Marxist component of the novel, class warfare and clear sympathy towards the workers and antagonism towards their exploiters, certainly must have been repellent to many in the émigré community. And while Sologub was briefly celebrated in the Soviet Union, by the 1930s he was forgotten, too closely aligned with the Decadents to achieve lasting status.

In fact the novel fits neatly into neither the Soviet nor the émigré ideological camps. For all the talk of class warfare, the Marxist reach of the novel is actually limited. Far from a standard socialist realist novel, *The Snake Charmer* features an uncertain ending rather than clear proletarian victory and places individual transformation above communal well-being. The central

24 Nadezhda Teffi's memoirs about Sologub offer a pointed view:

And this [the death of Sologub's sister] was the breaking point.

He left the service and married the translator Anastasia Chebotarevskaja, who reordered his life in new and unnecessary ways. A big apartment was taken, pink blinds were hung, gilded end tables were bought. The walls of his big, cold office for some reason were decorated with the Ledas of various artists.

“Not an office, but a glacier,” someone quipped.

Quiet conversations were replaced by noisy gatherings with dances and masks.

Sologub shaved his mustache, and everyone began saying that he resembled a Roman of the period of decline. He walked like a guest in the new rooms, haughtily pursed his shaved lips, squinted, searched for fading dreams.

His wife, Anastasia Chebotarevskaja, created an anxious and strained atmosphere around him. It always seemed to her that Sologub was not being treated with appropriate respect, everywhere she imagined insults, hints, inattention. She wrote letters in droves to editorial offices, letters that were utterly unnecessary and even harmful to Sologub, defending him from imagined attacks; she argued and made mischief. Sologub gave in to her influence, since he was by nature very suspicious and took offense easily....

He wrote new stories in collaboration with Chebotarevskaja. They were not entirely successful, and sometimes so unsuccessful and so devoid of even the breath of Sologub that many, including myself, decided that Chebotarevskaja was writing them alone, without even the supervision of Sologub. Subsequently this guess turned out to be true” (N. A. Teffi, “Fedor Sologub,” in *Vospominaniia o serebrianiom veke*, ed. Vadim Kreid [Moscow: Respublika, 1993], 84, 91).

axes of the novel are found not in class warfare, but in the symbolic names of three main characters: Vera ('faith,' the self-described “snake charmer”), Liubov ('love,' Gorelov's wife), and Milochka ('mercy,' Gorelov's daughter). The deeper motion of the novel revolves not around the superficial plot of whether or not the workers will gain ownership of the factory, but whether or not various characters can open themselves to spiritual transformation. As Ivan Razin, the novel's Christian apologist explains to Vera, egoism and greed will not disappear simply because the factory is owned by many people instead of one:

“Your comrades will become the owners,” said Razin. “In place of one large capitalist a thousand small ones will appear, and it will be hard to calculate what will come of that. Do you think that the egoism of people will die? Can human nature change as quickly as you dream? There is only one remedy for evil: brotherly and Christian union for the cooperation of labor and the distribution of worldly goods.”

– Твои товарищи станут хозяевами, – сказал Разин, – вместо одного крупного капиталиста появится тысяча мелких, и трудно будет учесть, что из этого выйдет. Думаешь ли ты, что эгоизм людей умрет? Так ли скоро, как ты мечтаешь, может измениться природа человека? Средство против зла только одно, – братский и христианский союз для объединения труда и распределения земных благ.²⁵

Like Merezhkovsky, Razin, with his undogmatic Christianity, envisions social change unfolding through large-scale religious and political-economic reorientation, not single economic acts.

However, Razin blesses Vera's enterprise despite her atheism and misguided faith because she is motivated by a dream, and dreamers are specially chosen by God:

“A dream deceives a person and guides him somewhere he did not want to go. But a dream is always more right than reason, and a person should always listen to a dream, follow it, fulfill the will of him who can enchant, as we, human beings, cannot. Our earthly life is a difficult and dark path through the great desert of the world, and the blessing of God is on him among us to whom a dream was given, who is lead by a dream. Even in death, he is happy, for he saw that which others were not able to see, he is marked with the stamp of a high calling.”

– Мечта обманывает человека и приводит его не туда, куда он хотел прийти. Но мечта всегда правее разума, и всегда человек должен слушаться ее, идти за ней,

25 Fedor Sologub, *Zaklinatel'nitsa zmei. Romany, rasskazy* (Moscow: “Terra,” 1997), 474.

исполнять волю того, кто умеет чаровать, как мы, люди, не умеем. Земная жизнь наша—трудная и темный путь в великой пустыне мира, и благословение Бога над тем из нас, кому дана мечта, кого ведет мечта. Даже и погибая, он счастлив,—он видел то, чего другим не дано видеть, он отмечен печатью высокого избрания.²⁶

This ability to dream, to see what others cannot, is vital to enabling spiritual transformation in oneself and others. At the end of the story (which Shklovsky correctly called a “fairy tale”), Vera and her faith in herself and her dream have not secured a better future for the workers, but she, together with others guided by ideals, have enabled Gorelov to undergo a profound change. He transforms from a condition of unawareness and spiritual void to one of love and sympathy.

Kitezh is a key symbol in the novel associated with the visionary capacity of those who are open to spiritual transformation. The centrality of the image is clear from its placement in the first pages of the novel, when Milochka discusses with her cousin Liza and friend Lenka whether or not it is possible to see Kitezh. Lenka believes she is too sinful to see Kitezh, and Milochka reassures her that “no one has ever seen Kitezh...no one has ever heard its church-bells” (Никто не видел Китежа...никто не слышал благовеста). Lenka, however, insists that “there is one person—every year on a holy day an invisible force takes him and sets him down in the city of Kitezh” (есть один человек,—его каждый год в святой день незримая сила восхищает и посреди града Китежа ставит).²⁷ Nowhere in the novel is the identity of this mysterious person revealed, but the conversation sets up the possibility of seeing Kitezh.

A page later, the narrator reveals his own ability to envision Kitezh in the beautiful environs of the Gorelov garden and its view on Sonokhta:

From the paths and the terraces of the garden a very beautiful view opened onto the Volga and the nearby city. Through the hazy distance the golden domes of the many churches sparkled joyfully and iridescently in the sun. The white walls of the buildings, spread widely above the Volga, gave the impression of calm clarity. Even the glorious city of

26 Sologub, *Zaklintonitsa zmei*, 477.

27 Sologub, *Zaklintonitsa zmei*, 363.

Kitezh would not have appeared brighter and purer to the gaze.

С дорожек и с террас сада открывался очень красивый вид на Волгу и на недалекий город. Сквозь мгlistую даль золотые главы многочисленных церквей радостно и переливно блистали на солнце. Белые стены домов, раскинувшихся широкого над Волгой, создавали впечатление успокоенной ясности,--светлее и чище, казалось, не предстал бы взорам и сам преславный град Китеж.²⁸

This moment serves to distinguish two types of characters. The Gorelov family loves the garden (though Milochka believes it should belong to the workers, since their work finances the pineapples and other exotic fruits that grow in this paradise-on-earth) and is therefore open to the transformative power of its beauty. On the other hand, Gorelov's half-brother Basharov, a single-minded businessman who prizes the fact that his money is safe in Berlin and that he vacations on the Riviera, is unimpressed: “But Basharov looked at all this wondrous beauty with bored eyes” (Но на все это великолепие Башаров посматривал скучающими глазами).²⁹

Part of the narrator's description, “through the hazy distance” (Сквозь мгlistую даль) echoes almost word-for-word lines from Sologub's Kitezh poetry: “Through the barely visible fog” (Сквозь туман едва заметный) and “Aim for the hazy distance” (Стремитесь во мгlistые дали). The images of sparkling golden domes and white walls are also found in the poems. And as in the poems, in the novel, Kitezh serves as a gateway, a vision of a perfect eternal world that offers the promise of transformation to those able to see it. The narrator, like many of Sologub's artistic characters, has such a vision, and the entire novel may be read as an attempt to transfigure the ordinary, day-to-day world through the beauty of artistic creation.

The first character in the story with a similar ability is Liubov. While in the garden contemplating her sincere, suffering, and undying love for a man who is not her husband, a love she has kept secret all her married life, Liubov encounters a door to another world:

28 Sologub, *Zaklintonitsa zmei*, 363-64.

29 Sologub, *Zaklintonitsa zmei*, 364.

It seemed to her at those times that she had walked a long, long road and was standing before an invisible door. And it was as if sometimes the door would open a tiny bit and a different world would appear, wondrously melding with this visible world of daytime, boring existence.

Казалось тогда ей, что она прошла длинную, длинную дорогу и стоит перед незримой дверью. И как будто бы иногда приоткрывается эта дверь и является иной мир, чудесно сливающийся с этим зримым миром дневного скучного бытия.³⁰

When she looks at the city, she experiences a vision of Kitezh:

Like golden stars in the light-blue haze of the air, the sacred domes of distant churches are shimmering, and beyond the green of the sweet gardens the white walls shine silver—is it not Kitezh before her? A quiet pealing comes along the water, and the heart begins to beat, to beat, sweetly languishing and yearning. She would like to take up a bundle, walk along a road without end and without border, as a homeless wanderer.

Золотыми звездами в голубой мгле воздуха мерцают святые главы далеких церквей, и за зеленью милых садов серебром светятся белые стены—не град ли Китеж перед нею? Тихий звон по воде донесется,--и забьется, забьется сердце, сладко томясь и тоскуя. Взять бы котомку, идти бы дорогой без конца и без края, бездомной странницей.³¹

This description of Kitezh likewise echoes Sologub's Kitezh poem, particularly in that the “sacred domes are shimmering” (мерцают святые главы), so similar to the way the “golden domes are shimmering” (мерцают золотые главы) in “Beneath the light haze of the fog.” Liubov's vision leads her to desire a life of wandering, an internal turn that shows her openness to change and transformation. She is one of those “marked with the stamp of a high calling” that Razin describes, whose “difficult and dark path through the great desert of the world” is “led by a dream.”³²

Liubov's daughter Milochka shares her mother's spiritual openness and potential for transformation. Though she initially insists that no one has ever seen Kitezh or heard its bells,

30 Sologub, *Zaklintonel'nitsa zmei*, 399.

31 Sologub, *Zaklintonel'nitsa zmei*, 400.

32 Sologub, *Zaklintonel'nitsa zmei*, 477.

she herself has an experience of the city later in the novel. After intervening when she finds her cousin Liza mistreating a servant, Milochka fights bitterly with Liza, and is deeply troubled afterwards. The contrition and spiritual searching this experience unlocks in her leads to an experience of Kitezh:

A light fog crept over the Volga, and therefore the sunset seemed a wondrous dream. The subdued Volga valley again seemed to Milochka a land of the blessed. The opaque, hazy fog sometimes seemed to gleam with tiny, moist, silver sparkles. From the Volga, a perceptible, sad silence could be heard that resembled the distant pealing of bells. The trees and bushes in the garden were warmly caressed and cradled by this tender, infinitely light shroud. Milochka felt forgiven and good.

Над Волгой стлался легкий туман, и потому закат казался дивным сновидением. Долина смиренная волжская опять предстала Милочке странною блаженных. Матово-мглистый туман иногда словно поблескивал крохотными, влажными, серебристыми искорками. С Волги слышна была внятная грустная тишина, похожая на далекий колокольный звон. Деревья и кусты в саду были тепло обласканы и убаюканы этой нежной, бесконечно-легкой пеленой. Милочка чувствовала себя прощенной и доброй.³³

While the golden domes and white walls of Kitezh are not visible to Milochka, the distant pealing of bells from the water through the sparkling fog are clear indications of Kitezh. Like Liubov's experience of suffering love, Milochka's experience of suffering mercy, her compassion for the oppressed and sorrow over quarrels, makes her open to the eternal world that Kitezh represents. She too can transform Sonokhta into Kitezh.

As a whole, Sologub's Kitezh shows something of the heritage he shares with Merezhkovsky, Gippius, and other Symbolist writers, but it is ultimately unique to his worldview and time. By this time Kitezh was already an established utopian image open to multiple interpretations and emphases. All of the Symbolist writers imagined Kitezh as a religious, social, and political ideal. But Sologub's Kitezh, developed a very eventful decade after Gippius and Merezhkovsky's, is different in an important way: whereas Gippius and Merezhkovsky imagined

33 Sologub, *Zaklintonitsa zmei*, 446.

Kitezh as a New Jerusalem that heralded the unification and communal salvation of all humanity, Sologub's Kitezh is highly individual. It is not a vision of a universal future world, but an individual vision into eternity, accessible not to humanity as a whole, but only to “chosen ones” with the spiritual-artistic disposition to see it. For these “chosen ones,” it is a spiritual refuge that brings consolation in a troubled world.

Moreover, in accordance with a general trend of the time, Sologub's Kitezh makes no reference at all to the religious dissenters who developed the legend. Whereas religious dissent and dissenters were essential for Gippius Merezhkovsky's Kitezh, they play no role in Sologub's Kitezh. Though Liubov and Milochka do share something of the disposition of “seekers” in the broad sense that Gippius and Merezhkovsky imagined them—and Sologub himself was not at all a doctrinaire Orthodox Christian—nothing in the novel suggests a link to Old Belief or sectarianism. The closest character to a religious dissenter, Ivan Razin, professes an un-dogmatic, Marxist Christianity but has no apparent connection to Old Believers or other conventional religious dissenters.

Sologub's innovations on the Kitezh legend resemble those found in many post-Revolutionary Kitezh texts. In particular, his focus on Kitezh as an individual refuge rather an image of communal salvation is typical of post-Revolutionary depictions of Kitezh. Perhaps after the hopeful association of Kitezh with apocalyptic change and religious-political revolution envisioned by Merezhkovsky and others, the disappointment with the actual results of the Bolshevik Revolution led to a reappraisal of Kitezh as an image. No longer a future hope for humanity, Kitezh became a refuge for individuals.

Like Sologub, the writer Andrei Platonov turned to the Kitezh legend for his own meditations on utopian dreams following the Revolution. Platonov was a generation younger

than Sologub, initially enchanted with the promises of the Revolution, but equally disenchanted with its failures. While Platonov remained a communist, many of his works undermine the myth of the Soviet utopia through satire and sorrow. His novel *Chevengur* was written primarily between 1926 and 1928, but not published until the second half of the twentieth century, after Platonov's death. *Chevengur* tells the story of an orphan, Sasha Dvanov, and his adventures with the quixotic Kopenkin as Kopenkin seeks the establishment of communism after the Revolution. Their search leads them to Chevengur, a town that claims to have established a perfect popular communism. This claim proves false, and the failures of Chevengur are starkly juxtaposed against the ideals that (supposedly) founded it. The novel draws heavily on utopian literature, such as Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun*, as well as many Russian utopian folk legends, including the legend of Kitezh. In the novel, Platonov juxtaposes the realities of the all-too-human Chevengur with the promises of Communism by comparing the quest for Communism to the search for Kitezh.

Far from an ideal utopia, the Kitezh legend is an ambivalent subtext in Andrei Platonov's *Chevengur*. As David Bethea and Igor Sukhikh have both noted, the demise of Sasha Dvanov's father, and later of Sasha himself, in Lake Mutevo recalls the Kitezh legend.³⁴ Sasha's father is a fisherman obsessed with fish not as a means of survival, but as a clue about another world:

This fisherman loved fish most of all not as food, but as special beings that definitely knew the secret of death. He would show Zakhar Pavlovich the eyes of a dead fish and say, "Look—there's wisdom! A fish stands between life and death, so that he's dumb and expressionless. I mean even a calf thinks, but a fish, no. It already knows everything." Contemplating the lake through the years, the fisherman thought always about the same thing, about the interest of death.... After a year the fisherman couldn't stand it any more and threw himself into the lake from his boat, after tying his feet with a rope so that he wouldn't accidentally float. *In secret he didn't even believe in death. The important thing*

34 David M. Bethea, *The Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 170-71. Igor' Sukhikh, "Russkie stranniki v poiskakh Kitezha (1926-1929). 'Chevengur' Andreia Platonova," *Zvezda* No. 8 (1999): 227.

*was that he wanted to look at what was there—perhaps it was much more interesting than living in a village or on the shores of a lake. He saw death as another province, located under the heavens as if at the bottom of cool water, and it attracted him.*³⁵

Этот рыбак больше всего любил рыбу, не как пищу, а как особое существо, наверное знающее тайну смерти. Он показывал глаза мертвых рыб Захару Павловичу и говорил: "Гляди – премудрость. Рыба между жизнью и смертью стоит, оттого она и немая и глядит без выражения; телок ведь и тот думает, а рыба нет – она все уже знает". Созерцая озеро годами, рыбак думал все об одном и том же – об интересе смерти... Через год рыбак не вытерпел и бросился с лодки в озеро, связав себе ноги веревкой, чтобы нечаянно не поплыть. *Втайне он вообще не верил в смерть, главное, же, он хотел посмотреть – что там есть: может быть, гораздо интересней, чем жить в селе или на берегу озера; он видел смерть как другую губернию, которая расположена под небом, будто на дне прохладной воды, – и она его влекла.*³⁶

This “other province” at the bottom of the lake, which the fisherman believed was not actually death as conventionally understood, but a place far more interesting than life on shore, may be a reference to Kitezh: Sasha's father's death is not just any suicide by drowning, but a concrete search for a better world at the bottom of a lake. Nonetheless, the fate of Sasha's father remains at best mysterious, and at worst, a misguided suicide that orphaned a boy, troubling the remainder of his brief life.

As Sukhikh shows, the fisherman's “suicide” recalls a “murder” recounted by Korolenko in his travelogue *In Deserted Places*.³⁷ According to a fisherman Korolenko meets, when a saintly man was pushed out of a boat in the middle of Lake Svetloyar in the dark of night, devout local residents believed he had not been murdered, but rather taken to Kitezh.³⁸ Making death equivalent to entry into Kitezh appears in many other Kitezh works, including Rimsky-Korsakov's opera (in which the heroine Fevronia enters Kitezh as she dies from exhaustion). It

35 Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur*, trans. Anthony Olcott (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978), 6 (emphasis mine).

36 A. P. Platonov. *Chevengur. Roman. Kotlovan. Povest*. Pod. red. N. M. Malyginoi (Moscow: Vrenia, 2011), 15-16 (emphasis mine).

37 Sukhikh, 227.

38 V. G. Korolenko, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii. T. 5*. (St. Petersburg, 1914), 248-251.

also recalls the suicidal obsessions of the early Old Believers, who forsook traditional Orthodox teaching on suicide as sin, instead considering suicide an entrance to heaven. Korolenko's story draws a division between faith and skepticism, between the hopes of locals who believed in Kitezhd and the salvation—not death—of the saintly man, and the pragmatic decisions of the urban officials who ruled the man's disappearance a murder. Similarly, Platonov's novel pushes faith (faith in human abilities, faith in the existence of utopia itself) to its limits, ever juxtaposing hope and faith with the confounding evidence of real life.

The reference to Kitezhd in the novel is complex, as Platonov bifurcates the image of Kitezhd and divides it between Lake Mutevo and Chevengur. Lake Mutevo, literally 'Muddy' Lake, is the opposite of Svetloyar, the “bright” or “light” lake. The “bright” place in the novel is rather Chevengur, the City of the Sun. The location of Chevengur, somewhere in the steppes, bears more resemblance to the legends of Belovodye than Kitezhd, and recalls other folk utopian myths as well.³⁹

Chevengur is a false paradise, however, a flawed, human-enacted parody of Kitezhd and other folk utopias. The Chevengurians' decision to enact their own “Second Coming” by mass-murdering the bourgeoisie brings their communist paradise-city into being. Just as Kitezhd was to become visible at the Second Coming, so the Chevengurians' Sun-City comes into being (free of bourgeois elements) following the “Second Coming” they enact. But when the Chevengurians see that their communist utopia is powerless to stop the death of a child, some—most notably Kopenkin (who is already suspicious because no one in Chevengur knows who Rosa Luxemburg is)—become disillusioned, realizing that there is no communism in Chevengur. Perhaps the fact that Chevengur was a false Kitezhd was evident simply from the Chevengurians' reliance on the

39 Bethea, 159.

sun: in the eighteenth-century Kitezh “Letter to a father from a son in a hidden monastery,” the prayers of the saints provide light without the sun; this itself is a reference to the New Jerusalem as portrayed in Revelation: “And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”⁴⁰

Utopian hope in the novel ultimately follows the path of Dvanov's father, the fisherman. In childhood, Sasha Dvanov digs a hole next to his father's grave and sleeps in it. Later, he goes to Chevengur after his father tells him from Lake Mutevo in a dream to go to Chevengur, using his death as motivation: “It's also boring for me to be lying here, son. Go do something in Chevengur. Otherwise why are we lying dead?” (И мне тут, мальчик, скучно лежать. Делай что-нибудь в Чевенгуре: зачем же мы будем мертвыми лежать...) ⁴¹ Later, Dvanov compares his experience in Chevengur to his father's experience at Lake Mutevo:

It was as though it was evening in the world, and Dvanov sensed that evening was gathering within him as well, a time of maturity, a time of happiness or regret. It was in precisely this sort of sundown of life that Dvanov's father had hidden permanently in the depths of Lake Mutevo, wishing before his time to see the future morning. Now another evening was beginning. Perhaps that day whose morning the fisherman Dvanov had wished to see was already passed, his son once again suffer[ed] evening.⁴²

В мире было как вечером, и Дванов почувствовал, что и в нем наступает вечер, время зрелости, время счастья или сожаления. В такой же, свой вечер жизни отец Дванова навсегда скрылся в глубине озера Мутево, желая раньше времени увидеть будущее утро. Теперь начинался иной вечер – быть может, уже был прожит тот день, утро которого хотел видеть рыбак Дванов, и сын его снова переживал вечер.⁴³

Moreover, Sasha sees, and appreciates, in the zealous revolutionaries the same passion that drove his father to suicide. It is not the utopian impulse in and of itself that attracts Sasha, but rather the

40 Revelation 22:5 (NRSV).

41 Platonov, trans. Olcott, 193; Platonov, *Chevengur*, 240.

42 Adapted from Platonov, trans. Olcott, 259.

43 Platonov, *Chevengur*, 318.

connection that impulse offers with his lost father:

On the other hand, communism tormented Chepurny the way the secret of life had tormented Dvanov's father. Chepurny could not bear the mystery of time, so he cut short the length of history by the rapid construction of communism in Chevengur, just as the fisherman Dvanov could not bear his own life and so had transformed it into death, in order to experience the beauty of that world. However, Dvanov loved his father not because of his curiosity and he liked Chepurny not because of his passion for immediate communism. In and of himself his father had been vital to Dvanov as the first friend he was ever to lose.... Dvanov loved Kopenkin, Chepurny, and many others because all of them, just as his father, would perish of impatience [of] life while he would stay alone among strangers.⁴⁴

Чепурного же, наоборот, коммунизм мучил, как мучила отца Дванова тайна посмертной жизни, и Чепурный не вытерпел тайны времени и прекратил долготу истории срочным устройством коммунизма в Чевенгуре, – так же, как рыбак Дванов не вытерпел своей жизни и превратил ее в смерть, чтобы заранее испытать красоту того света. Но отец был дорог Дванову не за свое любопытство и Чепурный понравился ему не за страсть к немедленному коммунизму – отец был сам по себе необходим для Дванова, как первый утраченный друг.... Дванов любил отца, Копенкина, Чепурного и многих прочих за то, что они все, подобно его отцу, погибли от нетерпения жизни, а он останется один среди чужих.⁴⁵

Sasha's father and his grave serve essentially the same role for Sasha that Rosa Luxemburg and her grave serve for Kopenkin and his utopian quest. When a disillusioned Kopenkin dreams that Rosa Luxemburg is lying in her grave tormented by her wounds while the Chevengurians distract him with their fake communism, Dvanov compares Kopenkin's quest for Rosa to his own quest for his father: “‘Why do you reproach us?’ Alexander whispered. ‘Does my father not suffer too at the bottom of the lake, waiting for me? I too remember...’” (Зачем ты упрекаешь? – прошептал Александр. – А разве мой отец не мучается в озере на дне и не ждет меня? Я тоже помню).⁴⁶ Dvanov's father, the seeker-fisherman who believed in a Kitezh-esque world, compels every step of his son's search for utopia-on-earth. When Chevengur proves a false utopia,

44 Adapted from Platonov, trans. Olcott, 259.

45 Platonov, *Chevengur*, 318-19.

46 Platonov, trans. Olcott, 321; Platonov, *Chevengur*, 395.

Dvanov ends his life “[seeking] that same road along which once his father had passed in his curiosity about death” (в поисках той дороги, по которой когда-то прошел отец в любопытстве смерти). He disappears into Lake Mutevo, where he realizes his dead father is still half-alive in him, while the lake remains unchanged.⁴⁷ The identical demises of father and son in the mysterious lake, albeit for different reasons, bookend the novel.

Chevengur displays Platonov's own deep disillusionment with the Revolution, in which he had once been a devout believer. Turning *Chevengur* and its all-too-human attempts to enact communism into a false utopia, Platonov employs the image of Kitezh-as-communal-New-Jerusalem envisioned by Gippius and Merezhkovsky and developed in works such as A. N. Tolstoy's “The Traveler's Tale” ironically. If there is a real Kitezh in the novel, it is not in *Chevengur*, but under the waters of Lake Mutevo; whether or not Sasha or his father ever reach it remains a mystery. Most likely the utopia of Lake Mutevo is every bit as imaginary as the utopia of *Chevengur*, the product of human impatience rather than submission to divine will. Regardless, like the vision of Rosa Luxemburg that guides Kopenkin, the Kitezh of Lake Mutevo is a personal beacon, not a communal salvation. Lake Mutevo “calmed” Dvanov's father and brought Dvanov's life to its cathartic conclusion, but it did not transform the world. Platonov's Kitezh is an individual refuge.

Dvanov's quest may ultimately be understood as the desire for a lost home. With the death of his father, Dvanov was fated to a lonely life in which he sought out companionship to replace the family he never had. His return to Lake Mutevo is not a search for utopia or curiosity about death, but rather the desire of an orphan to be reunited with his father. His “search for Kitezh” is actually a longing for something lost. As such it is also very similar to the Kitezh that

47 Platonov, trans. Olcott, 332; Platonov, *Chevengur*, 408.

appears in the “exilic” imagination of the émigré community and the poet Anna Akhmatova.

A Lost Home

In Gaito Gazdanov's semi-autobiographical debut novel *An Evening at Claire's* (*Вечер у Клэр*, 1930), the narrator leaves the horror of Revolution and civil war by ship, heading for Europe. As he nears France, he suddenly realizes that he is approaching the home of his childhood love, the French girl Claire, whom he has not seen since she left Russia a decade earlier. The realization of this hope turns his sad journey of loss into an entrance to Kitezh:

We sailed through the darkness of the sea towards the invisible city...and in the humid silence of this journey a bell would occasionally ring. And the sound, unfailingly accompanying us, only the sound of the bell, in its slow, glassy transparency, connected the fiery lands and water separating me from Russia with the whispering, wonderful, now-coming-true dream of Claire.

Мы плыли в морском сумраке к невидимому городу...и во влажной тишине этого путешествия изредка звонил колокол - и звук, неизменно нас сопровождавший, только звук колокола соединял в медленной стеклянной своей прозрачности огненные края и воду, отделявшие меня от России, с лепечущим и сбывающимся, с прекрасным сном о Клэр...⁴⁸

Though Kitezh is never mentioned by name, the appellation “invisible city” accompanied by the sound of the bell on the water is an unmistakable reference to Kitezh.

The scene has much in common with earlier representations of Kitezh, but also shows new developments in the image caused by the experience of emigration. The motif of Kitezh as a dream-come-true, a reunion with the beloved, can be found as early as 1907, in Rimsky-Korsakov's opera, and played an important role in many Symbolist and post-Symbolist works; Gippius in particular applies the marriage language from the Apocalypse to Kitezh. On the other hand, the placement of Kitezh outside of the geographical territory of Russia is a stunning

48 Gaito Gazdanov, *Večer u Kler*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh. T. 1. Večer u Kler: Istoriia odnogo puteshestviia. Polet. Nochnye dorogi* (Moscow: “Soglasie,” 1996), 154.

innovation on a legend that was once rooted to a specific Russian lake and had in recent years come to represent Russia itself.

Gazdanov's description reflects the émigré community's particular identification with Kitezh. While many poets and writers, both inside and outside of Russia, compared contemporary historical events to the disappearance of Kitezh, the feeling was perhaps most poignant among those who felt that *their* world had disappeared. The exilic mindset of the émigré experience not only drew the distinction between the “before” and “after” of the Revolution, but in extreme cases also between the absence of “true” Russian culture in the Soviet Union and the attempt to preserve it in emigration. Emigration, in effect, became Kitezh, a repository of pre-Revolutionary Russia, cut off from contemporary Russia, irrelevant and virtually invisible to those around it.⁴⁹

The Russian literary community living in emigration felt the duty of preserving Russian literary and cultural traditions. As Leonid Livak explains, hostility towards the Soviet regime engendered hostility towards the new literary forms developing there, and vice versa for the conservative literary output of the émigré world:

As autonomous subsystems with interdependent value hierarchies, Soviet and émigré literatures were, by 1930, locked in a mutually defining relationship based on the esthetics of opposition—they rejected each other's values as “noncultural.” Modeling exilic experience as “true” Russian culture, many émigrés marked Soviet experience as both non-cultural and un-Russian... Indeed, a rejection of tradition in the USSR was

49 Many émigré writers found it impossible to move on with their lives after emigration and assimilate into the cultures of their new homes. Scholars of émigré culture describe the younger generation in particular as participating in a “hopeless quest for the foggy ghosts of what was lost.” Many of Gazdanov's Russian characters in his novels set in Paris, for example, live a phantom-like existence between two worlds: they are “ghostly creatures, for, deprived of their original environment, they continue to exist either in a wholly imagined world, or else in real life, but only in parallel to French life. They are prisoners of their past, unable to make peace with the loss of that past.” See V. B. Zemskov, “Pisateli tsivilizatsionnogo 'promezhnutka': Gazdanov, Nabokov, i drugie,” in *Gaito Gazdanov i “nezamechennoe pokolenie”: pisatel' na peresechenii traditsii i kul'tur. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov* (Moscow: Biblioteka-fond “Russkoe zarubezh'e”, 2005), 9; E. Bal'zamo, “Nochnye dorogi Gaito Gazdanova” in *Gaito Gazdanov i “nezamechennoe pokolenie”: pisatel' na peresechenii traditsii i kul'tur. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov* (Moscow: Biblioteka-fond “Russkoe zarubezh'e”, 2005), 140-141.

countered by the self-imposed mission of continuity in emigration.⁵⁰

The result of these mutual hostilities was a renewed focus in the émigré community on preserving the literary traditions of pre-Revolutionary Russia as “true” Russian culture. “Kitezh” became a handy metaphor for this preservation-in-exile and the militant nostalgia that accompanied it. For example, in 1921 a Russian publishing house named “Grad Kitesch” (Градъ Китежъ) opened in Berlin, where it would operate for the next 20 years. Grad Kitesch focused particularly on literature that kept the memory of pre-Revolutionary Russia alive in the émigré community, publishing classics of Russian literature, memoirs, children's literature and textbooks, and reproductions of Russian paintings. The publishing house also included a large reading room, and a bookstore that sold items from other Russian publishers.⁵¹ In this context, the name Kitezh emphasized the conservative disposition of the publishing house and its mission to preserve the traditions of pre-Revolutionary Russian literature.

Kitezh likewise figured in direct polemics within the émigré context. Ivan Bunin, one of the most respected writers in the émigré community, who had already forged a reputation well before the Revolution and who became the first Russian to win the Nobel Prize for literature, appealed to the Kitezh legend as a source of identity for “true” Russian culture. In his 1925 essay “Otherland and Kitezh” (“Инония и Китеж”) dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the death of Aleksei Konstantinovich Tolstoy, Bunin draws a distinction between pre-Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary Russian culture. “Every memory of every great person of the former Russia is

50 Leonid Livak, *How It Was Done in Paris: Russian Émigré Literature and French Modernism* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 29-30.

51 Wojciech Zalewski [Voitsekh Zalevskii] and Eugene Hollerbach [Evgenii Gollerbakh], *Rasprostranenie russkoi pečati v mire: 1918-1939 gg. Spravochnik* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Rossiiskoi natsional'noi biblioteki, OP, 1998), 78-79, 21.

very painful now,” writes Bunin, “and produces a frightful comparison of what was and what is.”⁵² For Bunin, Aleksei K. Tolstoy is one of the heroes of Russian culture who demonstrated his deep humanity in art and deed, a stark contrast with what Bunin sees in the people (writers in particular) currently lauded in the Soviet Union.

To illustrate his point, Bunin draws an extended metaphor based on Tolstoy's poem *The Serpent Tugarin* (*Змея Тугарин*). In Tolstoy's poem, Tugarin, acting as a poet, prophesies to Prince Vladimir and the other heroes of Kievan Rus' that they will soon be in servitude to the Mongols. The heroes laugh at the “ugly mug” (рожа) Tugarin and slay him, claiming that even if they face a struggle against the enemy, it will be temporary, and that in the end they will overcome and throw off an oppressor. For Bunin, history is repeating itself, as Russia finds itself again facing an enemy as fearful as the Mongols:

And has the battle ended? Rus' “overcame” one great assault. But now another, perhaps more frightening one is looming before us.... An “ugly mug” is already being called the salt of the earth, the incarnation, the ideal of the “new” Russia, as if it were her only true face—in contrast to the former Russia, the Russia of the Tolstoys.

И кончилось ли это бореие? Один великий приступ Русь “перемогла”. Но вот надвинулся новый и, быть может, еще более страшный.... “Рожа” именуется уже солью земли, воплощением, идеалом “новой” России, ее будто бы единственно-настоящим ликом,—в противовес России прежней, России Толстых.⁵³

The inversion of values that he finds so stark and so troubling is evident in literature, according to Bunin, where “ugly mugs” and “arch-ugly mugs” (архирожи) such as Esenin, Babel', Seifullina, Pil'niak, Sobol', Ivanov, Erenburg, and even Blok, Bely and Gorky, have not only become the darlings of Soviet Russia, but are even celebrated by many in the émigré

52 I. A. Bunin, “Inoniia i Kitezkh. K 50-letiiu so dnia smerti gr. Alekseiiia Tolstogo,” in *Publitsistika 1918-1953 godov*, ed. O. N. Mikhailov (Moscow: Nasledie, 1998), 158. Bunin's essay appeared in the conservative Parisian émigré newspaper *Renaissance* (*Возрождение*).

53 Bunin, 159.

community.⁵⁴ Mistaking vulgarity for courage, these writers deform the Russian language and prophesy a future devoid of the values of Russia's cultural heritage. For Bunin, these new poets, like Tugarin, are preachers of a “Mongol” or “Scythian” Russia, in betrayal of the Kievan roots of “true” Russian culture. In contrast, Aleksei K. Tolstoy represents the best traditions of Kievan Rus' by manifesting his values of beauty, truth, and love not only in his poetry, but also in his bravery, civic activity, and responsible patriotism.

Bunin insists people must choose between classical Russian culture and the modernist innovations he sees, personified in the clash between the “ugly mugs” and the heroes of Kievan Rus', whom he identifies with the saints of Kitezh:

There are two irreconcilable worlds: the Tolstoys, the sons of “Holy Russia,” the Sviatogors, the pilgrims of the City of Kitezh—and the “ugly mugs,” the komsomol-youth Esenins, those whom the *byliny* once called Ivans. Will these “ugly mugs” really prevail? Will the blessed face, whose singer was Tolstoy, really darken more and more?

Есть два непримиримых мира: Толстые, сыны “святой Руси”, Святогоры, богомольцы града Китежа – и “рожи”, комсомольцы Есенины, те, коих былины называли когда-то Иванами. И неужели эти “рожи” возобладают? Неужели все более и более будет затемняться тот благой лик, коего певцом был Толстой?⁵⁵

Bunin's appeal to Kitezh is notable because Kitezh does not feature at all in *The Serpent Tugarin* or in Tolstoy's poetry as a whole. Though Bunin quotes a passage from Tolstoy's poem “My Little Bells” (“Колокольчики мои”), referring to the “bright city / With a sacred Kremlin / ... where the streets resound / With the pealing of bells” (светлый град / Со Кремлем престольным / ...где улицы гудят / Звонком колокольным”) as Kitezh, there is no way that Tolstoy could have been referring to Kitezh in the poem when he wrote it in the 1840s.⁵⁶ Rather, the similarity between Tolstoy's “bright city” and Kitezh reveals how much the image of Kitezh

54 Bunin, 160.

55 Bunin, 164.

56 Bunin, 163.

was shaped in the twentieth century to resemble a nostalgic portrait of an Old Russian City. Even in 1867, when Tolstoy wrote *The Serpent Tugarin*, and as late as 1875, when Tolstoy died, Kitezh was still poorly known, associated with religious fanaticism, not Kievan Rus. But by 1925, the metaphor of pre-Revolutionary-Russia-as-Kitezh was so common that Bunin could employ it with virtually no explanation. In fact, Bunin's choice of including Kitezh in his gallery of Kievan Rus' is actually motivated not by Tolstoy, but by Esenin's poem *Otherland*, which contrasts the coming Soviet Russia ("Otherland") to Kitezh, a relic of the past.⁵⁷

Thus for Bunin, Kitezh is not merely a representation of a lost Russia, but a matter of identity. By aligning himself with Kitezh, Bunin makes a choice to identify with a "golden age" of Russian culture akin to the "golden age" of Kievan Rus'.

The Locus of Prophecy

Identity is likewise central to the image of Kitezh used by the poet Anna Akhmatova. Akhmatova turned to the Kitezh legend in mid-March 1940 for two poems, a short lyrical poem "I put to bed my curly-haired son" ("Уложила сыночка кудрявого") and the longer *Way of All the Earth. The Woman from Kitezh* (*Путем вся земля. Китежанка*). Akhmatova's identification with the "woman from Kitezh" (the *Kitezhanka*) probably originated in her acquaintance with Nikolai Kliuev, who utilized Kitezh extensively in his poetry and was executed in 1937. Remembering him in Tashkent several years after his death, Akhmatova related the following story to Eduard Babaev: "Nikolai Kliuev was a catcher of souls. He wanted to tell everyone what his calling was. He explained to Blok that Russia was his 'Wife.' Me he named a 'Kitezhanka'" (Николай Ключев был ловец душ. Он каждому хотел подсказать его

57 See footnote 5 in this chapter.

призвание. Блоку объяснял, что Россия его “Жена”. Меня назвал “Китежанкой”).⁵⁸ The subtitle of Akhmatova's *poema*, written just a couple of years before Akhmatova told her story to Babaev, could hardly be coincidental, and many scholars have noted the presence of Kliuev in Akhmatova's Kitezh poetry.⁵⁹

Akhmatova's Kitezh is rather different than Kliuev's, however. Whereas Kliuev focuses on Kitezh itself as an idealized place, Akhmatova focuses on the condition of *being from Kitezh*. In both of her Kitezh poems, Akhmatova adopts the persona of a Kitezhanka who has been separated from the city, left behind in the world ruled by the Mongols. This version of the story is not found in folklore, but dominates the second half of Rimsky-Korsakov's opera, in which the heroine Fevronia is separated from Kitezh when it becomes invisible and must make her way back to the city through a torturous journey ending in death.⁶⁰ The persona of the Kitezhanka provides Akhmatova with an identity of a citizen of a lost home, a Russia that has disappeared; in this way she is not unlike Bunin and other émigré writers who appealed to the Kitezh legend for a source of identity.⁶¹ But Akhmatova takes the persona of the Kitezhanka a step further, using it as a position from which she speaks prophetically to the Soviet culture around her. It becomes a vital element in her personal mythology of the poet-prophet living in (internal) exile. By the mid-

58 Eduard Babaev, “Na ulitse Zhukovskoi...,” in *Vospominaniia* (St. Petersburg: Inapress, 2000), 12.

59 See K. M. Azadovskii, “Menia nazval “kitezhankoi””: Anna Akhmatova i Nikolai Kliuev,” *Literaturnoe obozrenie* No. 5 (1989): 66-70; O. E. Rubinchik, “Tam za ostrovom, tam za sadom...”: Tema Kitezha u Anny Akhmatovoi,” in *Anna Akhmatova: epokha, sud'ba, tvorchestvo. Krymskii Akhmatovskii nauchnyi sbornik*, vyp. 3 (Simferopol': Krymskii arkhiv, 2005), 46-66.

60 Akhmatova was apparently very fond of Rimsky-Korsakov's opera. In a journal entry from November 13, 1926, Pavel Luknitsky reports: “A[nna] A[khmatova] loves 'Kitezh'; she listened to it four times recently.” Presumably this “Kitezh” is Rimsky-Korsakov's opera. P. N. Luknitskii, *Acumiana: Vstrechi s Annoi Akhmatovoi*. Tom II. 1926-27 (Paris-Moscow: YMCA-Press and Russkii put', 1997), 222. Boris Kats and Anatoly Naiman both affirm that Akhmatova's two favorite operas were Rimsky-Korsakov's Kitezh opera and Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina*. See Karlsohn, 340 n. 782.

61 Akhmatova's similarity to other émigré writers was noted by her enemies in the Soviet Union. Robert Reeder cites a journalist in 1924 who called her an “internal émigré.” See Roberta Reeder, *Anna Akhmatova: Poet and Prophet* (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 1994, 2006), 228.

twentieth century, she defines herself not just as someone who belongs to pre-Revolutionary culture, but as someone with the sacred calling to preserve and bear witness to that culture in a hostile world.

The theme of the “lost home” emerges early in Akhmatova's post-Revolutionary work and continues throughout her life, coming into particular focus around the time she adopted the Kitezhanika identity. Roberta Reeder explains that “the loss of homes in which she lived was to become a major theme in Akhmatova's later poetry—the inability to return physically to her past because of houses shifted or destroyed symbolized the inability ever to capture the elusive, fragile world of her youth.”⁶² In her celebrated 1924 poem “Lot's Wife” (“Лотова жена”), Akhmatova reinterprets the biblical figure of the woman who was turned to salt as punishment for looking back at her home, which is being destroyed. In Akhmatova's retelling, Lot's wife is a sympathetic figure, who sees her “native Sodom” not as the sinful city portrayed in the biblical narrative, but rather as a beautiful place where she sang, did her weaving, and bore children to her dear husband. At the conclusion of the poem, Akhmatova vows her “heart will never forget / The woman who gave her life for one look back” (сердце мое никогда не забудет / отдавшую жизнь за единственный взгляд).⁶³ Several poems written in January and February of 1940 also address the problem of the “lost home.” In “Pro Domo Mea,” Latin for 'For My Home,' Akhmatova writes about her feeling of homelessness compared to the response of others whose life path takes them either straight ahead, or else in a cycle of returns to their original home. The lyric heroine, however, complains that the tragedies which follow her have disrupted her life, leading her “to nowhere and never” instead of to a home:

One walks a straight line,

62 Reeder, 23.

63 Anna Akhmatova, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo “Pravda,” 1990), 1:153.

Another walks in a circle
 And awaits a return to the paternal home,
 Awaits his former love,
 But I walk—dogged by misfortune,
 Not straight ahead and not aslant,
 But to nowhere and to never,
 Like a derailed train.⁶⁴

Один идет прямым путем
 Другой идет по кругу
 И ждет возврата в отчий дом,
 Ждет прежнюю подругу.
 А я иду – за мной беда,
 Не прямо и не косо,
 А в никуда и в никогда,
 Как поезда с откоса.⁶⁵

In “The Willow” (“Ива”), which bears an epigraph from Pushkin's poem “Tsarskoe selo,” the lyric heroine remembers a beloved willow from her childhood in Tsarskoe selo, lamenting that she has outlived it, that in its place only a stump remains. In “The Cellar of Memory,” (“Подвал памяти”)—written the same day as “The Willow” (January 18, 1940)—the lyric heroine makes a “visit to memory” (у памяти в гостях) by descending into a nightmarish cellar that brings to life the ghosts of her past. When she decides it is time to return home, she discovers she cannot find either her home or her reason: “Well, time to go home! / But where is my home and where is my mind?” (Ну, идем домой! / Но где мой дом и где рассудок мой?).⁶⁶

Akhmatova's sense of a lost home and accompanying exilic mentality is further evident in her identification with the poet Dante, whose experience of exile resonated with her own. In her article on Dante's impact on Akhmatova's development as a poet, Pamela Davidson asserts the centrality of “the image of the poet's relation to his home town.” Davidson suggests this “home

64 Judith Hemschemeyer, trans., *The Complete Poems of Anna Akhmatova, Updated and Expanded Edition*, ed. and intro. Roberta Reeder, Third Printing (Boston: Zephyr Press, 1997), 465.

65 Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 1:206.

66 Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 1:190.

town” for Akhmatova was Petersburg, but that “the impossibility of returning to one's city c[ame] to stand for the irretrievable loss of the past.”⁶⁷ Unlike Dante, who was temporarily, then permanently banished from Florence, writing his *Inferno* in exile, Akhmatova was never forced to leave her geographic homeland, remaining in the Soviet Union for the rest of her life. She never even experienced the forced internal exile of other Russian poets, such as Pushkin or her good friend Mandelstam. Nonetheless, her choice to identify with Dante during the post-Revolutionary period reveals her sense of being exiled from her home—her home culture. In a 1924 poem entitled “The Muse” (“Муза”), Akhmatova revealed that her muse was none other than Dante's muse:

When at night I await her coming,
It seems that life hangs by a strand.
What are honors, what is youth, what is freedom,
Compared to that dear guest with rustic pipe in hand.

And she entered. Drawing aside her shawl
She gazed attentively at me.
I said to her: “Was it you who dictated to Dante
The pages of *The Inferno*?” She replied: “It was I.”⁶⁸

Когда я ночью жду ее прихода,
Жизнь, кажется, висит на волоске.
Что почести, что юность, что свобода
Пред милой гостьей с дудочкой в руке.

И вот вошла. Откинув покрывало,
Внимательно взглянула на меня.
Ей говорю: “Ты ль Данту диктовала
Страницы Ада?” Отвечает: “Я”.⁶⁹

Akhmatova's association with Dante became even more intense with time, as she felt more

67 Pamela Davidson, “Akhmatova's 'Dante,’” in *The Speech of Unknown Eyes. Akhmatova's Readers on Her Poetry*. Vol. 2. Ed. Wendy Rosslyn (Nottingham, England: Astra Press, 1990), 204, 214.

68 Hemschemeyer, 373-374.

69 Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 1:185.

keenly her own sense of exile, sympathy for her exiled friend Mandelstam, despair over poets turned over to the ultimate “exile” of execution, and indignation at those poets who had compromised their integrity by writing in service to the Soviet state. In 1936, she wrote a poem entitled “Dante” (“Данте”), in which she commends the poet for not sacrificing his principles despite the suffering he underwent at the hands of his political enemies: when offered a chance to return to Florence under humiliating conditions, Dante refused.⁷⁰ David Wells explains that “the persecution of Dante by the Florentine authorities thus becomes an allegory for the attacks on Akhmatova and others, and more broadly on Russian culture as a whole, made by the Soviet state.”⁷¹ For Akhmatova, Dante became a model showing how to live with integrity as a poet in a time of political oppression. Akhmatova understood her separation from pre-Revolutionary Russian culture as a kind of exile, and refused—at this time, anyhow—to compromise her principles by supporting the regime that was demolishing that culture.

Akhmatova's turn to Dante, especially the later 1936 poem in which she focuses on the integrity of the exiled poet, accompanies a broader change germinating in her poetic voice at this time. Akhmatova wrote little between 1925 and 1939, completing just 20 poems in thirteen years. In comparison, in the year 1940 alone—a watershed year in Akhmatova's creative output—she wrote twenty lyrics and two narrative poems. Critics have suggested that her diminished writing may have been due to a ban on publishing her works, the troubled relationship she had with her lover Nikolai Punin, or the general horror of the time; or it may simply have been a

70 On Akhmatova's invocation of Mandelstam in the poem, and Joseph Brodsky's later invocation of Akhmatova, Mandelstam and Dante through an epigraph from Akhmatova he affixed to his own Dante poem, see David Bethea, *Joseph Brodsky and the Creation of Exile* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 66-68.

71 David Wells, *Anna Akhmatova: Her Poetry* (Oxford; Washington, D. C.: Berg, 1996), 79. See also Irina Sluzhevskaja's thoughtful commentary on this poem in her book, *Kitezhanika: Poeziia Akhmatovoi: Tridtsatye gody* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2008), 38-44.

natural and necessary stage of her artistic development.⁷² Reflecting on this time in retrospect, Akhmatova wrote the following in March of 1963:

On 1925

...it was as if somehow I had to go somewhere along that path over the abyss. But where to?... After that immediately began the multi-year residence “under the wing of destruction,” but at the gates of this “residence” staunchly stood poems about fate that had not yet been collected into one cycle. Then my name was crossed off of the list of the living until 1939.

The first layer of the revolutionary youth is blustering about, “with legitimate pride” expecting a great poet from their ranks. Esenin perishes, Mayakovsky starts to perish, Mandelstam is half-forbidden and doomed, Pasternak writes the worst of all that he did (*poemas*), the forgotten Sologub dies (1927), Marina [Tsvetaeva] and Khodasevich leave. And thus ten years pass. And having taken in the experience of these years – fear, boredom, emptiness, deathly loneliness – in 1936 I start writing again, but my handwriting has changed, my voice sounds different. And life reins in a Pegasus that in some way resembles the apocalyptic Pale Horse or the Black Horse from yet-unborn poems.

“Requiem” appears (1935-1940). A return to the previous manner is impossible. Which is better, which is worse is not for me to decide. 1940 is the apogee. Poems sounded constantly, stepping on each others' heels, hurrying and getting out of breath... In March *R[equiem]* was concluded with the “Epilogue.” In those days came *The Way of All the Earth*, that is, a great memorial service to myself.

О 1925 г.

...по этой тропинке над пропастью надо было якобы добираться куда-то. Куда?... За этим сразу началось многолетнее пребывание “под крылом у гибели”, но у ворот этого “пребывания” твердо стоят еще не собранные в один цикл стихи о судьбе... Затем мое имя вычеркнуто из списка живых до 1939 г....

Вокруг бушует первый слой ревлюционной молодежи “с законной гордостью” ожидающий великого поэта из своей среды. Гибнет Есенин, начинает гибнуть Маяковский, полузапрещен и обречен Мандельштам, пишет худшее из всего, что он сделал, Пастернак, умирает уже забытый Сологуб (1927 г.), уезжает Марина [Цветаева] и Ходасевич. Так проходят десять лет. И принявшая опыт этих лет – страха, скуки, пустоты, смертного одиночества – в 1936 я снова начинаю писать, но почерк у меня изменился, но голос уже звучит по-другому. А жизнь приводит под уздцы такого Пегаса, кот^{орый} чем-то напоминает апокалипсического Бледного Коня или Черного Коня из тогда еще не рожденных стихов.

Возникает “Реквием” (1935-1940). Возврата к первой манере не может быть. Что лучше, что хуже – судить не мне. 1940 – апогей. Стихи звучали непрерывно, наступая на пятки друг другу, торопясь и задыхаясь... В марте “Эпилогом” кончился

72 Reeder, 229.

“Requiem”. В те дни – “Путем вся земля”, т.е. большая панихида по самой себе.⁷³

“Those days” (March 10-13), when Akhmatova wrote the “Epilogue” to *Requiem* and *The Way of All the Earth* were indeed eventful: as the Soviet army warred against Finland, she also wrote “Mayakovsky in 1913” and her other Kitez poem, “I put to bed my curly-haired son.” As Goncharova points out, March 10th was an important anniversary for Akhmatova. In 1964, Akhmatova wrote a list of important events that occurred on that date: Zamyatin and Bulgakov died (1937 and 1940, respectively), her son Lev was arrested (1938), and Dante was sentenced to exile (1302).⁷⁴ In 1940, the memories accompanying March 10 pushed Akhmatova to a new stage in her writing and personal mythology.

The result of this “change in handwriting” was what Akhmatova at the time called a “new intonation” (новая интонация) that appeared in *The Way of All the Earth*: she began developing a new style that would come to full maturity in *Poem Without a Hero*.⁷⁵ Goncharova describes this “new intonation” as “memory of the past, devoid of any illusion or sentimental belief in its return...and the courage of a person left to live in a foreign world.”⁷⁶ It is essentially the ability to cope with traumatic memory by turning it into prophetic poetry.

Akhmatova's ability to face the tragedy of her past and transform it into poetic expression is a defining feature of her mature writing, a change that occurs over the course of several years,

73 *Zapisnye knizhki Anny Akhmatovoi (1958-1966)* (Moscow, Torino: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva na russkom iazyke, and Giulio Einaudi editore s. p. a., 1996), 310-311. In the Apocalypse, the black and pale horses announce trade/famine and death, respectively. The “black horse” Akhmatova references in this note from 1963 about 1925 may be related to the black horse in a 1962 poem of her protogee, Joseph Brodsky. In Brodsky's poem, “The black arch of the sky was brighter than those legs” (“Был черный небосвод светлее тех ног”), a mysterious wild horse, blacker than any blackness, stands overnight by a campfire seeking a worthy rider among those gathered around the fire.

74 N. G. Goncharova, “Putem vseia zemli kak 'novaia intonatsiia' v poezii Anny Akhmatovoi,” *Russkaia slovesnost'* 2 (1998): 27-28.

75 Lidiia Chukovskaia, *Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatovoi, T. 1, 1938-1941* (Moscow: “Solgasie,” 1997), 117.

76 Goncharova, 33.

beginning with *Requiem*. Akhmatova's earlier poetry displays a particular inability to cope with memory and loss. In many of her poems linking memory, tragedy, and homelessness, the lyric heroine finds herself paralyzed by memory. In "Lot's Wife," the title character turns to salt, becoming immobile because of her choice to look backward; similarly in "The Cellar of Memory," the lyric heroine opens the poem with a lament that she is unable to get over her past: "But it is utter nonsense that I live grieving, / That recollection sharpens me" (Но сущий вздор, что я живу грустя / И что меня воспоминанье точит).⁷⁷ It is this inability to overcome the past that leads to the tragic conclusion of her poem in homelessness and madness. Her poem "The Willow" expresses not only her sorrow at outliving a close friend, but also a helpless muteness: "And I am silent...As if a brother had died" (И я молчу...как будто умер брат).⁷⁸ Even in *Requiem*, the threat of petrification pervades the entire poem: "And the stone word fell / On my still-living breast.... // I must kill memory once and for all, I must turn my soul to stone" (И упало каменное слово / На мою еще живую грудь... Надо память до конца убить, / Надо, чтоб душа окаменела). The heroine speaks of "suffering turned to stone" (окаменелое страданье) and describes how "the beloved disciple turned to stone" (ученик любимый каменел).⁷⁹

This focus on paralysis and especially petrification in the face of memory and loss illuminates Akhmatova's comment about Pegasus, quoted above in the passage about the transformation of her poetic voice in the late 1930s. Akhmatova is retelling the myth of Perseus slaying Medusa. According to the Greek myth, Medusa was a snake-haired monster so hideous that looking at her would turn any mortal to stone. Perseus evaded petrification and slew her by

⁷⁷ Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 1:190.

⁷⁸ Hemschemeyer, 397; Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 1:188.

⁷⁹ Hemschemeyer, 389-392; Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 1:199-201.

watching her indirectly in a reflection in a shield he received from goddess Athena. From Medusa's dead body sprang the winged horse Pegasus. In *The Way of All the Earth*, Akhmatova may again be writing herself into the myth, as she stands nervously on the seashore above a dead *meduza*, a word that means both 'jellyfish' and 'Medusa' in Russian:

Above a dead *meduza*
I stand perplexed;
Here I met the Muse,
I give her my oath.

Над мертвой медузой
Смущенно стою;
Здесь встретилась с Музой,
Ей клятву даю.⁸⁰

In Akhmatova's retelling of the myth, she casts herself as Perseus and her muse as Athena. Through the gift of her muse, Akhmatova is able to avoid petrification when gazing at the horrible, allowing her to face her horrific past by relating it through poetry. And because Akhmatova's Pegasus is a horse of the Apocalypse, her poetry at this time takes on a directly apocalyptic tone as Akhmatova mythologizes herself as an apocalyptic prophet.

The Apocalypse is an important subtext in “I put my curly-haired son to bed.” In the poem, the Kitezanka, happily living outside of Kitezh with her little son, is suddenly caught in a reverie of her former life in Kitezh. The citizens of Kitezh—in Akhmatova's telling, martyrs who no longer walk the earth—chastise Akhmatova for not joining them in martyrdom, a reference to the Apocalypse to be discussed below. When she looks backward, she sees the house where her son is sleeping engulfed in flames:

I put my curly-haired son to bed
And I went to the lake for water,
I was singing songs, I was content,
I dipped out some water and I heard:

80 Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 1:234.

A voice I have heard before,
 The ringing of bells
 From beneath the blue waves,
 Just as they rang in our city of Kitezh.
 The big bells of St. George's [were beating],
 And the smaller ones from the tower of the Annunciation,
 And they said in a thunderous tone:

“Ah, you alone fled from the assault,
 Our moans you did not heed,
 Our bitter death you did not see.
 But the inextinguishable candle is lit
 For you at the altar of God.
 Why are you lingering here on earth
 And not hastening to don the wreath?
 Your lily blossoms at midnight
 And your long bridal veil is woven.
 Why do you sadden your warrior-brother
 And your sister-dove, the nun,
 Why do you make your darling child mourn?..”

As I heard the last word,
 Darkness overwhelmed me,
 I looked back and the house was on fire.⁸¹

Уложила сыночка кудрявого
 И пошла на озеро по воду,
 Песни пела, была веселая,
 Зачерпнула воды и слушаю:
 Мне знакомый голос прислышался,
 Колокольный звон
 Из-под синих волн,
 Так у нас звонили в граде Китеже.
 Вот большие бьют у Егория,
 А меньшие с башни Благовещенской,
 Говорят они грозным голосом:
 — Ах, одна ты ушла от приступа,
 Стона нашего ты не слышала,
 Нашей горькой гибели не видела.
 Но светла свеча негасимая
 За тебя у престола Божьего.
 Что же ты на земле замешкалась
 И венец надеть не торопишься?
 Распустился твой крин во полунощи,
 И фата до пят тебе соткана.
 Что ж печалишь ты брата-воина

81 Adapted from Heyschemeyer, 667-68.

И сестру-голубицу схимницу,
 Своего печалишь ребеночка?...—
 Как последнее слово услышала,
 Света я пред собою невзвидела,
 Оглянулась, а дом в огне горит.⁸²

The final image is strikingly similar to “Lot's Wife,” in which the heroine looks backward to see her home being destroyed. Likewise in “I put my curly-haired son to bed,” the heroine seems paralyzed between the past and the present, eventually forfeiting one because of the other. But the apocalyptic subtext of the poem hints at the next stage in Akhmatova's development, which she offers in full force in *The Way of All the Earth*.

“I put my curly-haired son to bed” addresses a critical problem for Akhmatova at the time: remaining alive while so many had died or emigrated. In several poems and conversations, Akhmatova revealed her disdain for those who chose emigration over fighting for Russian culture in the Soviet Union.⁸³ But Akhmatova's own survival while so many around her perished—including the arrest of her son, alluded to in the poem—forced her to consider her role among those who had been “martyred” for their culture. The Kitezh martyrs Akhmatova describes in her poem who speak in a “thunderous voice” (громным голосом) resemble the martyrs in the Apocalypse who demand to know why God does not rush to avenge their deaths on those still alive:

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; they cried out with a loud voice (громким голосом), “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth (живущим на земле)?”⁸⁴

82 Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 2:41-42.

83 Roberta Reeder cites a fascinating conversation between Akhmatova and Luknitsky in which Akhmatova explained that if enough people had stayed in Russia, they could have ensured the continuation of true society, but that the mass exodus of the cultured class handed Russia over to the culture of the Bolsheviks. Reeder, 156. See also Akhmatova's poems “When in suicidal anguish” (“Когда в тоске самоубийства,” 1917) and “I am not with those who abandoned their land” (“Не с теми я, кто бросил землю,” 1922).

84 Revelation 6:9-10, Revised Standard Version, Russian Synodal Version.

In “I put my curly-haired son to bed,” the reproach is even more direct: the martyrs accuse the Kitezanka of a kind of betrayal because she does not hurry to join them in martyrdom. Indeed, her initial behavior, singing and being cheerful, suggests she has forgotten the suffering of the martyrs and has made a comfortable life for herself outside of Kitez. Only the death of her son seems capable of undoing her allegiance to her current life and galvanizing her commitment to the Kitez martyrs.⁸⁵

Earlier in her life, Akhmatova had no successful answer to the reproach of the Kitez martyrs, but her allusion to the Apocalypse in “I put my curly-haired son to bed” suggests an answer: she is a martyr too, but one whose task on earth is not yet complete. A continuation of the passage from the Apocalypse quoted above reads as follows: “Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, *until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.*”⁸⁶ After her return to writing, Akhmatova imagined a role for herself as a poet-prophet entrusted with the mission of commemorating the dead and bearing witness to their culture, essentially keeping their memory alive. By this time, she had already written numerous poems about and dedicated to poets who had been repressed by the Soviet regime, acts of commemoration that she now claimed as part of a prophetic mission. Moreover, she began to question the line between life and death, suggesting that she too could be counted as a martyr. *Requiem* begins with the observation that the roles of the living and the dead had been exchanged, that it was now “only the dead who

85 Whether or not the arrest of Akhmatova's son, Lev Gumilev, was an important factor in Akhmatova's life is debatable, since she did not raise him and paid little attention to him until his arrest. Nonetheless, in her self-mythologization, Akhmatova fully employed first the image of the dutiful mother, and then the image of the mother suffering with her suffering son, as a part of her poetic identity. See especially “He loved three things on earth” (“Он любил три вещи на свете”), written in 1910 before Akhmatova became a mother; “The Gray-eyed King” (“Сероглазый король”); *Requiem*; and “I put my curly-haired son to bed.”

86 Revelation 6:11, Revised Standard Version, emphasis mine.

smiled” (улыбался только мертвый), while those alive resembled corpses “with blue lips” (с голубыми губами) who had “what had once been [a] face,” (что некогда было...лицом) and whose bodies were “identified” (опознал) as corpses would be. Akhmatova promises that she can and will speak for them, never forgetting their suffering, even in “blissful death” (в смерти блаженной).⁸⁷

In *The Way of All the Earth*, Akhmatova develops her identity as a martyr-prophet further, casting herself as a “living martyr,” an apocalyptic prophet entrusted with the sacred task of staying alive to bear witness. Akhmatova called the poem “a great memorial service for myself,” (большая панихида по самой себе), using a word saved for only those who have died, *panikhida* (панихида), thereby placing herself on the list of the deceased people she commemorates through poetry. The poem has the complicated structure of Akhmatova's late narrative poems, incorporating a title, subtitle, two epigraphs, a prose introduction, six cantos, and date and place of writing. In the poem, the Kitezhanika makes a nightmarish journey back to Kitezhanika that culminates in her death, akin to Fevronia's journey and death in Rimsky-Korsakov's opera. The lyric heroine travels through her own memory, reliving the most horrific events of the twentieth century, her own calling as a poet, and the personal tragedies of the Stalinist terror. As Fevronia's journey leads ultimately to her wedding in Kitezhanika/New Jerusalem, so the Kitezhanika's journey will result in the marriage “crown” the Kitezhanika martyrs urge her to make haste towards (“Why are you lingering here on earth / And not hastening to don the wreath?” [Что же ты на земле замешкалась / И венец надеть не торопишься?]).

The poem has been inexplicably neglected despite the fact that, due to the date and circumstances of its writing, *The Way of All the Earth* may rightly be seen as the connective

87 Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 1:196-97, 203.

tissue between Akhmatova two famous narrative poems, *Requiem* and *Poem Without a Hero*. Because *The Way of All the Earth* is so fragmentary and disjointed, jumping through time and space, those scholars who have attempted to analyze it have struggled to find a coherent thread to give unity to the poem. In his insightful study of time in Akhmatova's works, Kees Verheul sees the underlying presence of the “timeless” mythical city of Kitezh as an objective constant upon which the heroine's personal experience of time plays out.⁸⁸ Nancy K. Anderson points to the central importance of folklore, including meter intended to imitate folk verse, as a source of “historical continuity” that allows the past and the present to “shed light upon each other.”⁸⁹ The repeated directive, “Go back!” (Назад!) may also be seen as the poem's leitmotif. I argue that one of the most important unifying elements of the poem is its apocalyptic subtext, which organizes the seemingly chaotic flow of memories and guides the underlying pathos of the poem to describe the role of the poet-prophet as a martyr. Apocalyptic thought accompanied the Kitezh legend from its inception, changing in accordance to the beliefs and desires of those who employed the legend. For Akhmatova, the Apocalypse is not the promise of impending judgment or the coming New Jerusalem, but rather a locus from which a prophet can gaze on history.

An analysis of the apocalyptic motif in the poem and the apocalyptic poetics that flow out of it begins with the second epigraph, which Akhmatova claims is a quote from the Apocalypse:

“And the Angel swore to those living that time would be no more” (И Ангел поклялся

живущим, что времени больше не будет).⁹⁰ The erasure of the boundaries and causal lineage of

88 Kees Verheul, *The Theme of Time in the Poetry of Anna Akhmatova* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 139.

89 Nancy K. Anderson, “Forward into the Past: *The Way of All the Earth*,” in *The Word That Causes Death's Defeat: Poems of Memory*, by Anna Akhmatova., trans. and commentary, Nancy K. Anderson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 196-198, 202, 309.

90 Many published versions of *The Way of All the Earth* omit the second epigraph and/or the prose introduction. I have chosen to use the version edited by Mikhail Kralin, first published in 1990. In his notes to the poem, Kralin explains that until 1990, the poem had been published only in fragments due to censors. The version he published was an “authorized typed copy” from GPB combined with a copy held by N. L. Dilaktorskaia.

time implied in this epigraph, that time will be no more, will be a primary feature of the poem, but the epigraph itself requires further examination. It is in fact not a direct quote from the Apocalypse, but a paraphrase. The actual verses read as follows:

And the angel whom I saw standing on sea and land lifted up his right hand to heaven and swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there should be no more delay, but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled.⁹¹

И Ангел, которого я видел стоящим на море и на земле, поднял руку свою к небу и клялся Живущим во веки веков, Который сотворил небо и все, что на нем, землю и все, что на ней, и море и все, что в нем, что времени уже не будет; но в те дни, когда возгласит седьмой Ангел, когда он вострубит, совершится тайна Божия, как Он благовествовал рабам Своим пророкам.⁹²

Akhmatova's paraphrase, the substitution of lower case letter for a capital in "who lives" (живущим) and the removal of the modifying clause that follows it creates an ambiguity. Instead of understanding the Angel as swearing "by Him who is alive," that is, the resurrected Christ, the epigraph would most likely be read as the Angel swearing "to those who are alive." This emphasis on "those who are alive" brings to mind the altar scene in which the martyrs question God's lack of vengeance on the living, and the response that the living still have their own role to play. The truncation of the quotation further alters the meaning of the text, suggesting not the imminent completion of the divine mystery, but rather that those still living will experience the erasure of time.

The obvious "living" prophet implied in the Apocalypse is St. John the Evangelist, the author of the Apocalypse, who was entrusted with the task of prophesying his vision to the world. In the tenth chapter of the Apocalypse, from which Akhmatova's epigraph is taken, the Angel makes John a prophet by giving him a book to eat, which tastes sweet in his mouth but

91 Revelation 10:5-7, Revised Standard Version, emphasis mine.

92 Revelation 10:5-7, Russian Synodal Version, emphasis mine.

turns bitter in his stomach. This image is in turn an allusion to the Prophet Ezekiel, who was required to eat a scroll—a metaphor for the word of God—that tasted sweet in his mouth; but when he prophesied the words of this scroll, the people ignored and abused him.⁹³

Akhmatova’s epigraph thus calls attention to the witness of the living for the dead, and the bitter role of the prophet. As if to emphasize that she is a prophet of the same lineage as Ezekiel and St. John the Evangelist, Akhmatova also writes a prose introduction (apparently added later, when she was in Tashkent), “From a letter to *** (in place of a foreword).” In this introduction, she describes lines from *The Way of All the Earth* appearing on the margins of a draft of a poem called “The Vision” (“Видение”). This introduction bears great similarity to the introductions to the prophetic visions of biblical prophets, which always involve prose introductions that explain the origin of the prophecy, which is often written in verse. The Book of Ezekiel, for example, opens with Ezekiel’s description of how a vision came to him:

“In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.”⁹⁴ Similarly,

Akhmatova lists the date and how her “vision” came to her:

In the first half of March 1940 on the margins of my drafts lines that were not connected to anything began to appear. This especially relates to the draft of the poem “The Vision,” which I wrote during the night of the assault on Vyborg and the announcement of the ceasefire.

В первой половине марта 1940 года на полях моих черновиков стали появляться ни с чем не связанные строки. Это в особенности относится к черновику стихотворения “Видение”, которое я написала в ночь штурма Выборга и объявления перемирия.

Akhmatova’s introduction also resembles St. John the Evangelist’s explanation of his vision.

After describing the time and place of his vision, he relates that was told to write his vision in a

93 Revelation 10:7-11; Ezekiel 2-3.

94 Ezekiel 1:1, Revised Standard Version.

letter and send it to the churches of Asia.⁹⁵ Akhmatova's "Instead of a Foreword" is titled "From a letter to ***," suggesting that she has been given the same kind of Apocalyptic vision as St. John.

The second epigraph, that "time will be no more," further reveals the apocalyptic nature of the poem and the poetics Akhmatova uses to create the "end of time." The poem effectively erases time, superimposing events upon each other and fusing events and images otherwise separated by time and space. The first epigraph of the poem is a clear example of this technique. As many critics have noted, the epigraph "Sitting in a sleigh, departing the way of all the earth" (В санях сидя, отправляясь путем всея земли) is only partially taken from the deathbed "Teaching of Vladimir Monomakh to his children" to which it Akhmatova ascribes it. In the time of Monomakh, sitting in a sleigh was preparation for death. The second half of the epigraph is a quote from King David's deathbed instructions to his son ("I am about to go the way of all the earth...."). In essence, Akhmatova superimposes two similar events, the last words of a dying ruler to his children, upon each other; and both Monomakh and David give their children essentially the same message, entreating them to follow God and do good.⁹⁶

Moreover, the selection of these two characters in particular is significant for the Kitezh theme that is central to the poem. Vladimir Monomakh and King David were both figureheads of a "golden era" in their respective worlds. In the Bible, King David is regarded as the greatest and most faithful king in the history of the Kingdom of Israel: the land flourished under his rule, but came to ruin shortly thereafter. The biblical prophets explain that the sinfulness of the kings and the people who followed David brought divine retribution in the form of war and exile a few

95 Revelation 1:9-11.

96 "Pouchenie Vladimira Monomakha. Tekst, perevod, kommentarii," in A. Orlov, *Vladimir Monomakh*, (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1946), reprinted in *Slavistic Printings and Reprintings*, C. H. Van Schooneveld, ed. (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1969), 128-141; 1 Kings 2:2-9.

centuries later. This theology of divine retribution became the basis for the phrase “for our sins,” which was used to explain the Mongol invasions of Rus in the thirteenth century. Vladimir Monomakh, who lived in the century before the Mongol invasions, entered the Russian memory as an ideal ruler, the last of his kind before a period of war brought on by the sins of the people. Thus Akhmatova’s first epigraph both demonstrates the effect of the second, apocalyptic, epigraph, that time will be no more, and simultaneously emphasizes the Kitez theme with a quotation from a prince of pre-Mongol times.

Akhmatova depicts the apocalyptic erasure of time in a number of other ways throughout the poem, all of which underscore the themes of both apocalypse and memory. In effect, memory itself is an erasure of time, as the action of recollection reincarnates in the present an event of the past, free, as it were, from the fetters of time. Similarly, *The Way of All the Earth* superimposes memories upon each other, thereby fusing together seemingly unrelated events and images (a technique Akhmatova would further develop in *Poem without a Hero*). By undoing the causal linkages of chronological time, the poem allows symbolic and ethical linkages to sew together seemingly unrelated events.

While Akhmatova uses this technique to develop a poetic voice entirely her own, a similar technique was used by other modernist poets who were influential to Akhmatova, most notably Aleksander Blok. Like Akhmatova, Blok envisioned his poetry as a prophetic voice by which to divine Russia's future through poetic interpretation of its past. Judith Kalb explains: “The poet, according to Blok, is capable of conveying a sense of his epoch that historians and orators...simply do not grasp.”⁹⁷ Citing Blok's 1918 essay “Cataline,” Kalb shows how Blok's poetic process involves layering (Blok calls it “juxtaposing”) seemingly unrelated items to reveal

97 Judith Kalb, *Russia's Rome: Imperial Visions, Messianic Dreams, 1890-1940* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 124.

the unified movement of history:

I resort to juxtapositions (сопоставлениям) of phenomena taken from areas of life which appear to have nothing in common; in the given case, for example, I [Blok] juxtapose the Roman revolution and the versus of Catallus. I am convinced that only with the help of such juxtapositions and others similar to them is it possible to find the key to an epoch, is it possible to feel its vibration, to clarify for oneself its meaning.⁹⁸

In her later poetry, Akhmatova uses a similar technique, superimposing seemingly unrelated historical and personal events upon each other to decode the meaning of her era.

Thus in the opening canto, the image of a Soviet soldier seamlessly transforms the image of the Angel that guards the entrance to the Garden of Eden:

“Comrade, here is my pass,
Let me go back...”
And the soldier quietly
Sets aside his bayonet.
How splendidly and incandescently
That island springs up!
The red clay
And the apple orchard...⁹⁹

«Вот пропуск, товарищ,
Пустите назад...»
И воин спокойно
Отводит штык.
Как пышно и знойно
Тот остров возник!
И красная глина,
И яблочный сад...¹⁰⁰

Similarly, in the fifth canto, the phrase “ancient ache” (старая боль) brings together two separate conflicts between Russia and the East: first the thirteenth century Mongol invasions of Rus, then the Russo-Japanese War. This “ancient ache” then transforms into the longstanding pain of anti-

98 Aleksandr Blok, “Katilina. Stranitsa iz istorii mirovoi Revoliutsii,” in *Sobranie sochinenii. T. 6. Proza, 1918-1921* (Moscow, Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1962), 86, translated and quoted in Kalb, 124.

99 Hemschemeyer, 530.

100 Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 1:233.

Semitism as expressed in the Dreyfus Affair in France in 1899, in which a house on Rue Chabrol was nicknamed Fort Chabrol when anti-Semitic Nationalists barricaded themselves inside to avoid arrest. At the end of the canto, this Fort Chabrol in Paris and the people guarding it morph into a military fort in South Africa and the Boer soldiers defending it.¹⁰¹ This final layer of the “ancient ache” is the pain of colonial oppression, a reminder of the Tatar conquest of Rus that opened the section on the “ache”:

The *Viking* and the *Korean*
 Sailed to the East...
 There, like a swallow, hovers
 The old pain...
 And farther on darkens
 Fort Chabrol,
 Like the moldering crypt
 Of the last century,
 Where an old invalid
 Went deaf, went blind.
 He is guarded by
 Stern and sullen
 Boers with rifles.
 “Back, back!!”¹⁰²

“Варяг” и “Кореец”
 пошли на восток...
 Там ласточка реет
 Старая боль...
 А дальше темнеет
 Форт Шаброль,
 Как прошлого века
 Разрушенный склеп,
 Где старый калека
 Оглух и ослеп.

101 N. A. Zhirmunskaja, “Primechaniia,” in Anna Akhmatova, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, Biblioteka poeta, malaia seriia, izdanie tret'e (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1984), 679. Omry Ronen, *The Fallacy of the Silver Age in Twentieth-Century Russian Literature* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Pub., 1997), 25. In his writings on the Boer War, Winston Churchill mentions that British soldiers fortified an important railway station, Stormberg Junction, and called it “Fort Chabrol.” The soldiers abandoned their fortifications when the area was evacuated in anticipation of a Boer attack. Winston Churchill, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1900), 33-36. See also Mikhail Kralin, “Primechaniia,” in Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 1:411 and Anderson, 201.

102 Hemschemeyer, 533-34.

Суровы и хмуры,
Его сторожат
С винтовками буры.
“Назад, назад!”¹⁰³

Superimposing the Russo-Japanese War onto the Mongol invasions is a clear reference to Alexander Blok, whose cycle “On the Field of Kulikovo” (“На поле куликовом”) attempted to interpret current events (most prominently the war and the 1905 Revolution) as a kind of Nietzschean eternal return that had occurred earlier as the Mongol invasions. Akhmatova's inclusion of this Blokian subtext adds Blok to the list of writer-prophets Akhmatova commemorates in the poem and reincarnates Blok as an element of her poem.

Moreover, Akhmatova's references to the Russo-Japanese war illuminate a cryptic section in the second canto of the poem. During the meeting between Akhmatova and her muse over the dead *meduza*, a voice tries to dissuade Akhmatova from her future poetic path with a warning:

“You will return here,
You will return many times
But once again stumble
Over a sturdy diamond.
You'd better go past it,
You'd better go back,
Disparaged, praised,
To the patriarchal garden.”

“Сюда ты вернешься,
Вернешься не раз,
Но снова споткнешься
О крепкий алмаз.
Ты лучше бы мимо,
Ты лучше б назад,
Хулима, хвалима,
В отеческий сад.”

Scholars have struggled to understand the enigmatic “diamond” which is to become a stumbling block for Akhmatova. Kees Verheul insightfully suggests the image of a diamond conveys the

103 Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 1:235-36.

“absolute impenetrability of the past which the speaker vainly attempts to recapture *and* the transparent beauty of the object of her tragic search.”¹⁰⁴ But the diamond may have a more specific historical reference. The *Diamond* (*Алмаз*)—here Akhmatova emphasizes it is a “sturdy diamond” (крепкий алмаз)—was the only sizable Russian ship that was not destroyed in the most notorious battle of the Russo-Japanese War, the Battle of Tsushima. The battle devastated the Russian fleet. Though scarred from the fighting, the *Diamond* was able to reach Vladivostok without sinking. As such, it recalls Akhmatova's position as one of the only writers to escape destruction on account of the Revolution, providing another image of the survivor amidst martyrs that is so crucial to Akhmatova's poem and identity at this time. Akhmatova will have to return to the same place—facing the arrests and deaths of others while herself surviving—over and over, and must find a way to incorporate her survival into her poetic mission.

Another technique is the reversal of poetic time in the poem. The poem does not follow a chronological order, reinforcing the idea that time has ceased to exist and history has been layered upon itself rather than progressing linearly. The six cantos seem to jump from the present (that is, 1940) to the First World War, to an ambiguous “twenty-five years ago,” to the 1930s, to the turn of the century, finally concluding in an unknown, perhaps timeless, setting. The *plot* of the poem, however, moves in reverse time, as if following the order of the poem's leitmotif, “go back” (назад). Like Lermontov's famous poem “The Dream” (“Сон”), in which the poem opens with a dead body and closes with an earlier scene of the same body dying, Akhmatova's poem moves in reverse order. The first canto describes the charred remains of old fires, a reference to the Mongol invasions layered upon a more recent fire: “At the ancient, burned-out site / The charred depot stands” (У давних пожарищ / Обугленный склад). In the next canto, these fires

104 Verheul, 146.

are actively burning, as the poem superimposes the images of World War I and the Mongol invasions upon each other:

Trenches, trenches--
 You could lose your way!
 Of old Europe
 A scrap remains,
 Where in clouds of smoke,
 Towns burn...¹⁰⁵

Окопы, окопы,—
 Заблудишься тут!
 От старой Европы
 Остался лоскут,
 Где в облаке дыма
 Горят города...¹⁰⁶

Similarly, in the third canto, the heroine recalls the horror of finding a dead body; then in the fourth canto, as she walks home, she warns that the upcoming meeting will be tragic:

And there will be a meeting
 A hundred times sadder
 Than anything that happened
 To me back then...
 I will go home
 By way of the crucified capital.¹⁰⁷

И будет свиданье
 Печальной стократ
 Всего, что когда-то
 Случилось со мной.
 Столицей распятой
 Иду я домой.¹⁰⁸

The fifth canto lists horrific events that made headlines around the turn of the century, but these events are cited in reverse chronological order: the Battle of Tsushima, listed first in the poem,

105 Hemschemeyr, 531.

106 Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 1:233.

107 Hemschemeyer, 533.

108 Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 1:235.

occurred in 1905; the ships “Viking” and “Korean” were sunk in 1904; and the “Siege of Fort Chabrol” and the second Boer war both date to 1899.¹⁰⁹ The urgency of motion in the fifth stanza particularly emphasizes the apocalyptic erasure of time: what superficially sounds like urging haste—“Faster, faster / The time is up” (Скорее, скорее, / Кончается срок) is actually revealed as *the end of time itself*—“кончается срок”—which looses the chronological and causal ties that bind one event to another.

As if in response to this ultimate erasure of time, the sixth and final canto of the poem brings the poem back to its first epigraph, with the image of the heroine getting into the sled that will carry her to her Kitezh and death.

And I will take my place calmly
 In a light sled...
 I will return to you before nightfall,
 People of Kitezh.
 There is but one crossing
 Beyond the ancient stop...¹¹⁰

И в легкие сани
 Спокойно сажусь...
 Я к вам, китежане,
 До ночи вернусь.
 За древней стоянкой
 Один переход...¹¹¹

For Akhmatova, the linkage of the sleigh with doom recalls two of Akhmatova's friends, Mandelstam and Tsvetaeva through Mandelstam's 1916 poem, “On sleds piled with straw” (“На розвальнях, уложенных соломой”). In the poem, Mandelstam ties his own rides through Moscow with Marina Tsvetaeva to the tsarevich Dmitry who was murdered in Uglich, the

109 Zhimunskaia, 679.

110 Adapted from Hemschemeyer, 534.

111 Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 1:237.

pretender Dmitry, Marina Mnishek, and Pushkin as author of *Boris Godunov*.¹¹² The last lines of Mandelstam's poem describe the murdered tsarevich being carried away on a sled for his body to be burned. In the fateful image of the sleigh-as-bringer-of-death, Akhmatova links her own fate to Mandelstam, Tsvetaeva, and the actors of Russian history immortalized in *Boris Godunov*. As in many instances in Akhmatova's poetry, this personal remembrance of friends and fellow poets is layered upon another, more obvious, cultural reference.

The final gesture in *The Way of All the Earth* recreates a specific portrait from Russian history, as Akhmatova-as-Kitezhanka takes on an additional mask, that of Feodosia Morozova, a seventeenth-century Old Believer who became famous through an 1887 painting by Vasily Surikov entitled “Boyarynya Morozova.” The painting depicts a defiant Morozova being arrested and taken away on a sled.



Vasily Surikov, “Boyarynya Morozova,” 1887. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Morozova was a wealthy boyar's widow who became an Old Believer during the schism,

¹¹² See O. E. Mandel'stam, *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii*, text preparation and notes by A. G. Mets. (St. Petersburg: Gumanitarnoe agentstvo “Akademicheskii proekt,” 1997), 133-134, 542-543.

secretly taking monastic vows and corresponding regularly with the schism's leader, Avvakum. She was eventually arrested and imprisoned, dying four years later from starvation. Her story was recorded in her correspondence with Avvakum and in the “Tale about Boyarynya Morozova” (“Повесть о боярыне Морозовой”).

Akhmatova's identification with Morozova, found not only in *The Way of All the Earth*, but also in other parts of Akhmatova's *oeuvre*, has nothing to do with personal sympathies towards Old Believers. Unlike Gippius and Merezhkovsky, or other Symbolists who were fascinated by real-life religious dissenters, Akhmatova never aligned herself with contemporary Old Believers or their religious practices.¹¹³ Rather, she was an Orthodox Christian who presumably accepted the official Orthodox view that Old Believers were outside of the sanctions of true Orthodoxy. Her association with Old Believers is symbolic, a mask she donned to paint herself as a persecuted representative of a previous era.

In fact, Akhmatova's first associations with Boyarynya Morozova came not from herself, but from her Soviet critics. In 1923, a critic accused Akhmatova of being more appropriate for the era of Avvakum and Boyarynya Morozova than the twentieth century; a year later, an article in *Pravda* “portrayed Akhmatova as solemn, with a monotonous, sing-song voice, an Old Believer murmuring something about the dead.”¹¹⁴ In time, Akhmatova herself proudly adopted this identity as a symbol of a person allied with an old era, persecuted under the rulers of the new regime. References to Morozova can be found both in Akhmatova's notes and in her poetry.¹¹⁵ In

113 Reeder, 153.

114 G. Lelevich [Lavori Gilelevich Kalmason], “Anna Akhmatova (beglye zametki),” in *Anna Akhmatova: Pro et contra. Antologija. T. 1* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkogo Khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta, 2001), 461, 916; Reeder, 228.

115 See I. V. Erokhina, “Obrazy boiaryni Morozovoi i protopopa Avvakuma v poezii Anny Akhmatovoi (K voprosu o formirovanii semanticheskoi mnogourovnevosti teksta,” *Izvestia Tul'skogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Gumanitarnye nauki*, No. 1 (2009): 253.

a poem from the late 1930s, she seems to envy Morozova's life:

.....
 I know I can't move from this place
 Because of the weight of the eyelids of Viy.
 Oh, if only I could suddenly throw myself back
 Into some sort of seventeenth century.

On Trinity Eve to stand in church
 With a fragrant branch of birch
 To drink of sweet mead
 With the Princess Morozova.

And then at twilight in the sleigh,
 To sink in the dungy snow.
 What mad Surikov
 Will paint my last journey?¹¹⁶

.....
 Я знаю, с места не сдвинуться
 Под тяжестью Виевых век.
 О если бы вдруг откинуться
 В какой-то семнадцатый век.

С душистою веткой березовой
 Под Троицу в церкви стоять,
 С боярынею Морозовой
 Сладимый медок попивать,

А после на дровнях в сумерки
 В навозном снегу тонуть...
 Какой сумашедший Суриков
 Мой последний напишет путь?¹¹⁷

Like many of Akhmatova's poems, this work conceals its true intentions. As I. V.

Erokhina has shown, Akhmatova was referencing passages to Avvakum's letters instructing Morozova to stop drinking mead and take the life of her soul more seriously. It was following these rebukes from Avvakum that Morozova secretly took monastic vows, was arrested and

116 Hemschemeyer, 666.

117 Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 1:256.

ultimately died of hunger in prison.¹¹⁸ Akhmatova's mythology of her own life, most notably recorded in *Poem without a Hero*—from the carefree “sinner” of Tsarskoe Selo and Petersburg to the suffering martyr—matches the trajectory she traces for Morozova in the poem.¹¹⁹

It is precisely this mythology that Akhmatova draws on to conclude *The Way of All the Earth*, revealing herself as not just a Kitezhanka, but also an incarnation of Morozova. As such, she can claim a martyr's fate, answering the reproach of the Kitezh martyrs from “I put my curly-haired son to bed” and justifying her claim that *The Way of All the Earth* was a “great memorial service for [her]self.”

It is here, that, coming full circle, Akhmatova subverts the traditional notions of death and martyrdom that are generally associated with the Kitezh and Apocalypse subtexts of the poem. The lyric heroine of *The Way of All the Earth* describes living through horrific times, longing for a home that no longer exists, as a kind of living martyrdom. Sitting in a sleigh preparing for death, she says:

I waited for the great winter
A long time,
Like a white ascetic rite
I take it on.¹²⁰

Великую зиму
Я долго ждала,
Как белую схиму
Ее приняла.¹²¹

118 Erokhina, 254. *Tale of Boiarynia Morozova: A Seventeenth-Century Religious Life*, compiled and translated by Margaret Ziolkowski (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000), 49-78. See also excerpts from Morozova's correspondence with Avvakum in *Tale of Boiarynia Morozova*, especially 85-88.

119 Akhmatova's identification with Morozova continued throughout her life. In 1962, she wrote “The Last Rose” (Последняя роза), explaining that her fate was to suffer with Morozova and other women throughout history, including Herod's stepdaughter Salome, Dido, and Joan of Arc.

120 Hemschemeyer, 534.

121 Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 1:236.

Many commentators have identified in these four lines a complicated crossover of two images: “white winter” (белая зима) and “great ascesis” or devotional asceticism (великая схима). In Akhmatova’s poetic system, winter is often a symbol of death; “great ascesis” is the highest level of monastic vows a woman can take. In this interpretation, death and rejection of the world are equated as one.¹²²

This observation is helpful, but does not unpack the full meaning of the mixing of metaphors. The connection of ascesis and death through the word “white” has specific relevance for the topic of martyrdom. In the fourth century, when Christianity had become the religion of the Roman Empire, and the possibility of being killed for one’s faith had all but vanished, a new practice arose by which people could prove their devotion and willingness to die for their faith. People would purposefully renounce the world and spend their life in the desert as ascetics, fasting and praying. This practice laid the foundation for monasticism, which came to be known as “white martyrdom” in contrast to the “red martyrdom” of actual physical death, a distinction first coined by the North African bishop Cyprian in the third century. Monastic writings and the lives of saints describe ascesis as a kind of “daily death” that people undertake out of devotion to God, for it implies leaving behind one’s home, one’s family, and living as a stranger in the world. Isabelle Kinnard explains that “by the end of the sixth century, the two movements [red and white martyrdom] are presented as being virtually identical. The linkage is so seamless that the ascetics of the day describe themselves as martyrs.”¹²³

Akhmatova’s use of “white martyrdom” creates a space for her among the faithful

122 Goncharova, 32.

123 Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition from Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 98; Isabelle Kinnard, “*Imitatio Christi* in Christian Martyrdom and Asceticism: A Critical Dialogue,” in *Asceticism and Its Critics: Historical Accounts and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Oliver Freiberger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 131.

martyrs: if death can be a homecoming, the entrance into life, then life away from that home can be a kind of death. It is no coincidence that the experience she describes of her silent years before *Requiem*—“of fear, boredom, emptiness, deathly loneliness” (страха, скуки, пустоты, смертного одиночества)—finds expression in the last lines of *The Way of All the Earth*:

Now no one accompanies
 This woman of Kitezh,
 Neither brother nor neighbor,
 Nor the first bridegroom—
 Only a branch of pine,
 A sunny rhyme
 Dropped by a beggar
 And picked up by me...
 In my last dwelling place
 Lay me to rest.¹²⁴

Теперь с китежанкой
 Никто не пойдет,
 Ни брат, ни соседка,
 Ни первый жених,—
 Лишь хвойная ветка,
 Да солнечный стих,
 Оброненный нищим
 И поднятый мной...
 В последнем жилище
 Меня упокой.¹²⁵

As if responding to the reproach of the Kitezh martyrs, or the martyrs mentioned in the Apocalypse, Akhmatova asserts her own martyrdom, the martyrdom of staying alive to bear witness. For Akhmatova, this is “white asceticism,” poetry-writing as a spiritual discipline akin to monastic vows. In a posthumously published fragment from 1958, Akhmatova wrote the following lines: “All the unburied ones—I buried them, / I mourned for all, but who will mourn for me?” (Непогребенных всех—я хоронила их, / Я всех оплакала, а кто меня оплачет?).¹²⁶

124 Hemschemeyer, 534.

125 Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 1:236.

126 Akhmatova, *Sochineniia*, 2:65.

Describing how Akhmatova records history in her poetry, Vladimir Toporov explains that she finds in the everyday the historical, and in the historical the trans-historical or super-historical. In *The Way of All the Earth*, Toporov recognizes Akhmatova's ability to use an organic interconnection of personal and historical memory to create the portrait of "I in time and time through me."¹²⁷ Hers is thus the sincere voice of someone who witnessed the flow of history, appropriated it into her self-identity, and bore witness to that experience. In *The Way of All the Earth* we find Akhmatova's commentary on the task of bearing witness to a lost culture, symbolized by the city of Kitezh, and of speaking prophetically to the culture of violence outside of Kitezh. For Akhmatova, this is the martyrdom of the daily death of living in a hostile world, standing between the present and the past, forever looking backward through the sorrowful and chaotic twentieth century to a golden era that cannot be regained but must be preserved.

Akhmatova essentially uses her Kitezhanka persona as the foundation for a prophetic identity by which she can position herself "against the world" while responding to the reproaches of others who have disappeared. While she never overtly used the Kitezhanka persona after 1940, it is nonetheless this prophetic voice that will sound through her poetry for the rest of her life, most notably in *Poem Without a Hero*. A far cry from the Kitezh of Gippius and Merezhkovsky, with its promises of universal salvation, Akhmatova's Kitezh is an extremely personal, even lonely, matter of identity, which in turn gives purpose to her poetic existence.

In the course of less than a century, the Kitezh legend turned around completely in Russian culture. While nineteenth-century writers used Kitezh to identify Old Believers as

¹²⁷ Toporov, 263-64, 311.

“them” against the normative “us,” by the mid-twentieth century, writers used Kitezh to identify themselves—“us”—against “them,” elements of Soviet culture that felt alien to them. Kitezh no longer had any meaningful connection to real-life Old Believers, but had become an image of an ideal for a minority community that saw itself as persecuted by the ruling culture. This minority reprised the political-cultural feelings of the very Old Believers who first invented the legend without adopting any of their religious beliefs. Far removed from the geographical location of Lake Svetloyar where it had been rooted for centuries, Kitezh now existed abstractly and symbolically. No longer did people imagine Kitezh as a vision of Russia's future and its messianic fate. Those utopian dreams had disappeared with pre-Revolutionary Russia, and both those dreams and the country now seemed as distant and unreachable as an underwater kingdom.

Conclusion

Finding a Safe Haven and Recovering the Lost City:

Kitezh After the Soviet Union

Everyone has his own Kitezh

- Psoi Korolenko

In 1992, historian and radio journalist Dmitry Morozov gathered a group of like-minded people to found a community for orphans and abandoned, abused, and neglected children. Some of the children were officially adopted by volunteers working at the community, a small village in the Kaluga region southwest of Moscow, while others were raised in a kind of foster care in the village. The volunteers built houses and other buildings—a school, farm, and Orthodox church—in an Old Russian style and began teaching at the school and working with the children in the village. The aim of the village was to create an alternative to the institutional orphanage system in Russia based instead in family and community. They called their experiment the Kitezh Children's Community (Сообщество приемных семей “Китеж”), or simply, “Kitezh.”¹

1 Information about the Kitezh Children's Community is available on the community's website: <http://www.kitezh.org/>. See also Michael Schwartz, “Kaluga Region Journal: In a Fairy-Tale Village, Russian Orphans Thrive,” *New York Times*, 2 October 2008, section A6.

The choice of this name indicates both the endurance of the Kitezh legend in Russian culture and the breadth of its meaning and continuing development. Morozov explains that his group purposefully built Kitezh as a “material incarnation of Vasnetsov's paintings.”² According to Morozov, the fairy-tale nature of the architecture is crucial to the mission of the community, and also illuminates the choice of the name Kitezh:

We are proud of this “fairy-tale” architecture, considering it a necessary condition for setting a child's consciousness to a fairy-tale mode. Why a fairy tale? Because only in the space of the fairy-tale world are metamorphoses, miracles, and transformations possible. In fact, the village we built is only a material instrument for work with the invisible fabric of consciousness. This is also where the name of our settlement, Kitezh, comes from (in popular-folk [народном] consciousness, [Kitezh] is an invisible city, transformed by the will of God into a vessel for preserving spiritual energy).³

Morozov's Kitezh legend, here not even a proper legend but a piece of Russian collective unconscious, represents a spiritual refuge. For Morozov, Kitezh is a safe haven where children with traumatic backgrounds can escape that world, recoup their “spiritual energy,” the “invisible fabric of consciousness,” and learn healthier patterns for interacting with the world in a nurturing and therapeutic environment. At the same time, it is also a metaphor for the inner world of a child and the good potential that inner world maintains despite mistreatment.

Morozov's interpretation of the Kitezh legend differs from all of those prominent in the eighteenth through mid-twentieth centuries, and is indicative of a turn in the Kitezh legend at the end of the twentieth century. As a cultural symbol, Kitezh once again experienced a spike in popularity. As the Bolshevik Revolution led to imagining Kitezh as a lost, pre-Revolutionary Russia, the end of the Soviet Union invited the suggestion of Kitezh reappearing. *Glasnost* gave voice to underground and hidden works, including Akhmatova's *Way of All the Earth*, which was

2 Viktor Vasnetsov (1848-1926) was a painter known for his images of fairy-tale Russia: bogatyrs, Prince Ivan, the Snow Maiden. He also painted historical scenes of medieval Russia. His younger brother, Appolinary Vasnetsov, designed sets for Rimsky-Korsakov's Kitezh opera.

3 Dmitrii Morozov, *Pokolenie Kitezh. Metodicheskoe posobie dlia roditelei* (Moscow: RIPOL klassik, 2008). Available online at the Kitezh Children's Community website: <http://kitezh.kaluga.ru/generation/007.htm>.

first published in its entirety in 1990. At the same time, new interpretations of Kitezh were found in the voice of a new generation of writers: in the poetry of Olga Sedakova, the prose of Dmitry Bykov, and the lyrics of rock-folk musicians Boris Grebenshchikov and Psoi Korolenko. On one hand, trends that began a century earlier, such as the separation of the legend from its Old Believer roots and the transformation of Kitezh from a legend to a metaphor, continued. On the other hand, this process went so far as to make Kitezh virtually unrecognizable when compared to its earlier incarnations. Many late-Soviet and post-Soviet Kitezhes combine elements of previous interpretations of Kitezh, displaying the full range of the semiotic net Kitezh cast. At the same time, all of these recent appropriations of Kitezh adapt the legend to the specifics of the turn of the twenty-first century as the evolution of the Kitezh legend continues. A new development in the legend is the tendency to imagine Kitezh as a real, physical safe haven, as opposed to a desired future hope or a refuge in memory.

The Search for Kitezh Continues

The story that began this dissertation, that of the Russian environmental historians who used Kitezh to explain the Russian preoccupation with protecting small nature reserves, reveals an interpretation of the Kitezh legend very similar to Dmitry Morozov's in the Kitezh Children's Community despite the vast difference in the subject matter to which they are applied. The Russian scholars recalled the Kitezh legend in fairy-tale terms of good and evil rather than as a concrete legend about the attack of Batu:

According to the ancient Russian legend, when the country had become the Kingdom of Evil and Falsehood embracing both State and Church authorities, the Kingdom of Good and Righteousness – The City of Kitezh – sank to the bottom of a lake. Hence the Russian idea of “The City of Kitezh” is the idea of withdrawal from surrounding vicious life, the idea of wandering elsewhere in search of this “ideal City.”⁴

4 Vyacheslav Gertovich and Anton Struchkov, “Epilogue: Russian Reflections,” *Journal of the History of Biology*

Applying Kitezh to nature reserves, they interpreted the legend much as Morozov did: Kitezh is a fairy-tale safe haven that offers an alternative to the world around it. This haven preserves a unique good in its pure state and protects it from outside threats.

The Russian environmentalists' interpretation of Kitezh also reveals several layers of earlier interpretations of Kitezh. In their understanding of Kitezh, those who devote themselves to the quixotic task of protecting these nature reserves and studying the ecosystems contained within them (while ignoring other environmental problems) are, like the *beguny* or the religious dissenters Gippius and Merezhkovsky so admired, *seekers*. But unlike the seekers Gippius and Merezhkovsky associated with Kitezh, who were engaged in the fundamental social, political, and religious questions of their day, the Kitezh-seekers the Russian environmentalists envision withdrawal from life. This withdrawal is more akin to the post-Revolutionary interpretation of Kitezh, in which people with an exilic mentality chose to identify with “Kitezh” rather than mainstream Soviet culture, sometimes “withdrawing” to such an extent that they left the Soviet Union altogether. The Russian environmentalists' post-Soviet Kitezh thus combines earlier interpretations of the Kitezh legend in such a way as to produce a unique, post-Soviet version. Withdrawing from broader Soviet culture to live and work in isolated nature reserves, where nature was (supposedly) protected in its “pure” state, scientists were “seeking” Kitezh.

Kitezh, and the search for Kitezh, are likewise important in the lyrics of folk-rock musician Psoi Korolenko. Korolenko, whose given name is Pavel Eduardovich Lion, is a philologist and professor who wrote his dissertation on Vladimir Korolenko (1997). Vladimir Korolenko was a late nineteenth-century writer who was exiled to the Kerzenets region and who wrote a travelogue and some short stories about Kitezh and Lake Svetloyar. Lion adopted the

name Korolenko (“Psoi” comes from a joke found in Vladimir Korolenko's correspondence with his brother) because of the affinity he felt with the nineteenth-century author:

The themes of Vladimir Korolenko are so emotionally close to me that this writer can fully be my cultural metaphor and my symbolic name.... In this way I came to see myself like a kind of Korolenko, *mutatis mutandis*, with his virtuous humanism, idealism, attempts to overcome extremes and the jargon of this time, sometimes even using them—to overcome them by his difficult experiences, by letting them go through himself.

Темы Владимира Короленко настолько мне эмоционально близки, что этот писатель может быть вполне моей культурной метафорой и моим символическим именем. А символическое имя не есть маска. Я в этом плане увидел себя как некоего Короленко, *mutatis mutandis*, с его целомудренным гуманизмом, идеализмом, попытками преодолеть экстримы и жаргоны своего времени, иногда, опираясь на них же, — преодолеть их через свои переживания, пропускание через себя.⁵

Vladimir Korolenko's travels in the Kerzhenets region had a clear influence on Psoi Korolenko's first album (1988-1989), titled *Songs about the City of Kitezh (Песни о граде Китеже)*. The songs on the album are all, broadly speaking, centered on the theme of desire: love, eroticism, religious faith, vengeance. The final song on the album, “The City of Kitezh,” (“Град Китеж”), highlights this theme by expanding on one of Vladimir Korolenko's lyric digressions about the desire for Kitezh. As a whole, Vladimir Korolenko understands Kitezh as a “city of the past” whose admirers naïvely adhere to a legend—and a worldview—that has no place in the modern world. Nonetheless, in a lyric digression in his travelogue *In Deserted Places (В пустынных местах)*, Vladimir Korolenko admits how enticing belief in Kitezh is, and reinterprets it as a metaphor he and his generation can resonate with:

There is something very touching even for us in this legend. Many of us, having abandoned the path of obsolete Kitezh, having departed from that belief, from that prayer, nonetheless search with the same passion for our own “sought-after city.” And sometimes we even hear its beckoning bells. And then coming to, we see ourselves once again deep in the forest, surrounded by hills, knolls, and a swamp...

5 Interview with Psoi Korolenko by Andrei Smirnov, “Mir edin!” *Zavtra*, vypusk no. 14 (1101) (4 April 2013). Available online at <http://zavtra.ru/content/view/mir-edin/>.

Есть что-то умилительное и для нас в этой легенде. Многие и из нас, давно покинувших тропы стародавнего Китежа, отошедших и от такой веры, и от такой молитвы, — все-таки ищут так же страстно своего “града взыскуемого”. И даже порой слышат призывные звоны. И очнувшись, видят себя опять в глухом лесу, а кругом холмы, кочки да болота...⁶

Psoi Korolenko expands on his namesake's Kitez, describing Kitez as a dream each person pursues:

everyone has his own city of Kitez
 his own eternally sought-after light
 his own irreplaceable city of Kitez
 which has no equal
 and in the eternal search for this place
 we go hither and yon
 to its transparent heights
 aiming all of our trails there
 as well as our labors.

у каждого есть свой град Китеж
 свой вечно взыскуемый свет
 свой неповторимый град Китеж
 которому равных-то и нет
 и в вечном поиске этого места
 мы ходим туды и сюды
 к каким-то прозрачным высотам его
 устремляя все наши следы
 и труды⁷

In later verses, Psoi Korolenko ponders whether the individual Kitezhes each person seeks may in fact be the same Kitez, whether it exists only in memory, or whether even the wisest people might glimpse Kitez only once in their lives. Nonetheless, he implores people to search for their Kitez, “only that which no one anywhere / has ever found” (лишь того что никто и нигде / не найде). In the chorus, the singer asks for assistance on his lonely and unpredictable journey to his “native city” (город родной) and remains confident that he will soon find his “own long-

6 V. G. Korolenko, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii. T. 5.* (St. Petersburg, 1914), 243-44.

7 Lyrics and commentary on Psoi Korolenko's first album may be found online: <http://www.qub.com/q/psoy/01kitez.htm>.

sought city” (свой взыскуемый град).

Making Kitezh a personal and ideal goal, Psoi Korolenko follows not only a minor aspect of Vladimir Korolenko's interpretation of Kitezh, but also some of the major trends that followed in the twentieth century. Psoi Korolenko's personal search for an individual Kitezh recalls the post-Revolutionary interpretations of Kitezh that imagine the city as an individual refuge, as well as the symbolist and post-symbolist Kitezh that transforms it into an ideal goal. The fact that Psoi Korolenko wrote his Kitezh album during the *perestroika* years is surely no coincidence. During these years, Kitezh again rose to the front of Russian cultural consciousness, ready once again to be reformed for a new time.

Reclaiming a Lost Heritage

Kitezh experienced a rise in popularity at the turn of the twenty-first century as the fall of the Soviet Union opened the legend to new interpretations based in recent history. If 1917 was seen as the year when “Kitezh”—pre-Revolutionary Russian culture—disappeared, then 1991 was the year when this same “Kitezh” had the opportunity to reemerge and become visible again. Kitezh became shorthand for the reclamation of Russia's pre-Revolutionary heritage.

Using Kitezh to reclaim this heritage took many different forms, from serious artistic works to pop-culture kitsch. The latter category includes enterprises such as a restaurant called “Kitezh-grad” (Китежь-градъ), which opened in Moscow in 2008. The restaurant followed a trend for theme restaurants based on Russia's imagined past. With wooden furnishings, linen costumes for the waitstaff, and pre-Revolutionary spelling, “Kitezh-grad” is designed to evoke a fantasy of pre-Petrine Russia. While most of the menu resembles a typical 21st-century Muscovite restaurant, certain dishes focus on Old Believers (“Old Believer appetizer salad”

[Салат-закуска старообрядная]) or Old Russia (“Old Slavic-style beef” [Говядина по-старославянски]). Diners are invited “to rest from everyday cares and sink into the atmosphere of the past” (отдохнуть от ежедневной суеты и погрузиться в атмосферу прошлого...).⁸ The restaurant capitalizes on the myth of Kitezh as a repository of Russia's fairy-tale past, reworking the Old Believer idea that the righteous can disappear from the evil world. It also invokes the late-twentieth-century idea of Kitezh as a physical safe haven: in this version of the Kitezh legend, it is diners who can “escape” the bustle of the modern world for an hour by “sinking”—as Kitezh sunk into Svetloyar—into a dining experience.

A more serious, but not dissimilar, note was struck by several publishing houses that appeared after 1990 in Moscow, Petersburg, Yaroslavl, Voronezh, and Krasnoyarsk with a version of the name “Kitezh.” Like the émigré publishing house that appeared in Germany in the 1920s, these publishers appeal to the name “Kitezh” because of its association with Russia's past. In an ironic inversion of the original association of the Kitezh legend with Old Believers and other sectarians, the Yaroslavl Kitezh publisher focuses on books related to Orthodoxy and monasticism during the Soviet era, claiming “Kitezh” as a term that represented the preservation of Russian Orthodoxy under an atheist regime.⁹ Far more significant than the connection between Kitezh and sectarians was the understanding of Kitezh as a locus for preserving—and renewing—Russia's religious heritage.

One of the most significant appropriations of the Kitezh legend in the late twentieth century came in a 1991 album by rock musician Boris Grebenshchikov. Grebenshchikov, long known for songs that brought the tradition of “bards” such as Bulat Okudzhava and Vladimir

8 “Kitezh-grad” Restaurant website: <http://www.kitezh-town.ru/>.

9 For example, several publications focus on the life and teachings of Archmandrite Pavel Gruzdev (1910-1996), an Orthodox priest repressed but active in the Soviet Union.

Vysotsky into rock music, turned his lyrics toward understanding Russian culture during a period of great cultural transition.¹⁰ The resulting *Russian Album* (*Русский альбом*), written over the course of a concert tour that crossed all of Russia, combined Russian folklore, history, and current events. Like several self-styled poet-prophets of the earlier twentieth century, Grebenshchikov incorporated the Kitezh legend into his interpretation of Russian culture. While Kitezh is never directly named in the album, allusions to the legend, such as underwater bells, appear in several songs, including the opening and closing songs, in effect bookending the entire album in the legend. Kitezh is an ambiguous element in the album's mythology: though the singer wants to believe in Kitezh as a repository of good Russian culture that is now reappearing, he is also suspicious of it. The singer cannot properly evaluate the new religious and other cultural elements suddenly appearing (or reappearing) in Russian life because there are no trustworthy markers to navigate them.

The first song on the album, “Nikita Riazansky,” tells the story of an imaginary saint, the eponymous Nikita, who leaves the cultural and religious establishment and subsequently has an unorthodox encounter with Holy Sophia. This unusual saint's *vita* then leads to a larger story about the destruction of Riazan and the possibility of its salvation. While Nikita's unorthodox religious search has brought him to Holy Sophia, the religious establishment has not found God: “Nine thousand churches / Are waiting for Him, because he is supposed to save; / Nine thousands churches / Are seeking him, but cannot find Him” (Девять тысяч церквей / Ждут Его, потому что Он должен спасти; / Девять тысяч церквей / Ищут Его, и не могут Его найти). Instead of salvation, this establishment finds destruction as the final verse cites the

10 On the “seriousness” of Russian rock as a form of poetry or “rock-poetry” and Grebenshchikov as an outstanding example of this tradition, see Yngvar B. Steinholt, “You Can't Rid a Song of Its Words: Notes on the Hegemony of Lyrics in Russian Rock Songs,” *Popular Music* 22, No. 1 (Jan 2003): 94, 98-99; and Aleksandr Levin, “Pesni, Prislannye iz anglii (Opyt sinteticheskoi retsenzii),” in Boris Grebenshchikov, *Ne pesni* (Tver': LEAN, 1997), 8-9.

thirteenth-century “Tale the Destruction of Riazan by Baty” (“Повесть о разорении Рязани Батыем”). The “Tale” describes Riazan after Batu's attack as nothing but “smoke and ash”: “All of this happened according to our sins. There was a city of Riazan, and a land of Riazan, and its riches disappeared, and her glory left her, and it was impossible to see any of her blessings – only smoke and ash” (Все то случилось по грехам нашим. Был город Рязань, и земля была Рязанская, и исчезло богатство ее, и отошла слава ее, и нельзя было увидеть в ней никаких благ ее – только дым и пепел).¹¹ Similarly, in the song, the city burns to the ground, leaving only smoke: “And the fire burned through, we were left with only smoke” (И пожар догорел, нам остался лишь дым). Nonetheless, the singer alludes to Kitezh and the possibility of a hidden salvation: “But the city will be saved / As long as three of us / Continue talking with Him” (Но город спасется, / Пока трое из нас / Продолжают говорить с Ним).¹² The condition for the salvation of the city, the fellowship of three people with God, recalls the biblical story of Abraham bargaining for the salvation of Sodom: if 10 righteous people could be found in the city, it would be spared.¹³ Moreover, it suggests the possibility that the city will be saved despite the fact that it already appears to have disappeared—a motif of the Kitezh legend.

The chorus further develops the Kitezh subtext of the song. The singer implores God for insight into the meaning of tragedy, equating this knowledge with “learning to breathe under water” as the singer feels he is sinking into the water:

Look, Lord:
 There is a fortress, and there is fear from the fortress,
 And we are children in Your hands,
 Teach us to see You

11 “Povest' o razorenii Riazani Batyem,” in L. A. Dmitriev and D. S. Likhachev, eds., *Pamiatniki literatury drevnei Rusi. XIII vek* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1981), 195.

12 Complete lyrics to the *Russian Album* may be found on the official Akvarium website, http://www.aquarium.ru/discography/russkij_al224.html.

13 Genesis 18:17-23.

Behind every misfortune
 Accept, Lord, this bread and wine,
 Look, Lord, we are heading for the bottom;
 Teach us to breathe under water...

Смотри, Господи:
 Крепость, и от крепости - страх,
 И мы, дети, у Тебя в руках,
 Научи нас видеть Тебя
 За каждой бедой...
 Прими, Господи, этот хлеб и вино,
 Смотри, Господи, - вот мы уходим на дно;
 Научи нас дышать под водой...

Repeating the phrase “teach us” and rhyming “misfortune” (бедой) with “water” (водой) draws a parallel between the sinking of Kitezh and the experience of misfortune. Grebenshchikov highlights the idea that the disappearance of Kitezh would be understood as its destruction unless someone had the special vision to see divine work behind apparent tragedy. In the song, learning to “breathe under water,” in other words, learning to live in Kitezh, cut off from and irrelevant to the rest of the world, is only salvation to those with the spiritual perspective to see it as such. Put another way, the ability to recognize divine activity despite misfortune is equivalent to being a resident of Kitezh. In a mild hint at the sectarian origins of the Kitezh legend, Nikita's unorthodox approach to life and religion suggests that the way less traveled—a theme that will repeat throughout the album—is key to the sincere and therefore spiritually good life. Nonetheless, the ability to breathe under water is far from assured, and drowning remains a very real possibility. Kitezh is not a given, but a hope.

The ambiguity of Grebenshchikov's Kitezh further develops later in the album in the song “Wolves and Ravens” (“Волки и Вороны”). Whereas “Nikita Riazansky” presented Kitezh as a hopeful perspective on the world outside of time, “Wolves and Ravens” is located very much in the confusing world of *perestroika*. The singer recognizes the reappearance of a previously

hidden Russian spirituality, which he describes as coming from under the water; but he questions its place in contemporary Russian life.

We were drinking, and when we woke up, the night smelled of incense.¹⁴
 But all around is a tall forest, dark and moss-covered.
 Either this is a blessing, or an ambush for us;
 It is pleasant to the touch, but a draft blows on the soul.

They are walking with icons – with unfamiliar icons,
 But they are being lit with lamps from beneath dark water...

There stands a tall church, but there is darkness under the cupola,
 We stared our eyes out, but you can't see a damn thing.
 I would set out a candle, but all the candles have been bought.
 I would light alcohol on my hand – but where can you get any...?

They gilded crosses and stuck them wherever they could;
 But they exchanged the one given them for wine...

Пили-пили, а проснулись - и ночь пахнет ладаном.
 А кругом высокий лес, темен и замшел.
 То ли это благодать, то ли это засада нам;
 Весело наощупь, да сквозняк на душе.

Вот идут с образами - с образами незнакомыми,
 Да светят им лампы из-под темной воды;...

Вот стоит храм высок, да тьма под куполом.
 Проглядели все глаза, да ни хрена не видать.
 Я поставил бы свечу, да все свечи куплены.
 Зажег бы спирт на руке - да где ж его взять?...

Назолотили крестов, навтыкали, где ни попадя;
 Да променяли на вино один, который был дан....

For the singer, the problem is that the signs of spiritual renewal—icons, churches, crosses—are all unfamiliar. While these signs may be coming from Kitezh, a repository of Russia's true culture, the singer does not know for certain, and cannot find the “light” necessary to see things as they truly are. Unfamiliar icons are lit by lamps glowing from under “dark” water—perhaps

14 Several audio recordings have an alternate first line: “Perhaps it is God, or perhaps it is simply night that smells of incense” (Может, Бог, а может просто это ночь пахнет ладаном).

from Kitezh, or perhaps from ignorance; the interior of a dark church is impossible to see, and corruption and economic turmoil further hinder efforts to see it; gilded crosses can now be found everywhere, but the singer still senses that Russia's true spirituality—the cross that was “given”—was sold off long ago.

The singer ultimately concludes that amidst the many new signs, the only trustworthy ones are the eponymous wolves and ravens, which act as guides throughout the song. Returning to the themes of sincerity and the “road less traveled,” Grebenshchikov suggests the importance of trusting the familiar wolves and ravens, which guide a muddled way towards a worthy goal.

Perhaps it is true that there are no paths apart from the one well-traveled,
 And no hands for miracles apart from those that are clean,
 But all the same, we were warmed only by wolves and ravens,
 Who blessed our way to the pure star...

Может правда, что нет путей, кроме торного,
 И нет рук для чудес, кроме тех, что чисты,
 А все равно нас грели только волки да вороны,
 И благословили нас до чистой звезды...

The final song on the album, “The Barge-Hauler” (“Бурлак”) presses through ambiguity towards the hopefulness that opened the album. The song reprises many images and themes from the album, including Kitezh, questioning their ultimate value as positive or negative forces in Russian culture. As in “Wolves and Ravens,” here too Grebenshchikov points out that during the Soviet era, people lost touch with a part of their heritage, making it nearly impossible to interpret the signs of that heritage when it returned.

Russia stands at a crossroads as the familiar “winter”—the Cold War and iron curtain—is ending and the spring thaw brings signs that are hard to interpret:

How winter pacified us with iron and ice,
 Domesticated us, and then itself turned into spring.
 When the snow melts, oh, what will happen then?
 When the ice moves, oh, what will happen to me?

Как мирила нас зима железом и льдом,
 Замирила, а сама обернулась весной.
 Как пойдет таять снег - ох, что будет потом,
 А как тронется лед - ох, что будет со мной...

The singer cannot say whether the thaw is bringing restorative spring flooding, a catastrophic deluge akin to the time of Noah's ark, or the sacred waters that hide Kitezh:

It's either the Volga floodwaters, or a universal deluge.
 Or simply the lord brushing away tracks,
 But it's all the same to me – I'm almost ready,
 Ready to sing to you along dark water;

While from below the dark water bells are beating,
 From below the ancient wall comes a blinding siskin.
 Release me from my sins with the first beat of your wing;
 Release me from my sins – well why are you silent?!

А то ли волжский разлив, то ли вселенский потоп,
 То ли просто господин замечает следы,
 Только мне все равно - я почти готов,
 Готов тебе петь по-над темной воды;

А из-под темной воды бьют колокола,
 Из-под древней стены - ослепительный чиж.
 Отпусти мне грехи первым взмахом крыла;
 Отпусти мне грехи - ну почему ты молчишь?!

The song ends with the singer imploring God to provide a word—any word—that will offer guidance at this confusing time:

So count us among the angels, or the beasts,
 But just don't keep silent – I can't live without the fire;
 And wherever I go, I am always knocking on doors:
 So Lord my God, have mercy on me!

Так причисли нас к ангелам, или среди зверей,
 Но только не молчи - я не могу без огня;
 И, где бы я ни шел, я все стучусь у дверей:
 Так Господи мой Боже, помилуй меня!

Unable to evaluate the possible signs of religious and cultural renewal, including Kitezh, the

singer pleads for divine insight.

In the album as a whole, Kitezh functions as a repository of a lost Russian heritage that may now be returning to Russia. However, because of the break with this heritage forced through Soviet culture, Grebenshchikov warns that people lack the cultural landmarks to interpret this heritage. As a result, he cannot determine with certainty the difference between “authentic” Russian culture preserved in Kitezh and phony and dangerous elements that have sprung up in a newly pluralistic and open society.

These many varied appropriations of the Kitezh legend at the turn of the twenty-first century reveal how much the legend changed since its inception in the early eighteenth century. Once completely unknown except to a small religious minority regarded by the majority as religious fanatics, by the twentieth century, the Kitezh legend was well known throughout Russia. Initially regarded by Old Believers in the Kerzhenets region as a (probably) true story about the righteous city God had saved from the Mongol invaders, by the end of the twentieth century Kitezh had been metaphorized, removed from the concrete location of Svetloyar, and applied allegorically to the most varied situations in Russian history and culture: the Symbolists and their followers saw Kitezh as Russia's ideal future, whereas post-Revolutionary writers tended to imagine Kitezh as Russia's idealized past. Perhaps the most astonishing transformation of the legend was that while it was originally associated with sectarians and religious fanaticism, by the twentieth century, the dominant interpretation of Kitezh was as a symbol of true Russian culture.

These transformations came as a result of the works of several writers and groups of writers who appropriated the legend in their works, creatively applying it to their times. The first writers who discussed the Kitezh legend in the mid- to late-nineteenth century—primary among them Pavel Melnikov (Andrei Pechersky)—did so to describe the Old Believers to whom the legend initially belonged. While these writers found something charming in the legend, in general they were concerned about fanatical devotion to an invisible city, considering it a sign of an unhealthy mind. Then at the turn of the twentieth century when the symbolists Zinaida Gippius and Dmitry Merezhkovsky became curious about religious dissenters due to their own dissatisfaction with the institutional Orthodox Church, they reconsidered previous evaluations of Kitezh legend, casting it in a rosier light. The symbolists metaphorized the legend, imagining it not as a literal invisible city, but rather as a symbol of the New Jerusalem and the hope for a future Russia. Their concepts of Kitezh as an ideal goal and the importance of seeking this goal, of being a “Kitezh-seeker,” became powerfully etched into the legend, influencing understanding of the legend for more than a century to come. After the Bolshevik Revolution, when the dreams for Russia's transformation into Kitezh failed to materialize, yet another interpretation of Kitezh became prominent. In the works of many post-Revolutionary writers, Kitezh functions as a symbol of the pre-Revolutionary Russia that disappeared after the 1917. For those with a particularly strong exilic mentality, be they true exiles, émigrés, or people like Anna Akhmatova, who felt exiled from her home culture, being aligned with Kitezh became a powerful identity. The post-Revolutionary concept of Kitezh as a repository of authentic Russian culture proved as long-lasting as the symbolists' “Kitezh-seeker,” continuing to manifest itself into the twenty-first century. And at the turn of the century, as Kitezh experiences another rise in popularity accompanying the end of the Soviet Union, people have combined earlier interpretations in new

ways, and also conceived a new interpretation: Kitezh as a physically real safe haven.

The history of the Kitezh legend in Russian culture demonstrates both the tenacity of the legend and its remarkable flexibility. Because it could be and was adapted by so many different writers for different purposes and with different emphases, the Kitezh legend outshone many other Russian legends, establishing a permanent place for itself in Russian cultural consciousness. To this day it continues to capture the imagination of new generations with the promise of a hidden city and the lure of what it might hold.

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